

The
Climbers' Club
Journal

1995

The Climbers' Club Journal

Edited by
Smiler Cuthbertson

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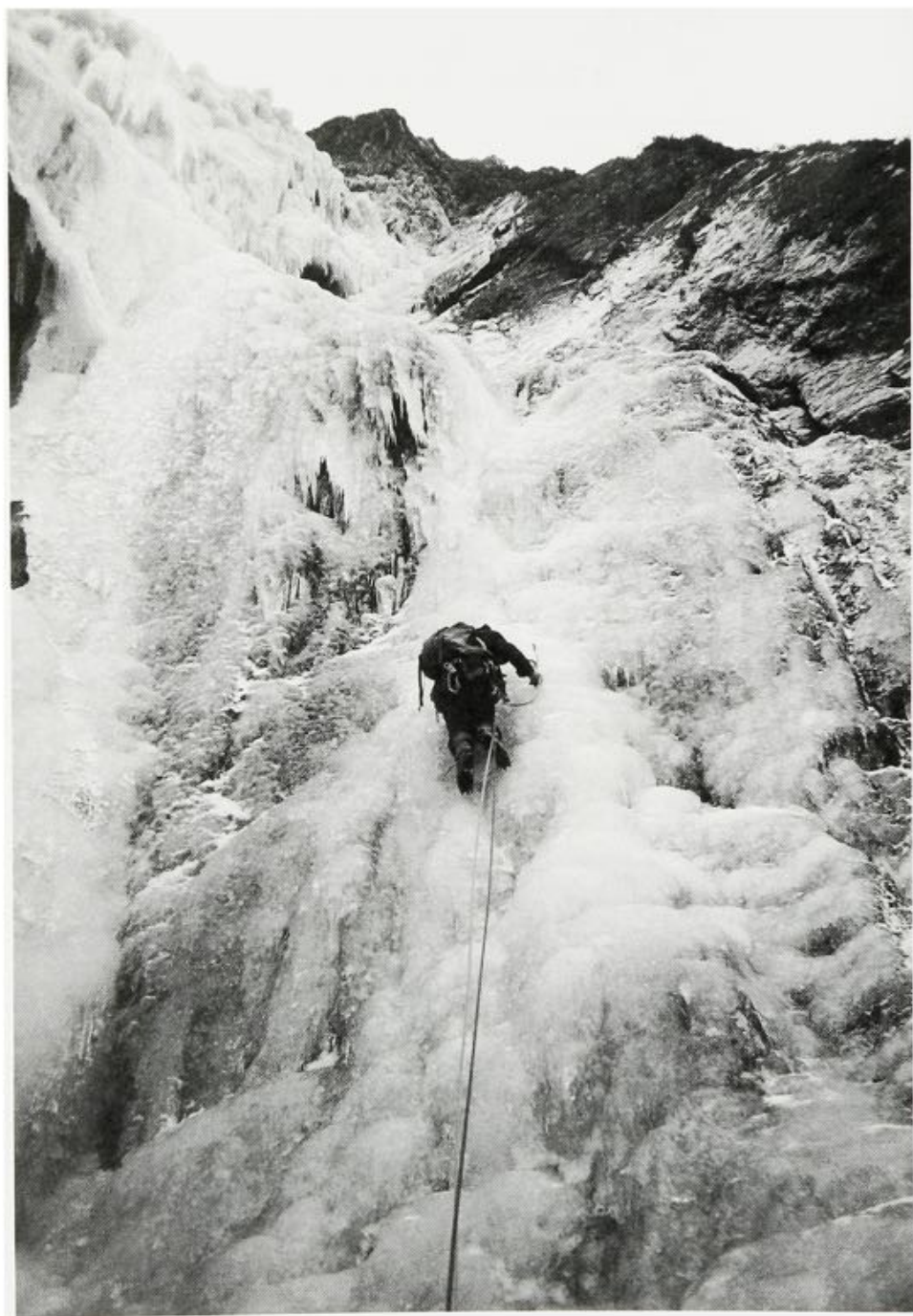
The Climbers' Club Journal

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Dave Wilkinson on Maesglasau Falls IV, Dinas Mawddwy. Photo: Neil Williamson

EDITORIAL

'What are we coming to, no room for me, no fun for you.' Bowie's immortal lines from one of the tracks on his *Hunky Dory* LP. It seems to reflect the current trends. Everything seems to have gone a little haywire.

The British climbing scene is having to respond to pressure from all sides. Conservationists, landowners, politicians, etc. Do we think we are resisting or gaining any ground? Well, if we compare Britain with other countries – say, Germany, where many of the best crags in the country are under threat of closure to climbing, some already closed – or America, where access versus landowners (an incredibly delicate situation) shows no real sign of improvement – then maybe it isn't so bad here.

However, for we mountaineers, rock climbers and walkers, it's an uphill battle and there's a danger of defeat.

Did you read the newspapers much last summer?

I often spent an hour, sitting outside the Bar Nationale, visualising how times have changed there, and read an English paper, from the newsagents on the Rue du Pacard. A costly price because of the exchange rate. I thought we were going for monetary union? I read on...

The young offender at the remand centre, told on his arrival of a later visit to a workplace in America, where counselling/other skills would assist his rehabilitation back to normal society. This would be funded by the taxpayer. Later, when told no trips were planned (cutbacks), he took the Local Authority to Court and claimed unjust treatment. The Authority lost their case, were fined substantially and the boy went to America....

The American lady car driver (an octogenarian I believe) who drove into a MacDonald's drive-in and ordered a coffee. She wedged it between her legs and, on driving off, it scalded her. The successful claim cost MacDonald's thousands of dollars. The coffee was too hot....

The pensioner who got so upset with people breaking into his allotment shed and stealing items, he slept the night in the shed with a shotgun. It happened – the thief returned, the gun went off, and the pensioner was jailed, for the offence of endangering the public with a firearm. The burglar, I believe, was refused the damages he had claimed...

The countless sleaze stories of Government officials, the astonishing facts about cash for questions, sales of arms to Iran, the misdemeanours of the Royal Family. Numerous newspapers... and the list went on and on!

You may ask, what's the purpose in all these stories/news items?

Well, my question is, "Who in the seats of power will be concerned about the closure of a lump of rock?" It only affects a small group of...what do they call themselves?...oh yes, 'those outdoor types!'

We have a small foothold in British life, and a large trek to make. Doesn't it worry you?

Smiler

Some Memories of Climbing in War-Time

John Hunt

At the end of a month of glorious weather in August 1939, when the only clouds were those of impending war in Europe, My wife Joy and I were walking with the Lake District artist Heaton Cooper, down Far Easedale, after a relaxed day's climbing on Lining Crag, below Greenup Edge. Only the day beforehand I had received a telegram, awaiting our return to the Old Dungeon Ghyll from a day spent climbing on Gimmer Crag. I was instructed to report at Greenock on 2nd September, only three days later, to join the first troop convoy of the War. I was due to sail on 3rd September, the third anniversary of our marriage. We strolled down the dale with a deep sense of things ending; of parting and uncertainty about the future.

I recall saying to Joy: "Whatever else changes, these hills will still be the same when it's all over." Self-evident though they were, these words implied the fun we had enjoyed during July and August of that year. We had rented a bungalow at Braithwaite, and later taken a cottage in Grasmere, after returning from India. Our stay in the Lakes had been intended as a 'retreat' from my studies for the Army Staff college exams. But as the days passed, bringing war even closer, that work became ever more irrelevant. In fact, we spent everyday climbing during those eight weeks; I still have the long list of climbs we did during that run-up to the declaration of war. The prospect of an end to those happy days, and to other days spent in Snowdonia during our three years of marriage, weighed heavily on our minds on our way back to Grasmere.

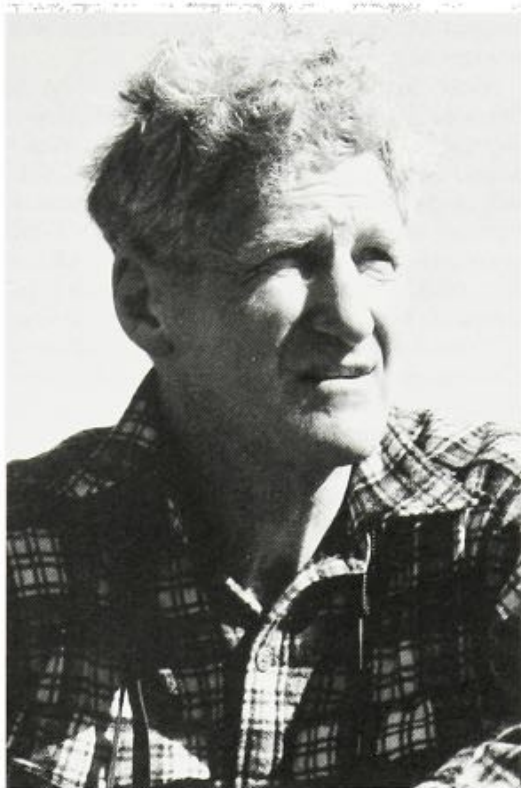
As things turned out, I had a rather good war as far as the mountains were concerned. I ran a training course at Helyg for members of my Brigade, and trained Commandos to climb in the Cairngorms and Snowdonia, and overseas there were times spent on Olympus, Athos and in the Appenines. There were opportunities to ski in the Vermion mountains, in the Peleponnese and on the hills surrounding Athens. But most memorable were the brief opportunities to return with Joy to the Lakes and North Wales during spells of leave from abroad.

The first of these occasions was, to say the least of it, unfortunate. I had returned from India during the summer of 1940, and our first chance to return to the hills was in December of that year. We were expecting our second child early in 1941, so Joy would not be climbing and we would not go far afield. We decided to spend the day following our arrival at Ogwen Cottage in the area surrounding Llyn Bochlwyd. It was one of those rare mid-winter days, with a clear sky after an overnight frost. Aware of my lack of form after 12 months since I had last climbed; conscious, too, of my forthcoming paternal responsibility, I resolved to do only a few modest climbs. I soloed happily up several routes on Bochlwyd Buttress, and moved on up to the Alphabet Slab on Glyder Fach. *Beta* and *Delta* presented no problems. It was now past mid-day; time to rejoin Joy, who was patiently waiting for me beside Llyn Bochlwyd. Should I do one more climb?

With growing confidence I started up *Alpha*. All went well until I reached the final pitch, which I remember as requiring a pull-up on small holds from an exiguous stance. Alas! I lacked the strength to make it. With a sense of resignation about the inevitable outcome, I lowered myself gingerly to the small ledge where I had stood. Once again I tried to pull up, yet knowing the hopelessness of it. This time toes failed to find the stance, and I was 'off'. I fell, the grey rock flashing past my vision like the walls of a lift when you descend to the basement. There was no sense of fear. I felt – or was aware of – a terrific bang, before floating into nothingness. I had fallen 100 feet before hitting the screes, and may have rolled a few more yards down the slope.

Close by were the rucksacks of a CUMC party who were engaged on the *Direct Route*. They found me, a further impediment to their baggage, when they returned from their climb. Eventually help arrived from the valley in the persons of a policeman and a doctor from Bethesda; mountain rescue was not an organised business in those days. With the Cambridge party acting as carriers of the stretcher which had been brought up from below, and with Joy in close attendance, we descended to the road. So much for paternal responsibility!

A year later, in December 1941, I had recovered from the accident and we were again staying at Ogwen Cottage. Once again it was a perfect winter day when we prepared to start out on what, in view of the limited daylight hours, was a somewhat ambitious programme. We proposed to cross Bwlch Tryfan on our way to Lliwedd, climb the East Buttress via the *Avalanche Route*, traverse Snowdon, Crib y Ddisgl and Crib Goch and return to the cottage: all this was on foot, of course, for we had no car in those days. This time we had a companion. Marco Pallis was a climber with Himalayan experience; he had climbed in Sikkim with Freddie Spencer-Chapman. He had also led an expedition to the Gangotri area of the Central Himalaya in 1933. He was also a competent rock climber, who had pioneered *Birthday Crack* on Clogwyn du'r Arddu with Colin Kirkus and Maurice Linnell. From his Himalayan experience he had adopted the Buddhist faith which, I suspect, had some bearing on our fortunes during that December day; he was imperturbable and oblivious to the passage of time.



John Hunt. Photo: John Hunt Collection

Joy and I had planned an early start, but Marco arrived very late and it was mid-day before we were able to leave the cottage.

It took us three and a half hours to reach the foot of Lliwedd. Marco was out of practice and unfit, so we made slow progress on the climb. By the time we had finished the route we were in total darkness, and had some difficulty in climbing the easy *Terminal Arête*. On the summit of the East Peak, having no torches, we were in real trouble. To continue over Snowdon and along the 'Horse-shoe' ridge was out of the question. Indeed, so minimal was our vision that we resorted to crawling on hands and knees, hopefully heading for the scree gully leading down to Llyn Lladaw, anticipating disaster from a fall over some minor crag on our way. During the descent Marco sprained an ankle, making progress even more snail-like.

At Pen y Gwryd we had a stroke of luck when we met a member of the Home Guard coming out of the hotel, who gave us a lift to Capel Curig. Here, by another fortunate coincidence, a good samaritan appeared in the person of Ifan Roberts, a local quarryman and botanist who was to become a good friend to myself and many other climbers. He was on his way home after duty as a member of the Observer Corps and he, in turn, gave us a further lift to Ogwen Cottage. It was nearly 2am. Great was the relief of Mrs Williams and her daughter, who were just about to report our absence to the police. I recall that episode with affection and respect for Marco Pallis, whose serenity and patience throughout the expedition was an object lesson to myself.

And there were other friends who joined us during further visits to Snowdonia, before I was again posted overseas in 1943. Indeed, our climbs, enjoyable though some of them were, were less important than the company we kept. I remember a splendid day in the *Great Gully* on Craig y Isfa with Alf Bridge. Alf, a perfectionist, was a dynamic and loveable character, who resigned at various times, from both the Climbers' Club and the Alpine Club on matters of principle, but remained a close friend of many climbers. He had helped me run the training course at Helyg and was later to play a vital role in the assembly and despatch of our oxygen equipment on Everest in 1953.

I recall a much smaller climb with Wilfred Noyce during that Helyg course: on *Chalkren Stairs*, Gallt yr Ogof, when he, a brilliant rock climber, 'came off' while climbing the final slab, and I had the privilege of holding his fall and then giving him a top-rope! During the Commando courses I enjoyed the company of Frank Smythe of Everest 1933 fame, and David Cox. Frank, a gentle and most unwarlike person, was commandant of the Commando and Snow Warfare school. He was a member of the party which made the first ascent of *Longland's* on Clogwyn du'r Arddu; but he, like Marco, was no longer in his prime on hard rock. With David Cox I did a number of climbs from our Commando Training base at Braemar. I also recall a very pleasant route we did on Craig yr Isfa, in the Arch Gully area of the crag. For David, Wilfred and myself, those years marked the beginning of a very happy partnership after the war, in Britain and in the Alps. With Wilf, that shared experience later extended to the Himalaya and the Pamirs.

I remember how peaceful were the hills in war-time; How remote they were from the global conflict. In Snowdonia, the roads were narrow and winding in those days, bordered by the ancient dry stone walls and burdened by a negligible flow of traffic. No tourist industry brought visitors in their thousands at

weekends to the 'honey-pot' areas of Beddgelert, Capel Curig, Betws y Coed, Pen y Pass and Llanberis. There were few climbers or walkers around. Apart from the mainly sea training orientated Outward Bound Centre at Aberdovey, no mountain activity centres had been established, to add their colourful anoraks to the scenery and to create congestion on the more popular climbs. Plas y Brenin was still the historic Royal Hotel. At Pen y Pass, the Gorfswysfa Hotel, famed for the reunions convened by Geoffrey Winthrop Young at Easter, was still in business. Ogwen Cottage was still a humble inn for the likes of Joy and me. The mountains were not under threat from new hydro-electric schemes or other 'environmentally unfriendly' development. There was no perceived need for planning controls; it would only be a decade later that the Lake District and Snowdonia would be designated as National Parks.

When we were able to return to those hills in 1946, the words I spoke on the way down Far Easedale on that glorious evening at the end of August 1939 were still true; "These hills will still be the same when it's all over."

How different is the scene today!

Soaked on Sunkist

Andy Perkins

Life can be funny sometimes – other times it can absolutely hilarious – and oddly circular in nature – and ironic. But enough of this cheap amateur philosophy – what we need is to set the scene so that you can understand what on earth I'm on (about).

Let me explain: I had been in an unsatisfactory mental state since returning from an attempt on the South Ridge of Gasherbrum IV in summer of '93. Not that it had been a bad trip, you understand – no-one died, we reached 7,000m, had some great laughs along the way, but the weather was unstable and we never really got our teeth into the route. Then in the Scottish winter season of '94, I had two extremely close shaves. In the first, I walked off the edge of a cornice on Coire-an-t-Sneachda in a white-out, avoiding termination by good luck (I fell down the shallow top slope of *Aladdin's Couloir*) and rapid ice axe braking. In the second, my partner Nick fell off while leading the headwall of *South Post Direct* on Meaghaidh, the belays ripped and both of us shot down 700 feet of snow slope, over the 40 foot bergschrund pitch and onto the front page of all the national newspapers.

The resulting injuries to my ankle meant that a planned trip to the Ak-Su for alpine big wall action had to be cancelled. This was extremely frustrating, particularly as the rest of the team still went, creamed the route and got sponsored by Nintendo into the bargain. Knowing that I would have to sit and listen to all the bullshit when they returned, I knew I had to sort out some climbing which would strain my brain to the limit but my ankle not at all. Yosemite seemed ideal – El Capitan is only a few hundred metres from the road and shoots straight out of the ground for 1,000 metres. No moraine slopes, loads of oxygen, fantastic stable weather (ha, ha, ha) and a bar within ten minutes of the drive of the meadows. So who needs the Himalaya?

I arrived in the Valley in mid-September with two huge haulbags of kit and no partner. This latter problem was solved whilst waiting in line for a Sunnyside site when Martin Veale wandered past. Sharing his site was a tall blond Norwegian (aren't they all?), Odd-Roar Wiik from the Lofoten Islands. You can just call him Odd – everyone else does. The three of us cruised up the *Moratorium*, a four pitch layback immortalised in Pete Livesey's article **I Feel Rock** then the *Lost Arrow Spire* complete with the obligatory buttock clenching Tyrolean to check out our ropework skills. Martin is a rope access supervisor, I instruct the same techniques for Troll, and Odd turned out to be on the rescue team for Lofoten and to have done *PO Wall* the previous summer. Our ropework passed the test, and we had a great time into the bargain.

Martin was keen for a couple of days on *The Nose* by this stage to bring his two months Stateside to a fitting conclusion. During our first day of fixing to Sickie, we saw a couple of disturbing sights: an Oriental team on pitch 1 with ENORMOUS haulbags moving at snail's pace, who volunteered that this was their first big wall. This seems to be a fairly common practice, and makes about as much sense as tackling the *Walker Spur* for your first alpine route; total chaos four

pitches above us in the Stovelegs as haulbags jammed, four teams and a soloist bottlenecked, and tempers and ropes frayed.

By nightfall, however, they all seemed to be on El Cap Tower and we figured that they would be far enough ahead of us not to be a problem. Wrong! As we pulled on to Dolt at mid-day, one of the four teams was still on El Cap Tower and the King Swing was total mayhem. We had a short conference, drank a load of water then rapped to the floor, not wanting to spoil our total enjoyment of the route up to that point by getting embroiled in the chaos. The only way to do *The Nose*, is in a day with a light 'sack so that the chaos can be swiftly overtaken, something which is impossible with a haulbag. Now you're thinking – what the hell has all this got to do with *Sunkist*? Patience – all will become clear.

Big wall action was on the agenda for both Odd and myself. His prospective team was laid up with a back injury in Switzerland so, once Martin had left for sunny Sheffield, it made sense for us to get on a wall. *Zodiac* was an obvious choice as a testing ground for our techniques and wall compatibility. It proved enjoyable, straightforward and left us with two weeks before my flight home and a hunger to get on something challenging. The Anthoine/Alvarez rat was hungry and needed a good meal. It took three days to come to a joint decision that *Sunkist* was the way forward. After all, it's on the front cover of the guide, Odd's mate had pushed it in 26 hours from the ground and had rated it as having some of the finest climbing on El Cap. The only question was 'Are we up to it?' – there's only one way to find these things out.

We fixed ropes in to Mammoth ledges and hauled two hefty looking bags, the brand new double portaledge and a bucket full of tinned food to last us up to seven days with room to spare. With a fine forecast for at least the next three days, we stoked the carbos ferociously at the pizzeria that night and went to bed early. Dawn the next morning saw us jugging for Mammoth and kicking off with the first five pitches of *Magic Mushroom*, pleasantly straightforward stuff to lead but the low angle slabs with a couple of long pendules left made for appalling hauling. That evening, I led 40 feet of pitch 6, which constitutes the first independent pitch of *Sunkist* proper. After some banter with Twid and Louise, ensconced 500 feet above and to the right of us on the *Shield*, we slept the sleep of the just above the right ventricle of the *Heart*, well pleased with our efforts.

The following morning, I finished off that A3+, and then took the next one, a cheeky little number with hooks, in-situ heads and some expando-nutting to reach a comfortable sit-down ledge. Odd then pegged a short but tricky groove to reach another perfect bivy ledge, but with only quarter to three on the Mickey Mouse alarm clock, we felt obliged to stick at least another pitch worth of work in before tea. Here was where the route started to get serious with us: a nasty move on a blind drilled hook placement, directly above an ankle snapping ledge. This was followed by balancy free climbing, only at 5.9 or so but, weighted down with the humungus aid rack, it felt more like 5.11. Arriving at the hanging stance underneath a roof which funnelled into a horrific-looking chimney, Odd took one look and came out with the 'off-widths are not really my scene' gambit. Tom Patey would have been proud of him. I muttered something about it looking like Yorkshire gritstone VS and launched into it. 30 feet higher with bleeding elbows, the protection distressingly distant below and a tied-off rivet just out of reach, it was time for extreme measures, i.e. Scottish Cheating Technique. Now I was using

a Grivel ice hammer as a peg hammer, the source of much hilarity in Sunnyside. 'I've heard it's pretty cold on top of El Cap at this time of year' was one remark. (Was this man psychic? We'll never know.) After three abortive attempts, I managed to hook the tie-off with the pick and Friend-leapfrogging/ jamming led to sloping ledges, the last we would see on the route.

Wasted from two long days, we set the ledge up badly in an unstable configuration, slept intermittently and awoke when the whole thing tipped to 30°. Getting out of my pit in an understandable rush to rectify the situation, I lost a sock into the void, which was later to prove very distressing. However, calm was quickly restored and I set off up pitch 11, which kicked off with a 20 foot swing left followed by further traversing left on hooks to reach the start of the groove/crackline which is the main, albeit tenuous, line which *Sunkist* takes up five pitches of gently impending orange granite.

Having clipped a reasonable looking in-situ head, I made a few more moves to another one, clipped in without testing it, stood up and found myself airborne back down the groove for 30 feet, grazing my shoulder and elbow in the process. The fact that it was the same elbow that had been tenderised on the off-width the previous day only served to make me even more motivated. After a full 55 metre run-out, I reached the point where *Jolly Roger* heads right. Gazing up a scary-looking slab with minimal hook placements, I shuddered with hideous anticipation. Some day, but not today. We headed left via hooks and rivets to a supposed A2 flake which, in reality, was as A3+ as any of the lower pitches. With the expanding flake facing the belay, any lob would simply have unzipped the entire construction. Aiding grades, even the 'New Wave' ones, seem as variable as those on Scottish ice, subject to conditions, physique, and tools available at the time. A long gently overhanging section on rivets followed, during which I discovered the knack of standing in the top rung and taking both hands off. Up till then, I'd been unable to contemplate how the rivets had been drilled in the first place!

I pushed out ten metres of the next pitch as the light reddened in the afternoon, happy that we'd cracked over 50% of the hard climbing. The belay at the top of pitch 13 was to be our home for the night, a four-bolt stance with no ledges at all. We felt superbly isolated, adrift on the orange wall and confident that, in two days time, we'd be on the summit plateau.

The following morning, I jugged back to the high point and set to on what was to prove the mother of all aid pitches. Taking wires, TCU's and Friends, it gradually became thinner and harder as Odd's figure, sat patiently on a padded plank, grew smaller and smaller below me. 70 feet out, I'd clipped into a well tested RP then levered myself into the top rung. As I straightened my leg to the locked position, I felt a sudden drop, a momentary impact, then I was airborne, confused as the RP had felt and looked bombproof. Dangling in space, I looked up to see the etrier still clipped to the piece and realised that the stitching on the top rung, after eight years of abuse, had finally given up. The secondary jolt had been the rapid transformation of my fifi hook (found on the Baltoro the previous summer) from a hook to a banana shape. Odd, equipped with full weight USA style aiders and clip-in daisy chains, merely smirked an I-told -you-so grin and let me get on with it. Further progress was now slightly slower as I had to use the undamaged etrier when making top-rung moves. The crack dwindled until I was forced into placing ball-nuts, RP zero's and even pegs, most of them tied off. Just

below the bolt belay required more Scottish Cheating to reach fixed manky copperheads, and it was with a scream of relief and exhilaration that I clipped the bolts, pounding the rock with a gloved hand shouting 'got you, you swine'. The self respect which I'd been lacking for nearly 12 months had, over the course of a four hour lead, finally returned.

As I hauled the two bags, obvious frontal clouds were beginning to pass overhead. The sun was disappearing intermittently behind clouds as Odd donned my Buffalo kit. I headed off up the next pitch which started with 40 feet of in-situ heads. The first one pulled out with the gentlest of tugs, hardly inspiring when another 15 waited above. I'd never placed one before but, following the place 'em, paste 'em, X 'em, sniff 'em doctrine, I made steady progress and exited with relief to a long rivet ladder interspersed with the odd hook move for another full 55

metre pitch. We now had only one more A4 pitch until a junction with *Son of Heart* which would mark the end of the desperate aid and light at the end of the tunnel.

The sky was turning grey as I swung up on rotting circle heads in a curving overlap, then exited over a two-foot roof by mega-Friend placements, then awkward semi-free moves to an awful stance with four very shoddy rivets, paradoxically labelled 'good bivy' on the topo. So shoddy, in fact, that I elected to run on to the next pitch. Here, we were supposedly back on easy ground, but the cracks became rounded and moves above the stance involved hooks, awkward heads and shoddy TCUs. Finally a house-holding wire, half a ton of rope drag and the increasing cloud forced a decision to retreat back to the 'good bivy', haul the bags and batten down the hatches for what was by now an obvious storm in the brewing.



Day Four on 'Sunkist'. The 'Mother of all Aid Pitches', Odd-Roar Wiik following Andy Perkins' Four Hour Lead. Photo: Andy Perkins

Nevertheless, we were confident there would be no problems. We had a brand new portaledge, complete with rain fly; we were on slightly overhanging ground and, even if it lasted for a while, we had three days of food and gallons of water. Initially, we fitted the rain fly on back-to-front but I insisted we batten down as firmly as possible and soon after we were comfortably ensconced.

At midnight, it started to rain and shortly after we became aware of heavy drops striking one end of the ledge. These gradually increased in intensity and frequency as the night wore on. It was evident that we were near a line of drainage which the westerly wind was blowing right onto us. It was psychologically extremely wearing, as this wind would shake the ledge from side to side, lift it by a few inches, or blast downwards compressing the fly onto our faces. Half a second later, a blast of water would smash against the fly, as if someone was pointing a high pressure fire hose at us.

Slowly but surely we started to get wet. Water dripped from the suspension tapes, ran down the inside of the fly, collected in a trough of fabric formed by the rain and slowly started to collect in the bottom of the portaledge. As the storm increased in intensity, the waterfall struck the ledge with greater and greater ferocity. With each blast, water penetrated right THROUGH the rain fly and we were enveloped in a fine mist. The Goretex shell on my down bag was utterly ineffective at withstanding this kind of assault, and the bag gradually deteriorated into a soggy rag. Odd in a fibre fill bag but with no waterproof shell was faring better but still became damp as the night dragged by.

Dawn the next morning brought no respite. The wind and waterfall continued to batter us almost incessantly and the visibility was reduced to 300 feet in the thick cloud which swirled around us. Inside the ledge we fought a losing battle against the cold and wet. Odd spent hours supporting the rain fly to prevent the build-up of pools of water, and his palms turned to white sponges. I lay in a pool of water, my head just out of it by using what had been my spare thermals as a pillow.

In the late afternoon, we consumed the tin of fruit which should have been our summit snack which rifled through my digestive system in about ten minutes. Odd could only watch in horror as I squatted, shat in a paper bag, filling the cramped space with a vile smell, then threw the bag out into the maelstrom.

A short while after this nightmare, it began to go dark and I realised that both of us were now getting seriously cold. I looked across at Odd, now shivering slightly.

"D'ya reckon that pit of yours will take both of us, youth?" He looked at me with a quizzical smile.

"There's a first time for everything. We're going to need to play every trick in the book to get out of this one."

It was quite a tight squeeze but, after a lot of thrutching and struggling, we were both firmly wedged with arms wrapped around each other, me on top (stop sniggering at the back). Our core temperatures and our morale rose quickly at first, then Odd's back started to cool off as he was pressed against the floor of the ledge. He began to shiver and I knew we needed more insulation and more food if a critical situation was to be avoided.

Our remaining two days worth of food was stored outside in the haulbags, one of which was also lined with a short section of foam mat. Going out into the

cascading water, howling wind and darkness was not a particularly enticing prospect but it had to be done. Psyching up took several minutes, then with a deep breath, I clipped onto the fixed line and slid feet first out through the gap between the rain fly and the ledge, over 2,500 feet of fresh air and into Armageddon.

The world was a pool of headtorch light in front of me. Looking down revealed streams of water disappearing into a black maw; I dared not look up as some elemental sadist was blasting the fine hose straight at me, so I preferred to concentrate on the world two feet in front of me. 'Keep it steady, lad, one stage at a time. Slide, jugger up, clip daisy onto belay, hook fifi to daisy, stand in aiders, rummage in the haulbag, don't drop anything and, whatever you do, don't unclip.' It seemed to last for ever, and in reality a few minutes later I struggled back into the ledge clutching four feet of foam mat and pockets stuffed with tinned food. It had been a sustained exercise in fear control, yet there was more to come.

The effect of the mat and a cold tin of meat stew warmed our heads and hearts for a short while, then we began to deteriorate once again as the cold ate into us. It was a long night as we fought the mental battle knowing that survival depended on believing we could make it, yet not really knowing the final outcome, eroded confidence. Around midnight, I reached a psychological low, visualising death by hypothermia, maybe after seeing Odd die first, then gradually fading away myself. I imagined the news being broken to my friends and family. As I rolled these nightmares around in my mind, I gradually came to terms with them, accepted them without being fatalistic, then resolved to put them away for a later time. I moved on to the business of caring for my survival, having explored a new area of my mind of which I'd previously been unaware. Without wishing to sound presumptuous, it's difficult to explain unless you've been to that edge; reading **Touching The Void** by Joe Simpson will give you far greater insight into this fascinating world than I could ever describe.

Around 4am, it got noticeably colder. I'd set my watch alarm to go off every hour to remind us to vigorously rub and shake each other, but the frequency was stepped up just before dawn. We were just about holding our own against the onset of serious hypothermia and I was relieved when the dawn gradually lifted.

At first the clouds still hid the Valley and the surrounding Sierra from us but slowly brief glimpses revealed the rest of the world which we'd been denied for over 24 hours. Cloud swirled below us in the Valley but directly across from us the High Sierra was blanketed with a thick carpet of snow and I realised that we were in a very serious position. After rain, the run-off from the El Cap summit plateau is rapid and brief. However, with snow it continues draining icy water down the cliff for as long as it takes to melt which, in this case, was going to be three or four days. There was no way we were going to be able to climb the remaining four pitches against the icy downpour, as whoever belayed would have become a hypothermia case within an hour. In addition, the final two pitches involved 5.9 face climbing which, soaked in a continuous stream and possibly coated in verglas, would have made for extremely dodgy action. Abseiling the route was almost as unappealing. Below us lurked many pitches of diagonal and overhanging terrain, of which at least the first four would have been in the direct line of the waterfall. The difficulties of handling the two haul bags, bucket and

portaledge in our debilitated state would have meant hours hanging off belays in the waterfall and the prospect of a mistake while abseiling was a nightmare.

In retrospect, had there been no possibility of rescue, we could either have attempted to climb out while the belayer operated from inside the portaledge, or we could have made a run for it downwards. However, Yosemite history is littered with the bodies of climbers who've tried to run for it, either upwards or downwards, so it would certainly have been an extremely risky course of action.

Peeking out from under the rain fly every so often, I could see gaps appearing in the sea of cloud below us. First, tiny figures moving around on Mammoth ledges directly below us as teams who were lined up for the *Shield* bailed down the waterfall line from the base of the *Heart*. During a shouted conversation up and down 2,000 feet, I managed to communicate that we were on *Sunkist*, we were cold and wet and needed a rescue.

It appeared that we weren't the only ones thinking along these lines. Further partings in the cloud revealed frenetic activity down in El Cap meadows. More tiny figures milled around a fire truck, ranger vehicles by the dozen and a small helicopter. Around half seven in the morning, a loudspeaker crackled into life:

"CLIMBERS ON SALATHÉ. THIS IS THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. I AM GOING TO ASK YOU A SERIES OF QUESTIONS. HOLD ONE HAND UP FOR 'YES', TWO FOR 'NO'. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

A pause, then:

"ARE YOU COLD?"

"ARE YOU HUNGRY?"

"DO YOU NEED A RESCUE?"

It was fairly evident that Team *Salathé* couldn't make up its mind, as these questions were repeated on and off throughout the morning. Meanwhile, the clanking sounds of winching could be heard drifting across from *The Nose*, and we patiently waited for the loudspeaker to address the same questions to us.

Around mid-day, the helicopter, which had been making shuttle trips to the summit plateau, turned its attention to the *Salathé* team who were obviously in a pretty bad way. In a stunning display of flying, the small machine hovered close to our ledge. I looked the winchman directly in the eyes and raised both arms outstretched at 45°, the international signal for 'I require assistance', or 'Help'. He waved and pointed down towards the Block on *Salathé*, and they then proceeded to swing a haul sack of gear into the beleaguered team. It transpired later that, in the States, it's only one hand up for 'Help' which in Europe means 'I am okay'. Perhaps we could have this small anomaly tabled under 'Any Other Business' at the next NATO summit meeting. Odd and I waited patiently as the day wore on, figuring that the *Mammoth* teams would by now have reached the meadow and would have alerted the search and rescue, YOSAR, to our situation.

Talking to the YOSAR leaders later, it transpired that the message didn't get through, and they had figured that the ground we were on was so steep that, inside our portaledge, we had to be dry. It was only when a rescuer was gently lowered down the *Salathé* headwall, spinning in space, that we were able to communicate our urgent wish to be off El Cap as soon as possible. My respect for the YOSAR crew, staffed by the Valley's finest big wall climbers, is absolute. These guys had hiked in overnight from Tamarack Flats in a howling blizzard, and had been turned back from the edge of El Cap due to the severity of the storm. After



Yosemite's Search and Rescue Personnel next to Andy & Odd's Portaledge Bivy (the wet one!). Photo: Andy Perkins

bivying out in the pine forest with little shelter, they'd pulled nine climbers from Camp 6 on *The Nose* and the two from the Block on *Salathé*.

The situation on *The Nose* had been completely chaotic. Four very well-equipped Americans led by Tom Nonis from Boston were sitting out the storm fairly comfortably when a French team, equipped with waterproofs but without sleeping bags or bivy sacks arrived. This in itself made the small ledge at Camp 6 fairly crowded, and then two Spaniards and a Venezuelan juggled the French ropes. This team of three only had one set of waterproofs between them. One of them was virtually delirious from hypothermia and, in his madness, unclipped one of the Americans from the anchors. Grabbing for the safety rope, he dropped the haulsack containing his sleeping bag and boots. Meanwhile, 'équipe française' were making heroic efforts to lead off the ledge, taking 40 foot screamers in the process. This was to no avail, and they all eventually juggled out, some more quickly than others.

By contrast, we were relatively in control and were waiting in the knowledge that we could, if necessary, survive another one or two nights, though the situation would have been fairly marginal had we been forced to take that option. We were certainly very relieved when Scott appeared on the very lip of the overhanging wall above us, directly in the line of the waterfall. As he was lowered to the level of our ledge, he was 20 feet out spinning gently on the end of two comfortably fat static ropes. In a well-rehearsed routine, he threw us a trail line and we pulled him into the anchors. Both static ropes were tied off and we were linked together with a safety sling to keep us together during the ascent and to provide a back-up. Doing hard physical work was a relief to me, as the blood in my body started circulating properly for the first time in two days. The effort of

getting rigged for the ascent combined with the adrenaline from abseiling out of the ledge over a few thousand feet of s.f.a. fired me up. 30 feet above the ledge and spinning directly in the waterfall, I had the presence of mind (or the stupidity) to whip the camera out and snap a quick shot of the nightmare in the fading light.

As we juggled for the summit, I urged Odd on with thoughts of the food, drink and flat ground which surely awaited us. The pinpoint of head torch lights on the rim grew gradually closer and then within 40 or 50 feet, it was all over. We were surrounded by the calm, competent, albeit tired faces, organised efficiently by Mark. We were shepherded across slabs along a safety line to the summit plateau proper, and I realised with a shock that we were wading through six inches of snow! 'I came to California for the sunshine; what's all this snow?' was my thought. The change in conditions from summer to winter was a total shock, though I'm told that snow has been recorded on El Cap's summit at all times of the year. The picture books of enticingly sun-baked granite have a great deal to answer for.

By now it was pitch black and the helicopter which had flown *The Nose* and *Salathé* teams was grounded. We were led into the backwoods to a small clearing, a large fire and positively enormous bin-full of steak, sweetcorn and spuds. We were sat down, given dry clothes, and I proceeded to drink hot chocolate continuously for three hours, knowing that I was seriously dehydrated. My feet were on the verge of a recurring frostbite injury, so Keith supplied pans of warm water to thaw them out.

The team started to drift in from derigging, and the story-telling round the fire got under way. The guys had had a record day and they were determined to make the most of it. Two of them had made an ascent of *Sunkist* immediately before us and, when they found that we'd reached the *Son of Heart* traverse line, congratulated us on *Sunkist's* 11th ascent. We swapped accounts of the pitches and I gradually unwound in the realisation that we were alive, well-fed and watered and, crucially, accepted by the rescue team as fellow climbers rather than incompetent victims. That night by the fire in the backwoods with some of Yosemite's most accomplished wall climbers will live in my memory forever. It set the finishing seal on a great experience. Thanks, guys.

The next morning dawned clear and sunny. We helped the team lug the camping gear back to the helipad on the summit and gazed out over a sparkling white High Sierra. For a while, the helicopter remained grounded with an unexplained warning light so, when it finally arrived, we were voted as the guinea pigs. The bubble vibrated, we lifted 20 feet off the ground and then flew straight out over the edge of El Cap to an immediate mega-hit of exposure. As we spiralled down towards the valley floor, I caught a brief glimpse of our ledge, a tiny green dot on the blankness, and revelled in the thought that we had been there. My state of mind was, and still is, strengthened by the six days which we had on *Sunkist*. I learned new techniques and plumbed new depths of psyche of which I'd previously been only dimly aware. The intensity of the experience has lived on and sustained me since then. I never thought, when I arrived in the Valley, that it would provide a catharsis such as this.

Cheap amateur philosophy is out of place here. Draw your own conclusions.

Jebels without a Cause

Andy Heald

El Al interviewed us separately and then together, and then separately again.

"No, we don't know anyone in Jordan... or Israel."

"No, we're going climbing."

"We packed our own bags."

"Because it's cheaper to fly via Israel."

"Because the Manchester flight goes on the wrong day."

"Climbing equipment. No, no weapons... would you like to see the guidebook?"

No, I don't think there is any climbing in Israel."

"You passed with good grades," he said finally and we proceeded to Gate 57.

A series of dawn buses and shared taxis through Jerusalem and the West Bank, past checkpoints and burnt out tanks, a little more hassle at the frontier and we were across the tiny Allenby bridge. An American, shouted at for taking a photo and we were in hunky, chunky Amman by 10am. Tea, haggling over cloth, Roman ruins, tea – a pattern was beginning.

Next morning the tall, dark, handsome taxi driver shouted:

"Petra, Wadi Musa," "El Petra, El Wadi" for two hours until we had filled the car. One passenger, a businessman said:

"Aqaba – very beautiful, exactly like Brighton."

Petra, Cathy said 'would be special if there weren't antiquities here.' Steep craggy brains, split by deep narrow canyons (siqs), red-green-brown-yellow banded rock and, of course, those facades. Picking up sherds washed out by recent rain, but what pot.. Nabataean, Roman, Bedouin, flower? Yes, it was busy but it was possible to escape and at 4pm they had a camel to catch, leaving a few souls watching the last of the light from the High Place of Sacrifice.

After two such days the minibus deposited us in Rum in time for us to have to do something with the day. Great battleships of sandstone, one to 15 miles long, up to 3,000 feet high, were all steaming south-west through the pink desert. Jebel um Ishrin, the dreadnought opposite, had a linked series of canyons 'Al Rakhabat' (the Narrows if the Mother of the Calf), which could be followed through to the desert beyond. Henry, the other bus passenger, adventurous, nil-experienced, brought along his flapping boot soles. There were sections of Mod or so, but exposed and the route findable only thanks to Tony Howard's indispensable guide and small Bedouin cairns. All around us, huge streaked walls with gargoyles and great overhanging stone cauliflowers. In the narrow canyon a rifle surprised us from beneath a chockstone, followed by an arm, a red and white tablecloth and a wriggling smiling Bedouin and then 20 wriggling shrieking clients. In the red dunes beyond, the heat had us scurrying between shady spots on the hike home. Lizard and snake tracks, and since the rain, tiny white and purple flowers dotted the sand. We bathed happy feet in Lawrence's well which features sensually in *Seven Pillars...* These minty springs occur frequently where the sandstone massifs rest on their granite plinths.

After a training route on Jebel Fara Ranayim we decided to go for Jebel Rum itself by *Al Thalamiyyah* and down *Hammad's Route*. We'd heard about guidebook

timings and fancied a bivy, so packed food, six litres of water and sleeping bags. We'd been brought up to report our plan, expected return time, proposed escape routes and mobile phone number. A small boy watched us packing, so we told him. Well, we made flailing handholds and pointed fingers and head-on hands. I wondered if he'd clear us out. 'Thalamiyyah' (the Dark One, the Place of the Djinn), led up a deep couloir of chimneys, slabs and stone meringues, dark indeed and suddenly cool as wisps of cirrus arrived and we worried about flash floods. The climbing was not difficult, grade V at most, and we soloed large parts, but the rock was 'of all qualities' and even seconding, it was well not to fall. Occasionally, the Bedouin had cut holds or piled stones, wobbling against an overhang, but there was no ironmongery and we soon decided that we were not coming down this way. Cathy led the crux, an unprotected, undercut groove of dune-like consistency, stepping off a particularly wobbly cairn.

On the plateau a new game began. Here were smooth white domes of sandstone, some 25, some hundreds of feet high, which we frictioned up in trainers. Between were deep siqs, sometimes we had to find a narrows to stride, a chock-stone bridge, or sometimes abseil in and climb out. The small spaced cairns became hard to spot as daylight faded. A mile took nearly three hours. A small desert up here was crossed by compass to Juniper Flat and a super bivy overhang. Soon, the howling gale took our juniper fire and threw sparks at the stars. A few nuts, a little fruit, good company and an adventure in hand, what more could I ask?



Cathy Woodhead Climbing in the Couloir of Al Thalamiyyah. Photo: Andy Heald

Frozen by five I was asking for dawn. Before breakfast we crossed the Great Siq by abseil and soloed out. More domes and airy friction slabs took us to the summit graffiti, apart from discreet cairns, the only evidence of humans since a sling yesterday morning. Down by slabs and domes, deserts and siqs, to a series of abseil bolts into the Great Siq and down *Hammad's Ridge*, to scree, minty springs, people and the luxury of a shared beer.

We felt we had done climbing and now wanted to do camels and exploration. After much haggling and tea we travelled on two shipwrecks of the desert, through wadis and over dunes almost to Barrah Canyon. Almost, because the camelmen refused at a rocky step and after more haggling we were left to walk the rest.

"But how will we find the water?"

"We don't know any water," they replied. But we found it anyway, a Nabataean dam no less, in a small rock alcove. We pitched camp in a wadi and a herdsboy showed us how to escape a flash flood. A walk around the massif brought us to a Bedouin tent and tea, and smiling children who nibbled curiously at our dried apricots.

Next day we crossed the Abu Iglakhat canyon between towering rock walls, with a steep Diff scramble to the col and one abseil from it, then past hidden Bedouin shelters to a flower carpeted wadi. Here, a tattooed mother and surprisingly unmarried daughter herded goats. They made off as we arrived but when Cathy removed her headcloth, they approached and beckoned us to tea. Sticks gathered, we supplied water, they tea, the goats gave milk and the sand is good for picture conversations.

Back at camp Hammad-the-Land-Rover turned up, careered down the rock step (we dismounted) and took us back to Rum via Thamudic rock inscriptions.

Staying our departure for one more route we chose Eye of Allah, a huge cave at the top of the east wall of Jebel Rum. Pleasant climbing and soloing up *Hammad's Ridge*, down into the Great Siq and six pitches of Severe or so, up super slabs to the Eye. Although it is possible to continue to the plateau, it was time for us to turn about and trust the spikes and threads in abseil. We had fretted all week about our ropes jamming on one of the curious rock 'crisps'. On the last abseil it happened. I soloed up and freed it easily but it seemed like time to go home.

The early bus did not arrive so we said goodbye to Rum clinging to the back of a pickup. Aqaba – old town, baking unleavened bread, snorkelling 'someone keeps emptying aquariums into the sea', a short stretch of strand and half of Jordan paddling in long robes. The businessman was right – exactly like Brighton. It is important to cross the border on Thursday as Jordan closes on Friday and Israel on Saturday and the plane goes on Sunday.

Jerusalem's old city had smells and alleys strangely reminiscent of Kathmandu. We saw some sights but more than this we visited Jewish and Palestinian quarters and talked to people. We saw the settlers in the West Bank and the rooftop gun emplacements at Hebron. We visited Hebron market 'it's not advisable to go in there'... maybe not for him and his gun, but I never met friendlier people. The road to peace stretches a few miles yet.

Moving on the Horizontal

David A. Briggs

It was well past midnight as we crossed the Moor of Rannoch. The most desolate stretch of boglands in the Central Highlands was covered in mist and occasionally the headlights would pick out the eyes of the red deer on the road verges. The sense of solitude and history continued onwards through Glencoe. The night had now become luminous with stars as we chased the white lines through Fort William and up to Spean Bridge. Eventually we entered Glengarry and the start of the 25 mile road that ends at the sea. Sleep was important as tomorrow would be a fulfilling day.

Three and a half hours later, at 6.30am, we washed in Loch Garry and ate breakfast with the midges. On every side the silver birch mixed with the glittering water. We drove through a primeval grandeur to Loch Hourn – the 'Loch of Hell'. The entrance through a narrow defile descends 700 feet in two miles leading to the ice-worn gateway of the sea loch and the isles. Prince Charlie evaded capture here, but only just. His escapade nearly left another body on the mountains as he narrowly escaped falling over a crag.

The sheer beauty of the remote hamlet of Kinloch Hourn was enhanced by the morning brilliance of the salt sea air rising from Loch Beag, the small loch of the greater Loch Hourn. This steep sided loch with its small hamlet of houses and farm is now all but devoid of people in the winter months with only two stalwart souls in permanent residence, their only neighbour, John Campbell, nine miles away in Barrisdale, is no longer considered remote now he has a radio telephone.

We registered the car at Lochhournhead Farm by paying the £1.00 parking fee to Mrs Potter – the source of this vital information. The nature of this arrangement being that should you fail to return by the day stated, she would set into operation a search procedure. This safety net serves to remind the reckless that these hills are not to be treated lightly, as does the sign at the end of the road – 'Take Care on the Hill'.

So paying due respect and with careful preparation we soon left this tranquil world and its small community behind us. We passed a few solitary houses on either side of the loch, most now only used as holiday homes; though Mrs Potter later told us of the grand old lady of 85 who returns to her home throughout the summer months by rowing from Kinloch Hourn.

The tide was rising as we made our way by a good path down the loch, the scenery reflected in the stillness of the waters, broken only by the ripple of an occasional boat. The blue of the sky contrasted with the black and grey of the rocks, the greenery of the trees and cheery redness of the rowan berries. There is no crowd here to break the spell.

In passing Eilean Mhogh-sgeir, 'the big rock island in the sea' the loch reached the great narrows of 'Caolas Mor' this being the gateway into Loch Hourn proper. Barrisdale Bay opened out before us and beyond the loch with its sea of glass was the gateway to the Western Isles.

The bothy placed next to John Campbell's home has none of the grandeur of the large, grey, granite house encircled by trees a few hundred yards away.



Loch Quoich Looking West. Photo: David A. Briggs

Barrisdale House is used by the owners of the estate while John Campbell, the manager, lives next door – he is the laird of this domain in all but title. The standard of the bothy with its flush toilets and electric light lays testament to his work, as does the standards on the farm.

On entering the bothy the sound of German voices filled the air. The devaluation of the pound against the deutschmark and a number of articles in the climbing magazines has brought a number of Europeans into this wilderness. We spent the evening in discussion and wandering up to the white house at the foot of Luinne Bheinn and Ladher Bheinn. This three-bedroomed house, sleeping 12, has recently been refurbished. It is available for rent and gives good access to the Knoydart Peninsula.

The morning brought wind and rain and dark clouds covered the tops of the hills. The path on leaving the bothy was wet underfoot as we climbed up Glen Barrisdale. However this is no dirt track but a path constructed by heavy toil and we made good time. The atmosphere was raw and damp but horizontal rain could not decry the pleasure as we followed the river tumbling over falls in its ox-bow meandering to the sea. The rain and mist never ceased, unless for those little, tantalising intervals, which make a day of Highland rain all the more hopeless.

We crossed the bealach with the wind on our backs, though condensation from the 'sacks kept us warm, as we walked cocooned, in the hoods of the waterproofs.

The river ran in the opposite direction down to Loch Quoich not long after passing the dark loch of Lagain Aintheich enclosed in its fortress on top of the

pass. The little stream running into Loch Quoich soon became a river. The well defined path ended as we came to the ruins of Gleanncoisaidh at the mouth of the loch. Sitting in the silence of the hills eating lunch the rain continued to fall. The buildings gave testimony to the vanished races and one is lost in wonder at the thought of the old population. The dam had enlarged the loch and the path ceased to exist and the way was hard underfoot. We trudged across the hillside stumbling over tussocks and falling into holes.

The end was in sight as the road to Kinloch Hourn came into view. The dam had receded in the drought and left skeletons of trees, white in the peat bed of the loch. The bridge over the river was found in a small defile and we stood on the tarmac road. A four mile walk brought us back to the car and the delights of scones and tea in Mrs Potter's farmhouse.

You never really know a place until you steep yourself in its atmosphere. We had been privileged to have a small glimpse of these hills and the people, while being aware of the vanished past.

Summary:

An account of a two day walk over the Bank Holiday in August 1995.

Maps: OS33 – 1:50,000 & OS236 – 1:25,000 Loch Hourn

Accommodation is available at Lochhournhead Farm. The flat sleeps two at £7.50 per person per night May to October. Telephone 01809 513253.

The White House, at Barrisdale, LR sheet 33, GR 871035, is available through:
RW and JD Gordon

Lude, Blair Atholl, Perthshire, Scotland, PH18 5TS.

The Bothy at Barrisdale is open all the year round and a charge of £2.00 is expected to cover costs of electricity and maintenance.

That Painting

Terry Gifford

That Painting

took 3 days, 6 Vesta meals and a 28 mile walk
to make.

It was in black and white (and grey): lead white,
storm black,
on a 6ft by 5ft primed canvas on an alloy frame,
bulldog clipped,
carried on a rucksack rolled up with brushes in a
ski bag.

Two litres of turps sloshed about in the rucksack with
light pegs

for anchoring the whole sail on a heather bank,
a butt,

under the most majestic, neglected, inaccessible crag
in Scotland:

the north-east face of Bienn Lair. Hornblende schist
gleams green,

bristling its beautiful forms: *Butterfly Buttress*,
The Tooth.

We climbed *Wisdom Buttress* in the spitting teeth of
a gale:

a shower on the big slab and the overhangs always
to come,

always worrying above but outflanked on unseen
ledges incut

for the artist's fingers feeling his way up the earth's
hard core

a long way from rescue, a pint, a car, all other oil
painters.

Back up next day at 11, position chosen, charcoal
outline

in the frame, a wild mile of rock reduced to its
incisors.

The painter does not think of commitment, courage,
the risk

of failure on a large scale in big mountains
far out

which the later sunset down Fionn Loch would not
pay for,

nor evening rainbows above the tent and Dubh Loch
because

at 3 o'clock in a downpour that painting was washed
away.

Not a Bad Trip

Dave Gregory

We certainly couldn't grumble about the weather in the early part of the trip. I didn't find out until afterwards that Squamish, British Columbia, has the reputation for worse weather than North Wales, and for the same geographic reasons, yet we had a week there during which we crept from shade to shade and climbed early and left late to avoid the heat. Scorched and sated we started our semi-circular tour of the American West by visiting Beacon Rock, Washington. We got no climbing however. Peregrines are becoming as intrusive on climbers' preserves over there as they are here and after walking up the zig-zag railed path to the top, and gazing in awe at the great Columbia River through the shimmering heat, we arced south and east for Smith Rock, Oregon.

The thermometer in the filling station read 104 in the shade. After two days of frying we decided that on a longish trip it was quite normal for one's fingertips to suffer wear, but to get them burned was not on and so we stayed one more day on which we rose early enough to do the *Monkey Face* and walk back over the ridge before the sun turned us into biltong on the path. From the wooden bridge over the Crooked River the water looked very inviting but the menacing sinuosity of a snake swimming below us was dissuasion enough. Besides, the showers are free, 24 hours a day.

Van-jammed and City of Rocks, Idaho. It did rain here. Every other day at about 3 o'clock. Just when the heat was getting oppressive and a siesta was in order. Half an hour after the lightning flashes and thunder crashes the rocks were dry again. Not the infuriating, mist-wreathing process, delaying the climbability of the rock until after dark, of a humid British summer, but an imperceptible lightening of the rock as its trapped heat banishes the water film into the dry high air, in good time for a couple of routes in the evening.

The Devil's Tower, Wyoming, behaved itself. Not a cloud, not a lightning strike, even on that so isolated finger reaching for the sky. The only danger there is being mistaken for a real rock climber, one who has actually been to the top, and being mobbed by the car park full of tourists, eager for information about the summit.

In Vedaawoo, still Wyoming, the weather system seemed to be getting a little out of kilter. It would rain and then take a couple of hours to dry out. True, we got more climbing done than most people, being acquainted with, if not inured to, by reason of our nationality, the prospect of epics in the rain, but this was taking incivility to the guests too far. Our last hours there were most disappointing. It rained from early evening and most of the night. Dawn, well not dawn but early day, saw the tents sodden, the rock as bad and visibility down to 20 feet. We compressed all the wetness in the back of the van and made our last big push to Denver, Colorado, a motel and a flight home the next day.

We had, however, an afternoon to spare and all the morning south the cloud had offered to lift. It would do no harm to go and look at Eldorado Canyon. As we approached it, various jagged summits broke clear of the grey murk and sufficient bits of blue to make a pair of tights brought optimism. We might just get a route

in. The clincher, however, was not the improving weather but the fact that we had to pay an entry fee to get in the canyon. There was a very high proportion of Yorkshire men (and woman) in the van crew and their brass is not made to keep American officialdom in the affluence to which it has become accustomed, without something in return. When we realised that *Bastille Crack* started from the roadside less than 200 yards from the van the die was cast. The pair already on the route seemed to be making reasonably speedy progress and the A team let them get started on the second pitch and began. The B team, which contained, as ever myself, but inexplicably, Martin Veale, followed shortly after. Speedily in his case, somewhat stolidly in mine.

The rock was a revelation. It looked like a well-cracked sandstone with a fair proportion of thin flakes up which to layback. The sort of stuff you get in Beeley quarry, with a high 90+% chance of its breaking off and landing you in the mercury. But no. Some magic vulcanism has fibred this with a backbone of steel. The flakes were top quality and the jams behind them as satisfying as fish and chips on a Friday night. The little crystals in the rock surface sucked your boot soles on and sank into your fist skin like a lover's nails. Rapture.

Amidst the ecstasy it did not go unnoticed that the sky above the canyon rim was darkening and at the top of the third pitch I gave Martin's belay a more than cursory glance. He was clipped into a warped old peg which looked to date from when Drake was searching for Eldorado and one of those curiously-shaped chocks which, in profile look like a bird's head and beak. You know, one of the DRPs (Designed Replacement Purchase), which cannot be got out of their setting whatever you do, short of blasting the rock. It was, he said, in situ. Well it would be. I stepped past him into a bay to find the A team waiting for the rope above to get well clear. Although, from where he was, the Big Fella could not see the darkness growing above the upper canyon, he was explaining the logic of letting a large gap open up between us and the rope above so that if it did rain we could go at the next easy pitches at full chat, which in his case is very fast indeed; for a start he reaches four foot further than me every time he puts his hand up, or bale out from where we were, without having to reverse some of the pitch.

I moved back to Martin to get a look at the, by now, kettle-black sky. Martin's face said he did not like the look of it and a few milliseconds after the first lightning strike hit the ridge opposite he had taken a sling off my neck, draped it over a domed bulge beside his belay, tied the ropes through it and was on his way. We three looked entranced at the kernmantel sling. Of circular cross-section it showed every intention of rolling off the dome. Although our holiday was almost over Martin's had a month to go and out of friendship, compassion, and a very understandable desire not to waste his return ticket we held the sling onto the dome as hard as we could with our fingers.

It was seconds only before Martin had arrived at the next stance below, on which a following aspiring team was having a knitting party with their sodden ropes. He had unravelled their ropes, driven them down and reached the floor himself in about as long again. The man is a marvel of motion, a human dynamo.

I feel the need to digress a little. I ought to mention that I am very set in my ways. I habitually carry a selection of slings round my neck, five or six usually. This idiosyncrasy of The Old Gadger they find very amusing when we're padding up bolted slabs, the crag top abristle with lower-off points and not a natural belay

in sight. Today their attitude was totally different. Not one of us was a Nobel Laureate, or wins prizes in pub quizzes, or anything intellectual like that, but we had all worked out that the last man down would have no one to hold the sling on the belay. I was in pole position and in a few minutes even at my staid rate of progress, I too could have been roping down out of the lightning zone with most of my gear intact but it was not to be.

They seized me and stole my slings. Before I could say, 'Eh up, that costs 40 pence a foot,' they had the abseil ropes passing through more of my slings than David ever used, and had them tied into the peg and the trapped bird-head. They even used a jammed knot. I was at least allowed to go first to test the new arrangement and eventually we all arrived safe, if sodden, on the ground, to go and change in the convenient toilets.

In the middle of this process, while we danced about naked on the wet concrete trying to get dry, the Big Fella took pity on me:

"You look undressed without your neck slings," he said, "have this". And he gave me a bit of tape he had taken off an abseil point the week before.

Mary has used it to tie the buddleia back.

A Week in Belgium

Geraldine Taylor

Friday 20th October 3.15pm. School's out, hurray, it's half term. Alex, my climbing partner, and I were on the road to Dover. We arrived at 11.20pm, drove straight onto the boat which set sail at 11.30pm. Dover/Calais is not the best crossing for Belgium but it only cost £96 for a car and two passengers.

At 4.30am on Saturday, I blew up my lilo, crept into the refuge at Freyr, found myself a bunk bed and fell sound asleep. Morning came, glorious sunshine, a hut full of hunky Danish men and the odd woman. The refuge was made of wood and had 24 sleeping places (no mattresses). In the middle of the room was a large wooden table with four benches around it. At the opposite side to the door there was a metal fireplace. The hut was basic but I liked it. The toilet was a wooden shed perched on the edge of a drop and the showers (which were locked all week) were also outside. I asked one of the Danish men how much it cost to stay at the hut each night. He said that since the man who looked after the place was away, it was free, but it meant that the electricity was off. We did not mind using candles and having no showers because it would be free. It would normally have cost 400 Belgian francs (about £4).

Time to unpack the car, have breakfast and to decide where to go. I thought that I would first unpack my double ring stove with its grill, so that I could get a cuppa on the go. I opened up the boot of Alex's car. Ah! Where is it? In England I had opened up the back of my van, where my stove normally lived and had left Alex to pack it into his car, while I fetched the rest of my gear. Alex got confused and packed a cushion instead of my stove! It meant that we only had a single gas stove between us and that I would have to forget about my grilled meals that I had planned.

The first day's climbing, where shall we go? What a choice! There are several different and excellent cliffs to climb on at Freyr, all with their own personalities. Here is a brief description of the main ones.

Le Mérimos – A massive, slabby crag which contains a maze of multi-pitched routes, up to 110m long and many one-pitched routes, most of which require a delicate technique.

Cinq Ânas – A beautiful rock, 60m and vertical, which has a set of athletic and powerful lines. This crag contains many cracks and grooves.

Tête du Lion – A small massif of one/two pitches, set right down by the waterside and composed of perfect, though occasionally polished, rock.

Pape – A popular and modern crag with routes mainly between 6a and 6c. The original routes on the cliff follow strong natural lines, running the full 60m of the face. More recent routes are shorter, mainly consisting of single pitches.

L'Al Legne – The most impressive cliff at Freyr. 120m in height, it contains many of the area's traditional classics, as well as hard new routes. The length of the routes vary from 20m to six pitches.

Louis-Philippe – A steep and interesting south-facing cliff which has powerful lines. This crag stays relatively dry in the rain.

La Jeunesse – A complex, steep south-facing crag with some excellent well-



L'Al Legne, Freyr. Photo: Geraldine Taylor

bolted climbs of all grades, especially in the middle range. This crag also stays relatively dry in the rain.

For our first day we choose to climb on L'Al Legne. We fancied an easy day because we were tired from the journey and also because my leg was still not 100% from being broken in a car accident. We did a couple of short routes and then *Le Spigolo/La Sortie des Flamands*, a 130m HVS/E1 (5b). The fourth pitch of this climbed up steep rock over bulges to gain the crest of the ridge. The view was breathtaking, being able to see some of the other magnificent crags. The finish to the ridge was like climbing along a bolted alpine ridge.

What a day and the best was still to come (well, almost), Belgian beer at the friendly Café Chamonix. This café is situated at the top end of the cliff and only a 'stonefall' away from the refuge. It serves excellent steaks, with a choice of various sauces and the biggest ice-cream sundaes that I have ever seen. I refrained myself since one meal in the café would have been equal to my normal week's supply of calories. Instead, I ate my carrot and lettuce leaves (not really). It was a good evening, having a laugh with the foreign climbers. At midnight, one of the Danish climbers decided to go climbing. Alex and a few others went but I decided to give it a miss since I did not want to risk hurting my knee again and I was far too drunk. They all returned safely, having top-roped a climb by throwing a rope down a pitch from the top of Al Legne.

The weather stayed brilliant all week. We climbed at different cliffs and did many first-class routes. One route which I especially enjoyed was *La Directissima* 6a (E1) on Al Legne. This route was 100m long and had four pitches, 4a, 4c, 5c,

and 6a. The final pitch followed a superb and sustained corner system, by a variety of bridging, finger-jamming and laybacking moves until it was possible to exit out in an amazing exposed position. My nerve was good and my pants clean.

Besides climbing at Freyr we also climbed at Berdorf in Luxembourg. It took just over two hours to drive here but was well worth the effort. Berdorf is like a fairyland. Sandstone walls and towers of superb bolted rock, set in a haunting forest of giant trees. My favourite route here was *La Plage* 6a+ (E2 5c) and 70 feet long. The climb went up a steep wall on hidden holds. Another route which I enjoyed was *Lionel Terray* 5+ (E1 5b) 80 feet, which started up a steep crack, passed bulges and finished up a flake to the top of the same tower of *La Plage*.

On our last day we finished at Dave, which is a convenient place to climb, being close to the road, near Namur. The rock was blackish limestone, with many pockets and a smooth texture. The cliff varied from slabs to overhanging rock. After four hours and climbing routes such as *Le Cosmos*, with 70 feet of 6a on the first pitch, and 100 feet of 6b on the second, I had no arms left and so we decided it was time to return home. *Le Cosmos* was an excellent, steep and sustained climb up a steep wall, overhangs, a steep corner and a roof. It finished up a steep wall from where we abseiled back down.

What a week we had had. Wonderful weather, climbing and beer. I spent less than I would have done in England, just under £100. I can't wait until October 1996. Guess where I'll be, if not sooner. Maybe this time I'll go for the steak and ice-cream.

The Great Climbers' Club Bolt Debate

Terry Gifford

This was the biggie. On the 7th May (VE Day weekend) the old heroes and the young pretenders were in Wales to debate the future freedoms of our crags – and to do a little cragging. Joe Brown found himself asking 12 year-old Adam Dewhurst:

“Where did you do these new routes yesterday, then?”

“On Holyhead Mountain”, came the high pitched reply, “three of them.”

The Climbers' Club was holding a debate open to anyone, on its own patch, on a bank holiday weekend and even had posters out to pull 'em in. The Sunday evening discussion of the motion 'Bolting is now posing a threat to the special nature of British climbing' in the Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis, got off to a good start for three reasons. Firstly, Ken Wilson, proposing the motion, moderated his tone by emphasising that this was an unthreatening, open 'conversation'. Second, Sid Siddiqui turned up to oppose the motion. (I've never been to Pilsey in my life before', was his reason for missing the BMC Area Committee meeting on his Harper Hill bolting.) Third, his supporters turned up, ensuring that all the arguments were heard.

A questionnaire returned by 490 CC members found that 382 of them would never want bolts on mountain crags, but perhaps more surprisingly, 62 members of the CC could justify them occasionally. CC President, Mark Vallance, quoting these figures, said that the British had an international reputation for a traditional concern with style. The CC, he said, in its representations to the BMC, needs a policy that reflects current consensus.

Dismissing 'the ecological three card trick' as a sleight of hand, Ken Wilson warned against “allowing the bolt to creep down through the crags and the grades”. “If battles had not been fought in the '60s and '70s, *Indian Face* would have been defaced while Johnny Dawes was in primary school.” He pointed out that the French were regretting the spread of the bolt. Now, the *American Direct* route on the Dru was being debolted by the Group Haute Montagne. The world, he said, was looking to Britain for standards.

Sid began by saying he was proud to have bolted the easiest sport route – a Severe. “You'll see bolts inside cracks on sport climbs,” he added provocatively. Arguing the need for sport routes in the lower grades to wean people from the walls, his watchword was “freedom of movement and freedom to train”. “We don't want to train only on walls and a minority attitude is holding back the evolution of the sport. The youth of today hold the future in their hands and they want sport climbs.”

The first speaker from the floor endorsed Sid's concern for the alienation of young climbers, as did several other speakers later, but Joe Brown, sitting on the front row between John Streetly and Mike Mortimer, quickly came in to question the need for sport climbs to get people outdoors. “Climbing took a backward step,” he said, “when short-cuts came in with the inspection of new routes. Spaces should be left for people in the future who can climb harder than we can imagine.” Joe intervened three times to bring the conversation back to common

sense. "Of course we've all clipped bolts," he said to prevent a vote on how many of the gathering had, "otherwise we wouldn't know what we were talking about. The point is that bolted climbs are characterless. You don't remember them at work the next week."

But the conversation kept returning to the need to accommodate all styles of climbing for the future and the spectre of 'old farts saying not here or not unless you lead E5' kept recurring. Ron James predicted a Clippers' Club alternative to the Climbers' Club unless "we bring them in through education". It was pointed out that Range West had been developed in good style by both young and old, and Ken queried the evidence that young people wanted more sport climbing crags. "Don't speak for me, Sid," one young woman cried. The irony of people new to climbing dictating the future of crags and the 'ageism' of the 'old farts' dismissal did not go unnoticed.

Mike Mortimer compared the polish quickly developing at bolted Horseshoe Quarry with the years it has taken to develop at Stoney. "Limestone can't take it," he said. "Bolts are a recipe for trashing our crags." But Ken's suggestion of restricting bolts to new routes above E5 was itself soundly trashed by the meeting. An alternative proposal was to draw a ring around crags already bolted and, in a spirit of co-existence, allow further bolting there but not outside. I pointed out that the meeting was avoiding the difficult question of whether we need any more bolts at all if we were to leave Joe's 'space for people who can climb harder than we can imagine'. Sid replied that this would inhibit the evolution of the sport. But what he did at Harper Hill was not evolution, I suggested, it was revolution – two people decided the future of a crag. Sid may not want bolts in gritstone, but if others had followed his example we would now have bolts in Yarncliffe Quarry. After the meeting Sid said that the case for bolting each crag should be considered on its merits, although I did point out that this could only be done if it was discussed in some public forum before the bolts went in. (He denied, incidentally, that the crag owner had made a financial contribution to his £600 costs at Harper Hill.)

A majority of the meeting agreed that British climbing had a special nature and finally the motion was carried by 75% of the 120 people present, 25% voting against. Three comments after the meeting struck home. "What no-one was admitting was the romanticism they enjoy in boltless climbing." Indeed, no-one had spoken of aesthetics, unless it was Colin Foord saying that "Dozens of little holes in timeless rock will show in future that they have failed the test." Second, Roger Payne wished that the Alpine Club would hold a meeting like this and bring pressure to bear on rampant bolting in the Alps. Then, as I was leaving, this guy I'd never met before, said to me in the spirit of the meeting, "It weren't bad was it – no split lips." But perhaps the last word should go to Yosemite pioneer Chuck Pratt: "In the '60s, sex was safe and climbing was dangerous. Now it's the other way around."

Bolts

Peter Harding

In the late '40s I advocated a limited and qualified use of pitons on British mountain crags and saw this widely extended during the next two decades to result in many first ascents of great routes at home and abroad. Of course there was a downside to such practice – some novices used pegs indiscriminately, or as a quick fix, in order to do climbs beyond their ability. However, developments in artificial protection, spearheaded mainly in Britain since that time, have made rock pegs almost obsolete. Looking back at more than a quarter of a century of piton usage on British rock one has to remark that it resulted in very little significant damage, largely because pitons only utilise the natural fissures. This is one reason why I now urge climbers to spurn the placement of bolts on all our mountain crags, sandstone outcrops and gritstone edges. Surely no-one wants these places to be despoiled like some foreign climbing venues or to see notices at the foot of British crags declaring certain routes closed for repair, the re-siting of old bolts and cementing-up damage caused by them working loose. One may argue about the tenuous distinction between artificial protection and artificial aid but the drilling of bare rock so essential to bolting does put it in the same unethical category as hold chipping. And makes it equally unacceptable!

It is important that our leading activists are seen to uphold those values which make rock climbing in Britain so unique by generally rejecting bolts, for newcomers in any field of activity tend to copy its star performers; they wear the same things, use the same gear and adopt similar methods. In this context it must be said that so-called sport climbing, as it is seen occasionally in televised competitions, does give a false and even dangerous impression of what rock climbing is about. Although the winning competitor may be the only one able to complete a set route up some monstrous, overhanging, indoor erection without falling off, all too often he or she is someone who fails to reach the top but falls from the highest point attained, to be held on the safety rope clipped into a nearby bolt hanger then gently lowered to the floor amid cheers from an audience. What a distorted picture this gives – a caricature of real rock climbing, climbing in which leaders have to carry, select and place their own, retrievable protection, where success is measured only by completing a climb without falling off, and its reward is simply an enjoyment of a rock route's unmatched variety of natural features and situations.

I would suggest that bolts should be outlawed on all our mountain crags, also on sandstone and gritstone cliffs. Any new routes on such places, involving placement of bolts, ought not to be accepted by magazine and guidebook editors for recording as first ascents. Only in old, disused quarries and on some limestone escarpments, where certain climbs owe their existence to bolts, should new bolt-protected routes be allowed: preferably with no bolt replacements. History shows that sooner or later someone will come along with the ability and confidence to do them with any protection or aid; a climber who has resisted, perhaps never had, the need for a quick fix!



"Retro-laddered"! John Streetly

Paul Williams, *The Crimson Cruiser – a Tribute*

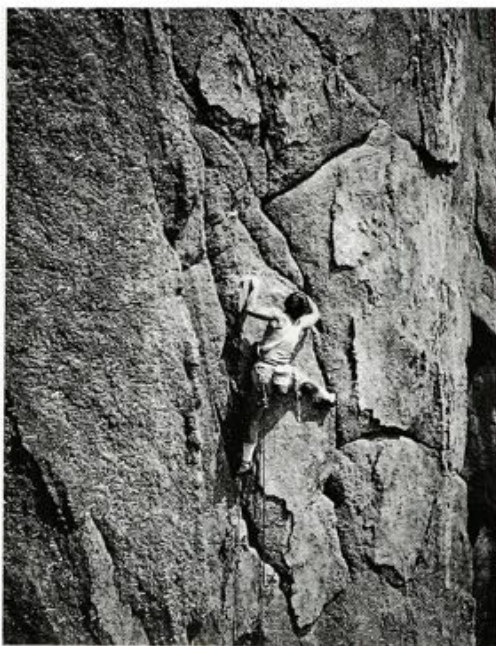
Peter Harding

Bad news travels fast but the worst comes over the ether. Like that early morning bulletin that a climber from Sheffield, Paul Williams, had died following an accident in the Peak District, on the previous day, June 4th. Paul's son Chris was soon on the 'phone to confirm this awful news. He and his dad had had a wonderful day on Froggatt, soloing damned near everything – spanking the rock, as Paul would say. For the second or third time on that fateful Sunday the pair of them were doing *Brown's Eliminate* when a handhold broke away; Paul fell and was fatally injured.

So unexpectedly Chris lost his father and I lost a great friend; the CC lost one of its truly great characters and without doubt its greatest guidebook writer since Menlove Edwards. More than just an author of immense talent, Paul had an eye for a good picture and produced some of the most stunning climbing photographs ever to grace a guidebook.

Paul was perhaps my best climbing friend yet one with whom I had never climbed. When he moved from Cwm-y-Glo to Sheffield we each promised ourselves to remedy this situation. But, for one reason or another, it was never fulfilled. Our friendship started casually at a CC dinner, barely ten years ago when he was working on his Llanberis guidebook. When it came out, in 1987, a copy thumped into my letterbox and on its fly sheet was written: 'To the author of the first Bumper Fun Book from the author of the second. Best wishes, Paul Wms'.

Later, when Paul was taking his son Chris to climb *The Old Man of Hoy*, (as a reward for successful 'O' levels), I was invited to be their third man and so become the oldest man to do it. Unfortunately I missed that chance but, on their homeward journey, Paul and Chris called in to tell Rita and myself all about their climb. Sadly, less than six years later I was to find myself walking along Froggatt Edge on a miserable Tuesday morning; a misty one of eyes



Paul Williams on 'Yankee Doodle', Land's End. Photo: Andy Newton

and crag. By the time I had reached the Pinnacle the mists had cleared; shafts of sunlight lit the rock and highlighted a little placement of flowers below the wall adjacent to *Green Gut*. My own small sprig was laid there too with a tiny card which said:

'In memory of *Charlton Chestwig*, the world's best climber,' (I recalled one of Paul's typically amazing route names – of a new climb he had done with Ron Fawcett). And my note just had to finish with; 'From the author of the first Bumper Fun Book to the author of the best and very last one'. It forced a tear to well, then I was happier reflecting there could have been no better way for Paul to die. Also that if Chris had been the first to grasp that rotten hold during the ascent of their last climb together the consequences could indeed have been more tragic.

Welcome to the Club

Jim Curran

It all started to go wrong before I had even left Sheffield. The original idea was that we, (Chris Bonington, Paul Nunn, Graham Little, Jim Lowther and I) would have a 'Kinnaur reunion' weekend at the Clachaig, singing for our supper by giving a joint lecture on our adventures in northern India the year before. This was to happen on Friday evening, but on Thursday, Chris came down with 'flu and pulled out. Before setting out for Scotland I left complex ansaphone messages in the hope that we could cobble something together. Paul was at a BMC meeting so we drove up separately, arranging a rendezvous at the Bridge of Orchy early on Friday, grab a quick climb and then go on to the Clachaig.

We met up at first light, both having endured mildly gruesome bivouacs in different corners of a frozen rubbish dump. Spirits were lifted by a splendid 'greasy spoon' breakfast in the Bridge of Orchy Hotel, then lowered a few minutes later as we struggled into salopettes and plastic boots in a bitter wind. We were aiming to do a route on what Paul referred to as 'Craig Doris' (that's what it sounded like anyway).

It had thawed all week but had refrozen in the past 24 hours with such a vengeance that paths, rocks, grass and heather seemed to have been French-polished. Only self-respect stopped me putting on footfangs as we skidded out of the car park and crossed a farmyard then over the main Fort William line via a railway bridge encrusted in iron-hard verglas. Cursing and slipping we wended our way up to the crag – a short walk by Scottish standards – with Paul nursing the theory that it would be out of the wind. I couldn't see how this was possible, but Paul, canny as always, was right and, rather to my surprise we were soon cramponing up a slope of perfect névé in flat calm.

Unfortunately, Paul's intended route had fallen down in the thaw since his last visit only two weeks before, and all that was left was an easy dog-leg gully. I pretended to be disappointed but dropped the pretence when Paul spotted a variation that led directly to the top of the dog-leg about three pitches from the top. It was supposedly only grade 2 or 3, but looked ominously free of anything white.

However the first pitch was



Paul Nunn in 'Raven's Gully', Buachaille Etive Mor. Photo: Geoff Birtles

exactly what I wished all ice pitches could be: easy-angled to begin with, steepening at the top with perfect 'thunking' (NB. my word, I've just invented it) placements in ice solid enough to moor the QE2. Above, it all looked horrible: a bare gully leading to an old fashioned cave pitch, splattered with a thin veneer of water ice. Here, for the first time in an undistinguished winter climbing career, I observed at close hand the mysteries of 'torquing' as Paul, 'bodging hugely', inserted an upside-down Friend in the cave roof, then hooked his axes into a thin crack above. After several attempts he swung up and across, front points skating on the right wall. Then to my increasing gloom, he traversed up and increasingly rightwards to find a belay of sorts. Judging from the time he took and his tone of voice, it failed to meet his exacting standards of safety.

I set off without much conviction, and ten minutes later wished I was somewhere – anywhere – else. As soon as I unclipped the Friend, the rope ran diagonally and, as I tried to pull on the axes (which felt as secure as hanging on a loose drainpipe), threatened to pull me off – why do I get into these situations?

"Take in – no don't – oh Christ – watch me". Gibbering, I pulled up, crampons skittering on what was left of the ice – done it. I climbed up and gave Paul a bit of a look. He knew what it meant.

"Just one more pitch, Jim – it really doesn't look so bad". Ha bloody ha, I thought as Paul unclipped from the token set of nuts and pegs that decorated the stance. But he was right again and to my relief we regained the easy gully, and after three long easy pitches we pulled over a half collapsed cornice that had now refrozen solid (or so we hoped).

As usual, time had sped past and it was already three in the afternoon as we coiled the ropes under lowering skies and once more headed into the teeth of the freezing wind. A few snowflakes spat at us as we walked down a broad ridge, aiming for a snowslope that seemed to take us a long way towards the path to the farm and car park.

As we started descending the slope we caught the full force of the wind. Tread carefully, I thought, peering under my hood through whipping snow squalls at Paul in front of me. Stamping down the iron-hard névé he drew ahead. Then it happened! Suddenly I was sliding, accelerating at an almost unimaginable rate like some ghastly fairground ride. Axe in breaking position – no good – try again but quickly before I lose it completely – a crampon catches – a crack – I spin round then a juddering stop in a shower of snow.

Curiously, I accepted what had happened almost instantly, with just a mild desire to run the tape back and replay the last few seconds without that nasty noise.

"Paul, I've broken something".

"I heard it". Paul was already plodding towards me, unclipping the rope. "Welcome to the club". What club was this?

"Well, chappie, its not got many members and nobody wants to join, but you're in good company – Doug, Joe, me even...."

It was late on a Friday afternoon, nobody else on the hill and it was blowing hard; I twigged: I'd joined the CC – the crawlers club.

"Lets just get you down this snow, then we'll sort something out". Being lowered down hard snow is no fun. Using an ice axe brake to keep in control I slid, Paul lowered. It was rather like being rubbed down with frozen sandpaper. At the end of each rope length I lay, head on the snow, axe planted at arms length

and shut my eyes as Paul climbed carefully down to repeat the process. I tried not to think too much but once, staring out at the snow-laden clouds in the gloomy twilight, it briefly crossed my mind that this time I might have blown it. I shut my eyes again.

At last, after about six or seven lowers, the angle eased off and rocks and patches of grass and heather appeared. I could lose height by a combination of stomach glistades (I have an ideal launch pad for the manoeuvre – not, I think, illustrated in my old copy of *Blackshaw*) increasing frequency, just plain crawling. Once I tried standing up and hopping, with an arm around Paul's shoulder but something started grating inside my boot and I gave an unmanly shriek. Paul looked embarrassed.

"Why don't you leave me up here and go down and get help? – I'm sure I'll be OK just crawling slowly" Paul looked grim.

"Not on chappie – it might take hours, and in this wind....".

He was right of course and I resigned myself to a long haul. Conditions were actually ideal for self-rescue – the iced up hillside that had been so irritating on the way up now gave maximum assistance on the way down. Eventually we regained the path and I settled into a lumbering, ponderous crawl. It was painfully slow and occasionally just plain painful as whatever had broken shifted about and snagged inside my boot (thankfully it proved to be only a broken fibula, not, as I had feared, an ankle). For a while not much happened. Then Paul had a brilliant idea. On the smooth downhill icy path I lay on my back and crossed my legs to keep my right foot off the ground. Paul grabbed my hands and walking backwards, dragged me like a sack of potatoes. Occasionally my head banged on rock: once Paul ripped both my gloves off:

"Sorry about that – for a moment I thought I'd torn your hands off!"

Funnily enough the enduring memory is one of laughing. After 20 years of Paul's company we knew each other so well and slipped into our normal random conversations about anything and everything. Paul, knowing my capacity to elaborate, wondered how soon I would write an article – I regretted the lack of a camera.

As dusk turned to night two things bothered me. One was that I seemed to have no symptoms of shock at all, and since the accident I felt no different (apart that is, from the odd spasm of pain, that produced yelps of anguish that Paul pretended not to notice). Was I already in shock? Would I suddenly flake out? It all seemed normal apart from an almost constant desire to urinate, despite being desperately thirsty. The only other thing that worried me was the view, (what there was of it) which stubbornly refused to change. Away over Rannoch Moor the faint lights of traffic seemed miles away, which they were. I regret to say that my admiration for Joe Simpson grew in leaps and bounds (metaphorically not literally). Whatever happened I would be in hospital fairly soon – the idea of doing this for days, and on my own, was truly appalling.

The bumping, sliding, pushing, dragged on interminably. Paul was constantly encouraging. Occasionally he would have a rest and I'd crawl slowly ahead for a few yards. Then he'd catch up and give me the benefit of whatever odd thoughts had occurred to him in my absence. He kept telling me 'it wasn't too far' – this was the only thing he said all day that really irritated me, as anything over ten yards was too far. But at last we came to the railway bridge. Halfway across a

local train clattered past underneath, its few occupants unaware of the minor epic being acted out just above their heads. I thought the farm and car park was only minutes away but it had obviously been moved since this morning. Suddenly I was flagging, my knees were rubbed raw through my salopettes and now it was so flat that Paul could be of no further help. I got colder and colder, my rests more and more frequent. But at last it was done and I lay in the farmyard as Paul went to fetch the car, to spare me the last 50 yards. I looked up into the night sky. It was snowing gently and the temperature had risen.

We sat in silence in Paul's car, swapping dregs of tepid coffee from a Thermos.

"Well done Jim – now we've got two choices – Glasgow, which is on the way home and has got big hospitals – or Fort William which is further away but nearer".

I ignored a typically Nunnesque contradiction.

"Come on Paul, you know as well as I do what we'll do".

And so we did, arriving at the Clachaig just in time for a pint and, in my case, several medicinal drams. Poor Graham Little had been the only lecturer to turn up and with a display of bravado, had managed to persuade his bewildered audience that only the summit day of a month-long expedition was worth talking about. Jim Lowther had crashed his car on Rannoch Moor, which was lucky for me as he could now drive my car home, which of course was lucky for him. But they were two strokes of luck we could have done without.

Paul drove me round to Fort William. Now safe and in good hands I thanked him profusely for all he'd done to get me down. This embarrassed us both a bit. Once inside the hospital Paul, who had been in control, calm and competent, reverted to his normal clumsy self, knocking things over, stepping in various delicate bits of apparatus, bumping into nurses etc. But he had saved my life. He had also, though neither of us knew it, just completed his last Scottish winter climb. I won't forget it.

Tour of Mont Blanc

Hamish Nicol

So far as I am concerned, it was Bob's idea. We would tour Mont Blanc in a party of eight, all of whom were his friends. They were nearly all formidable walkers and I worried slightly about my arthritic hip. Bob and I flew out together to Geneva and a bus took us from there to Les Houches where the tour starts. Beds in the Hotel Chavanne in Les Houches had been booked by five of the party and I thought we would be the last to arrive. We were not. David and Christine came into the dining room just as Bob and I had finished a nice dinner washed down by a litre of wine. They seemed a little uncertain if they were actually going to come with us. Next morning they were still deciding. Paul and Jane arrived later.

Blast off had been arranged by Paul for 9.30am on Tuesday September 12th. Reg and Sheila arrived by train shortly after this, and settled down to have a comfortable breakfast, followed by a trip to the supermarket to buy their provisions. All eight of us eventually caught the 10.45am ski lift up to Bellevue.

"Ooh" said Sheila, "this is fun, I haven't been on one of these before."

We all set off downhill from the top station at 11.15am, and the famous Tour du Mont Blanc had begun. At least it wasn't raining, and there were even shafts of sunlight in between the scudding clouds. At 12.30pm, after just over an hour of gentle plodding somebody said "let's have lunch" so we did. The Col de Tricot wasn't far away but the splendid view that you get from its summit had disappeared into the mist before our arrival. By 3pm our party of eight straggled into the little hamlet of Miage and stopped. Paul announced emphatically that he was staying here for the night. Some people did the TMB in a day and a half, he said, and good luck to them. He was going to enjoy himself, and have a holiday. Jane, Reg, Sheila, Christine and David all agreed with Paul, whilst Bob and I muttered darkly to each other, feeling and looking like conspirators.

These were our problems. It was early, and still a fair day, but the forecast for Wednesday was diabolical, with snow falling down to the 2,000 metres contour and continuous rain below that level. The section of the TMB from Les Contamines up to the Bonhomme hut is notoriously arduous and if you add to it two hours from Miage to Les Contamines you've got an eight or nine hour day wearing all those rain soaked clothes. Moreover Bob and I only had 13 days for the TMB plus a possible ascent of Mont Blanc.

So Bob and I stole away having arranged to meet up again at the Bonhomme hut the next evening. It seemed a suitable though rather messy compromise. Bob engaged top gear and bombed up the hill to Truc. I expect he was feeling guilty and I certainly was. Anyway I'm always a few minutes behind him on the uphill bits. He has his speed, and I have mine. Contamines became visible through the rain and low cloud at about 5pm. The tourist office there was extremely helpful and found us a room in a gite d'etape at Nivorin. It poured with rain all night. Next day was one of those character building exercises since it rained hard all day, as forecast by the Meteo. I shot into the village at 8am to buy some food for breakfast while Bob studied the route and the maps. He has a penchant for this sort of thing so I can leave him to it. Eventually we got off at about 10am, wearing

absolutely everything. Bob said "that must be the Chalets de la Balme" at mid-day, and suggested stopping for a cup of hot coffee. I thought this was a brilliant idea, and before my eyes swam a picture of a roaring fire, a warm kitchen, a pretty girl serving us and perhaps even helping us off with our wet things. It didn't happen quite that way. She was certainly pretty but very firm. We must drink our coffee in the next door portakabin which was only just one degree warmer than the ambient 0°C. The coffee was lukewarm and it cost 15 francs. Our visit lasted barely 10 minutes.

Snow had been falling quite steadily at the Col de Bonhomme and beyond and was trying to obliterate the path, so we were lucky to find the hut which only becomes visible at the last minute. It was 4.30pm. Inside, a charming man advanced towards us and after some brief formalities ushered us to our room. He was the hut Gardien and he did everything to make us welcome. Later he cooked a delicious dinner for us during which I chatted away to Chretien on my left and to Bob opposite. Chretien was obviously on his own, and was so overcome at having somebody to talk to that he bought us a litre of wine, so how could one refuse? By nightfall there was still no sign of the others.

Daybreak came gloomily with a thick fog, visibility down to 100 metres and 10 cm of new snow on the ground. Somebody had told us that the Elisabetta hut in Italy had decided to close early for the season, which meant that we must go to Mottets that night, only a short four hours away, and thence face a very long walk to Courmayeur. Bob wrote a letter to Paul setting out this sport plan, and left it with the Gardien. The path from the hut down to Chapieux was at first slippery and snow covered. Chapieux seemed quite deserted. Empty tables and rain soaked chairs stood outside the only hotel. At Chapieux the route turns sharp left and it is a very easy two hours up to the private hotel and dortoir of Les Mottets at 1,870 metres. There were only two other guests there, both utterly silent, and eating their lunch. They came from Leipzig in East Germany, and spoke only German and Russian. They were proposing to make for the Elisabetta hut that day, so it was important to get over to them the fact that it had closed.

"Nur winter raum offen" said I, and their faces fell. Oddly enough they became quite friendly after this piece of bad news. They were called Dixie and Herman and gave the impression that they were always slightly lost. Bob very soon decided to call them Pinkie and Perkie and the names stuck.

It was at Mottets that the limericks started. You were supposed to put something in the hut book so I wrote.

'Mottets is a nice place to be,
When it's raining so hard you can't see.
The mountains are huge,
And in such a deluge,
It's better to sit and drink tea.'

We dined at 7pm, and the food was superb. By nightfall our friends had not appeared and we realised that they were not going to.

Next morning, September 15th, our bed to blast off time had improved to only an hour and a half. Patting the amiable resident dog on the head, at 8.30am we climbed up to the Col de la Seigne in rain and a thick mist, closely followed by Pinkie and Perkie who soon went in front. On the col however things began to look very different. The top of Mont Blanc was almost visible and one could see

right down the Val Veni and the Val Ferret, andcould that be the Grand Combin....? Yes it could. Everyone jumped for joy. The Grande Balcone path which follows a platform on the south side of the Val Veni at just below 2,000 metres, gives a marvellous view of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey, and you can see it even better from the Plan Checrouit which was our stopping place for the night. Here Bob produced TMB limerick number two:

'The one way to beat all this mist,
Is to get yourself thoroughly pissed,
Two litres of wine,
Are simply divine,
And the views you've not seen won't be missed.'

Many other limericks were created and worked up during these eight days. Unfortunately all are quite unprintable...

In the morning it took one and a half hours to walk down to Courmayeur, though the town looked absurdly close. Here Pinkie and Perkie disappeared. It didn't take long to buy some food, and by 10.30am Bob and I were walking up to Villair and thence by a beautiful path to the Bertone hut. There doesn't seem to be a lot of point in the Bertone hut. It is too close to Courmayeur to be of much use, and we passed it at noon, then traversed the Monte della Saxe and dropped down to La Vachey looking forward to a nice rest, and a bed for the night. Unfortunately there are only two hotels in La Vachey, one was closed and the other full up. The Elena hut at the top end of the valley had already closed for the winter. This was the nadir of our trip. Bob decided we must hire a taxi: it was the only solution. Mr Andino, the taxi man, a most agreeable Aostan, drove us back to the Albergo Funivia at Pulud. I had last been there in 1955 with Tom Bourdillon. It had changed a lot in 40 years but was still recognisably the same. Here the bunkhouse was quite empty though two Germans turned up later. I very quickly booked Mr Andino for the following morning, to take us as near as possible to the Elena hut. The evening was hilarious and vinous, and we probably made far too much noise.

Mr Andino arrived at 8.30am promptly, and took us two, plus the two Germans (Egon and Henning, alias Eggie and Hennie) who had kindly offered to help pay the 60,000 lire taxi bill (about £24). The motorable road only goes as far as Arnava. Here Eggie and Hennie forged ahead, leaving Bob and me to our own slower pace, though we still reached the Col du Grand Ferret in only two hours. Here two MORE Germans were resting on stones. One spoke excellent English and asked me where we came from. Bob said :

"Bradford". I said:

"Stratford on Avon - you know, William Shakespeare's place." Whereupon I broke straight into the 'To Be or Not to Be' soliloquy from **Hamlet**. Some people chew prune stones on the long and tedious climbs, I prefer to recite poetry, usually to myself. Before I could finish Helmut said:

"Stop. Stop. Wait and do it again." He wanted a picture of this ancient Briton standing on the panorama table waving his arms about. It must certainly have been a most bizarre apparition. Helmut and Claus, (Muttie and Nickie), followed us down the Swiss Val Ferret towards la Fouly, but at the tiny village of Ferret a most welcome sight greeted us. It was a bus standing in the middle of the road. The sign on it said:- 'A Orsieres'.

'Just the job', I thought. So we sat for a delicious two hours in the sun, drinking

beer and eating cakes in the garden of a nearby hotel with Muttie and Nickie, and Pinkie and Perkie (who had also turned up). Then all six climbed shamelessly aboard at 3.50pm. At Praz de Fort, Eggie and Hennie joined us, but Eggie was limping and that was the last we saw of them. They went off home from Orsieres.

A cold wintry wind was blowing off the lake at Champex, but some fishermen pointed us in the direction of the Swiss Alpine Club Hotel, which turned out to be a private establishment and nothing to do with the Swiss Alpine Club. Madame looked us up and down a bit. This was a much posher place than any we had been used to so far, but I expect she needed the money as the hotel was virtually empty. She showed us politely up to a nice dortoir, and after an (only just) adequate meal, we went to bed. Nickie was soon snoring stertorously.

The next bit of the TMB is the notorious Fenêtre d'Arpette, a steepish walk up and over the col of that name and down the other side to Forclaz. Andrew Harper who writes the very useful TMB guidebook in English gets a little carried away here, describing it as a 'brute challenge for the experienced walker'. Well it's just a walk, though the steep west side of the fenêtre could be tricky if there was any snow about. Bob and I arrived at Forclaz at about 4pm, and fought our way through queues of fat ladies alighting from huge buses. The hotel however, was welcoming and quiet and by evening all the crowds had disappeared.

The next day was going to be our fifth consecutive eight hour day. Two pairs of hips were complaining by this time and the path up to Col de Balme and the French border, is as circuitous and complicated as a path can be. The hotel on the col summit was closed and shuttered, and only two lugubrious Scots sat sheltering from the wind and the rain.

"Let's buzz off straight down to Argentière" said Bob.

He was right: we did. The large CAF refuge in Le Tour had just closed two days before our arrival, so there was no alternative to a road plod as far as Montroc. Montroc has a station and just as we got there, a little train emerged from a tunnel on the Swiss side, stopped, tooted and waited politely. We jumped on and travelled the last bit to Argentière in style.

It rained all night and it was raining next morning. There was no point in spending two days on the Brévent in nil visibility, nor did it seem likely that Mont Blanc would be in very good condition with lots of new snow. So I took a train to Les Houches, packed up our bags, and caught the night train to Paris.

Summary:- Tour du Mont Blanc, from Les Houches to Argentière, in eight days, assisted by one ski lift, two taxis (one in the wrong direction), one bus and two trains.

Participants:- Bob Allen and Hamish Nicol.

Postscript:- David and Christine retired on reaching Les Contamines, Reg and Sheila did the same at Les Chapieux. Paul and Jane completed the TMB as far as Argentière, but were two or three days behind us.

Approx. total cost for HGN including travel, food and accommodation – £560. (Outward air journey courtesy of Air Miles). Half Pension in French and Italian huts came to about £20 per night. Switzerland is MUCH more expensive.

Map:- Didier et Richard 1/50,000 to Mont Blanc.

Guidebook:- *Tour of Mont Blanc* by Andrew Harper. Cicerone Press.

Climbing in Antarctica

Neil Boyd

'No climber should believe too much in their achievement. Everything returns to dust.' (Found written on the toilet door of the gents in the Clachaig).

If, as Laurie Lee supposes, we only travel to impress our elders, travelling this far to simply climb a lump of ice must mean I suffer from some terrible psycho-analytical childhood trauma that makes me want to make my granny happy. However, since the British Antarctic Survey do all the travel arrangements for which, in exchange, you sign over your life for a season, it appeared to be a good opportunity to see a strange part of the world and the few people who inhabit it.

The lump of ice two of us climbed was Mount Bouvier, which rises to over 7,000 feet on Adelaide Island and appears on your map as one of the smaller islands to the west of the Antarctic Peninsula. Not that we got too much time to climb you must understand, only a little R & R inbetween severe bouts of hard work, to justify the millions of pounds of tax payers' money spent on us. Mount Bouvier's east face is vast, tumbling with seracs for thousands of feet. It leads down to a channel, littered with icebergs which separates Adelaide Island from the spires of the Arrowsmith Peninsula. To the north a long ridge descends to the piedmont before rising up to Mount Reeves and to the west a large avalanche prone face is split by two ridges, which rise twisting from the 2,000 foot Fuchs Ice Piedmont to the summit ridge. Southwards, about 20 miles away lies the British Antarctic Survey base of Rothera. It was whilst I was working there, (destroying old cartons of fizzy water which had passed their sell-by date was one of the less important tasks) that I saw its triangular shape soaring skywards during the few brief gaps in the wild weather.

Deep Antarctica is a lonely old place comparable only to a bed-sit at Christmas. When you go climbing in the Himalaya or the Andes there is a point when you leave the mountain environment and re-enter the world of the living. However down south, there are no trees, no villagers tending fields around the corner and no descent into a warmer climate below the glacier line. The surroundings are harsh, barren, cold and windswept, a real white graveyard at the bottom of the earth. You often cannot compare shades of colour, there is little subtlety or play of light. The long never-ending summer days confuse the body clock, it not being unusual to eat breakfast in the evening and dinner at four in the morning. The cold is never ending, except when you go inside a lovely warm hut, or even a lovely warm tent. But as far as natural habitats go, we aren't meant to be there.

However, as I repeatedly found out, a scientist after a set of data pursues his goal with the same concentration as a Mini Metro driver doing 100mph on the M1; he is oblivious to everything around him, including the cold. So his, or increasingly her, field assistant, often stands forlornly like a Welsh sheep in a blizzard listening to the joys of geophysics and how this data that is currently causing your fingers to frotnip, will change the world.

After a two month trip near to the British base at Fossil Bluff, (which satisfies all the requirements for what a polar base should be; cabin-like, cosy, wall papered with pin-up girls and in-jokes and backed by snowy mountains), I

teamed up with Russ, a veteran of five Antarctic seasons, and still able to hold a conversation, to record an underwater explosion set off by an Italian ship, out in the Bellingshausen Sea.

We planned for a two week trip, so we took several big wooden boxes of luxuries. I once overheard an old scientist boasting how tough a field trip in Antarctica was. He obviously did not raid the kitchens for the dozen bottles of mango chutney, steamed tinned puddings and jars of Branston pickle before he flew off into the last frontier. Nor was he lucky enough to be bombed by the Antarctic squadron on Christmas day with fresh turkey from the Falkland Islands and bottles of brandy lovingly packed to withstand the 100mph drop. Our Twin Otter, driven by the pilot who had the record for the shortest commercial flight in the world, when a storm blew him from one Shetland island to another in 45 seconds, landed before dropping us off. Conveniently it was onto the ice shelf right under the very ridge that provided the most obvious way up to the top of Mount Bouvier. For purely scientific reasons of course, it was the only rock protruding above the ice to put our recording equipment on.

We set up camp in a big orange tent that was straight out of Scott of the Antarctic and alone weighed over 100 pounds. We also had great boxes of old food that were packed in the early '80s, with ingredients no doubt long banned by Brussels, a big old primus, gallons of fuel in jerrycans and stacks of books and music. Supplemented with a nearby emergency depot, I worked out that we had enough food and fuel to get us through the winter.

We spent the first few days pretending we were polar explorers dedicating our lives to science, man-hauling pulks on skis up a hill to a rock outcrop where we set up our delicate scientific equipment. These were the moments I had waited for, for all my never ending childhood. It was straight out of the movies. The only thing missing was some dastardly Russian ski patrol intent on attacking our remote listening post and a small bloody gun battle where Russ and I saved the world.

If I remember correctly there was never any intention of climbing Bouvier when we left casually in the mid-morning. We meant to go for a ski, or rather Russ



Antarctica Camp. Photo: Neil Boyd

would ski and I would curse, stamp and fall over and hoped to climb a small peak called Sneak Peak that was the first bump on the snaking ridge which led up to Bouvier. So there was little in the way of planning. My rucksack was still full of big tins of butter and jam, processed cheese and broken packets of biscuits which had accumulated throughout the season and I was hesitant to clear it out just in case I ever got peckish.

We reached Sneak Peak on perfect white snow and the teeth of red granite of our ridge were outlined against an unbroken blue sky. To the south rose the other high peaks of Adelaide Island; Liotard, Mangin and Gaudry. The highest, Mount Gaudry had been climbed by a bunch of bootnecks, who used a helicopter to get within a few hundred yards of the summit. This had caused much gnashing of teeth from the wintering field assistants who were extremely miffed that the lovely unclimbed hill that was framed by their bar window, should be conquered so unethically.

Russ spoilt my lunch by expressing a desire to climb Bouvier. From our lunchspot the climb looked long, steep and above all exposed whilst all the time some grey presence lurked menacingly over my shoulder in the form of responsibility. If we go up, I thought, something is bound to happen. It must do. I'm breaking some sort of vague promise, I'm here to work, I'm getting paid, I shall not have fun. I searched frantically for some excuse. Not enough daylight, no, wrong continent; weather, infuriatingly perfect; equipment, we had enough; it seemed we were doomed to go up and I nodded my assent to Russ.

We kept the rope on, which I always feel is a little pointless because it just means we both end up in a mangled pile at the bottom. There were great areas of blue ice all over this frighteningly exposed slope where the polar wind had come in stormy sweeps and stripped away the snow. As we climbed I saw in my fertile imagination the dramatic Victorian lithograph of Whymper's party being cast into the dark abysses from the descent of the Matterhorn. I felt that if we had fallen, I would undoubtedly survive and have to explain how I had killed my scientist whilst dragging him up a peak I was intent on bagging. God, I felt miserable. A perfect day, totally alone, a wonderful peak and I was scared to death. The consequences of any mistake were too alarming. I was neither climbing with a friend and thus absolved of more than my fair share of responsibility, nor was I a guide with a client who had asked me to do this. I was on some vague irresponsible middle ground carrying a poor job description.

We plodded up the slope below a line of seracs that were releasing a tinkling stream of ice chips. It was late afternoon and my conscience was demanding an explanation for being there at that time. We zig-zagged higher, searching for breaks in the steepness that would allow us to rest. We reached a great blue ice patch and it became more difficult. The tips of our crampons penetrated a few millimetres, our ice axes began to swing heavily and sweat was pouring through my eyebrows into my eyes. The sweep of ice below was perfect, sheer, unbroken for 3,000 feet. Dreading a sudden jerk that would wrench me from the slope, I asked Russ to take it easy and to keep the rope between us tight. He replied with an ease and nonchalance that I envied. Maybe he was the novice but he saw only delight in his surroundings whilst I felt like a shell-shocked soldier who had been at the front too long; I was tense and withdrawing into my private fears. Only a few hundred yards of concrete ice separated us from the south ridge. I would not

accept that it was straightforward, all I could see was exposure, all I could feel were aching calves and I continued imagining Russ pulling me down and myself being judged before some wild frontier lynching mob back at base. Then we reached the south ridge.

There was a beauty and loneliness in our two tiny figures standing high on this towering ridge above the absolute desolation of Antarctica. All around us great space dropped away. We were soaring like the albatrosses above the Southern Ocean. To the north and east were the thousand summits of the Grahamland Peninsula stretching southward to the polar plateau and below them lay a thousand icebergs, motionless on a sea of blue.

We sat down in a snowy hollow and ate dry biscuits, butter and pate. We had very little water left and the biscuits stuck like glue in my mouth. Above us the ridge steepened to 55° and a line weaved its way passed vertical cliffs. Those on the western side were plastered with wind-blown snow and those to the east were seracs which dropped away 7,000 feet to Marguerite Bay. Our ridge was a stairway that passed three false summits before a peak of triangular perfection. We reached the top at around seven. It was not a first ascent. Bugs McKeith had been up here in the late '60s, but those things do not matter. It felt important to Russ and me and that was what mattered. We took some pictures and thought about the descent and my surging fear came back with a light wind from the sea.

We had to get down; down to our radio, to safety and to our home at our tent which lay like an orange spore on a white sheet a mile below our feet. In my head I saw a hundred things that could go wrong before we reached safety. As usual I could not enjoy the summit. It is only later that a real feeling of pleasure arises – usually from the comfort of a bar or in a hot bath. My brain was churning out long lists of checks and warning signs. It was seven-thirty in the evening and over the warmer sea a dense black cloud had risen. From it the wind was blowing from the north-west in whispers and shudders. The snow was softer in the late evening sun and I began to wonder about different types of avalanches. I rushed Russ through his picture-taking and urged him to get moving down.

We moved down the ridge, moving quickly, Russ in the lead and myself behind intent on keeping the rope taut and believing that I could hold his slip with my axe. But how much weight would come on me? Could I hold him? What use is theory under this bare sky with his real weight pulling me to the edge? I asked Russ to face in on the steep sections and to go down slow. Russ glanced back and I was sure I caught a look of contempt. His look said he was competent enough, it said the ground was easy and that you talk too much. But I didn't care. The nauseating, twisting cramp in my guts that worsened as the ice slope grew larger had to be fed on an outward sign of fear. We arrived at the ice slope and stood motionless like two cliff divers at Acapulco preparing to leap. The sun lowered further, kissing the horizon and sending a thousand glittering rays of gold towards us, turning the ice slope into a palette of colour. We chose a zig-zag course down a line of least resistance and one that linked up the bumps on the slope which we hoped would offer us a second chance if we slipped.

There are often only two dirges in the mind when climbers go up and down mountains. One is a pop song, infuriatingly the one you least like, which won't go away and stays in rhythm with your footsteps or your breathing. This time I suffered **Mr Big**, an American rock outfit which I particularly loathe. The second

is a mantra of concentration to blank out the song and the dangerous dreamlike feeling it induces. All the way down the slope, blinking my eyes to reduce the stinging sweat, I kept repeating, 'Three points of contact, step, step, axe; don't slip, don't slip, feel for that step, step, axe; I'm the one who wants to be with you, Deep inside..., c'mon, shut up Mr Big, get a grip, step, step, axe.'

I found small landmarks ahead and gave them safety labels. 'There, we will be safer, only a 1,000 foot slip. There, we will be quite safe, it's snow not blue ice. A bit further and nearly total safety and there, on the rock absolute, unassailable safeness.'

We weaved down the slope, tottering like penguins traversing a continent of ice. I was bargaining with the gods, promising good behaviour, higher morals and days of penance if they gazed kindly down for another hour or two. As we neared our col the fear of the last few hours slowly dissolved and a calmness and deep happiness settled over me. It was like the story of the Buddha when he was asked how to meditate by an old woman. He told her she should concentrate on every movement her hands made as she drew water from a well. This would lead to a state of calmness and alertness that is meditation. I felt the same treading down from this high peak, beaten into a peace by the scale of our surroundings and the release from the knife edge of danger.

Russ wandered down, turning on the ice by kicking hard with his crampons and thumping in the end of his axe. We at last slid over the col and grasped the rocky buttresses, lying like rough coya husks afloat on my ocean of fear. From this point it was easy. We stopped at a pool of water cupped in a hollow of warm rock and satisfied our thirst. All seemed exceptionally good with the world. Above us the peak appeared huge and fantastic. It was as though we could see it through medieval eyes when mountains had an aura of magic, when their remoteness gave them a purity which they lost when we reached the top. We continued down, fitting our skies and slid back to the tent for lots of tea drinking.

It seems wrong now to say that those moments of descent down the bare blue ice slope had no grain of joy, but only black humour, nagging doubt and a great wish to travel quickly out of a paralysis of alarm. Our future goals are dictated to by these false nostalgic memories and recollections of events that did not really occur as we remember them. How many times have I blocked out the bad parts only to revel in the good bits? Do I always need to descend into fear and self doubt every climb to enjoy the pleasure later? If so, is not climbing a drug that becomes ever more dangerous as we try to recapture that dodgy memory of achievement in our reckless youths? To me it seems that the truth about what we remember about our times in the mountains is infuriatingly duplicated and various. I have since made that climb many times in my mind and each time it was different, dictated by how I felt at that moment. Yes, I loathed it, yes, I was strong, yes, I was wracked with fear, yes, I was weak, yes, I was irresponsible, yes, I was adventurous; take your pick.

But at the end of the day, when stuck behind some desk, knee deep in conventionality and driving to a never-ending maddening workplace with a million other suckers, it does give great pleasure to think back to a place that is utterly different to the one we now inhabit. And since pleasure is nearly happiness, that is why we do it all, isn't it?

Nunny's Last Climb

Dave Wilkinson

If you asked a child to paint you a picture of a mountain, he would do Haramosh II.

During the summer of 1994, Brian Davison and myself stood on a small peak in the western Karakoram and looked around. The majority of climbers are conservative, and go for the biggest and most famous mountains, so amazingly, most of the myriad of peaks we saw are still unclimbed. The one that most caught our eyes was to the south. We saw an unknown mountain, a sharp peak of snow and ice gleaming white in the sun against a perfect blue sky. This was a fairy-tale mountain, and we had the childlike wish to climb it. Back home, we discovered what it was, and that it was unclimbed. Plans were made for the following summer. Later, we enrolled Paul Nunn, Geoff Tier and Colin Wells to share this dream. We arrived in Pakistan in the first week of July.

A month later, we relaxed happily in our tents in the afternoon sun, dozing and drinking endless mugs of tea. We had just returned from the 6,666 metre summit to our high camp at 5,700m, tired but content after the day's efforts, and felt we had a right to be. We had dragged our weary selves up the top thousand metres of our mountain, and staggered down again, and our two friends were about to join us. We had been able to see them for over an hour; they had now passed from sight behind a bump in the ridge above the tents, but we could hear the sounds of their voices as they got closer. 'We' were myself, Brian and Colin, and 'our friends' were Paul and Geoff.

I lounged back sipping my umpteenth brew, feeling like a lump of partially reconstituted instant mash. I heard sounds from the other tent, Brian's stove purring yet again: tea for the lads. This had been a good expedition. Unlike many better-funded trips nowadays, we had done it all by ourselves – none of the use of 'tour operators' or 'trekking agents' to buy our supplies, organise our transport, hire our porters, and empty our wallets. While Geoff and myself, the advanced party, were hassling with the organisation in 'Pindi, we were approached by a plausible character, Ghulam Nabi, touting for work as a head porter. A good head porter is, of course, well worth his salt, in saving porter over-charging and other bother. But a bad one is worse than useless. So, was this one good or bad? While we were thus contemplating the unknown, the others arrived in town, and Paul and Nabi greeted each other as old and trusted friends with a mighty bear hug. We had found our head porter.

We had had perfect weather on the walk-in, and for long enough to get a view of our line. Haramosh II's north-west side looked distinctly climbable, but not specially safe, except by the line we had spotted.

We had virtually done the route already in our heads, but before we could try it in reality, the weather took a turn, with rain and snow for ten days. Suspension of animation was needed. I was fortunate to share a base-camp tent with Paul. This did not give me a relaxing period of stasis, but an interesting one. His convoluted arguments and credibility-stretching opinions were, as always, a bizarre mixture of mental stimulation and infuriating drain on patience. This was a trying period

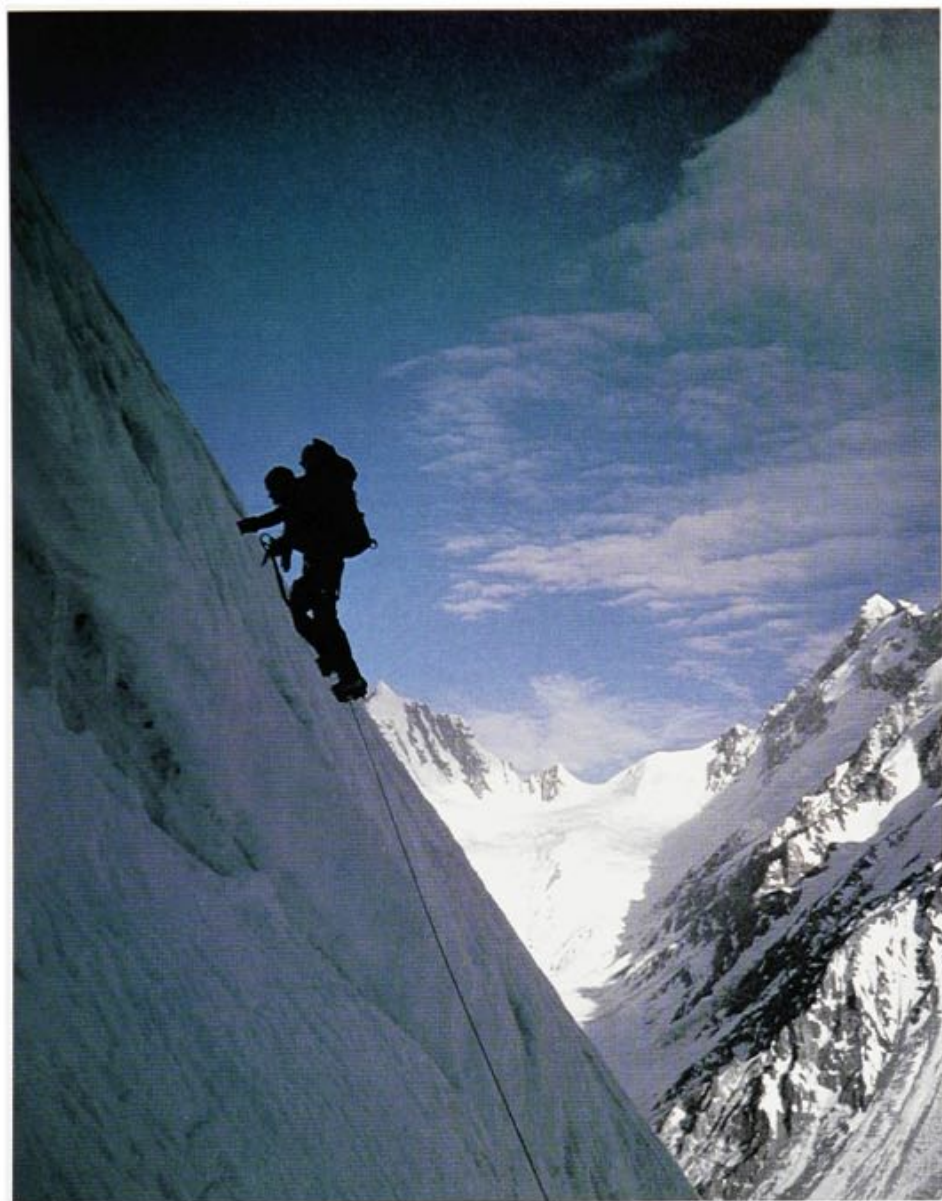
of waiting, enlivened towards the end by our home-brewed beer reaching the state of 'drinkable' (just about), and by a few amusing incidents.

One of these was a bit of 'reverse portering'. We had carried some food and tents up the glacier; two days later, we were annoyed to find them at another, much lower place. Back at base-camp we found out that there were some outsiders trespassing in the valley. A group of men from Sassi, a village in the Indus valley, had crossed the Haramosh La, a 5,000 metre high pass looking for gems, a popular pastime since the government had relaxed its prospecting laws. This seems to be the local equivalent of our national lottery; you may be unlucky and get nothing; but just as likely, you could find a semi-precious amethyst or garnet (rather like recouping lottery stakes with a £10 prize); then there was the dream of a jackpot, finding a big emerald would make them rich beyond their comprehension. But these men had found our gear, and imagining it to be abandoned by a previous year's trip, they had claimed it as fair swag and carried it down to take home later. But lower down the glacier, they found a bigger dump of ours, realised their mistake, and left it there. We were glad of this relative honesty. During the bad spell, they were stranded by the weather, and could not return over the pass because of the snow, nor retreat down the valley past their tribal enemies from this side. They were dependent on their limited means and ability to live off the land. They were too proud to beg food and shelter from us, and we had not the resources to give them much. We could spare them a brew or two and a drop of paraffin to light their fires of damp dwarf willow. They had a gun, and shot an ibex to survive. As conciliation for moving our things, they gave us three days' supply of the meat, a delicious and welcome variation to our diet. This generous gesture may have been altruistic, but later on we heard a story which offered a more cynical and perhaps a more realistic explanation. A few years ago, an expedition's base-camp had been looted in their absence, with much money stolen. The Sassi men were strongly suspected. The police visited them and made inquiries but no individual suspects emerged, so every man in the village was beaten up by the police. They did not want that again.

Then one afternoon, the weather relented, and the mountains re-appeared covered afresh with white. Next morning, we trudged back up the glacier, through the fresh snow, to our advanced base-camp, to find that our cached food had been seriously ravaged. These big black birds are a serious menace in this region, one we had paid too little attention to. They have huge appetites, cheek to match, and beaks with the pecking power to make short work of our several layers of cardboard, polythene and sackcloth. The only foods to survive intact were the tinned, and the buried under rocky cairns. But we could bring more up next time, for we had no intention of completing the route this time. The 2,000 metres to the top were too much for our fitness and acclimatisation to take. Next day, Brian, Colin and I did a reconnaissance and food carry a quarter of the way up. Paul and Geoff were not well, and stayed behind, Paul with a cold and Geoff with indigestion and vomiting. This was later to be the cause of their demise.

My day dreaming changed to more recent days. What a trip! After all the usual expedition hassles, we had succeeded – all of us had got to the top. In my smug, dozy sort of state, I had forgotten that such self-congratulations are out of order until you get back down.

And an interesting route it had been, in a not too technical exploratory sort of way. Our face looked rather like Mont Blanc's Brenva face, with plenty of very dangerous falling seracs. But as with its alpine likeness, this face had a relatively safe line following a disjointed spur which avoided all the danger... well, most of it.



Brian Davison on the Bergshrund of Haramosh II, c5,450m. Photo: Dave Wilkinson

The climbing was also reminiscent of the Brenva face. We only wore ropes where bergschrund and crevasses threatened non-climbing crust-breaking falls to their icy subterranean depths. Otherwise we made it safer by climbing unroped.

Cold-of-night mentality. Dark Neanderthal lower-brain-watched movement. Half-awake upper-brain trying to retain some share. Then daylight and warmth crept in. Mind now fully alert. Day-warm-shunning urgency. Safer moving faster and arriving sooner, before sun had softened snow to slide from under feet, and loosened rocks to fall on top of heads. Standard no harder than Scottish winter grade III, so climbing-fall danger less likely.

Being a west face was a safe feature – the sun did not hit it till later in the day, giving ample time to get out of the way of any potential snow avalanches or rockfall. Serac fall is a different matter and can happen at any time of day or night. But our line was safe from serac fall...except for a little bit just above the camp. Here, we'd had to run the gauntlet under some fairly innocuous looking ice cliffs, which had not fallen while we'd been around to watch. The lads would only take a few minutes to get past this danger zone, and they'd be safely with us. Then we could all look forward to a relaxing homeward journey.

My reverie was shattered by a loud crash: another serac breaking off. Presumably, one of the usual ones to left or right. Brian was first to pop his head out:

"This looks like the one over the route". As the noise died away, our friends' voices did not start again. We snapped out of our complacency, and rushed up the ridge to where we could see. There was no sound or sight of them, just a chaos of massive jumbled blocks of ice, and a deathly silence. We shouted their names but the mountain mocked us with its inhuman silence. We stood speechless, unable for some minutes to fully believe the obvious truth. We had to face the awful reality that we could do nothing at all to help them. But at least their end would have been rapid with such a weight of debris burying them; and this was a fitting grave, high on a wild and remote mountain.

More snowy weather then stranded us for two days at this top camp, before we could escape back down, and start the long, sad homeward journey. For the next two weeks, my morning awakenings were plagued by a strange half-disbelief. In my semi-awakened state, I found difficulty in knowing whether this had really happened, or was it a nightmare? Only later, when I was completely conscious, did I come to fully re-know the dreadful truth.

Five months later, I can try to look back a little more dispassionately. My dead friends are two of the best you could wish for, and their loss is inconsolable. But unlike some types of climbing, big mountains have not been made safe by technology, they remain an adventure. We would not wish it otherwise. Paul and Geoff were intelligent men; they knew the risks, and accepted them as part of something they loved. So, sad though we are, we also must accept the consequences of their adventuring.

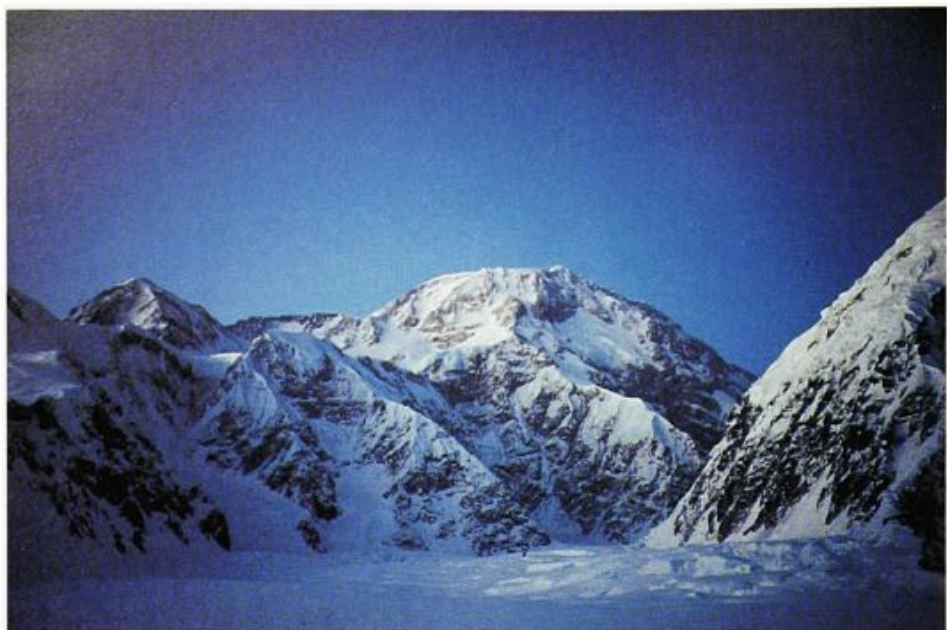
Summary: Haramosh II, 6,666m, Karakoram, Pakistan. First Ascent.
Route: North-West Face/Spur 2,000m. Two days climbing; grade – alpine Difficile.
Summit reached by all five members: B. Davison, C. Wells, D. Wilkinson, P. Nunn, G. Tier, on 6th Aug. 1995. Nunn and Tier killed by serac fall later on same day while descending just above the top camp.



Above: Haramosh II from Haramosh Glacier. Photo: Dave Wilkinson

Below: 24th April 1995. Homage to Kangchenjunga - 40th Anniversary Trekking Team at Oktang (15,250ft) below South-West Face. Photo: George Band

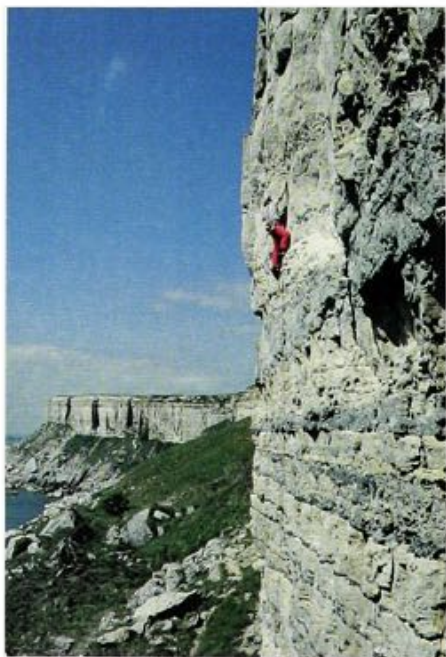
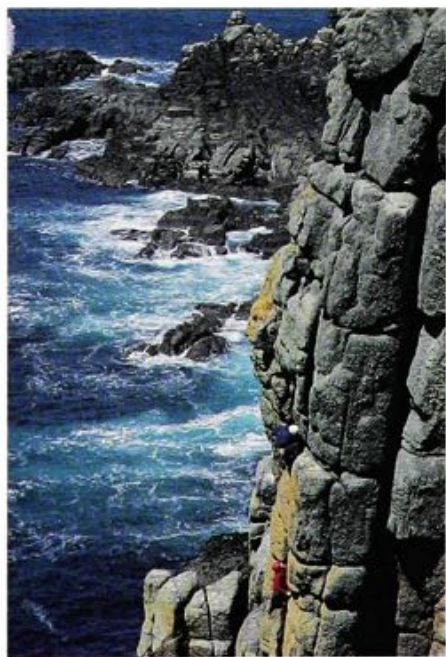




Above: Mt. McKinley. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

Below left: 'South Face Direct' VS 4c, Chairladder. Photo: Chris Craggs

Below right: 'No Man's an Island' E3 6a, Portland. Photo: Chris Craggs





Crevasse Rescue, Bernese Oberland. Photo: Smiler Cuthbertson

Scandinavian Sojourn

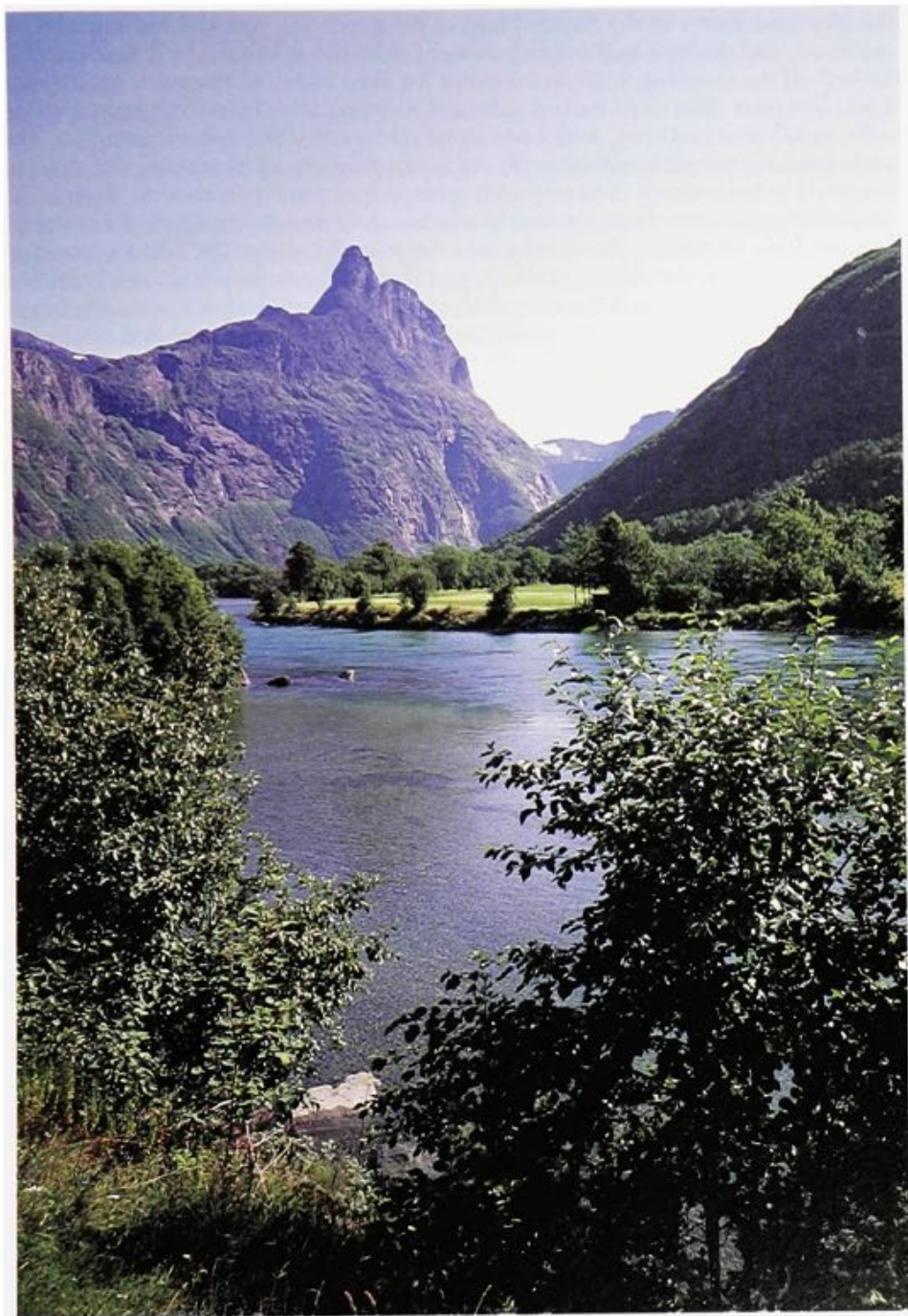
Chris Craggs

After four fantastic summers wandering the western USA we felt ready for a change, but where? We toyed with ideas that ranged from the Pyrenees, through the Alps, onto East Germany and through the Czech Republic, we even considered stopping in the UK, though that was considered just a bit too excessive. If we did that then doubtless the drought would end and we thought it unfair to spoil the whole nation's summer! Eventually the penny dropped, close to home, easy to get at, friendly locals, mountains galore, a place neither of us had ever been: it simply had to be Norway. On the potential downside I had been told that the place was very expensive and that the weather could be mixed or much worse. With the exchange rate against the French and Swiss francs being what they are at the moment, and having spent four summers in the desert we thought we would risk it.

So we loaded the car with full sets of waterproofs, plenty of pairs of socks, half a ton of insect repellent, and as much in the way of victuals as we could cram in (including 15 litres of wine and five of whisky, but don't tell the customs men). On the first Saturday of the school holidays the Colorline ship 'Viking' set sail from North Shields, an easy two hours drive from home, and we were aboard. 20 hours later we docked at Stavanger after a relaxing crossing, a sauna, a beer watching the cabaret, 10 hours in bed and an early breakfast: it put the 24 hour drive to the south of France into perspective.

The next five weeks were a revelation, the sun shone and shone, there were virtually no midges, crowds, tourists or rain. We climbed, hiked, fished, crossed glaciers and generally lived the Norwegian idea of the good life. For a starter we spent a week climbing at the open valley of Setesdal, 80 miles east of Stavanger, where glaciated slabs rise for almost 2,000 feet, and start only ten minutes walk from the (deserted) campsite. The days were hot (it was like being back in America), and the nights never got properly dark. A couple of pairs of eye patches from our local chemists were amazingly effective even though we felt like escapees from some bizarre quiz game 'Guess when it gets light'. From Setesdal we headed north via ferries and spectacular mountain roads, onto the highest peaks in Norway, the Jottenheim. Here we met the only crowds of the holiday when we joined the crocodile of walkers heading for the top of Galdhopiggen, at just over 8,000 feet the highest peak in Scandinavia. The book in the summit café (yes, café) revealed that peak was getting about 300 ascents a day, busy or what! The whole area is like a giant version of the Cairngorms with way-marked paths linking high standard huts and containing the highest 27 peaks in Norway. Small glaciers and permanent snow fields add to the interest in the stunning mountain range. I think we will return. Whilst in the area we also spent a couple of days exploring the Jostalsbreen, and its associated glaciers, the biggest ice cap in Continental Europe and another spectacular feature.

On northwards and we duly rolled into Romsdal, the two and a half weeks spent there was a revelation. Never having tried the game before, we had taken fishing rods with us in an attempt to supplement our diet and had no success in



Romsdalshorn, 5,100ft. Photo: Chris Craggs

the glaciated rivers of the South. Here in the fjords we virtually fed ourselves – mackerel, cod, pollack and coalfish straight from the sea to the pan, brilliant! We kicked off the climbing with an ascent of the East Ridge of Bispen, a spectacular 4,500 foot peak. The route looked quite intimidating from below but turned out to offer excellent scrambling, and a few short pitches of V.Diff before easing off. The view from the top was majestic with unknown peaks in all directions. The descent involved tedious down climbing with scree ledges interspersed with short walls until a long glissade took us down to a frozen lake and the footpath. Ever since I bought Tony Howard's Romsdal guide, back in the early '70s I had wanted to climb the stumpy Matterhorn of the Romsdalshorn. The approach was a steady two and a half hour grind and the nine pitch climbed was very alpine, a smattering of loose rock, swirling mist, occasional light showers and just now and then rainbows over Romsdal. Five long abseils took us back to the base of the climbing.

The rock climbing in the area was also excellent, the Norwegians having a similar approach to the yanks, nut protection is the norm wherever the cracks allow it and then when the cracks run out bolts are used. On blank glaciated slabs bolts are used as freely as they are required. The short steep cliff of Mjølvaammeren is the local venue for strenuous (and mostly hard) sport climbs whereas the glaciated slabs of Hornaksla offer friction climbs. Behind the slabs towers the main cliff where the routes are up to 12 pitches long. Eventually a poor forecast readied us for the trip home but after a day's drizzle the sun shone again and so we hiked up Store Trolltind, the highest peak in the famous Troll range. A four hour walk across frozen lakes, boulder fields and an interminable scree slope brought us to 'the Trolls Highway' a remarkable horizontal path cutting through spectacular scenery, and arriving at the gap of Bruar Skar. This is the takeoff point for the BASE jumpers and the downward view was truly terrifying, 850 metres of overhanging rock and then another 600 metres of steep scree – just one step is all it takes! The book on the top of Store Trolltind revealed we were the sixth party up there this year, a bit of a contrast to Galdhøpiggen!

Eventually the rains did come and we headed down the coast to Bergen. It was like driving from Fort William to Pembroke, a long day's drive and the weather changed accordingly. The last week we spent around Bergen, cragging and hiking, and by now (late August) the short northern summer was ending. The trees were developing spectacular colours and night-time frost became the norm, it was time to head home.

As the boat sailed from Stavanger the sun set into a sea of deepest blue, highlighting the old multicoloured wooden buildings on the water front. 20 hours later we were stood in stationary traffic on the A1 and it was raining – welcome back to Britain!

Newsflash!! Arctic Norway

As a rider to the above article, Andy Perkins and Clive Davies visited the area in August. They climbed on Midgardstormen, making the first ascent of *Lofte*, a four-pitch E3 route and the second ascent of the well-known but unrepeatable *The Journey*, a 13 pitch E5 6b route, first climbed by Tom Cosgriff and Sjur Nesheim in July 1993.

Azeri Adventure

Grace Hurford

The alarm clock beeped insistently... 4am and time to leave the comfort of my sleeping bag.

Luckily I'd cooked dinner so it was Sasha's turn to crawl out of the tent and organise breakfast. I had also taken the precaution of putting all my hill clothes on the night before (except for crampons) so preparation was minimal. By the time I'd persuaded the base-camp team to roll over in our cramped tent so that I could emerge, it was 4.30 and time for action... or so I thought.

"OK Sasha.. we go?"

"No way.."

"Huh? What's the problem?"

"The dogs... we must have daylight so we can see them creeping up on us."

Oh dear. Half wild Caucasus sheep dogs protecting their territory had not been on my sports plan. Still, a chance for me to stock up (unleavened bread, salami and black coffee) and at 5am we finally set off.

The objective was Shakhdag (Mountain King, 4,243 metres) a rather old mountain with steep sides and a flat top reminiscent of Kinder Scout. As it was my first venture into the Azeri mountains, we had decided to go for the ordinary route which entailed two hours of walking, one hour of via ferrata scrambling without any ferrata, three hours more walking followed by one hour of 35°



Shakhdag, 4,243m. Photo: Grace Hurford

snow/ice climbing to a very flat summit. The alternative was two days of rock climbing at HVS/E1 standard – unfortunately (?) I only had the weekend off work, so discretion became the better part of valour. 'Work' entailed setting up a school of public management in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, as Nottingham Trent University's contribution to re-invigorating the national economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Back to the story.

Baku was a small enough city to make contact with climbers fairly rapidly and, frankly, the expedition arrangements went more smoothly than anything else I had experienced in Azerbaijan. Sasha and Misha (two of Baku's foremost ice and rock climbers, respectively) drove myself and an unsuspecting student (Zara) five hours north-west of Baku, through ravines, ditches and some roads to the tiny village of Laza at 2,000 metres. This is getting high considering we started at 30 metres BELOW sea level by the Caspian Sea. After a very cosy night in our small tent, followed by protracted negotiations with locals to guard Misha's precious car, we were on our way.

I have done my fair share of walk-ins and on this occasion I just kept telling myself 'It's NOT as far as the Mutthorn Hut from Lauterbrunnen.'

It seemed to take a long time, and at one stage we 'requisitioned' a horse to take a weary base-camp member the last stage. Even the horse balked on the last section though, which involved a couple of moderate rock steps down a slab, above a whirlpool, and onto the great plains the other side.

It actually took six hours to the bivouac site, with stops, and the main pleasure for me was the greenery (rare in Azerbaijan – more noted for its oil derricks and sludge) and being able to drink fresh water. Water in Baku can be filtered, sterilised and boiled, and it still sets Geiger counters screaming.

Our bivouac site at 3,000 metres was in a small 'grough' leading down to a fresh stream, situated on enormous plains – a key passing point for shepherds, their families and flocks travelling from mountain village to valley village – all with different languages, religions and customs. My 'ace' team got by in Russian and Turkish/Azeri but there was an eerie feeling that we were just scratching the surface of far more ancient and unchanging civilisations.

A word here about load carrying. I could barely lift my 'sack despite the fairly pathetic load and was ashamed when I worked out how much Sasha and Misha were carrying. But they assured me as they scampered along, that compared to their winter exploits, their loads felt fairly minimal.

There are always so many variables to worry about in climbing, and having overcome access, load and cultural problems, the key factor became the weather – which was basically stable – sunny periods with the odd cumulus clouds drifting around – I was told that it takes days for bad weather to move in, and I could not help contrasting this with Chamonix eight days earlier, where conditions changed hourly.

On the route itself, Sasha steamed up the first six hours to 3,800 metres (having first taught me to say 'slowly' in Azeri – 'yavash'...) but I had the last laugh. My previous efforts in vile alpine weather at 3,500 metres did pay off (sorry for what I put you through, Wil) and soloing the last snow/ice slopes of Shakhdag were an absolute dream – the flat and rubbly summit was a bit of an anti-climax however, until Sasha pointed out that, to his knowledge, it was a first British ascent, and in

the distance we could see the mountains of Dagestan just waiting to be explored on our next trip.

What happened to the dogs?

Thankfully on the way up, they were still fast asleep, and on the descent, the shepherds helped us beat them off.

Meanwhile, back at base-camp, the casualties were mounting. Zara's moisturiser had frozen, Misha's cigarettes were running out and I was developing a visible panty line, time for a fast exit back to civilisation.

Summary: An account of (probably) the first British ascent of Shakhdag (4,243 metres) in the southern Caucasus, Azerbaijan, in the company of Sasha Nadjafov, supported by Misha Klimov and Zara Alekperova, on 9th September 1995.

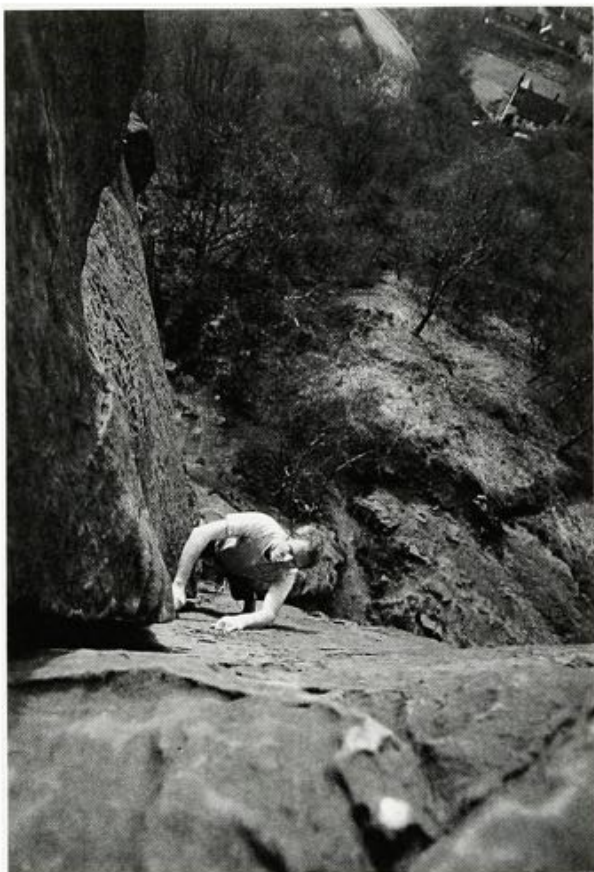
A Much Neglected Crag

Derek Walker

"Helsby – isn't that the green slimy looking crag you can see from the motorway? No, I haven't been there."

This is often the reaction nowadays when Helsby comes up in conversation with other climbers. Certainly Helsby Crag is a dank and dirty place for much of the winter; but go there on a warm summer evening with the sun on the soft red sandstone and the climbing is hard to beat. During the last year I've taken a couple of old friends, who have never been before, to sample some of my old favourites and they've come away bubbling with enthusiasm and delight at the quality of the climbing.

Helsby is, of course, steeped in history with some of the most famous names in British climbing making their mark there. In Laycock's **Some Gritstone Climbs** in 1913, he described the *Overhanging Crack* as one of the hardest 'gritstone' climbs in England. The Golden Age of Helsby climbing was undoubtedly in the late '20s and early '30s when the cream of English climbing cut their teeth there prior to making their first ascents in Wales and the Lakes. Charles Marshall, the first warden of Helyg, contributed his own climb and the delectable *Wood's*, before falling to his death attempting the first lead of *Flake Crack* in 1928. Ted Hicks, A.B.Hargreaves and Colin Kirkus were outstanding pioneers and their guidebook of 1930 included 11 new VSs, most of which were bold test pieces. Menlove Edwards was soon to follow, making the first lead of *Flake Crack* in 1931, and reputedly being saved by a hemp runner after a fall on *Eliminate I*.



Derek Walker on 'Flake Crack', Helsby.

Photo: Derek Walker Collection

The delicate, unprotected balance climbing which is a feature of Helsby prepared Kirkus for his bold leads on *Lot's Grove*, *Nose Direct*, *Great Slab*, *Mickledore Grooves* and other great classics. The confidence Edwards gained from leading *Flake Crack* must have inspired him to make the first unaided ascent of its more famous namesake on Scafell's Central Buttress a few days later.

The second great wave of exploration was in the late '50s when Hugh Banner and a small group of friends doubled the number of climbs and tackled many of the great overhanging walls and roof cracks, producing the *Mangler*, *Brandenburg Wall*, *Crumpet Crack* and many others. Meanwhile high angle slab and wall climbs were found including *Twin Scoops*, *The Brush Off* and *Fragile Wall*, while perhaps the most famous Helsby problem, the *Beatnik* was top roped by Jim O'Neill.

Throughout the early '60s the crag was popular, with Crew, Ingle and Boyson being regular visitors, although by now the newly discovered Frodsham buttresses were beginning to receive a lot of attention. Al Rouse made headline news in *Mountain* in 1971, when he made the first solo ascent of *Beatnik*. I was at the crag a few weeks later with some sixth formers when Boyson arrived with Bonington. After both had fallen off on the rope, Martin wandered back a few minutes later and made the second solo! The kids were deeply impressed! Al and Rab Carrington in their Chester days, produced some other desperate eliminates including the *Technicolour Yawn*, while Al was writing the last and sadly long out of print guide to the crag in the mid '70s.

In the early '80s, while living at the foot of the crag, Hughie Banner returned to pioneer a number of hard new climbs on rock that 25 years earlier he had deemed loose and unjustifiable! At this time I witnessed one of the most virtuoso solo performances of all time when Pex Hill trained expert Phil Davidson nonchalantly climbed up and down the hardest routes on the crag.

Over the last decade despite the vastly increasing number of climbers, the crag has declined in popularity. The top climbers devote their attention far more to the move, the power; the finger sapping severity of overhanging limestone. For the average climber, the insecurity, long run outs and lack of protection made Helsby unfashionable and scary. The other local outcrops of Frodsham, with its superb and secluded overhanging bouldering and Pex Hill, with its steep, short training walls, have remained as popular as ever, while John Codling's bolts have converted the loose and scruffy Frogsmouth Quarry, which I totally dismissed 25 years ago, into a local mecca for sport climbing enthusiasts.

Meanwhile, many of the Helsby East and Central Buttress routes, including old favourites like *Eliminate II* and *Jericho Wall*, have disappeared back into the hillside and are choked with grass and lichen. Some blame the emissions from the nearby fertiliser plant for the renewed vegetation while perhaps the effects of the smokeless zone have gradually been felt. Also voluntary agreements to protect a nesting peregrine in the last couple of years has blighted climbing in that area. But most of the brilliant climbs on the West Buttress are hardly affected and are usually in good condition after a few days of early summer sunshine.

Among these are many of my all-time favourites which would have to be among any selection I had to make for Desert Island climbs. The delicate hard severe moves at half height on *Grooved Slab* are sheer delight. *Wood's Climb* is harder; at first strenuous and fingery to get over the overhang, then delicate balance again up the groove. Ever since I arrived for my first visit in 1958 and a



Arnold Carsten leading 'Eliminate I' in 1946. Photo: Douglas Milner

young lad fell from *Flake Crack* on to the solid plinth beneath, I have had a healthy respect for that climb. It has been the scene of many accidents, from Marshall's to the present day, though now it is eminently well protected with Friends. The climb offers superb jamming in the upper part, graphically described in a Jim Perrin piece **In Praise of Jamming** in 1985. Around the corner, *Eliminate I*, at HVS would surely now get an extreme grade, with a rounded flake runner only materialising after 30 foot and the crux moves still to come.

On the lower Central Buttress, Kirkus' steep little problem, *Pigeon Hole Wall* has now matured through erosion into a 30 foot fingery 5a test piece, while above, the *Cornice V.Diff*, provides a superb little groove with a sensational hold above to surmount the overhang.

These are just half a dozen of my favourites and are a sample of all that is great about Helsby climbing. Perhaps a new guidebook when it eventually comes out will attract more people back to this most historic of outcrops. Go there and enjoy it.

Ode to an Old Sleeping Bag

Jim Milledge

Hail to thee my feather-filled faithful friend!
And must we say farewell?

It seems but yester-year you busted out,
All shiny new when I released you from
Your purchase plastic bag.

On many a freezing night you've held me
Warm in an encompassing embrace,
All snugly in my tent.

Or some nights under slowly wheeling stars
I've peeped out from your softly hooded mouth,
The draw string tight about my face; and in
The morning hoar frost on your lower lip,
My whitened frozen breath.

How often have I thrust you in your bag,
With numbing hand? Amazed that so much down
Should in so small a sack be stuffed.
At evening now, how jocund to be freed
And puffed you up to your full size again
With your tremendous loft.

But you are old and She decrees
That you must go and be replaced.
Your cover and your feathers may
Into the dump be tipped, but still
Your spirit lives and it will go
To that great happy Campsite in the sky
To join old boots, old tents, old ice axes.
A drop in the eternal ocean of
Our gathered mountain memories.

Written at Rara Lake, Nepal, October 1995

One Man's Watershed

Ted Maden

From the mid '50s to the mid '60s I climbed a lot on grit and a bit on limestone, and like many Club members I came to know and love the stretch of the Derwent and its surroundings from Matlock through Chatsworth to Hathersage and, of course, Stanage. The westward outlook from Stanage features a conspicuous conical hill which draws the eye to the shadowy mass of Kinder beyond. I did a few walks on Kinder including the Edale-Marsden one grey December day (and early night) with Tom Gerrard, brother of my regular climbing partner Peter and a young Rucksack Club member. I set off from Edale light-heartedly in a Christmas hat, but finished with respect for this classic bog-trot and for the hard men of the Rucksack Club who regularly did much longer and faster outings than this. Also by that time I had heard of the Derwent Watershed Walk but had not inquired as to the route of the walk nor the whereabouts of the Derwent headwaters.

My interest was belatedly aroused in the 1980s after moving back to the north of England from Scotland and reading about the Derwent Watershed in **The Big Walks**. One day in June 1987 I set off confidently to do the walk. A couple of weekends previously I had jogged the Yorkshire Three Peaks in 6½ hours, much faster than **The Big Walks** time of 9-10 hours. So I thought that for the 40 miles of the Derwent Watershed I would knock three or four hours off **The Big Walks** time of 14 hours. That was not how things turned out.



Early in the Derwent Watershed Walk – the South Edale Skyline. Photo: Ted Maden.

The conical hill that is conspicuous to the west from Stanage is Win Hill and is the first hill on the walk. I parked the car at Yorkshire Bridge below Ladybower Dam at 6.00am and immediately went wrong, turning left instead of right to seek a path up onto Win Hill. I found none and had to thrash through deep vegetation to gain the Hill's upper reaches. From the summit I went wrong again; not knowing the descent via Twitchill Farm I made a detour rightwards along the ridge and then back leftwards down to the valley at the Cheshire Cheese. Then all went well up Lose Hill and along the south and west Edale skylines, Kinder via the Downfall path, and the 'obstacle course' (as described by Phil Cooper in **The Big Walks**) from Mill Hill to the Snake. And so to Bleaklow and eastward across the groughs to Bleaklow Stones.

Bleaklow Stones is roughly the halfway point and is a fine viewpoint for the desolate moors beyond. It seems obvious where to go next: slightly north of east to Barrow Stones keeping the lonely outcrop of Grinah Stones to the right. Actually, Phil Cooper warns you to turn northwards sooner, but I had forgotten his advice, and at Barrow Stones found myself looking into the fastnesses of the uppermost Derwent about a mile downstream from its source at Swains Head, which was now to the left and behind. I decided to sacrifice strict adherence to the watershed and plunged down through heather to the infant Derwent and its welcome clear water. As I stepped across the stream it seemed almost as if I was on holy ground so near to the source of Derbyshire's mother river. (The fact that most of the moorland catchment goes to Sheffield via the Derwent and Ladybower reservoirs is a technicality that did not obtrude!)

I gained the Howden Moors to the north-east and picked up the boggy path that goes on and on and eventually to Margery Hill, the highest point in South Yorkshire. By now the weather had changed and the mist was down, but the walking had become firmer underfoot and everything seemed plain sailing, until I found myself unexpectedly losing height. I had forgotten (or had never known) of the deep indentation of the Abbey Brook. When I came out of the mist I was far down and off line from the Watershed and I failed to muster the determination to regain the heights. Instead I walked along the reservoirs past rhododendrons in bloom. After a scenic but weary plod I emerged at the main road at Ladybower and continued to the car at Yorkshire Bridge. After 36 miles and 13¾ hours I had not completed the walk!

Several years passed before I returned. Meanwhile I had learned the way from Win Hill to Lose Hill. More recently my wife Sybil and I had been doing a series of delightful moderate walks from a collection called **Out and About**. One of these was from the Derwent Reservoir car park up via Lost Lad onto Back Tor and Derwent Edge. We did it on a fine March day and the whole sweep of the eastern wilderness of the Watershed Walk spread out before us. I knew then that I wanted to return. The feeling was further boosted by a couple of outings on the Alport Castles Ridge, which is a particularly good viewpoint for the Margery Hill skyline.

On August Bank Holiday Sunday 1993 I set off again from Yorkshire Bridge, this time at 7.20am. I had still not discovered the path up onto Win Hill and I again plunged into thickets of brambles before emerging on the upper slopes. All continued well to Lose Hill where the sun was shining from a welcoming blue sky. Then I was jogging down Back Tor (the first of two hills of this name on the

walk, below Lose Hill) when I noticed an awkwardly placed rock. Trying to decide whether to pass it to the right or left my reactions were too slow and my right foot skidded off the rock. I heard and felt a sickening crack, and a shaft of agony shot up my lower leg from my ankle. I lay and groaned, both in pain and in disbelief that I could have so miscalculated in such a trivial place.

Soon a walker appeared on the col below. I considered whether to call for help, but the idea of not trying first to help myself was repugnant. The pain was subsiding and I cautiously stood up. My ankle would bear weight. I shuffled cautiously down to the col. My ankle seemed OK. I would carry on a bit. I traversed the south Edale skyline to Mam Nick. My ankle seemed OK. I continued round to Kinder. My ankle seemed OK. I even went to Kinder's true summit and then down the original Pennine Way grough to the Downfall. My ankle was holding up and I even jogged a bit. At the Snake I decided to continue.

From Bleaklow Stones it was almost a repetition of the previous attempt. I made the same mistake in going too far to Barrow Stones, but this time, painful ankle notwithstanding, I doubled back just below the skyline to regain the correct line. Then the mist came down again on Margery Hill and I made the same mistake as before, emerging in the Abbey Brook Clough. But this time I gritted my teeth and continued up the other side to Lost Lad and Back Tor (the second one) and along the Derwent Edge. But now it was windy and drizzling and dusk and I had no idea how to reach the crucial Strines Edge, so I just kept going along the ridge until a sketchy path brought me down to the Ladybower Inn. I had a bar meal and phoned Sybil and then hobbled the last two miles down the road to the car. My ankle was not OK. And I still had not finished the Derwent Watershed Walk!

The unfinished bit was from Strines Edge to Stanage End and High Neb, essential ground for any former gritstone climber. Towards the end of May 1994 I took a day's holiday midweek to have another go. The weather was reasonably good in Liverpool and I could hardly believe my eyes when I found that over the Snake an easterly wind was depositing mist and drizzle almost down to the Ladybower Reservoir! After glumly sipping a cup of coffee from the thermos I decided to proceed with the attempt, which was to differ from the previous attempts in a number of respects. First, mindful of my ankle experience last August I would wear lightweight boots instead of fell-running shoes. Second, I would go anti-clockwise starting with High Neb, so as at least to get that in the bag. Third, I would include a couple of extra features, Higher Shelf Stones, which is Bleaklow's third 2,000 foot top and is arguably on the true line of the Watershed (though requiring a dog-leg back to the main route) and Featherbed Top, just south of the Snake. Last, now being more than familiar with the south Edale skyline I would finish instead by Kinder's north-eastern edges and so along the connecting ridge to Win Hill.

I left the car at 6.30am. In the thick mist and soaking drizzle I did not really expect to get beyond Margery Hill, but it was a case of 'concentrate on the hill you are on'. With frequent reference to map and compass throughout, I navigated first past all those millstones, eerie in the damp fog, to the High Neb trig point and along Stanage End, across the A57 by an unexpected Sheffield city sign, then via the previously unreconnoitered (by me) and almost trackless Strines Edge, up to Dovestone Tor, Back Tor, around the true watershed line of the headwaters of the

Abbey Brook (much easier to follow anti-clockwise) and so to Margery Hill where, despite some searching, I could not find the actual trig point.

But I sensed the mist might soon lift and in any case I had by now decided to go on. On the dreary Howden Moors I emerged from the mist for the first time and met a veteran fell walker negotiating the bogs with a ski-stick. The mist lifted from Bleaklow just as I reached the main (western) summit. I continued in pleasant afternoon sunshine via Higher Shelf Stones (a fine viewpoint) and to the Snake and Featherbed Top. The way to Mill Hill was now much easier, a paving stone path having been laid for much of the way by the Peak Park Service to prevent further erosion.

I reached the rise from Ashop Head to Kinder at 5.00. I had sufficient daylight in hand to finish via the north-eastern Edges as planned, whereas the 'pure' finish via the south Edale skyline would leave me with Win Hill to do in darkness. Thus I settled for the north-eastern Edges and I really enjoyed the superb and spectacular walk above the deepening Ashop valley to the left. Daylight was failing on Win Hill but I found the path down through the woods to Yorkshire Bridge without trouble, a useful final link if I should ever return. I had been out for 15 hours with scarcely a rest and my lightweight boots were gripping my ankles like vices.

I had now taken in all the features of the Watershed Walk but still not in a single outing! Was it worth just one more effort? As it happened, circumstances were perfect for one Saturday this April. I was reasonably fit. I had run the London Marathon (fairly slowly) on April 2nd and now felt recovered. The weather was ideal: an anti-cyclone had settled with a cool, light northerly breeze and visibility would almost certainly be clear. So on the evening before, I assembled my usual pile of sandwiches, chocolate biscuits, a packet of Isostar and sufficient but not excess clothing. I set the alarm for 3.00am, drove the now familiar route over the Snake and was ready to start from Yorkshire Bridge just before 5.30am. I was prepared for up to 16 hours out, having realised that this, rather than Phil Cooper's 14 hours, was the expectation based on Naismith's rule for 40 miles and 4,000 feet of ascent.

The first glimmer of dawn was breaking. The eventual finish would be down the road from High Neb. So I would not need the torch now or later: eight ounces saved! Also I was in fell running shoes again, which, even though I did not plan to run, would be lighter and more comfortable than boots.

At Yorkshire Bridge I now knew to start by turning right instead of left, and in 100 yards I reached the flight of steps that leads onto the path up through the woods to Win Hill. At the Win Hill trig point I paused for a brief look round. Eastwards, High Neb was silhouetted by the red streak of dawn while to the north, the Howden Moors and Margery Hill loomed dim but clear beneath a high layer of cloud. I had it all to do but things were looking good.

I resisted the temptation to run down past Twitchill Farm, not wanting to overload muscles which had done no recent hill running and which had only just recovered from the London Marathon. On the descent of Lose Hill and Back Tor I proceeded super-cautiously to avoid repetition of the previous ankle incident. It was still early and no-one was about until I spotted a hang-glider riding the up-draught on Rushop Edge. The pilot (if that is the term) showed great skill but finally ran out of lift just as I passed, so we had a short chat where he had landed.



A Volcano? No, just Steaming Peat Groughs on Bleaklow. Photo: Ted Maden

I went to the true summit of Kinder then back to the Downfall path, where a few runners were out. Something clicked. I called:

"Are you training for the Downfall race?"

"Yes"

"I did it last year!"

The paving from Mill Hill to the Snake was now complete and I did not begrudge it one little bit.

I reached the Snake in just over six hours from the start, which did not seem very fast. However, I was going comfortably, and after very brief stops for sandwiches and water I traversed the Bleaklow groughs, which were steaming in the sun, quicker than expected. This time I took the correct way from Bleaklow Stones to Swains Head (there is a small indicator cairn about ten minutes from Bleaklow Stones). On the remote Howden Moors I was surprised to encounter a large party of ramblers sitting down for lunch, until it occurred to me that there are easier ways of reaching that spot than from Yorkshire Bridge!

It was a perfect afternoon with intermittent sunshine and light cloud, extensive views and a sufficiently cool breeze to minimise dehydration. I felt a surge of confidence that this time I would do it, barring injury. As if to warn me, I fell knee deep into a couple of bogs and felt incipient adductor strain on heaving myself out.

I reached Margery Hill at 3.40pm, ahead of my rough schedule. The trig point is some way back from the edge, which was why I missed it in mist the previous

May. Then along a delightful edge, seeing the Derwent moorlands and cloughs beneath for the first time, until I made the wide detour eastwards to circumnavigate the Abbey Brook headwaters. I climbed up the rocks to the Back Tor trig point just after 5.20pm. High Neb did not look too far away now.

Going south along Derwent Edge I made my one mistake of the day. Despite the clear conditions I could not actually see Strines Edge below the skyline to the east, and with High Neb beckoning I considerably overshot the correct turning point. I had to force tiring legs back through heather (fortunately burnt the previous summer) to regain the inconspicuous but geographically correct line of the watershed at Strines Edge.

The rights of way hereabouts are not well defined and from the Edge I seemed to be hearing gunfire emanating from the direction I was heading, near Strines Road. Not wishing to be met by a hail of bullets I peered cautiously over a convexity of the heather slope, and perceived cars going bang bang over a cattle grid!

I reached the A57 road crossing just before 7.00pm and at last set off on my summit push to High Neb, which I reached some 40 minutes later. The sun was setting atmospherically behind a small cloud above Win Hill with Kinder looming beyond. It was the perfect climax.

But I still had to get down. Not having climbed at High Neb for many years I had forgotten the detailed topography and had to search in a chilling wind for an easy way down that my stiffening adductors could negotiate. Once down and on the path I was overtaken by two climbers running at speed with laden rucksacks and ropes, while I could only walk. But the beauty of the evening was not lost on me and I had one last look round the great arena of Stanage, aflame in the last rays of the sunset, birthplace of so many climbers' experiences and aspirations. Then I joined the minor road for the last two miles down to Yorkshire Bridge.

I resolved not to accept any lifts, but was not offered any! I had thought it would get warmer as I descended, but instead the cold air from the moors seemed to follow me down like a catabatic from the Antarctic plateau. I began to feel chilled and had to stop to put on my anorak only a mile from the end. Where the lane joined the main A6013 there was a phonebox. I phoned Sybil, speech unexpectedly slurred by cold lips. I regained the car. Night had fallen. I had a quick bite and started back over the Snake with the heater on full blast.

Rock Climbs around the Bow Valley

T.E.Kenny

The postcards from Canada during the spring and early summer of 1995 told of incessant rain in the Rockies and cancelled trips. They were prophetic of the season to follow.

A wet week incarcerated at the Clemenceau Ice Fields, with only one major summit accomplished, had washed away my enthusiasm for the big mountain mixed routes I had been planning all winter, even in the unlikely event they were in condition. I decided instead to concentrate on the low level rock climbs of the Bow Valley, around Canmore and Banff, and some in the vicinity of Lake Louise. I could easily achieve these as day trips from the Canmore Club House of the Canadian Alpine Club. My friends from Calgary had agreed to call in periodically and Keith Haberl, who runs the Club House, and his girlfriend, Lisa, had promised to show me some routes at Lake Louise.

Still damp from Clemenceau, six of us set off from the Club House next morning in Lisa's 1953 Buick for the crags at the back of Lake Louise. Keith reassured me that there was a good mix of routes, both traditional and modern sport climbs. In fact, the initial development of these quartzite crags had been along traditional lines, with retro-bolting of the harder routes, followed by new, hard, bolted horrors. About 15 discreet outcrops are listed in the guidebook, all steep or overhanging and with routes between one and three pitches in length.

Lake Louise townsite was crowded as usual and we made our way along the track at the side of the lake, past the trickle of Louise Falls. Just five months earlier, I had skied across the lake to climb the frozen falls. But today it was raining, so Keith suggested we climb on the first outcrops along the track, Wicked Gravity Wall, and the adjacent Outhouse Crag; both dramatically overhanging in the upper third, they should be dry.

I was recommended to try *Pub Night* at 5.6, whilst Lisa led *Wicked Gravity* to the right at 5.11c and Keith added an overhanging top pitch to *Duracell* on the left at 5.12b. *Pub Night* is a nice corner crack and unbolted. Just one pitch, with abseil chains at the top. But the back drop view of Mount Victoria and Mount Aberdeen is inspiring. Lisa shouted across to Keith:

"Hey, Terry can place protection". It came as a surprise to me that even good technical sport climbers like Lisa were not too hot at placing gear.

"Okay, Terry, so I think you'd enjoy *Corner Journey*, it's just around the corner there", said Keith, now back on the ground. *Corner Journey* at 5.8 is the classic traditional climb of that crag. Some bolts now but it takes gear as well and is a steep corner crack of one long pitch. It's raining heavily now but we are still totally dry, protected by the overhangs. More fun followed with steep, bolted slabs. *Top Gun* and *Blue Valentine*, both at 5.7. I was really enjoying this bolted stuff but now the lift was ready to depart.

The weather was still unsettled, so next day we opted for Grotto Slabs in Upper Grotto Canyon. These are smooth, water-worn limestone slabs and dry quickly after rain. Probably the nearest climbing to the Club House, Grotto Canyon has an impressive, claustrophobic, steep walled approach with short, overhanging

bolted problems all the way along. The Canyon bifurcates at the head-wall, which contains some impressive, hard multi-pitch climbs, and the left branch leads to the slabs.

The routes are all single pitch, 150 feet long and range from 5.4 to 5.11, but the grades are hard! Most routes have only two bolts, each placed tantalisingly close above the crux moves. The super-smooth water worn *Alien* at 5.9, goes up the middle and is an exercise in friction and faith climbing. *Space Walk* at 5.7 has a bit more friction and the occasional hold but is still bold. A double rope enables abseil from trees at the top.

Some of my gear was still wet from Clemenceau and I fancied a day to dry out and wash. But the message on the Club House board that night read, 'Leslie will arrive from Calgary tomorrow. Wants to climb'. I hoped she didn't want to climb on Yamnuska. That place really scared me.

Yamnuska is a flattened pyramidal peak with a vertical, south-facing limestone face, lying in Exmore, just east of Canmore. It is the first big crag encountered west of Calgary. More than twice as big as Cloggy, the routes are around 400 metres in length, with a conversion factor of 5.6 taken to equal VS 4c. It is certainly not the place to be caught in a storm, since it acts as the lightning conductor of the area. I had been there during a storm one time and remember the echoing cracks of abseil ropes going down and distorted voices, sounds peculiar to big faces. Leslie wanted to climb on Yamnuska!

The day seemed alright as we walked an hour up the steep, wooded hillside with the crag looming bigger and bigger before us. She fancied *Grillmair Chimney* 5.5, the classic, traditional and first ascensionist route. A system of wide cracks and chimneys, it also acted as the lightning discharge pathway for the crag and there had been several fatalities over the years. I looked across the valley to Kananaskis, where storm clouds were brewing. We'd have to be quick.

Leslie was cool. This was her local crag. She was used to this scale and had done all the gems including *Red Shirt* 5.7 and *Directissima* 5.8, both still on my ticklist.

"We could do *King's Chimney* 5.5 instead if you like, but that has a traverse near the top that's difficult in the wet", said Leslie. So we kept to our plan and climbed the great cracks and chimneys, sometimes on loose rock but with plenty of pegs around. We had the whole mountain to ourselves and the storm clouds stayed over Kananaskis as we watched lightning flickering to earth.



T.E. Kenny Climbing at Yamnuska, Alberta.
Photo: T.E. Kenny Collection

"What's tomorrow's plan, Terry?" asked Keith later. Leslie wanted to do a route called *Gooseberries* 5.7 on the south east face of Tunnel Mountain near Banff. The others smiled but said nothing. The **Banff Rock Climbs** guide was long out of print but Keith was working on the new edition.

"I'd sure be interested to hear your comments on that route", he said.

The south east face was but a short walk from the car. Quartzite, steep and narrow, it reminded me of Raven Crag, Thirlmere, but much higher of course. The first pitch gets 5.4, so Leslie led it. But she wasn't finding it easy and would normally solo that. Well, if that was 5.4, what would the remaining pitches of 5.7 be like, I thought as I uneasily edged up. My turn to find out at a steep crag where a couple of layback moves took over from jamming half way up. I was pleased to reach the bolted ledge 120 feet up. Mountain route pitches in the Rockies are generally a full rope length.

Well, Leslie doesn't like jamming and less still, laybacking. She was struggling:

"Holy Smoly, Terry, this is hard. You must have been getting out a lot in England". I leant off the bolts and admired the view across to Mount Rundle, in brilliant sunshine today. More sustained climbing led to the crux, and I found myself cramped in a niche, the idea being to pull up and over. Three pegs in the back wall were a measure of previous desperation. I'd done *The Talisman* earlier that year and thought, 'I've been here before'.

I eventually got out but we still had to face the infamous 'Rat Piss Corner'. A left-facing diedre, the rats live in the crack and come out at night to piss on the ruggations of the slab. Years of stale piss give the place a characteristic odour and fresh stuff gets on the hands and rope.

But it still wouldn't end and two more equally hard pitches led to the final crack. Rundle had disappeared into mist by now and the odd raindrop was falling. Had this been the first pitch, I'd probably have given up and gone home. But retreat wasn't an option and I got up on a mixture of adrenaline, Leslie's exaltations, and the thought of a nice pint at Wild Bill's in Banff.

People in the bar give us a wide berth. Back at the Club House, we made a discreet entrance, hoping for an urgent shower. But Keith and the others were waiting:

"Our senses tell us that you've climbed Rat Piss Corner today, how did you find it?" I was tempted to say easy, but reflex said,

"Desperate".

"Yeh", said Keith, "that climb gets 5.9 in the new guide".

I finished the holiday with some long mountain rock climbs. The South Ridge of the South Summit on Mount Edith gave a pleasant 5.4 scrambling day with good exposed pinnacles. Mount Norquay, just west of Edith, gave *Escargot Corner*, a magnificent six pitch version of *F-Route*, at 5.7. It derives the name from the fossilised snails that form the foot holds on the slab pitches.

So there is a lifetime of climbing around the Bow Valley of all grades and types. I have not mentioned the 14 pitch routes on the East End of Mount Rundle or the sport climbs of Cougar Canyon and many others.

But the area is better known, at least in North America, for its winter ice routes. And that's next year's story...

The Glorious Diffs of Gower

Terry Gifford

In the evening the sun came out and lit up the Boiler Slab into a white reflector of expectation, drying, as only laid-back limestone can, above a twinkling sea on May Day weekend. The drive through rain again had been depressing, the campsite above Pilton Green, bleak and boggy, but the Boiler Slab above its little terrace was brilliant with possibilities, a 70 foot slice of something for everyone. The Nottingham woman was leading a Hard Severe through the bulges, whilst local lads were tackling an E1 overhang with cunning wires and coolness. No, it's not in the guide, they said, they'd seen it in the magazines.

Just the thing for the kids was a corner crack called *Classic*. Yes, another neglected classic, that scramble to a sharp, white layaway, a bridge, a pull right onto the slab and its hand-sized pockets awkwardly placed apart up the steepening slabs. Daniel's first climb had made him stop and think. He was 13 and not keen. Nicola had surprised herself by readily romping up it. She was a strapping 14 year-old and ready for anything. Then we stepped along to *Pinnacle Crack* at the right-hand end, with its interesting steep moves on jugs and friction at a firm V.Diff standard. This one was just for Gill. She was the 40 year-old I'd just moved in with.

Short but memorable, the routes on the Boiler Slab were a good introduction to climbing on the Gower. Every crag seems to be an ideal evening crag, which can take a day's pottering to fully explore. Each crag draws you to a wonderful picnic spot, perfect for a family weekend, especially a first camping weekend with a new family. Our evening closed with a westward walk above the cliffs from Mewslade Bay to discover the Worm's Head rising out of the sea at sunset, and the black ribs of a wreck in Rhossili Bay.

Next day we reached the beach as the rain fell. After an impromptu picnic in a kind of kiln at the top of the cliff, we made it again to the beach between Great Tor and Little Tor. Whilst the kids scrambled round the grassy slopes, Gill and I chose a route on Little Tor. Our choosing the Little Tor might seem to have been in tune with the easy-going spirit of this weekend, but in fact it looks the more challenging of the two Tors, a vertical wall that rises straight out of the sand. Or what was sand when we started. As I searched for a belay at the top of the first and only pitch, Gill jumped ahead of the incoming tide. When I looked down Gill had started climbing above solid sea, and I knew what she did not know. This was yet another case of the guidebook writer taking a glance and calling it Diff. The corner to the right of the central protruding slab of Little Tor is V.Diff, if there's to be any distinction between the two grades at all. Ask Gill, she'll tell you. Sometimes it makes a difference. It might be short, but it can be memorable with the tide licking at your heels.

On the next day we were ready for a bold attempt on the longest climb of the Gower, the 240 foot *East Ridge* of Great Tor Upper Tier (V.Diff). It was bold only because we slipped and hopped over rocks round the front of it at almost high tide again. Apart from that it was a bit scrumbly. I spotted this at the start, which is supposed to go up a scrumbly crack in a wall when the arête to the left is

clearly what a ridge climb is for and at the grade too. There is little memorable about the moves on the longest route in Gower, until, that is, the wall of the last pitch where, several moves up and committed, a layaway on the side of a crack enables a long, long reach for the top to be grasped. I'd call that a Severe move, even if you do get a Rock 1 to stay in. You can go round the side to the right if you're rigid about gradings but not about life in general. Gill did. She'll tell you. She's rigid about staying at V.Diff sometimes.

Since the tide was in on the Three Cliffs across the bay to the west we opted, for the last of our weekend's sampling of Gower, to drive across to the north-west point and search for North Hill Tor. We waited for the inevitable shower to pass, looking out over the saltmarsh below the wonderfully named village of Landimore. There was something going on amongst those wild horses as we walked along between the wooded rocky bank and water-channelled expanse of mud. Whinnying and setting off suddenly, nervous as birds, they'd race at full gallop to be stopped by some invisible wall and turn back at full speed again. By the time we reached the crag, it had become a strange grey sounding-board of a slab, having few features, but an undulating rippling surface like the wild rhythms of sound.

So *West Slab* is a Diff of a unique kind, requiring the reading of surface without the usual hints of cracklines or polish. At 25 foot we gathered at a ledge, all four of us tied to one spike on the right edge, and we listened to the wild horses going slaperty-clap, slaperty-clap, over the marsh for some mysterious reason that probably made more sense than us all huddled nervously here on this ledge. I don't want to lose the real quality of this climb in the atmosphere of its context, but sometimes the two are so fused that even Bill Birkett couldn't separate them. *West Slab* is a route you'd always climb differently, reading different stories in the rock, but always ending up as Diff. As Nicola tussled to untie herself at the top I pointed out the circling buzzard. Daniel missed the peregrine floating over its allotment, awaiting the three rising shelduck that were black and white flags against the marsh. And for some strange reason I seemed to be the only one who heard the first cuckoo at the end of that first weekend camping together in Gower.

October Odyssey

D.E. Hope

Around me is utter chaos. It is 11.30pm on a dockside at Heraklion on Crete and a milling crowd of ferry passengers, fed up with a 28 hour wait, is pushing against a line of whistle blowing policemen who are attempting to off-load a series of articulated lorries from the ferry. As each wagon rolls off, tearing apart the night air with their air horns blasting, the crowd rolls forward only to be waved back again as the piercing blasts of whistles shred the eardrums of those waiting. I look on with amusement, chuckling quietly as frustrated travellers bounce off the bumpers and scrape luggage against the sides of the trucks. Two Americans behind, grumble that this wouldn't happen at home. Of course it wouldn't. This is the Greek Islands and time marches to a different drummer here. The crowd is perfectly good natured, everyone jostling for position, locals who know the ropes, pushing to the front with total disregard for any system, which, of course, doesn't actually exist – that is, the system. I hang back watching. After all, the ferry isn't going to go until we're all on anyway so I watch and enjoy dreamily, breathing in the mixture of salt and diesel, letting my ears do the observation.

It all began with a 'phone call. It often does. An unknown American wanting to know if there were any climbers who could join him to climb to a cave on Thirassia in the Santorini group of islands. As I was going through my address list and his tale unfolded I found myself thinking, why not me? Especially relevant was the fact that he was paying for the whole thing in order to pursue his archaeological dream. Three and a half years ago he had discovered the cave and had failed to reach it. He was now returning after much research and with some slight corroboration from the British Museum about the likelihood of it being a possible site of antiquity. Two meetings, a lengthy discussion over photos, and a chat with a supportive headmaster saw me organising cover and arranging supplies on Monday while finding another team member. Damien had just got a job; Pat's girlfriend wouldn't let him go; Ian couldn't be tracked down; Stephen had just bust his ankle; Matt had fractured his skull at Symond's Yat the weekend before; Dougie had only just returned from the States two days earlier but he was hooked immediately so we rapidly generated a flurry of activity on the 'phone to gear manufacturers to make sure we had everything including the sink and we were off. Thursday night and a 7.30 flight from Bristol, pinching ourselves to make sure it was real. It was.

In the humid Mediterranean night just after we landed at midnight, we haggled with the taxi drivers about a 'good, cheap' hotel. A comical nightmare had just begun! We sped into the city, crossing double white lines, overtaking on blind bends, dashing through red lights. Narrow alleyways flashed past as if motorways. When we did stop for a light everyone else ignored them. Motorcyclists and mopeds weaved in and out, no right of way, no comforting law, no form or fashion but that of he who gets there first has the lead. And who needs lights anyway?

In the harsh morning Heraklion is steamy, a confusing mixture of sun and cement dust, a cross between a building site and a rubbish dump, shot through

with palms and horns and luxurious rhododendrons and screaming kids and fiery cacti and fighting lovers and siestas and noisy markets and predatory restaurateurs literally dragging you off the street and into seats where they charge you two quid for a cup of black mud called Greek coffee. Old mamas clad in the blackest of cottons ride side-saddle on grandpa's scooter, swearing at the buses, daring them to grind them under the huge bare tyres of the black belching engines. Everywhere feral cats slink; scrawny, meagre bundles of moth-eaten fur, outnumbering (but only just) the skinny-ribbed dogs that stagger drunkenly in hunger, bouncing against the walls or collapsed asleep in the roads. We relax on the sidewalk, the Napoli café providing good food at a price. 'What do you mean, spaghetti's off? What? Moussaka's off? Is this Greece or what?' A few gallops round the menu and what is left is a freezer full of leftovers after the tourist hordes have gone. We make do with an omelette!

At Knossos we do the cultural bit at the ruined palace. Bus-loads of pale German tourists in lime-green Lycra one-piece jogging suits, blend in with the pale slug-white skin of English torsos on top of redburnt legs. An argument ensues with the bus driver as we are introduced to another aspect of Greek life, the tourist rip-off, as we get sold the wrong ticket. We shovel 200 drachmas at him and he subsides fuming but satisfied. We must have paid him at least 10 pence more than it was worth but it's more important to him to save face than to give in. We searched for the last minute forgotten items such as a chisel for example. No chance. Heraklion is full of bridal shops and cafés but not a hardware shop in sight. I spent two days looking for underwear after arriving at the hotel on the first evening, to find it in my wardrobe – in Bath! At last, in an el cheapo market, the desired item is discovered. I buy the medium size expecting it to be EC regulation and spend the next six days with a voice several octaves higher than usual. And so we got used to waiting as the first ferry went five hours earlier than expected and the next was cancelled.

So here we are, clambering on board the Santorini ferry in a maelstrom of noise and hysteria and holiday hype, after three power cuts in the restaurant where we spent another five hours waiting. It didn't take long to adopt and learn the mañana position – legs stuck out horizontally from a bent frame inserted into one of those plastic seats especially designed to destroy the lumbar region. Meditation became the favourite pastime as time slowed down around us and within me. Bodies lie all over the deck, couples entwined, abandoned to the wreck of the night that remained after the long wait. Dougie climbs on top of the liferaft box and in a few moments is asleep in his sleeping bag while I prowls restlessly, unable to sleep. Eventually I find some space on the warmth of a hard galley floor and doze fitfully in the staleness of the previous day's food odours.

The morning arrived gladly, Orion gazing down, as we sailed steadily into the caldera targetting the blazing lights of the fairground flotilla of cruise ships that were docked at the new port of Fira, the main town on Santorini. 5.00am did not seem to be a good time to arrive but Dougie noticed a small craft chugging quietly at rest and on investigation found out that it was going to Thirassia, our destination. Seconds later we were on board, heading back into the wine-dark sea, enjoying our first piece of good fortune. The lights of taxis behind us illuminated the water as they zig-zagged up the precipice of the volcano rim to the tourist beaches beyond. Around us the encircling bands of rock in the caldera basin

glowed in the neon reflections and we shivered in anticipation for the first time, having not only made up time but now being in front. A sense of excitement rose.

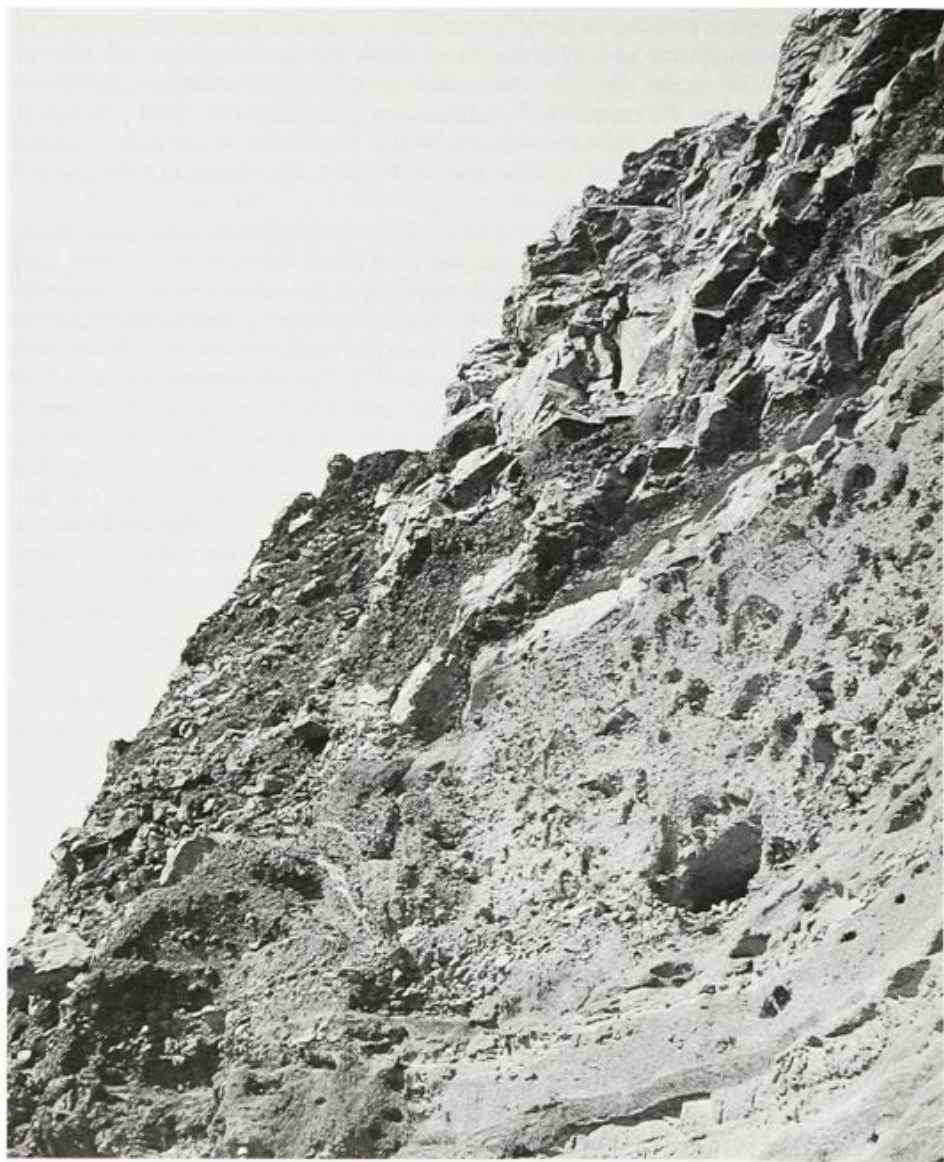
I'm chuckling again as I find myself wide awake, all my senses heightened by the breeze. The morning begins to break, slicing the clouds into thin layers of scarlet ribbon. We pass the rising cone of the new volcano, its scoracious slopes, silhouetted starkly against the dawn sky. It broods; shattered, broken earth skin, shards of dragon's teeth littering the coast. The dawn is quite spectacular and we pass beneath our cave in the half-light, not able to discern enough detail yet. We drop off a wedding party and their beer and at six we are heading back into the increasing warmth of the day. This time the cave is closer and the light shows some possible entries. We round the headland and glide into the small port where we disembark below the 900 foot climb to the hotel. We wait and breakfast on omelettes made with goats' cheese, piquant and tangy, special in the sunrise around us.

Back in the real world Dougie and I left Phillipe to sleep while we did a quick recce. The cave was about 250 feet up the cliff from the sea and it had been obvious that the direct line from the sea was looser than the guts of a dog with rampant dysentery. A traverse line in from the left seemed possible but when we got there it frustratingly ran out into an overhanging wall of tottering blasted lava chunks. A few feet lower at a notch in the seaward ridge we were able to scramble onto a loose scree slope and edged carefully across it for a hundred feet or so to the base of a jutting block. From the top of this a broken groove led back to the left but the ground looked horribly loose, great rounded blocks of lava, flaking off at the surface and pulling out without warning. Above, bigger blocks lay jumbled one on top of each other, everyone appearing to be the key that would let them all loose if removed. This seemed to be the only real line so we returned to the café, collected Phillipe, and ended up walking up the hill carrying two rucsacks each to the hotel after an argument with the donkey driver about the price he wanted, to take our luggage. Still, we needed the exercise after the last few days spent lying around.

The sole hotel was quite sumptuous but only cost us about £5 a night for a marble tiled floor and ensuite room with balcony. The food was exceptionally good and at last I got my moussaka, washed down by Metaxa, a particularly virulent form of Greek brandy. Our host, Contadinos, greeted us warmly, remembering Phillipe from three years earlier and so we settled into the real warmth of the Greek Isles.

Next morning an early start saw us head off down the hill at 7am. We quickly got organised at the notch leading to the initial scree slope and geared up. At the base of the block we placed two aluminium belay stakes we'd brought with us and tense, I stepped up onto the block, gingerly cleaning off loose rock. The wind gusted sharply, continually showering us with stones from the scree at the top of the groove. Clever things these helmets. Clean off holds, carefully now, throw away the loose stuff and step carefully up for ten feet to a platform on the right. Every muscle is tight with mental tension though the climbing is not technically hard. A wall of rounded blocks faces me, every one a hollow sound to it. Just like the Culm Coast, I muse, only this is volcanic. Each move takes ten tortuous minutes as I ease carefully on to each foot. At each stage I think, I don't want to be here, but the next hold beckons, so clean carefully, push it down to hold it in,

don't pull out whatever you do, no yanking on edges, and rise just one more place. Every move upwards commits us further, making it harder to retreat as the holds disappear below, seeable only by leaning out which is not an option to consider on this rock. I make it to the next ledge where every block is huge and hollow – quelle surprise! A ledge leads off left to a final groove-line. My best gear so far is a sling on a scrubby bush and a Rock 5 in between two loose blocks 30



Dougie Mallinson under the Cave on the Upper Pyroclastic Wall. Photo: D.E. Hope

feet below so if I go it's a minimum 70 footer, a couple of big bounces and a splash 200 feet further down. Clean off the dust again and step left. Transfer weight slowly, slowly... More dust and another step left. Stop breathing and stand up, careful... However, it's solid and I'm pressing in but the holds on the right are cracked and broken and shake. I find a Rock 4 which is encouraging. The placement is firm but the rock on the right-hand side shifts suddenly – oh goody. Nothing like a little confidence-inspiring protection! The top is in sight but it's a high step up right on a jutting block that has a crack up its back with daylight through on the other side. A positive hold for the left hand appears and with a quick light touch on the bad rock I'm up and facing the fine scree above, shifting like desert sand in the wind. I dig huge gravel buckets out of it as boulders fall out, bounding past Dougie below, looking for the sea. I dig some more and mantel down on to shifting pebbles, finally gaining a wall of red pyroclastics, boulders in volcanic mud.

A fallen boulder and a spiky bush provide the protection so I add another stake and I bring Dougie up. He traverses the scree for the next 150 feet to the wall below the cave. When I get there, I curse. It's not the solid limestone we were hoping for but volcanic ash, embedded with millions of tiny pebbles and some larger boulders. It has all the consistency of dried out mud and crumbles in the hand in a similar fashion. I scrape at it. Huge chunks come away in my hands. I'm really loving this and suggest to Dougie that it's too dangerous and that it's time to go back. He's not having any of that so I turn again and fashion holds out of the ash, leaving the pebbles in the base of the holes that I dig out with the hammer pick. A harder layer allows foot holds to be reached and a bit further up a shelf comes away in my hands. The nerve fails and Dougie takes over for the next shift. 30 minutes later he has gained a few more feet and three good holds have been dug out. It's hard work so I take over again from his high point. Following the line of least resistance I chop away at a hollow sounding mud band. Some comes off but the remainder gives me a flake hold which I have to trust. Above lies a hole with some pebbles in the roof that I undercut on and soon I'm stood on the line of mud. I teeter out right to a well-embedded boulder and thankfully grasp its security. There is no protection at all but I only have a few feet to go now. Every time I reach up a pebble falls out or breaks off. I carefully clean away the ash around the bigger stones and eventually stand up and can see into the cave. A few guano streaks smear the boulders at the entrance. One is firmly entrenched so after a few deep breaths I step up for it and sit gratefully in the mouth.

It's soooo small. About five feet high by ten feet wide by 15 feet long. The floor is flat and dry and covered in the bones of rabbits, birds and other small mammals. No wondrous discovery, no Joe Brown at Petra, no Minoan statues, no Linear A texts, no Lost Ark or Hitler's gold, just a few dusty, arid bones, leftovers on the floor of some bird of prey's dining room. Dougie declines the offer of a rope so I take the statutory photos and carefully downclimb, passing the rope over a pile of loose boulders I stacked up in the cave.

The descent was approached just as carefully, probably more so after the anticlimax of our non-discovery and the interesting removal of several of our stakes by an easy pull of the hand. We felt very disappointed but waited to voice it once we got back to the gear – I'd had too many close calls before when relaxing too early. Our walk back through the village was greeted with looks of disbelief

and amusement – ‘those stupid English’ seemed to be an adequate translation. Phillipe met us half way up the track and we greeted him with the news.

“Sorry, it’s a bust, man!”

But we had done the climb and done it safely and with room to spare which was satisfying in itself as was Phillipe’s realisation of a three and a half year old dream. A welcome shower and a beer (or two) finally laid all the ghosts to rest. We had a quiet night reminiscing over past climbs and explorations before a massive Metaxa, courtesy of Contadinos, left our livers groping blindly for the bedroom.

I woke to the sunrise pouring in over the balcony, the crater rim of Santorini afire with blazing orange flame. It was easy to imagine Thera in spasm, millenia before. We said our farewells and a quiet walk down to the harbour found us all waiting alone with our thoughts until the ferry arrived. This one was only an hour late. We spent a casual day of strolling in Fira and Ola on Thira before discovering that the next ferry had been cancelled and another day beckoned. Waiting was good fun now, we were well practised and hours of quiet observation and reflection did me a lot of good. Fira also seemed to have the world’s biggest collection of clothing and jewellery shops. Each shopkeeper patrols the doorways and alleys, like a predatory shark waiting to engulf the unsuspecting tourist. The barter game goes on around us. Some even step into our way, arms outstretched to usher us into their lairs, cajoling, imploring, occasionally pushing and definitely overtactile on occasions.

Australians man the bars. Here the welcome is a little more laid back and on the outskirts, smaller, friendlier cafés exist without the frenetic clamour for your wallets’ contents. We fight off the attentions of a couple of Australian male models at a pool table and escape into the brilliant night to watch the sunset at the Tropical Bar, an old haunt of Phillipe’s where we meet his friends for further reminiscence.

Four children, one American and three Greek, bounce around the quayside in joyous abandonment, squealing with delight as they turn the long wait into a playtime and a luggage trolley into a racing car. They need no other language than that of life to communicate. I reflect again on what happens to us when we grow into our older prejudices, while we discuss the world with an Australian lawyer and an Israeli student. Where do those prejudices come from? Where do they begin? Occasionally, I dip back into my journal to record another thought and the odd verse of some bad poetry. I put my pen away as the boat slowly lumbers up to the jetty wall, only five hours late. We get into Heraklion with four hours to spare and a meal at Barrito’s girds our spirits for the taxi drive back to the airport, thankfully somewhat gentler than the drive in. The flight is on time, our arrival at Bristol at 4.30am likewise, but the landing is appallingly bad, twisting and bouncing on one wheel over the runway to the accompaniment of many startled cries from passengers. The empty pit of fear that was my stomach reminded me why I don’t like flying. Even the stewardess sitting opposite me looked a little tight lipped after that one. The Captain advises us all to drive safely on our way home. Cheeky *\$!??*! My unspoken reply was unprintable. Four hours later I was teaching the Lower Sixth in a different universe.

Caveman

Ben Bransby

I had never been to the Old Redoubt sea cliff at Torbay in South Devon, but it was in that cave's dank interior that my one climbing ambition was to be found. The rock climb in question was *Caveman*, an awesome route blasting through the massive sea cave.

The route was first climbed back in 1982 by Andy Meyers and Mick Fowler. Fowler is certainly one of the best adventure climbers to have ever lived and still does routes at the highest standard in 'mad' climbing.

The cliff is over 100m high, though the route is much longer due to its tortuous passage through the overhanging sections. With the only approaches being either a tidal traverse (at HVS, a grade similar to *The Old Man of Hoy*) or a double abseil, the route is very serious. If you fail on the hard pitches you would have to abseil into the sea and swim to shore.

Since deciding that I wanted to climb the route about two years ago, it had been eating away at my mind. Due to the hard and serious nature of the climb I was biding my time and waiting until I felt that I was capable of it. One day John, who was also interested in the route, called and we decided to go down to the crag to take a look.

The day was lovely and warm. We scrambled down to a position where we could see the cave. This was not a boost to my confidence, it was massive. The hardest pitch, though only 12 foot in vertical height, seemed to overhang horizontally for what looked like 40 feet. The easier upper pitches, though still near my hardest standard, didn't seem too bad. Apart from the climb everything was right, warm temperature, so if we had to swim out we would not die from cold, Mike and Trev climbing very near, who could rescue us if need be, and a good climbing partner.

Walking back up the steep hill to the top of the cliff was death carrying my heavy rucksack, or at least it normally would have been, but my mind was racing. Still not totally committed to doing the route I was working things out, knowing we were going to try it, but trying not to think about failing. We both agreed to go for it.

The abseil in was scary enough. Two ropes were required to reach the bottom and this necessitated a nerve-racking swap from rope to rope at the half way point. Also, due to the steepness, I was hanging free all the way down. John had 'enjoyed' swinging in to a small ledge just above the sea, but it was easier for me as he could pull me in.

The climb was not too hard to begin. An easy pitch to get established beneath the roof. John went first. He was fairly quick partly because there was not much protection to put in. This didn't please me because, as the pitch was a traverse, if I fell I would probably end in the sea. Also, as the pitch was covered in guano, there was quite a chance I would slip. However, I was to get my own back on John later with scary traverses, and as for climbing on guano, there was a lot of that to come.

The next pitch was technically the crux, and a steep one. I was scared before I started and I could already feel my arms aching. After a hesitant start which led to

a small fall, I got going properly. A few hard swings, a strenuous pull, and I was near the belay niche, but still had the stopper move which had given so much difficulty on the first ascent. The move started OK, a footless swing and I plonked my foot on a bird's nest and jammed my knee behind a flake. But now what? Hanging partway beneath a horizontal roof on a hold far too small, I wasn't totally happy. I couldn't find the next grip. But I was nearly there. Only four more feet and I would have done the hard pitch. I must be able to do it.

I finally worked it out. I got an undercut by my feet, moved my legs over to a small hanging slab and pulled across. It was hard as my body was horizontal. In fact my feet were as high as my head, and pointing the way I was going.



Ben Bransby on 'Caveman', Torbay. Photo: Ben Bransby Collection

The belay, well, it was probably the worst I have been on. Everything was wobbly and about to fall away from the roof. Mike and Trev who attempted the route after us, pulled out one of the best pieces of protection. They said they put a sling on it and it snapped from the weight! A sling only weighs about four ounces. I bridged out on flakes and took care not to weight any of the gear more than I needed.

When John reached me he was not inspired by the quality of the belay either. He quickly set off on the next pitch putting in as much protection as possible. Consequentially he had a few rests. As the pitch traversed strenuously under the roof, this was still a pretty good effort. I was pleased to second the pitch with no rests on the rope, but when I reached John, he was pretty gripped. He had contemplated chucking his boots into the sea (they cost £70 and would sink). Then we would have to abseil into the sea and abandon approximately £200 of equipment on the crag. I managed to persuade him to let me continue, but only if I put in lots of gear to protect him when he seconded the next pitch.

This was the last of the very hard pitches and is in a very exposed position. It involves traversing the lip of the cave. You are squeezed on a small vertical wall with the lip of the cave a few centimetres below your feet and another roof above your head.

The pitch was not as bad as John's imagination seemed to have been making out, possibly due to my small frame. Crab-like sideways scuttles and a few swings on my arms and I was at a good rest, and soon the belay. This belay was good. It had nice gear and a great position. With a good view of John seconding, the amazing and still very steep upper sections of the cliff above, and 200 feet of space between me and the twinkling sea, I could enjoy it. Having finished the hard half of the climb, I was relaxing and looking forward to the rest.

John, on the other hand, was just coming to the hardest section of the pitch. This was a wet part where you have to do a few swings on very slippery holds. To protect John and myself, I had put in a piece of gear, but John felt he would fall if he tried to get it out from the wet bit. He tried to continue and when the wire popped out, he nearly fell off anyway. Luckily he managed to get through it without a fall and we continued to the top.

We decided to go of for a swim and, on the way, watch Mike and Trev on the climb. They didn't enjoy it as much as I did and found it very hard. Later, at the top, Mike said he was going to get a job with very long hours, and take up golf!

We enjoyed watching them struggle, it made us appreciate how hard it was. Now we were in the sun it was very hot, so the swim was called for, and then I had a shock. If we had needed to abseil into the sea we might have died trying to swim out as the water was so cold. The journey home was quick, and even though there were five people smelling of guano, I was soon asleep.

Mike has not taken up golf. He is still climbing full time and is doing well. He has put his *Caveman* epic behind him and done some very hard ascents.

A Rolling Strone Gathers no Moss

Tom Briggs

The van bounces up onto the cobbles at 35 Kirkgate and a blood stained Timmy Bonner staggers through the door, as if returning from battle, collapsing in front of the fireplace:

"Just a couple of hours sleep and then we'll leave".

Once again, the excitement of a wedding has taken its toll on this well-seasoned party animal.

Six hours later at the Uig ferry terminal we doss for the night in the bogs (where else?). Having overlooked the need to book for the crossing, we establish ourselves on the reserves list and wonder where the others have got to.

"I'll ring Wales" says Timothy.

There is vague talk about times, places, septic feet and hospitals. Tim and I decide to pack the essentials into each of our rucksacks in the hope that we can simply jump into the other car when it arrives. This unfortunately means having to leave his pink jacket and the guitar behind. Five minutes before the ferry is due to leave, a battered and bottoming-out Toyota screams into the car park and four scruffy reprobates and one shiny Mountain Equip-clad individual jump out.

"There's no way we're all going to fit in that", says Tim.

Plan X. As if executing a carefully rehearsed military manoeuvre, everything is thrown out of George's car and packed into Tim's van. Trangias fly, ropes are tossed, Safeway shopping bags stuffed and four bottles of slightly random looking Rosé are crammed into the heap. With just enough room to change gear, Tim rolls his vehicle into the last space on the boat.

Spreading maps out over tables in the Cafeteria, George takes charge of the proceedings. A giant of a man in a giant man's jacket and an astonishingly small skull hat, he reminds me of the Colonel in *The Dirty Dozen*, but bigger. After much deliberation it is decided that due to the adverse weather conditions (pouring rain), the cliff on Harris most suitable for playing about on would be Strone Ulladale. I try and hide my childlike excitement, but sneak off to skip around deck and swing off pipes and things.

A single track road leads up to the dam. The taxi kicks us out into the horizontal rain and we seek refuge in a small concrete building. After some time toying with an amazing rappelling spider and generally relaxing, we begin to feel peckish and a game of poison round the giant sluice wheel ensues in order to determine who is to retrieve the cake and brewing apparatus from outside.

When the last crumb of the suspiciously grey cliff-cake (a dubious representation of *Cenotaph Corner* with small climbing figure in tow) is consumed, we gear up for the walk in. After an hour I'm stumbling down a path with the hillside on my right steepening and curving away from me. It changes from grass to broken rock, to vertical rock, to an overhanging massif. This cliff is the whole mountain side!

"Strone" I whisper to myself; the very name curls a chilly hand round my throat. The accompanying mist and drizzle has me standing, shivering, staring in awe at this mega crag; a bit confused as to how steep and big it really is.

We set up camp and huddle together under a huge boulder which forms the

best bivy cave. After two days my back is killing me and I'm itching to take a better look at the cliff which is still obscured by swirling mist. A mass hike is made up the slippery ramp of death to a vaguely comfortable spot in the grass below the start of the *Scoop*. Tim and Crispin's toy fighting in this position of considerable scariness does nothing for my nerves as I desperately scour the myriad of blocky shapes for obvious weaknesses which may reveal at least one reasonable looking line. Steamed up specs and general wobbly-dizziness don't help with the overwhelming feeling in me that I shouldn't really be here. Tat blows around on the *Scoop*, and a rope is spotted high upon *Knuckle Sandwich*. We err on the side of sensible for once and use a rope to descend back to the sloping grass.

A morning of camp silliness and brewing up (it would madness not to) delays any climbing activity. Paul finds an amusingly shaped piece of moss and carefully removes it from a tree stump to place it helmet-like over his head, strutting around proudly for the cameraman before returning it to its original home. Shawaddywaddy and Timothy inevitably become involved in violent mud slinging warfare and I experience near-death with a large moving boulder. We decide that perhaps a bit of climbing is in order.

Tim and I dabble with the first pitch of the *Chisel*, but when I inform him that he will have to descend an unprotected, sloping ramp scattered with rocks and soily tufts he screams:

"Tom, come back to the belay at once!"

We take a look at how The Wainscott is doing on the first pitch of the *Scoop*. He seems happy making strange robot-mechanical noises as he elegantly Egyptians his way through the crux. With no other option really (virtually everything that looks reasonable is wet), we decide to try and follow Adam and George up the *Scoop*, ignoring George's suggestion of a second ascent attempt at Ben Moon's *Mosskill Grooves* to the left. After one pitch and the Bonner unable to roll up, never mind climb, I rap off. We make food at the bivy whilst Crispin tells us a story and watch the boys scuttling around in the semi-dark on the crag.

The next day is more successful and we make it half way up the *Scoop*, leaving



Tom Briggs on the First Pitch of 'Scoop', Strone Ulladale. Photo: Paul Pritchard

our ropes fixed at the start of the Flying Groove pitch. As we watch Adam on the top pitch, a Golden Eagle the size of a small light aircraft soars above him and I imagine for a second it snatching him from the rock and carrying him off to its nest on the Minestronie. That evening, my faithful climbing partner makes a desperate deal with Crispin. Crispin is keen to stay on Harris long enough to visit Creag Dhubh Dhibadail, but lacks the necessary transportation and company. Tim is keen to eat ice cream on some of the surrounding Harris beaches (said to be very beautiful), but can only fit in this noble pursuit if someone else will go on the *Scoop* with me.

I get my first lesson in jumaring the following morning and watch semi-convinced as Crispin spirals upwards with bits of clothing trailing off him and blowing about. It's my turn and I let her rip. Bouncing down the ramp on my backside I pick up speed and launch out across Harris, spinning uncontrollably and trying to remember which bit slides first. I am surprised at the relative ease of this pursuit, and consider doing it more often.

At the belay Crispin has everything ready. Nicely warmed up, I tinker with the first moves of the Flying Groove; placing some gear, scuttling to and fro etc.

"Right. This time."

I commit myself to the crossed hands undercut move (incorporating pastey pinch) and keep shuffling outwards. Looking for footholds beneath the sandwiched slab, I slide my foot unfashionably onto a rampy sloper and fumble a quickdraw into a rusty peg:

"I think you should try and calm down" says Crispin quietly.

I ignore this advice and proceed to shake out the next moves, putting Elvis to shame with my vibrating legs and spasmodic ankle convulsions. In what must seem like an attempt at turning my entire body inside out, I contort into the respite of the upper groove off an undeservingly contrived fingery-hand-jam-type-thing. Once in a position where at least some composure can be sought, I become increasingly aware of the 'don't look now, there's nothing below you' style exposure. Hoping that the most difficult climbing is over, I feel cheated at more one-chance-only moves to exit the groove proper. Having blagged these, a teeth grinding lunge for the sanctuary of a large flake and grovel onto the belay ledge ends the sham, and I am able to curl up in a little heap for a while before throwing Crispin the haul line.

We munch Bombay Mix before the last hard pitch. I smile because it's Crispin's lead. He loosens his rock boot due to septic foot related discomfort and hands me his green bomber jacket before taking off. Sitting on the ledge I feel as though I'm the luckiest person in the world, watching Crispin, not known for his physical strength, lighting his way through the bulges.

"C'mon", he shouts, using only the heel of his left boot as he battles to keep his feet in contact with the rock. It is one impressive display and I can't really believe I am here, let alone it all being for real.

We are the last to leave Strone, stumbling off across squidgy moss and sipping soup from a mug that Crispin had captured from the ferry and will return on the crossing home. Crispin has a sore hip due to wearing one boot and one not so white, white Woolies plimsoll. It's drizzling again. It feels soft and cool on my face.

"It's actually quite pleasant, this rain isn't it?"

"No", says Crispin.

Virtual Climbing

Mark Vallance

'There are only three sports: bull fighting, mountain climbing and motor racing. All the rest are games.' (Ernest Hemingway)

Hemingway makes the point that the possibility of death or serious injury distinguishes 'sports' from 'games'. Most climbers I know regard climbing as a superior kind of sport and one that is, for various reasons, a particularly meaningful sport. We have come to believe, because we risk life and limb when we pit ourselves against a rock face or mountain, that climbing has some value beyond the demands of athletic sports and certainly of ball games; that in some metaphysical way climbing helps us to elude our Sysiphan fate rather than compound it.

Climbing requires us to bring together a combination of skill, strength, bravery and commitment that often goes far beyond the requirements of most sporting activities. Until recently, this aspect of danger and adventure has always existed in the games that climbers have invented for their amusement.

The new game of 'Sport Climbing' – a real misnomer by Hemingway's definition – was invented by European climbers who lack our British game-playing tradition, a tradition which is not only part of our national culture but one that is required in order to amuse ourselves on the little crags and small mountains of our island.

Sport climbing has emerged from a European tradition – the alpine tradition of ascending high mountains and big cliffs. The acceptance of pegs to make an overall climb possible, has always been justified for technical climbing in the Alps, as much by the British as any other nation. So when the Europeans belatedly started to play 'little crag' games on their own abundant smaller crags, it was quite natural for them to adopt their own traditions and use of ironmongery. Their game takes the physical, gymnastic and aesthetic elements of rock climbing but removes the danger. But by eliminating the serious consequences of falling, sport climbing takes away the main ingredient, that element which makes rock climbing 'special', rather than just another game.

Sport climbers ask why climbing has to be dangerous. It is a good question which should be answered. The short answer is that adventure climbing need not be, and is not, particularly dangerous – but this avoids the question. There is no doubt that the most prestigious routes have an element of danger and those that bring the highest esteem, such as the *Indian Face*, where a mistake could be fatal, have a high danger factor. The bolted Tuolumne classic, *Bachar Yarian*, widely recognised as one of the greatest free routes anywhere in the world, is another such route. On this awesome, vertical, knobbly wall, the bolts are 40 feet apart and the leader contemplates a flesh-ripping, 80-footer whilst climbing the 6a crux – not exactly a clip-up.

Dedicated sport climbers resent having to defend what they do. They argue that theirs is just another game and that high technical difficulty is enough justification for bolts. What is interesting is that those sport climbing specialists who have successfully done hard adventure climbs such as *Indian Face* or *Master's Edge*, have received more kudos than any transient fame they might have received as the result of some desperately overhanging, bolted, red-point ascent. The truly

hardest climbs, those great routes that get the fewest ascents, are not bolted routes. In ten years time the hardest of today's sport climbs will no doubt have seen many ascents, but it is the unprotected adventure climbs that will remain as seriously hard challenges.

Climbers have always pushed the limits and modern sport climbers are no exception. Their routes are technically far harder than any routes climbed without bolts. The uninhibited use of bolts enables good climbers to do unbelievably hard routes. They also allow the average climber to do harder moves on routes he or she would not normally contemplate. In this respect, those who are most anti-bolting see bolts as 'a pact with the Devil' – something that is fundamentally wrong, though most climbers are ambivalent in their attitude, coy about their own indulgence and frequently dismissive, referring to sport routes as 'clip-ups'. There is no doubting that sport climbing is seductive in its expediency and easy promise of difficulty without danger.

Sport climbing's emphasis on pure difficulty has had an influence on 'real' climbing by raising the standard of what is seen to be possible. At its most extreme, on the overhanging and unprotected faces at Buoux or Oregon, the few have pushed the impossible whilst at Pen Trewyn or Sella we mortals have found we could do harder moves than previously, without the tug of a top rope. Yet climbing such routes rarely results in the lasting memories of real adventures. The biggest difference between sport climbing and adventure climbing is intellectual. The sport climb, however good, tends to be a physical event and its pleasure is ephemeral. Great classic climbs live on for ever – adventures to be mulled over, written about, revisited and talked about in the pub with those we did them with, and boasted about to those who were not there.

There is a fine line between sport climbing and adventure climbing; a line drawn in the mind. There is an emotional and intellectual engagement with an adventure climb that a sport climb can never provoke. The sport climb is sanitised, emasculated, it is 'virtual climbing' that, at its worst, is not really climbing at all. The over-bolted clip-up gives an illusion of leading. The rope snakes down behind you, just as in real climbing. You go through the ceremony of clipping the rope into the bolts as you 'lead' upward – chanting the litany of the leader ... 'Watch me' ... 'Slack, damn it!!' ... and as you clip the double-bolted lower-off chain, you shout down – 'Safe!' – as though you had ever been anything else! The contrast between the two types of climbing was brought home on a particularly fine traditional pitch in that heartland of bolted climbing – at Calpe in Spain. The magnificent, overhanging arête of *Missing Link*, with its massive threads and natural nut placements will remain a lasting memory long after much harder bolted routes have faded from memory. It is not surprising that a picture of this route graces the front of the English guidebook.

Bolts, as such, are not the problem. It is where the bolt is, or more importantly, where the bolt 'is not' that makes the distinction between a truly great climb and just another sport climb. Two or three well-placed bolts in *Right Wall* would make the route accessible to ten times as many leaders but totally rob it of its considerable distinction. One bolt in Froggatt's *Great Slab* would reduce the grade from E3 to Hard VS and destroy a classic. Such routes would no longer be in any way – special – just another virtual climb. They would no longer be routes that require character and fine judgement to lead, and this is the heart of the problem.

Great Slab is a good example. The prospective leader, unable to muster the courage to lead the climb, could anchor a rope at the top and dangle a loop just in the right place to clip in for the crux traverse – no need for any bolts. But what would be the point? One might as well top-rope it. If one were to top-rope it with five feet of slack then it would probably be harder than leading it with a bolt! Extending this argument brings one to the conclusion that the use of bolts brings the sport route closer to being a top-rope problem which is exactly what some over-bolted routes in France and Spain have become, with every hard move having overhead protection.

Many, probably most, 'adventure' climbers enjoy doing clip-ups from time to time – but mainly as a foil to 'the real thing'. There is no doubt that being able to concentrate on a series of very hard moves without having to fight fear and expend energy fiddling with gear, can be great fun. But is it really much different from top-roping? Given enough bolts the leader 'leads' the route without ever being in danger of taking a real leader fall. There is a point where 'real' climbing stops and 'virtual' climbing starts. 'Virtual' climbing is just like 'real' climbing, except it just isn't as 'real'. It is a way of 'doing' rock climbing without the need for commitment – that commitment which characterises it as one of Hemingway's sports.

Sport climbing has been accused of failing to produce great climbs or great climbing literature. Does the lack of adventure mean that there are no stories to tell? Where is the classic sport climbing writing to be found? We know where the hard sport routes are but where are the classic sport climbs? Great classic free climbs tend to follow great features whilst 'great' sport climbs often avoid natural 'lines'. They are frequently just 'hard' – soon eclipsed by the next, even harder route. Is it unfair to suggest that sport climbs cannot be great routes or follow great features? There *are* some truly great sport routes. The four pitches of *Pillar de Formis* at Buoux create a wonderful line on this major sport crag. Because of its size, and with its very exposed and committing final pitch, this bolted classic is an adventure, in the same way as the routes on the south face of the Aiguille du Midi are, to some extent, adventurous.

At the risk of falling into the trap of so many pontificators, I suggest that perhaps the end of technical difficulty is within sight. At present the technically hardest routes are short. With ten consecutive one-finger pull ups – so I'm told – *Action Direct* must be pointing the way to the limit. Surely no one could be so mindless as to contemplate more than one rope length of such moves, and if they were to do so, they would start to add an increasing element of adventure.

With the passage of time, climbers and alpinists have always applied stricter and more demanding rules to their games. Lito Tejada Flores referred to this tendency as 'the improvement to style' in his classic *Games Climbers Play*. It is difficult to contemplate modern, overhanging bolted routes succumbing to a purer, more adventurous style, but when the ultimate sport route has finally been climbed, then there can only be progress, either through 'improvement of style' thus making such routes more adventurous, or, through adding 'length', and with greater length, a corresponding element of 'adventure'. In the meantime we owe it to ourselves and to the integrity of climbing, to do everything in our power to ensure that our very real adventures not be diluted and sanitised into virtual climbs.

Morocco

Gill Lovick

Going to Morocco for the first time was a bit like jumping into a swimming pool without knowing what was at the bottom of it. In the end, we just had to hold our breath and jump.

We had seen a couple of magazine articles about climbing in Morocco, and knew information was scattered and sparse, but we gathered enough to work out a vague itinerary for our two week holiday. We had an image of warm rock, cheap luxury hotels, dark, cheerful faces amidst colourful clothes and a rustic lifestyle; sand, sea and surf, desert and snake charmers, not to mention carpet sellers, though I expected we could avoid those. I wondered if the water would be OK to drink, whether the food would give me the you-know-whats, and would there be supermarkets? Little things really.

Anyway, at the end of November, we flew on a not very cheap flight to Agadir, and arrived in hot sunshine. An hour and a half in the airport was spent bartering for a cheap hire car, though cheap it wasn't. We got him down to the lowest possible price (a 'phone call confirmed it was no cheaper in town), and persuaded him to let us pay by Visa. He filled out the form with a very sulky face – they don't like to lose a sale, so you can drag the price down quite a long way, but the sulky face, we found, was a common phenomenon, probably practised in front of a mirror in order to make the tourist feel bad about 'cheating' the vendor. Then we saw our car, and wondered if we had just paid for it outright. We hoped it would last us two weeks.

"Which is the best way to Tafraoute?"

"Oh, I show you. You have map? You go this way, it is better way, very beautiful".

On leaving the smart airport buildings of Agadir, it was as if a veil had been lifted to reveal the true Morocco. Agadir could almost be Benidorm, but you only need to travel a short distance to see the most common forms of transport are feet, bikes, donkeys, and on souk (market) days, lorries; women are covered from head to toe in beautiful colours, with only a peephole for eyes, roadside shops and stalls often sell only one kind of food, and stopping the car to buy or look is an invitation for beggars to put their hopeful hands in through your open car window. The roads are more or less single track through much of the country, though a roads programme is making sure that most of those single tracks are tarmaced. Traffic isn't heavy, but meeting a car coming the other way became a harrowing experience throughout our stay, a game of 'chicken' always ending with us swerving off the road onto the ubiquitous gravel, with pedestrians, children and cyclists having a rather fatalistic attitude to travelling along the side of the road.

Four hours of second gear later, we had seen some beautiful scenery, and a sunset, but we were still a long way from Tafraoute and were rapidly realising that completing our journey in the dark on this mountain road was going to be unpleasant. However, we finally rolled into Tafraoute, which felt suddenly alive after our dark journey, and headed for the nice looking hotel we'd seen in an

article in **Climber**. Having found out the prices, we headed straight back down to the village again and did a bit of bargaining for a cheap room, with the help of a carpet salesman, who I think got a commission. It was at this stage that I realised that my schoolgirl French was not quite the same as Moroccan French, and not all Moroccans speak the language at all, knowing only their native Arabic. The room was comfortable but spartan, and very cheap, and whilst in a hotel or restaurant, we were safe from the hassle of beggars. The village was a mass of activity, with the restaurant/bars open late (no alcohol), shops too, but the only women to be seen were a few western women, Islamic society pouring scorn on their women being out after dark, and they are never to be seen in the restaurants, for drinking tea in public is a shameful activity. The word restaurant is used quite loosely, being anything from an 'Arabian Nights' tent type affair to a room with a two-item menu overlooking an open sewer, but the service was always extremely polite, tourism being a major industry for the country.

The next, oppressively hot day was spent driving around the outskirts of Tafraoute, using a map kindly lent to us by another carpet seller, sussing out from the pictures in the magazine what was what. On the whole, we decided not much had been done at all, and what had been done was not well recorded. A car was necessary for getting about – any suggestion that walking was OK was bad information, especially when you were never quite sure where you were going. The amount of rock – desert quartzite and granite – was immense, seemingly endless. Tiny villages nestled in rocky hillsides, and daring drives up to them (a donkey would have been better) resulted in blanks when it came to looking for a mythical huge gorge. The following day, we ended up at a deceptively steep boulder, if boulder was the correct word for something as vast. Steve spotted a likely line, a beautiful steep crack and roof, and did I want to second it after he'd done it?

'Well, I'll see how you climb it first'. 25 feet and half an hour later, Steve admitted defeat, but decided to do the 'easier' line on the right, same question, same answer, same result. A short sulk later, we decided to go for the easy, slabby line on the front of the boulder, VS at the most, except it wasn't. We did do it, a striking crackline with worrying technical climbing on fragile exfoliating holds, feeling far steeper than it looked, far longer at three main pitches and a couple of exploratory ones at the end looking for a way off, and far harder at about E3 5c for the hardest pitches. A 'classic of the crag', with no new routes book to record it in. On our return to the village, we bought a very nice carpet from a very nice salesman, paying by Visa, T-shirts and warm clothes. I later regretted giving up those warm clothes.

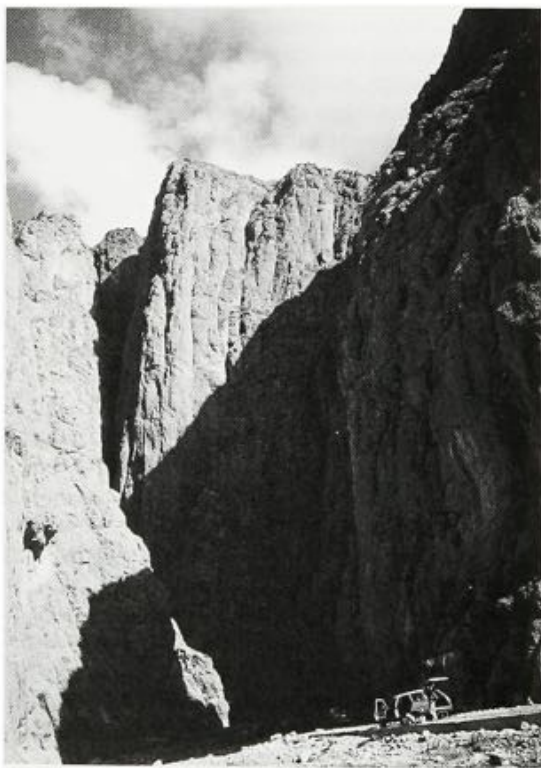
Everywhere in Morocco seems a long way from everywhere else, especially when the car you're driving rattles and shakes. But the country is so compelling to watch as you pass by: goatherds wandering the countryside at will, lorries laden with Berber tradesmen and their wares, often with their animals too, women working in the fields, pulling their veils across their faces as you pass them by, children waving, stalls on the roadside groaning under the weight of crystals and fossils collected from the rocky fields or mines, pottery sellers by the dozen. Colours of malachite, indigo, henna and saffron, clothes drying on rocks by streams. We made our way over a night and a day to the Todra Gorge.

The Todra, a high limestone gorge is actually on the way to somewhere, though

we never saw where, but Monday saw a huge amount of traffic coming down the dusty rough track in the gorge, lorries full of Berbers in all the colourful clothes they wear, minibuses with their roof-racks piled high with men, women and goats, and on their return before dusk, laden with fruit and vegetables. There are three hotels in the gorge, and we stayed at the one furthest up, the Hotel Yasmina, which was a strange but welcome sight to see after driving through darkness and rocky streams to get there. We again managed to barter our way into the smallest, cheapest room in the hotel, but when all you need is a bed to sleep in for the night, that's fine. There are campsites at the bottom of the gorge, but at the prices you can get hotel rooms in winter, there's no particular need to camp. The best thing about Hotel Yasmina, apart from the friendly staff, was definitely the hot showers, a seemingly endless supply of forceful hot water. The green strings of algae hanging from the shower head were an added bonus: French cosmetics companies charge a fortune for it.

The sides of the Todra Gorge where the hotels are sited are spectacular, and it is difficult to get a perspective on it, but you can only see a narrow strip of sky at the top, where the two sides appear to almost converge. Here, there are a few multi-pitch routes, some with a certain amount of natural gear, others fully equipped by the visiting French and Spanish climbers. Some route information is kept in a relatively haphazard form in the Hotel Mansour, but can be difficult to follow. We

did only one multi-pitch in the week we spent at Todra. This route appeared to be fully equipped, but we took a bunch of wires too, just in case. The first six pitches were fully bolted, from about 6a+ to 6b+ (E1 to E3), and were interesting and varied, feeling quite sustained and providing a new perspective on the gorge (we felt as if we were halfway up after only four pitches). The next six or seven pitches were a bit easier, and started off being equipped partly with pegs, but the bolts had run out. One bunch of wires was barely enough, so Steve was in the lead all the time now, even on the so-called 3c finishing pitch (not!). I was brave enough to lead the last 100 feet, and as we were coiling our ropes at the end of our six and a half hour climb, preparing for the walk down, a pair of Bonelli's eagles drifted overhead in the late afternoon sunshine.



Entrance to Todra Gorge. Photo: Cathy Woodhead

The Todra Gorge is many kilometres long, and walking up from where the hotels are, through the narrowest, shadiest part of the gorge where there are a few climbs, you emerge into sunshine as the gorge opens out. The nearest crag, Le Jardin, contains some of the easiest routes. This two pitch high slab catches the sun for most of the day, and can get a little too hot, but routes here are mainly about 5+ or 6a, and the French have introduced a handful of the local Moroccans to climbing here. This cliff is, however, a little dirty, and better climbing, though generally harder is to be found another two kilometres upstream in the Petit Gorge. Here, there are equipped climbs on both sides, so it is possible to find sun or shade depending on the ambient temperature, and it did become quite cold for a few days of our stay. There is probably only enough climbing here to keep most people going for two or three days at the most, and the topo in the French climbing magazine **Grimper** was totally useless. A hand drawn topo given to us by a friend just before our holiday was invaluable, and the best 'easy' route had to be *Renault Express* 6a+, a fairly steep pocket and jug route that was interesting and sustained. Many of the belays were simply bolt hangers, sometimes only single bolts, and we had a supply of old krabs that we left on belays. It is unfortunate that when the French and Spanish took the time to visit this country to do new routes they didn't always finish the job properly, as they would have been compelled to do in their own country.

The gorge contains a vast amount of limestone, and most of it is undeveloped, but there is scope for long, naturally protected multi-pitch routes as well as short (and long) sport routes. One very steep area, off the beaten track is Secteur Can Gullich where the easiest route is around French 6c (E4), and most are much harder than that, a kind of private playground for the super-hard French climbers. We visited it one day (I didn't climb), but even in the winter sunshine it felt too hot to climb, and I wondered why so much effort had gone into equipping such an elite area, rather than continuing to develop climbs for the more average visiting climber, so encouraging a few more visitors to the area and aiding the local economy. This would also provide something more for budding Moroccan climbers to do, should they be able to get hold of equipment.

There are no climbing shops in Morocco, as you'd expect (and I never did find a supermarket), and as millions of Moroccans live in mud houses or tents, they couldn't afford to buy climbing equipment if they wanted to; those few Moroccans inspired by visitors to climb have to rely on the goodwill of those people for gifts. One such Moroccan, Omar, asked us if there was anything we wanted to part with, and we offered our rope, saying we would leave it with him when we finished our stay at the Todra. He asked us how much we wanted for it.

"Nothing really."

"No, I must give you something. My family have a carpet shop."

"We've already got a carpet, and anyway, we're not really bothered."

"Well, a little silver then."

"OK, just a souvenir."

And so we arranged to meet after our last climb, and we salvaged together three quickdraws and a belay plate to give him as well, pleased to be able to help someone who was keen to be self-sufficient. He wanted us to come to his shop in Tinerhir, at the bottom of the Gorge, so we drove him down, and accepted tea. We weren't prepared for what followed, but from our experiences with Moroccans up

to this point, we shouldn't have been surprised. Omar introduced us to his brother, then left the room. We didn't see him again. Omar's brother uncoiled the rope, inspected it foot by foot, feigning knowledge, checked out each krab and belay plate for scratches, dumped the whole lot on the floor, and told us that this lot wasn't worth very much and how did we expect to get a carpet for this? We told him we didn't want a carpet, but he said that was OK, we could make up the difference with Visa. Horrified by this time, and very confused, we said we really didn't want a carpet, we already had one, and his reply was that we must need a smaller one to match then, or maybe part exchange. We finally angrily left with a small trinket which we were told was silver, although afterwards we wished we had taken back the equipment, and I really regretted not knowing the equivalent in French or Arabic of 'never look a gift horse in the mouth'.

Our troubles weren't over then, as a group of children waiting outside tried to insist on being paid for having watched our car, and as we started to drive back out of the narrow rocky streets between the mud houses of the Medina (an old town originally built by Jews) in approaching darkness, we found the headlights on our Renault 4 weren't working. This meant a trip to the garage where we were ripped off (unlike on a previous encounter with Moroccan mechanics who cheerfully charged next to nothing to fix a puncture for us), but we decided we would be able to claim that back from the hire car firm. However, the receipt we got was not verified by an official stamp, so we were never reimbursed. When we left Tinerhir that evening, and I didn't want to stay a minute longer, I was deeply depressed about my total loss of faith in mankind, particularly Moroccan mankind.

The last few days of our trip were spent travelling, first to Marrakech, which is another story in itself (except to say don't try and drive into the Medina), then along to the coast, taking in the fortified fishing village of Essaouira where craftsmen work with Thuya wood to produce everything from little trinket boxes to wonderful pieces of furniture; thence to Agadir, taking in the coastline past rickety villages and a hippy surfing colony before suffering the sudden shock of Agadir itself. In Agadir we had the best paella ever in a modern restaurant where it seemed the waiters thought we were royalty, followed by a swim the next morning in the sea before departing for the airport, and we desperately hoped we would run out of petrol as we coasted into the airport car park.

Some things to know before going to Morocco:

1. T-shirts (not white) and old fleece clothes are useful bartering material, and Visa really can be used for buying carpets.

2. People trying to sell you things will always try to make you feel guilty if you say you don't want what they're selling, or they may just believe you want to bring the price down. Their belief that you are rich and have an inexhaustible supply of money to buy things you don't want, isn't really their fault: compared to them we are rich, but a firm no may be enough. Be prepared in many cases to even be verbally aggressive – this always seemed to work for me, once thoroughly provoked, though the resulting look of horror and confusion on their faces never ceased to amaze me.

3. Don't bother looking for a supermarket. Most villages have a little corner shop-type-affair where items are usually priced, and this is where to look for bottled water, around 5 dirhams per bottle. Bread is cheap, but you may be charged a bit more if you're white. Petrol prices are similar to Britain.

4. See your hire car before you hire it (like we should have). Our car in Morocco was the most expensive and the most dangerous car we have ever hired. Cars are generally French ones, and the Renault 4 is favoured for rough terrain, of which there is plenty. Make sure you have an inflated spare tyre and jack. The electricians on our car were a mess. If you get any work done, try to barter the price first in case you can't recoup the money, and get an official receipt anyway. It needs to have the stamp of the garage on it, and a description of work done. Punctures and broken windscreens (both very likely) aren't covered.

5. On arriving in a new place, someone will be at your car window before you've switched off the engine. Usually they'll be offering to help you find accommodation. If you let them, they'll take you to the poshest hotel first (unless you're dressed in tatters, which I'm sure would be very helpful), but it doesn't hurt to have help in this situation unless you already know where you're going. Don't feel you have to give a tip; they appear to get paid by hoteliers.

6. Don't believe anyone who says they don't want to sell you anything, that they just want you to come and see. I think hard selling and bartering are on the National Curriculum. Browsing is difficult, although this was possible in the woodworkers shops in Essaouira.

7. Women should keep fairly well covered up, except on the beaches, and should anticipate a certain amount of mild harassment, though I never felt physically threatened, perhaps because I'd been seen with Steve. As a woman climber I was admired by young Moroccans and shouted at by old Berbers, presumably for being a little under-dressed, but I'm not sure.

8. Mint tea is the usual drink, and is served very sweet. Don't worry about the sugar, the tea is lovely, and very refreshing if you're hot or tired. Our hotel menu usually only had two items on it, so we alternated, and breakfast was normally limited to bread and jam. I believe they knew how to cater for vegetarians. If you want the sort of cuppa you're used to, try asking for English tea. You might be lucky.

9. Cigarettes are useful currency if you wish to take photos, but children will ask for them too. Sweets are also a useful standby for giving to children, but it is hard to find sweets or cigarettes once you are in the country.

10. Take extra climbing gear with you for giving to local climbers. Don't go with them to their house, however genuine they seem (and especially not if his name is Omar), and if you want anything for the gear, try to do business in a place of your choice, but don't upset the hoteliers.

11. Morocco is a very poor country, with a particular outlook on western visitors. Tourism is wanted, and very necessary to the economy, but they don't treat tourists necessarily the way the tourists expect to be treated, outside the hotels and restaurants. They assume tourists visit the country just to buy, not to look. Once this is understood, and I had trouble coming to terms with this, it should be possible to make the most of a visit to Morocco. If you want to see the real Morocco, and it would be a shame not to, you have to put up with continuous hassle. If you just want to climb, try to get a flight to Marrakech and head straight for the Todra Gorge. And leave your credit cards behind.

A Tribute to Charles Evans

John Hunt

On an early morning in mid-October 1952 I was relaxing in the bunk of a sleeper coach which had been 'slipped' into a siding from the overnight express to Glasgow. There was a knock on the door and I was greeted by two smiling faces. To my great surprise, Charles Evans and Alfred Gregory had taken the trouble to meet me at that early hour, to discuss the Everest Expedition and its membership. That was my first meeting with Charles and one which I will never forget.

The first few weeks of planning and preparation were a difficult time for me. I needed, as a first priority, to choose a group of congenial companions, with appropriate experience, who would work together as a team. The change in leadership had created understandable conflict in loyalty, and not everyone whom I hoped to persuade to join me were entirely happy about it.



Charles Evans. Photo: Dennis Davis 1957

One of those whom I was most anxious to enlist was Charles, possessed as he was of considerable Himalayan experience and strongly recommended by Eric Shipton. The warmth of that smile, as I hastily dressed to join him and Greg, was an immense relief.

The question of who might take over if I were to fall by the wayside was not addressed until much later on. It was only at the beginning of May in the following year, when we started the 'lift' of stores up the mountain from base camp, that I asked Charles to be deputy leader. I had delayed making that appointment, wishing to avoid any sense of a hierarchy in the party. However, at that stage, with the serious climbing about to begin, an eventual

replacement for myself had become necessary. Charles was an obvious choice. I could not have wished for more capable and loyal support than his, throughout the following, critical weeks.

I recall a strenuous day with Charles and Tom Bourdillon, when we made a first reconnaissance of the Lhotse Face, climbing to about 24,000 feet and in doing so, testing Tom's experimental closed-circuit oxygen apparatus. At that time, each upward step towards the summit was perceived as a minor triumph, and this was such an occasion.

I recall our struggle to put up two tents on the South Col in the teeth of a westerly gale, on the evening of 24th May, during the first 'Assault'. I shall never forget our feelings of euphoria two days later, after we three had climbed up the south-east ridge and later, when Charles and Tom came down from the south summit. That was, indeed, an heroic moment for those two, which gave to all their companions on the South Col an immense sense of uplift and confidence about the eventual outcome.

I remember Charles' steadiness during the descent from the South Col on 27th May, as we supported an exhausted Tom down the Lhotse Face. I remember his joyous welcome three days later to the triumphant 'summiteers', ignoring his own high hopes, as they returned from an achievement which he and Tom had done so much to make possible.

In the following years we met regularly in North Wales, as members of the Management Committee of the newly established National Mountaineering Centre at Plas-y-Brenin, on which he succeeded me as Chairman after the first ten years. It was during one of those visits to Snowdonia that we spent a pleasant day climbing on some minor crags at the head of the Nant Ffrancon. Later, we walked over Bwlch Tryfan to have tea at Pen-y-Gwryd. It was then that Charles complained of feeling a lack of balance as we came down off the flanks of the Glyder Fach. This was the first indication of his illness, which he survived for nearly 40 years.

Charles Evans, by his modesty, his commonsense, his quiet humour, his extraordinary courage in adversity, won the admiration and affection of all who knew him.

CC Guidebooks: Why Bother?

Bob Moulton

Recent criticism of the Club for delays in publishing the **Pembroke** guide, and the appearance of the rival Rockfax book have raised a number of questions: 'What is the Club doing in the guidebook business?' 'Has the Club's guidebook operation outlived its usefulness?' 'Does the Club want to stay in the guidebook business?' To judge from some of the recent comments, there is a view that the Club assumes that it has a God-given right to publish guidebooks and that the Club's organisation is now a slothful dinosaur ill-equipped to cope with the needs of modern climbing.

The Club has a long guidebook tradition: 85 years of publishing guidebooks, with 77 guides and a further 21 supplements, interim guides and **New Climbs** volumes, by authors including Archer Thompson, Andrews, Kirkus, Edwards, Noyce, Harding, Moulam, Crew (to name but few from previous generations), is something that the Club can be justly proud of. This tradition has given us a base to build on and strive to improve on. By maintaining a consistency of style and approach, our guides have a collective authority and acceptance with the climbing public which one-off books or series of books find it hard to compete with. (As an aside on the question of consistency of style, we never seem quite to be able to match the Fell and Rock, but maybe this is a reflection of the respective philosophies of the two clubs!).

Starting in North Wales, the Club has published books to the climbing areas as they were developed (including interim guides re-printed from journals to **The Three Cliffs of Llanberis**, **Craig Yr Isfa** and **Clogwyn du 'r Arddu** during the 1939-45 war), and then outside its traditional Snowdonia areas: **Cornwall and the South-East** in the '50s, **Dorset** in the '60s, **Gogarth** (a bit late!) in the '70s, **Pembroke**, **North Devon & Cornwall**, **North Wales Limestone** and **Mid Wales** in the '80s, and **Avon & Cheddar** and **Lundy** so far in the current decade. Many of our guides followed on from articles or supplements in the journal, and in later years from various **New Climbs** publications.

In the late '60s the Club took on the publication of the **Peak** guides, but the result was a severe case of indigestion when it soon became obvious that we couldn't cope with such an extensive programme. The **Peak** guides were handed over to the BMC, and other titles, such as **Dorset** (although, as it turned out, only for one edition), were given up in a process of retrenchment. This was a sobering experience for the Club and an object lesson that should not be forgotten. In fact, with a current list equivalent to over 20 titles, the size of our operation is probably larger even than at that time, but this time expansion has been gradual and carefully considered within the prevailing financial context.

The Club's guides have evolved gradually over the years, taking on board innovations such as plastic covers, pitch grades, E-grades, stars, colour photographs, the use of computers and (most recently) the two-volume sets and the use of teams rather than single authors. Further changes are under active consideration (such as the use of more diagrams and, where appropriate, topos, especially in relation to the whole question of sport climbing). However, change just for the

sake of it or because of the appearance of more fashionable-looking competition would be wrong, and we have stuck to a commitment to use full route descriptions and 100% coverage (the 'definitive guide'). This combined with an ethos of voluntary labour, the ever-increasing pressures of new developments and the climbing public's expectations as to the quality of content means that guides get progressively more complex to produce. Delays can result and some slippage in planned publication dates becomes seemingly inevitable. However, there is little or no evidence to suggest that commercial publishers would have published comparable guidebooks any sooner.

Does this mean we should depart from the basic principles of full descriptions, definitive/comprehensive coverage and/or voluntary authors? Not if our current healthy levels of sales (and consequently, income to the Club) are anything to go by. Climbers still seem to want to buy our guides in the face of increasing competition from commercial publishers. There are also very strong arguments for comprehensive coverage: it maintains an all-important record for future generations to build on in terms both of what has been climbed and in terms of the historical record. While the latter may not be of interest to all climbers, there are certainly many for whom the background and history is an important ingredient of climbing. Many climbers want to read about routes next to the one that they are climbing and elsewhere. Currently our cost basis is reasonable thanks to the voluntary effort that is put into our guides, with the result that guidebooks are well-priced in relation to other books and to climbing gear. In addition, the Club and the BMC Access Fund receive a substantial income from the operation, and volunteer rescue teams and other 'good causes' have benefited from smaller donations.

What has all this got to do with the CC? Some of the guidebook developments above were linked to the acquisition of huts, a few were to fill gaps when other publishers pulled out, and **Gogarth** was a question of regaining a lost initiative. The list of CC guides printed in the handbook shows how closely the history of the Club and its members has been tied up in the developments recorded in its guidebooks and in post-publication developments.

So if the Club is to stay in the publishing business what is the answer to the recent complaints? We now have nearly all our books on disk and we are putting in place more structured arrangements than previously for collecting new route information and comments immediately after publication. As always we are on the look-out for and welcome new blood. Of the 32 people who have written or co-authored CC guidebooks since the mid '70s, 17 were non-members at the time they started working for us and most went on to join the Club.

The publishing operation must be kept under continuous review, both in terms of the format/style used and of publishing methods, and lessons must be learnt, both from our own experiences and from the competition. Ironically, one such lesson is that one of our innovations of recent years, the two-volume guides (of which **Pembroke** is the ultimate development), causes disproportionately extra work for both author(s) and editor with the almost inevitable result of delayed publication. In nearly all cases it would have been possible to publish one of the two volumes months if not years before the publication date of the two volume book. We will have to look very closely at whether the many advantages of the two-volume guides (both to the user and commercially to the Club) are worth this

extra 'cost'. We should never lose sight of the basic purpose of a guidebook, which should be to get people out onto the crag and enjoying themselves. To this end there is an important balance to be struck between ensuring accuracy, and reasonable standards of English and readability (including humour) and getting a guide out quickly. Clearly we want to provide a higher level of accuracy than climbers would expect in an interim guide, other than for the most recently-developed areas, but how far should this go? The way our guidebooks require the climber to carry an ever-increasing number of Historical and First Ascent pages is another area we need to look at.

Certainly, I for one should like to see the Club's guidebooks become a more integral part of the Club than is the case at present. We've made a start with the recent and very successful 'Launch Meets' for **Swanage and Portland** and **Southern Sandstone**, and for more active promotion of the discounted prices at which members can buy guides, including selling the books at Club dinners. In a good year it should be possible to save a good proportion of the subscription by buying new CC guides (over £10 in 1995/6). We have also started (many years after the FRCC!) using our guidebooks to promote the Club by printing a short description of the club at the front of our books. We need more input to new guides and more feedback on existing books from members, and we want members to 'own' and be proud of the Club's guidebooks and its traditions, particularly with the Centenary coming up. There is now a steady flow of cash from the guidebook operation into improvements in the Club's huts, and possibly towards new huts. If there is to be a new hut I personally would like to see it being in one of our newer guidebook areas.

Recently, issues relating to copyright have been raised again. In principle I fully support the idea of a free market in climbing descriptions that was hinted at in the statement printed at the front of the 1981 **Gogarth Supplement** (following a dialogue with West Col, who published the original **Gogarth** guide). Thus we support local activists in publishing interim guides and supplements, and we shouldn't flinch from the threat of competition if we fail. But as with all competitions, we need a 'level playing field', and there are particular concerns at the prospect of 'cherry picking' selected climbs, books published in direct competition with our own titles – as opposed to the more traditional selected climbs books which provide a 'taster' to a much wider climbing area. The issues now at stake involve defining just what is a level playing field in the guidebook business. This raises all sorts of questions, including even the possibility of litigation. Such a step could have major consequences for the Club and for guidebooks generally, and any such decision would only be taken after very careful deliberation and evaluation of the views both of members and climbers in general.

To conclude on a personal note, working on guidebooks has brought me into contact with many climbers, many of whom are now personal friends, and has taken me to climbing areas and cliffs I might never have gone to (repeated visits to Lundy for a start!). Sadly, three of the authors I have worked with were killed climbing: Terry Thompson, Mike Harber and Paul Williams (the last mentioned being the most prolific CC author of recent times), and I think that we owe it to them to make a success of continuing the Club's involvement in guidebooks.

The Trials and Tribulations of Guidebook Writing or, of Bergs and Books and Little People

Nick White

It has been said before, and with lewder connotations, that size is not everything. For in the realm of guidebookdom large is not necessarily welcome, nor small beautiful. So what you hold in your hand, and how you use it are but one tenth of the equation (and no, this is not a prelude to a **Cosmopolitan** article). To appreciate the other nine-tenths, like an iceberg, you have to look beneath the surface. And as so often happens when you scratch the skin of something, be it as humble a question as "What is the meaning of life?"; or "Is there a God?"; or something far more profound like "Whose round is it?", then the full import of the topic in question hits home... especially if you've gone out drinking with 15 mates.

As with the other titanic institutions of our time, whose sides are constantly grinding along the iceflow of reality, each guidebook production faces a journey beset by problems which on the face of it appear inconsequential, yet...

Every single facet of that lowly object, the guide, has been deliberated upon by committees and venerable bodies (mostly of a stout nature). From the angst over headings to the agonising over the lowliest of commas, these decisions have ramifications which spiral away into the boggled minds of authors and editors. Ah! *the boggings, the boggings*, I'm breaking out in a cold sweat just thinking about them.

To assuage these fevered bifurcations of consciousness, a few kind souls buckled together a handbook to guide novice writers through the maze. Along with pointers on house style, and even more convoluted approaches to the minutiae of guide construction, it also offers some robust comfort. The only comparison I can draw is with a fictional manual which Richard Bach created for his spiritual novella **Illusions**. Entitled **Reminders for the Advanced Soul** it bears a striking resemblance to the pamphlet for guidebook authors (which is also handed down from 'on-high'). For instance, the opening passage of both begins:

'Remember where you came from, where you're going, and why you created the mess you now find yourself in.'

There are further gems of sophistry, perhaps the most pertinent being 'You are never given a wish/guidebook without also being given the power to make it true/happen... you may have to work (lots of overtime) for it, however.' Yet despite all the advice and support on offer, many of the fundamentals have to be worked through alone, usually on wet winter nights with some tortured wailing going on in the background. Set out below are a few of the more crucial boggings, beginning with the height of the author, a fact of life often overlooked in the appreciation of everything to do with climbing...

From an early age, three to be precise, I developed an aversion to things that were smaller than they promised to be. I lay the blame for this squarely on my mother's girder-like shoulders. Mid-scrub one bathnight, she grabbed and, just

before my mouth burbled beneath the scummy water she exclaimed:

"Now then youth, you're bound to be a six-footer with plates this big."

29 years of fallow expectation have resulted in a grim acceptance and, when faced with yet another telescopic reach, a Napoleon complex whose mantra goes something like this... 'Alexander the Great, five-feet-one-and-three-quarters; Charlemagne, four-feet-nine-and-a-quarter; Me, five-feet-two.... and-a-half.' That extra half-an-inch being as important, if not more so, than the remainder. After all, is this not reality's way of straining towards the unobtainable hold of requiredness?

Being a child of the '60s, you know – the anathema of free love; oxymoronic flower power; pot-smoking and its residual disorientation vis-à-vis decimalisation – I could never quite decide which sounded the larger of the two, 63½" or 159cms. Which brings me neatly to my next bergschrund, guidebook pitch lengths. Having first hurdled the serac that is the thorny question of: 'Do you grasp the firebrand of Federalism and give in to metrication, or do you make a stand, island nation that we are (Thomas Moore aside), and fight for the individualism that is the imperial 12 inches?' – you then come face to face with the subjectivity of pitch lengths themselves.

Pitch lengths appear to bear no relation to their given footage. Instead, they seem to rely on being directly proportional to the height of their perpetrators, combined to the amount of fear experienced in their execution. Never in the field of human conflict has one soul's yard been another's interminable nightmare. Apart, that is, from the contentious arena of grading, but more of that anon. Adding insult to injury, different rock-types incur their own form of pitch length as well. A rabid gritstoner always wants more of their boulder problem than there actually is. Whereas limestone tends to make the most of its grand faces, despite the undeniable fact that the last pitch is so unstable as to make even the San Andreas fault seem a safe place to store all your eggs. However, this state of affairs has a certain 'je ne sais quoi', whose rule of thumb appeals to those with artistic sensibilities. So a mealy-mouthed and grudging acceptance tends to rule the day, but only from the viewpoint that lanky gits have their heads in the clouds, while the more diminutive among us have our feet firmly on the ground.

The inadequacies of grading for those whose nadir happens to be a lacking in the altitude stakes, never ceases to amaze. Let's get real here, if you could split the atom of grading, the resulting fission of intangibilities would make the meeting of matter and anti-matter no more than a squeaky pop in a laboratory urinal. In the black and white world of guidebook semantics, one of the written-in-stone commandments is never fudge about with the grade. It is second only to 'always describe routes left-to-right.' And to those who believe that power will overcome anything, there is only one realistic criticism... **!***!! i.e. unprintable! Casting aside the more obvious grading issues, and getting down to the nitty-gritty of the issue, what about weight, the number of kids in-tow mentally, the mortgage and car repayments and whether the bank manager wishes to see you the following day. In short ('scuse the pun), do you supply a sliding scale with every route?

Now then, what about always describing routes from left to right? I mean where do you start with this one? For those with a predilection to conspiracy theories, there is one helluva meal to be made of this. It's almost as though you pass through some teenage portal which says 'Climbing this way' and you instantly get signed-up as a lifelong member of the communist party, 'I always approach routes from a

socialist perspective.' Or maybe it has something to do with the coriolis effect; or something far more sinister like the silent majority of climbers are left-handed, the quiet ones always being the dark horses of policy decision making?

There can only be one reason for the inclusion of stars in a guidebook, that being that when the volatile fires of the grading debate have died down, the unspent fuel of egotism can be expended in a further ballistic show of incendiary splendour. If you ever have the misfortune of being present at a guidebook debacle where both grading and stars become mixed, be prepared for a space/time paradox capable of taking out three or four major solar systems, or a goodly portion of an outer spiral arm of the Milky Way.

Now that the major snowstorms of the book's bones are tucked into the snowdrift at the glacier's snout, there are but a few minor scuffles with the blizzard of aesthetics to cope with, namely the action shots and the photo-diagrams. Each have their own 'peculiarities' to contend with. Action photos bring an author into the realm of film director, whereby playing your leading actors off against each other tends to bring out the best in their work. The photographers come at you like a gaggle of budding Baileys. Their portfolios displayed with a peacock's air of disdain, daring you not to pick their finest feathers (of which, they assure you, they all are). And woe betide you if you don't, especially when they see the selection of pathetic transparencies you've already amassed. We all know that Sicilians can be vindictive, but give a climber a camera and an inkling that they're any good with it, then tell them you can't use their work and... well, lets just say that a severed nag's head is the least of your worries.

Usable photo-diagrams, on the other hand, are reaped before the vagaries of mother nature, and their procurement is nothing short of miraculous. From storm-tossed and perilous paddling in open-topped canoes, to mad bike rides through torrential rain, returning again and again because the fates (i.e. the Sun) are not with you. Then the fateful day dawns, a cloudless sky, crisp conditions, and not a hint of vapour in the air. Game on! Tremulous hands fumble the SLR onto the tripod, click, click, click... perfect. Rewind the film, as the return spool spins far too easily. No. Damn, where's the film? That's when you see the sea fret moving inexorably towards you. Ten seconds later you can't even see your hand in front of your face. Well you'd believe that one, but how about such X-file phenomena as a plague of grasshoppers covering the crag, or toads raining down out of the wide blue yonder. It pays not to set up the camera in a pentangle of toadstools, especially when on Dartmoor.

Having scaled the previous nunataks of adversity, budding authors are now ready to get to grips with the crunch question... the agonising or not so agonising decision of whether to include a photo of yourself in the guide. The boggings involved with this alone could fill a book. Thoughts range from the Australian Mike Law approach 'It's the author's right to appear in every photo in the guide', to the very English (and virtually redundant) thinking 'Don't want to make a fuss old chap', which could mean anything... and nothing... or maybe... and why not?

So as a sort of summation you could end up with an idyllic route description for a guidebook which reads something like this: Flavour of the Month, 6.31396 yrs of Hard Extremely Unfathomable Thinking Bearing in mind that you've got an awful lot of responsibilities on the home front, tremulously teeter-out of the car and have a fag break to ponder all the imponderables....

Not the Walker Spur

Mike Mortimer

That summer we had plans to do the Walker (Spur) but Walker (Derek) broke his heel falling off his local crag so he went to St Tropez instead.

Undeterred I went to Chamonix, after all I know lots of people there, I would have no problem finding somebody to climb with. In the old days you just went to the Bar Nationale, Snell's Field or Pierre d'Orthaz and you were fixed up. Well, first of all, I found the 'Bar Nash' to have been converted to an up-market restaurant with not a climber in sight. I knew Snell's Field had been closed for some years but tried the other campsites only to be horrified by the vast numbers of unknown alpinists and no familiar faces. Furthermore, the weather was typical Chamonix with cloud at three levels and torrential rain. That night I slept in the car and by six next morning I was heading south for the Dauphiné. Four hours later, my tent pitched, I was walking up to the slabs of the Tête de la Maye with the sun on my back, having been pointed at a nice Diff by an English couple. It was my first visit to La Bérarde for 17 years and I was rather taken aback by the changes to the place since 1976. The big new campsite was an obvious development rendered necessary by the vast number of visitors to the area and though its construction had involved considerable re-shaping of the valley bottom, the end result did not seem unacceptable. On the other hand I was aware of a dramatic increase in the 'greenery' of the hill-sides with many, many more trees than I remembered. In 1864 Whymper noted that the valleys of the Véneon and Étançon had suffered from overgrazing and tree-felling and commented on the impoverished vegetation and soil-erosion which was still to be observed a century later. However, the interests of the Common Agricultural Policy coincided with that of the environment and with the removal of sheep and goats there has come the reappearance of trees and shrubbery, some in plantations but many by natural recolonisation. In all this has brought about quite a transformation of the area, very much to its benefit. On the way up to the slabs I counted 30 different types of flower in the space of two minutes and congratulated myself on the decision to leave Chamonix.

The start of the climb was less than 30 minutes from the tent so I was soon padding up the first pitch. I had hoped to meet members Salisbury and Price somewhere and there they were on the second stance, having spent a week at Ailefroide and just transferred to La Bérarde for a change. The route was quite popular so there was plenty of time to sit in the sun and chat which gave me chance to complain that the standard seemed a little fierce for Diff. They were not a little amused to inform me that the standard was 'Difficile' with pitches of V and not 'difficult'. I considered the offer of a rope but I was dressed for moving fast so when the sun immediately went behind a cloud the best policy seemed to be to get moving. The next pitch was quite impressive but on really big holds and all went well higher up on what was, after all, super granite until, just having climbed (effortlessly?) past a young French pair I came to a smooth wet groove. There was really no problem, I was on a ledge with a big fat bolt right on the move; unfortunately, try as I may I couldn't avoid the wet and without any gear it

was not possible to pull on the bolt. Feeling an idiot I decided the only thing to do was to wait for the next party but when I looked down they seemed terrified, presumably by my antics, and were making no attempt to leave their uncomfortable stance. I eventually persuaded the leader to move but he got stuck just beneath me so I climbed down to him and screamed 'mousqueton'; without a word and with bulging eyes he thrust out a quick-draw which I gratefully accepted. This immediately solved the problem and I happily left it hanging on the bolt hoping I hadn't frightened the French lad too much. With more straightforward climbing above I quickly reached the tourist path which leads to the summit of the Tête de la Maye but after the excitement I headed for the valley.

I joined the Salisbury-Price team for the next two days but was then back to climbing alone. However, I had learnt my lesson and wore a harness equipped with two long slings and screwgate karabiners and carried a couple of quick-draws. This worked well on these valley crags, as the bolts were considerably placed on the hard moves enabling me to protect most of them adequately by ensuring I was always clipped to at least one bolt on the hard sections. Moreover the style of climbing is conducive to soloing, rather like gritstone, encouraging fast movement but paradoxically permitting one to stand around and sort out the more technical problems.

The left-hand side of the Tête de la Maye slabs is a little further from the valley and therefore less frequented, though the approach paths are already showing signs of wear. I always used to wonder why paths in the Alps seldom show the erosion from which the ones in the British mountains suffer. At first I thought it something to do with our weather but eventually I realised that alpine paths are usually constructed and maintained intelligently. Here above La Bérarde was the haphazard and sudden development of a popular climbing ground without carefully prepared approaches; climbers were mindlessly blundering up the hillside creating erosion tracks that were already becoming unsightly. It is mainly guides who create these routes (though, obviously, we ordinary climbers benefit from them) and it is to be hoped that some effort will be made to avoid the environmental degradation, which has taken place below some of our popular crags.

One long route I did is in two sections cut by the summit path. Though easier technically than many of the other routes it is more serious with only the occasional bolt and it seems quite bizarre to meet tourists half-way up the climb. This route finishes quite close to the Tête so I decided to join the tourists making their way to the summit which is equipped with a beautiful table d'orientation.

The views are tremendous but I was immediately struck by the loss of snow from the Dauphiné giants – to the north, the South Face of the Meije was pure rock, the Bande de Neige had all but disappeared; similarly, the North West Face of the Ailefroide whose mighty Plaques des Glaces had become a few dirty streaks and the huge Bonne Pierre Face of the Dome de Neige d'Écrins was no longer cut by an elegant icy couloir but by a dirty stone-raked runnel.

Throughout the Alps the effects of the augmented greenhouse effect is to be seen in the accelerated glacier retreat of recent years but there in front of me was even more dramatic evidence of what is almost certainly man-induced climate change. Somewhat chastened I headed back down to La Bérarde.

Obituary

Alison Hargreaves

1962 (1983)–1995



Alison Hargreaves. Photo: Ian Smith

During the initial years of our association we climbed together on a regular basis, most notably during her first few trips to the Alps. After a false start in Zermatt at Easter '83, when persistent heavy snow thwarted all attempts to get to anything, never mind climb it, she opened her alpine account, and a respectable opening it was, with an autumn ascent of the Frendo Spur. If one disregards some low-level cragging on the flanks of the Chamonix Aiguilles behind the Envers hut, spring '84 saw her second proper alpine route in the shape of Mont Blanc du Tacul's *Supercouloir*, followed a few weeks later by a five-day blitz which accounted for the North Faces of the Courtes, Triolet and Matterhorn. Under the impression that we had finished after the first two I was unwise enough to embark on a period of 'rest and recreation' assisted by the appearance in the Bar Nationale

of an old acquaintance from New Zealand clutching a litre or two of cheap red. After a drive the following morning which I barely remember but would prefer to completely forget we arrived in the car park at Tasch railway station whereupon, unable to cope with the complexities of packing a rucksack and boarding a train, I crawled into the corner of a field and passed out. My coma was interrupted several hours later by the car park attendant's dog at the head of a search party otherwise consisting of the attendant and a very unamused Alison, at which point I was duly informed by the latter that she was going up to the Hornli hut, and that if or when I felt up to it I could do the same! It's tempting to believe that, had I not turned up, her solo ascent of the north face might well have taken place nine years before it actually did. It was quickly becoming very apparent from these first forays into alpinism that she was taking to the activity like a duck to water; as well as thriving on the actual climbing she approached the whole environment with an enquiring and observant mind that rapidly afforded her a shrewd judgement of weather and conditions.

Our last major route together was an unhurried and very satisfying ascent of the *Croz Spur* in October '85, when the short days and total absence of other teams

on the mountain combined to create an atmosphere of remoteness and commitment seldom encountered in the Alps nowadays, though presumably the norm when such routes were first climbed. Together with an enduring respect for the first ascentionists and their contemporaries, my lasting impression is of sitting zombie-like on the summit ridge in the fading light, too exhausted to co-ordinate thought and action, while the more active half of the team, apparently no less fresh than when we started, levelled a flat spot from the rubble and had a brew on almost in the time it took me to shed my rucksack!

Thereafter she moved up a gear; a trip to Nepal in 1986 resulted in a difficult new route on the north-west ridge of Kangtega with Jeff Lowe, Mark Twight and Tom Frost where, despite the illustrious company, she did her share of hard leading and reached the summit with Twight after Lowe and Frost had been forced by illness to the former to descend from a subsidiary col. The three following years saw ascents of *The Shroud* with Phill Dickens and the North Faces of the Eiger and Droites with Steve Aisthorpe, short trips slotted in between the demands of work and, following the birth of Tom in October 1988, three months after the Eiger, motherhood. These activities were interspersed with a regular diet of local rock and an increasingly respectable tally of Scottish winter routes.

Alison Jane Hargreaves was born in Derbyshire on 17 February 1962, and died, descending from the summit of K2, on 13 August 1995; throughout the intervening thirty-three years she had lived life to the full.

The second of three children of keen hillwalking parents, Alison developed a love of the outdoors through family outings and holidays in the hillier parts of Britain from the age of six. As a teenager at school in Belper she was fortunate enough to come under the Outdoor Pursuits tutelage of, among others, Hilary Collins, later Hilary Boardman, from whom she received a solid grounding in the basic mountaineering skills together with the beginnings of what matured into sound mountain judgement. She showed promise, too, as a competitive canoeist but any future in that direction fell victim to a combination of entirely normal feminine vanity – canoeing gives you big shoulders – and the growing lure of climbing which she had taken up at 13; and bearing in mind the intensity with which Alison approached most aspects of life, any two demanding physical pursuits were always likely to be mutually exclusive.

So; climbing became the name of her game, pursued both in and out of school with a characteristic determination that must have been essential at her age and at that time. As a climber whose own regular participation in the activity only really took off with the acquisition of personal transport I can only guess at the practical and social pressures on a girl in her mid-teens to do something else; anything else. These were the late '70s remember, long before the advent of indoor climbing centres, competitions and sport climbing, with the accompanying shift from an image of a rather oddball, dangerous and predominately male minority pursuit to that of a healthy and trendy modern sport, enjoyed by a rapidly growing number of fit people of either sex; independently motivated women climbers of any age were still something of a rarity, the more so those young enough to need to rely on public transport, lifts or hitch-hiking.

One can perhaps point to two defining occasions in Alison's life when, in Bonington terms, she 'chose to climb', although the first occurred before I knew her and as such is something of an assumption on my part. On her 18th birthday,

to the complete surprise and bewilderment of her parents, she left the family home in Belper and moved to the Matlock area to take up residence with Jim Ballard, a climber from the golden days of the Sheffield (and Stoney) Cioch Club, in whose local climbing shop she had occasionally worked as a part-timer, and whom she later married. It can't have been an easy decision to make, and it certainly led to a very difficult relationship with her parents for some time thereafter, but it also pointed to the iron will that is so often a crucial element in the make-up of those among us who achieve distinction in their chosen walks of life. With Jim's help and encouragement she put to good use a critical eye for equipment and a busy pair of hands to start a small manufacturing business, and was soon turning out camera bags, gaiters and other software under the 'Faces' label; this from her habit of filling in the lower-case capital 'a' of her signature with a Smiley face, except on cheques where it frowned! By early 1983 it was decided that the business had grown to the point of needing separate premises and more participants, of which I became one.

After the Droites there followed a couple of years of comparative domesticity which included the birth in 1991 of daughter Kate; in normal no-nonsense Hargreaves fashion (she took after her mother) the event would happen at home and that was that! It did. It wasn't long though before the alpine bug was biting again. In the interim she had discovered an affinity with soloing, largely forced on her by the practical difficulties of working a normal climbing timetable round two small offspring, so in March '92, while Jim played mother for a few weeks, she drove out to Chamonix to try her skill on larger fare. I think it was an enjoyable experience but one that left a feeling of unfulfilment; true, she bagged some reasonable routes, including the *Jager* on the Tacul, but was forced to back off her main objective, the North Face of the Matterhorn, in poor conditions. A consolation ascent of the *Hornli Ridge* involved her in a prolonged episode assisting the descent of other climbers, and the consequent frostbite brought the trip to a premature end. With hindsight it is easy to see this as a pivotal time, sowing the seed for a subsequent decision when, once again, she chose to climb.

Over the course of the previous decade Alison had been approached on many occasions by the local and national media, resulting in a series of newspaper and magazine features, radio and television interviews, short films, and the normal interest of the climbing press; she had for a long time been aware of the earning potential of carefully managed publicity but had generally not gone out of her way to court it, being a somewhat reluctant 'personality'. However: Faces, like many small businesses which had struggled hard to survive the recession was now having to struggle even harder to emerge from it; scope for personal recreation had for a long time been severely limited, and work was very hard and unrewarding, both materially and spiritually. In this situation it was inevitable that other options would be explored, resulting finally in the still difficult decision to bring the business to an end and pursue careers which better afforded us the means and opportunity to enjoy our common passion. For Jim and Alison this meant sponsorship, book contracts and an initial two-year sportsplan. They bought and modified a 30 year old Land-Rover, put the house up for let and, on a March morning in 1993, loaded up children and supplies and drove off to a new life from the Hargreaves' home in Belper. It was the last time I saw her.

Many readers will probably be fairly familiar with events since that day: solos

of routes on the classic six north faces plus, most impressive of the lot, a solo of the *Croz*; a book, together with lectures and appearances both here and overseas; prudent retreat, then glorious success on Everest, with its attendant media stardom; the hidden side, with marital difficulties and the repossession of their home; and the final chapter, K2. Like everybody else I can still only make an educated guess at what actually took place on that descent from the summit, and most likely we will never know for certain; but Alison held the firm belief that in the mountains you make your own luck, good or bad, and I'm convinced that, in her final lucid moments, she will have blamed herself for her predicament more roundly than any of her subsequent harping critics in the columns of the national press. I hope the rest of us can judge her less harshly.

Some months after her death the emergence in print of the existence of domestic difficulties and the possibility of divorce raised questions which I am neither inclined nor competent to address, I was out of the picture at the time so any assessment on my part as to how events might have turned out would lack the authority of close association; moreover, I have seen too much factual inaccuracy and uninformed opinion, even in painstakingly researched work from respected commentators, to base any judgement on what has been variously reported in the media. Let's just leave it at that.

I hope this piece has given an insight into some of the qualities which contributed to a memorable character. Some will be fairly obvious: focus, determination, energy, stubbornness, bloody-mindedness even, and an instinct for neatness and organisation; generosity, thoughtfulness, honesty and self-criticism; and a lot more. But I will remember above all her cheerfulness, best encapsulated for me in a face grinning up from under its helmet in the midst of a tricky section on an intimidating route in response to my query as to whether or not we should continue:

"I'm game if you are!" I should have known.

Good innings kid; we'll miss you.

Ian Parsons

Peter Bicknell

1907 (1927)–1995

With the death of Peter Bicknell on 31st May, the Club has lost one of its most senior and distinguished members. Born in 1907, he joined the Club in 1927, served on the Committee from 1939-1948, was then Vice-President from 1948-1951 before becoming President from 1951 to 1952; he was elected an Honorary Member in 1972. By profession an architect of some distinction, both practising and as a lecturer at Cambridge, he will perhaps be remembered more as a leading authority on the picturesque movement of the 18th and 19th century especially in the Lake District.

Even if he had wanted, Peter could hardly have avoided mountains and mountaineering. His father, Raymond, was a mountaineer of great competence

and authority, and much of Peter's alpine climbing was done with his brother Claud. Family holidays, which included climbing, were predominantly in the Lake District, his father being a senior director of the Newcastle Breweries, and also in the Alps, which he first visited in 1924. At Cambridge, in the mid to late '20s, he was very much a part of a small group which included pre-eminently Jack Longland and Ivan Waller. It was this small group that with others led to the renaissance of the Climbers' Club which, after the Great War, had become somewhat moribund. Being at Cambridge, and subsequently working in London and Cambridge, he naturally gravitated to North Wales rather than the Lake District.

His second proper alpine season, in 1927, was with his father. The inexplicable accident on the Aiguilles d'Arves, after an excellent month's climbing, when his father was killed, is fully recorded in the Alpine Journal. After the fatal fall Peter had to descend unroped and, to safeguard himself and his two companions, he found it necessary to cut his father's body loose to fall to the glacier below. I never heard Peter talk about this ordeal. Nor did it seem to diminish Peter's enthusiasm. It is, for example, notable that in 1931 Jack Longland and he did the *Mer de Glace Face* of the Grépon (including the Knubel crack) and the *Younggrat* on the Briethorn, amongst other good routes.

Nevertheless it is perhaps true to say that Peter, and those he chose to climb with, were more motivated by wishing to enjoy their climbing (usually guideless) and their mountains rather than going for first ascents or first British ascents in the Alps. There can be no doubt about Peter's competence as a mountaineer, or that he was a good go-er in the hills, because he was twice 'tried out' for Everest in the '30s, but on each occasion had to withdraw from possible selection for personal reasons.

It is typical of Peter's unassuming approach that on the famous occasion at Whitsun in 1928 he stood down from being a member of the party that made the first ascent of *Longland's* on Clogwyn du'r Arddu. The circumstances were that when Longland's party arrived at the foot of the climb they found Pigott's party already tackling the first pitch. Fred Pigott, recognising that Jack had prior claim from an earlier recce, immediately offered to withdraw. After a short discussion it was agreed to join forces, but Peter and Ivan Waller offered to stand down to keep the combined party to a manageable size. The rest is history. It is perhaps even more typical of Peter's unassuming approach that in recalling this piece of climbing history in his charming book **British Hills and Mountains** he doesn't think it necessary to mention the fact that two climbers, of whom he was one, stood down.

Throughout the '30s, the '40s (the war years apart as far as the Alps were concerned) and the '50s Peter was a regular visitor to the Alps, climbing more often than not with his brother Claud, and with others: Jack Longland, Basil Goodfellow, Tom Brocklebank, Peter Lloyd, Dick Graham and others. In Britain he ranged over most of our hills. He was a regular at Geoffrey Young's Pen y Pass parties and in 1932 he did the full Cuillin ridge solo (the first solo traverse?). In the Alps he ranged equally widely: the Stubai, Zillertal, Silvretta, Engadine, Oberland, Pennines, Italian Alps, Tarentaise, Dauphiné. The list is long, the range of routes wide – from the ordinary to the great classics.

At Cambridge Peter studied architecture (getting a first), and I am indebted to Edward Cullinan for this account of his career in architecture:

'In the late '20s and the early '30s, he worked on two important projects, both profoundly characteristic of their time: Welwyn Garden City (with Louis de Soissons) and the RIBA building in Portland Place (with Grey Wornham). Both of these projects can be seen as important bridges between the 'Arts and Crafts' and Modernism, both were strongly influenced by 'Art Deco'. In 1935 he returned to Cambridge, joined H.C. Hughes and started teaching in the Department of Architecture. Hughes and Bicknell's Fen Court for Peterhouse College is surely the most imaginative, the most prophetic, the best pre-war residential building in the University. And his humorous, generous, intelligent, knowledgeable spirit made him an excellent teacher. We ran the second year at the Department of Architecture together for five years around 1968. Students were in revolt, manifestos were rife, many were profoundly upset by the speed of events: Peter calmly continued with erudite help, gentle care, quiet persuasion: a lesson to us all.'

I first came to know Peter in the early '50s. He and his beautiful and warmly charming wife Marie lived in one half of 'Finella', a late Georgian house much altered inside by an eccentric Cambridge don. Philip Bowden, also a skier and mountaineer, and Margot lived in the other half, and I was a frequent Sunday lunch guest. Peter was already a knowledgeable collector of English watercolour artists, concentrating, of course, on hill pictures, (he, with his architect's eye, was a fine watercolour painter himself), and of early books on the Lake District. He continued to collect and became progressively an authority on the picturesque landscape. In 1981 he organised for the Fitzwilliam Museum (and later at the Victoria & Albert Museum) an exhibition **Beauty, Horror and Immensity – Picturesque Landscapes in Britain 1750-1850**. This brought him into contact with Dr Robert Woof of the Wordsworth Museum at Grasmere. He collaborated with Robert Woof on several exhibitions at Dove Cottage in the '80s. At the same time came his illustrated, and fascinating, edition of Wordsworth's **Guide to the Lakes**, and finally in 1990 his authoritative bibliography **The Picturesque Scenery of the Lake District 1752-1855**. His collection of 18th and 19th century drawing manuals, written to teach people how to paint in watercolours, he left to the Fitzwilliam, his books to King's College; both had become outstanding collections.

My final memory of Peter was when we ran into each other at the Royal Academy's private view of its seminal exhibition of British watercolours in 1993. We compared impressions. As we moved away Peter said, "And which single picture would you like to own?" What a question! I thought about the Ruskins, and I thought especially about the Cotmans. Then there were the Turners, a few lovely Lake District Constables, and a Welsh Girtin. But a single picture? It had to be Francis Towne's 'The Sources of the Arveiron'. He mused for a minute or so and said "I think I agree". I was very flattered. He was a man who knew his hills both as a mountaineer and as a connoisseur – an unusual combination.

Roger Chorley

James Emerson FRCS

1947 (1969)–1995

A childhood in the Peak District sparked off James Emerson's enthusiasm for climbing, partially interrupted by years of medical training and a developing career, but renewed on his return, in 1989, as a consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon in Sheffield. His tragic death from mesothelioma in August 1995 cut short the fullest and most valuable life, an almost unbearable loss to his family, friends and colleagues.

The son and grandson of doctors, James grew up in Bakewell and not surprisingly encountered the Longland family. In the early 1960s Nick Longland and Mark Vallance were storming their way through the Gritstone guidebooks. A few years younger, James and Mark's brother Stephen were keen and precocious apprentices. Nick's climbing diary records James leading several VS routes at Stanage at 15 and *Orpheus* at 16. James recalled fairly recently that Peggy Longland had taught him to tie a bowline and to belay, minor details presumably overlooked by the younger generation. The learning process continued in Wales: a successful expedition up *Torero* was followed by an evening of celebration in the PYG and a return in the dark to the inevitable flooded and flattened tents below the Wenalt, only James's survived.

A combined family holiday in the far north-west in the summer of 1964 gave Nick and James a tempting glimpse of the sea-stack Am Buchaille. A strong attempt was made, turned back by the combined perils of parental wrath and the swim back to the mainland. Tom Patey found their high-point peg 'just below the crux' on his successful first ascent a few years later.

Medical studies at the Middlesex left little time for climbing but the need for adventure persisted. James spent a year in a district hospital in Columbia immediately after qualifying. Returning to England he specialised in surgical work and, with growing enthusiasm and expertise, in plastic surgery and in particular, cleft palate repairs for very young children.

Much more recently he took a small medical team from Sheffield to Tusla in Bosnia for a few days to operate on the war wounded. This was valuable work but also the sort of expedition that James revelled in: long hours in primitive MASH-like operating conditions, with carefully selected music playing – a habit he had acquired during a spell in Adelaide.

Established in Sheffield and with a growing family, James began to make time for climbing again. The technology had changed but he adapted quickly, using The Foundry and bouldering trips to Burbage, only ten minutes from home, to build on his already impressive level of fitness. Sunday mornings on gritstone became a regular date and he broke through the 'E' barrier for the first time at the age of 46, leading routes such as *Millsom's Minion*, *The Right Unconquerable* and *Wuthering*, with Nick Longland as mentor and occasionally myself as an overweight second. With his close friend Stephen Corry of Survival International he climbed mountaineering routes in Wales, based at PYG, and particularly enjoyed ski-mountaineering weeks in the Alps, guided by Mark Diggins.

Other adventures included a 24 hour airborne trip to Skye with 'flying doctor'

David Moseley, a Munro-bagger in need of a leader for the *Inaccessible Pinnacle*. Sadly, plans for a similar flight to Hoy for an assault on the *Old Man* were overtaken by events. His illness was diagnosed in the late summer of 1994 but James, knowing all too well what the future held, continued with work, family life, climbing and other activities in the time that remained, monitoring and occasionally discussing his situation with the utmost dignity and composure.

The huge crowd at Ranmoor Church in Sheffield said more than I can about James as a person. He would have laughed at the numbers of medical colleagues and nurses; who was looking after the patients that day? The courage of his wife Vanessa and three young daughters was overwhelming. My own happy memories span nearly 30 years: his remarkable talent to entertain on the stage as a medical student, a marvellous two days on the Eive Slabs, James' aversion to acquiring hand-jam scars (they upset the private patients). Most of all one day of a last family skiing holiday, and James, already struggling a little on the uphill bits, with his sister Sidonie (my wife), Stephen Corry and myself. He finally found 'the powder', deep and perfect, in the long Pierre Lory valley above Val Thorens.

Martin Sinker

Sir Robert Charles Evans

1918 (1938)–1995

Charles Evans first saw the Himalaya on the last day of 1944. He was on a short leave at Darjeeling, walking in a chilling mist when suddenly the cloud parted and through a jagged hole the entire Kangchenjunga massif was revealed. The sight of those gigantic mountains, dazzling white in bright sunshine, and seen through a frame of dark cloud was like a physical blow which he never forgot.

After the excitement of the Everest climb in 1953, and before the team returned to the adulation of the crowds in Kathmandu and Britain, it was totally in character that, whatever the outcome of the climb, Charles had already arranged to stay behind in Solu Khumbu during the monsoon with a few Sherpa friends to continue exploration and survey to fill in one of the last 'blanks on the map' to the west of Everest.

Evans' key role on the expedition as deputy leader to John Hunt has been well documented, but even so several national newspaper obituaries after his death on 5th December 1995 were confused in their account of his reaching the south peak of Everest with Tom Bourdillon on 26th May 1953. Using closed circuit oxygen equipment directly from Camp 5 on the South Col at 26,000 feet, they had further to go on their assault than Hillary and Tensing on the second assault who would be using open circuit sets and starting from Camp 9 at some 27,900 feet well up the SE Ridge. So John Hunt was very careful in briefing Evans and Bourdillon to make the south summit their first objective and only continue to the main summit if three factors held true: the weather was reasonable; their oxygen was working satisfactorily; and they were feeling in good shape. In fact, Charles had had trouble with his oxygen set; as a result of limited supply he was not feeling too good. When they reached the south summit at 28,700 feet at 1.30pm – higher than

man had ever been before – the weather was not very encouraging either. By the standards of their day, they made the correct and courageous decision to turn back from that point, leaving some oxygen which was now spare for the benefit of Hillary and Tensing later on. It must have been very tempting, particularly for Bourdillon, to press on regardless, but had they continued and got into difficulties, they could have prejudiced the successful outcome of the whole expedition.

Although in the public eye, Evans' role on Everest may be deemed his major achievement, to his close friends and to the mountaineering fraternity, his inspiring leadership of the successful expedition to the SW face of Kangchenjunga two years later was a much greater endeavour. Apart from the last thousand feet, the slopes of Everest were well trodden, whereas three major expeditions to Kangchenjunga in 1929-31 had been totally repulsed and on the SW face nobody had been above 20,000 feet. John Hunt who had reconnoitred the east side in the 1930's had stated: 'Those who first climb Kangchenjunga will achieve the greatest feat in mountaineering. It is a mountain that combines in its defences not only the severe handicaps of wind, weather and very high altitude but technical climbing problems and objective dangers of an even higher order than those we encountered on Everest.'

Success on Kangchenjunga, on what was originally anticipated to be only a 'reconnaissance in force', was truly a team effort, with two pairs reaching the near summit on 25th and 26th May (the top being left untrodden out of respect and by prior agreement with the rulers of Sikkim who held the mountain sacred). As Michael Westmacott writing as AC President to **The Times** stated: 'Evans' leadership was unassuming but masterly. Like John Hunt on Everest, he carried a load to the top camp himself, helping to pave the way for the first ascent next day and continuing to remain high in support. With the agreement of those concerned, Evans' cable reporting success deliberately emphasised the team effort by withholding the names of the summiteers. This was in marked contrast to James Morris' initial brief coded message from Everest revealing, Hillary and Tensing's successful partnership before the full story was published.'

Sir Edmund Hillary paid a generous tribute: 'No member of the 1953 Everest Expedition was held in greater respect than Charles Evans. It wasn't so much his formidable determination in the mountains – we all shared that – but Charles had an understanding and warmth of feeling that made him something special to us. I accepted that his advice would always be sound, and his gentle smile made even the greatest difficulty seem much less important. Charles gave the expedition a quiet confidence that helped us deal effectively with the many challenges.'

Charles Evans was born in North Wales on 19th October 1918 and educated at Shrewsbury and University College, Oxford, where he read medicine. He qualified in 1943 and joined the RAMC. He saw service in the Far East (contriving a quick dash up Kinabalu) and in India and Burma. He was mentioned in dispatches before demobilisation in 1946 and the next year took a post as surgical registrar of United Liverpool Hospitals and Liverpool Regional Hospitals, which he held for ten years. He once observed that the two interests of surgery and mountaineering complemented one another: both required a precise hand and nerves of steel. He specialised in the very difficult area of brain surgery.

As a schoolboy, Charles tramped over the Berwyns. His first visit to the Alps

was with the OUMC in 1939. The war intervened; then he joined a Climbers' Club meet in 1947 followed by the Taschhorn – Dom traverse and the *Zmutt* on the Matterhorn. After election to the Alpine Club in 1948, he went to the Himalaya in 1950 with Tilman, Jimmy Roberts, Emlyn Jones and Bill Packard; a first foray into the formerly forbidden hinterland of Nepal. They went up the Marsyandi valley to reconnoître Manaslu and the north side of the Annapurna group, while the French were succeeding in climbing Annapurna I from the south. The following year he had arranged to try Deo Tibba in Kulu with Tony Trower and his godfather Edwin Ker, so turned down an invitation to join the historic 1951 Everest reconnaissance initiated by Michael Ward. Nevertheless, he was selected as Eric Shipton's deputy in 1952 for an attempt on Cho Oyu after the Swiss had unexpectedly gained permission to try Everest that year. Being repulsed on Cho Oyu, they then divided into smaller parties for climbing and exploration. Shipton, Evans, Hillary and Lowe had the excitement of crossing into the Hongu to the totally unexplored Barun Valley, dominated by the tempting graceful fluted spire they named Baruntse. The New Zealand Alpine Club organised an expedition there in 1954 under Hillary's leadership and, as a gesture of appreciation for including New Zealand climbers on British expeditions, they invited two British climbers to join them: Charles Evans and Mike Ball. They were duly welcomed as honorary New Zealanders!

Back in the UK, in 1956 he was awarded the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. In 1957 he married Denise, daughter of Nea Morin, and they have had three sons; the eldest 'Chuck' being currently Treasurer of the Alpine Club. One year, as a fluent Welsh speaker, he was invited to preside as Chief Druid at the Llangollen Eisteddfod. Soon after, Bangor University were looking for a new Principal. Accepting this academic post in 1958 relieved him of the more rigorous physical demands of surgery. It was a fortuitous decision because within a few years he began to suffer from multiple sclerosis. Even so, during his 26 years at Bangor – much of it spent in a wheelchair – he oversaw a huge expansion of the college's buildings and its student population. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales from 1965 to 1967 and from 1971 to 1973. He succeeded Eric Shipton as President of the Alpine Club 1968-1970 just after the merger between the Alpine Club and the Alpine Climbing Group in 1967. In 1969, as an outstanding Welshman, he was knighted in the special Honours List when Prince Charles was invested as the Prince of Wales in Caernarfon.

When Evans' climbing activities were curtailed, he took to sailing, at one time owning a yacht 'Triune of Troy' which had previously belonged to the author Hammond Innes. When he had to give up sailing himself; he still gained great vicarious pleasure in helping his wife, Denise, to plan and execute ambitious voyages across the Atlantic and to Cape Horn, keeping in regular radio contact.

He published three books: a delightful sketchbook **Eye on Everest**; the expedition book **Kangchenjunga – the Untrodden Peak**; and a skilful blend of personal recollection and practical advice **On Climbing**. In the latter he recalls how some of his clearest and happiest climbing memories are of short days, sometimes of hours, briefly stolen from a period of city life: 'They stand out because the experience they gave was heightened by the abruptness of the transition, and because many of the scenes had a special quality lent by the

weather and the season; by the snow or clouds, by the light of dawn or of sunset, or by the night. No matter how fleeting the opportunity, how short the time that can be spared, a man is refreshed by the hills. Every glimpse is worth while.'

Those of us who were with him on Kangchenjunga were delighted that he was well enough to attend our 40th anniversary reunion at Pen-y-Gwyrd in May 1995. It was a very special occasion for all of us. The twinkle in his eye was unextinguishable, but we sensed that it was probably the last time that we would all be together with him. We felt very privileged to have been in that select group lead by him and to have shared with him 'the wild and lonely places' of which he spoke in his valedictory address to the Alpine Club. Our respect and admiration for him came very close to love. In his own words from **On Climbing**: 'It is a long way from the Berwyn to the Himalaya, where you can enjoy the finest mountain adventure of all. The mountains and hills are there to be discovered; and whether they are the boy's crags of heather, or the great ranges untrodden since they were made, always they entice us to know them, to master all that bars the way; to them a part of us belongs. Always they speak to us of what is beyond them, and beyond the grasp of our minds; and once we have seriously played with them we can never let them be.'

George Band

J.R. (Nat) Allen

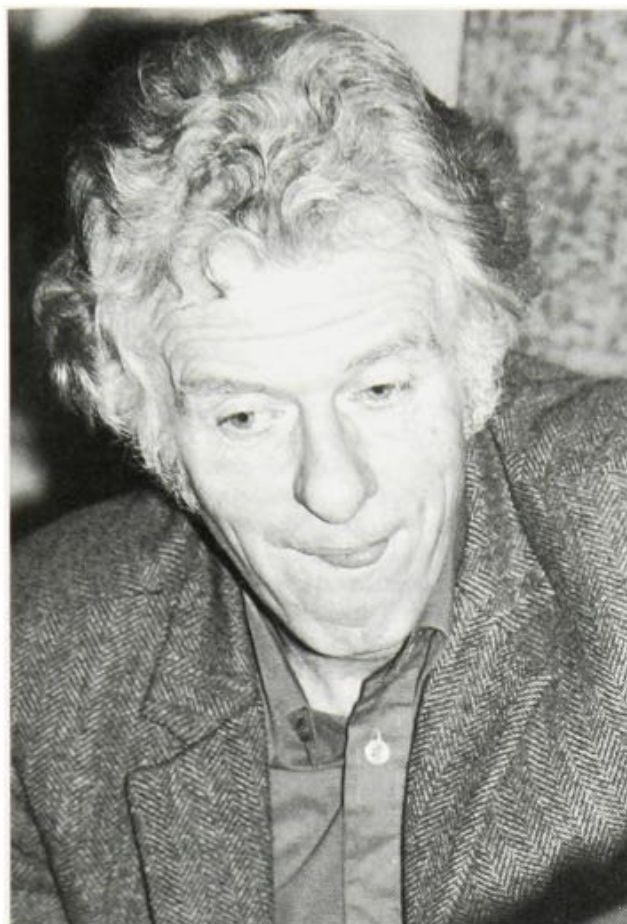
1928 (1970)–1995

On a Monday morning in early June I dropped in to see Nat and Ruth at their home in Buxton, to be met by the usual banter. Ruth asked me where I'd been. Nat told her not to ask questions that she didn't want to know the answers to. After a while Ruth left Nat and me to chat. We discussed what the committee was up to, our plans and ambitions as we had done many times. Before I left he told me that he had stopped taking the anti-cancer medication as he couldn't stand the pain of the side effects any more. I asked him what happened next and he shrugged non-committally. As I left I told him to take good care, knowing the futility of my words.

One Tuesday evening in late June I went to climb with some friends at Stanage. We had chosen an area that we knew was one of Nat's favourites. Together we did various climbs that we had done with him. The rock was the beautiful golden colour of gritstone on long summers evenings and there was just enough of a breeze to keep the midges away. It was a lovely evening to climb, but we had no heart for it, no-one wanted to say 'Goodbye'. As Nat would have said, we took an early shower and went to the pub.

John Reginald Allen was born in Derby of English, Irish and French ancestry. At the age of 14 he was apprenticed to a plumber with two other lads. They were all called John. To simplify matters the apprentices were renamed Ezekial, Nathaniel and Zachariah.

Nat had a traditional climbing apprenticeship. His first trips to Wales were on 'club' buses to Idwal, to walk and climb on Tryfan and the Slabs. At the same time he started to walk, climb and Youth Hostel in the Peak. He was a natural athlete.



Nat Allen. Photo: Ruth Allen

In his early years he alternated weekends climbing with weekends cycling and playing basketball with the 'Extecs' during the week – in this team he reached the National Finals!

As a result of this the Derby Mercury Cycling Club later challenged the Rock and Ice, through Nat, to a fell race to be held in Dovedale. Quickly, other local clubs joined in. This, of course, became known as the Dovedale Dash.

Nat's climbing quickly progressed, by 1946 he was climbing VSs, and his list of new routes started shortly after this and never completely stopped during his life.

In 1948 Nat met Joe Brown and joined the newly-formed Valkerie Club. He also did *Munich Climb* on Tryfan, at that time the mark of a 'class act'.

The Valkerie disbanded and the Rock and Ice formed from its ashes. 'War surplus' motorbikes were available and transport was becoming possible for most people. Very quickly the Rock and Ice set standards for routes that stood for a decade. Their numbers made their mark on every major cliff in every area they visited. Quite literally, they were legends in their own lives. Many stories were told about them, many apocryphal, but the facts belie the need for any fiction.

Nat was the centre of this. He climbed with everyone. A list of routes is meaningless. So often the first ascensionists read J.Brown, D.D.Whillans and J.R.(Nat)Allen. Nat was the Rock and Ice's chronicler. It was through him that the Rock and Ice new route activity was recorded. He was thorough. He kept files, scrapbooks and all his correspondence. With great mischievousness he kept a reply from the CC Guidebook Committee of the '50s. He had written to them giving details of the new routes *Cenotaph Corner*, *Cemetery Gates* and *Cobweb Crack*. The reply acknowledging the routes said interesting as they were, they were

only 'fillers in' and wouldn't the Club be better engaged in concentrating their activities on something really serious like the *Nose of The Ogof*! The truth was harder, hardly anyone outside the Rock and Ice could do their routes. The Rock and Ice women had lead *Cenotaph Corner* before it was climbed by the first outsider to the Club!

Nat kept the aural records in his head. He could tell the tales of the Road Menders hut, of bivouacs, of first and second ascents. He did the first ascent of *Erosion Groove* with Don Whillans and Joe Brown. It was thought to be harder than *Cenotaph Corner* because of its looseness. In extremis, Nat called to Don, "Don! Don! The holds have just broken off".

The classic Whillans laconic reply, "Never mind, there's another one". Nat added, "I think Don just wanted to see me struggle for a bit. I wasn't going anywhere with him above me!"

There were weekends when they all pretended to be Youth Hostelling so that they could get their girlfriends out with them but in fact they were doing every young climber's trick of sleeping rough in the Derbyshire caves.

Nat's alpine career started in 1951. Everyone drove out to Chamonix on motorbikes. In 1953 he was joined by the young Don Whillans. The Rock and Ice in the Alps carried on the tradition set by the previous generation of Oxbridge climbers, trying to do the best routes. Nat was always grateful for the kindness that they were shown by such people as Tom Bourdillon and Hamish Nicol and would talk of how they gave them the one thing they hadn't got - information, and held them in great respect for that.

When, in the early '70s Hamish became a supporter of the womens' cause in the CC debates, Nat couldn't help enough. It was a cause that he firmly believed in anyway but with Hamish pushing it, it was also a way of supporting people who had supported him.

By 1954 the Rock and Ice were becoming well known as a group. That year, Joe Brown and Don Whillans climbed the West Face of the Dru in record time, Don bivouacing in Nat's Pac-a-Mac. Nat described the events that followed:

'Rebuffatt came to find us, we were camping in the Biolet. We all know what English campsites are like in the Biolet. It had been storming and our site was more disgusting than most. He took one look at us and asked for Joe and Don. Well, with his attitude they weren't going to play, so he left leaving an invitation to come to his chalet for tea.

Later, Louis Lachenal arrived complete with a dolly bird on his arm, both dressed to kill, she in Couturier clothes, Louis in the height of French climbing fashion, white cable stitched socks, oatmeal breeches and red sweater. He too asked for M.Brown and M.Whillans. A tired English voice asked:

"Who are you?"

"Louis Lachenal"

"I've heard of you. Do you want a brew?"

"Please, what is a brew?"

"Tea."

Louis turned to his girl and said one word:

"Sit."

Amongst the squalor great friendships were formed.

In 1954 Nat joined the fledgling Alpine Climbing Group and supported it

throughout its existence. He was always very much at home with rowdy, wild young climbers and they in turn recognised a kindred spirit. To make sure that they got in to the Alpine Club he sat for some years on the AC selection committee.

It may seem that in the '50s Nat, like most others around, was eclipsed by Brown and Whillans. Yet you only have to hear their words to realise what a great emphasis they placed on his role in their climbing. Perhaps a better way to describe his role would be to say that he was the third amongst equals. What he lacked in technical ability he made up for in patience, knowledge and enthusiasm. Don Whillans always said that he would rather be partnered by Nat than anyone else. High praise. In his own right Nat always climbed to a high standard amongst his contemporaries – but not as hard as Joe and Don.

The Rock and Ice were boisterous. Games of British Bulldog – the Boy Scouts favourite game played by adults in Stone Barns, with a certain percentage of the players determined to win whatever the cost could result in broken limbs.

Practical jokes were taken equally 'seriously'. On one occasion Trevor Jones, who was climbing with them, forgot to put his PAs (at that time a very valued possession) in his rucksack. They were quickly picked up by the Rock and Ice. The next weekend Trevor looked for his boots but couldn't find them in his rucksack. The Rock and Ice man very obligingly lent Trevor his 'spare pair'. Trevor was suitably grateful and returned them at the end of the weekend, to borrow them the next weekend – this went on for a while and eventually the chap offered to sell Trevor his 'spare boots'. It wasn't until he examined them prior to purchase that he found 'his mark' on them, suitably toned down but not removed.

Nat spent most Christmas's in the hills. At one time he looked down Langstrath and saw a small wet green tent and wondered who on earth would camp there? Then he realised that it was his own! At other times the Rock and Ice would have a joint meet with the Creag Dhu in the Wasdale Head and Langdale Barns.

In the late '50s Nat married his first wife Tinsel. Marriage never seemed to stop them going out at weekends and together, in the Dinner season (October to December!) they would be seen at most of the major club dinners. Very often going from the dinner to a wet tent or to sleep in the back of their mini van. During the week they seemed to be host to the local activists – some even dropping by to take a bath – such was their hospitality.

In the Peak, Nat's knowledge was encyclopaedic. His first major contribution to guidebooks was the then essential **1957 Further Developments in the Peak District**. He continued to work with the Peak District guides all his life, giving route details and adding earthy common-sense to fierce and fiery meetings. As a result of this and his continual climbing on the edges he became known to generation after generation of Peak District climbers as 'Uncle Nat'.

At one such meeting Nat had worked out that the current young activists wanted to downgrade a lot of classics. Nat would have no part in this! I got a 'phone call: 'would I go to the meeting with him?' It was December. "How about doing some routes on High Tor/Wild Cat after work, by 'torchlight' before the meeting?" We met under Wild Cat in the frost, in the dark at 5.30pm and did three routes – all classics, by lamplight. We walked into the guidebook meeting, muddy in our climbing clothes, at 8pm. Nat started to say to the young lads, "Oh, haven't you been out tonight? Oh, you've just come from Sheffield. Didn't you stop at

Stanage/Curbar – it's a lovely evening for climbing – well, yes, of course, we only did three. What was it like? Well, of course, they were VS – as indeed they always are!" He made the right point and won before the meeting even started!

In 1958 the Rock and Ice nearly collapsed. Nat helped to resuscitate it and continued to be a lynch pin of the club, bridging the gap between the old and the new. He climbed with the new members, and if the Rock and Ice were no longer the 'hardest club' after 1959 (that mantle definitely belonged to Alpha then) they were still doing the best routes, opening up new areas and climbing all over the world. Weekends were still fast and furious and it was generally only the super gymnast Whillans, encouraged, aided and abetted by Nat, who could keep the young pretenders at bay.

The Rock and Ice stayed a tightly knit club. You couldn't ask to join, you were invited. You didn't even ask where they were going next weekend – if they wanted you to come they invited you. Such invitations were sought and treasured.

During the '60s Nat had his run on Peak Limestone with Derek Carnel and Derrik Burgess. Together they roamed the Dales seeking new lines in the same way Nat had done on the gritstone edges of the '50s. Almost as his knowledge of those areas was made public in the 1967 guidebooks, he 'discovered' North Pembroke. For the rest of his life he continually explored its coves and headlands. Throughout all of this he rarely stopped having his main holiday in the Alps or other big mountains.

Climbing with Nat was always great fun, if occasionally awesome. He would casually remark at 1am, in the Moon on a Friday night that the next pint had better be the last, as you had some 25th anniversary ascents to do the following day – that set the mind racing! What was he doing 25 years ago? You counted the years and started, too late, drinking orange juice.

Nat, through his tremendous network of friends, was involved in so many people, so many clubs, the list was almost endless. He touched the lives of all those he came in contact with. He joined the CC in 1970. I know that, had he wanted to, he could have joined the Club earlier. He waited until he thought that it was a more democratic Club. He thoroughly approved of the effects that Ken Wilson and Dave Cook were having on the Club, though he rarely publicly said so.

Once Nat joined the CC, it became with the Rock and Ice 'his Club'. He was fiercely protectionist about the Club, its ethics and its style. Especially in the changing '70s as the Club's centre of gravity moved gradually northwards. He canvassed actively for the young 'rockstars' of the day to join the Club. During the war, Al Rouse's mother had been evacuated from Liverpool to Derby, to Nat's parents. As soon as Nat realised this, he adopted him as a cousin and proposed him to the CC. Equally he made sure Whillans was a member by proposing him for Honorary membership, saying "we had better make him a honorary member then we don't have to worry if he doesn't pay his subscriptions".

Kirkus' generation said 'it was all about being in the right place, with the right people, at the right time'. For some of us, in my generation, this became quite simply 'where are we going next weekend, Nat?'

Nat's humour and banter were legendary. Many good northern clubs are not the quietest people to climb with. Nat was as bad (or good) as anyone. Step out of line and you would get a string of invective that would start, 'what are you doing

with that hold? Put it down immediately, you don't know where its been. This could be your finest hour and there you are going out of your way to spoil it.' This nearly always kept his climbing partners and apprentices in line. But, climb with him at your own or his limit and you could feel a surge of confidence flying up or down the rope.

He married Ruth, his lovely second wife, in 1980. I had sat on a bridge in Yosemite watching him write long postcards. I knew he hated writing postcards – but I had more sense than to ask him who he was writing them to. A year later they were married. In marrying Ruth he also became stepfather to her four sons. All his patience, all of his escapades with young climbers must have been called into play in this role, and many qualities that he probably never knew that he had. He succeeded in both senses. With Ruth he had the kind of marriage that many of us, with our restless and turbulent relationships, could be jealous of. He succeeded in gaining the love and respect of his stepsons, which in turn reflected in their attitudes and values towards their own lives. That he loved and cherished Ruth, and was in turn loved and cherished, there was never any doubt.

Almost idyllically for him, this marriage signalled a career change and he started to work for the Peak Park as their Planning Enforcement Officer. A job that paid him for working in the area he loved best, and he could combine it with lunchtime climbing or Stoney Middleton café gossip. In this job he was well respected, his integrity and the manner in which he enforced regulations to minimise the regulations disruption to themselves and their businesses' whilst ensuring they were rigorously applied.

Nat was a committed socialist. He believed in an equality that was free of class, race, creed, colour or sex. He believed in equality of rights and opportunities. He was a republican. Once, we stumbled dust dry off the road into a shady bar in a mining town, in the middle of Wyoming. The proprietor, hearing our accents, looked at us quite dramatically, and with a slight Bombay accent said:

"You are English. You used to think that you owned my country!" Nat's fast reply of:

"Never mind, when we got my lot back in power we gave it you back", earnt us as much free beer as we could drink!

In his way Nat worked for his ideals all his life. They fashioned the way he saw the world and the way he wanted the world to be. Despite his opposition to many aspects of our society he was never savage about it. He was a great healer. He believed it was better to change the societies that he lived in from the inside rather than the outside. Nat believed in forgiveness and conciliation. He never liked or trusted the English class structure, but where some of us would aim to chop 'Mandarins' off at their knees, Nat would be working subtly on shifting the ground so that their knees were on the same level as ours!

In climbing Nat found many of his ideals: a classless society, a society where people counted as individuals, regardless of their external circumstances.

I mourn, for we have all lost a true friend.

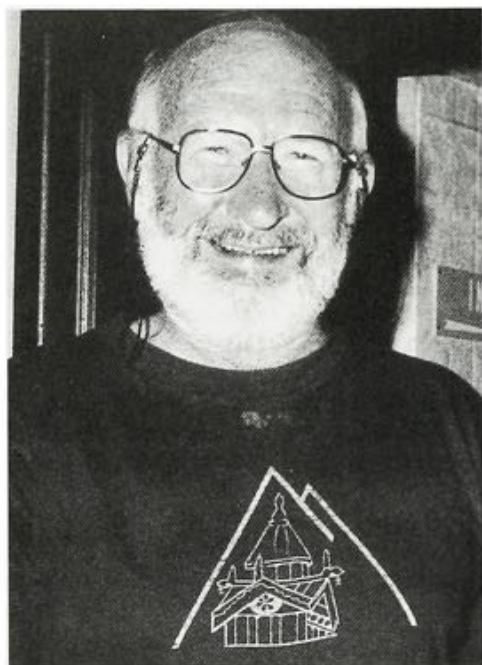
I mourn, for we have lost a champion and a giant of a man.

I mourn because I will never see his like again, and his passing brings many a tear to my eye.

Pip Hopkinson

Paul James Nunn

1943 (1967)–1995



Paul Nunn. Photo: Ian Smith

All climbing involves a balance between ambition and safety, between the conflicting objectives of achievement and survival. The everyday platitude 'safety first' can never apply absolutely to our game; if it did, we would stay in our armchairs. On the other hand, if success were the overriding factor, we would not survive for long. All climbers have a balance between these two forces, but the point of balance varies with the individual.

For a climber to become well-known, particularly in big mountains where the risks are greater, requires this balance to be towards achievement rather than safety. So it is that often, when a well-known climber dies, one can say 'I'm not surprised, he had it coming to him'. But no-one can say that about Paul Nunn.

Paul died on 6th August '95 by an unlucky accident, a freak serac fall at 5,800m on Haramosh II in the

Karakoram, on the descent after making the first ascent.

Paul James Nunn was born in 1943 in Ireland, but was adopted by an English couple as a young child. He was brought up as a Catholic in Macclesfield, and went to Xaverian College in Manchester. He graduated in Economic History at Sheffield University, and after a short spell teaching in a girls' school in Buxton, became a lecturer in Economic History at Sheffield Polytechnic (now Hallam University), where he worked till his end. While there, he did more than the bare minimum to earn his keep, with a wide undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programme, much convoluted discussion of academic course structure within the embryonic university's development, various academic papers published, and a belatedly completed PhD, in spite of numerous semi-illicit summer afternoon sneakings out to the nearby grit.

He was also a successful family man, with a marriage that has stood the test of time, and two grown-up daughters.

Paul's climbing career was most noted for its all-encompassing generality. He started in the Peak District in his mid-teens, was a prominent member of the Alpha club, the leading British group on rock in the late '50s and the '60s. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1967. He pioneered many new routes on British rock,

most notably in Derbyshire, the Lakes, and the Highlands, and also on Scottish ice. He wrote a guidebook to Borrowdale, and several to the Peak. Haramosh II was his 21st expedition to distant lands/greater ranges. More recently, he has been involved in the regrettable, but I suppose necessary, field of mountaineering politics, as Vice-President then President of the British Mountaineering Council; yet more work willingly and diligently undertaken by a man who already led a full (and many would say an over-full) life. He had the over-view and general sympathy with causes not just his own, combined with the intellectual and personal qualities to make more of this than anyone else I can think of... if he could find the time.

Because of his generality and also his out-going nature, he was a great link-man in British (and world) climbing; a link between different branches of the sport, between different attitudes and generations; in this he will be hard to replace.

Apart from his guidebooks, he co-authored several climbing books, contributed chapters to a numbers of others, and published a collection of his numerous short writings and articles – **At the Sharp End**. This showed greatly entertaining and perceptive writing ability; a promise of another career in which he could have flourished had he had a fifth or sixth life to live.

In spite of his north of England upbringing, his personality showed many of the archetypal traits of his native land. He had a huge bear-like physique, and a character to match. He was highly intelligent, with a lively interest in most matters; he often had, and expressed strong opinions, but not oppressively. His thirst for life was unquenchable; so was his thirst for drink. After a heavy night's imbibing, he retained the ability for tortuously involved discussions about all and sundry to the fascination and exasperation of others in the company. At times you just wanted to switch him off. Did he really believe what he had just said? Did you (or he) even understand his meaning through the alcoholic fog? Perhaps, after several uncomprehending grunted agreements to shut him up, he was mischievously testing his listeners with a preposterous view which no-one could possibly take in or agree with. Of course, this prompted the listener who was still 10% sober, and spotted his play, to fight back with a counter view of even more outrageous kind. But this would only encourage him to triple-bluff; you could fight back, but never beat him at this, his own game of drunken verbal sparring. He always had the intellectual upper-hand; or if not, he could certainly better withstand the effects of the alcohol.

I often suspected him of playing such games also when sober; if he did, he had the agility to side-step neatly whenever I tested for it, so I never knew for certain.

Above all, Nunn was a sociable and friendly man. In pub or on hill, he could and did talk to anyone and everyone about anything and everything. I have immensely enjoyed his company in this country, and on four expeditions, and look back fondly on the memories. I looked forward to many more, but these will now sadly not happen.

He shared the pioneering instinct; that of the romantic mountaineer, rather than the purely technical. He also shared my view that success on a mountain, while important, was secondary to survival; and this, combined with his long-won but seemingly instinctive judgement and nose for danger, made his death specially hard to accept. On Haramosh II we had looked long and hard before our

commitment to the route, and were agreed in our judgement that the risk (which there certainly was) was acceptable. Would big mountains retain their appeal, could they be made safe? With all his wisdom and caution, Paul knew that mountaineering was dangerous, and accepted the risk as part of something he loved. When he died, he made no mistake, unless venturing at all into such places be a mistake. The only difference between he and I is that when that serac fell, he was in the wrong place rather than I; so he is dead and I survived. I also accept the risks of our sport, so I must accept too his unfortunate death, but I will miss him.

Dave Wilkinson

Gerard Poole

1904 (1929)–1995

I knew Ged, as Gerard Poole was known by his friends, mainly as the brother of John Poole whose obituary I wrote in the 1986/7 Journal. In the later years the two, both then living in Anglesey, seemed always to be together, either in the hills or on social occasions of the CC or of the Mountain Club of North Wales, of which latter club they both became the President. They came from a mountaineering family, all seven of that generation being taken regularly from their native Staffordshire to the mountains of Wales. Sometimes their father would drop Ged and John off with a tent in the mountains, give them a small amount of money and let them look after themselves for a week or so. It may be this familiarity with the mountains which led Ged, at one stage, to make an attempt, which I believe was successful for a time, to hold the record for the 'Three Peaks': Ben Nevis, Scafell and Snowdon. He was not confined to the land, however, being an extremely keen sailor and living in a good part of the world for both the sea and the mountains.

Later all four of the brothers were simultaneously members of the CC for many years: the three sisters were not then eligible! John, several years before his death, was proud of having the oldest membership of the Club having been elected in 1920: Ged, the third of the brothers and elected in 1929, was only beaten by a handful of mostly notorious octogenarians.

Living in Anglesey, Ged and John could look at the weather on the mountains and then decide whether to climb, which they did regularly together and with friends until John's wrist incapacitated him for climbing: walking the mountains together continued longer. I joined them several times and liked to be the middle man on a rope of three: it felt very safe because they both knew the routes intimately from many repetitions.

Ged had a lovely relaxed personality and was extremely good company. His voice had a deep fruity quality and there was always a merry chuckle underlying his conversation. It was always a pleasure to see him coming to a meeting place, either in the mountains or for drinks before a dinner. What a pity that we now have none of the Poole brothers in membership.

Harry Sales

Geoff Tier

1944 (1990) – 1995

On August 6th, Geoff Tier was killed with Paul Nunn as they descended from the summit of Haramosh II (Pt. 6,666m). A random serac fall only minutes from safety, and two of my closest friends have gone, leaving an aching void that can never be filled.

Geoff was not one for the public eye, and never sought to publicise his considerable climbing achievements. He was very much in the classic mould of the British amateur mountaineer/explorer though he actually started climbing by attending a course at Plas y Brenin. Despite this, his natural athleticism quickly helped him become a more than competent rock climber (though hand jamming remained a painful mystery long after his move to Derbyshire). Over the years he chalked up an impressive winter list of hit routes in Scotland. Geoff was based in Reading for many years and was a member of the Alpine Club as well as President of the Reading Climbing Club, through which many friendships were forged.

With his regular partner Dave Souls, Geoff ticked countless alpine classics. Two stand out and gave him particular satisfaction. One was the *Walker Spur*, a long-standing ambition, the other was the complete traverse of the Chamonix Aiguilles – a 'grande course' completed by few Brits (or anyone else for that matter). Sadly he could never be persuaded to write about this, which would have made a superb article.

In 1977, Geoff led an expedition to Barnaj 2 in the Kishtwar Himalaya. Paul Nunn was invited to strengthen the Reading-based team, and I went along to film. Though the expedition failed in foul weather, friendships were forged and lasted. Geoff worked at Slough Town Hall at the time and I used to delight in trying to outwit his secretary into speaking ordinary English: 'Mr Tier is in conference' 'Mr Tier is on assignment', even 'Mr Tier works flexitime'.

'Are you trying to tell me he's gone home?' At last a smothered giggle.

'You could put it like that – actually he's playing squash'.

This lifestyle couldn't last and Geoff moved up to Hayfield where he threw himself into running a restaurant with his wife Barbara, renovating a house, becoming a father again, and developing a wonderful eccentricity and absent-mindedness that I always suspected was put on, until recently when I realised nobody could play the part that well.

In 1985, Geoff and I joined Andy Maskrey in Lima to climb in the Cordillera Apolabamba. We made the first ascent of Palomani Tranca. At 5,633m it was hardly the find of the decade but Geoff led a long tottering summit ridge with calm self-assurance. Later when Barbara flew out we all walked the Inca Trail. It was without doubt the best and happiest trip I had with Geoff and the memories will sustain me through many a bleak night to come.

Geoff leaves Barbara and Georgina as well as two older children, Joanna and Andrew. For all of them Geoff's loss can only be made bearable by the knowledge that his was a full and satisfying life, honourably lived, though cut short while still in his prime. I shall miss him.

Jim Curran

Christopher Paul Williams

1946 (1978)-1995



Paul Williams. Photo: Ian Smith

I can remember the first time that I met Paul Williams. It was in the Vaynol Arms, Llanberis Pass on a Saturday evening in early 1978. He was with the late Jimmy Jewell, the pair had made an ascent of *T.Rex* and Paul was reliving the day's exploits in what I later learnt to be his usual style – description with added sound track. He extolled the virtues, and the strenuousness of the direct finish, flexing a plump arm and announcing 'Pssst, the hydraulic piston got me up youth!'. His open friendliness and warmth were instantly obvious. The next time we met was at Tremadog, he was sitting in the sun at the top of Shadrach wall, he ad-libbed a commentary as we climbed on Vector Buttress. Later, in the Padarn he sang our praises and congratulated our ascent. He was that kind of man, especially where climbing was concerned, always seeing the best side, always ready to praise a 'Good effort, youth!'

I came to know him better, he staying with me in Sheffield to 'cruise the grit' and me with him at his home in Penisarwaen near Llanberis. This was in the late '70s and early '80s. Paul had left the RAF and was separated from his wife. Many will remember his hospitality during those years as the crags of North Wales received a physical and verbal onslaught. Paul usually acted as anchor man, strategist and christener of routes as Gogarth, Great Orme and Llanberis Pass were re-scrutinised and gaps filled. Of the list of routes from this period of activity, although usually led by Moran, Fawcett, Redhead or Pollitt, many bear the Williams' influence in the flamboyancy of their names: *Atomic Hot Rod*, *Jacuzzi Jive*, *Crimson Cruiser*, *Non-Dairy Creamer*, *The Atomic Finger Flake* and *Ivory Madonna*, the list goes on.

Later, Paul moved to Cwm-y-Glo and diverted some of his attention and energy to writing. **Snowdonia Rock Climbs** and later new **Llanberis Pass** and 'Cloggy' guides were produced in his own inimitable style. At around this time he also pioneered activities in the Llanberis slate quarries which gave more scope to play with both rock and words. Colossus wall with its eponymous route is a typical Paul find. The scratched 'Chipperdy doodah' near its base is a characteristic wry quip, half cocking a snook to the establishment.

Paul was not only a climber. His interest in and knowledge of athletics was impressive, stemming I think from school and RAF days. I remember runs along the Derbyshire edges when he was training for the Llanberis marathon which he

completed at least once during his time in Wales. Indeed, his enthusiasm for most sports was virtually uncontrollable. With climbing, no such control was possible or desirable, he frequently chattered like a man on a permanent post crux adrenaline trip, during a climb and, if it was merited, for days afterwards. From anyone else it would have sounded artificial, repetitive, almost boring. From Paul it was open and honest and we all knew that. Climbing, the antidote and the cure all.

Paul's memorial service saw Hathersage church packed to bursting with his family and friends. The sense of collective grief over his death was tangible, the only consolation being that he died doing something he truly loved. If life is a rehearsal for bigger and better routes Paul will be climbing them now, giving them exotic names and telling everyone about them, with added sound effects!

Bob Bradley

Tony Newton Husbands

1923 (1945)–1995

'Tony' Husbands died in Derby on January 3rd 1995. Tony was educated at Charterhouse and Clare College, Cambridge, where he did a Chemistry degree in 1941/42 in a compressed course before being employed on chemical warfare production for the remainder of the war in North Wales. It was at this time that he was introduced to the hills and learnt to climb. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1945 and will always be associated with Snowdonia. In later life he became an active officer and then a trustee of the Snowdonia National Park Society. After the war he worked for a drugs company in Slough, then on his father's death took over the family business of yeast merchants in Burton-on-Trent selling the yeast to distilleries and food manufacturers. He joined the Swiss Alpine Club in 1947 and was elected to the Alpine Club in 1968.

Active in many aspects of Burton life he was past Chairman of the Allied Brewery Traders Association, President of the Burton Club and Burton Regatta and was a freeman of the Cities of London and Glasgow. He followed his father in becoming Master of the Worshipful Company of Coopers in the City of London.

In the Alps, Tony would often climb with a guide. A telephone call would establish the state of the route and arrangements were made to meet. These 'lightening' forays ensured success on a number of occasions – the *Grépon*, the *Weisshorn* traverse, the *Dom/Tasch* traverse and the *Forbes arête*.

Tony had a very detailed knowledge of Snowdonia and many parts of Scotland where he was a frequent visitor and had a wide circle of friends. He was an excellent oarsman and shot and had great patience for deer stalking when not bird watching. He was a competent rock climber and at home on mixed alpine routes. He never recovered fully from a blood disorder contracted on an expedition to the Kangchenjunga region in 1985 but walked the British hills to the end. Tony much enjoyed motoring, company and bridge. A modest man of whom we all knew a segment, yet, as a very hospitable and social man he will be sadly missed by many, not only of his contemporaries but by a younger generation to whom he was a thoughtful and kindly companion.

Tony and Suzanne Strawther, Richard Coatsworth (Alpine Club)

The following obituaries were omitted from last year's (1994) CCJ.

Tony Mason-Hornby

1931 (1960)-1994

Tony Mason-Hornby, who died of motor neurone disease in 1994, was born Anthony Mason at Sandhurst in 1931, and although his father died while Tony was in his first half at Eton, he completed his education there and then went on to the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester before taking his first job as a Land Agent in Yorkshire.

It was while he was in Yorkshire that Tony's love of the hills developed during trips to the Lake District where he climbed with such famous old timers as Rusty Westmorland and Jim Cameron. Then, in the mid 1950s Tony moved to Bangor in North Wales to widen his experience as a Land Agent and no doubt to be well placed to climb in the Welsh hills. It was then that he started climbing with Ron James, and among other climbs they made the first ascent of *Inverted Staircase* in the Moelwyns in 1958.

A year later, Ron and Trevor Jones had the idea of buying a run down guest house, known as Ogwen Cottage, from the Penryhn Estate and converting it into a mountaineering school for young people and Tony agreed to act as their Agent. At the auction on Friday 13th February 1959, it became apparent that a brewery would outbid them so, on the spur of the moment, Tony decided to put in his own money to beat off the brewery, and there and then he became one of the founding partners of the Ogwen Cottage Mountaineering School.

The school opened in April 1959 and Tony gave up his job as a Land Agent and became, together with Ron, (Trevor had withdrawn), full time committed to one of Britain's first private outdoor centres. Tony as Warden, with Ron as training partner, together established the school as a leader in training, mountain rescue and safety standards. Tony qualified as a Guide in 1961, and in 1962 he, Ron and K.C.Gordon started the North Wales Guides Association which led in the late '60s to the formation of the present National Body – something Tony had always been keen to see.

Safety in the hills became Tony's special interest and he was deeply involved with, and the first Chairman of the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation. Tony obtained a film of Wastl Mariner and the Innsbruck team in practice and after careful study he and Ron were able to go out to Tin Can Gully and mimic the techniques and later to introduce them to Rescue courses. Tony was fairly heavily built, but was always first to volunteer to be lowered by a new fangled Marwa Karabiner break or Italian Hitch or to try out an Alpine Basket for comfort! He was also instrumental in producing one of the first codes of good practice in the mountains entitled **Safety in the Welsh Hills**, which saw wide circulation.

Ron has commented that in those early days 'Tony's influence was immense and his personal integrity, straightforwardness, attention to detail and clear thinking kept a rather volatile selection of friends and employees on the right path' and again 'his love and enthusiasm for the hills quickly communicated itself to his

pupils, whilst his approach to his own and their safety inculcated excellent habits into all who shared these experiences with him'.

1960 saw Tony joining the Climbers' Club, and then in June of the same year, his marriage to Cecily Barbara Carter who rapidly became a great supporter of the Ogwen Cottage, and again in Ron's words, 'Major Barbara as she was known by all the cottage habitues also had a special place in the hearts of this group of rough mountain men'.

In 1966, Tony's inheritance of the Dalton Estate in Westmorland from his cousin Charles Penrhyn Hornby was the occasion for him to leave Ogwen Cottage (which had by then been sold to Birmingham City Council), change his family name to Mason-Hornby and move away from Wales. However, his love of the hills never waned, and whenever possible he and Cecily and their three children would go off in their camper van to one mountain range or another, and he brought up both his sons to share his love of the mountains.

Tony's last climbing holiday was in 1985 when he and his eldest son, Francis, went to the Alps to try and repeat some of the first ascents done by his ancestor the Rev.J.J.Hornby with W.H.Philpott in the 1860s. They were based first in Grindewald and then in the Lötschental, but unfortunately bad weather prevented them doing any of the original 'Hornby' routes, although a number of small climbs were achieved.

Motor neurone disease was diagnosed in August 1993, and Tony had to give up first his walking in the hills, and then his shooting, the two sports that had played such a part in his life, but wonderfully supported by Cecily and his family, his spiritual faith and courage never failed and his gentle good humour remained with him until he died peacefully at home on 5th October 1994.

Richard Reynolds

Geoffrey William Telford Hodges

1931–1994 (Former Member)

When I first met Geoffrey Hodges I was just completing what is now known as a Gap year and he was on home leave from Africa. In the few months that followed we climbed and walked a lot in many parts of England, Scotland and Wales, but principally in the north-west Highlands. These experiences immeasurably broadened my mountaineering horizons and helped me towards views on the delicate balance between rock climbing and mountain exploration which remain with me to this day. I only wish our acquaintance could have been measured in years rather than months.

I had first become aware of Geoffrey when he was on the staff at Shrewsbury School in the late 1950s. For many of us in our teens, he was a fine role model – a decade older, a scholar of King's College, Cambridge, tall, cheerful and energetic, sporty and teaching A-level History right from day one. In this as elsewhere, he made the grade by his natural ability and application, and soon gained himself a reputation for his hill walking exploits and his affection and sympathy for high places.

Geoffrey was brought up the son of a clergyman at Brampton Bryan in the rolling south Shropshire hills. He was Captain of School at Eton prior to King's and – I speculate – must have come to the attention of Jack Peterson, himself a mountaineer, albeit a reticent one, who was soon to employ him. At Cambridge and following National Service in the Royal Artillery, Geoffrey mountaineered to the full, and from what he told me revelled in the variety it brought – the standard VSs on Cloggy – considerable psychological undertakings at the time for most people – Lliwedd, the Cuillins and high alpine routes whose reputations still hold good today, such as the south face of the Obergabelhorn. He edited the CUMC Journal to exacting standards and had ambitions to make a long term career in the Colonial Service, still then just about a possibility, but his hopes were dashed by the early onset of respiratory problems and so teaching it was to be.

When the two of us went to Scotland in 1962, Geoffrey had got it all worked out. He was a natural leader and had transport, huge enthusiasm and time. Our first expedition from a camp at the foot of Glen Affric covered Mam Sodhail and Carn Eige, the two highest peaks north of the Caledonian Canal, four more Munros and 18 miles on the flat. We climbed other big isolated peaks at the head of the Glen and further north, covered all 13 summits in the Fannichs in a day of stupendous rain and thick mist which tested our ability with the compass to the full. On An Teallach we made a route directly up one of the big, bulging buttresses above the lochan which had a distinctly insecure feel about it, due to a virtual absence of belays. But soon we were revelling in the safety of the broad summit ridge, the ground falling vertically away from Lord Berkeley's Seat, and the contrasts between the fractured northern landscapes around us and the huge grassy slopes of Kintail which we had recently left.

Our last staging post was in the Fort William area, almost cosmopolitan by comparison. We avoided climbing on Ben Nevis because of persistent bad weather, but walked extensively on the Aonachs, the Grey Corries and the Mamores. We were both by then quite fit, and I recall we were able to cover big distances without undue exertion. On the last evening we had an impromptu dinner party for three in a very small tent, the third man being an old friend of mine and now Professor of French Horn at the Royal College of Music. Geoffrey was on his finest form, cooking, chuckling and regaling us with not improbable tales of mutual acquaintances, Mons Officer Cadet School and the tolerant ways of its long suffering RSMs in their dealings with the young gentlemen in their charge.

Later that summer, Geoffrey and I climbed in mid and North Wales, and thanks to him, I had further insight into some lesser known parts of the Principality – Mynydd Eppynt, Cader Idris, the Arans, and the Carmarthen Van – and these affections I have retained ever since.

I had reason later to be immensely grateful to him when I had known what is known as a difference of opinion with my university examiners – his understanding and compassion were sincere and deeply moving at a time when my own world was in turmoil, and were of infinitely more value than anything I ever got from my evasive Director of Studies. Perhaps that really was Geoffrey at his biggest and best.

Apart from this, however, we never really talked about his work, my studies or topics of more universal interest such as girlfriends. I cannot therefore speak of his distinguished work at St Mark's College in what used to be Northern Rhodesia,

but it was a surprise and a pleasure to attend his wedding to Gillian in 1965. This was the one occasion in my life when I have ridden a big motorbike whilst wearing a tailcoat – a potentially hazardous occupation which I undertook lightly at the time but do not intend to repeat.

Geoffrey returned permanently to the UK from East Africa in 1973 and ceased to be a member of the Club, all at a time when developing lung problems were starting to show. The family settled in Aymestrey, Gillian's home village near Leominster, and not far from Brampton Bryan. They had three daughters and he taught with distinction at the John Beddoes School in Presteigne for many years, eventually retiring early in 1987 on health grounds. Before returning to the UK he had researched and published his first book on the Carrier Corps in the 1914-1918 Tanganyika Campaign and in retirement the pace of his writings as a scholarly but grass roots historian quickened, with a book published in 1989 on the local Wars of the Roses battlefield at Mortimer's Cross, a further work on Owain Glyndwr completed in 1994, and a proposed second edition of the Carrier Corps having reached an advanced stage of preparation.

I was vaguely aware that Geoffrey was having increasing health problems and it is of course to my lasting regret that I had not seen him for many years before his sudden death on 22nd November 1994 at a relatively early age. But by happy contrast, I shall always remember that long legged, high stepping pace setter of earlier days, out in front, heading up into the wind and ever eager to press on, just as I shall Geoffrey the wit and raconteur, in particular on that occasion when the three of us shared those bottles of cheap red wine while the Glen Nevis summer rain beat down just a few inches from our heads, and laughter and good fellowship flowed in equal measure.

Richard Owen

Author's note: I am most grateful to Richard Holmes for his help in the preparation of this memoir.

Members will have seen in the March 1996 Annual General Meeting report, an extensive list of members' and former members' deaths. Of those, some had already had a full obituary written in the 1994 CCJ, some have a full obituary in this Journal, and the others, listed below, will have an obituary written in due course: Pierre Dalloz, A.D.Malcolm, Malcolm Phillips, R.B.O.Richards, Gerry Roberts and Eric Downes (who was a member of the trust set up in honour of his son, R.O.Downes, which later led to the donation of the Froggatt hut to the Club.)

Trevor Jones

1930 (1958)–1996

As the journal goes to press we are sad to announce the death of Trevor Jones from cancer on 30 April 1996. Former president, guidebook writer and explorer Trevor had always been a stalwart member of the Club. A full obituary will appear in the following journal.

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Reviews

K2 The Story of the Savage Mountain
Hodder & Stoughton 1995

Jim Curran
Price £17.99

K2, the world's second highest mountain, is generally regarded as the world's most serious. It is exceeded in height only by Everest which is much easier technically than K2. Steeper and more technically difficult mountains there certainly are, but K2 is the most dangerous because of its sustained nature, size, altitude, unpredictable bad weather, and consequent difficulty of escape.

Much has been written about the many expeditions, successful and disastrous. This is the first book to combine all such writings to give an overall history of endeavour on this most challenging of all mountains. Inevitably, detail must be lost in dealing with individual episodes, but my overall impression was of this being done in the thoughtful and balanced manner one would expect of the author. His coverage of the early history of the mountains filled an important gap in my own knowledge; I found the accounts of the expeditions of Conway, Eckenstein, and the Duke of Abruzzi most interesting. A certain amount of extra-mural material is included here, such as the activities of the explorers Vigne and the Bullock Workmans, none of whom appear to have seen or even been anywhere near K2, but this does not fill too many excess pages and contributes interestingly to the history of the region as a whole.

As in the early history, in the middle period, from the first world war to the first ascent in 1954, we are treated to a comprehensive coverage of all visits to K2. Later on, the greater number of expeditions forces the author to be more selective, excluding those of lesser interest. I cannot fault his choices. Omissions are compensated by the appendices, which have full lists of all attempting parties, all individual ascensionists, and all fatalities, up to 1994.

The book is popular rather than academic history, so occasional journalistic tendencies in the writing have to be tolerated. I did not find such indulgences to be excessive or jarring. One small matter did disappoint me slightly: in his introduction, Jim mentions the similarity between the various disasters that have occurred. I mistakenly expected some all-revealing insight, but all I got from the main text was the common difficulty in reasoning and remembering at high altitude (that is *even* greater difficulty than at low altitude!), and the tendency to acrimony and recrimination after people die. Neither of these was any revelation.

But I struggle to find much to criticize. The writing is admirable, with a flowing narrative style, a balanced selection of what material is important, and an insight into what motivates climbers on K2 which should appeal to all types of intelligent reader. Jim Curran is honest but sensitive in the hard task of assessing fault for the various tragedies: he avoids doing this excessively or dogmatically, and always retains a sympathy for the frailty of human nature in situations of great stress.

This is a book equally suited to piecemeal reference, and to reading at a single marathon sitting.

Dave Wilkinson

Geoffrey Winthrop Young: Poet, Mountaineer, Educator
Hodder and Stoughton 1995

Alan Hankinson
Price £18.99

When I began this book I knew that Winthrop Young, after losing one leg in the First World War, had climbed the Matterhorn again. When I closed the book I had to admit that this was by no means his major achievement. He had been a key figure in a US funded attempt to prevent the Second World War. Seared by the horrors of the first War, which he saw daily as commander of a Friends' Ambulance Unit, and an admirer of German culture and people, he was employed by the Rockefeller Foundation during the 1930s to influence German liberal opinion against Nazism. In increasingly clandestine meetings in Germany with army officers and politicians who hated Hitler and the Nazis, Winthrop Young stirred the pot that eventually produced the failed assassination attempt on Hitler in 1944.

He never revealed this mission, even later in life when, with cloak and monocle, he was what he called 'an elderly celebrity, second class'. Alan Hankinson, a distinguished historian of British mountaineering, has been as surprised as anyone to discover this secret life in a life which had other secrets. Hankinson's clear style, straightforward honesty and humane tact uncover an action-packed life full of fascinating contradictions.

Born in 1876 to a long line of famous and privileged forebears, Geoffrey Winthrop Young was sceptical about the establishment and disinterested in accumulating money. Hankinson describes much of his life as 'Bohemian'. While a student at Cambridge he wrote *The Roof-Climber's Guide To Trinity*. A leading alpinist before the First World War, he started the Easter climbing parties at Pen-y-Pass in Snowdonia at which two generations of brilliant climbers pushed up the standards of Welsh climbing. It was Winthrop Young who, controversially, but in the interests of safety, persuaded the Climbers' Club to produce the first pocket guides to crags. It was Winthrop Young who, as President of the establishment Alpine Club, sought to establish a popular representative body to speak for all climbing clubs about safety, training and environmental threats. This became today's British Mountaineering Council.

Mysteriously sacked from a first teaching post at Eton, Winthrop Young later became an inspector of schools only to be forced to resign under equally mysterious and unspecified circumstances. A critic of the rarefied atmosphere of English public schools, he was instrumental in helping Kurt Hahn establish Gordonstoun and later the first Outward Bound School at Aberdovey. Yet he did not flinch from persuading Hahn to retire when it was clear that he was too mentally ill to continue in the job. Integrity is a force which directs the actions of this life, yet those mysteries remain unexplained, even in the personal diaries from which much of this book is drawn.

Perhaps a clue is to be found in the climbing poetry with which Winthrop Young celebrates both the romantic idealism and the physical realities of risk in the sport. Hankinson observes that the poetry is uniformly optimistic, even pastoral, about an activity in which many of his best friends were killed. The poet avoids dwelling upon his personal inner tensions, but it is in charting those deeply personal tensions that the biographer has turned a history into a moving testament to a complex, intensely moral man.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young was a homosexual during the dark ages of its illegality. Berlin and Paris were the outlets for his sexual vitality. But he also fell in love with the young daughter of Yorkshire's famous 'father of Norwegian mountaineering', Cecil Slingsby. With her he forged an honest family life that allowed for the affairs of both of them, whilst bringing up children to whom he was unquestionably devoted. His letters show how he was experiencing war again at second-hand through his anxiety for his son in the front line of the war at sea. It is to the credit of Winthrop Young's son and daughter that they have initiated this biography and given free access to all private papers. In return, Alan Hankinson has produced an immensely readable and rather moving book about one of the surprisingly freer spirits of his age.

Terry Gifford

Climbs of the Cordillera Blanca
Whizzo Books 1995

David Sharman
Price £14.99

This is a modern guidebook, plastic coated, ring bound and a product of the information age. It gives you all the details with no poetic meat on its bones. Efficient and plagiarised, it will appeal to those people who enjoy going to climbing walls and buy *Rockfax* or a lottery ticket without a surge of guilt.

It is practical and succinct, telling you all you need to know for a perfect Peruvian climbing holiday. There are maps and diagrams drawn by the author and some are a little blurred. It has got dates, descents, ascents and a little history. It gives guidelines on the environment and some bits on glaciation and geology to read between meals on the plane. It tells you how to hire a donkey and the price you can expect to pay, what equipment you need to take and that you cannot buy *Epigas* in Peru. Then the book gives a north to south, route by route description of the Cordillera Blanca.

There is an excellent pullout paper map of the range and, hidden away, a graded list, headed by Fowler and Watts. It is all most tidy, useful, indispensable even, if you are going to Peru to climb. No doubt it was a real labour of love for Mr Sharman with no worthwhile monetary reward, but I feel that not only does the Cordillera Blanca not need this but that herein lies the conundrum of mountain climbing.

Is not climbing about no rule books, individual expression and a sense of anarchy? What does one need to know about the Cordillera Blanca other than that there are some very beautiful mountains in Peru, the capital of Peru is Lima and it takes about £500 to get there? The rest of the trip is for yourself to discover.

Maybe the listing and boxing off of all human knowledge is inevitable progress but don't complain when you come back from Peru having met lots of people from Sheffield, all carrying Mr Sharman's beautiful book.

Neil Boyd

It is nine long years since the last **Swanage** guide was produced and how the world has changed: bolts, topo guides, bolts, climbing walls, bolts, mass participation and of course bolts. Like it or not these changes are here to stay but our definitive guidebooks have not changed dramatically with the times. Are they the last gasps of a dinosaur on the edge of extinction, or a beacon of stability in a churning world? I don't mind admitting I dislike topo guides, though it has to be acknowledged that the piratical activities of Vertical Brain have forced the BMC and the CC to address the fact that they cannot keep the climbing public waiting forever for new volumes to our most popular areas. The fact that VB have started adding photos, stars, short description, first ascentionists, etc. to their books suggests to me that we have had the format right all along, its just the timing that needs addressing!

So how does the latest definitive guide bear up under scrutiny? This new guide takes the form of two slim volumes held in one cover, as was the case with the **Avon/Cheddar** and **Ogwyn/Carneddau** volumes. It is a great way of packaging two portable books into one lumpy volume and of course has the advantage that traditionalists just wanting **Swanage**, and sport climbers just wanting **Portland** have to buy both volumes! With over 500 pages between the two volumes (almost exactly double that in the old **Swanage** guide) this is a major piece of work and Nigel Coe has to be commended for tackling and completing this task.

I don't much like the way that the two books fit into the cover, I find them difficult to get in and out of the overly tight sleeves and usually end up splitting their corners. Having said that, it is just about the only thing I don't like. The diagrams and maps are clear and accurate (especially necessary at Swanage) the photos are inspirational, and at £7.50 a volume they are damn good value. These guides definitely work because having thumbed through them I want to be there now!

I make no bones about always having found Swanage a gripping place to climb, the rather odd nature of much of the rock, doubts about the holding power of nuts in the raw material and highly harrowing exits, but of course it is all this that makes the climbing there so rewarding! These aspects are why I have always found the grades at Swanage to be a bit on the mean side. Although there has been some upgrading, many of the routes are still on the stiff side. If it is your first visit to the area take note and start



on routes that are a couple of grades below your normal operating level until you get the feel of the place! Talking to one of the locals a couple of years back he said that the routes weren't all that technical, just steep, strenuous and intimidating. My point exactly! Just a few miles down the coast much of the climbing at Portland is about pure pleasure. The full scale adoption of bolting has turned what was always going to be a neglected backwater into quite possibly the most popular sports venue in the country. This required a vision, a drill, and no little amount of ready cash and Pete Oxley supplied all three; the man deserves a medal. The new guide eschews 'French' grades, preferring to use for example E1 5b S meaning a 'sport' (or 'stapled') route, and I don't have any problems with that. Even the most dedicated sport climber knows what to expect on an E1 5b S, E3 6a S or E5 6b S.

In conclusion this is a very significant guide, a little late in appearing on the scene and thus giving VB the chance to pre-empt it to a degree. But of course with development continuing apace the topo guide is now out of date. With that being the case I can file mine with all the other old guides in the back bedroom and look forward to using the new definite volumes. I can't wait, though I don't think I will be going deep water soloing!

Chris Craggs

John Adams on 'Strongbow' E1 5b, Swanage.
Photo: Chris Craggs

Vertical Pleasure
Hodder and Stoughton 1995

Mick Fowler
Price £17.99

I have just finished reading **Vertical Pleasure** by Mick Fowler which I thoroughly enjoyed. The book starts off with Mick's apprenticeship at High Rocks, in the Alps, Scotland and Snowdonia. Mick then relates some highly entertaining stories of the South West where he branched out to other areas (this bit includes some references to me!). Here, Mick's enthusiasm for adventure climbing developed. This was to involve exciting approaches, unusual (often bold) climbing on routes such as *The Parson* at Dawlish and climbing on shale cliffs, chalk cliffs and sea stacks.

Later on in the book Mick goes on to write about his trips to Peru and the Karakoram, including the first ascent of the *Golden Pillar of Spantik* with Victor Saunders this being one of the most impressive Himalayan alpine style climbs of the decade. **Vertical Pleasure** tells about the highs and lows of these expeditions.

The book brought back happy memories to me from the time that I spent with Mick. It highlights his commitment to work with his contrasting enthusiasm for adventure climbing, his races away from London to places like Scotland for weekends of excitement and to far off places for his annual holiday. It shows that you do not have to be a full time climber to be successful. **Vertical Pleasure** also confirms that wherever you live, if you are eager and keen to climb then you will find a way to, even if the route is an ice climb up a pipe outside a railway station.

Mick shows his devotion to his father George, (a wonderful man who taught me to climb snow and ice), to his family and to his climbing partners such as the amazingly energetic Mike Morrison and the 'slippery' Victor Saunders. Mick and his friends managed somehow to combine the happy medium of working hard and climbing hard. When Mick moved to Sheffield and was unemployed for a brief spell, I remember how this enthusiasm waned and how he lost direction in life. He conveys his unusual and fascinating combination of work and top level climbing very effectively, and is an inspiration to those of us who are not full time climbers.

Vertical Pleasure brings to light the sense of adventure that climbing can involve. So many climbers have forgotten or missed out on this. I remember how Mick loved it when he had found a climb desperate, how he relished not knowing whether it would go or not. He seemed to thrive on epics.

The book is easy reading and Mick's true character speaks through his writing. There were times when I would have liked to have seen more of what Mick was thinking, especially when things were not going well. One cannot help but wonder what goes on in the mind of a climber who lives on the edge of life. The book is beautifully understated; Mick writes about his wild epics as if they were an ordinary guy's day out on the hills, but climbers will appreciate what is really happening.

In conclusion I will certainly read the book again and pass it on to my family to read. If you fancy a couple of evenings in with a beer or a few glasses of wine (why stop at one, Mick would not have), entering into the world of amusement, excitement and adventure, then you too should read **Vertical Pleasure**. See me if you do not enjoy it!

Geraldine Taylor

Chamonix Cragging – Valley rock climbs around the area
Cordee 1995

Nigel Shepherd
Price £9.95

The sub-title describes the main theme of this very useful guidebook. The number of British climbers visiting what is arguably the best place for alpine climbing in the world, grows each year. Summer has, for many enthusiasts, become a traditional pilgrimage to the Alps.

However, the weather is very fickle in Chamonix. Long hours, even days, can be spent huddling under canvas, alternating visits to the Supermarche and consolation rock climbing at the countless crags in and local to the main alpine range.

I believe Nigel, current President of the British Association of Mountain Guides, and an ex-habitat of Servoz, near Chamonix, has produced an excellent guidebook, but I would question his titling. Although on the surface, it would seem the crags described are too far ranging, needing a car to visit them, the main point about bad weather in Chamonix is that you have to get out, and the further the better. The question remains, a more enterprising title might have been less misleading.

The praise. Well, lots of it. The crags are well described, mostly bolt-protected and also advice on required natural protection is given. All necessary information is there for a good day's climbing. This starts with pictorial logos, which are superbly simple and extremely effective. A more normal narrative follows, written in Nigel's well established, clear and explanatory way. Although Nigel continually climbs

at a very high standard, there is no condescending, no sand bagging, although I did find the last couple of pitches of *Viper à Pied* (on Barbarine) quite hard for the grade.

These climbing grades are given in the French system, which by now, I believe, is well established in much of the world as the grade we all understand most easily. There is, therefore, no pointless comparison with the corresponding British grades. The descents from routes are well explained, and the routes, named and graded in an initial list, are relatively easy to find and once on, easy to follow. I felt the photos were only of reasonable quality.

Getting from Chamonix, both in time and direction, is clear and concise. There is a nice variety of routes described, of all standards.

My other wings? Only small ones. For someone who has climbed in Chamonix for nearly 30 years, I find his selection of the nearby (to the campsites) Chamonix crags a little disappointing. Why not include a small piece on the Guides' crag, or Les Jeux, or l'Source d'Avignon, all extremely popular bad weather destinations for Brits. Maybe that's it? Maybe Nigel is trying to remove some congestion from these overused crags. Well, OK. Congested they are, but they get a lot of attention from the campsite Brits, because they're easy to get to.

As for crags that need to be driven to anyway, I was sorry not to see Meirville in. Only a short hop down the valley from Dorenaz (towards Sierre), it has several great climbs on it, all being 3 to 5 pitches long on excellent juggy rock.

However, I felt the two real omissions were these....

Only an hour and a half away on the south (Italian) side of the range, is Macheby. Almost certainly glorious weather (maybe because it's in Italy?) it has a wealth of short and long (200/300m) climbs on superb slabby granite, all bolt protected. I'm lucky. I've just got hold of the 1985 guide to the area, and there's so much to do!!

Less than an hour down the autoroute is Salève. Brilliant limestone climbing all over the place, with the *West Face* route, a bit like three *Coronation Streets*. Enough said?

Sorry, back to Nigel's guide. It's good to have a selection of crags and routes to go for, in your own single guide, even though most of the crags are described in the myriad of books in the glass housings in Snell Sports (good place to browse on the third wet day!).

All in all, the guide seems to be directed to the more experienced traveller. I felt Nigel could have done a little better for the usual British visitor who, like me when I spent my first few summers in Chamonix, didn't know my plunger from my plunger. And it's no use me thinking, well the guidebook will sell well anyway. It would, I wager, sell more copies if it was full of local crags.

Smiler Cuthbertson

The Alpine Journal 1995 Volume 100
The Alpine Club/Ernest Press 1995

Edited by Joanna Merz
Price £18.50

Under no circumstance should AJs be read by people with more than the average modicum of brain cells as they provoke far too much thought. Although it is debatable as to whether or not they damage the health, there is no doubt that they can unsettle one's equanimity – a phenomenon currently identified as the *Wiz effect* which is akin to road rage or its mountain counterpart of 'crag rage'. Let me elucidate with an example:

A 13-year old pupil recently asked me the simple question, 'How high is the world's highest mountain?' My answer that Mount Everest was over 8,800m, or about 29,000 feet, displeased him somewhat. Although given credit for my geographical knowledge he had previously had it impressed upon his little mind that scientists deal in hard facts. My observation that, like the universe, the world's highest mountain is getting bigger failed to restore my tarnished image. Perhaps Michael Ward in the AJ might help. Let's see: in 1856 Everest was 29,002ft; in 1902 it was 29,141ft (8,882m); in 1975 it was 29,029ft (8,848.13m); and currently it stands at 29,028ft (8,848m). Now, the plate tectonics experts say that the Everest massif is rising at about 0.15mm per year, and height estimates may be out by a factor of plus or minus 0.8ft. By combining these we can conclude that 1,622 years from now (if measuring techniques are equally (in)accurate) then the increase in height could still be explained by errors in measurement. IF Everest gets progressively higher (ignoring summit snow cover variation) then each ascensionist will get slightly higher than the previous person (good for the ego and record books). Eventually when the tectonic 'surge' (that's a laugh) finishes perhaps the mountain will shrink – so denying the chance to get as high as previous climbers.

All that was just too much for my poor head so back to the AJ and soon I was fighting up the North Ridge of Everest with Dawson Stelfox, until the Irishman finally reached the summit. There his altimeter read 8,848m – so much for the accuracy of altimeters. Just how accurate IS an altimeter?

According to Alan Hinkes the North Side of K2 is one of the remotest places on our planet. In the Review section Geoffrey Templeman commented on Arka Tagh as being one of the most isolated places on earth. Just like last great problems there seem to be an awful lot of the most remote places! Which brings us to an interesting point; just what constitutes remote in this era of sophisticated travel? – and how many other remote places are there left to explore? And if the world population is such a problem why don't a few million people bump into the climbers who seek these 'blanks on the map'? Hinkes might not have succeeded on K2 this time but just looking at the photo, of the party negotiating the raging Shaksgam river on camels, suggests that this in itself was no mean achievement. Bearing in mind just how easy it is to get swept off one's feet by moving water – for what maximum speed of water (for any depth) can a camel remain standing? And how does a variable load on the camel's back affect the stability in water? Then if the worst comes to the worst and the camels are swept away how well do they swim – if at all? Not that I've ever liked the beast; the ones we had in the Sahara did nothing but kick, shoulder-charge, spit and bite. Perhaps a bit of raging water was needed to sort them out.

I got very excited by Paul Clarke's account of an ascent of the Diamond Couloir – especially when I looked at the photo on the rear cover, as for some time I've had an urge to return to the African peaks. And then of course there is Tanzania with plenty of tops to go at. I was just getting keen on the thought of a trip up Kilimanjaro and was pondering on the elephants having corridors (!) below the mountain, when my wife switched on the TV for the Holiday programme. Confronted with a £1,500 package tour of wingeing programme presenters and old grannies all plodding wearily up Kilimanjaro I returned to the AJ to look further afield. After the Low's Gully fiasco perhaps 13,455 foot (4,077m) Kinabalu on Borneo might provide the challenge. (They don't still have human head hunters out there do they?) But wait a minute, do you realise that 20,000 people top this peak each year? That's 384.6 people per day. And if that's an average figure what price the crowd on a good day? With that number why didn't the team who got lost just tag on to the end of the crocodile?

Perhaps a cruise in a Bristol Channel Cutter to Antarctica with Julian Freeman-Attwood (I've always fancied a hyphen!) might be the answer. There again the thought of violent 'willy waws' in the Beagle Channel is just not my scene, but a bit of high seas etymology with Jim Perrin could be fun. Now, is a willy-waw a combination of a Scottish wave with an Australian anti-cyclone (willy-willy)? Which turns my mind to Julie-Ann Clyma (see, with a hyphen you can get anywhere) and a high-level 'performance' with Roger Payne on an alpine-style ascent of Nanda Devi. The lengths that people go to in order to shake off a member of the opposite sex is amazing. Tilman was far more successful.

After a year of research to produce a bibliography of skiing books I was recently mortified when an American piped me to the post. I'm glad that he doesn't get a review in this AJ, but you certainly can't escape from skis in this publication. Skiers get everywhere from the highest mountains to the icy Poles. What did I find in the article **One Hundred Years Ago** but Sherlock Holmes disguised as Arthur Conan Doyle taking to the slippery slopes on ski – and could the Saint Bernard dogs of Switzerland have been the archetypal Hound of the Baskervilles? More recently it was J.G.R. Harding crossing Corsica's jagged G20 backbone on skis; as well as a trans-Pamirs trip and even a Russian Haute Route across the Caucasus by David Hamilton.

Perhaps one of the hardest rock routes might provide a change, but not a bit of it. Even Paul Pritchard's party need skis to succeed on Mount Asgard (Baffin Island) at A4/E4 6a up a tremendous 19 pitch, 1,000 metre wall. Well not quite, but skis were used for the 16 day approach. And to think that some rock climbers moan about the walk up to Cloggy!

Forging ahead to **In Memoriam** (and no, I don't fancy the sad task of contributing to the 1996 AJ) the skiers emerge yet again: David Cox and Griffith Pugh and one can bet that the plucky Yorkshire daughter of Cecil Slingsby (Eleanor Winthrop Young) must have followed in her illustrious father's footsteps in Norway.

Here please excuse me for a moment while I count up to ten before broaching the delicate subject of the AC library and its 14 year backlog of information. It's bad enough that the 'red elephant' with all its repetitions appeared in such a wasteful format. It could have included much of the Club's other documents which the climbing world at large need to know about. I'd also like to see a shopping list of the key books that are not in the AC library. It now looks as if before long we will now have to purchase a computerised database. Give me a book any day.

Getting serious again there is a letter on bolting from Elienne Gross, the Editor of **Die Alpen**. Every British climber should read this. I'll only give three quotes without comment (or else the Wiz factor will get me and I'll start foaming at the mouth and writing pages of vitriolic invective).

'Eliminating the danger wherever possible is the overall and permanent objective of humans and the purpose of all efforts. They illustrate a basic human tendency to be safe.'

'It may be possible to suppress the 'triumph of the bolt' in Britain for some time.'

'The bolt is neither a topic nor a problem for the younger generation; the bolt exists and they use it – what is all the talk about?'

And lastly to the vexed and unanswered question of WHO first set foot on the summit of Everest. Michael Ward clearly provides the answer on page 232 when he states firmly that:

'Hillary passed urine on the summit.'

Well there you have it... Tenzing got there first! But what is more thought-provoking is that in this pollution-ridden century when man finally sets foot on the pure snow of the world's highest summit and finally overcomes the virgin Chomolungma (Mother Goddess of the snows).....he urinates.

Geoff Milburn

West Midlands Rock
Cicerone Press 1995

Doug Kerr
Price £7.99

What? Climbing in Birmingham and the Black Country? This was my initial reaction on reading the title, but it proves to be a misreading. The 'West Midlands' referred to is not the industrial conurbation which springs to most minds when that phrase is used, but the part of the Midlands even further west, up to the Welsh border. The book is the successor to the 1988 guide by the same author and publisher with the equally misleading title **Rock Climbing in the West Midlands**. I would have preferred the book to be called 'Shropshire Climbing' or some such title which would let you know at a glance where we are – most of the crags described, and all the main crags, are in Shropshire, with just a handful of smaller outcrops in Worcestershire.

That was a minor criticism of the book's packaging. Its contents are far more important, but here I have a major criticism: many of the best middle-grade routes have been neglected. There is no other guide that I know of to this area. Unlike many of Cicerone's selected climbs guides, this book is presumably meant as a comprehensive guide (and if not, it should be). While it seems to fill this role for most of the crags described, it fails to do so for one of the main crags: Llanymynech.

Before I really get stuck in to my lambaste, I should point out that this one crag has been sub-contracted, the Llanymynech section is written by Gary Gibson, so Doug Kerr is not directly to blame. Since the 1988 guide, this crag has seen considerable development in the harder grades, with 31 new routes mostly from E2 to E6. Ten of these are on Red Wall, and use bolts extensively, while elsewhere the protection is mostly natural. These routes are all given full, and apparently good descriptions (with plenty of stars too), the majority being Gibson's own creations. But he has relegated most of the earlier routes in the medium grades (Severe to E1) to the status of a 'mention'. The main exceptions are those on the Blind Faith buttress which do get the full treatment, but no routes in these grades on the Main Wall or Bay Wall areas are fully described.

This is quarried limestone, and a characteristic of the rock type is the lack of strong features, making full descriptions more necessary than usual. His 'brief mentions' are totally inadequate to find and follow the routes, some of which are among the best that I have done of their type and grade in the country. Here are quality routes up to 200ft long, which are not properly described, while elsewhere in the same book there are 20ft routes at Stiperstones with full descriptions. Gary's justification that the routes are unpopular because of poor rock and vegetation has a bit of validity for some of them, but not all. Yesterday (30th Nov. '95), I went to Llanymynech for another look. Many of the routes in question, for example *Insanity*, *Flying Mantuan*, *Broken Dreams*, *Bridge of Thighs*, *Pink Panther* and *1887*, are of good quality, and are certainly not overgrown. Some of the rest are seriously overgrown, others only slightly. Their guidebook omission can only lead to further neglect and further vegetation, while those routes included in full will have more concentration of traffic, leading to polished rock, which I personally find more unpleasant than a little vegetation.

Llanymynech offers a serious style of climbing. Even with a full description, the lines are not obvious, the rock is not the best, and protection is not easy to arrange. One of the things I like best about climbing is its variety, and guidebooks should reflect this, rather than the authors' own favourite styles and grades. Guidebooks should cater for all climbers, not just the best of the generation, and those with the most popular tastes. Perhaps the CC should take over the next edition, but don't give the job to Gary!

Ironically, some of Gary's own routes are also becoming overgrown! Ivy now covers the first 10 to 20 feet of all routes on the Nomad Wall. The central part of Red Wall also has a little ivy at the bottom. Perhaps there will be further omissions from the next edition.

Pontesford has suffered a little of the same sort of treatment, but much less. This is the region's main beginners' crag, with many polished classics up to 200ft long mostly from moderate to VS, plus a few harder. Three pleasant little routes on the left wall of grassy gully have sadly been omitted as being overgrown. I did them a couple of years ago. They had only slight vegetation, none of the crowds which queued on the popular routes, and no polished rock. Some other routes have also been dropped for the same reason, which may or may not be justified, I have not checked them. Otherwise, this crag seems well-described.

I know the remaining crags less well or not at all. Other people may be as ignorant, so I'll say something about what is on offer. Apart from Llanymynech and Pontesford, the book includes four other crags of some importance. Two are sandstone, a rock of character, like it or loath it. Nesscliff has 48 routes, mostly in the higher grades (up to E8), and up to 160ft long. 13 of these routes have appeared since the last edition. Access to Nesscliff has recently become much easier. The other major sandstone crag is Grinshill. This is shorter, maximum route length 55ft, but has no fewer than 72 routes described, in all grades from 2b (sic) to 6b. This is more than double the number in the previous edition, the increase being a mixture of some new routes and a fuller inclusion of old ones.

Carreg y Byg has 38 routes up to 60ft in height, graded from Diff to E4, on quarried limestone. Ippikins Rock has 25 routes up to 60ft in height in all grades from Diff to E3, on natural limestone. Also included are many lesser crags of a varied nature.

The guidebook covers a wide variety of rock types, including limestone and sandstone already mentioned, volcanic rock on Pontesford and even some quartzite on Stiperstones. As a result, various grading systems are used. This inconsistency has some merit in such a varied context. Many of these crags have access restrictions for environmental and other reasons. These are fully covered in the book, but of course could change over the years. The book has plenty of good action pictures, but these are a little monotonous as they mostly seem to be of (or by) the authors.

This is a little-known area which deserves to be more popular. That has been said before, but remains true. Doug Kerr and Cicerone have produced a flawed but useful guide. The climbing is within easy day and summer-evening reach of Birmingham and Wolverhampton etc., and can be visited by those from further afield on the way to or from North Wales; the main crags are all close to the A5.

In spite of my criticisms, I look forward to using this guide next summer to explore those crags I do not know. I'll just have to remember to take my old guide when I go to Llanymynech.

Dave Wilkinson

Climbing in Majorca, Ibiza and Tenerife
Cicerone Press 1995

Chris Craggs
Price £10.99

The name of Chris Craggs has become synonymous with that increasingly popular and delightfully decadent activity of sun-rock bolt clipping. Ever since 1990 when **Costa Blanca Climbs** was published he has opened up to British climbers a world hardly known to the majority who had regularly shivered at Easter in Pembroke or tried to grab a route between squalls in West Penwith. Now the secret is well and truly out and if you – like me – love the relaxed nature of Christmas in Tenerife, Easter in Majorca or cheapo trips to Calpe or El Chorro at other times of the winter you will appreciate the size of the debt we owe to Chris.

His latest book, **Climbing in Majorca, Ibiza and Tenerife** is a much more substantial volume than either of his previous guides to the Spanish speaking areas of Europe – **Costa Blanca Climbs** and **Andalusian Rock Climbs** (1992). The latter focused mainly on the now very popular El Chorro area and introduced climbers to the guaranteed all year round good weather venue of Tenerife.

The new book follows the same format as the previous two guides. However, they were both described as introductory in nature. This third guide covers a greater geographical area, more cliffs and substantially more routes. It reflects the increasing importance of Majorca as a sport climbing venue and introduces climbers to Ibiza for the first time. Even so, the book can hardly be described as the definitive work on these areas. Chris modestly informs the reader when he has not visited a crag e.g. Cala Magraner. He readily admits when he has not done a route, warning the climber to be aware that both the quality and grade may not necessarily match the description. Indeed, some of the diagrams have lines indicated with a question mark where grade, quality and even the exact line are unknown or merely speculative. What he does do so very well is to encourage us to go forth and explore, for ourselves, the delights of Spanish rock and this guide will easily give us both the momentum and knowledge to do it. Having said that, don't throw away all your scrappy bits of paper collected from the bar in Bunyola or 'Es Refugi' in Palma. These topos can still reveal a secret or two that Chris may have missed.

I personally like the British adjectival superimposed on the Spanish numerical grading system. It helps when the local grades are inconsistent. I know of Majorcan grade fives that are definitely E2 5c, and 6a cracks that are HVS if you can jam. Generally his grades are about right or perhaps a touch generous (holiday grades). This is great for one's ego and it will help to sell the book to those who like to tick the name of the routes they have led in their guide.

For the less committed climber, or those with families to consider, these islands provide the perfect answer. Buy this book and you can do some cragging as well as going out in a glass-bottomed boat or gaze at the wonders of the caves at Arta. And there's always that bottle of vino collapso from the bar in Bunyola!

Roger Briggs

The Crag Guide to England and Wales. Second Edition
Crowood Press 1995

David Jones
Price £10.99

'To write a guidebook or not is the question – and the answer is yes. Not because there is any new information to impart over the existing full climbing guidebook series to the UK, since one could never improve on the full series of Ordnance Survey maps to the country; but like a road atlas this guide will get you and your car to any part of England and Wales and locate the desired crag.'

This extract from the preface is typical of the clumsy syntax and utterly bewildering logic that makes this book so painful to read. The author's woeful attempt to place the modern scene in the context of the history of the sport clearly demonstrates his lack of knowledge of even quite recent developments.

'It was not until the beginning of the 1980s that real gains were made. The introduction of the Friend and the death of the Whillans harness showed the way forward. The early years of the decade saw the introduction of chalk, excellent double-rope techniques, perfected belay plates, comfortable harnesses, rocks, RPs and, most useful of all, bolts. Indeed, the sting had been taken out of climbing and its popularity has grown enormously ever since.'

I am not sure what 'real gains' he is referring to but I certainly know that many of those developments in equipment and techniques had occurred by 1975. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how a case for bolts as a major influence on British climbing can be sustained. In fact, the author does not miss many opportunities to make out the case for bolting to the extent that he is prepared to distort facts and exaggerate the support for bolting British crags. 'They used to be scarce but are now sprouting up everywhere in increasing numbers. It is now accepted that they can be retro placed on limestone and in the higher grades this has become widespread.'

In refutation of this it is only necessary to say that open meetings throughout the country have repeatedly voted in favour of bolts being used on a limited number of designated crags and with a few exceptions the great majority of climbers have accepted this position. I was further angered by the following statement about Shepherd's Crag. 'Many of the hardest routes are top-rope and because of the local dislike of bolts I recommend that you continue their tradition.' This patronising nonsense appears to be suggesting that perhaps there are other crags in the area where it might be acceptable to place bolts. (Strangely, St Bees, one of the few sport crags in The Lakes area does not receive a mention.)

Of course, it could be argued that to most climbers the above arguments are only of peripheral interest and that the book stands or falls by its crag descriptions. So how successful is the book at providing sufficient information for an appropriate choice of venue for a climber visiting an area without a conventional guide? First, it should be said that the coverage is so comprehensive that even insignificant crags that are left alone by the locals are included. Secondly, most crag summaries (for, of necessity, that is all that can be given) seem to be fair but there are many inaccuracies that I spotted and these together with some idiosyncratic judgements about the quality of certain crags undermine ones confidence in the worth of the guide as a guide. The following examples illustrate this point. Cratcliffe Tor with some of the best routes on gritstone is dismissed as 'A small crag with some classic routes but disappointing as a whole.' Stoney Middleton on the other hand is described as 'without doubt one of the greatest crags in Britain...You can often see yourself in the limestone here, but sticky boots solve the problem and make all the routes quite easy these days.' After that how can you take anything the fellow says seriously?

Furthermore we read that '(Chee Tor) routes are generally easier than they look and can be done very quickly, it is easy to amass a total of 30 or 40 E points in a day'.

Obviously, not all the information is as misleading as the above but it makes you suspicious when reading about unfamiliar crags. It's a bit like reading a newspaper article about climbing full of inaccuracies; you then doubt the veracity of the other items on topics about which you know nothing.

If this guide is to be useful what is required is a greater selectivity, allowing the author to concentrate

on getting the details right, consulting more, perhaps polishing up the text (certainly avoiding the impression that it is his first thoughts thrown down with no further consideration or proof reading) and trying to capture the essence of each crag.

As an attempt at being constructive I suggest the following description of 'Greetland Quarry' (incidentally, more commonly called 'West Vale'): 'A small quarry, offering about 50 short climbs on good solid gritstone. Worth a detour if in the area' is replaced with 'A long low wall of quarried grit with an appallingly loose top, best known for its traverse, continuous for more than 600ft, which, together with lots of good problems, make it a superb outdoor climbing wall'.

Mike Mortimer

The Burgess Book of Lies
Cloudcap 1995

Adrian & Alan Burgess
Price \$20

This was going to be an easy book to review, comment on a few laughs, a lot of very powerful climbing stories and reflect on a couple of friends we don't see much of these days. I wouldn't have to read it all, especially those rather boring accounts of climbing in the Himalaya. Or so I thought. After a few chapters, I realised there was more to this book.

I read the early pages with a growing feeling that there was no need to write all that stuff about the mid to late '60s Chamonix scene in the way they did. The fighting, the thieving, the poor relationships with the police and locals, all part of the scene, in between great climbing. I knew all about those times, because I was there, but I'm not particularly proud now of some of the antics we encouraged each other to get up to. Maybe we felt there was a need to steal from shops, to incite the locals in the bars, to treat everything like the wild west, which we all did, especially in the Bar Nationale, maybe the Stella Artois was as strong then as I find it today. Sadly, the 'Nash' is no more the Video Jukebox/Flik football/late night drinking scene it used to be. (Maurice lives on, but no longer is propped up at the end of the bar.) However, 20 years on, everywhere else in Chamonix the memories still linger on, a mistrust of British climbers on entering the supermarkets and climbing shops and still trouble with the British on the campsites. I'm happy to forget the valley life in Chamonix, both now and all those years ago, so why write publicly about it? The young group in Chamonix this year, with me to learn the skills of alpine climbing, put my nose out of joint one morning when I awoke to find a restaurant parasol and a large quantity of wine, within our camping site. Suitably reprimanded, the offending items were removed, but not before I happened to glance into one of the lads' tents. There was **The Book of Lies!**

So I think I started reading the book on the wrong foot, so to speak. As for the twins? No-one can argue their prowess among the world's very best climbers. Their vitality, strength, courage, charisma, you name it, they've got it. It was a great feeling to be considered a friend of theirs, let alone the powerful image of being on the end of their rope.

The depth of their climbing, travels and experiences are reflected in the thickness of this book. From the early gritstone days, to those fabulous early alpine days, an ever-increasing delving into more difficult climbing in the Greater Ranges, attempts and successes on the world's highest peaks, failure and tragedy on some of those. It's all there, the pain, the gain, the fun, the sorrow and the tears.

At first I did find the writing not as good as I thought it should have been. Apart from the bad stories of the activities in Chamonix town and on the campsites, the climbing stories did appear to me to be too much of a listing, not much of a story of each climb, even though I knew the attempts and successes to be on the leading edge of modern alpinism. Well, I thought, like all memorable events, it's never quite the same writing about them – a bit like that photo taken just as the sun passed around that rock, leaving that unforgettable sight, which you rush to capture, only to find it never comes out as good after all. Not, that is, unless you are an expert with the camera. Here were two of the hardest men I know, trying to write a book of their life and times. Hard men – yes, characters – yes, pals who you could rely on when there's trouble – yes. Good writers? Well, to be honest, at first I thought, no, not really. There were too many – 'we went to...', 'we reached...', 'so we did this...', 'Adrian went left...', and 'Al did that...'. For a book with a thousand stories, the events reeled off like a long list, and the stories of those early alpine years started to get a little tedious after a while.

However, the gripping tales and incidents of the rest of the book more than made up for what I'd initially felt was a let-down. The more peaks they attempted, the more I was glued to my armchair. Wonderful, yet desperate stuff (and I don't mean the writing!) The lucky escape on Mt Kitchener's North Couloir, when trying the almost unheard of winter climbing in the Canadian Rockies. Great team-work and climbing, but still more avalanches and hard times on a very early ascent of the Cassin Ridge on Mt McKinley. Then Fitzroy, Huascarán, Logan, Everest, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna IV, Lhotse

and Lhotse Shar, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and K2. If ever there has been a tick-list ticked, the twins have done theirs.

Accidents and tragedy are unfortunately part and parcel of those on the cutting edge of mountain exploration. Witnessing from close quarters the fall of his close friend and Sherpa, Ongchu, Alan has to initially put his clients out of danger, then returning to aid the stricken and dying climber, is left with the agonising decision that he can do nothing to save his friend. Time and time again he makes a forlorn attempt to get his friend down to safety, until he has to make the only decision possible for the situation, he must leave him. This chapter, poignant as it was, more than illustrates the problems of responsibility when climbing in the Greater Ranges. There may be a group of good friends, a guided party, or a full-scale expedition team, but if things go wrong you could be on your own, and it seems to be an accepted rule. I say 'could be on your own' because we all know everyone will do their utmost to get a friend and fellow climber to safety. It just so happens that, in the Himalaya especially, there's a good chance you will be on your own. Scary? I'll say!

I hope the book sells like hot cakes. They are only trying to make a few dollars, to fund their next trip somewhere, and why shouldn't they? If we, as armchair readers, or as fellow climbers, who fall short of their prowess by a long way, can feel ourselves part of those gripping situations within each epic, then they have succeeded in putting together something worthwhile.

I did have a few nit-picking moments. Apart from not wishing to be reminded of the scams we used in Chamonix all those years ago, I thought the colour photos impressive and of good quality, but the black and white shots very poor. The text is annoyingly interrupted by explanations of climbing terms. If there are that many people out there who, in 1995, can't figure out some of the meanings, the more usual method of a glossary in the back of the book would have been better.

Apart from that, I couldn't fault the book, indeed, I haven't been so captivated since Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void* and *This Game of Ghosts*. The very thought of struggling through all the deep snow, with a 60lb rucksack, still haunts me!

Smiler Cuthbertson

The Game of Mountain and Chance
Baton Wicks 1995

Anne Sauvy
Price £8.99

Anne Sauvy specialised in ice climbing, ticking off, since the age of 17, the North Faces above her beloved Chamonix, together with some of the classic North Faces of Switzerland. Her list of 170 ascents would be the envy of any alpinist. But it was when, after a desperate five year period of miscarriages she found she was not strong enough to perform at the same level, that she turned to writing stories set in the mountains she knows so well. This is the second book of her stories to be translated into English, but in France there is a third collection of stories and a new novel, *Nadir*, about the Chamonix helicopter rescue service which was selling fast at the Passy Salon du Livre de Montagne this summer where I went to interview her.

The Boardman/Tasker judges this year found these stories contrived and some readers feel that Sauvy takes few narrative risks, producing predictable final twists. I disagree. Is it predictable to find that the hotelier who thinks that a death would draw attention to his village has to face the fact that it is his only son when his desire is fulfilled? This seems to me to reverberate with so much more than a simple plot twist that I am led to believe that some reviewers have missed the point. Perhaps it was those comparisons with Maupassant that greeted *Flammes de Pierre*. The elegance of Sauvy's stories is not their purpose. Part of their humanity derives from the moral justice of their ironies. Another part of their humanity is their focus on the tension between the mountaineers and the watchers. The emotional sensitivities being stepped around like a gaping crevasse in these relationships often drives the narrative. 'To write good stories you must not have too much technique' Anne Sauvy told me, 'because that is rather dry. You have to have what is in the hearts of all the different people, the mothers or wives of climbers, the people on the rope'.

Expecting to be bored because he'd been asked to liven up the conversation at dinner with an elderly woman who had a mild interest in mountaineering, the hero of *Table Talk* suddenly finds that it is the woman on his other side who asks him 'Perhaps you can tell me what happened to my son?' His dilemma is how much of the truth to tell her about her incompetent but fame-seeking son. These are the kind of moral and emotional conundrums that Anne Sauvy loves to explore. If that sounds rather sombre, nothing could be further from the truth, especially in this amazingly lively translation. One character complains about an article that 'said we were nothing but a bunch of posers who thought only about keeping fit and training for success. I know we do 250 pull-ups on one finger every morning before even going for a slash,

but...' You could almost believe that the author of these translations is married to a member of the Climbers' Club.

Terry Gifford

**The Best of Ascent
Twenty Five Years of the Mountaineering Experience
Diadem 1995**

Edited by Steve Roper and Allen Steck

Price £16.99

Ascent is the Sierra Club's annual mountaineering journal, published in California since 1967. The publisher's blurb says that 'Each successive edition .. has become a revered artefact of mountaineering culture' (just like some of the old Climbers' Club Journals sitting here on my shelves?...) 'Revered artefacts' sound a bit too creepy to me but I suppose I can guess what they mean. Don't let that put you off: there is some real tasty meat here. And not just in the quantity.

At nearly 400 pages long, with articles by 35 contributors, this collection or 'editors' choice' from the output of those years is far beyond my capacity to devour at even several sittings.

Of course, there is some pretentious or virtually incomprehensible stuff here (at least I think so) and occasionally I felt that, as has been said before, Americans and English are separated by the same language. But my few quibbles were overwhelmed by the quality of the rest. What a wonderful selection of bedtime reading! Lin snarled at me on several nights (more than normal, that is) because I wouldn't put the b.....light off until I'd got to the end of a piece.

The contents are split into sections, each having between four and eight articles, subdivided under such headings as *In the Vertical Paradise* or *A Sense of Whimsy* so that, once you have tried one of the pieces in a section, you have a rough idea of the style to expect from the others in the same section. There are a few carefully chosen black and white illustrations, but this anthology is not about pictures but about the pictures that words can create in your own mind, like listening to a good yarn on steam radio rather than surfing the television channels (our son of 16 years now watches two and sometimes three TV programmes at once, for Chrissake!). I realised that I had already read one or two of the articles before, somewhere in the dim past, probably when Ken Wilson gave away a free copy to help flog some of his other books in the 1980s, or was it '70s? And if I've seen that photo of Warren Harding picking his teeth with his thumbnail once, I've seen it a dozen times. But I am sure that over 95% of these articles were new to me – and to younger readers they will almost certainly all be new.

It is almost invidious to pick amongst so many delectable cherries, but I will do so just the same. I nearly died laughing at the mental picture created by the story of the climber who, on Mt McKinley, 'had stepped out for a quick trip to the latrine and the tent, held down solely by the weight of his sleeping bag, had decided to go for a stroll!' (*Roughing it on Denali* by Eric Sanford). One of my heroes, the great Italian, Guisto Gervasutti (the writers are an international lot, including our own climber-philosopher Harold Drasdo) is represented by a *A Moment of Suspense*, which is of breath-catching intensity. He, of course, climbed in the era when leaders just could not afford to fall off (and he was soloing to boot). I know all about being terrified of falling off myself, so this story gripped me, you may say, rigid. Then the two differing accounts of the ascent of the Deo de Deus, a lump of rock covered almost completely in Brazilian jungle, had me falling about anyway.

I won't go on any longer. Many of these articles are just like those Mars Bars – the ones that have lain forgotten at the bottom of your 'sac, been frozen a couple of times and then found again. They always taste the best; they've stood the test of time. If you get a chance to buy, beg or borrow a copy of this anthology, do it.

Bob Allen

**Southern Sandstone – Sixth Edition
Climbers' Club 1995**

Mike Vetterlein
Price £12.95

Dave Turner's *Southern Sandstone*, the fifth edition, was published in 1989, and followed an already distinguished CC lineage which had begun with Ted Pyatt's *South-East England* in 1956. Mike Vetterlein's sixth edition follows in this mould and is a guidebook which he, and any club should be proud of. Just look at some fairly dismal guides elsewhere, poorly bound, ill-mapped, with topos which are hard to follow.

Whichever way one turns, this guide is a quality document. In the Introduction you'll find the rules and suggestions thoughtfully explained but some ideas I had never even dreamed of (?blow-torching).



Robin Mazinke on the first ascent of 'Them Monkey Things' 6c at Bowles Rocks.

Photo: Robin Mazinke Collection

Compare these with the horrendous regulations on the Luxembourg Sandstone (a sort of giant Harrison's, if you haven't been) – a prison spell seems inevitable there. The expanded Historical chapter is a delight to local historians, while if you want to go climbing, you'll find out how to get there, how to behave, and that some of the routes at least are possible for normal mortals. Now Harrison's and Bowles do not provide for the intricacies of route finding Lliwedd, but the maps and plans, following this edition's predecessor, are clarity themselves.

Mike V has dropped the majority of the previous topo drawings – I could never really follow them anyway – and there are more photographs, of fine quality. I would put cross-references to these in the listed climbs, and vice-versa, and list the photos, too, after the maps and plans. And, by the way, I note the Series Editor slips in with a shot of himself by Vetterlein on *Advertisement Wall*, a 3c at High Rocks – but then, Dave Turner is on the back cover of the fifth edition, and only doing a 3b. He was soloing, though, and I think your rope looks a bit tight, Bob, but thanks very much for sending me a review copy. I shall use mine a lot. Everyone must buy this guide; really, it's excellent.

Charles Clarke

South Devon & Dartmoor Cordee 1995

Nick White
Price £13.95

Good guidebooks can be skilfully edited compilations from different writers, or, as is often the case with 'mainstream' areas, they can be well-crafted, well-checked updates of earlier works. Great guidebooks, on the other hand, are written by people whose sense of involvement with an area amounts to devotion. Devon seems to be a climbing area that inspires this level of devotion fairly consistently, and this guidebook is a worthy counterpart to Iain Peters' masterpiece *North Devon and Cornwall*. Both books capture the character of their areas beautifully, both are packed with humour and bubbling enthusiasm, and Nick's observations on the strange ways and dialect of Devonians are all the more acute for being made by a 'furriner'.

Aside from the north coast, the core of Devon climbing has always been Dartmoor, Torbay and Chudleigh Rocks. Any climber venturing beyond Bristol will have sampled one or more of these venues. A lot has changed in the last decade however, particularly on Dartmoor and around Torbay. Most climbers train these days, and in Devon that doesn't mean indoor climbing walls, it means outdoor bouldering. Dartmoor has clearly been scoured for bouldering areas and micro-routes and now there is recorded climbing all over the Moor, whether or not you bother to take a rope along. A rope is also optional in Torbay, where my old passions of sea-level traversing and 'deep water soloing' (a newly coined term for a long established activity) are enjoying a revival which is sure to be fuelled by Nick's colourful route descriptions.

Development in Torbay has been twin-track, with Anstey's Cove now an important sport climbing area while the Old Redoubt and the Sanctuary Wall have fulfilled their potential for top calibre adventure climbing. So far the bolt versus adventure conflict seems to be successfully resolved in Devon, with bolting being confined to certain quarried cliffs. Some of these, like Hazard Quarry and Torbryan, had little to recommend them in the past but are now enjoying considerable popularity especially in wet weather. Nick is the first author to do justice to Devon's wealth of climbing 'esoterica', and even the most seasoned

south-west addicts will find colourful new venues here to inspire them, from the dark secrets of the South Hams to the rich red sandstones and pearly chalk cliffs of East Devon.

It's hard to fault the practical side of this guidebook. The maps and diagrams demonstrate that the years Nick spent at Exeter College of Art were not wasted, the photo coverage is excellent and meticulous attention to detail is evident in the route descriptions. The parts of a guidebook which are usually a good read (Introduction, Historical etc.) are particularly entertaining and even the 'incomprehensible' geology notes are more compelling than usual. Clark Alston is credited (or blamed) for the historical and I'd like to take the opportunity of setting him right on the first ascent of *Moonraker*. According to Clark, the original start taken by Pete Biven and myself, is (somewhat amazingly nearly 30 years after the first ascent!) 'a bone of heated contention'. I found this puzzling so my last trip to Devon saw me rooting around in my old dad's loft looking for an account of the climb I'd written while still at school. Well, I found it, and this is what occurred:

We were heading for the obvious crack which is now the first pitch of *Moonraker* but once you have traversed around beneath the cliff base you can no longer see it. We went a bit too far and belayed beneath the first obvious feature you come to – the slanting corner which is now the first pitch of *Goddess of Gloom*. I led off up this, using a peg for aid to pass an overhang and took a stance above it. Pete followed and I'm pretty sure he didn't use the aid, but what impressed me was when he led the continuation corner by bridging *facing outwards*! I had never seen this technique before and got very gripped when I tried it myself seconding. Pete swung rightwards out of the top of the corner and made a short traverse to what is now the normal stance. On another occasion (Pete made the first five ascents of *Moonraker*) Pete found an easier but greatly inferior start well to the left and the modern first pitch, the crackline that eluded us, was first led by Frank Cannings.

A climber of some repute once asked me whether there was any decent climbing in Devon. I replied that I couldn't think of a better climbing area in the British Isles. Given the variety of cliffs and settings, the mild climate and the sheer number of stunning routes both in this guidebook area, along the Culm Coast and on Lundy Island, I'm not sure that I've changed my opinion.

Pat Littlejohn

The following reviews were unfortunately missed from last year's Journal and, being important Climbers' Club guidebooks, a full review is included this year – please buy them!

Lundy Climbers' Club 1994

Gary Gibson and Paul Harrison
Price £12.95

Lundy is a granite jewel set 20 miles off the coast of Devon. To climb on Lundy requires planning and commitment and those who venture there, as 15 of us did for the fifth annual CC meet, in the heat and drought of August '95, will feel special, knowing that whilst on the island they are a select few.

Surprisingly this is the first Climbers' Club guide to Lundy. The Club has a long pioneering association with the island through Keith Lawder, Peter Biven, Pat Littlejohn, Frank Cannings and Simon Cardy. Gary Gibson and Paul Harrison are superbly qualified to write this guide. Gary needs no introduction. He is responsible for a host of brilliant climbs – not to mention a wealth of controversy – and Paul has over 100 new routes to his credit. They describe 730 routes and provide all the information any climber might need to ensure a host of adventures and with rappels, low tide traverses and problematic escapes, adventures are often what you get!

There are just over 100 routes between Difficult and Severe – fewer than one might expect on a rocky coastline of over seven miles – but Lundy is a beautiful island with many interesting places to walk to, visit and explore, and is well suited for casual or less ambitious climbers. Middle grade climbers can enjoy 140 VSs and 100 HVs. For those looking for sterner stuff there are 380 extremes of which just less than half are E1 or E2. The quality of the routes is high. About 300 routes are given one or more stars but of 60 routes that achieve the coveted three star award, 25 are E5 or harder!

As with all sea cliffs, finding routes from above is often tricky and on Lundy routes frequently involve difficult or complicated access. The routes are described logically starting in the south and working clockwise round the coast – and in this respect the guide is easier to use than the previous guide. The authors have done an excellent job of enabling one to find routes and once on the route the descriptions are accurate and easy to follow – even if the climbing isn't. The 15 maps are very clear – the *Devil's Slide* diagram might show more useful information – and the 17 crag photographs are clear and helpful.

There are also 15 excellent and inspiring colour photographs – though the wave in the photo of *Diamond Solitaire* – a truly beautiful pitch – might dampen the enthusiasm of some! We watched a party forced to swim by a rapidly rising tide, as we lounged in the sun having completed the route.

This guide is the standard size and format and has a durable plastic cover. With nearly 300 pages the book is quite substantial. The history of climbing on the island, and list of first ascents are both limited to about 20 pages. The book is everything we have come to expect from the CC publications team – well written and definitive – much more than just a reference book. It is an essential volume for anyone wishing to climb on Lundy and at well under two pence per route it is good value too.

Jody and Mark Vallance

**Llanberis
Climbers' Club 1994**

**Paul Williams
Price £12.95**

There is little doubt that this volume will be seen as a memorial to Paul Williams' long association with North Wales and with Llanberis in particular. His death on Froggatt due to a snapping hold that many of us have pulled on was a cruel blow cutting short his life. I always reckoned he still had many editions of the Llanberis guide still to come. This latest guide is a chunky volume (though less chunky than its rather oversized predecessor which was also Paul's work) that covers everything in the vicinity of Llanberis apart for the strange goings on in the slate quarries. Personally I think this is how it should be, Llanberis is a traditional haunt, despite having its fair share of modern desperates. The quarries are a whole different world, haunted even in good weather by wandering souls who should be 'out on the hill' instead of grubbing about in holes in the ground.

I would have loved to have had the chance to argue with Paul about whether *Left Wall* is E2 or E3, whether *Lubyanka* is really worth three stars and if photo-diagrams are better than drawings of the cliff (and the guide has a healthy mixture of both). I would like to have gone on and told him how I appreciated the oddly pastel front cover, allusively reminding me of great summer days on the Grochan. Sadly such discussions are no longer possible. It is perhaps enough to say that I like the guide, I could find no mistakes in it apart from the misplacing of the diagram for Clogwyn Gafn, and even with that there is a reference to it in the correct place. The pictures are varied and illustrate the variety available in the valley, covering a spread of grades from V.Diff to E8. The historical section is informative and readable and the star ratings are pretty much spot on. Thankfully there is no graded list! The newly described area of Cwm Glas Bach gives a whole new set of routes for those who have ticked the rest of the Pass, and amongst these are some excellent short test pieces ideal for folks looking for tough challenges that aren't too long and aren't too far from the road.

There can be no really fitting memorial to such an enthusiast as Paul Williams but this book goes a little way to saying something about the man. Like him it is a solid, dependable workmanlike (craftsman indeed) volume and his love and respect for the hills shines through the well written and researched text. I don't know who will get the job of the next Llanberis rewrite but this one is going to be a hard act to follow.

Chris Craggs

Area Notes

Lundy 1995

Following the scandalous turmoil, family break-ups and mass resignations of many of the island's staff the previous year, encouraged by the worst of tabloid journalism, a new chapter was opened during 1995 with the appointment of a new Warden and Agent, Emma Parke and Tony Blackler. Both are no strangers to Lundy and have made commitments to maintaining the existing arrangements for climbers. Now that the dust has settled, regular and new visitors alike can look forward to a fresh outlook and management of the island.

Not much however could be done about the acute water shortage, a problem for Lundy during the summer at the best of times despite the recent installation of new water reservoirs. At one point half of the livestock had to be transported to the mainland to conserve supplies and the closing of the island to visitors was narrowly avoided.

As usual the bulk of the new routing took place during the long hot days in August. The main highlights were contributions from three climbers. Paul Donnithorne pulled a plum out of Deep Zawn, Mark Hopkins attacked the Focal Face and Paul Harrison launched out of Starship Zawn. This was the summer in which *Antiworlds* also saw several ascents with common consensus emerging that not only is it probably E5 6b but it is the lost and forgotten classic of the south-west.

The action began in the far north with a series of routes in and around the North Light Area by Tom Skinner and Rasik Parmar. These were *Joseph Hard Severe*, *Thomas Severe*, *White Water Hard Severe* and *Slight Separation Hard Severe*. In Arch Zawn Tom Rainbow and Mike Adams were attracted to a direct finish of *Rainbow* which they named *Rainbow's Wits End* E3 6a. This is now the better way of finishing the route than the original loose version albeit at a tougher grade. In the Phantom Zawn area Paul Harrison and Mike Snell squeezed three more routes out of Winston's Wall with *Casper* E3 6a, *The Tibetan* E1 5b, and *The Phantasm* Very Severe. In the same area Paul also added a direct finish to *Ripping Yarns* at E3 6a.

On the Torrey Canyon Tom Rainbow and N. Burton came up a smashing direct line through *White Collar Worker - The Ocean Doesn't Want Me Anymore* E4 6a, a route which left the Harrison team wondering just how they managed to miss that one. Another route was added to the Diamond. The often talked about lower girdle finally got its long awaited ascent. *Transatlantica* E3 6a by Mark Bartley seconded by Simon Cardy takes the parallel break below *Coast to Coast* from right to left.

Perhaps the biggest prize of the year went to Paul Harrison and Mike Snell with their breach of the walls between *Starship Trooper* and *Araucaria*. *Solaris* E4 5c, 6a follows the first part of *Starship* to an uncomfortable hanging belay, then strikes out across the undercut grooves. A low tide, late in the day is required. Nearby, out on St. James's Stone Simon Cardy found *A Climb called Alice* E1 5b which together with Mike Snell and Tony Sawbridge's recent routes make the stone fine adventure.

Moving down to the Three Quarter Wall area Harrison emerged with more quality middle grade climbs whilst singing Van Morrison tunes in his head. *Days Like This* E1 left of *Mad Axeman* and *Goldmother* HVS, are particularly good, in Ten Foot Zawn. On the Pyramid John Wilson, along with Chris Snell, and Mike Adams found *Aches of Loaf* Severe.

In Deep Zawn Harrison teamed up with Paul Donnithorne. The twisting groove in the south arête of the Zawn produced *In at the Deep End* E2 5c, and the thin crack-line in the right-hand side of the *Gracelands* wall was *Timelord* E4 6a led by Harrison and Donnithorne respectively.

Down in the south of the Island Ceunant team leader Mark Hellewell and S. Traynor discovered a new variation to an old favourite *Centaur* in Landing Craft Bay, *Wiggy Trip on Jugs* HVS 5a. The term 'wiggy' is a physical euphoric sensation felt when doing hard moves, or so I am reliably informed by the first ascentionists. Meanwhile on the Focal Face more serious events were taking place by the Bristol based and Lundy regular Mark Hopkins. Mark's XS 5b, 5a grade to his *Massive Attack* is the only clue to the line somewhere in the area of *Messing with the Kid*.

Simon Cardy

North Wales 1995

During the warmest, driest summer for years climbing was all but impossible on many crags, with sunburn, sweat and lethargy being among the hazards for the average climber. Balmy evenings bouldering in the Pass was a pleasure taken up by an increased number of people fried off the more popular crags during the day, and the most un-frequented of shady mountain cliffs became ephemerally popular, with a generous spattering of new routes added at these cooler altitudes.

However, some people will never be deterred, and hard new routes (easier ones too) cropped up on a variety of our favourite cliffs, including the hot ones, and generally by the people that hard new routes are expected from. The most prolific of these was Twid Turner, a Plas y Brenin instructor who spent his spare time on Castell Helen, where he eventually worked out *Vitalstatistik*. This route was prepared, and some of it practised over a period of time, with a few pegs placed on abseil in the evenings after work. The four pitches were each climbed free on different days, three pitches alone worth E7 6c. The first 5b pitch and the second 6c pitch were climbed on sight, and although Twid felt that he ought to climb all four pitches in a day, he was unable to due to an elbow strain, but for someone to come along and try the route ground up, on sight, would be to embark on an E8, (Steve Mayers' route *Extinction* on the Main Cliff was the first at Gogarth to be confirmed at this grade). Louise Thomas, Twid's girlfriend who also works as an instructor at Plas y Brenin, was the patient second. Another route which took a while, four years in fact, was *Follower of Hopeless Causes* in Thunderbird Zawn, a three pitch E7 again by Twid and Louise which includes an exciting traverse across the lip of an arch. A recommendation that dry conditions are essential could mean that this route won't see a repeat before the next hot, dry summer. Inland, on the Skyline Buttress in the Ogwen Valley, Twid added *Heart of Stone* E7, and *A Pocket Full of Kryptonite* E6 went up a little buttress near Craig y Rhaeadr in Llanberis Pass.

Well, those were all Twid's very big routes, and meanwhile Nick Dixon was searching out very small routes, preferably arêtes, and came up with *Open Heart* in Cwm Idwal, a slabby but fierce little 30ft arête to the right of the Slabs, going at E6 6b; nearby, opposite and up from Ogwen Cottage, an overhanging arête of approximately the same height yielded *Daisy World* E7 6c, this being Nick's third short, hard arête in a couple of years, the first being *Beginner's Mind* in Llanberis Pass in 1993, a hard and scary but disputed E8 which has seen more ascents than most E7s in the area. Maybe it's because it is close to the road. Over in Pont y Pant (Lledr), he also added a thigh-splitting *Half a Jesus*, a direct start to an existing route which entailed a full-on crucifix move reckoned to be British 7a, but safe enough at E5. There may have been a few more routes of Nick's, but he although he gets highly motivated to do new, technical, scary routes, once he's done them he becomes apathetic about writing them up.

With Llanberis Pass being such a popular area, most of the well-protected or not too desperate routes have been done, which leaves some not very well protected and/or desperate routes (or those with long walk-ins) for a few people to psyche up to do, and many of the remaining obvious lines are bound to be arêtes, which fall into this category. Owain Jones, who lovingly nicknamed Clogwyn Tyllau (above Carreg Wastad) Arêteland and did the difficult *Owain's Arête* in '89, accepted the challenge of another arête here and came up with *Jem* E5/6 6b/c, protected by pegs and a rather small Friend. This had a rapid second ascent by ever-grinning Tim Emmett, who incidentally also did the second ascent this year of the long Dawes-Raine girdle traverse *Rupert Road* E7 on Cloggy, with Chris Wentworth.

George Smith would normally have quite a few new routes under his belt in a year like this; however, the arrival of his daughter Emma slowed him down a bit, and he only managed three major new routes. *Ermintrude* E6 6a in Blacksmith Zawn, Gogarth was climbed on sight with Adam Wainwright, and as usual was rather steep, and over in Flytrap Zawn George finally completed the horizontal *Roof Rack* E7 6c, apologetically writing in the new routes book 'attempts over several years, I'm afraid'. Then, once the bird ban came off the Diamond on the Little Orme, Llandudno, George was quick off the mark with *To Boat - Or Not To Be*, an overhanging, juggy bolted French 7b (E5/6) on the far left of the crag.

Such long spells of good weather brought hard mountain routes into condition, making them drier and warmer, and as already mentioned, Emmett and Wentworth did the second ascent of *Rupert Road* on Cloggy, while Johnny Dawes set his sights on Nick Dixon's *Face Mecca*, and with the ascent complete, said it was an incredible experience and considered the route to be an amazing E9. The route was not done on sight, but on completion of the route, a fine effort, an ecstatic Dawes lowered off the belay without stripping the (little) gear from the route. Fortunately there were scavengers around to clear up.

Another hard route, this one on Gogarth, has received more ascents now. *The Enchanted Broccoli Garden* on Red Wall was first climbed by Paul Pritchard, bravely seconded by Mike Thomas. On the original ascent, a belay was taken at the end of the first pitch which most people would have laughed at, if they weren't crying, and a fall by the leader leaving this belay would have resulted in death to both. Thus, an on-sight repeat was slow in coming, Twid Turner having done the second ascent a few years ago after

abseil inspection (not surprising considering the grade and horror story description), but this summer two parties simultaneously decided they were ready for this fearsome route. Grant Farquhar and Chris Wentworth got in first. It transpired that although some of the rock is suspect, usual for Red Wall, and the climbing is difficult, runners are so plentiful and desirable that Grant ran out of them and lowered (!) back down to the belayer to collect more. What's more, he discovered a very sound belay a few feet from the original belay, not off route, which meant the dilemma of whether to clip into the abseil rope (as Twid had felt necessary) was over. The second pitch is a little easier than the first, with adequate gear, but both pitches rate 6b. The second team on, only days later was Crispin Waddy and Steve Mayers. Armed with useful information from Grant and Chris, Crispin still managed to run out of gear on the first pitch, and yes, lowered down to the ground to collect more! By now it had been decided that it must be physically impossible to carry enough gear, with Steve groaning under the weight of gear collected seconding this hard 6b pitch.

From sporting routes to sport routes, Neil Carson has been making his mark on Lower Pen Trwyn, Great Orme, Llandudno. The original hard route of the crag was *Statement of Youth* F8a, by Ben Moon in 1984, and this has undergone variations and straightenings over a period of time. *Youthanasia* F8b was a slightly straighter and harder version by Steve Mayers in 1991, following *Statement* to the end of the heel hook traverse, then gaining independence by going straight up with extreme difficulty to the top, while this year, Neil took the direct line into *Youthanasia*, adding a very hard start to the already difficult climbing above to give *Infanticide* F8c, of equal difficulty to the hardest route on the crag, Jerry Moffat's *Liquid Amber*, and one of the hardest climbs in the world. Still in the mood for tidying up, he straightened out Moon's new route *Seagull's Dilemma* by eliminating the traverse low down, giving *The Walking Mussel*, conservatively graded 8b, then climbed *Bad Bad Boy* without the major traverse left halfway, heading instead in a straight line up to the belay to give *Pas de Deux* F8a+. He's not called the 'Walking Muscle' for nothing.

Still on Lower Pen Trwyn, the youthful 36 year old Fliss Butler redpointed *Statement of Youth* F8a, her first route of this difficulty. Fliss' priorities have not usually been redpointing sport routes, so this is a particularly fine effort. On the subject of youthful ladies, Angela Soper led *Right Wall* E5 6a this summer, appearing to be improving all the time. Glenda Huxter, an Anglesey inhabitant has been ticking off the bold and technical routes of Gogarth and Llanberis Pass, proving that not all good women climbers have to stick to the 'safe' bolted routes. Glenda's E5s are too numerous for me to list here, but this year's E6s include Gogarth's *Blackleg*, *Long Run Direct* and *Me*, and in Llanberis Pass she did *King Wad* on Esgair Maen Gwyn (Scimitar Ridge) and *Lord of the Flies* on Dinas Cromlech, enjoying all of them, even though Lord did become something of an epic, taking 3¼ hours. Glenda's stamina is legendary, but it is her superb technique rather than her strength which enables her to climb such difficult routes. Glenda also did a new route of her own; *Care in the Community* on Gogarth's Red Wall, at E5 6a it is the hardest first ascent of an 'adventure' route in Britain by a woman.

I can't write a 1995 North Wales news report without mentioning the unhappy event of Paul Williams' death whilst soloing at Froggatt in June. Although Paul's home was Sheffield in more recent times, he had lived in Wales and was a regular visitor to the area, his gift of the gab having won him the sales rep job at DMM in Llanberis, and he was often seen soloing in the Pass on a nice evening or swaying round the Heights afterwards recounting some tale or other. His knowledge and deep interest in climbing in Snowdonia were perfect curriculum vitae for creating guidebooks to the area, complete with all the anecdotes he was famous for digging up, and making up. Even though he managed to irritate most people at one time or another, he was a big character, and has left a void.

Finally, the social scene in North Wales has taken a turn in the last year or so with the opening of the Beacon Climbing Centre in October 1994. Run by myself and Steve Mayers, and built by ourselves with the help of dozens of volunteers and skilled locals, it is about 5 miles from Llanberis, and is an indoor climbing wall on a par with the biggest and best in Britain, by far the biggest in Wales, and its lack of elitism has made it popular with locals and visitors, with enough to keep anyone going at whatever level. The Beacon's fun competitions have attracted the unlikeliest of competitors, from 6 to 60+ years old, and no-one ever seems to be that bothered about prizes. The Beacon has, however, enabled the keenest and the best climbers to train through the long, wet winters and be fighting fit for the summer's tick list; and for the rest, well, it beats evenings in front of the telly or down the pub, sometimes. And you'll be glad to hear it hasn't replaced real climbing, because we were quiet during the long hot summer of '95!

Gill Lovick

Peak District 1995

The furious activity Peak Gritstone experienced in 1994 was largely absent in 1995. It wasn't that people were any less enthusiastic, but more that good conditions were much rarer, with a sweaty and prolonged summer heatwave ruling out any deeds of daring do for a good proportion of the year, and the autumn proving to be a disappointment to those who can only get onto the grit at weekends.

Last year, Geoff Milburn began his enforced retrospective stating 'With the Chatsworth guide in its final stages of preparation....' before embarking on a whistle-stop anticlockwise tour of the edges, beginning at Black Rocks. As this statement still applies, and thus, remarkably, we have not seen a new guide in the definitive series for over four years now, I thought I would do the same.

Black Rocks saw a couple more hard new routes to add to the clutch from '94. Mark Turnbull was responsible for *Badmotor Finger* E5 6b, to the right of *Liquid AB's*, as well as *Slanted and Enchanted* E6 6b which bridges backwards out of *Jammed Stone Chimney* to gain a pocket on the left wall, finishing up the short arête. Ollie Ryall made a bold if rather esoteric ascent of the hanging slab in an isolated bay some 400m along the High Peak Trail, and up the path which forks off to the right – *Slim Wrap* E5 5b. On the repeat front here, big news was southern raider Shane Ohly's very impressive 2nd ascent of *The Angel's Share*, Johnny Dawes' horrifying slab route to the left of *Velvet Silence*.

The Amber Valley crags seemed destined for oblivion judging by the lack of activity in recent years, though Geoff Hornby, Mark Turnbull and friends did some exploring in 1995. Highlights of their batch of routes were *National Power* E5 6b, the obvious challenge above *Happy Landings* at Turning Stone Edge, and *Morning Wood* E5 6b, the roof to the right of *Happy Landings*; both these led by Turnbull. Hornby climbed the left side of the *Master of Suspense* arête to give *Mistress in Suspenders* E4 6b.

At Eastwood Rocks Simon Lee climbed the thin crack in the arête left of *Corpse Crack*, *Bristol Dreaming*, E4 6c. Geoff Hornby added *Mr Crispy Cruise* E3 5c which follows *Cave Arête* to the break before moving up and right to finish. The hanging groove above *Ghoul* gave Jon Fullwood an imposing E4 6b, *Beyond the Forbidden Forest*, whilst Dave Turnbull climbed the bulging wall right of *Corpse Crack* – *Sons and Lovers*, E3 5c.

At Birchens Paul Fearn climbed *Midships* E4 6c which is an excellent footless direct start to *Midshipman*, climbing the obvious groove.

On Gardoms Edge Andy Popp opened his '95 account with a scary new route up the shallow groove left of *Crocodile*. This groove was actually the line I had gone to look at when I climbed *Make it Snappy*, and from what I can remember there was an embarrassing lack of holds and protection, so I'm sure it deserves its E7 6c grade, and name of *Ecky Thump*, which Andy very nearly did the first time he tried to lead it.

Curbar was also on Andy's hit list when, late in the year, he led the scary slab left of *Avalanche Wall*, following the line mistakenly drawn as *Portrait of a Legend* in the *Froggatt* guidebook. Andy's route is E6 6b and independent all the way. Moving along the edge, Robin Barker climbed the obvious arête beneath *Diet of Worms*, *Slackers* E7 6b. The only other new routes at Curbar were Duncan Frisch's *Landlord's Out* which climbs the bulge and wall left of *Buckle's Sister* at E4 6a and *For the Good of the Cause*, E4 6b, which starts just left of *Big Rocker* and makes a couple of hard moves to gain a line of fingerholds leading leftwards to the finish of *Combat Les Pellicules*, this one climbed by Andy Barker.

Moving to Froggatt, the perfect isolated buttress which is home to *The Screaming Dream* saw its number of routes doubled in 1995. First off, and graded to ensure maximum hype, Jerry Moffatt bravely climbed the wall right of *The Crack* to give *Renegade Master*, a couple of pre-placed RPs protecting the technical top-out. Just to the right, *The Famous Chris Ellis* has now been joined by *The Infamous Gavin Ellis* which finger traverses left from the start of the former, to climb the sloping ledges at E4 6b, courtesy of golden oldies Mark Pretty and Chris Plant. On the boulders Ian Farrar climbed the face right of *Turd Burglar*, *Dogs Die in Hot Cars* E6 7a. On the main edge, Andy Popp made the first ascent, as opposed to the first claim, of the arête left of *March Hair* at E7 6b, whilst the delightfully named *Better Dead than Smeg*, E6 6c was Steve Fearn's solution to the long standing problem of the independent direct start to *Brightside*.

Millstone seems to have been taking a bit of a battering recently judging by the very heavy cleaning scars appearing all over the quarry. Of the less intrusive new routes, Julian Lines' route *The Psycho Path* E6 6b, which climbs a parallel line left of *The Snivelling* is worth a mention. Millstone has also seen one of its last great problems climbed (no not claimed, climbed!) when Adrian Berry finally soloed the line of peg scars between *Embankment Routes 1 and 2* to give the appropriately named *Elm Street*, a frightening and technical E7 6c and a fine effort on a piece of rock long deserving a route.

Most important of the new additions in the Burbage Valley was Simon Jones' well rehearsed solo of the left arête of the leaning tower left of *Roof Route*, a short but nonetheless very fine feature which has the unfortunate characteristic of being situated above one of the worst landings at Burbage, and (you've guessed it) having no runners. *Stampede* E7/8 6c, is certainly one of the nastier challenges on this most

uncompromising of the Eastern Edges. A few days after Simon bagged this, I led an interesting new pitch up the left arête of the *Boggart Buttress* on the same bit of crag. *Balance It Is*, E7 6c climbs *Boggart Left Hand* to just below the top of the crack, from where a long span left reaches the arête which gives a sustained exercise in power and balance. The combination of excellent runners in the *Boggart* crack, and even a little nut en route make this an unusually protectable gritstone arête, though as usual it has been ignored completely! Perhaps Keith Sharples, who followed the first ascent, will take up the challenge and bag the second?

Apart from these couple of routes, Burbage South seemed to be the sole preserve of Darren Thomas who was plugging the gaps with his limitless enthusiasm. Highlights included *Child's Play* E7 6c, a technical direct start to *Parthian Shot* as far as the break from which a traverse was made into *Brooks Crack*; *Freak Power*, E5 6b, the large hanging scoop about 20m left of the *Thistle Funnel*; *Heidi Boo*, E1 5c, the green slab and capping rib 8m right of *Freak Power*; *Bobby Dazzler* E4 6a, the face right again; *Bedazzle* E3 5c and *New Daz Ultra* E5 6a, two lines on a short vertical wall above a dangerous landing, round to the right of *Saul*; *Razzle Dazzle*, E6 6c, the face left of *The Ramp* in the Quarry and *Lovesick Puppy* E4 7a, the serious face right of *Hell for Leather*. Darren's obsession with Burbage is actually a result of it being the nearest crag to Fox House where the cheap bus fares end, so heaven help the other edges if he ever gets a car!!

Up on Burbage North Richie Patterson led *Happily Ever After* E6 6c, the hanging nose just right of *Wall Chimney* to the small capping roof, moving leftwards to finish. To the right of this John Allen's *Nefertiti* received several repeats and is reckoned to be a very enjoyable (i.e. dead safe!) proposition.

The only new route done on Higgar Tor in '95 was Simon Jones' *Rough Justice*, E4 6c, a smart mantelshelf between *Chance Encounter* and *Sickle Overhang*.

Stange itself has had a quieter year in 1995, though Joe Brown added a bold proposition with his solo of the arête left of *Shine On - Cemetery Waits* E7 6c, which along with Johnny Dawes' lead of perhaps the ultimate in nose grinding sloping finishes with his direct finish to *Snug as a Thug on a Jug - Warm Love* E6 7b, were the only real desperates climbed this year. The latter was aided and abetted by the encouragement of a TV camera inches from Johnny's scabbling limbs, which should make entertaining viewing sometime in the spring. Johnny also soloed the wall right of *Snug as a Thug*.. to give *Mumbles*, E6 6c.

Although the occasional new Stange testpiece seems to crawl out of the woodwork, perhaps more amazing is the number of good middle grade additions which continue to be climbed by those with a bit of imagination and an eye for a line. In 1995 Bill Birch climbed several good routes on the edge, pride of place going to *Sands of Time* which takes the oft considered line left of Robin Hood's *Cave Innominate*. The route climbs the wall 1m left of the *Innominate's* thin crack before moving left to a Friend placement (this placement was also gained direct at E4 6a). The upper section climbs leftwards through the strenuous scooped roof above the hourglass pillar to produce a classic outing. Bill also led *Echoes* E3 5c the now obvious line leading left from beneath *Black Slab* to pull round the overhang and hand traverse to the left arête of the buttress, which is climbed to join the finishing moves of *Wall of Sound*. In addition *Seduced by the Dark Side of Climbing*, E3 6b is a bouldery direct crossing the roof to the left of *Paucity Direct*, before finishing direct up the headwall; *Mossie* climbs the shallow groove and thin headwall between *Tip Off* and *Manchester Buttress* at E3 6a and is apparently well to the right of the other new line on the headwall which may be called *My Best Friend*. Finally Bill led *Introversion* E1 5c which climbs the slab and roof left of *Inverted V*.

Andy Barker, Martin Veale and the famous Chris Ellis paid a productive visit to Bamford managing to bag three new routes in an afternoon. *White Rhino Safari* E2 6a climbs the undercut left arête of the isolated buttress 200m left of *Berry Wall*; *Two Real Doleys Scrounging* E3 6b is the scoop in the upper part of the wall right of *Fizz* gained by a very precarious move, and finally an unnamed E3 6a climbs the wall above the *Queen Sabe* traverse utilising a variety of small pockets and pebbles. Andy was first past the post on the first two, and Martin won the race for the latter.

This activity seemed to be a catalyst for a mini new route boom, at least by Bamford standards. The Salmon slab is one of the finest pieces of grit on the Eastern edges, though a quick glance down it from above and to the side soon reveals its lack of any reasonable holds, and distinctly dubious 'slab' credentials. The original line of *The Salmon* was one of Johnny Dawes' finest routes, and he was disappointed to learn of its temporary demise after a large and important pebble broke off. Johnny returned to the buttress and managed to re-lead the original line at a rather harder E7 6c grade, though this only served to whet his appetite for more of the same. The result was a direct start to *The Salmon* which climbs direct to the obvious pockets the original route gains from the left. This was a truly desperate piece of climbing which Johnny, no slouch at this style, felt comprised three 7a moves in a row, and merited an overall E8 grade for the cumulative experience. Nick Dixon returned to this same piece of rock later in the

year to lead a line he first top-roped in 1985 in mistake for the original *Salmon*. *Salmon Left Hand*, which climbs direct from where the original moves right to the aforementioned pockets, is the easiest of the trio rating E6 6b, though it looks scary enough to me. It has already seen a number of repeats, and anyone managing all three could certainly consider themselves accomplished in this particular aspect of the gritstone art.

A totally different gritstone style can be found just above the Salmon slab where the bristling line of overhangs are impenetrable except for that abomination otherwise known as *Undercut Crack*, and the currently defunct A35. Actually Johnny Dawes had other ideas and after tidying up the lower tier, he set about taming the apparently holdless and protectionless twin runnels to the right of A35. What must have been a very bold lead followed and Johnny was certainly pleased with the result, *Avoiding the Traitors*, E7 6c.

The warm summer meant that any hard new routing on the Eastern Edges was virtually out of the question, though some high level activity was possible by those in possession of a stout pair of legs. One such contender is Andy Barker, who flashed the not insignificant approach to *Ashop Edge* on Kinder, and was well chuffed to return with a new route in the bag as well. *Monkey Madness*, E5 6c, climbs the front of the buttress between *Jester Crack* and *Lobster Crack*, and features an essentially unprotected 6c roof problem to start and an easier, though nonetheless steep and serious headwall – certainly a major addition to the moorland grit. In the Chew Valley Paul Clark enjoyed the *Wilderness Experience*, E5 6b, when he led the immaculate hanging slab right of *Caution Crack*, gained from halfway up that route.

A similarly lofty location was visited by Paul Mitchell and Andy, with Paul bagging an equally important new route on Howshaw Tor on Derwent Edge. *Engram*, E5 6c climbs the obvious roof in the middle of the crag, and provides a desperate though protectable testpiece for which you shouldn't have to queue (and the view isn't bad either!).

Staffordshire was extremely quiet on the new route front in 1995, though at least one big repeat merits a mention. In fact Simon Nadin's classic unrepeatable arête B4 XS received it's 2nd, 3rd and 4th ascents in the same day when a strong multi-national team descended on Hen Cloud from Sheffield. Seb Grieve led it first with French ace Jean-Minh Trin-Thieu and Australian Dave Jones hot on his heels. Seb then went on to lead *Aretenophobia* E6 6b, up the blunt rib left of *Chameleon* with a side runner (placed on the lead) in that route to protect the start. Dave Jones was swiftly in for a repeat.

Finally on this tour of the edges, was a brilliant new addition to Gentleman's Rock in The Lower Churnet Valley, from the evergreen Martin Veale. *High Speed Imp Act* E4 6b is described as a micro gem, the Churnet's answer to Ramshaw's classic *Tierdrop* and involves powerful and dynamic moves up the steeply overhanging wall right of *Gentleman John*. Martin was unseeded (allegedly) by a heavyweight Sheffield team featuring John Allen, Mark and Nicky Stokes, so be warned.

Whilst all this gritstone activity was underway, someone suddenly realised that it hadn't rained for a while, and perhaps it would be worth going down into Cheedale to see if the Cornice was starting to dry out. Not only was it dry, but the mystery of where had everyone been for the last few weeks was solved. They were all there!

The biggest news was John Hart's eventual success on his fine project right of K3. The result was undoubtedly a very hard route, provisionally graded F8b+ by John who named it *Forty Two*, this being the answer to life, the universe and everything, and coincidentally the age of the first ascensionist.

Although *Forty Two* was the most substantial new route, there were several others, along with a whole host of repeats culminating in Ian Vickers remarkable flash of *Monumental Armbalster*, which was certainly in the best condition ever with the grade consequently settling down as the summer wore on.

Perhaps the best of the other new lines was Chris Wright's inspired traverse of the very obvious slab (sic!) which runs leftwards from under the roof of *Taylor Made*. *Against the Grain* is somewhere in the F7c/F7c+ grade and provides an intricate and technical outing, culminating in a crimping crux bulge to the left of *Masculine Power Trip*. In the same area Keith Sharples completed his project to the right of *Forehead Trombones* which quickly saw a one day repeat by Mike Lea. *Sharp Practise* caps a technical leaning wall with a wild leftwards jump which Keith originally thought F8b, though once again properly dry conditions have allowed a bit of a re-think.

Back in the traditional part of the crag Mark Pretty added a brief but nonetheless enjoyable direct finish to *Old Man River* at F7b+, and *Spiders from Mars* was transformed from the status of 'never been done in years' to the most popular warm up on the crag, such are the wonders of modern technology.

Similar technology was applied to the Embankment where *Hungry Eyes* is now the most popular F7a+ on the crag, whilst Darren Hawkins climbed *The Whiting on the Wall* F7c, the direct on *Sturgeon in the Cupboard*.

Across the river on Two Tier, Chris Wright climbed a very enjoyable direct on *Seven Pounds Overweight* – *Lightweight* F7c+, whilst Mike Lea repeated *Aberration* which he felt merited the dizzy grade of F8a.

Another old Nadin route to see some attention in 1995 was the rather more reasonable *Flight of Icarus* which is fortunately nothing like as blank as it looks from below, and offers excellent wall climbing to a new lower off.

Runyon's Corner saw some rare activity in 1995. Gary Gibson produced *Open Verdict* F7b left of *Smash, Bang Wallop*, *The Jury's Out* F6c+, the rounded pillar left of *Big Butch*, *Underclapped* F7a, the wall left of the back corner of the bay, and *Overlapped* F7a, a leftwards line left again. On the Third Lift, Gibson climbed *All Fall Down* F7b, the front of the tower left of *Disraeli Gears*, and *All Made Up* F7b, the right hand side of the arête right of *Eye Shadows*.

Finally in Cheedale, Ruth Jenkins redpointed the blank leaning wall to the left of the ivy frond on Rhubarb Buttress. Apparently *Devine* 8a+ was discovered and cleaned by John Welford who then gave the line to Ruth as a birthday present. John had, however, already put up one of the hardest routes on Peak limestone earlier in the summer when he successfully redpointed his long standing project to the right of *Zeke the Freak* at Rubicon Wall. *The Bastard Free* climbs the approximate line of the not so old aid route *Free that you Bastards*, and its declared F8c grade could well prove to be on the conservative side.

The other big news on the limestone repeat front was Ruth Jenkins' redpoint of *Zeke the Freak* at Rubicon Wall, considered the hardest sport route in the Peak when it was first climbed, and at F8b another step forward in the standards climbed by a British woman.

Elsewhere in Water Cum Jolly, Neil Bentley redpointed *Superfly* F8a+ which climbs a dynamic line through the roofs right of *Albertocracy* on the (other) Cornice, whilst Malcolm Taylor managed to keep sufficient rock in place to climb the rubbly wall left of *Tin Of*, at Raven Tor – *Crumblefish* F8a.

This was not the only new route climbed on Raven Tor in 1995. Earlier in the year, Jerry Moffatt made a welcome return to form, and finally succeeded on his project left of *Chimes of Freedom*. *Evolution* F8c+, is now one of the hardest sport climbs in the country, though this didn't stop Malcolm Smith nipping in for a quick second ascent.

Gary Gibson did everyone a service during the summer by re-gearing most of the routes at Craig y Biceps, which is now an excellent training ground, once properly dry. Gary also climbed three new lines, two of which were rather disappointing compared to their neighbours, but the third was an absolute three star classic and without doubt the best route on the crag. *Laughing at the Rain*, F7c, follows the radically overhanging prow left of *Mesmerized* (probably the 2nd best route on the crag) on generally good holds after a tricky protection start. Gary's other new lines were *Wet Your Whistle* F7c, left of *Main Motor Mile*, and *Euphoric* F7a, to the right of *You Know UFO's*.

At nearby Deepdale, Gary climbed *Bob Slopes* F7a, a short but sharp line just right of the *Primrose Path*, *The Beast* F7b+, the best line on the wall right of *Primrose Path*, *Instrumentally Yours* F7a, the steep wall left of *Thunder Road* and finally *The Edge of Donnybrooks* F7a, up the arête right of Thunder Wall.

Smalldale Quarry saw extensive new route activity in the autumn with 16 new, or re-engineered routes appearing. Several of these are worthwhile, though perhaps the best was Nadim Siddiqui's *Virtual Insanity* F7b which climbs the wall, layback flake and arête right of *Stainsby Girls*.

Southern Limestone saw very little new route activity in 1995. Simon Lee climbed a new F7c+ across the roof of one of the caves behind *Arch Enemies* in Dovedale. At High Tor Malcolm Taylor plugged the obvious gap between *Bastille* and *Supersonic* with his lead of *My New Hat*, E6 6c. Aware of the Tor's bold traditions, Malcolm elected to place the two bolts, which protect the line, level with the two pieces of fixed gear on the adjacent *Bastille*, which anyone, who has teetered terrified up *Bastille's* groove, will appreciate are rather too far apart for comfort.

Neil Foster

Pembroke 1995

Surprisingly, Range West has not dominated the scene this year and the most significant additions to the Pembroke climbing arena have taken place in Range East and the north, where we shall begin:

At Llech Dafad the Martin Crocker-John Harwood duo made a number of forcible ascents including *Blackout Arête* E4 6a, which takes the immaculate wall left of *Conchoidal Fracture* and *Beastly Behaviour* E5 6a, taking the right side of the huge niche via a rib; although the most compelling addition was *Susie's Plot*, which climbs above the sea cave on the monster yellow wall right of *Gold* in Rainbow Zawn, and at E7 6a, 6c, 6b/c, it is probably one of the hardest routes in Pembroke to date. In the same remote area Ian Parnell joined forces with Crocker to make some noteworthy ascents with *Bruised Violet* E6 6a, *Gone For Gold* E5/6 6a, and also *Short Straw* E7 6b, an intensely bold lead – taking the incipient crack between *The Tin Man* and *The Scarecrow*. Tame in comparison was the line of *Antisocial*, E3 5b, which Crocker added to

The Peoples Cliff, but considering all of these routes were climbed on the same day (and April Fools Day at that!) one is left feeling somewhat deflated.

Paul Twomey made a fleeting visit to Purple Promontory where he found some very worthwhile discoveries with *Mood Indigo* E5 6b, and *Purple Heart* E5 6a, which is rumoured to be of similar quality to *Pacemaker* at Sharpnose. Parnell was busy here also, climbing a pumpy diagonal left of *Crunchy Beetroot*, to produce *Falling Together* E4 5c, and at Craig Llong he teamed up with Dave Henderson to ascend a crack and groove on the right side of the *Extreme Walks* Wall – *Can You Walk Like You Can Talk* E4 6a, was the result.

Now southwards to Range West where the majority of the (almost) 40 additions were fillers in. However, many are worth a mention either because despite concerted efforts by the army they still manage to be illegal (no further comment!) or because they are significant routes in themselves:

Bob Allen climbed *Peace Games* HS 4b, in the Trog Zawn area of Funlands, escorted by Dave Viggers, who responded with *Men Behaving Badly* S 4a. In the Crater Andy Weilochofski did the *Lobster Crawl* VS 4c, with J. Temple, a roundabout girdle of the north wall and part of the south wall.

Another two lines were squeezed onto the Atlantica Wall, Weilochofski adding the easiest line of *Sunset Chimneys*, a left to right across the wall at VS 4c and Damian Carroll continuing the theme with *Santa Maria* E2 5a, accompanied by Paul Donnithorne, who as usual has been extremely busy with an assortment of different partners: at Linney Point he ascended the impressive (hidden) hanging corner right of *Swift Execution*, so producing *The Final Curtain* E3 5b, 5c+, A0, with John Hornsby – the obvious challenge awaits.

In Olde Worlde Zawn Donnithorne and Sabina Eggert found the *Land of Nod* E2 5c, which takes the wall and roof left of *The Missing Chairs* and with Kevin Matthews and Hornsby he climbed the steep wall left of *Cafe Society*, starting up that route to avoid the large blank roof – *Tempest In A Teapot* E3 5c. In the same area Donnithorne sacrificed the lead to Allen, and together with Pat Devine they created the *Rainbow Sisters* E1 5b, a corner and crack system right of *Old Age Traveller*.

In Pen y Holt Bay Dave Barlow went *Igcognito Mr Slee* HVS 5a, up the corner between *Old Fossils* and *Blue Chicken Chilli* while Nicole Matton and Gareth Lante were back to their old stomping ground of Bulliber producing *Worked Out* HVS 4c and *Amazonia* HS 4b.

Steve Mayers continued to set high standards at Mount Sion East with his on site ascent of a new route 30 feet right of the abseil bay – although it took a pretty sizeable fall to create *The Executioners Song* E6 6b (so what's new?!)

Donnithorne, with his urge to exploit all areas, produced another fine line at the Rockscar Cliff – *Turnpike* E4 6a, takes a strong natural line right of *Toll Of Time* and was climbed with Marco Paganuzzi, who later swapped leads to *Bring Out The Gimp* E1 5b, in Perimeter Bays, which attacks a roof, wall and arête right of *The Colonel's Shorts*.

A jump over the fence next to catch up with events in Range East, where yet again Hornsby and Donnithorne teamed up to discover *Eviction* E3 5b, 5c, a huge pink groove just west of the south entrance to the Cauldron, so named after Donnithorne had been evicted from Range West for the day because he had answered the call of nature on the wrong side of the coastal path! Further east Donnithorne was reunited with Emma Alsford to *Paint By Numbers* E4 6a, 5b, on Mosaic Wall, which is fast reaching saturation point.

Only a stone's throw from the popular Crickmail Point there was a blitz on the relatively obscure Battleship Buttress area. Yet again Donnithorne, together with Stefan Doerr this time, found some gems in the zawn just west of *Men at Work* – *Black Beauty* E3 6a, a steep corner, *Black Widow* E4 6a, which weaves its way up the centre of the west face, and *Black is Black* E1 5a, 5b, an adventurous climb on the east wall, beginning with an unlikely traverse and finishing with some impeccable wall climbing. In the same area Dave Simmonite and Ian Smith discovered a quality severe in *Waggledance*, which climbs the slabby corner left of *Mrs Weston's Mean Green Kawasaki*. Donnithorne also added a steep and strenuous number right of *Business as Usual* – *Locals and Virgins* E5 6b, fights its way up the hairline crack and twin cracks on the distinctive pink wall. He also found a couple of worthwhile lines on the west face of Crickmail, where together with Harwood *Marina* E3 5c and *Raspberry Ripple* E2 5a, 5b, were formed.

By far the most significant discovery of 1995 must be *Preposterous Tales* HVS 5a, 4c, 4c, miraculously found by Dave Scott-Maxwell and Paul Deardon on Bosherton Head. This caving expedition begins with a traverse from the *Poltergeist Ledge* on the south west arête and finishes through the blow hole 40 feet back from the cliff edge. Already established as a Pembroke classic, this route is a must for all visiting climbers, with each ascent inevitably telling its own epic story.

New routes can still be found in Huntsman's Leap, where George Smith and Adam Wainwright climbed *Woeful* E5 6b, 5a, up the crack and flakes on the west wall beneath the boulder chokes, but finishing on the east wall. Just around the corner on Stuntsman's Buttress Carroll and Donnithorne have

Area Notes

been busy filling in the gaps, with Carroll finally succeeding on his three year project *A Waking Dream* E3/4 5c, which takes the large hanging corner at the back of the bay.

Bill Lounds has returned to Stennis Head adding a few lines including *Corker* E2 5b, which follows very closely in *Preposterous Tales* footsteps, ascending the cave and deep slot gained by a traverse left from *Bloody Knee*.

Lastly we go much further east to Stackpole Head, where Smith freed the roof of *Eternal Damnation* at E5 6b and Dave Turnbull and Jim Thomas got lost but managed to find *Not Quite Plane Sailing* E3 5b, which starts up *Condor* and thus produces yet another E3 traverse on this fine cliff. And so we await another year, when a new guidebook will no doubt bring about a surge of enthusiasm and a flood of new routing frenzy.....!

Emma Alsford

The CC's long awaited guidebook to Pembroke was published in early March to widespread acclaim and excellent sales. It is the biggest definitive guidebook ever to be produced in Britain. Sold as one book, but packaged in two volumes, it covers the currently quiet crags of the North coast, the first ever published guide to the newly developed, but restricted, crags of Range West and all the classics and many new routes on the ever popular South coast.

