

**The  
Climbers' Club  
Journal**

**2002-03**



# **The Climbers' Club Journal**

**Edited by  
Tim Noble**

**2002-2003  
The Climbers' Club**

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# The Climbers' Club Journal

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Mount Kenya (oil on canvas) by Jim Curran

# Editorial

'Great height gives you greater vision  
the view from the summit empowers you  
But in a way, too, it obliterates you.'

*(Mountains of The Mind, Robert MacFarlane)*

Low Bridge End Farm, St John's in The Vale, February 2004: Blencathra sports a saddlecloth of snow and the sky is azure to cobalt. Leaving the girls making a campfire by the farm beck I drive down Borrowdale, desperate, after six months abstinence, for a touch of rock. Rashly, I embark on something familiar but at the limit of my rusty skills. The remembered slab and saddle of *Little Chamonix V Diff*, smooth as a baby's cheek but stone cold, is both tonic and terror; sliding down then up and across on the blue polished edges, my fingers and toes feel as if they're encased in Ray MacHaffie's fabled boxer's gloves and roller skates. The exposure of the final moves threatens my physical and mental stability. I'm on the edge of panic. Finding resolve from somewhere, however, I will my bloated body to remember balance and control, but do not finish in style.

The view from the top is much the same as it was for me 35 years ago: Keswick still smokes peacefully and Derwentwater is a rare mirror, but I am somehow different, changed 'into something rich and strange', cleansed of self-doubt by the climb, but also horrified by the nagging thought, 'What if I'd slipped and left the girls fatherless?' I drive home in neutral to admire the campfire and make tea for three, brooding on my potentially self-annihilating obsession.

As climbers, I wonder if this isn't what we all seek: that willed enacted challenge to the ordinary in life which, 'taken at the flood', provides us with the courage and fortitude to face the ordinary with grace and equanimity whilst fuelling the secret flame of self-realisation. But what happens if 'the view from the summit' (and the need to get there) really does threaten and enact 'obliteration'? What then? How can this be reconciled with 'the ordinary life' of others left behind?

In the second *Journal* of the new millennium, this theme is vividly presented; there are many falls recounted here. For openers, Nick Bullock – surely currently one of the world's most talented Alpinists – leads us back to confront the roots of our obsession with vivid accounts of Peruvian Alpine and Cloggy solos that set the heart racing and fulfill Messner's dictum that climbing at the limits of one's capabilities is the only way to push out the boundaries of self. Nick's discipline and drive to perfect both his climbing and writing technique is a model for all of us – not the least because he faces his demons and near demise without irony or self-pity and is constantly exploring both the nature of mountains and the quality of expression of his movements over them. The Club looks forward to publishing further accounts of his climbing.

Richard Isherwood and Mark Vallance offer accounts of their last Himalayan expeditions in which personal revelation is matched by acute social and historical observation of Nepal and China. This last is a valuable aspect of much CC writing

setting a climb in its context. As I write, both Nepal and Tibet are undergoing profound social change with threats from internal and external 'reformers'; it remains to be seen how high standard mountaineering will develop if access to the highest mountains of the world becomes problematic. These accounts bracket three narratives, drawn from past experience, in which death, near death and the loss of friends is confronted full on. Tim Noble revisits a Himalayan accident that had a profound affect upon his 'ordinary' life; Chris Gibson writes vividly about a near fatal accident on the *North Face of The Triolet* and Dave Prior offers the most moving account of an Alpine accident I think has been published in the CCJ. Caught high in the infamous Alpine storm of 1970 (that Geoff Birtles, Alan Rouse and many other climbers experienced and were lucky to survive), he lost two good friends. The article is the more remarkable for its genesis: 'It has taken 30 years to get around to putting it together. I have done it for cathartic reasons, because I was talking to someone who recommended writing about trauma is a good way of confronting and coming to terms with difficult, haunting experiences. I am pleased to say that it helps enormously and sharing an experience instead of locking it away is a much healthier option. I hope other CC members might benefit from this technique'. Iemail from Dave Prior to Editor!

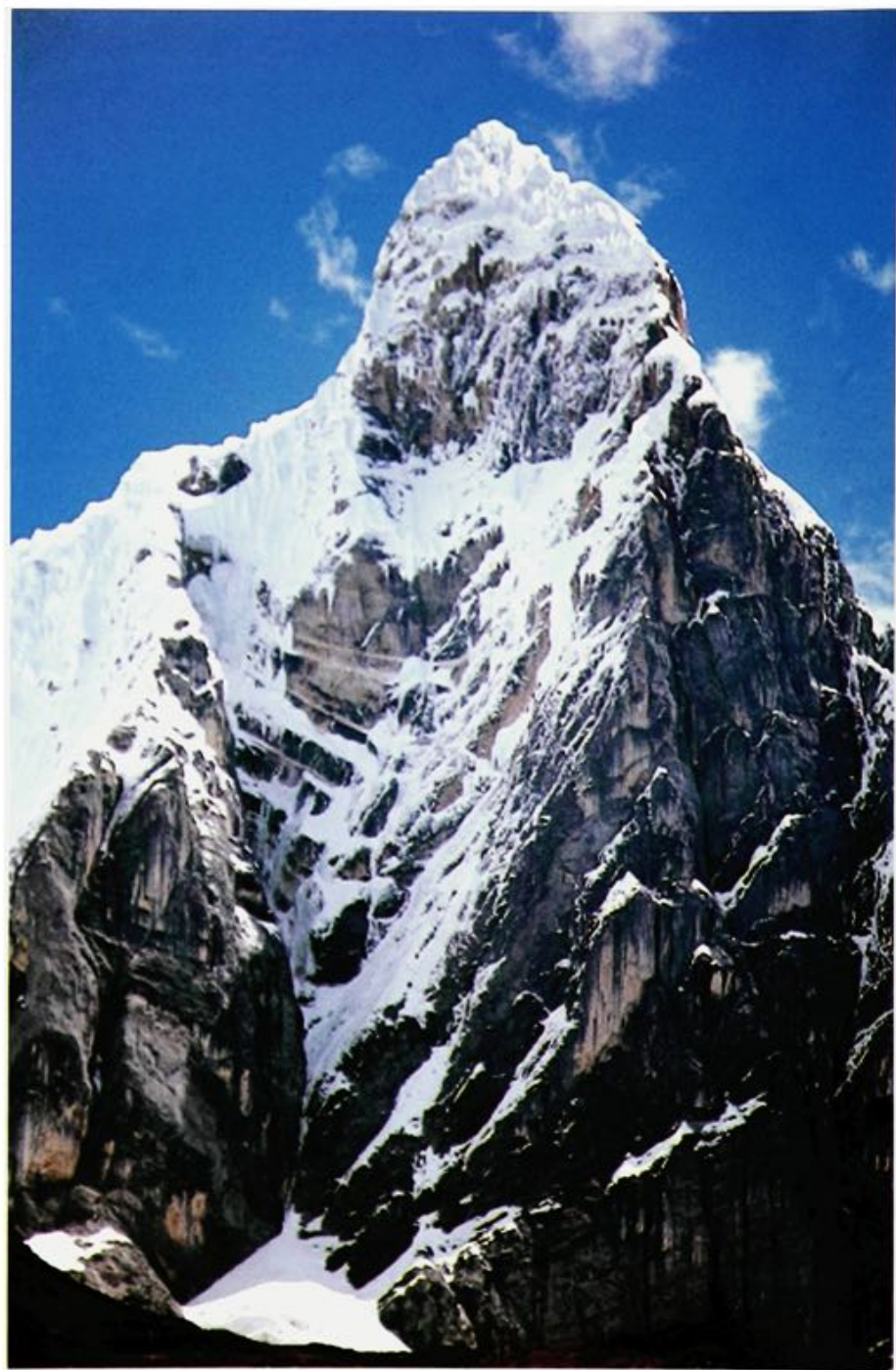
Terry Gifford writes at length, under the influence of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. I recommend members read this to get the full benefits of Terry's writing – though his themes are as clear as they always are. We have a risky memory from Jim Curran, another Tony Penning risky Alpine adventure, Dave Gregory contemplating 'What's in a name?' and a 'Ballad' from 'Cam' Campbell straight out of climbing history, immortalising Llanberis pub life in the '60s, before Norman Elliott returns us to the moral centre of climbing with a profoundly moving memory of one of his pupils learning to climb and discover himself. The article section closes with three important historical pieces about people and a place central to the Club's development and to climbing as a whole. The Club owes Steve Dean a debt of gratitude for his diligent and persistent search for significant detail in the lives of influential climbers: the Journal is the stronger for his regular researched contributions.

Sadly, we close with an Obituary that's full of memories of a generation of CC members who climbed, raced and organised expeditions together, men who, in their public lives, were 'empowered by a view from the summit' to challenge the ordinary and transform it. May we all continue to find the grace and fortitude to live and climb in the same manner.

**Opposite:** Tim Noble follows CC member, Richard Brown up 'Michelangelo' VS, on Crystal Slabs, Pembroke, above 'that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.'  
Photo: Ian Smith









# Andean á la carte

**Nick Bullock**

## **Hors d'Oeuvres: Surviving Jirishanca**

Spindrift was whipping into us, but Al Powell and I, protectively clad in down and Gore-Tex, were tucked up for the night. I finished the last dregs of hot chocolate and set the alarms for Midnight I knew sleep would be difficult, it was only 700pm. Behind us, Jirishanca's Southeast Face towered, a skyscraper with icy attitude. Though not as high as other mountains in this isolated range of the Peruvian Huayhuash, what it lacks in elevation it more than makes up with difficulty. It's a massive Matterhorn, dripping icicles - some of which are longer than routes in the Canadian Rockies. Fringed and latticed icefalls cover the upper three quarters of the face; they are joined together by narrow, snowy ledges and steep compact rock. The pointed summit is of course protected by the standard Peruvian house-sized honeycombed snow mushrooms. The whole of the face is a huge concave snow-shoot. At its base, a narrow, tight, snow-filled chimney provides the only access - certainly not a place to hang around.

Our first attempt to climb a new direct line straight up the middle of the face ended almost before it started snow in the chimney had melted leaving smooth steep rock impossible to climb. We explored other possibilities, but it soon became apparent that the chimney (or what by now had been named 'Death Couloir') would be the only way onto the main face and as clouds poured in and the temperature kept rising, we didn't think it on. Getting settled in the bergschrund, we waited for daylight. To rub salt into wounds, when the sun rose our fears were confirmed: it was far too warm. Snow in the couloir, freezing conditions and an early start were clearly absolute prerequisites. 'Death Couloir' would become a collecting point for anything falling from high up.

Back in the valley four long and frustrating days followed. On our return to the bivi it was clear that snow had lashed the face. 'Death Couloir' was full. But time was running out and a group of American climbers had made an unwelcome appearance, so on a cold clear evening we set the alarm for 1.00am and prepared to give the climb another shot. The storm blew in at 10.00pm. I couldn't believe it: snow, hail, even rain - at 5000m. Eventually, at 5.00am, the storm passed and we set off. Maddeningly, the sky cleared of clouds; it was a matter of time before the sun started stripping the face.

New snow clawed at our legs; the couloir was melting quickly. 8.00am: water poured down the rock. We are experienced climbers, capable of making a rational

**Opposite:** A melting pot of a Matterhorn: Jirishanca's South East Face, 'Death Couloir' is clearly visible lower centre. Photo: Nick Bullock

decision to wait it out in the 'schrund or return to the bivi, but neither option was voiced. Though we were in the wrong place at very much the wrong time, we quietly carried on. I took the lead; only two pitches of the couloir I told myself. Our intended line was on steep ground on the right side of the face where a headwall protects the climbing. "IT WILL BE SAFE," I kept telling myself. "Two pitches up this death trap and we'll be out of it. The climbing to come will be worth this moment of madness." Both of us had taken risks before – all climbers do when they want a route. And we wanted this route really badly. Mostly, you get away with it, don't you? You complete the climb and the risks are forgotten. But sometimes that's just wishful thinking.

I climbed fast, placing only two pieces of gear because the ground wasn't hard. The rope pulled at my waist; 60m out, but no sign of a belay. I shouted to Al to start climbing. I was looking up all the time, praying nothing was coming down to meet me. I shouted again, louder, sounding, I knew, impatient, worried. Snow flurries flew past; occasionally larger lumps rattled down from high above. The rope came slack; I moved on up aiming for a small rock outcrop in the middle of the gully. As I reached this haven and shouted down that I'd belay, a deep throaty growl terrified me. The rock I desperately wanted to hide under was too small. My ropes ran away uselessly, snaking down the gully. Driving my axes deep into wet, melting ice I cowered like a paralysed rabbit, waiting to be swept away.

Heavy concrete snow hit me square on, ripping me from the stance. I was thrown down the face, screaming "Please let it be quick!" Tumbling, spinning, hurtling down, the fall felt endless. Somewhere deep in the pit of my stomach I felt I was going to die this time. Upside down I crashed, left shoulder taking the full impact. My body collapsed concertinering my knees into my face. I felt my ribs, chest and back tear as all breath was smash-compressed out of my lungs. I think I blacked out momentarily, then came to, horrified I was still conscious, still falling and in agony.

Hitting soft deep snow stopped me hard. The immediate joy of realising I was still alive, gave way in a moment to horror as the fall continued. Spinning, twisting, somersaulting, pushed on by hundreds of tons of heavy wet snow I fell, crashing into rock. Surfacing at one point, I gulped air frantically and pulled hard, trying to reach the edge of the snow stream. I could feel rather than see my legs being twisted into unnatural angles, the joints screaming with strain. Still I fought, my resolve strengthening even as I knew I was weakening. As the snow slowed and started to set I clawed and swam. Pulling down hard I pushed an arm into where I thought was air, hoping to leave a visible sign for Al to dig around. (It never occurred to me that he might also be buried.)

But at least I was alive; I could hear Al repeatedly shouting my name. Moving was impossible, however: large blocks of snow covered me and I was tangled up in rope. Then Al came. Fortunately, he'd been spat out to the side of the avalanche. Ever the professional, he took photos of me first before helping me sit and take stock. My shoulder and knee hurt like hell; I'd obviously torn muscles in back, hips and ribs. My head ached; I felt physically and mentally shattered. I sat on the rucksack and, drawing in the whiteness of the snow and the savage beauty of the mountains, I popped Al the question: "What are you doing next May, Mr Powell?" Al looked at me 'right gone out'; he must have thought I'd lost my reason. Then it clicked: "Climbing this





**Above** Cold Lazarus rising: Nick Bullock at the end of the 400ft avalanche.  
Photo: Al Powell

bastard with you, of course, Mr Bullock.” Having received the answer I desperately craved and filled up with painkillers, we started the long descent.

### **Main course: Ultar-ing the balance**

Returning to Huaraz after two long and painful days on the road we met up with Owen Samuels and Jonnie Baird, who’d travelled to Peru with us to attempt a new route on the North Face of Ulta in the Cordillera Blanca. Unfortunately, Baird was having difficulty acclimatizing. Powell didn’t need to say a word; I could see his thinking as if I were psychic. Samuels has a partner who can’t acclimatise; Powell has a partner who’s all smashed up. Simple solution: Powell climbs new route on Ulta with Smauels and Baird goes home with Bullock. But there was no way I was going home to a rainy Leicester if the others were staying to have fun; so I suggested the new climbing partnership on condition that they let me come up to base camp with them. After all, I reasoned, the walk in to Ulta is extremely short and I’d discovered that if I stuffed myself with painkillers life was bearable.

Not long after the decision was made, I found myself in the late afternoon traversing under the North Face of Ulta. It reminded me of the more famous North Face of the Eiger. An ice streak that starts in the middle of the face and runs from toe to apex looked incredible, though not for me. I need a bivi spot to give quick and easy access to the ice slopes beneath the North West Face. I’ve left Samuels and Powell contemplating their line while I potted around the North Ridge to look at the face. I didn’t really believe I was capable of much climbing and I’m sure the others

didn't think so either, but I did believe that I might make a creditable effort on the Dawson-Cheesmond line, given the right conditions and enough painkillers.

At Midnight, the stars were bright and it was freezing. An hour earlier, I'd watched the pinpricks of light making their way to the base of the North Face. Time for me to wend a way through the large crevasses and broken ground and the steep ice field above. Crossing left into the centre, the climb started in earnest with typical Peruvian ice fluting: steep walls on either side, but good hard snow at the back for quick and efficient climbing. At about Scottish Grade 3 with occasional bulging turns, it reminded me very much of an extended *Number 2 Gully*, only steeper and with a massive amount of climbing above.

Escaping the confines of the runnel, the climb opened out. But this was more feeling than fact because I couldn't see a thing. It was very dark and though stars shone, there was no moon. For the first time on the trip it felt really cold.

The face appeared very steep. The ground I could see was broken with slithers of white. The original route follows a fluting right of centre, but I couldn't make this out. I did remember, however, that there was a continuous line of snow and ice on the left side of the face which also appeared to break through the mushroom madness directly below the summit. It was a gamble. Should I forgo the near certainty of the summit by the established line and first solo ascent, or go for broke and climb several new pitches finishing directly at the summit? There was no contest and I knew it.

Decision made, I moved out left into immediately more tenuous climbing: steep thin ice covering rocky bulges slowed me down considerably. Hollow ice over hard compact granite made think of last year and the new route Powell and I had done on Quitaraju. Hitting another large patch of snow reminded me of the basin on *Orion Direct*, the runnel of *Astral Highway* which I'd soloed a few months previously.

Pushing hard I sensed the top. I've been climbing for an eternity and the angle of the face has grown ever steeper. The ice is thinner, more rotten; this is nose to nose confrontation. The shallow runnel turned into a full Scottish Grade 6 mixed cimb, transported to the Northern Corries it would be perfectly at home. Large granite blocks are perched precariously one on top of the other and covered with a dusting of fine powder. There are good torqueing cracks. Holding my breath, I leaned back and stood up. The exposure is like nothing I have experienced. On one delicate move, halfway through a high left leg rockover on to an edge of granite, I catch the view down a thousand metres. It's been light for a couple of hours, but I find myself wishing it wasn't. Focused totally on the ground in front of me, I never thought to look below. The fall on Jirishanca was 400ft; screw up now and die. With no room for the smallest error, I slowed. Time weighed heavily, as did the vast distance below. I began to worry about getting down. The sun would hit the whole face in a couple more hours. The thought of its destructive power on those massive cornice mushrooms was just too terrifying. My original plan for escape was simple: down climb the whole route. But now it was blatantly obvious that this wasn't going to happen. Down climb thin and rotten Scottish Grade 5? I think not. Fortunately, Samuels had lent me a soloing rope, 50m of 7mm cord. I hadn't climbed any bulges higher than 25m, so I had enough rope to abseil over steep sections and the ice at the top of the



**Above** 'A lonely impulse of delight' halfway, solo on Ulta. The chosen line leads up centre. Photo: Nick Bullock

bulges had been good enough for ice screw threads. My only hope now was not to have to climb any steep, rotten patches longer than 25m.

I was nearly there. Clouds whipped past close enough to touch. A few more feet of difficult climbing, including a sketchy mantelshelf onto a powder-covered slab, remained. My sanity only just intact, this last manoeuvre gained me enough height to reach the summit cornice. 10ft away, a small snow corridor led between two vast overhanging mushrooms to the easy-angled summit snow slopes. There was no point abseiling off a melting anchor at the summit, or of sitting here slowly freezing waiting for the face to do the same; I decided I'd done enough and set off down.

But carefully down-climbing back past the mushrooms I made a grave discovery: I couldn't lower myself using my knackered shoulder. Ablakov Threads were going to be the order of the day, the very steep ground at the top of the face was impossible to down climb anyway. But this retreat was going to rank very high on the Bullock madness scale as I slid a tiny 25m. How many abseils would I need?

For once, however, the unsettled weather was in my favour with clouds blocking the sun. The face remained cold and the anchors safe. I abseiled over and over, sometimes trying to downclimb at a slight easing of angle, but the rain in my shoulder, the steep bulges and the iron-hard water ice patches soon convinced me there was no other way than rope-assisted.

Eventually, I reached the bergshroud, jumped it and slowly picked my way back through the icefall. Following steps where they hadn't melted, I attempted to levitate across smaller crevasses until I was faced with the monster I'd been dread-



ing most. This was a composite crevasse made from all the Hollywood mountaineering films ever made and put together; it had personality, character and was waiting for me with open arms. Dripping icicles from its mouth it could have swallowed a London bus and still have room to spare. The tenuous snow bridge I'd used at night had disappeared. Looking both ways, the icefall became more chaotic and there was no way I was going to explore elsewhere at this time of day. There was nothing for it but to jump the bloody thing. Landing on my arse having cleared the edge by inches, I slid down the slope, gathering speed all the time until, swinging an axe with my good arm I slowed to a stop. Finally, dragging my aching body over the moraine to the bivi, I ripped my boots off and lay exhausted in the weak sun. The whole climb and descent had taken 13 hours. This seemed slow, but after all, I'd only been taking a look, hadn't I?

### **Desert: Peruvian ice cascade**

As the sun set over Huascaran I lay knackered but content in my sleeping bag a crash disturbed the serenity. Turning to look, I quickly dived for cover: blocks of ice were flying about. Minutes passed and still ice ricocheted off rock. Something massive had broken off and come down. I knew that tomorrow, very carefully and cautiously, I would return to Huaraz and once I got there, I would barricade myself inside until it was time to go home. Peru obviously wanted to make a meal of me but I wasn't going without a fight.

**Below:** *Ulltar: the line of the Bullock solo, right centre to summit. Photo: Nick Bullock*



# Bhaje Expedition

**Dick Isherwood**

*"However well a man in his 50s may go up to 20,000 feet,  
I have come regrettably to the conclusion that above that  
height, so far as climbing goes, he is declining into decrepitude"*

IHW Tilman, Nepal Himalaya)

I had not been to Nepal for five years, and was feeling I should go there again when I got an email from Steve Town about a proposed *Alpine Club* trip in the post monsoon season of 2002. I proved to be the 13th potential member of the team, but any superstition over numbers was allayed by various people dropping out, leaving a final party of ten.

There was a time when expeditions were organized, if not literally on the back of an envelope, at least largely on one individual's desk. Email has changed all that. Everything relating to this trip was expounded multilaterally over several months. We speculated at length about Nepal's volatile political situation, the long list of obscure 'discount' peaks (those not needing a liaison officer), the weather, the rival trekking agencies, the gear list, etc, etc. It was not all enlightening but at least it didn't cost postage. Other resources of the internet age were also mobilized, including a source of satellite images which, if you studied them very carefully, confirmed that the Kali Gandaki river really did flow between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri.

After a flirtation with the Rolwaling valley we agreed on the Damodar Himal, north of the Annapurnas and Manang, as an area of relatively unvisited moderate sized mountains suitable for a group of climbers largely well past their prime. I found a 25 year old slide taken from Annapurna 2 pointing in this general direction, and it did all look attractive and not desperate. Pokharkan, 6346 m, seemed accessible from the Phu Khola, the scene of some of Tilman's explorations, and it wasn't too steep, at least from the north, if you believed our trekking maps. We couldn't find any record of an ascent but that didn't mean too much. Bikrum Pandey's Himalayan Expeditions gave us a reasonable quote for a month long trip with all supporting services, including a sirdar with five Everest ascents under his belt. We decided to stop worrying about Maoists, and we were set to go.

We met in Kathmandu at the beginning of November – a bit late in the season but this had been forced on us by the business commitments of a prospective member who decided at the last minute not to come at all. This was remembered later in the month when it became very cold. Not everyone knew everyone else and I, having been out of the UK for longer than I care to remember, knew only three others. I had kept in regular touch with Steve, the trip leader, but hadn't seen David Baldock since North Wales in the 60s. Bill Thurston reminded me that he and I had climbed *The Ramp* on Gogarth together back then. The four of us, with John Fairley and Martin

Scott, comprised what Tilman might have called the decrepitude platoon, though some of us proved markedly less so than others. Dave Wynne Jones was a significantly younger early retiree, while Toto Gronlund and Pete and Sara Spillelt were the young end of the team.

First things first. We had declined to pay in advance due to all the political uncertainty, so Bikrum's men hustled us from the airport to his office, without even time for a shower, to get that taken care of before we met any cut price operators in the street. Good business practice.

We were all looking forward to meeting Kaji, the five time Everest summiteer. He did not disappoint us. Barrel chested and beaming, he greeted us all warmly. He discovered I spoke some Nepali, tugged my white beard and named me 'Bhaje'. I had to go to my dictionary to find that this meant grandfather. Others were better qualified for this rank, but 'Bhaje' I was for the duration of the trip

I was impressed again by the traffic congestion in Kathmandu, so different even from the 80s when I last lived there. Someone told me there is a UN sponsored vehicle emission control program, but you'd never guess. Walking in the back lanes of Thamel is not much fun anymore with taxis and motorbikes swerving around the potholes everywhere. There were conspicuously few tourists – a fair number of individual budget travelers but not many trekking groups and none of the upmarket airconditioned-bus Agra – Nepal – Varanasi tour groups which used to keep the souvenir stalls going. Times were clearly hard for the tourist industry, but the rest of the domestic economy seemed to be thriving. Certainly, lots of people were buying motorbikes.

I hadn't been in the Marsyandi valley since the 80s and was interested to see what had changed. The road went further, the bazaar towns were bigger, and the trekking accomodation had multiplied. Further up the valley the dry lake bed settlement of Tal, which I remembered as two cowsheds and a minimal teashop, is now a small town with close to 20 trekking lodges. The steel cable suspension bridges, which by the 70s had largely replaced the hairy old indigenous structures, had themselves been superseded by bigger better versions provided in part by German aid. Electric power had spread way up the valley and IDD phone service was offered, though not always actually available. I spotted a microwave tower on a ridge several thousand feet above us and way off any main trail. Corrugated iron roofs, traditionally a sign of relative wealth in rural Nepal, were everywhere, even in the smaller villages way up the hillsides and far from the tourist route. There was a lot more fruit and vegetable production – oranges were in abundance at this time of year. There were no obvious changes in the extent of the forest cover, but less bird life along the trail, perhaps reflecting the increased traffic. Most positive of all, a huge landslide on the west side of the valley near Bahundanda, which I remembered as it encompassed a whole village, and which Tilman had noted as long ago as 1950, had stabilized – the previously raw and active earth slips were now covered in alders and other secondary forest growth. Like Mike Thompson, I have long been sceptical of the many expert predictions of imminent ecological collapse in Nepal, and these observations did seem to suggest that someone is doing something right.

The trekking lodges, though, were clearly not prospering. A few years ago, we



were told, the Annapurna circuit saw 75,000 trekkers a year. In early November, perhaps a little after the peak of the season but not by much, occupancy was below ten percent. There must have been some good deals available as Kaji kept offering us lodge accommodation to save his men the trouble of putting up tents.

We tried to do our bit for the local economy by buying beer at every opportunity. The price increased by ten rupees a bottle with every day's walk up the valley, leading to speculation that you could calibrate your altimeter by it. Rakshi, of which I once thought myself something of a connoisseur, is now hard to find as Kathmandu whisky of various interesting flavours seems to offer more profit.

In a friendly hostelry below Chame we met a friend of Kaji's who had just – guess what – climbed Pokharkan with a Japanese client. This was a bit of a blow, but at least it told us the mountain was climbable. They had gone way round to the north and up a lot of deep snow. The Sherpas were on their way home while the Japanese guy was crossing over to Muktinath with a single kitchen boy for company, each to his own.

At this point we left the beer and fried noodles scene and turned north up the narrow Nar Khola, the entrance to which is marked by a cliff very like a small El Capitan. I had wanted to go up this valley for a very long time. The trail was formerly tenuous, so much so that the standard approach to Nar was over a high pass from Manang. Works had clearly been done however, and the walking was easy though the scenery spectacular. We crossed and recrossed the river, in the bottom of a deep and steep sided gorge, on very solid bridges, some of them new. Parts of the route had been blasted out of the cliffs. Those who wanted their ice axes accessible for this part of the approach may have been disappointed. This trail leads essentially nowhere in economic terms, so I was both surprised and impressed that it had received so much attention.

We camped that night at Dharmasala, a single building best described as a high class Scottish bothy. It was a new stone built shed with an earth floor but also an upper story and a balcony, unlocked and available to any travelers. Kaji guessed it was built by the government – again a surprise to me as these outlying Tibetan areas used to receive virtually nothing from Kathmandu. There was just enough flat ground for our rather large tents; our small army of porters disappeared into a series of small caves in the boulders and smoke rose here and there on the hillside. The two young lady porters, in colourful saris and nose jewellery, changed caves frequently as the evening progressed.

Next morning we climbed steeply for several hundred feet and came very suddenly into a Tibetan landscape. The lush forest vegetation of the gorge gave way in a half mile or less to junipers and barberries widely spaced on a dry hillside. The first chortens appeared. We stopped for a break in an area of disused terraces below a small and very broken down village. A few houses were still in use, with padlocks on their doors, and an old lady carrying a load of dried plants told us they brought the cows down here in the winter. She herself lived in Nar, high up on the far side of the valley. This pattern was repeated as we went up the valley, with quite large areas of terraced fields, now disused, and villages largely abandoned, used only for storing winter fodder. The glaciers descending from Kang Guru and Gyachi Kang to the

east had clearly retreated a long way and this may well have cut off old irrigation systems. Kaji, whose home is Phaphlu in the Dudh Kosi gorge, was so impressed by the amount of unused flat ground that he wanted to build a hotel – and an airport to bring the tourists.

I watched the lammergeiers, golden eagles and Himalayan griffons soaring around cliffs as impressive as anything in the Dolomites, and traced some very theoretical climbing lines as we waited in the sun for the tea to come. I had forgotten how soft travel in Nepal could be. Then the sun went down and I was reminded abruptly that it was November. Days were getting short and nights cold.

We continued through more gorges, still on an impressive and newly-cut trail, and reached the old fortifications below Phu. These, too, were pretty dilapidated but it was clear that the residents had not always welcomed visitors from down valley. A small fort overlooked the narrowest point in the gorge and competent stone throwers would have made life difficult for an unarmed invader.

Phu and Nar are the only regularly inhabited villages in this valley. They once comprised a significant principality which also ruled over Manang and some points south, but clearly the people of Phu had not always got along with those of Nar.

Phu itself is built on the sides and top of an old moraine terrace at around 13,500 ft. It is a warren of perhaps a hundred thick walled stone houses with lanes, drains, chortens, firewood and fodder piles all packed into a very small space. The modern world intruded in the form of Maoist slogans painted on a few walls, and solar panels on the flat roofs. The fields around the village, now bare, showed remains of barley and buckwheat, and somewhere they also grew potatoes as there were plenty for sale.

The gompa was across the river and higher than the village. We had been without beer for days and I had hopes that the lama kept a good chang cellar, but the only occupant was an old lady spinning wool on the sun terrace, who didn't even have a key. The man who had it would come 'later'. This was as close as we got. We followed a well used trail to the hilltop above and found a flat area strewn with what appeared to be parts of human skulls. Traditional Tibetan funeral customs seem to be still going here. In striking contrast, just below the gompa was the village helipad, with all the works for yet another steel cable suspension bridge, recently delivered and waiting to go down to the new bridge pillars we had passed below.

We were now over 4000m, which made us feel we were getting into the mountains. A reconnaissance day out of Phu showed us some impressive peaks to the east (notably Nemjung, which is a very beautiful pyramid) but we made the mistake of having three parties go in different directions. Kaji came back with very definite ideas about how to climb Pokharkan, as did Martin, Bill and I from a different perspective. We overruled him, and not just because we were the paying customers – his route involved steep loose-looking rock, pegs and fixed ropes even below the base camp. I had a magnificent view of the east side of Pokharkan from the vultures' roosting ground far above the gompa, and we were fairly sure there was a snow route to the summit from this direction. This would at least give us a new route for our second ascent.

Next morning as we walked up the valley, we saw some cat-like tracks on the





Above 'Far, far, the mountain peak' Pokharkan from distance Photo R Isherwood

trail. They seemed a bit small for a snow leopard, but one lives in hope. A vulture flew in unusually low above us and landed in a depression on the hillside just above – then another, then two more. By the time we had climbed up far enough to see them there were almost 20, tucking in to the corpse of a male bharal, heads and necks red with its blood. It was hard to believe that this big goat had just tripped over and died on such a gentle hillside, so we suspected we had disturbed a predator at its kill, giving the vultures a free lunch. The cat tracks didn't go beyond this point.

Two more days took us to a base camp on a meadow at around 4800m where, by some miracle on this dry hillside, there was flowing water. As we all sat around breathing hard and hoping to acclimatise, the Sherpas played football. The meadow was not exactly flat and every few minutes someone would have to chase the ball several hundred feet downhill. The football survived the whole trip only to succumb to a reversing bus in Pokhara on the way home.

We made a very modest carry to a higher campsite, then it snowed six inches or so overnight. On the south facing slopes it melted off very quickly, but elsewhere it just stayed. Hoping that winter had not arrived for real, we gave ourselves two more valuable acclimatization days. Unfortunately for me personally, a cold had been going around and it now settled in my chest, reducing me to a serious level of decrepitude.

We went up to the next campsite at around 18,000ft, still no more than walking on moraines and boulder fields, but by now the Sherpas were running rings around us. John had picked up a copy of Rum Doodle at the bar of that name in Kathmandu, and it was beginning to seem too relevant for comfort. Kaji and two others climbed

most of the way to the summit this day, ignoring our chosen route, cached some ropes and came down to join us for dinner. The next day they carried our gear up to a camp on the glacier, our only one on permanent snow. They themselves returned to the moraine campsite for a warmer night and a full kitchen: "We'll see you at six am tomorrow. Be ready to go." This was getting embarrassing. There was a time when I reckoned I could keep up with most Sherpas.

I was now in a bad way and spent a horrible sleepless night, gasping for air and keeping John awake with my coughing. The next morning I just couldn't progress uphill at all and even had trouble getting down. The others, now reduced to five plus three Sherpas, climbed to the rope cache and discovered why Kaji had stopped where he did. The route ahead was not the snow slope he had indicated but a mess of seracs. Dave now took the lead and climbed a steep ice pitch to more snow slopes which led to a summit, but unfortunately not the real one. The route to that was down 150 metres to a saddle and up along another snow ridge; Dave, Martin and Kaji did this bit to finish the job. They all got down to the snow camp that evening after a 12 hour day.

The descent and return were uneventful until we reached the roadhead at Besisahar where the army and police were on alert and shopkeepers were pulling shutters down early. A Maoist attack was rumoured, and we could feel the tension all around, but fortunately it didn't happen that night. I did have the feeling that solo wandering in Nepal, which used to be very safe and lots of fun, is not a good idea these days. Next day we were by the lake in Pokhara.

# And Still Flow the Tears for the Hooded Monk

**Dave Prior**

It was nearly 6pm, the temperature had plummeted and in the last half hour the wind had picked up. I'd barely noticed this because the pitch up to the final overhang was difficult and I was getting very tired after a long day, so it was only when I was nearing the overhang that I began to see the change in the weather. The beautiful Vallée Blanche was just visible through the cloud, but the bright blue skies and sun in which we had been climbing during the day had secretively been replaced by blackening ominous clouds. There was cold and wind and also something different, more subtle, a change in the air. The rock began to fizz in a rising hum ending in a crackly 'flack' as it discharged a flash of static, creating a mauve haze to the rock and mist. There was a tingling of the skin, a feeling of great unease. I felt unsafe, but the immediate situation needed securing.

Rick and Arthur were sharing the belay with Steve who was waiting to follow. A last call to Steve to say I was going round the final overhang and to climb fast and I traversed to a ledge. With no time for a belay I took in. It seemed an age for Steve to arrive and when he did it had begun to hail and then snow. We moved to the best part of a sloping ledge, situated some 10m below the summit and stuffed all our ironmongery into a crack well away from us. I could hear Rick and Arthur calling to each other. We prepared for the night and called to them; they had decided to split the pitch and belay under the overhang and then join us later.

Conditions then changed very fast: the temperature dropped rapidly and ice started to form on the rock. Arthur and Rick were under the overhang unable to climb to join us and it seemed clear that this would not be possible, so we enveloped ourselves in our only protection, a 'Zarski Sac', and unable to do more in the prevailing conditions, braced our selves for a long hard night. Then there was a long flash like a silent explosion; the inside of our sac turned blue and my world changed forever...

It was in June 1970, without a care in the world, that I gave up my job to have a season in the Alps with my climbing partner, Steve Suthorn. We were at that age where there was only present; past and future did not exist. We drove through Germany to the Dolomites for our first adventure which was to be the *Maestri Route* on the Roda di Vael in the Catinaccio. We were early in the season and there was still a lot of snow, which is why we'd chosen the Catinaccio because it was relatively low lying.

The climbing was steep and loose and late in the day when a peg pulled out I took a fall onto a desperately weak belay. Grateful not to be falling, but shaken by the experience, our pace slowed, leaving us in one of the most uncomfortable bivouacs I had ever experienced: on an overhanging wall, in etriers, three pitches below the summit. We moved on to the Tofana where we did two more routes, the *Primo Spigolo* and the *Pilastro di Rozes*. On both we were caught in the rain which made the climbing serious and on the Primo we ended up off route, climbing a number of wet pitches with no runners and no belays. Scary stuff.

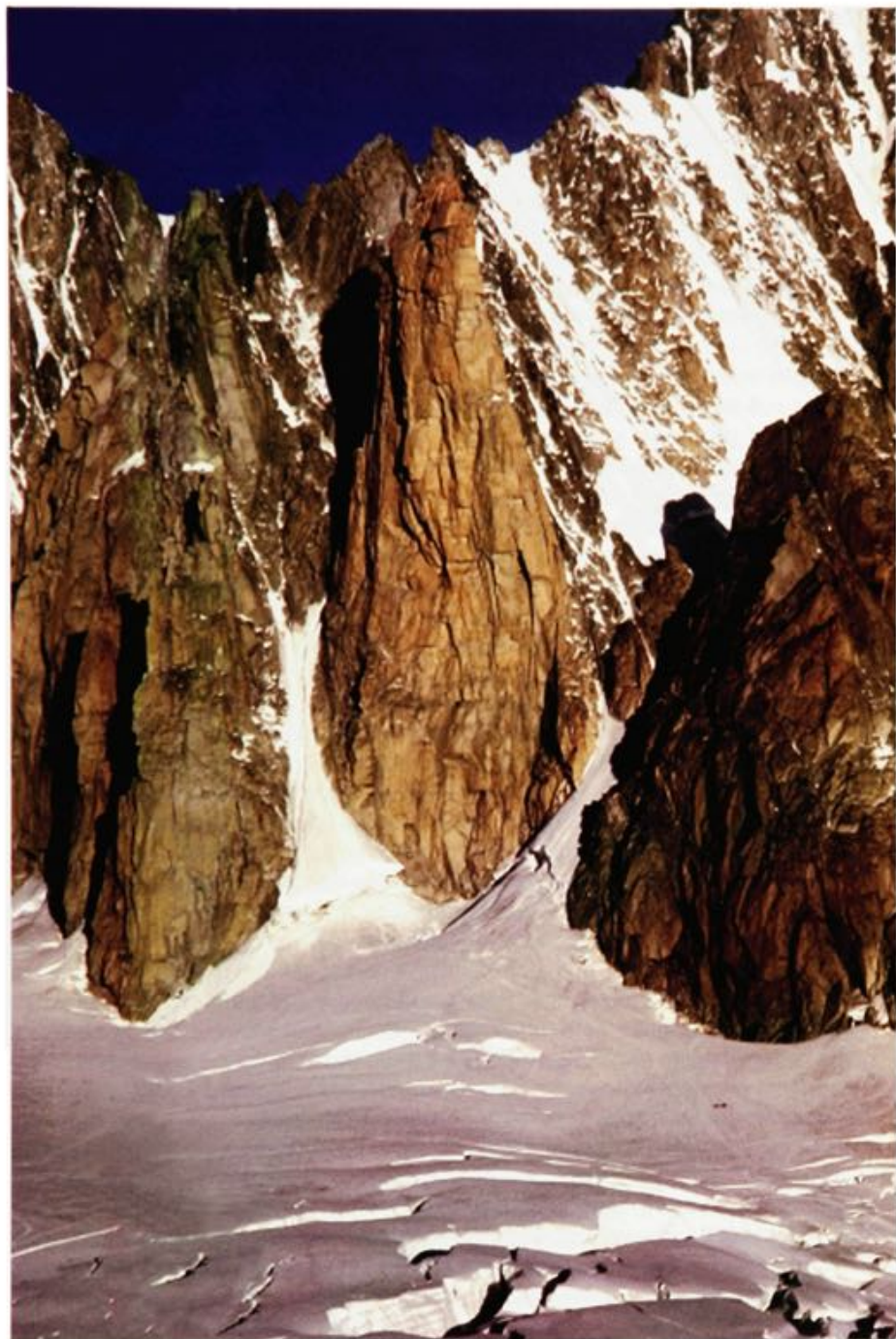
Next, we went to the Tre Cime where snow and bad weather prevented us from climbing, although Steve soloed a couple of descents, whilst I explored the area. It was a fascinating place because of the military activities during the Austrian Italian wars around 1918 that gave birth to what we now know as Via Ferratas. To seek better weather we went to the south side of the Blanc, to Val Vény and the *South Ridge of the Noire de Peutère*. This spectacular granite ridge with its five towers rises between the Brenva and Freney glaciers with magnificent views of Mont Blanc and the lofty, remote Pillars of Fréney. From our enforced bivvy three quarters of the way up Pointe Bich, it was clear that we had grossly underestimated this route. It took all next day to reach the summit and solo down the East ridge, which was exposed and demanding, with no room for any error.

We drove through the tunnel and established ourselves on Snell's field in Chamonix. My experiences here were to be plenty and wild: the drunken brawling, the outrageous behaviour, the skirmishes with the CRS, the Alpenstock, the Bar National and the general life style are all stories in themselves. In Cham, we met up with some friends. Alan Rouse and his mate were about to attempt *The Walker Spur* as their second alpine ascent, along with the Burgess twins. Eric Jones had just soloed *The Gervusutti Pillar*. Eric, Leo Dickinson and Cliff Phillips were later to make an attempt on a new route on the Brouillard Towers only to be caught in a storm and take three bivvies to return to safety. Rick and Arthur and many more friends continued to turn up. These were the heady days of hard climbing and seriously hard fun. Snell's field resembled a refugee squatter camp with ingenious improvised shelters made from materials borrowed or stolen locally. The structures metamorphosed as the CRS claimed and returned material, for them only to be replaced again later with other contraband. It was all unique, wonderful and completely squalid.

A spell of good weather quelled the debauchery as climbers returned to the mountains. We had decided to climb the *East Face of the Grand Capucin*, a stunningly beautiful granite obelisk and one of the many pinnacles at the head of the Vallée Blanche on the east side of Mont Blanc, a heavenly place where the mountains make love to the sky. And so, on a beautiful hot afternoon on the 23rd of July 1970, Steve and I, together with Rick Cane and Arthur Dekuzal, crossed the Vallée Blanche to the Cap. The snow was soft and heavy going. At one stage, as I fell through a crevasse, I managed to spreadeagle myself in time before I vanished into its icy tomb. The sky was that crystal clear dark blue black which you get only at

**Opposite:** 'Like a Candle in The Wind', The Grand Capucin dominates the Vallée Blanche – and an approaching party. Photo: John Cleare Images





altitude. We sat below the bergshrund under the Cap, soaking up the atmosphere and the brilliant white crevassed silent beauty of the place.

We had to climb the couloir on the left in order reach the traverse to the bivvy cave, Rick and Arthur set off first and we followed. On the second pitch I heard a warning cry from Brian Pooley, a New Zealander who had just arrived with Phil Jones, and looked up to see Steve, who by now had run out more than a 130ft of rope, falling towards me. He tumbled and slid head over heels as his only crampon bit the ice and sent him into another cartwheel. I looked at the single peg in the couloir wall and then back at Steve as he hurtled passed me.

"No runners, Oh Christ, I'll never hold him!"

The seconds passed in slow motion as I waited for the jerk to pull me from the rock and to certain death. Then the rope was sliding through my hands as I desperately tried to brake him. As I slowed him down he dropped over the bergshrund and into the soft snow. The peg had held and we were both still alive, saved because I had put my gloves on to keep warm whilst belaying and therefore could effect a slow brake without burning my hands. After this fall of some 260ft, Steve courageously picked himself up and climbed back up and finished the pitch.

After the traverse and a hard slab, we were soon settled in the cramped small cave for another uncomfortable night's bivvy at 12,000ft with French and Belgian teams. None of us slept, and despite the shivering, the wonderful colours of the unfolding dawn in the cold mountain air, were indescribably beautiful. Dawns and sunsets in the high mountains are magic moments which capture you briefly from reality and, like reality, are short lived. As the first warming rays of the bright sun rose above the Swiss border, we started the climb.

The climbing was varied and in places hard but on solid golden granite; we passed the crux 130ft wall in good time. We had kept together with Rick and Arthur, but because Brian was doing all the leading, the belay changes slowed them down and gradually he and Phil dropped behind. By the middle of the afternoon, I had traversed to the bottom of the final 700ft corner. The sun had moved off the face and the temperature dropped. Arthur, not known for his fitness, was visibly tiring and the belays were extremely small or hanging. A last call to Steve to say I was going round the final overhang and I traversed to a ledge, and took in....

After the flash, there was a devastating bang of thunder like the detonation of a huge explosion. I hardly noticed it, for I had been leaning against the rock when the lightning struck. I find it difficult to put into words what followed, but as the shock of the current went through me, my body felt as if it had cramp in every muscle at the same time. The agony of counter contracting muscles was excruciatingly painful as my head tried to touch my arse, my fingers tried to touch my elbows, and my heels tried to touch my knees. It seemed to go on and on and on. Through the pain I began realise that I could not breathe and slowly everything was going black. A massive roaring pressure in my head increased as did the blackness and the pain. I could stand no more, I had given up, how much more would I have to suffer before I die? Please God let me die now, I can't stand any more. I vaguely remember Steve giving me artificial respiration. The blackness faded and I felt a strange peace after the pain. Gradually I returned to consciousness and to the realisation that I was com-

pletely paralysed, I couldn't move anything, nor even hold my head up, or talk. Slowly dawning of the situation we were in, made me feel very very frightened. What was going through Steve's head and at what point he might decide he would have to leave me, was for him to decide. How on earth was I going to get off the Cap. I began to realise that I probably wasn't and by tomorrow, I would be dead. I did not want to live if I was totally paralysed, I began to think my life was finished.

About 10 minutes after the first strike we were hit again, although this time it didn't seem to hurt so much. I wondered if this was to go on all night until we were dead. How do you describe what was going through your head during a situation like this? During the night I went from absolute terror to relative calm; I had reached the point when there was absolutely nothing I could do to save or help myself and further worrying was pointless. Fear had turned to resignation.

Steve sat on the ropes, holding me and supporting me between his legs, my head just lolling about. I tried talking but it was just garbage. Steve was lucky, because his back was not touching the rock when the lightning struck; the current went through his legs and he was relatively uninjured. We were at 13,500ft in the middle of a ferocious storm with duvets and waterproofs only, but nothing to eat and very little water. We just sat there shivering and it was cold. The storm raged on and on with more lightning strikes through the night. Every time we had a strike and we lived, we just waited for the next one, not knowing if it would be the one which would kill us: the rising hum of the static, the flashes and the thunder were just terrifying. During the night, we thought we heard calls from Arthur and Rick, but they were lost on the wind. We shouted back, but nothing.

It was towards the dawn, as the storm abated and the thunder became more distant, that feeling gradually returned to my body and I could start doing things for myself. It was a glimpse of hope and yet not daring to believe the subtle change from a situation of possible death to one where you might live. We decided to get into the Zarski Sac for the last hours till dawn to try to gain some protection and warmth. We had not used it since the first strike for the illogical fear of it attracting another. As dawn broke, the storm subsided leaving everything under about a metre of snow. We were absolutely frozen, the cloud swirled about us and we glimpsed the odd patch of blue through a gap in the cloud. Instinctively we knew had to move now.

We shouted down to Arthur and Rick, straining our ears trying again but with no reply. The snow and ice and lack of belay denied us the opportunity to abseil back to the overhang to try to see them. I was very weak and unsure as to whether I was capable of the descent and led nervously up the difficult ground to the summit of the Cap, brushing off the deep powder snow. I needed to do this to prove to myself I could get off the mountain. We located the abseil point which was the start of a daunting descent into the nick. It was very cold and it seemed to take an age to arrange the crossed krabs safely for abseil. My fingers stuck to the metal; it was like they were covered in glue. The rock was plastered with ice and it was difficult to keep to the left to avoid the overhangs and the ropes were frozen.

We recovered the ropes and looked down the steep couloir running down the north side of the Cap. It was covered in deep snow and apart from the first abseil



slings on the wall of the couloir, none other were visible. Silently, we prepared to descend, both knowing the consequences of not finding the next slings. The situation was serious; we had no other options. I looked at Steve; his hair and beard were completely white with frost as he disappeared down the couloir.

The descent was painstakingly slow; there were only brief glimpses of the couloir as the cloud momentarily cleared. Most of the time we abseiled into a white out. We had to take the last 40ft really slowly, brushing the snow off likely looking bumps until we found the slings. Fortunately, we found all of them; but in a couple of cases, we had to abseil off the end of the rope and solo about looking . During the descent we were in constant danger from ice falling off the north side of the Cap. I was also getting concerned for the others and if they were to start descending the couloir, we were in the worst position should it avalanche. Slowly, we hurried on. The couloir seemed endless and the anxiety of not seeing what was below you, was wearing. Finally, I saw Steve sit down: we had made it to the bottom of the couloir. It was a great relief to be down. We dug out the rucksacks and sorted ourselves out. The visibility was very poor and I was worried about the return to the Midi. Surely, I reasoned it was safer to go to Helbronner.

We spent the next couple of hours, in reducing visibility, following various tracks made by the Belgian party in front of us, but these just ended up on crevassed islands. They had managed to get down before the storm and had bivvied at the bottom of the couloir. With the weather worsening again, we agreed to head for Helbronner. By now the situation was becoming very serious again. We were in the Vallée Blanche in whiteout conditions in heavily crevassed terrain. I remembered studying the crevasses whilst belaying and it seemed that if you kept to the steep higher ground as you traversed, you should miss most of the big crevasses.

The deep snow and the whiteout made standing up very difficult. Whoever was in front usually fell over within a few strides. It was unreal: one minute you were walking, and the next you were flat on your back without any sensation of falling until you hit the snow. Eventually, we walked side by side holding onto each other and this seemed to help. It took an awfully long time before, by sheer luck, I spotted the ski tow cable above us. We had stumbled for hours in one of the most heavily crevassed areas in the Alps in ever present danger. We had reached a point, where to live, we had to continue regardless of the risk. It was a miracle we had not fallen into a crevasse.

A steep hard slog took us up to the top of the ridge. By now the storm was in full force again and out of the mist, the Helbronner frontier station loomed and as we struggled to climb the ice covered steps, we were greeted by the CRS. They had been watching us with telescopes on the roof of the station during the previous day with mounting concern as the weather, unknown to us, rapidly changed. I will never forget the kindness of these men; they took us into their private accommodation and fed us with bread, stuffed tomatoes and endless wine and tea. They had taken us out of the storm and into the warmth of their quarters and given us such welcome hospitality. The realisation that we were actually going to live was overwhelming. We ate more and drank more and watched television. I collapsed in full clothing onto the bunk and was unconscious of the raging storm outside.



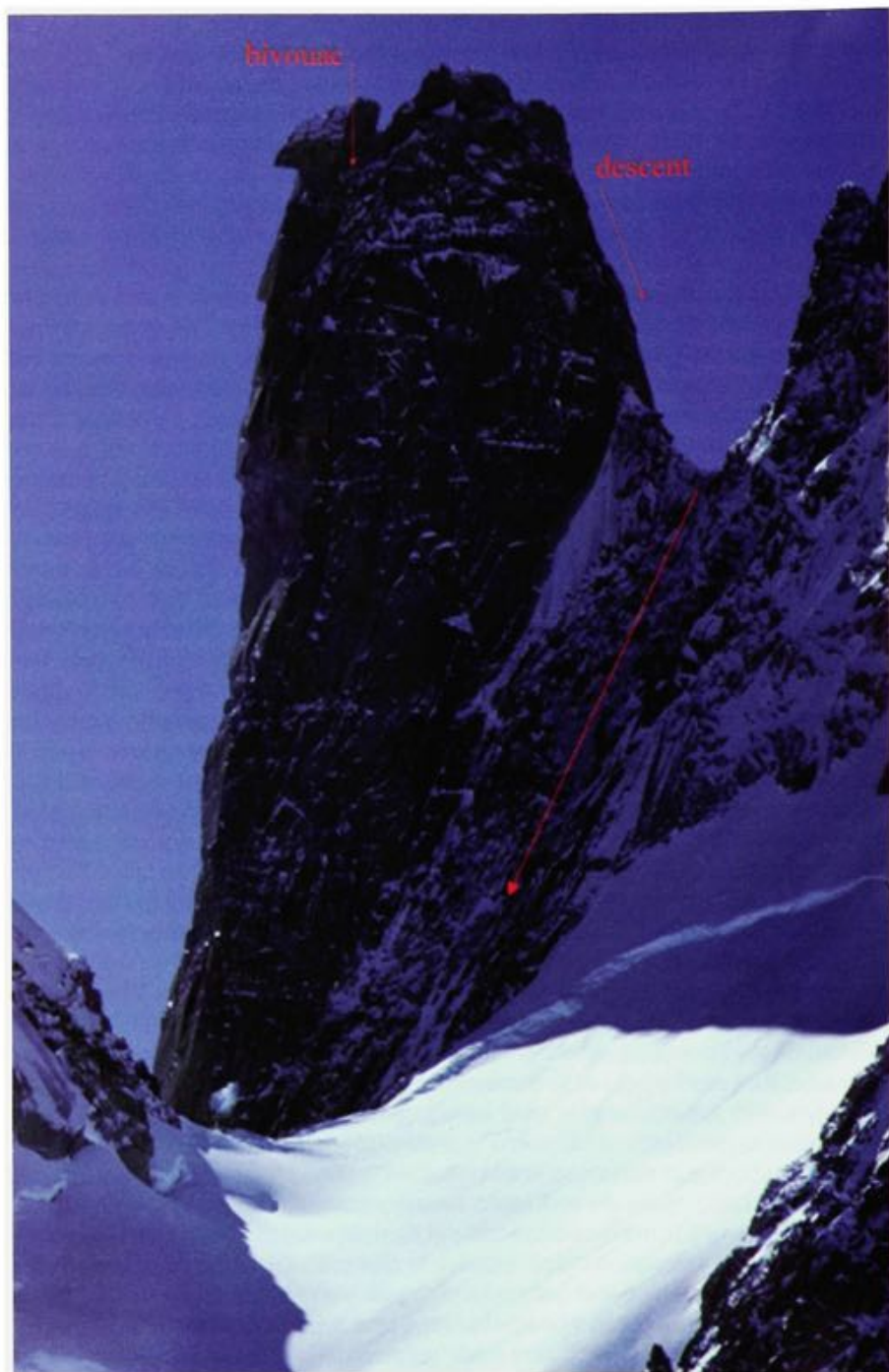
In the morning, the CRS questioned us in more depth about the teams on the route and took us to the telescope on the roof. A break in the cloud showed us Arthur and Rick still under the overhang, but we could not see Brian and Phil. If climbers don't move in the Alps, there is only one reason and I was not ready to face that yet, although I knew. All the téléferiques were still shut and we spent another day in Helbronner looking through the telescope, between the brief gaps in the cloud, wishing, wishing they were gone. But to see our friends still hanging there...

The storm finally passed through during a noisy thundery night and the morning brought clear skies. The teleferiques had started running and before dawn, the CRS had begun a rescue operation. During the previous day my feet had started to hurt – so much so, I took my boots off for the first time in five days. Within half an hour they were twice their normal size. Shit. I had frostbite. I managed to borrow some hut slippers for the journey back and later in the day we had a free ride down to Courmayeur. It was in the confined space of the teleferique when I breathed out, I realised I stank of burnt meat and inside it hurt as I breathed.

The Police took us back through the tunnel and in the CRS office in Chamonix, we learnt that Rick and Arthur had been killed in the storm, but their bodies had been recovered. I went to the hospital to get my feet looked at and was given a course of some vasodilator. Walking was difficult because apart from boots, I only had sandals.

Back on Snell's field I realised we had to tell Arthur's girl friend he was dead. That evening we talked with everybody exchanging stories. Brian and Phil had survived an unpleasant night of electric shocks, and then retreated the following day. I think Phil, who was relatively inexperienced at the time, was deeply affected by the experience. The night of the 24th June had seen the worst storm in Chamonix since records began. Fourteen people had been killed in that one night on Mont Blanc alone. Many climbers had been deeply shaken by the experience, including Alan Rouse and Geoff Birtles who were climbing the Blaitière. I think we got seriously drunk that night.

The police asked us to identify Arthur and Rick. We went down to the morgue in the hospital and waited patiently whilst they prepared Rick and Arthur for viewing. The sounds of the wooden table legs scraping on the tiled floor as they worked will stay with me forever. Eventually we were ushered into the room by a nun. Two swathed bodies lay before us. Their wet clothes and boots had been removed, folded neatly and laid on the floor. There was a smell of dampness from the mountain and something else. Rick was lying with his mouth open and his eyes shut. A ball of white linen lay where Arthur's head should have been. I turned to the nun questioningly; she pointed to his legs and in broken English explained that he had been decapitated and as his head was not suitable for viewing, it had been placed between his legs. I learnt later, when we reclaimed their equipment that the CRS had put the bodies into strong canvas mail bags and cut them free to fall 2000ft onto the glacier below. It seemed this was standard practice to minimise risk to the rescue teams. So this was how and why Arthur was so damaged. I had never been in a situation where I have had to identify a headless friend and it struck me how little I knew of my male friend once his head had been removed. I just remembered his joking,



laughing, happy smiling face and his dirty sense of humour.

Where there is a relationship between a man and woman, through intimacy, you become familiar with each of your own peculiarities, scars, moles and little personal physical details, which you both touch, share together and love, making identification quite natural. This time, man to man, it came down to the boots. I remember thinking how sad this was and if God would ever let this nightmare end. I left the morgue feeling very depressed and, I suppose, quite shocked. What was I going to tell their parents?

Over the next few days the weather was bad; my feet hurt and we liaised with the British Consul and the families as to what to do next. There was nothing in my education, which prepared me for this situation. Eventually, Mr and Mrs Cane and family came out to Chamonix, but sadly, Arthur's parents were too poor to afford the journey. The funerals were arranged and we had a brief service in the morgue. I can remember having to stop the nun from pulling back the sheets to expose their faces, as is the tradition of the country. I looked at the children; they didn't need to know what I knew, not at that age.

The burial of Arthur could be carried out pretty well immediately. For Rick to be cremated, however, which was what his parents wished, he had to be moved to Switzerland and this could not be arranged before his parents had to return home. The cost of repatriation in a sealed lead coffin was beyond their means. So, on a rainy day in Chamonix, we went to the funeral of a friend, whose parents were not there, attended by the parents of another dead friend, whose son was to be cremated in another country after they had returned home. I still have not come to terms with the emotions of that sad day. After the burial, we all had a meal and I promised Rick's parents that we would attend his cremation.

It was a week or so before a date was fixed and we got stuck in a traffic jam going into Geneva. The crematorium was not where we thought it was and it is to my dying shame that I have to admit that we arrived at the crematorium to find the gates shut and Rick gone. I had broken my promise to his parents and I felt awful. For me this was the end of the trip; I was a mental wreck and I still did not have any feeling in my toes. Steve still wanted to do the Badile and so we left Chamonix and arrived in Bondo in time for him to meet a partner. He successfully climbed the route and I picked him up in San Martino some four days later. He was tired and dishevelled but complete. We decided to go home.

The journey home was a nightmare: I started to have asthma attacks, I was terrified by the steel bands that tightened round my chest and stopped me breathing. I was back on the Cap, dying. Since leaving Chamonix we had all Arthur's and Rick's possessions on the roof rack. Strangely, their possessions stayed with us 'till we returned them to the solicitors in Liverpool. It was as if people knew and out of respect, left them be. Back at home I was listless, unhappy and haunted by my experience; I found it impossible to talk it through. I knew nobody who had had a similar experience and I had not noted the telephone numbers of Brian and Phil. It

*Opposite: Escape from a Dementor: the couloir descent route down 'The Hooded Monk' Photo: Dave Prior*



took a month or so before I returned to work. What I did not understand was the deep and traumatic effect this event had upon me and it was to be years before I began to understand that I had a problem. Everyday, I would hear Rick and Arthur's voices calling on the wind, feel the pain of the strike and the agony of the blackness. Everyday I would have to deal with it. I was unable to talk and break free, reliving the tragedy endlessly. Their voices called to me like the hauntingly random harmony of the Aeolian harp, changing to the strength of the wind. I started to feel enormously guilty and self critical, devastated by my own doubts and guilt. Did I really try as hard as I could to try to rescue them, or did I just run for cover? This question was beginning to destroy me. Could I have done more, should I have looked harder for an abseil to go to help them, or were they dead already? Could I have done more...? Guilt can be as deadly as a bullet, it just takes more time.

I started to solo mountain routes on my own. I found relief from the pin sharp focus which this required and it allowed me to obtain temporary peace of mind, finding peace in taking risk. I found that fitness was good for asthma, and challenge good for controlling the awful videos on endless replay.

This was my first experience of death; sadly, it was not to be the last, but it was the one which really hurt. Like the exquisite thrill of your first love and the unbelievable pain of that loss, it is the same with your first encounter with death: it will mark you as different and be recognised by those who have been there.

During the next years I seemed to go through a period of losing many climbing friends. When I drop into The Moon I still feel the presence of all those strong, happy and noisy people.

Little did I know it was to be ten years before I returned to the Alps. I became obsessed with visiting the scene of the tragedy and on a sunny spring day with skis and skins, I traversed the Vallée Blanche and skinned up to the Col de la Fourche on the Italian side, recklessly on my own, taking photographs of the Cap. On later visits to Chamonix, I would slip away from friends and have a few quiet beers by the graves of the climbers I had known.

It was many years later that I went for a drink with a business friend of mine. I had been fairly stable for a while, in control, managing. My chest was tightening and I needed a puff from my inhaler and he asked me when had I started to suffer from asthma. I cannot explain why, but the question was like a bullet in the chest: all the pain and fear and the memories of the Cap returned with ferocity. I made a lame excuse and left the pub. Crossing the road, I went into a wood and sat down on a log. The dam burst and years of silent suffering burst out and ran down my cheeks.

Later, I looked up at the sky through the trees to the bright stars and to the pointers of the Great Bear and Polaris: it's 30 years on, now, and still flow the tears for the Hooded Monk.

# Two Boys, Four Ice Screws and a Guardian Angel

**Chris Gibson**

Stepping away from the Argentière hut at 1.30am is a truly magical experience. With no moon, the luminosity of the glacier and the huge ice faces create an eerie glow that silhouettes the chaotically jagged skyline. "Yes," I thought, "this is really what I want to do: number 88". A low growl from a distant avalanche grabbed our attention. Steve Bell and I peered across number 92, the *Swiss Route* on Les Courtes that we'd climbed a week earlier, past number 99, the *North Face of La Droite* (definitely on our tick list) to the Verte, where snow cascaded from the ridgeline down the open gully to the left of number 52, the *Courturiol Couloir* (far too straight forward for our list). Steve pointed at two tiny points of light on the easy lower slopes of the route; specs of life dwarfed like us by the savagery of the surrounding scenery. From a mile away a short animated conversation seemed to take place. Perhaps two fresh batteries shone momentarily into two terrified faces, then as if the devil himself had stood between them, one, then the other raced away downslope, visibly running down the tracks they had forged minutes earlier.

Each of the two of us then focused on what we were doing and our apparent immortality; we didn't comment because nothing needed saying. At 19 this was my second season in the Alps, while Steve at 18 had only really climbed in Devon. Our outlook was driven by Steve's birthday present, to himself: Rebuffat's *100 Greatest Climbs in the Mount Blanc Range*. The early pages were still new and hardly turned back in Snell's field, while later pages opened easily to allow us to hand write route descriptions that we had almost learned in a rote fashion on rainy weekends when even Steve's ever-optimistic disposition had not sent us on our way 20 miles to Chudleigh, our local crag. We were having one of those very special seasons: five routes of TD+ under our belt and two weeks still to go.

My favourite climb so far had been the *Bonatti Pillar*, ascended in just over a day, overtaking Mick Fowler, who we knew only by reputation, *en route* Steve (Dinger) Bell was keen to do more big ice routes and generated the enthusiasm for our objective, the *North Face of the Triolet*. At TD it should be straight forward, though we had little experience of climbing open ice faces and with four 'Wart-hogs' and a 'Deadman', we were quite unprepared for what was to come.

A low bergschrund led easily to the foot of the face. The firm was at a relatively easy angle, and a rhythm soon developed as Steve and I gained height rapidly in the darkness, moving into the ominous convexity of the slope with little awareness of

the gathering exposure all around. Occasionally, I looked over my shoulder to see pairs and bundles of head torches fanning out from the hut. The meteo was excellent and no doubt lots of winter dreams would be realised today. A glance upward caused me to strain my eyes: the heavens had lost the stary array the morning had started with, each 10-15 steps marked a further transition into grayscale, until above us a tangible blue appeared.

In my solitary world, I became aware that Steve had stopped. My movements became the only sound. Seconds later, teetering on the brink of my aerobic threshold, I levelled with Steve, who was fumbling in his sack. The dawn had brought us to a halt; the exposure suddenly drew us to our senses. We had soloed over half the route in the darkness of early morning. The void abruptly stiffened our movements, coincidentally at a point 400ft below the only feature on this vast icy face, a serac line, and just where the ice face really steepened. It was time to rope up. The plan was to use two of the ice-screws to belay, while one could be used as a runner and the forth for the leader to bring up the second. On arrival at the stance the second would hand over a second screw to reinforce the belay and so on.

Steve made rapid progress on the first pitch, and gave me the confidence to follow through in similar fashion. A third pitch led us just below and to the right of the serac. "Fantastic, eh?" bubbled Steve.

"As good as bagged," I enthused, looking diagonally rightward where the slope visibly I gazed upwards into the crazy vertical rock buttresses marking the summit of the Triolet. The rope stopped and sagged slightly as the sound of hollow hammering filled the thinning air. "How's it going?" I shouted, in a curious and falsely disinterested manner, "Steep!" came the terse monosyllabic reply. I knew Steve now had the runner, and the renewed rope movement allowed me to return to my own lonely world.

Minutes passed and the loop of rope below me gradually grew nearer. "15 foot," I yelled with give-away anxiety; I had hoped the steep ice would be over by this point. The rope stopped moving, and for a handful of moments I felt overwhelmingly anxious and isolated. I focused upwards at the point 70ft above where the ropes disappeared over a bulge and saw in a split second a slackening of tension. Suddenly my senses became overloaded with sound and movement; Steve was off, cart wheeling down towards me, a kaleidoscope of hurtling mass. The one runner whipped the rope for a nanosecond, then failed, flailing ropes outwards into space. Steve passed me to one side with ballistic speed. In the following two seconds I knew without doubt that this was the end, closed my eyes and braced myself into the slope to accept the lethal reality – a 300ft leader fall onto two half inserted warthogs.

The 10ft of rope Steve had left when he fell razored into me; the initial impact, ripped me upside down. Then, nothing; all was still.

Sickened with adrenaline, blackness, silence and disorientation I began to realize I was still alive. I pushed up the helmet that somehow now coved my face back onto my head, to reveal in sharp focus the Argentièrre glacier far below. I was upside down and facing outwards. I looked towards the belay, despite being tied off, both Wart Hogs had bent over. I knew I was far from safe and instinctively rotated myself 180° to the upright carefully avoiding sudden and jerky motion. I found I could



*The North Face of The Triolet. Photo John Cleare Images*

not regain my foothold due to the deadweight on the end of rope that linked me to the belay. It was then, and only then, that I panicked: "Steve, Steve," I shouted urgently into the void. The taught ropes disappeared over the bulge far below, there came no reply. "Steeeeeve" I yelled again in an agony of self pity, my voice vanishing into the hostile headwalls of the bottomless cirque. Seconds passed, then magically came the reply; "Yeah?". A few explicatives later, and it became clear that Steve had survived his 300 footer intact, if a little dazed. It transpired that he still had his axes, so I asked him to take his weight off the rope by climbing a few feet up. Slowly the ropes slackened enough for me to regain my step. Steve took our last remaining ice screw and drove it home as I took stock of the situation. Carrying on was out of the question. Of the four ice pegs, the two I had made a stance with were bent alarmingly, the one Steve had used as a runner, again half-inserted and tied off, had broken in half with the impact of the fall, the fourth and only good peg was now Steve's belay. There was no other option, short of staying there hoping against hope to be rescued before we froze to the face: I would have to down climb the hardest ice pitch I had ever climbed up, but in descent without runners and knowing that I already had had more bad luck and survived, than half a dozen corpses in the basement of Chamonix hospital. A second fall, this time onto one screw and without a runner, would be the end.

A disjointed conversation, explaining my intentions, convinced me that Steve was in shock after his fall, a further scenario entered my conscious stream: If I did come off, even close to Steve, would he hold me? My thoughts changed the predica-

ment none. The new bends in the ice screws, created ample leverage: two turns and each popped out. Now I must learn, and fast, how to down climb 55° ice. Slowly I began my descent, I moved off my step, knowing I could never return here, 5, 10, 20ft, never looking down, occasionally taking a short rest on my axes at full arms' length, my calf muscles hyper-tensed, my forearms drained of blood, backing into the abyss. At 80ft, I came to the bulge that I had found so difficult in ascent and which separated me from Steve; I looked over my right shoulder to see Steve, still a long way below tensioned on the belay. The exposure was immense, the purplish shadow of the wall on the glacier far below intensified the magnitude of my fear; slowly I edged my way down. The steepness was such that only the front four points of my crampons contacted with the ice, while barely half an inch of water ice on each axe held the bulk of my weight.

At last the angle relented, and I began to think that I was in control again. I looked down and saw that Steve looked pale and tired. We had to compose the situation, and the snowy ledge directly under the serac, although utterly forbidden in every mountaineering textbook, would be the only opportunity. Instead of descending directly to Steve, I traversed diagonally rightwards to gain the ledge, overhung by about sixft of ice. The outer edge of the ledge was powdery, but towards the back wall the snow appeared more solid. Moments later with a double axe belay, I was overtaken by euphoria, I was safe and felt a great urge to laugh and shout. "Up you come, big boy," I taunted; Steve failed to respond to my light-headed comment. I watched as he painstakingly unravelled the belay, and slowly began his ascent to the ledge. Things got serious again when he belly flopped onto the snow. *Steve had been bruised and grazed by the angle of the fall, yet the same obstacle-free steepness had saved him from serious injury; more incredible was the fact that, in his double rope length plunge, his axes and crampons had not punctured him. However, he was clearly in shock, moving slowly and lacking his usual coordination. We shared an orange and some chocolate, as I inspected my hands which had been burned through thick woollen 'Dachstien' mitts in holding Steve's fall. My back and forearms had also been burned by the fall; a red and blue stripe of burned nylon had fused into the white cotton of an outer shirt, witness to the velocity of the plummet.*

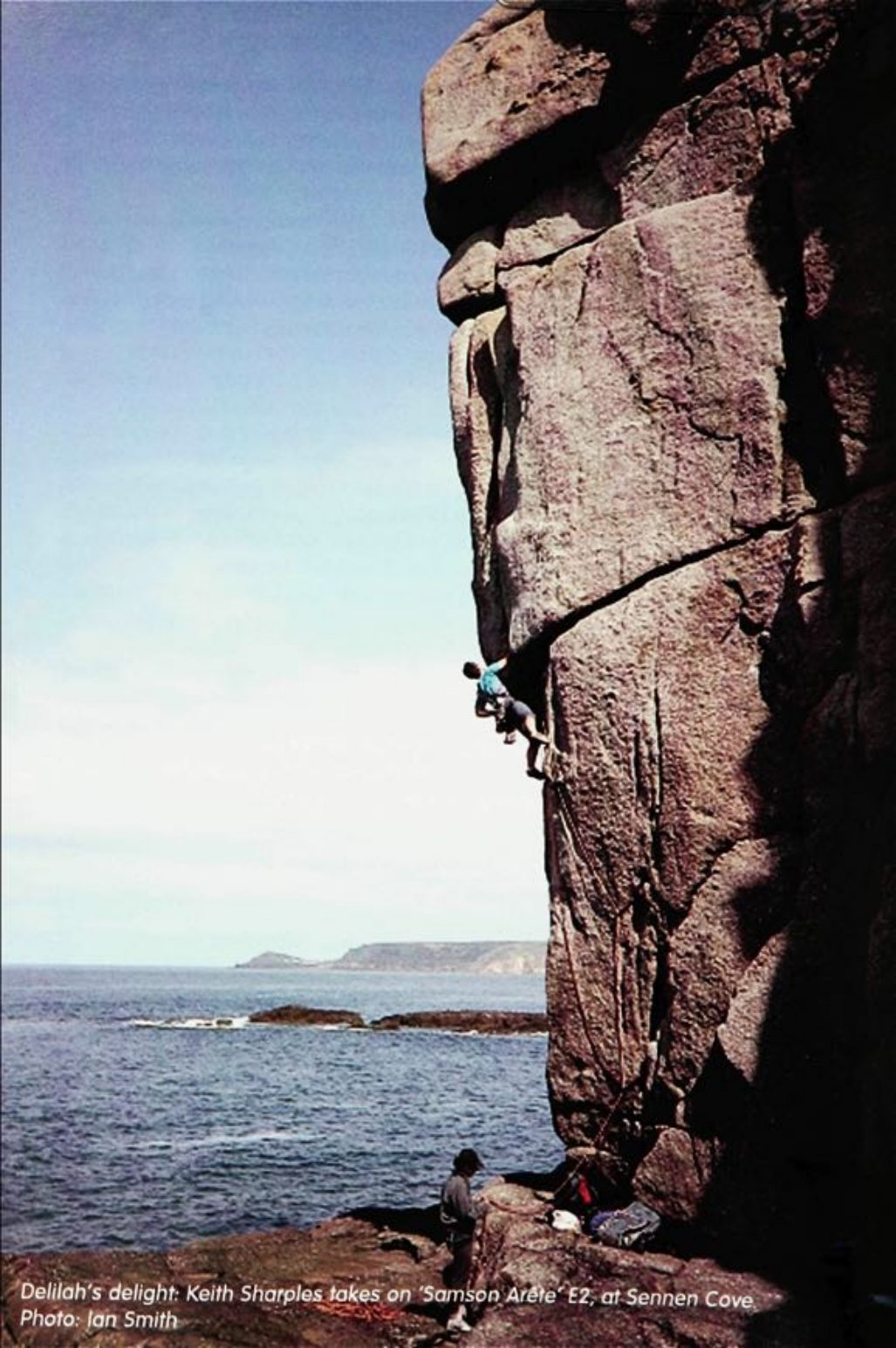
Out to the right of the serac lay our escape route, the 'voie normal', even from the foreshortened perspective we had from our position we could see that only a pitch, or maybe two separated us from the easy slopes of the summit saddle. It was now 10am, Steve's fall had cost us three and a half hours, and we were now considerably behind the schedule we had set ourselves, to be down the steep glacier to the south of the mountain before the sun created further hazards on the little trodden crevassed descent. I insisted Steve lead off from the stance; he would be slow, but at least I could catch a fall I argued superficially and without logic. Deeper down I knew I'd lost it; Steve was a better ice climber than I, incapacitated or not. Soon he was out of sight. I took no pleasure in my solitude or the savagery of the terrain, I just wanted to be off this mountain, to tell this story, drink beer and kill flies in the campsite, that's all.

"That's me," I shouted triumphantly, as the rope came taut. I knew Steve had



broken the slope from his quickening progress. Such was my desperation to get away that I had even undone the belay, and retrieved my axes ready for the off. I stepped back onto the face. After the security of the ledge beneath the serac, the exposure gripped me once more, as muscles stiffening from half an hour of inactivity stretched into action.

I followed a rising ramp to a steeper section of ice feeling awkward and heavy, but knowing it was nearly finished. Then, just audibly, I heard the unmistakable sound of ice cracking behind me. Instinctively, I glanced over my shoulder to see a part of the serac break away from the overhang, smash the ledge we had rested on and disappear in silent leaps and bounds down into the darkness. Blackshaw was right.



*Delilah's delight: Keith Sharples takes on 'Samson Arête' E2, at Sennen Cove.  
Photo: Ian Smith*

# Fools On The Hill

**Tim Noble**

*In the Himalaya, one perhaps puts on blinkers.*

(Chris Bonington)

Yesterday was a big diary day: the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rex's fall, so I gave him a ring for old times' sake. Rex and I meet infrequently these days, though we both have houses in France not far from each other with many good crags between them. Once upon a time we climbed together every weekend, but he hasn't touched rock since the fall. A walk or a scramble is apparently all he now needs – or a canoe in the Ardèche. When we talk, it's not about cliffs and routes and high mountains but those 'simple' things like life after marriage and full time teaching, or the price of wood, exchange rates and how our lives tick over with the passing of the years. On these anniversary days, I get out the copy of his diary he gave me and re-read our tale of shared foolishness – and cannot keep from crying.

It was September and time for school, but we'd been given leave of absence without pay to join six friends on a humble expedition to Kulu. All aimed to go exploring and climbing beyond the isolated village of Brahmaur. For four of the six of us, this would be our last Himalayan expedition and, being married men of modest means and mountaineering skills, we knew through every preparation day what selfish impulses of delight kept us faithful to the task. It was quite simple really: all we wanted to do was climb some big untouched hill before our lives were almost wholly circumscribed by burgeoning families and work. This sustained but abstracted chain of thought was our first folly – and in many ways the worst: it kept the expedition separate and distant from our daily lives and loves, a bubble wrap of excitement inside everyday events which insulated us. Our wives, we were to learn later, felt isolated and estranged; if we thought that we were busy going forward, we were really going back.

From Chamba, cupped within the rolling Pir Panjal range, the expedition followed John Barry's route to Menthosa, via Kharamukh (like its name, a filthy wayside hamlet by a filthy glacier stream). Here, pilgrims were gathering to start a solace-seeking journey to the Kulu Kailash – the Hindu holy mountain. Brahmaur is a religious centre. As we stepped from the bus into Alpine air, the golden temples roofed in light almost blinded us. We too were pilgrims of a kind, of course, but rather to the ice-encrusted steeples of the unclimbed peaks in the east, so we suffered no Pauline conversion in the overcrowded jeep as we passed Sadhu repeatedly measuring their length on the road, or at chai stops where beggars lay impassively in the dust while grateful flies drank offerings from their eyes. Still very much absorbed in our first folly we kept our gaze on the mountains, our purses closed and our consciences untroubled.

It was harvest time and porters were hard to come by, so Rex and I shouldered our packs, then strapped day sacks on our chests and tried to make a virtue of necessity. After all, we reasoned, the two of us were almost self-sufficient having brought with us some 20lb of dried food. The others had to load porters with sacks of this and that and eat apart from Rex and I at night. We felt smug; but this was our second folly: allowing a corrosive pride to drive an unseen wedge into the group.

For two days the six of us and four porters walked up the Budhll Nulla towards Kugti. Each day, vast herds of goats swamped the path and for 50ft above and below us the rocks stank of sun-warmed urine. If we were lucky enough to find a decent water trickle, inevitably it had been fouled. So it was unsurprising that as we straggled into Kugti in a downpour everyone was feeling ill and a sleeping bag was fouled. Later still, hungry as usual, and slogging painfully up a loose gully, we had to pull the flysheets out of our 'sacs to cover the porters; without some protection from the icy downpour they would have stopped or even turned back.

The third day started perfectly, but unfortunately the expedition also started to fragment. Tim Hurrell and Bill the barrister had already established a high camp to the west of us; Rex and I liked the look of the two distant fan-tailed peaks in the east. The map was useless. In front of us, a huge spur dropped several thousand feet from a shapely summit. On the map there was nothing. Wherever any of us went, we would clearly be making our own maps – of both the mountains and ourselves.

Suddenly, Tim and Tom, Roger, Bill and Nick were gone; Rex and I were on our own at the beautiful meeting of the waters base camp. The birds and long-horned Dzo got bolder. Resting a further day to try and shake off sickness, Rex lost his journal to a great grey cow. A slight setback it seemed at the time, but subtly, covertly, these were adding up.

Our third folly was not putting a rope on or moving together to cross the first, wild glacier stream. Looking back through the short lens at Rex struggling in the falls with his huge packs swivelling and getting soaked, I saw a Tarot picture of 'Death by Water'. The icy crossing had numbed me, and had he slipped I doubt I could have helped him. We didn't mention this again until we'd found a high camp site underneath the glacier snout at 15,000ft. where we let some wandering shepherds light us a fire in the rain.

The next two days passed quickly enough reconnoitring a route across the glacier and up on to the ridge hanging above. For some reason we'd agreed before we left that Rex would make us a double bivouac bag for us to sleep in, so on the sixth night, we found a little ledge above an ice patch at 18,500 ft and went to bed. Snuggled against my friend, I dreamed of climbing through clouds to an untrodden summit and going home to tell my wife.

Away early, we soloed a loose gully, learning quickly about Kulu rock: there was little point in putting a rope on when there was nothing secure enough to belay from and dropped coils set off stone fall. At a windy shoulder, two hours up, I'd realised that notwithstanding the view through binoculars, we'd let the quick blue perspective of distance confuse us about both height and time. The fantailed peak we'd been aiming at had slipped away behind a hanging icefield and 500ft of steep mixed ground. Rex was quiet as I suggested the fourth folly. Without a word, then, we





**Above** Ploughing a lonely furrow, Rex Bignell climbs his final snowfield. Behind him, the rotten rib, and the fall to come. Photo: Tim Noble

dropped ropes and harnesses in the snow and taking only flasks, axes, crampons, windproofs and spare gloves, we set off for the summit as our shadows shortened in the sun.

The steep mixed ground was very dangerous and the following ice pitch in the curve of the wave where ice met rock was good Scottish Grade Four. (We'd never attempt to do this unroped in Scotland, so why here?) I dared not look at Rex behind in case he signalled to turn back. Above the ice, a snow slope led up for 500ft to the summit 'schrund. As I ploughed a lonely furrow up it I thought the snow creaked and whispered to me, but I didn't dare stop. Why wouldn't Rex stay in my steps? I could manage 25 at a time, 27 was the limit of the known world – literally I suppose. He kept catching up; the competition spurred us on.

We crossed the 'schrund by a gossamer bridge, hearts stopped by the danger, and the summit rocks were just beyond. Clumsily, slowly, at almost 20,000ft, we unfurled the tiny flags our pupils had made for us. But the photographs we took are blurs because of the wind and swirling snow. Only then did it occur to me that we were on the edge, not in control. I tried to get down out of the wind, searching for the little couloir that I'd seen could take us back to our line of ascent, but reasoning had slipped away with altitude, water loss, fatigue and cold. Descending a steep snow slope in the gloaming I knew we had to stop or fall. Rex found a shattered pillar and I squatted astride a split block in a painful parody of that most vulnerable of positions. We were marooned in still air now, but wracked by bouts of whole body shivering. Despite my pleading, Rex tied himself to the pillar with his 'sac drawcord and took a sleeping tablet. I slept not at all through that star-shot, that darkly-glittering night.

At first true light we swallowed what remained in the flasks, hacked back to the summit and found the line of ascent. We wobbled down this glissading when we dared. Just above the skirt of cloud, Rex stopped talking and slowed down – markedly. Did I do the same? We were very much alone with ourselves, finding different descents on the steep mixed ground. I thought nothing unusual in this at all, then. It is like this, isn't it, on many climbing days and for many climbers: we ascend together at matched pace and descend apart, at personal pace, too full to talk.)

But then the accident happened. As they do. When you can't help each other. While I was tiredly contemplating a delicate step round a rib, several hundred feet above the ropes. Rex leaned outwards on a block of gneiss 20ft above me. The block pulled and Rex landed below me on his back. After the air cry he was silent. I couldn't move. The clouds were moving, or the world was turning, but Rex was still, bleeding from mouth and nose. I thought at the least he'd broken his back or skull and that we were lost, miles from anyone or anywhere. Had we prepared ourselves for this eventuality? In a fever of fear and guilt, relief and recrimination I remember cursing everyone but myself for our predicament. At least I was alive. (That selfish impulse still haunts me today, on every minor climb with a friend.)

For an hour I held him and tried to coax him back into full consciousness. Just as light was fading, I managed to get him on his feet and in painful stages to the ropes, to lower him, unbelayed, rope length by rope length down the shattered gully. Above the bivouac, I left him putting on crampons with palsied fingers and sped

down to get a brew going.

This was folly five and almost my last; I must have had blinkers on. It was very late afternoon and the light snow cover on the slope had melted. All my Alpine experience and training evaporated, too, as I set off without crampons, deadly tired and at the limit of my strength. In vibram soles on ice I simply skated through a glissade into a fall. Rex in his blue cagoule was whirled away to merge with sky as I rolled down the slope. I stopped eventually, suspended from my pick with skeins of skin from skinned hands dripping and staggered back to him, cutting steps and crying more in self-pity and shame than in real pain. He hadn't seen my fall, being too preoccupied with his strap buckles, none of which he'd managed to do up.

Little by little I got him down to the tent and back to base camp, Brahmaur took longer though. Of the others, no sight or sound until then. We all mucked in getting him back to Delhi, but sympathy for his state (and mine) was somewhat strained, I sensed, by unasked questions of our climbing style and commitment. In Delhi, he had another slip in a bathroom accident. The day after arriving home he collapsed and, taken to hospital, was diagnosed with kidney damage. It was dealt with, but he never climbed again.

And that's the tale, told not by an idiot but by the fool; and though we didn't know it then, it was the beginning of the end of a strong climbing partnership and, later, both our marriages. The ripples from that event particularly and its aftermath, spread slowly in dark, covert circles and nothing subsequent in our lives – climbing or otherwise – has been quite as still and clear as it was before the fall. (I exaggerate, of course, for literary purposes, but broadly it's correct: objective disasters, taken together with selfish and self-destructive thoughts and acts, resonate in consequences far beyond our capacity for controlling or predicting their effects. And no one can hope *pace* Macbeth, 'to jump the life to come'.) But we should have anticipated this banality, that the concealed sixth folly would catch us out. For the truth is obvious: brightness falls – as do climbers and angels; it's how we recover what we once were in that 'piping time' of helpless innocence that is all.

Talking to Rex, now, just brings back the fear, rage and self-dislike that we'd nearly shared in our near disaster. We remember how by going too far out – too far away from everything that counts to count the cost – we nearly lost ourselves and families. (I cannot keep from crying.) But very quickly, the moment passes and we speak of simple things before putting the phones down. Secure in the knowledge that we shall never have to face each other on a climb again, we go our separate ways for another year. I think we both thank God in our own ways that such small mercies are still available to those fools on a hill who fell and failed, but lived to tell the tale.



# Twenty Four Hours in Tibet

**Mark Vallance**

Everest Base Camp, Rongbuk Glacier, 22nd April 2000. I woke soon after 5.00am from a deep, dreamless sleep realising it was time to go home. I'd spent the previous week above 6500m at the head of the East Rongbuk Glacier and was still thawing out. The weather, though fine, had been cold – much colder than usual. I have always coped well with such conditions and though I've been to higher and to colder places, for the first time in memory I suffered. My trusty sleeping bag had not been up to the job. Was it the affect of altitude, or (surely not) my age?

Yesterday I'd hiked down from advanced base with Lachuu, our sherpa cook who'd signs of a suspected stomach ulcer. Whilst I had felt better with every downward step, Lachuu had had to stop every mile or so, and more frequently as the daywore on – the cause of increasing concern in such a tough climber.

This morning Lachuu felt better and, having taken over in the kitchen, was cooking eggs which I ate with a chapatti and lots of great filter coffee whilst waiting for the Ojeep, as the ubiquitous Toyota Land Cruiser is called in Tibet. The pre-war expeditions took six weeks to get to base camp from Darjeeling; we had driven from Lhasa in three days. Lhasa, a modern concrete Chinese city of a million people, so different from the image in my mind of how it should be, yet dominated by that Tibetan ikon, the Potala. A melding of the Titanic and Gormenghast, the smell of yak butter, the amazing tapestry-hung rooms, the scrolls, the dust, and the almost tangible sense of history was already a fading memory.

My journey today was to Zangmu on the Nepal-Tibet border, a 200 mile drive on dirt roads and over the Pang La, a 5,600m pass. The weather was dry and fine as we set off down the rough track engineered by the Chinese in 1960. In the front were the driver and Ten Tzing, the Chinese logistics organiser who, apart from seeing me to the border, would buy fresh fruit and vegetables for the expedition. I shared the back seat with a Tibetan yak herder who was going to see his wife who was about to have a baby.

I was familiar with the second part of the journey, having driven from Zangmu in 1990 when I'd climbed Shishapangma. Despite being long and dusty I was quite looking forward to the drive because its an interesting and exciting road, but also because I'd soon be in Kathmandu having a hot bath, a cold beer and a good meal. My mind wandered to Kathmandu and the narrow streets of Tamil. I would go to Yin and Yang tomorrow night and have giant Thai prawns, or maybe a steak at Rum Doodle. But my daydream was premature: there was hardship ahead.

I was taking photographs out of the window of the jeep. Everest was gleaming white in a fresh coat of snow, all pristine and shiny. Graham up at ABC would be



cursing. He was there courtesy of his employers, the BBC, to film the search for the camera that his great uncle, Howard Somerville had given to Mallory in June 1924. Any serious snowfall would greatly reduce his chances of finding it. We were passing the Rongbuk monastery five miles down the valley when cigarettes were passed round and everyone lit up; everyone, that is, except me. Should I ask them not to smoke? Probably not. I opened my window in a weak sign of protest. I thought positive thoughts as the pungent Chinese tobacco smoke filled the vehicle. It would only be a few minutes before they finished and the air would clear. Through the window dry, rocky hills and distant, brilliant white peaks were set against the ultra-marine sky of the high Tibetan plateau. 'O, I like travelling,' I thought to myself, and put the noxious fumes out of my mind.

Ten minutes later the cigarettes were passed around again. I opened my window further and made a few coughing noises. The air outside was cold. The Tibetan landscape opened out from time to time giving long views of distant snow-covered peaks. The harsh but pure view seemed to clean the mind; but the cigarettes would be passed round again and the interior of the Land Cruiser became, however hard I tried not to let it, the focus of all my attention.

The Tibetan Yak herder left us near Zemukh before we drove up the zig-zags of the Pang La. At the col I paid my last respects to a now distant Mount Everest. Then it was down into the high planes of Xigaze, the Chinese military check point and on to Tingri for lunch and a brief respite from the cigarette smoke.

We made good time on the flat road through the broad valleys to the west of Tingri; the hard landscape displayed every variation of colour from brown to grey. My clothes were now impregnated with the smell of cigarettes and even when my companions were not smoking I still reeked of it. Then I remembered my walkman. The miles passed quickly with the assistance of Bachand Mozart and it didn't seem long before we started the long climb to the last high pass, the Lalung La, with great views to the south of the Rolwaling peaks and Gaurisankar and, to the north, Shishapangma and old memories.

After the pass we started to lose height heading. The sky clouded over and when we stopped at Nylam it started to drizzle. At the military check point on the edge of town a gully was filled with rusting tin cans and broken glass. There was a lot of new building since my last visit, but the place was just as depressing: the new, brightly coloured, tile-clad buildings failed to dispel the frontier town feel. Ten Tzing and the driver disappeared for 15 minutes. I watched a young Chinese girl, dolled up in block heels and miniskirt pick her way across the muddy street, past the new, tile-covered cinema and into a concrete building that called itself a nightclub. It was starting to get dark.

The road to the Nepal border follows the steep gorge of the Bhota Koshi river. In places it is cut into solid rock with jutting overhangs above and a drop off of 1000ft or more into the river below. The prospect of the drive to Zangmu would normally be exciting, but the light had faded and by now I was tired and hungry and wanted the journey to end. I particularly wanted to get out of the smoke-saturated clothing and into something clean. We arrived at the outskirts of Zangmu in permanent rain.

The border town is built on an impossibly steep hillside which has severe



**Above:** 'Chomolungma sings the BBC blues': Everest gleams on the horizon in a 'fresh coat of snow'. Photo: Mark Vallance

traffic management problems at the best of times. A new mains water pipe was being laid under the road and temporary traffic lights jammed our jeep between big Chinese trucks belching black smoke both in front and behind. There was deep mud everywhere. Wooden walkways had been improvised in front of some of the tin-covered shacks on the outskirts of town. Bright electric lights illuminated the scene, throwing the whole townscape into harsh black and white. We waited. After about half an hour our driver got out, picking his way to avoid getting dirty. Five minutes later he reappeared with mud up to his knees. We would have to wait 20 minutes. Something told me that it would be longer.

After an hour we were able to continue and must have covered nearly half an mile before we were stopped again. This time it was total chaos. Ten- Tzing said we would have to walk. Not very far, he said, but I knew that he lied through his teeth. I rummaged through my kit bag trying to sort gear for the night: I found my head torch, grabbed my camera and valuables and slung my pack over my shoulder as I stepped down into the mud.

The next hour will remain with me for ever. I was in a post modernist hell, a 21st century version of the First World War trenches. Rain fell in a steady downpour like a black and white, Ridley Scott screenplay – a Tibetan *Blade Runner* film set. The dark was almost tangible, but seared and split by brilliant white light from headlights. Water ran down my back; I could feel the mud oozing over the tops of my boots and into my socks. I was disorientated and finding it hard to tell firm ground from mud. I had no idea where we were going as we weaved in and out of the

heavy traffic. The only redeeming feature was that we were going down hill. Massive Chinese trucks would move forward a few feet and stop, accompanied by the grinding of gears, or they would skid sideways, necessitating quick avoiding action. It looked as though there had been gridlock for ever. What were they all doing here? What in hell was I doing here?

After what seemed like hours (but was in reality half an hour), we reached a junction where the trucks could only go to the right. A jumble of concrete blocks stopped traffic from entering an unlit track covered in mounds of rubble and building material. My headlamp showed a landscape strewn with the sharp edges of corrugated iron and reinforcing rods for concrete, but there was less mud and no traffic. Over the next 15 minutes the nightmare gradually turned into a dream as the terrain improved and the occasional street light made movement easier. We were able to pick our way down steep, slippery steps between the maze of buildings eventually emerging, as though waking, on a brightly lit, winding, concrete road with shops on either side.

Ten Tzing led me to a cafe where he seemed to be known. I kicked wads of grey mud from my boots before entering, but nobody seemed to care. There was a party going on at the one big table in the room: senior Chinese officers to judge from the gold braid, and girls in frilly, pastel, nylon party dresses. They had been drinking for some time and hardly noticed my arrival. The table I sat at was filthy, the white plastic surface emphasising the grime; it bore chipped, greasy plates and glasses. I tried to arrange the mud-soaked lower half of my trekking pants in such a way that they would dry without sticking to my legs. In a glass-fronted refrigerator were cans of Coca Cola and I realised how desperately thirsty I was. Coke is always a safe bet when travelling, but laughter greeted my request: the cans were empty and the refrigerator was some sort of dummy display.

Ten Tzing chatted to his friends and I was glad to be left to myself. Some soup came in chipped, dirty bowls. It was tepid and of uncertain origin, but at least it was liquid. When the rest of the meal arrived (a greasy-gray, slimy-glutinous mass with almost cold, congealed, rice), I made a pathetic effort to eat, but my ability to swallow had become a gagging reflex. I craved a shower and somewhere to sleep. I had entered a world detached from reality. I was desperately tired to the extent that the whole experience was becoming some form of delusion. I started to think that I had somehow got into a Samuel Beckett play or that I was in the first circle of a Hell constructed by some Chinese Dante. A bottle of white liquor was passed to us from the party on the next table. The strong spirit was not exactly what I would have chosen at that moment, but it had a mercifully cleansing effect, cutting the greasy layer of lard from the inside of my mouth. I managed to make a show of joining in – which seemed to be genuinely appreciated, but the effort was one of desperation. Finally, I was rewarded with an offer to show me to my room.

The rain was coming down in stair rods as I was taken to a building further down the street, up several flights of stairs, across an open, flat roof and ushered into a room that was basic but clean and which I had to myself. I found a bathroom down a dark corridor, but the single tap made noises when I tried to turn it on and the large earthenware pots were empty. I rubbed the caked mud off my legs with my

T-shirt, went back to my room and fell instantly asleep.

Seconds later, it seemed, I was roused by a piercing scream, then another. I was wide awake immediately. The screams came from a woman in very real trouble. I got out of bed, unlocked the door and listened: silence. I wondered what I should do and looked around for a weapon. Then there was another scream, but this time less intense and followed by male laughter. I waited. Finally, there was female laughter. I was kept awake for some time not finding anything in the least bit amusing and at last fell into an uneasy sleep and a fading memory of wearied dreams.

Next morning I woke at 7.30am. The rain had stopped and I went for breakfast in the same filthy cafe somehow managing to eat a grey omelette, which somehow the cook had managed to make look like the intestines of a small mammal. I got him to make me some strong coffee. Then the sun came out and the world started to look better.

Krishna, my Nepali driver arrived at 9.00 am and we made our way amazingly quickly through immigration and customs. On the far side of the Chinese formalities there is a beautiful waterfall, sparkling water falling over white, unfractured granite. The Chinese use it as a place to dump rubbish. This mixed image compressed and reflected the strong contrasts of Tibet, the Tibetans and the Chinese: Yin and Yang. We made our way on foot down the steep hill to the Freedom Bridge, Nepal immigration and the village of Kodare. In my mind I shook the dust from my feet.

A few hours drive through the beautiful southern section of the Bhoti Kolariver gorge to Kathmandu took us to the haven of the Tibet Hotel. The long, deep bath was the most needed and most appreciated that I've ever had – as was the long, cold beer that followed it, taken sitting in the sun on the terrace. It had been a taxing 24 hours in Tibet.

**Opposite:** *'Faites vos jeux': CC Vice President Dave Viggers holds a strong hand on the beautiful 'Lucky Strike' E2, Rusty Walls, Pembroke. Photo: Ian Smith*





# Lost to Obsession

**Tony Penning**

When I first really noticed it my heart soared, and I called it The Diamond. I was driving up the Aosta valley towards Courmayeur, continually looking up at the Aiguille Noire. Directly below the summit and glowing red in the sunlight The Diamond was there for the entire world to see. I had to climb it, and immediately began to wonder if anyone else had.

After some research I discovered that it had been climbed in 1976 by an Italian team. They'd started on the right and come almost into the centre to take in the obvious corner, then gone back out right into a groove system that led to the top of The Diamond. This meant that the series of cracks and grooves towards the left were still virgin, and I intended to climb them.

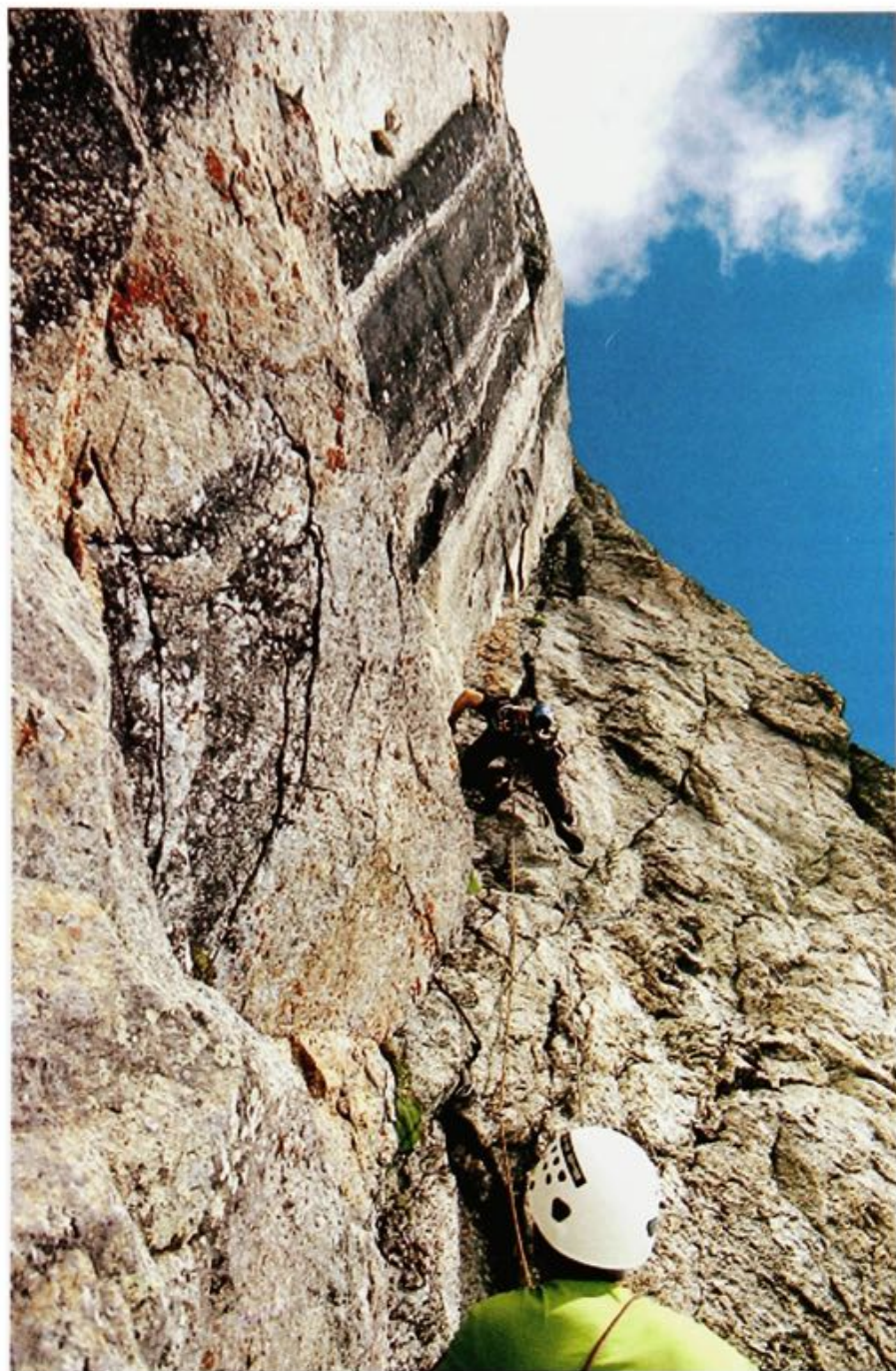
Having suffered a year of sleepless nights, I drove down to the Alps with James Boosey for my first attempt – a trip that proved to be very frustrating, as just six months earlier I had broken my back, and I struggled carrying loads up to the Borelli Hut. We made a half-hearted attempt at a shorter new route, but it was a relief when I finally admitted to myself that this wasn't my year and we headed back home.

The following year (2000) I decided to have a look at it in June, now with Nick Mullin and Jerry Gore. It was very quiet at this time of year and Matteo, an Italian Guide I knew, warned us of severe stonefall coming down the gully to the right of The Diamond. There is a 500m approach gully to The Diamond and in June it was full of snow, but the weather was set fair so we decided to give it a go. Because of conditions, we were forced to climb the left side of the gully, which at times proved difficult, with sections of E3 5c, but worse than this was the stonefall.

As time passed and we gained height, the heat of the sun started to loosen the rocks caught in the frozen snow and ice and all hell broke loose. As lumps of rock fell all around us we couldn't decide whether to go up or down. At one stance I was hit twice on the head and again on the neck. We were pretty damn scared and started to argue, but we decided to continue up the gully and it took us 13 hours to reach its top. We agreed that it was the most trying 13 hours any of us had ever spent, and settled down on very small ledges for a sleepless night. In our efforts to save weight we had decided against carrying bivouac gear, and so we shivered away until dawn. As soon as it was light we had a vote, up or down? I'm glad to say that now the decision was down, and we braved the shooting-gallery once more. At one stance, as we were preparing for an abseil, a rock smacked me in the chest completely winding me. We eventually made it down to Courmayeur and drank ourselves into oblivion. "F... that!" was the toast as we raised our glasses. "We ain't going up

**Opposite:** Tony Penning obsessively engrossed in the E4 groove, early in the morning of the second day on the first ascent of The Diamond. Photo: Dave Hope





there again."

September 2001, and guess who's back – this time with Ian Parsons, my companion of several big adventures. What could go wrong? Well, it snowed and then Ian slipped on a boulder and broke his hand. I had another go at the short new route I had tried two years earlier with James, this time making a bit more progress, but eventually defeat was mine and I returned home to dream some more.

The following year in July saw me, Nick Mullin and my long-time friend Dave Hope speeding down to Italy yet again – but this time in Dave's bright red Puma. The plan was simple: we would warm up on the short route I had tried twice before and then get straight up on to The Diamond. And that's exactly what we did.

The short (four-pitch) climb proved difficult. The first pitch was E2 5b, the second E4 6a. The crux weighed in at E5 6a, whilst the final pitch was E3 5c. We called it *Third Time Lucky*, and it boosted our confidence into the stratosphere.

After a rest day we headed up to the Borelli hut once more for a good night's sleep and to make final preparations. We rose early and by 8.00am we were at the foot of the gully. This time there was no snow in its bed and no stone-fall, and we followed the gully easily to the base of the Diamond in just a few hours. We moved over towards the left side and had trouble actually starting the climb. Eventually, I made progress up a difficult groove-line where I had to scratch away at cracks with my nut key trying to find gear placements. After 60m I still hadn't found a stance and Nic and Dave had to start climbing. It was with great relief that I reached a decent ledge, but only after 80m! The climb continued, almost as I had expected it to, with pitches that were E2, 3 & 4 but not wildly technical, and almost on cue we came across a reasonable ledge where we could spend the night. This time we had bivi gear and hot soup; I couldn't have been more content. Above us were three possible lines we could take in the morning and I for one, couldn't wait to get cracking.

The start of the day was shrouded in mist, lending atmosphere to our adventure, and after coffee and energy bars we prepared to leave the bivi. I tried each of the three potential ways above the ledge but none was climbable. I had been completely wrong about them and I now wished I had spent more time the evening before to make sure of ascertaining a feasible route. I even tried back the way we had come but I just could not find a way up. After two hours, and on the verge of screaming at the rock, I happened to look down and right. There was a line that might go. I got Nic to lower me down 12m to a huge sloping ledge and then I traversed right for a further 12m. There was a line; it looked hard but do-able and I brought the others over to my incredible position. I then followed a slim groove for about 20 m that led me to a small slab beneath a wide crack out of sight of the others. At first I couldn't reach the crack and the protection was poor, but I managed to place a peg way out left. Using a long sling on this I leaned out at full stretch and reached for the edge of the crack. With my heart in my mouth I gripped the edge of the crack and let go of the sling. For a second I thought I was off but fear took over and I fought the crack like a man possessed until I landed on a ledge above like a

**Opposite:** *'Wither wanderest thou, spirit?' Tony Penning 'looking for the line' up The Diamond. Photo: Dave Hope*





fish being pulled onto a boat. 'E4' announced Nic as he reached me. 'Prat,' commented Dave as he too pulled onto the ledge.

We now had a couple of easier pitches that led us to a position where we could see the upper part of the climb more clearly. We wouldn't be able to climb straight up but there was a definite groove-line diagonally right about 120m away. I made a long and difficult pitch to a hanging stance and brought Nic up. Dave couldn't join us in this cramped position and I tied him off a bit lower down. For the first time since we started out Dave questioned me as to where I thought the line would go next. I have to admit, our position looked awesome, but I still believed we could do it. I pointed over to the groove-line that now looked about a hundred miles away, and as I waved my arms about describing how I intended to get to it I felt slightly mad. "I'm not giving up," I said. There was a pause and I wondered if my obsession with this route could affect our friendship. I needn't have worried. "Fair enough," said Dave, "let's do it." "I'm good," said Nic, "let's keep going."

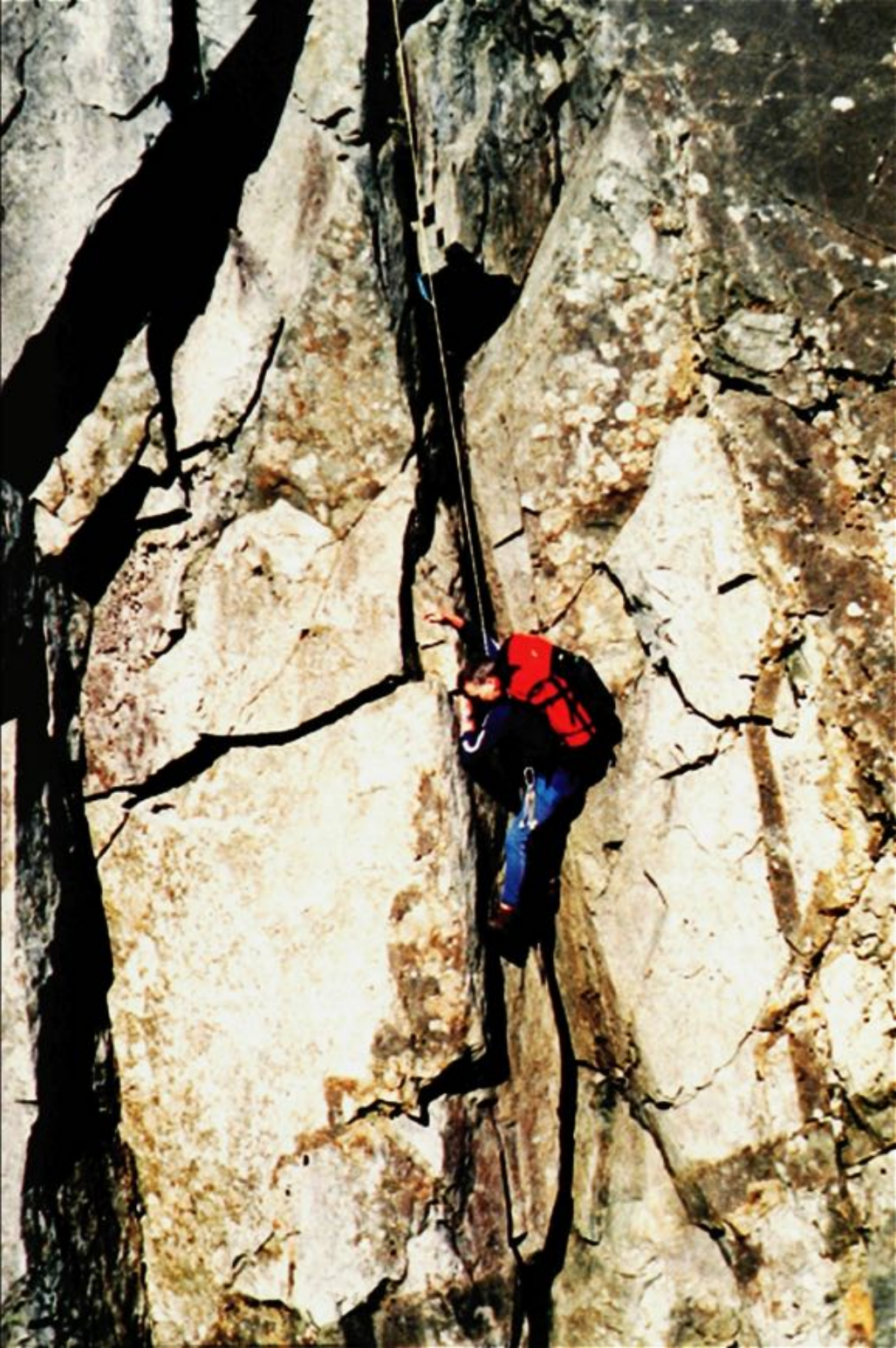
I was convinced that when we got to the groove-line it would lead us to the top of the Diamond, and when we finally reached it we peered up anxiously. I started climbing; it was only 5b but I didn't get any gear in for 12m. Holds led out onto the right wall in a very exposed position before taking me back into the groove. Another belay, and then a final pitch of easier climbing took us to the finish of our climb. We didn't shake hands; we were all too aware of how much work we had to do to get off.

We abseiled hour after hour through the night, hoping to get back to the start of the gully. But the dark threw us off course and we eventually landed on a steep section of the glacier down which we had to kick steps in the hard ice using our flimsy approach shoes. We reached safe ground at 3.00am.

When we arrived back in the valley I thought that would be it for the year, but I should have known better. After a couple of days off, Dave and Nic were keen for something else. Over the next two days Dave ended up in hospital with a mangled foot, while Nic suffered hypothermia and sniffed a new route out on the east face of the Eveque. I just don't think these boys are trying hard enough, do you?

**Opposite:** A model mountaineer's must-do pitch: King's Chimney in the Thearlaich-Dubh Gap, Sgurr Michonnich, Skye. Photo: Frank Fitzgerald.





# Northern Lights in Longsleddale

Terry Gifford

## Part 1: Dandle Buttress

Lara seemed to have stepped through a window into another world. It was eerily strange, yet familiar – Longsleddale lying back under a cloudless sky. The air was still and warm for early March. Shadows lengthened across the valley floor, fingering the foot of the craggy fells. Ahead of her somewhere was 'the finest Diff in the Eastern Fells' as she had overheard Lord Asriel mention it in passing to the scholars in the Retiring Room at Jordan Climbing College. They had not noticed the flash and glitter of savage laughter in his eyes before the firelight as he showed them a photogram of the strings of beautifully textured boulders below *Dandle Buttress*. For this was the only result of his expedition to the North in which they were really interested. But Lara, from her hiding place in the fleece cupboard, had noticed more in her uncle's lecture than the scholars who were seeking always to be at the cutting edge of climbing research. The fine Diff above their boulders was somehow beneath them.

So she had persuaded Roger, who had graduated with her from nights on the irregular Alps of the College roofs to dawns at the empty scholars' bouldering laboratory, to drive her in an allocated solarcar to the North. Having skipped school at midday, she stepped out to the welcome of a skylark's song in Longsleddale at 2.45pm, glad to be challenging time and light and gravity in this place, climbing for a change without the usual chalky aura of dust. Or so she thought, for she had not yet learned the true nature of Dust.

Lara and Roger hurriedly stamped into their big plastic boots and poured equipment into their backpacks. Roger had also sensed that they had stepped through a window.

'Look', he pointed out to Lara, 'that sign says "There is no toilet past this gate" I can't see one either. Can you?'

'Perhaps there used to be one when Lord Asriel was young', she said, staring over the stone wall into the apparently empty field.

The Green Road was closed. Here was another strangeness, the N P Church extending its authority beyond its obsession with Parking meters in the National Park, to stop machines from eroding the air of the valley so that humans could actually hear, if not always take the advice of their *dæmons*. Here, Lara's *dæmon* had taken the form of a lark, Roger's a peregrine, although Lord Asriel's was always a raven. Passing the large red sign declaring ROAD AHEAD CLOSED, Lara and Roger rattled their poles on the loose stones of the ancient track.



'We could descend this by moonlight if necessary', said Roger, 'but anyway I've packed my halogeenhead.'

And as he said this slightly smugly, another thought struck him so to him. At the last minute he turned to say 'Hello' as he walked on by and Roger noticed twinkling eyes through rimless spectacles. He seemed a lot younger than when Roger had last seen him. But when had he last seen him? He did seem familiar.

By the time Roger was climbing the style, Lara was already halfway up the steep fellside to the left. She seemed to be heading for the lower crag on the left of the bigger buttress they had come to climb. Roger hurried after her and when he was in shouting distance told her to traverse across scree to the right. At the right edge of the lower crag Roger caught her up. He looked into his palmbook and clicked 'Dandle Buttress'. The ancient words sent a frisson of particles across his scalp.

'We make for that dark cleft up on the left,' he said.

The scramble steepened, turned first wet and then rocky. Their poles got in the way, dangling from their wrists. Sweaty and out of breath, Roger waited for Lara to come into sight and checked his palmbook again. Above them the gully spilled loose stones over big boulders from its shadowed walls. Roger looked for a dry spot to sit and find the juice bottle and then Lara came panting up through the heather.

'Not a place to drop a boot!' she reminded Roger, as he piled a jangle of crabs and cams between them.

'Or the juice,' he said wryly as he passed it to her. His eye caught a knotted sling of thin green line that lay in the wet at his feet. He coiled it and clipped it on his rack as a free gift, not noticing that it was really an omen of inattention.

Geared up, he collapsed their poles and stowed them with his big boots into the backbag that he then strapped across his chest. He didn't hear the croak of the raven, or see the single saxifrage tempted into early bloom by the unseasonable weeks of warmth. At this point their journey was in the tradition of what used to be called 'leisure' when time had its old categories in BCC. Lara closed the tapes over her Stickies. She half registered the raven. She, too, approached *Dandle Buttress* with all the old attitudes of Before Climate Change. She let him arrange a big sling belay for her on a spike on the right wall of the gully below the massive chockstone. Here it would probably always be cold in the dark enclosing walls.

Roger stepped up steeply on blocky footholds, finding sharp edges for his fingers as he reached up. A high step into the bottom of a groove led up to a pinnacle which he grasped on each side until a step left of it enabled him to stand on its top. This was not a place to linger as his arms were at full stretch. A smooth groove to the right enabled him to brace his foot across and reach for the top of a flake. Here a series of long reaches, pants and pulls, with quick thinking for the feet, brought him into balance at the top of the groove and a choice of ledges at different levels in the sunshine on the very spine of the buttress. Round a block he found a faded sling had been left behind and as he clipped into it he noticed that a light crab had been left on it too. He put in a large cam in the gap beside it and tied into both sling and cam.

Before she left the ground, Lara pointed out the two ravens watching them from a perch high on the opposite side of the gully. Roger glanced across at them,

but he was musing on the sling left by the previous party. As Lara climbed thoughtfully up below him, he tried to work out whether a hurried second had left the sling, or whether a second could not follow the final strenuous moves Lara was struggling with now at his feet. The crab suggested an abseil. Either way, he thought to himself, *Dandle Buttress* was a journey that would have been teaching awareness to someone. And for some reason they had not discussed, Lara, when her turn came to leave this belvedere, left the token in place.

Roger led on, finding finger pockets on the airy backbone of the buttress and knobbly friction for his feet. Soon the rock steepened in front of him and, after a false trail of big flakes on the left, he turned right and was quickly able to step back onto the very crest of the buttress. As he approached a shelf on the crest from its right-hand side he found himself placing a hand beside a tangle of bleached sticks. When he stepped up beside it he looked into a wool bowl in the centre of the jumble of twigs. This held four blue speckled eggs. He suddenly felt sick.

Then he heard the harsh cries of Lord Asriel's dæmon over his shoulder. He knew he should not be here. He knew he had not been paying attention. He knew that this would have its consequences.

Roger had himself let out a cry. It was a curse against himself.

He hurried to climb the pinnacle above the raven's nest, to step airily from its top, reaching for the little finger flakes and stepping on to the small ledges for his feet. The rock remained rough and it stayed steep right up to the point where the buttress top went horizontal. Here Roger sat in the heather and quickly called for Lara to follow as the pair of ravens circled and dived out against the shadowed far fell. Now the valley's shadow crept up the wall with Lara, who, moving twigs to find a hold, did not notice the nest until Roger pointed it out. She, too, felt the same sickness. Not normally nervous, Lara felt the suck of the dark gully shafting down behind the pinnacle. She found herself disturbed by the exposure as she stood on the pinnacle top and called for a tight rope as she stepped across to the final wall of this pitch. Roger watched the sun dip behind the skyline opposite and felt instantly cold. The ravens dived closer beneath him now, eager to return to the buttress that was their true place of re-creation. As Lara sat in the heather beside Roger they knew that urgency had overtaken their delight.

Buckets of dried mud made holes in the heather for Roger to drag their rope along the crest of the buttress, bypassing pinnacles and flakes, draping slings and finally pulling over a flake with foot friction to a non-belay in the heather over a dip. Taking in the rope as fast as he could, he watched the golden band of last sunlight shrink up towards the skyline behind him. Lara turned the last problem on her left and when she arrived he sent her straight over the heather mound and down the gully behind, which had an undercut wet downclimb to a place where they could change boots and catch their breath. A rise over another grassy neck brought them to a clattering scree and then very steep grass reaching right down to the style.

Here they saw what they'd not noticed in their earlier hurry. Low to the side of the style was a small sign.

'Oh no,' said Lara. 'How did we miss this?'

There is a climbing restriction on this crag for Ravens. 1 March – 31 May. To be

reviewed. National Park Church and BMC.

'I stepped off left and followed you,' said Roger.

'Lord Asriel will already know,' said Lara looking up into the gloom at a single circling raven.

Their guilt hung heavy over the exhilaration of the afternoon as they stumbled back down the Green Road, discussing what they might say, where this road might now lead them, what choices were left to make.

'Did you notice that man coming down the track as we went up?' asked Roger.

'Yes. I thought I recognised him,' said Lara.

'I think it was Philip Pullman, that children's novelist. You remember we watched him on the videogram a few weeks ago talking to Melvyn Bragg?'

'Oh yes,' said Lara absently, caring only to be done with this uneven, tiring track they were on.

When they reached the solarcar it was finally dark. Turning to look back up the valley they saw in the sky strange streams and veils of light hung like curtains blowing sideways in the stream of some imaginable wind - particles of Dust, like themselves, as they were yet to learn in the footsteps of Lord Asriel, who had now become their reluctant instructor against the forces of ACC.

## **Part 2: The Subtle Knife of Carnedd y Filiast**

'This weekend we must go West,' said Roger. 'We need to find the subtle knife while this weather lasts.'

'I wish I knew why,' said Lara. 'Lord Asriel said nothing of what we should do with it when we find it. He just disappeared on his expedition to the far North. "It's in the wet West," was all he said.'

They were sitting under the digital weatherscreen at Jordan Climbing College on a Thursday evening where the senior scholars met each week to plan their research trips to what used to be called 'the cold North', or 'the wet West' in the days when little was known of the potential effects of the esoteric boulders below the Edges. In BCC these brief and regular journeys into altered states of body and mind used to be dismissed as 'leisure'. But After Climate Change climbing had become recognised as 'experimental theology'. In ACC climbing research had become so urgent a need for the human species that the New United Nations had set up research centres throughout the world like Jordan College in Sheffield. All scientists in all fields were now climbers trying to discover a way to see what was happening to the earth and its atmosphere. The profound disturbance in the earth's magnetic field clearly required adjustments in the human state of mind for the human species to be able to survive in ACC. But the climbing experiments of the scientists were slow in producing major breakthroughs. Personal competition in the peer review process kept distorting their results.

Lara's uncle, Lord Asriel, was at the cutting edge of this research and visited Jordan College from time to time to make his enigmatic presentations to the scholars there from his expeditions to the mountains of the Arctic circle. The younger ones, who were working on the boulders, tended to dismiss his evidence with derisive parodies: 'Listening to the mountain!' 'Feeling the mountain was ready for me and I



for her!' 'Seeing sudden brightness in flowers when walking down!'

Lara and Roger, regarded as merely the teenage children of servants at the college, were tolerated and largely ignored. But Lord Asriel seemed to recognise their alertness. Nothing was said, but he seemed to know that they had learned something on *Dandle Buttress* last weekend. Before he left for the North he passed Lara in a corridor of the college.

'It might help if you could find the subtle knife. It's in the wet West,' he said, and was gone through the doorway with a turn of his backbag and his agile plastic boots.

So it was that on another unseasonably warm Saturday March morning Lara and Roger were sitting in the sun discussing the climb of the day over cups of powerjuice.

'In the old wet West,' mused Lara. 'Do you remember the old story of the sword that rose from the lake?' 'Did you notice in the archives back there the way climbers wrote in BCC about the Atlantic Slabs? They often wrote things like "Good value" or "Great solo" in shaky inkwriting. I think in those days such words hinted at altered states.'

She nodded back towards the doorway of The Helgy Museum Hut. They were sitting on the transparent wrapping of the historic Trevor Jones Memorial Bench, a curious artefact, preserved for visitors to try for comfort in this interactive museum site.

'I wonder if we might just find our subtle knife rising out of the waves up there.'

Roger consulted his palmbook for the twentieth century names and pale pictures obscured by white lines

'Well, there's rather a lot of water up there!' he joked.

After the mysterious words '*F-stop Fitzgerald*' he found in larger letters the words 'Carnedd y Filiast (Cairn of the Greyhound Bitch) OS Ref. 623 627'

'There are nine lines on the old photograph and none of them has the name that they all mentioned in the archive's 'logbook' – *Left Edge*. Ah, and here's the name further on, with two little stars beside it. "600 feet. Very Difficult. 1921," it says here.'

'Well, I think that's where should start searching,' said Lara. 'Perhaps we'll even find out why it's subtle and what it's for.'

The lark was on a rising song of delight as they stepped up the steep turf left of an ancient wall. The lark was Lara's *dæmon*. In children they are not yet fixed. Lara's *dæmon* liked to take the form of a lark in a place like this, on a morning like this. Roger's took the form of a ring ouzel, excited to be newly returned to this habitat at this time of year. Last weekend Lord Asriel's raven on *Dandle Buttress* had taught them to be more attentive to the *dæmons* of place that might also be the *dæmons* of people. Now they gave a new attention to the ferns, mosses and heathers that they trod among under the already searing sun.

Pausing to wipe away sweat from their eyes, they turned to look down on the river running through its watermeadows, bounded by two roads on either side of the valley. Under them was the original road up the Nant Ffrancon, still maintained by the National Park Church, and on the opposite side was the new highway for ap-



proved solarcars. Across the meadows a solartractor was spreading, with its wide arms, the latest generation of fertilizer. This, Lara knew from what she'd overheard, was why Lord Asriel thought that the results of experimental theology were so urgently needed.

After an hour's walking, smelling, listening and meditating, all slightly removed from their forms in the valley, Lara and Roger paused by the ancient stone wall under the lower part of waves of slabs that fell from the mountain in long ripples of overlaps. They were mostly grey, but had sections of orange and white and black. To the right, the slabs merged into the heather of the hillside. But just before they did, a last edge, that dropped away to its left with a narrow and then a wider rippled slab, caught their eyes.

'It's the left edge of the last scrap of slab!' cried Lara. 'That's it! The gleaming subtle knife!'

'Let's go up and take a look,' said Roger, not entirely convinced.

At the very foot of the arete was a flat belvedere in the slightly worn turf where others had sat and engaged their harnesses. From here, looking up, was a brilliant blade of hard white quartz.

'Do you remember,' Roger suddenly said, 'in the archive, that old hairy hero, Rab Carrington, is recorded as saying, *'Left Edge': I think Martin and I soloed it in winter. We thought it was ice.*'? From below, in the winters of those days, it must have challenged even the limited perceptions of those 'leisure' climbers.'

As plastic boots, the litelunch and the poles were packed in the backbags each would carry, Roger spotted another pair of people breasting the rim of their high cwm. Were these scientists who were also seeking knowledge of the subtle knife? Did they already know what it could do and how to use it?

He turned his back on them and grasped the edges of the quartz teeth on the blade's long upward sweep.

At first it struck him as quite unsubtle. Chunky and easy angled, it invited a rushed approach. But as he rose, the space grew beyond his left hand and foot, always placed on the sharp edge of the blade. At the full length of his rope he belayed, resting his back on the blade. Its elegant purity was what was utterly mesmerising. He looked out from a place he'd never let into his head before and it produced a mood he'd not quite had before. There was no rush. This was a place to absorb, to be attentive, to learn from.

Smiling, Lara led through, already showing signs of beginning to be changed herself. Only twice did they step into a crack on the right, when the edge offered no holds. But quickly they were drawn back to the blade edge and its effect.

At the second belay they paused to take in the even undulations of the Wave Slab below that seemed vast and beyond them. It really was a tilted sea of stone, rippling from sky to earth.

From the third belay, shoes off, sitting in a big bucket of rock, Roger couldn't stop talking to Lara, as she approached, about the qualities of the knife. She too, kept resting to savour the next moves up the blade.

When, finally they sat down together they realised that the heather had, for some time, been encroaching from the right and was now within reach. True, the

knife appeared to make another final thrust skywards. But to reach it meant stepping through heather.

'Look,' pointed Lara. 'All the time we've been concentrating on the knife edge on this last pitch, the heather has been only a metre away to the right.'

They had discovered the subtlety of the knife that had kept their minds so focussed on its edge that now they sat here smiling, calm, definitely in a theological state they'd not visited before. They knew that, somehow, they cared about this place, although quite how to do so they'd not begun to think. If put to the test, they would defend it, even if it meant never encroaching upon it again. The knife had cut for them a window into another world that was also in the same world. They had passed through a doorway. Now everything had its aura clearly visible. 'Look. Dust,' whispered Lara, pointing to stones, heather, the far horizon and the blade itself.

The ring ouzel below them appeared to have found a mate. The skylark seemed to sing a little louder, although actually its singing was unchanged.

### **Part 3: The Amber Spyglass in Sierra Espuña**

'But, now, the weather is always unstable in the South,' argued Lara

Mary Malone frowned under her fringe of grey hair.

'Why do teenagers still always argue, despite huge steps in nanogenetic therapy?' she thought to herself.

'All the more reason to do climbing research there,' said Mary Malone, briskly. 'I'll lend you my amber spyglass if you'll let me use your results when you get back.'

'Well, it might be good to go through a window into Spain.'

'Look, I'll arrange for you and Roger to stay at Steve Green's Doss Museum where they all used to sleep in the days of "leisure" climbing. You'll find it hard to believe, although they've had to mend the roof and it's not quite the same.'

Dr Mary Malone was persuasive when it came to extending Lara's experience. It was clear the girl had something special. Lara and Roger, the alert children of college servants at Jordan Climbing College, had somehow picked up more than anyone realised. And after Lara's last trip to the old 'wet West' with Roger, they seemed to know how to open windows together, using something they called 'the subtle knife'.

'You'll not need those fussy Friends,' Mary went on, 'that my first boyfriend used to carry for protection in Before Climate Change. It's all digitalsuction now in ACC Spain. And from the CRAP village of Sella you could even get to America. You'll love those little Cultural Research After Pastoralism villages in Spain.'

'America?' queried Lara.

'It's an under-researched route in the Sierra Espuña. I believe it still has the word 'America' chipped into rock at its start, protected from the new storms, of course, to preserve the evidence of what those twentieth century dullards apparently needed. I have heard that the flora on it is quite exquisite now. And, of course, the golden eagles and peregrines have returned...'

'But we don't want a sudden drenching halfway up a cliff in Spain, just when

the research is getting interesting,' said Lara.

'Don't you see,' smiled Mary Malone patiently, 'that the Sierra Espuða is the perfect place to take the amber spyglass? At the southern end of the Costa Blanca weather zone and inland from the Murcia post-industrial zone you should get clear views of the movement of stratosphere particles, now that you've learned to see Dust.'

So it was that Roger came to cut a window for himself and Lara to step through onto an empty forest road. All around them were snapped trees and broken branches from the last stormwinds. In front of them was an interpretive screen telling them that in the Barranco de Leyva they could expect to see the *águila real* and the *halcón peregrino* flying among the choughs they could hear from the crag above the trees. The screen also mentioned the archaeological treasures hidden in the Barranco – an ice-well, a castle, an ancient trail built through the crags high across the south side of the valley and an old climbers' *refugio* at its head. As Lara and Roger walked up the broad forest track they noticed at each side the recent diggings of wild boar at the roots of rhubarb plants.

'Let's hang a backbag on a tree around here with juice and foodpacks for later,' suggested Roger. 'I think the descent must be down that gully that winds down through the crag up there.'

'I hope you can remember which tree,' said Lara, as Roger scrambled up through the fallen branches.

Further up the road, at a big boulder on the right, a little cairn marked the start of the ascent up scree that was strewn with wood. Soon they saw the scar of 'America' through its transparent cover. To its left was a short slab with the first signs of the digitalsuction system offering optional protection for the route. They sat and emptied the remaining backbag.

A cool wind was sweeping down the Barranco towards the sea. Lara noticed something odd about Roger's delay.

'It's not like you to not to be rushing to engage your harness,' she observed.

'I want to see what the weather's going to do before we launch on a five pitch route.' Roger sat back in the intermittent sun looking at the sky at the head of the Barranco. 'I don't like the look of those big black clouds coming over the back of this mountain. I think you should take a first reading with the spyglass.'

'I see what you mean,' said Lara as she unsheathed the spyglass with the amber lenses that Dr Malone had made.

Lara pointed it at the edge of the weather front and emptied her mind. She remembered what Dr Malone had quoted to her from a poet named Keats as an instruction in how to use the amber spyglass. Larawas to be 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. In Longsleddale Lara and Roger had learned to be aware of the *dæmons* of others and the *dæmons* of place. On Carnedd y Filiast, in what used to be called the 'wet West', they had learned to use the subtle knife to open windows in two directions, inner and outer. The result was that now, when they focused, they could see the Dust of all living things. Dr Malone had a hunch that after a long climb, Lara especially, might be in the right state to be able to see what was happening to the earth's



magnetic field.

In After Climate Change it had become clear that something was somehow unbalanced and since only climbers seemed to come closest to the attuned state needed to begin to sense the nature of this disturbance, particle physicists like Dr Malone and experimental theologians like Lord Asriel, doing similar work, of course, had become climbers in order to conduct this crucial research. Despite having constructed the amber spyglass, Mary Malone suspected that the young might have a clearer vision than she could achieve through its lenses.

'I can see movement beyond that black cloud,' Lara said, 'but it's a blur. Maybe we should try at the top.'

Roger turned towards the grey slab, tied in to the thin line and began to focus on moving over rock. Sharp edges for his fingers gave him confidence for the friction moves across the top of the slab, before a steep step in a corner gave way to a ramp of vegetation hiding rock holds. On a grassy ledge he belayed below two holes separated by a smooth bar of rock. 'No need to find threads these days,' thought Roger, as he clipped his belay chain into the solid microsucker.

'You know,' panted Lara as she neared the belay, 'when they thought brown was beautiful? Climbing girls who were tanseekers would have hated climbing through this sharp stuff.'

'I think the next pitch traverses across to that diagonal crackline,' said Roger, as Lara tied herself to the microsucker.

Delicately at first and then with more vigorous use of high sidepulls, Roger worked his way crab-like up towards the edge of the buttress. Profiled on the skyline he looked up for a while and shouted back to Lara.

'There's been a lot of rockfall up there where the old line used to go. Every other block has come away. It looks loose. I'm going across to a bush and I'll bring you up.'

The rains and temperature variations of ACC had altered a lot of old climbs. Many were now quite dangerous.

To get to the bush Roger gingerly crossed a bowl of thorny vegetation covered in loose stones, with the odd sun-blached twig from above. Even their new cooling flexiskulls could still be dented by a sharp stone falling a long way. At the bush, as Roger waited for his digitalsucker to take a reading of the rock and lock on, he noticed a faded line sling telling an old story.

What looked a mere scramble up steps of rock above became a battle with spikes and bushes that hid every crucial hold. The moves were often harder than they looked from below. Roger found himself actually resorting to the smallest of threads more than once when he could not find rock the right texture for a reading from a sucker. At the end of a full sixty metres of line he came to a sloping shelf under a tree. Above it a fist-wide corner crack rose with stacked bulging blocks on its left.

Lara came up sweating and annoyed.

'I'm spiked to death!' she shouted. 'Never mind the tanseekers, my cragsuit is just not good enough! They've got to do better with their thornproofing!'

'This must be the crux,' said Roger to calm her down. 'I'll go up and then haul

the backbag.'

Standing on the first block and feeling the crystalline grip of the bottom of the crack, Roger saw that this was committing.

'It's certainly intimidating,' he confided, as his trainer had suggested. 'But,' he told himself, as per instructions, 'it's only a BCC grade four.'

He reached up left, found a sharp edge and pedalled up, reached right to clip a sucker and then back into the crack. His fist bit. One more long reach and he was standing on a block under the next bulge. After the briefest of breathers he reached left again. The hold was less positive this time, but he'd no time to search further. Leaning back on his painful fistjam, he memorised the small footledges and, with a sense that he ought to break out left at the top, he reached for the poor hold again and heaved himself upwards. With one hand over the top he leaned back, trying to get his left foot up to the rounded edge of a block. It only rested on the lower part of it, but he had to keep going. It stuck. He pulled onto the top of a tower and tied to a big flake that a quick sucker reading showed to be firm.

Lara did not find it easy, but after a long pause one move below the top, she moved up, reached right to unclip the line from the last sucker and arrived beside Roger. She leaned into him, panting.

'A BCC four?' she questioned.

'I looked it up in the college library,' said Roger. 'In the "book" section there's an old document titled *Sun Rock*. That pitch was a four. But you're right. It's an ACC five.'

He pointed upwards.

'There's one long easy pitch left. Why don't you top out?'

Lara grabbed the rack and raced off. Just behind the tower were two marks where the holes from the old two-bolt belay been filled in. Delighting in slabs and cracks she made her way towards twin cracks that ended, finally, at horizontal rock. Suddenly Lara heard the electric cry of the choughs, saw the blue of wild iris in the limestone pavement, smelled the rosemary she had crushed underfoot. Far beyond there seemed to be summits hidden by heavy clouds. When he arrived, Roger consulted his palmbook for the notes he'd made from the *Sun Rock* text.

'It says here that the descent is to the west.'

'But that gully we saw is to the east,' said Lara.

'That's odd. The old crag diagram showed it to the east. The text definitely says west.'

'Anyway whilst you work it out, I'd better take a reading with the spyglass. I hope I'm tuned in to it now.'

What Lara saw was amazing. A torrent of particles could be seen racing between the boiling clouds and beyond them in the direction of the sea. What she heard when she looked through the amber spyglass was a distant electronic scream. These particles of Dust were being driven, or pulled, against the direction of the wind. It was as though the earth's gravitational force was being sucked into some void, some chasm that had opened up, not in the earth, but in the very structure of matter. As she looked Lara knew that this tide moving through the cosmos affected every living thing. She had not been aware that she was speaking aloud. She had

been recording what she saw in the memory of the spyglass.

She turned to Roger who had already finished coiling the line. But before she could speak he was shouting at two figures who had also topped out further along the crag to the east.

'Hola!' he called with a wave.

'Hola!' they called back.

'We don't want to be caught here in an electrical storm,' he said. 'We must find this gully to the west.' And he set off, jumping the cracks in the limestone, Lara trailing behind.

They were stopped by shouts behind them. Gestures told them that the descent was to the east. So they walked over to the two other climbers who by now were also ready to find the descent. They were Spanish scientists working on theoretical nuclear engineering. Their climb, despite its desperate grade, had not brought them the breakthrough results they were hoping for. Lara remembered overhearing a conversation in the Retiring Room at Jordan College when she had been trapped in the fleece cupboard.

'Do you know Lord Asriel?' she said suddenly.

'Si,' Carlos replied. 'It was he who sent us to this climb. We have been following his research into the effects of green energy in the Far North. It has implications for our own work, of course.'

'Roger,' said Lara, stopping in her tracks, 'we've been used.'

Roger looked at her sparkling eyes, her face flushed with excitement and relief. She was thinking aloud.

'Dr Malone sent us to America. Lord Asriel sent us to climb *Dandle Buttress* and then to *Left Edge*. Supposing they've been working in collaboration. Supposing we needed one insight before we could see the next. Where has that led us?'

'Well, to the new generation of green nuclear energy that these guys are researching,' he replied.

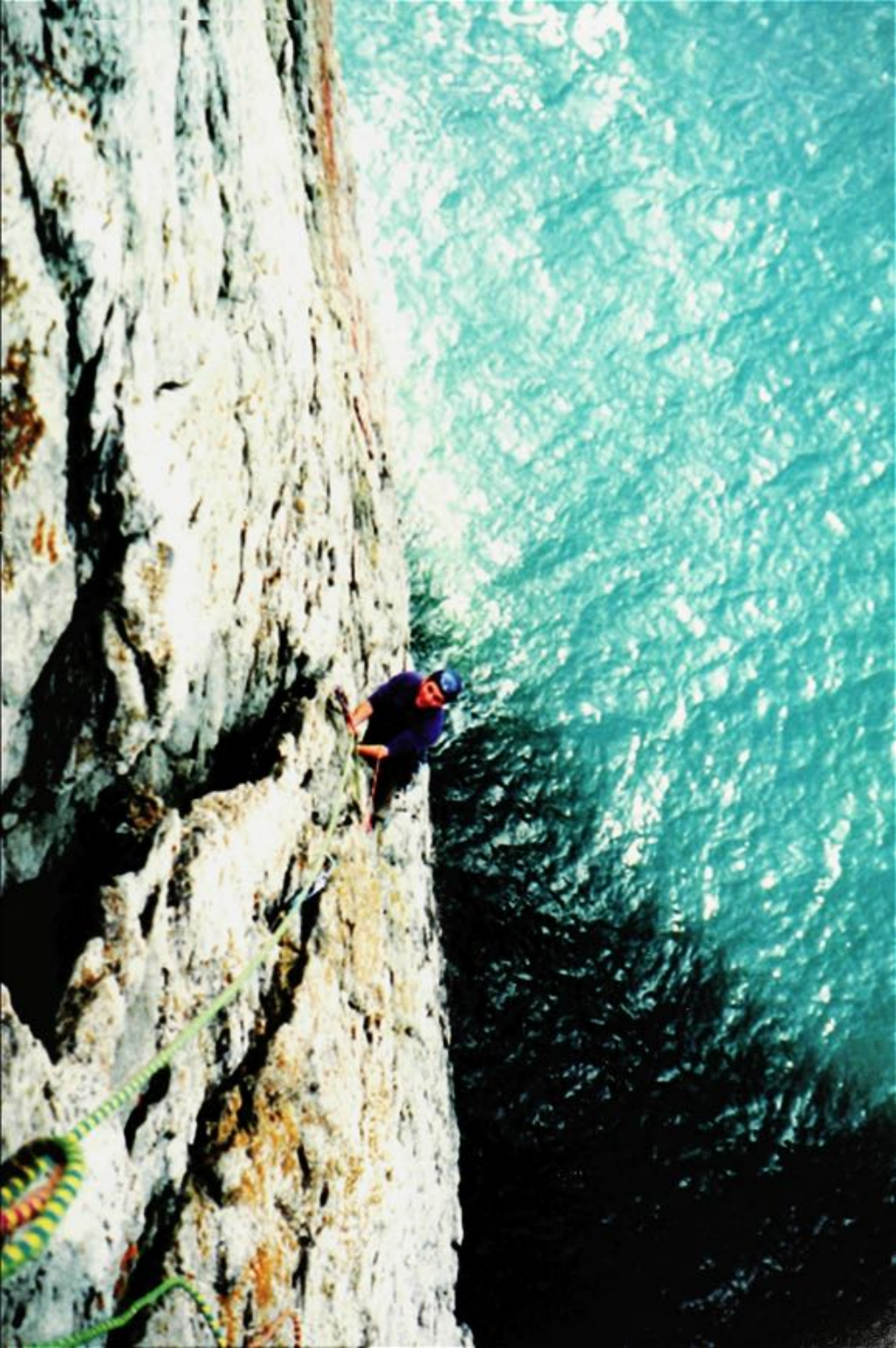
'But only after I've seen the true nature of the disturbance,' Lara said and turned back to the traverse right out of the gully where the descent led back under the crag to the tree where their backbag hung. Roger followed, still thinking hard. For some reason that Oxford traveller he'd passed in Longsleddale came into his head.

Manipulation; the stages of a story; a novelist; Philip Pullman, his train of thought ran, out of his own control.

Lara stopped again and looked back into his puzzled blue eyes.

'Perhaps *America* was better than I thought at the time,' she said knowingly, as though she was a character concluding some strange story.





# 'I Didn't Know You Could Paint'

**Jim Curran**

I can't tell you how often I have heard this comment in the last two or three years and I know that my responses (at first a long-winded explanation, but deteriorating to the cryptic "Well, you do now" that I currently employ) are not really adequate, so hence this article.

I started out as a painter. It is 30 years since I was seconded from the Faculty of Art and Design at Bristol Poly to a year at the Film School at Sheffield Poly. Until then I had lived and breathed painting and was amazed when I was converted, almost overnight to the multi-discipline of film making. The result, *'A Great Effort'*, was based on Menlove Edwards' classic article and screened on BBC2. To the outsider, it must have appeared that I never looked back, and that brushes, canvas and easels were summarily abandoned for light meters, cameras and tape-recorders. But I knew, deep down, that I would eventually return to my roots – and now I have. To my delight, my first exhibition in the Brewery Arts Centre at the *1992 Kendal Mountain Film Festival*, was more successful than I'd dared hope. So, it is time, I think, to take stock.

In 1959, at the age of 16, two events changed my life. The first was a little trespassing adventure to Chiddingley Woods Rocks near East Grinstead. Here in the heady aroma of leaf mould, sandstone, hemp-rope and sweat, I struggled, plimsolls flapping, up a few easy routes in the company of childhood friend Steve Durkin (known today to all at Harrison's, as 'Buzzard'). The second was starting a full time course at Ealing School of Art, where I suffered the youthful delusion that I was a reincarnation of Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne combined. Both climbing and painting quickly became all-consuming passions, but it has taken 40 years to combine the two with any conviction.

There was however, one rather dramatic coming-together between the art college and climbing, and one that, even today, I hesitate to write about for a variety of reasons – not the least of which is a lingering shame at my youthful irresponsibility. But, what the hell; let's get it off my chest.

The Art school was situated in what was then modestly known as Ealing Technical College, a rather boring, flat-topped, four storey building, built in the 1950's. Today it has managed to upgrade itself to some kind of Mickey Mouse University, but it still looks, and probably is, much the same. It is about 60ft high and its south, east and west corners are indented. On one side of the shallow corner the brickwork is

**Opposite:** Such a 'fearful symmetry': Tyger Jim Curran's corner and very near nemesis. Photo: Curran collection







set back about half an inch on every other course. It had provided me with a lot of primitive pre-climbing wall training, going up and down the first few feet until one day in 1963 a fellow student bet me (three pints I seem to remember) that I wouldn't dare climb the whole thing. At the time I was a regular Harrison's' Rocks habitu   (and weighed about half my present tonnage) Simple calculations revealed the number of moves I needed to make to reach the top, and a few lunchtime sessions to make sure I had the finger strength to do them, were the extent of my preparations. On a quiet summer evening, the moment arrived.

It was, without doubt, the single most stupid thing I have ever done – and I've done quite a few since. After about 30ft I was pitifully terrified and in the space of an hour, fast descent suddenly seemed even more gripping than carrying on. But as I gained height the brickwork became increasingly brittle, eroded by rain and wind, and footholds began crumbling. What to do? Go on, go for it, now I'm nearer the top than the bottom; easier up than down, but quickly – quickly. Suppressing great waves of terror, I rushed the last few feet and reached over the top to what I assumed would be a narrow parapet. Oh my God: it was about 18 inches deep, and gently inclined upwards. Mercifully, at the intersecting corner, two concrete slabs had been given room for expansion and I could just get in finger jams. In a despairing burst of blind panic I scrambled over the top in a flurry of feet and crumbling brickwork. I rolled into horizontal safety and then looked down at the ashen faces of friends who had stayed to watch. My fellow punter couldn't bear to watch and was already in The Castle opposite, downing whiskies. I didn't blame him. If I had come off I would have been killed. I could see the headlines in the local paper: *Art Student Dies In Tragic Prank*.

Shaking with the release of nervous tension, I set off back towards the painting studio where I had left an open window. *En route*, exploring a surprisingly interesting roof, I found myself looking down a skylight at the staff Gents, where a lecturer did a classic double take at the apparition above him. I dodged out of view, regained the studio and repaired to the pub to drink my winnings and a lot more besides. Even today I can reduce myself to a sweaty-palmed wreck by reliving those final moves. On a brighter note Steve Durkin, did a course at Ealing Tech (several years later) and told me that the climb had held out longer for a second ascent than *Left Wall*. As far as I know it still hasn't and I hope it never does.

Perhaps understandably, after this folly, my relationship with painting and climbing was tenuous. True, I remember doing a large painting of Dinas y Gromlech and also a series of etchings based on wild landscapes, but it wasn't until I first used a movie camera that I was comfortable in producing climbing/mountain images. Throughout my role as expedition filmmaker, I often fantasised about drawing and occasionally used a sketchbook, but the single-mindedness needed to produce a documentary always overrode any painterly intentions, as did writing books and articles.

During my 30s and 40s, my other parallel existence as a lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design at (the then) Bristol Polytechnic, meant I never lost touch with my roots; in fact I taught life-drawing every week for nearly 30 years. Writing Chris Bonington's biography and recently, *The Middle-aged Mountaineer*, I produced pencil drawings for each chapter; from these it wasn't such a big jump into painting

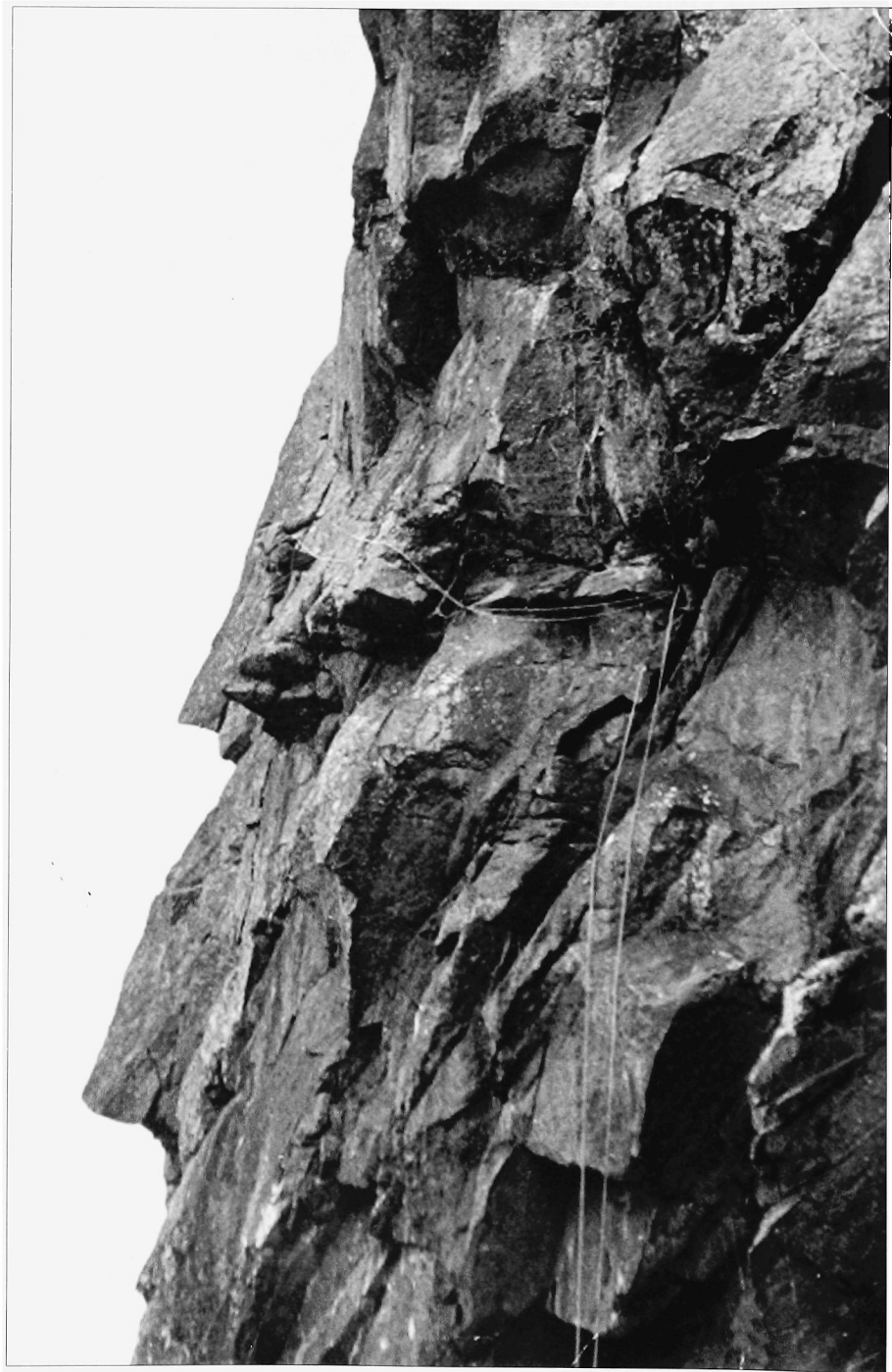
again.

What was different was subject matter. Now retired from the strange world of art college and free from it's elitist and often incomprehensively inward-looking philosophies, I decided that to kick off I would simply try and paint the mountain images that have meant most to me over the years. Unsurprisingly K2, Trango Tower, Chogolisa and Kangur were early subject matter. The paintings are quite large and, I hope, eye-catching, but in my own mind are primarily exercises in colour, light and form. Whether they are much else is really not for me to say. They owe something to painters as diverse as Turner, Edward Hopper, Cézanne (inevitably) Hockney and even Lucien Freud. A special debt is to Julian Cooper for whose friendship, advice and encouragement I have every reason to be grateful.

One artist and one painting still stand out: when I first visited The Tate as a 12 or 13 year old, I was hugely impressed by James Ward's giant painting of Gordale Scar. This monumental, dark canvas painted in 1812 epitomises the sublime in British landscape painting. Both Julian Cooper and Ginger Cain remember the impact it had on them. Sad to say it is no longer on show (doubtless overwhelmed by unmade beds and pickled sharks), but the memory is still vivid.

So it was that two years ago I resolved to paint a 'Homage to James Ward' revisiting Gordale and drawing and photographing from the same viewpoint. I have now worked on this canvas for longer than any painting I can remember, and it is still unresolved. My first thoughts, that Wards' original masterpiece was a highly stylised fantasy, has been superseded by the growing realisation that my own 21<sup>st</sup> century vision is no less a product of its time and if, by chance, it should last 200 years, will be seen in 2300 as painfully old fashioned.

Despite inevitable dead-ends and diversions I have now managed to produce some 20 paintings. In the autumn of 2004 I am having a show at *The Alpine Club*. Hopefully CC members will see it and will be most welcome. After that, who knows? Mountains and mountain images have been central to my life – and it's probably too late to change now, even if I wanted to.





# A Line of Force

**Claude Davies**

In mid March 1960 I managed to persuade 'The Baron Brown'<sup>(1)</sup> to pay a first visit to Tremadoc, where much potential for new routes existed. This first visit resulted in the climbing of two obvious groove lines on Craig Bwlch y Moch, namely *Leg Slip* and *First Slip*, both of which we climbed on the same Saturday. It also enabled an initial assessment of the possibilities of the big overhanging buttress to the right of *One Step in the Clouds*.

The following weekend my final exams precluded a visit to Wales by me, but Joe, accompanied by Trevor Jones, could not wait to get to grips with the possible line (he always has been impatient). In fact he progressed the route as far as the cave stance at the top of the second pitch. The attempt unfortunately failed when Trevor, following this pitch, lost contact with the rock on the crux moves which lead up to beneath the overhang before the rightwards traverse on to the ochre slab. Unable to regain the rock, as he was out in space, he was lowered off and Joe then abseiled back down, no doubt somewhat disappointed – although this was not an unusual occurrence for him. Indeed, in the 50s he ended up soloing (but remaining roped) the first ascents of *The Mostest*, *The Boulder*, and other routes, when seconds could not follow, or refused to do so.

The very next weekend, March 26th, we were back. The word had got out: Brown was going to make another attempt on the big buttress at Tremadoc. The audience gathered, some on the roadside wall to open up the view, and others beneath amongst the leafless trees. We were on stage and I for one felt jittery and intimidated. Trevor was also suffering from anxiety; he already knew just how hard the climb was. Amongst the crowd was Dave Thomas with his cine camera, along with Edgar Siddall taking black and white stills. How many of these photos have been seen since?

Joe decided that I would be number two with Trevor at the rear. We were all wearing state of the art PAs (Pierre Alain rock boots purchased in Paris on Alpine trips) – an advance on basket ball boots with the studs cut off, which in turn had been an advance on black plimsolls.

<sup>(1)</sup> The title was bestowed by Nat Allen at a later date and following the opening of the first Joe Brown shop at Menai Hall, Llanberis. It was also at that time that a postcard addressed to 'The human fly, Llanberis', with no other form of address, was successfully delivered; a big credit to the postal service.

**Opposite:** 'Irresistible force meets immovable object': Joe Brown and Claude Davies on the first ascent of 'Vector', Tremadoc. Photo: Edgar Siddall





Joe was leading on two overweight nylon Viking laid ropes, with consequential heavy drag. This was what we all used at the time, accepting the 20lbs weight penalty which compares with the current use of two 9mm sheathed ropes weighing 12 lbs in total. Perhaps we were strong in those days. At least they were highly unlikely to break or cut, but falling off on them would not be very pleasant owing to the lack of elasticity compared with modern specifically designed ropes.

It is pertinent to point out that then, there were no harnesses, no sticht plate belaying devices, no chalk, no sticky rubber, no Friends, no nuts on wires, no tape slings; they had simply not been invented. We carried a few rope and line slings, steel karabiners, an assortment of stones in the pocket for placing in cracks and threading, plus a hammer and a selection of pitons. The latter would only be used for aid or protection as a last resort but we had no hang-ups about their use for belaying where natural belays were problematical. It is unfortunate that today some of our guide books make reference to 'pitons being used' on routes, this having been taken possibly from original descriptions, and misconstrued. The word 'used' meant that a piton was placed. Only if it was used for aid to actually climb was it described accordingly. Shoulder/waist belaying was the norm, no matter what the situation – a practice quite contrary to the 'Alpine guides' system of direct belaying of the live rope via an Italian Hitch to a piton.

Joe set off up the familiar first pitch and quickly reached the small stance and good spike belay some 60ft above the ground. I soon followed, somewhat tense, a feeling not caused by the difficulties so far, but with what was looming above. Trevor stayed on the ground whilst Joe then continued up a steep and deceptively strenuous crack that eventually formed the edge of a large and comforting spike runner. Above, a steep slab and corner was capped by a roof, with an undercut ochre slab running out to the right, and eventually bye-passing the roof.

The corner to the right of the steep slab provided meagre purchase for the right hand and allowed difficult moves up, and eventual lodgement beneath the roof, and a precarious resting position. A piton, fixed the previous week in the ochre slab, enabled moves out on to the slab and the continuation corner. It was an impressive position and intimidating to witness Joe climbing it. Above the corner Joe was hidden from view as he eventually traversed left to reach a small cave stance. I then brought Trevor up to my stance and tried to come to terms with what lay ahead, acutely conscious of the whirring cine, and clicking of still cameras, and of course the comments by those occupying the nearby circle seats.

The ropes lay diagonally up to the right crossing the corner before linking with the piton in the ochre slab. The steep slab was delicate and the technical moves had to be climbed quickly. I was soon braced beneath the roof contemplating the moves right and the now longed for piton, but not relishing the diagonal rope situation. Once I had moved, and then unclipped from the piton, I was able to see that a nice protuberance on the right edge of the ochre slab would provide an effective edge for my right hand to press against, and relieve to a limited degree the effects of gravity.

**Opposite:** 'Still crazy after all these years': septuagenarian Joe Brown prospecting for new routes. Photo: Dave Jones



Unfortunately, and having obtained a comparatively relaxed position, the nice protuberance snapped off without warning and I found myself hanging in space some distance away from the rock. The only thing to do (prusiks were not on the menu in 1960 – at least not on mine) was for Joe to lower me back down until I could rejoin Trevor on the stance. I then had to repeat the crux and all the lower section of the pitch. At least I now knew how to do it and was able to complete the pitch with no more delights for the watching crowd enjoying the spectacle.

It was now Trevor's turn to treat the crowd. He, of course, was well aware of the difficulties and had no doubt been suitably impressed with my performance. He was obviously tense and I was careful to ensure that the single overweight rope was free from slack. He reached the good spike runner, out of sight of both Joe and myself, and then proceeded to tackle the crux moves on the steep slab, the scene of his previous parting from the rock. A sudden shout and he was dangling in space well out to the right and with the rope running through the piton in the ochre slab. Again he was lowered off and then refused to continue leaving me contemplating the future with some trepidation. Trevor's demise resulted in a small amount of gear remaining below Joe and myself and which I had left to protect Trevor. Joe nobly descended on the rope down to the piton and removed everything except the piton.

Above the cave the wall overhung. To the right and around the arête was an unpleasant looking ivy-coated wall (now the route *Void*). Joe had no doubts regarding the line to take: "We are going left into that bottomless groove just before the left edge of the buttress." In order to reach this groove a horizontal traverse had to be made, crossing an overlap at mid point. There was no protection on this section in those days and when Joe reached the base of the groove he placed two protection pitons in vertical cracks, one each side of a narrow rib and only a few inches apart. He linked these with a sling as neither of them had filled him with confidence, judging by the sound when being placed.

It was obvious that to climb the corner, which contained a thin crack, was going to be potentially harder than the lower crux, and would involve some precarious laybacking above the now considerable void. To add to the difficulties, the upper five feet of the groove was totally obscured by grass and other vegetation and at an angle of at least vertical.

Initially it was possible to bridge and gain a few feet. This allowed Joe to place a high piton which enabled a limited amount of gardening to be carried out in relative safety. He then proceeded with the laybacking, digging his fingers into the grass before pulling over the top. It was a masterly exhibition. When I followed I found it strenuous and committing and ever grateful for the sight of two overweight ropes in front. Nowadays this pitch is quite a different, and easier proposition with natural protection and straightforward bridging /laybacking free from vegetation.

What to call the route? The previous week I had been taking a Theory Of Structures examination: we decided to call the route *Vector* – 'a line of force'.



Allan Austin in 1961 on 'First Slip'.  
Photo: Claude Davies

A long productive partnership. Joe Brown and  
Claude Davies. Photo Derek Walker



Anon, Eric Langmuir, Joe Brown and Allan Austin sport old nylon necklaces at Tremadog  
in 1961. Photo: Claude Davies

# The Naming of Routes

**Dave Gregory**

It used to be so easy in the old days. There was no need to rack the brain for subtle similes or atrocious puns. The topology did it for you. You were the first party to climb some huge gash in the centre of the crag, the choice of name which you could give it was obvious: *Central Gully*, *Central Chimney*, or perhaps *The Gash*, or *The Ivy Gash*. *Canol* is a linguistic variation on the theme, being the Welsh for central. Not every breach in the crag goes plumb-line straight, water-drop-vertically, from the crag top. *Slanting Groove* is the obvious answer and I admit to using it twice, on different crags of course. One must not confuse the punters.

This purely descriptive naming did not apply only to recesses. The masters have left us slabs galore; *Great*, *Slanting*, *Yellow*, *Narrow*. A *Moss Groove* could appear on almost every crag and probably more would, as the post-Clean-Air-Act purer atmosphere sees lichens and mosses rampant on even popular crags, were it not for the surge in more imaginative contributions. Were the line more in the nature of a corner, with the necessary concomitant of ever-present seepage, the strictly descriptive name might slip a little: *Soap Gut* and *Green Gut* sidle in. Geography has not left us merely the mundane; *Ardverikie Wall* has poetry to it, as has *Ardgarten Arête*.

Colours, of course, come with the crag. *Red Wall* was an early entrant even if *Bloody Slab* had to wait to be accepted. *Black Cleft* could have been named in the early days of the sport except for its being too hard even for the early pioneers, adept as they were at grim struggles in the vile recesses of the bowels of the earth. *Green Cormorant Face*, first done with a point of aid in 1957 may mark some sort of divide between the early, purely descriptive days and the later transports of imagination but accurately descriptive it still is.

Coming down from the early days are the surname routes. *Jones's*, *Murray's*, *Longland's*, *Abraham's*. These, all early routes, must have been done when the climbing community was much smaller than now and when its members all knew each other and word of a new route would spread by word of mouth. 'Have you heard about Longland's new climb on Du'r Arddu?' And there it is, the route name creeps into usage. *Longland's Climb*, *Longland's Continuation*, *Murray's Route* and so on. No conceit on the originators' parts, just usage. *Adam's Rib* cannot come in this category, being merely a mind-step from the *Abrahams'* route known as *East Wall Climb*.

Well-known climbing teams have similarly had their names sent down to posterity. Harry Dover left *Dover's Wall* to spawn its later *Routes 1, 2, 3 and 4*; thank the Lord for the humourist who gave us *Nothing To Do With Dover*. With Gilbert Ellis he left *Dover and Ellis's Chimney* to mock modern stars; *Gordon and Craig's*, *Jones and Collier's Climbs* are all from that early era. Although the Peak District's ubiquitous and productive pioneer, J W Puttrell has, after the fashion of the time, his *Puttrell's Crack* and *Progress* on Wharncliffe he had a modern approach in the naming of his



climbs as well as in his pioneering. *Lime Juice Chimney* on Carl Wark was done in the early years of the 20th century and it spawned *Orange Juice Wall* 40 years later in similarity, one of the most typical naming gambits of modern times.

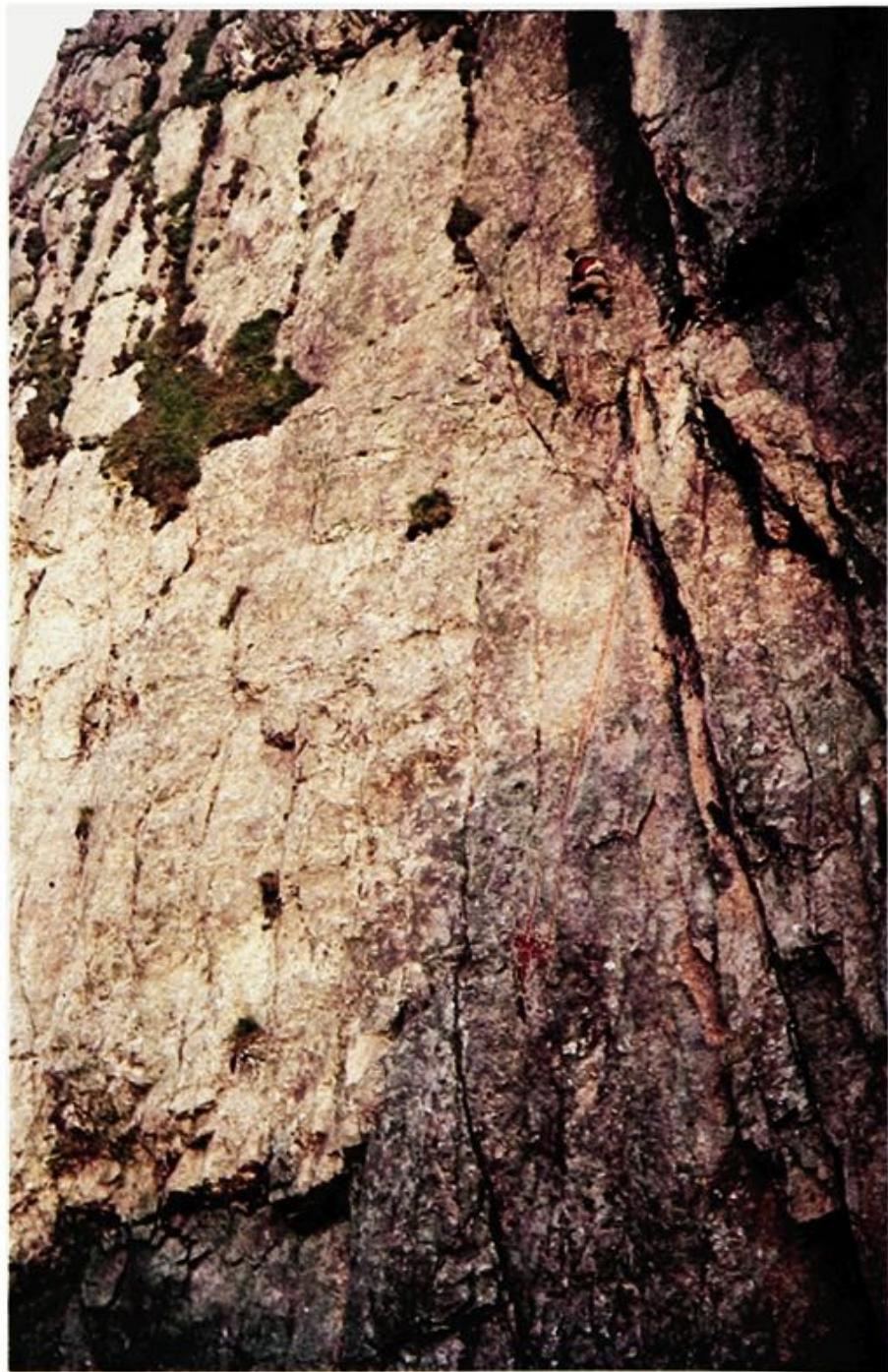
Whatever the incident which gave a name to the first route on a crag, subsequent pioneers will search for names with a similar meaning. 1956 saw Brown and Whillans putting up *The Rasp* and *The File* on Higgarr Tor showing that even those masters of the handjam must have been impressed by the roughness of the rock. Newcomers to grit certainly are. A workshopful of abrasive implements followed: *Surform*, *Bastard Cut*, *The Reamer*, and more and even *Brillo* joined them in the Tor's toolbox.

Millstone Edge is an oddity of this connected nomenclature. Its first route of any merit was *Great North Road*, done as an aid route. The name eminently suits the striking line but most of the successor routes, despite the crag's being so close to Sheffield, carry London-based names; *Petticoat Lane*, *Lyon's Corner House*, *The Mall*, etc, with only *Twikker* and *Pinstone Street* striking a blow for the locality.

Even a cursory examination of the route names in our, and American, guide-books reveals that climbers must read a wide range of literature, or at least have heard of it. Tolkien impressed many a climbing activist: *Gollum* and *Gandalf* and *Hobbits* abound. *The Sword of Damocles* and *The Vorpall Blade* betray an acquaintance with myth and literature. *Beowulf* has contributed his share. Henry Miller has cast a *Black Shadow* into climbing, of which *Black Spring* is the most apt. Spreading the name sideways was popular on Dinas Mot. *Black Spring* begat *Black Foot* which sired the unfortunate *Coon's Yard*. The Mot is home to *Slow Ledge Climb*. There need be no mistake about the problem there – a problem refined on the notorious slippery foothold on *Hardd* (which is the Welsh for handsome) and many a bootworn piece of limestone.

A combination of biblical reading and wit gave us *Agag's Groove*. In chapter 15 of the first Book of Samuel is written 'and Agag came unto him delicately... and Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal'. Surely we know what to expect of *Agag's Groove*? And what a name. But why did the writer of Samuel miss out the word *treading* before delicately? No climber he? The various *Via Dolorosas* must each surely tell an equally dismal tale.

Not only the dire prospect of the country's crags being full of Central Mossy Black Gash Chimneys and the like brought about the change. The imaginations of an increasing number of climbers were aching to be set free. Well before it was climbed *Limpopo Groove* had been named. Imagination had turned a 30ft dirty corner into Kipling's 'great, grey, green, greasy river'. Although traverses of mountains by their ridges were an early feature of mountaineering, girdle traverses were a later development of rock-climbing. *The West Buttress Girdle* hardly rolls off the tongue or challenges the imagination but *Playtex* makes the same point. Eventually the pun had to make its appearance. *Dinas in the Oven*, 1985 is, in fact, on Cloggy and Popp and Dixon should take a little blame for not finding a line on one of Wales's many fortress-like crags carrying the name Dinas for this little piece of wit. *Virgin on the Ridiculous* pleases even though we do not know if there is a greater meaning behind the immediately obvious pun. Of necessity early routes on a crag took the easi-





est way. Later ascents, probably by more capable parties knowing more of the crag, and having more efficient protection, might go more directly and so were born the Directs and Eliminates, and of course, on White Gill, *Eliminol*. A notorious odd-man-out among the eliminates is *Beeston Eliminate* in the Manifold Valley, which is a girdle traverse, but first ascensionists must be allowed their little joke. On Beeston Tor too is an easy pun, *The Beast*, not so much of a horror in these high-E-number-days but in its time sufficiently nasty to deserve the name. Clubs have committed their names to posterity after their members' new route efforts; *PMC 1* disguises the Polaris Mountaineering Club; *CMC*, the Cioch; *NMC*, the Nottingham. *Climbers' Club Direct* is less unobtrusive.

Unfortunately we have to put up with the dregs of naming, a toilet of disgusting titles. Colin Mortlock and Lyn Noble, educated gentlemen both, disfigured Cloggy with *The Little Krapper*. *Organ Flagellator* disfigures the same cliff and the same activist's train of thought gave *Menstrual Gossip* on the Pass's slate. A group of Sheffield activists have left Priestcliffe Quarry disfigured by *Rhino Whip Groove* which implies sado-masochism but derives from a mistreatment of a suspect in a Sheffield cell. Its companions are worse: *Flagellator*, *The Chancre*, *Gonococcus Groove*, *Priestcliffe Whore*, *Something's Stuck In My throat*, are enough to give an impression of the train of thought.

This comparison with something nasty has often been used in a comparison with unpleasant members of the animal kingdom. The unpleasant hollow, filled with brambles and a multitude of examples of other grasping plants, in Beeley Quarry, which might give refuge to many a specimen of nasty fauna, was christened *The Snake Pit*, and *Python*, and *Rattler* (loose rock?) followed; in *Aspirant's Crack* a pun creeps in and, of course, with *Scorpion* and the more worthy *Scorpio* on Cloggy there is a sting in the tail. *Tarantula* and *Bushmaster* are another pair of unpleasant creepers and can you not feel the menace of the *Carnivore* lurking on Craig A'Bhancair Wall. Life's unpleasantness is not restricted to the multi-legged. *Pellagra* lurks in wait on Tremadog and *Desperation* on Stanage.

Animal kind's animosity is not its only remembered quality. *Ghecko Groove* commemorates not that animal's useful prehensility but the need for it. Hugh Banner must have wished for the gecko's sucker pads on his ascent. I certainly did when I followed not long after. We have been rescued by sticky boots but the image of the necessary adhesion remains in the name. Arrochar's *Glueless Groove* makes the same point in a different way. *Orang Utang* makes a point obviously and *Brachiation Dance* more subtly.

There is a class of climb on which a particular situation or configuration registered so strongly as to give the climb its name. *The Fang* on Gouthier; *The Pinch*, the *Pause*, *The Long Reach*, all from the Etive Slabs. *Little Brown Jug*, at the other end of the country, spawned, by courtesy of an interest in Glenn Miller's music, *String of Pearls* and, miles away, *String of Burls*.

Ladies of all sorts make their appearance. *Cleopatra*, *Salome*, *Delilah* and

**Opposite:** Bathed in appropriate light, Dave Gregory returns, in 1989, to a consanguineous relationship with 'Bloody Slab'. Photo: Gregory collection





Kafoozalam, hard cases all, make their individual contribution. *Harlot's Face* a more The Naming of Routes general comment. Brunhilde doesn't seem to have appeared and yet the Ring Cycle would be a prolific seam to mine. Climbers are evidently not merely interested in the hard-faced of the sex. *Miranda* appears and was some lovesick swain *Waiting For Laura*? He evidently was *Late Back for Laura*, but *Laura Said Yes*, or *Laura's In A Bloody Bad Mood* never saw the guidebook page, although *Sleeping With Sarah* did. *Tartar's Crack* and *Princess Anne's Crack* are best avoided but while we are in this area what thoughts does *Venerly* give as the name of a limestone crack?

*Bucket City* would be a gratifying title to believe but at E6 someone has to be kidding. Oregon's Smith Rock has *Ten Gallon Buckets* and you can believe that. *The Ten Craters of Wisdom* in Derbyshire's Dovedale are not quite as huge, as befits our smaller facilities, but are pretty gratifying jugs for all that. Politics will not be left out. *Menshevik*, *Communist Convert*, *Totalitarian* all have left their mark whereas *Young And Easy Under The Apple Boughs* may carry a hint of political uncorrectness but a greater memory of carefree youth, a touch of *Cider with Rosie*, live life while you can and devil take the consequences.

*Naddyn Ddu* is something of an oddity. It comes from the South Yorkshire pronunciation of the greeting 'Now then, thee' and apparently is the Welsh for the Black Chipper. *Woubits*. No-one seems to know who actually gave *Woubits* its name. Whillans, the first ascensionist, is famously supposed to have said, "Woubits? What the hell's a woubits?" It seems to be a hairy caterpillar or a woolly bear, reflecting neither Whillans, nor Brown, nor that gloomy menace lurking high up the Far East Buttress of Cloggy. The crag has its share of evocative names. Whillans might well have said, "What the hell's a troach." My dictionary doesn't tell me. *The Croak* could be on any cliff where the raven sweeps past the mist-shrouded faces but only on Cloggy could *Vember*, the daughter of the Halfway House café, be honoured with her name on a route. Its direct continuation, done in June, just had to be *November*.

Imagine Pete Crew leading the second pitch while Bas Ingle belayed, tucked up in the groove like a gnome. Blood-red rock, the patient crunched-up second, and finally the pun, *Haemoglobin*. How many climbers must have gazed at the empty spaces on a crag's faces, or scrutinised photographs of it under the cover of their office work? How many dreams have begun so? What matter that a certain William Shakespeare used the title first. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* must encapsulate every potential first ascensionist's hopes and *Margins Of The Mind* takes climbing beyond aspirations to the edge of sanity and the beginning of horror.

Every climber, just as they have their favourite climbs must have their favourite route names. Their Desert Island Route Names. Here are mine. The all time best must surely be *A Dream Of White Horses*. Anyone who has seen a high swell roaring into that zawn, any zawn, being compressed into the narrowing space and the spray and spume being thrown high over the cliff top will have those mind-filling memories recalled by the evocative name. To the dustbin, however good the route, with the

**Opposite:** Moving inexorably from left-to-right, Tim Noble and Terry Gifford climb 'Communist Convert'. Photo: Noble collection



pathetic parody of a *Nightmare Of Brown Donkeys*.

*Sea of Cloud*; I admit, partly my own invention, but what climber has not experienced the marvellous vista of a cloud-filled valley surrounded by a ring of peaks. *Road of Ghosts*; a Milburn concoction on the Far West Buttress of Cloggy brought to mind by the gardening operations being reminiscent of the actions of the great teams of the '30s, whose ghosts might well have been watching unobserved.

*Dragonflight*; a minor classic on one of the rock-gyms of the Derbyshire Dales, too hard for me and the name will draw no great vistas to mind, but what a powerful, poetic name, capable of several interpretations. The names of *Cenotaph Corner* and *Cemetery Gates* can hardly be separated from the powerful image of their overlooking the gateway to the Llanberis Pass, but the names alone are full of threat.

*Oceans Of Emotion*. What emotion brought that to mind? Fear, surely. *One Step In The Clouds*, *Space Beneath My Feet*, *Angel Pavement* (literature again) all carry the concept of movement, travel, of a sort. *Atomic Finger Flake* is a route I must obviously never get on. Sausage fingers maybe but nuclear-powered steel fingers certainly not. *Tensor* and *Vector* have a terse, mathematical, inference of force and energy but for malign foreboding of the danger of attempting a route give me *The Widowmaker*.

There's my list. You know a better list? Go to it.



# Delving Deep

**Nick Bullock**

I slip and slide down the green, grassy ramp. Towering grey turrets force their way into the cool clear blue sky. Tufts of grass spring from ledge and corner. Water dripping down rock. Sodden. Lichen-coated.

Why climb?

People live secure lives, climb clean, solid, secure climbs. Have solid secure jobs. Seek solid, secure shoulders to lean. Clip bolts. Use mats.

Why climb this climb?

Clogwyn Du'r Arddu is a magical cliff nestled into the green rolling hillside beneath Snowdon. Crowds trudge the laborious path from Llanberis to the Snowdon summit. Foregoing the beauty of this majestic brooding crag, *The Black Cliff*, to stand with others at some insignificant litter-strewn, noisy, concrete-covered summit. A cafe and a train make it worth the effort though.

I continue cautiously, past the party about to begin *Longland's Climb*, a classic VS. Past the water running freely down *The Black Cleft*, an E2 with a traditional reputation and traditional slime, Joe Brown and Don Whillans at their most twisted. Past the pool at the base of *The Black Cleft* which churns and turns as water slides over green. Gurgling like a pan of boiled eggs spinning in a vortex. I slide a little farther until the start to *Bow-Shaped Slab* is reached. I think it's the start to *Bow-Shaped Slab*. Having never climbed on Cloggy's West Buttress I'm not sure. Familiarisation, must be part of the reason I have decided to undertake the forthcoming adventure, which is to be a solo of the 985ft *West Buttress Girdle*. Sixteen pitches of grovelling and route finding difficulties or will it be a fabulous journey following in the footsteps of climbing history?

I blame The Coffin Dodgers staying at the CC hut, Ynys Ettws, for starting me on this journey of tradition. Too much talk of pioneering ascent, hemp rope, pebbles and chockstones led me to believe I had been missing out. I felt I owed it to them to climb a traditional route. After all, hadn't hanging around with them made me feel young?

The West Buttress is a slab. I know it's a slab because water doesn't drip it trickles and the loose rock remains in place. Folds and creases like corrugated card break the massive V-shaped slab making corners and arêtes.

Pulling around one such arête leaving *Longlands Climb*, places me first on *White Slab* and then on to a Ledge called Linnell's Leap, the scene of death defying jumping action on the first ascent of *Narrow Slab* in 1933. The void beneath makes me wonder if I shouldn't just climb up, forgo the crab-crawl with all its exposure, but it is only 4c for heaven's sake originally climbed in nailed boots with hemp rope. A grade I hadn't realised existed until not so long ago. I suspected the Bullock ignorant-arrogance was about to come back and bite me in the backside. My climb-

ing year had been very successful, in the mountains, new routes and hard repeats, had found my name appearing in the climbing press frequently. I felt in danger of becoming a tad up-my-own-arse, the perfect time then for a traditional down-to-earth grovel

In these times of convenience, grade-concerned, adventure-limited, outcome-guaranteed climbing, I needed uncertainty. I wanted to climb something out of fashion, something the baggy-trousered bouldering mat brigade would never be seen dead on. Maybe I was just getting old and twisted like Joe and Don. Maybe I was finally realising the extent of what it means to be a full card carrying member of the climbing fraternity.

Leaving Linnell's Leap is somewhat of an out-of-balance blind grope around a bulging corner. Pinching and leaning from mouldy, sugar-coated rock gives me cause for concern. Consoling myself that it is only 4c (with 6c exposure) and avoiding another clod of vibrant well-watered grass, I inch my way up *White Slab* looking for a peg belay to comfort myself I'm on route. Checking the guidebook once again after pulling it free from my stomach, sweat-sodden and plastic-coated the book had glued itself to skin. Balancing, precariously, I turn damp, pulpy pages with my teeth and realise I have climbed too high. I thought as much, the technical grade for the pitch is 4b, a veritable scramble under normal circumstances. Realisation was starting to penetrate my thick skull that 'normal' was not going to happen today.

Over-compensating, tenuous, taught-tendon reversing across damp mildew-covered ground found me back on track. With the slab crawled and the groove above grovelled I was now nervously entrenched in a dark alcove. To say the way forward or, more correctly, the way to the right wasn't obvious would be selling the situation short. Spragging myself tight into the back of the gloomy overhanging corner the guidebook was consulted again. To my horror the notch in the overhanging arête above and behind, was the way forward.

'Come on Bullock for heaven's sake it's 4c' I chastised myself while facing out, bridged across the dark fold looking down hundreds of feet. Uncertain this actually was the correct line made me appreciate the difference of on-sighting a climb and working a climb. Knowing what is coming, gear placements, size of holds, condition of rock all make a massive difference to a climber's mental strength, preparation and confidence. Redpointing or headpointing, fine physical achievements maybe, but a world apart from the on-sight.

Smearing wet shoes on wet rock, leaning back and hanging into space, stretch, touch, I need an extra inch. Reverse.

A second time, feet inches higher, more reach, lean back, stretch, touch, carress, assess. Reverse.

Psyche up, chalk up, look down ...GIVE UP?

The lump of rock I pinned all of my hopes on appeared to be balanced on the crest of the arête, was it solid? Was it attached? Where did it lead? What did it lead to? This was definitely the levelling experience I sought from the day. I just didn't expect to be levelled quite this much.

Two attempts, leaning out and backward to reach the notch in the arête resulted in retreat. Committing to the third attempt, past the point of no return, I breathe

a huge sigh of relief to find clean and dry rock. Swing into space. Gibber on to the arête. Mince across a slab, another wet and slimy slither lest and finally, finally a ledge, large enough to sit. I rip over-constricting shoes from swelling blistered feet. A well-earned rest and more guidebook study is called for.

Introspective retrospection pushes into the forefront of contemplation. Am I enjoying this? Certainly the pain from my blistered feet is not enjoyable. The fear from uncertainty is seductive and the view from my eyrie is exceptional. Looking down on to the dark, deep waters of *Lyn Du'r Arddu* images mirrored from the still water cast across the surface. Dark thoughts run through my mind. The risk of climbing without a rope over wet, loose, dirty rock makes me reflect on my life. The outcome is uncertain. Living life to a ripe old age, through careful, cautious calculation with no risk, no uncertainty may lead to a long life, but does longevity mean happiness? Happiness surely must come from challenge, going out on a limb and taking risk.

Why do so many of the people I look after on a daily basis in the prison gym return time and time again? Drug takers. Thrill seeking, car stealing joy-riders. Fighters, gang members, armed robbers.

Growing up in deprived run down areas with limited opportunity, living and wanting for goods beyond their means. Without the intelligence or knowhow or want to wait, or want to work, may be a major contributing factor to the life they live. But the thrill of the chase, the uncertain outcome, the tension, the excitement must play its part also. Crime or climb? An intoxicating drug in the sterile Western life we are expected to lead. Is it possible as climbers or criminals we seek the same but on different sides of the law? Are both climbers and criminals in some way looking for escape from the cotton wool existence forced upon us? Climbing and failing has downfalls of sometime fatal proportions, a severe price to pay, but worth the risk for many. The criminal also has severe consequences to face. About five years of them for most of the inmates in the local prison I work, but with climbing, as with breaking the law, we return over and over, addicted to the lifestyle be what may of the consequences.

Forcing tight shoes on to swollen feet relieved the pain in my head brought on from too much thinking. The enormous stride around a blind arête focused me to the job in hand. The void beneath my feet falls away dramatically. Halfway through this self-inflicted torture I was at last starting to get a feel for the climbing and exposure. Merrily scampering across more damp dark rock while avoiding tufts of sprouting lush grass found me on the crux section of *Bow-Shaped Slab*. A wide steep slab split from right-to-left with a crack running its length until disappearing around a corner at its base. Passing pleasantries with the party on the way up the crack of *Bow-Shaped Slab's* traverse broke the solitude. The second's gibbering was a tad disconcerting though. The ropes running between the two were behind my back and should he fall the chances of taking me with him were great. This in mind I gave him a few stern words of encouragement and pulled him past my sitting stance unceremoniously to clear the way ahead for my down climb.

The technical crux of the girdle on the following pitch was dry and lichen-free, making it pleasant. The easy 4b pitch that followed was anything but pleasant, in fact it was decidedly unpleasant. Moving directly up the 40ft corner from one wet



slippery hold to another wet slippery hold on to a slimy layback and a greasy smear was thought inspiring. Patting chalk on to the edges for my feet in an attempt to dry the holds did make a difference and, finally, I arrived at the top of the corner pulling myself hot and bothered to sit on the top of a plinth.

Several times I questioned why I continued with this punishment. Several times I wanted to run directly up, escape by climbing some clean classic. The voice in my head wouldn't allow it though. I knew the taunting would start if I did. Why should it bother me if I didn't complete the climb. Who would know? Who would care? *I would.*

Down climbing a corner placed me at the foot of *Central Rib*. Another classic VS, covered in moss and dust following an overhanging corner filled with dirt and grass. A vertical wall hemmed me in on the right. I pulled on a block. It moved. I reversed. I crimped and bridged, took all the weight on my legs. Leaned from a dirty hold. Stepped on a dirty hold. Leaned out farther. Reversed. The third attempt found me higher still and committed. This was starting to feel familiar. I suddenly realised how tired my arms felt and as I reached bulging ground the thought that I could fail on a VS shocked me somewhat.

This was pitch 11 and the climbing was taking its toll on my strength. The rock didn't care that I climbed hard. In fact did anyone care I was here and doing this? The obvious answer was no, nobody would be impressed by my 1,000ft grovel and that was probably my reason for doing it.

Laybacking a crack in a spectacular setting, the technical difficulties of the girdle were nearly over. Two-thirds of the way up and three-quarters of the way along the West Buttress my gritty, slithering, side-shuffling journey of discovery was rapidly coming to an end. Broken ground and grass were followed until the end of the crag was within reach.

Finally, four and a half hours from the start I sat on the summit ridge of the West Buttress and watched the crowds trundle from Snowdon summit, pink cellulite-wobbling, cream-smeared and sun-scorched. Basted flesh, worn-out and wilting past my sweaty, sitting form. Did they care I had soloed the *Girdle* of the West Buttress, definitely not. Would other climbers look on my successful ascent with respect? I don't think so. But sitting there in quiet contemplation I had travelled far and answered many questions. I now felt ready to return to a life of regularity and acceptance until my parole came the following weekend. Maybe if I run quick I can meet up with The Coffin Dodgers before they leave the hut; they surely will enjoy and appreciate an account of my day. It may even jog their memories of completing the climb 40 years ago.

# The Ballad of the Padarn Lake Saloon

**Ian 'Cam' Campbell**

A bunch of lads were whooping it up  
At the Padarn Lake Saloon,  
Joe rolling cigs, Cam buying beer,  
Mo whistling out of tune.  
Back of the bar in a huddled group  
Were Ingle, Potts and Crew,  
And standing there with a cynical air  
The lady that's known as Sue.

When out of the night which was clear and bright,  
And into the din and the glare  
There stumbled a climber fresh from the crags  
Dog dirty and covered in hair.  
He looked like a man who could handle himself  
You could see that from afar,





As he pushed his way across the room  
And called for a drink at the bar.  
There was none could place the stranger's face,  
Though we searched ourselves for a clue;  
But the most intriguing was the little league  
Of Ingle, Potts and Crew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes  
And hold them hard like a spell,  
And such was he, and he looked to me,  
Like a man who climbed real well  
As he quaffed his pint and looked around  
He sort of seemed aloof;  
He said, "I've climbed your hardest stuff  
And I think I have the proof."  
Then I got to figuring who he was  
And wondering what he'd do,  
And I turned my head – and there watching him  
The lady that's known as Sue.

Have you seen a man who climbs real well?  
He talks with a studied cool;  
He'll not tell you what he's done,  
Afraid to look the fool.  
But not this man, he volunteered,  
And told us all he'd done:  
The hardest routes for miles around



He named them one by one.  
Red and White, Octo and Shrike  
The Thing and Masters Wall, Vector, Tramgo, Woubits Left,  
He said he climbed them all  
"But I want to state and my words are straight  
And I'll bet a pint they're true,  
That its safe to tell that I climb as well  
As Ingle, Potts and Crew.

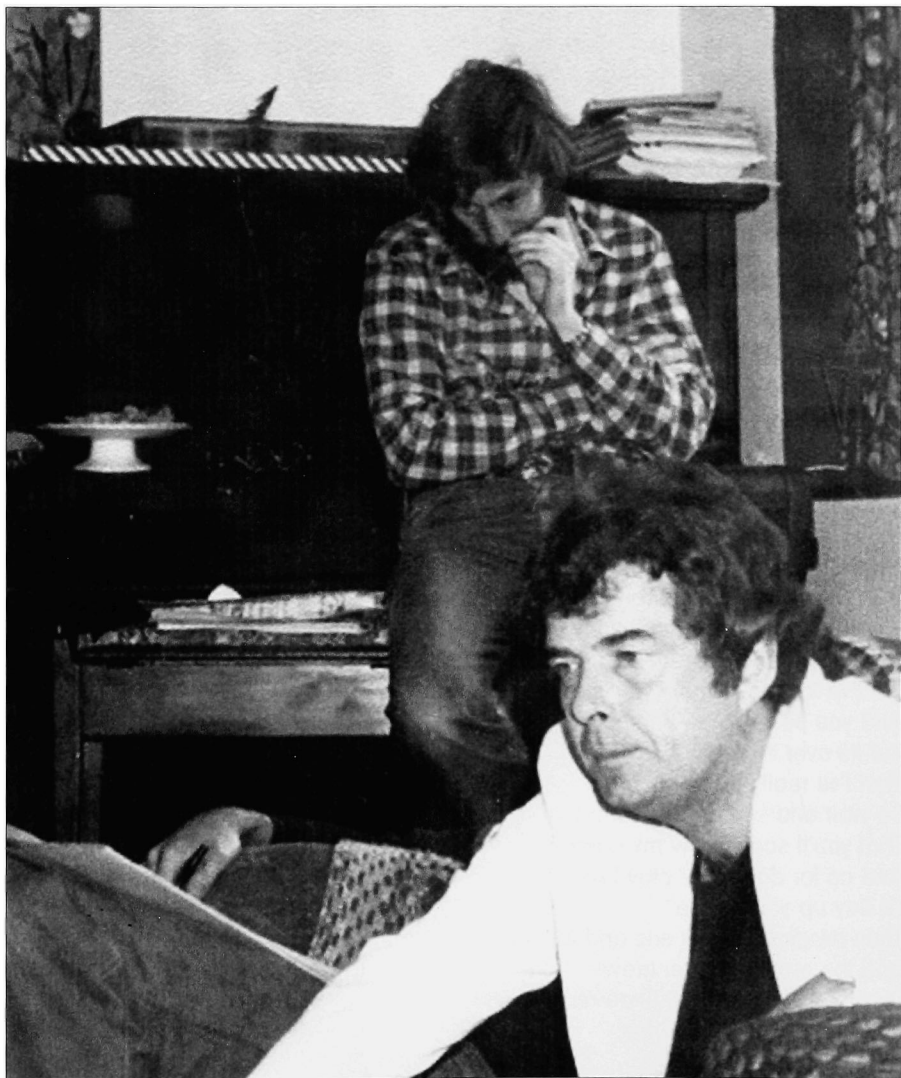
His eyes went drifting round the room  
And he seemed in a kind of a daze,  
'Till at last the dart board fell in the way  
Of the stranger's wondering gaze.  
Joe and Mo were having a drink,  
There was no one on the board,  
So he struts his way across the room  
And stands there like a lord.  
In a tartan shirt that was glazed with dirt  
I never saw him stray,  
Then he grabbed the darts with his rock-scarred hands –  
My God, how that man could play.  
With triple top and nineteen too, almost everything he got;  
Fifteen ten and bulls eye too, he cuffed them every shot.  
He beat them all with an arrogant ease  
As the challengers formed a queue;  
And last of all, to try their luck, were  
Ingle, Potts and Crew.

Then all of a sudden he turned and spoke  
In a voice that was soft and calm,  
"Lads" said he, "You don't know me  
And none of you care a damn  
But I've told you what I've climbed round here,  
And you seem to be impressed,  
But its over there on Anglesey  
That I've really done my best.  
So wait and see and I guarantee  
That you'll soon know my name.  
And as for darts, you play like tarts,  
I'd tidy up your game."  
Then he grabbed his sac and left the bar  
And the apprehension grew.  
"Il guess we'll make it three more pints,"  
Said Ingle, Potts and Crew.



### *The Ballad of the Padarn Lake Saloon*

These are the simple facts of the case  
And I guess I ought to know;  
They said the stranger was full of bull  
And I'm not denying so.  
But I somehow think, as I sip my drink,  
And strictly between us two,  
That the one who really knew the truth  
Was the lady that's known as Sue.



# Rock Therapy

**Norman Elliott**

Sally was maladjusted; the educational psychologist said so. Today he would be called emotionally, socially and behaviourally disturbed and probably confined to a secure unit. By the age of 12 he had attended eight schools leaving a trail of disaster, a headteacher with a heart attack and a whole staff threatening to resign unless he was immediately removed from the premises. He found the confines of a classroom impossible and was capable of wreaking unbelievable havoc in a matter of moments. His educational attainments were non-existent.

Ours was a small experimental school in beautiful countryside on the edge of the Peak District and Sally was its first pupil. Back in the late 1960s very few units like this existed.

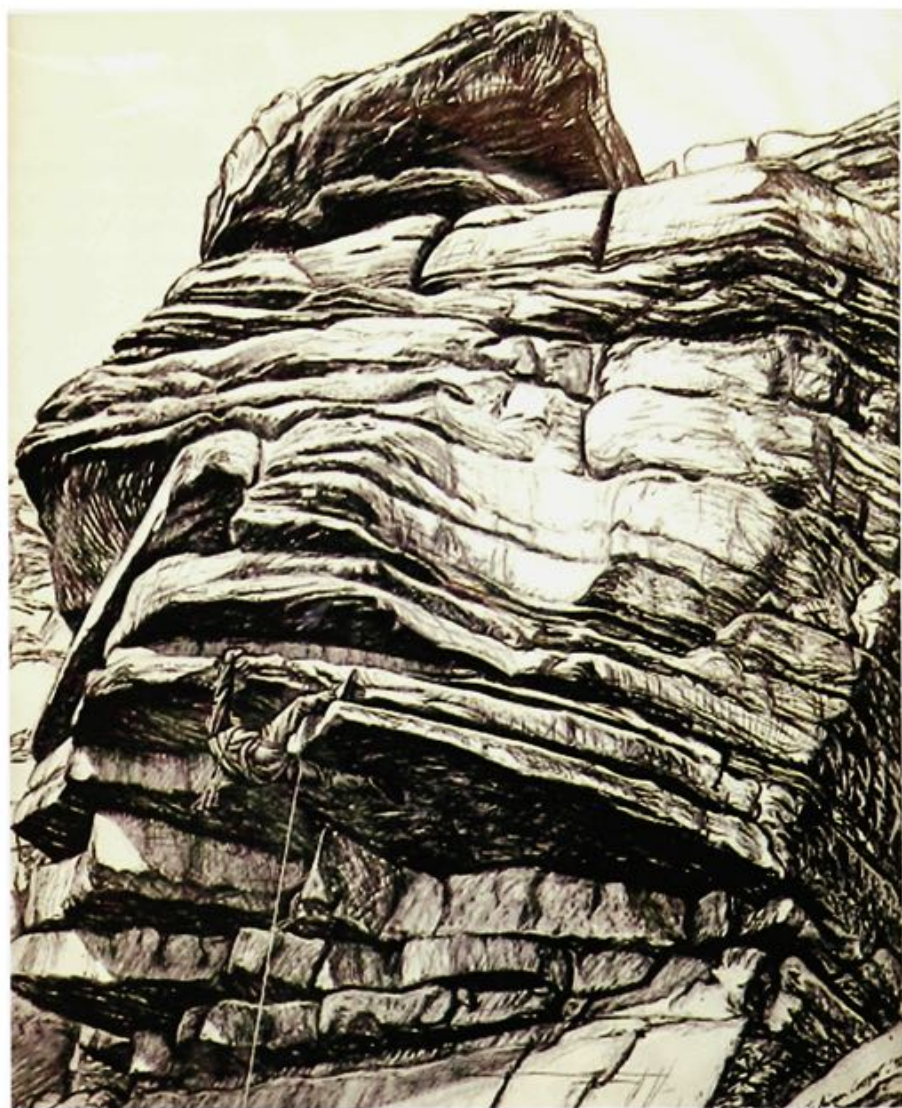
Sally was one of 10 children at the school, all of whom had been expelled from more than one mainstream school. Most of them responded quickly to what the school had to offer, but Sally refused stubbornly to engage with any of the activities, preferring to spend most of his time in the grounds trying to entice other children away from the learning environment. When confronted, he would immediately head for the roof. He had absolutely no fear and climbed with a grace and co-ordination which was astounding when one witnessed the clumsy movements and lack of physical skills he displayed during conventional games. We tried all sorts of ways to prevent these excursions but he only found another route – usually harder.

The anxiety that this provoked in the school's management was immense and it was seriously considered that he should be locked away. A persuasive visiting psychiatrist, however, assured us that he detected progress and that we should try and stay calm under fire. This was easier said than done and there were many lessons which were interrupted as Sally traversed by the classroom windows some 20ft above the ground sometimes trying to answer the teacher's question from outside the building. After some time he started to respond to this 'educational input' and would often climb in through the window, which was always left open, if the lesson caught his imagination. He would, however, still retreat to the coping stones if upset and once did immense damage to the slates after a distressing visit from his social worker.

He was not without a sense of humour and once, whilst out in the school minibus, was asked by a new boy what he would do if we saw his mother in town. "I'd run like hell" was the immediate response. "Why?" the other child asked. "Because she's been dead three years," replied Sally with a crooked grin.

On another occasion a small child was rapidly removed from morning assembly by the deputy head when it was discovered that he was playing with a large horseshoe up his vest. As he disappeared through the door at a great rate of knots, Sally was heard to say under his breath: "Didn't bring him much luck did it." Whillans





Flying Buttress Direct, Stanage by Julian Cooper

could not have done better.

In an attempt to channel his love for climbing, he was given an old pair of EBs and introduced to the gritstone edges on the nearby moors. He was soon seconding everything we could lead and basking in the admiration of the other kids who up till then had called him a nutter. One night on the television he saw a clip of Joe Brown leading *The Sloth* and from that moment nagged to "take us up an overhang."

And so it was that on a clear but cold winter's Stanage morning that we assembled below the overlaps of what is now known as *Flying Buttress Direct* which in those days contained a couple of pegs. It had just been led free by Paul Grey (1971) and had something of a reputation. Sally was tied on to a top rope and set off up the slab. He reached up round the first bulge and swung free. He seemed to hang there for ages before letting go, swinging out, and slowly turning, was lowered to the ground. There was no yelling or cursing, his usual response to frustration and as we all went to console him he did something that he had never been known to do before – he started to cry. Great aching sobs which caused the other kids to turn away in embarrassment and disbelief. He allowed his kindly care worker to envelop him in her big sheepskin coat and pour words of comfort down his neck. It was suggested that now would be a good time for a warm drink and sandwiches. This proved the distraction that everyone needed and the kids tucked in with the usual banter their backs to Sally who was still fighting back the tears.

Now, when Sally failed at anything his usual reaction was a face-saving rejection of that activity. So it came as a considerable surprise when a quiet voice said: "I want another go. Please, I want another go." He stood looking up at the roof and no persuasion by us that this might not be the best course of action had any impact. Reluctantly we tied him on again and in seconds he had raced up to the roof, reached out and executed what would a decade later be called a perfect heel hook. A quick pull through followed with a roll on to the ledge and to the cheers of us all he stood proudly upright. This was the first time we had seen any body do the route and 30 years ago for a young lad to climb it so fluently even on a top rope was quite an achievement. His key worker recorded that he was still smiling hours later has he snuggled down to sleep that night.

That climb changed Sally's life. Slowly, very painfully he started to read and write, his head always in the *Stanage* guidebook, asking about names, grades and other information. He spent hours copying and enlarging diagrams of the crags we had visited and gave them as presents to special people in his life. When another child ripped his charcoal drawings off the wall in a temper he was desperately upset, yet managed to keep his anger within acceptable limits. Over the next year his behaviour became much more integrated and he attended school every day. By then he rarely climbed over the building – just now and then as if to revisit old moves and prove to himself that he could still do them.

I lost touch with Sally when I went to work abroad, but some years ago on returning to this country I found myself lining up in the Nottingham marathon and there he was at the side of me. Our exchange was brief but warm, but then we were off and with a wave of his hand he left me way behind.



# Food and Mountains

**David Trelawny Ross**

Food. And mountains. When you put those two things together what's the first thing that comes into your head? What sort of memories do those two words trigger? Is it a night of awesome French cuisine in a tiny village up in the Alps? Or is it simply chewing through endless Power Bars? Does a be-your-own Jamie Oliver moment come to mind? Or just a heavy sense that there has only ever been endless peanut butter sandwiches? Can mountains and food be even talked about meaningfully in the same sentence? Does a love of the wildness of the mountains mean things of sensual pleasure have no place? Or is a trip to the mountains a big chance to experience new tastes and indulge your creativity away from the norms of everyday life?

I think my first food and mountain memory is chewing my way through a huge bar of Bourneville chocolate, unused 'emergency rations', in the back of a school minibus, aged 12, after a freezing, exhausting but unforgettable heave, in wind and cloud, to the top of Pen-y-fan in the Brecon Beacons one dark February. Not exactly haute cuisine. In my all time top ten would probably be meals like a seemingly bottomless fondue eaten in a quiet bar with weary satisfaction after my first Alpine route, on the Dibona in the Ecrins. Or a huge cous-cous squatting on a dirt floor in a village in the high Atlas after a day on Toubkal, the highest point in Northern Africa. Toward the top of the list would be near Skardu in a remote high valley in the Karakorum, on a trip when I was doing some teaching in Pakistan. After seven months, buffalo curry and naan bread were beginning to lose their exotic novelty. We arrived at a tiny village almost at the foot of a glacier, to be met by a man offering to show us his 'shop'. Slightly surprised by the thought that there might be anything resembling a shop this far up in the mountains, he unlocked a door and showed us his collection, bartered from returning expeditions on their way out from the mountains, the most recent of which had obviously been Italian. Minutes later we found ourselves leaving with arms loaded with boxes of pasta, apricot jam, huge chunks of parmesan, and sachets of instant cappuccino. The locals made a fantastic wholemeal bread, and we enjoyed a refreshing change from chewy buffalo, lounging by a bubbling stream, surrounded by endless rows of snowy peaks.

I don't know much about the science of nutrition, except the very basics. All I know is that we need a good balance of carbohydrate, for basic energy, and a bit of fat to slow down the release of that energy and enough protein for building muscles, important amino acids and other things. Getting the basics right is obviously important to survive long days which burn up lots of energy. But, beyond the basics, how imaginative can we be, to feed ourselves in a way that energises us without being at best boring and worst unpleasant? I have too many memories of shovelling down semi-rehydrated Beanfeasts and pasta everywhere from the Atlas to the Andes. Does



it have to be that unpleasant?

The subject of cooking and eating in the mountains rather obviously occupies a wide spectrum from a summer's walk in Alpine pastures to the extremities of high altitude mountaineering. The needs and constraints that shape the way food is consumed in each situation are so various that it would be pretty pointless to try and come up with a collective set of platitudes to cover the whole topic. Are there any general criteria relevant to the majority of food in mountain situations? If so, the list would, I suppose, include the following: the food needs to supply a good dose of energy and be balanced nutritionally; it needs to be easy to cook with a minimum number of ingredients; it needs to be quick so that it doesn't use a lot of fuel; it needs to be easily carried and not too fragile; ideally, the ingredients would be easily bought or gathered locally, it needs to look and taste good.

So, if you like eating and food as well as mountains, what food and mountain experiences make it into your top ten? What meals do you always cook as soon as you get to the campsite in the Alps? What essentials do you always carry to liven up dull food? I want you to send in your favourite recipes for eating meals in the mountains. They should loosely fit the criteria above. If enough readers send in enticing recipes we might be able to put together a Climber's Club Cookbook for the next journal. To get the ball rolling, I'm going to finish with a couple of my favourites from last summer in France.

### **Cheese fondue**

I don't know why I hadn't done this on trips before. I'd eaten loads in restaurants, but when a friend made it at the campsite in Ailefroide in the Ecrins, I realised what perfect food it was for cooking in the mountains. Really easy, tasty and very quick. I like having this sort of meal with a large salad, to get a nutritional balance, otherwise it can be a bit of a protein, fat, carbo overload.

You'll need, for two people:

- A clove of garlic, chopped into small pieces.
- Two to three handfuls of cheese, grated if possible, or cut into fairly small pieces. It might loosely fill quite a large bowl. Use the hard mountain cheeses: Beaufort, Comte or Gruyere. Emmental is fine, but try not to use too much of it since it doesn't have nearly as good a taste as the others.
- A glass of white wine
- Loads of bread cut up into bite size pieces

It'll take about fifteen minutes of fuel to cook.

One of you can cut up the bread, while the other is chopping or grating the cheese. When the bread and cheese are ready, one of you can get the salad ready while the other starts cooking. Pour some wine into a couple of glasses. Pause to enjoy the taste of the wine and take in whatever fabulous mountain scenery surrounds you. Pour another glass of wine into the pan, throw in the garlic and heat until the wine begins to boil. Now put a small handful of the cheese onto the wine, stir it into the wine until it melts. Gradually add the rest of the cheese, stirring all the time. Keep the

heat as low as you can, so that it doesn't burn on the bottom. The cheese should turn into a thick sauce. It may not look very beautiful, but it will taste fantastic. Once all the cheese is melted, turn the heat down as low as you can, and start eating. Grab a fork each, prong some bread and plunge into the cheese. If it starts to burn, you can take it off the heat. If it begins to solidify, you can put it back on the heat. As well as bread, you can of course plunge anything else into the fondue; pieces of carrot, raw mushroom, pepper and so on.

### **The salad**

Buying things for salads in France is so much nicer than in this country. You get about a hundred sorts of lettuce to choose from for a start. Throw whatever ingredients you like into your salad. I don't ever buy ready made dressings. It's so cheap to buy some olive oil, which you use for cooking, dipping etc., some wine vinegar, which you could drink if you get really desperate, and some Dijon mustard, which is a nice reminder of your trip, when you get home and it sits in your cupboard. Mix to taste, probably two parts oil to one of vinegar and one of mustard.

### **Stuffed globe courgettes**

I hadn't seen these before, looking like baby water-melons on the outside. They were really good, but you could use normal ones just as well.

You will need, for two people:

- Two courgettes
- A couple of cloves of garlic, chopped
- Some ham and or cheese, chopped into small pieces, and or some peanuts or olives; basically anything to give it some different flavours and protein
- A pack of tabbouleh or cous-cous salad
- A pack of carrot salad

Both of these last two ingredients are everywhere in even the smallest supermarkets in France. You could make your own obviously, but it is easier not to. It will take about fifteen minutes of fuel to cook.

Cut the courgettes in half around their 'equators' and scoop out the insides, leaving a shell about half an inch thick. Fry the garlic in some oil and when it's beginning to brown, fry the insides of the courgettes until they soften and begin to brown. Turn them into a bowl with the tabbouleh, or cous cous and whatever else you are using; ham, cheese etc and mix it all together. Add a little extra oil or vinaigrette if you feel it is a bit dry. Heat about an inch of water. When it is beginning to boil, place the courgette shells, in the water, scooped-out side facing up, so that they sort of poach in the water. You might have to be imaginative about fitting all the halves in at once. I think I even did them two at a time. After about five to ten minutes, they will be soft. Remove them from the water. To 'plate up', as they say in the trade, make a bed of carrot salad in each of two bowls or plates. Place two courgette halves on each, and stuff with the tabbouleh mixture. Decorate with a sprinkling of herbs, picked from the fields, or with a few more olives and enjoy the contrast of orange and green, and the

fresh summer flavours, as you watch the rock above your campsite glowing pink in the warm evening's sunset. There you have it. Food and mountains. Both can be as challenging and enjoyable, and as fulfilling and memorable as the other. Send in your recipe.



# Waiting for Gobbo

## An easy but highly exciting Dolomite classic in the Cadenspitze area

**Colin Goodey**

It was a relatively poor early summer season in the Dolomites, the winter and late spring snows were slow in melting leaving high crags and passes still banked-up come mid-July 2001. My wife and I had decided many moons ago as we drifted into middle age that the Dolomites could offer us all we could dream of in terms of beauty, medium grade classical climbs, long distance walks (Alta Vias), sport climbing and, of course, Italy's unique and famous Vie Ferrate. Add to this the rather better climate than the Western Alps, and for us, it has become Utopia.

I first visited the Dolomites in 1957, mostly to stare in wonder at such awesome faces as Cima Grande's North Wall with its *Brandler/Hasse* and *Comici* routes – so much bigger than The Great Orme where I grew up and began my climbing way back in 1946. I did, however, venture on to one classic route – the *Spigalo* on the Punta Fiammes along with some walking in order to see the extent of this wonderful 'new world'. Many seasons in the Western Alps followed and these in turn were followed by visits to the Caucasus, Africa, South America, Spain and Greece but always in my heart I knew that one day I would return to these beautiful mountains, sadly, I fear that I have left it too late to 'pick the sweetest plums'.

So, after several summers' walking, climbing and Ferrata-ing in several areas and not withstanding the ravages of old age, along with a worn out body and several injuries, we found ourselves waiting this July for our annual ration of Dolomite classics, one of which was *The North Face of Il Gobbo* in the Cadinspitzen area little frequented by English climbers according to the guardian of the delightful little Fonda Savio Hut where the intimidating lon first acquaintancel lady guardian speaks every European language that she might encounter and makes the most scrumptious apple strudel in the Tyrol. We had discovered these superb mountains a couple of years back whilst walking a beautiful trail between Misurina and the Tre Cima, The Bonacossa Way. This protected path had taken us into the heart of the most magical range of mountains that I had ever visited, carpeted with every conceivable Alpine flower and so colourfully described by Antonio Bertin in his guide of the eastern Dolomites '... a fairy-tale stone forest of slim towers, tapering pillars, torn pinnacles, sharp-edged blades, crenellated ridges, steep needles which shoot skywards like arrows...'.

Reading deeply around the area I was not surprised to discover that the Cadenspitze had cast its spell over some of the greatest climbers of their days as far

back as 1870: Wundt, Eotvos, Witzeman, Innerkofler, Dimai, Duller, Dibona, Cassin and Comici – all magic and evocative names.

Our aim was now to climb the North East Cadenspitz via the Via Ferrata Merlone and at least two of the classic routes made by one of the above 'greats'. We chose two impressive towers, the slim spectacular tower of Il Gobbo by its North Face and the huge squat tower above the cabin, the Torre Wundt, by its South Face. All we needed was fine weather and this was in short supply so, as on all Alpine holidays, the waiting game had begun.

The weather fluctuated with brief spells of sunshine and showers and on a couple of such days we snatched the famous *Hexstein Route* (Spigalo Sud) on the Sass di Stria with our daughter Kath and Christine Corner climbing ahead of us. We learned later, from Chrissie's dad, that a good friend, Ron James the British Guide, had been on the route a day or so before researching and updating his splendid Dolomite guidebook; the route is not to be missed. On another waiting day, we snatched the Merlone Via Ferrata on North East Cadenspitz and sat mesmerised by the awesome views from its magnificent summit, worth every one of the 262 iron rungs.

Days ran into weeks. The company of friends was superb and we spent time searching out and identifying many species of Alpine flowers. We visited 1915-18 Italian/Austrian war sites for which this part of the Dolomites is famous. The great mountaineer, Geoffrey Winthrop Young, lost his leg on this battle front and few British visitors to the Dolomites realise the intensity of the fighting that took place there in tunnels and on the high ridges. We eventually said goodbye to our friends who had to return to the UK, their holiday over, and continued our wait for Gobbo and Wundt.

The storms continued with crashing thunder and flashing lightning reverberating throughout the huge towers and walls reminding us dramatically of those dark years of fighting in these beautiful mountains. Kath and Chrissie's time was running out so they decided to go up to the Savio Hut in poor weather with the hope that in the event of a better next day they would at least be on the spot. We joined them and it turned out to be a wise decision, it rained in the night but the next day dawned fine. It had to be a ridge between two lows as the barometer continued to fall. The girls decided to go for both routes, but we knew it had to be one or the other, so we opted for the rather more spectacular but shorter Il Gobbo; the waiting was over.

As we set out for the Col di Diablo we met two Austrian climbers who had done the route the day before in rain and cloud. We asked about the route and they replied: "It is not hard, but it is beautifully scary." Kath and Chrissie rushed to the nearby start of Wundt as we began our plod upwards to the forcella where the climb begins.

Interestingly, Il Gobbo was first climbed in July 1902 by a large party of great distinction: Dimai, Siorpaes and Vertzi with the very famous baronesses Ilona and Rolanda von Eotvos from Hungary, great pioneers and explorers of the Dolomites but their amazing story is for another day.

When my wife and I arrived at the Forcella di Diablo after kicking steps for 500ft in old winter snow, our excitement rose as both the Goblin and the Devil grimly stared down at us as we stood alone on the deserted col. Will the weather hold? We

rationalised as clouds scudded around neighbouring summits and our barometer showed a steady fall. "We can easily beat the weather if we hurry, it's only four long pitches," I nervously reassured my wife.

The start did not leap out at us as we thought it might considering the now frequented line made in 1910 by Fanton and Vecellio and now retrobolted, we had to search out the shiny ring bolt marking the start on the flanking slabs of the Diablo and then I was quickly on my way, not difficult but I saw little evidence of retrobolting, only old threads.

Pitch 2, das kamen (the chimney) and what a chimney: it rose vertically into the sky and we immediately feared a thrutch was about to ensue but, on entering the cleft, an easy passage over blocks and chocks is discovered leading to a void at the far end leaving one with no alternative but to seek a way up the gloomy recesses of the chimney walls. It was dark inside and the side walls smooth and steep and I could see no obvious route upward initially but as my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I spied a Petzl bolt about 15ft up the left wall. This was the way but it was no cakewalk and one steps out of the chimney some 100ft above on to an exposed belay platform. Looking around after slamming into the more than adequate cemented-in belay rings, I didn't fancy any direction from there. 'God am I on the right route', I wondered?

I brought Sue up in silence and she, even following the rope, got lost in this evil 'kamen'. Pitch 3 and the route was trying to scare us by allowing us to think there was no easy solution for upward travel. "Where do you reckon the route goes from here?" I asked Sue secretly knowing it had to go up the vertical wall rising from across the top of the chimney. "There had better be a bolt or peg or good placement in that wall with that bloody drop below," I uttered with a mild dry throat. Like all great classic routes, the excitement mounts and diminishes, holds and solutions arrive just when you need them and the climb seems bigger than it really is. The step across the chimney from Diablo to Gobbo and the wall above did sport a shiny Petzl and I was very glad of it. The route then moved out to the right around a nose with vast exposure reminding me of *Main Wall* on Cynr Las then on easily upwards with no gear for 30/40ft to the penultimate belay ring.

Pitch 4 and one just knew that from there on, vertigo could very easily grab the faint-hearted. "Would you like to lead this final pitch to the summit?" I asked my wife. She was tempted but the awesome exposure that was increasing as the tower began to taper to what seemed an unaccommodating point made her decline. We understood from the description that there was a very fine airy ridge which led to the top and I now guessed it would be blade-like. I climbed easily up to this and peeped over and my stomach turned over as I mounted the one-foot wide 'ridge'. I remember thinking then that this route has got everything. The drop was pulling at me from three sides as I made my way delicately up this final blade, eyes fixed to the front hardly breathing. I noticed I was gripping the handholds harder than was necessary, this was now in a different league to *Main Wall*.

There was barely room for one person on the tiny crown of the Goblin and my sling and krab were secured to that welcome ring bolt faster than one could blink. At first it was difficult to look around and admire the view as the now 360° exposure



had a strange effect on my guts. "Climb when you're ready," I called down the void eventually and, seconds later, a white face appeared on the narrow arête, jaw set, eyes forward. Sue climbed quickly and neatly up to my perch on that amazing summit. "Oh God, how do we get off? Where does the ab go?"

Two or three long abseils would get us off. The first, off the summit ring, would take us freely through space down the void between Gobbo and Diablo – gripping. The others, whilst long, would be down the steep lower pitches without too much problem but not before fear, tears, frustration and prayers had occurred at our efforts to free our ropes from the summit ring bolt, the impossible had happened.

"Pull pink."

"No, it's bloody purple with the knot, don't you remember?"

Neither would budge.

"Let's stay calm, we need our ropes otherwise we are stuck up here." I rationalised.

"I think it's a case of twisted ropes rather than a knot jam, remember how you spun descending the void?"

I said with a great effort to stay calm. The hypothesis was correct and on separating and winding the ropes in the opposite direction to Sue's spin (we could not see any twisting from our position) they eventually became free enough for the pink rope to run smoothly down towards us, funny how you forget simple things when you're gripped.

The col was deserted when we eventually coiled the ropes and we had a blissful lunch but the drama was not over. My mobile phone rang starkly interrupting the tranquillity of this wonderful place. It was Mat Smith, my son-in law, calling from Sheffield to inform us that Neil Bentley climbing with our friend Paul Reeve, had suffered a dreadful accident whilst attempting *The Fisch* on the South Face of the Marmolada d'Ombretta. We had only been talking with them a day or so before in Corona when I had wished them both good luck on this great route. Our little adventure was soon forgotten and our thoughts for the rest of the day on our descent via the Bonocossa Way were with Neil.

# Helyg 1939

*Elliott Viney, whose obituary notice appears on another page, spent five years as a prisoner of war in Germany, from 1940 to 1945. In the camps he helped to organise a library, edited a camp magazine and arranged courses for his fellow officers in academic and professional subjects. He also kept up a journal and among his papers Emlyn Jones came across a number of articles of reminiscence and interest, including one of a weekend in Wales in 1939. After starting from his home in Aylesbury, Viney continues:*

As we pushed west, first the Breiddons lifted their three humps on our left and then the very visible border itself appeared as the long line of grassy hills rose to the west. The AA box at Gobowen marked 150 miles and a few minutes later we have circled over the bridge at Chirk and crossed the border. For a moment there is disillusion as the collieries are seen on the right, but soon we had turned finally west up Llangollen Valley and followed the A5 through Corwen, Yspilly Ifan and so the fork at Cerrig-y-Druidion, approaching which there is always a glorious sense of anticipation. The road streaks westward over the moor and as we topped a rise the mountains of Snowdon are suddenly there ahead, impossibly remote for all their 25 miles. Topped with snow they are just as exciting as the Alps from the Jura or the first sight of Kangchenjunga from Darjeeling. This view never tires me and it had not lost its thrill, even though we were cold, hungry and impatient. Luckily there is nothing to cause delay; Pentre Foelas, the Waterloo Bridge at Bettws and a halt at Morgan & Jones shop to lay in stocks. Beyond, the road climbs steeply, crosses the Llugwy and winds through Capel, leaving only the two mile climb up to Helyg, lying snugly between the river and the road.

Helyg has had three states. The original single hut, probably little different from when Borrow dismissed it as a 'filthy hovel' had given place, just before I first knew it in 1933, to the three-room building with an attic and a large, but seemly, garage on the far side of the road. Then in 1938 Donkin from the heights of the Presidency of the Club and, to a lesser extent of the Institution of Civil Engineers, had said "Let there be light". So now, when we entered the two others were there cooking their breakfast on the electric heaters and the geyser was steaming. Admirable as these new cooking arrangements were, I regretted the old familiar roar of the massed battery of 10 Primus stoves, with all their accompanying ritual of paraffin, petrol and 'prickers', on them. I had once cooked for 25 members of the OUMC for 10 days, without complaint from them either.

I am not very clear what Tony and I did that day; all I know is that we climbed somewhere in the Ogwen Valley, but it cannot have been a very memorable day. There was too much snow for serious climbing, but that we reached the top of Tryfan I do know. I find it difficult even on good days to remember more than the general outlines of climbs, details escape me or transpose themselves on to other routes. This does not worry me as an inexperienced rock-climber; to me it is more satisfactory to

say "It was a grand day, we climbed Tryfan" than "We made a new variation on the Grooved Arête, descended from Belle Vue Terrace and finished off with the traverse under heavy rain, but we didn't go to the top." It may be a fetish, but I hate not visiting the summit of a mountain on which I have been climbing. And I have seldom been so shocked as by the legendary story of H M Kelly climbing his brilliant series of new routes of Scafell for five years or so before, under persuasion, actually going to the top.

I do remember, too, that we did not visit the Milestone Buttfress on this particular day. The Milestone seldom gets its due. Because it is an easy climb, because it is worn white with scratches, because it is popular and hackneyed, the climbing intelligentsia class it with all other best-sellers, yet that it is an excellent climb is often overlooked by the beginner who cannot believe that his first climb can have been anything but trivial compared with his later triumphs. Like its discoverers, the Abrahams, it is too often dismissed with a shrug which refuses to acknowledge that these loquacious brothers had a finer eye for a sound climb than any other of the pioneers. Its supreme merits are its variety, crack, chimney, slab and ridge in a short space, its accessibility and its splendid rock. It is the ideal introduction both to rock-climbing and to Tryfan. Like scores of others, it was my first climb, but I honour it for more than sentimental reasons.

If we were on Tryfan, it is not unreasonable to suppose that we visited the Belle Vue Terrace as I never willingly missed it if I was on the mountain. It is one of those places which have a special niche in one's memory and affections, not so much for specific associations as from their intrinsic self, their very being where they are. The hidden pools on top of Haystacks is another of them. So is the Westmorland Cairn on Great Gable and Ling Crag on Crummock Water, all of these have pleasant – and unpleasant – associations, but all sufficiently unique without that reinforcement. The Terrace is the finest spot in North Wales, a miniature 'Rue des Bicyclettes', 30 square feet of security in a vertical world. Getting there, one's feet dangling down the North Buttfress (which Ivan Waller once climbed so quickly that a portable gramophone on the Terrace had time to play only one record) and easier rock above one gets that splendid feeling of remoteness which is not isolation, from the world and its troubles, a remoteness even greater than on top of a high peak in a mist for the one link with the world, the white strip of the Holyhead road far below, makes the remoteness more definite by its very presence. Of course, the Terrace is crowded with memories. I took Nigel up there on his first climb when he was 13 with James Fisher and John Gask. I took Johnny Shaw from the works on his first one, a year later in 1936, and he didn't like the last 12ft of traverse. I have basked in the sun and huddled in the rain; this time there was a sprinkling of snow and we did not stay long, but pushed on up to Adam and Eve on top.

The Bristly Ridge and indeed all the Glyders are at their best under snow, for the shapeless hillsides take shape under it, the rubble of boulders are hidden and the Castle of the Winds is transformed from a prickly stone-heap into an abstract composition of fantastic beauty. I think that this March Tony and I found the head of Twll Du and descended easily to Cwm Idwal, but on a previous visit when Alan was with us we had missed the place in the mist and going down the wrong slope were



far down into the Llanberis Valley before we got below the mist and found out our mistake and trudged up to Gorphwysfa to catch an opportune bus back to Capel. Cwm Idwal is a grim place; it seems to get so little sun and the old legend that no birds fly over the Llugwy, though not literally true in fact, is frequently borne out in practice and is in keeping with the spirit of the place. The Slabs have more memories even than Tryfan – an elaborate cats-cradle of ropes, parties and beginners on the first day of an Oxford meet or standing on an exiguous hold with David wrestling with the crux of the *Piton Route* muttering "I must be like a Russian" presumably an allusion to the *Planned Approach* for it certainly seemed like five years whilst I clung to that hold. Tales too of the Mallory girls running down the *Ordinary Route* whilst their mother exhorted them from the bottom not "to be careful" but "hurry or we will miss the train." Away at the head of the cwm are the rather indefinite cliffs of Glyder Fawr which have a special niche for me because of my first lead there on my second day's rock-climbing. David and I were left out, so nervously tossed up for the lead which I won and led him up a theoretical *Central Route* to my own amazement and infinite exhilaration. I only once led him again.

I have always felt sorry I have been so little on the Carnedd, but my few visits there have all been good. A solitary walk from Capel took me over, Pen Llithrig and Pen y Helgi Du to another of these 'places' like the Terrace, I mean the little grassy col above Ffynnon Llugwy.

The mock Oxford international expedition to Pen yr Olen Wen was in heavy snow with Senor Garco di Guana, M Cox, Oleg Poluninn the White Russian and James Fisher the Red and myself as leader. Alf Pollock from America and John Ryle representing the British, is another memory, luckily immortalised by the camera. But best of all, I think of those first four days which culminated in an all-day ascent of the *Great Gully* of Craig yr Ysfa with Andy d'Aeth, David and Ralph Hope; a really memorable day for us and one which finally and completely bound me to the mountains. It had the merit of getting progressively better all day culminating in the great cave pitch and emerging on to the summit of Llewelyn just before a glorious sunset. Even so there was still time to visit Carnedd Dafydd and race the darkness down the long slopes, aiming at the solitary light from Helyg.

Helyg – the impressions are too numerous to mention, but it is as a haven, as the solitary light seen in the dark from the hillside that is the insistent impression and I would not have it otherwise. I enjoy discomfort in the mountains only if I know there is food and a fire somewhere at the end. Other mountain reminiscences so often talk of happy evenings yarning round the fire and so forth, but I have always found the business of preparing and eating a big meal takes so long that I am ready for bed and too tired to talk. As for reading that is impossible except in very bad weather; ten to one the books that are religiously packed, the Oxford Verse, Tristram Shandy or whatever it is return slightly bent, but quite unread; mostly certainly the mountain anthologies do. If one reads at all it is the climbing guide or that masterpiece, the Helyg Log. Good talk there is, but it is rare. Richard Bell dates his first move to the left from a long evening at Helyg when Jack Longland and James Fisher argued out the *Brave New World*, I remember that evening, but I did not take part – I was washing up and getting tomorrow's food ready.

After experiences as a prisoner, one likes to think that one will pay more attention to food after the war. I doubt it. There is so little time either to prepare beforehand or when you are actually there. Certainly there was a certain monolony about our mountain cooking, but we didn't care provided there was plenty. Helyg was better than camping, for you were within reach of Hughes and Jones at Betws and Gwern-y-gof Isaf supplied milk. But even there, sausages, baked beans and fried beans were the staple meal, followed by tinned fruit.

During the 1935 OUMC. meet I was messing for 25 for 10 days. I remember we bought 30 big cartons of Force and the town of Betws' weekly supply of sausages as it came off the train, passing through we had told them to start cutting bacon and when we returned in an hour, the pile had reached the counter and the machine was red hot but it was all gone in a few days.

Sunday morning was fine as I ran down to the stream (the marshy ground squelching under my feet) and was in and out as quickly as possible. We drove round to Pen-y-Pass to try the Horseshoe. Quite frankly the day is a blank; I cannot even remember which way round we went. That hardly matters because both are good, according to your point of view. Those who like to get up quick and linger slowly home naturally finish over Lliwedd. The slow starters who keep the climax to the end reverse this and from the top of Crib Goch can run down to the inn. The ideal is to begin with a good climb of Lliwedd and not reach Snowdon till say six on a summer evening, when the crowds have gone and the mist has cleared. But, by whatever route and under any conditions it is a great walk.

On my second Oxford meet we did our best to wreck the railway and I know I carried a loose rail down to Llyn Du'r Arddu where I planted it on the little knoll; it may still be there. David has recorded his feelings at hearing the clank-clank of the metal on the scree, when he was struggling with the crux of *Longland's Climb* on that extraordinary day. We had left the cars at the 'Snowdon Ranger' and the four experts: John Hoyland, David, Alan and Ian Serrailier tried the climb armed only with some tattered typescript notes, whilst Oleg Polunin and I wandered over to the Far West Buttress. At six they were still below the crux; at seven I was on top, rather worried as the sun went down. During the long hours whilst the lights of Llanberis came on, then gradually went out, leaving a sense of unutterable loneliness and isolation, Oleg and I clambered about the upper buttress till eventually one rope reached John and the leading three joined us. Anthony had long been left below the crux; we could hear him singing. The moon helped us down the snow of the east terrace to where he could, with great difficulty, be got down, then a weary re-ascent of the terrace as the mist descended and I earned a permanent reputation as a route finder by leading them off the mountain and back to the inn. It was three when we met the rescue party near Pen-y-Gwryd and four before John fell asleep in his soup at Helyg. It is the one rock-climb I really want to do and the one that I really dread doing.

Snowdonia is not all North Wales; the outlying climbs, the *Great Slab* on Cwm Silyn for instance are still neglected as well as Edward's better finds in Llanberis Valley and elsewhere. Perhaps the new guidebooks will act as a decentralising agency after the war. There are plenty of summits to visit yet, in particular the elegant Moel

Hebog over Beddgelert. Its counterpart Moel Siabod is a splendid off-day mountain; it was this one that Nigel, aged 13, climbed alone and to prove his ascent to doubting elder brothers produced a photo featuring the cairn and one of his feet. North Wales is more fortunate in its low-lying wet day climbs, Little Tryfan, the Teyrn Bluffs and the unique recesses of Lockwood's *Chimney*. Away to the south and in full view are the Moelywyns and the thin ridge of Cnicht, badly mis-named 'the Welsh Matterhorn', but an admirable mountain.

On Easter Sunday in 1937 we could pick out from its summit the skiers on the South Face of Snowdon. There is the long low hills of Llyn which look so enticing in the evening sun and the walk from Carnedd Llewelyn north to the sea. In fact, I only know a handful of these North Welsh hills. The Arans, Berwyns, Arenigs are names and skylines; there is plenty yet to do but I have one outstanding memory – Cader Idris. The approach is different. I remember a rendezvous and vast breakfast at Welshpool and the great pass above Dinas Mawddwy. Certainly the ascent of Cader from the south is splendid, the cool green of the miniature alps and the sudden turn into the wildness round Llyn y Cae.

I think of it as a summer mountain, probably partly as a result of Arnold Lunn's chapter on his accident. Most of all I remember a winter drive home and the sense of plunging into the unknown as we suddenly turned off the road at Bala and headed up a very steep hill, which led on to the most barren of moorlands; it was dusk and our lights were failing and I felt miles from anywhere; it wasn't till we reached the friendly shelter of the King's Arms at Bridgnorth that I felt 'safe'. I get the same feeling whenever I leave North Wales in the later afternoon or evening. I got it this time as Tony and I drove east and the darkness chased us down to Llangollen, an irrational desire to get home quickly, to get out of Wales, over the border, through the marshes and only putting the Severn behind me at Bridgnorth puts it at rest.



# **'The Adventures of Wheech'**

**Robin Smith**

**1938-1962**

**Steve Dean**

In our consumer dominated, media influenced world, the term genius is so overused as to have become meaningless. The term has become devalued and yet British climbing has produced its share: Mummery, Herford, Kirkus, Dolphin and Brown spring to mind and the modern period has produced the likes of Livesey, Littlejohn, Cuthbertson and Dawes all advancing the game with great skill and desire. It is now forty years since we lost a key figure from that select group. The brilliant and enigmatic Robin Smith whose outstanding ability both on rock and ice left a legacy of wonderful routes that substantially upped the ante in the Scottish mountains. Not only was Robin astonishingly gifted as a climber and explorer of new routes, but he also possessed an outstanding intellect and an ability as a writer that has continued to inspire the generations that have followed him. Sadly, his potential as a man was never to be realised. On his first visit to the great ranges in the summer of 1962, he was killed with Wilf Noyce whilst descending Pik Garmo in the Pamirs. Robin was still only twenty-three. At the time of his death, he was regarded as probably the finest mountaineer to come out of Scotland since Harold Raeburn. His influence was enormous and is still felt to this day.

Robin Smith was born in India in 1938. His family was based there at the time as his father was working for the government as a naval architect. The family returned to Scotland after the war and resettled in the Edinburgh area. Robin was educated at George Watson's Boys College, where he gained a reputation for daring and unconventional behaviour as well as academic ability. In his later school years he took to hill-walking and then to rock-climbing with great enthusiasm, and by the time he left school in the summer of 1956, he already had an extensive knowledge of the Scottish mountains. He developed rapidly as a rock-climber, soon moving up to the top levels of the day. While still at school, Robin met Jimmy Marshall who was to be a very strong influence on his development as a climber. The Marshall brothers, Jimmy and Ronnie were key figures in a renaissance of Edinburgh climbing that had long been overdue. Their enthusiasm and drive rubbed off on Robin, and was later to also lead the way for Dougal Haston, who was also to be associated with Robin.

By the summer of 1956, Robin was already climbing Very Severe routes (the then full weight Scottish version of the grade) and was a regular visitor to the crags of The Cobbler and Glencoe. Academically he had done very well at school, and that



autumn he went to Edinburgh University to study philosophy. Just before starting at university, Robin had an adventure on Ben Nevis that was to demonstrate his increasing ambition and drive, and was to form the basis for one of his best known essays. That September he set off with two mates to climb Route 1 on Carn Dearg Buttress. With that quickly disposed of, they turned their attention to *The Crack*, Arnold Carsten's hard route on Raeburn's Buttress. The climb proved to be a rather fierce one and it had a mean reputation. The remainder of the party were able to retreat when things got too difficult, but Robin was benighted halfway up the route. He spent the night on a small ledge and made his escape the following morning, determined to avoid the ignominy of being rescued. Those at the CIC hut had clearly been worried, but this character-forming episode ended with no ill effects for Robin. He subsequently wrote about his experiences in an essay for the EUMC Journal called 'Twenty Four Hours'. As a piece, it is wonderfully carefree and humorous and points the way forward for his later writing: 'You rush off upwards, but as you rush you feel the wall swing smoothly through 30 degrees, and then you aren't rushing any more but are strung up on nasty little overhangs topped by the little sloping ledges...'

Robin seems to have warmed to University life quickly, and he soon made a major impact within the mountaineering club. His already considerable ability and strength of character soon emerged, and he became a key figure in what was at the time a focus of climbing talent that was to include characters like Dougal Haston, Andy Wightman and Robin Campbell. The Edinburgh University club at that time was to be as influential as that that grew up at Leeds in the 1970s, and it made a substantial contribution to climbing both in Scotland and the Alps. Writing in the SMC Journal, Jimmy Marshall described Robin at this time superbly: 'City wise, he was to be found clad in short Italian jacket, with trousered legs arrogantly bowed and tapering dynamically into once-pointed mangled suedes. Banana fingered hands, a quiz-zical smile 'What line today?' and the odd scar or two and you had Smith. Ready for anything, an extended 'jar'; a feast of jazz, a midnight slog over the Pentlands or the all-night study. Being truly nocturnal, most of his studies were done at night and, for that matter, a great percentage of his climbing'.

The spring of 1957 saw the start of Robin's new routes, with his audacious lead of *Blockhead* on Garbh Bheinn. Climbed with Victor Burton, this steep bold route still warrants at E1 grading, and is both strenuous and serious. It was to be the first of more than 40 new routes in Scotland over the next five years. Later that year Robin added new routes on Arran, *The Cobbler* (the hard *Glueless Groove*) and on Skye. More significantly, that summer Robin made his first trip to the Alps forming a partnership with the experienced Jim Clarkson. It was a good introduction for Robin and he climbed two particularly fine routes, the *Mer de Glace Face* on the Grepon, and the *South Ridge of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey*. He also soloed the *North North East Ridge of the Aiguille de l'M*. That summer also saw the first meeting of Robin and a young schoolboy called Dougal Haston. Dougal was camping in Glencoe with Jim Stenhouse, when Robin approached them and asked if they fancied doing a route.

**Opposite:** Frozen in time: Jimmy Marshall's (almost iconic) photograph of the young Robin Smith



Dougal later recalled the event: "We got out of the tent to find a thick-set, medium-height figure with incredibly bowed legs. He was dressed in the then fashionable oilskin jacket, sou'wester and wellington boots."

Robin led them up *Revelation* on Slime Wall on the Buachaille, a route only put up the year before. It was an important step for Dougal and the beginning of a strong but turbulent friendship with Robin.

At the end of the year Robin made his first new route in winter, with *Long Chimney* on the Cuneiform Buttress on the Buachaille. Climbed with Derek Leaver, it is still a respectable and steep grade IV ice climb. That winter, Robin gained a lot of snow and ice experience that was to serve him well in the years ahead. In time he was to become a brilliant ice-climber.

At Easter 1958, Robin and Dougal paid a visit to the crags of Snowdonia. It was a wet and windy weekend, as recalled by Richard McHardy: "I'd met Dougal the year before in Glen Brittle. He was struggling up V Diffs and Severs like the rest of us. He had obviously improved, and had this very good lad with him, Robin. Despite the weather, Robin ended up leading things like *Cenotaph Corner*, *Cemetery Gates*, *Hangover*, *The Grooves*, *Diagonal* and *Sickle*. This was very impressive as they were all done in poor conditions."

Robin's lead of *Cenotaph Corner* was only about the seventh or eighth ascent, and was a long, dour struggle in very wet conditions.\* The trip to Wales established Robin's reputation, and with it came the realisation that on rock he was as good as anyone around at the time. A few weeks later he travelled down to the Lakes, and with Derek Leaver added two new routes in a day on the East Buttress of Scafell. *Leverage* was a good route, but *Chartreuse* was even finer and both still retain an Extreme grade.

By the end of June further exploration had resulted in the first ascent of *July Crack* in Glencoe. In addition, Robin had also produced the main part of his first great route in Scotland. The climb in question was *YoYo*. Robin climbed what was to be the first 120ft of the route with David Hughes, in awful conditions and completed the route the following year. The first pitch of *YoYo* is the crux, and it is probably never dry. The story goes that Robin climbed it using a towel to try and dry the holds. The route became an absolute classic taking a striking line up the North Face of Aonach Dubh in Glencoe. A new star had arrived.

That June also saw the creation of perhaps Robin's greatest rock route, *Shibboleth* on Slime Wall on Buachaille Etive Mor. Robin had looked at the line for some time and produced a brilliant route of great boldness (for the time) and extreme difficulty. *Shibboleth* takes the prominent groove line up Slime Wall above the start of *Raven's Gully*. It is a highly impressive place and this climb more than most says much about Robin's mental strength and determination. The first ascent was marked by an accident to Robin's partner on the route, Andrew Fraser, who suffered a broken leg on one of the upper pitches. A ribald rescue followed through the night before Andrew made it to hospital. *Shibboleth* was a climb at the highest technical level of the day and was particularly notable for its poor level of protection. In the

\* Later immortalised in Tony Smythe's *Rockclimbers in Action in Snowdonia*.

opinion of some, it was the hardest route in Britain at the time. Modern protection has only slightly tamed *Shibboleth*, and even today the current E2 grade is thought to be harsh by some. It was to be many years before the route was frequently climbed, and it has scared a lot of people.

Robin returned to Chamonix that summer and picked off a couple of top quality rock routes. With Trevor Jones, he made the second complete ascent of the *Brown-Whillans* route on the Blaitière in two days, taking advantage of good weather. Trevor remembered an amusing incident where they were preparing for a bivouac and he noticed that Robin didn't have a duvet. Robin simply replied: "It's Dougal's turn to use it this week." He also teamed up with Morty Smith to make a swift ascent of the *West Face of the Dru*. These two climbs effectively placed Robin in the forefront of British alpinism at that time.

An interesting feature of Robin's student life was the friendship he developed with the veteran of the Brenva Face and Nanda Devi T Graham Brown. Brown was already well into his 70s when he and Robin first met and was the EUMC Vice President. He had a house in Manor Place, Edinburgh where he lived in some chaos together with numerous lodgers, almost always people associated with the University mountaineering club. Brown took a great interest in the activities of the club, and became a mentor to Robin. He became increasingly eccentric as he grew older and Robin enjoyed his company enormously. Brown possessed a large library and a great knowledge of the Alps, which he readily passed on to the club members.

In the early part of 1959 Robin made two notable winter ascents on Ben Nevis with Dick Holt. In January they climbed the serious *Tower Face of Comb Butress*, and then followed that with the first winter ascent of the *Orion Face*. Later that summer Robin produced appropriate finishing pitches for both *YoYo* and *Shibboleth* in Glencoe, but the great events of that year came later. That summer Robin returned to Chamonix, and with the fellow Scot Gunn Clarke succeeded in making the first British ascent of the *Walker Spur* on the Grand Jorasses. They reached the top of this magnificent route just a day ahead of a team composed of Don Whillans, Hamish MacInnes, Les Brown and John Streetly. The ascents by the two teams represented a huge psychological breakthrough for British Alpinists such was the status of the route at that time. It was a fine achievement by Robin and Gunn, and Robin later recorded it in his essay for the EUMC Journal 'Walking in the Alps'.

'... and we came out on the final crest of the spur running up into the *Pointe Walker*. It cut like a knife down either side, and clouds were blowing out above us over the summit ridge. Sometimes it looked like 100 feet, sometimes like 1000, then we were into and over the cornice, wallowing in soft snow and out of France into Italy'.

Full of ambition, Robin headed for Grindelwald and a rendezvous with Dougal Haston to climb the *North Wall* of the Eiger (at that time without a British ascent.) Alas it was not to be; Dougal had all his gear stolen and returned home much to Robin's annoyance. It was probably this incident that led to the tension between them, when they teamed up that September to make the first ascent of *The Bat* on Carn Dearg, Ben Nevis. By all accounts the climb was an epic and, for the time, very hard and strenuous (it is still graded E2 more than 40 years on.) The climb became the subject



**Above:** The first two teams to climb the Walker Spur on the Grandes Jorasses, photographed in Courmayeur in August 1959. L to R: Don Whillans, Les Brown, Robin Smith, Gunn Clarke and John Streetly. The photo was possibly taken by the other team member Hamish MacInnes and is reproduced here by courtesy of Audrey Whillans. Of the group, only Brown and MacInnes are still alive.

of what is probably Robin's best known essay 'The Bat and the Wicked' published in the SMC Journal. English raiders had already put up *Sassenach* (1954) and *Centurion* (1956) on this superb buttress, so Scottish pride was at stake. Robin takes up the story as Dougal is having an epic, and shouts that he is coming off: 'It began under control as the bit of news "I'm off", but it must have caught in the wind, for it grew like a wailing siren to a blood curdling scream as a black and bat-like shape came hurtling over the roof with legs splayed like webbed wings and hands hooked like a vampire'. Still regarded as mean, strenuous and awkward, the first ascent of *The Bat* was another great effort and was to become the subject of an excellent film made in 1979 by Jim Curran and Tony Riley.

That same month, Robin partnered John Cunningham of the Creag Dubh to produce the bold *Long Wait* on the Etive Slabs. This fine route is still graded E2 and contains a lot of 5b climbing in its 700ft. What a team though, Cunningham and Smith. The events of that summer firmly placed Robin in the top echelon of British climbing both at home, and in the Alps.

The winter of 1959/60 was quite a hard one in the Scottish highlands and good snow and ice conditions occurred for several weeks. In the February, Robin spent a week at the CIC hut with Jimmy Marshall climbing on Ben Nevis. It was to be a week that re-defined the art of Scottish winter climbing and the pressure was on as Jimmy was to be married the following month. They started with the first ascent of



Great Chimney on Tower Ridge (a tough Grade IV). The following day (Sunday) saw the first ascent of *Minus Three Gully* (IV) followed by a moonlight descent to the hut. The next day they climbed the excellent *Gardylloo Buttress* (V) sharing one axe! This brilliant route was not repeated for 11 years. On the Tuesday, they made the first winter ascent of *Raeburn's Route* on Observatory Buttress (IV) a particularly steep ice route, but even better was to follow. The following day, after a late start, they stormed up *Point Five Gully* to make the second ascent in only seven hours. After the contentious first ascent, Scottish pride was restored. This was followed by a day off; a walk over the Grey Corries in a blizzard, Spean Bridge, the pub and near arrest. They returned to the CIC by midnight. On the Friday they made the first winter ascent of *Pigott's Route* on Comb Buttress (hard IV), but had saved the best for last. On the Saturday they made the first winter ascent of *Orion Face Direct* (V) one of the great Scottish winter routes. Hard climbing, difficult route finding, poor stances and belays combined with an Alpine scale made this a tour de force by two brilliant climbers. Winter climbing in Britain was never the same again; their efforts that week represented perhaps the highest level of step cutting technique. Their experiences that week resulted in some outstanding writing on the subject. Robin's *'The Old Man and the Mountains'* written for the EUMC Journal is full of humour and obvious respect for Jimmy Marshall's ability as an ice climber. Marshall's own *'Garde de Glace'* and *'Orion Face'* (both written for the SMC Journal) are as fine, and make gripping and entertaining reading. The following month, Robin made the second ascent of *Zero Gully*, with Dougal Haston and Andy Wightman.

The time is perhaps appropriate to touch briefly on the subject of Robin as a writer. His series of pieces for both the EUMC Journal and the SMC Journal are one of the treasures of British mountain writing. His writing has a delightful, youthful urgency but that is balanced with a steady objectivity and ready humour stressing the importance of having a good time, whatever the circumstances. There is never a hint of egotistical comment, but rather Robin tends to under state the often desperate situations that form the settings for his essays. There is a strong argument for his work to be published together one day, for it repays constant re-reading, and for someone so young, its quality is outstanding.

The summer of 1960 saw Robin establish some more new routes on Scottish rock. Notable among these were *Thunder Rib* on Skye, *Gob* on Carmore Crag climbed with Dougal Haston and the bold *Marshall's Wall* in Glencoe. Later that summer, Robin returned to the Alps and made an important ascent in the Oberland. Climbing with Brian Wakefield, he made the first British ascent of the very serious Welzenbach Route on the Gross Fiescherwand. They had an epic on this, and it led to the writing of one of Robin's best-loved pieces *'Goofy's Last Climb'*. Despite the title, Robin's partner that day still climbs hard. Robin also attempted the unclimbed South East Face of the Fou with Joe Brown and Dennis Gray but they were unsuccessful. That summer Robin also climbed with a group of Russian climbers who were visiting Scotland. This was to result in an invitation to climb in the Pamirs in two years time.

The following year (1961) was to be a little more subdued for Robin, as his efforts went into completing his University course that summer. He achieved a good degree, and gained a place at London University to study for a PhD starting in the

autumn of 1962. In climbing terms Robin's best effort that summer was the first ascent of *Big Top* on Aonach Dubh in Glencoe, climbed with Jimmy Gardner. This superb and open climb remains one of the finest in the valley and has delighted hundreds of climbers over the years. That summer Robin travelled out to Zermatt where he and Dougal attempted the North Face of the Matterhorn. They made very rapid progress up the route, but ended up retreating as a storm came in. On the descent they met Toni Hiebler, who went on to make the first winter ascent of the Eigerwand. Hiebler noticed that Robin and Dougal were wearing thin sweaters and jeans and coined the phrase 'Das blue jeans' to describe British Climbers. The term stayed in use throughout the 60s and reflected some Continental opinions about the irreverence of British Alpinists at the time!

Undeterred by the Matterhorn experience, Robin and Dougal headed east to the Dolomites. There they made the first British ascent of the very difficult and long Swiss-Italian Direct on the Cima Ovest. They had two cold bivouacs on the route, but it was a fine achievement for the time and formed the subject of Robin's tale 'Snakes and Ladders'. That autumn saw more new routes in Scotland, including the excellent *Clean Sweep* on Hell's Lum Crag in the Cairngorms, climbed with Graham Tiso, and *Boggle* an early Extreme on Ben Eighe in Torridon, climbed with Andy Wightman.

Robin spent much of the winter of 1961-2 working as a hospital porter. A winter trip to Chamonix with Dougal proved fruitless, as neither of them could ski. In the spring he almost grabbed the first ascent of *Central Pillar* on the Esk Buttress (climbed two weeks later by Pete Crew and Mike Owen). Robin, accompanied by Ronnie Marshall, Jim Moriarty and Graham Tiso, had got a long way up the route but was defeated by failing light and had to retreat.

Robin had been selected for a British expedition to the Pamirs Range in Russia, that summer. The team was led by John Hunt, and included Malcolm Slesser, Wilf Noyce, Joe Brown, Ian McNaught Davis and Ted Wrangham. In April 1962, Robin made his last contribution to climbing in Glencoe with the very hard *Girdle Traverse of the North Face of Aonach Dubh*. Climbed over a number of days with Dougal Haston, Robin Campbell and Neil Macniven, this was something of an epic with its share of poor rock and great exposure. In June, just before his departure for the Pamirs, Robin teamed up with Davey Agnew to climb the very fine *Needle on Shelter Stone Crag*. It was to be his last new route, and is a particularly fine one in a majestic setting, a fitting culmination to a superb period of exploration.

Alas tragedy was to strike early in the Pamirs expedition. Robin and Wilf were descending with two Russian climbers after a successful ascent of *Pik Garmo*. The Russians stopped to put on crampons, while Robin and Wilf roped up and continued their descent. Soon after, they both fell 4,000 feet to an ice shelf below where they were buried two days later. Wilf, a cousin of Colin Kirkus, was in his late 40s and had intended this to be his last expedition. Robin was still only 23 at the time of his death.

After the expedition, Eugene Gippenreiter, one of the principle mountaineers from Russia wrote to the Alpine Club and the SMC: 'It is with courage that Mrs M C B Smith met the news about the tragic death of her son Robin in the Pamirs. She wrote to her friends in Moscow that she was not rich and had only a small house but there

would always be a bed for one or two Soviet climbers in her house'.

It is the brevity of Robin's life that leaves one wondering what might have been. His ability, fitness and drive were the equal of anyone at that time. Had he taken up his post at London University as planned, it is likely that he would have soon gravitated towards winter climbing in the Alps and the history of climbing in Wales (particularly on Gogarth) might also have been very different. He and Dougal Haston were planning to climb the North Wall of the Eiger on Robin's return from Russia, and the future was full of opportunities. Dougal was deeply upset by Robin's death. He went on to become perhaps Britain's finest mountaineer, with the Eiger Direct, Annapurna and Everest leading to world fame. In a strange way, an important part of Robin's legacy was the obvious influence he had on his mate Dougal. Sadly, Dougal was to die while still only in his 30s skiing off-piste in Switzerland in 1977.

Robin's nickname, Wheech, seems to date from his time at University and is strangely appropriate. He would be 62 now, but the face that stares back from Jimmy Marshall's excellent portrait is not only questioning, but is eternally young. His loss as a climber and as a writer is beyond measure and this is reflected by the esteem in which his memory is still held. To conclude, I can do no better than use the affectionate words of the EUMC Journal in describing Robin: 'His achievements were secondary to his enthusiasm for the hills. He was active nearly every weekend regardless of conditions, whether making marathon hillwalks, repelling Sassenachs in the rain, or cutting steps up Tower Cleft with the CIC coal shovel. The mood of happy disorganisation in which he climbed is reflected in his articles. Written in an original and humorous style, they reveal his character far better than any eulogy. Even writing these lines, one can hear his sardonic laughter'.

Particular thanks to Robin Campbell, Ken Crocket, Jimmy Cruickshank, Dennis Gray and Jimmy Marshall.



# Eustace Thomas: Manchester Mountaineer

**Steve Dean**

*'I have been accused, too, of rushing things; but if one begins a long Alpine programme at fifty-four years of age there surely is no time to waste'.*

*Eustace Thomas (1928)*

Despite having climbed, walked and run in the High Peak for many years, nothing had prepared me for the depth of fatigue I was now experiencing. A party of four of us were some 35 miles into an April circuit of the infamous Derwent Watershed a 40-mile bog trot over the roughest and highest hills of the Peak district. It was turning dark as we laboured along the Mam Tor-Lose Hill ridge and I for one desperately wanted to be back at the car down at the Yorkshire Bridge. Some hours ago, in the depths of Bleaklow, I had made a strong mental note that 40-mile bog trots across Howden, Bleaklow and Kinder with a 'sack and big boots, were just too tough for me. Someone's bright idea that it would be perfect Alpine training was now being roundly cursed. Later, as we collapsed into the pub and the glow of achievement arrived, I began to recall the wonderful loneliness of much of the route and started to wonder about its origins.

Some initial research told me that the Derwent Watershed Walk was the invention of Eustace Thomas of the Manchester Rucksack Club and that he first did the route in 1918 when he was already in his 50s. Eustace had my profound admiration; all we had to do was haul ourselves around the route. In his day, he and his companions would also have been busy dodging gamekeepers for much of the way. Further delving on my part revealed what an extraordinary mountaineer and character Eustace Thomas was.

He was born in London, in 1869, one of a large family, and his father worked as a tax inspector. Eustace spent much of his boyhood in Battersea and attended the City of London School. Later he became a student at Finsbury Technical College walking from Battersea to Finsbury and back every day with his brother Bertram. Whilst at the college, where he obtained a good degree and later a lecturing post, he was a contemporary of Owen Glynn Jones. In his early life he appeared to have no interest in mountaineering, but all this was to change when at the age of 32 he moved up to Manchester to join his brother Bertram who was setting up in business as an electrical engineer and contractor. They were later joined by another brother Frank, and Bertram Thomas (Engineers) Ltd was to become highly successful in the years ahead.

The company was particularly involved in the design and manufacture of heavy switchgear and their equipment came to be used all over the world. Eustace's role was to devise methods of dealing with the constant flow of customers' problems and to organise the workshops to deal with them. He had considerable scientific talent and great mental energy, which enabled him to make a great contribution to the development of the company. In due course he was rewarded with a comfortable income that enabled him to travel and pursue his many interests.

By the time Eustace had reached his late 30s, he was seriously overworking and his health was suffering. He had digestive problems and trouble with his feet and it seemed that the ravages of middle age were upon him. He responded initially by taking up race walking, and trained himself to become a good competitor. However, in 1909 when Eustace was already 40 a friend introduced him to the Manchester Rucksack Club and it was to transform his life. Initially his activity on the hills was quite limited although it did include some visits to the Alps, but gradually he became more involved with the activities of the club and was introduced to its traditions of hard walking on the Pennine moors. Despite already being in his late 40s, a flame was ignited in Eustace and he rapidly became the hardest hill-walker around. In 1918 he and Norman Begg repeated Cecil Dawson's Colne-Buxton walk of over 50 miles in under 18 hours and this was the beginning of many such hard efforts.

The long-legged Eustace approached bog trotting in a scientific and logical manner. He spent much time studying the terrain of prospective routes, but great care was also taken over matters of diet and light footwear. This attention to detail was to serve him particularly well, as he turned his attention to the higher mountains both in Britain and later the Alps.

Following the Colne-Buxton trip, Eustace planned and executed the classic bog trot of the Derwent Watershed, which was achieved in the autumn of 1918. In *High Peak* Eric Byne and Geoff Sutton described the event thus:

'His next great feat was accomplished with Norman Begg, Alf Schanning, William Walker and Bill Humphrey, when they planned and executed the Derwent Watershed walk, one of the stiffest and most notable bog trots in the Pennines. It is rough moorland from start to finish, exceptionally wild in character, and according to Thomas "included some very sharp corners." The distance of thirty-seven and a half miles gives no indication of the toughness of the course. They started from the Yorkshire Bridge Inn near Bamford at 5 am. The route lay over the summit of Win Hill, down into the Hope-Edale valley, up again to Lose Hill, then along the Mam Tor ridge and Rushup Edge to Kinderlow, then down the Kinder river to the downfall. Next one of the sharp corners led to Mill Hill, Ahop Head, Featherbed Top and the Snake Road. At this point the party were all together and ahead of schedule, but Bleaklow as always, was the crux. Despite good weather the long crossing by way of Bleaklow Head, Bleaklow Stones, Swain's Head and Rocking Stones to Margery Hill took its toll of energy. The party began to lag, and Thomas, still accompanied by the cheery Norman Begg, began to forge ahead. Round Howden Chest they swept steadily on, then crossed to Strines Edge and the Sheffield Road. They trotted down the last steep slope to the Yorkshire Bridge inn at 4.39 p.m., 11 hours 39 minutes after they had set out, and exactly 41 minutes ahead of schedule. The remainder of the party arrived 58

minutes later'

The achievement of this very hard course, dodging gamekeepers en route, in under 12 hours was considerable anyone in doubt is invited to try it! Every February the Derwent Watershed now forms the route for a tough orienteering event in which four-person teams attempt to cover the course, largely at night. The top teams of fellrunners get around in about nine hours and in summer it has been run considerably quicker than that. I think Eustace would have been highly impressed by such speed over such unforgiving country.

Encouraged by his experiences on the Pennine moors, Eustace began to look further afield and initially turned his attention to the mountains of Snowdonia, where in 1919 he made what is thought to be the first complete round of the 14 3,000ft summits. This tough outing of 25 miles is now a classic and much sought after by competent hill-walkers. That same year, he also made his first attempt at the Lake District Fell Record, which had been established in 1905 by Dr A W Wakefield. The first attempt by Eustace ended in failure, when deprived of the partnership of Norman Begg (who departed for the USA earlier that year) he attempted the round alone. He succeeded in completing Wakefield's course, but was well outside the 24 hours allowed. With typical thoroughness, he set about preparing for a further attempt the following summer. This time, Eustace completed Wakefield's route in under 22 hours but did not regard the record as broken, as the course had not been extended. However, as a consequence of meeting A W Wakefield, Eustace was introduced later that year to Geoffrey Winthrop Young and the two formed a great friendship that was to last until Young's death in 1958. Two further attempts were made on the Fell record by him in 1921, but were thwarted by bad weather.

Eustace was finally successful at extending Wakefield's record when in June 1922 he succeeded in covering 66½ miles and 25,000ft of ascent within the allowed 24 hours. The weather was misty and drizzly for most of the way, but the conditions suited Eustace and he also had a very good knowledge of the course coupled with many months of careful preparation.

In the Rucksack Club Journal the following year, Eustace attempted to put this kind of activity into context in relation to mountaineering as a whole. There is a wisdom and humility in his words written 76 years ago: 'It would appear that this test makes as near an approach to the conditions of the greater mountaineering as this country can afford. There are no new ascents possible, and no glaciers, but there were the difficulties of cold, fog, and rain, and of a journey through the mountains at night without moon. The course made a severe call on endurance in virtue of the great height ascended and the distance travelled. Friends acted as porters, and carried food and extras-this being a precedent already established. There was no snow at this time of year. On other occasions, even this difficulty has been added by undertaking a long course in winter and at night, and meeting very serious conditions on ground not previously traversed. This is another variation of the same game, and is real mountaineering adventure under the conditions available in England'.

It was a very fine achievement by Eustace to improve on Wakefield's record, and he also continued for a further four and half hours to cover a total of 30,000ft of ascent. This level of performance over the Lakeland Fells was not improved upon



until June 1932 and the emergence of the Keswick fellrunner Bob Graham. To this day, the Bob Graham Round, (some 72 miles, 27,000 of ascent, over 42 peaks over 2,000ft all in 24 hours) remains a hard challenge for fellrunners and requires great fitness both physically and mentally.

Following on from the Fell Record, Eustace set his sights further afield. In the summer of 1923 he made his first serious visit to the Alps, already aged 54. Previously, Eustace had enjoyed a number of casual holidays in the Alps, but that year he spent five weeks in the mountains and formed a huge attachment to them. He acquired the services of the guides Joseph Knubel and Alexander Lagger, and in the course of the holiday climbed 24 major summits. These included the Charmoz, Grepon and Blaitière done in a single day, and likewise the Jungfrau, Monch and Gross Fieserhorn. In three hard days, they also traversed the Zinal Rothorn, Dent Blanche (by the *Viereselgrat*) and the Matterhorn (by the *Zmutt Ridgel*) before returning to Zermatt. Eustace's account of that holiday in the Rucksack Club Journal, makes extraordinary reading and it is clear that he had become smitten by the magic of the Alps. That year he became a member of the Alpine Club and resolved to return to the Alps the following year. In the course of the 1923 season, Eustace had formed a firm friendship, with Joseph Knubel and they were to climb much together in the years ahead. Eustace's comments about guided climbing are considerate, and honest: 'In final retrospect, the writer feels some regret at the number of inactive days; there were fifteen or sixteen on which little more was done than to walk up to a hut. A keen party of amateurs might have fitted some of these in and taken the risk of overdoing it. It would not have been fair to expect more from professional guides, whose living depends on keeping fit, and who, in any case, were doing cheerfully a good deal more than is at all customary. Moreover, the chief guide carried a responsibility from which the writer was free'.

Eustace commenced the summer of 1924, by becoming the first person to complete the Scottish 4,000ft peaks in 24 hours (using a car between Fort William and the Cairngorms.) He followed this by returning to the Alps and again procured the services of Joseph Knubel. It would seem that the suggestion of doing all the 4,000m peaks came from Knubel but it was a plan on a grand scale likely to appeal to Eustace. He adopted a list that had been compiled by Captain Farrar and made some additions of his own. Initially he climbed always with Knubel, and completed his first list of summits in 1928. One particular highlight that summer, was the climbing of all four great ridges on the south side of Mont Blanc (the *Brouillard*, the *Innominate*, the *Peuterey* and the *Brenval* in only 13 days. At that time he and Knubel were the first people to traverse them all, a very fine achievement for the time.

However, the 4,000ers were not quite finished. Eustace kept on finding new ones that had to be done and in the meantime a new route had been made on Mont Blanc du Tacul linking several points above 4,000m. This climb, the traverse of the Aiguilles du Diable, was first done in August 1928 and combined great length and isolation, with technical difficulty and much abseiling. Eustace had completed all the other 4,000m peaks by August 1930, and earlier attempts at the Aiguilles du Diable had been thwarted by poor conditions. He had to wait until the summer of 1932, when he was involved in the third ascent of this superb Alpine route. Unable to

acquire the services of Joseph Knubel, Eustace teamed up with the guide Alexander Tangwalder, and together they did a training route (albeit a new one) on the Moine. From there they obtained good views of the Aiguilles du Diable, which appeared in reasonable condition. That night at the Montanvers they met the Chamonix guide, George Cachat, who had been on the first ascent four years previously. He agreed to join them and they set off up the route two days later from the Torino Hut. They made reasonable time up to the Col du Diable and on to the ridge proper. Initially, the two guides had thought they might only achieve part of the route, but to Eustace's joy, they completed the climb arriving at the summit of Mont Blanc du Tacul late in the afternoon. They arrived exhausted at the Requin Hut at 8pm that night, after an 18-hour day. At the age of almost 63, Eustace had completed all the Alpine 4,000m peaks. He was the first British climber to achieve this (by far) and only the fourth or fifth person to climb them (although none of the previous efforts had included the Aiguille du Diable.) The remainder of that 1932 holiday included ascents of the *Mer de Glace* Face of the Grepon, and then a journey east to the Dolomites to climb several routes including a traverse of the Vajolet Towers an ascent of the Third Sella Tower, and the *North Face* of the Langkofel.

Aside from his considerable Alpine achievements, Eustace was very active within the Rucksack Club and was President in 1924. He had a great gift for friendship, and his social functions were enjoyed by the club membership for many years. He was well aware of the rapid developments of British climbing at this time, and enjoyed the friendship of key figures such as Fred Pigott, Morley Wood, Maurice Linnell, A B Hargreaves and Colin Kirkus. During the 1930s he also became involved in the increasing concern about accidents and rescue facilities in the British mountains. Particularly bad accidents at Laddow and on Crib Goch highlighted the problem, and in 1932 the Rucksack Club appointed a Stretcher Sub-Committee which eventually led to the formation of the Mountain Rescue Committee. Eustace contributed hugely to this urgently needed work by designing and manufacturing a stretcher suitable for mountain rescue work. With its extending handles and sledge runners 'The Thomas Stretcher' embraced numerous features that did much to reduce the labour of rescue teams and the suffering of patients. The basic design albeit modified, is still in use all over the world, and it is a fitting memorial to this remarkable man's love of the hills.

Eustace's interests were not confined to the world of mountaineering. During the 1930s, he took up gliding and became highly proficient at it. He then acquired a small single seater aeroplane and learnt to fly. From this he moved on to a Percival Vega-Gull four seater, in which he made many excursions. Someone who flew with him on occasion being Ivan Waller. In 1939 Eustace celebrated his 70th year by flying his Percival out to Egypt and back again. He had a number of difficulties on the return flight due to the imminence of the war. Shortly afterwards the RAF commandeered his little plane. Eustace responded by providing £5,000 for Lord Beaverbrook's appeal to purchase a Spitfire for the RAF. The aircraft Eustace paid for was one of 10 provided by the people of Manchester from a fund set up by the City Council. Eustace's Spitfire carried the City Crest on its nose and was known as 'Eustace'. It served with a Czech-manned squadron, flying defensive patrols over south west England and

offensive sweeps over Northern France. It was shot down by enemy fighters in April 1942, the only one of the Manchester 10 that met that fate.

One of the regular delights in the later part of Eustace's life was the regular visits he was paid (most notably for the Rucksack Club Dinner each year) by his close friends Geoffrey and Len Winthrop Young. He particularly enjoyed entertaining them at his home in Cheshire. Eustace had been a particularly strong supporter of GWY's efforts in the early 1940s to rejuvenate the Alpine Club, and to make the initial moves that led to the creation of the British Mountaineering Council.

After the war Eustace continued to travel widely, and continued to support the activities of his beloved Rucksack Club, and the Alpine Club. Peter Harding recalled that Eustace had a particular fondness for Cratcliffe Tor and would always try to attend club meets there. On his 90th birthday Eustace was flown over the North Pole, a journey he enjoyed immensely and, finally, in October 1960 this quite remarkable man passed away, aged 91. He remains a great figure in the history of mountaineering in Britain, and his late entry into the sport and his wide ranging achievements have been an inspiration to many. His indomitable spirit and great powers of intellect, were coupled with a ready wit and a great warmth of personality that is fondly remembered.

So, next time you are out on the Derwent Watershed, spare a thought for the tall, shadowy figure that trod purposefully that way 80 years ago, still unaware of the great adventures awaiting him. His own determination and refusal to accept conventional limits, led the way for many others to follow.

Particular thanks to John Llewellyn and Peter Harding of the Rucksack Club, Tom Waghorn of the *Manchester Evening News* and Walt Unsworth.

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# OBITUARY

## **Chris Brasher** **1928 (1948) - 2002**

Chris Brasher joined The Climbers' Club in 1948. He resigned for some obscure reason in the mid-80s and threw in his lot with the Rucksack Club. Just as everyone said he wasn't a natural runner that happened to win an Olympic Gold Medal, they also said he wasn't a natural climber, yet he had a considerable impact on the climbing scene, instigating the BBC live climbing exploits, such as Kinsey Crag, Old Man of Hoy and the Aiguilles du Midi. It was these programmes that introduced the public to the laconic Joe Brown and the loquacious McNaught-Davis and showed them how relaxed professional climbers were: no fingertip hanging while the feet flailed around for grip, just upward progress with perhaps the second expressing doubt now and then on the sparse advice given by the leader

I actually heard Brasher before I saw him. It was in Helyg one morning in 1949, whilst in bed, that I heard an abrasive voice harassing some poor CUMC member on how to make porridge. I now know that Chris's knowledge of porridge making was practically nil but that, then as later, he felt obliged to change any plan that he hadn't actually made himself. He was at that time the President of the CUMC so probably thought it was necessary to establish authority in the kitchen in the morning before the rock faces were reached later in the day?

We were both on the CC Committee in the late 1950s. We used to meet in Mrs Jo Briggs's sitting room at Pen y Gwryd. The only matters I can remember being discussed seemed to be concerned with the annual 'car and climbing' meet at the Clachaig Hotel, where the likes of members Harris, Neill, Mawe, Bull and Brasher drove like maniacs to be the first at the foot of some cliff perhaps 50 miles away.

Actually, CC members were seriously into car rallying in the '50s, and Brasher had a works-tuned Triumph TR3 in which he drove in the London, RAC and Tulip Rallies. It was in this car that he passed John Mawe in the Edgware Road at 4am. John in his Le Mans Frazer Nash was setting out to break the Marble Arch to Pen y Gwryd record. The two drivers considered racing together for the next 240 miles, but Brasher was just returning from the Wimbledon Ball where he partnered his future wife, Shirley Bloomer, so sensibly declined the challenge.

On one wet and muddy two-day London Rally deep in the wilds of Dyfed, Brasher showed his genius for organisation. Some dozen cars were stuck on a short slippery hill, with the only way up being achieved by a team of pushers. The problem was that the team kept shedding manpower as each car reached the top and disappeared into the night. Chris, seeing the danger of his car being left without pushers, ran ahead and confiscated the ignition keys until his car was up. Pat Moss, Stirling's rally driving sister, was not amused.

In 1958, after four years of fruitless negotiations with the Russians by other CC

members, Chris took over the job and within a year had engineered an agreement with the Russians to allow a party of British climbers to the Caucasus, mainly due to the good offices of Eugene Gippenreiter and the late inclusion in the party of Sir John Hunt. This was the first British climbing group to go to Russia for over 30 years and all the members were from the CC. It was also a classic example of how Brasher networked a desired decision. He enlisted the President of his Achilles athletic club, the Rt Hon Philip Noel-Baker, to approach Christopher Mayhew MP, who was the chairman of the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council, who contacted the Russian Ambassador in London, Mr Malik, who gave the go ahead to Gippenreiter and the USSR Mountaineering Section to make arrangements for such a visit. The trials, tribulations and successes of the expedition are well-recorded in *The Red Snows* jointly written by Sir John Hunt and Brasher.

As a rock-climber he was a competent Hard Severe leader, but he preferred long ridge scrambles and journeys through mountains whether on foot or on ski. It took him five attempts before he succeeded in crossing Scotland on skis from Fort William to Stonehaven; no navigational problems, just the melting of the snow east of the A9

In the year before his death he traversed the Cumbrian mountains from north to south; completed the GR5 walk from Samoens via Chamonix and the Col du Bonhomme to Landry; spent a week off piste skiing in Saas Fe and dog-sledged in northern Sweden. Sadly, he will now never make the expedition proposed for crossing the Chilkoot Pass from Skagway to Whitehorse, or the more sedate 'Downhill Only' walk from the Thames source to Oxford.

His energy, mostly directed to ensuring his friends were not allowed to grow old gracefully, will be much missed, as will his generosity to dozens of environmental schemes, ranging from the demolition of the petrol station opposite Pen y Gwryd, to helping the National Trust purchase Hafod y Llan and Gelli Iago, to saving the Petersham Meadows complete with cows

John Disley



## Sir Peter Holmes MC

### 1932 (1950) - 2002

I first met Peter in Murren while on a skiing holiday with my mother and sister. I was 16 and he was 21. Peter, with his lifelong eye and nose for a good deal, was the Ski Club rep for the resort, with all expenses paid. Somehow, he attached himself to our family and what fun we subsequently had as he introduced us to liar dice and cherry brandy. The latter was the only drink available, he told us, to his beleaguered forward platoon on a hill top in Korea, where he won his MC. He skied with a panache and a bravado of which I

could only dream. Late on Christmas Eve that year, 1953, in the bar, after my mother and sister had gone to bed, he suggested we carry our skis up to the little Anglican church at the top of the village for Midnight Mass. Afterwards, we skied in the moonlight back down through the sleeping streets to the hotel. It was the sort of romantic, spontaneous escapade which attracted me to this singular man.

Twice the following term he drove up from Cambridge on his 750 Royal Enfield and picked me up at a secret location outside Uppingham and whisked me off to some outcrops in Charnwood Forest for a day's climbing. One was allowed only to go out on a Sunday with one's parents or approved grown ups dressed in Sunday best of black jacket and pin striped trousers. But who could resist the thrill of adventure with a man like Pe-



**Above:** Peter Holmes with daughters, Hermione and Jo, in Pembrokeshire 1981.

ter? He gave me an anorak and old trousers which I put on behind a hedge. My housemaster never knew.

There followed an Easter holiday week staying at Raw Head in Langdale with fellow novice, Richard Hey, 20 years my senior and a don at Peter's college, Trinity. We climbed on White Ghyll and Gimmer, but I can remember only the details of a day on Bowfell Buttress in pouring rain. Half way up, scraping and floundering in a pair of borrowed tricourmis, I shouted up, 'Have you got a good belay?'

'Yes,' Peter yelled back with a wicked laugh, 'a good psychological belay.' I arrived at the stance to find the rope over the roundest of roundy knobs, kept in place

by his skinny rear end.

At the end of the summer holidays in 1954, Peter, Richard and I spent two complete weeks staying at Ynys Ettws, climbing many of the classic V Diffs and Severs on Lliwedd (his favourite crag because it was unfashionable and empty and Peter always eschewed fashion), Glyder Fach, Tryfan and The Three Cliffs. On the final day, Peter suggested I make my first lead and as I sat triumphantly on the grass at the top of The Wrinkle, he brought from his pocket and gave to me, a pristine copy of the Wilfred Noyce edition of the Llanberis Pass guide. It was September the 12<sup>th</sup>, my birthday. I treasure that guide to this day.

In retrospect, that fortnight provided my halcyon days, though many more climbing trips with Peter were to follow. A year later, I joined the Army and Peter, after marriage and two successful expeditions with Judy to Lahoul and Spiti, joined Shell and screamed off in the fast lane to an almost legendary Chairmanship of that company some 30 years later.

We continued to climb together for the next 20 years during Peter's home postings, between spells in Sudan, Libya, Doha and Nigeria: *Ampitheatre Buttress*, *Pinnacle Wall*, *Grooved Arête*, *The Direct* on Glyder Fach, *Outside Edge* and *Kirkus's Route* at Cwm Silyn, *Reade's Route*, *Main Wall*, and the *The Direct Route* were some of the routes we knocked off, sometimes on snatched weekends, or on joint expeditions with our families camping at ynys. Our final trip to Wales, together with his eldest daughter, Hermione, was when Peter was about 50, shortly before he became Chairman of Shell. One day we climbed *Mallory's VS* route on Y Garn (the other Y Garn). Before the climb, Peter announced with that misplaced certainty of which he was all too capable, 'Absolutely 100% safe bet it won't rain; leave waterproofs in the car.' There was no gainsaying Peter. And ? I was negotiating the crux when, BOOM – there was such a mother and father of a storm that we just got up the route. Later we learned two climbers had been swept of Cloggy at the same time. Hermione and I giggle about that climb to this day.

Next day the three of us climbed the entertaining *Schoolmaster's Gully* on Cyn Las after which Hermione went back to Cwm Glas IMawr. Peter and I set off for *Fallen Block Crack*. I led the route wearing boots and sat at the top of the crux pitch feeling utterly shattered. There was a tug on the rope and Peter shouted up, 'For Christ's sake, Binnie, get a move on!' It was in jest, I know, but I lost my cool and shouted down the crag that would he ...well show some... ..patience and wait until I was ready to bring him up. Eventually, he joined me and the atmosphere was horrible. We descended in agonising silence; and though we did our best to make it up, something had snapped and I felt very uncomfortable for the rest of the holiday. *Creagh Dhu Wall* at Tremadoc next day was to be our last climb together. Years later, and far too late, I apologised for my outburst on *Fallen Block Crack*. Of course, he smiled and said something like, 'Don't worry, it's all ok now. But somehow...

Peter started climbing as a schoolboy in the late 40s with Wilfred Noyce, had a wonderful ability to create fun and to energise those around him. He was fiercely competitive. He hated social gatherings and always left parties early. He would take us out to dinner and buy us the best wines in the house and send us books to our remote posting in the Hindu Kush. He was Godfather to our eldest son. We never



met, but that he asked after our children and my mother. He was given to wild, improbable hyperbole and knew no half measures. Love me or leave was his nostrum, nothing else would do; and when I was young that was exactly how it was, for I idolised him and when he told me was to be married, I was actually jealous. So, I had to share him with someone else.

But there was a side to his life of which I was ignorant. I knew him as a family man the loved his three daughters with passionate pride and as a climber. Five years before he died he took me fishing on The Test. I caught nothing all day, but Peter, who did everything well – global negotiations, golf, bridge, photography, diving – landed four beautiful trout. It had become his final passion. I met him again, once, with Mary, his second wife, but only for half an hour, it was all a bit awkward. And two years later, he died.

Mike Binnie

## **Robert Evan Kendell** **1935 (1955) - 2002**

Bob Kendell died a few days before Christmas 2002, aged 67, at his home in Edinburgh, of an unsuspected brain tumour. He joined The Climbers' Club in his last year at Cambridge at a time when the CUMC contained such luminaries as Geoff Sutton, Bob Downes, Eric Langmuir, Mike O'Hara and others.

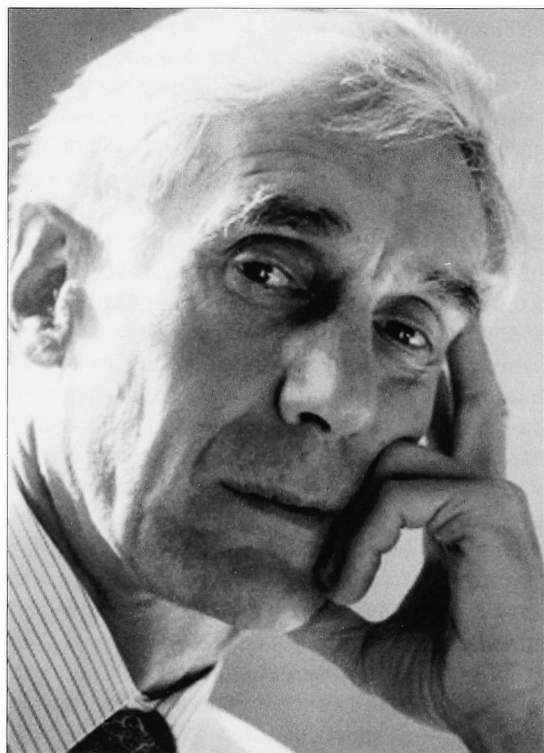
Bob spent much of his childhood on an uncle's farm near Bethesda, and by the time he was 10 he had walked over the major mountains of Snowdonia with his father and younger brother. The family subsequently moved to London where Bob went to Mill Hill School before winning a scholarship to Peterhouse College at Cambridge. There he gained a double first in the Natural Science Tripos (Biochemistry). Although Bob started to climb at school he flowered in the company of some of the brilliant Cambridge climbers. He made regular trips to the Alps, Wales, Lakes and Scotland, helping to pioneer some routes on Carnmore crag in north west Scotland. A fortuitous encounter in 1957 led to our climbing together for the first time on an ad hoc Bristol, Cambridge and Oxford Universities meet in the Dauphiné. In 1960 we went on a highly successful expedition to Peru led by Kim Meldrum. Later he climbed in the Alps and Pyrenees with Kim and John Cole and in 1963 he made a trip with John Tyson to the Kanjiroba Himal in Nepal. He continued climbing and walking at a high level of fitness to within six weeks of his unexpected death. Together with one of his sons and his wife Ann he joined my wife and our daughter and me on a memorable trek in Chitral in 1993.

In his prime, Bob was a confident leader up to mild VS but he was in his element on mixed rock and ice. He and I had some exciting moments on *Glovers Chimney*, *Green and Comb Gullies* and the *North East Buttress* on the Ben in March 1960. We even thought we had made a new route somewhere near *Italian Climb* and returned in triumph to the hut, only to be met by Hamish MacInnes who said he had done the route the week before. Latterly Bob climbed the mountains and canoed almost every summer in Torridon with Ann and his four children. He was brilliant in

difficult conditions, utterly dependable, a man in whom one instinctively put one's trust.

Although known only to a few friends in the climbing world, Bob was a giant in his profession of psychiatry. After early distinguished work at the Maudsley Hospital he was offered the Chair in Psychiatry at Edinburgh University at the age of 39. He undertook pioneering work of immense significance. 'Kendell', to quote from *The Guardian* obituary, 'wrote on puerperal psychoses (experienced by women after childbirth) and other depressive illnesses, but it was the challenge of the diagnosis and classification of psychiatric illness which exercised him throughout his career and established his international reputation. He was a pioneer in the use of structured interviewing techniques to generate more robust diagnoses, and made skilful use of health statistics to tease out the risk factors for schizophrenia. His writings explored the concept of mental disorder and, particularly, whether the major functional psychoses are independent entities or part of a continuum of mental dysfunction'.

Bob was elected Dean of the Edinburgh Medical School in 1986, he served twice on the Medical Research Council, was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, wrote a textbook of psychiatry which is used worldwide by undergraduate and postgraduate students to this day, sustained a steady output of research of the highest calibre, became a foundation fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences



and continued to be an active climber, sailor and canoeist. In 1991, Bob was appointed Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, a post which made many stressful demands on all his skills. The award of a CBE was recognition of his success, though I felt that his outstanding achievements were deserving of nothing less than a knighthood. His election to the Presidency of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1996 speaks of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow professionals.

Bob was never afraid of making difficult decisions in his working life any more than he was on the hill, in a number of which situations I was involved. He was not one for small talk or chit-chat. In some quarters he was described as being austere and there was a grain

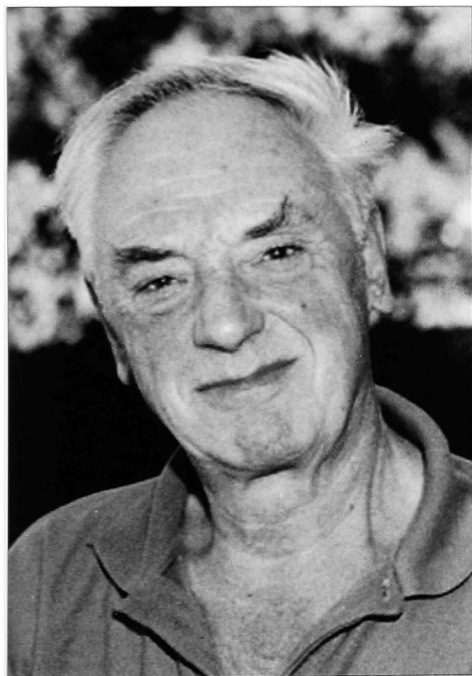
or two of truth in that; perhaps a touch of the puritanical. Yet he had a beautifully dry wit and when he wanted could charm the birds off the trees. He was one of nature's 'one-offs', a singular man, a very fine man, sadly missed by his colleagues, friends and, especially, his family.

Mike Binnie

## **Johnnie Lees GM, BEM** **1927 (1950) – 2002**

Johnnie Lees joined The Climbers' Club in 1950 and for the next decade or so was one of the best known figures in the British climbing scene, largely because of his key role in the development of the RAF Mountain Rescue service. In 1958 after a particularly difficult and dangerous rescue on Craig yr Ysfa he was awarded the George Medal, the only climber, as far as I am aware, to have gained this award for bravery on the British mountains.

John Rodney Lees was born in Chingford, Essex in December 1927 but the



family moved to Hexham, Northumberland in 1937 and he was educated at the local grammar school. Most holidays in his teenage years were spent on long adventurous cycle tours with his cousin Denis Greenald in the north of England and Scotland with hill-walking and scrambling thrown in, and Johnnie kept meticulously detailed log books of all their exploits. He joined the RAF towards the end of the war hoping to serve as aircrew, but with peace imminent there were few opportunities and he became a physical training instructor (PTI). Posted to the south of England in 1947 he again met up with Denis, now at the London School of Economics, and they began to climb regularly at Harrison's Rocks where Johnnie soon became an outstanding performer on the hardest test pieces of the day. Meanwhile his family had moved to Otley so leaves were spent honing his skills on

the local gritstone outcrops as well as trips to Wales and Scotland.

By 1950 he had climbed in the Alps with the LSE mountaineering club and joined the CC and RAFMA where he was soon regarded as one of their most gifted young mountaineers. The significant moment of his career came after the Lancaster bomber air crash on Beinn Eighe in March 1951, when doubts were expressed about

the expertise and inadequate equipment of the local RAF rescue team to cope with the severe winter conditions. RAFMA was asked by Air Ministry to help with the reorganisation of the rescue service and, in October 1951, Sgt Lees was asked to instruct on the first training course for team members. Three months later in January 1952 he was posted to RAF Valley on Anglesey as leader of the most important rescue team in England and Wales, aged just 24 and with little actual rescue experience himself. He learned fast and over the next 10 years, serving mainly at Valley but also at Kinloss, he was largely responsible for re-moulding the service from poorly equipped though willing amateurs into rescue teams second to none at the time. He fought for and got better equipment, whilst at the same time organised summer and winter climbing courses for team members. And this was, of course, at a time when the modern network of civilian mountain rescue teams just did not exist.

Meanwhile despite the heavy demands on his time he continued to climb whenever possible. The same year he went to Valley he met Gwen Moffat and they married in 1956. In her first book Gwen described his climbing as 'superlatively neat... his movements slow and deliberate... he thought on rock'. Only once did she see him close to his limit, on a rare ascent at the time of Jack Longland's *Blade* finish to *Javelin Buttress*, where he retreated from the crux, had a long grumble and then passed the hard moves without difficulty. He became one of a handful of guides for North Wales and then was for 10 years the only guide to be qualified for Wales, England and Scotland – now there are some 150. In the mid 1950s on one of the first BBC TV films about climbing he neatly followed Joe Brown on an early ascent of *Suicide Wall* in his standard issue RAF mountain boots, when other notables failed to follow. Shortly before he died he chuckled as he recounted to me how he had lent his old white sweater to Joe, the better to be seen on camera, who then threw it down for Johnnie to wear, so the sweater went up the route twice. There were more Alpine holidays and in 1955 he went to Kulu on the first RAFMA Himalayan expedition during which several first ascents of 6,000m peaks were made.

My personal knowledge of Lees began in 1956 at the age of 19 during National Service after being posted to Valley and joining the team. In some ways this changed the direction of my life. Within weeks of joining I attended the annual rock-climbing course based at Glan Dena and learned to climb (with great difficulty) in nailed boots. During that fortnight he took me up my first Severe, the delectable *Pinnacle Wall* and the following year he led me up my first VS, *Lot's Groove* with minimal protection in his old RAF boots. I was mightily impressed. In fact Johnnie did have a great influence on me and the other young men in the team, for he radiated confidence in all mountain scenarios whether searching for missing aircraft, carrying out night exercises in the pouring rain on the Denbigh moors, or leading us up VS climbs. It was he who proposed me for the Club in 1960. That same year I went to the Alps with him, Vic Bray and John Sims, and in 1961 I was with him on the first ascent of one of his best new routes, *Space Below my Feet* in the Moelwyns, a few days after Gwen's first book was published.

The finest achievement of his rescue career, and the one for which he was awarded the George Medal, came in January 1958. Major Hugh Robertson had fallen halfway up an icy *Amphitheatre Buttress* and had been lying on a ledge with severe



head injuries for several hours before Lees and members of the team managed to reach him from above. It was bitterly cold, long after dark and doubtful if Robertson would survive. Using a rope and slings Lees improvised a sit-harness and the delirious and struggling Robertson was hoisted on to his back and the pair were lowered into the abyss and down 200ft to safety. Vic Bray, responsible at the belay for the lower, vividly remembers the nightmare scenario that the knot joining the two 120ft ropes might snag. Undoubtedly Lees's quick thinking and the speed and efficiency of the rescue saved Robertson's life. He recovered and was instrumental in obtaining the first commercial rescue harness, the Austrian tragsitz for the Valley team.

Johnnie left the RAF in 1961 and worked for a while at Ogwen Cottage with Ron James. At that time in response to the growing number of incidents in the hills involving school parties, he and Ron submitted to the BMC proposals for basic mountain training for leaders of school and youth groups. Their ideas were developed by Jack Longland, President of the BMC and Chairman of the CCPR Outdoor Pursuits Division, and led to the formation of the Mountain Training Board and the Mountain Leadership certificate in 1964. After leaving Wales Johnnie went on to be an instructor at Applecross and then worked at Ullswater Outward Bound school in the mid-60s. In 1966 he was appointed as Warden Service Officer and then Ranger Training Officer for the Peak District National Park and also served as Secretary of the Peak District panel of assessors for the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. He demanded the same high standards from civilian rangers as he had in the RAF with the rescue team members and remained with the Park Service until his retirement in 1985.

His marriage to Gwen had always been mutually respectful but also tempestuous and they divorced in 1970. He later married Dorothy Pleasance, a colleague from work and their life together in Over Haddon was as peaceful as his previous relationship had been stormy and he missed Dorothy terribly after her death in 1994. There were no children from either marriage but Johnnie was always a loving and caring stepfather to Gwen's daughter, Sheena. Before and after retirement he worked occasionally as a guide but did not do anything like as much climbing as in his earlier life. He and I met up at regularly at BMC meetings and at Valley reunions for the '50s team members and he always bubbled with the old enthusiasm when we climbed together.

Throughout his career and retirement he was involved in the work of the BMC, as Chairman of the Safety Committee in the '70s and as a long serving member and secretary of the Peak area committee. In this capacity he wrote a meticulously detailed account of the Peak Area for the BMC 50th anniversary History. The Guides Association made him their first 'Honoured Guide' and when the RAF Mountain Rescue Association was formed in 1993 on the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the service it was inevitable that Johnnie was chosen to be the first President.

He always maintained a keen interest in and concern for the Club. He wrote the first interim guidebook for the Moelwyns in 1962 and was hut custodian of Helyg and Cwm Glas cottage in the '70s. He insisted that we are *The Climbers' Club*, and sent me a very stiff 'Dear Mr President' (when I actually wasn't) note to this effect on a postcard size piece of hard cardboard imploring me to remind the Newsletter editor of this fact. Other amusing anecdotes show that he could be fussy and per-

nickety to a degree. Hut rules for example. On one occasion a recent President returned from a week-end at Bosigran to find some milk bottles on his desk in the office he shared with Johnnie, accompanied by a terse note reminding him that he should always bring back his empties. The thing was they weren't even Mark's. And who else would dream of tackling Whillans for not signing the book and paying his shilling 'day fee' when Don and Audrey had been invited in for a cup of tea.

Johnnie always held strong and forthright views and was never averse to expressing them, which sometimes upset people, but basically he was a very caring person with a deep love of wildlife and the environment. After the obituary in *The Times*, Joyce Tombs wrote a short note which was published in the Lives Remembered column and is now worthy of repeating. She recalled her first encounter with

*Below: Johnnie Lees with 'casualty' Paddy Andrews during an RAF Valley MRT exercise on Holyhead Mountain in 1958 using the newly acquired Tragsitz. Photo: Vic Bray*



JRL over 50 years ago at Harrison's: 'It was not his climbing exploits (which were formidable) that impressed me most, but the fact that I was roundly scolded for picking wild primroses. This was typical of Johnnie – he would never ignore an issue or behaviour about which he felt strongly – and it goes some way to explaining his lifelong commitment to safety in the mountains. I never picked a wild flower since then and am unlikely to see wild primroses again without remembering JRL'.

Johnnie was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus in April 2002 and died in Bakewell on August 15th.

*Derek Walker*

## Dr John F Mawe

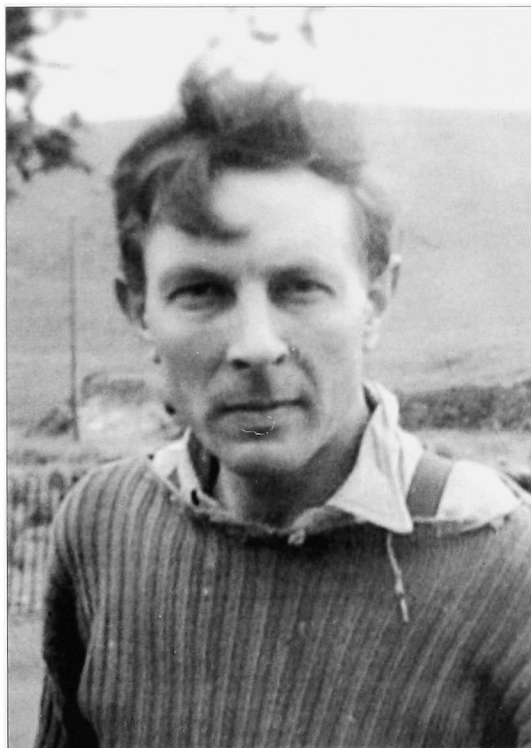
### 1925 (1949 ) - 2002

John Mawe was a 'godsend' to a number of younger members of the Club in the late '40s and early '50s. He practiced in Bethnal Green, had a car, then a Morris 8, and best of all had access to petrol coupons. This meant that he could offer a lift to Wales at least once a month to three London-based members. He was a capable rock-climber and held his own among his peer group which included members: Peter Hodgkinson, Mike Harris, Dick Viney, Mike Bull, John Neill, and Dave Thomas. He seconded *Mur y Niwl* in his mid 50s – an intimidating climb for seconds.

He seldom missed the annual Easter 'climbing and car-rally' expedition to Scotland and also went with other Club members to the Alps where he led one of the ropes up the South Ridge of the Salbitschijn. Later he famously mended the steering geometry of his Aston Martin with an ice-axe and a large lump of rock.

He will probably be best remembered as a driver of fast cars: Rileys, Aston Martins and a Le Mans Frazer Nash, in which he drove from Marble Arch to Pen y Gwryd (the old A5 apart from the last four miles) in two hours 57mins 474 seconds, averaging 76.4 mph. His 'co-driver' was only required to hold the stopwatch.

*John Disley*



## John Neill 1917 (1945) - 2002

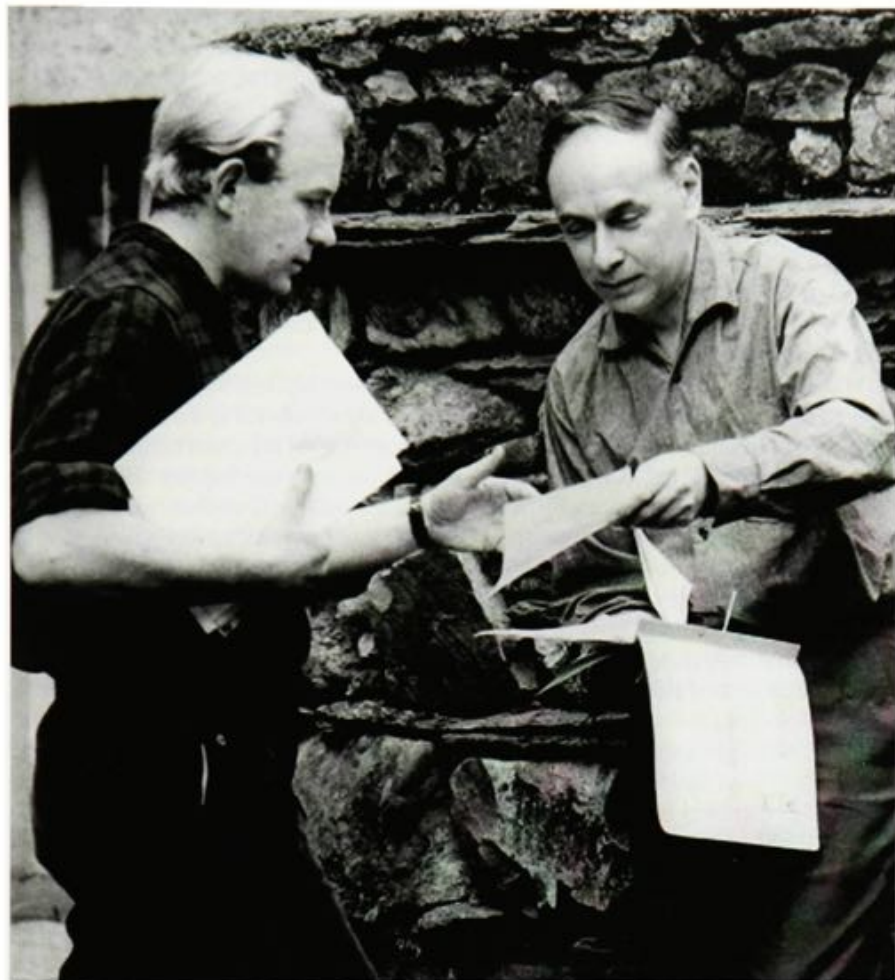
Though a keen and active climber (albeit at a modest level) it was more in scholarship and service to the climbing world that John will be primarily remembered. As a CC Guidebook Editor (1961-1970) he presided over the publication of eight important guides including seminal works on Tremadog, Clogwyn du'r Arddu, Llanberis Pass (North and South) and Bosigran at a time when demand for information had reached a peak. Guidebook finances were in an infant stage yet John was able to organise printing and sales to such a degree of efficiency that a regular publishing programme was possible. This guidebook work had begun in his 'New Climbs' section in the Journal that began in 1955 and which he soon pumped up to an intense level of observation and interest. In this he showed a lust for obscure information matched only by the equally scrupulous Edward Pyatt. The two of them recorded new climbs from Cornwall, Wales, Ireland and Scotland and even the Lofotens. By 1956 Neill was on his own. No detail escaped his eagle eye. He was particularly assiduous in noting early repeats of the great Rock and Ice routes noting (in 1958) three ascents of *Hangover*, eight ascents of *Cemetery Gates*, six of *Cenotaph Corner* and three of *The Grooves*. This sort of microscopic watch on ascents – all of which, at that time, were very dangerous for all but the most proficient leaders, showed an intense interest in what is now termed the 'cutting edge' of the sport that knocks spots off modern commentators.

His period as Journal Editor (1960-1966) was equally active with a succession of fine articles by authors that included Bonington, Patey, Mortlock, Ward, Fitzgerald, Hodgkin, Austin, Walker, McNaught Davis, Lunn and many others. They described major ascents in the greater ranges and intense rock and ice activity at home. To this was added, humour, philosophy, culture and science. Neill's skill in getting a full spectrum of the main activists to contribute maintained a fine tradition set by his predecessors which we have striven to maintain in more recent times. His special interest in this period was in Welsh crag and mountain names and in the industrial archaeology of mines in Wales and Cornwall. Peter Crew (now a senior industrial archaeologist in North Wales) notes that John and Ruth Neill's article 'The Coppermines of Snowdon' (CCJ 1963) and his two-part 'Names of Crag in Snowdonia' (CCJ 1963 and 1964) written in partnership with R Elyn Hughes, are of the highest quality but little known because of their obscure (in scientific and local history terms) publication. It seems that the Hughes/Neill naming is far more reliable than the recent Ordnance Survey changes.

Through the '70s to the mid-80s John served the club in its archiving and library activities and as its representative (for a period Chairman) on the BMC Welsh Committee. With Eric Jones he played a key role in the acquisition of the Bwlch y Moch cliffs. He was also a valued diplomat on Welsh access matters during a period of the rise of Welsh nationalism when they could very easily have gone awry. Latterly, he was also involved with BMC South West Area access matters concerning an issue on Bodmin Moor.

In 1985 he took on the considerable responsibility of President of the BMC





*Above: John Neill, on the right, photographed in 1966, handing over Journal papers to his successor as Editor, Nigel Rogers, at the Rawhead Meet.*

supported by a group of notable Vice Presidents: Chris Bonington, Alan Rouse, George Band and Paul Nunn (a complete CC/AC line-up). This was at a time of tension within the BMC when various activists and professionals were dissatisfied about the Council's affairs. John Neill handled these tensions with civility and good humour... frequently advocating post-meeting visits to Rusholme curry houses to burn away the rivalries with Madras, Bangalore or Phal.

My associations with John are almost all linked to affairs. I queried his re-election as guidebook editor at the first AGM I attended in 1965, criticised the large amount of (no doubt worthy) non-climbing material in his 1968 Cornwall guide, and found myself under his Presidential hammer in the mid-80s BMC disputes. Yet, de-

spite this sequence of criticisms, I was always struck by his easy-going approach and charmed when he generously gave me valuable advice when I published Friedrich Bender's Caucasus guide in 1992. Indeed he had rapidly become a Caucasus expert after his visit in 1958.

John Neill was born in 1917 in Sunderland, the eldest son of a Marine engineer. He was educated at Newcastle Royal Grammar School where he was first introduced to walking and climbing in the Pennines, the Lakes and the Alps on school trips. These were made under the leadership of Michael Roberts who may also have provided literary and scientific influences. In 1935 he was in a school group to Val d'Iserre in the Graian Alps where Roberts led a party of 14 schoolboys up *Aiguille Pers* (3,387m) as their first Alpine climb. This trip is described in Janet Adam Smith's *Mountain Holidays* (pp55-58).

In 1936 John was awarded a Chemistry Scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. I have been unable to unearth details of his University climbing though the OUMC should have been very active at this time in the aftermath of the Cox/Hodgkin/Hoyland era. After graduating in 1939 he volunteered for the Navy but the War Office, noting his science background, assigned him to an experimental explosives (TNT) unit in Scotland. After the war, he joined *The Climbers' Club* in 1945, travelling regularly to Wales from London where he worked for British Oxygen. Later he joined GKN in Wolverhampton and finally the engineering firm C W Walker in Wellington, Shropshire.

Neill's key climbing partnership was with Mike Harris in the 1950s, an association which he describes vividly in his CCJ obituary note for Harris (who disappeared with George Fraser during a bold summit push on Ama Dablam in 1960). The two met in 1950 and formed a natural partnership, Harris the climbing star, Neill the planner and organiser. They joined a racy group of John Mawe, Dave Thomas, Chris Brasher and John Disley and many others, speeding to Wales every weekend in their sports cars, climbing and drinking hard – a classic assembly of bright young hopes that exemplified the period. Harris and Neill subsequently competed with merit in both the London Rally and also overseas in the Tulip and the Monte Carlo Rallies. John Disley recalls that John was one of a group who regularly met at the CC's Easter Meet at Ballachulish when each day started with a sports car race across Scotland to one crag or another. One mysterious by-product of the period is *Athlete's Route* in Glen Coe which Ruth Neill remembers John noting that he climbed with Roger Bannister. Bannister did indeed climb in Glen Coe, with Chris Brasher in Easter 1954 (two months before his historic four minute mile), but he makes no mention of *Athlete's Route* in his book, or climbing with Neill. At present, therefore, this mountaineering puzzle remains unsolved.

In his obituary note for Harris, Neill refers to a series of Alpine seasons they had together. He lists Harris's ascents as including *Salbitschijn South Ridge*, the *Breithorn Younggrat*, the *North Ridge* of the *Badile*, the *South Ridge* of *Aiguille Noire* and the *South Ridge* of the *Meije* (though he is unspecific about which of these he completed). At home Harris's rock routes eventually reached a very high standard, including an early ascent of *Cenotaph Corner*. Neill's abilities were more modest. His name appears on a number of routine new routes on the Tremadog cliffs during its early exploratory period but he was more of a chorus member than a prima donna.

Perhaps his climbing high point came in 1958 when he joined the British Caucasus party responding to the Soviet visit to Britain. After a failed attempt on Ushba the party moved to the Bezingi region and while others were involved on Jangi Tau, Shkhara and Dyctau, Neill climbed Gestola 4,860m with Eugene Gippenreiter while Dave Thomas (the third member of the team) waited for them on Gestola's western col.

He met Ruth in 1959, a Geography student at University College Aberystwyth, when she was working at the Pen yr Gwryd Hotel and from this point his priorities changed to marriage, job, family and the aforementioned climbing affairs. During this period he moved to Ludlow from where he developed interests in Point to Point (that his daughter followed) and as a Parliamentarian in the Sealed Knot Civil War re-enactments. After retirement the Neills moved to live in Falmouth, close to the Cornish cliffs that they had always loved.

John was thus the quintessential climbing servant, a loyal and skilled administrator without whom our affairs would be much the poorer. Both The Climbers' Club and the BMC salute him for a life of service done with good humour and modesty.

He died in May 2002 at the age of 85 after heart problems. He is survived by his wife Ruth, his daughter Bridget and son, Alasdair, who maintains a family link with climbing and the hills as an Outdoor Pursuits Instructor in Plymouth.

*I would like to thank the following for their assistance in the preparation of this tribute: Ruth Neill, John Disley, Dave Thomas, Peter Crew, Andrew Roberts, Alan Blackshaw, Tony Moulam, George Band, Peter Harding, Dennis Gray and R Elyn Hughes.*

*Ken Wilson*

I am happy to have been asked to add a few words to John's obituary. We first met in the early '50s when the the Royal Hotel at Capel Curig was still a hotel. He was trying to climb a telegraph pole with the aid of prusik slings after a Saturday evening in the bar. Not that he was a drinker. Fortunately the Geological Survey, after two years in the basement of the Museum of Practical Geology, had posted me to our Manchester office. John Neill and Mike Harris travelled from Wolverhampton where they both worked in GKN's Group Research Laboratories. I think they provided the titanium that was made into spikes for the ultra-light running shoes, provided for Roger Bannister for his four minute mile attempt by Eustace Thomas of the Rucksack Club. We got on well together. One day John and I exchanged cars. I drove smoothly round in his new Ford Consul while unknown to me they tried to drive my new Landrover up Carnedd Llewellyn via the radar road, but were defeated in a boulder field.

Ken queries the *Athlete's Climb*. This may refer to our mass ascent of *Clachaig Gully* on April 18th during my Easter Meet in 1954. John Mawe had arrived in his 1950 Le Mans DB2 Aston Martin with Chris Brasher and Roger Bannister taking turns in the boot, no doubt in the grand tourism style so disapproved of by Ken. Mike and John were a very successful rally team once taking part in the Tulip Rally. The previous day we had filled the Landrover and driven to Ardnamurchan and climbed the *Great Ridge* of Garbh Bhein, a wonderful 1,000ft moderately steep climb on gneiss ending

on the very summit. A brilliant fine day to remember. However, *Clachaig Gully* was a different kettle of fish. I had fallen off it six years before, leading the crux, spraining one ankle and breaking the bones of my left hand and cracking ribs. I remember trying to catch my balaclava as I fell. I woke to find my sole companion shaking me by the shoulder and asking me if I had broken my back. There was no prospect of rescue and my unknown second confessed he had never abseiled. I had to show him how to get down and then rope down myself using a self protecting method I had seen in a magazine. It took six hours to get to down to the Clachaig Inn where I had to phone for a taxi to take me to Fort William Hospital. There I was pronounced fit enough to return to the Youth Hostel and the train back to Aberdeen University the next day.

With this memory still in my mind I looked forward to renewing its acquaintance. The Gully with its many pitches was just as wet as before, so after the first waterfall I removed my upper clothes and stored them in my 'sack. Hours later Chris led the Red Chimney up the left wall in fine style, but it was cold and we were all wet through when we reached the top. Chris had been getting increasingly anxious about Roger's well-being. This weekend had been for them a surprise break in Roger's rigorous training schedule for his attempt on the record. Fearing that Roger might catch pneumonia Chris then insisted that he should change into my spare dry clothes, for the greater good of British sport, of course. How could I refuse?

When he later magnificently broke the record, I felt I had played a small part in his success. We did not catch pneumonia. I am writing this nearly 50 years later. John, or Jack, Neill as some knew him was a tower of strength in this endeavour as he was in our various Alpine holidays. We led through, I remember, on the *South Ridge* of the Salbitschijn with its fine views of the jagged West Ridge. I was in Zermatt when he, Mawe and Harris climbed the *Breithorn Younggrat*, on the personal recommendation and advice from Bernard Biner himself, at the Bahnhof in Zermatt where we stayed.

On another occasion we led through in two ropes when we climbed the *South Face* of the Meije intending to finish up the *Directissima* to the summit, but by then the fine morning had deteriorated into heavy wet snow. The small *Glacier Carrée* above the face was rather steep and prone to stonefalls. The guidebook had advised us it was '*tres arrienne, très dangereuse, avec rochers comme les autobus*'. From the top of an ice-filled chimney we gained the glacier and decided to escape to the ordinary route by traversing just above the lower edge in approaching darkness. By mutual consent we unroped for the move in case one of us slipped; for the greater good? We didn't talk about it afterwards; Geoffrey Winthrop Young might not have approved. During the descent I laid my ice-axe down briefly to adjust my crampons, when it slowly slid off into the darkness and the void. I didn't see it again until the autumn when I received an ice-axe shaped parcel through the post. My initials had been on the shaft but I still don't know who returned it.

John was the prime mover and researcher of the project, before the British Caucasus Expedition became a reality. This was achieved with the assistance of Eugene Gippenreiter a Secretary for Pistol Shooting and Horse Riding at the then Ministry of Sport. He hoped to become a Master of Sport. Our invitation to John Hunt



to join the party ensured our acceptance in Moscow.

Needless to say although my earlier personal letter to Marshall Bulganin seeking permission was not answered, when we arrived in Moscow eventually, by train, I was asked by a reporter if I was the person who had written that letter. The Iron Curtain had still been in force at Frankfurt on Oder, where having been mistaken for a party of British trade unionists at first, we were obliged to leave our Standard Vanguard estate cars at the frontier post and continue by train with all the expedition luggage. Ralph Jones was our Russian expert having learnt it during his National Service. Once in Russia we were in Eugene's care, the little Russian language I had absorbed during a winter of evening classes seemed as nothing. Later on, however, we soon picked up essential phrases such as 'Go easy on the sugar'. John's Russian was better than I expected. Nearly every Russian we met wanted to speak English to us. Read Chris Brasher's *The Red Snows*.

Not long ago during his last visit to Britain before his unexpected death, Eugene gave me back the first page of my original letter to Bulganin. Perhaps he had raided the files of the KGB. Our difficulties as an expedition in 1958 were largely due to very heavy snowfalls during our attempt on the double traverse of Ushba which we had planned. This powder snow affected all the high Caucasus. John was a fine friend yet I find it difficult to remember him without thinking about Mike Harris, lost on Ama Dablam. His death changed us all.

David Thomas

## **Sir (Francis) Alan Pullinger CBE, DL** **1913 (1943) - 2002**

Alan Pullinger was born on 28th May 1913 at Trowbridge, where his father was Wiltshire's first Director of Education. As a boy Alan developed a lifelong interest in the world of nature, beginning with childhood walks along the Kennet and Avon canal. He was educated at Marlborough and Balliol, where he read Engineering, much to the surprise of his Admissions Tutor, who pronounced dismissively: "Oh dear! You will find that very stunting."

Nothing could have been wider of the mark. After Oxford he joined the Trowbridge based firm of heating and ventilating engineers G N Haden & Sons, the Hadens and the Pullingers were family friends and he spent the whole of his working life with that company. During the War he was involved in the building of airfields and the development of air-conditioning for tanks.

He became Managing Director in 1958 and Chairman in 1961. During his long stint at the helm he managed to maintain the strong family ethos of the firm, whilst at the same time taking it to a position of undisputed prominence in the industry, building on its reputation for technical excellence and expanding operations by acquisition – the firm was renamed Haden Carrier in 1971. He undertook a number of important projects overseas, such as the Sydney Opera House and Jeddah Airport.

He became President of the Heating and Ventilating Contractor's Association, and later of the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers which, under his leadership, received the grant of a much coveted Royal Charter in 1976. Alan fre-

quently described himself as "just a plumber."

He had many interests outside the firm. He became a governor of Benenden School in 1976, his first wife, Felicity, had been head girl and became vice-chairman of the Council in 1981. He was personally involved in a number of important building projects there. He was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Hertfordshire in 1982 and for 15 years was Chairman of the Hertfordshire Scouts. In 1970 he was appointed CBE and knighted in 1977.

Alan's passion for the mountains took off when he was at Oxford. He helped to revive the OUMC and joined The Climbers' Club in 1934, taking over the Editorship of the Journal from Elliott Viney in 1940 and held that post until 1946. He was elected to the Alpine Club in 1943, served on the committee in 1961, and as Vice-President in 1988. In 1991, he was made an Honorary Member, partly in recognition of his efforts in trying to secure alternative premises for the Club, following the move from South Audley Street.

In 1934 he was with a group of Oxford friends on an expedition to the Lofoten Islands, where he distinguished himself by leaping between the two precipitous rock towers on the summit of Svolvær. With many of the same friends he made an adventurous crossing to St Kilda, notwithstanding an almost complete lack of sailing experience.

He climbed and walked extensively in Skye, the Cairngorms, North Wales, the Lakes, Connemara and Cornwall throughout the '30s. He managed one Alpine season before the War in the Dolomites, where he climbed the Langkofel, the Funfingerspitze, two of the Sella Towers and other climbs. After the War he returned to the Alps and also travelled widely, making several visits to Nepal and Bhutan. I can add one personal note. In 1963 I climbed in the Bernina with Alan, Charles Warren and Tony Dummett. Our aggregate age was a little over 200. On our ascent of the Biancograt we were rather held up by a party of four young Italians, estimated aggregate age about 80. As a result it was late when we reached the summit and a blizzard had developed. We abandoned our intention of descending on the Swiss side and made our way to the Marco e Rosa Hut, where we found an Italian couple intent of being married on the summit on the following day. We put a blanket screen round them, but never knew whether a gun was jumped. The following morning we descended on the Italian side and met the best man coming up. At a farmstead on a high Alpine pasture we received an offer of ham and eggs. The farmers' wife produced two chilled bottles to accompany this repast. I still remember Alan's ringing cry "Orvieto Secco, a very good breakfast wine."

The Alpine Club and The Climbers' Club will miss Alan Pullinger, a great character, mountaineer, beagler, sailor, ornithologist, naturalist and loyal friend. He was a marvellous companion on the hills, very fit and a great goer. He kept up his activities into old age, making his first parachute jump on his 80th birthday and travelling to the Galapagos and to Ethiopia where he climbed Ras Deshan 15,180ft, when well past 80.

He was a fierce driver and many stone walls on the roads to North Wales and the Lake District can testify. On one occasion he drove through a bridge parapet on an old Roman road, having told his friends that there was no need to worry – Roman

roads were always straight – he had failed to remember that there was one kink, where the road crossed a railway line.

Alan's life was not easy. He lost an elder brother, who died tragically during a routine appendix operation. He lost two wives, both of whom died of cancer, and his first-born son. He is survived by a daughter, Clare, and a second son, Anthony, to whom I am indebted for much of the detail in this obituary, delivered by him in a moving address which he gave at his father's thanksgiving service.

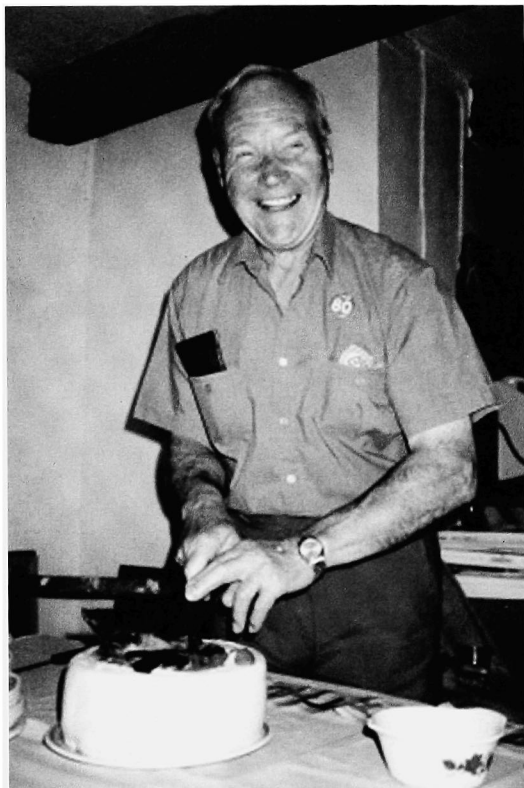
*Emlyn Jones*

## **Commander Cortland James Woore Simpson** **CBE, DSC, RN** **1911 (1939) - 2001**

Enthusiasm and energy were Jim's outstanding qualities, coupled with great warmth for his friends and a mischievous smile. To the end of his life, he always had to have a 'project', which he tackled with determination and skill. His greatest project was the notably successful two-year Joint Services Expedition to North Greenland, in 1952-1954, recognised by the CBE, the Polar Medal and the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

The son and grandson of admirals, he was destined for the Royal Navy from birth. He went to Dartmouth when he was 13. As a midshipman, he showed the zest for life and the enquiring mind that were characteristic – the logbooks he was then required to keep are full of beautifully drawn sketches and observations on the peacetime operations of his ship. He served as a junior officer until 1932, when he was transferred to the reserve list, the navy at that time being under pressure to reduce the number of active service officers. He then read for a degree in electrical engineering at London University. He was recalled in 1939, serving in the Mediterranean in an anti-submarine flotilla and subsequently in destroyers in the North Sea and the Atlantic. In the Mediterranean, his ship was sunk by a U-boat, and Jim distinguished himself in helping fellow-sailors into life-rafts. Continuing to serve in anti-submarine operations, he made use of his technical knowledge in the development of hydrophone and sonar operation and after the war was appointed first lieutenant of the Royal School of Communications and Weapons Engineering. He retired from the navy for the second time in 1961.

Jim first climbed in 1938, but the war precluded anything outside the UK, apart from a brief visit to the Lebanon, after he had been ship-wrecked. There he learnt to ski, as well as doing some rock-climbing. After the war, there was no holding him. During the winter of 1945/46 he climbed in Scotland almost every weekend. The following summer, he was on a Climbers' Club meet in Norway, climbing mainly with Bill Tilman. Their rope seems to have been faster and more persistent than others on the meet and achieved ascents of eight peaks or major ridges, as well as traverses of 11 glaciers and cols. The next winter he was again in Scotland, doing a first ascent with Bill Murray and D K Scott and again climbing with Bill Tilman, on Ben Nevis, where they were lucky to escape a fall on the descent without serious injury. The



**Above:** Jim Simpson in the galley. Photo: John Atherton

great man was so impressed that he warmly supported Jim's application to join the Alpine Club, though observing characteristically that Jim's qualifications were 'not up to pre-war standards'. Three Alpine seasons followed, mainly with Charles Evans, Richard Hull and Anthony Trower, during which they did a number of major traverses in very good time, notably the Dom/Taschhorn and the Old Brenva. Jim also had a spell with Andre Roch's research party on the Jungfrauoch.

In December 1947, Jim set up the RN and RM Mountaineering Club, initially as a section of the RN Ski Club and was its moving spirit and first secretary. In addition to meets which he ran in Scotland and North Wales, there were a number on the Cornish coast and Jim's name will always be associated with the first ascents he made, notably *South Face Direct* on Chair Ladder, *Zig Zag* and *Doorway* at Bosigran. But climbing was not an activity

that found particular favour with the naval hierarchy, who presumably preferred to leave that sort of thing to the Royal Marines. Polar exploration might be another matter and Jim developed an enthusiasm for a small naval expedition to explore Scoresby Sound, in East Greenland. The idea was turned down by the Admiralty, but not without encouraging noises in some quarters.

Nothing daunted, he got permission in 1950 to join the summer relief party of the Danish expedition to Pearyland. During a flight, the mountains of Queen Louise Land were pointed out to him – entirely surrounded by ice, fleetingly visited but never explored. In a five-day solo journey, he reconnoitred the approaches through the coastal mountains to the 20 mile wide glacier beyond which lay his 'promised land'. He had seen from the air that this glacier was a formidable barrier of ice hummocks, melt water streams and gorges. The following year, with four companions, he crossed the glacier in three days, carried out a further reconnaissance and confirmed that a large lake to the north was deep enough to take flying boats. Plans which had been developing over the past year now crystalised into an ambitious programme – the exploration of Queen Louise Land coupled with seismic and gravimetric work on the



ice-cap using tracked vehicles. It was typical of Jim that, having had a comparatively modest plan turned down, he should now propose a bigger and more complicated expedition.

He needed all his enthusiasm, tenacity of purpose and persuasive powers to overcome the numerous difficulties in his way. With the valuable moral support of Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Algernon Willis, he obtained the blessing of the Scott Polar Research Institute, the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society and finance from Shell. He persuaded the Navy and the Army to help with men, equipment and supplies and the RAF to carry out an extended 'training exercise' which had better not be costed. Treasury approval was given only two months before the expedition sailed.

It was landed in Greenland at 75°N by the Tottan, a converted sealer. From there, the bulk of the expedition requirements were flown 150 miles north by RAF Sunderlands to the large lake in QLL, where the base was established. The only items that could not be flown in were the eight tracked vehicles and trailers. These were taken north by the Tottan, in the expectation that they would cross the great glacier after the winter snowfalls. Immediately the fly-in had been completed, Jim, with five companions, set off on a 250-mile dogsledge journey to the centre of the ice-cap to receive a large air-drop from RAF Hastings flying out of the American base at Thule. One plane crashed in a white-out – luckily no-one was killed and the crew were flown out, with great difficulty. Jim's party erected a prefabricated hut, where three of them were to spend the next eight months carrying out meteorological and glaciological research. Jim and the others sledged back to base, arriving just after the sun disappeared for the winter.

Meanwhile the tracked vehicles had been landed 100 miles south of their intended destination, due to bad sea-ice conditions. When the sea-ice froze, and with the help of the Danes, they were driven north, to spend the winter at



**Above:** Author of the '91 and '92 guidebooks to West Penwith, Des Hannigan, enjoys Jim Simpson's classic *Bosigran VS, 'Zig Zag'*. Photo: Ian Smith

Danmarkshavn. In the spring, under Jim's personal leadership, they were driven across the sea-ice and the glacier with great difficulty in two separate parties, a trail blazer and a more heavily laden main party, the latter taking nine days to cross the glacier. After that, things ran reasonably smoothly and all the hard work paid off in terms of exploration and scientific results. With hindsight, some of the problems could have been foreseen, but if they had been taken too seriously, the expedition might never have started. It needed someone with Jim's optimism, drive and apparent refusal even to acknowledge the existence of obstacles, to get the venture off the ground and established in the field.

After this great success, it was back to naval service for another seven years, with retirement at the age of 50 to live in the family home in East Anglia. But not, of course, an idle retirement. He taught mathematics for a number of years. He kept sheep. He had hoped to establish a vineyard, but planning permission for an accompanying house was refused. He was a churchwarden and a bell-ringer. But above all, he kept in touch with his friends and with the country he loved. Fishing was a passion. Every year, he would be in his van in Scotland for the climbing and fishing, and in Cornwall at The Climbers' Club hut, the scene of some of his rock-climbing triumphs. He continued to rock-climb until he was 80, with the determination he had shown all his life – to the apprehension, sometimes, of onlookers.

In 1985, Jim finally left East Anglia for the West Country, with his beloved wife, Ann, first of all converting a barn at Luxborough into a comfortable and elegant home, with a precipitous garden carved out of the hillside and some years later moving to Iddesleigh. Even when compelled to move again, in order to live more practically in a village with some facilities, Jim insisted on moving heavy rocks to landscape their garden and was full of a project to improve their conservatory.

Jim was recognisably and proudly an ex-naval officer, with what would now be called old-fashioned views on life, but to the end of his days he was young in heart – more an eager schoolboy than a distinguished explorer. He will be greatly missed by his many friends.

*Mike Westmacott*

## **W A (Bill)Trench** **1923 (1973) - 2002**

I first met Bill in 1951, he was a chimney sweep at the time and came to do a job at my parents' home in Llandudno. I was 15 at the time and lived and dreamed mountains. On discovering he was a climber I 'latched on' to this fascinating, colourful he was black at the time. Smiling, kindly pipe-smoking mountaineer of the 'old school'.

Bill took me under his wing and provided me with transport to the hill each weekend and through him and his many friends I was privileged to meet and climb with many distinguished climbers of the day: Gwen Moffatt, Johnnie Lees, John Neill, Bob Downes, Don Whillans and many more at the 'cutting edge' in those days. It was Bill who fostered my great love for Lliwedd as this was his favourite crag and he looked upon it, as I do and always will, as a place of pure adventure. We climbed all

the popular classics and found our way up seldom done routes: Runnel, The Squiggle, Rocker, Mallory's Three Pinnacle face, The Clam and Elliptical flame. Sadly a neglected crag today but I will always look upon it not only as 'Bills crag', but a place of fascinating history where the names of Thompson, Mallory, Eckenstein and Edwards will live forever.

Bill was very much my mentor and I was close to him for more than 50 years. He introduced me to both the Cromlech club and the C.C. and his simple 'no frills' approach to climbing inspired me greatly. I will never forget those magical summer days on Lliwedd with Bill - the sweet smell of Players navy-cut wafting up from his pipe as he grinned his way up obscure pitches so proud to be following his 'prodigy'. I will climb some of these routes once more and I know he will not be far away. Bill died on November 20th 2002 after a long battle with cancer. I shall miss him and my condolences go out to Rhian his wife and his son Alan.

Colin Goodey



## **Elliott Merriam Viney DSO, MBE, TD, DL** **1913 (1935) - 2002**

Elliott Viney was born in Aylesbury on 21st August 1913 and died there in August 2002, a few days short of his 89th birthday. Throughout his life he was closely associated with Aylesbury and the County of Buckinghamshire. His family firm, Hazell, Watson and Viney, Printers and Binders, played a prominent part in the life of the town and Elliott became its Chairman in 1967.

He became involved in a large number of local organisations including the Aylesbury Chamber of Commerce (Chairman), the Aylesbury Orchestral Society (President), Aylesbury Association for the Protection of Property - he was bi-centenary President in 1985 - a county magistrate and Chairman of the Aylesbury bench from 1972 to 1983. He was High Sheriff of the County 1964-65 and a Deputy Lieutenant from 1951. He made a valuable contribution to the life of the Church of England in the county, serving as a churchwarden, trustee of the Bucks Clergy Charity, the Diocesan Advisory Committee and, most notably, as a founder trustee and subsequent chairman of the Bucks Historic Churches Trust.

He will also be particularly remembered in the country for his work for the Bucks Archaeological Society, where he served as Joint Editor, over 30 years, Secretary for 25 years and President from 1979 to 1997. On the national stage he was a governor of The Museum of London, 1972-1988, President of the City of London Archaeological Trust 1985-1989, President of The British Federation of Master Printers

and Master of the Worshipful Company of Grocers. This long list of his outstanding service is by no means exhaustive.

Elliott Viney had a most distinguished war record. He had joined the TA in 1932, went over to France with the Bucks Battalion of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, and took part in the gallant defence of Hazebrouck in May 1940, where he was acting second in command (and briefly the senior surviving officer in the Battalion). This rearguard action contributed to the escape of large parts of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk and was commended by the Germans, who in a radio broadcast announced that 'the defenders of Hazebrouck not only delayed the advance, but resisted in a manner truly worthy of the highest traditions of the British Arm'.

Elliott was captured and spent his next five years as a prisoner of war. In 1945 he was awarded the DSO for his gallantry at Hazebrouck, and also became MBE in recognition of his service in the POW camps, where he ran the camp library, edited a camp journal and organised courses in professional and academic subjects for his fellow officers. After the War he kept up his connection with the regiment, and remained in the TA until 1988. He was President of the Bucks Battalion Old Comrades Association from 1960 and was awarded the Territorial Decoration.

Elliott's love of the mountains dates from his early days, with family holidays in Buttermere and walks in the Alps. He was elected to The Climbers' Club in 1935, served on the committee from 1936 to 1939 and was Journal Editor from 1937 to 1940. He was elected to the Alpine Club in 1945, proposed by Leslie Shadbolt and seconded by S. B. Donkin. He served on the committee from 1951 and on the Library Committee from 1972 to 1991. He was President of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club in 1934-1935. He was a member of an Oxford party which climbed in the Lofoten Islands in 1934 and put in a good season in the Dolomites in 1938.

After the War two tragic events entered his life. In 1947 he climbed Mont Blanc with David Cox, Robin Hodgkin and Nully Kretschmer. They were joined by John Jenkins and two friends. From the summit Elliott and those two decided to go down on the French side by the Mer de Glace. The other four descended the Brenva Face, by way of the Old Brenva route. Jenkins and Kretschmer fell and were killed. Cox and Hodgkin had the daunting task of climbing down after them, although the bodies were not found for several days.

Then again in 1956, Elliott's younger brother Dick, who was Secretary of The Climbers' Club at the time, was killed climbing with Tom Bourdillon on the Jäghorn. These events didn't in any way diminish his love of mountains, but it did mean that he lowered his sights. He continued to walk in the hills of Snowdonia, the Lakes and the Cuillins. He also continued to run, he was field master of the Old Berkeley Beagles from 1952 to 1975. In fact, he first subscribed when still at school in 1929.

In 1950 he married Rosamund Pelly. They had two daughters. The Club extends its sympathy to his family on the loss of an outstanding character.

*Emlyn Jones*

The Editor apologises that some Obituaries for 2002-2003 are not included in this *Journal*. They will appear in the 2004 edition.



# REVIEWS

**Yosemite. Half a Century of Dynamic  
Rock Climbing**  
**Alexander Huber and Heinz Zak**  
**Bâton Wicks £30**

If *Yosemite* were just a collection of climbing photos in this era when the climbing photo is almost passé, it would still be an outstanding book. It is, however, far more than this. *Yosemite* tells the development of climbing in The Valley from the earliest explorations by surveying teams in the 1860s, when merely reaching the top of a peak was a major achievement, through progressive developments of technique and equipment up to the present day. Equally important is the book's discussion on the changes in climber's attitude towards ascents of these vertical deserts of granite over this period.

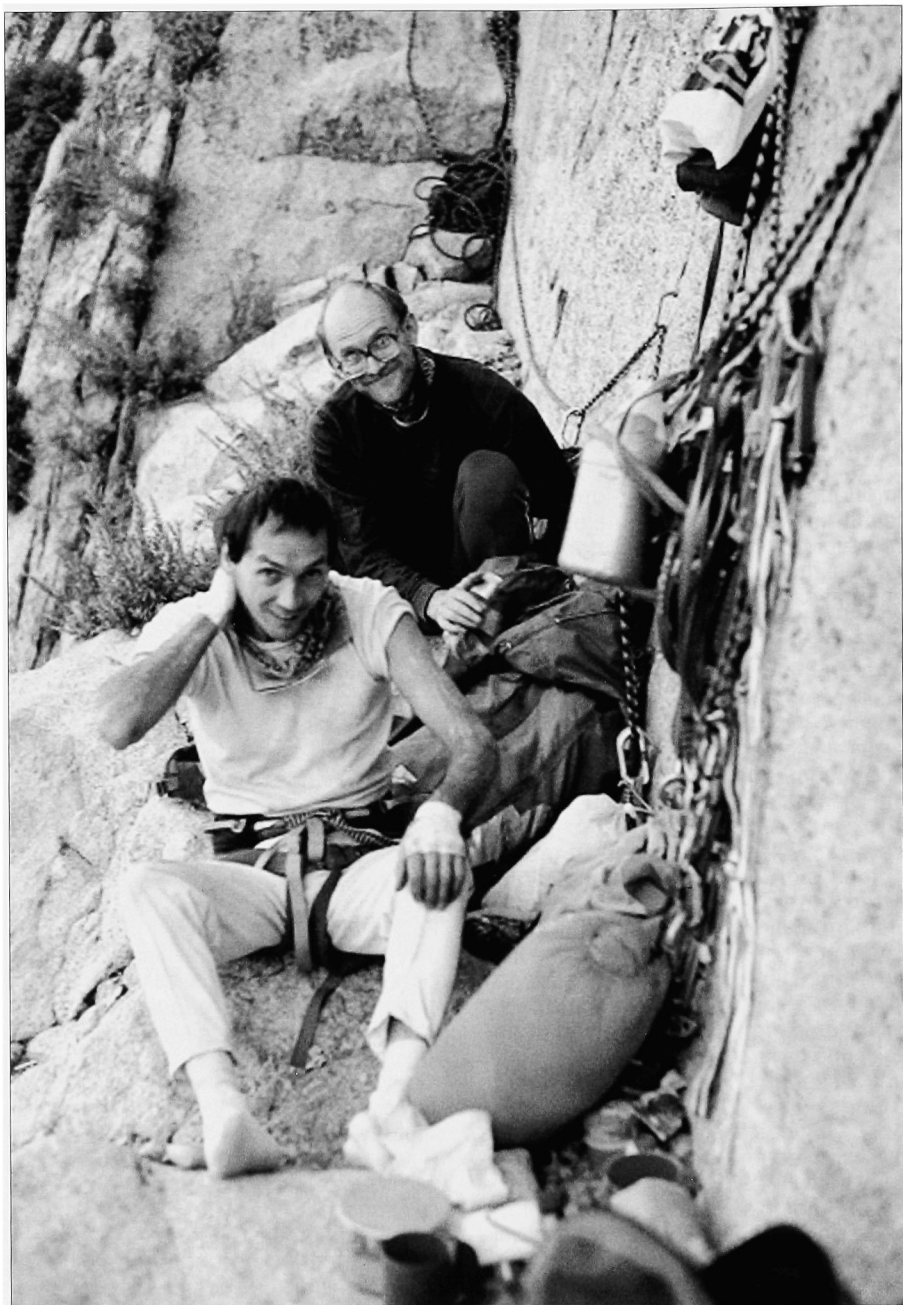
The early history section is necessarily compressed and draws upon other authors, though there are amusing anecdotes, not least was King's inability to find Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the Sierras, never mind climb it. As the book progresses, however, so historic detail develops and those legendary names start to appear, John Salathé, Allen Steck, Royal Robbins, Warren Harding, Bill 'Dolt' Feurerer, Chuck Pratt and Yvon Chouinard. By the '60s, the holiday atmosphere of earlier decades of climbing in the valley is changing to the more familiar one of competition and rivalry and arguments over the use of bolts and style of ascent are rife. Nothing changes.

Original accounts of first ascents are included and among them is an excerpt from the 1959 *American Alpine Journal* of Harding's 12-day first ascent of *The Nose* on ElCapitan. This seemed a little lacking in continuity in places, for instance, a retreat from the Stove Leg Cracks was followed in the next paragraph by Camp 4. I seem to recall a lot of climbing and ropework between these

two points including the famous king swing from the top of Boot Flake. Robbins's accounts of the ascents of *Salathé Wall* with Pratt and Frost and *North America Wall* with Frost, Chouinard and Pratt flowed far better and conveyed much more about their times.

Where the text is not by Alexander Huber there are fine chapters by Jim Bridwell, Mark Chapman, Jerry Moffatt, Leo Houlding and John Long amongst others. Lynn Hill's account of her free ascent of *The Nose* is also there to inspire. It's about this point in the book that something changes. Gone are the grainy burnshots taken from a stance, historic statements though they are, and in their place are stunning pictures of free climbing on some of the hardest and best climbs that *Yosemite* has to offer, interwoven with tales of their ascents. The change reflects one of attitude and no route remains sacred in attempts to forge them into free climbs of the highest order. I don't think that these pictures will ever be bettered. Zak's obsession with detail, his eye for position and his boldness in putting the two together leave one gasping. I can remember the headwall on *Salathé* – and hanging out over 900m of space with a sackload of cameras was not an option. Zak, a top climber himself in combination with Huber, probably one of the best climbers in the world and other world-class activists have produced a collection of palm tingling pictures. There are too many wonderful shots to mention; many are taken on the overhanging or very overhanging walls of El Capitan, particularly amazing are the shots taken on *El Nino* and *El Corazon* that both include pitches of 5.13b. Almost all are taken from positions that convey an almost religious faith in equipment, single-minded obsession with perfection and a total inability to register ludicrous degrees of exposure.

Not all climbs are in the 5.13 category and there are some luscious shots taken on Cookie Cliff of the more acces-



**Above:** Bob Conway (left) and Bill Wintrip at a bivouac on Lung Ledge at the top of pitch 12 on Salathé Wall of El Capitan, Yosemite. The next pitch, Hollow Flake 5.9, was probably the most scary and dangerous pitch of the whole route. Photo: Chris Jackson

sible *Outer Limits* (5.10c) and *Wheat Thin* (5.10c) and some beautiful landscapes. I have to confess, however, that one of my favourites is of Randy Leavitt on his route *Book of Hate* (5.13d) on Elephant's Graveyard. Does that look tough. You can tell a good book by the sweaty fingerprints and this one is well-covered. Buy it, buy it for the granny, you don't even need to be a climber for this one.

Chris Jackson

**Anderl Heckmair: My Life**  
Translated by Tim Carruthers  
Bâton Wicks

Even those of us who know little of climbing outside these shores, excepting perhaps the bolts under winter sun in Spain and Italy, have heard of the Eiger and the various, often fatal, epics which have taken place on its threatening and challenging North Face. The name of the Austrian Heinrich Harrer is well-known to the British climbing and non-climbing public because of his books, *The White Spider* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. Both of these were originally published in German, as was the book under review. Harrer has been criticised recently because of his suspected allegiance to the Nazi party and the same suspicion attaches to any top-ranking sportsman, or woman, who represented the Austrian/German 'union' in that era.

Heckmair is no exception. He was German and was attracted to Leni Riefenstahl, eventually the famous maker of the film of the Berlin Olympic Games, and through the contact with her to the fringes of the Nazi party. See the photos of her in the book. What young fit climber wouldn't have been? We should have sympathy. What would we all do if an extreme left- or right-wing government were elected here? Stop climbing? Refuse to play rugby or soccer or netball or hockey for our part of Britain? Unlikely. However, the successful ascent of the face by the joint Austrian-German team so soon after the German invasion of Austria must have been welcome grist for the German propaganda mill.

The two Germans, Heckmair and

Vorg, (who had the unusual, to us, first name of Wiggerl), started up the North Face after the Austrians Heinrich Harrer and Fritz Kasparek but overlooked them for a very good reason. The Austrians had made the very mistake which Vorg and Heckmair had made on earlier attempts. They had not prepared themselves for ice-climbing, had no axe and had had to cut steps up the ice sections with an ice hammer, bent double because of that tool's short length. Heckmair and Vorg were wearing, for the first time, recently acquired 12-point crampons, an innovation at the time and, as Heckmair says, were surprised at the way the two front points bit in. What were the four to do? They joined up as parties of different nationalities have done on that face, and others, many times since. Heckmair led throughout with Harrer as the reliable last man and collector of the ironware the others used. How his hammer arm must have ached when they got to the top. Harrer's *Die Weisse Spinne* was copyrighted in 1958 and in Britain as *The White Spider* in 1959. He got in first and has collected all the fame derived from that Eiger ascent and consequently reduced the fame and admiration which Heckmair has deserved.

Heckmair evidently had in him not only the makings of a first class, indeed pre-eminent, mountaineer but the mind of a future author because he collected photographs, largely missing in the original *The White Spider*, from early in his career. He scorned Vorg's taking a camera on their attempt on the North Face but this book however contains many of his photographs. Those and many others shed light on the climbers of his era and their gear and were not included when Heckmair's memoirs were first published in English in 1975. This edition has some additions to that text and the extra photographs.

The book is not, of course, merely an account of the first ascent of the Eiger's North Face, although that section is gripping and the high point of the book. It is truthfully entitled *My Life* and includes accounts of his early, youthful, less experienced and perhaps more dangerous

climbs and the many other later climbs and expeditions on the worldwide stage. He almost forgets to mention his first wife and allows his second a mere couple of lines. He has more to say than Harrer about his nearly getting swept into the Nazi party but spent some of his army service on the eastern (Russian) front, where in fact Vorg was killed. Not the comfortable niche to which Nazi party favourites get sent. I am getting carried away. Read it for yourself.

I cannot judge how good a job the translator, Tim Caruthers, (whom I assume to be an American since the translation is credited to The Mountaineers Books of Seattle) has made of the original German but the English text reads well, without the stilted mechanical prose of some translations of German.

I have one minor criticism. As a onetime Physics teacher I find the use of the word *meter* to indicate a length irritating. *Metre* we use over here. 'Five meters higher I could finally cut a good stance and plant two ice pitons'. What were they doing with these meters? Standing on them? Ignore that idiosyncrasy – it is a damn good read. Get a copy, and belay yourself well into a comfortable armchair and get on that face, all 6,000 foot of it, with him and thank God that you're not holding his falls or taking his pegs out. And when you've recovered from that there are all the other faces that carry his bootmarks. I hope you're up to it.

Dave Gregory

**Meirionnydd**

by Martin Crocker, John Sumner, Terry Taylor, Ellyn Jones, Dave Wrennall and Mike Rosser

Edited by John Willson  
Climbers' Club £18

The front cover of my 1988 CC guide to *Mid-Wales* shows regional guru, John Sumner, on his awesome *Darker Angel*, Craig Cau. Now I'm a humble VS leader – even at the best of times – who will never ever find himself 'between two 5c pitches' and whose only outing on a pitch of that grade (seconding pitch 2 of Green

*Cormorant Facel*) resulted in a series of ignominious and embarrassing multiple aid moves but that front cover was still one of the main reasons I bought the '88 guidebook – that, and wanting to write about Sumner's wonderful *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. Because, for climbers, imagination is all, isn't it: the picture (or the privileged viewing) shows what's possible, what there is to aspire to and what to dream of ascending. You climb way above your grade in your mind's eye ('with the bonus of one dry handhold', as this guidebook tells us).

I remember sitting in vertical bracken one hot summer morning in 1975 watching Pete Livesey 'clean' *The West Face* route in *The Great Zawn*, prior to him leading Jill Lawrence up it the next day and never believing that one day I'd get on to that cold dark wall and make a good fist of seconding *Desolation Row*. It was dreaming of *The Dream* that got me there. Just so, I reasoned, it would be worth climbing the scrappy *Pen Coed Pillar* to walk round, lie in the heather and gaze at the vast gully wall with the eye of faith, tracing routes, imagining myself on that tiny, perfect ledge between 5c overhangs.

Looking at the '88 cover again, I wonder if John Sumner ever did the same and imagined himself up the overhanging outside edge of the wall when he found, ground up, *Darker Angel*. Whether he did or not, he got himself into one of those particularities which CC guidebooks so frequently record for posterity: the frontispiece of *Meirionnydd* (a better photo, incidentally than the '88 front cover), taken by John Sumner himself, shows prime guidebook writer and Meirionnydd new-router Martin Crocker powering up the E5 *Blame it on the Gods*, just to the left of *Darker Angel*, in front of an impossibly blue, ripple-infested watery background.

Looking through the lens, Sumner must have realised the claim that his route in the '88 guide was 'one of the great Welsh classics' was probably doomed. Sure enough, it now gets re-described as 'nonetheless, a very fine outing'. So it goes; it's in the nature of



things, competition between the best climbers of the age trying to get a guidebook out on time is bound to produce new and audacious routes of the highest quality and there are certainly hundreds of these in this book. Incidentally, the route name, *Blame it on the Gods* maintains the artistic integrity set by all the route names on the face and thus the otherworldly atmosphere of the place. The photo also provides that neat continuity and supplanting of explorer and guidebook writer that is such a feature of our Club's approach to charting climbing across time and the country.

Good photos sell modern guidebooks. The front cover of *Meirionnydd* sports another brilliant photo, but this time of a VS on Simmde Ddu. 'I could do that route,' I thought, 'I want to do that route.' and so didn't send the book out for review. The photo is brilliant partly because it catches one of the three most recent activists, Norman Clacher in toe-tensed, balletic balance on a back-lit wall with empty hills behind him, clearly engaged and enjoying himself, but also because once again, quiet water is visible. One begins to wonder how many crags in Mid-Wales have the added advantage of watery backgrounds and with over 200 featuring in this bumper guidebook it seems probable that there are many.

Cue eager page turning and interrogation of maps and before long one discovers that in this area one can climb on rock that's also water-washed. For starters, Martin Crocker, is seen on the first ascent of *Waterworld* eight metres right of a glittering waterfall and Nick Dixon pirouettes improbably on the river-smoothed glassy rock of The Tubes, a few feet above a river that in spate is apparently a 'brown maelstrom of standing waves, speeding water and debris' in which, not surprisingly, 'several people have lost their lives'. Why have I never been there; it's just off the road? I yearn for a look, but note the names of those who have 'boulder hopped' 'in from the shore': Pritchard, Dixon, Waddy, Wainwright and reason that once again it would be just for a gazing visit.

But then there's Rhinog Fach to

consider: I absolutely must have a long summer day there, doing the 'oldest... longest, highest (Severe) ridge in the Rhinogau' and *Walking on Water* a 50m Severe that is a 'unique slab climb above deep fresh water'. According to the book, 'A fine day's mountaineering can be had by combining both climbs.' Here's food for a Journal article, surely.

And, finally, there is the detailed list of First Ascents from which we learn that, latterly, the competing teams of explorers led by Crocker, Clacher and Taylor have apparently spent as much time in the water as on the rock. Crocker climbs four new routes in a 'wild weekend of gales'; again, on another occasion, 'the second day, the route was a sheet of water'; Terry Taylor has fun with the weather: *Dance to the storm. Eye of the Storm. Why Does It always Pour on Me* and Crocker, clearly driven by manic energy, cleans and climbs in 'continuous pouring rain' where the only way he can keep dry is by 'having an umbrella strapped to his head'. Honorary membership of the Club seems a small reward for devotion of this quality and magnitude. Here is our sport recorded at its best.

But it is not just the heroic efforts of prime mover, Crocker, or his co-writers – indefatigable CC stalwarts all – that we should applaud for this guidebook. While President Smith was dealing with Huts and foot-and-mouth, the evergreen John Willson was lured out of a 'well-earned retirement' to oversee editorial control and production of over 500 closely written and printed pages: a stunning achievement. Phil Gibson – surely with Al Phizacklea – at the cutting edge of line-drawing of mountain features, produces some works of art here where crag detail supplements and enhances route line information rather than obscures it and Don Sargeant and Simon Cardy control the photodiagrams and artwork beautifully. Of particular note – where many outcrops abound in a complex area like Craig Cau – are the boxed overprints to show cliffs in relation to each.

Coupled with clear descriptions of how to get to the cliffs and get off them (still for me the crux of the day) these fur-

ther examples of the art of guidebook writing are a pleasure to encounter.

There is a lifetime of climbing here – even though Crocker seems to have crammed it all into a few months and Harold Drasdo continues to evidence and though clearly the weather sometimes makes gutters of the high crags. I remember in particular, a very wet Aardvark on Gist Ddul, there are hundreds of new short routes on quick-drying rock that can be snatched with a minimum walk. So, this is a book not just for the shelf or the armchair (who exactly is the P Livesey who seconded *Brigate Rosso* and *Ghost Dance* in April 1999?), but also for the 'sack and the climb. Buy it now, but whatever else you do with it, please keep it out of Meirionnydd mountain water.

Tim Noble

**An Unsung Hero**  
The remarkable story of Tom Crean,  
Antarctic Explorer  
by Michael Smith  
Headline

I read this book with much the same enjoyment as children show when hearing once again a story they already know backwards. It is the story of three major Antarctic expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century. What is new and valuable about it, however, is that it puts Tom Crean, a naval rating, at the centre of the story and provides interesting details of his early life on a farm in Kerry, of the circumstances leading to his being recruited into Scott's first Antarctic expedition, and of his fortunes after he left the Antarctic for good to lead a settled family life at his pub, The South Pole Inn, at Anascaul on the Dingle peninsula. His involvement in Antarctic exploration lasted 15 years.

Anyone who has served in the army or the navy will know what a pivotal role the non-commissioned officers, the sergeants, the corporals, the leading seamen and the petty officers play in the running of a regiment or a ship. They are often the men that save the day. And Tom Crean was an outstanding example. Strong, loyal, good-natured, practical and

courageous, he was a tower of strength in some of the most desperate situations encountered in the Antarctic between 1902 and 1916. An interesting reflection on the class structure of English life is that whereas Crean ended up running a pub in Ireland, Evans, whom he rescued from death and man-hauled on a sledge for miles across the Ross Ice Barrier, went on to be Admiral Lord Mountevans.

There were many brave deeds done in those days. The world was much bigger then than it is today (now that the South Pole has become a holiday destination for the wealthy) and the risks to life in polar regions were much more serious, particularly considering the lack of communication with the outside world. It is right enough, therefore, to describe that period as the Heroic Age of Polar Travel. But the author does rather over-use the term and, invariably, with capital letters. One might also call it, less generously, the Age of Ineptitude, exemplifying as it did the British disinclination to learn from foreigners. He is also at great pains to insist on the rigours and the suffering.

A reading of Vilhjalmur Stefansson about life in high latitudes (*The Friendly Arctic*) would do something to adjust the balance. The ordeals these men went through, if as severe as implied, would require a lengthy convalescence. Yet, in fact, a bath, a good meal and a night's sleep usually were sufficient. This is not to belittle the achievements and the fortitude shown by these men, but what we most want to know about extreme adventures is what it was really like, not what builds people up into supermen with mythological powers. The ship's company of Shackleton's *Endurance*, for example, marooned on the Weddell Sea, were physically a cross section of ordinary humanity, distinguished no doubt by their adventurous spirit but not otherwise exceptional.

In adversity some polar explorers found in themselves splendid qualities. Many have been recognised and applauded: Wilson, Bowers, Oates, Wild, Worsley, Hurley for example. Many too besides Crean could be described as

unsung heroes, notably McNeish, ship's carpenter, the oldest member of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition at 58, and the only one that was not impressed by Shackleton's blarney.

It is good to see Tom Crean singled out as a key figure in Antarctic exploration and the discovery of other unsung heroes will add to our awareness of great things done when men go out into the unknown. Captain Cook is rightly celebrated as a great explorer of the southern seas but several American sealing captains made equally daring voyages of discovery in the stormy waters of Antarctica though they were reluctant to let anybody know where they'd been and what they'd found. Tom Crean's Antarctic performance was truly admirable and Michael Smith gives him full credit in this thorough and enthusiastic account. He was a popular and cheerful expedition man who must have done much to sustain morale in harsh conditions. He was exceptionally strong but also had qualities of character and a practical good sense that proved invaluable. The book's cover picture, a closeup of Crean's face, says it all.

It is a worthy addition to any Antarctic library.  
Tom Price

**The Fall**  
**by Simon Mawer**  
**Little Brown £12.99**

Good quality climbing fiction is a relatively rare commodity. To my mind the only really satisfying examples are Roger Hubank's two excellent novels *North Wall* and *Hazard's Way*, and Alison Fell's deeply emotional *Mer de Glace*. These are thoroughly enjoyable books, where climbing forms something of a framework to stories of human frailty, strength and sometimes courage and humanity.

A new book has appeared that is more than worthy to be included alongside the work of Roger Hubank and Alison Fell. *The Fall* by Simon Mawer is a splendid book, written by a well-established novelist (it is his sixth novel) who in the past has had work long listed for

the Booker Prize. The book begins in dramatic fashion, with a presumed suicide on the Great Wall of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu. This sets the stage for a story of complex relationships from the late 1930s up to the present. In truth this book is not about climbing, it is a fascinating kind of love story, with elements of betrayal, obsession and guilt throughout, working up to a poignant conclusion. However, the climbing context holds the story together superbly and makes for exciting reading.

Simon Mawer clearly knows North Wales well and the climbing sequences are very convincing. He also cleverly recreates the period at the outbreak of the Second World War both in Wales and in the hell of the East End of London during the Blitz. The various characters unfold over the years and the story culminates in an epic on the North Wall of the Eiger, where the narrator Rob Dewar is rescued and with his innocence and confidence shattered moves away from climbing and embraces real life as an adult. I don't know if Simon Mawer has ever been on the North Wall of the Eiger but that section is truly gripping, fearful and downright unpleasant. It is also the turning point of the story, yet there are still surprises to come. I have to confess that I couldn't put the book down, it is a superb read and totally addictive.

On the cover Beryl Bainbridge describes *The Fall* as 'Wonderful and surprising. An absolute joy to read. Simon Mawer has entered the first rank of British novelists'. This is no hype; this is a very fine piece of work worthy to stand alongside the fiction of Roger Hubank and Alison Fell. The book was a popular winner of the 2003 Boardman Tasker Award, holding off a strong challenge from Ed Douglas' excellent biography of Tensing. Go out and buy it, *The Fall* is an absolute treat.

Steve Dean

**Llanberis**  
**By Iwan Arfon Jones**  
**Edited by Bob Moulton**  
**Climbers' Club £15**

The opening sentence of Bob Moulton's

Introduction to this new guidebook says it all, 'The Llanberis Pass is one of the foremost areas for rock-climbing in Britain'. I'd go further than that. Is there, one must ask seriously, any other mountain feature in Britain which, when referred to in its diminutive form, viz: 'The Pass', is instantly recognisable in climbing circles? I doubt it. Speak these two words as a question to a rock-climber in any bar from Braemar to St Just and immediately a shared lexicon, a fevered personal recollection will kick in and an alcohol-fuelled discussion ensue: *Wrinkle, Nea* (before the fall), *The Cracks, Main Wall, Crackstone Rib, Shadow Wall, Mot Direct, Diagonal, Lion, Spectre, Brant, Kaisergerbirge Wall, Erosion Groove*...

Moves will be rehearsed; difficulties disagreed about and gaps in experience exploited or commiserated about. It hardly matters the name or grade of the routes – or even the sequence in which they were attempted or climbed, because anyone who is serious about climbing gravitates at some point in a climbing career – usually earlier rather than later (with brownie points for early unofficial camping, burning furniture and being banned from the bunkhouse, or sleeping under Landrovers by the boulders) – to 'The Pass', to what I remember as 'The Three Cliffs'. And, let's not kid ourselves: in Ynws Ettws of a night (any night), we know who has led *Cenotaph Corner*, don't we, even if they don't tell you or it's not in the log? Long ago eclipsed as a yardstick of difficulty, this route is still the revered icon of our sport: doesn't every climber have either to attempt it, or plan to attempt it if they are to believe themselves an integral part of the climbing community, sharing in the history of the sport? Indeed, I'm thinking of suggesting to the committee a new category of honorary CC member: one who has waited until his/her mid 50s to lead *Cenotaph Corner*, because commitment to the sport of this magnitude would guarantee automatic entry to any other climbing club in the world.

Why has this occurred? Surely Stange is as sacrosanct, Cloggy as central, Bosigran as obligatory – to say nothing

about Peak limestone? Not so. And it's not just about the sheer variety and density of climbing on offer in 'The Pass', it's that *here* is where standards of climbing in the *mountains* really began to take off and consolidate. Forget The Lake District; that's where we go after we've served an apprenticeship in 'The Pass'. Ageing Editor's advice to young aspirant CC members: do it the other way round and:

la) expect to struggle on The Cromlech: any E1 on Gimmer – the *String*, for instance – doesn't match the experience of the *Gates* (even though you've only seconded these two? Ed) and  
lb) you simply won't get the rock footage in front of your peer group; the FRCC are a tight band of oldies and youngsters clip Spanish limestone nowadays rather than repeat Dove's new desperates, or respect Reecastle's testpieces. Here is where you must first cut the mustard, publicly.

This is partly because in the Llanberis Pass, 'a climber at work can be watched keenly from the road by critical fellow climbers (some using binoculars)' – possibly even from Ynws Ettws and, partly, because this is where the cutting edge climbers have come to make a mark, and still do. Think of Menlove Edwards; the Harding era; the Rock and Ice; the Alpha; the Milburn inspired 'Free The Pass' campaign in 1977 to 'push modern free-climbing standards in North Wales'. This valley is the crucible of the sport. You doubt my assertion? Look through the First Ascent list and count who is missing. Incoming Peak and Lake District teams are obvious: Biven and Peck; Matheson and Cleasby and Tony Willmot are there. Leading lights – even came to live for a time. Now read about who has contributed to the compilation of the guidebook; so it's not surprising that 'Climbing evolution and developments in rock-climbing have taken place here at a terrific pace'.

In the early '80s 'Standards became so high that virtually anything seemed possible.' Uerry Moffatt's solo of virtually every Cromlech test piece. This new guide nods in that direction: 'Standards have increased and attitudes have



changed'; we are now in an era of 'prepared routes'. 'The Pass' is still producing the goods, still challenging the new youth, still showing the infinite riches of a little place.

Do I need to say more? Yes, two things: the brilliant photodiagrams (courtesy of Simon Cardyl), identifying the rash of 'newly-discovered' little crags, with their host of modern micro routes and the comprehensive maps by Don Sargeant are both highpoints – worth buying the book for on their own. The rest is just as good (no slate, of course) though I doubt I shall be transferring my list of dated ascents to yet another new guide.

I was 14 when I first camped in 'The Pass'. I can still remember the moment, after a horrendous journey in a Local Authority Youth Club minibus an incompetent tent pitching and hopeless Primus-fired meal when, stepping out into the star-spangled violet night and turning slowly through a full circle, I tried to recognise the mountain tops around me. It was the first time I really smelled that indefinable mountain smell – of rock, water and high-moving air. This remains the defining trigger of emotion for me – as does 'The Pass' in my climbing career. I daresay it is the same for thousands of other climbers, who really should buy this latest edition, to trigger memory, fire up the blood and start planning that long-overdue ascent of *Cenotaph Corner*.

Tim Noble

### **This Mountain Life The First Hundred Years of the Rucksack Club**

**Edited by John Beatty  
Northern Light**

This book is a pictorial record of the activities of the Rucksack Club, published to commemorate the centenary of this illustrious club, one of the most important in the history of British mountaineering. Established in 1902 it was the sixth mountaineering club to be formed in Britain, and was the second 'regional' English club being firmly based in Manchester, the first being the Yorkshire Ramblers' which was founded 10 years earlier.

The Rucksack Club has always been well-known because of its enduring reputation for long distance walkers and outstanding fellrunners. Soon after the First World War their most outstanding fell runner was Eustace Thomas, who at the age of 53 held the Lakeland Fell Record, then took up Alpine climbing and became the second person and the first Briton to climb all the Alpine 4,000m peaks.

Their membership in the inter war period also included many of the leading rock-climbers of the day, men like A S (Fred) Pigott, Morley Wood, Harry Kelly and Arthur Birtwistle who made superb new routes in Wales, the Lake District, the Peak and Scotland. The Club had established the first mountain hut in Britain in remote Cwm Eigiau in 1912, but this barely survived the First World War and was closed in 1920. However, in the late 1920s they leased Tal y Braich in the Ogwen Valley and used this as their base during that golden age of Welsh rock-climbing.

It was during this period that the club made a vital contribution to the wider mountaineering community by being instrumental in the establishment of the National Mountain Rescue Committee with Wilson Hey as the first chairman and A S Pigott as secretary. After the Second World War the Club's lease on Tal y Braich expired but in the late 1940s they acquired Beudy Mawr in the Llanberis Pass which new rock-climbing star, Peter Harding, used as his base for many of his historic ascents at the time.

The tradition for big walks, hard climbs and expeditions throughout the world has continued to the present day and the whole period has been superbly portrayed in the photographs chosen from the Club's archives by John Beatty. The Rucksack Club celebrated its centenary with a splendid Dinner in the Manchester Town Hall in October 2002. Enough copies of the book were published for members, immediate friends and guests. Fortunately it has now been reprinted and is available to all who might like to delve into the history of one of the earliest, most active and influen-

tial clubs in the country.

Copies are available at £20 each plus £2 p&p from The Rucksack Club, c/o Dunrobin, The Crescent, Dunblane, Perthshire FK15 0DW  
Derek Walker

**Cwm Silyn and Cwellyn,  
by Paul Jenkinson and Bob Wightman  
Edited by John Willison  
Climbers' Club £12**

This area holds a very special place in my early climbing career. It saw the beginning of my productive partnership with my best friend Dave Gregson when we belonged to the Harrow Mountaineering Club. In the late '60s we climbed the majestic *Crucible* on Craig yr Ogof above the shimmering lakes of Cwm Silyn one dry September and the following year the impressive *Dwm* on the beetling buttress of Castell Cidwm. As youngsters beginning to feel our way on to the harder things in Wales at that time the world seemed to be our oyster. By the time the first independent Climbers' Club guide to the area by Yates and Perrin came out in 1971 Dave, only 24 years old, was dead, killed on the Eiger. Of course I went back and climbed on both crags again but always with that sense of ennui, of unfulfilled promise.

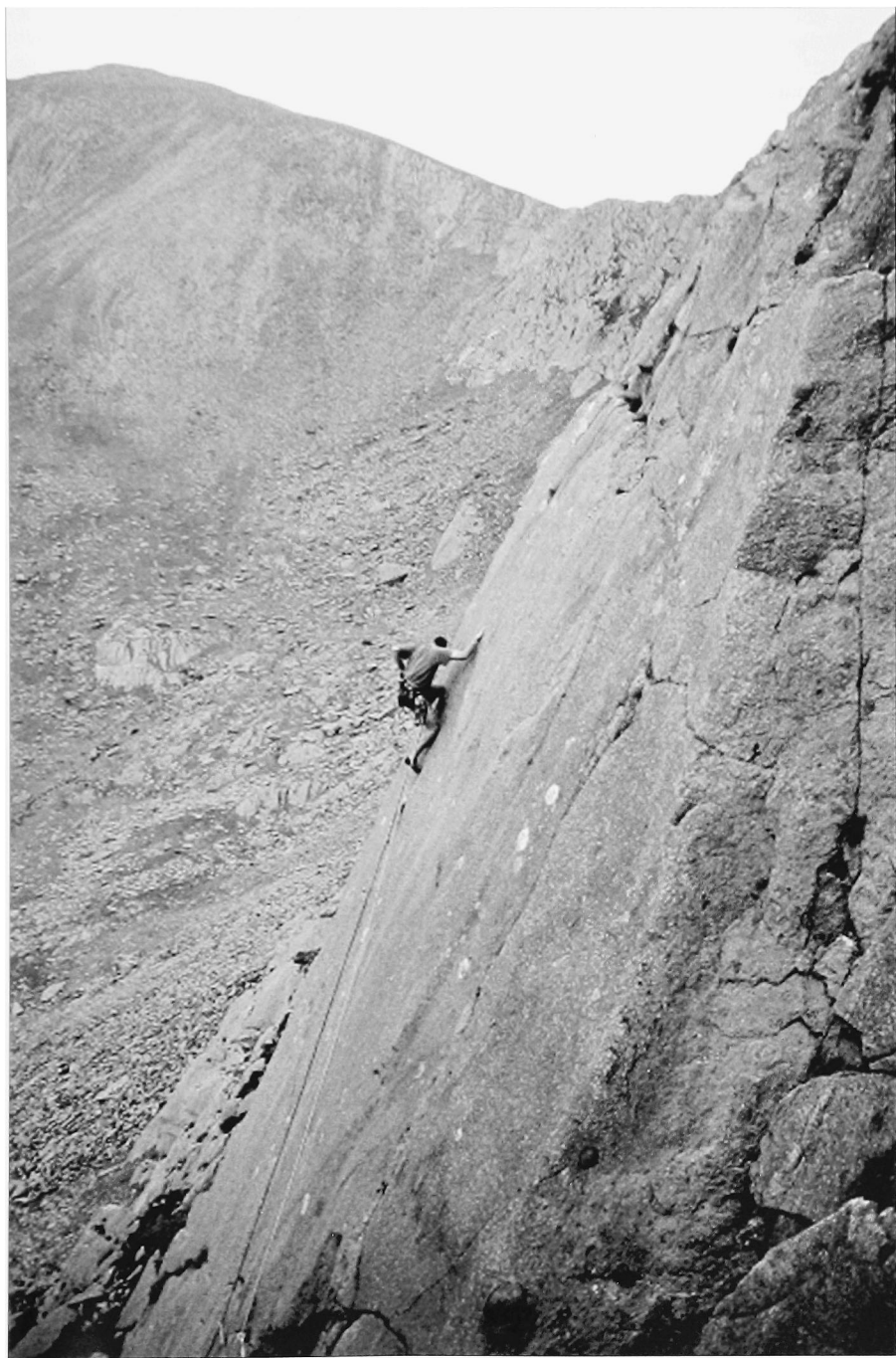
But what of the new guide, only the second to be devoted entirely to this beautiful and often unfrequented corner of Snowdonia? With less than 130 very informative pages and a dozen action shots within, it is thin, but perfectly formed (In fact it is considerably thinner than the '71 volume – even though there are over 150 more climbs – but this is entirely due to better book design and lighter weight, tougher paper). Apart from the excellent front and rear cover photos the first thing that struck me was the strange nostalgic quality of some of the landscape and crag shots, like watercolours or, more accurately, like black and white shots hand-tinted with pale colour. I rather liked the effect but I couldn't quite put my finger on why they should be so until I read in the Editor's acknowledgements to Don Sargeant (superb maps and photo-dia-

grams as usual) who 'still found time to make repeated excursions into the hills to obtain satisfactory conditions to take the photos required and then to process all the artwork using the Isid digital technology for the first time'. Digital imaging, whether through the printing dyes used or compression of the colour information in the file, has this capacity to 'pastelize' certain images. To my mind this is not necessarily a bad thing but will definitely be used by future generations to identify 'early digital guidebooks'. (Whereas I predict 'late digital guidebooks' will be small thin handheld screens with colossal memories on which one will be able to call up the description and colour topo of any climb in the world merely by speaking nicely to it.)

The subtitle *Rock and Winter Climbs in Eifionydd* is an indication of the addition of some 20 odd winter climbs scattered throughout the guide. All we need now is for global warming to go into reverse to enjoy yet another aspect of these lonely cwms. Conversely, with the fashion in full swing I am surprised there is no mention of any bouldering in the area (unless I missed it), perhaps the walk-in is too much, or perhaps there just isn't any (no doubt a bouldering aficionado will put me straight on this). The history section is brief, interesting and well-written and cleverly supplemented by the fulsome first ascent list at the back with its detailed anecdotal and historical paragraphs added to the dates and the dramatic personae.

Of the 30 or so crags which then follow only the high quality crags of Castell Cidwm and Craig yr Ogof have achieved any real popularity, perhaps with the exception of Craig Cwm Trwsogl at the head of Cwm Pennant containing Perrin's classic *The Exterminating Angel*. This is a shame as there seems to be some interesting climbing available for those who like remote locations, wild mountain landscape and who aren't

**Opposite:** The front cover photo from the Cwm Silyn... guidebook; Nigel Coe climbing Erection (E2) Llechog. Photo: Don Sargeant



afraid of a walk or of asking a farmer for permission to climb on his land. Unfortunately, the landowner at Clogwyn y Garreg and Craig Isallt 'does not permit climbing' and the descriptions have been left in the guide on the understanding that 'it is possible that this situation will change when CRoW is fully implemented'. Who, I wonder, will be willing to test the power of the legislation with the landowner when it is?

This then is a fine addition to the Club's guides and a testament to the hard work of the authors and John Willson the editor. All descriptions of climbs and the approach and access notes appear to have been scrupulously revised and updated and there is a sense that this guide, once expected to be just a chapter in the *Tremadog* guide, can now rightfully stand as an independent area on its own merits. And I for one can't wait, with this slim comprehensive volume in hand, to continue my exploration of the many delights of this remote and beautiful corner of the mountains.

Brian Wilkinson

**Lake District Rock  
Selected Rock Climbs in the English  
Lake District  
By Members of the FRCC Guidebooks  
Committee  
Edited by Stephen Reid  
FRCC**

On my study shelves stand most of the complete editions of the FRCC guides to The Lake District; I have been scrambling and climbing there every year since early boyhood, 45 odd years ago, even writing a book about its VS climbs. To the fury of my daughters and incomprehension of my partner, I pile these guidebooks beside the loo and memorise route names like lines of favourite poetry.

So why do I need a volume of 'selected climbs' in The Lake District that is 'aimed at the occasional visitor'? Especially since, at the best of times I don't actually like books of 'selected climbs'. I've got the Williams *Snowdonia*, the Littlejohn *South West* and the Birkett *Lake*

*District*, but none of those with UIAA accepted topos and few others I've ever opened or used, because 'for me, selected climbs' are like poetry anthologies. The kind with titles like 'The Nation's 100 Best Love Poems: one for every Occasion', or 'Pam Ayres' Favourite Farmyard Ballads' bound to set the sheep against the goats: they signal a sort of end of the canon, a summation, a taking stock and, by their nature, they are other people's selection rather than mine, the poet's or the crag's own offerings.

It is the editor's choice that defines the vision – of poetry and climbing. I think of Al Alvarez's defining *New Poetry*; Larkin's mere nod to the massive presence of Ted Hughes in his run through British poetry and Hughes's own careful editing of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*. These are not necessarily the poet's choices in the poet's chosen places and though I know that routes are continually entering and leaving guidebooks under editorial discussion and control better by far, surely, to buy the full guide and the poet's collection?

On a continuum, with a selected volume at one end and a sheaf of notes suggesting gaps to be filled at the other, I know where most climbers would want to be and Editor Stephen Reid is no exception, even now finding interesting unclimbed pitches on Gimmer and Pillar. It's not that I expected to find my only shared new route in The Lakes included you understand (a pleasant-enough though slightly scrappy little VS on Waterfall Buttress, climbed with Buttermere guidebook writer David Craig in 1986, while checking the Newlands Valley and, by now, very probably returned to nature), nor that there is any evidence of a desire to include modern routes climbed by the editorial team, it's bigger things missing that rankles. Waterfall Buttress itself isn't included, that, too, was somewhat esoteric but in this book the whole of Newlands has evaporated. No Dale Head; no Miner's Crag. Birkett calls *Dale Head Pillar* 'a classic climb' – classic in 1975, perhaps, but not now.

You begin to see my point, I hope. It's not that I'm taking issue with the 500



or so routes included here 'the bulk of them in VS to E2 range' with over 100 routes or Severe or less and all 'described by those who know the area best'. It's just I know that books like *Hard Rock*, *Extreme Rock*, *Cold Climbs* and my own humble *Great VS Climbs in The Lake District* act like selected climbs, honey-potting routes and crags to the exclusion of others that deserve rediscovery. Having said that, I'm delighted to see the excellent *Beowulf* and *Grendel* on Scrubby Crag included and several other little gems.

Having weighed in like a grumpy old man, I must say something positive: the pictures are generally sound, if a little unadventurous given the collective talent available. But flick through and find how many are close ups, though. Very difficult to get good climbing pictures in close up – especially from above and below (Matheson and Gore offering hirsutely-challenged heads to the fore) but there are pictures of women and children climbing, which is nice, and reminds that the CC can find only Grace Hurford, Jill Sumner and historical pictures of ex President Jancis and Catherine Destiville in the 800+ pages of the two guidebooks reviewed in previous pages. This may be a cunning ploy by the editor to suggest the amenability of the region; bring the family you 'occasional visitor' you can get them on the rock, too. It worked on me: I showed my little six year old step daughter, named Flora, the picture of little Flora Wharton 'checking the guidebook' not, I'm afraid, 'beneath Shepherd's Crag', but very much on top of it, clad in climbing shoes but unroped, as far as I can see. Pictured above the section 'Safety Advice', I thought originally it might have been ironic. My Flora just grimaced, however, and turned back to teen time TV. I'll be on my own again this year, then.

The production is lavish – if perhaps a little too fussy on the page with different-coloured enhancings and masses of info. But what really saves it for me is the quality of Al Phizacklea's colour in-filled crag diagrams which are simply superb and rate easily as well as Gibson's line work for the CC.

Having served time in front of Bob Moulton's legendary guidebook selling figures, I should dearly love to know this book's unit costs and projected sales. For established Lakes oldies like me, I doubt they will want it for other than the diagrams; for the 'occasional visitor', however, I assume the Moulton equivalents at the FRCC have done the numbers and reckoned that despite the rain, the cheap Spanish flights and the cost of holiday cottages, there are enough of them out there wanting to climb in The Lake District and prepared to buy this anthology rather than the complete works. Good luck to them; but to the 'occasional visitor' I'd say go and explore Newlands and do *Miner's Girdle VS*.

Tim Noble

## Editor's Endpiece:

On page 144 of the 2001 *Journal*, I posed three questions about an old black and white photo: Who is the climber? What is the crag? Which route? I received only one reply:

I was really surprised when I saw that photo on the last page. I just cannot remember how you got hold of it. What do I win if I guess who it is? Anyway I thought I'd give you the full history of the photo. It was, of course, on Shepherd's. I think I was with a girlfriend who was not climbing; maybe she took the photo. I had nothing to do so I went up to the tree just below the top of *Donkey's Ears* and abseiled down. I then climbed a few feet up *Monolith Crack* until I could tie into the abseil rope, just high enough so if I fell off I would (maybe) miss hitting the deck. Where I am in the photo is traversing from *Monolith* towards a scoop which I think is a route now called *Hippos Might Fly*? It did not exist then of course. I found the bit I'm on getting to the scoop quite difficult – probably the hiking boots were not much help. Anyway, then I finished up what I think is 17 or 18 at the time. Hope all is well with you; look forward to the next *Journal*.

Very Best Wishes,  
Paul Ross, Colorado

My apologies to members for the protracted and delayed arrival of this edition of The *Journal*. By way of reassurance, with a few more contributions, a 2004 edition can be ready in early 2005.



