

The  
Climbers' Club  
Journal

1998



# **The Climbers' Club Journal**

Edited by  
Tim Noble

1998  
The Climbers' Club

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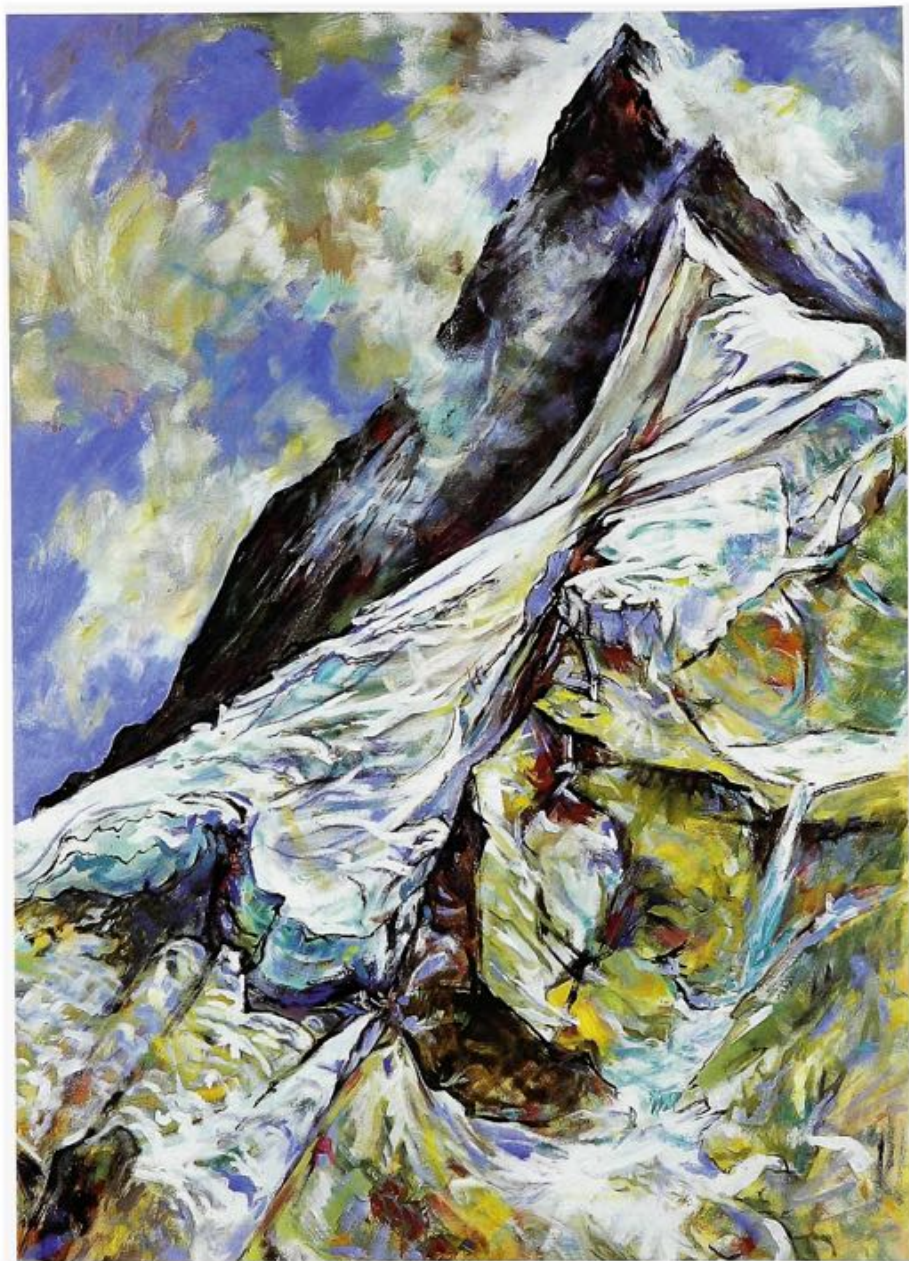
# The Climbers' Club Journal

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1998

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MATTERHORN ZMUTT RIDGE, Peter Osbourne, 1995  
(oil on canvas, 30 x 20 ins)



# Editorial

*'Memory, the warder of the brain, shall be a flume.'*  
(Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*)

Chamonix, August 1999: snow fell on the Aiguilles and the wind blew hot and cold. Frequently soaked, we were chary about going high. On a day set for hut and peak, all second-stage téléphériques stopped and even the artificial luge became a real flume and closed. In brighter times, we cragged on bolts (low level in every respect), potted in the Aiguilles Rouges and doodled along the *Papillons Ridge*. The Peigne slabs crawled, but the great ridges and faces above us lay open and empty. Though the *Midi Plan* was a sponsored walk, and the last cable car full of flushed foreigners who'd flashed the Cosmiques or South Face routes, the *Frendo Spur* stayed silent as the grave. The big peaks were still: was there anyone out there?

Walking my young daughters up to look at the much-shrunken Argentiére Glacier and the waterfall John Sumner climbed in winter, I realised that Alpinism, as I'd learned it patiently, through the 60s, has altogether changed: global warming may be making cautious summer rock-climbers of us all. A (reliable) memory has it that 25 years ago, my traverse of The Grépon (with at least eight other teams) was followed by a straightforward descent of the Nantillons Glacier. Today, apparently, the glacier is a crux in itself and the Charmoz Grépon Couloir a dangerous stone-shute: rockfall is all; ablation an almost daily situation.

Clearly, to keep the spirit of adventurous Alpinism alive, CC members are looking now to climb world-wide, or in winter. In this volume, Terry Kenny lures us to his bash (a regular CC meet) on the awesome winter-ice of Canada; John Sumner and Steve Coneys take pleasure in an alpine winter ascent of the first order; Dave Carr gets cold feet in New Zealand; David Wynne Jones just avoids being washed away in the Andes and Stephen Reid writes of a Greenland full of frozen sea.

But cold CC adventures are also balanced by climbs in warmer climes. Six members remember sun-baked rock from Spain and Switzerland to Oz, from Crete to Carolina. How to whack a bush should now be taught on modern Alpinism courses. These articles are full of incident: temperate feeling is clearly a necessary condition for a hot climb.

Bob Moulton, Harold Drasdo, Steve Dean and Bill McKee provide articles that record an important meet for posterity; chart a history of holy ground; give back the big names of the times and tackle writing styles with tongue in cheek. A stoical Geoff Milburn suffers second surgery (from the editorial knife) to offer humour in the Hoffnung style and then two fictions cleverly twist endings. To conclude, five finely-wrought epics remind us that good writing about climbing adventures is carved out by powerful forces of memory: a flume, indeed, by any other name.

# Ice-climbing in the Canadian Rockies

Terry Kenny

'Frustrated Scottish climber seeks partner'

So read a note pinned on the notice board in the *Alpine Club of Canada* club house in Canmore a couple of years ago. During the six years I have been visiting the Canadian Rockies in winter, there has been a steady increase in the trickle of British climbers, but a trickle it remains. This seems surprising, since the poor and unpredictable Scottish winters of recent years ought to make Canada an attractive proposition. Unless, like Smiler, one lives in Inverness or, like Godefroy Perroux, can spend a month in the CIC hut, there is every chance that the marathon drive from England on a Friday night will be rewarded by a wet slog up the Allt a' Mhuilinn or a frustrated search for Hell's Lum in the mist. But in a two-week trip to the Rockies, a dozen or more quality ice routes may be accomplished, with time left for the pub, or even afternoon tea.

Forget those awful walk-ins: there are hundreds of routes within a few hours' walk from the road. That is not to say, however, that some approaches are not without objective hazard, and the Canadians take avalanche risk very seriously. Sure, there are also high mountain, big-face water-ice routes such as *Slipstream* on Snowdome and long, arduous ski approaches to routes such as *Takakkaw Falls* in Yoho River Valley, but these lie outside the scope of the present article.

The Canadian waterfalls freeze around November and for the most part stay frozen until late March. Therein lies the main difference from Scotland, with its freeze-thaw cycle. Some south-facing routes thaw if a chinook ('eater of snow') blows in; then may freeze again. But the main seasonal variable is the thickness of the ice. Personally, my favourite time is when the days are longer, in late February or early March. Temperatures in the Townsites frequently go down to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  and lower on the ice, but most days seem to settle around  $-10^{\circ}$  to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  (though last March was warm at  $0^{\circ}$  to  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ ).

People ask about grades, and these are not strictly comparable to our own. I'm not the best authority, but a sizeable consensus would put the technical standard of *Point Five Gully* at hard grade 3 by comparison with Canadian grades. Bob Allen also made the valid observation that climbing on waterfalls seems doubly exposed: the classical Scottish-type gully, for example, gives some illusion of security, with its narrow walls and the occasional hold, but on waterfalls there is the added dimension of lateral exposure.

As regards equipment, leave the drive-ins at home. Nobody here uses them anymore. Also, throw away those old, coarse-threaded ice-screws bought for Scotland, but perhaps never used in anger. By the time you get them in, you'll probably have fallen off with fatigue. Unfortunately, the Russian titanium screws bought cheaply in Kathmandu must also be discarded: they screw in easily enough but studies at the University of Calgary show that they tend to snap when the leader falls off. But the good news is that Smileys' ice-screws, which are close replicas of the 'Black Diamond', can be purchased in Canada for about £15 each compared to £55 for the BD in Britain. A note here also on the 'Abalakov Belay Anchor'. Of academic interest only in Britain, it is the definitive method of fixation for belay and rappel anchors on the water-falls (REF). A threading device and tat are therefore useful.

The areas of interest are in Alberta, Eastern British Columbia — mainly in the Banff, Yoho, Kootenay and Jasper National Parks — and also in Kananaskis country. Most climbs are within striking distance of the Trans-Canada Highway and the Ice Fields Parkway. The Ghost River Valley lies outside these boundaries in the eastern foothills of the Rockies, and is mentioned later. The best valley base is Canmore, which is the Llanberis or Boulder of the Rockies. Sit in the Drake pub for long enough and the Who's Who of climbing passes by (ask Peter Newman about the Drake in Canmore). The flight destination (7 hours from England) is Calgary; the lowest price I've found was £350 charter. It's nothing to drive 200km return for a route, so car hire is essential. Four-wheel drive is useful but expensive, though petrol is cheap. The roads are quiet and usually well ploughed and gritted.

An easy first day to assess the ice and recover from jet-lag might be *Grotto Falls* (II,3) located in Grotto Canyon, a few miles drive east from Canmore. The initial part of the 45-minute walk-in, past a cement factory, seems unattractive. But soon its crampons on to walk up the frozen stream-bed and all the noise is left behind. Ancient Indian writings decorate the narrow canyon walls in places. The more modern markings of bolted summer rock-problems decorate others. The Falls is at a bifurcation of the canyon and gives two easy pitches, choose your own line with chains for belays and rappel. Some years, a harder left-hand variation forms for the top pitch.

Cascade Mountain lies outside Banff, and on the lower flanks, subtended by a massive avalanche bowl, is *Cascade* (III,3), south facing and just a few minutes walk from the road. Easy ice scrambling gains the two main pitches, which are near vertical and give a better introduction to Canadian grade 3 than *Grotto Falls*. Bolted belay stances exist on adjacent rock with fixed gear at the top for rappel. Last year I debated whether to climb it again with Bob and Peter, but was put off by the chinook. This was a fortunate decision because the next day, the bottom half fell down.





*'If you ever plan to motor west': Cascade Mountain, Banff from the Trans-Canada Highway (waterfall dead centre is Cascade). Photo: Terry Kenny*

The short drive along the Trans-Canada from Canmore to Banff is dominated on the southern side by Mount Rundle. For ordinary mortals Rundle is the home of *Professor's Falls* (III,4), the trade route of the Rockies. Five vertical pitches, all quite long, are fortunately broken by large ledges, which give a feeling of security. But the pitches are serious, particularly the top, which is more like grade 5 some would say. There has been a number of accidents on this popular route.

Mount Rundle is home to *The Terminator Face*: a massive expanse of vertical, loose, black Canadian limestone 3,000ft up the mountainside and on full view from the highway. This is definitely no place for ordinary mortals and boasts the legendary 500ft ice smear routes, *Terminator*, *Replicant* and *Sea of Vapors*, the test pieces of North America. What drama has surrounded this face and what epics have taken place. *Sea of Vapors* in particular was immersed in aura following the first ascent in 1993 by Josephson and Hendricks; they likened it to climbing frozen mist and gave it grade 7+. Who



*L to r: Terminator, Replicant, Sea of Vapors. Photo: Terry Kenny*



*T.K. on the first pitch of Professor's Falls. Photo: Bob Allen*



*The awesome top pillar of Louise Falls. Photo: Terry Kenny*



*Climbers on the Left-Hand Weeping Wall. Photo: Bob Allen*



*Moonlight Falls (Kananaskis) in a lean state. Photo: Terry Kenny*



would get the second ascent? Rumours were rife. Every time an artefact of ice formed, parties would gather with binoculars beside the Trans-Canada, and names would fly around the pub that night. But it was always a false alarm. The years passed with no further ascents until 1996, when the ice formed thickly, following an unusually wet summer. One day, an artefact of ice was seen to move, then a second one below the first and, yes, it was climbers and they were moving fast, so they must be good. Well, they don't come much better than Alex Lowe. The fascinating tale of *Sea of Vapors* and the unsavoury developments immediately following this second ascent are dealt with in the AC of Canada Journal.

Heading north up the Trans-Canada Highway, Lake Louise, a great ski resort, is about 45 minutes from Banff. Standing outside Chateau Lake Louise, the snow-covered panorama across the frozen lake towards Mount Victoria and Lefroy is magnificent. *Louise Falls* (II,5) is hardly visible from this perspective but is reached by a short walk around the lakeside path, avoiding the horse-drawn sleighs. The lower pitches are friendly enough and usually lead to an ice cave. Above that, however, stands a great vertical column. More have fallen from here than anywhere else — though injuries have been few. The problem is purely psychological: you leave the security of the flat-floored cave for the immediately vertical ice. There's an almighty drop below and little chance of a rest above, so many parties rappel from the cave.

Beyond Lake Louise, the Trans-Canada veers west and passes through the town of Field, a reliably cold place with a large number of north-facing waterfalls, all close to the road or railway line. Last year, before doing battle with *Massey's* (III,4), Bob Allen tackled a Buffalo Burger in the little café and found the latter more difficult to overcome. *Massey's* is a good introduction to grade IV: sustained and vertical on the first pitch, but easier angled on the last couple of pitches. It is certainly an easier introduction than *Guinness Gully* (III,4), at the other end of Field, which is sustained throughout. *Carlsberg Column* (III,5) lies nearby; I seconded the hard first pitch a few years ago and this terminated my latent hopes towards the much harder *Pilsner Pillar* (III,6), regarded as an aspirant hard climb. On a gentler theme, *Extra Lite* (II,3) is probably the easiest route around but avalanche prone. I used to think ava-



T. K. on *Massey's* first pitch.  
Photo: 'Buffalo' Bob Allen



lanches didn't happen at Field until a girl was avalanched off *Guinness Gully* last year; *Massey's* is probably the safest route in this respect.

Just before Golden is Kicking Horse Canyon, and adjacent to the road is the south-facing *Pretty Nuts* (I,4). Like all these climbs, it doesn't look all that steep until you're on it — but the first pitch is exceedingly long. Four pitches in total, and the last has a real sting in the tail. It starts off nice and gentle, then becomes concave and rises up sheer for the last half-pitch. But the best climb in the canyon is *Lady Killer* (III,3) with two great pitches which feel vertical but are not quite (that's my kind of climb), and it has a Scottish feel as well, with gully walls.

As the Trans-Canada turns west outside Lake Louise, a bifurcation continues north towards Jasper and subsequently becomes the Ice Fields Parkway, passing the Athabasca glacier at road level. This journey is worth making for the ride alone, but is also the road to some of the most famous ice climbs in the world. The highway climbs steeply to Bow Summit and Bow Lake. To the west, *Bow Falls* (III,3/4) is visible in the far distance. Access is across the frozen lake, and snow shoes or skis would be sensible; there is some avalanche risk towards the end. The falls are very broad, maybe 150 ft at the base. One year, my partner took his first swipe at the ice and a horizontal crack, half the width of the falls, appeared at his placement, accompanied by a nerve-shattering groan from the ice. We didn't hang around, but went for a safer-looking line around the corner.

Continuing north, the scenery gets better all the time: Crowfoot Glacier and Dolomite Pass. Last year, Bob had photo-stops every couple of miles. There are a few climbs along this section, including *Murchison Falls* (III,4) but I've not done much here. Eventually, the Saskatchewan River Crossing is reached, with a welcome petrol station, opened only last year. Before then, it was wise to carry extra cans.

If the scenery was good before, it now becomes even more spectacu-



*Stepping into the moody blues: the top pitch of the beautiful and world-famous Bow Falls. Photo: Terry Kenny*

lar with range upon range of peaks. There are so many that in many cases, even those close to the road are unnamed. But now the massive bulk of Mount Wilson appears to the east, rising 5000ft above the road; many of its complex gullies and great limestone walls still unclimbed.

*Lady Wilson's Cleavage* (III,4) however, has numerous short technical pitches over a total length of 1,100ft, and seemed a good idea. But there was a lot of snow and half way up a little spindrift avalanche came down; it was just enough to frighten us, so we retreated quickly. Exactly twenty four hours later, I was skiing on the opposite side of the valley and chanced to look across to Mount Wilson but couldn't pick out the gully. I knew why when the sound wave travelled across and there was a roar as *Lady Wilson* was engulfed in an avalanche. Down it came, taking out enormous pine trees like matchsticks, not even stopping at the highway, which was subsequently closed.

Just a few miles north of *Lady Wilson* and starting right next to the road is the gully to end all gullies, *Polar Circus* (V,5). Put up in 1975 by the Burgess twins, it has remained the classic and probably best known ice climb in the Rockies. It's over 2,500ft long with 1,700ft as graded climbing with the crux at the very top.

But it gets better still: only a short way along from *Polar Circus* is *Weeping Wall*, as close to the road as *One Step in the Clouds* or *Shadrach!* The first time I saw *Weeping Wall* was in summer; it was a massive black limestone face, oozing water. But now it was a frozen block of ice, four pitches high. As if one wall were not enough, there is a continuation high above: *Upper Weeping Wall*, boasting even harder routes. In the reasonable grades, *Left-Hand Weeping Wall* (II,4) is the easiest route on the face but has a tremendous aura and exposure which demonstrates well Bob Allen's theorem of laterality. *Central Pillar* and *Right Hand Weeping Wall* (III,5/6) are frankly too hard for me; *Snivelling Gully* (II,3) on the far left is more to my liking.

On our 1998 trip, Bob, Peter and I continued from *Weeping Wall* up the IceFields Parkway further than I had been before in winter to *Bridal Veil* and *Panther Falls* (II,3/4). Unfortunately, the latter was terminally ill, with a great horizontal crack at half height. But *Bridal Veil* was in excellent shape, as was Bob who led the bulging first pitch. A scrambling pitch followed, then the top, free-standing column, behind which Bob walked to take photos of me climbing.

We still had time that day to drive the short distance further north to the Columbia Icefields. The glacier meets the road and in summer is a Mecca for tourists. But now we were alone and stood in the bitter cold taking in the panorama of classic Canadian climbs. To the far left was the *Regular North Face* of Mount Athabasca with the *Silverhorn* route just to the right. Then, the *Practice Gullies* on Mount Andromeda and *Skyladder*, the classical alpine-ice boss of the Rockies. Further right again to Snowdome and the awesome 3,000ft water-ice route, *Slipstream*,

high on the face. Finally to Mount Kitchener and the *Grand Central Couloir*. There's a number of winter routes around the Icefields and probably the best known is *Curtain Call* (IV,6), but the nearest I've got to that is knowing people who've done it. Further north, there has been considerable activity around Jasper and this is food for another trip.

In the early 1990s, everybody was talking about 'The Ghost'. It was the place to go and every bar room conversation with climbers would inevitably turn to the subject. The Ghost River Valley, as it is properly known, is a true wilderness area located in the eastern foothills of the Rockies, isolated and distinct from those described above.

The river divides the 'Ghost' into Ghost North and South. Access is truly off-road and by four-wheel drive truck only. Too bad if it snows while you're in there. The ride into 'The Ghost' struck me as somewhat equivalent to driving into Craig Yr Ysfa from Aber; even the guidebook urges caution and the section on 'rescue' is brief: 'You're on your own pal'. For the visitor, the best plan is to team up with locals and I'll never forget that first trip, around 1995, driving across frozen mud-flats and the eerie lilac dawn lighting up the great, prominent rock-tower of 'Devil's Thumb'. The easiest climbs take on a serious air in this ambience. *This House of Sky* (III,3) is the classic easy climb in the Ghost North, with many short climbing sections separated by walks. But an optional grade 4 top pitch gives new meaning to the cliché that the leader must never fall: it's unthinkable in the Ghost. Across the valley, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (II,4/5) hang off the rock near the summer classic rock climb, *Bonanza* (5.8).

*Wicked Wanda* (II,4.5) is probably the classic route of the Ghost South. Numerous subsidiary valleys and gorges radiate from the main valley. *The Big Dipper* (III,4) lies in 'The Valley of the Constellation', one of the main branches. A long walk-in across the frozen mud flats, then through a limestone gorge, with massive faces either side, and the waterfall suddenly appears around a corner. Two steep pitches with an undulation between give the impression of a fairground ride, but the name is astronomical. From the opposite side of the main valley radiates Planter's Valley, leading past the stringy *Weathering Heights* (III,4) and the enormously broad *Peanut Gallery* (III,4). The Ghost is also home to those internationally recognised terror routes, *Fearful Symmetry* (III,6), *Sorcerer* (IV,5), *Hydrophobia* (V,6) and *Malignant Mushroom* (II,5); they're all in the top grades.

So, I hope this account has whetted the appetites of 'frustrated Scottish climbers'. I've not even mentioned the routes in Kananaskis to the south of Canmore, where *Moonlight and Snowline* (III,4) are the classics. Neither has Warterton Lake near the Montana border been discussed, because I've not been there yet. Maybe next year, however.

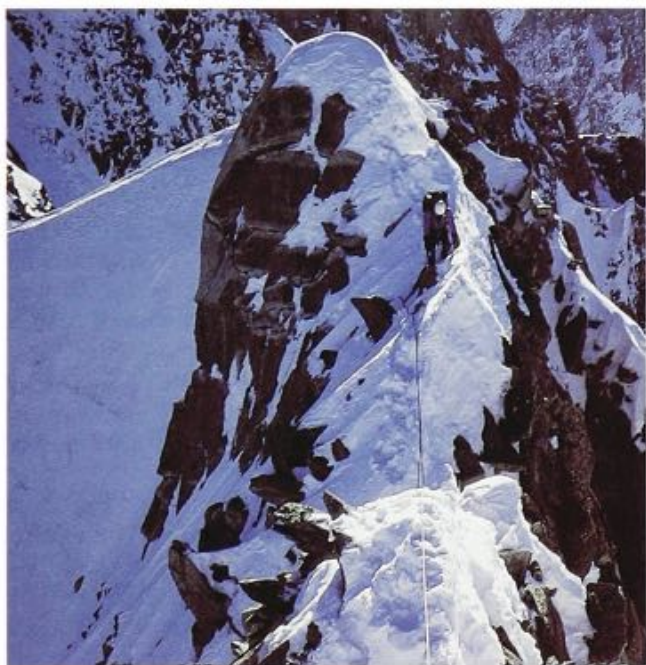


*'The Iceman Cometh': grappling with the foreshortened and impending top pitch of Pretty Nuts, near Golden. Photo: Terry Kenny*





*'Of ice and men': (above) Steve Coneys near the top of The Grand Couloir of The North Face of the Talèfre and (below) traversing towards the Petite Aiguille de Talèfre. Photos: John Sumner.*



# Grand Couloir, North Face of the Talèfre

**John Sumner & Steve Coneys**

We arrived in Chamonix after a period of high winds and seven continuous days of snow, during which three metres was deposited. Everything looked lethal; but a good spell of weather was forecast, so we decided on the long flog up to the Couvercle to both acclimatise and determine the condition of the *North Face of the Talèfre*.

Conditions at Montenvers were fierce: a wind ripped straight through us as we struggled down deep snow to the glacier and throughout the slow push up to the Couvercle. Our fingers turned numb even in big windproof mitts. We had given ourselves a time limit: if we hadn't reached the ladders by 2 p.m. we would turn back. The going was better than expected because the high winds had cleared much of the snow; great humps of green ice showed every where on the Mer de Glace.

We reached our point of no return on the Leschaux Glacier well within allotted time and decided to go for the hut. Sod's law had it that the snow now deepened; the wind hadn't stripped the Leschaux Glacier like the Mer de Glace. We were without snow shoes or skis, so by the time we'd got to the start of the steep winter approach to the hut, via the right-hand side of the Talèfre Glacier, we were totally knackered. Steve had been disappearing into hidden holes between boulders and was constantly looking for bivy spots in case we didn't make the hut. I was aiming just to get to the hut come what may, and eventually staggered through the door as darkness fell.

The place was totally deserted; clearly, no-one had been there for sometime. Snow on the beds told a tale of the fierce storms a week before. The silence of the place was wonderful — just what we had come for. After a good night's kip, we decided to flog as far as we could up towards the Talèfre North Face to see what lines were in nick. Before leaving in the morning, though, we had a little incident. The hut was equipped with an SoS button in a very prominent place. Steve, doing a final cleaning of the floor with his rucksack on, accidentally hit this button. Visions of a helicopter rescue loomed, but all was well after he explained the mistake.

The approach to the Talèfre was still unconsolidated deep snow and it wasn't long before we were knackered again. The view of the face wasn't what we had hoped for: there was very little snow. The lines of the *Dufour* and the *Couloir Central* looked very lean, with bare rock sections. It was still difficult to tell if they were in or not; a good pair of small binoculars is a must next time we do a recce. The only routes

which were continuous lines were the *N.W. Couloir* and the big open couloir to the right. We descended the slopes and glaciers back to Montenvers following our steps in half the time, and even catching the 3.30 p.m. train back down to Chamonix. After a bivvy at the Montets and once again doing the little North Face of the Petite Aig Verte, plus an ice route at La Crèmerie, we were ready to go back up to the Couvercle hut.

The weather was still superb, with very cold nights and crystal-clear days. We made the descent via the ladders (which were now clear, instead of dropping down to the ice caves), and picked up our old prints on the Leschaux Glacier. Here, four German climbers with massive packs (which were even larger than ours) came shuffling towards us on snow shoes. They had been trying something on the Jorasses and were saying how extremely cold it had been. The approach to the hut was relatively pleasant compared with last time. We arrived with the sun still high, so a pleasant hour was spent sunbathing and drying our gear. The silence, broken only by the calls of a couple of choucass, was superb.

As the sun disappeared behind the peaks, the temperature dropped like a stone and we moved into the hut. It had been dark for at least an hour when, going out for a pee, I saw a couple of headtorch lights approaching. Three French climbers — one a woman — came in. The woman suddenly collapsed across the table. Steve, being the perfect gentleman, brought her round with a cup of tea. We learned that they had skied down from the Aiguille du Midi after catching the last cable car up. We were complimented on our fine tracks, which had saved them a lot of time and energy; but they laughed at us for not having snow shoes or skis. Their comment was 'only the English would do this.' Not long after this, two more French climbers came in and then two German lads from a route on Les Droites. Our solitude was broken; it was back to being a normal Alpine hut.

The French climbers, who were going for a route on the Talèfre, had massive packs (which, like the Germans before them, were even larger than ours); so we would have company. We were off first in the morning at about 5 a.m. following our old tracks. As light slowly came in, we could see the French teams skinning on their short skis way over to our left. The crevassed slopes to the base of the face were completely energy sapping; we sank up to our knees at every step. One French team tackled the 'schrund and seemed to take some time over it. The other team looked as if they were going up the *North East Couloir*, which is normally used as the descent gully.

We reached the 'schrund and started to gear up; it had taken us five hours. Clearly, 10.30 a.m. was not a good time to start anything serious. The French lads were going for the *N.W. Couloir* and sending down lots of ice. The pitch above the 'schrund started with a short vertical section on iron-hard ice. It was followed by good placements on

still very steep but perfect névé. We decided to get out of the French line of fire, and so traversed up and right into the *Grand Couloir*.

Good sections of névé, interspaced with hard dark ice, followed. The dominating feature was a colossal totem pole-like pinnacle, on the right of the couloir, which seemed almost to overhang us. The couloir steepened towards the top and the day's efforts were taking their toll. We still had about three rope lengths to go when the French lads appeared on the ridge above us. They waved and shouted down a friendly knowing greeting, knowing full well we would be spending a cold night on the ridge. The last rays of the sun were just touching the tops of Les Courtes and Les Droites, and we knew we had about one hour of daylight left.

We finally reached the knife-edged ridge and hunted wildly for some flat spot in the gloom. In the end it was just a matter of flattening the snow ridge off sufficiently for us to lie down. The position was incredibly precarious with huge drops on all sides. We got in our sleeping bags. The temperature on Steve's thermometer read  $-25^{\circ}$ , while mine read  $-18^{\circ}$ , so we split the difference, say  $-20^{\circ}$ . These were the coldest temperatures we'd experienced in winter. Steve was worried about his frostbitten toe from a few winters ago on the Triolet. It was obviously playing up again. A slight breeze started up, which had an effect on the stove's performance, but overall, we gave the Dick Turnbull stove five stars.

Eventually, morning came and, as usual, waiting for the sun's first rays, we were slow to start. We followed the French lads' tracks along a precarious snowed-up rock ridge and eventually climbed a chimney to the top of the Petite Aiguille de Talèfre. Here, easy slopes on doubtful wind-blown snow lead to the ridge leading to the Pt. Sup. de Pierre Joseph. The descent couloir described in the French guidebook, *Neige Glace et Mixte*, as  $45^{\circ}$  looked steeper and we started by making two abseils on *in-situ* gear. After that, we slowly belayed each other on a long tiring descent. The snow was not good névé, but had a sugary, ball-bearing-like consistency. We reached the base, making a final abseil to avoid the 'schrund. Our tracks were followed back to the hut as darkness once again took over after a superb sunset.

Only two other climbers, Swedish lads, were at the hut. They had just made a fast ascent of the *Shea/Jackson* on the Droites. We got on well and discussed stoves at great length. They had designed their own, similar to Dick Turnbull's, but less prone to suffer in windy conditions.

The weather still continued to be superb as we descended towards Montanvers and the motorway-like procession of skiers on the Mer de Glace. We finished the holiday with a brilliant ice route called *EMHM* on the Argentière glacier, close to the Chalet Militaire, a far superior venue to La Crémérie.



# Hotel Mount Cook

Dave Carr

Plateau Hut had become very familiar over the days, as we sat around bored, waiting out the storm that raged around the corners of the hut. At 7,500ft, and with no heating beyond the primus stoves that we cooked on, it was a cheerless place to sit out bad weather. We three Brits were waiting to do the *East Ridge of Mount Cook*. After that, we intended to traverse the nearly mile-long main ridge to the summit some 5,000 ft above, then descend down the infamous Linda Glacier back to the hut. Enlivened only by toilet visits (a misery of 100m sprints across the snow, all the time being blasted by spindrift), the days had passed slowly. In comparison, the hut was a real haven and we idly pondered what it would be like to be caught out on the mountain in such a storm.

Even bad weather has to end sometime though, and the early evening weather call on the radio promised good weather for the morrow; so packs were packed and re-packed and we retired to bed at 7 p.m. in anticipation of the midnight alarm call. However, as is so often the case before a big route, it was hardly needed as the next four hours or so were spent racked by sleeplessness.

We stumbled up at the appointed hour and faced the first of the many tribulations of the day: breakfast. For some reason, this consisted of museli, milk and tinned guavas. Whilst seemingly a popular dish with Kiwi mountaineers, it is an unlikely and unpalatable combination which, on my part, certainly took some stomaching. However, after the mixture had been washed down by tea, it was thankfully time to leave.

There came the usual fumbling misery of fitting on crampon straps with frozen fingers and remembering how to rope up and move together across a glacier. It would be a long walk across the snow plateau from which the hut gets its name, before traversing close under the East Face to reach the steep snow slopes up to the ridge itself. This then winds elegantly upwards, before merging into the steep East Face, not far below the summit ridge.

With crampons squeaking satisfyingly on iron-hard snow, we descended gently downhill into the centre of the bowl, before climbing up to the other rim of the saucer to traverse below the big East Face. The going was easy, but our pleasure of moving in the crisp night air under a starry sky was somewhat dimmed by the horribly early hour of the morning. In addition, it was pitch black and we were able to see little beyond the silhouettes of the mountains and the pool of light cast by the head-torch beam on the snow ahead.

Our study of the terrain the evening before had paid off, however,

and we seemed to move easily through the maze of crevasses below the East Face. Everything appeared to be going well. Suddenly, the absolute quiet of the night was broken by a loud boom and roar from somewhere up on the face above. We stood in horror in the darkness, unable to see where the avalanche was coming from. Was it above us? Were we in the line of fire? We crouched stock still, waiting in an agony of suspense for the inevitable impact. It seemed like an eternity, but couldn't have been more than twenty seconds or so. Thankfully, it didn't come near us, but crashed into the bottom of the face somewhere over to the right, in the direction from where we had come. With heartfelt thanks for our deliverance we moved on, somewhat chastened.

Until this episode our pace had been relaxed, leisurely even, but this incident put a spring into our step and we upped the pace until we had come out below the snow slopes which led up to the ridge. Feeling more out of harm's way, these several hundred feet of ascent were dispatched quickly and we were then on the beginning of the ridge itself, gazing upwards into the still dark night.

After a breather and a drink we started ascending the ridge, moving roped together. After a while, the first glimmerings of dawn were seen out to the east and soon, we were treated to the extraordinary spectacle of the snow slopes of nearby Mount Tasman, glowing dark chocolate brown in the early morning light. We stood transfixed as this slowly turned to a pink glow. We could now see our surroundings in more detail, and particularly, the spectacular knife-edged ridge, curving elegantly away. Huge cornices required us to keep well below the crest in places. The exposure was tremendous, with the East Face to our right and the huge Caroline Face to our left. But whilst adjusting the hood of my duvet jacket, a gust of wind blew it out of my hands and it floated serenely off across the Caroline Face. I would miss it later.

Time whizzed by as we climbed on and on without seeming to gain height as quickly as we wished, and we began to see in reality what a long ridge this was. It began to merge into the final slopes of the East Face, whereupon we stopped moving together and started to pitch the climbing. This was largely enjoyable Scottish grade II to III, but we were anxious to get on. Time was passing quickly. The sky, which until now had been clear, began to cloud over a little from the west and a cold wind started to blow around the ridge.

The final ice pitch up to the ridge was a steep sixty-degree, full rope length, which was somewhat trying, given that we were now getting very tired from an early start and the altitude. It also felt rather bold, given our limited number of ice screws. I took rather a long time here and whilst the exertion kept me warm my companions were soon chilled to the bone from sitting around waiting for me to finish the pitch. Around midday, we thankfully reached the main summit ridge and were surprised at how long it had taken us to get this far. For the first time that day we were able to see out to

the west; there was a storm coming in off the Tasman Sea. That shouldn't be there; it hadn't been forecast. A hurried discussion followed. Surely it would be easier to continue the route along the summit ridge and down our intended descent route than to descend back down the way we had come, wouldn't it? Andy was very quiet.

We decided to carry on and started off along the summit ridge, but the weather came in much more quickly than anticipated and soon, we were in the midst of a typical New Zealand nor'wester storm. We continued on, moving together roped up, balancing along the narrow ridge at over 11,500 feet with strong winds, spindrift and minimal visibility. The rope snagged itself with annoying regularity on those annoying little spikes called sastrugi which festooned the bare ice-covered ridge.

It was obvious now that Andy was suffering from mild hypothermia, brought about by sitting around below the steep final ice pitch. We had to chivvy him on regardless, however. We were having to move slowly just when we really needed to get motoring along the ridge. All pleasure had gone out of the day. Whilst Andy appeared to be able to keep putting one foot in front of the other for now, he was unfortunately the only one out of the three of us who knew the complicated descent down to the Linda. Things were beginning to get serious, until we found a small crevasse at a step in the ridge and got Andy down into it. After an hour out of the wind he had warmed up and felt well enough to go on.

We reached the 12,600ft summit late in the afternoon, but didn't linger, knowing full well that we would have our work cut out finding the way down in the storm. We began prospecting downwards for the descent, but after several abortive forays downwards we began to face the grim fact that we couldn't find the correct way down in the prevailing conditions. It quickly became apparent that the only safe alternative was to find some shelter and sit it out until the next morning in the hope that it would clear then. This was a grim prospect — given that we carried no sleeping bags or stoves — as we had never imagined that we would have to spend the night out.

We had noticed an open-ended slot in the ice just below the summit itself and, with heavy hearts, climbed wearily back up some several hundred feet to it. At least with a roof it would shelter us from the prevailing wind; but being open-ended, it would not keep all the wind out, nor was there any snow to plug up the open wall. However, it was the best thing on offer, so we reluctantly settled into our grim icy home for the night. A polythene bag was slit up and went down onto the floor. My warm clothing consisted of a poor quality hollofil duvet, now without a hood, a neoprene cagoule and a fleece jacket. Andy was put into the middle. Looking like three corpses stretched out, we settled to a grim sojourn. For me, this consisted of trying to get as much of my body as I could onto a small square of karrimat and the rucksack. Our three pairs of feet, minus boots, went into one rucksack which, despite all I had read, didn't appear to gen-

erate any warmth. To add to our discomfort, the water bottles had frozen solid and all we had left to eat were some dried pears. Given the state of our parched mouths, these were inedible. So our cold, hungry, thirsty night began.

We thought it dangerous to fall asleep, and talked of the beer we would drink and the Christmas dinner we would gorge when we got back to the valley. We meticulously planned this meal in great detail. Despite the cold, however, we did drop off to sleep from time to time; but these short snatches of sleep were regularly broken by the sound of teeth chattering or by dustings of snow, blown in on cold gusts of wind. Once awakened, we would furiously wriggle our toes to ward off frostbite. At regular intervals, horrible leg cramps would afflict us all: an unhappy victim would writhe in torment, waking his companions with groans. Like all such nights, it was seemingly endless and morning came slowly.

It was a grey dawn, but at least the storm had abated, and though visibility was still poor it was good enough. Despite having none of the impediments of sleeping bags and stoves, we nevertheless took a long time to get packed up and, after forcing frozen feet into frozen leather boots and strapping crampons on, we thankfully continued our descent.

A fully-recovered Andy led us unerringly to the correct descent and we were soon climbing down the easy snow gullies that seamed the rocky face until we reached the Linda shelf. This is a huge tilted snow slope, the lower lip of which ends in huge seracs which fall several hundred feet to the Linda Glacier below. The shelf has to be traversed to the left until you can step off onto the glacier itself. It is not a place to skip across, especially when tired. Having traversed this successfully we then came into the line of fire of the aptly named gun-barrel. This is a huge serac barrier on the cliffs, above which overhangs the end of the shelf and the descent along the Linda Glacier below. There is no way of avoiding this nasty and we grimly plodded down onto the glacier, thankfully moving further and further away from the line of fire of the gun-barrel. It is this sort of objective danger that makes the normal Linda route so dangerous.

The sun was out now and the only things left to overcome were the tortured crevasses of the lower Linda, which required some lengthy detours and a long uphill plod back over the plateau to the hut. Being early afternoon now, the snow was soft, and to tired bodies, the going purgatorial. At every step we sank deep into the snow. It was peculiar the way that we could all manage to trudge 300 ft or so, but would then simultaneously collapse in the snow. The hut was visible ahead during this time but never seemed to get any nearer.

After what seemed an age, we fell through the door to find a kindly Kiwi climber. In good time, big bowls of hot sweet tea were thrust into our hands. Bliss, absolute bliss; no tea had ever tasted so good. The night was spent re-hydrating, though we could eat little. We slept well in

the warm comfort of the hut.

The next day we had wonderful weather for our walk back down to Mount Cook village, by way of Cinemarra Col. The day after was Christmas Eve, so we headed to the famous Hermitage for one of their famed all-you-can-eat smørgasbord buffet lunches at \$3.95. The table groaned under the weight of the hot and cold dishes. However, we sat disappointed as our shrunk stomachs could only manage a small portion of the goodies on offer. Christmas day was celebrated in true Antipodean fashion, however: sunbathing in the garden with a full roast turkey dinner to follow. At least we managed to do that full justice.

I suppose we made lots of mistakes that day, but at least we escaped with our lives and limbs. Our only injury was a touch of frost nip to big toes (though the effects were felt for several months). We were lucky: New Zealand friends who tried the mountain a year later were less so. Trapped by a severe storm in a crevasse for several days without sleeping bags, they were fortunately (and eventually) dropped a radio from the helicopter. After rescue, though, and hospitalised, they'd had both legs amputated below the knee. Their radio call sign had been 'Hotel Mount Cook': clearly, 'Hotel Mount Cook' isn't always as forgiving to its guests as it was to us.



*'Look well to each step.' The huge cornices on Mount Cook's East Ridge. Photo: Dave Carr*



# Nevado Padrecaca

David Wynne Jones

By planes, coaches, minibus and burros, we moved closer: to Lima, where stone lovers entwined on cliffs of gravel, above the Pacific breakers; to Huancayo, in a bedroom which opened onto a garden crowded with flowers, rifled by the occasional hummingbird and to Miraflores, with its plaza being turned into a bandstand and a dusty upper floor of the 'town hall', where we dosed and trod carefully for fear of crashing through the broken floorboards. Then, suddenly, our mountain of equipment was at base camp being sorted and re-sorted. As we tried to settle in, though, huge glacial boulders broke up the stream and birds of prey circled in the sky.

We were in the right valley, but far from certain where the mountains were, or even which of them might be worth climbing. The team split up, heading to passes and viewpoints for bearings to fill in the 'blanks in the map'. Despite the invaluable reasearch Paul had done, information was still scarce and the maps, at 1:100,000, were not detailed enough. We were the first British team in the area — indeed, we knew of no other expedition here since the 60s. 'Shining Path' guerillas had made the area very dangerous, but the current status was apparently 'pacified'.

Acclimatising and beginning to identify some targets, we continued to wake to clear blue mornings with a touch of ice. Paul Hudson and Ken 'Chico' Findlay bagged Quepala Sud, 5,350m, in a day up a very loose broad ridge, getting back after dark; and Pam and I scrambled along another loose ridge to Punta Baleitus, 5,055m, with fine views of Ticlla (which we were preparing to climb). Others scouted the ridges and passes towards Ticlla. As the highest mountain in the range, dominating the surrounding peaks, Ticlla was obviously the major objective; but there was another, lower peak in the next valley to the N. which caught our interest. We eventually identified this as Nevado Padrecaca, 5,362m, and believed that it had not yet received a first ascent. An attractive mixed ridge led from a small approach glacier to the summit.

Stuart Gallagher, Ken 'Grande' Moseley, Pam Caswell and I set off with heavy packs to bivouac in the valley at the base of Nevado Padrecaca. It was after lunch before we were ready; then it was hard work climbing up to 'Pete's Pass'. A steady scree-strewn droving trail led down to a precipitous-looking traverse which rose, under the hanging glaciers of Ticlla's East Face, gently across the face of cliffs on the opposite side of the valley. Crossing a broad boggy ledge fed by melt water, we were very conscious of those glaciers, and on their return, Stuart and Ken were alarmed by an ice avalanche. Then we were on to the cliffs with rock-cut

steps and dry stonewalling, apparently stuck on in places, fitting the unlikely line for the passage of cattle, sheep and llama, but with no room for bunching.

The trail rose up to another pass to the north, but we had to continue to traverse east, to reach the rocks near the little glacier where we intended to bivouac. I had dropped behind to take some photographs and was surprised to see no sign of the others when I hurried round a spur to climb towards the pass. It suddenly seemed a very lonely place. By the time I'd spotted them, traversing below the bulge of the hill which had hidden them, I was well onto another traverse-line which converged with theirs, higher up.

We stumbled up unstable moraine debris to find some flat shelves and corners of rock near a clean little lake where we could spread the karrimats and build stone walls for windbreaks. Food and as many brews as we could manage preceded a long and uncomfortable night; a huge sky full of stars compensated. Big planets hung unwinking, whilst the starry smear of the Milky Way spread itself across the sky, and the constellations clustered and crowded each other, hour by hour.

Next morning, low cloud hung its webs, and specks of snow were falling. We delayed until 8.00 a.m. to judge the weather, then set off in clearing but still cloudy conditions. We climbed up debris to get onto the ice of the glacier while the sky gradually cleared. Climbing and belaying in two pairs, but more or less together, we found it not technically difficult, but quite steep. Ken and I led up to a junction with a ramp leading to the snowfield above the rock bands. Ken placed an ice screw, whilst I rigged a sling around a blunt block, making sure of Pam's stance. I then followed Stuart up steepening snow and ice to where he had an ice-axe belay near a horizontal break in the snow. A short furl in the crack and I had a good thread around an ice boss. The next pitch eased out onto the broad ridge.

Pam and I removed our crampons and scrambled up the rocks as far as we could to avoid struggling through potentially collapsing penitentes. Back on the snow, we



*It's a long way from Huancayo: belays in the snow-ramp system, high on Nevado Pedrecaca. Photo: David Wynne Jones*

threaded our way between rocks up to a short steep pitch of hard water-ice. Pam took a seated stance, braced in the snow trench between the rock and the edge of the snow slope, while I led up over rock and hard ice onto better névé. It was straightforward, although the 'dinner-plating' was a little disconcerting at first. Pam followed carefully and we unroped, leaving the rope in place for down-climbing the pitch, since Stuart had called from ahead that the next rise was the summit plateau. This was a litter of penitentes, which we soon abandoned for the rubble and gravel rim leading to the highest point. We discovered Stuart's plastic sidekick, 'Norris the Gnome', ensconced upon a little cairn for a sponsored night out on the summit.

Stuart and Ken climbed down doubtful rock rather than tackle the ice pitch again, but lent Pam a second ice axe to boost her confidence as we reversed the ice. She passed it back to them on the ridge below, but was beginning to feel the effects of altitude. On the initial snow slopes and ramps, she went first with me belaying, but got tired and said she was finding it more difficult than the ascent. Despite using them all on the way up, she seemed to develop a gift for missing the belay points. My own reaction to the altitude was an irritable snappiness, which fortunately only resulted in one heated altercation. I suppose part of the problem was that we'd had only one alpine season together in poor weather; there had been limited opportunities to gain confidence in each other as partners.

Back at the bivouac at 3.00 p.m. I was very dehydrated and needed some time to drink. Stuart and Ken had set off for base camp, leaving us their stove but time was against us. So, despite Pam's keenness to get back, we stayed for another uncomfortable night rather than descend from 'Pete's Pass' in the dark. Fortunately, Chris, Peter, Paul and Ken 'Chico' had enough spare bits of food to tide us over.

There was a snow shower in the morning, but the others got away quickly. The traverse path surprised us with a couple of inclines. Pam, operating in 'autopilot', began wheezing badly at one point and stumbling about at another. She became resentful of my efforts to encourage her to drink, eat or rest. Then we reached the pass and I persuaded her to take a break. After that, we descended to base camp and she set a cracking pace.

However, our first decent meal for 48 hours and thoughts of relaxation were interrupted by deteriorating weather. Friends arrived at different times (Norris's night out and subsequent rescue being noteworthy) and soon, Peru resembled Scotland in winter. The subsequent storms pinned us down for several days and claimed the lives of several unfortunate motorists who were trapped in their vehicles on high road passes.

But we'd been lucky — and that's surely the attraction of exploring such isolated areas: after the uncertainty, the remoteness and the less than reliable maps, to find and climb a (possible) fine new route is truly fulfilling.



# Midnight Magic

Stephen Reid

As I breasted the slight rise in the narrow spit of land that separates Kong Oscar's Fjord from Skeldal, I was poorly prepared for the view that confronted me. Behind lay memories: of six unclimbed peaks on the Sefstroms, followed by as many days of tiring travel; of long glacier ascents, steep passes and of descents sadly too shallow to schuss with a sled (over a foot and a half of fresh snow in twenty-four hours had seen to that). To be truthful, we were exhausted — and we'd had our share of dramas too: injury due to rock-fall; 36 hours on a route for one party; crevasse rescue, and then, this long, if easier last day. In bed only by four in the morning, we hadn't started skinning over the snow - covered ice of the Skel until well into the afternoon.

I had been leading most of the day, breaking trail through the snow, delighting in the new territory revealed and in the tracks that criss- crossed the frozen river. Here were lemming, arctic fox and musk oxen. We never actually saw an animal, though, except barnacle geese and ravens — and certainly not the polar bear on whose account we had been forced to share our journey with a heavy pre-war .303 rifle and half a dozen rounds.

I had a song that came into my head when I was skinning along like this. It was no use trying to get rid of it; its rhythm so suited my actions that it was there all the time whether I wanted it or not.

'D'ye ken John Peel in his coat so gay,  
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day,  
He's over the hills and he's far, far away,  
With his horn and his hounds in the morning.'

Round and round like a madrigal it went, banishing all conscious thought and concerns and turning me into a pulk-hauling mechanoid. 'Da da da da da, da da da da da'. That spit of land boasting small outcroppings of mosses, lichens and rough grasses, pushing through the snow was tundra — a magic word, bringing back long forgotten memories of the ink-bespattered, initial-carved desks of my old school geography classroom. I was about to remember another one, too... but what were they staring at, over there, on the horizon?

As usual, I had tired, been overtaken, and was now the rearguard of our team of eight. The others had all reached the high point of the rise and had stopped, dropped their sacks and let the shafts of their sleds fall. There was a lot of pointing going on and cameras were much in evidence. What were they doing? What could they see that I could not? And then I dragged my weary body the last few yards and saw it: pack ice. Those were the words: 'tundra' and 'pack ice'. Pack ice as far as the eye could see, right across to Traill Island at least (and that was five miles away) and set in

the pack ice, was a vast armada of ghostly galleons — great, green, blue, white, icebergs, glistening and glittering in the land of the midnight sun. Festooned with rainbows of stalactites and deep, cool, ice-blue grottos, they lay scattered higgledy-piggledy, like so many pebbles, a giant's playthings left out to melt.

The sun was shining on the sea,  
Shining with all his might;  
He did his very best to make  
The billows smooth and bright —  
And this was odd, because it was,  
The middle of the night.'

We skinned across the frozen, snow-covered sea for hours until we reached the nearest 'berg, which just happened to lie more or less directly on our way to Mesters Vig. Here we rested and cooked our final meal in Greenland: soup, pasta, nuts, chocolate pudding, tea and whisky. Not bad for the dregs of the larder. Then, clamping on crampons and siezing axes, I climbed the iceberg; it was a first and, most probably, a last ascent.

From its summit, I could see all around me my iceberg's brothers and sisters, glimmering in ghostly unison — and also the peaks on Traill Island brushing against a cerulean sky, twirling wreaths of whispering mist twisting over Mesters Vig. The vast, polished red orb of the sun, kissing the northern horizon was sending great golden rays skimming over the soft white surface of the frozen sea. I looked at my watch; it was midnight. The witching hour was upon us.



*'This fella's feeling for ice': Stephen Reid looking for his 'berg's brothers and sisters' at Midnight, Kong Oscar's Fjord. Photo: John Peder*

# Rebels without a Clue

Geoff Hornby

I stood in the open door of the rig floor, watching the sun rise from way over northern Norway; another winter's rough-necking was within an hour of completion. Then it would be headlong into the summer's sports plan: a trip to the Alps and a big North Face was to be followed by my first trip to the Himalaya and after this, a swanee across the pond for a big wall in Yosemite. These dreams had kept me going through the drenchings, the endless hours of chain spinning and the abuse I received as the only Englishman on a thirteen-man drill crew.

Four days later, I was sunbathing outside the Argentiére hut in the Mt. Blanc massif, watching the diminutive figure of my future climbing partner pounding his way up the final ice-field on the North Face of Les Courtes. Rob Yee, a Chinese-American, was to be my partner in crime for the first third of my great escape: an attempt on the *Schmid Route* on the North Face of the Matterhorn. That night, we shared a boulder bivouac that was plagued by the guardian of the nearby hut: he kept hosing water on the bivvy spots that were too close to the hut for his liking.

Our first day on the hill was a rapid trip up the lower part of the North East Ridge for a quick scan across the North Face to check out the critical features. John Barry's descriptive nightmare of failing to locate the right passage, and having to traverse off across desperate and loose ground, had left an imprint on my mind; so we looked carefully for the critical connection between the lower ice-field and main continuation groove-line.

Whilst relaxing that afternoon at the hut, we were joined by a diminutive powerhouse of a man who proclaimed that he was both the Head Guide and the *only* guide who was capable of climbing the Matterhorn under the current snowy conditions. He gazed at us disdainfully before introducing his huge American client, with whom he had just conquered the *voie normale*. It was hard to imagine a more contrasting pair: Luki appeared to be permanently sitting down (though he had calf muscles bigger than my thighs), whilst the American was the kind of guy who could reach the top of most gritstone crags without making a move. Luki took an instant dislike to the pair of us. He had obviously assumed our foray up the Hornli Ridge was a pathetic failure, due to gross incompetence rather than reconnaissance. So, imagine his horror when we answered his query and he discovered we were heading off to the North Face at midnight.

As well as being 'General Bergfuhrer of the Zermatt Mountain Mafia', Luki was also, apparently, the Director of the Mountain Rescue Services, and therefore felt it was his duty to demand our return to the val-

ley. Rob just sat there grinning with 'The Boss' playing through his Walkman, whilst I bowed my head and concentrated on sharpening my front points. Clearly, there would be a problem soon if Luki didn't bugger off, because Rob would start taking the piss out of him in Chinese, and all I would have left for crampons would be a pile of iron filings.

We stepped out of the hut at spot on midnight and plodded up over the scree hump to gain the glacier. Resting for a second, I gazed upwards and commented that despite the abundance of stars there appeared to be traces of thin high cloud that might signal the approach of bad weather. Rob gave me one of those withering looks and said: "You stupid English berk, that's the finest display of the Milky Way you are ever likely to see." We continued in silence.

The initial ice-field is usually a straightforward grunt up a thousand feet of fifty-degree ice and snow; the only highlight in our ascent was the departure of one of my crampons from the sole of my boot. Placing both ice tools in the slope and clipping in, I threw my foot up in front onto the offending steel object and torqued the straps back up. It seemed to fit too easily, but I couldn't work it out in the dark.

With short retaining walls, the top corner of the ice-field closes in on you. We dug a spike out of the ice and then hung off it whilst uncoiling the single 300ft 9mm rope. A short mixed groove gave access to a second subsidiary ice-field; we nipped across it and over some more short walls until we could stand on a snowy spine beneath the main groove-line. It was a good point to read the route description: 'Find a corner to the right and down climb into the larger corner system.'

Two fit Swiss guides caught up with us and slid through without wasting any time. I did, however, enquire if they had done this route before and received my second withering comment from Rob: "This is a route you do only once!" As they passed us, Rob appeared forty feet above, traversing in from the right: 200ft of rope and only 40ft of height gained. I'm convinced that the descriptions given in early alpine guide books do tend to lead to you to make all the same route finding errors that the writer made on his ascent.

The big groove was steady, fairly easy but with poor belays and very few runners. However, although our progress was continuing well, route-finding problems were yet again to be our demise. Our two Swiss friends had hung a left somewhere near the top of the groove and we had missed it. Consequently, I found myself following Rob up a very steep and loose blocky wall to an exposed belay on the edge of a slab covered in snow. There was no feasible way other than straight up or straight back down.

I patted steps into the soft snow and gingerly rocked up from step to step, feeling my brain becoming more and more detached from the insecurity of my foot movements: this lot could go at any moment. After a hundred feet I reached the base of the next wall and slammed half the rack in between the blocks. I hung there, wasted, whilst Rob tight-rope



teetered up the slope. He dispatched the next wall without fuss and took a nice stance below a long groove-line. It looked hard and whilst racking the gear, I demanded the water bottle — only to receive a blank look: he didn't have it. I certainly didn't have it, so around about now, the lady in the hut would probably be tidying it away. I was parched.

Delicate bridging up the groove past some pegs led to a blank wall with two bolts in it. The higher of the two was draped in some old white tat, always a clue that this was a regular high point. Above lay a thin crack that would require awkward nailing to a lower-angled area. We were snookered; we didn't have enough gear to climb it and it looked solid A3. I hung on the old bolt, wondering what the hell was going on. Clearly, we were on *The Bonatti Direct*, or even some other *direttissima*.

Whilst pondering our predicament, I spotted a line of thin side pulls and edges crossing the side wall of the groove and leading to some cracks in a small overlap. Instructing Rob of my intention, I began the technical sequence across the twenty-foot traverse. Things went remarkably well at first: the side-pulls were small but sharp, and the horizontal holds had a veneer of ice on them, allowing some purchase for my front points. But then my left foot skidded. Looking down, I almost went into shock: the crampon was hanging by its strap around my ankle. I was paralysed, couldn't even begin to move. My weight was all on the right foot and balance was shared between two side pulls. Realising that the longevity of this position was debatable, I decide that my only chance was to jump for the tat on the bolt.

A brief discussion set the team plan. Rob would crank gently whilst I extended off a side-pull and, at the point of departure, he would suck in the rope like mad to reduce my air time should I miss the tat or the bolt shear. It sounded good to Rob, but he hadn't seen the sun-bleached crap I was depending on.

It was all over in a second: my hands connected with the tape and my arms were all but ripped out of my shoulder joints. Hanging back at the starting point, I analysed the crampon problem and spotted the fault. Because this was a North Wall, I had given my holy canvas gaiters the day off and borrowed some snazzy nylon ones. The thinner material meant that when tightened to the last hole, the strap was still mildly slack. This was a bad place to try and make adjustments.

After a spell, I dispatched the traverse easily and plugged the overlap with four wires. Pulling over, I found my nose pushed into fresh markings in the snow. As I stood, I spotted the traverse line back in from the left made by the Swiss team. I shared their stance, put my gear in their cleaned out placements and relaxed. Over to my left, a movement on the ridge caught my eye: the Swiss were descending the Hornli. They had summited and we were on the final easy slope.

The last five hundred feet of snow-covered rubble are best forgotten; the dehydration was grinding us down and when we finally hit the

summit we were completely whacked. We climbed methodically down the Hornli in failing light before reaching the Solvay bivouac hut at 10.00 p.m.

I don't remember anything else until the hut door was thrown open and a guide informed us that this was an emergency shelter, not a place to sleep. Rob garbled at him in Chinese (the gist of which was that last night it felt like an effing emergency, so piss off); but it got us going again. We ran down the ridge to the Hornli Hut and each inhaled three, ridiculously expensive Pepsis before wandering down to the cable car station. Here, an English tourist pulled at my shirt and asked if I'd guide him up the ridge: I left him confused as to whether he was insane, I was insane or the mountain was insane.

We dashed into the *téléphérique*, anxious not to miss the last descent, and ran headlong into...Luki. He was on his way back up to guide the ridge again. Having heard from the Swiss guides that we had topped out and obviously delighted that his services would not be needed, he smiled. I told him the route was fine, apart from the Bonatti pitches which were well-hard. His expression turned from amazement to beaming pride. I was confused at this, until I sussed that he'd misunderstood my accent and thought we'd climbed *The Bonatti Direct*. I grabbed Rob's arm and pulled him into the empty *'phérique*. "Let's not hang about in case he asks any more questions," I told him. We had nothing to lose. Luki was smiling, we were smiling, even the Matterhorn was smiling.

Over dinner that night we discussed many things: the quality of the local beer; philosophy; the amount of cheap red wine we could drink; the price of our mountains of pasta and the value of having been part of the (possible) first Chinese ascent of the Matterhorn North Face. Then we fell off our chairs laughing and were asked to leave the premises.

# Centenary Sandstone

**Bob Moulton**

An extensive programme of events, based mainly on the huts, was listed for the CC Centenary Year. But this meant that London and the South East was conspicuous by its absence from the formal celebrations. However, an idea emerged from the success of the sandstone evening meets (which started in 1995 with the midsummer's eve Harrison's Meet followed by a barbecue at The Junction); Mike Vetterlein, therefore, proposed an eight-outcrop walk and we linked this to dinner at the High Rocks.

Putting the emphasis on the climbing in the South East rather than on the city, was for me a fitting successor to the Club's London Dinners and AGMs which had been the norm for the Club until 1974. Having joined the club in the 60s, my main memories of these, at places such as the Hurlingham Club and Criterion Hotel, were of the annual round of conflict between the reformers (vocally led by Ken Wilson) and the old guard. 'Women' was the main issue; but the AGM I remember best was when, together with Ken and Malcolm Howells, I stood for the committee against the committee nominations. The subsequent resounding defeat gave us a sharp lesson in the power of the establishment.

The High Rocks was the ideal location, being in the main climbing area of the South East and fitting in well with an eight-outcrop walk. It also provided the scope for a more informal dinner, which is in keeping with my distaste for the more formal aspects of club dinners. In fact, I hadn't been to that many of the Club's dinners (my main reasons for joining the Club having been to do with guidebooks, staying at huts, and to act as voting-fodder for Ken), so I had little idea as to what was involved in organizing one. Consultation with Pip Hopinkson identified a gap in the Club's Centenary programme that coincided with our desire for a date near to the summer solstice. Having been benighted on our first rehearsal for the walk in November, we were leaving nothing to chance.

Following advice from Pip as to the normal format for dinners, I invited three eminent sandstone climbers to speak: Chris Bonington (whose very youthful introduction to climbing is shown in *I Chose to Climb* by a photo at Harrison's) said he'd love to have come, but that he'd be away sailing with Robin Knox-Johnston; Mick Fowler said he would do anything but an after-dinner speech and offered to do a slide show, instead, and Martin Boysen (who still hasn't answered any of my letters).

So it was back to the drawing-board and this time we decided to emphasize the informality of the dinner and not have 'formal' speeches. Booking a room at the High Rocks seemed a good idea too, and this we did so well in advance that by the time I came to confirm the booking, they had lost all record of my earlier visit and follow-up letter. We completed the

guest list with Terry Tullis, whose work at Harrison's since the late 50s is well known, and Billy Maxwell one of the early Sandstone Climbing Club climbers.

It was then time for an item to go in the newsletter. This meant a decision on the menu; a back-of-the-envelope calculation to work out the cost per head, and a few moments of doubt as to whether £17 was too much. We trailed the dinner in the newsletter. Assurances from Pip and Ken gave me the confidence to assume that the Boysen team would attend. Martin's reputation in sandstone circles was, and still is, such as to make his attendance highly desirable. I had mild panic when the newsletter failed to appear and wrote a stropmy letter to Bob Allen suggesting that if the newsletter was delayed much longer, his time as President might be distinguished by the Club losing the first half of its Centenary Year programme. But the newsletter duly appeared and the bookings started coming in.

Meanwhile, Mike Vetterlein had been planning a timetable for the walk — the timing and route of which had been refined after a second rehearsal, slightly earlier in the year — and preparing details of the maps that we'd be sending to all takers for the weekend. Never expecting it to be followed seriously, we had a bit of fun drawing up a list of suggested routes at different grades. But it did raise in our minds the question of finding easier-grade routes at each of the outcrops for sandstone novices and some of the older members, whose attendance at some of our evening sandstone meets had been such a welcome feature.

High Rocks was the main problem. Like most climbers, I have always steered well clear of the easier-graded but horrendous-looking chimneys at High, but Mike assured me that *Anaconda Chimney*, graded 4a, was the most reasonable. I found this hard to believe and made a point of meeting Mike at High Rocks to give it a try. After four attempts, the loss of considerable amounts of skin and changing from shorts to Ron Hills, I gave up and declared the climb unsuitable for our purpose. Fairly desultory attempts then followed to find a more suitable easy climb. I did manage to struggle up *One of Our Chimneys is Missing*, a recent 'discovery' at 3a, but it seemed ridiculously hard for an easy climb and I abandoned the search for the day.

Mike produced a detailed timetable and route map, with inserts for the more obvious points at which people might get lost, and between us we produced a set of yellow card arrows complete with the centenary logo to pin up on convenient trees and gateposts at these points. We had agreed that Mike would go round at the front of the party to show the way and pin up the arrows, and that I would go round last to help the stragglers and to take down the arrows.

The list of those attending was shaping up into a good mixture of past and present sandstone climbers — the former aided by the lobbying efforts of two colleagues in particular. The cheques kept coming in and we were approaching the limit for the room we had booked. I mailed out Mike's



map to all concerned. As the day drew near, I started playing around with seating plans and discovered the complications created by the fact that numbers don't always add up conveniently to the eight-per-table that we were using, with the added complication of the need to keep a few ex-couples apart. Discovering new skills on my PC culminated in my production of the menu. But I ended up with a blank page at the back of the menu, so at the last minute, I came up with a chronology of dates that attempted to relate the Club's history with the history of climbing in the South East, with an emphasis on our guests and members who would be attending. Some interesting 'links' emerged: that Aleister Crowley had climbed at Beachy Head before the Club was founded (enlivened by thoughts as to what the reaction of our predecessors would have been had the Great Beast 666 wanted to join the Club); that Harrison's had been discovered by a Club member while hunting; that Nea Morin, the mother of sandstone climbing, could never have been a CC member and that the Club voted to admit women at its first AGM away from London. It was an entirely personal list of events, drawn up mainly from memory, but I thought it might provide some mild amusement while people waited for the first course to be served.

The forecast for the day was heavy rain and our estimates of the numbers taking part in the walk dropped every time Mike and I spoke. We arrived early in a grey wet car-park at High Rocks (in my case together with a box full of menus, table numbers and table plans) and waited for nobody to appear, but they did. A total of 30 made the start, including the President, two ex-Presidents and the Treasurer. Fifteen minutes or so later, after greeting old friends and making introductions, a convoy of cars departed for Bowles where it was still raining. We had arranged with a few of the regulars for ropes to be put up quickly to avoid delay and there was a flurry of activity. Within minutes, Mike and his team had completed their climbs and departed for Eridge. Others, less focussed on the task, started catching up on the news with friends they hadn't seen for years; so I encouraged another group to move off on the walk since I was conscious that Eridge might prove to be a bottleneck. Martin Boysen appeared — to climb rather than to walk — but it was good to see at least one of the guests had made it.

I shepherded the rump of the walkers away from Bowles; the sight of a crocodile of over twenty of us in brightly-coloured cagoules wending our way through the lush Sussex countryside was quite something. Approaching the first of Mike's yellow arrows, I realized from the back of the pack that something had gone wrong when everyone went straight on when they should have turned right. The yellow CC arrow, made soggy by the rain, had collapsed and pointed nowhere. A few shouted directions and we were soon back on track. The intermediate party that I had packed off from Bowles, however, went straight ahead and ended up having to walk for a mile along the main road. All the subsequent arrows survived and nobody

got lost. We arrived at Eridge and a minor traffic-jam, but it soon worked itself out. The rain stopped and I changed into shorts as a sign of solidarity with Ken who, with an eye to fashion, was wearing a lurid combination of cut-off denim shorts and wellies.

The walk to Harrison's was drier, though still wet underfoot, and not helped by the fact that I sent the main party along an overgrown footpath that Mike had sensibly avoided by a short detour. We arrived at Harrison's at lunchtime and caught up with some of the advance parties. During this part of the walk, I discovered the Treasurer hadn't brought the Club cheque book. This presented the minor problem of how we would pay the £1000-odd bill for the dinner that evening. A very few moments thought led me to the conclusion

that I probably didn't have that sort of money in my bank account, so in contravention of rule 23 of the Sandstone Code of Conduct, I borrowed a mobile phone to summon up the guidebook cheque book from home. Although the number of climbs available at Harrison's meant that there was little delay in climbing, we started to run behind schedule due to other distractions. Some stayed on to do more climbs and others were meeting up with old friends who'd gone straight to Harrison's.

Eventually, the now enlarged main body made its way towards Groombridge, where we were faced with the decision of who was going to stop at the pub. Most of us had grabbed a sandwich or two at Harrison's, but the published programme did allow for a brief stop at The Junction. Although friendly to climbers, The Junction was at that time noted for its slow service of meals, and I could foresee this doing serious damage to our already suffering timetable. Fortunately, nobody seemed that bothered and I was able to shepherd the group away from the flesh-pots of Groombridge and down past Groombridge House and along the banks of the River Grom. Luckily, no one seemed to notice that this also entailed passing a sewage treatment works. Mike hadn't thought it necessary to put any arrows up on this section of the route. This was one of the improvements in our route and I had only done it once before, when Mike had been leading the way and I hadn't been concentrating. So I had one or two anxious moments when my local knowledge was called upon to pronounce which way we



*Sartorially-challenged publisher shyly proffers climbing advice to sandstone novitiates? Photo: Jancis Allison*

should go. Luckily, I guessed right and we found ourselves at High Rocks.

As part of the deal for the dinner, the management had agreed to waive the £2 entry fee to the Rocks for the CC group. A sizeable crowd had now congregated at the Rocks, including our guest Mick Fowler. I did a quick climb and then tried to make sure that our senior member on the Meet, Frank Palmer, got up a climb at High. I had learnt that *Shelter Chimney* was easier than the chimneys that we had tried on the unsuccessful dry-run, so I put a rope down it and did the climb myself to find out if this was true. Although there was a short restricted section, I found it was a good deal easier than the other horrors and I encouraged Frank to have a go, but, despite his valiant efforts, we had to admit to joint failure. We were now well behind schedule and a quick tour of the Rocks told me that everyone there was more than happy to call it a day, doing more climbs or just talking to friends old and new.

I decided to complete the walk but to abandon the climbing both to take down Mike's arrows and to see how people were doing. High Rocks Continuation Wall was next on the list and here some of the more adventurous members of the main group were doing a climb, although they had decided to go no further. I met up with two parties at Bulls Hollow, but declined the offer of a rope on the classic *Bramble Corner*, wanting to get back to the hotel ahead of programme. I delegated the arrow-removing and walked on to Happy Valley Rocks where I met up with the mobile phone I had used at Harrison's. In his party was a friend who had planned to drive back to Lewes to change, and to collect his wife. Clearly, his plan was now hopelessly ambitious and further breaches of the Sandstone Code followed while we arranged for a lift and for his clothes to be delivered. I caught up with the vanguard party at High Annexe and arrived back at High more or less on schedule. I quickly changed in the car park and together with Mike, and armed with my box full of table plans and menus, called in at the hotel. Everything seemed to be going to plan, although we still hadn't sorted out a screen for the slide show. An unsuccessful phone-round search for a 4ft-screen for the slide show led to the decision to use a sheet. I delegated the task of attaching it to the wall to Mike and returned to the car-park to await my wife and daughter's arrival with the cheque book.

A continual stream of arrivals followed: people were coming in from the walk, collecting cars from Bowles, arriving for the first time and meeting up with partners, but there was still no cheque book. After a few last minute collections of payment for the dinner, it was nearing time for the group photo in the grounds of the Rocks. My family arrived at the last minute, having had to return for the cheque book, and I started to usher the crowd from the bar across the road for the group photo. This operation was complicated by the fact that the hotel staff would not allow glasses to be taken across the road, but in fading light we assembled on a convenient slope in front of the Rocks. Further delays were caused by the discovery of a wasps' nest in the midst of the group, necessitating a hurried re-arrange-

ment before the photo could be taken.

The dinner itself went almost uneventfully: my seating plans worked, no-one complained and, at the last minute, I remembered to buy a bottle of wine for each of the guests. Within minutes of sitting down however, disaster struck: an irate Ken Wilson stormed over to my table to draw my attention to a serious omission (Martin Boysen's article in *Mountain 35*, *Confessions of a Sandstone Addict*) from my notes on the back of the menu and to demand my immediate resignation from the Club (I made the last bit up). I mumbled something about it being a very light-hearted list but this did little to avert the onslaught. In fact, Ken was right (as usual) in that the article was a classic, and I had in fact drawn heavily on it when working on the historical for the sandstone guide. In my haste in preparing the notes I had opted for the more frivolous reference to Boysen's choice of Krankenkopf Crack at High Rocks as one of his Desert Island Climbs. For those who know the climb, it is the choice of a true sandstone addict.

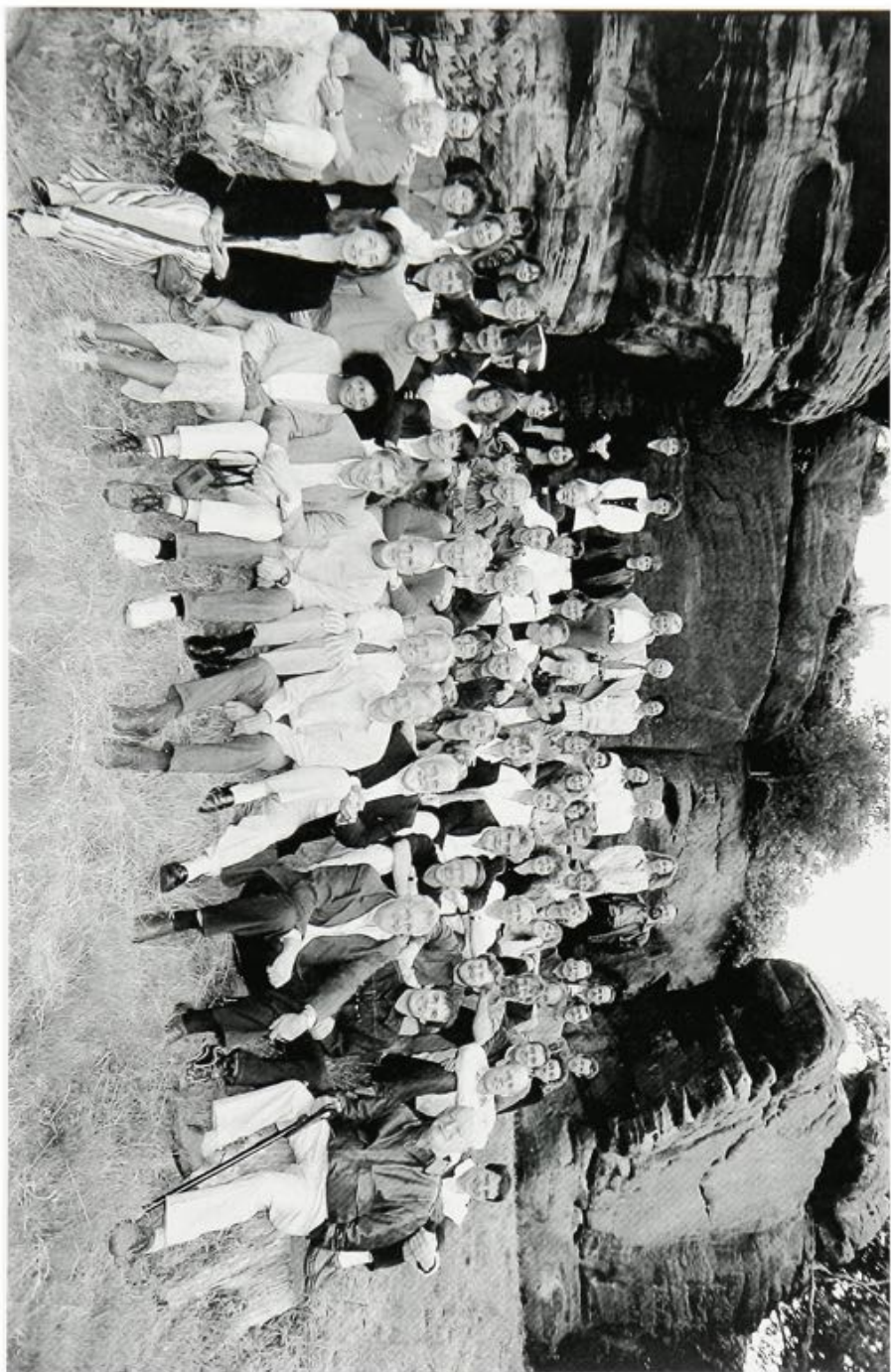
The President gave a lively 'informal' speech with a plug for the Scottish Hut and, in a gesture only made possible as a result of his efforts to release the embargo placed on distributing the remaining stocks, presented copies of the *Centenary Journal* to the guests. Mick Fowler's slide show — a self-deprecating run through the outrageously adventurous development of chalk climbing in the South East, full of anecdotes about the incidents that seem to go with the territory — was pitched at just the right level. It may have done little to persuade the audience to climb on chalk, but it was very amusing and conveyed the exuberance and commitment needed for this type of climbing. It is a fitting postscript to the dinner that Mick accepted the honorary membership of the Club during the centenary year.

The bar was open till 2.00 a.m. but it had been a long day and around midnight my party was ready to go home. But first, I had to pay the bill. It was then I discovered that I'd left the service charge out of my back-of-the-envelope calculations. However, thankfully, the total cost was still within Club limits. I then found myself as minibus organizer for the free service that the hotel laid on for those staying at the campsite at Harrison's. This involved protracted negotiations between hotel staff on the ground floor and a seemingly ever-varying number of takers for the first minibus two floors up (where the noise level was increasing by the minute).

Eventually I saw everyone on to the minibus, dumped a member-donated flagon of beer onto the lap of an unsuspecting camper and waved them off. I then left instructions for a second minibus for the hardened drinkers (which never materialized — but that, and the identity of the replacement car driver, is another story) and left for home.

*Opposite: Not a wasp in sight, just sundry sandstone addicts, gurus and aficionados at the CC Centenary Sandstone Dinner. Photo: Chris Eades*







## Bob's back of the menu history notes

- 1894 *Etheldreda's Pinnacle* at Beachy Head climbed by Aleister Crowley the 'Great Beast 666', (definitely never CC).
- 1898 The Climbers' Club founded.
- 1908 Harrison's Rocks 'discovered' by Charles Nettleton (CC) whilst hunting.
- 1926 First record of climbing on Sandstone, Harrison's, by Eric Shipton (CC), Nea Morin (not CC) and others.
- 1934 H Courtney-Bryson's guide-book, *Rock Climbs Around London* (not CC) published.
- c.1948 CC members active: Johnnie Lees, Mike Ball (*Monkey's Bow* — a very early 6a), Menlove Edwards (with his eponymous *Effort*), and Tony Moulam (soloed *Slim Finger Crack*).
- 1951 Sandstone Climbing Cub formed.
- 1954 *Coronation Crack*, High, climbed by Billy Maxwell (a year late?).
- 1956 First CC guide-book, Ted Pyatt's *South East England* published. Followed by a further five editions and various re-prints.
- 1958 Harrison's Rocks purchased by a group of climbers and given to the BMC.
- 1969 Ian McNaught-Davis's *Who Digs Harrisons?* in *Mountain 1*.
- 1970-9 The Festerhaunt at Groombridge run by Terry & Julie Tullis.
- 1974 The last CC AGM and Dinner in London, at the Flemings Hotel.
- 1975 CC rules changed to admit women members.
- 1979 Martin Boysen's *Desert Island Climbs*, Craggs, included *Krankenkopf*.
- 1981 *Dry Ice* at Dover, climbed by Mick Fowler.
- 1992 First women President of the CC, Jancis Allison, sandstone climber in the 60s.
- 1995 First CC evening Sandstone Meet, approx. 40 attended.
- 1998 CC Centenary Sandstone Dinner.

# Les & Lawrie

Steve Dean

*'I'm from Essex, in case you couldn't tell.'*

(Ian Dury)

*'Mountains, climbing, freedom — they were summed up in a monosyllable. Wales meant home for our liberated spirits.'*

(Showell Styles)

The birth of modern climbing journalism in Britain can be narrowed down to the summer of 1968. Everything changed when *Rocksport* appeared from South Wales and when Ken Wilson totally transformed the last two copies of *Mountain Craft* before *Mountain* appeared the following year. Suddenly, for better or worse, British climbing began to be reported in a thoroughly modern fashion. Information spread rapidly and climbing at last became 'democratic', more media-aware.

Two of the earliest stars arising from this new process were the Holliwell brothers, Les and Lawrie. From 1968 to 1972, it was impossible to pick up a climbing magazine and not read about their exploits. They arrived on the scene in the mid 60s and were at the cutting edge on Welsh rock for a number of years, until the tragedy of Lawrie's sudden death in the summer of 1973. They made a major contribution in the period 1966-1973, which resulted in over fifty new climbs, predominantly at Gogarth, or on Llech Ddu in the Carneddau. More than anything, though, they are remembered for being different from the accepted norm. At that time, it was still widely believed that the only way to get to the top level in British climbing, was via a hard apprenticeship on gritstone — in other words you really had to live in the north.

Les and Lawrie came from Essex, with no traditional entry into the sport, and no membership of a club. Their isolation prevented them from being psyched out by the mythology and perceived wisdom still prevalent in Wales in particular. They brought to the table a loud blend of rapid cockney-speak, self mocking humour and a level of excellence on the crags that was difficult to ignore. Added to this, they became widely liked and admired for their honesty. Jim Perrin recalls their entry onto the scene: "They were huge fun, they played with it all and delighted a lot of people. The scene had got very heavy and moribund, and it was brilliant once they started coming into the pub. The voices, particularly Les's would just get higher and higher. They provided a lot of laughs and Lawrie in particular was a brilliant rock climber, one of the best I've ever seen. He was so springy."

A quarter of a century has passed since the heyday of the Holliwells and much in the sport of climbing has changed in that time. But a warm

appreciation of them in *Welsh Rock* and a couple of brief obituaries of Lawrie seem a scant reward for such an interesting contribution; so I decided to contact Les, to see how he recalled those times when he and Lawrie were up in Wales virtually every weekend.

Les Holliwell, though now well into his fifties, is still a very slim, fit-looking man with greying hair and piercing eyes; I instantly sensed something of the drive he and Lawrie had brought to climbing: "We grew up in Romford, in Essex. There were three brothers; I was the eldest (born 1939) followed by Lawrie and Richard. Our parents were very enthusiastic about the wild places and we had holidays in North Wales, the Lake District, Cornwall, places like that. My Dad also had a number of books about mountaineering, he knew all about the pre-war epics on the Eiger. We were lucky for the time. Dad had a car so we could travel around and got to visit some interesting places while still quite young."

Les was in the last batch of people called up to do National Service, serving in the RAF. A hill-walking holiday in 1960 kindled an interest in the mountains of Snowdonia: "We'd seen people climbing with ropes and decided to get some gear and try it. The following summer (1961), I'd left the RAF, got an old Morris 8 car and four of us returned, including Lawrie, who was then eighteen. We were wonderfully incompetent; but it quickly emerged that Lawrie had a talent for climbing and by the end of the holiday, he'd led us up *Soappgut* on Tryfan."

Developing their climbing in such isolation and initially with only spasmodic visits to the hills, they worked their way slowly up the grades and embarked on the traditional VS apprenticeship. Lawrie emerged as the natural leader on rock: "Lawrie clearly had a talent for it, but I also think he had a point to prove. We were in quite a tough group of mates. I was working as a draughtsman in London, cycling 36 miles every day, while Lawrie was working at Ford in Dagenham. We were both studying in the week as well. We were physically a competitive group, but Lawrie was always regarded as the brainy one. He ended up with a very good job designing juggernauts."

Through climbing in Wales and meeting other climbers, Les and Lawrie found out about the sandstone climbing in Kent and Sussex. Relatively near to home, they took to it with great enthusiasm: "We got very keen on the sandstone, after really struggling with it to start with and used it to get very fit. If we weren't going to Wales we'd go to, say, Harrisons for the day, and build up to doing up to 30 routes of 5b-6a, most of which we'd solo. It gave great strength/stamina training. Often in the summer, we'd go down on Wednesday nights as well. I'd meet Lawrie at the Dartford crossing and we'd try and get another 20 routes done. Very few people were soloing on the sandstone at that time and we took a few tumbles, but it was great preparation for Wales. We used to crawl home exhausted."

Les and Lawrie continued to visit Wales and occasionally the Lakes, Avon or Cornwall. The progression up through the grades was a steady





Lawrie at ease in 1966 on Crucible HVS, Cwm Silyn. Photo Les Holliwell

one, although by Les's admission, they were not very good initially at matters like belaying and placing protection. However, rapidly gained technical ability and fitness led to a major breakthrough in 1964: "In June that year, two sandstone mates of ours, Robin Harper and Bob Junkerson, suddenly broke through into the Extreme grade. In a weekend they did *Sickle*, *Karwendel Wall*, *Brant Direct* and *Hangover*. They told us we'd do them easily. Lawrie was very sceptical at first, but soon after that we did *Cenotaph Corner*, *Cemetery Gates* and *Vector* in a weekend. We had made our own breakthrough and never looked back after that. That August we also did the *Cromlech Girdle*."

There followed a couple of years steadily repeating all the major routes in Wales and gradually the visits became more frequent as well. By the summer of 1966 their reputation had begun to spread: "By 1966 we had done most of the big routes in Wales, and other things were also improving for us. By that time (I was 27, Lawrie was 24) we'd both finished studying at night school. We had a decent car and a lot more time available for getting away at weekends."

Certainly, their efforts at that time were increasingly impressive with very early repeats of *Great Wall*, *Dinosaur* and *Winking Crack* (complete). Of even greater significance was the second ascent of *The Skull* on Cynr Las, Martin Boysen's superb route, which was then being regarded as perhaps the hardest route in Wales. "We were still really operating on our own, camping in the Pass. One night we picked up a climber hitching to Wales, and it turned out to be Pete Crew. He was hugely impressed by what we were doing and it then dawned on us what progress we had made."

Ian Roper comments that: "Wales was quite a closed scene in the 60s, but in a strange way Lawrie and Les were people who upped the ante. There were a number working at it, but they really had something. *Wonderwall* was very significant in my opinion — and remember, it was ground-up in those days, often on pretty primitive gear. Lawrie made a very important contribution to Welsh climbing as a whole."

Geoff Milburn, too, has strong memories of them at this time: "Lawrie





Noisy Archimedeanes? Les and Lawrie 'moving over stone' after their first ascent of Eureka. Photo: Ken Wilson

and Les were noisy, funny and had a superb line in ironic humour. They were initially regarded as a little abrasive by some, and were very competitive. Their sharp southern accents and brashness ruffled a few northern feathers, but they rapidly gained respect in Wales, and were well liked."

By 1966 it was almost inevitable that they would turn their attention to new routes, for there was much to go at in Wales, particularly on Anglesey. They made a tentative start with *Itch* at Tremadog and *Poker* at Hyll-Drem; but of greater significance that year, were two new routes on the much-neglected Llech Ddu, deep in the Carneddau: *Iota* was quite slight, but *Venom* (now graded E3) was a major contribution to a wave of exploration on this wonderfully atmospheric crag.

In August 1966 Ken Wilson found them making the first ascent of *Eureka* at Cwm Silyn. Ken recalls: "Fragments of purple cockney came floating down from the crag as Les cursed his brother for sloth, laziness, lack of poke and all the other sins a solid second can think up. Then came Les's turn, and the process was reversed with Lawrie urging him on, though rather less forcefully. I didn't realise it then, but the Holliwells were to become the most effective new route team in Wales since Crew and Ingle." Les remembered that day: "By the time we got back to the pub. Ken had told everyone about us. To be honest, meeting him was a double-edged sword, because we soon became very well known. I'm quite a gregarious person, and it wasn't really a problem, but Lawrie was a much more withdrawn, private man. He absolutely hated all the daft adulation that came about."

The following year began with a series of eighteen new routes in

Moel-y-Gest quarry, near to Tremadog. Most of these were on impressively loose rock, highly fashionable at the time. *Scarface* was added to Llech Ddu in June and involved an impressive amount of gardening, described by Les as vertical bulldozing using a swan-neck hoe and a large stiff brush. The route has become quite popular. Of greater significance in 1967 was Les and Lawrie's growth of interest in Gogarth. At that time there was an electricity crackling about the place and it was inevitable that they would soon be involved: "We'd heard all about the crag and went over to Anglesey to have a look. We did *Gogarth* and were absolutely gripped up by the atmosphere. We were soon back, however, and thought the place was brilliant."

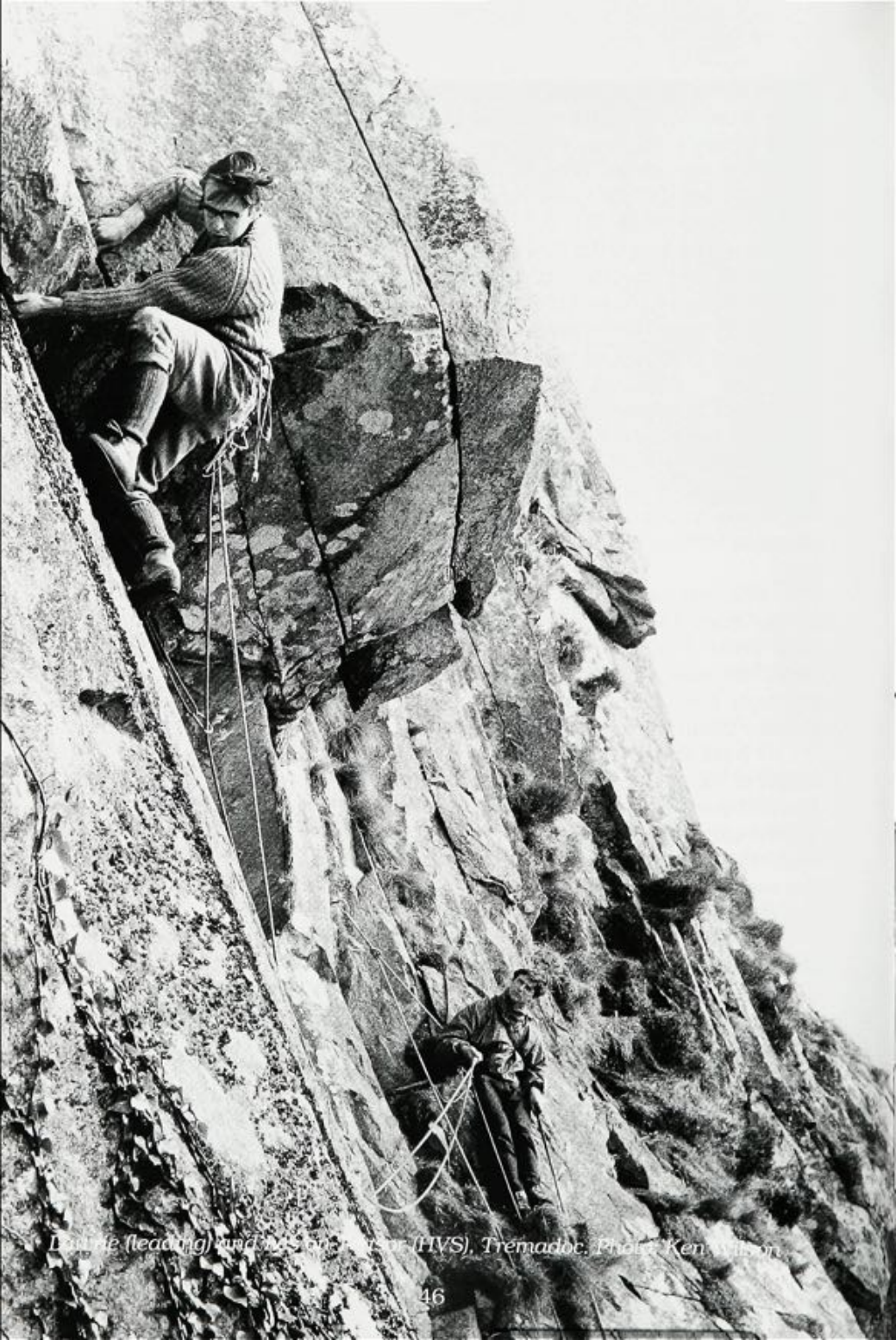
They started off on October 1st with *Yellow Scar*, climbed on the day Ed Drummond put up *The Strand*. To Lawrie's chagrin much of *Yellow Scar* later fell down. In the remainder of October, they added *Black Spot*, *Gladiator* and *Park Lane*. This latter route, on the upper Tier, was the subject of a series of first ascent photographs by Leo Dickinson that did much to popularise Gogarth. The following month, they added the pleasant *UFO*, climbed after writing their car off the night before on black ice.

Les and Lawrie had quite a reputation for hard driving, hammering across from Essex to Wales virtually every weekend. "I usually lectured until about 9.00 p.m. so we were late getting away, driving through the night. We sharpened our wits for the weekend by bombing up the M1 at 100mph, having long philosophical conversations; Lawrie was a very deep thinker about all aspects of climbing."

I have this image of their Cortina GT, speeding along the A5 in the midst of the night, the radio crackling with the diminishing signals from Luxembourg or the all night pirate stations in the Thames estuary, filling the car with the freshness and brilliance of late 60s Dylan and Hendrix, with the sun chasing them from the east, as they speed towards a day on the wind-swept verticality of Llech Ddu, or more thrills on the sea cliffs of Gogarth. All is energy and drive.

The scene in Wales was marked at this time by the appearance of bogus route descriptions, particularly at Gogarth. Les and Lawrie were quick to see the danger of this situation and Les was involved in an investigation that led to an article appearing in the Sunday Times. "That was a strange business. I once met the person at the top of Gogarth. He had a sack full of brand-new gear that had never been used."

In early 1968 they added *Interrogator* and *The Amphibian* to the cliffs of Gogarth, but much of that year was spent exploring Llech Ddu a total contrast to the white quartzite of Anglesey. That year they made six new routes on the crag: *Zenith*, *Skid Row*, *Cupid's Inspiration*, *Gytrack* and the excellent *Blitzkrieg* and *Herostratus*. The explorations on Llech Ddu had an epic quality, involving heroic efforts of gardening and removal of loose rock. It was a miracle that they avoided a bad accident;



*Leader (leading) and second climber (HVS), Tremadoc. Photo Ken Wilson*



and many stirring stories are well told in Les's excellent article, *Llech Ddu, Lawrie and Me* which appeared in *Crags* in the late seventies. That summer also saw the addition of the popular *Hypodermic* on the main cliff at Gogarth, climbed on a desperately hot day.

By this time, Les and Lawrie had become well known in the climbing world and in March 1969 were the subject of an article by Peter Gillman in the *Sunday Times*. Such coverage of rock-climbing in the popular press was very rare in those days. Leo Dickinson remembers from this time: "I'm convinced that Lawrie really had no idea how good he was, he was as good as anyone of that period. Joe Brown let them into his inner circle, I'm sure because they were just so likeable as people. But I doubt very much if Joe could understand a word they said, because they spoke so quickly. Lawrie talked himself up routes. Great blokes: fast talking, fast cars, fast climbers."

In January 1969 Lawrie climbed one of the bogus lines on Gogarth with Dave Mossman and they called it *Sceptic*. The entire route fell down a month later. *Valdini* and *Locarno* were added that spring, and in April, Lawrie made one of his finest first ascents when he climbed *Wonderwall* in Easter Island Gully with Dave Potts. This route takes a soaring crack-line up the wall opposite the abseil in. They used two points of aid, but by all accounts Dave was well impressed: "It looked preposterous to me: it wasn't as though he was making for anything, just more overhanging rock. I was very impressed: he got right out to the lip before packing it in. The point of this is that he was quite prepared to try anything. That doesn't sound much now, but it astonished me then." *Wonderwall* soon acquired a big reputation, with several early failures on it. The aid wasn't removed for some years.

There then followed a glut of further routes on Gogarth in a productive period that May. The excellent *Swastika* was added to Easter Island Gully and *Igdrazil* to the steep wall opposite Wen Slab. Lawrie, with support from Dick Isherwood and Les then put up the very steep *Mantrap* to the right of *Mousetrap*. In early June, Lawrie was involved in one of his best known new routes when he was approached by Ed Drummond to attempt a new route in the Wen Zawn area: "Ed and Lawrie: it seems a most unlikely combination, but Ed actually approached Lawrie. I think Dave Pearce acted as intermediary; we knew Dave quite well as he often travelled in the car with us. I watched them climbing from the headland opposite Wen Slab. It was very impressive and the route in question was *Tyrannosaurus Rex*."

This superb climb, soon known as *T. Rex*, rapidly became a Welsh classic, and is one of the finest routes at Gogarth. Initially, Lawrie had some doubts, but once Ed had cracked the first pitch, he quickly led through across the hand traverse and it was obvious what a superb route it was. They completed the climb the next day with Lawrie leading the final loose wall to the top.





*The plate that launched a thousand hits? Laurie Howell on the crux of Tyrannosaurus Rex. Photo: John Cleary*

At that time Lawrie and Les also added *The Savage on Yellow Wall*, and with Dave Potts, they climbed the wonderful *Spider Wall* to the left of *Britomartis*. After all this excitement on Anglesey, Lawrie set off for the Alps, while Les began to get involved in guidebook work. As Les recalls, it was at about this time that they started to climb together less frequently: "You have to remember that we'd climbed together continually for about eight years. It wasn't a question of us falling out, we were simply moving into different directions."

Les's efforts in the production of guidebooks for South-East England, Gogarth and the Carneddau became Herculean, and the present excellent guidebooks to these areas owe much to his work at this time: it involved a huge amount of soloing, pitch checking and more than a few epics — all quiet and important work that often goes unappreciated.

Meanwhile, Lawrie was in Chamonix making an attempt on *The Walker Spur* with Will Barker, Dave Yates and Barry Whybrow. Their first attempt ended in an epic when, trapped on a bivouac by continual rain and stonefall, they ended up rescuing the German alpinist Karl Golikow who had sustained a badly smashed leg, caused by stonefall that had also killed his partner, Jorg Lehne. Les recalls: "The lads had a real epic that time. Lawrie was feeding Golikow cigarettes until the helicopter arrived. They went back a few days later and battled up the route in poor conditions, with three nights spent on the face. A number of parties combined to form a rope of about fourteen, leading to the top. Lawrie was at the back with Barry and they ended up with loads of spare gear."

On Lawrie's return from the Alps, he and Les starred in a film made by Bev Clarke and John Cleare about climbing in Wales. The filming was done over a number of weeks and centred on four climbs: *Cenotaph Corner*, *Grond*, *Diagonal* and *Pinnacle Arête*. In one week, Lawrie led *Cenotaph Corner* over twenty times. The film "*The Climbers*," later won an award at the Trento film festival and impressed the international audience. Sadly, it has not been released on video — which is a shame, as it would offer a fascinating snapshot of that period, containing as it does, much footage of Les and Lawrie in action.

Les and Lawrie rounded off 1969 with two further new routes on Gogarth: *Bullitt* and *Hash* in the Flytrap area of North Stack. The following year promised additional interest on two counts: Lawrie had accepted an invitation to go on an expedition to the Hindu Raj area of Pakistan led by Barry Whybrow; and the brothers had been approached by the BBC to take part in a live television broadcast from Gogarth to go out on August Bank holiday.

That summer Lawrie set off with the expedition to the Himalayas. Initial problems resulted in the team attempting a hard route on the East Face of Koh I Bandaka Sakhi. Progress was halted high on the 5,000ft face by extremely loose rock and the attempt was abandoned. In poor health, Lawrie hurried back to Britain to the commitments on

Gogarth with the BBC.

Les remembers: "Lawrie flew back from Istanbul and we went straight over to Gogarth to prepare for the broadcast. He was not at all well from the expedition, and initially we struggled on the first pitch of *Tyrannosaurus Rex* for a couple of days before things improved. While preparing for the broadcast, they climbed *Minute Man* in Wen Zawn with Janet Rogers. The television live broadcast featured Joe Brown and Ian McNaught-Davis on *Spiders Web*, Pete Crew and Don Whillans on *Wen* and Lawrie and Les, with Janet Rogers on *T. Rex*. This was the BBC's big follow up to the Old Man of Hoy event of 1967. It was reported with some humour in *Rocksport* by Phil Watkin: "The Holliwell brothers and Janet Rogers moved smoothly up *T. Rex*, with every promising sequence cut short just as it was getting interesting."

Lawrie stormed up the first pitch (though none of that was televised); and higher up, Les parted company when a hold snapped off. Overall, the broadcast was dominated by Joe on *Spider's Web*, a televisual climb. Later that autumn, Lawrie and Les returned to Wen Slab and climbed the excellent *Zeus* up the fine slab to the right of *Wen*.

The following year they continued to add new routes, although the pace slackened a little as Les became increasingly involved in guidebook work and Lawrie was about to get married. In April, Les climbed *The Rib* on Craig Lloer with Janet Rogers and in July, Lawrie returned to Llech Ddu with Barry Whybrow. They climbed *The Fourth Dimension*, a sustained 400ft girdle of the Central Wall. They used three points of aid, but it was still a considerable achievement. Freed of its aid by Dai Lampard and Crispin Waddy in 1989, it now weighs in at a meaty E5 and is one of the most serious routes of its kind in Wales.

That August they also made two new additions to Clogwyn du'r Arddu: one was a superb new start to *Bow Direct* — which was particularly hard and unprotected (Lawrie graded it HVS) — and the very pleasant *Land of Hope and Glory* on the Lower Far East Buttress.

In October, Lawrie returned to Gogarth again with Barry Whybrow and climbed the superb *Hysteresis* at Mousetrap Zawn. He resorted to three points of aid, but shortly before his death, returned and freed the route. It is perhaps his finest contribution to Gogarth: a thrilling E3 in a brilliant position. That month Lawrie also climbed *Ziggurat* on the upper tier with John Kingston. It was around this time that he climbed the magnificent line of *Supercrack* in Easter Island Gully, but using two points of aid the route wasn't claimed. Alec Sharp climbed it free in 1974.

In December, Lawrie climbed the *New Girdle of Mousetrap Zawn* with Barry Whybrow; it was a pleasant route and his final contribution on Anglesey. In total, he and Les produced almost thirty new routes at Gogarth between 1967 and 1971. Les reflects: "It's very interesting to hear how far things have developed in Wales. One thing that always amazed Lawrie, was that we were able to go from being virtual novices to doing repeats of



things like *The Skull*, *Great Wall*, and *Dinosaur* in such a short time. Compared with other sports, we were convinced quite early on that climbing was extremely under-developed. The standards were really quite low and no one seemed to train at all. The explosion in standards since has proved the point. Lawrie would not have been at all surprised by what has come about."

By 1972, Lawrie had married his girlfriend Liz and was busy putting a house together. Les, meanwhile, was renovating a cottage in Deiniolen, a popular activity at the time. Jim Perrin recalled climbing with Lawrie one evening, as he was starting to get back into it again: "Lawrie had just got married, and got a house together in rural Essex. I went out for an evening climbing with him at Harrisons. He soloed *Wailing Wall*, *North-West Corner* and *Edwards's Effort* and all manner of 5cs and 6as with perfect grace and control and I, who was climbing well, followed him nervously up some of them. His was a masterful demonstration of skill and confidence. He was such a brave and confident and beautifully-balanced climber, both mentally and physically."

Lawrie began regular serious climbing again in 1973, and that summer the urge for new routes returned. One weekend in August, he was in Wales with John Kingston, prospecting for a new route on the Amphitheatre Wall of Craig yr Ysfa. They had gone to inspect the superb line now taken by Rab Carrington's *Aura*, and set up separate abseils to clean the line. John set off down first and as he descended, he heard a sudden cry and a rattle of rocks. Lawrie's abseil anchor had failed and he'd fallen 200ft to the bed of the gully below. John rushed to his aid and made frantic efforts to resuscitate him, but Lawrie died soon after from multiple injuries. Les remembers it all clearly: "I was working at my cottage in Deiniolen that weekend, laying a path. Lawrie, Liz and John called in that morning and then set off for the crag. That afternoon for the only time in my life, I had a strong premonition that Lawrie was dead. I'm normally very cynical about such things, and I pulled myself together and carried on working. Some time later, John and Liz returned with the awful news; John was covered in blood. That accident had a huge impact on our family and we've never got over the loss of Lawrie."

Despite the tragic death of his brother, Les's feelings for Wales remained strong, and after a while he returned to climbing, becoming very active again in the mid-seventies. He made good ascents of routes such as *Great Wall* on Cloggy and *Great Arête* on Llech Ddu and also produced the excellent 1975 guide to the Carneddau. This was a labour of love, involving huge amounts of effort and a lot of solo climbing. He produced his last new routes — *Anubis* and *Cerberus* on Llech Ddu and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* on Craig yr Ysfa — in the summer of 1976 and then gave up climbing. "To be honest, I was under increased pressure from work and study and made a conscious decision that climbing would have to go. I was in my late thirties and I was philosophical about it.



Now, when I walk past Llech Ddu or Cloggy I genuinely don't miss it. Lawrie and I had some fantastic times together in Snowdonia and I was grateful for that. However, I felt my life had to move on and I had no regrets about packing it in."

In the history of climbing in Wales, Les and Lawrie are significant as an important link between two eras: the traditional Welsh Gothic image brilliantly captured in Smythe and Cleare's *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia*, and the clinical and efficient new world that was to be ushered in by Pete Livesey and Ron Fawcett a decade later. Lawrie is very fondly remembered, not only for his achievements on the crags, but for the bringing to the game a high level of integrity. In his obituary in *The CC Journal* Malcolm Howells said of Lawrie: "He was a man of unbending honesty in everything he did. He never cheated, he saw no point in it. He understood very well that British climbing is based on arbitrary, almost pointless rules, but he always kept the rules."

Following on from this, Jim Perrin made the point that: "To my mind, Les and Lawrie did help to advance climbing in a quite subtle psychological way. Their readiness to take on anything, and their perceived status as outsiders were very significant influences in breaking down the barriers and thus enabling the widespread technical advances of the mid 1970s."

Despite the sadness of that part of the story, Les remains positive. After twenty-five years, he looks back on his time in the mountains with Lawrie with great pleasure and justifiable pride for what they achieved.

He and Lawrie must have been a terrific team: "Basically, we came from a very modest background, but the desire was there: it was to do with what was in us. But in the end, it's not the climbing I miss, it's the people that went with it. But I suppose that's what it's all about, isn't it?"

*For help researching this article, I should like to thank: Les Holliwell, Ian Roper, Jim Perrin, Joe Brown, Richard McHardy, John Cleare, Ken Wilson, Geoff Milburn, Leo Dickinson, Angela Soper and Barry Whybrow.*

# A User's Guide to Buying Snowdon

**Harold Drasdo**

*Consider the enjoyment you will be able to give to thousands, the fishing, the climbing, and the joy of allowing people freely to ramble. There are few opportunities ever afforded a man to possess a park like this and know that the people are all able to enjoy it without paying a farthing."*

(Advertisement for the sale of Cwm Llan, 1889)

With reservations, was the price extortionate; were the risks plausible? Most walkers and climbers seem pleased that the National Trust has secured another slice of Snowdon. The news brought to mind, however, a bigger intervention of thirty years ago. In each case the land involved was widely described by the press as the whole mountain 'including the summit'. In each case the purchase was made 'for the benefit of the nation'. It's worth reconsidering that earlier enterprise to see whether there are lessons to be learned.

First, a comparison of the two purchases. In April 1968, following a year of discussions, the Secretary of State for Wales took advantage of powers conferred by the 1949 Parks and Access Act and bought the larger part of the Vaynol Estate lands currently on the market. The area amounted to about 13,000 acres, say 20 square miles, or 5,250 hectares. It comprised the entire northern half of the hill, together with the south-western flank of the Glyder ridge and the eastern end, from roadside to skyline, of the Rhyd-ddu — Nantlle pass. There were twenty existing agricultural tenancies. The land was expected to sell for well over one million pounds, but by some means was obtained for a remarkably modest £140,000.

The Trust's acquisition is a third that size: roughly 4,000 acres (6.25 square miles, or 1,600 hectares). It comprises the south-eastern aspect of the hill (Cwm Llan, Cwm Tregalen, Cwm Merch) to the skyline formed by Yr Aran, Snowdon, Lliwedd and Wenallt; and also the detached holding of Gelli Iago, the north-western slope of Cnicht down to the Nanmor road. The two estates were farmed by the same owner. The price paid was three million pounds.

In 1968, the land acquired, the matter rested with the Welsh Office. It was quickly announced that the farms would be resold to the tenants after provision for protecting access and extending nature reserves had been written into the deals. The Welsh Office would supply model agreements for the transactions, but would retain a strategic 300 acres at the summit. In detail, negotiations would be carried out by agencies on the spot. Then there was a silence, broken only by rumour.

It lasted twenty years. Eventually, it became known that the operation had been concluded and the results were seen on National Park information boards. They're most easily accessible now on the 1998 1:25,000 *Snowdon and Conwy Valley map* (Outdoor Leisure 17), except that it doesn't show the boundaries of nature reserves.

No-one in office today has a full grasp of all sides of the Vaynol negotiation: senior staff moved elsewhere, retired or died; some survivors suffer from partial losses of memory (evident when delicate questions are approached); organisations were restructured (Caernarvonshire expanded into Gwynedd, the National Park administration escaped County Offices and control, the National Parks Commission became the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy divided, merged and sub-divided to produce, in the Principality at present, the Countryside Council for Wales). The 1949 Act was itself amended by later enactments. Confusingly, responsibilities were devolved and seen through independently, without resubmission, to a controlling panel. No concluding review or report was published.

The Vaynol affair has to be seen in a broad context. Snowdon is the hardest of hard cases. Quite possibly it's the world's most popular mountain. Projecting from counts through the last thirty years, perhaps a million people a year attempt it, only a tenth using the mountain railway, and most of the remainder reaching the summit. A Working Group set up shortly after the sale surveyed the land and produced a two-volume (unpublished) report. In 1972 the Countryside Commission was instructed to appoint consultants to advise on a neat shape for the summit and on footpath erosion, parking and so on. The consultants felt they couldn't do this without considering the hill as a whole and produced the Manasseh Report in 1975. The Park Authority accepted this, but felt it better to consider the area as a whole, including the surrounding valleys and villages, producing the Snowdon Management Plan by 1980. This plan and a concurrent review of the National Park Plan had to be reconciled to avoid inconsistencies. Both these plans had to relate themselves to the County Structure Plan. From masses of detail, large principles and strategies were evolved and are now engraved in stone, apparently forbidding reconsideration. Meantime, the farmers farmed, the climbers climbed, the bird-watchers watched, and Snowdon rose above it all, remaining, miraculously, a magnificent hill. And it's surely the case that if farming, conservation and recreation can co-exist on Snowdon they can co-exist anywhere.

This is a speculative reconstruction of the Vaynol affair. (To the purchase price, we add an unknown and terrifying cost in man-years.) The National Park originally reached into three counties and the Park administration for Caernarvonshire was a sub-division of County Planning. By its nature, Park Planning was charged with furthering both environmental and recreational objectives, and by its inclination with

defending both the local economy and culture — also to become statutory objectives later. County Planning, the Conservancy and the Countryside Commission seem to have agreed the ground rules for the operation together.

The conservation interest was already mobilised. Ten years before the sale of the estate, most of the eastern side of the mountain was already under notification as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Within this area in Cwm Llan and Cwm Dyli, the Conservancy was subsequently to establish declared National Nature Reserves. It already knew its priorities for the adjoining Vaynol land, had staff available to present its case, and was a principal actor in the negotiations. (Classes of nature reserve other than agreed or declared NNRs, together with SSSI protection, aren't represented on Snowdon.)

The farming interest wasn't mobilised and to some extent wasn't bothered. No-one could dispossess the tenants and they could let the negotiators sweat. They had an incidental problem, being represented by two rival unions — the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales — each thrown into some confusion at the possibility of having to sit side by side and agree with each other. Some tenants concluded agreements relatively quickly and amicably. Others perhaps felt resentment that new conditions about the land on which they were living and working were being imposed by bureaucrats. But they could afford to sit things out, and the last one sat it out until 1988.

The recreational interest wasn't encouraged to mobilise, the general public being thought incompetent to offer expert advice on its activities or hopes. In particular, the Ramblers' Association and the British Mountaineering Council were permitted no direct involvement and it's hard to see much equity in the exercise. It's unclear who originally proposed the access land boundaries, though to a large extent they were already suggested by the existing mountain wall. It appears that the Conservancy restricted its demands to those enclaves of greatest scientific interest, freeing the rest. (Land cannot legally be recognised as both nature reserve and access area, though in upland Snowdonia restrictions on public access to the larger nature reserves have never been imposed.)

Responsibility for seeing the Agreements through had, by 1978, passed to the Park Authority but, catastrophically, the access areas and the provision of rights of way outside those areas seem to have been considered separately and with differing degrees of enthusiasm. It's possible that the arbitrators represented the public interest by consulting the Park Wardens, relying on their intimate knowledge of the area. If so, however, there was a gross imbalance: the negotiators opposing huge external pressures or resistances from the Conservancy and the Unions, only with the views (perhaps discreetly expressed?) of a few field staff.



Secretaries of State for Wales, they come and they go. I don't know to what extent the hopes of Cledwyn Hughes have been fulfilled. But in the late 60s, I was Secretary of the North Wales Committee of the BMC and can review my own hopes. On its behalf, I wrote a detailed memorandum, complete with map, discussing what was needed. Re-reading it, I can pretty well stand by it, except that it gave no credit to Hughes, treating the matter simply as a Treasury purchase. Fifty copies were distributed, with the Welsh Office heading the list.

What did we get? The good news was that very extensive tracts were designated as open access land 'in perpetuity', though all of these were over land to which access had never been contested. It appears, however, that not a single new right of way and perhaps only one short stretch of permissive path was secured.

There are some discrepancies between the information boards, the physical signposting, and the O.S. map. But the map is our first resort and it shows, for instance, no right of approach to the access area which includes Craig y Bere; the most famous cliff in Wales, Clogwyn du'r Arddu, together with Llechog, Clogwyn y Ddysgyl, the Parson's Nose and Cynr Las, excluded from the access land as nature reserves; a strange lobe of access land west of Llechog only to be entered by descent and left by ascent (the idea has its charm); unsatisfactory entry to the eastern end of the Nantlle ridge; no paths put in place as road alternatives down the Llanberis pass or from Rhyd-ddu to Bwlchgylfin and Snowdon Ranger — where a contested path was recently lost at a Public Enquiry. (In general, the east side of the mountain has always been welcoming; the far side is the Wild West, where caution is often required. Herbert Carr mentions difficulties here in the 1926 Climbers' Guide to Snowdon.) These much-needed links over land the public recently owned, would be hard to re-negotiate; and it appears that we now make regular compensatory payments to some farmers for access or disturbance on the land we sold to them. Surely this is what the operation ought to have been designed to forestall?

It's said that there's still ill-feeling amongst a few farmers about the Vaynol sale. This is hard for an outsider to understand. All climbers and walkers would have been happy that, at knock-down prices, the tenants should have gained ownership of the land they'd been farming once the access needs had been satisfied. I can only come up with two explanations, both uncharitable. The first is that the Welsh Office was instructed by the Treasury to get every penny back (or, alternatively, that the District Valuer set high values on the farms). The total return from the sales may not be in the public domain, so this hypothesis is untested. The second is that some of the farmers wanted the land, but didn't want the nation passing through.

The advertisement that inspired Sir Edward Watkin to buy Cwm Llan and lay out the Watkin Path would astound a prospective land-

owner today. And I can't imagine an 83-year-old Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair, staggering up into the cwm to declare the path open, as Gladstone did in 1892. But Victorian philanthropy lives on, not just in Sir Anthony Hopkins and Chris Brasher, but in the multitude of individual walkers and climbers who responded to the National Trust appeal. Cwm Llan is secured in perpetuity. No walker or climber can complain about the Trust's stewardship of the Carneddau estate or of the 3,000-acre Great Gable block, bought by the Fell and Rock Climbing Club as a memorial to those of its members who died in the First World War and handed over to the Trust.

In general, the Trust is in an easier position than the Vaynol land negotiators. Rather than having to arrive at agreements with sitting tenants, it will be installing its own tenant who will have to accept its plans. Nonetheless, there are constraints on what it can do and, other than in detail, it's hard to see what substantial new benefits it can offer to conservationist or climber. No doubt it will divide the land into its standard categories of open and restricted access, but these will presumably only formalise the present situation which was generally satisfactory. The conservationist probably can't hope to see a massive reduction in sheep-stocking, which would entail the fencing of the estate — an appalling prospect to the majority of contributors to the Appeal. (To the Endangered Species list we must add natural skylines; we have Listed Buildings and we need Listed Skylines.) If the Trust has dreams of a perfect hill farm, an expensive hobby nowadays, perhaps the most it can do will be to protect the restoration of some native woodland in the cwm.

In detail, however, on looking at the map, there are a few easements the Trust might offer to climber and walker. The climber's interests are the more limited. This area doesn't offer the massive enticements of the old Vaynol lands, but it has some attractive low-level cliffs as well as less popular crags higher up the hill. First, a novelty. If the Trust management decides it might be fun to beat the bounds, it's going to need help: the boundary apparently follows the old wall to meet Clogwyn y Wenallt on top of the boulder abutment between the starts of *Shake* and *Bovine*. Then, it must pursue a diagonal leftward line to the resumption of the wall on top of the crag. In that case, it crosses a number of notorious routes at inconvenient levels and may be beyond the resources of any living climber.

The next most important crag is Craig y Llyn. Like the Wenallt, exploration started fifty years ago. However, despite its pleasant aspect and attractive structure it has never drawn the crowds, since it tends to be rather mossy. Here, there's a possible difficulty: the cliff lies in the long reach of steep wooded hillside above the road by Llyn Dinas. These old oak woods have ecological importance as well as aesthetic appeal, and it will probably be felt necessary to keep sheep fenced out. If so, it

would be helpful if these woods were included in the access area with one or two entry points permitted, so that climbers, botanists and bird-watchers can do their own things. No walker in his right mind would start an ascent of Snowdon up this appalling slope.

For the walker, the map suggests two enticing possibilities which the Trust might make real. On this south flank of Snowdon, three Trust properties now stand side by side. Unhappily, the one in the middle, Hafod-y-Porth, is a closed estate, run on a novel 'farm-share' arrangement. Now it happens, that from the five or six miles of road centred on Beddgelert, there is no legal access to Snowdon — the so-called 'Beddgelert Path' starts from Pitt's Head, a mile from Rhyd-ddu. From the topmost point of the Craflwyn Hall land, in which footpaths have lately been opened, the boundary of Hafod-y-Porth rises for a quarter-mile to the summit of Craig Wen and then follows the mile-long ridge to the top of Yr Aran. A right of way along this boundary would give a delightful (and virtually unknown) route to Yr Aran, or a superb approach to Snowdon for the stronger walker. There has been concern for many years about erosion of the steep South Face of Yr Aran. The gently rising Craig Wen ridge can hardly be thought so fragile and would permit descent by the North Ridge and Cwm Llan. The new park and ride proposals support excursions like this. But if the Trust were to open the use of this ridge, some means should be found of showing on O.S. maps that the perimeter of the restricted area may be skirted. The Trust never (?) designates new rights of way, but might, at least, indicate a permissive path.

The second obvious possibility would require the Trust to play a part in projects reaching beyond its boundaries. This would be to provide the single missing link in river paths extending from both Pen-y-Gwryd and Pen-y-Pass to Pont Aberglaslyn; and simultaneously a useful link in an already fairly complete Circuit of Snowdon route, offering, for unaccompanied younger walkers, four conveniently spaced youth hostels. (Long-distance off-road valley or river paths make more sense than contrived long-distance mountain paths: they have history on their side; they're immensely appealing; they're easier to maintain, and they collect many walkers of all ages who'd otherwise be forced onto eroding mountain paths.)

At present, the right of way following the north shore of Llyn Gwynant extinguishes itself in swamps below the lake outlet. Escape is made onto the road by an ageing girder footbridge and an old kissing gate and it's necessary to trudge along this busy road for a mile to exits near Bethania. The status of this escape is uncertain, the O. S. map not recognising it. (It is, in fact, useful for climbers visiting the small crags around the Gwynant Needle.) A north bank path from the footbridge to Bethania would virtually eliminate the use of the main road all the way from the two cols to Pont Aberglaslyn at least. Ideally, this would take

the riverside, but a fond hope exists that otters might re-establish themselves here. Alternatively, a private track passing by the farm could be opened as a permissive path. This might be thought an intrusion, but since camping was on offer here and a Trust campsite would certainly offset the inevitable losses of sheep-farming today — perhaps that's not the case.

In summary: both purchases pre-empted possible future difficulties for so long as the public insists that 'in perpetuity' (a promise that, by its nature, law can't honestly make) really does mean forever. The Vaynol purchase didn't provide, and the Cwm Llan purchase doesn't guarantee to provide, much new recreational advantage. It appears that, whether as tax-payer or subscriber, it's surprisingly difficult to buy one's dreams. But we may still get a few more shots at buying Snowdon, the grandest natural monument and national symbol of Wales. A large farm to the west of Yr Aran, backing onto the Trust's skyline, is on the market at present, and the surplus from the Appeal might be put to use here. Of course, it may be that the Government seriously intends to find time for its projected Right to Roam legislation, and it may be that it hasn't planned to sabotage it by giving local power structures control of the local forums.

Walkers and climbers are often deliberately misrepresented as indifferent to the interests of conservation and hill farming. And they're often urged to leave the countryside just as it is for posterity. To bestow a public good for posterity is a true indicator of high civilisation; but the way to ensure that posterity enjoys that gift, is to secure better access now, rather than rely on promises. It seems appropriate to end with two notes on paradise.

*'If not now, when? If not here, where? If not for you, then  
for whom?'*

Primo Levi (from an earlier source?)

*'The society I live in is mine, open to my voice and action  
or I do not live there at all.'*

Paul Goodman



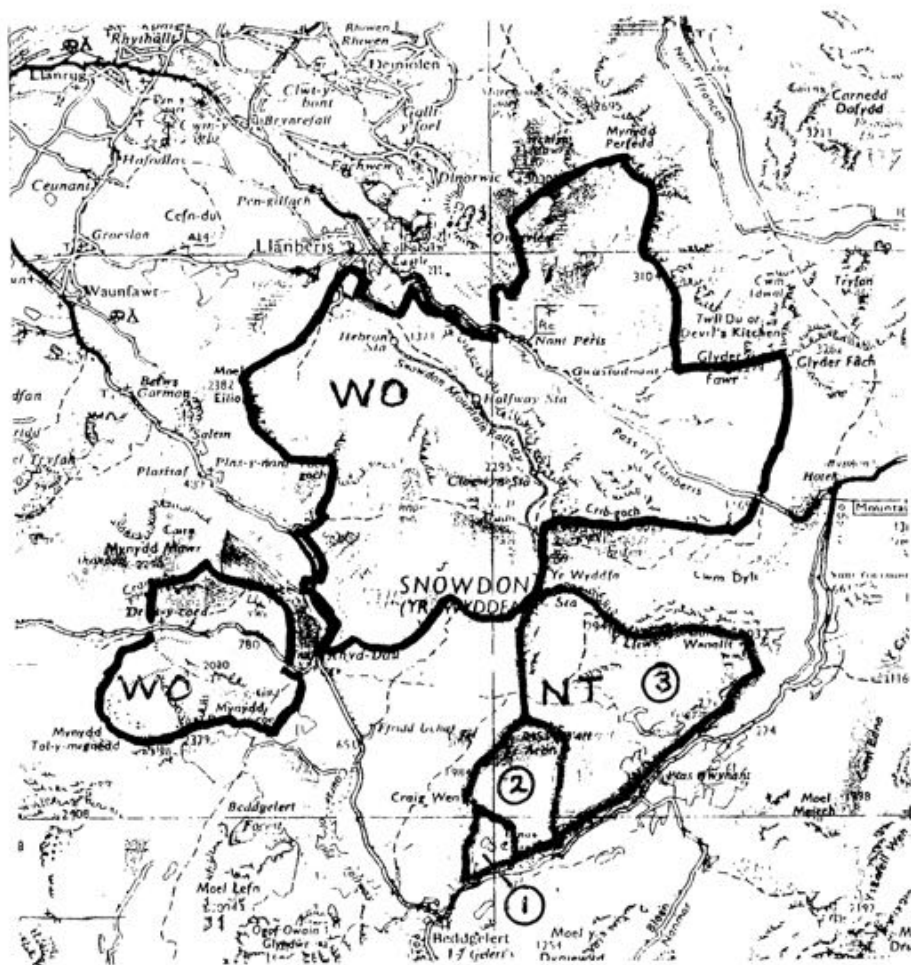


Figure 1: SNOWDON: AREAS PURCHASED

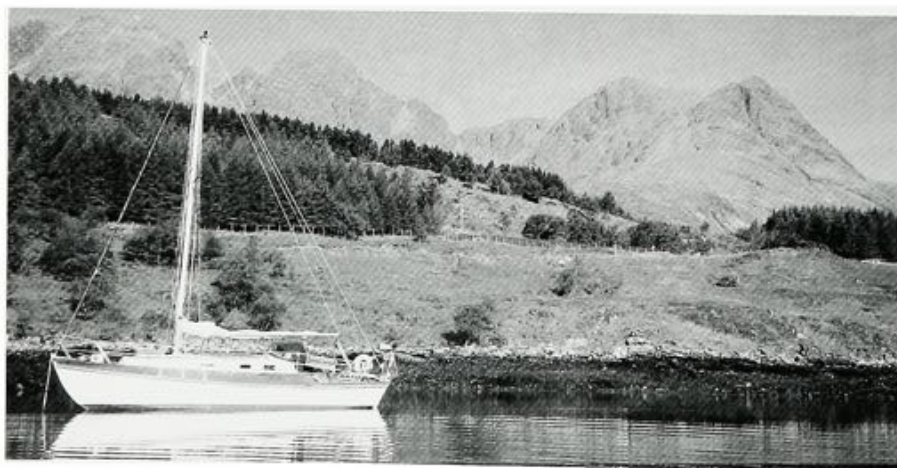
WO: Welsh Office Vaynol Purchase, 1968. NT: National Trust Acquisitions in 1990s. 1, Craflwyn Hall; 2, Hafod-y-Porth; 3, Cwm Llan. NT acquisitions not on Snowdon, not shown



**Figure 2: SNOWDON: ACCESS AREAS AND NATURE RESERVES**  
 AA: Welsh Office Access Areas agreed in perpetuity. NNR: National Nature Reserve (part 'agreed', part 'declared'). The SSI includes the whole of the NNR and extends further north and west



*'TORRIDON', Clifford Fishwick, 1987 (oil on canvas, 40 x 30ins). Fishwick, a mountain landscape painter of national significance, was also a keen munroist and life-long sailor. (CC Journal 1996 and Obituary, 1997)*



*'If you have a sturdy boat, full of food and water...You are independent and can venture wherever the sea reaches.' 'Mollyhawk', Ben Strode's boat, anchored in Loch Slapin. Blaven and Clach Glas are within easy reach. Photo: Stroude collection. (see article p 89)*



# **Fat Chance Hotel**

**(A tale of outrageous luxury, comfort and safety on the Costa Blanca)**

**Brian Wilkinson**

"No, no and definitely no! I don't like Spain, I don't like Benidorm and I sure as hell don't like staying in this bloody Hotel," I said sulkily to Ian on our first morning as, nervously, we eyed the enormous flock of pensioners noisily consuming what passes for breakfast at the Hotel M. Ian prodded the inert plastic mass on his plate in agreement. "And anyway," I said, "I hate flying."

Having rapidly consumed the regulation two pints of black gold we were ready to step aboard and take up the allotted seats on our ancient projectile. I grinned idiotically at the stewardess, forgot to assume my usual BAA authorised crash position and giggled through a wobbly take off while the other ageing regulars nonchalantly read fat, lurid paperbacks. I needn't have worried; the flight, like the in-flight meal, was uneventful. I almost dozed. Above Alicante, the plane circled the airport ready for the down-climb while I clenched the armrest and my buttocks. When the two-man team stepped on the tarmac, it was of course pouring down. 'Welcome to Spain' read a sarcastic sign.

As promised, it was pure Spanish Sun in the morning and our little white car took us to the big white sugar loaf of the Penon de Ifach for a long route up the centre of the South Face: over a thousand feet and nine pitches make *Via Angalada-Gallago* a substantial undertaking, at about E2 in English money.

We fell out of the car at the bottom of the crag into an icy wind cutting across the bay; but up in the sun, the big yellow wall beamed down invitingly and we knew that once we started up the route, the face would turn into an oven. The traumatic transition from horizontal tourist to vertical climber was achieved with the usual wide-eyed terror, but by the second pitch, we had settled into a big-climb mentality. The climbing started out strenuous and in places intimidating; we had just forgotten how big this face was.

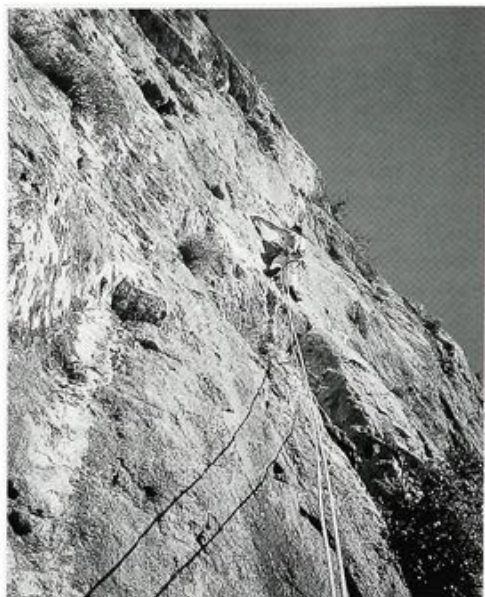
After three or four pitches, we hit a tremendous groove system, which soared up a slender pillar in a dramatic position. Climbing bare-backed above the void, little green lizards scampered in and out of the cracks and danced over laughable Spanish pegs made out of lollipop sticks and hair pins. My throat was as dry as a bone and I had scraped my arms trying to get intimate with an overhang on pitch two. This didn't matter, for it was exhilarating to be embedded in that beautiful wall, absorbed by the climb.



After five hours we reluctantly topped out near the summit, still with a Siberian wind howling among the rocks, and the sun still blazing out of an impeccably blue sky.

In contrast to the big bold routes on the Penon, Gandia (or *Penya Rotja de Marxuquera*), just off the main route to Valencia, is short and sweet and well bolted up by the 'sausageheads'. But first we had to find it.

On the fourth circuit of the busy town of Gandia, we stumbled accidentally onto the right road which led to a deserted parking spot beneath the crag. A short stroll through the orange groves gained a suntrap below pink and vanilla walls with panoramic views of the surrounding orchards. Out of sight, there was



*'You've got to pick a pocket or two': on Valentet de Valencia. Photo: Brian Wilkinson*

the impending 'Sector Hydraulics', a playground for the ultra-fit, but, our team kept to the merely vertical. The climbs were mostly dynamic sprints up steep walls on surprising hidden pockets — all exhilarating and enjoyable. Ian was wearing his ridiculous straw 'Man from Delmonte' hat, purchased from the beach bazaars of Benidorm. The hat however, did not stop us from climbing *Valentet de Valencia* (E1,5b) or *Pa Roig* (E2,5c) — both excellent examples of the pick-pocket genre.

Lounging in the sun and feasting on the almost acceptable packed lunch provided by the management of the Hotel M., our attention was drawn to two spindly brummies who arrived wearing nothing but shorts and burnt skin. They proceeded to have an epic of Homeric proportions on a short route nearby. After an hour of embarrassing and repeated failure on this little climb, they gave up, only to be told by a passing team that they were on the wrong route. Ian kept his head down and consulted the guide, while I strolled barefoot round to an adjoining area, inadvertently smashing my big toe nail on a slab of rock on the ground. It hurt so much I almost fainted. T.M.F.D looked on sympathetically as I writhed around shouting and cursing, but I swear, out of the corner of my eye, I could see a little robin redbreast also rolling around in the dirt, laughing his little legs off.

Ian led another route while I nursed my toe (which looked completely unscathed). "What a fuss," Ian was thinking. I couldn't follow

Ian's lead as I couldn't get my toe into the rock-boot. However, when Ian led yet another brilliant looking pitch (*Nina de Porcelana* E1,5b) I couldn't stand it anymore. I tied on and hopped up with a rockboot on one foot and a floppy trainer on the other — ouch! ouch! ouch!

Back at the Hotel M., I picked despairingly at the evening meal; it was so bloody awful, I resolved to live on lettuce and dry rolls ('See Spain and Diet'). After a stroll along the wonderfully tacky boulevards and bars of Benidorm for a few beers, I proudly displayed my left big toe: it was black.

As I couldn't shoehorn my swollen toe into a rock-boot, the day was declared a rest day and we explored the impressive El Barranco Del Mascarat (or as we called it, 'The Musk Rat Gorge'), spanned by three shapely bridges. The bottom of the ravine was littered with three thousand leaflets for Dutch showers, a leather briefcase and a dead dog, all of which had been thrown off the road bridge two hundred feet above. Walking in the silent shadows, the place was eerie and claustrophobic.

We stopped for our midday scrum on the unused road bridge above the Gorge where, to our amazement, we found three young Spaniards making preparations for a bridge-jump. They introduced themselves in pidgin English (which, considering what they were contemplating, was most apt) and continued setting up the ropes. The preparations attracted no public attention and the traffic continued roaring past; it was just the five of us.

The first lad for the jump was about seventeen, short, stocky and with a face as scarred as a prize fighter. He very coolly climbed over the railings and dropped like a stone...until he appeared almost on the floor of the Gorge when the rope catapulted him between the pillars of the bridge opposite like a missile. It was both fascinating and horrifying to watch.

The second lad was more nervous and clutched frantically at the rope when he fell through the air. Did their cheap camera we photographed them with really capture all that space, all that tension and fear? I doubt it.

The third leapist was a girl, about fifteen or sixteen, delicate featured and almost frail, with long dark hair. I have never seen anyone so profoundly anxious as she was as she tried to climb through the railings instead of over them. Inwardly I think we all screamed in sympathy when, with her long hair streaming, she fell through the air, squealing with fear. As they left, they solemnly shook hands with us and thanked us for our help. What can you say? We looked at each other as they drove off in their battered car and shook our heads in disbelief and admiration.

Sulfada in Spanish means...nothing (we asked some Spaniards), but *Via Sulfada* climbs the Muscarat Superior, a pillar that stands like a sentinel above the Mascarat Gorge bridges. We decided to climb this

700 foot E1 as a test run for 'the toe'. The climb starts amusingly enough from the tarmac of the south-bound carriageway of the N332, the second's attention being split between the leader's erratic progress up the grassy scramble of the first pitch and the wing-mirrors of speeding Spanish lorries which passed within inches of his left ear. On the climb proper we froze to death on the shady windswept stances of this devious and absorbing route, dressed as we were for the beach. The rock was compact and 'unreadable' and tiny pockets and flakes appeared when least expected. Route finding posed some problems but four o'clock saw us at the top, heady with success, satisfaction and incipient hypothermia.

The 'toe' had done its stuff without too much complaining and so mutual agreement dictated something sterner and *La Teta de la Novia* (E3,5c) on the wall to the left of *Sulfada* was singled out as a worthy opponent for the next day. Remembering yesterday and being wise virgins we dressed for the North Pole and duly arrived at the bottom of the route sweating buckets under the intense Spanish sun. I blasted off up the first hard pitch, struggled manfully with the crux bulge and arrived jubilant at the first stance after 120 feet of exquisite wall climbing.

The next pitch up thin, flared grooves provided Ian with an exciting and sustained lead, the kind of vertical chess that he excels in. I worried my way up behind, impressed. Two more meaty pitches and we were at the top nursing sore toes and squeaking at each other through parched throats. The circuitous descent through exotic and often vicious Spanish flora kept us awake until, back at the car we sat in the sun among the dirty heaps of discarded bottles, cans and cardboard boxes of another roadside beauty spot. We celebrated with a bottle of wine, a cigar and a cube of chocolate I found at the bottom of my rucksack.

Ian says I sat up in the middle of the night, shouted, "Watch Out!", then immediately crashed out again. Was I falling in my dream or being chased by a cold Spanish ommlette through the corridors of the Hotel M?

My toe and I were tired and in the mirror I looked gaunt. Was it the food, old age or the excitement, or all three? "Let's rest today", I said. "OK," said the Man from Delmonte, "We'll do a route on Toix West". Ian took the puzzled look on my face as acceptance of the plan and we drove immediately to this friendly little crag, beloved of many a Brit and Sausagehead, nestling on the edge of a sea of tacky holiday homes and swimming pools called Urbaisacion Maryvilla. We did a long middle grade route and an even longer middle grade descent (is that possible?). Too long it seems. Back at the car I went to unlock the door and found it already forced open... .

I didn't mind losing the cash (there was little enough) and I wasn't overworried about the credit cards but the theft of my battered camera with those undeveloped and unrepeatable shots of flying Spaniards and



Ian on 'La Teta': that hurt.

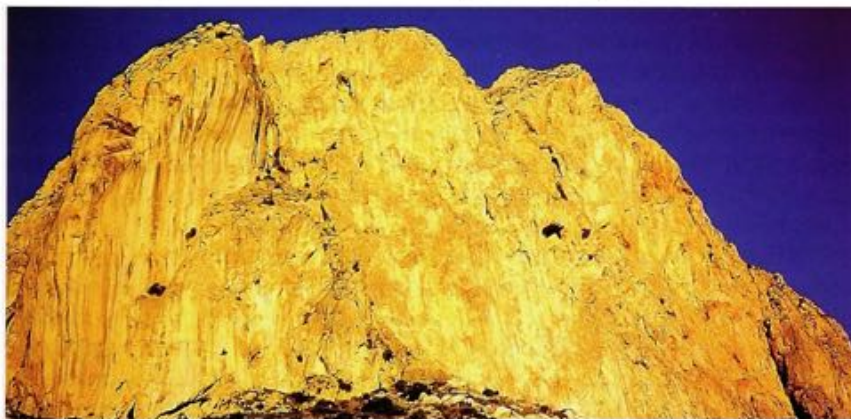
On the last day we had a few hours climbing time before our flight out. Where better to spend them than on the beautiful orange wall of impending limestone set above the lazy Med on the Toix Sea Cliffs. It was true that we had seen *El Dorado I* (E2,5b) earlier in the holiday but had been, quite frankly, intimidated. It seemed too steep for my whimpering forearms; but now, as we stood beneath it a second time, the prospect of a little more flying time on top of the two hours jetting back to Blighty didn't seem quite so outrageous.

Standing at the bottom of the route the wall appeared big. My God, it WAS big. What seemed to be a hand crack from across the beach was in fact a chimney. The face was over two hundred feet high but to my innocent English eyes it had seemed much smaller.

I twisted Ian's arm to allow me lead the first hard pitch up the impending crackline. What I thought would be a strenuous nightmare of fading strength above a greedy void turned out to be a dreamy space-walk on friendly holds, clipping spaced tat with comforting regularity. Even the hanging stance was exposed, like being suspended from a parachute snagged on Nelson's stone telescope.

In contrast, the second pitch was elegant and refined — a series of little pockets and cracks like a dotted line of possibility meandering across a sheet of limestone parchment, in its own way as good as the pitch below. We may have been reluctant to start it but now it was beneath us, we were loathe to finish; like all good things it seemed to end too quickly.

Tramping back across the beach in the warmth of the afternoon sun we stopped to take our very last look at Spanish rock. "Well, there's always Majorca I suppose," I said, gazing back at that wall smouldering across the bay. Ian was unable to suppress a wry grin.



*A sugar-loaf in the sun: Penon de Ifach South Face. Photo: Brian Wilkinson*



# Ups and Downs On Majorca

**Jim Rubery**

Unfortunately, the arrival of the autumn equinox heralds the demise of evening climbing and the advancing days of winter eventually puts a cold, damp blanket on any attempts to maintain a full climbing or walking programme. So, if you are like me and don't have muscles like Popeye or legs like Olive Oil, it's a case of pumping iron, creating variations on the artificial climbing walls and dreaming of big cliffs and mountains of perfect rock with compelling lines soaring up into a clear blue sky. But then again, why bother to dream? Just a two hour flight from Manchester (one and a half from London) and your dreams can become reality.

The destination for these particular 'dreams' is the Spanish island of Majorca. This beautiful island has superb scenery, mountains well over 4,000ft, an extremely varied flora and fauna, climbing of all grades, boundless scrambling and a winter climate that boasts, on average, over 5 hours sunshine per day and a mid-day temperature of 15°C. in December.

The climb that I would return to on this island again and again is probably one of the most compelling lines in Spain, if not in Europe, and the walk, is a high-quality scramble through a stupendous ravine, between towering cliffs descending from a little over 2,000ft. to the sea. Both venues share a similar geological feature, being situated in limestone gorges. Like the mythical Sirens in Homer's *The Odyssey*, both beckon seductively as you make your way toward them; but the rocks of which these Mediterranean structures are formed, are not for the destruction of ships and sailors, but for an Aphroditian experience as you undertake two of the finest adventures on this beautiful island.

A thirty- minute drive from customs, followed by a very pleasant twenty-minute stroll alongside orange groves and olive trees, and you can be at La Gubia — at present, the most well-developed climbing area on the island. There are climbs on both sides of the gorge, but the most compelling feature is the soaring right-hand arête, visible from the outskirts of Palma, 12 miles away, and the line of our climb. The climb itself is a little short of 600ft; but there's a further 300ft. of scrambling required to top out, followed by a superb stroll down ancient olive terraces — *La Gubia Normal*.

Closer inspection reveals the arête to be formed by the termination of a monstrous rock fin projecting into the ravine. It forms a pillar rather than an arête, the left wall of which is a mighty sheet of orange-streaked limestone, maybe half a mile long and getting on for 1,000ft. at its highest point, on which there are no routes. The right-hand side swings round to form Gubia's North Wall: a huge amphitheatre, that is well exploited by the Spanish climbers. The base of the 'arête' is quite broad and forms a 130ft.-high cone and a choice of starts. A right-hand start, marked by an old

battered bolt head, is slightly harder at about 5a, whilst 20ft. to the left is an easier start at 4c. This is recognised by a red-painted cross on the rock. Both starts look scrappy, with quite a lot of initial vegetation, but both pitches avoid the worst of this, picking a neat line up to the stance. In fact, the more substantial bushes and shrubs afford the opportunity of placing a few rare slings for protection.

The stances are all numbered and equipped with combinations of bolts, pegs, chains, slings and red direction arrows for the next pitch, but apart from the odd peg and *in-situ* sling, the original route is conventionally protected. A standard rack of nuts, a few slings and smaller Friends should more than suffice. Having said that, you have to work quite hard for it, as the rock is not the most accommodating when it comes to placing gear.

Since I first did the route in 1990, a number of variations have been created on the original line. All of these are in the modern Spanish style — big bolts or pegs and all fairly close together. If you find yourself on a bolt ladder you are off route but mighty safe. After completing the first pitch, which deposits you at a stance at the apex of the 'cone', a deviation to the right is necessary to avoid a steep, orange, concave wall. The left-hand bolt-line starts slightly up and left from here and consists of four brilliant pitches on incredibly sharp rock (look out for the lycra) at a constant 5a, whilst the right-hand bolt-line, as you would guess, is just round the arête from the Normal, and that too, is four pitches of superb climbing. Due to the geological structure of the 'pillar-cum-arête', there is not a lot of room for deviation, and hence route finding is no great problem. All the information that we had in 1990 was that 'it goes straight up the arête at about VS'. John and I took this literally and apart from a few 'ums' and 'arrs', had no difficulties. If the section you are about to tackle looks steep, strenuous and highly improbable, then you are off line.

As the pitches roll by and height is gained, the vista improves, along with the realisation of how foreshortened the whole thing is from the ground. To the south is the island's capital, Palma, with the fleshpots of Arenal and Magaluf sprawled out on either side around the bay. To the north and west, and in sharp contrast, are the shapely mountains that make up the interior of this beautiful island. One of the most obvious features of these limestone peaks is the immensity of virgin rock that abounds: cliffs and faces ranging from orange through to grey and up to several hundred feet in both height and width. So why are they so unexploited? First, they involve a walk that requires a fair bit of uphill exertion (so why bother when there are still acres of roadside rock to play on); and secondly, the number of local activists is pretty small.

The real climbing ends rather abruptly, when the arête terminates at a substantial flat notch, well furnished with bolts, chains and several slings. If you are feeling confident, it's time to coil up the ropes and enjoy the scrambling up the series of rock fins and grooves that lead to the top of the ridge. If you are not too happy at this prospect it is probably wise to keep

the ropes on as the drops on either side are pretty spectacular. The thought of a clumsy move after all this effort doesn't bear thinking about. If you have had enough, you can abseil back down one of the bolt lines (double ropes advised).

The top of the ridge is marked by an old dilapidated stone shelter and a dirt track, a hint of more prosperous times in these mountains. Wherever you go on the island, you are always reminded of the tremendous amount of work that once went into creating terraces for olive, almond and fruit trees, and all of them carved out from the side of the hills. Many are now falling into disrepair, though. I am informed by people in the know that it is possible to go up right from here, to the very top of the ridge, and follow a track that winds down the south side of the cliff and back to the base of the crag but I have only followed the track down through the ancient contorted olives. Eventually this leads through a farm yard. You will know when you

are near to this abode by the noise created by what sounds like a large, savage dog. Your thoughts are not wrong. As you scurry through the narrowing yard, hugging the wall on the opposite side to the animal, the beast makes its charge. Luckily, this slavering brute is prevented from dismembering you by a neck wrenching jerk as a sturdy chain comes tight, throwing the thing into a full 180° turn before depositing it in a snarling heap in the dust. I'm not sure how stress fatigue affects a chain, but I hope it doesn't break when you are passing. (c.f. *Ronnie's Last Climb*, Terry Gifford CCJ, 1992).

Just after leaving the farm yard, turn right along the road where the very welcoming tavern is reached in a mile and a half. The track leading to La Gubia is another 600yds. further on.



*Ancient olives on Majorca. Photo: Jim Rubery*

## **A trip to the seaside**

The Torrente de Pareis, often referred to incorrectly as the Calobre Gorge, is the destination for our second adventure. Situated on the spectacular north coast of the island, it is about 6 miles east of Soller as the crow flies, but getting on for double that by road. The walk starts from the little church of Saint Pere at Escorca, a holy place dating from the 13th century, and opposite the Restaurant Escorca. This gives you a choice, depending on your mood, of either downing some 'Dutch courage' or saying a prayer. Pass the

church on your left and turn immediately left up some steps by an ancient olive tree. Turn right at the top of the steps and, after passing behind a farm, go through the left of two gates. The walk is one of the most popular on the north coast and from this point the path is quite clear, with signposts, painted arrows, well-scratched rocks and a worn footpath. The trees soon give way to open pastures and glorious views of the surrounding mountains, including the Puig Major, the highest peak on Majorca. Unfortunately, access to this top is prohibited as it houses a military establishment.

The mouth of the ravine lies ahead — a massive chasm hewn through the mountains as if by the sword of some colossus. In fact, it has been eroded out by the cumulative effect of two rivers which converge at the head of the gorge to form the Torrent de Pareis. After heavy rains, the gorge may contain some quite deep and extensive pools. These can usually be easily waded through, but if your visit is unfortunately timed, you may have to get more than your feet wet.

The path zigzags down the hillside heading for the river bed. On reaching this, bear left and head for the Entreforc, the point where the two rivers meet and the start of the fun. For the speleologists in the party an impressive cave system, known as La Fosca, can be found on the left at this point; but our journey carries on into the confines of the gorge, and due to the number of boulder-chokes along the way, a fair amount of scrambling over and the odd bit of 'weaseling' beneath these, may make the trip feel more akin to caving at times. Look out for the red arrows which point the way through the more chaotic sections. The difficult sections are quite short with little in the way of exposure, but it may be wise to pack a short rope and a few slings for anyone in the party who may be of a slightly nervous disposition.

The walls of the gorge soon close in, shutting out the sunlight and decreasing the temperature by a degree or two. Huge cathedrals of limestone, over 1200ft high, tower above, painted with the rich colours of leached-out mineral deposits — reds, oranges, yellows, browns and greys — a truly magnificent canvas, with shrubby splashes of green in places, and the whole natural work of art slashed high overhead with a stroke of electric blue.

The walk does not always confine itself to the stream bed. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile into the gorge it is necessary to scramble up the left bank and then back into the bed in order to avoid a particularly large, overhung boulder choke, and close to the mouth of the gorge, a detour up the right bank is made to avoid an extensive pool. Most of these diversions are quite obvious and usually well marked.

The walls of the gorge eventually start to open out and diminish in stature, allowing the warm sun to flood in once more. The shingle bed also gives way to golden sand as the lovely bay of Cale de Sa Calobra is reached and the Torrent de Pareis merges with the clear, turquoise waters of the Mediterranean. The exit from this little bay is via a man-made tunnel through the cliffs on the left side of the bay as there is no natural easy



access. The original way used to be down the slopes of the 'amphitheatre' on the left, just before the tunnel entrance. Remnants of the old steps can still be seen rising up to the col above.

Once through the tunnel you walk into the neat little village of Sa Calobra and back to reality, with its bars, restaurants and trinket shops. I suppose you could say you have been 'dis-gorged'. Your little adventure may now be over or it may only be half way through. How to get back to Escorca? Buses do run up the hill, occasionally, and it is possible to hire a taxi. The 'thumb' is a possible option, but the forward-thinking two-car party, will have already left a vehicle here. You could always reverse the whole thing if time and energy allow and the abuse from your companions is not too severe.

The two trips described are both extremely different but equally enjoyable. The Torrent was tackled by a mixed party of seven, with plenty of stops, and took us about 4hrs. from top to bottom. John and I started *La Gubia Normal* about 2.30 p.m. and were seated in the taverna as the last rays of the sun filtered through the windows, illuminating our rapidly emptying glasses of San Miguel. The next day a party of four were on the route for 10.30 a.m. and were not down until well after sunset. A point to bear in mind, though, is that there is virtually no twilight in this part of the world, so when the sun fades behind the hills or sinks into the ocean, it really does go dark quickly.

But no matter how long you take, what time of day you start, or how many there are in your party, you are bound to enjoy these excellent little adventures. One thing is for certain: you are virtually guaranteed to do more climbing and walking in Majorca than if you were to stay at home and dwell on those winter blues.



*'Stone and alone': The Calobre Gorge.*

*Photo: Jim Rubery*

# Quotes from a Small Island

**Joan Prickett**

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Andy, we'll miss the bloody boat!"

"No we won't."

"It'll take too long."

"No it won't, Joan. It's a short pitch; it looks easy and it's probably the last."

"Okay, but we've got to be quick." Our little 'domestic' over, Andy climbed the pleasant, twin-cracked, 60ft MVS pitch as easily as predicted. I followed, then scrambled on to check that we were at the top of the worthwhile climbing pitches, whilst Andy set up our first abseil. The water-sculpted limestone of the narrow, twisting gorge made beautiful undulating forms and I found a childlike pleasure in moving swiftly through the exquisite, landscape unencumbered by climbing paraphernalia. Time was limited and I was reluctantly about to turn back when, rounding a blind corner, I came to an abrupt halt. "Andy," I yelled. "AND...EEE, you've got to come and see this."

It was September 1998 and we were in a high-sided, dry river gorge on Symi, a small Greek island some four miles off the Turkish coast and twenty three miles from Rhodes. Our first trip to the island had been five years before this, when we had fallen in love with the place. The scenery is stunning and the neo-classical architecture of the old harbour town delightful. There are many places of archaeological interest, the people are friendly and the food is, well...Greek. Hailed as one of the most romantic of the Grecian Islands, it boasts secluded rocky bays, swimming and snorkelling in the clear blue Aegean sea. Outwith the harbour area, the island is sparsely populated; people tend to travel around the island by sea. When you're walking overland, you feel you have the place to yourself. We found some pleasant, rough walks and some interesting scrambling and if that wasn't enough, we then realised there was also great potential for climbing.

The gorge we were climbing opens out onto the least accessible bay on the island, St. George's Bay, which is ringed by steep limestone cliffs and walls. Most of these are vegetated and broken, but one or two areas, however, do seem to have considerable potential for long 8 to 10 pitch routes on solid rock, using traditional gear. At the extreme right of the bay is a steep scree and scrub slope and a large, gently-angled slab that allows the easiest access and exit (though easier still is the 30 minute taxi-boat ride from Symi harbour). Since our first trip in 1993, several new, bolted, single-pitch routes had appeared and this had engendered in us a sense of urgency to 'do' something.

Putting out a route on the big wall was an attractive thought but at

## Quotes from a Small Island

around 1,000 feet, it would clearly be a serious undertaking without a strong team as back up. Besides, the island's atmosphere just doesn't encourage frenetic activity all day, every day. I certainly wouldn't want to be on Symi and spend the whole time cleaning and working out routes, unless there were sufficient numbers of people to take turns.

Our son, Shaun, and daughter, Eve, and Andy's recently bereaved Mum had joined us for the first week of our two week holiday on Symi; climbing would therefore be limited. Andy, however, optimistic as ever, had entertained the fond notion that — excluding his 75 year old mother — we would make a sufficiently able group to tackle a big new route. He had reckoned without the jaded state of our offspring and the 'Lotus Eaters' lure of the island. So, apart from some of the bolted routes, other more serious climbing clearly wasn't going to happen this time. But after Shaun, Eve and Gran had departed, Andy and I decided the gorge might be fun to explore.

Taking a range of rock gear, pegs and some 'leave behind' slings and krabs, we began climbing around 11a.m. (start time restricted by the routine of the taxi-boat service in late September). The tricky first pitch, taking the smooth water-worn rock, was one of the newly-bolted routes. According to the red painted sign at the bottom, it's 'Greek' VIIa. We had both led the pitch before and agreed that in the shade, it was good French 6b. In the fierce midday sun, however, it became something quite different. I was particularly glad to let Andy repeat his lead as we were not only very hot, but tormented by a swarm of tetchy hornets.

I found moving off from the belay bolt onto the second pitch rather testing, but the climbing quickly became easy Diff. for 40ft or so. The third pitch involved climbing down 10ft into a smooth-sided swirl hole, and then on up a steep wall for another 75ft. The bottom 15ft looked technically E2/3 5c, and very poorly protected; an option was to clamber around the easy but chossy and lightly vegetated side. Andy led through choosing the latter and it was technically pretty easy at VS 4c,



*'Joan and alone': the 'Greek' VIIa pitch.*

*Photo: Andy Prickett*



but rather looser and more awkward than it looked. In addition, it was not as well protected as we'd hoped and that added to the difficulties.

The fourth pitch began after a horizontal scramble over boulders: it had an awkward start, but plenty of cracks for protection and mostly solid, if a little smooth, rock. At about HVS/E1.5a/b and 100ft, it was delightful. New routeing is new to me and I'm sure I wouldn't have enjoyed it so much had I not been leading pretty steadily at harder grades that summer. Anyway, it was a lovely pitch.

After another scramble we were at the site of the little 'domestic', with me feeling a little guilty to have ended up leading the best new pitch so far. Which takes us neatly on, up the next pitch, to the point where I had stopped in my tracks and yelled back for Andy to come and take a look.

"AND...EEE" Needless to say, the convolutions of the high sided gorge meant Andy couldn't hear me until I had retraced my steps a little way and bellowed at the top of my voice. He soon joined me and we both stared at the focus of my attention: a beautiful steep wall of clean rock. Over 220 feet in height, its top formed a distinct notch in the skyline above.

The volume and force of the winter waterfalls had made the rock smooth and a technically E3 5c/6a climb for the first 30ft. Hard for us, but so inviting. However, it was late and even attempting to climb the wall was out of the question this time around. Instead, we would have to scramble and abseil our way back down the gorge as quickly and safely as possible in order to catch the last taxi-boat. If we missed the boat, we both knew we would be faced with a foul scree slog followed by a 1<sup>st</sup> hour Diff. slab climb and a two to three hour slog across rough ground with all our gear and in the dark. This was a great incentive to move as fast as our legs and arms could manage.

Although we found no evidence of anyone having climbed up the gorge above the bottom pitch, the ring-pegs situated at the top of the three main pitches told us someone had abseiled down before. We chattered excitedly as we set up our abseils. Both of us were so hooked on the idea of traversing the whole gorge, we decided to travel back cross-country the next day and do it top to bottom. We made the tiny jetty with just ten minutes to spare, giving us just enough time to stash a little fruit and water before the taxi-boat arrived.

The following morning we set out from the old harbour town at 6 a.m. We left early so that we wouldn't be too hampered by the heat so we could catch the 12.30 p.m. taxi-boat on from St. George's Bay to the next bay, which boasted a small, ramshackle, taverna and plenty of cold beer.

The scenery on Symi is usually delightful, but that morning it was simply breathtaking. The irregular coastline, rocky bays, blue sea and the distant mountains of Turkey tinged with misty purples and pinks,



made the early rise worthwhile whatever the outcome. We followed a rough track along and up to a small monastery nestling in the hillside and then trekked on over scrubby, rocky ground, eventually finding our way to the start of the river bed. We enjoyed ourselves scrambling down increasingly exciting rock steps, over smooth boulders and around swirl holes until we reached the point that formed the notch at the top of the big wall. It was 9.30 a.m. and already the heat was fierce.

Andy pulled the gear out of his sack and groaned: he had forgotten to pick up the two extra double slings we'd agreed we might need, following the somewhat heated 'discussion' we'd had the night before. This discussion was reminiscent of a number of other 'discussions' over the years since I started climbing 'proper' (i.e. more than once every five years; able to lead; able to tie my own knots and carry my own sandwiches). You see, I tend to lean on the side of "I think we should just take this and this, and perhaps this just in case." Andy, on the other hand, tends towards a minimalist approach. Whilst neither of us has had dreadful epics, we have both suffered a little as a result of our idiosyncracies. Andy's often been heard to say things like, "If only I'd brought my..." or "Damn! That's my last quick draw." Whereas I have been known to be so weighted down with gear I'm unable to make some strenuous moves. From the top of my second E1 lead, *Cenotaph Corner*, I took a short flyer; the bruises that appeared on my thigh the next day matched an almost full set of 'Rocks', and believe me, I'd laced the route.

Anyway, here we were, with little gear even by Andy's spartan standards. To complicate matters further, there was no sign of the expected ring-peg. Whoever had abseiled down the gorge before us must have found a way in from the side. Perhaps they had wanted to avoid taking a stance part way down the wall. Andy had brought a few pegs, but he would need the full small range to ensure a decent abseil point on the wall. Using a couple of wedged chockstones we set up a belay and abseil point at the best site we could find, some 100ft back from the lip. It seemed solid enough, but was not ideally situated: the two double slings would have been handy here.

Andy was soon over the lip and travelling down the wall, scanning the rock for decent placement sites for pegs and the couple of friends he'd brought along. He took a while, and we were both beginning to feel uncomfortable, unprotected from the overhead sun. I heard the peg hammer ringing out, changing in tone as the peg sank home, then Andy calling to me. Great; time to move. Clambering over the edge, I felt that first stomach flutter, when the ropes move and sometimes jerk into a new position just before getting established on an abseil. Everything was fine, however, and I quickly arrived at Andy's side grinning like a Cheshire cat. This was fun and exciting. I felt particularly excited at the thought that maybe no-one had been just where we were.

We were both very thirsty and drank what remained of our water,

knowing we had a bottle waiting for us in the stash at the bottom. It was as we began working to bring down the abseil ropes that, high up in the gorge, we hit the low point of the holiday: the ropes locked solidly in place. No matter how hard we pulled or altered the angle of pulling, the ropes remained, infuriatingly, in exactly the same position. Neither of us could imagine what could have caused the locking. Whilst waiting for Andy to set up the next belay and abseil point, I'd checked the whole area for potential problems, even blocking off the odd rope-jamming crack with stones. However, no matter what the cause, the only option was for one of us to prussik or shunt their way back up the full rope length and attempt to sort out the belay. Although either of us could do the deed, we both knew that Andy, stronger and more experienced than I, would be that much faster.

The sun's heat was intense as Andy made his way strenuously and sweatily up the fixed ropes. His walk-in boots were no help against the steep, smooth rock. Almost at the top, he sent a hail of brick and half-brick-sized rocks ricocheting down the wall towards me. Most whistled past, but one glanced off my huddled form, leaving me shaken rather than hurt. For a brief but clear moment, I felt conscious of the vulnerability of our position; I knew that no-one really knew where we were. Of course, that's the risk any of us takes when we climb 'off piste', even in this, relatively tame, environment. We had tried to explain our plans to the taxi-boat driver, so he'd understand why we'd want a lift out of, rather than into, the bay, but he'd steadfastly refused to believe it was possible. The focus for the inhabitants on the island is the sea. People, apart from the very odd goatherd, don't even walk further than they have to, so climbing is just not in their experience. In the event of an accident, even had they known where we were, I doubt they could do much about it.

So, we were alone, just as we knew we would be. At times like these, I think about my life. Here am I, a 49 year-old woman with two delightful, grown-up children; a challenging and rewarding career as a therapeutic counsellor and a warm, loving, lively relationship with my husband and climbing partner, Andy. In fact, generally I see myself as a pretty sane sort of person, so what the hell was I doing in this gorge, in the blistering sun, in the middle of a dry waterfall chute, dangling from two friends and a channel peg, with rocks raining down on my head? I could be swimming about in deliciously cool, clear water or relaxing under a shady tree, reading a good novel, or...or, anything other than dangling here. Well, I don't really know why, except that almost nothing can beat the buzz, nothing quite matches that almost primal feeling of being really alive, or can satisfy so many aspects of my being in one go.

Well, enough of that. Andy had sorted out the problem and was back by my side. The karabiner had turned and pressed the rope into the bulging rock face, effectively locking off the ropes; the more we pulled, the more it tightened. He was tired and we were both very thirsty. We

needed to get down quickly out of the sun, find the water from our stash and catch the boat that could take us on to the bay with the little taverna and cold, cold beer. But the boat would arrive at 12.30 p.m. and it was already 11.15 a.m.

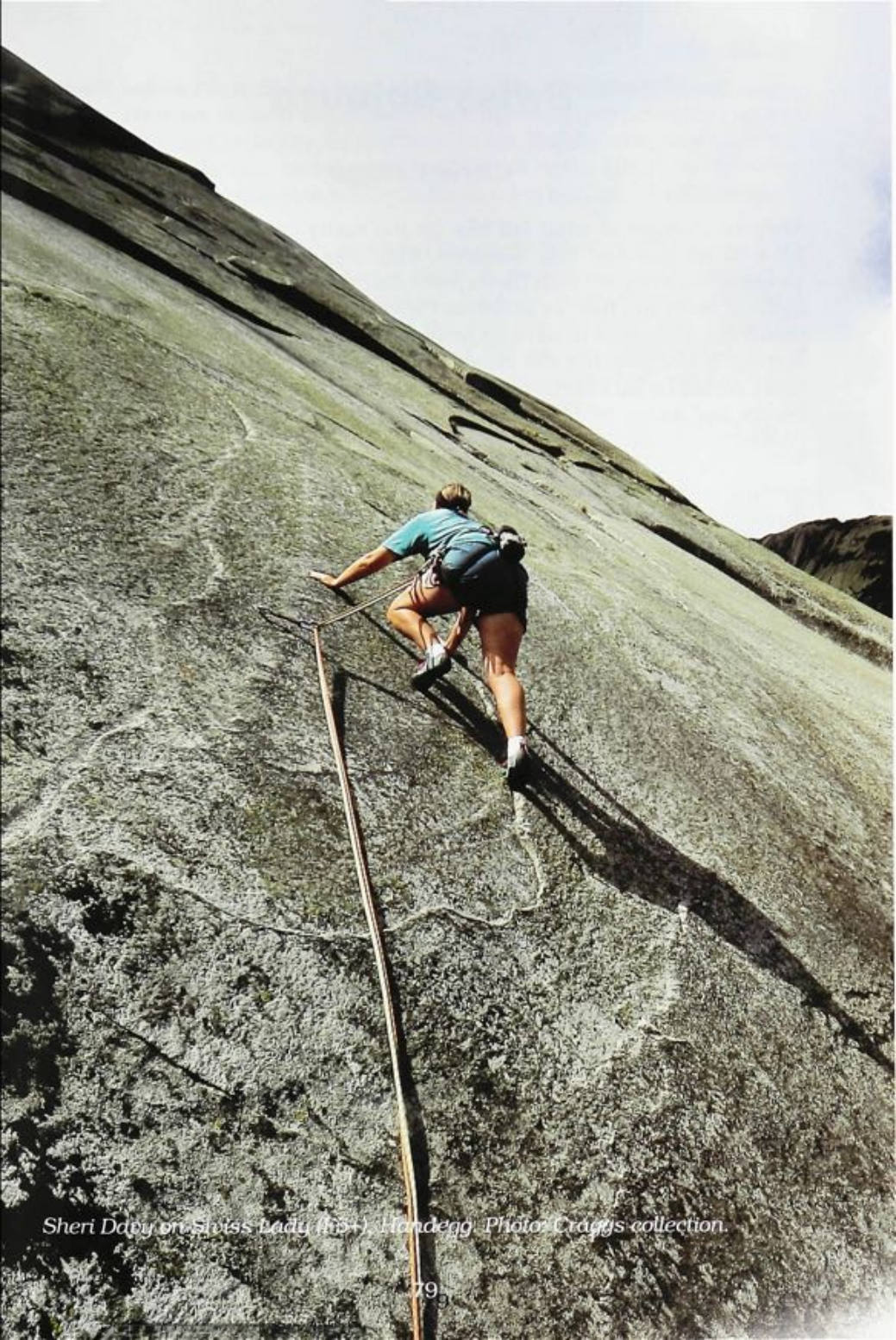
Still, we managed to find sufficient energy and motivation to traverse the rest of the gorge safely and efficiently and arrived in the bay at the same time as the boat. We hadn't had time to take off our harnesses or put gear into the sack, but ran clanking and jangling past a small group of gawping, semi-clad bathers before jumping onto the boat gasping for breath. In our filthy gear and with red faces and parched lips, we were the source of much interest and amusement.

But we didn't come away completely empty-handed: at the bottom of the pitch where our ropes had jammed, Andy had found a beautiful, bronze sheep's bell. It had a clear, distinctive ring when he rattled it in the swirl-hole below me as I abseiled down to join him; we have it hanging in the hall at home. Knocking it brings back the memory of that gorge on Symi — the fun, the excitement, even the brief scare. Will we go back there again? Almost certainly. It would be good to climb the whole of the gorge sometime and perhaps take another look at the cliffs around St George's Bay. However, the other attractions are still just as appealing: the secluded bays, beautiful scenery, interesting architecture and archeology — not to mention the swimming, lazing, walking and, of course, the romance!



*Beware Greek rifts: the gorge of St George's. Photo: Prickett collection*





*Sheri Doby on Swiss Lady (R3+), Handegg. Photo: Craggy's collection.*



# Swiss Sojourn

Chris Craggs

After an absence of what felt like far too many years, we finally made it back to Switzerland last Summer. This was not going to be a classic storm-bound season with the express aim of bagging 4,000-metre peaks, instead, with the full set of Swiss Pleasure guides (almost £100 investment) the plan was to sample some quality rock climbing in an Alpine setting. If the weather did choose to do the dirty on us and 'crap out', there would be no sitting around in soggy campsites this time, we would be up and away, heading south in search of the sun, as far south as proved necessary.

School in Sheffield finished at 3.30 p.m and by 5.30 p.m. we were in Hull, safely established on the North Sea ferry 'Norland', beer in hand waving goodbye to Blighty in real style; the holiday had begun. The dreaded alternative of the M1, M25 and 'the battle of the Channel' had been considered and we raised a glass to the friends taking this supposed 'easier option'. After a buffet, a couple more beers in the bar and good night's sleep, it was a leisurely breakfast before we hit the motorway and courtesy of toll-free roads in Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany, we were established at the fine granite cliff of the Martinswand in the French Vosges by tea time.

In truly traditional fashion I got badly burnt the first day and the on second one it rained interminably. Sat under our £25 Argos Catalogue 'Gazebo' (the hit of the holiday, with up to a dozen bodies crowded under it on the wetter days), I muttered about giving it 12 more hours before driving home and booking a flight to Wyoming.

As if a point had been made, the rain duly stopped and we moved on to Switzerland where several surprises waited in store: it wasn't horrendously expensive; it didn't rain all (or even much) of the time and as hoped for much of the rock climbing was of the highest quality. Initially we headed for the limestone faces above the swish (i.e. high-priced) resort of Leysin, a place I had heard about for over thirty years but had never quite made it to. The major attraction of cable-cars to and from the cliff made for an gentle approach to the idea of getting fit.

The highlight of the area is undoubtedly the hundred-metre-high limestone face of the Sphinx. This was originally explored back in the 60s by such luminaries as Dougal Haston and John Harlin who were based at the International School of Mountaineering just down the slope in Leysin. Since that date the walls have been covered with high-quality routes, the majority of which are hard and well bolted.

The four pitch offering of Les Lausannois chair-lift, whisked us to La Brea and from there a superb horizontal path cut across the steep

hillside before running up into a hanging valley to the very busy Cabane d'Orny. Here we missed the onward trail up the lateral moraine, and so scrambled down onto the Orny Glacier and plodded our way ever upwards until a discrete metal signpost pointed to the right, up the steep and very unstable moraine towards the retiring hut, at 10,400ft it was a very welcome site.

We were last up in the morning (no surprises there then) as all the other hut occupants had already gone. A well-beaten track zigzagged between partially exposed crevasses, until we bore away to the right towards the beckoning pyramid of the Aiguille de Tour, our target for the day. A steepening in the surface of the glacier indicated that the donning of crampons was no bad idea and, securely shod, we made our way to the bergschrund below the peak's East Face.

By now, the early risers were all on their way down and, full-on to the rising sun, the face was starting to show signs of wear and tear, with bits of rock, and lumps of softened snow sloughing off the face and clattering and swishing down to our right in disconcerting fashion. A well sculptured set of steps zigzagged through the bergschrund and then headed leftwards to eventually reach a series of rocky terraces, where we deposited our crampons and sacks. The route took narrow ledges to reach the exposed arête of the mountain, where, for the first time, the view to the west towards the Chamonix valley and the great white bulk of Mont Blanc caught our eye.

The final ridge involved scrambling up awkward corners and great perched boulders; then suddenly we were there, with nothing above except fresh air. The state of the bergschrund and its attendant snow slopes precluded too much dallying, though we made time for the summit photo shoot and hand shake. Back on the glacier, it was still only 10.00 a.m. and with time to spare, we tacked our way back across the blinding white expanse, stopping for a second breakfast and plenty of photographs. The rest of the day was spent lounging on the terrace, soaking up the high-altitude sun, and gazing across at the shadowy triangle that had given us such an excellent outing.

After one more night in a now almost deserted hut, it was up early for the long descent to the valley. Hidden far below in the early morning haze we headed ever downwards towards the greenness, a steaming hot shower and especially a cold beer.

As September approached, our 'Summer Sojourn' drew to a close. The mountains were quieter by the day. We decided to break the long journey home with a couple of days cragging on yet more deserted cliffs, in the French Jura. From there a long push back to Zeebrugge, another night on the boat and the bleak thought of the approaching British winter was just around the corner. As to the thoughts about where to go this summer, the Friday night ferry is already booked.

# Bluff Knoll

(full bodied, with a nose)

Cathy Woodhead

In Western Australia 26 km is dead close. Following a recommendation, we had a meal at a windmill 'close' to the Stirling Ranges and discovered that each wine bottled for the windmill is named after one of the mountains in the range. So we drank 'Ellen Peak', to celebrate our two-day bushwalk/scramble along the ridge of Three Arrows, Pyoongurup Peak and Ellen Peak.

The ridge is an island rising from a tree-covered plain. We wore gaiters against snakes and instead of lots of warm clothing, carried lots of water. Sleeping out in a huge cave, we witnessed a spectacular electrical storm. Dozing off while the laser show continued, we were rudely woken hours later by a crash immediately above us. No worries, mate; it missed. Back to wine and windmill — the latter built by a Dutchman. Apparently, he'd used a huge pole and a piece of string to lay the bricks (which had been salvaged from a 'nearby' burnt-down Co-op, 85 km away). Optimistically, we decided to buy a bottle of his 'Bluff Knoll' in case we got up the 300m face to its 1,073m summit.

Next day we were happy to register our proposed climb in the Stirling Ranger's log book: *Marionette* is described as 'an excellent route, highly



Not a slasher in sight: Bluff Knoll, proud above the un-whacked bush.  
Photo: Andy Heald

exposed in its lower half and with some superb positions'. Even without stars, at 244 metres with eleven pitches it seemed a good bet (only two routes here have any stars at all, and these are harder and much shorter). Getting to the bottom of the crag involved serious bushwhacking. The undergrowth here is impenetrable, so for a path to routes, read 'fight through bush'. The day before, we'd tried hard to reach the foot of Marmabup Rock in the Porongurups, but failed miserably, not knowing the ethics of slashing through vegetation, or (truth be told) having a slasher.

I was the one with Austral-

ian experience, so I fought first. I had spent my teenage years hanging out at Port Noarlunga's roller skating rink, swimming off its jetty and generally eyeing up the lifesavers and surfers. A disappointment in sport, I didn't run that fast or shoot goals that well and skating backwards had limited value. Then at 16, I discovered rock-climbing in the Flinders Ranges.

All I knew about climbing was from the Disney film 'Third Man on the Mountain' and the guide, client, boy and Alps were nothing whatever to do with my life. My brother, over from university in Britain, told us that he had rock-climbed. His chief story was that he had run out of control down a slope, tripped and was thus saved from plummeting over an edge. Still, at least I knew university students did rock-climbing; so when it came to an introduction at the foot of a greasy gully somewhere in the Flinders, I was first to volunteer and then very keen to do more.

As a fresher at Adelaide, we had hemp wound round and round us, then tied in Tarbuck knots, and sacks full of rocks hurled from above so that we could practise waist-belay leader falls. Before migrating back to Britain there were two weekend trips to Mt. Arapiles. We carried pitons and geological hammers, but mostly used hawser-laid slings. Once, we gathered around a climber who had 'something on a sling': he had read that climbers in Wales found nuts from a mountain railway, filed out the threads and used them to put in cracks as belays. It seemed an incredible, outlandish, brilliant idea — and it was this long ago that I had last climbed in Australia.

At Bluff Knoll, we forced our way through to *Hell Fire Gully* and eventually reached a huge dark cleft. *Marionette* starts 'about 60 metres to right of entrance to the Chasm at a large slab at foot of first bushy gully right'. Isn't it funny how a simple description is open to so many interpretations? Where exactly was the entrance? How large a slab were we looking for? What counts as a gully? How bushy? By the time Andy was sure he had found the place, I had gone quiet. Would he lead the first pitch?

Next pitch: 'Traverse left above awkward corner round two small noses to gain obvious crack in gully left wall. Up crack to ledge below overhang; belay.' Would he like to carry on? I was decidedly wimpy — as you can be when there's another to rely on. However, the third pitch was '21m (crux) Out to arête, a few feet further left then up twin blocks. Arête direct to large ledge.' By now I was sure we were on route; the pitch lengths were right and all the features in place. We were also well off the ground and this made me happier. Andy, put off by the word 'crux', was not feeling so brave, however. Time for 'role reversal'; I took the lead.

What magic to go first: finding the route; placing the runners; being in control and not scared witless on something that is too hard. The belay ledges had large loose blocks scattered around and the idea of abseiling from any of them was not an option. There was no time to relax; the route

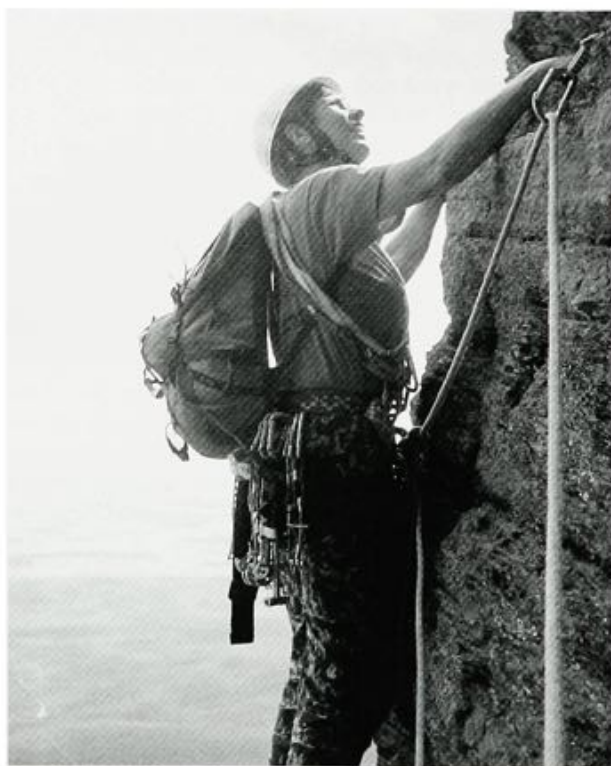


## *Bluff Knoll*

was too big. Would the odd cloud grow into another thunderstorm? Did lizards really mean no snakes? Would the sun fry us? Would we find the way? We alternated leads and down under, our tiny hire car got smaller and smaller.

The route took us up the progressively pronounced arête of the Chasm with superb positions as promised. Then, after eleven pitches, we reached the sudden summit, right where the tourist path comes up. There was no hand rail and anyone could have taken one step to the cliff foot. All around, the tree-covered carpet with rucks from the outlying hills, blurred to infinity. What a place. What a country.

My transfer to the Perth office would involve full migration: Andy had interviews and a good offer, but the Sirens just weren't strong enough. I sussed the seductive warmth that makes you walk barefoot, only to step on three corner jacks. And the wine? We drank that a year later with our Perth friend, here, under Tal y Fan.



*Cathy Woodhead picking a route round a delicate nose on Bluff Knoll. Photo: Andy Heald*

# North Carolina Climbing

Terry Gifford

*Hickory, NC, February 1995*

If you're going to take a flyer out into space from a new crag in a US Wilderness Area, you might do worse than make sure you're held by a local. Mine was a snuff-dipping, steely-fit local with a greying crewcut by the name of Howard. He serves behind the counter in the local climbing store, greeting everyone by name as they pop in from the sun/mist/snow/ice/sun that has been January in North Carolina. On campus at Lenoir-Rhyne College, my students confided to me: "You know, Howard is *the* man." Whatever that means, he certainly is, as far as I'm concerned.

After taking me bouldering in the leafless backwoods of late January, on the first Sunday in February we hit one of the major crags outcropping on the rim of the Linville Gorge, location for the filming of 'The Last of the Mohicans'. Now only bear hunters get into the remote parts of the wooded gorge, Howard tells me. He adds that modern bear hunters here have packs of dogs with radio transmitters on their collars. This is America, after all.

Howard is the nearest thing to a native I'm likely to meet. He lives in a wooden farmhouse that his great-grandfather built in 1886. He learned his own hunting on the property he now searches every Thursday for fallen wood for his stove. Last winter's ice-storm still provides him with enough fallen timber to be 'cording wood' on his day off, to keep in shape and heated through the winter. He also boulders two evenings a week on a friend's garage wall. He's put up new routes (which he pronounces as 'rowts' ) in the Linville Gorge, but never been west of the Mississippi. His pride and joy is his brand new silver 4x4 pick-up truck. He cleans it before each Sunday's climbing trip.

His shining silver truck comes ghosting out of the dimness just before dawn to pick me up. I still can't get used to simply slinging the gear in the open back of the truck. And of course, I'd eaten breakfast, forgetting that we'd buy a 'biscuit' and coffee on the road. Beside Lake James, where the Linville River emerges from the ravine, Howard pulls off onto a track, jumps down to engage the hubs of the 4x4, and eases his baby gently over six miles of ruts. Then there's two miles of hiking up to the rim where we bushwhack to a place which looks like any other, but where Howard knows we will emerge into these knarled low trees on the very edge of the gorge.

"Dang! Ice," Howard says, as we begin to down climb the steep descent gully. The lingering smooth ice sculptures do not hinder our progress down wet loose blocks. "Any good at tree climbing?" asks H. Sliding down

a log across a gully is not a familiar British climbing skill. Finally, a short rappel from a tree over a wet cave gets us to the trail round to the front of this magnificent wall. Fortunately the trees are still bare and allow an appreciation of this 500ft white granite cliff that is seamed with horizontal lines, rough textured and rich in features that give a variety of types of climbing with not even the thought of a bolt allowed by these fiercely-independent North Carolina climbers. I don't know it yet, but H. is the master of the bomb-proof six-point hanging belay. He doesn't yet know that he's going to need it.

Our line is a starred 5.6 called *Little Corner* that falls back into the cliff after a bulge that hides the first belay. We're geared up and H. is tied in for the lead, when he says to me: "This sounds crazy, but I haven't climbed with you before. Can I see you tie a figure of eight?" For a moment I don't quite understand. I've been climbing for over thirty years. I chuckle to myself and wonder if I'd have thought to ask that. My respect is growing by the minute.

The corner itself is a little vegetated, but there's a fine crack-line on the right that leans back. H. makes short work of it, placing what comes to be his regular four runners in each pitch. He rounds the bulge with the small bush in it by making big steps up right. With only ten feet of rope left he takes a long time fixing a belay at every stance. Here, he doesn't like the *insitu*-threaded tape, he tells me.

The first pitch is deceptive. The edges turn to slopers, the crack narrows and forces the use of a raised slab on its right, which then runs out of edges just as the left side rears up smoothly. There's nothing for it but a blind layback with feet testing the friction. It's better than it looks. Then steep pulls right of the bush turn into mantels onto ledges leading left into the little belay ledge. I notice that H. has equalised all his belay points to perfection; I'm climbing with an old-fashioned craftsman.

He's done the 5.10 on the left that comes in close here and knows the topo shows a 5.8 crack up left, so he heads up towards a roof, stemming wider and wider until he is pulling up the wall on its right. Soon after he belays, taking even longer this time. I should have guessed what that meant.

My problem is that after bridging up to reach a good edge for my righthand, I'm then committed to the right overhanging wall, and when I reach round the roof with my left hand I find nothing. The corner has closed up. H. found some edges here to pull up on. I retreat and try again. But there's nothing new to be found and my arms are screaming 'Not enough training.' On my third try I fall off. I'm turning in space on H.'s two 10.5mm ropes and sit above the wooded winding river way below. Failure on a 5.6 first time out is embarrassing.

H. is a model of Southern politeness about it all. He lowers me down to the belay. I clip in and untie from the purple rope H. has been leading on. The other rope he's not been clipping into the gear, although



we're both tied into it, trailing it, ever cautious with this unknown partner, for possible rappels. Now it can be used to top-rope me through the crack on the left which goes easily at 5.6. This was obviously where the route should have gone, but we've both learned that H. is so much better than me that he can take a straight line and I simply can't. Shaken, but not stirred, I can relax at H's expertly-improvised belay as he cruises on up the comer, pointing out a steep 5.6 crux stepping into a bottomless V on fist jams. In my strained state, I find this tiring, but it's all there and, in the next two pitches I can appreciate the brilliant sharp-edged quality of this rock. So I'd topped out after a little too exciting an introduction to the Linville Gorge's Shortoff Mountain, the most southern in a line of crags before the gorge dips down to Lake James.

### *Sheffield, February 1999*

You've gotta go. Easter would be a good time. August is too hot and sticky they say. But North Carolina climbing has for a long time been a well-kept secret, even from the rest of America. Traditional climbing of superb quality on varied types of rock and the locals loving the chance to climb with visitors from the UK. They've been so cut off for so long that even a Brit of dubious ability was given that quiet Southern hospitality.

I didn't know it yet, but H. was to hang in with me. A few weeks later he took me up the best 5.7 in North Carolina just a few metres south of *Little Corner*. *Maginot Line* 5.7 is an overhanging corner that has horizontal slots for perfect stemming in balance all the way past a hanging belay to a wall, a roof and a final steep wall, all on terrific holds. I did this on a Sunday in late March after it had rained on the Wednesday, but the route had dried in the early North Carolina sun. In fact, the whole crag showed no signs of drainage.

The next crag to the north along the rim. North Carolina Wall, has the best 5.6 in the state: *The Daddy*. I'd done this on an Easter trip in 1994, when carrying water was crucial to our sunbaked, vulture-watched success on this 500ft exposed buttress which keeps its crux for the final overhang. Further north, across the other side of the Amphitheatre descent for *The Daddy*, is the starred ridge of *The Prow* at 5.4 and then the overhang of *The Open Book* at 5.11.

So there is quality at all grades here, as there is at Table Rock further north again and the distinctive feature of the landscape for miles around, from which the North Carolina Wall routes are approached. The key to Table Rock is finding out in advance whether the gate to the access road has been unlocked for the season. If you like the mountain ambience, Looking Glass Rock is a dome in the forest of fine friction and exposed leads. *The Nose* is the classic 5.8 and better protected than most things here. There are official little camping spots on the road accessing Looking Glass, up from Brevard to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Stone Mountain is a beautifully-streaked, 600 ft friction dome, with



## North Carolina Climbing

two classic cracks, above a meadow close to the road. Belays are bolted, but don't expect many in between.

I really liked Crowder's Mountain, a monolith overlooking the skyscrapers of Charlotte. Here are both traditional routes on amazing rock flutings and overhanging sports routes. Avoid weekends when it's crowded.

But I recommend you fly into Charlotte, hire a car and call up Mike Turner at Blueridge Mountain Sports, Greensboro NC 27408 (910 852 9196) to get the local news about access and camping. Then head for Moore's Wall where discrete wild camping is allowed. Mike will want to meet you there and show you the superb routes on some of the finest, marble-like rock I've ever climbed on. *The Wailing Wall* 5. 6 on the left of the Amphitheatre went through some unlikely but sharp-edged rock for its grade. After, call up my old partner HowardMask ([rhmask@twave.com](mailto:rhmask@twave.com)) (828 322 2297; home: 828 464 6209) to check if the road is open before going up to Table Rock to camp wild. Howard will be delighted to climb with you or recommend appropriate crags for the weather conditions. Dan Flowers, who also works at Outdoor Supply Co. with Howard, does professional guiding.



*600ft of friction, year round, on Stone Mountain, NC. Photo: Terry Gifford*



*Howard Mask on the popular Sentinel Buttress 5.5, Moore's Wall, NC. Photo: Terry Gifford*

At both these stores I've arranged for you to get 10% discount if you take a copy of this journal article along. Howard and Mike climb every weekend, all year round. They don't get many visitors to these magnificent crags in the backwoods and they're only too willing to be helpful. So, let's build a C.C. connection.

Get out there, y'all.

# Climbing and Sailing: can they compare?

Ben Stroude

It occasionally happens that the misguided climber, usually middle aged, grows weary of his first love and is seduced by excitements that would have been unthinkable during the devotion of youth. It has been well said, after all, that you cannot eat breakfast all day. Some turn to skiing and ski-mountaineering, some to paragliding, some (according to normally reliable sources) to sexual adventure. And a few take up sailing.

The seduction is insidious and, for some, hard to resist: you get married, the kids come along (or vice versa, it makes no difference), they need bucket-and-spade holidays, you are bored on the beach so you buy a canoe; then a dinghy; then — and this is the crunch — you read Tilman. Entranced by his adventures, and by the elegance of his prose, you can now rationalise your apparent desertion of climbing. With a slightly bigger boat, you can sail to the mountains. They don't have to be in Patagonia or Spitzbergen (you realise that Tilman was the hardest of hard men and by comparison you are a total wimp, besides which you have a job to hold down and he apparently didn't), but surely Scotland is possible, with Norway or Spain not totally out of the question. Suddenly you are hooked, and all that money which was going to get you to the Himalaya is now tied up in a hole in the sea surrounded by fibreglass.

Is it worth it? Do sailing and climbing have anything in common? Let us compare and contrast, just in case any reader is about to buy a boat. Yes, the two sports have a lot in common, but it is not necessary to ramble on about the great challenge, fresh air, wind in your hair, sunsets, the escape from the office, etc. The single word, adventure, sums up that lot; enough said, surely. It is in the sub-divisions of each occupation that some rather intriguing parallels lie. For instance:

**The climbing-wall ace: the reservoir dinghy racer** Both groups are usually youthful — even the older participants being young at heart: both are highly competitive and so become incredibly skilful within their environment and, perhaps because of that, are sometimes looked down upon by the old and crusty because they do not usually encounter greasy, wet rock (tides), snow and ice (rough seas), navigational problems in cloud (fog) or, indeed, much physical danger at all. Both can get changed and resort to the bar after an hour or two. Nevertheless, some individuals are able to transfer their specialist skills to the greater ranges (the oceans) very successfully.

**An Alpine route: crossing the Channel** This is serious stuff because there are objective dangers. The time commitment from hut to hut, or harbour to harbour, is usually between 12 and 24 hours, within the range of fairly accurate weather forecasting but subject to the occasional unpleasant surprise. There are hidden crevasses (flotsam) and loose rock (Liberian vessels with no one on the bridge). Survival skills and accurate route-finding (navigation) are therefore important. Afterwards you drink too much wine and swagger around Chamonix (Cherbourg).

**The expeditioneer: the ocean crosser** With a similar time commitment of a minimum 4-6 weeks away, both groups must, first and foremost, have tolerant wives or husbands. They must be able to live without washing, with insufficient sleep — often taken in unusual positions — and eat ill-prepared food. High levels of self-reliance and stamina are required by each, together with an acceptance that they have to take whatever weather comes along and make the best of it, as no help is available. Indeed, no other human contacts will be made for weeks on end, so tolerance of snoring and the similarly annoying habits of others is essential. In short, these are the same people, in different but related situations. That is particularly the case at the extremes; the solo climber on the current Last Great Problem in the Himalaya is the same self-centred nut case as the solo yachtsman in the Southern Ocean, redeemed only by the occasional display of exceptional heroism when some one is in trouble nearby. And, incidentally:

**Climbing instructor at (say) Plas y Brenin: Sailing instructor at (say) Plas Menai.** Hairy, bearded, identical.

Before dashing off to the Boat Show, there are four practicalities to consider, starting with the sordid subject of money. Even the best heeled of us has priorities and it is undeniable, I am afraid, that a boat is more expensive than all the latest Goretex, fleece, footwear and equipment put together, and oh boy, that is saying something. Its purchase can be justified only if you regard it not as a toy but as transport and holiday home combined. Compared with a rapidly depreciating car, it is amazing value and if reasonably maintained will probably appreciate in cash terms. The reality is, though, that when you decide to buy a boat you will fall in love and reason will fly out of the window.

So how much? Well, our member George Bintley spent 8 weeks in 1997 on a 700-mile cruise from North Wales to the Western Isles and back in all sorts of foul weather, knocking off as he went, 25 Munros and Corbetts, in his 24ft boat, *Maid Moira*, which he had bought for less than £3,000. But George is a handyman and had tweaked the boat considerably. £10,000 would, in 1998, buy you a very sturdy, well used 26ft Westerly (the best known brand of cruising boat) to do the same kind of thing in reasonable comfort. For bigger and better, the sky is the limit. Depending where you want to keep it, moorings, insurance and



running costs will be some 5% to 10% of the purchase price per year.

Secondly: time. This is another negative. Unless you are an academic or retired, you don't have sufficient holiday to make the best use of your boat. Cruising is a slow-motion business, 100 miles per day being good progress if you don't stop. So you cannot get all that far in a weekend, and with a summer holiday of (say) three weeks, you will be worried about getting the boat back to base on time before it is half over. This problem is the reason why cruising 'sailors' commonly spend more than half their time at sea with their engines running. There is nothing wrong with that, but the sad fact is that it is impossible in a weekend to replicate the intense satisfaction which climbers can get from a couple of great routes.

The third practical consideration is, '**The Yotties**'. It is ridiculous to try to generalise about thousands of people. However, just as there are public misconceptions of the climbing world ('Will they never grow up?... Forever getting stuck and risking the lives of all those gallant rescuers'), so there are about yachtsmen. The very word conjures up images of blazers and flannels and gloaming brasswork at Cowes, does it not? "What do you think you're on; Daddy's yacht?" is a well-remembered question from the days of National Service. It cannot be denied that the class distinctions of an earlier age linger on very overtly in the world of sailing. Can you imagine a climbing textbook with a section devoted to flag etiquette? Or climbing clubs whose committee members enjoy military titles (Commodore, Vice Commodore, etc.) and are routinely addressed by them? Or how about the Royal Mountaineering Association of England and Wales, patron — naturally — the Earl of Snowdon?

You really do not have to become involved with all that unless you want to. If some sailors take that aspect of their sport too seriously, it is well balanced by the quite extraordinary importance which some climbers ascribe, often in print, alas, to the business of shinning up and down rocks. You will look in vain for agonised debates over ethics in the yachting press. On the whole, yotties do not seek any deep meaning; they are pretty clear that they do it for fun. So, in the sailing world, just as in climbing, you will find the vast majority to be good blokes (and the female equivalent — does that badly-needed word exist?) with a few oddballs whom you can avoid.

Finally, there is **Health**. Whether your usual day out is spent trudging for hours to some remote Cairngorm crag, or stepping off the road onto your route in the Avon Gorge, you can be pretty sure of one thing: you are going to spend a lot more energy than if you were sitting in the cockpit with your hand resting casually on the tiller. Racing yachtsmen, forever changing sails and grinding winches, might justifiably protest, but as a generalisation it must be the case that climbers have to be fitter and stronger. It is nice to know your sport is doing you some good, but, on the other hand,



whoever took up climbing for the sake of his health? The fundamental difference to be considered lies, naturally, in the two playing fields, the sea and the mountains, and how they are used. These dictate that climbers have to look for difficulty, while sailors don't; for them, getting from A to B is sufficient challenge. The climber's perfect day is just to get up a route at the limit of his ability, where the issue was in doubt. It is one of the joys of climbing that this can be achieved whatever the ability of the individual and however bad the weather. Hence the athlete who normally pushes the limits of the possible on warm, dry rock can still have an enjoyable epic on a scramble in a blizzard. This happy flexibility is not available to the sailor, for the sea is too strong. No matter how skilful the helmsman, he cannot overcome the power of the sea in a coastal gale, so (if sane) he stays in harbour. His perfect day is to have reached his destination with the wind at force 3/4 on the beam all the way, and to have sorted out the problems posed by navigational hazards, tidal streams and other vessels in good order. He would still probably have enjoyed getting there in a stronger wind or, under engine, in no wind, but his pleasure lies much more at the mercy of the elements than does that of the climber. That does not, of course, necessarily make it any less intense.

There are those who consider that the climber's ultimate bliss occurs not on the route at all, but afterwards. Nirvana is sitting at ease in hut or pub, with the knees beneath a well-stocked table, contentedly reviewing the dangers and discomforts of the desperate ascent just completed and relishing the contrast between then and now. If that is so, then the sailor's delight is exactly comparable; the g. and t. in your sunny cockpit in a sheltered harbour, after the rigours of the storm, is a precise analogy. Critics of both might point out that the effect can be obtained more simply and cheaply by banging the head against the nearest wall, and then stopping.

So far, if we are keeping score, it would seem that the balance of desirability lies with climbing. There are two remaining considerations — one very important, the other much less so — which might even the scales. The minor one concerns the cerebral pleasure (a bit like doing the crossword) to be had from navigation. Even though the amazing magic of GPS is available, you still have to be able to think a little in case it is switched off or your batteries fail. And although the earth does not move for climbers (we are speaking literally here, you understand), the sea most certainly does and it requires just a little enjoyable thought to track your boat's position upon it. It has not been established, by contrast, that any intelligence is required of climbers: the instincts of our simian ancestors usually suffice.

The crucial concept of **romance** is difficult to pin down, especially for one who has been chiding climbers for taking themselves too seriously, but in this highly subjective article, sailing has it, whereas climbing

does not. Why? Well, it is partly a question of history and partly the freedom which the sea can provide. The use of the sea, for fishing, for the transport of goods and people, for exploration, for conquest and defence — those activities are as old as the human race. If you sail out of Plymouth Sound, say, for the short passage along the coast to Falmouth, you will consider exactly the same factors regarding course, tide, wind and weather as did Drake, Raleigh and untold generations of seamen before them. When you arrive, you will anchor in the same place as they did and make the same calculations about the length of your chain. If you cross the Channel to the pleasant harbours near Brest, you notice that every headland bears the fortifications ordered by Napoleon's marshals and by Hitler's generals, and you reflect, as you approach with red ensign flying, how different might have been your reception in less happy times. When you leave Belfast Lough for the North Channel, you will see exactly the same final glimpses of your homeland as did a million emigrants. You know that you will return, but it takes a dull dog not to feel something.

Then there is the freedom of the sea. You know, from school geography, that it covers two thirds of the globe and that, when you look westward from Bosigran, the Atlantic Ocean at your feet is also lapping the shores of North America. Afloat on that water, you can go there. No one will stop you. If you have a sturdy boat, full of food and water, and if, importantly, you have the bottle, you can go tomorrow. You are independent of roads, railways, airports and those who regulate them and can venture wherever the sea reaches. And if, like me, you are nervous about crossing an ocean, then the coastline of Europe has enough challenge and variety to last a lifetime of adventure. It is that freedom which feeds the dream, not of white horses but of a gentle swell from the west and a favourable forecast.

So what is the conclusion? First, we are in any case advised to try, in our short lives, every sporting experience other than incest and morris dancing. In that spirit, therefore, all climbers should take to a boat at least once. If you hate it, then that is one problem solved. If you want more, then probably the necessity of earning a living and the impossibility of giving up climbing will combine to take all your time, anyway. Eventually, however, the great day will come when, with luck, retirement makes all things possible and life begins anew. Do not, I beg of you, wish your life away in looking forward to old age, but the unbelievably splendid fact is that suddenly there is time for those distractions we considered earlier (though whether we are then up to the sexual adventure is a separate issue). Climbing and sailing can be combined, with the best of two wonderful worlds available; and, as the anchor goes down again in Loch Slapin this year, with the sun setting behind the next day's targets of Clach Glas and Blaven, the aperitif will taste particularly well.

# A Question of Style

Bill McKee

The 'games climbers play' are recorded in many ways, and the stories climbers tell are related in a range of different styles. The same goes for both the all-round mountaineer and for the occasional hillwalker. But for the broadminded and the generalists amongst us, these activities and their practitioners' views of 'the game' are all interconnected.

For instance, there's still plenty who'd consider themselves to be climbers, rather than walkers, who began their journey on the proverbial camping trip to the Lakes with the school or the scouts, viz:

"Where's your cagoule, Smithers?

"I dunno Sir, me Mam packed me bag."

And by necessity, the enthusiastic alpinist practises all aspects of the broader game of mountaineering.

But the different though related arms of this pastime of ours seem to have entirely different modes of expression when written down, and their interconnections could hardly be guessed at from the variations in style their participants adopt in putting pen to paper. There's a good reason, of course. This is that, despite the broadness of the church which houses us, there's a world of difference between an account of a successful redpoint of some 8c+ or whatever, and a vigorous stroll over the rough bounds of Knoydart; between gleefully negotiating the vertical crud of a Culm classic or trudging up Mount Vinson. To a greater or lesser degree, these are all part of climbing/mountaineering/walking's rich and established written tapestry, its library of styles; but it's rare for an accepted formula to be discarded or consciously adapted and the experience related in an unorthodox way. So what would happen if we were to blur the boundaries a little and liven things up a bit, to mingle the styles of the tales and the telling of them?

One of the most commonly found and adaptable styles is the pure descriptive account of what might be termed 'the walk' and 'the climb' — although a fair degree of soul-searching can sometimes be thrown in. In its most extreme form, the average account of a day's walking boils down to three clearly defined stages. First, there is the planning. Walkers love to plan their trips, and mention is often made of this as a way into the piece:

'So, as the dark winter evening wore on and we shared a wee dram or two and exchanged ideas and reminisced

of mountain days, maps and guidebooks were pored over, and a plan was hatched that we — that is, Roger, Nigel, Sally and myself — would gather at the Sligachan on the Easter weekend.'

Sometimes, however, the plan may be a little more vague:

'As we descended the lengthy spur of Beinn Dearg, the grey cloud had lifted a touch and allowed us a fleeting glimpse of the magnificent panorama to the north. It was at that moment that I knew I would return some day to climb those hills, and now, here I was...'

The account of the walk itself is invariably punctuated by descriptions of the flora and fauna encountered, usually in the form of fleet-footed deer, tweeting bird life, O-level geology, and rare plants nestling in mossy hollows — although it's rare for the writer to allow this to obscure the walk's progress. One would expect to be informed of each summit, for example, and in many cases each subsidiary summit, ridge, rise, descent, col and corrie; of fluctuating weather conditions, and the lie of the land, as well as a few witticisms centred on the foibles of companions: 'Roger had predictably brought cheese and pickle sandwiches again'. Also perhaps on display, will be a thinly disguised rant against the proliferating ticklist munro-baggers, and the dumbing down and discarded coke cans they've brought to the once pristine mountains.

The more clinical walker may opt for the 'stopwatch' approach, with at least some space devoted to a blow-by-blow account of whether the day is proceeding according to schedule, as in:

'By the time I had arrived breathless and late at the bealach the light was beginning to fade and I was cursing Simon under my breath for that lost half hour traversing the wrong side of the pinnacles. There would be no time to lose now if we were to reach the tent by seven.'

While perhaps more commonly, the gear freak will be unlikely to resist slipping in an account of how effective his new 'Atomic Storm Repeller' is at keeping out the squally showers.

The third and final section, the aftermath, may be highly variable. In some cases a protracted justification of the day's activities will fade into an evocative sunset as the protagonist subsides into humble reflection; in others, the trials and tribulations of the day will be soothed away by anticipation of the evening's bonhomie in bothy or pub. In many, too, the exhortation to visit the area yourself will be clear.



The shorter term intensity of climbing rather than walking gives rise to a rather different emphasis; but again there are very often three predictable stages to the description. It's when the plan, the event, and the aftermath are recounted in the style of the other 'activity' that things could be livened up, though. For example: the abrupt, staccato, short bursts of words used by many climbers to portray their focus on that troublesome crux — you know, the 'Go! Go again! And again. Left, right. Up. Out. One hand over the lip. Gasp! Aagh — it's a sloper! And I'm off. Shit!' type of thing, has limitless applications in the hillwalking realm. Those final few yards to the top of a long cherished summit might particularly benefit from this approach:

'Throwing caution to the wind once more we went for it. Zig-zag left. Then right. Back left. And right again. The clunk of vibram on stone, the heart-stopping exposed scramble, willing ourselves on. And on. Rasping breath as we reach the cairn. The rustle of celebratory mintcake...'

Another area which may benefit from a different style could be the 'recent development' approach — beloved of area activists. Never mind those half-dozen new lines on the crumbling sandstone of 'Mucky Road Quarry's newly unearthed Landfill Headwall', what about the discoveries in our more remote sites?

'Following last year's discovery of the potential on the steep convex slope below the col by a party from Lincoln University Rambling Club, further ascents have been made of the impressive terrain just to the right. Most notably that of The Superdirect by a solo walker from London during a week's holiday in the area. This ascends the edge of the right-hand scree slope before contouring leftwards below the bracken to gain a prominent rowan tree. Repeat walks have already confirmed quality and difficulty and, although some doubt remains as to the style of the first ascent, an incipient path is already beginning to appear.'

Of course, this sort of thing could work 'in reverse' too, by adopting the gently-paced style of the celebration of all things pastoral and pedestrian to describe a climbing experience. So the description of a favourite 'round' in Lake or Peak District would perhaps metamorphose into something along the lines of:

'This time, we chose to enjoy the route in the opposite direction, so on reaching the open moorland above the

cliff, where the panoramic vista of Upper Smurfdale both tempts and intimidates the eye, we began to carefully descend the line of satisfying crimps. By the time we'd both reached the hands-off rest above the flared slot, Roger proposed a brief lunch stop, and we stood in balance to munch our sandwiches while dippers, buzzards and pied wagtails chirruped in the valley below...'

Or then again, maybe not. Maybe the multi-faceted experiences on mountain or rock which we naturally wish to recount have long since found their own niches in the infinite range of the written word. Perhaps just a little tweaking around the edges is all that is needed from time to time to counter the formulaic?

Certainly, our best commentators possess that rare gift which allows their work, though rooted in well-established styles, to write in an original voice which is theirs and theirs alone.



*Surely something to write home about? Peter Newman greets an old friend on Arran. Photo: Terry Kenny*

# The Horse Washer

**Moira Viggers**

"Of course," said Jim, and his eyes were sparkling with the joy of saying something stupid without fear of a medical note being made about possible aberrant behavioural tendencies, "we could always do the first old-style, oxygen-free ascent."

Laugh? We nearly died. But it brought the conversation round to old times, and the first time we'd climbed anything 'oxygen-free' (not that it really needed oxygen of course, as it was only just 7000 metres): Kan Tengri in the Tien Shan range. I still swear it's the most beautiful mountain I've ever seen. There we were, a load of impecunious university climbing club students, blissfully unaware that it takes more than 'wanting it' to climb a peak like that, and carrying that ignorance as both torch and shield. I hadn't met you then, Annie — this was pre-Millennium — but it was the first time I met Jim.

I don't know why I hadn't come across him before, because he was in his final year and had belonged to the club ever since his 'fresher' days. Maybe it was because he had a regular partner and, with the arrogance born of ability and experience, they tended to remain somewhat aloof from us first-year youngsters, the 'common herd'. But his partner couldn't afford the trip, and Jim couldn't resist it, so he flew out with us to Kazakhstan in sociable mode and I just happened to be sitting next to him. You couldn't help but like him, Annie; in those days he wore eccentricity as his natural garb — along with the largest collection of Bob Dylan T-shirts in the world. He adored Dylan (ofcourse, he wasn't a reviled rebel then) and could quote, at will, large chunks of totally obscure songs that, with its lilt and charm, somehow sounded like the poetry of his Welsh namesake.

Seasoned travellers as we thought we were, accessing this mountain was a bit different from anything we'd done before in the Alps. Almaty seemed European; but once outside the towns, transport was limited and we were in John Wayne country, where the horse is king.

As Jim said, "It brings a whole new meaning to the phrase "one-horse town". The final part of the journey was by an ex-Soviet helicopter, which transported us and our kit to a seasonal Base Camp on the glacier below Kan Tengri.

I'll never forget that flight. I'd never been on a helicopter — before or since — where you could open the window, lean out and take photographs. In fact, crossing some of the passes, it felt as if you could lean out and touch the hills themselves. I swear, on occasions, we were only 3 metres off the ridges. Base Camp itself was a little tent city perched on a wind-swept moraine; but it was the possessor of the highest sauna

in the world'. The sauna in question resided about quarter of a mile from the Camp itself (this, we were reliably informed, was because the sauna was fixed); but the Base Camp moved from year to year according to prevailing conditions. The previous year, the sauna had been in the middle of the camp.

I never told you about the Horse Washer did I? That's where it happened, in the highest sauna in the world, the night before we started across the glacier to Kan Tengri ABC. Did we anticipate the most glorious adventure of our lives with a light supper and an early night, ready for the forthcoming action? No. Jim and I found ourselves staggering across the moraine at midnight, heading for the sauna, tanked to the gunnels with vodka.

Once there, we threw off our clothes in the ante-room and slumped, half conscious, on the top shelf of the hot room, the only sound the distant thump of the 'genny' and the gentle drip of sweat from forehead to thigh. I lost track of how long we lay there, but we were woken from our reverie by the sound of the door to the ante-room opening and closing, and then sounds of washing. And when I say washing, I mean WASHING. No hand basin job this; the sounds suggested vast quantities of water were being poured from container to container, with enough slopping and slooshing and general kerfuffle to raise the dead.

We lay there transfixed. Eventually Jim spoke: "My God, someone's out there washing a horse!" As if on cue, the noise peaked to a crescendo; my drunken imagination span with images. This must at least be Perseus rinsing down Pegasus after a hard day at the Gorgon's. Eventually, the noise stopped. To coin a phrase my fey old Irish grandmother would have used: 'A knock came to the door'. Neither of us moved. We were frozen-caught in time, imagination, and a superstitious sort of dread. The door opened. A head peered through, turned to us and smiled, revealing a pure gold front tooth. Tanya, the Base Camp cook? Carefully, she laid out two brilliant white shoe laces across the edge of the hot coals, flashed us her golden smile once more, and left.

Maybe you had to be there to understand it, but the incident stayed with us. All the way across the glacier the following morning, up the ridge to the snow-holes at Camps 1 and 2, and eventually to the summit, every unusual sound, every strange movement of flysheet or howl of the wind would prompt Jim or I to whisper to each other, *sotto voce*, "It's the Horse Washer." This was usually accompanied by a wide-eyed pantomime of primitive fear, followed by manic giggles. In a season of mixed weather, we were the only ones to summit, and somehow the Horse Washer became our mantra, our talisman for success.

We took it back with us to England, little knowing how short our time would be there as we learned that Blair's 'Nanny State' would become 'The Safe State' (do you remember the slogan over the Millennium Dome, Annie? 'The Safe State for a Safe Century'. That sent the first



chill down my spine), where any joy in rebellion and acceptance of risk would be crushed, and eventually treated as mental disorder, with all such activities banned ('Adrenaline Is A Sin'). How could we know that politically, we would end up with the 'Safe World Union': conform to 'Safe Society', or be exiled? How many years is it since anyone climbed a mountain on Earth?

I've tried, Annie, believe me I've tried. I graduated, stopped climbing and then there were you and the kids. God knows, I love you; but it was just pure chance that T should run into Jim here, after all these years. Basically, I don't think he's really changed: deep inside there's still a Dylan trying to get out; so I shouldn't have been surprised that he'd want me to climb Mount Armstrong with him. You have to admire the man, he's managed to cobble together some home-made crampons, ice-axes and other kit from all sorts of scraps. He reckons the axes are modelled on a pre-millennium design known as 'the banana pick', but they look more like instruments of torture to me.

I know I shouldn't be here at the foot of Mount Armstrong, and that there'll be hell to pay if we're found out (we're supposed to be on leave for some R & R at Moonbase III), but everything in my soul says it's right. Give the kids a big hug from me and tell them their dad has gone to see if the mountains of the moon really are made of green cheese. Jim says that if we're successful tomorrow, we could call the route 'The Old Pretenders' Ridge'. As for me, even though it's as still as death, with no atmosphere and no wind, I'm going to be listening for the Horse Washer.

# The Leap

Mike Robertson

You were always the more talented, the stronger, right from the first day we touched rock together. We explored the short limestone sea walls at Seacombe, while the waves crashed haphazardly against the stacks of square-cut boulders, and the sun finally found its way down into the cobalt-blue sea. We played, firm and confident in our childish comprehension of the future, work and love a long throw away, our freckled faces catching the spray from the eager swell, our laughs combining and lifting on the breeze as the evening drew on. Back at the campsite we played down our escapades, diminishing the danger. Mum and Dad's pointed questions receiving only the vaguest of answers.

You were always the more bold, Sandy. That day at Seacombe I strove hard to keep up: every dare would press me further; following you took all I could muster. Do you remember those early days on Aldershot's military land? Those wild tree-climbing expeditions? Trees with branchless sections couldn't stop you, and those trees were gigantic, spiralling up into the afternoon sky like the huge, twisted fingers of a sleeping giant. It was you who found the thirty-foot length of hemp, tying it to your wrist with a granny knot and lassoing those elusive overhead limbs with it; scaling the bald trunk, hanging on that doubled-over rope as if it were a ladder, throwing your leg over the tied-off branch and somehow manoeuvring your body (effortlessly, it seemed to me) to arrive in a sitting position on it. Life was a constant thrill to you, and I gladly gave up all else to join in. We were an inseparable team and life without those high, leafy branches breaking the summer sun into fractured, golden shafts of light, or the thought of existence without your manic, cheery laugh never occurred to me.

Years later we stood at the base of the Cromlech. You were always the dreamer, Sandy. Fostering thoughts of big numbers, wild places, travels to far away worlds. I grunted as I followed you up *Right Wall*, that most historic of routes, marvelling at the unprotected difficulty of those moves to the porthole. You barely paused for breath, your natural optimism winning the game for you; your infallible enthusiasm your only trump card. We abbed off that tired old tree as the rain came in, turning our chalk bags to mush and plastering our hair to our scalps. "*Lord of the Flies* next," you said, as we slid our way down the scree to the road. I smiled, already knowing it were true. For you, dreams were unrealised reality, future appointments in your own private, mental diary.

I think you only moved to Bristol to study so you could spend more time in the South West and Pembroke. Am I right? I stayed often; we

drank, drank some more, partied plenty, and I fell in love with climbing all over again. I recall you leaping thirty feet into the sea at St Govan's from that huge boulder, butt-naked, of course (you seemed to like that sort of thing). I never followed you on that one, and you never mentioned it. In you, I saw a loveable rogue, a genius of exuberance, a master of enthusiasm. I tried so very hard to keep up (did I?).

Then we were twenty-three, twinned as no other brothers could be. The world oyster beckoned, and you still carried that boundless excitement around in your travel bag, clutching it to you as a small boy carries his favourite present at Christmas time. I fell in love with a gorgeous woman and moved to London. You stayed in the west. We played when we could, although our lives had irrevocably changed. I remember that crazy Pembroke weekend well; you were fit, psyched like never before. I held your ropes on *Souls*, after changing that ageing old bit of tat for you, the piece just by that last hard move. You'd always loved on-sight climbing the most. The tide crept inexorably in as you finally caressed that long, blind line of steep side-pulls; why could I never commit so readily? It was the beginning of your long, sometimes torrid affair with that most magnificent of crags. I picked up the phone in Tooting some fifteen months later to hear your voice. "Three routes left to go; imagine ticking the entire Leap, can you just imagine that..."

Your energy seemed limitless. We saw each other a little less that following year. You took a sixty-footer off *Nothing to Fear*, and I wondered again what drove you. My job encapsulated me, drowned me repeatedly with meetings, decisions and politics. The weekends drifted by, with me braving that westward drive down the M4 less and less. I lost my spark and you re-kindled yours.

I received a package of short stories written by you in the post one fine autumn day. They were good; the last of them was the shortest and the best. It was so sad I cried at the last paragraph. The tears rolled down my cheeks, and I was in the office! I hoped no-one had noticed, but they must have (people were so kind those next few days at work). Sandy, how little did they know? I keep a copy of that last story in my wallet; the original stays firmly in my sock drawer. I think it is the most valuable thing I possess — yellowing, creased, and written in your own unpredictable scrawl. The image that always comes to mind is the little girl in that story (you never named her, but it never mattered really), standing with her small doll outside the isolation ward at Sutton hospital, alone and confused.

I still read it, and if I've been drinking, I almost always cry. That last year was a time of sadness, joy and rediscovery. I got divorced and fell apart, you bugged me and told me not to worry. We laughed, cried and even celebrated our youth once more. We went back to Pembroke (I finally led *Pleasure Dome*, thanks for your encouragement), Pentire Head, Ogmore, I even tried a little bouldering on Dartmoor. It always hurt my

tips. You recommended more beer the night before (but I did once catch you rubbing vitamin capsules into your hands). The best line we did that last summer together was *Darkinbad the Brightdayler*. I'm glad you led both pitches, 'cos I fell off more times than I care to remember. We didn't get out of the tent until noon the next day, such were the celebrations. Remember that? I dubbed your Quasar the 'Concrete Hotel'; you took the piss out of my old Canadian tent. We shared yours after that.

So this is my nightmare, Sandy. It returns to haunt and destroy me, although I've tried to overcome it. It plagues me, assaults me, devastates me. Do you see what I'm saying? And it's always been the same. Because I was there, on that last day. It was yet another one of your outlandish pranks, and I hurried down from Bosherton after hearing the gossip at the café. We hadn't seen each other for a few weeks, but you'd called me to tell me you'd finally bagged the second ascent of *Boat to Naxos*. We arranged to climb that weekend, but I was late. I was often late, but not always. Why that day? I was going to ask you not to do it. Sandy. Would you have listened? Why should you? Did you ever listen to my small, reasoning voice of sanity?

I was there, and I think you never knew it, even in that last moment. So this is my nightmare. I need to talk to you about it. This is how it goes. I'm running the turf. The grass is springy, helpful. But I'm still one hundred and fifty yards from that huge, gaping slot in the groundwe call paradise. Huntsman's Leap lies there, deep, cool, inviting. I'm running against a crisp south-westerly, and it slows me. But I see you now, down by that narrow place where a guy once jumped his horse across. Did they have less to live for in those ancient, fabled days? Now I see someone else close by. Someone holding a huge camera. I see him in my dream, erect and ghostly-still. I shout, but the wind is against my voice, and the words lose themselves in the breeze. I see you more clearly as I draw closer, my steps growing ever more ponderous, tired now. I see you brace yourself, knees slightly bent and I shout again, one last time.

This is my own, personal nightmare: you never saw me. I watched as you leapt awkwardly, disappearing sideways into the void below. What went wrong? Did you lose your footing? Your body slipped out of sight, and there was no sound, just the wind which may possibly have destroyed you, and then an insistent, endless noise which I finally identified as mine.

I hear the cameraman has nightmares, too. I never spoke to him; he exists, but only in my nightmare. In my dream I still run, my feet still rise and fall rapidly, the springiness of the turf kicking my limbs high into the air. In my dream the wind buffets me like it never could on that final, fateful day. In my dream, I shout — a low, strangled gasp. In this most terrible of dreams, I lose both a twin brother and a best friend. I awake, sweating and calling out your name, over and over and over.

This is my nightmare.



# Poem by Terry Gifford

## AND THE BRIDE WORE TRAINERS

for Doug Robinson

In the early morning light we sit on the rimrock  
and watch the Valley wake up fifteen hundred feet below,  
the first cars crawling out of the trees past the meadow where  
we brewed coffee in yesterday morning's steam of aromas.

That grand American Lodge, the Ahwahnee Hotel,  
is a doll's house under our heels, still an incongruous  
stone block dwarfed by the finest rock architecture,  
these Royal Arches upon which we sit and read poetry

to each other in the still and somehow emotional air.  
Grapefruit and bagles, coffee, cups and a pot, light bags,  
we pendulumed in the packs on our backs climbing  
Royal Arches yesterday in thirteen perfect pitches.

In the night two full-moon soloists rested, talking,  
the other side of our bivi boulder. 'Nothing but a boombox  
between them'. You said you had to press a bagle on them,  
declining water before they left for the notorious descent.

I heard only voices in the creek falling over the rim  
in my jet-lagged sleep. After filtered coffee from our  
manzanita fire ('the smallest twigs give most heat')  
we each find poems in our packs, take them to the rim.

The next two days little is said, but much is given  
and received, filtered, somehow, just by each other's  
presence: nights on the ground, days in the open  
(Jeffrey's pine needles make the best sleeping mat).

It doesn't matter that we don't climb North Dome.  
Waiting, cloud watching, we see across the Valley  
a green pollen cloud leave Glacier Point. Those trees  
are making love to this tree! 'Some Trickster's reaching

penis trick!' I realise. Like the up-thrust snow plant,  
or perhaps the deep, low pumping sound of the grouse,  
the very smell of the trail, the softness of everything  
up here, the afterglow on snow peaks second night:

'No pencils were taken out. Poets struck dumb  
at twilight. Yosemite Point.' Gary Snyder's gift  
of form, you say, using it here, like manzanita,  
in the morning of our final day, when you give me

the gift of moving over stone, knees bent between  
walking and jogging, down the turning Yosemite Trail  
to a beer in the Ahwahnee Hotel, gatecrash a wedding,  
watch the bride walk out into the meadow, glance up.

# **I Chose to Write**

## **(about Chris Bonington)**

**Jim Curran**

If I have been asked once, I have been asked a hundred times: why on earth should I write a biography of a man who has already produced three volumes of his own life story? A cynical answer might be found in my ever-shrinking bank balance, but there are more compelling reasons. As we all know, Chris Bonington is a prolific writer and anyone who wants a detailed record of his major climbs will have no difficulty in finding it. But, while we have a pretty good idea of what he has done (though I have been amazed at how often his track record has been belittled by people who should know better), the man himself remains something of an enigma.

In researching this biography, I interviewed dozens of Chris's friends, climbing partners, business acquaintances and talked to hundreds of people. Surprisingly, it was difficult to get much more than rather predictable generalisations about his character (if I hear him described as enthusiastic once more, my teeth will be completely ground away); so, I was determined to probe a little deeper.

Both Chris and Wendy Bonington were extremely supportive. To my delight, Wendy dug out a sheaf of notes and diaries written by Chris's mother, Helen Bonington, throughout the 30s, the Second World War, and up to the end of his school days. These provided a vivid insight into a rather insecure, lonely childhood in which toy soldiers and dreams of being a king or a dictator sat uneasily with his mother's left-wing Hampstead views. This duality runs right through Chris's life: a desire for adventure, to push himself to extremes, coupled with a need for emotional, financial and physical security has set up contradictions, which can never be completely resolved. These help to make him the extraordinary person he is.

There was of course a temptation to let the book degenerate into an endless list of expeditions, and to some extent, I have had to succumb — for after all, expeditioning has constituted a huge part of Chris' life — but I hope I have shown much more than this. I have been lucky in that I have known Chris for around twenty years and have accompanied him on four major trips and several filming projects, so I can claim to be a fairly experienced Bonington-watcher.

During these years it has been fascinating to observe how others relate to him; Pete Boardman, Joe Tasker and Al Rouse, and his present partners, Jim Fotheringham, Graham Little and Jim Lowther have all, at some or other, grown close to him. But it is probable, that in a friendship that goes

back all the way to *Everest South West Face* in 1975, only Charlie Clarke has remained his chief confidante. The reason is that Charlie, as a doctor, poses no challenge or rivalry to Chris as a climber. But most of his climbing partners have at some time or other, either competed with him, or not lived up to expectations. However, even with Charlie, Chris is reticent. Perhaps this is just half shyness, but it's also an awareness that as a leader, he has to maintain some



*Exciting new book idea, gives subject and his biographer cause for thought. Photo: Curran collection*

degree of isolation from his troops. For instance, Chris will always pitch his base camp tent apart from the rest of us; will inevitably be the first to leave an evening session in the pub or mess tent, and will probably have a single room in hotels (this last is actually much appreciated by team members who have all, on occasion, suffered the loudest snoring in the civilised world).

Writing the book has had its ups and downs. Memorable Bonington one liners from Whillans, Mike Thompson and Tom Patey have contrasted with the long list of awful losses: Ian Clough, Nick Estcourt, Dougal Haston, Pete Boardman, Joe Tasker and Al Rouse. So, for those who still see Chris as some sort of computer-orientated automaton, ruthlessly chasing one success after another, there is an alternative view, which I hope I have managed to convey: of a man who has known failure, deep personal loss, sadness, depression and loneliness. Perhaps the revelations of these emotions will temper doubters' preconceptions. It is of course, always easy to be cynical or jealous of others' successes, and when you have had as much success as Chris, it is inevitable there will be snipes. But don't forget his voluntary work for LEPR, for *The Alpine Club*, *The British Mountaineering Council* and the *National Parks*.

In the course of writing *High Achiever, The Life and Climbs of Chris Bonington*, I had the honour and good fortune to interview John, Lord Hunt only weeks before his death. Let his words end this article:

"Chris is a highly socially responsible person, and that, as much as his climbing, is what makes him great."



# **Gill and Phil Go Climbing**

## **(a thriller)**

**Gill Lovick**

The Diamond is probably the most impressive cliff on the Little Orme: a huge lump of Carboniferous limestone with few cracks and much overhangingness. All ledges are, or have been, occupied by kittiwakes and cormorants. It has a beach made up of nice smooth pebbles — very convenient for catching the afternoon sun and eating sandwiches, as long as the rats don't get them first — and all the routes have been bolted. They have had to be bolted because so much of the rock is so steep with such small holds, and the walls are so long that nothing, but nothing, is easy.

Except at an extreme low spring tide, the nice beach is always cut off; so we would have perhaps up to three hours to walk in and walk out again, with one person getting a go at a route. Otherwise, we could abseil down an extra-long rope from a hard-to-find abseil station after a long trek, or we could abseil on a shorter but still very long rope from a harder-to-get-to abseil point at mid-tide or below. So why did I ever get myself a project here?

I do remember actually: I was persuaded to by my climbing partner who had a project there already, and we needed something to do when he was resting. So, we managed to get to the top of an abandoned project which ended part-way up the cliff (a mere 30m of it) to suss it out. The way the original project went was way too hard for me, but I worked out better alternatives which gave a straighter route anyway. A couple of trips there on my own saw the whole thing bolted with Eco-bolts, and I was able to get it all worked (at least I could do all the moves, including a 6c sequence after a horribly strenuous clip), but I only managed the climb in three sections. Still, that was the way everyone else did these sport routes until the final redpoint. But, things being the way they are, what with trying to coincide days off with low afternoon tides, drying afternoon sunshine and a light westerly breeze out of bird-ban time, somewhere between August 15th and November after a dry summer, I didn't get down there very often (no-one did), and the project sat and waited as time began to erode my memory of the crucial moves.

Last year I decided to go back. Phil turned out to be a willing partner (at least he said 'OK'). I mean, everyone always did sound a bit trepidatious about going back to the Little Orme after a break from it. I was feeling guilty about not having been back to the project and pol-

ished it off. I wasn't as fit as I had been then. It must have been four years ago when I was last there, and the weather had been crap in the autumns since then, I'd got fatter and been overworked. Plenty of excuses. No project had been completed on the Diamond in that time, but mine was the easiest. All the others were at least 8b. So, on the day the bird ban came off, I pulled out an extra-long abseil rope and a spare shorter one, a 60m sport rope, eighteen quickdraws, harness, boots, chalk bag, and, oh yes, must have a helmet. Never go on the Little Orme without a helmet. Good for fending off loose rocks, seagulls and bird-shit. I checked the tide tables and weather forecast and things were looking good: decent weather, at least till after dark, and although the tides weren't perfect, they were neap tides, and I remembered the base of my route didn't stay covered for long either side of a neap tide. We could probably belay above the water anyway, so we should be OK. You could abseil right down my route with two ropes and a couple of deviations. No worries.

I parked the car right by the end of the North Beach, and Phil was there waiting for me with his girlfriend, Alison. I shoved Steve's mobile phone in the glove compartment — there was no way I was taking that with me, and besides, it was only borrowed, so I could be contacted from work in an emergency, and I didn't really know how to work it. I'd be no use to anybody while I was on the Diamond, anyway. Howard and I had always joked about habitual mobile phone users who would walk down the street saying to their invisible mates 'guess where I am now', so we didn't want to join their ranks. Alison was fretting about Phil. She wanted him to take their mobile phone in case he had a problem, but she had no phone at home, and was in a dilemma. So, the problem was easily solved when I reluctantly retrieved the phone from the car, and Phil said he knew how to work it but we probably wouldn't have to use it. Alison kept their phone and was reassured, and with the other in the top pocket of my rucksack, we waved goodbye and trundled laboriously up the beach under a blue sky. It felt hot.

"Do you remember the way to the abseil bolts, Gill?"

"Yeah; up the steep, slippery grass, leftwards along the scary path, dodge below the little rocky outcrop, through the cabbages and nettles, then creep towards the edge of the ledge, which might still have a cormorant chick on it. If we don't move too fast, it shouldn't jump."

I'm not renowned for my good memory, but for once I was right first time. I should have been — it's some of the scariest grass I've ever been on. I'd been up there quite a few times, enough to have it seared painfully into my memory, only to be soothed again by late night trips to the Godfather for kebabs with the other Diamond teams. Thankfully, there was no bird. Short rope rigged and the long one on my back, I left Phil cooling down while I tried to find the re-belay way over left that would get us nearer the top of my route, so we could put a rope down it.

"I can't see it Phil; I can't remember how far over it is, if it's still there."

I looked at the ab rope rubbing over sharp, crumbling rock above me. The helmet was only mildly reassuring. I jumared back up the rope, ready with Plan B. "Do you want to have a go at dogging the route Phil? You have to promise not to flash it. Only we could ab straight down to the beach with the long rope, because the tide hasn't got that far yet. We could try the route, have a rest for a bit when the tide comes in, 'cos it won't come in that far on a neap tide, then have another go and jumare back out before it gets dark. It should be OK."

Always ready to agree, Phil said yeah, fine, and we re-rigged the rope, tucked the spare in the rucksack and left it on the ledge. All we needed was a bit of gear and the climbing rope in the rope-bag, and off we went.

Down at the bottom, the stench of recently departed birds was only just bearable, and the ones still on the ledges over to our left were giving us plenty of flak. We slithered across green slime and barnacles to the base of the project. It looked so much shorter than my memory would have it, but no less steep. Good job Phil was going up first. However, his agreement for a visit here wasn't entirely altruistic, as he wanted to eye up the vast expanse of rock to the right of my project. Anyway, there was no problem with Phil flashing my route; he floundered fairly early on and rested a few times, but he's very tall, and reaching between the bolts was far less of a problem for him than it would have been for me. He dawdled on the way down to examine future possibilities. Now it was my turn: top-rope. Good. I wanted to re-acquaint myself with the strenuousness of it before getting on the sharp end again. The water was still far enough away for me to have a good go on it, or so I thought, so I climbed up but ended up hanging by the third bolt, then again by the fifth. Looking down, I saw Phil had crept up onto a boulder to escape the approaching tide. Looking up, I saw a hell of a lot of route yet to climb. Best come down and escape up the beach until the tide went out again. It was nice and sunny, so we could just have a laze around. Shouldn't be long.

From our private beach we listened to the sing-song music wafting over from the pier across the bay and watched the dog-walkers and holiday makers on the main beach across the barrier of sea. We wandered around, examining other people's past glories, trying to remember who did which route, and how hard it was. We watched the water. It looked slack, so it should be just about high tide by now. It never went beyond the end of that slab on a neap tide. Another three-quarters of an hour, and I can have another go. Phil started skimming stones. I had a go. My arm has forgotten how to throw. Never was any good at it anyway. We caught up with two years' worth of news, 'cos it was ages since we'd seen each other. The tide came in further. Didn't expect that. Never mind, won't be long now. Slept a bit in the sun. Opened my eyes to yet less beach. That's funny. The tide's got to turn now. Why is it still coming in so fast? I suppose in four years the level of the beach could have changed. Bugger. I won't get much of a go on the route at this rate. We talk about it as the sun goes in. A bit chilly now.



Shame we left the rucsacks at the top of the abseil, now inaccessible because of the tide. No food and we're both hungry. The helmet goes back on, to keep my head warm. The rope bag is useful too, as a wrap for my shoulders and legs. Keeps the breeze off, which seems to have picked up. Encouragingly, the sun comes back out again for a few minutes, and I soak up the rays. Then it goes back in, and feels cooler still. We watch the gusts blow black over the water. It's beginning to dawn on us that it might get dark before we can get back to the route, but neither of us says anything. Eventually I had to: "If we swim now to the beach, while the tide seems to be slack, we could just go back up for the sacks and go home. We could get the gear from the route tomorrow."

"I'm not getting wet. Anyway, the beach is quite a long way."

"Alright, let's wait." More clouds, more gusts and the water's looking quite choppy. Half an hour later, and: "We've got to do something."

"I'm not getting wet."

Eventually, the tide ebbed far enough for us to consider wading back to the route, but it was cloudy and pretty windy now, and the light was fading. We really wanted to go home. Unfortunately, I'd left my jumars and cow's tails hanging from the first bolt of the route, so getting out wasn't possible until one of us had retrieved them. Phil said he couldn't see the abseil rope any more. It must be there, it's just a bit too gloomy to see now, that's all. The breeze had hardened up now and was blowing the tops off the waves. The tide seemed to have stuck in one place. I was freezing.

Phil rolled his tights up, but I'm short, so I took mine off and tucked them into my helmet, then we waded horribly through small but fierce waves back to the big rock below the route. Phil tied into the climbing rope and I belayed him to retrieve my jumars from the bottom slab of the route. A few hours earlier the place had seemed so benign, so calm, but now I was feeling that low, sinking, bowel-movement feeling, dispelling the 'it'll all work itself out soon' state of mind I'd managed to maintain up to now. Standing together on the rock and peering into the twilight, Phil proclaimed again that he couldn't see the abseil rope. I squinted over to the dark corner and then the light wall above, looking for the white rope. Suddenly I spotted it, just as it blew up into the air in a huge arc and draped itself some 70ft up across the wall. It stayed there, and was never going to blow back down again.

Great. Lets review the problem, and try not to wail in exasperation: there had been two possible ways out, but climbing out wasn't one of them, not from this cliff. Jumaring was no longer an option either, unless the rope miraculously came back down to us. Swimming was all that was left, and it was definitely far less appealing now than earlier. If we stayed the night on the beach we could get hypothermia and still have no means of getting out in the morning. I've always been adamant that I would never phone for rescue from a sticky situation, and Phil was also adamant that he would never call the Coastguard either. Besides, we couldn't, the phone



was in the top of the rucksack on the ledge we couldn't get back up to.

"I'm going to swim" I said, determined. I hoped he'd follow.

"You can't. It's too far, too dark, and there's a current."

"I'm sure it'll be alright if I stay in close to the cliff, and that way I'll stay out of the current and the waves will be broken up a bit. I'm sure it can't be too far from the shallow sandy bit round the corner. I'm going to give it a go."

Phil, still perched on his rock, watched in disbelief as my tights went back into my helmet, which went back on my head, and I gingerly slid past barnacles into the water. Instantly I was pounded back onto the rock. Slightly grazed, but still undaunted, I floundered to the next rock. The waves looked little, but they contained plenty of power. I persevered for a couple more minutes, snatching a temporary reprieve from the battering by dragging myself onto another little barnacle-infested rock. I'd got about 15 yards. I must have looked a sorry, pathetic spectacle, with blood oozing from gouges in my hands, knees and feet, and fanning out through goosebumps into the cold, salty wetness on my skin.

Phil looked at me sympathetically. "Are you coming back?"

"Yes."

The pounding was repeated on the retreat, and I rejoined Phil on his safe and cosy rock. I tried to dry my legs with my tights before replacing them damply. My T-shirt was soaking and I was shivering uncontrollably. Fortunately, Phil had come up with a cunning plan. The climbing rope was still in place on the climb, and he appeared to be sure that if he top-roped some of the way up the route, he would be able to run a distance across the wall and grab the abseil rope. Mildly reassured, and obviously having no better idea myself, I quietly agreed and set myself to belaying. After a few attempts in what was now quite a fierce wind, running back and forth in an ever widening arc, he succeeded. On lowering him down, life appeared to be getting more difficult again; the base of the route and the base of the abseil, still over water, were a fair distance apart, and Phil was eventually going to have to let go of the ab rope and let it drop. He tied his remaining quickdraws on the end of the ab rope and hoped the weight would be enough to keep it down. He let go of the end, and for a heart-stopping moment, the end of the rope, draws and all, fluttered up on a gust, then settled back down on a boulder. Quickly, Phil tied off the climbing rope, and proclaimed he had to get to the top first; Alison was going to be worrying by now, and he wanted to call her in case she panicked and called the Coastguard. Phil retrieved the end of the ab rope and handed it to me, then hopped across the rocks with his big stride and disappeared rapidly upwards and into the darkness, leaving me alone at the bottom of this vast cliff to listen to the sound of the wind, waves and chattering teeth.

After a few minutes I attached myself onto the ab rope. I'd borrowed someone's jumar to go with my own jammer, and was momentarily disturbed to find out it was left-handed. I fixed myself up with a sling for a

chest harness, and pulling the rope through as tight as I could get it, I tried to get across from boulder to boulder, there still being plenty of water between them. Then, a few yards from the base of the abseil, I decided to swing into position. Until now, I'd managed to keep my climbing boots and tights reasonably dry, but suddenly I found myself first surfing, then plunging up to the waist in cold water, the rapid waves and darkness completing the shock and disorientation.

I jumared laboriously out of the water, to find myself instead being buffeted more and more by the wind. The jammer wasn't sitting right, and so much of my effort was being wasted in making no progress at all, and with a wrong-handed jumar too. Finding what felt like a ledge, I readjusted the jammer, and started again. Still not right. The wind was swinging me across the wall. I could have cried, not in fear but in total exasperation. I couldn't believe this was happening; I was tired of being cold and hungry, and wanted to be tucked up warm in bed drinking hot milk and watching the late-night news. But I wasn't, so I readjusted the sling around my chest and started again, making progress this time. Eventually, I was well on the move, and reaching the free part of the abseil, I started swinging wildly across the wall, crashing at the end of each swing but never knowing quite when I was going to strike. Glad about the helmet. I felt so small and so unfairly matched against Fate and the Elements: the long, long cliff, the tide, the darkness and the wind howling past my helmet and the thought of the rope rasping over rubble above. I paused from time to time to re-inhale after the air was knocked from my lungs. Grunts, curses and pathetic wails were mercilessly blown away on the wind, and anger brought a vigorous rhythm to my jumaring.

Finally, I reached the ledge and Phil was fishing a jumper out of my rucksack for me. If there had been any light we would have seen the steam rising off me. We were out of the wind here, and it felt suddenly so comfortable, safe and quiet compared to the cliff and sea below, and I slumped into our little shelter. Phil spoke and pulled me out of reverie: "You're not going to like this."

"No, this is fine, I do like it. What time is it?"

"About eleven. Anyway, I don't mean that."

"What then?"

"Alison's called the Coastguard, and they're going to send someone out to rescue us."

"But we don't need rescuing."

"We've got to call Alison back and give her the number of your phone so she can give it to the Coastguard, then they'll call us, and we'll cancel it."

"I don't know the number. I know, I'll call Howard and get him to tell me. Bloody hell! How do you switch this phone on?"

Phil grabbed the phone from me and pressed a couple of keys to unlock the keypad, and handed it back to me. I dialled my home number

and waited for Howard to pick up the phone. He'll probably be thinking I'm in the pub. The phone clicked a response, and a quiet voice spoke. "Hello?"

"Hello, Howard."

"What have you been doing? I thought you'd be home by now."

"You'll never guess where I am now."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm in a little cave on a ledge about 200 feet above the sea, and about 200 feet below the top, and I'm cold and hungry."

He asked me if I was thinking of coming home, and I said I'd like to, but first we had to get the cliff rescue off our back, then we might spend the night on the ledge because we couldn't get back down the grass in the dark, and it was just starting to rain a little bit — oh, and by the way, could he tell me my phone number so that we could tell Alison, who would tell the Coastguard, who would give us a call and sort it all out. Trying to take it all in, he found my number and told me it three or four times, while I relayed it to Phil so that between us, we would remember it long enough to tell Alison. Finally, the phone rang. That would be the Coastguard. I handed the phone to Phil.

"I'm not speaking to them."

"Why not?"

"I'm just not. Anyway, they know me, I used to be in the lifeboat team."

So I spoke to the Coastguard, who ascertained that we were alright, but said they couldn't cancel a rescue; we were going to have to be rescued whether we liked it or not. Even after I'd conferred with Phil and we protested, the Coastguard were adamant. How were they going to rescue us? Apparently, they would try to winch us to the top and walk us off. I told them that was impossible, so he said they might then lower us down to the ground. "But there's only water down there." Finally, he said that a helicopter might do the trick, but as a last resort. I gratefully but politely said we didn't really need them, but what was the weather forecast. "Storms," he said, "coming in soon." Brilliant. Anyway, he'd get back to us.

Phil and I chatted in the dark, discussing options. Neither of us was keen on finding our way back down the grass we'd come up in the daylight, and neither of us could remember whether we could traverse off to the base of the cliff up and to one side, from where we could reach the road. Just then, a bright light shone. We squinted, and as our eyes got used to the light, we realised it was a floodlight on the beach shining right at us. The coastguards must now be looking for us through binoculars: how embarrassing. We still didn't want to descend the treacherous grass, and Phil went off for a pee. Meanwhile, Howard called to find out what was going on, but I kept the conversation short in case the Coastguard wanted to talk to us again. So I rang off. Where was Phil? He'd been ages. That's all I needed, Phil falling off the cliff going for a pee. Then I saw his silhouette against the light. He was excited. He'd found the path to Upper Craig y

Don, and had realised that the light wasn't being shone by the Coastguards but by the council to illuminate the crags for the tourists. So we packed our bags, and gingerly crept along the ledge, blinded but simultaneously reassured by the light, onto a grassy traverse on the steep slope above the cliff.

The wind suddenly hit us. Big Phil was fine, but little Gill was unnerved, and by now so pissed off with this comedy of errors. Buffeted by gusts of wind, and slowly feeling for holds for hands and feet, we teetered round a little rocky buttress above the two hundred feet of steep, slippery grass and cliff. Almost immediately, we emerged to the safety of a horizontal grassy path and the familiar rickety fence at the bottom of the most benign crag on the Little Orme, with no sea, just gorse and hawthorn.

Despite the howling wind, Phil and I giggled for the first time in hours, and he admitted to probably preferring death to the embarrassment of being rescued by the people who used to be his volunteer colleagues in the cliff rescue and lifeboat rescue. We hopped over the steep wall at the bottom of the field and into a pool of yellow light on the pavement, where Phil announced that that he wouldn't be walking with me unless I took my helmet off. Finally, we were on the home straight, along the pavement leading back to my car. What a relief. But no, what was this? A Land Rover with a flashing blue light was slowly cruising towards us. COASTGUARD. That's for us. "Ignore them," said Phil.

"We can't; they've come looking for us." Phil hung back and let me speak to them. They spoke first: "Have you seen two climbers stuck on the cliff?"

"We're the climbers, and we're OK. You can call it off. Thanks for coming out. They looked confused, and looked at each other. They'd come to rescue climbers who couldn't get off the cliff. Then one of them spotted Phil lurking in the shadows. "Hello, Phil." Phil looked sheepish.

"Hello, Dave." After a few minutes we managed to convince the rescue team that we were the only people that had been on the cliff, and that we no longer needed rescuing. They had just one more question: "So, exactly where is the Diamond then?"

Down the road, we were met by a weepy but relieved Alison, offering us food back at the house. I was so hungry, but all I really wanted was a pint of tea. So, at midnight, I got into my car, quickly called Howard to tell him I was going for food and he could go to sleep, then turned on the ignition. Casually I looked down at the milometer: it read 66,666 miles. It certainly felt like the Devil had been playing a game with me tonight.

The next day, after the rain, I returned with Howard to retrieve ropes while Phil was at work. As I parked the car I looked at the mileage, and calculated that the numbers added up to six. Only a little superstitious, I drove up the road and back again ensuring they came to a healthy eight. Then, wandering up the beach to the scene of the previous night's epic, I heard the phone ring from the top of my rucksack.



# Waiting For Mowat

Martin Wragg

Afternoon passed gradually into evening; the ever present westerly breeze began to pick up; the temperature fell degree by degree. It started to rain: not heavily, but persistently — the sort that slowly but surely finds its way under even the best waterproofs. Way out in the North Atlantic, something unpleasant was occurring: the three-foot swell that had welcomed our arrival had now doubled. We were equipped for action, not a bivouac, and certainly not in such an exposed location. Where was Mowat? He had promised to return by 6 p.m. and it was now past 8 p.m. The twilight deepened.

The four of us were sitting on top of a 50m stack off the west coast of Orkney. We were only 100m offshore but that 100m was filled by the unforgiving North Atlantic and the shore itself comprised a tiny platform at the base of a 60m cliff of unknown difficulty. I remembered that only 10 miles north of our perch on the summit of North Gaulton Castle, Kitchener died when HMS Edinburgh foundered off the same coast during a storm in 1916. Bits of this ship were found on top of the cliffs. I was not enthusiastic at the prospect of sitting out a storm overnight. As night approached, I reflected on the events that had conspired to bring us to this place. It was mostly Ken's fault. I had served my apprenticeship with Wil (once famously described as the original 'peurile ticker'); *Hard Rock* was too good a tick list to ignore. So it was that I persuaded a large Mynydd team to undertake a weekend hit on the Old Man of Hoy.

Following an overnight drive from Derbyshire, dawn found us on the quay at Scrabster in a howling gale watching the rain stab through the narrow gap between sky and sea. Steve Mowat met us at Stromness and ferried us across to the Hoy pier in his wonderful old wooden trawler, Triton, where Jack Rendall was waiting with a van to take us across the island to Rackwick Bay. The storm proved relentless and a reconnaissance that afternoon served only to deepen our pessimism. Miraculously Sunday dawned bright and sunny, the wind had dried the rock, and by early afternoon a dozen of us were celebrating the adventure with champagne on the summit.

Of course stacks have more in common with mountains than crags, so the adventure was prolonged until *terra firma* was regained. The final overhanging diagonal rappel gave rise to a certain amount of panic among some of the party, which, in turn, provided entertainment for others. Thereupon, the bad weather set in again. With further climbing out of the question, the weekend was rounded off by a coach tour of Orkney's best archaeological sites: Scara Brae, Maes Howe, Ring of

Brodga, Stones of Stenness etc., arranged over the ship's radio when Mowat came to collect us. As the return ferry took us back to Scrabster, we reflected on a perfect weekend and laid plans for the following year's May Bank Holiday.

Just as sea cliffs offer an added dimension compared to inland crags, so stacks provide an even more intense experience. We were hooked and the Hoy trip inspired a succession of annual pilgrimages to the far north. The format of a three-day weekend seemed to balance opportunity with the risk of adverse conditions, whilst the May Bank Holiday fell neatly between snow and midges.

The Old Man of Storr was next, a climb that required a swimmer with expertise in rope-work. The resulting Tyrolean ensured that those of us with a rudimentary knowledge of mechanics remained dry. Phil failed to understand the importance of the rock platform below the stack, which provided support for the rope mid-point between the distant anchors and to general amusement provided a practical demonstration of the difficulty of swimming whilst in full climbing gear, clipped to a fixed line and equally, the difficulty inherent in managing an underwater environment without diving equipment.

The climb proved straightforward and pleasant. It also gave me the opportunity to learn more about fulmars. Their ability to spit regurgitated, partially digested fish is not infinite (as had earlier been thought), and their aim is not wholly accurate. Accordingly, if the bird's position can be identified in advance, it can be provoked by feinting movements into a series of attacks which have the effect of emptying its arsenal. If the ploy is well executed, one remains on the rock and fish-free. As a fall back, however, I recommend wearing old and disposable clothing, or none at all.

Next came Am Buchaille, the last of the three classics. This ascent remains vivid for four reasons:

(1) The quality of the climbing (not something to be taken for granted on stacks and not of primary importance given the other ingredients).

(2) The brilliance of the weather (a matter of great good fortune given that on arrival I found that my gear and clothes — save shorts and sandals — were in another car in some distant and unknown part of the Northern Highlands).

(3) My personal discovery of the coefficient of friction existing between naked flesh and Torridon sandstone (fortunately excellent where feet are concerned, but less satisfying with other parts of the anatomy).

(4) The realisation that even in a traditionally sea-faring nation, there are those who are better advised to remain on dry land.

I should explain that, being respectful of the width of the channel between mainland and stack, the changeability of the weather and water conditions and the potential difficulty of the climb (and hence the time required), together with tide tables etc. we had invested in a small

inflatable. I had not previously recognised that basic oarsmanship was a skill. This fact was brought home to the full team by Derek's display of supreme incompetence. His total lack of understanding, combined with the effect of wind and wave, resulted in his progress being restricted to clockwise revolutions in reverse. This meant that the result of 30 minutes intense effort was to place him a considerable distance further from the stack than when he started. I am happy to say that these moments have been recorded on celluloid for posterity and for Derek's future embarrassment. The climb was easy by comparison.

After such relatively accessible offerings, I had to look further afield for our next objective. After much scouring of maps and guides and telephoning of other stack enthusiasts, coastguards and fishermen, The Maiden was chosen as the next victim of our insatiable appetite. Research soon revealed that she had a twin sister, but succumbing to a predilection for big women, we selected the higher westerly virgin. In fairness, both had lost their virginity years earlier, but we were not going to let that influence us. In any event, history was 'suitably discrete', and such information as we had was more by way of rumour and innuendo than evidence provable beyond reasonable doubt. My information suggested that this Maiden had yielded to approaches from north and east, but I could find no evidence of a conquest from the west — although my photographs suggested that a suitor caressing that flank might be favourably received. I knew instinctively that a slow and careful approach was more likely to bring success than brute force. I resolved to attempt her seduction by this means. However, I kept such thoughts to myself, for they were certainly premature.

We had first to get ourselves out to the stack which, although not far offshore, was obviously the remains of an earlier incarnation of the headland, Whiten Head, which comprised the nearest point of the mainland and from which access was rendered next to impossible by awesome cliffs. A seaborne landing was required. On this occasion, our inflatables were clearly inadequate. The nearest beach was several miles from the stack with no possibility of any intermediate retreat in the event of weather or engine problems, due to those imposing cliffs guarding the flanks of the headland. Fortunately, I had taken the precaution of recruiting Martin MacKay, the local fisherman, who knew the waters of Durness Bay like the back of his hand.

Once again weather and sea conditions were the major consideration: as I looked out into the wind and rain lashing Durness campsite on the Saturday morning, I did not need Martin to tell me that the venture was out of the question in the prevailing 30ft swell. We resigned ourselves to a day of coastal exploration with little hope that conditions would improve sufficiently during the course of our brief visit. However, that night in the pub, Martin refused to throw in the towel and suggested we reappraise things in the morning. The devil looks after his



own. Once again the Sunday dawned bright and clear. The wind had died away and the sea was calmer, although the great grey-green rollers, sweeping in from New Foundland, still looked very impressive. I remembered those splendid little crags at Sheigria, only an hour's drive to the south. It did not occur to me that there was any prospect of taking a small wooden fishing boat out in such seas with the aim of effecting a landing on the great, jagged, wave-battered tooth that we had targeted. However, Martin declared himself willing to have a look, and we were not sufficiently knowledgeable or experienced to run away from the challenge.

We met him a couple of hours later down at the little harbour of Rispond Bay and, two at a time, Martin ferried us out to his boat. It was four miles across the bay to our objective; we were half-way there before we began to appreciate how sheltered the harbour was. The Maiden stood face-on to the prevailing westerly winds, seemingly calf-deep in the surging sea. The rollers came surging up to her thighs before subsiding to reveal her feet. The swell was fully twenty feet, and the landing was clearly impossible, indeed suicidal. The power of the waves as they crashed onto the stack was enormous, and it seemed to me that the boat looked more fragile by the moment. It was clear that a slight error of judgement would result in our being smashed to pieces upon the rock in an instant, and nobody was going to be swimming home through that sea.

Martin stood off the stack and watched the waves. To our amazement, he started to run in towards the North-West Arête. As the boat closed on the rock, the sea was driving into our port bow. Suddenly, we were picked up by a big wave which built and built, lifting us up and carrying us sideways. Forward momentum was still considerable and I felt the blood drain from my face; I was certain that we were about to die. Martin had other ideas. Suddenly, he threw the engine into reverse and, as we reached the very apex of the wave, the bow lightly kissed the rock and we were backing off under full power, retreating to safety. We were spellbound. Martin had brought the boat onto the stack at the only possible landing point on the west face where a tiny ledge, some five feet above the crest of the waves (and therefore only a foot or so above the bow), provided access to an easy corner which led to the huge platform running along the southern half of the face, twenty feet above sea level. I realised that we had been witness to a consummate piece of seamanship.

Martin announced that he was willing to repeat this feat to land us on the stack. One by one, we balanced on the bulwark in the bows supported by 'the deck hand' as Martin selected another wave. Timing was everything. Balance was difficult carrying a pack and ropes. We had to wait for that fleeting moment when everything was in equilibrium. The pause between forward and sideways motion and reverse;



between rise and fall. Timed correctly it was a simple step; but we each knew that we would only get one chance. We considered using a rope, but the prospect of being plucked off the rock as the boat reversed away was not attractive. In the event, the landing passed without incident as we each took our turn to hop off the bow onto the welcoming foothold in the centre of the cliff face. All of us were soon assembled on the platform.

Views differed as to the favoured line of ascent; Chris and Kevin decided to repeat the original line up the North-East Arête. Although graded only severe, it is a 'Fowler Severe'. The approach necessitated an anti-clockwise traverse of the Maiden's left shin and across the back of both her calves. The climb then followed the outside of her right leg, flank and shoulder. Derek and Alan chose a route up the South-West Ridge. The initial incursion up the Maiden's left thigh was favourably-received, but as it transpired, the consummation was not a foregone conclusion. A lady is, after all, entitled to change her mind and say "No" at any point in the proceedings.

All of this seemed to me to be missing the point. John and I fancied a direct, not to say a full frontal, approach up the centre of the West Face. We inched our way up a sinuous groove that led, as it were, between her legs to a band of overhangs. These were duly penetrated to reach a belay in the Maiden's belly button. The rock above was in an advanced stage of disintegration and it was apparent that the further-ance of our seduction would have to be more circumspect. Fortunately, a narrow crumbling ramp led diagonally across her stomach to the Maiden's right breast. This we caressed lingeringly before moving to her shoulder where the belay was of the Suicide Wall variety. The Maiden had her face turned to the north and the move to cross the overhang of her chin to reach the first runner will long remain in the mind. From there, we followed the fine arête of her Roman nose and crossed her patrician brow, only to be surprised by the discovery of a deep notch separating us from the unstable pinnacle which comprised the Maiden's crown. A certain amount of ingenuity and blind faith secured the prize. The first accent of *Hymen* (E2 5b) was a truly orgasmic experience. The others also obtained fulfilment as they found different ways to the summit and arrived one by one.

Coming down from such a high is usually an anti-climax, but not on this occasion. The obvious descent was an abseil from the notch down a groove on the North Face to a ledge 20ft above the waves. An easy traverse took us to the North-West Arête, but to regain the ledge below the West Face required a long hard traverse across the overhanging cliff. Fortunately, it was on jugs because the absence of belays meant that we were soloing. Martin had been monitoring our progress and brought the boat back in to take us off the stack. It was apparent that our departure would necessitate the reverse procedure to our arrival — not a prospect for the

faint hearted. It's surprising how small a 30ft lobster boat can seem as you balance on small holds 10 feet above mountainous seas and concentrate on timing your jump. Back on land, Martin confided that he had been shitting himself every time that he took the boat into the stack and would not be in a rush to repeat the venture. I let him know that we had assumed that it was old hat to him, and that we had been quite ready to abandon the attempt when we first saw the size of the waves hammering onto the stack.

Time dulls the memory (a little anyway), which is how we came to be on Orkney the following year. The guide hinted at the prospect of adventure on North Gaulton Castle and a few miles further north, Yesnaby Castle offered the chance of a double hit. We needed options because the party had grown to 20, no doubt attracted by the tales of previous trips. The Saturday afternoon was given over to reconnaissance, on the back of which plans were laid for the following day.

The party was divided into three groups: the walkers, the technicians and the adventurers. The technicians opted for the higher-graded route on Yesnaby Castle and were to take two inflatables to assist access to the stack and enable exploration of the surrounding cliffs. The adventurers chose the technically less demanding route on North Gaulton Castle, which was compensated for by the difficulty in accessing it. The walkers planned a north-to-south expedition along the entire west coast, which would give them the opportunity to check out progress on both stacks. I had arranged to meet Steve Mowat at Stromness dock to discuss tactics. He had checked the charts and believed he could get us in with his 40ft launch and the weather forecast was reasonable. The key to effecting a landing would be the size of the swell, determined by whatever was happening thousands of miles out in the Atlantic, together with the topography of the rock at the base of the stack.

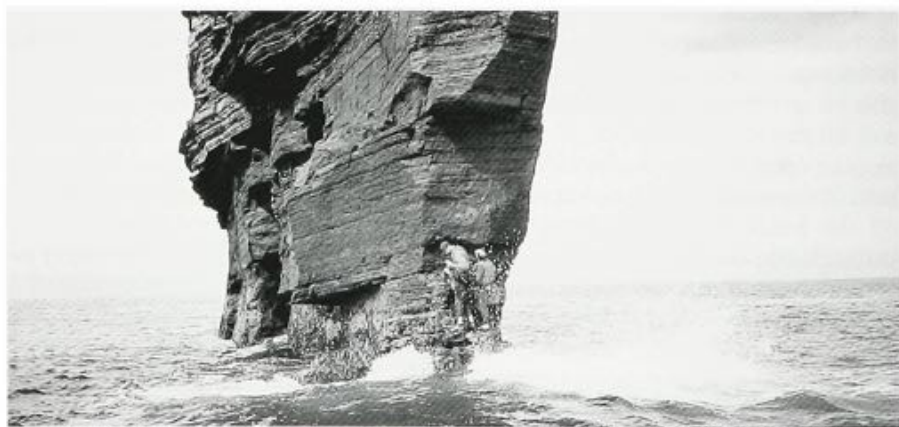
North Gaulton Castle is located in a west-facing bay, surrounded on three sides by vertical 60m cliffs. Unprotected from westerly gales, it did not seem a friendly place and the three-foot swell was more than enough to give us problems. However, the water was deep enough to enable Steve to sail all the way round the stack. The most likely option for landing was a sloping ledge at the bottom of the South-East Arête, which had been the route of ascent for the only previous visitors. The problem was in staying on the ledge long enough to place protection and assess how to climb through the overhang above to reach a large ledge, where a base could be established. The overhang looked decidedly difficult. It clearly required a long reach and Nigel, being the tallest of the party, was deputed to deal with it.

Unfortunately, the rock of the slabby ledge rising out of the sea was exceedingly slippery. Despite his best efforts, Nigel was unable to maintain upward progress. His momentum slowed, was altogether lost and then increased, but in reverse direction providing him with an early bath. A rack full of hardware does not assist buoyancy, but we fished him out

before he had consumed too much sea-water and sent him back for a further attempt. No doubt keen to avoid a repetition, he renewed his efforts with grim determination and made it to the top of the slab. He was obviously having a problem remaining there, but appeared to solve it by the unusual technique of wedging his head against the overhang with sufficient force to fix his feet to the slab. However, this was not a permanent solution, it being clear that some sort of belay was required.

Seafaring folk have a theory about every 7th wave. The one that plucked Nigel from his perch must have been the 49th. There was never any doubt about the outcome. One moment he was wedged in his niche, albeit looking distinctly apprehensive (he could not see the approaching wave, but we could and he could see us), and the next he was exploring the sea bed. We engaged the winch again and hauled him back on board, but there was no way Nigel was going to put a third attempt to the test and all of a sudden, we were short of volunteers.

An alternative approach was essential and we commenced a further circumnavigation of the stack. North Gaulton Castle is vaguely rectangular in plan on an east-west axis but the western elevation is certainly the bow, cleaving those big Atlantic rollers, whilst the stern is to the east. Nevertheless, we identified a weakness on the northern side of the bow: a crack and corner system, which we thought could be exploited if we could but effect a landing. Eventually, this was achieved on the North Face and a difficult traverse to the bow effected. The assault team of Kevin and Keith were then able to secure a fixed line which enabled reinforcements in the form of Graham and myself to be landed. The corner was then ascended to mid-height on the stack — at which point the bow began to severely overhang. These difficulties were



*'Stack characters in search of a building experience': Kevin and Keith securing a line to North Gaulton Castle. Photo: Martin Wragg*



avoided by a traverse across the South Face to a junction with the corner cracks on the South-East Arête, whereupon the original route was followed to the summit.

*Atlantic Odessey* (HVS) is not a technically difficult climb but it is, as they say, character building. The summit is perhaps 30m long by 10m wide and I think I can fairly claim to know it as well as any man alive. By 9 p.m. it was nearly dark and we had been on the summit for more than 5 hours — which is longer than most folk would chose to spend there. Eventually, we felt rather than heard the heavy pulse of a big engine, and the bows of a ship rounded the headland. To our dismay it was not the launch, but Triton, Mowat's trawler, a 100ft vessel that needed a clearance much greater than could be guaranteed in the waters adjacent to the stack. The summit was devoid of any secure anchor point for a belay, so we had prepared our escape by fixing a spare rope around the stack's stem as an anchor point for an abseil down the seaward overhanging bow. We had planned to rappel directly into the launch, but the trawler could not get in close enough. As we watched, our friends launched a 6ft inflatable, which Rob brought in directly beneath the stack. From our vantage point it seemed little more than a matchbox tossed around on the heaving sea, but that matchbox seemed a better option than spending the night (or eternity) on top of North Gaulton Castle.

Over the years I have undertaken many spectacular and some precarious rappels. However, few have been as memorable as the free descent into that small inflatable in a big ocean. Encumbered, as I was, by 20 or 30 pounds of hardware, the moment at which I released the descendeur from the rope, judging the swell and the tide and knowing only too well the consequence of any error, is etched in my mind. It may explain the fact that this most recent trip was some years ago. However, writing up this saga has sharpened the memory and whetted the appetite. There are, after all, so many stacks and so many adventures awaiting those willing to pick up the gauntlet.

But why, I hear you ask, were we waiting until dusk for the return of Steve Mowat? I am reliably informed that ships are designed for forging a course through seas large or small. However, they are not designed for a prolonged alternation between forward and reverse gears in an attempt to land climbers on a sea stack. The morning's activities had worn out the clutch on the launch, in consequence of which it had taken the entire afternoon to limp back to Stromness. Steve had then transferred to the trawler to undertake his daily evening ferry trip to Hoy before returning for us. He did not offer an opinion as to the alternative evacuation plan to be utilised in the absence of Rob's inflatable and we did not ask. We were just pleased to get back to Stromness before closing time. The bar, of course, being the place where every good climb should end.





*A matchbox on the heaving sea: the daisil into the inflatable on the retreat from North Gullion Castle. Photo: Martin Wragg*

# Snow White

**Ben Bransby**

Climbing big, loose, adventure routes is always something that seems better in retrospect; but as I hadn't climbed one for a couple of months, I was pretty stoked to go down to Beachy Head with Mr Parnell and try a Fowler classic: *Monster Crack*.

To many non-climbers, scaling any rock face sounds mad, so the idea of climbing Beachy Head might appear no more horrendous than, say, attempting the Old Man of Hoy: they both look impossibly dangerous. But as an experienced rock rat, I knew that attempting the former was downright stupid.

Now gritstone is lovely solid rock; limestone is a bit flaky; sandstone is a bit, er, sandy; but chalk, surely, was never meant to be climbed on. Mr Parnell, however, had climbed a few loose chalk adventure routes, so we got together ice screws, lump hammers, chocolate bars, pegs and some weird things called hexes — in fact, all the right kit.

I got a lift down to 'The Head' with the third member of our party, Sandy Ogilvie, and we arrived on time. As Ian was late, we went to scope out the crag. First impressions were: it's big and steep. Second impressions were: it's big and steep and loose. We actually managed to look at the line of *Monster Crack*, but simply didn't believe it, as it looked too steep and blank.

When Ian arrived, he seemed to know what he was doing, so we followed him. I phoned the Coastguard to let them know where we were going, whilst Ian tied the abseil rope to one wobbly fence post. The abseil was nice fun: flints, sharp and heavy, falling down from above; changing over to the second rope and other stuff.

The first few pitches were remarkably pleasant, especially as I was seconding. Then I had to lead the cave pitch. All the lower pitches had been following lines of weakness, but apart from the flints sticking out, this pitch took a blank piece of wall. I had pulled on flints lower down and about half of them had fallen out. There were some *in-situ* warthogs on the hard bit and I added two or three extra of my own. The warthogs are quite reassuring — until you realise that you have hammered them not into a crack or anything, but straight into the rock, and the entire rock face has vibrated. I got up the pitch OK, although it was quite exciting pulling on flints with 300ft of air beneath your feet, hoping the flints would stay in. We all reached the top safely, although due to it being dark, Sandy left some gear in.

As the climb had gone well, Ian and I decided to try another Fowler route: *Sunday Sport*, only 3 pitches long. So, as there were just the two of us, we didn't start exceedingly early, and by the time we had retrieved our

gear from the top of *Monster Crack*, abseiled down and got to the bottom of the climb, I was starting to get hungry. No worry, though, we'll just climb fast.

Ian climbed the first proper pitch. He managed to remove a loose block early on (due to his superior weight over earlier ascensionists), and completed the pitch in a slow methodical manner. I was enjoying seconding the pitch until I got to one very stubborn warthog. You normally twist these ice screws out, but due to its placing in a corner, I couldn't get my hammer to it — and as warthogs are £12 or so, I didn't feel like leaving it behind. But after about 50 minutes of digging, I got it out. Although the climbing was very nice and proved not too difficult, it still took over 45 minutes to get up that pitch. Ian had placed four more warthogs, which I 'enjoyed' getting out. The next lead was mine: it was a 60m pitch, given a technical grade of 6a. Now 6a can be jolly hard on normal routes, so this was bound to be a good lead. Indeed, the climbing was hard straight off, and although the warthogs were *in-situ*, they were old and wobbly.

Apart from 5m on the crux of *Monster Crack*, we had been climbing cracks; but the first 45m of this pitch were on flints and I got more and more scared as the warthog protection got worse and worse. When you're doing 6a moves 15ft above a wobbly warthog with sharp flints to cut your ropes, and one of your footholds falls off, you get a big adrenalin rush. Well, I had a non-stop adrenalin rush for all that first 45m. And then it got *really* scary — very chalky and loose. The *in-situ* warthog was out and I started to pray. The final 15m were horrendous: flakes with my last gear in started to pull out; ledges I reached from the poised flake collapsed when I stood on them, and I felt every flint I touched would fall out.

As the panic started to set in, I reached a bit of crack. By jamming my arms and legs in this, I felt that I wasn't going to fall off instantly, just fairly soon. I put some gear in the crack and pretended it was good. Then, by using flints with one arm, and leg and the crack for the other half of me, I managed to make progress. But every time a flint gave way under me, I got more and more unnerved. Luckily the final *in-situ* warthog appeared and I gladly clipped it. I was very tempted to hang on it, but thought it would fall out. I pulled myself into the belay ledge and took a while to subside from my adrenalin overdose — especially as the belay was just two of those old wobbly warthogs.

By the time Ian had got up the pitch, it was starting to get dark and we still had a 46m 5c pitch left. Although I was a little cold, I was happy just to sit on the belay whilst Ian started up the pitch. Clearly, Ian was also 'enjoying' his pitch. It was getting darker and darker, and the size of the blocks being dislodged was growing. After a furious spell of TV-sized and odd fridge-sized blocks coming down, Ian gave up free climbing in favour of aid. As Ian had done a few aid routes in Yosemite, I felt a free climb up a crack would be no problem. But you can imagine I was just a little worried when Ian let out

a scream (I think something about dying). He was standing in a sling on one of those stupid warthogs and it was coming out. The resulting fall was scary — although I don't know how big it was, as I couldn't see anything for the darkness.

Ian continued aiding for another half hour or so until he couldn't go any further. Then he lowered back down to the belay, leaving numerous pieces of gear behind: warthogs, camelots, nuts, quickdraws, slings and hexes, all of which he had failed to get out. We decided abseil was the best way to escape; I think we both felt then that things were getting a little too dangerous. I for one felt if we got down alive, I would be more than happy.

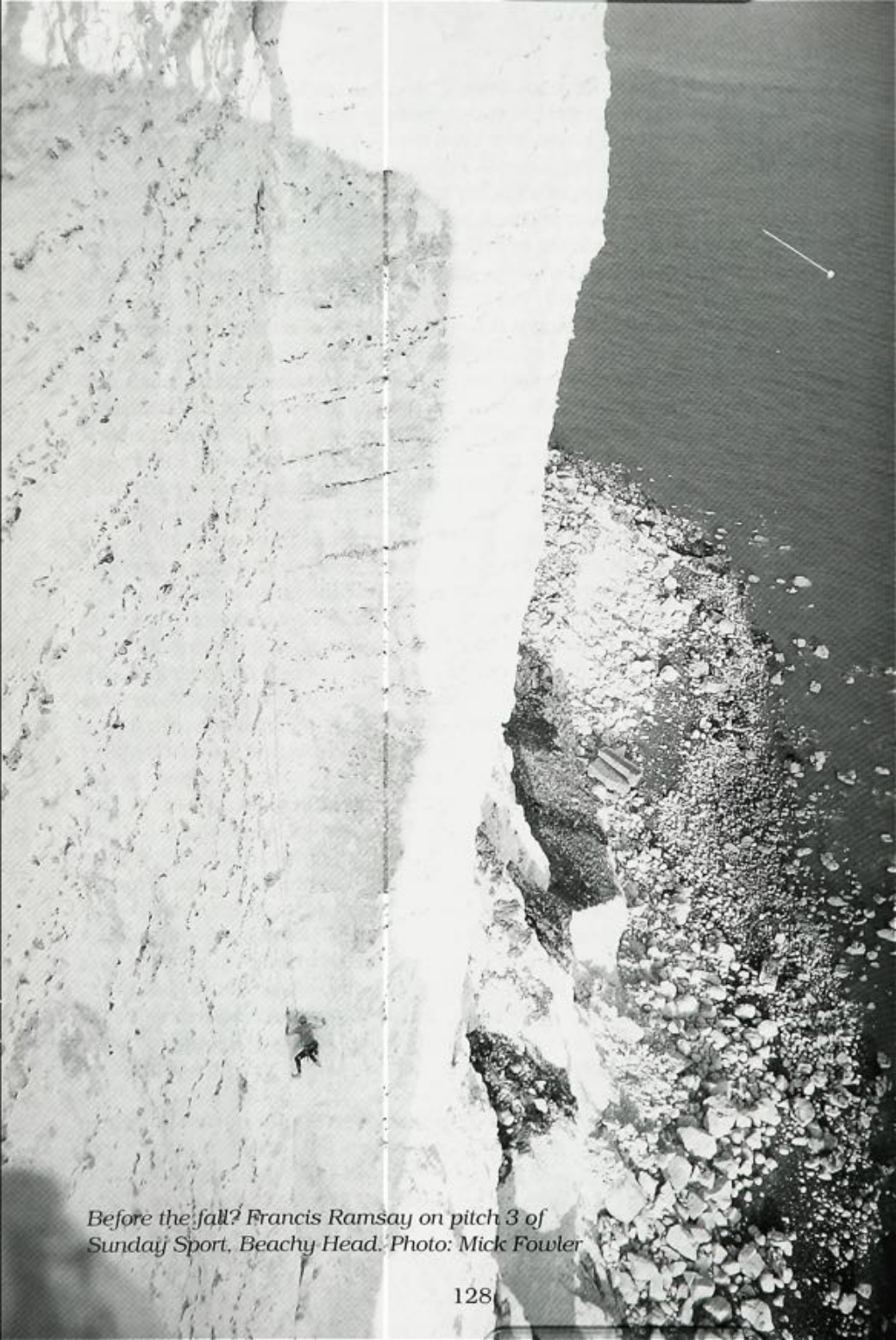
The first abseil — free hanging nearly all the way in the dark — was scary; but the periodic flashes of the lighthouse enabled us to work out where to head. The next belay down was one of those horrid, stupid and wobbly warthogs; we backed it up with another warthog. The next abseil was even more scary, although not as dark. The lighthouse was shining on the line of descent now, although this made things more grippy as we could watch the rope rub over the edge of the flinty slope; we could almost feel the rope fraying on the final scramble down to the ground.

But all was not yet well: we had to get back to the top, and the tide was rising. To climb up the steep grassy slope and then prusik up the abseil rope was not on: our frayed nerves couldn't take any more of that. We started walking along the beach. It took a long time. The lighthouse showed where we were going every 20 seconds and destroyed our night vision (just as it recovered from the last flash), and the waves were getting closer. We managed to dodge round a headland and decided it was time to try and climb up. Our toes were hurting from kicking boulders, and if we didn't find a way up soon, we would have to turn round before we got trapped by the sea. As the lighthouse was now hidden by a headland we couldn't see much, but just went for it anyway. Luckily we got up, but it took time.

The Coastguards weren't fazed by me ringing them at 10.00 p.m. (five hours after sunset) to say we had finished climbing; they hadn't even begun to think about a rescue. But the local Bobby, thinking that we were attempting suicide, did arrive to stop us jumping off the top. After 10 hours of suicidal epic we were quite happy to go home to bed.

For the next few months, I was happy to do nice safe routes — even the odd competition. It's winter now, and time for ice; so Ian and I were thinking of going to Scotland. But only if we have enough of those lovely warthogs left to use in their ideal placements: ice, or even better, frozen mud.





*Before the fall? Francis Ramsay on pitch 3 of  
Sunday Sport, Beachy Head. Photo: Mick Fowler*

# Breaking the Lock

Frank Fitzgerald

Kinder Scout was deep in snow. On the lower open slopes of Grindsbrook it was cold; but in the bed of the gorge we were shielded from the strong wind and, with the winter sun's weak heat focused on us, we sweated inside our cags as we plodded through snow drifts on the horizontal parts and slithered about on the frozen vertical steps. It was a benign repeat of an earlier time in Glencoe.

One can have trouble in Scotland; the skill is in avoiding it. Once, when the BBC was busy filming on The Ben, the hut was filled with so many hangers-on that Mike Ball found it impossible to walk round the table to his food. So, with remarkable agility, he tried to crawl over the top of it, but because it was so rickety, he succeeded only in upsetting the communal bottle of Glen Morangie. I remember vividly that that was not the only thing he upset. I wondered whether I should pretend not to know him, or be prepared to stand with him, back to back.

The trouble in Glencoe was different. We had set off for *Crowberry Gully* a couple of days earlier, but had been seduced on to the *North Buttress* when we had seen it in profile, absolutely plastered with snow. It was so well covered that even at night it could be seen, luminous against the sky. Today, however, with the *North Buttress* 'in the bag', *Crowberry Gully* it was going to be. The weather was good — no wind, blue cloudless sky, and warm sun — as we walked up from the hut, pausing only for a sandwich and to admire the *North Buttress*, which still looked superb.

However, the gully was not so well filled with snow as we had imagined it would be. It was cold out of the sun and the easy snow pitches were interspersed with little ice pitches which had to be climbed; they interrupted the flow of our ascent. But the effort kept us warm, and we made good progress. A wind had got up (though we were not to know it, deep as we were in the gully), and what we could see of the sky should have showed it turning a threatening grey and provided some sort of warning (not that it would have stopped us, for the climb was far too enjoyable for that).

We were so engrossed in the route that I am not sure when the change occurred, but it appeared to come very abruptly. Suddenly, the top of the mountain was in a blizzard. The wind had strengthened and little powder snow avalanches started by the eddying gusts far above, were quietly falling on to us, gluing our eyelids together, first melting then freezing on to our anoraks, breeches, eyebrows and hair so that soon we were cased in ice. A pause for insulin for Mike and food for us both gave an opportunity for a conference.

Normally, Mike's insulin injection involves baring his torso. Not on this occasion, though: for the only time in nearly forty years, the needle went through ice, tweed breeches, pyjama trousers and God knows what else, before it came into contact with flesh. However, it appeared to work and he seemed OK — at least in the short term — so we decided to push on.

The junction was the decision point. We were well up the route but there was still a couple of pitches above, including the crux, which was probably devoid of all but powder snow. With the snow whirling and eddying about, we could see that there was a gale on top, yet we could hear remarkably little except that eerie, faint hissing noise that falling powder snow makes. As one of my friends once said, it is somehow reminiscent of a well-oiled hearse. The powder-snow avalanches were getting much bigger and more frequent. We were now very cold and once out of the shelter of the gully, would get colder in the wind (these were the days before cagoules, overtrousers, fleeces and Gortex). Retreat seemed impossible — or was it?

We did not fancy climbing down the route, it would have taken too long. The snow would have presented no difficulty, but the icy steps would have been another matter. We did have front points — mine bought the day before after completing *SC Gully* in ten-point crampons. Also, in addition to our long-handled, straight-pick axes, Mike had an ice dagger and I a long channel peg with a handkerchief wrapped round the end to provide a handle. They were useless on hard ice. There were no natural abseil points either, the gully walls being remarkably smooth. It was Mike who solved the problem. Thinking 'Dead Men' too cumbersome, we carried only 'Dead Boys' — though now we wondered whether they would hold an abseil in the snow. However, the loose and soft material was cleared away and one was inserted into the harder snow below. A karabiner was clipped into the wire, we untied from our ropes and fastened them together so that we could abseil a full rope's length and passed them through the krab. To allay our doubts about the safety of the arrangement, and to check its soundness, an ice axe shaft was passed through the krab and driven into the snow. The theory was that if the 'Dead boy' started to move, the krab would move relative to the ice axe. I went first and Mike signalled that the system worked well. We were soon on to easy ground, albeit without dead boys and karabiners.

That should have been the end of our troubles, but in fact they had hardly begun. We had got very cold indeed whilst arranging and descending the abseils and when we left the shelter of the gully to descend to Lagangarbh the gale and blizzard hit us with further force. It was impossible to move quickly; a minor injury in the circumstances would have been serious and the path was obscured by fallen snow. The light was fading and even with head torches, in the near white-out, visibility was minimal. Communication in the wind was impossible. With eyes



screwed up to keep out the blinding snow which penetrated the gaps in our clothing and our nostrils and mouths, we descended, slowly and safely, but got ever more cold. How we did it, I shall never know; but eventually we arrived at the hut door. And still we were not finished: our hands were so cold that we could not muster the strength to turn the key — either individually or together. Desperate situations demand desperate remedies. I put the pick of my ice axe through the key and turned. There was a slight groan from it and it fell to pieces in the lock, but the door opened. We staggered into the calm and comparative warmth, switched on the electric fire and for the next half hour, just sat in front of it, saying nothing but absorbing every radiated calorie, our thawing clothing forming pools of water on the floor.

It was some time before we recognised that this was far from failure. The topography of the Buchaille is not easy to interpret in mist and I did not remember seeing 'the shallow, cairned col' at the head of Coire na Tulaich when we were descending from the *North Buttress*. Perhaps the snow had been too deep. In any case, the guidebook warns that descent can be particularly difficult in white-out conditions. Considering the difficulties we had experienced with our descent from the bottom of the gully some 1,000 ft lower than the summit, the navigational problems we would have faced and our clothing, then 'state of the art' but by today's standards, hopelessly inadequate, it seems likely that had we pressed on we would have died of exposure on the descent.

But we didn't, and there we were the pair of us, wallowing in deep snow on a gorgeous day, reminiscing happily. Our bodies were in Grindsbrook, but our minds were back where they have often been, decades away, still excited by the climb and our escape in that fierce blizzard in Glencoe.



# The Surly Bonds

Geoff Milburn

*'Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth  
and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings.'*

(*'High Flight'*, John McGee)

1995 was one of the most traumatic years of my existence as friend after friend died. In the climbing world, there was an unnerving feeling abroad of 'who's next?' or worse, 'Could it be me?' How easily it seems, we can 'slip into the next room', even though as climbers, we spend our lives hanging on tenaciously by the fingertips. Sometimes, however, the door to that room is opened wide when we least expect it.

By the last day of the holidays I was a wreck. This was because eight weeks earlier, on a snowy Friday afternoon, I'd gone to the bank and on impulse had bought a large custard tart. Jogging back to the car, I slipped on a patch of ice. As my feet shot from under me, my arm crooked to protect the tart (if only I had let go of the fragile delicacy) and I landed on my elbow. There was a loud crack; people on the other side of the road looked across. The subsequent operation next day, to put metal rods through my upper and lower arm, took two and half hours.

The media made a meal of it: every newspaper bill-board in the Manchester area carried the headline, 'Custard pie fells mountain man.' Oh, how they all loved it — teachers, pupils, friends and relatives. For days they fell about laughing until they cried. Strangers, too: in a supermarket someone would call out, "Here comes the custard pie man."



*'Ducks not fooled by leg-amputee-hunter's broken wing trick', or 'Custard-pie man practises extreme skiing'? Photo: Milburn collection*

It was as good as a tonic. At least I lived to tell the tale (but I didn't tell the doctor — who would have been livid if he had known — that I went skiing at Val Thorens with the Buxton Mountaineering Club, a mere eight weeks after breaking my arm).

Everything went smoothly on this away 'break', apart from the fact that in order to protect the damaged limb, I tried to ski down every mountain performing only left-hand turns. Somehow I survived all the near falls and arrived intact at the last morning. I got off to an early start and swung up on the first chair-lift of the day. It was Easter and already warm, so I unzipped my jacket and leant back contentedly to get the benefit of the first rays of sun which were sweeping into the dark valley. Far away on the horizon, Mont Blanc was silhouetted against a deep blue sky. I was pleased; considering my handicap, I'd clocked up a good tally of runs during the week and life was good.

The long, leisurely chair-lift was one of the old design, but I was in no hurry — take it easy on the last lap, I thought. Approaching the top, I nonchalantly lifted the safety bar and nodded a warm hello to the strikingly attractive young woman who was duty lift operator. As the distance between us narrowed rapidly, she smiled at me across the gulf. Although it distracted me, by force of habit I shuffled from side to side to check that my clothing was free from the chair. Then, lifting up my ski tips to clear the edge, I hit the snow and started to stand up, ready to push the chair away. That was when time went out of control and things started to happen really fast: something, somewhere, was holding me back and while still in a half crouch I pushed down hard and tried to straighten up into a standing position. In that split second, as the chair propelled me forwards, I glanced down behind me and realised that the draw-cord toggle of my jacket was somehow caught below and between the old wooden slats of the seat. Sudden panic struck, giving me no time at all to think and assess what to do. Even worse, the lift operator had looked away as soon as she saw me starting to leave the chair and so, because she was scanning the lower slope of the mountain, she did not observe the next comic sequence of events. Perhaps it was just as well.

Firstly, the seat — maliciously and with intent to do me as much mischief as possible — poleaxed me at the knees, and threw me over on to the snow on my side. For an encore, it merrily bounced off my left shoulder, clipping me on the side of the head for good measure. With some relief, I looked up to watch it moving harmlessly away from me, but only to see it swing round the big wheel and come back inexorably towards me. Unbelievably, the cord of my jacket was still attached to the chair and clearly, therefore, to my utter horror, so was I.

Instinctively, as the chair sailed past me, I just had time to kick off one ski as my eyes followed the chair. The cord of my jacket then began to tighten very quickly, bunching up the material and turning me round

in the process so that I then faced downhill. It was all too obvious that in a split second the chair, having decided that it wanted human company while descending the mountain, was going to pull me off into space.

I had only one thought: 'I MUST snap the draw-cord!' Slamming my remaining ski into the snow, I adopted a tug-of-war stance. Pulling down with all my strength in a snatching action, I gave it all that I had. I was convinced that such a thin draw-cord would be sufficiently weak to snap cleanly. It wasn't and didn't, and with a sudden sharp jerk, I was accelerated forwards and horizontally out into space.

Not knowing the correct French terminology for this moment, I resorted to shouting "Hey!" at the top of my voice, and as I spun round, I was just in time to see the astonished lift operator's jaw drop wide open. She in turn was frozen in time while I described a backward pendulum through space, directly below the chair. That bit was almost pleasant and I relaxed as if I could then do no more to control my fate. However, as I fully expected the cord to snap at any second, another voice inside my head was beginning to scream a dire warning. About then, the lift operator hit the stop button and the chair came to a sudden halt. I, however, having already started my pendulum, was obliged to continue it backwards through thin air. With my scientific training, I was reminded of the laws of physics: these obliged me to discontinue my involuntary forward space-flight. As I started to accelerate on the return swing, I glanced down past a blur of snow and picked out a rocky bluff on which the lift station was built. It couldn't have been more than fifty feet high, but ominously, that looked quite high enough. What happened next was totally unexpected.

Years ago, I remember Simon Horrox, one of my best friends, having a long fall of some 70ft on Pavey Ark; he was saved when he aimed for and landed on a tiny ledge. Afterwards, he swore blind that while falling he'd had ample time to pick his landing spot. I remember laughing scornfully at this suggestion. Amazingly though, in my moment of desperation I, too, suddenly saw a ledge below me and even though I was moving, I didn't lose sight of that tiny ledge for an instant. It was my ONLY hope.

It was the next event however, which came as the big surprise: without a single conscious thought, I simply lifted up my arms above my head, dropped out of my jacket and headed for the ledge, arrow straight. Believe it or not, there was even time to realise that hitting the cliff with the tip of the remaining ski was not a good idea, so just before impact, I turned my foot so that the ski was at a right-angle to the cliff.

The free boot hit the ledge first, closely followed by my right shoulder as I crashed into the cliff in a near standing position. All of a sudden, the world stopped moving and my left hand shot out to clutch the rock. Years of climbing told me where a good hold would be; I didn't even have to look.

Readjusting my weight to get into balance, my next concern was

for my supposedly broken right arm. It seemed intact, even though my shoulder had taken the brunt of the impact force. Then, hearing a faint noise, I looked up to see a cute but worried little face appear above me; "Monsieur! Monsieur," it called. My feeling of relief quickly turned to one of utter foolishness. I grinned sheepishly (as one does at such times), not quite knowing what to say. Undoubtedly, if I had been one of the old guys, I would have raised my hat to salute the arrival of a lady. "Je suis OK," I said casually in my best French, trying to appear nonchalant, as if I regularly did this sort of thing on a daily basis.

The French girl must have taken an instant liking to me for she started to make a perilous effort to climb down to join me. But having an aversion to being rescued and being a man of old-fashioned chivalry at heart, I could not allow this to happen and was instantly galvanised into action. "Je suis un grimpeur des roches grandes, et des montagnes du monde," I blurted out. All good stuff that.

"Ah, monsieur, yoo ar Eenglish," she replied. Clearly, being highly intelligent as well as devastatingly beautiful, she had in some mysterious way determined that I was not French. But how? Perhaps the bold front that I had put on had not fooled her? Or was there a slight tremble in my ever-so-slight Yorkshire accent? Leaning ever farther over the edge, this vision of delight began to ask me anxiously if I was injured: "Ow ar yoo? Ar yoo alright?" It was that sexy French pronunciation which was nearly my undoing, for my knees went to jelly and I nearly slipped off the ledge.

She told me to stay where I was as she would get help. Of course, that wasn't on and I determined to make a bit of an effort to show the flag for dear old England. Despite her protestations that I should stay exactly where I was, I started to explore the cliff. After a move or two I became more enthusiastic (even though to have fallen from that position would have been terribly bad form), so I made a serious effort in an upward direction to join the vision who had brought me back to my senses.

While I was pulling over the top, desire must have stirred her for she reached down to get her hands on my body. As I straightened up with an effort, I looked down into her worried face: what a gorgeous creature she was. Speechless, I just stared at her, waiting, waiting. She made a slight move and then began to caress my right arm, gently from top to bottom. This caressing was interspersed with reassuring little sounds. She repeated this routine on my left arm. To prolong the joy, I was sorely tempted to tell her that my right arm was definitely broken, but regrettably, she gave me no time. Swiftly changing her tack, she knelt down in front of me and lovingly grasped... my ankle. She slid her firm, capable hands gradually up my leg, ever higher, until she arrived at my upper thigh. Was this a thorough medical check, or was it merely a massage to relieve the possible onset of muscle cramp? Or was it per-



haps something else, that 'Je ne sais quoi'? Who cared; I was in heaven. For the first time in my life, I had a brief, fleeting glimpse of eternal bliss as she completed her thorough once-over — but unfortunately, only of those of my skiing muscles necessary to effect the 'French Technique'.

Afterwards, as we stood there, uncertain as to what to do next, we turned and gazed out at my red ski-jacket which was dangling forlornly below the chair. The girl was all for starting the lift and despatching my coat down the mountain, but despite becoming detached from it during this episode, I was still deeply attached to it.

Then I had a bright idea: at full stretch I hooked the jacket with my ski pole and slowly started to pull back the chair. It came within our reach. The French girl, being petite, could only just get her fingers round the base of the chair and nearly became an involuntary trapeze artist. Nobly ignoring the distinct possibility of a double-act swing (with the pair of us hanging from the underside of the chair), I let go with one hand. This released the chair a bit, but caused the girl to lose her balance. She would undoubtedly have gone over the edge had I not grabbed her jacket and hauled her back to earth. Teetering on the edge, she clutched me to her in a wild and desperate clinch; we must have looked like Sherlock Holmes locked in mortal combat with Moriarty before they plunged to their doom over the Reichenbach Falls. As she increased her grip on me, however, I began to feel much better — for after all, had I not saved her precious young life?

Regaining her composure, she shrugged her shoulders in that strange way the French do and uttered an endearing little chuckle. Then, remembering her duty, she turned back to me. First, she apologised profusely for the fact that she had not reacted fast enough to the emergency and let me know that if I complained to the authorities, her job would go for a Burton (or its French equivalent). Looking deep into my eyes, she innocently asked if there was absolutely anything else at all she could do for me? What words could do justice to my deepest thoughts at that tender moment? Perhaps it was just as well that she did not know what was going on in my mind, or she might have pushed me off the ledge. As it was, with dancing heart and racing pulse, I returned her gaze and smiled a knowing little smile.

Having retrieved the rest of my gear, it took only a second or two to click into my bindings. We shook hands and I pushed off. After one last lingering wave of farewell, I slid into the first turn and pointed the tips of my skis downhill to show her my true mettle — for was there not still one more box of Milk Tray to deliver? Downwards I sped, like an arrow.

**Postscript:** This article — the second part of a longer piece — was originally written in fond memory of: Nat Allen, Paul Williams, Kath Dawson, Paul Nunn, William Heaton Cooper, Alison Hargreaves, Trevor Jones, Tony Husbands and Jack Baines.

# Unreliable Memories

Ian Gray

A streak of blond hair swept across her forehead; her eyes, concerned, peered into his face. A large black and yellow hood obscured the rest of her face, but her words were clear and demanding: "Tell me your name and where you live?"

He lay there in the warmth of a dream, looking into her face and beyond it to the hills; but the rain clouds obscured the background and the crags looked cold and wet. This was not a good Sunday for climbing; maybe he would just stay in bed. Yes, that was a good idea: make the telephone call and call off the day out — perhaps go to the wall later. In the dream the voice was still demanding, so he answered it anyway. The face behind the hood seemed to relax a little then and he absorbed a little more of the comfort of the bed.

Damn! This wasn't a regular day out. Hadn't he promised to go up to the hut on a special meet? Better get up then and get sorted, have breakfast, make the butties and make sure the waterproofs are in, just in case. First, a couple more minutes in bed.

But the face still peered in (pity about the hood); he wondered what she really looked like. And the dream was still there (which was odd, because he felt quite conscious now). Most dreams, he felt, should impart a sense of knowing — since they're based on the wide-awake world of people and places remembered — so it was interesting that the view of Langdale was graphically clear. He didn't often dream of mountain views and never before could he remember one like this.

Then, a gradual feeling of *déjà-vu* crept into his mind, a feeling that the process of getting up and preparing for the day had already taken place: of a journey already undertaken and plans made; of discussions about where to go and of decisions being made; of easy rock made harder by the rain and of other climbers moving around him. But it was quite comfortable contemplating these thoughts and he still wasn't sure he was going to get up, special meet or no. Maybe a pinch would impart some sense of reality into the world he was sure he was floating in?

A movement beyond his immediate vision caught his eye: another hooded face. Interestingly, it seemed to be framed by the same fabric as the first hooded face: yellow and black. But the grey bearded face was just as unknown to him as the enigmatic female one. He lay, breathing shallowly, wondering what sort of dream place this was, and then the data from the outside world began to intrude. The voice changed from demanding things of him and started to reinforce the returning memory of his increasing consciousness. "Tell me your name and where you live?"

He repeated the information, but this time the words came out with more difficulty. His chest seemed constricted as the veils of sleep receded from his mind. She bent over him again and he saw the hair and the eyes still obscured by the hood. Another detail on the hood confirmed his returning memory. There, stitched on the top, he could make out the words, 'Mountain Rescue'. "Helicopter in about 20 minutes; we're going to lift you into a survival bag," she said.

He absorbed this information and all that it implied: he had fallen and was apparently fairly seriously injured. But how could it be that an injury severe enough to warrant a helicopter could be so pain free? The embarrassment of needing a helicopter was almost more uncomfortable than any physical hardship; however, he definitely did not feel like moving under his own steam. He felt the lift and drop as he was expertly moved into an environment which closed round him. A soft brush of nylon reminded of sleeping bags, but the significance of the lack of bending and head movement passed him by.

Then the ugly thought came to him, hard and gnawing in his head: there had been others on the route. Where was his second? Only one fleeting image returned, like a single frame from a full length movie, of grey rock and a Friend in a crack as he sped past it. Christ, he didn't know the details of how he had got back to this ledge, but had he hit anyone on the way down? The panic tightened his chest and for the first time he felt his ribs grating against each other. "Is there anyone else hurt?" The words came out two at a time, forced by his inability to get enough air into his lungs. The cold heat of panic and despair was making him tense and sweaty and adding an urgency to his life. Did he really want to know the answer?

A conversation took place beyond his immediate ambit. "No, no-one else was hurt". He wasn't sure whether or not to believe her. Would she lie to him to keep him calm? Why had she needed to check if the others were hurt? Wouldn't she know by now who had been treated? Couldn't she see the other casualties? "Are you sure?"

"Yes, you're the only one." The emotional relief spread through him, but the tension of anticipating an alternative answer left him feeling both weaker and stronger at the same time. He wondered, briefly, how he would have coped if the answer had been as bad as he could imagine. Could he have come to terms with injuring someone else? How would he have lived with himself (for he now realised that he probably would live and he determined not to let go of that)?

He needed no imagination or peripheral vision to see the helicopter: it sat directly above his head like a dentist's drill, yet strangely quiet. A figure moved vertically through his vision. The blond doctor (for doctor she must be, he now presumed) disappeared inside the body of the hovering aircraft. It must be quite serious if they were taking the doctor on board. A new voice spoke to him, unseen from behind and below him: "It will be windy from the rotors when we lift you. I'm going to put my hand over your face

to protect you". He relaxed since there was nothing else to do, and an internal voice told him to concentrate his own limited resources on what they could do: breathing might be a good idea, since it seemed to be currently fairly fundamental.

He felt a gentle lurch. A hand appeared to shield his face, but it produced a claustrophobic panic and he was relieved when it disappeared. Strange, but there was very little wind this near to the body of the helicopter. The door loomed close and wide now. A pair of feet appeared and pushed against the stabilising bar below the door. The stretcher turned and entered the body; he felt it being pulled in. He heard the thud of the door and then all was darkness.



*'...it sat directly above his head like a dentist's drill, yet strangely quiet.'* Photo: Noble collection



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# OBITUARY

## **Henry Cecil John Hunt, Lord Hunt of Llanfair Waterdine**

**1910 (1939) - 1998**

The general public tends to think of John Hunt as the leader of a military-style expedition which, by good organisation and team-work, steam-rollered its way up Everest. But John was a true mountaineer from early youth. He was 12 when he first put on a rope and 14 when he climbed the Piz Palu. His early climbing career was, however, largely confined to guided ascents in the Alps and extensive ski mountaineering. The latter led in 1931 and 1932 to two adventurous forays in the Pir Panjal, with a single companion, when he was stationed in India. It was not until 1933 that he first climbed in Britain and was thus inevitably attracted to rock climbing and to more technical routes, guideless, in the Alps. There followed a lightweight expedition in 1935, with James Waller and others, which reached 24,500ft on Saltoro Kangri. The same month, he and Rowland Brotherhood made the first ascent of the impressive south buttress of Kolahoi.

Later that year he was elected to the Alpine Club, and was on the shortlist for the 1936 Everest Expedition, only to be turned down because of a heart murmur, the first of several occasions, he records in his memoirs, that doctors were to tell him to be careful about climbing the stairs.

Paying no attention to doctors, he and his wife Joy and C.R.Cooke carried out in 1937 an exploration of the north and east sides of Kangchenjunga, in the course of which he soloed to the south-west summit of Nepal Peak, at over 7,000m. This trip was partly aimed at investigating the possibility of late autumn expeditions, instead of the spring season generally favoured for high altitudes.

Stationed in North Bengal, he and Joy were able to trek extensively in Sikkim, and in 1940, again with Reggie Cooke, they made for Pandim, which they had marked out as a good objective. Unfortunately, an urgent summons back to his regiment forestalled them; covering an amazing daily mileage, he and Joy rushed back, only to find that the ship to Europe would not sail for three weeks.

It was on his return to Britain that John developed his interest in training in mountain areas for troops, and its relevance in the education of young people. After a spell training territorials, with the help of Wilfrid Noyce and Alf Bridge among others, he was appointed chief instructor of

the Commando Mountain & Snow Warfare Centre, under Frank Smythe, 'a most unwarlike character'. He was disappointed that the troops he trained were later mostly employed in the Netherlands, none being made available to the Eighth Army in Italy, where he was next posted. There he commanded a battalion and, later, a larger *ad-hoc* formation in the Apennines, confronting the German 5th Mountain Division. The initiative lay with the enemy, who were patrolling aggressively, and it was his job to turn the tables on them. The award of the DSO is evidence of his success.

In 1944-45 he was in Greece, with the brigade under his command reluctantly involved in the civil war. Without hope of reinforcement, they were stationed in Patras, surrounded by the 3rd Division of the left-wing ELAS, and aware that many guerillas had infiltrated the city. In spite of the danger, the local civilians were strong in his support, but there were daily provocations and intimidation by ELAS. He held frequent conferences with the ELAS commanders, a situation which must have called for all John's tact, diplomacy and firmness. In the end, ELAS forces were defeated in the Athens' area, and those investing Patras withdrew in haste. It was after this extraordinary campaign that he was appointed CBE.

After the war, there were opportunities for climbing in Greece and in Egypt, before John was posted to Paris, where he and Joy got to know French climbers and became 'bleausards'. His contacts with British climbers were few. 'Who is this Colonel Hunt?' was the reaction in 1952, especially among those who had recently been with Shipton. Their meeting, when he had been suggested as organising secretary or deputy leader for 1953, was a failure, the difference between their approaches to the forthcoming expedition being aggravated by the ambivalence of the Himalayan Committee. 'No doubt I was over-keen and showed it' is the characteristically humble comment in his memoirs.

On his eventual appointment as leader of the Everest expedition, he first tried to persuade the disappointed Shipton to join it. He had more success, helped by Shipton himself, with Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans, who deeply resented the late change of leadership. The rest, as they say, is history. But it was no inevitable progress to the summit, nor was it at all like one idea of a military campaign except for the fact that, a lot of the time, the Commander and one or two staff were hard at work with plans or despatches while the rest of us relaxed in the communal mess tent. Organising ability John certainly had, and a tremendous capacity for work, but his prime quality as a leader was his humanity. Everyone knew that they were valued. He looked for the good in every man, and got the best out of him. His skill was such that, somehow, the inevitable next step seemed to be as much one's own idea as the leader's. The Everest team soon became a close-knit group of friends and, under John's benevolent eye, has remained that way. Of none was

that more true than of Tenzing. Their relationship could have started badly, with Tenzing resenting his reception at the British Embassy in Kathmandu as some kind of a head porter, instead of the experienced sirdar and climbing partner of Raymond Lambert. The resentment did not survive exposure to John's charm and genuine goodwill.

As one got to know him, the image of the regular army officer, the simple soldier, faded. He was a more complex character, a man of many parts and many interests. He did not talk about his past, but his autobiography, *'Life is Meeting'*, is illuminating. His father, who was killed in Belgium in 1914, had been in the Indian Army, and his mother came from a military family, so it was always assumed that he would be a soldier. The family had high expectations for him, which he proceeded to satisfy by passing into Sandhurst first in his year, and afterwards gaining the Anson Memorial Sword. But he describes himself as having been 'a bit of a misfit and doubtless somewhat of a prig'. He was serious and very hard-working. Joining a British regiment in India, he found regimental life not greatly to his liking; he preferred expeditions in the countryside, or games which he organised with the soldiers, to the conventional round of polo and parties. While others took a siesta, he learnt Urdu with a munshi.

Then in 1933, he answered a call from the authorities for volunteers for intelligence work with the police in Bengal, where terrorists were conducting a campaign against the Raj. This was an experience which informed his whole life. Not only did he get to know and respect the ordinary Bengali, but he found himself in sympathy with the young, idealistic, high-school students who provided many of the terrorists' recruits. When opportunity offered, he encouraged headmasters to channel their boys' energies into activities more suitable to their youth, by organising games and competitions and giving them responsibility. Missionary zeal was part of his make-up.

But, thankfully, only part of it. The zealous young officer had too much sympathy with too many different types of people to remain prigish — if indeed he ever had been. He regrets, in his memoirs, that he had not allowed himself much fun and relaxation.

A corrective was now at hand. In 1936, he married Joy Mowbray-Green, and they lived happily ever afterwards. She was an ideal partner, sharing his love of mountains and wild country, of birds and butterflies, bringing out his warmth and enabling him to relax and put his obsessions into perspective. He was still the serious, dedicated soldier and mountaineer, but he was also, for the rest of his life, her 'Johnnie'.

This background was unknown to those who met him for the first time in 1952. We only knew that he was as good a leader as one could wish for. It was a surprise to us to find that he was also a remarkably good public speaker, on all the occasions, formal and informal, when he was called upon. We knew that he spoke Urdu, but his total fluency in



French and his good German were unexpected. Later, he learnt enough Russian to converse when he went to the Caucasus and enough Spanish to be the most fluent of our party in Peru. I have no doubt that his Greek was more than passable. It was not only a natural gift for languages and hard work that were responsible, but his urge to communicate with all those he met.

After '1953 and all that' (his words), he resumed his army career until 1956, when he retired in order to set up and run the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. He returned of course to the Alps and to rock climbing. He was never an ace performer on rock but was very strong and very, very determined and got a lot of fun out of it. It was part of his nature that he should do all he could to help others, especially the young, to participate. Equally, he was keen to promote good relations with climbers in other countries, in particular the Soviet Union, which had seen very few Western climbers for many years.

The list of his climbs and treks is long: the Caucasus with a Climbers Club party, the Pamirs with the Scots; the Pindos, Greenland and the Tatra, all with parties of youth; the Pyrenees, Yukon, Nepal repeatedly, Sarawak, Hunza, Peru, as well as alpine seasons. At the same time, he served the climbing world in many capacities. He was president of the Alpine Club in 1957-59, the Climbers' Club in 1963-66, and the BMC in 1965-68. But at all times he could be called upon for advice and for help, which he gave unstintingly. He helped to establish Plas y Brenin. He reported on mountaineering training. He was one of those busy men who yet seem to have time for everyone and do everything on time.

It was of course not only the climbing world that he served. Shortly after he finished with the Award Scheme, having run it for ten years, he was in Canada climbing with a CAC meet when Roy Jenkins telephoned to ask him to become the first chairman of the Parole Board. This was a new concept for British justice, and involved John in working with many people, from senior judges to warders, police and probation officers. He set up the Board, and ran it with a great measure of success for seven years. During that time, he also acted as an emissary from the government to establish the facts about alleged genocide in Nigeria, and to make recommendations for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Another difficult government assignment was to report in 1969 on the organisation of the police in Northern Ireland. His report resulted in the disbandment of the once notorious B Specials.

He was created a Life Peer in 1966. Taking, as he said, a little time to become acclimatised to the rarefied air and the arcane procedures of the House of Lords, it is clear from his speeches that he came to enjoy the experience. He was keen to make his contribution on the subjects dear to his heart — opportunities for the young, penal measures, sport, care of the environment. His speeches in the House, like the 'few words'

he was so often required to say outside it, were thoroughly researched, appropriate to the occasion and leavened with a dash of humour. They also demonstrated his wish to see both sides of a question and his refusal to impute inferior motives to those not sharing his views; the most he allowed himself was a gentle irony. He was well adapted to the courteous ways of the Lords. On one occasion, he referred to a previous speaker as 'the noble and charming lady baroness' — probably not the standard mode of address. One hopes that in due course she reciprocated with 'the noble and gallant lord'. He was indeed gallant with the ladies relaxed in company, no longer the over-earnest young soldier.

He enjoyed his own celebrity, but was the least ostentatious of men. He was proud of his achievements, but spoke only of what others had achieved with his help. His sense of duty pervaded his whole life, but he wore it lightly. His appointment as a Knight of the Garter in 1979 recognised not only a lifetime of service, but the way in which it had been carried out. He was a man with a great warmth for his fellow men. Life for Joy, their family and his many friends will never be the same now he is gone.

Mike Westmacott

### John Hunt: a personal view

At the truly magnificent Service of Thanksgiving for the life of John, Baron Hunt of Llanfair Waterdine in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, George Band, at the end of his Appreciation, quoted Lord Longford as having said: "In my eyes, Lord Hunt was the greatest Englishman of his time". Certainly, no man I know of had on the one side, fewer flaws in his character and on the other side, more positive attributes. He was, to my mind, a quintessentially good man, incapable of a cowardly or vicious act. He could, of course, hold strong views about the merits or demerits of other people — particularly of people in the political field which, by demand, he had to enter in a variety of capacities after Everest.

But this is the *Climbers' Club Journal* and I must not stray too far. Mike Westmacott has excelled himself in his summary of John's career, including his climbing career, and all the broadsheets carried full and largely accurate accounts of his life. I shall, therefore, dwell on the more homely but relevant aspects of John's life.

My first acquaintance with him was shortly after Everest, when I borrowed his braces to join contributions from most of the rest of the team for an Everest Exhibition which, when I was a town clerk, I set up to accompany a local showing of the Everest film: ropes led up to Camp V outside my room. But then he became President of the CC and I

became the Hut-Booking Secretary and our acquaintance flourished: I used to give him lifts to Wales. He was the ideal travelling companion, but the qualities others have commented on — his breadth of knowledge and his amazing memory for places, languages and names would sometimes make me only too conscious of my own limitations. I was almost pleased when, one Friday evening after Joy had prepared us some beautiful sandwiches, he left them in the house and we fared much worse at a roadside caff: he was not infallible.

But at committee meetings he was the perfect Chairman and the meetings were always over in time for us to eat. One thing stands out in my memory: he insisted that the qualification for new membership of the Club should not be entirely dependent on tiger climbing ability, holding that a consistent love of the mountains, coupled with a consistency in one's professed standard of climbing was sufficient. And he was right: how else other would splendid characters like Keven Fitzgerald have been allowed in?

In the last few years, Pat and I have taken many holidays with John and Joy, trekking in Nepal and Ladakh and walking in Europe, England and lastly, the Scilly Isles. One thing stands out in Pat's memory of John. We, the trekkers, had all crossed a swollen icy stream. Pat was at the back and saw that John had stayed behind in order to help the badly-shod or unshod porters across with the aid of his outstretched stick. He was the one person who thought of doing that. Towards the end of his life, John's energy and health were failing, but never the delightfulness of his companionship. He was a great friend to an enormous circle of his friends and a great man.

*Harry Sales*



*John Hunt. Photo: Hunt Collection*



## Dave Pearce

1945 (1970) - 1998

Dave Pearce died on the 1st August 1998 as a result of an accident at one his favourite crags. He was intent on sharing with his stepson, Tom Estcourt, something of the exhilaration and adventure to be found on the cliffs of Craig Gogarth. Red Wall was the target and they were descending the ridge between that crag and Castell Helen, together with Joe Carter. Dave was traversing easy ground between the first and second abseils when an apparently solid boulder became detached, knocking him off balance. He fell into the zawn at the bottom of the crag.

The accident was witnessed by Andrew Walker who was about to start up *Wendigo*. He was lowered to sea level and swam round into the zawn where he was able to bring Dave to a landing point. Meanwhile, Tom and Joe completed the second abseil and with Andrew, extricated Dave from the water, whereupon Tom, a doctor, attempted unsuccessfully to revive him. The rescue services had been alerted and a lifeboat and helicopter attended at the scene. The rescue culminated with Dave being airlifted to the C & A Hospital at Bangor. Emergency surgery was attempted unsuccessfully.

David John Pearce was born in Coventry in 1945, the third of four children. He was both a clever and adventurous child who from an early age exhibited the trait of independent and calculated thought which was one of his strengths in later years and provided a rich contrast with his spontaneous wit and love of life. He prevailed upon his parents to allow him to attend Tile Hill School, one of the earliest comprehensives, (although he had passed the eleven plus and qualified for a grammar school place); perhaps this demonstrated the beginnings of a social conscience which became a guiding force in his life. Dave was a good student and in due course was admitted to Leeds University to read Mathematics and Philosophy, a choice of subject which seems to have perfectly suited his academic ability and character.

Dave's four year spell at Leeds was to have a major influence on his life for reasons additional to education. It was here that he met and married Kathy and they had their first child, Alexis. A second child, Charlotte, arrived a few years later. It was also during the Leeds years that Dave started climbing. In the mid 60s, Leeds University was one of the country's climbing hot spots; but in those days Dave was a modest, talent rather than a star — albeit that he played a minor role in the design of the Leeds Climbing Wall.

Following graduation he moved to Bristol to start teaching — a profession with which he soon became disenchanted. However, there

was an active climbing scene in Bristol which included a number of talents, including Ed Drummond, who was leading developments at Avon Gorge. Climbing with Chris Perry, Dave made early repeats of many of Drummond's routes before creating their own offering, *Peryl*. During this period, Dave also distinguished himself by making the first (but probably not the last) bivouac on *Coronation Street*, an event that reflected the speed of his companion rather than Dave's ability.

That ability was recognised by Drummond, who recruited Dave to join him in the development of Wen Zawn at South Stack, Anglesey. Their first route, *A Dream of White Horses*, rapidly gained classic status, no doubt enhanced by the lyrical name (interestingly a combination of Dave's poetic 'White Horses' and Drummond's 'Dream'), and is now recognised as one of the world's great rock climbs. Ascents of *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, itself a three-star classic, and *Games Climbers Play* followed shortly. The significance of those undertakings was considerable. Traffic has cleaned the rock considerably, but at the time its quality left much to be desired. Limitations in the protection then available also contributed to the substance of the undertaking; they were at the forefront of development at that time.

By now Dave was disillusioned with teaching and he turned to industry, putting his mathematical and computer skills to work with GEC at Borehamwood. He and his family moved to London where he came across Ken Wilson, then editor of *Mountain* and was recruited as equipment editor. Dave performed this role capably for many years and also participated in the Robbins interview which profiled the legendary Yosemite pioneer for British climbers and proved to be highly influential. However, Dave was soon to move on again, gaining employment with Ferranti where he met Nick Estcourt. The Pearce family moved to Altrincham where they became near neighbours to the Estcourt and Bonnington families.

Nick, Chris and Dave were the founders of 'The Altrincham All Stars' and were soon joined by Martin Boysen, Malcolm Howells and Dave Potts. Others followed: Sean Williams, Trevor Jones, Tom Leppert and later, Pete Boardman, Joe Tasker and Ken Wilson. All were talented, gregarious and outspoken, but Dave and Nick (until his death) were the natural leaders. Soloing was *de rigueur* and ropes allowed only for rescue purposes, a concession for which I had occasion to be grateful more than once.

I well remember my initiation with the 'All Stars' on an early season Tuesday hit at Frodsham where, it seemed, the entire team dispatched *Crew's*, *Banner's* and *Boysen's* without hesitation before a grinning bearded piratical character was blindfolded with a red bandanna and pointed at a line that was clearly harder still. This, it was explained, was Dave Pearce and that was his route and, of course, he climbed it with ease. He provided a further demonstration of his

skill and speed on the rock and with the rope before the night was over, producing a top rope to save me from an unpleasant landing when I briefly allowed my ambitions to exceed my ability. I had never before experienced the intensity of competition that characterised activity on the crag that evening. It continued at the pub where Dave was again at the centre 'the craic'. Stars they may have been but there was no hint of elitism. Any pretention was mercilessly exposed to the amusement of all, but with great good humour. As the evening progressed there was a demand for 'the vote' and Dave assumed the chair and orchestrated events. Venues for the following week were proposed, debated and voted on amidst much good-natured abuse and barracking.

The 'All Stars' were invested with a zest for life that required everything to be done at full throttle. The preface to one memorable evening at Willersley was a fiercely-argued political debate provoked by the 6 o'clock news on the car radio. On arrival, the entire team followed Boysen up *Garrotter* as far as the 2nd crux, which he pronounced too wet to climb. I had just struggled over the 1st crux at the back of the group and was not interested in soloing back down. The entire team, which included the cream of British mountaineering, was therefore crag fast with no-one around to provide a top rope. Much debate ensued before Boysen pronounced that the rock above had dried out, an event which Dave put down to the amount of hot air generated. That evening's climbing concluded with a roped ascent of *Lime Street Direct* by the team of 12 in less than 10 minutes all in, the speed reflecting the imminence of closing time. As we broad-sided around a bend on the Via Gellia on the way home, after a couple of quick pints, we noticed the red stripe down the side of the approaching car. Dave's observation, "There's no point in slowing down now" seemed to have more than a passing relevance.

In the early 70s Dave teamed up again with Ed Drummond to visit Norway where they twice attempted the first alpine-style ascent of *The French Route* on the Troll Wall. At that time, an attempt on the Troll Wall was a major event and most climbers doubted that an alpine-style ascent was possible. Although they failed to top-out, they got very high on the wall and their attempt gained them international respect. Subsequently, Dave and Malcolm Howells visited Yosemite where they made rapid ascents of the *Classic Route* on Half Dome North West Face and of *The Nose* on El Capitan. They were then joined by Al Harris for an ascent of *Salathé Wall*.

Dave's move to Altrincham and the gathering there of the other All Stars was no accident; it was the gateway to North Wales, which was at the forefront of British rock climbing in the late 60s and early 70s. The scene centred on Llanberis where, then as now, a number of leading activists had based themselves: people whose social (or

other behaviour was often as extreme as their climbing. Dave drew huge enjoyment from the activities of these eccentrics and had a facility for joining in their pursuits whilst avoiding their wildest excesses. The ethos was one of extreme climbing followed by extreme partying; Dave excelled at both.

In 1974 he and Nick Estcourt created *Lung Fish* on Craig y Rhaedr. Two years later, he recruited Paul Trower to produce *The Cow* — still rated E5 and another three-star classic. The first pitch is particularly impressive and at the time seemed outrageous. However, although he made some significant first ascents, for the most part Dave was more interested in a general enjoyment of quality climbing than in exploration. Always modest and dismissive of his own ability, he never considered himself a mountaineer. However, I have known no better or safer mountain companion and enjoyed various climbs with Dave in Scotland and the Dolomites. Dave ascended many of the Scottish winter classics on frequent forays north and, as with his rock climbing, these included some notable ascents. With Willi Todd he made an early repeat of *The Fly* on Creagh Meaghaidh and accompanied Mick Fowler on various lightning raids to the far north. With Paul Braithwaite he enjoyed the first winter ascent of *The Shadow* on Carn Dearn.

I enjoyed various trips with Dave over the years: weekends in North Wales, longer trips to Scotland in summer and winter and a family holiday in the Dolomites. Not all trips were successful in climbing terms, but that never mattered. Dave's comradeship, breadth of knowledge and humour were such that the 'craic' was always good. On the crag, there was nobody better to be with. It was not necessarily about the hardest route, but rather about extracting the most fun from any situation. Dave was a master at this even when *in extremis*.

One of our Scottish trips was curtailed when Dave, un-characteristically, took a fall on *Pinch Direct* and went over the overlap. The impact was taken by his ankle which failed the test. As he gathered himself at the base of the crag, two youths appeared and enquired in broad Yorkshire accents as to the difficulty of the route. "Piece of piss mate," Dave instantly responded, mimicking their accents. When staff at Fort William Hospital admitted that they lacked X-ray equipment, they offered a choice of transfer to Aberdeen or Glasgow. Dave opted for Manchester Royal Infirmary but the doctor indicated that they could not provide an ambulance for a journey of that length. "That's all right mate, we've got a car," quipped Dave. Such incidents were happily rare.

Back at the workface, Dave was no more enamoured of industry than he had been with teaching and he and Nick Estcourt decided to set up a climbing shop in a partnership which involved both families. The venture reflected Dave's character in that it was carefully planned,



and in using Nick's name, built upon the national reputation gained from his 1975 exploits on Everest's South West Face. It had always been intended that Dave would run the shop whilst Nick remained at Ferranti until the business became established, but Nick's death on K2 in 1978 was a severe blow. The fact that this was overcome and that the shop developed into one of the most respected climbing retail operations in England was a tribute to Dave's industry and organisation.

In the early 80s Dave again took an interest in climbing wall development when he played the leading role in the design and construction of the wall at Altrincham Sports Centre. For a number of years this wall was rated as one of the best in the country. It led to Dave's involvement with the BMC, where he played a key role in negotiations with the Health and Safety Executive; these resulted in agreement on a relatively regulation-free environment. This philosophy was documented in the BMC/Sports Council Climbing Wall Manual, which has been highly influential in the design and management of other facilities.

By the late 70s, Dave's marriage to Kathy had foundered. Following Nick's death, Dave and Carolyn fell in love and they eventually married. The Nick Estcourt Memorial Award had been created by Nick's friends and substantial funds accumulated to finance an annual award to a leading-edge mountaineering expedition. Dave acted as secretary to the Trust and, whilst never an expeditioner himself, made many telling contributions to their annual deliberations — notwithstanding the presence of seasoned campaigners like Bonnington, Scott, Braithwaite, Nunn and Fowler.

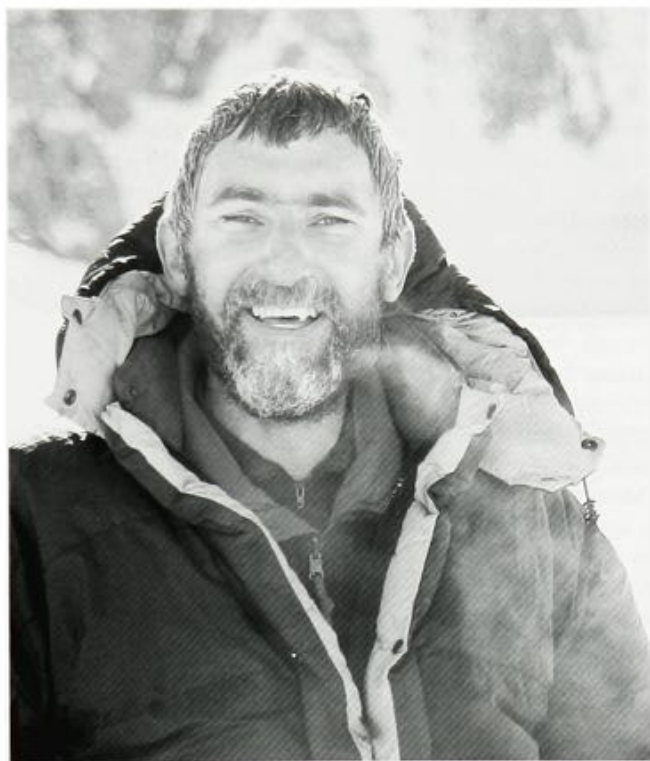
Dave's only attempt at expedition climbing (to Denali with Dick Turnbull, Frank Connell and myself in 1994) was wholly unsuccessful. The trip was dogged by a succession of problems — not least when we were buried by snow in our tents in a major storm, an incident that was too close for comfort. Suffice it to say that Dave proved capable and reliable throughout. Almost as important on a long trip, he was always excellent company.

Unfortunately, Dave had limited time available for climbing in recent years. Difficult trading conditions necessitated enormous effort to keep the shop profitable. Finally, in late 1997, Dave was able to negotiate a sale of the business to Nevisport. The deal required him to continue managing the shop until the following summer in order to ensure a successful transition. That achieved, Dave was able to start to reassert some control over his own life. He began to get back into climbing, but sadly the accident intervened only a few months later.

Dave Pearce was one of those larger-than-life characters who brightened up the lives of all around him. Despite his outgoing char-

acter and great sense of fun, he was a deep thinker who carefully considered all options before committing himself to action. He put great effort into all his undertakings and in consequence performed well at whatever he committed himself to. He was not a materialistic individual but worked tirelessly to provide security for Carolyn and his dependants. He was also an open and generous soul who was immensely loyal to the many friends that he built up over the years and by whom he will be greatly missed. He leaves two children from his first marriage to Kathy Watson, Alexis and Charlotte and three step children, Matthew, Tom and Martha, from his second marriage to Carolyn Estcourt.

*Martin Wragg*



*Dave Pearce. Photo: Martin Wragg*

# Louise Dickie

**1960 (1987) - 1998.**

Louise Dickie died on August 27th from injuries sustained as a result of a leader fall, while attending the Rendez-Vous Haut Montagnes Meet in Switzerland. She was on a multi-pitch mountain route above the Cabane de L'Aneuve above La Fouly. During the meet, she was climbing with an international group of women climbers.

Louise had been involved in outdoor activities from school days, completing her Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award and working as a volunteer national park warden. Her climbing career began at university where she enjoyed climbing with a variety of people; she quickly progressed on to longer and harder routes. Louise was happiest in the mountains among her many friends.

Louise joined the Pinnacle Club in 1985 and the CC in 1987. She became membership secretary of the Pinnacle three years later. She deployed her considerable organisational skills to initiate local contact lists and 'open meets' for women climbers. Over the course of many years, Louise did a great deal to encourage new opportunities for like-minded people to get together and pursue their interests on the crags or in the mountains. She was the President of the Pinnacle Club at the time of her death — a position which she took seriously and through which, in her first term of office, she made a major contribution by ensuring the completion of an extension to the club hut in Snowdonia.

Louise climbed widely throughout Britain and Europe. Since 1987 Louise had been the UK representative to the Rendez-Vous Hautes Montagnes — an international group of women climbers who organise annual climbing and ski touring meets in different mountain areas. In 1997 the meet was hosted by Louise in the Lake District. She was a competent climber who enjoyed a good day on the hill; in her company the 'crack' and the action were equally important. She was a highly articulate person with a fund of entertaining stories — a good companion in the hut at the end of the day.

Louise died in the flood of life. She had realised many of her climbing ambitions, leading respectable routes like *Left Wall* and *The Strand*; but she also had many other interests, plans and projects to look forward to beyond climbing and mountaineering. She had almost completed her M.Sc. and, having recently travelled extensively around New Zealand, was looking forward to a return visit, possibly to work there for a while. She was a musician and had practised yoga keenly for many years.

Louise leaves very close friends behind — among them, the many European women climbers who were with her at La Fouly. They will retain countless memories of good days on the hill together in her company. She will be sorely missed by her parents and three brothers — as she will by everyone who knew her.

*Stella Adams*



*Louise Dickie (left) climbing with Vreni Jaeggli in the Garmisch area. Photo: Cathy Woodhead*



# Charlie Vigano

1928 (1967) - 1998

Charlie was born in Paris in 1928 and moved to Italy with his English mother and Italian father when he was three. He grew up in Milan and retained a slightly exotic accent throughout his life. In 1943 the British Authorities contacted his mother and said they could no longer guarantee the family's safety. He and his younger brother escaped with their mother through Spain and Portugal to Glasgow. His older brother was a student and did not have the same freedom of movement. He was arrested for demonstrating against the Nazis, deported to Mauthausen concentration camp and shot.

Glasgow Central Hotel provided a first job for the fourteen year old Vigano as a trainee chef. Charlie took advantage of the cheap travel available to him and roamed around Britain spending as much time as possible in the Highlands. He met John Cullen in 1948 on the Cobbler. John describes his first impression of Charlie as "a foreign looking chap with a foreign accent". They became regular partners, climbing together every weekend for the next five years, first in the Glencoe Mountaineering Club, utilising the weekend club buses as transport to the hills. They both joined the Creagh Dhu in 1951, and despite his chef's training, Charlie was considered to be the worst cook in the club.

They had no money and no equipment either, except for a hemp rope, nailed boots, sandshoes and ex-army windproof clothes and ice axes. Protection was a talisman worn on the head called a skip bunnet. Charlie was very fit and determined. In the season of the 'Munich Six Pads' (known in England as fell races), when fierce competition pushed up the pace weekend after weekend, Charlie and Hugh Currie crushed some pretty formidable opposition by running non-stop along the railway line from Bridge of Orchy to Rannoch Station, wearing boots and carrying weekend packs, a distance of over ten miles'

Charlie was involved in one of the greatest highland climbing epics when he held Hamish MacInnes's rope as he was stuck for six hours in the dark, bridged across the groove on an early winter attempt on *Raven's Gully*. MacInnes was eventually dropped a top rope by other club members, and Charlie and his companion spent a very cold night on the hill without gear. He climbed with Johnny Cunningham and Patsy Walsh, making many first ascents with them in Glencoe, including *Revelation* and the second ascent of the *Bludger's Route/Revelation* combination on the Buachaille.

In 1958 he ran out of patience with the Scottish winter and in order to climb on winter gritstone, moved to the Buildings in Manchester where

he knew Black Jack Thornton and others of the Langdale Lads. Here also resided close friends and the future Shielgh Vigano. Charlie and Sheilgh spent the next forty years climbing and walking together — in all probability, a unique husband and wife climbing partnership. Certainly, at the time they married, the men did the climbing and the women walked or waited. But Charlie was the exception to the rule: he would climb with the club on Saturday and with Sheilgh on Sunday, always encouraging her.

He was again involved in a major epic when the famously shortsighted Patsy Walsh tried to climb *Sheaf VS* on Cloggy, and then led *Walsh's Groove* E3, 5b by mistake. In 1961, Dennis Gray (whom Charlie had first met in 1951) invited Charlie to join the Rock and Ice. When Don and Audrey Whillans were married, Audrey insisted that Sheilgh came on the honeymoon to Glencoe. She correctly believed she would have been left on her own whilst Don climbed. Another infamous incident occurred during this week, when Whillans espied the line of *Carnivore* and led the first pitch accompanied by Charlie and Johnny Cunningham. The rain came, ending that attempt with Whillans determined to return, but Cunningham 'stole' the route the following week, much to Whillans' annoyance. Audrey never forgave Johnny.

In 1969, Charlie discovered North Pembroke — the ideal holiday place for a young climbing family. He went on to return for 30 years, climbing over 450 new routes which, much to his disappointment, were mainly left out of the new 'definitive guide' for the spurious reasons of quality and vague geographical descriptions. Many of the routes and new crags he discovered are excellent; in later years he enlisted his daughter Carole's partner, Dave Kenyon, to lead routes up to high-quality E5. Charlie believed very firmly that a definitive guide should be just that.

He was involved with the BMC for many years, becoming Chairman of the Lancashire and Cheshire Area Committee. I was impressed by his support for young climbers: he enthusiastically endorsed the use of bolts on steep limestone in the 1980s and claimed there was no difference between a bolt and a Friend, since they both made it a safer game. In the competitions debates of the late 1980s, he was keen to see them go ahead and, almost alone, supported John Dunne at the Marquis of Granby AGM. He was self-educated with an encyclopaedic general knowledge, a great love of language, poetry, current affairs and socialist politics. He also had a knowledge of climbers and climbing second to none. Obscure articles were plucked from fifty years of magazines at the slightest hint of interest. Amongst all this he had a keen, wry sense of humour with a wonderful glint in his eye as he executed some cutting riposte. He had, after all, had his wit sharpened in the hard school of the Creagh Dhu and the Rock and Ice.





*'Boldness be my friend': Charlie Vigano  
rappelling on Katsengeberge Wall in 1957.  
Photo: Creagh Dhu/Vigano collection*

In 1983, Dave Hope wrote an article about Real Climbers (CCJ 1983). 'Joe Brown and Don Whillans are Real Climbers, Dennis Gray and Chris Bonington are not, nobody is sure about Mac... Real Climbers don't throw up in pubs, they do it outside, preferably over the local panda car. Real Climbers don't belong to organisations such as the Climbers' Club or the Friends of the Earth. They do have fantasies about belonging to the original Creagh Dhul' Excepting the panda car experience, Charlie belonged to most of these organisations and he was a Real Climber, heart and soul.

He took up new branches of the sport with great enthusiasm and was an avid trainer throughout his life. He was always there — on the crag, the wall, the hill — encouraging others to perform, bantering and joking. He was invariably with Sheilgh, a gifted and elegant climber in her own right. Charlie was planning for the next ten years: Wadi Rum in Jordan, Tuolumne Meadows and always Spain with the bolts, acres of traditional climbs and, of course, those mythical ridges.

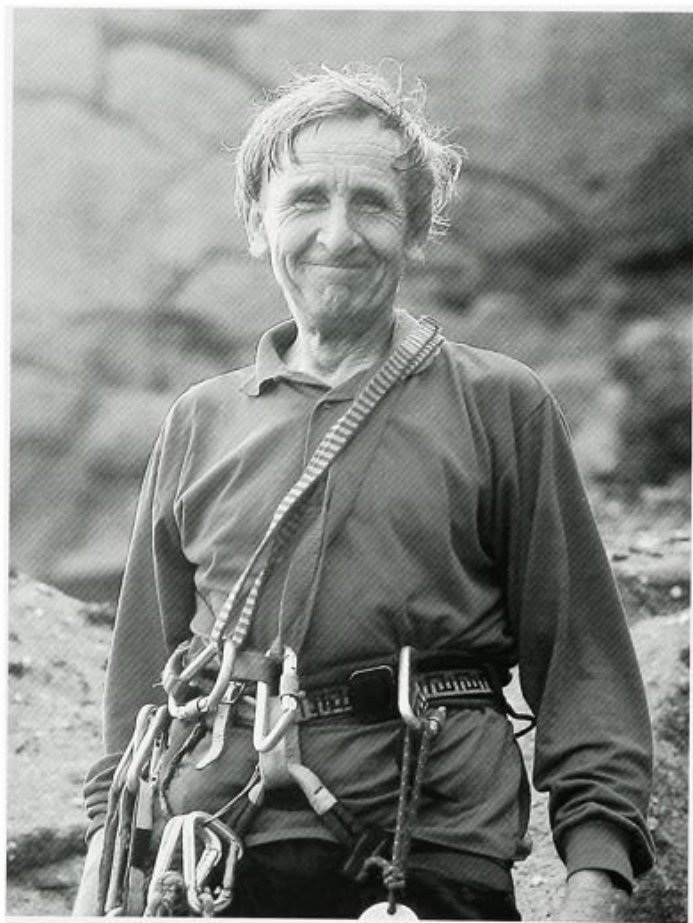
An enduring memory of his humour is of a prestigious BMC dinner in Llanberis with a Government Minister in attendance and four generations involved in a spoon-hanging contest: Charlie, Ian Vickers, Paul and Adam Dewhurst. Charlie won of course; he had the nose for it. And of his climbing? Well, the nose sniffed it out: when others had long since lost their commitment, Charlie would catch the train to Warton little quarry and solo as many of the highly polished routes as possible. Amazingly, it was his favourite crag.

In recent years he had discovered Majorca, the Costa del Sol crags and this year the Costa Blanca. We were on our fourth annual holiday in Spain together. Only ten days earlier, Charlie and Sheilgh had returned from a walking and climbing holiday in Majorca. At Salem, on the Tuesday, we had done ten excellent routes, finishing on a climb of great variety with delicate slabs and a 5c sting in its tail. We bantered about the time he dropped me 20ft on to his shoulders at the wall, whilst he talked about the bad old days, before real climbing began — when you had to go to Stanage in the winter, instead of the real thing, Ingleton Climbing Wall. Later that same afternoon, he skipped, 69 years young, across the river bed to take a long shot of Sheilgh as the red glow of sunset settled on the crag, singing as he went that he might have had enough for today. Most of all, he loved those ridges, dancing delightedly along his castles in the sky. He fell from a pinnacle on the Bernia Ridge when a block gave way.

John Mason

*With thanks to: John Cullen, Derek Walker and Sheilgh Vigano*





*Charlie Vigano. Photo: John Mason*

## Peter Mould

### 1930 (1975)-1998

I first met Peter in 1951. Peter's sport at that time was cycling, but we soon convinced him that two wheels were quite unsuited to getting up hills, and with a minimum of tuition on Welsh rock, he became an able and confident rock-climber and was soon doing most of the leading; thus he became my regular climbing partner for many years.

The following year, Peter and I camped at Arolla, where we climbed most of the surrounding peaks, including the Dent Blanche; we were only defeated on the Dent d'Herens by the weather. 1953 was a marvellous climbing year for both of us; we climbed in North Wales and the Lakes, reaching the top of Nape's Needle on Coronation Day, whilst the rest of the country was glued to the television. We then attempted the welsh 3,000ers, but were defeated half-way round by non-stop rain. This had been planned as a preliminary to the Alps, where, based on Zinal, we traversed Besso, the Zinal Rothorn, the Obergabelhorn and the Weishorn via its North Ridge. We returned fit and enthusiastic, and once more attempted the 3,000ers. This time, we were more or less successful, despite persistent low cloud and intermittent rain; but we never did find the top of Glyder Fawr, despite spending an hour wandering round the summit plateau looking for it.

The following Easter we tried our hand at winter climbing on Ben Nevis, where Peter showed himself as talented on snow and ice as he was on rock. Peter has always had a deep religious faith, and on our way back South we visited York Minster, where two very scruffy individuals were shown into the choir stalls before the service. Engulfed in the huge seats and separated by the stall wings, we were each in our own private world. The choir entered with a solo counter tenor singing the Lamentations of Jeremiah. It was the first time either of us had heard a counter tenor and it was a moving experience.

It was soon after this that Peter became disillusioned with his job in industry, and joined the Colonial Service, later to become the Commonwealth Development Agency. He was sent to Oxford on a year's course, where he met and married Phyllida, and they were finally sent to Africa. This was inevitably the end of our regular climbing together, but in 1962 they rented an apartment in Pontresina for the duration of Peter's leave, where I joined them with my family. Peter and I did a fine climb on Piz Palu, which Peter filmed, and then, joined by my wife, the three of us had a wonderful day on the Biancograt; all trace of previous parties were hidden by fresh snow, so it felt like a first ascent. Peter then took our 'au pair' up Pitz Roseg; quite an achieve-

ment for a young Dutch girl who had never seen a hill before, and lived below sea level. One day, both families took the chair-lift to an alp above the village. When the time came to go down, there was an enormous queue for the lift, but we had no food and needed to shop before the store closed. Peter had always been phenomenally fast down-hill, so he volunteered to run down the track beneath the lift. He told us afterwards that not only was he cheered on by all the people on the chair-lift, but that he overtook twenty-two chairs on the descent. Needless to say, he reached the shop in time and we did not go hungry.

Our last major climbing holiday together was to N. E. Greenland in 1971, in a party that also included Harry Sales and Malcolm Slesser. We made first ascents of some ten unclimbed peaks in this totally unexplored area, but sitting on top of one mountain Peter discovered a note stuck in a tin. This was traced to a pre-war Arctic expedition, which had put ashore on the coast below us and had climbed what had appeared from below to be the highest local peak.

Peter was a good friend and we never had a cross word or a hint of disagreement, whether the day was easy or tough, whether the climb was light-hearted or tested us to our limit. I have already mentioned Peter's strong Christian faith. This found its practical fulfilment when, after leaving the Commonwealth Development Agency, he and Phyllida set up a charitable trust to build and run a Christian retreat and holiday centre in the Preseli hills above Pontfaen. Peter and Phyllida not only organised every detail of the setting up of the Trust and the development of the site, but Peter did much of the hard manual labour with his own two hands. It remains a living memorial to him. Despite cancer and a hip replacement, he continued to rock-climb, and climbed with his family in Slovakia last summer.

*Jack Derry*

## **Peter Mould: a personal view**

Jack Derry and I were, for a period, regular travelling and climbing companions to C.C. meets in North Wales, Derbyshire and the Lakes. On the 'international-expedition' to Greenland, mentioned by Jack, we shared a tent while the three Scots shared the other tent. Pat and I also had holidays in the Alps with Peter and the Derrys. Pat was able to experience the confidence that Peter could give when one was following his rope: it could put one's climbing up a grade or two.

But he was a delightful companion in other ways, always full because we worked together on a number of environmental cases whilst he was chairman of the B.M.C. Access Committee, of which he was a founder member with Gwen Moffat and Hilary Sinclair. Amongst many other activities, he organised a massive opposition to major development on the Pembroke Coast national park and I acted for the various bodies that came under his wing at a public inquiry, successfully, thanks to his efforts and energy.

The development and conversion of a large mobile home encampment to permanent housing, if allowed, would have set a precedent for the whole of the coast and other national parks. Also broad in its effect was his concern with footpath erosion which played its part in the setting-up of the British Upland Footpath Trust: he collaborated with other mountaineering bodies in Scotland, England and Wales to form this organisation, which we managed to establish as a charitable trust. Since then it has become an increasingly successful promoter of properly maintained mountain paths. He was a forward thinker and doer and a great asset to the mountaineering world.

*Harry Sales*



# REVIEWS

**The Peak: Past and Present,**  
**Gordon Stainforth.**  
**Constable, 1998 £25.00**

**The Cairngorms: The Nature of the  
Land, Colin Baxter and  
Rawdon Goodier.**  
**Colin Baxter and Scottish Natural  
Heritage, 1998 £8.00**

It is helpful to look at these books in parallel for the light they cast on each other. *The Peak* is a lavish hardback 'conceived, researched, written, photographed, designed and typeset' by Stainforth. *The Cairngorms* is a handsome broad-format paperback (a reprint of the 1990 hardback) with photographs by Baxter and text by Goodie. At price for length they're instep. These books come from writers with intriguing combinations of interests. Stainforth holds degrees in philosophy and in film and television. He worked for some years as film editor on noted motion pictures and this is his fourth publication on British hills. Goodier (who provided natural history notes for CC guides of the 60s) is an ecologist who held influential posts in nature conservation for thirty years. He engages in debate on moral and religious philosophy, including that of the East. Baxter has produced several books of photo-essays on both city and wilderness, but is most widely known for the snowstorm of postcards which drifts southward bearing his name.

The first half of Stainforth's text is a history of the Peak until the coming of the railway. After glancing at astrophysics, it brings in the first settlers and then parades the invaders, from Celt to Norman. It screens plagues, outlaws, religious persecutions and civil war. It shows us the first famous tourist with the Industrial Revolution hard on his heels. The second half offers an engaging review of advances in rock-climbing through the last century. In the first half, the photographs counterpoint the text, whilst in the second half, the text is built around the photographs.

The book rests on a daunting programme of reading and enquiry. It's so dense and rich, so ambitious in scope, that

it's simpler to shape particular criticisms than to generalise helpfully on its broad virtues. I'll take the soft option first. I felt some resistance to the omniscient voice, confidently describing beliefs and ceremonies from two thousand years before the arrival of the first civilisation with the wit to take notes. I was startled by the easy identifications: the Horned God becomes Hob, then Herne the Hunter, then the Green Man, then Robin Hood. I was an unwilling conscript into frequent time-travelogues, where I heard accents open to parody: 'It is the evening of a Sun Day...AD 42.', 'But who are these travellers on horseback?', 'It is the year 1640 and standing at the latticed windows.' These complaints stem from the fact that Stainforth has cast himself as popular commentator as well as academic researcher. He's managing masses of detail as well as tenuous concepts and to make it widely accessible, he calls on the rhetoric of the new media. In fact, I think he's remarkably successful and I'd guess that this is as good a general history of the area as you can find. His deep involvement and his huge enthusiasm are infectious as he explains the tides of human movement, marshalls his enormous cast, visits important sites, discourses on significant events and produces crucial documents. (He has an unerring eye for apt quotation. I was delighted by the remark of an eminent FRCC member, also known in cosmology, that the universe looks like 'a put-up job'.) His occasional flippancy can entertain, as in his introduction of the 'increasingly overweight and paranoid...wife-swapper and serial killer' Henry VIII.

The strangest feature of the book is the suppression of modern history in favour of our curious pastime and a profile for a target reader eluded me. But the book will be fascinating and inspiring to any young climber who hasn't yet learned much about climbing history in the Peak and who is curious about the landscapes around him. Stainforth implies a kinship through dependency between Neolithic (New Stone) Man and the new rock man. In fact, the caver might claim closer affinity with the first cave-dwellers and Peak-land cave exploration has a history as epochal as climbing. However, I refuse to complain about this preferential treatment.

In the Cairngorm massif, Rawdon

Goodier finds no tumuli or Roman roads to distract him from the exercise of his trade, interpreter of Nature's fuzzy logic. He remarks of his text bit disingenuously, that 'its eccentricity is not without design'. (He's set a little trap.) Whilst Stainforth marches through human history chronologically, Goodier climbs through natural history vertically, starting from the valley and ascending at walking pace to the plateau. He generalises his ascent, making observations from any valley or any corrie. In the ravaged woodlands he discusses the impact of deer populations and the options of regeneration through management or exclusion. Here he offers 'one of the earliest statements on the ecological effects of grazing' from the remarkable Ox Mountain Parable by Meng Tsu (Mencius), 372-289 BC. Leaving the treeline, he looks at wet and dry areas, noting plant associations and altitude zoning — the 'marvellous carpet of heather, crowberry, blaeberry and lichens'; the 'beautifully rippled mat of woolly hair moss with Bigelows sedge and crowberry'; the 'sheltered embayments... rich in dwarf blaeberry and bog blaeberry'. He embodies these perceptions in some lines from McDiarmid.

Intermittently, he asks himself hard questions. Does the botanist's eye extend or obstruct his appreciation of the mountains? Not more so than for the climber, he decides. He interjects reminiscences expressing the delights of rock, snow and ice, in sunshine or storm. He searches for the soul of the high-corries; 'wherein does the quality of the corrie lie, in the emptiness or in the form?' Here he considers the relative impacts of climber and skier. At length we reach the plateau, which is, for its animals, 'an arctic island...their nearest neighbours....the Faroes, Iceland and Spitzbergen.' And then a brief glimpse of its grandeur in winter. In the final chapter he stands back and summarises what we've lost and what remains at stake.

I've read very little by Goodier, but receive anything new eagerly, knowing what to expect: an elegance of plan and analysis, spare and simple but fetchingly presented so that it strikes with poetic force. (Sub-titles from an early paper spring to mind: *Olkos and Ethos: Landscapes of the Senses; Landscapes of the Mind*.) And then there's the tone: a little elevated, almost austere, but always scrupulously level so

that even when deep feeling is evident 'the writing remains bafflingly cool, almost dispassionate'.

However, as with Stainforth, I was puzzled about the presumed readership. He poses his central question about the area — 'Can we...persist with a culture which will eventually diminish its quality without at the same time bringing about our own moral and spiritual diminution...?' — in so detached a voice that it seems he believes that the developer might be halted by an appeal to reason. Perhaps there were professional constraints, his employer being co-publisher, on how strongly he might express himself. But in refusing to raise his voice, it seems possible that the argument will mainly stir the converted.

Each book balances text and photographs. Looking at the two, I notice a regrettable design principle: a double-spread photograph's permitted but never two facing pages of unbroken text. I'd better say immediately that all the photographs bear striking resemblances to the scenes they depict, except that a few of Stainforth's offer colours I've never seen in nature. In fact, I don't even know the names of the colour values in his magnificent Bonsall Moor view, though I have to admit that the chill of those winter fields rises off the page.

The lengths photographers go to astound me: Stainforth procures coach and horses, riders, costumes and permissions to re-enact scenes from Defoe's tour; he organises monks on horseback and has extras cloned by computer; he sends his pals up pinnacles and ridges to pose beside the full moon, and to justify this effort and expense, he prints a selection from each operation — repetitions which will puzzle those who've skipped the small print. His ambition is large and he ought really to be directing the next remake of *Ben Hur*. Baxter (perhaps egged on by Goodier, who is fascinated by aerial views) simply hires an aeroplane for some of his Cairngorm panoramas.

Mirroring his ambitious project, Stainforth's two hundred photographs fall into many categories: studies of natural detail, ancient monuments, architecture, portraits, an extensive portfolio of climbers in action, and pastoral scenes as well as mountain prospects. To these he adds maps and archive material from many

sources so that there's almost a surfeit of illustration, encouraging mindless browsing. Many of the photographs hold the strong resonances conferred by time. On the whole, though, I wasn't stirred by the re-stagings of social or climbing history. It's staggering to see Joe Brown subduing *Right Unconquerable* again, forty-seven years after the first ascent; but it doesn't have the impact of the earlier image in which he looks as if he intends to get lots more done that day and by which an ensuing history is conjured up. Similarly, I'd have preferred portraits of Birtwistle, Elliot and Harding in their prime.

Stainforth's photographs are designed to satisfy his exacting aesthetic principles, though his requirements are sometimes quirky as well as extreme. He has distracting spectators erased from a climbing shot yet allows distracting contrails to scar a dozen skies. Generally, he says, he disapproves, of manipulation and strong filters. He relies on nature to produce the spectacle he wants and if necessary he's prepared to lay siege-until she produces it, at whatever time of day, night or year. The result is an impressive collection so wide in range that it's pointless to cite personal choices without discussion.

Colin Baxter might easily have illustrated Goodier's remarks on plant communities. Instead, bar a few woodland studies, he restricts himself to views of corrie and mountain. Perhaps there was a tactical agreement here; nothing must detract from the sense of spaciousness. Some of these photographs are primarily informative, displaying characteristics of topography or ground cover. And I found the aerial views unsettling and oddly lacking in aesthetic force. This might be put down to a disorientation from the loss of the normal terrestrial viewpoint. A more sophisticated explanation is available in the intriguing 'prospect-refuge theory' proposed by Jay Appleton in *The Experience of Landscape*.

The core of Baxter's collection is formed by the views of the plateau, especially in winter. There's a shot of Beinn Bhrotain in sunshine and spindrift, without real information, without a real point of focus, yet absolutely mesmerising. Generally climbers think of mountains as excitors of delight, as energisers of the body, as exercisers of the sense of wonder. Something

else corner strongly through in Baxter's panoramas, as in Stainforth's moorland views. It's an insight little explored by mountain writers, but it's well expressed by G.H.B. Ward, quoted by Stainforth: 'It is a wide, wild place, far from the ways of men, who are here the most occasional of creatures, and all its notes have the sadness of great spaces — of the mountains, moors and seas...'

In summary, here are two notable books representing efforts for which climbers must be grateful. Each makes a startling claim. Against a vast reach of Peakland history, Stainforth has chosen to showcase rock-climbing, not as a marginal cult but as, by implication, the richest enjoyment the Peak can offer; and he makes this proposition in a book bound to gain wide notice, including, perhaps, that of the planners of the National Park he's describing. Baxter and Goodier examine our most important mountain block and make a plea for its conservation. Goodier finally, with some diffidence, proposes reverence for nature as a quality of the harmonious mind. His concerns brought to-mind a warning reported years ago by David Brower: 'In obliterating wilderness, the physicist J.H. Rush points out, man repudiates the evolutionary force that put him on the planet and in a deeply terrifying sense is on his own.'

Harold Drasdo

**The Crystal Horizon,  
Reinhold Messner.  
Crowood Press, 1998 £14.99**

It seems enormously late in the day to be reviewing this book. Such is the pace of development, Messner is already beginning to look like yesterday's man. The explanation is that this is the paperback edition, appearing nine years after the hardback, which in 1989 was already very late for an exploit actually achieved in 1980. So is it still worth reading? Not for its literary quality alone. This is of course a translation, and I am not clear how much of the final style to lay at the author's door, how much at the translators'. But translated work can be superb — not least from Audrey Salkeld; I'm thinking specifically here of Kurt

Diemberger's *K2*...I conclude therefore that Messner is not as good a writer as Diemberger. He's not at all bad; just not enormously good. And such 'middling' achievement is not typical of the man. For even with a perspective of 20 years, this was an extraordinary ascent. Not surprisingly therefore, the book comes alive when we get onto the climb itself. The earlier scene-setting sections tend to drag somewhat. The book would be better for being shorter.

There is a good historical background, which I enjoyed, and one or two excellent descriptions of the Tibetan landscape. The weakest parts are his politico-cultural comments, his philosophising in general. The truth is that no-one would think his analyses here worth airing if he wasn't already a celebrated figure. This is no worse than having to put up with the great thoughts of football players and similar in the media, but nor is it any better. Everything he has to say about Tibetan culture and the Chinese invasion is mainstream opinion now, and there's nothing wrong with it, but it's all rather obvious. On the other hand, I may be forgetting that this book is written for a lay audience, and perhaps the average reader would be totally ignorant of recent Tibetan history.

My other gripe — not unconnected — is with his cogitations on Buddhist philosophy and how they relate to his own motivations. Messner bangs on endlessly about what motivates him and how it relates to eastern thought — and he does it in all his books. But Messner, like most of the best mountaineers, is no philosopher. And precisely because he tends to come up with this stuff too often, it is easy to mix his books up. I didn't realise I'd read this one before until I came to a quotation — and there are some excellent ones — which I had used in my own book.

Surely the truth is that Messner is a child of his time: he's a western-achiever through and through, with an ego the size of Mars, and he wants to get up Everest solo because he wants, quite simply, to *be first*. Best to state it once and have done with it, rather than go round and round playing at self-justification. It isn't necessary.

As for Buddhist quotations, they are completely out of place because there is really nothing that contrasts more com-

pletely with what is going on here than the Buddhist philosophy. I'm sure Messner knows that perfectly well.

Ultimately, Messner is interesting, and interesting to read about, not because of the feat itself (there is no such thing as a superman in climbing), but because of the willpower, the determination and energy, that lies behind it. He is hugely organised and well prepared. I remember hearing somewhere — perhaps at one of Doug's lectures — that he cuts the labels off his underpants to save weight. Apocryphal perhaps, but it makes the point. And I suspect that what he doesn't know about the meteorology of the Everest region, monsoon breaks, and 16 years weather cycles isn't worth knowing. In fact I could have stomachached more of this. He is far too self-absorbed to be able to say much of interest about his own character, but his character is very interesting.

So for me the most interesting prose in the book are the excerpts from the diary of Nena Holguin, his girlfriend of the time and, apart from a Chinese interpreter and liaison officer, his sole company on the trip. It is not that these excerpts tell us anything surprising. On the contrary, they confirm exactly what we would expect, which is roughly this: this man is an ego-maniac; he expects everything his own way; he hasn't got a clue about relationships and he's a bastard. So why do I stay with him? But you must know why! Because unlike most people, he's not boring. Whatever he is, he's not boring.

Because Messner's not a great writer, and because he's repetitive, I approached this book unenthusiastically. I found the first third too slow. But once we got to base, particularly once we got on the climb, he had my attention. He may not be a great writer, or a great philosopher, but he is one of the greatest mountaineers of all time. And that should be enough for anyone.

Phil Bartlett



**The Alpine Journal, 1998. Vol. 103,  
No. 347. Edited by Johanna Mertz  
The Alpine Club and Ernest  
Press £18.50.**

Food for thought? Lethargically I picked my way half-heartedly at some of the obscure bits of world exploration — though all of this failed to raise more than a flicker of interest. Pangs of greed, however, suggested that I should home in on the humour or the juicy bits of controversy, but after a general scan of the feast that was waiting, I eventually decided to discipline myself to take the meal in the prescribed course order.

In the first articles, on Changabang's North Face, Andy Cave makes it clear that not all expeditions slum it as the 'high rollers' Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne actually spread out a tablecloth for most meals at their base camp. Perhaps Roger thinks that BMC stands for Better Meals Campaign? Sadly, despite successes on Changabang, Cave's article poignantly records the loss of Brendon Murphy. It was

Julie-Ann's words though which provided a thought-provoking start and got my brain-cogs moving: 'Perhaps the most special mountain is the one that captures your imagination in your early climbing days — the one that is so big, so hard, so impossibly beyond your ability that it could only be a cdream.' It was easy to envisage how Changabang fitted such a description, but thirty years ago that was exactly how I felt about Cloggy and its big routes.

Jim Lowther had other dreams and homed in on the Kulu Eiger, which revealed that he had his feet firmly on the ground. His thinking was to go for: 'Something technical but not too easy, something unclimbed, cheap and easy to get to, and in an interesting area.' By chapter three, death struck again during the first summit assault of an Indian expedition on Everest. Against traditional feelings about what one should do after such a disaster and how one should have some respect for the dead, a second assault was launched; but after three deaths, one must surely ask the question, 'Why?'. Perhaps the answer is given elsewhere in the *A.J.* where National Pride is cited as the reason for Indonesian and Malayan teams succumbing to huge pressure from home

to succeed at all cost. The Indian climber, Das, makes two interesting comments: 'A person makes history by setting foot on Everest'. Such a value judgement makes it quite clear that although Everest is now a 'reasonable target for any fit party', the mountain is still regarded with almost holy reverence and that an ascent of it — in any style — will confer much kudos on anyone who returns to tell the story. This attitude is interesting up to a point, but is not as telling as the one about the place where they left their 'friends' bodies, then passed them by a short while later. To quote Dias, about the place where the bodies of their friends lie: 'Everest is the finest Cenotaph in the world.'

But to be precise: the term 'cenotaph' will actually only be correct if the bodies are removed from the mountain. The word that Dias should have used is the less romantic word 'tomb'. Certainly, if things carry on unchanged, Everest is in danger of becoming the largest mountain cemetery on planet Earth.

In chapter five 'In Pursuit of Gya,' we get a flavour of another obsessive nationalist attitude that seems to be so prevalent in 'emerging countries' at the present time. To quote Arun Samant: 'Competition to make the first ascent of Gya was getting really hot. We knew of no cure for the "Gya fever" with which we were now infected.'

Interestingly, Alan Hinkes homes in on another area which borders on obsession when he writes about the 8,000-metre 'tick club.' He refers to mountaineering as being more of a way of life or a 'passion.' Where, though, does one draw a line between healthy passion and blinkered obsession? And as to his point that 'climbing eight-thousanders is expensive,' sufficient to say that such a thought with all its ramifications leaves a very sour taste in the mouth. On Lhotse, Hinkes had to plod up to the summit behind three Russians, a Dane and a Canadian. On the summit he then chatted on the radio to a friend who had just topped Everest (along with a lot of others), filmed for Tyne Tees T.V. for a while, then abseiled down the fixed ropes.

By this time I was feeling rather queasy and almost subdued; it was only a matter of time before a four-lettered word appeared. I did not however expect the word

'bolt' to be linked to the names of Craine, Dawes, Green and Pritchard. On reading further, though, I soon realised that their 1,000m new route on the Wallof Dykes in Kyrgyzstan was only accomplished after an E5 6b crux pitch. That must have been something special on such a high cliff. Just, perhaps, the three hand-drilled bolts might be forgiven. Anti-bolters however, might also be forgiven for having a smug little smile as Green discovered that metal protection devices do not always give 100% infallible security. At one critical point, Green attempted to create some placements for bat hooks: 'When drilling a placement he gave his thumb a resounding blow with the hammer and had no option but to retreat.'

It is left to Jim Curran to lighten things up a bit and deliver a feast of humour in a delightful style. He and McNaught-Davis, on their way to Yosemite, hit Las Vegas where they emerge as heroes of exploration when they have what they describe as a gruesome night in a cheap motel: 'the sight of all those blue-rinsed semi-transparent old ladies endlessly feeding the slot machines was beyond my comprehension.' It must have been hell in there. The article though was the lull before the ethical storm and I realised that it was gloves off time.

The Big Issues chapter — complete with an A.C. disclaimer (how brave) — was to be the main course and it continues where it left off last year. First, a voracious lion, in the shape of Ken Wilson, roars out a challenge in support of traditional values. He asks us the key question: 'Will rock climbing degenerate into theme-park exercise?' In a comprehensive (I dare not suggest less) overview of the 'fixed-protection racket', he highlights the dangers for people who start to climb on fixed protection 'routes' then progress to 'normal' climbing. His greatest taunt is thrown out when he seriously asks the question, 'Is bolt-protected climbing really climbing?'

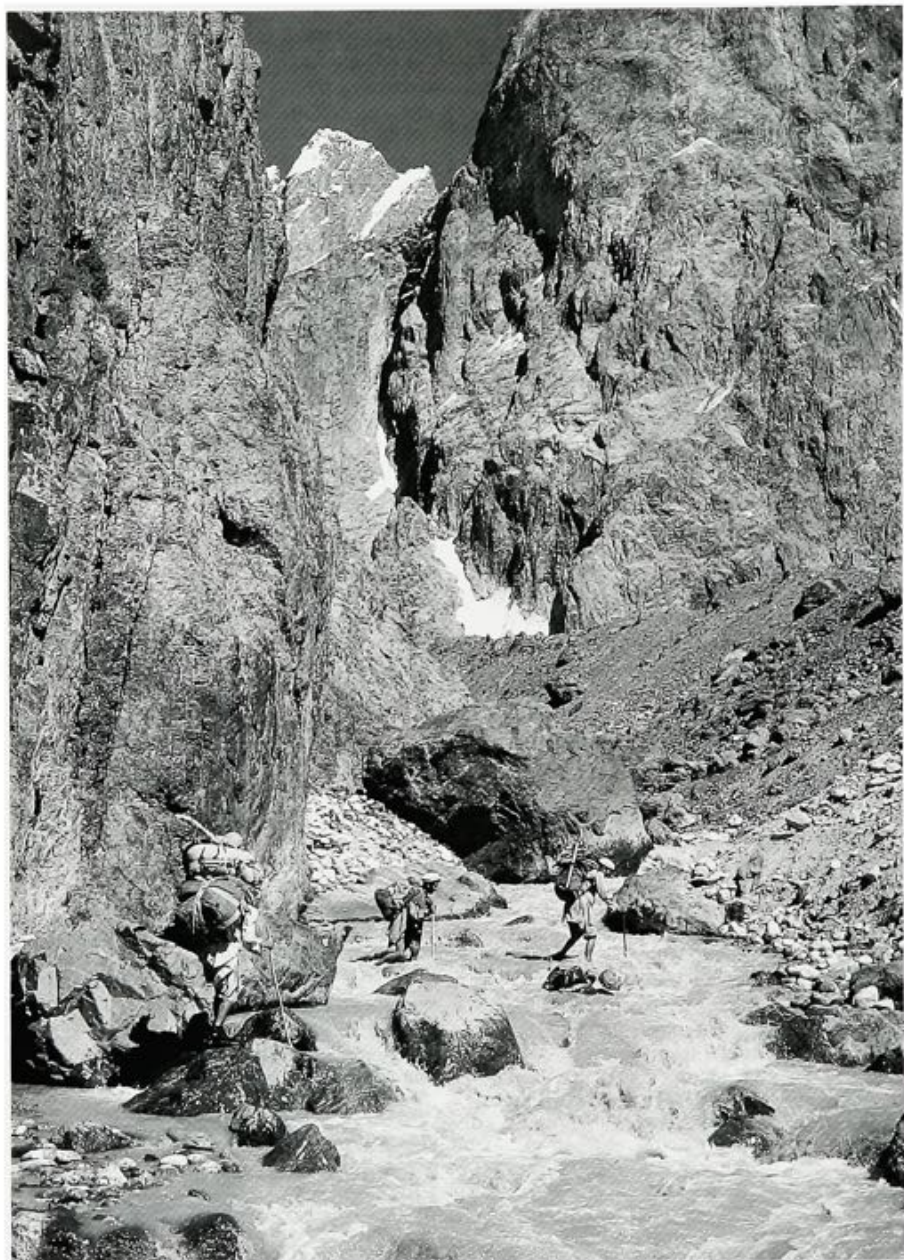
Doug Scott then launches in with 'Fame and Fortune,' which is all about, 'Risk, responsibility, and the guided climber.' In his introduction, he refers to human suffering as shown by Buddhist symbolism in which a pig represents our ignorance, a cockerel our greedy desires, and a snake the anger within us. Greed leads to a search for fame, fortune and power, and

in the drive to ascend the world's high mountains: There are those whose ambitious desires outstrip their own ability so that they have to pay others to help them achieve their goals. Accidents in the mountains then lead to recriminations, blame, and eventually to litigation in search of compensation. Such is mountaineering to day.

The cudgel is then taken up by David Hamilton who decries the razzamataz of 'The Great Himalayan Circus,' when porters, 'drag their employees, like so much baggage, up the mountain. Anyone who ascends a peak in this style does not deserve to be called a climber.' The leading female climber of a South-East Asian nation was manhandled to the summit by two strong porters, one pulled on a short rope from the front while the other pushed from behind. 'Things seem to be going from bad to worse and we are left with the following dismal picture which may stand as a prophetic and doomy epitaph: 'Everest has already been lost. What happens on that mountain can no longer claim to have any connection with the sport of mountaineering.'

But if you read nothing else, you must seek out Joe Simpson's article, 'Dead Man Waving.' It is utterly riveting and if you have any humanity inside you, then you will be upset, but if you don't shed at least one tear then you have a serious problem as a human being. The article chronicles the appalling episodes in which injured, distressed and dying climbers on Everest were ignored by others. When you can zip shut a tent door in sight of a dying man or believe, to quote a Japanese climber, that 8,000m is really 'no place for morality', then perhaps it is time for all climbing on the mountain to cease, or at the very least be confined to the handful of mountaineers capable of climbing it without oxygen.

So many of the articles and quotes of the 1998 A.J. have an underlying theme which seems to be challenging us to seriously reconsider what we really mean by the terms 'mountaineering' and 'rock-climbing'. There is also a challenge that we must consider the impact that we have on the environment and to face up to issues such as: litter, pollution, defacing rock and mountains, our wise use of money and relative values, and especially



*'Relative values': small and self-sufficient in the Hindu Raj Range.*  
Photo: Tim Noble



where we stand in relation to the value of human life. Certainly, the true mountaineer will put the preservation of our environment as a far higher priority nowadays, than the dubious goal of reaching a mountain summit or going from the bottom to the top of a cliff — even if in the process, 'history' is being made.

Geoff Milburn

**Valais Alps West,  
Lindsay Griffin.  
Alpine Club, 1998  
Price £19.50**

This is the first of two volumes covering what the Swiss call the 'Valais Alps', but we used to call the 'Pennine Alps'. I actually prefer the latter title, for tradition, and also because only the north side of the range is in the Canton of Valais; the south side, also described in this book, is definitely in Italy. And the name 'Pennine Alps' is appealingly descriptive for the main alpine spine, the 'Backbone of Europe'.

Covered in this volume are the mountains on the west side of the Zinal valley and everything to their west, plus two major peaks normally approached from Zermat, the Dent d'Herens and Matterhorn. The East volume, yet to be published at the time of writing, will cover the rest of the Zermat mountains and those to the East. This split may seem a little strange, but I can't think of a better one.

Only four of the range's many 4000 metre peaks are included in this volume, but three of these, the Dent Blanche, Dent d'Herens and Matterhorn, are among the most serious mountains in the Alps. Also included are many delightful but lesser-known parts of the range, which will be found relatively uncrowded. Perhaps the most important coverage in the book is of the Arolla region, with its superb variety of routes on lower and medium sized mountains, making it one of the best centres for an introduction to the Alps, as well as having plenty on offer to the more experienced.

I think the purpose of guide books is 10% inspiration and 90% information; this book follows that model admirably. Alpine guide books have a difficult mix of needs to satisfy: large amounts of information

to suit all tastes, routes on all types of material, the full range of difficulty, and of scale from the longest and most challenging routes to shorter lower alternatives for training and indifferent weather. And all in a portable format, so space should not be wasted.

With the number of routes now recorded, a comprehensive guidebook is scarcely practical or economic to produce, so this book is inevitably a selected guide. But it does include a huge selection.

In these days of short attention spans and pandering to mediocrity by dumbing down in the media, it is a pleasure to encounter a book which is unashamedly (and 90%) packed with information (over 400 routes on 170 different mountains). Yet it still manages to find space for 10% inspiration: the photos; and the interesting historical glimpses, which take up little of the valuable space, do not distract, and encourage one to further reading of the mountain history covered elsewhere. Of course no book is perfect, there *are* a few places where space is wasted, and you can be sure that I have pounced on them in the lines which follow!

The first 80-something pages are the usual introductory sections including information on valley bases, huts, walking tours and a short section on valley rock-climbing. This is all very informative, then on page 84 we get the first of our route descriptions. These occupy the bulk of the book, followed by 17 pages of indexes and 97 pages of photo-diagrams, making a grand total of 544 pages. One might think that this amount of extra-mural information, on top of so many routes, would make the book unduly thick; but this is not especially so by the standards of present-day guides, due to the use of sensibly thin paper. There will still be room for some gear in your sack.

There are eight splendid colour plates (I have to be complementary, as one of them features me), plus the front & back covers. These provide good inspiration without adding unduly to weight or cost. The 97 photo-diagrams have the dual role of inspiration and information, which they fulfill well for the most part. A few of these are *not* so good and could be omitted: no. 2 is rather uninspiring and not very informative - it only shows a walk to a hut on a col, and a single route from there up



a ridge; the ample description in the text plus a map would have been more than enough. Nos. 81 and 82 are the same photo (NW face of *Dent Blanche*) with different routes marked — these would have been shown better on a single enlarged version of the relevant part of this photo. But these are small criticisms.

Routes are graded in the traditional French overall system of PD, TD etc. to give a combined indication of difficulty, length, seriousness etc. I think this is the best sort of grade to use for the Alps. Some continental books have dropped this system in favour of a purely technical grade, presumably because of the difficulty in being objective when giving overall grades. They have a point here, but not a very good one. I think a subjective overall grade is better than none at all; and in any case, technical grades are not objective either. The overall grades are supplemented in this book by an interesting downwards extension to W1 and W2, for walking routes which are too easy to warrant even an F grade. Individual rock pitches are of course graded technically in the standard UIAA system of I, II, III etc., but the table showing the equivalent UK grades is unfortunately placed some way after mention of the UIAA grades.

The routes themselves are presented in 15 chapters; each has a little introductory sketch map showing the main mountains and huts, but so little else that they're scarcely worth having. We don't need this dumbed-down sort of treatment. As noted in the introduction (p.26), the book is designed to be used in conjunction with the Swiss & Italian maps, so inclusion of maps in the book is a luxury, not a necessity. If they are to be included at all, I would have preferred them to be a bit more informative, showing hut walks, and the main route approaches.

The amount of detail in the route descriptions varies tremendously, depending on the route's length, complexity and popularity; from several pages (e.g. *Hornli Ridge*) down to brief mentions of a single line or two. They seem to be well-described, but I can't personally vouch for their accuracy. I try to review books conscientiously, but unfortunately I haven't found the time to go out and check all the routes. I have read the descriptions of those routes I have done, and they seem accurate as

far as I can remember, but my memory is notoriously bad. Personal checking of all route descriptions by authors, just about possible for British guide books, is totally impossible in the Alps, so the information is of necessity 'from a variety of sources'. However, the author is well-known for his painstaking attention to detail, so I'm sure errors will be at a minimum.

For anyone with an interest in climbing in the Valais Alps West, I would certainly recommend this guide.

Dave Wilkinson

**Scotland's Mountains Before the Mountaineers, Ian Mitchell.  
Luath Press, 1998 £9.99,**

Time and again when I've set foot on a mountain, I've found myself thinking: who first climbed this hill, who first frequented it, before us lot with our rucksacks and our escapist dreams? And whoever they were; did they bother about getting to the top; was the summit meaningful for them? Now Ian Mitchell has tackled just this subject in a book that is unusual in finding a new approach to those familiar hills. He set out to write 'the prehistory of Scottish mountaineering: explorations, ascents, travels, social relations in the mountains, before mountaineering became an organised sport from the middle of last century. He has done so with the thoroughness and the probing eye for detail of a trained historian who has a passionate and radical concern for our wild land.

The stories he tells are about the lives of shepherds, keepers, watchers, hunters, poachers, drovers, tinkers, surveyors, map-makers, geologists, botanists, miners, wallers, soldiers, fugitives — people who had to be in the hills to do their work. A typical case is Ben Avon in the Cairngorms. Thirty miners worked at 2800 feet on its southern slopes, trenching the gullies to get out the semi-precious gemstone called *cairn gorm*. My mother used to wear it — pellucid and brown as one of the darker malt whiskies — in rings and brooches. The laird of Invercauld made £200 a year in rent from the industry around 1800. Because the records of such early frequentings are scanty and at sev-

eral removes, it's hard to tell exactly how high on the mountain or by which route these first climbers travelled. Mitchell wonders: 'Can we believe that none of these miners and poachers went the few extra feet to the summit of Ben Avon?' There are actually more than a thousand of those extra feet. Would hard-worked miners, or poachers more concerned with deer in the corries than with the scanty game on those wind-scoured, gravelly summit plateaux, really have gone that extra mile?

The mixture of working-class and middle-class professionalism that went into these first climbings is typified in the case of Sgurr nan Gilleann, which Sorley MacLean called:

'the blue-black gape-mouthed sgurr,  
the tree-like slender horned sgurr,  
the forbidding great dangerous sgurr,  
the sgurr of Skye above the rest.'

The first known ascent was by Duncan Macintyre and J.D. Forbes, who reached the summit by what is now called the *Tourist Route*, in 1836. Macintyre was local, a ghillie, and it was he who found the way. He had already tried the mountain several times, according to Forbes, 'both by himself and also with different strangers', i.e. with deer-shooting clients. Forbes was an Edinburgh science professor who designed the first seismometer, made first ascents in the Alps, and produced the first fairly accurate map of the Black Cuillin.

He understood the mountains in his own way, proving that they were glaciated, and Macintyre understood them in his, as a climbing challenge and as a harbour for the biggest wild animal left in Britain. Macintyre's perception of the mountains is not on record. Forbes's of course survived, in his own publications and in a Victorian biography, where he is quoted as pitying anybody to whom the dead silence of sequestered nature does not bring an irresistible sense of awe.

Such are the people who crowd Mitchell's pages. Ministers of the Kirk had a passion for measuring mountains. Artists etched and painted them for successful books — George Fennel Robson's vistas of Beinn a Bhuird and the Lairig are well reproduced in colour here. Soldiers and draughtsmen anticipated the Ordnance Survey in making the first serviceable

maps of the Scottish mainland — commissioned because the Army had struggled with poor maps when it was fighting the Jacobites and devastating the Highlands in 1745-46. In all this Mitchell's writing is as exact and well-sourced as anyone could wish.

However, his book would have been a better read, and more attractive to people not yet familiar with the hundreds of peaks and ranges that he deals with, if he had described the terrain more fully. The fact that An Teallachin Wester Ross was first misnamed Ptallach, then Kalloch, is less interesting without some context evoking the dragon-ridge and terraced spires of Britain's handsomest mountain. Beinn Airidh Charr, piling above the west shore of Loch Maree, does not come alive in the phrase 'the rugged Corbett'. The history of the Cuillin of Rhum and the Paps of Jura is well narrated — how much more would it have meant if those beautiful blue breasts rising serenely above the sea had been described with some richness of language? Maybe a future edition should be enriched with thirty or forty good photographs. At the same time the index should be revised to include some missing topics, e.g. the Clearances (four references), red deer (two), the shieling or transhumance system (seven), plus some missing places, e.g. the Cuillin of Skye, Strath Naver, and Torridon.

The text itself has just one thing I'd call an omission. Discussing the vivid knowledge which poachers had of the Cairngorms, Mitchell quotes 'The Poacher o Braemar', a Scots song which 'shows the decline of Gaelic in Upper Deeside'. To complete the theme he should have cited a finer and earlier poem, 'Allt an Lochan Uaine' by Uilleam Rynuaie. Adam Watson translated part of it in his S.M.C. guide, *The Cairngorms* (1975). Uilleam was a redoubtable deer hunter, who was presented with a rifle by a laird although he poached freely between Glen Derry and Strathspey. 'Allt an Lochan Uaine' was the most popular song in those parts for several generations. Line after line makes us hear and see the mountains:

'The Burn of the Green Tarn  
Sent me to sleep with its sound...  
... the antlered stag  
Is blustering in the glen...  
In my little bothy of the rocks

Although they had no words at all...'

Such a lyric is inspiring evidence for Mitchell's thesis that the mountains were intimately understood by the dwellers there even before the incoming of the more self-conscious connoisseurs.

David Craig

**A Sense of Place: The Best of British Outdoor Writing, Ed. Roly Smith.**

**Michael Joseph, 1998  
£15.99**

If I were you, I would wait for the paperback. Not that there isn't some lovely writing in this collection — chiefly from Jim Perrin ('Befriending the Raven'). He speaks as eloquently and intelligently as ever on a place he adores and has learnt in his heart. He bears the names of the hills of North Wales, their histories, their meanings and their flora and fauna like a personal inscription. The depth of his feeling for his countryside is Wordsworthian, and while it never runs away with, or from him, it guides him. But what makes his piece so particularly engaging is its centre, the raven, which for Perrin unleashes tales within tales and a moral for our times. Through Perrin, we meet both bird and symbol, and all that it has ever meant must indeed be befriended, known and loved.

But otherwise, this is a collection of formulaic rambling memories. What does such an anthology seek to achieve? Perrin's piece is a pleasure to read because the man can write, and that is the best reason to read anything. For the rest: Walt Unsworth's affectionate and comprehensive stroll around Shropshire (nicely framed by a fall into unconsciousness and off a route at Pontesford Rocks), and Stephen Venables's lively recollections of Avon Gorge are delightful to me because I know these places so intimately. But I was less than interested in the mish-mash of potted histories and personal memories of crags, gullies and shores I will probably never visit. The problem is that the writing is simply unable, in most cases, to carry one's interest far enough. The preponderance of leads such as 'I first ventured on to Skye...' or 'I had been living here for five years...' introduce a homogeneity which

flattens the individual writing. Here is yet another fond memory of being a lad on this or that crag — and yes, they are all men in this collection. Best advice: wait for the paperback; sneak a read of the Perrin on a quiet wet day in mooching mode, or just get out there.

Kym Martindale

**Slack. The Fun of Climbing,  
Dennis Gray (Privately published)  
£9.95**

This, a follow-up to *Tight Rope*, is the latest instalment of Dennis's memoirs — a recounting of more of the picaresque episodes which have occurred in his remarkably active life. He has chosen to publish the volume himself, in soft back, and has kept the price down to under £10. The book is well illustrated with black and white photos — there is nothing wrong with that — but many lack contrast and give the book a weary look. But remember that these are snaps, impromptu records of transient situations and not posed scenes recorded with a quarter plate and tripod. Despite his experience as an author, Dennis could have done with some editorial help.

Why no chapter headings in the front of the book, for instance and no index at the end? He surely knows some computer buff that could pull that out for him? Made up as it is of short episodes, the book reads racy. Stories of similar content are organised into chapters. 'Clever Buggers' deals with the early Leeds scene. Other chapters deal with his activities with the B.M.C. at home and abroad: Africa, Thailand, Australia, and the Himalaya. I admire either his incredible memory or his foresight in keeping an exhaustive diary.

Few of us have had or made the opportunity for climbing and travel which Dennis has contrived. Where many of us would have crept into these local and foreign situations with trepidation and kept a little to ourselves to avoid getting involved, Dennis approached them with an open mind, almost eager to become involved in whatever local life and incidents arise. Even in Britain he seems to have frequently got into altercations with the biggest antagonist he has ever seen, and Dennis is built

on slight lines. I have heard people suggesting that there are too many incidents in this book, and its companion volumes for them all to have happened. I am not quite willing to believe them: Dennis is a person to whom things happen. I remember seeing him, in the early days of nuts, fighting his way up *Pinnacle Arête* in weather which was sending every one else back to base. He was trying to recover a piece of gear left, in falling darkness, the day before. He is, after all, a Yorkshireman. I still carry the memory of 'The Baron' and 'The Villain' up for choice of Morty Smith or Dennis as partners on The Capucin. Selection sorted, Dennis followed Don into the unknown, armoured only with a duvet which had lost its feathers and a peg hammer for a walking axe on the glacier.

Collections of incidents like this are a necessity of our climbing history. Already, from Dennis' generation, two master memories — Nat Allen and Don himself — have gone, and with them a fund of stories often told but unrecorded. There must be plenty of their contemporaries left who should be doing what Dennis has done. Most of them will not, of course, have sufficient self-belief or, more probably, a large enough fund of stories to risk publishing a book, but record them they should: there are club journals — our own in particular for that very purpose. If these strictures apply to you, go to it.

If Dennis is eventually consigned to some climbers' Hades together with all the other climbing reprobates, his perpetual location will undoubtedly be a flat, cragless desert. No matter to him; he has such an enthusiasm for anything to do with physical activity that he'll have Old Nick organising a desert marathon before you can say feeding station.

Probably no-one has been better placed to recount stories from our sport over more than half a century than Dennis. I know that years ago he was considered for Principal of White Hall Outdoor Pursuit Centre; in retrospect, he must be grateful he was passed over and so could eventually become General Secretary of the BMC. For it was this post that brought him into contact with so many climbers. As a consequence of these meetings, we have here presented a cornucopia of incident. We should be grateful.

Despite climbing and mountaineering

possessing a body of written work larger than any other sport, excepting, perhaps, cricket, much of our current or recent history is oral: the crack in the pubs, the tales at club dinners. This is the stuff of Dennis's collection.

For you, dear reader, buy a copy of the book; and if you harbour thoughts of writing like this, start keeping a diary — your turn will surely come.

Dave Gregory

**Whale Watching with a Boy and a Goat,  
Terry Gifford  
Redbeck Press, 1998  
£6.95**

This is a collection of poems to take on your next expedition or your next weekend away from whatever you call your home. It charts those experiences which throw into question what 'home' and 'discovery' and 'new world' really mean to us, and also what anchors us to 'home'. For these reasons it is a collection that both challenges and moves the reader.

There are two discrete parts to the collection and each has a distinctive voice and mood. The subjects which each part covers, and their complementary concerns serve to create a tension which holds the entire collection together as a whole.

The first part deals largely with Gifford's experiences of being in America, and his sense of place and of the past means that his responses are beautifully and hauntingly shadowed and shaped by Americans' different histories. Past and present, the public and the personal, and the urban and the rural or the wilderness continually collide, and what lingers is Gifford's understanding of the fragility of his surroundings and his own place in them.

The second part of the collection confirms that fragility in environmental terms, offering most vividly and with some poignancy, a picture of the 'old world' that is damaged and decayed. Yet, somehow, this world endures, for Gifford is no alarmist, and sees too, in 'Hunting the Dolmen of Haute Languedoc' the natural impermanence of the environment as a comfort, this being 'our certainty'.

If one poem could sum up this collection it would be the final one, written for Paul Nunn. In the evident loss which the



poet feels for a friend, is the acceptance and celebration of what made Nunn the climber, man and friend that he was, and perhaps too, what makes climbing the sad yet alluring business it is.

Kym Martindale

**Illusion and Reality,  
David Edward Hope.  
Prior Park College, Bath, 1998**

The author of this collection of poems and prose pieces is, I would say, a Romantic at heart, and I will admit that I find his particular brand of Romanticism difficult. Not difficult to understand — that indeed is part of the problem, for there is little to tease or jolt the reader here, this being a voice that soothes and reaffirms; it is rather that I find Hope's work is difficult to swallow. It is strangely familiar, and I was several poems into the collection before I recognised the echo of the young Wilfred Owen — that is, the young poet paddling in verse and adjectives, awash with Keats and the romance of being a poet. Hope's too, is a voice that is in love with poetry for its own sake, a voice which has yet to learn discipline in the precision of language. T.E.Hulme, who had no time for the Romantics (although that was his loss) expressed this precision as follows: 'The artist I take to be that man who simply can't bear the idea of 'approximately'. He will get the exact curve of what he sees whether it be an object or an idea in the mind... To prevent (himself) falling into the conventional curves of ingrained technique, to hold on through infinite detail and trouble to the exact curve (he) want(s).'

Hope's subject is love and loss and the infinite — he writes of souls and landscapes and visions. He is, as Hulme might say, forever dragging in the infinite. The problem is that better poets have done this already in a language whose leavings Hope seems happy to use. In other words, both his aesthetic and his poetry are rather second-hand.

It may be that his use of such archaisms as 'oft' and 'o'er' are part of a bold attempt to resurrect the spirit of the sublime and the imagination, but in this day and age they sound merely like poesy. It is not that there is no promise of an interesting voice developing here

one day. There is clearly strong feeling, and occasionally Hope can rock your senses, as the poem 'Touching' demonstrates. There are also flares of originality: 'last year I fell off the end of the world' is as gripping and powerful a first line as any I have read, but it is lost in the banalities of 'your urgent touch' and 'a million blessings/rain down on my being'. What is lacking is real imagination, the imagination that gets tough with language and which refuses to be content with cliché. Speaking as a Romantic, Hope's work disappoints me ultimately because there is little sense of him having striven for his lines in his mind and heart! If this is a tough review, it is because I feel Hope betrays his own talent.

Kym Martindale

**Lliwedd, Edited by Kelvin Neal  
Climbers' Club, 1998  
£7.95**

My initial impression was that this was not a Climbers Club guide at all! In fact I rang the editor to check that I had actually been sent an 'on-sale copy' and not some sort of special review version. This slim but glossy little hardback, with an artistically appropriate black and white dust jacket will look fine on anyone's bookshelf, but it will not survive one drizzly, windy day on Lliwedd's 1,000ft crags and as such represents a significant departure from the Club's normal workhorse approach to guidebooks. Why? Well, the low price is a clue and on reading the text and absorbing a few facts and figures about climbing on Lliwedd, the need for this to be a cost-efficient volume is apparent.

Out of a recorded climbing history of over 110 years, 98% of all the routes were done in four distinct periods of development totalling just 16 years prior to each guide being published. Forty routes, a third of the crag's total, were established between 1990 and 1996; all were climbed by Kelvin Neal and friends and by the guide-writer's own admission, almost all are unrepeatable. This major crag is seriously unpopular!

Within its brief, this guidebook works: it is simple, efficient, definitive and presumably will also be cost effective. Its old

fashionedness suits its subject admirably. The guide writer has accomplished what must have been a daunting and demanding task (for which he was virtually the only person qualified) admirably.

In almost 40 years of climbing on virtually every crag in N Wales I have been to Lliwedd once only, over 25 years ago. We did *Avalanche* in the rain, in boots and sacs and it was exciting and rewarding enough for anyone. We followed the continuation up to the ridge and finished a great day out by returning to the car via Crib Goch. We resolved to go back and get to know Lliwedd a little better as soon as possible. Why did we never return?

Well, certainly, this new guide does its job on me: I'm looking forward to returning to Lliwedd sooner rather than later — and maybe this time, I'll look for something a little harder and more modern than *Avalanche*. Who knows, on this vast, historic, under-explored crag, there may, even now, be some new hidden gems just waiting to be discovered.

Al Evans

**Pembroke Supplement**  
**Compiled by Dave Viggers, Edited by**  
**Ian Smith**  
**Climbers' Club 1998**  
**£2.50**

For those of us who climb at a modest grade, who have forked out for the 'new' Pembroke guidebook, have young families, big mortgages, increasingly onerous and time-consuming jobs, little family holiday time for personal indulgence on rock (wherever the family holiday happens to be) and generally circumscribed travelling around the country at weekends, because the car is in constant use as a children's ferry etc., a guide supplement which announces that it is primarily 'intended to aid future guidebook teams in the...task of guidebook production' is not going to be an automatic buy.

And yet, and yet...I for one can't resist an update — even though 90% of the routes are just eye-catchers for me when I sit down after a classic and study a cliff. (I tend to do a lot of this in Pembroke, because climbs are steep and short and my partners want to do a lot of routes, one after the other.)

However, it galls me that good middle-grade routes which I Should Have Found keep cropping up. Sorry about that, but I can climb slabs very well, and I reckon there are at least 20 slabby routes I could and should have climbed first, in this guide — if only I'd got there before the supplement came out, that is.

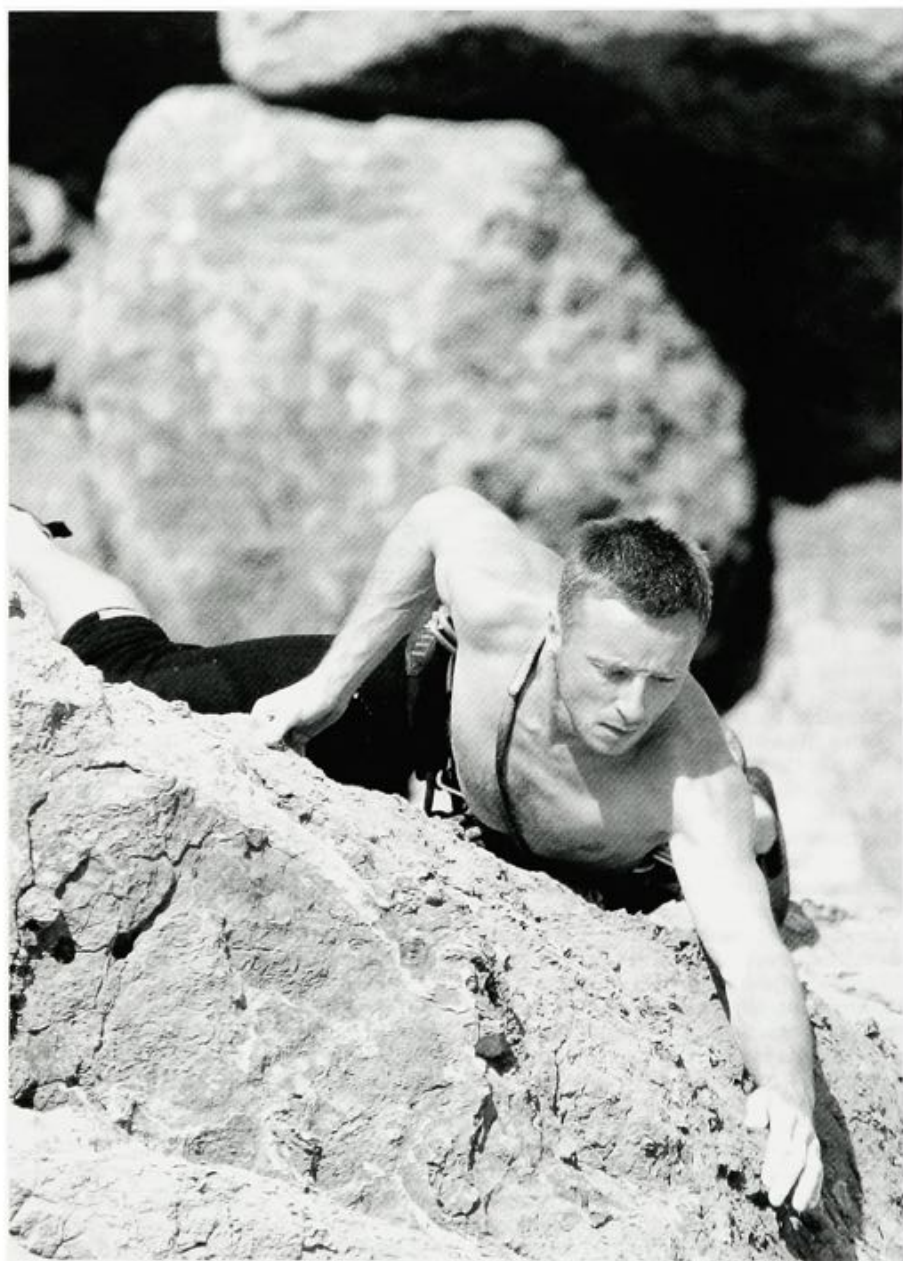
North Pembroke is a lovely, quiet and little-visited area; amongst other discerning regulars like Nat Allen and Chris Jackson, who made it their own, was Charlie Vigano whose untimely death made it impossible, still, to check some of these routes. A good job Viggs has got it all in print, however, because lonely, sad old Severe-leaders like me, still roam around places like The Black Cliff, looking for the gaps Charlie left in the 'definitive guide'.

Another interesting reason for collecting these supplements is to find out just when the opposition was snooping around and discover just what you missed when you were there — and when you weren't. I know I should spend less time climbing when I go to Pembroke and much, much more time prospecting for new VS routes. The trouble is, the few partners I have left just want to climb.

Given the constraints of time and production costs, this is an excellent little job. It needs cross-referencing with the main guide, though, and this presents one or two problems (the reappearance of Pencarnon Slabs, for instance, on pp12/13 and 18/19; and no index). But as Chris Craggs pointed out in his review of the new guide in the 1997 volume of the *Journal*, there are more than enough lines here to fill a lifetime, without seeking new rock.

But I know I'll still be buying the supplements: they're good for my health — competitive health, that is. That back picture, now: *Swordswallower* E1 on Rusty Walls. I could just about have followed that with a tight rope. A Vigs family outing, eh? Well, I still haven't been to Range West yet and there's a new Severe girdle in this guide. Come on chaps, any want a second? I've got the supplement. Mind you, it'll have to be in your car and my gear's getting a bit old and I've not much cash, what with the girls' new shoes last month, and I shall have to be back by Sunday lunchtime...

Tim Noble



*'Not without interest.'* (Pembroke Supplement, p.74): Paul Twomey on the first ascent of Broken Arrow, E4 6a, St Govan's Head. Photo: Simon Cardy

**Kilimanjaro & Mount Kenya**  
**A climbing and trekking guide,**  
**Cameron M. Burns.**  
**Cordee, GB and The**  
**Mountaineers, USA**  
**£11.95**

Mount Kenya ain't what it used to be. And neither is Kilimanjaro. It's not just the retreating glaciers which have changed the whole complexion of the East African mountains since the first modern routes were put up in the 60s, it's also the context. Neither change is for the better.

Today Kili' is an expensive National Park geared to doughty — and not so doughty — tourists hiking to Africa's highest point before the altitude gets them. The employment of local guides and porters is now obligatory, though I've yet to hear how these fellows perform on, say, the intimidating *Messner/Renzler* route with its 90 metre free-hanging icicle. In the 70s, Tanzania used to be a pretty crummy place, a failed socialist paradise where beer and bananas seemed to be the only rations obtainable locally and where I was once arrested for photographing 'government servants'. These proved to be cattle, because agriculture was nationalised. In those great days there were major new lines still to do on the mountain and, given appropriate tact and back-handers, there were few bureaucratic obstacles to climbing them.

Conversely, Mount Kenya was even then a well-organised and properly-run National Park and little has changed thanks to the enlightened management of the warden, Bongo Woodley, himself a climber. People-pressure has increased however, from both tourists and from real climbers. And of course the mountain is worked out. Virtually no scope remains for meaningful new routes, certainly not for visiting climbers — the resident ex-pats of the MCK have been seeing to that for the last twenty years. It is the context of the mountain that is so different today: crime, security and the erosion of public services in Kenya are currently such that travel and mountaineering are no longer the carefree pleasures they once were in the 60s and 70s.

But these two magnificent and unique mountains still soar up into the wide African skies and the climbs on them are still

superb.

Thus it is no surprise that for 40 years, the Mountain Club of Kenya has published a succession of excellent and authoritative climbing guides. Written by climbers for climbers, a new and up-to-date edition has appeared every decade. Which makes me wonder at the purpose of the book under review (which of necessity, duplicates much of the MCK guide, includes many of the more popular routes but misses several important features). For instance, I could find no mention, either in the text or on the topo', of *Shipton's Crack* — the key chimney on Nelion's *voie normale*, nor could I find reference to *Shipton's Cave*, that strategic bivi in the Mackinder Valley.

Indeed, the regular pocket-size MCK volume is such essential equipment for any visiting climber or trekker that Cameron Burns' book of rather larger format is all but redundant climbing-wise.

But I'm being unfair, for there is much other material of value in this book, aimed as it must be at the typically rather naïve North American visitor on her or his first trip to the Third World. If you've not already done your research you'll find the background historical chapters interesting — although I did balk at the accusation that the European Colonial Powers exploited East Africa for slaves. That, surely, was the Arabs, centuries earlier. We British outlawed the slave trade in 1807, since when, the Royal Navy patrolled the East African coast to enforce that prohibition. Political (in)correctness is no substitute for facts. But the Glossary of Local Languages — English, Swahili, Meru and Kikuyu — is useful, as are the appendices of contact addresses, phone numbers, local outfitters and so forth. Then there are no less than seventeen pages of genuinely practical tips on such things as Airport Tax and Alcohol, Toilets and Tipping, Pickpockets and Park Fees. Among other valuable information there are sections on Health, on Acclimatisation, What to Eat in Nairobi and How to Avoid Getting Ripped-Off. That this is essential contemporary material says something of the times in which we live. Any aspirant East African climber will find this part of the book worthy of study. No, things ain't what they used to be.

John Cleare



**Walks and Climbs in Romsdal,  
Tony Howard, Nomads, 1998  
£14.99**

This republished version of the original 1970/1979 guide book to the Norwegian valley of Romsdal is a difficult one to review. The original little blue book inspired me almost thirty years ago; I dreamt of climbing the jagged ridges of Vengatind, topping out by the giant cairns on the Romsdalshorn, tiptoeing along Bispen's airy crest and maybe even having a sniff at the fabled 'mile high' Troll Wall. I eventually made it there in 1988 (some dreams take a lot of chasing), and was back in 1989 and again, for a prolonged stay in 1996. Have no doubt, this is one amazing place, despite changing tastes and despite the weather and the cost (75 pence for a tomato, £5 for a beer!) this is one destination that really should be on the itinerary of any serious climber, up there with Yosemite, the Dolomites and the Verdon Gorge. The area has everything: semi-alpine peaks, huge rock routes, sport climbing, bouldering (if you really must), hut to hut trips, world class fishing, scenery to kill for and despite all this, the place is still incredibly quiet.

O.K. enough of the travelogue, how is the guide? Well, there is no easy way of saying this, but being very heavily based on the original guide, it is quite simply 30 years out of date. The photos are generally from an earlier era, the diagrams are mostly the originals, as are the descriptions and grades. Unfortunately, the world has moved on, big mixed/aid routes are not where it is at any more, and as if to add insult to injury a large part of the most famous route in the book, the *Rimmond Route* on the Troll Wall, has recently fallen down. (In reality it has been falling down for years, it is just that recently it got its act together and went on holiday in a more spectacular style.)

To be more positive, and as is the case in any mountain area, the core of the guide is still reasonably accurate, despite shrinking glaciers and snow fields, the maps, photos and diagrams are still almost as much use as they ever were. Also there is some (just a little) updated information, like the abseil route down the classic *North Ridge of the Romsdalshorn*, a brief mention of the hard free routes on the short and

steep Mjelva cliff (two out of the thirty) and a hopeless one-line description of the ten pitch *Jugoslavruta* on the huge walls of Hornaksla. Sensibly the guide refers frequently to the locally produced 'Klatring (clattering?) i Romsdal', which is a bit of a low-tech product, but at least it is pretty much up to date, being published in 1995. It covers a selection of the longer classics described in Tony Howard's guide, but also includes substantial information on recent rock climbing developments both of the sport and traditional variety.

I don't want to damn this guide, as the author rightly points out, there is not and nor has there been for a long time, anything else in English about the place, and that reason alone justifies its republication. Perhaps the answer is simple: for all its flaws, it is worth buying the old/new (or is it new/old) Romsdal guide; get a copy, get inspired, book a passage and when you get there buy the local guide to help you fill in some of the missing details. Everybody will be happy and if my experiences are anything to go by you should have a great time.

Chris Craggs

**Hamish's Mountain Walk & Climbing  
The Corbetts, Hamish Brown.  
Baton Wicks, 1997  
£16.99**

This is a combined edition of the author's books. The first, dealing with a continuous traverse of the Munro's, the second with the ascent of the Corbetts.

These books originally appeared in 1978 and 1988 respectively and though they are obvious 'bed fellows' there are differences to the way they work and read. The former is a description of a continuous uninterrupted journey, whilst the latter comprises of memories from many individual days on the hills, spread over many years.

I found the first book, dealing with the first ever entirely manpowered (excepting ferries) Munro's Traverse, compelling reading. The author has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the hills and we are given glimpses of many magical mountain moments. The scenery, light and weather changes, the sighting of plants, flowers, animals and birds all fea-



*Sheri Davy on the South Ridge of Bispen, Romsdal. Photo: Chris Craggs*

ture throughout the narrative. Its not all upbeat though: importantly, the emotional 'Lows' of the journey (mainly poor weather or midge-induced) are related just as well. Further, some excellent historical snippets are included, evoking vivid images of those early pioneering Munroists. Clear simple sketch maps are included to illustrate the route taken. Though the walk was record-setting at the time — and was undoubtedly an incredible achievement — Hamish never seems to be racing on in a great hurry and his writing has an enjoyable easy flow to it.

The second book is written in similar style. However, I feel it's not a narrative like 'Mountain Walk', rather it's a book to be 'dipped into'. Though by no means a guidebook to the ascent of each Corbett it serves to widen the view, putting meat on the bones (of a map and guide). Alternative routes, traverses and combined Munro and Corbett days are suggested. Certainly a valuable alternative of information and an ideas source to be consulted before venturing onto the hills. I expect my copy will become well thumbed over the years as I seek out the next few 'ticks' (this reviewer is an unashamedly incurable tinker).

In summary I feel anyone who spends time walking in the high mountains of Scotland will greatly enjoy this excellent omnibus.

*Craig Harwood*

**A Dales Walk, Bob Allen. Michael Joseph, 1997 £16.99**

**50 Best Scrambles in the Lake District, Bill O'Connor David & Charles, 1995 (Paperback 1997) £9.99**

**50 Classic Routes on Scottish Mountains, Ralph Storer David & Charles 1998 £14.99**

If the distribution of books for review by the Editor could be likened to dealing cards for a game working from south to north, firstly we have Bob Allen's A4 size description of 'a long distance walk through England's most beautiful scenery'. A proud Yorkshire boast that some

of us may wish to support. The book describes a 70 mile, six day walk through the Dales, tracing a circular route from Leyburn to Richmond. Stage lengths vary from 8 to 15.5 miles with all sorts of options given to suit weather, party-fitness and competence.

An awesome amount of supporting information is given regarding accommodation and transport to ensure that this single book should obviate the need for any other reference material. We also get a set of route sketch maps with concise written notes, which are neatly segregated at the end of the book.

The walk is used to give direction to the main text of the book which takes every opportunity to provide an illustrated history of the places and buildings visited. Much of this I found fascinating; in particular the story of Lady Anne Clifford who gives her name to a stretch of the walk. The supporting photographs are excellent as you would expect from Bob, taking up nearly half of the book.

So, if you're looking for interesting background information on the heart of the Dales, lots of good photographs of this scenic area or a walk that could be ideal for CC members with young families, this could well be the book for you.

Scrambling can be defined as filling a mountaineering continuum between walking and technical rock-climbing, argues Bill O'Connor in the introduction to his *50 Best Scrambles in the Lake District*. Where the boundaries lie doesn't really matter, and is probably incapable of definition on less than ten pints of Newcastle Brown.

The point is that scrambling can provide really satisfying days out in the hills, 'engaging brain and brawn' in a struggle with nature. A good scramble has often been my own reaction to dripping wet main crags, with suitable adjustment of technical expectations. Scrambling puts us back in touch with the roots of our sport and I personally believe that a hidden gully or unfrequented ridge often makes a preferable approach to the trade route to many a hill summit.

In this book we get 50 scrambles, graded as to difficulty, quality and navigational skills required. The routes are spread around The Lake District, visiting all the important areas. Each route has

the scramble in its surroundings including the approach and descent. These drawings would also be of use if the scramble was the start of a much longer hill day.

From the cover picture of Striding Edge, the colour photographs maintain a high and inviting standard throughout the book, showing area landscape views and also specific shots of each expedition. In fact, it may be too high a standard for realism, as I can find limited illustration of the muck and grot that inevitably forms an inherent part of most scrambles. The picture of the approach to Mill Ghyll on page 71 is an honourable exception to this.

As pressure of numbers grows on the District, scrambles can be a useful part of one's strategy to avoid the crowds. This book can give inspiration for planning some great days on the hills and reliving them afterwards.

Following a book on civilised walking and a book on uncivilised scrambling, we now come to a book that sets out to cover both. Ralph Storer's 50 classic routes north of the Border are however much closer in spirit to the Lakeland scrambles than the Dales walk. Once again, we have a grading system for the routes, which now covers difficulty, terrain, navigation and seriousness. (I can't help wondering to what extent these systems are based on the British winter expedition grades published in *Mountain 106* in 1985.) This was devised following a discussion with Ken Wilson as to the key requirements/parameters for success and survival on these routes — considered to be technical difficulty, fitness of party and commitment/remoteness).

*50 Classic Routes* is the fourth of a series which includes the previously published *50 Best Routes* and *50 More Routes in Scotland* and *50 Best Routes on Skye* and *Rassay*. Fortunately, Scotland is big enough and interesting enough to yield another 50 worthy routes, as gathered here. The introduction explains that the criteria for selection include the ascent of a mountain over 2,000ft without recourse to rock-climbing, but scrambling is allowed. There is also the usual health warning about Scottish winter conditions.

The introduction to each walk contains the expected details of grading, distance, assessment and seasonal notes. Additionally, there is an idiosyncratic local note eg

Ben Vorlich 'Fissure' note: on the western slopes of Ben Vorlich, high above Loch Sloy dam, are some curious clefts known as the Vorlich fissures'.

I wish I'd known about these late one evening in January 1979 when I fell clean through the snow cover near the summit of this hill, up to my shoulders in a fissure filled with icy running water. The subsequent freezing moonlit descent to Ardul with ice all through my clothes is not easily forgotten.

The range of routes spans Beinn Resipol with all flags at grade 1 to e.g. Beinn Mheadhoin which scores high marks for navigation and seriousness. Some walks appear to be curtailed to meet an artificial formula. For example, Route 38 advocates an 'up and back' route on Beinn an Eoin when surely the classic way is to return over Baosbeinn. Even more surprisingly to myself, Route 40 'The Glensguab Circuit' visits Conna Mheall but then avoids the obvious ascent of Beinn Dearg, the main and highest peak of the area, from the col between them.

On a more positive note, Route 18 'The Treig Traverse' is highly recommended, with the addition of Beinn Na Lap. This unique experience starts from the isolated Corrou station and should be done solo on a clear day in the depths of winter. There is a total feeling of commitment as the train pulls away from the station and you set off for Fersit with few options in the available daylight. The accompanying picture on page 45 shows the appropriate conditions.

There are many little gems hidden in this book and some excellent colour photographs, showing the Scottish hills in their varied seasonal moods. Ralph Storer acknowledges the forbearance shown by his companions whilst he paused or diverted to get a good camera shot. This care and attention is evident in the quality of the pictures which illustrate what is overall a fine book within its self-imposed limitations, off to one side from the mainstream Munro/Corbett books, but none the worse for that.

David Matthews



**Climbers' Club Guides**  
**A Manual for Authors, John Willson**  
**The Climbers' Club, 1998**  
**£2.00**

Let's be charitable and suppose that for every 100 thoughts a climber has about a guidebook, one in 25 may be about its writer — and these probably to revile him for inaccuracy or omission ("It said, 'Move left to a crack', but I couldn't find anything to get even a fingernail in!"). But it is possible that only one thought in a 100 is expended on the language of the guidebook itself — its quality, richness, accuracy and spirit. And yet, in the pub, we are all putative guide-writers and editors, discussing words, their deployment and meaning. Consider, for instance, the humble adverb in 'Move left *boldly*'. How that word will be demeaned by leaders (after the move), keen to show their fearlessness by substituting the words '*with ease*'.

We can all rewrite descriptions with impunity, but it takes real skill to compose route descriptions which are dispassionate, informative and entertaining and to keep it up for 20,000 words. That skill has always been at the heart of traditional guidebooks which, in Harold Drasdo's words, 'have been the repository of the spirit of British rock-climbing...the sacred books unifying us, storing and handing down our history and culture.'

John Willson, one of the most experienced of CC (and thus British) guidebook writers and editors knows this, and also knows that with many writers contributing to the production of a modern guidebook, problems with grammar, syntax and punctuation can render 'a script a veritable minefield'. He has written this invaluable manual to help authors avoid those problems, but also to 'describe the complete series of processes' in the production of a CC guidebook. This is far too small a circle: it should be required reading for *anyone* seeking to write or edit *anything* in climbing writing. It is one of my essential reference texts.

There are four sections, three of which — 'The Author's Work', 'Written English', and 'Word Processing' — are generalisable well outside the designated audience and indeed deserve more detailed

consideration in a wider context (CCJ Editor note). But as well as being an excellent practical guide to writing guides, it is also a good read. Willson's passionate concern for, and deep knowledge of his subject and his mastery of style, produce some classic judgements: 'Forget any primary-school hang ups you may have about the use of the second-person pronouns'; 'grammatical rectitude is never enough if your intentions are not clearly communicated'; 'in creative prose, liberal use of brackets creates an ugly effect'. (N.B. act on this, ed.)

The section on present participles is a good pub quiz: 'How many times have you read( or even written): *Climb the groove trending right at the top?*' What does this mean: (a) the top section of the groove trends right; (b) the climber is to trend right within the groove near its top; (c) he is to trend right out of the groove (but before) its top; (d) he is to trend right on reaching the top? The grammatical answer is (a); but do you know why? If you don't, then buy this manual from John now, and start thinking about becoming a real guide book author.

Tim Noble

**12th International Festival of  
 Mountaineering Literature  
 Bretton Hall**

A cold grey day meant that the crags were never seriously in competition with this event, though Terry Gifford has confessed to praying annually for bad weather.

Peter Steele opened with the story of the writing of his book on Eric Shipton, which seemed to have been fated from the variety of unexpected coincidences and chance encounters which turned out to supply material for the biography. Some interesting asides on research techniques included the 'one and a half hour rule' which maintained that people had told him everything he could use in the first one and a half hours of any interview. The personal details which he had unearthed following a trail of ice-axes and ex's revealed other aspects of this ascetic mountaineer.

Dennis Gray followed with a series of linked readings from his newbook, *Slack*. This, a sequel to his first book of stories

based on a lifetime's involvement with climbing. *Tight Rope*. Sharply-observed comicwriting delineated characters like Don Whillans in anecdotes which tap the mythic dimension of story and are capable of uniting the climbing community as easily as the Berbers Gray describes in his introduction.

Next, Gordon Stainforth provided a slide presentation of his new book, *The Peak*, which he described as 'a bitperimental'. He tried to unite Bach, Defoe and Johnny Dawes in a visionary community based on the Peak District. Stunning visuals were accompanied by a bold commentary, but there was a moment when Stainforth himself paused to confess to a feeling that his words may have been a little over the top.

Lunch was its usual good value, not only for the food but also for the opportunities to talk books with people and browse the selection displayed by Jarvis Books.

Elaine Brook took the potentially disastrous after-lunch slot with readings and commentary on her new book *In Search of Shambhala*, but succeeded in challenging the audience with her story of a journey to an inner reality. Her search for the sacred, hidden kingdom of Shambhala had begun in climbing but had led to the conviction that enlightenment lay within, and with that discovery the need to climb had left her. A swansong to climbing indeed.

Elaine then joined a panel including Gill Kent and Pam Caswell, who introduced a forum on women's writing with a review of Jill Lawrence's address to the festival 10 years ago and some comments on the contemporary scene. A lively discussion followed, though the oft-repeated pious hope that good writing would always be recognised seemed a little naive in the face of the treatment women like Alison Hargreaves received from the press for 'indulging' in climbing. The female stereotype is alive and kicking in the columns of women journalists like Nigella Lawson. Other women might well feel justified in keeping their heads down, but clearly a more sympathetic climate was developing with the advent of women like Gill Kent taking some control of media outlets.

Indicative of that improving climate

was the OTE/Festival Women's PhotoCompetition, won jointly by Liz English and Virginia Cooper with visionary climber pictures. Later the High/Festival writing Competition was won by Sally Zigmund with Kay Dowling taking 2nd and 3rd prizes with two other pieces, evidence indeed of quality women's writing. Ian Smith in drag presented a wonderful in-character reading of An E-mail from Base Camp, though only a woman could have demonstrated the eye for detail in this acerbic self-revelation of an 'Essex Girl' meets Mountain situation. Interestingly, all communications regarding adjudication were conducted by e-mail, including Chris Bonnington's judgement by satellite from Sepu Kangri base camp!

Dawson Stelfox repeated his Boardman-Tasker adjudication speech delivered at the award ceremony at the Alpine Club, with plaudits for many and a well-deserved winner in Peter Steele for Eric Shipton.

Between that adjudication and the later one for the High competition, Ian Mitchell showed some slides alongside readings from his new book, *Scotland's Mountains before the Mountaineers*. This included a description of a probable first ascent of a Munro at the Battle of Glenshiel, when several hundred Jacobites fled over it pursued by several hundred more Hanoverian soldiers. Amongst those other people who had climbed mountains before mountaineering was the Gaelic visionary poet Duncan Macintyre who 250 years ago was still part of a thriving oral culture which reached back to prehistory. His work was given some attention with songs from Jack Law.

The afternoon was rounded off with a convivial opening of Peter Osborne's exhibition, entitled *Held Heights*, of mountain paintings, some of which included the text of poems.

After tea, Doug Robinson was warmly introduced by Mikel Vause and proceeded to deliver a superbly atmospheric reading from his book, *A Night on the Ground, A Day in the Open*, to the accompaniment of slides of the Sierra Nevada. He has climbed as far afield as the Himalaya, but has found his spiritual home in the wildernesses of the High Sierra.

Robinson suggests that the climber not only develops an artist's vision to see the line of a route and create a climb by making that route 'go', but also experiences 'eternal moments' of vision, or heightened awareness of the spirituality of the world about him because of the specific conditions which come about through climbing. He is at present working on a book about this with an unusual scientific dedication to unravelling the biochemical strands of these experiences. In the process he has thought long and deep about the relationship with wilderness, concluding that we need to be able to turn to the wilderness experience to satisfy a need within us and balance the artificiality of much of our so-called civilisation with another reality.

The festival has grown into an unmissable annual event for anyone interested in mountaineering literature. Authors have been prompted to develop different approaches to the presentation of their work, including songs and music, whilst a strong visual element is shown most obviously in the regular mountain art exhibitions. Critical standards are explored in the judging of competitions and awards whilst forum sessions encourage audience participation, and there is always time for those all-important informal conversations, whether continuing debates or taking issue with authors. Terry Gifford can take full credit for organising such an enjoyable event.

*David Wynne Jones*

**'Mountain',  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery,  
April - June 1999**

Without intending to be so, this was a vigorous reply to 'SublimeInspiration', the Abbot Hall summer show of 1997 which neglected contemporary mountain painters. Lacking the pulling power to gain the loan of the great Turners, perhaps, Wolverhampton Art Gallery surprised us with the vibrancy and variety of artworks taking mountains as their subject in the twentieth century. There were no Sunday painters here, but artists in the maturity of use of their media pushing a bold,

individual vision from the South African Georgie Papageorge's collaged canvas 'Maasai Steppe Ascending' (1997) in which the red cloth of a banner challenges a reading of the texture of landscape behind it, to Patricia Macdonald's aerial photograph 'The Great Glen' (1999) which demands a fresh comprehension of a mountain's pelt, to the turbulent, unexpectedly wild brushstrokes and colours of Peter Prendergast's 'Nant Ffrancon Valley, Summer Evening' (1992).

Two contrasting examples of a vision finding its form here originated in Japan and in Sutherland. Masakatsu Kondo achieves a sense of the whole mountain by fading out stark contrasts in what might be a photograph of a real rock and snow mountain, so that the vaguely named 'Mountain H' (1998) has a holistic spiritual force in its tones of bluish grey. I'm not sure I like this approach to a mountain. If I say I'm not sure it's healthy, this begs the question of whether a climber's aesthetics need necessarily to be of a certain cast. I certainly prefer the bracing, rough brush sweeps of oils on hardboard in James Morrison's striking vision of 'Suilven, Grey Day' (1991).

When these irresistible cries of weather and moor have pulled you closer, you hear the deeper, subtler fugues of loch and rock bowl and ptarmigan and gravity that makes your skin tingle and your eyes water. No need to say you're in the presence of a masterpiece that will alter how you see Sutherland next time. Several images placed mountains in a context of human culture, foregrounding silos, say, or framing poppies on little crosses in a crevice of a rocky summit in the Falklands as does Gary Williams' photo 'Mount Longdon Remembrance' (1997). And the contemporary work was contextualised by Millais's small 1854 sketch of Ben Nevis, together with work by Whymper and Ruskin on loan from the Alpine Club. It was good to see that these works are getting out more. But the more dramatic challenges from the past came from Peter Graham's 'A Spate in the Highlands' (Graham: 1836-1921), a Victorian drama of brown water, low-slung cloud and a broken bridge, on loan from Manchester City Art Gallery and worth seeking out, together with B. W. Leader's loving detail in every leaf and

tone of turf. Clever hanging provided a series of contrasts and questions as one turned right through a door to find Leader's 'A Quiet Valley Among Hills', bright with the Blakean joy of cleans'd perception, followed by Harold Speed's 'Llyn Gwynant After Rain' (Speed: 1880-1957) holding quietness of a reductive kind in simplified forms and fading light, which was followed again by Philip Brahm's bold attempt to convey vast Highland tracts in 'Virgin Flow' (1998) by fading the far focus to make us concentrate on a foreground lit flow of bright blue into bright green, loch into meadow, land into water. And so to the two stars of the show. Judging by the entries in the visitors' book, David Leverett's huge canvas 'Shadow Across The Land' (1988-91) has captured the local imagination, filling the wall at the end of one room with changing weather across the light greens and yellows of fields below a stark sloping shadow. It's certainly a tour de force of visual, if not aesthetic, impact. But when one begins to ask questions more closely, a degree of technical slight-of-hand seems to exceed its claim to be making statements. Where does this strangely angled shadow come from? How do the fields actually relate to the mountain? What is the mountain's form? In fact, Leverett's small and apparently simple Chinese ink on paper piece elsewhere in the show probably says more, with more subtlety, as the raised swirls in the paper come through white like a snow storm or like fossils in rock.

Filling the wall at the opposite end of the gallery was the work I'd been watching find its form through the winter which, in Ken Wilson's opinion was the star of the show. The final image of 'The Brenva Face' (1999) was a revelation of how paint can mediate what happens to light on the angled facets of snow in a complex face. Similarly the brown brush strokes do not so much represent rock as say something of its intricate texture and mutability. Paint has been allowed to run down the low rock ridge that descends in the foreground so that gravity is seen to be pulling below the bottom frame of the image, tugging at anyone who would enter such a complex arena of forces. Startlingly, a touch of red from an earlier

working comes through to the close viewer of the centre of the face. 'Blood', muttered Wilson, 'as anyone who'd attempt such a face would know.' This little enigma sums up the mystery of the way the whole painting is more than the sum of its parts, as I've attempted to describe them.

Sold! To one Reinhold Messner, as a result of his visit to the Alpine Club Millennium Symposium. 'The Brenva Face' by Julian Cooper, painted for this Wolverhampton show, will now hang in the museum of mountain paintings Messner is currently accumulating. Marguerite Nugent, Senior Curator at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, can be pleased with at least one outcome of this show. She is to be congratulated on showing us what is possible for a modest municipal art gallery and for indicating what we might see again in a later reincarnation.

Terry Gifford

### Errata & Apologies

In the *CC Journal*, 1997 p.48, it was of course Dave Yates who contended that *Spectre* and *Ivy Sepulchre* might have been climbed free. On p.49, a missing line of text read: 'Dinasour and Zukator, Clement's tactics on'. On p.51, it is Jack Street's in volvement 'with Chris Jackson' on *Vulture* which is attracting rave notices. On p.55 the first ascent of *Primus* was done by Joe Brown and Don Roscoe; and on p. 58, Al Coburn seconded on ascents of *The Rift* and *Winking Crack*.

Unfortunately, despite the editor's assurances to the contrary in the 1997 volume, no updated S.W. Area notes appear in this Journal — nor have other notes been forthcoming. With new route information increasingly reported in other places, and CC guidebook up-dates or new editions planned, the policy of printing Area Notes in each Journal is currently being considered by The CC Publications Committee.

Finally, the editor would like to thank all contributors and members who have been waiting patiently for this volume, and to offer his apologies for the protracted delay in its publication.



# AREA NOTES

## North Wales 1998

It wasn't the ideal summer for doing much climbing – plenty of rain interspersed with hot, humid days. However, it's fortunate that not everyone is put off, and the usual dichards will always be out scouting for new routes, ready to pounce when the conditions come right. The patient ones tended not to be the youngsters though, and new routes were found both in popular and neglected areas by the old girls and boys. Howard Jones spent many a damp afternoon checking out the Range in the Gogarth area, climbed on before but relatively unfashionable in modern times. Finding a number of lines he climbed **The Secret of My Excess** XS, 5b in Pooh Bay, then sent Glenda Huxter up a nearby line, the hardest to date, which eventually went at E6 6b— **I am Curious Yellow** follows a steep groove. Much of the climbing here is of the friable variety, but more routes have since been climbed by Huxter and Jones, and George Smith beat the others to a typical George line over a cave on the nearby Fortress, producing **Honed on the Range**, E5.

On Red Wall at South Stack, Howard also found a line starting from as low as you can go: **Bottom of the Pile**, E2 starts at a ledge just above sea level and continues up to belay on the spikes at the foot of *Wendigo*. At North Stack, the Huxter/Jones team went over to the other side of the rock from the usual routes to risk the outwash of the huge Stenna ferry returning from Ireland, to climb **Rickety Fence Route**, XS 6a and **The Jig's Up**, E5. Even Holyhead Mountain doesn't seem to be fully worked out, and Twid Turner climbed **A Seagull Ate My Crisps**, E4/5, a crack in the gully just left of *King Bee Crack*, while Mel Griffiths climbed the arête and slab right of *Sai Dancing*, giving **Trehern Arete**, E6. Still on Anglesey, at the lesser-known Carmel Head where George Smith and Martin Crook ascended a trademark loose route in '92, Glenda Huxter climbed a more solid slab with a peg in it: **Jam Yesterday, Jam Tomorrow but no Jam**

**Today** is E4. Some activity has occurred on the limestone of the Ormes and environs, although information is a little hard to come by sometimes. Kristian Clemmow has climbed the hardest routes, finding a micro-route off the stony beach at Angel Bay in Rhos-on-Sea. **Angel of Destruction** is 30' of nut protected gymnastics, and is E7 6c. More recently, he set about straightening out the start of *Pure Conjecture* in Elephant's Cave on the Great Orme; **Pure Rejector** increases the grade of the original route to 7b+.

In the mountains, J Appleby proved that there are routes of moderate grades still to be picked. He climbed **People's Republic** and **Angels and Infidels**, both VS, on the Skyline Buttress at Gallt yr Ogof in the Carneddau. In the Crafnant Valley, Tim Neill climbed **Tangled**, a direct line through *The Web*, giving committing and reachy climbing (Tim is 6'5") and a grade of E5, 6a. Not much appears to have been done in Llanberis Pass, but Tim found a little climb in Craig Cwm Glas Bach. **Pocket-Lips Now** starts 10ft right of *Beasts of the Field*, and is E3. Nearby, on the Slate, there was a flurry of activity, mainly by Ray Kay and friends. **A small rusty nail on a large mantelpiece** is the unlikely name for what might seem an unlikely route in the Lost World, climbed, sometimes horizontally, in five pitches ranging from 4a to 6a with some aid, by Ray, Trevor Hodgson and Dave Towse. Also in the Lost World, **The Lost Crack**, E5 was climbed by George Smith, and **The Lost Boyz**, E2 by Steve Sinfield. In Mordor, Ray climbed with Martin Crook up **Rosen the Chosen**, a two-pitch HVS, and a four-pitch E3, **Mau Pin Rey**. Another route by Ray and others, **Wild Horses**, was given the indecisive grade of HVS/ E2, the grade possibly depending on the use or avoidance of a rowan tree in a cave en-route. In Australia East, Martin Crook and Ray Kay climbed **Buffer in a Crackhouse** at Martin's favourite grade of XS. Generally described as loose and horrendous, I'm not sure anyone will be rushing out to repeat it.

At Tremadog, Iwan Jones did a couple of new lines on Pant Ifan: **Gwrygydwyr** (best attempted after a few pints — the pronunciation, that is, not the route) climbs a line left of *Terraqua*, and an unnamed route climbs slabs above *Terraqua*



*Glenda Huxter on I am Curious Yellow, E6 6b, The Range, Gogarth.  
Photo: H. Jones*

to the right of *Teatime Arête*. Both are given E1 5c.

At Llechog Facet, Pat Littlejohn did a couple of routes: **Summer Buttress**, E4 gives sustained climbing on the right-hand side of the buttress of South Bluff, and **The Devils** is a three-pitch E5 following grooves left of *Voice in the Wilderness* at Craig y Bera. More modest routes were climbed by J.Appleby and by M Davies at Craig Dinas.

In Nant Gwynant, on Clogwyn Y Bustach, Pat Littlejohn did a gem of a Hard Severe left of *Marble Arch*: **The Precipice Walk** is 240ft. He also put up **Wizard**, E3 which takes the rib and face right of *Forte Strapimbo*. Still in Nant Gwynant, Dyniewyd East, for routes from Severe to E1 were climbed by teams consisting of D. Ferguson, P.Ekins, and C.Slinn.

Finally, on the specialist haunt of the Llyn Peninsula, where loose holds, dodgy runners and poor belays are the norm, Owain Jones and Tim Neill climbed **Hinterland**, E3 on Mur Y Mor, 25ft right of *Chimbulak*. Pat Littlejohn, still keen on the area after his epic 16 pitch route *War and Peace*, returned with **Full Sail** and **Hard Tack**, HVS and E1 respectively, on the Craterer Slab at Craig Dorys. The former route is described as having good rock. In the Vatican Zawn, Adam Wainwright and James Harrison did **Messalina Direct**, E4/5.

Gill Lovick

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Tim,

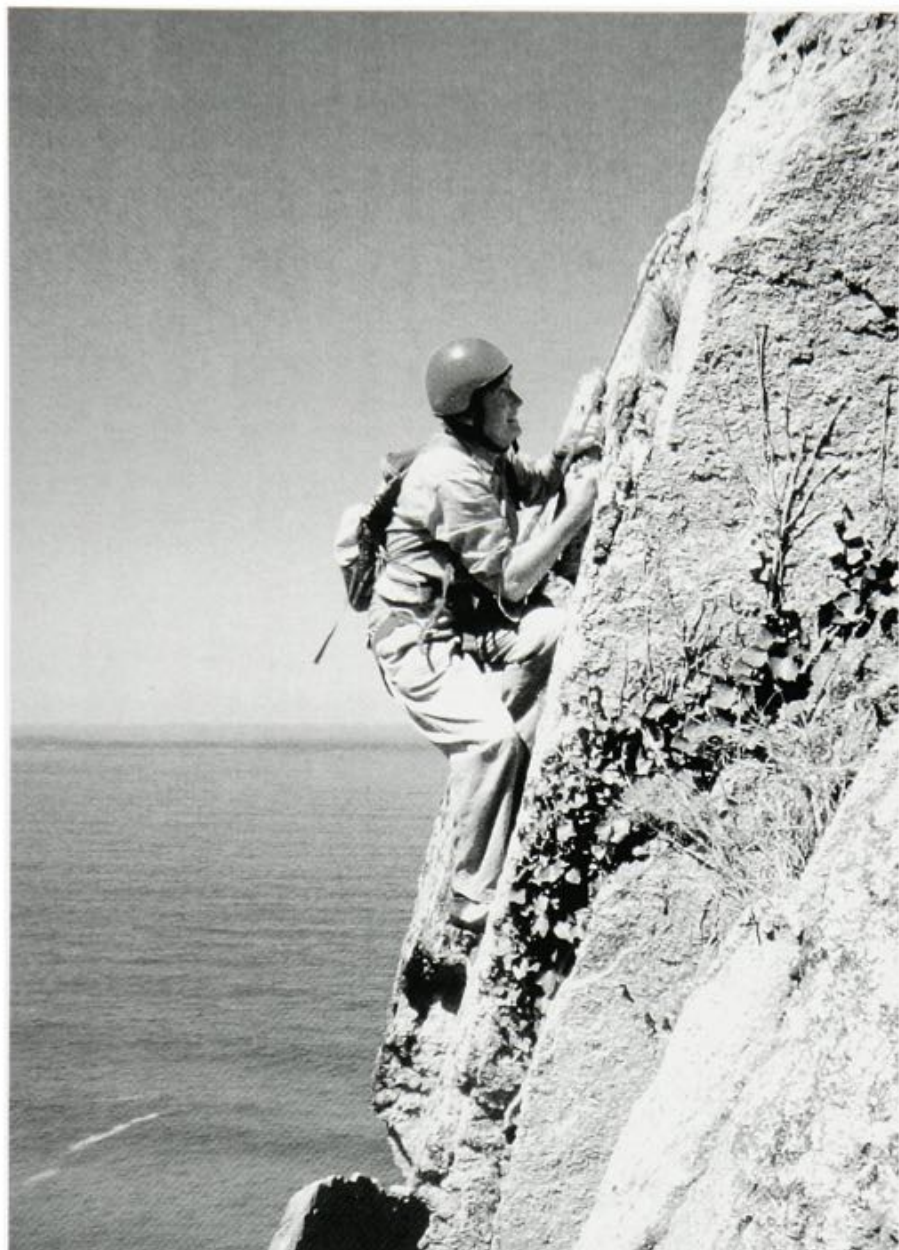
Here's a reply about Andrews:

As the editor says (*CCJ* 1997 p.73), only Peter Biven could definitely say where he got the beautiful phrase, 'Nothing but sea, America and night.' His guide book was finally published in 1968, after years of gestation. (Peter was a perfectionist who laboured over the style as well as the contents and his book is a model guide). At that time we were all up to our eyelashes in D. H. Lawrence and I certainly believed that he was quoting the 'Master'. Since the phrase wasn't in the 'Nightmare' chapter in *Kangaroo*, where Lawrence described his wartime stay in Cornwall, I assumed he had used it in one of his letters. John Andrews's article has convinced me I was wrong.

His great-uncle was obviously far too meticulous and scholarly not to have acknowledged the quotation, if that was what it was, or to have had it embroidered presumably with pride on a family cushion. I also suspect that Lawrence would not have been his style of writer. Andrews was nearly twenty years older than Lawrence and his background was altogether different — middle-class and scholarly. From his point of view, Lawrence would probably have seemed disreputable and subversive, not an author he would have quoted or even read with much interest.

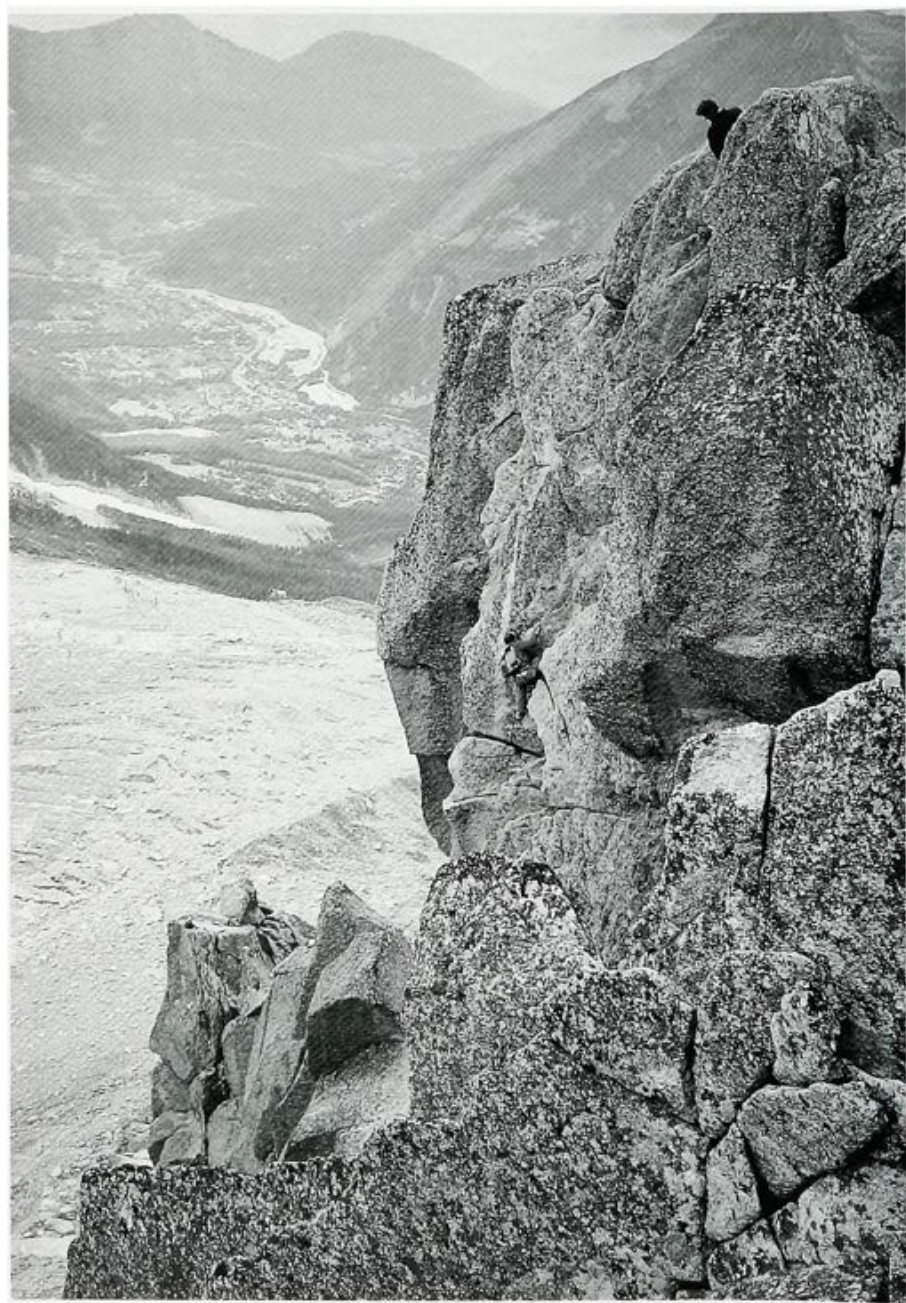
More important, the fragments of verse which his great-nephew prints in his article show that Andrews's poems are soaked in the unique atmosphere of West Cornwall and that he used the haunting place-names with great subtlety to re-create it. Andrews may not have been a great writer but 'Nothing but sea, America and night' is a great line and I no longer have any doubt that it is his.

sincerely,  
Al Avarez  
Flask Walk, London



*Harry Sales — who claims to be the oldest ex-President of the Climbers' Club still climbing — enjoying warm granite at Biven's and Andrews's spiritual home, Bosigran. Beyond him...? Photo: Sales collection*





*The crux pitch, Papillons Ridge, Chamonix Aiguilles. Photo: Tim Noble*



