

The  
**Climbers' Club**  
**Journal**

**1991**



# **The Climbers' Club Journal**

Edited by  
Smiler Cuthbertson

1992  
The Climbers' Club

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# Colorado Dreaming

John Harwood

Nearly there, I thought, as I crawled towards the summit of Independence Pass. Why is it always sod's law that one should run up behind a rickety camper intent on obeying the ultra-cautious American speed limit just at the beginning of a bendy, seven mile climb to 12,095 feet? And me with what was euphemistically described by the travel agent in Cardiff as a 'compact', actually a shoe box. Still, on the downhill stretch, I squeezed past and could make real progress towards a real eldorado — Eldorado Canyon and associated rocks at Boulder, Colorado.

I was on a family holiday but, having left Sue staying with an old school friend in Aspen, I was able to take a week's detour onto the rocks. What was even better, I had persuaded my good friends, Andy and Pete, to take a holiday at the same time. But before they arrived, I had a couple of days to myself.

My sportsplan had evolved on the long flight to Atlanta. The idea was to visit a few accessible cliffs where I could solo a VS (5.5 or 5.6) or two and rig up a top rope to shunt harder things. So I was full of bright ideas and enthusiasm as I swung round the bends of Boulder Canyon. A few cliffs recognised, a few missed, and one or two potential bivouac sites were passed in a blur of scenic bends and even more scenic joggers. Then on quickly to Eldorado and, with the heat of the day making me remember my days in California only too sweatily, I disgorged myself below Supremacy Rock.

I geared up and, luck of luck, ran into a friendly American climber straight away. Cathy offered to hold my rope and I was immediately up and away, up the slab, hardly believing my luck. Then her boyfriend appeared! Still, Mike turned out to be a tolerant sort, and we did another slab route together, before I went round to top-rope *Supremacy Crack*. Why did Whillans miss out on this? He'd have eaten it for breakfast! OK, it's steep but even I found the jams excellent.

But Supremacy was in the sun, and Cathy was off home so I had little incentive to hang around. On to port of call number two. *Wind Ridge* is a classic and 'simply must not be missed' according to Jim Erickson (J.E.). It's all very well for him to talk but I didn't know that then, and was carried along by the enthusiasm of his guidebook. A tricky move round a bulge at 20 feet should have warned me but I pressed on in a very impressive position, becoming more and more concerned, as they say. To tell the truth, I was scared stiff! Soloing in the hot sun on a steep wall may be alright for J.E. but I was rapidly beginning to wish I was elsewhere. From the first terrace, I was able to traverse off and go round to the top of the cliff from where I rigged a rope to shunt the top of *Wind Ridge*, and, afterwards, *Tagger*. This latter cosmopolitan classic apparently involved an enigmatic sequence at the crux. I wouldn't know! By the time I got there, I found my own special solution to the difficulties — I pulled on a krab!

Next day, fortified by a binge of Arby's roast beef and 79 flavours of ice-cream, but forgetting the racoon-disturbed and character building sleep under the stars, I was up and at it by dawn. Even so, I was second in the queue by the time I reached the base of the *East Face* of the Third Flatiron, otherwise known as the finest

beginner's climb in the States.

The other party gave up soon, saying it was late, and they had to be someplace else. Since it was only seven in the morning, I doubted their excuse. Perhaps they doubted my sanity and didn't wish to witness an epic? However, I was much more confident and padded upwards with only a slight hitch (literally) when my trailing rope snagged on a 'chicken head'. What else could go wrong? After all, it was only V. Diff. Well, on the last pitch after about 800 feet, it did go wrong, as I strayed onto difficult rock by following chalk smudges. My neatly coiled rope on a ledge below wasn't too comforting as I extricated myself from a piece of rock that would have had me in real trouble if all the holds hadn't been there.

The descent route from the summit went past *Friday's Folly*, a climb that is larger than life according to J.E. and the scene of one of Layton Kor's climbing milestones. So I had to shunt this superb vertical pitch. It was only rated 5.6 but would be given HVS in Wales. After all this excitement I had time for some Raison Snails and 7-up, good healthy American fare.

Another summit, the First Flatiron, beckoned me since it was not yet midday. Erickson recommended the *North Arête* but I had had enough of fear for one day and sauntered along the bottom, intent on the easiest way to the top. In a hollow, I came across a large Alsatian and his owner, who was waiting in vain for a friend to arrive. I got him to hold my rope while I did *East Face* and then whisked quickly onto the summit via the *South West Face*. A spectacular view over Boulder awaited me, with the other pinnacles and summits in full view. Then it was quickly back down to the fleshpots for some junk food and a chance to cool off before rushing over to Denver to collect the boys.

The flight was more or less on time and Pete 'bivouac king' Lewis sleep-walked his way into the arrival lounge. Apparently it had been an eventful flight, with a full rehearsal for the forthcoming Olympic sprints, as the lads successfully made



"Would you buy a second hand karabiner from these three?" (John Harwood, Andy Sharp and Pete Lewis in Boulder Canyon, Colorado.) Photo: John Harwood



the connecting flight in Atlanta. I remember reading once that Colorado's most famous climber, Layton Kor, once had a thing about lettuce ('lots of energy in lettuce') but what Andy had to say about this particular vegetable was unprintable. Anyway, I guided them to the car which, parked next to a Lincoln, looked even more compact than ever. A moment of despair passed the lads' faces but we got everything packed in and set off for the hills.

Next day was a Sunday and started inauspiciously. We needed somewhere for breakfast and drove around until we spied a restaurant which was open. It was a Dunkin' Doughnuts establishment. My meal wasn't too bad, but apparently, according to Andy, Dunkin' Doughnuts ranked alongside lettuce for negative points in the culinary stakes. After this setback we made for Rincon Wall in the belief that any cliff more than five minutes from the road would be deserted. We were almost right. *Aerial Book* warmed us up with a first pitch reminiscent of *Nexus Direct*, and definitely harder than the so-called crux crack above. A route just to the left called *Over the Hill* was pronounced as being ideal for me! J.E. called it 'a prerequisite for all has-beens', which seemed a bit pointed. Still, it was a very nice climb and one gets used to being insulted.

A couple of hours later I was on the receiving end of scorn again as I fought with slippery holds to place a runner on *Bastille Crack*. It was no use Andy telling me that even Arizona Stan had soloed it, all I could think about was J.E.'s discouraging statement that 'the number of people who have fallen on the first pitch must be in the hundreds by now'. Anyhow, I did my piece on this classic climb after which the boys floated up the *Northcutt Variant*. I did it in my own special way!

That night the boys rediscovered the delights of The Dark Horse Bar and I received a rare morale booster. A very, very nice man asked me to prove I was 21. The lads rolled about, laughing, and I couldn't dampen my elation!

Next day we went back to Rincon, this time for a modern classic — *The Land of Ra*. This turned out to be one of the best pitches I have ever done with continuous and interesting climbing on perfect rock, set in great surroundings. It was just the right standard for me, difficult but no cheating or tight ropes needed. After that, we moved right and climbed a succession of short climbs of varying standards, pleasure and classic status. The afternoon was enlivened for Pete and Andy by watching a chipmunk trying (and succeeding) in outwitting me. This beautiful creature (\*\*\*\*ing rodent) was intent on sharing my nuts (careful now) and raisins and eventually made his lightning strike while I was belaying Andy on a taxing 5.12. The food was safely (so I thought) tied up in my rucksack. The rest of the week I was spilling food out through the gnawed hole in the bag! The next morning found us plastered under the roof of *Guenese*. It all went better than I had expected, given the hero poses in the climbing books of supermen like Steve Wunsch having a lot of trouble. But then, I guess, 18 years is a long time in climbing, even for me.

We'd been having a bit of trouble adjusting to the searing heat (it was June 30th) and the thought of continuing the day's sportsplan on *Superslab* was very unattractive so we went over the other side of the canyon to do a route on The Bastille called *Blind Faith*. This climb was described by J.E. as a 'peerless handcrack' and so seemed suitable of our attention. The crux was slippery, insecure, strenuous and looked extremely difficult to reverse. As the latest guide says 'the name of this route takes on a new dimension when one considers it was established as a free solo'. Certainly the legend of J.E. was beginning to assume



*Andy Sharp and Pete Lewis on 'Guenese II' (5.11), Redgarden Wall, Colorado. Photo: John Harwood*

awesome proportions to me!

By now the strain of frequenting the fleshpots of an American college city, not that we noticed the co-eds, of course, was beginning to tell. Andy had contracted a nasty little infection which required treatment. Being a man of the world I knew the prescription would be penicillin but it took a visit to the local hospital and handing over vast amounts of dollars to convince him. He still swears it was for his throat and that's what we're all saying — Linda!

Anyway, the lateness of the hour and correspondingly high temperatures suggested a sensible day's activities. So we made an hour's uphill walk in the sun to do *Death and Transfiguration*! Actually this much publicised route was well worth the effort and must have rated as one of the hardest rock climbs in the world when it was first done. Described as 'absurdly steep and strenuous' and needing 'renaissance of extinguished arm-strength', it was the excellence of protection that made it so enjoyable. That is, apart from the top moves where I spent about 15 minutes trying to remove a nut which Andy later had the grace to inform me was in place! Still, who needs enemies anyway?

Back in one of Boulder's ice cream parlours we recovered quickly and Andy (obviously suffering from sun-induced penicillinitis) suggested more exercise for the evening. So it was back to Redgarden Wall, by which time Andy had sobered up enough to point Pete at the rock. As usual, Lewis climbed steadily up the cliff, scarcely pausing to flick ear wax at passing lizards. *The Flakes* was a pleasant climb but, even more important, finished at convenient abseil chains so we could make double quick time to The Dark Horse. They still asked me for I.D. — America's a great country!

That night, we shifted our bivouac site in Boulder Canyon (home, the previous year, of a serial killer, though we didn't know it then!) to Castle Rock. This was just as well since a fantastic thunderstorm lashed the cliff above our shelter during the night. But the morning brought blue skies and our objective, the classic *Country Club Crack*, was dry. It was my idea to do this — 'when it was done free, the most difficult two pitch climb in the US' — since it was to be my last route before leaving. The boulder problem first pitch seemed ridiculously hard to me but the main crack was superb. I got to the top in a lather of sweat with my hair looking particularly nonchalant and covered in feathers from my moulting sleeping bag. Still, it was a fitting conclusion to the week's climbing and definitely an uncontested classic.

So all that remained to do was to find a hire car for Andy and Pete, find my son at his summer camp in Keystone and nurse my compact over four 11,000ft passes to Aspen. As I drove southwest I reflected on the week. A well known quote — 'going to the right place, at the right time, with the right people, is all that really matters' — sprang to mind. The weather had been perfect and Boulder was one of the best rock climbing centres I had ever been to. And thank goodness my two good friends, Andy and Pete had come — or I might have done myself a mischief soloing! As it turned out, the rest of the holiday was equally successful and Sue had a fabulous time also. This was just as well, for within three months she would be dead, since unknown to us at that time she had secondary cancer. I'm really glad that she had a great time — our final months together were happy, spent enthusing over the fun we both had had in the USA. As for the climbing, Colorado is great — I can't wait to return!



# *Pyramidalny*

*Mike Mortimer*

The Karasu Valley can be reached in about an hour by helicopter from Osh in Kirgizya (now Kirgistan), Tashkent in Kazakhstan or, as in our case, from Dushanbe, capital of Persian-speaking Tadzhikistan. With the ending of the Afghan war, this area has become popular with Russian mountaineers and an increasing number of non-Soviets have visited it during recent years. Easy and relatively cheap access is obviously one reason for this popularity but also, unlike most of the Pamirs, the valley offers granite of a quality comparable to that of Chamonix and the Bregaglia. Moreover, the scenery is stunning with a sheaf of spectacular rocky spires set against a backcloth of beautiful snowy mountains, the highest of which is Pyramidalny (5,500m), our major objective.

Base camp was provided with a multitude of comforts including a large mess tent but the site did have two major drawbacks. The first was the lack of a water supply (the nearest spring was about 800m away) and the second was the distance from Pyramidalny. Neither of these factors was much of a problem for our Russian friends as they were exceedingly fit and seemed to enjoy everything that involved pain and suffering, such as superheated saunas and carrying heavy rucksacks up big hills. On the other hand, my inability to carry a moderately loaded 'sack at anything other than snail's pace was an embarrassment to all, not least myself. Our first carry to advance base took me eight hours while Sergei and Sacha did it in under four, with 'sacks twice the weight of mine.

One of the great attractions of base camp was the variety of visitors who dropped in for tea, coffee, whisky, brandy or vodka (depending on time of day and religious persuasion). The local Kirgi shepherds were particularly welcome, not least because of their sense of humour. They were intrigued by the presence of a woman in our team and one asked, with a twinkle in his eye, if Irena, our translator was there in pursuit of the 'Order of Lenin'! They were obviously proud of their mountains and it pleased them that so many people travelled from other countries to climb them. When I showed them photographs of the Chamonix Aiguilles, they were somewhat taken aback, obviously having believed that their granite spires were unique.

It cannot be claimed that this wild valley is unspoiled, as it provided Stalin's war-effort with tin and mica. Rusty skeletons of old trucks and the remnants of a road, high amidst the moraines, gave a strange atmosphere not unlike that experienced when climbing in the remote parts of the Dinorwic Quarries. Despite the proximity of the glaciers, there is a cathedral-like quiet only broken by the wind blowing eerily through the ruins of the mine buildings, but one senses the rapidity with which powerful, chaotic forces are repairing the effects of man's intrusion into this wilderness.

In more modern times other influences, in many ways more insidious, threaten the peace and beauty of the valley. During the three weeks of our stay there was an average of over 100 tents in a stretch of little more than a kilometre. Some were trekkers, including a large British party, but most had arrived by helicopter.

## *Pyramidalny*

Amongst these was a large Red Army contingent taking part in a big wall climbing competition, the aim of which seemed to be to accrue as many difficult ascents as possible within a given time. Speed and style are factors in judging performance as well as the production of a lavishly illustrated report containing detailed route descriptions. The competition centred on the 1,000m plus walls of Asan, Usan and 4810, whose predominantly featureless granite is ascended by artificial climbing with lots of bolts. These are removed after use to limit the number carried.

On the opposite side of the valley facing Asan and Usan, and starting just below the old mines, are a series of huge unclimbed slabs, very smooth but at a reasonable angle, giving the prospect of some hard and serious free-climbing. Exactly why they have been ignored is difficult to understand but presumably it is something to do with the requirements of the competitions. Our approach to Pyramidalny took us directly under the slabs and I always stopped to pick out possible lines.

Beyond the mine buildings the scenery becomes ever more desolate, no longer dominated by the granite monoliths. Instability and chaos rule, the wind whistling round tottering ridges and the almost constant clatter of falling stones reinforce the impression of a shifting and disintegrating landscape. Here and there, remnants of the old road made a welcome appearance to ease the ascent up to a strange, perfectly flat plateau of moraine, which itself looked almost man-made. Now the North Face of Pyramidalny began to make a real impression. Somewhat like a giant version of the East Face of Mont Maudit with its conflux of ridges and gullies, and offering a profusion of lines, one of which had been climbed the previous winter. A summer ascent would be a risky proposition, for the gullies were frequently raked with stonefall and snow slides, as hot sunshine alternated with heavy snowfall.

At the far end of the strange plateau, a wind break provided a resting place before the really hard work started. A branch of the main glacier provided the approach below the West Ridge of Pyramidalny to a remote cirque, the site of advanced base. On each of our two carries, the ascent of the trackless, unstable scree from the plateau, left me quite exhausted, unable to contribute very much to the establishment of the camp.

In contrast, the two Russians acted like Sherpas and Guides, carrying much more than their share, cooking the meals and planning the ascent. We appreciated this up to a point but their attitudes to climbing seemed quite different to ours. I would have chosen to climb the 50 degree ice slope leading up to the ridge in the early hours while it was still rock hard. Instead, we rose at first light, had a substantial breakfast and finally started climbing with the sun already softening the ice. Sasha and Sergei roped up, but since the climbing was straightforward, though with little security, we chose to solo and thus managed to keep up (just) with the Russians, who were belaying to ice screws every rope length. Despite the heat and the poor conditions I enjoyed the ice slope, probably because there was sufficient technical interest to distract me from the intense effort required. However, the West Ridge is little more than a steep walk requiring only the ability to put one foot in front of the other. Finding myself alone, there was ample opportunity to dwell on the stupidity of struggling up snowy mountains in far-off countries. Slowly, very slowly, I made painful progress up the ridge, frequently slumping down in the snow, in a vain attempt to cool down and recover



some strength. Eventually I reached our bivouac site, comfortably placed below the subsidiary summit at about 5,000m.

Completely exhausted, I collapsed next to Brian who seemed to be enjoying the baking heat of the Central Asian sun. It was good to have rejoined the team but the pleasure of being horizontal was all too brief, my head seeming to get hotter by the minute, as the scree radiated the accumulated heat of the day. The others were soon busying themselves, moving stones to make a platform for the tent. A Russian petrol stove spluttered into life, water was quickly boiled and a brew prepared. The 'Wendy' tent was quickly erected while I forced down a cup of green tea, unable to offer even a token gesture of help.

I was still in a state of collapse when the first snowflakes came drifting innocently down, evaporating instantly as they touched the hot rocks. At first I didn't attempt to move but just enjoyed the relief as the snow settled soothingly on my burning forehead. As the storm gathered force a shout from Brian stirred



*West Ridge of Pyramidalny after the snow storm. Photo: MG Mortimer*

me into action. I declined the invitation to join them in the doubtful comfort of the crowded 'Wendy' tent, choosing to cocoon myself in my bivvy bag. Virtually in a world of my own, my only contact with the rest of the team was the ventilation sleeve of the tent, through which food and drink would occasionally be passed. Eventually the others settled down for the night, Ian staying in the tent with Sasha and Sergei, while Brian and Deak bivouaced a few metres away.

Though warm and comfortable, sleep was impossible, for I was involved in a continuous fight to keep my bag from filling with snow, at the same time ensuring there was enough of an opening through which to breathe. Thus occupied, I slowly recovered from the heat exhaustion only to begin worrying about the seriousness of the situation. The mountain desert climate of this part of the Pamirs usually guarantees settled weather but 1991 was an exception, with regular mid-afternoon snowfall. Starting late, this storm had long outstayed its welcome. 30cm of snow had already fallen with nothing to suggest it would not continue all night. A descent down the 500m ice face leading back to advanced base was now a worrying prospect, but if it kept up all night...

The snow continued inexorably to build up and, peering out into the blizzard, I could barely see the tent, only an arm's length away. Suddenly I realised my inner boots, mitts and goggles were somewhere out there under the snow. Panic-stricken, I dived out, furiously demolishing the adjacent drift in what I thought would be a vain search. Amazingly I found them quite quickly and, shaking off the dry snow, I pulled them thankfully into the bag with me.

Just before midnight, the snowfall eased as quickly as it had begun. Within minutes the sky cleared and a ghostly moonlit snowscape was revealed. For some time we admired the view, picking out the lights of the nearest villages, some 60km to the north, before finally drifting into a deep dreamless sleep.

Despite a fine cold dawn, or maybe because of it, we were slow to rise and organise ourselves, pausing frequently to take photographs in between digging out the gear and preparing breakfast. Now recovered, I ate a good breakfast, but realised that I was not fit enough for the final easy section of the mountain, especially in deep new snow. Furthermore, there was obviously a risk of being avalanched on the upper slope, with the sun full on it. Deak, a Himalayan veteran, agreed and after some discussion, we decided a summit attempt would be unwise, though Sacha and Sergei were still keen to have a go. Ironically the weather was perfect all that day and we descended to the valley without incident.

That was almost the end of the expedition. Brian and Deak went back up for one last attempt but the weather deteriorated rapidly, forcing another retreat. Meanwhile, I climbed the classic route up Usan with André, the third Russian climber in the team. This proved to be a superb outing on perfect rock, made exciting by the usual afternoon storm.

Months later, the memories still come flooding back. The lack of success on the mountain seems of far less significance now compared with the friendships we made, the meetings with the Kirgi shepherds and not least our contact with an empire soon to be no more. Two weeks after we left, tanks were on the streets of Moscow.

Summary: A personal account of a joint Anglo-Russian expedition to the North-West Pamirs, organised mainly by the Sverdlosk Mountaineering Union.

# *Climbs with John Longland*

*Ted Maden*

I first met John Longland in the dissection room of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Cambridge during autumn 1954. We were first-term medical students; John noticed my CUMC tie and strolled across for a chat. Neither of us was destined for distinction in human anatomy, but the burden of learning that subject was lightened by Mike Ball, then a trainee surgeon doing a year's demonstratorship in anatomy, and also wearer of a CUMC tie.

At that early time I had boundless but naive enthusiasm for mountaineering, with several Frank Smythe books voraciously devoured, limited background in hill-walking and a sum total of two afternoons' rock climbing at Widdop. John, by contrast, scion of a distinguished climbing family, had climbed for several years and seemed to know everyone and everything. He had a naturally outgoing personality and we soon became friends.

The CUMC held a beginners' meet at Helyg for a week that December. As not infrequently happens on such occasions the top brass were having a meet of their own elsewhere, and John was the official Helyg meet leader. He arrived at nine o'clock on the first night of the meet, having walked from Betws with two rucksacks, one on his back, one on his front. He was completely happy and in his element and the meet came to life with his arrival.

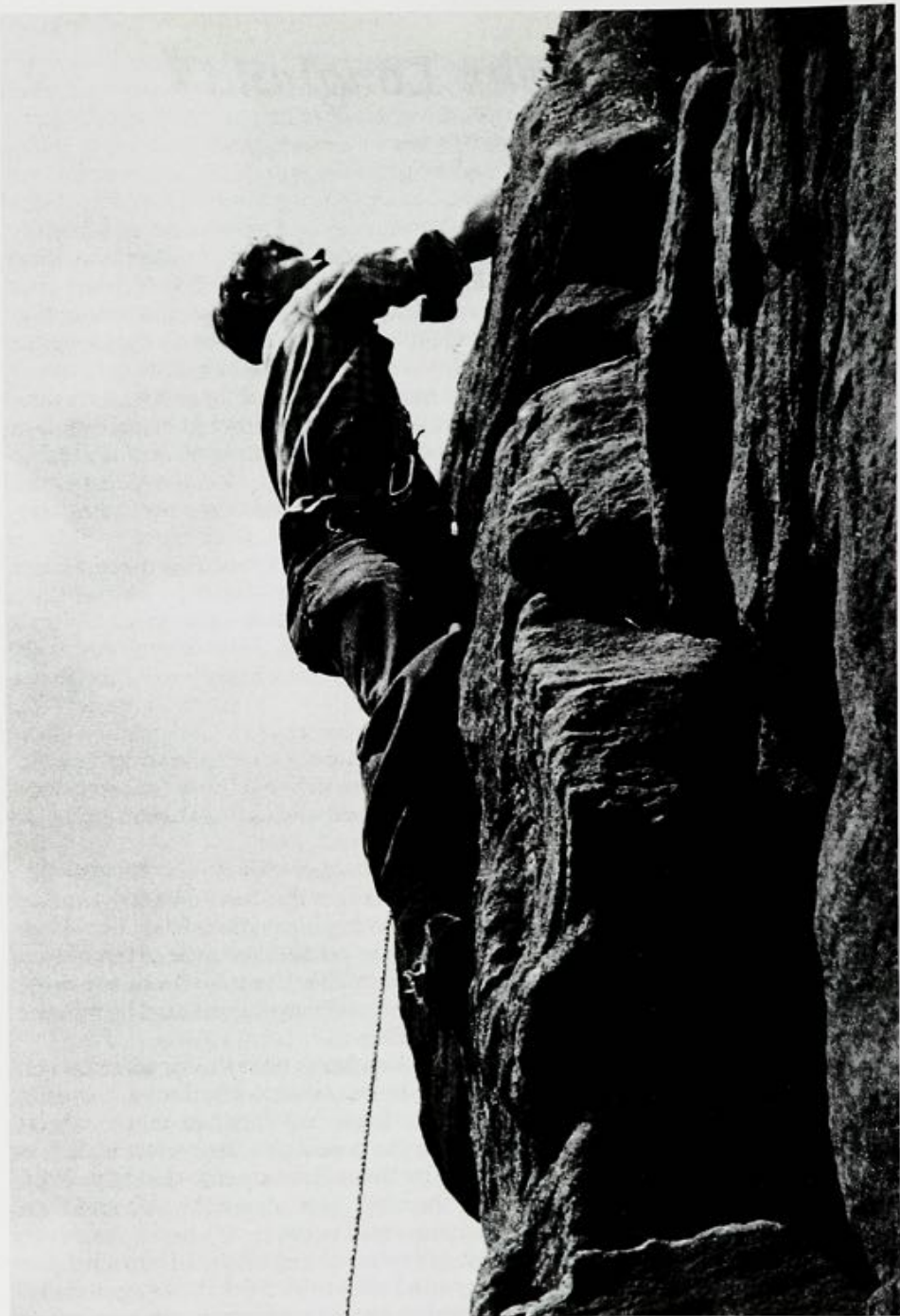
There was snow overnight, but despite the resulting desirability of an early start there was no way a sizeable group of students cooking communally could prepare and consume porridge and sausages, which my diary records were breakfast, in under two hours. Thus it was 11.30am when several of us gathered on the Heather Terrace.

John set off to lead a rope of three up what was then called *First Pinnacle Rib*; now it is named *Overlapping Rib*, one of many changes that have swept the nation in recent years. I was second on the rope. Another beginner, Mike Clay, was third. We were followed by another rope of two, while yet another rope of three were starting up *Second Pinnacle Rib*, now alias *Pinnacle Rib*. The two climbs converge higher up. Snow lay a few inches deep on the ledges. In my innocence I little knew that the scenario held the makings of a Late Show.

As we progressed, the cloud-base, which had hung near the Heather Ledge, also rose, giving spectacular views down into the cwm, while above, the cliffs remained shrouded and mysterious. Undaunted, we lunched at the actual Pinnacle about halfway up the climb. Under the conditions the Yellow Slab, just above, was not on. Instead we went round by the easier corner to the right. Then John did an excellent job of first leading the long crack above the slab and then shepherding all seven of us up as day turned into night.

Two days previously I had scrambled up Tryfan's North Ridge. Thus when the first four of us joined John on the easier ground above the crack it was agreed that I should lead this group down the North Ridge. From the summit a streak of green sky in the west marked the end of the day, and distant lights twinkled in Bangor and Llandudno. Soon it was dark. My diary records: 'It was full moon, and gaps





*John Longland on 'Garden Face Direct', Gardoms Edge. Photo: Longland Family Collection*

in the clouds were rapidly widening, so that the snow was well illuminated. We kept the rope on, carrying coils, but my rope got hopelessly tangled up, so we had to stop for twenty minutes to straighten it out by the light of the moon... (Ted's recent companions please note, I was ever thus.) We got back to the hut sometime before 7pm. John and the *Second Pinnacle Rib* party were glad to have our footsteps to follow, as the moon had gone behind the clouds again when they descended an hour later.

At the time I did not think twice about John staying behind to help the entire group up the slippery and difficult crack at nightfall. He was totally in command, volubly cheerful and encouraging. Now I realize he showed excellent leadership under conditions where not all group leaders would have been so happy.

During the week the weather see-sawed from diabolical to not too bad, and various further climbs and walks were done. Now, more than 35 years later, my diary brings back not only the principal acts and players but also a wealth of supporting details. For example we inevitably, on the Sunday, ran out of shillings for the electricity meter. John Harding displayed talents which were later to lead him to success as a solicitor, by persuading the local vicar to open the Sunday collection box and extract therefrom 20 shillings in exchange for a pound note. At the end of the meet I visited an aunt in Llandudno from whom I secured a travel grant for the onward journey by train to Manchester.

Back at Cambridge John Longland persuaded various owners of transport to visit Derbyshire on Sundays for gritstone climbing followed by tea at the Longland family house, which was then at Crich. I went on one such trip after the June exams and we enjoyed a perfect day on Gardoms and Birchen. The accompanying photograph shows John on *Garden Face Direct*.

We had separate arrangements for the summer holidays; I climbed in the Pyrenees and the Dauphiné, surviving two narrow scrapes, one in each area; later in the summer John climbed with his father and others at Zermatt and Arolla. We both then did summer jobs to earn some money.

We met again in Derbyshire for a weekend in mid-September for the novel (to me) experience of instructing at the White Hall Outdoor Pursuits Centre. Afterwards on a short trip to Crich, John showed me his very own gritstone outcrop, a quarry tucked away in a wood with some smallish but entertaining and difficult routes. One of his creations was a VS with a large overhang which he named *Smaug*. At the time the name meant nothing to me. Now I realize John had been well versed in Tolkien.

I drove to North Wales, John planning to follow for a rendezvous at Ynys a few days later. In the meantime I had a brief but memorable encounter with another John. I was in the bar of Pen-y-Gwryd when a short stockily-built person entered.

"Well John," said Chris Briggs, "what did you do today?" I was mildly curious as to whether this person was a walker or climber. His reply dispelled any doubt.

"The third ascent of *Suicide Wall* and the second ascent of *Suicide Groove*."

John Streetly had been climbing with Don Whillans; Don had led the Wall, John the Groove.

After a couple of days at Helyg on a low-key CUMC meet I went to Ynys for the rendezvous with John Longland. He had not yet arrived, but Streetly was there, without Whillans but still wanting to climb. My climbing had not yet touched Welsh VS and I found the Llanberis atmosphere daunting. Streetly led

me up *Nea* and *Trilon*. One of my worries on the latter was whether he might get into difficulties; I had a lot to learn! After *Trilon* he let me lead him up *Crackstone Rib*!

Across the valley the declining afternoon sun cast shadows in Cwm Glas. I did not yet know what lay in store there. John Longland arrived in the evening and clarified that point, a climb called *Main Wall* which was 'about V.Diff' and which we would do tomorrow. I wrote the story of the next few days under the title 'Two Walls' in *Cambridge Mountaineering*, 1956. That archive is not on everyone's bookshelves and is incomplete in some respects. I therefore reflect here upon that pivotal week.

If each of the few hundred moves on *Main Wall* were placed at ground level, then it is probably true that none of them would exceed V.Diff. Zigzagging as they do up a steep and imposing wall their cumulative effect is very different, especially if, as on that occasion, it starts to rain soon after the start of the climb, the party ahead has problems, and number two of the present party, in socks over bendy rubbers, is unable to cope with the additional impediment of a well provisioned rucksack. Luckily the party ahead were able to help us out with the rucksack at a critical point. Drenched, we made it to the top after a few hours. There had been no doubt about John's commitment and his mastery of the conditions. He was hungry for a week's climbing.

In the next four days we climbed *Grooved Arete* and *Munich* on Tryfan, *Unicorn* and *Wrinkle* on the Wastad, *Houndshead Buttress*, *Olympic Slab* and *Helsinki Wall* at Tremadog, *Avalanche* on Lliwedd and *Ribstone Crack* on the Wastad. John led all the VSs.

The landmark climb was the first ascent of *Helsinki Wall*. John had not declared this project as part of the Tremadog sportplan. When he sprung it on me after *Olympic Slab* I was, in modern parlance, gobsmacked. In the current guidebook the first pitch is graded 5a. At the time this seemed the less horrific of the two main pitches, offering the possibility of subsequent escape to the top pitch of *Olympic Slab*. When John ruled out this option and headed left to the steep upper wall I really got the jitters. It was both a fine lead and a good piece of prior line-spotting by John. Even now people tell me it is a quality climb. Why Helsinki? Because it is next to *Olympic Slab*, which John Disley had put up in 1952, the year of the Helsinki Olympic Games.

Two days after *Helsinki Wall*, and the day after the pleasantly unpressured visit to Lliwedd, John wanted to do *Great Slab* on Cloggy. The weather had deteriorated again and we reached the Big Cliff in a dense drenching mist. Undeterred, and with socks over rubbers, John cracked the short but difficult entry slab and led way up into the mist and the first belay point. I balked, totally. I could see only too clearly the likelihood of a slip, a big swing under the overhangs, and then what? At first John thought he had insufficient rope to abseil, but luckily the ropes were just long enough. He rejoined me and we walked down the hill in awkward silence.

As we did so the clouds cleared and our spirits rose. We would rescue the day on the Grochan. Three climbs seemed quite feasible. I would take *Phantom Rib* as my first Welsh VS lead, John would lead *Brant* and *Slape*.

The first pitch of *Phantom Rib*, up the cracks, did not seem easy but we had a schedule to keep and I did not dally. John joined me at the belay and I continued

with difficulty to the little ledge, fixing a line runner. The rib above looked blank but, with some wishful thinking that the previous move had already been the crux, I set off, unsure where I was heading but making irreversible, fingery moves. About 30 feet above John I got into hopeless difficulties, to the left of the correct line and peering into *Hazel Groove*, but unable to reach that relative haven. John began to realise what was happening and prepared himself. I clung on until I could cling no more, and then zoom, thump, zoom, tug, tug! The first tug had been the line runner breaking, the second was John holding me perfectly, a few feet above the deck. His achievement had been all the more remarkable as the thump had been me hitting him on the way down.

He was as shaken as I was, and probably a bit concussed. He lowered me the few feet to the ground and I went down to Ynys for help. Luckily Hugh Banner and party had just arrived and they quickly went to John's rescue.

We seemed to have escaped remarkably lightly, myself with strains and bruises, John with a cracked wrist bone. However, John told me on a later occasion that a skull X-Ray, taken some years after the accident and for a different reason, had revealed evidence of a previous fracture. The only likely cause seemed to have been the *Phantom Rib* affair.

Thereafter we had some adjusting to do. Whether it was primarily due to the fall and its psychological effects, or whether mainly for other reasons, I shall never fully know, but the fact is that we did not from then on do any further hard climbs together. Undoubtedly a contributory factor was that my regional interests diversified, with visits to the Lakes and Scotland, whereas John continued to concentrate largely on Wales. Another factor was that I began to feel happier and more in control of situations as I increasingly took on a leader's role with primary responsibility for decisions, and John also was primarily a leader. We did, however, remain friends, and the friendship continued to be embraced by the Longland family after their move to Bakewell.

As the years went by I began to think it would be fun if sometime John and I were to repeat the *First Pinnacle Rib* together on a December Day. I never followed the idea through, and now it is too late, but I shall always remember with pleasure and gratitude those early, formative days and climbs with John Longland.



# *The Queen's Shilling*

*Rod Hewing*

I blame 'Pip'.

Since the late 1950s I had been quite content to climb and wander at will throughout the land. Have sleeping bag, will travel. A tent, a luxury. Barn, bothies, chicken shed and a red phone box, no problem.

Time passes. Arthritis, no respecter of person, points a misshapen finger. Joints swelling, an accurate prediction of wet weather.

"Come inside lad. Join the CC. Sleep on mattresses where famous and infamous have lain. Breathe in the atmosphere created by the 'bonhomie' of climbers, man to man and smoking chimneys, damp walls and character..." ad infinitum.

So it was. Pip persuaded me to join 'the establishment'. That passport to give me entrance to those places where real climbers went.

I am not that easily bought. No sissy I. Strong liquor was supplied and I fell at my hero's feet, Peter Harding (author of Llanberis guide 1950 — the bumper fun book of all time).

But enough of that. I passed the test. I'm in. I'm a member. What joy, what bliss, what crap.

I could now stay at any of the six huts at will. I had a part share, and this coloured my vision. Even as a member my sleeping bag was stained black from the Downes' hut floor. I approached the Count House with caution at night. I still needed a certain 'je ne sais quoi' to cook at the Ynys kitchen. Tony Jones at Helyg still shouted at me from his position of authority above the kitchen.

This was not how I had imagined it.



*The Downes' Hut. Photo: Rod Hewing*





*"Scuse me, can you move your Lada?" Ynys Ettws. Photo: Rod Hewing*

On several of my visits to Ynys I met with only one person who shared my vision. One lone Henry Adler. He alone had started to go where others before had only ventured. We enthusiastically discussed how the huts should be. I was his willing apprentice.

It was not to be a long apprenticeship. Having earlier approached Keith and Dennis, the Downes' hut duo, to ascertain my feelings, Henry announced that he wished our roles reversed. Again, "more alcohol landlord, the lad's undecided." Oh dear, if you must.

And so it was. At the AGM, February 1989 I was unopposed as the Huts' Fuhrer. The Queen's Shilling was accepted. It could only be a 5p fee. Within months the club was in overdraft.

Builders had been engaged to save the Count House from its own dilapidation. Climbing on Bosi was replaced by close encounters with the National Trust and planning officers from Penwith Council. No time for High and the climbing catalogues. Let me loose with the trade journals, JCBs and plastic frames versus HB nuts and sticky boots.

Regular hut users and readers of the newsletters will see how we have gone from strength to strength. The Count House awaits only a refurbished toilet block. At Ynys, which is set to become our flagship, at the time of writing major improvements are in hand. At the other four huts improvements have been set in motion. It may seem only small steps forward, but in the long term we shall have six huts which reflect our standing as a major force in British climbing.

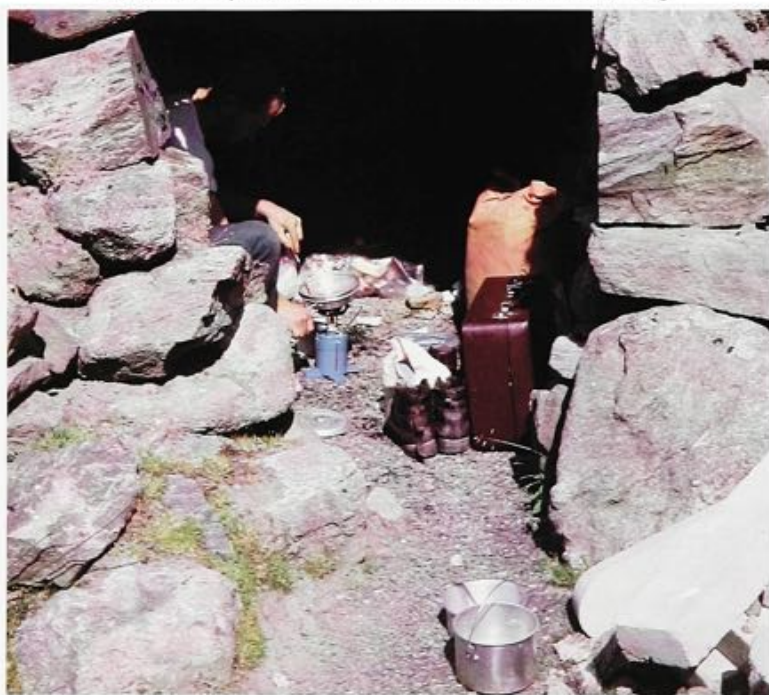
I am enjoying the challenge I have accepted. The buzz from a job well done, like an E route conquered.

Mountains remain an ever present challenge. Likewise our huts. With care and conservation both hut and mountains will be there for the generations who follow.



*Above: The Count House. Photo: Rod Hewing*

*Below: Proposed Scottish Hut? Photo: Rod Hewing*





# *A Quick Dash in the Karakoram*

*Dave Wilkinson*

Beneath me, the face dropped away into the night as we steadily gained height. The steepness below was betrayed by the small pool of light from Neil's head-torch bobbing about as he kept pace with us. Above, the end of a 9mm rope flicked and scraped against the crusted snow-ice. I stepped up towards it and it snaked away out of reach of my cramponed feet. Had I moved a little faster, I could have spiked it with my front points. But Bill, the rope's owner, tied to its upper end, was moving at a good pace, and kept it out of my way, though he knew nought of its danger.

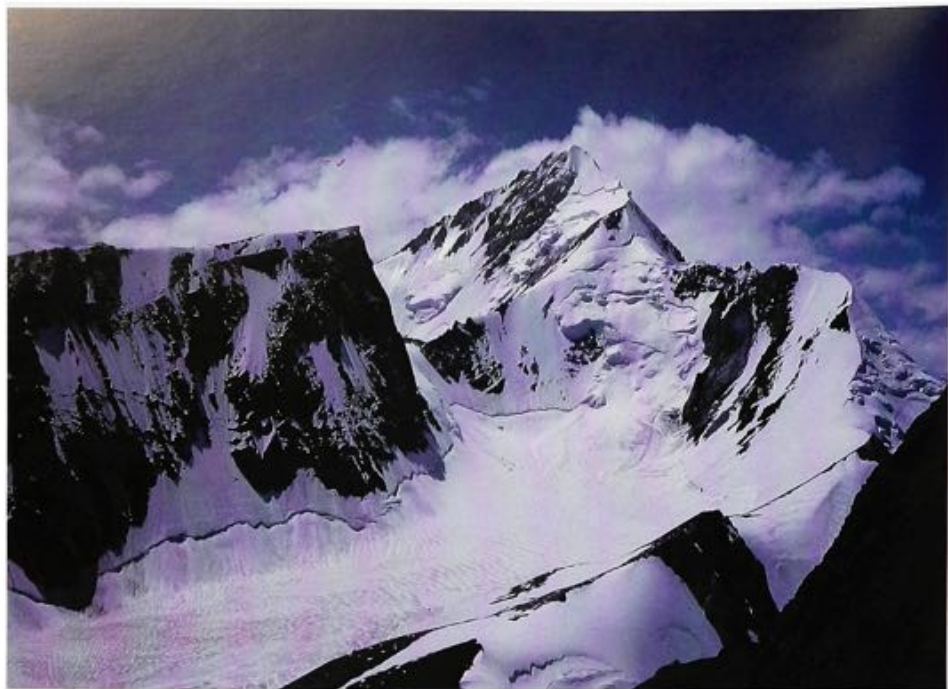
Since the bergschrund, we had moved together. Two of us had untied from the ropes, the other two trailing them up the icy slope, to avoid the need for coiling them, then uncoiling again when they were needed once more. Not for us the continental style of one-off-all-off roped moving together.

Just above me, John could be heard but not seen, as his front points crunched into the 45/50 degree slope. He moved confidently, directly up the slope with his head-torch turned off. I preferred the flat-footed French style, progressing in big zigzags. This felt rather less secure, and I definitely needed my light on, but it was easier on the calves.

The slope was in darkness, but away from the face, the nearby peaks and ridges, and the glacier below, were bathed in moonlight. Stars shone with a frosty twinkle. It could have been the upper part of any alpine north face. In fact, we were at 6,500 metres on the West Face of the unclimbed Chong Kumdan in the eastern Karakoram.

After two and a half weeks of travelling by road and foot, we had reached our base camp. A small patch of snow and alpine flowers, surrounded by glaciers and mountains. This was a remote area. It had never been camped in before. We had then spent two weeks combining acclimatisation and reconnaissance of this previously unattempted 7,000 metre peak, by climbing some of the lower surrounding peaks, also unvisited. The main peak was not unreasonably steep, but we could spot no obvious line, and after a fine spring, much icy ground was visible which might otherwise be snowier.

We had chosen this side of the mountain in spite of it being the most distant from base camp, a two day glacier trudge away. The long approach had its compensations. A shorter climb, only 800 metres height from the glacier to the summit. While Bill and I had reconnoitred the south-east side of the mountain, Neil and John had spotted this line. It looked good for a quick, one-day dash. So we travelled light, with no bivvy gear — only two 9mm ropes between the four of us, and very little belaying gear. We did allow ourselves the luxury of a gas stove for melting snow and fending off the dreaded altitude dehydration. But in spite of our light 'sacks, the lung-aching debility of the altitude forebade any startling turns of speed, and there would be no soft option 'voie normale' for our descent. We had risen at midnight, not relishing the prospect of a gearless forced bivouac on the way down.



*Chong Kumdan I (7,071m), Eastern Karakoram. Photo: Neil McAdie*

The position was frightening, high on an unknown Himalayan face at night. The prospect of a slip, and the unroped climbing, demanded caution; but this was not easy with the mind-numbing monotony of such a slope. Pre-dawn drowsiness didn't help. Part of my mind had to be filled with some memories of life at home, or the walk in, or something undemanding, leaving a little mental capacity for the job of not falling off.

Suddenly, I returned to full awareness. The overlying snow crust had thinned to a veneer, and full concentration was needed on the ice. I always like to keep all my crampon points filed sharp, not just the front ones. This fussiness now paid off. I was able to maintain my zigzagging style even on this icier ground, preserving calf strength, should it be needed later on.

Snowier ground now, so back to auto-pilot. Then full attention again. Above, Bill and John have stopped, concern drifts down. The slope has steepened, but instead of bare ice, the snow cover has changed to hollow crust. Some whim of the weather and the slope's orientation had caused the surface layer to be separated from the underlying ice by an air gap, it was dangerously unattached. As I moved up, the whole slope was hollow, and felt ready to detach itself at any minute, taking us with it. I crept back down a little, and started to traverse leftwards. This could have been a bad mistake — weakening the downslope support for the crust.

But it was better lower down, and got better still as I moved across to a rockier convexity in the slope which we had just made out in the darkness. Panic over, but the slope now steepened considerably. Ice screws went in, and we tied on again for a couple of pitches of proper climbing.

The sky was lightening now as dawn approached. Ominous bands of cloud crossed the sky. Ahead, the slope eased off to 45 degrees, so we untied again, and resumed a faster tempo. Above, the rocky upper face reared up. On our acclimatisation peaks we had met the local limestone. It resembled those white and crumbly varieties of cheese from the north of England. We wanted to avoid rock climbing. Over to our left was the North-West Ridge, with unpleasant looking rock towers lower down, but easier and snowy above. A convenient diagonal gully-ramp linked the face with the ridge, and gave the key to our route.

Roped up again, Bill and I climbed the ramp. Two pitches of ice with crumbly cheese, and not much to belay to. Full marks to John and Neil for spotting the route, but now they had a strange aberration. Our ramp seemed thinner and barer than they had expected. In fact, they thought we had not found 'their' line. So they climbed some loose rock further right, failed to find their ramp, and when they realised their mistake, were fully committed, and had to continue on 65 degree scree to rejoin the ridge just above us. Meanwhile, we had stopped for a brew, and watched their progress with a little concern, and plenty of amusement.

When I say 'brew', I mean lukewarm water with sugar dissolved in it. Bill had forgotten the tea-bags!

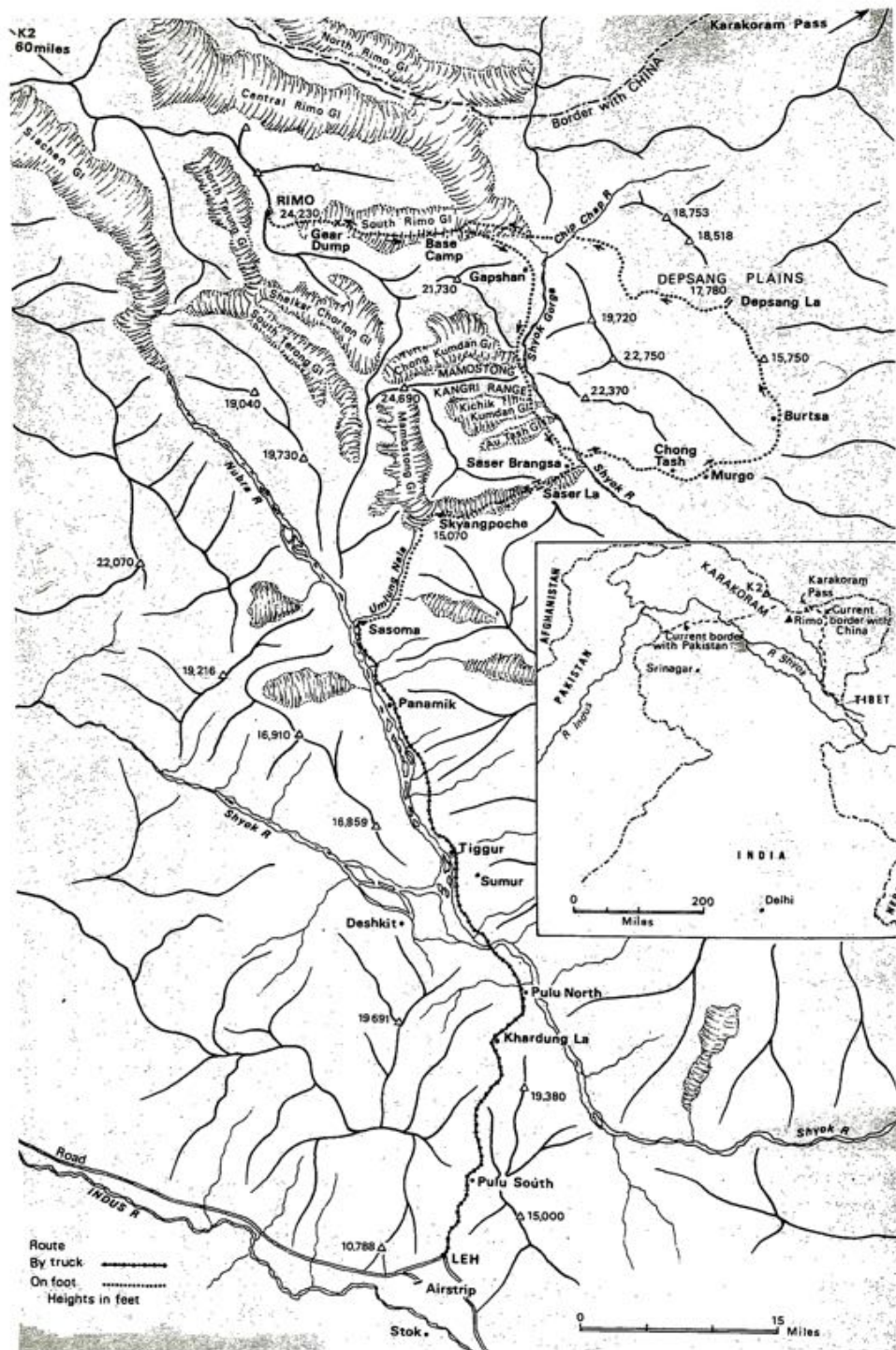
Ahead, the ridge rose to the summit, bounded on the right by the loose rocks of the West Face. On the left, cornices overhung the 2,000 metre North Face. In between was a passage narrow enough for exhilarating views on both sides, but broad enough for a comfortable ascent. We left the ropes off. The ridge rose with an undulating profile, easy bits with steeper steps in between. The texture varied from ice to powder resembling talcum, which squeaked underfoot. Progress was a struggle as we neared 7,000 metres, hearts thumping, lungs working like bellows as the frosty air wheezed in and out. But it was also a pleasure. Our goal was almost in our grasp, the views on both sides grew ever wider and deeper, as we steadily mounted this 'Stairway to Heaven'. Wisps of cloud and wind blown powder raced across our path. The cloud played hide and seek with the sun, which, when permitted, flashed diamond points of light off the snow crystals ahead.

Suddenly John stopped. There was no more ridge. He thought the very top might be a cornice, and demanded a rope to tie into. So protected, he climbed the last few feet, and found no cornice, but a knife-edged snow ridge. I was not first up so decided on the inverted form of one-upmanship, and waved the others through to show my generosity in being last up. Bill and Neil sat *à cheval* astride the summit crest, while John stood upright, and amused us all by doing a little dance on the very crest — no doubt a hillbilly hop from the mountains of his native New Hampshire.

Feelings on the top were a mixture of joy and satisfaction at a job well done, and smug mutual congratulation. Exhilaration at the staggering view of mountains all round, and worry about the descent. Cigar-shaped clouds raced across the sky, and we had no reserves of food or bivvy gear should things not go to plan. All too soon, we had to leave our heaven, and return to earth.

The ridge had taken over an hour and a half on the way up, but can't have been more than 20 minutes in descent. For the ramp, we tied our two ropes together and did a single abseil of 100 metres. We knew there was no good anchor half-way down. Three of us could abseil, but to retrieve the rope, the last man had to climb





Map Showing Area visited by Expedition.

down unprotected. Guess which mug got lumbered with that job? As Neil kept reminding me, I was supposed to be expedition leader.

Down climbing the icy lower face did not appeal. Nor did more abseiling, for we had precious little hardware. So we did a long descending traverse over to the other side of the face, on an inclined traverse on deep powder which didn't feel too stable. Not an unqualified improvement, the ascent line might have been better.

We reached our camp with several hours of daylight to spare, but little energy left, so we spent the night there. It snowed in the small hours, and all next day, so we felt happy over our choice of quick dash tactics.

## **Summary**

Indo - British Chong Kumdan Expedition 1991

**Region visited:** Eastern Karakoram, Ladakh, Northern India.

**Approach journey:** Four days by bus from Delhi to Manali, then over four high passes across the Himalaya, (including Tang Lang La, over 5,000 metres) to Leh. Then two days by Indian Army lorry over Kardung La (5,500 metres) and up Nubra valley to Sasoma.

Seven days walk in, with loads carried by pack-horses, over Saser La (5,300 metres) to Saser Brangza. Then upper valley of Shyok river, and Chong Kumdan glacier to base camp.

**Expedition members:** Dave Wilkinson, Paul Nunn, Lyndsay Griffin, John Porter, Bill Church and Neil McAdie (British)

Harish Kapadia (Leader), Muslim Contractor, Dhiren Pania, Bhupesh Ashar, Vijay Kothari, Ajay Tambe (Indian)

**Main peak climbed:** Chong Kumdan I (7,071 metres), 1st ascent. Route: West Face/North West Ridge. Porter, Church, McAdie, Wilkinson. 4th August

**Other first ascents:** (various combinations of team members)

Chong Kumdan V (6,500 metres)

Chong Kumdan IV (6,500 metres)

Kichik Kumdan (6,640 metres)

Laknis (6,235 metres)

Kumdan Terong (6,456 metres)

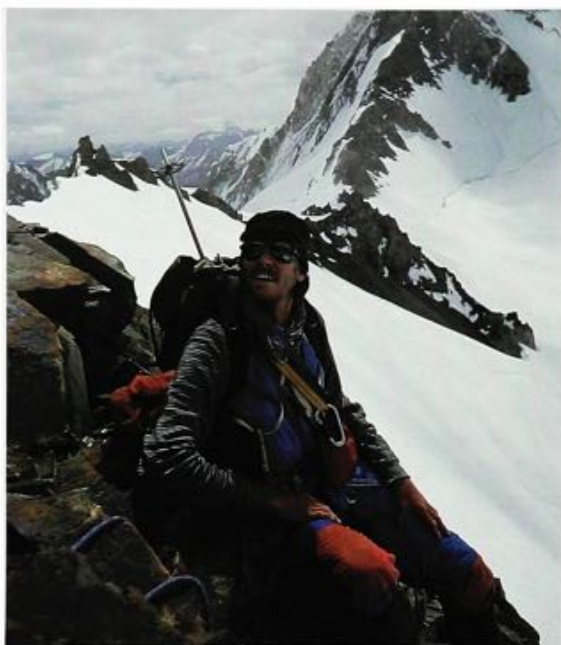
Landay (6,170 metres)

**Other peaks climbed: (not first ascents)**

Chongam (6,250 metres)

Stos (6,005 metres)

Skyang (5,770 metres)



*Above: Lindsay Griffin on top of Kichik Kumdan (6,640m) with Chong Kumdan behind, Eastern Karakoram. Photo: Paul Nunn*

*Below: Bill Church and John Porter on Chong Kumdan (7,071m) with Mamostong Kangri in left background. Photo: Neil McAdie*



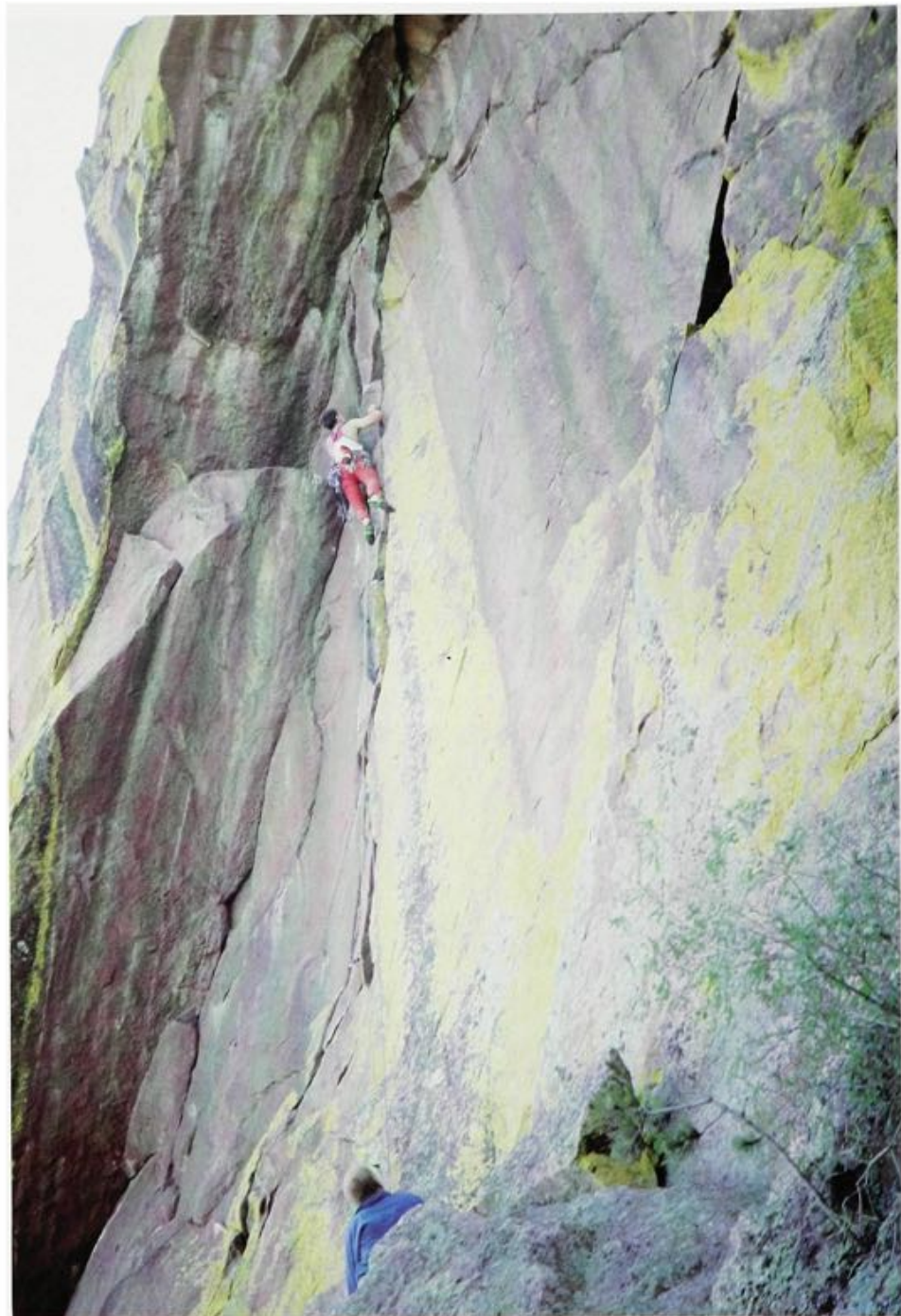




*Above: Pyramidalny (5,500m), Eastern Karakoram. Photo: MG Mortimer*

*Above: Ang Phurba and Smiler Cuthbertson in Nepal. Photo: Rosie Walmsley White*





*Andy Sharp on 'Death and Transfiguration', Green Mountain Pinnacle, Colorado.  
Photo: John Harwood*





*Hugh Banner on 'Salathe Wall', Day 1. Photo: Derek Walker*

# Crag 'X'

*Norman Elliott*

The morning dawned bright, very cold and December clear. The chums, which is what they called themselves, gathered together having only partially shaken off the Saturday night with aspirin and Earl Grey.

They had climbed together now for 20 years, having set out from the Sheffield suburbs on hundreds of occasions; to the Himalaya, Africa, the Alps, Arctic Canada, and of course a multitude of other forays into the nooks and crannies of this country now too numerous to remember. They had done it all, or all they were capable of, and the climbing scene no longer held the excitement of youth.

Today, however, was different. An edge of anticipation fed the banter as they loaded the rucksacks into the car and kissed the children goodbye. Today WAS different. They were going to a new crag. Not only a new crag, but a secret crag whose location had only just leaked out during the last few months. A major discovery, it was rumoured, little climbed on and still with great potential. Even today, the magic words Crag 'X' still had the ability to stir the adrenalin, and bring a glint of enthusiasm to bloodshot eyes.

"Shall we put the helmets in?" asked a chum.

"No," came the informed reply, "I've heard it's quite solid and the protection is very good," and as an afterthought, "it's just another thing to carry."

Their laughter pealed across the frosty dawn, a discharge of nervous anticipation fed by the challenge ahead, as they piled into the Volvo estate and set out. The leader, who wore thick glasses, had a map he had obtained the day before, which he used to myopically direct the driver, first through the familiar Peak District and then into open country.

They drove for nearly two hours, through a raw and frosty landscape, constantly putting to the back of their minds the pleasures that would be gained by walking through such beautiful countryside. A few sacrifices were called for on such a special day. After all this was novel, this was great, this was... NEW.

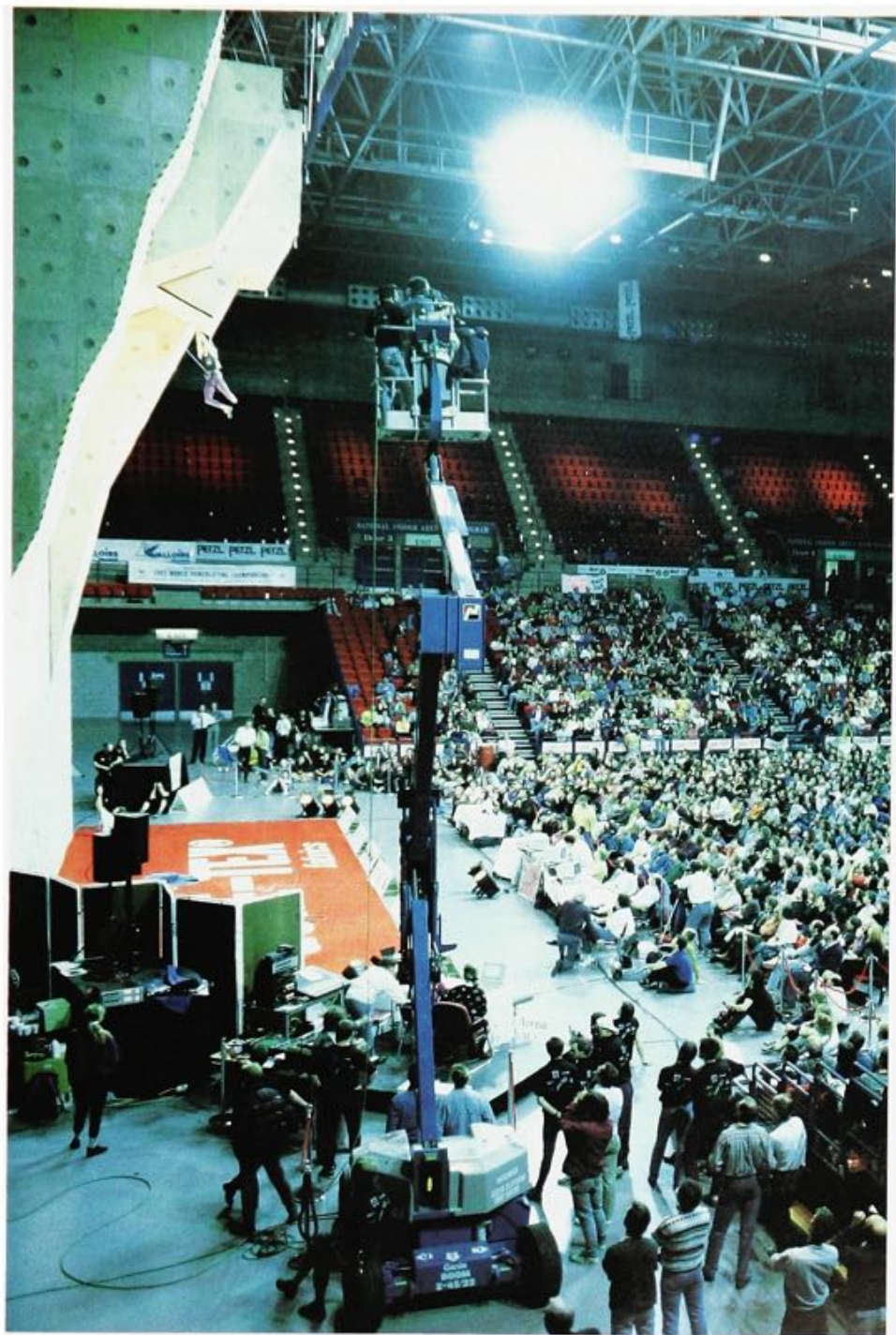
The approach was difficult, the road convoluted and unfamiliar. On one occasion they had to negotiate a difficult section, a track filled with great pot holes, as if Jim Curran had been down it on a pogo stick. Determination saw them through, however, as it had done during many epics in the past. Soon they were nearly there.

They had been told that access to the crag was difficult, and that on no occasion must they do anything to upset the local residents. Therefore, they took particular care to leave the car parked neatly, so it would not block the road which ran close to the hill.

The crag lay hidden behind the bend as they walked along a dark waterway recently cleared of weeds, and trudged up the icy path to a small opening in a wall which gave access to the open ground at the base of the cliff. No wonder it had remained secret for so long. Even when you were only a few metres away it remained hidden in its secret dell, out of sight, unknown, undiscovered.

The chums were a little surprised to find other climbers already there.





*Crag 'X', Birmingham 1991. Photo: Ian Smith*

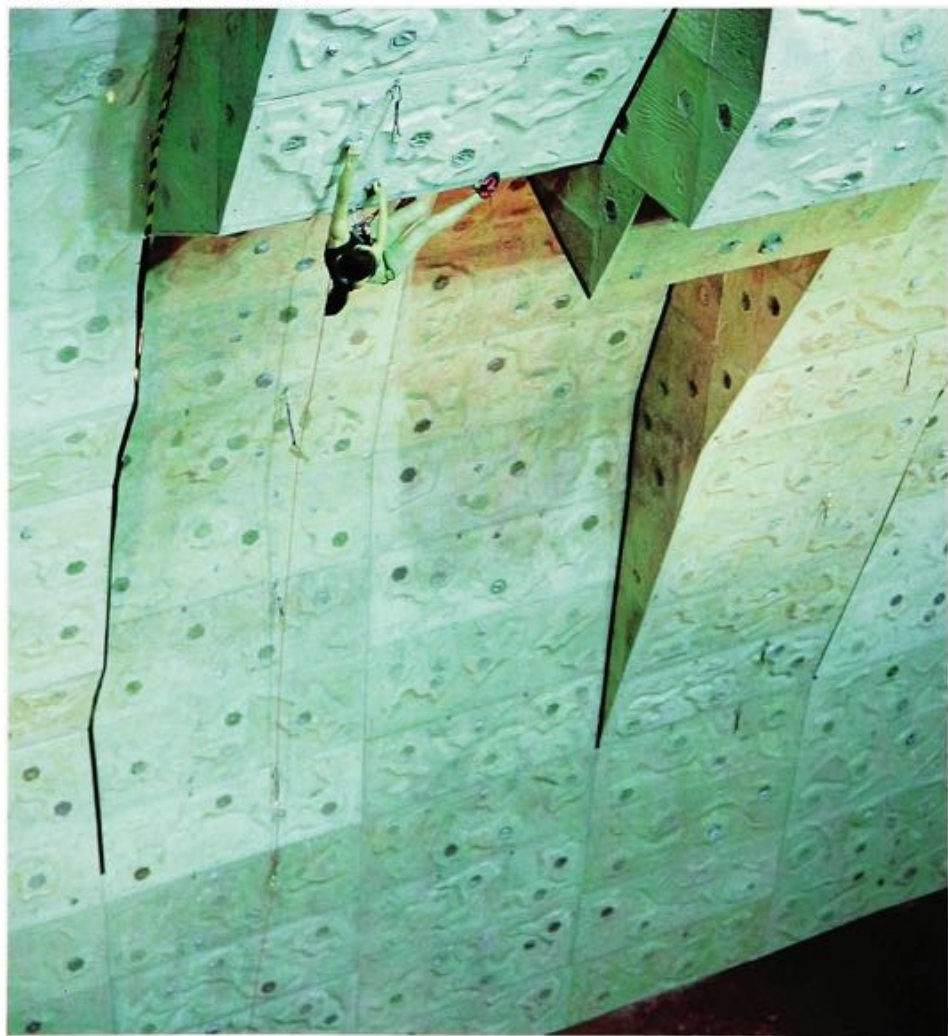
## Crag 'X'

Obviously the word had got out — was nothing sacred anymore?

There it was! The first view took the breath away. What a discovery, what a dream, what a crag! Huge, overhanging, leaning, compact, smooth, complex... the familiar words all applied.

The three chums sat down hushed and awed. They had seen Everest, El Cap, swung below Kilnsey's roof, and still they were impressed, perhaps a sign of middle age, but still impressed.

The ground below the crag was fortunately flat, a comfortable place to sit, a place to take stock and unpack the gear. The smallest one of the chums was a birdwatcher and, having spotted some movement high on the face, produced a pair of binoculars. These were used by each in turn to examine the outcrop in some detail. No nests were seen.



*A Competitor in action, Birmingham 1991. Photo: Ian Smith.*



By now the day had lost most of its icy chill, and it wasn't long before pile and pullover were being discarded.

"Don't get many days like this in December — think it's going to stay dry."

The left hand pillar of the crag showed some movement. An early arrival was already sizing up a possible line with animal eyes and chalked up fingers.

"I think that's Boysen," said the leader "trust him to be sniffing around if there are new routes."

We watched him climb for a few tantalizing moments. He appeared to be climbing with a group of other friends, all of whom appeared to be past their 'sell by' date.

"Perhaps it's a CC meet?" whispered the leader. But then, after watching Jerry Peel in action, "Perhaps not!"

By midday other, younger climbers had appeared on the crag. Many of them wandering along dipping their fingers into small bags. For a moment we thought it was chalk, but then we were reliably informed that they contained a form of popcorn, apparently a dietary supplement that all top climbers were now eating, with the added advantage of sticky fingers if one ever felt like climbing. We began to realise that we were really out of touch.

To bridge the gap between the generations, one of the chums gave vent to a solitary poetic outburst, a can of Diet Coke in hand...

"The sight of climbers struggling upwards to the supreme summit would have taught men to lift their eyes to the hills, to divert them only for a moment to something pure and lofty. Satisfying that inner craving that all men have hidden in their souls."

It seemed the right place and the right thing to do.

"I say," said the leader, "isn't that Bonington over there? And yes, it's Birtles with him! Gosh, it must be an important discovery, to get him out on the crag!"

Birtles stood at the bottom of the wall watching a young nubile floating from hold to hold. It was good to see these older mountaineers giving such active encouragement to the younger generation. Obviously inspired, she rounded the roof, poised on the lip, clipped her runner, and made her summit bid, six feet away.

By the end of the day the chums were thoroughly pumped by all this excitement. Their larynxes tightened in knots. But they were pleased to have participated in such an historic occasion.

Having attended the indoor International Mountain Literature Festival the week before, it was good to be back in the great outdoors, even if the queues for some routes had been a little inconvenient. They drove home strangely satisfied, the bond of friendship even stronger from the shared adversity of their memorable day, even if they had shown, well, a certain testicular reticence in attempting some of the routes.

The following Saturday the chums went to High Neb, but returned early to watch the football results on Grandstand.

"God forbid that climbing ever becomes like that," said the leader.

"I know what you mean," the smallest chum said, "but even Stanage is a bit of an anticlimax after last week, it's so..." he groped for the word, "... so artificial."

# The River

Dave Gregory

There are two main attitudes to be observed in the demeanour of a leading climber's second; the assiduous and the completely uninterested. It is a safe wager that the latter type will be facing outwards, probably sitting at ease, in relative comfort, at best gazing unconcernedly into space, at worst almost or actually asleep until the tug of the ropes on the belay device indicates some frantic activity above.

The assiduous is likely to be facing inwards, almost hanging from the belay in a position to follow developments above and hardly likely to remain asleep for long as any slumping forward will crack their head on the rock, an excellent alarm clock not unlike the principle which once provided the watcher over a whisky-still with a one-legged stool.

On arriving at the stance below the first real pitch of *The Black Cleft* I could see that it provides a luxury of options and an exception to these theories. One can delve around in the lower recesses of the Cleft itself and arrange a belay there giving one the option of facing out, leaning back against the sodden slab, all unknowing of activity above and descending detritus, or facing in and leaning out from the same anchor and being able to dodge the fire power. Taking either of these choices the second will become acquainted too early with the nature of that recess's glutinous emanations and it will give an extra spice to see the leader driven to this initial indignity in the attempt to get a good foothold to start from. There is, fortunately for the second, a wholesome pillar out from the corner to lean back on and a jammed boulder beside it to provide a dry attachment. Underfoot, all is clean and dry; an excellent vantage point for the next hour or so's proceedings.

All sages need a hero; all armies, even the cowardly, a leader and I had mine. It was an unexpected alliance. I had come to North Wales for the weekend with my son and his rope-mate. While Bill had spent the Saturday drilling holes in bits of slate and practising the moves, Jon and I had a pleasant day on the Mot and then formed the cavalry which rode to the evening rescue in the quarries, to hold the ropes and take photos for posterity's sake.

Back at Ynys, I was foolish to take my attention off them for a moment and found that they had organized Sunday for me. Jim Lawrenson was short of a rope-mate for the day, wished to climb on the big cliff, and the "What haven't you done that I haven't done, that I can get up?" horse trading began. Jim was after *The Boldest* and Bill, with the accuracy born of experience, judged that Jim, though light, looked strong enough in the back to get me up that. And what besides? He had, it appeared, a sneaking idea of doing *The Black Cleft*.

"Thirty years he's been waiting for that" said Bill and the die was cast.

We made two decisions, gearwise: to carry as much gear as we could, from Rock Ones upwards; and to dispense with chalkbags. There seemed little point in collecting and carrying a couple of litres of chalky slime. It would weigh heavy, and slimy chalk will enhance no friction and both our bags are such pretty colours.



The Cleft was a riot of vegetation for about 100 feet and much of the slab on its left was coated with an evil shimmering layer. Collier's snout would be a kind description. It seemed to have a vegetable content but whereas most plant life phototropes upward, or at least makes some attempt at reaching upward to the light, this rampant scum leaped joyfully downward, reaching eager tendrils outward to where it detected human life and food. There was an exception to this all-pervading miasma. For about 10 feet up from the stance, just out from the corner, a narrow band of merely damp rock extended. On this there could be perceived by the believer, or pointed out by the second, willing his leader to succeed, not wanting to have to lead the hard pitches himself, a few small protuberances which would pass as footholds.

The guide, by indicating that the gradings given are for FREE ascents, implies, not very subtly, that there are those who succumb to unethical activities in an attempt to maintain position or even gain height. I wish to make it quite plain that my man is made of sterner stuff. Not a tweak. In any case, the gear becomes instantaneously so coated with colloidal crud that it is of no use in gaining height at all. There are surprises in the ascent. After half an hour's energetic burrowing, one occasionally finds evidence of previous human passage. Pre-Cambrian pegs. An evolutionary history of the sling; a tape sling knotted to one of kernmantel fastened to a quarter weight hawser-laid, snaking back into the viscous bowels and attached, perhaps, to serpent's teeth. A bright, shiny hex, and no one passed this way before this twelfth month. Metallurgists, fame awaits the man who patents the metal-preserving prophylaxis of *The Black Cleft* glue. There are also elemental studies in human psychology. The leader places gear with no thought but of its suiting the placing and yet how often the second's is thrust into the grimiest, slimiest, rot-infested slots. No matter who the owner, the gear is going in steadily, about three or four feet apart, and progress is made.

The progress is best described as steady. Ten minutes evacuation of the next two feet, despatching the rancid compost leftwards while every sinew strains to maintain equilibrium on holds which would be a decent 5c if they were dry and clean, reveals not enough holds and not enough of a gear placement. Where are the imagined 5a incuts revealed by the uplifted good Welsh turf of *Longland's Direct Finish*? Where is the Walsh's groove crack? The Cloggy Corner crack? The right hand in, left foot up, pull, push; repeat the sequence? Nowhere. There is a crack, a series of cracks, in the other direction, too wide to jam, suitable for laybacking, if the prospect of that on a near-vertical skidpan ever entered anyone's head. Squirming seems the only answer. Intimate contact with the drain-run of the cess-pit. Has the summit hotel a toilet block? Could a geological joke be directing its contents past all the laccoliths and dykes, through the fissures and fistulas, and out here in this so nearly a sewer?

The leader's excavations have an inconsistent product. The branches of what looks like water-cress float down, parachute-like, with a gentle rocking action making little noise. They move to and fro across the slab at the behest of little flurries of wind and seem to hang in space below one, becoming smaller rather than further away. Individual leaves of this occasionally essay the flight alone. They flutter back and forth aimlessly, often developing a fascinating spin if their curvature is correct. Whilst one is watching the silent evolutions of one of these proto-helicopters there will come the mean, adrenalin-pumping swish of a solid,

sodden mat of primeval Cleft-sponge. These rush down, Newton ordered, splattering on face and path below. The plug to seepage they once afforded, gone, the flow down the corner becomes a river, spreading sideways to foul that initial dry 10 foot-worth. Every hold, however painstakingly cleaned, becomes covered with the splatterings of the succession of vegetable projectiles. Most of the slab to the left has its every horizontality covered with a selection of slime-covered leafage which would tax a botany professor. Strange, so little interest is being shown in starting *Longland's* or going down to *Gecko*. For that matter no one seems to be starting up the groove of *The Mostest* even though it is well round the corner and yet there seems to be queues for all the other routes.

The river flow is catholic in its choice of channel. As he raises his arm to root rubbish out or use a hold, I can see the water drip from his waist, having sluiced down his arms. As his arm bends, the spout leaves his sleeve at the elbow, spraying over the sidewall and the slab. The tracksuit bottoms are long since a sullen green, a-shimmer with water ripple, as the flood forces past the harness legloops on its way to the sea.

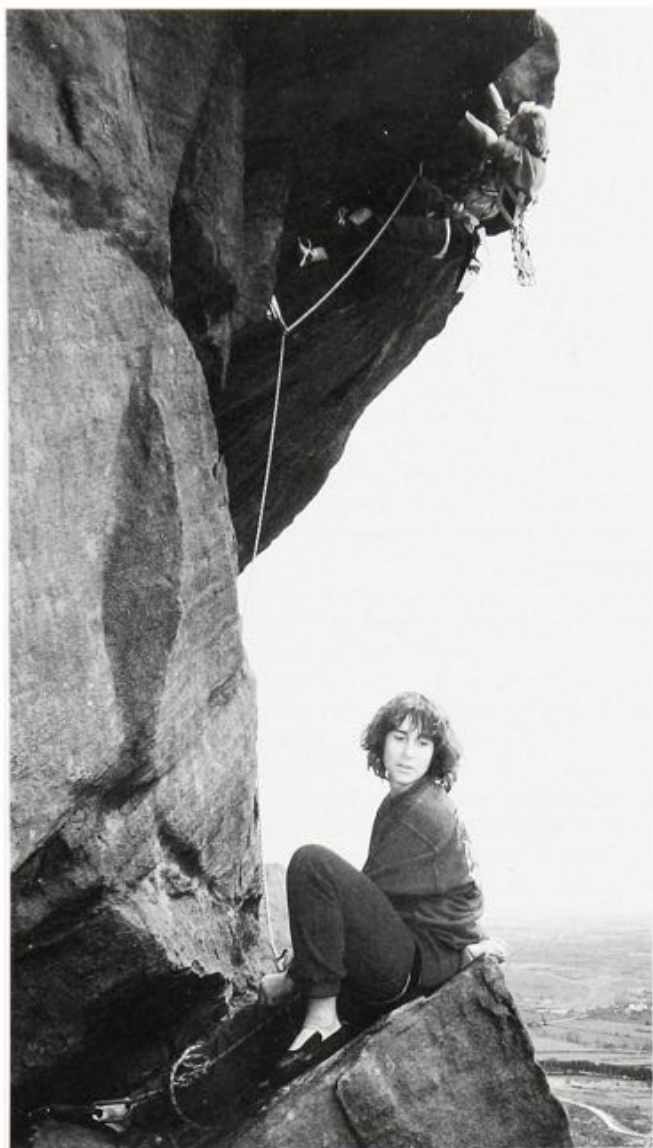
It is supposed to be 60 feet to the first belay and our confidence falls as no evident stance appears. I tell out the distances as the half-way mark gets nearer and passes. 50 metres is 150 feet plus a quarter of 50 which is about 12 giving 162 feet. Half of 162 is 81; he has got to be well above the belay now. Spirits fall. The two pitches together are 130 feet and we realise he is getting close to where the rock begins to dry off and before long he is speeding up the drier rock, relieved of the dead weight of all that original gear, and is moving over the bulge with its well-sized crack and out to *The Boulder* belay.

The stinking agony of the ascent must be less for the second since most of the *Matto Grasso* has been cast adrift. The water flow is, however, greater, the holds are uniformly dirtier, the gear is difficult to see and more so to extract. The standard ploy of holding it in one's teeth while hands are changed on the holds gives an abominable taste to the adrenalin dryness and fearful thoughts of typhoid. The day is still clear and warm but a creeping lowering of the skin temperature plots the spread of the seepage from extremities over the whole body surface. The same muscles, used repeatedly in the same movement, begin to protest and then to scream. The delight of reaching the dry rock and the bulge with positive holds is diluted by the piteous pleadings of the leader to generate some body warmth.

Grudging assent to this heartfelt plea having been given, he leaves me with several tons of gear and sodden tapes and clothing dragging my harness down, and leaps at the bone-dry slab and overhang above. I am left flexing arms and shoulders and wondering if they will ever flex fluently again. Which of my aches and bruises is the worst? The neck.

Birds and cats, and no doubt other animals of which I have no knowledge seem to be able to move their heads to and fro at remarkable speeds which humans cannot aspire to. To see a small bird shake water drops from its head, after a dip in the birdbath, is to encounter frequencies of oscillation which radio engineers cannot hope to emulate. A second on the Cleft, watching one sod plummeting below him, will have his gaze wrenched upwards by the next swish and from watching the lower portions of that one's trajectory, have it pulled up again by the threat of the next waterlogged projectile. In between whiles, the second peers

anxiously upwards, craning back the neck, watching hawk-eyed for signs of any slipping in the leader's treacherously planted feet, occasionally whipping the head sideways to avoid a clod of mis-directed clart. The human cervical vertebrae are not up to this sort of activity and consequently, tomorrow, I am going to the doctor's. I have this condition, at present unknown to medical science, called Black Cleft Neck.



*"Watch me youth!" Jeff Lowe and Catherine Destivelle on 'The Sloth'. Photo: Derek Walker*

# Three Mountain Phenomena

*Brian H. Kembell-Cook*

I wonder how many members of the Club have experienced any or all of the following phenomena, either in the Alps or amongst our own mountains?

1. Interference spectra seen round the sun at the point of dawning.
2. The luminous appearance of trees, shrubs and birds seen a little before sunrise.
3. Buzzing phenomena in thunderous conditions.

I have experienced interference spectra and 'buzzing', each on one occasion only, but have never seen the luminous appearance of trees, shrubs and birds, although these must surely be often there to see if one has the wit to seek it out. I saw interference spectra in July 1973. My sons and I had spent the night on a height overlooking the Mer de Glace near Chamonix. At dawn, the sun rose from behind a snowbed on the ridge, north of the Aiguille des Grande Montets. First we saw the sun shining through the snow. Then it appeared, a tiny, bright orb, which was surrounded for less than a minute by rays in all the colours of the rainbow, darting out in every direction — an entrancing sight. I had not come across any reference to this phenomenon or to luminous appearances until I read the following passages in Professor Tyndall's *The Glaciers of the Alps* first published in 1860. On his second ascent of Mont Blanc in 1858, he set off at 7.20am for the Grands Mulets:

'For a long time we were in the cool shadow of the mountain, catching at intervals, through the twigs in front of us, glimpses of the sun surrounded by coloured spectra. On one occasion a brow rose in front of me; behind it was a lustrous space of heaven, adjacent to the sun which, however, was hidden behind the brow: against this space the twigs and weeds upon the summit of the brow shone as if they were self-luminous, while some bits of thistle-down floating in the air appeared, where they crossed this portion of the heavens, like fragments of the sun himself. Once the orb appeared behind a rounded mass of snow which lay near the summit of the Aiguille du Midi. Looked at with the naked eyes, it seemed to possess a billowy motion, the light darting from it in dazzling curves, a subjective effect produced by the abnormal action of the intense light upon the eye. As the sun's disk came more into view, its rays however still grazing the summit of the mountain, interference-spectra darted from it on all sides and surrounded it with a glory of richly-coloured bars. Strange to say, though the luminous appearance of bodies projected against the sky adjacent to the rising sun is a most striking and beautiful phenomenon, it is hardly ever seen by either guides or travellers; probably because they avoid looking towards a sky the brightness of which is painful to the eyes.(1) In 1859 Auguste Balmat had never seen the effect; and the only written description of it which we possess is one furnished by Professor Necker, in a letter to Sir David Brewster, which is so interesting that I do not hesitate to reproduce it here:



'I now come to the point,' writes M. Necker, 'which you particularly wished me to describe to you; I mean the luminous appearance of trees, shrubs, and birds, when seen from the foot of a mountain a little before sunrise. The wish I had to see again the phenomenon before attempting to describe it made me detain this letter a few days, till I had a fine day to go and see it at the Mont Saleve; so yesterday I went there and studied the fact, and in elucidation of it I made a little drawing of which I give you here a copy: it will, with the explanation and the annexed diagram impart to you, I hope, a correct idea of the phenomenon. You must conceive the observer placed at the foot of a hill interposed between him and the place where the sun is rising, and thus entirely in the shade; the upper margin of the mountain is covered with woods or detached trees and shrubs, which are projected as dark objects on a very bright and clear sky, except at the very place where the sun is just going to rise, for there all the trees and shrubs bordering the margin are entirely — branches, leaves, stem and all, — of a pure and brilliant white, appearing extremely bright and luminous, although projected on a most brilliant and luminous sky, as that part of it which surrounds the sun always is. All the minutest details, leaves, twigs etc., are most delicately preserved, and you would fancy you saw all these trees and forests made of the purest silver, with all the skill of the most expert workman. The swallows and other birds flying in those particular spots appear like sparks of the most brilliant white. Unfortunately, all these details, which add so much to the beauty of this splendid phenomenon, cannot be represented in such small sketches.

Neither the hour of the day nor the angle which the object makes with the observer appears to have any effect; for on some occasions I have seen the phenomenon take place at a very early hour in the morning. Yesterday it was 10am when I saw it. I saw it again on the same day at 5pm, at a different place of the same mountain, for which the sun was just setting. At one time the angle of elevation of the lighted white shrubs above the horizon of the spectator was about 20 degrees, while at another place it was only 15 degrees. But the extent of the field of illumination is variable, according to the distance at which the spectator is placed from it.'

Professor Necker goes on to discuss the conditions under which this striking 'self-luminescence' can be observed. It is only to be seen in mountainous country, and the observer must be at some distance from the objects for them to be illuminated. He wrote that on mountains in the Alps he had seen large tracts of forests and immense spruce-firs illuminated throughout their whole length, and that at the same time, though at a distance of more than 1,000 metres, a vast number of large swallows or swifts, which inhabited those high rocks, were seen as small brilliant sparks or stars moving rapidly in the air.

Professor Necker concluded by suggesting that his correspondent might easily observe the phenomenon in some part or other of the Scottish hills where 'some long heather or furze will play the part of our Alpine forests, and I would advise you to try and place a bee-hive in the required position, and it would perfectly represent our swallows, sparks and stars'.

Reference to bees leads naturally to a third mountain phenomenon, which some members of the Club have, no doubt, experienced in person; this is the

buzzing sound heard when thunder is about, usually compared to the buzzing of bees. The electrical conditions which produce the buzzing may also cause one's hair to stand on end. Mrs Audrey Le Blond, in her book **Adventures on the Roof of the World**, devotes a chapter to 'Thunderstorms in the Alps'. She quotes the experience of C. Packe (related in a very early Alpine Journal) who, when descending a peak in the Pyrenees, heard a buzzing sound coming from his rifle, and thought a bee had got stuck in the barrel. When his alpenstock also started buzzing, he made haste to escape from the area. She also quotes an article in the same journal by F.F. Tuckett, who experienced a ferocious storm on the Roche Melon:

'As the clouds swept by, every rock, every loose stone, the uprights of the rude railing round the chapel, our axes, my lorgnettes and flask, and even my fingers and elbows, set up a 'dismal universal hiss'. It was as though we were in a vast nest of exited snakes, or a battery of frying pans'.

The bees have never buzzed for me in the Alps, but one day in April 1963, I arrived on the summit of Tryfan with a party of schoolboys. The air was still and it was gently snowing. The bees were buzzing busily, and our hair really did rise and stand on end. I have a photograph of a present member of the Club sitting on Adam with upright locks to prove it. I wonder whether any other Club member has experienced the phenomenon in this country?

(1) Editor's note:- Professor Tyndall's assumption as to why guides and travellers avoid looking directly into a bright sky is well founded. It's not just painful, it's very damaging to the eyes. Be careful.

An interesting and absorbing subject. I will be happy to receive accounts of any other Club members' experiences of the three phenomena. Future journals will benefit from such contributions. DJC.

# *Fhidleir Buttress*

*Hamish Nicol*

I lay in my tent by the lochan side. The heather was so dry we could have camped anywhere. A mile away across the loch, the *Fhidleir Buttress* of Ben Mhor Coigach stood improbably out from the dull brown undulating moor, like the prow of a ship. It completely dominated our view, and our thoughts. We had parked our cars in a lay-by on the slopes of Cul Beag, shouldered our heavy pack frames and set off southerly across the pathless moor to the loch side. The narrow single track road which skirts Stac Polly has the trappings of civilisation; a few cars, a rubbish bin here and there, but the moor is as it has always been since the glaciers receded, empty, boggy and rarely visited.

The *Fhidleir Buttress* was first climbed in 1962 by Drasdo and Dixon after a siege which had lasted for almost a century, though 'siege' is too strong a word for the sporadic visitations of rock climbers. Drasdo reported a thousand foot buttress of superb Torridonian sandstone with only one major disadvantage. A week of dry weather was necessary before it could come into condition and this rarely happens in north-west Scotland.

In 1985 we were lucky. Dave Atchison, Peter Newman, Robin Prager, Bill Thomas, Michael Westmacott and I had driven the 480 miles up from England in three separate cars and all arrived at about the same time, at the private hostel in Achnashellach, which was our rendezvous for that year.

Our first day had gone well and after a couple of good routes on Fuar Buttress, we strolled over to the famous Mainreachan Buttress, also on the Fuar Tholl, and climbed *Investigator* (graded Hard Severe but technically much easier than this). Next morning after breakfast, the weather was still perfect and somebody said;

"Why not climb the *Fhidleir Buttress*?"

And this is how it happened.

The *Fhidleir Buttress* is up north of Ullapool so there was a short car drive to do first. The yomp with pack frames over the moor took only two hours, and after supper, Dave and I had time to walk over to the foot of the buttress to reconnoitre the route. The SMC guidebook to the Northern Highlands (1974) by Tom Strange, has, on page 150, a discursive and not very precise description. However, satisfied, we caught a couple of trout in a tiny lochan and returned to the tents. You don't have to be very expert to catch trout in Scottish hill lochs. All you need is a collapsible seven foot spinning rod, a spinning reel, a length of monofilament nylon with a breaking strain of about five pounds, and a few Mepps spinners size No.2. A penknife and a pair of scissors complete your equipment, which might cost as much as £30. No proper fisherman regards this as fishing, of course, but proper fishermen are only to be found near smart hotels and not very far from the roadside. Your angler, like your average Brit, avoids unnecessary exercise.

We got up at 6.45am next morning and started climbing two hours later. Robin led off into the sinuous cracks at 9am and the climb was on! Pitch by pitch it became harder and steeper until, by 12.30pm, we reached the 'pale slabs' which had repulsed all the earlier attempts. Robin by-passed the first slab on the right



and found a pleasant grassy ledge for lunch. The only way onto the second slab was on the left, where a grassy crack seemed to breach the first overhang and the steep rocks above it. Luckily a very easy ledge took us over in that direction. At this point I realised that the slabs were very steep walls and not slabs at all. So, Robin, Peter, Dave and I joined in a rope of four, leaving Michael and Bill to bring up the rear, and make it all look rather easy. The grassy crack was all right until the top 20 feet which was on very small holds. The tiny ledge above this bit was the start of the third slab.

Above the tiny ledge was an overhang, and above that was a very thin wall, where a puff of wind could have blown Robin off, or so it seemed to me when I got there. Ahead, only one obvious way led through the final overhangs, a vicious looking twisty finger-jamming crack. Robin called down.

"This looks a bit nasty. Look out!"

Then he led it very quickly. One does not hang around in uncomfortable places.

The climb had taken us six hours. We sat about in the sun at the top, taking photographs and feeling very pleased with ourselves. There are not many perfect days on the hills, but this day on the *Fhidleir Buttress* came very close to perfection, hard, but not too frightening, one of the best climbs of its standard in the United Kingdom.

Back at the campsite I got out a piece of paper and added up our total ages. 327! Robin and Dave had let us down a bit. They weren't even 50!

# *The Man Who Abolished Guilt*

*Dave Cook*

"Yes, I know there's a gap in the market, but is there a market in the gap?"

"You bet there is," Johnny replied, "think of all the men you know — fathers, husbands, students, workers, wankers — whatever hat they are wearing, guilt keeps them in line. It must be the same with climbers."

I gulped nervously. In this mood Johnny's imagination bounced about like a fire-cracker. You were never sure where his comments were going to land.

"Look," he explained maliciously, "think of you and Jane. Guilt rules your relationship. Each time you go climbing and leave her alone with the kids for the week-end, you spend the next week in a frenzy of 'new mannery', beating your breast and stroking hers trying to amass sufficient points to cancel out your guilt and her anger."

"Nonsense," I barked back, "it's called give and take — something you wouldn't know too much about." Johnny tilted his head and grinned, pleased to have drawn first blood.

"Listen dummy," he purred, "it won't work. You are so transparent there isn't even a watermark. Do you think she doesn't know that all your lovey dovey stuff is a con — the price you are prepared to pay for a week-end away from her. God — it's positively evil. When was the last time you were nice to her spontaneously, rather than as a crafty scheme to stack up the points?"

Ouch — on the chin — footwork — get out of range. When Johnny punches like that I leave the ring.

"That's what marriage is like," I countered weakly, "without guilt there can be no morality. You're right, It does keep us in line."

"You are full of shit" he stated sadly as if I was a no-hope case.

"I'm going to abolish guilt from my life. It's a dangerous emotion. You can be paralysed by it, and deceived by it. And in the end it's just window-dressing. Most people parade their guilt to show how 'right-on' they are, but when it comes to the crunch it means nothing. Selfishness rules. Best have the reality on the table."

It took Dostoevsky 700 pages to say something similar. I felt as if his collected works in hardback had fallen upon me.

In the years to come I often remembered Johnny's fighting words. We met occasionally — on the crag or in the bar — and he never lost a chance to remind me that his memory was also good. He said that a cloak of remorse and lost opportunities hung around me like mist on the Ben, and even used to sing me 'The Guilty One' by Jerry Lee Lewis to rub it in. Don't think I didn't try to change things. I didn't like being under heavy manners like that. Jealousy and envy — no problem — seeing them off was easy, but the big G was a different matter. Just as the old Soviet Union is finding out with virulent nationalism — something it thought had been relegated to the history books — guilt kept bouncing back in my life and slapping me across the face.

Johnny, on the other hand, seemed to thrive on his diet of emotional lobotomy. Women, he said, liked his honesty.

"Make your wants explicit" he was fond of saying. "Then people can make up their own minds without bullshit."

He was good on the rock as well. I guess most people have to jettison half the baggage they carry around in their heads to deal with climbing's simplified reality. Johnny had done it already. He was always ready for the crux. You will understand by now that we are talking real 'love-hate' here. We were 'mates', but the chemistry was occult.

Which probably explains why we climbed together so infrequently. Yes, our careers had swirled us in different directions — geographically, socially and financially — but the mountains span wider gaps. As so often it was a funeral that united us. Among climbers no party or celebration seems able to issue an invitation with a greater attractive power. Across the windswept churchyard was ranged a class photograph from every corner of our contrasted lives, a unique cobweb of partners and memories from rock faces the length of the land, as if the names from the columns of my annotated guidebooks had all assembled. However at the end of the service, only one strand of the web was in my hand.

"We must do a route" I found myself saying.

"I've got the gear in my car" Johnny said.

As always he was ready.

The valley cliffs were damp and cold, but the west facing quarries beckoned. Johnny had done several first ascents in the early days, necky ungardened leads that had earned him a big reputation. One of them, the ugly jumbled wall above the pool, still awaited a repeat. *After the Ball* Johnny had named it. I had tried it several times, but on each attempt midnight had always struck before I got committed.

"Don't suppose you'd fancy a second ascent?"

Johnny looked at me curiously. "You mean, would I take you up it?" he responded tartly. He led the first section in fine style, then disappeared from view above the overhang where the angle fell back. The upward movement of the ropes slowed to a halt and the half-way marking tapes seemed to shuttle-cock across my stitch-plate. Funny how sometimes the static flickers along the nylon. Geiger-counter palms can sense a leader's cry of desperation before your ears pick up the soundwaves.

The runners stopped him below the roof — an honest thumping fall, devoid of malice. May they always be so clean.

"Not like I remember it" Johnny grunted. Up he went again. This time no wind-mills, just up-draught, surging to the top. "Shit — the whole top wall has been chipped." His anger crackled back down the rope, jump-leading through the metal in my hands.

Indeed it had. Hewn incisions cat's-eyed the vertical slate. I paused for a long time beneath them, searching for alternative holds. There were none. The wall was unclimbable without the chopped finger-pulls.

"How did you do it on the first ascent, Johnny?" I shouted.

His face craned over the rim, guilt-edged against the evening sky.

"The loose flake has gone" he replied, "whoever chipped the holds must have pulled it off."

"You did it, you bastard, you chipped that route. If that's how you live your guilt-free life, you can stuff it."



Johnny looked up startled, the rope half coiled across his hand and composure skidding across his face. A snarly smile fought to retain control; harsh words striving to accelerate out of danger.

"Always so quick to judge, aren't you? Do you honestly believe that I would have taken you to the scene of my crime if it had been me? Today I fell off the first time trying it without the chiselled holds. Sure, I used them eventually, just like you. But on the first ascent the upper wall was unmarked — no chips — right?"

It was hard to tell which was worse — the crime or the cover-up. His own route description in the guidebook, extolling the quality of the rock, impaled the lie in the widening space between us.

We walked back to the car-park in silence; my suspicion and his feigned betrayed friendship, eye-balling each other across the path. That's how it ended. We never climbed together again.

Years later he called me out of the blue.

"How about a week-end in the Lakes?"

I prevaricated clumsily in reply.

"Don't worry about the last time" Johnny urged, "life's too short. I bet you've been eaten up with guilt. No need. I forgot it straight away."

"Forgot what?"

"Calling me a liar and a cheat among other things," he answered cheerily. "You are forgiven."

I didn't go to the Lakes that week-end.

# *A Day on the Cromlech*

*Mike Frith*

The day started like most good days seemed to start this year — with the drive out in early morning sunshine and hot sausage rolls and coffee for breakfast at the caravan 'Chez Cameron'.

On this particular occasion the (well) over 40s team was supplemented by an over 50s member — for strength and experience. Over coffee a discussion ensued as to where we should pit our respective skills. Derek and Malcolm fancied Cloggy which was too far to walk for my liking. My preference of Anglesey was too hot for the mountain men, so the Cromlech seemed a fair compromise.

The drive from the caravan site to the hut was uneventful, the discussion at the car as to who should lead what and in which order proving more interesting. Our intrepid elder member plumped for *Left Wall* with Malcolm opting for the steep, technical but well protected *Foil*. Having arrived at the conclusion that I wouldn't be called on to lead, my 'sack contained only the essentials; rock-boots, harness, food and a large bottle of lemonade. The handicapping system worked well, my light 'sack and unfitness being balanced by the size of the racks the other two were carrying, allowing us to arrive at the base of the Cromlech within a couple of minutes of each other.



*Dinas Cromlech. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson*

Established on the huge sloping ledge beneath the open book walls, surveying the view in warm sunshine made everything seem right with the world. A cursory glance around confirmed that there were only two other climbers on the ledge, a pair of well muscled youths in their late teens and they were gearing up for the Corner. While Derek went through the motions of choosing rock boots, rack, etc., I had chance for a look at the Corner team as the leader embarked on the route. Now I come from a generation where drilling out one inch Whitworth nuts and threading them with braided nylon slings was considered mandatory in order to climb above VS. The nuts never seemed to be used but to drag them up a route was looked upon as character building. I was reminded of this when I spotted the enormous amount of gear the leader was carrying. Pride of place, however, went to what looked like a piece of four inch diameter hexagonal down-spout which was presumably intended to be the man-made equivalent of the Pudding Stone.

After some time Derek finished with the preliminaries and set foot to rock. I moved up to the base of the Corner with the camera to get the classic shot looking out over the Pass. Getting close to the Corner team made me realise what I'd suspected from below — we were in for an entertaining day. Moving away from the direct line of flight I sat back to watch.

As most people know, the first difficult bit of the Corner arrives at about 25 feet — the leader didn't. He made the move below and ended up with his left leg out horizontal, right leg scrabbling in the corner for a hold. As the trembling increased I knew the inevitable was about to happen. Modern convention seems to dictate that a leader, when about to fall, shouts in a controlled voice 'take' to his second. With our man, convention went out of the window and an uncontrolled 'aaarrh' was followed by him being stopped, hanging upside down three feet from the deck. The look of abject fear on his face as he passed within inches of his second's feet was quite memorable.

After this cameo, life on the ledge settled back into something approaching normality. Lying back in the warm hazy sunshine it was time to watch how Derek was faring. He had made good progress and had become established at the resting ledge below the final 20 feet, and crux, of the climb. Little movement took place for some time as he fixed the protection, rested and 'girded his loins' for the next bit. My attention began to wander and fixed on another group just joining us on the ledge — they looked the business. Their leader, wearing only a pair of shorts, was about 20, built like the sports stars in the magazines and was replete with pony tail and suntan. This team are for *Right Wall* at least I thought. Doubts about this as an objective did surface, however, when Malcolm pointed out the tattoo around his belly button which read 'Made in England'. These doubts persisted when the leader described the position on the ledge as 'awesome'. Their route turned out to be *Spiral Stairs* about which they were really enthusiastic and they eventually climbed it without too many problems. This was more than could be said for the Corner team, the members of which, having swapped places, were now re-engaged in battle with Joe's classic test piece. The new leader had managed by pure determination to get himself established just below the crux moves. His first attempt at these ended in failure, 20 feet lower, after his first experience of flight time.

Meanwhile Derek had ceased to become the *in situ* climber and moved with purpose and one or two light tugs to complete the route — a fine effort I thought



given his lack of match practice. During the course of my preparation and ascent our man on the Corner enjoyed two more gravity powered trips and a further one more during Malcolm's ascent. While all this was going on a team whom we had previously ignored on *Cemetery Gates* were providing further entertainment, the leader taking a 25 foot fall from just below the girdle ledge. By the time we had abseiled back to the ledge, the leader on the Corner had let common sense prevail and lowered off.

Up to this point the day had been a pleasant combination of exercise, relaxation, entertainment and a little excitement. However, a reminder of the dangers of climbing was not far away. It was actually falling through the air and arrived in the shape of a rock the size of half a house brick, dislodged from the top of the corner by our friend with the tattooed navel, abseiling back to base. To say we were fortunate is probably an understatement.

It was time to leave the ledge and get to grips with *Foil*. However, Malcolm's parting comment to the assembled throng of: "The reason why we're so old is that we've managed to avoid dick-heads like you" was, I thought, a classic.

After the incidents on the ledge, the ascent of *Foil* was almost an anti-climax. Malcolm climbed it in almost perfect style taking just one rest by the crux. This was much better than Derek and myself; we had to have lots of tight rope to get the runners out (which is an excuse I seem to be using a lot more lately). The climb completed it was back down to the ledge, gear packed and away before any further objective dangers came our way.

# "Now I Know Why"

Bob Entwright

The summer of 1978 gave plenty of opportunities for honing up our fitness ready to meet the challenge of Yosemite in August/September. The last week-end we could get a decent walk and a rock route to test our abilities saw Trevor, Rick and myself leaving the car-park of the Brotherswater Hotel, striding out for Dove Crag and our intended route, *Extol*.

About half way to the crag where the path crosses a small stream, I sat down and looked at the scenery. At least that's what I told myself I was doing. In reality I needed a serious rest. The other two were up ahead with thoughts of not being the last to get to the climbing. Trevor was always a competitor.

On that small, warm rock, I wondered if I had done enough to get fit for the untold rigours that lay ahead in the Californian sun. Before I got too depressed at the thought of being a burden on the team, I continued on, to the shadowy rocks at the foot of a wet looking first pitch.

"Yours is the sharp end" said Trevor, as I surveyed the unpleasant preliminaries. He'd decided the big second pitch was his, as Rick was leaving the heroic stuff to us. In the event, I ended up leading the whole route which made me feel good and banished the morning's depressions. That was, until the walk down, when I stumbled a lot and the 'unfit' feeling returned. Driving back along the motorway, my thoughts were... "I wonder why?"

Yosemite was everything we'd been told, and more. Tuolumne Meadows gave us some memorable days but the two I recall most were our last in the park before becoming tourists in 'Frisco' and 'L.A.' The Chouinard/Herbert Route on the Sentinel was magnificent. Rick having to lead everything above the 'Afro-Cuban Flakes' with a very shaky head torch, then having to talk me up carrying the 'sack, in the pitch black dark. Finding our way from the summit, at midnight, down a very narrow gully to a welcome stream was the best route-finding I've been involved in. All credit to Rick for this. At the stream, after much drinking of its sweet water, we decided not to risk the last 1,500 feet in the dark, and slept until a combination of the cold air, morning light and small lizards licking the salt from our cheeks, woke us and we continued the descent. Again, Rick was quite a distance in front as I was stumbling and feeling unfit. After two weeks of intense rock, walking and descending (roping down the east face of El Cap was demanding), I thought... "Why?"

Feeling unfit at various times when walking to and from crags became the 'norm' and I stopped thinking about it. Until 1981. This was the year the company I worked for moved factory, with the usual stresses this can cause. I began to feel very tired. So much so that I fell asleep at the wheel of my car when the traffic lights were on red! Apart from causing much merriment with my workmates and at the pub, it suggested to me that 'expert' help might be useful.

The consultant's words were "I wish I was as fit as you" and despite several hours of tests and examinations, which of course inflated his fee, I was pronounced physically sound but "may be suffering from a slight case of overwork

and don't overdo it in the mountains, lad."

Skiing in Andorra with Rick's newly formed winter holiday company was an invigorating experience. Fitness of the legs is paramount in this sport, but by early afternoon I couldn't push the ski edges into the snow when turning. The "Why?" question began reappearing but not seriously enough to stop me doing some of my best climbing over the next few years. Good seasons in the Alps and memorable summers in the Verdon Gorge, the Vercors and on other French rock. Discovering how to stop quickly on skis encouraged boldness and high speeds making winter in the Alps very exciting, but the dreaded afternoon tiredness returned quite often.

1987. A new love, a wedding, a honeymoon in Chamonix, Vercors and Verdon. No climbing of course, just amongst the mountains with my new wife. The two loves of my life. Together. Perfect. But, whilst walking through the long tunnel in the Verdon Gorge, I was again stumbling over small stones in the dark!

The biggest stress factor of all began later in the year when I left the security of a multi-national company to start my own. Seven days a week with only a few days off for climbing whenever they could be justified. Winter skiing still provided the ups, but the downs were there if I let them encroach. Some super days on Gogarth repeating routes I'd done 10 years previously, fired up the fingers and even encouraged the odd E4. This made the confidence roll in and, when time permitted, several good, if stumbly, weekends were stolen. One such opportunity came when Rick Johnson 'phoned and asked if I fancied a week-end in the Pyrenees.

I was working in London on the Friday morning, drove out to Gatwick and flew to Toulouse where I was collected by one of Rick's ski coaches delivering a party of nuns back to the airport from Lourdes. The coach trip to Lourdes is a story all on its own but meeting Rick with the resort car, was very welcome. We drove to Bareges and the end of the roads as we know them, to collect a turbo four wheel drive machine left by the custodian to convey us to the hut. My turn behind the wheel. It was dark, very steep and precipitous, on rock strewn tracks, in a strange vehicle. Exciting is not the word. However, the refuge was reached incident free. The refuge was a magnificent building in the heart of the Pyrenean National Park amid splendid mountain scenery. We had three days of superb rocksport. Walking down at the end of each day with the sun setting, throwing shadows and reflections into the many small lakes beside the path, I felt that too much work and not enough play had taken its toll on my body. Rick was regularly half a mile in front, constantly having to wait for me. Dusting myself off innumerable times after falling in the thin powder snow that lay over the rocky terrain, I made a vow to get my legs very fit.

Early summer 1990, a trip to Wasdale with my old friend Alan Thompson, resulted in us doing half a dozen excellent middle grade routes on Kern Knotts. Then came the walk back to the valley with the recurring question... "I wonder why?" A heavy fall on the path beside the little church necessitated a drive to the hospital emergency department where a number of small stones were removed from under the skin on the palm of my hand.

Later the same year I thought I would let the private medical insurance scheme I was in, pay for another go at finding out the reason for my tiredness and inability to walk in a straight line. After three days in hospital undergoing check after

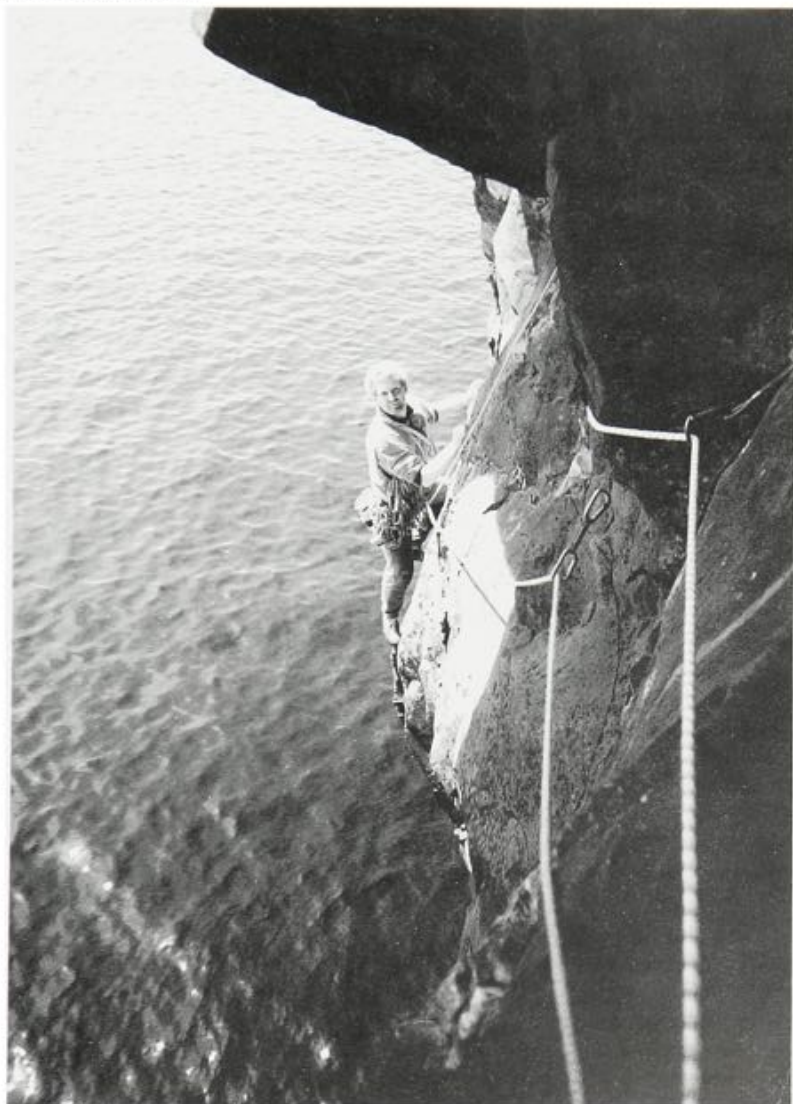
check, in and on an array of very sophisticated equipment, the consultant (not the same one as nine years previously) visited me.

He spoke softly. "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, you are very fit and will probably live your allotted three score years and ten."

I looked at him and said "That's nice to know. I'm ready for the bad news." Equally softly but with firmness came the reply "You've got Multiple Sclerosis."

I thought for a few seconds then, quite calmly, said "Thank you for the diagnosis.

Now I know why..."



*Iain Peter on 'Astral Stroll', Carn Glouce, West Penwith. Photo: Derek Walker*



# The Perfect Day

Steve Beresford

Sometime long ago in the '70s, I had that elusive animal, the perfect day in winter. As Jim and I humped huge loads up the Allt a'Mhuilinn towards the CIC Hut, it was drizzling, the omens were not good. Jim (known universally as Jockey because of his penchant for the turntables) was desperate to get a good day on the Ben. His Scottish ancestry and dissolute lifestyle led to frequent bouts of frustration as seasons trickled by with only bad weather and drinking sessions to show for our Scottish winters.

This trip we decided to camp high and wait for the weather. I had done this before but Jim was unaware of the misery to come. The key to camping on the Ben is being organized and busy. This requires two people to participate. Jim opted out so I washed up and completed my evening toilet to the incessant sound of the Ben wind which seemed to penetrate every nook and cranny.

I set the alarm for 4.30am and proceeded to sleep soundly right through. As the alarm sounded I wearily rolled over, thinking the whole process was a waste of time. Unzipping the doors 'just in case' a new world greeted me. The sky was clear, the snow was rock hard, the temperature rock bottom.

"Jim, Jim — get up!" No response. An ice-axe pick insistently poking his sleeping bag achieved its objective. The balding pate of my fellow conspirator emerged moaning, belching, complaining.

To anybody who hasn't had the wonderful experience of getting ready for a winter's day from a tent, the following will probably seem exaggerated. Breakfast, dressing, putting gear on, sorting it out, all takes an inordinate amount of time. Always cold, always awkward, never easy. By 6.30am we weren't speaking to each other but ready to move. The process of unthawing boots, fiddling with crampon straps, putting harnesses on, had taken its toll.

For weeks, in the warmth of the pub, there had been endless discussions on routes, but since arriving in Fort William, not a word had been said. We just set off meandering between patches of snow, gently strolling uphill as though an unknown hand was drawing us to our destination. Apart from the crunch of crisp snow and the odd grunt that eerie morning, silence hung over the Ben. The distant icefalls glistened in the moonlight, beckoning us on.

We eventually found ourselves at the foot of *Garadh Gully* on the side of *Tower Ridge*. "Let's solo this to keep warm" is always a good ploy early in the morning. The rope and slings remained in the 'sacks as we cramponed up perfect snow/ice to a small pitch. Soon after dispensing with this, we topped out into the upper basin as dawn broke. Everything was perfect, the sky clear, the ice all in condition, the buttress seductively glistening in the early morning light.

As moths drawn to light we became sucked into the side of *Tower Ridge*. An unspoken desire to climb *Glover's Chimney* took hold. It was there, it was available and it looked good. All the paraphernalia of winter climbing emerged. Deadmen, pegs, screws, slings, nuts. I always feel like a Christmas tree festooned with baubles and bangles.

With the first and last pitches reputedly the hard ones, Jim gallantly offered the sharp end of the rope to me. I started off gently, working up on perfect snow/ice, muttering about its perfection to Jim. Suddenly I thought 'Christ! This is steep!'

As panic began to set in I rationalised, no one could fall off such perfect stuff, could they? Placing a screw, I continued rationalising until a perfect Moac placement arrived. The angle eased and my tension ebbed away as I buried a Deadman, took in the rope and stared in awe at the view. Jim followed, muttering and mumbling, pausing around the screw to do some deep thinking. He eventually arrived, admitting to the steepness and thanking a 'Sassenach' for a tight rope.

The next few pitches ebbed and flowed around us. It was all steep snow with good belays. Wonderful exercise, giving great satisfaction with the weather staying excellent all the time. In the shade of *Tower Ridge*, the snow kept in perfect condition, it was like cramponing to heaven.

Eventually we arrived at the foot of the final pitch, a glowering chimney which had recently been featured on the front cover of a Mountain magazine. I looked for salvation — there was none — I had to climb it. The chimney appeared to consist of two steep sections with a small bay in between. The pitch terminated at *Tower Gap* on *Tower Ridge*, from where we had been assured it was a gentle stroll to the summit plateau. Checking Jim was tied to everything in sight, I set off, worrying, up the pitch.

The first bulge was a typical winter problem. All the axe placements were in the back of the chimney while the footholds were out on the walls. Sloping bits of rock covered in slivers of ice and new snow, on which my crampons gained a tremulous hold. Quivering and heaving like a beached whale, I pulled over into the middle of the chimney. The rope hung down to Jim uncluttered with protection, ominous, threatening. I selected a huge channel peg, making sure it was Jim's, and gleefully thumped it into a crack which was gently caressing my nose. It sang like an opera singer, all the way in.

Emboldened by the peg, I quickly bridged and torqued my way up the final chimney. I placed my 'Terrors' in good snow over the top. Over the years, from articles and hearsay, I had built up a picture of *Tower Gap* as a gentle col in the midst of steepness. To my amazement, as I pulled over the top, I found a 2,000ft drop straight down *Observatory Gully* beckoning me. I retreated gibbering onto my tools. I described my feelings to Jim, 150ft below, in glorious technicolour language. He couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. When the shaking stopped, I very tentatively pulled back up, sat astride the Gap, and shuffled round the corner, to find two pegs to thankfully tie to.

I began to absorb the splendour of the Ben in its winter garb, while Jim followed. From my eyrie I could see all of the classic climbs. All day long, a helicopter had been buzzing round the Ben and it appeared to have just landed on the summit. I observed two figures climbing what looked like a very hard line on Gardyloo Buttress, and people filming from the plateau. Jim arrived blowing and puffing, but full of praise for the pitch. We quickly moved together up the remainder of *Tower Ridge*.

The scene from the summit was like something from a climber's fantasy world. Out to the west and north, the serried ranks of high Scottish hills shone white against an orange sky. A front was on its way from the west, laden with heavy

## *The Perfect Day*

snow clouds. The light was spectacular, playing its rays on the blades of a helicopter incongruously parked a few feet away. We were greeted by Hamish McInnes and Yvon Chouinard, who were filming.

"Good route?" they enquired. Just below a cornice, Rab Carrington and Al Rouse were emerging, having completed the line on Gardyloo Buttress. Everything was perfect. We sat on the summit for hours.

Eventually, as the light began to fade, each descended alone, silently, to the abseil posts. Locked in our own thoughts, we barely spoke until we reached the tent. Then and only then did our pleasure in the day begin to verbally emerge, starting as a gentle babble but becoming a roaring torrent of feeling and excitement. The perfect day.



*Rab Carrington reaching the summit plateau, Ben Nevis, after the first ascent of 'Left-edge Route' (Grade VI) with Al Rouse. Photo: Paul Nunn*



# *Eurocrags en Passant*

*Peter Hill*

Probably most of those who travel to the Alps by car rush down their choice of motorway, perhaps from Ostend or Calais, thinking what a flat and uninteresting countryside it is, until they see the real mountains from the approach road. And quite a lot of it is dull from the rock climber's point of view. But many also do not realize that, tucked away amongst the vast plains of Belgium or north-west Germany, there are some interesting crags. Perhaps none worth devoting two weeks holiday to, but still some bearing comparison with some of the major rock outcrops in the UK. They can provide worthwhile climbing for a long week-end or the odd day, and with the increasing possibilities of people from UK working over there for a few months or even years, it seemed worthwhile to give a bit of background information.

A short article in the Journal cannot, of course, hope to compete with conventional guidebooks, and the model is Pyatt's 'Where to Climb in the British Isles', published in the 60s, where each crag is identified, located, and given a few brief comments on the character of the crag and its routes. Actual guidebooks are a bit of a problem. Even if you read German, French, or Dutch (or Flemish) easily, the situation on most of these crags is not as well organized as in the UK. Most of the books available are produced by local clubs or individuals and are not available through normal booksellers. Some were available but are out of print. The best approach is often to enquire locally from other climbers or a tourist office (Verkehrs Verein or Syndicat d'Initiative), but this does not help the climber in transit or just visiting for a Sunday. In any case there is a lot to be said for re-living the experiences of the initial explorers. A list of some guidebooks is given at the end of this article.

The area covered here includes Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany, roughly north and west of a line from Karlsruhe to Bayreuth. The former Bundesrepublik south of that line has been omitted as being close to the real mountains and the remainder of the old East Germany has also been left out. This omits some interesting rock in the Schwarzwald, the Schwäbische Alb, and Franken, and on the Elbe — maybe to be covered later. France has not been discussed as it is already well covered by several English language books on the outcrops. The general arrangement is geographical, as the majority of outcrops of any interest are found along river valleys. A confession — I am not a geologist, and if something looks and feels like, say, sandstone I will probably call it that, even if the experts have more subtle distinctions.

## **Local customs (not the douane or zoll)**

It is worth mentioning that courteous visitors should observe local customs concerning, for example, existing fixed pegs, top-roping, and use of chalk.

## **Belgium**

Belgium is not well known as a place to climb, except perhaps for Freyr, which occasionally features in illustrations in the Journals. In fact the hilly area of the



Ardennes conceals a lot of crags, small and large, within its forests, again mainly along the river valleys which cut into what is really a plateau reaching up to about 1,000m altitude at the eastern end, known as the Hautes Fagnes (or Hohes Venn or Hoge Venen — languages and place names get confused in this area). Mostly limestone, as at Freyr, there are strings of crags along the river valleys of the Meuse and the Ourthe, and some tributaries. Freyr is an outstanding example, and well worth a visit, having some 250 routes up to 90m long. Five magnificent buttresses face west across the river Meuse just south of Anseremme, and some drop straight into the river (could some routes be started from a canoe?). Normal access is from the top, where there is a CAB hut and camp site (UTM grid reference FR 3565 — see note on map references at the end). With the river below, and road and railway on the other side, the atmosphere is somewhat similar to the Avon Gorge but on a grander scale. Rather short of easy ground, as the limestone beds are close to vertical, there are spectacular routes on all the buttresses, so that it is difficult to suggest any special ones. On the northernmost buttress of Mérimos, *Les Hermétiques* on the southern face is a good 5-, and *Cubitus* on the far right of this face, at 4, is a good introduction to the cliff and its grading. On the Tête de Lion, right down at river level, the arête forming the extreme outer edge of the crag approached from the south (down past the crag called Al'lègne) is a good 5-.

Minor crags in this area are Al'rue (FR 3464), Chamia (FR 3264), Moniat (FR 3567), Tahaut (FR 2965), and Waulsort (FR 3463) but these are low compared with Freyr (except perhaps Moniat), and only offer a few routes each.

Going further north beyond Dinant the main crags are at Goyet (two crags of about 30m, with about 90 routes), Dave (Neviau, about 58m and 50 routes), and the relatively well-known set of crags at Marche-les-Dames, near Thon. There are about 130 routes here, up to 65m long, but access is restricted because of the boundaries of a military camp. Permission could at one time be obtained by 'phoning the duty officer (081-58190), but best to check locally if you think of visiting. Some of these crags can be very busy at week-ends, being near Liège, just as for many crags in the UK near large towns.

Along the river Ourthe there is another string of pleasant limestone crags, mostly in the valley below Durbuy, but with some further south (upstream) near Hotton. Perhaps the most interesting collection is just above the railway bridge at Sy (that isn't a spelling mistake), where several crags of up to about 35m offer around 120 routes of all grades, again with some faces rising straight from the water of the river (FR 7985). Further upstream, just above the village of Vieuxville, the Rocher des Corneilles offers some 30 routes of quite high standard in a pleasant situation facing south (FR 8085). Another good group of climbs is at Hotton FR 7671 on the right bank of the river, with some 45 routes up to 40m length. Worth mentioning here is the long distance footpath (Grande Randonnée) which runs along the foot of this crag, and in fact also joins up with other crags in the valley. A pleasant walking/climbing excursion could be constructed using these marked routes (without entering the debate about route marking). Downstream below Sy the rocks at Comblain-le-Tour should be mentioned, but unfortunately only because they are subject to access problems and should be avoided by visitors wishing to be diplomatic. A lot further downstream, in the region of Tilff, the crags of St Anne and Strivay (FS 8304 and 8101) offer a variety of routes, longer at St Anne, up to about 30m but shorter and athletic at Strivay.

The valley of the Lesse offers a few crags, including one near the well known cave site of Han-sur-Lesse. Called Anticlinal, there are about 20 routes of up to 20m (FR 5553). Another group belonging to this valley includes the Aiguilles de Chaleux near Furfooz (FR 3965, 20m, 15 routes); and the Pendu near Walzin (FR 3666, 35m, six routes).

A few other widely spread areas of Belgium offer climbs on varying material from quartzite to rather questionable puddingstone. In the east of the country, overlooking the valley of the Amblève near the village of Warche, a pleasant little crag offers a dozen routes of up to 20m (GR 1186). In Hainaut a curious geological formation known as the Fondry des Chiens (and attributed to the devil like many such features) on the Plateau des Abannets offers a dozen or so routes up to 10m (FR 1248), and at Lompret (ER 9947) there are wider possibilities up to about 27m, but rather hidden behind vegetation.

In the general area of the valley of the Sambre, further west, a crag near Montroux called Bouffioulx (FR 0982) has a hut and some 25 routes up to 20m long. Access is normally limited to members of the CAB, but friendly approaches from visitors from overseas can solve many access problems (sometimes the question is not so much membership of a given club as one of adequate third party insurance. Take a membership card with you, and BMC insurance if you have it). In this general area and near the frontier with France are a few other minor outcrops such as Jamioulx (FR 0178); Four a Chaux and Pont Romain near Montignies St Christophe (ER 8470); and Presles (FR 1282).

## Luxembourg

Luxembourg has one outstanding area for climbers. Just north of the village of Berdorf near Echternach (LA 0922) is the collection of sandstone cliffs and pinnacles known locally as Wanterbach. The village is on a plateau (and is well equipped with hotels, camp sites and a swimming pool) and the crags are reached by going downhill towards the valley of the Wanterbach. More than a hundred routes of all grades can keep the visitor occupied for days amongst the complex of outcrops, with a distinct chance of getting lost — at least we got rather lost when it got dark while we were absorbed in an interesting area.

## Germany

One of the areas of Germany which seems to have missed the attentions of climbers from UK is the Pfalz. The name will be familiar to wine drinkers, and provides one advantage of climbing there, but we have not seen a UK car number-plate in the area, although there has been a USA military presence (in Pirmasens) for years. The area could perhaps be described as a large scale Kent, with pleasant rolling green hills interrupted by sandstone cliffs and pinnacles in the most unlikely places. Good centres are Dahn or Annweiler, and within easy car reach of these you have about 120 crags of varying sizes (up to 50m height). There is a good guidebook (see list at the end) well illustrated with diagrams and sketch maps. In such a large area it is difficult to pick any typical faces, but the Asselstein near Annweiler in the east of the area (MV 2448) is a fine example with some 30 routes from III to VII+. Further to the south-west is the area of Wieslautern, once known as Bundenthal (MV 1439). There are good routes on the Geierstein and the Bundenthaler Turm (II to VI+).

Nideggen is a small town overlooking the valley of the river Rur (not the Ruhr) south-east of Aachen. The side of the valley offered a fine site for a castle in the Middle Ages because of the ready-made defences provided by the cliffs and most of the castle is still there. The cliffs are below it and on the nearby valley sides, dropping steeply to the river. The rock is dark coarse sandstone with layers of larger inclusions (conglomerate?). Sometimes these larger pebbles form crucial holds — and they have been known to come out of the matrix material under stress. Although known to visitors under the generic name of Nideggen, there are in fact five main groups of crags, at Untermaubach (LB 2023); Rath (LB 2120); Nideggen itself (LB 2118); Abenden (LB 2117); and around Blens and Hausen (LB 2215). Between them they offer a total of some 500 routes, mostly around 10 to 15m in length, but with longer possibilities on the Nideggen group and at Blens. Worth noting is a prohibition on some of the crags near Blens during the bird nesting season, normally from February to May. The most interesting faces — inevitably a subjective question — are Breidelsley at Blens, the Hochkoppel at Untermaubach, and Hirtzley at Nideggen. The guidebook, incidentally, (no.6 on the list) is an excellent example of the genre, with area sketch maps; sketch maps of each crag group; and very clear diagrams of the faces. The different areas have tabbed pages for easy location, and the general style has the same feeling of care in production as Wainwright's Lake District volumes.

Over towards the eastern side of the old West Germany, a range of hills sits between the Weser and Leine valleys south of Hannover and east of Hameln. The summit ridges of these hills support a chain of small outcrops (Jurassic limestone) stretching from near Coppenbrügge in the north to near Kreiensen in the south. Each group of crags is usually named after its nearest village, and hidden in the forest above it. A range of 10 to 20m height covers almost all the routes, but the widest choices and longer opportunities are given by the crags at Erzhausen (NC 6348) with some 40 individual faces and 100 routes; at Holzen (NC 4655), with 11 faces and 80 routes; and Lürdissen (NC 4458) with 27 faces and about 150 routes up to 30m. A distinct and recommendable area is at Kanstein (NC 4468) offering about 40 faces and almost 200 routes of all grades. Many of the crags show a very systematic approach to maintaining a clear relationship between the guidebook and the terrain, with numbers carefully painted on the face at the foot of each route! However, when in Rome, why not use the Roman's numbers?

Not far away from these hills is the smaller outcrop group of Suntel, north of Hameln near Hessische Oldendorf, where the Hohenstein (NC 2183) has some 50 routes up to 40m long on limestone. Six crags remain accessible, out of nine in the area.

Heinberg, to the east of the main north-south autobahn A7 near Lutter (NC 8564), gives a wide selection of shorter climbs on sandstone outcrops in a pleasant area.

Coming back towards the west, there are four excellent dolerite crags near Bruchhausen (MC 6886). The one providing the longest routes, the Bornstein, is another place subject to restrictions in spring and early summer to allow birds to nest undisturbed. Of the others, the Goldstein is perhaps the most interesting, with some 40 routes of up to 60m length.

In the area known as Teutoburgerwald, on either side of the main B219 road (MC 1389 - MC 0892) below Ibbenbüren, about 20 outcrops of varying height (up

to say 20m at the most) provide good practice. Some parts of this area can be busy with tourists in the summer season, and the conspicuous crag known as the 'Hockendes Weib' should be avoided.

The Harz offers a wide selection of crags, including granite (which has hardly featured in the rest of this summary), in areas such as the Okerthal and the Oderthal. There are also a few isolated small outcrops further west such as those in the Odenwald near Darmstadt. However any more detailed discussion will have to wait for another occasion because of pressure on the editor's space.

### Some guidebooks

- (1) Die Bruchhauser Steine im Hochsauerland (in German) by Paul Steinacker, 1981. Hindenburgerstrasse 3, 4740 Oelde 1.
- (2) Die Felsen des Weser-Leine-Berglandes (in German) by Richard Goedeke, 1978. Liebermannstrasse 4, 33 Braunschweig.
- (3) Guide de l'Escalade en Belgique (in French) by Dumoulin & Villanyi, 1984. Société Spéléologique de Wallonie. ISBN 2-87102-001-9.
- (4) Guide des Rochers Belges et Luxembourgeois (in French, with notes in Dutch), Club Alpin Belge, 1965. Out of print, but the only one I know of covering some of the lesser crags in Belgium.
- (5) Kletterführer Südpfalz (in German) by Daigger, Laub, & Sturmer, 1978. Gartenstrasse 2, 6786 Lemberg/Pfalz.
- (6) Kletterführer Nordeifel-Rureifel (in German) by Schmitz, Esser & Siegers, 1985. Nordkante, Zulpicherstrasse 6, 5168 Nideggen.
- (7) Klimgids Sy (in Dutch) by Jan Groeneveld, 1986.
- (8) Topo Freyr (in French) by S van Sint Jan, 1984. asbl Sélété, rue Jenneval 35, 1040 Brussels.
- (9) Topografie van de rotsen bij Nideggen (in Dutch) by Martien Offermans, 1984. Humperdincklaan 41, 5654 PB Eindhoven.
- (10) Topografie van de klimtuin Nord-Eifel, deel 2 (in Dutch) by Martien Offermans, 1985.

All these guides, except (3) by Dumoulin and Villanyi, give cliff face diagrams keyed to names of routes and their grades.

### Maps and grid references

There are good maps of the Ordnance Survey type covering all the areas discussed in this article. However they are not always as easily obtainable from booksellers or similar shops as are OS maps in the UK. In addition, the grid systems are incompatible and are not usually shown across the full area of the map, but only as marginal 'ticks'. A system common across our whole area is the UTM or Universal Transverse Mercator grid, and this appears on some commercial maps such as the German 'Generalkarte' published by Mair Verlag. The references quoted throughout the text here are UTM references in zones 31U and 32U to the nearest kilometre, in most cases indicating a central approach point for a crag rather than any particular face or route.

### Cautions

The always emotive subject of relative grading on these crags of very varying



character has carefully been avoided. Although there are UIAA guide-lines they do not always help, or are not followed, and the only way is really to get 'calibrated' locally. Where grades have been mentioned they are as used locally.

Inevitably the collection of information and visiting the crags listed here took several years of week-ends and longer visits. Some of the comments may therefore be a bit out-of-date. Not that the rocks themselves change much, but their environment may — in some cases drastically. We revisited one small crag in Belgium after about a year, only to find that it had almost disappeared beneath the footings of a motorway viaduct! Civil engineering can move quickly in these countries. Any comments or suggestions for updating the information here would therefore be greatly appreciated by the author.

### **Acknowledgments**

Over several years, many people have helped with information, climbing companionship, and occasional gentle tension on a rope. Members of AMA, RAFMA, KNAV, CAB, DAV and BSWE are too many to mention, but particular thanks are due to Simon Durkin and Peter Thomas for their constant help. Although one has now departed to Norway and the other to Oman, maybe the opportunity will recur for another search for an obscure outcrop and a climb in one of the odd spots of Europe.

*See also article by Terry Gifford on Hohenstein and Hönnetal on page 98.*

# A Very Special Day

Steve Foxley

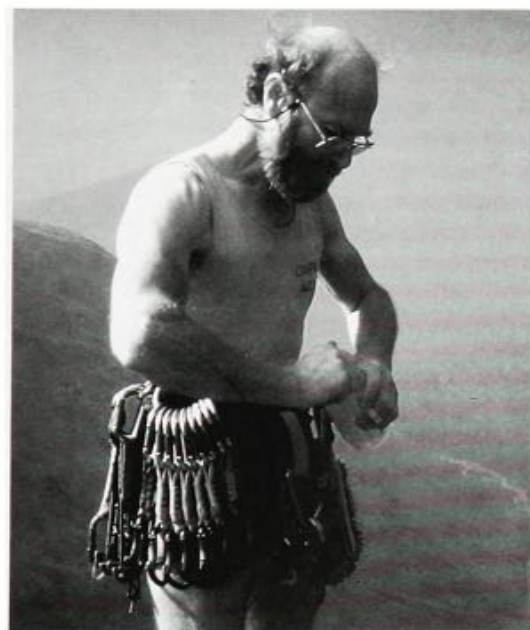
It was Tuesday night when the 'phone rang. The caller was Rod Valentine. 'Must be serious, what's he up to?'

"Can you make the Lakes tomorrow?" he said. I had too much on but said Thursday was OK. I was told Wasdale was on the agenda, so we arranged to meet at Brackenclough on Wednesday evening.

I had a good ride up to Wasdale via Ulpha, a good short cut if you can find it. Arriving at the hut just after dark, I met Rod. Once I got myself sorted out, we went over to the pub at Wasdale Head for some liquid refreshment, and I was put in the picture about the following day.

On the previous Saturday, Rod had been up to the Napes and tried the climb on sight, but had found it too dirty. They did another climb, then abbed down to clean the first big pitch. Next day, Rod recruited another climber of great strength (and size) to go back and finish the route. Rod led the first 6b pitch and young Brian followed, only resting once on the pitch. Again Rod faced a similar problem with the top pitch. Too dirty. The climb had not been done for some three years.

So here we are on Thursday morning, another glorious September day. Wasdale is peaceful. We set off about 9am, after a good breakfast. Up the steep ridge that leads to the top of Gable. Eventually we reached a point where you traverse the hillside past the origin of British climbing, Napes Needle.



A few minutes later we were there, Tophet Wall.

I had never seen this crag before. What an incredible sight. A big sweep of overhanging rock, and right up the middle, a line of chalk marking our route, *Incantations*.

Rod suggested going to the top and abbing down the top pitch to clean it. The climb would be impossible otherwise.

Once we had set up a belay, my brave leader disappeared down the rope. Some while later it was my turn. Off I went not knowing what to expect. Suddenly I found myself spinning round in space. Maybe I should have gone to work after all.

Once I was down at the belay, Rod's next job was to lower me to the bottom. More excitement, what

Rod Valentine. Photo: Steve Foxley

a place! I was about fifteen feet out from the rock. Get back in touch, deep breath and go for it.

The climbing is immaculate, good positive holds but very steep. After a short breather at the peg (not the best in the world) I pushed on to the belay. That pitch was about 120ft, mostly overhanging, and graded 6b. The next pitch also gets 6b, a lot shorter but even more overhanging!

Rod is all set and attacks the pitch. It looks hard to get any gear, but this man can do it if anybody can. He places two Rocks, and then it's the big clip (the old peg). Yes. He does it. This is really spectacular. A party on Tophet Wall are well impressed by all this and take some photos. Just at the end of the crux sequence, Rod got it a bit wrong, thinking it went straight up. Another go and he cracked it, with a step right. This man is really determined. A big cheer! Then he pushes on to the belay. Now my turn. Off belay and climbing. Suddenly I realise how steep this really is. Very powerful sidepulls and undercuts, then awkward jams. I move right at the top of the wall and a Friend gets stuck. I've just done the last hard move but the Friend is back left. Strength going... no option but to fall off. Place a nut, remove the Friend and then repeat the last moves. Up into the awkward groove and so to the top.

What a fantastic route, first climbed in 1984 by Pete Whillance and Dave Armstrong. It's had less than 10 ascents to date, due to its serious nature.

I felt very honoured to be on this ascent with such a brilliant climber. But the day was still young. Rod had other plans.

Next on the list was *The Viking*, a tough E3, and the hardest route in the Lakes for some time.

My lead, 5b straight off the ground, quite sustained and the same angle as the previous route. Protection was awkward and spaced. I was tired. I hauled myself onto the belay ledge and brought the maestro up. He assured me the next pitch would be 'Reet!'

On I go, good holds at first and some runners, but the angle is mean, and it gets harder. About halfway up the bitch (I mean pitch) I ran out of steam. It's no good. Back to the belay ledge. I've had it!

Rod volunteers to do it although he'd done the route many years ago with hardly any runners. He makes it look easy! After about ten minutes he's up and taking in. Off I go, still no easier but the rope inspires confidence, and before long we're both at the top, celebrating. It had been one of the best climbing days I have ever had!

We descended at great speed down the scree and arrived at the hut at about 7pm. After some tea, I set off home and arrived about midnight totally exhausted. Rod stayed on for a few days and more hard routes. The weather broke the following Wednesday and the high crags were out for the rest of the year.

That day will be in my mind the rest of my life, not just for the fabulous routes and isolated situation, but also for the good company. Cheers, Rod!



# Grand Day Out

*Kym Martindale*

The last time I was up here, the clouds were rolling black as thunder on the heads of the Carneddau, and the whalebacked ridges sank from heavy mists to the valley. The wind gusted abruptly at our backs and roared in the distance like a motorway. The Llafar racketed down the hillside. There was a promise of nothing but rain.

My friend was afraid — of the clouds, the blind tops, the greasy rocks. She wasn't a climber, was unsure of what constituted a scramble, and suspected that we might die. It meant nothing that the Llech Ddu Spur had two stars in the guidebook, was graded Class 1 and not serious. If you had to use your hands, it was climbing, and she'd tried that once and hated it.

We'd been walking together for years, Chris and I, done the Cleveland Way, Offa's Dyke; but then I took up climbing and was no longer to be trusted on the hills.

"I thought people just didn't go up things in mists," she cocked an eye at the looming sky, the lost summits.

How far apart we'd grown, I thought with a shock. I'd believed that once, steered clear of the bad days, stayed in the valleys. But you can't be a fair weather mountaineer. You learn to deal with the murky stuff, make sure you don't get lost, but learn how to deal with it if you do.

It was just before we rounded into the closing of the valley, where the black rock rears up a grim wall, that the hills seemed to part and a couple emerged. They were old and and the first people we'd seen all day — a tad different from the throngs on Snowdon. They wore '50s regulation beige anoraks and bobble hats, with matching rucksacks which bulged in all the wrong places. They bore sticks and jolly grins. They'd obviously bought all their gear when they first took up hill-walking 30 or 40 years ago and seen no good reason to change it.

We were hailed in Yorkshire accents thick as gritstone and asked our destination.

"Llech Ddu Spur, a scramble up that small ridge."

"Ooh, we'd like that, aye, a grand day out that."

This heartened Chris. Then something struck me. Where were they headed, coming down off a 3,000 foot summit at 10.30 in the morning in their 70s?

"Oh, we camped up there last night," he said, and she nodded, pointing back up the valley. We stood in silent awe, hearing in our minds the wind and rain ripping at the windows of Llanberis Youth Hostel the night before.

"Bit wild up there, I'll bet," I said.

"Oh, not so bad, mind it were bleak when it got dark, burnt two candles down, we did." Another stunned silence — candles in a tent? We weren't sure whether to salute their hardiness and take heart for our own future senior years, or think them idiots and worry about them going up in flames, a lonely beacon on an empty hillside some bitter night.

As they strode off, Chris and I looked at each other. We'd decided on the Youth

Hostel as a soft option, the weather being so drossy that weekend. We crept on humbly up the valley.

Today I'm with Alastair. Alastair is a climber, we are climbing partners and, I like to think, close friends. This is our first outing on rock for months, since a two-week climbing holiday in Ireland. We're unfit from Christmas and lack of training. The weather is little different from my last time here. But there's no question. We'll go up to the top, using our hands, our feet, thinking and feeling rock.

I tell Alastair about the hardy pensioners and we smile, because we're in the habit of bed and breakfast.

We scramble up loose wet heather gullies to good rock with holds for your fists and start the Spur. Dizzy feet below, I can see the massive boulder Chris and I sheltered under with our lunch. We'd toiled up the flanks of Llech Ddu, Chris more and more quiet until finally she had stopped and said,

"I'm not happy, I really don't want to do this."

I'd seen someone bullied up a climb once, trembling, in tears, forcing herself up blank rock because she loved the person at the top and that was what they wanted. I wouldn't do that to anyone. We had turned back.

Alastair flops on a wide grassy platform. Around us the wind snaps, hurrying clouds away from snow-capped Carnedd Llewellyn. It's not any amount of snow to get excited about, not worth a crampon — but it looks gorgeous. Above, in gaps of mist, the icy, frosted crest rises, and we do too, all the way to a howling, bitter summit with real cold, dry snow and tiny frozen pennants of ice leaning from grass stalks with the wind. A cold marking of its passage. We smile over our rolls, cold sardines and vegeburgers, crouched in the lee of the summit shelter. A grand day out, this.

# Big Ben Banjo Band

*Peter Harding*

"I'll buy the food and arrange transport."

These were Richard Meyer's final words on our Easter trip to Scotland at our earlier planning meeting, and I eventually met him at Manchester's Picadilly bus station. The first bus soon filled with folk, and Richard's bulging rucksack. We rattled and bumped our way through some of Lancashire's many mill towns. Bury came and went, a grave-like place. Then it was Ramsbottom, a straggly settlement at the backside of beyond. Lolling against the driver's bulkhead, Richard's rucksack began to disgorge its contents — vibratory motion and static friction have that strange way of ganging up to fool the force of gravity. Slowly, a huge beefsteak appeared from under the flap, proceeding to bleed its way through inadequate paper wrapping. I marvelled that Richard could get such fare, with food still on ration, and wondered what other gastronomic delights were in his 'sack to sustain our stay at the CIC hut on Nevis. Such drooly dreaming ended abruptly as squealing brakes heralded the arrival at Rawtenstall. From here we would travel in separate cabs through the night to Glasgow, for Richard had pre-arranged 'hitches' with a local haulage firm. Their heavy lorries would also bring us back again in a few days time.



*Ben Nevis in its Winter Garb. Photo: Paul Nunn*



Departing before dusk, our long ride north was slow and noisy, well punctuated with many transport cafes and mega-mugs of tea, 'Snowies' at Garstang, the infamous 'Jungle' on the way up Shap, 'Carnforth Connies' and 'Lockerbie Jock's', all favoured haunts of the trucker, that late lamented long distance lorry driver in the halycon days and nights before motorways and G.T. juggernauts with turbo-charged demons at their wheels. After an hour of simulated sleep in the cab before dawn, we arrived on the outskirts of Glasgow, and caught an early tram into the city. There, tea and toast preceded another bus ride, courting the Clyde, then up Loch Long, past silent ships, redundant men o' war awaiting an ignominious fate at the hands of the oxy-acetylene cutters of demolition gangs. The morning started weeping as if to mourn their passing. At Arrochar, we left the long loch to go by Lomond's bonnier banks to Tyndrum and watched the rain from stationary seats in the tiny vestibule of a large hotel, waiting for yet another bus. This one, 'MacBraynes for the Highlands' promised more, climbing the Black Mount to reach Rannoch Moor, through Glencoe then round Kinlochleven. As it turned out, only a grim grey canvas of swirling mist went by the bus's windows, these being frequently daubed with raging torrents that were making their escape from unseen mountain corries. At Kinlochleven, there was another hour to await a final bus, so, hungrily we sought the one and only cafe. Cottage pie with neaps and tatties was avidly put away. When the waitress, Jeanie, came to retrieve our polished plates, Richard gave me a questioning look, I nodded. The same again was promptly ordered, quickly brought and rapidly consumed. Later, Jeanie came again to ask if we might manage a pudding too, but saw at once that this was a silly question. She hurried off to bring us ample dishes filled with treacle sponge and custard. When she brought our cups of tea, Richard shot me another quizzical glance but this time I shook my head. So only one more helping of pudding was ordered.

Richard was not only one of the CC's leading climbers, he was also its one and only leading eater!

In the doused embers of a winter's afternoon, the final bus dumped us out, in appalling weather, at Fort William. Our ex-WD anoraks were no match for Scotland's worst. Excusably therefore, within a mile we gave up all hope of flogging on to the hut, and spent that night in the little green tea room cottage near Achintee. Next morning, an early breakfast stemmed the rain and we slogged our way up a snow-filled Allt a'Mhullin, arriving at the hut just in time to unload our 'sacks, and join a party of the Liverpool University MC. This led by none other than Dr G.G. MacPhee — legendary climber and editorial author of the SMC guidebook to Nevis. Although I had never met Graham MacPhee before, I knew him well by name and deed; ere the next few days were to pass, this meeting would be indelibly recorded in my mind.

However, that first day went almost without incident. Our motley band of three undergraduates, two doughty doctors and one lowly lecturer, ascended Carn Mor Dearg's arête to reach the big Ben's north-east shoulder, then its summit. After a belated lunch in the ruins of the old observatory, we descended towards Carn Dearg and the Red Burn. Suddenly MacPhee halted and produced from his 'sack a large piece of tatty tarpaulin. Tying this around his waist and up between his legs, he sat down on the snow announcing that he would now demonstrate how to glissade 'all the way down to the wee Lochan an't Suidhe'.

Gripping his ice-axe like a white water canoeist's paddle, with a few strokes he went hurtling down the mountain-side in a cloud of flying snow. Richard watched this, at first with amazement, and then concern. Anyone who has read Anderl Heckmair's autobiography will know that German Alpinists are weaned, at an early age, away from any suicidal tendency like performing a sitting glissade. (They had other ways of tempting fate). Richard put a hand on my shoulder and said in a serious tone,

"We must now make the proper glissading quickly, to reach that lochan of ant's wee, in case we are needed to lead a search for Dr. MacPhee's body."

As it turned out, the Doctor had reached the frozen lochan safely, as did we all, sitting or standing. But trudging back to the hut I sensed that Dr. Meyer and Dr. MacPhee, even without exchanging more than the odd spoken word, had nonetheless fingered their respective daggers.

That night, MacPhee's party supped like Spartans on a simple stew, whilst Richard and I dined like kings, fried steak coated with oatmeal — an Aberdeen Angus Schnitzel à la Meyer! I was glad our catering had been left in Richard's hands.

Next morning the day dawned grey and white. Occasional breaks in the grey revealed many gashes across the white where snow had avalanched from the gullies. We all waited for Dr. MacPhee to prescribe a plan. Secretly, I hoped it would be five card brag, or even pontoon, but he came out with a single word. "Gardyloo!" (Only the name of the best known gully on Ben Nevis).

Our ascent would consist of two separate ropes: MacPhee and Meyer on the leading one, and yours truly leading the LUMC lads.

Random rivulets of powder snow ran in almost continuous streams, but steady upward progress brought us to a narrow chimney of ice, flanked by sheer walls of white. Leading the first rope, MacPhee set about this crucial pitch, and my own little band, assembled below, came under a steady bombardment of ice chips as he hacked away with his huge axe. (Of course, none of us wore crampons, for, prior to the '50s, these were rarely, if ever, used on our home hills in winter. As for fancy front-pointed 'foot fangs' and 'terrordactyl' type of ice-axes, such aids would have been considered akin to stalking red deer with laser guided missile launchers. Twelve point crampons were only just invented before World War II and ice climbing styles in the post war '40s were exactly the same as in the pre war '30s. In those days one was expected to conquer one's own wintry mountains by pure unaided effort!)

So MacPhee slowly smote his way up the ice, hacking out adequate holds for mittened hand and booted foot. Wedged below him, Richard gave negative leader encouragement...

"Your axe, Dr. MacPhee, is perhaps too long for such steep ice." Maybe this was intended as a friendly commiseration but it had the effect of adding a savage fury to MacPhee's hefty hacks. Then it was...

"Would it save time, Dr. MacPhee, if I came up and gave you a shoulder?" Such an offer was interpreted as the flash of a Teutonic dagger. It brought a swift reply... "Would you, Dr. Meyer, care to take over the lead?" When MacPhee had retreated, Richard proceeded to show his alpine metal. All the disadvantages of Vibram soles on hard ice were outweighed by his shorter axe and better technique. Richard rapidly disappeared up into the white hell of *Gardyloo*. His shout soon



*Gardylloo Gully. Photo: Roger Payne Collection*

came for MacPhee to follow. Eventually, so did my own party, its leader benefiting greatly from neat steps already cut.

Above the narrow ice pitch, the gully gradually widened into a slope of steep but kickable snow. Visibility slowly improved as the falling spindrift lessened. Our doctoral duo led on up to a gigantic cornice. In its underlying balcony, MacPhee belayed while Richard traversed leftwards to a point where the impressive roof of snow seemed more vulnerable. My own team now assembled beneath the cornice to watch the 'A' team at work. We prayed that the mass of snow above our heads was stable.

Now it was MacPhee's turn to use his dirk...

"Perhaps, Dr. Meyer, that bonny wee axe would be better given to making a tunnel." He gave an extra twist... "Trying to notch a big cornice wi' such a small tool will be slower than eating Christmas pudding with a tooth pick." Then he turned the blade on me... "Maybe, Mr. Harding, you are bored with our Scottish snow plodding. Why don't you try your hand at *that*?" He threw a meaningful glance in the direction of the most diabolical formation of wind sculpted snow I had ever seen, a devilish double cornice on the right. It was clearly a thrown down gauntlet, which, as Richard's snow and ice apprentice, I could hardly ignore. So, making sure my 'B' team were well belayed, I swallowed hard, then traversed out to have a look at it. Eager to make a good impression, I decided on a stomach traverse along the top of the lower cornice. Reaching a point some 20 feet away, where the upper cornice seemed less formidable, I squirmed around gingerly and grinned back at my companions. They were certainly impressed. MacPhee even stopped paying attention to Richard's progress and regarded my own with incredulity, the silent words forming on his lips easily discernible as 'Bluidy Sassenach nutcase!'

He was obviously puzzled about what I would do next. That made two of us! With few options open, I swung my axe in a bold semi-circular arc and buried its pick deep into the belly of the upper cornice. Now I could pull up on the shaft, stand, and deal with the upper lip. Having successfully performed the delicate manoeuvre, the lower cornice decided to get in on the act and promptly collapsed, dropping silently down the gully, to leave me swinging from one hand at the end of an ice-axe. Not for long though. My hand slipped smartly off the shaft and I shot off down *Gardyloo Gully*, in pursuit of the lower cornice. (I never did like wrist loops!)

The strange thing was that time seemed to stand still, and I was not the least bit scared. Then came the horrifying sound — a God almighty roar which really did frighten me witless.

"H-O-L-D!"

It was the first time I had ever heard one of MacPhee's dreadful screaming shouts. Then the rope jerked me upright to a stop on the snow slope 30 feet below. Skillfully hiding any sign of fear, I nonchalantly kicked back up, eventually managing to reach my ice-axe which still hung from the upper cornice. Richard had reached the summit plateau and we all followed his route.

Assembled on the Ben in a bit of a white-out, everyone waited for Graham MacPhee to dictate the next move. But Richard Meyer lost no time in using his metaphorical knife again.

"Perhaps, Dr. MacPhee, as the authority on Ben Nevis and editor of its guide,



you can find a suitable gully down which we can all make the proper glissading." That final adjective carried a certain emphasis. Glowering, speechless, MacPhee turned away and started looking for the top of No.3 gully. I followed in his footsteps. As he moved slowly forward, peering into the white void, there was a muffled sound like the snapping of rotten wood and an ominous looking crack opened up in the snow between us. Quick as a cat, MacPhee was down on all fours and scrambling back towards me. He had ventured too close to the edge of a cornice. Richard was delighted by this event, assuming that MacPhee had identified the top of No.3 in the best possible way. He thrust his rope into my hands, instructing me to belay him, then leapt across the crack, driving his axe deep into the unstable cornice. It tilted visibly, the fissure opening even more. Richard shouted back...

"When it goes you will hold me as I jump off, and the gully will be avalanched clean, so we can make the glissading."

He levered away at his axe causing the broken cornice to rock back and forth. I had visions of this huge mass of snow dropping down the gully with Richard and his ice-axe on top of it — the whole lot plucking me off Ben Nevis into the bargain. MacPhee watched all this with amazement then gasped...

"Bluidy madmen!" Turning to his LUMC lads he shouted,

"We canna stay to watch Dr. Meyer and his fearless friend commit suicide," adding as he walked away, "bodies are easier to recover from the corrie below."

Richard became very annoyed, not with MacPhee's outburst but with that reluctant cornice. It must have been supported on good foundations (or maybe my prayers were being answered!), and it simply refused to go. To my great relief Richard quickly gave up trying to make it do so and shouted loudly,

"I will come back. We must accompany Dr. MacPhee, in case he should meet any more difficult snow and ice!"

Two separate and silent parties trouped off down towards the north-east shoulder to descend via the Carn Mor Dearg arête.

At some point directly opposite the big Ben, across Coire Leis and 1,500 feet above the CIC hut, we all halted for a rest. Richard surveyed the mountain-side very intently then said in a booming voice,

"Here we can jump off the ridge and make proper glissading direct to the hut!" Noting that this had attracted MacPhee's attention he continued, "You go first Peter, holding your axe firmly with both hands, and I will follow."

Looking down that steep white slope to the distant rock spangled floor of the corrie, I gulped. Icy fingers reached from the pit of my stomach at tightly stretched heart strings. But Richard was a most experienced snow and ice man, who had spent the war years in Zurich, studying for a science doctorate, and climbing most of the mountains in Switzerland. If he said jump then I could be sure it was safe to do so. I jumped. Landing like an expert ski-jumper I sped down the hill in perfect balance, classic style, crouching slightly, leaning forward with knees bent and ice-axe at the ready. Exhilaration! Then I hit the ice and equilibrium vanished in an instant. Once more that day I was soon accelerating to Isaac Newton's celebrated law, but this time I was somewhat worried. Until that awesome, thunderous cry rang out again. MacPhee's horrific holler,

"B-R-A-K-E !!!"

It had me absolutely ess-aitch-eye-tee scared. So much so that I clutched my axe

with fear driven strength causing its pick to bite into the ice and produce a breathtaking shower of ice chips. Then came the time warp again and I felt I was stationary — frozen in fear and space.

Occasional rocks started to hurtle by, upwards. The plume of ice particles from my pick gradually slowed, together with the slope's upward velocity. Finally, everything came to rest. I kicked in one tricounied toe, then the other, and stood supported by my axe. Looking up, I waved to Richard.

"OK" I shouted. "I'm there!"

A moment's silence elapsed before his faint reply,

"You-must-climb-up-again,-making-the-good-practice-for-stepcutting!" Indeed it was! When I at last regained the ridge, our two subdued parties combined into one big noisy band, to continue down Carn Mor Dearg to a point where the corrie could be more easily attained.

Later, in the hut, I discovered the day's misfortunes were not yet over; Richard's supply of steak was limited to that one we had eaten the previous night. Moreover, his supply of oatmeal appeared to be unlimited, constituting our only other foodstuff. Yet those gods who had minded me against the machinations of MacPhee and Meyer had not deserted us. In the hut cupboard I found an old, half full jar of strawberry jam. At least this added a bit of colour to the evening meal. I had had enough white stuff for one day.

The next morning MacPhee and Co. left for Liverpool, but before they parted, Richard posed a question,

"Perhaps, Dr. MacPhee, you could suggest something for Peter and I to do?"

I held my breath, anticipating MacPhee's reply, but he simply smiled,

"Well, Dr. Meyer, no-one has yet made an attempt on *Rubicon Wall*, in fact, as far as I know it has not even received a second summer ascent in rubbers — but I would recommend you go up and down the *Tower Ridge* first, to gain more experience of our snow and ice conditions."

This carefully concealed and well-aimed dirk flew straight over Richard's head.

After they had gone, I followed Richard's masterful lead of the *Douglas Boulder* for a few hundred feet, to approach *Tower Ridge* the hard way but my nerves were as twangy as a busker's banjo. At each step, on slippery, snow covered slabs, I faltered, half expecting another terrible cry to echo across the cliff. Despite Richard's obvious disappointment I insisted on turning back.

"We could just do this towering ridge," he argued, "then avalanche that loose cornice above No.3 to make the quick glissading back to the hut."

That was another thing I was afraid of!

In the afternoon I left Richard reading Shakespeare and toiled up Coire Leis with an old pair of skis. Some snowy solitude, I thought, would sooth my shattered nerves. Strapping skis to my Lawrie Mk Vs, I glided gently back to the hut. Wonderful. Never having been on skis before I marvelled how easy it was to go. Then the slope steepened, speed increased and I found how hard it was to stop. No sticks! No brakes! "Wa-a-a-oh!" A terrified cry echoed across the corrie — this time it was mine! Heading for the hut at an alarming rate of knots there was only one thing to do. Fall down! This did the trick and I eventually came to rest, mostly by dint of bouncing off a few boulders. Staggering into the hut looking literally like some bleeding, abominable snowman, I found Richard asleep.

Next day I began my journey home, leaving Richard to stay on for a day or two. (He had enough oatmeal to last a week!) Before I departed, two wild-eyed Creag Dubh laddies arrived so I left happy in the knowledge that Richard would 'no be short o' good companions'. Descending quickly to Fort William, I still missed the only bus which would enable me to make all the connections needed to get me my pre-arranged lorry lift to Rawtenstall. Fortunately a quick appraisal of personal finance showed that a train ticket was possible. During that wonderful rail journey to Glasgow, as I gazed out over the vast wilderness of Rannoch Moor, I reflected on my recent baptism on the big Ben and doubted there would ever be a confirmation. However, there was; and I did get used to the white stuff. Never cared much for oatmeal porridge though, nor overcame that gripping fear of hearing one of Graham MacPhee's horrific hollers!



*CIC Hut (in modern times?). Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson*



# McKinley Flier

Bill Barker

I am supposed to be an expert parapente man these days, so that when Sam Roberts suggested going up onto the Carneddys for a quick flight I was ready and eager to go. Unfortunately my reputation as an expert is based on one flight only and that was in tandem with a well-known super-expert from Switzerland. The truth is I had never actually 'done it' on my own and this seemed just like the chance to put that right.

It was a bright and breezy afternoon in the Helyg car-park and we decided to go up into the cwm on the side of Pen Llithwrig as being a nice forgiving place to start. When we got up there the wind had become quite gusty, but you need a nice breeze, to take off anyway. Sam had the first flight and I have to admit that when a particularly fierce gust shot him straight up into the air I began to wonder if this was going to be quite so easy.

Anyway, we can't back off now and after Sam staggers back up the hill I gear up in all the harnesses and slings and we lay out the canopy behind me. This is supposed to be really simple, I have seen it done lots of times, and then with a casual flick of the wrist I bring the canopy up off the ground.

My God, this is like being clipped onto a demented helicopter. The next gust shoots me straight up onto the air, I haul on the brake lines frantically, because I need to do something frantically, and the next thing I know I am rolling on the ground enveloped in lots of very colourful laundry.

How can this be? How is it that a man of my experience cannot handle a gusty wind half way up the Carneddys? The crucial difference will be well known to all climbers. It is that great chasm which is fixed between leading a pitch and seconding it, and that is just the difference between solo parapenting and being a passenger.

My previous experience of parapenting was on McKinley in Alaska in 1990 when I actually got to jump off the top, and then it seemed so easy. We flew into the glacier base from Talkeetna in a small plane which takes about an hour or so over a singularly barren landscape.

The base is at about 7,000 feet and so to the top of McKinley at over 20,000 feet is quite a decent walk. We were just doing the *West Buttress* which is the standard way up. I say 'just' doing it but it is, in fact an excellent route up a great mountain.

The whole route takes about five days and follows the main glacier most of the way. We were all on skis and pulling sledges with our gear on them. This is reasonable enough going up but when skiing back down the sledge reveals itself as an invention of the devil. When you are skiing straight down it catches up and knocks you over and when you are traversing it is not unusual to see the sledge come swooping past.

Anyway, we were still on the way up. We spent a day at about 11,000 feet in a snow storm and then after four days we got to the camp at 14,000 feet. It is supposed to be a good idea to acclimatise here for a few days but really 14,000 feet is not very high, although the rangers predict the most dire consequences for



anyone rash enough to ignore this advice.

We left our skis and most of the rest of our gear at 14,000 feet and we hoped for a snow cave at 17,000 feet and so on to the summit the day after.

The ridge up to 17,000 feet is a very pleasant day out and leads to a plateau where we dug out our snowhole. My friend Harry had decided that he would do without a sleeping bag. He didn't sleep a wink as the temperature fell to about -40 degrees C and all our sympathetic remarks were met with a rather surly shortness.

Next day was fine but with a good breeze and very cold. It is a long plod along the broad ridge to the top but the height does get to you a bit and I was very glad to get to the plateau just below the summit. The parapente guys stopped here to organize their chutes and burn a little incense or whatever else they do. I carried on to the top with Harry and a magnificent view, but I have to admit that by then the thought of the flight was edging over my mental horizon.

We got back to the other guys and, surprise, I was to go off first with Andrea. Andrea is a sort of parapente version of our own Smiler and I had difficulty matching his manic grin as we geared up. This was where we came in and, as I was saying, all you have to do to take off is pull up the canopy and step off. With the right man pulling the strings (not me) all of a sudden we were flying!

We swept over the *Cassin Ridge* with the canopy snapping and rustling in the wind. When I got my eyes open I had to admit that this was a new experience and then some! We were about 10,000 feet above the glacier and I could see base camp which we had left about a week before, in fact we could have flown all the way back except for the small matter of our tents at 14,000 feet.

We passed through some small patches of mist and turned in towards our camp. We touched down perfectly, but I was so tensed up that I fell flat on my face.



Harry Taylor and Bill Barker, McKinley Fliers.

Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

It was good to sit there with a cup of tea and watch the others come down. After we had taken off the wind had got so bad that Harry had 16 attempts before he came to take off. It had never occurred to me that it was particularly windy but that is the great benefit of pure ignorance.

Next day the rest of the guys flew down to the airstrip but I had to walk down to pick up some of the kit which we had left lower down. This is how I know all about skiing when towing a sledge and the knowledge was dearly bought, in fact after a final brain seizure of rage I took the skis off and walked the last 15 miles or so.

# *We Failed On Ultar*

*Victor Saunders*

"We failed." Steve said to Kees, when we returned to our base at Shokumshun.

"So did Mick and Crag," replied Kees "and the other news is the Japanese are here. They've taken 130 porters up the Ultar Gorge, and what is more, they have bought 22,000 feet of Kevlar rope for fixing."

"This is mind boggling," I thought, as I looked over our base camp. Two tents, brought up with the help of four porters. A week earlier Steve and I had been on our way to the summit of Ultar with a pair of 150 foot ropes.

When the alarm dragged us from our dreams on September 3rd we were one night's work from the summit ridge, just 12 hours from the top of Ultar. Our line would follow the great triangular icefield, a feature of about 50 degrees, dotted with icecliffs here and there, to its apex 1,500 feet higher. The top of the icefield was connected to the summit ridge by a double corniced snow crest, about 500 feet long, leading to 200 feet of difficult climbing, which in turn led to a col on the summit ridge, at slightly over 22,000 feet. From this col we could see easy snow slopes to the summit at 24,000 feet. We felt optimistic about the weather, which had remained perfect, and about our chances.

But our optimism was horribly misplaced. By 11am the next morning, we knew our climb was over. Not only that, we would be lucky to make it down alive.

Steve and I had climbed to the end of the double corniced crest, a hateful and difficult section with all the solidarity of a haystack on edge, balanced on a skyscraper. Steve was in the lead, on the fourth brittle ice traverse, when I noticed that my left crampon had broken. We had a discussion at rope's length, me shouting, and Steve hollerin'. We agreed to push on. Within five minutes Steve hollered that his ice hammer had broken. In all our combined climbing careers, spanning a total of 27 years, neither of us had broken an axe or crampon. Now, within the space of five minutes, we had broken one of each. It was unbelievable. We were one day from the summit, after six weeks of effort. The sun shone out of a mockingly blue sky. I could have cried had our position not been so serious. Now we had to reverse all those brittle ice traverses with broken tools.

I remembered how Steve Venables had dropped his rucksack, our stove and tent poles at 23,000 feet on Rimo I, and knew how the poor fellow felt — devastated. I had caught him jumping up and down, tearing at his hair, and wailing, "Why me? Oh, why me?" Sustad had felt like doing the same, which just shows that Norwegian-Americans are not totally devoid of emotion. I tell you, all I wanted to do that moment was jump up and down!

It took us the rest of the day to struggle back to our last bivouac. Having spent the rest of the next day preparing our abseil equipment, attaching short slings to our ice screws and pegs, Steve and I left the bivouac that night.

We planned to cut ice bollards and ice threads to save our precious supply of abseil gear. There were 9,000 feet of descent to the glacier to prepare for. Fifteen thousand feet below us flowed the Hunza river. Edging it, like fine purfling, was the Karakoram Highway. A patchwork of green terraces, bordering the river,

betrayed the cultivations of the people of Hametabad.

"It's horrible being able to see Hametabad from here", said Steve.

"It's much better not being able to see anything," I replied.

We had waited until dark before starting the long retreat, for the sun to go off the slopes, for the stones and avalanche slopes to refreeze, and possibly because the sight was too horrible to contemplate with no moon, a soot-black night. The sounds turned out to be worse. As I dangled in the middle of our first abseil, there was a noise like an express train out of a tunnel, and a large section of the mountain-side decided to share our icefield. In the echo of the receding explosions, and the sulphurous cordite of the rockfall, I suggested to Steve that we might live longer if we abseiled down the rocky left side of the icefield, well away from the fall line.

"You're right. If we stay here there's a possibility we could die."

On the rocky left side, our ropes immediately jammed. It was Steve's turn. With heart in mouth, he pulled tight on the free end. It would not move. He was not tied into the belay, he could not be. The other end of the rope was somewhere up there in the darkness. He pulled again, there was no movement. I shone my torch at him and he made a face like he had just chewed a lemon.

"I'm going to have to pull from higher up... I guess it's the knot." I nodded sympathetically.

"Take care," I said impotently, making plans to try and grab him should he fall in my general direction.

Steve was up there for half an hour, while I shivered with cold and neurosis.

"Victor," came the voice from the dark "if the ropes go on jamming like this we are definitely going to die. If we abseil down the middle of the face, we'll only maybe die."

"That's incontrovertible logic," I said to myself.

In the middle of the icefield, there was a waterfall in a large runnel. The nearest thing I'd seen to this were the monsoon drains we used to have in Malaya, deep concrete channels meant to take away storm water, but which usually lay like mantraps, just under the flood surface. The ropes took the first opportunity of falling into the waterfall, and freezing solid, bending at unpredictable angles, and more or less imitating hawser wire.

Some hours later, I don't know how many, two abysmal and free hanging abseils deposited us below the fangs of the bergschrund, and we reached the hanging glacier bivouac.

Here we stopped for two hours, before pushing on to make the most of the night. The imperative was, as always, to make as much ground as possible before the sun made all progress impossibly dangerous. Against this we had to set our growing exhaustion and increasingly disfunctional limbs. Steve, with the instinct that marks him out as a real mountaineer, and not just a climber, had searched for and seen an abseil that avoided the first brittle ice traverse. It took us past the pocket hanging glacier seracs, where the ropes twisted into corkscrews and jammed tight.

"I can't believe these ropes," said Steve, as I clambered up the free end, "they're the worst jamming ropes I've ever used... there should be a government health warning on each one..."

The sun emerged into an almost clear sky as we reached the 'Z' couloirs. The



hidden valley was spread out before us like a model landscape. It was incredibly, and compellingly, beautiful. In that moment a realization dawned on me. We weren't unlucky at all. We were privileged just to be here, to have attempted two new routes from this valley, to have explored this unvisited glacier. My mood changed from one of deep despair to sheer exultation.

Probably it was the knowledge that we might now survive the descent, but I shouted to Steve. "Hey Steve... Wouldn't you rather have failed on this route, than have succeeded on the Japanese route?" After a brief moment came the reply, "Yeah...everytime."

#### Summary

Victor Saunders' description of part of the 1991 North London Mountaineering Club expedition to Ultar, an unclimbed 24,000 foot peak in the Karakoram.

# *In Praise Of Nig-Nogs*

*Duncan Boston*

I think it was Harold who said out loud what had until then been an unspoken belief. It was during one of those competitive, noisy discussions in the bar of The Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel in the early '50s, probably with some of the visitors from Manchester. Anyway, out it came to flatten all argument; the definitive statement, "Even our 'nig-nogs' climb VS."

Before anyone rushes off to the Race Relations Board, those of the north, particularly the old West Riding will remember that the 'nig-nogs' were a sort of youth organisation open to paid up subscribers of the Bradford Telegraph and Argus, the local evening paper. They were a parochial equivalent of the Scouts' and Guides' Associations, the Boys' Brigade or the Woodland Folk of Sheffield. Very worthy. The term only took on its derogative tone in the mouths of returning National Servicemen or those of the arch satirists of the Bradford Lads. Among them the title came to mean the everyday, the ordinary, the lower echelons of their self-appointed elite. Anonymously purchasing membership for Denis was not a gratuitous act of charity but rather a comment on his increasing tendency to act the sage, visionary and prophet at the tender age of 13 years. Thus he became the only person in our small climbing world who could prove, with membership card and badge, that he was a fully qualified 'nig-nog'.

Even without such proof everybody knew who the 'nig-nogs' were. They were the bulk of us in fact. I certainly had no doubt or shame in accepting the title. It was enough to belong to the group. I quietly took pride in the statement. Especially from Harold, of whom we were mostly a little in awe.

He was serious about climbing. Well, we all were. It was all that, as a group of youngsters, we were interested in. The whole scene, the rock, the mountains, the walking, the week-ends in Wall End, dreams of the Alps and beyond. The conviviality of the group, the shared experience of the establishment of myths, the flaunting of conformist behaviour, the aura of the exception. But Harold was really serious.

He, even then, had a marked preference for 'not wasting time walking' and getting onto roadside crags like Castle Rock and Iron Crag and finding new routes. He often went out on the rock in conditions we 'nig-nogs' had decided were more suitable for walking or 'festering'. New techniques fascinated him and within his very limited resources he was always the first to discover and experiment. It seemed to us that he accepted early on the idea of falling off in his personal pursuit of excellence. Being 'extended' was a sign of a good day. His conversation was larded with foreign phrases like 'face nord' and 'très difficile' to our mystification and admiration. Climbing books in German and French were described to our collective astonishment. We even liked to believe that he had read 'Les Trois Dernières Problèmes Des Alpes' (in the original).

And he recognised us.

For yes, we were climbing VS. Not all that many people were in those days and whilst Harold, Arthur, Peter and Don were doing hard new routes, the 'nig-nogs'

were joyously and enjoyably working our way through the list of classic climbs.

It is in the nature of most people to have moments of ambition. To be first or best (or known). A sensible spur to achievement but for most of us tempered with a normal inclination to comfort and security. A healthy fear if you like. Being a climbing 'nig-nog' was (and is) like that. You can do your own thing, have your own little adventures, enjoy your personal highs without expectations from outside. You can enjoy the belonging and taking part and, because it is part of the same mini-world, experience the close-up grandstand view of events taking place centre-stage.

One day in 1948 Jim and I were on the gentlemen's side of Gimmer. We did *Nocturne* on Pallid Buttress followed by *Juniper Buttress* and were astonished at the number of people occupying spectator stances on the west side of the gully. Finishing our route we wandered over to the edge just beyond the top of the *Crack* to see what all the fuss was about. Peering over the edge we saw the familiar blond head of Arthur Dolphin.

"Wotcher Arthur."

"Hello boys. Have you got a rope?"

"Sure."

"Well hang around." Future climbing historians were to describe this as a momentous break-through in climbing standards. We were just a couple of 'nig-nogs' glad to see Arthur climbing so well. Smashing bloke.

He never needed the rope anyway.

A year or two later, 1951 I think, Alfie, Jim and I were satisfying an ambition on the *Crack*. Pete and Fred had decided to try to settle a little local argument about the route that Arthur had done. Whilst thrutching about on the top pitch I heard a metallic clatter down below. We shouted to ask if all was well round the corner.

"Sure," said Fred, "no doubts about a peg anymore."

Nor were there.

In 1956 another great occasion — the Bradford Lads/Nig-Nog/Cloggy Meet. We had all been there before and done various things but this time we decided to go and clean up in our own way. All low key with no stars in the team.

We humped all the gear up to the lake. An arrangement was made with one of the train drivers to bring up milk and the papers each day. A great week still remembered with several verses in the Bradford Lads Calypso:

The boys they go to Cloggy to camp,  
They used a candle for a lamp,  
Denis nobbled Terry in the middle of the night,  
And set the whole damned issue alight.

With confidence, confidence etc...

We climbed every day and cleaned up the guidebook (the original Barford one, not the Williams edition).

One day we had a mass assault on *Longland's*. Two of the Manchester boys were trying something new just to the right. We reckoned one of them was a 'nig-nog' like ourselves. Certainly he kept dropping things. Just before the top pitch we looked over to see what was happening. The leader looked to be in the sort of place



*In Praise of Nig-Nogs*

'nig-nogs' shouldn't go and was flicking loops of rope at something not easily discernible.

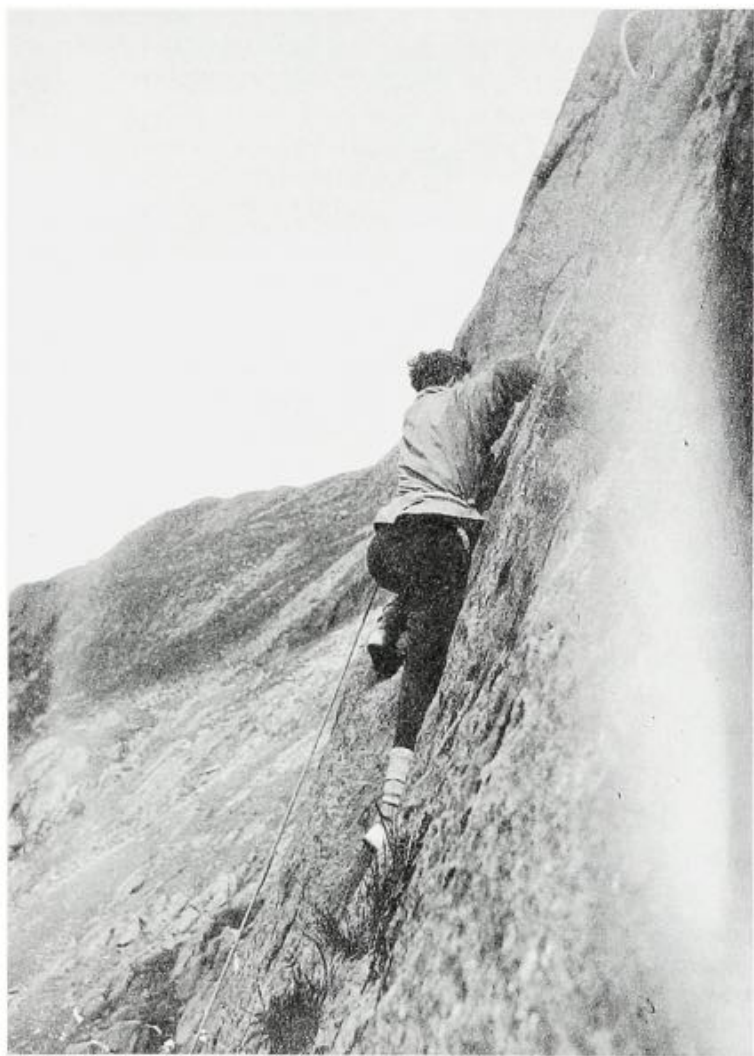
"Ow do Ronnie?"

"Wotcher mate... Hang around a bit."

Just like Arthur, but like him he seemed to manage all right.

Once again being 'nig-nogs' got us ringside seats for a great event.

And so on, it seems, for a lifetime. The 'stars' may come and go but the 'nig-nogs' of my youth are still out there, drawing their pensions and enjoying themselves. Some of the stars of old survive to become like us.



*Rennie Bere on 'The Piton Route', Idwal. Photo: Rennie Bere Collection*

# *The Roof of Europe in 10 Days*

*Colin Goodey*

Though the faithful climber is, in his essence a thoroughly domesticated man and rarely strays from his own home, the Alps, a spirit of unrest occasionally takes hold upon him and drives him forth to more distant regions'. So wrote Mummery when describing his visit to the Caucasus in July 1888. Perhaps we can now add the Himalaya to 'home' since so many treks and expeditions leave our shores for these ranges. But nevertheless Mummery's sentiments will always hold true and certainly, for me, the thought of a trip to the Caucasus excited me far more than the Alps or Himalaya where most serious mountaineers have been — I knew no one who had been to these mountains.

It was certainly this spirit of unrest that prompted me to accept an invitation from some Ukrainian friends to visit these 'distant regions' of the Caucasus, with a view to a joint venture. The idea was for the Ukrainians to show us their mountains: the Caucasus, Crimea, Pamirs and even more interesting, the Fansky Mountains near Samarkand.

So, the first trip was to be a lightning visit to the Caucasus and Mount Elbrus, the highest peak of Europe at just under 18,600ft — nearly 3,000ft higher than Mont Blanc, thought by many as being Europe's top.

The visit was unforgettable, the kindness and hospitality was overwhelming and the spirit of 'glasnost' ever prevailing. The Russians so desperately want and need commercial projects linking them to the West in the form of joint ventures and, with their magnificent unspoiled alpine regions, can offer so much to British trekkers, climbers and alpinists.

We flew British Airways to Moscow and immediately on arrival at their international airport sampled a 'flavour' that we were to taste throughout our stay. The arrivals hall was shoulder to shoulder with flights having arrived from Paris, Germany and Tokyo as well as our London flight. We stood expectantly at the carousel clearly marked, London/Moscow Baggage Reclaim. A full half hour was to pass before anything came along the conveyor belt, and when baggage did appear it was mainly boxes of televisions and computers from the Tokyo flight. 'Twid' Turner, a member of our team, immediately forced his way across the hall to the carousel marked, Tokyo/Moscow, and there discovered about 250 bewildered Japanese passengers watching with blank faces a fully loaded carousel of British luggage going around and around.

After a conducted tour of The Kremlin and Red Square with one of our Ukrainian contacts, we boarded a sleeper train bound for Kharkov where we were met by the rest of our Soviet friends. Impressive they were too — six Masters of Sport and one with the added distinction of also being a Snow Leopard (conqueror of all 7,000m peaks of the then USSR). They were all instructors or alpine guides within their own country and one of them a member of the recent successful Russian expedition to Manaslu. Between them they had formed a small alpine travel business aimed at introducing westerners to their great mountain ranges and wished us to assist them in the co-ordination of this.

We were treated like V.I.P.s and after two days of meetings and discussions, and much vodka, boarded another train south for the long but interesting journey to Minvody, the last major city before the Caucasus and the Georgia border. From here we travelled by small alpine bus for four hours up through the foothills and primitive villages of a strange but exciting land to arrive high in the Baksan valley, one of the most interesting and lovely places of the high Caucasus. Our accommodation here was, by our western standards, very good indeed and not suprisingly we discovered the hotel was used almost exclusively by 'the Party,' so we felt privileged indeed.

After several treks in and around the Baksan valley in the hope of gaining some acclimatisation we were taken up via a cable-car to the lower slopes of the Elbrus ski fields where we enjoyed a few hours skiing beneath a cloudless blue sky. Having escaped broken limbs we shouldered our 'sacks for the relatively easy walk up to the 'Priut Odinatsati' better known as 'The Refuge of 11' — a futuristic looking hut at 13,800ft and the principal starting point for the ascent of Mt. Elbrus.

Earlier, in the valley, we had met a party of Italians with their guides from Courmayeur and we were rather amazed when one of the guides came over and said, "Hello, we meet again." I asked him where we had met before and he replied, "Kilimanjaro." I then remembered passing a very large group of colourful Italians descending from the Kibo Hut three years previously.

The Italians were at the hut and were planning on making the first parapente descent from the summit of Elbrus, so we had very pleasant company and enjoyed many tales of their adventures on Mt. Blanc, East Africa and the Himalaya.

Even at this modest altitude most climbers at the hut were suffering from severe headaches and felt miserable, except of course, the Snow Leopard, who suggested that we take a pain-killer and join him at once in a further acclimatisation walk up to the Pastukhov Rocks at 15,750ft and back to the refuge before nightfall. This we did and were rewarded with perhaps the finest vista the Caucasus can offer, since Elbrus is located on the western end of the Caucasian chain and detached a little distance to the north. Thus, one sees the whole central portion of Caucasus spread out like a towering mural to the south. Great mountains like the precipitous two-headed Ushba 15,410ft, which is generally considered the steepest and most majestic peak of the range and the sharp rock needles of Schscheldi 14,305ft with its superb north face as yet unexplored by Western climbers. The breathtaking view continues eastwards taking in the other five highest peaks of the Caucasus: Dzhangi Tau 16,565ft, Dych Tau 17,064ft, Koshtan Tau 16,877ft, Shkara 17,064ft and finally Kazbek 16,558ft, this lying just west of a military road crossing the range into Georgia via the Dariel Pass (the most important pass across the Caucasus).

Before making our descent back to the 'Refuge of 11', we had the good fortune to witness one of the Italians and a Russian guide making a practice flight from the saddle between the twin summits of Elbrus. They circled us before making perfect landings on their skis and together we all continued our descent for supper and an early night.

It was freezing hard and the stars were twinkling at 1am and after a laboured breakfast of Paracetamol we left for the summit at 2am — clearly altitude was going to be the major problem as we had had so little time for acclimatisation. Nobody spoke as the eerie line of head-torches bobbed and swayed their way up



the snows towards the Pastukhov Rocks, to be halted intermittently by one or another member of our Anglo/Russian team vomiting or peeing in the virgin snow of the previous night. In preparation of this plod, I had secretly added to my breakfast menu of chocolate and Paracetamol — Diamox, in an effort to stave off the debilitating effects of altitude. This was to be my salvation because, as the sun rose in a flush of crimson and gold, my headache vanished and I suddenly felt strong. By the time we arrived at The Rocks it was clear that my wife Sue was feeling so ill that her summit bid looked to be in jeopardy, also Twid, the strongest member of our team was complaining of giddiness as well as severe headache. I opened up my 'pharmaceutical department' in the lid of my 'sack and offered my wares but there were no takers; either they were too sick to contemplate swallowing anything or they were suspicious of my 'prescription'.

Twid and the Snow Leopard, Victor Vitaly, were the first to leave The Rocks and did so at a cracking pace whilst a cameraman who was feeling ill began his descent with Gennady, one of the guides. I set off with a Ukrainian, Vladimir Gubanov, in pursuit of Twid and Victor who were now well ahead, on the steep rise leading to a leftward traverse to the saddle, some three hours away. I now felt extremely fit and found I was able to move more quickly and soon forged well ahead of Vladimir, closing the distance on my friends ahead who appeared to have stopped. Looking back I could see my wife gallantly plugging on with Irina, a Ukrainian doctor and 2nd category guide of alpinism, so I was happy she was in good hands. The next time I looked back I was saddened to see them both descending and, on catching up with Twid, discovered his headache was back with a vengeance; he felt sick and giddy and wished to rest for a while. He pointed upwards towards Vitaly and suggested I follow and that he would join with Vladimir if he felt better after a rest. Vitaly waited for me at the start of the normal leftward traverse for the col and on joining him, I could see Twid indicating his intention to descend.

I now found myself alone with two non-English speaking Ukrainian 'Masters of Sport' excitedly pointing directly up the south face of the mountain. I didn't know whether to feel flattered or petrified at the prospect of joining them on a direct line up the face as opposed to the normal plod along the traverse and up to the summit via the col.

"Colin" they said, pointing directly upwards, "no problem, yes."

It looked like *Trinity Gully* for about 2,000ft and the advantage seemed to be that it would be much quicker than the long plod of the normal route, so I nodded my approval. I then set off behind the Snow Leopard, closely followed by Vladimir. The route became steeper and steeper as we followed a line of steps which, I discovered later, were made by two of the Italian guides a day or so before. I became absorbed in counting 10 steps at a time and resting and, although I still felt strong, my lungs were working 'triple time'. Hours passed quickly and on one of my gasping rests I took stock of my position. I was now about 600ft above Vladimir, and Vitaly was not to be seen above me. The ground was very steep and I realised that a fall from here would be hard to put right. It was exciting and I enjoyed being alone. I knew I could make the top provided I simply continued to count 10 steps repeatedly. There was a rock step about 200ft above me and my heart nearly stopped each time I rested, only to discover that the step was no nearer. A full hour was to pass before I found myself beneath a vertical wall of rock

well marked with crampon scratches and with a sling blowing in the wind near the top. The 30 foot wall was easy provided one kept one's head, and on grasping the sling and pulling over the top I was greeted by Vitaly's smiling face;

"Hello Colin — Elbrus, Elbrus soon." He then turned and set off up a steep couloir topped by what appeared to be another rock step of similar height as the last. For the first time I began to tire and wondered if I would have the strength to continue and make the long descent. Vladimir was catching me up now but Vitaly had topped the couloir and vanished from sight. I continued up what seemed an endless staircase checking my watch at every rest; time was 'flying', I estimated 20 more steps to the next rock step but it turned out to be 60. Resting below this step, I heard a radio crackle into life and on popping over the short step found myself on the summit of Europe.

"Bassa, bassa, bassa," Vitaly was calling over the transmitter, then after much crackling and exchanges in Russian I heard Bob's (my brother-in law) voice congratulating me on topping out — I told him I was about to start my descent — little did I know then just how fast I would be descending in 10 minutes time.

There was a freezing, cold wind blowing on the summit, so after Vladimir had arrived and we had taken a couple of summit photos we began our descent. I felt certain that we would re-trace the normal 'trench' up the mountain as our route down and as such, would not need crampons. In preparation for the deep wet snow of late afternoon, I had pulled my super-gaiter rands over the soles of my boots. Vitaly now made a sudden change of plan and indicated a more direct route down the short westward end of the south face and without more ado he and Vladimir turned suddenly to the left down a steep slope.

The slope had begun to freeze again in the wind and my plastic boot edges could not gain a purchase due to the the rands of the gaiters. I had, in my triumph, made all the basic errors born of fatigue and, relaxing too soon, I was now to pay for it, even my axe was safely fixed to my 'sack and all I had was a ski-pole in one hand. It was the first and only time I was to pass the Snow Leopard on the mountain and he and Vladimir apparently watched in horror as I shot past them at breakneck speed.

"Focking-hell Colin, focking-hell Colin," I could hear Vitaly calling with his limited vocabulary. I sensed the slope was convex and as I did so, I took off and realised I was about to die. All sorts of things flashed through my mind in that short space of time — mainly the bother and grief this stupid error would cause my wife and friends. However, my Guardian Angel steered me into a slope of softer snow and I was able to use my ski-stick, held low down, as a brake and I came to a halt on a cliff edge.

The adrenalin had woken me up and I was now fully aware of my situation and totally in control. I traversed across the south face to rejoin my route of ascent earlier in the day and descended this, competently and safely using the correct gear for the task in hand, reaching the start of the traverse line well in advance of my companions who chose a descent that was not for me. We were all happy to meet again and toast our success and my narrow escape. By the time we reached the 'Refuge of 11', it had been a long day. Touching down at Heathrow three days later, we had had a hectic but eventful 10 days.

# *Breaking the Rules*

*Jancis Allison*

The scene is set in the early '60s, when the Climbers' Club was an all-male club. It should perhaps also be explained that at that time, Ynys Ettws had a bathroom (now the 'members only' bedroom).

There was a time in days of yore  
When women were not allowed through the door  
Of Ynys, Helyg, nor the Downes Hut neither,  
Though not through want of trying either,  
To join that great illustrious Club  
Of hardy climbers — (ah, there's the rub).  
For its numbers were worried they could be outdone  
In feats of endurance, so I'm told by some.  
Though I'm sure this certainly cannot be true -  
More likely they wished to preserve their loo!  
For women could use a little cell  
'gainst Ynys back wall (I know it full well).  
Their women this little room could use  
As long as the hut they didn't abuse.

Now I have an awful tale to tell  
Of sheer timidity — oh bloody hell.  
How weak I was that terrible night;  
I should have put up a far better fight.  
For I had hitched up from Oxford City  
(All on my own 'twas more the pity).  
I had, I thought, a faithful friend  
Who'd erect a tent for me to attend.

HOWEVER —

The night was rough and wild and wet  
When down the road I was duly set;  
Then forced to walk from far Nant Peris  
To Ynys Ettws in the Pass, Llanberis.  
The rain lashed down, the wind did howl  
As I trudged on through the night so foul.  
No moon shone down to light the road,  
Not even the line in the centre showed.  
I clung to the wall, until at last  
The sign at the entrance to Ynys I passed.  
I then plodded up the puddled track,  
But a Vango tent the field did lack.  
I searched and searched and searched in vain



### *Breaking the Rules*

For all I could see was the driving rain.  
For I am very sad to say  
My very good friend in Ynys lay,  
In total warm and faithless bliss —  
Me, he certainly did not miss.  
Now, I dared not enter through Ynys door  
For that would be breaking Climbers' Club law.  
I decided the only place to be  
Was the outside loo, for the likes of me.  
So in I crept and settled my seat  
On the wooden loo, which was quite a feat.  
For the room was certainly very small  
And not really meant for such a call.  
However, I somehow managed to fill the place  
With my 'sack and pit, while the water did race  
Down the hillside and under the door,  
And created a puddle which became more and more  
Like the Padarn Lake as the time went by;  
And as daylight came how I did sigh  
For the days when women could be in the Club —  
I would certainly always pay my sub.

However, a stroke of luck at last  
For Roy Beard, the custodian, came hurrying fast.  
Now Roy was known to be terribly fierce  
And no woman I was sure his heart could pierce;  
But this hard heart softened and he saw the light  
When he realised my truly terrible plight.  
For he knocked on my makeshift bedroom door  
And an ass he did make of the CC law.  
For he asked me in to the forbidden den  
Of CC members and then, oh then...  
He even offered to run the bath  
This I must say caused me to laugh (not half!)  
For never in all my life it seems  
Nor in my very wildest dreams  
Did I ever think I'd get such a chance;  
This made me want to shout and dance —  
For this was the beginning of the end  
Of male domination — 'tis true my friend!  
For wickedly through me a thought did run  
Of far off days that were yet to come.  
When women could walk freely through the door  
Of Ynys, Helyg, the Downes — and more.  
Well, now it seems, those days have arrived  
And very great pleasure I have derived  
From sitting proud on the new Ynys loo.  
Well, wouldn't you?

# *An Unexpected Reminder of the Past*

## *Henry Adler - CC Pensioners' Section*

It does not all have to be about desperate exploits by intrepid members, does it? Not much intrepidity, or should it be intrepidity or whatever, left here in the geriatric department in any case. So you will have to put up with a little nostalgia encountered quite unexpectedly as the result of a visit when climbing could not have been further from my mind. The purpose of the expedition was in fact quite sinful, something to do with my pre-occupation with good wines, but it was conveniently combined with calling on almost my very first boss in the world of aeronautics, the dim distant past indeed.

We met in a charming old cottage in the West Country. There was another elderly couple present as well and we took tea as tea can only be taken in such pleasant surroundings. The conversation turned to North Wales:

"Years ago I spent quite some time there", said one whom I had not met before.

"A second cousin of mine invited me to one of those climbing huts, trying to get me interested in the sport but my performance was really quite terrible and I went walking instead."

Who was the cousin?, where was the hut?

"I am related to Menlove Edwards and we stayed for a week at a place called Helyg. It was in 1933 I think."

They had first met in 1929 or thereabouts when he was serving an apprenticeship near the Edwards' home and had been invited for occasional week-end stays. Menlove and his brother were already spending much of their time climbing but the cousin was more interested in aeronautics and, as far as the outdoors was concerned, in walking the hills rather than scaling them 'from the wrong side'. Over the years, though they met only very occasionally, Menlove's troubled mind became more evident to his cousin, particularly his severe feeling of insecurity, but he had no idea of what was troubling him until very much later, close to the end of Edwards' life. We left it at that.

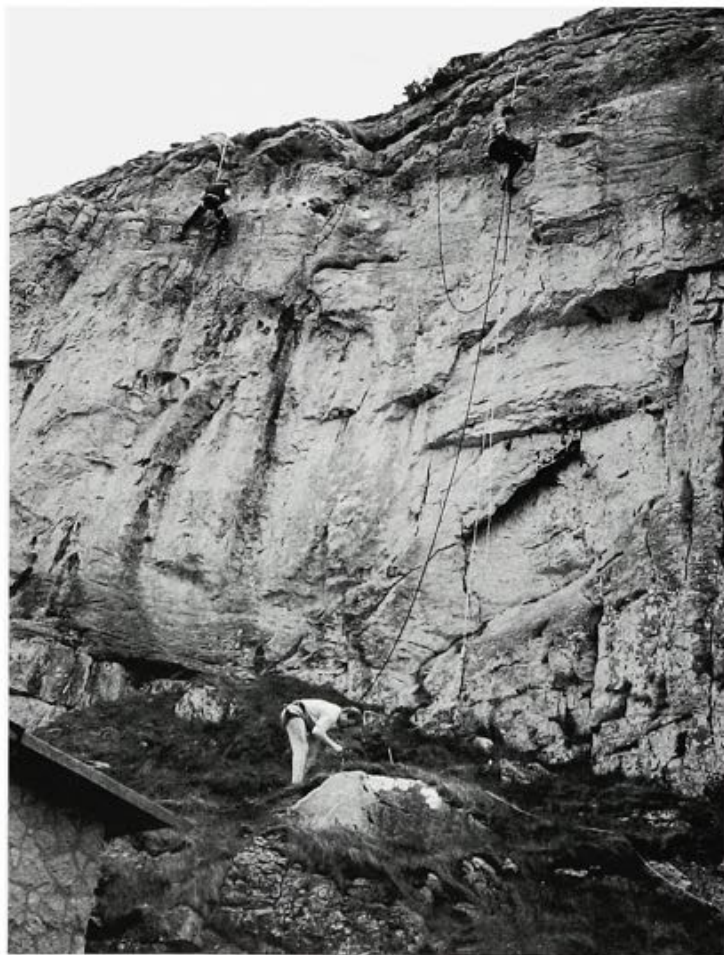
I was quite stimulated by this unexpected 'It's a small world' situation but it was to become smaller yet! I thought a little gesture would not come amiss. With the author's immediate willing help I procured a spare copy of our Helyg book and sent it off with my compliments. 'I had no idea Menlove was so prominent in the climbing world' said the thank-you letter 'and there is something else. I was surprised to see that another distinguished pioneer, Ivan Waller, was also among my friends'. They had worked together at Rolls Royce during the early years of the war. 'He got me to try a bit of climbing in Derbyshire when opportunities arose as we travelled to and fro between aircraft works'. (This reminded me of my own occasional detours and of meetings arranged for Fridays rather than Thursdays in places much closer to the hills than London, when I was still in harness — temptation seems to get the better of even the best of us when it comes to snatching a day or two at the crags). However, evidently Ivan did not try hard enough because Menlove's cousin once removed, remained firmly removed from the climbing world.

## *Reminder of the Past*

Did it all end here? Well, not quite. I phoned my old boss to tell him what had transpired and how I had appreciated meeting his old friends from Rolls Royce days.

"Well, I also worked with Ivan Waller" he told me, "He was quite a character, you know! One day on my way home from work I was waiting at a bus stop when another friend, riding a tandem bike all by himself, stopped and offered me a lift. I was just about to get on when a car came to a sudden halt. Out stepped Ivan and with the words: 'I have always wanted to try riding a contraption like this — you take my car and I'll see you later', he got on the tandem and left me to drive myself home in comfort. Ivan was just like that."

So here you are — an innocent outing turned into a bit of innocent nostalgia, no desperate crux moves, no frightening loose rock nor howling winds around insecure bivouacs, but to do with our climbing world just the same, and a small one at that.



*Putting in the Abseil and Lower Off Bolts at Pen Trwyn 1991. Photo: Derek Walker*



# *Maurice Guinness - A Memoir*

*Ivan Waller*

The sad notice of the death of Maurice Guinness after 69 years as a member of the Climbers' Club brought back vivid memories of the winter alpine meet which he organised in January 1926. It was written up in the bulletin of the Climbers' Club by a member of the party and a reprint follows this memoir.

Maurice became a member of the club in 1922 and only four years later became Honorary Secretary. He was made an Honorary Member in 1973. He and I lived several hundred miles apart and only met on very rare occasions, and my only real knowledge of him was gained during that winter alpine meet.

As a lad just turned 19 years of age, only recently a member of the Club and on my very first visit to the Alps, I was very impressed by all around me, but even so, I found in Maurice a character, personality, competence, call it what you will, which made him as good a companion as you could ever wish for, and we were indeed a happy party with him to lead us.

## *Proceedings of the Club Winter Alpine Meet by George Reid*

The Meet was held at Murren from Jan. 1st-16th, and was attended by M.W.Guinness, E.F.Guinness, Knowles, Morris, G.L.Reid and Waller, while Lunn, though naturally far too busy to participate, held a watching brief in the proceedings.

For weeks beforehand the intending participants had been anxiously scanning the reports of snow conditions appearing in the papers. They had watched the figures in the 'Depth of Snow' column steadily shrinking, until on the appointed day the conditions at the majority of ski-ing centres were represented by —, although Murren still claimed a modest few inches. This, rather naturally, was not calculated to raise the spirits of those concerned, and it is to the credit of the Club that no faint-hearted member turned tail.

The journey out was made in almost incessant rain. On arrival at Lauterbrunnen it was still drizzling, and no sign of snow could be seen. At this stage several members showed a sneaking inclination to return, but remembering the large sums already expended on tickets, they decided that it was rather late, and joined the somewhat gloomy party in the funicular. The ascent began and continued, and still continued with no trace of snow. At last, about three-quarters of the way up, a small dirty patch about the size of a half-crown, was observed nestling in a sheltered spot by the side of the line, and was greeted with much enthusiasm.

This was the turning-point in our fortunes. The snow gradually increased as we went higher, and our spirits moved in a similar direction. By the time we had reached the top of the funicular the ground might fairly have been said to be covered with snow. There was a final short stage in the journey, during which the

depth of snow increased to at least two inches, and snow — a very poor variety, but still, snow — took the place of the rain.

Arnold Lunn had very kindly placed his chalet at the disposal of the Club during the Meet. We found it to be situated on a steep slope overlooking the rink and the Palace Hotel, with a magnificent view of the Jungfrau, Mönch and Eiger beyond. The chalet was equipped with every reasonable modern convenience, including an excellent stove on which about six different things could be cooked, water heated, and clothes dried (and also cooked as some of us found to our misfortune), all at the same time. It had been arranged that an old 'charlady' from the village should visit us every morning to cook breakfast and clean up generally, but we were to be responsible for our own evening meals.

The next morning we were delighted to find that it had snowed properly during the night and there was about a foot of new snow on the ground, which was increased to over two feet that day and the following night. We had further snow at suitable intervals and, in general, the weather was very favourable all though the Meet.

During the first few days we fell about assiduously on the practice slopes, concentrating all efforts on attaining sufficient proficiency for expeditions to be undertaken. The evenings we spent in the Palace Hotel dancing, and, in general, obtaining relaxation from the serious work of the day. It is feared, however, that these evenings, delightful though they were, tended to have a somewhat demoralising effect upon us, in encouraging rendezvous on the practice slopes and in the village cafes the following day, and thus interfering with our progress in the art of ski-ing. It was therefore perhaps not such a calamity as it appeared at the time (except of course to the unfortunate victim himself) when E.F. Guinness took it into his head to break out one morning with violent measles. This did not affect our ski-ing activities, although of course it effectively put a stop to our evening diversions.

About this time certain of the more impatient members of the party began to become restive and expressed a desire to escape from the flesh-pots of Mürren and to undertake the conquest of some peak or pass worthy of their mettle. The oracle, in the shape of Lunn, was duly consulted and rose nobly to the occasion by pointing out two reputedly virgin rock-pinnacles on the upper slopes of the Schiltgrat behind Mürren. Two enthusiasts, Knowles and Waller, set off next day. After a laborious ascent of steep snow slopes (in the course of which one of Knowles' skis escaped from its bindings and sailed joyfully downwards for several hundred feet before it could be recovered) they arrived near the foot of the pinnacles. These, despite their innocent appearance from a distance, were found to be only approachable across a steep snow and ice slope. The expedition had omitted to include an ice-axe in its equipment and was regretfully compelled to own itself beaten.

This reverse increased rather than diminished the ardour of our heroes (one of whom has not been christened 'the little indomitable' for nothing). The whole party in fact felt that some considerable deed of valour was now due to show 'our calm contempt for the mountains'.

However, the next few days glided happily along without anything very serious being attempted. Further practice was indulged in — a speciality being the execution of 'Christies' at incredible speed at the bottom of the practice slopes,

where the snow was beaten as hard as a board. These manoeuvres had to be more or less abandoned after a certain member had been warned off the course by an indignant professional whom he had taken in his stride. Sterner stuff was not neglected and snow-smothered enthusiasts could frequently be observed grappling manfully with the terrors of the downhill telemark, 'with the stomach proudly to the fore'. Various minor excursions were undertaken in the hills behind Mürren, for which purpose the assistance of the 'Alleybubble' was by no means disdained in overcoming the first 1,500 feet of the ascent.

Other excursions were also attempted — excursions into the mysteries of the culinary art. Vivid recollections remain of a family of pancakes which were created one evening. They would undoubtedly have proved magnificent eating if they had not become too enthusiastic and burst into flames while being tossed.

A word of appreciation must also be recorded for the boiled eggs which the charlady dispensed with unfailing regularity at breakfast time. These eggs were undoubtedly laid by Chinese hens in the time of Confucius. They varied in colour from delicate salmon-pink to bright green with purple spots, and in taste from dried cocoa-nut to - ?! In spite of these slight drawbacks they were, with very few exceptions, consumed with the utmost relish. One of the exceptions was the specimen allotted to the Honorary Secretary on our last morning, which, on being beheaded was found to contain absolutely nothing at all. (This was not the result of a time-worn joke, but a genuine scientific phenomenon witnessed by several sane and sober mountaineers).

It must not be thought, on account of the digressions, that the more serious objects of the Meet were being neglected. Far from it. All this time much discussion took place in evolving plans for a really ambitious expedition. The magnificent Jungfrau range and the mysteries beyond were the chief attraction, and at last the following programme was decided.

We were to start off by taking the train down to Lauterbrunnen and up the other side of the valley, through Wengen, to the Scheidegg. From there we would go on up to the Eigergletscher Station and change onto the Jungfrau Railway, arriving at the Jungfrau Joch in the early afternoon. After a short stay at the Joch we would ski down the Aletsch Glacier to the Concordia Hut, where the night would be spent. We would ski over the Grünhornlücke and spend the second night in the Finsteraarhorn Hut. From there climb either the Finsteraarhorn or the Oberaarhorn, according to whether the gods were with us, or not, returning to the new RothlochHöhle Hut. The next day would be occupied in coming back over the Grünhornlücke and up the Jungfrau Joch, whence there was a possibility of bagging the Mönch early the following morning before returning to Mürren.

To the expert ski-mountaineer this may not appear a very energetic programme, but as we were all either in our first or second ski-ing season, and did not intend to take a guide with us, it seemed all we could hope for. As events turned out it was much too optimistic.

When coming out to Mürren, we had counted on obtaining locally any ropes or axes required, and had, therefore not brought them with us. Thanks to the extreme kindness of Mr. Amstutz (brother of the well-known ski-runner and mountaineer), to whom no trouble was too great, we succeeded in procuring the necessary impedimenta. Much valuable advice was, of course, obtained from Mr. Lunn.



The weather on the morning of our departure was rather doubtful, and we had an anxious time in the train wondering whether the clouds would disperse. On arrival at the Scheidegg we discovered that the fare up to the Jungfrau was very expensive, but that a considerable reduction could be obtained for a party of 12 or more. There were five of us and another party of five also bound for the Concordia. Two more were therefore required, and by extolling the wonders of the Jungfrau Railway and the beauties of the view from the top to all and sundry, the necessary addition was soon obtained.

The section of line between the Scheidegg and the Eigergletcher Station was snowed up, so we had to walk. We may have looked an amateurish party: we certainly had no guide with us, and the effect was perhaps increased by the natty headgear which Morris insisted on wearing all through the Meet in spite of considerable banter and even threats of violence; however that may be, several rather comic-looking individuals, on enquiring and being informed where we were going, earnestly implored us not to risk our lives on such a hazardous adventure. This having no effect, they treated us to a large amount of well-meant but superfluous advice to avoid the yawning chasms and rushing avalanches which awaited all who ventured into the upper regions.

By the time we reached the Jungfrau Joch there was not a cloud in the sky, and the wonderful panorama looking down the Aletsch Glacier was seen at its best. I think our two recruits must have had their money's worth. After having some food we set about descending the steep snow slope to the glacier. In this we were rather handicapped by being prevailed upon by the porters of the Joch Hotel (who had all the time fallen over each other in their desire to assist us) to utilise what they called a short cut, instead of going up to the top of the col as the other party had done. We found that this short cut involved being lowered like sacks of potatoes down an ice-slope. Rather than create delay and unpleasantness by refusing at the last minute, we submitted to this undignified means of descent.

The four and a half miles on ski down the Aletsch Glacier and across the Concordia Platz were most enjoyable. The snow however was in bad condition, consisting mostly of hard 'wind crusts' with a soft patch — and the inevitable result — every now and then. We found the other party already established in the hut and all spent a fairly comfortable, although somewhat cold, night. The next morning the weather was not very promising and the cold intense, so both we and the other party (who were making for the Lötschenlücke) put off turning out until about nine o'clock. When we did set off we found the cold even more severe than we had anticipated. Boots and ski-bindings were soon frozen stiff. Our way lay up gentle snow slopes under the cliffs of the Kamm, where the sun, which had by then appeared, could not reach us. We were not really adequately equipped for withstanding extreme cold and although we moved fast we could not prevent the gradual loss of feeling in hands and feet. When we at last got into the sun, at the top of the pass, we were in rather a bad way. About two hours of rubbing with snow, and other attentions, was required before some of us were 'all there' again. Meanwhile those who had been less seriously affected indulged in some pleasant rock-scrambling on the Grüneckhorn. By the time we were all ourselves once more and had had some food, the afternoon was well advanced. We came to the conclusion that it would be unwise to continue.

We skied down to the Concordia again, part of the time using the rope, which,

to say the least of it, is not so easily managed descending as ascending. However, the only incident worthy of mention was a graceful solo by one of Knowles' skis, which seemed to specialise in this particular form of diversion. We arrived back at the hut at about 4.30pm. A foot inspection followed, and it was discovered that the only permanent casualty was one of the Honorary Secretary's big toes, which was of the appearance and texture of marble. The efforts of the whole party were concentrated in turn upon the obstinate member, with the result that after about three and a half hours' attention the Hon. Sec. could feel a good deal as far as the joint, but beyond that he was given up as hopeless.

Meanwhile an excellent 'hooch' was being brewed and we prepared to make ourselves comfortable for the night. We contrived to be fairly warm under a multitude of blankets and with a very unhealthy atmosphere inside the hut. I should not like to guess what the temperature was outside. The next morning we made a slow, and for the Hon. Sec., rather painful, journey back to the Jungfrau Joch. We were in the sun all the time and it was much warmer, but about 10 minutes of cold wind on the Joch was sufficient to make our extremities numb again, on account of their sensitive condition. We found a somewhat anxious party awaiting us at the hotel, where the frost-bitten toe was carefully examined and ministered to. We then returned to Mürren the way we had come.

The failure of our expedition caused us considerable despondency. We had set out full of confidence on our first experience of winter mountaineering in the high Alps and had been driven back, ignominiously beaten. The mountains had turned the tables and showed their calm contempt for us. Recollections of the prophecies of disaster at the Scheidegg returned to taunt us.

On our return to Mürren, however, we learned that fortune had truly been against us. The conditions which we had experienced had been quite abnormal, in fact we had struck the coldest spell experienced in that neighbourhood for many years. We were assured that, under the circumstances, we could not have been expected to carry out our programme. The party who had spent the first night at the Concordia with us had not enjoyed their trip over the Lötschenlücke, and one of their guides had had his hand very badly frost-bitten.

All this news restored our morale to some extent and we began to think that, after all, we had not done so badly to return with half a toe as our only casualty.

The few remaining days of the Meet were ungrudgingly given over to experiencing the delights of ski-ing as a wintersport, pure and simple, rather than as an adjunct to mountaineering. All agreed that the sport (and its attendant festivities) had attractions from this angle second only to its primary object. However, for the benefit of those who may view the idea of a Winter Alpine Meet with suspicion, it may be stated that not even during the latter period did any member set foot (or any portion of his anatomy) on skate, luge, bob or other winter sport machine, although this object was not consciously attempted. All efforts were concentrated upon achieving sufficient skill in the art of ski-ing to be of assistance in mountaineering expeditions. The experience gained by all those who attended the Meet will undoubtedly be of enormous assistance to them on their next visit to the High Alps at whatever season of the year.

The only further remarks concern our casualty. He, poor fellow, never regained consciousness, gradually turned black and hard, and, some four months later, quietly came off while his owner was having a bath. He is now preserved in the Club Museum.

# Parchamo

*Roger Bennion*

I'd got the money, I'd always wanted to go, so why not now? My climbing stories were wearing thin; I needed a new source of material. There was a necessity to move quickly — five other people had a claim to the funds available and were plotting to do a Maxwell with my redundancy money. My trip to the Himalaya was threatened by a desire for pleasure and comfort by the rival group.

I wanted a challenge! Excitement! Adventure!, but with safety and security, a bit like Ultimate Reality I suppose, but a bit cheaper. I'm no hero, the sort of bottle I possess would be suitable for a sampler of Chanel No.5 — I couldn't even take a fall below a bolt.

So I needed someone to arrange a trip for me which required me to a) turn up at Gatwick, b) climb a Himalayan Peak, c) return to Gatwick. b) was slightly qualified by the requirement that I should at least feel like a climber and not a sheep.

One Saturday night in the Heights, I met a man who could, or at least said he could — Smiler!

By the end of the evening I believed he could and hadn't parted with a penny. When I told friends Smiler was organising a trip to the Himalaya for me they smiled a pitiful smile. I assumed they were pleased for me which inflated my ego as I saw myself pushing back the limits of the impossible.

Well, to you of little faith, Smiler did fix everything, very well in fact, so well that this article will compromise his editorial integrity — the 'Cuthbertson Trip to Parchamo' where everything ran so smoothly and nothing happened, so there's nothing to write about. He arranged everything, he even carried a leech around under his hat so that we could all return having experienced the 'leech', a basic tick for any trip to Nepal.

October found us in Namche Bazaar, having ticked the hairy bus ride and the trek in. Strange place really, the rows of houses on the side of the hill remind me of the Upper Rhondda Valley, not quite what Chamonix is to Mont Blanc but it's all there is, and the gear's cheaper, even if you do have to barter. The cinnamon rolls are not to be missed.

It is not a place to stay long; we paused long enough to discard the trekkers that Smiler had somehow managed to entangle in the party. The trekkers were a very superior group — either fitter, richer or older (in certain cases all three) than the climbers — their departure brought slight relief. We consoled them before they left us by assuring them that probably they could have climbed our peak, it was just unfortunate that they didn't have our experience — they would never know the real truth. Two days later we straggled off from Namche to head up the Thame Valley towards the Tesi Lapcha, not forgetting to spin the 47 Prayer Wheels at the Gumpa before leaving the village — except for one member who refused — he used another brand of hope. The first day saw us in Thame, famous for the late Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and being quite dreary; a bit like Nant Peris without the greenery or the Vaynol.



Time is irrelevant in Nepal. We arrived early so ordered food at a lodge which took so long to prepare that in the meantime the yaks had arrived and our cook had prepared the evening meal. We ate two dinners, we couldn't afford to offend anyone — good job we had Smiler and Bevis with us.

The following day we had the usual Sherpa delaying tactics of showing us monasteries while the yaks were loaded up, caught us up and passed. The same effect could have been achieved by simply giving the climbers a load to carry, even a small one. Actually this is unfair criticism as some days my shoulder was positively bruised by the weight of my camera strap. Whilst considering Sherpa tactics it brings to mind one of life's little mysteries — why were the Sherpas already doing what we thought might be a good idea? — is it innate anticipation or somehow were they organising us? Whichever, it didn't seem to matter at the time.

I eventually noticed, after they had been with us two days, that we had acquired two Sherpanis to help the cook; even then it was only because the offer of 5.30am tea and washing water was in a higher key, initially I'd put it down to the cold. Yes, washing water, what an anathema to a crag rat of the '60s.

We now began to gain height noticeably as we approached the glacial moraine below the Tesi Lapcha itself and a small problem arose. The four-legged drive HGVs couldn't cope with the terrain and were not insured so it was left to the Sherpas to carry the gear; we needed to save ourselves for the rigours ahead. So whilst we struggled with day 'sacks, the Sherpas carried the loads, feminists please note we allowed Sherpas and Sherpanis equal loads. I succumbed to altitude and demanded Diamox (only because it was supposed to make the extremities tingle). Any credibility I had was completely gone after I staggered into base camp after everyone else including the Sherpa carrying 60kg, slunk off to my already pitched and equipped tent to drink tea and depart the scene by listening to Pink Floyd's 'Delicate Sounds of Thunder' concert.

We had considered a further camp above base on the col but a recce by Sandy revealed that the approach to the col wasn't too bad so it was agreed we would attempt the mountain and return to base in one day.

The next morning we left camp before sunrise and swore across the rubble on the glacier in darkness to the steep slopes leading to the col. An hour or so later we were on the col, to savour the magnificent views over the Rowaling Valley to Gauri Shankar in that air of solitude that only those who have experienced the wildness of the greater ranges will understand. In this case ever so slightly marred by 3 Irishmen, 3 Scandinavians and a party of 15 sundry Brits with Sherpas and porters and all the necessary tentage (including mess tent), brought to the scene courtesy of a well known (but Smiler won't let me name it) expedition company. Of course they'd all cheated by approaching through the Rowaling Valley (I hope we were cheaper, Smiler?).

A race for the top ensued up the virgin snows of the north ridge, virgin apart from the footsteps of an Australian team that had climbed the peak the previous day. Unfortunately the pace proved too stiff for the nonprayer wheel spinner (non-believers beware) who lay down on the snow motionless and probably would have slid back to the col except that Sandy and Smiler refused to cut the rope. After a brief discussion along the lines of 'Piss off Smiler we're going to the top, you take him down'. Smiler took the leader's decision to return to base camp

## *Parchamo*

with our prostrate Christian. So Bevis, Sandy and I continued by a sort of quick, quick, slow gasp up the mountain. We emerged sometime later at a subsidiary peak to discover that the Ozzies and Scandinavians had not climbed the final summit, but the way was long prepared by the 3 Irishmen (no, not using tarmac) and their Sherpa, so we followed; so did 15 others led by Steve Monks. They had paid their money so they were to get to the summit. This resulted in the Himalayan equivalent of getting 18 people in a Mini whilst we all had our moment of glory at 6,273 metres.



*Heading for Parchamo Summit. Photo: Roger Bennion*





*Parchamo 'B' Team in action. Photo: Roger Bennion*



# Hohenstein and Hönnetal

*Terry Gifford*

I have a hunch that wherever you are in Europe, you're within reach of a crag. But I thought my theory would be severely tested by two weeks in Bielefeld, midway along the autobahn between Hannover and Dortmund, on the edge of the North German Plain. As Gill was driving our car through Bielefeld my eye was caught by a likely-looking shop which said it sold 'Nichts für Stubenhocker!' As we reversed out of a tramline we seemed to have been stuck in for some time Gill translated: 'Nothing for housemice'. Well, were we housemice or were we cragrats, snarling for rock and Eurodiffs? Bursting through the door of Bielefeld's version of a climbing shop we fell upon the bookshelves. Sure enough, there were individual guidebooks to a crag in each direction on the autobahn, and even more whisker-twitching, the new German directory of information and topos for 51 climbing areas in every part of the country, Deutschland Vertikal. The price threatened to turn us back into housemice. But only for a moment. We were on our way.

What we found were two friendly limestone outcrops hidden amongst trees, but catching the September sunshine. In contrast to French limestone crags, these two German crags had a variety of natural features and a variety of types of holds, plus good routes in a range of grades. Of course both crags are protected by bomb-proof cemented ring-bolts in the European style. It's odd for a British cragrat placing a Friend on a V. Diff crack climb to realise that you've not seen the bolt cemented into the face outside the crack! Is this the face of things to come for all British limestone?

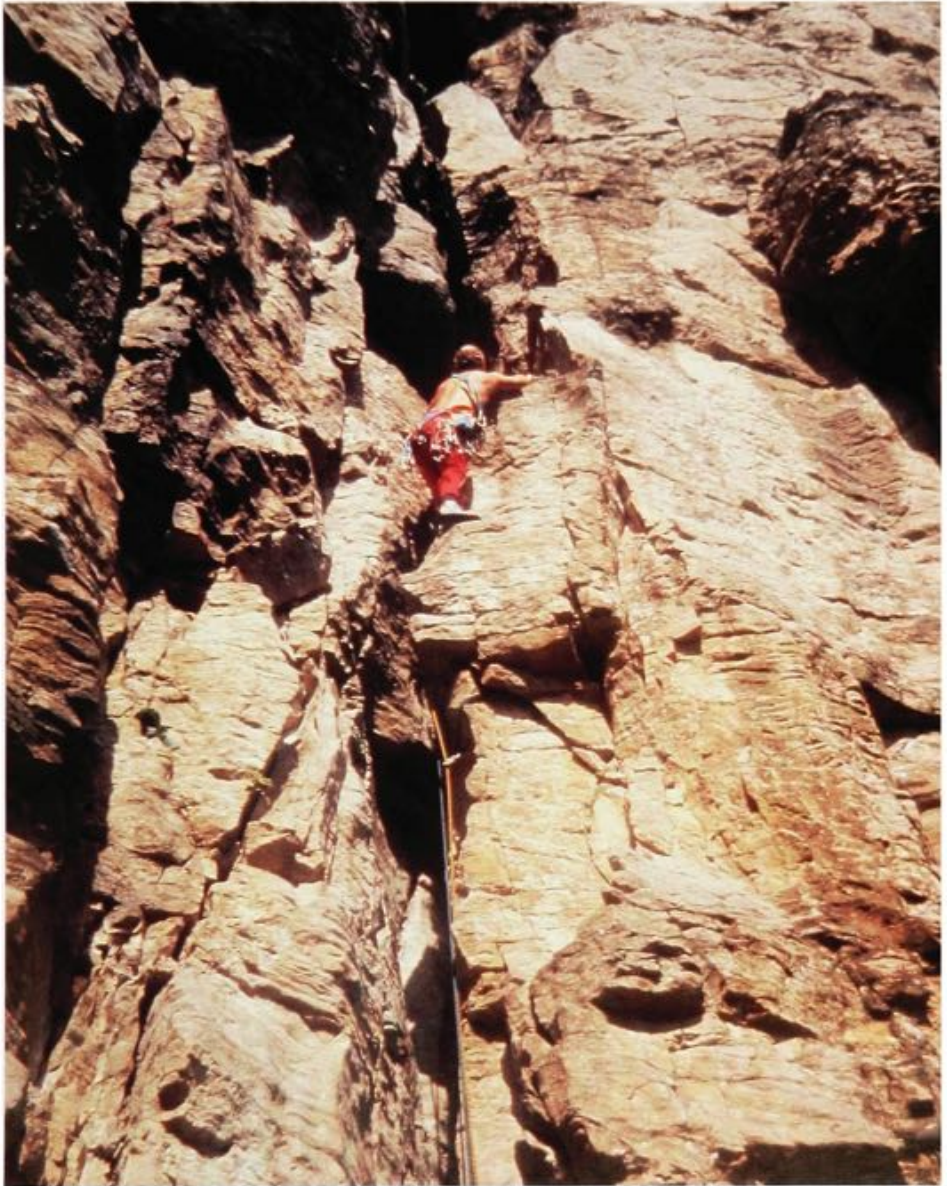
So, for the benefit of those housemice who find themselves adrift on the autobahn and turning into Eurocragrats, here's how to find the German versions of Willersley and Wildcat — with bolts.

Hohenstein is 45km south west of Hannover, on the edge of the Sintel mountains, between Hameln (of Pied Piper fame) and Buckeburg. This dry, south-facing crag is 40m high and about 200m long. Chimneys, cracks and roofs, offer climbs from V. Diff to 6a, but the rock needs some care. In Hessisch-Oldendorf you leave route 83 in the direction of Zersen/Pappmühle. From the car-park at Gasthof Pappmühle (where the guide is on sale) a path leads to the crag in half an hour, after following signs to Hohenstein Klippenweg.

Hönnetal is in a river valley 10km south-east of Dortmund in which several crags are hidden in the trees very close to route 515 going south-east out of Menden towards Balve. Five kms out of Menden a road turns left to Eisborn. Locals park on the triangle of this turning, but there's a layby 150m south. Crossing the road opposite the turning, a track leads into a field beside the railway. Across a dry (in August) river bed there are two crags. Binoler Wand is on the left of the railway bridge and on its right is Feldhofstein. We climbed five routes between V. Diff and Mild VS on varied forms of over-bolted solid limestone 35m high. This is the forcing ground for Dortmund sport-climbers, so be prepared for lots of brightly coloured cragrats falling off the rock all around you.

Mentioning to Bonington the following weekend at the Royal Vic. dinner that I'd discovered some little gems in Germany suddenly brought a light to his eyes and a whirring of the famous computer behind them;

"I climbed in North Germany when I was in the army, at a place called Hönnetal," he said. There was actually no reason why I should feel like a Stubenhocker, but I did.



*Terry Gifford on Hohenstein Limestone. Photo: Gill Round*

# A Lone Star State of Mind

Bevis Bowden

I'm hiding in the corner of the Leschaux Refuge. I feel like Garbo in this late night grand hotel. A far cry from Chamonix and the Bar Nationale. Where the Righteous Brothers serenade Sylvia with flowers from the Compagnie Des Guides de Chamonix garden, and where you drink too much and talk too loud. Listening to tales of short storied splendour, only gurus are masters at relating. Aspirants learning, with cheek to glass and ears nailed to the stage.

The *Walker Spur* is a dream. Our guide, a colour spread from Vertical. Our collective experience, nothing stellar. We were simply acting on our dreams as Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman had.

The glow of the Leschaux gave us guidance as a lighthouse gives guidance with its light. I'm fragile in the morning. I grow stronger in the day. I can sprint like a new spring doe by the fall of night. I feel, though, inspired in the folkabilly Lone Star State of Texas, appropriate to my state of mind for the duration of the climb.

'Dangereux à cause des chutes de pierre'. The fragility of the morning disappeared as swiftly as the spring doe runs. The rock fell around us like a veil at times, sometimes so close there was an open window for my winged heart. I have always smiled kindly when you hear of accounts of rockfall the size of televisions and pianos. We were truly honoured as we swiftly ascended the steep loose ground of the spur.

The route was ascended in its entirety in rock boots, as its mixed nature was in absence. I believe the quality of the experience is not, to say in the eye of the proprietor, according to the amount of beer and wine sold across his bar but by the contented faces of patrons who leave his bar with songs and tales resting on their tongues.

With the spur's difficult traverses still snowbound, our technique resembled the Sesame Street Big Bird stomp. The traverses find the sun at all times because the orientation of the spur is more north-east than north. It was this, the spur's aspect, and the absence of mixed conditions which enabled us to ascend the spur in this way.

The breath of August was hot on our backs as we established ourselves, with both teams moving well together. We climbed for 18 hours until the Rébuffat crack was far behind us. We were all pleasantly surprised. Our ledge, before the smooth walls of the Tour Rousse, was so small you couldn't find your pockets to put your hands in them. An unintentional game of twister pursued as all pitted down. Higher and higher we watched the route fade away into black, as we watched the evening fire burn away and the snow lighting up the night sky. We listened to distant serac fall. A sound that could drive the devil out.

The card game so patiently started soon became a torture to everyone. With a further brew I began to race the moon across the sky. The ropes hung imprisoned, waiting for the morning thaw. We were all afraid of the shadows here on the ledge. The night was warm whisky in my pit as I pulled my bed clothes higher and wondered would the rock-fall stop calling out if I turned on a light.



It was just another morning for the Walker, with a pale sky in the east and all the stars in the west. It's a miracle it comes around everyday of the year, as far as we were concerned. We left the ledge with big boots on and climbed to the summit cornices. All were on fine form and we were established on Pointe Walker as the morning sun welcomed us warmly.

Inspirational thanks to Nanci Griffith.

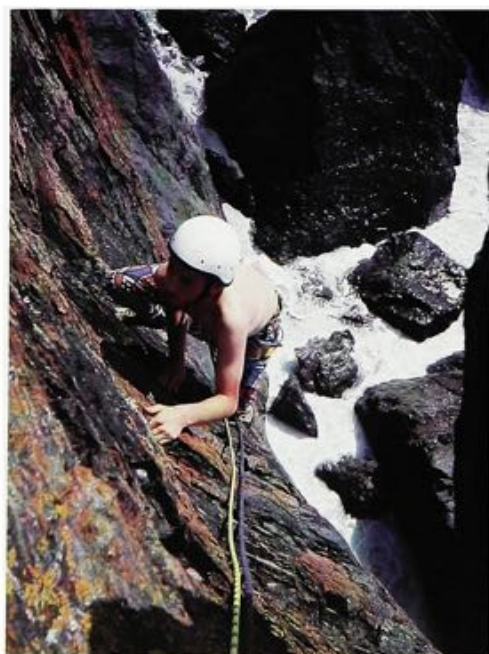


*Grandes Jorasses from an original watercolour by Ginger Cain*

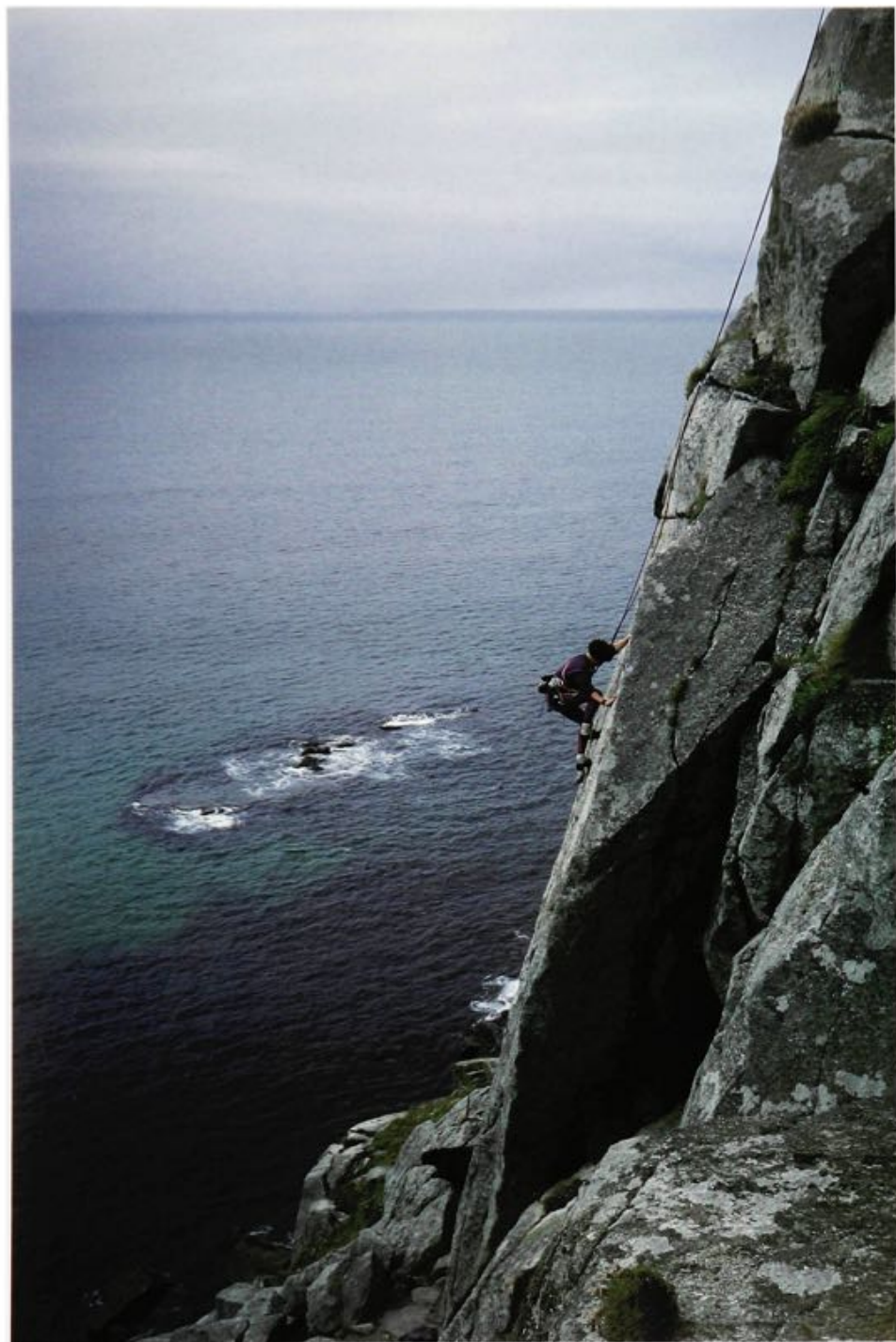


*Above: Members of the 1991 Family Meet, Cornwall. Photo: Terry Gifford*

*Below: Tom Gifford (aged 15) on 'Limelight' (HVS 5a) at Lizard Point. Photo: Terry Gifford*

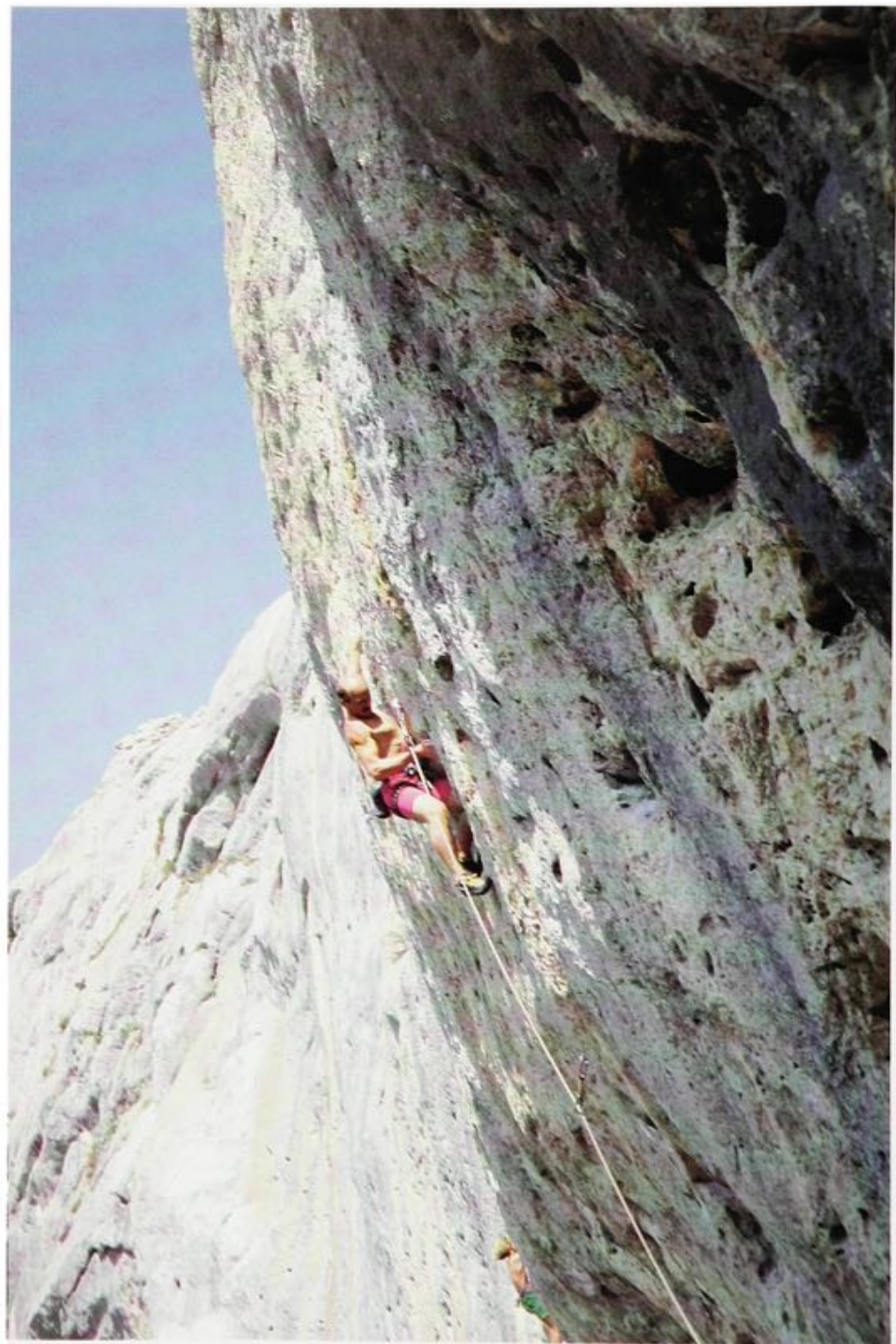




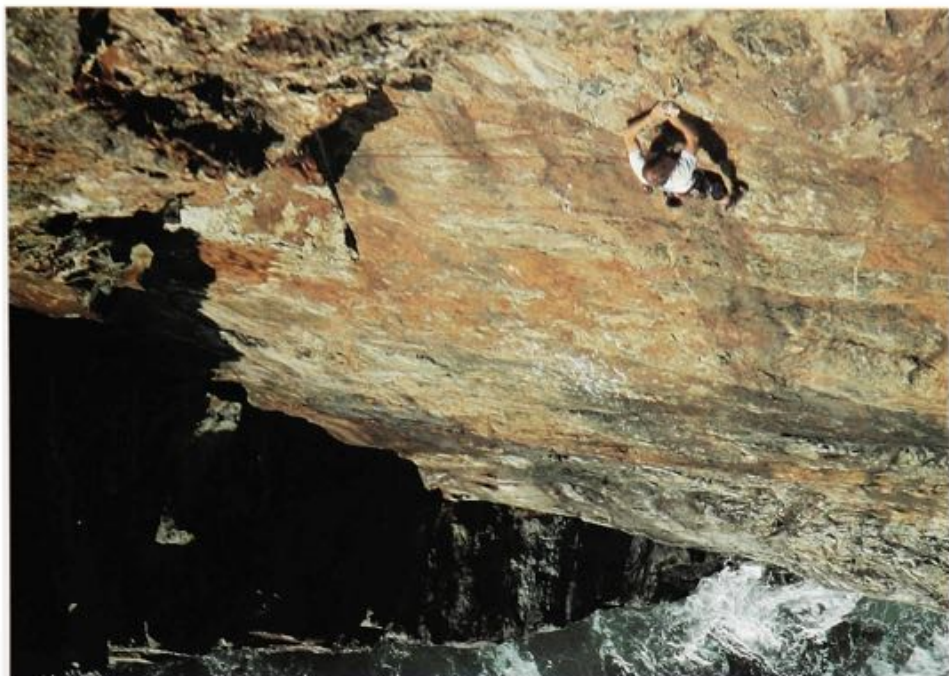


*Jody Vallance (aged 13) on 'Visions of Johanna' (E1 5b) Bosigran. Photo: Terry Gifford*





*Mike Owen on 'Medicine Douce' (7c), Ceuse, South of France. Photo: Elaine Owen*



*Above: Derek Walker on 'Mercury', Carn Gowla. Photo: Dave Hope*



*Tophet Wall, Great Gable.*

*Photo: Steve Foxley*



*Rod Valentine on 'Incantation'*

*Tophet Wall. Photo: Steve Foxley*

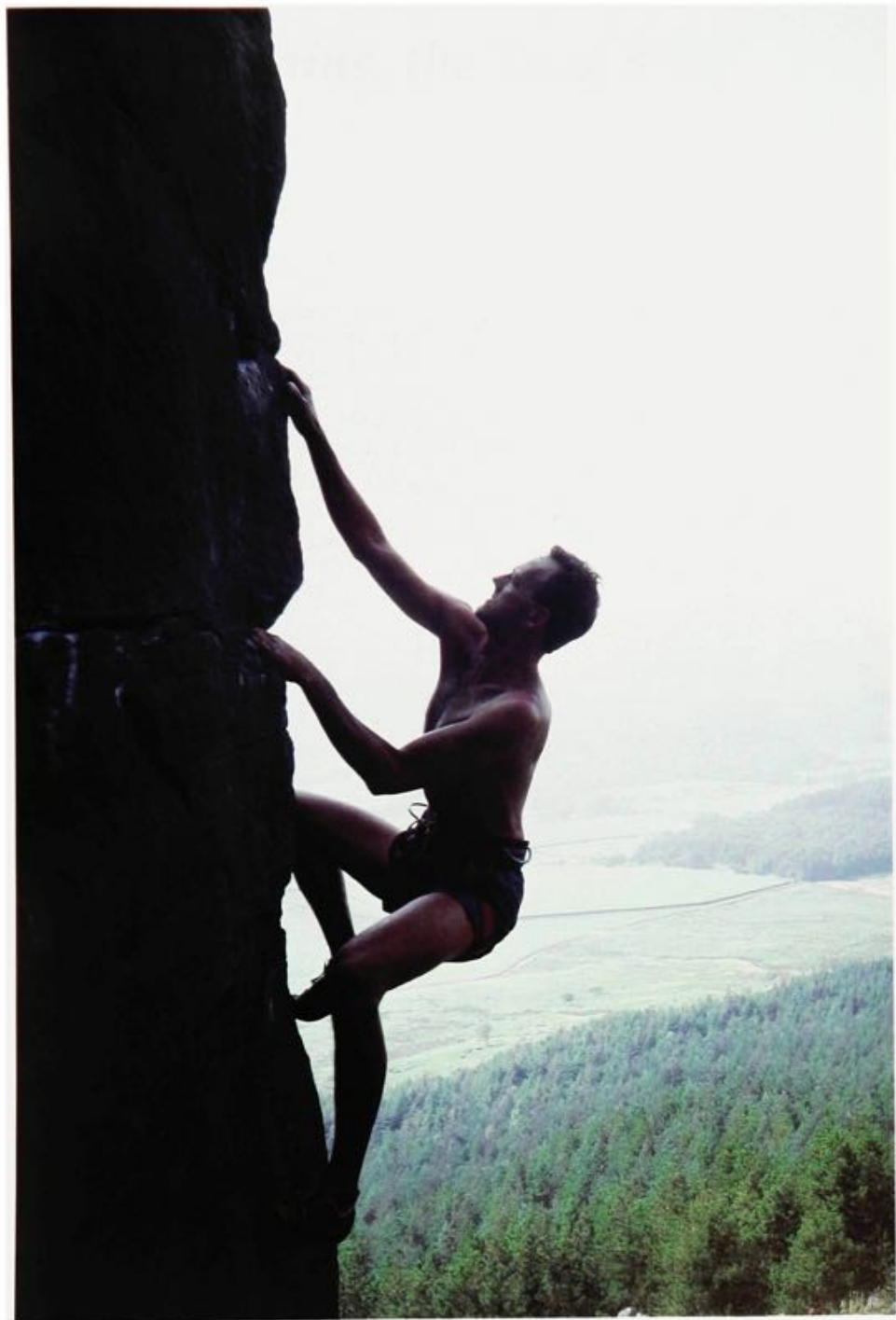




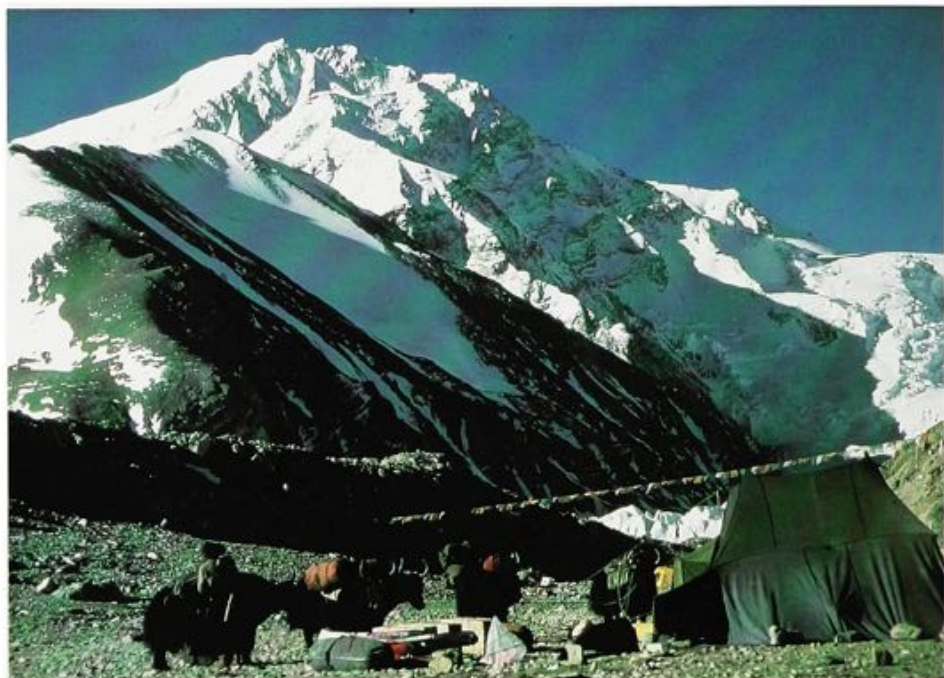
*A 'young' Steve Clegg (with hair) on 'Hombre', Anglesey.*

*In the late '70s this photo graced the cover of the cult group - Joy Division's best selling record, Contradiction.*





*Al Churcher alone on Crookrise. Photo: Churcher Collection*



*Xixabangma from Base Camp. Photo: Mark Vallance*

# *Big Mountains, the Easy Way*

*Mark Vallance*

Himalayan climbing had always seemed to me to be esoteric; not for mere mortals or even accomplished climbers but for 'experts'. The literature of Himalayan expeditions tends to compound this with descriptions of overcoming horrendous obstacles, undergoing hideous hardship, requiring vast fortitude, coping with myriad medical conditions and suffering wallowing bureaucracy. The couple of months holiday required for a Himalayan trip tends to militate against the average bloke and favour the leisured or the climbing bum.

Then, two years ago, I saw an advertisement in Mountain magazine for a real expedition organised by Himalayan Kingdoms. All I had to do was pay my money and take my chance. No organisation, just turn up at the airport. The mountain was Changtse in Tibet, (the Northern peak of the Everest group). The team was international; four Brits, two New Zealanders, two Australians, two Norwegians and a Chinaman. At Kathmandu Airport we found that Tibet was closed because of 'Tiananmen Square', but we were able to switch to the South Peak of Himalchuli in Nepal which had had only one ascent, by a different route and was about the same height as Changtse.

The only problem was that there was virtually no information available about it. A bus ride, a truck ride and seven days of the most beautiful hiking in the world got us to base camp at about 4,250 metres. Another 1,500 metres of scree got us up to a small summit at the end of a three kilometre-long gendarmed ridge which separated us from the mountain itself — we seemed to have come the wrong way but were now totally committed to this route. Twelve days of very hard work got us onto the mountain. These twelve days were just like the expedition books; climb up hundreds of metres with a heavy load, dump it, go down, do the same the next day, and the next day, and the next day, sit out bad weather and do the same again but with deep snow too! I was losing weight and getting fit.

Finally we put a tent up at about 6,400 metres; or to use the local vernacular 'established Camp III'. We had been through an ice fall which is scary but mandatory for real Himalayan climbing. Next we had to climb a 180 metre ice cliff before making the 'Final Assault'. We got up at two o'clock in the morning and hiked up to the cliff. We then spent two hours waiting for it to get light because we had got up too early. We 'Fixed Ropes' up the ice cliff. This was heavy duty stuff with hard, steep ice climbing. Above the ice barrier one was forced to do that real high altitude mountaineering thing — take a step then breathe hard for a minute, then take another step, breathe hard again. The technique is not mandatory because Russell Bryce, our heroic leader, did not seem to find it necessary — but I did.

Having got up the ice cliff it was a doddle to the summit. Unfortunately we did not make it because it was a very long doddle and by mid afternoon, in 'deteriorating' weather we had only reached 7,000 metres. This is where I learned the hardest lesson which is, 'never be on the First Assault'; you do all the hard work but don't get any of the glory.



Well anyway, we got four people to the summit so it was a successful trip, visiting a great part of the world, dispelling my esoteric image of Himalayan climbing and leaving me with the desire to go higher.

Next year I was back, but this time it was to be Tibet. Xixabangma is the highest mountain in Tibet and the easiest 8,000 metre peak. My old friend Russell Bryce had done all the organisation. This was to be a small lightweight trip, two New Zealanders, two Norwegians, an Australian and myself.

Tibet is a very high, very dusty dump which improves above the snow line away from the Chinese who are unreasonable and the Tibetans, who, whilst being great characters, will rob you blind given half a chance. It is also totally different from Nepal which is mainly lush and green with great villages and beautiful hiking.

We drove all the way to base camp at just under 5,000 metres and sat about for a week getting our breath back. Then we hiked up to Advanced Base Camp — 36 kms and another 900 metres. Having 'established' A.B.C. (to use the jargon again) we hired six yaks and took everything we could up there for our Summer Holiday. It was cold most of the time, but 5,800 metres is usually cold. The great thing is you acclimatise fast. After a day or two we started hiking up the mountain, but this year it was easier: a couple of trips up to Camp I, a hike up to Camp II, a couple of days of storm so down to A.B.C. then back up to Camp II. Carrying a big rucksack to 7,000 metres seemed much easier than carrying nothing at the same height the previous year. Things were going well and the weather... settled. A wonderful night at Camp III at 7,400 metres and a hard but nice day out going up to the top; eight hours up, one hour down. The sense of achievement was fantastic. I'd done it, I'd climbed a big one — but never again!

Because I was now a real Himalayan climber I went to the big Everest Extravaganza at the R.G.S. This was a serious mistake because Steve Bell of Himalayan Kingdoms bent my arm about Broad Peak. Well, I'd been to Nepal and I'd been to Tibet but I'd never been to the Karakoram and as all we experienced expedition types know, the Baltoro is where it's at, and Concordia is the centre of the Universe, (after Stoney Cafe).

The Karakoram is a cross between Nepal and Tibet. Very dry but with some great trekking and just full of mountains — unlike the Himalaya which is mainly a thin ridge of high peaks with jungle on one side and Tibet on the other. The trek to Broad Peak from Askole is one of the ultimate mountaineering hikes. Some hard trekking involving difficult and dangerous footpaths, a rope river crossing, grand views up the Biafo Glacier and of the Trango and Cathedral Spires. Further on the Baltoro and Godwin

Austen Glaciers are truly the Throne Room of the Mountain Gods, with Masherbrum, the Gasherbrums and above all, K2, dominating everything. Broad Peak is a big ugly brute with only one logical route up it. This route is straightforward but surprisingly steep with few natural camp sites, but it's possible to get off the mountain and back to base camp very quickly.

Once again I got very fit and went up and down, up and down, lots of times and was really going well but the weather was not as kind as last year and we were lucky to get three people to the top including Ramon, a 58 year old who made the first Venezuelan ascent of an 8,000 metre peak, and Alan Hinkes who's climbed lots of them. But we were unlucky not to get a dozen up the mountain because if

the weather had been just a little better we were all ready, fit and able. My memories of Broad Peak are dominated, like the mountain itself, by K2, the Mountain of Mountains; of views across the countless peaks of the Karakoram from high camps on fine evenings; of struggling with storms going up, and coming down, and particularly when living in our tents on the exposed camp above 6,000 metres.

The hike back, up the Vine Glaciers over the 5,800 metre Gondagorro Pass and down into the Hushe Valley rounded the holiday out nicely but I'm definitely not going back next year....



*At 20,000ft on Broad Peak. Photo: Mark Vallance*



**Above:** Craig y Merched. Three Pillar Crag. 1. Call Me Wemage VS 5a. 2. Pas De Chat Severe. 3. ★ Colonel Chinstrap E1 5c. 4. ★ Alien HVS 5a. 5. ★★ Magic Mushroom E1 5a/b. 6. ★★ The Haw Lantern E2 5c. 7. ★ Sunset Arête HVD. 8. General Schwarzkopf HVS 5a/b. 9. ★ Bleating About The Bush VS 4c. **Below:** Rhino's Buttress. 1. Naked Dissent E2 5c. Alchemist's Stone E2 5c. 3. Zig Zag Severe. 4. Flourish Of Strumpets E1 5c. 5. VS 4b. 6. VS 4c. 7. Velvet Revolution VS 4c. 8. ★★ Rhino's Corner VS 5a. 9. The Tusk HVS 5b.





# Craig y Merched (a crag in the Rhinogs)

John Sumner

If you are after solitude and beautiful mountain scenery, this fairly low level crag is the answer. The rock is Barmouth grit, a rough, sound rock with good incuts and good protection (more Friends than usual).

It has a sunny aspect facing south-west to west, and dries quickly. The routes vary in length from 40 to 70 feet. So it's not going to become a major climbing area, just more of a place to go and climb superb rock away from the hordes.

Its other feature, unusual these days, is that it is not a crag full of desperates. The climbing is in the VS to E2 bracket, with some good V. Diffs as well.

The crag is situated at the end of the quiet Afon Cwm-Mynach (GR SH690233) which drains into the Mawdach Estuary and consists of several buttresses close together above forestry. Three Pillar Crag and its continuation crag on the left, probably give the best climbing with such routes as *Magic Mushroom* ★ E1 5b, an easy touch for the grade. It takes a devious line to gain an obvious niche in the central pillar. Nice delicate climbing with adequate protection. *The Haw Lantern* ★★ top end E2 5c, has a steep, technical but well protected 5c start with a magic 5c 'go-ey' top wall. *The Gadgie* ★★ E3 5c, on the continuation crag to the left, is probably the hardest route done so far. It takes an arete line with again, mainly delicate, technical climbing, and only just adequate protection. The crux, however, has a short, strenuous, finger-pulling section. *King of Sunset Town* ★ HVS 5a, is the obvious crack line in the centre of the wall right of *Gadgie*. A good line with sustained 5a climbing. *Alien* ★ HVS 5a, and *Colonel Chinstrap* ★ E1 5c, take lines next to each other. *Alien*, a steep corner with some fine airy moves over a bulge, and *Colonel Chinstrap*, the arete to its left with a precariously thin move, although the protection is good. *Sunset Arete* ★ H.V.Diff, takes the fine right hand arete. A classic!

Rhino's Buttress, reminiscent of a gritstone crag, is close by, and gives a fine selection of VSs, with *Rhino's Corner* ★★ VS 5a, another classic. A hard start to enter the corner, then fairly easy up this, finishing with sensational moves through big overhangs on good jugs. Excellent protection. If this was on Stanage, it would be a three star route.

A total of 28 routes have been done here up to December 1991, with more to come. The climbing on the whole is more of a delicate and technical kind, rather than strenuous and overhanging stuff, with just the odd section where a 'go for it' approach prevails. Climbers who have contributed to first ascents here have been mainly from the Stafford Mountaineering Club, although the odd rogue outside this group have also added routes: i.e. Terry Taylor and F. Filzek (local climbers), Peter Benson (Rucksack Club) and Phil Baxter (of bolt smashing fame).

A short summary of Craig y Merched, in the Rhinogs, developed so far by members of the Stafford Mountaineering Club.



*Above: Sir Jack Longland, Ivan Waller and A.B.Hargreaves and  
Below: Lord Hunt and Jancis Allison at the CC Annual Dinner 1991*



# MAY B over the Years

Gwyn Evans

"Remember those routes we did on Skye a few years ago, what sort of grades were they? I've been asked for some info for the new guide and thought I'd better get your views, a sort of consensus." This was John Harwood ringing out of the blue and asking my opinion — and me who not so long ago only had two grades in his new route repertoire; VS 4c and E2 5b.

I had vague recollections of the routes and their names: *Teflon* — a nonstick route on a wet day; *Trappist* — a wet route up a trap; *Gauche* — a route on the left; funny how these things can be dredged up. The diary collection showed the trip to have been in May 1976.

This search took me through a few other diaries and the Bank Holiday at the end of May seemed to have been fruitful.

1977. *Sidewalk* and *Isengard* on Dow with a *Matinee* performance at the Roaches on the way home. *Sidewalk* was 6a in those days but I couldn't believe all 6a pitches were going to be that straightforward.

1979. An overnight drive, the first boat out of Ardrrossan and a long, laden walk into Glen Rosa saw us brewing up at 10.30. Only one thing to do. *South Ridge Direct* and *Sou'wester Slabs* saw the ticks out of the way so that *Hammer*, *Anvil* and *Sickle* could be enjoyed.

1980. You flog up the Allt a'Mhuilinn and spot a couple reclining outside the CIC hut. As you cut up the hillside they get up and start walking, their route is obviously much easier than yours and they arrive at the foot of the obvious central line a few minutes before us. The biggest mountain in the UK and the only four climbers in the area are intent on the same route — *Centurion*. We settled in as team two and thoroughly enjoyed it.

1981. Scotland again. At the Cairngorm chairlift I find I've left my Helly Hansen in the tent so we do a round trip on Binean Shuas via *Ardverikie Wall* ('sacks but no big boots on the way up). The next day was quite electrifying on *The Needle*. The thunderstorm on the plateau certainly livened things up a bit, my great consolation was that, with me being a short arse, the lightning was more likely to hit Pete than me.

1984. *Shibboleth* was bone dry and the trade route of the day so we took the softer but still good combination of *Bludgers Revelation*. *Long Reach* had a heart stopping unprotected moment at 80 feet out when it looked as though the then President might well be scythed off by one of the Club's newer members, falling off *Pause!*

*Trapeze* had a similar moment. The group gathered on the ledge overlooking the gully were watching the front team 'sack-haul up the steep final wall. As the gear was unclipped the 'sack flew out in a huge arc to the accompaniment of some involuntary gasps and cramping sphincters.

An alpine start from the tent at the head of Dubh Loch saw *King Rat* climbed on dawn-pink granite and *Goliath* on the more usual grey before the sky took on the same hue.



1988. An abortive Scottish trip got as far as the end of the M74 before a retreat to the Salving House from where we grabbed *North Crag Eliminate*. The Downes hut, Ynys and home were the succeeding destinations.

1989. Chastened by our '88 experience we headed south. *Ghost* and *Bow Wall*, the latter 17 years after bottling out on it. While we did *Dream/Liberator*, Rod Valentine decried the mix 'n match approach and did *Dream* then *Liberator*. We finished with an *Astral Stroll* seemingly inches from a sucking sea with a novel bidet stance. Ideal territory for a first time E1 experience!

1990 was a lay off with tennis elbow, just long hard bike rides over the local mountains.

1991. Back in the swing of things — in North Wales a dismal day suggested a trip to the Slate. *Dervish* was good but we hankered for the real rock of the Pass. Established on the first pitch of *Lubyanka* with a rocking Rock and half a Friend between me and oblivion in the crevasse I wasn't sure that this was the rock I wanted. But aren't those the routes you remember?

1992?

# *November in the High Street*

*Smiler Cuthbertson*

Perhaps I always used to get depressed at this time of year? Not because of falling leaves, or lessening daylight, or gathering mists, or greasy rock, but because of the High Street.

Windswept, sullen, no one around. It was very depressing. Winter snow and ice a long way off. If it ever came? What was there to do? It was a hibernating season. Place shut. Do not disturb.

I once escaped this sentence. The land of home-grown tequila beckoned with open arms. What happened? I never tire of quoting my ex-boss from over there, who said, 'They had to drag this guy outta here screaming!'

At my sensitive time of life, I very reluctantly returned. From endless sunshine, more dry rock than even I could imagine, and bottomless tequilas, to a weather pattern less than useful to an ageing rockjock. Dank autumns came and went, usually spent lying in the gutter outside the local bar, drunk on Labatts, hoping to be picked up by some north wall groupie. Or staggering back from the bar through the council estate, where the rest of the drunks hung out.

Then Clare moved onto the scene, computer and all. I dragged myself from my bed of pain, where I had been trying to enjoy a complete and not too inexplicable depression. Born again, we called it.

We finally escaped the High Street, moving to that place where they say there are more climbers per square metre, than at the local crag, on a dry Sunday in a good summer.

That apart, I like this village. The traffic doesn't pour through this High Street, unlike the other one, as if they were trying to say 'We mustn't go around the by-pass, we might miss something'. Here, all around are green fields and tranquility, a far cry from the council estate where, even though the pavements are spacious, the locals (and the sheep) still walk on the road.

To preserve my sanity, I spend as little time as possible going back to the High Street. It's interesting to note that it's even more alienating, when one does not live there, though our new place is a mere three miles away. Each weekend my seven year old daughter comes to stay. I remember that day in the sun, when we first tried to escape. She is still too young to remember how Grumpy had sat on a wall at Disneyland, and refused to acknowledge the two year old in her pushchair (sorry — it was called a stroller there). Now she spends her weekends kissing a horseshoe, hoping this pagan rite will somehow propel me and car (with daughter in it) back to her old pals in the High Street.

Often I resisted. Last week Joanna changed sides and asked Clare if she would go? Clare went into labour instead, which is more or less the same thing.

I've done more reading of good books lately. This is not to suggest I'm getting any smarter, you'd be right in saying 'far from it'. There just seems to be more time and space up here to do that sort of thing, especially when the rock's wet and climbing is not such a good idea. Of course, such spare time catches you out eventually. Now I spend my spare autumn days doing the CC Journal. I guess you can't win 'em all.

# Two Is One Too Many

*Al Churcher*

## Stanage Edge

Above the russet-golds of bracken and late summer grass, Stanage Edge seems to shimmer — a petrified wave of grey gritstone between moorland and sky. Locking the car, chalk bag in one hand and slippers in the other, I follow the well-worn path up to the edge. The last group of beginners from a local centre is making its way down, and with most climbers still at work, for a brief instant I have the cliff almost to myself — all six kilometres and 800 routes. A little stretching, then my fingers are following the familiar crack of *Via Media*. How many times have I done this over the last 15 or 16 years? Enough to make it feel as though it's almost an extension of the path in a different plane. Take the easy way down this time, but after the harder walls on either side, *Via Media* becomes a bannister for my aged-child's body to slide down. *Black Slab* beckons — easier climbing, but after the initial traverse in above the overhang, and only rounded breaks to palm, the series of step-ups is much harder on the head. Not one for windy days.

Already the cares of the day have dropped away, and as others arrive and a gentle banter fills the evening air. My body forgets that there was ever such a place as a classroom filled with 31 small bodies with 31 disproportionately large voices and demands. A friend calls me over, and as the descending sun turns the rock to gold we set off on a climbers' version of follow-my-leader. First one in front, then the other, often so close we seem to climb as one.

## The Grit

An idealised picture? Not really, for it's only a week since I had a late afternoon session not so different than that described above — and that was at the end of February. Of course there are days when it rains or blows, or when man-eating midges force a retreat before sticky rubber even touches rock. But to the hundreds, even thousands of climbers from the northern cities and towns that lie within 30 or 40 minutes of the nearest gritstone escarpment, this is a common experience, a common heritage. For gritstone at its best is so hard and compact that you feel every hold is 100% secure. Its texture rough enough to perform extremes of friction, yet often allowing fierce overhanging hand-jamming without taping. Its geological formation and weathering giving holdless slabs, bald aretes, and every variety of overhang, crack and corner possible. With cliffs up to 30 metres high and six kilometres long, often no more than five minutes from the road, no wonder it's known as 'God's own rock' — the perfect medium for soloing.

For most of us that means the perfect medium for safe soloing, staying well within our own limits — most of the time anyway — relishing the ultimate freedom of climbing completely unencumbered by ropes, harnesses, equipment. For what is this climbing anyway? Take away all the intellectual pretensions along with the equipment and we're just children climbing rocks instead of trees. And just like children we can do it alone or with friends — relish the solitude of the sighing wind in the moorland grasses, or laugh and joke and pretend to compete.



That's one side of grit — the relaxed one. But with grit having perhaps the strictist ethics to be found outside of the sandstone of Saxony or Bohemia — strictly no pegs or bolts on natural grit — the extension of these bald aretes and slabs brings in a much more serious aspect. Top-roping a route doesn't qualify as an ascent, so being completely devoid of protection, many routes can only be led solo. This has led to the additional 'P' for protection grading in the current Yorkshire Gritstone guidebook. P1 being defined as 'generally well-protected, with falls likely only to damage egos' whereas P3 threatens 'dire consequences. Do not fall as you'll be lucky to walk away. Get full life insurance now'.

Top-rope practice before a first ascent is now taken for granted — and probably has been since not long after the days of Brown and Whillans in the '50s, with their tennis-shoed ascents of such routes as *Great Slab* and *Cave Wall*. Routes that, by remaining unprotected, retain both their Extreme grades and their annual harvest of broken limbs. But once established, the on sight lead soon becomes the only respectable ascent. After Drummond's ascent of *Archangel* (E4 6a) in 1971, the competition for the first ascents of the arêtes forming some of the best remaining lines on grit, really hotted up. Originally named *Ulysees Bow* by Drummond, after climbing it on a slack top-rope, it was not until 1983 that a very in-form Jerry Moffat (aided by the first pair of sticky-rubbered Firés to be imported) achieved a lead at E6 6b. Being completely on sight, the second ascent was almost of equal performance, and brought fame to the 16 year old Johnny Dawes. Johnny has gone on to become one of the greatest British climbers ever, with a whole string of serious solo or marginally protected climbs, first on grit and then on Welsh slate, quartzite and volcanic rock. His finest achievements are perhaps *Gaia* and *The Braille Trail* on gritstone, and the 'ultimate death trip' — *The Indian Face* on Snowdon's Clogwyn D'ur Arddu — the first E9. The two earlier routes waited several years for a second ascent, and *The Indian Face* remains unrepeatable after seven years.

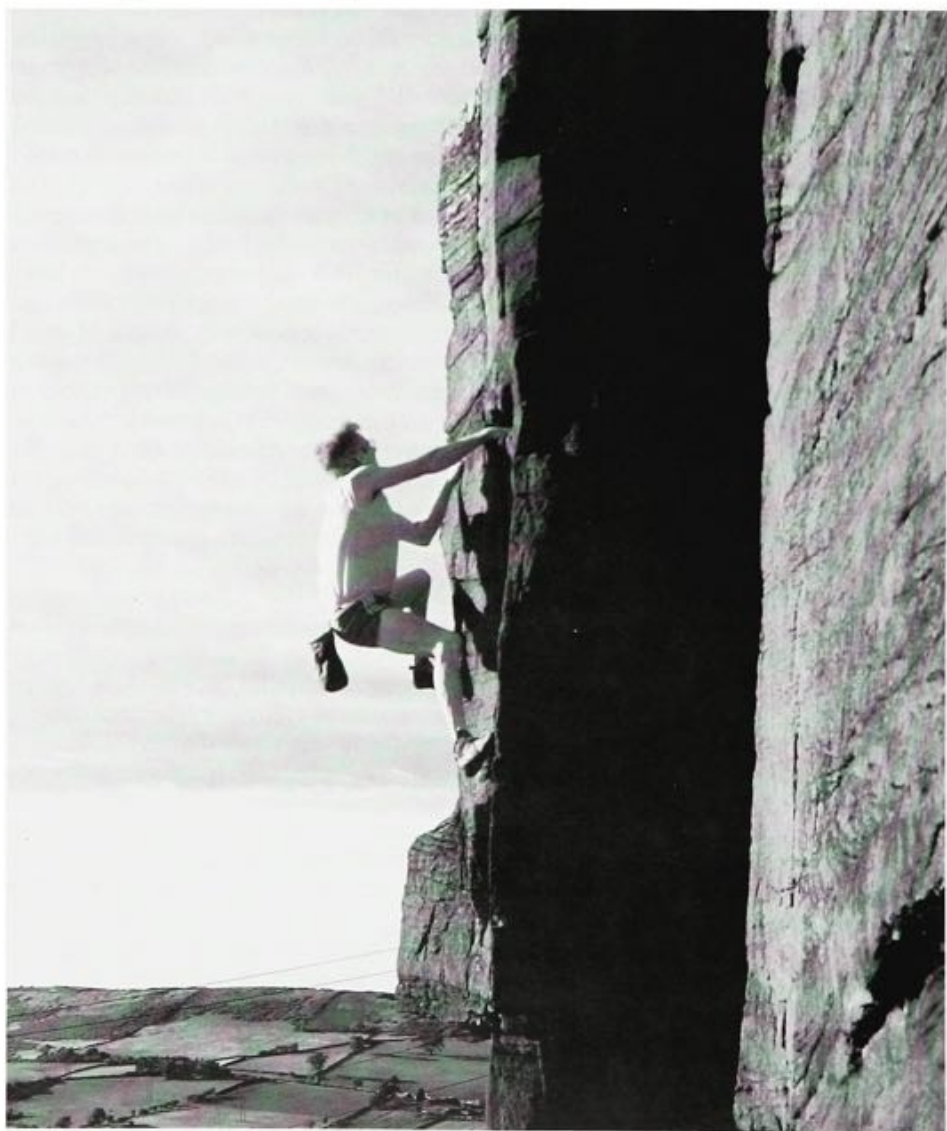
Not the least of his accomplishments when trying new gritstone routes, was Johnny's ability to jump off from as high as seven or eight metres and bounce! Just after Dawes' ascent of *Ulysees*, Neil Foster provided the final twist to the saga when he took a bad fall from its crux. A few days earlier he had himself solved the problem of another, only slightly easier, unclimbed arete, but had been unable to think of a suitable name. Lying in his hospital bed with one of his ankles badly smashed, but with his sense of humour obviously undamaged, the perfect name presented itself — *Ulysees or Bust*.

Gritstone also, lends itself to 'chain solos', the most popular target being 100 different routes in a day, although at least one climber has broken the 200 barrier. These can be of any grade (including easy descent routes), or one can increase the difficulty by only climbing routes of a certain grade (VS is a good challenge for experienced climbers) and usually necessitates visiting more than one crag. But Ron Fawcett (himself the author of many hard gritstone climbs) put this into perspective in September 1986 with his solo of 100 extremes on four different edges. About 1,250 metres of climbing in roughly eight hours including seven E4s, three E5s and a number of E1s, E2s and one E3 in descent!

With many gritstone routes less than 10 metres in height, it's often hard to decide when bouldering ends and soloing begins — particularly if the hardest moves are near the ground. Perhaps the real dividing line is the point where you

## *Two Is One Too Many*

can jump off, and hope to walk away. Certainly one can still suffer serious injuries, and even die from 10 metres — particularly as many routes rise up from the waiting mouths of a jumble of blocks and boulders — but one does feel there's a reasonable chance of living if you do slip. Add the ease and speed with which it's possible to drop a rescuing top-rope (assuming there's one around), and the possibility of avoiding the crux by traversing off on some routes, and though it remains a serious game, soloing on grit rarely assumes the commitment of soloing on the larger mountain crag.



*Soloing/bouldering on Wharncliffe Grit. Photo: Al Churcher*



## North Wales

This is the other area most renowned for soloing, partly because, along with the Peak District, North Wales has traditionally been the forcing ground for new standards of difficulty and commitment, and so has attracted its own group of resident 'hot shots'. Not suprisingly, accounts of deliberately unroped ascents are comparatively rare before the 1960s — probably because the standard of protection available prior to this was so poor, and the consequences of most leader falls so horrific, that the presence of a rope was often fairly irrelevant. (Although the mere presence of a rope can be a significant psychological prop, there can be few British climbers who have not, at one time or another, been faced with a crisis of confidence on encountering a hard move a long way from protection, and solved it by placing an absolutely useless micronut. The sight of the rope running through a karabiner giving the confidence to complete the move).

An unprecedented soloing boom took place in North Wales in the late '60s — a time when the climbing/social scene was perhaps at its zenith — coincidently at a time when more advanced equipment, in particular the more widespread and sophisticated use of nuts, was making climbing safer than ever before. The exploits of such climbers as Cliff Phillips, Richard McHardy, Eric Jones, Al Rouse and Pete Minks, peaked in 1969/70 with ascents of routes like *Vector*, *Grasper*, *Pellagra*, *Suicide Wall*, *The Thing*, *Cenotaph Corner*, *White Slab*, *Woubits*, and *The Boldest*. The shock to the nervous system of the conventional climbing establishment was doubled when Rouse and Minks soloed *Vector* together, a transistor radio on Minks' belt blaring out the Rolling Stones. All of these were deliberate unroped solos of climbs that were test pieces of their time. Nowadays they are generally well-protected for a conventional ascent. But in those days they were certainly serious undertakings, particularly those on the mountain crags of the Llanberis Pass and Snowdon's Clogwyn D'ur Arddu, where one is more than likely to encounter the odd loose hold or wet patch of rock. Over 20 years later they all still retain their Extreme grades, and their place on the tick list of any ambitious climbers, working their way up through the grades.

Of course there were bound to be mishaps, and there were certainly some amazing near misses. In May 1970, Cliff Phillips was soloing alone on *Black Foot*, an Extreme on Dinas Mot, in the Llanberis Pass. A slip on the delicate slab of the third pitch resulted in a 65 metre fall to the slabs below. Repeated collisions with the rock slowed him down sufficiently to ensure his survival, but resulted in numerous injuries, the most serious being a broken pelvis. Despite this, he managed to crawl the half kilometre or more to the road, and drive himself to the nearest village before he collapsed over the steering wheel, to be found unconscious just before midnight! Terry Taylor's escape was even more spectacular. With an even longer fall than Phillips' in prospect, his slip from high up on Cloggy would have been fatal had one of his bootlaces not caught on the projecting head of a piton and left him hanging from one foot!

Al Rouse was later to lose his life in the 1988 K2 tragedy, but the rest of those named above are still climbing. Eric Jones (who went on to solo many important alpine climbs, including filmed ascents of the *North Faces of the Eiger and Matterhorn*), is now a semi-retired family man, running the climbers' cafe at Tremadog, but still regularly soloing his quota of HVs and Extremes before dinner! Perhaps there's a special god keeping his eye on soloists, for it's remark-



able how few deaths have resulted, especially in the all-night party scene of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll (not to mention the beer!) that was the North Wales scene of the '60s and '70s.

During that period, but a little further afield, Jim Perrin's solo ascent of Cheddar's *Coronation Street* (E2 5b) proved nearly terminal when things went wrong at the start of the third pitch, the smooth vertical crack, 100 metres above the ground, that provides the crux! But for those too young to remember, a look through the magazines of the time will reveal a forgotten side of the '60s far more insidious and dangerous than the drugs or alcohol — 30cm wide flared jeans!

## **Scotland**

This era also saw many hard solos of difficult ice climbs. The development of front-pointing techniques, enabling experienced and confident climbers to make the most of the short Scottish winter days. Ian Nicholson showed an astonished climbing world what was possible with his unroped ascent of the two great classic Grade 5 gullies on Ben Nevis in 1973. At that time, *Zero* and *Point Five* were THE routes, and, with a long walk in and out, the ascent of either commonly took more than 10 hours. Nicholson did them both, almost 350 metres of Grade 5 ice, in a morning, and was back at the pub in Fort William in time for lunchtime opening!

Even without considering the extra safety margin allowed by speedy ascents, given the confidence, unroped climbing on ice is not necessarily so much more dangerous, especially in Britain where good belays are often scarce or non-existent, complete rope-lengths of unprotected climbing common, and the best ice frozen turf... Soloing in two perhaps gives the best of both worlds — retreats are easier to engineer, and you still have the psychological support of a partner (except that the second can have more stress than the leader). Certainly, paired soloing, on rock or ice, lowers the level of commitment considerably, but whether this gives more or less satisfaction is up to the individual.

## **The Livesey Era**

With his huge number of first ascents, in virtually every area, Pete Livesey was certainly the foremost figure in British climbing in the '70s. The most successful of the group of Yorkshire climbers who first realised the benefits of regular and systematic training on climbing walls. Through his writing as much as his climbing, Livesey was responsible for a near-revolution in British climbing. With the construction of more climbing walls, the swift acceptance of training led to a general leap in standards, and his exposure to the sunny delights of California and Provence was the final nail in the coffin of the idea that alpinism was the logical progression from rock climbing. An idea that was to take another 10 years to gain the same acceptance all over mainland Europe.

Livesey's routes, such as Britain's first E5s, *Footless Crow* and *Right Wall*, were characterised by their sustained nature and boldness. Where other climbers would struggle to place a nut, then fall on it, Livesey would climb on, a mental strength developed by years of soloing right up to his own limit. In his own words:

"When I first started climbing, I soloed everything. Although I had a rope on I didn't put in any protection at all. I had virtually no equipment anyway, so I was prepared to solo anything I wanted to climb."

In this way he added mental conditioning to his tremendous finger strength,

later using it to great effect in long and difficult solo climbs in the Dolomites, including several significant, and little publicised, first solo ascents.

He was also known for his humour and competitiveness, well illustrated by his solo of a hard route at Tremadog (*Tensor* — now E2 6a) in suede shoes. He was supposed to be seconding John Sheard, who completed the route and started taking in the rope, taking it in ever faster until the end appeared, followed by a grinning Livesey.

### Later — Ron

For a while Livesey's early young partner, Ron Fawcett, went on to take his place. Ron was perhaps an even more prolific soloist, partly because of his often being without a second, for unlike University lecturer Livesey, Fawcett devoted himself full-time to climbing. One of his soloing sessions on Clogwyn y Grochan in the Llanberis Pass, came to an abrupt end, Fawcett recovering consciousness to find his dog frantically licking his face. He still doesn't know what happened and the broken wrist soon mended, unlike the next time, when a parapente accident led to the insertion of a steel plate.

Phil Davidson had a similar lucky escape on Dinas Cromlech. His solo of *Right Wall* was on impulse — the day was right, the confidence, the desire, everything necessary for such an outrageous act. Repeating it for a photographer was a different story, and the story is that Davidson found himself in the middle of the wall wishing he was somewhere else, and looking death in the face. It says much for his strength of mind — or his survival instincts — that he completed it successfully.

Jerry Moffatt has also had his share of hard solos, but for regular hard soloing close to the limit, one name stands out above the rest. Already known as a steady E1/E2 soloist in the mid-70s, business and other commitments led Jimmy Jewel to near-retirement in the early '80s. For his comeback, a secret training regime and a diet of fruit produced a 'powerful climbing machine', and one that was some 15kg lighter. Total Control is the name of the video of Jimmy in action, including the first solo of *T. Rex*, a serious E3 on the sea-cliffs of Gogarth. It was also the perfect term to describe the climbing of someone who revelled in soloing big, serious routes that most climbers would have nightmares just thinking about climbing unroped. Total control and commitment, allied to a silky-smooth technique produced days such as one on his favourite crag — Cloggy. In April 1987, starting at 12.30pm, he climbed five E2s and three E3s, about 1,000 metres of Extreme climbing plus the equivalent amount of descent, walked the five kilometres back to his car, and was back in Llanberis drinking tea in 'Pete's Eats' by 4.30! A few weeks later he was back, soloed *The Boldest Direct* (E3) on sight, and made the second solo of *Great Wall* (E4 6a) to warm up. He then astounded everyone by proceeding to solo the loose hanging arête of *The Axe* — E4 6a and one the most exposed and 'out there' routes that can be imagined. Who can forget the magical photo on the cover of the Cloggy guidebook that remains a tribute to Jimmy?

A few months later, soloing a familiar Severe, just to return to a cliff-top climbing hut at Tremadog, he slipped and fell to his death. Almost an exact repeat of the death of Tony Wilmott in the Avon Gorge, Bristol, around 20 years earlier. One of the stars of his generation, and responsible for many serious new routes

in the South-West, Wilmott named many of these after Pink Floyd songs, music which he also used to great effect in what were probably the first mixed-media climbing audio-visual shows.

As far as I know, these are the only top-level climbers to die soloing on British rock. Both were climbing at the highest standards. According to his big friend Paul Williams, Jimmy Jewel could 'on sight' most E5 6bs, and no doubt could have repeated the E6s of his time, had he had the motivation to lay siege to them in the modern manner. Some of Wilmott's routes waited years to be repeated. On their own fateful days, both were wearing everyday street shoes, and carrying small rucksacks, and both were climbing easy climbs well known to them. Climbing at one's limit requires a high level of concentration. Soloing at one's limit refines this even more, and requires an immense amount of respect and awareness for the rock, the space around you, and your own fragility. Easy routes can be climbed with as little respect and concentration as going up the stairs to bed, but the consequences of a slip are the same, and in its irony, the tragedy seems to be even greater.

### The '90s

The solo of 1990 was again in North Wales — Dave Thomas' ascent of *Lord of the Flies* (E6 6a/b), Ron Fawcett's line to the left of *Right Wall*. But for Thomas' *tour de force*, and perhaps the most remarkable solo yet to be performed on British rock, we need to move to the south, to the ice cream, sand and sea of South Devon. Not far from the tourist delights of Torquay, and just outside the old fishing village of Brixham, the rocky headland of Berry Head juts out into the English Channel, its seaward face carved open into the gaping mouth of a huge sea cave. For years, the cave provided little more than access to the climbs on the merely vertical walls to the left, particularly the classic HVS of *Moonraker*. Many have felt, as I did, that the atmospheric sea-level traverse into the half-dark of the cave, with the sea sucking at your heels and the great arching roof some 30 or 40 metres above your head, was the best part of the climb.

For Mick Fowler, ice axes and crampons are as valuable for summer as they are for winter climbing, and he has long been known for his love of esoteric delights such as the crumbling chalk cliffs of Dover, or tottering sea-stacks composed as much of turf and soil as rock, anything that has, in his own terms, 'excellent death potential'. In fact, anything horribly loose and dirty tends nowadays to be referred to as 'Fowler country'!

In 1982 Fowler established a stunningly exposed traverse following the line of huge flakes across the lip of the great cave. Despite its comparatively lowly grade of E5 6b, *Caveman*, as it was aptly named, waited another seven years for its second ascent. Done by Nick White and Dave Thomas in 1989, they increased its grade to E6 by freeing the single rest point.

That summer, after establishing a counter-diagonal to *Caveman*, *The New Stone Age* (E6 6b), Thomas abseiled down to clean a more direct line up the overhanging wall above the mouth of the cave. Perhaps stimulated by Crispin Waddy's impressive solo of the nearby *Dreadnought* (E3 5c) the idea of soloing *Caveman* entered his head and refused to go away. But with September, and his return to college imminent, time was running out for Dave to complete his remaining projects in the area, and this plan, outrageous as it was, was replaced by the



unthinkable decision to solo the new line (already named *Terracotta* because of the sediments of red clay between the limestone bedding).

Though loose and unpredictable, the wild upside-down land that is the first (and crux) of *Caveman*, was at least familiar. Thomas was soon painfully bridged out in the red-flaked niche, between roof and sea, that is the stance. He was unable to clip the peg at the back of the niche to rest, as the only sling he carried was too short. Retreat was now out of the question, and Dave was unsettled by the feel of a hold, crucial to the exit from the niche. It did nothing for his confidence when the cap came off the top of the hold, revealing a lining of mud 'like a mixture of peanut butter and salad-cream'. Hoping that this would glue it together, he replaced the cap and, locking it into place with a jam, pinch-gripped it with the other hand. It took three attempts to make the committing and irreversible drop down onto the long horizontal flake that runs like a handrail across the roof. At one point he was suspended upside-down and hanging from a heel-hook to rest. At another, he cut loose and, with his legs hanging completely free and giggling like a maniac, he heel-hooked and jammed his way out to the point where the new line took off. The crux moves were obviously going to be pulling over the lip of the cave, to gain the merely overhanging rock above! Dave immediately realised how much of his weight had been on the abseil rope when he had tried the moves some days before. With the weight of the sea pulling him outwards, that way was impossible, so locking hard on a low jam and with no chance of a second try, Dave was faced with a 6b on sight slap for flat, dusty holds above. Easier climbing led to a reasonable ledge, but the chance to relax a little, along with the knowledge that the two remaining pitches were much easier, was almost his downfall. The moves to leave the ledge, though only 5c or 6a, were harder than expected, and it was only after three increasingly frustrated attempts that he was able to psyche himself up sufficiently to complete the moves and reach the easier angled, but loose, rock above.

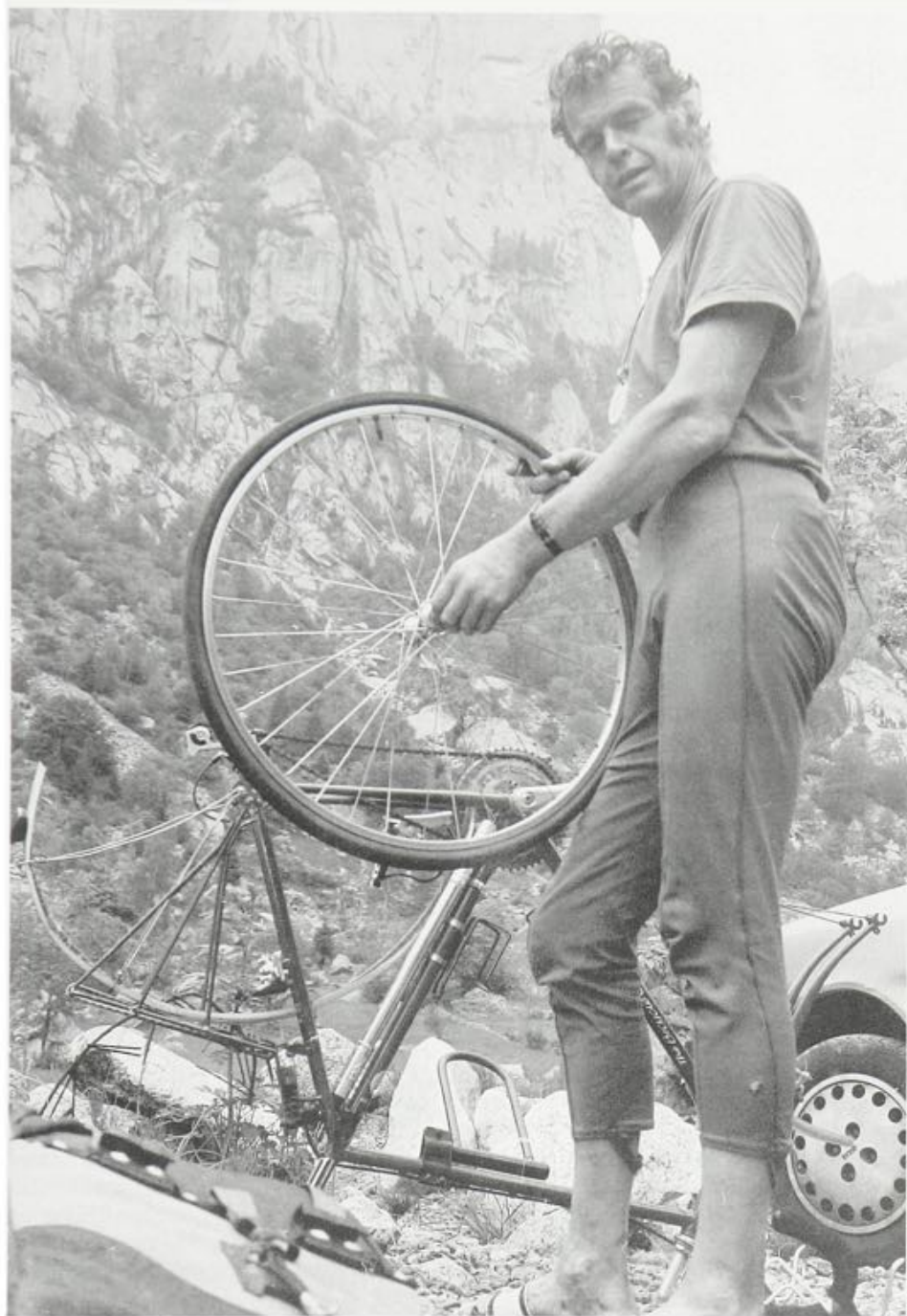
What impulse drives anyone to such an inspired piece of madness, is probably impossible for even the protagonist himself, to say. But perhaps an excerpt from an unfinished piece of Dave's writing will give some idea of the 'high' he felt:

Born into the half-way niche,  
I am presented with life's gamble.  
A pinch-grip shifts like a deck of cards  
and only my inner web of self knows  
how close my faith is to extinction  
beneath the swamping swell below.  
A boulder surfaces and I understand its smile,  
as, for six or seven metres, my life  
follows the course of a single rail.  
The simplicity we all strive for.  
I swing along, ecstatic with this freedom,  
in control, knowing my life is in my own hands,  
inverting to bat-like from a footjam above my head.  
The stage is open, and the pretender  
inside cannot refuse its lure.

To most people living in the safe, sane, everyday world, any sort of climbing is madness. The solo climber goes a little further along the ledge, and Dave Thomas, Pete Livesey, Ron Fawcett, Jimmy Jewel and Johnny Dawes et al, to its very edge. All of them thrived on those moments of inspiration, those moments of near-madness that Johnny Dawes (in an interview with Jim Perrin) described as the times when a 'climbing god' takes over. Soloing is the antithesis of the modern way of 'working' routes for hours (or even days) until you know them backwards. It's part of the adventure ethic of British climbing, that although under threat, still prizes the on sight lead far above anything else.

Most of us don't want to go too near the edge, but those amongst us who love climbing for its freedom and adventure, surely do so because of those moments when the god is in us — and perhaps the god comes most often when we have no rope to hold us to the earth.

Author's note: An altered version of this article was published in Italian, in the October 1991 special rock climbing edition of the Italian magazine, **La Rivista della Montagna**, and was entitled 'Due Son Troppi'. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to reproduce parts of it here. Also thanks to Dave Thomas (for the poem) and Jim Perrin (for the quote).



*Dave Cook, repairing yet another puncture, on his 20,000km 'rocking and riding' cycle journey to Australia. The book - Breaking Loose - is due out in 1993.*



# Bilberries

*David Weaver*

The air was thick with moisture; its density made him aware of pressure on surfaces. Everything in the landscape was being squeezed and it was hot. The surface of the lake looked like pewter, silver grey and dimpled, barely moving under the pressure. The stream sounded blurred as if he heard it through cotton wool.

He had left the car about a mile back in a layby off the single track road that undulated over the grassy strip of land between the hills and the grey water. In front of him was the great blunt pyramid of Gable, the pale path following the rounded south-west edge the only mark on its green surface. Away to his right across the dull sounding stream and behind Lingmell he could see Scafell. He walked steadily up the path leaning forward into the slope, listening to the regular sound of his boots scrunching and thumping softly as he gradually gained height. He paused every so often in the grey heat to look back at the changing perspective of the valley and for a breather. When the humidity was as high as this his lungs always seemed to need twice their usual amount of air. Slowly he plodded upwards, his mind half focused on the rocks ahead and half on the simple task of placing his feet so as not to slip or stumble. He picked his way warily across the scree run and paused beneath the first cliffs to look back, panting. He was high above the lake which appeared to be condensing out of the hot moist air, trapped between the mountains. The sun was shining into his eyes and made the distant surface of the lake glitter and sparkle. The rock and grass beneath his feet faded into the distance until sky, land and sea merged in a pearly opalescence. Another path led to the right, dropping down past the Needle and he could see figures moving amongst the boulders which formed the transition between rockface and hillside. The easier going was welcome after the last 2,000 feet of slog and presently he arrived amongst the boulders. The separation of the 60 foot Needle from the main face was now clear, defined by a gully. The grass has been worn away by several decades of booted feet and the Lakeland rains had added to the erosion, leaving channels deep between the rocks, almost threatening their stability. Sitting at the base of the Needle he slowly unthreaded his old dusty boots, eased out his stockinged feet and wriggled his toes — bliss!

He unclipped the waist harness of his small daysack, slung it off his shoulders and dug around amongst the jersey and waterproofs for his smoothsoled rockboots. Out they came and in went his old heavyweights. With daysack firmly fastened, shoulder straps and waist line tight he set off up the first small face, trying out his sense of balance and testing his fingers and toes on small fissures and excrescences, concentrating his mind on physical puzzles. He paused to re-thread his right boot — that foot was half a size bigger than the other and was too tightly laced for comfort.

The air was cooler, lighter, he moved steadily up and across the rock, above the gully separating Napes from the bigger face. From the soft clink of metal and the occasional distant voice it was clear that other climbers were on the rocks but

when he eventually turned the corner at the top of the gully he was dismayed to see the Needle festooned with coloured ropes and hung about with bodies. All the faces he could see were occupied by at least two climbers more or less securely attached; even worse was the queue of youngsters waiting to start the 150 foot corner. He joined the queue and fidgeted. Leaning back on the big rock face that reared up behind him he watched the antics on the Needle. The bunch in front of him were not making any progress at all, the leader was obviously having difficulty moving off the first stance; a buzz of apprehension came from the rest of the party, two girls and a lad. He'd never climbed on Gable before, so could not offer any helpful suggestions, except that they should look for something a little easier and get out of his way. Still no movement. Bored, he examined the face above him. It was slabby and creased with ledges and cracks, some sprouting small tussocks of coarse grass and more rarely small junipers. It looked marvelous, standing unobstructed in the sunshine, free of people and promising views of unbeatable beauty down the valley and across the lake to the sea. Plenty of holds, even if it was pretty steep. The more he looked, the stronger the urge to test the problem became. He moved his left foot onto a slab edge and reached for a groove; up came his right foot and he was free.

No problems from the other world intruded during the next hour or so. He was completely involved in balancing and holding, moving smoothly, considering, testing, retreating, searching, always aware of his physical reality, testing his courage and delighting in the familiar newness of it all. The angle of the slabs varied from about 50 to 70 degrees and the holds from the size of a half penny to 'jughandles' which allowed him to use all his fingers. Sometimes he came across bilberries half the size of his thumb nail with powdered skins, luscious and dark, rich and slightly bitter, with juice that stained his fingers deep purple. Sometimes milky-white quartz crystals sliced through the rock, with facets that glittered in the sunshine; sometimes the rock edges were sharp enough to cut his fingers if he was careless. After about 100 feet of climbing he paused in a small 'sentry box' and turned to face outwards. He must have been 2,500 feet above the stream that glittered amongst the trees scattered round the northern end of the lake. Far away the sea gleamed and flickered through the haze. He could almost look along the undersides of small scattered clouds floating in a layer of cooler air above his head. He delighted in being high above the earth, contained in the layer of air wrapping the planet which slowly diffused into the void on one side and formed a negative image of the earth's surface on the other. The air in the valley seemed to blur into the surface of the lake. His concentrated activity restored the balance of his life, from thinking of the world to moving in the world, from indirect to direct experience. Ever since his time as a student he had been excited by ideas which linked space and time, and this formed part of the excitement he always felt in the hills. He recognised that the divide between moving in and thinking of the world was a function of his language rather than a true reflection of reality: like the junction between the lake surface and the air, the divide became more or less important according to the questions asked of it. The surface of the rock was permeable at one level, allowing the air to penetrate and cling to it, rather as he felt he did in moments of desperation.

As he moved slowly towards the top of the cliff the rock became slightly steeper but contained more fractures. The frequency of grass tussocks increased, de-

manding greater care. The drought had left them dangerously dry, reducing them to shrunken fibrous lumps only tenuously attached to the rock. Some 20 feet from the cliff top the rock to his left divided, forming a small three-sided hollow about six feet across, facing due west and full of warm honey-coloured light and a profusion of bilberries — a haven full of riches. He picked his way across the face to it and carefully heaved himself onto the dry grass. He sat like a nestling, quietly absorbing the warm scented air and soaking in the sunlight. The combination of tranquility after effort and the descending cadences of the hills held him suspended and wrapped in stillness. After a while he blinked to clear his sight and settled his back into the pungent grasses, loosened his boots, and lazily set about harvesting the bilberries. He dozed, purple fingered, squinting into the evening sun. The low light was catching the edges of the land and turning the heavy moist air into a golden iridescence. Replete with that magical combination of tiredness and achievement and savouring the fresh wild flavour of bilberries he sat absorbing the beauty of the land through every particle of his being. Light slowly faded, allowing shadows to fill hollows and stretch back from hills until all distinct form had vanished from the land in the soft gloom. He gathered himself, tightened his boots and moved quietly off into the dusk.



# *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*

*Fred Jenkins*

Now that I have exceeded the allotted biblical span by half-a-dozen years, I am the more convinced that the psalmist was right. The trouble started in 1980 when I developed a 'ceiling' of 3,500 metres. Several attempts were made on previously climbed alpine four thousanders, and a week was spent at the Finsteraarhorn Hut at 3,000 metres in the cause of experiment, to ski over the Oberland Peaks. The party observed that my pace was modified, to say the least, above the 3,500 metre level.

Concessions had to be made. I was persuaded to walk over the Haute Route, having skied it previously, but found it hard going, with the added complication of a creaking hipjoint. The answer seemed clear — to bend the rules and go somewhere alone, and to be prepared to bivouac when convenient or when halted for Tilman's reason — the inability to go any further. I found that the Fjallraven Sovsacksoverdrag with an inner sleeping bag enabled one to remain warm, dry and comfortable in extreme conditions — a somewhat novel following of Mr. Jorrocks' dictum, 'where I dines, there I sleeps'. Then there was the question of terrain. Where could one venture in safety? Snow covered Scotland in winter with langlauf skis for lightness, and the Pyrenees in summer, seemed reasonable choices.

The first Cairngorm traverse was modestly low level. Langlauf skis are a delight to carry, so after a walk from Aviemore it was pleasant to ski into Rothiemurchus and then to the Lairig Ghru. Feeling old, and not looking forward to the last steep stretch to the Sinclair Hut, I cleared a patch of snow at the timber line, bivouacked, and brewed up. A couple of climbers arrived en route to the bothy in the Garbh Choire, but in spite of being curious as to its exact location, for I had never been there, I remained in bivouac. The next day I skied over to Corroul bothy, passing the Sinclair Hut which was awash underfoot as expected. The following day was a long plug down to White Bridge and by the Geldie Burn to the Ruigh-aiteachain bothy in Glen Feshie followed by an easy day mainly walking to Balachroick hostel. Then to Aviemore.

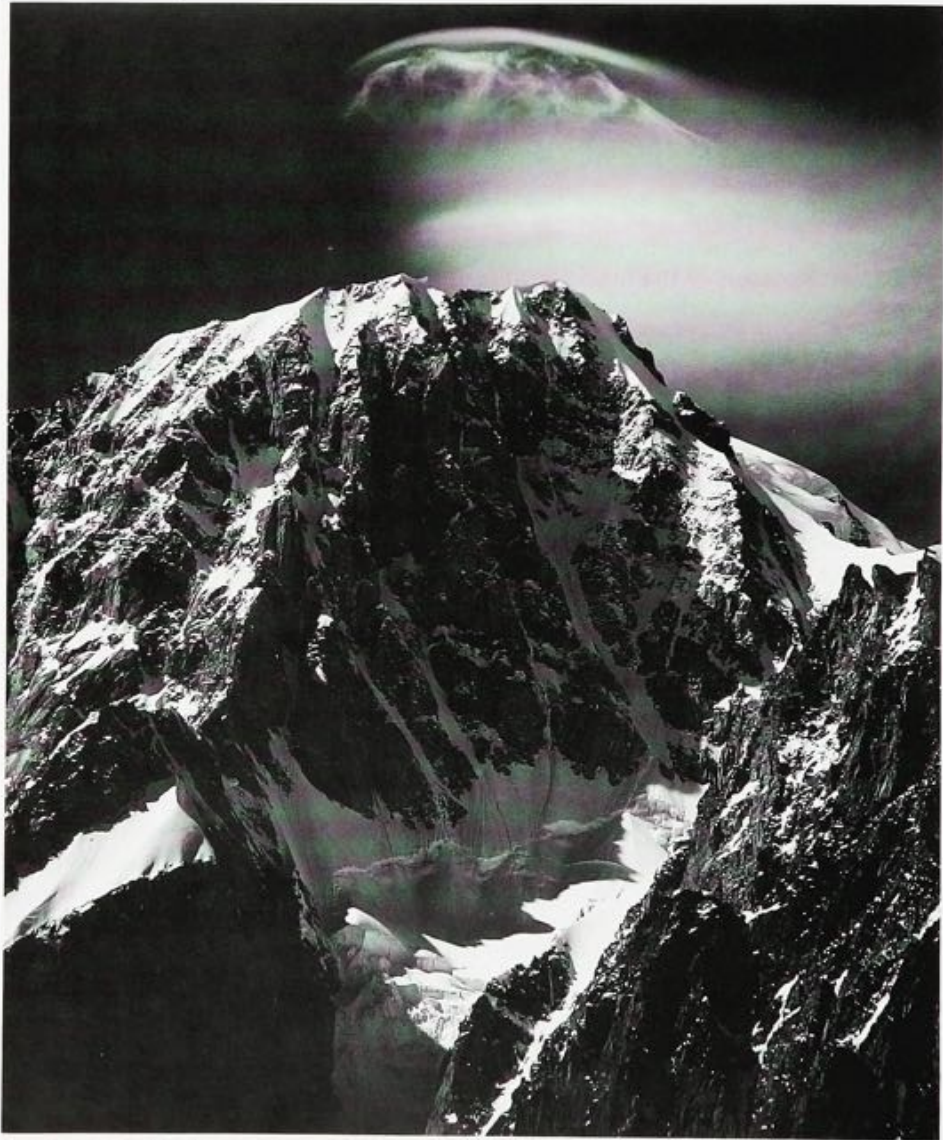
Variations have been Kincaig, a former hospital, now a hostel, to Ruigh-aiteachain bothy, and by the Geldie Burn — a difficult crossing on the remains of a bridge to Bynack Lodge, a ruin with nothing standing — an unpleasant bivouac with no real wind-break. Then by the falls of Tarf down Glen Tilt to Blair Atholl.

Also from Kingussie to Tromie Bridge, and Glen Feshie to Ruigh-aiteachain Bothy. Then by Mullach Clach a'Bhlàir and Cairntoul with return by the Lairig Ghru. There were interludes when I returned to alpine skis, and in spite of creaking joints made several traverses on the Cairngorm plateau.

The Pyrenees in summer have Atlantic weather. Bivouacking was occasionally damp, but one could reach a hut for the second and sometimes the third night. I tramped from Cauterets to Pont D'Espagne and the Refuge du Clot — I was last here in April 1972 and March 1979 — and proceeded over Col de la Fache to Campo Blanco and the Penalera Refuge, which was full of rubbish inside. After

a bivouac on the south side of Respumoso reservoir I went round by the north side of the reservoir to Lac Arriel and lost my watch through taking it off to avoid rucksack straps after a rest. This meant going down to Cauterets for a replacement. After returning to Penalera Refuge and bivouacking, I crossed to Refuge Wallon and descended in continuous rain to Pont D'Espagne and Cauterets, cursing my decrepitude, and remembering past fitness in 1972 when we climbed Balaitous on ski.

— Eheu fugaces labuntur anni —



*Frenay Face, Mt Blanc. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson*



# A Terrible Year

Trevor Jones

During the winter of 1991 frost loosened a limestone block at the top of *Om*, a 5b route at Stoney Middleton. A few weeks later, having done the crux, I reached over the top and pulled on the rickety block which flew out, me with it. The ropes were crossed when clipped into the respective karabiners. Then the ropes knotted themselves round my right ankle as I somersaulted upside-down, and complete body weight broke the ensnared ankle and left me suspended in a cocoon of ropes. I screamed with pain for several minutes until a human pyramid reached my shoulders and I was lowered to the ground, where my foot fell in a rather tired manner at 90 degrees to the leg. In the hospital casualty centre a nurse said; "Cut that bit of webbing off." It was a new posh American harness and I replied "Can't you just ease my leg up and slide it off?"

"But it's just a bit of webbing."

"Bit of webbing! It's a 60 quid American harness!"

A three hour operation later, my leg had five metal screws and a six inch plate to hold it all together and was subsequently to set off a book-thief metal detector in the local library. Later in the ward a male nurse came in;

"Hello boys, anyone want their dressing changed?"

There was a stony silence, as he minced towards me.

"How about you?"

"Perfectly alright thank you."

"Now let's have it off."

"Won't it do later?"

When the lights went out an unconscious, toothless 90 year old in the next bed crawled on to the floor barking loudly for several hours and repeated this performance every night until a friend bought a half bottle of whisky to deaden the noise. One day a tiny physiotherapist appeared wielding a Zimmer frame.

"Think you can hop into this?"

I hopped into it with my good leg, inclined the frame at 45 degrees and shot down the corridor.

"Stop that Mr Jones. Stop it."

I nodded.

"That was very naughty. Are you going to behave now?"

"No."

"Do you want crutches?"

Next morning a Schwarzenegger-sized physiotherapist appeared with the crutches.

"You Mr Jones?"

I nodded.

"Here are your crutches. Any problems?"

"No certainly not. Thank you for your trouble."

A long, long spring then summer and in August I asked a steel-rimmed bespectacled lady consultant if I could climb.



"Climb! Climb Mr Jones! Time isn't on your side. Let us say Xmas."

Spoken as if I was mad, senile, drunk or all three. I realised that the metal rims went right into her brain for dealing with people like me. Ignoring her advice, a few days later I went to Windgather and poked a swollen Stealth-rubber clad foot onto a Diff. On transferring body weight to the barely healed leg it felt as though it would snap again and a horrific vision of those steel spectacles. Then I remembered the immortal words of Menlove Edwards:

"So I was not done yet and on the way back setting to work I soon picked up my pride in this way, today the victory has been to the devil, but tomorrow is not to him yet."

I decided to climb with my old friend Colin Matthews, who descended from his garage ceiling, which was encrusted in minute holds that only he could see. He had set his summer sights on *Great Wall* on Cloggy. The smooth rock sheet in the middle of the East Buttress that had defeated the Master, Joe Brown, in his prime, now it had become a magnificent E4 6a. Even in my younger prime E3 5c was the ultimate limit. I felt like a religious Victorian sceptic.

"Is it right?"

The protection seemed reasonable and I comforted myself that I could use the blue tape holds if I got into extremis. When it was my turn the angle soon became, as the Victorians quaintly described it, AP — absolutely perpendicular. When I arrived at the 6a move I had a vision of the steel-rimmed spectacles and I was lifted and suddenly there were holds. How was this? It's quite an advantage to climb with the ex-junior weight lifting champion of Surrey — Colin Matthews. I felt a gentle levitation as the 6a horrors sank below me. On the next pitch there was a gigantic step right that would even have taxed Nureyev, it was damp too. Upward tugging would not solve the problem, at full stretch with the right hand on to a scrape, I fell sideways in a pendulum and just managed to get a foot on to a sloping ledge as all other muscular systems gave up the ghost. On the way down as I clicked into the amnesia mode I nudged Matthews.

"Well done, not too bad."

*Great Wall* induced a mood of foolish euphoria and when Colin suggested *Great Arete* on Llech Ddu, Ward-Drummond's big route, I agreed. Partly because it is in one of my favourite Welsh valleys — Cwm Llafar. I had a low opinion of Ward-Drummond because of all the controversy about his much-aided ascent of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I somehow thought that the *Great Arete* was going to be a pushover. From the top of the second pitch a leaning overhanging corner leered down at us. As Colin moved up it breathing heavily his comments were,

"No gear."

"Poxxy old peg."

"Rusty jammed wire."

Then "Watch the rope, watch the rope for Chrisssss sake."

By this time I realised that this was going to be my Armageddon. It took Colin an hour and a half to do 120 feet and on stepping into the groove I realised that the problems were going to be the most serious I had ever undertaken. If I fell at any point I would swing off left and be suspended. The rock was peculiarly compact, similar to Nevis, no holds and no runners.

I did the first 5c move and normally I would have preened myself on a success, but I realised that this was just the start and it was going to get harder with

continual 5c moves. I climbed until I was alongside a jammed wire left by Ward-Drummond, that was frayed, rusty and showed an antique fragility. I was forced into a dyno upwards to the next unsatisfactory rugosity.

Down below on *The Groove*, a climb with holds, I was providing an unexpected bonus to the climbers on that route.

"Hey, look at that old guy, he's having a right bloody struggle." Eventually I reached the overhang where a peg was knocked in at its left hand end. Unfortunately the climb lurched up its right hand edge. I cursed Ward-Drummond. Why did he put a peg in there, any halfwit could see that its maximum advantage could be extracted from the right hand lip — and so it left me six feet away from the hardest move of my life. I was 45 minutes hanging from that peg, cursing Matthews. I sympathised with C.E. Montague about the man in his story 'In Hanging Garden Gully'; 'He hangs safe by a single hand that learnt its good grip in fifty thousand years dodging among the forest boughs... the next little ledge the object of all human hope and desire, is only twelve feet away'. At the extreme right hand end of the overhang a stone was jammed, and looked as if it might even be used as a hold, leaning sideways, and pushed two fingers round it. It oscillated alarmingly and I scuttled back to the peg.

I pondered; if I fell I would be in space; if I was lowered off I would be further in space and no chance of contacting rock again. I felt a sympathy for Oliver Hardy when he said to Stan Laurel:

"This is another fine mess you've got me into."

How to describe the hardest move of one's life? A frantic struggle and it must have seemed like a demented Whirling Dervish clutching at bits of tat, rocking holds, minute scrapes and tight ropes. The final arete unfortunately had a large hole in it giving a distant view of Bethesda. I felt it might disintegrate at any moment. Eventually, though, I got to Colin and I was so tired on the way down I couldn't talk as even my tongue was exhausted. As I sat in the car I decided that as a senior citizen I would NOT do any more E4s.

# *Easy Day Out For a Lady*

*Chris Jackson*

"Caving?" A long, long pause followed. "You mean, Sunday, like this weekend?"

"Er... mm, yes."

He sighed, closed his eyes and slid down a little further into the chair, rested his drink on his belly and feigned oblivion. No comments: you'd think I'd suggested joining the local knitting circle.

"Yeh, remember, holes in the ground, full of water and darkness and horrible-ness."

Still no sound from him, though from all around us welled an endless babble, a roar, a stream of voices that echoed like water running deep underground, chairs scraped, glasses jingled as they were carried in precarious trays-full from bar to outstretched hands, the sound of laughter rose and fell, feet stomped to the sounds of the disco; sweat and aftershave; scent and smoke; the local climbing club dinner. Suzy, ever sociable, had drifted off somewhere, either doing the rounds or knocking 'em out on the dance floor, and, threatened with several more pints it seemed imperative to organise something now or succumb to the inevitable and end up once again in indecision and Horseshoe Quarry.

"Oh, right... holes in the ground, yes... mm." Eyes slowly closed again and breathing became imperceptible, probably asleep I thought, possibly dead, though I hoped not as the landlord probably wouldn't invite us here again if he were.

It would be Bill's first outing of the winter season and my second, but slumped in the bar, he seemed strangely reluctant to commit himself to a deep trip involving lots of ropes and SRT tackle. It may of course have been an innate sense of caution for which he is rightly famed but I have noticed that after his tenth G&T a certain mood of foreboding always sets in. The decision wasn't easy however, for, unlike the South Wales area, most decent caves up here in the north have vertical bits and it was not until he'd dismissed most of the Yorkshire Dales as too deep, too tight or too wet that I spotted a message straight from the Astral plane, a sure sign from the other side, probably the hand of Norbert Casteret himself, and written on a Stones beer mat. There was a big ring mark made by a pint pot overlapping the edge, looking a bit like a 'D', a little ring mark, probably from a glass of rum and blackcurrant, forming an 'o' and a biro scribble a bit like a crooked 'w', unmistakable, D-o-w, it could only mean Dowbergill Passage: I tentatively suggested it.

Life returned with a suspicious stare;

"What's it like then, and no sandbag?"

"A doddle. Bob and I cruised it in three hours the other year, a really nice trip."

He stared into his empty glass as if to accuse the lemon slice of stealing the last of the gin, and let out a long drawn-out sigh.

"OK, I suppose so, but you're definitely at the top of the blame rota for this one."

In the next chair, Marilyn, Roy's wife, was making a good imitation of a seat cover. She half opened one eye;



"Where are you lads off to then?"

"Dowbergill, you and Roy interested in a caving trip on Sunday?"

"Nar, he's off running somewhere."

"Ah right, silly question, well how about you then, easy day out for a lady, a classic in the Dales, pick you up at seven."

"OK."

Dowbergill Passage runs through the hills north west of Kettlewell and consists of over one and a half kilometres of fault-controlled rift linking Providence Park to Dow Cave, allowing a 'through' trip of around three kilometres. The passage carries a stream which emerges from a sump at the Providence Pot end of the passage, and which eventually joins the stream issuing from Dow Cave. On the survey, the trip looks easy, the passage seems to be ruler straight, which is correct, but what doesn't come across so well is that, in places, it's only one foot wide and a hundred feet high. Graded 4, it is a popular trip for medium grade cavers, it is also a very popular venue for the cave rescue, for if the stream rises, the connection with Dow Cave floods to the roof and it also becomes necessary to leave the stream, climb up into the rift, and make extensive desperate traverses. Most parties follow the passage downstream from Providence Pot — this was the direction Bob and I had taken during a dry spell the previous year. This time, the weather had been less than perfect and, knowing the connection with Dow Cave can sump, we decided to start there rather than find our exit flooded at the end of the day. Adey, a friend from Kendal, joined us in Kettlewell and the team was complete. We left one car in the village for our return, then drove the other to the nearest approach to Dow Cave.

Dow is a fine and gentle cave, maybe this is what Norbert intended in his message from the other side. It starts with a wide meandering stream passage which allows easy walking through pools and up waterfalls, with just a bit of hands and knees work through an ancient roof fall where there were signs of lead mining. Fifteen minutes later and the easy going was over, for on our right, a stream entered a low tube; the connection with Dowbergill Passage.

Bill led the way, he was the only one with a description, and we were soon wading and swimming our way into a rapidly enlarging chamber between displays of coloured flowstone. The passage narrowed briefly and we were obliged to duck under the water to pass the constriction; wetter than last time.

That was then, this is now.

As a dream, strangely disconnected from reality, we wade and float onwards, neck deep, silent, save for our waves slopping and clucking peevishly beneath the undercut walls of the passage, until suddenly our way is blocked by a huge chockstone which extends down into the water. I flounder to the front and float my feet under it but the water is well up and I can't feel the other side of the constriction without submerging my head. I vaguely remember climbing down at this point on our previous trip and dropping into the water, so we opt to climb up which is much easier said than done, for dropping down a smooth rift is one thing, climbing it in wet suits and wellies is another. By back and footing at a thin crease, I get into position where I can traverse onto the obstruction, about 20 feet above the stream. Bill and Adey help Marilyn up to this easier traverse line and we are soon all in position on the obstruction, high above the water.

At this level, by the combined strength of our lamps, we can just make out

sections of false floor, formed by wedged blocks leading away into the darkness. Between the blocks are holes down to the stream. We opt to stay at this level, at least for the time being.

Marilyn is an experienced climber, but there, in the black and wet rift passage of Dowbergill, I think we found something that in her climbing career she'd so far managed to avoid, and that was chimneying, or in this case, rifting.

On and on, four travellers outside of time. For soon it seems that there has been no other existence but this, all else is of no consequence, back and foot, back and knees, sometimes bridging, other times facing forwards and supported by the hips, but slowly, very slowly, for Marilyn is finding the technique difficult and we all take turns in encouraging her. Bill, like a newscaster with his autocue running in reverse, makes valiant attempts to decipher the route description. It was written for a party coming the other way, and between us we manage to force features in the passage to fit the description, though we must have passed Hardy's Horror three times. An 800 yard chamber, which is described as being 28 feet wide, never actually materialises. I try to recollect my previous trip but it is hopeless, the little grey cells are either deteriorating faster than I thought or we are at a different level, disorientated, like rats in a vertical maze. At times we make easy progress along false floors high in the silence of the rift, and at others we are able to get down to stream level and force our way against the hissing, roaring water, but inevitably the passage narrows down to a squeeze and the water dams up in front of the leading caver, making progress impossible and necessitating a climb and a return to traversing.

Three hours into the cave and I suspect we are nowhere near past the difficulties; committed, but wasn't that why we came? Going back with Marilyn, retracing our way through the rift so recently hard gained seems unacceptable. We are bound to end up somewhere different anyway. Continuing into the difficult unknown draws us on. Better the devil you don't know than the one you do.

Well ahead at this point, I sit down on a conveniently shaped chockstone to wait for the others, turn out my lamp and soak up the darkness: so quiet high in the rift there is barely a sound, so rare these days, primordial, as it's been for a million years. Far, far away the sounds of the water and of voices, are difficult to separate, they seem like one and the same, ripples in a stream. For a time I am convinced that I hear other voices, a party coming from the other way perhaps? But no, just the sound of a distant torrent. Eyes open, eyes closed, there's no difference and I find myself half dozing, dreaming, miles away on a warm sunlit hillside. How much light from one of these cells? Six hours, seven hours maybe, that means half gone and no spare, stupid! I resolve to buy one before a next trip and in the meantime will try and manage on the small bulb instead of main beam some of the time.

From out of the darkness of Dowbergill Passage there drifts a shriek followed by a pause and a far off splash. I know what's happened, Marilyn has fallen through the rift into the stream. A prickle of sweat — what if she's injured? She must have gone 30 feet or more. I traverse back along the rift and at a widening I can see down to the stream where there's a flicker of a head torch followed by a small resolute figure, pushing her way upstream. We coax her back up to our platform, hat and glasses awry but no serious injuries: too tired, she had been

unable to keep herself back and foot across the rift and had slipped from her helpers' grasp.

From here, the rift has taken on a very awkward width and it seems unlikely that Marilyn will be able to traverse it. I make an exploratory foray for a few hundred feet and only just make it back to safety, desperate, no toe holds and really wide back and footing. Bill climbs up to a level and pronounces things possibly better. Adey and I help Marilyn up to the new level with some difficulty, and, had the situation not been a little worrying, it would have been comic. Back and footing across the rift, Marilyn climbs up to me until she could stand on my shoulders, then, with Adey lifting her up by an armpit, I push her feet up until she can find purchase. Once at Adey, there is a sort of rubberised wrestling match which, had we had a video camera would probably have sold well in the Whip and Wellie Weekly. Established at the new level there does seem to be less holes and more in the way of a false floor.

Five hours and we're still in the rift, six hours and we're down at the stream again, which is no wider and littered with huge boulders, which we have to climb over, or, by lying in the stream, under. Suddenly I recognise a length of old rope that Bob and I had used to climb into the upper part of the rift last year, surely we were nearly past the difficulties. Spirits lift, the passageway becomes still broader, occasionally blocked by rockfall which forces us to make scrambly diversions in ancient oxbows, long forsaken by the stream. Bill makes the description fit something at once, Bridge Cavern, well yes, it's got a sort of bridge consisting of tottering blocks and though it's not quite as big as the description suggests it will do nicely, thank you. Six and a half hours, where's that connection with Providence Pot? The description says Stalagmite Corner, here are stalagmites but no corner, the passage runs straight as a die though we poke and prod around in vain hope. We press on, all tired now, Marilyn particularly so, tripping and stumbling at times, glasses and hat at strange angles, but still grinning. At last, a corner with stalagmites and there on the left, the low passage leading into Providence Pot, a quarter of a mile to go. From the clean, water-washed Dowbergill we enter the steep, muddy confines of Providence Pot, but now, who cares about a little mud?

Seven and a half hours and we can smell the outside air, clean and fresh with a hint of sheep. A flat crawl soon leads to an easy climb up a shaft through boulders supported by scaffolding poles, to the lid which caps the entrance. The cave nearly has the last laugh, the lid won't hinge open, it takes some seconds to realise that it swings to the side.

Outside, it's dark except for a thin moon over the moors. Someone says, 'easy day out for a lady!' and I dodge a badly aimed tackle bag. Laughing and chattering now, we head for the lights of Kettlewell far below.

The party consisted of CC members Chris Jackson, Bill Wintrip, Adey Hubbard and Marilyn Small.



# Obituary

## *John H. Longland*

1954 - 1991

An impressive number of members have offered their appreciations of John Longland, who died at Christmas 1991. These bear eloquent testimony to the very high regard in which he was held by the Club. The first two, in obituary style, precede and complement the essentially personal tributes. Ed.



*John Longland*

John Longland died on Christmas Eve 1991, aged 55, after an illness of some three months. He was the first of four children of Jack (now Sir Jack) and Peggy Longland. He started to climb in his early teens and was elected to the Climbers' Club in 1954 at the age of 18. In the same year, he went up to Cambridge and joined the CUMC, becoming President in his third and final year (1956-7). At the end of that year, he was a member of an expedition of seven climbers, including three from Cambridge, all of whom reached the summit of Pumasillo in the Peruvian Andes. He remained in South America for almost two years, returned to England, carried out National Service in the army and then joined Unilever, for whom he worked until 1981, mainly in the UK but with a period in South America. He held several offices in the Climbers' Club between 1963 and 1984, including being a Vice-President (1982-84). Thereafter he was elected an Honorary member.

Although John was not a very active climber in his later years when he was serving the Club, the picture was very different in the mid '50s. I have written an article in this issue of the Journal recalling our climbs together at that time. For John, those climbs were part of a concentrated and productive run of climbing between 1954 and 1957, especially the first of those three years. A highlight was an historic occasion in 1955 when he led Jack up *Longland's Climb* for Jack's fiftieth birthday.

In the mid 1950s climbers were still shod in bendy gymshoes; running belays had not reached anywhere near their current level of sophistication and frequency per pitch; and the Peter Harding generation VSs and HVSs were the upper limit of most climbers' aspirations (although soon to be replaced by the Rock & Ice routes). During that period, John brought technique, strength, determination and judgement to bear on all his climbs. By the standards then prevailing, he was a promising young climber.

Nobody who knew John at that time could fail to wonder why that promise was not fulfilled for longer and more abundantly. Was it an after-effect of my own fall from *Phantom Rib*? (See the main article). Was it an exaggerated fear of failing, in the covert competitive aspect of climbing that lurks in many of us from time to time? Or did he lose his commitment for other reasons? For all his extroversion, he did not reveal everything about himself.

But does it matter? Nobody *has* to climb hard for a specified number of years or routes. Climbing should be for fun. Nevertheless, the peak performance of an athlete in general and a climber in particular is a profoundly important part of his whole life. For John, that peak came early.

When John died, his family arranged a wake. In so far as any such occasion can be happy, it was a happy occasion. Everybody agreed that it was how John would have wished it to be. We extend our sympathy to all three generations of the Longland family.

*Ted Maden*

Way back in 1964, when the Climbers' Club was a much more reserved institution than it is now, and I was an aspirant member summoned to attend a Club meet 'to get to know more members', John Longland was the first person I met who bucked the trend and put me at ease. The Assistant Secretary — as he then was — was seated in a corner at the PYG radiating bonhomie, and he instinctively started chatting away about friends, relatives and the CUMC, of which he had

been President some years before. Without any prompting, he offered to support my application, did so, and a few weeks later wrote to tell me I was in. His ready encouragement to a near stranger made a lasting impression, and the cheerfulness I then saw in him never seemed to desert him, whatever the circumstances, even in our last conversation just a few days before he died.

For various compelling reasons, not least his own lengthy posting to Colombia, we did not meet properly again until the late '70s. John had by then also been Secretary briefly, Journal Editor for two years, and was currently Treasurer. We talked at the Lakes' meet in 1979, he persuaded me to offer my services as Hon. Secretary, and so began our concurrent terms of office, which ran through to 1982. During this time, we conversed and corresponded more or less daily, I think without a single cross word. And the credit for that is his.

The greatest tangible achievement of that period was the realisation of a hut in Pembrokeshire, following much discussion and quite a lot of pressure from within the membership. It was certainly John who made the whole thing feasible, with his clarity and conviction in Committee, and his skilled but amiable negotiations for funds with the various parties including the two Sports Councils; and helped by his alertness to Welsh sensibilities, on which he was further assisted by his friend and mentor, Wynford Vaughan Thomas. When May Cottage was officially opened later, by Wynford, in the presence of key members of the local community, I suspect it gave John particular and lasting satisfaction.

He served as Vice-President of the Club from 1982-84, but the early '80s were not easy times for John, either professionally when he was declared redundant after serving Unilever for many years, or in his personal life, which ultimately led to his moving from Cheshire to work for Sir Peter Scott at Slimbridge. These circumstances of the moment were also instrumental in his not being nominated for Presidency of the Club, perhaps an inevitable disappointment, but one which he faced up to with impressive equanimity.

All of this, however, did enable our own friendship to develop further. John visited us regularly *en route* between Chester and Bakewell, and we were constantly delighted by the sparkle of his conversation and the breadth of his interests and experiences outside the world of climbing. He had a prodigious appetite for non-carping and highly informed conversation about who's who, and whenever he came to see us, one of the few ways of reducing him to silence was to place the current edition of that publication under his nose, and a full glass or cup in his hand.

I have a range of impressions of John which bear ample witness to the variety of his long-standing talents. The young scholar from The Dragon who went on to Oundle and to his father's Cambridge college. The man whose total devotion to all of his large family, and pride in his forebears, could never ever be doubted. A ready and sympathetic link between climbing generations — something the CC has rather tended to lack. The promising medical student who opted successfully to transfer to the world of industry. A man who loved languages and, what is more, the opportunity to use them — not, until recent years, a very fashionable thing to do. The young National Service officer in Germany, slipping over (when it could still be done) for an evening at the StaatsOper in East Berlin. The smiling member of the Pumasillo team. The charismatic and fulfilled teacher of young people when, more recently, he was working on the YOPS training scheme in



Cheshire. And possibly sharpest of all, the slightly built first year undergraduate, still in his teens, forcing his way up through the slate and the overhangs on the first ascent of *Helsinki Wall*, in the finest of family traditions.

Within the Club, of course, John's undisputed contributions were enormous, firstly in the succession of key offices each of which he held with distinction, and also in his mastery of cajoling people (like myself) into doing things in the Club context which they might not otherwise have done. So his indirect influence on the welfare of the Club was a whole extra dimension. Coupled with this, at the time of his death, his father, brother, son and cousin were all CC members. All of this bears witness to a record of service to the Club, and an affinity with it, which seems unlikely ever to be beaten: and thus we are all losers now.

*Richard Owen*

John was an outstanding teacher of climbing, and a very important person in my life, as well as being my cousin. His own confidence and certainty of success were infectious, and in the golden days of the late '50s and early '60s, he enthused a generation of young people to climb for pleasure. A 'phone call from John always seemed to lead to some new experience or adventure. There were memorable family days in the sun at Brassington and large, unruly parties up the Hound's Head Pinnacle. John, with Nick his brother, were mainly responsible for my own introduction to climbing. In due course this led us to the Alps, my first visit and I think John's last, in 1963. Our subsequent arrival, with Mark Vallance, at the top of the Aiguille Dibona coincided with the revelation that abseiling had not been on my curriculum thus far. Typically, John saw this as a splendid opportunity rather than a problem; what better place to learn? In moments I was suitably briefed and over the edge.

John's horizons drew in over the years, but his enthusiastic planning for the future continued even through his last illness. As his father wrote of him in *The Times*, he left many friends.

*Martin Sinker*

I think it was because Alf Bridge was one of John's godfathers that I found myself bivouacing in winter on Kinder Scout, John being then about 10 years old. I remember little else about that day other than trudging about in the mud and wet mist until we found what John cheerfully dubbed 'The Kinder Overflow' — better known to others as the Downfall.

He next came into my life at Easter 1950 when, with his father, Alan Hargreaves and his son Richard, Bryan Hilton-Jones, and Trevor Morris we assaulted the East Peak of Lliwedd. I was nursing an unbendable leg into use again and John, aged 14, with enduring kindness, took it upon himself to find the easiest way for me!

He clambered easily over the rocks, talking constantly, and made what could have been a long and painful day into one of my most cherished memories.

When John was still a teenager we found that we were lost in Cwm Silyn. We were trying to find some ancient and forgotten route during desultory work for the forthcoming guidebook to Snowdon West, and, tiring of the game, John pointed out a line which turned out to follow the edge of a dramatically trembling flake! This became *Terror Infermer*, which I think was John's earliest first ascent. At any rate, his ebullient triumph made it feel to me, like a great achievement.

There are many other climbing memories, on gritstone, in Wales and in the Alps, but I pick out one occasion. It was John leading me up an early ascent of *Helsinki Wall*, his own route at Tremadog. It was hot, and I sat belaying in a bramble bush whilst John, rarely pausing his ceaseless chat, led stylishly up what I found shortly after to be a very steep and demanding wall. He tactfully kept the rope tight for my turn, and congratulated me on my skill and ease of ascent when I landed, like a puffing grampus on the top of the cliff.

Of course, John had long been a member of the Club (introduced by Jack as someone he'd known for most of his life!). He was tireless in his work for the Club, and certainly used his astute and political mind to help me through some of the difficult times when I was President, notably the protracted negotiations for the Pembroke hut.

We could not have done without him.

*Trevor Jones*

I like to think of John as he was when I first met him in 1956, about to set off as a member of a party which, with limited experience but a wealth of talent and enthusiasm, had decided to have a tilt at a high Andean peak, Pumasillo. Their success was a quite outstanding achievement, but more important was the spirit with which they brought it off. John was the gay and carefree extrovert, and had a large part in its success. As the expedition's Patron, I will always feel a sense of pride and affection for Simon Clark's gallant band.

Later, during my term of office as President, John was still the boisterous enthusiast, and we had the opportunity of climbing together in Cornwall and Snowdonia. I recall especially an ascent of *Longland's* on Cloggy, which John led with justifiable pride and pleasure; and in a lower key, a dank and wooded route in the pass of Aberglaslyn. I still have a valued photo of John, cigarette between his lips, studying the next move on a fearsome wall of Cornish granite.

Because of his vitality and 'joie de vivre', John was a most lovable person, and there are many who, like myself, recall his memory with affection.

*John Hunt*

Tributes have been paid by many people who knew John longer than I did: I have seen what they have said, so I will keep this short.

I succeeded him as Secretary when he went to South America. When he came back, I think I was the first person to climb with him — this was on a minor CC sailing expedition to Sark, which I have written up in the Journal. The year was 1974, and he and I were climbing companions on the short but unclimbed cliffs. I was immensely flattered that he let me, a soft man, lead him, a hard man, because he had been away so long. The one climb of ours, *Oyster Catcher*, to be recorded in the Jersey and Guernsey guide, shows him as the leader. I must have encouraged him to come back to form!

But it is his personality that will live on in memories. From the early times of family meets in Cornwall to the later times when it seemed only social occasions brought us together, what always impressed me was his ability to take command of a situation or a conversation, and my realisation that he was a unique character and a long standing friend.

*Harry Sales*

# Maurice Guinness

1922 - 1991

Everyone in the Climbers' Club will have been saddened by the news that Maurice has died, although he achieved the age of 94. The Club owes him a great deal for all the things he did in the early days of his membership, many years ago.

I first met Maurice in the typical way one meets everyone in the Climbers' Club, or for that matter, in any mountaineering club. I was reading, and this dates me, Alan Hargreaves' wonderful piece 'More of Arfon' in the **Fell and Rock Journal** 1933, and was fascinated by every word, as I still should be if I came across it again. I was alone in the Smoke Room at PYG, reading this article, when a minor disturbance caused me to look up from it and there was the handsome figure of Maurice, in a scarlet flannel shirt and yellow tie, which was almost his trade mark as the years went by. He was rather angry, and I asked what was upsetting him,

"I was looking forward to a very happy afternoon," he said, "but one of the people I was with, got wedged inside *Lockwood's Chimney*. We had a frightful time getting him out, and he had to take off all his clothes, and this of course wasted the whole afternoon."

I liked all this, and I liked him — with the result that we sat talking and I offered him a drink.

"No, thank you, much too soon," he said. That was typical of climbers of the day, that if they were out on a climb they drank nothing and ate nothing until they were back in their lodging or hotel.

That brings me to the sacred subject of Maurice and Helyg. As everyone in the Club knows, or should know, it was Herbert Carr who found Helyg, then a completely dilapidated and deserted hutment, and caused the Club to buy it. The Club was in low water in those days and the labour of putting Helyg together, as it were, fell on Maurice and Herbert, who were inseparable friends, and Raymond Greene. It is known, I think, to all elderly members of the Club, that there was a ceremony of the opening of Helyg, when it was discovered that they could not get into it — that the key had been lost, so that a window had to be forced and three persons; Herbert Carr, Raymond Greene and Maurice, climbed through it in that order, forced the door open and declared the hut in action. There was a sequel to this: Maurice went back to Helyg when all this was over and slept alone in it for the first night of its belonging to the Club.

Maurice had no desire to cut a dash in the Climbers' Club, or any other club. He is the only person I know who found Switzerland a bore, and he only paid two visits to it. Of course this was mainly during the days when crossing of passes, as well as the climbing of mountains, was considered an achievement; and at that time most climbing was still guided, which would not have pleased Maurice to any extent. He settled down to steady climbing at home, with Herbert Carr and others. In Charles Evans' first book, **On Climbing**, it is Maurice who is the climber on the dust cover doing one of the big standard routes; this pleased him very much indeed, but I do not suppose he mentioned it to a soul except me.

I will end this short notice of a close friend with two typical incidents.



Maurice, David Cox and myself were out walking, and near the summit of Lliwedd we paused while they made me go to the top and touch the cairn. On my rejoining them, I produced two cans of beer which I had carried up. David took one; I myself had long abandoned drinking, and Maurice stood horrified watching the sinful drinking of beer whilst out on a mountain. David suggested that the time had come for us to return to the hotel, and Maurice announced that he would lead the descent from Lliwedd because he knew a very special route. Half-way down David remarked in a mild way,

"I don't know about you Maurice, but I do know that we are all going to fall off in a few minutes if we continue along this route."

"Good gracious! I've led you astray," said Maurice, and indeed he had. We retraced our steps to a more reasonable downward route and got safely home.

The second occasion was the last on which I was out with him. He was tired and worried, and fed up with things in general; so was another friend who had just had two years in hospital as a result of an accident on Cloggy. David, Ray Greenall and myself suggested a sporting afternoon on something simple and easy and, together with Maurice, we made our way to Little Tryfan. As everyone knows, it is hardly a climb, but it turned into a riot of entertainment. The rest of the party set off to scale the route and I sat waiting for them, having unbelievably already scaled it myself. Maurice, who for many years had had a badly crippled leg, was delighted,

"I never thought I would be on the rock again, and here I am; it's wonderful." We all enjoyed ourselves enormously, and Maurice said it was the most enjoyable afternoon he had had for 10 years. Whenever I met Maurice after that he would always refer to the happy afternoon we had all had that day.

After Maurice's death, which was a month before Christmas, I had a letter from his son Gerald, who said that his father often talked about the enjoyable conversations we occasionally had. I always got far more pleasure from them than he could possibly have got out of talking to me. And, to go back to my first meeting with Maurice already described, I myself took to wearing scarlet flannel shirts and yellow ties quite often thereafter — not perhaps a specific compliment to Maurice, but certainly as a tribute to his excellent taste.

He was an altogether delightful, very unassuming, very humorous man: someone whom one could not forget. His whole life was based on honourable behaviour and on friendship to members of the Climbers' Club, and I was proud to be one of them.

*Kevin Fitzgerald*

Editor's note: There is a very good picture of Maurice opposite p.16 in Geoff Milburn's book, **Helyg**.

# Sir Douglas Busk K.C.M.G.

*Former Member*

Douglas Busk, diplomat and mountaineer, died on 11th December 1990, at the age of 84. His career in the Foreign Service took him to posts in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, East and South Africa, North and South America, and Japan. In his last three appointments: to Ethiopia, Finland and Venezuela, he was Head of Mission. His was a remarkably varied and distinguished record. I first met him when he was the Counsellor at the Embassy in Baghdad, while I was on tour from G.H.Q. Middle East Land Forces in 1947. I was impressed with his lack of pomposity, his brisk approach to the business in hand, his forthright but friendly manner. We soon struck a mutual chord on the subject of mountaineering, the more so, since we had enjoyed similar experiences in the Alps, particularly in Graubünden and Savoie. Peter Lloyd, writing in the *Alpine Journal* 1991/2, described Busk as an 'establishment' figure. And so he was. He was educated at Eton and Oxford, and his outlook may be described as 'patrician'. His initiation into climbing began when he was at school, and continued through membership of the Oxford University MC. In his mountain autobiography *The Delectable Mountains* (1946), Busk referred to visits to Snowdonia and the Lake District, but he does not appear to have had much experience in, or enthusiasm for, British rock-climbing. The Alps were his great love. His alpine record, while not in the high register of difficulty, was certainly a respectable one for the times he was climbing in. He climbed and skied in Austria, the Oberland, Wallis (Lötschental and Zermatt), in the Kesch and Bernina regions of Graubünden. But his favourite stamping ground was around the valley of the Arve. In the 1920s and early 1930s he made a number of classic routes; on the Drus, the Verte, the Grépon and the Charmoz, the Blatière, and on Mont Blanc itself. His guide on most of these climbs was Armand Charlet of Argentière. It was a period when a number of the more gifted amateurs still chose to climb with professional guides, and Armand became a close personal friend. Their last contact was through a message which Douglas asked me to convey to Armand, when I attended the centenary celebrations of the Club Alpin Français at Chamonix in 1974. Armand was a dying man and I felt it a special privilege to fulfill this personal mission.

As a skier, Busk had grown up in an age when 'pistes' did not exist. Like myself in those days he used skis as a means of touring and climbing; he viewed with apprehension, the onset of the ski industry, the building of lifts and the arrival on the mountain scene of a growing multitude, whose obsession was with speed and competition, rather than a love of the mountains.

Beyond the Alps Busk seized every opportunity to climb provided by his tours of duty. In Iran, he climbed Demavend and the Takht-i-Suleiman; in East Africa he made two new climbs on Mount Stanley and he climbed on Table Mountain. He also climbed in the Rockies and in the Northern Andes. I have no record of his having visited mountains in the Soviet Union, but he was most helpful to me in supplying sketch maps of the Western Pamirs for our joint expedition with the Russians in that area in 1962.

## *Obituary*

I will always regret that we never met, or climbed together in the Alps, when we chanced to be in the same areas and on the same mountains in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Our only contacts were on formal and social occasions. In such circumstances, Busk could display great charm, but he was occasionally brusque, and I fancy there was a strand of intolerance in his make-up. I felt I was not seeing him at his best, in a mountain setting, which his writings about his climbs will reveal.

In retirement, Douglas Busk devoted his remaining energy to the promotion of exploration and mountaineering. He did a great job for the Alpine Club Library; he chaired the Mount Everest Foundation; he donated funds for a 'Busk' medal, to be awarded annually by the R.G.S. 'for geological and conservation research'. He chaired the committees which supported the expeditions of Bonington on Annapurna and Ward on Kongur. As a member of the latter committee, I noted that he was a tired man. I respected his decision, shortly afterwards, to withdraw from active life and spend his last years quietly with his wife, Bridget, in their Hampshire home.

*John Hunt*

## *Rennie Montague Bere*

*1928 - 1991*

"You've got to meet him Geoff. He's an incredible bloke... been all over the place... you'll love his photograph album — lots of old sepia climbing shots... he climbed with Edwards in the '30s...and he's still as keen as mustard... he just loves to talk to climbers — and you'll get cream scones and tea into the bargain."



*Rennie Bere*



That was August 1979 when Pete Whillance first told me about a wonderful old climber whom he had met recently while climbing on Compass Point. How strange that a modern top climber should have been so impressed by someone from a bygone era. I was intrigued. A few days later my steps took me to Bude where it was easy to locate the nearest house to the cliffs. Rather uneasily I pressed the doorbell and waited, not really knowing what to expect. Had I been royalty the welcome could not have been better and I was soon in front of a large jovial man whose eyes began to shine as soon as he heard I was a climber. In no time at all he was tugging on his wellingtons and mackintosh... and promptly headed off across the fields — chattering excitedly about climbers who had appeared on HIS cliff. And what about the most recent, a very impressive performer called Pete Whillance — a very cool customer who seemed quite at home on the most non-existent of holds. Such was my introduction to Rennie Bere.

Rennie, the son of a clergyman, was born in Dorset on 28th November 1907 and after education at Malborough he eventually went on to Selwyn College, Cambridge in 1926. There he joined the CUMC and was taken up his first rock climb, *Kern Knotts Chimney*, by Jack Longland. Rather fortuitously he soon befriended Ted Hicks who was to become one of the top three climbers of his generation. They cut their teeth on Cambridge roofs after dark, as well as practising on local trees — but they soon spread their wings to Wales and the Lake District in search of rock. It was while with Hicks that they found Richards' Piton on the wall above Idwal Slabs — causing Hicks to comment that, 'It should be done away with'.

After joining the CC in 1928, Rennie paid frequent visits to Helyg from his home in Shanklin, Isle of Wight, and was fortunate to be present in June 1929 when the teenager Colin Kirkus first showed his true potential. Charles Warren, leading Rennie up Tryfan, sternly told the young Kirkus to tie onto their rope, to prevent him from soloing up the cliff. Later that day Rennie was able to photograph the first ascent of *Lot's Groove*, on which only Hicks had the ability to follow Kirkus.

Perhaps Rennie would have spent more time climbing if work had not got in the way. In 1930, after a delightful spring trip to Skye with Charles Warren, Rennie joined the Colonial Service and went out as an Assistant District Officer to Uganda, near the Sudan border. He was ready to remain in Uganda for 25 years in various roles, but was also ready to return to Britain on leave, whenever the opportunity arose.

In 1932 Bere was once again in the right place at the right time, when he was introduced to Menlove Edwards. The classic opening by Edwards was, 'Are you the R.M.B. who used to climb with F.E.H.?' A strong team was soon formed for Edwards to make the second ascent of Kirkus's *Great Slab* on Cloggy. The second man, A.B. Hargreaves, commented, 'Menlove made no bones at all about that slippery little slab and the long green caterpillar'. He also recorded the third man, who weighed fully 15 stones (actually 12), made a dash at the slab then shot off into space. The man swinging in space at the end of the 150ft of line was Rennie Bere. Edwards quickly realised that the considerable weight was threatening to pluck the little man from his perch and promptly hauled Bere up a few feet using only brute strength.

Although Bere can clearly be seen as third man in the picture opposite page 22 of the book **Samson** he was not to continue further as, after his unceremonious flight, he was relegated to the ground staff. He did, however, later in the day, join

Edwards and Hargreaves to make the third ascent of *Curving Crack* — a fine consolation prize.

After the opening of the 'new' Helyg in 1935, Menlove talked Rennie into visiting his Devil's Kitchen domain for the first ascent of *Devil's Dump*:

'...the steep bit is an interesting study in mosaics. But they did not finish it off very well. Alternatively it may be regarded as an excavation of the Dump, and you get holds on the bits sticking out; it is decidedly decomposing. Herein lies the charm'.

By 1935 Rennie had moved his English base to Cornwall but was still able to attend the joint CC/OUMC meet in the Alps. Amongst several interesting outings he did a traverse of the Grépon with David Cox. That year Cox and Bere recorded the first rock climb in Devonshire — the oddly named *Climbers' Club Ordinary* on the Dewerstone. No one knows from where the name came.

1936 was to be a particularly eventful year, and when Bere married Anne Maree Barber it was to be the start of 'one long adventure with never a dull moment'. That close togetherness was to last for the next 55 years, and it was together in 1941 that Rennie and Maree had an idyllic visit to the Himalaya, when they explored Sikkim.

Rennie was promoted to District Officer in 1942 and, during the War, he took charge of a Polish refugee settlement. Several of the Poles crafted home-made crampons and ice-axes from scrap metal and eventually ascended Alexandra in the Ruwenzori — no mean achievement during war-time. Rennie too was very active during the war years and ascended Rutara in the Ruwenzori during 1942, as well as climbing Mt. Mikeno (14,565ft) in the Belgian Congo in 1944. A year later he succeeded on the Margherita Peak (16,794ft) of Mt. Stanley.

As first President of the Mountain Club of Uganda, Rennie had the vision to work towards the production of a chain of huts, which would allow future generations to have easy access to the great East African mountains.

After a quarter of a century in the Colonial Service, Rennie finished in the position of Provincial Commissioner and retired in 1955. Retirement is a joke really, as he then became the first Director and Chief Warden of the Uganda National Parks. In this capacity Rennie met several generations of the British Royal Family and escorted them round the game parks.

Eventually Rennie and Maree went to retire in Cornwall in 1960, but this merely marked yet another phase in their life together. Rennie began to write on conservation with titles such as **Wild Mammals of Uganda** (1961), **The African Elephant** (1966) and **Birds in an African National Park** (1969). The landmark for mountaineers, however, was his superb book, **The Way to the Mountains of the Moon**, which was published in 1966.

In Cornwall Rennie worked tirelessly for the local Trust for Nature Conservation and produced **Wildlife in Cornwall** (1971) before his final fine contribution **The Nature of Cornwall** in 1982.

Twelve years ago Rennie nostalgically reminisced about Helyg and his early climbing adventures — modest though they were in his opinion. After all, he wasn't a leader of the first order, but he was content to be in a supporting role, ready to back up his leader, come what may. He did, however, wish that he hadn't lost touch with the Club. Could he possibly re-join, even at his late stage in life? Of course he could — and he did. And what quiet satisfaction he got from the

Helyg Diamond Jubilee celebrations as well as from reading about current controversial issues in the great world of climbing.

In his youth Rennie was a tall, rangy, outdoor character who arrived in Africa: '...with a rifle, a pair of climbing boots and little else. The rifle dominated my spare time, exploring the country in search of game. I soon gave up shooting however, as the 'primeval instincts of the barbarian' developed into a more mature interest in animal life. The climbing boots are still with me. The climbing fever dies hard, but it was many years before I realised that high mountains have very much more to offer than the mere scaling of the heights, however great the challenge to one's physical and mental make-up'.

I can see him now, boldly forging ahead, looking for excitement... through the bush and its thorny thickets... and out amongst the great herds of the vast plains... to the high silent snows of the Ruwenzori... before disappearing from the rugged and windswept Cornish coast in search of the next great adventure. We're only one stride behind you, Rennie, my old friend. If you look back you'll see us following in your footsteps.

Geoff Milburn

## J.M.K. Vyvyan

1953 - 1991

Michal Vyvyan, who died towards the end of 1991 at the age of 83, belonged to a generation of mountaineers most of whose climbing was done in the years between the Wars and just after, so there are few who remember him.

No one seems to know how, why or where he started his climbing career but, by the time he was 25, he had four or five alpine seasons behind him. The best of these, at Chamonix in 1930 included ascents of the Peigne, Requin, *Mer de Glace* Face of the Grépon, with a new route on the Grand Gendarme, the Géant, traverses of the Charmoz-Grépon, Aiguille Verte, the Drus and the Peuterey Ridge of Mont Blanc, all with a guide, but a considerable achievement no less. He had also done a number of good routes at Zermatt and Arolla and a guideless season with A.E. Foot (who proposed him for the Alpine Club in 1933) that included a new route up the face of the Pic Coolidge.

By this time Michal had joined the Foreign Service and was stationed in Moscow where he developed a hatred of Soviet Communism that later led him to give up his diplomatic career. Shortly before the War he and Campbell Second together carried out an ultra-lightweight attempt on Rakaposhi in the Karakoram. Although they did not reach the summit this expedition was remarkable for its time, in its application of alpine climbing principles for the Himalaya.

During the War Michal served in the army, 'only in the best regiments' he used to say, including the Guards and the Commandos. After the War, he found himself hopelessly out of sympathy with allied foreign policy. He left the diplomatic service and shortly afterwards, became an history don. Then he became a fellow and tutor at Trinity, Cambridge where he lived in beautiful rooms in Neville's Court, as something of a recluse, to the end of his days.

During the late '40s and early '50s Michal had a number of seasons in the Alps.



Two of them in Bregaglia and Zermatt including some fine standard routes on the Matterhorn, the Dom and Obergablehorn, but he did little after that, as far as I am aware. Equally he did little, if any, climbing in this country. Although he joined the Club in 1953, I do not recall ever having seen or heard of him in the huts, but in later years he had a cottage in the Lakes from where he walked a lot, as he did, now and then, in Skye and elsewhere.

Although Michal was not one to 'suffer fools gladly' and had a reputation in later years for a rough edge to his tongue at home, in the mountains he was an ideal companion; courageous, intelligent, witty, unflappable and totally competent. I particularly remember a day or two I had with him in the Bernina in 1947. I was staying at Maloja with my family when Michal rang from Pontresina where he was 'in the Shport Hotel, Shporting' as he put it. He suggested we do a climb together, so a day or two later saw us plodding up to the Tschierva Hut in the hot afternoon sun, with an eye on the Roseg for the 'morrow. But when we got up at 2am, everything was shrouded in impenetrable fog and there was nothing for it but to go back to bed. Up again at 6am, we breakfasted and then, as the mist seemed to be lightening a little, decided to walk up to the col at the end of the *Bianco Ridge* of the Bernina, and cross it, if we could, to the Diavolezza where I was due to meet my wife that evening. We left at 6.30am and, as we walked up, over first path and then steepening snow, the mist gradually lightened until, when at last we reached the col, it finally dissolved into cloudless sunshine. Without a word we turned south onto the *Biancograt*. The conditions were superb, we had the mountain to ourselves and the views were magnificent. We made good time to the summit, down the *East Ridge* and over the Fortezza, to struggle up to the Diavolezza in failing light, just in time for dinner and my appointment. Next day we traversed the Palü and Bellavista to the entrancing little Marco e Rosa Hut and, the day after, over the Bernina again, down to the Boval and Pontresina.

All in all, one of the best expeditions I have ever had, made totally enjoyable by Michal's delightful and inspiring temperament.

It is for such memories that I and his other friends will always remember him and be grateful.

*Tony Dummett*

## *T.H. Sinclair*

*1945 - 1991*

I can only comment on his last 18 years during which T.H. Sinclair's mountaineering was severely restricted by asthma, but he still enjoyed being in the hills and continued to give dedicated service to mountaineering. My first contact with Hilary goes back to 1973 when Gwen Moffat and I met in his house, as the BMC's newly formed Access, Conservation and Amenity Committee.

At that time the BMC had no central activity on access and conservation: area committees simply reacted to problems. As the first Chairman of the ACAC Hilary set the agenda for BMC policy on these issues and wrote many of the BMC's representations on national level consultations. His paper on threats to mountain areas, for the BMC's Future Policy Committee in 1973, showed a brilliant

understanding of existing and, in retrospect, future problems, and contained many potential suggestions on BMC action. Hilary relinquished the Chair of the Access Committee in the late '70s, but continued as a member almost to the end, displaying the same thorough conscientiousness that had characterised his service throughout. Although not attending meetings for the last five years, he would receive and read the papers and often write in with comments. I (by now the Chairman of the Committee) always found these comments helpful and to the point. Hilary played a major part in enabling mountaineers to find a national voice, albeit less raucous than some, on access and credibility among government agencies and other representative bodies that the BMC now enjoys.

*Peter Mould*

## *W.T. Matthews*

*1949 - 1991*

Trefor Matthews, who died in October 1991, had been a member of the Climbers' Club for 43 years, having been elected in 1949. In the early years of the War he was an officer in the Royal Signals, but in 1943 he transferred to No.10 Commando, joining the troop which was commanded by Bryan Hilton-Jones, with whom he had climbed a lot in the days before the War. He would have made an ideal Commando officer (as did Bryan), but in 1944, when they were testing a new type of light nylon rope in a quarry near Arundel, the rope broke as Trefor was starting an abseil, and he fell vertically for 90ft. His injuries included a compound fracture of the right femur, fracture and dislocation of the right elbow, and compound fracture and dislocation of the right wrist. Not surprisingly this accident put an end to his military activities, and indeed to his climbing; but he always retained his love of the mountains, which he passed on to his family. He served on the CC Huts Sub-Committee 1951-53 and the CC Handbook shows him as Custodian of the R.W. Lloyd Hut during those years.

Trefor was a chartered accountant in Caernarfon, practising in the firm of W.J. Matthews and Son which had been founded by his father. He was an active and much liked figure in many aspects of Caernarfon life. Among other things, he served as a magistrate for 30 years, and as an elected member of the County Council for a long period. He was also High Sheriff of Caernarfonshire either just before or just after another CC member, Chris Briggs. Trefor was a frequent visitor to Pen-y-Gwryd, where it always made the evening if he and one or two others, who had the Welsh gift for spontaneous song in harmony, could be persuaded to get to their feet. Incidentally, he was also a keen golfer, and had been secretary of the Caernarfon Golf Club for over 40 years; it was a happy coincidence that the Matthews' lovely house, Bryn Teg, is close to the course.

He had not taken an active part in the Climbers' Club affairs for a good many years: but those members who knew Trefor were fortunate, and they will remember him as a very fine man and a notable figure in the life of North Wales.

*David Cox*

# Merfyn Gwyn Hughes

1946 - 1990

Merfyn Hughes died on 6th October 1990 after a long drawn-out illness; he had suffered from motor neurone disease since 1988, after retiring early due to a cerebral thrombosis in 1987.

He was born at Llangefni in 1928; while up at Jesus College, Oxford (1945-48) he was President of the OUMC, and was elected to membership of the Climbers' Club in July 1946. His membership of the Club was for him a means to get people to climb with, and he was not much involved with the mechanics of the Club or Club life — though he was an enthusiastic member of the sub-committee on the Welsh nomenclature of crags which operated in the '60s. His climbing, and his personality are best dealt with by several members of the Club who had close contact with him; what they write about him is given below.

*John Neill*

In many ways war for young men is a stultifying period; there is little freedom or chance for enterprise, and friendships are often broken violently. From such an experience I came to Oxford in 1947 and soon met Merfyn. He was a very proud Welsh young man, fresh from school, but wholly relaxed and at home among all ranks of Oxford society. Besides this easy manner he could inspire us all to heightened endeavour; he led from in front with climbs such as his brilliant *Overlapping Wall* on Carreg Wastad made in 1948, an XS. This mention of standards is largely by-the-way, for Merfyn was, above all, a total mountaineer, always happy and at one with the hills and wilder places; he was patient with the novice and enjoyed a scramble on easy ground just as he did the exertion needed on more demanding slopes. When, in later years, we went together to Baltistan in 1961 on an RAF Mountaineering Association expedition, he demonstrated the unselfish delight he always took when climbing, by joining the survey party instead of one of the assault teams.

Merfyn was a powerful and charming influence, able to confer some of his sparkle on his lucky companions.

*John Sims*

A first impression of Merfyn Hughes was that he was, indubitably, Welsh. His face was thin and pallid, with a pointed jaw. He had a shock of intensely black hair. He was tall and appeared to be frail. He had sensitive hands with very long fingers. His garb was a cut-down Burberry (very fashionable at the time) and tired-looking breeches. His voice had a marked Welsh cadence.

When he introduced himself I knew at once who he was, for he had a considerable reputation as a rock-climber. His climbs in Wales, particularly in the Llanberis Pass, were of the very hardest for the time. I found out that he was at Oxford and, because of his background and current situation, was on the fringe of the groups from Manchester, Liverpool and the Midlands which, in 1950, were dominating the advance of climbing in Wales.



I was having a cup of tea at 'Merfyn's Shack' at Ogwen when he shambled up and began talking. The day was terrible (as were most days in 1950) but the weather began to clear, and after about half an hour Merfyn suggested that we climb *Marble Slab* on Bochlwyd Butress. What happened next left an impression on me which is as vivid today as it was 42 years ago. Remember that I am writing of the days of nails, and particularly of a day when the slab was really wet. Merfyn climbed without a pause — or rather — he floated up. His only attachment to the rock seemed to be by the very tips of his fingers and his toes; it was if he had a bag of hydrogen beneath his jacket. I could see feet of space between his body and the rock, and was sure that, had a stray gust of wind come along, he would have been off. Yet there was never a sound or scrape from his boots. Later I followed, and kept thinking, 'How did he do this?' I slithered and scraped up with a very tight rope, and realised what super skill — not strength — coupled with great determination had given him his totally merited reputation.

We climbed together that year during gaps in the pouring rain, and I got to know Merfyn better — though not well, for his was an elusive personality; he was essentially a very private person. He was greatly influenced by his brother-in-law, Bryan Hilton-Jones (also a member of the Club), who was tragically killed in a car accident in Spain not long afterwards. I think Merfyn was deeply affected by Bryan's death; certainly he seemed thereafter to lose some of the fierceness of his interest in climbing.

Merfyn Hughes was never an alpinist or climber of big mountains, but he was undoubtedly a great rock-climber of his age.

*Ralph Jones*

My only climb with Merfyn was *Lockwood's Chimney*; I wish there had been many more such climbs.

I was glad to be able to spend an hour or two on each of three or four occasions with Merfyn when his illness was well advanced. His mind was, as ever, crystal clear. He was in correspondence with Stephen Hawking, both being prominent members of the Motor Neurone Society, with, of course, a common professional ground in physics. Merfyn seemed to enjoy our one-way conversations; I hope they helped a bit to relieve the tedium of practically total physical incapacity.

Merfyn was a staunch friend, a patient tutor, a worthy son of Wales. We who knew him will remember him with affection; he was in every way a good and gentle man.

*George Robertson*

I first met Merfyn at Helyg during Easter 1948; he had joined the Club a year or two earlier via the OUMC and his natural ability and drive on rock ensured his becoming one of the most able climbers of my generation. However, very few first ascents meant he was to remain one of its unsung 'heroes', though such a title would have been quite in-ap in those days for anyone capable of leading the hardest routes. MGH, at that time, was certainly one who could and did do so. He climbed on the Llanberis Pass cliffs as early as 1946 when they were virtually unknown and considered as preserves of supermen like Menlove Edwards, too vegetated, too steep and too difficult: Merfyn added a direct finish to *Pharoah's Wall* on Dinas Cromlech. It was two years before he recorded another first ascent

— of *Cobweb Wall* on Craig yr Ysfa. However, his major contribution to Welsh climbing was a solo ascent of *Overlapping Wall*; extremely hard for its day, it was one of only three XS climbs in the first Llanberis guide. In 1949, the *Spectre*, on Clogwyn y Grochan had remained unrepeated for almost two years, acquiring a reputation which was perhaps unjustified. Merfyn led myself and Peter Hodgkinson up the second ascent of *Spectre* and then led us down *Phantom Rib*, as VS route which had only just received its first ascent! A few days later we did the first ascent of *Unicorn* on Carreg Wastad, almost a companion to *Overlapping Wall*, but only VS.

In 1950 MGH organised his own little expedition to the High Atlas resulting in a few new peak ascents and in the following year I think I managed to persuade him to take over the journal's New Climbs and Notes. In this day and age, when nearly everyone is doing difficult climbs, it is hard to imagine the position at the end of the 1940s, when the climbers in Wales, and in the Lakes, who could do the very hardest routes, were counted on the fingers of one hand — but MGH was certainly one of them. Generally quiet, somewhat aloof in Helyg, but outspoken when the occasion demanded, Merfyn was a climbers' Climbers' Club member and so came in for criticism from a few of the Club's older, less active mandarins. In the hills and on the crags he was a great companion at any end of the rope.

*Peter Harding*

## *Tristram Spence*

1981 - 1991

The death of Tristram Spence, from cancer I believe, was doubly tragic as it followed the death, some years ago, of his older brother, Oliver, also from cancer. The Spence family were architects in Newcastle and Charles, the father, was a great fell walker and well-known to an earlier generation of climbers. The family was, from time to time, to be found at the late 'Annie Burns' Wood House' on Crummock Water, a favourite resort of many well-known climbers of the past.

In late April 1971 on the High Level Route from Chamonix to Zermatt I was with a party of eight which included four from Newcastle who knew the Spence family, and by strange coincidence Oliver, Tristram and a friend, accompanied by a member of the Climbers' Club (Dick Sykes) were doing the ski tour at the same time, and from time to time our routes would converge. I remember on the fifth day, while we struggled through a storm from the Chanrion to the Dix Hut they had taken the Otemma Glacier and had the usual epic finding the Vignettes Hut, and how after a day stormbound in our respective huts we had continued in now perfect weather again over the Pas de Chevre, and how, as we climbed to the Vignettes we followed descending ski tracks which we later found were made by two members of the Spence party descending for the day to Arolla to renew their provisions.

We met up with them again at the Col du Mont Brulé. While all the other parties were zigzagging, skinning, kick turning and finally walking to the top, the Spence party went straight to the foot of the centre of the shallow couloir, put on their crampons and walked straight up to the top, a magnificent demonstration of how

the job ought to be done.

Our last meeting was at the foot of the *Zmutt Ridge* of the Matterhorn on the long descending traverse down to Zermatt, and by then we had learned a lot from this happy little band of almost carefree enthusiasts.

The club offers its condolences to all the members of this sadly bereaved family.  
*Ivan Waller*

## *L.G. Farnell*

*1936 - 1991*

We have also been informed of the death of our member, Leonard Farnell, by his son, Tim.

Leonard died on 28th June 1991 at the age of 82. He was elected in August 1936, having been proposed by G.H. Kirkus (Colin's brother) and was a continuous member until his death. But he had not been an actual climber for many years. However, his pre-war climbing activities were many. He climbed in Norway, Switzerland and France as well as the usual UK mountaineering centres (N. Wales, Lakes, Skye etc.) There cannot be many nails and hemp men left!



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# Reviews

**Eyes to the Hills**  
Constable 1991

by Gordon Stainforth  
Price £19.95

All the reviews of Gordon Stainforth's magical photographic journey through the mountain landscape of Britain have been unanimous in their praise. The Guardian's reviewer going so far as to call it 'simply the best book of British landscape photography you are ever likely to see'. I'm not familiar with the whole range of landscape photography, but it's certainly the best volume on our mountains that I've ever come across, and will stand comparison with anything published on the Alps, Himalaya et al.

The majority will probably acquire it solely for the pictures, and with page upon page of memorable images of our hills in all their ever-changing moods, who can blame them? The best of these being perfect realisations of the author's aim to 'levitate the camera' and make us see as from a 'disembodied flying eye'. Look at 'Schiehion rising above a sea of cloud' (p.134/5), 'Rannoch Moor after a snowstorm' (p.102/3), or 'looking down on the meanders of the Ulladale river' (p.152) and you'll see what I mean. The last of these has a texture of wet grass and sphagnum so real it makes you want to plunge your arms into it right up to the elbows!

But this is so much more than a beautiful coffee table book, and the superbly realised juxtaposition of text and image will surely encourage even the most dilatory reader into the text — an exploration of our response to the mountain landscape over the last 250 years. Despite the author's dry and academic style, it is rarely less than stimulating, and his choice of quotations could well re-awaken interest in some of his original sources. Not that mountains are always seen as picturesque or beautiful; look at Ruskin's description of an alpine scene as 'a slippery glutinous heap... like a beach of black scales of dead fish...!'

My criticisms are few indeed: although the sweeping condemnation of 'tick lists' and their innocent pleasures seems rather hard, are Munroists really only interested in climbing Munros any more than **Hard Rock** tickers only climb routes found in **Hard Rock**?

The text ends with a plea for a self-examination of how we treat this most precious resource — our planet — from the chipping of holds, to how we place our feet when walking in the hills. Certainly, if anything is likely to awaken our sense of being temporary wardens of such wonderful/terrible places, it's pictures such as these. And, if the author's premise that 'we cannot see a mountain landscape properly without being involved in it' has any truth, they in turn, will send us back to our sources.  
*Al Churcher*

**Island at the Edge of the World**  
Hodder and Stoughton 1991

by Stephen Venables  
Price £16.99

This is Stephen Venables' third book. His previous two, **Painted Mountains** and **Everest - Kangshung Face** were about his Himalayan expeditions. In his latest book, the author takes us, with his four companions, to a completely different world. The 'island' is South Georgia, which made the world headlines briefly during the Falklands War of 1982.

Stephen writes well about his climbing, but equally well about 'extra-mural' matters. This book is no exception. Do not expect a book purely about mountaineering. There is much more about the problems of survival on this wind-blasted island, close to Antarctica, with a climate not unlike the nearby Cape Horn and Patagonia, infamous for their storms.

He includes a comprehensive account of the island's history, from the rise and fall of the whaling industry, Shackleton's legendary escape here from Antarctica, to the more recent involvement in the 1982 conflict with Argentina. He also writes sensitively about the natural history and ecology — from his contact with local species to a more general discussion about the future of the Antarctic region — with the conflicting pressures of exploitation for minerals and tourism, and wilderness preservation.

A cynic would say that all this extra writing was necessary because insufficient climbing was done to fill a book. True, but this does not matter if the other subjects interest you: it is all relevant and highly readable.

I did find the first two or three chapters quite distasteful, with the unashamed pursuit of contacts in high places, and the long list of hyphenated surnames and military ranks. But the truth is that the trip would have been impossible without the help of the armed forces, and such help does not come as a matter of course. I suppose I should really be complimenting the author for his honesty about this: I think it was the need for all this creeping that annoyed me, not the writing about it.

Later in the book, my attention was sometimes distracted from the narrative by the frequent diversions into history etc., but these regular interruptions did put the extra material into context within this expedition.

What about the actual climbing? The mountains of South Georgia do not rate amongst the world's highest or hardest to climb, but they do have their own problems of access and unstable weather. The party spent much time walking in, and holed up in a palatial snowcave they had built. It seems that they did solve the twin psychological problems of 'switching off' for the long days of enforced idleness, and then rapidly 'switching on' again when the weather gave a brief respite. They made the first ascents of two major mountains and several lesser bumps, including the island's highest unclimbed peak, Mount Carse (7,645 ft). I found Stephen's account of the latter ascent especially poignant, seizing the day (and night) with a fine piece of opportunism before the storms closed in again.

Dave Wilkinson

**Limestone - 100 Best Limestone Climbs in Britain**  
Cicerone Press 1991

by Chris Craggs  
Price £19.95

My immediate reaction to this book was that I wanted to see it. The simplicity of the concept — 100 limestone routes — was appealing: why had no one thought of it before?

A quick look at the contents page excited recollections of happy days. Various of the pictures brought a smile of recognition: routes pegged (I often start at the back of a book) routes led, routes shared, routes despaired. Mr Craggs had selected worthy routes, powerful lines in their own right. He had also met his own criteria: 'a clearly defined physical feature... inescapable at the grade... finish on the cliff top'. Gradings appear sensible and safe.

It was evident that the author had devoted a huge effort to this enterprise, and sufficiently inspired a faithful and much illustrated team to achieve its realisation. His acknowledgement to them is surely well made.

A closer look was merited — at the pictures, the text, and to consider what more general statement the book made about the passion of climbing.

Perhaps coffee tables have got smaller. I wanted bigger pictures. Only 12 were full page. Others, like *Crithmum* or *Scoop Wall*, were stunningly small. But did they capture the atmosphere of routes I had done, or inspire me to try others I had not? Too often they did not. Nothing for example of the towering vegetative grandeur of Cheddar is apparent from the picture of *Coronation Street*: no hint of that compelling line. Perhaps one picture per route is not a happy compromise. The image presented is overwhelmingly of rock, of endless sunshine, of a masculine world. Moves feature more strongly than routes: the illustration of *George* might be anywhere. Landscape is too often excluded, and this belies the intention to select 'a clearly defined physical feature'. The general views in the Introduction are pleasing, but are not enough to redress the balance. For all the considered positioning of climbers in many of the shots, the images are no match for the identically priced, larger formatted, Christmas released *Eyes to the Hills* by Gordon Stainforth.

I should have preferred to find the pictures on the same page as the text. This, like the pictures, did bear the stamp of authority. Mr Craggs had really been there. Yet I felt on balance that the climbs found more eloquent expression in the pictures than in the text. The more I read, the less I saw the point of it: what was the book getting at?

My conjecture was that with many of the routes at E2 or above - and for limestone there may be an degree of inevitability about that bias — the majority of chosen lines might not be accessible to the majority of potential purchasers of the book. The format is surely too large for a guidebook, yet the text is essentially a series of access and extended route descriptions, even down to what runners to take, and, for the harder routes, where to put them. I did not find this detail terribly rivetting. For routes I'd climbed, I knew the answer; for those I'll never do I really do not care that much; for those I might do, I'm not really sure I want to be told. It takes the adventure out of climbing. An alternative approach,



adopted by **Hard Rock** — essays of an experience based around a route — must be of more general appeal, and speak of an experience that could be better shared or imagined by others. True, there are interesting snippets of historical information, and the occasional discourse on something else (flowers for *Machete*, the beach for *Heaven's Door*, geology for *Bow Shaped Slab*) but even with this variety 100 vignettes by the same author become tedious. Duplication of information in Description and Essay do not help, and neither does sloppy, slang or macho language: 'getting a nut in is a real fart' (*Moonchild/Lumatic*). There is need to be wary of one or two references which reflect the author's ability, rather than the likely experience of the novice leader at the grade: *George* and *Manzoku* are two examples.

My conclusion was less happy than my first impression. I regretted too the lack of any central reference to the environment. There are helpful references to nesting birds, a healthy respect for the sea, but cautionary remarks on flora (*Machete*) are largely negated by comment elsewhere (*Laughing Cavalier*). Climbers are not alone in enjoying limestone. It is not exclusively ours — indeed we own none of the routes described. For botanists, for ornithologists, for those who simply enjoy the spectacle, it is a special delight which climbers do nothing to enhance. We live in an overcrowded country. It is only by inspiring a wider appreciation of our sport, and by manifesting some comprehension of the points of view of others that we will secure for the future the opportunities and general freedom of access (albeit hard won, and bitterly lost in some cases) we have in the main enjoyed in our time. This book fails to develop its potential to contribute to a wider debate which we ignore at our peril.

Nonetheless it is a significant book, and a considerable achievement for Mr Craggs and his team. I hope they will return to the fray — but for gritstone may we have 101 routes for the same price?

Henry Folkard

**The First Fifty; Munro-bagging without a Beard**  
Mainstream Publishing

by Muriel Gray  
Price £12.99

According to the jacket blurb, Muriel Gray is evidently a 'controversial television presenter and principled newspaper columnist' and the style of this book smacks of TV chat-shows and the tabloids; it is certainly not tedious. Short chapters on walking, scrambling, climbing or just bagging a selection of Munros (she makes an issue out of the differences) are interspersed with short chapters on such topics as 'Going into an Outdoor Shop', 'What's in your Rucksack' and so on, which enable her to make numerous quips and comments, some of which are quite funny, even to a boring old chap like me. The bit about 'being without a beard', by the way, is because she sees the Scottish mountains being dominated by bearded, smelly men and she would like to see more women there.

Apart from the bagging, she is not averse to a bit of de-bagging. About the mountains of Assynt she writes 'I fancied Assynt... if (it) was a boy I'd have knocked it down to the ground with a rugby tackle and pulled its trousers down years ago'. She 'wouldn't say no if a boyfriend were to slip naked into one of those clanking climbing harnesses after a hot bath and a glass of wine', but, thank goodness, advises 'don't expect to have sex in a bothy'. Gender or sex pops up (oops) quite frequently in these pages although it is often at an undergraduate sort of level: 'You remember your first mountain in much the same way you remember your first sexual experience, except that walking doesn't make as much mess and you don't cry for a week when Ben Nevis forgets to phone next morning', for example.

Her descriptions of days on the hills are weighted towards the human incidents experienced on them. The South Kintail Ridge becomes a race against another party of walkers, while an account of an ascent of Schiehallion is dominated by her smashing her own vacuum flask on her current boyfriend's head because, at her own request, she was left behind while the others continued to the top. On another ascent she sees another couple of walkers and makes a great issue out of the fact that they fail to say 'Hello'. If she was dressed as she is on the front cover of the book then I can't say I'm too surprised: they could well have thought that she had wandered away from a funfair or escaped from Disneyland.

Exaggeration is a key ingredient in the humour but it is somewhat over the top e.g. 'In the time it takes to get the better of this slope, you could raise a family and marry them off'. I've been up and down Ben Nevis about 20 times but never yet seen anybody going up there carrying 'a flat-pack fitted kitchen, a Liberty print sofa bed or a nest of tables' which she implies is a regular occurrence. 'Clods in caravans' can be frequently spotted, as can 'rich, fat dick-heads out to kill things for fun'. As for the photographs, I almost forgot to mention that there are 52 of them — a mixture of black and white, and colour. A few of them very good, some of them diabolically bad. To use a bit of Muriel Gray style hyperbole, the bad

ones look as if they were originally out-of-focus prints which were then enlarged through the bottom of a bottle. Of the 52 pictures, no less than 23 (eight of them full page) are of, guess who: our authoress, Muriel Gray herself. So if you failed to grasp that this book is somewhat heavy on the cult of the personality from the text, you could hardly fail to notice it from the photographs.

I'm afraid the proof reading slipped up a bit too. Gore-Tex is consistently spelt Gortex, Chris Bonington acquires another 'n', Liathach loses an 'h' and tourists 'pour over' information leaflets. It is all part of the impression of everything having been dashed off at break-neck speed. Somehow, however, a genuine love of the hills does manage to come across; some glimpses of the splendour of the highlands shine through and I must say that, on the whole, I greatly enjoyed reading this book because it is certainly different. I just hope I never meet the authoress on the hill.

Bob Allen

**Hillwalking in Wales - Volumes 1 & 2**  
Cicerone Press 1991

by Peter Hermon  
Price £6.95 each

This is a most useful guide and £6.95 is a reasonable price nowadays, but beware — you must get both volumes. The alphabetical arrangement puts the Brecon Beacons and the Carneddau in vol.1, Snowdon and Ffforest Fawr in vol.2. Is this an indication that the author and publisher know what they are doing, or that they don't? Probably the former.

The descriptions of the walks known to the reviewer cannot be faulted. They contain enough detail, but are not fussy, and are accompanied by comments on the surroundings that show that writing the guide was indeed a labour of love. It's a pity that the photographs are mostly uninspiring.

The coverage extends to all hills over 2,000 feet, plus some lower level walks in the same areas. There are mountain groups I couldn't place — the Tarrens, the Hirnants, the Cwmdeuddwr Hills — providing much scope for enjoyable walking when the weather or the state of the party rule out rock. The most notable exclusion under the height rule is perhaps the Clwydian range, north of Llangollen.

Unusually, there is no section on 'how to walk', nothing on footwear or other gear, map reading or coping with emergencies. This is not meant as a criticism, but it would have been better if the dangers of the Welsh hills had been underlined. The introduction mentions winter conditions very briefly and the Carneddau section carries a warning that 'potentially lethal' Arctic weather may occur, but there is little or nothing to indicate to fair-weather walkers just how dangerous Crib Goch or the Zigzags can be. There are plenty of people around who need such warnings.

Mike Westmacott

**Bosigran and the North Coast**  
Climbers' Club 1991

by Des Hannigan  
Price £10.95

The CC has produced the first of its two new Cornwall guidebooks. **Bosigran and the North Coast** is to be joined in a few months by **Chair Ladder and the South Coast**. In a break with tradition, Des Hannigan, a local climber, has written both volumes.

Both guides will contain the same historical sections (it would be impossible to separate them anyway!) and this is well written, well researched and very inspiring. Hannigan records the leaps and bounds of Cornish climbing, from the early explorations made by copper and tin miners in the 18th century, right up until the works of the Edwardses in the 1990s. He handles the ethical controversies of chipping and bolting in a professional and even-handed manner, stating clearly that the aim of the guide is to 'reflect the best style matched to the ethos and traditions of British climbing'. I am sure Hannigan has the balance and tone right, but only time will tell.

The format of the guide has also changed; each crag now comes with an aspect/outlook, tidal information, coastguard identity (apparently the coastguards don't always use the same name as we do for the crags) and excellent crag location and approach details. All of these will make it much easier for visitors to find their way around, and also will inspire the more regular visitor to search out new areas — previously something which could take some time.

The routes are well described — descriptions being both accurate and informative whilst at the same time interesting and evocative '...suddenly one cannot retreat and it's fifteen feet to micro jugs...' of *Deja Vu*, 'spacewalking' of *The Ghost*, 'impressive, but handle with care' of *The Eyass*. All in all the

descriptions make you want to go climbing, surely the ultimate aim of any good guide (and the good news is, many of those nasty grading anomalies have been sorted out).

Hannigan has also included the date when protection or belay pegs were last known to be in position. The worth of this information is debatable, as it does not help with the all-important evaluation of how good the in situ gear is (it does, however, allow new bits of in situ gear to be identified/removed should they sprout later).

Personally, I feel that the photos are a bit of a mixed bag - some, like the the back cover shot of *Mastadon*, convey the feeling and atmosphere of Cornish climbing superbly; others are less than successful. Keith Sharples' excellent photo of *Green Cormorant Face* deserves special mention — it really makes you want to get out on the rock.

All in all this is a first rate book, one of which both Des Hannigan and the Climbers' Club can be proud. I eagerly await **Chair Ladder and the South Coast**.

Iain Peter

**Froggatt  
BMC 1991**

**by BMC Guidebook Committee  
Price £14.95**

No doubt there will be murmurings from certain quarters, questioning the judgement of the editor in giving this guide to someone outside the Peak scene to review. Well, I suppose the sale of any guide isn't confined to local residents alone and it might be argued that any old guide will sell locally but it has to be something to attract sales from further afield.

Well, this guide is something special and no more than the area deserves. I realise that the cognoscente will say that this guide is merely typical of what is expected from the Guidebook Committee in the Peak. I would say that it joins the ranks of the recent Llanberis and Cloggy guides, what greater praise is needed?

It is all things to all climbers, anecdotal, even nostalgic, challenging, inspiring, everything a good guide should be, whether read on the crag or in the armchair. I found it rather like an old climbing companion, we could meet and it would tell me another story or we could plan our next Saturday together.

The photos are excellent and I feel the old shots sit well in the guide and, in fact, enhance its coffee table appeal. The diagrams are brilliant; I couldn't find the credit for the Higgat Tor sketch, it's probably in there somewhere. I'm not of the school that prefers sanitized topos. I like to savour my guides, not for me a guide so thin that it produces no unwanted bulges in the lycra.

I didn't find any obvious errors in the grades, even if I had I wouldn't admit it, go and find out for yourself. There has to be some adventure left. You've got to be pretty small-minded to start combing this guide for errors, if you do, I suggest you ask yourself why? This guide is about all that's good in the British climbing scene (no, I'm not a chauvinist or a xenophobe), it reminds one of the culture and tradition, it is bold and it doesn't mind knocking the ego — but it is fair. And it's gritstone, with some of the best crags and best routes. By the way it doesn't just cover Froggatt, but Curbar, Millstone, Lawrencefield and more.

Just one thing. Why so grudging about including a graded list? Is there a bit of professional snobbishness here? A bit like the editor of *The Times* refusing to include Andy Capp. They're harmless (graded lists, that is), provide discussion, and will probably outlast 'The Foundry', even if no-one admits to liking them. If your route is not high enough up the list then go and climb a harder one, if that's what you need. Or simply tear out the pages!

Is it expensive — no. This guide contains enough climbing hours at any grade for most climbers, particularly those who will need to use it!

Anyway, who cares? How can you put a value on a day's climbing at Curbar, or a summer evening's visit to Froggatt, or an afternoon's soloing at Burbage. Just compare what this guide offers in terms of satisfaction with even the best climbing walls.

Just go and buy it! Whether you're a dreamer or a schemer, you'll enjoy it.

Roger Bennion



**Mountain Lover**  
Crowood Press 1991

by Dennis Gray  
Price £14.95

I opened this book with keen anticipation, read the introduction (one longs to know who the boring and insensitive speaker was, at the BMC meetings) and started the first chapter, which covers the writer's early days with the Bradford Lads and the Rock and Ice. Good stuff this, but it all seemed familiar, and indeed it is, as great chunks of **Mountain Lover** are taken from **Rope Boy** (pub. 1970), in some cases word for word. And at least two of the illustrations are identical.

So, what are we left with? An autobiography, some of which is already covered in an earlier volume, in some cases in greater detail. The accounts of an epic on the *Solleder Route* on Sass Maor with Ian Howell in 1965, Alpamayo in 1966 (incidentally the photographs of this are much better in the older book), the attempt on the winter girdle of Creag Meaghaidh with Bugs McKeith, and the expedition to Gauri Sankar in 1964, are all old stuff. The account of the author's close friendship with 'Beardie' is moving — all of us who knew and climbed with Eric Beard deeply regret his untimely death in a car crash — but again, it's all old material.

The 20 years since 1970 embrace Dennis' time at the BMC which, amongst other things, entailed a great deal of world travel. Korea (which has the largest women's university in the world), Japan (which appears to have the most dangerous mountain in the world — Tanigawa-Dake), South Africa and Morocco all figure, although the Moroccan chapter consists mainly of articles already published in the **Alpine Journal** 1990/91. His travels are sensibly arranged under regions visited, and in this way, some of the book could be useful for reference purposes. Some of us might question his remark on p.13 that climbing is now 'safe, respectable and middle class once more'. And yet on p.196 he mentions that over 50 of his friends have died climbing — some of the leading mountaineers of his own generation, none of them incompetent or unwary. It may be 'respectable' in that it is now accepted by the general public as a sport in its own right. Middle class it surely is not — it is one of the few classless activities, indulged in by social drop-outs and peers of the realm (read **Climbers** by M. John Harrison, admittedly a novel).

Yet through all this comes an extremely likeable and modest character with the gift of laughing gently at himself. In some ways the beginning and the end are the best parts — a very evocative poem at the start and a good chapter at the end about climbing and life in general. But £14.95 seems a bit steep for the middle, much of which is far better told and better illustrated in **Rope Boy**.

Sally Westmacott

**Vortex**  
Diadem 1991

by David Harris  
Price £13.95

I'm a sucker for fictional climbing stories. Add to the tale — drugs and violence in North America and you have **Vortex**, by the Canadian author David Harris. Published by Diadem in 1991, this enthralling book could also be read in **One Step in the Clouds**, the multi-story book from Diadem, and had its inspiration from the reality of a plane crash some years ago in the High Sierras, when a large number of Yosemite Valley climbers got rich quick on the contents of the stricken plane's cargo.

The story follows events after the discovery of a large amount of drugs together with their badly injured owner, by a couple of 'reasonably honest' climbers, high on a snowy ridge after completing a difficult snow and ice climb nearby.

It's not surprising the location is clearly and accurately portrayed. Mountain Seattle is the author's home town. His local climbing knowledge shows through.

I found the book easy to read — short, sharp chapters and the tale bouncing backwards and forwards between the conscience-torn climbers together with the usual love story, the baddies, and two contrasting policemen in different countries.

A vivid display of the deadly business of drug-running, its consequences, and the better known escapades in the climbing scene around Camp 4 and on *Salathe Wall* (I could feel myself reaching for the chalkbag, my hands sweating up as I desperately tried to turn the pages).

What seemed like a certain closing net kept me in total suspense and up all hours, until, relief, a happy ending. But — the unexpected twist was revealed only in the last line.

Smiler Cuthbertson

The Alpine Journal 1991/1992 Vol.96  
The Alpine Club/Frederick Muller

ed. Ernst Sondheimer  
Price £17.99

Death and doom seem to feature prominently in this latest AJ especially with articles such as 'For Whom the Chopper Chops', 'Death at Extreme Altitude' and 'Oh My God, We're Dead'. One can also spend 'A Night in a Hole in the Ground', go follow 'In the Footsteps of Gervasutti', 'Trekking on Tops' or even try 'Descending Peak Lenin'.

In retrospect there is a choice of 'The 125th Anniversary of the First Ascent of the Matterhorn' or, if that is too recent for your taste, go back in time to 1785, to the origins of Russian mountaineering.

For those who still want value for their money then try the shale-climbing Tax Office Manager from London who advises us all as to whether or not we ought 'To Bolt or Not to Bolt'. Amongst other contributors we find engineers, a Zermatt hotelier, a manager of adolescent truants, the usual boring crop of teachers and lecturers (who have lots of spare time with nothing better to do) and a surgeon. It takes all sorts to create an AJ and with Ernst Sondheimer handing over after five volumes it will be interesting to see how a woman will take to the driving seat of one of the premier journals.

Geoff Milburn

**Know the Game — Rock Climbing**  
A&C Black 1991

by Andy Newton  
Price £2.00

Andy Newton has written this latest addition to the long list of **Know the Game** titles.

In the words of the back cover 'this easy-to-follow guide makes accessible the exhilarating world of rock climbing to newcomers and novices. It suggests ways of starting out in the sport, explains basic techniques and terms, and describes equipment, safety procedures and environmental considerations'.

I suppose it does all of the above, but in such a terse, short and compressed fashion (the book is only 40 pages short) that it is difficult to imagine anyone making progress in rock climbing with only this little manual. However, that aside, the text is technically accurate and well written and would provide a reasonable introduction for someone who has little or no knowledge of climbing. It provides a low cost introduction to the sport.

Iain Peter

**The Alpine 4,000 Metre Peaks**  
Diadem 1991

by Richard Goedeke  
Price £12.95

A comprehensive guide that takes you across the whole of Europe. Describing in detail the routes of ascent of all 4,000 metre alpine peaks by classic routes. Often the routes of original ascensionists, still providing some of the most wonderful lines of ascent. A topo-type diagram accompanies many of the routes.

There is more than enough to be getting on with in this guide. Indeed, if your vocation is the alpine 4,000 metre peaks by the classic routes of ascent, then welcome this guide with open arms. For Richard Goedeke's guide is no more or no less. What it is, is a precise account with an aura of responsibility towards aspiring ascensionists.

Bevis Bowden

**The Trekking Peaks of Nepal**  
The Crowood Press 1991

by Bill O'Connor  
Price £14.95

It was only time before such a guide was published. I'm sure there were many contenders, especially from an increasing interest from across the Atlantic. I wonder if the respective publisher saw this inevitability and perceived a deluge of similar guides into the market. However, Bill O'Connor's **Trekking Peaks of Nepal** arrived. What is published is a regional account across Nepal of its trekking peaks, so designated by the Nepalese Mountaineering Association. Each peak carries a day to day account of its approach, its ascent and descent.

There is moral responsibility in writing a guide — I would imagine both to one's self and to those

who will use it as an invaluable resource. However, there should be an element of accountability. The guide's defined parameters should relate to the expectations of those who will use it. It is here that the book has its shortcomings. It treads the delicate balance between account and philandering. To merit an accolade and be worthy of the mountains it describes, it needs to be more than a variation of an already well documented theme.

*Bevis Bowden*

**Outcrops**  
**Littlewood Arc 1991**

by Terry Gifford  
Price £5.95

A well-named slim volume of climbing verse; apt because it contains variety, splendour, the familiar, the hidden gems one associates with outcropping.

The poems celebrate the touch of fingers on rock, the wild places and capture the essence of climbing. Included in this anthology are flashbacks to Terry's Fenland origins as well as visits to climbing areas worldwide. Terry has included some of the concerns of our time — familiar themes come over with a punch. The message is bleak and evokes a response in the reader.

This is a book to dip into, to reminisce over, to ponder over and enjoy.

*Stella Adams*

The following titles were also received, journal space precluding full reviews.

**Mountain Photography**  
**Diadem 1990**

by David Higgs  
Price £9.95

Expert advice on mountain photography, in ever-changing conditions. The discipline of basic techniques, clear advice on fundamentals and specialist tips, all these and more, in the quest for good photographs.

**Walking Guidebooks**

**Classic Walks in the Alps**  
**Oxford Illustrated Press 1991**

by Kev Reynolds  
Price £22.99

Thirty of the best walks in the alpine regions, described superbly, thoroughly and simply, enabling the readers and users to extract the best from their visit. Good photographs.

**Long Distance Paths of South-East England**  
**A&C Black 1990**

by Alan Castle  
Price £9.95

Seventeen trails through varied terrain, fully described with information on maps, guidebooks, transport and accommodation.

**Long Distance Walker's Handbook**  
**A&C Black 1990**

by Barbara Blanchard  
Price £7.95

Comprehensive guide to over 300 long distance walks, all over the UK. Ideal book for planning a walking excursion, wherever you find yourself with time to spare.

**Walking the Summits of Somerset and Avon**  
**Patrick Stephens Limited 1991**

by Hamish Brown  
Price £7.99

A newly charted walk from Maidenhead to Chepstow, fully illustrated and supported with details of accommodation and places of interest.

**Challenge Walking**  
**A&C Black 1991**

by Alan Castle  
Price £1.99

A further title in the **Know the Game** series. A good, albeit slim, introduction to this specialised walking sport.



**Mountaineering/Climbing Books****The Handbook of Alpine Climbing**  
**Crowood Press 1991**by John Barry  
Price £14.95

Paperback version of the classic reference manual, invaluable to any aspiring alpinist.

**Modern Alpine Climbing**  
**Cicerone Press 1991**by Pit Schubert  
Price £5.95

Pocket-sized paperback, covering the equipment and techniques applicable to safe and enjoyable alpine climbing. Translated by George Steele (of the BMC's technical committee).

**Winter Climbs — Ben Nevis and Glencoe**  
**Cicerone Press 1990**by Alan Kimber  
Price £9.95

Updated version of the 'bible' to the Ben and the Coe. Much improved information including good inside cover maps, detailed advice on safety, weather, avalanches, and all topics necessary for a safe and enjoyable visit. Alan Kimber has produced a good guide, with excellent photos and diagrams.

**Flammes de Pierre**  
**Diadem 1991**by Anne Sauvy  
Price £12.99

Mountaineering fiction at its best. Although several of her stories have appeared in magazines and journals, this is the first collection of Anne's work to appear in English. Stories are set around Mont Blanc.

**Summits and Secrets**  
**Hodder and Stoughton 1991**by Kurt Diemberger  
Price £10.99

Reprinted (paperback) version of the now classic autobiography of the Austrian, who achieved tremendous success in his alpine career. Having switched his attentions to the greater ranges, he developed his skills as a high altitude film maker, eventually to find tragedy on the storm-swept slopes of K2. Every climber's bookshelf should have this.

**Everest Reconnaissance**  
**Hodder and Stoughton 1991**Charles Howard-Bury & George Leigh Mallory  
Price £16.95

Edited by librarian Marian Keaney, and taken from the wealth of diaries Howard-Bury was famous for keeping. Marian has been able to piece together previously unpublished diary entries, as a prologue to the description of the 1921 Everest reconnaissance, and adding to the remarkable historic narrative in George Mallory's account of the expedition.

**STOP PRESS**

The following books have only recently been received. Although published in 1992, they are of sufficient importance to be given a brief review in this journal.

**Doug Scott - Himalayan Climber (A lifetime's quest to the world's greatest ranges)**  
**Diadem April 1992**

Price £19.99

Doug Scott has put pen to paper, and it's a winner! The great days, the triumphs, the defeats, the tragedies, and the reasons why we all climb — they're all here. A superb photographic autobiography by the man who is arguably, one of the best of British! His quiet, unassuming, laid back manner, belies a determination which has carried him through countless adventures, and enables him to provide a CV second to none! This book is a must!

**John Roskelley Last Days**  
**Hodder and Stoughton March 1992**

Price £19.95

Two Himalayan expeditions. Success and failure highlight the difficulties of high altitude pioneering. John Roskelley, without doubt, one of the finest Himalayan climbers, writes in a style full of excitement, humour and insight.

**Classic Mountain Scrambles**

by Andrew Dempster

**Mainstream Publishing April 1992**

**Price £14.99**

An essential guide to the best scrambling in Scotland. Illustrated with maps, photographs and an invaluable appendix on techniques and ropework.

**Scrambles in Snowdonia**

by Steve Ashton

**Cicerone Press April 1992**

**Price £8.95**

Revised edition of the original 1980 version, containing not only the original classic scrambles, but also many more routes, within a weatherproof PVC cover. Normal guidebook sized with plenty of warnings about the dangers of scrambling. Estimated route times would have been useful.

**The Relative Hills of Britain**

by Alan Dawson

**Cicerone Press April 1992**

**Price £8.95**

Virtually a UK directory of 'Marilyns', hills that are regarded as 'relatively high'. The book contains a fascinating collection of 'not too serious' facts and figures about these 'relative hills'. Good photos of a selection of peaks, but it would be unwise to believe the dust-cover when it says 'a large number of very clear maps which make it easy to locate all the hills in each region'. The relevant OS map is essential and it would be advisable to be competent with its use.

# Area Notes

## Peak District 1991

"I can remember when I was naive enough to think that there existed blank pieces of rock which would never be free-climbed" - Anon.

It never ceases to amaze me, how some climbers can so easily sacrifice the thing that is most precious to all climbers; the rock itself. The actions of a few climbers can deny access to the rocks for everyone. At Staden Quarry, inconsiderate parking is causing problems to the landowner and at Horseshoe Quarry, climbers who should know better still park at the gate to the quarry entrance rather than walk the extra one hundred metres or so from the layby. Other misguided individuals prefer to desecrate the rock by chipping holds. However, climbing a route which has been chipped is a hollow victory and for the person wielding the chisel it proves nothing. Black Rocks still bears the scars of these desecrators and the once superb arete of *Curving Arete* has been ruined. On Froggatt Edge one misguided individual chipped a line of pockets up *Hairless Heart* (these were quickly cemented up by Jerry Moffatt) and a few months later, white gloss paint was daubed over *Great Slab*, Joe's Direct slab and on one of the large boulders behind the Froggatt pinnacle. Thankfully, this has now been cleaned up, but it will take some time before the Edge recovers. On new routes, climbers are still using the excuse of cleaning a route to chop down 'inconvenient' trees and to create holds which are sufficient for them to climb the route. It is not always through ignorance; recently a well-known Peak District climber was spotted in Chee Dale with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other.

Despite the dry summer, there has been relatively little new route activity. Not even the excellent Peak Supplement by Chris Hardy has caused the usual new-route-fever associated with new guidebooks. It seems that the rock athletes are devoting their energy to repeating the existing modern desperates rather than searching for new lines. Ben Moon once again demonstrated his remarkable ability by climbing *The Screaming Dream* on Froggatt after only one fall; unluckily his foot slipped off near the start. Jerry Moffatt soloed *Pump Up the Power* F8a+ on Raven Tor and on the same crag Quentin Fisher soloed *Out of My Tree*; apparently Quentin 'dynoed' past the crux moves! Also of particular note, Robin Barker and John Welford have been repeating many of the hardest routes in the Peak including *Mecca the Mid-life Crisis* F8b+. John also repeated *Gonads* considering it to be only F8a+ and made the second ascent of John Hart's *R'n P* F8a+. *Mecca* almost saw repeats by Chris (Animal) Plant who seems to be climbing better than ever and by Mark (Zippy) Pretty. Fresh on the scene, the young Scottish climber Malcolm Smith has been making a name for himself by climbing *Four Door Dostoyevsky* F8a+ in Chee Dale in two days and *Out of My Tree* F8a on Raven Tor within an hour of trying it! He also repeated *R'n P* and flashed an ascent of *Bored of the Lies* 7b+.

Of the recent new routes on gritstone, possibly the most impressive is on the Cioch block at Burbage. Sean Myles succeeded where others had failed, by redpointing the desperate line which meets *Offspring* at the end of its traverse, now named *Captain Invincible* he graded it E8 6c or F8b. With several *in situ* pegs and some pre-placed wires, it is a lot safer proposition than the nearby *Parthian Shot*; however, not all the pegs are good. On Ramshaw, Seb Grieve climbed the extremely serious arete which *Dangerous Crocodile Snogging* (sensibly) avoids, calling it *Clippitty Clop, Clippitty Clop, Clippitty Clop*. Apparently, he wore jeans on the ascent as he had to *à cheval* the arete. At E8 6c it probably will not see many repeats in the near future. Seb practised it on a top-rope before soloing it; make a will before trying this one! Seb also repeated *Dangerous Crocodile Snogging*, which has also seen repeats by Stuart Bolton and Andy Popp. Also on Ramshaw, Mike Cluer gave us *Monty* E4 6b which takes the slab and wall right of *Wick Slab*. On Shining Clough, Paul Mitchell and Andy Barker climbed the direct start to *Big Wall* to give the *Stall* E5 6b. On Derwent Edge, Paul also climbed *Chickenhead* E3 5c, which takes the obvious roof left of *Excel*. In the rarely visited (for good reason) Bamford Quarry, Stuart Bolton and Seb Grieve took part in *The Big Excellent Adventure* E5 6b which takes the obvious unclimbed arete mentioned in the last guide. On Stanage, after a winter in the gym, Neil Travers found himself *Back in the Y.M.C.A.* E4 6c (now chipped); this starts left of *Cue* and finishes up *Millsom's Minion*. Also on Stanage, Steve Bancroft climbed the left arete of *Leaning Buttress* to find *The Old Bag's Head* E4 6a. Martin Veale and Chris Craggs climbed *Which Doctor?* E5 6a to the right of *Physician's Wall*. Chris Craggs, who seems to



have a talent for finding new routes on even the most popular of crags, has produced a whole crop of them on Stanage accompanied by Jim Rubery, Colin Binks and Dave Gregory. On Rivelin Chris also found *Ausfahrt* E3 5c, the arete left of *Exit*. Finally on the grit *Blanco Superdirect* in Dovestones Quarry has been relieved of its aid point by Arran Kirk at the modest grade of E2 5c. Perhaps with the advent of the new Froggatt guide we may see even more on the gritstone in 1992.

Meanwhile on the limestone, a lot of the new route activity has (predictably) taken place in Chee Dale. Keith Sharples proved once again that it pays to be strong, by climbing the awesome roof left of *Cry of Despair* using a variety of locks and jams. His route *Roof Warrior* F8a is in a similar vein to his nearby *Jug Jockey* and should prove to be popular. Further to the left John Hart's *Last Eggs Before the MI F7c* climbs a line just to the right of *Monumental Armblaster* but it fails to make the link with it. This has now seem numerous repeats, including a beta-flash by Tony Mitchell; however the link into *Monumental Armblaster* remains a project for next year. Further along, on Riverside Buttress, *Maxwell House* F7b+ by Chris Wright takes the wall right of *Max Museum* and Keith Sharples's *Rough Justice* F7c is further right again. Just to the left of *Max Museum* Gary Gibson produced *Maxonomy* F7a+, however its bolts could be clipped from *Afterlife* and so were removed, much to the chagrin of a team waiting to climb it. Further right, Gary Gibson added a couple of good routes to the right of *Tyrannosaurus Max* at F7a and F7a+ respectively. Over the river on the upper tier of Two Tier Buttress *Reward* F7b by Simon Cundy takes the wall right of *Tier Drop X-Plodes*; this has already proved to be popular. On the lower tier Simon Lee climbed the starting groove of *Malnutrition* and continued up the wall to meet *Offal* to produce *Ghee Force* E4 6b. On the Long Wall, Gary Gibson cleaned and claimed the obvious line left of *Jungle Rock* at F7a. Keith Sharples also climbed this line, and finding it chipped, was thinking of giving it the provocative name of 'The Sound of One Man Chipping'. Gary Gibson went on to add a couple of lines at E4 6b between *Freeway* and *Trickshow*, and up on Moving Buttress he climbed the arete left of *Protest* and *Survive* to give *Never to Look Back* F7b. Gary also bolted up numerous lines on the small buttress down and left of Moving Buttress, now known as Viaduct Buttress, but these have not proved to be popular. At the other end of the dale, Simon Cundy placed two bolt runners in his *Doggy Style* E4 6b between *Changeling* and *Doggone Groove* on Chee Tor; these have since been removed. Finally in Chee Dale a couple of minor routes have been done on the Nighthawks Wall above Runyon's Corner: *Nighthawks at the Diner* F6b+ by Chris Rudd and to its right *Shred Your Stick* F7a (a skate-boarding term 'go for it') by Simon Lee.

In Tideswell Dale Malc Taylor added *All My Pegs in One Basket* E7 6c on the first buttress below the village; and in Water-Cum-Jolly on Rubicon Wall Malc also added a *direct start* to *Plectrum Maxilla*, which he graded F8a+ and serious. Also on Rubicon Wall, Ian (Squawk) Dunn has added his *Totally Awesome* F7a to the left of Rubicon and the loose *Zeit Geist* F7b to its right. Both of these routes have become popular, perhaps due to the ease of access and the number of bolts Squawk placed. On Moat Buttress the water level seems to be slowly falling, despite the dam, and it is now possible to get to most of the routes. Taking advantage of this, Rob Harrison and Simon Cundy gave us a *Nude Motorcycle Girl* F7a+ on the wall left of *Out of the Shadows*. Also on the same crag, to the right of *Triton*, Alan James and Paul Dearden climbed *Two Sheep to Leicester* F7a and *Searching for the Yeti* F7b. Up on Psyche's Buttress Simon Cundy added *Dawn Razor* E4 6a between *Early One Morning* and *Sunrise*. While on the Cornice in the same dale, Robin Barker tied up the *Tea Monster* by climbing it without the bolted-on hold. He has decided to rename it to *The Free Monster* F7c+.

On Craig Y Biceps and the seldom frequented Raven's Foot Buttress Gary Gibson has been active in producing several new routes, but again these have not become popular. Finally, Geoff Hornby and Suzi Samut have been busy climbing new routes down in the Wirksworth Quarries, perhaps the most significant of this year's crop is *Snooze and You Lose* E4 6a on Lime Kiln Quarry and *Velvet Underground* E4 6a on Dale Quarry. Other routes include *Blue Sky Mining* E3 5c, *Luxury Liner* E3 5c and *Evolution of Micraster* E1 5b on Colehill, and *Slave to the Rhythm* E3 6a on North East Quarry. However, the recent popularity of some of the quarries at Wirksworth may be causing access problems and some climbers have been asked to leave by the quarry owners.

Some other news which may be of interest, is that some routes are getting harder; down in Chee Dale *Unleashing the Wild Physique* F8a on the Cornice has lost a crucial hold to Keith Sharples (rumour has it though, that it may once again reappear back on the route). Also on the Cornice, *Old Man River* has lost a crucial hold making the start much harder. On Stoney Middleton, the somewhat easier *Pearly Gates* (VS4c,4c) (no French grade this time!) has lost part of its top pitch; and no one seems to have rushed

up there to glue it back on as yet (I wonder why?).

Finally, concerning the use of bolts (a subject which often causes heated arguments and threats of physical violence) some routes now sport new bolts. *Rubicon* has been re-equipped with three shiny new bolts and a bolt belay making it a much more popular route. *Cordless Madness* in Chee Dale has also been re-equipped with much more substantial bolts and hangers than the rather worrying ones recently put in. Other routes such as *Sardine* on Raven Tor had extra bolts placed but these have subsequently been removed. Bolt belays have been installed at the top of some of the more popular routes in Horseshoe Quarry by Jim Kelly. In the less frequented Ladybower Quarry a bolt belay has been placed as a lower off point for a recent route, however this time, the rock is quarried gritstone and it seems likely that it will be removed.

To give climbers the chance to voice some of their opinions on the placing of bolts in the Peak District, several open meetings on the subject have been organized. Most climbers who made the effort to attend, felt that it was taboo to place bolts on gritstone and an attempt was made to determine which limestone crags were fair game for the cordless drill brigade. The general consensus was that bolts should not be placed which could be clipped from other routes and if a route was to be re-equipped, the character of the route should not be changed. It was also decided to set up a committee chaired by Paul Dearden which would consider the issue of bolts in the Peak District. Let us hope it acts in the interests of climbing and the climbers who climb the routes.

Geoff Radcliffe

### North Wales Recent Trends - Good or Bad?

*'Today the sun shone in North Wales and it was possible to forget all those weeks of monsoon-like weather. Gogarth was packed and North Stack in particular saw plenty of action...'*

*'The long awaited lifting of the bird ban on the Little Orme has prompted some frantic activity...'*

*'Many other impressive routes were climbed and one has to question the likes of some who harp on about the demise of adventure in British climbing.'*

The above extracts are from my North Wales reports in **On The Edge** magazine last year. In the end well over 400 new routes were climbed; Gogarth, The Slate, The Lleyn Peninsula and North Wales Limestone in particular attracted the attention for new routes. Far too much to do justice to in a single review. So, to be a little controversial, I will use the recent spate of hard new routes at Gogarth and on North Wales Limestone to discuss the premise that bolts, competitions, red-pointing and pink-pointing are destroying British climbing. I would like to show that, at least in North Wales, all aspects of climbing are alive and thriving, that 'sports climbing' seems to have taken its place quite comfortably alongside more traditional climbing and that there are plenty of people enjoying both styles.

1991 was definitely an important year at Gogarth, with the impressive repeats of very hard routes seen in 1990 becoming even more commonplace, and many hard new routes were established. Even completely new areas were developed. As soon as spring arrived Twid (Mike Turner) moved in with repeats of *The Hollow Man*, *Isis is Angry* and *Free Stone Henge*. The latter two being long-awaited second ascents. Many other climbers were active at Gogarth in the early summer, and ascents of once-feared routes such as *The Clown* on North Stack and *Conan the Librarian* in Wen Zawn were becoming commonplace. Removing the aura surrounding the old and revered routes of yesterday is the first step, I believe, towards producing the next generation of hard routes. In this respect Gogarth certainly has plenty of potential for anyone prepared to put in the effort, particularly on some of the steeper rock.

George Smith was one such person prepared to put in the time, and with various partners he succeeded in establishing three superb new expeditions into upside-down land within the depths of Wen Zawn. *Bar Fly* was his first route, and weighing in at E7 6b it is also the hardest. It takes an improbable line in the Spider's Web area and, as the name implies, it requires considerable knee-barring ability. George then went on to free-climb *Spider's Web*, a possibility that many climbers had considered; none had guessed that it would go at such a reasonable grade. It actually succumbed to a flashed ascent at a modest E5 6b. A myth shattered? If bridging down a chimney, reverse arm barring a slot and then making a wild swing around the lip of the cave sounds like your kind of route, then you'll love *Spider's*

Web. George rounded off his activity in Wen Zawn with *Billy Budd*, a superb E6 6b. A wild pendulum to gain the start of the route and a large jug handle are just two of the attractions to be found on this route.

Other important lines were climbed, one of the more obvious being *Rubble*, a route perfectly described by its name and taking Wen Zawn's *Concrete Chimney* in its entirety. This route was predictably the work of Paul Pritchard and Leigh McGinley, Paul no doubt thinking that whatever Patagonia had to offer it couldn't be looser than *Rubble*. This again was a very obvious challenge tackled on sight and with a pathetically low regard for personal safety! I also picked out an obvious and much-eyed line in 1991: the clean and deceptively overhanging wall between *Mammoth* and *Hunger* on the Main Cliff. My own on sight efforts were foiled half-way up, where poor protection and a perplexing move eventually persuaded me that an abseil inspection would be wise. I was now desperate to complete the route, so, three days later and despite a heavy downpour I was back on the route. With the advantage of a little knowledge of what was to come I was able to complete *Extinction*, a superb route that I gave a tentative E8 6b, bearing in mind a potential future on sight ascent.

Many other fine routes were climbed at Gogarth in 1991, which is welcome interest. It keeps Gogarth where it belongs as the 'adventure climbing' Mecca, where 'on sight' doesn't refer to the amount of trivial 'beta' (crucial knowledge) that you get about a bolt route prior to an attempted flashed ascent, but rather to the fact that you are prepared to get out there and risk life and limb. The Lleyn Peninsula was also popular, and such is the importance of the on sight ethic that most activists feel a guidebook would detract from the nature of climbing there.

In complete contrast last year were the developments taking place on North Wales Limestone. Five years ago Craig y Forwyn was lost to climbers and in 1990 it seemed that we had also lost Pen Trwyn, another major crag. Fortunately, because of some nifty negotiations by the BMC and a generous geologist, 188 of Pen Trwyn's 320-odd climbs were declared 'geologically OK'. Lower-offs, marking of banned areas with wooden stakes and cleaning loose rock off were the main requirements to be fulfilled to regain access to these 188 routes. Again, thanks to the BMC, this time for providing money for the lower-offs, and to DMM for coming up with a superb new resin bolt, the work was completed, largely over the summer of 1991. Volunteers were thin on the ground and it is a fairly small group of climbers that can claim responsibility for 'saving' Pen Trwyn.

At the same time, Lower Pen Trwyn (the tidal lower section which is unaffected by the access problems of the marine drive higher up) was being re-equipped with yet more Eco-Bolts. Castle Inn Quarry was getting the same treatment with the North Wales Limestone Bolt Fund raising the cash. Sports climbing is somewhat controversial but I feel several factors have made the widespread use of resin bolts on North Wales Limestone acceptable. First, if you are going to accept fixed gear then at the very least it should be visually acceptable (and in my opinion coloured tats and pegs issuing rust streaks are *definitely* not), and at the most it should be capable of holding the weight of a falling climber. Conventional 8mm and even 10mm bolts are clearly not up to this, after a short period of exposure to the marine environment, since we have witnessed the failure of at least six 8mm bolts on the Ormes in the last couple of years. The second and perhaps more important reason for using resin bolts for lower-offs and to replace old fixed gear is that it maintains access. Although not all climbers would argue that climbing ought to be totally safe, few would disagree with the importance of the safety of passers-by, who, in the case of Pen Trwyn, are tourists enjoying Llandudno's scenic drive. The placing of lower-offs just below the tops of climbs has added considerably to both climbers' and the public's safety. That really covers the situation regarding bolts, though some people will undoubtedly claim that the bolt fund has overstepped the mark. However, the vast majority of climbers involved have welcomed the re-equipping, and let's face it, if Britain is to have a French style sports crag anywhere, then where better than on North Wales Limestone?

As well as all of this there was plenty of new routing on the limestone last year. Moffatt's *Liquid Amber* received an impressive second ascent from Ben Moon after only five days of working and red-point attempts. Progress with this sort of route can only be measured in terms of the time taken for repeat ascents to be made. A two day attempt of this route culminating in a red-point may soon be possible, but I am sure a one day ascent will have to wait quite a few years. *Youthanasia*, an E8 6c (8b), was my contribution on Lower Pen Trwyn, a route that starts up *Statement of Youth* and then branches out left to tackle a particularly blank piece of rock. A thorough working of the moves proved that the climb was, at least in theory, possible. It then took me longer than I would care to admit to turn this possibility into a red-point ascent. Red-pointing nerves are just as real as the sort of worry that might



precede attempting a scary route at Gogarth.

The other important routes of 1991 were on the Little Orme and it is here that sports climbing and adventure climbing merge. Such is the case with Dave Lyon's *Ocean of Emotion*, a well-bolted E6 6b taking a superb piece of limestone situated right in the middle of the vast and remote Detritus Wall, not a place for the faint hearted! The Diamond was also busy for a short period and four excellent new routes were climbed. Mick Ryan was first with *Hysteria* (E5 6b), an excellent exercise in jug-hauling with plenty of bolts. Next were two routes from me: *Specular Reflections* (E7 6c) came first, which is a free ascent of Rowland Edwards' original aided first pitch of *The Wall of the Evening Light*, the second pitch having been freed a few years ago by Andy Pollitt with a different start. Next I climbed *The Sting*, an E6 6b lying between *Specular Reflections* and Pollitt's variation. As always with The Diamond the climbing is steep and juggy whilst at the same time being intricate and technical. Finally on The Diamond, George Smith climbed *A Skip of Fools*, at E7+ 6c; the name apparently refers to the resident climbing population of Llanberis. This was the hardest route so far on The Diamond but with plenty more steep and unclimbed rock this crag definitely has E10 potential.

So that just about sums things up, though it doesn't in any way do justice to the 400 new routes climbed last year. It does hopefully indicate that as far as new developments are concerned, North Wales is at the forefront of both traditional climbing, as at Gogarth, and of sports climbing on the North Wales Limestone. Then again there's always the Slate, or Tremadog, or The Llyn Peninsula, or the vast number of mountain crags...

Steve Meyers

### Pembroke 1991

Perhaps, not surprisingly, given its geographical isolation and also the fact that it's difficult to fathom (sic!) all the secrets of a rocky coastline, Pembroke continued to yield significant climbs throughout the year. The fact that a new guidebook was imminent seemed neither to reduce nor stimulate the exploration. But then, most of the activists were folk well briefed in the area and with projects stored in their brains from previous visits.

Naturally, one of the first on the scene was Gary Gibson. Partnered by Roy Thomas, he homed in on the Stack Rocks area. Gary led *Only The Best Will Do*, while Roy struggled up the wide crack of *What Friends Are For*. They also did a difficult pitch with *The Gorgon*.

As the hordes descended at Easter, activity increased. Unbelievably, the mud in the middle of Huntsman's Leap's east side produced a route. Frank Ramsay takes the blame! He climbed what can only be described as an overhanging mud-filled cave to produce *Thunderbox*. Miners' headlamps are needed more than anything else — apart from nerve!

Meantime, Dave Viggers was doing *Unseamly Behaviour*, which put a better finish (appropriately named for more than one reason?) to *Seamly Behaviour*. On the north coast John Harwood paid a visit to the current Crag X (Pen Castel Coch) to see what all the fuss was about. Andy Sharp celebrated the visit by adding a typical finery test-piece with *Wait on the Corner*.

Suddenly (and amazingly) the attention switched to one of the first developed (and seemingly completely developed) cliffs — Mother Carey's Kitchen. Paul Donnithorne and Emma Alsford each led pitches next to *A Sea Change* and added yet another variant to Brazen Buttress with their *Superdirect*. However, by far their best find was a steep but juggy line starting to the left of *Star Wars* — *Galaxy*. Just around the corner, Gibson launched up another 'uphill' line on the Space Face. *Just Klingon* was the name, which doesn't sound encouraging! The final event on Mother Carey's was Steve Monks' ascent of *Hindenberg*. This line, near *Zeppelin*, again tested fitness to extremes and there were all the usual stories about leaders being too exhausted to pull in the ropes etc. Joe Brown and Ron Fawcett come back, all is forgiven!

In the Giltar area, Tony Penning and John Harwood had been developing Bubbleton Crag on the east side of Beck's Bay. Actually the cliff was first climbed on in 1987, but, owing to a lack of information, the whereabouts of *First in the Firing Line* could not be sorted out until correspondence was forwarded to the guidebook writer in 1992! Anyway, Penning developed a taste for the place and, despite an unfortunate incident with blocks, added several routes. An excellent girdle, *The Long Goodbye*, was notable and not just for the climbing. It will surprise nobody who knows Tony that we started the original ascent in a gentle drizzle and with about an hour's daylight left. My ascent involved almost

continuous aid in darkness! The next day with Andy Tierney, we did it properly! While Tony had been gardening on the crag one day, I traversed around the corner to explore. My mistake was I told him about it! A couple of weeks later, Tony was busily gardening the top of the best line I'd seen, when a face appeared above. It was Steve Findlay, who had seen the same line over a year previously and had just driven from northern England to do it! The route was named *Doctor Findlay I Presume?* Fortunately, Steve was a gentleman and he didn't choose to snap Pennings' rope with his bare hands but went away to pastures new to climb *Grimley Fiendish* and *The Jet Minor*.

By the time summer came, Gary Gibson had started a new campaign. He re-ascended the now boltless *The Subterranean* in Huntsman's and then *Dawn Chorus* at Mowing Word. With Roy Thomas, he then added an excellent 'microroute' with *Gluestone* at Chapel Cove and *Not Tonight Josephine*, a quality wall pitch at Trevalen. But their best routes came in August when they climbed *Bridge Building*, on the white wall to the right of *Romanesque*, *Falling Towards England*, near *The Gorgon*, both in the Green Bridge area, and *Lemon Crushed* on Stackpole East. Gary reported that both Roy and he were ecstatic about the quality of *Falling Towards England* and it certainly looks to have the makings of a modern classic. On the same day Andy Sharp and Pete Lewis returned to a previously spied line and put up *Cereal Killer*, in a tight zawn near Misty Wall.

Throughout the year Steve Quinton continued his output of routes on the north coast. He even discovered worthwhile new cliffs such as Craig y Crisial at St. Davids. *Act Of Insanity* was his best route at Crisial while *Curse of the Cragmonsters* was added to Caerfai. As the year drew to a close the appropriately named *A Nightmare on Cold Feet* was completed.

Then, suddenly, Range West was the place to be, or not to be according to the Army and the Pembrokeshire constabulary! Naturally it was Dave Cook who got things moving and then galvanized others into joining him. With Jim Perrin he had made a lone route earlier in the year but, as soon as the voluntary bird ban was over, he organised a week-end for friends from London. News of the activities was deliberately spread and soon South Wales climbers and Bristol activists joined the action. The pace of development was breathtaking — about 150 routes added by the year's end.

The stupendous overhanging wall of Greenham Common, perhaps the showpiece of Range West, was breached by James Richardson with the mighty *Tasmanian Devil*. On Mount Sion East, Emma Alsford, Paul Donnithorne and Dave Viggers added a number of good quality, mid-grade routes including the novel *Lost in Space* and the excellent pitches of *Bazooka* and *Rum, Sodomy and The Lash*. Steve Findlay and Mark Hopkins (that pair of wimps again) joined in the jamboree with *The Exile* and *Pit Bull* while Cook, with Ian White and John Dance added *Desert Island Dicks* to Greenham Common.

In late October of 1991 the 'Cook offensive' culminated in a mass trespass supported by some 50 climbers, including past and present activists and some sympathetic pressmen. Some 20 new routes were pioneered ranging from VS to E6, with Pat Littlejohn raising technical standards another notch by his ascent of *Focal Point*. Findlay and Hopkins opened up the crag under Flimston Down (with the aptly named *It's A Fair Cop*) while Cook and Devine, along with Dave Barlow and others, began the development of the buttress of Pen y Holt Bay.

Later, Littlejohn returned with Alsford to snatch a second route on Greenham Common's leaning wall from under the noses of the authorities — the unrelenting *Fear No Evil*. In November, the development of the vast headland of Linney Head started in a series of dawn sorties. This reached fever pitch when Alsford, Damian Carroll, Donnithorne and Bob Watson celebrated Christmas by climbing over 50 new routes and effectively working out Pembrokeshire's best low grade crag — Western Walls!

Pity the poor guidebook writer over all this and don't you dare complain when the guides finally appear.

John Harwood

(With admission to plagiarism from Dave Viggers!)

These notes combine two years of new route activity. Whilst there has been a significant decline in numbers of new routes, partly I'm sure due to Gary Gibson's absence over the period, there has been no decline in quality. There is no shortage of unclimbed rock, but the art these days is not only knowing what, but where. However, new visitors to the Island can pick off plums and, with a little research and imagination, anything is possible!

Work is now well underway on Lundy's fifth guidebook by the co-authors, Gary Gibson and Paul Harrison. It is being completely re-written and climbs will be described as you approach the cliffs rather than north-south as at present. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Mountaineering Club have pulled out of publication, due to financial reasons, having supported the guide for many years. Instead, the task is now in the hands of our very own Publications Sub-Committee, with its ever-expanding range of titles. A CC guide should hopefully appear sometime in 1993. And so to the routes themselves, which, working anti-clockwise round the island, have been as follows.

Paul Harrison and Mike 'the climbing solicitor' Snell got extremely *Bored* E1 5a one wet afternoon on the east coast before they renewed interest on The Constable. Here they were *Caught in the Act* E1 5b before they found *Naked Gun* E2 5b, both on the north face.

Moving around onto the west coast Mark Bartley succeeded on his much-tried *Ain't No Wenie Roast* E4 6a on Grapefruit Buttress, contributing a fine addition to this excellent non-tidal location.

Considerably more development took place in the Arch Zawn area which continues to provide rich veins of untapped rock. In one evening Simon Cardy found four good VSs: *Sole*, *Lundy*, *Fastnet* and *Smith Knoll Automatic*, along with various partners; Geraldine Taylor, Paul Harrison, Mike Snell and Mark Bartley, whilst the latter also added *Valentia* at the same grade.

Nick White slipped in to add a well brushed and named *Serpentine* E3 5b above the descent, whilst the Llandudno firm of Dave Lyon and Norman Clacher discovered three good-looking routes on the new After Six Wall. Norman drove Dave delirious. As a man who works nights, and whose climbing is keener than mustard, he insisted on getting Dave up at five o'clock each morning to clean the routes. This made for some very long days as the sun unfortunately never reached the wall until 'after six' in the evening — when it was dry enough to climb. These nocturnal efforts however produced *Rigging in the Frigging* E4 6a, *Women in Chains* E5 6a and *Smoke on the Water* E6 6b. Further to the right, Harrison and Cardy eventually succeeded on *Bastard Wet Crack* E4 6a, a line that had been plagued by dampness on their many previous attempts.

Moving down the coast two more tales were told in Short Story Zawn, namely *Shaggy Dog Story* E2 5c, by Cardy and *In One Bound* E2 5c, by Tony Sawbridge and Mike Snell, to the left and right of *Big Shinner* respectively. In the same area Cardy also came up with *Death* and *Weirdness in the Surfing Zone* E1 5c, left of *Friction Impossible*. Round the corner on the Seal Slab three excellent additions were found. First, Harrison fought his way up Lundy's answer to *Walsh's Groove*, *Sumo* E3 5b. Secondly, Cardy worked his way slowly up *Badlands* E3 5c, the big brown wall right of Wonderlands before Mark 'the dark' Bartley sought out the bold *Dreamlands* E4 5c, this finding its way up the arete overlooking *Sumo*.

The Torrey Canyon cliff saw a major transformation after a winter storm, with the collapse of *Rachel*, a route that once adorned the cover of an old guide. It's only a question of time before *Controlled Burning* falls down so if you still haven't done it yet, look smart (I'd give it 20 years at the most). Near the descent, Cardy found *Like it or Limpet* E3 6a, a short problem at plateau level, unlikely to fall down in a million years. In the same area Cardy and Snell found *The Ancient Mariner* E1 5a, a long slab pitch right of *Pellets of Delirium*.

The heavyweight route of 1990 was assigned to Nick White who braved hair-raising abseils to clean a high, brown wall in Crunchy Toed Zawn. Nick was rewarded with *Wolfbane* E7 6a, which picks its way up the most unlikely blank wall on Lundy, and is — apologies for the worn-out metaphor — absolutely gobsmacking! His second on the route was Pete Bull. Just round the corner, Steve 'chalkless' Findlay straightened out and re-cleaned *Good Vibration* which he re-named *Certainly Squirish* E2 5b.

A new buttress was found between The Diamond and Fluted Face and dubbed Benson's Buttress. The Harrison/Cardy team found *Skull Duggery* E1 5b on the left and *Slave Labour* E2 5b to the right. On Fluted Face itself, Harrison added a *direct start* to *Redspeed* at E2 5c, which now ranks the route as a classic three-star climb at the grade. It will no doubt become the standard way to do the route. Also here Cardy added *Godspeed* E1 5b, a direct start to *Devil's Honeymoon*.



## Area Notes

In the St.James Stone area, Nick White, climbing with Neil 'rocknotes' Foster, breached what the guidebook describes as 'a large number of seemingly blank groove lines'. Starting with a point of aid he gained the horizontal 'suspended' beam left of *Space Bandit* and the groove above. *Araucaria* E6 6a 6c traverses the beam with Friend protection from left to right and slightly downwards, then breaches one of the unclimbed grooves. Unfortunately like many of the remaining unclimbed buttresses on Lundy, the cliff is frequently damp, but some very exciting prospects remain to be done. In the same area on a more moderate, but no less adventurous, note Mark Bartley and Simon Cardy added three routes right of *Crack Climbing for Beginners*, *Neptune Rising* E2 5c, *Herbert the Turbot* E1 5a and *Harry the Hake* H. Severe.

Interest with the route *Wild Trip on Jugs* caught the attention of Julian Mathias and Steve Findlay. They added a less tidal start and extended finish to produce *Outrageous Voyage on Buckets* E4 6a 5b. A more outrageous route still was climbed by Crispin Waddy and Ian Wilson on the Devil's Chimney. The much fancied but unreachable crack opposite *Promised Land* went at a reasonable (?) E6 6a in two pitches which they called *Uncontrolled Gurning*. A little way out to sea on another nearby stack, Steve Findlay and Julian Mathias found an eliminate on *Sea of Tranquility* called *Sea of Dreams* E4 6a.

Most of the new climbs are being found towards the north end of the island these days but two exceptions to this were Nick White's crowning contribution to Two Legged Buttress and Doug Smith's route on St Patrick's. The latter climbs through the overhang right of *Meninirons* which was called *Forgotten Sun* E4 6a. Nick's route climbs the central groove up between the legs of the buttress which, being very hard, and a line which he and Dave Thomas had been attempting on and off, was called *The Dog's Bollocks* E6 6b, partnered by Neil Foster.

This brings these notes to a close. With routes like *Araucaria* and *Uncontrolled Gurning*, Lundy must now surely rank as the undisputed adventure climbing centre of the country. With so much unclimbed rock, future development remains an exciting prospect for many years to come. I can't wait.

*Simon Cardy*



