

The
Climbers' Club
Journal

1999 - 2000

The Climbers' Club Journal

Edited by
Tim Noble

1999 - 2000
The Climbers' Club

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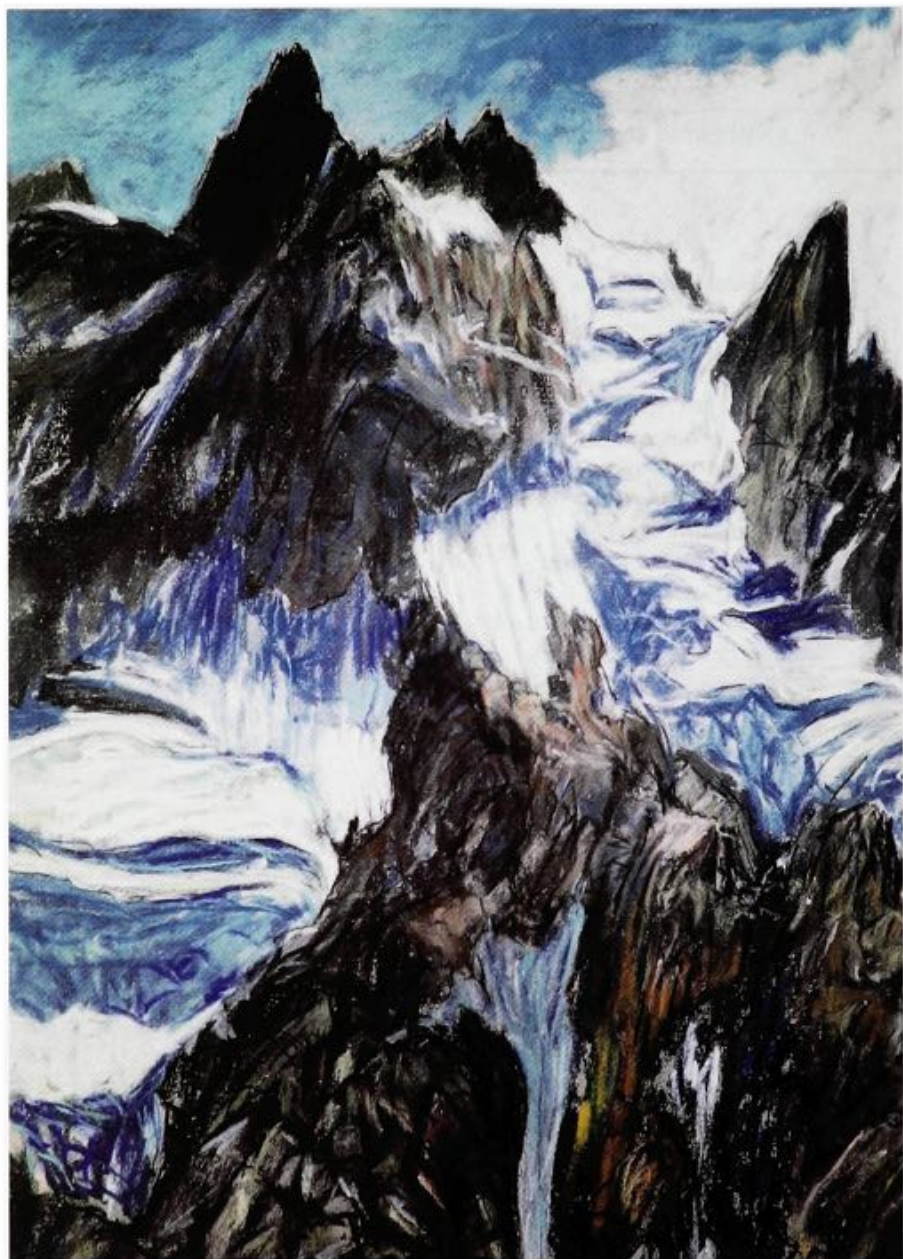
The Climbers' Club Journal

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1999-2000

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*NORTH FACE OF THE AIGUILLE DU PLAN, John Colton
(chalk, 40 x 60 cms)*

Editorial

*There are more reasons for hills
Than being steep and reaching only high'
(High up on Suilven, Norman MacCaig)*

Ilkely, Christmas 2000: the deep pockets on top of *Cow Rib* are iced portals into a heart of stone; on the horizon, Almscliff is a berg giving its thumbs up, and the first moves of a wind-withered *Walewska* provide more than generous friction. Climbing is not the reason we are here today, though, rather it's to exorcise a death. "Let's go where we can see Granny in the sky," my eight year old exclaims. But following her up the back of the quarry I'm gripped by 25 year-old images: of my colleague Des Birch's languid technique on problems he'd learned with Arthur Dolphin, here and at Almscliffe; of a teacher and pupil sneaking round behind Livesey and Fawcett as they competed on the same lines, and of an alpine-preparation bivouac on the ledge of *A Climb* when teacher and pupil, profligate with torch-light, drew a curious police audience.

Every CC member has images of such bright days and nights, such sights and reasons for being high; but this Journal gives other reasons, too, why we seek hills and highs. Behind accounts of epics large and small are long-term trusting friendships which have inspired humility as well as pride. Special relationships figure highly: between teachers and pupils; between doctors and patients; between climbers and Coastguards; between generations wryly appreciative of each others' achievements (Terry Gifford, Steve Dean, Andy Heald); between long-term climbing partners — even between man and his best friend (as Mark Vallance's *Best in Show* attests). Peter Evans adds to the tale of CC sea-connected forays; Ernie Philips and Martin Sinker pop heads over the couch to keep 'Time's wingéd chariot' at bay; Geoff Milburn, Moira Viggers and Dave Gregory pluck again at humour's strings and Mike Browell writes of a run that testifies to the supportive nature of the international mountain fraternity. A theme of friendship on the hills permeates all these articles — and the sadly-extensive Obituary.

As I gaze from a high cold place after a death, and wonder what more might be 'a fair reward for the average life', other words come to mind. First, a line in Gilly Reid's letter, enclosing her husband's slides: 'No-one can ever understand the obsession with *Hard Rock* routes, but without it, Stephen would be a lesser man.'; then Tom Price's revelation after a Cuillin traverse, of being in simple sustenance, 'How rich I felt, and how favoured', and finally, Charles Warren's assessment of his life as having been preoccupied with, 'something supremely unimportant, but of tremendous interest'. So, if we climbers need bright words 'to light us on the way to dusty death', find in these CCJ pages more rewards — and reasons enough for hills, whatever their steepness or height.



Hard Rock, or 40 Years of 'Puerile Ticking'

Derek Walker

'Like a double-sized *Cenotaph Corner* topped by overhangs.' Colin Mortlock's words echoed in my mind as I tried to rest, perched with half a cheek on a tiny ledge on Dove Crag⁽¹⁾. Les and Claude were 80ft below on the stance. I gazed at the view and tried to get myself calm enough for what would surely be one of the biggest leads I had ever undertaken. Eventually, I straightened up and confronted the rock.

The hard bit of *Extol* is a very steep wall to an overhang where there is a horizontal crack. Although I probably got a nut or two in, I was really relieved to get a Friend in the break. To the right, the overhang is broken by a groove; getting into this is the crux. There is supposed to be a piton here. Les Brown, who had done an early ascent, told me he had found this section very hard, even admitting to being gripped — a rare thing indeed, for this taciturn and unflappable climber:

"I felt as if I'd done the hard bit getting to the overhang, but when I got there, I thought, 'Good God, where's the peg?' I'd met Whillans the day after he had done the first ascent, and he told me that he'd 'buggered up the route', as he'd been 'forced to put a peg in'. But what impressed me was that he had left placing it so late! I thought the climbing lower down was harder and couldn't understand why he hadn't used a peg earlier."

Even though the modern gear made me feel reasonably secure, this was still no place to hang about: I was all gaunched up under the overhang. Groping round the roof and feeling the peg at last, I clipped it and pulled quickly into the groove. As I finished up that final groove, which was still hard, I felt huge relief and the exultation that comes after climbing a great route.

Looking back, this was one of the most memorable ascents in my *Hard Rock* odyssey: in 1986, a few weeks before my 50th birthday, I had just completed a climb which, as a young climber, I'd regarded as one of the hardest routes in Britain. Clearly, today, *Extol* has been overtaken in difficulty by many more desperate routes, but Mortlock's image of a 'double *Cenotaph*' stayed firmly implanted in my mind, keeping me too scared to try it for years; I had thought it quite beyond me. How lucky we are now, to be able to do these great climbs. In the 1950s and 1960s when most of them were first done and repeated, the gear was pretty rudimen-

Opposite: Fearlessly facing the philistine: Derek Walker follows the first traversing pitch of Goliath. Photo: Ken Wilson



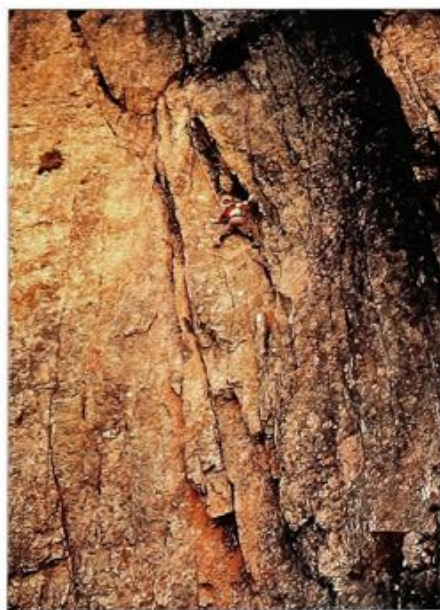
Mortlock's 'double Cenotaph': Chris Bonington and Johnnie Lees on the final pitch of Extol. Photo: Bonington collection



John Baker on Diagonal, pitch two, in a bitter dusk. Photo: Tim Noble



Meaty moves: Stephen Reid tackles Carnivore. Photo: Reid collection



The Cloggy route the book left out? Dave Gregory flows up Bloody Slab in 1960. Photo: Rosemary Collier



Etive-magic: Colin Binks tiptoes over crystals up Swastika's quartz band. Photo: Chris Craggs

tary by comparison with today. Mortlock describes Don as leading right up to the groove with minimal protection; the peg would have been essential. Some of today's climbers may sniff at the pegs used by those pioneers, but they will fail to understand the sheer coolness under pressure of a first ascent lead such as *Extol*. Mortlock, no mean climber himself, described Don's ascent (he took two and a half hours to do the pitch) as: 'the finest piece of rock climbing I have ever seen.'

"Bloody 'ell fire, what kept yer?" would have been Don's comment when I finally completed the *Hard Rock* routes (bar *The Scoop*, of course) in 1999, after 40 years of 'ticking', "Must be the slowest bleedin' collection in climbing history." And he would, of course, have been right. I doubt if anyone who has been seriously ticking them, has taken longer to complete the climbs.

It all began for me walking up to Cloggy at the end of that perfect golden summer of 1959; the Black Cliff still had a formidable reputation then. Paul Herbert and I chose one of the easiest routes: *Great Slab* features a long entry pitch; a struggle up the Forty-Foot Corner and a romp across the delectable final slabs. It was my first *Hard Rock* tick 16 years before the book was published.

The second two routes came the next year, following Johnnie Lees up *Diagonal* and Geoff Sutton up *Cenotaph Corner*. 'The Corner' was only just beginning to lose its fierce reputation. On an earlier attempt, Geoff, failing just below the niche, had to down-climb after five hours on the route because the 'pudding stone', the crucial place for a thread runner, was missing. 48 years after Joe's first ascent, it is incredible to remember the aura which surrounded this route, possibly the most famous of all Welsh climbs. But the climb's reputation was fully justified then because the protection consisted mainly of chockstones which were quite awkward to



The sting begins: Giles Atkins assays the crux of Praying Mantis. Photo: Tim Noble

thread, and the pegs below and above the Niche.

In 1962 I was with Don Whillans on *Carnivore* when he led the *Direct Finish*, his last great British first ascent, which went unrepeatd for nine years. The climb has remained etched on my memory because each pitch was hard and the last pitch quite desperate: the initial steep section (where I'd slipped from wet rock on an earlier attempt); the exposed traverse (which Don coaxed me across), and



'Where Angels fear to tread'? John Baker bridges up the crux groove of Christian's Coronation Street. Photo: Tim Noble



Nigel Birtwell on the (still) thinly-protected pitch two of Bonington's Malbogies. Photo: Tim Noble

then that horrendous final pitch (where Don shot up to the overhang, put in a peg and stormed the vicious crack to gain the rain-swept final slabs). I followed with considerable help from above. Our ascent of *Swastika* during the same week seemed relaxed in comparison with the *Carnivore* epic. In those early days, there were also several more trips to Cloggy, which included an ascent of *Bow Shaped Slab* with Jim O'Neill, before I left for a Chilean teaching appointment in 1966.

My return to Hard Rock climbing at Easter 1971 was

sudden and effective: Trevor Jones gave me a crash course in the new 'cheating' equipment of wired nuts, hexes and Moacs that had been developed during my residence abroad. Before the early 1960s, the big unprotected routes were the preserve of the best climbers of the day — the likes of Brown, Whillans, Banner, Bonington. But, by the end of the 50s, an eager new pack of Alpha Club 'upstarts', led by Crew, Boysen and Ingle were beginning to tackle these routes, with Soper and Gregory also doing early repeats. These were climbers who could be relied on to keep their cool and stay calm when the protection was poor; the rest of us just gibbered.

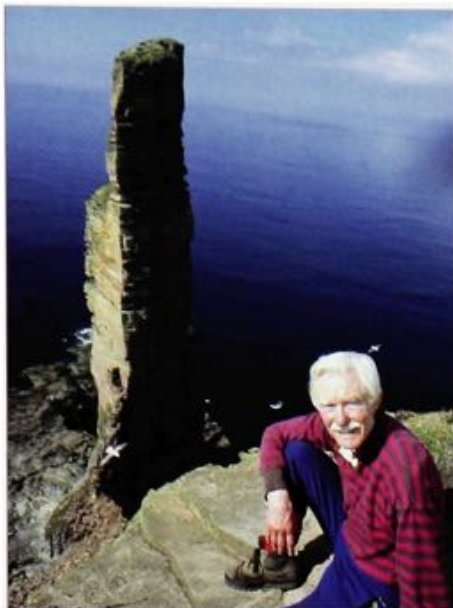
But by 1971 it had all changed: the new equipment, placed on lead, but offering hitherto unimagined security, and nearly always obviating the need for fixed pegs, allowed ordinary climbers like myself to attempt the hardest routes of the 1950s. In two days, Trevor and I climbed *Bloody Slab* (which did not make the book) and *The Grooves* (which did). We would not have been keen to venture on either of these routes a decade earlier. Later that summer, and over the next few years, we ticked *North Crag Eliminate*, *Gimmer Crack*, *Dwm*, *Centurion*, *Suicide Wall*, *Gormenghast* and *The Great Prow* — the latter in old-fashioned style in boots, half-weight rope and a couple of slings, en-route to Blaven after traversing Clach Glas.

Sitting in bed at Christmas 1975, I leafed through my brand new copy of *Hard Rock*. Ken's cast list of famous climbers had written essays reliving their experiences on some of the finest and hardest climbs in Britain. I eagerly scanned the chapters on the routes I had done and realised that there were many more great climbs still to do. Harold Drasdo warned Ken what might happen as a result: "People will start rushing all over the country wanting to tick them".

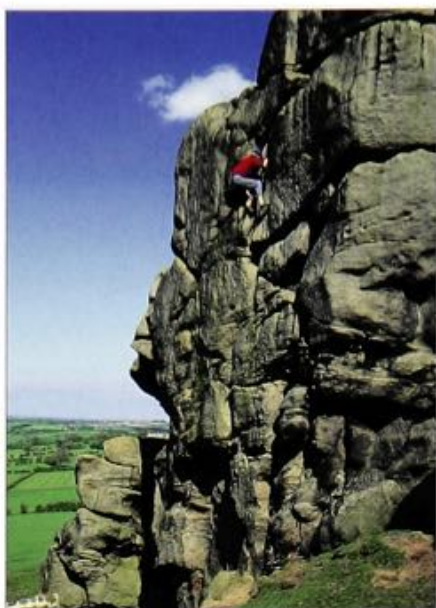
"Surely not," replied Ken, thinking that 'puerile ticking' would be ridiculous (2). But he was wrong; and I was among the many who wanted to tick them. One notable sighting at that time, by Terry Parker, was of a young hero struggling up *North Crag Eliminate* with the book stuffed down his jumper! The original 'Puerile Ticker', Will Hurford, did the lot by 1978; but



"I can't get a Whillans Harness to fit me!" Don Whillans (with egg) & Diana McIlreavy half way up *The Old Man of Hoy* in 1978.
Photo: Derek Walker



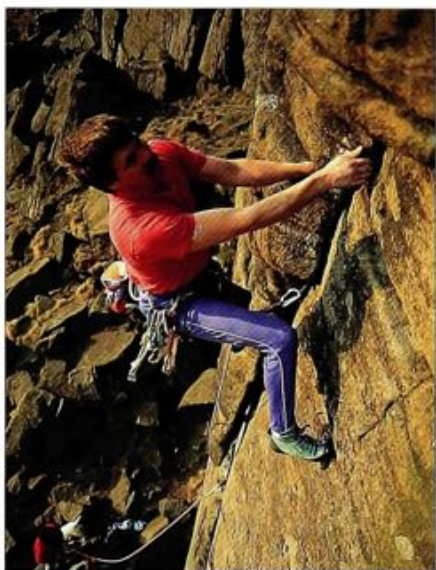
*Two outstanding old men: Mike Banks and The Old Man of Hoy.
Photo: Banks Collection*



*Yorkshire pride: Pete Robbins explores the N.W.Girdle of Almscliff.
Photo: Chris Craggs*



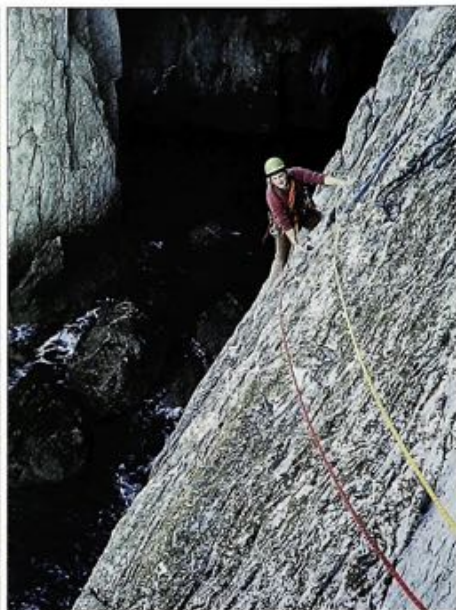
*The Hard Rock soft touch? Dave Spencer on Chee Tor Girdle.
Photo: Chris Craggs*



'May they never be so short.' Jim Perrin's Hard Rock yardstick: Right Unconquerable. Photo: Chris Craggs



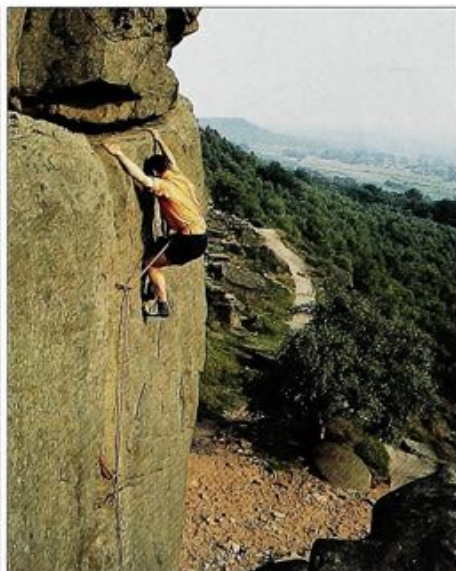
*Space below his feet: Mike Ridding addresses the crux of Sirplum.
Photo: Chris Craggs*



A friend in high places: the late Renny Croft on pitch one of A Dream of White Horses. Photo: Tim Noble



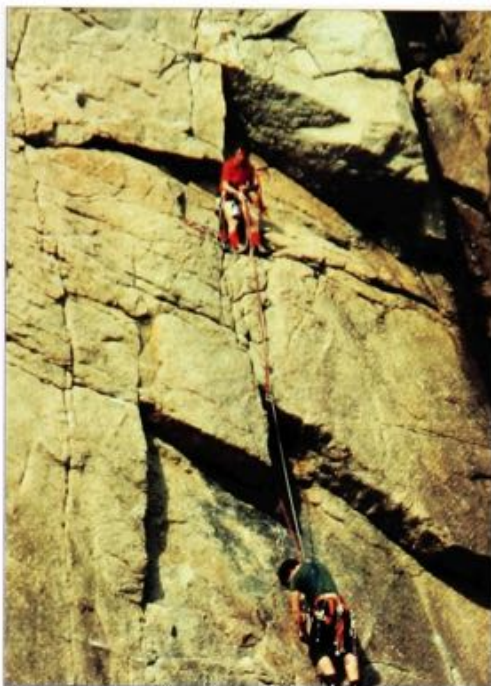
*Diana McIlreavy following the crux chimney of Engineer's Slabs.
Photo: Derek Walker*



Mark Vallance 'walking the wall' on Valkyrie. Photo: Vallance collection

he was unfortunately stopped three times by the fourth pitch of *The Scoop*, and it was to be another decade before Stephen Reid managed to complete them all.⁽³⁾ My own quest for the Holy Grail of the list continued — albeit at a much more leisurely pace.

Trevor and I went to Cheddar in 1978, where we climbed the famous *Coronation Street*. Set incongruously above the tourists and traffic of Cheddar, this has to be regarded as one of the best outcrop climbs in Britain. The big groove pitch above the shield, in a truly commanding situation, is particularly fine. With a style he was later to make his own, Chris Bonington boldly attempted the route in difficult conditions and then, accompanied by the first of many a TV retinue, snatched the first, almost free ascent, in



Climbers on the first pitch of Bishop's Rib, July 1975, before rockfall changed its form and grade. Photo: Tim Noble

a visiting raid. But he was already an old hand hereabouts. One of his best discoveries was *Malbogies* on the Main Wall of Avon Gorge, which Trevor and I climbed the following day. When Chris and Geoff Francis forced this fine route in 1957, I was a student at Bristol; but apart from the easier *Malpractice*, the UBMC members at that time were too nervous to venture onto the Main Wall. *Malbogies* went unrepeated for five years.

Another of Bonington's fine collection (this, like others, master-minded by Tom Patey) was *The Old Man of Hoy*. Earlier in 1978, I was one of a team of five to climb the original route. One of the team was the now tubby Don Whillans. He'd quipped: "You get me up, Derek and I'll get you down." Don's comments on first seeing *The Old Man* were typically 'Whillansesque': "Bloody 'ell fire, if I get my weight on that thing, it'll topple over."

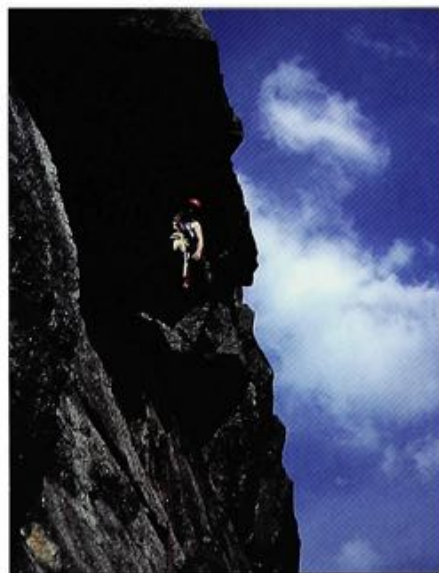
Ron Leather, one of the Hoy team had previously joined me on ascents of *Gogarth* and *Sirplum*. The latter, though only an outcrop climb, is another example of the 'big grip' factor you get on so many *Hard Rock* routes. On the main pitch, having gained the first 20ft and clipped the peg, the trap is sprung: you must now step boldly up and out between



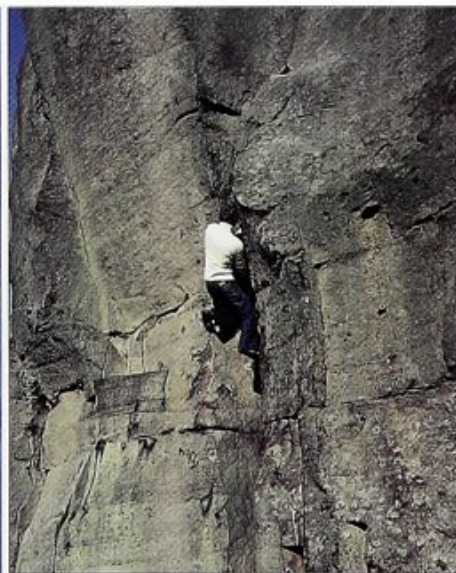
Underneath the arches: Stephen Reid swings across Kilnsey Main Overhang. Photo: Reid collection



The loneliness of a long-distance lead: world-class climbing up White Slab. Photo: Reid collection



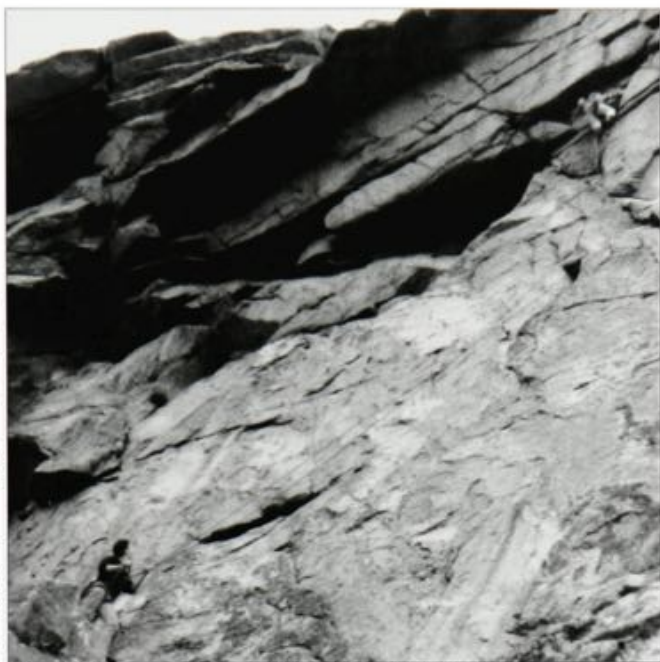
Editor needs aid: Tim Noble at the roof of King Rat. Photo: Will Randle



Editor needs no aid: Geoff Birtles soloing Elder Crack. Photo: Birtles collection

the huge overhangs with a terrifying drop below.

By the mid 1970s, I had begun to climb regularly with Hughie Banner, who was of course a star climber. The hero of *Troach* (surely one of Cloggy's finest routes), Hugh had become a great Anglesey aficionado. Among many great routes we did there were *Mousetrap* (which winds its way up some amazing rock, described by



Cornish cream: Nigel Birtwell and John Baker sample Bow Wall. Photo: Tim Noble

Trevor Jones as 'like climbing potato crisps'), *Big Groove*, and *A Dream of White Horses*. On our first visit to Cloggy together, we climbed *Slanting Slab*, a bold, impressive and spooky Whillans route, on which Trevor

advised me to lead the first pitch, despite the dubious pegs, and leave the longer second pitch to Hugh. *Debauchery* and *Bishop's Rib* were also ticked with Hugh at this time.

Bob Allen and I climbed many great Lakeland routes together, including *Engineer's Slabs* and *Deer Bield Buttress* (R.I.P.). On Carnmore, in 1977, we grabbed *Gob* during a storm break, and in the same season we climbed *White Slab*, Bob managing to lasso the tiny spike on the first attempt.

After a long lay off, Richard Carter got back to hard climbing in the early 1980s. Over a perfect few days at Whit 1984 we climbed *Tra-*



Unknown climbers high on Cloggy's Great Wall. Photo: Chris Craggs



peze, *Yo-Yo* and *The Bat*, all *Hard Rock* ticking at its very best, but *The Bat* felt like the big one. We'd been gripped for years by Robin Smith's vivid account of the first ascent, an account which Jim Curran's fine re-enactment in his film reinforced. So it was amazing to remember those epics as we tackled the 'little hoodie groove' and the fierce overhangs from which Haston had taken his fliers.

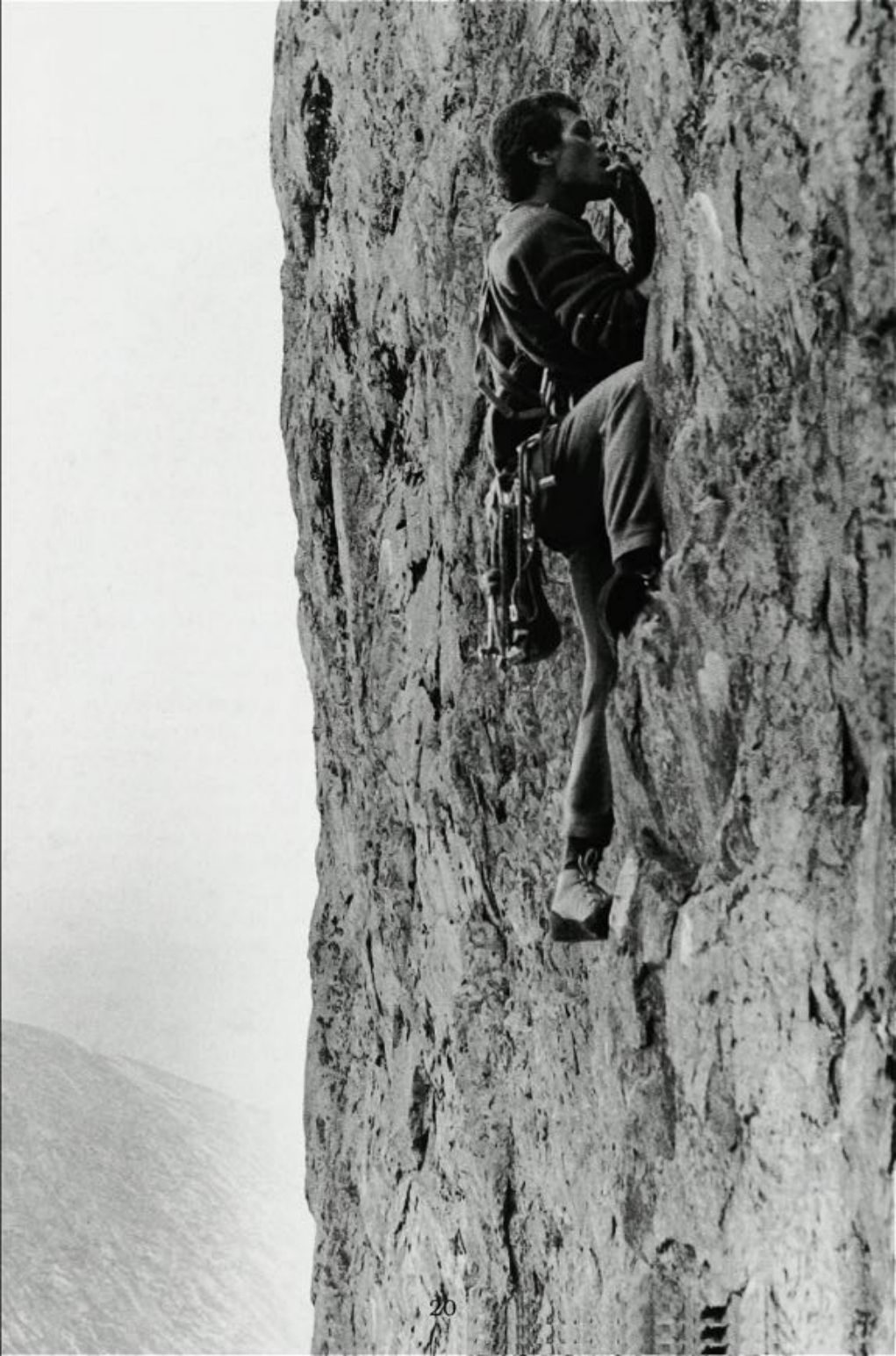
The last great Glen Coe route came in 1987 when a chance encounter with Al Churcher gave us the opportunity to snatch *Shibboleth* before the rains came. A similar fortuitous meeting a year later, with Dave Roberts and his 14 year-old son, led to an ascent of *The Needle*; Stephen demonstrated his burgeoning talent by leading 'the crack for thin fingers'.

In 1976, I had climbed *Central Buttress* on Scafell with Roger Salisbury, and about the same time did *Praying Mantis* with Ginger Cain. By the mid 1980s there were left to do only the three hardest Lakes routes, all of which I would have thought completely beyond me 20 years earlier. However, the equipment and footwear had improved to such an extent that I could seriously consider taking them on. I climbed *Ichabod* with visiting American friend Larry Giacomino in 1981, but although we walked to Esk Buttress the following day, I could not persuade him to come on to the *Central Pillar*; it was not until 1987 that Malcolm Cameron and I at last achieved that historic route, 25 years after Pete Crew had picked the plum. Then there was *Extol*, described earlier, which gave me as much pleasure and adrenaline flow as any in the book.

Back in Wales, I've followed *Vector* a number of times, most memorably on an International Meet with Jan Wolf (who to my consternation was more concerned with filming me on his video camera than keeping the rope tight). Jan was the husband of the talented Mrufka, who died in that same awful, protracted tragedy as did Al Rouse, on K2. Sadly, Jan too, was to die soon afterwards in the Himalaya. Although I never led the upper crack, my first time on *Vector's* Ochre Slab was a memorable lead in 1980. A couple of years after this, Tony Edwards and I helped to repair the Cwm Glas Bridge and then just had time to rush up to Cloggy for *Vember*, one of the first of Joe's brilliant Cloggy routes.

At the beginning of the 1990s I had about 10 routes to do. In the spring of 1991, I led on *Carnage* with Malcolm Cameron and a few months later he reciprocated in grand style, leading both pitches of Cloggy's *Great Wall*, perhaps his personal best. That same summer, with Malcolm, but with me leading the first and last pitches, I laid the *Carnivore* ghost to rest, 28 years after my epic with Don. Don's finish is still hard, but psychologically, so different. Before reaching his ancient peg, I could place three good wires; then, dangling from the overhanging crack, I espied a long piece of tat, just waiting to be clipped. For me, it was still

Opposite: Gripping the 'potaato crisps', Joe Brown and Pete Crew make the first ascent of Mousetrap, South Stack. Photo: Ken Wilson



an awesome struggle, full of memories and nostalgia, but now safe and secure, courtesy of the modern gear. It was a far cry, though, from Don's lonely lead in 1962.

In 1994, with Trevor now in his mid-60s, but always enthusiastic for new places, he cycled and trekked with me in 1994 to the marvellous Creag an Dubh Loch to climb *King Rat*. The following year, retirement left me time for unfinished business: in 1996, Kilnsey's *Main Overhang* was climbed with Mike Simpkins. He had done it before, 30 years earlier as a youth and was happy to give me the big pitch. Mark Leach's recent bolts (placed for the free ascent) helped relieve the terror as I swung under that enormous roof in distinctly traditional style. The other big aid route, however, was to elude me. In June 1998, plans for an attempt on the free version of Sron Ulladale's *The Scoop* with two hot shots were stillborn: disappointing but perhaps as well, for I might have had to be winched up it, and the route was, after all, included to deter the 'puerile tickers'.

Like me, Les Brown had now retired and was always keen for new adventures in Spain, Morocco or nearer home. In 1996 we went to Arran for *South Face Direct*, and the following year with Pete Tumbull to Devon for the scary sea level traverse and spectacular climb up *Moonraker*. Les had never been to Carnmore, so, in 1999, carefully avoiding the May Bank Holiday, we had three days in the Fisherfield Forest where we saw no-one in this remote mountain area: consequently, a mist-draped *Dragon* was enjoyed to the full. Having dropped the guidebook, however, we needed Les's exemplary route finding skills to keep us on route; but finally, I swarmed up the overhanging Droopy Flake and so to the top.

The last two big ticks, *Goliath* on the Dubh Loch and *Raven's Gully* on the Buchaille, just had to be climbed with Ken Wilson, the architect, but unwitting instigator of all my peregrinations. He responded to my suggestion of a trip with a degree of narrow-eyed suspicion, yet those three days will be enduring memories. Ken was enthusiastic and exuberant; the banter on the long journey north never faltered. He congratulated me on finding a fellow chatterbox and we gossiped as the miles rolled by (broken only briefly by a dram with Professor Dutton) on the road to Ballater.

We revelled in the remote beauty of the hills as we cycled and walked to the crag. He took the first pitch of *Goliath*, a long and poorly protected traverse, and I led the steep groove above. Two exhilarating and exposed slabs then led us to the top. As we descended the gully, however, a modern phenomenon occurred: we were approached by an anxious young climber asking us if we had a mobile phone. Apparently, his mates were cragfast on *King Rat* and he wished to contact the rescue team. We were

Opposite: Some 'petty test of social correctness': Stephen Reid attempts Shibboleth in 1984. Photo: Alan Leary

flabbergasted. Here we were, in late June, in perfect weather, with five full hours of daylight left. So what was the problem? Luckily, by the time we'd reached the foot of the crag again, his chums had 'considered their position' and were making progress up the crag. As we walked out, Ken and I reflected on contrasting attitudes to risk and responsibility.

From Ballater we hastened to the FRCC Hut at Kinlochleven. Next morning, and somewhat strangely for such a big crag, the approach to Slime Wall and *Raven's Gully* seemed an anti-climax after the Dubh Loch experience. The weather was damp and misty, the rock, appropriate for the location, wet and slimy. Ken sported full waterproofs and we hauled the sacks on most pitches. There was much talk about character-building experiences and undergraded 5a pitches; we gave full praise to Jock Nimlin for his great efforts in 1937.

The next morning we called to see Hamish McInnes, who Ken had got to write the *Raven's Gully* chapter in the book. The old fox of Glen Coe regaled us with all his *Raven's Gully* anecdotes, Bonington and Chouinard figuring prominently. Chattering all the way, we drove home in pouring rain.

Notes:

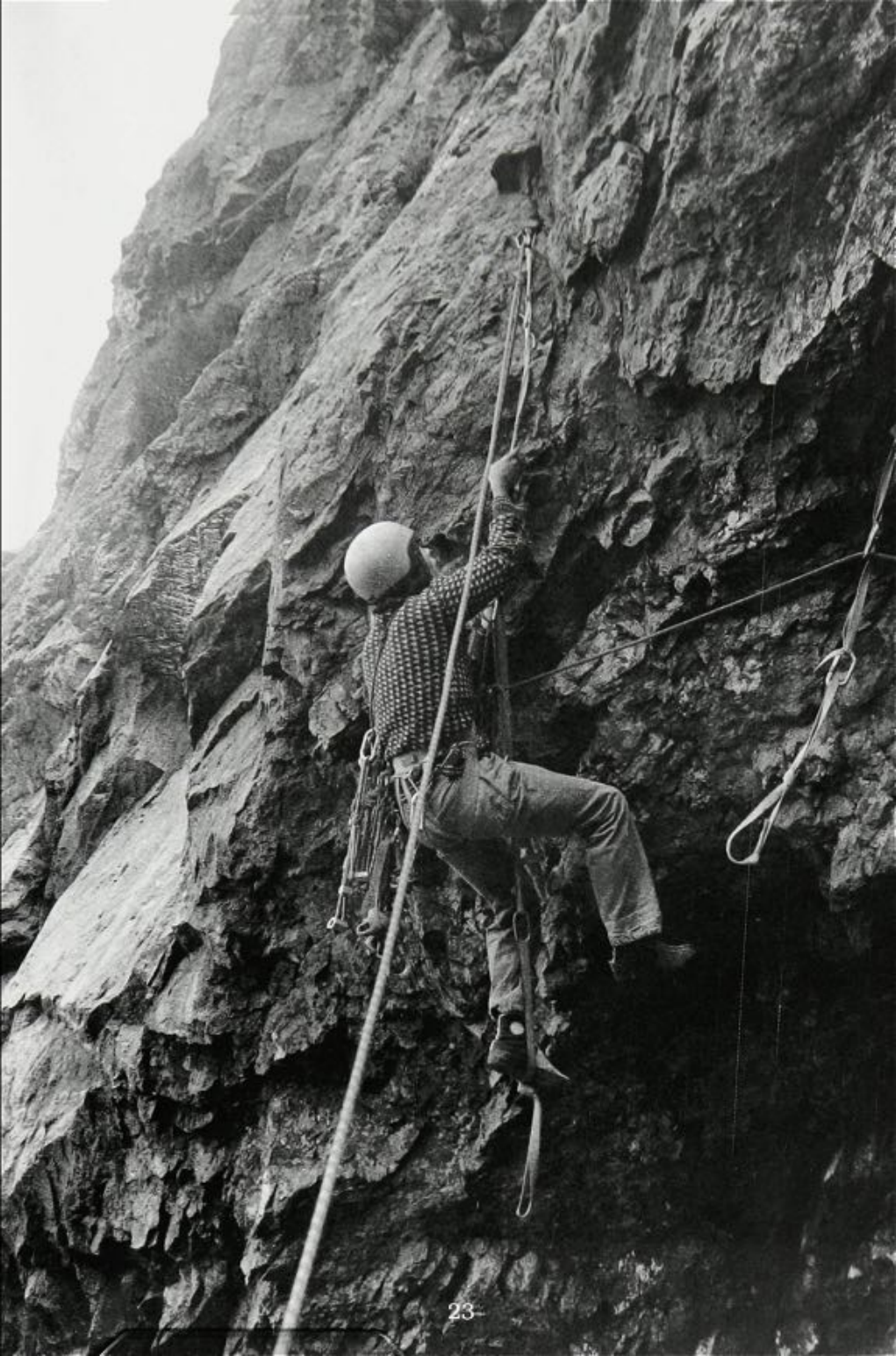
(1) An account of the first ascent of Extol by Colin Mortlock: 'Entity', CCJ 1961

(2) Ken Wilson explains: "The term 'Puerile ticking' was coined, half in jest, and rather later, during an interview I gave to Geoff Birtles at the time of the publication of *Classic Rock*. I did not wish to encourage slavish adherence to the list, it was merely a guideline. To counteract the tendency, a list of other equally good climbs was added at the end of *Classic Rock*."

(3) See article by Stephen Reid: 'The Big Tick', *High Magazine*, April 1989

This article is a celebration of 40 years of great climbing. Nearly all the routes were done with Club members, many of them great friends over a long period, and some of whom reached the dizzy heights of President of the CC. As one who was never in the 'first division', I have been privileged to have climbed with those, like Don and Hughie who were, and with many other fine climbers. It has been remarkable that advances in gear have assisted experienced climbers to maintain their standard, and climb well into late middle-age, on routes which were, 40 years ago, considered among the most difficult in the country. Such has been my good fortune. I have tried to include most of the routes in the book and the names of my climbing partners on my first ascents of these climbs, but just for the record I'll try to include the others I left out:

Opposite: Jim Moran pulls gingerly up the slings (placed by Geoff Milburn) to reach solid rock and the start of the 180ft first pitch of Slanting Slab. But their ropes were only 150ft. Photo: Geoff Milburn



Hard Rock

1971	Kipling Groove Chee Tor Girdle	<i>Peter Gerrard Chris Calow</i>
1975	The Groove	<i>Jane Mortimer</i>
1977	Elder Crack	<i>Mike Mortimer (l)</i>
1978	Suicide Wall Bow Wall Valkyrie	<i>Rod Valentine (alt & l) George Bintley (probably before)</i>
1980	Alcasan	<i>Paul Stewart (alt)</i>
1984	Right Unconquerable	<i>Larry Giacomino (but almost certainly before)</i>
1992	Almscliff Girdle	<i>Mike Mortimer (alt)</i>



*Peter Biven country: unknown climbers on the traverse of Suicide Wall.
Photo: Tim Noble*

Double Whammy

Toni Carver, Paul Pocock & Roger Salisbury

The St Ives Times & Echo, Friday February 25th, 2000 Climbers winched to safety in dramatic cliff rescue

Two prominent members of *The Climbers' Club* were badly injured after being struck by a rock-fall in a descent gully near Bosigran, just before noon last Sunday. A third member of the party who escaped the rock-fall assisted her injured colleagues while another climber raised the alarm. The injured climbers were airlifted to The Royal Cornwall Hospital, Triliske by the search and rescue helicopter from RNAS Culdrose after a navy doctor on the helicopter attended to the injured climbers on site. Coastguard rescue teams from St. Ives and Penzance, both on routine patrols in the area, also attended. One of the climbers has now been discharged from hospital after receiving treatment for a broken collar bone, while the second is still receiving treatment for his lower left leg which required surgery. The helicopter hovered over the scene for nearly two hours in what has been described as a 'protracted rescue' by Falmouth Coastguards.

John Atherton (61) from Mousehole and Roger Salisbury (67) from Helsby, Cheshire were descending the cliff to tackle the famous 750ft *Commando Ridge* when the accident happened. John's wife, Janet, was the last of the trio due to climb down. She said she had no idea where the rock came from, but heard Mr. Salisbury shout a warning to her husband. "I looked down and could see Roger, but not John." Mr. Atherton, who was standing at the foot of the gully, which finishes at the top of a 10ft wall, had been hit by the rocks and knocked off the ledge into the air. Mr. Atherton said he heard the warning and remembers feeling something hitting his chest: "Then I was in the air. I haven't really managed to speak much to Roger about it yet, but on the phone he said he saw me disappear over the edge in a shower of rocks." However, despite severe bruising and a broken collarbone he was able to arrest his fall and secured himself by belaying.

Despite a badly fractured leg, Mr. Salisbury had managed to stay in the gully and was also able to make himself secure. Mrs. Atherton climbed down and made sure the men were secure before leaving to call for assistance. However, another climber had already seen the accident and raised the alarm. Minutes later, a helicopter from 771 Squadron appeared, piloted by Lieutenant Darren Manser. The winchman for the operation, Leading Aircraftsman Andrew Furness, said it had been a precarious rescue because of the position of the climbers. With the tail rotors turning just 10ft away from the cliff the winchman, P.O.

Aircrewman Paul Winterton was lowered with Surgeon Commander Baker to make sure both climbers were fit to move.

"The rescue was made slightly harder because of the direction of the wind. Normally, we operate from the right hand side of the helicopter, but we had to position the helicopter with the left side facing the rescue, in effect blind-siding us, but the rescue probably looked worse than it actually was," said Lt.Manser. "We'd flown around the area in the morning and commented on how many climbers there were and said to each other that we wouldn't be surprised if we got a call out."

John Atherton, a former secretary of *The Lands' End Climbing Club*, and custodian of *The Climbers' Club* Hut at Bosigran, together with his wife Janet, have been active members on the west Cornwall climbing scene for some 35 years. Roger Salisbury is the Chairman of *The Climbers' Club* Huts sub-committee which is responsible for overseeing the club's property throughout Britain. This week, local climbers were incredulous that climbers could have fallen victims to a rock-fall in granite country where the rock is renowned for its stability, and on a descent which is used many hundreds of times in the course of a year. None can recall an accident of this nature happening before.

"I can't resolve this in my mind at all," says Janet Atherton. "This rock didn't come past me and I don't think it came from the gully below me. I can't see where it would have come from to have the velocity to have done so much damage. I won't get this sorted out in my mind until I go back and have a good look around." Other local climbers familiar with *Commando Ridge* say that one possibility is that the rock fell from a loose area high up on the ridge and bounced into the gully just above Mr. Salisbury.

John was dead — he just had to be! The paving stone-sized rock that had shot past my right ear and between my feet had hit him on the chest as he looked up in response to my anguished shriek. He was now out of sight, at the bottom of the descent route. Janet, his wife, 10ft above me had seen it all. The silence was deafening. I was in a small bay, facing out, preparing to turn and face in for the final 40ft of the descent, when the rock passed me. Passed me? My left foot felt 'squidgy' as I moved to let Janet into the bay. This was not surprising really: the rock had laid my leg open, knee to ankle, pushing the broken tibia into the back of the leg and exposing the leg's inner workings to my horrified gaze. The wound was two inches wide, but I'd not felt a thing.

Janet, cool and calm, climbed down past me with her eyes closed, I seem to remember. From the ledge below, she called up that John "was conscious, and seemed to be OK". My old Dad used to say that the sweetest words in the English language were: "Here is the money I owe you." Don't you believe it.

Alone, the fear of blacking out through blood loss gripped me; I

didn't want to join John on the ledge beneath. My only gear was a couple of Friends, neither of them any use. My helmet was in my sack back in the Count House, as was my whistle.

The gulls over Porthmoina Island were still noisy; the sea was still as blue-green; the climbing parties on Bosigran had hardly moved, but one way or another I was certain my life would be changed. Each time I looked at my leg, the more certain I was that it was a job for the surgeon's cross-cut.

My trance-like state was broken by Janet's arrival, on the way back to the Count House to alert the rescue services, and the realisation that there were other climbers on the ledge with John. One of them, Dave Hope, climbed up to me and soon fixed some sort of belay. Then a yellow-jacketed HM Coastguard (a friend of John's, needless to say) appeared, accompanied in me by a surge of relief that help was on the way. The RNAS was suddenly hovering over John; the winchman was on his way down, then back up and across to me. The man on the cable introduced himself: Royal Navy Culdrose. I said that I'd spent some National Service time there with 42 Cdo., a million years ago, but he was on to the Doctor in the chopper. "We've got an aged Bootneck here, Sir, you'd better have a look at his leg." 'Sir', was Sgn. Cmdr. Baker; his arrival seemed to trigger a major adrenalin rush: I felt that I was falling apart.

I was terrified of hanging on the cable with my left foot loose, but the dressings sealing the wound against infection were re-assuring. With the strap round my back and under my arms, Andrew the winchman and I were lifted gently off. "Don't lift your arms!" I was warned. Not Bl...y likely, I thought: I had the seat of his overalls in a vice-like grip. In fact, I very nearly sank my teeth into his flies for extra security, but even in my parlous state, I was conscious that the Admiralty would take a dim view of such an action.

Jammed up against the Helicopter bulkhead, I waited for John on his stretcher. What would I say to him? Was it my carelessness that had triggered the rock-fall? I'll never know — but I like to think not, and he bears me no grudges.

After three operations the wound was closed. My tibia is now full of steel: nuts and bolts, and bits of broken drill. Unfortunately, the livid scar that made people shudder has virtually disappeared. But as my old fighting and drinking mate 'Ginger' Wood said: "Good healing flesh is one of the many benefits of a life filled with fags, booze and loose wimmin."

Best in Show

Mark Vallance

Tuesday night is climbing night for the disparate group of climbers which gathers somewhere north of Ashbourne and south of Kendal throughout the year. We're known as 'The Tuesday Night Team' (the name 'Altrincham All Stars' having become redundant). 'Citizen Ken' (Wilson) tries to give us nick-names. He refers to me as 'The Short-Haired Vallance Hound', a name based on his unfounded belief that my aim is to be 'Best in Show' in the sometimes competitive Tuesday environment. The name is, however, too cumbersome to stick.

But this is not a story of Tuesday night climbing (though the history of the 'All Stars' ought one day to be told in these pages): it is the story of Digby, my short-haired Hungarian Vizsla. He is the true 'Short-Haired Vallance Hound', who, in a few brief seconds in November, logged more air miles than high-flier 'Frank the Decorator' has in the last five years.

It was the 11th minute of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, and I was walking the South Downs Way with Digby at my heels. We had passed Beachy Head an hour previously and were climbing towards the top of the sixth of the Severn Sisters when a rabbit popped up just behind me, right under Digby's nose and took off towards the cliff top. Digby followed, his nose not six inches from the rabbit. I shouted; Digby hesitated (he always comes when shouted). But now he carried on, straight towards the cliff top, 30 yards from where I was standing. I shouted again, knowing it was a lost cause and then watched in horror as rabbit and dog arced out over the cliff top. The whole event was over in seconds. Surely there was something I could do? But there wasn't. I knew that such a fall was bound to result in death. But it mustn't. If only I could have the last few seconds over again, everything would be different. But it wasn't. I could have had him on the lead. But I hadn't. This had not really happened. But it had. My God, I thought, what will Jan say? Digby is really her dog.

The edge of the cliff was treacherously loose; I dare not get close enough to look over, even lying on my stomach. I tried in several places to get a view of where the dog had fallen, but without success. I had an image of him lying broken and bleeding on the boulders that I know lie at the base of these cliffs. I set off over the remaining two hill tops and down to the pebble beach of Cookmere Haven.

Cutting back under the cliffs, I rounded the first headland, only to realise that the tide was too high to get to where Digby had fallen. I raced back, sweating, taking a short-cut up the edge of the cliff to the scene of the accident. This time, I spent longer trying to get a view down. Still I couldn't see the base of the cliff. I climbed the flank of the Fifth Sister:

the cliff was plumb vertical for about 50ft below where Digby had fallen, but that was all I could see. Then, from the crest of the Sixth Sister I saw that the tide came right up to the base of the cliffs near the 'impact zone', but I still couldn't get a proper view. If Digby had fallen into the water, then maybe there was a chance, a slim chance, that he might have survived. I decided to contact the Coastguards to find out when the tide would be low enough for me to get under the cliffs.

I reached the Visitor Centre at Exeat at about 12.20pm, an hour after the accident, but it was closed. Next door, the cycle-hire place was open. I tried to be calm as I spoke to Brigitte, the cycle-hire lady, but my voice was cracking as I told her what had happened. She phoned the Country Park Rangers. One of them, Andy, came round and took me to their office. The Rangers were friendly and sympathetic; hot tea was thrust into my hand whilst they discussed what to do. First they phoned another Ranger, Neil, who lives nearer the cliffs and who has a sea kayak. Neil said he would go and have a look in his kayak and I gave him a detailed grid reference; but the Senior Ranger said it was too dangerous. Neil, who had a dog of his own, thought otherwise, and said it being time for his lunch break, he'd go out for a paddle.

Next, the Rangers contacted the Coastguards: the full-timers were busy down the coast somewhere, but a couple of part-time volunteers said they would come over. I'd been in the Rangers' office for over an hour before the Coastguards arrived. They were more concerned about Neil being out in his kayak than about Digby, but then I was surprised that either service was willing to spend time on a dog.

The Coastguards weren't very keen on me going with them, but I persuaded them by saying that I would be able to pin-point the exact spot. Off we went in their Land Rover, first to the kayak launch site at the foot of the cliffs: no sign of Neil or his kayak, but Andy was there with a Land Rover and radio. We left him and set off to the cliff top to try and spot the kayak. This took some time in the Land Rover, and then it took ages for one of the Coastguards to get geared up with a body harness and huge throw bag full of static line. We belayed him to the edge of the cliff at the top of the Seventh Sister. There was still no sign of the kayak and miles from the accident site. At the top of the Sixth Sister, they spotted Neil in his kayak; he seemed to be fine. Finally, we got to the take-off site.

The Coastguard approached the cliff edge and lay on his stomach, harnessed and belayed from the the Land Rover. For several minutes he combed the boulders with his binoculars. Finally, he beckoned me over, indicating that it was safe to go to the edge of the cliff, but that I should keep hold of the static line. The cliff was vertical all the way to the boulder beach. The tide was going out and the boulders were still wet. There was a dead rabbit stretched out on one of the boulders where the retreating tide had left it, but there was no sign of a dog.

The radio in the Land Rover crackled into life: Andy was reporting Neil was back at the pebble beach. Standing a few yards away, I distinctly heard the words, "The dog's all right." My first thought irrationally, was that they had found another dog, that it couldn't be Digby. But it was! The rush of disbelieving, unbelievable relief was almost as palpable as the horror of those suspended moments of the accident itself.

Neil had paddled the half mile or so to below the Sixth Sister and found an area of ledges, boulders and scree, the detritus from a previous rock-fall and the only area where the dog might hopefully have swum, or less hopefully, fallen to. He'd beached his kayak and made a thorough search of the area without success. Just as he was getting back into his kayak, a small stone had tumbled down the scree. Looking up, Neil briefly saw the head of a dog cowering in an alcove that somehow he'd missed. Digby was cold, but some three hours after the accident, dry, stiff, and in shock. Neil was used to taking his own dog kayaking, sitting it on the spray deck, but for Digby he had to remove the spray cover and get the 70lbs of unfamiliar animal into the kayak and lying between his knees. It must have been quite a feat.

When I got back to the Rangers' office, Digby was already there, curled up on a rug. When he saw me, he got up very slowly and walked stiffly over, wagging his tail. As I fussed over him, I explored his back, his ribs and his legs; my hands told me he was alright. Everything was in one piece, but his chest and tummy were somewhat cut and bruised. His collar, 20mm climbing webbing, was wet. My guess is that he arced out over the cliff, landing cleanly on his back in the water and remained conscious. He's a good swimmer, and covering the 100 or so yards to the safety of the raised beach would not normally have been a problem. He must have been in a panic as he pulled himself out of the water, amongst the boulders, rocks, scree and breaking waves; hence the injuries to his under-side. A later inspection of the cliff showed that he'd fallen at least 150ft, landing in a maximum of 12ft of water.

Without the spray cover, Neil had got wet on the return trip and gone to shower and change. I phoned him to say thanks, but I needed to get Digby to a vet for a thorough check-up as soon as possible. Andy, the other Rangers and Coastguards seemed very pleased with the unexpected outcome, as I thanked them and said my good-byes.

Next day we bought a magnum of bubbly and took it to the Rangers' office. Neil wasn't there, so we went for a gentle walk with Digby, who was stiff, but otherwise fine, and improving rapidly. On our way back a Land Rover approached and stopped. An unfamiliar Ranger got out. "Is this Digby, by any chance?" he inquired. Later, I was to reflect that the words 'Thank you' can seem very inadequate.

The Conductors

Frank Fitzgerald

In the 1950s, the journey to the Alps was generally by train. The hard men carried just a sac; but the gentlemen also had spare gear and clothing in a small suitcase which could be left in a convenient luggage office. Naturally, when Stan and I stepped off the Simplon Express at Visp, we had suitcases (actually, Stan had a Gladstone bag). After travelling all night, the first need was for sleep; we were soon booked into a hotel whose name I have forgotten. It had numerous floors and we were right at the top, under the eaves. The young porter took my sac and case and left Stan to carry his own. There was a stream of banter at every landing; he questioning my superiority and I, the young man's intellect. This finally elicited the response, delivered in impeccably elocuted tones: "If you will be so kind as to leave your luggage here, Sir, I shall be glad to bring it up to your room later."

The weather was good, so we left the following morning for the Baltschiederklausehut. After a long walk in, we were delighted to find that we had not only the hut, but the whole valley to ourselves. A pipe-opener on the S.W. Flank of the Bretlauhorn was followed by a traverse of the Bietschorn, leaving the Baltschiederthal via the East Rib and descending by the North Ridge to the Bietschornhütte, and thence to the Lotschental and a bivouac. The following day was spent wandering in thick mist on the Lotschen glacier. After a night under a large boulder, we decided to cut our losses and retreat to Zermatt where, as ever, Bernard Biner greeted us warmly.

After a comfortable night in the Bahnhof Hotel we walked up to the Rothornhütte, which also was empty, except for Alexander Graven's brother the guardian. Alexander had been Graham Brown's guide, so the evening was spent quietly talking, in particular of Brown's triptych on the Brenva face of Mont Blanc. The following morning we were off to the *Kanzelgrat*. We had a little difficulty: first, in getting on to the crest of the ridge, as its flanks were very icy, and then again at the exit, which took us direct to the summit, where we were greeted by a gentle flurry of snow. The weather thickened on the descent and, influenced by Graven's view that the following day would be fine, we decided to stay overnight at the hut.

Bernard Biner had told us that he expected the weather to break in a few days, so with an early start, we ran down to Zermatt in record time. Pausing there only long enough for a drink of milk at the dairy, to buy provisions and to let Bernard know of our plans, we caught the next train down the valley to Randa. We would walk to the Weisshornhütte.

Perhaps the run down from the Rothornhütte was responsible, or

maybe the milk had upset me, but I was feeling distinctly queasy on the walk up. I didn't eat well and in the morning felt weak. To make matters worse, the guardian failed to wake us at the agreed time and the Swiss team who were also going for the *Schaligrat*, and who we thought would guide us along the complicated route to the *Schalijoch*, had left an hour or so before we started.

We lost time on the way to the col, but as I felt a little better when we reached it, we decided to continue with Stan in the lead. After the initial steepening I felt quite well, and we moved rapidly for the next few hours, though an ominous bank of cloud was forming on the right hand (east) side of the ridge. From a few rope lengths below, we saw the Swiss team leaving the summit; at roughly the same time, I saw my first Brocken Spectre (complete with a glory) on the now quite dense cloud bank. A little chimney, down which melt water was trickling, led to the summit and I arrived in double quick time, though a trifle damp, rapidly followed by Stan. The aim now was to dash down the snow at the top of the East Ridge and negotiate the rocks below before the light started to fail. But shortly after we had moved off, and only a few feet below the summit, something stopped me dead in my tracks. I think there was a flash; certainly, there was an enormous bang and I felt a dull thump on the back of my head which knocked me forward on to my knees. There seemed to be no lasting harm done, but the sensation was very unpleasant and quite frightening. "Struck by lightning? Don't be so bloody silly," shouted Stan. Almost immediately: FLASH...BANG! And there he was beside me, crouching in the snow. A thunderstorm was upon us. It was already late in the day and a storm was the last thing we needed.

I managed to overcome an irrational urge to throw away anything metallic, including my ice-axe, and we held a short strategy meeting. The outcome was simple: measure the time between flashes, then, 15 seconds after a flash, proceed rapidly down the ridge, and 15 seconds before the next one was expected, crouch down. FLASH...BANG! "One, two, three...15. OK: time's up; let's go." Immediately we stood: FLASH...BANG! Merely standing was enough to cause a discharge, and in the hour or so we were pinned down, it seemed that like ancient gods, all we had to do to summon thunder was raise an arm.

Slowly the frequency of the discharges declined and the storm left the summit; we could hear it grumbling away on neighbouring peaks. It was replaced by a thick snow storm and white-out, which hindered our descent. It was now quite late, and at the end of the snow, we decided to bivouac rather than risk the rocks in the whiteout and the dark. Luckily, we found a ledge under an overhang, inserted a peg and settled down to a dinner of dried apricots and chocolate, sitting on our gear with feet inside rucksacs. It was a cold night and we both lost body heat rapidly. We resorted eventually to sitting alternately on the other's knees in a 'warm' embrace, 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off.

Dawn showed snow still falling, with some eight inches or so on the surrounding rocks. But there was no wind, and as soon as it was light enough, we set off, negotiating heavily-powdered slabs successfully — though thanks to the whiteout, we were some two or three rope-lengths below the point where one leaves the crest of the ridge for the glacier before we realised our mistake. Having to retrace those few feet seemed most unjust, but soon we were down and the snow had stopped. When we reached the moraine, I lay down and slept for about an hour. Stan carried on to the hut, which was now deserted, and I found him examining the carefully-drawn crucifix in the margin of the hut book, against a note of our likely demise in the storm. At the time it somehow seemed 'British' to record details of our route with the comment, 'Weather unsettled'. Then we were rapidly down to Randa to avoid a rescue party.

We slept in the Bahnhof by night and in the meadow at its back for two days. There were magnificent views down the valley and occasional philosophical discussions with Bernard; but the weather did not recover sufficiently to allow our planned attempt on the *Younggrat*, so we retreated to Arolla. It took until nearly the end of the holiday for conditions to become reasonably good there, but we traversed Mont Blanc de Seillon from a bivouac just above Arolla, via the Pas de Chèvres and the Dix hut, descending the West Ridge. The following day we made a marathon expedition from the hut, over the Pigne d' Arolla and along the Otemma glacier to a bivouac on the moraine of the Mont Durand Glacier. The day after that, we effected a traverse of the principal summits of the Grand Combin, descending via the Panossière hut to a bivouac above Fionnay. On our last afternoon, in a hotel in the main street of Marrigny, we negotiated with an ample matronly lady for a hot bath for the pair of us at two Swiss francs each. We were duly ushered up the stairs and into a room containing an enormous iron bath, fed by a miniscule gas geyser, the jet from which soon told of its urgent need for a prostatectomy. It was clear that there would not be a sufficient depth of water in the bath before our train left for Paris that evening, so cooking pans were unpacked and bathing carried out with repeated fillings of pans, splashings, pourings, scaldings and yellings, the one outside the bath 'assisting' so that not a single tepid drop was wasted.

It was in these happy, though dank and somewhat insalubrious circumstances that we inaugurated 'The Conductors' Club', justifying Stan's future use of the letters CC after his name in hut log books. A further member was recruited at the next *Climbers' Club* annual dinner; indeed, there are more of us around than you might imagine.

Cured, But Not Spared

'Horace'

Lethargy, we all agree, is one of the most dangerous conditions of the modern world; yet, 'positive' lethargy, a recent study notes, is now a fundamental human right, topped by little else that life has to offer. The study goes on to say that lethargy is making increasing demands upon our spare time and that its flame grows more fierce as we grow older. How many doctors, I wonder, are aware of this incipient malady and what strategies, if any, are adopted to alleviate and treat sufferers? Does the medical establishment recognise that there is a problem? I met one of that ilk some time ago; he was acutely aware of the symptoms and sufficiently moved by the oath he'd taken: 'Doctor, cure the sick.'

I bring this to your attention, because a number of years ago I, too, contracted the mild form of this illness. In those days, it was known as *BD*. (More of this later). I certainly found out, with some pain, that the medical profession was 'trialling' a course of treatment secretly, in the deepest reaches of the country. However, a politically sensitive health minister destroyed the original cast of practitioners. I can tell you only *my* story, and leave you to decide whether you have experienced a similar regime. I repeat: the medical establishment now outlaws these techniques as they are a serious infringement of patient privacy (a leader in *The Guardian* once referred to the techniques as, 'clinical assault'). As for my own views, they will be reserved until the end of this story and I will allow you to make a considered judgement. For legal purposes, however, throughout this article, the physician's identity is obliterated. He is, as far as I know, still practising far away from these shores. I shall refer to him pseudonymously.

So we begin. One September, a few years ago, after a bout of Alpine wandering, I felt sure that some virus or disability seasonally affected me. There was a vague complaint doing the rounds that became somewhat coyly named as 'blithe disregard', but no-one would let on that you had it. Initially, my disorder came and went, but patient-ignorance, the palliative that is the succour of the medical profession, can overtake even the most passive recipient, as the roots of the malady sneak like dry rot through the host. Early symptoms of Stage 1 are: heedlessness, even a carefree approach; playing the game by different rules; letting things slide; lying awake at night. In fact, an agglomeration of negatives. Do you recognise any of these symptoms? Stage 2 of the disease is far more serious, however. Indications are: not listening to a blind thing anyone says, and 'enjoying the present'. You have the picture?

Although they could spot the symptoms, no doctor could agree on the causes of *BD*. The problem, too, is that the patient does not recognise

the symptoms until well into Stage 2. There were 'experimental trials'; it became very mysterious. The treatment seemed to lie in an imprecise realm of 'karma therapy', that little-known world of 'alternative' medicine, 'moon reading', and 're-birthing'. You may assume from the narrative which follows that the violent junctures occur after the administration of treatment (which the particular practitioner I consulted, provides damnably subtly).

Well, here is Glencoe with the sun on it, and one case of *BD*. The patient couldn't be in a finer recovery position: Malibu, take second place. I should say that on this climbing trip I am fortunate to have a 'trained medical person' as my rope-mate: I am certainly in safe hands.

The good doctor came over to my *WDZ*, or 'Wind-down zone' (known for years in Britain by the noun, 'doss'); but this appellation did not fit anymore. He had brought with him my new *RP*, or 'Recreation Plan' and promulgated this in a manner I characterised as 'uncanny'. Its main proposition was that 'Braemar (distance 200miles) was 'not very far away'. The vehicle would move from Point A (The Kingshouse), and take the road journey to Point B (a dead-end car park at Inverey), via Tomintoul and Braemar. We would be inside that vehicle and, 'it would not take us long.' Before we get hung up on epistemology, I immediately identified two alarming flaws in this argument. Namely: (i) we were over here; and (ii) it was over there. From where I was sitting, the nostrils could detect the scent of the Atlantic tide beyond the pools of diesel at Glencoe village. Behind me, the eastern fortress of Caimgorm was light years away.

It was 4.30pm on Saturday; sunshine continued to blaze down on the camp. I was into my third brew of Lapsang when I begin to notice transcendence in the surrounding inanimate objects: the tent door flapped in the light breeze; the paraffin stove gurgled its merry song; climbing gear — ropes, rock-boots, harnesses — were linearly disgorged onto the grass. Could it be art, I pondered. A great day on the Buachaille was behind us, and there was so much more to explore ahead. Every rock, and leaf had a new meaning (the word 'heavenly' describes the feeling best). Suddnly, I realised my reverie was observed and I chilled. What spirit or whimsy disturbed me I shall never know, but there was an adrenaline release. I began to rummage through the gear for the guide-book. "Perhaps we ought to climb something a bit harder," I mused. The good doctor drew near for conversation. "He's really looking after me," I declared to myself.

"Well, what *I* was thinking of doing next is a real classic, something I've had my mind on for ages," said Tee-Kay slowly.

"What's that?" I enquired blankly.

"Er, Talisman."

"Tal...Talis...Talisma...Nope; not here," I garbled, casting the book to one side.

"Er, no, you won't find it in that guide, actually, because its over on

the far side of the Cairngorms. It's a few miles away from here, but not far really, and I've been into it before and it's not so bad really," said Tee-Kay, in that curiously monotonic-other-being sort of way doctors adopt when working. I noticed that one or two of the tent pegs were behaving strangely. The tent was sagging and deflating, ever so silently and gently, with the somnambulant dance of a crocus flower at dusk.

"Why leave Paradise?" I protested. "The six hour walk in to some crag or other will take up half of tomorrow. Add the walk out, and then the eight-hour drive back to Lancashire, and somewhere we fit in a climb?"

"Oh, we can do half of it tonight. Shouldn't take long, we're both fit and you're going well."

I love that little phrase, 'going well', it's the WD40 of Queen's English, isn't it?. Moreover, Tee-Kay uses it so deftly and I'm such a sucker for praise. Perhaps his treatment was working? But wait: I am *not* ill! I am *not* being treated for anything. Was I coming out of...*BD*? Was I in remission? Was I listening again? "Well, you're driving, and it is your petrol," I remonstrated. The motor was already running, however, the car turning: a smooth operator was at work. (Stimulated by the healing powers of remembrance, I now move the narrative into the first person.)

It is post-card stuff all the way to Aviemore, particularly on one of the finest late summer evenings I've ever had the good fortune to encounter. The view from the look-out at Onich Point, the cosmic western seaboard flaring with Aurora Borealis, has, over the years, almost killed thousands: motorists, brains filled with f-stops, dash across lanes to the vacant lay-bye. Then there's the drive through Glen Spean and by Loch Laggan, in the falling shadows, with its islets, lone pines, and filligreed reefs of driftwood. There is sufficient 'shimmering', 'longing', 'descending', 'calling' and 'will ye nae come back againing' here, for it to be cartoned, parcelled, and sold at the wayside kiosk, alongside those crown-removing bars of thick Highland Toffee.

Time passes and I grow negative again. My heart begins to yearn for home, for the East Lanes road and Tyldesley. To be sure, the world inside the confines of Tee-Kay's glass-fibre shuttle is tranquil and unscathed, but it smells slightly of athlete's foot. The world outside, however, cannot be more repellent, almost alien: it was hard to imagine the awfulness that subsists on the other side of the pane. It is a world of predation, a world of inter-communal cleansing in which the favoured weapon is the proboscis, and the fixation blood. A world in which the battalions are female invertebrates — ageless, miniature she-devils, tarn hags that race hither and thither, and hither again. It's a world where no living thing can escape the 'lock-on' effect of flaring nostrils: once erect, these break down any defences you care to muster. The predators crawl into your hair, give you the cramps, buzz your eardrum with their little beats; their craving cannot be quenched. Know what I mean?

I doze. "Any music, Tee-Kay?" As if he has forgotten a link, what

follows is a maddened scrabble through the glove-compartment. With one fist off the wheel, he hands me a tape with a gleam in his eye. He's now firmly glued back onto the road ahead, foot hard down, and the tappings are belting through the octaves. "Try this one; it's good."

I carefully nurture the cassette into a hole on the moving dashboard and turn-up the sound to full. Within a second, I am teleported to some public house on the Isle of Dogs where glasses chink, audiences participate, young oafs hee-haw and girls titter. Then, rising above this reverie, a choral motif of klaxon voices soars, twanging guitars play, and, worst of all, a thump, thump, thumpety-thump bombardment resonates off the walls of the mobile dome. "What is this?" I shriek, tongue hewn to the stalk seen in Picasso's 'Guernica'.

"Only England's finest: those masters of artifice, 'The Baron Knights'. They're good. Don't worry, I'll play you some Hank Marvin next," soothes the doctor, mellifluously. The sound hits the base of my brain as lethally as any toreador's espada. 'Am I ready to bleed? Yes, I'm not afraid of body-piercing anymore: shoot that diamorphine into my butt. But wait; no. I am still under treatment. Put up with it. Listen and pretend. (Oh gnat where is thy sting?) I try to induce sleep. Oh little town of Aviemore, how still we see thee lie. Thank God, it appears at the next bend; only 100 miles to go now.

As the summer street illuminations switch on, we pull in for a meal at an attractive fish and chip shop, owned by two Norwegians (as you would expect). Over his plate of acid-green peas, Tee-Kay draws maps in the air with his silvery knife. Suddenly, he pauses for a moment and takes stock of the situation: "Just a little further to go," he announces with the ponderous emphasis of a hod-carrier. It comes to me later, that Tee-Kay must have been a taxi driver at some early stage of his protracted medical training. He normally drives sensibly, sparing those liberating surges of the throttle for the dual carriageways. But now, as mile follows mile and one heathery bend leads inextricably into the next, he grows impatient. Perhaps he thinks the clock has stopped running.

As night falls, we seem miles from our target; could there have been a mis-navigation? The brakes grow hot and fade; tides of midges cover the windscreen and the wipers break down. At the Lecht, a particularly undulating section with many towering blind summits, the vehicle rises like a tank before collapsing earthward once more, its engine roaring and screaming in acceleration and deceleration. Without warning, scores of suicidal rabbits snap up from the tarmac like proud, wooden skittles in a Cornish pub. Taste bids me efface the outcome.

Before long, however, the twinkling lights of Braemar appear across the moonlit hills. They grow larger and larger, until finally we enter the town at 11pm. Hostelries brim with Attic revelry on all sides. There is much screaming and whaling (which alarmed me, until I realised that this is the sound that real people make during periods of arousal).

The doors of the Invercauld Hotel are flung open and the pitching lilt of a highland melody wakes me from a nightmare. A wedding party is in full swing. I glimpse this Breughelian scene, this wave of life flickering before me, and feel like the pauper at the gate. "Only nine miles to go now, son; soon be at the end of the road," says Tee-Kay, softening his disposition, but jamming his foot hard on the throttle as we sweep past.

"Whoa! I go no further. I need a drink. I need people. I crave their humanity. I need colour and shape to stimulate my tired brain. It's been cold-turkey time for too long."

"Oh, well, um...all right then," says Tee-Kay cagily. "Although (and he pauses), I'll only allow a quick one." He says this with an air of administrative terseness and swings the vehicle round again, bringing it to an abrupt halt, and hitting the hotel railings head on. Squeezing between the front of the grimy vehicle and the dented railings, and dusting rabbit bits from our Lycra wear, we enter and enjoin with the denizens of Braemar. The lights, the music, the zephyrs of conversation — peoples' faces and teeth smiling like so many drops of dew. Everyone is trying to drink or dance themselves stupid in the main bar: it's a typical Saturday night in this wild land.

Tee-Kay is thirsty, too, thank God. However, a glance at the dial on the wall gives him all the information he needs. My time is up; down that beer. We have 2 hours of moonlight walking to do. Either the treatment or the curse is working as we steal out into the night to the refrain of Roy Orbison's 'Only the Lonely'. In point of fact, only the long walk into the long night lies ahead, and I am not one for going gently.

It is with great relief, that at 2.20am the final scrunch of boot heels hit gravel, and the sweaty cold shoulders can let the sack go. Time to collapse whilst Tee-Kay falls onto his pack in search of the bivvy tent. Looking upwards at the stars above Derry Lodge I think, 'Twinkle, twinkle little star...' Then it all goes dark.

Curr...unch. I awake. What is the deep green, almost black, manifestation that I see before me? It is Tee-Kay, half out of his pit, feeding himself upon corn flakes direct from the packet. The translucent light filters through the weave of nylon and we both look pretty sick. His carefully-balanced diet of cereal for breakfast, and Kit-Kats at all other times, means that he can reduce pack weight. Fortunately, I know this and have slipped in more 'basic' essentials, such as a stove.

We wander off early. Finally, I am relieved to see a crag of Lakeland proportions, about 300ft high. It's a pinkish thing, gilded with grey flossing rain clouds escaping from the Lock Avon saddle. Why did we leave the sun-soaked western highlands for this headlong dash into misery? Just how far, as the ptarmigan flies, is Aviemore now? About 12 miles; ok, it's anorak time.

So, *Talisman* looms above us at last. In light rain, we climb to meet the nose where it overhangs profoundly and the head can only tilt down-

wards to view the scree far below. All faith balances upon the single peg belay as we huddle and play 'hopsey'. Here the route gets real. The move off was more psychological than technical: a leftward, crab-like move (if anyone can think of any other land animal which walks sideways, please publish in the newsletter for the benefit of other writers), which feels awkward. With eye dead-fixed to the anchor, and right hand clutching the only hold, the other arm extends left to the edge of the stance block. Tee-Kay says: "I've got you, son!" The left hand slides out of sight, a digit at a time, crystal by crystal, to find the next hold. The feet and toes are also lost from sight under the block. Tee-Kay says my belly is becoming my third arm. Finding the handhold, I wonder what to do with my feet? Go back and start again. I need to see if more footholds exist. I try a lower traverse, substituting fingers for belly, which is a laugh, but I spot the vital lower foothold further across and down.

Back a yard and re-do the first attempt and 'click', the upper reaches of the climb are unlocked. Of course, what is really at the back of my mind is the *Classic Rock* description of the aerial moves out of the sentry box up ahead.

The Sentry Box fits one person squatting, rear stuck out, or kneeling to confess. Nevertheless, the pegs let you lean out confidently to examine the crack above. Examine the small print: the braille of nubs your toes will have to read to make that passing charge. Then duck back in. Those steel eyes have some glorious tat from each technological generation of textile evolution: they demand your own contribution. Will a 3ft sling give me the slack I need? No. Try doubling it. Another quick look, then with sinews set, spring the head into enfilade coming from the saddle. Place that jam (it feels like a Higgar Tor classic) and crank. Nubbins! Good hand holds! That's it: belays and an eagle's pad for a ledge. The physician's acumen is revealed at to me last: I'm a soul released from *BD*; my addiction has returned.

Just Wild about Africa

Geoff Milburn

Blunt Yorkshiremen are not renowned for their flights of fancy, but I freely admit that I might have been cursed by too vivid an imagination. It has caused me a lifetime of anxiety, as I can always anticipate in advance what might go wrong: here, a foot slipping on a greasy hold leads to a fall on to those pointed rocks far below; there, a creaky flake will plunge down on me before I can creep past it; everywhere, key runners which will lift out. Crevasses lurk and hide in my path, ready to open up and the bulging snow cornice high above is just waiting for me to pass below its fall line. Perhaps the 'Whillans philosophy' is at work in my life? This explains why those who wear helmets because they fear falling stones, attract lethal missiles.

But take snakes for instance. My own fear of snakes might explain why once, coming off Chapman's Peak near Cape Town, I was accosted by a six-foot long Cape Cobra of a mean disposition. Then there was the encounter with another snake while soloing half-way up a crag: it struck at me as I sought a handhold. The others left me to slit my flesh and suck out some blood. I sat in the sun for an hour, contemplating my imminent demise, before I realised that it must have been harmless. Then there were the Boomslanders: bright green thread-like snakes with dark, piercing eyes and darting tongues, which tended to hang down from trees while the locals screeched and looked for a brush to drive them off. I tended to watch in fascination, just waiting for fate to strike.

Having passed Black Mambas, Green Mambas and Puff Adders, we eventually headed west from Durban to home in on the Drakensberg mountains. Here the locals were friendly, and it didn't take long for us to get a 4-wheel drive vehicle to grind up the spectacular Sani Pass into Lesotho, where we were somewhat taken aback by the primitive conditions. At over 6,000ft, the locals survived harsh winters wearing little more than a blanket over undergarments and a pair of wellingtons to cover the feet. This poverty contrasted strongly with the opulence we found when we went back down the mountain and round to the Cathedral Peak Hotel, where my story really starts.

After an early breakfast I dropped down the road and headed past the trout hatchery where eagles hunched morosely in the tops of small trees. At my approach, they took off almost reluctantly like great aeroplanes struggling to gain height. Crossing the river was made easier by a complex boulder-hopping operation. Being on my own and in an alien landscape, I convinced myself that I would do nothing hasty or silly which might lead to a stupid accident; so I carefully attacked the first slope, steadily aiming for a small bluff up on the skyline. Soon I struck a

good path which headed up to rocks on the right bank of a steep rocky ravine. A long stick was put to use to sweep in front of me in order to give sufficient warning to any slithering creature which just happened to be basking in the early morning sunshine. Partly being a trifle uneasy about what lay ahead, I picked up speed and took the hillside at a rush. A chattering above me caught my attention and a succession of heads soon appeared above the rim of the gorge. Several groups of baboon were in residence: they were clearly unhappy about me passing through their territory.

Now without a doubt, baboons are nasty sods at the best of times; I had already crossed their path on several occasions near Cape Town. The big males, in particular, with long, pointed fangs look very evil, but I had in the past, clapped my hands or shouted to scare them off and I wasn't too worried by their proximity. As I gained height, they moved out of range warily as if they were more worried about me than I was of them. Soon, I left them behind as I neared more open ground. The rolling hillside above the ravine led up to a flat upland area with pools of water and a variety of lush green vegetation. Alpine-type flowers grew in profusion and, having broken out on to more open ground, I felt more at ease. In fact it felt very much like a good day high in the Scottish hills rather than in Africa. Happily, I scanned the sky for eagles and perhaps Lammergeyers. One huge hawk with a vast wingspan soared up past me on the warm thermals of air, and I was in its shadow for seconds until it drifted away across the hillside.

Up above me, I could see that the ridge narrowed and steepened up considerably, merging into what looked like vertical rock. It appeared it would be fairly straightforward to traverse rightwards into a broad gully which constituted the upper reaches of the luxuriously green valley on my right. At intervals along its length, this valley possessed a sequence of tantalising, foamy white falls and some unplumbed pools.

At this point I was relaxed, happy and content to be among such devastatingly beautiful surroundings: only the buzz of the odd passing insect broke the tranquility. If I had sat down for long, I would have happily nodded off for a while. I trucked upwards onto a gravelly bit of the ridge. Picking my way carefully up among loose stones I kept my eyes firmly on the ground about 10ft in front of me. Just as I started traversing slowly out to the right, a noise from nowhere rent the air, increasing in volume by the second. Having seen enough nature films, only one word fitted the noise: LION! The 'Rrr...a...aagh' was utterly unmistakable. Almost immediately the noise repeated, even louder than before, nearly causing me to recoil backwards off balance. It grew and grew till it filled the wide valley and echoed off the rocky walls to fade away in the far distance. My imagination went into overdrive as the possible unpleasant consequence of meeting a pride of hungry lions hit me forcibly. Desperately, I scanned the cwm for any sign of the wild

beast. There seemed to be nothing, but utterly transfixed to the spot, I was desperate to know the worst. Seconds ticked by while I listened to my heart thumping loudly. Then again, even closer, came that terrible roar.

Turning on the spot, I fled in blind terror, down that sharp ridge, with great jumping, crashing strides, sliding boots scattering the stones in all directions. Already out of control, deep down inside I realised what was happening: it became apparent that my strides were too long for me to stop at that degree of steepness. Fortunately, the ridge below me broadened out into a little knoll and my momentum took me to the top of it. Grinding to a halt, I swung round in a defensive posture. It was only then that I realised that the rucksack which I clutched like grim death in my right hand would be utterly no use in warding off any wild animal which might attack at any moment. It was almost laughable, but the burning question which I kept asking myself was, "What was it?" and even more worrying where was it at that moment? Minutes passed as I scanned the hillside for any sign of movement, and slowly but surely my heartbeat subsided to a more normal level.

Whatever it was had gone and I was left alone on the ridge. If only another party would come up and give me some company, but no such luck. With adrenaline still flowing freely, I remembered that the hormone prepares the body for 'flight or fight', so having already done the flight bit, I hastily built a little cairn of stones ready to repel anything which approached. Then, feeling somewhat foolish, I ate a sandwich, had some fruit and built up energy with a bar of chocolate. Things were taking a turn for the better. Nothing was chasing me. I was safe, and after all, what a fool I was to have let some strange noise scare me from my goal, Cathedral Peak. Surely there couldn't be anything really dangerous up there? No; they'd have warned me at the hotel, and Derek Walker hadn't seen anything when he'd been up it a few months previously.

Eventually I convinced myself that I was making a lot of fuss about nothing and had been spooked by some odd acoustic phenomenon which had amplified the sound out of all proportions. I didn't believe in Sasquatch or the Yeti, or for that matter the 'Old Grey Man of Ben MacDhui'. It was decision time and I had to decide whether I was a man, a mouse, a coward or a fool. Then I remembered that when my kids were small, they screamed that they had seen a huge rat perched on their beds: it had dripping jaws and it leered at them. They called it 'Bobbing Blue', for some strange reason. Eventually I tracked it down and it turned out to be a tiny mouse, no more than two inches long. Imagination knows no bounds.

The die was cast and I forced myself to retrace my steps up the slope back to the start of the traverse into the gully. Being more cautious, my eyes were skinned for any sign of movement. Then, far across the cwm, I became aware of shapes bounding up the rocks. "Bloody baboons,"

I muttered, though they did look far larger and more intimidating than those I had seen below in the lower ravine. They somehow were more chunky and almost black, with silvery hair on the backs of the larger ones, like small gorillas. "I'll scare them off if they come anywhere near me," I mused idly; but I was far from convinced. Despite the big distance between us they clearly aware of me and several turned and bounded across the slope towards me.

Getting closer they started to get bigger and bigger. When they were halfway from me, it struck me that not only were they about my size but, rather like chimpanzees, they were actually running on back legs and swinging their arms, so that their front arms just touched the ground. My reaction was to start waving *my* arms and to shout at them. Suddenly, in the corner of my eye, I registered a blurred movement a lot closer to me, but off to one side.

"Oh s...t! What the hell is it?" I gasped in disbelief, as I registered an angry, hairy black face with fangs that were not as long as a baboon's. Panic hit me like a wall as the creature began to emit a deep growling. Without another thought, I turned tail and ran again. I careered down into the deep ravine, past the still chattering baboons, as if 'Old Nick' himself was after me. Only much later did I slow my headlong downward rush, and cast a furtive glance behind me to see if I was being followed.

By the time I reached the bar, ready to down anything that looked remotely alcoholic, I had regained my composure. The barman cheerily enquired if I had had a good day on the hill. For a while I chuntered while trying to formulate a sensible question. Eventually, I took a deep breath and asked him as casually as I could: "What is there up there that is a lot bigger than a baboon, roars like a lion, and growls like a Doberman?" He gave me an odd look as if he was deciding whether or not I was trying to wind him up. Then, seeing that I was deadly serious he replied: "Nothing like that, mate." Quick as a flash I said, with some considerable feeling and conviction, "Well there is now!"

Of course, as time passes, by I constantly ask myself the question: Just what flight of fancy or adrenaline rush could account for what had happened to me in broad daylight? In retrospect I can only repeat the question I often get asked at school: "Sir, why is it that strange things always happen to you?" A good question, that. I'd like to know the answer to it.

Of Dow and the Rocking Doctor

Tim Noble

*If risks are to be taken, they should be
taken only by those fully alive to them.*

(Frank Smythe)

Since elision is the prerogative and sole luxury of the self-accused, let me explain. This is a story about a teacher, a pupil, an accident, a doctor, a patient and Dow Crag that starts with an admission of guilt: it was all my fault. Judge me, O Club; but only after you've read the tale.

You see, years of agonised thought have forced upon me a simple conclusion: it must have been the act of saving his teacher's life that persuaded the pupil to study medicine. Indeed, it was pure existentialism; at that critical moment, he *chose* to become the 'Rocking Doctor', committing himself in perpetuity to all forms of rock and role. Now populist psychology programmes tell us that life-saving acts can slowly transmute into life-changing pacts, and though I've never asked what impact that early shattering event had upon the RD's latent altruism, he has repeated the story often enough to all and sundry for me to judge its psychological import.

But it's time to tell the story publicly (together with its protracted aftermath and resolution), for there are pressing reasons why the writer must now come clean. First, to disabuse the RD's long-suffering dinner guests (who have heard *his* version of the story many times, and have come to believe that the RD's teacher and early climbing partner is a cad). Secondly, for the Editor's guide and sponsor, VP Smith (who to this day is still largely ignorant of his protégé's calumny, and whose advancement within the Club might even, at this 11th hour, be fatally compromised as a result of a blatant election rule violation. And thirdly, for the Editor's own editorial adviser, Ken Wilson (who long ago inveighed against 'educationalists' who strove to impose inappropriate outdoor experiences upon unwitting school children). Does he know what sort of cuckoo he's been nurturing all unwittingly, in the warm CC nest?

To the story, then. Imagine, if you will, a young, arrogant teacher of English, reared in Surrey, in his first year of his first teaching appointment at Accrington Grammar School for Boys. He is 21. With a group of upper sixth formers (many of whom, being scholarship hopefuls, are a mere two years younger than their leader), he has just pitched camp beneath the rotting walls of Langcliffe Quarry, late on a Friday night after school. He has planned a weekend bus, climb and walk tour in The Dales, taking in some 'rock-climbing' at Langcliffe (sic) and Crookrise. It is his first

school visit, his first outdoor trip with pupils and, as yet, he has no formal outdoor qualifications, though he has just registered for his ticket of 'local authority official approval', the Mountain Leadership Certificate.

Of an impulse, he decides upon a night climb. Which of his pupils will follow their intrepid leader up a little route by bright moonlight? Only one is foolhardy enough to come forward: the strong boy who has just represented England schoolboys at basketball. Neither leader nor putative second have climbed by night before, and the teacher has, in reality, only slightly more climbing experience than his willing partner — nor does either possess a belaying device. However, both are raw, fit and technically competent with knots and slings and the leader knows at least how to tie a waist belt properly. The rest of the boys, in varied states of bewilderment, disbelief, scorn, envy and terror look on as the teacher and pupil set off up an unnamed, unchecked, but obvious groove, capped by an overhanging block. Don't look now, but the teacher has created a recipe for disaster which requires no further stirring: in the psychological terminology so freely promulgated by his former teacher-trainers, it is already a *folie a deux*.

Chanting early Dylan songs (of which the pupil and his teacher are, and will always remain, avid and competitive renderers), the pair climb the first pitch and belay satisfactorily 80ft up on a sound ledge. Above, a short groove leads to the overhang. Bridged across the groove, moments later, the teacher threads a sling between the overhanging block and groove and, still thrill-conscious of the watching, trusting troupe of boys, reaches wide with both arms and essays the outrageous pull over the roof. There is no other protection between the teacher and his pupil. Not even as a youngster, climbing much harder things at Stone Farm, has the teacher tried such a move. So why now, when he has another life in tow?

When it comes, the fall is almost Miltonic; the block (obviously, dramatically, inevitably) rocks and gives way, unthreading the threaded sling. The teacher somersaults down the groove. The pupil, tied directly into the rope, but with slack in the system, is dragged to the edge of the ledge by the shock of the fall, lacerating his left shin and burning his hands. He stops the teacher just as rope-stretch allows a touch-down. The climbing belt pulls round. Hanging like a pub sign pig in a sling, the teacher looks dead meat from a distance, but has dislocated only his left shoulder. Somehow, he unties and staggers to his tent, wherein he wrestles the arm back into its socket (it will need pinning 10 years later). Now fully alive to the risks he has taken, he falls into a shocked sleep. The pupil on the cliff makes his own way back to the tents. Next day, sore and raw, they climb at Crookrise as if nothing has happened.

The following year, led by the same teacher, most of the boys will go on to ski The Coppice hill between lessons; manage the big Yorkshire aid routes; climb lots of Lancashire grit and go to Skye and the Alps. Some

will stay in touch for the rest of their lives, climbing together and apart, or not climbing. Many will become leaders in their fields. The teacher will move on to other schools, Arctic Norway and the greater ranges; the life-saving pupil will become a doctor, a 'tissue specialist'. So it goes: what was almost a tragedy becomes merely a tale told by the idiot. But both climbers might have died, and by rights, the teacher should have been dismissed (if so, then no more tales at all).

Now picture this: the 'Rocking Doctor' (for that is what he has become — a partner in a Lancashire practice and an amateur rock band) rings the teacher 28 years later. He has read the teacher's Lakes climbing book and dined in and out many times on a tale not yet published. His acquaintances now want to meet and climb with this teacher. Shall they get together again? Well, is shared spilt blood thicker than ink?

They meet under Castle Rock and, with no boot on any foot, the RD, prodding the squishy tissue around the teacher's long-term gammy right knee, diagnoses chronic neglect: 'a torn posterior horn of the lateral meniscus'. The teacher becomes a patient. They re-climb *Gillercomb Buttress* together in the rain, remembering all the angles and linguistic dimensions of their partnership, and after a raw steak in St John's in the Vale, agree to keep in touch. A year later, the RD is asked to be the medical on an expedition to Peru in 2000. Can the teacher spare a weekend for training and a dinner party? Is this an offer he can refuse?

'We gotta get out of this place,
if its the last thing we ever do...'

The Animals thump out of the high-quality stereo, as the RD swings the big turbo Volvo along the back roads to Coniston. Everything is happening at speed. "Do you remember coming round t'house in Rishton, that fus' time?" he asks, thwacking the wheel in time to the relentless bass. I remember well, and tell him so: about the disconcertingly forthright invitation for tea after school one evening, 'to meet th'owt queen'; the fascination of sitting on the kitchen floor learning how to clean copper pipes with HP sauce and the touching old-world kindness and courtesy of his elderly parents. "Dad was askin' after yer t'other day, y'know. He's still cycling five miles t'shops 'cos they're 2p cheaper than where they live. Aye, an' th'owt queen wants to know 'ow that nice Mr Noble's doing." Torver comes and goes; the RD, pretending to plectrum-pluck the wheel, practises for a gig in two night's time. As the car bobs and weaves, memory lane unwinds: long days on moorland grit, followed by impromptu route and crag-planning suppers at my tiny flat in Church. We'd have to drink from vases because I'd let the dirty dishes go.

The RD bellows out the words to The Commitment's version of *Mustang Sally* ('You'd better let your mustang go!') and slips the clutch as we power up the Walna Scar Track. I direct him to the furthest possible parking spot. This concession to my lack of fitness does not go unnoticed, though. "Don't want t' over-tax yer, now do we? I mean, have yer thought

about yer weight at all, what it's doing to yer heart?' He's not my real doctor, but I can take this sort of directness only from him. Sheepishly, I shoulder what seems an inordinately heavy 'sack for a day's climb, and start up the track, ski poles clicking. The RD's 'sack dwarfs even his huge frame (*admit it, he's got both ropes*; Ed). "Mus' get fit for Peru," he booms, and generously falls into step beside me.

Dow Crag comes into view and we stop to catch my breath. I tell him of the day I shared with Harry Griffin on Eagle Crag, Grisedale and the anecdotes he'd proffered about climbing with the Barrow Boys on Dow in the late 1920s when public transport was the norm. Just as we happy band of schoolboys, with a teacher, had once used the bus to travel all over for the northern gritsone edges, Harry caught the early workmen's train to Torver and walked from there to Dow. On these long walks with his own teacher-mentor, George Basterfield, Mayor of Barrow, he'd patiently learned the mysteries of the climbers' guild. How Sansom, of *Central Buttress* fame, recommended barley sugar on the fingers to help them stick, but George inclined to grapefruit juice; how bespoke nail patterns in the Walna Scar Track mud denoted individual climbers Billy Clegg and A.T.Hargreaves, with boots from Stephens of Coniston. "Jus' like us, eh, teach," the RD laughs as we plod slowly up the rotting scree to the foot of A Buttress. "You taught me 'ow to climb."

But by the time I've made it to the base of *Gordon & Craig's Route*, the RD is all geared up and in full flight, singing Dylan ('How does it feel, to be on your own?'). Above us, a daring plane has torn the big blue bag of the sky apart; there is another white sky bag inside the blue. Because he presses me, I chatter about the book and past ascents with other dear friends of *Murray's Direct* and *Eliminate A*. Delicately, with nods to public and private conventions, we make the transition from ageing professionals in different jobs to partners once again.

With voice in fine fettle, he leads the first pitch up the bone-white scoop. I get the second, and the easy traverse on pitch three. This latter is no more than a scramble along an airy terrace above the harder lines, but paradoxically, it provides me with my first real sense of climbing on the route. At the end, the RD calls for a photograph for old times's sake: the teacher in the lead, on a loose pitch, with his pupil holding the ropes. I lean out (checking the belay this time) and look down and across at the *Eliminate A* exit, remembering the final finery moves.

Fittingly, the RD leads the *G & C* crux. Humming 'The Boss's' *Dancing in the Dark*, he turns the corner. Alone again, I recall David Craig's words: 'It was only the second route on which I felt the aloneness of being out of your partner's sight on a big crag.' Waiting for the RD's rope to move, I squeeze into a niche to keep out of the raw wind, look warily into the solid wall of air and speculate. Long mountain routes provide much more than individual moves or tests of skill and strength: they're mirrors of our selves in transitional states. As we climb from pitch to pitch, changing



CC Editor, exposed on Dow Crag.

Photo: Dr Thomas Johnson

our stance and perspective, we chart how we can change ourselves. It's a risky business. Here, as in the flux of ground-based lives, we depend, then don't depend; use up our strength in view of others, then move out of sight (perhaps even to sob with fright). How much we choose to show of pain and pleasure to others and ourselves is up to us. Then there's the past to account for, too: how truly we have led the route and looked after those with whom we've climbed.

The RD calls; I follow. Things *have* changed. I scrabble round the corner into the blast and wonder, as I chill, why I've nothing more for torso clothing on than a tee shirt. It's misplaced pride again, of course — but not this time, I hope, before a fall. I wonder if he'll ask me if I'm cold?

I find the guide book's 'tricky move up and right to a higher ledge of dubious blocks'. "Yer gonna luv this, teach," my leader calls from higher up and still out of sight. Appropriately, as I cross them, the blocks rock wildly above the edge of all things. I thrill with apprehension; it is why we're here. Bridged across 'the exposed and awkward corner', I look down to a leader *in-extremis*, on the knife-sliced corners of *Sidewalk*, 100ft below. This crux move has to be one of the most exposed at the Severe grade in all of Lakeland. Dreaming still, I bridge, reach up for the bulge and pull out left 'to a welcome landing' by my pupil/doctor/friend. I hug him, and just manage to hide my tears.

"So *you're* the teacher who fell all those years ago," the well-dressed woman breathes, as she balances barbecued chicken in beautifully-manicured fingers. "We've heard so much about you; *do* tell us more." The Rocking Doctor is wreathed in smoke, but can hear clearly. Thwacking the basting stick on raw meat to the beat of Free's *Alright Now*, he looks across at me and grins: I see what he might do with my torn posterior horn of the lateral meniscus. However, I know it *is* all right now — I'm a doctored patient who's still alive, a good pupil who's learned how to take his teacher's cue. So, remembering my cod psychology notes (but this time fully aware of the risks before I take them), I look her straight in the eye, take a deep breath, and tell her what I'm sure the RD wants her to hear: "Madam, I'm afraid *we've* nothing more to say."

Don't Believe Everything You Read

Tony Penning

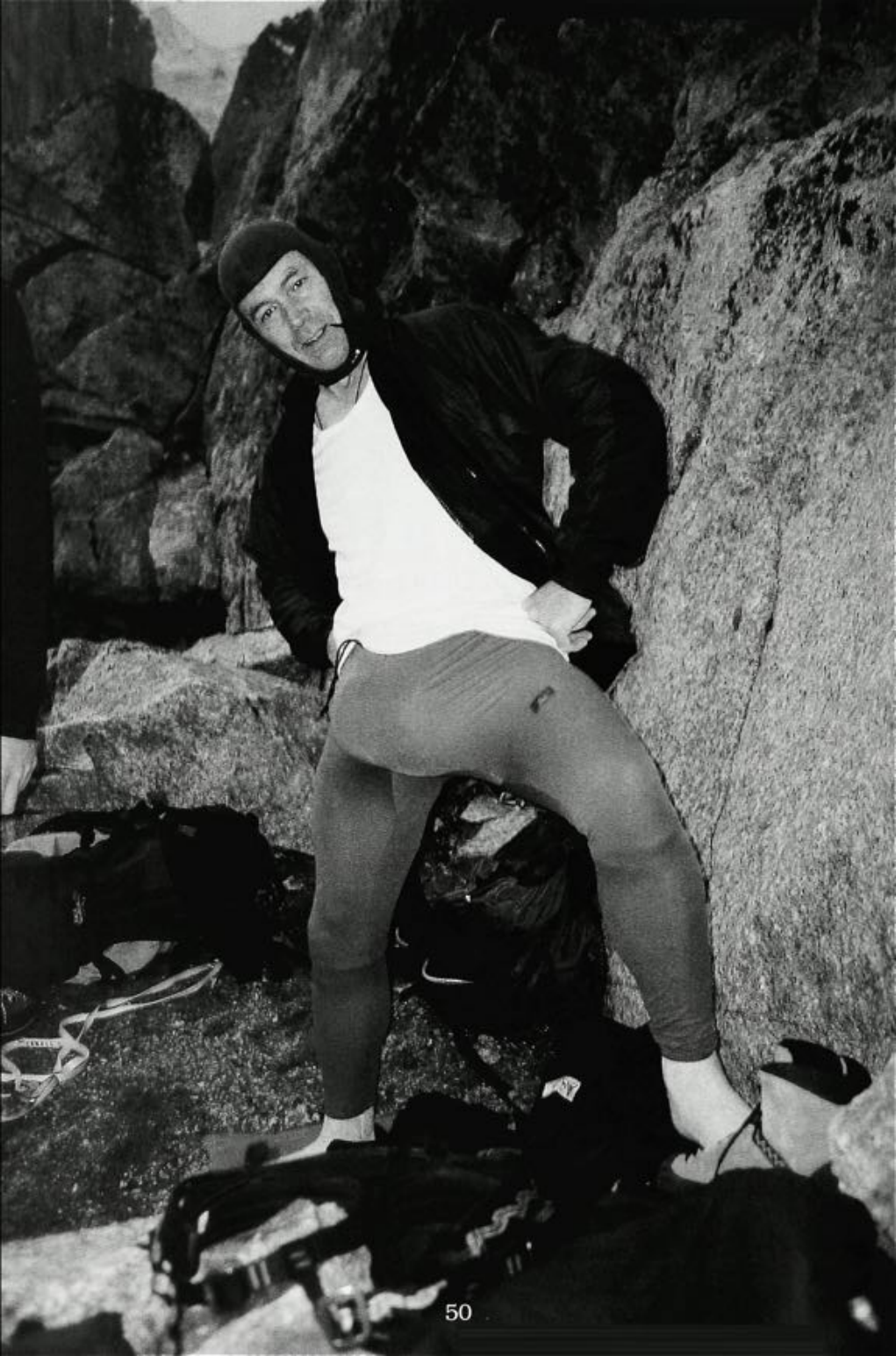
Spring 1999: James and I are on the way to Gogarth. I'm reading a newspaper article about 'Risk', and James is, as you would expect, doing the driving. The article evaluates every activity from train travel and riding to bell-ringing. Climbing and mountaineering get a mention, coming seventh overall in the most-risky of all activities — unless, apparently, you have been engaged in these sports for 30 years or more. Then, staggeringly, they shoot up to first place. Coincidentally, 1999 is my 30th year of climbing and mountaineering, but as we continue our journey, I don't give the article a second thought. Later the same day, however, whilst struggling gamely with pitch two of *The Cow*, a hold breaks and I embrace some 50ft of air before James generously decides to stop me.

A little later in '99, James and I, together with friend Tim, return to Gogarth to tick *Big Overhang*. After a couple of hours upside down, I pull out round the lip of the overhang and a peg snaps; once again, I take to the skies.

Stanage is the next venue for a scare. Slipping from a rounded break just below the top of a climb I stop, amazingly, at the next break down (to the surprised gasps of friends below). Hauntingly, the contents of that article on 'Risk' come back to me. But, given that I am shortly off to the Alps, this last fall is as nothing in the great tapestry of a life's climbing — a mere hiccup, surely? Well, just as hiccups and tapestries don't obviously mix as metaphors, so climbing with alpine novice James and his friend, Rob, but carrying a minimum of kit, gets us into a right tangle, too. Second day out, almost there, a terrible snowstorm traps us for 18 hours on a tiny ledge. Fortunately, a passing helicopter finds us during a clear weather window and gives us a lift down. Clearly, it is time to see the year through a little more carefully.

October '99, and the year's nearly over. 30ft up *Endangered Species* at Wintour's Leap I'm taking care, and not being at all risky. I get a nice little runner in and take a side-pull. A large block starts to shift. There's been no sign it was loose, but it's too late now. The block and runner come out, and I've nowhere to go but down. The X-rays reveal that the force of the ground-strike has broken three of my vertebrae. I spend much of my recovery time reflecting on 30 years of climbing, concluding that I wouldn't have swapped them for any other risky business — but, as you would expect, I stop reading newspapers.

Overleaf: Tony Penning (with well-warmed lunchbox) prepares for an Alpine Bivvy. Photo: Penning collection



A New Adventure

Ernie Phillips

As one approaches the inevitable three-score years and twenty, one's body starts to fray at the seams somewhat: bones ache, muscles creak, and the brain nags. Well, in 1991, I was pretty fed up with flogging my body up rotten tracks to get to even mankier snow, so I said to my friend Pettigrew, "What we need is a new adventure."

After some thought he said: "When Kipling was writing *Kim*, he made a journey from Simla to Kulu, and he did it on horseback. How do you fancy that?"

The last time I rode an animal, was a donkey on Blackpool sands when I was about five. However, I gave the matter some thought, and after talking to local riding stables, I made my way to Snowdonia to where they do mountain pony trekking. A most delightful young lady took me out for a couple of rides, and came up with the view that I should be able to manage the trip.

The arrangements were made by email and fax, and soon we were away to Schipol and then on to New Delhi. While we were in Delhi, we had to visit Dr. Gill, who is the head of the Indian Civil Service, and coincidentally, a mountaineer. It was a rather unnerving experience, as his place was surrounded by soldiers armed to the teeth with automatic rifles. The meeting went very well, apart from the fact that he managed to drink most of the whisky that we took with us from England.

We spent a few more days in Delhi, visiting the mediaeval Astronomical Observatory and the Indian railway museum. The next move was a journey on the night sleeper from Old Delhi Junction to Kalka Junction. This is a journey that every body should experience once (but only once) in their life. It is said that the villains on this train are the most accomplished thieves in the world, and one of them was able to rob us. Fortunately, we recovered the loot, but the culprit melted into the crowd.

We reached Simla the next day after climbing up into the mountains on the rack railway. The night was spent in the most delightful hill station of Chapslee, still redolent of the Raj. The next morning we went higher, in a jeep, to meet our five Sherpas, the mules, and my horse Gomba, who was to be my transport for the next 15 days or so. Gomba was, in fact, a mare and had with her, her half-grown stallion foal who wanted to suckle his mother all the time. At 250 kilos, he was quite a nuisance.

Most of the trek was around 11,500ft, which is near the upper limit of grass and vegetation (the animals have to graze morning, mid-day and evening). Most of the time, we were above habitation, descending only

now and then to ancient villages where the local inhabitants still thresh the grain with hand flails. The camp sites were idyllic: tea in the sleeping bag in the morning; hot water to wash in; a nice table and chairs set out for breakfast, and enough food to put on 10lb a day. Normally, we'd set off about 8.00am and travel until midday, when we'd catch up with the sherpas, who had already brewed up on a fire and prepared lunch.

The afternoon followed the same pattern: to the next camp by about 5.00pm, and then by ablutions, tea, rest, and a drop of Scotch, to dinner. The weather was superb: sunshine, cool dry air and marvellous views all the time. Eventually, we came to the end of the journey and it was time to descend to the valley — which is where I started to have some trouble. I had learned in Wales that going up hill on a horse is no problem, but I had a feeling that descending might be a different story. And so it proved; the 5,000ft drop turned out to be perhaps the most taxing thing I have ever tried.

In the end, I had to get off: the walk was down hill. So it was, but the trouble is, that when you've just had four hours on the back of a horse, walking turns out to be very difficult; and we discovered in any case that Gomba had shed a shoe. This meant that we had to curtail our last day's journey, but by some strange form of bush telegraph, the jeep turned up at our last camp site and whisked us back to civilisation and our friends who live in the Kulu Valley. We stayed with them for a few days, and then flew back to Delhi for the next part of the trip. It was nice to be back in civilisation for a day or two, with the use of a superb swimming pool in the best hotel in the city. After a short rest, dealing with the dhobi wallahs (I think that some of my clothes still smell vaguely of horse), it was time to move on.

The next place we visited was Khajuraho, which is a good day's journey away. This is where the famous temples are. They were built between 900 and 1100AD, and the murals, of which there about 20,000, depict what can perhaps best be described as 'athletic performances' and one might well feel that they are not for the eyes of delicately brought-up young ladies. Nevertheless, the well informed Brahmin who spent a day showing us round, told us that women ask more questions about them than men.

From Khajuraho, we moved on further west to Rajkot where we stayed for a few days at Rajkumar College to visit friends. This is where Pettigrew worked for some ten years as a Senior Housemaster: it is the Indian equivalent of Eton. With an intake of a 1000 students a year, I suppose that at some time or other he must have whacked the backsides of some of those who are by now, the upper crust of the upper crust of the elite of India. As a result, he is greeted with the greatest respect by his ex-pupils.

From Rajkot we moved west again to visit a friend who is a Rajah, and who has set up a Trust to preserve the Gir Forest. This has belonged

to his family for about 1000 years, and is part of the Indian jungle. The object of the visit was to look for the lions which live here. Few people seem to know that lions live in India and even fewer have ever seen them. However, we were very lucky and saw a lioness with four cubs, another solitary lioness, and a lion who was licking his wounds after a fight.

From the Gir, we travelled west again to what is more or less the shore of the Arabian sea to view another fabulous temple, built right by the water, so that it can be seen from far out on the horizon. Our trip was nearly over: we had been in India for four weeks and we still had to get to Bombay for two or three day's recovery, before our flight home.

So, what's the verdict? Well, my view is that when you can't walk any more, you can still have a good time in the highest mountain areas of the world — probably up to the age of 100 or so. Are there any caveats? Well, as far as the horse riding is concerned, one or two: stables in the U.K. will have a wide range of gear to suit everyone, but when you meet your horse in India, you're stuck with what you find. I have quite wide feet, and the stirrups were rather narrow. If I went on a trip like this again, I would take a pair of stirrups with me that fit.

The other problem which can arise concerns the bridle paths themselves. In days of yore a tax was levied on the local inhabitants: they were obliged to spend a certain amount of time keeping the way clear of vegetation and trees. As transport has now moved predominantly to the roads, however, a rider is always at risk of being garrotted by a thorn-covered branch and, unfortunately, the horse won't stop of its own accord.

So why not have a go? If you don't fancy a horse, you could always try an elephant.



'Very cheap elephant, sahib. You pay for only one cwt of feed a day and no need of stirrups' Photo: Tim Noble

Eclipse of a Climbing Career

Martin Sinker

Not a lot to report from the armchair over the past 20 years or so: some brief and deeply-valued forays onto old favourites at Tremadoc and Cwm Silyn; escapes from the beach to monster sea-level traverses; excitements on the wonderful Porth Ysgo boulders (now officially 'discovered', I believe) and interludes on the delectable little neck-band crag above Rhiw. But this summer brought a rare convergence of The Total Eclipse, son Roland and self in Cornwall: Pentire's *Great Wall* was the nearest rock, but dauntingly steep. Roland and I both had seconded *Eroica*, though many years apart. Around 1980, Nick Longland, with his usual immaculate memory for every hold,

talked me up from above (the knee-lock under the overlap on the first pitch was a revelation). More recently, Olly Stephenson led Roland on a lively fly-past ascent; but we both knew that this route was far out of reach of our modest abilities as a team. Beyond the Rumps, however, a long-anticipated and far easier target awaited us: Seven Souls Rock. The sea-cleft swim was calm, the summit scramble steep, then easy: descent options include fairly serious deep-water jumping. There are also good, overhanging traverses to explore on the landward-face, but beware the swell and tide.

We crossed the Camel Estuary next day, and so to the seaward side of Stepper Point. A wet and misty walk, years ago, revealed the stunning Butter Hole, 'inaccessible except by sea', and the intricate 'trod' and rock descent to the butter-yellow sand. The



Well past the knee-lock heroics: Nigel Birtwell completes the long first pitch of *Eroica*. Photo: Tim Noble

sea is crystal and always rough; the trippers far above enjoy the added frisson of distant pink bodies in the surf. However, the descent is exceptionally exposed and the inlet is a tide-trap. You have been warned.

This time, a rising flake-crack on the right was the objective; it's superb water-worn slate. Although at a modest angle, it had been winking at me for some time (Guidebook writers relax, this is probably the easy way down. But if the North Cornwall Guide had been in print, I might have been better informed). So to the crack, slanting left then curling right to a steep, spiky groove or corner, a hanging slab and final flaky-wall: three pitches should do it comfortably. The name was easy, too: *Last Tango* (Brando fans will quickly finger the allusion). Sadly, it was not to be. Water-worn turned to weathered within 40ft, and to shattered not long after. Belay material at the base of the steep corner was little better than dried mud. Roland followed part-way up to review alternatives to the left; abseiling was not an option, and climbing down into the tide, increasingly unattractive. Leftward-exploration developed into a careful traverse far to seaward, across bottomless grooves and shaky pinnacles, to reach sounder rock and stronger grass. Upward escape ensued — perhaps to the disappointment of an increasingly obtrusive coastal helicopter. In retrospect, it was not one of father's brightest ideas. Two days later, we went to Lundy.

This was Roland's choice; he'd been and I had not. Long-term planning, via the Lundy web site, included careful selection of optimum sailing times and tickets (no eyebrows raised, surprisingly — despite my surname being inauspicious for boat travel). Though she's never touched a rock since 1969, my climbing bride of 30 years, Sidonie, came with us. Roland said the granite would be perfect: I couldn't wait.

The day began early with a misty drive to Clovelly; then we footed it down the steep cobbles to the harbour just as 'The Oldenburg' appeared from Bideford, and a scorching sun broke through. Dolphins were a bonus on the crossing; but the new Lundy pier was not quite ready to receive us. Waiting for the last of seven launch trips to the shore, burned up precious climbing time. A few trees give shade on the steep track up to the Lundy plateau; but traversing three quarters of the island's length became a steamy route-march. However, this was more than rewarded by reaching our climb. Seen for the first time on a blue sky, blue sea day, the perfection of the *Devil's Slide* slab is beyond description. What a monument to the immortal Admiral Lawder, and what a first ascent to find.

With total island time at just over four hours, Roland and I planned to climb only the upper half of the slab; Sidonie declined, although she would have romped it. In the event, on reaching the bottom of the grassy descent ramp, we were tempted to climb the lot, and so followed guidebook down the 'narrow rib' to sea level. The rib seemed hard and used up time; but soon Roland was roped-up and in action on the slab. Our



Inclined to a diabolic perfection: The Devil's Slide.
Photo: Tim Noble

ropes were long and he reached the half-way ledge in one pitch. Time was becoming a serious problem, quickly dismissed from the mind as I followed up to him and then led through to the unbelievable delight of a scamperring up the steepening upper slab and across the airy traverse below the head-wall. Roland followed smoothly through and up the final blocks: we were on top with a little over an hour in hand to our boarding-time.

A burst of applause and mini mexican wave from a group of watchers came as a surprise; Sidonie, observing, said they were all high as kites. Heat and sweat were overpowering: Roland's was for a plunge at Jenny's Cove. This has become a hazy memory of steep descent; a magical leap into bottomless cooling water; an unseemly tumble back in on top of Sidonie, and of loads of blood from barnacle scrapes. But sadly, the Cornish Great White did not appear. A merciless yomp back to the harbour and we found at least half the passengers still queueing to go aboard; our 'last off, last on' position turned out to be good news. Another swim seemed essential. Unfortunately, this led to a very old-fashioned look from the lady Warden, as I tried to combine climbing back into my undergarments with being last to board the launch. My comment, "Beautiful island, isn't it?" didn't win from her even the ghost of a smile.

Albatross

John Galloway

Tuesday 29th August 2000: with Spring low-tide during the day and fine weather, it was time for the next in Bob Moulton and my series of adventure projects: *Skeleton Ridge*, *The Old Man of Hoy*, *Magical Mystery Tour*, and now *Albatross*. This last is four and a half miles of inescapable sea-level traversing below chalk cliffs. Bob called the Coastguard to explain the sports plan and that we would not need rescuing: suggestions from Shineen and Di that we should take lifejackets, torches, warm clothing, and a mobile phone were rejected. This would be a minimalist expedition: swimming trunks, vest, rockboots, camera and snacks.

A precious 45 minutes behind schedule, we set off from Alum Bay at 3.15pm. An hour's hopping over slimy boulders and two wading sections brought us to The Needles. We soloed the landward Needle, finding only one juvenile kittiwake on top. This was fun — certainly a change from dogging *Slim Finger*. But 45 minutes had been squandered. I'd sailed past the route twice and thought it was all boulder-hopping (apart from Sun Corner which is where you emerge from Scratchells Bay onto the Channel side). Only Severe, this, so no problem for experienced El rockers; but we had forgotten that dagger in the guide book.

We walked across Scratchells Bay and under the 200ft overhanging scoop which is the most impressive cliff in the South East: it was time to start climbing, but the overhanging chalk dropped straight into the water. Because rock boots don't allow a flipper action, we swam, very slowly,



Avant nous, le deluge: John Galloway and Bob Moulton set off from Alum Bay to 'climb' Albatross. Photo: Galloway collection.

until we managed to refine the technique by pulling on flints. For over an hour, we swam and scrambled. Most of the 'scrambling' was chest-high in the water; then, boulders at last. "It's all over," said Bob. A little motor boat detoured in close: "You all right?"

"Fine, thanks, we're going to Freshwater Bay." But it felt very lonely after the boat had gone. We had a snack and started boulder-hopping again. 5 minutes later we came to the next wet bit. Cameras and vests were packed away again in dustbin bags in the bumbags. Another hour of wet scrambling and swimming ensued, and then the boulders came back. We scrambled over the boulders (above sea level, so the friction was good): they varied in size from small houses to footballs. After 10 minutes, we rounded a corner and saw miles and miles of coastline. Freshwater Bay was too far away to see, and worse, we could see more swimming ahead. We boulder-hopped for half an hour; the swimming section did not get any closer. It darkened and suddenly wasn't fun any more. After a further hour and a quarter of boulder-hopping, the boulders stopped and the cliff was sheer into the sea. It was very dark, now with no moon, and still a long way to go; more swimming and wet scrambling for about half an hour. Why is this thing in the guidebook? There's no climbing on it. It was a choice between a cold night out (which would mean going back a long way to the last of the boulders), or a long dark swim into Freshwater Bay, above mid-tide with Spring tides bringing higher water. I made a resolution: when I get out of this mess, I will grow up and stop doing silly things (this is perhaps overdue for one approaching 60).

Then came a bright light and a mighty whirring: we continued wet scrambling in the dazzle of four searchlights. At least we could see the holds now. But the down-draft was cold, and stirred up waves which made swimming awkward. After 20 minutes of illuminated wet scrambling, the large inflatable of the Freshwater Lifeboat nosed in to the rock, and we sprawled in gratefully. When we were two hours behind schedule and it had got dark, Shineen and Di had called the Coastguard. Shivering under a blanket in the Lifeboat station, I was too cold to write my name and address. Bob, however, who is more non-slim than me, was warm enough to do the documentation.

The following day, normality seemed unreal. "For our next project," declared Bob, "we should do some climbing. I've found a good route further west — a sea-level traverse." Di didn't look at all keen. When we met again, she quoted Carol Anne Duffy's poem, *Mrs Icarus*:

I'm not the first or the last
to stand on a hillock
watching the man she married
prove...
he's a total, utter, absolute Grade A pillock.'

The Girdle Traverse of the Atlantic North Face

Peter Evans

The traveller between Europe and North America cannot fail to notice that they are separated by a vast shimmering expanse: the *Atlantic North Face*. Seen from a distance, say 35,000ft, it appears featureless; but closer inspection reveals it to be, for the most part, covered in rugosities varying in size from little jugs to frowning overhangs. It is so huge a face (I have calculated its area to be some three times 10 to the minus 19 light years), that routes cannot be described in detail. Harding's limpid words on the *Girdle Traverse of Clogwyn y Ddisgl*, in his *Llanberis Pass Guide*, apply well to our *North Face*: 'The traverse may be taken in either direction and offers several grand situations. No detailed description is necessary: the climber is left to choose his own time and find his own difficulties and weaknesses'. Indeed, once quit of the Atlantic's flanks there are few distinctive features and route-finding skills are essential. Think of coming off Nevis in a white-out, or crossing Kinder and Bleaklow in thick mist, then multiply the distance a thousandfold. But on this face it is the wind that plays a leading role in the length, even the outcome, of an expedition. The wind is so very often from a westerly quarter that, to the weary climber heading into it, the very calms seem westerly.

Although no route has been, can ever be, exactly repeated, the traverses fall into two main groups: east to west and west to east, with the wind pattern making the latter always the faster. However, this is essentially a route to be savoured, day by day, week by week, not rushed in a few hours as the young jet set would. Who really made the first traverse is lost in the mists of antiquity or under the cover of time.

The traverse has become so popular as to be called a 'trade route'. Be that as it may, it remains a stirring, and shaking experience. The ideal number for such an expedition will depend on the 'fit' or degree of benign inter-action among members, working towards a common end: a sort of 'all in the same boat' attitude must prevail. I incline fairly steeply to the group of one, as shortening the lines of communication and ensuring uniformity of effort; praise and blame, too, are more properly apportioned, and the concept of the solo traverse has become more popular. Unfortunately, a dreadfully uncivilised element of competition enters at times and it becomes a 'race'. Against such carping it should be remembered that competition prompted the earliest attempts on this face (and yet, and yet, there are those sagas: dismissed by some as the work of an early spin doctor). But, to the route of the matter. There are two caveats: ignore those who say 'you can't get there from here'; and

don't fly in the face of convention — the proper start is at sea-level.

I will confine this account to my east-west traverse. For the majority of CC members a starting point in the west (of the east) makes sense, but a direct route is possible only between certain entrances and exits if untimely curtains are to be avoided. Thus from a start near South Stack, say, it is important that the Irish overhang be turned on its right or left flank. Many an expedition has come to grief through not observing this simple precept: carelessness; poor route finding, and bad visibility have all played their part. A start from the Plymouth or Falmouth mile-stones has much to recommend it: each avoids the tediously crowded, boulder-strewn, approach from further east. But even from these starts a *direttissima*, in the sense of the shortest, or Great-Circle, route as it is called, is impossible if the exit aimed for is south of the Newfoundland spur.

My first traverse was in 1956 along the 'French Line' (the Cunard Line sounded dull). I was with a large, guided party, heavily reliant on artificial aids. But, fast and enjoyable though this was, I could not avoid feeling something of a passenger, and it was not until I mounted my own solo expedition some 20 years later, that I began really to appreciate the awesome challenge and beauty of it all. Artificial aids had to be kept to a minimum; mainly simple devices to harness some part of the wind, were it never so prevailing, to aid progress. It was far from 'plane' sailing. Supplies are unobtainable 'en route'; a careful and adequate selection is essential, as is the means of transporting them. In my case this took the form of a stout container or vessel which, though only 32 ft long, combined splendour and economy in proportion suited to my unsponsored pocket, while leaving enough over for a few cases of basic necessities together with food and water — there is NO drinking water anywhere on this face. Clock and compass are also very important (one would feel lost without them), but a good rough guide for much of the chosen route is that in the early morning, the sun should lie, generally, behind you. Several hundred feet of rope were taken, but there are no fixed anchor points beyond the Azores aiguilles. They were far to the south, anyway and, besides, anchoring there causes delay and the possible onset of the dangerous euphoria known as the 'Azores high'. After much deliberation, crampons and axes were left behind —indeed, ice was seen on only one day of the many sodden ones. I had a hard hat, too, but used it only in the worst weather.

But, I get ahead of myself, which is more than I did in the long hot summer of '76. To get leave to 'embark' as one might say, on this expedition, I had to give the whole thing a serious air by entering a competition. The only recompense for this abnegation of my Corinthian principles was the number of simple spontaneous parties before and after the event, where one got simply and spontaneously tight. The rules were clear: 'from Plymouth to Newport leaving the Nantucket light to

starboard.' I am not convinced, however, that this Nant — 'stream' in Welsh — is necessarily evidence of early visitors from the Principality.

Over a hundred assorted nationals set off that June morning, mostly intent, gimlet-eyed and 'very' serious. I was feeling rather gimlet-eyed myself, and would no doubt have been among the leaders had I not stopped to advise a competing American cousin the way to the start line. But maybe this was just my excuse to avoid the vulgar rush. All the latest equipment was in evidence, much of it electronic, but the weather was to prove heavy for sponsored and unsponsored alike, and only two thirds of the starters made it to the finish; two disappeared without trace; the rest retired, let down by faulty equipment or struck by foreign objects. One at least finished with a top rope, or tow.

There were high winds often, and storms when my portable anemometer was stuck on the stop at 60 knots and every one a 'granny'. Three times in heavy weather I put extra guys out, battened down the hatches as they say and retired to my sleeping bag until the buffeting was over — more of a blow-out than a buffet, really. So I made my way across the Face, day after day, up and down, up and down, taking advantage of every hold that was offered. But I had not reckoned with a pervasive langour, known variously as the 'Atlantic Drift' or lassitude and longitude or even, in its more intense manifestation, the Gulf Stream. My relative lack of high latitude acclimatisation meant that progress was hindered by this adverse current of lethargy. Once realisation dawned, I made every effort to overcome it, mainly by heading for that prominent gendarme, Cape Race. Here, on that part of the face known as the Grand Banks, many a climber has mortgaged his property, even his life, only to lose both by keeling over into the negative equity of steeply falling pressure known so appositely as 'lows'. I, more fortunate, encountered nothing more than days of dense fog.

I was now at a point where I had to change direction if I was not to make a premature exit from the face on a track leading to Halifax or Boston or even to a point where there was no easy way off and the expedition would have been, as it were, sunk. We remained fog-dogged for much of the time; never did see the Nantucket Light, but picked out some cairns or 'buoys' a couple of miles from the edge of the Face (invisible in the haze) and a few more miles from the prescribed exit. This we reached as darkness fell, to anchor the container that had come to seem like home among a whole lot of others. After a general clean-up, food and drink a blissful kip was enjoyed, with no worry about wind or weather for the first time in weeks. I reported my arrival the following morning and had a second, liquid breakfast with an old chum and some friendly natives.

So, how would I grade it? Essentially the problem lies in route choosing rather than route finding, though finding is essential if you're choosy about your exit point. As so often, the difficulties are as much

subjective as objective. Pitches, perhaps 'stretches' for a traverse, can vary from Mod to XS, depending on the weather, which in turn, depends on the route chosen: the far southern route being usually more clement, though often wet. The season, too, is not without its influence. In all a moody face, by turns smiling and scowling in response to the winds that are such a feature of the region. When the winds roar, the face bellows back; when they drop to a whisper it chuckles, and when they die away it presents a mien of silent, glassy calm. In short, it is, my friend, supremely indifferent to either your traverse or my travesty.



'Rugosities, varying in size' in mid-North Face. Photo: Peter Evans

The Skye Ridge, from Travail So Gladly Spent

Tom Price

The Yorkshire Ramblers in the early 1950s had one or two very interesting Whitsuntide meets at Loch Coruisk on the Isle of Skye. The participants met at Mallaig, to be taken by boat to Loch Scavaig, and fetched back a week later. I joined George Spenceley for two of these trips. Our ambition was to make the celebrated traverse of the Cuillin Ridge, and in the early part of the week we made our plans and deposited bottles of water at two places on the route in preparation for the big day. On the eve of our attempt we turned in early in my small army pup tent intending to set off at one in the morning. On such occasions I need no alarm clock; I keep waking up every half-hour or so. When we looked out at one o'clock it was obvious the weather was changing. The wind was rising, the sky starless and overcast, and there was already a hint of rain in the air. We cancelled the trip, and when in the next hour our predictions were confirmed and the tent began to be shaken by wind and rain we sank deeper into our sleeping bags and were soon fast asleep. It was a rough night, and we were aware once or twice of movement about the camp, but we were snug enough and slept on.

We turned out next morning, however, to a rather hostile reception. Our companions, assuming we were battling it out on the hill, had conscientiously checked our tent during the night, replacing pegs where necessary, making sure it did not blow down.

We had better luck the following year, and once again the plan was to leave Coruisk at one in the morning. This time we were a party of three, as we had been joined by Crosby Fox, a sea captain by profession and a keen mountaineer.

Our first objective was the summit of Gars-bheinn, and we reached it at 3am after a scramble straight up its flank. In the dark on the way up something hissed loudly at us and we persuaded ourselves that it was a wild cat. By the time we got to the top, daylight had already arrived, and all around us, so it seemed, lay the sea, dotted with islands and headlands, an inspiring sight. There is nothing quite like being up the mountain at the dawning of the day. One feels not only favoured but virtuous, as though the pleasure one experiences is deserved, and not simply a gift from heaven. We had some breakfast and moved on quietly enough, conserving our energy, for we had much to do. We had brought a rope and a sling or two and plenty of food and drink. I had even brought a sleeping bag, not against the possibility of bivouacing on the ridge, but in preparation for our night out at the end. We made good progress over

Sgurr a' Choire Bhig, Sgurr nan Eag, Caisteal a' Gharbh-Choire, Sgurr Dubh Beag and Dubhs, to the Thearlaich-Dubh gap, where we met our first bit of difficult rock, and roped up for it. We were pleased, we were doing well, and we were soon on the summit of Sgurr Alasdair, the highest mountain in Skye. It lays off the main ridge, but we were soon back from it and over Sgurr Mhic Choinich and An Stac to our next obstacle, the Inaccessible Pinnacle, or 'In Pin' as we always called it. The long exposed scramble along the top edge of this remarkable blade of rock brought us to an abrupt drop. A number of old furry slings marked the abseil point. Not one of them looked worth risking one's life on, but taken together they seemed reasonably safe. To avoid having to add to the collection, we arranged one our own slings in such a way that when we passed the rope through them all, ours was too long to bear any weight, but was there ready in case the others gave way. The heavier members of our party then went down, and since the old slings bore their weight, I, the lightest, was able to take our own sling off and trust to the old ones.

To be out on this splendid ridge, the rockiest of any in Britain, was rewarding on several counts. The panorama was magnificent with great hills standing out of the sea and going on, range after range, it seemed, into the far distance. The rock, gabbro, was as rough as sandpaper so that we stuck to it easily, and so steep as to convince us that these were mountains, not hills. The day was hot and sunny; one might have been among the isles of Greece. It was good to be alive.

Our way now led over Sgurr Dearg and the various tops of Sgurr na Banachdich, the smallpox peak, to Sgurr Thormaid and Sgurr a'Ghradaidh, the peak of the mighty winds. It was midday now and we were still going well. George, a great believer in food as a means of combating fatigue, kept making sure were well stoked up. One item of food we'd brought was 11 raw eggs beaten up with sugar and carried in a glass jar. When it came to the pinch neither of my companions could face this delicious concoction, so I had it all to myself and I must say it slipped down easily and proved a highly efficient fuel.

It was about this time that we began coming across men stationed here and there along the ridge, not appearing to be going anywhere. We passed the day and went over Sgurr a' Mhadaidh. Somewhere along the ridge, perhaps in the bealach by Harta Corrie, we stopped to chat with two such loiterers, and found that they were members of the Alpine Club on a meet at Sligachan Hotel, and that in recognition of his conquest of Everest, they were giving John Hunt a celebratory treat by enabling him and his wife to do an unencumbered traverse of the Cuillin Ridge. The pair were wearing espadrilles, and carrying no ropes, food, drink or spare clothing, as these were to be provided en route.

This piece of gossip had an interesting effect upon our little group. By our steady and purposeful progress along the ridge we had made satisfactory time, had had no serious hold-ups, and were clearly going to



'COIRE LAGAN' Clifford Fishwick, 1990
(Oil on canvas, 4ft x 3ft)

make it to Sgurr nan Gilleann quite comfortably. We could now afford to slow up a little, take some of the pressure off, take full note of the incomparable rock scenery. But Crosby Fox became obsessively anxious not to be overtaken by the Hunts, and the fact that occasionally they could be discerned in the distance behind us gave a particular urgency to his fears. We were urged to step up the pace, and when we got to The Basteir Tooth and roped up for the rather intimidating pitch up from the little col, the presence of another *Alpine Club* man waiting there with a rope at the ready was like a goad to drive us on. I for my part, notwithstanding the 11 eggs, was getting tired having been on the go since 1.00pm in the morning, and I had little sympathy for the idea of this finishing spurt. But we made it and avoided the ignominy of being overtaken.

On the way down across the moor to Sligachan in the heat of the afternoon we stopped at an inviting-looking dub, stripped off and plunged into the peaty water.

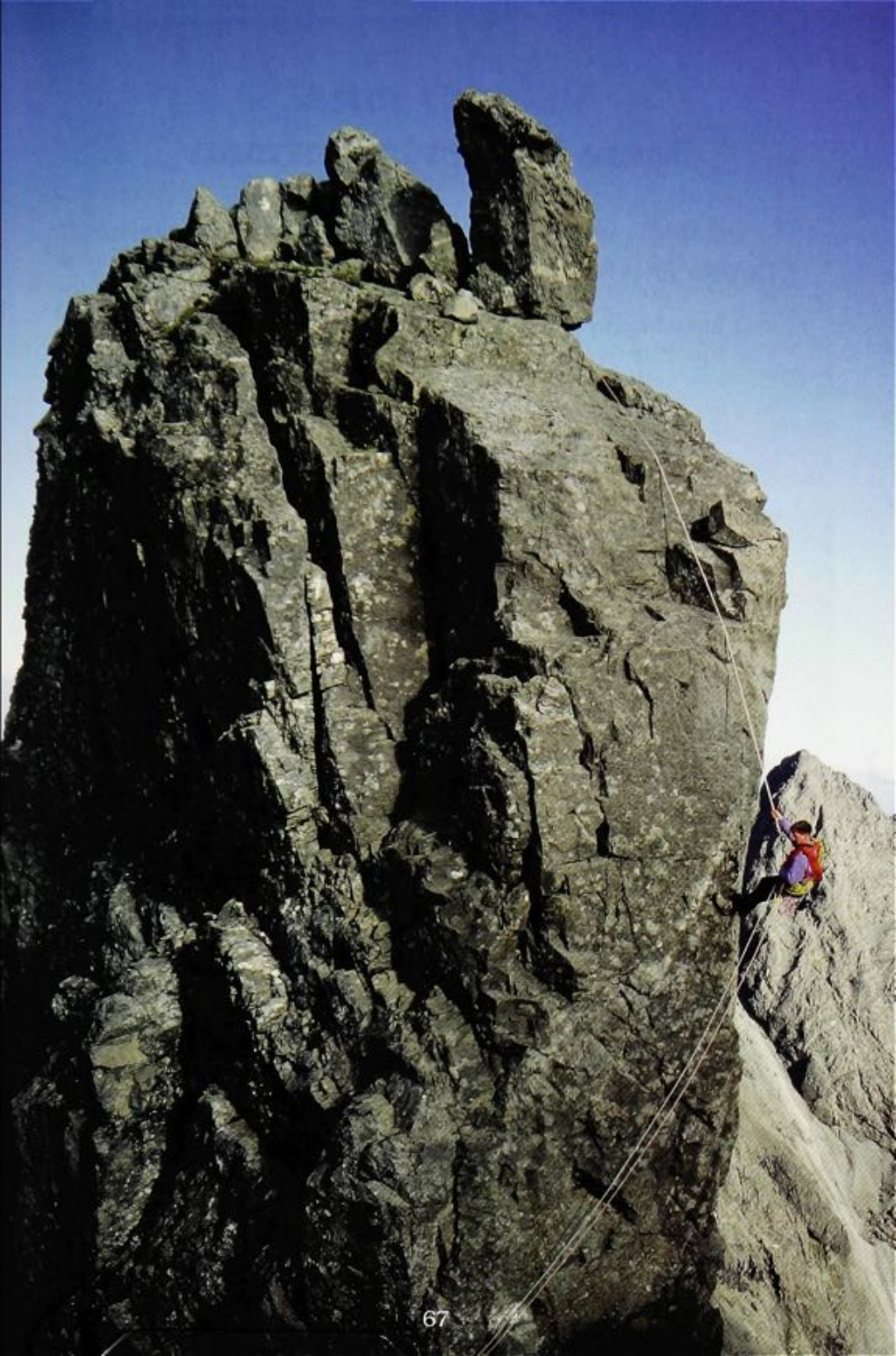
We ordered dinner at the hotel. The idea was to sleep in the heather and set off at five in the morning so as to be up Glen Sligachan before the sun began to beat upon it, for the heat wave weather seemed certain to continue. My friends had been offered sleeping bags by two of the *Alpine Club* men we had spoken to on the ridge, and they thought it only civilised to take a shower before using them. For my part I went straight out into the heather, full of good food, got into my bag, and was blissfully

asleep in minutes. George and Crosby fared less well. Livened up somewhat by the shower, they were pestered by midges and kept awake for hours. Consequently when I awoke at five, eager to get going, they were very difficult to rouse and very grumpy. It was for their own good, I pointed out, and in the end they had to admit it, for we got to Loch Athain in the cool of the morning and were up on Clach Glas by the time the full heat of the day struck us.

We were all fairly drowsy on this walk, but the interest of the rock scrambling kept us from nodding off, and we still felt quite strong. As we went down the ridge of Blaven towards Camasunary an eagle lifted off a ledge just a few feet immediately below us, and sailed off leaving us in no doubt of its size and power. We continued on down, with the fine panorama of the sea before us and the jagged seven-mile ridge of the Cuillin to our right. We still had the walk round to Loch Scavaig to do, but the hard work was over, and we felt well pleased with our two days of mountain travel.

When, a day or two later, the boat came and took us all back to Mallaig, I walked down the quay to see if I could get a herring or two for our supper. Some fishermen were unloading their catch into barrels. They were quite willing to let me take a few, but laughed when I tried to get hold of the slippery fish. "Put your hand like this," one of them said, holding his own hand, palm up, with the fingers spread out and bent up like claws, I did so and he hung a herring by its gills on each finger.

George and I, travelling in my open top Austin tourer, pulled off the road at the white sands of Morar, and in the golden afternoon sunshine we fried the herrings in butter over a driftwood fire, the air full of screaming gulls clamouring for the guts and leftovers. What I remember about that delicious meal is how rich I felt, and how favoured.



Poem by Kevin Borman

Cuillin Bivvi

Gas hisses towards a dusk coffee
The squat turret of Mhic Choinnich
darkens just north of our sleeping bags
in their contorted, rock-hemmed niche.
Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Thearlaich
are black pinnacles south.

We haven't said much all day,
mostly just chosen individual lines,
soaked up views, negotiated rock.
Now we talk briefly, gaze slowly,
sip hot liquid, share a smile.

In the west improbable horizontal
fireworks way out on The Minch
evolve like a sixties light show.
East, cloud drapes a wild white
banner over Marsco. Our finger ends
sing from the abrasion of gabbro.

We know we'll wake as if we've not slept,
torn between enthusiasm and wariness
at the thought of the rock blade we hope
to climb by six, before the crowds arrive.

We squirm around, working towards a fit
for human shapes on the few blades of grass.
Finally, euphoria overcomes
fitful thoughts of dawn and we drift off,
quietly sure that one bivvi here
is a fair reward for the average life.

After Crocker

Tim Noble

Apparently, it is now recognised in serious sporting circles that coming second 'is no more than being the first of the rest of the losers.' Well, so what? For many seconds, our fate has always been to arrive after — to follow where others have not feared first to tread. So it's 'no big cigar' if we 'come second', or even '659th' (cf p.103); it's just pleasant to let 'Guidebook' or real leaders guide us in 'life's feast'. On rare occasions, however, we followers get an urge not to come after one of the best: we want a *First Ascent* of our own. But here's the rub: we need, first, a range of cliffs with 'excellent climbs still to be added' that must be empty out of season (for reasons of secrecy and shame). Check your CC guidebooks, natural seconds: North Pembroke fits this bill. Beyond Britain's most secret and austere of Cathedrals in St David's lies a wild and secretive coastline and the quintessence of sea-cliff climbing. A habitat of keen 'explorers with initiative' for over 35 years, the gabbro cliffs between Strumble and St David's Head are, in the words of the 1995 CC *Guidebook*, 'no sport climbing area', but 'a place for the adventurous'.

Many leaders have left their marks: Mortlock, Biven, Cleare, Boysen, Allen, Carnell, Harber, Donnithorne, Littlejohn, Quinton, Viganò, Parnell, Twomey, and Crocker. So, how can this be the place for the follower to be first for a change? Don't despair: read the Historical and list of First Ascents. Change comes slowly here; months go by without a new route being recorded, then, out of the blue, a new Severe is climbed. Slabs abound (and are still being found). In short, despite repeated



Act of God: could it be M.C. seconding a repeat ascent? Photo: Tim Noble

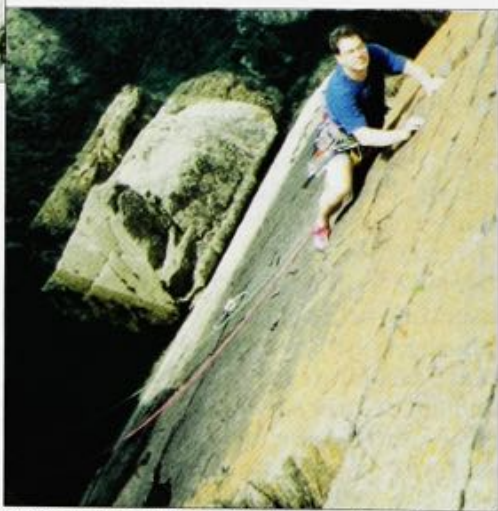


A family affair: the Atkins's rock on Al Evans's Dream-boat Annie. Photo: Tim Noble

Giles relished the joke, the warm-up 'after Crocker', and all the other classics that we found and climbed; but next year we'll need a tougher start to N. Pembroke new-routing. I'm currently planning an 'after Mayers/Parnell/Twomey/Littlejohn/Quinton/Donnithorne' warm-up. Any other sad and natural followers out there who fancy coming first for a change?

visits by the best climbers of the day, this is just the place for the natural follower to find a little first as well. And to tempt a partner to follow you to Craig Coetan (where Severes come thick and fast and there's a little rock to spare), you might try 'The Ploy': "Ok, here's the plan: we climb my only British new route; then, before prospecting for more Severes, we check out a... a...Martin Crocker route!"

"What? Editing has got to you at last; you've lost your mind," Giles exclaimed. It hasn't — nor have I (yet); but only because of a careful reading of CC Pembroke Guides and Supplements. In 1975, M.C. took a walk alone, checking, exploring, looking for a *Suzie's Plot*. At Craig Coetan, he wandered off the path into the almost vertical, producing his only North Pembroke new route of the year. *Act of God* is a 110ft VS, with 'splendid climbing' and 'big holds...at the right moment.'



Slab happy: Giles Atkins on the classic Severe, Red Wall. Photo: Tim Noble

Sadgill Wall, Longsleddale

Terry Gifford

You know how quickly a route can assert itself upon your tied-on, racked-up and ready-to-climb enthusiasm: it grabs you when you think you're grabbing it. '6m right of a rowan', and the starting jugs of the spiky buttress satisfy your eagerness to get going in the lead for the first pitch. Then, suddenly, you're balancing on a toe-point on top of a spike facing a steep wall that has closed up its compact face and you're feeling around for the smallest of finger holds just to give you time to work out the next move. But time is what you've not got on your rack. Time is what you were supposed to have bought by regular visits to the synthetic indoors through the winter (which in my case, I had not got).

So it was back to that familiar dialogue between the 'Do something quick!' voice and the 'Stay cool!' voice. At a second stretch of a foot to the sloping ledge out on the right, I decided that the friction had to be good enough. And, at the same moment, my fingers found a little square edge that had been above my head all the time. Committed now, the most tempting holds were at full stretch; but I risked my foot skidding off before my fingers could close for a breath-held pull.

At this point the Artist arrived and started chatting to the Welsh Editor who was holding my ropes, seemingly on a bit of a 'hiraeth'. They were joking about something. The sling around the spike seemed a long way below. There was no question of my greeting the Artist (I was too gripped), although at the back of my mind I knew it would seem churlish — especially since he was responsible for my acquaintance with the hidden gems of Longsleddale. Indirectly, he was responsible for my winter-long obsession with *Sadgill Wall* — which is only Mild Severe, south-facing, now with two stars and perfect for a first Lakes route after snow and rain have stopped. Little did I realise that I would be dragging the Welsh Editor out of his Sunday morning bed, to do it in a day's flash from Sheffield on what was to be the hottest day of the year. 'When we were young', I remember Pat Ament telling a Buxton conference audience, 'we had some scary adventures and we came back barely alive.' At the end of this long June day that's how we would feel, but without the benefit or excuse of youth.

My acquaintance with Longsleddale had begun 10 years earlier when David Craig and I had met the Artist to climb his father's route on the opposite side of the Valley. Exactly 60 years after the first ascent, we climbed *Black Cleft* HVD on a dry afternoon at the end of summer. Having a thrillingly bold swing right at the top, it was so much better than the name implied. Then, last year, we truanted from the newly-revived *Kendal Film Festival* and the Artist belayed Gill's lead on *Dandle Buttress*

HD, whilst I took snaps. The top of the first pitch was surprisingly strenuous, so Gill belayed early for me to lead through. This brought us out onto the airy buttress up which Gill led from exposed ridge, to frictionous slabs, to a steep little corner and 'Spike Minor' (as the nomenclature of 1929 has it). The narrow neck containing 'Spike Major', that joined the buttress to the mountain, had us exclaiming in amazement and dancing along Alpine-style. Walking out that day, I looked over my shoulder and noticed someone leading across a slab below an overhang on the right of the crag: *Sadgill Wall* made its mark on my mind. Next spring, I thought.

So here I was at last (actually not in the first flush of spring, but certainly flushed), and about to spring for those jugs in silent terror whilst the Artist joked with the Welsh Editor out of sight below. A little leap; a firm fist-grip; a scrabble of feet and the jagged ridge led up to a steep pull to the most solid of spike belays.

'Now, what did you have in mind for this drawing?' shouted the Artist, who had loped up the scree with the long stride of a local.

'A crag sketch like your dad's guide book drawings,' I called down.

'You mean from back down there?'

'Er, yes.'

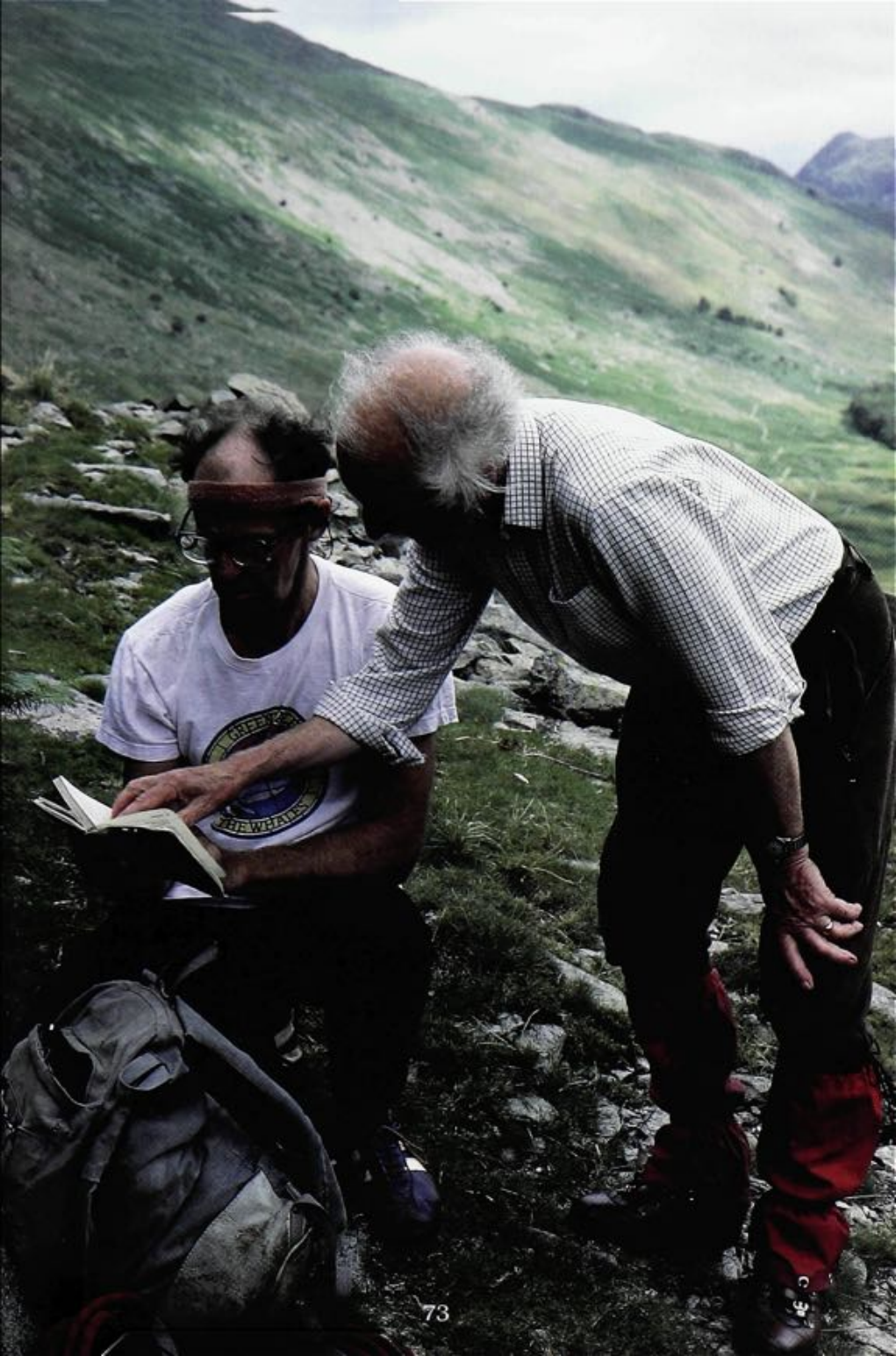
'Right,' came the nonplussed reply, and the Artist promptly slid down the steep grass on his bum, like a kid having a great time in his back garden — which of course he was.

Fortunately, the Welsh Editor declined an offer of the next lead, so I got to discover why this route has gained a star since the previous guide. The second pitch is simply stunning: steep, well-protected and needing a thoughtful approach. It begins by a swing along the edge of a slanting crack to a thread behind jammed spikes; then launches across the slab below the overhang in a brilliant puzzle of footholds and always sharp spikes for grateful fingers. The belay ledge is one of those places where it simply feels good to balance the close reading of rock beside you and the open reading of river, and meadow, and mountain beyond.

Now a conundrum presents itself: where to begin a traverse of the steep slab on the right? I went up to place a sling on a small spike and up again to traverse at a break. This may have been too high and too safe, but the heat of the day was taking its toll; getting up vertical heather to the rowan belay took a sapping effort. The Welsh Editor yanked on the bilberry roots into the grassy bay above and tied on to the broken wall of the bay. Here, I started up a crack, found myself stepping round to the right and up onto another eagle-eerie of a ledge below the '3 metre crack'. It's actually the corner on its left, which is climbed by foot-jams and long pulls.

As rock gave way to heather, I slumped beside the last rock on

Opposite: Lakes evergreens: David Craig (left) and Harry Griffin dissect route descriptions below Eagle Crag, Grisedale in 1988. Photo: Tim Noble



which to belay. I felt weak and whacked; taking in the rope took a dry-mouthed effort. The Welsh Editor arrived in better shape than me. The Artist was still at his post, leaning back against a boulder still sketching far below. Now came the narrow neck of pinnacles that is the top of *Dandle Buttress*. It should have been fun, but the last heave up the last pinnacle drained the last of my strength and I flopped down on the turf that curves over into the short descent gully. I was glad I had a helmet on to keep the sun off and equally glad I had the new boots clipped to my harness for the gruelling steep descent. But I advised the Welsh Editor to keep his rock-shoes on for the first part of the under-cut descent gully, which is both tricky and loose. In the shade below it, we changed into our boots and frankly, lay back a bit in the cool breeze that always funnels through here.

Then, over another grassy col, and we were sliding down scree and steep grass seeking a seepage in the stream bed to suck at and slap on our burning necks. Below the crag, we descended slowly towards a boulder, big enough to offer shade to two sad gits panting like sheep; the Artist popped up, not at all pooped by the heat. Rehydrating at the pub, Julian Cooper showed us his sketchbook and Ian Smith thought he might have a photo or three. I thought I might be able to write a piece without exaggerating the heat, perhaps, and resisting the title 'Sadgit Wall'.

Julian's drawing of the route is so intensely full of information and impressions that it's the very opposite of William Heaton Cooper's economical sketches of crags for the FRRC Lake District climbing guides. "Your father really understood crag structure," said Harry Griffin to Julian when I took him to see Julian's recent paintings from his trip to Kangchenjunga Basecamp. Harry first climbed *Sadgill Wall* in 1949 and now, just a month before his 90th birthday, he remembered that first pitch as "Feeling VS: it was steep, smooth and holdless. We were wearing clinkers on our boots, not tricounis. Eric Arnison and Tom Philipson and I each had a go at that first pitch and failed. Then I remembered that I had some black rubbers in my rucksack and succeeded. But credit must go to the other two, you know, who did the whole climb in clinkers."

I remember the interesting challenge of working out the route and feeling lonely and exposed in the upper reaches of the climb. We had no slings, just the rope that was tied round our waists. I never climbed it again, but lots of people come and tell me how much they have enjoyed it. Well, me too, Harry. I for one am looking forward to climbing it again and perhaps feeling less of a sad git on *Sadgill Wall*.

Poem by Kym Martindale

This Route

Gone feral
in pursuit of routes
broken loose
and thin from wanting
crawling in the face of nature

She's traded too much
for this bitter line,
this moon-arid rockscape these sabre-toothed peaks,
and even perfect sinews
ache with the price.
Who is she? Sticked monstrously
from hunger and anger
and remorse,
from snarls and curses
in black sharp places
that fire her reach
that damn the earth dragging
at her hips —
she's hauled it up so many routes
and it's never enough.

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

This route has rung the till.

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

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

*Opposite: The late Alison Hargreaves climbing Right Unconquerable.
Photo: Ian Smith.*



Chatting with A.B.

Steve Dean

Perhaps the greatest pleasure in producing my book about the life of Colin Kirkus, was the opportunities it provided to meet many fascinating characters from the climbing world, past and present, all eager to offer recollections or opinions of Colin's life. Amongst them were Jack Longland, Ivan Waller, Hal Jacob, Marco Pallis, Bill Stallybrass, Charles Warren, John Watson and Ifor Freeman, all of whom provided background to Colin's place in the history of climbing.

However, the crucial figure in helping me to piece together much of Colin's life was someone I was not only rather in awe of, but was also someone I came to know quite well in the last years of his life. That person was, of course, Alan Hargreaves, known throughout the climbing world as A.B., a senior member of *The Climbers' Club*, *The Fell and Rock*, and of course *The Wayfarers Club*.

While carrying out my initial research, it soon became obvious that A.B. was a key figure in Colin's short life, having been one of his closest friends. I recall a conversation with Jack Longland early on, when the humour in Jack's comments indicated that I would have an entertaining time interviewing A.B. Initially, I approached him by letter, and received a warm invitation to visit him at his home at 'Southfield', Ulverston. I approached with some trepidation as I'd been warned that A.B. did not suffer fools gladly and would be forthright and direct on all matters. I need not have worried; I was greeted by a tiny man and briskly ushered into a room overflowing with papers and books. It was October 1986, and this marked the beginning of a friendship that was to be a great source of pleasure to me. I switched on my tape recorder and over an excellent bottle of Bordeaux produced by A.B., we commenced the first of many conversations.

I was delighted to discover that despite A.B.'s advancing years, he possessed a very clear memory of his climbing adventures between 1928 and the outbreak of the last war. As a result he was able to provide me with very vivid recollections, not only of various activities on the crags, but perhaps more importantly, memories of every day life in Liverpool when he and Colin were young lads just starting work. Similarly, his recollections of characters such as Menlove Edwards, Jack Longland, Marco Pallis, Fred Pigott and Morley Wood were very valuable in building up a clear picture of the pre-war period in both Wales and the Lake District.

As a result of that first meeting, I was to visit A.B. many times over the next few years. The usual pattern was for me to arrive at about 11.30 am, with some Hartley's bitter which A.B. particularly liked. We would

talk for a couple of hours and then take a light lunch that he always took great care preparing. Despite his spiky exterior, A.B. was a warm and modest man and I came to look forward to our meetings. I was of course, in a most privileged position; it was clear from our first meeting that A.B. had loved Colin like a brother and that his memories of that period were very dear to him. He was delighted to be given an opportunity to talk fully of his times with Colin and frequently told me "this will be a great book." I would tease him that he was only saying that because there was a lot of material in it about him. On one occasion, he was describing his early days in *The Wayfarer's Club* and the establishment of the Robertson Lamb Hut (he was in fact the first Hut Custodian here, but soon passed the job into the able hands of Harry Spilsbury.) "Ha, The Wayfarers! Splendid chaps. Steve, you really should become a member at once"

Following that first visit to Ulverston, many of my evenings would be livened by the phone ringing, and a familiar voice at the other end: "Ha! Hello Steve, A.B. here. I was just thinking..." He was a constant and positive critic of the early drafts of chapters, all of which I had put on tape for him. He was always glad to discuss the material and was a constant source of ideas and direction for the text. I was aware of his increasing frailty and his loss of eyesight and the increased arthritis clearly caused him to be very frustrated at times. On occasion, I found him to be rather cantankerous, but on the whole he was engaging company with a great general knowledge of pre-war climbing, and a great affection for his companions. As his health declined in the early 1990's, I worried that he might not live to see the book published but in the autumn of 1993, when the book finally appeared in the shops, A.B. was still active and expressed his delight that our shared efforts had found their way into print.

In November 1993. I had the great pleasure of being asked to speak at *The Wayfarer's Club* Dinner in Ambleside. Guy Kirkus (Colin's brother) was with me, and after I had spoken Guy read some of his poems. At the bar afterwards, I reunited Guy with A.B. and watched with great affection as they instantly fell into conversation, having not met for almost half a century. In his early 20s, A.B. had been a regular visitor to the Kirkus household, often calling round to talk climbing with Colin or to make plans for future trips. Guy remembered that his parents, who were quiet, gentle people, were somewhat overwhelmed by the boisterous, driven enthusiasm of the young A.B. At first, they seriously wondered what sort of character Colin had got himself involved with. It was poignant to see A.B. and Guy together at the bar of the Waterhead Hotel after all that time; there must have been much to talk of.

In 1994, shortly after the death of Jack Longland, I was invited to speak at *The Climbers' Club* Dinner in Llanberis. Again, Guy was with me, and A.B. was also there. Guy and I were very warmly received by the CC and after we'd both spoken A.B. got up to say a few words. He

announced in his loud, clear voice that "I will get up onto my hind legs, so that everyone can see me." He was helped up onto a chair, where he stood and made the most wonderful speech. He talked with great warmth about Colin and other pre-war characters and most particularly about Jack Longland, his life-long friend. I felt very proud to know this wonderfully courageous old man, keeping the faith for his lost friends in such an affectionate and spirited manner. Needless to say, A.B. got a standing ovation.

The loss of Jack Longland, and soon after that the passing of Ivan Waller affected A.B. very deeply, for it was as if the three of them had drawn strength from the long friendships they had shared. It was at around this time that A.B. finally left 'Southfield', and moved to a smaller flat in Fountain Street, Ulverston. I would sometimes call in on my way back from the Lakes. He would be seated amongst piles of papers, journals and books, his spirit still driven by the desire to work and be involved in things going on. I took him for lunch one Saturday, at a pub at Grange-over-Sands, where he was obviously well known and spoilt rotten. I was amused to see the way he revelled in all the attention he received from the girls serving and how he still loved to tell a story at a volume that ensured that the whole pub heard it. Later, we walked along the shore and he talked of his great love of Ireland, the Scilly Isles, Lundy and perhaps that closest to his heart, opera. As we drove back to Ulverston we talked again of his young days climbing with Colin; it was a lovely afternoon, with the sun breaking though onto the fells.

Very late in A.B.'s life, Jim Perrin wrote a very warm article about him that appeared in *Climber* magazine (March 1993). To Jim's utter dismay, for A.B. was much admired by him, A.B. was totally outraged to be the subject of such a piece and threatened all sorts of dire consequences. Even in his 90s, he was a character to be reckoned with.

The last time I met A.B. was in the summer of 1994. He was visiting Buxton with his daughter Susan and God-daughter, Jo Longland, to go to the opera. I stopped off en-route for Wales and had tea with them all. A.B. was as verbally robust as ever, castigating me loudly for climbing on the slate.

We exchanged letters later that summer and then word reached me of his rapidly-failing health. Sadly, it was no surprise to hear of his passing at the age of 92. I was delighted to have known this extraordinary man and to have had the opportunity to share many warm, laughter filled hours with him recalling his youth. Without A.B.'s proud drive, desire and constant gentle prodding, I don't think *Hands of a Climber* would have made it into print, and for that, I will always be in his debt. He really was unique and having known him enriched my own love and appreciation of climbing and the hills.

Just after A.B. died I went out one cold and blustery afternoon and walked around the lake at Cwm Idwal. I hadn't been there for some years

and had forgotten how grand it all was. I thought about Colin, Jack, Ivan and A.B., and of their bold pioneering efforts there 60 years ago. They were all great spirits: I hope they still sometimes visit that wonderfully wild place.



Steve Dean and A.B. Hargreaves. Photo: Dean collection

Working with Plastic

Dave Gregory

Half-term was going to be a washout. We would sulk in our metaphorical tents, and play the waiting game, ready to surge forth to do battle if the elements relented. I dodged the showers, building walls to terrace the mini-Montenvers slopes behind the house, becoming stiffer, joint-creakier and back-wearier by the day. Relief came from a most unexpected source: some TV location agent had seen Chris's book on limestone climbs and had run him to earth. American Express wanted a fearsome location and a team of young, clean-shaven abseilers — and they would pay.

Gordale Scar filled one bill; Chris passed for one of the others (which I thought was a bit rich: if he counted as young, I said, so did I, and I'd shave my face, and my chest if the money was right). Martin and Seamus got the other two hero slots, but I could have a little job, providing I didn't get my aged ugly mug in front of the cameras. When all the Bank Holiday turmoil could be relied on to have gone sodden home, we left Sheffield early (well, early by Chris's lights anyway), and reported to a hotel in Malham with a double room each. The others must have rattled like a pea in a drum, but mine being (so they said, with all the force of logic behind them), on the ground floor, it would be convenient to keep the gear in. There was much amusement that in addition to this stroke of genius, my room also possessed facilities for the disabled.

We were in The Buck Inn, fortifying the inner man before what looked like being a wet, cold, and windy day in the Scar, when the hirer arrived to check on the help. Assured that everything was under control, he departed to spy on other hirelings and seek out other locations while we humped a million ropes and assorted iron bars and stakes, lump hammers, pegs and every form of abseiling device known to man into the gorge. Offer had been made in Sheffield of a rechargeable drill, for placing bolts; but, to my relief, the vote had gone against this, after all I have a reputation to keep up, and an ingrained terror of 'the Wilson' in full spate.

We soloed, with heavy sacks, and in no little danger, up the tufa rib at the head of the gorge in drizzle and wind-blown spray, to solo the streaming narrow arête and walk back on the true left top, until we were above the tufa rib. One rope had to land its abseilers plumb on that, so we drove a selection of stakes through the turf into the cracks beneath and hurled a rope into the gale. Of course, it blew out sideways and knotted itself inextricably round a tree, but eventually, Martin got down to the tree and hung the ab rope from that. No one slipped down the sodden grass into the gorge and we were all grateful to find easier footing on the other side and monster boulders for belays. Having pulled up all

the ropes and coiled them out of sight, we soloed back down the tufa, carrying the unused impedimenta. In view of the potential repeated wading through the water, I was wearing plastic boots, and was not happy when one sole came off halfway down the tufa rib. I got down safely (about E4, I thought), but had desperate trouble on the path to the car. Perhaps I was too old to be the star in the advertising epic.

Next day, against all the forecasts and odds, was fine and the fields below the gorge started to fill with cars and vans, disgorging people, gear, people and more people — in fact, some 25 in all. What the hell did they all do? We were given a list of their functions. My young, clean-shaven, and presumably photogenic companions were listed as TALENT, while I figured as support. Was it actually a 'Wonderbra' ad? 'Prod Assistant' (was this to goad reluctant abseilers?) 'Prop Master' was easier, except that there didn't seem to be any props — unless we were they. 'Runner' (were there bets on the descent times?). There were 'Focus Pullers' and 'Gaffers', 'Directors' and 'US and UK Producers' — the latter the elegant, desirable, and scrumptiously- named, Lucinda Uallop. Interesting jobs all, doubtless, but the one which most of us aspired to was 'Clapper Loader' — a position at present held by one, Chunky Richmond. Martin opted for being 'Best Boy'; it was, he said, only the truth.

There were special requirements: fleeces and hard hats, not for the abseilers but the ground level team (25 of them) who evidently didn't fancy sixteen stone abseilers landing on their heads; and special instructions, 'No crew to go above 10,000 feet without a Guinness or wings.'

An American seemed to be in nominal charge, but our particular boss was the DOP. He was the most down to earth of the bunch, and Thank God, he knew what he was doing. He gave me a radio, telling me to keep it switched on all the time, and a spare battery, which he asked me not to drop (I realised then why all the ground team wore helmets). We tested it at a distance of 10ft and then we, the high-level team, went off to do our thing.

The DOP, Steve, had trouble with his radio. He had not before worked with anyone used to calling classes to order across a rugby field, or yelling for tight up a 150ft pitch and he had to hold his receiver at arm's length, even when it was turned down to a minimum, but he never lost his cool even under that pressure and the multiple changes forced on him. The American decided the left-hand side rope was not needed; the right-hand side one was in the wrong place. We moved it, and Martin, careful of the team below, slowly lowered his sack down on it. Down went Chris and then Martin to find that the sack had gone into the water and been left there, mouth upstream. Looking after the abseilers' gear was clearly not on the function list. His change of clothes was sodden. What did they care?

We spread the clothes over any sun-facing boulders, well held down by rocks, and returned to business. The camera had followed their descents and the rope needed moving; another one was needed eight feet from the first. I watched Martin carefully feed a second rope into the 'sack and hang it below him to pay out as he slowly abseiled down. He was 15ft down when a knot appeared in the rope below him. Impossible: Houdini would have been hard-pressed to get out of that impasse, and he jumared back to lower the sack weighted by a stone. Chris went down for the camera to test the take with instructions to bring up the 'sack; he re-appeared some time later complaining at the weight of the 'sack and was not pleased when we took out the stone and cast it aside as unnecessary and useless.

Steve and I babbled on with our "Do you copy?", and "Over", and "Go, go, go!" The American wanted a really fast abseil, so Chris finished up sitting in the river with burned glove palms. No, no good. The A team wanted them to abseil simultaneously — first the big fellow above, then the little one. Could one of them come down slowly and get to the ground before the other faster one? Could they try the big fellow on the far rope and the little one on the near rope, and then the other way round? Could they stop twisting round as they came down clear of the rock? Could one of them carry a camera and film the other, despite the twisting? After half-a dozen descents, the A team decided that they only wanted to film the bottom section of the descent and gave Martin a radio to stuff in his jersey to relay instructions. For the last few takes, Chris and Martin hung suspended, waiting for clouds to pass the sun. They could have jumared up for each descent and saved all the rushing up the gorge. 11 descents, and floggings back up the gorge, they did. Money well-earned. Reserve Seamus and myself got better pleased with our lesser roles; it was very pleasant in the sun on the grassy terrace.

Eventually, we got permission to 'Wrap up' and the gorge floor was filled with scurrying personnel. We stripped all the ropes and carefully went down the tufa rib, expecting chaos and mountains of litter. Not a scrap remained. The caravan had left no traces and only a small reception team remained to claim my radio and settle a few financial matters. After another high-class meal and a special bottle of finest on the house, the others went off to free-load free drinks, but I went to bed. It's hard work, working with plastic and I was due to be back to terracing the mini-Montenvers on the next day.

The American Express advert appeared on television about a month later; you could just catch the abseiling sequence if you concentrated. The abseilers were in unrecognisable silhouette and could have been the Typhoo chimps for all a couch potato could tell. Perhaps I hadn't been cheated of a moment of glory after all.

Rock of Ages

Andy Heald

It is often said that 'youth is wasted on the young'. This is simple jealousy of course, and it seems to me that more frequently 'age is wasted on the old'. They say that the one thing we learn from history is that man does not learn from history. But surely, the slight decline in physical powers should be more than compensated for by greater life experience? Until, that is, the dread spectre of forgetfulness creeps in. And so it was... I had been climbing for nearly 30 years and Richard was seven years older than I; so, in climbing terms we were approaching an aggregate three score years and ten. It was, perhaps, a good time to consider one's position.

We had chosen the correct venue. Due to advances in science we had both managed to keep up the illusion that we were climbing as well as ever. But it was a moist November day in the Welsh mountains with mist swirling around the peaks, so we decided upon a rapid ascent of *Grooved Arête*. We had chosen the correct equipment to travel light, move fast and beat the darkness. We had one small bunch of wires, three or four quickdraws, a couple of slings and half a rack of Friends.

We clambered up from the Milestone to Heather Terrace as fast as our weary limbs would carry us, to stand below the burnished crack which, despite the huge scratched 'G A', always seems to bring forth the query " 'Ere, what's that you're on mate?" There we discovered our fateful error. We...(no, I must take full responsibility, despite his additional years, Richard's dementia was not as advanced as mine)...I, had left the wires in the car. Thus we had to face a route of some 800ft, on a far from perfect day, with three assorted Friends and a few bits of nylon tape of various lengths. My oft-forgotten nut extractor, today with no nuts to extract, jangled at me in a metallic, mocking voice. I had done the route over 20 years before, finishing in a thunderstorm that had left a man dead over the hill on Llech Ddu, and had a memory of a difficult and exposed wall just below the top. The fear stole into me: I wondered if I would somehow be able to cam the impertinent nut extractor into position and tie it off. Just settling for a walk was never suggested. There's no fool like an old fool.

I always seem to have to lead that horrid crack, polished by generations of thrashing limbs. But soon, Richard was high on the fine rib that is Pitch 2. "There's a No. 8 Rock, and it's completely stuck," he called down. "Oh salvation!" I made him describe every detail of the placement. I chose the largest stone I could grip and carried it up in my pocket. The stuck runner hadn't a chance against the nut key and stone routine in the hands of a desperate man.

We climbed rapidly to the Haven, our trophy clipped to the leader's harness; but like best crockery, it somehow seemed too precious to use. At the Knight's Move, we came upon a well-equipped pair of lads in the prime of their early 20s. Politely, I gave the second a good start, but grossly underestimated how slowly it is possible to climb. Thus, in the middle of the slab, I found myself directly below his flailing heels, wondering how far I would fall in my unprotected state, if his heavy boots kicked me off. Presently, he came to a runner and tugged it and twisted it, to no avail. "Oh no; not another!", gasped his exasperated leader. I looked in horror at their gear: green tape. My eyes darted to the Rock 8, dangling from my blind side: green tape. How could I be expected to give it back now with the trials still to come? They had so many and we had only one. I deftly unclipped it and slipped it into the pocket which had once held the stone that had committed the guilty act. I would find a way to give it back at the top. Then, I removed his newly-stuck runner and presented it, smiling sweetly.

At the stance on the edge, he led through, standing on my shoulder to overcome the awkward start; but ran out of courage in the middle of the groove and belayed. I removed their slightly stubborn belay nut before his mate was able to follow. Richard and I passed the Rock 8 furtively between us, not daring to use it for fear of discovery. On this occasion, my steep-remembered wall failed to materialise, and we got past the lads by finding a parallel line up the last pitch.

Sorting our meagre gear didn't take long; they would be along in a minute. I asked Richard what we should do about the Rock 8. He took it from my hand, and saying, "I think that's the debt youth owes to experience", he reached past my bag and dropped it into his own. I, who had chiselled it out with my own bare hands; I, who had extracted their runner on the Knight's Move; I, who had removed their belay at the stance on the edge; I, who still felt the boot print on my shoulder; I...I smiled contentedly in anticipation of all I would learn by the time I reached Richard's age.

Settings for Suicide

P.R.J. Harding.

I did start...to write an essay, but it was soon clear that it was not an essay I wanted to write but the facts; the plain facts as they happened. The fact is, there has been murder done...under their noses, and the fools can't spot the murderer.'

So runs the start of a strange but acclaimed piece of writing by Menlove Edwards, published in the *C.C.Journal*, 1937. In my younger days, J.M.E. was one of my heroes; and once, on Tryfan, I actually climbed with him. It was a memorable occasion. Another hero of mine, Ivan Waller, was also there and he made me feel not only embarrassed but 10ft tall as well, by remarking: "Peter climbs rather like Colin Kirkus, only much faster." However, what I remember most vividly about that day was Menlove's movement on steep rock. In an old pair of boots, nailed only with triple hobs, he went up effortlessly as if he was on some magical moving staircase. I saw and spoke to J.M.E. again at a couple of the CC's annual dinners; but a few years later, I was saddened and shocked by his eventually successful attempt at suicide. I must stop this digressive reminiscing now, and get on with my own tale, which, like Menlove's *Scenery for a Murder* has a thread of tragedy running through it.

The elderly lady had barely closed her eyes when sleep came and the dreaming started. At first it was like a fast video re-wind: fleeting glimpses of places and people, real and imaginary, speeding back through time to settle finally on scenery which, though familiar, was strange in a way that defied memory. Suddenly, there was movement in the scene as a young woman came hurrying up the old bridle way to pause and rest by one of the huge rock pillars forming that henge of the Nine Stones. She was now almost at the Tor of the Great Cliff; her long journey would soon be over. Moving on again, she reached its flat, slabby summit then started to walk more slowly, mumbling to herself as she neared the top of the Great Cliff itself. There she stopped, genuflected, and then let herself fall over the edge.

Kneeling before a roughly-sculptured crucifix in that shallow cave at the foot of the tor, lips moving in silent prayer, the old monk sensed rather than heard a body land on a slab of rock below the cliff's big wall. Crossing himself, he picked up his staff and made his way round the base of the cliff. He soon found the woman, lying face upwards, eyes open, staring sightlessly into the darkening sky. Bending down he wetted the thumb and forefinger of one hand with holy water from a small gourd

at his waist and gently closed each of the eyelids, making a tiny sign of the cross as he did so. Then, picking up his staff, he returned to the cave. In the morning he would summon help from the close nearby to carry the body down for burial. Suicide was of course a mortal sin which prohibited Christian burial. But who was to say such sin had been committed? Perhaps the woman had ventured too near the edge of that big wall of the tor's Great Cliff? Although it was known as Wall of the Suicides, surely not everyone who fell from its top intended to do so.

At this point the picture faded and the dream moved on in fast forward motion, flitting through scenes of life and death, in war and peace, until it slowed once more, revealing a couple of youngsters engaged in what some folk regarded as another attempted suicide: to climb up that big wall of the Tor of the Great Cliff. Their ultimate success in doing so set new standards, and was hailed as the start of modern rock climbing in Britain. Once again, the dream pictures began to fade, this time finally disappearing altogether. The elderly lady on the bed lay there peacefully; on her face there was just the hint of a smile.

By the end of W.W.2. Gareth had become a top-notch climber—one of less than a dozen 'big names' at that time, for the sport was still rather exclusive and the post-war mass movements had yet to get into their stride. When the war had started, he was still at school and, being a keen cyclist, used his bike to overcome such travel restrictions as wartime conditions imposed. At weekends and holidays he would pedal great distances to reach and scramble up some enticingly-named peak, for he had been fascinated by mountains from an early age.

Nicole was Gareth's regular girl friend, and had been so ever since they first met during their schooldays. Two years his junior, she was a diminutive young lady, very athletic and keen on cycling too. So, in their early days together, they would go off on their bikes at every opportunity, exploring the nooks and crannies of nearby hills and dales, occasionally lingering in some secluded spot, perhaps to rest or even explore more personal ones and often employing feet as well as fingers to conquer an interesting bit of rock. It was this occasional bouldering which led them onto become real rock climbers; they were soon doing top grade routes—new ones even. Within a couple of years, they were both well-known as two of the best climbers around, and Nicole herself, a natural gymnast with strength that belied her tiny frame, was perhaps the youngest, and probably the most able female rock climber of that time. In their circle of friends, Nicole was almost always addressed as Nicky; Gareth likewise became known as Gary. Some four years after they first met, when she was just 18, and with parents' approval they got engaged.

High on one of those once quiet and vegetated cliffs in Wales the leader was a good 60ft or more above his second man. It was fascinating to watch them for they were obviously trying a new and difficult route. Having reached what seemed to be a quite impossible bulge the leader

knocked in a piton. After clipping a runner and making a preliminary sortie, he shouted down to his mate that the next bit looked like it might be too difficult. It was then I recognised him as an up and coming young tiger by the name of Gary Pinder. I couldn't identify his second who was well-belayed to a large flake directly below him, but found out later that he was Stephen Spellers, usually known as Steph. What surprised me though was his immediate reply: "You won't know if it's too difficult until you've fallen off it." That didn't sound at all encouraging, but his leader was already at grips with the desperate-looking bulge. "This bastard is bloody hard," he shouted. The second's response was again surprising; "Don't fall off just yet 'cos I'm lighting a fag." And sure enough the chap had cupped his hands and was putting a match to a cigarette. Thankfully the leader had by then conquered the *mauvais pas* and, balancing on what must have been adequate footholds, was himself lighting a cigarette. Some weeks later I was told that the route they had pioneered was one of the hardest climbs in Britain. Certainly those two lads were a talented team, but also an unusual combination: a leader who didn't seem the least bit worried whether his second was holding the rope or not and a second who was quite happy for the leader to push things beyond the limit, perhaps even take a bad fall. That struck me as being rather strange.

When Gary graduated he accepted the offer of a job close to the Welsh border: with access to those mountains of Snowdonia it promised more frequent visits to one of his favourite climbing areas. As things turned out though, pressure of work in that new post, as well as week-end visits back to his parents' home once or twice a month, conspired to limit his Welsh climbing expeditions to the usual high days and holidays. However, those home visits did enable Nicky and himself to enjoy some good gritstone, for his parents managed a small hotel in a town quite near to the Peak District. Nicky had her own room and spent most of her weekends there. Indeed she had almost become an adopted daughter, perhaps making up for the loss of Gary's two sisters who had both died during infancy: the eldest one, had she lived, would have been just the same age as Nicky, so the latter and Gary's Mum were particularly close.

At the end of my long walk along those quiet Derwent edges I was quite surprised to find Stanage busy, although it's climbing clientele on that particular Sunday would be regarded nowadays as very sparse indeed. Walking below its impressive buttresses I soon came upon the folk I was looking for: a small group of army personnel on a week-end climbing course. My old friend Alf Bridge, who was running the show, had invited me to look in on them. However, just at that moment, all the instructors were in a huddle, discussing a problem. Apparently, two of their number had gone off to have a look at a prospective new route and, having been away much longer than was expected, there was a growing concern about them. Quite unexpectedly though, shouts from the top of the edge heralded a re-appearance of the missing pair and as they

descended, I recognised the man as Gary Pinder's pal, Steph. I didn't know his diminutive female companion, but soon discovered she was Nicky Reave, Gary Pinder's fiancée. Apparently their adventure in a deep and narrow chimney some distance away along the edge had taken much more time than they anticipated for, although Nicky's tiny build enabled her to climb it quite easily, Steph's had got completely stuck at a point where the chimney became a narrow cleft. However, they seemed to think it was a worthwhile climb and were wondering what name to give it. A suggestion of calling it *Nicky's Nook* immediately produced a few sniggers. I cannot recall what name, if any, the route was finally given but, my observance of Steph's face during this little episode caused me to have curious feelings about him. There was definitely something going on it that young man's head, something I couldn't define.

A month or so before Christmas, arriving home on one of his usual week-end visits, Gary was shocked to find both his parents very upset and Nicky nowhere to be seen. It took him some time to take in the detail of what had happened. Now as everyone knows, any local pub or village inn is usually a place where secrets don't exist for very long; any bit of scandal becomes known on both sides of the bar almost before it happens. In this case the whisper was that Nicky and Steph were having an affair. Indeed, it was said that on Saturday nights, when Gary's Mum and Dad were busy behind the bar, Nicky had been seen taking Steph upstairs. On hearing of this, Gary's Mum had confronted Nicky about the matter and, after strong denials and harsh words and tears on both sides, the distraught girl packed her bags and returned to her parents' home some distance away. All this had happened on the week-end previous to Gary's visits and, needless to say, he was absolutely dumbfounded. He went over to see Nicky at her parents' home and hear her side of the story. Still very upset, she was also repentant, admitting the beginnings of an affair but saying it had never gone 'all the way' and strongly denying that she had even taken Steph up to her room at the Inn. Gary believed her and things returned to normal between them. Sadly though, this was very short lived for, with one of his oldest climbing pals implicated, Gary found he could neither forget nor forgive what had happened; so he and Nicky went their own separate ways. Eventually she did get married to Steph, but although they remained active in the hills, both of them faded from the fore-front of the rock-climbing scene. Most amazingly though, Nicky never fulfilled the promise she had exhibited as a pioneering rock athletic; never again did she take part in any first ascents or lead routes which had not been led by a woman climber. However, Gary continued to be involved in climbing developments for many more years and before getting married he enjoyed quite a few more female relationships. Even with increasing responsibilities at work and in his own family developments he remained active in mountaineering. Many years went by.

The elderly lady at home alone had not long retired from her almost life-long job, but being childless and therefore having no grandchildren to embrace, embroil or occupy some of her life in later years, she soon became depressed. At least that was a possible reason for her depression, which was rapidly becoming worse, intolerable even.

That particular day her husband was not at home, so she knew it would be possible to execute a plan which had been in her mind for some time. She poured herself a glass of water and took it with her into the bedroom. Then, taking a handful of tablets from a small bottle on the bedside table, she swallowed all of them before lying down on the bed. When that expected feeling of drowsiness began to develop, she took the pre-placed plastic bag from under her pillow and put it over her head before relaxing and letting herself succumb to that now compelling urge to fall asleep. A little clock on the bedside table showed it was nearly 3.30pm.

The old climber on top of Stac Polly sat resting after his solo ascent of the direct route up its western buttress. It was one of his favourite Scottish rock climbs, for it ended virtually on the summit of a proper little mountain from which the views could be superb. They were so on that day and he sat there enjoying them for several minutes before starting to reflect on the afternoon's ascent: it had been enjoyable, but rather strange. All the time he was climbing he had had a curious feeling that he was not alone; someone seemed to be following close behind. At one point he had actually turned his head to say something to that ethereal companion but of course, there was no-one there. It was a rather disturbing incident, which he couldn't account for.

Then, stopping his day-dreaming and appreciation of those views, he looked at his watch: almost 4.00pm, so he must start his descent. When he got back to the car, there was a two hour drive back to the hotel where his wife, himself and their youngest daughter were staying. As he stood up though, he felt a sudden pain in his left arm; it was just as if someone was gripping it tightly to prevent him leaving. Oh God! Not a thromboly. Not up here on the Polly. Not on my own, early in May and so late in the day. But, magically, the pain vanished and breathing a sigh of relief, he started his descent to the tiny car park almost 1800 ft below.

Several days later, Gareth Pinder was deeply saddened to learn of the death of his one-time very close friend. When such news is unexpected, it comes as a shock — especially if it was suicide.

Ma Lowe Investigates

Moira Viggers

It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it. I stooped to pick up a handful of dirt and threw it onto the coffin. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust... .

As I started to walk away from the open grave, I felt a hand on my arm and turned to face my client, the person who had brought me here. I'd recognised her immediately when she had walked into my office not two hours previously: Dame Patricia 'Pat' Littleloo, formidable climber and mountaineer, veteran of a thousand alpine nights (with a similar number of alpine guides), awarded a Dameship for her tireless and virtually single-handed promulgation of the E2 5b grade, regardless of the *actual* grade of the route. She was also the doyenne of The Climbing Club — that dubious association of climbers with which I'd had various dealings in the past. As it turned out, it was in this capacity that she had come to see me.

Lowe's the name, Philip Lowe, and I'm a private dick, a dick for hire. Not a pretty job — and you need a strong stomach, particularly when faced with the likes of Dame Pat at 9.00am in the morning after a night on the bourbon. She hadn't combed her moustache and she was inclined to boom, which made my head hurt. After a while, I managed to catch the drift of her discourse, delivered *mezzo forte*, and discern that she was worried about the recent untimely death of one Andrew Stevens, Hon. Secretary to the Committee of The Climbing Club.

"To lose one committee member could be construed as unfortunate," she pronounced. "To lose two, looks like carelessness, but losing five is just plain profligate." She had a point. I questioned her closely as to the circumstances of the deaths.

"It was shortly after the AGM. The first was the Meets Secretary. We never thought too much about it really. After all, we all knew he liked a drink or two, so it didn't seem very strange when they found him upside down in a bucket of claret (one bottle isn't enough). We thought it a sad way to go, but fitting enough.

Next was the Treasurer; a tragic affair. He was out for a weekend walk with friends, along the edge of Stanage, when apparently ~~he sud-~~ suddenly yelled "Money", rushed to the edge of the cliff and leaned over, reaching out wildly with his hands...only to lose his balance and plummet to his death. Subsequently, it transpired that he had spotted a 20p piece on a ledge, and in his desperate efforts to acquire it on behalf of the Club, met with his untimely end.

Still we didn't think there was anything amiss. These things happen all the time. It seemed merely unfortunate that the Membership Secretary, when entering his front door, after a night out on the beer,

was smothered to death by a pile of unopened membership applications (oddly enough, all from the same person, a Mr John Doe), which inexplicably fell on his head. We shook our heads in sorrow that he had fallen so behind with the day-to-day tasks of his Committee position.

But it was the death of the Ranger that finally alerted us that something was going on. Although only an ordinary Committee member, he was punctilious in his attendance at Committee meetings, and he was one of several absentees at the first meeting after the AGM. Subsequent enquiries at his North Wales home revealed that he had gone to *The Wayfarers* Hut for the weekend, but had never returned. The Committee was concerned enough to co-opt a sub-committee to investigate at the hut itself, and what they found was... ." At this point Dame Pat's voice faded and broke off; she fell into harsh, racking sobs, clearly still tormented by the memory. After I had poured half a bottle of bourbon down her ear trumpet to revive her, she managed to carry on.

"We found him in the Men Only dormitory of the hut, stark naked and tied to a bed with an old Black Whip rope. He was barely conscious. "Thank God you're here," he croaked, "I can't...25 times already...not any more... ."

"Who did this to you?" cried the Serious Editor for North Wales, newly-elected to the Vice Presidency, and thus leader of the investigative sub-committee. But it was too late. The Ranger merely gave a ghastly gurgle and died. But you see now, Mr Lowe, why I have come to see you.

I did indeed. A known heterosexual murdered in the Men Only dormitory of *The Wayfarer's* Hut, in a suspiciously sexual manner. This was indeed death in Suspicious Circumstances. But Dame Pat had not yet finished.

"The President immediately called an Extraordinary Meeting of the remaining members of the committee (according to paragraph 2, subsection 3 (iii), line 27 of the Memorandum of Association) to discuss the situation. The Hon. Secretary dusted off his trusty PC to send out the notices, but his body was found some 24 hours later, slumped dead across his mouse. The Serious Editor, who understood such things, said that he had caught a particularly nasty virus from the computer and died. The funeral is today."

I leaped to my feet, hangover forgotten. "We must go to the funeral, Dame Pat. It's clear there's a murderer at large and we must act at once if we are to avert another tragedy."

Thus it was I stood at the graveside of the Hon. Secretary, and walked with Dame Pat and the remaining members of the Committee to partake of sherry at the local hostelry, after the service. As we sat sipping Diesel Cream, I scanned their faces. There was the President, his genial, weather-beaten face lined with concern. Around him were the three Vice Presidents, including the newly elected Serious Editor, acolytes to his every whim, and the remaining ordinary Committee members — the Token

Tart, the Newsletter Editor, the Dour Member. Every one a possible murderer. I thought back to the events Dame Pat had described. The truth seemed lost in a fog of confusion. But suddenly, like the mists swirling back from the summit of Snowdon, I saw the truth, and realised the identity of the Brocken Spectre.

I rose slowly to my feet and called them to order. Dame Pat adjusted the volume on her ear trumpet. I had their complete attention.

"There is a murderer amongst us — we all know that. A very clever murderer who thought to confuse and deceive the Committee while disguising his wicked aims. When Dame Pat related the details of the various death to me, I spotted an obvious anomaly. How could a man lure the Ranger to his death at the *Wayfarers* Hut? The answer is clear. It wasn't a man." I swung round to confront the Token Tart. "You lured him to his death, but thought that no one would suspect you because it was a Men Only room. At first I thought you must be the killer, but then I realised you had no motive to kill anyone else. You seduced the Ranger because you fancied his big blue eyes, but your motive was to make a political point about access for women. When I looked at the details of the other murders, I realised that you couldn't have committed them — you weren't strong enough to drown the Meets Secretary, and you're blonde, so you must be a bimbo when it comes to computers, which means you couldn't have killed the Hon. Secretary."

I paused for breath; the tension was palpable. I continued slowly. "Why would anyone want to kill Committee members? And why were they all members who had responsible positions? The answer was clear. Future Presidents are elected from the Committee's senior positions; the murderer was removing the competition. Yes, Mr Serious Editor, your secret is out!"

As I announced this, the Serious Editor blanched and shrank back in his seat; his face seemed to collapse; he couldn't even bluster. "Note when the deaths started: AFTER the AGM, when the Serious Editor was elected to the Vice Presidency. Such was his overweening ambition, he couldn't wait to go through the proper channels, so he was clearing the way to become the next President of The Climbing Club by murdering all other contenders. It must have come as a shock to discover the Ranger had been killed as well, but it suited your purposes, and in fact made life even easier. I wonder how long it would have been before the President met with an unfortunate accident?"

I have often thought this was one of my finest cases. Even dear old Dame Pat was impressed enough to ask me to marry her — but they're a strange lot, The Climbing Club.

Dark Peak-White Peak

Mark Vallance

A Monday in late June at Marsden, with the weather misty and the time an unseemly 5.15am. We set off up the familiar track that starts the classic Marsden to Edale moorland walk. He wanted to trot, I didn't. 'He', is Mike Browell, ex-Hon. Secretary of this club and an enthusiastic member of the Dark Peak Fell Running Club. Mike is also my conscience. He is considerably younger than I am and every now and then he phones me up and suggests a trip. I've done a variety of events with him and several trips to Scotland, usually to knock off more Munros in a day than is considered respectful. My usual response to any suggestion from Mike is to say 'No', but he always has some way of making what, at face value, is going to be a debilitating, muscle-cramping, foot-crucifying, knee-grinding epic into a light-hearted day out that strictly, anyone of my age (over 50) should be able to manage without so much as a grunt. But today, things had got seriously out of hand.

Some weeks previously, Mike had asked casually if I had ever done the Derwent Watershed. My mind raced: *The Watershed? The great epic of Peak District bog-trotting?* "No," I replied, not thinking fast enough. In retrospect I should have known that this was a set-up. I now know that he knew I hadn't done it. He also knew that not only had I not done it, but that I wanted to do it. Most importantly, he knew that I felt deeply guilty that I had not even attempted it.

The result was that on a less than perfect day in early June with thunderstorms as well as sunshine, we had a great day out, completing the 42 miles in a comfortable 11 hours, setting out from Hope car park as the church clock struck five, and arriving back as it struck four. It was the ease with which we achieved this walk that resulted in the objective to which we were now committed: the Peak District from end to end, starting along the legendary Marsden-Edale hike, a middle section of limestone dales and trails, and finally a long cruise down Dovedale.

So here we were, moving at a fast pace up into ever-thickening mist, past Wessenden Reservoir on the well-used Pennine Way track. The first hour or two of a long walk always seems to go slowly. Today, the combination of poor weather and the early hour required an effort of will to keep going. Like all really big tasks, the trick is to concentrate on the job in hand and not think of the final objective. Thus, in the course of a mere 100 minutes, we arrived at the top of Black Hill.

At this point the change of gradient from gently up, to gently down, and the change of terrain from boggy tussocks to smoother grassy moorland, persuaded me, along with the nagging of my companion, that a bit of trotting might not be such a bad idea. The mist started to clear. Our

route finding (well, to be truthful, Mike's route finding) was tediously perfect, and within two and a half hours, Black Hill was history. The clouds were thinning and Bleaklow lay ahead. So far, so good.

Now Bleaklow, as aficionados of the dark Peak will know, is a big place and not to be taken lightly, but as I previously commented, it is the first hours which pass the slowest and these were already behind us. Within another 50 minutes we were at Bleaklow Head and soon after 9.00am we'd found the two litres of lemonade hidden by Mike the previous day at Snake Summit. The sun started to make an appearance and life looked good

Now, it is my opinion (not shared by every one, I know) that the National Trust has done a superb job by laying a sinuous line of paving stones over Featherbed Moss to Mill Hill. These heavy slabs of old mill-stone are wonderfully varied, in both colour and texture, and whilst they may be visible by those flying north as the plane circles over the moors before making the final approach to Ringway Airport, this magnificent footpath is not visible from the higher ground of Kinder or elsewhere, until one is almost on it. More importantly, it has changed what in most conditions is one of the most dreary and soul-destroying sections of moorland into an easily-negotiated and pleasurable hike. The only problem is that it does form a slight dog-leg. "How about making a beeline for Kinder Downfall over the North Edge?" enquired Mike.

"No way," said I.

By Middy, the White Peak (now graced by a clear blue sky) and the prospect of food, beckoned. The day before, I had left a big plastic bag hidden behind a dry stone wall by the road near Perry Dale. It contained litre bottles of lemonade and Coca-Cola, a large pack of cheese and onion sandwiches, and half a pound of marzipan. It also contained a tee shirt, a clean pair of socks and a fresh pair of very comfortable trainers. I left my sweaty tee shirt, peat stained socks and muddy fell shoes to be collected later. Mike mocked my new attire and insisted that we set off after a seven minute lunch break with me still tying my shoe laces and stuffing sandwiches.

First, we ran a mile of road to Peak Forest, then the gloriously easy grass valleys of Dam Dale, Hay Dale and Peter Dale to Monk's Dale with its 10 minute section of difficult, dry, bouldery stream bed, and so to Miller's Dale.

Getting to upper Dovedale was, from an aesthetic point of view, somewhat contrived. We linked tracks and country roads for seven miles, keeping to the west of Taddington, Flagg and Monyash to reach the Dove near Pilsbury Castle. My task-master was urging me to break into a trot at this stage, but I managed to resist the temptation until we reached the fine, valley-side footpath that leads into Hartington village. Here, we enjoyed huge ice creams (Mike tut-tutted but reluctantly agreed to have one, too) and drank cans of cold Lucozade purchased at the only

shop we were to pass all day. It was 4.00pm; we were feeling good and knew that nothing could stop us now. Beresford Dale, Wolfscote Dale and Dovedale provide 10 miles of the finest valley scenery in Britain, and on that wonderful, midweek, summer evening they sped past in a haze of euphoria and exhilaration.

At Thorpe Cloud, we were met by my wife, Jan, who had hiked up from the car park with the dogs. They gave us a great welcome, but we still had business to attend to: after 13 hours and almost 50 magnificent miles of Dark Peak moorland and White Peak dales, the National Park boundary was a mile ahead at Coldwall Bridge. I got there at 6.00pm, a few minutes after Mike who asked, "What kept you?"

Grand Raide De Reunion

Mike Browell

In the canyon of the 'hot mouse' (Le Ravine de Souris Chaud), the Reunion Harrier circles above, hungry eyes angled downward, vigilantly searching for dinner. Deep down in the box canyon below, the hot mice dance, for they are not out in the open with 'Les Fous'. The raptor turns, empty-eyed and soars up and away to the volcano top where the air is clear. There is food below, but 'Les Fous' are moving too quickly. Who are they, and where are they, these fous?

The outburst that is the Ile de Reunion, rears abruptly from the Indian Ocean to a volcano of 2700m in the south, where the Piton de Fournaise still erupts regularly. It's a fairly well-behaved shield volcano, and doesn't usually cause much grief to the island's inhabitants. Not many, however, choose to live in the savage south beneath the corridor taken by lava flows. Out in the ocean, a long way out from Africa and India, Reunion developed relatively recently in geological terms, and ecologically the island is quite poorly resourced with no large native mammals and no snakes — just 'Les Fous'.

In 1646, the French deposited some hapless mutineers on a seemingly inhospitable volcanic island; they thrived, and the French government saw fit to turn Mascarin (later renamed Reunion) into a colony. It remains French, and because its economy is part of France, it is relatively affluent for a close neighbour of India and Africa; prices are not much different to the French Riviera. The Reunion Harrier is unique to the island — and les souris chaud? Almost certainly they jumped ship; but that is to digress. Who are the crazies, and what is their dance, The Grand Raid?

In late October each year, almost 2000 people gather before dawn in a sports stadium at the south of the island: drums beat in the tropical night; floodlights blaze; people with serious intent mingle restlessly. Then, at 4.00am, the stadium empties as a flood of energy propels a rush uphill, through a torchlit avenue and up through the sugar cane fields. The leaders have the most severe attack of the crazies: they run uphill with determination, relentlessly, and when civilisation fizzles out, they take a jungly tunnel up and up, eventually meeting the dawn sunshine on the very rim of the volcano.

Its about 20km to this awesome view over the still smouldering lava fields, and just another 5km to an ash desert and the first crossing of the public road. The road has wound its way up the Piton de la Fournaise in a more leisurely way than the runners, reaching a height of 2400m and a magnificent overview of the crater. But on this day, there are many people milling within this remote moonscape. In a tented Point

d'Assistance, helpers serve endless Coca Cola, water, fruit, energy food and, for those who need it, first aid for blisters. The Mini-Raiders, not yet fully-fledged 'Crazies', call it a day at this point. They've ascended 2400m in 25km from sea level, and are quite justifiably tired.

The sun beats down and most 'Crazies' are wearing 'Foreign Legion' sun hats with a generous neck flap. As they jog over the fine ash sands and lava flows, their manes fly in the breeze. They have another short climb in sight, and at 250m they top out on the high point. The biggest climb is now over, but only 25% of the total distance has elapsed. All later climbs will be smaller, usually a mere 1000m. I took 6 hours to reach this point by 10.00am on Friday 29th October 1999.

What's it all about? The Grand Raiders are on an epic voyage from south to north across the island, a traverse of 125km (80 miles) from Saint Joseph to Saint Denis. The super athletes at the front will complete this traverse non-stop in under 18 hours, whilst the hikers will take up to 60 hours, the threshold for medal qualifiers. Colin Donnelly took just under 22 hours last year, and I think became the first British finisher ever. The Grand Raid style of ultra-marathon is familiar to the French: a mountain activity which appeals to fell runners, joggers and hikers alike. It may appeal to the sort of person who would like to do a Karrimor Mountain Marathon (it takes place on the same weekend), but who doesn't want to carry a tent and sleeping bag, and doesn't like the uncertain British mountain weather in late October.

The organisers of this mountainous Grand Raid make it very easy for their huge entry of almost 2000 starters. They provide a well marked route, with repeating sponsors streamer tapes to reassure the uncertain, guarding participants against wrong junctions and warning of death potential and dangerous terrain. Every few kilometres they provide a Pointe d'Assistance with food and water, often helicoptered up to mountain tops; in addition, encamped paramedic teams lurk along the jungle trailside at frequent intervals, waiting for 'victims'. These kind people's whole object is to keep Grand Raiders on their feet, massaged and cajoled into continuing the journey of a lifetime. The support is more than just water and oranges: there's as much Coca Cola, non-alcoholic beer and hot soup as you can drink, and all manner of energy food. At two locations there are major aid stations: half-way in Cilaos and three-quarter stage at Grand Ilet. Both have teams of masseurs, paramedics, hot meals and halls full of camp beds with blankets (and with fleas, too). Some people collapse for a full night's sleep here, others rest an hour or so before pressing on.

The climate during the Grand Raid is quite variable but predictable: mornings are hot and sunny, but by early afternoon sea mists have risen to the mountain tops and a complete cloud cover obscures views. This keeps things tolerably warm rather than scorching. In the ravines the mice stay hot.

The 1999 Grand Raid

This was the 7th running of the Grand Raid de Reunion. Strangers form a very small component of the Raid; the majority of entrants are Reunionaise and French mainlanders. To get accepted for the event, I had to provide medical evidence of craziness, just sufficient to say that my body was in reasonable working condition. Upon acceptance, the organisers issue route descriptions and maps, and encourage people to train on the course, or by going upstairs two at a time.

As already described, the first section of 33km climbs from sea level over le Piton de Fournaise, a dramatic taste of volcano scenery, alpine heath, barren black ash and lava with occasional scrub vegetation. Once the mini-raiders have pulled out, the field thins down a bit, but there are still plenty of people around. You're rarely alone on a Grand Raid.

The second 30km section starts benignly enough, with a pleasant descent from the volcano through cattle pastures with an exotic juxtaposition of delicate Arum Lilies and rough gorse, to a crossing of the main trans-island highway. The Grand Raid is a big event for Reunion. Hundreds of cars pack the road verges, giving a carnival atmosphere along the approach to a huge feeding station. There the party continues with a barbecue, music, sandwiches and people lazing around, enjoying the early afternoon sun after a big effort.

But its hardly started. The trail continues gently uphill on jungle tracks, insidiously creeping back up to 2200m on the lip of the cirque of Cilaos. There, perched on the edge of a colossal drop, is the Bivouac Kerveguen, established and refuelled by helicopter. It needs to be, because it's a long way from anywhere, and in particular, a very long way down. The verticality is exceptional, and if it were not for the tropical vegetation clinging to the cliff face and concealing the exposure, some thoughtful people would decline to continue without a hand rail or parachute. This is a cruel descent of 1000 quad-destroying metres, a rocky zigzagging trail, sometimes with short metal ladders. A fall wouldn't always be fatal, but it would sometimes be a close thing. All good and bad things must come to an end, and this bad thing comes to a good end in a beautiful forest of Japanese Cryptomeria trees. If you've never seen a forest of these trees, its worth going for this alone: beautiful, but at a terrible price, for the last few kilometres on a good road down to Cilaos were the red hot road to hell.

The organisers had planned well: they knew the likely casualty rate, and at the Rest Station, a huge paramedic team was busily syringing blisters and taping up the debris. An even larger team of masseurs was pummelling tired legs, whispering encouragement to exhausted Raiders. Across the yard were dozens of dozing bodies, wrapped in dubious blankets. Outside and inside, people were showering, changing sweaty and dusty clothes from packages sent ahead to wait at each rest station.

The better prepared even had slippers and towels. This was half way, but for some, the end of the line.

For me, after 14 hours on the go, it marked the end of daylight, because tropical days are 12 hours followed by 12 hour nights. Soon after 18.00hrs it was dark, and I sat on the edge of a camp bed contemplating the pleasure of a little doze. Perhaps just a few hours? But all around me people pulled on the headtorches and prepared to set off into the night. Carried along by their enthusiasm, I abandoned thoughts of much-needed sleep and creaked myself upright. Amazingly, despite complete fatigue an hour earlier, everything seemed to function, and I was off.

The third 30 km section links the three huge cirques of Cilaos, Mafate and Salazie — a trip which should be on everyone's agenda, but possibly not at night. These massive natural amphitheatres hang around Le Piton des Neiges, Reunion's high point, and yes, sometimes there is snow on the Tropic of Capricorn. To link the cirques is a feat of great footpath engineering. I have a numbly-recalled sensation of a long dark climb, the statutory 1000m up, before plunging, equally precipitously, 700m to the deserted school at Marla. There are no roads into the cirque of Mafate, but there is quite a community spread out over the farmable lands. Marla is a spooky place to encounter at midnight: from the dark hillside comes an increasing glow, then round a corner is a blaze of floodlights and all the razzmatazz of a feeding frenzy. Bodies were lying everywhere; the bunk beds looked appealing, but all were full. Reluctantly creeping out of the lively atmosphere, I had a vague recollection of the map image of a short ascent followed by a col where vehicles can drive to overlook the inaccessible cirque. I had reasoned that the road would continue easily down by zigzags to Grand Islet, the next major destination. It was an optimistic miscalculation.

The climb out of Cirque Mafate started spookily, crossing watercress beds, then climbing up through rocky woods, often on rickety log paths. With the whole of my world limited to the spread of a Petzl beam, it was hard to get a feel for the big picture. Occasionally, a glimpse upwards would locate pinpricks of headlamps from people zigzagging in front. But the really spooky bit was almost tripping over the casualties. The head torch would pick up a reflection, and I would imagine that I was arriving at an aid station. As I got closer, it would turn out to be a reflective strip on the jacket of someone who'd crashed out, sleeping on the edge of the track. These people must have pushed themselves to the limit and collapsed. Not serious casualties, however, the night was too warm for hypothermia, but definitely running on empty.

In a particularly eerie wood came the rising sound of roaring generators. Expecting to stumble into another feeding station, I emerged to a deafening water meadow, where thousands of frogs were making amorous sounds. At last the col, and roadhead, with a couple of cars

enjoying the view. At 3.00am? More amorous sounds? A steady jog down a well-made road soon brought me to another feeding station. In my mental picture, the next rest station was almost in sight, but cruelly, this was not to be. Just around the next corner the GR route deviated from the road and began another of those quad destroying 1000m descents. This one was interminable, and every bend and rocky step was just like the last. Going slowly, with barely enough light, it seemed to take forever. A group of about ten people crocodiled downwards, staying together for mutual support. And when the down bit stopped there was an awful revelation, and audible groans. Looking up, we could make out lines of headtorches zigzagging back up again. This was seriously taxing at 4.00am, after 24 hours continuous effort, but I was relieved to see that it was taxing everyone. Indeed, some were so taxed they collapsed, and there were bodies by the track all the way to Grand Islet. I was grateful to reach the Rest Station at Grand Islet and immediately joined the queue for a massage, then a session of blister bashing before wrapping myself in a flea-ridden blanket for a short doze. Dawn was breaking as I slept, and at 7.45am I was up and fresh for the final 33km section. Its amazing what a couple of hours sleep can do.

All systems seemed to be working adequately and a steady amble down the road led to 'The Wall'. There, at the three quarters stage, was the crux: simply, a seriously steep 1000m cliff. The path miraculously zigzags a climbable route, which is thankfully concealed by dense vegetation. Without it the exposure would be awesome. Anyone familiar with levadas in Madiera will be able to picture the type of vegetation-dripping hillside, rarely tackled head on by footpaths.

This climb takes what it takes: ages. And along the way are the exhausted bodies of the fallen. Some have fallen asleep. Some have just fallen. Its an awful interminable slog and sometime later, after some unhelpful stretchy cable handrails, the top happens suddenly: an abrupt transition from vertical to horizontal. On the horizontal bit there is water, food, music and smiling friendly people whispering kind promises of downhill all the way to the finish. It sounds good, but the reality of 30 km to go hasn't quite sunk in.

The mist had already swirled in and visibility on the Plaine des Chicots intermittent, a glimpse ahead, then gone. But the trail is a smooth worn route across cracked slabs, painted with a white line. This must be a notorious place, easy to wander off route on a huge pitching rock platform. Soon the track reaches the refuge, another oasis of comfort in a harsh and remote location.

The next 10km brings depressing little ups and down as the track takes a switchback ride along the cliff edge, through thick jungle. All around is thick mist, in the open barely wet enough to feel like rain, but in the jungle, water condenses on the large leaves and falls steadily as massive drips, turning the trail to slippery mud.

As each 10km climb followed another in quick succession, the map denied their existence and showed only down, its large contour intervals concealing the reality of a saw-tooth mountain ridge. Finally, a brutal climb heralded the true descent, and from there on it was truly sweet, or would have been had it not been for the rain, mist and mud. The rain grew more persistent, the jungle denser and the mud grew thicker.

This proved to be a huge tactical advantage for anyone wearing nicely studded Walshes and wielding a couple of handy trekking poles. I was able to whiz along the jungly tunnels, steaming past struggling slippery-soled 'crazies' as they clung to trees, often sliding out of control down dangerous descents. All went fine until the final five km plummet. This was torture, as the path zigzagged down through dense woods for 700 vertical muddy metres, over rocky steps, fallen trees, down muddy channels, finally to emerge onto the road just a few hundred metres from the La Redoute Stadium.

Although the leaders had passed through the finish many hours before, there were still plenty of people supporting enthusiastically; it seemed to be expected to put in a bit of a jog around the half lap of track to the finish. My finish was at 18.00 hrs on the Saturday, 38 hours after starting at 4.00 on Friday, and just in time, as it was dark within an hour. My position was 659th from 1400 finishers within the 60hr cut-off, and from just under 2000 starters.

The Reunion Harrier circles overhead. It is now late on the afternoon of Sunday, the third day, and the stragglers down below look slow and well nourished, easy prey — much better than those scrawny fleet-footed ones.

Chalkmarks on the Bridge

Steve Dean

The old bridge has stood across the River Derwent since 1878, sheltered by even older Ash and Willow trees along the river bank and set in a pleasant area of park land close to the centre of Derby, a short distance from the site of Handyside's foundry where it's ironwork was forged over 80 years before. The bridge is supported on each bank of the river by massive blocks of gritstone cut from quarries up in the Peak District near Ashover. The gritstone is a coarse variety, and heavily stained by the continuous seepage of rainwater and oil from the two railway tracks the bridge carries.

By mid- afternoon, the western side of the bridge is deep in the shadow of the large trees alongside it. These trees provide the shelter for large numbers of birds: most commonly, Blackbirds, Thrushes and Sparrows; but frequently large noisy crowds of Jackdaws gather, and their cheerful, social chatter dominates the setting of the old bridge.

Occasionally, people walk along the footway under the bridge, heading to or from the town centre; the only actions on the slowly-flowing river are the antics of Mallard ducks, the passing of an infrequent oarsman, or the bright flash of a Kingfisher. For most of the day all is peace here — the sound track is only of bird song and the buzz of dragonflies. The ironwork on the bridge is rusting in places, in need of a coat of paint, but the elegant form of Andrew Handyside's structure does its job well when, on the dozen or so occasions every day, the peace of the setting is suddenly broken.

From the west comes the gradually louder chuffing of a train climbing the gradient up towards the bridge through the cuttings from Derby's old Friar Gate station. This is a load of 24 coal trucks en-route for the Nottinghamshire coalfield 20 miles to the northeast. The locomotive was built in York in 1930, and after almost 30 years of heavy use has seen better days. It needs maintenance and is not pulling well, despite the sweating efforts of the fireman to load more coal into the firebox. Gradually, the steam pressure increases and the train picks up speed as it approaches the bridge. The locomotive is filthy and rusty in places; smoke and steam escape from beneath its wheels as it climbs out of Derby. The peaceful setting of the old bridge is rudely interrupted by the wheezing locomotive as it approaches. A whistle scatters the birds in all directions as the train clatters across the bridge, heading eastwards; sparks and cinders hiss as they strike the still water of the river below.

After the cacophony of the train's arrival, the sound gradually fades away and the smell of sulphur and steam is all that is left. As quiet returns, so too do the birds to the trees and again birdsong beautifully

compliments the late afternoon sunshine of this October day.

The year of this mundane event is 1959. The whole of Britain is unusually dry; it has been the hottest and driest summer in living memory. There have been water shortages, and people have even died from sunstroke. The Conservative government was telling a population still recovering from the war, that they had never had it so good. A seemingly tamed Elvis was serving in the army in Germany, while up in Liverpool, an 18 year old named John Lennon was struggling to put a band together with his mate Paul McCartney. In New York, Miles Davis and John Coltrane were busy creating some of the finest jazz music ever made; and in the world of climbing, it was a year of great change for Britain.

The seemingly endless dry weather had given rise to unprecedented levels of activity on the British crags: many people's standards improved rapidly, and extreme climbing became commonplace instead of being the preserve of a gifted few. The true birth of modern British climbing, in spirit at least, can be traced to that summer of '59. As Geoff Milburn once succinctly put it 'climbing became democratic'. Many people made big advances and myths, half-truths and reputations were gradually broken down.

It was a year of great deeds in the British Mountains. In Scotland, *Point Five Gully* was at last climbed as a winter route, and later that year Robin Smith climbed *The Bat* and *Yo-Yo*. Frenzied development went on all over the Lake District, while in Wales all the great routes in the Pass and on Cloggy had several repeat ascents, with Joe Brown and Hugh Banner adding important new routes. Out in the Alps, British teams were at last successful on *The Walker Spur*.

As the old railway bridge basked in the late afternoon sunshine of that autumn day, 150miles away I was a child of nine in South London. Like many other boys of that age I was preoccupied with football (it was the year Forest won the cup), cricket (England easily won the series against India), and railways (we lived next to the main line from London to Brighton.) I doubt if I even knew that climbing existed, but I do remember the heat: the tarmac melting on the roads in London, and the warmth of the sea, even on the east coast, during our family holiday.

40 years have passed since that sunny autumn day, and many changes have come about, though much is still the same. The old bridge still spans the river and its elegant appearance has gained it the designation of a Grade II Listed Building of Historic and Architectural interest. It is now over 120 years old, but the ironwork has recently been repainted. The trains stopped steaming this way in the autumn of 1966; the bridge now carries pedestrians, cyclists and the occasional horse. The great trees and the birdsong remain seemingly unaltered. The River Derwent flows slowly past, some 50 miles south of its lonely source below Grinah Stones, high on the flanks of Bleaklow. The trees shelter the

bridge as they always have.

I now live nearby the old bridge, and walk past it on my way into town. Occasionally, I wander down there to climb, as the coarse gritstone parapet on the west side of the bridge is a popular bouldering spot and has an enjoyable range of problems and forearm-pumping traverses. At one time I used it a great deal, developing elbow tendonitis for my pains, but these days my visits are infrequent, though no less enjoyable for that. The popularity of the bouldering there varies from year to year, but this autumn the problems were all particularly well chalked-up.

I wandered down early one evening in October 1999, and not unusually, there was no one there, although the holds all looked well used. It was a sunny evening and having sorted out my rockshoes and chalkbag, I had soon worked up quite a sweat on one of the traverse lines. I wondered what the hard grafting men who built this thing in the 1870s would have made of our climbing all over it. The great lumps of gritstone are weathered and stained (lichen abounds in the damper parts, but many of the hand and footholds are polished with frequent use). Parts of the structure are cursed by being wet, but when the rock is dry and clean the climbing is good and offers an excellent workout.

I thought of those great blocks of stone being brought down from the Peak by horse-drawn wagons and then being placed here to support the ironwork of the bridge, carrying the weight of passing trains from the time of Gladstone and Disraeli. They were probably already blackened by smoke before Walter Haskett-Smith started climbing in Wasdale, before Archer Thomson laid hands on the cliffs of Lliwedd, or before Jimmy Puttrell gave birth to gritstone climbing in the Peak.

The old bridge is of course subject to the sworn enemies of urban crags: dogshit and graffiti, and the seepage doesn't help. However, on a good night, and this was one, I enjoyed bouldering on it with the warm familiarity of good sequences of moves next to the river. I carried on working on the traverses and did some of the problems. Later, comfortably pumped, as I was easing off my rockshoes and thinking about a pint, two young lads arrived sporting baggy clothing, woolly hats and hauling a big bouldering crash mat. We had a friendly chat for a while and then I watched while they started climbing. They were both obviously very good and cruised a number of problems with ease. As I watched, I felt some envy for their lithesome youth, their light frames and their obvious delight in their own energy, but I'm always inspired by watching people climb well. There's no point in lamenting the passing of the years; we all have our time at our physical peak and the trick is to recognise that and to make the most of it.

As I chatted again to one of them, his mate switched on a tape deck and the old bridge echoed to the beat of the Manic Street Preachers. Another of their mates arrived and a good level of banter started up to accompany their efforts on those little gritstone walls and arêtes, with

the chalk dust flying, and a lot of bouncing onto the crash mat.

I left them, and walked the short distance along the river bank to an old pub situated close to the site of the ironworks where they made the bridge in the 1870's. It was a pleasant Monday evening, but turning cold quite quickly, the way it often does in the autumn.

I savoured that first pint, my arm barely able to lift it. I thought about the three lads bouldering on the bridge: it was good to see such generous enthusiasm and mutual support like that. And then, I remembered the significance of the date: today was October 4th, the 40th anniversary of Hugh Banner's first ascent of *Troach* on the East Buttress of Cloggy, perhaps the first great modern wall route in Wales. So many changes have come along since those days; but it's heartening to know that people like Joe Brown and others from that era are still getting out on the crags, still chasing the magic.

I finished my pint and walked back towards the old bridge. A cold breeze was blowing, but the three lads were still working hard on problems to a soundtrack from the Chemical Brothers. Their comments made me laugh as I walked up the hill and out of the park. It was getting dark now, with a threatening sky away to the west and it looked as if we'd have rain by the morning. I paused for a moment and could still hear their tape-player down below the bridge. It occurred to me that there's something special about local bouldering spots that seem to go right to the heart of our game: I wasn't thinking now of famous bouldering places like Caley or the Burbage valley, but about all those scruffy little places where people start to turn their climbing dreams into a reality.

Away in the distance, I heard the whistle of a train as it pulled out of Derby, heading north for Sheffield and Leeds; in a few days time I'll be following it, heading for the Lakes. I walked on towards the yellow glow of the streetlights as darkness fell on the river, the trees and Handyside's bridge, covered now by the chalkmarks of our efforts and echoing to the voices and laughter of climbers. The beat goes on: I'm so glad to be still part of it.

Bintley's Syndrome

Ben Stroude

When a medical condition is encountered which does not appear in the textbooks, it is time for the patient to be concerned. Later, when fully recovered, he can rejoice, warm in the realisation that the doctors do not know everything, and boast about it. George Bintley does not boast, but I think his tale deserves telling. After all, some one else might suddenly go blind, and if he has read this he might be re-assured.

It all happened on Ben Nevis, on a February day and night five years ago. The mountain was well plastered; the weather was fine except for a cold wind, and George and I and my elder son, Ben Junior, were on *Tower Ridge*. We two oldies had done it previously, but it was young Ben's first long, classic Scottish route and I wanted to show him how wonderful it was. Having been dropped at Glen Nevis hostel, we made reasonable time to the CIC hut and then, more slowly, up on to the ridge. The plentiful snow was in good condition; we had the place to ourselves; the scenery was, as always, marvellous, and we thoroughly enjoyed a leisurely progress uphill.

Much too leisurely as it turned out: the speed of a rope of three, moving one at a time, is very different from that of a pair moving together over the easy bits. Looking back, we were simply too casual and not treating this long route with the urgency it deserved. Thus it was that when we reached the little ridge before the Eastern Traverse, it was already late afternoon and the light was starting to fade.

We were still not that concerned. George and I had done the top part of the ridge umpteen (well, four or five) times before and, with the weather still clear, the prospect of descending in the dark via Red Burn and pony track held no terrors. But, more seriously, we simply could not find the crucial traverse. Either we were at the wrong height or it was blanked out by snow and ice, and in either case, to continue would mean a potential epic for which we were not prepared.

So we retreated. Again, there were no problems; we knew well enough not to panic and do anything silly. My wife, who was to collect us from the youth hostel between 6.00pm and 7.00pm, would have to wait a bit and I would be told off, but that was life. It was much more important to be absolutely safe and secure.

That we were, but unfortunately we were also incredibly slow. The light gradually went, but we had head torches. The wind increased and became bitterly cold, but we were all well clothed, or so we thought. We had not bothered to eat or drink for a long time, but that seemed unimportant. All that mattered was not to fall off. Consequently, to compress the hours into a sentence, it was not until early morning that we made

the last abseil down from Douglas Gap, and nearly 4.00am before Ben and I, hurrying ahead of George, reached the CIC hut and its radio-telephone.

I was sure that my wife, Dawn would have told the police about our non-arrival, and I was right. After an evening of fruitless, and indeed, dinner-less driving up and down Glen Nevis and to the distillery and back, she had gone to Fort William police station at about 11pm. There they were very kind, calming her with lots of tea and sympathy, and gently grilling her as to our intentions, equipment and experience. Consequent on that, they alerted Lochaber rescue team to the possibility of a call-out, but fortunately decided to delay its activation until the following morning. Then they sent Dawn off to bed in Ballachulish, where we were staying with Mike and Sheena Hall.

So that when I phoned down from the hut, it was "Ah, yes, Mr Stroude, we know all about *you*, sir," and the unspoken words, "you irresponsible twit" were well understood. But I was contrite and he was really very pleasant. On being assured that we were all safe and well and suffering only from embarrassment, he promised to ring Dawn at once with the news and my suggestion for a rendezvous. (Breakfast at the Nevis Bank Hotel. Had we made it, we would have been disappointed, as it turned out that this hotel did not recognise the concept of casual breakfasts for non-residents).

Unbeknown to me, however, we were *not* all well, which is where we come at last to the point of this narrative. George had disappeared. Last seen following Ben and me towards the hut, and therefore perfectly safe, he was nevertheless not there. A shout or two revealed that he was *below* the hut and not very happy. When we caught up he revealed the reason.

"There's something wrong with my eyes," he said, "I can't see."

And nor could he. In an incredibly short space of time, say an hour from the foot of the Douglas Gap to near the hut, his vision had deteriorated from normal, through blurred, to grey curtain only. He had been led towards the hut by the whine of its wind generator, and then thought it best to feel his way downwards, knowing that we would catch up.

We were all horrified. It scarcely seemed possible that this sudden blindness would be permanent, yet who could be sure? Of course, it had been very cold up on the ridge, and we had all heard of hypothermia and its symptoms, but George was showing none of those. He was completely rational and had been climbing with all his usual competence. Naturally, he was floundering a bit now, but so would anyone who could not see. Clearly, we needed medical advice, and the sooner we got down to civilisation the better.

So, with George and I clutching either end of an ice axe, we moved slowly down the track beside the Allt a'Mhuillinn. It was necessary to keep up a continuous commentary on the state of the ground: "Gently

down for two or three steps; now a bit steeper; now we're coming to a little ditch, move forward to its edge; now a three foot jump across — that's it, well done — come left to miss an icy bit: oops! Sorry about that. Have a little rest; now, it's very boggy for a few yards, but quite safe; now, here's a little scree slope — take it steady..."

Progress was at the pace of a particularly old and decrepit snail. Poor old George fell over many times when the words got out of sync with the steps, and when, occasionally, the guide stumbled. But eventually the sky lightened behind us, and the gradual dawning of a fine, clear day helped enormously — though, alas, it did nothing for George's sight; he was still completely blind. At about 7.00am we were still a long way from the road, and I sent young Ben to run on down to meet the car; it would not do to miss our rendezvous a second time.

Shortly after that, we began to meet the occasional group of keen climbers moving uphill, bent on doughty deeds upon the mountain. Each time explanations were necessary. For one thing, George and I were by then clinging to each other rather prettily, and although displays of overt affection between adults of the same sex are, alas, not unknown nowadays, they are not common on cold Scottish mountain sides at daybreak. Still holding hands, we eventually crossed the golf course and were walking down the main road when young Ben and Dawn drove up in the car. One phase of the adventure was over; now to get the patient cured.

Rightly or wrongly, we drove past Fort William hospital and went straight home to Ballachulish. Mike Hall, our host, was a member of the Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team and might, we thought, recognise the symptoms. He didn't, but he did have good relations with the local G.P. who turned up within seconds, so it seemed, of putting the phone down. George still could not see a thing.

"Food, hot drinks, warmth, sleep," prescribed the doctor, "and if you're not on the mend by this afternoon, call me again."

And he was right. We all had a good breakfast, courtesy of Sheena, the climbers went to bed for a few hours, and when we woke up, George already had some vision. Thereafter his sight gradually returned to normal over the next six hours or so. The panic was over.

But it was highly alarming at the time and would have been very much more serious had George's total loss of sight occurred when climbing, rather than when on easy ground. Why did it happen? Could it occur again?

A clue may lie in our clothing. We were all well clad except that whereas Ben and I wore fleece-lined, windproof caps, George wore only a loosely knitted, woolly bobble hat, through which the cold wind could whistle unchecked. Maybe that bit of grey matter which deals with the sight became numb and therefore inoperative until thawed out. But maybe not; after all, a great many people are habitually out and about

in much lower temperatures in the world's cold places without going blind.

What do the books say? There is now an extensive literature on mountain medicine, much of it written by our own distinguished members. The vast majority of that, however, concerns problems at high altitude, meaning a great deal higher than our much loved but humble highlands. Of that relevant to Scotland, hypothermia seemed an obvious possibility. The subject is dealt with at length in many authoritative books, articles and web sites (though not, curiously, by the BMC whose advice pages do nevertheless cover the efficacy of oral contraceptive pills at high altitude, you will be glad to know). Even home health books for the layman, of the genre of Readers Digest DIY (Diagnose it Yourself) Manual, or Teach Yourself Hypochondria faithfully list the standard symptoms of shivering, clumsiness and inability to concentrate — none of which George displayed.

No authority that I can find mentions loss of sight in that context. However, when seeking references to blindness elsewhere (and excluding snowblindness) a clue can be found. The club's good friend and honorary member, Doctor Charles Houston, on page 192 of his book, *Going Higher* (Third edition, 1987) does record an instance of a climber suffering repeatedly from temporary loss of vision:

Though he had no headaches, the neurologist said he was having migraine equivalents, not related to altitude. I now know of a dozen episodes like this. Because they seemed to occur on mountains, they were blamed on oxygen lack. A search of the medical literature on migraine turned up hundreds of reports of patients with similar blind spells... occurring at sea level and therefore not due to oxygen lack'

Charles goes on to suggest that an aspirin a day, though it doesn't do much for migraine itself, can deter 'equivalents'.

So it seems that George is not unique, after all. But the condition still does not, apparently, have a name and I, foolishly rushing in, hereby propose one. If Addison, Alzheimer, Crohn, Parkinson and the others can have their diseases and St Vitus his dance, Bintley should have his syndrome. At least it slips easily off the tongue, which is more than you can say of *New Variant Kreuzfeldt-Jacob*, not to mention *Dupuytren's Contraction*. All I ask, doctors, is that when diagnosing this in future, you remember that you read of it first not in *The Lancet*, but in *The Climbers' Club Journal*.

Notes on the Annual Dinner, 2000

The Annual Dinner, 2000 of *The Climbers' Club* was held in March in The Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis. Principal guests were Jeff Lowe, one of America's foremost mountaineers and President of Cloudwalker LLC, Dave Rhodes, President of the *Fell and Rock Climbing Club*, Yvonne Bard of *The Pinnacle Club* and Dave Roberts representing the *Midland Association of Mountaineers*. The toast to the guests was wittily proposed by Committee member, Moira Viggers; her sharply-drawn sketches of the guests were warmly received by all and prepared diners for a long, but stimulating evening of speeches.

Jeff Lowe, the third speech-making President of the evening, spoke late into the evening, starting just as the punch of the profiteroles was beginning to pass away and the coffee had cooled. His life and climbs with most of the 'big names' of mountaineering on some of the most challenging routes of the world's cliffs and mountains was a sort of ultimate tick-list — the stuff of dreams (or nightmares, depending on one's predilection for pain and suffering).

But despite being one of the world's finest solo climbers, Jeff was at pains to point out the debts he owed to fellow climbers from whom, over the years, he had learned so many skills and techniques. Though clearly in a different mountaineering league to all the diners present, his engaging modesty and testimony to the essential communality of the climbing fraternity, endeared him to his audience. It didn't seem to matter too much that by the time he had finished speaking, the first course Roast Sirloin of Beef was but a small and greasy memory, the plates long-since washed and stacked away.

The two speeches which preceded his (from Dave Rhodes and Bob Allen) were minor masterpieces of politically incorrect humour. They are printed here in edited form, not to protect the innocent, or the easily-offended, to excise or to revise in the light of events that have happened subsequently, but as an acknowledgement that some impromptu asides and longer anecdotes work best only in an atmosphere of live applause and genteel heckling. As ever, it is best to watch and hear accomplished speakers in full flow, in front of a mixed and biddable audience, than to read their words in print.

However, if it helps the reader a little, it may be pertinent to point out that in his professional life, Dave Rhodes is an experienced teacher of Geography, well able to deal with interventions from the floor, and that at times (if not much of the time, one suspected), neither President could resist speaking with tongue well-lodged in cheek.

Tim Noble

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen of The Climbers' Club.

On behalf of your guests, thank you for your generous hospitality. Jeff, Yvonne, Dave and I are enjoying the occasion. Thank you, too, to Moira Viggers for her kind — nay, flattering pen portraits of our team tonight.

This kind of dinner is an excellent and long-awaited opportunity to make everyone squirm by flapping on about 'The Comradeship of the Hills'. If I were to go on long enough here, there wouldn't be a dry seat left in the house. Yes, links between clubs are important — and not just to launder the previous year's fallings-out over huts! As of now, I calculate that there are 291 joint members of the CC, stroke FRCC; 87 stroke MAMs and 10 CCs stroke Pinnacles. When I spoke to Pip (Hopkinson) on Monday, there were 276 joints. Those of you who think you know me well, will have assumed I've been through and counted. As you like. Today I can announce there are 291. That is 15 new this week, bringing in **more money...with which we shall...!**

Sorry, sorry about — thought I was back on Breakfast Time TV for a moment. Where was I? Joint members. Fear not: there are still distinct differences between us. There is also the perennial chestnut of YOUTH RECRUITMENT. A Headache for some, this issue — it takes on, in the heads of some Committee members, the intensity of a migraine. But they will join when they want to, I say. I myself have tried, on two occasions, to pull young members (towards the F&R, of course!) My recollection of these events may illustrate the differences between us.

I first met Jodi — that's **your** Jodi Vallance when, at the age of 15, with great aplomb, she led father Mark up *Moss Ghyll Grooves*. 'Ho, ho young shaver,' I thought, all jovial at Brackenclose, 'happy to do the necessary when you're old enough! Nod, nod, wink, wink, know what I mean?' BUT, I could see in her silent eyes, the answer: 'SOD OFF! I'm going to join a proper club.'

The next occasion was when Martin Moran and I were in the Allt a Mhuillin at 5.00am one April morning. (If there is anyone here who doesn't know Martin Moran, he and Mick Fowler are like Liverpool and Manchester United — in either order.) What you don't know, is that Martin and I were at school together, though on opposite sides of the red biro. His meteorology is really quite good... . Anyway, Martin was heading off to solo *Zero Gully* and I was going over the *CMD* (only one axe, see?) We didn't arrange to meet on top, because he'd be there in a couple of hours and I'd be after that, it being further...

(Jeff Lowe would no doubt say: "*Zee-ro Gully* is a kinda short cut up Ben Nevis — shortens the walk-in!")

Well, I've known Martin since he was so high, and I suggested to him once again...and once again. "No, thanks, Dave," he replied each time. "I'm going to join a proper club." Mind you, he joined the SMC!

There is no rivalry. Of course there's not; climbing's not like that. There's no rivalry, but there are subtle differences — not the least being

subtle differences, difficult to fathom on the female side. Subtle differences in expectations, perhaps?

Call a lady in the *Fell and Rock* a woman and she'll never speak to you again. Call a woman in *The Climbers' Club* a lady and she'll clock you one. But I've no idea what to call a female in the SMC — there's no call for it...yet (Laddie, perhaps?). *Pinnacles*? I suppose they invite K9 and R2D2 to their dinners. But of one thing I'm sure: the well engineered kindred system which operates between our clubs here, enhances all our mountain lives. Family differences remain, and so they should. We are never so close as to be limbs entwined, but we are good neighbours, whilst respecting the privacy of each other's backyards. It's an ideal, good deal.

Looking over that neighbours' fence I am sure you will allow me to speak for all of us here, not just your guests, if I say how glad I am personally still to be talking to Roger Salisbury and to hope he will soon be mended. What a grand man he is. Many will know of his leg but will not know what happened in hospital. I feel that people should at least share in his recent hospital experience. Many will not know about this. Possibly not even Roger himself. As you know Roger is a very fit man, a total stranger to hospitals, and it was with both necessity but reluctance that he entered one. He was suspicious. "Our Rog had heard a lot about matrons, had heard how ferocious and tough; and to see NHS from the inside, he thought it might be a bit rough." Well, he went in and the matron...(unrecorded matron story: Ed)

I am nearly done.

But I am **envious**: I want to pick out particularly something which I suspect is unique to *The Climbers' Club*, among other clubs, and very much to its credit. Looking out from under my Herdwick Deerstalker, I **do** feel envy. It is probably not what you were guessing at, but I believe *The Climbers' Club* has something of a tangible literary tradition amongst its members. There is a history of writing and a willingness to write, even today: authors, books, journals, articles, prizes. I am not sure that it is a matter for congratulation of anybody in particular, as it seems just to exist, or appear. But keep it if you can. I am sure that that kind of comfortable expression and record, riding easily on top of all the climbing and the domestic and the commercial issues is one good clear sign of the balanced frame and strong muscles with which this *Climbers' Club* of yours, is endowed. Yes, after all, congratulations: a potent CC.

I now take great pleasure, wearing my smart visitor's hat and also, with my own CC ancient membership in my pocket, great pride in proposing the health of *The Climbers' Club*. Please drink to it.

Dave Rhodes

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope and believe that I shall be fairly brief, but I do have to speak of certain things. First, on behalf of us all, I have, yet again, to thank Dave Atchison for organising this Dinner. He started doing it when the Club still had Dinners in London (which was up to about 30 years ago, I think) and he's still doing it. It is amazing how remarkably young he still looks.

Secondly, may I thank Sean Williams for all the hard work he puts into organising the Ton-Up Club. Like Dave, he's been doing it for years.

Thirdly, may I thank Moira Viggers for taking the trouble to bone up information on our guests. And may I add to the list, the names of Steve Andrews, Max Biden, John Darling, Philip Hopkinson, Mike Rosser and Roger Salisbury for their work in producing the Annual Report and Accounts. Believe me, that is a worrying process, as the glittering array of ex-Presidents, Vice-Presidents and their long-suffering ladies here tonight will surely agree. When our phone rings at home, it is a fairly common thing to have it passed to me with the comment "Bloody Climbers' Club, again!"

When I mentioned Roger Salisbury just now, I realise that I must, in fact remind you all to have a thought for absent friends. The ones I wish to particularly remember, because they have all asked me to give you their apologies for their absence, are The Three Rogers.

First, there is Roger, Lord Chorley. Roger broke his gammy leg (the one that was affected by polio all those years ago) while walking in the Lake District. He tells me that it is progressing, but still has a long way to go before it is right. I'm sure he'd love to hear from any of you who know him.

Secondly, there is Roger Briggs. He had a hip replacement about four weeks ago and, after a few worrying days immediately after the op, is now making a good recovery. As an expert on these matters myself, I receive regular news and enquiries from him and he'll be climbing again in about three months.

Thirdly, Roger Salisbury. Sadly, he was descending a gully at Bosigran with John Atherton, the Custodian of the Count House, when a boulder came away above them. Roger was hit and his left leg badly broken below the knee. He has just come out of hospital and we all hope that he'll be back to normal after a few months of physio. He better had be, because he's on my team to go to Tibet in September!

I am especially delighted to see John Atherton is actually here tonight. John was swept off his feet and down the gully also, breaking ribs and a collar-bone and damaging his ankle. Thankfully, he has managed to get here tonight, with Janet. Well done, John.

Talking to Roger on the phone, he was philosophical about it: "I've not had an accident in nearly 50 years of climbing, so I suppose I mustn't complain," he said.

When I was about 16 years old and still at school, I went to a gritstone crag called Yellowslacks on the edge of Bleaklow, with a chap known as 'Wanker' Wallman (by the way, the landlord blew the crag to smithereens shortly after this event). I started up a V Diff route, tied onto a piece of clothes line, but not knowing anything about belays beyond the fact that the second held the rope and was supposed to be tied onto the crag himself. About 30ft up, I found myself in a layback position and groping for a 'Thank-God hold' (In this context I suppose 'groping' is an interesting word), I couldn't find one. Sticking my fingers back in the crack, I tried twice more. Then I shouted down to my mate: "I think I'm going to fall off."

"Don't fall off," he shouted back. "Hang on, I'm coming up." He promptly untied the rope and started to climb up behind me. As you can imagine, I passed him on the way down. I was travelling faster. I remember clearly hitting a ledge and then the ground at the bottom of the crag. After that, I started rolling down the scree with the rope trailing behind me like a snake.

Did I tell you about my Davy Crockett hat? Well, I didn't have a helmet (I don't think they existed in those days), but I had a hat made out of rabbit-skin, with a long fox's tail down its back. This, plus a lot of luck, managed to save my head from serious damage, but when I stopped a long way down the scree and realised I was alive, there was blood running down my face from a head wound, nevertheless. 'Wanker' arrived a few minutes later, and we tottered off down to Glossop where I sought the local hospital's accident department. A doctor put a few stitches in my head and we caught the bus back home to Manchester while the bruises developed and shock began to hit me. I walked along Ashdown Avenue and knocked on our front door. My Dad opened it; he had no idea I went climbing at all. "What on earth has happened to you?" he asked. Before I fainted on the doorstep, I managed to come out with "I've just fallen down the stairs on the bus." I don't think the knock on the head affected my brains. But then I would say that, wouldn't I?

Last year, at this same Dinner in Derbyshire, I mentioned that your Committee had managed to beat off a serious attempt to demutualise *The Climbers' Club*. It was a spoof, of course. Much more seriously, however, the idea seems to have caught on, or something like it. Max Biden mentioned it at the AGM earlier.

Avid readers of *Climber* magazine will be aware that the word is being put about that this time *The Climbers' Club* is For Sale. For those of you who have not yet read this blatant leaking of confidential facts, I tell you that we are described as having 'assets well into 8 figures'. These come from, 'Guidebook sales and offshore bullion deals'. The aim of the sale, it says, is to finance a large expansion of our membership base to, 'in excess of 80,000'. We are also going to build up to 100 new huts throughout Britain and Europe. Now, I resent leaks of information

like this, so I will tell you that many of these huts will be in the south-east, where we can get the highest rents and the rising property values will put a smile on Max Biden's face. These huts, we learn, will all be built to a formula based on the 'Little Chef' concept. Well, this is really premature. Your Committee have not yet had chance to ask our architectural consultants Craig Harwood and Andy Prickett to even check out this concept, but I have doubts whether 'Little Chefs' have enough showers and loos to serve as CC huts, especially loos of the foot-wetting variety. So there will be some variations on that concept.

This story continues by saying that, 'individual members of the Club are set to receive one-off cash windfalls, which could be in excess of £1000 with' (and note this), 'incumbent Committee Members receiving much more'. How on earth does this reporter know that? Even if it were correct (which I neither confirm nor deny), how on earth does anyone think we can attract Committee Members of the calibre of Peter Scott, Sue Leyland and Terry Gifford, if we cannot make it worth their while? This story is definitely false in one particular, however: it states that, 'President Bob Allen will receive a substantial whack.' I should jolly well hope so! If there can be fat cats in the utilities like gas and water, why not in climbing? I am not ashamed to say that my personal 'whack' is not likely to be merely 'substantial' but 'obscenely substantial'. Now if you want your 'whack', you'd better keep supporting me and your Committee. After all, we are the Cabinet of the CC. We also believe in joined-up government. We'll tell you just as much of the truth as we think you need to know. Remember: we allow you to make up your minds without confusing you with any facts! I believe that the Editor of *Climber* magazine may even be here tonight? Where is that Bernard Newman? I wish to bring this vile conduct to the notice of the opposition. Where's Ian Smith? He's deputy editor of *High Magazine* and a Vice-President of this Club and he ought to be able to uphold high standards, if anyone can. Will you look into it, Ian? Make sure they get the proper story next time.

Now, you may have noticed that I have not even mentioned Scotland. Not yet, but I do have, here in my hand, a press-cutting from the *Highland News Group*, a newspaper distributed around Lochaber, including, of course, Fort William and Spean Bridge. They got it all wrong before and, like that *Climber* magazine, they've got it wrong now. The headline reads: 'We don't sell double glazing'. Sorry, that's the wrong bit! The correct bit (which is still wrong) reads: 'Third time lucky for CC. Luck had nothing to do with it. May I quote verbatim: 'On two occasions last year the mountaineers were knocked back by the weight of local objections and by Lochaber Area Planning Committee.' No mention of the fact that we received unanimous approval from the Planners twice. The first time was when we tried to buy the house in Roy Bridge, named 'Schoolwood', and we failed then because the vendors withdrew the prop-

erty from sale. The second time was recently, when we got a unanimous vote in favour of our attempt to buy another property, called 'Riasg', also in Roy Bridge.

So where are we now? I was in contact with our solicitor in Scotland right up to the last minute before coming to this Dinner and, if we had had any further good news, he was going to ring me on my mobile phone here tonight. He hasn't done so, but I can assure you all that we are within the width of a gnat's testicle of having our Scottish hut. I would just like to say that if, or rather when, we are finally successful, we will have acquired a property for just half of what we originally thought the cost would be. We have got no money from the Lottery, or the Sports Council, but no strings attached either. We will have to spend money converting this place to make it suitable for our use, so I am saying now that anyone who has not yet contributed to the Scottish Hut Appeal still has time to do so.

I now enter my third and final year as President: I do not intend to be a lame duck. It is my aim, intention and hope that not only will we have a Scottish hut successfully running in the year 2000, but that we will have done much more to improve Cwm Glas, Helyg and Ynys: the wet winter has shown up a few problems that were not evident when I came to office. There is a great team of guys to see this work done; with your support, it will be.

Finally, it is my job to hand over to Jeff Lowe. Moira Viggers has already said a lot about him. We had hoped that Jeff was going to show us a video he's made about climbing ice. Unfortunately, we've realised too late in the day that American technology has not yet caught up with ours, so we can't screen it.

In a foreword to Jeff's book *Ice World*, John Roskelley tells how Jeff and he climbed the North-East face of Taweche in Nepal, six miles from Everest. He writes: 'I knew that the route had to be climbed in winter to avoid falling rock and ice debris... Despite intense cold, nine bivouacs, my cerebral oedema, Jeff's acute mountain sickness and some incredibly difficult mixed climbing, we summited and made it down safely.' In his own book describing that same climb, John Roskelley describes Jeff Lowe doing something which most of us would find simply impossible: 'Standing in his etriers, Jeff acrobatically strapped on his crampons for the next pitch, a narrow chimney filled with ice.' Can you imagine it?

Bob Allen

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OBITUARY

Michael Joseph Ball

1925 (1946) - 2000

With the death of Mike Ball, the club has lost one of its great characters and active members. Easily recognised in one of his many rugby shirts and with his well worn clothing, he regularly attended Club meets and until a few weeks before his death was active on Peak and Yorkshire gritstone. At each venue he arrived with every intention of climbing whatever the weather, adjusting the standard to the available partners and the prevailing conditions. Climbing was clearly in his blood. His maternal grandfather was the 19th century pioneer Joseph Collier, and though in his early years his mother discouraged climbing, he was lucky enough to have been at Greshams School during its wartime evacuation to Newquay. Although cliff climbing was forbidden by the school authorities he was one of a very active group, including our late member Tom Bourdillon, which made illicit expeditions under cover of darkness. A problem arose when they found a body and then, before reporting it, had to search for some non-climbing vantage point from which it could be seen.

He went from school to read medicine at Cambridge where he was a leading light in the CUMC and played stand-off half for the 60 Club. (There was also a story of the weight of the hockey sticks fastened to the clock's hands at some college or other, forcing it to read 6.30pm permanently.)

His long association with the Club began in 1946, thanks to the rule that then allowed officers of the Oxford and Cambridge Clubs seats on the CC committee. In 1949, with Tom Bourdillon, Mike traversed the Drus, climbed the *Mer de Glace Face* of the Grépon and traversed The Meije. He was the doctor with the Barun expedition in 1954, treating with great skill Jim McFarlane's frost bite from his fall into a crevasse, and Hillary's broken ribs sustained in the abortive rescue attempt. He also managed to be in the first ascent of Pethangtse (22,080ft), Chago (22,540ft) and climbed two other unnamed peaks (21,300ft 20,200ft). But the demands of a family and a surgical career precluded other Himalayan visits and his possible inclusion in the Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

I first met Mike in the early spring of 1956 when we went to Wales for a weekend's climbing with Tom Bourdillon. Our first climb together was *Longland's* in drizzling rain and with snow on the rock. Mike described the expedition in *CCJ* 1989/90. From then onwards we remained close friends. Those who knew him only in later life will be surprised to know

that in 1956, Mike was quite a snappy dresser, both on and off the mountains, though even then there were signs of the later sartorial idiosyncrasies. I remember an early trip when the wire holding the clinker nailed sole to the upper of his right boot finally broke, and progress only came about after it had been replaced by a bootlace. Someone once remarked that as he prepared to climb, the items of clothing which came out of his 'sack were clearly intended for the dustbin, but instead he put them on and set off for the crag. Mike really did not care about appearances or material things, what really mattered was the climbing.

In the early days when we were both living in the South, we travelled regularly to Wales and I was quickly impressed by his driving and road craft: his main quality was probably decisiveness. Late one Sunday evening, returning from a Welsh weekend, we careered round the Coventry by-pass and found ourselves rapidly approaching a lorry entering a roundabout. Mike's car, a pre-war Hillman, was always loth to stop and there was no way it was going to on this occasion. Its brakes were poor and their deficiency worsened by his driving in his sleeping bag in order to keep warm. He rose to the occasion magnificently. We just went the other way round the roundabout, entering after the lorry and coming out in front of it.

Some time in the 60s Mike was found to have diabetes. It is a dreadful, chronic disease which erodes the patient's health and quality of life. Mike merely said, "I shall have to manage my condition." And manage it he did for more than 30 years, so that we had almost as much fun and excitement out of the Diabetes as we did out of the climbing. Specimens and samples of various types were taken and analysed at belays, on stances and on summits, followed where necessary by insulin injections and the obligatory jam sandwich. We often wondered what had happened to the full specimen bottle inadvertently left below the crux of *Bower's Route* on Esk Buttress. On one occasion, as he prepared to load the syringe, Mike dropped the insulin bottle, which shattered, but there was enough left in the shards to provide a dose. On another, as we were walking out with all our gear from the CIC hut over the Ben via *Number Five Gully*, Mike decided to have his insulin under the cornice so as to avoid the blizzard on the plateau, but he succeeded only in dropping the bottle down an ice axe hole in the snow. Despite frantic digging we failed to find it, and so had to carry on over the top and eventually down to the Belford Hospital for supplies.

In his day, Mike was one of the finest movers over rock in the country and a measure of his immense will power is that some of his hardest climbs at home and abroad were done after he became diabetic. Of course he did not always manage things correctly, but those occasions were well outweighed by the others.

In his middle years, Mike began a love affair with the camper van. He was particularly attracted by Dormobiles and they appeared to return

his affection by striving to complete the seemingly impossible tasks he set them. In Scotland and the Alps he drove along tracks that a motor cycle scrambler would have avoided. Once, above Arolla, we woke to find ourselves marooned on an island by flood waters. The passengers were ordered out of the van, we thought to lighten its load and reduce the risk of its sinking into the mud below as it traversed the water. Mike, however, used the available terrain to get up speed apparently in an attempt to jump the Dormobile over the water. The poor thing tried desperately, and at least one member of the party still swears that for a few fractions of a second it was indeed airborne. I can't say as I was intent on avoiding the inevitable shower of water and mud. However my most lasting memory is that when the Dormobile succeeded in one of these feats, Mike's features were transformed, he would radiate pure delight.

When we met Mike had already climbed a number of the harder routes in the UK and in our early years we concentrated on the classic rock climbs in Wales and the Lakes. However, as my work took up more of my time, I was less frequently on the crags and Mike climbed with a variety of partners, mostly in Wales with members of the Club and ex-Repton school friends of his son, David.

In the 1960s he became a consultant surgeon in Mansfield and discovered the joys of Peak gritstone, particularly favouring Froggatt Edge where routes such as *Sunset Slab* suited his style of balance climbing. He always had a project. One was to repeat all his grandfather's routes and I remember well the move over The Nose Direct on the *North Climb* of Pillar, verglassed and in the dark.

At the beginning of 1970, he returned to Scottish snow and ice, and for the next 11 years we went to Scotland each spring, mainly to Ben Nevis to climb classics on the little Brenva, *Glover's Chimney*, *N.E. Buttress* and of course his grandfather's *Tower Ridge*, an occasion when so far as we could tell, we were the only persons on the mountain. We also spent happy days on empty crags: in Glencoe; in *SC Gully*; on the N. Buttress of the Buachaille; the W. Face of Aonach Dubh, and traversing the *Aonach Eagach* deep in snow. We had to leave the SMC huts on Friday evening and drive some way south before bedding down for the night in the Dormobile with a plan of action for the morrow. Tremendous days on the *Great Ridge* of Garbh Bheinn of Ardgour, traverses of Ben Lui and Ben Oss, and of Ben More were the result. Occasionally we got as far south as Castle Rock of Triermain, and helped ourselves to a couple of rock routes on the Sunday before finally turning for home. Mike had this theory that only the very young can afford to put things off. Sadly, his Scottish forays were curtailed by his being fairly badly knocked about when avalanched in *North Gully* (CCJ, 1988).

He had been in the Alps in his student days when he and Tom Bourdillon amongst other things traversed La Meije. Mike and Ted Wrangham, after climbing the *Violettes Ridge* on the Pelvoux, were on

their way to join Tom and his party when they heard news of his death in 1956. Our first season, in 1957 was ruined by poor weather but we climbed the SW Integrale of the Moine, the NNE of the Aiguille de L'M and traversed the Ecandies. Mike loved alpine rock: Pointes des Cineastes, Dents du Coste Counier, Leiterspitzen, Jagigrat, Eveque S Face, Dibona S Face, South Ridge of the Salbitschijn and the *Voie Rebuffat* on Les Rouies is not a complete list and some he climbed more than once. He took an inexperienced Reading University party up the *Ferpecte Arête* (CCJ 1975). He also applied Scottish techniques to the N faces of the Pigne D'Arolla, Petit Mont Collon, and the Lenzspitze (CCJ 1985/86) and the *Jenkins Arête* on Mont Blanc de Cheilon. If the weather was really bad, there was always the Bargy and climbs in warm sun. He always found something to climb. He was the most unflappable man that I ever met, which made him a very steady mountain companion.

Returning from Scotland on one occasion in foul weather with the roads treacherous, it was my turn to drive whilst Mike settled into the passenger seat with 'The Times' crossword. On a long downhill stretch, I lost the back end, and we started to swing from side to side as I struggled to regain control. When I finally succeeded, he looked up from the paper only for a moment, said 'Well held Sir.' and went straight back to the crossword. He was unique. There could never be another Mike. Those who knew him will never forget him. I shall miss him greatly. People who never met him will also remember him; especially the thousands of motorists throughout Europe, nearly all prematurely grey-haired, who at some time or other met the Dormobile head-on at speed on some mountain track or broadside as it swooped across a dual carriageway to take advantage of a cheap petrol offer. He will be remembered by countless people of all nations, walks and stations in life that he met on the hills, in huts and in everyday life, many of whom he helped, advised and tended. He was the friendliest of men, particularly to the young whom he addressed as equals; indeed he never spoke down to anybody, and with the sick or injured he was most caring.

He will also be remembered by restaurateurs living close to roads linking the Alps to Fort William and beyond. After a week unwashed and unshaven in the CIC hut we approached a hotel close to Fort William, not an area renowned for the quality of its cuisine. We entered the restaurant in a cloud of feathers issuing from the tears in Mike's duvet jacket. He was shedding down like a young swan. 'May we have dinner?' Mike asked politely. 'I'm sorry Sir,' said the manager, 'The restaurant is closed this evening' He was lying of course, as the presence of other diners proved, but we didn't argue, we just went to the Kingshouse. Mike rarely argued, except perhaps about the line of the route. He was the most loyal friend and confidant. He loved the hills and the people in them, especially he loved *The Climbers' Club* and served it in a number of capacities, being Vice-President in 1984-7 and he was one of our honorary

members. He was a proud man, not of his own achievements but of his wife Elizabeth, their family, and their achievements.

Mike was many things, father, grandfather, surgeon, writer, rock climber, mountaineer, but above all he was fun. Our last day of climbing together was shortly before his death. He arrived in heavy rain and we toured N. Yorkshire looking for dry rock, settling eventually for the mini outcrop of Barker's Crags in Scugdale, where we started on wet rock and progressed with a drying wind through to dry rock and weak sun in the afternoon. He was delighted that day to exhibit the remarkable sense of balance which never deserted him. Mike once told me that no male member of his family had survived beyond 55, but he lived for nearly 75 years-and in the last seven years alone, he had doubled the number of gritstone crags he had climbed on. Mike was a true mountaineer, he never gave up, he had a great life and lived to the full every minute of it. Would that we all could be so lucky.

Frank Fitzgerald

Mike Ball : a personal view

Mike Ball was one of my earliest *Climbers' Club* friends. We met while staying at Helyg in 1946, the year in which both of us had joined the Club, and finding ourselves without climbing partners, we teamed up to sample a few of old Ogwen's classic routes. I can still picture Mike wearing his huge white roll-neck seaman's sweater, which had lost the elbows of both its sleeves and, needless to say, much of its whiteness too. But it was Mike's boots which really caught one's eye, for they were clinker nailed Robert Lawrie MK 7s, the very best ones available. Their condition though, could only be described as ailing, and they looked old enough to have been the first pair of MK 7s produced by Rob. Lawrie. The toecap of one boot had come away from the rest of its upper and was attached to the sole only by its welt stitches. However, Mike had cleverly restrained it from coming completely adrift by looping a piece of wire round under the toe clinkers then back up to hook into the lowest lace holes. Despite their dilapidated condition, out on the hill, Mike used those boots safely and with great skill.

Every one of the routes we did was climbed in nails, for just after W.W.2, any visits to Snowdonia were usually so short and infrequent that, in order to make the most of them, rock-climbing had returned to being an all-weather mountaineering type of sport. In any case, plimsolls good enough for rock climbing were hard to find because wartime rubber, (apart from that used for military purposes), was most reclaimed stuff - bad for wear

resistance and even worse for friction. Therefore those old guide book gradings such as, 'Very Severe in rubbers. Exceptionally so.' could sometimes be taken quite literally.

In the short time Mike and I spent together we climbed, amongst other routes, *Lot's Groove* and *Lot's Wife* on Glyder Fach as well as *The Direct Route*, taking its even more direct alternative pitches and finishing up Menlove Edwards' *Final Flake* — possibly a second ascent and probably the first in nails. Together with Jack Longland's *Blade Finish* to *Javelin Buttress* in Idwal, it was said to be the hardest pre-war pitch in Wales. But it must have been the somewhat gentler *Lot's Wife* which Mike and I were truly smitten with, for my diary records that we had our wicked way with her on two successive days.

After this all too short a spate of enjoyable climbing with Mike I didn't see him again for many years. During what was left of the '40s he was up at Cambridge reading Medicine then staying on as a demonstrator before leaving to practise as an orthopaedic surgeon; eventually becoming a highly respected hospital consultant, not only in the U.K. but also in the Arab Emirates. I knew that he was continuing to climb whenever and wherever he could, but our paths never crossed until, quite by chance, we were pleasantly surprised to find ourselves sitting next to each other at one of the C.C.'s annual dinners in the '60s. Since that time we often met at Club dinners, and invariably Mike had so much to say our meals usually went cold well before we finished eating. More recently we saw each other at Terry Gifford's annual Festival of Mountain Literature at Bretton Hall, because yet another of Mike's interests lay in writing, and several C.C.J. articles bear tacit testimony to his literary ability. At such meetings, Mike would often contribute to any discussion for he almost always had a view about things and spoke honestly, often quite humorously and sometimes controversially. As age began to make itself felt, we frequently swapped ailment stories whenever we met, but there was rarely any mention of Mike's Achilles heel, that diabetes problem which he had to cope with for much of his life. M.J.B., as a man and a mountaineer, was definitely in the MK7 class. I was extremely saddened by news of his death: I shall miss him.

Peter Harding



Mike Ball on Castle Ridge. Photo: Frank Fitzgerald

Matthew Bransby

1945 (1993) - 2000

Fun: that's the word that sums Matthew up for me. Whether it was on the cliffs or in the pub I knew that if Matthew was around there was going to be lots of laughter. There'd be outrageous banter, ridiculous behaviour. An entertaining time would be had by all. The venue, the weather, the grade of the climb didn't really matter. You just knew you were going to end the day saying you'd had a good time.

In my experience, Matthew was always extremely modest about his climbing abilities and achievements, but the truth is that in more than 30 years of climbing, he'd accumulated a vast portfolio of mountain memories. Matthew climbed in many of the famous mountain regions of the world. He was a cautious, frequently nervous, but above all enthusiastic climber. His itinerary ranged from alpine classics such as the *Midi-Plan Traverse* and the *Rebuffat* route on the South Face of the Midi to the frightening rock towers of Czechoslovakia protected only by knotted slings jammed in holes and cracks. On British rock Matthew regularly climbed at E2. Climbers will understand something of his enthusiasm and energy if I say that he and Chris Vernon climbed *Central Pillar* on Esk Buttress and *Central Buttress* of Scafell in one day. In more recent years, I was lucky enough to share Matthew's initial fear and subsequent delight at leading what I believe was his first E3 at a quarry near Weston.

Other highlights included a trip to the rock-climbing mecca of Yosemite in California and his first new routes on the sea cliffs of Pembroke. There was even a time in the early days of indoor bouldering competitions when Matthew seemed to be winning nearly as many prizes as Ben. But he did have the advantage that there was a veteran's category and he was frequently the only eligible entrant.

But such a list of climbs gives no idea what Matthew was like to be with. Climbing with Matthew was memorable because he was a natural entertainer. There are many much better climbers to whom showing fear is a sign of weakness. The strong silent types of the climbing world are immensely impressive, but they are also rather boring. Matthew, on the other hand, rode a roller-coaster of terror and delight. Every ascent was accompanied by a constant commentary on his emotional extremes. One moment he was amazed, the next terrified, the next ecstatic. I remember one sunny day on Haytor on Dartmoor, when the whole crag came to a stand still to watch Matthew struggle with a particularly troublesome overhang. Matthew was safely surrounded in a web of runners, but too scared to commit himself to a swing. He met our yells of encouragement and good-natured abuse with the not ungrounded suspicion that all we wanted to do was see him fall off.

On another occasion, a wet day in Pembroke when any sane climber would have headed for the pub, the Bransbys and I went new-routing. While Jean held Ben's ropes on one line, I led Matt up a broad groove topped by a rubble overhang. To escape this involved squeezing horizontally through a tiny cleft before pulling up a vertical grass wall to the top. When Matthew came to follow there was a problem. The cleft seemed narrower than his shoulders. For perhaps half an hour I watched in stitches as first one bit of Matthew then another appeared out the end of the hole. The sounds of the struggle could have been heard on the other side of the Bristol Channel. Perhaps all the yelling burnt some calories as Matthew finally popped out like a cork from a rather flat champagne bottle. His battle reminded me of the ancient saying about how it's impossible to force a camel through the eye of a needle. So *Matthew is a Camel* became the name of the climb.

Matthew of course got his own back on many occasions, usually by mocking my own climbing ineptitude. One of the best things about being away with the Bransbys was knowing that the evenings would be spent in ferocious argument with everyone trying to come up with more devastating insults. Anyone who didn't know Matt's good-heartedness could be shocked by his outrageous comments. There's a famous climb in Pembroke called *Preposterous Tales* which Ian Parnell and I attempted one soaking dark December day. One of the main things that kept me going was the knowledge that Matthew had already climbed it and we'd never hear the last of it if we didn't get up.

I loved Matthew because he had no British reserve: one moment he could be telling everyone about how good his new heart drugs were for his sex life, the next he'd be telling me why I was too old to climb hard. On the last evening I spent with him in Pembroke, he reduced the pub to stunned silence, followed ten seconds later by hysterics, after breaking the flow of an argument with my partner Lorne with the proposition "Do you fancy a shag?". In the event, what Jean called his 'Hot Date' ended up being merely a day out climbing with Jean along as photographer and chaperone. Matthew made a special sartorial effort and turned up wearing something close to Andy Pandy pyjamas. They didn't get up that many routes, but Lorne came back, as so many people did after climbing with Matt, raving that she'd had a brilliant time. And that is the crux of what I want to say about Matthew: I simply never had a bad day out with him. Whether it was climbing or pubbing I knew if Matthew was around there would be giggles, laughter and not infrequently hysterics. I am desperately sad for Jean and Ben about Matthew's loss. But he leaves me, and I'm sure many others, with dozens of happy memories and whenever I think of Matthew I find I am automatically smiling.

John Alcock

Matthew Bransby: a personal view

Mathew and I climbed together for nearly 30 years. When we met at Sheffield University it was the beginning of great developments in climbing. Climbing books still gave you information on how to nail boots. We had steel crabs and had drilled out brass nuts for protection though heavy aluminum crabs and wedges threaded on bits of rope were making an appearance. It was a time of great experimentation. Have you heard of the Tarbuck knot? Mathew had developed an early version of a belay plate and he persuaded the technicians at Southampton to run a few off for him on the milling machines in the University workshop. He was trying to get people to try them out instead of the usual shoulder or waist belays. The harness had still not arrived but we had moved on from the hemp waist loop.

One of the earliest climbs we did was *Great Western* at Almscliffe. We did it with the Moac in the vertical starting crack and a sling round the block above. Off across the traverse with a racing crawl, a mighty pull on the pocket and a scrabble onto the pinnacle. Your next piece of protection went into the crack above. We both found it quite exciting and I think it was his first route at Armscliffe which made his ascent of the route very impressive indeed. You were in for a long swing and a heavy smack into the rock if you messed up.

A few years later, Mathew moved from Sheffield to North Rigton, only about half a mile from Almscliff. I know the whole family was very happy there. Ben was born and grew up in that house. Many a happy evening was spent on and around that crag: Ben went from being pushed in a wheel chair to pushing the hardest routes on the crag. Often we would go back to his house after climbing. There are many happy memories of the house full of people with Mathew making experimental ice cream desserts mixing fruit, chocolate and raspberry sauces with anything else he could find at the time. Ben's new route at Almscliff, done a year ago is currently the hardest route on the crag, which I'm sure made Mathew and Jean particularly proud and completes the happy memories they must have had of that place.

For many years, Mathew and a group of local climbers used to go to Scotland in February. On one occasion we were staying in the chalets at Kinlochleven and the south-westerlies had moved back bringing heavy rain and a thaw. Mathew had heard that *Clachaig Gully* could be climbed. The immediate response was the obvious one, but Mathew, who was always one for a lively debate, won the day and we duly set off for an iceless ascent of the gully. We thrashed our way up, with water pouring in at our necks and out at our ankles. We were defeated only when one particular waterfall pitch required more time than we could hold our breath for. It turned out to be one of the most amusing and memorable

days on the hills. It was typical of Mathew to come up with the unexpected and to generate the team enthusiasm to try the unexpected; he always tried to squeeze the last drop out of every day. Even when we had climbed hard and were tired it was always Mathew who would look to see if the could get another route in.

A couple of years ago Mathew joined Ben in Yosemite dragging a couple of old fogies with him including me. Ben was away pushing the limits while we contented ourselves in ticking off the more reasonable classics. On one occasion, we had gone down to a boulder which had been bolted to reproduce the crux sequence of bolt placements on an old Layton Kor classic. This American climber was about 6' 6" tall and the bolt placements represented a bit of a reach for mere mortals. One of our group set off up the practice boulder and after about 20 minutes became entangled in the ropes as he failed to make the long reach. He announced between gasps that he had a text book on aid climbing back at the tent, adding that he hadn't read it yet. At this point the complete foolishness of the situation became too much for Mathew who started giggling. I soon followed, and we were soon made completely incapable of doing anything with the two rope handlers rolling around on the floor in uncontrollable laughter while the third who was the last to see the joke writhed above them. This was just a few yards from the car park where the tourists stopped to look at the impressive scenery. I don't think I have laughed so much before and it was quite a few minutes before we were in a state to let our man down. We didn't drop him. Mathew had a good eye for the absurd and would be the first to laugh at himself. This made him such easy and entertaining company on any trip. He will be sadly missed

David Collier



*Matthew Bransby.
Photo: Jean Bransby*

Malcolm Cameron

1946 (1980) - 2000

Malcolm Cameron was brought up in Windsor, attending Slough Grammar School. Like so many others of his generation, he got his introduction to the hills through the Scouts, going to The Lakes and Wales as a schoolboy and getting hooked. After school, he did an engineering apprenticeship in Slough and by the mid 60s, was hitching up to Wales at weekends. It was in Wales that he met his long-time friend, Arthur Green and his future wife, Sue.

In 1971, the year of his engagement, he moved to Liverpool. Sue describes this move as "the greatest culture shock of his life", because he had to work with 'scousers' and 'scallies'. However, Malcolm didn't have to live in Liverpool; he moved in as lodger with Sue's grandmother in Pen y fford, and when he and Sue married, they took over the house and remained there all their lives.

In 1985, when I was President of the Club, Malcolm volunteered to be Hon. Secretary. This was at a time when I had been anxiously and unsuccessfully looking for a replacement for Mike Browell. Although we met before, on occasions, I didn't really know Malcolm well; we hadn't climbed together, over the next few years, all that was to change. He was tremendously efficient as Secretary: very easy to get on with, and he clearly loved the job. He helped with the organisation of the Helyg Diamond Jubilee Reunion that summer and enjoyed meeting the senior and distinguished members of the Club. Sadly for me, however, he accepted a job in America after only eight months as Secretary, and departed for two years. On his return, he served again as Secretary for four years under Hugh Banner and Jancis Allison with the same dedication and attention to detail. As a result, he was made an honorary member in 1992 and served as Vice-President from 1997 to 2000, both honours he fully deserved and of which he was very proud. A serious and thoughtful man, Malcolm remained always highly committed and very concerned about the well-being of the Club.

He was a very enthusiastic rock climber and we did many great routes together. In the Lakes, we climbed *Saxon*, *Astra* and *Central Pillar* of Esk Buttress; but more often, we climbed on his home ground in Wales where shared highlights included *The West Buttress Eliminate* and *Lubyanka*. On his actual 50th birthday, in September 1996, on a cool and blustery day, he led *Memory Lane*, a very fitting experience, and he enjoyed the celebrations later even more.

He had a good alpine record, doing some fine routes with Brian Mullarchy, Smiler Cuthbertson and Fritz Sumner; they gained him en-

try to the ACG. In the late 90s, his own new business allowed him little time off, but he joined me for a week's holiday each year, twice in the Dauphiné and twice in the Dolomites. Among a number of superb routes were *Aurora Nucleare*, a brilliant modern rock climb on the North Face of the Pic Sans Nom and the *Pilastro de Rozes* on the Tofana.

For such an extremely safe and well-organised climber, Malcolm's death was cruelly tragic. On September 9th, he had just completed *Le Marchand de Sable*, a superb rock climb on the Tour Rouge above the Envers des Aiguilles hut in Chamonix. This area is regarded as being relatively unserious and safe, but just a few minutes from the hut, when Malcolm and his companion, Neil Hitchings were crossing a dry glacier, a large boulder came down the glacier and hit Malcolm on the upper body. He was killed instantly.

Our sympathies go out to his wife, Sue and daughter Sally; they will miss him tremendously. He will also be missed and remembered with great affection by his many new friends in the climbing world.

Derek Walker

'Malwatching' : a personal view

In the mid 1960s a fledgling rescue team was developing at Ogwen under Ron James and it was there, with Roger Jones, that I first met Mal Cameron and Sue. We all went to Chamonix in 1966, Mal's first season, and did some of the classic routes on the Aiguilles. I well remember the surprise of the Guardian at the Requin Hut as we descended to Chamonix in superb weather. Why? To stand in front of a shop window and watch England beat Germany in the World Cup. The season ended with us marooned at the

Gouter Hut in dreadful weather and Mal interrogating everyone about a lost tin of corned beef. Shortly after that we began climbing together more regularly and fled the nest at Ogwen where we had cut our teeth, to become apprentice Vagabonds in the Pass.

In the late 60s and early 70s we were pushing each other rather erratically in and out of the extremes. 'Watch me!' echoed down the rope as Mal, with a trace of hesitancy that belied his ability, rose to the occasion. Our seniors in the Vags at that time were involved in developments on Cloggy and Gogarth and when Pete Minks or Al Rouse were short of an able second, it was Mal who was grabbed. On many occasions I watched him hauled off into the unknown to make early ascents on those great cliffs.

Mal was always interested in the nuts and bolts of climbing. Sue knew when he had had a hard day at the office. He would disappear upstairs and there would be the jingle of krabs as he re-arranged his gear yet again. Everything had to be just right — sometimes infuriat-

ingly right. We took up aid climbing with wooden wedges made from old chair legs and all the trappings of aid and pegged our way up everything that Malham, Gordale and Ravenstor could throw at us in our own style of 'Little Wall Climbing'; all great fun. This came to a head in April '71 when I was one day back from honeymoon and summoned to North Stack and *The Big Overhang*. The ascent was a prolonged affair, ending in near darkness like many of our routes, with the girls holed up in the lighthouse keeper's cottage; I remember the final wall and waiting for the flash of the light to illuminate the next clip. Mal later went on to do *Zodiac*, that modern aid route, on El Capitan, and I could only watch with some envy and considerable admiration.

He was essentially a rock climber and in '72 we did the *North Ridge* of the Peigne. He also climbed for some time with Bryan Mullarkey, doing the *Brown-Whillans* on the Blatière in '75. By the mid '70s his energies and aspirations had outpaced me and he went on to expand his horizons with the CC. This last year he had returned to climb again with the Vags. His infectious enthusiasm and quirky nature brought an air of freshness to the Club and we all warmed to him. He was a real character and will be missed by many.

Arthur Green



Malcolm Cameron. Photo: Cameron collection

Raymond Handley

1928 (1960) - 2000

Raymond Handley died suddenly and unexpectedly on the 13th May 2000. He was raised in the city of Derby, where he lived all his life. His academic studies were carried out at what is now known as the University of Derby, and his military service during the period of conscription was as a Bevan Boy. He hated every minute of it, and would no doubt have been more suited to flying as a fighter pilot. He was trained as an Electrical Engineer, and his career was on the immediate staff of the Chief Electrical Engineer of Rolls Royce Aerospace division, with special responsibility for purchasing. He was elected to membership of the Club in 1960, and served as Custodian of the Lloyd Hut from 1970 to 73. He was a gregarious type of individual; he liked his wine, his food, and his cars. He had many friends in the climbing world and will be greatly missed.

I first met Ray Handley through our common membership of the then extant *Valkyrie Club*. This was about the time when Jack Longland was establishing the first Activities Centre at Whitehall, in Derbyshire. We were both invited to become Founder Voluntary Instructors, which we did, and I came to know him well as a result. He was an athletic sort of person, well co-ordinated, and his technique improved rapidly, so that we were frequent climbing companions and covered a wide area. The Peak District, of course, Wales, Cornish sea cliffs, Chamonix, the Valais, etc. We both had an abiding interest in skiing, and were among the few people at that time who undertook winter ski mountaineering. We managed to pull in the odd new rock route here and there, not a great deal to shout about as our objective was the sheer pleasure of being on the crag. With the demise of the *Valkyrie* we both joined *The Oread Club*, and in 1961 Ray was a member of the Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition to Indrasan, and in 1967 he was elected President of *The Oread Club*.

As always, the ravages of time started to take their toll and Ray began to have problems with his circulation, so that although his climbing ability was probably undiminished his difficulty lay in getting to the foot of the crag, and perhaps even more so in getting back down to the road. He eventually found some rejuvenation by playing golf most days, a game at which he achieved considerable success, eventually becoming captain of his local Club. I shall greatly miss him for his friendliness, good humour and bonhomie, and above all, as a great climbing companion.

Ernie Phillips

Alistair Ramsay Morgan

1947 (1980) - 1999

It's summer, 1973: Alistair is hacking an armchair bivouac out of a knife-edge of snow as darkness and frost fall on the South East face of Mont Maudit. A bright starlight allows us a clear view into the abyss. There's no stove (it disappeared in the hut), so no drink, just some fruit drops. He is much more relaxed about this than I am. He doesn't seem that bothered by a soaking sleeping bag or leather boots that need chewing to unfreeze them before we can get moving, either. But the morning brings sunlight, a romp to the top, a successful plea to a passer-by for a drink and a piece of cake and the first British ascent of the *Cretier Route* is in the bag.

By this time, Alistair had been climbing for a dozen years or so, since starting at school in Cheshire under the tutelage of one of his teachers, Derek Walker. And although he continued rock-climbing throughout his life, it was mountaineering that became his great love. At university in Manchester in the late 1960s he fell in with a large group of keen and talented climbers in the Manchester University Mountaineering Club. I really got to know him when we shared a student house together with Geoff Cram, Ian (Sherpa) Roper, Martin Burrows-Smith, Dave Robbins, and others, which became a base for hectic climbing activity virtually every weekend. Many of the friends he made here continued to be his climbing partners thereafter.

After Manchester, he moved to the University of Strathclyde for his postgraduate work in Chemistry, a move that allowed him to indulge himself in Scottish rock and ice climbing, which he did to the full and where he developed a love of Scotland which never left him. During this time he mostly climbed with Scottish friends, but I, and others from the south, often joined him.

From the early 1970s onwards, Alistair put together an intense series of Alpine seasons. By the time his mountaineering career was cut short in 1985 by a mysterious disabling condition affecting his right arm, he had 12 Alpine seasons, two Himalayan first ascent attempts and a Yosemite rock trip to his name.

His 1970s Alpine seasons included ascents of the Dreckhorn, Breithorn and *The Lauper Route* on the Eiger in 1975 with John Burslem and Dave Robbins. Summer 1976 saw him top out on the Nant Blanc face of the Aiguille Verte and the North Spur of the Aiguille du Chardonnet. In the summer of 1978 he ascended the *Cordier Pillar* and the *Sentinelles Rouge*, and in 1979 the *Swiss Direct* on the Courtes and the North-Northeast face of the Aiguille du Midi.

He had many wonderful days on these and other routes but also had his share of epics. *The Lauper Route* was particularly character forming. After a heart-stopping slip by Dave Robbins, while leading on black ice, with no runners and a very sketchy belay, they fought their way to the *Mittellegi Ridge*, only to be faced with a nightmare, night-time descent of the ridge, abseiling, climbing down, and sometimes losing the way and re-ascending in the dark, with ropes frozen to hawsers.

In the 1970s he had moved to the Open University in Milton Keynes, where he stayed until the end. Also during this time, he became a member of *The Alpine Club* and the *Alpine Climbing Group*.

In 1976 Alistair joined the small and elite group of Britons who indulged in winter alpine climbing, he and John Burslem ascending the North Face of the Tour Ronde and the *Gervasutti Couloir*. It was in 1982 that he teamed up with Dick Turnbull for three further winter alpine seasons, which Dick covers elsewhere. He adored the winter scene in Chamonix, and the camaraderie of the self-selected few.

He and I did lots of winter climbing together, including *Point 5 Gully*, where he showed me how to improvise a decent grip on a wooden-handled ice-axe, and later (1979, by which time modern axes were available), we had a glorious day on an early ascent of *Black Cleft* on Cloggy. Alistair led the ice pillar and I led the big rock corner pitches, both of us revelling in the wild experience of an extreme rock climb in winter conditions.

In 1980 Alistair made an attempt on Sickle Moon in the Kishtwar, in a team including John Burslem and Dave Robbins. Although failing on that objective they succeeded in making culinary history, with Alistair's renowned speed eating paying off, in their consumption of 144 somosas at the first tea-house on the way out.

His experience was invaluable when, in 1984-85, he, Dick Turnbull, Martin Burrows-Smith and I began planning another Himalayan trip. The soaring pillar of Bhagirathi III in the Gharwal had just been climbed, so we transferred attention to the East face of the Central Peak of Meru, later to be dubbed 'The Shark's Fin'. Two weeks of heavy snow forced a change of objective again, this time to the East Face of the North Peak. We got home safely, but had failed to reach the top.

Now with a weakened right arm, Alistair turned from climbing to spend more time sailing (obtaining his off-shore skipper's licence) and to cycling and skiing. Alistair often felt he had never reached his true standard in rock-climbing, and this is doubly true of his skiing, where despite immense determination and a number of specialist training courses he failed to become as skilful a skier as he wanted. He had to be looked after by his companions on some occasions. I feel that it demonstrates the affection in which he was held that no one ever mentioned this to him, but simply kept encouraging him.

He did his own share of encouraging though. Faced with difficulties in the mountains, such as the threat of a storm, or getting lost in a

whiteout, Alistair was usually sanguine and often said to me "Oh, don't worry, John, it will be alright". We saw this optimism and determination while he was trying to fight the cancer that struck him; making the decision to have the surgery on his spine, which could have either killed him or helped him to walk again; trying to get the movement back into his legs after surgery; kicking up to get the best wheelchair available. Tragically, this time it wasn't alright. Alistair leaves his wife Sue and step-children, Lucy and Tom.

John Jones

Alistair Morgan: a personal view

Quite how Alistair and I got to winter climb together in the French Alps I can't recall, because on the surface we were very different personalities. Al was always very considered and cautious, sometimes even pedantic, whereas I was usually over-enthusiastic, pushy and bombastic. Looking back, it must have seemed a sure-fire recipe for disaster. However, Al had been out in winter before and his experience with John Burslem on the North Face of the Tour Ronde and *Gervasutti Couloir* on Mont Blanc du Tacul in 1976 gave him crucial knowledge and an authority which only came with having been there and done it. For me his experience was vital if I was going to survive an Alpine winter and I like to think that Al responded to my obvious keenness and blatant desire to do the big routes. So it was with anticipation on my behalf and some trepidation from Al that we drove out to Chamonix in early February 1982.

That year was our 'annus mirabilis'. Conditions were brilliant with hard névé everywhere on the hill but with enough deep snow on the approaches to fully test our resolve. We started with the North Face of the Charmoz which took us a long day's snow-shoeing all the way from Chamonix just to reach the bottom of the route. (No Montenvers train in winter in those days) The climbing was superb, weaving up well-iced runnels onto the central ice face and a bivouac below the *Merkl Couloir* direct finish. What I remember was Al screaming that his calves were agony and then the magical first winter bivvi on a slim ledge hacked out of the ice. Al liked his comforts, so his part of the ledge always ended up being luxurious in comparison with mine. This was to be the first of many long winter nights spent in inhospitable places with Al, every one of them memorable. Next day we were up and off down, both of us ecstatic with a route and an experience that we would value for ever.

We finished our two weeks with an early-ish British ascent of the

Cornuau-Davaille route on the North Face of the Droites. For us this was as ambitious a route as we could imagine and we caught it in brilliant nick. We pitched the whole route and topped out, (after one bivvy) at midday at the col where we were met by a dramatic and sudden storm, which gave us as hard a struggle, as we had ever had. Visibility was instantly reduced to zero as we pushed on down past an invisible Couvercle Hut to the Leschaux glacier where Al ensured our extremely late arrival in Chamonix by slinging his less-than-perfect snow shoes down a crevasse in a fit of exhausted rage. We eventually did arrive, trailing snow into the Bar National to catch last orders and a generous 'grande bier' from an incredulous Roger Baxter-Jones.

The Droites gave us both a high that lasted for at least two months. So 1983 saw us back in Cham again in early February and attempting the *Cohen-Collister* route on the North Face of the Aiguille Sans Nom. This was particularly memorable for our only row on the hill. Where should we bivvy? As our compromise site near the top of the main icefield proved so unsatisfactory, both of us were happy to admit that we had lost the argument. The next day we found the exit ice pitches steep and hard and we were forced into a second bivvy (on an agreed site, this time) before a worrying descent down the infamous *Whympier Couloir*.

1984 saw our last winter trip to Cham. We decided to go for the *Super Couloir* on Mont Blanc du Tacul, but extreme cold (somewhere around -30°C) put paid to our attempt after three pitches of finger-numbing rock on the *Gervasutti Pillar* start to the main couloir. The long walk down the Mer de Glace was fraught with worry, but this time Al could see the sense in keeping his snowshoes on.

1985 saw Al and I along with Johnny Jones and Martin Burrows-Smith off to the Gangotri in Northern India to attempt the East Face of Meru. Suffice it to say we failed, but our high point has not yet been surpassed despite many subsequent high-powered efforts. It was on this trip that Al contracted a viral muscular problem in his shoulder that brought his climbing to a premature close. After that we still went to Chamonix every winter, but now Al came for the skiing.

Al gave me some of the best climbing experiences that I've ever had and ushered me safely through the dangerous early years of my winter Alpine career. His steadfast reliability and genuine love of big mountains are what I remember best — that and those long, hard comradely nights under the storms and stars of a cold winter's night in the mountains.

Dick Turnbull



Alistair Morgan. Photo: Dick Turnbull

John Streetly

1928 (1952) -1999

John Streetly was a phenomenon. Like a meteor, he blazed across the British rock-climbing scene in 1952 with his first ascent of *Bloody Slab* on Clogwyn du'r Arddu, then after an Alpine season or two, he was gone — back to the wilds of Trinidad.

Although born in Swindon on 2 August 1928, his family soon moved to the Caribbean where his father became the Venerable Archdeacon Streetly for Trinidad and Tobago. A brilliant swimmer and fisherman, John and his younger brother Arthur filled the family larder with lobster and red snapper. John won an Island Scholarship to Cambridge and he and I arrived at Queens' College together in 1949 to read Natural Sciences. He immediately made his mark as a total all-round sportsman. Bronzed and tousle-headed, he was a five foot four inch bundle of restless energy. He won a Freshmans' swimming trial; a boxing blue at featherweight; coxed for the College and then, looking around for other pursuits, was introduced to rock-climbing.

The Mountaineering Club used to hire a coach for a day's climbing on Derbyshire gritstone which most beginners found impossibly difficult. My first memory was seeing John soloing 20ft up a Very Severe. 'Come down, John, this instant,' shouted Ted Wrangham. 'Don't you realise that's dangerous?' Clearly he needed taking in hand, but apart from gaining experience, he didn't need teaching. It was literally like holding a tiger by the tail. One morning just before dawn, we crept out of College to make an illegal ascent of the vertiginous tower of St John's College Chapel. In the 1930s it was 'the last great problem' for Cambridge roof climbers solved, I believe, by Jack Longland.

In North Wales in 1952 we repeated climbs that were then not often done by Oxbridge types: Birtwistle's *Diagonal*; the second ascent of Tony Moulam's superb *Mur y Niwl* and Peter Harding's *Girdle of the West Buttress* on Cloggy. It must have been while descending from this along the Western Terrace that we first noticed and briefly toyed with the entry to *Bloody Slab*. The story of its first ascent on 10 June 1952 has now entered Welsh climbing folklore. I had planned to be there with John, Ted Wrangham and Brian Mudd, but the chain broke on my ancient motorbike and delayed me overnight. By the time I arrived, the deed was done. Folklore is the richer because if I had been there, I feel I might have restrained him from such an ill-equipped and irreversible venture. But Ted Wrangham was known as a forceful second. John was some 50ft up in a most precarious position and called out, 'What do I do now?' 'Foot out to the left,' shouted Ted and, miraculously, a tiny hold appeared. Nobody cared to follow and when the brand new 200ft rope ran out,

John had to finish the climb solo.

In a two year interval 1951-53, *Bloody Slab* was the only one of 14 new routes on Cloggy which were not led by either Joe Brown or Don Whillans. Domination by the Rock and Ice was almost complete, but they had no tradition of writing about their climbs. John was persuaded to write an account for *Cambridge Mountaineering 1954* which must be one of the most frank and desperate descriptions in climbing literature. Even with today's gear and sticky soles, it is still graded E3.5b.

Then came John's first alpine season. After warming up with David Fisher on the first British ascent of the *East Ridge* of the Dent du Crocodile, he joined a CUMC meet which I organised amongst the 4000m peaks of the Valais. Our best climb together was the rarely repeated North Ridge of the Dent Blanche. John and I had a close shave when slightly off the route beneath a vertical wall, which I had to restrain him from tackling direct. Instead, while I belayed, he traversed delicately right on tiny finger holds with slab friction for the feet. Suddenly, the block he was holding in both hands broke off. Down he went in a cloud of dust and debris. Fortunately, the single running belay held and we survived.

John then disappeared to Trinidad where in 1960 he helped to set up the British Scientific Company, Brisco, which provided instrumentation for offshore oil and gas. Occasional legendary tales leaked out of John doing a headstand on top of a 120ft oil derrick, or landing a 400lb grouper which a few years previously would have been a world record.

On holidays he was well placed to join expeditions in South America: with John Kempe's party to Peru in 1956 when he and Michael Westmacott summited the 18,797ft Huagaruncho; and on Barrie Page's expedition to the Central Tower of Paine in 1962-63 when the team just thwarted a rival Italian group, also determined to make the first ascent. Then came two trips to the prow of Roraima, which was finally climbed in 1974. His only Himalayan trip was in 1960 with Dennis Davis' group to Nuptse, but he had to leave before the successful ascent.

Briefly back from Trinidad in 1955, John came across Don Whillans cooling off in a stream above Llanberis. 'Come on Don' he said, 'I've a few years climbing time to make up'. The next two weeks were the most hectic Don could remember — second or third ascents of the most difficult climbs they could find: *Cemetery Gates*, *Erosion Groove*, *Surplomb*, *Suicide Wall* and *Suicide Groove*. Four years later, hardly having touched rock in between, John flew out to Chamonix to join Don, Les Brown and Hamish MacInnes on the Walker Spur, which still awaited a British ascent. Climbing as two pairs, John led the second rope most of the way. But halfway up they noticed a very British jammed-knot runner: Robin Sutherland and Gunn Clarke had beaten them to it by a day.

After the Booker Group bought the Trinidad arm of Brisco, John moved to the UK, settling in a fold of the north Devon hills. Our families met on Sally Westmacott's AC/CC September meets at Bosigran where

the children had their first taste of rock-climbing. But John's later years were racked with pain, as crippling arthritis seemed to pervade all his limbs. It was sad to see a friend with so much courage and determination grow old and wizened, but he could still fish his own trout stream and a salmon beat on the Torridge. He enjoyed meticulously slicing and serving his own smoked salmon for his guests, with a chilled white wine, as old stories were recounted. He rejoiced in his large maturing family who all survive him: his wife Elizabeth and children Julia, Alison, Jane, Michael (elected to *The Climbers' Club* in 1995) and Joanna.

Will we ever see John's like again? Let Don Whillans, who could be rather sceptical of University types, but who became a good friend, have the last word: 'With the possible exception of Joe Brown, John Streetly was the best rock climber I ever climbed with. His technique was incredible; he turned his lack of inches into a positive advantage and even though he could climb as delicately as a fly, moving fluently over seemingly holdless rock, he could also overcome problems requiring sheer physical strength with ease.'

George Band



John Streetly. Photo: George Band

Geoffrey Byrne-Sutton

1930 (1952—1967) - 2000

Geoff Sutton died in Geneva at the end of March, having made the city his home or his base for almost 40 years. During the 50s and early 60s, perhaps to some extent for a further 10 years, he was one of the most influential figures in British climbing for his writings and translations, for his energy and enthusiasm, and for his central position as intermediary between groupings of activists who had hardly yet begun to communicate.

His publications included his contribution to *Snowdon Biography* (with Winthrop Young and Noyce); *Samson*, the revelatory introduction to the life and writings of Menlove Edwards (again with Noyce); and *High Peak*, a history of Derbyshire walking and climbing (with Eric Byne). In the second and third of these collaborations, whilst building on the personal experience of Noyce and Byne, he was effectively the writer and brought the projects to fruition. He was also the author of a manual on aid climbing and the translator of the autobiographies of leading continental alpinists (Terray, 1963; Mazeaud, 1974; Heckmair, 1975.). And in the late 50s, he had been the key figure in organising what were possibly the BBC's earliest radio and television features on climbing: the first listening in on the instruction of novices on Castle Naze, the second watching Joe Brown glide up *Suicide Wall* and *East Gully Wall*.

He was born in Bristol, a child of two extraordinary families. His father was brought up in Canada and was one of 16 children, his mother was Irish and one of six. His parents became estranged when he was about six years old and he rarely saw his mother subsequently. He did not meet his Irish relatives until he sought them out in the 60s, added their family name to his own, and began to identify strongly with Irish culture, taking Irish citizenship.

He was sent to spend the war years in Canada with an aunt who enrolled him in a Jesuit school. Resisting blandishments to become a priest, he returned to Britain where his further education at Harrow ended abruptly in expulsion (out of bounds, riding a motor-bike, and with a girl on the back). Undaunted, he drove up to North Wales where he picked up another pillion passenger, Gwen Moffat, who initially overestimated her driver's age by several years. The ensuing events are memorably recorded in *Space Below My Feet*. With some misgivings she introduced 'this gilded youth' to her circle of dropout friends. 'Geoff Payne masked his disapproval for a time but couldn't resist a pointed remark on the stranger's elegant cuff-links, a remark which was accepted pleasantly and without embarrassment. When he'd gone... we shook our heads, heavy with foreboding...' But the stranger returned to see

more of Moffat, this time bearing a bottle of gin, and she took him up his first climbs.

He did not immediately follow up this challenge. First, he worked his way around the world on boats and many entertaining stories date from this period. In America he looked after a millionaire's motor launch, worked in a lumber camp, and travelled through California as it made its first experiments in post-war lifestyles. In Hong Kong, he secured a post as a radio announcer, concealing the fact that he was resident in the Mission for Distressed British Seamen. On returning, he went to OCTU, and began to seize every opportunity to climb in North Wales and in the Avon Gorge. He saw out his National Service as a subaltern in the Somaliland Scouts, where, whilst in charge of an escort for a prisoner, the camp-fire was allowed to die down; a lion picked up a sleeping bag containing a member of the party and had walked some distance before rifle fire secured his release.

On going up to Cambridge to read Modern Languages in 1951, he began to engage in serious climbing, becoming CUMC President in 1953. During this period he joined *The Climbers' Club* and was to serve on the Committee from 1955-59. When Bob Downes died on Masherbrum and his father wished to establish some memorial, Geoff, with Peter and Dinah Evans, played a leading part in the acquisition of the Downes Hut. He climbed widely in Britain and Ireland, leading or seconding new routes in the Avon Gorge, Derbyshire, North Wales, the Lakes, Skye and Donegal. Of these climbs *Poor Man's Peuterey* at Tremadoc is easily his best known. (For the Old Man of Stoerr he equipped himself with Don Whillans as leader.) At some point in the 50s he obtained a Guide's Certificate and made some use of it over the years. He was not at the cutting edge of contemporary rock-climbing, and never implied that he was. But the fact that he made it his business to talk to, to learn from, and if possible to climb with the leading activists tended, in some quarters, to make people underestimate his own capacities. Although he was much bigger and burlier than the preferred mould for the expert, and tended to take his time over difficult moves, he could lead quite hard routes for the time, whether delicate or strenuous, with perfect control.

More importantly, he was extremely active in the Alps. In the early and middle 50s, Cambridge mustered an unusually ambitious and forceful group of alpinists including, Goff Francis, Roger Chorley, George Band, Ted Wrangham, Chris Simpson, Eric Langmuir and Bob Downes. Through these years, Geoff took part in ascents of a fair number of those routes in the Western Alps most highly prized by British climbers. Equally interestingly, he felt confident enough to lead one of the earliest British ascents of an ED, the West Face of Pte. Albert, with a lady, Eileen Gregory, as second; and, in an apparently retrograde step, but in order to see what the professionals could teach, he and Goff Francis hired Lionel Terray for the original route on the Frény Pillar. He was also drawn to

off-beat areas further afield, and was a member of small expeditions to locations few had then heard of: the Hoggar mountains in the Sahara (as early as Christmas 1952), and the Cape Farewell peaks in Greenland in 1958. His skills as a linguist were later to allow him to make acquaintances and friends amongst the greatest European mountaineers.

His appointment as Principal of Derbyshire's Outdoor Centre led to important introductions. In its earlier years, White Hall had a quite small permanent staff which was strengthened by using weekend voluntary instructors from a rich range of local climbing and caving clubs. Geoff and his wife Ann, who was perhaps the most competent woman rock-climber of the 50s, launched into the gritstone and limestone scene with delight. His strong interest in people, his lively curiosity and his huge enjoyment of get-togethers in newly-discovered pubs broke down barriers. As much as anyone, he was responsible for opening communications between the university and *Alpine Club* axis, which had set the pace in the Alps, and the new northern activists who were now making their mark.

He had a complex and gifted mind and an imposing physical presence. In the early 60s no-one could have said what he might not achieve. In fact, what he did with his life was a surprise. There were many changes, since he believed that more than four years in one post tended to dull the wits. On leaving White Hall, after two or three false starts, he taught at the International School in Geneva. From then on, he started to extend his languages, adding Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, and even smatterings of Arabic and Erse to a French so fluent that it sometimes overcame his English.

After a spell at the Batelle Institute in Geneva, and a stint with the World Meteorological Organisation, he spent some time with UNRWA in Lebanon. A series of prestigious posts as Head of Languages or Director of Translations followed: at the International Patent Office in Munich, with the International Atomic Energy Authority in Vienna (where he found himself monitoring the communiques on Chernobyl), with the International Telecommunications Union back in Geneva, and lastly with CERN. Meantime, Ann, a doctor, had remained at her secure post with the World Health Organisation in Geneva. During his lengthy absences they had grown apart, and she eventually returned to Britain, settling finally in Wales.

For some years Geoff introduced English visitors to the Salève (where he had climbed some of the harder routes with Michel Vaucher), but he had deliberately moderated his climbing after the birth of a daughter, Fiona, and a son, Quentin. He canoed and sailed for a while and he continued to enjoy ski-ing and walking in the Alps. His last day on skis, three weeks before his death, was with Quentin. He continued his worldwide travels, sometimes with others (making an Atlantic crossing with a Swiss party, but flying back because he'd found the voyage boring), but

more often alone. Quite recently, he had taken a four-month journey through the Himalaya, Tibet and China. Whilst in Tibet, he and a chance-met companion were able to hire ponies and make the four-day pilgrimage round Kailas.

In his earlier years he had contributed occasionally to literary magazines and *Outposts* had published a selection of his work, *Half a Loaf*, in its New Poets series. Regrettably, probably as a result of the endless and demanding struggle with other languages, he apparently abandoned any large creative ambitions, but resumed the writing of poetry in the mid 80s. Latterly, he started to communicate more regularly with Ann, whose interests had now turned to painting and writing, and they began to exchange poems. Geoff's deep love of literature had never failed, though he seemed to me more deeply immersed in European and Russian than in Irish and Anglo-American culture. In a letter written six weeks before his death, he remarked that he had been re-reading Pushkin, Tsetaeva, Blok, Pasternak, Akhmatova and Mandelstam 'as much for instruction as for pleasure'. His critical judgements were often severe and his standards daunting. Yet when I last met him, I was surprised to find that he'd read Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* with keen interest and still occasionally looked at mountain writing.

Geoff Sutton's life and character cannot be fitted into the short space of an obituary. He will be remembered for his generosity of spirit, his energy and restlessness, his conviviality, and the broad range of his interests and conversation; and even (at this distance with something like affection) for his heroic efforts to suppress the child-like tempers which circumstance could arouse in him. He will be deeply missed by his family and his friends from the climbing world of 40 and 50 years ago.

Harold Drasdo

Note:

I am grateful to Peter Evans for supplying material from the *CUMCJ* and to Ann Byrne-Sutton for information on family matters and for confirming or clarifying details of chronology.

Charles Buchanan Moncur Warren

1906 (1968) - 1999

Charles Warren, who died at Felsted, Essex, a few days short of his 93rd birthday, was the oldest surviving member of the pre-war Everest Expeditions. His father was a doctor in west London and Charles followed in the profession with distinction. After school at Eastbourne, he read Medicine at Cambridge and qualified at Barts Hospital in London. During the war he served as a GP and began to specialise in Paediatrics. After the war, and by now married to Dorothy Lowick, a radiographer, he settled in Essex, where Charles became consultant paediatrician at the Chelmsford and Colchester hospitals. Here he was renowned for developing the technique of performing exchange blood transfusions on infants with neo-natal jaundice. In combination with colleagues, he made great contributions to the treatment of jaundicial infants and conducted meticulous studies in the management of Wilson's disease. He was elected FRCP in 1967.

Charles started climbing at Cambridge where he joined a powerful group of climbers, including Laurence Wager, Jack Longland, Ted Hicks, Peter Lloyd and Ivan Waller, with whom he climbed in the Peak District, North Wales and Scotland, with longer vacation seasons in the Alps. On a visit to Black Rocks, Derbyshire he got into difficulties while soloing a steep pitch. Unable to finish the climb or to come down, he eventually fell off, landed on his feet and after a somersault, finished up on his back. Undeterred, he rubbed himself down and continued climbing. In 1928 while returning from Skye, his party made the second ascent of *Gimmer Crack*. They were very fit and found the route relatively straight forward, much to the surprise of Graham Macphee, who had been on the first ascent, and who watched the young climbers from the amphitheatre.

With a good list of classic Alpine ascents to his credit and by now qualified as a doctor, in 1933 he joined Marco Pallis, together with Hicks, Richard Nicholson and Colin Kirkus on an expedition to the Gangotri glacier. Here, he made his mark when he climbed Bhagirathi III (as it is now called). The crux, at over 21,000 ft, involving loose rock and a struggle with an overhang was led by Kirkus. The climbers were entirely self-supporting for six days, carrying a bivouac tent and a week's supply of food, chiefly pemmican and boiled sweets.

This success led to an invitation to join Eric Shipton's 1935 reconnaissance expedition to Everest and the subsequent well documented attempts in 1936 led by Hugh Rutledge and 1938 led by Bill Tilman. Charles, with natural modesty, was never sure whether he was invited as a doctor who could climb or as a climber who happened to be a doctor. However, during these unlucky years, which were dogged by

poor weather, heavy snow or early monsoon, Charles climbed to over 24,000ft. and made noted contributions to high-altitude medicine and the study of effects of oxygen. He also brought back the first colour slides of Everest, and made friends with his sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, who visited him in Essex in 1953. In 1935 he found the body of the lone climber, Maurice Wilson, on the East Rongbuk Glacier. Recent attempts to sensationalise certain aspects of this episode caused Charles much unease. 1935 ended more happily when heavy snow prevented further progress and the party, which also included Tilman, retreated to the nearby glaciers where a glorious month was spent map-making and climbing some 26 peaks over 20,000ft, including Khartaphu and Kharta Changri, in a feast of lightweight Himalayan exploration and first ascents unrivalled before or since. Not long ago, Charles was delighted to receive a card from a party visiting the same area who had hoped to claim virgin summits, only to find 'you had been there before us'.

After the war, and despite an increasingly demanding professional life, Charles continued to climb whenever he could, usually with members of the *Alpine Club* and the *SMC*, but especially with Iain Ogilvie who was his regular partner for more than 20 years. He went several times to Africa, where he climbed on Mt. Kenya, Kilimanjaro, the Ruwenzori Land, the Drakensburg and was made an Honorary Member of the *Mountain Club of South Africa*. He particularly enjoyed the *Alpine Club* Centenary celebrations in 1957 at Zermatt where his party which included Ogilvie and Macphee, succeeded in climbing the Dent d'Herens despite the gloomy forebodings of the then President of the AC. He joined the *SMC* in 1968 and in 1977, at the age of 71, he completed the traverse of the Cuillin ridge with his old friend Ivan Waller.

I first met Charles in the early 1970s and climbed regularly with him in the Alps, the Lake District and especially Scotland where he had long wanted to do some fine classic rock routes. At the *SMC* Easter Meet in 1981 conditions were perfect. With Dick Allen and myself he climbed *The Cioch Nose*, Applecross and on the next day *Ardverikie Wall*, a total of more than 1000 ft of Very Difficult/Severe rock with never a moment's hesitation or anxiety. He wore for this occasion a pair of boots made for him by Lawrie, which he had worn on Everest in 1938.

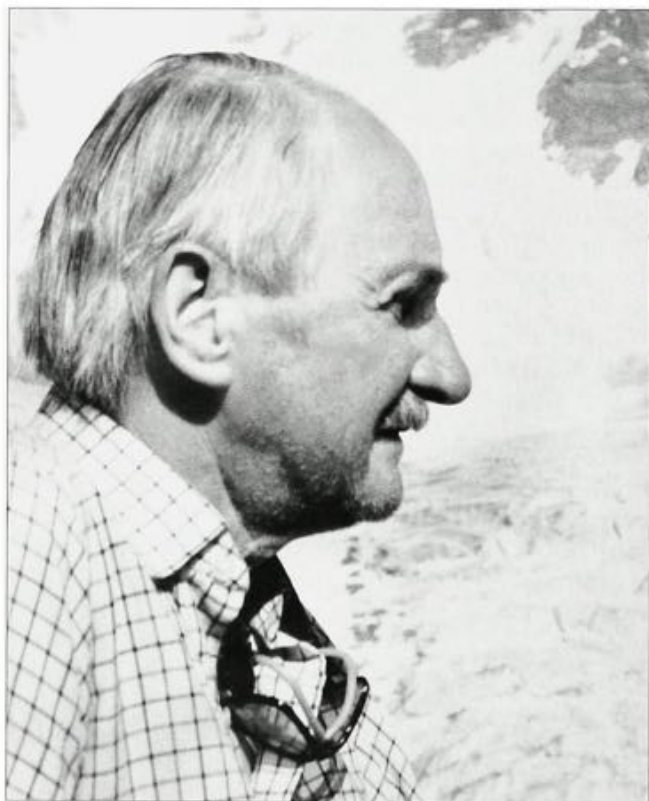
Although no tiger on rock and ice, Charles had great staying power and seldom showed signs of fatigue. He was the perfect companion, whether on the hill or driving across Europe to the Alps where his enthusiasm for a well-rounded holiday produced fascinating diversions to view old bridges, art galleries and churches. He had a fine collection of early English watercolours and a great love of the Romantic period in art and literature, both of which, together with a lively interest in the contemporary mountain scene, helped to keep him alert to the end.

But other things were more important to him. A few years ago we sent him a card from an Easter Meet. He was not well and could not be

with us. In his reply let Charles have the last word:

That card with the signatures of my old friends did me much good...Letters from grateful parents, for example, please me more than all things, including my mountaineering memories: and the old ticket collector at Chelmsford Station who once stopped the train for me because I had been kind to his child. No, these are the things that matter; our human relationships. Not necessarily getting to the top of a high mountain. That is good fun but rather unimportant. But how glad I was to have had the opportunity to do something supremely unimportant, but of tremendous interest in life.'

Oliver Turnbull



Charles Warren
Photo: Iain Ogilvie

REVIEWS

**The Totem Pole and a Whole New Adventure, Paul Pritchard.
Constable, 1999
£16.99**

Two years ago, Paul Pritchard won £2,000 for the best mountaineering book of the year. This second book tells how he spent that money on a world climbing tour. But most of the book is about the unexpected 'whole new adventure' of recovering from severe brain injury by learning to talk and walk again after a rock hit his head in Tasmania, on a pinnacle called The Totem Pole.

The book, written as a form of therapy at the Wirral Neuro Rehabilitation Unit, is a new kind of mountaineering literature because most climbers who suffer an injury of this severity are either dead or unable to write about it. But Pritchard is unstoppable. Told he will never walk again, and certainly never climb again, he walked into the Festival of Mountaineering Literature at Bretton Hall on November 20th 1999 to read from this book and talk about climbing in the future. "The doctors simply don't know me" is his response to a gloomy prognosis.

So how well do we get to know him through these remarkable, hard-won pages? He gives the impression of revealing all, in his raw and honest detail, but some questions do remain unexplored. As he reached the bottom of that abseil down the slender, sea-lapped pinnacle, he describes the block that hit him as choosing that moment to part with the pinnacle. But did his rope pull it off? He indicates that his previous serious accidents had happened at times of emotional stress in his life and hints that this was also the case here, but goes no further. The girlfriend who hauled him up to a ledge and ran for help certainly saved his life. She supported him through surgery, and early rehabilitation until she was able to tell him that she needed to separate from him. The reasons are hazy. A year later, after sailing around Antarctica, Ceila Bull calls at his little house in Llanberis and tells him her version of the accident that closes the book. After the rescue, the ambulance team had to protect her from what they called her 'superwoman persona'. Well, what was the

effect of the accident on her last year of continued adventure? Perhaps we will have to wait for her book to find out.

Writing this book Pritchard describes as an atonement. Quite how this works is left for the reader to deduce. Certainly he puts his passion for climbing into a new perspective that allows more value for relationships. The drive at the sharp end of the sport, where he had played a central role is inevitably more selfish than it need be at the relatively relaxed leisure end of climbing. In Australia, on the world tour, he has a telling meeting with the man who saved his life in his previous bad accident. Glen Robbins had hauled him out of the sea below an Anglesey cliff and had returned to Australia 'with things left unsaid', as Pritchard puts it. A talented climbing photographer, Robbins had 'distanced himself from the climbing scene ever since'. The trauma Pritchard's lifestyle had left in some of those around him has come home to him in the writing of this book.

But this grim realisation is far from the whole story. The heart of the book is a diary of rehabilitation. Some of the detail of this I found hard to read in the intensity of its pain, frustration and fragility. Reading it can bring tears to the eyes. And then there are the hilarious moments which Pritchard creates, observes or gets dragged into. He is proud that he always got picked up for the weekends back in the wild Llanberis climbing community. More often than not, these seem to set back his physical recovery while doing his morale a lot of good. At one party he cries out in pain as a stoned skinhead 'helps' his wheelchair through the door and he gets beaten about the head as a result! Fortunately, friends pull the skinhead off before more damage is done. People in wheelchairs, Pritchard muses, tend to act as magnets to drunks.

The warmth and support of the weekends from this community of climbing crazies that Pritchard documented so vividly in his previous prize winning book, *Deep Play*, is matched during the week by the staff at the rehabilitation unit at Clatterbridge. Trips to the Liverpool Tate are a revelation to Pritchard who becomes fascinated by a particular Picasso because 'she is still how I feel'. Some reviewers have felt that this central section of the book is slackly written, but anyone who has been in any kind of long-term recovery from in-

jury, or knows people who have suffered a stroke for example, will know that this diary is essential to the book's attempt to follow the full consequences of Pritchard's horrific accident.

A film producer persuades Pritchard to revisit the Totem Pole where he develops a need to see the scar on the rock where the block came away. He does so exactly a year after the accident in a poignant, tricky boat journey that leads to an admiration and respect for the pinnacle and a satisfying sense of closure.

What remains is the 'whole new adventure' of discovering what this changed person can do, I suspect that this unself-pitying book may become a best seller.

Terry Gifford

**Travail So Gladly Spent, Tom Price.
The Ernest Press, 2000,
£17.50**

If, within the past 20 years, I'd come across an anthology of new work by the best of post-war British climbing writers, the very first thing I'd have looked for would have been something by Tom Price. This may seem surprising since his contributions to the literature have been short, few and far between. He's now in his 80s and, mercifully, he's put a book together at last.

'To the extent that risking one's life can ever be so described, Moss Ghyll Grooves is a delightful climb.' That was the opening sentence of his piece in *Classic Rock*. It had stopped me dead while I thought about the voice. Then I realised that I was hearing an echo from a half-century earlier, the famous opening of C.E. Montague's *In Hanging Garden Gully*: 'To climb up rocks is like all the rest of your life, only simpler and safer.' Price, as usual, had seen the other side of the truth.

At that point it struck me that I was also catching another, much fainter and more distant echo: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged...' It may seem fantastic to set Price beside Jane Austen, a widely-travelled Twentieth Century adventurer and the stay-at-home spinster daughter of a Regency clergyman, but I see some affinities.

The 40 chapters, often quite short, mainly relate to climbing, hill-walking, skiing or canoeing. No plan is imposed, you

could start anywhere, though there's a general chronological drift, sometimes interfered with, from past to present. In summary, the content might be split into three classes. First, there are off-beat adventures far afield trekking in the mountains of Lesotho; many months spent surveying in South Georgia (including a retracing of Shackleton's epic crossing); a descent of the Hanbury-Thelon river in Canada's North-West Territories. Price calls this last journey one of the most significant and memorable adventures of his life as well he might. Aged 57, and with little canoeing experience, he takes along a 54-year-old novice companion. Their 500-mile descent of this seldom-travelled waterway takes a full month and seems as extreme a commitment as any Himalayan expedition.

A second element springs from Price's involvements in outdoor education, mountain rescue and BMC affairs. These are matters I didn't really want to know much more about, threatening to interrupt the pleasure of his narratives. As I ought to have expected, I was quickly disarmed by his tendency to make points by telling stories and also by his ideas, the refreshing common sense sometimes amounting to subversion.

The remainder of the book, its core, covers 60 years of domestic and Alpine excursions. It raises a curious question. Throughout the earlier years of climbing there apparently existed a substantial silent majority going about its business uninvolved in, and perhaps indifferent to the great historic actions. Have its representatives now become a minority, with most climbers incorporated into a mainstream through the influence of the magazines, the reach of advertising, the glitter of the gear shops and the sea of information in which we're drowning?

Price has held organisational roles and was a rock-climber dedicated enough to lead many of the harder Lakeland classics of the generation preceding his own. But he has also spent a great deal of time wandering alone in the hills, unburdened by equipment or ambition, and he always speaks as one of the unincorporated. Essentially, this book does for postwar British climbing what *Always A Little Further* did for 30s Scottish climbing.

'Style is the imprint of what we are on what we do,' Daumal said. Price's writing

Is like his climbing. He keeps things simple, never using a long word when a short word will do. It looks largely without artifice, though that's not quite the case. It's easy enough to pick out its virtues. There's the terse and selective detail of the settings, the wide landscapes, the remote settlements, the vagaries of weather. There's the keen interest in the people he encounters, in Alpine peasants as strongly as in mountaineering celebrities. (A brief note on finding Menlove Edwards in residence at Helyg makes sad and revealing reading). There's the piercing nostalgia colouring the descriptions of his earliest adventures. There's the delicious humour which keeps on surfacing. (I found myself re-reading some pieces previously seen in club journals — *Short of The Folding Stuff*, *Youth at the Door*, *Training for the Haute Route* — with an almost continuous smile on my face.) And bound into his reflections on his long life there's what I suppose we must call the wisdom of experience.

Aside from the interest of the content, the book stirred a prying curiosity about the character of the author, a curiosity no other modern climbing book has excited. The tone is often philosophic and sometimes confessional though nothing shocking is confessed. He admits to a modest pride at things well done and he does not disguise a wistful susceptibility to the appeal of women ('girls of a disturbing beauty walked through the town'), an interest expressed with characteristic delicacy. If his disapproval is aroused it is conveyed in the mild-mannered and may be tempered with amusement. It is impossible to imagine that there might be anyone, anywhere, who actually dislikes him. And yet I found his composure somehow baffling. He seems to tell everything and still I find it hard to get my thoughts in a row and any speculation may be beyond the bounds of a straight review.

I hope I've made it clear that this is quite an exceptional book. From the past 50 years, of all the British climbing autobiographies I've read, Price's *Travails* feels like the most rewarding, and the most likely to last.

Harold Drasdo

Regions of the Heart: The Triumph and Tragedy of Alison Hargreaves
David Rose and Ed Douglas,
Michael Joseph, 1999
£16.99
(paperback available)

When Alison Hargreaves was blown off the summit of K2, the world's second highest mountain, in 1995, many newspapers condemned the risk-taking of a mother of two young children. When her husband, Jim Ballard, took a TV film crew along on a trip for the children to see their mother's last mountain, the poignancy of their loss was seen in millions of homes. Of course, we all said, we would never take the risks that Hargreaves had. Sadly, that was so long ago that some members who said that to themselves are no longer with us.

In Sheffield, six days before Alison's death, we had been stunned by the news that the vastly experienced and safest of mountaineers, Paul Nunn, had been killed in the same range by a falling serac. The climbing press later pointed out that similar accusations had not been levelled at Nunn as the father of two daughters. Weren't mothers to be allowed the same rights to climb the highest mountains as fathers?

This Hargreaves family-based biography, which quietly presents the facts of Hargreaves' life, its impressive achievements and its tragic traps, reveals that the issue is more complicated than this. Reading this book leads to the inevitable conclusion that Hargreaves was not killed by a mountain, but by a marriage. In the end, despite clear opportunities to do so, she seemed unable to extricate herself from either fatal course.

Alison got the climbing bug from her hill-walking family and from outdoor pursuits at Belper High School, Derbyshire. A Saturday job at The Bivouac shop in Matlock led to the first of a series of dramatic decisions that reveal a sad desperation underlying her outwardly sunny personality. On her 18th birthday, and to the surprise of her parents, she moved in with the shop's owner, Jim Ballard. She decided to make a life out of climbing and, although she lacked outstanding flair, she was one of the few women on the English rock-climbing scene at the time.

An Alpine apprenticeship was cut short

by demands that she contribute to the business which had now, on her initiative, expanded into gear manufacturing. The biographers seem to forget that she was also a director in the business when it failed.

The writers credit Hargreaves with a determination to succeed, but her desire to emulate the charismatic darling of the French media, Catherine Destivelle, was never realistic. Hargreaves became increasingly desperate for public recognition in the UK from which sponsorship might follow. Ballard's support veered between privately denigrating her and publicly making exaggerated claims for her. With the business in a downward spiral, she made her mark by being the first British woman to climb the North Face of the Eiger. She was five and a half months pregnant.

This ascent later brought her the sponsorship to fund a family escape. Now with two children, as their house was repossessed following the collapse of their business, the four of them took off in a landrover for Alison to climb in one summer, the famous six North Faces of the Alps. It was the worst summer to attempt it and her book contract only added to the pressure of nine months as gypsies. Determination and skill in finally succeeding were undermined by criticism of two of the routes she chose as avoiding the classic difficulties. So she soloed the Croz Spur in winter, with a helicopter photographer to clinch the much-needed publicity.

Now the bread-winner for a family of four and a full-time climber who had to not only regularly make impressive ascents, but come back with the publicity material, Alison Hargreaves was under a pressure probably unequalled by a British woman. When the comparisons were made, nobody pointed out that Paul Nunn was a university lecturer whose wife also had a full-time job. In addition, this book suggests that Hargreaves was especially torn between wanting to a full-time mother and a full-time mountaineer. She couldn't bear to be parted from her children. When she went to attempt Everest, she took her children, too.

But when she turned back rather than risk frostbite ('bringing up children without fingers to hold them', as she put it) she was met by the fury of her husband.

This book is frank in revealing the additional pressure of the violence of Ballard's

emotions. The word 'assault' is used more than once.

In her last interviews she said publicly that she would be divorcing her husband, but privately she did not believe the courts would give custody to a mountaineering mother against a full-time father. In her very success she had created a trap from which she believed she could not escape.

Hargreaves returned to Everest to become the first woman to climb it without Sherpa support and without bottled oxygen. She did not realise that the financial consequences of this ascent meant that she did not need to leave immediately for K2 as she had planned. Her turmoil in base camp interviews about her children, her marriage and her career make difficult reading.

The issues this book raises for the future of women's mountaineering remain unresolved. (And perhaps this review ought to receive a reply from one who has resolved these issues.) The authors do not dwell on them heavily, wanting to give due recognition to Alison Hargreaves as 'one of the greatest female mountaineers ever'. Perhaps, in time, that claim also deserves a reflective reply — as does this book, since Jim Ballard's side of the relationship is unrepresented here. Working with what they had, the authors did a professional, economical and frank job with a story for our times containing more to consider than I can hint at here.

Terry Gifford

**High Achiever: The Life and Climbs of
Chris Bonington, Jim Curran.
Constable, 1999
£18.99**

It is a measure of Chris Bonington's stature in the mountaineering world that one of the last century's greatest of world mountaineers, Reinhold Messner, can open his Foreword to Curran's biography with a contentious assertion that *doesn't* have a reader immediately up in arms: There is no doubt that without Chris Bonington British mountaineering would have developed differently in the second half of this century. And it would have been less successful. This gentle and affectionate account of Bonington's life doesn't set out to prove

this assertion, but rather it lays out Bonington's unfolding journey 'from Hampshire to Caldbeck, from Harrison's Rocks to the Eiger and Everest', to show how this complex man has developed as both man and mountaineer. However, such now is Curran's mastery of the mystery of writing that by the closing pages, he has brought us comfortably to a clear understanding and acceptance of Messner's claim.

What Curran doesn't do, however, is to 'Menloveise' Christian: there is little here in the way of deep and probing psychological insight into character or motivation — though at first sight, the family background looks potentially fruitful. Chris's parents apparently combined 'immaturity, laziness and heavy drinking' with an unpreparedness 'mentally and physically' for the responsibilities of parenthood. They quarrel and fight and it is ultimately Chris's grandmother who picks up the family pieces and provides long term stability for both him and his divorced mother. Chris, too, is a withdrawn boy, often lonely and 'useless at games'; so lots here, to string together and theorise about, surely? But Curran wisely eschews this course, being perfectly attuned to his subject, close in friendship. He is wary of causality in the nature/nurture debate and though the fascinating opening chapters contain a wealth of detail about Chris's early life, drawn from an exclusive source in Helen Bonington's diaries, he allows himself only one open speculation of the genesis of CB's future success: 'his fondness for running away, apparently for no other purpose than to see what it felt like'. But there are other influences, too. Like many lonely and not particularly outstanding pupils from a disrupted family and 'disturbed education', Chris finds solace in reading, and by the age of 13 was 'by any standards, extremely well read.' Like many another young man of that age and time, he discovers the world of mountains first through a book and his 'imagination is jolted'. Curran is surely right when he links this discovery via reading with Chris's penchant for doing a runner: 'In those very earliest days it was Chris Bonington's exploratory instincts that were roused.' From that moment, it appears an inexorable progress (Tom Patey's satirical song comes immediately to mind: 'Onward Christian Bonington...') in which luck at being in the right place at the right time is combined

with a drive for achievement which belies his youthful appearance. A chance meeting with Hamish MacInnes, for example, leads to a first winter ascent of *Agag's Groove* and an encounter with the fabled Creagh Dhu Club (they thought Chris 'must live in a doll's house'). In Wales, Ginger Cain spots him doing early ascents of Extremes and shares a road mender's hut by the Gromlech Boulders during the summer of 1954: 'he was really pushy — his push was way beyond mine.'

Throughout the next years, Curran highlights this tremendous drive as being at the core of Chris's success; and though there are events in life over which Chris has little control, at critical turning moments (leaving the army, choosing not to sell margarine, stepping into the climbing role on *Eiger Direct*), he has clearly seized on opportunities, intuiting rightly that these were moments for him to make something of himself.

However, it is not only the fabulous first ascents and the partners he managed to engage — then, if not now, 'he has been extremely shrewd about who he has chosen to climb with' — but the fact that he worked hard to master different crafts and combine them with a deeply-held delight in climbing (c.f. Review *CCJ* 1989/90). It has been this synthesising intelligence that has enabled CB to set up the series of international expeditions which have made him a coffee table and media name and the natural successor, at least in the public mind, to Lord Hunt.

Bonington the 'High Achiever' also comes over in Curran's words as an intensely private man, as much devoted to family, voluntary work and charity as he is to mountaineering; but the deaths of many friends — particularly that of his closest friend, Nick Escourt, and those of Pete Boardman and Joe Tasker — have moved him to write about the intense emotions he felt at these times. Curran points to *Anapurna South Face* as being 'a breath of fresh air' in expedition books, partly because in it, Chris 'wrote with disarming frankness about his own weaknesses.'

This, too, is a high achievement: for the man who might be hailed as our first very public professional climber, the KCB of climbing, has helped our sport develop its public face of humility and sorrow to counteract the commercial glitz and cynicism

now endemic in the publicity surrounding the lives of other 'professional' climbers.

In this country, post Everest 1953, it is largely only Bonington's expedition books which have provided an eager British general public, avid for nationally-sponsored sporting success with accounts of adventures that were at the cutting edge of the sport itself. These books have also helped frame the context within which we, the mountaineering fraternity have learned to judge ourselves and our peers' achievements, both in Britain and abroad.

We end the book with Chris now in his 60s, but still expeditioning and lecturing. The last chapters are somewhat of a chronicle of these activities, but by now Curran has deftly shown us just why his subject has what Messner calls 'stature'. It is a measure of both Bonington and this book that we whole-heartedly agree with Messner's assessment and opening assertion.

Tim Noble

**The Coniston Tigers, A. Harry Griffin.
Sigma Leisure, 2000
£9.95**

'Write about anything you like, but for God's sake keep off birds'. So wrote the late A.P. Wadsworth, editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in late 1950 to A. Harry Griffin, inviting him to contribute to the paper's 'Country Diary', once a fortnight. The rest, as they say, is history. But to be precise about the Griffin achievement (not a Harry Griffin, but *The Harry Griffin*, as Alan Rusbridger, Editor of *The Guardian* writes in the Introduction): 1300 contributions of a few hundred words every other Monday for 50 years, written originally from 'Westmorland' (which Harry writes of in characteristically forthright terms as 'this ancient, splendid, unspoiled county'), and for the most part about his 'lovely Lakeland' which 'sadly, because of mass tourism' is not the place he knew as a boy. This adds up to nearly half a million words about 'hills, snow, tarns, stone walls, deer, climbs, skiing, breath-taking views' and, just sometimes, about birds.

As I sit down to write this review on January 5th 2001, *The Guardian* recognises Harry's achievement by giving

him five columns to tell his loyal and appreciative readers a little of the history behind the diary. They would do well by buying this book to hear more about his Lake District and its activists in the 1920s.

Harry writes of a primal time: 'of care-free days...on uncrowded crags... Grassy, uneroded tracks...and two-wheeled horse-drawn gigs...still going over the passes.' A time when the young Coniston Tigers had 'fewer than 300 classified rock climbs on all the crags in Lakeland' to themselves and when there were no 'hikers' because 'the word hadn't been invented', when 'there were no youth hostels or climbing huts in Lakeland' and when the very idea of a 'weekend' was a strange one. What bliss it must have been then to be alive and on high Lakeland fells. And Harry tells it like it was: his spare, paced but informative prose, honed by the years of writing to tight deadlines and order, picks out the telling details of weather, route, view or companion. He knows what his readership want to hear and see — because, of course, even though the book is sprinkled with some of his chosen diary pieces, the style is now so much a part of the man that the whole book reads as an extended diary, down the years.

Harry started to climb and explore Lakeland at an early age. Like that other famous Lakeland mountaineer and resident, Chris Bonington (who writes his Foreword), Harry began mountaineering as an 'undistinguished pupil at school'. A schoolmaster started him off with the admonishment, just before the summit scramble up Stickle Pike, not 'to drink from streams' and 'never to roll boulders down the fellsides'. I remember receiving just such an induction from just such a teacher, 45 years after Harry's.

At the heart of the book are the Lakeland lives of the 'Tigers'. Harry's meeting and subsequent climbing with George Basterfield, Mayor of Barrow in 1929 (surely one of the most apposite of meetings recorded in the history of English climbing) leads to a lifelong involvement with, particularly, Dow Crag, Gimmer and Gable, their routes and walks. With Jack Diamond, George Spencely, Tommy Tyson, George Anderson, Dick Mackereth and others, the youthful Griffin explores and climbs in any weather — often going out late at night after a full day on the hills, just for a dare or on a whim or, quite clearly,

because the mountains are there and the time must be used to the full in this arcadian place. They court hardship, not for its own sake, but because it gives them access to greater delights in the hills. They have a little hut on the shores of Goats Water in which they smoke and rest and yarn (yarning is an important factor in the Tigers activities). On their first real adventure together here, the Tigers' struggle to get out of their frozen clothes, then photograph them against the side of the hut 'solid as sheets of tin'.

The book is full of similar anecdote and recollection in this style of unassuming delight in the ordinary — for Harry rarely philosophises or strays from his tale. He writes, too, movingly about death and personal loss; and his observations about larger Lakes characters and visitors like Sid Cross, 'Rusty' Westmorland, Jim Birkett, Ivan Waller and Alfred Wainwright are both pithy and telling. Harry doesn't shirk from telling Wainwright, for instance, 'to his face', that he was wrong for 'leading people by hand up the fells'. That no-nonsense attitude to mountain discovery is characteristic: Harry has always helped people to see Lakeland through his eyes, so they can come to see it for themselves through their own eyes.

Perhaps, however, Harry himself may be slightly to blame for a similar 'offence' to Wainwright's: the 1300 *Guardian* 'love letters' as he calls them, have been a siren song for many down the years, luring us to explore just those hidden gems of Lakeland that were once his and the Tigers's own to explore. The book doesn't comment on this anomaly — and nor, in a way, do we want it to: it is his 'Testament to a Youth', after all. But for anyone (*Guardian* reader or otherwise) who cares about the generative history of one of England's most beautiful mountain regions, and who will derive enjoyment from reading one of the minor-masters of English descriptive prose, add this book now to your collection of *A Year in the Fells* (Hale, 1976), and *A Lakeland Country Diary* (Crowood 1990. Reviewed CCJ 1989/1990).

Tim Noble

**Distant Mountains, John Cleare.
Duncan Baird, 1999
£25.00**

This book sub-heading is mistitled; it should be called 'An Encounter with one of the World's Greatest Mountain Photographers' — for that is what John Cleare has become, and the book is a celebration of his skill. Since 1966 when John invented modern rock-climbing photography with the inspirational *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia* (with Tony Smythe), he has travelled the mountain ranges of the world capturing the high and wild on film. This book covers 11 areas, from the Western Highlands of Scotland to the high Himalaya of Nepal, taking in Africa and the Americas en route. The photos are typical Cleare: superb compositions, technically accomplished and full of atmosphere, reflecting the way in which he involves himself completely with the subject; it's a visual treat. The texts (mostly too short, unfortunately) are written by a variety of authors including Cleare, and are much less satisfying. Some are extracts from already published books; others appear to have been written for the book. But the impression is that they are there to provide an excuse for the photos. As a photographer myself, I'm biased, but I would rather have had a book with more photos and more words from Cleare himself about the photos (the extended captions hint at how good this could have been). One gripe: the design, which is good, clean and tidy on good paper and well-printed, is spoiled by cut-out studio photos of various bits of mountaineering gear interspersing the text — all horrible and unnecessary. What this book does do is make one realise how satisfying (and how necessary) a proper retrospective of Cleare's photography would be. And that's not to suggest that John's past it: I'm sure he's got many more years of mountain photography in him, but the work of compilation could certainly be started. So, don't expect *Distant Mountains* to be a great read: it isn't, quite; but the photos make it worthwhile, and any admirer of Cleare, or indeed any lover of great mountain imagery, should have a copy.

Ian Smith

**Rock Climbing In England and Wales,
David Simmonite.
New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd, 2000
£25.00**

Once upon a time, in the far-off days when Pete Crew and Baz Ingle were doing their best to usurp Joe Brown's crown, I was commissioned to do my first mountain book.

My chum, Tony Smythe — son of Frank and a Plas y Brenin instructor for a while — wrote the supporting essay on the contemporary Welsh scene while Pete, Baz, Martin Boysen, Rusty Baillie and several other leading activists did the modelling. *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia* appeared in 1966. There were just 39 plates (in black & white of course); the 35,000 word text was printed on modified blotting paper and the price was an expensive 35 bob. The book was reprinted several times and for a while forgotten. My royalties, I seem to recall, amounted to some 60 quid.

Looking back over more than 30 years, it's obvious that the book, gauche though it seems in today's terms, was a milestone in my career. The techniques that I evolved to make my pictures, both photographic and climbing-wise, were then novel, though they have since become commonplace. More importantly perhaps, it recorded an interesting and dynamic period in climbing history. The book has become something of a collector's piece; I've even seen it offered at \$250 in California.

But the world has moved on fast. Rock-climbing has developed from what was still an amateur, rather esoteric and usually beery pastime to a mass-marketed, taken-seriously and frequently professional 'sport'. Techniques have evolved, attitudes have changed, rock-stars have waxed and waned. Printing and publishing, too, have developed, both technically and conceptually. Today, immaculate colour reproduction is the norm, enabling innovative publishers to sell lavishly-produced large-format volumes to affluent readers at a price which would have paid for the whole of my first alpine season. This is progress, and it's epitomised by *Rock Climbing In England and Wales*.

Many pundits have already compared the two volumes, each recording the contemporary game but at an interval of 34 years. The finished results are as different

as chalk from cheese. The present book is a classy production, a delight to handle and beautiful to look at, claims one could hardly make about the Snowdonia volume. The treatment, too, is very different and far wider-ranging. We covered only Snowdonia (Anglesey was still terra incognita), although a planned series of similar volumes covering other areas was scuppered when the publishers were taken over. And Smythe's evocative and often humorous text painted an in-depth background for my pictures.

By contrast, this book touches on 25 climbing areas ranging from Northumberland to Land's End via the Lakes, Wales — North and South, the Dales, the Peak, Southern Sandstone, Bristol, Dorset and Devon, i.e. most of the places where serious climbing exists, with one or two exceptions.

But the text is thin. After an introduction by Ron Fawcett, each 'chapter' is prefaced by a 3-400 word 'essay' by a prominent local activist: Dave Birkett, Ian Smith, Moira Viggers and Des Hannigan to name a random few. Good stuff, but little of it, and the reader is left wanting for meaty extended captions. A good photograph is worth 1000 words but add 100 word caption and it's worth 2000.

And then comes a portfolio of pictures, the number in each 'chapter', actually a compromise between time, weather and deadline, vaguely reflecting the relative importance of the location. The Lancashire Quarries claim five images for instance, Dartmoor seven while the Llanberis Pass earns 13. In a total of 215 typically magnificent pictures, there are certain to be several from your favourite climbing area.

Words, treatment and layout notwithstanding, the book is the pictures. I can honestly say that this is the first collection of rock climbing images that have engendered any real emotion in me in all of 30 years. I wrote in *Rock Climbers in Action* that I hoped that my pictures conveyed 'that tingle in the instep, that hot damp fear on the finger-tips.' Many of David Simmonite's images do just that. A photographer after my own heart, his best pictures present not only the climber on the climb, but crucially, also the climb in its context.

The title spread, a spectacular image probably now quite familiar, is just such a picture. Feet pedalling in space, the climber

hangs from the lip of the great roof of *Paralogism* at The Roaches. His apparent desperation contrasts the tranquil Staffordshire countryside, the moors, the patchwork fields, hedges and copses that stretch into the distance. Such contextual images convey space, distance and exposure and capture the sounds of wind and sheep, of running water or sucking waves. They portray the nuances of the game as well as the arena in which it is played. To me these are classic images, each well worth its 1000 words.

I like also the scene-setting cameo images scattered throughout the book. Sorting gear below the route, lacing up the magic boots, the inquisitive seal off Lundy and the hot-air balloon over the Avon Gorge. These little 'asides' serve to spice the gingerbread.

But while photographs should always communicate emotion of some sort, whether finite or abstract, they need not always tell a story. It is sufficient that they please the eye. All too many climbing photographs of recent years are mere records of contorted faces, chalky fingers, straining bodies and little more. The move has been captured, but it could equally well have been in the gym. Compare such snaps to Simmonite's picture of *Bathtime* at Vivian Quarry: textured rock, nothing more, is reflected in the pool — a symmetrical mirror image — a graphic design in which the tiny solo climber is an anachronism, but the anachronism that makes the point. Simmonite the photographer is also an artist. He has an eye.

There are too many enthralling pictures to describe — anyway it would spoil the delight to come. Great climbing pictures don't just happen, of course, they must be worked for, both physically and logistically, and here Simmonite has displayed true professionalism.

I was amazed to learn that this entire book was shot in three months — a *tour de force* which others had considered impossible. Professionals live with such tight deadlines, however, and they are met only by dogged application — and in this case also by much hard driving, luck with the weather, management-skills with the models and the inevitable compromise. I understand for instance exactly why there are no pictures on Cloggy (a glaring omission): any solely Snowdonia book would not have

been credible without them. In the 60s we, too, had a ridiculous deadline and climbers then climbed only at weekends. Always the great crag was shrouded in mist and running with water. It took six months to photograph six routes on Cloggy and even then only one climb was dry. The well-known picture of Pete Crew on *Great Wall* was shot in drizzling rain; it was a real test of friendship and mutual respect.

What comes over clearly in this book is that modern rock-climbing is extremely gymnastic and frighteningly bold — it's a game well justifying its apocryphal appellation of 'ballet in the vertical idiom'. To me, more active these days on snow than on rock, most of the climbs photographed are hard ones with unfamiliar names, all apparently basking in rather better weather than we endured in '65.

My one critical observation may reflect on those involved in creating the book and penning the words or perhaps it truly describes the ethos of modern rock climbing. It appears now to be a serious business. It used to be a laugh, a vaguely ridiculous game; today it seems to have outgrown the fun and become a sport. I quote from the book's anonymous introduction: 'Hopefully, some great measure of enjoyment still lies at the heart of it all.' Well, I'd hope so, too. Surely that what it's all about?

This is a fine and evocative book. Deservedly, it should prove an important milestone in David Simmonite's budding career. Hopefully, he will earn more from it than 60 quid. And I suspect that in 30 years time it will be considered the important and definitive record of the rock-climbing game as it was played at the turn of the millennium.

John Cleare

Creagh Dhu Climber; The Life and Times of John Cunningham, Jeff Connor.
The Ernest Press, 1999
£14.50

When John Cunningham was a wee boy in the east end of Glasgow, he used to dart under the bellies of the horses hauling the coal carts. During his long prime as a climber (roughly 1946-1970), he liked to set 'traps' for people, e.g. egging them on to

climb the dripping walls of the Arrochar caves, looking for holds only he could see, then pretending surprise when they fell off. In *Ravens Gully* on the Buachaille Jimmy Marshall asked him, 'How on earth did you do that?' and Cunningham answered 'Ha, ha! I found this wee hole for my ice-axe, hammered it in, then just did a handstand on it.' He was like that, would always withhold a vital piece of information.'

This reminds me of Alee Livesey, brother of Pete. Once, in White Ghyll, I was waiting with Peter Craig to try the steep wall at the start of *Do Not* and we called up to him, 'Where does the line go?' He called down, 'Up the middle.' Pause. 'Or on the right.' Pause. 'Or on the left.' (We got up it, though.)

In 1976, when Chouinard was researching for *Climbing Ice*, he came to Glencoe to climb with Cunningham and was introduced to the *Creag Dhu*'s notorious howff, Jacksonville. Cunningham killed a rat and when a man came in late and accepted the offered sandwich, Cunningham 'presented him with the rodent...between two slices of bread.' These gruelling japes were the quirky side of a man as perfectly attuned and committed to climbing as anybody else in our history before or since, the equal in quality (so far as you can ever tell) of Jones and Botterill, Herford and Kelly, Birkett, Greenwood, Whillans, Brown, Livesey, Fawcett, Cuthbertson. Examples? Here are two. On a desperate retreat from the Kohl-Larsen plateau of South Georgia, during a surveying expedition, Cunningham fell into a crevasse and rescued himself by bridging out of it in stockinged feet, letting them freeze to the ice for adhesion before each upward move. At the climax of his supreme mountaineering feat, the first ascent of Mount Jackson (11,200ft), the highest peak in Antarctica, his party were blocked near the top of the summit arête by a huge ice-mushroom. Davie Todd offered Cunningham the lead because it was his birthday. Cunningham proceeded to front point a 600ft slope above a 4000ft drop to the glacier, then climbed into the mushroom and up through it by a sheer ice chimney. Iain MacMorrin's fine colour photo shows Cunningham's left leg disappearing into the bulging white face like a butterfly reversing into its chrysalis.

The japes were not just Cunningham's though, they were the style of the *Creag Dhu* and functioned as its acid test or rite

of passage. According to Tommy Paul, who still has Cunningham's tools from his many years as a carpenter in Beardmore's shipyard: 'On the Cobbler you were encouraged to climb routes then descend easier ones, it was supposed to prepare you for the big mountains...they never actually taught you to climb...If you wanted to be taught to climb you would go join the Lomonds.' (You can hear the scorn.) Cunningham also 'blackballed virtually every membership application that came up', to enforce the highest standard of trustworthiness among members.

Their sheer toughness is staggering and easily the equal of such other famous examples of hardihood as Bill Tilman or the Yosemite crag-rats who seem to live on cans of Bud and scraps of (stolen) food while dossing in the valley and doing huge free climbs on the granite walls. When Cunningham and Hamish Macinnes were on their two-man expedition to climb Everest in 1953 — slightly smaller and less well-equipped than Hunt's — they camped near Taweche and bought '1. cwt. of spuds, a large tin of cooking grease and a sheep, which was still alive.' Their gun had rusted, their knife was too blunt for the kill, and 'Bashing its head in was out of the question as we wanted to eat its brains.' Finally Macinnes strangled it.

Such ultimate freaks or fanatics of the mountaineering sub-culture can emerge from any class. The particular *Creag Dhu* form of it grew straight out of the 'root-hewn Scottis saul' of the Clydeside working class and was one of its strangest and finest flowerings. One of the most exhilarating passages in this lively and down-to-earth book describes how Cunningham used his place of work as one great, gangling, glorified gymnasium. By the end of his first year at Beardmores, 'the iron and steel lumps became freeweights, the high walkways used to hone his balance, the scaffolding employed for continuous pull-ups and the outside shell of the scrap metal disintegrator became an improvised climbing wall'. Cunningham is also credited with being especially expert in equipment: footwear, ropes, ice gear such as screws and pitons, axes and hammers, because he was a joiner, well used to building and rebuilding the decks of warships.

The downside of all this is the hardship we glimpse in the habit of never allowing

two brothers to climb on the same rope because the family couldn't risk losing two breadwinners in an accident, or the fact that Sam Brown, owner of Glasgow's first climbing shop, and Sandy Cousins, a leading battler for mountain access, both died of asbestosis contracted in the same Govan shipyard.

Cunningham is also a special individual, whose character we can infer in its complexity from Connor's wealth of memories taped and transcribed from the many contemporaries who are still alive and climbing and mountain-biking in their 70s. Cunningham was exceptionally strong, and handsome; 'meticulous' and 'immaculate'; almost infallible in his movements (just one injury, to his nose, in 34 years of climbing, often with unprotected 150ft run-outs); terse, sardonic, and shy — no girlfriend till he was 23; no wife till he was 46. My impression is that he was a person strongly, and justifiably, aware of having great talent presence who could not, because of his innate reserve and his stern upbringing, bask in well-being or easily open himself to relationships. He had a steely self-containment which squared up to the world on its own terms and no other. From this emerged his mordant way with people, his patience and skill as an instructor, his steadiness in the mountains, and his genius in pioneering unclimbed rock.

David Craig

Siegfried Herford
An Edwardian Rock Climber,
Keith Treacher.
Ernest Press, 2000
£14.95

Anyone attempting to write British mountaineering biographies these days has a very hard act to follow. Jim Perrin (*Menlove Edwards* 1985) and Alan Hankinson (*Geoffrey Winthrop Young* 1995) both set astonishingly high standards for this type of work. Keith Treacher of *The Rucksack Club* has grasped this particular nettle, and after several years of painstaking research, has produced a fascinating account of the life of Siegfried Herford.

Herford was a major figure in the early development of British climbing; he achieved routes of a level of difficulty in

the years leading up to World War I that defined the nature of the sport until the emergence of people like Birkett, Dolphin, Cunningham and Brown more than 30 years later. A man whose talents placed him well ahead of his time, Herford was an inspiration to Collin Kirkus and Maurice Linnell in the 1930's, and his first ascent of *Central Buttress* on Scafell in 1914 remains one of the epic tales of British climbing.

Siegfried Herford was born in 1891 in Aberystwyth. His father was Professor of English at the University there and was married to a German girl, who came originally from Bremen. When Siegfried was eight years old, the family moved to Manchester when his father became Professor of English at the University. Keith Treacher handles Herford's family background and the significance of the German community in Manchester with skill and affection. We are told of how Herford was educated both in England and in Germany, and developed his love of the wild places. On leaving school in 1909 he was already an active climber, and that year he entered the School of Engineering at Manchester University. It was only a short time before he became involved with the *Rucksack Club*, a focus for high-level mountain activity even then. The emergence of Herford's formidable talents are well documented and the period 1910-1914 was to be a fruitful one indeed, populated by many of the key characters of the period. The book succeeds in not only focusing on Herford's many climbing achievements, but also gives insight into the strong relationships he formed with characters such as John Laycock, Stanley Jeffcoat, George Sansom, C.F. Holland and Geoffrey Winthrop Young. His climbing partnerships with Laycock and Sansom in particular are well documented, building up to the exciting story of the successful ascent of *Central Buttress* on Scafell.

Keith Treacher brings the period into sharp focus, and while the social context and equipment of the time are very different, you can almost smell the burning ambition and desire of the hardest rock team of their day, to produce what was an outstanding series of climbs. Herford's relationship with Geoffrey Winthrop Young is handled sensitively, and it is clear that Young placed him in the same class as Hugh Rose Pope and George Mallory as the

greatest climbers of their period. A very bright future in the Alps and beyond seemed to await him, but cruel fate decreed otherwise. The climbing action ends poignantly, with a rapid ascent of the *Zmutt Ridge* of the Matterhorn in July 1914 with Geoffrey Winthrop Young (reputedly, without a rope). Afterwards, they relaxed in Zermatt on the eve of a war that would cost Geoffrey a leg and Siegfried his life:

The Zmutt Ridge effectively ended the season. Siegfried and Winthrop Young elected to spend the final day of the holiday bathing from a small boat on Lac Lemman. They talked about this and that, talked endlessly about mountains, little realising that all they might have cherished and hoped for in the world of mountaineering, and open winds, had already come to an end. The glint of light reflected from the uneasy shadows in the water, while behind the cloud gathering over the Jura to the north, all the livid steeds of the Apocalypse were gathering force, making ready to ravish and consume Siegfried and so many of his generation. Their moment together on the lake marked more than the end of the holiday.'

Keith Treacher writes in detail of Herford's experiences at the start of World War I: his involvement with Winthrop Young's ambulance work, and the peculiar circumstances whereby he was denied a commission in the army. The explanation of the class-ridden, suspicious xenophobia of the time sets the scene for Herford's experiences in the ranks, in the trenches of northern France. He was destined not to be there long, killed by sniper fire in January 1916. The effect of his death on his friends was enormous, and Treacher covers this aspect with feeling. Perhaps the saddest case was John Laycock who had written the first ever gritstone guidebook and dedicated it to Herford. The loss of Herford and Stanley Jeffcoat in World War I broke Laycock's heart; he never climbed again, settling after the war in Singapore.

Full marks to Peter Hodgkiss at Ernest Press for making available a first-class piece of work that brings into clear focus one of the key characters of our sport. So, if you buy only one book a year, make it this one: the word is that only 700 copies are to be produced. Don't miss out.

Steve Dean

A Right to Roam, Marion Shoard.

OUP, 1999

£8.99

An early issue of this Journal, just 100 years ago, included a combative essay by A.L. Bagley on gaining access to those of Scotland's mountains enclosed within deer forests. In the following issue the Journal Editor found himself obliged to apologise to the many members who'd been distressed by Bagley's sentiments and, in the next again, to publish a statement from the Committee distancing itself from Bagley's views. These three pieces are featured in the *CC Centenary Anthology*. It's unlikely that the club harbours so many landed gentlemen today, so there shouldn't be a furor over a partisan review of this book.

Marion Shoard's two earlier books caused nationwide storms. *The Theft of the Countryside* in 1980 centred on landscape change and damage through modern agricultural practice. *This Land Is Our Land* in 1987 (and later updated and republished as a Gaia Classic) examined the history of land tenure and control. Each of these books revealed a capacity for tenacious research, an ability to marshal masses of information, and a ferocious strength of purpose.

This book shows the same qualities and its content is briefly as follows. She begins by summarising 1999 law relating to trespass, to access, and to the enhancement of access by agreement, purchase or enforcement. Nine basic classes of landscape or water resource are then described, together with the characteristic problems of access to each. Two complementary histories of the last millennium follow: first, that of the strengthening of land rights by the gradual construction of a moral philosophy and the procurement of legal sanctions to support a right of total exclusion; second, the countervailing philosophical positions and the struggles, legal and illegal, to resist exclusion. The moves by landowners (facing ever-increasing pressures from a society with both mobility and leisure) to pre-empt new legislation by promises of more widespread access agreements or offers of access by payment are examined. The unproductivity of present legal avenues for extension of access is analysed. The case for access and two alternative strategies are laid out. Finally, the implications of a gen-

eral right are anatomised.

Throughout this discussion Shoard reports the requirements and attitudes of all classes of landowner and land user objectively, whilst never disguising her position. However, she also advances a personal argument on strategy, directed at supporters of access rights. The larger campaign has centred on mountains and moorlands, as the titles of twenty-odd Bills and a single unworkable Act make clear. She regrets that. She wants a 'universalist' rather than a 'partialist' right, opening up the whole country rather than isolated blocks in the north and west. She wants to turn the law of trespass on its head. Today we can walk nowhere except where we're permitted; one day, she hopes, we'll be able to walk everywhere except where we've conceded an exemption. (The expression 'universalist' seems risky, suggesting that no exemptions are possible and encouraging deliberate misrepresentation. Here, I'll refer to general or selective rights.) She foresees that government is likely to settle for the softer option but thinks the landowner would be spared pain and suffering if he had all the operations at once. She also reasons that selective rights invite complaints of discrimination, calls for compensation, and gerrymandering with land classification.

She's consoled to some extent by the examples shown in Europe, where she's inspected positions both in the statute books and on the ground. Although she's crusading to establish the general right enjoyed in Scandinavia, she notices that selective rights tend to be extended as landowners find their fears to have been groundless. To offer an example, the strongest impulse in Germany has been for access to forests. In 1969, North Rhine Westphalia passed a regional law granting public access to all woodlands, large or small, state or private. In 1975, West Germany used this as a model for its Federal Forest Act and in the mid-80s, widened the scope of the Act to include other classes of land. Soon after reunification, this legislation was extended to embrace East Germany.

This argument has become of importance to climbers. In the earlier years of the sport most of our needs would have been met by an Act securing access to mountain and moorland areas. Today, there's intensive activity on sea cliffs, in lowland quarries, and on crags in forest and farm-

land. It seems to me that climbers ought to support her case unconditionally.

However, it has to be pointed out that Shoard's sword is double-edged. Her case for access is on behalf of walkers and the less obtrusive activities. It isn't extended for, say, bikers. In speaking of city parks she notes, in an aside, that public places can be captured by special interest groups — 'dog-walkers, skateboarders or gay cruisers' — changing the character of the site for the ordinary user. That can be true of climbers. When, as walkers, my brother and I first visited Malham Cove, we found ourselves alone there and were deeply impressed. The experience wouldn't, however, have been destroyed by a modest number of other walkers.

Today, no doubt, there are visitors who are entertained by the showbiz as 20 parties of climbers crowd the stage, but for others the impact of this great natural monument must be degraded. This relates only to particular cliffs. To Gordale Scar, say, but not to Kilnsey where the scene includes constant road traffic with intrusive noise; and not to most high mountain crags which few walkers are likely to approach closely.

Although *A Right to Roam* is consistently illustrated by examples from every corner of Britain, it can't be described as easy reading since it's so stiff with fact. However, it stands unchallenged as the central and essential work on the access debate. For walkers and climbers it's surely the most important book of the last decade. Beyond that, it's worth noting that it's useful for reference purposes. If you want to learn about Common Agricultural Policy or the rise of paintball gaming or Cross-Compliance Schemes or the Peasants' Revolt you can start here. The price is remarkably modest. Presumably, publication was timed to precede the Government's moves on new access legislation and it might be assumed that the argument has been overtaken by events. That's not the case. Even if the present Bill survives its passage unweakened, and even if the legal machinery proves workable, Shoard's tremendous effort will still be before us, impossible to ignore and setting the agenda for a final Access Bill.

Harold Drasdo

**The Alpine Journal 1999. Vol. 104,
No. 348. Edited by Ed Douglas.
The Alpine Club & The Ernest Press.
£18.50**

The creature out there was, 'an indefinable, big, stinking exotic animal'. So there you have it, though to me it merely sounded like some member of a storm-bound Himalayan or Polar expedition. It could even have been a quote from a member of the Yeti race who on rare occasions have glimpsed strange hirsute humanoids shambling about in their snowy land — perhaps even Messner himself. His long-awaited book, 'My Quest for the Yeti' is already in the shops. The Yeti is once again big news but its proved existence is not 'yet', I am sorry to say — apart from the curious photograph of a Yeti mother and child sheltering in a glacial cave during a severe snowstorm which can be seen on page 68 of the 1999 A.J. After a few sniggers I became facetious, for after all just what does a yeti look like? In this journal alone there are illustrations of some prime contenders, but these on closer inspection all turn out to be people who are supposedly classified as belonging to *Homo sapiens*. Gary Pfisterer for one is a dead ringer and would scare the hell out of anyone who met him on a dark night in the hills. Then how about (in order) the hairy Tibetan hermit, Mattias Zurbriggen, Bonington, Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, Norman Hardie, or even Fanny Bullock Workman. The shot of Bonington talking to the monk is a classic and could easily have the caption 'spot the Yeti'. Sad to say though (and being a bit more serious) Messner, who in 1986 said, "I saw a Yeti", now says that the great ape-monster of the snows is a figment of Western imagination and is just a bear. No doubt those who saw its footprints, such as Mallory, Noyce, Gregory, Shipton, Ward, Izzard and Bourdillon, would be sorely disappointed. Also what about those who actually saw the beast such as Tombazi, and Stobart, and who would have dared to challenge Whillans? Time will tell however, if all our fuss has been justified or it is merely the bogey man in another guise.

Having chased and re-chased the Yeti theme about for a while, the rest of this A.J. was a bit of an uphill slog and I felt rather sorry for all Ed Douglas's hard work

to maintain the long and vital tradition. Flicking aimlessly through the photos, I wasn't too inspired to put it mildly. There were over 30 that were either views or odds and ends, but the other half of the shots which depicted people were mainly of individuals who were either just standing (elaborate posing), sitting (casual posing) or having their portraits taken (posterity posing). Even the seven photographs that could, with a bit of imagination, be described as action shots were more than a bit suspect. There was one bum shot, one person standing on an ice-ridge, one standing on a ledge on a crag, then a distant shot; but three cheers to Stephen Venables for the one proper action shot. The other contender, of Fawcett bouldering, was really another standing poser as Ron never stays still long enough for the shot to be in focus; but well done to Dennis for trying.

After going backwards and forwards through the articles, I desperately went for 'Issues and Controversies' to get a bit of steam up, but apart from an old controversy about the Pigeon sisters daring to show that women could perform well in the Alps long ago, the really interesting story is all about Annapurna and the fact that the lid needs blowing off the official 1950s account by Herzog. Unfortunately Sue Harpur's article only gives us a hint of what is under the surface and as Louis Lachenal's account is only in French up to now, we will have to wait a bit longer.

Getting even more desperate, I thumbed through the *Area Notes* looking for a few errors or profound gems to keep my interest going and, sure enough, they were there. For example a one-footed Welsh American has climbed Everest despite 'mechanical problems' and while still on mechanical lines it is worth noting that some itinerant Italians have managed a fine route on Madagascar. Of the 122 bolts used (on Madagascar not Everest), 26 were for belays, leaving a mere 96 for the 13 pitches. That works out at a bolt every seven metres.

Nearer at home on the Ecrins I was fascinated to learn that 'Temperatures were relatively warm, especially in the sun.' There, 'Powell took a 12m fall attempting to aid a fragile icicle.' Elsewhere, 'the very popular Cosmiques Hut was officially closed shortly after the collapse of an estimated 150 cubic metres of the rock on which it stands.' Amazing. My mind was

**Extreme Alpinism,
Mark F. Twight.
The Mountaineers, 1999
£16.99**

then further blown to learn that Nisbet in the Northern Highlands has waited 10 years for 'a crucial ice smear over the crux bulge following a fresh March storm.' This contrasts with an attack on the Aiguille de la Grande Rocheuse which had 'very delicate ice climbing on a runnel only 10cm wide'. It makes one wonder just what does constitute a true winter ascent. Consider half a smear of ice on a hold, a loose hailstone on a ledge or even a 3cm runnel. What with fragile icicles, smears and 10cm runnels, I was quite worn out by then, but even more horrors were in store.

Believe it or not but there are those strange people about who still take a perverse delight in the rock being coated, but not with ice. For example, in about 1960, Paul Nunn and I went independently to Foula where we dived with death on the guano-coated skating rink of the fulmars. Coming back to earth and more up-to-date in Stephen Venables excellent article, *The Changing Face of South Africa*, I caught up with him at the foot of the South-East Arête of the amazing Amphitheatre in the Drakensberg. 'As we roped up the professor apologised for the poor state of the grass', and indeed, photo 26 really does have a photo showing a climber enthusiastically wrapping himself round a grassy cornice on Cathkin Peak. (It wouldn't last long if Al Evans got near it.)

Elsewhere in Africa, in Namibia to be precise, Venables stopped off at the Spitzkoppe to observe the 1946 chipped holds of Shipley, Schaff and O'Neill who decided: 'if the route would not yield to ordinary methods, we would violate all the rules of mountaineering and cut our way to the top.' One trusts that Venables tip-toed past the bucket-sized indiscretions of the somewhat weak-willed pioneers who fortunately did not get as far afield as Madagascar. And in passing, while talking of indiscretion, I was intrigued to learn that Paul Braithwaite is now a president of Vice within the A.C. (Vice President) as opposed to a Vice-President. Hyphens are tricky little chaps but there actually is a difference between a 'high level traverse' and a 'high-level traverse', you know. Which just goes to show that the A.J. still provides plenty of food for thought, if one has a devious mind as well as a copious amount of spare time.

Geoff Milburn

This is an extraordinary book, but I don't like it very much. I am told that it won some sort of prize in America, so someone obviously likes it better than I do. The 'alpinism' referred to in the title is what we might call 'alpine-style' climbing, in Alaska, the Himalayas and other major ranges as well as the Alps. The author favours a lightweight, low impact style of climbing, with no bolts and no fixed ropes or other siege tactics. I agree whole-heartedly with this. The photos are good; so are some other bits; but I dislike most of the book.

This is the first time I have ever been tempted to give up while reading a review book. However, I did persevere, and eventually completed it with a struggle. But it was definitely a siege, rather than an alpine-style reading.

Most of the book's content is a highly detailed and intense dissemination of his views on what one must do to prepare for and perform well at the highest level in this sort of climbing. Twight has an excellent record in extreme alpinism, and is well qualified to write the book. There is much good advice. For example: 'great aerobic capacity doesn't translate into the ability to climb K2 in under 24 hours if you are not psychologically predisposed to that style of climbing.' 'Nobody controls a situation in the mountains. It is vanity to imagine one can. Instead, grow comfortable with giving up control and acting within chaos and uncertainty.' Both of these quotes are from his first chapter, on 'Attitude and Character'. This chapter is quite readable and mostly makes sense, although it is somewhat over-loaded with such truisms.

Subsequent chapters, on Psychological Training, Physical Training, and Nutrition were the most tedious to me. We get page after page of the following sort of stuff: 'Modern biofeedback techniques permit training to synchronise the two hemispheres' (of the brain); 'Among suitable warm-up exercises are the seated dumbbell press, front dumbbell raises, bent-over reverse dumbbell flies, bench press, dips, and triceps press.'; 'The anaerobic threshold is the heart rate at which blood lactate content (lactic acid) reaches more than 4 millimoles

per liter of blood'; To combat this (formation of free radicals), take supplemental antioxidants, either precombined or separately. Antioxidant supplements should contain vitamin C, vitamin E, L-glutathione, and selenium. It may also help if they contain coenzyme Q-10, n-acetyl cysteine, and beta carotene.' Perhaps I'm betraying my ignorance, but all this was totally above my head. The book might be recommendable as a postgraduate text for those who have already done a first degree in sports science. The main chapters are separated by shorter pieces, narrating some of the author's climbing experiences. These were probably intended as refreshing breaks in the intellectual discourse, but also serve as vehicles for his egotism.

Any illusions of academic rigour I might have got from reading these technical chapters were soon dispelled in the later chapters on equipment and technique. The latter are more comprehensible to ordinary mortals like myself, and show the author to be normally fallible, and quite dogmatic and biased in many of his opinions. He totally rejects down in favour of man-made fillings for sleeping bags and quilted jackets, although this is still open to much debate. He also prefers artificial insulation for gloves and mitts, without mentioning that wool is even worth considering. On the subject of ice-axe leashes, he discusses various types of wrist attachments, how one should remove them when placing gear, and also stresses the need to avoid dropping the tools, but never considers permanent tool attachments to harness or shoulders. Such deficiencies cast doubt on his opinions in the obscure earlier chapters.

The author does reveal that he has a sense of humour, with the occasional dry quip. From his equipment chapter: 'If the weight worries you, you can try to get away with one headlamp for two people, but you will only try it once.' But such humour is rare. I laughed a lot while reading this book, but mostly at him rather than with him. I won't be throwing my free copy in the bin, the book has enough of worth to give it shelf space, but I wouldn't recommend purchase, except possibly to serious academic sports scientists.

Dave Wilkinson

**Everest - Expedition to the Ultimate,
Bâton Wicks, 1999**

£10.99

**All 14 Eight-Thousanders,
Crowood, 1999**

£25.00

**To the Top of the World,
Crowood, 1999**

£14.99

Reinhold Messner

I must say, I was rather hoping the Editor would be sending me Messner's recent Yeti book to review, not these, because Messner's various 8000 metre adventures are so well known, and these stories have been repeated so often. But the reissue of the first two of these books (by Crowood Press and Bâton Wicks respectively) and the issue in paperback of the third (by Crowood) demonstrates that the demand for stuff from 'name' authors rarely flags.

Nothing here has changed my view of Messner much. His books are O.K., but they do not match the achievement that led to them. I still find the prose crabbed. This might be partly due to the translation, yet other authors translate well — Diemberger's K2 book for example. I still find the combination of factual account and romantic sentiment uneasy. Take this short paragraph, taken at random from *To the Top of the World*:

'When I crawled outside again, the big black birds flew off with hoarse croaks. A gust of wind scattered them and they sailed off into the sky in different directions. One climbed so high that, for a brief moment, it came between me and the summit of K2 but not, I thought, close to it; as I was gazing up he came back down. That was my way, pushing beyond my own horizon. The first two sentences are fine; but it's downhill from then on.

I don't find any of Messner's many attempts to explain his motivation successful. As a result, I always find myself searching for the entries from his girlfriends' diaries. These invariably say more in a few sentences than the man himself manages in a whole book. And though his mountaineering judgement is probably unequalled, some of his other judgements are odd. Thus, from *To the Top of the World* again:

The fact that I have climbed all fourteen eight-thousanders is of secondary importance for alpine history. Perhaps it

will stand as a footnote, like the completion in 1911 of all the four-thousanders in the *Alps* by the Voralberg mountaineer Dr Karl Blodig. Both have little to do with the development of mountaineering.'

This is as mistaken as Alan Clark thinking that it was his thoughts on defence policy that would last rather than his diaries. It's what Messner would like to think, because he would like to think his lasting contribution is to style and philosophy. But he's fooling himself. Messner's daring, minimalist style has always been around. Climbing all the eight-thousanders hasn't. His views on style are great to read, being so trenchantly expressed. How about these sentences, from the opening of *Expedition to the Ultimate*? Mount Everest continues to make negative headlines: as a 'rubbish tip', a 'fatal magnet for adrenaline-freaks', or as 'an amusement park for tourists who have been everywhere else.' 'Ever since word got out that you could purchase "the climb of your dreams"...it became transformed into a consumer product....'

Mount Everest tends to shrink in our imaginations when we read it has been 'conquered' by a couple of hundred mediocre alpinists, who probably would not trust themselves to climb Mont Blanc without help'. This is more like it! There's plenty more, and I can take any amount of it, probably because I agree with it. But whether it actually expresses an 'objective' view of what is good or bad in mountaineering is another matter. Philosophies tend to follow from peoples' experiences, not the other way round. Messner is almost bound to take the ethical view he does, simply because of his abilities and success. It's good rhetoric, but not good philosophy. Apart from anything else, there's no escaping the fact that Messner is himself inextricably bound up with the cheapening of Himalayan mountaineering he so denigrates through sponsorship, publicity, and the cult of the 'star'. Much better, surely, to simply say: 'I wanted to do it this way, and thank God I managed it before the also-rans all came along and spoilt it'. End of story. No need to go on for three books' length.

On a rock-jocking trip to Spain recently, I read Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*, and couldn't help making the odd comparison. Thesiger's conservatism and dislike of

progress reads much more sympathetically than Messner's, because he didn't contribute to it himself; one believes Thesiger when he says that he didn't even really want to write the book, and needed persuading. Thesiger seems to have been genuinely an independent agent, and the development that overtook southern Arabia at the beginning of the 50s owed nothing to him. Of course, he could afford to be independent — or I assume he could, being an Eton man. That helps enormously, and probably helps to make *Arabian Sands* the great book it is. It also helps me to arrive at a truly preposterous generalisation: that most (all?) of the truly great travel and sporting books are written by amateurs.

Anyway, of these books of Messner's, you would be unlikely to want to read all three. If you want a coffee-table volume, go for the (hard-backed) *Eight-thousanders*, with lots of colour photos plus plenty of asides and comments from other actors in the drama. The soft-backed *Expedition to the Ultimate* is less glossy but has photos too, and significant amounts of history. *To the Top of the World* is similar, though with some reproductions of some large climbing paintings by the French artist Jean-Georges Inca that Messner is very enthusiastic about. It is essentially a selection of many of his best Himalayan articles, and probably the best introduction to his thinking.

Phil Bartlett

**Hermann Buhl: Climbing Without
Compromise, Reinhold Messner &
Horst Hofler**

(translated by Tim Carruthers)

Bâton Wicks, 2000

£16.99

At last, a definitive work on Hermann Buhl — and Reinhold Messner translated well, to boot! Tim Carruthers has produced a superb translation of Reinhold Messner and Horst Hofler's much-needed biography of one of my all time mountaineering heroes. Like many climbers, I devoured the account of Buhl's life *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage The lonely Challenge* not realising how little of the real Buhl was being revealed. To learn 46 years after its publication that Kurt Maix, a Viennese journalist prone to romantic hyperbole, had been a bit too free in his editing of Buhl's

original diaries was an annoying betrayal. Now, Reinhold Messner and Horst Hofler have collected Buhl's writing and presented them unadorned and his true character shines through; this is so much better than Maix's embellished version.

The book in no way competes with *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*, which remains a great classic of mountaineering literature, but rather it stands alongside the original, presenting a more honest and prosaic account of Buhl as a man and climber. He is revealed as very much the hard core climber in the modern idiom — a driven man for whom the mountains and his climbing came before all else. He was smarter, fitter, and more futuristic in his approach to climbing than Maix would ever have realised. His solo ascent of Nanga Parbat and later the Alpine style ascent of Broad Peak was a clear pointer to the 'Super Alpinism' of today.

A loner with a difficult childhood, Buhl was a classic wanderer-climber. His writing is sparse, to the point, and relatively unemotional. Tim Carruthers — at last a climber translating climbing books (like *Geoff Sutton, perhaps? Ed*) — has produced a wonderfully faithful translation that cuts through the hyperbolic and overblown turn-of-the-century romanticism of Kurt Maix's original work. Buhl would never have thought in such terms and could never have written in that manner. This incredibly hard man was uncompromising, ambitious, and unrestrained in his climbing and wrote accordingly. But the Buhl myth lives on; now we can understand it better with this complete and more balanced picture of one of the greatest climbers of his generation.

Joe Simpson

If the name of a book can reflect the spirit of its subject then this is it. The text is Buhl's own words, either from his diaries, or from published articles. There are introductions both to the book as a whole and to each section, to set the scene, however the purpose of the book is to let Buhl tell his own story. This it does remarkably well. Buhl must have been a reasonable writer; the style is quite modern, far more direct and unpretentious than many books of the 50s. The translation by Tim Carruthers is excellent. Though the diaries are edited, these are extracts; the

pieces used have not been altered. Messner and Hofler have brought the various pieces together into a coherent account of Buhl's climbing career. The result is a very readable account of the rise of one of the great climbers of the twentieth century, who influenced and inspired a generation by his uncompromising attitude to climbing.

There are two sections of very good colour photographs, as Messner notes it is a great regret that there are no colour photographs of the young Buhl climbing. The photographs do show the mountains of his greatest climbs. There are many black and white photographs in with the text, which add considerably to the whole. There are also wide margins and on just about every one there are quotes and often, small photographs. I found these quotes, many by Buhl but many more about Buhl by his climbing partners and contemporaries, extremely revealing. They really helped get a feel for the man and his attitudes.

What I did not like and believe to be very unfair is Messner and Hofler's vilification of Kurt Maix, the editor of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*. Their view is that Maix's reworking of parts of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* altered and diluted Buhl's message about his attitude to climbing. So should *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* have been left unedited? What most people do not realise, is how important the role of the editor is. Writers become over-enchanted of their prose, stray from the subject, put things in the wrong order, put inappropriate bits in and do not always write for the appropriate audience. The role of the editor is to correct all this, without altering the meaning of the book and make sure the whole thing makes sense. Just about all books (and this is probably particularly true of climbing books) need editing if they are to fulfil their potential. There are quite a few mediocre books out there that would have been a lot better with good editing. There are also some that are unpublished that might well have been with the right editor. Maggie Brodie gave a very amusing after-dinner speech to the CC a few years ago about editing the work of mountaineering writers. One of the stories was about the trials and tribulations of editing Doug Scott, I think she locked him in a room and took away his ciggies until he delivered the goods. Editors get little enough recognition without

this being further undermined.

That *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* is the great success it was probably has as much to do with Maix's editing as Buhl's writing. Messner writes in the Appendix that Maix's style was 'an expression of the times that carried on throughout the 50s. It was designed to appeal to a mass audience and it did. Buhl's exploits already well known among some climbing circles became widely known and have inspired people ever since.

This book is not designed to appeal to a mass audience, though I think almost anyone would enjoy it. Importantly, it is not a rewrite of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*; it is about Buhl's attitude to climbing and his total commitment to his ideals. Messner and Hofler have used Buhl's lucid and unpretentious personal account to convey this. It is not however either an autobiography or a biography. The introductory passages do give some feel for the environment in which he operated, but to my mind it is too brief. Things have changed a lot since the 1935-1957 era. It was far harder to get away climbing then, even living in Innsbruck. During the war it must have been extremely difficult. That Buhl did so much and travelled so far, says as much about his character as his climbs.

What the man did away from the climbs, however, is hardly explored: the problems of his early life, where he worked, how he dealt with the petty jealousies of the climbing scene, who his contemporaries were — these are touched upon without being fully developed. There was obviously deep conflict between Buhl and Herrligkoffer, and also with some other members of the Nanga Parbat expedition, but there is little explanation of these problems and an understanding of them would add to our appreciation of Buhl's drive and dedication.

That being said, this is a marvellous book, obviously well researched and put together with care. As a treatise on Buhl's climbs and his credo it will be hard to better. It is well worth the price and is a very interesting read. I do hope that one day someone does a biography of this great and influential climber and that it is as much about the environment in which he operated as about the man himself.

Vic Odell

Nanda Devi
Exploration and Ascent
A compilation of the classic mountain-
exploration books Nanda Devi and The
Ascent of Nandi Devi,
Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman.
(With a new introductory memoir by
Charles Houston)
Baton Wicks, 1999
£10.99

In some respects, everything has already been said about these two wonderful books from the 1930's, and to anyone remotely interested in the Himalayas they will already be familiar. *Nanda Devi* by Eric Shipton was published in 1936. It describes his journey with Bill Tilman, in 1934, up the Rishi Gorge into the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. It also describes the two traverses of the Badrinath-Kedernath and Badrinath-Gangotri watersheds. Bill Tilman's *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* was published in 1937, and describes the adventures of the 1936 Anglo-American expedition to Nanda Devi, during which Tilman and Noel Odell made the first ascent of the mountain.

This new production of these two books is blessed with a warm and humorous introduction by Dr Charles Houston (of K2 fame) who was a member of the 1936 expedition to Nanda Devi. Houston's wonderful recollections of that period, and his affectionate accounts of Shipton and Tilman are worth the price of admission in themselves, and once again, Ken Wilson deserves full credit for securing such an appropriate Introduction to the book. Anyone who has heard Houston speak will know what a sharp mind he has, coupled to a wicked sense of humour.

Shipton's *Nanda Devi* was his first book, published by Hodder & Stoughton. It is a wonderful account of an adventurous journey to a beautiful and virtually unknown region. Shipton comes across as a very warm character with an endearing humour and quick observation of his companions: 'So we ambled leisurely through a world of exquisite beauty.' They did rather more than that, though: he and Tilman attempted to climb Nanda Devi by the South Ridge and made some 3000ft of progress before turning back.

The tone and pace of this book are sheer delight — not least because it also con-

veys Shipton's kind recollections of the help the expedition received from local people during the travels. Geoffrey Winthrop Young described the book as 'among the best books of adventure known to me'. What comes over most strongly is Shipton's unbridled curiosity and the manner in which he seems wholly at home in the wild places.

Tilman's *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* was also his first book. Along with his wonderful books about sea journeys, this remains my personal favourite in his work. The 1936 Anglo American Expedition appears to have been a happy one (cf *Remarks at The Hundreth*, Charles Houston CCJ 1997: Ed), and the ascent of the mountain by Tilman and Odell a fine achievement and particularly satisfying for them as they had been overlooked for that year's Everest expedition. In the *Wayfarers Club Journal 1939* (Tilman was a member) this book was described as being notable for its 'quiet restraint', and that is a perfect description. Tilman writes with a sense of laconic virility, laced with a genuine affection for his companions. There is the wonderful story of the telegram they sent to Tom Longstaff having reached the summit ('Two reached the top-August 29'.) that typifies the whole tone of the book, and their adventures were summed up well by the words of Charles Houston: 'Nanda Devi was an extraordinary experience. We knew that Tilman had steered the ship and we all had rowed.'

Revisiting this book was a pleasure because it remains one of the finest mountaineering stories to come from a British writer; everyone should read this, and appreciate the awe and humility with which they approached the mountain. The appearance of these books side by side provides an ideal opportunity to compare the qualities of the two writers, and for newcomers it is a perfect introduction to their extensive respective bodies of work. The book also includes a very interesting brief history of the mountain from Tilman and Shipton's first visit in 1934 up until 1996. Not the least of the revealing information is the alleged CIA activity in the area, designed to monitor Chinese missile tests, and the restrictions this is thought to have led to in the area.

To sum up two such outstanding books, and an area of such great beauty, perhaps

we should leave the final word to Charles Houston:

'What of the future? Certainly others will go to their blessed mountain, approaching it from over the rim rather than through the Sanctuary. The twin summits can be reached over the rim without trespassing on the Sanctuary, which hopefully will be protected, perhaps closed to all, because it has been so often littered since our stay.'

Though this is sad and would anger climbers, there are so many other lovely valleys and peaks that are not so fragile and more easily accessed, and these should satisfy those who truly love the mountains. How true is Oscar Wilde's statement: 'Each man kills the thing he loves.' Only now are we beginning to revere and protect the mountains we love. *Nanda Devi Exploration and Ascent* at about the same price as a chalkbag, must be the bargain of the year.

Steve Dean

**Everest, The Mountaineering History,
(Third Edition), Walt Unsworth.
Bâton Wicks, 1999
£25.00**

This is undoubtedly the definitive work on this subject. It is mainly the previous edition with a little extra information, and this is stated quite plainly, but this edition has an extra chapter, covering the last 10 years, mainly covering commercial expeditions and the search for a body. There is also another Appendix: 'further background information to the earlier expeditions'.

I did not feel that the author was as emotionally or intellectually engaged in this new material as he had been in the previous chapters, where the author's interest, even passion comes across. The parts covered by the previous editions truly deserve to be described as 'meticulous and balanced'. In the new material, the coverage of the commercial expeditions is meticulous and it gives a balanced view, but in a slightly detached way. There is less empathy for commercial expeditions and the search that resulted in finding Mallory's body. This I find easy to understand, however the historian has eventually to make a

judgement and on these issues, particularly that of the search for Mallory's body it is side-stepped and we are not given the depth of discussion needed. Whether you agree with these developments or not, this is surely more than a personal matter: they will have an affect on the future of the mountain, and as such need to be fully evaluated.

If you have bought either of the previous editions, the extra in this edition is probably not worth the price, though there is nowhere else where the collective information is available. If you do not have a history of Everest, then this is the book for you.

Vic Odell

**Shisha Pangma, The Alpine style first ascent of the South West Face,
Doug Scott & Alex MacIntyre.
Bâton Wicks 1999
£12.99**

This is an over-due reprint of a classic. As a true insight into an expedition, 'warts and all', it is the best one I have come across. I felt that the writers were being very open and honest, conveying their frustrations, tensions and problems but also their respect for each other, and their passion for climbing. It is also a frighteningly revealing insight into the bureaucracy of mounting an expedition to China, and the problems of making it work on the ground.

The latter part of the book contains information about the mountain and more generally about Tibet.

Vic Odell

**Pushing the Limits:
The Story of Canadian
Mountaineering, Chic Scott.
Rocky Mountain Books, 2000
£30.00**

This is a magnum opus, covering in a mere 440 pages the history of climbing in Canada from the earliest days to the present, including the events and the personalities. This is not a book you sit down with, start at the beginning and continue through to the end. You leaf through it, a photograph or a heading captures your attention, and you dip in and get hooked.

Some time later you resurface and wonder where all the time has gone.

Chic gave the keynote lecture at the Bretton Hall International Mountain Literature Festival 2000; this is a man who knows his subject inside out and backwards. His command of detail and the development of themes is quite incredible. The style is quite informal almost conversational, but it is well written and absorbing. I do not know anything about the Canadian scene, so the names are not familiar, except for a few international ones. This does not detract from the book, in part from the explanations but also due the quality of the writing and the many excellent photographs. There are few long discursive passages.

The book is made up of many potted biographies (an interesting counter-point to the *Burgess Book of Lies* is Chic's evaluation of the twins) and essays about the main events and themes. The book is arranged geographically, starting in the west and moving east, then abroad. Until you get used to it, this is a little unsettling, as most history books have a chronological order. It is made worse if, like me, you leaf through the book somewhat randomly.

The photographs are mainly black and white but they are very high quality, well-reproduced and the subject matter and composition is excellent. But I think having been to the Rockies and recognising some of the mountains, either by name or sight helps. Check it out.

Vic Odell

**Valais Alps East, Lindsay Griffin.
Alpine Club, 1999
£18.50**

This is the second volume of *The Alpine Club* guidebooks to the mountains of the Valais Alps (a.k. the 'Pennine Alps'), and is complimentary to the *Valais Alps West*, which I had the pleasure of reviewing in our last Journal. This later volume of the guide includes all mountains of the range to the east of a line through the Zinal valley, over the Col Durand and Theodul Pass and down the Valle d'Ayas. So it includes all main peaks accessible from the Saas and Zermatt valleys except for the Dent Blanche, Dent d'Herens and Matterhorn which appear in the western volume. How-

ever, if ascents of 4000 metre peaks are your ambition, the current volume has the major share, with 27 of them, more than the earlier volume, or any other guidebook area, and roughly half the total in the Alps.

Having already reviewed the earlier volume, I now find that its companion is very similar in style, and equally good in quality. I could cheat by just giving a rewrite from last year's journal with minor changes, or I could simply say 'I refer readers to my previous review.' You would not regard either of these options as good value for money, and I suppose I should try to justify my free reviewer's copy, so I'll try to come up with some new things to say. That will, in fact, not be very hard, for both books are packed with content, most of which is good, and I'd struggle to find fault.

This volume is slightly shorter than its companion, but also a bit cheaper. The material is organised in the same sort of way: the opening 70 pages of introductory material, followed by the main section of 248 pages of route descriptions, and a closing section including indexes and 72 pages of photo-diagrams.

The introductory section has information on valley bases (including local information such as transport and weather forecasts), huts, route grading, walking tours and valley rock climbing, as well as much else of use. Apart from UIAA technical rock grades (I, II, III, etc), the traditional French overall grades of F to ED are used, but with extensions at both ends. At the top end, the ED (extremement difficile) is subdivided in an open-ended way by ED1, ED2, etc as is now fairly standard. At the lower end of difficulty, walking/scrambling routes which are too easy to warrant even an F for facile grade, are given walking grades of W1 or W2. These are applied to the walking tours and hut approach walks – quite useful, I suppose, if you're planning to go to the hut with a non-climbing spouse, children or grand-parents.

Valley rock-climbing information is a relatively new feature of British Alpine Guide books. Small valley crags in many alpine valleys have been developed mainly as sport-climbing facilities with protection bolts, etc. One would be unlikely to go all that way for this express purpose, but for

something to fill in odd half days or periods of poor weather, valley cragging is a useful alternative to the high peaks. Both volumes to the Valais Alps include information on the location of such crags with brief descriptions. No actual routes are described on the crags, but that is scarcely needed, as topo guides can usually be obtained locally. Concerning the mountain route descriptions, there is little I can really say except that they seem to be well described, and those that I have done seem to be accurate, as far as I remember (which isn't very far). But I believe the authors are as conscientious as any, and errors will probably be as few as possible with information which is by its nature rather uncertain. A total of 245 routes are described on 65 separate mountains, in addition routes to 22 cols, and brief descriptions of a few rock-climbing crags (higher than the ones included as valley crags). The classic routes on the big peaks in the easy to medium grades are given the greatest coverage. These are the type of climbing the range is most famous for. There is also a good selection of harder mixed routes (e.g. on the Lyskam and Breithorn North faces and Monte Rosa East face); and plenty to do on the medium peaks, when the weather is too good to stay in the valley, but not good enough for the biggest summits. In fact, the book is admirable in its coverage of every aspect of climbing in the range.

The routes are numbered using a system which has long been popular with continental guide books. Each peak is given a number, and each route on it a letter. So route 23e (the Triftjigrat) is the 5th route to be described on mountain number 23 (the Breithorn). This system gives a nice logical classification, but only just works for the Breithorn, where the routes go up to 23w. Over 40 routes are given on Monte Rosa, so the shortage of the alphabet has been overcome by giving separate numbers to the mountain's various summits. The routes are organised in five chapters, compared with fifteen shorter chapters in the companion volume. Each chapter starts with a little sketch map. I was very critical of these in the other volume.

This volume has fewer of these maps, although they are a little better (surely the



authors have not read my previous review?). However, I still think they are unnecessarily sparse; a few dotted lines to show the hut approaches and ordinary routes would not make the maps overcrowded.

There are some fine colour photos. Unfortunately, these are separated from the relevant bits of text. Publishers have always excused this annoying sort of thing by saying that it is unavoidable, given the nature of the printing, pagination and binding processes. Is this still so in these days of computerised publishing methods? The black and white photo-diagrams are an appealing and useful complement to the text, and the quality is generally good. It would be more convenient to have these integrated with the text, but the text is printed on very thin paper to make the book compact, and the photos are on thicker paper (presumably for opacity), so this integration might not be possible. I rather like the old-fashioned ribbon book-marker in the earlier volume, but unfortunately there is none in this one. For lots and lots of good information, well presented in a portable form, these two volumes could scarcely be bettered. If you wish to climb the big alpine peaks, and you've bought the first volume, get this one as well, its just as good. If you didn't, go out now and buy them both.

Dave Wilkinson

**Classic Dolomite Climbs, Annette
Kohler and Norbert Memmel.
Bâton Wicks, 1999
£16.99**

First, I must to come clean about why I am doing this review: it's to keep the guide. Ken sent the review copy to the newsletter editor, so I was faced with a stark choice: either review it for the Journal myself, or give it up to someone else to review. No contest!

This is fundamentally an excellent guide; it inspired us to go there this summer. It is an adaptation of a 1998 German guide and it shows — not in the translation itself — the text reads well, and the descriptive and explanatory passages are easily understandable, but the nomenclature

is tricky. For those of us who are used to the mainly Italian names for routes and peaks (the maps are in Italian) in the Dolomites this book's use of German names is confusing. There is an 'Introduction' for English speaking climbers at the back of the book (which is confusing), and occasional footnotes throughout the text to explain peculiarities. Perhaps the editors did (or could) not take firm enough control in producing both the German original and this edition. Also that the authors have an 'I am not going to compromise to popular demands, take it or leave it' attitude. The guide is a selection of '102 high quality rock-climbs between the UIAA grades III and VII', but the caveat is not on the cover, whereas a photograph of a F8a sports climb is! The explanation of both is hidden within the first few pages. The authors have chosen routes because 'All have one thing in common: we reckon they are really good. This evaluation does presuppose, however that the rock quality fulfils our high expectations, that reasonable belays can be found and that the climber is not required to stare too bravely into the cold eye of objective danger.' All selective guides have to be a personal and therefore a subjective choice. On the whole, I feel the choice of which routes to include is their prerogative. I have no argument with their excellent choice, except they have only included one route on the North Face of the Cima Grande and none on the Cima Ovest. While the authors have to rely upon their own judgement of what are the right routes to include, they also have a duty to respect the expectations and ambitions of the public they expect to buy their book. A small compromise here would, I suspect, add a great deal to the book for a large number of climbers.

There is a black and white photograph of the face the route is on with every route description. These photographs are all high quality, clearly showing the face, the main features on it and the line of the climb. Yet where a photograph covers more than one route it is merely reproduced again (and again). Either a different shot of the face, or putting more than one line on a photograph and using the space saved for 'action' shots, would have been more effective.

Opposite: Sally Noble on the Vinatzer Route, Third Sella Tower. Photo: Tim Noble



without increasing the number of photographs or hopefully the printing costs. The colour action and panoramic shots are grouped in two sections. They are again excellent photographs, but there are not enough of them and they would have been far more effective inserted into the text. The colour of Dolomite rock and the contrast between sky, mountain and meadow, is strikingly beautiful. The vibrant colours are one of the areas attractions and to use mainly black and white shots means the guide is far less visually effective than it could have been.

There is a colour map at the back of the book, which covers the whole area, and monochrome maps at the beginning of each section. While no one would advocate that you dispense with a proper map, the map reproduced enables clear identification of the locations of the peaks and the road routes between them. The monochrome maps are clear and have sufficient detail without being cluttered. Overall the maps add considerably to the effectiveness of this guide.

The topo diagrams are given a full page for each route (occasionally two routes share a topo if they are close together); they are clear informative and easy to follow. There are also topos of the more complicated descents which are very welcome. The introduction is succinct, gives enough background to be of interest, and briefly but clearly describes the approach, start of the route and general line. We had no problems using the guide.

Enough of this nit-picking; is it worth buying? Yes, it is, definitely! I hope that this guide helps revitalise interest in an area of the Alps that has inexplicably become unfashionable.

It is an attractive guide to flick through, and does the job of showing where the routes are located and what the line is very well. However, it is not the book it could and should have been.

Vic Odell

**Symonds Yat, Edited by John Willson.
Climbers Club, 1999
£6.95**

At last, it's out. The missing link in the Wye Valley Chain but was it worth waiting for? I have to say after seeing the front cover that yes it was. You would not believe the fuss that the delay of this section of the Wye Valley has caused. It is without a doubt the most popular area in the Wye as was demonstrated when the climbing shop at the Warehouse Indoor climbing centre sold 60 copies within a week of its appearance. What is the attraction? With easy access, ample parking, tree belays and idyllic surroundings it is one of those cliffs that appeals mostly to the low/middle grade climber as well as groups but perhaps a word of warning here: the rescue services attend more cliff accidents at the Yat than at all the other Wye Valley crags put together.

The guide itself is a slim hardback which looks and feels good, and with over 450 routes represents excellent value for money. The layout is clear and concise with some useful crag diagrams throughout the guide. I was concerned that many of the climbs would be dismissed with route descriptions which do not do them justice — as has happened in one section of the main *Wye Valley* guide. But I'm pleased to be able to say that the climbs have been fairly treated. The Symonds Yat sandbag should now be a thing of the past, as the climbing grades have also been sorted out by this team of authors and are now more accurate.

All of the photographs in the guide give a feel for the Yat — indeed, the atmospheric black and white photo of *Picket Line* at Near Harkening Rock looks positively scary. David Hope and Roger Lanchbury should be congratulated for taking care of Symonds Yat over the last 25 years, both on and off the crag — particularly the access situation, the historical records and the Yat's ethics.

John Willson's contribution to the Wye Valley guides since 1975 should also be recognised. He says that this is his last guide and I for one, will miss his particular style

Opposite: 'An excellent route' (North Devon and Cornwall Guidebook): Tim Noble on the two star HVS, Journey to Ixtlan, Carn Gwla. Photo: Richard Brown



of writing and his meticulous editorship. Willson's editor's notes provide a fitting finish to this review. Scope for development seems now restricted to finding scrappy areas of rock that can be plastered with bolts for those no longer wishing to make adventurous forays through the delightful perfumed gardens and grand if occasionally unstable rockeries of the traditional crags of this unique and powerful canyon.

Tony Penning

**North Devon and Cornwall,
Edited by John Willson.
Climbers' Club, 2000
£14.50**

The first time I visited North Devon and Cornwall was as a Plymouth Polytechnic student back in 1986, when a group of us hired a 20 year old Morris Minor Estate and trundled up to Baggy Point for a weekend's cragging. The definitive guidebook of the time was Bob Moulton's *Devon Rock Climbs*, a descriptive and workmanlike text with an inspiring black & white cover shot of *Shangri-la* that got us to the crag and up a few routes. It was not until the publication of Iain Peters's definitive guidebook in 1988 however, that justice was finally done to the quality, atmosphere and adventure of north Devon coast climbing. This guidebook with its unique style, humour and sense of understatement, its colour photos (including one of the best cover shots I can remember), detailed maps and crag diagrams and its revolutionary graded list (based on the Fowleresque 'Survival Factor') always struck me as one that was going to be hard to beat. So to the question: how does the all new year 2000 edition compare?

Well, first a word for the authors, Dave Hope and Brian Wilkinson, and the editor John Willson: to me (and virtually everyone I've spoken to about it), the new guide gets a big thumbs up as a worthy successor to the 1988 edition in virtually every respect. Writing a guidebook for North Devon and Cornwall is a far cry from writing a guidebook for the Llanberis Pass, Stanage or Southern Sandstone. Much of

the coast is rarely visited by climbers; new routes can remain unrepeated for years and on all but the most popular crags (Sharpnose, Baggy, Pentire and the like); even established routes may receive few repeats. Checking descriptions, grades, star rating etc of the several hundred new routes featured in the guide (not to mention other rarely climbed routes) has been one of the biggest challenges faced by the authors, but the end product makes the effort well worthwhile.

Anyway, what else? Well on first impressions, the new guide looks very similar to the previous one with its dark, broody cover and rear cover shots and its black binding. The content and presentation however is a significant advance and the reproduction and print quality is also first class. Don Sargeant has excelled again in the crag diagrams department, with detailed topo-style drawings of Vicarage Cliff, Cow and Calf, Blackchurch Rock and many others. There are around 40 colour photos ranging from Baggy classics to esoteric masterpieces like *Breakaway*, *Savage God* and *The Incredible Hulk* (the first route on a shipwreck ever to be pictured in a British guidebook). The use of hollow stars to indicate when route quality is unconfirmed is a welcome addition, likewise the built-in page marker and the use of page references at the beginning of route descriptions that feature a photo in the text.

The few niggles I have with the guidebook are very minor points and barely worth mentioning. The odd typo is inevitable in something as complex as a climbing guide, but these are few and far between. Some of the humour is missing from the new guide (along with a graded list) and like all those who still think in terms of Marathon bars and Opal Fruits, *Shangri-la* and *Lost Horizon* will always be on the Promontory, not Long Rock as it is now (correctly) called.

Anyway, enough rambling, the guidebook team have done a top job and the new text is a worthy companion to a lifetime's worth of adventuring on the north coast. It joins *On Peak Rock* and Nick White's *South Devon* guide as one of my top three British climbing guides.

Dave Turnbull

Opposite: 'And did those feet': Dave Scott-Maxwell leading on the first ascent of Jerusalem, Hartland Quay. Photo: Dave Turnbull





**Gogarth, Edited by Geoff Milburn.
Climbers Club (reprint, 1999)
£9.95**

As an outdoor retailer as well as a wall manager one of my pet hates even though I know it's unavoidable is a guide book going out of print and there being no date for a new one. It's recently happened to *Avon and Cheddar, South Wales, Stanage*, and others. Some time ago (about 2 years) *Gogarth* went out of print, and although the next one is being worked on, it could be another year or more before it's at the printers.

I'm pleased to be able to report that the CC have allowed a reprint of this important guide, and although the colour pictures have been dispensed with, it's good to see *Gogarth* back on the shelves.

The black and white climbing photos that remain are very good and give a great feel for the cliffs, while the crag diagrams by Greg Griffith are excellent and make finding your chosen climb a cinch. This reprint has a soft card cover (the original had a hard cover) and will not be that hardwearing but that's a small price to pay.

All in all this reprint is very welcome and I've just found out that *Kinder and Chew Valley* is to be reprinted. Let's hope that other guides in a similar situation will receive the same treatment.

Tony Penning

**Langdale, R.M. Biden.
F. & R.C.C. Guide
£14.00**

Because I learned to climb rock in Langdale (in the middle 70s), reading the new guidebook had the feel of re-entering dreams, or exploring the grey folds and crevices of my own brain, where 'Langdale' has become a complex of images, of memories: soaring buttresses, desperate manoeuvres, exhilarating swings upwards, occasional crunching falls. How could a guidebook live up to a comparison with some of my own dearest experiences? This one triumphantly does and is the best I have ever seen. My old guide, Austin and Valentine's of 1973,

is battered now, after falling all the way to *Jack's Rake* from pitch 3 of *Rake End Wall*, and stained with crushed insects (possibly Bracken-clocks) and crumbs of prehistoric mint cake. So now I can retire it to the bookshelf and carry Max Biden's excellent new one instead.

For a start the book teems with good writing, imaginative and witty. *Haste Not in White Ghyll* is nicely characterised: 'An impertinent excursion for its grade which probes the monumental barrier of overhangs.' The words about the traverse precisely call to mind those moves which make you feel like a wingless peregrine: 'A delicate step right gains a cramped gangway system running rightwards under the overhangs. Follow this and descend abottomless coffin-like groove...' Pavey Ark is treated with ironical affection 'with its sunny disposition, it is able to host a superior quality of vegetation'. It's typical of Max Biden's warm attitude to history that he then grafts in Haskett Smith's century-old comment: 'These upper rocks are of splendid gripping quality; rough as a cow's tongue...'

Biden's own idiom is up-to-date. A new E7 on the east wall of Pavey is 'a heart-stopping eliminate...with the prospect of serious air time.' Throughout, his prose puts you keenly in touch with the moods and sensations that flush through as you climb, as in these words about *Razor Crack* on Neckband: 'Follow this (main crack) over several overlaps and the odd jammed flake to the top where you can sink thankfully among the bilberries.' Such delicious touches perhaps owe something to the lively and humorous way with guidebook writing which has come in to the north-west with the work of Steve Read (now Guidebook Editor for the F. & R.C.C.). It makes me think back ruefully to my own struggles to get such phrases as 'oozing innards' and 'avalanches of flowers' accepted into the 1987 Buttermere guide.

The book is prefaced by a brilliant 3-page article on Lakeland geology. If that sounds remote from cragging as we know it, how's this for an intimate fusion of the ancient and the modern: 'at times the ash here [in the vast volcanic crater which went to the forming of White Ghyll, Raven, and Gimmer] was so hot that it flowed like a

Opposite: Tony Penning on *The Big Overhang*, *Gogarth*. Photo: Penning collection



lava as it cooled, welding itself into rock. Such flow banding produces excellent incut holds where it dips into the crag.' Or this: 'Deer Bield Crag is one of the youngest products of this whole volcanic period; due to a fault running through it, it is still settling!' — from which we can understand more deeply the cataclysm in 1997 which dismantled that major crag and wiped out three of its classics, the Crack, the But-tress, and the Chimney.

This guide is also completely efficient, so far as I can judge. Historical omissions have been repaired, especially a whole clutch involving Peter Greenwood on Bowfell North and Far East Raven, although the index makes rare mistakes when it leaves out Peter's *Jaundice* and Biden's own *No Porkies Please*, apparently because these routes have no detailed entries to themselves. People have always been oddly snooty about Swine Knott, on the other side of White Ghyll from the main crag, and I was pleased to see that *No Porkies Please*, now credited to Max Biden himself in 1996, is a frighteningly unprotectable line up the centre of the main wall, which I climbed mistaking it for *Porkers' Parade*, with my son Neil, on September 24th 1984.

The grades allotted seem altogether sound. Some of the more imposing middle-grade routes have been moved up a notch: on Gimmer, *Bracket and Slab* from MS to S, *Asterisk* and *Samaritan Corner* from HS to MVS, and *North West Arête* from MVS to VS, and the formidable *Hobson's Choice* on Pavey East from HS to VS. This is against the grain of some of the more recent hard-man-oriented guides which have downgraded some classics, for example *Moss Ghyll Grooves* on Scafell from MVS to HS (while calling its cruxes harder than *Botterill's Slab*, which it gives 4b, 4c). The star system remains as lunatic as ever, a perfect stamping-ground for those who like to chop logic on wet or wintry days when the crags are unmanageable. For example, is anything really gained when only three routes on the whole of White Ghyll do not rate a star? And categorising has reeled off through the looking-glass when the graded lists are divided not only into E4, HVS, etc., but into 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low' divisions inside the lower ones.

The illustrations are another matter, inspiring in their beauty and a terrific appetite for either the Langdale novice or the blasé veteran. There is no nonsense about concentrating on the upper E's where few can venture. I can't go harder than E2, and that rarely, yet I've climbed 18 of the 40 routes illustrated. The photos themselves balance nicely between details of climbers in action and views of crags in their mountainous surroundings. They range from a climber spreadeagled on and dwarfed by the colossal vertical grain of *Cascade* on Pavey East to a dizzy shot looking down on Dave Birkett as he strains to clip a runner on the nearly-impossible overhang of his new E8 on Raven, *Daves Rides a Shovel Head*. They even find room for a fine clear archival black-and-white photo of Dave's grandfather Jim on *White Ghyll Slabs*, partnered by Len Muscroft, half a century ago the greatest of Cumberland's rock partnerships, in corduroy breeks, with a hemp rope and what looks like no protection.

This book really does justice to the gamut of cragging in this, the central dale of Lakeland, from 1870 to 1999 — or possibly from A.D. 1400, since George Bower waggishly suggested in the *F. & R.C.C. Journal* that *Jack's Rake* was first climbed by 'Jack' about the year Chaucer died. How times have changed. 'Jack' was probably going up the fellside after his sheep. Dave Birkett climbed *Daves* having spent the whole day psyching himself up in his darkened workshop.

David Craig

**Trekking and Climbing in Nepal,
Steve Razzetti.
New Holland, 2000
£13.99**

Yet another book on trekking? Worry not. This authoritative guide has features which readily set it apart from any previous trekking guide. Before we start on the treks themselves, there are three preliminary chapters: an Introduction to Nepal, dealing with geography, people and cultures; Arrival in Nepal, with everything you need to know before you step out; and Trekking and Climbing — the actual logistics of be-

ing on trek and the varying trekking styles. This third chapter also introduces the trekking peaks, a logical progression for many trekkers.

The main parts of the book are the chapters in which the author divides Nepal into five trekking regions: Western, Annapurna, Langtang, Everest and Eastern, describing the character of each region, and its more desirable treks. For each trek we are supplied with a detailed map, an illustrative strip map of heights and walking times, useful 'trek essentials' and where appropriate 'climb essentials' with a route photo. Spread through the text there are also some 50 special topics in highlighted boxes, ranging in scope from philosophical, such as responsibility, to severely practical: how to cope with queues at Lukla.

More than half his 25 treks lie in the western part of the country, as one might expect from an author with a missionary zeal to popularise 'the wildest, most remote and least trekked part of Nepal'. Trek 8, the Dhaulagiri circuit, receives the accolade as Steve Razzetti's all-time favourite trek in Nepal. The route has everything: a high mountain setting, unique weather systems, and a well-earned reputation for an often impassable crux, frequently giving rise to a long and hungry hike out. What more could one ask? Eight of the suggested treks also offer mountaineering options. Four of these so-called trekking peaks are near Annapurna, two in Langtang, and six in the Everest region. Standards vary from PD to a little more serious on the French Alpine grading system, but the descriptions are everywhere realistic. My own personal choice would be for four weeks in the Rolwaling with Parchamo thrown in and the Tesi Lapcha to finish, but with this guide (weight 550gm) in the 'sac, one really is spoilt for choice.

The book ends with important conclusions on minimal impact and the environment. I do fully share the author's anxiety about Maoist disturbances in certain districts, and fervently hope that a dialogue may soon be started and peace eventually restored. This guide is attractive to hold and a real pleasure to read: it's poetry.

John Tyson

The Climber's Handbook, Garth Hattingh.

New Holland, 2000

£12.99(paperback)

The Mountain Skills Training Handbook, Pete Hill & Stuart Johnston.

Crowood, 2000

£18.99

Suddenly it was raining books. Review books always arrive with no time to read them properly, let alone write carefully considered authoritative articles exploring every aspect and coming to well balanced and pithy judgements etc, etc. But here goes.

Climber's Handbook by Garth Hattingh is an example of a book that wears its heart on its sleeve, literally. It looks great. Flick through its soft-back coffee-table format (too big for a handbook, surely) and loads of glossy photos flash back at you. Look closer and there are lots of diagrams, drawings and other technical illustrations. So far, so good. Look closer still and it all becomes rather confusing. Very soon one begins to get the feel that this book has bitten off more than it can chew. By trying to cover 'climbing' in its entirety from the 'why' to 'how' and 'where' it starts becoming very selective very soon. To put it politely, it is thin.

For instance, there is no adequate discussion of whether one should use a single rope or double ropes, which the charitable may put down to this book being for an American public, but to me points to a lack of thoroughness. Top-roping gets a double-page spread dedicated to it, but not as you might expect, to emphasise the necessary anchors, ethical issues or more fundamentally belying safety considerations. Rather, we are treated to simplistic basic advice (no diagrams or relevant illustrations) and a startling photo of as unlikely top-roping venue as you can imagine. Confusing, perhaps even misleading. Page 83 helpfully suggests you use quickdraws to connect wired nuts to the rope but fails to offer crucial advice on appropriate karabiner gate types or the correct direction for safe gate alignment. Hattingh then confounds the issue by directly contradicting his own further

Opposite: Healing heights: a 'Medical Centre' between Jumla and Rara Lake, Western Nepal. Photo: Tim Noble



reasonable advice to 'avoid clipping the rope directly into the karabiner clipped to the nut as it is more likely to dislodge the nut —' by showing exactly that being done by the climber on the front cover of the book Sloppy or what?

Overall, this book looks fine, but fails to deliver in real climbing terms. If you are looking for a reliable comprehensive instruction handbook, I suggest you check out the B.M.C.'s *Handbook of Climbing* by Ian Peters or the old stalwart *Mountaineering and Leadership* by Eric Langmuir. This book would look good on any non-specialist publisher's list and the designers have done a good presentation job. Your granny might buy it for you from a high street book shop but real climbers deserve better.

Mountain Skills Training Handbook by Pete Hill & Stuart Johnston is a book that knows who it is written for and why. The 'Training' in the title is the give away and the numerous 'observations' are often tips as how to make teaching more fun and effective. However, this book whilst primarily addressing itself to instructors and group leaders, has a lot of basic sound advice that both the experienced and the beginner will find helpful and interesting (for example, did you know that there is now a new and less painful method of classic abseiling? Well, p. 25 will illuminate it for you). This is the antithesis of Hattingh's *Climber's Handbook* in that it sets out to deliver a specific menu of necessary summer and winter technical skills in a clear, authoritative and up-to-date style. The well-targeted range of this book means that the authors can deliver comprehensively what they set out to achieve. This is of real value and the attractively and robustly presented package is impressive in its completeness, clarity and modernity.

In comparison to Hattingh's broad brush approach to technical details such as how to clip nuts (see above), this manual unerringly selects the crucial factor when clipping nuts and highlights it with a series of clear diagrams showing how to safely align karabiner gates etc. Simple, I hear you say but not always easy to get right. By the way top-roping gets 5 full pages of 'how-to' diagrams and comprehensive considerations concerning safety etc. This standard is consistent throughout the book, making this a work of great value to all climbers not just instructors. At £18.99,

however, it is not cheap and whilst it does not cover as wide an area as Eric Langmuir's *Mountaineering and Leadership* at £14.99, it does offer a thoroughly modern coverage of the core mountain and rock-climbing skills essential for not only instructors, but for you and me as well.

Dick Turnbull

50 Best Routes on Scottish Mountains 50 More Routes on Scottish Mountains, Ralph Storer.

David and Charles, 1998, 1999

£14.99 & £9.99

These two useful volumes should be on every members' bookshelf, especially those who are going to make use of the new club hut, 'Riasg'. Each book covers walking and scrambling routes from afternoon jaunts to day-long expeditions, providing an excellent selection from across the length and breadth of the highland mountain playground.

All the walks chosen by Storer suit the practicalities of car-bound visitors, as they are all circular routes. Also, his main aim is to interpret the highlands beyond the box-ticking symptom of 'Munroitis'. About a fifth of the routes will treat the most determined (or jaded) of Munro baggers; the same goes for climbers. Within the covers are good days out for exploring in their own right, as well as a change or rest from crimping and cranking. Better still, they provide a soulful alternative to days thrown aside and filled with hours of gear fondling in Fort William.

None of the routes includes rock climbing, so packs without ropes should provide light relief on the more challenging walks. However, some of the routes do involve scrambling and if tackled in winter, may require the usual paraphernalia that bedecks winter mountaineers. Above all, the reason for this selection being the best is that it will prove to describe the most enjoyable routes on offer. During the last couple of winters, Storer has always been close at hand whilst I have been ploughing my way through the winter ML scheme. As a result, my logbook now illustrates a broader experience of the highlands compared to my previous intimate knowledge of only the main climbing venues.

Each volume follows an easy to use

format that really works. It is clear, concise and provides worthwhile reading and anecdotes to entice you and your friends away from out-of-condition cliffs and soggy turf, to having what the SMLTB would describe as 'a quality mountain day'. The books' size won't take up much space in your stacking boxes either.

The introduction includes an excellent map, pinpointing the whereabouts of each walk. Thank goodness; all too often this is overlooked and omitted by authors and publishers. With Storer it is easy to see that about 40 top notch routes lie within a snowball's throw of the new bunks at Roy Bridge: enough fun to keep even the youngest members occupied for many years.

Each walk is illustrated with an at-a-glance summary of essential information. This includes a graphical attempt at grading, useful seasonal notes and a simple assessment. This feature is very good indeed. The maps for each walk are excellent: they are the clearest I have come across. To be honest, after this stage, I'm inspired enough to be out on the hill. Only later do I muse over the walk's essay.

The photographs have been taken in a variety of conditions across the four seasons. All are sharp, well presented and give a good flavour of what to expect. I was particularly inspired by the wintery shot of Sgurr nan Reathreamhnan (Storer includes tips on understanding and pronouncing Gaelic names) and the rosy shot of Luinne Bheinn reinforced my own romantic memory of a lonely tramp through Knoydart.

The selection close to the new hut includes some great classics; a traverse of the Grey Corries in winter would test the endurance of even the fittest. The Ballachulish horseshoe also brings back memories of being led by Mickey the Jack Russell in a New Year blizzard. It is also possible to incorporate some great mountaineering into the routes such as the N.E. ridge of Aonach Beag in the Aonachs or a winter ascent of Reaburn's Route on Creag Meagaidh.

With these two volumes, David and Charles have presented Storer's knowledge and love of the highlands in a unique and practical guide. Who is there better to have as a highland companion?

John Baker

The Magic of the Munros, Irvine Butterfield.

David & Charles, 1999

£25.00

Lonely Hills and Wilderness Trails,

Richard Gilbert.

David and Charles, 2000

£16.99

Irvine Butterfield burst onto the mountain book scene with a bang in 1986 with his highly regarded *The High Mountains of Britain and Ireland*. With the assistance of Ken Wilson's layout skills this cross between a guide book and coffee table book gives a comprehensive and beautifully-illustrated description of the 3000ft + mountains of the British Isles in its 25 x 21cm portrait format. Allowances are made to include fine mountains that might be at the magic height, such as Beinn Dearg in Torridon and summits deleted as heights are revised by the OS, such as Beinn an Lochain.

I was fortunate to spend some time with Irvine in the 80's as he debated which peaks to include in this book and took painstaking care over getting all the myriad details of maps and access notes correct. At one time, he wanted to include only Munro's original list, corrected for subsequent height revisions, but a number of alternative lists eventually surfaced in the book. His devotion to the Scottish hills and landscape is supported by a deep fund of knowledge and experience. This fund of knowledge proved most helpful as I moved towards completion of my own round of the Munros and tops; the final summit being Sgurr a Mhaoraich in 1985, accompanied by Irvine amongst others. Irvine's follow up book to *The High Mountains* makes no compromises. It is concerned only with the Munros as re-defined in 1997 and makes no real attempt to guide the reader to the hill. Name, height (still imperial height given first-well done Irvine), meaning of the name and short description of significant features is all we get. The 37 x 25cm landscape format allows for full justice to be done to the excellent set of photographs which depict all 284 currently listed main tops.

The photographs are taken by a wide group of hill-goers whose contribution is acknowledged at the start of the book. The many colours and beautiful atmospheric effects seen in these hills is well represented. A preponderance of the views are

in winter, or under some degree of snow cover. Whilst bringing a chill to old bones, the white stuff makes for dramatic pictures and clear delineation of peaks and ridges.

Irvine has given us the pictorial record these wonderful mountains deserve. For the veteran munroist, it gives a compelling reminder of days spent in remote areas under the sky, in every weather from heat wave to icy blizzard and whiteout (so these pictures can reveal where we have been and never seen). To those not yet well acquainted with the area, the pictures give a taste of what is on offer from the easy slopes of Ben Lomond to the potential for Alpine scale epics in the remote corries of the Cairngorms. All royalties from the book go to the John Muir Trust, so why not buy this book for its own undisputed merits and to help preserve the mountains it celebrates.

It would be difficult for the new millennium wanderer in the Scottish hills, cosseted by a vast range of excellent guide books, illustrated volumes and up to date maps covering the Highlands and Lowlands, to appreciate just how little useful information was available even as recently as the early 70s. Maps were mostly 1 inch and based on a survey done in the early 1800s. Mountain heights and Munro qualification seemed to vary with each new publication of the SMC journal or re-issue of the tables. The SMC guides contained few maps and some were rather outdated.

With very few people at the Munro game in those days, any information as to the best routes up a hill or possible combination of hills was eagerly seized upon. (I personally found Wainwright's *Scottish Mountain Drawings* very helpful as an aid to understanding the general topography and possible lines of ascent of a hill). The original publication of *Memorable Munros* as a typewritten booklet containing a few black and white prints, by Richard Gilbert in 1976, was a welcome addition to the library. Whilst this booklet is intended as a personal account of ascending all the Munros, culminating with Bidean nam Bean on 12th June 1971, it could usefully be added to the small fund of information available to assist in planning one's own campaign.

Since completing his Munro round, Richard Gilbert has not been content to rest on his laurels. Mountain walkers have been regaled with tales of his adventures from the Caucasus to the Arctic, from Scotland

to Provence, often through the pages of *High* magazine. There has been the 'Walks' series of books, edited by Ken Wilson. These large format, well-illustrated books have given inspiration to many of us to get out and visit some of the wonderful and remote places that Britain has to offer.

Now we have Richard Gilbert's personal anthology, which collects material from his various writings into one volume. No longer the typewritten yellowing pages of *Memorable Munros*. This book is a quality hardback containing two sets of colour pictures, conveniently grouped into 'Scotland' and 'The world beyond', though the former group does allow two pictures of Yorkshire to be appended.

I have really enjoyed reading this book. As a statement of what one man with a wife, four children and a job as a chemistry teacher can achieve as an adventurer, it is astonishing. Though I have read many of the tales before, they still come over as fresh and well worth the re-visit. Over and above the standard walk records, there are fascinating historical tales, such as following the Chilkoot pass into the Klondike in the footsteps and wagon tracks of the prospectors of the 1890's. We also have accounts of some of our home grown mountain characters, such as the story of the serial peak bagger and Lakeland tarn dipper, Colin Dodgson. And in spite of all those Munros at an early age, Richard retains a deep love for the Scottish Highlands, especially the North West as evidenced in story and photograph throughout the book.

David Matthews

Classic Treks: The Most Spectacular Walks in the World, Editor Bill Birkett.

**David & Charles, 2000
£19.99**

This is an inspirational book in a thoroughly modern format, packed with accessible information and terrific pictures so move that screen saver and click on:

Calling www.Trekkers.com (prehensive)- here comes your Techno-briefing as filed @ page 188 Overview 30 treks selected from (literally) the best in the world. **Start @** John Muir Trail, N America. **Finish @** The Thorsborne trail, Australia

Difficulty and altitude: From the

pastoral, populated English 'Coast to Coast' walk to 17,000 ft in the Himalaya; from the heat of Arizona to the icy wastes of Patagonia.

Access: Mostly from Airports; then you need trains and buses before getting those legs and lungs to work. Essential data on this (the mechanised bits) and permits/visas supplied, but don't expect spoon feeding.

Local Information Maps and guidebooks: what you need; work out where to get them. Background reading to enhance the anticipation and/or re-live the memories.

Accommodation & Supplies: especially useful as normal services are definitely not available on many of these Treks-foreknowledge strongly advised to guard against epic hunger march.

Currency and Language: I'd rather not know, being deficient in both.

Photography: useful in assisting your obituary writer if things go wrong.

Area information: gives excellent information to assist you in avoiding Park Rangers and the like, who want to confine you to safe areas for an exorbitant fee. www.addresses also given (see title of this briefing).

Timing and Seasonality: best months to visit-best to pay attention to this to prevent death by dehydration, frostbite or avalanche. Alternatively, some seriously anti-social hard men could welcome this information as a guide to getting things out of phase, thus ensuring they have the basis for a truly 'British' adventure. Climate-seasonal variations increase south and north of the equator and according to height (does this explain why it's always winter and raining on Snowdon, whilst sunny and dry at Tremadoc?).

Health and Safety: Vaccinations-us against them or them against us?

General Health Risks: see above.

Special considerations: useful techniques not normally needed in Beddgelert to deal with the likes of bears, nasty insects and exotic pathogens.

Politics and religion: be aware (unlike the general tenor of this review).

Crime risks: see above.

Food and Drink: wise advice to avoid debilitating illness ruining your Trek highlights.

Scenic: absolutely outstanding, and so are the photographs in this book. Can your credit card take the strain; does the long arm of Barclays reach into the Drakensberg; the lure of these adventures is strong.

Wildlife and Flora: most of what the world has to offer.

Temperature and precipitation: matrix of expectations. Beyond the Techno., what a great book! If ever there was a volume

to stimulate the Mountain Wanderer's lust for adventure, this is it.

Once you have cut through the inevitable planning that Treks of this magnitude (up to 3 weeks and 100 miles + in tough country) demand and can strike out on foot into the enticing distance: awe inspiring!

Thanks, Bill, for pulling together such an inspiring collection of adventures and contributors. This book could become the 8000m challenge of the trekking world.

David Matthews

**The High Summits of Wales,
Graham Uney.
Logaston Press, 1999
£14.95**

Yet another ascension acronym for achievers: a Hewitt is a Hill in England, Wales or Ireland above 2000ft (further defined as having a 100ft height separation). Current wisdom is that there are 137 of these hills in Wales. This is a quality paperback of 322 pages, with 80 b & w and 30 colour illustrations, accompanied by 20 maps. Some of the older illustrations are worth a look, showing a rural Wales that has been consigned to history by the passage of traffic, both motorised and pedestrian.

There is a natural split in the book. Part 1 is a general guide to the history and ascent of the hills spread from Snowdonia to the Black Mountains. Unusually for a walking guide, reference is made to significant rock exploits. Part 2 is the account of Graham Uney's traverse of all these Hewitts, from Garreg Lwyd to Tal y Fan, in the summer of 1998. I found this quite an interesting and informative book, once I had got over my personal distaste of that awful acronym.

David Matthews

**Great British Ridge Walks, Bill Birkett.
David & Charles, 1999
£22.50**

Lots of terrific colour pictures in the 190 pages of this 9 x 10" hardback. As scrambling could get scary for the novice hillwalker, there are grading systems and disclaimers. The range of 50 routes described would be most people's choice,

from Snowdon by Crib Goch via Blencathra by Sharp Edge to the Flacaill Ridges of Caimgorm. There is a good mixture of distance and difficulty, ranging from the populated accessible such as the Langdale Pikes, to the more serious stuff such as the traverse of the great ridge of Beinn Eighe.

In summary, a wide ranging choice of 50 fine scrambling routes in Britain supported by excellent colour photographs — worthwhile if somewhat expensive.

David Matthews

**MONT-BLANC Ski de Randonnee,
Eric Delapemere & Franck Gentilini
Vamos. e ieux Servoz - 74310
SERVOZ - FRANCE. 150 francs.
(Available from Snells, Chamonix etc.)**

Being in the fortunate position of spending the ski-season in Chamonix, I couldn't understand why nobody had got round to producing a guide to the many day ski-tours of the area. Walk in to Snells for the last time until next year, and there it was, hot from the press. And for those ski-tourers whose French, like mine, is not quite good enough to guarantee that they'll come down in the right valley, have no fear: this is by way of an advance warning, as an English version is due to appear before next season.

As one would expect, the guide will be of most use to skiers based in Chamonix, as over 60 of the 82 routes are listed under the areas most easily accessed from there: Les Contamines/St Gervais, Chamonix/Mont-Blanc, Argentiere/Le Tour and the Aiguilles Rouges, with the remaining routes centred on the Swiss (Valais) and Italian (Val d'Aosta) sides of the massif. Excellent quality photo-diagrams (including many aerial shots) illustrate the routes, with sketch-maps conspicuous by their absence. As the guide is meant to be used in conjunction with the relevant IGN map (conveniently listed with each description), this seems fair enough, though an overall allocation map would be useful.

A twin grading system uses the normal Alpine F to TD+ system for each route, plus a ski grading from SM (Skiur Moyen) slopes up to 25°-30° through BS (Bon Skiur), to 30°-35° TBS (Très Bon Skiur (to 4C)) to EBS (Extremement Bon Skiur), 45° upwards ('Domaine du ski extreme'). With

an A suffixed where alpine experience and equipment are required — principally for routes involving glacier skiing or climbing with crampons etc., it's no surprise that the NE Face of the Courtes is given TD+/EBSA, though perhaps the addition of a skull symbol would be more appropriate. At the other end of the scale are a number of half-day routes suitable for those putting skins on for the first time, making this a useful purchase for competent holiday skiers with a some mountain experience wanting to give touring a try.

**POLVERE ROSA - Itinerari Off-pistenel
Massico del Monta Rosa
(Off-piste Skiing in the Monta Rosa
Massif), Marco Rizzi. Idee Verticali
Edizioni, Via Gallezio 11, 17024,
Finale Ligure., Italy (SV)
Tel/fax 019-695997**

Published in a useful bi-lingual format (Italian & English) similar to the well-established French off-piste guides to Chamonix, etc. *Polvere Rosa* describes 64 descents, plus 5 day-tours from the Northern Italian resorts of Champoluc, Gressoney and Alagna. Listed under 7 headings, each route description is accompanied by sketch maps (replacing the photo-diagrams of the French series) with two areas served by Champoluc, four by Gressoney and one by Alagna. Unfortunately this is not immediately apparent from Part Two's area index, but this is easily solved by copying sub-titles and page numbers from the main, opening index). The introduction deals briefly, but adequately, with equipment, avalanche dangers and first-aid, together with a very detailed list of addresses/phone numbers (repeated in even more detail in the various sectors). Apart from a cursory warning against attempting crevasse-rescue without proper equipment and training, a notable omission is a section on the dangers of skiing on glaciers, and a list of necessary maps would be equally useful. Each route has the usual notes on access, exposition, vertical descent, difficulty, and seriousness (steepness, distance from lifts etc.) summed up by a series of symbols at the top of each page. Actual descriptions are short and to the point, closing with notes on character/danger etc, such as 'check up on conditions before crossing the lake', and 'Great fun

through the trees — poudreusel'

In any bilingual guide, minor errors in translation add to its charm, and from the few displayed here, my favourites are: 'a broken bending...can become a terrible experience' and 'the itinerary with the greatest affluence of the Monta Rosa.' The latter conjures up visions of gold-bedecked Milanese in fur-coats and Amani suits gliding past in a snowy *passeggiata*.

But finally, the photos, mostly by publisher Andrea Gallo (familiar to those who've climbed in Finale as climbing activist/shop owner and guide-book writer); they are truly inspirational, successfully capturing both the exhilaration of a run, and the wild beauty of an area that offers such a wide range of uncrowded skiing/boarding, from easily-accessible non-serious routes for off-piste virgins, to the long, complex and difficult routes of Alagna. Despite the fact that the continued closure of the Mont-Blanc tunnel means it's less accessible by road than before, I for one can't wait to get there. Hopefully this guide will be on Cordee's list by next season, otherwise contact the publisher as above.

Al Churcher

**The 13th International Festival of
Mountaineering Literature
November 1999, Bretton Hall**

Is there any other literary event in Britain like this festival? Each year, from all corners of the globe, impressario Terry Gifford summons up interesting writers and speakers and creates an eclectic programme which combines topical interest with significant historical retrospection. For anyone, anywhere, who is serious about reading mountaineering writing, and listening to writers and critics, it is *the* unmissable date of the year.

Over the years, the festival has grown in stature and ambition; it can now truly claim international standing and recognition. This is partly because the quality, range and daring in programming brings bigger audiences each year — as well as luring regulars from Europe and America for the weekend. It is time, perhaps, for some significant international and commercial funding to find its way into the coffers, a change of venue and a widening of the remit.

Appropriately, with a theme of 'Risk' at the centre of the 13th festival, some of the presentations were themselves decidedly risky in both format and content. Notwithstanding the usual problems of fog/ice and delayed arrivals of speakers, Gifford's equanimity, and the timetable remained intact. Indeed, in this year, he elected to introduce a fringe event; try out a live chat session; mount a performance of a one-act play with only one rehearsal and tackle deeply-emotive issues in other presentations. Did I not say the festival had grown in ambition?

The day started with complex moral issues which arise from, and give a context to, our risky sport of mountaineering. Nor was this the only time these issues were aired. David Rose and Ed Douglas read from, and discussed their biography of Alison Hargreaves (cf review, p153). Rose and Douglas dealt at least as competently with these questions on the day as they do in the book, though veils were drawn in both over certain issues. Their account of Hargreaves's professional and domestic life conveyed the poignancy of her plight as mother and, latterly, as a professional mountaineer. The pity was it took Alison's death to resolve that ambivalence of role; the tragedy was that it need never have happened. K2 could have waited, apparently.

Tom Price, a mountaineer all his life, whose book *The Ernest Press* has just brought out to wide delight and critical acclaim: (cf extract p63 and review, p152), then introduced Jeff Connor's biography of John Cunningham. This book, another scorcher from *The Ernest Press*, as much about the fabled *Creagh Dhu* as about Cunningham himself, provides a fascinating insight into the early days of hard Scottish climbing. Cunningham, clearly a difficult character to get to know, was noted for his 'japes' and supreme control in risky situations. Tom Price, a pawky figure with the mien of the ancient mariner, nearly upstaged his subject, giving a bravura performance full of anecdote, humour and gentle erudition, and in front of 300 people. He stole the audience's collective heart.

Jim Curran has always been a festival favourite. Capable of both caustic wit and genial bonhomie in one breath, he can be formidable. In the new format of interview with Gifford, talking about *High Achiever: The Life and Times of Chris Bonington* (cf

review, p154), he was in fine form. Not many of us, for instance, in a moment of response, can tell Ken Wilson in full flight that a spell of National Service would have been good for him and get a roar of applause and laughter as a reward. But the audience knew that Curran is also a major mountaineering writer and listened attentively to his insights, not simply because they knew he is Bonington's friend and biographer, but because they were interested to learn about the process of writing a major biography. Nor did he disappoint them, being frank about his subject's foibles and traits, and prepared to explain the selection of episodes. Full marks, J.C. for carrying off a risky presentation: let there be more of these in future, T.G.

When Paul Pritchard walked haltingly out to read from his Boardman-Tasker winning book *The Totem Pole* (cf review, p151) – effectively the next volume in his own autobiography – the audience was silent in admiration of his courage. This was risky reading in both form and content – and once again about living dangerously, both personally and professionally. Pritchard has matured astonishingly quickly as a writer; he is able to move, inform, amuse and challenge his readership by design; and writes also with the same level of honesty as he climbed: taking extreme risks and facing the consequences squarely. It would surely be fascinating to explore the genesis of his style. But it was writing, he told us, which helped him deal with his accident and its personal and domestic consequences. The appreciative audience, some not without tears in their eyes, applauded.

The first international dimension to the day was supplied by Anne Sauvy and Emile Zopfi. Sauvy, an assured and very experienced writer of short stories, talked of her moving experiences writing differently about the Rescue Services in Chamonix and the risks they take almost daily, recovering fallen climbers. Her stripped and clinical prose, read by Sue Harper and Ken Wilson, describing a dead woman climber being winched into a helicopter, reminded us painfully of Ed Douglas's account of Alison Hargreaves' death. Emile Zopfi, who rather riskily, gave up his regular job to be a writer, read the much admired and already published story, *Cengalo, Cengalo* from his new collection *The Colour of the Black Mountains*. It is a wonderful story, within

whose rhythms, repetitions and experiments with dialogue, is captured all the romanticism and futility of alpine mountaineering.

Stuart Campbell read from the new Scottish Poetry anthology *Things Not Seen*, and Kevin Boorman, for long an audience member, and now published poet, read from his new collection *Inside the New Map* (cf *Cuillin Bivvy*, p68). These regular explorations in another genre always make the festival sing.

Dave Gregory, chair of The Boardman-Tasker Judges then gave a forthright assessment of the books the judges had read. This was a true pugilist's speech, delivered by one of the sport's master storytellers and word-smiths. It also raised a few hackles – which was all good risky stuff in public, and a good preparation for the *High Writing Competition* winner: a play about a Yeti luring a woman climber to the hidden Shangri La of Yeti land. Ian Smith took big risks with this performance after rehearsing it just once; but the three students from Bretton Hall came up trumps.

After a viewing of the fine drawings and washes of the late artist, Bill Wynn, the first fringe event the festival has mounted followed. For the launch of his new *Bâton Wicks* venture, the combination of Shipton's *Nanda Devi* with Tilman's *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* (cf review, p169), Ken Wilson had brought Shipton's son John and the writer of the new Introduction to the volume, Charlie Houston, together to launch the book. A large crowd, drawn more by the chance to hear and see men associated with legends and great books, rather than the free bubbly stuff, were much entertained.

But the day finished with a presentation that held us spellbound. Charlie Houston and Bob Bates, survivors of the 1938 accident on K2 and long-term climbing companions over 50 years, talked without notes, minds still crystal clear, about K2. Charlie reminded us that mountaineering should be fun: when the risks get too much, give it up, as Charlie did in 1953. As Tony Streather joined them for a historic photo, many in the audience were tearful once again and stood, for the first time, to applaud him. A fine end to an incredible day.

Tim Noble

