

The
Climbers' Club
Journal

1994

The Climbers' Club Journal

Edited by
Smiler Cuthbertson

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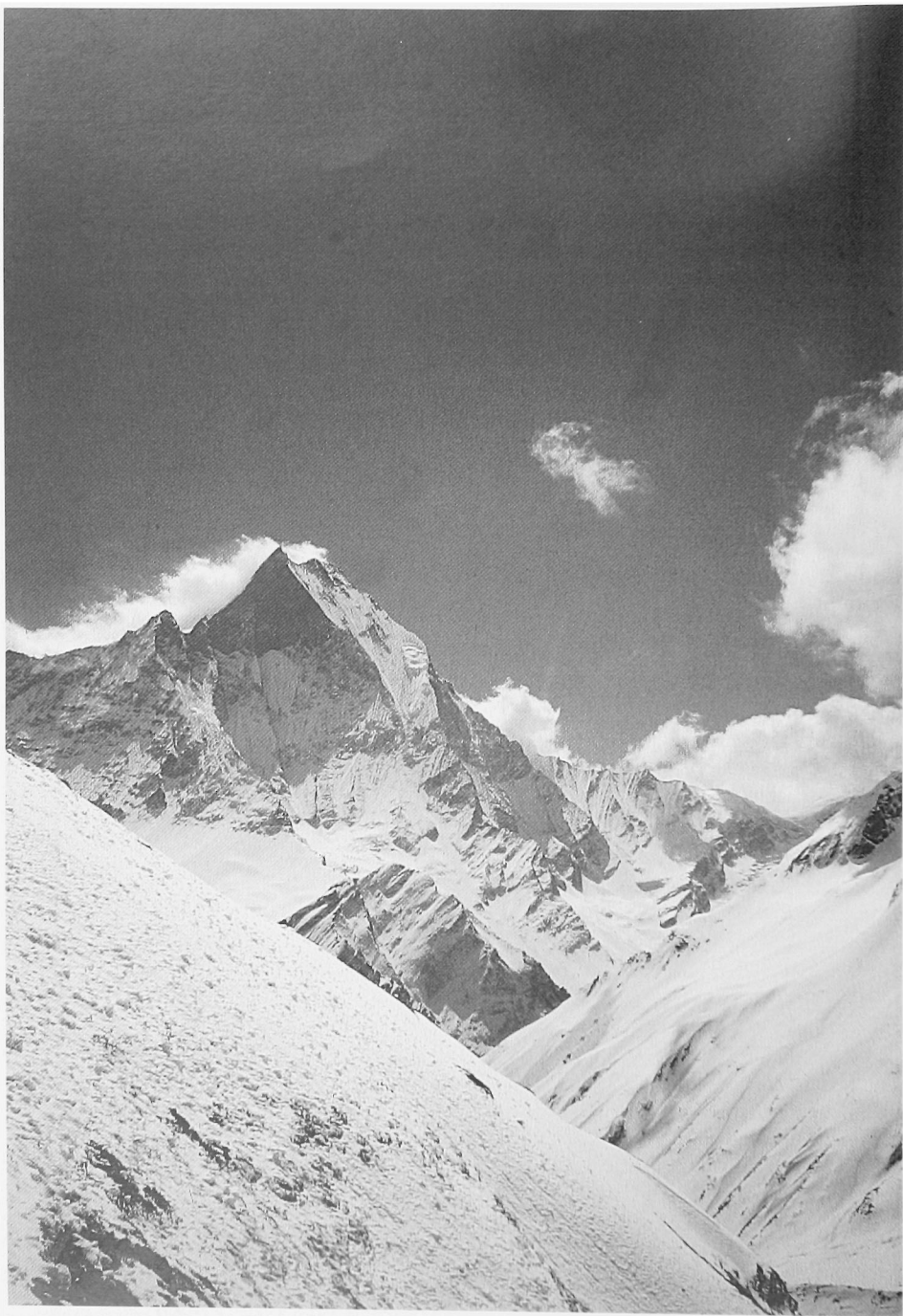
The Climbers' Club Journal

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Machapuchare from Tent Peak. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

As Free As An Eagle

I was heading for the Annapurna Sanctuary, with my two clients, three porters and my good friend Supa Tamang. Dwarfed by massive peaks – Machapuchare, the Annapurnas, the Gangapurnas, Huinchuli – to name only a few – our intended target for this trip, Tharpa Chuli (Tent Peak) was lost somewhere in this wonderland of giants. As we passed through the police post check point, I was reflecting on the Scottish winter I'd just left. It suddenly struck me – they're trying to stop me doing this . . .

Recently, anti-climbing articles in the press, TV and radio have been prevalent, following a series of unfortunate accidents and tragedies on the frozen hills. Several considerations were being suggested, by people who have little or no knowledge at all, of what we, as climbers are all about.

One suggested option – ban climbing altogether. Another – mandatory insurance. Limited controlled access is being considered. Even fully-paid rescue teams, with the denial of helicopter use, is on the cards. The whole concept of our heritage is under threat. We offer a weak (or even meek?) retaliation to these arguments. To ban us from climbing altogether – an extremist's view? Insurance – how soon we would be like America. Erosion and the access problems – there could be some grounds for improvement. Those involved in mountain rescues are all climbers themselves, willingly going out for missing and injured colleagues. Helicopters? The teams themselves admit the mountain flying is essential training towards active service, and don't complain (usually!).

Hectic working life, with all its pressures, now means our free time is more important than ever to us all. At the moment we have the freedom of choice, as to what we do with our space.

As I watched the lammergeyer circle elegantly over the Modi Khola, I tried to imagine solutions to this thin end of a serious wedge. Our whole existence surrounds exploration, the vast oceans, and our treasured mountains. One solution, where we can play a major role, is to take a more common sense approach to our sport. More basic training, better use of equipment, and above all, a more responsible attitude and sensible adherence to the weather forecasts, and to the all-important avalanche reports, posted daily for our use.

There will always be incidents, but it's down to us how we ease the current sensationalism of the media. Then we can educate, even support, those who make these waves, converting them from what is ill-informed opposition. There is an insidious, creeping line between our freedom to participate in our wonderful activities, just where, when and how we like, and a situation where controls, even prevention, would be the norm. That line is drawing closer and closer all the time.

We failed to stop the chalk, we're losing the battle against bolts – We must stop this!

As for Tharpa Chuli? Four days of hot mornings, afternoon snow storms, and dangerous avalanche conditions, pinned us down at Annapurna Base Camp. Eventually we broke trail for two days, through exhausting snow, to a high camp. Our summit attempt was thwarted by even more hideous, steep snow and, with exhaustion and altitude problems abounding, I called a retreat to Kathmandu.

But it was my choice!

Smiler

Emerald Gully

Henry Folkard

"There's Ali" said Nick.

And there she was indeed, strolling in the sleet by the sea.

Ullapool. March.

The Ferry Boat Inn kept a warm welcome. In the bar, the rugby international was into its second half. There were no rooms available for three people – but there was one for two, and we could all get in that.

Phil sat in the shower and sharpened his crampons.

"They've lost" said Fred, moving from his corner in the bar downstairs, "the fire is too hot to sit by. Shall we ask if they can do breakfast for us at seven? Eight seems a bit late."

So it was we were tramping through the regimented forest, dank and silent, each wishing the other would pause for rest.

Beyond the pines a narrow band of smooth snow, bereft of tufts of heather and bilberry, marked the path rising up Gleann na Sguaib. Phil waded on. He did not stop. I hoped Ali would want a rest.

I was tired. Was it the long drive the day before, or a sleepless night, or age, or being unfit, or anxiety? The ground was not frozen. The wind from the sea was raw, but lacked a biting edge.

My mind wandered. It had been much colder on the Ben – was it really 20 years ago now? The last time I'd attempted an ice climb of such severity. Graham had led the first pitch, belaying on a single leeper in a vertical crack. I remembered leading through, avoiding the obvious ice fall, bridging up a chimney on the right with two steps in it. No runners. Ensconced, I'd not noticed the change in temperature. The exit right at the top of the chimney on to something slabby did not look such a good idea. Graham 150 feet below, and a single rope.

Phil waded on. If the snow covering the path was even, what was underneath it was not. He disappeared again. Nick was silent, Ali perspiring.

"Carry on", said Fred. But I could see he was not looking at the path. It was the disintegrating ice in the gullies of Diollaid a'Mhill Bhric that held his gaze. More or less north facing too, I thought.

"I'll have to retreat", I'd shouted to Graham. I found a poor crack in a little roof and was optimistically trying to knock an ace of spades into it.

"At least I'll get half way down". I did, just to the first step. There were still no belays.

"I'll reverse the rest solo", I'd shouted.

"Throw me an end of the rope first", Graham had shouted back. He caught it. I could not thread anything through the three tie-in points on my Whillans harness so just clipped into the krab on the crutch strap. Then they slid through the soft snow. Terrors do.

"I'm off" – and off I was. A jolt. A desperate lunge into nothing. Crampons half bit,

then lurched me into a crazy back flip, so fast, falling free past freezing ice as an eternity of time stood still, motionless in mad motion. 'Twist' my consciousness cried, frantic on approaching impact, 'take it on your shoulder and mind your neck and back'.

It was so still and quiet swinging to and fro on the end of that rope, high above Coire Leis. I could not get my head to make my legs work, and why wasn't Graham saying anything? I made a noise, and tried to swing into the ramp that broke my fall and made me bounce. I seemed to think I was unbroken, yet confused and uncoordinated. Then I could stand, and hear an anxious answer to my noise. Speech came again.

"I've been shouting for ages" came Graham's voice, "didn't you hear? The leeper's all twisted"

"I'm not sure it's a very good idea", I said. It was raw and cold under Emerald Gully, now we had stopped. It glistened at us – silent ice, giant cornice hung.

"I'm going for it", said Phil moving up without falter. Was this real or was it still reverie? Nick followed.

Fred said 'no'. He would do *Archway*, the ice fall on the left, with Ali. I dithered and hesitated upwards in logic or in fear; in foolhardiness or fine judgement; in decision or resignation. I neither wanted to fail to be part of a successful team, nor to do the climb. I dug a snow profile and increased my dilemma in an agony of recollection.

"Things either go very well or very badly on ice" I told the empty air.

"At least the belay is all right" said Nick. We had soloed up an easy fan of snow and into the bottom of the gully. On the first steep section I'd declined a top rope, but examined the run out potential below. Phil had started up again, and was trying to get a screw into steep ice, sweeping up right and on to a place beyond view. Steeper than it looked, I thought. Another screw, and the rope ran out steadily, inching its way out of sight. Nothing. The sound of pegs. Nick was on his way.

"Here goes my first ice pitch", he'd said. Then it was my turn. A section of steep ice – the second ice screw, obstinate in its tenacity and inaccessibility, took all my energy – then less steep insecurity, crusty crud.

Phil was starting the next pitch by the time I arrived, pursued by some horribly competent Scots, who seemed at ease and in enjoyment.

The main sweep of ice led up 100 feet or more to the left hand side of the gully, but Phil wisely eschewed the unstable mass in favour of a line through a small bulge to the right. This he surmounted with little grace and no gear, discharging a great furrow of rotten snow as he forced his way up the miracle of adhesion above. A traverse left to a rib, or large rock, led to a poor stance, but not before a well placed runner, bless him, safeguarded the initial difficulties with a direct pull for the seconds.

The Scots set about the main sweep of ice, committed, hesitated, prevaricated, altercated, withdrew and descended into the gathering gloom, by abseil. 'Would I join them?' Too frightened to choose, I went on.

I could not get the lost arrow out, try as I might. I had bought it in 1968 in the Mountain Shop, Snow Hill Ringway, Birmingham. It had served me well, though in recent years had been somewhat retired, and I was sad to abandon it. But the

darkness beckoned and the rope pulled. Phil was already starting the next pitch – Nick cross armed if not knotted – climbing left and up and out of the gully proper, and up and left again to a huge boulder below the giant cornice. The pitch I followed is better not described.

But then the God of the gully seemed to begin to relent of his ire. As darkness gave way to the cold light of the moon, the balance of apprehension shifted. Little things, but one by one, better snow and ice just where a placement mattered; a poor belay on a worse stance gave way to an excellent number 7 hexentric in ten feet; a happy ringing noise as the huge boulder above accepted a second peg to back up that which was in situ, and, just out of sight, the hint of a little rib that split the cornice as the prow of a ship might part the waves.

And so it was in the now freezing wind beneath the twinkling stars we rejoiced in the nectar of tepid tea, as, exhausted and cramped, the grid block lights of Ullapool beckoned us from our eyrie of content.

Twice on the ridge we paused to check windslab slopes. Twice our caution was rewarded by an ominous crack and unseemly scuttle to rockier ground. The tide of events was with us now, as we made our weary descent.

“I nearly did not come”, I said to Phil.

“It would have been an entirely justifiable decision” he said.

In the silence of the night I remembered Graham, in peace.

Ali came out of the Ferry Boat Inn to greet us.

“We had a brilliant day”, she said, “the last pitch turned out to be absolutely desperate”. Inside, a pinted Fred, Predator pleased, sat smiling by the fire.

20 years ago it had been Smith’s Glenlivet. Tonight it would be McCallans.

An account of an ascent of *Emerald Gully*, Beinn Dearg, in March 1994 by Phil Robins, Nick Carr and Henry Folkard – with reference to a parallel ascent of *Archway* by Fred and Ali Hall, and allusion to an attempt on an undefined line in the region of *Number 5 Gully*, Ben Nevis, some 20 years earlier, by Graham Russell and Henry Folkard.

A Number on the Milestone

Peter Harding

'Climb upon my knee, Sonny Boy.
When skies are grey, Sonny Boy.'

Two lines from an old tear-jerking song which helped to make Al Jolson, the American jazz singer, famous during the late '20s. Some 20 years later there came the inevitable 'send-up' version, (by Spike Jones I think), in which a child-like voice piped up with a seemingly endless succession of ridiculous questions, – what's this or what's that and what's the other? Each one came before a lyrical phrase of the original song, thus making the mimicked voice of Al Jolson to appear to answer these purile interjections. In the late '40s, members of the Stonnis Mountaineering Club – formed by a group of young, midland rock activists in 1945, would sometimes perform this parody of Jolson's hit song when they were climbing together on a big route. It usually started if the leader seemed to be making slow progress whereupon the last man of the party might shout up in a loud, high pitched voice: 'What's the weather like?' Those waiting on the stances above, and even the leader, would then sing out in unison; 'When there are grey skies.' And so it would go on, verse after verse, the chorused answers to childish questions.

Occasionally, the Christmas gathering of the Climbers' Club coincided with a Welsh meet of the Stonnis Club and since a number of the latter were also members of the former, Helyg's accommodation had to be augmented by other eating and sleeping arrangements for, in those days, the CC was strictly a men only club. Fortunately, there was a nice convenient hostelry just about a mile down the road from Helyg: Tal-y-Waen was the home of the local mountain guide George ('Scottie') Dwyer and his wife. It catered for climbers and was also well situated for visiting Craig-yr-Ysfa where a mass ascent of *The Grimmeret*, (one of the hardest pre-war routes in Wales), had become a traditional Christmas Day objective with all participants expected to wear their paper hats, or carry balloons, retained from the Christmas Eve partying.*

After Christmas 1948, many climbers remained in North Wales for an extra day or two, working off their Yuletide excesses on the hills and crags around Ogwen. On the day after Boxing Day a large party of Stonnis folk set out to clamber up the buttress of Tryfan but, as the only member of that merry band who owned a car, I had promised to disengage myself from the mountain by early afternoon in order to drive down to Bangor and pick up two young ladies from the railway station. One being a nurse at a busy Birmingham hospital and the other, her younger sister, a BBC radio producer's secretary, both had to work over Christmas so they were rather late in joining the Stonnis Club's meet. The return journey up that winding road of the Nant Ffrancon pass with three of us crammed into a small open-topped, two-seater sports car and my passengers' well-filled rucksacks

*An account of these proceedings, entitled *The Quivering Brethren*, was published in the 1989/90 Climbers' Club Journal.

taking up any space available behind the seats, called for considerable motoring skill. Those frequent gear changes were most decidedly tricky – the MG's ultra short gear stick nestled snugly between the legs of one of my passengers. As we neared the tenth milestone from Bangor my pre-occupation with this delicate task had to cease temporarily while I drove more slowly, looking upwards and scanning the impressive cliffs above for any sign of climbers. Despite the gathering mist and noticeably dwindling daylight I soon spotted a number of folk on the upper pitches of Tryfan's Milestone Buttress. Promptly braking to a halt and getting out of the car I cupped both hands in front of my face and directed a shout in their direction;

"WHAT'S-THE-WEATHER-LIKE?"

Faint echoes from surrounding crags half repeated my question before the even fainter sounds of a melodious reply from above came floating down;

"When there are blue skies."

I bellowed again;

"WHAT-WILL-YOU-DO-ABOUT-IT?"

Sure enough the expected answer soon followed much clearer this time with all voices in close harmony;

"Never mind those grey skies."

Just once more I hollered back;

"WHAT-WILL-YOU-HAVE?"

The final response was real Welsh male voice choir stuff, its last words stretched and held;

"We'll still have you, Sonny Boyee!"

My two companions glanced from me to the cliff and back again in utter amazement then Winifred gave a sly, knowing smile. Her elder sister, Margaret, as yet unschooled in all the funny idiosyncratic ways of the Stonnis Club, looked at me quizzically and asked quite innocently;

"Do you know those people up there?"

"Well," I replied, keeping as straight a face as possible; "I'm not absolutely sure so let's go up and find out who they are."

It was a good excuse to get our hands on some rock before the daylight went completely so we were soon scrambling through the maze of massive twilight boulders to reach the Milestone Buttress and climb its *Ordinary Route*. When we reached the top there was neither sight nor sound of those Al Jolson mimics – the cliff was silent and in darkness.

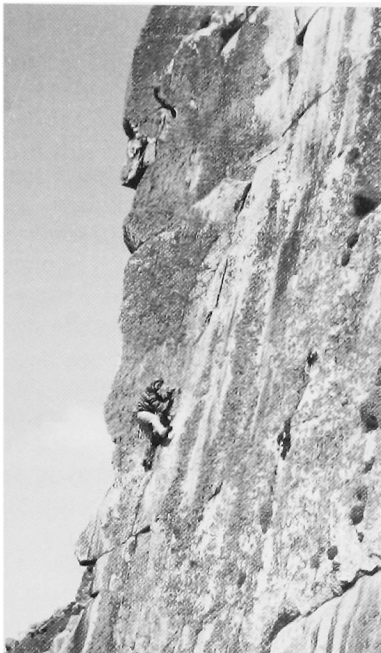
Continuing the journey to Tal-y-Waen, our car's headlights illuminated a large group of climbers walking down the road near Helyg. As we went by, a falsetto voice cried out;

"What's the weather like?"

This time it was my female duo who were quick to respond;

"When there are grey skies."

They had soon picked up that crazy number, on the Milestone.

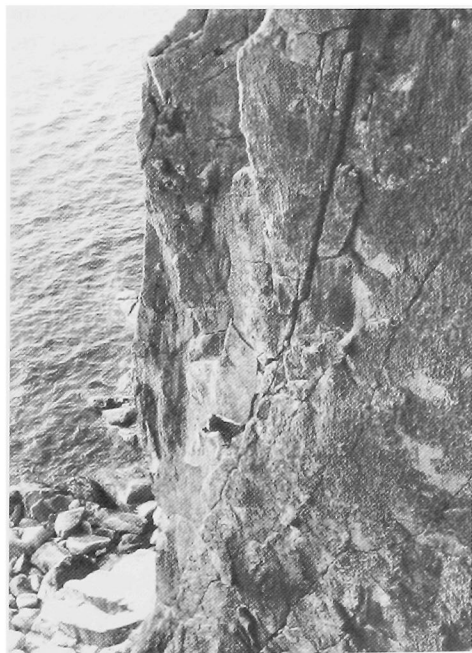


Top Left: Graham Gilbert on 'Road Runner', First Buttress North.

Top Right: Pat Littlejohn on 'Antiworlds', Deep Zawn

Below: Graham Gilbert on 'Formula One', First Buttress South.

All first ascents on Lundy, September 1972. Photos: Bob Moulton



Editor's Note re 1993 CCJ:

That's the trouble with asking for articles, attending PSC meetings and having two or three passed over the table. Simon Cardy assures me he would have been pleased to write the article **Lundy The Golden Years** but he didn't! Of course it was Bob Moulton
Sorry Bob!

Chinaman's Peak

T.E.Kenny

I climbed with some unlikely partners in the Rockies that summer on an opportunistic basis. But the unlikelyest of all was Michel Pelletien, a French-Canadian 5.11c sports climber in his early 20s who lived in Squamish, north of Vancouver. Famous for its massive granite face, The Chieftain, Squamish is a climbers' climbing area; a place where locals from Yosemite and Joshua Tree go for their holidays. Michel climbed here three days a week, when he wasn't somewhere else, so I knew he had to be good.

It had been unusually hot in the Rockies that summer. Many of the mixed routes had been in poor condition and dangerous. I had already experienced a powder snow avalanche on the North Ridge of Assiniboine, stone fall on the North Face of Mt Fay and from the North Face of Mt Athabasca, and had witnessed a massive avalanche involving the whole side of the nearby *Silverhorn* route.

So driving down from the Columbia Ice Fields to the Canmore Club House of the Canadian Alpine Club that Friday night, I was looking forward to a peaceful week in the relative safety of the Bow Valley rock climbs with my friend Ian from England. My only concern was that, following his recent leg injury, he might not be fit for climbing.

I fancied the North East Face of Chinaman's Peak, a 13 pitch 1,500 foot limestone rock climb at 5.7 by the best variation and allegedly with bolted stances. It had a reputation as a fun-climb.

Chinaman's Peak catches the eye as a perfect pyramid as Canmore is approached from Calgary. Everyone wants to climb it. It is separated from the precipitous east end of the 13 mile long Mount Rundel by a col, over which passes the Smith-Dorian-Spray trail into Kananaskis.

But at breakfast in the club house that morning, my worst fear came true. Ian was limping badly and clearly would not make it. I was bitterly disappointed. Meanwhile, Michel was frying a pan full of potatoes for breakfast when the big American approached him,

"Say Michel, we're really sorry but to do that route as a threesome would take eight hours and we're not prepared to do that".

Michel looked dejected; over six feet tall and wearing a dirty white baby grow, in which he ate, slept and climbed and never changed, he looked like a bouncer for Mothercare.

"What route was that, Michel?" I asked.

"North East Face of Chinaman's," he replied.

"Well, I'm stuck as well," I said, "shall we do it together?"

"I can be ready in five minutes," he said, emptying his frying pan into a loaf, "I'll see you in the car park to pack the gear".

He looked at my rack in disbelief,

"We'll use my rack," he said, "you take this half". He passed me 20 pounds of rack. "I'll take the other half".

"Is this your big wall rack, Michel?", I asked.

"No, it's my little wall rack," came the reply. Ten minutes later, we were bouncing up the Smith-Dorian-Spray trail, scattering stones and dust in my shining new hire car with my mind more on the no-claims bonus than the climb.

But safely parked and unscathed, we were soon walking up through the pine forest and out onto the enormous boulder field which leads to a scree traverse directly under the great vertical rock wall of the North Face.

"What about falling rocks?" I asked.

"Don't worry," he said, "you'll hear them before they hit you."

Now around the corner and to the foot of some easy slabs that marked the start of the route.

"I need to eat again," he said, and buried his face in the loaf. I took the initiative and geared up.

"We'll just solo these first slabs," I spluttered.

"But of course, what else?" he said.

Well, the slabs might have been easy angle but they were exceedingly loose with debris on the holds. Exposure grew and I was a bit sorry I had suggested soloing. But I was halfway up, and looking down he was just gearing up. Next thing he flows past me in effortless smooth motion and is waiting for me at the stance.

"Monsieur," he says, "I do not know how old you are but you are clearly older than I. I hope that when I am your age, I am as fit as you" I wasn't sure how to take that but it did strike me that here we were, two players from the antitheses of the game, about to meet on the middle ground.

Now we glimpsed the Americans, several pitches ahead.

"Hey you guys, look here, I found myself a buddy", he shouted.

I'd been doing my arithmetic and reckoned that if I did the first pitch, he'd get the crux.

"I'll do this pitch," I said.

"Fine". The rock was sun-baked and warm with easy but pleasant climbing up a long groove. I took out the full rope and he came up so quickly that I couldn't take in fast enough. He passed by without comment to take out another



*Michel Pelletien on Diedre Pitch, Chinaman's Peak
(Bow River and Canmore behind).*

Photo: T.E.Kenny

full rope without a runner. Now it was turning into a contest to lead the longest pitch with fewest runners. Unfortunately, these long leads had messed up my calculations and here I was, landed with the crux.

It looked easy from below, as usual, and even as I passed a peg, I didn't feel the need to clip in. But soon the holds on the little arête I was following ran out. There was another, plausible looking arête a metre to the left. The problem was they were separated by a void in-between.

"I'm just going down a bit to clip into that peg, Michel."

"Well, hurry up, I'm getting hungry again," he shouted.

I leant away from the arête with my right hand and stretched my left foot across towards a hold on the adjacent lip and hoped it would reach. Then I was across. I hoped it was the correct line because I didn't fancy reversing that move. Even popular Rockies' routes have a virgin feel about them and are unpolished.

Now up through some little overhangs on big jugs and cracks. I found another peg and used it this time, reassured to be on route. This pitch will slow him down a bit I thought. He was at the crux in no time but then he delayed. Good, I thought, he's having a problem.

"Monsieur," he said, "I can see a rope."

"You mean a sling," I said.

"No, I said a rope and I mean a rope. There is a rope hanging down over there, I'm going to investigate." He scrambled off over 5.9 ground to the right and vanished. Then he returned. "There is a rope hanging down from a big overhang and underneath is a jug of water."

"Do you see any bodies?"

"No, I see no bodies, just a rope and a jug of water." He made short work of my crux and joined me.

"And now I must eat," he said. "If I don't eat every two hours, I lose my strength." I did not object.

It got a bit harder now and more grooves led up to the big final Diedre and slab pitches. But the climbing was superb. First of all up the Diedre proper and then bearing left onto the steep slab. One section was quite smooth but protected by a peg. He just took it in his stride.

We reached the summit coincidentally with the Americans and two and a half hours from the lower slabs.

"Hey, we caught you guys up, me and my buddy here climb fast," said Michel.

A solitary figure stood at the far end of the long summit ridge. We walked over. He was surrounded by tons of equipment, bolts, compressor, ropes, the lot. Now the mystery of a dangling rope was to be explained. This guy had flown in from Vancouver the week before to put up a solo, 20 pitch, bolted, sports climb straight up the north face. The dangling rope had been his workplace for the morning. But we never explained the jug of water.

Now we slid down the disgusting scree slopes back towards the Smith-Dorian-Spray trail with the east end of Rundel and its legendary rock climbs in full view. Maybe Michel would climb here with me tomorrow?

"What do you do next, Michel?" I asked.

"Tonight, I meet my friend in Banff at 11 o'clock. Then we drive up the Radium Highway to sleep in the car and tomorrow we go up to North Face of Mt Stanley".

I never saw him again but have little doubt that he did it

Lambs to the Slaughter

Montagne des Agneaux, 3,662m, Ecrins Massif, Dauphiné Alps

Terry Gifford

I'd stopped going to the Alps. Once was enough. A crocodile up the Wildspitze and a beautiful but scary morning on the Zinal Rothorn watching the team ahead fall off the crux concluded my apprenticeship in one season. Alpinists will say I'd hardly got started, and they'd be right. But I decided I could live longer and better without the hut walks, the hurry, the competition, the crowds and the stonefall. I saw too many accidents waiting to happen that were outside my control. OK, call it fear. So when the kids came along I had great summers family camping around the crags of France – wine and warm limestone between games of boule.

But kids grow up and it all comes around again. Tom had visited Chamonix with his French exchange family at 14 and by 18 wanted axes and plastic boots for his birthday. It could be put off no longer. It was time for a return match. The CC/AC alpine meet was at Ailefroide and the Dauphiné seemed a suitable place for a second look. We arrived early and went up on the Glacier Blanc, just an hour from the car park, for Tom to try out his new tools and for me to brush up on technique. If you've never practised ice-axe arrests on glacier ice with your banana pick the mountain will make a monkey out of you sooner or later.

When the meet assembled, nine of us went up to the Pelvoux hut for the Pelvoux traverse by the *Coolidge Couloir*. At 3.30 the next morning Tom and I found that we had gone too high, too early, too fast. Going slowly and with lots of rests we were nevertheless a quarter of an hour ahead of the recommended time. Paradoxically, this was a measure of our unfitness for alpine walking. We hadn't found our rhythm yet. But this trip also showed us that Daphne was going at about our pace – and she completed the route – so we invited her to join us on our trip to Montagne des Agneaux. This had been recommended by Wil Hurford as a good acclimatisation route of snow and rock. It turned out to be much more than that.

Daphne hesitated.

"I'm not sure if I should do this. Look what happened the last time I accepted an invitation from you!"

As the last person on the rope she'd finished in the dark at North Stack, Anglesey on *Britomartis* (HVS 5a) in January after Norman had been washed by a wave whilst leading the initial crux traverse. He had valiantly led the route in a slow state of increasing hypothermia, so spaced out he'd not stopped at the end of the first pitch but stretched the ropes to the cliff top. (His account of this in the 1989/90 CCJ and is called **A Wet Weekend in Wales**.)

"But we are a long way from the sea", I persuaded, "and Norman." I'm not sure which point won.

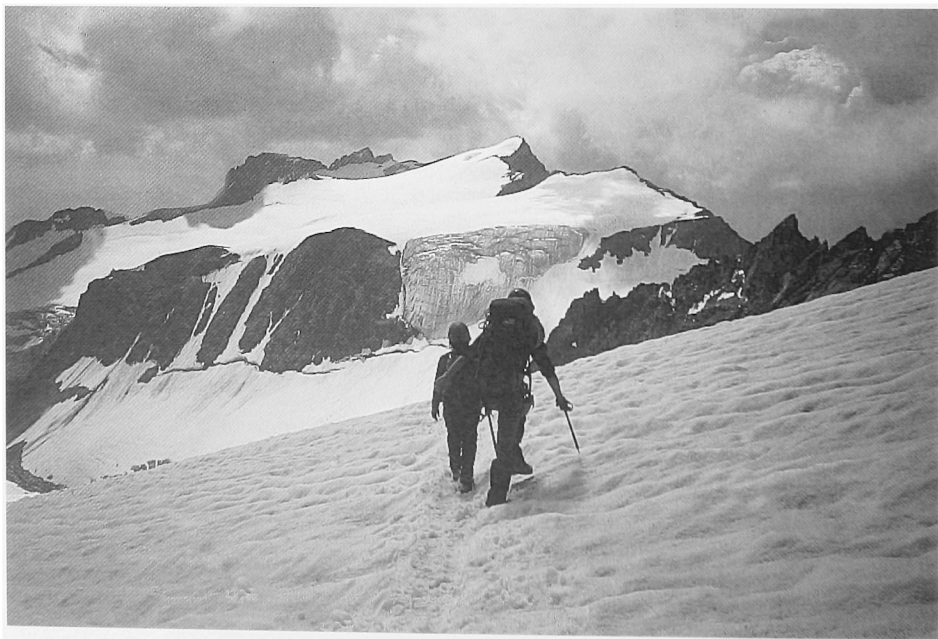
"So what do you think of bivying above the hut and leaving at, say, 6.30 tonight?"

"Mmm... You know, I think I can manage without a sleeping bag."

Daphne was upping the stakes.

“OK. I’ll try it myself.” Well, it almost worked.

The hour and a half walk up the zigzags to the Glacier Blanc hut was pleasant in the last light of day. There was someone new to talk to – or listen to, in Daphne’s case – and there were no crowds charging up to one of the most popular huts in France. Above it there were several tents and the boulder bivy sites were occupied by sleeping bodies. But we found a flat patch with a low wall built to keep out the chill breeze off the glacier. By ten o’clock we’d built it up a bit and settled down. I was cold on my upper hip, probably because I had my thermarest mat inside my bivy bag. During the night Tom turned a lot in his plastic survival bag and I assumed, wrongly, that he was cold too. Daphne just snored, as experienced alpinists should. Somehow I’d got to sleep by the time the alarm went off at 3.30am. Breakfast was bread, cheese and water, eaten whilst lacing boots by headtorch. All around us lights in the darkness indicated others doing the same. It was as if some ancient army had arisen from the earth at a silent signal. We appeared to be the first on the trail up the moonlit moraine. No torch was needed. It was windless and I was sweating already, still wearing all the clothes I’d slept in. At the snow we were overtaken by the first silent shadows. At the last boulder in the snowfield we paused to put on crampons, not a good place to do so because things can fall down the melted gap between rock and snow. Tom gave me chocolate. Daphne was still eating dry muesli. So we set off to plod up the snowfield, going as slowly as possible, happy in the knowledge that Daphne would be slower and still get to the top. A glance at the guidebook might suggest that this south-west face route to the south ridge is a boringly easy snow-plod to a worthless rock scramble up an insignificant summit. If W.A.B.Coolidge



Descending the Monêtier Glacier from Col Tuckett. Photo: Terry Gifford

first climbed it in 1873, it is graded Facile and is only four hours from the hut, it's hardly a great achievement. But this is to miss the point. It is continually interesting, changing direction four times, linking three glaciers, climaxing in exposed rock climbing, and at 3,662 metres giving the best views of the entire Ecrins massif from the Pelvoux to the Meije, not to mention Mont Blanc beyond.

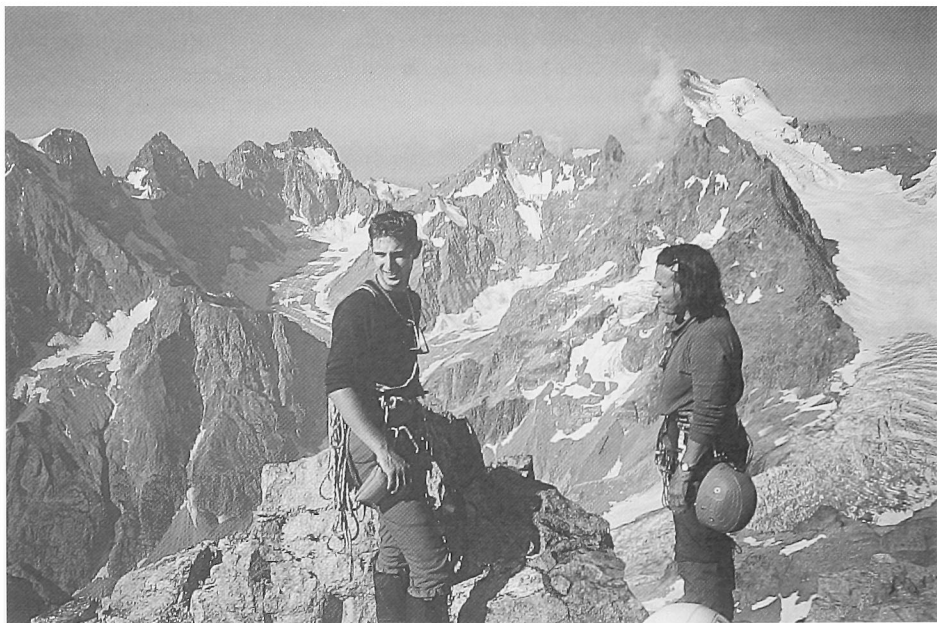
Fit people went in a straight line up the Glacier Jean Gauthier, head down, full throttle. They should have looked up. High on the left the route goes over loose rock which makes a line of stonefall down to those greyhounds cutting the corner below – lambs to the slaughter again. I spotted a guide taking his party on a long zig to the right, to zag back left higher up. I pointed this out to Tom and we did the same. When I came to cross those rocks, clumsily in crampons, I knocked one down and stood dumb for the word 'Below!' in French as it rolled silently, the word and the rock, down the snow towards a couple who were eventually alerted by the cry of the Frenchman beside me. They dodged it.

"Dad, you should have called", Tom said, embarrassed.

At the next rest, where these rocks meet the next glacier, the Frenchman gave me a long look. I accepted it, guiltily.

Now, as dawn was lighting up the Pelvoux and the Ecrins behind us, we turned right. Snow again led up to rock and a little narrow ledge that gave access to the knife-edge snow of the Col du Monétier. As I waited for Tom and Daphne, a Frenchman told me my 'family' were not far behind. I smiled at my unexpected marriage to Daphne. (Sorry, Daphne, I know this is not the place for you to find this out. I have somehow forgotten to mention it before.) Here the sun hit us too and gleaming snow swept away below us towards the Briançon valley. A left turn, down, then up the snow brought the summit rock pyramid in sight for the first time. As we got closer it was clear that there was a certain amount of Gallic concern about the first steep rocks. The short, horizontal rock ridge of Col Tuckett was a consternation of crampons and axes abandoned, ropes and belays, climbers wanting to overtake each other and guides shouting at their clients. Daphne arrived and suggested we solo it. So we did. It was steep, exposed, Diff and delightful. We were on our home ground. Luckily no-one fell on us. From here on it was our turn to quietly overtake a few roped up scramblers on the loose, open but easy south-east face. When the next hold appeared to be a cairn, the summit came as a surprise.

And what a summit view! To our left the multi-headed Pelvoux, to its right the squat Ecrins, far right again the mighty Meije was outlined in all its length. For Tom's first alpine peak the weather, the view, the company and the climb could not have been bettered. He pulled out a hip-flask and offered me a dram, surprising me with the quality of his upbringing. (He's lived with his mother since he was ten.) Daphne ate some more dry muesli and posed patiently for photos. I looked around at my fellow summiteers. Mostly they were male and female pairs, all eccentrically dressed, but all roped together. On the descent over that loose easy angled rock they were going to be lethal. So when a guide set off with his five-client-rope, I suggested that we followed. Actually I had difficulty keeping up with them. It was amazing. They all moved together, he shouting encouragingly at the woman in front to go left or right, whilst he belayed them over a spike before racing down to the next spike. He knew the route upside down and every belay spike along the way. Eventually I lost them and waited for



Tom Gifford and Daphne Pritchard on the summit of Montagne des Agneaux. (Barre des Ecrins on the right.) Photo: Terry Gifford

Tom and Daphne at the bottom of a tricky bit. By the time I got to the initial rock step again his 'bonne corde' were sliding down the snow below. As I rigged the rappel ropes more consternation broke out from the French teams queuing up behind. They'd passed the bolts on the way up presumably, but did not realise that a rappel was the norm. Their single ropes, halved, might not reach, they now realised, and they began making friends with other ropes in order to join together, in that French sort of way. Tom had forgotten his belay plate so he had to learn the three twists round a krab method that is not in the manuals. Daphne helpfully suggested the hot seat method, but Tom's smile and, "No thanks" implied that, unlike the French, contraception of a permanent nature was not required here. I also had a sentimental attachment to the possibility of the continuation of the 'corde de famille', or (for those from Nottingham) the family line.

By now we were so late that the soft snow allowed for a fast descent: Tom discovered the sitting glissade and I discovered that I had a hole in the outer layer of my trousers' seat that turned into an ice pack which had, by the bottom of the route, cooled my bottom into a dangerous state of frostbite which I would have had difficulty explaining to Gill, amongst other things, when I got home.

'Montagne des Agneaux' means 'The Mountain of the Lambs'. This time we had been the lambs of innocence, easily given a wonderful first, second and latest alpine experience on the continuously interesting Montagne des Agneaux. Perhaps, after all, you don't have to be lambs to the slaughter if you pick your routes, conditions and partners in the Alps.

This Route

Kym Martindale

Gone feral
in pursuit of routes,
broken loose
and thin from wanting.

Crawling in the face of nature.

But she's traded too much
for this bitter line,
this moon-arid rockscape with its sabre-toothed peaks;
and every perfect sinew
aches with the price.
For what is she?
Stitched together from hunger,
and anger and remorse,
she snarls, curses
in black, sharp places
to fire her reach
and damn the earth dragging at her hips.
She's hauled it up so many routes,
but it's never enough.

Her other self grows cold in the valley,
her one-time self, lambent in the gleam of the rock,
is a painful return
of rooms empty, and fires gone out,
of nights when terrible overhangs loom,
no-one to cradle them away.

This route has rung the till.

Her arms are solid with tiredness,
lumps she must carry.
On the last ledge she leans,
could slide into space,
let the slow, sorrowful leaving
wind her in like sleep.

For there is nothing above
but the top,
and the deeply shadowed descent.

The Austrian Route on the North Face of Les Courtes – A Winter Ascent

Fritz Sumner

The Argentière hut in winter has always been a place of great atmosphere for me, (so different from the summer scene). This year, January 1994 was no exception. No more than ten climbers (no skiers) and all going for something good. The cross section was quite interesting. Three French lads had just come back from doing the *Petit Viking* which they said was in brilliant nick and two Swiss/German lads had just done the *Ghilini Couloir* on the Pré de Bar. Two Dutch lads just arrived and were going for the Courtes and two other English lads, one (whose boss was Dick Turnbull and worked at Outside, Llanberis), was the comedian of the party.

The conditions so far this winter had not been good, high winds and a lot of snow had kept climbers from a lot of the high routes unlike the last few years. A good spell was forecast – at least three good days – the first since the start of the season.

The flog across the glacier and up to the base of the *Austrian Route* was better than expected, good consolidated stuff although there was just the hint of windslab about it. My partner, Jim Savage, seemed like a power house of energy arriving at the 'scrund with me trailing some way behind.

We roped up, made an easy crossing of the 'scrund and started up a 50° slope to a vague weakness in the rocks above. A nice pitch through these, probably II/III on excellent névé brought us to another 50° slope. This was taken diagonally right to a 55° section before another neck through rocks which came out onto a band of slabs with a groove/gully line through them on the right.

The snow was not quite as good here and the pitch up the groove/gully line gave the hardest climbing on the route, grade III Scottish. After the slabs another 50° slope but this time on good ice.

We slanted off up to the right again to where a snowy ramp line cut through rock. The start was awkward, balancing on weirdly angled rock wedged in ice to gain the ramp proper. A few pitches up this brought us level with the Red Tower on the *Central Spur* with my power house partner starting to wane.

Darkness suddenly was not far away, the sky had become overcast with a nasty dark look over towards the Argentière. After a few pitches above the Red Tower it was head torches out and the hopeless hunt for the bivy ledge began. Eventually a huge boulder loomed ahead and a convenient slot beneath it gave us what we were looking for. The height was 3,700 metres according to my barometer watch so three pitches next morning should see us to the top.

A light was flashing us from the Argentière hut. The two English lads were obviously wondering if we were OK. We made sure we didn't flash back.

The bivy slot was sloping at about 30° and snow was carefully pushed out to form a ledge, very precarious but decidedly better than hanging from harnesses. Fortunately there were no disasters like dropping the stove or boots.

The morning's weather had a bad look about it. Cloud was brushing the

summit just above us. The forecast man had got it wrong again. Only two good days, not three.

The altimeter reading was correct – three to four pitches and we were on the summit, looking at the Blanc, or what we could see of it, most of it covered in an evil layer of dark cloud. Time to make a fast descent so we opted for the quick way down via the Col des Droites. The descent down this avalanche prone slope was hideous, sinking thigh deep at every step on 40° to 45° slopes all the way to the glacier.

No one else had been this way except for a lone skier whom we could see lower down the slope. Presumably a solo lad carrying skis, having done something on the Droites.

The descent back to Montenvers and eventually Chamonix was the usual knacker grinding. But the route was done and everything felt good.



Jim Savage on North Face of les Courtes. Photo: Fritz Sumner

Ladhar Bheinn (Larven)

Cliff Fishwick

I dreamt that I sailed into Loch Hourn on a glorious morning in August, landed from the dinghy on the edge of Barrisdale Bay and, climbing round the shoulder of Larven I plodded up the north-east ridge to the summit. There I sat in bright sunshine for a while then, descending to the bay, was picked up in the dinghy and, joining the boat, sailed back into a rich sunset across The Sound of Sleat to Skye.

When I awoke I found that it was not a dream but real. But it was a bit more complicated than my brief description suggests.

I had wanted to climb Larven for some years, attracted as many others have been by the remoteness of the mountain and the great wilderness of Knoydart which surrounds it. I had studied accounts of it and created a picture in my mind of the whole scene. The main problem was getting there, the usual way is to drive along the 20 miles of single track road which runs from the main A87 near Loch Garry to the farms at the head of the loch, Kinlochourn. There follows a walk of six or seven miles along the lochside to Barrisdale Bay behind which rises Larven, hidden by its ridges which descend to the loch. There is a bothy at the bay or camping is possible. After the climb the return by the same route. However, my wife Pat, was not very keen either to walk into the bothy or stay in Kinlochourn alone in our camper van. So the most direct way seemed to approach from the sea.

On other occasions I had sailed in various parts of Scotland with my son Mark in his well known old yawl, Temptress, but she needed to get to Scotland on each occasion from Falmouth, making the whole trip more complicated. By deciding to leave the boat to winter in Scotland, some of the urgency was removed and she would be there for the next summer too. So we sailed, he and I, from the Isles of Scilly to the Clyde where I left and returned to Devon by train to drive the camper and Pat back to Scotland. Meanwhile Mark's girlfriend, Vicki, joined Temptress in the Clyde and they sailed to Mull and onward. Pat and I arrived in the van at Isleornsay on the Sleat peninsula and awaited their arrival while gazing across the sound to the entrance of Loch Hourn dominated on one side by Beinn Sgriol and on the other by Larven. The area is noted for bad weather; locally known as 'Loch Hell' its steep fjord-like configuration attracting any cloud and rain in the neighbourhood. When Temptress arrived Vicki stated categorically that there seemed to be a good weather slot for the 'morrow, so at 8.00am we weighed anchor on a fine morning with clouds rising above Loch Hourn, though by no means without doubts about the way the weather would develop. For this reason Mark did not wish to stay overnight in the Loch. Temptress is a deep draught boat and anchoring is difficult in these lochs where the water is either too deep or shoaling quickly as at Barrisdale, where extensive flats dry out. Although he has joined me on many occasions in the mountains, Mark did not want to leave Pat and Vicki alone with the boat so within minutes of arriving I was being ferried ashore by Vicki, who dropped me among the rocks at the edge of the bay. It was 10.00am. Everything looked different from my imagined scene. Was that Larven ahead or some other big mountain? Where was the stalkers' track described in the

Munro book with such simplicity? The hinterland of the bay seemed bigger and wider . . .

I struck out by the river to where I could see a couple of tents. A drowsy climber emerged and I asked for the track. I had to retrace my steps. It was now 10.30am so I cracked on in the increasing warmth on a nearly hidden track through shoulder-high bracken, on the slopes of the Creag Bheithe ridge. The path rose round the shoulder then began to flatten and descend – was it the right track? On and on then round to the left until suddenly Coire Dhorrcail opened up dramatically. The hidden mountain showed the true scale of its construction – a wide corrie backed by great crags and enclosed on the left and right by two high ridges. The sheltered corrie was green and lush – almost subtropical.

Now I knew what was in store. Since I returned to the Scottish hills in more recent years I have rediscovered the sometimes prolific vegetation of these western mountains. Most routes to summits may be technically easy in rock climbing terms but the going is never easy. These ‘walks’ entail strenuous struggles over rough ground which are often very time consuming. When you have to leave a stalkers’ track, expect the worst!

As I looked up the corrie I could see the sweep of the slopes leading up to the ridge on the right and a long way above. The path I was on now became less distinct, as it followed the left side of the stream and became wet, with high marsh grasses, hummocks and hidden rocks. To the right, the stream which cascades from the upper corrie descended into a deep and precipitous gorge, which ran out to Loch Houran.



From halfway up Ladhar Bheinn. (Temptress visible in Barrisdale Bay.)

Photo: Cliff Fishwick

At the point where the last traces of human passage ended I crossed the stream and started up the uninviting soggy slope, with no obvious contours on which to plan the ascent. Every slight hollow contained a hidden dripping watercourse – all the vegetation was at least knee deep. Maybe things would be better early in the season before the intense summer growth but now I could only take each rise as it came. About 1,200 feet later I emerged, cursing and sweating onto the rounded ridge. I was now stripped to the waist and still very hot! A path along the ridge crest appeared, thank goodness, and, following it, I moved over a succession of rises, each becoming narrower as the slopes on either side fell away more steeply. As I dropped to a shallow col I was surprised to see a stag no more than 20 yards away staring at me with a puzzled expression. I took out my camera slowly and he posed perfectly for a moment then continued to graze as I walked by. The ridge now rose to a beautiful crest with steep sides to seaward and into the head of the corrie. I was now abreast of the top of the big crags and opposite, across the corrie, was the steep dome of Stob a' Chearcaill on the Creag Bheithè ridge. This part of my ridge was the subsidiary fine crest of Stob a' Choire Odhaire and there only remained a short descent, then a final push up to the summit ridge. Soon I was standing on the roof of Knoydart – for so it seemed. This was exactly as described in my reading of descriptions of the mountain. The two summits are joined by a ridge like the top of a tent – just as simple and wide open to the surrounding scenery. On this day I had the good fortune to be able to see in every direction. My gaze covered wave upon wave of hills from Skye to the west round through Torridon northwards with Kintail and the rest of Knoydart and down to Mull and beyond. It was 2.00pm. It had taken me longer than anticipated. I could hardly believe my luck and contemplated continuing down the south ridge to drop down to the Barrisdale track. But I was anxious not to be late back and was well aware that the foreshortened view of the south ridge made it appear to be shorter than it would be. So, after a bite of food, a rest and some photographs I began a more leisurely descent by the way I had come up. However the long vegetated slope to the corrie bottom was just as tiring on the way down – there was no way you could trust the ground hidden beneath the tussocks. Near the bottom just as I felt it was all over, my left leg disappeared down a boggy hole forcing my right knee up to my chest. I can still feel that last sting from Larven. I am getting old, I know, but I think the mountain is quite tiring.

My return was seen from Temptress and the dinghy was waiting for me. Back on board I relaxed with tea and buns, as we were soon motoring back to Ornsay over a calm sea and into a blinding sunset over Skye. What an evening!

Next day we drove to Torridon in continuous heavy rain. Temptress returned to Mull.

A few days later I climbed the Beinn Eighe ridge – splendid, energetic and bone shaking but classic in its configuration and full of familiar kinds of obstacles with which my experience felt at home.

Larven was different.

Myths and Madness

The names are fictitious, the story not entirely?

Max Biden

The two elderly men were having a good day in the late Autumn sunshine which dappled Stanage Edge. They stopped below *Goliath's Groove* and broke out their flasks and butties. Gazing across the open landscape they reminisced and laughed about old adventures, some oft told, others not.

"It had all the ingredients of a classic epic" said one, "- a last great problem, wet rock on the day, personal ambition, dedication and that mainspring of motivation; the rivalry between friends and peers perceived as light-hearted but which can scar the soul."

He launched into his story proper, eyes misting over as he conjured up the mental imagery of those years long ago.

This line had drawn the gaze and musings of many passing climbers. Hanging there in that field of overhanging rock. Just looking at it was exciting and exhausting. It was almost as if this ancient dome of lava had the powers of a Gorgon but instead of turning her witnesses to stone, played only on their resolve. Each generation's experts and pacemakers alike were imbued with a sense of personal doubt and lethargy when glancing up and would pass, trying to avoid the Gorgon's Eye.

"It is often like that" said his friend "and sometimes it is only the brash enthusiasm of inexperienced youth which can overcome it."

"Indeed, and so it was with Eric" confirmed our storyteller, as he stretched himself amongst the warmth of the millstones and the bracken. "Of average size and frame, Eric was a very strong and gifted climber. Unfortunately, his ability could also be erratic. When the brain chemistry came together, he was unstoppable and then for no apparent reason he would be struggling on a VS."

"We've all met VSs like that", mumbled the other.

When this happened, he knew that he could do much harder climbs and he found the contradiction distracting. A disincentive to climbing at all on some occasions. Anyway, he too had been attracted to The Line but, like the mythical Perseus, he seemed to possess Athene's blessing. He had seen through the Gorgon's gaze and spied a tenuous line of holds behind the viperous tresses of moss.

"Come on, let's give it a go" he kept saying. "We've nothing to lose and we'll never know if we could have done it until we've tried."

"Quite right, young man." But alas I too was trapped under the Medusa's baleful influence and the usual enthusiasm was stonily suppressed.

Albert, however, was not. With a wiry frame, fingers of sprung titanium and more than adequate technical ability, he was always a sucker for other people's ambitions. Now Albert was wiser and more experienced than Eric and declared that The Line would have to be cleaned. So one Saturday, Eric dropped a rope down and started to brush. Being a thorough person and not having acquired the deeper subtleties of gardening skills, by the time he lost contact with the

overhanging rock several hours later, there was a white motorway down the crag where every tendril of moss and lichen had been eradicated. It was just a pity this motorway did not extend to the bottom. The wall below the halfway break still harboured its growth, protected by its steepness and out of the reach of our spinning human rotator.

Nevertheless, there was nothing for it now, they were committed. All those whose ambition towards The Line had been frozen would now be galvanised into action. It had to be Sunday and early (a lesson learned by certain eminent first ascensionists on Esk Crag long ago.) As it was, they were only just early enough. Over the horizon steamed the Professor and the Engineer. The Professor wore glasses and was of discerning nature. Technically skilled he also enjoyed contemplating the theory. The Engineer on the other hand was highly motivated, with a mechanical bent and vivid imagination which had lead him into hot water in the past.

The four were well acquainted but in such circumstances, even friendly rivalry can bring tensions. Eric and Albert prepared for their adventure on a ledge 100 feet up the crag, knowing they could not retreat. To do so would waste all the effort of the previous day for the benefit of the jackals below. The Professor and the Engineer settled down to watch from a good viewpoint on the other side of the gully. Maybe the attempt would fail and they would have a chance? Meanwhile, they could act as umpires in this contest between the movable and immovable. Time dragged a little at the start. A shared joke in the gully brought a burst of laughter floating up.

The first 20 feet were common with another 'last great line'. It was not well protected. Fingery, dynamic moves with no chance to warm up and carrying the prospect of a nasty fall onto rock ledges. The rock was damp and greasy in the early morning and Eric was struggling to gain the ledge from which his own route would move left. Was the attempt going to fail before it had even started? The self doubts worried at his desire, disturbing his concentration. The bubble of laughter launched from below reached his ears. Surely they could not be mocking? Were they trying to distract him? Was it part of a ploy to persuade him to retreat? Did they realise just how serious his precarious position was? Flustered and more than a little unhappy, he made the ledge. Now he could really begin...

Although he had made a conscious decision not to practice any of the moves from his rope the day before, he had noted possible key holds and the opportunities for protection. He placed a poor wire, made a couple of moves up to fix a better one and returned to his ledge. His first objective was a thin ramp-like feature sloping up a few feet above and to the left from which a hard series of moves would take him to the next good hold.

He hung off the edge of the ramp but the poor dish-like depression, which he had to move up to as he commenced the hard series, was wet. He just couldn't get enough chalk onto it as the moisture trickled down from the break above. Retreat and regroup. Another try, another scurry back to his den. He had to swamp the hold with chalk to soak up the wet and do it quickly enough to enable him to make the next moves before he ran out of strength. A plan hatched itself and he removed the T-shirt from under his sweater.

Stuffing it in his chalkbag ready to suffocate all the damp in a 12 inch radius, he dashed across the wall, grabbed the cloth and pulled it out in a flurry of excess

chalk. Inevitably, it snagged as it came, destroying the intended smooth action. He grabbed the cloth with his teeth while he attempted to sort himself out quickly, only to find that his fingers had slipped and he was hurtling down, his face engulfed in the T-shirt. His fall was a strange, dark and dusty sensation which ended level with his ledge. Retreat and regroup. There was now no noise at all from the audience below. They appeared spellbound by these desperate antics 'ragdoll throws itself at crag' might proclaim the climbing magazine headline.

He launched out again. He knew he was heading for a truly finger-curling jug, even if it was in the middle of nowhere, and the knowledge gave him the confidence to persevere. Once committed, he also knew there was no retreat by road – it would have to be British Airways again and this time it was going to be a long-haul flight – he went; gained the ramp, wished in the dish; lunge left, change hands, hesitate, swallow, don't forget to keep breathing, feet smearing, dynamic lunge left again – got it!

He hung there, his nose resting on his knuckles, fingers gripping tight in a puddle. He focused cross-eyed on his submerged fingernails. The jug was full of water. In the cool of the night, a hairline crack had wept its bitter tears and he was committed. The break and a possible rest was only a few moves above but that meant standing in the wet jug. And the thought of wet feet up here.... He moved up to a small spike.

Whoever had called it a spike needed prosecuting under the trade descriptions act. This apology was not the finger gripping spire it might have been but a thumb-like protuberance merging into the rock. A rest was needed urgently and our hero flipped a tie-off onto the nubbins to be held in place by his weight alone. He could hardly relax while he cuffed dry the soles of his shoes, wondering if the Gorgon would belch with disdain and dismiss his miserly respite into the void.

At least the rock was dry above – and clean, with a rusty peg to offer token protection. But there was no respite in the halfway break. More hard moves enabled an entry to be effected over the bulge protecting the main groove. Another runner boosted his confidence. Wild bridging and layaways allowed gradual progress to be attained. But the strength was dwindling and another fall was almost inevitable. He collapsed into space, swinging like the grandfather clock pendulum with which he was beginning to identify.

Thoughts of retreat flickered only to be dismissed by Albert down below.

"It's your route Eric, stick at it, give yourself a decent rest before having another go." The madness of stubborn determination blurred his thoughts and memory; the subconscious 'fight or flight' reaction resulted in both – fighting upwards followed by one or more flights from higher up the groove; a further need to rest.

He was nearly there when fate flung a final ironic gesture in his way. His gardening efforts had neglected the actual finishing moves and the earth beneath the grass which waved tantalisingly in the warm sun above was weeping treacherously onto those holds. Fortunately, the Professor had seen the problem and had gone round to the top to inspect. He removed the offending clods, dusted off the holds and at last Eric was up. The classic coming together of rival forces wins through.

Albert, by now stiff and cold, seconded the pitch and removed the gear. It was hard work. A rope was requested and given to the two who had patiently waited.

The Professor had problems and lost contact. Similarly the Engineer but without the gear to keep the rope into the rock, he flew out into space and had to be manhandled up the crag. It all went to confirm the difficulty of the route.

"Ah! what a weekend it had been..." The old man drifted off.

"I can't understand why this didn't become a well known epic?" queried his listener.

"Yes, it was a pity" came the reply. "It should have been. I'm sure it would have been a much more gripping story if it had been written up whilst the events were fresh in the mind. Perhaps all four names should have been credited to the first ascent because they all played a part in the adventure. Maybe Eric and Albert were concerned about the somewhat controversial profile of the other two at that time. Who knows? Who were Eric and Albert anyway? They were not well known. After a while, the ascent became engulfed in that air of judgmental self-righteousness which often clouds the Establishment of the day."

"Even so, it still makes a good yarn!"

And with that, the old guys picked up their rucksacks and sauntered back to the crag, happy to repeat their favourite problems.

Horatio's Horror

Terry Gifford

Yesterday the geese were going north
rippling their V uncertainly, high
above the moors in the sun-scoured sky.

Today the 'Golden Oldies' of the Climbers' Club
emerge under a far buttress of Birchen Edge,
white hair hidden by Joe Brown helmets

or suspiciously new woollen army caps.
Ex-WD to a man, they were killers.
They fought for this day. They offer

each other a rope, biscuits, stories
about the innocent wisdom of recruits
and a 70th birthday night on Cader Idris.

Arriving late, I heave my 'winter fat'
onto rock until halted by the roof
of *Horatio's Horror*. I can't hang left.

'Would you prefer your lunch sent up?'
I descend under tension from rope and hubris.
Later it is led by a man of sixty-two.

Mike Birt, even bolder, strides out right,
exposed to the face of *Nelson's Nemesis*.
Seconding, I can only marvel at how

fingers fit the tilted gritstone grooves
of the final moves and the mind is calmed
by the wide sky, that untracked wild moor.

Such a day a sailor (who's not a climber)
might give his right arm for! Two drops of blood
on the rocking chockstone of *Victory Vice*

are all the price we pay today, plus past
horrors buried under sincere politeness:
as they leave they thank each other.

Mike Banks says, 'Do you think you could write
a pithy poem about today?'
Obviously not. But thank you. Thank you.

Climbing, Skiing and Scoring Points

Mark Vallance

Since the moment Jerry Moffatt topped out number one at the Leeds Climbing Competition and Simon Nadin became the first World Champion Climber it would seem that competitions were here to stay. Magazine editors have been filling their columns with reports, profiles, photographs and league tables. Columnists have been hailing the dawn of a new era. Manufacturers have been sponsoring their 'hired guns' to promote their goods and the Sports Council have been giving our tax money to the BMC to promote the only thing that they understand – 'events'.

What is the relevance of competitions for the ordinary climber? We might happen to see a five minute snip of an event on television or even go to watch a competition. We might actually take part in a bouldering competition at a local wall – but overwhelmingly it is real climbing, not competitions, that we actually do.

Most competitive sports such as soccer, tennis or darts are about scoring points and the way the points are scored is universal within each sport. Whatever the game or the level of competition, be it school, club or top professional – all are trying to do the same thing – score points to win.

So what, you might ask, have climbing competitions got to do with skiing? Most of the skiers in the world, just like most of the climbers, have never entered or been to a competition, though like me they may watch Ski Sunday every now and then. Skiing is like climbing in that the thing that skiers and climbers actually do, when they do their thing, is totally different from what the competitive minority do.

As in climbing, there are a wide variety of games that recreational skiers play – leisurely cruising a blue run, aggressively tackling a slope of icy moguls, carving new tracks through half a metre of powder, skinning to an alpine peak in anticipation of a perfect spring snow descent or loping cross-country through deep woods on lightweight skis – these are, in their own way, much like the various games that climbers play. These 'games' are played with varying degrees of skill but without formal rules or constraints, and above all, without scoring points. We do it because the activity is pleasurable, exhilarating, challenging, or maybe just companionable; we do not do it to win. Like competitive climbing, the world of ski racing has little in common with the activity indulged in by recreational skiers, other than the equipment that is used. Like climbing, there is, for every thousand recreational skiers, only one racer. A ski racer, like a competition climber, is only active for a few minutes, whilst the recreational activity usually lasts all day.

Competitive events in both sports are extremely costly. Organising a ski event, even a basic kids' event, requires time, organisation, equipment and logistics. To promote a two day international climbing competition costs about \$100,000; that's about \$100 a minute. Neither skiing nor climbing competitions can happen without sponsorship.

It would be extremely difficult for a group of keen climbers or skiers to go out

and organise a serious competition. It is also the last thing that most of them want to do. I have not yet heard of any climbing club that has hired a climbing wall for a week-end to initiate a formal competition to see which of its members is the best climber. Most of us have better things to do with our climbing time.

But competitive ski racing is big business. Why should competition climbing not be just as successful? Ski racing, in all its forms, is fast, exciting and colourful. It takes place in exotic locations and is sustainable through a whole season. Competitions are not only sponsored and backed by a multi-billion pound skiing equipment, clothing and holiday industry but other industries such as banking, insurance and tobacco sponsor events.

This is because the activity of ski racing, in all its forms, is both interesting and understandable by the uninitiated or casual observer. Competitive skiing contains high levels of skill, speed, danger and thrills that are easy for anyone to appreciate.

Compare this to climbing where the activity is slow, the degree of difficulty impossible actually to see, and the level of skill displayed by the participants hard to assess, particularly by the uninitiated viewer. The action takes place indoors on an artificial surface in some place like Birmingham and where the average 'fall' has nowhere near the 'ooh aah' appeal of those car-wheeling, tumbling, snow churning humdingers we see on the ski slopes. It is not surprising that sponsorship for regular large scale, international climbing competitions is hard to come by and that even 'World Cup' events are regularly cancelled for lack of support.

There are many who regularly take part in bouldering and other competitions on local climbing walls but these events are small and easy to organise. They can be funded by an entry fee that climbers are able and willing to pay. They are intended to be fun and one of the nicest features of them is that participants regularly help and encourage each other – winning is not that important. Climbers would never wish to pay the true cost of participating in large scale leading competitions, whilst spectators will not pay enough and the media is not much interested – just a five minutes clip of the condensed highlights every few months is all the interest that the non-climbing public will sustain.

But if you are a budding rock superstar there is a ray of hope. There is an event watched by millions every week that features climbing. It's exciting and glamorous, has a big pay out for the winner, is for men and women and is played by amateurs and professionals but so far it has not got UIAA approval. It's called **Gladiators**.

The Hardest Walk in the World?

The Corsican GR20

Hamish Nicol

George, Peter, Malcolm, Fleur and I set off to walk the southern section of the GR20 on Monday July 4th 1994. The southern section is far easier than the northern, so it would be good practice, and break us in gently. We would go as far as Vizzavona in six days, and catch the train from there back to Calvi. But the very next day at 5pm I was alone walking thoughtfully up to the Asinao hut. How did this happen?

The walk from Conca in the south of Corsica to Calenzana in the north is the hardest of all the French Grande Randonnées and a pretty tough undertaking, because it is remote, dry, hot and in places involves technically difficult scrambling. It is 110 miles long and you have to climb up and down 9,700 metres (32,000 feet). The line is direct and uncompromising and follows the central mountain spine of Corsica, rarely dropping below 1,000 metres and reaching a maximum height of 2,200 metres. On some days you will not cover more than one mile in one hour. The route is generally well way-marked with white and red flashes on the rocks, as are all the GR routes. The huts though guarded, are poorly equipped, and although they have gas stoves, they often contain little else. You need to carry a sleeping bag, basic cutlery, and food. In some huts you can buy simple food such as goat cheese, Corsican pudding, (a sort of dried up doughnut) sausage and wine but it is expensive to do so. The track is crossed in places by roads, and there are one or two rudimentary restaurants in surprising places, but you have to know where they are, and they are very seasonal. Not all of us, as we set off on that very hot day, knew all these things.

Four had arrived by air from London very late on a Sunday night in early July 1994, our flight having been delayed for five hours by incredible congestion at Gatwick. Luckily the car party had been in Calvi for a day or two and had rapidly bought enough food for five people for six days, much of it tinned food, delicious but heavy... That night everybody packed their 'sacks as best they could. All weighed much more than 30 pounds, as checked on my little spring balance. What little research I had done had told me one thing, which was emphatically spelled out in the first GR20 guidebook, written by Michel Fabrikant in 1964. Your 'sack must not weigh more than 12 kilograms.

We left our base at the bergerie at 8am on the Monday morning, seven people in one large Volvo. George drove us skilfully down the east coast of Corsica in four hours, and we arrived in Conca at noon. Conca appeared deserted, dozing in a temperature of 38°C. It took two hours to get a simple meal in the only restaurant which seemed even half open so it was 2pm before we got started. At the first landmark, the Bocca d' Usciolu, a most impressive slit in the rock through which one catches a glimpse of the wilderness beyond, Peter was already suffering from the heat. Mary poured a litre of cold water from her water bottle over his head and neck, and he felt a little better.

Mary and Susan now returned to the car, and the five of us carried on. The first

part went easily and well, and after a short descent we came across a little river with a most delicious rocky pool just above the path. It was quite irresistible and the five of us, throwing modesty to the winds, stripped off and jumped in. Towels, toothpaste and bathing costumes are not carried on the GR20. After this brief moment of bliss in the cold water I dried myself by standing in the sun, which only takes 10 minutes, and realised, looking at the map, that the Paliri hut was still a long way away, so we had better get a move on. But it was no good. By late afternoon Peter and George were suffering severely from the heat, and taking long rests. Rucksacks were emptied and redistributed. We found twelve squashed tomatoes which Fleur was carrying in a plastic bag and ate them on the spot. The advance party eventually got to the Paliri hut at 9pm and the stragglers not till 10pm by which time it was dark. After a rapid and nauseating meal we stretched ourselves out on the grass outside the hut and let the south-west wind blow softly over us. It had not been an auspicious first day.

Next morning it took two hours to get started, but at least we had disposed of a lot of surplus food. The hut gardienne was absolutely delighted, especially with the garlic and onions. Bavella was not far away, up and over the Finosa col. Here, there is a minor road, three bars, one épicerie and a hotel. Peter decided to bale out at this point, it was just too hot, and that left four. We stayed just long enough to down a beer, and after crossing the Col de Bavella, took the lower route which descends into the Asinao valley and then goes due north parallel to the river. A long halt at lunch time in the shade of some tall pine trees, allowed George a breather, but he was still badly affected by the heat. At 5pm, at the point where the path crosses the Asinao river, George decided to bivouac and go no further and the Rutherfords kindly volunteered to return with him. Satisfied that George would be well looked after, I decided to continue on my own. I was going well, and although I do not like solitary travel, could see no better alternative. So I walked thoughtfully up to the Asinao hut, alone.

The hut was full of French and German walkers, but most of them were travelling south. The guardian was a true Corsican.

"What" I asked, "do you think of the French?" Back came the answer -

"Pas beaucoup", after an impressive roll of his hairy forearms. Corsica, like Scotland and Wales wants 'indipendenza' and you see this scrawled on all the big boulders by the roadside.

Next morning I left at 6.30am, a great improvement but not good enough to beat the only other walker, a lone Frenchman called Michel, who was going my way. He had been pretty scathing about our performance so far.

"Vous êtes toujours trop tard," he had remarked, tersely. The route goes steeply up from the hut to the summit of Monte Incudine, at 2,134 metres the highest summit actually crossed by the GR20. I found myself in the midst of a group of very pleasant young Germans and we photographed each other on the summit. Their leader seemed a little anxious about me.

"Gott sei mit ihnen" he said pointedly as I set off alone down the north ridge. This proved to be one of the most delightful sections of the route, with easy walking and distant views to the north. After crossing a river by a suspension bridge over the Ruisseau de Cavallare, I found to my amazement a little restaurant which called itself the Buvette d' Incudine. Here you could buy a small beer for ten francs, a large apple for five, and a 'walkers' menu' for 65 francs. (NB

exchange rate eight francs to the pound sterling.) This improbable place was serviced from the west by a four wheel drive track, and sure enough there was a Suzuki truck standing by the restaurant. Refreshed I set off again over easy undulating wooded country, the path dipping down to and crossing many minor streams. At about midday I spotted a rucksack and a figure partly hidden behind a tree. It was Michel finishing his lunch. He told me he was 50 and a PT instructor in a large school in Tarbes, France. He was carrying a 'sack weighing 18 kilograms which included a tent. This was lucky for me, since otherwise I would not have caught up with him. We decided there and then to join forces. At the Bocca di L'Agnone we filled up our water bottles from a generous spring, and set off to traverse the steep ridge which leads north-east to the refuge d'Usciolu. This is technically the only difficult section of the southern GR20, and is not unlike the Skye main ridge.

The GR20 is well supplied with huts, five to eight walking hours apart. They are all small with room for between 20 and 40 people, and are provided by the Parc Naturel Regional de la Corse (PNR). A night costs 45 francs, or 10 francs if you wish to camp outside. The Usciolu was pretty typical. It had three gas rings, some pans, a few cups and plates, but no sink. I bought from the guardian a bottle of wine, a piece of sausage, and some Corsican pudding. This cost 95 francs, which made me gulp. After lunch, Michel told me he had found a shower and had enjoyed a good wash, plus some light entertainment. I soon found out what he meant. All the shower and washing facilities on the GR20 are exceedingly open plan, and would certainly not be approved of by the Fell and Rock Climbing Club. In front of me in the shower queue were two pretty girls who decided to have a shower together, and neither seemed at all embarrassed by the primitive arrangements.

Next morning Michel and I left at 6am and went north over mountains and ridges to the Prati hut in just over five hours. All day a strong south-west wind blew, and I wore my fibre pile jacket till noon. We had lunch in the Prati hut, and went on after an hour to stop at the Col de Verde. Here the bunkhouse is very basic and costs only 40 francs, but nearby is a café where one can buy drinks, and sandwiches (25 francs each) but no meals.

Only two very easy days separated us now from the central point of the GR20 at Vizzavona. Moreover the Capannelle hut, one day's march south of Vizzavona has a good restaurant, and is in winter a ski resort, so it is supplied by road. This is a very sybaritic part of the way. Imagine my amazement and delight when, within sight of the Capannelle hut, I saw Mary on the path, coming towards me. I kissed her, and she burst into tears. She had been convinced that, alone on the GR20, I might have come to a sticky end. Behind her came Susan, George, Malcolm and Fleur. They had all driven up by car from the bergerie to meet me. It was a great reunion. A quick dash up the Monte Renoso (2,354 metres) in the afternoon kept us all occupied, and produced another memorable swim in the Lac de Bastani.

Next day came another surprise. Peter had walked up through the forest from Vizzavona, carrying a bag of fresh oranges, to meet the walking party. He had had a remarkable time since the Col de Bavella. Having walked and hitched for miles, he eventually had come upon an itinerant preacher who had given him a lift almost to Ajaccio. Peter might have become a born again Christian had there been any common language between the two of them. That was the end of the

southern section of the GR20. The train from Ajaccio arrived promptly in Vizzavona at 3.52pm and rattled its way to Calvi in four hours.

Two days later a new team set off from the bergerie to tackle the northern section. The Rutherfords had left, and been replaced by the Allens and the Morgans. Bob Allen and I would go from Bonifato to Vizzavona, and George would show Richard Morgan a shorter section as far as the Col de Vergio. The four walkers, accompanied by a huge support party, went up from the Bonifato forest station to the Carrozzu hut, with delicious bathing en route in the clear pools of the Lamitu river.

On July 13th George, Richard, Bob and I left the hut at 6am, crossed the suspension bridge, turned left and climbed steadily for 1,000 metres to the col Muvrella, from which the view to the south, of the Monte Cinto, and of all the central peaks as far as the Paglia Orba, is breathtaking. There was a lot of snow visible in patches and this decided George and Richard to speed on ahead and make for the Tighiettu hut that night. Bob and I, who were less ambitious, did not see them again for two days. Very soon the GR20 bifurcates. You can turn left and descend to the Stagnu hut, but it is more fun to continue along a fine jagged ridge as far as the Punta Missoghju, then climb down a scree gully into Haut Asco where the Altore hut once stood. Just below the site of the old hut are some good bivouac sites, and here Bob and I stopped at midday. Bob set off to find some water while I got the stove going. We spent the next eight hours idly dozing and eating. I had a very comfortable night in my lightweight sleeping bag and bivouac sack. Bob was not so happy, without a bag. At 2,000 metres it gets quite cold even in Corsica in July.

The next section of the GR20 is the famous Cirque de la Solitude. Bob and I were determined to get there early, and arrived first at the Col Perdu at 7am. The situation is impressive, stark and desolate. From the Col Perdu the route drops steeply into the western cwm of the Punta Minuta, and climbs up again following the obvious waymarks to the Bocca Minuta. An iron ladder bridges the only difficult bit, reducing the overall standard to that of a stiff scramble. It was all over in less than two hours. We passed the Tighiettu hut without even stopping, came to a lovely pool, swam in it, and reached the Bergerie de Ballone famished, at noon. This is the second of the GR20's pleasant surprises. Two enterprising people have built a thriving restaurant, complete with a bar, and outside a campsite. They gave us a three course meal for 80 francs, and I bought some smelly cheese and a piece of sausage. It is well worth stopping here because the climb over the Col de Foggiale to the Mori hut is a real grunt. The hut was rather crowded, but we got a bed space and stopped for the night. Next day was again fine, and it was to remain so as far as Vizzavona. It is an easy walk down the Golo river valley, but the temptations of many exquisite swimming pools somewhat delayed our arrival at the Hotel Castel di Verghio. This lies on an important road pass over the mountain chain, and here George and Richard had spent a very comfortable night. Mary, Susan and Sarah arrived in the Volvo within minutes and produced an enormous sandwich lunch which disappeared rapidly. George and Richard returned in the car, while Bob and I continued along the GR20.

Our objective was the Manganu hut that night. The way took us through a fine forest to the Col St Petru and thence over ridges and cols to the Lac de Nino. The lake itself is more like Ireland than Corsica. Round it are lush grassy swards

where horses and pigs roam. We had another marvellous swim, finished off Mary's sandwiches, then wandered along by grassy meadows in the direction of the Manganu hut. The lush green grass of the bergerie de Vaccaghia was however even more attractive to our eyes than the hut, so we stopped there. Here the owners generously allow clients to camp for nothing, and my offering of a 10 franc piece was politely refused.

Next day it was only 40 minutes of easy walking to the Manganu hut but beyond it lies one of the more difficult parts of the route. The climb up to the Col de Capitello is quite a puff, and there follows a steep rocky ridge with interesting grade 2 scrambling as far as the Col de la Haute route and thence down to the Pietra Piana hut. The twin lakes of Capitello and Melo make a pretty picture on the north side of the ridge. We were just in time to secure a bed space in the hut, since it is the smallest on the GR20. As usual there was lots of time for what Bob calls 'Egyptian PT'. i.e. sitting on a bench talking to the other walkers. Only two short days remained to Vizzavona, first by ridges to the Onda hut in five hours, and thence steeply over the Crete de Muratello down to a railway line. Just to make the last day more interesting we included the Monte d'Oro, (2,389 metres) a lovely summit from whose top the long descent on the east side is quite challenging.

I had by this time done most but not all of the GR20. That little portion from Calenzana in the north to the Carrozzu hut, kept nagging at me, and I knew I would have to include it. Peter Newman very kindly offered his services as a guide, as he had done it before. So on Sunday 24th July Peter and I with a small support team walked up, for the last time, to the Carrozzu hut. The hut itself was almost empty but at least 39 young people were sitting about outside preparing to bivouac. From the Carrozzu hut to the Piobbu is one of the longest though not technically the hardest days on the GR20. It is also poorly marked and quite easy to get lost. By the Col Innominata and the Col Avartoli the amazing path climbs, twists and turns, nowhere very difficult, but always steep and interesting. We were going so well that we threw in the Capu di Landroncelli (2,145 metres) for one last look at the Paglia Orba and the big mountains to the south, arriving tired at the Piobbu hut at 1pm. One hour later it rained torrentially for four hours and dripping wet Germans kept coming in all afternoon. Our last day was fine, and easy. It was a gentle amble downhill to Calenzana with lots of time to talk to the other walkers. Mary and my daughter met us having lunch, at 2pm. I had finished the GR20.

The team in order of appearance:

George Band, Peter Newman, Malcolm and Fleur Rutherford, Susan Band, Mary Nicol, Michel Godeau, Bob Allen, Richard Morgan, Hamish Nicol.

A draconian kit list for the GR20:

Light sleeping bag (say two lbs), bivouac 'sack, foam mattress, boots (light-weight), socks (two pairs), handkerchief (one), light cotton shirt (one) with long sleeves, (easily washed – dries in half an hour) shorts, fibre pile jacket, track suit trousers, underpants (two pairs), small tooth brush, soap, one or two J-cloths, head torch, cagoule, sun hat, maps (Didier Richard 1/50,000 Corse Nord Number 20 and Corse Sud Number 23), guidebook (e.g. Alan Castle – Walking the GR20.

Cicerone Press.), lightweight slippers for hut use (as supplied by some airlines to their club class passengers), compass, small boy-scout knife, plastic mug (one), plate plastic (one), spoon (one), toilet paper, sun cream, water bottles (one litre – one, half litre – one).

Food:

It is sometimes necessary to carry food for up to four days. Everybody will have their own ideas about food, but it is worth noting that dehydrated dinners cannot be found in Corsica, and chocolates and day food are expensive there. It is best to bring both out from UK. Muesli or nut bars are better than chocolate, since they do not melt, and Cross and Blackwell make very adequate dehydrated food, obtainable in any UK supermarket. It is never essential to bivouac but it can be very pleasant, so you will have to consider carrying a stove with cooking utensils. The only Butane refill obtainable in Corsica is that made by Camping Gaz.

Wisdom Buttress

T.E.Kenny

In June 1990, I made my solo round of the Shenavall Six, that remote horseshoe of Munroes lying to the south of An Teallach and concave to the north. From the summit of A'Mhaighdean, I looked down to the Dubh Loch and Causeway, with Carnmore Crag, that private playground of the Cambridge University Club of the 1950s, rising steeply above. But for me, the view further west over Gorm Loch More towards the three mile long and thousand foot high precipices of Ben Lair was even more impressive, with over 30 buttresses and ribs.

I had driven past Loch Maree many times over the years and seen Ben Lair lying to the east as a grassy sloped uninteresting peak, just failing the Munro criterion. I had not realised that the other side, guarded by the vast Carnmore wilderness with oppressive access, yielded these massive buttresses. But I could not afford to linger too long that day, with ten more hours of lonely round to go. And with the other trials of the day, I had soon forgotten the spectacle.

One glorious June two years later, I was camped with Hamish Nicol and the others at Shiel Bridge.

"My dear boy," he said, "how do you fancy *Wisdom Buttress*? It looks quite hard. It's one of those VS Scottish V.Diffs on Ben Lair".

He should know, I thought. More than 20 years before, he had stood under *Wisdom Buttress* with George Band in Scottish rain, when the overhanging ramp that forms the first pitch ran wet like a waterfall. The hornblende schist was like soap and ascent unthinkable. They resolved to return another day.

I didn't need asking twice and later that week, the party was established at Carnmore bothy after a 13 mile walk-in. I was pleased that George Band was with us and Dave Aitchinson was the fourth member. George had stoically carried in a peg hammer and a few pegs in case of retreat in the wet. This rock is notoriously devoid of natural belays and protection.

From the bothy, the buttresses of Ben Lair are seen head-on. *Wisdom Buttress* is steep, narrow and bottle shaped. The route starts at a slanting, overhanging ramp and traverses up the lip of this and leftwards to move directly up steep ground. The angle eases half-way up at some big slabs, only to rear up horrendously steeply at the end. The route description records this part as being on sloping holds with enormous exposure. Added to this the lack of protection, remote setting and potential transformation in the wet, the whole undertaking took on a serious air. We frightened ourselves by viewing the route through binoculars and, even making mental adjustments for the distorted perspective, it looked horribly improbable.

I didn't sleep too well that night and was ready to leave by 6.30am and so was Hamish. Another glorious day and dry now for over a week. But showers from the east were forecast for the afternoon. We would have to be up by then, before the schist metamorphosed to soap. Otherwise we might need George's pegs! We were not returning to the bothy, so had to carry our gear out. We followed the trail towards Loch Maree and gained height this way. Then, dropping our packs at a strategic point, we geared up and traversed high across the steep, exposed scree

to the tip of the buttress and the overhanging lip that marks the start.

It was my go. Just two steps off the scree onto the lip and the ground had already fallen away unbelievably, exposure enhanced by the steep screes dropping away below. It wasn't hard but rounded holes did not inspire confidence. I longed for an incut hold and looked in vain for protection as I worked up and the exposure grew. Looking down, I could see two tiny figures labouring up the screes with mighty 'sacks. George and Dave had decided on the direct approach. I felt more relaxed now, to have some more company. Then I found a small horizontal crack that took a wire and felt much happier and warmed to the climbing.

The rope was nearly out and still no sign of a stance. The description said work left then back right towards the middle of the buttress. But I was getting into chossy ground; then I spied an oxidised hexagonal and some bleached tat in a crack higher up. I reasoned I was on the winter line and used it for my belay.

Hamish came up quickly and, having a better eye for a line, found the correct route lower down and followed it up past me to the right. Now he was on the layback crack that constitutes the second pitch.

"But this is superb, my dear boy", he shouted down.

Soon he had led the whole rope out. I was soon sampling the delightful crack and saw what he meant. Amazingly, he had found a big spiked belay, the only one on the climb.

Now it went up steep slabs trending left, then across to another slab. But lacking Hamish's eye, I was soon on unlikely ground again and the way barred by an overhanging roof with another oxidised hexagonal and frayed tat hanging down. I visualised an epic winter retreat many years ago. So I had to climb a steep crack on the right to regain my original slab, finishing on very delicate holds and belaying on a tiny ledge. We were at the foot of the middle slab pitch; that had looked so steep through the binoculars last night but Hamish saw the slabs off in one glorious lead without a runner. The angle was easy with great chunky rounded holes.

And so to the upper and more difficult part of the route. Just then I felt the first rain drops. The description of this great, steep, exposed section on sloping holds came to mind. The cloud was blowing in from the east for the first time in a week and I wondered how long we had left. Hamish had felt it too but said nothing. George and his pegs were three pitches below and with them our hopes of salvation, come the rain.

No time to waste now and I set off on a rightward traverse to gain the exposed nose. Standing on the edge, the drop below was beyond belief and looking upwards the way seemed steep and implausible. But the sloping holds materialised and I kept on going up and up in balance and longing for protection. At last it was over and the rain had kept away. But as usual, I was unable to find a belay. The rope was tight and I suspected Hamish was already climbing. 'Don't fall off, Hamish', I thought. But he never does. I got a flimsy Moac belay and felt half secure.

"My dear boy, what a delightful pitch", he shouted, "Shall I lead the crux?"

It's one of those sting in the tail climbs, with the crux at the top. It looked like the crux as well and seemed totally out of keeping with the grade. An overhanging rib which surely must have hidden holds over the top? We hoped

but had no way of knowing.

Hamish went for it. It looked most improbable. He lurched for the presumed jug and got it and pulled up. But there was nothing for his feet so he just walked them up the rib, going for more jugs above. And all this over the aforementioned void. He got these too and was up. It was now easy going to the summit and reminiscent of *Amphitheatre Buttress*. The rain never came and we sat in the sunshine practising knots, before carrying on to Ben Lair summit. We returned to meet George and Dave as they finished.

Nothing remained now except for the half-marathon walk out from Carnmore to Poolewe with two golden eagles soaring above. A truly magnificent setting for the hidden gem of *Wisdom Buttress*.



Hamish Nicol on top of Wisdom Buttress. Photo: T.E.Kenny

Sir Jack Longland and the Plas Y Brenin Committee

Ken Wilson

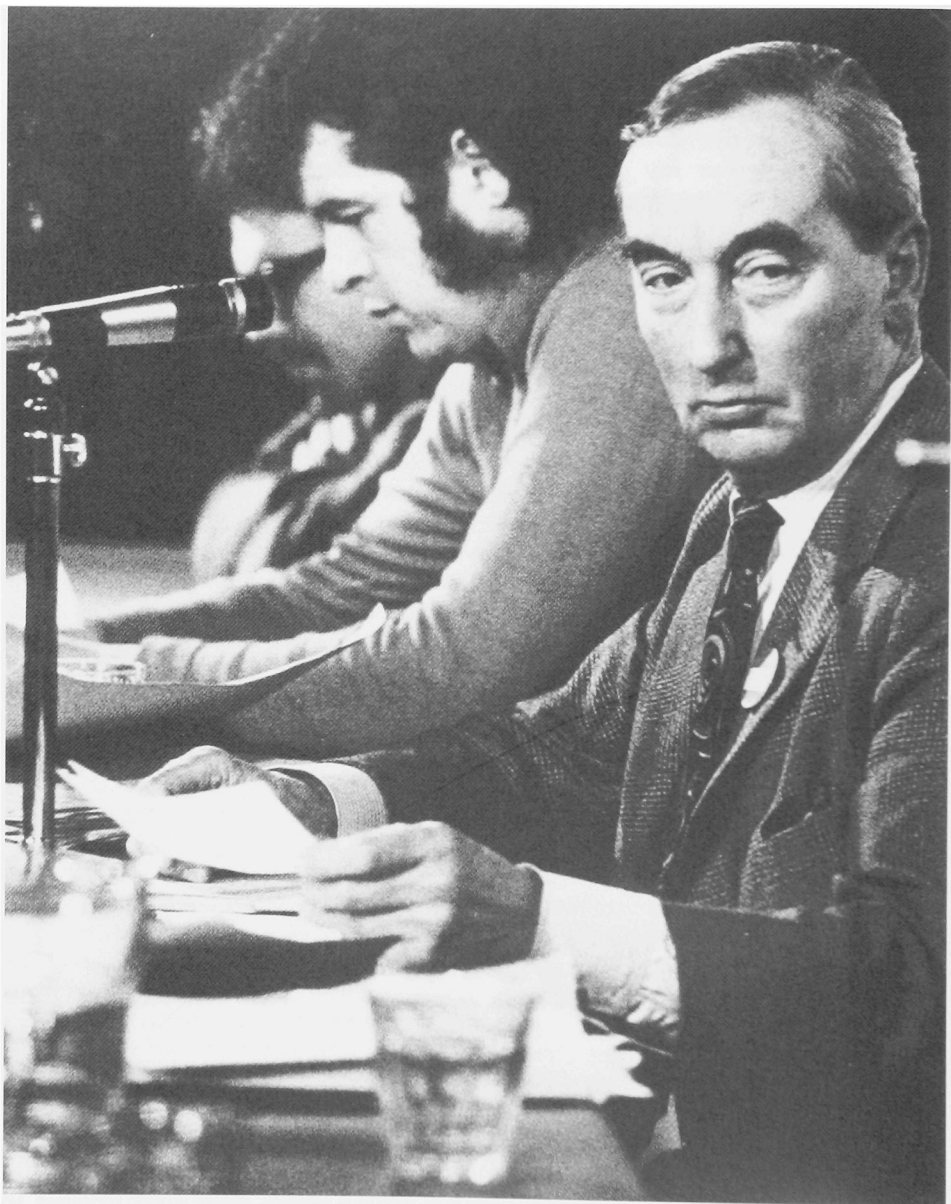
In the last Journal John Disley paid warm tribute to Sir Jack Longland's sagacity as Chairman of the Plas y Brenin Management Committee, a point I wholeheartedly endorse. However, John's memory of the meetings over which Jack presided is not the same as mine. He portrayed them as rancorous and unpleasant, whereas my recollection is that though feisty and frequently stimulating, they were always constructive and good-humoured.

As a BMC representative (along with Dennis Gray), I served on the PYB Committee for several years during the late '70s and early '80s and found it an illuminating experience. Certainly it was one of the most efficient and dedicated committees I have attended – we had a serious job to do and meetings took all day. All the members (a number of whom were amateurs in the sense that nobody was paying a salary for them to attend) applied themselves with dedication to the task. The business-like tone was set by Jack.

This was my first experience of him on committee though I had watched his adroit handling of the potentially explosive merger between the Alpine Club and the Ladies Alpine Club when he was AC President in 1974. There was also the bruising experience of the Mountain Training dispute between the BMC (including Dennis Gray, Bob Pettigrew, Wil Butler, myself and a number of others) seeking reform, and the MLTB (Sir Jack Longland and others) and the Sports Council (John Disley and others) supporting the status-quo. Jack was very much in the firing line on that matter and became its chief sacrificial casualty. It was largely a financial, correspondence and public-relations battle, fought at long range with the main protagonists remaining in their bunkers as the salvos were exchanged, though I believe there were rugged face-to-face wrangles at MLTB meetings. I was not present at these exchanges but maybe John Disley, in his reference to 'personal attacks', was under the impression that I was.

Following on from that dispute the BMC wished to ensure that Plas y Brenin was staffed and led by people who were primarily 'climbers' (as opposed to the outdoor activity careerists that were favoured by the Sports Council and its nominees). It was against that background that the PYB Management Committee conducted its affairs during the period in question. (Note: Plas y Brenin is, of course, involved in other sports but its main focus, then and now, is on climbing related activities, and as such it will always be one of the BMC's main concerns as the premier training institution in that field). With this volatile agenda one might have expected the committee, chaired by Jack and containing two of his most trenchant erstwhile critics, to have been the focus for confrontation that John Disley described. Just the opposite was the case. Jack displayed no rancour about his earlier reverse and the business of the committee was always conducted constructively and in good humour. Jack and I joked about it over a drink on many occasions since. It turned out that the BMC's policy aims were broadly in line with his ideas – we had a similar vision for the Centre's future (not

surprisingly as he was of course a committed climber with a climber's preoccupations and instincts). I have no wish to be critical about John Jackson's long reign as Director which had many good points, but by the '70s PYB seemed to have lost direction and during the Mountain Training dispute its position was less than helpful. The BMC reps believed that this was because many at Plas y



Sir Jack Longland in Committee. Photo: Ken Wilson

Brenin had lost sight of the sport's essential ethos of freedom, and were happy to appease those demanding more certification and regulation. During Bill March's all-too-brief period as Director (1977-1979) the 'pro-climbing' trend began to develop. The critical point in the BMC's policy thrust hinged on the choice of his successor and after a tense meeting John Barry was appointed as Director. Thereafter the pro-climbing line prospered, sometimes with a surplus of 'colour' and 'incident'. The trend finally matured (after a lucky turn of events) with Dave Alcock's fortuitous appointment to the directorship in 1985.

The cumulative effect of these appointments has seen the Centre's affairs, during the last 17 years, conducted in a manner that buttressed and enhanced the sport. The ordinary 'climber on the crag' can measure one aspect by noting the regular public lectures and seminars at PYB and the relaxed social attitude that prevails. This contrasts with an atmosphere that by the mid-'70s had become inward-looking, elitist and somewhat unwelcoming to outsiders. On the training front the sport's core values, tempered by restraint and attention to detail, became steadily more apparent in the Centre's approach – important nuances which are critically linked to the ethos of the leadership. As the premier centre, with great influence on other centres, these are important matters that have the potential to shape the whole mountain instruction scene over a long period.

I believe the seeds of change were sewn in the late '70s, given shape by the various staff adjustments and finally gained expression in the policy document **Plas y Brenin in the '80s** which was Jack's last major achievement on the Committee before he retired. I had the honour to serve on the sub-committee he set up to forge that policy which he subsequently commended to the Sports Council, the BMC and the other representative bodies. Not surprising, with such a radical document, the Sports Council found it difficult to swallow, but many of its commendations have taken shape in recent years.

Jack was a skilful and tenacious politician, but he never trimmed, and always stayed firm to his core beliefs. He consistently voted to remove the barrier against women in the CC rule book through seven years of battering at the club's Jericho walls of misogyny. But all his glittering political and professional achievements pale in comparison to his climbing. In Wales, Idwal devotees regard his lead of *Javelin Blade* in 1930 as a key event in the development of British traditional rock climbing. Even more impressive (though not as technical) was the first ascent of the West Buttress of Cloggy. This must have been a huge adventure, though he placed a piton on the faith and friction slab, a dastardly deed. Fred Pigott joshed him about this in a CC Dinner – "Who was it that said that a man that could place a piton in British rock would shoot a fox?" Jack chuckled and quick as a flash came the rejoinder "Yes, yes, and I've shot a fox too." These exchanges among the bright young chaps of the '20s give us some hint of the preoccupations that laid the foundations of the climbing that has served us so well. In fact Jack deplored pitons and his climbing exemplified commitment, panache and style. With the attitudes he built now under serious threat one regrets that he cannot be with us, hale and hearty, bringing his waspish wit to bear on the bolting debate. It would be fun.

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?

Mike Burt

My ideal route must astound my friends with my skill and daring, while causing me no distress nor putting me in any real danger. It must have secure stances and comforting belays together with sufficient protection to still any anxieties that may stir within me.

It is not everyone that can find joy hidden in a few little knobs of rock, so what is the nature of the ecstasy that we seek? It is not available cheaply. We all know that it does not lie in the easy amble. A walk over the Anoach Eagach or a rock trade route can be very pleasant and agreeable but you haven't faced up to anything more than a bit of hard work. Such an outing fails to give more than a warm glow, certainly not the bite that lures the disciplined hard man and the indulgent dossier alike. Something more is needed to give a taste to the beer and the savour to life, even if that savour is due to run out by next Thursday.

If you did reach up and try to get another hold when you were a wreck of quivering jelly and self doubt, then, even if you didn't get up the route you might be able to live with yours. We've all been psyched out by routes before we started. The fear level was too high, it was too overwhelming to act as a stimulus any more. Then sometimes, despite that, you get up the route, and you own the world, until about next Thursday.

Wherein lies the lure of a bit of hard rock or ice? There is something shameful in finding fulfilment in such a pointless and threatening pursuit. Is it really more worthy to pull up on a hold of four millimetres rather than one of five millimetres? Can our objectives really be that trivial? Survivors of the days when constant hard manual labour was commonplace would find it sinful to so misdirect ones' energies. To dream and scheme in pursuit of such an abstract goal that can maim or worse appears very perverse to such folk. Alistair Ross the skiing coach observes that crofters' sons were not supposed to indulge in such frivolous notions as skiing.

In the television programme **The Moose's Tooth** in Alaska featuring Mark Wilson and Geoff Lowe, Wilson says that in order to discover the limits of his ability in mountaineering it will be necessary for him to die. Admittedly the comment was for television and was probably a little hype aimed at the sale potential of a scrappy film, but the self delusion is staggering.

Perhaps he really is one of the supermen who accept outrageous odds against their survival in order to complete great routes. The Himalayan rate of one fatality in ten is a terrible curse to bear, yet people who are aware and wise accept it consciously. Would one accept such odds when agreeing to a surgical operation? Do military commanders accept such odds when planning an engagement? But those who do accept these odds are not stupid. To be on a serious route with one of them gives oneself an extra dimension. One's body can do what it normally cannot. Such people do everything they can to give themselves a chance to survive and they can do plenty. The tragedy is that they are the victims of their own excellence. Harold Drasdo suggests that they are too committed to survive.

The cult of soloing very hard routes arouses great fervour among its advocates.

We hear that it is the purest, most unrestricted way to climb. The human spirit is released. Joy and uplift are unconfined. One is admitted to a hallowed group who can thumb their noses at an inferior world. One is in the vanguard of the attack on the silent majority... a majority who are tearing their hearts out lest one of their idols should come to grief. Some of its exponents live in a world of make believe. Others are very clear headed and know just what to expect of themselves, though often, even they have had fearful accidents. Success can be seen as a supreme achievement but failure demands a terrible price.

When speaking of western mountaineers in the Himalaya, a leading Sherpa was driven to ask if their lives were so empty that they needed to come to such places and take such risks. But he doesn't have the option of decades of obscurity in a suburban paradise.

Does all our zeal and dedication really amount to no more than a perverse taste for **Deerhunter** style Russian Roulette? The lure can't be the fear element solely or we could get all we want from sitting under an improvised sword of Damocles, in a cosy armchair in a centrally heated room at home.

I have for many years vainly sought some alternative to climbing. It would be conducted at no more than walking distance from my house. It would be protected from inclement weather. It would absorb me so completely that I would no longer need to climb. I would be much better at it than I am at climbing.

Sinai Re-visited

John Hunt

Nearly 50 years ago my wife and I, accompanied by six friends, all of us stationed at Headquarters, Middle East Land Forces on the Suez Canal, paid a visit to St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula. My own collection of the Climbers' Club Journals is incomplete, but a pencilled note on a type-script copy of an article describing this journey, records that it was published in the Journal in 1949.

At that time the visit involved a difficult and adventurous drive, which took us three days along a route which began by following a narrow coastal road beside the eastern shore of the Gulf of Suez. At a point beyond a little port named Abu Zenima, then used for the export of manganese which was mined in the hills, we were able to turn inland, following a succession of untracked wadis, negotiating soft sand, tamarisk scrub and huge boulders. It is indicative of the primitive nature of that venture, that we had been advised to look for a lone tree on the coast, as the point to turn inland. Driving continuously in low gear, our car radiators boiled over frequently; on the first day alone, we had refilled them with 24 gallons of our precious water supply, which we carried for all our needs in that arid desert.

But the hazards of the route were off-set by the magnificence of the mountain scenery. I was greatly impressed by the huge sandstone wall of the Gebel Banat (1,516m) and the granite cliffs of the Gebel Serbal (2,070m) which towered some



Sandstone Peaks ('The Seven Pillars...') in the Wadi Rumm. Photo: John Hunt

5,000 feet above us. I noted at that time that a wealth of fine climbs awaited discovery by future alpinists. The granite massif in which the monastery is located is even more splendid. During one strenuous day of scrambling, Joy and I climbed the Gebel Musa (Mount Sinai) – 2,285m and its higher neighbour, the Gebel Katherina (2,637m). Next day we traversed all four summits on the ridge which dominates the opposite (north) side of the Wadi Saf-safa, in which the monastery fortress lies. There were few technical difficulties, but the great 'boiler-plate' slabs of red granite and a few chimneys provided good entertainment. I was reminded of war-time climbing with David Cox on Craig an Dubh Loch, one of the crags of Lochnagar, during respites from training Commando soldiers in the Cairngorms. Last December Joy and I re-visited this area at the end of a 'Package Tour' in Jordan. Sadly, the romance of that earlier expedition has long since been dispelled by tourism and modern communications. The Monastery has become easily accessible by air, road and sea, from Egypt, Jordan and Israel. We travelled by a ferry ship from Aqaba to the oil port of Nuweiba on the west shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, and onwards by taxi on good metalled road to the Wadi Saf-safa.

But for us it was a nostalgic pilgrimage, 40 years on. I had to be content with viewing the summits from the valley; but Joy (herself also in her 80s) found no difficulty in climbing 3,500ft to the summit of Gebel Musa: a remarkable performance on her part. However, the purpose of this article is not to indulge in sentimental reminiscence. It is offered as a postscript to my article in the 1949 Journal. I venture to suggest that exploration of the mountains of Sinai by the present generation of active climbers is a real challenge and opportunity.

From the highest summit in Sinai (Gebel Katherina) we had views of a number of peaks in the south of the peninsula which exceed 8,000 feet. We were not able to identify the rock, but from what we saw during our journey to the monastery in 1949 I am confident that good climbing will be found, whether on sandstone or granite, in that whole region. It would be necessary to obtain agreement for an expedition from the Egyptian Government, which is well aware of the attractions of southern Sinai for tourism and has built modern accommodation on the Plain of Rephadim, near St Catherine's.

It was the astonishing sandstone cliffs in the photograph opposite which inspired T.E. Lawrence to entitle his famous book **The Seven Pillars of Wisdom**. The Jordan Government is encouraging climbers to visit the Wadi Rumm, and we watched two of them, half way up a hitherto unclimbed route which appeared to present serious difficulties. The length of most climbs in that area are, I estimate, about 4,000 feet.

Tented accommodation, evidently intended for the climbing fraternity, is available in a camp adjacent to a good restaurant.

Our return to Sinai, and the visit to the Wadi Rumm in 1994, gave Joy and me itchy fingers and toes, and made us wish we had been 50 years younger!

The Editor thought you might like to see an interesting letter of support for a prospective member. The names have been changed to protect the innocent!! (Spelling has been corrected!!)

Membership Secretary

Climbers' Club

7th December 1994

Dear Sir,

I've known Bill (or Captain Granitic as a small bunch of us call him) since 1983 when I arrived at Bloxwich University. Both of us were on the fringe of the mountaineering club there, and became friends when we met up in a blizzard in the Northern Corries of the Cairngorm. From that time, we climbed together often, most productively in the Chamonix valley. The Captain was in my regular alpine team for the following three years when we developed our grounding in alpinism which was later to be put to good use in the Greater Ranges. Routes such as the South Face of the Fou, the Directes des Capucines and the Central Pillar of Freney were standard fare for us, operating from a base in Snell's field with the rest of the shuffling dossers. It was not without its moments of drama, particularly the time when I took a 90 foot screamer at the top of the Freney while the Captain held the ropes and his breath simultaneously.

We then went on to apply ourselves to the Himalaya in 1985 with a trip to the Gangotri, where the Captain was successfully ill in alpine style before going round India on a budget that makes Ken Clark look like Mother Theresa. The words 'tight', 'duck' and 'sphincter' spring to mind. Since then, the Captain has successfully saved money in the States, Bolivia and Bradford, where his house was used as a part time cold store facility by the local curry houses.

As well as being thrifty in a Scottish style, he is an undergrading old Hector. Believing that he is completely incompetent at any grade over E3, he therefore grades all routes of E4 and above at E3. He further maintains that he isn't very strong, despite being built like Arnie (above the waist, at any rate). This is bull of the highest order.

Not only is he strong, he is also a bold sort of chap, having consistently won the all-comers avalanche surfing championships two years in a row for his fine efforts on the Argenti re glacier and on *Sinister Gully* when the Welsh judge awarded an unprecedented 9.9 for style.

So, to conclude, Bill is built like a Bradford outside privy, rides rhinos for Yorkshire and should be Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Get him in the Climbers' Club without delay. It'll be worth it just to know he's actually spent some money on the membership fees!

Yours Truly,

Felix

Blundering about before Dinner

David Weaver

The pair of them had set out early, well not quite as early as they had intended, but earlyish. No breakfast, just a cup of tea and, expectations of 'the works' for breakfast on the way.

The M25 was not busy enough to render the road invisible and the M40 was a doddle, but communication from the empty midriff reinforced the dim awareness that the only 'works' relating to breakfast that either of them had – was the building site passed on the M40. Breakfast happened at 11.30ish on the A5, four and a half starving hours after setting out. They might have arrived a little earlier but David 1 had difficulty fitting his left foot between the front of the driver's seat and the metal panel behind the clutch pedal. The net result of this anatomical problem was that he could not change gear. The use of an ice axe was considered as a means of reducing the size of the problem but as this would have entailed spoiling the very handsome appearance of a brown dimpled shoe, the idea was abandoned in favour of David 2 driving.

The further along the A5 they drove, the snowier the landscape became and hopes of a cold, crisp, snow-crunching few days were high, the forecast could be wrong after all. Earlier in the week Andy had said the valley had been full of snow and some of the roads closed; if there was that much snow in the valley the tops must be magnificent. They had arranged to meet him just after lunch for a conducted tour of DMM before settling into either Cwm Glas or Helyg. As they drove into Capel it was clear that the temperature had gone up; the road was wet and branches dripped and glittered in the late winter sunshine. At Capel, Joe Brown's siren cry was ignored and they turned left to speed through glorious snow-covered country, over the pass and down into Llanberis. By this time the sky had moved down to the height of a wet telegraph pole, the glitter had degenerated into grey windy murk and the wind was decidedly unfriendly.

Andy was in good spirits and bounced around with an appalling level of energy and enthusiasm, talking nineteen to the dozen and obviously delighting in knowledge of systems, materials, machinery and production methods. The trip around the factory took them from bulk metal stocks and a description of control systems, through crashing, earth shaking production, into assembly and checking, right through to destructive testing a 2,700kgs krab which failed elegantly at 3,400kgs, a convincing demonstration of DMM's quality control and good design. David 2 bought a figure of eight and would have loved to have bought a new harness and some Wallnuts and some new krabs and some slings and – but David 1's amused reproving gaze made him think better of it. However they both agreed that making high quality gear was the best possible use for an old ammunition factory.

By the time they had said their goodbyes and thank-yous the weather had congealed to a cold grey windy drizzle. On the way out of Llanberis a crucial decision was reached and common sense prevailed – they both decided the only possible place to stay was Helyg for the simple reason that it really was a climbing hut. The siren calls from JB's were heeded but although goods were handled, even

fondled, no rash decisions were made.

The car park at Helyg is the only schizophrenic car park in existence. It simply cannot decide whether it is a stream or a car park and today was obviously a schizophrenic day. There were other vehicles parked well above the rushing waters which emerged, quite naturally, from the garage. The inset chain barrier is a great improvement and it wasn't until the car was parked and gear assembled on respective backs that the extremely imperfect waterproofing of David 2's trainers became evident, during attempts to re-fasten the easy-to-use closing device which was confounded by an apparently elastic chain.

Along the dry stone wall beneath the larches, through the manic gate and the first revelation was the sight and feel underfoot of wall to wall stone steps, rescued from an early grave and gleamingly wet in the lamplight, cascading down the slope, all the way to the path around the hut. Lights were on inside the hut and on opening the bunkroom door the sense of bustle and business, of warmth and work (work?) not to mention the sight of teacups meant only one thing – they had chosen the wrong hut. However, as they were both rather large and difficult to miss, it was not possible to slink away quietly to mind their own business and make their own tea. Ski sticks were being placed with skill and energy over the fire, serious things were happening in the shower with cement and blocks, and pieces of wood were being arranged with skill around bunks, which actually exhibited signs using words rather than topos. This development would have been fine but it assumed that CC members could read, or rather, see, when they returned to the hut after an evening spent destruct testing the local brew.

The skis and sticks eventually succumbed to determined and expert ministrations and remained on the wall above the Everest honours board. The fire blazed, causing garments to be shed in a faster time than that achieved by the average politician. Tea was offered, accepted and Rod assumed the role of 'the King's shilling' causing useful work to be done under the watchful eyes of Og and Wyn, the Helyg twins, well probably only Og, as Wyn was still doing things with cement and blocks in the shower. The virtues of curtains were discussed with some vigour, although the quality of colour, pattern and workmanship were recognised as impeccable – it was the reality of curtains in Helyg that caused the greatest heart searching. The new windows were fine, the new shutters finer, but who had ever heard of Helyg curtains even without a liner (sorry – lining). The elevation of the old kitchen cartoons to new heights in frames (wow) on the bunkroom wall and the careful placing of Herbert Car's plaque and trophies of Helyg's celebrations above new brass memories of past custodians, symmetrically screwed to the back of a new wooded seat, brought the historic community of the club into focus around the fire in satisfactory simplicity.

Gear was stowed in new cupboards or hung at bunk ends and all traces of custodianly activity were swept away; Rod and Gwen left, taking with them all hope of any more proper work and more importantly, more proper tea; the twins left to take on some more destruct testing and another quiet day drew to a close. Well not quite, because a word or two needs to be said about the hazards of destructive testing. At DMM this necessary activity takes place in a small safe room and within an appliance specific for this purpose. There appeared to be some evidence that similar activity had taken place in or around Helyg in the

recent past without the use of a specific appliance. The nature of the material tested was obviously rather volatile owing to its high specific gravity and, coupled with a vigorous approach to the testing itself, i.e. much elbow bending, had caused an unprecedented level of horizontal displacement to be achieved, severe enough to produce an ocular contusion of epic proportion and stunning technicolour. Had the duration of the elbow bending been longer, the level of horizontal displacement could have been considerably more serious, although the likelihood of even more visually exciting results cannot be ruled out. In instances where this phenomena may re-occur it is recommended that a position no more than a mattress thickness above the floor is selected and the helmet worn. With a modicum of luck this will reduce the damage.

The next morning they wandered around the kitchen, gently getting in touch with the day. The clouds had risen considerably and when they set out, all but the highest tops were clear. The wind was gusting from the south-west and the temperature had continued to rise. The stream running down the valley was so full it appeared to have a surface springing and heaving brown and white above the snow-covered banks. It was a toss-up between flogging up Cwm Cneifon and thence to Bristly Ridge or up left beneath the Bochlwyd Buttress and on to Tryfan. David 1 decided that he would take a ski-stick with him rather than his alpen stock and offered the other stick to David 2: who decided to stick (or stock) with his ice axe. Nant Bochlwyd had spread itself across a large part of the hillside and they found themselves tracking steadily leftwards towards the Bochlwyd Buttress in their efforts to find a place to cross its freezing, vigorous waters. They took the snow-covered slope gently, pausing every couple of breaths for a step and a look round at the snow-patched hillsides and back to the surface of the Llyn Ogwen behind them, dappled with wind-blown ice. Groups of young, fit people passed them cheerfully at frequent intervals. They reached the well trodden path up to Bwlch Tryfan, the saddle between Bristly Ridge and Tryfan. The Llyn Bochlwyd glittered in the mid-morning sunshine but boulders around the edge were still joined icily to the surface which was slowly splitting into dull white pancakes separated by dazzling strips of water. The ground surface was frozen solid with patches of ice beneath the snow, so movement off the path was interesting in its unpredictable accelerations and sudden stops. David 1 had a small camera which he usually kept in a chalk bag, the first sight of which caused David 2 some alarm – what was his sensible and reliable friend doing with such a dangerous thing? Today the camera was in a small black, soft leather zipped case and it had been used already to record the erratic progress of the day. He handed it to David 2 who kept it for the rest of the jaunt. A dry stone wall marked the ridge across their path and they decided to follow the left-hand section that ran like a bony crest up into the mists that covered Tryfan. The snow was knee deep in places and its surface would sometimes collapse underfoot with joint wrenching suddenness and they were both certain that three legs were better than two. The mists lifted from time to time and they were rewarded with fleeting views across and down the rock-strewn landscape. The route ran along the edge of the cliffs that sprang from Heather Terrace and glimpses of spectacular clarity straight down into the gullies salted the flavour of the day. People and dogs appeared in surprising profusion as they moved slowly up towards the summit and when they arrived at the court of Adam and Eve there was scarcely a place to sit for lunching woolly-

hatted enthusiasts – and their dogs. David 1 went to have a look at Adam and then Eve but prudently decided that he did not wish to waste good eating time and that it was not in his nature to play to the crowd.

After lunch the question of descent was raised: there was a choice of a return via the route up or of a continuation down the North Ridge to the road. David 1 & 2 argued for the North Ridge and after asking amongst the enthusiasts they set off in that general direction. The mist made route finding difficult as vision was limited to about 15 yards and although footprints abounded there was little indication of where they eventually led. For David 2 the price of bad decisions long past was beginning to rise and the descent started to develop into quite a serious problem. Neither of them had been down the ridge for some time and the exact route eluded them.

Ice beneath the snow ensured that some parts of the descent were considerably faster than others and particularly uncomfortable, if fleeting, pressures on joints and sinews, which in turn slowed them both down. They were moving steadily westwards across increasingly difficult steep ground and on more than one occasion were very relieved when the heather proved to be securely frozen into the soil and the rocks strongly textured. They had been on the go now since about 9.15am and it was just passed 3pm. With a little luck they would soon be able to claim the record for the longest ascent/descent time from the car park to Adam and Eve and back, a record they both thought was well worth going for. The AGM started at 6pm and the dinner about 7.30pm, which left them two hours to reach the road.



Tryfan, near Helyg. Photo: Steve Foxley

After tracking back and forth above a slight overhang they decided that an abseil was in order and unpacked the rope. Making the best of a bad lot, a projecting spur of rock was selected and David 1 abbed down in great style amidst spectacular snow flurries to the next layer of the terraces about 20 feet below. He tried pulling the rope but to no avail, so David 2 selected another spur and they tried again. The rope slipped round the rock as David 1 pulled one end, so David 2 followed him down only to find that the rope would not budge an inch when he reached his companion. Various prayers and incantations were tried but all to no avail. Nothing for it but to climb back up to release the rope. As the snow had been out of the sun all day it was pretty firm, so a combination of step kicking and heather hanging brought David 2 back to the top. Down it went, snaking blue across the white and grey, and he simply slid down to it with ice axe at the ready. By this time fatigue and the usual pain in the foot were beginning to cloud the day and for the first time he caught himself looking down the rock-strewn, snow covered slope with a marked lack of interest. David 1 was carefully finding the way down, concerned that they might come out on top of Milestone. The route had taken them further and further away from the North Ridge and onto what he perceived as increasingly difficult ground.

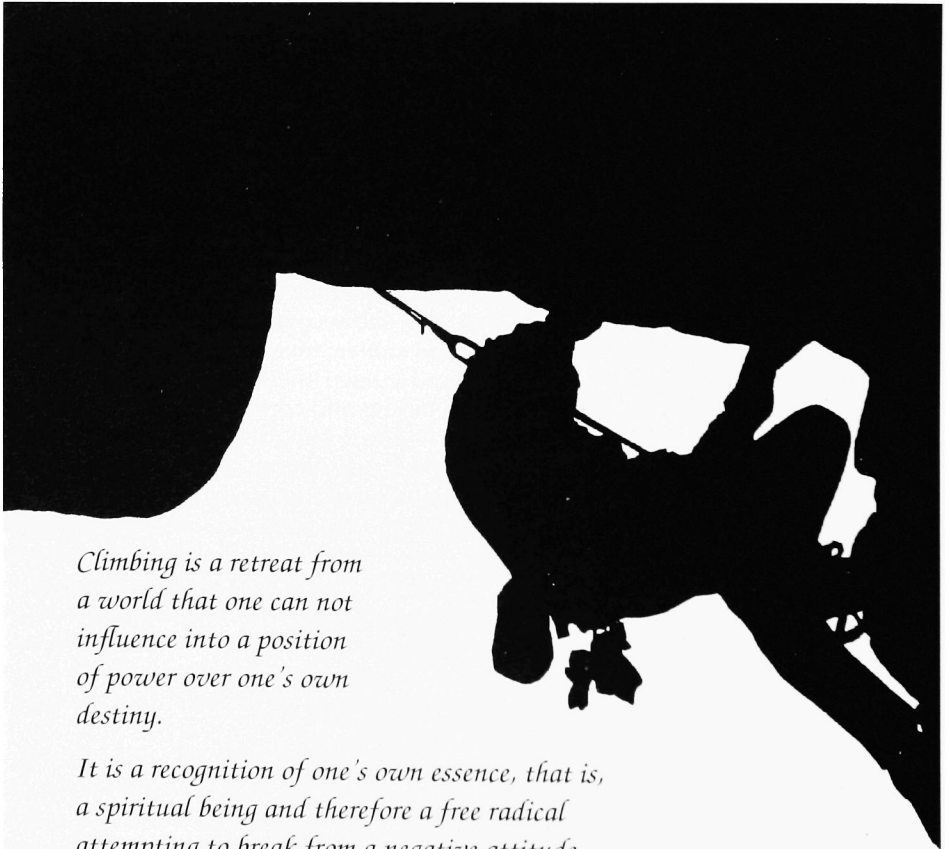
After a period of staggering about that produced a number of unexpected bum slides, they spotted an apparently reasonable scree-filled gully and they picked their way slowly and awkwardly towards it. Lunch was a long time ago but David 2 had some old Dextrose tablets which they sucked from time to time: at least the awful taste took his mind off the fire in his foot. The descent on the half-frozen scree was a bit of a bit of a nightmare but they were soon well below the mists and moving across gentler ground, but fatigue was beginning make his head spin and it was very hard to concentrate, so his bum became wetter as the frequency of ground contact increased. David 1 kept his usual careful eye on him, seeking the least difficult way through the snow-covered ice and across the numerous boulder spreads. The noise of the subterranean streams became more persistent as they stepped and slithered and cursed their way across the snow-covered frozen lower slopes. The light was fading and combined with the need to find somewhere flat, stable and warm, served to focus their somewhat battered collective intelligence. If they were right in their calculations, for the first time that day, they would arrive at the road just in time to miss the AGM.

At about 6pm they reached the wall that edged the road and, with undisguised relief, heaved themselves over it, onto the most blessed stretch of flatness imaginable and it wasn't remotely slippery. The car seemed much further away than was necessary, but when they did eventually reach it in the half-dark it was like entering a palace. The drive back to Helyg was slow and careful and the pre-dinner wash and brush up was taken at a very gentle pace. There was one moment of complete bliss which was intimately bound up with a cup of sweet tea, and then they were off to Llanberis and the dinner.

They were both so knackered that they couldn't find the Hotel and when they did it was so full they wished they hadn't. David 1 found the bar first and ordered two glorious pints but David 2 arrived shortly afterwards so he had to give one to him. They found their table and sat down with great care, easing battered legs into uncomfortable positions. The company swept away the day's fatigue and daft stories revolving around awful visual/aural puns produced roars of laughter

as much for the awfulness of the puns as for Mike's telling. Raucous conversations followed and various people traversed elegantly across the back of their seats, which were hard up against the bar, to reach their own seats which were further along the table. The food took an inordinate time to arrive but when it did, proved to be exceptionally good, one of the best CC dinners they had tasted. The speeches were just far enough away, with the one exception of 92 year old AB who climbed onto his chair and wowed the assembled company with his wit and wisdom.

Back in the quiet of the hut, repairs were made to the most troublesome of the day's consequences, followed by a careful unaided ascent onto the best bunk ever and into the bliss of a sleeping bag.



Climbing is a retreat from a world that one can not influence into a position of power over one's own destiny.

It is a recognition of one's own essence, that is, a spiritual being and therefore a free radical attempting to break from a negative attitude to the world.

David A. Briggs

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner

Corsica High Level Route GR20

Mike F. Browell

‘At every step the solitude grew more profound’.

They say that to lose one’s partner once is unfortunate. To lose one’s partner a second time is careless but to lose him three times or more must be intentional.

The French Grande Randonnée long distance footpaths are an exercise in isolation and a relatively recent discovery for me. Last summer saw a solitary circuit of the Tour de Mont Blanc in four and a half days, running alone with a light ‘sack with minimal gear. I had anticipated that solitude and loneliness were synonymous but was relieved to find one without the other.

So seeking for further amusement... ‘the GR20 is generally considered to be the most difficult of all the GRs. . . wholly mountainous. . . . 177 km and 9,700 metres of ascent.... serious undertaking etc. hyper-etc.’

It had the makings of an interesting trip.

It wasn’t planned as a solitary epic! John Myers agreed to join me on this adventure. He had excellent credentials, stamina to spare, multi-day trekking epics under his belt, a good KIMM partnership... and speaks immaculate French.

Malheureusement, his attitude and agenda were slightly at variance with mine. Whereas he saw it as an opportunity to chat in French conversation-class mode to fellow travellers on the way, I wished no more than a quick bonjour – au revoir. Clearly some serious attitude problems were to be overcome.

Attitude is everything on these ventures. If you expect it to take a fortnight it will take a fortnight. I expected it to take five days but John didn’t. He packed extra kit and extra yummy supplies of dehydrated food.

Corsica is like Italy with an attitude problem. It’s French territory but the ambience and place names are Italian. The language sounds Italian. Scenically it’s a mountainous island renowned for its infamous tortuous coastal roads and gloried for its chic beach holiday resorts. But the genius loci is the GR20. Running north/south it takes an audacious line through the highest mountains, never dipping below 1,000 metres and rising beyond 2,000 metres at cols and summits. It chooses not to take in the ultimate high points but there is no harm in that...The Corsica Super-Marathon takes place each year in August and an international elite of some 20 hard individuals spend six days pretending to run the GR20. Our scheme reversed the route from south to north over the same period, saving the more rugged north section to the last so that we could die struggling in dramatic mountain scenery. Better than fade quietly away in the southern foothills.

There are three logistical problems to be overcome on such an epic run. Firstly water. Much of the route follows ridges which streams find difficult to cross. Fortunately by running it is possible to minimise the time you feel thirsty. Cunning?

Secondly, accommodation. There are over 14 spartanly equipped mountain

refuges at one day hiking intervals. Rather more thinly spread are four small hotels where beds and food are available. The solution is to carry small quantities of appalling dehydrated food as an incentive to blast past as many huts as possible and aim to reach hotels. Or suffer the disadvantages of dehydrated food.

Thirdly, food. See dehydrated food, as above.

June '94 was a tricky month for Corsica. Snow had fallen and the island was experiencing an uncharacteristically wet summer; flooding of the mountain streams had caused disasters and, all in all, things were not going in accordance with the guidebook's seasonal predictions. No matter, better to travel hopefully...

Day One – Keep on Running

Arriving at the tiny mountain village of Conca I couldn't help noticing that the sides of the road were lined with crypts as if entering a graveyard.

This foreboding was soon forgotten as we set off on a crack of dawn start. Optimistic notions of doing much running were rapidly laid to rest as we stumbled up the first rocky path. Having crested the first rise, notions of running the flat bits also evaporated as the rock strewn chaos continued. When at last a downhill arrived it proved possible to trip and tumble.

This set the scene for the next five days, where running was the occasional activity for no more than 20% of the route. The remaining time was spent sweating uphill and rock hopping and falling downhill.

John was clearly under strict instructions from his coach; instructions which compelled him to start like a dormant tortoise and finish like a demented train. I had experienced this mode of Myers movement once before; the Jekyll and Hyde phenomena...

The first parting of the ways took place after one hour.

I had plenty of time to ponder upon the loneliness of the long distance runner as I drank several beers and ate a lonely sandwich at the Col de Bavella some four hours later. By the time JM arrived it was time to go. The early afternoon clouds were forming and soon we were in thick mist and pouring rain, slogging to an early finish at the Asinao refuge.

It was not a happy experience. Spending a soggy night in a remote hut with soaking gear, the prospect of dehydrated food and more of the same in future days was not inspiring. The only sensible resolution was to aim for a distant hotel and restaurant, and to accept no substitute.

Day Two – Breaking up is Hard to Do

After an early start the next day we reached the second parting of the ways as I waited on the summit of Monte Incudine. As John arrived and sat down for a breather (as instructed by his trainer) I proposed to meet him at the hut. This simple understatement of intention belied the question 'which hut?' 12 hours later I staggered into the restaurant at the end of the rainbow and ordered a couple of grande bières. I drank them in solitude with a toast to absent friends, showered, changed, read a book and eventually started a lonely dinner. As the evening shadows lengthened a solitary figure was seen staggering towards the Capannelle dortoir...

It had been a long day. One might have expected an emotional greeting but with stoic resolve John got stuck into his meal as if it was an everyday occurrence

to be left for dead on top of a mountain with only the photocopied shreds of a map to protect him.

Day Three – Lonely Hearts Club

Day three started gently enough with a runnable track contouring until a steep zigzagging descent lost all the precious height gained and gave more scope for parting of the ways. Vizzavona station was not easy to locate with potential wrong turnings at every turn. I waited in now traditional solitary mode for my companion to emerge from the forests.

This half-way oasis is reported to be an opportunity to enjoy the comforts of civilisation and prepare for the terrors yet to come. Ten minutes of comfort, civilisation and a couple of lemonades did the trick and we were off to tackle the crux. This proved to be the 1,000 metre flog through forest and rocks to the Crete de Muratello. With this awful business out of the way it was almost enjoyable to tumble down the ridge to L'Onda Refuge. Despite strong winds and swirling mists we decided that the next section should be tackled direct over the tops. In retrospect this was a bad decision and navigational problems (OK, so we lost the little red and white markers!) ensued in thick mist and a gale amidst the craggy pinnacles of the ridge. We were somewhat grateful to get sight of the Petra Piana Refuge as the clouds cleared on our descent.

Day Four – Lazing on a Sunny Afternoon

It started with a spectacular ridge crossing taking us through a tortuous route across unlikely terrain. The views were superb but the line unlikely, only appreciated in retrospect. We managed to avoid parting for a couple of hours but then the inevitable happened and long spells of loneliness ensued.

A short while later after a very pleasant runnable section through alpine meadows I arrived at Le Lac de Nino, a lonely and picturesque spot well featured on postcards. Some time later John arrived....

The final section of this short day took us over a spectacular ridge – and down donkey tracks to the Hotel Castel di Vergio. The afternoon was yet young and we passed it decadently supping beers on the terrace of the hotel. Anything to avoid another night in a refuge!

Day Five – Only the Lonely

Day Five was to be the highlight and started with a gentle couple of kilometres jogging down the road at dawn. By the time we had topped out of the first valley near the Mori Refuge the sun was strong. As we descended through pine forests it felt and smelt like Yosemite. Thirst forced us to stop at a bergerie; actually the path virtually passed through the building! The enterprising proprietor fetched supplies up the track by donkey and charged enough to make a comfortable profit. The donkeys attempted to supplement their meagre income by eating John's sandwich.

The climb up to the Cirque de la Solitude (Ah! Solitude – a place which sums up the epitome of the loneliness of the long distance runner!) was a pleasant rocky scramble passing the architecturally-interesting Tapanatu Refuge. As we passed over the col the scenery changed and the image I have retained is of a bomb crater. The Cirque de la Solitude is a barren and stark place, bare unvegetated rock



Gorge Crossing on GR20. Photo: Mike Browell

tumbling down to a narrow defile. The way through is at first unclear until the awful realisation that the line descends deep down into the cirque. As the rock steepens, chains and ladders appear and whilst in dry conditions it is possible to pad down the slabs, in the wet and with huge 'sacks, no doubt the extra security is justified.

Having climbed all the way down, passing an ominous fresh bloodstain, we had to scramble back up again. As we left the cirque the atmosphere changed back to the familiar expansive views down to the Altore ski station. Passing the jumbled remains of the Haute Asco hut led down to a choice of route. We chose high and were rewarded with a grinding ascent to pick our way along a Skye-like ridge until at last it was possible to slide down snow slopes towards the Spasimata Refuge. The descent was long and complicated and I regret to say that I mislaid John yet again. At the hut I met the charming guardienne Nicole and eventually was able to introduce JM as he stumbled in.

Nicole! Papa!!

Such are the things of dreams....

Day Six – Homeward Bound

On the sixth day it was wind-down mode and a second breakfast of ice-cream and coffee at the Auberge de la Forêt. Things seemed to be going nicely and in the correct direction until the forest track turned back on an un-mapped hairpin. Our map clearly predated the forest fires of the '80s and a continuing un-mapped sequence of hairpins took us higher and higher up the hill and away from our objective. Then the path stopped, not with a bang but with a whimper, fading away to nothing. Just chest high maquis. Optimistically we headed uphill. The maquis tolerated this but took some revenge and soon our legs were shredded. Then we met Le Legion. Three pairs in full kit were fighting their way down where we were coming up. They had been hunting (what??) but had lost their dogs. In coarse French they invited us, if we saw them, to whack them soundly and send them downhill.

This scenario caused us some concern. Had they really lost their dogs? Or eaten them to supplement rations? Would they be court-martialled for eating the highly trained equipment? We struggled on.

Time passed. At last the final slope to Calenzana. But this was not to be a pleasant jog down to the finish. The voracious maquis tried to devour us every step of the way and our well tanned legs were bloodied by the finish.

Finally after five and a half days we were free of the routine, able to have an early lunch without guilt and able to throw away the remaining detestable dried food!

It was while I was speaking on the 'phone to Joe Simpson, that the germ of an idea developed,

"I thought your book was great, Joe. It's a pity you're not in the CC, with writing like that."

"It really IS about time I joined the CC", he replied, so casually and undefended, I just knew I'd clinched it.

"I'll get you a membership form if you do me an article", and the deal was set! He's now got a form. I had two for the price of one!

Meteorite Ridge

Ishinca Valley, Cordillera Blanca, Peru 1994

Joe Simpson

It came from the depths of space ending a journey of unimaginable time. Streaking from the western darkness in a searing fireball, low on the horizon, as it dipped towards the gloom of a nearby valley. It looked for all the world like a burning stricken aircraft; soundless despite the fury of its earthbound flight.

"Did you see that?" Rick yelled excitedly from the shadows above.

"What?"

"Crickey, you should have seen that."

"Seen what?" I shouted as I tried teetering up a chimney of loose granite blocks.

"It was a meteorite. Really close, like a crashing plane..." and he told me in a rush about its glories as I struggled up to his stance cursing the rock, the two in the morning cold and the fact that I had clearly just missed one of the most wondrous spectacles in the world. I couldn't imagine the probability of being so close to such an event. I wondered how many light years it had hurtled through space, how many thousands of years old it might have been before it crashed into our tiny piece of the world? Had it even come from our solar system? And it was just typical that I had my back to it when it landed.

We sat on a dusty block and peered around trying to distinguish features on the ice field above us. The yellow beams from our torches criss-crossed crazily in the night, until we fixed on the shadow of a serac and pinned it against the darkness...

In the east there was the faintest glimmer of dawn; a thin light-blue band rising above a jagged black horizon of peaks. For an instant they flashed gold and white and clouds on the horizon flickered.

"Oh blimey!" I said. "Lightening."

"Are you sure?" Rick asked anxiously. The sky flashed. There was no sound.

The bell rang time as Richard came back from the bar.

"How do you feel about going back to Peru?" He asked as he handed me a pint of bitter.

"Oh, it'll be great," I replied airily. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, you know. Bad memories, that sort of thing."

"Don't be daft, it'll be great, and I'm being paid. Anyway it wasn't Peru that did me, or even the mountains. It just happened; could have been anywhere. I have been on ten trips since then, you know. No, I'm looking forward to it." I said with six-pint blasé self-confidence.

I had accepted Bob Lancaster's offer to guide clients in the Cordillera Blanca for his trekking company High Places. Rick Potter and I would guide on various acclimatisation peaks before attempting Huascarán (6,768m), the highest mountain in Peru. After the trip Rick and I planned to do some climbing for ourselves.

"Just easy routes, OK?" I had warned him. "Nothing hard, nothing new, all right. I'm not getting into that scene again."

"Sure," he said, "but good easy ones. Alpamayo, perhaps, or Artesonraju."

A week later as Heathrow approached and Sheffield faded down a long ribbon of grey motorway I was feeling less sure of myself. Was this such a good idea, I wondered? I felt superstitious with a sense that I might be tempting fate; as if going back could be an end of a journey, an extraordinary adventure that was pulling itself to a close. Would all the good things that had come out of Peru for me suddenly vanish, and worse, would all the bad return in a rush?

"Don't be daft." I told myself. "That's idiotic." But a part of me didn't believe it. I lit a cigarette and watched a Jumbo defy logic as it hung in the empty sky above the terminal. "God, I hate it when they do that."

In three weeks of near perfect weather we climbed the South East Face of Urus Este (5,420m), the South Ridge of Ishinca (5,530), the East Ridge of Pt 5,520m, and finally the long and in my opinion dangerous slopes of the *Garganta route* on Huascarán Sur in four tiring days. As the bus taking the clients, Tony, David and Malcolm, pulled out of sight I turned to Rick.

"What do you reckon?"

"Oh, I think they'll be happy with the trip. 100% successful and all that. They had a good time."

"No, I mean that," I said pointing at the white sail of Ranrapalca piercing the sky above Huaraz.

"I thought you didn't want to do a new route?"

"Well I didn't then, but I do now. The man who likes to say yes, that sort of thing."

"Right, OK then, you're on. Let's get sorted."

With the help of Eudes Morales at Pyramid Adventures we organised transport, burros, arriero, food, fuel and a camp guardian for Rick, Matt and Helen Ward, and myself. The total cost for an eight day excursion up the Ishinca valley came to £40 each, although that was a special deal from Pyramid Adventures.

Peru, and Huaraz in particular, was a wonderland. No peak fees, no liaison officers, no triplicate permit applications, no baksheesh and hassle. Step off the plane in Lima, get on a night coach to Huaraz, book into a cheap, clean hostel like Edwards Inn (\$10 double room) and acclimatise with some frantic Pisco slammers and Sangria-induced chicken, dancing until five in the morning in Tambo's night-club.

In the morning Huascaran, Copa and Ranrapalca loom over the small town only one day's beautiful walking from the road-head, and behind lie the true beauties – Alpamayo, Artesonraju, Piramide, Santa Cruz, Taulliraju and the fearsome Chacaraju. It is a climber's paradise with a wealth of staggeringly beautiful mountains, glorious treks through high forested valleys, past enchanted lakes. And when you get back you can drink like crazy and dance until your heart cracks.

'Stand up next to a mountain,' Jimi Hendrix shrieked in my head-phones, 'Cut it down with the edge of my hand,' and I collapsed in a heap besides Rick.. 70 pound rucksacks and dodgy legs were not a good combination.

"This is counter productive." I snapped. "Far too much gear, too much food, hardware; too much everything..." I harangued Rick in my usual irrational manner and he sat there with a calm smile, looking appreciatively at the north face of Ranrapalca looming above us.

"Looks good, doesn't it?" he said when I had spluttered to an indignant silence. "Should be fun."

"Could be," I muttered as I lurched to my feet and staggered drunkenly in circles trying to get my legs into some meaningful dialogue with each other. There was a piercing shriek in my ears as the tape changed over making me throw my arms in the air as if I had been shot in the chest.

'Pump it up, pump it, pump it, pump it...' The dance music thumped through my head with an hypnotic mega bass beat loud enough to make your ears bleed.

I tottered unsteadily towards the mountain, legs lurching forward in staccato rhythm to the song.

I watched the silent bursts of lightening flare on the horizon with a mixture of foreboding and depression. Until then I hadn't realised how much I had wanted to climb the north spur. A new route, an eye-catching line up the centre of the face, and perhaps most importantly for me, a chance to cap a great trip, the most successful I had ever had, with a fitting memory. I had returned to Peru nine years after Siula Grande, full of superstitious worries about what might happen, unsure of how well I had managed to shelve the bad memories. That first ascent had nearly destroyed me and yet had created so much in its place. It seemed suddenly very important to my brittle self-confidence to climb this route. I wanted to close the door on the past and start again the way I had always wanted it to be. A delusion perhaps, and not a very good reason for climbing, but important to me.

"Shall we go down?" Rick asked in a voice that screamed "Let's go up".

"I don't know. Once we're through the seracs we might not be able to retreat safely and if that stuff hits us ..."

"It seems to be holding back and there's no thunder. It must be miles away, over the Amazon somewhere."

I looked at huge banks of clouds building up against the eastern walls of Palcaraju. Streamers of silver-grey moon-lit cloud poured slowly over the rim like dry ice over the edge of a stage and then dissipated. I remembered how we had noticed from Huaraz that Ranrapalca, for some odd reason, had seemed to remain clear of bad weather. These clouds welling up over the mountains looked strangely lethargic as if unable to summon the strength to push forward and envelope us. A white flash streaked with gold briefly illuminated the storm clouds.

"I suppose we could go on a bit further, at least until the seracs."

"It should be light by then," Rick said, "might look a bit more promising."

So we went on pitching up a diagonal ramp line leading into the seracs of the lower ice field, always looking east, counting the lightening flashes. Slaymaker, Rourke, and Johns had been this way 18 years before, fixing ropes for 700 feet up to the top of the seracs before climbing the 2,000 foot north face ice fields above in a single push. At the seracs we intended breaking out left and heading for the start of the north spur, crossing the lower edge of the ice field towards a narrow rock chute leading onto the spur. To our left the icefield plunged off a 350 foot overhanging granite wall to the Ishinca glacier. It felt exposed and precarious as we approached the seracs, conscious of the long airy fall off the suspended ice slope.

Just as the Americans had encountered in 1975, we found our progress slowed by the most extraordinary ice and snow conditions I had ever seen. The whole face seemed to be corrugated. The surface was a serrated band of shark's fins. Six inches apart and 18 inches high it was as if someone had poked in millions of slate tiles at an angle to the 55°- 60° slopes. In the early morning cold we could teeter up on these penitents with minimal fracturing but it made for awkward, off-balance, high-stepping manoeuvres. The seracs proved to be the broken relics of the icefall of labyrinthine crevasses and ice chimneys that the first ascensionists had encountered. Clearly a huge amount of it had winged off into space below us.

I hammered in an ice screw and waited for Rick to arrive. Above me blue obelisks of ice hung out over the icefield. A large fractured wall draped in icicles and eaten away into honey-combs caught the first rays of dawn. There was a popping sound that made me jump and an odd tinkling of breaking glass, crystal chandeliers rattling in the wind.

"The lightening has stopped." Rick said, taking the screws from me.

"I noticed."

"How do you feel?"

"Nervous." I said nodding towards the rotting ice cliffs.

"Yeah, let's get out of here." He said as he took the rack and set off diagonally leftwards through the heart of the seracs. He was soon out of sight. The ice suddenly began creaking and popping, making me jerk from side to side with fright. It came from all around me. With a crisp sound of breaking glass, a slab of candy-floss ice tinkled past me. Another sharp report came with a feeling that something had settled, as if the slope I was belayed to had abruptly dropped a few inches. I looked nervously at the ice-screw; it was both a belay and a trap. I couldn't move away from it. The rising sun gleamed through the blue ice walls around me flashing white off the lattice of ice bubbles. I thought of Rene Daumal's story of **The Hollow Men** who 'in ice appear as bubbles in the shape of men', and who at night 'wander through the ice and dance during the full moon. But they never see the sun, or else they would burst. They eat only the void, such as the form of corpses; they get drunk on empty words and all the meaningless expressions we utter.'

I was just concluding that Daumal was a nutter, although pleasingly imaginative, when one of his hollow men saw the sun and burst. There was a crack, a slow ominous creak and then a whooshing sound as the serac above me partially keeled over and tumbled towards me. I lurched to my left with a squeal of fright and came up hard against the sling on my ice screw. Within milliseconds

it had gone crashing past me, a chunk of blue ice the size of a supermarket freezer, cartwheeling down the ice-field before vaulting out into space above the overhanging rock wall. It hung there for a moment at the height of its fall and then plunged out of sight with shocking suddenness.

Cursing furiously I began unscrewing my belay.

"Are you OK?" Rick's faint call came from above.

"Get a belay, quickly." I yelled and flinched as the seracs popped and cracked with a sudden burst of enthusiasm. I was surprised to see my hands shaking as I tried to clip the screw to my harness. Stuff the Hollow Men, I'm getting out of here. I set off after Rick without waiting to see if he was safe.

"Did you get hit?" Rick asked when I reached him.

"If I had we would both have been taking flying lessons by now. It missed me by a few feet. That was scary."

"Well, I might add, that this isn't much better."

"Why?"

"I was digging for a belay, and I think that this ice-field isn't attached to the rock underneath. It's like we're on a huge bob-sleigh ready to go."

"Well, thanks for that," I muttered as I looked warily down to where the ice plunged into space. "But I'm not going back down through those seracs, lightening or bob-sleighs or anything. I'm out of here."

By mid-day we were clear of the lower ice-field having exited through a narrow rock chute at its left-hand end to reach the base of the north spur. The north face was basked in sunshine and heat waves seemed to shimmer across the vast expanse of ice.

Far to our right we could make out the 1975 north face route. The shark's finned surface sweeping up towards thin rock spurs reaching down from the summit headwall, 2,000 feet above us.

As we climbed up the crest of the spur the heat intensified and the shark's fins began collapsing under our weight. The snow took on the consistency of wet sugar. There was no use placing screws or even ice stakes. We edged closer to the shattered rocks that hung from the crest of the spur. To our left, the rocky central couloir plunged down to the glacier, hemmed in by vertical walls of broken granite and fringed by curtains of icicles near the summit. Massive bombardments of rock and ice thundered into the couloir making us jump at first until we realised we were safe. The glacier was blackened by the dust and debris in a wide fan far below.

As night came in we had slowed to a near standstill, unnerved by the precariousness of the snow and the instability of the rock. Three pitches from the top of the face we were forced to dig a tiny cave into the side of a cornice and wait for the night to freeze the shark's fins into climbable condition. It was a chance to re-gain control over a situation that had been getting out of hand. Fear, cold, and tiredness had been making their play for our souls. After a cramped night we quickly climbed the last 400 feet to the summit headwall where we found an old piton at the point where it narrowed. It was the first piece of gear we had come across and was clearly where the 1975 route exited onto the summit slopes.

After 30 hours on the face and with wind-whipped clouds and driving snow, we decided not to go onto the summit which was set back towards the south-east. Instead we tried to find the start of the north-east ridge which we hoped to

descend. Unbeknownst to us it was north-east face we wanted and after too many anxious probing searches we began down-climbing in the hope of finding a rock anchor to abseil from. I kept peering down into a murky world of shifting clouds and the shadows of rock buttresses. It seemed as if we were attempting to descend the north face of the Eiger, yet we had been told that it was a straightforward descent. The ice fell away abruptly at 65° as I crossed a few small crevasses. I hammered an ice screw into the brittle water ice and continued down towards a small outcrop of dark rock that refused to get any nearer. Coils of rope began curling around my axe heads. Rick was coming down, moving together on steep ice with inadequate anchors. A mounting tension built up inside me. I had been here before. 'This is where things go wrong', I kept telling myself, 'this is how it always happens'. I was on the point of panicking when at last my crampons skittered onto the jumble of granite blocks and I fixed a belay, almost weeping with relief.

Four abseils later found us trudging towards a chaotic icefall and cloud filled sunset. Snow flurries eddied around us as Rick picked his way confidently through a maze of gaping holes and I tottered after him whining about how I didn't like crevasses much and was he sure this was the right way? Just as exhaustion overtook me and I decided it was time to dig a snow cave we came out onto a col above the Ishinca glacier which led down to our first bivy site. We were enveloped in soft purple cloud as the last of the sun glimmered through from above. A chocolate bar revived me but Rick had slumped after his magnificent effort in the icefall. I knew something was wrong when I watched him trying to burn his toilet paper in a snow storm at 5,300m. Even rabid environmentalists wouldn't do that.

Suddenly the tension evaporated, and we were laughing and hugging each other and apologising for all the angry scared exchanges and looking in delight at our manic purple faces knowing we were safe, and that we had done it, and it was ours forever, never to be taken away.

As we staggered down to base camp we repeatedly looked back at the line of the route and grinned at each other, with heads full of magic and that temporary sense of invincibility that comes after good days on the hills. As the tents came into sight the feeling waned to be replaced by the dull aches of tired bodies. The following day Rick wanted to climb Toclaraju, (6,032m), a beautiful ice pyramid at the head of the valley. I said no, I was too tired, Matt and Helen wavered, but by three in the afternoon we were all struggling up steep scree slopes to a high bivy beneath the north-west face of Toclaraju.

Ten days later, en-route to Bogata and Caracas, I pulled the blind down and peered out the window of the plane expecting to see the Cordillera Blanca beneath me. I was shocked to find myself staring at the West Face of Siula Grande no more than a mile away. I could see everything – the line of our route, the descent, the accident site, the lowers, the glacier and moraines and the site of our base camp. For a long sickening moment it all came flooding back in a way I had not experienced for nine years. It suddenly seemed horrifyingly real, suddenly made me realise how good a job I had done at shelving the memory.

"Que quieran beber?" The air hostess asked.

"What?" I said unable to drag my eyes from the view outside. "Oh, right! A drink. I'll have a gin and tonic please. Could you make it a double?"

"Certainly, sir," she smiled and scooped ice cubes into a glass. I peered fixedly at Siula Grande as it drifted into the distance.

"They are very beautiful, the mountains," she said as she handed me the drink. "You like them, yes?"

"Er, yes. Yes, just a bit."

Joe Simpson and Rick Potter completed the first ascent of the North Spur of Ranrapalca (6,162m) D+/TD 1,000m 29-30 August 1994.



Piramide Peak 5,885m, Cordillera Blanca, Peru. Photo: Dave Wilkinson

One Very Fine Day

Jim Curran

It is 2.30am, or 'Chinese dentist time' as Al Rouse always called it (geddit?). I fumble with the lighter in freezing darkness. The stove splutters and its faint blue flame vaguely illuminates the cramped confines of the tiny two-man Gemini tent into which Paul Nunn and I are improbably squashed. Outside we are perched precariously on the very crest of a snow arête which shoots away into black fathomless depths on both sides. Chris Bonington and Jim Fotheringham share the same platform, which took three hours to excavate, though their tent actually protrudes over the north face. Just below, Graham Little and Jim Crowther have dug their tent into a made-to-measure slot, where it nestles snugly into the angle of the slope. Above us, the Indian climbers Divyesh Muni, Muslim Contractor and Pasang Bodh are crammed into a fourth tent. We are now at around 6,000m with only 550m to go.

The ice melts slowly as I dose, clutching the pan with gloved hands to stop it sliding off the stove. I am hollow with apprehension. Today is our hoped-for summit attempt on Rangrik Rang, an unclimbed 6,557m peak in the Kinnaur Himalaya. Yesterday I was knackered as we climbed 12 interminable rope lengths. Deep down I doubt I will be going much further, though I would dearly love to. Meanwhile I prepare the brew and all too soon we gulp the tepid sweet fluid and start the grim business of getting up. Paul described our interminable contortions, thrashing around inside the bulging, bending tent, as being like 'two whales caught in the same net'. At last we are ready, as the first lights of a clear dawn seep through the blue Goretex walls.

After only one rope length I realise that, for me, the game is up. I am going slowly and with so many rests I run the real risk of jeopardising the summit bid for Paul and possibly everyone else. Sadly I hand the little video camera to him and retrace my steps back to the tent, traversing precariously around it to the entrance, trying not to spike it with my crampons. I unrope and silently watch the end snake upwards as Paul ties on with Muslim. Inside the tent again after only half an hour, I lie cold and disappointed in my pit as the sounds of the others gradually fade away. It's going to be a long day, for all of us.

And yet, as the sun touches the tent and the temperature rises, so do my spirits. With not a breath of wind it is utterly silent. I am surrounded with a quite fantastic array of peaks stretching into Tibet in the north and the Garwhal and Gangotri in the south-east. Kamet is prominent in the distance, looking here remarkably like K2. It is without doubt the finest view I've ever had at altitude and sitting in the entrance I lapse into daydreams and reminiscences, of people and places I've been lucky enough to experience in the last 18 years of Himalayan climbing and filming.

As I tried to digest the view, and after I had used a roll of film trying to do it justice, I faced up to some fairly self-evident home truths. Now 51 and on my tenth Himalayan foray it was obvious that I wasn't going to make expedition films for ever. This would be my seventh, excluding the rock climbing films and several other related projects. Though this trip, with Hamish Kapedia, had been

more than usually fulfilling, there was still a feeling of déjà-vu about making yet another one. Since my first venture on the Trango Tower in 1976, I had seen and learned a lot. More to the point I had achieved virtually all my youthful ambitions which had seemed so improbable when I first held a camera. Trango, Kongur, K2, Everest and so many places visited, so many stories...



View from Camp III, Rangrik Rang. Kamet in Centre. Photo: Jim Curran

Now I must make it clear that on that stunning day I had no intention of stopping climbing, or indeed of stopping of making films. But from now on, it would be on my own terms, especially the climbing bit. Although I loved the buzz of going off with the 'A' teams, I was never remotely in their league as a climber and I had recently found, or rediscovered, the fulfilment of achieving more modest goals under my own steam. A trip to the Caucasus and another to the volcanoes of the Atacama Desert with Ian McNaught Davis had been especially memorable and I had further adventures planned (one to Mt Kenya and Kilimanjaro with Mac has already happened). But now, sitting outside the tent, looking across the greatest mountain range in the world, I was conscious that it was time to call it a day at this level. Sooner or later the decision would have to be made, preferably by me and not the mountains.

As the day wore on, great thunderclouds, like nuclear explosions, towered over the Garwhal. Eerily, a band of haze just below the horizon, crept across the vista. Since the great storm on K2 in 1986 I have, I admit, been neurotic about weather changes, but could this be a harbinger of bad weather? The silence was oppressive. I melted more snow, and made a large pan of orange for the others on

their return (I drank most of it). The shadows lengthened and the form of the ridges, stretching across to Tibet, was thrown into high relief, the colours intensified as the tent slipped out of the sun. Far below I could see the moraines where Advance Base was sited. Tomorrow with luck we would all be back up there...But now, on my own I could say that I was content. Tomorrow was another day.

As dusk fell and the first little pangs of worry for the safety of the others started, I heard faint voices then, to my relief, clear conversation in the calm evening air. Soon, crunching footsteps heralded the arrival of the successful team. They had all got to the top but it had been a long day. As I passed out the orange drink to be shared by a parched Chris and Jim, my solitude was broken. But it had been after all, a very good day.

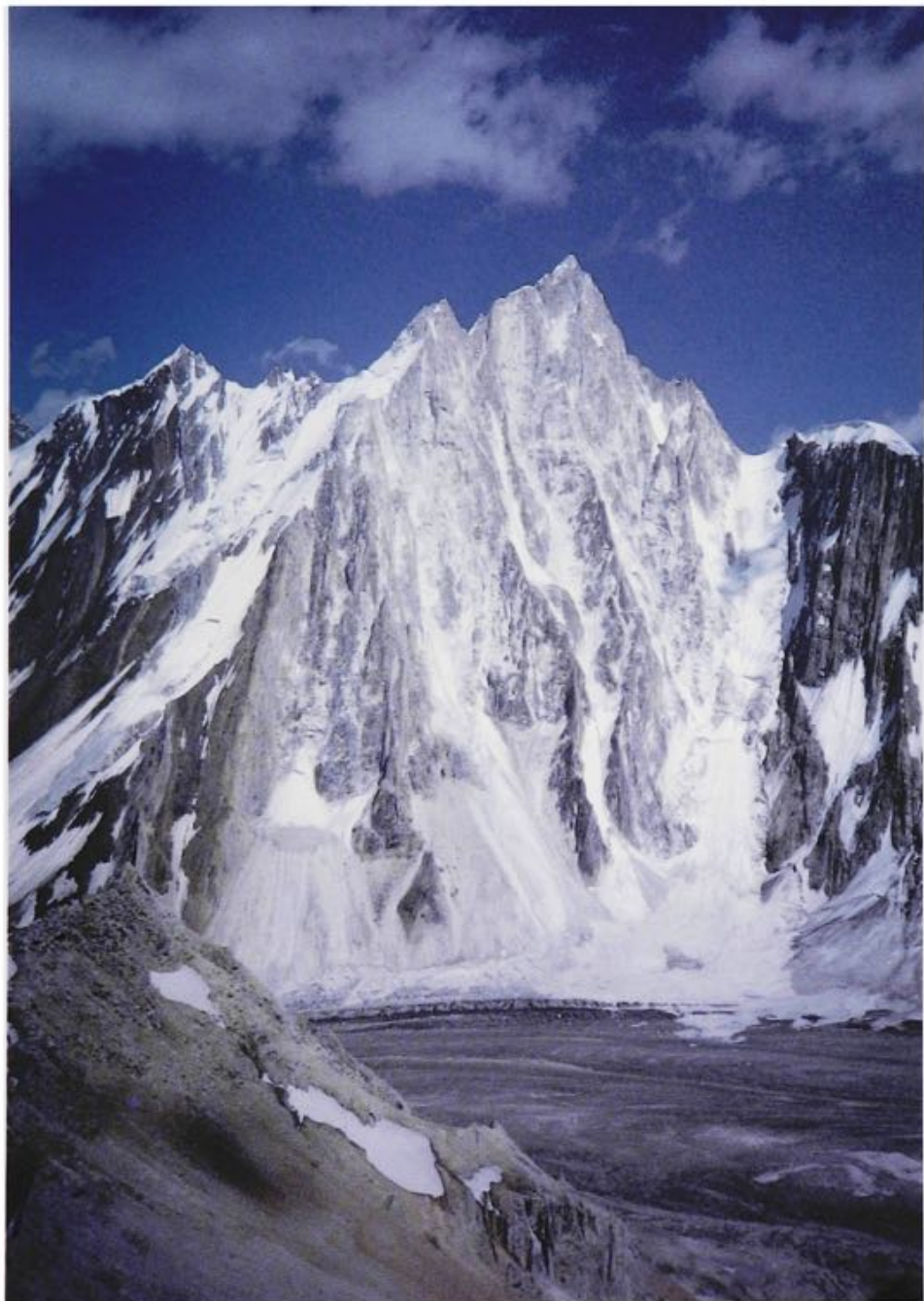


'An eerie band of haze crept across the vista'. A view down to the moraines of Advance Base Camp. Photo: Jim Curran



*Above: Reflections at Uyumrung, Western Karakorum. Photo: Dave Wilkinson.
Below: Monte Disgrazia North Face in Winter. Photo: Lindsay Griffin*





Unclimbed Peak c6,000m, East Side of Gorombur Glacier, Western Karakorum. Photo: Dave Wilkinson



Above: Unclimbed Hagshu North Face, Zanscar

Below: Annapurna Sanctuary - Inclement Weather. Photos: Smiler Cuthbertson

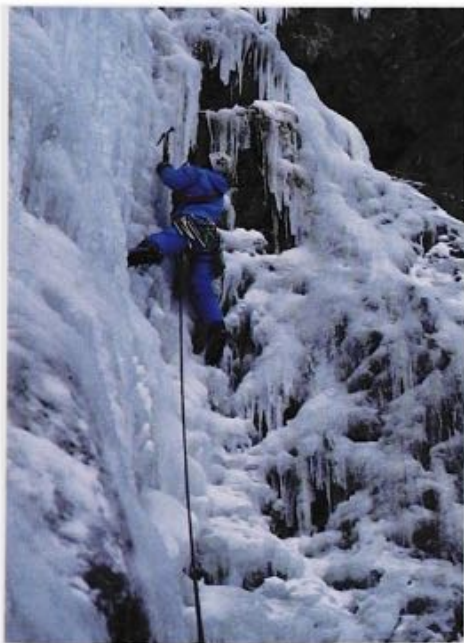


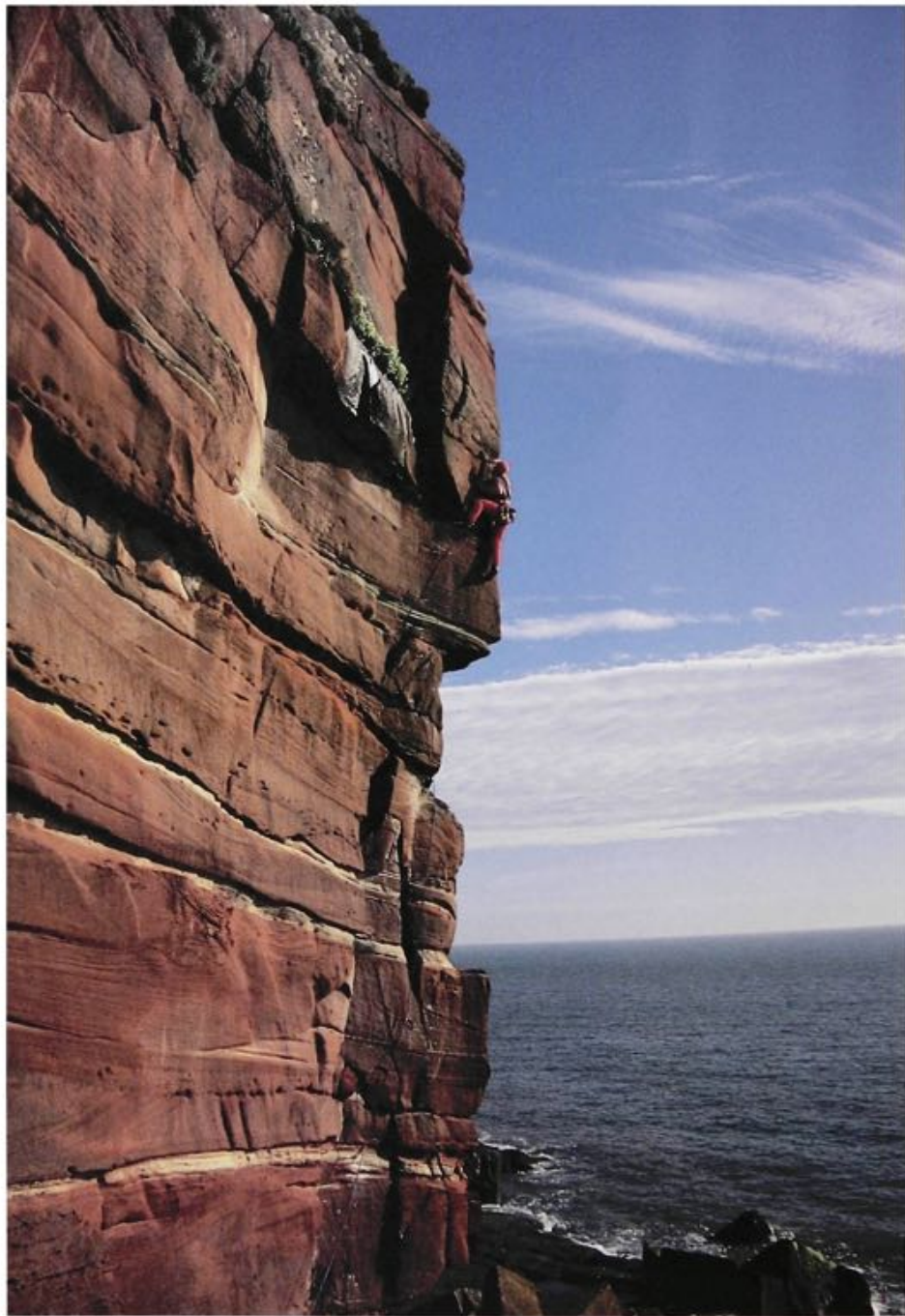


Above: In extremis, Hagshu North Face. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

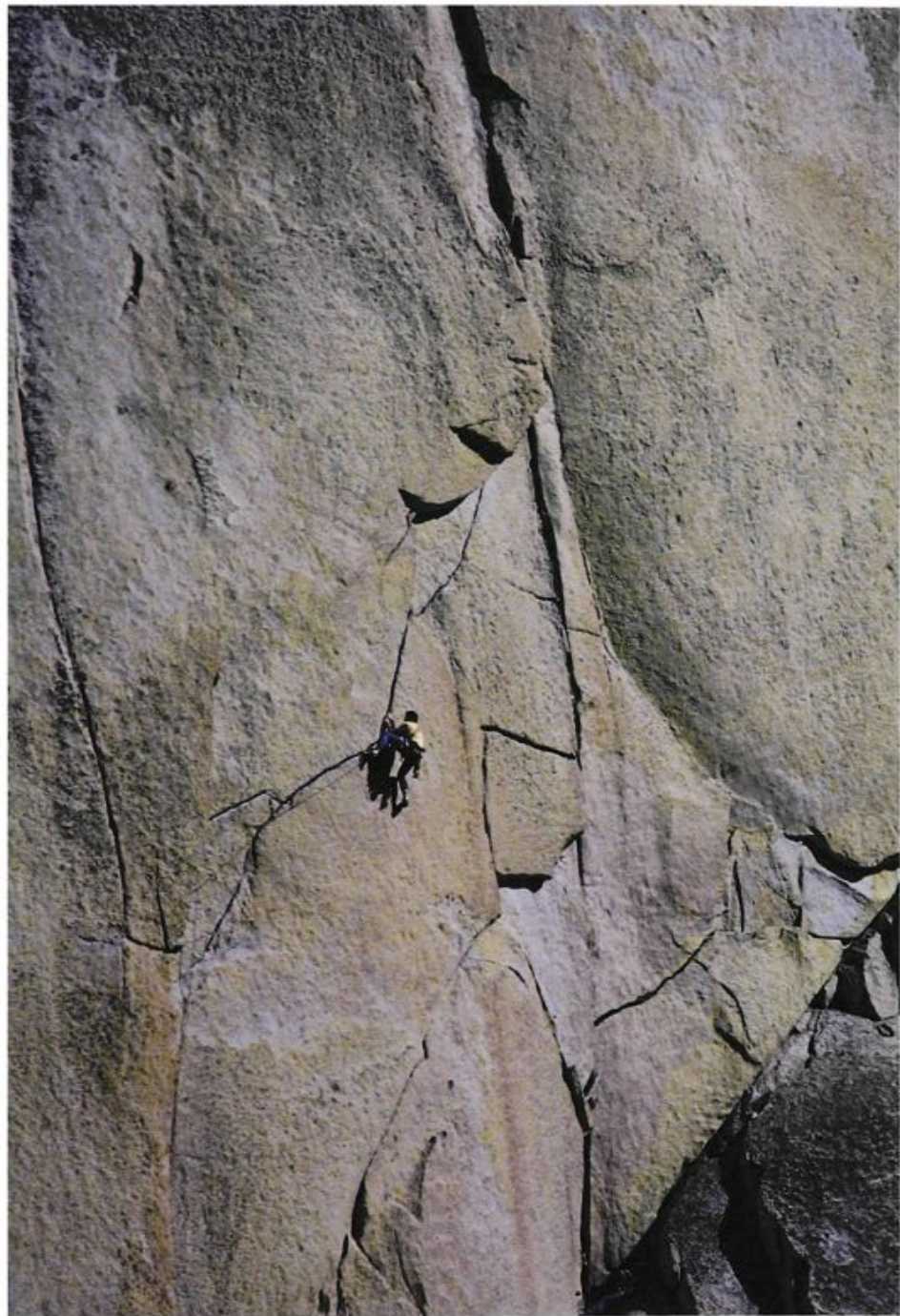
*Below left: Cascade de la Folie, Fournel Valley, Argentière la Bessee.
Photo: Lindsay Griffin*

Below right: Alan Rouse - Winter on the Aiguille de Midi. Photo: Paul Nunn





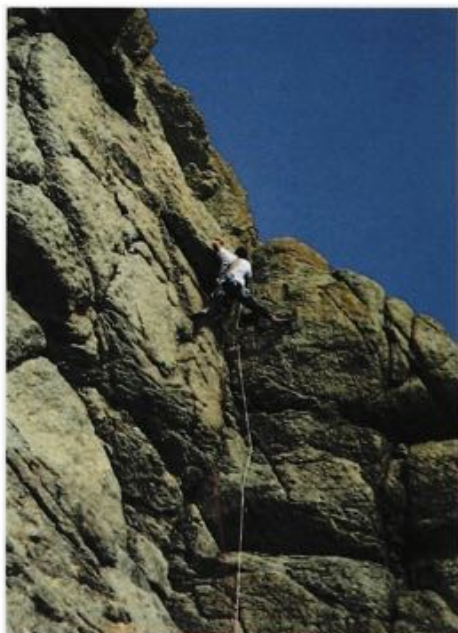
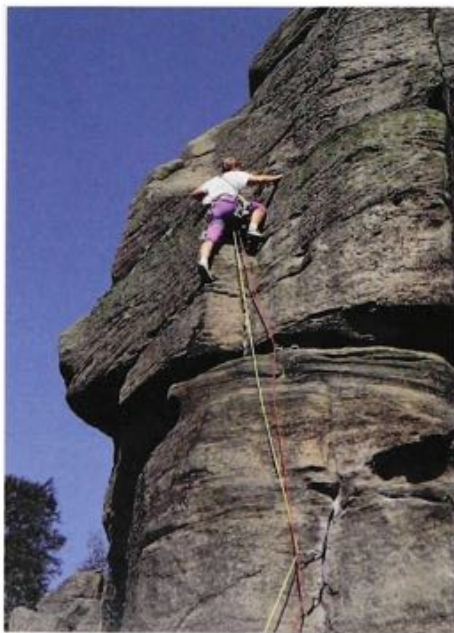
Colin Binks on St Bees. Photo: Chris Craggs Collection

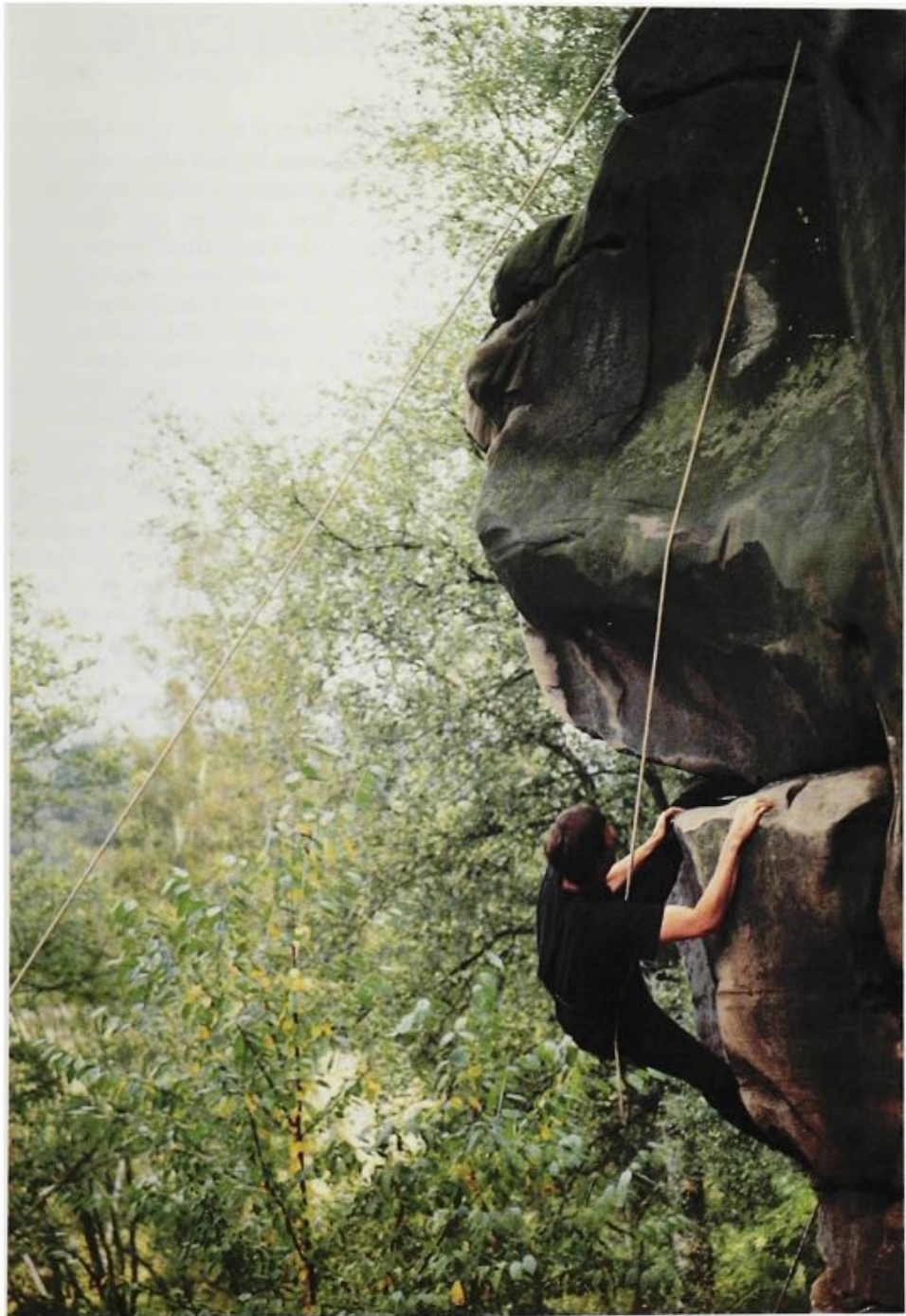


'Airy Interlude' 5.10a, Needles, California. Photo: Chris Craggs Collection



*Above: Bob Moulton on 'Central Crack' 5c, Under Rocks
 Below left: Bill Dark on 'Birch Tree Wall', Brimham Rocks
 Below right: Dave Farrant on 'Seal Slab', Chair Ladder.
 Photos: Ian Smith*





John Kelly on 'Stupid Effort' 5a, Harrison's Rocks. Photo: Ian Smith

Looking After the Cornish Cliffs

Mike Banks

One evening back in June '93 I tagged along behind some friends who were going to a regional BMC meeting in Penzance. At least it was being held in a pub. There ensued the ritual snarling match between the local activists and Rowland Edwards. There were also mutterings about a secret National Trust report on the Cornish cliffs. The word was that the NT, which owns most of the Cornish climbing cliffs, had commissioned a survey by a professional environmentalist, Katherine Hearn, to assess the damage being done by climbers to sensitive areas. Rumours were rife of an impending ban on cliff climbing over a wide area.

All the while I had been sitting quietly at the back, sipping. I then made an idiotic double mistake. I opened my yap and made a constructive comment. I was instantly drafted as chairman of a committee which was to delve into a subject about which I am spectacularly ignorant. It was all to do with climbers messing up the flora. There's me, a total non-gardener; indeed I would like to make gardening a criminal offence. The committee has now been in existence for about two years. It brought together climbers and the environmentalists, the latter represented by the NT, English Nature and the RSPB. On our side were representatives of the local climbers, the Edwards and the BMC in the person of Kath Pyke the Access Officer. Its official name is the **West Cornwall Access and Conservation Liaison Group**.

Climbers could hardly deny that their sport causes some damage to the cliffs particularly in the form of eroded tracks to the foot of the climbs and by the gardening of routes, particularly new routes. Climbing also disturbs bird life. Climbers are not the only, or arguably the major, culprits compared with the legion of walkers, mountain bikers, farmers, fishermen...the list goes on. But climbers get to places unattainable by ordinary mortals so their damage is very sharply focused.

As soon as it was ready, the draft report was studied by the committee. It runs to some 40 pages and contains some extremely useful maps which pinpoint the environmentally sensitive areas. This enables the climbing cliffs to be fitted into the jigsaw and related to the conservation problem. In general terms it emphasises the international botanical importance of the plant communities of the Lizard and West Penwith. Because the geology of the two areas is so different they support differing plant communities, many of them unique to Britain because of the extreme south-west position and the mild, oceanic climate.

The vital redeeming factor is that the NT and English Nature, unlike many private landowners, are not in the business of erecting KEEP OUT signs. Recreational use of their land, specifically including rock climbing, is very much part of their remit but they have to perform a delicate balancing act in many areas where there is a conflict between public access and conservation. This aspect is well brought out in the summary of the report:-

The cliffs of West Penwith and The Lizard support many features of international and national importance and provide a much-valued resource for recreation, particularly

rock climbing and walking. Some of the best nature conservation features are affected by cliff climbing, notably crevice, ledge and cliff-face communities, bluebell gullies and breeding seabirds.

The bulk of the report is devoted to technical botanical descriptions of the various plant communities and an assessment of their importance. Birds and seal are also included. Ravens, peregrines and auks receive specific mention as being in need of protection.

You could be forgiven for assuming that, with climbers and environmentalists facing one another across the table, the battle lines had been drawn up. Quite the opposite, I am happy to report. Attitudes have changed a lot in recent years and we are all environmentalists now. Since the first meeting, discussions have remained constructive and good natured. A great deal of useful work has already been set in train.

Logically the first thing to do was to examine the ground in detail. Problem areas, where they existed, would then be revealed. To this end local climbers and NT officers have together visited all the climbing cliffs in West Penwith and the Lizard. Climbers have provided safety top ropes for botanists to dangle down the cliffs and assess plant communities in exposed cracks. The immediate result has been that many climbing cliffs have been given a clean bill of environmental health.

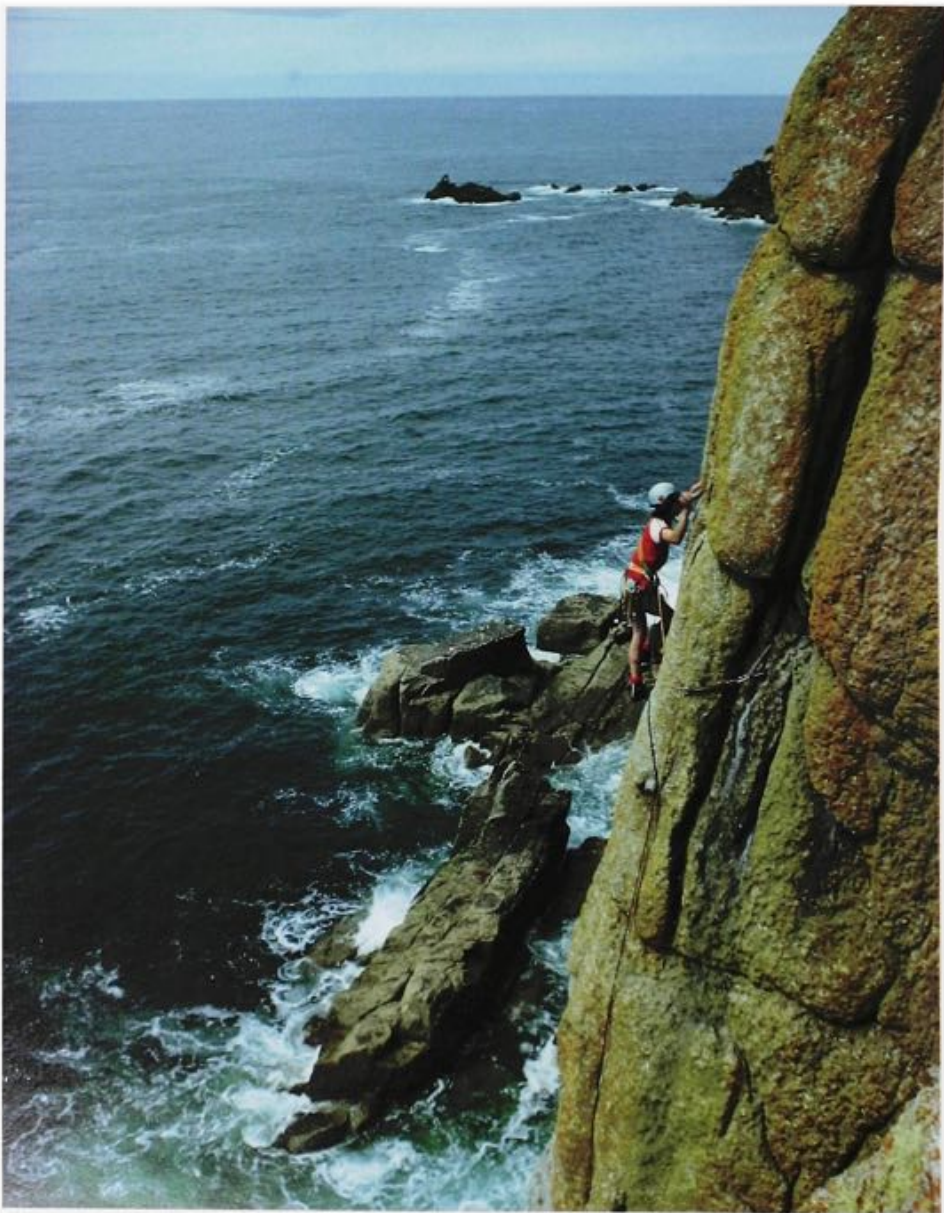
It is unlikely that there will be any broadbrush solutions. Each problem is quite specific and can only be sorted out on an individual site basis. However, some more general considerations became clear. For instance, probably about two-thirds of all climbing takes place at the four most popular cliffs: Bosigran, Chair Ladder, Sennen and Carn Barra. These climbing honeypots are subjected to heavy erosion on the descent tracks and on the cliff top; and, unfortunately, garbage collects. A modicum of 'management' in the form of erosion control of paths is clearly necessary. In fact work has already been started to provide stone steps down the very badly eroded *Pinnacle Gully* at Chair Ladder. This is being carried out and financed through a joint initiative of all parties. In fact a model of co-operation and understanding. Although both areas are botanically important, the Lizard is pre-eminently so. Luckily the east coast, where there is least climbing, is the most sensitive. Some restrictions on climbing may well be called for. Luckily none of the climbing honeypots are located on The Lizard.

There is one important aspect where climbers can, indeed must help. In the old days we thought nothing of gardening a new route. It was as messy as it seemed unavoidable. We have now become far more aware of the very special, and often rare, plant communities that are to be found on both sea cliffs and mountain crags. Gardening new routes is no longer acceptable. There is still plenty of scope to make new routes on the sections of sea cliffs scoured clean by sea and spray. Potential new routes where extensive gardening of cracks would be involved, must be left untouched. This is going to call for a considerable measure of self-restraint. Not easy if you have been excited by the possibility of a fine new line. But the more we spread the word, the quicker attitudes will change as change they must.

The environmental argument makes strong sense in Cornwall. When we arrive at the Count House at Bosigran, who fails to appreciate the mild climate (you can

Cornish Cliffs

often climb with warm fingers in January), the nearness of the sea and the vegetation more lush than anywhere else in Britain? Almost Mediterranean. This luxuriant landscape adds significantly to the pleasure of the climbing. It is up to us to keep it that way.



'The Mitre' VS, Chair Ladder. Photo: Mike Banks

Remembering David Cox

Peter Harding

With the passing of David Cox the Club said farewell not only to a great mountaineer and rock climber but also to someone who recognised the need for, and worked towards, an important change to its membership policy during the '50s. Coincident with his term of presidency, and those preceding years as vice-president, the CC became more democratic, opening its door to young climbers who were not exclusively from, (and I hate using such terms), the upper and middle classes. Since I resigned from the Club's northern committee and then from the Club itself on this very issue in 1951, (together with Alf Bridge, the then Hon.Sec.), I did not see the change from inside as it were. But on rejoining in 1958, when David Cox was still president, the Club's 'new look' was therefore all the more obvious.

My association with David came about due to my friendship with Wilfred Noyce and was further cemented by Alf Bridge, a good friend to each of us. In my own early days as a rock climber, David Cox was of course one of the great 'names', a little younger than Menlove Edwards and Colin Kirkus, slightly older than Wilfred Noyce and of similar age to Nully Kretschmer and John Barford. Like all of them he too was something special – not simply a pioneer of significant or difficult new routes but a guidebook writer as well. So, when in 1949 Wilfred Noyce invited me to join David and himself on a trip to the Graian Alps, I was quite excited. The three of us duly set off for northern Italy in Wilf's small saloon nicknamed Miranda.

In marked contrast to Wilf's rather intense and serious, almost humourless, perhaps housemasterish nature, David's overt humour belied any staid or stuffy image one might have expected, in those days, of an established Oxford history don. During our drive across France this quickly came to light when Miranda's engine cut out suddenly, causing us to come to a halt by the roadside. Getting out, I looked under the bonnet, suspecting a petrol pump problem whilst Wilf and David removed the huge tea chest strapped to the rear of the car, which functioned as our luggage boot, so as to get at the tool kit. This very large impressive canvas roll was then unfurled to reveal umpteen empty compartments and finally, in the very last couple of folds, a tyre lever and a pair of pliers. David's immediate comment, (to me as a college lecturer in engineering), was a memorable one; they would now find out whether I was an engineer or not! During the next two days Miranda's fuel pump was removed, stripped and rebuilt a number of times with those pliers, in the end to fit a new diaphragm, specially made for us in Bourg St Maurice. By this time I had siphoned and swallowed more petrol than was good for me and David, who had followed the history of Miranda's petrol pump problem and those invaluable pliers with great interest, observed that my petrol-swallowing could prove advantageous. In the event of trouble with our primus stoves I might come in useful again, this time as an alternative means of heating!

In Italy our first stop was at Valgrisanche from where we would climb two or three Graian peaks. Apparently we were the first Brits to visit this area for more

than 50 years. Our first night there was spent in its one and only hostelry – an amazing experience. The evening meal was served directly into bowl-shaped depressions, hollowed out in the wooden top of a large communal table and eaten with the sole aid of bread torn from communal loaves. Afterwards David and I were led by candlelight to what seemed to be a tiny room containing two palliasses whilst Wilf was ushered to another part of the inn. However, in the half-light of the morning, our room proved to be simply a curtained-off section of a much larger one, those curtains transparent enough to reveal other guests asleep. David and I, half-dressed, went off to find a toilet and washroom. Negotiating a maze of unlit passages we entered a large bare room through its unlatchable, swinging door. A wet, stone floor sloped down from each side towards a hole at one corner. In an adjacent corner there was a dripping water tap. Venturing onto the slippery floor David suddenly fell and slid towards that awful hole. Rapidly I went to his aid. At that instant, with the pair of us on all fours on the wet floor, a dark haired damsel entered the room carrying a small towel in one hand and a wad of tissue paper in the other. She was completely naked. Seeing David and me gazing up at her she stopped, muttered something in Italian, turned and went out again. For a moment David and I just looked at each other, then he came out with a one-liner; our nude lady friend must have forgotten the soap! Hurriedly we relieved ourselves in turn at the horrid hole, took a quick swill under the tap, then fled that ghastly, evil-smelling place.

After breakfast we walked up to the Rifugio Marioni, intending to climb the Testradel Rutor next morning. Arriving at the hut by lunch time, Wilf decided that we would carry on and reconnoitre our route for the next day. He led the way, David and I followed on, with me carrying our coil of rope. Continuing on and on, never uncoiling the rope, we eventually finished up on the summit of our peak that very afternoon, then followed its northern ridge to a col from where we descended to the Upper Rutor Glacier. With Wilf still leading we were soon crossing a section of the glacier where its surface was characterised by a series of dark blue stripes, some of them quite wide. David and I looked at each other questioningly while Wilf, now well ahead pressed on unperturbed. Just to be sure I heel-kicked the edge of one such dark strip and there was an ominous cracking sound so I couldn't help blurting out something about 'bloody crevasses covered by thin ice' and the 'consequences of me falling into one when carrying our only coil of rope'. David gave me a wry grin. I had no need to be concerned. Our leader could clearly walk on water so we had little to worry about. But, if I suddenly disappeared, he was sure that Wilf had another rope in Miranda's box!

Staying overnight in the hut we descended to Valgrisanche next morning, later walking up the valley to bivouac near Fernet. (No big reservoir in those days.) Our plan was to traverse the Grande Rousse then continue over the Punta Giasson, but first climbing the north ridge of the Bocca del Invergnan, an ascent which was reckoned to require 12 point crampons. On this occasion we didn't even use our 10 pointers, that difficult ice section being craftily avoided by keeping to an adjacent but difficult rockface – one of the advantages, according to David, of inviting a well-known rock gymnast to join the party! Higher up, now on hard snow, Wilf took over the lead and I shall always remember the final section when, having led out all his rope, he called for me to come up and join David. When I reached David's stance I sensed we were quite near the edge of our

mountain's eastern face. After he had started his climb up to Wilf I was a little uncomfortable about the position of my ice axe belay so I moved it, just a foot or so, to what seemed a more strategic placing in the unlikely event of any untoward happening above. Its shaft went into the snow far too easily and up to the head. Pulling it out again there was daylight at the bottom of the hole – I was standing almost on a big cornice, directly above the east face! Rapidly moving my stance a few feet further away I belayed there, relieved when the time came to climb up and join David. Recounting my experience to him he gave me that re-assuring smile again. I suspected, under his snow-goggles, those eyes would have their usual twinkle. Then came another Cox's pippin: danger never deters Wilfred from his chosen line, up or down a mountain! I should have known that, by then.

Our holiday in the Graians continued to be sprinkled with retrospectively amusing incidents and without David's soothing influence and company these may have well made me irritable and nervous; as it was I enjoyed every minute and certainly learned a lot about mountains. And men!

Although I climbed with Wilf on subsequent occasions in Wales (he was of course my guidebook editor), I never had another opportunity to climb with David and only ever met him again at annual CC dinners, in those days still held at their traditional London venue. We corresponded on a variety of topics during the early '50s until family matters and a new job, back in industry, took control. My contact with David was lost. I must say that I am immensely glad, indeed very privileged, to have known and climbed with David Cox; to me he was not just a great name but, more important, a great man and mountain companion.

The post dropped onto the porch floor. A few bills, circulars and . . . an article – but who from? There was no author's name. After a few reads, I knew I wanted it in, so I 'phoned a few pals, who might have known this author . . . I asked: Paul Nunn, Dermot Somers, Tom Curtis, Dave Wilkinson, Tut Brathwaite, Steve Bell, Joe Simpson, Ian Smith, Phil Thornhill, Pat Littlejohn, Tim Carruthers, Wil Hurford, Brian Molyneux, Lindsay Griffin, Jon Tinker, Ken Wilson, Victor Saunders, Steve Venables, Doug Scott, and Bill O'Connor. Guess what? No luck!

Here it is anyway!!

The Pom – Poms are Coming

Write something the man says, but what? How about a dramatic rescue with hairy abseils, fast decisions, exposure, and a tragic ending. Nah! All mine have been endless and boring searches, no box office there. A long hard climb on a remote sea cliff then, with abundant loose rock, copious and unfaithful vegetation with three falls or a knockout to decide the outcome? Nope, haven't really done any. No, it will have to be an epic, always draws the crowds that does. A good high-mountain struggle with snow, wind, poor conditions and – for real star quality – seriousness.

Big John wants to solo and score maximum rassemblement points, but needs crevasse insurance so we three set off for the Tacul, he for the *Gabarrou/Albinoni*, we for the easier *Gervasutti*. Now quite why we committed ourselves to doing it at night escapes me, but it must have had something to do with the poor conditions that season (right that's the first one in). A quick run under the Point Lachenal to a picnic in the snow and a rethink. The snow is lousy and the *Gervasutti* both shallow and long, so we'll follow John but fearfully tied together.

Well, we soloed to the 'scrund, but the avalanche gets us halfway, and only a 12 point tango saves embarrassment and is this wise? But the big boys only nod, and on we plod.

Darkness falls (No.2) as we hit the steep stuff, but a good screw belay augers well. John disappears into the gloom yelling obscure Canadian quips, and my leading machine follows on perfect ice, but I sit in the dark listening to snow slides and half-remembered last minute warnings from the woman. A shout tells all about the belay and I teeter up but decline the next lead, pleading lack of familiarity with crampons and axe, so he bequeaths me that poor belay with promises of better to come as rock walls can be seen above. Good ice leads right, and John's debris fails left, so we slide à droite and we've gone wrong already but there are no abseil points and it's never like this in **Blackshaws**, so it's Grade III-IV up a narrowing couloir. Epic pre-requisite No.3 arrives as a series of spindrift avalanches which lodge behind my glasses, but it's dark anyway and three more scary pitches bring a poor wire belay and a faint whiff of fear. 80feet out and a manky wire and the whiff is full-blown realisation, but I have to go to a ledge that isn't and runners that aren't and a big snowslide that is and this is **SERIOUS**.

Still, nothing can go – OH HELL! My headlamp's failing and darkness once again and Joe Methodical takes over – find new batteries, disentangle from plastic bag, Pinnocchio fingers on small connections, switch on and all will be well; but it

isn't 'cos the bulb's blown, but I've got a spare somewhere so it's an assembly-line in Braille and I can see! I've dropped my wallet, but found a good spike to ease the tension, and a belay arrives, and later the Cripple, bringing boiled sweets and cold winds (every good epic has its cold winds). The angle eases, but the obligatory sting in the tail finds the Cripple tired in the dawn, and it takes forever...The new day brings an increased awareness of the lack of contours on 'snow can avalanche on as little as 23° ground', but three worrying pitches of 45° breaststroke lead under the cornice, which we can't get over, so a three pitch traverse and a ten foot wall, and I'm running around like an unchained dog 'cos we're up! But John arrives from his snowy Wendy House, and ties me up to a long lead and makes me go slowly down steep slopes to relative safety. Wait in the snow and swop bits of the climb and relive the fears of the night, and all that's left is to down-climb a Grade III gully to find my empty wallet, and a lonely graunch up the Vallée to the real world, and can I go home now?

Summary

An account of the first British ascent of the Super Goulotte – a thin ice runnel on Mont Blanc du Tacul. 1980.



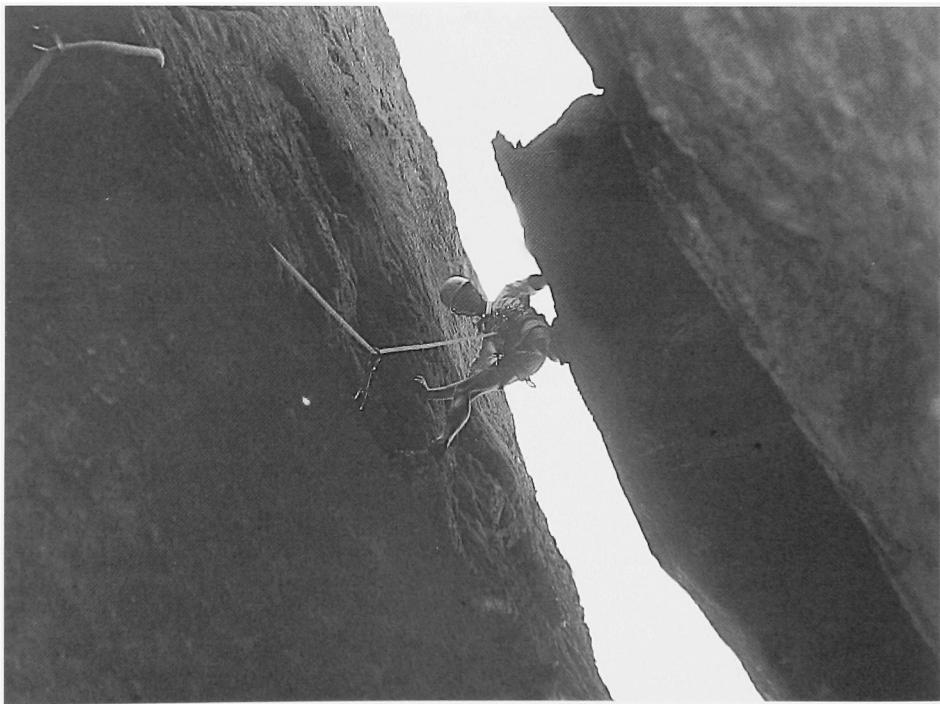
Steep Ice on a Mont Blanc du Tacul Goulotte. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

Climbing in Australia

Mount Arapiles in the Grampian Mountains

Hamish Nicol

Australians say that Mount Arapiles is the best rock climbing area in their continent, and they should know. Geologically it belongs to the Grampian mountains which lie some 40 kilometres to the east. The Grampians as a whole is a walking and climbing area of great beauty and interest. The mountains are low, only 600 to 1,000 metres in height, and the rock is sandstone which has been tilted to produce impressive eastward facing cliffs and long tree covered dip slopes on the west. The rainfall is low by UK mountain standards; 60 cm per annum in the dry north Grampians, even less on Mount Arapiles. The whole area was discovered and mapped by the explorer Major Mitchell in 1836, but the rock climbing potential of the cliffs was not developed until as late as the 1960s.



'Agamemnon' Grade 9, Mt Arapiles. Photo: Hamish Nicol

Access

Is by international air flight from UK to either Melbourne or Adelaide. Melbourne is nearer, but your decision will depend on where most of your Australian friends and relatives live. Cost of return flight to Adelaide or Melbourne – say £750. (depends a lot on time of year.) The Grampians lie just to the south of the main road between Adelaide and Melbourne, roughly 250 kilometres from Melbourne and 500 kilometres from Adelaide. Horsham, an important market and tourist town (population 12,000) is the main centre for Mount Arapiles and the North Grampians.

So your best plan is either to hire a car at the airport and drive all the way to Horsham or to go by train to Horsham, and hire a car there. Local public transport is poor to non-existent. Mount Arapiles lies 25 kilometres to the SW of Horsham just beyond the little town of Natimuk. There are hotels and motels in Horsham and Natimuk and one climbing shop in Natimuk. Hall's Gap is a nice little town which serves the central Grampians, with hotels, camp sites and shops. You can drive from Horsham to most places in the Grampians in an hour or two.

Car hire in Australia costs \$60 approx. per day. £1 = \$2 (roughly) This excludes the cost of petrol which is about half the price of UK petrol. A room in a motel is about \$50 to \$70 per night but you can pack a lot of people into a motel room and most have some cooking facilities and all have a TV and a fridge.

Where to Stay

There are well appointed and convenient camp sites everywhere. The one at Mount Arapiles is 15 minutes walk from the crags. This would be a good place to stay because you will meet the local climbers who are very friendly.

Climbing

The rock is a very hard quartzite sandstone. It is so safe that you can pull up on a wafer of rock as thin as an After Eight, then stand on it. It will still be there and so will you. The climbs are very steep and physical. Most are between 100 and 250 metres in height. There are some 2,500 recorded routes on Mount Arapiles and many more in the main Grampians. The climbs are graded 0 to 32. 0 is a walk, and 32 is pretty desperate. Grade 13 is a good VS (4c) and grade 9 is about V.Diff.

People to Contact

Hugh Widdowson lives in Natimuk and runs a climbing school called 'Arapiles Mountain Guides'.

Address: PO Box 142, Natimuk, Victoria, 3409, Australia.

Telephone: 053-871-284. Mobile: 018-504-460. Fax: 053-871-502.

I had a very pleasant half day with him. We climbed from 9am to 1.30pm. He supplied ropes, climbing shoes etc. for no extra charge, and it cost me \$80. We did three routes; a 13, an 11 and a 9 and I was pretty tired.

The man to contact in Adelaide is George Adam. He is an ex pat. Scot who is the managing director of the Paddy Palin climbing shop at 228 Rundle Street East, Adelaide 5000. Tel: 08-232 -3155. There are Paddy Palin shops in most big towns in Australia. Climbing gear tends to be more expensive than in UK as it all has to be imported.

He also runs a travel business called Thor Travel and a climbing school which regularly visits Mount Arapiles and the climbing rocks in Morialta Gorge, Adelaide.

Best Time to Go

November (Spring) and May (Autumn) are good months. The only months to avoid are January and February when the rock on Mount Arapiles is too hot to touch.

Guidebooks etc.

The guidebook to Mount Arapiles is out of print, but Hugh Widdowson could possibly find one for you. **50 Walks in the Grampians** by Tyrone T. Thomas is the best walking guide. (Available at Paddy Palins and many book shops.) Walkers should not miss the Mount Hollow/Stapylton traverse – a grade 2 scramble of excellent quality, Mount Difficult, the McKenzie falls, the Jaws of Death, the Pinnacle from Hall's Gap, the Nerve Test. There is excellent rock climbing on Mount Stapylton and on Mount Difficult. The area is well covered by 1: 25,000 maps. These can be bought in local Information Centres. There is an excellent one in Horsham.

How about a Climbers' Club meet on Mount Arapiles? Any takers?

Food (or drink) for thought:

As seen in the Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald (North Wales) – April 1st 1994

Everest veterans, Steven Venables and Rebecca Stevens will provide the inspiration for 600 young people, as they climb Snowdon next Saturday (April 9th) on the first leg of the gruelling Timberland Three Peaks Challenge.

The challenge involves climbing Britain's three highest mountains, Snowdon, Scaffell and Ben Nevis within 36 hours, in aid of Raleigh International.

Rebecca Stephens was the first British woman to scale Everest, the world's highest peak, and Stephen Venables was the first man to climb Everest without the aid of bottled water.

The Quebrada Ishinca – One Week Wonderland

Joe Simpson

This is a brief itinerary of just over a week's excursion from Huaraz to the Ishinca valley. Since there are any number of possible treks and climbs to be done in the Cordillera Blanca, either as preparation and acclimatisation for greater things, or as main objectives in themselves, I thought it best to describe our acclimatisation week with a rough idea of costs and logistics. I have in mind those readers who perhaps have not been to the greater ranges before or whose mountaineering aspirations are not so ambitious. However it remains an excellent acclimatisation itinerary even for the hotshots who plan to go on to death-defying stunts on the serious nasties like Chacaraju and Taulliraju. All the climbs described are fairly straightforward and would fall somewhere in between the alpine PD and AD grades although bear in mind that grading climbs up to 6,000m is an entirely subjective undertaking, meant simply as a guideline, and factors such as altitude, weather, previous experience and personal fitness must all be taken into account.

Why Peru?

It's cheap. Before you all charge off to the airport it can also be expensive depending on your night-clubbing bill. Food and drink and accommodation is more expensive than in Asia but by no means outrageous. A double room at Edwards Inn cost 20 soles (US\$10). The dollar rate was about 2.20 soles but this can fluctuate alarmingly. If you want to get by on nearly nothing it's perfectly possible but not much fun. Bear in mind that these are your only overheads. The mountains are free and that for me is its real selling point. If you are sick of peak permits, trekking permits, liaison officers and all the bureaucratic hassle that often plagues you in Nepal, Pakistan and India then this is the place for you.

Take a flight to Lima (Viasa and Iberia Airlines), buy your visa at the airport on arrival, spend as little time in Lima as possible except to get entertainingly robbed and then board a night coach to Huaraz (seven to nine hours) and the mountains are all yours.

It's fun. If you like a bit of pleasure with your mountaineering this is the place for you. Nothing better after a hard week on the hills than to relax in Pepe's restaurant over several beers, a delicious pepper steak and a ton of garlic bread before heading to the various night-clubs and bars for an evening of wild excess. If this isn't your idea of a good time there are plenty of other possibilities. Away from the maddening crowd can be achieved by staying in Monterey (5km north) with its hot springs or in Caraz (31km north) which has a few small basic hotels and is near the entrance to the Ulta valley, the start of some beautiful trekking.

The Mountains

The Cordillera Blanca is long (180km) and narrow, never exceeding a width of 20km. Between 20 and 30 peaks rise above 6,000m (that's including all the multi-summitted mountains), and another 30 are higher than 5,700m. These are located

on the main crest of the range. The highest of these is Nevado (Mt) Huascarán (6,768m), the world's highest peak in the tropical zone and among the highest in the Americas. Only Aconcagua (6,959m) and three peaks in the Chilean-Argentine Andes are higher.

Parallel to the Blanca lies the snow-less Cordillera Negra (up to 5,000m) and between the two ranges is the valley of the Rio Santa also known as the Callejon de Huaylas. Huaraz (pop: 5,000 alt: 3,050m) and Caraz (pop: 1,200 alt: 2,250m) and the re-built Yungay are the main towns in the valley. The valley has stunning views of the range throughout its length and has a reasonable tarmac road for its entire length. Because it is long and narrow the range is always close to this main road making base camps easily accessible usually only one to three days walk. The glaciers have retreated owing to their position near the equator and rarely extend below 4,800m which means easy walking through grasslands and forests rather than thrashing around on rivers of ice and moraines. The western side of the range is cut through by 15 U-shaped glacial valleys (quebradas) which create perfect entrances (up to 4,400m) into the centre of the range.

The Weather

It seems that June and July have the most settled weather. This year there was unbroken clear weather for the whole eight weeks. The earlier you go the less busy are the mountains and treks. Do beware fiesta time. Peruvians seem to have fiestas at the drop of a hat but there are some that can cause problems – prices doubled, all hostels and hotels booked solid, and throngs of rich Limarites behaving obnoxiously – in particular there is a festival lasting about a week in the middle of July, based in Huaraz. Try and arrange to be in the mountains, or enjoy yourself, get bladdered, and realise that you have run out of money all of a sudden.

The Itinerary

Eight days in the Quebrada Ishinca. Four summits. Beautiful walking. The Quebrada Ishinca is a dramatic canyon lying below the south west face of Nevado Tocllaraju and the broad amphitheatre formed by the western wall of Palcaraju. Laguna Ishinca and Nevado Ishinca lie high above the campsite in a steep sided valley to the south in a cirque dominated by the north face of Ranrapalca.

Day 1 – Equipped with food, petrol, petrol stoves (a must, as propane/butane mix is unavailable), climbing gear, tents etc. for seven or eight days, arrange transport and burros (if required – they are cheap so why carry anything) and a guardian for the campsite, through one of the many agencies to be found in Huaraz (recommended is Pyramid Adventures, Eudes Morales, Av. Luzuriaga). Local buses can take you as far as the turn off to Collon at the Paltay bridge. A jeep or pick-up would take you all the way to Collon avoiding a hot and dusty walk (one hour) although this would be a gentle introduction to the altitude.

Follow the path east out of the village of Collon which descends towards the river, crossing a small hamlet before reaching the river. Follow the left bank, cross a bridge and continue along the other side until you reach a gate at the entrance to the valley (usually open). If you have burros your arreo will sort everything out

for you and may even stay up as your camp guardian (\$7 per day). Follow the river through a beautiful wooded region of quenual trees eventually crossing an area of moraines and keeping to the right bank. Reach the head of the cirque where there are very comfortable campsites on the right hand side (four-six hours).

Day 2 – Urus Este (5,420m) East Face (500m) 40°-55°. A good acclimatisation route. The mountain overlooks the campsite. Get up early and leave about 3am. Cross the valley floor heading directly towards where a gully of scree cuts through the hillside below Urus. Stagger around in the Rhino grass for hours looking for the path or check it out the day before. Follow the path zigzagging steeply on the right side of the rocky gully until you reach the rocky skirts of Urus (two-three hours). Take a line through the broken lower rocks and reach the snowfields coming down from the summit. Keep right, contouring behind a rock buttress, and then follow undulating snow slopes (55° maximum) to reach a small plateau. From here move left towards a thin curling ridge, airy, and then up the short summit slope (three hours). The summit is sharp, pointy and satisfying with stunning views across towards Huascaran and Copa and Hualcan (6,122m). Descend by the same route.

Day 3 – Ishinca (5,530m) South-West Ridge. (550m) 45°-55°. Arise even earlier and set off for the Ishinca refuge (basic) following the left bank of the river and climbing out of the valley on good paths on its right side (looking up) going south. Skirt round two hanging valleys and then zigzag up loose scree. Look out for an iron cross – the path makes large loops on the left and passes below the cross some ten metres from the refuge. Continue south past the refuge skirting round the lake following the path (cairns) descending towards the lake (to the west) on the crest of moraines opposite the summit. Before reaching a steep loose cliff dropping into the lake, icefall on the left, take a steep dirt track which leads eventually to the edge of the glacier (three-four hours).

Climb the glacier heading towards the south-west ridge on undulating snow slopes to the base of the summit tower. Cross bergshlund and climb snow/ice to the summit. Take many pictures and wonder how long you can keep waking up at these ridiculous hours.

Day 4 – Rest day. Lie around in the sun developing acute sunburn and being ferociously bitten by the innocent looking blue-bottles that bite like horse flies. End the day sore and lumpy with little fly grave yards everywhere you sat.

Day 5 – Tocllaraju (6,032m) North-West Ridge (700m) 55°-80°. Don't get up early. Pack bivy gear, stove, food etc. and stagger off towards the impressive burst moraine dam at the head of the valley some time in the early afternoon. Cross several small streams heading to the left of the dam and wend up between the dam and the scree slope coming down from Tocllaraju. Guess where a steep scree path cuts down the hillside and launch yourself at it. Loud music and ski sticks essential. Two hours later you emerge amidst large boulders and overhung by a large fractured rock wall. Leave the boulders and follow the snow/ice slope beneath the rock wall watching out for windslab and rockfall. The slope emerges on the glacier beneath Tocllaraju. Climb the glacier towards the west face. Pass to the left of a group of seracs under the west face and camp – watch out for crevasses (three-four hours). Get up at midnight and leave no later than 1am. This mountain has a scary avalanche/serac threat for much of the first three-four hours

so it's best not to be able to see it. Follow the glacier towards the west face keeping crevasses and seracs to the left. Traverse in under the face (high risk time – eyes closed) heading for the lowest point on the ridge. Cross several small crevasses until forced to make a rising leftwards traverse on a narrow ledge above large crevasses. Cross a tricky snow bridge and come back right above and parallel to the lower traverse until it is possible to cross another bergshrun and climb steep ice up onto the broad west ridge/face. Head towards some prominent seracs on open slopes (55°) then thread through an area of stable seracs and pinnacles to reach the base of the summit wall. Cross a bergshrun and follow steep snow (55°-60°) towards the summit cornice. Bear left at the top and exit onto the broad summit not visible from below. Or in our case, cower five feet below the cornice convinced the summit is about to fall off. Descend by same route.

Day 6 – Rest day. Much the same as previously except heavily blistered and covered in old scabs. Kill a multitude of flies.

Day 7 – Ranrapalca (6,162m) North-East Face 55°-65°. Resist the urge to rush back to Huaraz for pepper steaks and night clubbing and instead get up at the crack of dawn and wobble back up to the start of the Ishinca glacier (as per day 3 except more knackered) (three hours). Follow the glacier towards the south-west until it is possible to cross over the north-east ridge of Ranrapalca via 50° snow slopes to a col on the ridge. Traverse left away from the ridge towards an obvious icefall. Find a way through the icefall with much swearing and falling into holes until you emerge on open slopes leading into the north-east face keeping the ridge on your right hand side. Attack the face without hesitation, crossing a tricky bergshrun and heading straight up to a band of rocks 200 metres above. Break through the rocks and follow the snow slopes, one short steep pitch 60°-65°, to reach the summit plateau near where the north-east ridge finishes. The summit is set back about half a mile towards the south-east along a narrowing snow ridge to a one-person summit (five hours). Descend by same route (six hours).

This would be a long day and could more easily be done from a bivy amongst the huge boulders at the foot of the glacier. NB: I would suggest that Tocllaraju and Ranrapalca are the more serious propositions. The former because of the avalanche danger and the need to move fast (variable with the years) and the latter because it's a long route with a complicated icefall.

Day 8 – Rush down the valley towards a rendezvous with beer, steaks, and dancing, pausing only to pay your arreiro/camp guardian and kiss the donkeys. You will be happy in the knowledge that you are now well acclimatised with three or four summits under your belt and able to dance until five in the morning at 3,050m without suffering heart failure.

Take a few days out in Huaraz. Maybe go have a look at Yungay – a pitiful and sobering experience. Or do a quick three day trek up to see the ruins at Chavin whilst you gather your strength for the next foray into the mountains – perhaps a Quitaraju and Alpamayo double hit from one base camp, or a thrash up the Garganta route on Huascaran Sur with everyone and his mother, or some evil stunt on Chacaraju, alone and un-troubled and panicking like hell.

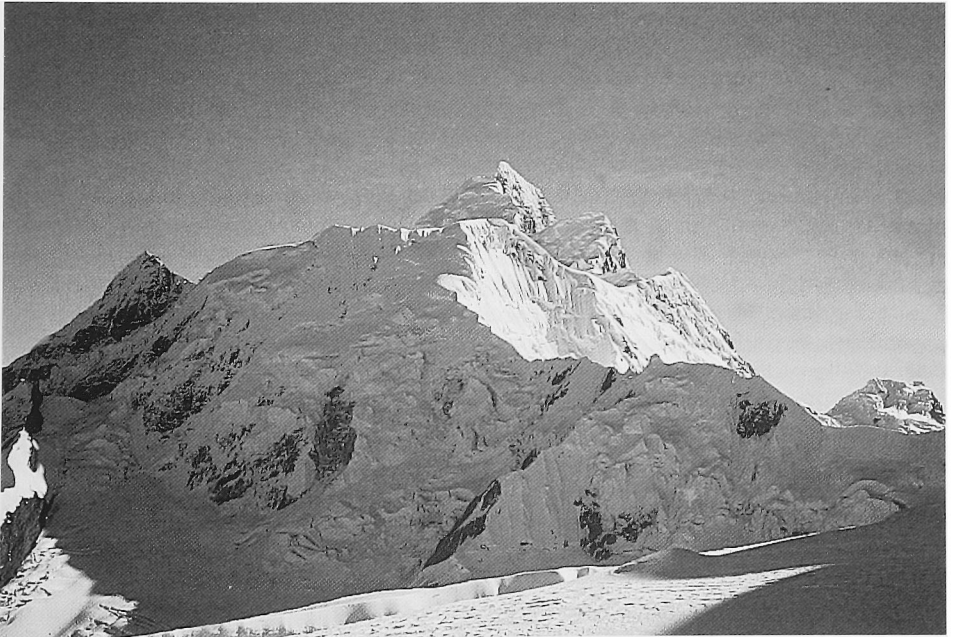
Recommended Reading:

Trails of the Cordilleras Blanca & Huayhuash of Peru – Jim Bartle ***
South America on a Shoestring – Lonely Planet Guidebooks

Peru – A Travel Survival Kit – Lonely Planet Guidebooks

Yuraq Janqa – Kohn Ricker *

Climbs of the Cordillera Blanca – David Sharman (yet to find a publisher) ***



Huantsan, 6,395m from Rurek Sur, Cordillera Blanca, Peru. Photo: Dave Wilkinson

Ce N'est Pas Grave, Monsieur

Falko Rech

After nearly ten years, and now with three young children we had, at last, returned to the Alps. The outward journey went well and the sun was shining as we arrived at our campsite in the Ecrins. My climbing partner was not due to arrive for a while so, after a few days, I left the family to the delights of the campsite's open-air pool and set off on a leg-lashing acclimatisation flog up to the Breche de l'Olan. That night I prepared a bivouac site, intending to climb the North Ridge of the Olan the next morning but was put off the idea by watching five young French climbers quickly descend the ridge only to spend an age floundering around on the Upper Sellettes glacier. The next morning, as I stowed the bivy gear, I opted instead for an 'eye of faith' ascent of the Aiguille de l'Olan which was glacier-free and, with its snowy gullies and rotten ridges, turned out to be quite exciting enough for my first day out this decade.

Roger turned up a few days later, but all was not well. He would not be able to climb for a while longer and the weather forecast suggested that the current 'beau temps' window was due for imminent and emphatic closure. I decided to use what good weather remained to reconnoitre a route up the Roche de la Muzelle, an enticing peak just visible from the campsite, commonly regarded as a good summit to reach but involving a long approach from hut to glacier. After a second leg-lashing hut walk and my first ever tongue-lashing from a local guide.

"Vous êtes seul! Mon Dieu!.. ." I settled down for a night in the hut, anticipating the traditional episode of the Eurovision SnOriNG contest. But that night it was to be 'nil points les grimpeurs' and 'dix points le vent.' The weather window was closing early and the hut shutters were flapping a warning for all to hear. By the time the various flailing fenêtres had been caught and closed it was 4am; time for the west flank and north-east ridge room to be awakened. Nine of us enjoyed the grey pleasure of a candle-lit breakfast. The guided party of five Belgians were first off, followed by a pair of Frenchmen and then me, happy to use other folks' lamplight. An hour later, after the first flash of lightning and some distance below me, the guided party turned back, a caterpillar glissading, still roped, down an adjacent couloir. I shouted down to the two Frenchmen that I was above the level of the Col de la Muzelle and could see clear skies towards the south but, after a few more distant bursts of éclair, they too turned back. I paused, now feeling more lonely than solo. In the far distance to the north and east I could see Mont Blanc and the Jorasses. They stood trapped between the glowering cloudbase and the sombre valleys, silhouetted against an horizontal slice of crimson dawn (red sky in the morning...). I wondered how many anxious pairs of eyes were on the Rochefort looking towards the Ecrins to gauge what their day might bring. Lightning flashed again over l'Alpe-d'Huez and I guessed that the worst had passed, the storm now fermenting malevolence for its visit to the Haute Savoie. I carried on up the Muzelle glacier, onto the Col Jean Martin, round onto the east face, up one gully, then another and onto a misty roaring ridge before the skies turned really black and hail began to be delivered at trade rates. The first summit, any summit, was sufficient; it was time to go.

When I left the hut about two hours later there was not a cloud in the sky. The only tell-tale reminder of the mornings meteorological mayhem was a faint white dusting of the summit rocks and my 'sack of wet clothing. *C'est la vie*. I set off on the long descent to the valley musing about my exciting morning, blissfully ignorant of the fate crawling up to meet me some 3,000 feet below.

The Muzelle hut is reached by a stiff three hour walk from the valley. The path forms part of GR54, the Tour de l'Oisans, is well maintained and the hut is a popular goal for the day walker. About an hour up the path from the road there is a twee little watering site with a wooden duct channelling cool, clear spring water out of a stream and into a trough. Someone had carved and planted a small plaque bearing the inscription 'La source de vie' and it looked as though a cleaner came up from the village each morning just to keep the place tidy. I stopped for a drink and a breather, looking around for a 'petite roche' on which to leave my 'sack. Butterflies flew up from the damp patches around the trough. Warm sunlight dappled the footpath as I returned to my 'sack and, having climbed into the straps, I put my hands down on the wall behind me to lever myself up into the vertical, ready for the last lap to the campsite.

They say that in times of crisis one's whole life flashes before one's eyes. I knew immediately that I had put my left hand onto something reptilian but I only managed to see a couple of rounds of 'What happens next?' before this particular life crisis was resolved...

"Well, Emlyn, what happens next?"

"Ri-i-i-ght, well, er, thank you David. We think that it's a grass snake playing in the green and yellow shirt of Grenoble Wanderers. It does a magnificent swerve round the left thumb, dummys the index finger, plays a one-two with the rucksack waist belt and goes off for an early bath without scoring."

"Hm-m-m, a good try but I'm sorry Emlyn, I'll have to pass it over to Bill for a bonus."

"Aye, thank you David. We think it's an aspic viper, about 18 inches long, wearing the olive green jersey and brown diamonds of Venomio Maximus. It hasn't eaten for about two weeks and has just returned from a period of suspension for venom over-production. It bites him on the left index finger leaving two bleeding puncture marks before sliding off, hissing 'Et vous, Anglais'." "Remarkable! Two points, Bill. A perfect answer in all respects."

I looked down at my finger in disbelief but the ominous blue stain which was visibly spreading under the skin and up towards my hand confirmed reality. I glanced absently at the snake, now gliding casually into the undergrowth; a handsome beast, but surely too small to do any real damage...I applied a DIY tourniquet with the finger and thumb of my right hand and started off back down the path at Olympic walking pace, startling several groups of walkers who were making their way peacefully up to the hut. One couple, sensing that something was amiss, followed me down asking if I required assistance.

"J'ai été piqué par un serpent", I told them in my best Franglais, waving a purple digit at them as evidence.

"Ohhh, une vee-purr!" they exclaimed as we descended towards l'Alleau. The man had recognised me from the campsite and walked with me while his daughter ran down the path ahead of us towards the hamlet. By the time I arrived, there was a welcoming committee, an open doorway and waiting bed.

The Sapeurs Pompiers were on their way from le Bourg d'Oisans, so that was that!

The lady of the house looked closely at me as I stepped into the bedroom, then at the damaged doigt.

"C'est bon. Vous n'avez pas le choc. Ce n'est pas grave, monsieur."

I nodded my agreement weakly, still suffering jet-lag from the descent. I believed that viper bites are rarely serious but I didn't feel at my best. I was tired, dirty, soaked with sweat, dehydrated and the finger was throbbing bass-baritone as it expanded towards bursting point. I tried to resist as Mme Shiraz pushed me down, big boots and all, onto the pristine coverlet but this lady was definitely not for turning.

"Le pantalon, monsieur...."

She signalled 'trousers down' and revealed a waiting hypodermic.

"Um-m-m, qu'est ce que c'est?"

I ventured, trying to retain control of the situation.

"Anti-istamane. C'est normale."

Three pompiers thudded into the room at that point, looking for all the world like the Front Row of the National Team. Words were exchanged with Mme Shiraz. The tight-head prop looked at me, nodded with a big whiskery grin,

"Oui, le pantalon.. .", and pointed from my waist to my knees.

I complied and winced as the hypodermic, the first of many, made my acquaintance. The Front Row gathered round the bite site, issuing that long, low whistle which strikes fear into the heart of all motorists as the mechanic slides below the car. A radio was produced. This was a case for the Flying Doctor!!!

The room was beginning to fill up, and through the window I could see children hanging off an adjacent balcony trying to catch sight of the action. I heard their oohs and ahhs as I waved the violet doigt in their direction. Mme Shiraz, a retired nurse, offered a bowl of tea and agreed to telephone the campsite to inform my wife of her husband's new-found celebrity status. An Alouette roared overhead, landing in a nearby field and the flying doctor, in full alpine gear, managed to squeeze into the room.

"Bonjour, monsieur. Ce n'est pas graveCaramba!"

It's not very encouraging when you manage to shock the doc but it was just one of those days. Red tracks had begun to appear in the veins along the length of my left arm and there was a definite tightness in the armpit. Magdalene arrived, full of concern and anxiety, ill at ease at the sight of a room full of people and a helicopter standing by with its motor running. She relaxed as she determined the true situation and acted as interpreter for the doctor. Blood pressure, heart rate, temperature were all measured and a fluid line set up. Forms were slowly completed (no-one ever believes my name) and farewells exchanged. I was to be flown to the hospital in Grenoble to be kept under observation for a few days. The Pompiers, full of bonhomie and ribald humour, placed me into a sort of pneumatic sarcophagus which they manoeuvred, not without some turbulence, out of the house, through the gathered throng,

"Bonne chance, monsieur, bonne chance", and into the helicopter.

The guide and the pilot wanted to see the injury before the flight, as if to assure themselves that it was a bona-fide case, worthy of the effort. They seemed satisfied and we set off, rattling through the air over the campsite where three

little boys were waving daddy goodbye, over le Bourg d'Oisans and down towards the fleshpots of Grenoble.

I tried to reassure myself that I was in 'Soins Intensif', wired up to a heart monitor, an automatic sphygmomanometer and a two litre drip because it might look bad for the local tourist industry if a punter, even an English punter, snuffed it from a snakebite received beside a GR in the centre of the National Park and in the middle of the summer season. I remembered the trouble that Chief Brody had with the mayor and the Amity town council - 'If word of this gets out there won't be a Fourth of July' The red tracks up my arm had disappeared under massive bruising; the whole arm was black and blue and the lymph node in my armpit was like a pulsating golf ball. The bitten finger had doubled in size and the area above the puncture marks was becoming an unwholesome black contusion. Any movement of the arm was excruciating. A steady stream of staff kept arriving for a look-see, shaking their heads and wandering off. The ward doctor brought in 'an interpreter' who asked me to read a two page document, tightly printed in French, and then sign it at the bottom. It was a release paper which would allow the medics to trial a new anti-venom treatment based on genetically altered horse serum. I asked for a photocopy of the release form before I was prepared to sign. This was not forthcoming and I heard no more about it. Not very *cheval-rous*, I reflected.

The nursing staff were terrific and we managed to keep each other amused with our attempts at communication.

"One metre à gauche, monsieur, and you would 'ave assieyed sur la vipère! Ooh la-la."

After the evening shift-change the nurse-in-charge lifted the dressing from my hand to reveal a large black blister immediately above the bite. She lanced it (my eyes still water at the thought) and said something about the doctor visiting in the morning. A couple of very minor bumps on my forearm, probably grazes sustained on the Muzelle that morning, had swollen into bantam egg-sized haematoma and were quite painful to the touch. After an uncomfortable night I received the morning team of doctors, all gowned up and ready for action. I tried to establish what was going on and was horrified to hear the word 'chirurgie' being used. It was only when I heard 'gangrene' that I passed the hand over for their inspection. The surgeon outlined his intentions and removed the blistered area, a piece the size of a half franc coin, all the way to the bone, saying that if all went well we (we !) might get away with only removing this piece. I hoped so and, during the operation, managed to keep the flag flying such that the sang froid of l'Anglais was remarked upon (but my toes were curled so tightly that I got nail marks in my heels).

Magdalene made the not inconsiderable return journey from Venosc to Grenoble by car three times in as many days, complete with our three little boys (Mme Shiraz had offered to look after them each time). I am sure that it was the doctors' sympathy for my wife that enabled me to leave the hospital after only those three days. I had to agree to place myself in the care of a GP in le Bourg d'Oisans to have the dressings professionally changed each day. The hospital had been tremendous, the quality of care by the nursing staff irreproachable and the food superb but I would have agreed to almost anything in order to get out. The arm was still very bruised and delicate. When the dressings were changed and the bandages removed from the hand it seemed to over-inflate, causing intense pain.

There was no question of being able to drive but, as the days passed, the bruising began to fade and the left hand hurt a little less. The index finger remained swollen for about six weeks and the joints ache even now (two months later). The excision site gradually healed but has reopened a few times – too much climbing, too early, I suppose. It looks as though this particular adventure is finally behind me – which is how it all started in the first place!

My sister works in an intensive care unit in Birmingham. She tells me the most likely reason for my being assigned to an ICU in Grenoble was that the medics probably thought they would have to remove the arm. I'm not superstitious – I climbed the Roche de la Muzelle on Saturday the thirteenth of August – but it could have been worse!

Here are a few statistics and observations:

It is alleged by some that only about 30% of viper bites inject venom.* Others believe that any bite making successful contact (i.e. piercing the skin) will inject venom.**

In the Ecrins area about 5% of venom injected humans die.*

Viper venom is one of the most efficient anti-coagulants known, hence the bruising. It is also a powerful haemotoxin and actually destroys blood cells.**

Viper venom can usually be tolerated by adults unless they exhibit the anaphylactic response (severe whole-body swelling after, for example, a wasp bite).***

Vipers exhibit a range of colouring from the 'traditional' brownish-olive with darker diamonds to almost pure black. If you ain't sure, then don't touch.**

Folklore tells us that hungry vipers produce most venom and that 'angry' vipers are most likely to inject venom. This is difficult to substantiate. All vipers are potentially dangerous.

There are several species of viper in Europe. I probably met the smaller and more toxic aspic viper. The British or northern viper is larger and less poisonous.**

If you are bitten then get yourself to hospital as soon as possible. Avoid increasing your heart rate by running or through panic. If the most efficient way to hospital is to walk then do so. Symptoms occur almost immediately but do not become serious for some time. Do not bother with blades or with trying to suck the poison out. By the time you start to use either technique the toxin will have been distributed and the damage done. Do not use potassium permanganate as an antidote.**

I have seen climbers pick up torpid vipers early in the year above the cliffs at Bosigran. I presumed that the vipers had just awakened from hibernation – when some people believe them to be at their most venomous.

A viper bite will probably not kill you but it will cause you pain and keep you off the crags for a few weeks.

Sources:

* Department of Toxicology. GHRU. Grenoble.

** Martin Noble. Head Keeper. The Reptilary. Hampshire.

*** Department of Intensive Care. Queen Elizabeth's Hospital. Birmingham.

Post Script: Just before Christmas I received a bill for £1,600 from the hospital in Grenoble. Vive l'insurance.

A Sea Change

David Hope

It had been a good week with the confidence rising continually as we pushed our grades beyond former limits. The final day was to be fitting then, and, awakening to the same blue skies of previous days we lingered over breakfast and a second mug of tea. Even on such a day the Great Zawn is a forbidding place but we blended in with ease that summer, fingertips and fists hardened to its coarse crystals and searing cracks. We scampered rapidly over the approach, anticipating, driven almost, to the abseil point.

We pulled the ropes through. There were no hints, no shivers of apprehension, nothing to indicate the day ahead but as we stood on the edge of the crevasse I was vaguely aware that the sea had a rougher edge to it, a few white horses, a choppier, irregular rhythm not quite in tune with this sunwashed morning. Not threatening but disturbed. Ignoring it we stood on the other side of the crevasse joking about how desperate we'd first thought that jump to be, years ago, now just routine. Soon, the gear racked, he went to work from the boulders on oddly wet rock to reach the foot of the groove. It was, as the guide stated, greasy but also running with water, against all expectations. A slip brought a quick runner and a few feet further, another, as the slime oozed an uncomfortable atmosphere into the air. For some unaccountable reason I checked the belays though there was no need. A fleck of spray caught my ear and salt water slipped into my left eye, stinging. The day was hot, the sky cloudless but I felt chilled. The rope slid out a few more feet and grunts and swearing gave evidence of an unexpected thrutch on this supposedly straightforward pitch. Although not concentrating fully on the rope I mechanically inched it out. The shine was off what was going to be the start of a great day. A scatter of spray dotted the back of my T-shirt and its companion swell took my left foot. I swore and shook the saturated leg, taking a step back and glancing seaward. The vagueness of my earlier apprehension distilled into something firmer for the sea was not playing the game today as the weather was. Besides, we'd got the tide right as well so why am I getting wet? The air had changed too, the quality of the sound deeper, booming, oceanic. And then came the first wave. I recoiled in shock, soaked to the skin, staggering back a little and inadvertently tugging the rope. A strangled cry of surprise came from above demanding attention and no pulling. I apologised and stepped back onto a higher boulder, freeing more rope with a wary eye seawards. I added my own comments of haste, amazed at the sea change, changing to ones of shock and cursing as another, bigger wave slapped me to the bed of the zawn in an angry swirl.

"Make it snappy, I'm getting soaked down here."

A grunt and a few more feet, and then the belay ledge, but not before two more angry swipes had left me shivering, scraped and a little worried. Both of these had hit the groove and I had to climb the blooming thing. I ought not to have looked out to sea but I was under compulsion, sensing fully what was going to be there. A black, brooding sea was rolling great crashing fists of Atlantic into the mouth of the zawn, hiding the lower sky and darkening the already gloomy floor. A lull in the waves allowed me to get in the groove and up it a few feet. The

runner wouldn't come out and I caught the full force of the wave and a mouthful of salt, swallowed in the gulp of a breath. Coughing and retching I shouted for a tight rope which was duly delivered with much mirth from above. The next one drove the breath from my body and I noticed with grim satisfaction that the spray had caught him as well. 'Serves him right for laughing,' I chokingly thought, and then I realised that that wave should not be reaching him. 40 feet up and that wave reached him? With disbelief I watched myself as if from afar as the water casually brushed my hands and feet from the rock in the next rush. I dangled, twisting in the rope and now, very much frightened. Fighting for breath, every time I opened my mouth I drew in water and spat and choked and gasped frantically.

"For Chrissake sake, the effing rope", I screamed, not realising that he too was dripping. The ledge arrived courtesy of the swell, lifting and throwing me a crumpled scrap at his feet. I grabbed automatically at the belay rope and hauled myself to my feet, as he tied me in.

"What the hell is going on?" he shouted trying to make himself heard above the roar.

"I don't know and I don't care," I yelled into his ear, "but we're not going to climb out of this at 6a so we'd better figure out how to get off."

It was difficult to communicate because the sea was thumping and clawing at us almost continuously. I looked up through salt smeared eyes to see them breaking 20 feet above us. Realisation came quickly. We had to get across the traverse to the crevasse and then reverse the jump to the abseil platform. It was difficult to think straight, or to organise, rock expelling breath by its sheer force, numbing us with its cold. Breathing was an epic in itself, as each blow submerged us for what seemed like hours while lungs shrieked for air. With eyes closed under each onslaught it was difficult to gauge the time for the next air so a throat full of water would leave us rasping in air, unable to time the next hit or gasp, catching us in mid breath and exhausting us further. We were just hanging from the belay as it seemed pointless to try and stand on the ledge but we somehow couldn't work out the next stage given the fury of our surroundings. It was then that I thought we might not make it out.

Time was suspended as we grimly fought to stay upright in each rush of the ocean. Somehow we established the idea that we would have to traverse across the teeth of this foaming monster and found ourselves counting the seconds between each breaker. The first attempt was a skidding lurch across the wall lunging for any hold to purchase enough time before impact. The wave took him with one hand clawing vainly at a crack and bodily flung him upright some five feet until the rope stopped his rise. The force on my belay plucked me off my feet and as I lurched sideways the plate locked and he dropped, catching a glancing blow with his thigh before going under the next. I hauled him in and held him tight with one arm against the ledge as the next wave washed over us and seemed to keep us submerged for a lifetime. As it withdrew we sank great coughs of air into our lungs, each seeing real fear mirrored in our eyes. He got angry.

"Come on you swine" he screeched, "can't you do better than that? Come on! What about a real wetting?"

I grabbed him by the hair and shook him out of his hysteria, the pain getting through. Calmer now, though with flecks of spittle flying, he turned to face the

gap again.

We tried to establish the best landing point on the platform only to realise that it too was raging white with massive sheets pumping back and forth across it rumbling up the abseil. But we'd pulled the ropes through and without the security...? One thing at a time now, we've got to get there first.

And so our efforts assumed an almost dreamlike quality with him setting off aiming for the last far point as the sound receded into the background and all that became important was our two sparks flickering, fighting against the damp. Almost outside ourselves we watched our torn hands clutch and clutch again while the sea played with us, dancing us around on the foam, batting us back and forth between breaker and granite, submerging us until we thought we'd burst, flinging us brutally against the hardened walls of this liquid prison. Our hopes began to fade as salt tears mingled with salt waves, a final enslavement seemed to beckon. How long, how long? The aches in my body told me that we were still alive. Time did not matter. Small details stood out. I watched his camera snap from his harness and into the embrace of the sea. I counted our ropes' abrasions waiting for them to become the inevitable, almost natural end. I sucked my torn knuckles wondering at the life in their salt taste and once, only once found my thumb in my mouth as my eyes, storm wide with wonder, watched him make another effort. This time he almost made the ledge by the crevasse only to slip and fall away. A despairing lunge caught an edge with his left hand and a great sobbing moan escaped his lips before the next wave caught him and flung him on and beyond the crevasse to flounder on the platform. I shouted for all I was worth.

"Get up. Get uuuuup! You've made it. Get to the wall before the next one."

He hadn't heard I'm sure but instinct saw him clawing his way across on hands and knees, only to be bowled over and thudded sickly into the back wall. Please no, I whimpered to myself, please don't take him back. Pleeeease no. I cried on in silent misery but the waves relented and he appeared staggering on one knee, his arm over a good lip in a hollow on the platform.

I don't recall how he made the few yards to the foot of the exit route but somehow he was tied in on nuts and laboriously pulling in the ropes against the snatching of the waves. I didn't want them to come tight. This place was my security. So what if each wave tore my feet away? To commit myself to a swim in these towers of fright seemed an absolute lunacy. I talked myself into it. Check your harness. Check. Are the knots OK? Yes, OK. Which nut will come easiest, that has to be the last? OK that one. Take that one out now. Come on, come out. I collapsed at the futility, weeping in raging, barking laughs, spitting out each wave as it engulfed me. You stupid fool, I thought, just untie and go, leave the nuts, treat yourself to some new ones. In the event the sea took my hand and as I unclipped the final one I was flung up into the air and descended head first.

He told me later that I was screaming in abject fear but I have no recollection. I was just thinking that I hate swimming. I can swim but I dislike it as an activity and that this was a stupid way to die. I came to, bobbing, gasping and thrashing the disorientated surface, seeing only white and blue around me. Where was the crag? And then a mule kicked me in the back as I was slammed against the wall below the crevasse. I hung briefly on the now tight rope as he held me, and managed to turn and face the ledge, having enough presence of mind to watch the

next wave drive in and jump on it, flailing wildly with my arms. I dropped onto the platform and with a combination of scratching and dragging, made his belay.

We were still being hit but now the full force of the attack was being curbed by the wall of the platform. At least we could breathe in relative comfort without fighting to stay on our feet and slowly I nudded my way up the exit route, slumping often into the slings to rest. At the top it was some while before I could trust myself to stand and fix the belay, finally coming to with his calls to my ears. God, I ached. Spent, but secure, we slumped on the upper rock platform and slowly stirred.

Pushing the tears from my eyes I glanced across at him as he dragged himself into a sitting position and sagged back against a boulder. He tried to grin. I noticed that he'd chipped a tooth and his gums were flecked with red above a swollen and discoloured lip. A sliver of blood and mucus was smeared across a cheek from his nose and a dull wet glow of red in his matted hair was beginning to seep out over his left temple. One sleeve of his T-shirt hung by a couple of threads above a rent seam, almost down to his waist, and angry weals displayed the effects of abrasive granite across his ribs. He swallowed awkwardly, trying to speak but only succeeded in croaking until he'd properly cleared his throat.

"My God," he whispered, "You look a right mess."

Kevin Fitzgerald Remembered

Audrey Salkeld

In 1969 Kevin Fitzgerald edited, briefly, **Mountaineering**, the BMC newsletter of the day. 'I'm in Dutch at the moment all over Europe,' he would bewail, 'but my eyeman may stop the whole fatuous business tomorrow.' The cataracts were already plaguing him, that would lead to total blindness later, although also – it has to be said – he enjoyed affecting great age long before it struck him with full sandbag force. 'As one approaches one's 100th birthday,' (this, as a mere sexagenarian) 'one's myopic vision fails to get anything, even the BMC, into any sort of perspective.' And, 'a fine lunch with McNaught Davis and Ken (Wilson), had me coming home like Clemenceau, feeling almost 80 again'... 'All the writing is on the walls'... 'And this morning I was asked if I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE ALPINE CLUB. How true it is that in England you have to be old before you can be loved.'

For more than 20 years I gorged such delicious letters from this 'Ancient of Days, blind as any bat'. Others, less privileged, must seek consolation in his published short stories, novels and the endearing **With O'Leary in the Grave**, celebrating his youth, and more especially his frequent preposterous father. The novels – eight thrillers written between 1943 and 1960 – are hard to come by these days, though the paperback edition of one sold 168,000 copies in the United States. Very much of their period and featuring a Bulldog Drummond-like character, some have climbing episodes. **Throne of Bayonets**, set in North Wales, sees gunsmoke in the bar of a thinly disguised Pen y Gwryd and the final shootout over the cliffs of Lliwedd.

Shorter humorous pieces are buried in Magazines: **CCJ** for the years 1954 to 1975 yield several gems, and **Your Lovely Hills are Very Dangerous** was first published in the now almost forgotten Mountain Life. Fitzgerald also produced the history of the Farmers' Club and a guide to the Chilterns, where he lived for nearly 50 years. He was especially proud of a contribution to Stephen Potter's **Cragmanship** 'did it with Potter and Hilton Jones – both dead and greatly missed by me – in the Athenaeum Drawing Room.'

But the published output is distressingly small for one who loved literature so much, and who lived life to amuse, encourage and draw attention to the absurdity of the human condition. This was, I suppose, because his skills lay in actually **TELLING** stories; he was in great demand as an after-dinner speaker, and as a broadcaster during and after the Second World War. And besides, so much creative energy was channelled into maintaining his many lively correspondences.

As a young man Fitzgerald studied Agriculture and farmed for a short while in Tipperary and in Canada. He has described learning to plough with a pair of horses – 'on a fine October day, in a vanished Ireland' – as the happiest day of his life. Between 1928 and 1962 he worked for ICI, some of that time as the company's General Manager in Ireland. His wife, Janet Quigley, who predeceased him, was an innovative and early editor of **Woman's Hour**; his daughter Penelope is a distinguished theatrical director. Between them, they knew simply everyone.

Readers will have noticed that little mention has been made of what **The Times** obituarist called 'his somewhat indifferent prowess as a rock climber'. It is true Fitzgerald only took up with mountains at the age of 45, when ordered to rest after a warning cardiac episode. It was clear to him that:

'any fool trying to get up the easiest of cliffs at an age when he should not be walking to the nearest posting box, or not too often, is going to suffer major operations, the trifling loss of all toenails, the wrenching of bones and muscles, and frequent collapses on hillsides, roadways and mountain paths. He is going to have to wear steel and leather corsets, feel ill at all times, be described by friends half his age as 'totally unfit'.

There comes a day 'when in tears from pain I groped my way round Llyn Idwal and made up my mind about one or two things. That night I gave up smoking. It wasn't enough. There was only one thing for it. I gave up drinking.' Three months after that appalling step a totally-abstaining, non-smoking Fitzgerald walked over the col of Craig yr Isfa and was looking into the Amphitheatre before realising that this was a walk he couldn't do, and on which he had a very bad collapse three years earlier. 'I thought you were finished,' said the doctor, watching me sipping water in Helyg after that little experience. So did I.'

Fitzgerald's climbing had to be packed into an all too short span, but he swiftly learned to 'sit about soaking wet, bitterly cold, and to pick with some appearance of relish at bits of burnt sausage, something called 'sandwich spread' and once, but only by accident, at cold pork and pickle inside a doughy roll.' By then, the greater truth had struck him. Climbing was about being in the right place at the right time with the right people. What was actually done was of no importance whatsoever. 'Serious climbing, and there should be no other kind, is almost entirely a matter of personal friendship.'

Dipping deeper into my treasure folder, I snag upon something else: 'When my one-line obituary comes to be written, it may well be the single phrase: 'Like Joe Tasker, Kevin was a Billingham man.' It would be a pity to befog the minds of mountaineers still further with stuff about Cashel, and Tipperary, and Owen's Fairy Hill...

'What a lot on information I give you from time to time for 'The Fitzgerald nobody knew'. You'll be able to start almost any time now...'

Thank you Kevin. For the Fitzgerald we all knew and loved so much.

The Wrinklies' Coast to Coast

Al Churcher

I've often thought that there's something akin to the **Last of the Summer Wine** characters about our group – an ageing and somewhat crazy bunch of climbers, canoeists, cavers and racing bikers who now spend most of their spare time doing silly things on skis and mountain bikes.

As we're all teachers in our other lives, every year has to have a series of 'projects' to keep us going through the miseries of term-time, and this summer it was to be an off-road coast to coast. Though we'd been talking of this for some time, it took the publication of a guidebook to spur us into action. 'It might end up as popular as Wainwright's walk, so let's get it done before the crowds', was the thinking. Tim Woodcock's guidebook route zigzags around quite a lot, presumably in order to take advantage of the Youth Hostels en-route. Unfortunately, this means that the route often disappears off the bottom of one OS sheet on to the top of another and then back again, so that some seven maps are needed to cover the whole route. He attempts to get round this by including all the relevant sections of these maps in his guide, but to facilitate this has had to both reduce the scale from its normal 1:50,000, and to give only a narrow strip from each map. Even without long-sight/short-arm problems, the first makes the maps difficult to follow, and the second means that when you do lose the route it could be hard to get back onto it! In any case, we quite liked the thought of a directissima, so Andy, being our map-man, got to work on sorting out as direct a route as possible, and highlighted these onto four Pathfinder maps. A visit to Mick at Acqua Three for a bit of cutting and sticking (to remove a large overlap on one sheet, and trim away some of the excess territory to north and south) and we had three fully laminated, but very lightweight maps. As our aim was a lightweight, four-day trip, low weight and bulk were priorities – especially for the carries through the Lakes.

Monday 25th July

A last brew and the obligatory photo-session on the beach at St Bees and we were away. Converted by Sustrans, the old railway line from Whitehaven to Rowrah now makes an excellent cycle-way, complete with giant sculptures and benches carved from whole tree-trunks. We'd just left Rowrah when Andy pulled up with a disintegrating back wheel-rim. We'd been riding for less than an hour, but after a late start it was already after 5pm, so it looked like we'd blown any chance of getting over to Wasdale that day. But our fairy godfather was at hand in the shape of the Rover dealer in Rowrah. A phone-call to Cleator Moor found the bike-shop still open, and while Andy was being chauffeured thence in an executive Rover we retired to the pub opposite the garage. We'd hardly sipped the froth off the top of our pints, when Andy was back with a new wheel. If you're going to break down anywhere, this is the place to do it, and while the rain lashed down outside and the landlord and his early regulars looked on in amazement, Andy changed over the gear block and Lew chopped through the spokes of the old wheel to save the hub. Less than an hour and a half after stopping, we were away again!

The forest track along Ennerdale, with views of Pillar Rock appearing briefly

through the mist above, made us feel we were really on our way. But once out of the trees and approaching Black Sail Hostel, first Kim, and then myself were blown completely off our bikes by sudden gusts of wind. As expected, the slog over Black Sail Pass involved more carrying than pushing, and with the gusting wind, there were times when I seemed to be carrying a kite rather than a bike. The rain was down to just the odd shower now, and with the top of the pass we left the worst of the wind behind us. The track down to Wasdale is as unrideable down as up, but at least you don't actually have to push going down, and the thought of the bright lights of the Wasdale Hotel encouraged us through the gathering gloom. Even if the bitter does have London prices, it still slipped down a treat, and with food off and a couple of pints or three on empty stomachs, there was a fairly high giggle factor as we followed Lew's headtorch through jet-black lanes to the Fell and Rock hut at Brackenclose for the delights of bedtime pot-noodles.

Tuesday 26th

Next morning at eight the rain was doing its best to batter its way through the roof, and with Wastwater only occasionally visible between the squalls I began to wonder if this was the final proof of global warming.

Needless to say, the carry over Styhead Pass was horrendous. The 'guaranteed to keep you dry' qualities of my new Goretex jacket didn't really help much, for with no hood, streams of water cascaded down my neck to join those flooding down the sleeve of whichever arm was holding the bike on my shoulder. Once again the wind was trying hard to rip the bikes from our grasp, and after the



The Carry over Styhead. Photo: Al Churcher Collection

hour's climb up we were now faced with wading streams swollen to knee-deep torrents.

Andy's back-problem means he's unable to carry his bike, so we waited for him by the mountain-rescue box. Watching the waterfalls from the summits above being blown vertically upwards, and feeling my body-temperature plunge, I began to wish I'd thought of wearing a wet-suit. Nearing Esk Hause we began meeting assorted groups of East-European walkers, the looks on their faces suggesting that the sight of four men carrying bikes up a mountain provided graphic confirmation that all Englishmen are mad. (And when Kim remarked on how much he was enjoying himself, I began to see their point.)

Once again we reached the valley bottom before it was worthwhile trying to pedal, but the ride along Langdale under clearing skies began to restore our spirits. A monster hot meal in the Stickle Barn and a 15 minute drying out session with the hot-air dryer in the gents, completed the process, and by the time we left, the sun was even getting in on the act. A quiet lane from Chapel Stile led to excellent off-road along the terraces above Rydal Water, and after tea and buns in Ambleside we were soon admiring the after-storm sunlight on Windemere as we pedalled up towards Jenkin Crag. Like the Garburn Road from Troutbeck over into Kentmere which followed, it was a much easier climb than expected, and it wasn't until we'd dropped over from Stile End into Longsleddale and begun the day's last climb up to Mosedale, that the legs really started to go. Being as it was 5.30pm by then, perhaps our fatigue wasn't really surprising. The rough, cobbled track may just be rideable to fresh (or younger) legs, but for us it was a long push, with plenty of opportunities to stop and look back on the late evening sun reflecting on the sinuous meanders of the River Sprint.

At the head of the dale the bridleway forks, but the start of the Mosedale track is less than obvious. A false-start followed by an attempted short-cut across the river almost restored my moisture balance to what it had been that morning. But after a push over the crest of the moor, there was just the soggy descent to Mosedale Cottage – rather like riding through stiff porridge, if you've ever tried it.

Wednesday 27th

With its newly repaired windows and water-tight roof, Mosedale Cottage is definitely in the four-star bivy class, and if people would make sure the doors are left closed after them it would surely warrant five. As it is, the need to clear the floor of sheep droppings before you can bed down, lowers the tone a little. With my own bedroom I slept like an innocent, and even Kim moving in the middle of the night to escape Lew's infamous saw-mill impressions did little to disturb me. Kim snores too, but as his takes the form of a softly ascending musical scale, you could easily imagine you were sharing a room with a sleeping Julie Andrews, and the effect is almost lullaby-ic.

With another long day in front of us we were up at seven, and away by eight. After the wind and rain of the previous day, the grey sky and light drizzle was positively inviting, and once past the initial stretch of porridge, the track became clearer, giving pleasant grassy riding to the A6. Luckily we only needed to follow this for a couple of miles before following a well-surfaced bridleway running parallel to it. Shap Moor was next, and this rarely visited area between the A6 and

the M6 was one of the surprises of the trip. Firm grassy tracks, curlews piping as the clouds sped overhead, and despite the nearness of two major trunk roads, a real feeling of remoteness.

But breakfast had been a pretty perfunctory affair, and when we passed the very end of the access road to Tebay services at 9am, stomachs were rumbling and blood sugar and energy were definitely running low. I was all for stopping, and Kim and Lew are always ready to eat. But Andy was dead against it – village cafés were OK, but motorway services were definitely beyond the pale! I must admit to being more than a little miffed, and when he said there was a café a few miles further on at Orton I took it out on the bike and thrashed on ahead through the quiet country lanes. It may not have been good for my energy reserves, but it stopped me thinking about food, and when we were all sat outside the tiny village café in the sunshine being plied with tea, beans, bacon, cake, and all the other healthy carbs that keep the wheels turning, I had to agree that he'd been right.

The next section followed the Coast to Coast path by easy bridleways through pleasant grassy meadows to Sunbiggin, then headed north across the exposed limestone of Great Asby Scar just east of High Peak. A good spot to stop and admire a 360° panorama of hills – those of the Lake District seeming far away now. A few more miles of track, then quiet back-roads brought us into Kirkby Stephen and its plethora of cafés.

From the hamlet of Winton, just to the north, a narrow road climbs steadily eastward for almost four miles, giving glorious views back over the Appleby Fells and Howgills – and lots of bottom gear twiddling! At around the 1,200 feet level on Bowber Hill, the tarmac gives way to a track leading down to Wrenside Farm. After a push along the edge of a spectacular gorge we seemed to describe almost a complete circle in our attempts to follow the unmarked bridleway across the massed tussocks of Kaber Fell. (Hint – this part of our route was the same as the guidebook description – if you use it, ignore the instructions about the 'undefined bridleway' and simply follow the edge of the forest more-or-less due east from the abandoned Woofergill Barn until you meet the road. When we looked back after an hour of sweating and pushing, we wished we had!) The road up from Winton was beautiful enough, but the Tan Hill road puts that into the shade – on top of the world, man! In the early evening sun it certainly felt like that, and we were at least on the very spine of Britain, for shortly before Tan Hill itself is the Cumbria-Yorkshire border – the east-west watershed of England.

At 1,732 feet, the Tan Hill Inn is the highest in England, and at 7.30 on that particular evening it was certainly the most welcome. The atmosphere inside was as good as the beer and with three pints of excellent Theakstones and a huge plate of Cumberland sausage and chips to ease the way, the time slid by. After the efforts of the past two days, the thought of drinking until closing time then curling up in our bivy-bags wherever we could stagger to, was becoming more and more attractive by the minute. Unfortunately, this pleasant illusion was all-too-soon shattered by the sight of the other three getting up and putting on their jackets! Apparently there was a possible bivy site in some ruined mine buildings just on the moor ...

A last trip to the gents to remove my lenses meant I was the last to be ready. Kim and Lew set off leaving Andy to wait for me, and seeing me put on my 'sack and pick up my bike, he followed after them. At that moment a terrified rabbit

kitten ran between my legs, followed soon after by the pub cat. Unable to stand the kitten's screaming when the cat caught it, I retrieved it from the cat and released it in safety on the other side of the road. Andy had now disappeared, but knowing they would stop where we turned off the road, I set off quite happily.

The moors were golden in the last evening sun, and huge long shadows rode ahead of me, chasing dozens of rabbits off the road. A short climb led to a long descent, and with no sign of them ahead, and full of the joys of a summer evening and good bitter, I got onto the big ring to chase them down. And with my speedo hovering between 25 and 40 mph it was an exhilarating way to end the day. But after five miles I was beginning to get a little concerned, and a mile further on, when I got to the bend where an overturned tanker had blocked the road and found that no-one had seen the others, the awful truth dawned. Yes, I'd missed them.

Riding back up wasn't anywhere near as much fun as coming down, but in-between unkind thoughts, I consoled myself with the thought that they'd be waiting for me back at the pub. Were they hell – and worse, no-one had seen them. The problems of having only one map between us now became apparent – I'd not even a route card, and didn't have a clue where they were. I suppose there's always a first time, but in several years of riding together this had never happened before. We ALWAYS waited for stragglers at every junction. The barmaid said she'd overheard them say they were going one way, the barman another. But even without his warnings about going on the moors at night, I wasn't mug enough to try and find them at that time. Leaving a message at the bar, I rode slowly back up the hill. I'd had enough for one day and all I wanted was sleep. I was expecting to spend the night in the lee of a ruined railway wagon on the side of the road, but to my surprise the other wagon on the opposite side of the road was not only unlocked, but contained tables and benches. An emergency shelter for stranded winter motorists? Anyway it was another five-star bivy, and in minutes the thermarest was unrolled, the sleeping bag was out, and my troubles were left for the morning.

Thursday 28th

Despite being up at six for attempts to intercept the others in Swaledale and Richmond, it took a series of 'phone calls back to base in Sheffield before we finally met up in the late afternoon outside the pub in Great Broughton. At least I didn't seem to have missed much – the off-road sections over Whiteside and Marske Moors seemed to have involved as much pushing as riding, and from Richmond it had been mostly back-lanes with the odd section of bridleway. I'd made a diversion to visit the flesh-pots of Northallerton (not the sort of place you ever go to as a climber) and was more than ready for the North York Moors – which to my mind offer some of the best off-road in Britain.

After the long road climb up to Hasty Bank, we had the sun on our backs as we followed the Lyke Wake Walk eastwards, before turning north to follow the old railway line of Rudland Rigg. Is there a better place in all the world than high on an empty Yorkshire moor in late summer, with giant shadows pedalling silently beside you? No wonder we rode past our turning across Baysdale Moor. A final push down into the valley at the head of Grains Beck and the stove was on for a cocktail of yet more PN's mixed with all the smashed up remains from the bottom

of our rucksacks. Despite the magic of the rowan trees, the midges were soon on to us (or should I say, on to me!) so while the others treated themselves to a wash in the stream, I retreated to the safe-haven of my bivvy-bag.

Friday 29th

With some 40-odd miles of mostly off-road riding ahead, and a rendezvous to be made at Boggle Hole by 4pm, we were awake at six and away before seven. Traces of mist clung to the heather, but the sky above was clear and becoming brighter by the minute as we zigzagged our way by a mixture of drovers tracks and lanes through Westerdale and Rosedale Head. Glaisdale Moor gave us our first glimpse of the sea, but now it was serious head-down stuff, for Glaisdale Rigg must give one of the best downhills anywhere. Arrow-straight for almost three miles of good track, it's a chance to really let it run – and 30 miles-an-hour off-road is as good an adrenaline rush as you'll experience on any crag!

The mega-breakfast at the pub in Glaisdale rated just as highly on its food scale, and after over three hours of running on empty, to say it was welcome is a slight understatement. Endless refills of tea and coffee, plates and plates of cereal and full sets – simply the best, and all for £4 a head!

Beck Hole and Goathland both have 1 in 3s, and the climb from the latter up onto Sleights Moor is lo-o-o-o-ng. The sea was becoming closer at every sighting now, and with one enjoyable fast track after another, we were obviously way ahead of schedule. In fact we had little more than a few hundred yards of off-road left when I came unstuck. The front wheel caught on the edge of a rut – and I was flying. After a couple of minutes writhing in the heather, I got back on and rode up to where the others were waiting with their scorecards. The blood running down my leg was pretty impressive, but the golf-ball sized bruise that quickly followed was what really improved my score!

Boggle Hole was only a lick and a spit away, and the cold salt-water of the North Sea provided perfect physio. Lew got in on the act by diving in and hitting his head on the rocky bottom, but when Liz arrived with the celebratory champagne, he refused to accept our advice about alcohol and head-injuries, and insisted on drinking his share. After riding along the beach to Robin Hood's Bay we continued the celebrations with more Theakstones and Guinness. But it was hard to get lost on the steep road between pub and car park, and I was soon dreaming of bike-riding sheep in the back of Andy's car as it sped back to Sheffield.

A Short Dolomite Holiday

Mike Burt

I had always felt a bit superior to the Via Ferrata. The idea of following a length of wire is a little hard to take seriously when you are supposed to be doing some form of mountaineering . . .

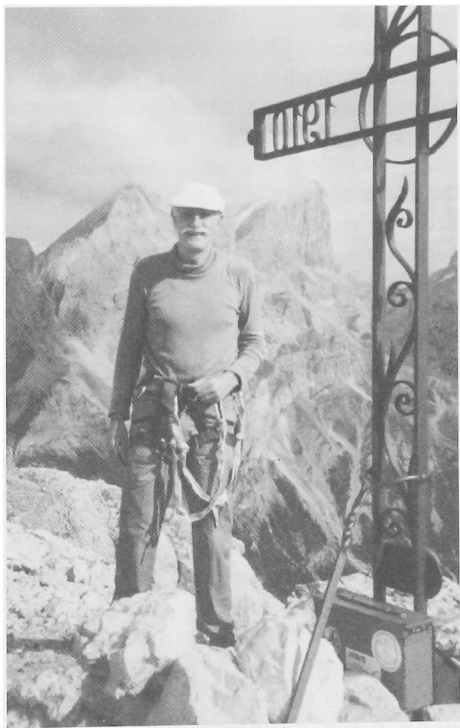
My wife Jean, and I booked a coach holiday to the Dolomites. I would see if it was possible to combine such a trip with romping up ladders and along cat-walks. It seemed odd to go up the Sella Pass in a bus just for the sake of going there. We were offered a cable-car ride for the experience. A special stop was taken to look at a ski-jumping area.

We were staying in a village called Molina close to the better known Cavalese. The closest of the possible routes was about a half hour's bus-ride away. It is called the Punta Polsa and is a part of the Latemar Group. It is only a tiddler but it would do for a start. The bus driver was very keen to be helpful. He got the idea across to me that I had to change buses. With little fuss I rolled into the village of Ziano and the bus stop was right at the church, from which the route started, according to my guide.

From the start it was uncanny how well the book described the route. Opposite the church, find a graveyard with a surfaced track going around the back of it. Follow the track for a few hundred yards, turn right through a small park and so on, and everything fitted. The path went quite steeply up through pleasant woods, coming eventually to a rock wall, where it was promised, signatures could be found dating from 1750. As promised I found them. They were in some sort of red dye. They must have had some good red ink in those parts in 1750, for it to have lasted through two and a half centuries of freeze and thaw. Allegedly they were the signatures of herdsman who took their animals that way for summer pasture.

The route now went along under the rock wall. The signatures were an encouraging landmark for me. When you are alone in unknown hills small gains give you a bit of confidence.

Arriving at a gully in the rock wall it was clear that something should be happening around about, but what? I



*Mike Burt on Summit of Collac
(Marmolada in background).
Photo: Mike Burt Collection*

couldn't see any sign of a continuation so perhaps things were going to get a bit tricky. Then all was well, a piece of wire of very good quality, in very good condition, was visible directly above me.

I had two slings for attaching myself to the wire fixtures. The approved gear is called a Kinetic Impact Shock Absorber, I must get one next time. The rock section wasn't serious nor very long. It finished on a huge pillar which itself was rather lost in an enormous continuous face.

The ascent probably wouldn't be worth the effort necessary to get up without the wire and ladders but I found it well worthwhile. I would much rather have done that than Pen yr Ole Wen, or Wyth Burn, out of Thirlmere. There was a cross of perhaps 15 feet in height on the top of the pillar. Mirrors had been nailed to the cross to reflect the light across the valley, but conditions had not been kind to them, most of them were broken.

On returning to Ziano I intended to get back by a bus which was supposed to leave in an hour. It didn't. I tried to get a lift. After a fruitless start, a really nice old couple stopped. They were so keen to talk to me but it was only afterwards that I realised that what they had wanted to know was, had I retired? It was good to have the facilities of the hotel to come back to.

Jean had been to Lake Garda, she'd had a boat-ride and had done the usual tourist bit. Many others had been doing the same even though it was late September.

The next day had to be devoted to exploring the countryside around the village of Molina. Amongst other things we were asked to move someone's three-wheeled delivery float. It wouldn't start on the battery so we had to push it to where it had to go. We looked for a lake that was on a diagrammatic map of the area. We poked around little lanes, took photographs, and did the sort of things that tourists do. The next Via Ferrata was a sterner proposition. It was more difficult to get to on the bus and it was of a reasonable height, if you think of 2,715 metres as reasonable. I was relying on a cable-car to get me to the start but as far as I could find out, it wouldn't be running. The mountain is called Collac. It is a lot closer to the Sella Pass than it is to Molina. I had to miss the hotel breakfast to get out in time for the bus. That may seem a small sacrifice, in my case it is not. It turned out to be the school bus. Again, the change of buses. Again, the driver was so keen to set me down where I wanted to be.

"The cable-car please."

"You'll find it on the other side of that big house."

It obviously wasn't working. A group of men were plaiting strands of wire. I thought I'd make quite sure that was no chance before I did anything that was too extreme so I went to ask if it would be running that day. A heavy silence met my enquiry. You could feel the thoughts running through the air. 'How could anyone ask such a dumb question, what the devil do you think we're doing.' One of them did answer me.

"No, it's not."

Well, I'd better just get as far as possible by walking up. I wouldn't be able to do the whole thing now, but too bad, I'd just have to do what I could.

I don't like walking. Especially I don't like walking up hills. I didn't like walking up that one. I liked it even less when someone came storming up behind me and overtook me without the slightest trouble. He was going like a train. I

tried to recover a little self-regard, when someone else came up even faster. At least I managed to find out that both of these express trains were going up the same route as I was. They were so fast that I didn't expect to see them again.

So on with the slog. It took about two hours to get up the section that the cable car would have covered. As I was getting close to the top of that section, I was surprised to hear voices coming from behind a shed. I expected to see more workmen but it was the two speed merchants who had overtaken me. They were Austrians and had taken their time having something to eat and putting on their gear.

The route was obvious from this point. I preferred to keep going until I had to stop to put on gear. There was the cable. It was easier to get up by using it than it would have been without it. You couldn't get off-route following that. We came to some harder parts. It took more effort to hold onto the cable. Then some wet sections made it harder still. Oh yes, that cable was making a great difference now. The Austrians had got back in front of me but on some sections I was catching them up. A very steep laddered section appeared. I actually had to wait. Then they drew away from me quite seriously. I was beginning to feel the effect of the effort and of the altitude. I never have acclimatised well and I wasn't doing now. There were typical Dolomite towers soaring above me, it was all very romantic but all I wanted to do was get up. At such times that wire gives a great comfort. There was a bit of traversing, a few short bulges to scramble up and the top appeared unexpectedly. A little walk and there were the two Austrians taking photographs.

It had been so much better than I'd expected. I had got to the summit. It was a beautiful day. I had a good chance to catch my bus back to Malign.

A quick chat with the Austrians, a couple of photographs and a look around and I had to be on my way down. If I missed my bus and couldn't get back then I only had my credit card to get me back home. The tour bus would have gone.

The descent started with long sections of traversing around towers, then a number of gullies, that were typical of anywhere, came along. A few spurs had to be crossed and that was about it for the rock section. An uphill section to get to a col was a surprise I could have done without. I was so slow on there that movement was barely perceptible.

The rest was just plodding. Superb Italian countryside, that up to a few weeks ago, would have been swarming with walkers and tourists. It was now completely deserted. I only wanted to cover it as quickly as I could, and that was slowly.

I was down at the road with about three quarters of an hour before the second to last bus. Brilliant; but I'm not going to wait around. I'll try for a lift. Such wonderful people. I got four lifts back to Molina. Each one was an experience in itself. As a hitchhiker you enter a special world where people will talk to you as they only talk to their Teddy-Bear or their bathroom mirror. I had forgotten how good it could be. A delicious hour and so many delicious memories.

Jean had been wine-tasting and enjoying the local delights. The hotel roasted a pig and put on its best for us.

I am inspired by the thought of being able to go around these glorious rock formations, in reasonable security, entirely on my own, if I choose to. Why did I overlook them for so long? I'm going back to make up for lost time.

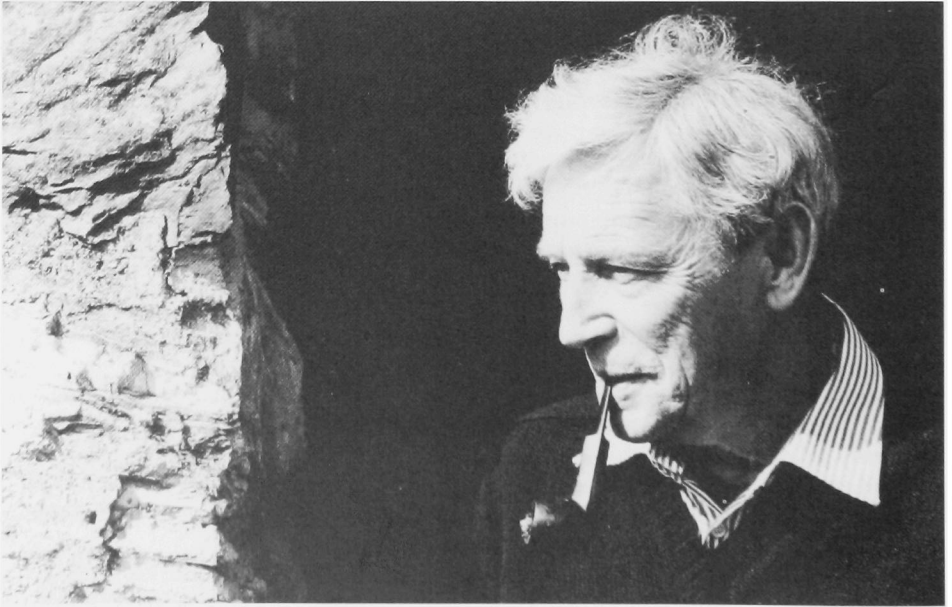
Obituary

David Cox

1913 (1933) – 1994

Last year Jack Longland, this year David Cox: they were of succeeding pre-war climbing generations and along with John Hunt – the last survivor – they made a great triumvirate of elder statesmen who, in their intellectual stature, mountaineering record, and committed contribution to our sporting world, were of a stature not easily discernible in any of their successors.

David Cox died of respiratory problems on the last day of a holiday in Cyprus at the age of 81. He had gone there rather courageously as recuperation after a long and painful illness. There had been complications after an operation, he'd had a tracheotomy, been tube-fed for months, doggedly fought his way back to a state of tenuous health, started to drive again, go to the pub at nights, resume his daily routines. His holiday on Cyprus had revitalised him too, regardless of the risk it entailed for him. On the day he died, his dear friend and contemporary Robin Hodgkin received from him a postcard enthusing about two Crusader castles he hoped to see, and mentioning an elegant peak on which he had noted with interest that there was a slab route pioneered by John Hunt. Medievalist and mountaineer, these presiding quiet passions of David's life had remained with him to the end.



David Cox. Photo: Jim Perrin

David was born third and last son of a preparatory school headmaster at Yelverton, on the south-western edge of Dartmoor. He went in due course to public school at Clifton, and thence on to Hertford College, Oxford in 1932, where his academic career was exceptionally distinguished. He took a First in Classical Honour Moderations, and a Congratulatory First in Modern History. He won the prize fellowship examination for All Souls in 1937, and was elected Fellow and Praelector at University College in 1939 – a position in which he remained until his retirement in 1980, at which time he was Vice-Master of the College. His professional life as a historian he devoted to the painstaking transcription of his College's archive of medieval documents, and to the community of its scholars, amongst whom he was regarded with warmth as a man of great intellect and as a peace-bringer – opinions in which even the irascible tribe of mountaineering concurred.

The dry textual studies of the medieval historian were only a part of David's life. Just as his twelfth-century bishops were complemented by crusading knights, so was the work of his mind balanced by his fervent need for the mountains, his enquiring affection about which lasted into old age. He began his climbing with scrambles on the Dartmoor tors at an early age. His father's sternness had been expended on the two eldest boys. For David, the Benjamin of the family, there was a gentler induction into the outdoor life and the Moor, on to which he frequently went with his father for bird-watching, rambling and camping expeditions. His arrival at Oxford in 1932, and that of two young Quakers, John Hoyland and Robin Hodgkin, in the two succeeding years, marked the great moment in the history of the Mountaineering Club there.

Unassuming even in his undergraduate days, the first hint of David's talent as a rock-climber came in the course of an ascent at Easter 1934 of *Longland's Climb* on the West Buttress of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu with John Hoyland. One of the hardest climbs of its day, and on the most forbidding of Welsh cliffs, it was completely out of condition, the rock dripping and the ledges covered with melting snow. (I wonder how often in these days of technical prowess, *Longland's* is done under those conditions?) Hoyland gave an account – amusingly callow to our later consciousness – of what happened in a letter to his father: 'After climbing an easy pitch, there came another hard one, and I found I could not do it under the conditions, but Cox very gallantly undertook to lead it, and to my relief just managed it before it got dark. It was a really magnificent effort, and has showed me more than anything else the worth of a good upbringing and education, as two people I was climbing with last Christmas who were physically just as sound, cracked up completely under far less trying conditions.'

David's partnership with Hoyland might have come to much; the one thrusting, the other philosophical, supportive yet with competence to cope whenever crises arose. Both of them were of playful bent, too, as the affair of the Indian Institute's elephant – which David recounted to me with various embellishments on several occasions – made apparent: 'Next to my college in Oxford was the Indian Institute, on the roof of which was a handsome bronze weather-vane in the shape of an elephant on top of a rather smooth dome about 20 feet high. John and I set out one night to capture this thing, but when he was about halfway up a trapdoor opened in the roof and out came an Indian caretaker, complete with turban and kukri and looking very sinister. We fled back to my

rooms, and as they were rather adjacent and I was the only man in the college who enjoyed climbing I came under suspicion. Shortly afterwards I had a fall at Pontesford and was in hospital, during which time, knowing that I couldn't then be suspected, John made a second attempt and succeeded in making off with the thing despite the Indian's appearance again. How he managed it I don't know – it was surprisingly heavy, as we found out when we came surreptitiously to replace it a few weeks later.'

David was a member of a reading party run that summer of 1934 by his eldest brother at the Eagles' Nest, Balliol College's base on a spur below the Gouter Hut on Mont Blanc: 'You were supposed to spend your time reading **Cicero** and people like that. It was absolute agony. But I got away one day, hired a guide and – it was my first alpine excursion – did the Pointe Albert and the Aiguille de l'M. Walking up, there was a tent visible at one point where John Hoyland had told me he intended to camp. I thought to visit, but there was no time. In fact, it must have been empty by then...'

Hoyland had been killed on the Fresnay Glacier. This death of the OUMC's brightest star cast a long shadow over its activities, but the arrival of Robin Hodgkin in the autumn of 1934 provided it with a new focus and Cox with a new partner. The momentum was slowly re-established. The pair's ascent of the *Climbers' Club Direct* climb – the fiercely overhanging little roof-crack at the foot of the Dewerstone in Devon – in 1936 was one of the technical masterpieces of its time, as hard, perhaps, as any pitch yet done in Britain. Their most notable season of climbing was in 1937, when they camped beneath Clogwyn Du'r Arddu with George Mallory's daughters Clare and Beridge, who were then at Cambridge (David was later invited by Beridge to accompany her to the Alps on her honeymoon, but as he ruefully recalled, 'I was reduced to climbing alone, for she found her new husband to be most uxorious, and was thus preoccupied with those duties'). In this Welsh summer, they were more innocent: 'We weren't sleeping together. We bathed every day unclothed, of course, but the tradition was that you didn't look.

Whether or not they looked, they certainly climbed, making significantly difficult new variations to several existing climbs – the *Top Traverse*, which had defeated Kirkus, on *Great Slab*; the *Wall variations* on *Pigott's*, which were astonishingly exposed for the day and the first true wall pitches on Du'r Arddu. Most of the other routes they also repeated. And at the end of the week, after a long day on Lliwedd, at eight in the evening David found and led a line up the steep left-hand section of the East Buttress which he called *Sunset Crack* and which was the last climb pioneered on this finest of Welsh cliffs in the great decade of its initial exploration. Hodgkin remembers his climbing style as being 'cautious, considered, but very deliberate and sure once he had made the decision to go.' His final addition, before war intervened, was to make the first ascent, climbing alone, of the difficult and delicate *Spiral Route* in the Amphitheatre of Craig yr Ysfa – a solo effort which ranks with the great achievements on Welsh rock. He was engaged at the time in writing the interim guidebook to Craig yr Ysfa with Nully Kretschmer, who was killed just after the war in the Alps. *Spiral Route* (which Cox originally called *Sodom*, 'because there was no looking back' – the name was altered by the prudish guidebook editor of the day) is still graded Hard Very Severe.

During the war, David was posted to the Royal Artillery, though he claimed his mathematics were not up to it and would later tell luridly absurd though never catastrophic anecdotes about what would now be termed 'friendly fire' to illustrate this. In 1940 his entire unit was posted to the western desert. David was posted to another unit in the north of Scotland. Six weeks later this unit too was posted to the western desert and he was left behind again: 'In both cases half of them were wiped out, so I was lucky. But people were beginning to give me white feathers, so the second time it happened I went to the Colonel and said, 'Look here, Sir, I would like to come with the regiment.' He followed it up, and word came from the War Office that I was on a list of chaps with experience of mountaineering who might be of use in instructing the Commandoes.' So David spent the rest of his war as Chief Instructor, along with the skier Jimmy Riddell, of the Mountain Warfare school, which took him to Canada, the Lebanon, Jordan, and latterly back to Llanberis in Wales, where, as a Major now, he was Commanding Officer of the Commando Training Wing, with some desperate characters under him. One of these was Chris Preston, who was intent on being first to lead the long-standing problem of *Suicide Wall* in Cwm Idwal. David ordered him to inspect it on a rope first, and then hauled him out when Preston was marooned on the halfway ledge by the inability of his seconds to follow. When Preston – who was the wildest character though by no means the best climber in the training wing – went back, determined to make the lead, David absented himself, joking afterwards that had Preston been killed in the attempt, as his CO he would have been court-martialled. So the part he played in the making of the hardest climb of the pre-Brown era in Wales was marginal, but he soon made amends for that by producing a classic ascent of his own – the beautiful *Sheaf* climb up the centre of the West Buttress of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, which was extremely bold and intricate in its route-finding. David's last significant contribution to mountaineering history was his climb with Wilfrid Noyce to within a rope's length of the sacred summit of Machapuchare in the Central Himalaya in 1957. Despite the magnitude of this achievement on a high and difficult peak to which access is now forbidden by the Nepalese government, and the properly respectful reason for its non-completion, David was always absolutely straightforward about it: 'To say that we climbed it was a plain untruth.' The following year he contracted polio, his struggle back to health after which in courage and resolution matched any ascent he ever made. Throughout his later years he served the community of mountaineering as truly as he did that of scholarship. He was a President of the Alpine Club (arranging during his incumbency, despite all protestations of the diehards, for its merger with the Ladies' Alpine Club) and the Climbers' Club, and an inspired editor of the **Alpine Journal**, where he continued the excellent work begun by the previous incumbent Francis Keenlyside, injecting into the publication a mood of calm, authoritative enthusiasm, and bringing into mountaineering's literary fold a new generation of eager alpinists. As with his students at Oxford, he had a knack of making younger climbers feel valued and a part of the continuum, with their own valid contributions to offer. The world of mountaineering – all too often petty and self-interested – always seemed finer somehow and kinder in his company. Funnier too – there was an irreverence, a mischief, a glinting comedy in him which made us laugh at ourselves as well as our forebears and which redeemed him from the

stateliness of silver hairs. To those who attended, in his quiet way he was the finest and most instructive of raconteurs. A visit to his rooms in college was a step back in time – the muted light, leather armchairs, the aroma of tobacco, cultured interest in what you had been doing and a huge black and white photograph of Machapuchare on the wall, his gaze often lingering wistfully on it, at which moments it was difficult not to recall Noyce's description of him struggling in frustrated humour and a howling tempest to light his pipe before the retreat. To hear David sparring in the bar parlour of the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel with Jack Longland and Kevin Fitzgerald, both of whom have died in the last twelve months, was as civilised an entertainment as mountaineering ever offered. His gift for friendship was eclectic and profound. He calmed, amused and educated all who encountered him, was one of those rare individuals whose death marks more than a personal passing.

Jim Perrin

The Reverend F.L.Jenkins

1914 (1961) – 1994

Fred Jenkins who died in December 1994 aged 80 will be fondly remembered as Honorary Padre to a host of mountaineering clubs. But Fred was first and foremost an alpinist and ski-mountaineer of wide ranging achievements, with a disconcerting trick of trumping would-be claimants to priority in out-of-the-way places.

Fred, a Welshman, was born in Aberdare, a mining town set deep in the uplands of Glamorgan. After schooling in Aberdare, Fred graduated from St David's College, Lampeter and was ordained in 1938. From 1939 to 1945 he was Curate of Bishop's Castle, Shropshire, and it was to these same Welsh Marches, in sight of the Cambrian Mountains, that he and his wife Audrey, eventually retired.

During the Second World War, Fred combined with his pastoral duties, part-time service in the National Fire Service. But in 1945, at the age of 31, his career took an adventurous change of direction when he joined the army as a padre. In 1947 he qualified as a parachutist with the 6th Airborne Division and for the next 17 years, travelled extensively, serving in Cyprus, Germany and India. It was during this time that his climbing career burgeoned, in association with the Army Mountaineering Association. Fred climbed extensively in the Alps, particularly in the Carnic, Julian and Styrian Alps which were easily accessible from Trieste where he was stationed from 1950/52. His earlier classic climbs in the Pennine Alps tended to be guided but his bent was for guideless climbing in less frequented parts – Corsica, Pyrenees, Turkish Ala Dag and Picos de Europa. He also visited Sikkim, Tibet and the Rockies and took particular pride in the AMA/Pakistan Expedition to Malubiting in 1959, of which he was Deputy Leader.

Fred was an early disciple of ski-mountaineering. A solo ascent of the Cyprian Mount Olympus on ski in 1947, prefaced a number of individualistic ascents. But his most fruitful years resulted from his meeting Jeremy Whitehead on an SCGB

tour of the Otztal in 1969. This led to a 16 year partnership of mainly guideless ski tours, led by Jeremy and Jim Roche, covering most of the French Alps.

Fred was already a member of the Fell & Rock and ABMSAC when elected to the Alpine Club in 1954. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1961. From 1977 to 1989 he served as Honorary Secretary of the Alpine Ski Club.

Fred's no-nonsense, economical graces – institutional for so many mountaineering dinners, were a mirror of the man. Tough, stoical, commonsensical and tolerant, his religion was a staff but never used as a stave. He will leave behind a host of warm memories and we send condolences to his widow Audrey who was herself so courageous during his last months.

JGR Harding

Harry Sales adds:

Fred Jenkins was an extremely pleasant fellow: these are not my words but those of George Starkey in 1954, forty years before Fred's death, when proposing him for membership of the Alpine Club. I would now, as would everyone else who knew Fred, associate myself with them. He remained an extremely pleasant fellow to the end. We all saw him at the various mountaineering clubs to which he belonged, having a quiet chuckle about something or other, and always, in perhaps his most generally remembered role, saying a subtle grace if there was a dinner.

But back in 1954 his climbing record was impressive: he seemed to have lost no opportunity to climb anything available in the Alps, Cyprus, Corsica and the Pyrenees, always guideless and frequently alone. And this carried on for the rest of his life, except for the last year or two when a hip replacement left him still on sticks, as he was the last time I chatted to him. But to the pure mountaineering he added, for a large slice of this life, the ski-mountaineering in which he took such great delight, starting and continuing for a long period with Jeremy Whitehead, who is writing more fully of this in the Alpine Journal.

John Harding has written about more of his life away from the mountains and I will end this supplementary note by echoing John's words: Fred 'will leave behind a host of warm memories amongst all who knew him.'

John Derek Evenett

1928 (1951)–1994

I first met John in December 1949. 11 members of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club had travelled up from Oxford by train to Ambleside, and thence by bus to the Robertson Lamb Hut in Langdale, for the Club's pre-Christmas meet. Tom Bourdillon was the meet leader and he took the first day off in order to buy enough oatmeal, bread and jam to last for a week. The rest of us had a cold wet day on Bowfell. On day two I climbed with John on Scout Crag, and on day three John climbed *Gimmer Chimney* with Tom, who thereafter became one of John's life-long heroes.

I next climbed with John in September 1951, again in the Lakes. We did *Great*

Gully on Pavey Ark together, and later even had a go at *Gimmer Crack* in the rain. John certainly visited the Alps at least once but he married soon after going down from Oxford and soon found little time for mountaineering.

John went up to New College Oxford with an open scholarship in physics. His other main interest at Oxford was acting, and he became an active member of the New College Dramatic Society. He later worked with the Tavistock Repertory Company in Islington, and played the part of Estragon in **Waiting for Godot** in the Greenwich Festival.

Professionally he specialised in advertising, marketing and public relations. He set up his own company and worked in this field until his sudden and unexpected death, from cancer, in 1994.

John was strong, brave and courageous. He was a happy man and met his short and devastating illness with great dignity. Throughout his life he was kind and generous both to his family and to his friends. He had two sons and I am grateful to York, his eldest son, who has kindly supplied me with many of the biographical details in this obituary.

Hamish Nicol

One obituary omitted from last year's (1993) CCJ.

Kenneth Pearson

1907 (1939) – 1993

Kenneth C. Pearson was born 26th March 1907, in Birkenhead, Cheshire. He died in West Kirby, Wirral on 13th October 1993, after a short illness.

Ken's interests began with rowing and rugby union. His love of the mountains developed around the start of World War Two and after serving in the RAF, climbing became his main source of recreation. His frequent sorties to the rocks of North Wales, the Lake District and to the high mountains of the Pennine Alps led to the formation of many close and lasting friendships. He often visited Helyg and Ynys Ettws in Snowdonia. In later years, Ken's love of the local mountains continued undiminished but was mixed with visits to other regions, particularly parts of France and Italy where he took great delight and interest in historical architecture and art while gaining enjoyment from the countryside itself.

His active participation in walking and mountaineering continued into the year that he died. He was a member of, and involved in the meetings and social activities of, The Climbers' Club, The Wayfarers and the Alpine Club, where he will be sadly missed by his many friends.

He is also greatly missed by myself, his son Gavin, I being his frequent companion during the earlier years.

Gavin Pearson

Tony Husbands

1923 (1945) – 1995

It is with great regret that we have to announce the death of this long-standing member. He died on January 3rd 1995. A full obituary will appear in the following Journal.

Paul Williams

1946 (1978) – 1995

We have recently received news of the tragic death of Paul Williams. Paul died on Sunday 4th June 1995 from injuries received in a fall from Froggatt Edge. Paul was a very well known and likeable man whose sense of humour found an outlet in virtually any situation. He will be sadly missed by his multitude of friends in the climbing world. A full obituary will appear in the following Journal.

J.R. (Nat) Allen

1928 (1970)–1995

The end of a legend. We are sad to report that, as this journal goes to press, Nat Allen died of cancer on 24th June 1995. A full obituary will appear in the following Journal.

Editor's Note: The 1993 Journal showed Kevin Fitzgerald being roped up by Tony Moulam. The gentleman on Kevin's left was Lesley Hobson, not Sir Jack Longland. (Ref: Tony Moulam)

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Orogenic Zones Bretton Hall

Compiled by Terry Gifford and Rosie Smith
Price £9.95

Since 1987, at Bretton Hall College in West Yorkshire, Terry Gifford has been organising annual single-day investigations into what's new in climbing writing. Like the Alpine Club he was the first in his field and was able to name his event The International Festival of Mountaineering Literature so that later imitators at Banff and Passy must identify themselves by location. This book is a selection from the first five years of the Festival. The arresting title and the startling cover may catch the passing browser off-balance. Well, orogenic simply means making mountains. The hand in the photograph is crimping, if that's the word, on an exhibit in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, sited in the grounds of Bretton Hall.

I write these notes reluctantly. I'm represented by the longest piece in the collection and ought to have been allowed to decline by pleading an interest but the Journal editor wouldn't let go. However, it happens that I missed the first four events so that even though some contributions have since appeared in magazines or books there are things I haven't seen here.

One of the most interesting pieces, by Jill Lawrence, glances at the 'gatekeepers' of climbing literature, the dismayingly small number of publishers and magazine editors who decide what will and what won't be widely available. (Journal editors, regrettably, don't count. Most club journals aren't ordinarily seen in bookshops and aren't reviewed in the magazines. Something has to be done about this. An annual inter-club essay prize might draw attention to some of the excellent material still appearing in the journals.) Lawrence is talking about access for women writers but most men whose material or approach lies outside existing formats find they face similar problems.

This book is Bretton Hall's first publication and let's hope there'll be more to come. The logo on the spine shows the gigantic portal of the Hall and it will be noticed that the gate is wide open. Gifford has enticed all sorts inside and I can't go round the whole zoo. I'd guess that there's something for everyone to disparage here as well as to admire. Perhaps the book doesn't have the solidity of the standard anthologies of recent years. But the anthologists were ransacking the past, straightforward; Gifford has been commissioning material and speculating in futures, a more hazardous enterprise.

Picking through, then, there are observations on climbing writing by Dave Cook and Paul Nunn, and by Audrey Salkeld and Rosie Smith jointly. There's a good deal of light reading. There are surveys of French and Polish mountain literature by competent authorities. There are a couple of careful adjudication speeches from Boardman-Tasker chairs and there are the winning entries from the Festival/High Magazine short story competition, another open gate. There's a scattering of poetry introducing some surprises – a lady who needs to be heard as well as read, Kym Martindale; and a man who can actually turn out a formal sonnet, Tony Hughes. Curiously, the three writers already recognised in the larger world of literature, David Craig, Alison Fell, and Gifford himself, all present themselves as poets here. The whole of this material has been carefully edited by Rosie Smith.

If this collection is already out of print all isn't lost since the Festival goes on. The book doesn't establish that it's an extraordinarily enjoyable and stimulating social occasion, more intimate and more lively, to my mind, than the Kendal Film Festivals of a few years ago or the BMC Conferences. It takes place in pleasant surroundings with various incidental attractions. It seems well worth the sacrifice of a Saturday a year in November.

Harold Drasdo

Over the Himalaya Diadem Books

Kiochiro Ohmori
Price £25.00

This is a picture book of the Himalaya. More specifically, it covers the Nepalese Himalaya, including the Tibetan and Sikkimese borders.

The book starts with an uncontroversial foreword by Chris Bonington, followed by a map of Nepal, which clearly shows the locations of all the mountains in the photos.

This is followed by the photos themselves, 44 double page spreads of the mountains, taken from the air. The technical quality, as judged by my non-expert eye, looks excellent. Amazingly large amounts of detail are visible, and as Bonington points out, the book would be ideal for route-planning for

proposed future expeditions. The contrast seems ideal, and the colour is under rather than over-saturated, erring the right way, but perhaps a little too far.

The pictures' format and presentation are to me less pleasing. The book is horizontally orientated, which means that the photos (double-page) have a very long and thin format. This is used to good effect in some cases: panoramas, and vertical shots of faces, some with astonishing glacier perspectives below. In other cases, I would have preferred a single page of a more conventional shape, uninterrupted by the page divide.

Photo titles are badly handled. The photos are divided into six regions, with all titles for a section printed alongside the first picture of that section. Surely, each title could be given with its photo, making unnecessary the distracting turning-back of pages.

The book ends with a modicum of extras, including an illustrated key to the subjects of each photo. A good book for the avid collector of such coffee-table glossies.

Dave Wilkinson

In Search of Limits
Hodder and Stoughton

Mark Bles
Price £17.99

Basically this is the story of how a group of Army climbers, deliberately chosen without much regard for skill or previous experience, proclaimed with considerable fanfare that they would be the first to climb all the 4,000m alpine peaks in one season.

In the event they climbed 47 of the 61 four thousanders and blamed the mountain weather, which they found disagreeable, for their failure.

Compared with the efforts of say, Moran and Jenkins (who seem to have done 75 of the 61 peaks in one season!) or Alison Hargreaves' superb solos of the big north faces, this story is a non-starter.

The book is decently written and the soldiers are nice, worthy characters. The photographs are unusually dull with the notable exception of one depicting the Duke of Kent climbing as No. 2 on a rope. He is photographed at one of the dramatic highspots of the book when the leader and author, Mark Bles, is in the process of falling into a crevasse – one leg is already nicely in. HRH, who had probably not been very well briefed, is sitting firmly on his backside with the slack rope to the leader loosely held on one hand and not wound round his body. Poor chap, he had probably been dragged along for publicity reasons. And that rather sums it up. The book has the strong scent of an Army PR exercise.

Mike Banks

Hold the Heights – The Foundation of Mountaineering
Hodder and Stoughton

Walt Unsworth
Price £19.99

This history of mountaineering is a delight to read, and is about as comprehensive as one could expect it to be within the confines of a single volume. Comparisons with Chris Bonington's book **The Climbers** will inevitably be made, though the two books are not strictly comparable. Bonington's is the book of the TV series, Unsworth's is a true history. Bonington is selective by giving us his own personal favourites and heroes. He makes no bones about it. Unsworth's book ends at the ascent of Mount Everest, but covers the whole ground from the 15th century to 1953.

Hold the Heights begins as many have done with the ascent of Mont Aiguille in 1492 four months before Christopher Columbus discovered America. On page one, chapter one is a translation of a letter written by Antoine de Ville to the President of Grenoble asking him to come along and see for himself 'the most horrible and frightful passage that I or any of my company have ever seen.' This technique of quoting direct from the climbers themselves comes across very well, is used extensively in the book, and makes for a very direct taut narrative. I particularly liked Botterill's description on his eponymous slab, quoted from the **Yorkshire Ramblers Club Journal** of 1903.

'Not wishing to part with the axe I seized it between my teeth and with my fingers in the best available cracks, I advanced.' Splendid stuff.

The text is peppered with references. You don't have to take them up but it would be silly not to. Did you know for instance, that Professor J.N.Collie discovered Neon gas, and was the first man to use x-rays medically? It is a very well written, scholarly and detailed work, which will prove to be an important manual of reference for mountain historians. There are some felicitous phrases. Mallory did

not know why he wanted to climb Everest. He 'was a man trapped between the hammer of uncertainty and the anvil of ambition.'

Hold the Heights proceeds from Mont Aiguille, to the 'Geneva School' and the first ascent of Mont Blanc. The English did not get to the Alps until about 1840, i.e. till the arrival of railways. When they did they HAD to use local guides since they knew nothing about mountaineering at that time. There was moreover no tradition of mountain climbing in Britain, where they might have learned their trade as we do now. This came much later.

When I first went to the Alps in 1949 it would never have occurred to any of our party of alpine novices to take a guide. We had trained in Scotland, and anyway we could not have afforded it. Unguided alpine climbing did not get started till the last two decades of the 19th century, and the first guideless Briton was Mummery.

Walt Unsworth's book is different from other histories because either in the lines or between the lines it says not only what happened but why it happened. When Tom Bourdillon and I climbed the North Face of the Dru in 1950 we were on our own, because there was no tradition of hard British alpine rock climbing at that time. Mentally we were not prepared, and here Unsworth is absolutely right. Though I had never heard of Colonel Strutt and barely knew of the existence of the Alpine Club, there can be no doubt that his negative influence slowed down the development of British alpinism in the inter-war years.

There are very adequate chapters on climbing in the Americas, in New Zealand, in the Caucasus and of course the Himalaya. Mr Unsworth has every reason to be pleased with his handiwork. Let's hope he will be able to give us the next volume, 1953 to the present day, very soon.

H G Nicol

The Alpine Journal 1994 Vol 99
The Alpine Club/Ernest Press

Edited by Johanna Merz
Price £18.50

The '94 edition of the **AC Journal** has two outstanding merits. One is the diversity of articles in each section of the book; the other is the reference value of the volume as part of a library of previous editions. Mind you, 1994 seems to have been an eventful year, what with centenary celebrations, a 'grande' traverse, a collection of inspired solo ascents and sadly, some notable answers to the call of the Eternal Reaper. This year the Journal contains 37 varied articles in addition to the usual notes, reports, reviews and memoriums, so I will not attempt to comment on all.

The contributions from Martin Moran and Alison Hargreaves are both written in an unassuming style, almost as if they had been co-erced into providing the copy. Moran is no stranger to the extended mountain traverse but what may not be widely appreciated is that each exploit is for the benefit of a particular charity. As working guides, he and Simon Jenkins gave up a valuable 55 days, from the end of June to the middle of August, to traverse the alpine 4,000ers – and all on foot or bicycle. Anyone who has ever been out with Moran will know how extremely fit he is (he holds the record for the Skye Ridge traverse), even so this venture was no picnic. The first few weeks appear to have been a succession of summits reached in blizzards, navigation in white-outs, marooned in bivvy huts and road gradients of up to 1 in 4. The last few weeks developed into a race against their schedule. 80 miles of cycling and the Grand Combin in two days and 33 hours from Col Maudit to the Eccles bivvy hut via Monts Maudit, Bionassay, Blanc and Brouillard demonstrate just how they were having to push themselves. This will be another one for the bookshelf.

Alison Hargreaves also had problems with the weather in her solo round of the big six. Having planned to start several weeks earlier, she can finally get away in the middle of June – 'a window of two days' – 'deep snow at the Leschaux Hut' – 'let the French pair go first or rush ahead?' – 'thin ice covered with powder snow' – 'lowering cloud and icy blasting wind' – 'down the ridge' – 'campsite at Les Bois at 10pm'; all described in a most straightforward manner. Only at the end of the article does the reader discover just how fast she was moving: two and a half hours on the *Shroud*. Of the six north faces, she had to contend with bad weather on all but one, the Dru. On her final route, the Cima Grande, nervousness appears for the first time whilst tackling the early pitches. Only when the hardest pitch is done well, does 'rhythm begin to flow' – and then it starts to rain. All in all quite a hard day's summer.

Last August I met the Director of ISM at the Bertol Hut, and he was lamenting about the disappearance of the North Face of the Pigne, previously a trade route for the school. Nigel Sheperd takes this up with an interesting and uncluttered overview of alpine glacier retreats for which a past Bishop of Geneva bears some of the blame. Sheperd demonstrates how the popular theory of cyclical European mini ice ages is now suspect, apparently the next one should have started a decade ago.

Although nothing can be proven beyond doubt, I tend to agree with him. We don't need scientists telling us that the Mediterranean and Western Pacific are getting warmer or that the eight hottest years on record have all been since 1980. We see it every year in the retreat of familiar glaciers and the dirty, sooty surfaces of once pristine faces. I don't think the Director of ISM would solve his problem with any of the suggestions Andy Macnae makes in his piece about avoiding the Chamonix trade routes. Of some 30-odd proposals, only two are less than TD; well it is the AC Journal. Even less so with Lindsay Griffin's piece about an autumn visit to what seems to be a delightful area for rock routes; the Porcellizzo side of the Bregaglia. Here the granite is 'golden brown' and 'a quality rarely surpassed in the Alps'. If Griffin is that enthusiastic, it must be worth a visit.

Food seems to have been the problem for both Rick Allen on Dhaulagiri and Mick Fowler on Cerro Kishtwar. Allen was the only British member amongst a group of Russians and Georgians who didn't understand the cultural importance to our lad of tea and muesli bars. Fowler's difficulty was how to kill a chicken bought in to relieve a monotonous diet. So that's how it's done. Roger Payne gives a harrowing account of the British attempt on K2 – 'the worst monsoon in 50 years' he says – sounds like more of that global warming stuff. Jerry Gore lays down some guidelines for the alpinist of the 21st century before describing a first ascent in the Paine Group of Patagonia and Graham Little's story of some new routes in Greenland exhibits the best pattern of late 20th century expeditioning; small, compatible and friendly. 30 pages of Everest celebration gives about a fair coverage of the 40th anniversary, with articles by Westmacott, Ward, Gippenreiter, Ralling and Stevens. Two other 'oldies', Curren and Murland, muse about the passing years without letting it get them down. Competition climbing also receives a fair spread with a record of the AC debate held on 26th October '93 and a paper from Blackshaw to the UIAA.

Among the many illustrations, several are particularly interesting for what they depict: the 24 men and women on the summit ridge of Mount Hood in 1894; the observatory that once stood on top of Mont Blanc, the 'awesome size of an avalanche on K2 and the pencil drawing of an 1884 American climber on Half Dome, showing his method of ascent from spike to spike by lasso!

With over 350 pages between the covers it is difficult to do justice to all that is within. Enough to say that this edition really does contain a broad mixture of both entertainment and information.
KC Gordon

A Walker's Guide – Central Switzerland
Cicerone Press

Kev Reynolds
Price £10.99

100 walks in the French Alps
Hodder and Stoughton

Terry Marsh
Price £15.99

I suspect we are all guidebook collectors at heart, poring over them time after time, looking for ideas, trying to find something to disagree with. Come to think of it, we were probably train-spotters in an earlier life, so it was with pleasure that I took these two books to review for the Journal. Both are pocket sized softback books aimed at walkers, from those who can barely do it to those who manage to traverse long rocky ridges with the finesse of a chamois training for a marathon. So, wide appeal.

Kev Reynolds's **Central Switzerland** starts with a map showing clearly the area it covers then moves on after the index to an extensive introduction dealing with the geography, travel arrangements, accommodation, flora and fauna and weather, then moving on to the nitty gritty of the paths and grading, interspersed with a set of good quality colour photographs.

Then, area by area, Kev Reynolds describes his 90 chosen walks with grades, distance and height details, and so on. Easy then to choose something for your mood or fitness. The descriptions seem clear enough, and from my memory of this area, they seem accurate. Certainly with Kev Reynolds's reputation to rely on I doubt if there is much wrong in there.

So it's cheap, succinct, well produced, but maybe a touch dry. It is a bit like a guidebook before they let Paul Williams write it. Perhaps it's because I've just finished re-reading Bill Bryson's **The Lost Continent** that I find, 'In Wangi, the Upper Valley, the track takes you past several farm buildings, waymarks indicate an alternative way off to the right; no comparison with 'I should have known better. My first rule of travel is never to go to a place that sounds like a medical condition and Critz clearly was an incurable disease involving flaking skin. The upshot was I got hopelessly lost.' Perhaps it's the German names – Schachental, Brunnialp, Strangmatt, Galenstock. How can they catch your attention in the manner of Bryson's Coleslaw, Indiana, Frigid, Minnesota, Dry Heaves, New Mexico, Colostomy, Montana?

So it's good value, clear and concise.

Terry Marsh's **100 Walks in the French Alps** does not look quite as good, costs more, has less precise printing quality, and doesn't mention it is only dealing with Savoie and Haute Savoie. OK, so its got the same sort of introduction, gradings and the like, but what is it like as a read? Pretty good, I thought.

You want to go to Chamonix again, the spouse/partner/children don't want to climb and like walking, eating, drinking. Sounds like a dilemma – so leave this book around. Terry Marsh understands that most people don't walk just to feel knackered at the end; most seek inner relief, they wish to know more about their surroundings, and eat and drink. He tells you things, for example, from walk 32, Lac d'Emosson:

'Observant walkers may have noticed (or heard), en route, small red trains ascending the hillside across the Torrent de Barberine. Here a combination of funicular railway, a 'train panoramique', and a small monorail, hoick visitors from the village of Le Chatelard...Yet there is an even greater secret here, hidden away in the recesses of the Swiss Vallee du Trient. Geologically-minded walkers may well recognise the dark rock formations as being the type in which fossils can be found, but would anyone expect, at such altitude, to find the fossilised footprints of dinosaurs?'

Still not 'Dullard, Illinois' stuff, but pretty good. I certainly found I could simply sit and read this book, and it's littered with references to places to eat and drink.

Both books different. Both good.

Hugh Davis

A Hard Day's Summer – Six Classic North Faces Solo
Hodder and Stoughton

Alison Hargreaves
Price £16.99

One of the most important factors in being a good author is to have something worthwhile to write about. In the 1960s, the great French alpinist and guide Gaston Rebuffat wrote a famous book **Starlight and Storm** in which he gives a spirited account of his ascents of six of the great north faces of the Alps: the Eiger, Matterhorn, Grandes Jourasses, Dru, Piz Badile and Cima Grande. One could quibble about his choice – the first three would probably be on any informed alpinist's list, but other north faces (e.g. Droites, Finsteraarhorn) might contend with the other three. But Rebuffat's choice is undoubtedly six OF the best, if not indisputably THE six best. Subsequently, these six north faces have been regarded as a sort of north-facer's yardstick, a target for ambitious alpinists, and are frequently referred to as THE six north faces.

A number of previous alpinists had climbed them all in one season, but in the summer of 1993, Alison Hargreaves became the first person, man or woman, to SOLO them all in one season.

Small-minded readers might ask what sort of record is that? Personally, I'm not much interested in even defining such records. I regard that as the stuff of athletics but not of mountaineering, but others may wish to debate such matters, so here is a bit of nit-picking. Does Alison's ascent of the Lauper route (albeit by an apparently new variation) really qualify as an ascent of the Eiger North Face, as it does not lie on the true 'nordwand'? Does an ascent of the *Shroud* (not on the main central part of the north face) with descent (in bad weather) by the Hirondelles Ridge without going to the summit really qualify as an ascent of the North Face of the Grandes Jorasses? (Alison did follow it up with the *Croz Spur*, indisputably a complete ascent of this north face, the following November in an extended 'season'). Was her ascent of the North Face of the Cima Grande valid, as she traversed above the difficulties but below the summit to the descent ridge (which many parties do)?

I am not trying to detract from her achievement. I ask these daft questions partly as devil's advocate, but also because she does rather set herself up for them by claiming the record in the first sentence inside the dust-jacket of her book. Do I recognise her achievement? I'm not in the least interested in such 'records'. She climbed what she climbed, and what she climbed were by any measure six huge and demanding routes, and this was a superb performance.

Anyone who has done any ONE of these routes will confirm their greatness and seriousness, but to solo them ALL inside a year was a magnificent achievement of body and spirit. Moreover, Alison did so in poorer than average summer weather, and in very fine style, rapidly and unlike some continental media-driven record-setters, without expensive valley support and helicopter transport to and from the routes.

But my main task is to review Alison's book rather than her climbs. Alison is an exceptional mountaineer. But her writing is noticeably unexceptional. Perhaps this is its strength. The book is not great literature; it is a straightforward account of her summer's activities on and off the mountains.

This is totally unpretentious writing, and easy reading. I am not the most determined reader, but I had no difficulty picking the book up and reading it at one sitting. This says much for its style, but also points to a possible fault: it is very short, only 117 pages to the body of the book. The rest is made up to 158 pages with various appendices. One of these I found interesting (the potted history of the six mountains), but some of the others I confess to not even reading in full (e.g. the list of equipment and supplies I'm not really interested in how many pairs of underwear she took). I do not like the overabundance of appendices, but I'm glad they were included, if only to make up the publisher's weight, rather than to pad out the main text and lose its conciseness.

I suppose her appendix of sponsors and suppliers did have to be included, but did she also have to make frequent and to me annoying references in the main text: '...I refuelled with a litre of Isostar and Jordan's Frusli bars.', '...I climbed into my favourite Brasher boots...'? This sort of thing may be good for buttering up the sponsors, but it is distracting to the reader.

The book starts with a couple of chapters about the background to the author's alpine climbing, and motivation for the six north faces project. We then follow her, her husband Jim ('JB'), their two children in Perkins the landrover, along with kitchen sink and a mountain of gear (both climbing and domestic) out to the Alps in late March 1993. She then had a frustrating period of over two months in which none of the six was possible, due to the bad weather, a situation any alpinist will sympathise with. But this did enable her, in between caring for her offspring, to get herself VERY fit, which was of long-term benefit to the project. Although he is only written about in short bursts, JB emerges as a source of strength and stability in the background during this period, as well as later on while she was climbing.

It is not until chapter 5 and mid-June that the weather relents sufficiently to do the *Shroud*, first of her six. The remainder of her account is of a frantic fight with time and the weather, to get them all done. The writing does not include any philosophy or insight into her motivation for such climbing. Perhaps this is better than the over-agonising and soul-searching that we get from some authors. We only get hints, occasionally heart pulling, of the conflicts which she must have felt between success and fear, motivation and family ties. The account ends with the *Comici* route on the Cima Grande. I would have liked to read about the *Croz*, which is only mentioned in an appendix.

Finally, the women's angle. Thankfully, the book contains no overt feminism. But the unwritten message is clear enough. Women can perform well on big mountains. For some years, they have been doing so on rock, but like athletics, where the marathon was not on the women's programme for years after they competed well in shorter distance events, so the endurance side of women's climbing has lagged behind. This book points the way to other potentially ambitious women mountaineers.

Dave Wilkinson

Short Walks in the Lake District

60 Walks for Short Days, Wet Days – and with the Family

Michael Joseph

Bob Allen

Price £14.99

I was not expecting to find a package on the floor when I came in, and if I had been, I would not have expected to find **Short Walks in the Lake District** inside it. So I said 'oh', and put it down.

But I picked it up again, before making tea, for my immediate impression was that this is a very attractive book. Now that it has been looked at, read, and returned too, I have no cause to revise my first impression. I think it is a splendid publication, and would recommend anyone to have an instant impulse, and go and get it.

Simple in concept, uncluttered in presentation, it does precisely what the title would lead you to expect it did, and really nothing else. The contents page is clear, the introduction short and well judged. The book contains descriptions of 60 walks of an average of about five miles each, arranged in three groups – the south-west, the south-east and the north. Each walk is described in about a page of text, nicely broken up around well-chosen full or half-page photographs (taken in all weathers), a clear, neatly drawn map, and a little summary box to tell you of your likely level of exertion. From my chair I was pleased by recollection of the familiar, but more than that, enthused to explore the unfamiliar.

I had one or two niggles, but nothing to disturb my overall impression. I might have chosen a different picture for the front cover, and done away with the sub title. I looked in vain for a note about the pictures. The text is enlivened by historical anecdote, a sympathy for geology, viewpoints, and the odd building, but, apart from the moorhens at Cunswick Tarn, there is hardly any mention of wildlife, nor indeed of flora – not that I mind finding all this out for myself. I suppose my biggest niggle though was the size of the book, what I would call half a coffee table book size. It is a bit too big to carry, yet the detail in the text, and clarity of the maps, might make you reluctant to leave it behind.

So buy the book – go take a walk. You will have no problem in knowing where to park, and once you have parked, you will notice that as often as not, and even better, you can take two walks from the same place, not just one.

Henry Folkard

Review of **Countdown to Rescue** by Bob Maslen-Jones

An Apology

The 1993 Journal included a review of this book by Hugh Davis. The Editor wishes to apologise to Mr Maslen-Jones for certain comments included in the review with which he has taken issue. The review was not published with malicious or defamatory intent. However Mr Maslen-Jones has drawn to my attention that references in the review appear to question his competence as a member of Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team and his motives in writing the book. The Editor is concerned to discover that such an interpretation may be placed upon the review and wishes to record that this was not his intention and to apologise for any distress or embarrassment inadvertently caused by the review.

Area Notes

North Wales 1994

Curious – people are become so secretive. There are ‘activists’ by the score scurrying hither and yon, but ask for precise word of their activity and you receive only the sage look, the mysterious hint before they’re off sunwise again to some elusive location ‘between Snowdon and the sea’, as Winthrop Young remarked of activists from an earlier time. Which at least proves that the syndrome (why should it be thought a problem?) is at all new. If your research extends to the new route books in Pete’s Eats or Eric’s Cafe (those hut logs of former years at Ynys or Helyg are now as anti-democratic and defunct as the tarbuck knot of my youth, which no-one ever used and no-one could ever tie), you’ll find there for the most part, record of innumerable insignificant previously-climbed-but-unwritten-up verminous variations by which members of the University of East Scunthorpe Climbing Club (mock not -Livesey planned his great campaign of the early ‘70s from the safe haven of East Scunthorpe, before the chartering and incorporation of that metropolis’s university) stake their tenuous claims on fame and our attention. If you don’t believe me, look for yourselves.

Amongst the dross, the diamonds, and some of them in all conscience are large enough. There is, for example, the route done by ‘Twid’ (Mick Turner) and Andy Roberts (former fast bowler and currently coach to the West Indies cricket team) on South Stack’s Yellow Wall. It is to the right of *Sind*, which I recall from almost 30 years ago gives you backache, a dry throat, fear-ache, and no doubt other ailments too. Anyway, Twid’s route is called *The Bog Softy*, is E6 6b, for reasons unknown to me or perhaps you either. The leader is said to require friends, though whether these are to lower him a top-rope, give him a massage or console him afterwards is also unclear. I require friends too at times but do not advertise this fact. It is against the best stiff-upper lip traditions of British mountaineering, which are being everywhere undermined. Which leads me on to Blacksmith’s Zawn – so called because of a ferocious character, seven feet tall and undoubtedly direct from dark Celtic legendary, who patrols its (if a greengrocer’s apostrophe appears here, as happens all the time in everything I write for these damned publications, blame the accursed sub-editor, for I plead innocence!) top and threatens to toss climbers into the sea. There is, it must be stated, no connection whatsoever between this character, who until you meet him only exists in old story, and the name of George Smith’s and Leigh McGinleigh’s E7 6b route here, *The Thug* – climbed, so it is said, with Ms Deborah Quinn, whose robust tongue lashing from behind Pete’s Eats counter is one of the delights of Llanberis – as in her remarkable aperçu proclaimed to a crowded café one morning in loud Scouse accent and directed at Messrs Smith, Newton, Crook, Wainwright, McGinleigh & Co.: ‘Youse guys, yer don’t go climbin’, do yer – yer just go plyin wi’ each other.’ However, Debbie apart, since George Smith’s name has come up in this conversation (sorry, report), twice now, I should tell you that down by Rhiw, on the leaning wall of the bluff at the seaward end of the so-called gritstone crag, which is actually gabbro, a climb has appeared called *Ultracrack (Too Hard for George Smith)*. It was climbed with fewer ethics than might be seen to prevail at a Tory party conference, is E4 6b, and the inference to be drawn from its name is, it must be said, unproven. As, too, is the inference in the name of George’s and Adam Wainwright’s new route to the left of *Tyrannosaurus Rex* in Wen Zawn, *Mister Softy*, E5 6b, which creeps finally out of the void on to the final moves of that long and tedious traverse hereabouts the name of which momentarily escapes me. It is, however, very long.

Interesting thing, though, length. You’d have thought our technological chieftains would by now have got it perfectly tabulated, but wonder of wonders – a sphere where the subjective still prevails! For example, I took my son up *The Fang* recently, which is described as having a top pitch 120ft long. And I’ve rested secure in that belief, never bothering to measure it, for 30 years. You see, it FEELS that length – chiefly because there’s a section of 15 feet or so without any runners. But when, on this particular evening and because of a marginal involvement in the new Tremadog guide, I came to measure it, it came out as 24 metres, which is less than 80ft. Even this 50% increment seems parsimonious by comparison with several routes of 120ft which Pat Littlejohn has climbed on the 40ft-high Elephant Rock in Nant Gwynant. Pleasing to report, therefore, Martin Crook’s and Andy Newton’s *Exploding Buttress* on the West Buttress of Lliwedd, which is 1,000 feet long, E3, with innumerable 5b and 5c pitches, and quite the best route ever to be climbed on Lliwedd, especially for those skilled in the placing of RPs. This may, of course, be simple expedience, since Martin is the only climber in the universe whose rack consists entirely of RPs. On the other side of Snowdon’s summit, on Llechog, myself and Tom Leppert climbed *The Circus Animal’s Desertion*, which is E2 with three 5b pitches, and nearly 400 ft long. We were considerably bemired and there were grievous complaints in

the course of the ascent about the quality of Llechog mud. It takes a direct line up the left arête of the *Resurrection* slabs. On the subject of *Resurrection*, there seems to be a tendency – perhaps because of the first ascent description, for this climb to be called *Erection*, which is the name Hugh Banner, our former President, gave to a 20ft direct finish of his which was not even contemplated on the first ascent. I'd suggest it be described as the *Erectile Finish* henceforth, with the addition that it is short, and short-lived, though quite stiff for an old man. But enough of this. Other things happened elsewhere – on Gallt yr Ogof, on North Stack, on Craig Rhiw Goch, but you'll know about them in due course. So be patient, as well as assured that much remains, even though the pioneers of 2024 are likely to be told that George Smith did it 30 years ago . . .

Jim Perrin

Peak District 1994

The film **The Magnificent Seven** starts with a memorable scene in which no-one is prepared to drive the hearse to the cemetery. Yul Brynner (the man in black) utters the immortal words "Oh hell, I'll drive". Such was the position in the Peak District this year when every well-known activist turned down the chance to write these notes. They can manage to climb or train almost daily but putting pen to paper (unless it is for commercial gain) must nowadays take second place to serious work such as servicing drills, shopping for the latest bolts or recharging 'their' batteries. Smiler eventually had no alternative but to bring an old gunfighter out of retirement to do the business. So I'll drive the hearse . . . but be prepared to duck when the bullets fly round the limestone crags.

All recent Peak District activity should be put into clear perspective by first acknowledging the repeats of *Indian Face* on Cloggy by Nick Dixon and Neil Gresham. That is what British climbing is all about – balls before bolts (whatever your gender). And make no mistake women are catching up fast as for example was shown recently when Ruth Jenkins broke into 8a+ on Rubicon's *Caviar*.

At the outset a few repeats are worth highlighting, and of these Seb Grieve's bold lead of Curbar's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* deservedly set the pace. In the muscle stakes Robin Barker's second ascent of *Monumental Armblaster* stood out as did Nick Sellers' flash of *Yemesis* (8a+). *Hubble* at a mighty 8c+ was repeated by both John Gaskin as well as Malcolm Smith. The latter also made an impression with his one-day storming of *Fontainbleau*, 8b, on Minus Ten Wall at Stoney.

With the Chatsworth guidebook in its final stages of preparation it is perhaps fitting to work anti-clockwise round the gritstone edges starting at Black Rocks. Hitting the big 'E' numbers we have *Make it Slappy* E6 6b, Simon Hunter's pushy solo of the right arête of *The Cube* and at the same grade Rob Mirfin's *Cybertron Mission* up the right arête of *Finale Wall Direct*. Out in front however we have the 'Return of Dawes' to the velvet silence area. *Jumpin' on a Beetle* at E7 6c was to set the trend but *The Angel's Share* at a dizzy E8 7a, was to be one of the hardest routes of the year.

Another spectacular E8 6c, *Gom Jabber* was to be done on Gardom's Edge by Simon Jones who pushed his neck out a long way on the dangerous arête and wall in the bay left of *Make it Snappy*.

Modest little Baslow Edge was propelled into the big league with Richie Patterson's *Poppers* E5 6c, up the wall left of *Grand Potato*.

Curbar has always provided a big incentive for each generation and four routes stand out this year. Paul Tattersall opted for the wall left of *Flake Crack* to give *Five at the Most* E4 6b.

Things now start to get serious! Soloing the arête right of *Peapod* hardly gave Dave Pegg *Peas of Mind* at E6 6a. For those whose forte is dynoing for jams then have a word with Paul Mitchell before taking *Tube of Foster's* direct. *I Bet He Drinks Carling Black Label* went at E6 6c with a recommendation for a 'spotter'. A few 'catchers' would seem more apt. Any idiot can spot a falling climber but the trick is to prevent gravity from having the last laugh. Robin Barker's *Direct Start* to *Diet of Worms* went at E7 6b – one of several E7s to be done this year. Barker also stole another E7 7a on Froggatt Edge where he succeeded on the roof right of *Strapadictomy* to give *Cock Robin*. The other E7 at 6c/7a was *Dick Van Dyke goes Ballistic* to the left of *Indoor Fisherman*, a pushy solo by Dave Pegg. Another good effort was by young Darren Thomas with *Fatal Attractions* E6 6b, the wall between North Climb and Science Friction.

Thomas also left his mark on Burbage Edge with *Navana* E6 6b, the wall left of *Living in Oxford*. Bill Birch, on *The King's Return* E2 5b, found a line between *Great Crack* and *Big Chimney* but it was Dave Pegg who stole the big one. *Three Blind Mice* E7 6c, is a very thin bit of climbing to the right of

Long Tall Sally. Also on Burbage was Johnny Needham's *Gazebo Watusi*, E6 6b, up the airy arête left of *Obscurity*.

Pausing at Burbage is perhaps a good time to mention **Bouldering in the Peak District**, a guidebook by Allen Williams (backed by **On the Edge**) at £8.95. Love it or hate it, but we must ask ourselves the question, do we want masses of climbers descending on the boulder problems with a tick list to go at?

Across the valley on Higgarr Tor saw Neil Foster returning to complete the very obvious left arête of the Leaning Block. *Block and Tackle* finally went at E6 6c – a good name for what some seconds might need to complete a modern hard route.

The recent Stanage topo guidebook has not only triggered off much discussion as to whether or not we want the topo approach, and what the format ought to be (cheap and basic or more professional and sophisticated) but it has also pointed out the remaining gaps as well as one or two people's pet projects. It certainly galvanised Neil Foster into action for a haul of at least four good new routes. *Headless Chicken* E5 6b, is the roof to the left of *Off With His Head*. The hanging arête to the left of *Chameleon* has been screaming out to be done for years and Neil proved himself to be the *Master of Disguise* (now is that a pun?) at E6 6b. *Carpe Diem* E6 6c, is the intimidating roof and wall left of *Cave Eliminate*, but perhaps Neil's most scary route was *The Nine O'clock Watershed*, E6 6c, up the arête right of *Paranoid*.

Blank arêtes have certainly caught the imagination this year as shown by the *Flight of Ideas* E6 7a, caught by Simon Jones when he pushed the boat out on the arête to the left of *Tower Face*. Another Stanage addition was *Brittle Star* E3 5c, by that well known proof reader's nightmare – Mike Przyuredzki.

Across the Pennines are the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good is the weather which does on rare occasions come right at last. The bad are the intruders who descend to poach on foreign ground, and just to prove that beauty is in the eye of the beholder the ugly are really the gems of the Black Peak wilds. Two contenders stand out at the top of the list of Chew Valley new routes. The awesome wall to the right of *Pulpit Ridge* at Ravenstones gave Andy Popp a *Black Mountain Collage* at E7 6b. Even more horrific was *MadMan* E7 6b (no, don't ask the obvious question) the holdless arête right of *Trident* at Wimberry. And while you are trying to imagine that, just pause to consider the factors which combined to make Dave Pegg decide to solo the route.

Paul Clark's trilogy of new routes has provided a welcome addition to the repertoire of the unfashionable Charnel Stones. *From the Cradle to the Grave* E3 6a, is the slab to the right of *The Sprog*, *Paul's Arete* E4 6b, is the arête right of *Paul's Perambulation*, while harder still is *Sad, Tired and Old* E5 6b, up the centre of *Temptation Slab*.

On the Bleaklow massif, new routes are something of a rarity, particularly on Laddow, but Keith Ashton and Jim Moran managed to squeeze in *The Tea Drinking Tabby* E1 5b, as well as *Poking the Fire* E2 6a, the arête left of *Chimney Breast*. Jim Moran also made the pilgrimage to Barrow Stones for *Doc Holliday* E3 6a.

Few people have taken advantage of dry spells to search out some of Kinder's remaining big lines – amazing when one considers the scarcity of good gritstone lines in other areas. Andy Barker and Paul Mitchell have however made the effort and been well rewarded. On Chinese Wall, right of *Suspense*, Andy threw out the challenge. *Wakey, Wakey Glossop* E3 6b, as well as demanding *A Pound of Flesh* E5 6a, from the high-quality roof above *Necrosis*. Along on Ashop Edge Andy gave Kinder a highly technical pitch with *Glock Over* E4 6c, the wall to the right of *Machine Gun*. Paul Mitchell's *Dizzie Gillespie* E5 6a, up the roof flake to the right of *Swinging in the Gallery* has been given a big billing and has been quoted as being better than *Strapadictomy*. That should get them going. *Peach Finger* E1 6a, was up the black overhangs to the left.

Working down past the Downfall which failed to attract any takers this year, Upper Edale Rocks provided a bigger pull – yet again. Paul Mitchell attacked the left-hand end of the crag over a roof for *Gather Ye Gritbuds* E3 5c, but it was Andy Barker's solos which gave the big numbers. *Help Me!* (with varying numbers of Es at the end) went at E5 6a, up the right-hand side wall of the overhanging block. Even harder was the challenging line up the left-hand arête of the block which has been eyed for some time now. *Stigmata* went at a heady E6 6c. The final Barker/Mitchell offerings on Kinder were on Crowden Tower East at the right-hand end. *Dour Power* E2 5b, and *Pocket Battle* E1 6a, both taking an arête and a wall.

As the sun sets in the west so one's thoughts finally turn to the Roaches area where there are no easy pickings to be had. On the Third Cloud, the blunt nose and wall left of *Elastic Arm* gave Richard Pickford *Sands of Time* E4 6a. On the Roaches between *Barriers of Time* and *Ackit* a very technical, as yet

unnamed line, has gone to Paul Clark at a massive E6 7a. Ramshaw yielded one of its final problems through the roofs beside *Brown's Crack* when Rob Mirfin finished *Sketching Wildly* at E6 6c. Even harder was Justin Critchlow's big push up the slabby arête to the right of *The Crank*. Stringing together several 6c moves without any protection gave *Ultimate Sculpture* at E8 7a+. Anyone fancy making the second ascent? Also, on Hen Cloud, Justin soloed the wall right of *Footpath Chimney* at E4 6c.

Disappearing into the deepest south in the Churnet Valley Gary Gibson became firmly esconced between Robin Hood and Maid Marion to *Gain Entry to Your Soul* E3 6b.

And that is all that has happened in Peak rock-climbing this year. . . apart from a few little antics on the limestone. *Frank and Ken's Excellent Adventure* E1 5a, (Connell and Wilson) in Peak Dale Quarry proved far more interesting than the sordid little saga which was to follow. Basically what happened was that a couple of good guys spent hours gardening a lot of loose rock in Harpur Hill Quarry. Unfortunately they then mutated into monsters and became drill happy, thinking themselves to be above accepted ethics. (One name even appears in the CC Handbook for 1992 albeit without an address.) A whole junkyard of bolts appeared (over 100 bolts on 25 routes including three helpless VSs) and when Citizen Ken saw the extent of the vandalism there was a right old stink. Bolts were chopped, bolts went back, bolts were chopped. . . accusations were made. And it still rumbles on.

What is serious is that over 10 years ago Neil Foster said to me 'Geoff, bolts are coming – you won't be able to stop them'. Another well-known climber predicted that we would soon see bolts in gritstone. The problem is that with the advent of modern climbing walls and sport climbing a new philosophy has arrived to challenge the basic tenants (and the tenants!) of climbing to which we hold so dearly. A wedge (a strangely appropriate term) is being driven into the heart of climbing to create a gulf between traditional and sport climbers. However, for the sport climbers to practise their 'art' they need rock. Beware though, for like the horrible predatory New Zealand earthworm which has now obtained a foothold in Britain, they will breed rapidly and not content with overcrowding they will spread in search of new territory. From a foothold on the overhanging limestone crags they are even now spreading on to traditional territory. It is amazing what can be done with even a single bolt. And don't be fooled by excuses for exceptions to the rule, such as, 'it's only a grotty little quarry anyway'. Or, 'well we cleaned it up so we have the RIGHT to choose what ethics prevail'.

There is not even just one excuse for using bolts, there are many, some more insidious than others. For example they: are used to replace 'tatty old gear'; have been placed in existing boltless routes; have been placed to increase the number of bolts on an existing climb; have been placed where there is bomb-proof natural protection; have been used instead of natural tree belays (to protect the trees) so climbers can lower off to the ground.

Let us look in on the current limestone scene as portrayed in the magazines. In the September *High* we read that in Chee Dale '...the cordless drills have been whirring their appreciation'. Well that's a good start to warm your hearts! Perhaps only one correspondent got it wrong. Let's swap magazines to *On the Edge*. There, to quote Jon Barton, 'The epicentre of activity has been at the Cornice in Cheedale, which is drier this year than anyone can remember'. 'Seb Grieve has gone to great lengths to make it a safe crag.' '... a range of three-star routes from 6c+ to 8b all safely equipped thanks to the Peak Bolt Fund [of which more anon] administered by Seb Grieve.' Since when was climbing intended to be a safe activity? In the modern parlance the word 'safe' now means 'popular'. Significantly extra bolts were added to *Martial Music* – but at least they were chopped. 'Old gear' was also replaced by bolts on *Une Crime Passionnel* – but therein lies the rub; what is a crime nowadays and what is perfectly normal behaviour.

So what's new on The Cornice, now home of over 40 highly popular modern sport routes? At F7a+ Seb Grieve launched in with *Gardener's Question Time*, a direct on *Rue Morgue*. He also weighed in at F7b+ with *Succubus* (no pun intended) to the left of *Shazam*. By F8a we have Chris Wright in action with *Wright On*, the wall and bulges left of *Taylor Made*. Mike Lea's *Streamline*, at the same grade, was reported as going through the traverse of *This is the River* to finish right of *Rapid City*. (I suspect however that someone had crossed *This is the Sea* with *That was the River*. You can get just too aquatically clever at times.) Keith Sharples will confuse older climbers with his route *Nemesis* (a Gray West route on the other Cornice. Alright, Brachiation Dance to you!). Keith's *Nemesis* at F8a+ breaks out of *Monumental Armblaster*. (At this point I notice that damned French grades have even invaded my computer keyboard with F1 to F12. We'll soon need bigger keyboards! And in any case why can't we put right our own grading system so that the seriousness of the lead is reflected in the E grade? If the protection is bombproof then a route can't be E4, E5, E6 or E7 by definition). This was quickly repeated by Robin Barker, Mike Lea, then John Welford. Another fine achievement was when Ian Vickers flashed the unrepeatable *Roof Warrior*. The culmination to much effort over many months finally came when

Seb Grieve completed his pet project **K3** which at F8b is second only to *Monumental Armblaster* in the crag's graded list.

Beyond the terribly exciting world of The Cornice microcosm there was other activity. Sharples crossed the water to The Nook to become *The Duke of Earl (Grey)* F7b+, taking an obvious line of metal objects through the bulges left of *Michael Foot Jam*. Nettle Buttress saw some action when Chris Gore homed in on the wall between *No Light* and *General Incompetence*. His *Toys for the Boys* went at an easy F8a. Also in Chee Dale was *Super Orchid* F7b, by Tony Coutts, a line between Long Wall and Two-Tier Buttress. Finally, on Chee Tor a fine rib left of *Duel in the Sun* gave Andy Popp *Theology* F7b+, while Tony Coutts bolted *Mahoopma*, E5 6c (what no French grade?), left of *Dogonne Groove*.

In Water-cum-Jolly a couple of significant lines appeared after the usual 'boring' effort. The headwall left of *Honeymoon Blues* gave Malc Taylor *Cause for Almoany* F7c, while on The Cornice a direct finish to *Albertrossity* went at F8b to Simon Reid. On Raven Tor Mark Pretty had *Hot Flushes* to the right of *Verbal Abuse* at E7 6c.

Searching the rest of the limestone revealed only two good lines in the south. On Wildcat the wall left of *Great Crack* gave Zaff Ali an E5 6b, *Waiting for an Alibi*. Over in Dovedale it was reported that a shiny new blot(!) had marred the rock to the right of *Deltoid Shuffle*. The explanation was to be *Gastrocnemius Rex* E5 6b, by Gary Gibson. Naughty, naughty, Gary! Will more bolts now appear on Ravens Tor and will another crag be sacrificed for human greed?

The bolting malaise is, as predicted, spreading rapidly and laid down guidelines (including agreed BMC policy) are already being wantonly flaunted. Certainly there seems little respect for tradition when some sport climbers are determined to create routes of all grades with equally spaced bolts, irrespective of the climbing difficulty or the availability of natural protection. Just as chalk was eventually accepted by the Clean Hand Gangs who had held up their palms and said 'NEVER', bolting is beginning to infiltrate and taint the very heart of Peak District climbing. Among the ranks of those who have so far adopted a pure and traditional approach are climbers who have sold out to grab some of the few remaining bits of rock which would not likely for some time be ascended using traditional protection. Having got this far let me leave you with a few thoughts by lifting a set of 1983 quotes from an article in the CCJ.

'The utmost attempt to place adequate protection must be made before resorting to the bolt kit.'

'Bolts placed must be minimal in number and must attempt to uphold the British tradition of boldness.'

'Clearly we should search our souls deeply before resorting to placing bolts and try not to be so selfish with our available rock, that we must try to achieve a result at any price. History has shown many times that what is impossible for us today, may be possible tomorrow, sometimes even for us! We should be careful – the eyes of the world are upon us – let us not lose our tradition for ethics and boldness.'

Those words by Keith Sharples are as valid today as they were over a decade ago.

Geoff Milburn (A worried Peak Series Editor)

Pembroke 1994

Pembroke missed the 100 mark by a mere two this year, and yet again Range West boasted over half of these new routes – despite the lack of easing on restrictions and the absurdly long brain numbingly boring briefings, the lengthening of which must be another cunning plan on the army's behalf to discourage unwanted climbers.

But first to the less contentious and esoteric north, where Steve Quinton and Les Welch climbed *Slope On A Rope*, E1 5a,5c,5b at Carn Porth Llong, a line weaving in and out of *Necromancer*. D.Juchan and Derek Carnell visited Pencarnan and Llenrac slabs adding four new lines, including *Blade Runner* E2/3 5b, a shallow corner and scimitar-shaped slab right of *Zawn Corner* and *Dekapod* E1 5b, 1pt aid, a narrow recess and flake 30 feet further right – Steve Quinton promptly removed the point of aid but stuck to the original grade!

At the new area of Pwll Arc, Nat and R.Allen climbed *Flag Crack* HV Diff, *Snatch Crack* S, and *Robbers Corner* VS 4c, while D.Juchan soloed *Easily Led* S, the prominent flake crack on the north-east corner of the stack.

And so down to the army personnels' playground – Range West, where game shooting (which included a peregrine and the likelihood of coughs this year...), horse riding and commercial ventures

which ruin the 'sensitive cliff top', are happily ignored and take place all year round, while climbers, even though ringing ones, are continued to be scorned upon.

Gaps appear to be forever opening at Western Walls, where Alan Leary and Paul Donnithorne added a handful of routes including *Fellow Hoodlums* E1 5b, a line left of *Van Gogh* and in a similar vein, attacking three overlapping roofs. Emma Alsford and Roy Thomas found a way into the attractive crackline left of *Bumble Three* via a tenuous traverse from the right, producing *Stiff Upper Lip* E1 5b, while Dave Wilkinson and J. Butler added nine routes to this area between Severe and E1, of which *Flatulence S*, is one of three in the smelly zawn – cows and sheep either jump or are pushed down a hole in the back of this zawn, creating an extremely unpleasant stench in this area!

At Funlands Alsford retaliated to Tim Robbins' *Whores Drawers* with *The Limp Pimp* HVS 5a, accompanied by Donnithorne and Marco Paganuzzi, who then wandered over to Linney point and managed to find a new line up the solid front face – *Old Sparky* E2/3 5c, which follows the very steep crackline right of *Last Orders*.

The most developed area for this year has to be Arch Cavern zawns, which have produced nearly 20 new routes from Severe to E2. In the west tunnel John Hornsby and Bob Allen climbed *Toby, the Tiny Tasty Ranger* HS 4b, after Graham Houstons new born son – so named because of Alison Fells reference to Graham! On the same wall Pat Devine and Allen climbed *Shorter Than The Briefing* HS 4b, although I challenge anything that could claim to be longer! Andy Robinson and Kevin Sales followed an unusual line through a tube at the back of the cavern, *Wormholes In Space* HVS 4c, while Donnithorne and John Harwood climbed some routes in the east tunnel, one of which took the hanging groove in the headwall, *Beatrice* E2 5c. Also in this vicinity Allen, Devine and Hornsby climbed *Who Shot (Port) Stanleys Goose?* VS 4c, and this was responded with *It Was The Colonel In The Kitchen With A Revolver* E1 5a by Pete Johnson and the same trio – Apparently Colonel Portman was caught for shooting wild geese in the Falklands! The same four added a short quality route just right of *Scorpion* – *Breaking Loose* VS 4c, something Cooky's presence will never do from Range West.

Gareth Lambe and Nicole Matton moved from their usual stomping ground at Bulliber to Juggy Point and 40 Foot Wall, where they found *Prelude* S and *Tatie Mac* S respectively. At Mount Sion East Donnithorne, Alsford and Paganuzzi found another way to breach the huge roofs with *When The Levee Breaks* E3/4 4c, 6a, 4b, out of the cave and up the zigzag crack left of *Outlander*. Alsford slipped in another couple of short routes at the tidal Perimeter Bays area – *The Colonel's Shorts* VS 4c, through an overlap and up a groove with Bill Wright and Sam Sturgess, so named because the commandant had been spotted in a spectacular pair of donald duck beach shorts that day, and *Headless Chicken* HVS 5a, with Donnithorne, up a deceptively steep wall opposite.

We now take a jump over the fence to a disclaimer-free Range East, where Dave Scott-Maxwell and Paul Deardon climbed the chimney/aven left of *Haven* 17 in Flimston Bay – *Teddy Bears Picnic* VS 4b. In Bullslaughter Bay the Donnithorne and Leary duo made a rising traverse on the east face of the grass-topped narrow promontory – *Sidewalk* E1 5a, and then swapped leads to ascend the south facing facet of the stack in the centre of the bay, *Walking the Dog* Diff. In hot pursuit were the two fleabitten mutts, Rags and Sky, soloing, needless to say!

Towards the year end, at Mewsford, part of the south face hit the deck, unfortunately destroying a number of classic lines, including *Idle Threats*. On the west face Donnithorne and Alistair Hopkins followed a rib above the deep rock pool, right of *Never Say Goodbye*, and moved into a nicely positioned groove in the upper face – *Wishing Well* E2 5a, 5b and Dave Branch climbed a groove to the right, *Stay Sharp* VS 4c. Crispin Waddy and Andy Donson developed *Lockjaw* E4 6a, at Rusty Walls, a superb hanging arête and narrow slab right of *The Sounding*, and close by Damien Carroll and Bob Watson were busy discovering a new area right of Misty Wall. They produced a number of worthwhile routes on Foggy Wall, including *The Wrong Trousers* E1 5b and *The Devious Penguin* HVS 5a.

At Bosherton Head Donnithorne and Alsford made a rising traverse across the south face, with a wildly exposed second pitch, *High Life* E1 5a, 5b, after which he then managed to find an unclimbed line just outside Huntsmans Leap with Martin Slee – *Blind Magic* E2 5b, which traverses onto the face left of *Myola*. Dave Viggers, accompanied by Carroll and Watson squeezed in another line on Stuntsmans Buttress – *Two Men and a Scrote* HVS 5a – although I'm not sure who's who!

John and Ann Arran free-climbed the futuristic roof crack of *Ignorance Is Bliss*, through the huge cave at Trevalen, renaming it *Horizontal Pleasures* E6/7 6b and from the same point they also traversed right under the roof to join *A Walrus' Dream* – producing *Bin Cat* E4 6a. Another impressive lead was taking place next door at St Govans, where Andy Donson and Mike Rose blasted off *In Orbit* E5 6b, a line between *The Call Up* and *Kraken*, crossing the rubble chimney from right to left.

Lastly we move much further east to Stackpole, where yet again Donnithorne, who can leave no

place untouched, created an introduction to *Plane Sailing* with Leary, **Red October** E3 5b, 5b, 5b, 5b, nearly 300 feet of climbing across the orange wall and beyond, starting up *Consolation* and finishing up *Leapfrog*.

This only leaves us to wonder what we can expect in 1995 – apart from the obvious continuous stream of new routes by the fanatics, a new guidebook seems imminent, and is likely to contain in excess of 3,500 routes – top that!

Emma Alsford

Lundy 1994

This was a quiet year by any standards. The appearance of the Harrison/Gibson guide in July was followed by a lull in new route activity as is often the case following a publication. This year's visitors, of which there were more than ever, seemed happy to repeat some of the 700 routes now on offer in comparison with a mere 350 in the 1985 guide. Highlights go to the route names rather than the routes with Simon Mooney and Mike Snell taking first and second prize respectively. Many of the new lines were reported as wet, crumbly, or taking in little new climbing. Paul Harrison came to the rescue however with one or two very worthwhile lines.

Starting from the South in Hidden Zawn, Jon Wilson and Chris Webb did the central line right of *Demons etc*, **Speeding Limpets** VS 4c, whilst on the same day Tom Rainbow and Tim Robbins put up *Aquaplane* E3 6a, which unfortunately covers much of the same ground as *Stone Gollum*. On Focal Buttress Chris Snell along with Wilson linked *Olympica* to *Wild Country* at E4/5 6a, again covering little new ground but no doubt fine climbing.

On Flying Buttress Paul Harrison along with Mike Snell and Mark Bartley did the bold arête left of Diamond Crack, **Shine On** E4 6a. On a small buttress south of Grand Falls Zawn Simon Mooney and Neil Burton got the best route name of the year award with **Lundy Morning Reeling** S 4c. Meanwhile just right of *Sunday Morning*, in the Picnic bay area, Harrison found **Boys from the Black Country** E2 5c, and Mike Snell ascended the frequently damp rampline to the north which was so wet that apparently 'a river runs through it'. According to my list that I've got here, this also appears to be the name of the route as well; **A River Runs Though It** E1 5b, (don't you wish you could have thought of that one, I would have killed for it) Well done Mike, for the second best route name of the year.

Up on the Torrey Canyon cliff, Harrison and Andy Wilkes blew out on **Blow Out** HVS 4c, a system of shallow cracks between *Mono Man* and *Marisco Striptease*, said to be crumbly. The same team did **Sir Jack** E2 5c, a line right of *Sidewinder* whilst up in Short Story Zawn the same team added a direct finish to *Jug of Punch* at HVS. **Deadline** E4 6a 5a, another hard offering in Arch Zawn, starts as for *Headline* but pulls up leftwards and across to *Stop Press* and *Northern Exposure* E3 6a, taking the excellent streaked grooves left of *Mary Patrica Rozalea*, both routes by Paul Harrison and Mike Snell. Finally, no season is complete without another claim on the East coast which this year went to Shirley 'Templar' Taylor and Da Gombu Sherpa with their **Friction Addiction** E1 5a, on First Knight Templar, 20 feet right of *Permanent Nerve Damage*.

Simon Cardy

