

**The
Climbers' Club
Journal**

2001

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Edited by
Tim Noble

The Climbers' Club

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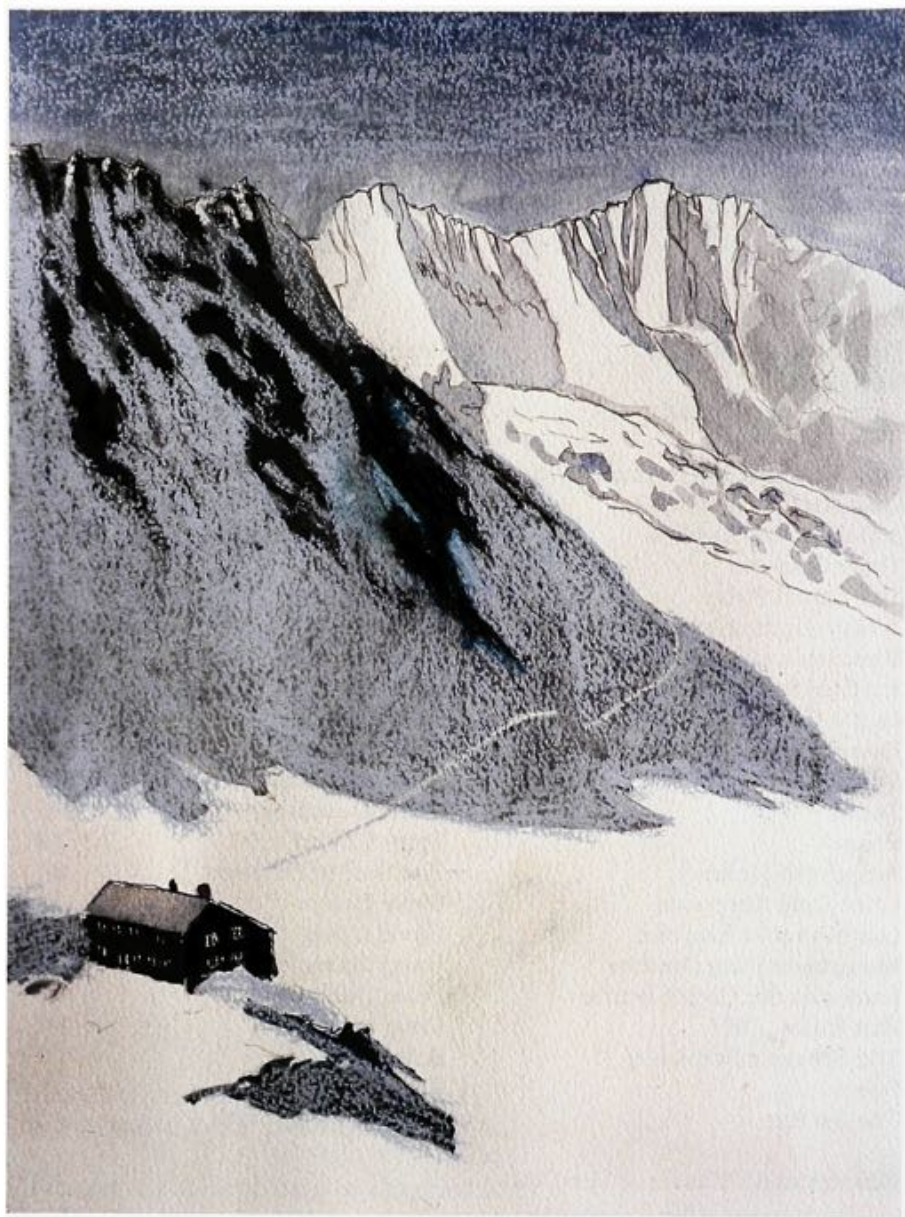
The Climbers' Club Journal

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2001

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*THE BRITANNIA HUT, Tom Price
(oil on canvas)*

Editorial

'The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
no traveler returns, puzzles the will...'

(Hamlet, Act III, Sc.i)

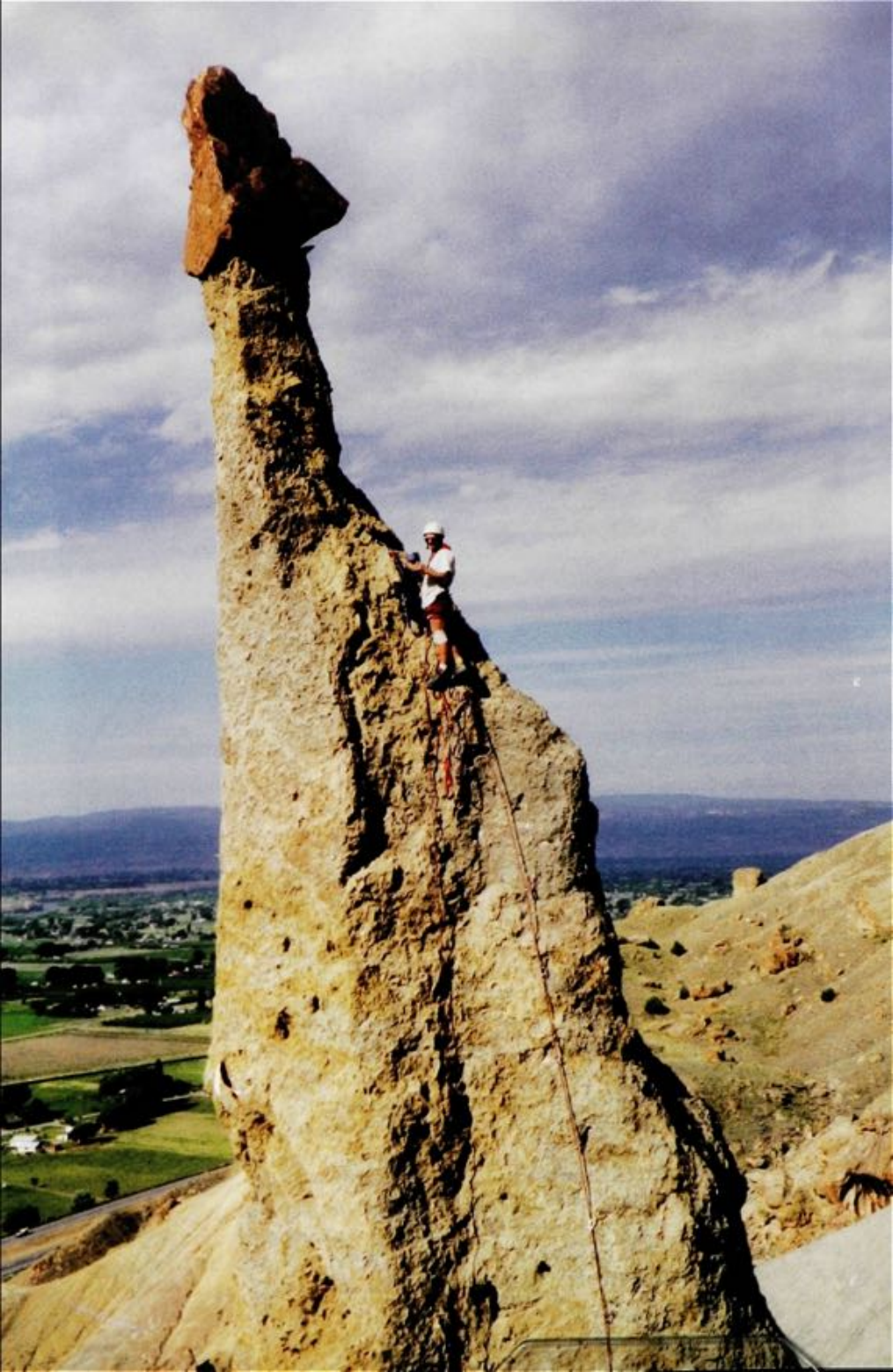
In any written account of a climb, the metaphor of quest or journey is an implicit ordering figure. This metaphor may be deployed to explore the writer's reordered state of mind, as a product of the climb, or of the new rock climbed; either way, new ground is found. But as Brian Wilkinson and Ernie Philips show us in this first *Journal* of the new Millennium, the 'journey' can be recursive: going back to a remembered climb or climbs can be as powerful a means of unlocking imagination and the big currents that drew and draw us to adventure as finding new routes in Greenland (Tom Briggs), or on the dirt towers of Colorado (Paul Ross).

Sometimes, however, we have to wait for the right conditions for the journey, as long as 23 years, in Colin Beechey's case, but only a couple of months and a delay of days for Nick Bullock. For some of us, the journey may take different forms as we age, but the revelatory experience can be just as intense as when we were very young in deed, providing an elixir of profound potency. The evergreen Mike Burt tells of CC members journeying into the still largely undiscovered country of Canadian winter ice; John Sumner discovers some of the best ice he's climbed in a long career; Roger Wilkinson realizes how much will is indeed needed to 'exit the cave by the one and only and now all too obvious way'; Colin Skeath climbing with OAP Angela Soper, feels the pinch in fingers and toes and even 'The Don' it seems, found other ways to explore the depths of being (Jack Jackson).

Two accounts of expeditions long-ago completed also grace these pages. Both give sights into what CC member Phil Bartlett in his book *The Undiscovered Country* (Ernest Press, 1993) nominates as that territory which is 'beyond our normal everyday selves' — territory the more interesting in these accounts for being at the 'bourn' or limit of what was then the norm. Expeditioning in the desert and women and Sherpas climbing in the Himalaya is now a commonplace.

Dave Gregory offers us double the dose of his usual admonitory, gently-stinging schoolmasterly humour; Steve Dean, David Craig and Harry Sales provide further insights into the effects that place, exercise and dreams have upon the journey; and Bob Allen narrates a long but highly-important account of recent Club history. Dave Wynne-Jones's fiction, too, cunningly draws on recent historical revelations about one of our greatest mountain explorers, to show the relationship of symbol to personal and public history.

Hamlet was right, of course: the world beyond death (if it exists) is waiting just out of sight for all of us, inescapably the last great adventure. But as Brian Wilkinson reminds us, until then, 'the journey continues' and so long as the play of memory on climbing experiences and the subsequent 'recollection of emotion in tranquillity' is important to members of the Club, so shall the pages of this *Journal* continue to explore the 'undiscovered country'.



For Want of a Nail

Paul Ross

One October day in 1999, my wife and I were driving down Interstate Highway 70 from Grand Junction to look at property in the nearly-small town of Palisade, Colorado, when we spied some highly unusual towers: known properly as 'The Things of Beauty Towers', the locals prefer to call them 'The Dirt Towers'. One particular tower, close to the road and seemingly not more than 75ft high looked both disturbingly phallic and unstable, but even more disturbingly, I thought it potentially climbable. Eventually, we settled in Palisade and in June 2000, I climbed the tower, naming it *The Sword of Damocles*, after my friend Peter Greenwood's route on Bowfell in Great Langdale. Though it wasn't as long a route as its Lakes' namesake, it had much the same feel of impermanence about it.

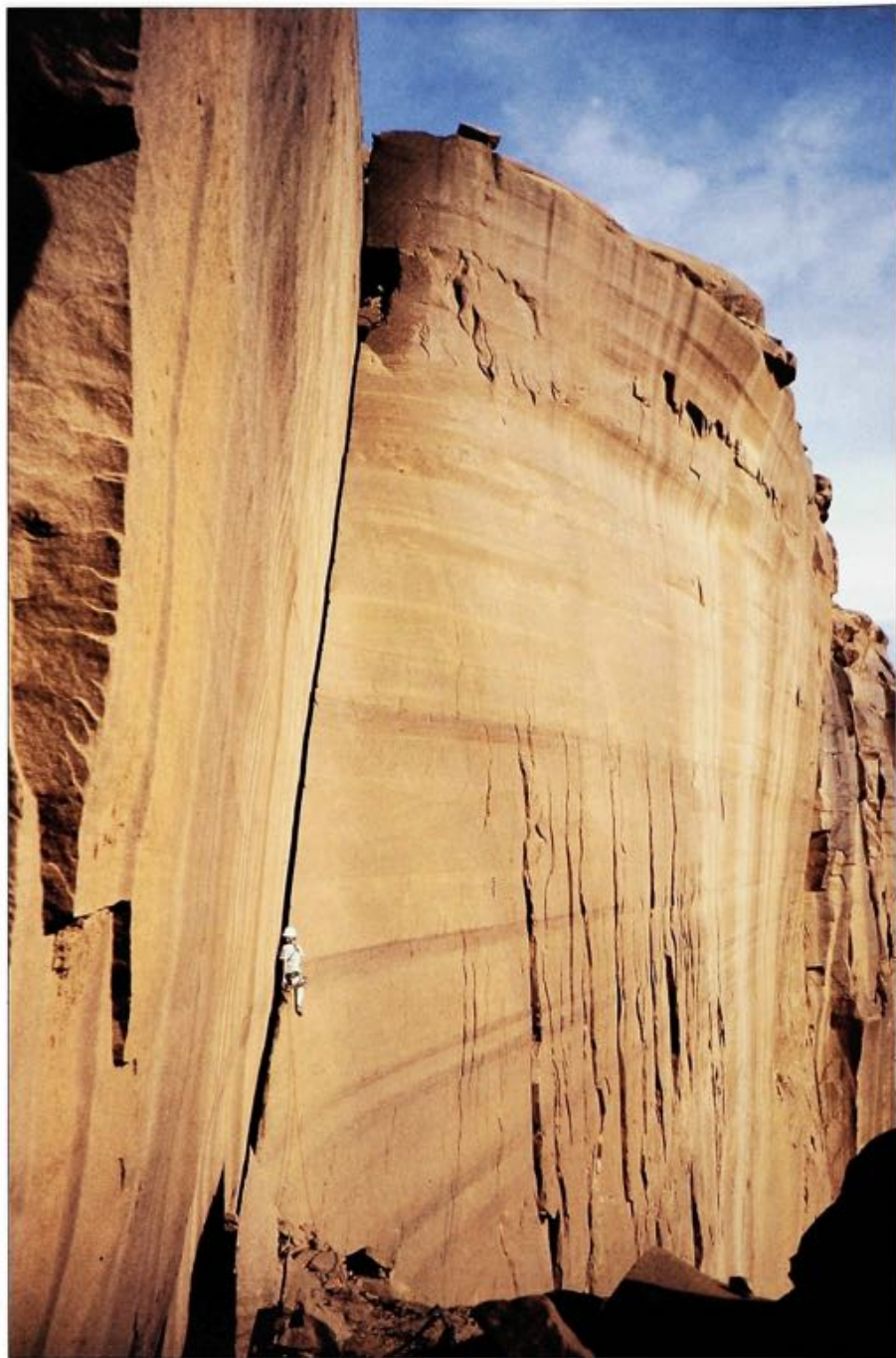
It was a while after I'd climbed this tower, however, that I discovered four other routes had been done hereabouts by a well-known American climber, Pete Takeda. A magazine article of his about The Dirt Towers had been incorporated in his book, *Pete's Wicked Tales*. When I told him about my ascent of the really thin spire of *The Sword*, he expressed surprise, thinking the top was way too small to stand on; I guess he hadn't anticipated the arrival of a mad, expatriate climbing dwarf from Borrowdale, England.

The problem with these dirt towers is obvious: how do you scale a compressed shale shaft and then surmount the overhanging sandstone block? Looking carefully at the serious challenge presented by *The Sword*, and closely examining the density of the shale, I came away with one overriding conclusion: it was very loose. So how to overcome this difficulty? I drew on experience and took a short walk around my local hardware store. There I discovered several large nails — from 8 to 12 inches long and 3/8 inch thick. I bought one of the largest, walked back to the spire and hammered it directly into the shale, leaving a couple of inches sticking out for a tie-off. I'd found the solution; all that was needed now was a little insanity mixed with energy and the summit photo would be in the bag.

Pete's climbs were on quite 'fat', substantial towers; the 'skinny' ones, all still unclimbed, were more photogenic. In his book, Pete had mentioned a few of these projects: one of them, 'The Totem' a 90ft column, we climbed and renamed *Mad Dogs and Englishmen Tower*. Another, *The Bug Eye*, he reckoned to be sci-fi horror and irresistible challenge: we renamed it *Bug-Eyed Monster Tower* after a memorable ascent.

So, the winter days ahead were taken care of: all I had to do now was step down the road from my house to find a host of towers just waiting to be

Opposite: 'Don't umesce with me!' Paul Ross, **his** helmet secure, nears the summit of *The Sword Of Damocles* on the first ascent. Photo: Maria Ross.



Jeff Pheasant deeply engaged with the 180ft top pitch of The Road Not Taken: a '520 ft VS with a 15ft 5c crux at the top'. Photo: Paul Ross



Not to fright, Josephine: Napoleon's Toothpick, first ascent. Photo: Ross



The abseil from Mad Dogs and Englishmen. Photo: Ross collection



Summit of Tom Thumb's Tallywag; Bug-Eyed Monster Tower on left. Photo: Ross collection



Finger-smackingly good: the quintessence of Dirt Tower climbing. Photo: Ross collection

climbed. But to be fair, there was one other slight problem still to be solved: finding partners to accompany me on these very dirty and crazy-looking routes. My wife held the rope on a couple of excursions, and climbers visiting us helped out as well. But sadly, the latter seemed to leave us soon afterwards.

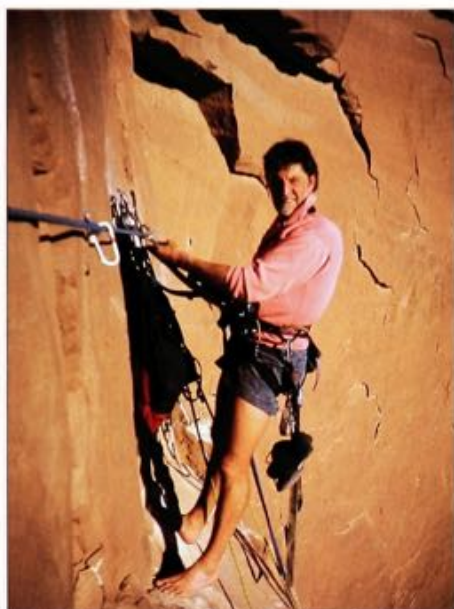
However, the tally has mounted. To date, seven new towers have been climbed — though a particularly nasty-looking one still holds out (I shall have to get *really* bored this coming winter). Of course, we've had a few minor epics on some routes. On the first ascent of *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* for instance, I managed a classic aid error, smashing a forefinger at full swing of my heavy piton hammer. Luckily, I was only 20ft up when I accomplished this stroke of genius; so I sat and nursed the finger, thinking of Bonatti when he did the same to his thumb on his solo ascent of The Dru. I resolved to carry on. The dirt dribbles soon stopped the blood flow and the intricacy of the climbing helped shut out the pain. Sadly, however, my second, who had spent three hours patiently standing in a freezing gully of choss did not follow me. The next day, he took off back to Hawaii.

The skinniest spire I've found, *Tom Thumb's Tallywag*, gave me some of the scariest climbing so far. The pinnacle is only some 15ft high, but to reach it, we first had to climb a 70ft vertical shale arête. This succumbed to the now well-practised nailing technique without any untoward incident. Just before the summit, I placed a nail, clipped in and then reached to the sandstone block. I placed a bolt for the descent, but worried about the security of this thin summit (it measured no more than 2ft by 1ft), I didn't clip the bolt before balancing carefully up. Standing on the summit for the obligatory photo, I had what I thought was a dizzy spell — brought on by fear, exhaustion and old age, perhaps — until I realized with a thrill of horror that the entire pinnacle, from its base upwards, had started to rock to and fro. I was still clipped into the spire at mid-height; had it cut loose, I was clearly bound for a big ride. I took the descent very carefully (to say the least) and had a good look around on the way down. The whole pinnacle was balanced on a base of compressed shale no wider than the summit block; so I mentioned in the route description that it's unwise to clip into any part of the spire in case it decides to collapse.

The attraction of these towers is obvious, but there's so much more to climb. I've had great adventures in the beautiful deserts of South West Utah, in and around the Moab area, which boasts high quality sandstone spires, great cracks and only eight inches of rain a year. In 2001 we had visits from veteran CC members, Chris Bonington, Colin Downer and Richard McHardy: each returned with at least one new route and a sun tan. All I miss is the annual Moroccan trip with the lads.



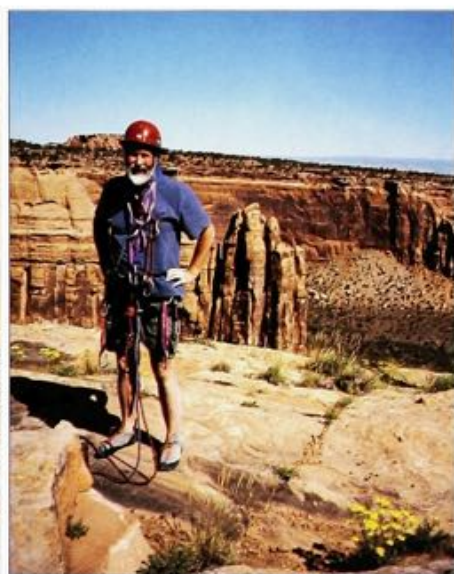
Paul Ross leading the first ascent of Keswick Lads' Day Out, Tombstone Butte, Moab. Photo: Colin Downer



'Kick those shoes off, do not fear.' Colin Downer at the first belay of KLs'DO, Moab. Photo: Paul Ross



'Age shall not weary them': Richard McHardy & Paul Ross, Haggis Spire, Indian Creek. Photo: Ross collection



Knight on a bare mountain: C.B. on Independence Monument Tower, Colorado. Photo: Paul Ross



The Iron Lung

Tom Briggs

Southern Greenland feels like the outer reaches of the civilised world: vast fjords, full of icebergs, stretch miles inland, dominated for their length by endless granite spires and walls. Peppered along this coastline are a few Inuit villages, managing to survive 10 months of frozen sea and isolation as they hang on to some semblance of an ancient way of life of hunting and fishing. But even with the presence of these indigenous people — and a few Danes, either working for the government or involved in tourism — arriving on ‘the world’s largest island’ feels as if you’ve never really been anywhere remote until now.

Our helicopter landed in Nanortalik on July 8th. Over the previous two days, we’d flown from London to Copenhagen and then on to Narsarsuaq. By Greenland’s standards, Nanortalik is a large fishing town with a harbour, freight depot, school, two supermarkets and a hundred or so multi-coloured houses housing a population of around 1,300. In recent years, a growing number of climbing expeditions have used the town as a springboard for their explorations into the surrounding fjords.

We were met by Niels, a Danish agent for Greenland Tourism who assists with the smooth running of these expeditions. Niels, greying and bespectacled, is in his early 60s; he has the posture of a highly respected man. His turtleneck sweater with the marketing slogan ‘Greenland – what a wonderful world’ printed on the folded neck, demonstrates his considerable business acumen. Prior to our arrival, he had ensured that our freight arrived safely, notified the local supermarket that we would be in town to buy food for three weeks and was currently negotiating us a deal on a boat which would take us around the coastline and up Torssukatak fjord to our objective. We were his number one priority that week and nothing was too much trouble. As Grimer put it: “He’s the kind of man who promises little, then always delivers more.”

But there was one thing that Niels couldn’t arrange at the drop of a hat: the removal of millions of tons of ice from Nanortalik harbour. We were stranded for the time being in our cosy little cottage, playing amongst other games that we’d made up to pass the time, ‘the waiting game’. There were six of us in total: myself, Matt, Grimer, Ian, Airlie and Lucy. It was Matt’s expedition — he having been to the area twice before. The rest of us had come together on the strength of two photos taken the previous year. These showed a distinctive square-cut, vertical wall with a flat top, which Matt

Opposite: *The huge wall of The Baroness above Torssukatak Fjord. ‘The Iron Lung’ follows a line trending left up the wall from the tiny snow patch at the top of the ‘introductory slabs’. Photo: Tom Briggs*



The view across a berg-sprinkled Torssukatak Fjord to The Baroness on the left and The Baron, the highest peak, on the right. Photo: Tom Briggs

had estimated, was between 1,900 and 2,500ft high. It was unclimbed and had been dubbed 'The Baroness'.

It took us a couple of days to get organised in Nanortalik, but in this time, the ice still didn't move. Our well-made plans looked fragile before we'd even left the UK, as our tickets for the flight from Copenhagen to Greenland and onward connections never arrived. We were now reluctantly considering alternatives to The Baroness in more accessible fjords — principally Tasermiut Fjord and the famous granite towers of Ulamertorsuaq and the huge dome of Ketil. These venues, although not 'worked-out' as such, had been visited by many expeditions and featured in Audrey Salkeld's essential book, *World Mountaineering*. But not wanting to repeat routes, or get involved in aid climbing and above all, wanting to climb The Baroness, we decided we'd give it four days.

At 8.30am, Niels knocked on the cottage door. I sat up and fumbled for my glasses. Looking out to sea I knew we were on our way for, amazingly, the ice had broken up over night and disappeared. Niels had also found us a fisherman who would take us to Torssukatak fjord and The Baroness. At the pier, we inspected the boat; Grimer, being the only non-swimmer, wasn't convinced. Trying to judge by eye whether or not an 18ft open-topped fibreglass fishing boat can carry six climbers, six expedition barrels, 12 rucksacks and 15 cardboard boxes of food is best left to the skipper. We all just made it on board.

Our route out to sea was anything but a straight line: the skipper had to manoeuvre around larger icebergs and occasionally ease smaller ones out of the way with the bow of the boat. We were impressed at how he managed to judge where we could squeeze through. The sound of scraping ice and creaking fibreglass was disconcerting, but soon, we were in the

open ocean and cruising south around the coast. The further we travelled, the more impressive the coastline scenery became: rock dominated the inland skyline, cliffs in the distance viewed through binoculars looked massive.

At the mouth of Torssukatak fjord, we began to get a better sense of scale. As our tiny boat chugged along down the middle of the fjord, carefully navigating around cathedral-sized icebergs, the six of us couldn't decide in which direction to look. Side valleys broke off from the main fjord and we'd catch a glimpse of some immense face as we passed by. Our attention was drawn to a prominent diamond-shaped peak on the south side of the fjord. 'The Baron' is the highest unclimbed objective in the area, the front face of which is a perfect shield of orange granite around 2,500ft from bottom to top, just asking to be climbed. But where was The Baroness? As we approached the shoreline, our cliff, which faced west across the fjord, began to come into view. The steepness of the face was immediately obvious, viewed in profile and as we got closer, we recognised the giant sweep of granite, grey and orange, unashamedly lacking in major features. We took turns with the binoculars, excited by the imposing nature and striking beauty of the wall: it was perfect, but we had no idea whether or not we were going to be able to climb it.

We set up base camp in an idyllic, albeit tussocky, area directly in view of The Baroness, with a nearby stream and well-positioned viewing boulder where we would spend hours staring through binoculars, trying to piece together lines and speculating as to whether a certain feature was this size or that. The weather was clear, cold and settled and we made hay on day one, carrying rucksacks full of fixed rope to the base of the cliff. We estimated that the 'easy introductory slabs' were about 170ft to the bottom of the main face. Three pitches of E1/E2 and I scrambled onto the grassy terrace which marked the end of anything remotely trivial. I immediately had a sense that no one had been here before us and soon Matt arrived, declaring: "Well it's obviously not been climbed" We picked our way along the terrace, trying to get a decent view of the wall, trying to recognise features that we had spotted from camp and trying to work out how big it really was. The left side of the face was gently overhanging all the way, features failed to link up and it was obviously territory best left for those with portaledge and that strange desire to aid climb. Further right, the wall was steep but not quite vertical in its lower half, with an obvious cracked tower a few pitches up to go for.

Airlie and Lucy joined us on the terrace and decided to go to work on a line right again. As they disappeared around the corner, I led off on our first pitch and was quickly involved in steep climbing. At about 100ft, a short strenuous groove ran out and I was forced onto the open face, making technical and committing moves on small, fragile flakes. Fifteen feet from my last runner, 5c ground was becoming 6a ground and I was still 15ft short of the base of a flared crack. I couldn't believe it: not even a pitch off



Spot those lines: a close up of The Baroness wall. Photo: Tom Briggs



Tom Briggs at grips with pitch 4 of The Iron Lung. Photo: Matt Dickinson



Dickinson jumaring up Faulty Tower on the 'big push'. Photo: Tom Briggs



Needs and wants satisfied; Briggs on top. Photo: Matt Dickinson

the deck and we were already failing. I retreated to the top of the groove and hung on the gear, pumped and feeling completely drained. Matt shouted did I want the pegs. I didn't know how to place a peg; I didn't want to place a peg; I just wanted to get down, so I lowered down the groove, took a hanging belay and brought Matt up. He took a quick look, confirmed that I wasn't being a wimp and got the tat out. Back on the terrace, we waited for Airlie and Lucy who had made good progress, having fixed two rope lengths to a ledge, with a line of cracks scoped out above. Matt and I discussed our options and decided to return the following day, jug up the girls' ropes and try and traverse in to the wide crack feature higher up, with the view that we would get a realistic idea of whether the route would go or not.

That evening, we waited for the other pair, Ian and Grimer, to return. We'd seen them that afternoon, half way up a cliff opposite the Baroness. So the pattern of the trip evolved: long days out with two portions of supper left in the pan before bedtime.

We felt like cheats jugging up the girls' ropes, but as we hadn't got anywhere yet, it was justified as a means of assessing the viability of our line. The traverse pitch was pokey, with Matt backing off and me going for it. This time the runout was only 20ft and it got me into the base of the big crack. After some pleasant jamming, the crack soon became a chimney and it was a depressing sight to look up at over a rope length of off width above. Two moves into the off width and I had placed our only number 6 Friend, which was tipping out on the maximum range of expansion. Again, I had the overwhelming feeling of not wanting to be here, having not really got anywhere. Trying to arm bar up a slightly overhanging off-width with no gear, on a massive cliff in the middle of nowhere was just ridiculous. I lowered off and pendulumed back onto the ledge. It was already mid afternoon, but Matt and I must have spent another four hours on that ledge, not actually doing anything, just talking about it. It was like trying to solve an equation, or one of Grimer's brainteasers, but without all the necessary components to find the correct answer. We decided, finally, that we weren't ready to give up yet, that we'd have a rest day, borrow some more big Friends and come back to try the crack again.

Having already knocked off one route already, Ian and Grimer were soon involved in a 20-hour push up a crack-line that bounded the very edge of The Baroness wall. They were in the mess tent at breakfast the following morning, too tired to go to bed. Grimer had a quizzical look on his face: "I felt like I pushed it out further than I ever have," he said. Their route, which they insisted on calling *Multiple Buttocks*, was a 16-pitch sustained chimney horrowshow, the highlight being the 'Tonya Harding slot'. Two days afterwards, they still looked like they'd just escaped from Alcatraz.

We got back on the route. The off width had become as much a psychological barrier as a real one. We hadn't discussed who was going to try and lead it, but I'd decided that if Matt wouldn't, I would just layback it

without any gear. Matt racked up the three number 6 Cams, removed his helmet and went to work. He was genuinely terrified. The off width became an unprotectable chimney, but he was soon hanging from some flakes halfway up. I followed, collecting the number 6s and led through. Forty feet above the belay I got stuck in a bottleneck; it took everything to move half an inch. My feet thrashed around and Matt shouted up: "Are you okay?" God, I wanted to get out of that chimney. I had spied from the ground what had looked like a crack up the middle of this tower, the chimney that I was climbing being the right side of what was effectively a massive free-standing pinnacle. I arranged gear and pulled out to take a look. Whooohaaa — this was what new routeing should be about: a perfect hand crack led straight up to the top of the tower and soon I was perched comfortably at a belay, grinning and feeling for the first time that we had done some climbing.

Above our 'Faulty Tower' was a white band of dubious rock. Matt held together a short, poorly-protected pitch on eerie hollow rock to reach the base of a rising line of flakes. He fixed a high point for the day and we retreated, abseiling the lower walls on the way down to inspect the line which we had originally imagined would lead directly up to the base of the Faulty Tower. Matt swung on the rope, scraping at shallow seams in the sinuous groove below and muttered: "It's too hard... this won't go... it's got to be E7... there's no gear." I followed and was more optimistic because I could see that there were enough holds. However, a 50ft section would have to be pegged with knife blades. That night, we finalised our game plan. Building on the day's momentum, we'd jug to our high point and go for a summit push, returning later to equip and lead the lower two pitches.

At 5am we forced down fried eggs and strong coffee. I tried to pace the jugging: three ropes up the lower slabs, two to the 'Ladies Ledge', two more to the top of the 'Faulty Tower' and a final one to our high point. By now, it was 8.30am and I was ready to lead off up the diagonal line of flakes. On closer inspection, I realised that one of the flakes was cracked lengthways along the base, about two metres from the top. To climb it was potentially foolhardy, but there was no other real option. It was too early in the morning to contemplate a leap of faith, so I just took it and teetered as gently as possible up the detached flake. I rocked up on to the top of it, being careful not to exert any outward pressure, but the wall above bulged outwards and I was in a strenuous position, forced to move up quickly or have to reverse back into danger. I made a powerful layback move off a pinch, stabbing my foot high onto a smear and standing up to reach the safety of a small ledge and gear.

The rest of the pitch followed a perfect cracked groove to a ledge with good belays. I fixed the rope and hauled our bag as Matt jugged. We had decided to take lightweight bivvy bags and down jackets in case we didn't make it in one push, hauling was an added drain, but I preferred to have some cushion. Seconding felt just as hard as leading on this wall and on the

next pitch, I had to battle to stay with an unrelenting overhanging groove that Matt warned, was 'the living end'.

The sun was now on the wall. It should have been quite enjoyable, but we had expected the climbing to get easier, the line more obvious. Above the ledge, there was a shallow, blank groove with no crack in the back and steep, unfeathered walls in all directions. We were in the left-hand of two parallel 'tramlines' spied from the ground. Our plan had been to make it into these and we'd be home and dry, running out 180ft pitches up perfect hand cracks and corners, all the way to the summit. We could see the hand cracks — only 40ft above, but out of reach. It began to feel like the day was slipping away. Although we had a good idea of where we were on the wall, it was hard to guess how many pitches it was to the top and so far, we had only climbed two new pitches from our previous high point and we were knackered and then there was this groove.

A friend went in about a foot above a big block, which Matt was belayed to. Just standing above it felt precarious: there was no other gear and the only holds in the groove were a few crystal crimps, nubbins and smears. It was 20ft from the belay ledge to a small, but obvious square pedestal. I tried piecing together a sequence rightwards. Matt was silent and I could sense he was thinking it was getting late, that there wasn't any gear, that I couldn't afford to fall off, how we'd put in so much effort and we were going to fail. After nearly an hour of tinkering about at the bottom of the groove, I reversed back to the belay and took my shoes off.

I was in my 'playful mind' — a trick where you don't approach a problem seriously because the problem is too serious to be solved with a rational and responsible mindset. The world becomes the few square feet in front of me and everything else is remote. I'd spent an hour in that groove, trying combinations of holds. But secretly, I'd worked out a sequence which I knew would work and it didn't matter about the consequences of getting it wrong because these things always work out. I was just going to go for it.

I put my shoes back on, chalked and launched into the imagined boulder problem. Fifteen feet up, I rocked up high into an awkward bridging position on smears and reached for the 'jug and gear'; they turned out to be a sloping hold and a wobbly Rock 3. I paused before the committing mantelshelf onto the pedestal and a crack that took gear; 20ft of climbing in 2,000ft, that's all it would have taken to stop us. But we were through — the impasse passed.

We'd now reached the right-hand tramline. The next two pitches followed vertical and overhanging cracks, climbed on acid jams, with the odd strenuous lock on a finger flake. It was extremely physical climbing and I could feel my strength going. One hundred and forty feet was far enough on this kind of steep ground, especially when you'd been assured that: "The next pitch is only E2" and it's just been more E4/5. Actually, the grade was irrelevant: everything was hard and every pitch had its own particular difficulties.

I took a hanging belay in the crack and flaked the rope. We'd only climbed five new pitches, but we'd been going for 12 hours and I was glad to sink into my harness. The evening mist floated in beneath us and crept up the wall. The sun was warm for just a few more moments until it moved behind the crown of jagged granite spires on the opposite side of the fjord, breaking cold shadows onto the orange face of The Baroness.

Matt reached the belay and immediately looked up in anticipation at his pitch: a straight finger crack in the back of a vertical and totally smooth groove, with a section that was choked with grass. As usual, there were no other options — though it was the kind of crack that looked hard, but maybe 'do-able'. So far, the climbing had been desperate when it had looked 'do-able' and Matt was aiding within a few moves of leaving the belay. He leap-frogged the gear and progress was depressingly slow. I had to lock off one rope, holding his weight whilst I tried to pay out the other. I just wanted to get off now.

Then Matt started moving more quickly; free climbing again, he shouted down to me: "The angle has changed, I think there's only going to be one more, easy pitch." At the belay we had our first real conversation in hours. I could see where I was heading and by now, the sun had gone and I desperately wanted to get off the route. I made some feeble joke about coming across an *in-situ* peg and then disappeared out of sight. As I scrambled up short walls and ledges, I could feel the elation bubbling; it was almost a shock when I pulled the rope drag up the final crack and on to safe ground.

I didn't mind sitting there, then, taking in the rope, feeling both exhausted and relieved, because I knew it had been more difficult than anything that I'd ever done before and it felt like a natural progression, what I'd wanted and needed.

Matt arrived as the light faded. We scrambled up onto the summit and stared in all directions at the vastness of Greenland, at the endless granite spires and walls, reaching to the horizon, and the shape of the fjords, blanketed in low cloud, far into the sea. It was a wonderful place to be. Grinning, we shook hands and took the photos.

Reminiscence Therapy

Brian Wilkinson

Everyone knows that most climbing photographs of one's self taken by mates are rarely any good — partly because they're either taken hurriedly or record forgotten and insignificant events that can have no wider public significance. But occasionally, by an accident of light, history or circumstance, one picture can become a striking and resonant image that has immense personal symbolic importance. A shot by Jeff Streeter of me at the start of the hand traverse on *Direct Route*, Dinas Mot is just such a one of these. It was a significant moment in that it was my first VS lead (a big deal to me in 1965) and a turning-point that set me on a road down which I am still travelling. My mother intuitively recognised the photo's deep significance for her son and kept it framed beside her bed. On a recent visit, I picked up her dusty icon and examined it anew.

The grey image shows a shy teenager, an impulsive loner whose raw imagination was spiked by Dylan lyrics and climbing folklore. In black and white, the sky seems dazzlingly empty, irrelevant; the rock is all. I note my serge breeches and torn back pocket holding the canvas-covered 1950 Llanberis guide. I note the hawser-laid nylon rope bowline-tied around the waist and two Stubai steel krabs attached to unseen slings. These details drop like pebbles into the pool of memory, spreading ripples from another world: *Direct Route*, climbed over 35 years ago, and a further 35 years after Colin Kirkus's first ascent between the wars. Looking at the dusty image, I felt compelled to return to that piece of rock, to feel the worn holds again and taste the scented, sepia exposure. I just had to get back.

The omens were good: first, I was particularly unfit — as I was then (indeed, as every nobody was then) — before training came along and reinvented the meaning of success. Secondly, I was due to reunite with old friends at a wild Welsh gathering of the clan. And thirdly, but most importantly, Wales, the birthplace of an absurd and undying obsession, had become a stranger to me; an invisible wedge of time had been driven between my hands and her ryholitic body. It was the new millennium and I needed therapy.

Driving up from Devon in daylight, I got lost on a new roundabout somewhere near Wrexham. Back in the 60s, the A5 was like the groove of a Cresta Run and it was impossible to get off route — that is unless you overshot the Llangollen 'eternity' bend at 3am in the morning at the onset of the big sleep or lost it on the Betsy bends trying to avoid a big sheep.

Approaching the mountains just past Capel, I expected the Horseshoe group to have shrunk with time and relativity, but was surprised to see them big and heavy, like a dark jagged cloud at the end of the road. This

was renewed unfamiliarity, not a homecoming.

The weather was immaculate, and that, too, was odd. I half-expected to repeat the route in the wet — which would have really pushed the limits of my commitment to the idea, especially on the tough start to the final crack. As it was, Graham and I threaded our way to the foot of Dinas Mot dampened by perspiration but not precipitation.

Of course there was another party on the route. In fact there were two and another gearing-up waiting to start. The foot of the crag was strewn with 'sacks, dogs and climbing gear coalesced into personal piles. New arrivals like ourselves were casting around for vacant spots to create our own small areas of ordered chaos. Climbers were either stumbling to and fro beneath the cliff consulting word and rock, or 'playing statues' on the climbs themselves, while across the valley on the Three Cliffs we could see the confetti of other climbers doing the same. On our first venture on *The Direct*, Jeff and I had the Pass to ourselves.

The Direct is the line of the route, straight up the middle of the crag, that magnetises the imagination. This line, the sprinkling of stars and, for those with a sense of history, the pedigree that comes with a Colin Kirkus route, all contributed to the fact that we were queuing like customers outside Harrods before the start of a half-price sale. In the vacuum of waiting I became mesmerised by the ludicrous amount of almost brand new gear the leader ahead of us was carrying for such an old route. In '65 I had three hawser-laid nylon slings and no harness or nuts. With this observation I could have reclined on my bed of smugness had I not, a few moments before, disembowelled my own rucksack and withdrawn a similar arsenal of ammunition.

The first pitch is one grade up from a tedious scramble, a scramble. At the first stance, four or five climbers were hanging from their belays like a bunch of grapes on a Welsh vine. I found my own attachments and Graham and I joined the good-humoured cluster.

It wasn't long before enough colourful little grapes had been harvested by nearby climbs to allow me to start up the long shallow groove pitch which had been the most memorable, all those years ago. Time, it seems, has been kind to the Mot's most endearing characteristic: its leathery skin. Both smooth and rough at the same time, the passage of a hundred thousand hands and feet has not robbed it of its kindly feel but has enhanced it so that now the moves suggest each other effortlessly, one into another, into another, into another.

Placing gear was a distraction, but once restarted the rhythm played on. Up above, a well-trained athlete called down from the hand-traverse that constitutes the crux of the third pitch and which he had overprotected: "This is a piece of piss."

"Of course it is, you prat," I mumbled to myself, foraging for a belay. When G arrived, I struck a pose on the same hand-traverse. I noted the exposure (as did the camera) and scuttled across and up to the ledge be-



'These fragments I'll sure against my ruin': a 'torn back pocket, a nylon bowline and the irrelevant sky': Brian Wilkinson climbing Dinas Mot Direct in 1965. Photo: Jeff Streeter

neath the groove and cracks of the last pitch. Back then I remembered receiving an electric jolt of exhilaration completing those poorly protected moves above all that space, a wonderful counterpoint to the slow rhythm of the long groove below. Now, the same moves succumbed to the mundane leverage of modern protection and old-fashioned experience.

The last pitch begins with a move or two of 5b up the smooth starting groove. I dithered on the frictionless bridging thinking, 'This could be embarrassing...' I didn't remember cheating with combined or even uncombined tactics on the first occasion. I gave it another go but my feet began to slip imperceptibly on self-doubt. I stepped back and smiled to myself. Without protection or an easy option I was being forced to focus. Back up again I forgot the setting, the grade, the history and all the other trappings that come with this route and applied myself.

As if by magic, holds soon arrived and with them, relief. The rest of the pitch was a warm and wonderful waltz of bridging and laybacking and comfortable hand jams. In contrast, belaying at the top was a nervous affair of watching poised rocks, disturbed by the rope, collecting themselves on the brink of imminent flight back down the route.

The climb was, of course, the same but different. The intensity of that first ascent was replaced by a more relaxed enjoyment and an awareness of the environment: an appreciation of the structural integrity of the parts that make up the whole. But the real difference — the profound difference, between then and now, it seemed to me — was between the unknown and the known: you cannot recapture the intoxication of initiation by repetition.

The patient had responded well to treatment and went on to climb went on to climb the sensational *Gollum* on the Eastern Wing, with its tricky and serious bulge low down and its wild and wonderful overhang above. The next day, after early rain, we climbed the delectable and unreadable wall climb of *Bochlwyd Eliminate* in Ogwen. So, the journey continues; the links are re-established.

Opposite: 'No initiation by repetition — the journey continues': Brian Wilkinson on Dinas Mot Direct in 2000. Photo: Wilkinson collection



It's All My Fault?

Ernie Philips

I did my first climb well over 60 years ago. It was *Queen's Parlour Chimney* at the Black Rocks, followed by *Long Climb* at Brassington. Shortly after this I found my way regularly to the Ogwen Valley where I stayed at Ogwen Cottage, which at that time was a guesthouse kept by Mrs Jones. This involved a train to Bethesda and walking the rest of the way up the A5. By a stroke of good luck I met my lifelong friend Arnold Carsten there. Arnold was the President of the Liverpool University M.C. and was writing the guidebook to Helsby. Together we knocked off virtually all the climbs in North Wales over a period of several years, with ventures to Cwm Silyn and Cader, Craig yr Isfa and Black Ladders, little known places in those days.

About the middle of the 1940s, we both became members of the CC and a really fantastic opportunity followed. At this time, Menlove Edwards was writing the first guidebook to the Llanberis Cliffs. He lived in Liverpool then and he and Arnold climbed together now and again, the result of this being that he gave Arnold a typewritten draft copy of the guide before it appeared in print in our *Journal*. As a result we were able to go round to the Pass at every opportunity, knocking off all these new routes one by one — presumably quite a few of them could have been second ascents. Of course, the other habitues of Helyg never knew the location of these routes with strange names which were appearing in the hut logbook. In the meantime, we had made a number of visits to the Lakes, regaling ourselves on all the VSs up there: we didn't have time for the run of the mill stuff.

Standards increased and the odd new route appeared here and there. Arnold took himself off to the New World to work, so that I lost touch with him for a long time. However, the climbing went on and new routes came; *Spectre* fell and things began to get serious. It should be remembered that up till then, there was effectively no protection for the leader. I recall leading out 150ft of rope on *Devil's Buttress* with no runners. Crippling or death falls were common and on any route the leader had to be able to reverse a pitch back to the belay. Inserted chockstones had been used as long as people climbed, but the effect was probably psychological, as I never heard of one doing any good if put to the test. On my part, I have always fostered a great sense of self preservation and being aware of the Munich group of climbers on such places as the Kaisergeberge, I made my way to a local blacksmith and persuaded him to forge up a dozen pitons, horizontal and vertical, six of each. I cleaned and polished one and then etched it to make sure it was up to specification which, in fact, it was.

Now Menlove had left two obvious but totally daunting routes to challenge future generations, to wit: *Ivy Sepulchre* and *Cenotaph Corner* — of which the former looked 'possible', but the latter didn't. Well, the *Sepulchre*

'went', with a peg for protection at the crux. I remember the day well as it was hot and when I topped out, the front of my shirt contained most of the remains of an old raven's nest. The route had lived up to the name which Edwards had given to it and I suppose it represented something of a step forward.

The next item was *Cenotaph Corner*, but this route gave the impression of being of a different order of magnitude and called for a different approach, so although it was not the custom in those days, and being single pitch anyway, I abseiled down it for a close look. I also took some photographs of it. The conclusion was that it would probably need three pitons for aid at the crux. By now the Mandarins of Power in the CC were muttering, and words like 'ironmongers' and 'steeplejacks' were being bandied about, although, of course, it wasn't their brains which were at risk of being spread over the boulders at the foot of the Cromlech.

It didn't need any reflection to realise that an ascent would be a Pyrrhic Victory, but others were not so constrained. Some hard men from further north, referred to as the Manchester Sherpas and rejoicing in the name *Valkyrie Club* were known to me very well. They soon became aware that pitons were to be had and I was charged with obtaining 100, to be distributed in 10 lots of 10. My recollection is that they cost 10 pence each in old money, so that came to half a quid per set and I suspect that I am still owed for some of them. Of course, as I said, they were a hard lot and beer and fags always had priority.

So, in the fullness of time Joe Brown decided that the plum was ripe for picking and I had a ringside seat when the attempt was scheduled. The rest has been documented elsewhere and as is well-known the descent of JB's hammer onto Wilf White's head, who was after all belaying Joe, terminated matters for the day. It was, in fact, a considerable period before the climb was completed, but in the meantime the planting of an iron man must have saved a lot of anguish. A serious problem then was that hardly anyone had karabiners, unless they were lucky enough to have been to the Alps, but the M.O.D. took pity and released onto the market a vast supply of ex-W.D. items. Few people were aware, fortunately, that some of them could fail at two or three hundred kilos, although I must say that I never heard of anyone being hurt as a result of one failing.

Up to this time climbing on limestone was regarded as being totally de trop: holds that were safe one day could dissolve in rainwater and fail a bit later on. Because of the availability of good protection, many classic climbs all over the country became less than suicidal and there really was a golden age of development. The full flowering of the piton was quite short, but was accompanied by the appearance of etriers, golos, expansion bolts and such-like regalia; cavers eschewed ladders in favour of single rope technique for deep shafts and hospitals heaved a sigh of relief. Then, almost overnight, things changed again as some genius conjured up the idea of the nut (cf: CCJ 1997 p 93, 'The Scottie', Ken Latham). Engineering stores up and down

the country were raided for suitable material, powerful machine tools were pressed into service drilling out threads and various textiles from nylon bootlaces upwards were threaded through them. Shortly afterwards, the commercials moved in and bits of metal which looked as if they had been subjected to some form of medieval foot torture appeared on the market. Later on, strange devices similar to over-engineered rat traps came to replace their wooden wedge predecessors, at great expense, and nowadays one needs about a £1,000 worth of hardware to make the first move off the ground, where first ascents were made many decades ago with no more than a 100ft of pre-nylon rope.

So, what it all boils down to is that it's all my fault.

Or is it?

When I was a great deal younger, and no doubt a good deal stronger, I had the occasional outing with my old friend Alf Bridge. Now Alf was what Fats Waller (not Ivan) would have described as 'a big butter and egg man' and a weekend with him on Bleaklow required the following few days to involve no more than contemplation and pure thought, while one recovered. In his youth, Alf climbed with Colin Kirkus and Maurice Linnell, and their mode of transport was a motorcycle and sidecar, which Kirkus drove. When it failed, which apparently was a frequent occurrence, Linnell swarmed up the nearest telegraph pole while Kirkus carried out the necessary repair. Maurice had the habit of smoking cigarettes through a long cigarette holder, and when the last dregs of the butt-end were disappearing in smoke he used the holder as a blowpipe to project the glowing ember into the top of Colin's Wellington boot, with some degree of success it seems.

As may well be imagined, this caused considerable friction between the parties and Alf's task was that of peacemaker. According to Alf, Colin never moved off the ground without a few six inch nails in his anorak pocket, which Alf confiscated on the spot and bent in the middle, thus making them useless. Bending these nails was no big deal, as I could do it myself, but straightening them again was a different matter, and Alf was the only one of the trio who could do it, thus guaranteeing his ability to harmonise the situation. So what you may ask? Well surely it raises the interesting question as to why Kirkus should want to have these bits of hardware with him on his climbs? Probably we will never know, but maybe, just maybe, it's not entirely my fault after all.

Just The Best VS In The World

Roger Wilkinson

As you drive across the flat sea of the Wimmera, Mount Arapiles rises out of it like a huge upturned boat, towing the little dinghy of Mitre Rock behind it. As you get nearer, if you are lucky enough to be making your first approach in the morning, the sun picks out the bold features of this magnificent crag in brilliant detail. Unlike many British crags which seem to shrink as you get nearer to them, Arapiles does the reverse: huge walls, slabs, ribs and gullies appear for the delectation of the climber's eye. Perhaps most striking is The Bluffs, where a pinnacled spur pushes out above the climbers' tents dwarfed below. Less obvious from a distance is The Pharos, which Classical scholars will recognise as The Lighthouse.

The Pharos is a huge fairly flat-topped pinnacle about 80m high and about 40m square at its base. Its front face is seamed with grooves and gullies, some of which go at remarkably easy grades (about Severe), while this is also home to one of the great Aussie hard routes, *Punks in the Gym*. The back wall, which is nice and shady for hot weather climbing, sports a lower 25m or so which leans well the hard side of vertical and, naturally, is home to some modern desperates. It's not the sort of place where you'd expect to find a route suitable for a couple of modest climbers looking forward to getting their old age pensions in a year or two. But you'd be wrong, for there also lies the most memorable route so far of my long and undistinguished climbing career. *Lamplighter* is a Grade 14, which in this case means solid VS 4c.

The first pitch is quite innocuous, starting up a series of little right-leaning overhung ramps starting from the left hand side of the impending wall. Just when you're wondering where it goes next, you find a bottomless chimney above you leading back though the roof and on to a kind of blob of rock with a commodious ledge well-furnished with belays. As you start the second pitch, I realise I should have warned you to scramble up the rocks near the start, to suss out the route by matching up the photo in the guide book with the crag. Oh well, too late now. The theme of the first pitch continues, but the ramps are now steeper, narrower; the holds smaller and the exposure is, well... Getting off the belay ledge is tricky, but is protected by a peg — rather unnecessary in this age of cams, but clip it anyway. The ramps are now unrecognisable as such: they're actually steep walls.

The third ramp is really a kind of groove; you're climbing on strange chicken-heads now and this ramp seems to be overhanging, stretching the definition of the word. You're on a vertical wall with a steeper one that you can't see below, climbing diagonally away from the stance. Just check you've got those prusiks. A lay-off move lands you on a little pulpit where the exposure makes you quiver. Still, room to take a breather and stock. Above

you lurks a repellent wide crack-cum-narrow chimney, which if you'd taken my advice and looked at the picture in the guidebook before you started, you'd know wasn't the way. Well that's a relief — until you realise nothing else looks remotely feasible.

The exposure is now mind-numbing; have you really got to teeter off round the blunt arête to the right to something you can't see, above that aching void? You sure have! It's the psychological crux, and when you've done it you find yourself on a small sloping ledge just-and-so in balance at the bottom of a very in-your-face V-groove. Looking behind and down doesn't seem a good idea. A little prayer "let there be a good runner" is fortunately answered in the affirmative and, then, while you're still gibbering from the head crux, here's the technical crux, up that steep groove with one high, polished, inadequate toe-hold and handholds no better than they ought to be. Then a bit of easy bridging leads to the comfort of a large, enclosed stance. You had begun to wonder whether there would be enough rope, such a big pitch does it seem. In fact there are 20m of slack to take in.

This great route hasn't finished with you yet, though. The third and last pitch is better split. Just climb easily up a pillar into a large cave, from which there is apparently no escape. It's a strange, leaning sort of cave, consisting of two walls inclined in the same direction but at different angles, and almost meeting high up to the right. No, it's premature to start looking for the rap chains: you just have to exit the cave by the one and only and now all too obvious way. You must climb the slabby wall of the cave right up to the 'narrows', then traverse out to the exit crack. First, up into the top back corner of the cave where a crack takes a medium cam, then inch out under the roof where a BIG cam (I did tell you to bring one, didn't I?) gives you the nerve to keep going, like a moth heading for daylight. You inch out on sloping footholds. You don't really need handholds, which is just as well as there aren't any. The most useful part of your anatomy is your back as the cleft narrows. O.G. Jones would have been proud of you. This is the sort of thing you really hate, but in all honesty, it isn't too bad. But you can only say that once you're up on top and preparing for the 50m free abseil down the south face of the Pharos, where, as you descend spinning gently, you can inspect some of the routes REAL climbers do.

Landscape Without Men

G.J.Sutton

Geoff Sutton, who died in 2000 was one of the most respected of translators of climbing literature. He was also a fine writer. This article, published in 'Limbo' (Vancouver, 1964), was written for a non-climbing readership. It describes a trip in 1952, when Geoff was 22. (Editor)

I remember as a small boy I used to imagine expeditions, gentlemen in immaculate white duck trousers and pith helmets pushing aside the bamboo stems with the butts of their express rifles (why 'express' I wondered, and still do: did the bullets go particularly fast?) and at noon sitting on ammunition boxes, lunching off cucumber sandwiches and champagne brought to them by grinning bearers. Or one sat in a sled drawn by a team of mettlesome huskies, the runners hissing over the crisp snow, and every so often pushed back the goggles with one fur-gloved hand and startled the penguins by crying "mush".

It never seems to work out like that at all nowadays.

In the first place someone has to pay for it. Now that there is no more buried treasure apart from what has to be mined, there are only two sorts of expeditions, the serio-scientific and the sporting, or playboy. The former do not have too much difficulty raising money as they are usually initiated and back by institutions or individuals heavily disguised as institutions, but the trouble with them is that they are haunted by the spectre of work. This kind of expedition, the only one now worthy of the name, is best left to the professional scientist in pursuit, at least ostensibly, of his job. The sporting expedition is really just a glorified holiday and is only given the four-syllable label in order to dignify its members in their own or other people's eyes. It may often be politic to deceive others with labels if one can, but it is better not to deceive oneself and I prefer to call a holiday a holiday.

However, if you aren't rich and you have the reasonable ambition to travel without working, you must think where you want to go and tie a label on yourself such as 'The British West-Wonga-Wongaland Expedition 1965'. The second step is to get a patron to put on your headed writing paper, and these are usually not hard to find among the ranks of those who have become famous through the same process.

Then you start writing round. You arrange a publisher for the book you are going to write when you get home and get a three-figure advance. You write to several committees and scientific bodies offering to collect things like Liverworts at about 10,000ft if they will give you a lot of money and, surprisingly often, they do. You write to people like Unilever explaining that in return for the privilege of supplying you with half a ton of free margarine you will send them a snapshot of yourself devouring it avidly on top of a

giraffe (wonderful publicity should double sales) and I won't tell you, reader, what kind of reply you get from them. Hard-pressed businessmen without time to waste on fending you off are badgered into giving you free cigarettes films, cameras, food, beverages, clothing, reduced travel, even money — in fact, if you have average intelligence, a little time and no scruples you are doing badly if you can't show a profit. If you are a professional you also fix up a lecture-tour agent and worry about the film rights. A few people do live on this basis. I have sometimes contemplated going a step further and living off the proceeds at home without going to all that trouble: the publicity photographs could be taken with hired animals against suitable backdrops, the book could be written more quickly and accurately after suitable research in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the publicity results would be the same, West-Wongaland one year, High Shirkistan the next, until one's knighthood came up and one could retire. But that's a digression.

In those Walter Mitty dreams of boyhood I always felt that that fellow who had both husbanded every drop of the precious fluid in the desert and also chewed raw polar bear with the fur on, was considerably up on the narrow specialist in sweating or freezing. I decided to try a bit of both when the time came. There was the problem of finding a practicable objective. The Tibesti mountains of the Sahara seemed suitably mysterious, but a little research showed that they were beyond my means. I was less conversant then with the methods of extortion described above. Some time later I picked up a French book about another Saharan mountain range called the Hoggar. They were equally interesting, and had the merit of lying near a major trans-Saharan trade route: it seemed a possibility.

The next thing was to find a companion. I was walking down King's Parade meditating this when suddenly the best possible man crossed the road towards me. It was George Fraser, toughest of climbers, most thoughtful and gentle of friends, who was later to die tragically in the Himalaya. I asked him then and there if he would come with me, and he agreed at once. We soon found a third kindred spirit in Ted Wrangham, a strong and determined climber from Northumberland. We decided that there was nothing to be gained by waiting, and that we would go during the next vacation, which happened to be Christmas. This left us about three weeks to make preparations, and about five to spend on the entire trip. If we were to have much time on the spot leisurely forms of travel were ruled out, but lack of cash forced us to compromise and we went by train to Marseilles, thence by ship to Algiers, and there boarded an aged Dakota heading 1,200 miles to the south.

I'm not an authority on the Sahara just because I have holidayed there, but a word of description may help those who don't know it better. It isn't all shifting dunes: there are such areas, but also stony regions and mountain ranges. In the Hoggar the general 'floor' level is from 5,000 to 7,000ft and the peaks, which are mostly eroded volcanic plugs and basalt necks, rise

we were there and even snowed on the highest tops. But this was said to be only the second time in 11 years. Thus there is virtually no surface water, and no vegetation but dry thorn bushes except in the rare oases where there are palms and tamarisks. At Tamanrasset there were birds and domestic animals, but we saw little wild life apart from lizards. You do not go where you want; you go where there is water and do the best you can from there, so a local guide is a necessity for a proper campaign. At that time of year the sun was still so hot at noon that the rock could be painful to climb on, but in the shade the air was chilly, and all night it was so bitterly cold that we shivered as we lay fully-clothed in our down sleeping bags beside the fire. Nobody had thought of letting off atom bombs there in those days, and these extremes felt healthy. The air was clear and the land, yellow ochre in the morning light, mud-coloured in the later afternoon, assumed colours of unbelievable splendour when the sun was low.

The area is inhabited by Tuaregs, a recently pacified warrior tribe who used to live by plundering southward and bringing back a large Nigerian slave population called Haratin. The Haratin are jolly, practical, and live in the oases. The Tuareg are grave, polite, mainly nomadic, pasturing goats and camels. Now they can no longer plunder they have a slightly unemployed air. Nobody knows where they come from, but they appear to be related to the Berbers and their language shows Phoenician roots. They do no look either Arab or Negroid, being tall, almost black, with straight European features. They are Muhammedans but older beliefs still lie not far below the surface. Unlike the Arabs the men go constantly veiled in deep blue and white robes but the women are not veiled at all.

We made the flight from Algiers in four hops, crossing the Atlas mountains, the Great Erg (a vast region of sand dunes), and unending wastes of red earth and rock. Every few hours a tiny patch of green would appear, and as we circled down to land figures would run out to meet and gossip with us while we refuelled. In the late afternoon we saw dusty-looking lumps in the desert ahead which turned out to be mountains as the pilot, with Gallic élan, swooped and banked sharply around one of them. This act of kindness promptly caused Ted and George to be sick.

That evening we set up our tents in a corner of the oasis at Tamanrasset. After dark the booming of drums made us wonder if we were about to be prepared for somebody's dinner, but cautious investigation revealed that in fact a wedding was taking place. Half a dozen drummers pounded hypnotically at tomtoms of various sizes. The smallest one would start a rhythm, others would take it up one by one and experiment with it, and when the big one suddenly came throbbing in the tempo was confirmed, everyone formed lines and danced, shuddering and treading with tiny movements and half-shut eyes. The firelight

reflected from their eyes and teeth, and bystanders waved electric torches in the air.

Next day we haggled for camels and guides. Eventually we engaged Rabadin, a courteous young Tuareg who knew the country well, but being a nobleman, would do no menial work. Through him we hired riding and baggage camels. Finally we engaged Dahmani the Haratin cook, an original with a bawdy sense of humour, an enormous grin, a falsetto voice and 14 children. Early the following morning we teetered uncertainly out of the trees towards the mountains, feeling already far enough off the ground on our camels.

Riding a camel is the most philosophical of occupations. Camels move both legs on one side at the same time, producing a slow swaying motion. Far above the earth you perch on a little wooden seat flanked by huge saddle bags and guerbas of water, your bare feet crossed on the U of the animal's neck, a string through its nose. Although you are in fact making a good walking pace the earth seems to go past very slowly indeed. Restored to *primaeval* rhythms and landscapes, the mind is free to wander. Large ticks are also free to wander up your legs. Only when it is time to dismount and the camel bends his front knees you are jerked back into reality by a feeling that you are being fired from a catapult over the top of a high cliff. There is a sudden realisation of the frailty of the human neck, then you are jerked back into your seat as the back legs bend, and finally out of its again as the monster subsides to ground level. As you step off you try to let it be understood that your open mouth and staring eyes were in fact due to a yawn.

Space is lacking to describe all the climbs we did, and one will have to serve as typical. In all we made, I think, four first ascents and five repetitions, none of them of any importance, but of great meaning to us because it was our first experience of standing on untouched ground.

Perhaps the most memorable to me of those climbs, though not the most difficult, was the Adat. The name in Tuareg means a finger. We first saw this mountain on Christmas day 1952 and at once altered course towards it. The terrain was intricate and it took us a whole day of thoughts and ticks and windings in and out to reach it, broken only by the ritual of the noon halt. About noon Rabadin would look for shade or water. Usually there was neither, but presently he would cluck and hiss to the camels who thereupon observed the catapult tradition. Thorn was gathered (or, if lacking, unloaded from the travelling Selfridges on the baggage camels) and set on fire. A little unleavened bread, baked in the ashes of last night's fire, was broken and handed round. A small tin pot was entirely filled with green tea and a sprig of mint, topped up with water from the guerba and stewed for some minutes. Small coffee cups emerged from the depths of Dahmani's yellow robes and were half-filled with sugar. The tea was poured in, stirred, then put back into the pot and stewed again. This sequence was always followed exactly three times

and then, and only then, we drank exactly three cups each. Not much was said. The hobbled camels cropped their unappetising thorn, the fire went out. One read a verse or two (us, not the camels), then dozed off. Presently someone got up with a sigh and things were got together. The tea-leaves were thrust down the protesting throat of Dahmani's pet camel for their supposed nutritive qualities, so far shamefully neglected in Cow-cakes. Occasionally a Tuareg might materialise from nowhere to share our tea and sell us camel's milk and a goat to embellish the evening stew of vermicelli.

In the evening we camped close to Adat and found it to be a cylindrical peak vertical on all sides for about 700ft. Knowing that I should have to lead the assault next day I did not feel too Christmassy and we went to bed early.

Next morning we rose at dawn, unfroze the tea water and choked down the heavy dough that served us for bread. It was a relief to begin trudging up the 1,000ft cone of scree which surrounded the mountain. After some sweaty and ineffectual efforts on the south side we decided to explore, and in the chill of the northern face spotted a long chimney which, if we could reach it, seemed to offer a feasible line to the top. Between us and its foot was a steep 200ft wall that appeared to be composed of large blocks loosely piled on each other and only waiting for one to be dislodged to bring the whole lot down. After a few tentative movements I was almost depressed to find that progress could be made without too much technical difficulty (perhaps grade three), and it became an exercise in trying to hold the conglomeration together with frozen fingers as one climbed it, carefully pressing down on the holds instead of pulling them out, sweating under the arms in spite of the cold. I was reminded of occasions on Cheddar Gorge. George stood below holding the rope, Ted's Leica could be heard clicking with what seemed to be unnatural loudness. Nothing was said. Slowly balancing from hold to hold, unable to find any protection as the ground receded, trying to will my thirteen stone into nothingness, I at last came to a ledge below a smooth overhanging wall where it was possible to hammer in a piton (venting my relief on it with great blows) and bring up the other two.

The wall above was impossible, and to reach our chimney it was necessary to make a long traverse to the left before climbing up. The blocks were larger and seemed looser than ever. It is one of my disabilities as a mountaineer that I have a sense of values and a vivid imagination, a combination which keeps one alive but frightened. At the point where the traverse ended and ascent was resumed I could foresee all sorts of unpleasant happenings and turned to the others for sympathy and perhaps an excuse for retreat with honour. But they were made of sterner stuff.

"It's terribly loose," I said.

'Oh," said George.

"I don't think it's justifiable."

No reply. I didn't look the strong, silent man of action. The situation had to be retrieved.

"Probably just nerves really" (surely no man could be cad enough to agree with this).

"Yes," said Ted.

There seemed nothing for it after than but to go on, making sure that they could see my cold, set face. It reminded me of the second pitch of *Overhanging Wall* on Scafell, easier but looser, but in the same way never offering a belay. Eventually there was a sloping ledge. It was impossible to find or make any anchorage, but as I had run out of rope there was no choice, and with two wobbly pitons in a blind crack and death in my soul I shouted to them to come on. I might have saved myself the drama. They both made light work of the pitch and stood gazing at the chimney, which was now not far above, with a buoyant confidence that filled me with depression. I turned my back on them and started to climb again. After about 30ft in the chimney I found a really good natural belay and everything seemed changed. The rock got more difficult and everything seemed changed. The rock got more difficult and interesting but at the same time sounder, there was plenty of protection, and the climbing was of the strenuous crack and chimney kind which I love best. We fairly rollicked up the next two or three pitches, and suddenly with a throb of the heart I realised I could shout to the others that there was no more doubt. The chimney ended on a pebbly terrace, perhaps 100ft of easy scrambling below the top. As soon as Ted had joined me I unroped and, leaving him to bring up George, sped on. It was about 11am, the sun high and hot. This was my first virgin summit and I wanted it and the sky to myself for two minutes, no nonsense about planting the Ruritanian flag hand in hand. Subsequent peaks would be gladly shared. This I had won.

Soon scramblings were heard and the second and third human beings arrived. An alpine guide once remarked that on reaching the summit of his mountain the French mountaineer would exclaim at the beauty of the view, the German would dedicate his ascent to his comrades and native land, and the Englishman would sit down and ask for something to eat. We saw no reason to upset this valuable custom. To the limit of the horizon stretched a forest of ochre-coloured peaks. Many days journey away to the east stood a huge pillar of a mountain, the Imanrose. Later we were able to commend it to Belgian friends, who climbed it after a tough struggle. Then, after an hour or so, we had to think about getting down.

This thought always shadows the second half of my summit rest. Climbing up, due to the structure of our bodies, is a safer and more natural process than climbing down, though perhaps more effort. On

the way up you have the elation of the hunt and the prize to be won, which in advanced climbing is usually the way rather than merely the summit alone. Once the summit is gained the next thing is to get down alive, a more sober business and usually less pleasant because of fatigue. This is when the majority of accidents happen in greater mountaineering. Not until the party is right off the mountain can concentration be relaxed for one second: speed is usually important, but method must never be sacrificed to it.

We could all foresee certain difficulties about our descent of Adat, but there was nothing to be gained by putting them off. The chimney was descended in a series of abseils the body. The exposure was impressive and we had to take great care to avoid knocking loose stones down on to one another. When we came to the long loose traverse it was impossible to abseil and we had to climb it, an unpleasant procedure that was in the event accomplished without incident. From the ledge at its end one more abseil, partly 'free', dangling clear away from the rock, landed us thankfully on the ground. Festooned with our jingling equipment we trailed back to camp dazedly in the heavy heat. That evening we were able to celebrate with our carefully-hoarded bottle of wine and our one can of peaches.

Later we ran out of money and had to do our climbing on foot from Tamanrasset on the peaks within a radius of 20 miles or so. This involved starting out before midnight and walking in the enormous moonlit desert like a crab across the seabed — *tacitae per amica silentia lunae* one remembered to reach our mountain just after dawn. The climbs were then done and the forced march home effected in the heat of the afternoon, dry, tired out and joyless. Evening would find us haggling in the caravanserai, attempting to sell punctured air-mattresses and pressure cookers to Tuaregs in order to raise the wherewithal to buy food. From this predicament and a host of discontented customers we were presently rescued by the arrival of the aeroplane just before we ran out of luggage. The trip had cost us roughly £100 each.

At Dieppe we were impressed by what appeared to be queues of wounded. These bandaged heads, arms in slings, crutches, plaster...had war broken out in our absence? Then we realised that these were the English, evacuating the continent after their annual assault on the skiing resorts of the Alps, but still gallantly queueing. We were back to a landscape with men.

A Holiday in Garhwal

Dorothy Ruttledge

*The following unpublished article, first given as a talk to a women's group and written when the CC, excluding women, was most definitely still a 'landscape with men', has been submitted by veteran CC member Major David Ruttledge. David is the son of Hugh Ruttledge who was a founder member of the Himalayan Club and leader of the 1933 and 1936 Everest Expeditions — on the former of which, Mallory's ice-axe was discovered by Jack Longland. As limited access to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary up the Rishi Ganga is apparently now possible again and Sherpas are climbing Everest in their own right, it seems appropriate to recall the signal achievements of Hugh Ruttledge — for in 1926, he was the first mountaineer to reconnoitre the Rishi and to effect a northern crossing of Traills Pass between Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot. Shipton and Tilman's successful traverse of the Rishi Gorge in 1934, and the subsequent ascent of Nanda Devi in 1936, (cf: CCJ 1997, 'Remarks at the Hundredth', Charles Houston and CCJ 1999-2000, p169, review of Nanda Devi, Steve Dean) owed much to Ruttledge's earlier reconnaissance. But it was also Ruttledge's efforts to develop Sherpa and Bothia porter support for expeditions — recognised by amongst others, Smythe and Shipton — that provided a much-needed stimulus to the further exploration of the Himalaya. Jonathon Neale's book *Tigers of the Snow* (2002) tells this story — of how Sherpas developed from 'coolies' to 'climbers' — a story begun in part by Hugh Ruttledge.*

What this article shows is that Dorothy (who accompanied her husband on the first clandestine European circuit of Tibetan Kailas in 1926), if not as accomplished a mountaineer as her husband, was quite as ardent a recipient and recorder of the experience of high mountain exploration as any male climber then writing. So why did we wait so long? (Editor)

Looking from Almora in clear weather towards the great mountains of Trisul, the trident of Shiva 23,406ft above sea level and Nanda Gunti, the Veiled Goddess 21,286ft on its left, one sees that from the shoulders of these mountains there is a descent of several thousands of feet before they actually meet and it appears that there should be a way over at this juncture which would lead to the north of these peaks, into the valley beyond.

Dr. T. G. Longstaff, a very noted explorer, mountaineer, scientist and Vice-President of the Alpine Club, had spent six months travelling in Tibet and exploring the valleys to the north of Nanda Devi, when his two greatest achievements were the crossing of the Bagini Pass between Dunagiri and Changabang and climbing Trisul with two Italian mountain guides and a Gurkha. He also made a map of these regions which was of great value both to the Royal Geographical Society and the Al-

pine Club.

In the spring of 1927, Dr. Longstaff wrote to Mr. Rutledge, Deputy Commissioner, Almora, saying that there was a valley lying under the West Face of Trisul that had not up till now been explored or mapped and he would very much enjoy visiting the Himalaya again to see this valley and so complete his work of 20 years before. He had always wanted to find out if this was a possible route to the Rishi valley, which he had already visited.

We gladly took up the suggestion, our love for the Himalaya growing year by year, as we came to know them better and arranged for the expedition. Six coolies trained on Mount Everest to go safely over snow and ice were sent for to Darjiling and the Colonel of the 1/3rd Q.A.O. Gurkha Rifles kindly lent two Gurkha soldiers to go with the party.

Dr. Longstaff arrived from England early in May, and by the 17th the main camp was established at Sutol in Garhwal and everyone was busy sorting out clothes and food that was to be taken for high climbing or left for the return. Supplies for the coolies had to be reckoned carefully — bags of sattu, potatoes, gur, tea, spices, cigarettes. The English members relied mainly on atta, a little dal and rice, a few tinned stores as milk, cocoa, butter, tea, chocolate, dried fruit marmite (a vegetarian bottled soup — an excellent stimulant). We took as well a few candles and matches and dubbin to rub on the boots to keep out the wet. Dr. Longstaff had some medicines. Clothing consisted of warm under-clothes, puttoo suits, Balaclava helmets, as well as sun topis, gloves, dark glasses, puttees for walking in snow, strong boots with well-nailed soles and sweaters, with all of which the coolies were also provided. Several pairs of socks are worn in extreme cold, so boots must be large as pressure on the feet restricts the blood flow and gives rise to frostbite, a very painful complaint. Each man had an ice-axe, useful as a support on all kinds of hillsides, and two long ropes were taken. The climbing party, now consisting of 11 members, with some agency coolies to go a few marches further, leaving large tents and servants at Sutol, started up a steep hill on the way to the Silisumudr Glacier, on May 18th.

There was a real holiday feeling in their hearts at the prospect of the beauties in scenery about to be revealed, and a thrill at the thought of possible dangers and difficulties to come in an unknown land that would call for judgement, discretion, patience, skill and courage: when on one's actions the safety of other lives may depend. Each man must be alert and taking his part in ensuring the safety of the whole, and helping to make a success of the enterprise. There is no more wonderful brotherhood than that of the mountaineering party. It must not be too large. Often in Switzerland where huts are provided on the mountains for sleeping and refuge in bad weather and especially for rock climbs, two maybe sufficient to surmount difficulties, but on snow and ice three is a safer number as if one man falls into a crevasse, it takes two to pull

him out. In the Himalaya the distances are so great that coolies must be engaged to carry food supplies, and can often be left below if not suitably dressed and trained for high work.

Long ago, as a legend tells us, some pilgrims made an attempt to cross the Nanda Gunti Pass, and Shiva was enraged and threw an avalanche of snow down upon them, so that they were destroyed, and he set a serpent to guard the valley at the Silisumudr Glacier, where a pilgrimage is said to be made about every 12 years. For this reason, it was not very easy to persuade two local men to act as guides to show us the quickest way through the jungle to the mouth of the Glacier, but they did at last consent, one being a brave retired soldier of the 1/39th Garhwalis, who had five medals.

The first and second marches from Sutol, saw the party hard at work pushing their way through unbroken jungle on steep hillsides. There was no pathway, and thick bamboo was very troublesome, but the scenery became more and more wild and beautiful, the Rhododendron trees in flowers of varying colours added to the artistic effect and it was interesting to see tahr, across the river on the steep rock: many handsome birds also attracted our attention. The second night was spent on a knoll above the river among birch trees, and the third morning broke cold, but our way soon led us beyond these trees which appear to grow higher than any other, on to the bare hillside which made easier going though occasionally we had to cross snow in a nullah, where if anyone had slipped they would have rapidly arrived in the river and there ahead of us at the narrow head of the valley lay a great dark curved body, the snake. We looked at each other in surprise. As we approached the place, it gradually turned itself into a large pile of stones, a moraine such as lie beside all glaciers. From this point the Silisumudr Glacier came into sight: a marvellous rounded mass of ice with a hole at the base where the melting ice flowed in a stream and was met by the Nandakni waters flowing from the snowfields and glaciers of Nanda Gunti at right angles to the valley we had come up. The Doctor said the ice of the big glacier was probably moving at the rate of one foot a day, but as it also melted rapidly in a hot sun the eye could not detect this. The upper part of the glacier was flat and scattered with stones and rose up towards the Wan Pass from whence the pilgrims are said to descend but it is a very dangerous way threatened by falling stones from two sides, and no traces of people having been there or camped there could be found.

A search was made for a good camping ground and the tents were set by the Nandakni river just before it joined Silisumudr round another old moraine. The guides and the extra coolies now went back. We had time to examine our surroundings.

The western face of Trisul rose above us to a great height just across the river, a vast expanse of rough rock, hanging glaciers and

snowfields, where sometimes a falling pinnacle of ice would create an avalanche of snow which as it descended the mountain flew up like clouds; or melting snow would let loose a rock that bounded down with terrifying noise till it was buried in the snow beneath. Dr. Longstaff told how the snow blown by the force of an avalanche will go right through your clothes, and will choke you too, if you do not hastily cover up your nose and mouth with a handkerchief. We were glad that none came our way. Rock avalanches can be heard, but those of snow often come silently.

Right ahead of us up the valley could be seen the snowy pass we had come to seek, about four miles away, where, as if under a veil Trisul and Nanda Gunti clasped hands (and Nanda Gunti herself looked very regal). Two days were spent here with an examination by Mr. Rutledge from the hill above through the durbin to see the best way on, and make out whether there would be a suitable camping place at the foot of the Pass itself.

Next day we went up with the coolies and some loads to make a closer inspection and prepare the ground for tents, 3,000ft higher. The weather was very fine and dark glasses had to be worn as the glare on the snow was intense, and almost every step of the snow slopes had to be tested with the ice-axe before proceeding as the ground was quite unknown and very often snow may cover the mouth of a hole in the earth below. All went well though the party often rested, owing to the heat, as this part of the valley was very sheltered from wind between the two great mountains. As the foot of the Pass was reached, an outcrop of rock appeared from the snow and there was an excellent rock shelter for the coolies who would bring up brushwood next day for the fire, but on examining the ground only three very exposed rocks were found on which the three small tents could be placed and tied down to large stones — one was for Dr. Longstaff, one for us and the third for the Gurkhas. Having prepared these platforms, eaten a light lunch of chapatis, chocolate and raisins, and taken photographs, the party returned to the 12,000ft camp near Silisumudr to bring up the rest of supplies and tents next day. The camp above would be 15,000ft in height.

The 23rd May was again a very fine morning, and everything was packed up except the largest tent and some clothing not required. We left at 7.10am going due north for the high camp. Dr. Longstaff was suffering from neuritis in the left arm and headache, but he proceeded in spite of these drawbacks.

The 15,000ft camp was reached at noon and we fixed up our tents among and on the rocks which made very hard beds in spite of the sleeping bags made like two very light rezais stitched together on the sides and open at one end. After some refreshment, Mr. Rutledge chose two of the best coolies and went on up to inspect the pass. Dr. Longstaff and I remaining in camp became very anxious as clouds had come up

and soon the three were out of sight in falling snow. But they did not turn back till they had arrived at the top and looked down the other side. Four hours later they suddenly appeared before our tents roped together for safety. As snow still fell, the pass was reported to be too steep on the further side to take coolies over, but it was decided the remaining members of the party should see it next day.

The clouds cleared in the evening and a brilliant morning saw Dr. Longstaff, Mr. Rutledge and myself with three men, setting off at 7.20am to mount the 2,000ft of steep snow. Dr. Longstaff was feeling better and we found the steps made the day before a great help, though they were covered with new snow. One man had to turn back as he felt giddy at the height. The first crest was reached at 9.40am and there was a strange hollow like a deep basin, round the side of which we had to go before mounting to the main pass. If the snow had avalanched with us here, we should all have been quietly buried in this place with no hope of rescue, but luckily the snow remained firm enough. Arrived at 17,000ft on the crest of the pass at about 9am we had a marvellous view down on to the Ronti Glacier. The snow slope fell steeply below our feet and then flattened out into a long glacier that curved out of sight between the ridges running north from Nanda Gunti and Trisul, Dunagiri, a fine mountain was visible to the right. Great care had to be observed as it was found that the ridge was corniced. So we did not all stand near the edge at once, but one by one, tied round the waist with the rope and with some holding it, we trod at a safe distance from the edge to look down. I heard the ice crack beneath my feet and hastily stepped back.

This was no place for laden coolies: climbing down would be too dangerous, though we could have managed it; but there was no village below to provide food, so it was impossible. The proper way to the Rishi valley is by the Kuari Pass. We could not see the Rishi though we knew it lay between us and the Dunagiri beyond the Trisul North ridge. Dr. Longstaff wondered whether there might be a secondary, and easier, pass in a ridge that stood out a little from the face of Trisul, and after photographs had been taken we were all roped together on the long rope at intervals of about 12ft, and crossed the steep slope above the unpleasant once more. Dr. Longstaff was leading and testing every step of the snow. We looked over our new ridge and saw with joy that it was easier, though we should be threatened nearly all the way on the further side by avalanches of rock and snow from Trisul.

The day was advancing and although snow may be safe to walk on in the early morning after being frozen at night, it is sometimes quite unsafe by midday and we were all the time afraid this might avalanche with us, so it seemed advisable to return to camp, where next day we all had a rest and discussed plans. Clouds gathered by 1pm, and seeing that we should not get into the Rishi, we sent off the Gurkhas to Sutol to bring the coolies up again to the lower camp. We heard many avalanches



The first view of Nanda Devi's North Face from above Bigu, taken by Hugh Rutledge in 1926. (Compare this with Julie-Anne Clyma's photo of the mountain from the Pachu valley in CCJ 1997, p16)

falling down Trisul. The decision had been reached that owing to the possible risks to be encountered over the new pass, we should again reduce our outfits and attempt this with only two or three best men, go over for two or three days and come back.

This night of May 25th a terrible storm came on, our tents were almost blown down about us, we had to hold them up a part of the night and snow fell and wind howled. At midnight the wind paused and blew again at 2am, first from one side and then another in fury. So next morning we could not try our pass, but dried our tents when the rocks dried and the sun came out. We had to change our plans again. We would go over the pass for only one day and back, with one or two men without loads.

On the 27th the cold was intense and we slipped on our boots and coats quickly, having of course slept in all other clothes at this height and went down to the coolies' rock by the fire to have cocoa and chapatis before leaving at 6am for the ascent and by 7am were well on the way to pass number two when on looking back, we saw a terrible mass of dirty clouds rising rapidly and knew we were in for another storm. We raced back to camp, sliding down some steep snow, but the snow caught us just before we got in and the rest of the day was very uncomfortably spent shut up in the small tents. Our Darjiling men supplied us with food cooked on the fire under the rock when the storms were not too severe and Dr. Longstaff told us thrilling stories of his climb up Trisul and other mountains. It was as if the big mountain said to us: "I have given you long enough for your expedi-



Members of the 1927 'expedition'. Standing: Gurkha riflemen and Sherpas. Seated centre: l to r: Hugh Rutledge, Dorothy Rutledge, Tom Longstaff. Front row: porters. Photo: Rutledge collection

tion, now I must get on with my work." The wind blew and snow fell, covering the lady Nanda Gunti with a new white sari, edged with blue. She was a capricious lady, the veiled goddess: sometimes in the morning, she would appear calm and beautiful for all to see, then suddenly she would gather her veils of cloud about her and send a shower of snow upon the camp. If Trisul spoke, she must woman-like, so it is said, have the last word.

On the night of the 27th, the snow fell to the depth of nine inches and our tents were covered. We slept through it, but were glad in the morning, finding the snow had ceased, to pack up and beat a hasty retreat about 9am to Silusumdr. There we found the bigger tent had collapsed in the storm. Dr. Longstaff said this camp was no longer safe from avalanches with all the new snow on Trisul, so we moved everything over and camped between the snake ridge and the glacier mouth, and met the coolies just arrived from Sutol. We rested a full day here before making our way home.

How beautiful and fine it all was, away from human habitation, with the great mountains above, who truly reward those who, through fatigue, heat, cold, hunger and thirst yet seek them out. Then they open up their treasure troves and reward our labours with the finest views, and give us health, and teach us patience, self-reliance and judgement, drawing out our reverence and devotion. It is never possible to become familiar with these great ones, for they ever vary, and you never know before hand what they may allow you or demand of you; your respect never diminishes.

Not many days now remained of leave and the weather was uncertain, so we returned to Gwaldam by the Gingtoli and Kurumtoli and Nuali ridges. By this route we should avoid some of the hot valleys and still be able to worship from afar the great peaks it had been our privilege to live among for 10 all too short days.

Three Sonnets by Tim Noble

Not through my lens, but by some other eyes
you're framed; from that stupendous view they choose
to snap just you. The camera never lies.
Ladakhi Buddhist monks think it's a ruse
the Kashmiri silk merchant has contrived:
to release the shutter on your quick smile
before they're pictured or the sky's arrived.
Beside you all seek space to rest awhile;
get settled; be themselves. Though glacier dust's
a film, this bright transparency's what's best:
back-lit, sharply-focused, eyes wide with trust.
I've a camera: I know what's true. So, lest
others take photos and their hearts to you,
show me your heart — and a framed picture, too.

Poring over the Silk Route map, I know
little of these rich places but the names
I've read about and where I want to go.
Following a guide's a rough and tumble game —
especially in the dark: it's all been seen
by others in the past and nothing's new.
But maps can show that 'here' may also mean
the same as 'there' and between the two, few
delights I fear, or ways of turning back.
And what if we lose our bearings now? Which
way to turn? Whose baggage gets unpacked?
Clearly, steppes to the east won't make us rich;
so, since I'll be encompassed in your lap,
you be our guide and compass, read my map.

This salted field is finger-fenced with slate;
we walk the edge on sea-ground stones in sand.
I ask you if it is my fault or fate
I come to you so late; you draw your hand
through mine like silk and turn me face to face.
No other love can recompense for this:
revealed, we seek from lips and fingers grace
to give and take small gifts of shells, a kiss.
I touch you as we cross a bridge, to shield
you from the burning of our boats; but hold
too hard, like slate posts in a salted field.
Kissing your fingers then just makes me bold:
since stones 'heart' at your finger tips' behest,
move mountains, love, and set my heart to rest.

The Zmutt Ridge of the Matterhorn, a 21-year wait

Colin Beechey

Most climbers will admit that the Matterhorn is a pretty impressive pile, even if their ambitions lie in other directions. I first became interested in mountains as a schoolboy back in the late 1960s and remember furtively reading an account of Mummery's race for the *Zmutt Ridge* during a particularly boring physics lesson. Predictably I soon lost all interest in physics but remained inspired enough by the Matterhorn to attempt the Zmutt a couple of years later, in 1969. We were not very experienced and the mere sight of the Ridge meant that our attempt got no further than Whymper's Bar in Zermatt. We did, however, succeed in climbing the easier *Hornli Ridge* but an unfortunate fatal accident to a party of English climbers, the aftermath of which we could see on the East Face, confirmed that this was a dangerous mountain and we lost all desire to return.

Once home, thoughts of climbing the *Zmutt* returned, my fascination enhanced by a relative lack of information or articles about the route in the climbing magazines of that time. From that year on the route was included in the 'sports' plan of every Alpine holiday, but with only two weeks available each year we never even set foot on the mountain. Conditions never seemed right or we were not in Zermatt if they were. I was also not even sure what the ideal conditions were for an ascent; too much snow would make the considerable amount of rock-climbing tricky and too little snow would make the traverse of the famous Carrell's Gallery difficult and dangerous due to stonefall.

Since the Matterhorn was first climbed, the *Zmutt Ridge* had been seen as a possible, but unlikely looking route. Indeed it was the guide Melchior Anderegg who uttered his famous remark about the *Zmutt Ridge*: "It goes but I'm not going" when looking at the route from the nearby Dent Blanche. It was eventually first climbed in 1879 by the talented English climber, Alfred Mummery, his guide, Alexander Burgener, and J. Petrus and A. Gentinetta. Something of a race developed between Mummery's party and another led by the guide Imseng and Englishman, William Penhall. Penhall's party took a more direct route up the West Face, joining the *Zmutt Ridge* at the teeth, only to find Mummery's group some way above them. Mummery reached the summit first, so completing a superb piece of route finding. The route has retained its reputation as one of the finest climbs of its grade in the Alps and unlike the *Hornli* and *Italian Ridges*, has managed to escape having fixed ropes draped all over it.

Twenty Alpine holidays passed with no further attempts on the Zmutt. My usual partner, John Daniels, was now well into his 50s and felt that big

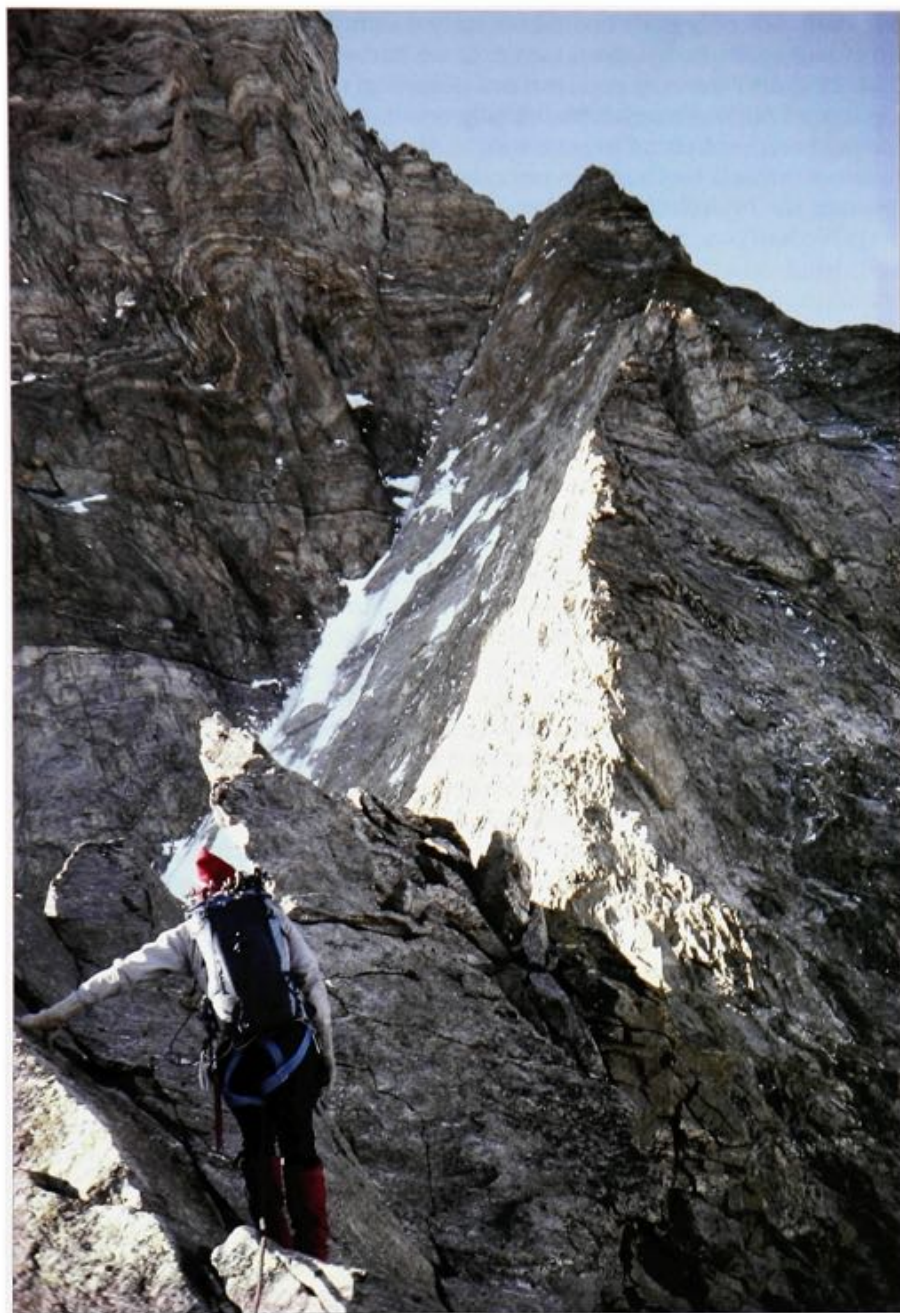


A 'pretty impressive pile': The Matterhorn from the Dent D'Herens. The Zmutt Ridge follows the left skyline. Photo: Colin Beechey

Alpine routes should be done sooner rather than later. In 1991 we started our short holiday with a traverse of the Dômes de Miage, followed by the Bionnassay the next day in a terrible storm. We had intended to continue over Mont Blanc but the storm meant we only got as far as the Vallot Hut. Nevertheless to get so high only a day or two after leaving sea level boded well for our fitness. We then climbed at Arolla but a view of a very snowy Matterhorn from the Aiguille de la Tsa put paid once again to any attempts.

A few days later however our hopes were raised by other climbers who told us that the Matterhorn now looked in fantastic condition with most of the fresh snow gone. Within hours we were in Zermatt setting out for the *Zmutt*. We had long ago decided that the surest way of doing the climb was to take the longer original route from the Schönbühl Hut rather than to traverse in from the *Hornli*. To enable us to avoid the complex descent from the Schönbühl Hut in the dark we decided to bivouac somewhere above the hut. This, of course, meant heavier 'sacks but to compensate we had a couple of pints of anaesthetic at Furi above Zermatt and proceeded towards the Hut. The guardian warned of storms tomorrow which totally changed our outlook, our relaxed approach now replaced by nagging doubts. We left the hut in the late afternoon and descended 500ft or so down to the dry glacier and crossed this heading towards the small peaklet called Sattel. We climbed up long soft snow slopes peppered with rockfall towards a steep 200ft-high rock barrier.

The guidebook was not helpful, suggesting we should climb a gully to



John Daniels explores The Matterhorn's physiognomy — the Zmutt 'Teeth' with the Zmutt 'Nose' looming above. Photo: Colin Beechey

our right. The only gully I could see looked intimidating so I started to climb up a vague rib in what appeared to be the easiest place. The rock was diabolical and once the rope ran out John had no option but to start climbing too. I knocked several, thankfully small, rocks on his head, his helmet having been left behind to save weight. He described later that he had tried to make himself 'as thin as a pancake' and he must have succeeded as he reached the top relatively undamaged.

We had now reached the flat area of the Tiefnatten Glacier at 3,000m and decided to bivouac. We found a perfect flat spot with a water supply benefiting from the evening sun long after the valley was in shadow. I spent the last hour of daylight rushing up and down several alternative lines looking for a way up the next section of the route. Again the guidebook did not help, but I decided that the route lay up a snow tongue over to our right. After convincing myself I could find it in the dark I went back to our bivouac for supper then sleep. It was an impressive and eerie place with frequent rock and icefall from the Penhall couloir and the nearby Dent D'Herens.

We were up at 3am and away by 4am. We found the snow tongue in the dark and took crampons off for an awkward rock wall at the top. A steep rock ramp led rightwards followed by an improbable looking chimney with good bridging holds. As it became light we climbed hundreds of feet of easier ground towards the crest of the ridge, heading directly on good snow to the foot of the Zmutt 'teeth'.

We climbed over the first tooth on good rock, then around the second one. From there we made a semi-abseil to a gap from a peg, the only bit of *in-situ* gear that we noticed on the entire route. We then followed an exposed crest to a level section. The ridge above looked even more impressive but turned out to only be about V Diff or less so we moved together. The enormous rocky bulk of the Zmutt nose reared above us for hundreds of feet, but looked so solid that stonefall seemed unlikely. Our admiration for Mummery rose as this section of the route from any viewpoint looks totally improbable. Nevertheless a steep buttress and, later, a shallow scoop led upwards, neatly bypassing the lower part of the nose by pleasant, slightly wet climbing, again on good rock.

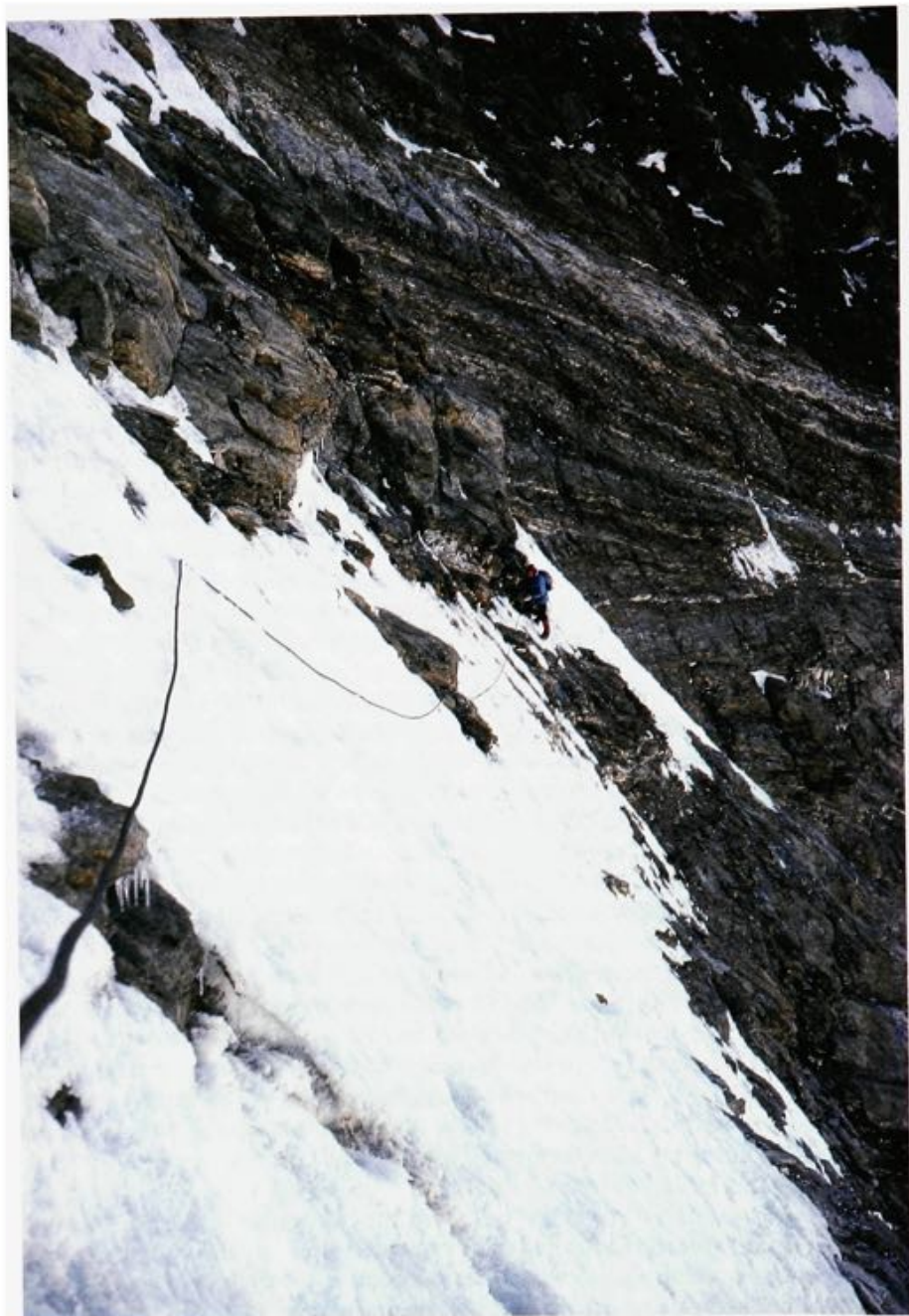
Above us we could see hundreds of feet of vertical or overhanging rock leading to the summit but once again Mummery's route follows the only weakness across this, 'Carrell's Gallery', a narrow high-angled snow ledge leading leftwards to the ridge above the Zmutt nose. To reach it we had to traverse loose ledges rightwards and climb up slabby verglassed rock to reach a rib. We were very aware of the possibility of stonefall but once again nothing fell except the odd stone that due to the steep ground above, passed well over our heads. At the top of this rib I could at last reach the hard frozen neve of what we assumed was Carrell's Gallery. It was a spectacular traverse, at least 400ft long, poised above the Zmutt nose with no real belays and tremendous exposure. Towards the end I did find a spike and at another point placed a peg. We were very grateful to eventually reach the

ridge. This again looked difficult and snow-plastered but it gradually eased towards the summit. It was on this ridge that I made an unusual discovery. As I reached up for a hold my fingers curled around an old rusty clinker boot nail. How long had it lain on that tiny ledge? It was the 1990s and nails had been out of use for many years — the romantic in me imagined it could have been Mummery's. The summit ridge went on for ages but suddenly we could see the Summit cross. At 1pm we were there. It had taken us nine hours from our bivouac, a total of 11 hours' climbing from the Schönbiel Hut, a very respectable time for two old men. We felt overjoyed, our elation made greater by the fact that we had the summit to ourselves. Perhaps this was explained by the appearance of the sky that now looked very ominous to the south.

At 1.30pm we started down the *Italian Ridge*, a route that neither of us had climbed before, rather than the more familiar *Hornli*. I'm not sure of our reasons but I think it was just because we were curious to descend this famous climb. We soon found the first fixed rope and then 'Jordan's Ladder' complete with wooden rungs. We also soon worked out that to descend these slippery ropes hand over hand was extremely strenuous and probably suicidal so we resorted to abseiling alongside them. Below Pic Tyndall John noticed a long traversing ledge that seemed to go for hundreds of feet, conveniently bypassing a long section of pinnacles on the ridge crest. It was there that the storm hit us: loud thunder crashes, rain and then snow. We started to panic, having both experienced Alpine thunderstorms before. We rejoined the ridge after our ledge ended but had great difficulty finding the way. During a lull in the storm we at last saw the Carrell Hut far below. The fixed ropes were discontinuous and we wasted a lot of time descending the pinnacled ridge. I was convinced we had missed the hut but suddenly there it was, only one abseil below.

We reached the hut at 6.30pm after a five-hour descent, shattered and dehydrated. We had been incorrectly informed that there would be a warden and food so we had no extra provisions. I did, however, find a Mars Bar that we divided into four pieces, two for supper and two for breakfast. A few more people arrived but the storm continued dumping several inches of snow outside. The descent next day to the Abruzzi Hut then Breuil and a cable car to Zermatt was endless but made easier by our success. John summed it up in a letter to me later 'The Zmutt-Grat were we really there? The stone on the head, Carrell's Gallery, alone on the summit, the opiates were high, what a day'. Yes I can agree with that and just add that yes, it was worth waiting 21 years for.

Footnote: In the 1990s The Zermatt guides took it upon themselves to despoil this fine route by adding bolt belays and fixed ropes for their own commercial gain. This caused public outcry and they were persuaded to stop before too much fixing was done. It was too late, however, to stop the placing of a bivouac hut at the foot of the route, thus changing its remote character forever.



'It's a long way to trip an airy': traversing the exposed ice shelf of Carrel's Gallery to regain the Zmutt Ridge above the Nose. Photo: Colin Beechey

A Sub-Alpinist in the Albigna

Tim Noble

There was a time (a lifetime ago) when the Headboy of my boys' Grammar School caught me and three other lower sixth form friends playing darts in 'his' local at lunchtime. For this crime I was 'named' and (Dreyfus-like) ritually stripped of my prefect's badge in full school assembly; then reduced, not to the ranks — as my leering, gun-toting peers in the Combined Cadet Force were expecting — but to the more humiliating status of 'Sub-Prefect'. It was a public shaming which, in the face of sustained junior school sarcasm and profound parental disappointment, I remember bearing with an inauthentic insouciance for a year and half, and which I have never forgotten. It has left me with both a horror of the prefix 'sub' and a deeply-rooted flaw: a continuing inability to take the authority of Headteachers seriously. This last has, I now realise, been something of a mild hindrance in my 30-year career as a teacher.

But reflecting on that public humiliation, I'm convinced it was the main reason I yearned to become a rock-climber, drawn passionately to the sandstone outcrop of Stone Farm: put simply, by becoming one, I could fancy myself 'above' rather than 'below'. If, I believed, in some small private way I could excise the prefix 'sub' from my lexicon, public failure wouldn't matter ever again.

Books helped of course: *Annapurna* and *Everest* were consumed avidly. But knowing that I could never become a Herzog or a John Hunt (no CCF background you see, and already demoted), I read the 'Blackshaw Bible' for comfort every night, poring over the Alpine section with its avuncular advice for acolytes, and got gripped by the pictures of aid climbing on The Capucin and 'After the bivouac'. At this time I could just climb Stone Farm 5b. Would English sandstone 5b translate to Alpine 5 superior, I wondered? I desperately wanted to climb '5 sup' so I wouldn't feel 'inferieur' anymore — particularly at school. In short, I soon wanted to graduate as an Alpinist. Alpinists, it seemed, were easy-going but determined people, preferring the freedom of rock, the democracy of rope and bivouac and the unyoked humour of the local to more formal manifestations of authority and status. So, for the past 31 years, around the ranges, I've more or less managed to kid myself that I then became, and still remain, an Alpinist. But events repeat themselves; the past is the same country as the present, it just gets revisited more often as we age.

"Ah... Tim... the Bregaglia!" pronounced Mike Burt in reverential and archival tone over the phone: "Be sure to have a go at *The Flatiron* on Piz Gemelli. I remember when we did it there were no bolt abseils in place and you had to press on to the summit. That was some time ago,

of course, but a man of your calibre should have no trouble with it."

Now Mike, as the CC well knows, is a real Alpinist who, in early-old-age, is still out of his armchair perfecting ice-climbing skills in challenging places, and climbing hard rock in Hoy places. So, though I was flattered, be sure that I had the prescience of mind not to blurt to Burt that on my first visit to this longed-for region, and in the one week I had available, I'd dreamed of shimmying up the *North Ridge of The Badile*, sussing out *The Cassin* on the descent, flashing *The Flatiron*, seriously considering *The Cengalo Pillar* and still having time to play in the Albigna of an afternoon or on a 'rest' day. In that warm moment of praise ('man of your calibre, etc.'), and in the Luciferian heat of self-delusion (so necessary a stance in professional life, but a perilous pose on the peaks), I believed I really would keep up with CC friends John Baker and Richard Brown — the former, frantic for a guide's carnet, the latter, paper-weight and whippet-fit.

The true blame for my still-to-be-related ignominy lies elsewhere, however (though still within the CC), for it was none other than President Smith himself who told me about the Albigna: "Great place for a rest day. Take the early morning cable car — saves a 900m walk — and you'll get the crags to yourselves mid-week, 'cos the guides come out of the woodwork mostly at weekends for the trade routes. Above the dam there's a host of 300m stonking rock routes on the Spazzacaldeira; you've just got to do *The Fiamma* on the ridge. Beyond the hut, there's shed loads of climbing on good-looking peaks. Take the new topo-guide — oh, and look out for the Albigna Ghost: there's a grade 6 up its face. Get John to lead it. It'd make a brilliant picture for the Journal." I could see my caption: 'Scared... less, Tim Noble picks his way round the ghost's nose.' (More smut than Zmutt, per-

haps, but quite in keeping with Tim Smit's 'Tinkerbell' theory of project management that has informed all my Alpine dreams: 'if you can persuade enough people to believe in it, it'll happen'.) But I still had to persuade someone to climb with me. Eventually, Richard took pity, leading the 300m *North East Ridge* of Spazza. Some delicate and exposed rib work and Severe slab climbing on the edge of the overhanging ridge were highlights; but the *Nigg Variation* was a White Ghyll Extreme, and watching a guide waltz up *The Fiamma* while I refought the 'Battle of Wounded Knee' was galling. Richard was kind, but admonitory: "When will you get it fixed, Tim?" (I quite expected this response, however: on non-Alpine days, he's a



Nose-pickingly good? The Albigna Ghost. Photo: Tim Noble



The Spazzacaldeira, South Face, bounded on the right by the North East Ridge. The Fiamma and The Dent form an 'M' left of centre. Photo: Tim Noble

Headteacher.)

That evening, I gazed disconsolately at the Greek hoplite's helmet of the Cengalo, burnished in alpenglow, its unflexing eye cold-staring down Val Bondasco. John had regaled us with a 'Twilightish' account of up and down a snowy *North Ridge of The Badile* in a night and day; I knew I'd never make it. The van-load of Poles next door didn't help, either. Alpinists all (infallible test: away two days with big 'sacks'), they were clearly in the grip of some potent fire water — large bottles of which lay around, Hopkinson-like (cf: CCJ 1997, p.9), dangerously close to a huge bonfire — roaring incomprehensible jokes whilst sorting mountains of gear. Looking for pity, I limped over: "It's this knee," I said slowly, "a long-term injury. We went Albigna yesterday. Took cable car. Did easy climb. Try big routes later. You climb in Albigna?"

One addressed me pityingly: "We *walk*. Make seven grade 6 routes on South Face of Spazzacaldeira. Then go to bivouac at Badile. Climb *Cassin* and come down." Aghast, I thought of flashing him my AC card as credentials; the dirty dishes seemed a just reward.

In camp next day, puffy knee-nursing, I read about my friends' route on Piz Balzet, 'A classic of sub-Alpinism in an Alpine setting'. My public humiliation was complete. Forget any leading or competing, because I couldn't have subbed for either of them. The bitter truth hit me then: I wasn't even a *sub-Alpinist* anymore, just a below-average rock-climber.

But now that I'm free at last of school, prefects, Heads and all forms of self-delusion, I've realised how to re(l)earn my AC membership slowly: I'm going 'back to rock-climbing basics' on mended knees — to Blackshaw, boulders, and Stone Farm sandstone.



Swedish Icefall Climbing

John Sumner

Heavy snow and minus 6° temperatures greeted us as we disembarked from the train at Björklinden (quite mild for mid-March, we were told).

Björklinden is really just a railway station in Sweden, located 30 miles east of Narvik. We had decided to stay there so that my wife could ski and Alex, George and I could tackle some of the icefalls in the area.

The morning after our arrival snow clouds cleared to blue skies, and there was the most wonderful view from our metal box-type chalet. Beneath us, five miles wide and 70 miles long, stretched the vast frozen lake of Torneträsk. The mountains of Tjuonatjakka and Nissuntjarro dominated the scene.

At 6am the next morning, Alex and I caught the school bus to Abisko and descended into the Abisko gorge: a couple of grade 3/4 icefalls in the gorge, together with some small ice-flows close to the lakeside road and an excellent 45m grade 4 pitch on the mountain side of Njulla provided us with warm ups. There were at least four other fine-looking lines hereabouts.

Later, hearing reports of a good route in very remote surroundings, we hired a car and travelled to the railway station of Kaiserpakte, between Abisko and Kiruna. The approach to the fall — as with all of the routes on the hills — required snow shoes to cope with the seemingly bottomless powder snow that was squeezed between tightly-packed silver birches.

Our final foray was onto a route on the superb-looking ice-wall we had spotted from the train, beyond the station of Kaiserpakte: named *Octopussy*, it turned out to be the most spectacular fall I've ever seen. It was just too much for me: vertical pillars shot up for over 300ft, topped by immense octopus-like ice overhangs. What a place; what a route. And for those of you who might be tempted to sample this amazing area, you might like to know that throughout our trip we saw not one other climber.

Opposite: Not shaken, but certainly stirred: John Sumner on 'Octopussy', up the icefall near Kaiserpakte. Photo: Sumner collection

Ice Cold in Canada

Mike Burt

Being a slow learner at ice-climbing and keen to avoid back-breaking walks, I was drawn by talk of Terry Kenny's meets in Canada. Having done some Scottish and Alpine routes with Peter Newman, I was yet more interested when I found that he had been to Canada and enjoyed himself. With Peter Sterling also nibbling at the bait, Terry was encouraging. Laetitia Elliott was fired with her usual enthusiasm and so the three of us arrived in Canmore, Alberta in February 2000. My daughter and family came on the same flight and went to nearby Banff to ski.

Terry kept open house to a constant flow of CC members. Our doss was close to Terry's 'down town' residence; known as a 'Condo', it was palatial. On our arrival, being tired from the flight, hungry and having just driven in from Calgary, we indulged ourselves by dialing up a Domino's pizza. Such luxury felt somewhat sinful.

For the next few days, Terry directed us to a variety of hauntingly named icefalls: Grotto Canyon, Heart Creek, Haffner Creek (often passing Dead Mans Flats en route); they all offered a range of grades and the possibility of doing two or three ascents in the day. Every chance was there to make that vital step from easy ice-climbing when in balance to hanging vertically from axes.

We started on down to earth Canmore Junk Yards. "It was mega cold, with super hard ice and painful," was Peter's summing up. Falling easily victim to self doubt, I wondered if I had wasted my time by joining the trip; I felt dissatisfied with the easy angled sections, and like a novice on the steep ice. Even Peter found it a bit depressing — especially as we only had my archaic ice screws to give us any protection. But, after a quick stop at the Canmore gear shop to purchase some new technology (four shiny ice screws with extremely sharp teeth), we felt better armed for the next foray on to the ice. The next day at Grotto Canyon took away any doubt: glorious sunshine.



In the fast lane: Peter Sterling on the M6 left of Hers. Photo: Sterling coll.

The approach was by a narrow, high-sided stream bed where you expected to see Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull, around the next corner, exhorting the Braves. We needed crampons just to go on to the almost flat frozen stream. There were ancient Indian drawings painted on the wall of the canyon; none of us had seen anything like this before. Spirits rose as the whole adventure started to bite. What a wonderful place. Adding to the upbeat feeling, the climbing itself offered a massive leap in rewards: the ice was steep enough to give a sense of having done something worth going for. There were chains for security; satisfying ascents were made; confidence grew.

When the three of us went back to the same place a year later, with Peter's friend David Ellis, a more serious route called *Hers* had to be tackled. Crazy Sterling cruised it followed by Laetitia. I whimped out on to a top rope. A few days later, the Maestro Peter went back to do an even harder mixed route: an M6+ just left of *Hers*. It involved hooking rugosities and tiny rock projections. "Very strenuous, but fun," he said. "It's easy when you get to the ice."

Amongst the gentler routes, one called *Riverside* in the Kicking Horse Canyon is memorable for the railway line, which extended right over to our doss and for a picturesque ice cave, complete with ice chandeliers, halfway up. Those slow moving and extremely long trains have a magic about them, as they roll along only slightly faster than walking pace and hoot at you to get out of the way. You have to wait — perhaps as long as 20 minutes, for them to go by before you can cross the line to go shopping or to approach a route using the railway line as a path through the deep snow. Pigeons eat the grain that drops from the wagons, as do the bears when they wake up later in the year. The cave, far more attractive than the one on *Vanishing Gully*, is a desirable residence for a troll. The route is enjoyable and makes a good outing.

Frozen waterfalls can't avoid a similarity of appearance but *Bridal Veil* is different: it is a route of great beauty. It dips as a veil might, and even manages an air of the shyness that brides were supposed to feel in bygone days. The two falls that make up the veil form free standing two-



No slow learners: Mike Burt in action at Heart Creek. Photo: Peter Sterling



'An air of shyness': Peter Sterling on Bridal Veil. Photo: Sterling collection

metre thick columns, so giving the route its distinctive appearance. John Temple of "Ice is rock — it just has a lower melting point" fame, soloed it some days before our sizeable CC party climbed it together. Anyone who could climb that route and not enjoy it might as well give up climbing on ice there and then. However accomplished anyone might be, it is a wonderful experience. Sadly, the following year, the ice was horribly brittle and the route far harder to climb.

An icefall known as *Masseys* was the most serious climbing we did on our first Canadian holiday. As is so often found, the width of the icefall offered a range of difficulty. Graham Exley led Peter and me. He took the hardest line: it

was steep — in fact vertical to start. There was no choice but to hang from axes for the first 80ft. Graham didn't flinch: he made a smooth controlled ascent, placing four screws. Peter followed in like style; but I found it tiring and demanding. However, there was easier-angled ice above and it was one of the few routes that allowed us a walking descent.

Amongst all this action, the sticky cake scene loomed large; brownies and large hot drinks with free refills went down in quantity. CC groups met regularly for evening meals in The Drake, Rose and Crown, and a timber cabin called Sherwoods — all of them in Canmore. The larger of our two 'last meals out' was in Banff: over 20 members met at a place called 'Wild Bill's'. They served Canada's answer to the 'Big Jim' at 'Pete's Eats'; it was described as "Enough for the whole damn possee". Onion rings were chomped endlessly. The centrepiece was probably a buffalo. It was certainly big. All the first timers found it hard to believe the tolerance, good nature and friendly manner of the Canadians serving in these places. I have a gift for creating chaos and for general incompetence in eating places, but I never succeeded in rattling one of them.

Cascade is a route that can be seen from miles away: it draws you. It looks good — neither terrifying nor benign. Terry organised a sizeable group to do it towards the end of our first trip. There is Alps-type strenuous walking to get to the meat of the route, but it's walking on snow and ice, so some people might enjoy it. Terry and Sue Leyland took off first

with little delay until a large chunk of ice, about the size of a football, fell past Terry from higher up the route. We all stood still, looked at each other and considered the options. It stayed calm, so we carried on up. Graham led me across the first climbing pitch, a rising traverse. It was beautiful climbing: hard enough to make it worthwhile but well below nightmare standard. I wanted to lead the top pitch, although my minders seemed alarmed by the idea. It was a really good pitch. The ice near the top was an inch-thick shield over the running water. It was easy to guess where the lump of ice had fallen from with such fragile ice and strong Canadian sunshine softening it. Peter was abseiling off as I was finishing, and he pointed out a welcome peg at a strategic point.

Another team went up later in the day and required helicopter assistance, but no details are known as they had no connection with The Climbers' Club: probably the ice had become too soft. Some months later, Tony and Sarah Whitehouse had to make a dash from the bottom of this route when a mass of ice and rock crashed down where they had just been sitting, burying their gear beyond retrieval.

On our second holiday in the Rockies, Terry recommended *Lady Killer*. It wasn't easy to find. The marche d'approche was gruesome but mercifully short. It was clear that the route called for a grasp the nettle attitude. Sterling was equal to it: hanging off one axe, putting in screws, moving on up was all in the day's work to him — or so it seemed. I asked Laetitia, who was to follow Peter, to leave the screws in for my ascent. They were a mercy, but I had to wait, hanging off my gear, for a party of three to abseil down the pitch, which offset the advantage a bit. I felt good about getting up. Peter disposed of the top pitch in what had, by now, become his customary style. I took a top rope on it and was glad that I had, for I was doubtful if I could have led it. David, who followed me, did the photography and thought that the route was great. It was: if you can do this route, you can climb on ice. On being asked if he was trying to wipe us out, Terry admitted that it was a 'sandbagger'.

An easier but comparable route enjoys the wry name of *Wet Dream*; it has only one worthwhile pitch. We had to turn back from it on our first visit because the snow was too deep and no track had been made through it; even a few hundred yards without 'sacks was painfully slow and tiring. On the second trip we could get to it, but it wasn't a pleasant walk: Peter shot up, placing four screws with impressive ease. I was tempted to ask Laetitia to leave them in place, but didn't; lack of strength obliged me to miss out the third one and just keep going. Although it would have been better to have had it in place, the gap between protection was nowhere as great as on *Point Five* or *The Left Edge of Observatory Buttress* or many other places known to CC members.

The Ice Flows at Haffner Creek make a perfect playground; most of the routes are no more than half a rope's length. There are also some chains in place to tie on to and to descend from. A few days there would

make an ice climber of anybody. The four of us covered a satisfying footage of ice and had a day to remember. For the first time ever, I tried taking tension from a karabiner clipped into the shaft of my axe (I've got to do something to offset not being able to place screws while hanging from one implement). I had always imagined that it would be the last word in reckless daring, but in fact, it was a most pleasurable experience: my inadequacies were overcome by magic and a bit of a pull by Laetitia. I could now place screws; the ice loved me at last.

Professor's Falls is one of the outstanding routes of the area. We heard its praises sung on the first day of our first visit and often thereafter. It is a succession of very good pitches — the first and the last being the hardest. The other three did it while I took a rest day, and were inspired by their ascent and exhilarated by a subsequent trip to Banff Springs, to the bliss of a soak in the hot springs: "A hot body, a cold head and a view of the stars against a darkening sky outlining the mountains: brilliant," said Peter.

Our day at Two o'clock Falls included a tour of some sacred Indian lodges; they are wooden and the shape suggests a framework for a very large tent. When we passed them, they were decorated with many brightly coloured pieces of cloth. A tradition was being kept alive, but what insights

had gone for ever of the people who could lead a natural life and thrive in such harsh conditions?

The last route that the three of us did together was some 70 miles from Canmore and is called *Extra Lite*. It has an enjoyable easy start. Then, although it continues to be enjoyable, you know you're doing something real. Having been pretty flat and whimpy on the two previous routes, it was what I needed personally, restoring a bit of self-belief. Walking back to the car along a rail track, we had to wait for a typically slow-moving, hugely long, Canadian train to go by. This one was even slower than usual due to the gradient. It wasn't pure 'Rock Island Line', but close. As the engine passed us, the driver came slowly



Coldly intoxicating: Laetitia Elliott samples Extra Lite. Photo: Mike Burt

down his steps and gently deposited a bag on the ground, saying something about water. Laetitia picked it up: it was a gift of sealed beakers of spring water, for which we were truly grateful. A couple of hours later, having easily overtaken it on the way home in the car, we watched the same train going by our doss.

Terry kept our evenings alive with slide shows and talks by people with very enviable life styles and impressive accomplishments in mountains. Val Pitkethley, lives in Canmore and guides treks in the Andes and Nepal; her slides were really impressive — as was the affection she expressed for Nepalese people. Will Gadd seems privileged to spend his time paragliding in the search for new routes and then going to climb them. Nice work if you can get it. I would only be jealous if I could do any better.

Early into our second holiday a big CC team went to Johnston Canyon: there were routes for all appetites, and all of them worth the effort. Large groups were belayed close enough for idle conversation; bonhomie overflowed; the sun shone brightly, and something like a climbing wall atmosphere developed. We were treated to the spectacle of daring ascents up vertical ice for about 100ft — some of them solo — by a party of locals. Trippers came to watch. Peter and David tried abseiling on an 'Abalokov Sandwich' and found that it held them. That day alone was worth going to Canada for. Though easily accessible ice is priceless, there are also plenty of chances to ski: we didn't bother taking our skis for the second holiday.

These days, I'm glad of any worthwhile mountain experience. It doesn't matter what it is as long as I can do well enough to get a crumb of satisfaction from it — and Canadian ice offers a far better climb per hour ratio than I have found anywhere else. But don't take this as definitive: there are very many more demanding and glorious routes than I have written about here; it's all there waiting for you.



Canada dry: Sterling and the ice master encased at Riverside. Photo: Burt coll.

In The Grip of The Dru Couloir

Nick Bullock

In early September, news comes to Nick from a friend that, courtesy of a bad summer, the Alpine North Faces are already in condition; so he drives the long road to Chamonix and meets Paul at the Argentière campsite. The weather forecast is checked; routes are studied; plans are hatched. Two days later, the pair bivvy on the toilet floor in the Grand Montets téléphérique station because the mist has been too thick for the planned afternoon approach to *The Dru Couloir*.

Skies clear at 4am. Neither climber has come this way before, but it's straightforward — even the glacier. Secretly Nick hates this floundering through icefalls: it's enough to test the most patient, and Nick isn't the most patient. But it is well past dawn when they enter the lower couloir, and the bergschrund is steep. Climbing perfect ice they move side by side, slow but sure, each dragging a rope. Now underneath the direct line into the upper couloir, they stop and stare upwards: the direct, although harder than the original line is more straightforward to follow, but it's not in condition. It will have to be the original.

The climbers take turns to pitch steep mixed ground. Nick leads a steep corner, aiming for a chimney, but is drawn left to a vertical wall with a crack splitting it. Not quick to recognise the obvious, Nick tries to climb the crack free, but his crampons skid on smooth rock. He tries laybacking off torqued axes — with the inevitable result. Paul now climbs to Nick and gently informs him that what has just spat him out is in fact The Nominé Crack. Ego is restored: at 5c and A1, surely nobody could free climb that in crampons, could they? Paul assures Nick that no, they could not.

The sun comes round The Dru; green hillsides bask; there are longing looks from the belayer. It has taken Paul four hours so far on the Nominé Crack: he has no aiders; no special equipment; his only aid is upward-tied long slings to stand in. With every inch gained, the belayer has silently cheered, encouraged, hoped for and (quietly) begged the leader to pull over the top. Another hour passes; the belayer begs more. Another hour passes; the belayer still silently begs.

At last, after six hours, Paul is belayed on no ledge. A cramped stance makes it impossible to set up a hauling rig for the second. After six still hours Nick begins the aid pitch without ascenders. By now it's dark. To save time/not risk his rucksack getting jammed, Nick decides to climb with it on, but quickly regrets this decision because every move

Opposite: 'Boldness be my friend': Nick Bullock at grips with *The Dru Couloir*. Photo: Bullock collection





Nothing for the begger's bowl: Pete Schnitzer prepares for his six hour climb of the Nominé Crack, up and to his left. Photo: Nick Bullock

is desperate. Crampons spark; he pulls, he pulls; he torques axes. The rope is tightened; but the single 8.5 mm stretches like elastic as he loads it. He ends up lower than before. **TORQUE!** Hook a peg — and another. Pull! Stand on front points. Yes: at the quickdraws, a haven of security. Both axe blades are hooked, and bodyweight is pulled. He can scream now: "TAKE IN!"

He begins again. The leader has had to clean as much gear as possible, so Nick torques/scrapes up long blank patches. Suddenly, his axe bursts from the rock, jabbing him below the right eye. He bleeds and swells. He wonders what a broken cheek would feel like. Would it stop you climbing? Arms solid with pain, Nick wrenches over the last inches to meet Paul; but his anger that the ropes were not tugged tight enough evaporates and admiration takes its place. It's amazing the pitch was led at all with so little gear.

They will move no more today, for bodies and heads are drained. They bivvy at the top of The Nominé Crack. Standing in rucksacks, they swallow cold dinner (hanging and lighting the stove is too much trouble). Paul eyes Nick enviously: after experiencing a night hanging in a storm on the Grandes Jorasses, Nick carries a lightweight belay seat for such occasions. Combining seat with rucksack, Nick slips into a hammock position. Paul is unable to find enough room and shivers, his sleeping bag pulled only as far as his waist. Peeping out, Nick doesn't envy the night Paul has ahead of him: having learned a valuable lesson on

the Jorasses, he's glad he's not Paul. Paul asks if this bivvy is as bad: "It's much better," Nick lies.

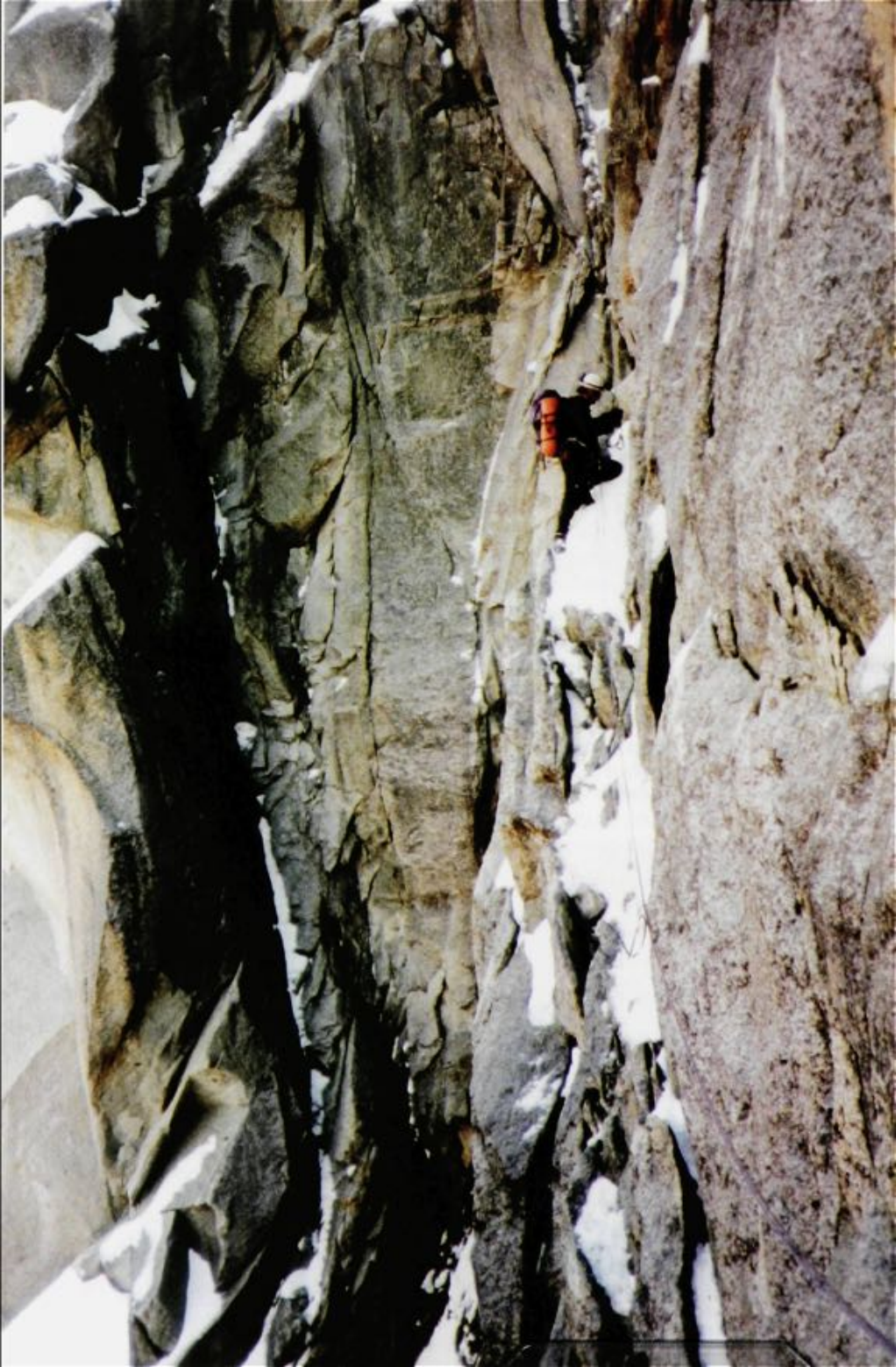
It is light. Nick leads off, his body stiff; he aches, but begins to warm. After 40m of Scottish V/VI, he belays. Paul takes over for more of the same — another 40m in a chimney parallel to the upper couloir. They climb one more mixed pitch to 'the yellow crack', which is the hardest pitch yet. What's to come looks harder still. A terse description in the guide-book: 'Traverse at the yellow crack.' Nick wonders how many 'yellow cracks' there are on The Dru. In one or two pitches right they will reach the couloir where they will be romping up perfect névé, with just a few steep moves to keep it interesting, and where there will be bivvy sites in abundance, large enough to party on. Oh yes, life will be good in the couloir.

Two pegs: Paul places another. He weights it; it jerks downwards. He quickly unweights it and places it again; it holds. Now he reaches up and clips the peg furthest from him. He's at full stretch. The belayer tensions the rope. Paul swings for the corner, scrapes/flails, swings back, steadies himself, swings again, and... NAILS IT! Very hard moves now — slowly upwards with no protection and full commitment. The couloir is so close. With points on tiny edges, he reaches, at last, another peg. This must be right; yes. So now, Paul lowers off the peg. A small ledge spied earlier is inviting: here's the chance to cook in daylight (warm food and drink is too tempting) and also, maybe, recovery.

The ropes are left in place to gather ice. The climbers get ensconced in bivvy bags with the knowledge that their highpoint can be climbed back to

'The eyes have it': a cheekily-challenged Nick Bullock, contemplates his lead above the bivouac. Photo: Bullock collection





safely. Snow is tumbling down the face, but will it stop?

At 7am Nick shouts to Paul in the swirling snow that tears away voices: LET'S GET DOWN... YES... I SAID... DOWN... GET OFF THIS. Gear is left in place. For a moment Nick eyes it, begins to add up the cost of lost kit, then quickly forgets it: The Dru can keep it. The climbers can't wait this storm out because snow is pouring down; its white thickness has a personality that wants them gone. They get going: boots gaitered and crampons fastened quickly (hands numbed); gear thrown into rucksacks (sodden sleeping bags stuffed together with snowflakes) to the first abseil.

Nick goes first; Paul fumbles to set up a karabiner brake (his belay plate must be somewhere at the bottom of the face). At last, Paul joins Nick and sets off on the second abseil. With no belay in sight, he gets close to the rope ends. But his krab brake jams and he can't move up or down. He kicks; begins to swing; pendules once, twice... and grabs a spike 20ft to the left. YES! Downwards movement can continue. Nick, on his turn, uses all of the rope and more in search of a crack to take a wire or peg; the stretch tugs hugely at his waist. He kicks points into good ice, buries axes, clips in and... releases the rope. Nylon rushes through the stitch plate, shooting back up the face. So: the rope is out of reach. Nick tries to place a wire in rotten rock... then a knifeblade, which bottoms out, both are useless. He front points left to good ice and starts cutting a bollard. He's made lots of these and knows it's fine.

Suddenly there's a soft roar: soft... soft... SOFT — then white weight hits him hard and he's enveloped in a hurtling. His reaction is immediate and automatic: he drives in axes, presses his forehead against the ice, braces and pulls in firmly. But snow builds up on his legs and rucksack, and his arms, half-glimped, are heavy-white. Snow packs against his chest; breathing gets difficult; he is taking in ice-mouthfuls, quietly suffocating. PLEASE STOP. It must stop. Then, yes! The horrible white weight starts slipping from around him. He lung-sucks air. He's alive, so gets on with the job in hand, getting down safely.

They jump the bergschrund; other climbers' footsteps remain faint in the falling snow. They sprint for the rognon and flat ground; clothes get ripped off; gear is thrown around to dry; water's found and drunk greedily. Nick looks up to where the couloir is still lost behind cloud and tumbling spindrift and wonders if it was the right decision?

Later, aching and very tired, Nick leans on the Monteners railing. The Dru is in sun. He wonders when to suggest a return (they know the route and equipment, and now there's another real incentive — the chance to retrieve lost gear). Two days later they do climb it, but by a slightly different line, so no gear. Are there any CC takers out there?

Opposite: A stairway too leaven? Pete Shnitzler climbs the second pitch above the Nominé Crack, on the successful ascent. Photo: Pete Bullock

Don and The Deep Red Sea

Jack Jackson

Don Whillans was well-known for his twinkle-toes on rock, but there were other times when he could also 'walk on water'. Let me explain: Don was always interested in the wider adventure of expeditioning rather than just climbing. Prime examples of this interest were his early solo overland motorcycle journey from Rawalpindi back to the UK; his trip down the Amazon; diving with me in the Sudanese Red Sea and a sky-diving course in America. When discussing a possible expedition with climbers who thought that the climbing concerned might not be beneficial to their careers, he would ask: "Don't you want to come just for the adventure?"

When Don moved from Rossendale to Penmaenmawr, he had a strong interest in tropical marine fish. Marine aquariums are notoriously difficult to keep and all the fish in the tank often die, so he figured that there had to be a better way to see these colourful creatures. While staying with John Streetly at his home in Trinidad, he tried taking a diving course, but the local instructor took him to a ridiculous 100ft on his first dive; not surprisingly, this put Don off.

At this time I was spending seven months a year operating a dive

Don the diva: two masked butterfly fish resist an invitation to take up residence in a Penmaenmawr fish tank. Photo: Jack Jackson



boat in the Sudanese Red Sea, so in April 1982, Don volunteered to come out and give me a hand. The situation was perfect for him: bivouacking on an artificial island on a coral atoll 17 miles out to sea, it was a pure, self-contained expedition situation, with some of the world's best underwater visibility and fish life. I taught him to dive and he was a great help running the boat and lifting heavy anchors, compressors and diving cylinders.

Throughout his life, Don was always prone to vertigo-like dizzy spells. This is not a fear of heights, but a mismatch between the signals originating from the left and right sides of the inner ear, which the brain cannot decipher. It is common among divers who have problems with equalising their ears, or some who look down for too long. Being over very deep water with amazing visibility, especially on a rocking boat, often brought on attacks, but as on mountains, Don struggled through; he always showed his best side when conditions were difficult. We had one spell where he helped me keep the boat safe through dozens of heavy squalls and many different wind changes at night.

Don was keen to see sharks, but like anyone new to tropical seas he was afraid of them — especially those that were over two metres long — so when I fed them for clients, I would hide him behind the coral.

In April 1984, bringing his wife Audrey and Derek Bromhall of Genesis Films, he came out again with a view to making an underwater film for Channel 4. Audrey and Don snorkelled more than dived, but they saw just about every fish in the Red Sea, and had several shark encounters — which got them 'walking on water' as they scrambled for the reassuring safety of land or boat. Audrey loved it and we had great difficulty getting them both out of the water to eat. Don's favourite fish



*Before the big dive: Whillans in Patagonia.
Photo: Derek Walker*

dish was the Regal Angelfish — a great taste for a serious aquarium collector.

By the time he returned to the UK we had sorted out a complete package for a film, with Don managing fish tanks on the island for the macro shots. Derek succeeded in getting a contract with Channel 4 and actually had the money organised, but unfortunately Don died while we were putting the equipment together and then, later, a coup d'état in the Sudan replaced the government with Muslim fundamentalists and we never received permission to film.

Bill Peascod's death of a heart attack on Cloggy visibly unsettled Don. While coiling the ropes after abseiling off, he said to my wife: "It was a good way for Bill to go, doing what he loved best — at least it was quick." Just four months later Don, too, was dead: a great loss to the climbing world.

Opposite: *Adrian Liddell and Jeff Lamb on the second ascent of 'The Dream', Great Zawn, in 1974. Photo: Frank Cannings* **Below:** *Frank Cannings at Sennen. Go to Reviews page 141.*





Poem by Kim Martindale

Hunter

I am taut to breaking with this climb
singing like the rails
when a train sends its hum
zithering ahead.

I scan the territory
jagged overlaps bounding
to the horizon
but,
sweetly spaced,
so I begin, having found
the scent,
a silent creeping
that the rock will not hear or see
that will not start it
into a sudden buck.
Stealth is the key,
stalk the summit as it dozes
unaware in the scrub above.

I capture holds cracks
any weakness
is fair game
any pinched edge any cranny
and I string out the guts
of the climb
like minor trophies

Almost there I pause
muscles burning check the distance

at my hips a big hex clinks
brittle in the focused quiet
to be stilled with a quick hand
but the scrub stirs
a rustling grows
it has to be now
the last move
sure to the target

a flurry of leap grab metal cracks on rock knuckles bang
gnarled roots scrabble in shale

but I have it —

I have it.

The crag squirms uselessly
as I bind it with ropes and slings

Todra

Colin Skeath

I'm hot, very hot, but the heat is dry and I don't sweat. My feet, balanced on sharp edges, cook in the over-tight shoes. I hold a dusty crimp under left-hand fingers and a sloping pocket under my right hand. My shoulder burns and I have time to reflect on the stupidity of climbing without either T shirt or sun cream. I swap hands alternately, dipping deep into chalk. My dry mouth tastes foul; I adjust my feet. The rope, clipped through a wire 20ft below, leads down to Angela Soper, who's out of sight. Overwhelmed by the never-ending pitch on this 'sport climb' without bolts, I take a moment out and view the parched landscape; but I've no choice: I must move up. I take a deep breath and... stop; must chalk up first. Okay: this time (must chalk up again). Right: feet high — the crimps hold out. I move up, but I'm shouting in my head: "GOD PLEASE GIVE ME A BOLT!" I keep going with no bolt in sight. I see a wire placement; the nut slips sweetly in. I pull it tight and clip; relief at last. More confident now, and after a couple of quick moves on agonizing feet, I can see the double belay bolts. Twenty feet of delicate and painful climbing on brittle crimps leads to the stance. I clip in, take my shoes off and bring Angela up. She climbs without pause for 150ft (I'd hoped she would at least show some signs that it was difficult). She arrives at the stance, but this time isn't singing. She asks: "Shall we go down?" So we do, abseiling 400ft to the ground — to the foot of Poissons Sacres in the Todra Gorge, Morocco.

The Poissons Sacre ('Sacred Fish') is a stunning sun-baked, almost feature-less crag. It sits in a primitive landscape which stirs a sense of primaeval awe: hereabouts there are caves abounding in which you can imagine Cromagnon Man might have lived, viewing much the same gorge as we can today. Indeed, at night, these same caves are sometimes lit by the fires of nomads who live now much as they have for thousands of years.

The climbs on Poissons Sacre are difficult to locate; you're never really sure you're on the right route. Bolts, as I'd discovered, are few and far between, the rock is like cinders — sharp and potentially rope-slicing (so abseiling needs care) — and the grades... well, French 6b can vary from 6b to 'no way'. The climbing is both bold and uncertain (no chalk trails to follow), with few nut placements; but being both remote and serious, surrounded by mountains, desert, caves, little vegetation and miles of rock under a vivid blue sky, it's unforgettable. With no mountain rescue or helicopters, however, you're very much on your own.

It was eight months before this experience, after a week of trek-

king in the High Atlas, that I made the journey to this gorge and came under its spell. It's a stunning area: a kilometre long, decorated with 1,000ft walls of reddish limestone, running into a valley of sublime 6,000ft cliffs. Though its remote, its easily accessible; there are four inexpensive hotels and you don't even need a car because the climbing is literally on the doorstep. On my first visit all I had was a chalk bag and a pair of 5.10s. Frustrated, but knowing I'd return, I consoled myself by soloing around on Mansor, on of the 1,000ft walls.

Unexpectedly, in February 2001, I had an option to renew acquaintance with the gorge, but there was little time to get a team together as most people had already booked for Spain. Angela, however, was free and feeling a need for adventure. It took us 22 hours to get to Todra — by coaches, planes and very dodgy taxis; but after three hours sleep in the hotel 'Les Roches', we were climbing.

Perhaps we shouldn't have started so fast, because, tired, we couldn't find our chosen first route. The result was a mini epic: 350ft of traditional climbing on loose rock. Eventually, we abseiled and went to Les Jardins, a friendly, well-bolted sunny cliff at the northern end of the gorge. This is the ideal place too climb if you're shell-shocked after a long journey — on warm rough slabs of limestone above agricultural terraces.

The following day, during a leisurely Continental breakfast whilst we waited for the sun to warm the Pillar Chouchant, we could appraise this conical peak in the centre of the gorge, which offers several routes of 10 pitches from 6a to 7b. With a mixture of bolted and traditional climbing, the Couchant gives tremendous multi-pitch climbing. On the upper traditional pitches, it's very tempting to run them out. This is fine until 15m or so when you get to difficulty and are faced with the prospect of a gigantic fall. This happened to me twice, my courage failing on both occasions, necessitating down climbing to arrange gear. As the light faded we summited and half an hour later were drinking coffee in the hotel planning our next outing.

Situated beside Poissons Sacre is L'Elephant, a 500ft cliff similar to Poissons Sacre, with the exception that the routes are easy to locate and there are frequent bolts. Angela and I walked up the barren scree slope past a sleeping nomad and his camel. The gorge was still in shade and cold, but this cliff has the sun from first light and was pleasantly warm.

Angela and I are an oddly-matched climbing partnership, but we climb harmoniously. She is 25 years my senior and is proud of her OAP status. She is strong and has balance second to none, able to contort her body and conserve energy resting where no rest appears possible. Working moves out she optimizes maximum efficiency. She is a joy to watch. On the other hand, I'm not. Like a hired thug I'm pointed at the strenuous bits and told to get on with it.

The next morning, was spent haggling with tradesmen in Tinehir

and by the afternoon I was restless. So I decided to solo the *Arret Nord*, a 1,200ft Severe. It promised dramatic climbing with a share of dodgy rock. At one point, about 900ft above the gorge floor, the route led up a steep wall, split by a laback crack. I held the crack and eyed some tat on a peg 30ft up. A rush of adrenaline hit as the situation dawned on me (I think the guidebook gave the pitch 5c). I took a deep breath and started the layback. Almost immediately I began to shake and get scared. I then lost the head game and wobbling badly, managed to reverse the moves to a small ledge. I became chairperson to a madman in one ear and a sane person in the other. After 20 minutes of indecision I heeded the sane person and wimped out, finding an easier but more dangerous alternative to the crack, pulling up huge hollow flakes. After a couple of hours more climbing, I ended up lost in the summit moonscape — just another brilliant day in Morocco.

The Todra Gorge offers an unbeatable combination of adventure, sport routes, long easy routes, hard traditional climbing and above all else, an unforgettable experience. If I close my eyes, now, I can see myself back on the Poissons Sacre, dry-mouthed and clinging to crimps, listening to Angela singing happily way below.

Poem by Terry Gifford

Crystal Ridge

Rising above the last hump
of wild hill, blown brown,
wind trammelled and wet,
the snows of Ben Macdhu
lie back between the black
knuckles of the mountain's fist,
clenched against a sky tearing
across the Cairngorm's fragile skin,
worn now as much by walkers
as by winters, their technical boots
kicking at bare bones.

And is the naked stone of this fist
'the sub-arctic jewel of Scotland',
clenched against the National Park,
or gleaming in the centre of its ring?
Cairngorm — a chairlift, a restaurant, now
a funicular. The ptarmigan still croaks
across Coire Sputan Dearg, but
how could the Cairngorm snow bunting
have hoped to halt a funicular in EU law?

Crystal Ridge — glinting, grazing,
crumbling its crystals under boots
and Cairngorm thaws, poised between
rock, snow and run-off to the sandy glen.
A finger gently angled down at us,
it points to isolation and change:
Wilderness Permits, Bike Bans,
Radio-linked Rangers, less snow,
more zoning, campaigns to save the midge.

Rising above the last hump
of wild hill, the cold silence
of Crystal Ridge in spring sun,
the helicopters come and go
lifting, as from the back of a hand,
of the snows of Ben Macdhu
fuel-soaked from the crash
guarded by Americans clenched
against curious walkers and
Scottish citizens crossing
the fragile skin of their land.

A Spanish Holiday

The Right Hon, Earl of Fulwood D.G.

It must have been in the middle of January that three of my old rope-mates crept out of the woodwork and dropped it into my shell-like that they were going to Spain in February for a climbing holiday. They had it nearly all sorted out: an apartment booked in Calpe, several guidebooks in all sorts of languages, some of which they understood, a young forest of topos, a hire car to meet them at the airport and permission from their respective spouses. They already had flights. All they needed was a fourth; and they were willing to put up with me.

It was Geoffrey who actually phoned. He was decidedly enthusiastic — a typical salesman in full flight; there would be winter sunshine, absolutely guaranteed, old man, just the right temperature for shirt-sleeved climbing, cheap food, cheap drink. All the climbs had *in-situ* protection. I was a bit doubtful. I had thought about going skiing. We both had. The snow seemed to be quite good this winter for a change and these bolted-up climbs all seem to start at E something. Nobody puts bolts on the grade of climb I'm comfortable on. Well, the skiing prospect had become academic.

The wife had twisted her knee pulling one of the neighbour's ewes out of a hedge and so I got a week's exeat. Geoffrey reassured me about the grades. There were easier routes, some of them bolted, but they were going to take a rack of British gear because there were some good long routes at a lesser grade. The skiing still pulled, but the clincher was that I would be letting them down if I didn't go. A rope of three would be no fun. My new mirror glasses would look just as *soigné* on the crag as on the piste. I said I'd give it serious consideration and 'phone the next evening to give them my answer.

The good lady said "Yes," but Geoffrey beat me to the 'phone call. We'd only just finished the evening meal when the phone rang. They already had seats booked, but he'd checked with the bucket shop. There was a spare pail for me on the same flight. "Good show," I said. "Book me a bucket."

Typical. Sod, his law, operated as usual. Living as I do in the pleasant part of Cheshire, it is fairly easy to get to Manchester Airport but nearly every foreign destination I wish to fly to can only be reached from Gatwick or Heathrow or some other benighted southern traffic jam. If there is a flight from Manchester they have the cheek to surcharge you. And now, I had to be in London on the Friday and the flight was from Manchester early on Saturday morning. Even if everything went according to timetable I wouldn't be able to check in the usual two hours before, but I should just about be able to get to the airport in time for the

plane. Geoff gave me my ticket and said they'd cross their fingers and look out for me on the plane. The meeting in London went well and I even got time to have a quick sweep of the shops. Fitted myself up with a natty white cap. You remember the ones the guides used to wear in Chamonix, with the little flap that folds down to protect the back of your neck and your ears? Just the thing for the sunny crag scene. Oh, and the price of the pass-out: a new leather handbag for the wife, which cost more than the flight; bloody London.

As it was I had to get a taxi from the railway station to the airport but I got there 20 minutes before take-off on a typical Manchester day, solid stair-roads with a wind behind them. I'd just picked out the flight number on the monitor and was rushing down the Departures concourse looking for the right desk, when I rocked back on my heels. Clawson was having his luggage weighed at my check-in desk. I hid behind a huge queue for La Palma until he'd vanished towards Passport Control and sneaked up to the desk. To my surprise the young lady knew my name. Well, I suppose she would: I'd be the last person to check in and there would be only one seat left. Hope to God it wasn't next to Clawson. But no, it wasn't, and that wasn't the reason she knew my name.

"Your friends," she said, "have persuaded me to save you a seat by them. Most irregular, but one of them was very persuasive."

"That would be Richard," I said, "he can be very charming. Where is the seat?"

"At the very front," she said, "in the No Smoking Area."

"You don't happen to remember where the gentleman who just checked in is sitting do you?"

"Not exactly, but he's somewhere near the back. He didn't seem to mind, he said that he would enjoy a good cigar. I told him they weren't allowed, but he ignored me."

"He would," I said, and thanked her as politely as possible and hurried on praising Providence and the charming Richard.

I hustled along the corridors on the moving walkways, keeping a weather eye open for Nemesis in the shape of Clawson. As I entered the final hall I saw him disappearing down the tunnel. I would be right behind him as we got on the plane. I dropped my hand luggage and took off my jacket and sweater, put on the new white cap, with the flap down, wrapped the sweater round my neck, put on the mirror glasses and marched boldly down the tube into the plane. I needn't have bothered. Clawson was already at the back of the plane, opening three overhead lockers at once, dropping bags and coats onto the people below, trying to force his bags in, simultaneously trying to persuade the young lady in the window seat to have his by the aisle. Much more convenient, but I think she held him off. I didn't take too much notice, I took care to sit down pretty quickly. I hushed the comments of the other three about

my unconventional appearance and warned them of the imminent danger to the peace of mind and safety of body of the inhabitants of Southern Spain. None of them had ever met Clawson, but Geoffrey had heard of him, and not only from me.

They calmed me down. These retired captains of industry like nothing better than to get their teeth into a problem. At Alicante the people at the rear of the plane would get off down a set of stairs put up to the back door. They'd watch him get off and when he was safely out of the way we'd get off, at the front. If I wished, I could wear my disguise after we'd gone through Passport Control. They knew my old rucksack and would get it off the carousel for me while I skulked behind a pillar. We'd let most people get well away before we went through Customs and tried to find the car rep. No problem; Philip even saw Clawson's team go off in their car: three of them altogether. Bold fellow, Phil; he even had a word with their teamleader, or at least the fellow doing all the signing up with the car rep. They had an apartment in Benidorm, which was a relief. The only risk now was meeting him on the crag. We never did. We had a tremendous week. Calpe was a brilliant centre and all the lies that Geoff had told to get me to come turned out to be truths.

By the journey home, I couldn't have cared whether Clawson sat beside me on the plane home or came to stay for a week. A week of dry, sun-washed rock. It did rain once, at night. Six and a half days climbing in a row. What more could you want? My fingers were terminally arthritic but I was euphoric. Euphoric, happy as a heifer in hock-high hay. If I did see him I'd pretend I was high or drunk and sleep the flight away. As it happened I had no need. We got four seats in a row across the plane. I was on the outside of my block and the seat next to me was taken just before the plane went by a fellow who looked ill. He sank into the seat and looked glazedly about him not knowing what to do with his hand luggage. The hostess seemed to think the same when she asked him to stow his bag. He hadn't the energy to get up out of his seat and I offered to put it up for him. I was just putting it into the locker when he apologised and asked me if he could have it for a moment. He unzipped it and, as he took out a paperback, I couldn't help noticing a bundle of quickdraws. He kept looking around him like a hunted man but avoiding my eyes when our glances crossed. The window seat on the other side of him was still empty and he cringed every time someone walked by. He started like an unbroken colt when I commented to him that it looked as though we would be able to spread out onto the spare seat. Looking at me with fearful suspicion and not answering. He never heard the hostess asking him to tighten his seat belt and recoiled when she touched him on the arm to attract his attention.

As the plane took off he heaved a huge sigh of relief. Again he completely ignored the hostesses when they came down with the drinks trolley but on impulse I bought him one of those little plastic bottles of

brandy. He looked at me in amazement and started to lift his body forward out of his seat to get at the change in his pocket and was even more amazement when I told him not to bother. The others, who had noticed this little byplay, were even more surprised than he was; the number of times I'd spontaneously bought one of them a drink that wasn't in a round being countable on the fingers of one foot. He started the brandy in little sips and then finished it off in one long swallow. He put the plastic beaker on my seat table and relaxed back into his seat.

"Thank you," he finally whispered, just as Geoff leaned across and asked me if I'd heard the commotion halfway down the plane. "I think it's your friend Clawson. He's opened a bottle of plonk while he was standing up and spilled half of it down a rather large old lady." The lady in question was not taking this kindly and Geoff stood up, pretending to get something out of his locker, to give us a commentary on the proceedings.

Clawson was wearing a cravat, one of those yellow Paisley things which go with tweed jackets and leather elbow patches, and he was attempting to mop down the lady's ample décolletage with it while still waving about the bottle which was scattering drops of tinto on all and sundry. Someone with tact sent the two prettiest hostesses to sort him out and eventually comparative peace reigned instead of red wine.

"Is Clawson really a friend of yours?" asked my neighbour and, upon my assuring him that he was not and that, in fact, I'd spent the journey out in mortal fear of his seeing me, he added with a vehemence which surprised me. "That man is a menace to civilised society, childhood euthanasia is the only answer to people like him."

"You know him? We have something in common." And I told him a little of the Pembroke episode and the dinner in *The Club*. He sagged in his seat and started to tell me of his holiday.

Clawson's team of three had been in the ground floor apartment below my neighbour, Sandell, who was also in a team of three. They had arrived at the apartment block almost together on the first Saturday and had been unloading their respective cars at the same time. One of Sandell's friends had been before and knew where the nearest supermarket was, so the two cars went off in convoy to buy in food for the first few days.

"I should have seen the symptoms then," Sandell said. "The bread counter is just inside the door and you have to pay for the bread separately there, but he went off into the main store with a trolley full of bread and cakes he hadn't paid for, with the assistant yelling at him down the store. He wanted the best apples from the front of one of those heaped-up pyramids and finished up with half of them on the floor. He mistook a German woman's trolley for his own and went off with it. Her husband was a bit aggrieved and Clawson got on his high horse about Krauts and the war and the way they put their towels on the beach

loungers. His friends had to drag him away pretending they wanted his opinion on some wine. They'd just paid for all their stuff when he realised that the jars of what he'd thought were jam were bottled fruit and he wanted them changed. That mystified the young woman on the till. The queue forming behind him was very grateful when she got the manager to come and he proved to speak English.

That evening, one of the others in the downstairs team, a pleasant bloke called Ashley, had come up and asked where they were going on the next day. It finished up that the two carloads would go to the same place and Ashley would climb with Sandell so they'd got three ropes of two, Dalle d'Ola they went to and had a relatively good day.

"I felt sorry for Clawson's rope mate, though," said Sandell. "Clawson seemed to be a bit off form. Twice he got to a bolt and took the quickdraw off and then discovered that he needed it to hang on for a rest. He got his finger through the bolt eye and then started screaming for tight because he thought his finger was going to get pulled off."

Most of the day he got lowered off but twice the routes were a bit long and the leader belayed at the top. The first time Clawson abbed off first and was only a bit nervous, but the second time he came down last and froze on the stance. He was there for 20 minutes, messing with knots, and plucking up courage until a German, which was a trifle ironic, came across and gave him a top rope. Most of Sandell's group were embarrassed, but Clawson seemed quite cheerful about it all and couldn't see what all the fuss was about.

The three of them decided to risk going to the same place as the others the next day, provided none of them had to climb with Clawson. That was how it started off. Puig Campana they went to. They all set off from the car park together and walked up to the face in crocodile. Poor old Sandell just followed the man in front of him, who was following the man in front of him, who was Clawson, who went wrong. They finished up soloing up the sides of a steep gully, full of barbed-wire trees and razor-blade bushes. By the time they got there the other three had started and only the third man was left on the first stance. He had left a rope dangling down to the floor. The other bloke was wider awake, and fitter, so that he didn't need as long a breather, and must have known about Clawson. Sandell says he had got his gear on and tied onto the rope faster than a gecko's tongue and was starting to lead the second pitch before Clawson was asking if Sandell wanted to lead the first pitch. He, Clawson, thought he'd save himself for the crux pitches. It was only later that Sandell realised that they would never know which the crux pitches were. Clawson did offer to lead one easy-looking groove, but finished up taking ages, dropping two krabs, a quickdraw, and two wires, and putting in masses of unnecessary gear, most of which came out. After that Sandell finished up leading it all.

Every time Clawson came to a hard bit, he'd try to find another way to

do it, get off line and be pulled back in by the rope. Three times he fell off, once because he'd forgotten to take a runner out and climbed past it until the rope jerked him off. He'd forgotten his descendeur and insisted on abbing with the rope wrapped round the back of a karabiner. This put masses of coils and kinks in the rope and twice it got stuck when they pulled it through. Part way down one ab, fortunately near the bottom, he found a loose block and pushed it off. It landed on Sandell's rope and cut 40ft off it. They got to the bottom ages after the others, two of whom had waited for them. The stone had landed near them and they played hell with Clawson, who took umbrage and stormed off down the hill, got lost again and got to the car half an hour after everyone else. Sandell knew about Clawson by now and thought he'd done his share of penance, after all he wasn't even in their team, but no, as worse was to come.

That night Sandell and one of the others wanted to phone their wives. The two of them were just getting into the car when Clawson came bursting out of the building and forced his way into the car. He wanted to telephone as well. They stopped at the nearest telephone box and got out to form an orderly queue. Clawson, as efficient as ever, locked the passenger doors, pushed the locking knob down on the driver's door and pulled it to, leaving the keys inside. They spent an hour trying to get back in and finished up having to break the quarter light. They fixed a plastic bag over it but, of course, that was the night it blew hard and rained and the car was awash with water the next day.

The morning after, a fellow from another team in the block came knocking at Clawson's team's door. His mate was ill and he wanted a rope mate for the day. He was better than them and they fixed up that he'd lead them as a big international rope up *El Dorado I* on the Toix Sea Cliff, using their gear, and when the second on the rope had got to the top he'd push off back to Benidorm to see how his mate was, leaving them to it. He climbed on two ropes with Clawson as second and everyone else behind on single ropes. He was as strong as a bull and romped up the main pitch pulling Clawson up so fast, he hadn't got time to mess about. Even so, Clawson had taken a long time, so the leader whipped up the top pitch, tied one of the ropes off, took his own, and disappeared to see how his mate was. Clawson had clipped the single rope behind him into every piece of gear there was, so that the rope went to and fro like a fiddler's elbow and, of course, it jammed. The man was still belayed at the bottom of the crack. He shouted up to Clawson until he was hoarse and then untied to untwist all the kinks which had fed back. He had been wise enough to hold the rope between his teeth while he was dealing with the very end, but the minute he held it in one hand to shake out the last above him, it came loose at the jam and Clawson pulled it through.

A lot of the gear had lifted out because the rope was going back and forth and it slid down, its weight making a great loop on the rope, so that when the free end went up the gear slid off into the sea. It turned out that

most of it was Clawson's. It was the only time I saw Sandell smile. They managed to get the dangling end of the rope back by throwing another rope's end round it. Sandell insisted on waiting until a third person got to the stance, so that Clawson wouldn't be belaying him, before he led the top pitch, using the gear the leader had left in, and the comfort of the fixed rope. He had a knife, he said, and he nearly cut Clawson's rope when it was top C tight, but the belayer behind would very probably have held him.

Very politely that night they explained to the other team's leader that they didn't want to go to the same place tomorrow, at least if Clawson was going to be in the party. Sandell, they said, was showing signs of strain. The trouble was they didn't know which crag Clawson's team was going, to be able to avoid it. They settled on starting fairly late to let the other lot get away and then going into the gorge to do *Aurora*. There were no cars parked when they got there, and they breathed sighs of relief all round. Life was wonderful until they got to below the red corner with the wide crack. One of Sandell's team was a star at gritstone cracks and was looking forward to it but sitting below it, looking as happy as muslims at a pig roast, were Clawson's mates. He was halfway up the crack, clipped into the bolt, but struggling ineffectually in the crack. His foot was stuck and he'd been there half an hour. The crack star wasn't having that and he climbed past and over him. There was, said Sandell, a certain pleasure in using Clawson's head as a foothold; a pity tricouni boots had gone out of fashion. When all three were up, they heaved Clawson out of the crack and up to the stance at a rapid rate of knots. Leaving him there they shot up the next two pitches and decided to ignore the guidebook and descend down the slope beside the rib to the canyon bottom.

They thought the other team would go up to the summit as the guide suggested, but no. They were near the bottom of the prickly bush slope when they heard the others hallooing. It was easy to see what was wrong, Clawson had been climbing down one of the walls holding back the old terracing and pulled it over. A regular avalanche tore down into the barranco. They only, Sandell said, escaped by rushing sideways out of the stonefall line ignoring the spiny undergrowth, finishing up alive but scratched to ribbons.

Halfway back to the airport on the motorway, the other car had nearly run them off the road, because Clawson pulled the driver's arm to get them to pull over. He'd put his small 'sack into the wrong car. A motorcycle policeman had seen all this and gave them a going over for, as far as Sandell could judge, erratic driving. He was hoping that Clawson would lose his temper and strike the policeman, but no such luck. His 'friends' bundled him into the car and wouldn't let him say a thing.

Sandell had insisted on checking in before all the others to get a seat on his own. He said these few hours in the plane had been the happiest of the week. It had been a relief to get everything off his chest. It was not likely that Clawson would find anyone to go to Spain with him after that week's débâcle, and in any case he probably wouldn't be let into the country again. We ought to be safe.

Sandell almost smiled.

Chee Dale Afternoon

Steve Dean

"The dodging of trains was the most death-defying feature of climbing in this area until the late 60s; tunnel-walking escapes, when the valley path flooded on winter nights, provided the pinnacle of sensation, as one leapt from the path of an oncoming monster in complete blackness, or cowered, nose in water, between the sooty walls and the roaring wheels. That excitement has now gone, and one can only conjure up the spooks of trains and tunnelling navvies on black night retreats."

(Paul Nunn, 1974)

A lovely early autumn day, and here I am back at Chee Dale, a place I haven't visited in a long time. I've always found it a rather strange place to climb and walk: surprisingly isolated and increasingly dominated by the greenery claiming the valley back after the closure of the railway in 1968. Yes, it is indeed a strange place, somewhat secretive and secluded, yet marked forever by the presence of the railway in the form of a whole series of bridges and tunnels along the valley. The line had been opened in 1867, and was the Midland Railway's principal route from London to Manchester. Today, however, the valley is a peaceful place, a good place to take in the pleasant limestone scenery above the many twists of the River Wye and to watch the varied birdlife. All this is a million miles removed from the noise and disturbance of the railway, which existed there just over 30 years ago.

I've always enjoyed climbing on the crags along the south side of the river; and the setting and position of the routes on Plum Buttress and Moving Buttress are particularly fine, being full of character and overlooking the old route of the railway into the series of tunnels that once led to Miller's Dale. When the railway was in operation, the lines divided below Moving Buttress, and while the branch line down to Buxton passed beneath Plum Buttress, the main line to Manchester headed northwards towards Chapel-en-le-Frith. Today the alignment of the old railway carries the name of the Monsal Trail, a pleasant and gently graded pathway for walkers into this strangely lovely place in the heart of Derbyshire. On this balmy September day the place was lush and leafy after a wet summer, and the rich greens of the trees, grass and ferns contrasted pleasingly with the bold white crags. A light breeze carried birdsong from the trees below us as we walked up the steep grassy slope to the foot of Moving Buttress. A pair of butterflies caught my eye, as I looked down the valley to the first of the railway tunnels to the east. Some walkers were emerging from its mouth accompanied by a lively Springer Spaniel, and were chattering happily in the gentle sunshine. It was all so different from my first visit to this place over 30 years

ago. I remembered a February afternoon in 1969, and walking along the valley after a heavy snowfall. The place was very still and quiet below an ominous grey sky, and the trees were heavy with snow, itself so fresh and white, that the crags seemed dingy in comparison. The railway tracks were still down, although the line had been closed the year before, an early victim of the Beeching rationalisation of the rail system at that time. I recall that we walked along between the rails throwing snowballs at each other.

As the others walked on, I stopped and watched a team busy climbing an aid route on Plum Buttrass. The second was wearing a red duvet, smoking a fag and hanging nonchalantly from his stance, paying out the ropes to his mate who was some distance above him. There was much banter between them, and after a while the bloke in the red duvet started singing the Beatles song 'Day Tripper'. There was something about their attitude, combined with my own feelings for the area that made me decide to try and live up near the Peak District. Something of the magic of the place was present there for me that day. We didn't climb anything ourselves; it was far too cold and miserable, but the atmosphere of the place stayed with me. There was something about those crags, dark and brooding above the still shiny tracks of one of the great railway routes through the middle of England that appealed to me, and made me want to return.

There were two areas of thought running through my mind as I lingered behind the others as they walked towards the tunnel below Moving Buttrass. One, was my response to the humour and attitude of the two lads on Plum Buttrass; I never found out who they were but their repartee had made me laugh, made me want to be part of it all up here, far away from the bustle of dreary South London. The other was the significance for me, of the railway line we were walking along, what had once been the main line from St. Pancras to Manchester. During the 1930s, my grandfather Bertram had done split shifts on that route, working either from London to Leicester, or from Leicester on to Manchester and back. I thought of him all those years before, hard at work as the train hurtled along towards Manchester and the end of the shift. The railwaymen had to work hard on that route as well, as it climbed steadily from Bakewell, up past Monsal Head and Millers Dale before emerging from the tunnels into Chee Dale. They called it the Manchester Bank — a name no doubt coined by the firemen who must have had to sweat hard as the trains climbed through the heart of the Peak. The sight of what we now call Runyon's Corner and Moving Buttrass must have come as a great relief to the crews, as they toiled to keep the steam pressure up before the gradient started to level out, and they could begin the long steady descent down to New Mills and Manchester. Passing through Chee Dale must have cheered them, given them a chance to relax, and perhaps have a smoke, with Manchester only about 20 min-

utes away.

I never knew my grandfather; he died in 1939, 11 years before I was born. Like many other working men of the time, he was badly damaged by his experiences in the trenches of the Great War, suffered increasingly poor health afterwards, and died of Tuberculosis while still only in his 40s. I can never go to Chee Dale without thinking about him — and the men he worked with on the railway all those years ago.

I never got to climb in the valley while the trains were still running, but those who did tell me that it was quite an experience: hanging by your fingertips on Moving Buttress or Runyon's Corner, while a Manchester express, belching smoke and steam, roared past beneath you. It was said that the crags used to shudder as the trains passed them, and I can believe it. Just below Moving Buttress there used to be a signal box, and the crag is supposed to have got its name from an old railwayman who worked there, and swore that it moved every time a train came past. Rumours have emerged in recent years that the line from Matlock to Buxton might be re-opened, and once again Moving Buttress might tremble.

Returning to the Chee Dale crags this particular autumn day had given us a good work out, the steepness of the rock resulting in us being well-exercised with aching toes and swollen forearms. I'd saved the best route until last: the excellent, steep fingery wall of *Thin Lizzy*, perhaps the best route on Moving Buttress. The friction on the dry limestone was good, but the climbing was harder and more sustained than I remembered (I'm getting old and feeble, I know) and it was with a dry throat and pumped arms that I tied myself onto the trees at the top of the wall. Alan wandered up it after me with ease, while once again I let my mind wander. I glanced at the blue tape sling around the tree, and the yellow climbing rope tied into the karabiner that passed through it. My eyes then drifted down the valley, down to the river and along the alignment of the old railway to the tunnel, and took in the serene character of this place on a gentle, autumn afternoon. It was hard to even imagine the raucous, cacophony of sound that would have echoed around the place, as a steam-hauled express burst out of the tunnel mouth. Yet just over 30 years ago, such a thing was a regular every day occurrence here, frightening the birds out of the trees as another monster roared past. Then would follow the gradual return to silence as the sound of the train faded into the distance and the gentle rustle of leaves and birdsong would be flavoured by the last remnants of the smell of steam, smoke and oil; a striking contrast.

We abseiled back down *Thin Lizzy*, packed the gear away and eased our feet out of torturous rockboots. The sky had started to cloud over, and as we walked back towards Wye Dale it looked as if it might rain soon. Wandering along beside the river, contemplating a pint or two on the way home, I started to think about my grandfather again. Perhaps it is something to do with a pang of guilt on my part that even at 50, we still need to climb, to come out to play like children. The lives of our grandparents and even our parents were so different

from our own as to make comparison meaningless. The social changes since the last war have given us a degree of freedom and mobility beyond their comprehension. I was glad to make the connection of this peaceful place with my grandfather, and the brilliant engineering achievement of the Midland Railway in creating a main line through such a complex landscape that was to remain in use for over 100 years. The sharp contrasts in our respective lives were not lost on me, however, he, and men like him, passing through this lovely place whilst hard at work, while we now come to Chee Dale for an enjoyable and exhilarating form of leisure. I thought of him peering from the train on a winter afternoon more than 60 years ago, looking up at the same crags we now climb on. I realised how lucky I was to grow up in the gentle and peaceful 1950s. Not for me my grandfather's life of hard work in service, five years fighting in the trenches and then in Turkey, hard graft on the railways, and then a premature death leaving a wife and young family with another World War on the horizon.

For some reason, the beauty of the valley that evening, particularly the lushness and subtle colours of the trees together with the constant rippling of the river, seemed to bring this into clearer focus for me. I thought again of the railwaymen here over 100 years ago, and the hard plain lives they led. Progress brings both benefits and new problems, but we really don't know we are born. I thought how lucky we are to be fit and active, and able to enjoy a delightful autumn day in such a fine place. In one of Walter Tevis's books (either *The Colour of Money* or *The Hustler*), he scornfully laments that self-pity is the most popular indoor sport in modern western society. Tevis got it right, but sometimes we all seem to need a prod, a reminder of our own relative good fortune. For me that afternoon, going to Chee Dale and reflecting on the old railway and my grandfather's life provided just such a reminder.

When we got back to the car park at Wye Dale, the Dippers were flying fast and low over the river, and the great trees were alive with the social chatter of dozens of Jackdaws. The birds were here long before the railway was built, long before the climbers and walkers ever came to this place and will be here long beyond us. As we'd come away from the crag, it had looked as if rain was on its way, but now the sky had brightened towards the west and it had all the makings of a fine evening. The Mallard ducks in the long grass grumbled as I started the car, scuttling out onto the river as we made our way onto the Bakewell Road and our journey home.

Just beyond Bakewell, I pulled over into a lay-by and we got out into a surprisingly chilly breeze. Autumn was well on its way. In the clear evening light there was a good view of the hills away to the north, where the limestone country merges into the harsher gritstone plateaux of Kinder Scout and Bleaklow. I looked down at my tired hands, which still had chalk under the nails, and then away again towards the hills. I shivered slightly and could have sworn I heard a train whistle, far away towards Miller's Dale. We climbed back into the car and headed for the warmth of a pub fireside in Tideswell, tired but content after a good day.

Laziness and Exercise

David Craig

Do I ever, really, want to exercise myself? Lazing is so nice. It is so sane. My body is at ease, the garden lounger is bearing up my head, my back, my legs as gently and buoyantly as a cloud. And lying back like this I can look straight up into the clouds, those white strands that swell slowly, curl in on themselves, unravel from white chrysanthemum to cauliflower to wisps of milk in a huge cobalt ocean... I can watch the swifts race past, screaming with the joy of flight. Here is the perfection of lazing, to be so at ease and at the same time offered the spectacle of supreme exertions by another species. They have to feed, these swifts, those swallows and martins, those eternally nibbling sheep. To keep alive, they have to fly and munch, fly and munch. I don't. I can stay here for hours. My fodder is in the fridge. I can make it edible in 20 minutes. Sure, I could go and hunt for my food by catching rainbow trout in the flooded gravel pit two miles down the road — it's just about the only outdoor place not debarred to us by this year's plague.

I don't have to move, but I will. I will get up from my lounger and plant those Livingstone daisy seedlings near the flagstone path whose extra warmth will help the flowers blaze into colour like wee torches. I will walk 100 yards to the bowling green and bowl for an hour, which is just about the calmest and most gradual game known to the human race. And why? Because the mind never quite lazes, it needs exercise for its satisfaction, and my eyes abet it. I can see that stretch of blank flowerbed asking for growing things. I can see that vault of perfect blue which assures me that rain is a thing of the past (of at least a week ago) and I can work off the restlessness in my legs on the bowling green without fear of interruption from the elements.

I think it's in my legs, this pent-up wish for movement which the foot-and-mouth prohibitions in the ghastly months since late February. I can't walk between the fields or up the fells. My thighs want to forge forwards. My chest and forehead want to feel the resistance of the air and the passage of it as it flows past. So I'm not all lazy — exercise can be as true a delight as eating Loch Fyne kippers or drinking mango nectar. When the fells are not closed by the plague, it's my especial pleasure to mix lazing and exercising, moving and relaxing, in the peculiar balance of climbing rock. I suppose that in squash, as in bowls, you're always at it, there is continuous movement, whether it's frantic or gentle. When you climb rock, you alternate. For some minutes, to pause or even to slow down could mean injury, and perhaps death. You have to swing sideways, then upwards, with your fingers hooked onto little sharp ledges, or else your arms will tire unbearably, the glycogen



*Stretching the legs: David Craig takes exercise on 'Eliminate A', Dow Crag.
Photo: Tim Noble*

in your muscles will run out, they will go limp like string. If you're second on the rope, you'll dangle, more or less comfortably. If you're leading the climb, you may well suffer a fairly drastic collision with some lower point on the rockface, and some part of you will bruise or cut or break.

Let's imagine that this intense exercising of body and mind continues upwards without failing. You plant your toes in the right dimples on the rock. The pressure of your high-friction rubber soles keeps them there. You transfer, your weight leftwards, then upwards then upwards, at exactly the right moment. The mass of Borrowdale slate in front of your eyes passes in a blur. You're across, you're round, you're up, with a gasp you've pulled onto that roomy ledge, anchored with a metal nut jammed into a rough-sided crack at waist height. You've given an owl-call of jubilation to your partner invisible down below you've pulled in 90ft of rope. Belaying and secure, you can laze. It really feels like that. In the aftermath of the adrenalin rush that helped you to get this high on the great rock buttress called *Troutdale Pinnacle*. In the aftermath of the rush you reach an acme of peacefulness. A beach must feel like this after the ebb — stretched-out, sheer, nothing is happening any more, the sunlight and the wind's movements can be accepted with a sublime indifference to what may happen next. This minute is good. Everything is all right, the tasselled crowns of the birch trees 100ft below are extraordinarily beautiful. The whole of you hangs suspended — effort, movement is somewhere else, far off — you're lazing.

True, your hands are working, taking in the rope. Your brain is working, imagining what point down there on the rock-face the second climber must have reached. The centre of yourself is at ease. It's in that condition most beautifully imaged by Shakespeare as a swan's-down feather at slack water, when the tide is neither flowing nor ebbing. You're lazing as completely as if you were in bed between dreaming and getting up, or as if you were supine on the lounge in the garden.

It's a dialectic, isn't it? A necessary alternation between exerting and relaxing. Each intensifies the other. Without the exercise of humping 25lbs of ropes and gear up the hillside, and the more dynamic exercise of shinning up the crux pitch of *Obituary Grooves*, I couldn't be lazing on the ledge. Without the exertions of whoever made this garden out of a farmyard and my wife who's perfected it, I couldn't be lounging under the laburnum, letting my eyes follow the sprinting and jinking of the swifts. I'm glad I thought of that, that both are necessary that without the lazy-contemplation part of it, the exertion part of it might have gone unappreciated. Because otherwise it would have been a victory for puritanism, and only righteous industry would come well out of the reckoning. Unless of course it's puritanical to believe that you can be fully at peace only if you've put in some really arduous effort in the first place.

Mountaineering Dreams

Harry Sales

Mountaineering literature has little to say about dreaming except in its metaphorical sense. Yet mountaineers sleep when they can and when they sleep they dream. What do they dream about? Unfortunately, anyone threatening to tell a recent dream is normally given short shrift by his companions, so the material for this short article is meagre and largely confined to my own experiences. I apologise for concentrating so much on my activities, asleep or awake, but only hope that my memories strike a common chord amongst those who frequent the mountains and who bother to read this: I have come across people who say they never dream but cannot believe they can be climbers or mountaineers.

But climbing or scrambling episodes, in some form or other, are a regular feature of my sleeping pattern. They, like erotic dreams, come when least expected, but regularly, over the years, they reappear. Sometimes they are repetitive in the sense that I am descending or ascending an extremely steep or dangerous place: rarely, if ever, a rockface — nothing so obvious. But a surprising variety of landscapes feature: thick mud, heavy scree, steep vegetated slopes with no view to the ground below. All these are situations one has encountered in various parts of the world, but why choose them to dream about? Why not dream about the even more dramatic situations on the open mountain itself? Why not dream about actual happenings, the times one has come off, the times others have come off, the near misses, the almost disasters? Never in my dreams am I falling in a critical situation; yet I have been incritical situations. Who has not?

But that thick mud. Could it be the mud Pat, Bob Allen and I encountered on the flanks of Mount Kenya — obnoxious stuff in which our badly maintained but superbly driven jeep nearly ended its life trying to get as high as possible on the eastern side? The vertical bog on the western side was a little muddy, too: all good dream material. The scree, of course, comes straight from the alps: those endless trudges up and along terminal moraine, the weather clamming in, the sky getting dark and how much further to the hut? And the steep vegetated slopes: they could be 'easy ways down' at Swanage, Tilly Whim, Subliminal or such. Or could they be at Bosigran, on the way down to Porthmoina Island, when you were allowed to climb there? The fairly steep way down to the base of *Bosigran Ridge*, where Roger Salisbury and John Atherton both tried to stop the same boulder with their bodies, comes to mind, but is not steep enough to match my dreams. There are plenty of desperate places in the Lake District that would qualify, though.

But, again, they can be repetitive in another sense. Many times I

have had a vivid picture of being somewhere in the Zermatt area, and dreamt that I had once more come all that way and done nothing except waste time. As I have always felt the need to get value for money, this is a thing I have never done. Why then dream it? Again, I have a picture which, because I've dreamed it more than once, I can still bring to mind, of a particular steep ascent leading to a saddle between two summits: in my dreams I have always been unable even to start the ascent. In fact, it bears no relation to anything I have seen or experienced: I've always managed at least to start. But what about real events in the Alps? The time when David Young and I were weathered off the Matterhorn and descended threequarters of the way with lightning flashing all around us; or the time one of the McCalls came off on a steep snow traverse and one at least of us managed to hold the rest; or the time when we were descending a glacier unroped and well apart, and I managed to go through a crevasse? These were all suitable subjects for dreams, but do not resurrect themselves whilst I'm asleep.

It is the repetitive nature of dreams that puzzles me; are they trying to tell me something? In a completely different landscape I have frequently dreamt of a particular area of sandstone climbing: I have climbed on most of the sandstone outcrops of Southern England but none resembling this: it could not and therefore does not exist: because two sandstone faces were on opposite sides of a broad grassy area, facing each other so that my companions and I were able to wander along trying routes on one side or the other: wonderful but impossible. But why should I dream this regularly? Is dream life trying to make real life easier?

By and large my climbing dreams have been about difficulties rather than dangers: are they trying to tell me, in some Freudian way, that I have got over difficulties in the past and can, therefore, get over whatever I'm finding difficult in the present? But some of my more impressive predicaments could have qualified for that justification. What about the time when, on our way to Sark, we had sailed in to the foot of Boulder Ruckle and I was led up something above my standard, only to find on the halfway stance that the rope from my leader was making a rapid descent. Rescue in the form of a borrowed rope came later. I won't divulge the name of my leader; he died several years ago. So did Peter Biven, with whom I remember climbing similar things on the limestone at Berry Head, but feeling absolutely safe in his hands. And what about those great sea traverses at which he was an expert, where clothing was kept to a minimum? But that takes me to that epic Alpine Club traverse of *Magical Mystery Tour* in filthy weather with about 12 on a rope, in traditional Alpine manner. The fact that I was in the sea more than most, to the peril of my comrades as well as myself, should have given me ample material for dreams galore, but I have not used it.

My dreams have never encompassed an actual fall, though I have

fallen — notably when I was with John Poole, who first took me climbing, as distinct from scrambling; we were both leading young Parachute Regiment men on the Milestone Buttress. As a peculiar result of John's courteous assistance of a lady in distress, wedged at the bottom of the famous chimney, I soloed down to meet the others. I remember John shouting to me to get further in, but the next thing I remember was being helped down on the slopes below, and apologising profusely to the others. The funny thing is, that I remember John shouting once and me apologising once, but he insisted that he had shouted many times and that I apologised about 50 times. Concussion produces peculiar effects but not, as far as I can remember, relevant dreams.

What of other people's dreams? For obvious reasons I have little knowledge of them. However, there was the amazing experience with Natalie Bull, recorded in her obituaries, when in a hotel in Kathmandu, I dreamed that she was pushing me up a hill in a wheelbarrow. Next morning, Pat and I were having breakfast and Natalie came to join us. With a straight face I said: "Thank you, Natalie, for pushing me up that hill last night in a wheelbarrow."

She jumped a mile and said: "How did you know?" She'd dreamed that she had exhausted herself completely pushing me up in that barrow. Strange but true. True also is the account I have given elsewhere of Don Whillans's dream. At the house where we habitually stayed in Sennen Cove, he had been watching a film that depicted the detached hand of a murder victim following the murderer into his bath. This then featured in his dreams. The next day, I was climbing at Land's End with Derek Walker and one of his daughters on, I think *Land's End Long Climb* and took over the lead at the last short pitch. As my hand went over the final piece of granite, Don emerged from the hotel with a drinking companion and, almost staggering back at the sight of my solitary hand, emitted the words enshrined in my memory: "Ee, there's an 'and 'ere: oo, it's 'Arry's".

My own dreams still take me to the hills. Recently, whilst asleep I found myself, with Pat, climbing some hill or mountain with Bob Allen (who has the habit of saying, "We could fit a little route in on the way up."), and him suggesting we deviate from the ridge to get to the bottom of some cliff or other. We've climbed and scrambled with Bob in many places, and this is not out of character. But what about my other recent dream, like so many in the past, where I've had the ability to climb around inside and outside buildings with the skill of a monkey or a Ron Fawcett, sometimes coupled with the power to levitate or at least hover over the stairs or the hillside as I go down? I've heard a Freudian explanation of that, too. And now, when an operation has forced me to cancel a trek in the mountains of Spain, I dream that my rucksack has gone missing in an airport. Has this any significance? Surely, there's a literature of mountaineering dreams still to be collected?

Ladies at The Count House

Peter Cullinan

Sometime in the late 1950s I was staying at the CC hut at Bosigran, courtesy of the Club, and running a climbing course for a party of Royal Marines from RMFVR London. We started at six every morning, outside, stripped to the waist for PT, which was invariably run by a very fit and unkind sergeant.

One of the 'games' we played in these sessions was called 'British Bulldogs'. This involved a team in line abreast trying to break through the other team, and if successful, going over a 10ft drop to win. I remember once looking at the landing and thinking it seemed a good idea to lose. However, on one of these occasions the game was played, it was my misfortune to pick out a huge ape of a man called Cpl. Shirren to try and break past. He held me in a ferocious bear-hug, so tight that I couldn't breathe. Feeling myself losing consciousness, unable to speak and in desperation, I jabbed two fingers in his eyes. He let me go then, roaring with laughter, blood pouring from both eyes and shouted: "Well done, young sir!"

After a week of this, (and some quite good climbing in between) the men wanted to get some girls in from the local hospital and end the course with a party. I refused this request on the grounds that ladies were not allowed in CC huts at that time. However, I was outranked and over-ruled by Surgeon Commander Roberts who was attending the course as Medical Officer. Ropcy was a very kindly old man, at least 40 years old, who drank a lot of whisky and smoked 80 cigarettes a day. He kept these in all his pockets in special plastic containers to save them from getting crushed. As a result of these habits, his hands shook a little; but he still proved an excellent medic, because no one dared be ill for fear of falling under his knife. "Cullinan," he roared, "if the boys want a party, give them a party."

We advertised the party as 'Commando Ball, Saturday Evening at the Count House'. On the night, I took a three ton truck, with Cpl. Shirren driving, to the hospitals in Penzance and St Ives and picked up about 20 hopefuls in their best frocks and falling-down shoes. Knowing full well the impression that the hut — with Tilley lamps for light and a spade for the loo — would make upon these sensitive souls, we stopped at the Gurnard's Head for a quick nerve-settler. Arriving at Bosigran we could just discern, through the gloom, a group of desperate-looking men in denims, puttees and S.V. boots (we had no civvies).

"We're not going in there," someone said from the back of the truck. "Bloody long walk back," was Shirren's reply.

Once inside, there was plenty of beer, and dancing to an old His

Master's Voice gramophone — though unfortunately we had only one record, 'The Donkey Serenade'.

I realised that the party was going rather better than I had anticipated when I found that my partner and I were the only couple dancing in what is now the Biven Room; everyone else had disappeared into the rabbit warren above.

Transport left at dawn to deliver the girls back to the hospitals to become ministering angels on the early morning shift, and we were back to a final bout of PT to sweat out all the beer. And so it was that women were entertained at the Count House, but as it was over 40 years ago, I pray I will not be drummed out of the Club.

Hut Rules, OK?

Dave Gregory

Never arrive first, You will have lost or forgotten your hut key and being found sitting waiting for the next arrival creates suspicion of one's having any right to use the hut at all. Besides, being first and having to switch on the gas, electricity, and water means that you carry the blame for the consequent explosions, flooding and fusing, not to mention the thermostatless kettle which someone left plugged in, empty, and switched on. By the time you have brought in all your gear and turned your thoughts to Earl Grey it will just have had time to burn out. It would, of course, have been the only working kettle.

But be not last. There will be no bed spaces left and you will be condemned to the collapsing armchair or sofa, or the ash-impregnated fireside rug, or even the sticky marmalade-encrusted table. You will wish to go to sleep early but the other users of the hut will all be earnest carousers, holding vigorous opinions on all the burning topics of the day which they can only unleash on humanity in a full-throated roar. When they do decide to go to their ill-deserved spaces in the sleeping quarters the first one to leave will, for the first time, notice your recumbent form, pull aside the cover you have arranged over your face to see if it is one of his friends. If you are so unlucky he will actually shake you awake to convey some trivial greeting; if you are not he will shout 'Sssshh' as loudly as is necessary to wake you and switch off the light so that all the others stumble over you on their way out. Most of them will spill the dregs of whatever they had been drinking over you. You remembered to use your bivvy bag? Second is a good position to arrive in. Be courteous, of course, to your predecessor but do not spend too much time in greeting that first arrival. He will need to be busy checking all the services and turning off taps and so on. Go and choose your bed space while you may.

Not near the door into the dorm. Nor the one out of it into the bogs and shower-room. By a window, to have control over the atmosphere and light levels. Not on the dangerous top deck, nor on that section of the less exposed bottom deck where one's face and the tenderer portions of one's anatomy can be used as a stepladder by the inhabitants of the top deck.

Wherever you decide on there will be light by it. Unobserved, remove the bulb but do not place it where it may roll onto the floor. You will not wish your nocturnal stagger towards to be imperilled by shards of shattered Osram. Besides there may be a bishop in the company, and your fakir imitation will undoubtedly result in a roundelay of robust Anglo-saxon; or perhaps the company includes a lightly-sleeping Christian Scientist who does not believe in the existence of pain and will not admit of the laceration of your feet being any excuse for so widening his vocabulary.

Thou shalt not have an alarm clock. If you wish to arise late you have no need of one, but by the immutable certainty of Sod, his law, someone else will have one. If your luck is in, it will be positioned near you and when its owner is well-grappled in the arms of Morpheus you may be able to lean over and depress its activating switch. Be careful. Being found feeling about other sleepers under the cover of darkness may bring upon one the suspicion, at the least, of an unhealthy, or perhaps too healthy an interest in one's neighbour, whatever, the sex, and at worst, of dishonesty. If you wish to rise early you do not wish the kitchen to be full of similarly semi-comatose breakfasters. The kettle has burned out, remember and there will be a consequent extra demand on the stove; so no alarm. No. Rely on the unshrouded window to allow the dawn light to wake you. Hang a blanket over it before you leave and the others may sleep on for hours.

This will only be the case if you have taken care to fill the morrow's 'sack before you retire and can quietly extract it from its hiding place without raising the dead. It is amazing how many people, captains of industry and exemplars of academe, imagine that you can sort out the equipment necessary for a winter ascent of say, The Slack Cleft, or Great End, or one of The Ben's gullies, in silence. The Anvil Chorus would be quieter, but not to their ears,

Beating rivals to a route is not the only reason for quiet early rising. There will surely be senior persons in the hut, committee members, honorary members and the like who may have undue influence, if crossed, on the question of one's remaining a member of the club. Such people often wish to rise late and have, in the evening, born of their mature years, a comprehensive list of excuses as to why they have not done anything during a perfectly splendid day. They may wish to have a quiet, unobserved, trawl through the food boxes in search of pâté, say, or other delicacies which their spouses think would be wasted on a climbing weekend or their likely companions, or merely refuse to allow to be taken to the foetid surroundings of "that hovel", (how different from the early days of their courtship when she expressed delight at "that wonderful little cottage") I may wrong them. Perhaps they have merely retired to be able to spend less time with their families and a day spent leafing through 10-year old copies of *Climber* is definitely better than a day at home watching breakfast time, mid-morning, lunchtime, mid-afternoon, and evening TV.

Now, as to the hut. Let us assume that it has robust walls and a watertight roof, and doors to exclude the sheep and dogs common in rock-climbing areas; lockable doors, to exclude the sponging non-members common in rock-climbing areas. It shall have a large kitchen with a large central table to accommodate many large persons who eat with their elbows widespread, for not all the frequenters of club huts drink tea with their arms well tucked in to their sides and their little fingers delicately poised. The table shall have ample space under it for the legs of the aforesaid large

persons. Any space for storing food boxes shall be under the working surfaces.

For the size of the 'lounge' I care not a fig. A more companionable atmosphere arises when the various sittings or cookings can argue and discuss *in situ*, waving ladles or wooden spoons to emphasise their points, around the kitchen table. This may result in some slight spatter of food stains on the kitchen wall which should, therefore, have an easy-clean surface so that the hut warden does not get scrubber's elbow. The kitchen should have extensive working surfaces and, at the very least, half a dozen sockets (in addition to the cooker connections and in all but two of these, (one for the toaster and the other the microwave) a Thermostatted kettle, and there should be at least two wall-mounted electric water heaters.

And, having used a kettle, thou shalt damn well refill it and switch it on so that the next poor bugger who needs a kettle full of water to make a brew, or to warm or fill his flask doesn't have to wait half an hour because you've used the water from the kettle held filled.

And, finally, the most cast iron, unbreakable, Moses-ordained commandment. Thou shalt not snore. The most mild of men are rendered choleric by the most gentle of nocturnal trenoloos. Snorers consequently may be the recipient of a variety of well-aimed and unexpected projectiles. The snorer will find that the art of ballistics is not dead and though the typical climbing club hut is not equipped with so-called smart bombs many huts have small collections, of which the members are inordinately proud, of old norwegian skis, bamboo ski-sticks, alpenstocks and tricouni-nailed boots.

No, definitely, Thou shalt not snore,

The Struggle For Riasg

Bob Allen

The Climbers' Club Newsletter for June 1996, under the heading 'Lottery Bids', advised members of our attempts to secure lottery funding for the major works planned for The Count House and the R.O. Downes Memorial Hut. In addition it stated 'It is also the Club's longer term strategy to purchase at least one further hut to mark its Centenary in 1998. We are actively considering locations in the eastern Lake District and the West Country, where few climbing facilities exist at present.'

The geographical situation was soon to change completely. By the time of the Newsletter for June 1997, President Mark Vallance wrote that 'At the general meeting in 1996 there was an overriding vote in favour of acquiring a new hut, with very strong support for a Scottish Hut as opposed to one in the Lake District or elsewhere'. The same Newsletter gave details of a plot of land at Victoria Bridge on the outskirts of Fort William and stated that a bid by the Club of £22,000, subject to planning permission, had been accepted by the Highland Development Board. The total cost for the project (for a purpose-built climbing hut to accommodate 24 people) was expected to be £150,000 and, it was hoped, that the Scottish Lottery Commission might provide £75,000 of this. The outpouring of funds from the Lottery was in full flow at the time and the Club was expecting to benefit for both the Count House and Downes huts, so this hope was not quite so extravagant then as was later realised.

However, reservations had been expressed by several members, early in 1997, about the Victoria Bridge site, its relative closeness to a large secondary modern school, a noisy main road and a trading estate and the fact that it was not sufficiently rural. Further problems of potential subsidence etc. soon came to light and it was abandoned as a suitable place. Towards the end of 1997, as President-elect, I became personally involved with the project and took steps to rope-in several older, senior members (Derek Walker, Roger Briggs and, shortly afterwards, Craig Harwood especially) in the search for a suitable site and it was Derek who had the bright idea that we should contact Ed Grindley. Both Derek and I had known Ed for years as a Fell and Rock member, although we had not seen much of him since he moved to live in the Fort William area. On our own first trip north we met Ed and he embraced our project with an enthusiasm that was most heartening, rapidly producing lists of potential building sites and properties for sale. Equally rapidly, we inspected and rejected about a dozen sites all over Lochaber, made the discovery that many sites are sold privately without going near estate agents' offices and made our initial (and very illuminating) inspections of timber-frame houses. Ed took us to a climbing wall built inside a brick tower attached to Lochaber High School and there introduced us to

one of the Highland Council's planners, also a climber. Before long, by way of the Highland grapevine and the help of Ed and Bob Wright (a local entrepreneurial builder), we had identified a potential plot of land that we were advised would shortly be for sale, at Upper Inverroy, Roy Bridge, northeast of Fort William. The planner, Simon Fraser, indicated that Planning Permission would almost certainly be forthcoming and that his department would support an application. With what optimism one starts such a quest.

It had been appreciated that only about 8% of the Club's membership actually attend the AGM, or a general meeting, and that the Scottish hut project was one of the biggest that the club had ever undertaken. It had, therefore, rightly been decided in Committee under Mark Vallance's presidency, that the whole membership should have the opportunity to comment on the proposals, by way of a questionnaire, supplied with a pre-paid envelope. The questionnaire itself was drafted and re-drafted about six times, but in the end we probably got it right. By 27th February 1998, 443 questionnaires had been returned (out of a nominal membership at the time of 1,050) and 85% of these 443 were in favour of a Scottish hut, 77% of them keen to have a hut in the general area of Fort William. The next most favoured location was the Cairngorms, with Torridon, the North West and Skye gaining a few votes. More replies were received later, but they supported the conclusions already reached. The same questionnaire had also given an encouraging picture as to the amount of financial support that might come from members. In consequence, the AGM on 28th February 1998 (at which I took over the Presidency), overwhelmingly passed two motions authorising the Committee to acquire a hut in Scotland and the necessary steps to finance it — including the option to take out a commercial loan if necessary. I had photographs to show of the potential site at Upper Inverroy and of timber-frame construction. Particularly when compared with the situation when the Club decided to purchase Helyg, by one casting vote, this was an enormous mandate. All we apparently had to do now was to buy the land, raise the money and build the hut. 'Ho! Ho!' (That is intended to represent a hollow laugh.)

On April 18th 1998, Craig Harwood and I met with Sandy and Jenny Hastings, owners of the plot of land at Upper Inverroy. From our previous forays we knew that the going rate for a building plot was £20-£25,000. We asked the Hastingses to increase the area of land on offer and, when they increased it by 40% to about 1,450 square metres, offered them £25,000, subject to necessary contracts which they accepted.

That very same day, we called on the immediate neighbour, Mrs Cook, to explain our interest and she welcomed our plans enthusiastically. The other adjoining property was owned by people living in Warrington; it was their holiday house and the owners were absent, so I wrote to them of our plans to keep them in the picture. The planner led us to understand that we were doing all that was necessary and that the necessary de-crofting permission would be easily confirmed. With hindsight, our error was that we

believed him.

On April 18th, I sent out questionnaires to 30 club members who had shown interest, in order to get opinions as to which features were desirable in a purpose-built club hut and so that Craig could get on with his design of a building with all speed. This he did, coming up with a plan which made best use of the site. By using Alpine style bunk beds ('matrazenlager', not individual bunk beds) we would have been able to sleep a maximum of 30 people on the (expected to be few) occasions when the hut would be fully utilised. This figure of 30 bed spaces was to be used as a stick to beat us in the troubles that followed.

On April 28th, I spoke to Steve Kennedy of Anderson Banks Solicitors and he advised that there was a four-month delay in confirming de-crofting permission from Inverness, so he needed a detailed plan of the site as soon as possible. After trying several local firms who could not do the job, we eventually found one who could and, on June 1st, received copies of ground survey drawings. Our solicitors drew up a first draft of an Offer to Purchase but, following discussions with Mrs Cook (the neighbour, who supported us throughout), it had become clear that there was disputed ownership of a narrow strip of land. This was only about 2ft wide, at the edge of the road leading to Mrs Cook's house, but we should have to cross it to get access to our building plot. Also, large volumes of surface water draining off the plot in bad weather interfered with Mrs Cook's access and would have to be re-directed onto the Hastingses land. The proposed new mains sewerage system would also be coming across their land. Our first inklings of the unpopularity of the Hastingses with the local population began to surface.

On June 28th, the CC Newsletter appeared with the first appeal for funds and the following day our solicitors sent the Formal Offer to Purchase to the Hastingses solicitors. This contained the revisions our solicitors thought necessary to cope with the new factors, but the reaction from Sandy Hastings was unfavourable and he was, in fact, very upset. I rang him myself and he confirmed that he was very ill (leukaemia) and was going into hospital almost immediately for chemotherapy treatment. He was also bankrupt, needed the £25,000 urgently and could we not purchase the plot on Outline Planning Permission only? I told him it was unlikely but that I would look into it.

After talking to Max Biden (our enormously helpful Treasurer at the time), we agreed that full Planning Permission (including formal confirmation of de-crofting) was essential, but also decided to offer Sandy Hastings £3,000 'up-front' to ease his financial position. This would not be re-payable if we failed to get full planning permission (which we confidently expected). The reaction from Sandy Hastings was not what we expected. Far from being pleased by our offer, he said that he and his wife needed a certainty rather than a possibility; apart from that, he declared that they had another party interested in the plot who was prepared to purchase on Outline Planning Permission only. Was this just a ploy? We suspected so, but

we had no means of knowing. Craig phoned the planner in Fort William, who again told him that he thought our chances of getting the full Planning Permission were very good. Also, so long as the Application (for permission), with fees and drawings, was in his office by 9th July, he thought he could get it into the Planning Meeting's schedule for August 10th (this was a full month earlier than we had thought possible). In consequence, I phoned Sandy Hastings and told him this news, but said nothing else about the contract.

At the Aspirant's Meet at Ynys Ettws on 3rd July the Committee were all agreed that detailed planning consent was definitely needed and Craig Harwood produced a modified drawing of the proposed building. During the next few days I phoned Sandy Hastings and confirmed that the Club would pay the full amount three days after receiving formal notice of success in the Planning Application. The bad news was that the Keerys (owners of the holiday home next to the plot) had decided to object to the planning application. The jungle tom-toms from Inverroy, faithfully reported by Ed Grindley, were saying that objections were being stirred up in the village against the size of our project, that our proposed hut was on a single-track road and too many cars would be parked there.

On August 7th, I returned from holiday to be advised by Max Biden that the Appeal for funds had reached £23,000. On August 10th 1998 the Planning Committee of the Highland Council met, considered our Application and, despite the recommendation for acceptance from the planner's office and on which we were relying, voted against us by four votes to three. This was a serious blow. Craig and I conferred and immediately decided to give 'notice of representation' i.e. to request (at no cost) re-consideration at the next Planning Meeting. Unfortunately, this would not be until November 2nd.

Why had it gone wrong? The official reason given was that 'the proposed development, by virtue of its scale, would give rise to excessive noise and disturbance'. Was this the real reason? Was it anti-Sassenach sentiment? Craig and I decided that we had better mount an educational campaign, concentrating on the councillors involved and, in September, as well as writing to local councillors. Ed Grindley arranged a face-to-face meeting with two of them (the Macdonalds, husband and wife). At that meeting it became clear, as they admitted, that they had misunderstood our plans and, therefore, voted against us. Were they to change sides, which they intimated they would, the issue would be resolved to our advantage (from 4-3 against, to 5-2 in favour) and we felt that the three hours spent talking to them had been well worthwhile and returned south in more hopeful mood. Shortly afterwards we made a further trip north when we met some of the more vociferous individual objectors, amongst them the owner of the Roy Bridge Hotel with attached bunkhouse and I addressed an evening meeting of the Lochaber Community Council. At the meeting I answered many questions and from these it became clear that, amongst other things, we were

accused of being a commercial organisation in disguise. We charged for our bed-nights, so we must be. Also, what was to stop us selling this property within a few years to some hotel chain? There were already a number of commercial bunkhouses in Lochaber (in Fort William, with two in Roy Bridge and numerous bed-and-breakfast establishments) and our clubhouse would simply steal their trade. This is not quite as easy to refute as one might think. However, complaints about competition are not acceptable planning objections, so the opposition must present them in a different way. The way chosen by objectors (apparently involving the close family network in the village) and using letters to the press and a petition containing 60 signatures (some of them phoney), was to concentrate on the apparent dangers involved in increased traffic using the single-track road that would lead to our plot. The new building itself, it was claimed, was too large and would have too many occupants. These would drive up from the south, horns blaring and stocked up with cheap food and booze from the southern supermarkets (and so contributing nothing locally). The visitors would then create a racket with music and banging doors and would totally destroy the peace and quiet of this little crofting community. We were accused of being an elitist club and it was immoral that we might receive public money for our project.

Craig and I decided to tackle at least some of these concerns by putting forward a Management Plan for the proposed new building. We emphasised that radios and music were banned, that there would be no car parking anywhere but on the car park spaces provided, that climbers travelling from the south would normally arrive two or three to a car etc. and that the hut would only be fully occupied on two or three occasions a year. Because of the locally expressed fear that we were just another backpackers' bunkhouse in disguise, I very reluctantly agreed to a clause which would have meant that, were we to wish to allow any other club to use our building, then that club would have to book the entire building.

But there was also a hidden agenda, which became clear as time progressed, which hinged on the fact that Sandy Hastings, the vendor of the land and a former solicitor, had allegedly created many enemies locally. Many residents of Roy Bridge had no wish to see Sandy Hastings or his wife, make any more money out of selling off crofting land. It was more than hinted that the Hastingses had in the past acquired the land very cheaply indeed and at the expense of elderly residents who had not realised the value of what they had sold.

The local Roy Bridge councillor had voted for us in the Planning Meeting, but the weight of local opinion being mobilised against us meant that he would have difficulty sustaining his original position. In fact, at the next meeting of the Lochaber Community Council, on October 6th in Spean Bridge Hall, one of the local activists against us wrote to say that 'the meeting was attended by 27 people (the biggest turnout they have had since the local school was proposed for closure...26 of the people present voted against

your proposal. Nobody spoke in favour of it and Councillor William MacLachlan abstained'.

In the background, Ed Grindley carried on beavering away, contacting the other local councillors on the Planning Committee. One, who had voted against us, told Ed that he would change sides so long as the Highland Council's Roads Department raised no objections. As soon as Craig had modified our plans by adding a further two parking spaces, the Roads Department withdrew its objections. But when it came to the vote at the next Planning Meeting, on November 3rd 1998, that same councillor still voted against us. However, to our delight, we had turned the tables, we had won the vote. This time it was by 5 votes for us to 3 against.

Success at last? No way. In November 1998 the *Oban Times* included an article which quoted a Roy Bridge caravan site owner as saying: "I won't have mountaineering types on the caravan site, they cause a lot of trouble. As far as I'm concerned they should be kept out of the area."

By a strange quirk of fate, when we had lost the first vote (by 4-3 on August 10th) Sandy Hastings, the ex-solicitor, had drawn upon his own knowledge of the planning process and told the local Roy Bridge councillor about an arcane procedure (available, apparently, only in Scotland) called the 'Notice of Motion'. If, within three days of the last Planning Meeting, three councillors were to sign one of these Notices, the decision taken at the Planning Meeting would be suspended and the whole issue raised again at the next one. Sandy had hoped to use that procedure in his, and our, favour when we lost the last vote. Unfortunately, then, no three councillors could be contacted in time. Equally unfortunately, this time three councillors were found to sign the Notice of Motion, so our 5-3 victory was a hollow one and we could not proceed any further until after the next Planning Meeting, scheduled for December 14th 1998. Craig Harwood, in particular, was hopping mad, as he had prepared all the official paper work and was our professional adviser on the planning process.

In the meantime, Sandy Hastings's condition deteriorated further and he went off to hospital hoping for a bone marrow transplant. Our lobbying and letter writing continued in an attempt to counteract the bad publicity we were getting, but we received a further blow when Mrs Jenny Hastings wrote to say that she was withdrawing her offer of sale to us. Her ostensible reason was our 'failure' to put the £25,000 purchase price for the land into a joint deposit account (although our solicitor told us we could not do this legally anyway). In an interview given to a local newspaper, however, she was quoted as saying: "I am not prepared to continue with the sale to the climbing club and would now like to find a private buyer. I would love them (i.e. the club) to get it and stuff the opposition. But even if they did, the Crofting Commission would be down on me like a ton of bricks."

I wrote back to Mrs Hastings that we were not giving up, feeling fairly certain that she would not refuse our cheque when — or if — we did get planning permission. However, the reference to the Crofting Commission

had raised yet a further spectre.

We had been advised that the plot of land at Upper Inverroy had already been de-crofted and it had. But it now became clear that the de-crofting permission had been for a 'dwelling house'. Why was this a problem? Our solicitor was quite convinced that our building definitely qualified as such, and the Crofting Commission, unofficially and over the phone to our solicitor, agreed likewise. But the guns were evidently being wheeled out to defeat us on this new front, even if we won the vote at the next review. On December 6th 1998, Ed Grindley phoned to tell me that Sandy Hastings had died the day before. So now our vendor was a virtually penniless and grieving widow with a very young child. This, incidentally, seems to have gained her no sympathy with the locals.

December 14th came and with it a special Planning Meeting in Fort William. Again we won the vote, again by 5 votes to 3. However, for the second time, another procedural device was used, whereby one of the objecting councillors collected the requisite signatures, seven this time, to invoke the 'Notice of Review of Standing Orders'. This would oblige the planning application to be reviewed yet again, this time before the 'whole council' in Inverness. So, although we had lost the very first vote, we had won the following two but we still had not got our Planning Permission. It was beginning to look like 'heads we win, tails you lose' and Craig and I were very incensed. We decided to submit an Appeal against the first refusal, although it was unlikely that a decision would be received quickly.

Time passed and the Highland Planning Committee met in Inverness on 27th January 1999. We lost the vote by 14 to 11. Reports filtering back from Inverness hinted that a group of councillors closely connected with the Scottish National Party had formed the bulk of our opposition. It also seemed that a letter from the Crofting Commission, which we did not see but were told about, had some influence in the debate. Objectors to our planning application were able to speak, but we were not allowed to send any representation. One CC member wrote to me on the lines of 'They just don't want us up there'.

By this time, trying to take a rational, rather than emotional view of our position, I had become personally convinced that The Climbers' Club had no future with a purpose-built structure at Upper Inverroy. Even if we won the Appeal to the Scottish Office, I felt that we had raised too many objections with the detail of our plans. Most particularly, I felt that it was the proposal for a 30-bed facility which was a crucial factor. We could not escape the fact that the objection to the 'scale' of the building came up each time. I decided to start again from the beginning, to find a new site, or an existing building that we could convert. In the meantime, the mechanics of pursuing the Appeal came into play; we had a site visit to Upper Inverroy by an inspector and, to cut a long story short, we lost the Appeal. Whatever the professional planners might say, they could only recommend acceptance of our plans. It was the elected councillors who had to decide.

By now, practically everybody in the Highlands was aware that we were in the market for a property and phone calls and messages seemed to arrive almost daily with new propositions. On separate occasions I accompanied Pip Hopkinson, Roger Briggs, Pete Scott and Craig Harwood to look at more sites. Hamish MacInnes told us, via Claude Davies, of several possibilities. One was that Hugh MacColl wished to sell his facility and camp site in Glencoe, which sounded exciting. Peter Scott and I had a look at that in detail, but were not very keen and Hugh could not come up with a price anyway. We were left with the feeling that he was really hoping that a good fairy in the shape of the National Trust for Scotland or another Jimmy Saville (who had bought Hamish MacInnes's little house halfway up Glencoe for an astronomical sum) might pop out from under a toadstool and offer him half a million pounds. We scoured the estate agents' offices in Fort William and Ed Grindley re-activated his local connections. The result was totally negative. We found absolutely nothing anywhere else in the Glencoe, Ballachulish, or Fort William area, despite looking at a further 50 or so possibilities.

Fate now took a hand. Ed Grindley told us (via Bob Wright the builder) that the owner of a fine modern house in Glen Spean (only about five miles east of Roy Bridge) was considering selling. The asking price was £150,000 (although we learned that an independent valuation had put it at over £200,000). We would have to obtain 'change of use' planning permission, of course. It was delightful, but I realised that it was now simply beyond our means. Our applications to the Lottery Commission, which Peter Bishop was still assiduously submitting, were getting nowhere and the political climate was changing and not in our favour. The Scottish Hut Appeal was definitely proving worthwhile, but not raising enough money fast enough and showing signs of fizzling out. I reluctantly told the owner that we could not afford it and withdrew.

Almost by sheer chance, since we had driven eastwards along the A86 out of Roy Bridge on many occasions over the last year and noticed nothing, I spotted a 'For Sale' sign outside the very last property in the village, a modern one-and-a-half-storey timber-frame bungalow named 'Schoolwood'. Pete Scott and I inspected it within hours.

After having just fought, and lost, a protracted battle for the Inverroy project, it might have seemed crazy to some people to contemplate taking on Roy Bridge yet again. I felt certain, however, that we were now in an entirely different situation. Objectively, the location was close to a main road, not on a minor, single track one; the building existed and was far enough away from neighbours not to raise any prospects of complaints of noise. Very importantly, it was not built on croft land. Subjectively, I had the feeling that the hysteria generated by the previous project had made many local residents realise that the objections had been overdone. One resident wrote to me to say that she was 'ashamed of her fellow Scots' and how they had treated us. Ed Grindley definitely detected something of the same feeling and the then owner of the Roy Bridge Hotel and bunkhouse (who had been

one of our most vocal opponents) was reliably reported to have himself 'done a bunk' with another woman and disappeared from the scene. We enjoyed juicy stories of how his wife had burnt his suits in the garden. The vendors of 'Schoolwood' said they were willing to sell to us — even that had been in question — and at a price we thought we could afford. Craig drew up provisional plans for conversion to an 18-bed facility, deliberate scaling-down from the original 30. Of course, we would have to go through the same process of seeking Planning Permission. My heart sank at the thought of that rigmarole all over again, but I was determined to avoid the mistakes of the last episode and so immediately wrote letters to all the councillors again and to as many owners of properties close to 'Schoolwood' as Ed and I could identify. Most importantly, we now began to receive letters of support and not a single letter of objection was received in the Planning Office in Fort William in response to the statutory advertisements in the local press. Maybe the opposition was by now just too tired of the process? Maybe we were doing it right at last?

On 20th August 1999, we were advised that our application for 'change of use' for 'Schoolwood' had succeeded and by a unanimous vote in our favour. What a change of heart. We immediately organised an independent valuation and an independent structural survey, done on 6th September, which proved entirely satisfactory. We had deposit money ready, the balance of the purchase money organised and Max Biden had even arranged a loan facility for us with the bank, in case we needed one. Steve Kennedy, our solicitor, had all the legal papers prepared. We were ready to move swiftly to complete.

'We'll be in by the winter of 1999'. That was what I thought and was still thinking when I arrived home at the end of September from a big trek in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. The very first piece of mail I opened contained the news that the vendors of 'Schoolwood' had withdrawn their property from the market, just hours before we were to make our formal Offer to Purchase. The demons of Roy Bridge strike again, I thought. "Have the opposition 'got at' the vendors?" On contacting them, however, the story emerged that they had simply been unable to afford to buy a property suitable for their family in Aberdeen and the husband had been obliged to resign from his new job there and stay put in Roy Bridge. It was a bitter blow for us; the search began yet again.

In the meantime, partly because of the publicity over our own project and for other reasons, the climate of opinion in the north of Scotland was hardening against clubhouses or huts or any more similar developments. Incidents of rowdiness in Kyleakin, where drunken backpackers had to pass residential houses on their way back to the bunkhouse from the pub, were specifically the trigger for this. An article in the newspaper *Scotland on Sunday* said it all 'That's enough backpacker bunkhouses'. It had made little difference that we had tried consistently to explain that ours was a 'private clubhouse' (we had learned not to use the word 'hut' in Scotland, as

it suggested the wrong meaning there). We sought help from any official body who might give it. The BMC and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland were particularly helpful in putting forward our case. They also made us even more aware of policy guidelines on huts, bunkhouses or clubhouses that were being thrashed out in Scottish committees and which we would ignore at our peril. Skye, Speyside and Lochaber (where we were looking) were clearly especially sensitive areas.

As a result of information received, as the police reports say, we turned up more possibilities in the dying weeks of 1999. I was still recuperating from my second hip replacement, so Pip Hopkinson and Craig Harwood went scouting without me. Two properties emerged, one in Ballachulish and the other, incredibly, in Roy Bridge.

Before making any further move, I spoke to the two local councillors by phone to establish whether there would be any problems that they could foresee with our showing interest in either property and was greatly relieved to hear that there were not. Almost immediately, however, we came under some pressure to give Kinlochleven serious consideration as a major attempt was being made, financed by 'European money' (i.e. our own money handed back to us by the European Union) to re-develop Kinlochleven, which was going into serious decline following the closure of the aluminium plant, the major source of employment there. Peter Scott and I took this initiative seriously and visited three site possibilities, but two of them were simply unsuitable and the third building was too large and anyway only 100 yards from the Fell and Rock hut, 'Water's Cottage'. Kinlochleven was no good.

As soon as I was able, I made the trip north again, with Pete. We looked at yet more possibilities that had been offered, including a fishing hut beside the River Coe and a few hundred acres of Forestry land. The Ballachulish property was soon discarded, despite the councillor feeling that it would be all right, as being in a far too residential area. However, the one remaining place that we had to assess, right in the heart of Roy Bridge itself and only a couple of hundred yards from 'Schoolwood', where the vendors had 'given back word', looked like 'the real McCoy'.

A four-bedroomed bungalow in about three quarters of an acre of land, with mains electricity, oil-fired central heating, mains water and (recently connected) mains drainage, built using the energy-efficient timber-frame construction, this property started a real ripple of excitement in my cynical heart. There must be a catch?

Craig and I immediately went to call on the neighbours, for this bungalow was one of four, although well-separated from each other, in a private close. Within minutes the first neighbour told us that lots of people had looked at it recently, but had all walked away because there was a serious crack in one wall and it looked as if the house was going to split into two halves. When we looked for ourselves, sure enough, there was the crack, gaping about two inches wide at the top. There was also a wavy line in the roof tiles that somehow did not look intentional. Apart from those problems,

the property looked extremely interesting and in a surprisingly good condition internally.

We exaggerated the problem of the crack when talking to the other neighbours, in order to dampen the enthusiasm of any other potential buyers but, privately, Craig felt fairly sure that this problem was caused by 'point loading' and was essentially a joinery problem that could be solved. Once he had crawled around the roof space and looked at it with an expert eye, he was even more convinced. Later, when instructing a building surveyor, we stressed that he should pay particular attention to this matter, and to the wavy tiles.

Once again it was back to the word processor and the letters went out like confetti to councillors, residents, anybody who could be remotely affected by our project to turn this bungalow, named 'Riasg' then and retained now, into a suitable Scottish hut for The Climbers' Club. I felt sufficiently confident of our ground now to negotiate with the Building and Control Manager to seek to modify the original restrictive condition about letting the property to kindred clubs, to one stating that, 'the clubhouse shall be let solely to members of the owning club and their guests, together with members of groups from kindred clubs who book in advance'. Not, please note, to kindred clubs who 'book the whole building in advance'.

On February 4th 2000, we were advised that the Highland Council's Planning Committee had unanimously approved our application for change of use of the building and for a maximum of 20 bed-spaces.

But we still had to buy it.

'Riasg' had been owned by an elderly lady, Miss Nora Williams, who had no direct descendants, so it was not likely that this property could be withdrawn from the market, but there were no fewer than seven beneficiaries to her will. These all had to be consulted and agree before any financial offer we might make could be accepted. The guide price for the property was £80,000 but the structural survey report (which we had instructed should concentrate on the problem of the crack in the wall) suggested that we could well have to spend £7,000 at least on rectification works. Knowing that it would not make too much difference to seven beneficiaries if they each received a couple of thousand pounds less than they might have originally expected, I decided to offer a price of £65,000, nearly 20% less than the 'guide price'. We waited with bated breath for three weeks to see whether the beneficiaries would agree without haggling. Eventually, after being held on a knife's edge by the very last beneficiary for nearly two weeks, they did and 'Riasg' was ours.

Of course, that was not quite the end of the story, but the suspense was over. Craig did yet more plans and yet more visits were made to Roy Bridge by small parties of volunteers, including Mary Nicol (who gave us the curtains and whose husband, former president Hamish, would have been delighted to see the CC at last acquire a Scottish hut). Reg Pillinger went, as did Pip Hopkinson, Craig Harwood, Peter Scott, Roger Briggs, myself as

task-master and joiner, Peter Anderson, who installed the bunks. Patrick Green kindly gave us full sets of crockery, cutlery and glasses. The place was carpeted throughout using contract grade cord carpet (for noise reduction, appearance and better wear characteristics), the kitchen fitted out and a great load of mattresses and chairs purchased from Ikea in Birstall (and delivered by them, for a derisory sum, as well).

I have already mentioned Craig Harwood several times and make no apologies for doing so again. He and I plotted and planned, I wrote letters while he drew plans. What was achieved could not have been done without him. Ed Grindley, whose help had been absolutely invaluable throughout the whole period, had offered from a very early date to be our first custodian and, since he lives only a couple of hundred yards away, it was an offer we could not refuse. He was never away from the site, either working himself or keeping an eye on the work done by Bob Wright to sort out the problems with the crack and the roof in particular. Fortunately, those turned out to be comparatively minor.

I must not fail to mention, although not by name, the 212 members who donated just over £25,000 in direct donations, plus a further £12,000 in loans. That money, plus the tremendous contribution from the profits earned by the sale of guidebooks by our Publications Sub-Committee, meant that this project, one of the most ambitious undertaken in the Club's 103 years of history, has been concluded without recourse to any outside funding and without in any way starving any of our other huts of funds. By the time of the planned official opening on March 17th 2001 (although that had to be postponed because of the countrywide outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease) it was already being well-used. The struggle for 'Riasg' may not have been a great climb on a big mountain, but there were times when it felt like one. I am proud to have been able to play my part in its success.



A hut for all seasons: Riasg. Photo: Bob Allen

Poem by Kevin Borman

Winter On Beinn Sgritheall

gearing up, we go
a near vertical half mile
red rock then snow

senses islanded in
wind's relentless chill

shifting from sea's grey
from all usual contexts and routine
into a winter mountain day

separate from each other
how it increasingly is

we pause, frozen in time
at an iced-up lochan's
feathering of rime

we've done this for a decade and a half
shared those times, but now

we say nothing, look far west
to grey ridges
and Rum's saddled crest

cloud closes, we work on and up
through a steep white silence

until, at the summit, the view hits
by the cairn's etched crystals
as cumulus splits

we scan and stare, drink coffee
try to take it all in

peak beyond peak
land rucked, snowy forever
and still we don't speak

five hundred mountain days
I'd guess, in our sixteen years

two hours below,
Loch Hourn shimmers sporadic mercury
as we turn to go

the start of a long descent
which takes us

cramponning down
to a different colourless
same old town

The Ice-Axe

David Wynne-Jones

There are few treasures of more lasting worth than the experience of a way of life that is in itself wholly satisfying. (Eric Shipton)

Helyg brooded in a gloom of trees below the A5 where traffic barrelled out of another world. Cracks of light splintered from kitchen windows: no one had bothered to open any shutters. 'Looks like everyone arrived late', Geraldine mused as her feet felt their way down dark stone steps. But it was quiet and there was no shuffle of expectancy from within as she dropped her bags in the passage, before pushing the kitchen door open with her food box. 'They must have gone straight down the pub,' she thought, casting an eye over the names written into the hut register.

Glancing quickly at her watch, she realised the others could be back from the pub soon and that it was far too late to be bothered with cooking. Cheese on toast would be nice though, and a mug of thick chocolate spiked with vodka.

She always came properly provisioned, though the flight to Helyg had been pure impulse. Working late into Friday evening to dispose of a mountain of paperwork, she was suddenly seized with a sense of the futility of it all. Despite a bad weather forecast, she'd thrown her pre-packed bags into the rusting Fiat. She knew she should have stayed Supply Teaching. Though the permanent job seemed to offer security, in reality it was stealing her soul.

She shivered, feeling a presence, called but heard no reply. The place breathed history, ghosts.

She wondered if anyone had lit the fire, so carried her scratch meal into the lounge, shouldering through the door with full hands. Incandescent coals filled the hearth behind a fireguard, which she soon nudged aside to stretch her legs in the warmth of a real fire. She munched crisp toast and swallowed smooth gulps of chocolate, staring into the flames. Alpha waves soothed her thoughts. Now she was glad no one else was present. There was no need to swap gossip or plan routes. She could be quiet. She could be calm.

She fetched the vodka bottle and a glass from the kitchen and poured herself a shot, then walked about the room, relaxed and aimless. Her eyes passed over lit showcases of rust-bronzed crampons, nailed boots and ancient guidebooks on either side of the chimney breast. A pair of heavy wooden skis hung above the mantle. Black and white snapshots drew her attention to faces long dead and officialdom was caricatured in the bold lines of cartoons. Several antiquated ice-axes

were screwed to the walls, and she trailed her fingers over the familiar smoothness of a shaft, the cold steel of its terminating spike.

Suddenly she started. Beyond the partition, amongst the usual dumped clutter on bunks and pegs when people left hastily for the pub, a mound of clothing had moved. Someone was in the dorm after all. She quickly checked the bunks. Just one.

The sleeper raised a tousled head, aware of her presence, and blinked. "Hi... er... What time is it?"

"After 11," Geraldine replied, and the head sank back into folds of sleeping bag.

She stepped quietly back to her bench before the fire, perturbed and awkward in this half-presence of unexpected company. Her space was invaded, her sense of peace slipping away. After a few moments of silence there was a rustling and shuffling which told her the sleeper was getting up. A woman flitted to the door in a thick towelling dressing gown and moccasin slippers. 'Bit dressy for a hut', Geraldine thought as she listened to the receding steps on open wooden stairs. There was a sound of water flushing and the woman was back. She looked around the room as though seeing it for the first time, then sat opposite Geraldine, near the fire.

"Sorry..." they began together.

Then Geraldine laughed and said: "You first."

"Oh, well, I was going to say I was sorry about being offhand with you when I woke. I'm just a bit wiped out. You see I've driven all the way from London this evening. I couldn't share the driving because I haven't been able to get 'any driver' insurance on my car."

"The Mercedes Coupé in the car park?" Geraldine interrupted.

"Yes. I haven't had it long enough to appreciate this problem before. The others went off to the pub with a friend of John's who was already here, but I just couldn't face it." She was still apologetic; "We had a big promo party last night until late." Then paused. "And you?"

"Me?"

"Yes, what are you sorry about?"

"Do you want the list?...No, seriously, just waking you."

"Oh, that's okay, I've caught up on an hour or so. To be honest, I wouldn't mind talking for a while. I'm a bit nervous about all this." She waved a hand that took in the hut and its memorabilia. "I'm Fay."

"Gerry. Would you like a night-cap?"

"Please." She nodded.

"I'll get another glass." As Geraldine returned from the kitchen she probed, "You're not a member then?"

"No. John signed three of us in as guests. He thought it would be a good idea if we got some first-hand experience of the climbing world before starting on our next campaign."

"Campaign?"

"Advertising. We won the contract to promote the new book on Everest and handle the film rights. The book will have all the pictures from Irvine's camera, computer-enhanced of course, and should finally establish their claim to be the first to reach the summit." Despite her tiredness, excitement bubbled in Fay's voice.

"I thought there was still some dispute about the so called 'summit shot'."

"Yes, that's been going on for a while now. But there's another shot which seems to be looking down the... South West Face, I think it is. Does that sound right? I'm not 100% sure. That's one reason why John thought we could all do with a weekend in the mountains... kind of tuning in. He's really been the driving force behind winning the contract." Fay paused, thoughtfully, and Geraldine poured them another drink, giving her time to think. "It's ironical really. My father led one of the early Everest expeditions in the '30, but I was never really part of the scene. He didn't spend much time with Mummy and me."

Geraldine's mind flashed back to the frequent partings from her own father, her mother's tears after he disappeared on yet another expedition, and Simon who had always been so busy when she tried to arrange to see their son. "Yeah. Men are bastards aren't they."

Fay's face showed her surprise at the bitterness, but Geraldine said no more. A wistful expression replaced the surprise, and Fay appeared to be thinking aloud as she continued awkwardly. "Well, maybe, some. But I don't think Daddy was really a bastard. It's quite romantic really. Mummy told me about it when I was in my teens."

"How old are you?" Geraldine cut in.

"Thirty one, actually. I've been through one barrier." she joked.

"Ah," Geraldine sighed, "a '60s child. That explains it."

"Not really. Mummy was in her 40s when she had me. No flower child. I was just a late accident," she laughed.

Shared laughter drew them together, then Geraldine sipped her vodka and confided, "I was a post-war utility baby." Her smile faded. "I suppose they were looking for a sense of security, a future, but Dad never lost his wanderlust, his need to climb." Her voice was hard but the bitterness had mellowed.

"Fathers!" Fay grinned wryly. "But there was romance too, there at the beginning. Mummy and he had this wild affair in Srinagar, years earlier when she was just a girl. She'd been married at 18 to this awfully good catch who turned out to be a hopeless alcoholic. Well, one night they were driving back from a party when he lost control of the car and went straight into the river. If it hadn't been for one of the men in the car behind who plunged in after them she'd have drowned. He followed a trail of bubbles and pulled her out by the hair. She was a widow at 19."

"A merry widow from what you've said."

"Not really. A very attractive widow, but her mother installed herself

"Unsuccessfully?"

"Oh no. As far as Indian society was concerned, she and Daddy were just dancing partners. It was late at night that he prowled staircases and corridors to find her room, and after getting it wrong once or twice he had to shin up drain pipes to her balcony; just like Romeo and Juliet." She laughed. "He was always forgetful, a bit vague at times." Her smile faded and she leaned forward, staring into the fire. "He didn't have much time for children, reading a lot in the library... I remember walking in on him one day: 'And whose little girl are you?' he said, looking up from his book... I just ran away." She paused and her tone became apologetic. "Mummy did have lots of visitors, and there were other little girls I was playing with that day, but..." she tailed off.

"It still hurts," Geraldine completed the sentence remembering her own father's expedition planning: books with the leaves turned down littering the shelves and maps spread out on tables, so that sometimes they had eaten from plates on their laps as he lost track of meal times. She finished her drink and poured another, topping up Fay's glass. "That's a coincidence: my parents met in India too; Simla. He was passing through on his way to some remote Consular post just before the war and she was the daughter of one of the local officers in the Indian Civil Service. A brief encounter, but they wrote to each other through the years he was away." She was quiet for a moment. "She told me she looked into his blazing blue eyes and was lost, quite lost, just melted like an ice cube."

"Oh, yes, the eyes definitely have it," Fay responded, in a tone of self-mockery edged with regret. "Every man I've ever been with, and there's been more than a few, has had such beautiful blue eyes. Just like Daddy's. Yes, there are some lovely bums and hands, but the eyes definitely have it."

They laughed together and Geraldine built up the dying fire with new coal. "But not climbers?" she asked.

"Not really. John used to climb and he knows people, but living in London, his career comes first. And we're not together now anyway. Not really... What about you? Current man a climber?"

"No." Geraldine paused. "No current man. My husband wasn't a climber. I suppose I made sure of that. But I just couldn't leave it alone myself." She hesitated then plunged on. "After Steven was born, I suppose I became a bit obsessive... felt like I was trapped if I couldn't go climbing whenever I wanted. Simon was quite happy to look after Steven, so I went. But I just seemed to drift away from them, and somehow the buzz I got out of climbing started to overflow into having a fling or two with climbing partners."

"But you were still committed to the family?"

"Oh, yes. Nothing serious." Her flippancy became reflective. "I remember one scary abseil over the lip of a sea cave onto a boulder beach, the waves pounding at the mouth of the zawn. I stood on the wet rock hugging... Andy, I think it was... and then I had him, right there on the slab at

the start of the climb. Strange how I've always seemed to climb with men... I can't even remember his second name now." She gave a tight grin. "That's the generation gap, I suppose. Dad and his climbing friends always referred to each other by their surnames, and it was the same when he taught at the Boys' School, but we're all on first name terms now." She glanced narrowly at Fay. "Anyway we split up: Simon and me. Simon has a girlfriend now, and Steven seems to get on with her. Last time I saw Stevie he had a girlfriend of his own... I see him when I want to, mostly. Not much romance there, I'm afraid," she finished sharply.

"But what about your parents?"

Geraldine seemed to consider, then decided, "Yes, there was romance there. In India. Mum always kept coming back to one trip she made with Dad before they returned to England. She was in her 20s and a keen walker. They took some of his Sherpa friends and three porters and trekked into a remote glacial valley where he planned to do some survey work. She found the hardship a shock, but the romance was irresistible. They slept out under the stars, read poetry aloud by the light of the campfire, bathed naked in secluded mountain pools, then lay out in the sun to dry. Yes, real romance. She came back to it again and again over the years."

"And later?"

"It was after they married and arrived in England that everything went wrong. Children, and years of teaching in some boring rural backwater came between them. Eventually he had a disastrous affair with a very pretty but hopelessly inadequate woman on the staff. So Mum took up with the new P.E. teacher who seemed more dependable... They're still together anyway, Mum and my Step-Dad, so I suppose she was right."

"And your Dad?" Fay prompted, gently.

"Dad disappeared after the divorce. Lost his job over it, and just seems to have done odd jobs for friends for his keep. We heard he was in South America, then he'd resurface in Greenland, or be leading a trek in the Karakoram or lecturing in Norway. He wrote occasionally, but it was always from some forwarding address." She tailed off.

"I'm sorry, Gerry."

"It's like I never knew him."

"I know." Fay shivered, and Geraldine leant forward to poke up the fire.

Fay turned back to the flames and seemed as she started to be talking to herself, but as she went on became more intense and focused on Geraldine. "Mummy never said much about what Daddy had been up to after her mother put a stop to their engagement. I think they wrote sometimes, but during the war his letters dried up completely. I always thought he was a spy. At any rate he never talked about it."

"No. It's funny but Dad never gave anything away about the war," Geraldine added thoughtfully.

"Mummy married Arthur. Another good catch as far as her mother

was concerned; another alcoholic as it turned out. Either she or Society must have had a weakness for them. It was years later, while she was nursing Arthur in the last stages of his illness, that Daddy came back on the scene: so they had to keep it rather low profile. I even have hazy memories of Arthur: a big man sitting in autumn sunlight with a blanket around his legs, muttering. There was a record he liked to have played, over and over: 'Keep right on to the end of the road.' Fay sang it quickly, lightly. "But the only other thing I remember about him is seeing him sprawled on the terrace, his legs going but unable to get up, swearing, slurred and dribbling. Other people must have thought he was my father for years, before they worked out the relationship between Mummy and Daddy."

"That must have been hard for you."

"Yes. They were never really frank about it, except to me. Then I was packed off to boarding school and they got on with their own lives: Daddy returning from some trip or other to spend time with Mummy in London or the house in the country before disappearing on the next one. No, I never really knew him either."

A door banged and there were voices in the passage.

"Christ, you're still up. It's one o'clock." A man was leaning unsteadily on the doorframe. "We got into the residents' lounge." His lopsided grin was apologetic.

"Yes, John, we are. I've had a sleep but then we've been talking," Fay replied. "Gerry, meet John."

"Hi" he waved. "Coffee? Chocolate? Cheese on toast?"

"No thanks," Geraldine responded.

"Nor for me," agreed Fay. "Don't be too long," she called to his retreating back.

"We've probably got time to get to bed before they bring their food in by the fire," Geraldine said, resignedly. "Best not to stay up or it'll turn into an all-nighter."

"I see. Better hide the vodka." Fay was learning.

As she crossed to her bunk, Fay's attention was drawn to one of the ice-axes, screwed to the partition but vibrating with the passage of feet on the stairs beyond the wall and the slamming of doors. She reached out and touched it gently, then turned to Geraldine: "I've got one just like this, you know. Daddy left his with Mummy when he went on his last trip. He wanted her to have something of his that meant a lot to him. He must have used another on the mountain but they never found it."

Geraldine spun around, off-balance, as though she had been struck across the face, but steadied herself with a hand on one of the bunks reserved for members. She watched intensely as Fay slipped into her bunk, then unrolled her own sleeping bag and climbed into it.

Next morning, Geraldine ran through pelting rain to tune her car radio to the 7.55a.m. weather forecast. "... a deep depression... gale force winds... heavy rain..." Worse than expected. Outside the cloudbase was

down to a couple of hundred feet. She offered to take Fay's team to the climbing wall at Plas-y-Brenin and John thought that was a good idea. She watched Fay's awkward movements from hold to hold in an atmosphere of chalkdust and resin. Her own body was full of tension and she felt herself snatching and fumbling rather than flowing over the features of the wall.

John decided to pack up early and go to the bar. They would stay on for Sunday in the hope of improving conditions. It was a long way back to London.

Geraldine could be home in two hours and knew that there was more chance of better weather towards Sheffield by morning. She pointedly declined the offer of a drink and casually waved them goodbye, deliberately missing Fay's hesitant attempt to catch her eye.

All the way home, Geraldine's wipers swashed at the windscreen, and, as she carried her bags into the bedsit, rain tapped rhythmical cold fingers on the windowpanes. She side-stepped the multi-gym, which dominated the centre of the room to open a large built-in wardrobe where her holdall was kept. Dropping the bag into its base, she paused, sighed, then leaned forward between the hanging clothes.

She felt about, then grasped what she was looking for. An ice-axe lay in her hands. Its long wooden shaft terminated at one end in a spiked ferule, whilst a straight-forged pick with flattened adze, utterly functional, was riveted into the other. His ice-axe. The one he'd left with Mum had she'd left her. She weighed it thoughtfully for a long moment, then the knuckles of one hand whitened and she suddenly threw it back where it belonged.

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OBITUARY

J Malcolm Barr CBE, MA, LL M 1926 (1953)-2001

Malcolm and I first met climbing in North Wales in the early 1950s and little did I guess at the time that a friendship would develop that was to enrich my whole life or that 20 years later he would save it by supervising my rescue after a serious skiing accident in the Cairngorms which resulted in a broken neck.

Malcolm often climbed with Tony Moulam in a period when Tony was very active with Peter Harding, John Disley, Chris Brasher, Roger Craster and Dave Thomas, often in the company of Mike Harris, John Neill, Ted Wrangham, Roger Chorley and many others. Thus Malcolm found himself climbing to a high standard, although he was not a natural climber or a true athlete, sheer determination enabled him to follow and support a leader safely up difficult rock. Indeed he was involved in several first ascents both in North Wales and on gritstone.

He married Elaine Rhodes in 1956 and we saw less of each other as growing families demanded more of our spare time but we always kept in touch. As his daughters grew older they started riding; he bought a hunter called Rufous to accompany the girls when they rode and this was the beginning of one of his major interests. He asked John Whittaker to help with training Rufous and a whole train of events followed: the purchase with John of Ryan's Son, his daughter Clare falling in love with John and eventually their marriage. Malcolm became involved with international show jumping, becoming a member of the International Show Jumping Association.

Meanwhile his family business grew and he became its Chairman. He was also a director and late Chairman of the Leeds Permanent Building Society and had other directorships in the business field. He became High Sheriff of North Yorkshire and was awarded the CBE in 1984.

Apart from show jumping Malcolm became involved in ocean-racing and shared the yachts Valkyron and Blue Charm with Derek Cook; he navigated for Ted Heath in Morning Cloud in the Fastnet race and was also a navigator for the first Yorkshire boat to sail in the Admiral's Cup race, Prospect of Whitby. He then gave up ocean racing but bought a boat in the Mediterranean where he had a number of wide-ranging cruising holidays.

Malcolm was educated at Shrewsbury; he became a governor of the school in his later years and was also the Chairman of the charitable Shrewsbury School Foundation. In this capacity he was very much involved in the building of their new music school which was opened by the Prince of Wales



in 2001. He was not only a benefactor of this but also founded a musical bursary at Shrewsbury.

Sadly his wife, Elaine, died in 1995 but he was sustained not only by his many interests, but also by his deep love of music, poetry and literature until his death on the 15th July 2001 at the age of 74.

GWF Pigott

REVIEWS

Mystery, Beauty and Danger
Robert H. Bates Peter E. Randall
University Press of New England
£25

This is a novelty, a new book written 55 years ago. It's a previously unpublished doctoral thesis, described accurately enough by its sub-title: *The Literature of the Mountains and Mountain Climbing* Published in English before 1946'.

It's easy to see the problems of organisation this material presented, problems for which there's no simple solution. History insists on being in charge but geography keeps interfering. Meantime Bates has an agenda of his own. He's anxious to distinguish between them and us, celebrated writers who've expressed appreciation of mountains and experienced climbers who've wanted to reveal a privileged knowledge. In the event, between a brief Introduction and a short Conclusion, he delivers two parallel histories as four instalments, the first and third dealing with mountains and the second and fourth with mountaineering. The two histories are just a little out of step since one is taste-related and one is skills-related. The question of whether either history drives the other is not examined.

The first section deals with an archaic period in which it was hard to find anyone with a good word to say for the hills. The few writers rounded up are generally Europeans whose remarks or exploits happened to have been translated into English. In the 18th Century one or two bold Englishmen making early Grand Tours started to question the popular attitude. Between 1790 and 1830, Wordsworth to Shelley let's say, the English Romantics caught up with Rousseau and Goethe and changed public taste irreversibly.

The second instalment steps back to 1786 when Paccard and Balmat climbed Mont Blanc and anything became possible. In the ensuing 50 years each of a good 30 heavily guided tourists published his personal Narrative of an Ascent of Mt Blanc in 18—. This led into the Golden Age of mountaineering and the scramble for unclimbed summits. The Alpine Club was formed in 1857 and quite rapidly a respectable literature developed culminating in Leslie Stephen's *Playground of Europe*. All this activity is restricted to the Alps.

The third part resumes the interrupted history of taste and extends it to the time of writing. It looks at the poets, novelists and essayists who admired mountains but generally kept their hands clean. North American writers now make their entrances and the world's more distant ranges now attract some notice. The record is an impressive one, including many of the famous Victorians. Few climbers have written so memorably about the visual impact of the hills as they did. It's noticeable, however, that the great post-Victorian writers have shown much less interest.

In the final episode Bates turns his attention to climbing writers from late Victorian times to the end of WW2. He regrets a tendency to concentrate on technical matters and says he'll deal principally with the writers who've resisted that temptation. However, it isn't easy to list authors he's rejected on that count. Attention now turns towards the greater ranges with the early Everest accounts typically replacing the Mont Blanc narratives of a century earlier.

The book includes a useful bibliography of about 300 titles and Bates seems to have covered his field pretty thoroughly. A systematic search for important omissions might say more about the reader than the writer. In trawling through the whole canon of English poetry (and coming up with

some interesting lines from Thomas Churchyard I can't remember seeing elsewhere) he produces Shakespeare's surprising remark in the Sonnets but omits the equally well-known but more powerful fragments from Donne and Blake. On a larger matter, he's gone through the journals of the national Alpine Clubs but ignored those of other British climbing clubs. It occurs to me that, in order of appearance, the journals of the CC, YRC, FRCC, Rucksack, Pinnacle and Wayfarers Clubs might well amount, pre-1946, to 200 volumes. And they include a great deal of good writing. Generally, in fact, he seems least at home with material on the British hills. He misreads a detail in Arnold Lunn's misadventure on Cader Idris and locates it on 'Table Mountain in Wales'.

The literary judgements are succinct and balanced right up to the time of writing (even in noticing contributions in 1946 from Tilman and Janet Adam Smith, technically beyond his scope). However, he makes acknowledgement to some present-day writers for comments and suggestions so a little revaluation may have taken place. That must add anyway to the security and value of this study.

The question finally arises: is this the best introduction to mountain literature to the cut-off date? For the reader whose interest is restricted to mountaineering it may be that the earlier anthologies of Lunn and Irving, say, with their lengthier extracts and selective coverage, might offer a better sense of our heritage. Today we'd want to add Noyce, Styles and Kenny to the list. But by any reader interested in general literature, including the audiences Bates has captivated in his recent appearances at the Bretton Hall Festival, this contribution is sure to be eagerly received and seen as a useful reference work, informative, reliable and both stirring and amusing in turn.

Harold Drasdo

True Summit
David Roberts
Constable £16.99

Our family copy of Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna* is as stained and faded and scuffed as an old boot left out in the rain. We acquired it at Christmas 1952, the third impression of the hardback one month after publication. Later, the copy passed through our next generation like an illness. All of us, mountain-lovers, were gripped by it and appalled by it. The snow-blindness, the amputations, the doctor's scissors snipping at rotting flesh alive with maggots and, perhaps most poignantly of all, the moment on page 197 when Terray shakes Herzog's hands at Camp V, after Lachenal and Herzog have come back down from the summit and suddenly stops smiling, 'Maurice — your hands.' There was an uneasy silence. I had forgotten that I had lost my gloves: my fingers were violet and white, and hard as wood'.

Suffering at high altitude had been glanced at before, in the stoical and ironic manners of previous climbing generations. It had never been anything like as obscenely cruel as this. The whole book is graphic and the proportion of semi-recalled, semi-invented dialogue gives it the vivid readability of fiction. I would guess, too, that the self-inflicted martyrdom of the climbers and the details of their torment have greatly helped *Annapurna* to its huge currency (12 million copies according to David Roberts, 15 million according to Herzog). After all, the sado-masochistic potency of Jesus on the Cross (with whom Herzog more and more identified himself) has worked pretty well for the Christian cult, hasn't it?

Fifty years on, David Roberts has scrutinised Herzog's account of that first-ever ascent of an 8,000m mountain. With the keenest eye and the most conscientious scruple he has weighed the printed and manuscript materials tracked down people, pieces

of film and equipment and interviewed survivors or their closest relatives. The result is invaluable not only for the mountain climbing record but also as a tracing of how fact evolves into myth and, beneath that, of how experiences, already filtered through perceptions, evolve still further into memories, then into the public selection from them that serves various purposes.

For example, during the prolonged reconnaissance of Annapurna, Lachenal and Terray tried to climb the North West Spur. In his excellent autobiography, *Conquistadors of the Useless* (1963; Baton Wicks, 2001), Terray writes, 'We were back in our old semi-divine form, each reacting on the other so as to double his normal skill and strength almost in defiance of the laws of nature. In this supercharged state we literally played with the obstacles, running up them like cats...' Lachenal's diary, quoted by Roberts, is low-key and emphasises difficulties: sleet makes the rock-climbing dangerous, a traverse across rotten slabs feels 'extremely exposed', two of their abseils are on poor pitons and they get back to their tent 'completely soaked'. Neither version of those days is 'correct'. Each is filtered through a personality. Some people are prone to exaltation, others are more down-to-earth. Some, we may say, are equipped to be better witnesses than others, although we shouldn't fall into thinking that the disenchanted or sober view is necessarily the more reliable, since it may well take a lively imagination to perceive an experience to its depths. Herzog inclines to the exalted, both in his excitement at beauty and extremity and in his belief that he was doing it all for France. Here is what he made of his and Lachenal's approach to the summit, '... all sense of exertion was gone, as though there were no longer any gravity. This diaphanous landscape, this quintessence of purity — these were not the mountains I knew; they were the mountains of my

dreams... we had no fear as we continued upwards. I thought of the famous ladder of St. Theresa of Avila'. Here is Lachenal (from his diary), 'After the traverse, a few rocks, neither difficult nor particularly congenial to climbing, then a couloir led us toward something that, from where we stood, looked like the summit. We climbed up to it. The top of the couloir was merely a kind of saddle from which stretched, to the left, a sort of arête that once more seemed to lead to the summit. Oh, it was long'. And as paraphrased by Terray, 'The higher they climbed the farther away the summit seemed as cold and fatigue took their toll, but at last they got there. Those moments when one had expected a fugitive and piercing happiness had in fact brought only a painful sense of emptiness'. This seems to be the more usual climber's response. In book after book the summit feeling is epitomised in words like 'we felt no elation'.

So moods and personalities refract the event. A different source of discrepancy arises from a person's need for self-esteem and for the esteem of others. Herzog originally wrote about the loss of his gloves, 'I saw them slide and roll. They went further and further straight down the slope. I remained where I was, quite stunned. I watched them rolling down slowly, with no appearance of stopping. The movement of those gloves was engraved in my sight as something ineluctable, irremediable, against which I was powerless. The consequences might be most serious'. In *L'Autre Annapurna* (1998, not yet translated) there is no mention of the gloves being dropped and in April 1999, interviewed by Roberts in Paris, Herzog testily brushes aside his almost lethal blunder and the further blunder of forgetting that he had socks in his rucksack to use as makeshift gloves, 'Losing the gloves didn't cause [the frostbite]. The journalists always say that, but they're wrong. I just put my hands in my

pockets as we descended'.

All this is natural. After half a century of living with such results, who wouldn't shift uneasily and blur or redraw the image of what really happened? Much less acceptable re-workings come to light when we realise how Herzog's tendency to self-aggrandisement was abetted by the ambition of the French Establishment to promote the climb as a way of regaining the national honour lost in the capitulation to Hitler in 1940, the Occupation, and their still having a very minor record in the Himalaya. The Comité de l'Himalaya of the Club Alpin Français chose as leader of the Annapurna expedition, not one of the best and most experienced climbers (the Chamonix guides Terray, Lachenal, or Rebuffat) but the less experienced, less talented, Herzog, executive of a tyre company, ex-officer in the anti-Nazi army and staunch Gaullist: John Hunt, so to speak, not Eric Shipton.

The chief fixer in all this was Lucien Devies, a veteran climber who had trumpeted the nationalist motive for mountaineering as early as 1939. The Germans, Austrians and Italians had beaten the French to the 'last prizes' in the Alps on the Walker Spur and the Eiger North Face. Now this could be redeemed in the Himalaya. After a press conference in the Grand Salon of the Club Alpin, he made the climbers take an oath of obedience and 'swear upon their honour to obey their leader in everything.' Herzog loved it, 'In that moment our team was born'. The other climbers hated it: Lachenal muttered a parody of the oath and Rebuffat characterised Devies as a 'victoriste', adding 'Depersonalization... A certain Nazification' — strong words after those years of martial brutality and genocide under the Third Reich.

'Obedience to the leader' turned out to entail a ban on anybody other than Herzog writing about the expedition for five years. It lasted, in

effect, for much longer than that. Lachenal planned to publish a memoir, called *Carnets du Vertige* in 1956. In November 1955 he was skiing on the Aiguille du Midi above Montenvers, fell through a snowbridge into a crevasse and broke his neck. At once Herzog got hold of the manuscript and, along with his brother Gérard and Devies, 'pruned [it] of every scrap of critical, sardonic, or embittered commentary'. Lachenal's own full words remained unpublished till 1996. Reading detail after detail of this censoring and sanitising, I found it hard to sit still. The cover-up — here is one of the chief weapons of the powerful, whether in politics, science, the media, sport, or for that matter education. The Devies-Herzog axis seem to have deleted every phrase or word that suggested their expedition had been anything other than saintly in its honourable perfection. Lachenal writes, 'We convinced Momo [Herzog] to head off towards the great glacier on the East Face'. The axis delete 'convinced', to eliminate the suggestion of democratic disagreement. 'We obeyed' is deleted because it sounds as though an order had been given — although that oath had been exacted. For a similar reason the summit photographs must not be called 'official' — although Lachenal was omitted from the photographic credits to make it look as though Marcel Ichac had done it all by himself. 'Herzog was chosen leader by a decision among the powers that be' — deleted. The descent was a *débandade*, a demoralised retreat. 'But no!' rules Servies (who wasn't even there) and 'Is this the place to say so?' rules Herzog, with his managerial sense of what not to admit. Lachenal was a candid observer with an uninhibited eye for human detail. The suits never like that kind of thing. So they suppressed — as well as all mention of taboo items like boils, vomiting, diarrhoea, women's breasts and the offering of girls or boys to 'the sahibs' for four rupees a head — such valuable

sentences as these, about a Nepalese burial, 'A hole is dug near the river, the girl put inside it, and after a little ceremony covered with stones. The body will be carried away by the floodwaters to fertilize the plains of Nepal'.

Finally, the axis suppressed the 2,000 word *Commentaire* which Lachenal appended to the Notebooks, so robbing two generations of testimony by one of the world's most remarkable climbers, because of comments like this, 'For me this climb was only a climb like others, higher than in the Alps but no more important. If I was going to lose my feet, I didn't give a damn about Annapurna. I didn't owe my feet to the Youth of France'. So he explains how he was reluctant to give in to Herzog's insistence on climbing the last few hundred feet and only gave in because Herzog would probably have died if he had gone on solo.

It is hugely to David Roberts's credit that he has found out so much and set it down with such scholarly care and such heartfelt belief in telling things like they are — so far as any of us can ever do this. The most poignant moment in his quest, for me, was his visit to the chalet Terray built in 1947, to have tea with Terray's widow Marianne. He has already found, in Terray's childhood home, the manuscript evidence that *Les Conquêteurs de l'Inutile* was written by the man himself and not (as some had nastily hinted) by a ghost writer. Now, in a high cupboard, at Marianne's invitation, Roberts and Maurice Guerin (publisher of the uncensored *Carnets*) find 'an old, scarred rope and a beat-up rucksack... Inside, we saw a smashed headlamp, stirrups, broken carabiners' — the gear Terray had been using when he fell to his death in 1965 from a rock face in the Vercors, 'In the silence, I took one of Terray's broken carabiners in my hands and turned it this way and that. It was as close as I could come to meeting the man'.

David Craig

Snow in the Kingdom
Ed Webster
Odyssey Books £30

Another day, another Everest book (sigh). But such a jaundiced reaction would be unfair in this case, as in *Snow in the Kingdom* Ed Webster has produced one of the very best of the recent offerings. It is also clear, both from the prose style and the care lavished on production, that this is a labour of love. There is some great writing, both desperately sad and triumphant, photography second to none, a bibliography and exhaustive index.

What impressed me particularly was the freshness and sense of revelation Webster manages to achieve. This is no mean feat, not just because the subject of Everest has been so minutely dissected so many times, but because the book is impressively long: nearly 600 pages.

It chronicles not one but three trips, the totality of Webster's Everest experience. This is even more substantial than it at first sounds, as between them the three expeditions cover the different sides of the mountain pretty comprehensively: a West Ridge attempt with an all-American team in 1985, a North Ridge/Face attempt in 1986 and the Kangshung Face expedition of 1988, about which Stephen Venables has already written so powerfully. There must be very few people with such a record.

The interest of the accounts is in the same order, the book building to an appropriate climax with the harrowing descent from the Kangshung Face in '88.

I found the first interesting for the flavour it gave of a large, young and rather naive team on a very big route and the insight into the open-eyed Webster and the expedition's leader, one Jim Bridwell. It's very well done, but these are not particularly inspiring subjects. No-one ever looked likely to

get to the top.

On the second expedition Webster's role wasn't strictly that of a climber at all, but photographer and support to Roger Marshall, the British climber now living in America who was intent on repeating Messner's solo ascent, or something close to it. A very different kettle of fish then. Marshall himself reminded me of my old friend Ed Drummond, in that he too clearly has a monumental ego, wished very much to make a great name and ends up giving an impression of loneliness and odd vulnerability. He didn't make it up Everest. Webster on the other hand made a solo ascent of Changtse, (24,879ft), Everest's North Peak, which is curiously downplayed. It was here more than anywhere else in the book that I felt I had to read between the lines. There is one other point of great interest: the arrival on the glacier of Messrs Beghin, Loretan and Troillet, intent on a lightning ascent of Everest's North Face in the most modern of modern styles. As everyone knows, Loretan and Troillet pulled it off too.

But the book's climax is the account of the Kangshung Face expedition, consisting of Webster, Paul Teare and Robert Anderson from the USA, and Stephen Venables from the UK, and here comparisons with Venables's book (*Kangshung Face*, Hodder and Stoughton, republished by Odyssey Books as *Alone at the Summit*) are inevitable. It is no denigration of Webster's account to say that Venables's is better. To me he has an ability to structure a story that gives him a real edge — he should try a novel.

Still, good as Venables's photography is, he can't match Webster's — at the least, he can't match Webster's reproduction. These are not only stunning photos, there are an awful lot of them and they are superbly printed. However good the writing, the pictures are even better. And oddly, whilst the pictures are so well-printed, the text is not.

Presumably it has been reproduced from a disc rather than typeset. I may be all wrong here, being no expert in book production, but it doesn't look quite right. But this apart, the production is superb and, perhaps, in the end it is a difference which only shows what it should show: where Webster's heart is.

And where and for what he is prepared to take the greatest risks. I can never resist trying to find lessons in Everest books and here's what I've found in this one: a mental picture of that summit day in 1988 with Venables, ruthlessly focused and eschewing everything extraneous, creeping inexorably upwards, not fast, but not wasting a single precious moment — whilst Webster, for whom photography is so important, just can't resist. And so those odd seconds, minutes, slip away. He doesn't make the summit; he does get frostbitten fingers.

Here is a book to warn that simply wanting to take your 'precious moments' with you exacts a price.

Phil Bartlett

The Alpine Journals of the English speaking World, a comparison

Tim came to the January committee meeting with a small stack of books to be reviewed. I took the *AJ*, *AAJ* and *SAAJ*. Since I was going to Canada, I volunteered to obtain a copy of the *CAJ*. Tim suggested adding the *NZAJ* and making it a world tour. Rather than review them individually I decided to compare them and evaluate them against their stated/implicit objectives.

Firstly why are these journals published and what are their objectives? To state the blatantly but fundamentally obvious, these are club journals, produced on a voluntary basis by committed enthusiasts. There are limits on the resources available, both editorial and financial. They are not produced for commercial gain but

to inform the clubs of members' and activists' exploits both at home and abroad. This can cover developments in the greater ranges or activities closer to home, and be cutting edge or recreational. The content depends not only upon on the editors' selection but also on whether expeditions and activists see a particular journal as the vehicle for their report/article, and this depends in part upon the extent of the journal's distribution. As it is these activists and members who contribute articles and reports, the literary standards vary. Before the era of climbing magazines they were the only vehicles to record the exploits of climbers and record the exploration of the greater ranges and as such were an invaluable record and a store of information. In the present era of competing mass circulation climbing magazines and the internet the recording of new climbs in journals is almost redundant. The journals can, however, take a long-term view so some comment is appropriate. These days its main role is one of club communication and expressing a clubs identity. This is done through articles and reports about mountain activity, the editorials and remembering passing members.

Rather than review the journals individually I decided to evaluate how they measured against their stated objectives and met my interpretation of the needs of a club's membership. The remit of the different journals varies greatly, as do geographical influences; the United States, Canada and New Zealand all have domestic Alpine ranges, New Zealand is geographically remote while Britain is closest to the European Alps. The British also have the greatest historical baggage. The American journal is aimed at a worldwide audience, whereas the Canadian, New Zealand and South African journals are domestically orientated. The journals receive varying degrees of sponsorship and there are varying degrees of

transparency in recording this.

The visual impact of the contents is important. It is often the photographs and the layout that draw you in. They are the hooks that get you to start reading an article or report, from listening to one magazine editor this is a dark and subtle art, involving psychology and an eye for the right picture. Therefore I have included comments on the visual impact of each journal.

The American Alpine Journal 2001

**Editor Christian Beckwith
The American Alpine Club**

There is a distinct difference between the *AAJ* and the rest, both in size and scope. In 'notes for contributors' it sets itself the very demanding target; the *AAJ* 'records the significant climbing accomplishments of the world in an annual volume'. No other journal has such an ambitious mission statement, or comes close to offering a challenge; it is the magazines that do, e.g. *High's* 'Mountain INFO'. This is an American perspective of what are the significant climbing accomplishments, but in a single volume it contains a remarkable amount. This journal is very focused on its objective with no articles of a more general nature. It is A5 in size and printed on good quality paper with a large number of good black and white photographs, topos, maps and diagrams inserted in with the text, especially in the expedition reports section. This journal has sponsors but the amounts are not indicated.

This is very much a record of expeditions to the greater ranges and developments in these regions, or cutting edge climbing in less remote areas. It is well-produced but the reports are those of expedition members, inevitably some parts of the reports become repetitive, how many expeditions pass through Kathmandu airport in a year? This approach does not encourage overall analysis of

developments in a region nor draw out the most significant developments and achievements. It is an inspirational volume; the photographs especially make you want to visit the areas. In the expedition reports the recipients of financial support have a note at the end of the report, however, this makes it very difficult to evaluate how this support is distributed.

This journal is aimed at the activist and people with a real interest in developments in the greater ranges. It does cover most of the world, with a range of contributors, with very different objectives. It is a valuable source of information in a single volume, however, as a member of the AAC I think I would feel disappointed by it as there is little in it to tell me what the club has been doing and what the mass of recreational climbers are doing.

The Alpine Journal 2001
Edited by Ed Douglas
The Alpine Club and the Ernest
Press £18.50

The *AJ*'s objective was set nearly 150 years ago and reflects the spirit of Victorian middle class Britain, 'a record of mountaineering adventures and scientific observations', when there was still the remnants of the idea mountaineering was only justified by its contribution to science. The range of articles is far more diverse, covering more general mountain travel, anthropology and history as well as expedition and regional reports. A large part of the historical section is merely a reprinting of articles from earlier *AJs*, this seems a total waste. I found the articles on general mountain travel incongruous, is the *AJ* trying to compete with *National Geographic*? It is A5 in size, however, it is not printed on quality paper; so the photographs cannot be inserted with the text but are in sections usually of four pages. There are three colour and three black and white sections. The photographs,

though good, add little to the text. There is page after page of solid text, this has a negative visual impact and appears boring and unimaginative, not enticing the reader to delve deeper. In the past *AJ*'s were printed on better paper and had black and white photographs inserted with the text, this was far more interesting to skim through, and does draw you in. The topos, maps and diagrams are adequate rather than good. The area reports are edited rather than using expedition reports, this means that the editors for each region, who know the area and the climbing, have to do the work of analysing developments and trends, which they do very well. This approach is far more succinct and more directly informative and hopefully less biased. This is a great strength of the *AJ* and in this aspect alone it is head and shoulders above the rest of the pack.

The support of expeditions by the Mount Everest Foundation (MEF) is dealt with as a separate section. I could easily see the number of expeditions supported and their geographical spread. Where appropriate these notes were cross-referenced to expedition reports.

There are a number of anomalies, including a large section (six pages) on three cutting edge winter climbs in Scotland, which seems a bit parochial. I could find no information on AC meets and activities. The *AJ* comes across as a slightly outdated, backward looking journal that is losing touch with its membership as it is aimed at a mainly armchair audience, who's great days are behind them. This description does not fit most of the AC members I know. I can't help feeling the *AJ* has lost its way in the last 20 years. Obviously cost is an issue but there is a lot of padding in this journal that could easily, and usefully, be removed to cut printing costs.

Canadian Alpine Journal 2001
Editor Geoff Powter
The Alpine Club of Canada
C\$23.50

I could not find the CAJ's mission statement explicitly stated, so I e-mailed the editor and he sent me the following. 'The CAJ is designed to reflect the actions, thoughts and styles of Canadian climbers, at home and around the world, as well as to capture the climbs done in Canada by others. Because there has long been no other Canadian climbing publication (until the recent emergence of *Gripped* magazine), the CAJ has needed to be far more than just a journal of record (like the AAJ); it has been THE voice of the Canadian climbing experience. As such, it includes poetry, mountain art, and extended essays on the Canadian scene and mentality'.

The CAJ is focused on the climbing and mountaineering activities of the club's members, and while it is cheerfully parochial it is not xenophobic. The articles are not just about major climbs, but they are very much about climbing and mountaineering. It is, unusually A4 (21 x 28 cm) and printed on good quality paper with black and white photographs, this means that the full-page photographs have higher visual impact and show far greater detail than any of the other journals. The *Journal's* sponsors and the amount of sponsorship are clearly stated.

The area reports are definitely accounts of club members' activities, they are informative accounts of mountain activity but there is no analysis of cutting edge developments or what new routes are being done on a systematic basis. There is no editorial on the new route activity, since some of the really hard mixed routes are being done there this is a disappointment. This information would unfortunately be second-hand, but some short, edited resumé gathered from magazines and other

journals should have been possible. The financial support of the ACC and the Canadian Himalayan Foundation for expeditions and related projects are both reported, however, I was unable to form a view as to exactly what expeditions, climbing or environmental activities had been supported.

This is a good club journal aimed at reporting the activities of its members and club activities in a specific region. This it does well, both the activist and the recreational climber will find articles of interest here. I thought that this *Journal* did try to meet its objectives. As a recreational climber I found this *Journal* very readable and interesting, it is well put together, the standard of production can only be described as professional, has a high visual impact which inspires further delving and a desire to visit some of the places in the articles.

The Journal of the Mountain
Club of South Africa 1999
Editor Martin Wells
The Mountain Club of South
Africa

Though perhaps not strictly an Alpine club, the journal fits well with the others. One of the objectives of the club includes; '... the dissemination of information on mountains and mountaineering'. This is the *Journal's* function. The contents are split into; General, Africa, Abroad, Route Descriptions, in Memoriam and the Mountain Club of South Africa (section reports and officers of the club). The articles cover the current activities of the members and activists, covering both trips by recreational and cutting edge climbers, the main emphasis is on rock-climbing and trips to the greater ranges. This is aimed at informing the membership of what has been happening in the last year and as such is very focused.

There are reasonably sized sections on new route activity in South Africa, by several contributors, and reports by

the different club sections, however, there is no overall editorial of new route activity, merely lists of routes. The editorial is informative about the main developments in South African climbing. It is 215 pages of A5, printed on quality paper with colour and black and white photographs inserted in with the text. There are rather fewer photographs than the *CAJ* or *NZAJ* and this does reduce the visual impact, pages of solid text are far less enticing. There is no mention of sponsorship but there are six pages of advertisements, four in colour, two in black and white, these are in a single section and are not intrusive.

There is a good balance between Himalayan expeditions, climbing in Africa and climbing outside Africa (from America, to Malaysia and Skye). The focus of the articles is very much on climbing with only a couple of articles about flora and fauna. As with the other journals there is a certain amount of parochialism, the writers assume the reader is familiar with the geographical area and the names of people. I could find no information on financial support for expeditions.

As a club journal aiming to inform membership of a specific geographical area of climbing developments and activities, and club activities, this had the best balance of articles and information. It is not as visually impressive as some of the other journals, i.e. *CAJ*, *NZAJ*, nor are the contents as provoking and readable.

New Zealand Alpine Journal 2001

**Editor Bruce White
New Zealand Alpine Club**

This *Journal* does not have a stated objective nor notes for contributors. It comes across as similar in ethos to the *CAJ*. This is to inform the NZAC members of members' activities through reports, articles, essays and poems. The *Journal* is focused on the mountain activities, but not on hard

climbing. The contents list is sectioned into; New Zealand Rock and Ice, Overseas, Alpine Reflections, Area Reports, Poetry and Obituaries. There is a good balance of articles in these sections. It is not a standard 'A' size at 21 x 25 cm and at 128 pages it is not a weighty tome. It is printed on quality paper with many black and white photographs inserted with the text, there are also some colour photographs. The text is in two columns, which breaks it up. It looks good, is easy to flick through, and the photographs and large print titles invite further delving. I could find no evidence of this *Journal* being sponsored.

I felt the articles were written for the limited audience of the membership. The geographical details were not amplified and knowledge of the area was assumed. This is not a problem, and does not detract from any of the articles. The area reports are definitely those of individual groups, the new route information is patchy and there is no overall editorial on this. Developments in New Zealand are not covered in any of the other journals, so there is a real gap here. If one of the functions of journals is a record of significant climbs and developments, then this journal has failed; it is not in the position of the *CAJ* where big brother, in the form of the *AAJ* covers this. There was no information on sponsorship for expeditions.

This is a good club journal, informative on member's activities, both at home and abroad. It looks good and care has obviously been taken with how it looks. It is aimed more at the recreational climber rather than the activist. The articles are interesting and I enjoyed reading it

Conclusion

The only real value of the *AAJ* is as a complete record of cutting edge and expedition activity. As a means of informing the members about the club's activities it is useless. Clubs that

are the central mountaineering organisation of their respective countries publishes the MCSAJ, CAJ and NZAJ, they need to inform the membership of climbing developments and issues, both at home and abroad and the activities of the club and its members. This they do in different ways and styles, there are different focuses and the presentation and format is quite varied but all are reasonably successful. The basic balance of the contents of the MCSAJ is perhaps marginally better but the visual presentation of the CAJ and NZAJ is better. The one that came out poorly was the AJ. Though some of the articles and expedition reports were as good as any and the reporting of developments around the world the best, however, the journal is visually unappealing and several articles were out of place or just padding.

Vic Odell

Conquistadors of the Useless

Lionel Terray

Baton Wicks £10.99

At last! This new edition of Lionel Terray's autobiography, published by Baton Wicks, is long overdue, but nevertheless quite timely. It relates to and coincides with David Roberts' controversial, but engaging *True Summit*. However, young Alpinists have been denied this book for far too long. If it were not for Ken Wilson, this classic tale of post war Alpinism could have been lost forever.

Like the author, the story behind *Conquistadors* is complex. The autobiography was long thought to be the work of a ghost writer. In literary circles Terray was considered something of a country bumpkin. He did, in fact, aspire to the romance of peasantry; a complete contrast to his suffocating middle class roots. If Fleming's *Killing Dragons* is to be believed, a good guide would have been blessed with a farming background.

Terray's inability to write a decent

letter was flagged up by his detractors as evidence for his illiteracy; but he was anything but a gauche clothard. During the research for *True Summit*, Roberts uncovered a dusty manuscript as he rummaged around in Lionel's family Chateau. In the forward to the Baton Wicks edition, Roberts describes his joy at discovering that it was *Conquistadors of the Useless*: under the dust was Terray's own handwriting.

How ironic that Roberts by chance, has salvaged the literary reputation of one of France's greatest guides, whilst *True Summit* has completely tarnished others; it is an astonishing angle about one of the big mountaineering epics. On Annapurna, Terray played an inspirational and selfless role during the expedition and won the day with the rescue of his beloved and long-term Alpine partner, Lachenal. The harsh reality is that expedition's success resulted from a big chunk of luck.

There exists a post-epic photo of Terray carrying his frostbitten friend from the plane on to French soil. The strength and endurance of this unique partnership are clear to see in the exhausted expressions of the stoic Terray and shattered Lachenal. The book's collection of photos may have been more complete if this had not been left out.

Conquistadors of the Useless is difficult to put down as he describes his early life and Alpine career, until Annapurna. Thereafter his recollections are a little less enthralling. The certainty of success makes for less compelling reading. I guess I had more empathy with the earlier part of the book.

From a young age I had been keen to read *Conquistadors of the Useless*, as an early mentor had stated that it was essential homework. The title, which has hints of colonialism (despite Terray being something of the reluctant hero during the war), has always been intriguing, alluring even. It has taken me 20 years to get hold of a copy. It

didn't disappoint. In my youth, I had devoured other classic tales: Herzog, Bonatti, Cassin and Desmaison's *Total Alpinism*. I wonder; did Rene realize he had a hard act to follow?

The chapters 'I meet Lachenal' and 'The North Face of the Eiger' demonstrate that indeed Terray and Lachenal were the Conquistadors that did much for French pride in a bombed-out Europe. Lachenal had the edge on technique, although a little gung-ho; but Terray was the mountaineer, who could sniff out a route across any terrain when the odds were against them and their lives depended on it. His control no doubt came about from the skills he learnt at a younger age when he was a champion skier for France.

Their individual characters complemented and balanced each other perfectly: ying and yang. They became a climbing machine that took the flame of Alpinism from the likes of Cassin and Heckmair and raced ahead with it. I can think of few if any, successful Alpinists who have been fortunate enough to benefit from a long-term, strong Alpine partnership like theirs. The French guides Frendo-Ravenal, Gabarou and Boivin have come close. Perhaps Tasker and Boardman... The realities of hard core Alpinism are perhaps too desperate.

Was Lachenal a little close to the edge of insanity? After Annapurna he never regained the prowess on rock that he was famous for. The frustration this caused tipped the scales to a point he couldn't control. He entered a life of self-destruction, which ended at the bottom of a crevasse in the Vallée Blanche. Unlike Terray, who had his wife, clients, and farm, Lachenal had sacrificed everything for his climbing.

Terray's early climbing partner Gaston Rebuffat also suffered on Annapurna. He never returned to the greater ranges, but instead concentrated his efforts on guiding in Chamonix and the Alps. Whilst

Rebuffat also wrote on climbing, he was more of a mystic concerned with the elegance and poise of French Alpinism. With Terray you get the real deal; you can smell the sweat, sense the urgency...

His supreme fitness and endurance were in part due to his military training. They were phenomenal feats that make awesome reading. The life he led as a farmer, guide and Alpinist should have been punishing and, at times, he does let his guard down to describe the exhaustion he experienced.

Some might say Terray is too self-regarding. But compared to what? The all too usual self deprecating style of the British Alpinist? There is a Gaelic arrogance in his style, but it is deliciously flavorsome and justified. He achieved what others are proclaiming as the way forward in Alpinism today. For the Eiger (which was the coveted second ascent) he trained and sought out the best equipment available, adapted it, then chucked it away to climb fast and light when it mattered. Instead of Patagonia they had to make do with double sewn potato sacks for the first bivvy. No doubt they looked just as cool.

He served his apprenticeship and learned his craft in the European Alps. He did what mattered to achieve his ambition, despite incurring the wrath of military superiors. Terray honed his gift with style and speed before applying it on the world's most distinctive peaks—Fitz Roy, Jannu and the massive Huntingdon.

Little compromise and total commitment are features common to both his writing and his climbing. The lines of his autobiography are every bit as powerful as the lines he followed in the mountains.

The new surge in the popularity of Alpinism at all levels has in part been prompted by Twight's inspirational masterclass *Extreme Alpinism*. However, Baton Wicks reminds us that

it is *Conquistadors of the Useless* which is the basis of modern Alpinism and super Alpinism on the world's greatest peaks. Ken Wilson can take solace that by rediscovering inspirational books such as this, he will do much to safeguard and promote the adventurous integrity of mountaineering.

John Baker

**Frank Smythe The Six Alpine/
Himalayan Climbing Books
Baton Wicks £18.99**

Smythe was a prolific and popular mountaineering writer and photographer in the 1930s and 40s. His books importantly, helped to establish an understanding of climbing and mountaineering in the British population. This omnibus is the pick of Smythe's 27 books and chart much of Smythe's climbing career up to the war, his rise, via the Brenva Face, an impressive Himalayan record and perhaps in 1939 showing that he was past his best, but still enthusiastic and significantly enjoying his climbing. The expeditions to Everest in 1933, 1936 and 1938 were publicly the height of his career, but for Smythe, Kamet and the Valley of Flowers expeditions come across as the most enjoyable and rewarding. Everest to use Smythe's own much quoted remark was 'another bloody day'.

It is very apparent that these books were written in a different era, also that Smythe saw mountaineering as a quasi-religion. He certainly believed that to be a true mountaineer required a reverence for mountains. It is his elevation of mountaineering to a quasi-religious experience that jars, as it did with many of his contemporaries. Most climbers experience a feeling of awe of the power and beauty of nature but have the good sense not to try to articulate it. Smythe did try, repeatedly, and was criticised for it. Part of the problem is dealt with in Arnold Lunn's

obituary; Smythe refused to read books of 'explorers of the borderland between the natural and supernatural'. As he did not want his thoughts to be confused or influenced by them. The result was his writings reveal a superficial and primitive understanding of religion and a view of mountains that comes close to idolatry.

Lunn's obituary would have made a very useful preface to this omnibus, as it puts Smythe's career in perspective and explains why Smythe continues to include these passages. Though having read the explanation I was not inclined to forgive the sin.

The books also chart the development of Smythe as a person and a writer. There is a real change in his view of the porters and the British role in India between *Kangchenjunga Adventure* and *The Valley of Flowers*, written about eight years later. That Smythe modified his views during a period when imperialism was still quite strong says much for the man. His observations on Nazi Germany were written after the outbreak of the war so must be treated with caution. The style of writing also develops, the later books have a more relaxed style and there is more of a sense of humour.

These books should not be seen as a complete record of the events that they purport to cover. You need to read around the subject to understand what was actually going on during some of the expeditions and the feud with Graham Brown is not mentioned at all by Smythe. It is dealt with in an excellent appendix though. In common with other books of the time these are sanitised accounts of the climbs and expeditions. The personal problems and disagreements are largely glossed over, only in *Kangchenjunga Adventure*, are there hints that all was not well and Smythe was at odds with the establishment. It is also the book in which he criticises and analyses the equipment, food and methods. Perhaps

it is because in the subsequent expeditions he was part of the leadership. From other accounts it is evident that Smythe sought to influence the decisions made on the Everest expeditions and was a power in the 'underground leadership'.

This edition does not add much to our understanding of mountaineering in the inter-war years nor are they major literary works. These accounts are too sanitised. Smythe's books need to be read in conjunction with other accounts and histories, to get a complete and objective view. Where the books do provide a real insight and are a source of information is in the mundane events of Alpine holidays and small Himalayan expeditions. The narrative parts of the Alpine books, *Kamet* and *The Valley of Flowers* are very enjoyable. Though if you are not interested in botany and do not have knowledge of Alpine flora, as I do not, parts of *The Valley of Flowers* are extremely turgid.

Baton Wicks did the business on inter-war mountaineering anthologies with Tilman and Shipton. Smythe is not in the same class. Perhaps what is needed is an anthology of several writers who produced outstanding single volumes about this period, such as Raymond Greene and Howard Somervell. This anthology is good in parts but it does not make an impressive whole.

Vic Odell

West Cornwall
Edited by Nigel Coe
Climbers' Club £19.95

I well remember eagerly awaiting in 1968 the publication of *Cornwall Volume 1*, the Biven and McDermott guidebook to the northern part of the West Penwith peninsula. It was very overdue; *Cornwall Volume 2* by Stevenson covering the south coast had already appeared two years earlier in 1966. Note that these guides were then simply called 'Cornwall', there was no

other significant climbing in the county outside of West Penwith in those days.

The 1950 Cornwall guidebook written by pioneers A W Andrews and E C Pyatt was, of course, hopelessly out of date. Descriptions of the great mid-1950s Biven-Peck and Goodier-Deacon routes at Bosigran had never been published. One had to get hold of a copy of typed-up descriptions that Biven had duplicated. This was before Xerox photocopying was commonplace, so such documents had to be typed into a foolscap sized stencil and wet duplicated. There were numerous versions with hand-written new route additions. On many the details of an all important crux section were blurred in a fold of the paper. Good clean copies could be traded for several pints of beer in the pub and many people simply relied on trying to memorise details from the route-marked crag photographs in the Count House.

Peter Biven had been commissioned by CC Editor Wilfred Noyce in the early 1960s to produce a new Cornwall guidebook for the Club, but he was finding it to be a heavy task. He was not familiar with the south coast, his visits there being confined to a few 'raids' on what was firmly the territory of the Royal Marine Commandos with Rawdon Goodier, Zeke Deacon, Vivian Stevenson and Mike 'Mac' McDermott among the key players. It probably came as some relief to Biven when Viv Stevenson stepped in to write the south coast volume and, later on, when Mac McDermott assisted with finishing off the north coast volume. Such was the effort required.

When Volume I was finally published comments were made about how thick it was with 212 pages, 'too big to fit into one's pocket' it was said. Looking at it again now and comparing it to the latest version one notices how openly spaced the text was. The new version, expanded to include The Lizard peninsula and the Isles of Scilly and now more aptly called *West*

Cornwall is the combined effort of Nigel Coe as editor, 12 contributing authors and an artist or two. It is still in two volumes; 'North Coast' and 'South Coast' but both are inserted in a plastic wallet style cover 38mm (1½ inches) thick and the volumes now contain 343 and 327 numbered pages respectively. Perhaps we now have even bigger pockets in our trousers.

This mammoth effort is, of course, the result of over 30 years of contributions and continuity and it leans heavily on the sterling work of the previous 1991 editions by Des Hannigan and even re-uses many of Don Sargeant's crystal clear maps and diagrams from the earlier work. There are still echos of Peter Biven's writing in the historical section.

Such continuity is important, climber's guidebooks should smoothly bridge the gaps of generations and not be parochially based in today's young scene or over-emphasise today's style or prerogatives. Without wishing to rekindle the controversy I think the politics of the Edwards saga should have been toned down even more and that the fine and extensive contributions made by Rowland and Mark should stand without slur. In all processes of evolution, change and development mistakes are made and blind alleys visited.

Climbing in the West Penwith peninsula has extreme breadth and variety and the combined authors, current and past, have captured this through the in-depth and well-written historical, the anecdotes throughout and the inspirational pictures, photos and diagrams. The cover photos are especially powerful in depicting the beautiful golden granite with magnificent shots of *A Swift Flight of Fancy* at Sennen and in the Great Zawn.

Apart from desperate sailors climbing cliffs after being shipwrecked and miners' activities seeking copper and tin, the first record of climbing in

the area is of Alpinist and literary critic, Sir Leslie Stephen, ascending a chimney at Gurnard's Head in 1858, seven years before Edward Whymper conquered the Matterhorn. I have always found it fascinating that these English gentlemen were climbing and scrambling around, sedately and leisurely one imagines, on mountains and cliff so many years before the American epic Battle of the Little Big Horn, 'Custer's Last Stand' in 1876.

These Cornwall guidebooks are now for the first time fully metric. Britain was supposed to go metric 28 years ago in 1974 but it has been a very slow and cumbersome process, with litres, pints, kilometres and miles still regularly interspersed in everyday life. The 1991 guides were still based in imperial feet. I recall arguing at a Publications Sub-Committee meeting back in the mid-1970s that climbers' guidebooks should become metric as the metre seemed a unit more appropriately scaled to the climber's dimension; the crack was always '3 feet to the right' but never 'one foot to the right'. Maybe 'one foot in the grave.'

Metrication was, of course, quickly adopted by British engineering industries, they had to if their Widget was to fit into a Euro-Widget. At that time I worked for Xerox and we were converting all designs into metric units. There were lots of 25.4mm dimensions used then (that's one inch to you youngsters). A draughtsman in the company declared: "It's a good job we're going metric. We'll be more accurate in millimetres cos there's more of them to the inch." With climbing dimensions it's the other way around '3 feet to the right' becomes '1 metre to the right'. That's much less accurate. Strange though because the climbs have now got closer together and there are a lot more shorter 'boulder problem' routes described. 'One metre to the right' is now often on the next route.

Those familiar with the old volumes should note that Land's End has

moved. It is now in the North Coast volume. The inclusion of routes on the Isles of Scilly is particularly welcomed by aged rock stars as a place to boulder whilst on holiday.

There is an element of 'split personality' with the guide. It cannot make up its mind whether it's one volume or two. For example, the authors and contributors are listed only in the North Coast volume. The crag overview and the frontispiece and cover titles also appear only in this volume. The Isles of Scilly are in 'South Coast' yet a photo of Peninnis Head appears in 'North Coast'.

I must admit to being very baffled about the choice of rear-of-frontispiece photograph in 'North Coast'. In an area that has some of Britain's greatest rock-climbs at Bosigran and the Great Zawn I would expect the leading photo to portray one of them. Instead we have a photo of 'unnamed route at Cripps Cove, Logan Rock'. Tracking this down in the guide reveals that it's in the South Coast volume where we read on page 169 'Next is Cripps Cove, which has little to interest the climber'.

'At the end of the 20th century West Cornwall has survived as a magnificent adventure climbing venue. The majority of those who climb in Penwith and on The Lizard come from outside the area and are drawn by the exhilarating promise of adventurous sea-cliffs where the rock remains in charge and where the future is not robbed of its promises and challenges. The future may confound every shade of opinion, of course, and probably will'.

These two guidebooks, combined into one, provide enough rock-climbs to last a lifetime.

Frank Cannings

Hazard's Way
Roger Hubank
Ernest Press £12

I have to confess from the outset, that I am not a great fan of mountaineering fiction. With one or two notable

exceptions, Alison Fell's deeply emotional *Mer de Glace* springs to mind, this area of writing often disappoints. However I have to say that *Hazard's Way*, a new novel by Roger Hubank, is a superb read that is highly recommended. Written in spare and simple prose, the book takes you back to the scene at Wasdale Head at the turn of the nineteenth century. The author has a clear grasp of the history of the period and skilfully works fictitious characters into the story alongside key figures of the time such as Oppenheimer, Collie, Montague and the Abrahams. This serves to give the background an instant credibility, in conveying the atmosphere of the Wasdale Head Hotel and the valley at that time.

Roger Hubank's first novel *North Wall* was published in 1977 and was well-received at the time. It displayed an impressive degree of insight and feeling, combined with a clear grasp of what serious Alpine climbing was all about. The book was both compassionate and frightening and touched on deep fears and regrets many of us will recognise. Essentially, *Hazard's Way* is about personal struggle in the face of intense family and social pressures. The narrator, George Hazard, is a young man trying to cope with strict Edwardian family life set against the background of the Boer War and its impact on life in Britain at that time. Against his father's wishes, George has chosen to study medicine at Cambridge and whilst a student becomes a regular at Wasdale Head meeting and climbing with a variety of characters there.

As his own difficulties, both at home and in establishing a career, increase George's visits to Wasdale become islands of uncomplicated joy although one gradually senses a diminishing of returns for him as problems begin to emerge there as well. One key part of the story is set up in the Highlands, when George visits his

grandfather at his home near the Black Mount. On a winter's day, he walks the hills alone and watches two divers swimming on a lonely loch, 'Out on the loch one of the divers uttered its strange cry, a thin small sound chiselled on the freezing air. Its lonely note entered my heart. Suddenly I felt a surge of longing, yet for what I could not have said. It went beyond words: baffling, larger than my grasp, a weight of yearning that seemed unendurable, inapprehensible, yet somehow bound up with flat, steely water, the vast sweep of hill and glen. And yet a world outside, beyond the world of men. My eyes, I remember, filled with tears'.

As I indicated earlier, the story is set at the turn of the 19th Century and culminates in a dreadful accident on the Pinnacle Face of Scafell (based on what actually happened in September 1903.) The book's prologue is set much later in 1924, when George Hazard is in his 40s and is present at the unveiling of the memorial tablet at the summit of Great Gable. While, on the face of it, this is a bracing adventure story it is, in fact, something much more serious than that. The impact of the Boer War on George's psyche is mirrored by an increasing sense of doom for the future. Although still years away, the growing shadow of the First World War is present in Hubank's steady and gentle text. The reaction of some of them years later on the summit of Great Gable listening to Winthrop Young's speech, leaves you in no doubt of the bitter lessons learnt by the survivors of two terrible wars. In this sense, the prologue sets the tone for the whole book.

To conclude, this excellent novel is the work of a real craftsman who demonstrates a fine level of sensitivity and humanity. Not only does Roger Hubank write superbly, but his historic accuracy and attention to detail place you in the heart of the action and face to face with George's own conflicts and struggles to discover his place in life.

As his need for the release climbing gives him increases, so something forewarns George of the direction it is leading him. 'Something in men was not to be trusted'.

The conclusion of the book, and particularly the final page, moved me deeply and stayed with me long after I'd read it. The loss of innocence it represents is almost unbearable, set amongst the great hills around Wasdale.

Steve Dean

Dougal Haston The Philosophy of Risk

Jeff Connor

Canongate £16.99

This is Jeff Connor's second biography of a Scottish mountaineer; the first was the acclaimed *Creagh Dhu Climber*. For this book he has drawn on many of the same sources, in addition to Haston's notebooks. Connor is a journalist and this shows in the way the book is written, though the style is relaxed and uncomplicated there is a wealth of information and a welcome degree of analysis. He has obviously done a vast amount of detailed research and interviewed many of his subject's friends and contemporaries.

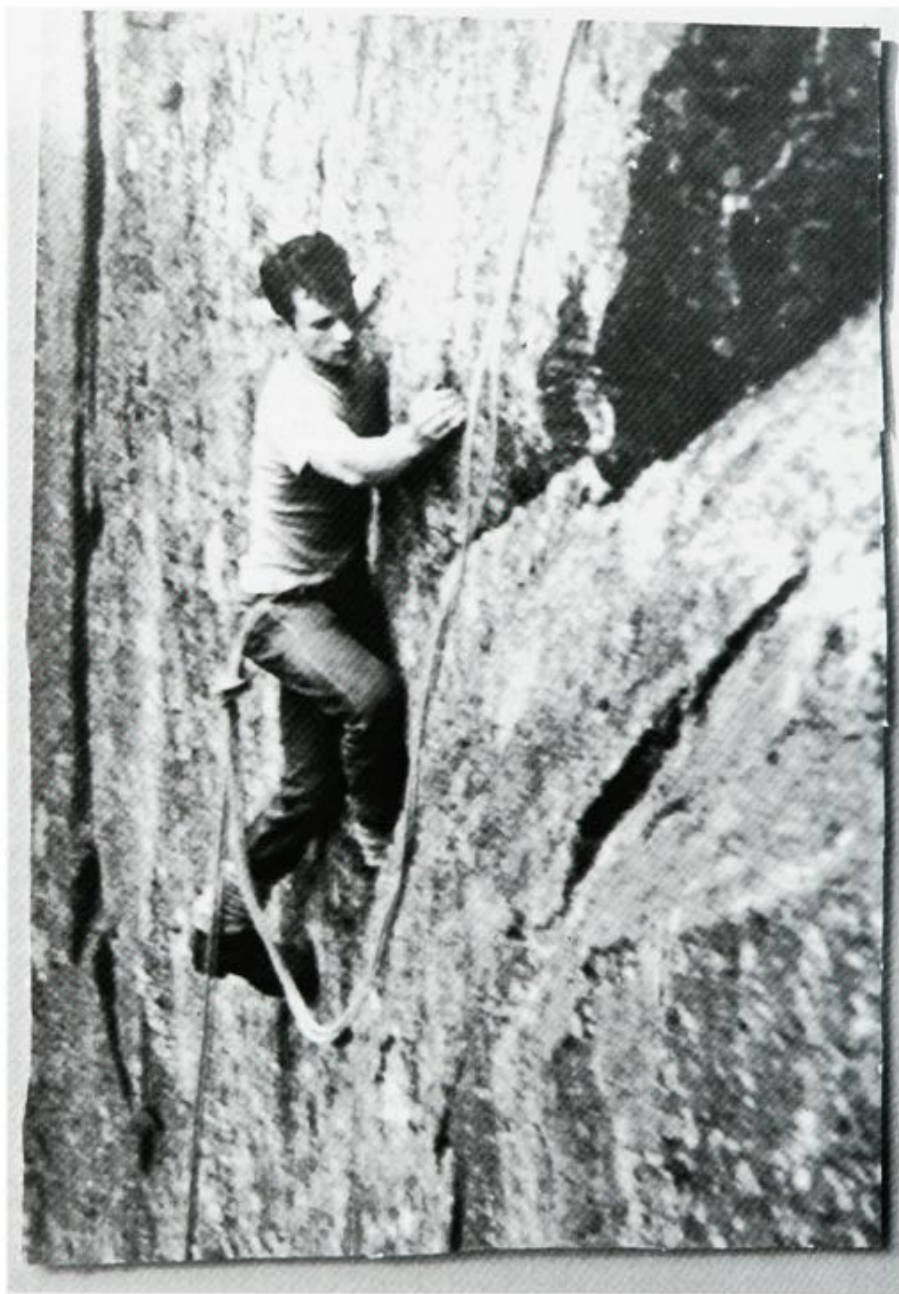
This is not a laborious, blow by blow account of Haston's climbs; in fact the climbing is not dealt with in detail. This is a close look at the man and the environment that he interacted with. Many of Haston's companions and contemporaries are given detailed attention and there is a great deal of back-ground information, that shows the environment they were operating in and the social, peer and establishment pressures they were subject to. Haston's and others' actions are analysed and the themes and motivations (pressures) drawn out. One of the themes of the book is Haston's philosophy; he thought deeply about his attitude to life and this influenced his life and climbing. It also charts how he evolved as a person; Haston appears

to have been more accepting and tolerant in his last years, quite different the aggressive rebellion of his youth.

Though Haston was (is) a mountaineering icon, Connor has not put him on a pedestal, he has clearly shown the man's very real weaknesses and failings along side Haston's significant achievements and strengths. This is a good, well-balanced and objective book that is worth reading. It deals openly with the problems and development of its subject. Haston comes across as a powerful performer, particularly on the big hills, but with all the problems that the character traits, determination and focus (or is it selfishness and obsession?), that are so useful on a big climb have in everyday social interaction and relationships.

What comes out of this book is a far clearer view of the climbing 'scene' in Scotland from the mid '50s to the mid '60s, a good insight into the life in Leysin and a far better understanding and appreciation of a quite complex person.

Vic Odell



Who is the climber? What is the crag? Which route? Send answers to the editor.

