

The  
**Climbers' Club**  
**Journal**

**2004-5**



# The Climbers' Club Journal

**Edited by  
Tim Noble**

**2004-2005  
The Climbers' Club**

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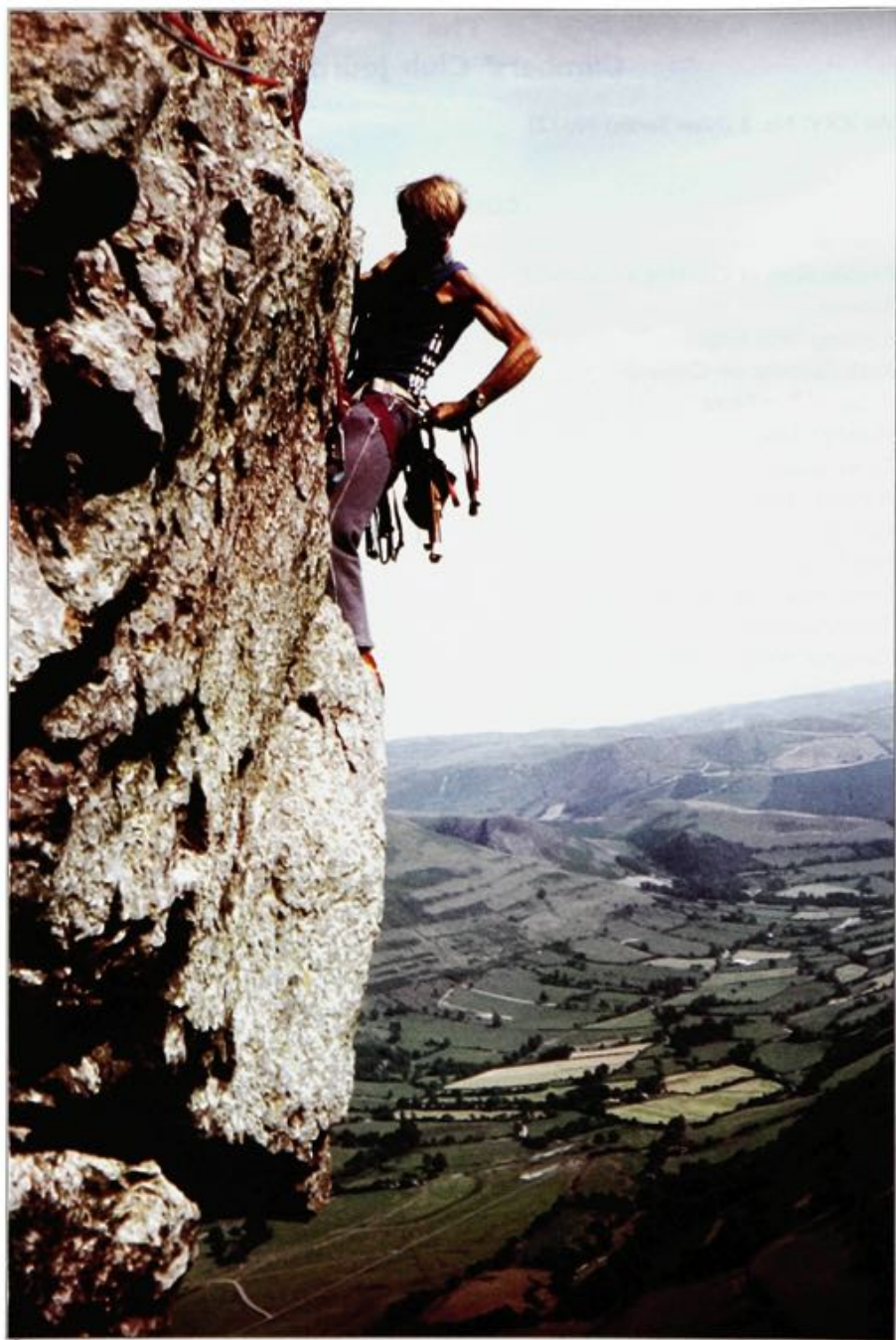
# The Climbers' Club Journal

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2004 -2005

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# Editorial

*"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a collossus, and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about...."*

(Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*)

Once in a generation every sport throws up a unique talent, an athlete so prodigiously gifted or so passionately dedicated to pushing out the parameters of self within the discipline of the particular game that his or her achievements become legendary, iconic; his or her influence on game-style studied by thousands of would-be emulators. One thinks of Jordan, Korbut, Warne, Botham, Best, Spitz, Lewis, Shumacher, Ali, Coe, Woods — the list is quite possibly limitless, certainly contentious, and is larger since the 'professionalisation' of the Olympics and the development of sport as a worldwide commodity trading in 'personalities'.

In our own sport we, too, have had our fair share of collossi: Buhl, Bonnatti, Messner, Kurtyka, Lafaille are probable occupiers of the hall of fame. But there are others — more private, more self-effacing, perhaps, and working on a smaller canvas — who, nevertheless, by their tireless efforts to take and live the rock-climbing and Alpine games to their limits, set such standards of commitment and evince such an intensity of zeal in all aspects of the climbing sub-culture they contribute to, that we are compelled to follow where they lead. Just such a one was evergreen and staunch CC member, John Anderson Sumner — who died as he'd lived, with fortitude and courage in the face of adversity. The magnitude and range of his 40-year contribution to, and influence on, our sport and its practitioners was such that his passing may well come to be seen by future chroniclers as the end of an era in British climbing. Be that as it may, because of the many received responses to John's death (and his noteworthy and regular contributions to *The Journal*), it feels important to break with an unwritten Club tradition and devote the spirit — if not a fair percentage of the substance — of an edition to celebrate the climbing life of one of The Club's most prolific and influential members. To that end, John Harwood (in a letter to Jill Sumner) had something to say about John that might stand as a Club Valedictory:

*'John was such a dynamic character and so full of enthusiasm for his beloved hills. I remember well how encouraging he always was for someone else to do fresh lines. At first, maybe, a hint of rivalry, but that couldn't last long with his nature and he was always anxious to hear what we had done and then to suggest fresh ideas (to JH and Martin Crocker as they worked on the new Meirionnydd guide, Ed.). And the work he put in over the years! I think that the recent guide-book is a testament to him and to his almost unimaginable efforts in unearthing earlier lines.*

Opposite: Such stuff as dreams are made on: John Sumner on his own route, *Dream Racer* E2, Craig Cywarch. Photo: Sumner collection

No doubt you will have numerous memories of his comments, habits and personality on the rocks and elsewhere. Please accept my comments that, as a fellow climber, I much admired and liked John. To me, he stood for what climbing is all about'.

The four articles following Rawdon Goodier's reminiscences of early climbing in Cornwall and Gwyn Evans's encounters with *Bishop's Rib* are, therefore, presented for the first time, or re-printed (with many thanks to *Climber* and The Rucksack Club), to frame and add depth to the Obituary and give those members of The Club who had not met or heard of John, insights into the nature of 'the climbers' climber'. Tony Moulam and Terry Kenny in particular put their fingers precisely on the pulse that drove John's vision and action; we mourn his passing in celebration.

Martin Wragg lightens the tone with a cameo performance under the ruthless camera eye of 'The Director', Ken Wilson. Dick Turnbull is next, with an epic retreat from *The Croz Spur*. Conducted in his inimitable style, it lacks (because of the wind, presumably) only those lazy spirals of cigar smoke that oft accompany him on such climbs. Nick Bullock then adds to his significant contributions to The Club's literature with a disturbing yet illuminating memoir that is as brutal in its honest articulation of personal pain as it is in the graphic recording of witnessed events. Ken Latham follows, counterpointing Nick's writing with his own memories of climbing in Wales that are the more poignant for their piquancy. They, in turn, prepare us for Gerry Martyn, Graham Adcock, Dave Gregory and Peter Warland who settle us to accounts of routes and places where we ought to climb and hike; more laconic humour and Wales again for first climbs.

In the spirit of this edition, Tim Noble then recalls climbing in Arctic Norway 30 years ago, before Harry Sales, Matt Entwistle and Harold Drasdo provide the historical perspective that is such a distinctive characteristic of *The Journal* writing at its best: setting the record straight about 'authority' and our precious stones; challenging accepted wisdom about an interesting Lakes character and applying diligent and painstaking research to unlikely sources.

By invitation, Dennis Gray fills the non-fiction slot and contributes a partisan response to the biography of Don Whillans (that should complement the lead review). Steve Dean remembers a stalwart of The Club (Obit. *CCJ* 2003), before Peter Benson writes of JS on ice, and Al Churcher takes us into Alaska and the boundaries of the utmost west. Is it too fanciful to suppose that a long way out there, where the ice is always perfect and the rock overhanging, the restless and driven spirit of John Sumner is even now striding like a colossus, searching out unclimbed North Faces?

Virginia Woolf believed that whenever the living think of the dead, the dead live again in the shadow world. If she was right, we should spare John a thought, now and then, and give him an afterlife to match his life.



# Some Recollections of Climbing in Cornwall 1952-1955

**Rawdon Goodier**

---

I was introduced to Cornish sea cliff climbing by Alan Imrie, a CC member and army captain studying Russian at the University of London, who I had met through the University Mountaineering Club. He'd visited Cornwall in 1950 and had done the first climbs on Carn Barra. My first visit was made with him in Easter 1952. I don't remember much about the climbing on that occasion: we did the first recorded route on Gurnard's Head; a new route on Wicca Pillar; and a couple of new routes of similarly modest standard on Carn Barra.

Two scenes remain in my memory, however, from that visit. The first was our meeting with AW Andrews at his house at Tregarthen near Zennor, in a room dappled with sunlight reflected from the sea. Andrews was then an old man, but still keen to talk about climbing in a sense of direct connection with the beginnings of climbing. (He had, after all, with Archer Thompson, written the first ever rock-climbing guidebook for Lliwedd in 1909, after having done his first climb there in 1905, the same year he pioneered *Ledge Climb*, the first route on Bosigran Main Face. Forty years later, with Pyatt, he wrote the first climbing guidebook for Cornwall.) Subsequently, I became a recipient of the small poetry cards that he used to send to his friends at Christmas. The second incident was when we were walking down the lane to Wicca Pillar. We were waylaid at the gate of Tregarthen Farm by a girl of memorable beauty who, probably unused to passers-by, wanted to know where we were going and what we intended to do with the rope we were carrying. We explained that we were going climbing — which caused wide-eyed astonishment. Did people really do that sort of thing in Cornwall? But, on that first visit, it was not the specific climb or incident so much as the character of the granite and the ambience of the climbing in the continual presence of the sea that made a lasting impression. No other climbers were encountered on the cliffs.

On those few occasions when my name has been noted in climbing literature, it has generally been as a 'Marine climber'. I am not displeased to be so classified, for there is no doubt that the fullest development of my climbing abilities occurred when I was doing my National Service in the Royal Marine Cliff Assault Wing (CAW). However it obscures the fact that I was already a climber and a member of the CC before doing National Service in 1953-55, by which time I had climbed in the Alps for three seasons.

I started climbing in my first term as a zoology student at University College London in 1950 and continued with an enthusiasm which was not entirely helpful to my studies. The University College Club promoted a broad approach to mountaineering — with the emphasis on Scottish winter and Alpine climbing but, at that time, it did not harbour

outstanding rock-climbers – so, until I joined the CAW, V Diff was about my limit – but thus indeed, with one or two notable exceptions, was the general situation in the CAW in those days.

It was by no means easy to arrange to do one's national service in the Marines, and even harder to get into the small Cliff Assault Wing. There were many hurdles to be overcome: basic training, commando course, etc; however by the autumn of '54 I found myself in the position of 2nd Lieutenant in the CAW — with about one year left of my service to run. I think I was the first 'civvie' climber to join the CAW, though there were others soon afterwards, including Peter Cullinan, Alan Blackshaw and Barry Biven.

Most of the Wing's rock-climbing training took place in Cornwall where they had a small camp in huts near Sennen. From this base I immediately became involved, with NCO instructors (who were 'Regular', not national service marines) in the running of cliff leader courses — these was not just rock-climbing but involved getting ashore from landing craft, the firing of grapnels and much abseiling in full kit and nailed boots. All the rock-climbing training was done in tricouni-nailed boots.

On occasions there would be a sort of 'in-service' training for the officer and NCO instructors. Depending on who was in charge, these could be days of significant physical challenge: running up and down Sennen beach carrying telegraph poles; falling off impossible boulder problems at Logan rock; boulder hopping or traversing at water level until everyone had fallen into the sea.

I have vivid memories of one more light-hearted occasion. We were rather late starting out from Sennen and I think that the original intention must have been to climb at Bosigran. It was a very hot day and for some reason or other we arrived in great thirst at the Tinner's Arms at Zennor just before lunchtime. Taking pity on our parched condition the landlord (who knew us well as good customers) very unexpectedly presented us with the substantial remains of a keg of scrumpy. Rather against our principles — and undoubtedly against standing orders — we consumed a considerable quantity of this potent brew before deciding that duty demanded we should do some climbing. It was now rather late and we decided, probably fortunately, not to go to Bosigran but to climb on Wicca Pillar instead; so off we set in very cheerful mood, across the moorland to Wicca. A glimpse of adders initiated, with much hilarity, an adder hunt (not something I would have approved of in my later career). Unfortunately, one of the instructors had the misfortune to actually catch one which, unsurprisingly, bit him. His cry of alarm did nothing to abate the carefree mood of the party who then started climbing in a rather unserious manner on Wicca Pillar. After a short time the snake victim complained that his arm was painful and starting to swell in an alarming manner. This complaint was initially met with a rather jovial and unsympathetic response but, upon inspecting the said arm even the most callous concluded that medical attention was desirable. So, after an exciting lorry ride to Penzance (the driver had not been allowed to share in the cider) the victim was delivered into the hands of the ministering angels at the hospital. Some of the latter were particularly

attractive and it was unkindly insinuated that the victim's many visitors over the ensuing days were due to reasons other than comradely sympathy. His recovery and release from hospital was, unbeknown to the hut warden, celebrated by a very successful party at the Count House from which the nurses emerged impressed by our chivalry and the splendour of CC properties.

For most climbers rock-climbing in the dark is simply the result of serious miscalculation, but it was part of our marine training. Whatever doubts one may have had about its military significance, it was certainly a remarkable and rewarding experience: a new appreciation of the character of rock demanding one's full attention. It was generally undertaken at Sennen when there was some moonlight. Of course, the feasible night climbs at Sennen were generally quite well-known to us by day; nevertheless, climbing them at night, even by moonlight, was a very different experience. One's sensitivity to the granite and one's awareness of the sea was enhanced: white horses on a dark sea; sparks struck off the rocks by tricounis – careless move – the enemy might see.

There was not a continuous tradition of seeking new and harder routes in the CAW: perhaps it was not seen as very relevant to military strategy and, one suspected, in the case of some of the Wing's senior officers, that it was not expected of us lest it become expected of them. However, the potential had been foreshadowed by the ascent of *The Mitre on Chair Ladder* by John (Zeke) Deacon and John Kinnaird in 1954. At the end of 1954 I noted in my diary that I had spent 77 days during the year actually climbing, not including hill-walking.

I spent the first three months of 1955 in the Cairngorms (the CAW was also involved in the running of snow and mountain warfare courses both in Scotland and Norway) and I didn't meet up with Zeke till the early summer when he returned to the Wing from Malta. The first new route that we climbed together seems to have been *Socket Wall* at Carn Barra in late June. I found him an ideal climbing partner: keen to explore and a delight to watch in action on the rock.

It must have been at about this time that Mike Banks rejoined the CAW as its commanding officer. This initiated an acquaintance, then friendship and highly intermittent climbing companionship spanning Cornwall, Scotland, the Andes and the Dolomites across the many years since that time. I don't think I am doing Mike an injustice by suggesting that in those earlier days he was a climber whose courage significantly exceeded his technique. I have to admit that he never fell off while climbing with me, but one often felt that a fall was imminent and only prevented by moves of a rather desperate character. Perhaps I was spoiled by climbing with Zeke who never gave this impression. However, this meant that seconding Mike was never dull and he is a remarkable example of a climber who improved greatly with advancing age — a fact confirmed for me 40 years later when he led me up *Little Brown Jug* with great fluency.

I have no doubt that the subsequent development of the climbing partnership with Zeke was stimulated by the Biven/Peck debut at Bosigran in early August. In July I had

taken leave to climb in Chamonix with Mike Cunningham. We had an ambitious programme, largely frustrated by dismal weather. However, following a meeting with Tom Bourdillon and Hamish Nicol at the Biolet we took their advice on a route they had written up in the *CCJ: The North Ridge of the Peigne*. This was the hardest Alpine rock-climb that I achieved and I returned to the sunshine of Cornwall from the rain of Chamonix fired with enthusiasm for big things, to find, in the Count House Log Book, the Biven/Peck entry of their first ascents of *Doorpost* and *Suicide Wall* which they had pioneered a few days previously. I think that we were more intrigued than piqued — though there may have been some slight initial feeling of having been beaten to it — but there were plenty of other opportunities. In my case, however, these opportunities had to be realized soon as by that time I knew that I would be bound for foreign parts by early November. Within a few days we had arranged to take time off to return to Bosigran to climb *Doorpost* and *Suicide Wall*. Unsurprisingly, my clearest recollections are of *Suicide Wall*. Whatever pique we may have felt initially was swept away by the feeling of joyous admiration for such a fine route.

I think that at that time Zeke and I were fairly well-matched on all climbs — though in Zeke's case he was to go on and become a climber of really outstanding ability — as witnessed by the Cornwall guidebook, whereas my life was to take a different course when I finished national service in the autumn. However, even then it did not escape me that, on *Suicide Wall*, Zeke made a much better job of leading the traverse pitch from the Pedestal than I did following — not that the next pitch, which fell to me to lead, was a walkover.

Within a few days Zeke and I embarked on the exploration of a girdle traverse of Bosigran that was to become *String of Pearls*. As I noted in the introduction to the interim guidebook, 'There can be no other cliff in Cornwall which lends itself to a girdle traverse of such character as Bosigran Face. Most of the other cliffs are broken by gullies and zawns, or have insufficient height, but the Face has none of these disadvantages and gives 750ft of continuous climbing'. I had pondered the possibility of such a traverse for some time but had not been too confident of my ability to carry it through. Now, however, the time seemed ripe.

It was a blazing hot August afternoon when we started out from the vicinity of *Ledge Climb*. The first two pitches were not too demanding and the route seemed to suggest itself without any sense of artificiality and not too many options. The first moves of which I have distinct recollection are those linking the *Doorway* belay to the pedestal of *Suicide Wall*, involving the gaining and traversing of *Bow Wall* (I seem to recall that we christened the wall on that day) — great positions on marvellous rock. The working out of the route and the actual climbing took longer than we expected and it was 8pm when, sunburnt and parched, we roped off from the belay on *Nameless*. Next day, in similar weather, we returned to complete the remaining and rather harder part of the route, however, we did not like having had to split the route in this way and returned two weeks later to com-



plete the whole traverse in four and a half hours.

All editions of the Bosigran guidebook, except the Biven/McDermott, describe the route from left-to-right. I can understand the rationale of this, but have my doubts about it. To explore these doubts fully would take more of this account than appropriate but, briefly: the original orientation of the route involved a relatively gentle prelude on classic ground and a conclusion in *Beaker Route*, which is delicate, pleasing and not too demanding – the greatest difficulties lie in between. The revised orientation involves a very fierce start and its conclusion, *Little Brown Jug* is a great independent climb with a tough finish. I get a feeling that this is gilding the lily. There is also the consideration (irrelevant, perhaps, to those who consider climbing an athletic but not aesthetic activity) that the original climb heads seaward while the revised version, as it were, heads into the land. I have not done it in this latter direction (though I have read that it is judged easier), but I suspect that, to some extent, it detracts from full awareness of the wonderful situation one is in. In moving seawards and westwards with the sun one ends at the little brèche between the Main and Seaward Cliffs and can then wander down to enjoy the evening light in Halldrine Cove.

During the summer of '55 the Bivens continued to make their forays to Cornwall, mainly to Bosigran. The week after we completed *String of Pearls* they put up the magnificent *Little Brown Jug*. By some chance we never met up at Bosigran, so the warm, friendly relationship and in some instances climbing companionship that Peter Biven talked about only started to develop later. Our first encounter was at Pordenack where we found them exploring what was to become *Sea Fury*, by which time we felt we knew them from their climbs. It must have been about this time that I first met up with Wilfred Noyce in Cornwall, at Logan Rock. He was CC Guidebook Editor at the time and, having heard of the new routes that were currently multiplying, he asked if I could start to prepare an interim guide in co-operation with the Bivens. In consultation with Peter Biven I started on this immediately and then handed it over to him to complete when I departed the scene soon afterwards.

My swan song in Cornwall with Zeke was *Raven Wall* at Bosigran, about which I retain some misgivings. It was certainly a tour-de-force at the limits of our climbing capabilities at that time (and, for me, for all time), but the use of some aid at the crux (though I gather less than was often used subsequently) reduced its attraction for me so that I retain greater affection for *Autumn Flakes* which I had done with Peter Henry a few days previously. Perhaps my feelings for the latter climb are not uninfluenced by the fact that it was the last climb at Bosigran that I was able to lead, about 20 years ago.

All this may sound to have been a bit of an idyll — and indeed it was. I still retain an unalloyed gratitude for the experiences it afforded though, at the time, I was not unaware of certain ambivalences in my situation. Some of these I have touched on elsewhere, in Tobias and Drasdo's *The Mountain Spirit* (1979), notably the intuition that it might be more rewarding to approach climbing and mountaineering as an art to be cultivated rather than a sport to be pursued. Perhaps my concern to develop my career as a biologist pointed

me towards a more 'diffuse' yet more comprehensive relationship to cliffs and mountains which later found expression in work on the plant ecology of African mountains, the fauna and periglacial geomorphology of mountains in Wales and Scotland — and the natural history sections to several of the North Wales CC Guidebooks before such sections went out of fashion (what does that tell us about climbing culture or lack of it?).

Within days of the *Raven Wall* ascent I was handing in my uniform and equipment at Eastney Barracks in Portsmouth. A month later I sailed from Southampton to Cape Town on my way to Zimbabwe and a different life.

**'We were the first, that ever burst, (above) that silent sea': Rawdon Goodier on *Zig Zag*, Bosigran. Photo: Goodier collection**



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# Reprise(s)

Gwyn Evans

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Easter 1969: Cornwall is soaking up the sunshine and, at Chair Ladder, Ken Wilson narrowly avoids getting washed into the sea (complete with his camera) as he runs past the Suicide Pool.

"Come on give it a go; you won't know if you don't try." This from Chris, one of our team, calling down to me from the stance of *Bishop's Rib*. This would be my first Extreme (no sub-divisions in those days); I would be seconding, but at least I could see what it was all about. The little flakes didn't seem too hard to use; there were footholds and then there was a stance. This was cosy with three of us, but not for long as Chris (all 6ft 2ins of him) just reached up and disappeared through the overlap. The rope came tight and it was time for all 5ft 6ins of me to go. I didn't find it quite as easy as Chris had made it, because I have to make many more moves, but I don't fall off or otherwise disgrace myself. So that's an Extreme. Perhaps I'll have some more of that, I thought.

Fast forward: June 1969; finished exams; off to Cloggy for a first visit. My new big boots are killing me, I've big blisters and we aren't yet at the Halfway House. A glass of lemonade and the sight of the crag spur me on. "You can't lead a major Cloggy pitch on your first visit, so I'll do that, you just do the first bit up to that stance there." This was my partner's comment to me as we stood below *Llithrig*. Somewhat in awe of the place I acquiesced and led up to the stance. Some time later a rather sheepish figure returned to the stance saying that he couldn't see a way past the overhang. "Better get out there and have a look before going down." I reach up past the overhang and there seem to be holds, so I carry on until they run out; then there's a spike. This must be the rope move. I pull in lots of one of the ropes and fix it through a runner, almost forgetting about the other rope; perhaps I can use that for protection. Leaning against the rope, I shimmy for what seems like ages down and across to a ledge and take a stance. The second man complains because the sling I used on the spike is his and he isn't sure if he will be able to retrieve it. Just think, if he had led the pitch that would have been my problem. The next two pitches go fairly well; all that's left is to traverse the Green Gallery. "Keep the ropes on, this is more gripping than the climbing."

Fast Forward again to summer 2005: how things have changed. *Bishop's Rib* has been through the ignominy of downgrading and then reassertion to EI (the new-fangled Extreme grade that I can manage) *Llithrig* meanwhile has retained its EI grade, as long as you have strong fingers. It's a Committee Meeting in North Wales and Fiona is incapacitated. "Take Keith climbing," she demands. The weather has been good, but neither of us has been to Cloggy for ages. "I've never done *Llithrig*," says Keith and I've forgotten what it was like (not having been up since they closed the parking at Hafoty Newydd.) However, we have a secret weapon: a young man (Andy) with a car who quite likes

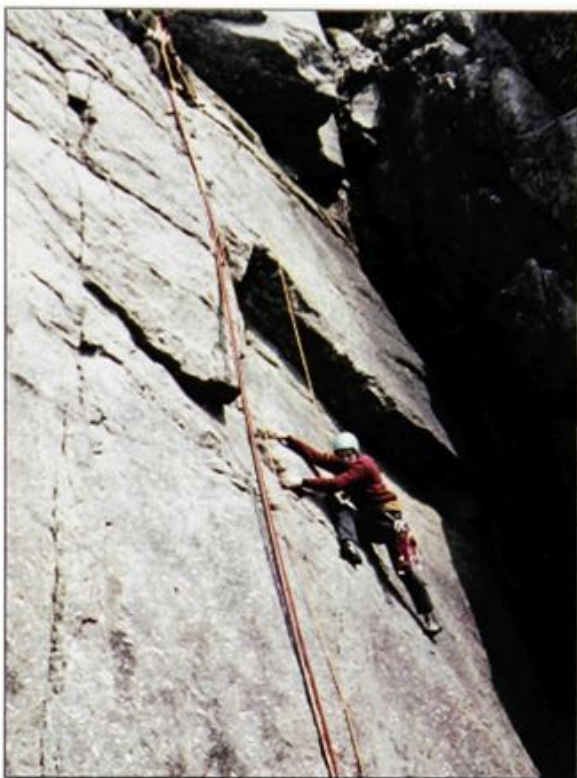


running up hills. Andy drops Keith, Astrid, me and the gear at the top of the hill, takes the car back down and then rejoins us. We have a pleasant walk up to the re-opened Halfway, but unfortunately none of us has any cash to buy lemonade, so it's Adam's Ale and on.

The East Buttress looks smaller than I remember; I opt for the first pitch this time as I've done the 'big pitch'. Keith sets off: "Nice picture of you standing on that arête, pity I left the camera in the 'sack.'" The ropes move steadily out with no pulling in on one rope. Does that mean I'm going to have to do the move free? Eventually I set off. I reach around the overhang to a line of big holds and see a very long

sling hanging off the spike. Cunning. Keith is telling me about his bad shoulder and finger joints and how he tried to do the move free, but eventually succumbed to a traditional ascent. Whoopee! I grab the sling and I'm on the stance; it's no distance at all. With a quick flick of the wrist, the sling flips off. A very nice crack pitch leads to a stance below an improbable looking corner. The next pitch turns out to be even more improbable, launching out onto the left wall on good holds. We still keep the ropes on for the Green Gallery; some things don't change.

A month later in Cornwall, I meet Al Downie at the Count House. This is supposed to be a family holiday after a week on Lundy, but I'm let off the leash for a day. "Meet you at Porthgwarra at 9.30am." Standing by what used to be called a Coastguard Station (now downgraded to a volunteer Coast Watch post), we look at the guide and the tide. One of them is clearly wrong; fortunately it's the one which can change. A sortie to find *South Face Direct* is successful and by the time we've done it, the tide is looking much



How best to bash The Bishop? Keep the rope tight and try it sideways. Al Dean belays Gwyn Evans on Bishop's Rib.

Photo: Pete Clay

better; we can see the Suicide Pool. So, there's only one thing for it, *Bishop's Rib*. Now it seems we would both like to lead pitch 1.

"Which hand?"

"Why?" says Al.

"Just choose, left or right."

"Left."

"Sorry, the stone was in the right," I say, dropping the stone.

"What does that mean?"

"I get to choose the pitches."

From the bottom the line is obvious; white marks all the way. We didn't use that stuff all those years ago, but I may this time, lovely little edges and protection just where you need it. Not too much; just as well because we are climbing with a Scotsman's stripped-down rack. Tie on and bring up Al. He, like my leader of all those years ago, is also over 6ft and just reaches up to the holds before disappearing onto the best protected bit of V Diff climbing in Britain.

# Climbing with 'Fritz'

Tony Moulam

Easter 1956 was memorable for me as Larry Lambe finally persuaded me to visit the hut of The Mountain Club, Tyn-y-Twl, in the Cywarch valley. They had leased the cottage in 1954 and he had often enthused to me about the enormous amount of virgin rock within easy walking distance, although he had said less about the prolific vegetation. On Saturday and Sunday I climbed with Larry, but he then introduced me to John Sumner, who wanted someone to share the second ascent of *Purge*, an artificial climb he had completed on 1st April. I think we approached from Buzzard's Balcony and the route we did was in fact only the second pitch as now described, involving quite a lot of aid. I found the route very strenuous and afterwards we enjoyed the thrills of John's fine exposed *Stygian Wall* in alternate leads. I was impressed by the original route finding up this intimidating and complex part of the cliff and remember John being very concerned about the ethics of his first ascent, because he had placed a protection peg by abseil beforehand.

To finish off the weekend John took me round onto the North Face which I had earlier climbed by a new route, *Hopsit*. He pointed me at *First Visit*, to assay the second ascent. This was classed HVS and after our success and whilst we descended, John cemented our friendship by remarking that he had not thought that I could lead such a hard climb, as I was so old. I was 28 and it is ironic that he went on to lead similar and harder climbs until he was 67 or 68.

I arranged to meet John in a week's time, in the Manifold Valley, and tried to approach by the ford beyond Filsbury. It was impossible to pass, or to turn the car round, so I had a difficult job reversing up the steep hill and, after completing this tricky manoeuvre, eventually arrived at John and Dave Adcock's camp, about midday, a little late and a lot flustered. John had meanwhile found favour with the farmer by helping him with a difficult delivery of a calf and this meant that we were welcome to climb on his crag, which was more than he tolerated from other climbers. The obvious line was up the prominent gash, which we christened *Ivy Gash*, somewhat unimaginatively. I belayed at its foot and John set off up the rather nice 30ft slab under the impending left wall. On his way, he dislodged a rock about the size of half a brick which bounced down the rock and, in a final cunning trajectory, landed flat on my head. It didn't hurt, but I had recently read an article about delayed brain haemorrhages after blows and worried for the rest of the day whether I was going to succumb. However, I joined him at a peg belay out to the right, without further mishap. I took the next 70ft pitch, zigzagging up to the upper part of the crack, to a sloping grass ledge from where we easily reached the long ledge below the overhang. Here Dave joined us to watch the impending fun, as well as to add moral support.

The rib on the left bulged twice and exposure rapidly increased, but John made short work of the section, placing one peg to protect a final steep move which landed him in a

runnel full of saplings, trees etc. The only remaining difficulty was caused by rope drag and the difficult communication over the 80ft pitch and the noise of the rising wind. There was no sign of any earlier passage and the farmer told us that no-one had climbed his cliff before, so we were surprised and disappointed when the guidebook credited the first ascent of *The Thorn*, as he called it, to Joe Brown, in 1953.

John was planning a trip. I think his first, to the Alps and so we met again three weeks later outside the Central Library in Manchester. John and Dave Adcock had come up from the Potteries on a motorbike, so they hid it somewhere and we proceeded in my car. The journey was uneventful and we arrived at the FRCC hut in Buttermere in the early hours of the morning. On this occasion we did not have an Alpine start but managed to reach Birkness Combe by 11am and set off up *Eagle Front* leading alternate pitches. I had an advantage over John in that I had tried the climb before and failed on the third crux pitch, so I magnanimously let him lead the first. It was easier this time, in the dry, as my previous attempt had been in drizzle and socks and we finished the excellent route in quick time. We then went on to the top and descended on the right wing of the crag before immediately assailing the *Central Chimney*. This started off very easily but we soon reached more serious stuff where the chimney defined itself properly, if narrowly, and led to a more open area. Now there was an opportunity to escape on the ledge we had recently followed on our earlier climb. The rather intimidating Y Chimney above soon yielded to Fritz's cunning and the remaining 100ft soon succumbed.

We descended and took to the rocks again at the earliest opportunity. This time we did *Double Cross*, a delightful climb originally made by Sid Cross, Jammy Nelson, HM Kelly and C J Astley Cooper, doyens of '20s and '30s climbing in the Lakes. This proved easier than the two previous routes, but we were fed up with being in the shade, on what was a lovely day, so we scrambled up to Grey Crag, where we made short work of *Spider Wall* and *Fortiter*. We coiled the rope and descended *Chockstone Ridge* and *Harrow Buttress* solo. It would probably have been quicker to descend to the valley floor and re-ascend to our next objective, High Crag. Mistakenly, and reluctant to lose height, we traversed the rough fellside and were quite weary when we reached the Rock Table Ledge, up on the left of the main buttress. By chance another friend, Mike Dixon, arrived and so as a rope of three we would have more opportunity for rests. I took the lead on Peascod's *Resurrection*, then the hardest route recorded, with John as second and Mike in the tail end position. I think he regretted having joined us as I made my slow painstaking way up the cliff as he abandoned us after descending *Gatesgarth Chimney* whilst we set off rapidly up *Nameless Route*, leading alternate pitches and, having finished, ran down to the Fish Inn to replace some of the liquid we had lost and then repaired to Birkness Cottage to rebuild our energy with a large stew.

Inexplicably our start was later the next day and we decided to try another Eagle Crag. This time it was the one in Greenup Gill and we chose *The Great Stair*, because it only rated Mild VS. Again we were to lead alternate pitches and, because of seniority, I



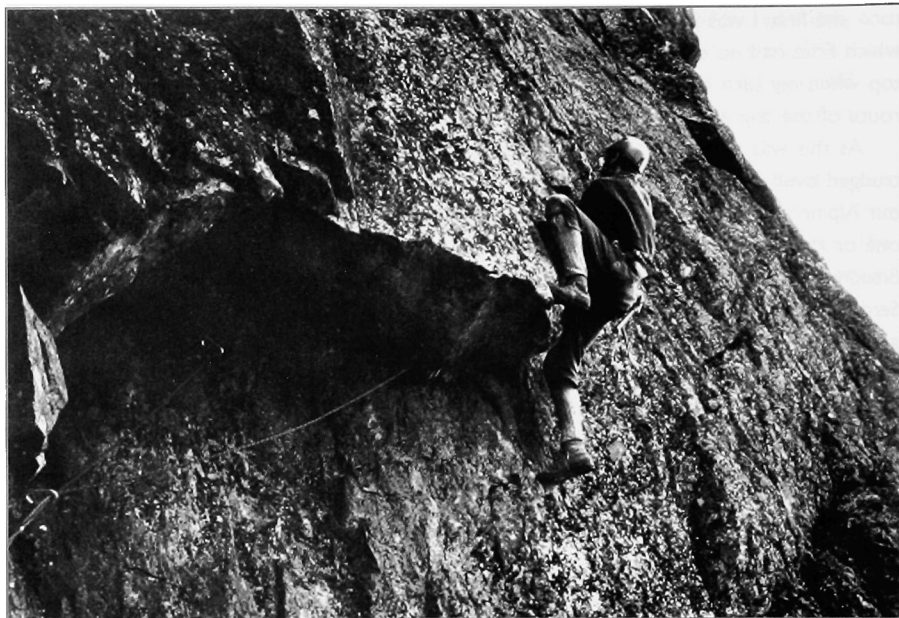
took the first. I was pleased about this decision when we got to the penultimate wall, with which Fritz had no difficulty. I found it steep and smooth and was glad that he was at the top when my turn came. I revelled in the easy and enclosing final chimney and our first route of the day was done.

As this was supposed to be Alpine training we picked up our (heavy) 'sacks and trudged over the top of the ridge and descended to the foot of Heron Crag. Continuing our Alpine theme we moved up *Heron Crag Buttress* together, only occasionally pausing for one or the other to belay. We descended and moved across to Sergeant Crag where I led *Broadway*, a pleasant slabby climb. We then finished off the day with a solo ascent of *Sergeant Crag Gully* which was dry for once, and did not cause its much difficulty. It was going to be more than another year before we climbed together again, as we both had other commitments.

Eventually, we managed to plan another weekend, this time in Derbyshire. I met John at the Ilam Rock footbridge and, as it was fairly late in the afternoon, we decided to have a brew. John set up the stove in the incipient cave under Pickering Tor and soon the billy was steaming. He threw in a handful of tea leaves and, before I could say that I preferred sugarless tea, half a can of sweetened condensed milk. To add to my trials he then kicked a large amount of sand into the two enamel mugs before handing me the larger one. Eventually we could delay no longer and we attacked a groove on the west face of the tor, which I am sure had got steeper and steeper as we delayed our start. The short traverse from the saddle at the back of the pinnacle looked to me to be fairly hard, but John hardly hesitated, only pausing to drive in two pegs as he surmounted the overhang near the top of the route. The pubs were not open yet so we crossed the river into Staffordshire to look up *The White Edge*.

It was too late to start it so, instead, John tackled the groove in the middle of the East Face. Initially it overhung quite a lot but a peg made short work of it and he called me to join him on a sloping ledge, where I found that he was tied to what I regarded as a very insubstantial tree. It looked easier above, so without hesitating I continued up the now more amenable groove to the top of the pinnacle. As I had managed to secure myself somehow John then set off down the *Original Route*, but he did describe to me where the holds were as I descended as last man. Honour was satisfied now so we walked to the inn in Hopedale for a relaxing drink before we camped in Halldale. The morning proved to be fine, but there was a chilling wind which I resented as I stood on the ledge at the foot of *The White Edge* holding Fritz's ropes. He seemed to make excruciatingly slow progress up the line of overhanging peg holes but eventually, with a bit of puffing, he was up this hardest part of the climb. Or at least he was able to escape onto the edge, for a breather. The edge went more easily and he was soon able to move back left to the crack, which was decorated with various bits of wooden wedges, including part of a broomstick. A thrutch up and out of a niche, and John was triumphant on the summit.

Although I was cold and shivering after about three hours of inactivity I soon warmed



'Go tell the Spartans how we climbed': John Sumner surmounts the overhang.  
Photo: Tony Moulam

up as I started to exercise myself on the impending rock, although my fingers did not seem to work very well. Retrieving gear took even more effort and I reached the aforementioned broomstick in a bit of a state. My equanimity was then shattered as I rested in the sling and my weight caused the thin nylon to split the ancient wood and deposit me a foot or two lower and muttering at the extra effort I would have to expend to reach my earlier high point. All too soon the excellent climb, and the weekend was over, and we returned to our respective homes.

The next weekend we went to Wasdale with the intention of doing *CB*, but it was not to be. We had expected the middle of June to be fine but sullen skies and steady rain dictated inactivity in our tent, punctuated by regular brews. Sunday was a little better but we decided that high crags were out of the question and I innocently asked Fritz if he had ever climbed a classic gully. He answered: "No," but he wasn't particularly keen to, anyway. To persuade him I said that he couldn't consider himself a proper climber until he had, and extolled the pleasures of *Clachaig Gully*, *The Chasm* and *Moss Gill*. I also said how much I had enjoyed an ascent of *Great Gully* on the Screes, which I had recently shared with AB. I think that John was still a bit reluctant, but we set off in the drizzle for *C Gully*. We crossed the footbridge over the stream issuing from Wastwater and continued on the track just above water's edge. The gully was obvious above with *Great Gully* cut more deeply into the broken cliff a little way further along. We scrambled up to where a short wet corner gave

an idea of what was in store.

Another short crack and more scrambling lured us upwards. We were now wet through and so there was no point in avoiding the cascading water and at least as we got higher the volume seemed less. This was probably a sensory illusion but we convinced ourselves that we were enjoying it and continued until we lost count of pitches. The alternation of scrambling and some quite tricky climbing, often on suspect rock, sustained interest almost to the end, when we reached the vague path at the top. Ironically it was a fine evening now and as we descended the rough hillside back to Wasdale Hall the sun set over Sellafield in a misplaced flare of glory.

These climbs were done in the middle of June 1956 and I saw John only once again that year, at the Mountain Club dinner a month before I got married. Neither of us realised it would be so long before we shared a rope again, but in July 1969 we were both back in Cwm Cywarch and John, with an impish grin, sought my view on a climb of which he wished to do the second ascent. He revealed that it was *Spartan*, which had been put up by 'Smiler' Cuthbertson and 'Ginger' Caine three years earlier. It had repulsed several attempts and was obviously a serious undertaking.

It was on the same facet of the complicated crag where I had made my first impression on John by leading *First Visit*, as recounted earlier. My acquaintance with the rock was not of much help as this route was totally different. For a start the wall at the beginning was surmounted by a long overhang and a tricky traverse had to be made beneath it until a very high step could be made onto a nose to surmount it. I watched John edge out, cramped under the overhang, but I observed that at least there were several comforting running belays in the crack at its back. I also noted thankfully that John made the high step with his left leg, as I had difficulty bending my right leg, as a result of a motor accident many years ago.

John was soon perched on the wall beyond, peering on for the key to the traverse round the next comer. He stood still for some time and then moved off boldly right into the middle of the smooth and unrelenting wall. His target was a spike on the far side and this provided a fine runner, which at least gave me an idea of where I would have to go. Another move or two, then a stride round the buttress edge, where he disappeared from view. All too soon he shouted that it was my turn and I unravelled my several belays and stepped awkwardly up to the roof. Progress beneath it was not too difficult and at least I was close to good protection, which I did not remove but clipped into the back rope, after I had passed.

Soon, I was ready to make the high step to a tiny ledge with the rope pulling me over to the right. I managed to rest on the ledge (or foothold might be a better description, under the trade's description act) whilst I worked out the moves to take me over to the edge. John had done a complicated manoeuvre to change feet in the middle of the wall, but I was able to make the delicate and exposed moves on to the spike, and then round the edge to join a grinning 'Fritz'. The second pitch chimney was a welcome relief, at only 4c

it seemed like scrambling to the top of the cliff and my most memorable climb with John.

These memories are precious to me as a memorial to a charming and invariably cheerful and exuberant companion. His impact on rock-climbing in Central Wales was enormous, but his other achievements in the Alps were also notable. His guidebook work survives him and will indicate to future generations what lasting results a dedicated approach like Fritz's can produce.

# Rock-catching on Cywarch

Tim Noble

Walking with S to the summit of Caer Caradoc was hard work: the sheer brunt of it took the burnish off our skin-deep fitness. On the summit rocks, huddled in lee calm, I tried to read the deep blue riddle of distance. Like half-seen pieces of stained glass high in a wall of stone I thought I could see The Arans on the edge of sight. Yes, yes; there it was: Sumner country — where we were bound for a first-time visit the following day. After posing for wind-torn pictures in the sun, we drumbled down through dusty bracken to the cow-loud path, the car, then tea and toast by friends' fire in Shrewsbury. With a head full of Cywarch climbs, I sneezed all the way back, though; if nothing else, I'd caught the beginnings of a cold from Caradoc.

The early morning drive to the cliffs took longer than expected, but I was confident I could cover the 50 miles on a red road fairly fast. S kept counting coins for petrol and, wisely, very quiet. However, it was midday by the time we started up the path. A fine light drizzle tickled at our cuffs and necks while the big south buttress gleamed in an unearthly light. I was taken aback by the range, the big hill atmosphere and the broken cliffs. In the last flat moments of the Afon Cywarch, a busy farm reminds of hill-fast Lakeland dales, and the deep-cut, noisy bed of the Camddwr stream beside the hut at Bryn Hafod, of North Wales.

We wandered up wet broken ground on an excavated path, the white, turned stones, slick with sticky mud and rotting vegetation. As one looks up at it the cliff leans back, declining the eye's insistence to show its true angles. John Sumner warns us of this phenomenon in the West Col guidebook to Central Wales:

'... it is fairly safe to assume that everything is about ten degrees steeper than it looks. This optical illusion is probably connected with the high angle of some of the vegetation.'

We'd come to climb the Sumner classic of the cliff, *Will-o'-the-Wisp* and, bar two orange-helmeted climbers seemingly dressed in boiler suits, there was no one else around. Sod's law, though: they were after the same route.

Below a beetling, dripping, green and mucky rib, we stood and dribbled in the drifting rain and wondered about the descent in 'sticky' boots. I'd walked up in cut-down worn-out rubber wellies and had had to wade; but perhaps the Sumner story in the guide and *Classic Rock* could be believed and we might trust the granite's friction, despite the deep streams of mud and heather-filled water running down the face.

I climbed the first two pitches in one long wet run-out over perfect rock, the grease and wet allowing me to perform a showy piece of anti-slip technique on the glistening slab.



S was unimpressed. We'd got ahead of the orange-helmeted brigade by bravado and by missing out the belay on the mossy ledge and tree. The rain drifted away; S took off the sweaty Patagonia and did a series of nifty two-steps up the pitch. Together, we brushed off bits of twig from rock and shoulders and looked around for evidence of the pick axe and spade that John Sumner must have used to dig this climb out of the vegetation. Below us, the pine trees in the two sharp-edged plantations sighed in damp harmony and a cold breeze. Away to our left, looking out, the hut smoked peacefully. Once again, I wondered if 'Lord' Sumner was in residence and observing the outsiders on his route. Not a chance, of course, knowing his legendary appetite for the game, he would be out and away under some dry overhang, looking for a way over it. But I carried on climbing as if he was watching, hoping he would approve of our delight and determination.

I stepped out easily across a gleaming ledge where hands were hardly needed: it was as easy as a Sunday afternoon walk before tea. At its end, I leaned out from a little ramp that felt just like the traverse under roofs on *Slack* in The Moelwyns, to inspect the slab to come. Long scars of lichen seamed the rock — and there, yes: did I spy the marks of man-made tools, images of making in the cracks?

Stepping briskly leftwards once again, I was surprised by short falling noises and on a sudden impulse held out my hand to catch a falling stone and put it in my pocket and save it from the rainy day. It was small, white, quartzy and perfectly-formed; it sits on my desk before me now — a reward from John, I like to think fancifully.

Left and left again on wharf-sized holds with a lovely step across the slime and I was face to face with 'the banana-shaped tree'. After S had sprinted across the pitch, I set about the bulging, folded granite above my head. The large collection of unnecessary gear around my waist clanked like Marley's chains and kept catching under the roof, nearly pulling me off as I reached a rounded, greasy flake. I lowered from a nut into the mud to testify to my incompetence. (Don't look now m'lord.) S pointedly looked at her watch. I'd not bothered to bring the guide out in the rain, but knew we were at the proper place because of the Vibram prints in the mud at the stance. *Hard Very Difficult* it says in the guide (lovely touch, that — the emphasis of grade: it dignifies the route correctly); but do you willingly climb overhangs like that in big boots? I realised I was trying to follow a wayward route (*Mud Slide Slim* VS, I now think) seduced by the gleam of steep white granite winking in the watery sun.

Round left again and up a superb stepped arête I crept (like *Centipede* does on Raven Crag, Langdale) and straight on up a steep wet corner to a crack: the best moves on the route, these seemed, with soggy, pulpy fingers and water-cleaned fingernails. S loved these moves so much she looked at the watch and said we had time to go back round and do *Bluebell Babylon* before the winter cloud closed in again — and so we did, going straight through *Will-o'-the-Wisp* as Sumner suggests in *Classic Rock*. At MVS with little bulges that

**Opposite:** A series of nifty two-steps on the water-washed granite of *Will-o'-The-Wisp*.  
**Photo:** Tim Noble



kept the moves below them dry, I found it the perfect end to our watery day on Cywarch. Light caught us momentarily as we slithered down the gully and watched the orange-helmeted brigade engrossed below the roof of *Mud Slide Slim*. To my chagrin, though, I saw they were wearing big boots.

My wellies were full of water when we got back to the 'sacks; I hadn't left them upside down and as we peeled of ropes and clods of mud from foot-wiped socks, the rain caught us with cagoules off and waterproof trousers down. Changed first, I careered selfishly straight off over the springy pine beds in plantation one to get out of the rain and sat in clouds of humid breath while S came stepping at a proper pace. Again eager to be away, I lost the path and, unforgivably, went across a farmer's field. S was quiet and I thought I'd spoiled the day. Then a Roman thought struck me and I looked round furtively: *he* couldn't see me from Bryn Hafod, surely? I'd rather have turned to stone. However, we *did* see the farming family in the cow pens attending to the herd and I called out profuse apologies for the way we'd walked and asked permission to go through the two big gates to the road.

In the car we wolfed soggy cheese sandwiches and steamed. Looking up through the wipers at the line of *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, where I'd caught a rock, a real cold and made some silly mistakes, I vowed we'd be back to explore all those other cliffs like Tap-y-Gigfan and Gist Dhu, with friends, and perhaps, if we were really lucky, stay in Bryn Hafod and meet the guru of Mid-Wales — though only when the gleaming line of *Will-o'-the-Wisp* was clear of water-carried stones and in the sun again.

*Postscript: But that was years ago — in another country even — and besides, S has gone and 'the indestructible', the man himself is dead, 'untimely cut off in his prime.' I'll never meet him in Bryn Hafod. Writing this, I pick up my Cywarch stone and muse on times past and those that will not come to pass, and as I do, 'such a small thing as loss comes now and touches me.'*



# A Tale of Two Faces

Terry Kenny

That the *North Face of the Wildspitze* in the Austrian Alps should have eluded John Sumner for so long seemed a paradox. After all, he had already acquitted himself on many of the hardest North Faces in the Alps, those described in his Bible, Erich Vanis's classic, *Im Steilen Eis*. These included routes of the calibre of the Droites in winter and Courtes. But now he had failed twice on the Wildspitze and was beginning to despair he would ever make it.

I was having similar luck with my attempts on the *North Face of Mount Stanley*, a face comparable to the Wildspitze, in Canada's Kootenay National Park, having likewise failed on it for the second time that summer. So, when John and I met on his annual post-Alpine weekend in Wasdale that autumn, we commiserated over our respective failures of that season. It was not that the routes were too hard or the weather and conditions too bad, it was more a question of finding the right, or indeed any, partner. Most of our contemporaries had long since given up climbing Alpine ice routes with massive approaches and younger guys did not seem interested. We concluded that this observation applied equally to both North America and Europe.

It was that weekend we contrived our pact: we would team up and go to Austria in June to climb the *North Face of the Wildspitze* then to Canada in August for Mount Stanley, these being the respective optimum months. We departed Wasdale that Sunday each happy and fired with enthusiasm for this extravagant project.

Frau Pirpamer-Moser welcomed John like a long lost son to her Hotel Post in Vent. After all, he was now into his third visit and she had given us very favourable terms. Her family had all been mountain guides in the Oestal since the beginning of time. She immediately summoned Hans, one of her sons who had recently been on the mountain, to tell us the conditions. "There is very little snow this year," he started, "there have been very strong winds this week and what snow there has been blown off. The face is just bare ice. Nobody has climbed it yet this year." John's face filled with pleasure and I felt excited, if a little apprehensive, as we went to bed after our long drive from England.

Sleep did not come easily that night, as my mind flitted over a thousand thoughts; but the recurrent one was not so much about the 'bare ice' but how I would get on climbing with John. Although we had been to Canada together many times and even climbed on the same routes, we had never had the intense experience of sharing the same rope. I did not have to wait long for my answer.

"Small 'sack, chap," he said next morning as we packed for the Breslauer Hut. John had judged an early season attempt the best option, but the main hut was still closed so we would have to carry food and cookers for the winter raum. He lifted my 'sack, comparing it to his own and then nodded in grudging approval. It was heavy enough, but only just.

Some subtle change in chemistry had occurred and our relationship had turned from the social to the professional; I was soon to realise that this was how John approached his big climbs.

We each declared our intention of taking a leisurely pace on the hut walk, then set off in an undeclared race, first one in front then the other. We made the hut in ridiculous time and were the only ones there. I set about collecting snow, lighting the fire and generally getting the place in order. These hitherto unrevealed signs of domesticity vaguely amused John as he settled down to reading Bill Bryson (with stochastic roars of laughter), and brewing tea.

The weather forecast was bad and the glass outside the main hut had fallen, even during our short stay. Nevertheless, we set the alarms for 3am, but awoke to a starless sky and flickering lightning towards the Italian border. This was to have been training day on the Hinterer Brochkogel (a moderate rock ridge climb adjacent to the Wildspitze). With this outlook, however, we rolled over and went back to sleep.

When we awoke again, John had developed a headache so he reverted to Bill Bryson. I amused myself climbing a nearby scrambling peak. The following day was no better and mild depression set in. However, the third day dawned more promisingly, so we made an enthusiastic early start for the Hinterer Brochkogel. The approach covered much the same ground as would the descent from the Wildspitze, so would be a valuable reconnaissance exercise. It was supposed to have been an easy route, but we soon found ourselves on a formidable rock ridge with progress barred by a steep pitch of hard blue ice. Obviously, conditions had changed drastically since publication of our old Oestal guide. Crampons barely biting, John did a good job on the 50m lead and once again we were on rock, albeit with throwaway holds.

We were now on a very exposed ridge, not far from the summit but the weather was deteriorating rapidly and we felt the first snowflakes. We pressed on and made it just as the real snow started. The descent was treacherous and both of us were tense and nervous; there was nothing to be gained by roping up despite the massive exposure, thankfully diminished by the now white-out conditions. We eventually reached the col, which marked the convergence with the common descent from the Wildspitze and relative safety, each chastened by the experience. Despite our combined experience, we had tackled the climb as a trivial route and been kicked by it. But more importantly, we had extricated ourselves from the situation with a margin of safety and shown that we could climb together. The winter raum was miserable and the glass even lower so we decided that afternoon to retreat and savour the food and beer in Vent.

Frau Pirpamer-Moser assured us the weather was improving so we set off again next day for the Breslauer Hut, with slightly more subdued aspirations as regards the North

Opposite: A face too far: John Sumner relaxes in the meadows below the North Face of Mount Stanley, Canada. Photo: Terry Kenny







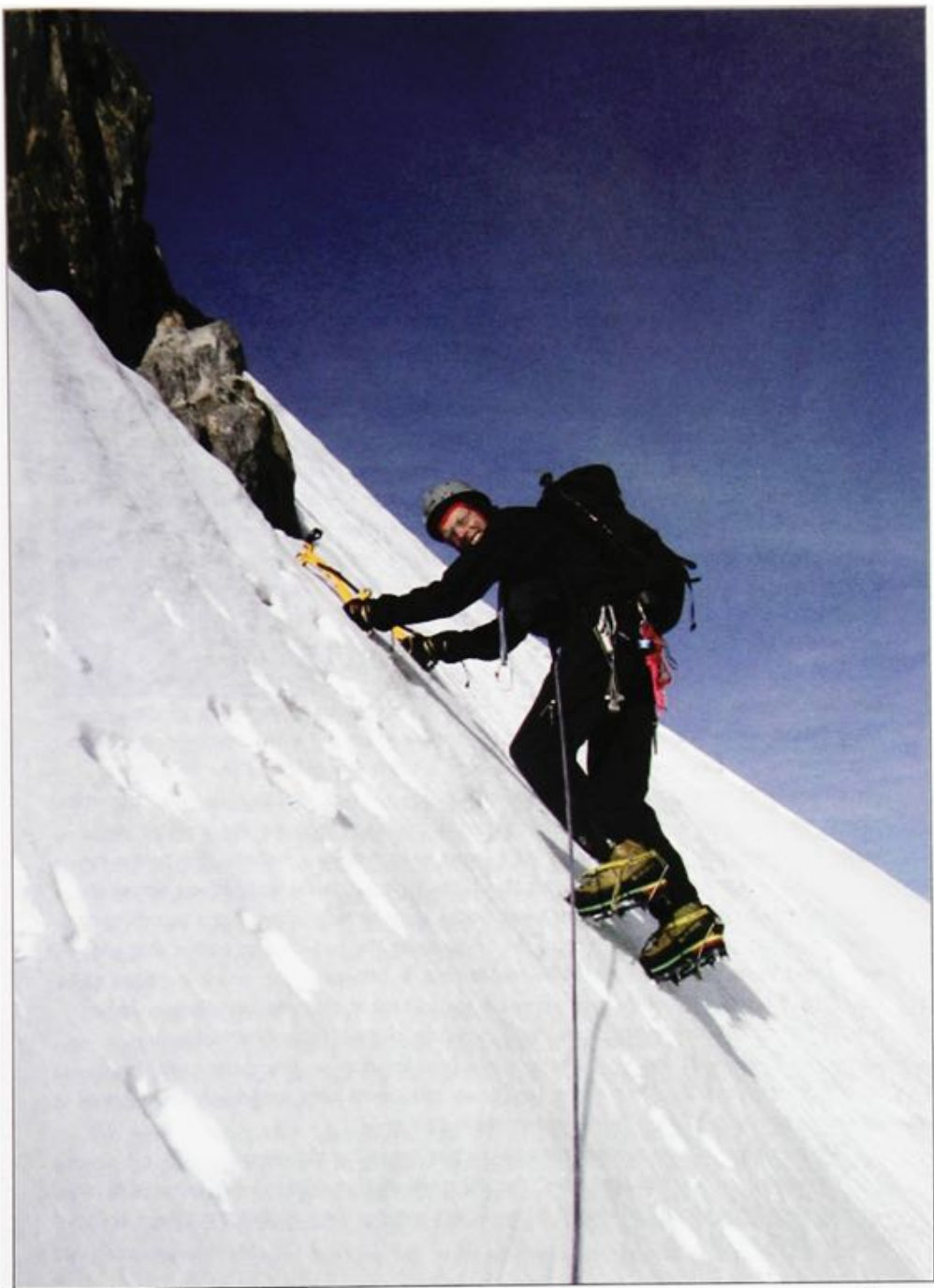
A league of gentlemen: Terry Kenny and John Sumner (minus doting dog) relax after their race to the hut. Photo: Kenny collection

Face. Much to our surprise, some Munich climbers and their scabby mongrel dog now occupied the winter raum. Worse still, the dog was eating its dinner off one of the communal hut plates. John was initially furious but, when the dog seemed to adopt him, mellowed somewhat. We came to a quiet agreement between ourselves to discreetly put the dog's plate to one side. The Munich climbers were most amiable and we spent a very agreeable evening drinking their beer. The dog had positively fallen in love with John and sat on his knee in ecstasy. Their intention was to climb the Wildspitze by the North East Ridge, dog included: apparently, it had made many similar ascents.

Next morning dawned clear and cold. We were up by 3am and away soon after. John had trodden this track twice before and knew it well. The approach to the *Wildspitze North Face* from the Breslauer Hut was long and complex but John, with all his research, had judged this the most feasible. At first a rocky path but then we hit the glazier and time to rope up. It seemed a relatively benign glazier, with few crevasses, and we plodded up in the half dawn, all thoughts of racing extirpated. We stopped to rest and looked back, only to see clouds boiling over from Italy. There would be no North Face today.

We were now well in to the holiday and it was looking like John might fail a third time. Really, the climb had to be made within the next two days, or never. As we went to bed

**Opposite:** An unappeased appetite; John Sumner out where he always wanted to be, traverses below the rock band on the North Face of The Wildspitze. Photo: Terry Kenny



that evening, the sky was clear, the glass rising and we set the alarm for 2.30am, though I saw no sleep.

When would I stop falling? The rope had long since pulled tight but I was still falling on the stretch. My last vision of the world as my head went below the surface of the glacier was of John in the half light, with every limb flexed in lightning fast reaction, trying to arrest my fall. He succeeded and I climbed out of the crevasse, shaken but uninjured, much to John's relief. He had certainly done a good job in saving me, like the true professional he was. He looked at me but said nothing. I knew he was giving me the option to back out and the relief in his face when I said we should press on was evident. "Bad luck, chap," he said, "could have been either of us." Kind words, I thought. We pressed on through the dawn.

To reach the North Face, we had to circumnavigate half the mountain and all over treacherous glacier terrain, involving massive detours around gaping crevasses. We crossed the first col only to lose our height gain before climbing to the next. It seemed endless. Now the sun was high and we sweated in the heat. I felt weary. After five hours, we emerged from a serac field into the open and suddenly before us loomed the North Face, within striking distance, glistening ice, as awesome as it looked in *Im Steilen Eis*. I wanted to take photographs but John was possessed by renewed drive and surged ahead with boundless energy, dropping coils of rope as I fell behind. It was as though he was afraid I might back out if we delayed too long.

John had already eyed the only feasible line through the bergschrund, the key to the face. By the time I caught him up, he had already set up the belay on the lip of the bergschrund and was raring to go. He made short work of the initial overhanging ice and was soon on the face and out of sight. The rope went out quickly and the thud of his placements was punctuated only by his shouts of joy and bits of falling ice, glistening white against the dark blue sky. Above the bergschrund, the route took a rising traverse right, under a narrow rock spur, then followed a direct line on steep ice all the way to the top.

"Rock," shouted John and I ducked as a stone whizzed past. I was halfway across the traverse and directly under the rock band. Rocks were already falling in the scorching heat. I moved as fast as I could and joined John on his belay. We had decided earlier that each would lead three successive pitches to enable rests in between. John was in paradise, as he set off up the steep ice of the face proper. A joy to behold, this was John Sumner in his natural habitat, relishing every move, fluid, confident, elegant, as professional as any Chamonix guide. Hans was right. The face was bare ice and our crampons hardly bit beyond front points. It looked a long way down as I joined John, confidently leaning back off his ice screws with rope neatly coiled. He led off again.

The bergschrund now looked miles below and I gaped at the exposure.

"I suppose you want to lead now," he said somewhat grudgingly. I was tempted to say 'no' but then took control of myself. After all, this was my element too, the thing I liked best in climbing. I led off.



**'Face below his feet': John Sumner near the summit of The Wildspitze. Photo: Terry Kenny**

"You're kicking ice down, chap," he shouted up. I traversed a little to the left but wondered what else he expected on this kind of face. I was climbing well by my standards but knew that, compared to John, I was moving awkwardly. He receded into the distance as the arc of rope between us grew longer but all the time his eyes were fixed on me, watching every move, unblinking, assessing and judging. It was hard work; pitch after pitch; more akin to easy angle water ice than Alpine ice. The odd patch of residual, thin *névé* gave some respite.

"We've done it mate, we've done it," shouted John as he raced to join me. "Stanley next, mate." Some leads later, it was mine that ended us on the North East Ridge, just below the summit. I was immediately struck that John had reverted to his friendly address of 'mate' as opposed to 'chap'.

We were ecstatic. All the frictions of the previous days disappeared. We posed on the summit for photographs then raced down the Normal Route to reach familiar ground. At last we could relax. It was John who took the initiative. "Sorry I shouted about you kicking ice down." It was then that an amazing revelation came about. John had never experienced this phenomenon before because he had never allowed anybody else to lead on his



numerous North Faces. He had led every pitch of every route.

A few weeks later in Canada we stood in 'The Meadow', the bivouac site under the North Face of Mount Stanley, inspecting the route. John was more concerned about the notorious gear-eating pack rats which occupied the site than the prospect of the climb. We selected a suitable bivouac and resolved to return later in the week for the route. It was blisteringly hot and the sky was already darkening with smoke from the forest fires consuming Kootenay. Next day, the Park was closed by the wardens until further notice. There would be no chance of climbing the North Face of Mount Stanley that year.

It was to be John's last trip. True to his character, he had kept his half of our pact, to attempt Mount Stanley with me, even though he was no longer at that time feeling his best. We spent much time together on those two trips and opened our souls a little. I was intrigued as to why he had never attempted the North Face of the Eiger, a route well within his remit. But he was wary of objective danger, understandable after his epic on the Walker Spur and could not justify that route in his mind. What struck me most was the rigorous, almost scientific way, he approached his big climbs. The meticulous planning; the protocol-based criteria for retreat; the minimisation of objective hazard; I teased him over this rigour but he raised his finger and said: "How do you think I've stayed alive so long, chap?"

I believe John held as much in reserve as he gave on the mountains, so great was his safety consciousness. Yet he still operated at the top end of the game, seeing new generations of mountaineers come and go. He was already a legend in his own lifetime and one can only speculate what he would have achieved had not held so much in reserve.

It was a privilege for me to be with him on this last adventure.

*Postscript: I returned to Mount Stanley the following year with Canmore climber, Everett Fee, but the face had been totally destroyed by the parching heat of the successive hot summers, a fate similar to that of the Similaun, near neighbour of the Wildspitze. I have no desire to return.*



# Murphy's Law

Peter Benson

A jaundiced, Sassenach-flavoured description of Scottish winter mountaineering requires one to imagine a well-wrapped up climber, expensively dressed by Messrs Brown/Tiso et al. trudging slowly up a steep snow slope in a full scale blizzard with 30lbs of scrap iron tied to his back, slowly tearing up £10 notes as he goes. Or, as Alistair Borthwick puts it in *Always a Little Further*, for the maximum and minimum of pleasure in the open air, winter mountaineering in Scotland is pre-eminent.

So here we go again: what a misery. I'm standing on this snow-banked ledge some 2,000ft up on Creag Meagaidh, spindrift billowing downwards in great clouds, enveloping everything and everyone, with icy particles malevolently seeking out those hitherto warm, dry, intimate places — those you've hung onto as a last vestige of comfort to compensate for being caught short in this wild, tormented maelstrom. Hell's teeth, what black-enamelled, blue bath-tubbed, insane madness causes me and countless other lunatics to put up with this? To paraphrase Frank Kiernan in his brilliant *Story Without a Moral* (RCJ 1937), there seemed no sense in it; there's enough misery and suffering in life without going looking for it.

There were other spindrift-coated, grim-faced figures involved in this macabre Scottish day. Our common goal was a route called *The Pumpkin*, a much sought after winter prize. A party of two were in pole position at the start of the first pitch, while two more were 50ft up battling it out on the big steep slopes above. We stood, me and my mate John Sumner, backs to the wind, beating our Dachstein mitts together like demented penguins as the spindrift condensed on nose, chin, eyelashes and upper lip, then re-froze to form icicles. I've never seen my mate (or anyone else for that matter) look so forlorn and miserable. As the wind howled like a dervish and the spindrift reduced my world to a few square yards, I tried hard to adopt the James Bond technique for dealing with events outwith one's control: to retreat from this howling nightmare into a safe and locked mental strong-room. Unfortunately, it didn't work very well; my mental stronghold rapidly became a little shell of suffering.

As I stood there, wreathed in the tools and weapons required for a Scottish winter day out, I bridled and cursed at the injustice and fickle whim of nature that had brought the two of us to this sorry pass at the foot of the very first pitch of this three-star grade V, Meggy special. We had driven at high zip on Friday night from Stafford up the M6 and A74, then whizzed up Lomondside to Glen Orchy. Three hours glorious zizz in Louis's croft, up at 5am; booted and spurred by 6am; another hour's drive to Laggan, then a weary slog in wet snow into Coire Ardair. Now here we stood, Damart-vested, fibre-piled Gore-Tex men, crampons sharpened like Wilkinson Sword razor blades, axes honed to a fine edge and trained to the last umpteenth of an umph on Woodbine cigarettes and Guinness

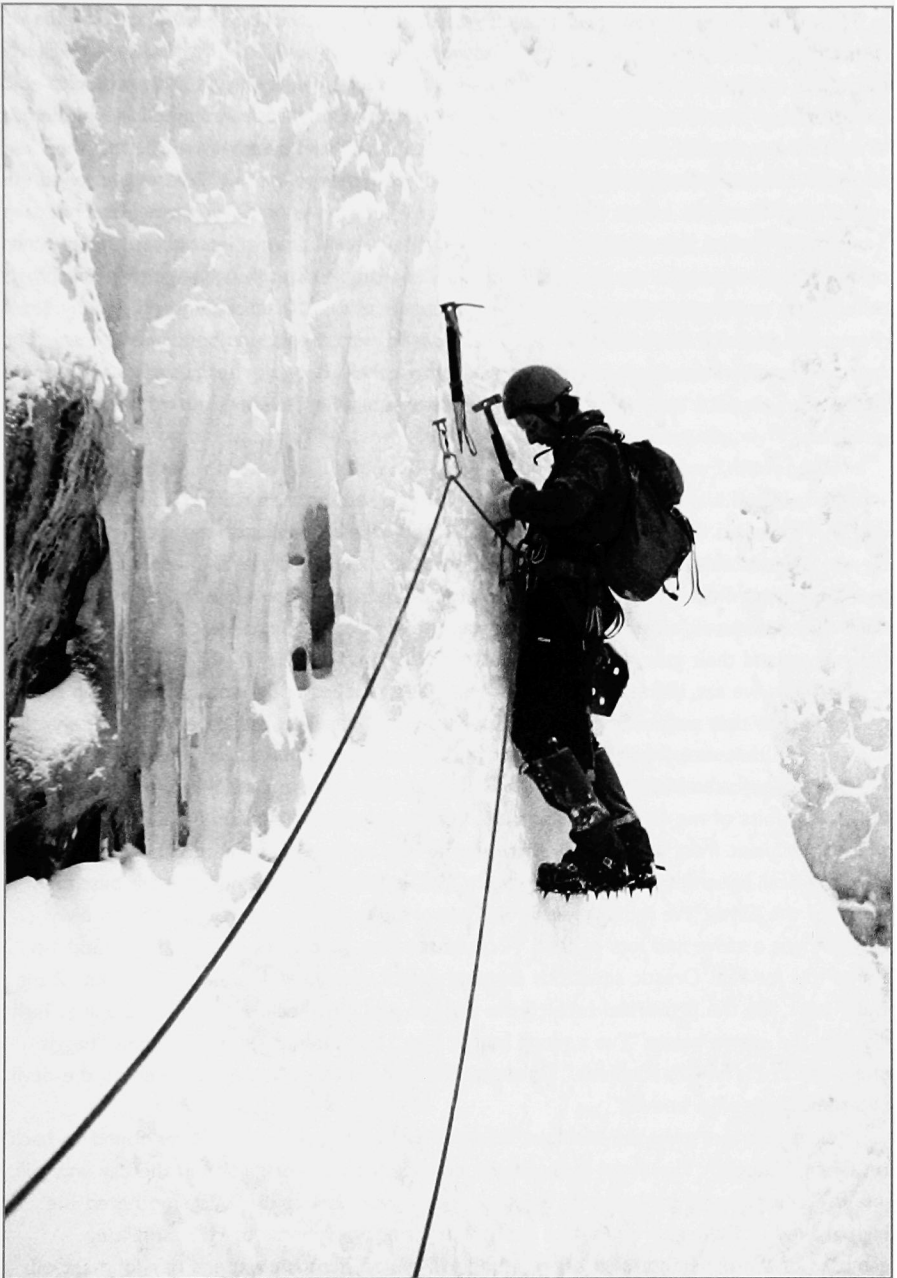
stout. And this was it, the bottom line: a world of grey swirling ice and snow whipped up by a wind operating outside the limits of the Beaufort scale.

John's face was still a picture of misery and 20 wild frozen minutes passed unbelievably slowly. Nothing much happened: the leading pair advanced 15ft or so. At this rate, using the three or four of my brain cells still functioning, I calculated that their present rate of progress meant we would be starting the route at about 9am Sunday. It was now 9.30am Saturday morning; I shuddered at the daftness. After another 10 minutes shivering in this uniquely unpleasant and excruciatingly hostile environment, I cracked. Bending down to John's ear I said simply: "John, I'm giving this away;" and promptly stomped off down the steep snow into the corrie. *The Pumpkin* could wait for another day. John followed grumbling, then a quick scuttle through the guide showed us a two-star gully round the corner on the left. It was only a IV, but, perhaps more fitted to the prevailing conditions. We shuffled off around the base of the lower rocks and into the gully proper, until a steepening reared up before our frozen noses. I took up a good position under an overhang on the left of the gully bed: at least here we were out of the wind, though we could hear it baying like a banshee higher up.

John strode with determination to the centre of the gully and addressed the 70° slope. Neatly, he planted both his tools in the névé, then front-pointed until his body was arched like a coiled spring — his whole body tensed, ready for the next upward mobile surge. Suddenly, there was an almighty roar from above and about half a ton of Meggy spindrift and snow swept down the gully. Most of it fell on John and he disappeared in a billowing white cloud. I crunched up over the belay, frightened witless and waited for the inevitable: the blood curdling scream and the whiplash writhing of the rope that would come from the avalanche-encased flailing body of my brave leader. But as the noise of the avalanche subsided and the air gradually cleared, I unhinged myself from my tense 'hold the falling leader' stance to see the figure of JS still attached to the mountain and still in his coiled spring mode, but coated from head to foot in spindrift. It had built up in great gobs on his arms and shoulders and an elongated cone sat atop his helmet like a giant dunce's cap. From a catalogue of grim, uncomfortable incidents, this rated a good 5 on the Richter scale of Bad Times... "Pete," he shouted, "I'm getting out of here." And without further ado he marched away.

I lam and we are still in the corrie, but further down and away from the beetling, snow-festooned cliffs and threatening avalanches with their attendant whirling clouds of spume. Eating our butties and sipping scalding hot coffee from flasks (spiked a wee bit with 'Dew of Ben Nevis'), I felt almost human again. "We've got to do something," said John, "something positive. Coming all this way and nothing to show for it, it's just not on." I kept schtum, content to concentrate on taking in fuel. Out of the murk above, a couple of Jocks came towards us. Encased in suits of ice and snow they looked almost as miserable

Opposite: On points again, John Sumner leads Ritchie's Gully. Photo: Benson Collection



as I felt. These were the two hopefuls who had been in pole position at the start of *The Pumpkin*. John's eyes glinted: a ghost of a chance was presenting itself for another crack at the route. No chance; I wasn't going back into that white cauldron and the two Jocks confirmed my worst suspicions. "The hale face is avalanching," one remarked laconically. "We're off tae the Fort fae haggis an' neeps." After that brief summary of the day they stomped off down the glen. Balked of the route, John kept muttering, "We've got to do something." Then, like a man clutching at straws: "Have you ever dug a snow hole?"

"Aye," I replied, "bloody hard graft and, what's more, I know at least three wrong ways of doing it. Most people try to dig side by side, colliding with each other, getting in each other's way and ending up with frayed tempers and an unsatisfactory, uneven, grubby grotto. The smart trick is for each participant to dig into the slope about two metres apart, then, when the depth is judged to be correct, you both dig horizontally at right angles towards each other. Lo and behold, a three-star bivouac complete with exit and entrance."

"Okay, youth," says John, "let's get cracking."

We selected a slope at the correct angle and for the best part of an hour cut, thrust, dug and shovelled the dreaded white stuff like Klondike miners after the mother-lode. Thus by midday on a cold, dreich Saturday in February, in a lonely corrie in deepest Lochaber, two grown men had fashioned, by furious physical activity and what little mining experience they possessed, an executive, three-star, snow hole biwy, into which they placed themselves and their gear. What a big deal.

So there we sat, silently ignoring the ribald and raucous comments made by the sons of Dalradian as they passed by on the track below us. "Hey, Tam, jist tak a look at they barmpots in that wee snowy hole oop there." "Hey, Jimmy (directed at us), is that the Meggy Hilton you're building?" Howls of laughter which we studiously ignored. After about 20 minutes bits of me started to feel quite cold and I was certain I could detect the first signs of incipient frost nip. Hypothermia was lurking in the wings. Paradoxically, John waxed almost lyrical, his enthusiasm bubbling over. "This is fantastic. This must be the best biwy north of the Clyde. We mustn't waste this opportunity. Now have you brought a biwy bag? I've got a stove and lots of food." I could see that glint in his eye again. My God, he wants this for real. Drastic situations demand drastic measures, in a flash I was out of the snow hole, like the proverbial rabbit from the hat, and pinwheeling down the slope at high zip into the corrie below. "I've a much better idea," I shouted over my shoulder, "haggis and chips at McTavish's Kitchens." To quote Menlove Edwards, 'today has been to the devil, but tomorrow, who knows?'

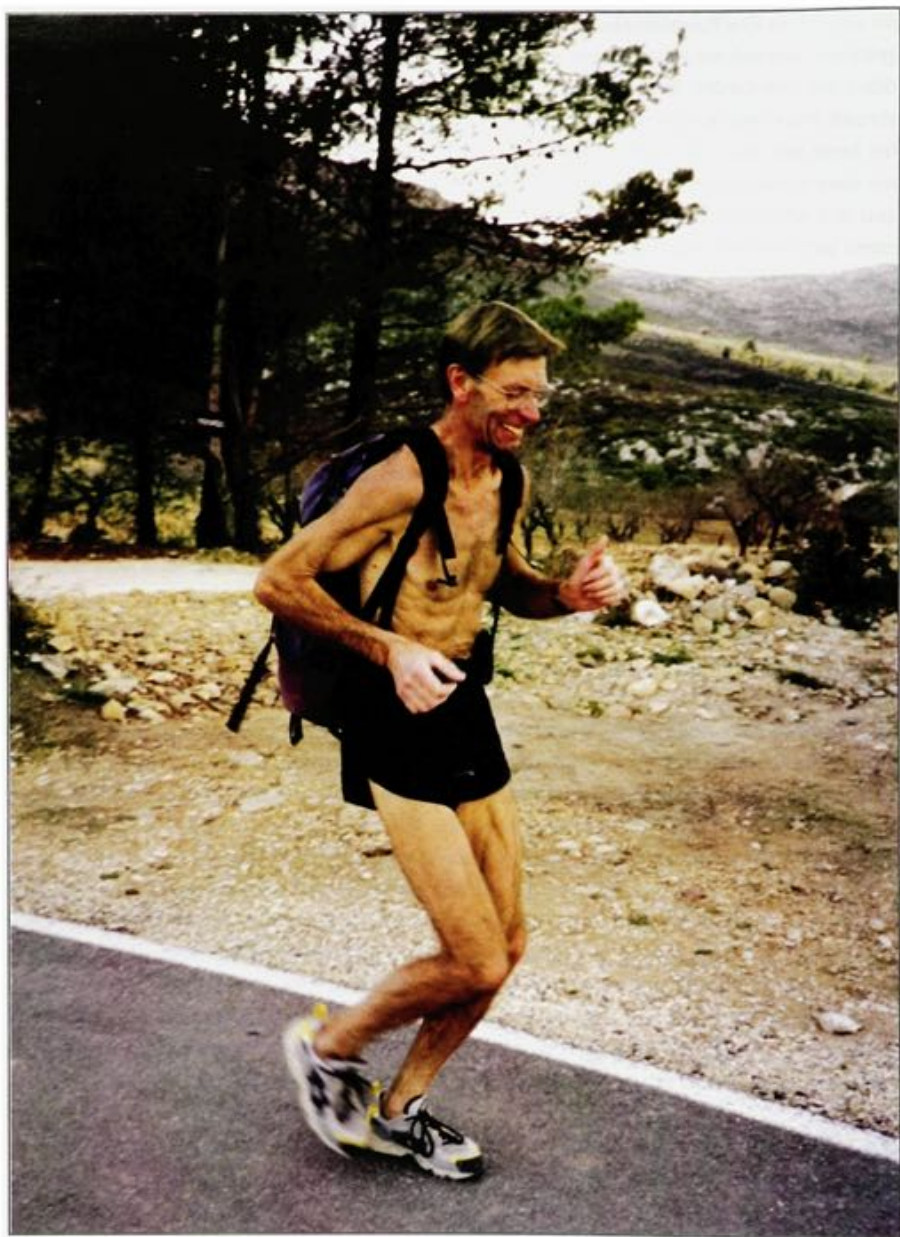
Relentlessly pursuing the Menlove Edwards philosophy, two weeks later found us back on Creag Meagaidh. The snow in the lower corries was like concrete and the day was still, just the whisper of a cold breeze. To offset this, a grey blanket of cloud smothered the high ground and clung in wraiths to the gullies, rising at intervals to give tantalising glimpses of the upper crags. In short, a not too typical Scottish winter's day. John set off

on pitch 1 of *The Pumpkin*. He hadn't gone far in the general direction of up when the grumbles started: he wasn't happy with the state of the snow, he didn't like the feel of it, didn't like the colour, the texture or the sound of it. Pessimism hung around him like a shroud. Here was a role reversal. I was no longer the snivelling wimp of two weeks ago, I felt brisk and sharp (for this, read 'naive' and 'stupid'). "Come down," I commanded, "and let me have a crack at it. All it needs is a spot of 'ack-it-attack-it', clenched teeth, a wee bitty zest and enthusiasm. Show me a man who can stand shoulder to the slope, etc., etc." John came back morose and sullen. "Don't like the look of this pitch, chap, it just doesn't feel right." We swapped ends. I addressed the 70° icy slope, set off northwards, reached and passed John's high point. Then 'thwack', I drove my ice-axe into the slope above my head and was petrified as a jet of icy water spurted out from my placement. Warily, I front-pointed up and poked about in the hole, peered in and took a nano-second to take in that the whole acre of snow and ice I was prattling about on was detached from the underlying rock strata and water was pouring down between the two layers. Immediately my brain went into panic overdrive: we could be in real serious trouble here. There was an ironic cackle from below. I felt the swish of that old man with the scythe. Swallowing hard, I very timidly and very, very carefully backed off and slunk away.

I didn't say much on the walk out, numbed by shock and bitter with disappointment. Paradoxically, John was almost benign, grinning his famous ear to ear grin: "I told you, chap, I could sense there was summat wrong." So there the matter rested - *The Pumpkin 2*, Sassenachs 0... I felt like a 'fugitive from the law of averages'.

*Postscript: Two weeks later, John Sumner was at it again with an acolyte from the Mountain Club, John Keska. This time they were successful and JS was on a big high for four weeks. The other John, when questioned closely, still had a haunted look which suggested that the line between success and failure had been razor thin.*





Was this the pace that staunches a thousand slips? John Sumner having just run The Bernia Ridge, near Alicante, Costa Blanca, returns to base unsweating. Photo: Peter Benson

# Dress Sense

## Martin Wragg

When I arranged to drive down to Bristol with Ken Wilson for the BMC AGM I was not expecting a quiet weekend. I knew that the driving would be accompanied by vigorous debate on issues facing the BMC, politics and all manner of other events, all conducted at full throttle. Not content with the afternoon fare of National Forum and AGM, Ken wanted to be there first thing in the morning when the different sub-committees were holding a range of meetings on access, climbing walls and who knows what else — and Ken wanted to attend them all, even though they were taking place simultaneously. So much for Saturday's plans; but hopefully Sunday would offer the opportunity of a climb.

We sat through endless meetings on the Saturday with one eye on the brilliant sunshine baking the lawns of Bristol Grammar School and wishing we were elsewhere. Fortunately the weather held and on a glorious spring Sunday morning we drove down to Avon Gorge and parked beneath Main Wall. Ken announced that he was bringing out a new edition of *Classic Rock* and it was essential that he re-familiarise himself with *Piton Route*. He had hoped to entice some celebrated dignitary or younger star to pose for his camera but since they had all gone to Cheddar, I would have to do. He issued his instructions: I would have to lead the more difficult pitches whilst he did the middle one and selected the optimum camera positions.

We geared up by the car. Whilst I selected a rack suitable for a VS, the first climb on the crag, Ken donned his standard uniform of heavy blue fibre pile trousers and jacket. To the best of my knowledge nobody has manufactured this sort of clothing since the 70s and nobody I knew wore it then. Ken, however, swore by it irrespective of the soaring temperature. It was at this point that he took issue with my own kit: black trousers and white T-shirt. This, he explained, was a photographic disaster, since the overhangs and steeper bits were black and the rock above white. My clothes would be the perfect camouflage, which was not at all what he required. Further, the pants were too long, showing not enough ankle and had to be rolled up just the correct amount. The lack of a helmet was also a problem in terms of colour definition and Ken considered the possibility that I should borrow his, although just, maybe, my bald patch was now large enough to compensate.

At the top of the easy approach I organised a belay whilst Ken fiddled with his light meter and produced a camera. I had never seen the like, although it was vaguely reminiscent of certain museum exhibits. Ken dismissed my ignorance and stated that this was a Leica, albeit of even greater vintage than his clothes. "It's not the age that matters," he explained, "it's the quality of the lens and the person behind it." I had to acknowledge that the reputation of both was formidable.

The crux of the first pitch involved a delicate move out of a groove and away from

gear, leftwards across a wall. There was nothing which a climber of my generation would regard as a hold on which to hang, only little edges for balance. It was all in the footwork and it gave me something to think about for a minute or two before I identified the correct sequence that would enable me to stay in balance as I moved across and up to something more positive. As I made to start Ken noticed that my trouser leg had slipped an inch too far and, horror of horrors, I had a cap hanging from my right hip. I needed something to protect my pate from the sun when it moved round onto the crag. However, this would not do at all: "Very naff," said Ken. I complied with his instruction and stuffed the offending object down my T-shirt. Mid-sequence it transpired that a slight adjustment of hand and body would better suit the artist's requirement. Naturally, I complied.

The belay soon arrived where I found that some of the pegs post-dated the first ascent and made myself secure. Ken arrived in no time at all and led on. The rope swiftly ran out but then there was much delay while the rope danced in and out repeatedly, mirroring the movement of the impresario above. On arriving at the stance Ken explained the importance of camera position, angle etc. Just up and left from the belay was a steep little wall which Ken regarded as the crux of the route. He thought it might tax me and wanted to make sure that he didn't miss a shot. "You can always tell when somebody's struggling," he said, "the camera never lies."

I have to confess that it did slow me down quite a bit. There was a big juggy block way up to the left, but how to reach it was not obvious. Clearly, there would be a tricky move or two but the question was whether to traverse low, high or somewhere in the middle. The options soon narrowed. Although Ken advocated staying low, the lower traverse ran out into nothing and the finger holds on the highest option were wet and slimy. However, the level of polish on the footholds of the third/middle way was unreal. As I made to step back down and take stock of my situation, Ken warned me of the bush in the corner below. This, it transpired, had been the subject of his ministrations while I had been waiting to follow the previous pitch. He had persuaded various branches to lodge themselves in cracks and behind flakes in improbable places so that they would not obscure his picture. However, they were stout and whippy; one touch Ken assured me, would be sufficient and they would strike like a cobra and part me from my tenuous contact with the rock. I was forewarned, but it did not seem to me that the remainder of the adage held true.

The problem was that the crux was up left whilst the protection was down right. The difficulty was compounded by the knowledge that Ken was more intent on catching the dramatic photograph than myself. After much dithering I decided to sacrifice the best fingerhold on the crux sequence and placed a small Friend. Ken took issue with this, not so much with the protection as the fact that the yellow webbing on the Friend was no longer visible on my hip, thereby disturbing the colour balance of his shot. However, the fingerholds were strangely better than before and the friction much improved, so I re-

ordered the rack to the boss's satisfaction before completing the sequence and finishing the climb.

Whilst coiling the ropes at the top of the crag, we agreed that the first ascent had been a tour-de-force. Only at that point did I discover that there was no abseil descent and that we faced the long walk down in rock boots. I don't do pain as well as I used to. Back at the car Ken decided that the least he could do was to buy me an ice cream. The very least, I concurred. Then back in Langley (Macclesfield, you understand) Gloria rustled up a chicken dinner to round off a memorable day.

*Postscript: The author acknowledges that he has employed a degree of 'poetic licence' and that the 'director' may have a slightly different recollection of events, but he is unwilling to let the truth — or the 'director's' perception of it — stand in the way of a good story.*

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# A Winter Descent of The Croz Spur

**Dick Turnbull**

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Somehow, unnoticed by us, the storm had been slowly and stealthily coalescing about us for at least four hours. I had a fleece balaclava with a small (and annoying) peak visor lined on the underside with blue fabric. This may sound irrelevant but every time I looked up, the sky looked blue. So it was "Yeah, everything's fine; get on with it." when Frank kept asking what I thought of the gathering weather.

Suddenly a violent gust of wind whipped the snow around us and I looked up with a start at the reality of wild weather around me. There was no blue sky and there was no mountain either as sudden squalls of snow heralded the onset of a full-blown storm suddenly surging around us. It was late in the February day and we were tired and ready for the relative warmth and rest of our third bivvy, so it took all of two seconds for the decision to be taken and Frank and I were vainly casting around for somewhere to scrape clean and perch on.

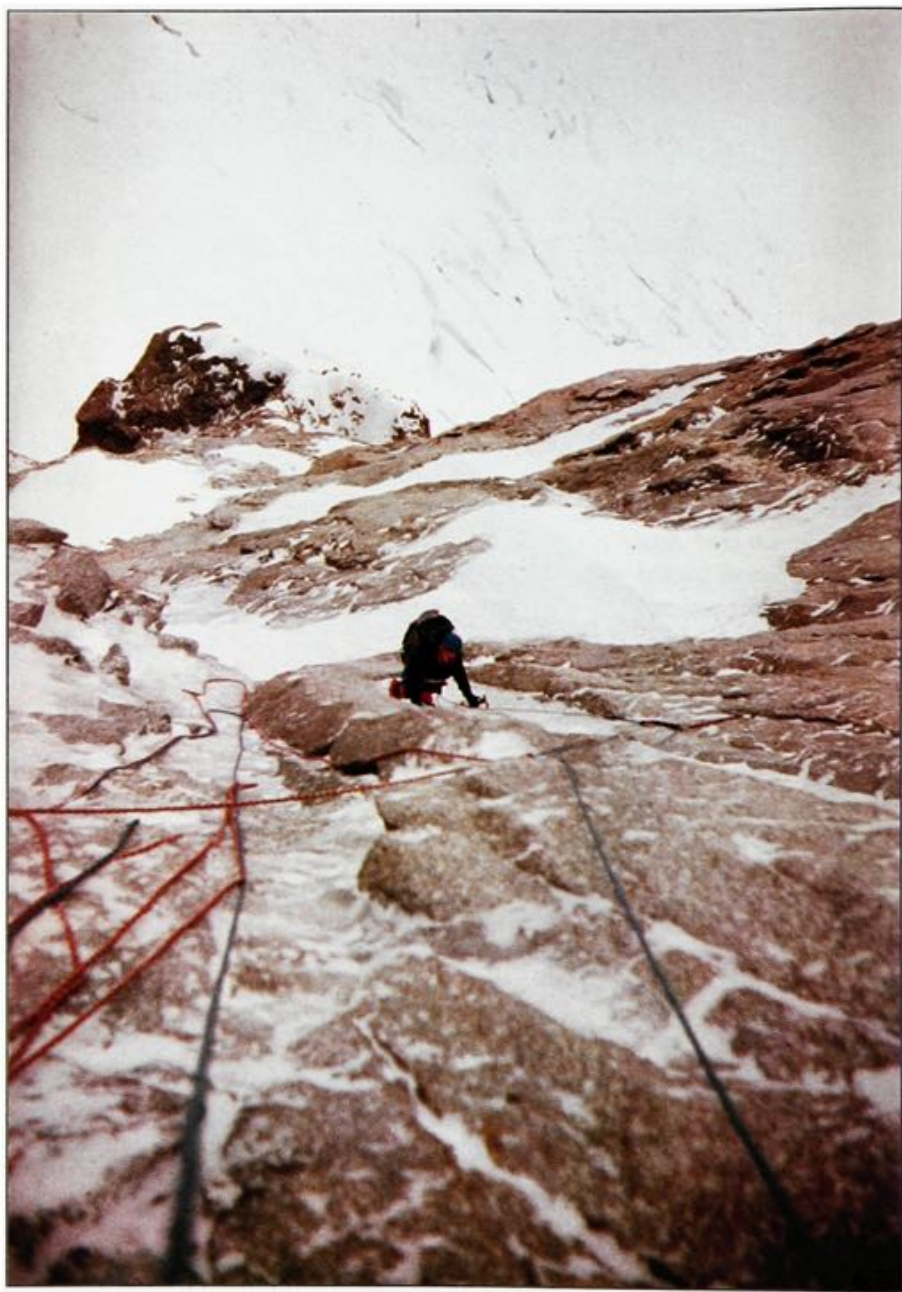
It was day three on *The Croz Spur* and we were two short pitches from the top. We had had great conditions with dry rock, good ice and absolutely brilliant, modern, mixed climbing in the solitude of a great Alpine face in winter and we were happy with the route being so nearly in the bag. The stealthy arrival of this unheralded storm shocked us and the totally unsuitable nature of our surroundings for bivvying unnerved us as we settled down on two pathetic lumps of shifting rubble for what was going to be a long, cold and sleepless night. This was Frank's first big Alpine route in winter and his sleeping bag was not really up to it. I had a specially made Gore-Tex-covered Mountain Equipment bag complete with bivvy hood which allowed me to retreat from the now howling night. The fact that I slept fitfully in between sliding from my perch was testament firstly to my exhaustion and secondly to Mountain Equipment. Frank was not so lucky as his pit was wet and flat inside his bivvy bag. When eventually the morning came with the storm still rampaging around us it was obvious after a brief attempt to climb the remaining two pitches to the summit that Frank was not really up to another night out. It had to be down. I was terrified of the thought of 4,000ft of abseiling, but even more scared of another night out at high altitude with an already shivering Frank. The final decision maker was the state of the notorious descent from the Grandes Jorasses with up to two feet of new snow ready to sweep the unwary into the Val Ferret.

We packed up, stuffing wet bags straight into our packs. No brew was possible in the wind and anyway the urgency of our position forced us to get on with it. With the first anchor set up and the rope thrown hard downwards into the blast, Frank's chilled fingers promptly dropped his belay brake. Shit! One second of fumbling and we were consigned to

**Opposite: Up or down on The Croz Spur, style is all. Photo: Dick Turnbull**







a long nightmare of precarious descending on karabiner brakes. I shouted the question to Frank: "Have you ever used a karabiner brake?"

"A what?" was his reply. As I had used one before I passed him my brake only for me to watch horrified as he took the brake, juggled with it like he had the eponymous hot potato in his hands and then clutch vainly as it spun out of reach and joined his other brake somewhere 4,000ft below.

We would have stood together in stunned silence if the wind had allowed us to. No time for recriminations as I switched straight into instructor mode and showed Frank how to fit the karabiner brake puzzle around the rope before he set off into the swirling snow. This was to be the first of 27 long and desperately anxious abseils. The wind took exception to our efforts, clawing at the ropes as if trying to rip them away and wrap them round the smallest spike. It was imperative that we waited for any lulls in the roaring blast before we either hurled the writhing snakes down into the swirling mist or dragged them down praying for their safe delivery at our feet. The ropes themselves behaved impeccably. They were new Everdry Edelrids and repayed their investment handsomely as they stayed supple and compliant throughout the descent, unlike every account of climbers fighting icy hawsers in the tales from the Golden Age of mountaineering.

Things were going fine. Our heart rates had stabilised with periodic spikes of high anxiety when the ropes had to be pulled. We were getting through our rack, mainly nuts and slings with the expensive Friends being kept to the last. The further down we went, the quieter it became — spookily quiet — with a new noise, now: the insidious slithering hissing of rivers of spindrift. Frank had mastered the complexities of the treacherous karabiner brake and we began to think that we were going to get away with it.

After 24 abseils were were back in the steep groove/corner where the initial couloir steepens and runs up into *The Croz Spur* proper. Here it was like a waterfall with the entire spur venting spindrift into a chaotic, atmospheric plunge pool. The ropes ended halfway down this cascade and all we had to belay on was a single peg and nut in the same crack. With two of us hooked up to this belay-cum-anchor half suffocated and blinded by chilling spindrift, our growing composure evaporated. It made being in *Point Five Gully* on the Ben in a storm seem like an idyllic memory. The only relief was the pulsing nature of this icy torrent. Every two minutes we would get a 30 second pause where visibility returned and you could breathe normally and shake the massive piles of spindrift from your back, arms and shoulders. We pulled the ropes and they came, reluctantly, slowly but they ran, one rope down then the other coming and then, stop. No movement. Panic started to swell; both of us were hauling on the recalcitrant rope, but nothing: it was stuck.

So, this was our payment for a smooth ride so far, was it. Paranoia surged through us as we half drowned in the inexorable stream and verged on panic. I shouted to Frank — though he was no more than two feet away — that we should somehow toss for who

**Opposite: Frank climbing difficult mixed ground before the storm. Photo: Dick Turnbull**

would go back up the rope as it was too dangerous to volunteer. We had a knife, but it was deep in a pack and there was no way we could get it out without risking losing a pack and sleeping bags etc. Frank immediately shouted that he would go back up. "No you can't," I shouted. "It has to be fair."

"No, I'll go," he shouted again. So, like the cynic I am, I let him go. With a loose bight hastily clipped to his waist Frank waited for a lull and began hooking his way desperately up the steep mixed corner — Scottish 5/6 on the way up in good weather. Inevitably, he couldn't make it in time before the next onslaught and immediately he disappeared into the raging maelstrom pouring down the whole mountainside. All we could do was get heads down, squeeze into the groove, fight for breath and hang on. Frank was trying to climb safely putting in runners etc. but repeated waves of spindrift proved too much for this responsible approach and somewhere over the roar of the avalanches I heard "\*\*\*\* it! I'm going for it up the rope."

Suddenly the rope ran out fast. The next pause in the spindrift saw Frank up at the top of the groove, 50ft out from his last runner making steep moves pulling on the rope into a small alcove where the angle dropped back. He just made it as the next express train roared by and in the following pause he released the jammed rope and cowered back into his recess and managed to fix a proper anchor that would keep the rope free from hazards. Instantly, he was coming down, rapidly passing me and swooping away into the gathering gloom. Then an age later the rope went slack and I was quickly sliding down out of the tumult and onto the long steep snow/ice slope at the start of the climb.

The surge of relief on getting out of the heart of the maelstrom was quickly tempered by the realisation that we had 300-400ft of steep snow/ice to descend, find our skis, ski down through two feet of new snow, not fall into the myriad of crevasses and then find (and reach) the hut, all in the gathering dark. Suddenly we stumbled onto a brand new fixed rope stretching off into the gloom. Where it had come from we had no idea but we grabbed this 7mm washing line lifeline and shot off into the unknown, skipping over a nicely full bergschrund and landing head first in the morass of soft snow at the bottom. Miraculously, our upright skis loomed up in our headtorch beams and we plunged off down through thigh-deep snow. So desperate were we that we kept our skins on our skis rather than lose control and career off into one of the now insidiously covered slots that were all around us. After struggling to slide/walk down we eventually emerged onto the flat and weirdly came across recent tracks stretching away into the now quiet night. More ominously, these tracks were haphazardly punctuated by man-sized black holes. Soon the unfortunate creators of this trail of tears appeared in our torch beams. Marek and Berek, young Polish lads, had come up the *Spur* behind us and had retreated before us leaving the mysterious 7mm washing line over the bergschrund. Their eyes were staring out of ice-encrusted balaclavas full of fear and echoes.

"Stay with us. Stay with us," they pleaded. So we did until we judged ourselves out of the main crevasse zone, when the slowness of our progress and the growing awareness of



how cold Frank was, forced us to push on to try and find the hut as quickly as possible. Somehow we did manage, not only find the hut, but also to reach it up the now worryingly full slopes that lead up to the Leschaux. Once there, we managed to dig out the door with manic energy and stumble in accompanied by drifts of accumulated spindrift. Safe and alive at last.

*Postscript:* Marek and Berek eventually turned up three hours later to find us under mounds of blankets. The next day dawned fine, except there was no Croz Spur on view as the remnants of the storm lingered on. At 9am we heard a chopper racing up the Leschaux Glacier. The small red rescue helicopter zoomed past and below the hut and straight for the Croz. We watched it begin to work the spur, zigzagging up the buttress occasionally disappearing into the cloud. It took us awhile to click that it was looking for us, but then we were away and down the slope running to be visible on the glacier. It took three quarters of an hour for the chopper to go up the Spur, over the back into Italy and return carefully down the Spur and back down the glacier towards us. We were visible; we were jumping up and down. The chopper screamed to a halt, hovering 30 yards away while a megaphone appeared out of the window and boomed at us: "Monsieur Turnboulle?" What service. We nodded inanely; they shouted "Okay" wagged their tail and shot off for coffee and croissants in the valley while we just had the long cold trudge back to normality. For the record it was Andy Cave who picked up the gear bonanza from our descent, on an early summer ascent. He reckoned it was a good enough haul for a full day out on Cloggy.



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# Echoes

**Nick Bullock**

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The thin skin of the tent stretches and presses into my face, a freezing-cold bump, bulging like a pregnant woman's stomach. Outside the snow continues to fall. Turning from the pregnant bump, I shuffle in search of a new position that will relieve the ache on the bulging walls of my bladder. My bladder has pushed with insistence for 15 hours. The tent is dark-damp and festering; almonds of condensation stick to the ceiling like frozen teardrops. Twid and I have hardly moved for five days. I start to drift once again and hope for dreams of warmth, fresh food and female companionship, but the cell-like deprivation takes me once again to my past. Memories flood like the condensation in the hollows beneath my sleeping mat. Fifteen years of working in the Prison Service mingles with memories from early expeditions: innocence and ignorance, fighting-tension-gut-twisting-terror and hatred.

I discovered climbing at the age of 27 while training to be a Physical Education Instructor in 1992. I discovered aggression and violence, loathing-lying-pain and prejudice several years before. At the tender age of 21 I walked into a new world, one that society would rather forget. The great wooden double doors opened and the red brick towering walls loomed, entombing me. The shadows clinging to the dark beneath the walls changed me; the dark corners in the sick minds rearranged my mind. 15 years later fortune shone, light entered like a shaft of sun breaking from a storm-cumulus-cloud filled sky, the doors opened and I was released from a life sentence to begin a life of adventure-risk-travel and people. Fear and terror were still with me, but there was no risk now of a red-hot pan of cooking oil mixed with sugar being thrown into my face.

The punishment block of Gartree Maximum Security Prison is dark. The corridor runs in the shape of an L. Footsteps echo, painted-pipes run around the low ceiling, uncovered like an engine room of a ship. The sick-sweet smell of sweat-shit and fear cling to clothing and soak into the pores of my skin. Twelve steel doors face into the gloom locking in the hatred. Strip lights provide the only light, an artificial sulphurous glow that gives no warmth or revival. There are no windows to look into this microcosm of misery that is enclosed inside a microcosm of misery. Life is artificial. Rules of life do not exist here, just rules of survival. Life is brutal-separated-secluded. Normal everyday values are not to be entertained. Normal everyday values are a sign of weakness, and weakness is something to be exploited. As a prison officer waiting to be accepted onto PE Officer training, this was my life. Deemed to be fit and healthy and less prone for a heart attack, this was the normal position for those waiting to begin the 12 months training. I worked for 18 months in the Block; at the time I never guessed it would stand me in good stead for time on rock and in the mountains.

Waking after only two hours of sleep-worry and stress made the night an intimate

companion. I would drag myself from bed in the morning, dress, blue trousers, white shirt, tie, whistle-stave and key-chain knowing I would be dressing again as soon as I arrived and entered the gloomy medieval environment of the block. A flame-retardant boiler suit and plastic shin guards, thick leather gloves, steel toecap boots and a helmet would then be my suit of armour and the shield I hid behind was made of Perspex. There was no way to avoid the oncoming fight. I drove the 10 miles to work with the radio playing music I didn't hear. In a daze, I nearly crashed into the rear of the car in front most mornings. No food, I — couldn't stomach it, concern coursed through my veins pumping fear, twisted guts bubbled and tension gnawed. Eating was impossible, like the morning after the night before, my stomach would churn. Reaching the prison car park I hoped there would be no space so I could turn around and drive home. On entering the prison I would joke with other Prison Officers: false laughter, bullshit and bravado-the maggot in the intestines squirmed, the fear and bitterness was simmering beneath the surface. I breathed deeply, savouring the second before entering the madness, before opening the four-inch-thick wooden door of the block and entering into the dark sub-world of the underworld. The time arrives when psychological turns to physical. Stressing before opening the door on hatred and aggression, before being smashed into brick and slammed to the floor is good mental and physical conditioning for the hardships of the mountains.

Huddled all night, wrapped in a Gore-Tex bag at 5,500m on a crest of snow, the wind buffets me, the void, dropping sickeningly on each side, claws at my psyche. The fabric pushes into my face, damp, humid and claustrophobic like someone pulling and holding a plastic bag over my head. The rime-encrusted wall above is mentally taxing; it whispers sweet nothings to me through the night, enticing me on, leading me into the unknown. My character will not be able to back down from the challenge: there is no escape, no way around the oncoming confrontation. The wall is like a murderer holding out his meal tray waiting for more food at the serving hatch. Wooden fingers attempt to tie the laces of frozen boots the slow ungainly movement is delaying tactics. Confrontation is unavoidable: the ice-coated metal work is packed and the ropes, solid-like wire, are uncoiled.

Jamie Fisher, Jules Cartwright, Owain Jones and I attempted the Shark's Fin on Meru Central in the Gangotri region of India in 1997. This was my first expedition, my first time in Asia. The mental and physical training of life in the Block were a good grounding. We struggled every afternoon with the heavy snowfall, altitude-exposure and inexperience. The rack was too big and our objective difficult: 6,500m of unclimbed, uncompromising mountain, above an avalanche-prone slope at the base leading to a mixed ridge of hewn-granite-blocks, teetering on a knife edge separated by ice runnels and exposure, topped by the monolithic 400m high fin of smooth overhanging rock. The snow plastered the rough granite like shit smeared to the walls of a cell and smeared into the ears-eyes-hair and body of an inmate on dirty protest in the block. The intimidation was similar. The mental strength needed to face another day of savagery on a winter climb in the Alps or the Himalaya, or force myself on when every inch of my mind screams to stop-turn around-

run away-rewarm and recover, is never as hard as what it was like to open a cell door, knowing aggression and hatred, pain and brutality was a certainty.

Fisher, Cartwright and I reached a high-point 400m beneath the summit of the Shark's Fin. It does not sound far, but it might have been in outer space. The final 400m of the route were the awesome fin of overhanging granite that no one to date has climbed. Our naivety didn't allow us to look from the valley and run away; we were too proud and pushy. Like dishing out the chips from the prison hot plate, I couldn't live with myself if I bowed to intimidation. A queue of murderers-terrorists-rapists-hell's angels-drug-dealers kidnappers and thieves watched with microscopic interest every second of the day looking for a way in, an easy touch, someone who would fold with intimidation. A smack in the mouth was better than the self-loathing knowing I was a coward and opening myself for more of the same. Giving two scoops of chips instead of the regulation one just wasn't worth the easy quick fix.

I jumared ropes for the first and only time on the Shark's Fin. We had fixed our four climbing ropes on the first attempt and ran away when the regular afternoon snow had started to fall in the morning. The two 10mm ropes and the two 8mm ropes had been fixed and left in place for a return match. All four ropes were stretchy climbing ropes. For a week between the first abortive attempt and the second attempt, the ropes had swung in the wind chafing like a scab on a kneecap. Jumaring with a 25kg sack adding to my 70kg bodyweight, while watching 8mm of nylon repeatedly saw across a sharp edge above, terrified me. Inexperience didn't entertain the thought of fixing the ropes tight or duct taping the ropes where they ran over edges. Thoughts of John Harlin on the Eiger ran through my head constantly. Thoughts of chafing sheaths-white mantles and death were with me every time I pulled on the rope. I do not believe in God, but as wide-scared-eyes, hypnotic, turned red-raw with intensity, I stared-mesmerised by the sawing of the rope over rough granite and the imagined sound of the grating-chafing sheath entered my head. I prayed. The gaping space dropping away for hundreds of feet and the fear of falling were as addictive as heroin, and as deadly.

Cartwright broke one crampon on the first day and continued. A second broken crampon slowed him more, but still we continued as a team of three, Jones having opted to remain in the valley. Cartwright's drive refused to allow him to accept the obvious and our faith in him refused to allow him to leave: he was our good luck talisman. Reaching a testing traverse on ice at 6,100m on day four was the deciding factor, however. Jumaring sideways with no crampons on vertical ice, an anchor pulled with the extra strain of yarding and relying solely on the rope. Cartwright plummeted. He fought for a second with gravity, then he was gone. Fixed to the rope by his two jumar clamps and nothing else, he swung like the pendulum of an old clock, gathering speed with the arcing precision of a missile locked into its target. Smashing into rock 30m below, I heard the sickening crunch of flesh on rock. We turned and ran at this point; Cartwright's leg was bleeding and badly injured. Fisher's and my head were battered and mentally exhausted. Reaching

the base of the climb two days later; the gasp of relief poured from us in nervous laughter. Relief, the same as after a battle in a cell, the grappling and grasping done, the smashing into walls and sliding in shit done, avoiding the spit and snot and successfully dodging the bucket of piss thrown at us. With the inmate laying trussed into a body-belt, naked and face down in a secure cell, the nervous laughter would begin and the day could start.

Expect the unexpected.

Like fire fighters in the station on a slow Sunday afternoon, four of us would doze in the office of the Block, feet up and prone, relaxed on the surface, but guts twisted and messed up. It would only take the sound of an alarm bell to break the monotony. In the Block any bad shit happening would be flushed our way. We were the U-bend between the pan and the sewer of the prison population. Gartree Prison is for the worst offenders in society — a category A prison. The key had been thrown away for most locked inside its walls, and because of this, most had little to lose. Sitting dozing, waiting and wondering before jumping into action when an alarm bell rang was great preparation for the mountains.

Paul Schwitzer and myself were on the second day of climbing a mountain called Savoia Kangri in Pakistan. Savoia Kangri stands next to K2, it is 7,263m high and unclimbed. The first attempt stopped abruptly when Jamie Fisher climbing as a pair with Jules Cartwright was hit by a rock that rattled from high and bounced like a pin-ball, glancing off Fisher's Bicep. On the second attempt, Schwitzer and I, climbing through the night, pulled from the gully onto a large rolling cornice of snow that had formed at the top of a ridge. The cornice overhung so far, a great rolling ice-cream dollop that a semi-detached house could stand beneath it. A cliff of black-blocks jutted from a frozen pebble-dashed wall of rotten-snow and ice, dropped sheer, until reaching the Savoia glacier 1,000ft below. Arriving late in the afternoon we hurried to cut a level platform from the snow of the cornice. In the fading light of the early evening we moved around on the top of the cornice with a long lead of rope attached to rock anchors 50ft away and we tried not to think of the gaping void beneath the floor of snow.

Gasherbrum IV, Broad Peak and K2 stood towering above our viewing platform. Eric Escoffier and his client were missing on Broad Peak, presumed dead. I stared intently at the West Face of K2, a plume of snow and cloud streaked from the pointed summit. I tried to imagine the avalanche that had swept Nick Estcourt to his death and the deaths in '86 of 13 climbers, including Alison Hargreaves and Alan Rouse. We anchored the tent to the same rock as we had attached ourselves to 50ft away; there was nothing else. The ropes ran in a curving arc and grew heavy as ice gripped. To pin the tent onto the top of the cornice, we drove the shafts of the axes into the snow at each corner.

We brewed and survived. Life above 6,000m is not easy. Noodles and soup boiling in a hanging stove spilt and soaked into down, reducing the warming properties of the feather insulation. The litre pan, full to the brim with gruel, swung and rattled; it reminded me of an incense burner in a Greek sermon. The slop slithered down the outside of the pan

cooking into a dry crust, like blood from a cut. The wind tore across the cornice battering the little tent and snow fell in large flakes threatening to bury us. Settling down for the night, fully zipped, arms strapped straight along my side, unable to move, but warm, I thought of the inmates I had fought and held face down, hand pushing into hair, warm skin pushed into the cold rough concrete floor of the strong-box, a face pushed so hard into the floor that the blood left the cheek and the crazed etching of the concrete was copied on tender skin. The special cell was like a padded cell, but not as comfortable. Prisoner wrists were locked into handcuffs that were fastened to a 6-inch wide leather belt around their waist. Trussed, arms straight and by their hips, they would be left to contemplate the error of their ways. More than once, even after being trussed, however, the inmate would attack us as we entered the cell. A team of three officers, in arrowhead formation behind a shield would try to contain the outburst; spitting-headbutting-kicking and charging were all in the rules of engagement and used against us regularly. There wasn't an inch to spare in the tiny single skin tent: this was our cell, a cell of deprivation; I wondered what crime I had committed to put myself through this torture.

Schwitzer began to snore — he always snored and it really pissed me off. I lay there in the dark with my sleeping bag pulled tight around my face listening to the wind and the snow and the snoring. I must have dozed off but suddenly woke with a jolt. Paul stopped snoring; I lay petrified.

"Did you feel that?" Paul whispered in his Californian-pot-smoking-hippy-drawl.

"Of course I felt it; shit, you know what's happening don't you?"

The cornice had loaded with fresh snow and the extra weight had caused it to crack and settle. It was two in the morning. We frantically pulled frozen boots on without tying the laces; the inside of the tent was as cold as a freezer. We had to get out of the tent. I could imagine the cornice breaking off and the tent with us wrapped inside like a chicken in cellophane, hanging, suspended on a thread, unable to escape before the tent ripped apart spewing the contents from the fabric-bowels, hurtling-screaming into the night, into dark void, grating and tearing, hitting the pebble-dash in pieces thousands of feet below.

The snow blew into the tent as soon as it was unzipped; heavy flakes slapped into my face. I crawled from the entrance, floundering on all fours into the maelstrom of a full-blown-blizzard. Crawling through deep snow on all fours, it lapped cold against my chest and thighs. I edged from the overhanging section of the cornice and balanced on the crest of the ridge. I was unclipped, but the only anchor was the one the tent was fastened to, and I wasn't keen to clip that.

Schwitzer joined me, a snow-covered apparition crawling from the dark. Whiskers of his goatee mingled with the ice encrusted to his face. Round John Lennon glasses streaked, steamy and lopsided, hid his eyes, eyes that were wide and wired like a crack addict (like my own). We crouched, scared a gust of wind would blow us from the edge and wondered what to do. The cornice had dropped a foot. A crack had opened running its length. The wind cut through my body and soon we both were shivering. We were still undecided on



what to do, but it was obvious we couldn't stay out in the open. Clipping to the rope we cautiously stepped onto the cornice expecting it to collapse. It appeared to be solid so without using much imagination we began to clear the new snow off the cornice to lighten the load. An hour later we crawled back into the tent to start the long wait and several more snow clearing sessions each hour. Schwitzer didn't snore again that evening.

Escaping from the deadly cornice camp the following day we met Fisher and Cartwright retreating from the summit ridge. They had been battered by the storm all night, but had found a good bivvy site and left a stash of food and gas. All four of us retreated to return several days later and reach 7,000m. We existed for four days being battered once again by high winds, snow and Baltic bone-numbing temperatures. We stretched two days food into six, but our chance to sprint the final 2630m to the summit didn't arrive. On the evening of day eight since beginning on the third attempt, we made it safely back to advance base, and the following day Schwitzer led Cartwright, Fisher and myself down to base camp suffering with snow blindness.

Brutality is something I equate to the mountains, but the mountains are not brutal. People are brutal. Death and injury-disfigurement and distress occur in the mountains, but the mountain has no soul. Occasionally being in the wrong place at the wrong time or sheer bad luck takes a toll. Sometimes a mistake or a bad decision or when ego and ambition get in the way, accidents happen. I witnessed brutality first hand inside a prison. For 15 years slashing-stabbings-beatings and bludgeoning were common in my life. I watched an inmate spin and break the cheek of a colleague as we escorted the inmate into the strongbox. My colleague was 6ft 5ins and built like a brick-shithouse. He fell to the floor unconscious in a bloody-pulp with the single punch. Another Prison Officer and I fought the assailant for 20 minutes, separated from the rest of the prison. No-one knew we were fighting for survival, before another Prison Officer happened on us and rang the alarm bell. Rolling-twisting-grasping-writhing, two-against-one, and still we were outnumbered until the cavalry arrived.

On another occasion I held the head of an inmate, pushing a gym vest into the hole in his skull where he had been hit twice over the back of the head as he leaned forward to pick up a weight from the floor. A contract had been taken out on the inmate as it had been discovered that he was a paedophile. The price I found out later was a £20 crack deal. The second swing from the iron weight training bar punctured the inmate's skull saving his life, reducing the pressure that had built from the first death-dealing blow. I wallowed in tangled-twisted-sticky strings of clear cerebral fluid that hung from his ears like Nepalese prayer flags; the grey matter ran freely from ears and nose mixed with vivid bright red blood. I lay slithering and slipping while attempting to save the life of the inmate who writhed in agony. He was 15 stone and thrashed like a fish on the deck of a trawler. Thirty inmates in the gym stood and watched; none helped.

A clot dried on the gymnasium floor — large and jagged, like the outline of Australia, dark and crispy. The police arrived immediately and began an inquiry. Two days later they

decided I was innocent of taking a bribe to look the other way. The prison governors had been warned that that this inmate was at risk, but they had ignored the warnings and attempted to place the blame on me. Luckily, the original paperwork that had disappeared had been copied and the internal blame-shifting inquiry collapsed. My evenings were spent on my own for a while after this episode and my clothes were thrown away.

Red-hot, oil-filled chip pans with sugar added making the oil stick on contact with skin were a favourite of the clientele for the delivery of maximum pain and permanent scarring. PP9 batteries in socks made superb implements to cave in skulls with one quick swing. A table leg wielded like a baseball bat was a great weapon to break bones. Bic razor blades melted into the head of a tooth brush replaced the want for a Stanley knife and tubes of steel, machined in the engineering shop by IRA terrorists made to fire a single round were all a part of my life in the late '80s. The learning curve was steep on the way to prejudice-paranoia-bitterness and loneliness. Luckily I found the gym, which led to the mountains and finally my escape. Witnessing so much injury and having to deal with savagery on a daily basis probably helped me with some of the incidents I have seen occur while mountaineering or rock-climbing.

"WATCH ME MICHAEL, IGNORE WHATS GOING ON, OKAY?" I vividly remember calling down to my climbing partner. His eyes were as big as an owl's as the blood pumped, hitting the grey rock all around him. I had only just recovered from breaking my kneecap after falling from a climb on the Rainbow Slab. On that occasion, Michael had been sitting too far from the bottom of the slab half asleep when I fell from the crux moves of *Cystitis by Proxy*. The one good piece of protection on the climb was a bolt. The bolt was just below me as I fell and I remember thinking at the time, why am I still falling? I hit the ripple of the rainbow, 30ft below the bolt after surfing the slab and watching Michael being pulled across the ground like he was water skiing. My knee took the full impact, smashing into a lump of slate standing proud from the smooth-sheen of the black-velvet. I finished the climb and walked back to the car knowing that something was amiss. A week later, I had reduced the swelling and was climbing 7a, but I had booked an appointment for an X-ray, just in case. Seven weeks later, fresh from a full leg plaster, the kneecap that had been split in two had knitted together and I was with Michael again on an even more serious climb called *Tess of the D'Urbevilles*.

*Tess* is a scary E6 high on the Left Wall of Dinas Cromlech, it has limited protection and only the best at placing devious bits of gear can make the climb justifiable. Unfortunately, I do not fit into this category. I was on-sighting the climb and, as normal, I took the approach of why bother wasting time and energy fiddling bits of brass into marginal placements when forging on makes more sense. This approach is all well and good until outside forces intervene or my arms get tired.

Several rockover moves forcing my still not fully functional knee into positions it didn't like, caused it to ache badly. My eyes attempted to focus on the sharp, crozzled rock inches from my face but failed; the combination of sweat and tears brought on by pain and

effort stung and blurred. My head threatened to implode. I was still on the sick from work and I was facing a ground fall from 70ft. Forearms burnt with the effort of crimping edges no thicker than tiles around the sink of a washbasin. I attempted to work out the 6b moves that led to the comfort of the first piece of good gear since starting on this madness. Concentration was paramount; time stood still. Clarity. Nothing else mattered apart from moving right 10ft.

The climber tackling *Cenotaph Corner* to my right was a blur, an insect buzzing on the periphery. There, but only in the grey mist of my sub-conscious. Buzzing. A minor distraction. I lock off, the muscles in my shoulder tense, shake out, chalk up, study-plan-breathe deep with control. Prepare. Once committed to the sequence of moves, I would be continuing in one of two directions; reverse was not an option. The insect moved to my right — a move he will not forget for the rest of his life. A move I will never forget for the rest of my life. He pulled on the pudding stone, a house-brick lump of rock wedged for years into the crack of *Cenotaph Corner*. The Pudding Stone ripped from the corner as easy as a vegetable-knife is pushed into a Prison Officer's neck on a quiet evening in Gartree Prison.

The clarity coursing through my veins, heightening my senses made me watch with deadly fascination. In slow motion, end over end, the block spun, plummeting. The insect stopped buzzing and screamed. His belayer took no notice. I watched with deadly fascination, still unable to pull my eyes away from the five kilogram lump of death spinning its way to misery. The insect screamed again. The block twisted and turned closing in on its target. I watched with deadly fascination. Only several feet above the skull that the stone was about to smash into a grey-splintered mess of pulp, the belayer looked up and jerked his head back. The pudding stone missed his brow by an inch, ripping into his bare arm. Blood shot high into the air covering the grey rock. The belayer collapsed, the insect whimpered, no longer on belay. Mayhem ruled. Blood spurted.

"WATCH ME MICHAEL, IGNORE WHATS GOING ON OKAY?"

I made the moves. A rock over, a match, a foot swap-flagging-gently easing body weight-controlling the barn door my body wanted to emulate and finally into *Left Wall*: protection; life; living.

Hanging from big holds with the gear placed, I looked into the owl-sized eyes of Michael. Not once had he taken his eyes from me. Blood covered the rock around him. The unconscious body of the belayer had been lifted over Michael and still he had faithfully watched me ignoring the bleeding body passing beneath our ropes. The insect had been lowered from *Cenotaph Corner* as his motivation to continue with the climb had waned, leaving me to finish *Tess* half an hour later, very relieved.

As the rain hammers against the window of Ynys Ettws, the hut that is nestled into a grassy-damp fold deep in the heart of Llanberis Pass and what is now my unofficial home, I take stock of my life. The big open fire warms me. The wind rattles the door and the memories rattle my mind. No longer is there a Home Office cheque at the end of each

month. No longer the comfort of a pension and regularity. The rain soaks the hillside and the streams pour in white-gushing torrents. The leaves on the trees open with new vivid-green fresh and innocent leafy-life. Grey rock drips with the deluge and sheep shuffle beneath boulders. No longer hate and misery. No longer bigotry-violence-aggression and mutilation. No longer a life tracked until retirement, the right to vote or possessions. No longer wealth, but now I have riches unimaginable.

# Fast Forward: Climbing at Castell Cidwm and things in between

Ken Latham

## Wizard japes

In 1963 I was about to leave the comforts of my home in a small Welsh village to attend senior school in Liverpool. Would the hills of Snowdonia, my playground, become a distant memory? As a small boy I liked nothing better than roaming the hills of home; my younger cousin John and I would be off on some grand jape somewhere, damming streams, building dens, exploring the many slate quarries that dotted the landscape and having great fun with the incendiary devices that had been discarded around the slopes of Snowdon by the armed forces during their training for World War Two. If you gathered enough of these rusting old bombs together you could easily blow apart a solid Welsh drystone wall (believe me, I still carry the scar on my right knee to prove it). Who remembers the old wooden signs by the side of the Rhyd Ddu path proclaiming in stark letters DANGER BOMBS KEEP OUT? If that wasn't a sign to go exploring, then I don't know what was.

We were lucky that we didn't come to too much harm, but many of the gang had a few close calls. The only great fear was getting a roasting when you got home, a rip in your pants or a hole in your shoe was a lot more fearful than sliding down the cables of the slate tips holding on to a thin strand of wire, hoping that your mate was on the ball to catch your legs as you went whizzing by at a great rate of knots.

A memorable hill day that John and I had was an expedition to ascend Moel Hebog. On a glorious day in the long summer holidays we strode off up the hill, a bottle of Corona lemonade as emergency supplies. If we were ever stranded, we could start a fire through the glass and reflect the sun's rays directly to the house. What better piece of kit would a budding explorer need? None of our family members knew of the plan and probably assumed we were playing in the hayfield or off fishing at the lake. We figured that if you could see the summit of Moel Hebog from home then you could see home from the summit (it seemed a reasonable assumption). The trip was a great success and we planned to try a few more mountains before the holidays were over. I remember that I was nine and John was seven, today we would have the Mountain Rescue Services, the Child Protection Act, The Health and Safety Executive, and Uncle Tom Cobbly and all to ensure that we were NOT in any way to venture out of sight of any responsible person owning a mobile phone (with internet access) and GPS navigation.

One of the last walks we did together in 1963 was Mynydd Mawr. We were going to ascend the mountain via the ridge from Drws y Coed, but even we, as Rhyd Ddu lads, were in fear of the farmer who had — and still has — a hatred of anybody who might just want to go on the mountains to enjoy themselves, so we decided to take the path



through the forest on the edge of Llyn Cwellyn where we knew there was a small slate quarry (Chwarel Goch) where you could drop great slabs of wafer thin slate and watch them spin in slow motion through the water into the depths of the crystal clear pool. It was this walk that bought the steep face of Castell Cidwm to my attention and I remember as an 11-year old being scared of its awesome steepness and the way it seemed to fall towards you as we stood at the base of the gully. We ascended the peak via the gully and were amazed to find wedged in the stream a complete propeller with the tips of the blades twisted from impact. Some research later with my Uncle Jack revealed that during the war a De Havilland Mosquito had crashed on the summit of Mynydd Mawr with the loss of all the crew (for many years afterwards there was several parts of undercarriage wedged between the stones of the summit cairn as a grim reminder and memorial to the event). I climbed the peak with my family in February of 2005 and there was no sight of any metal from the crashed aircraft to be seen anywhere (the aircraft was, of course, famous for its wings and fuselage being constructed mainly from timber which wouldn't withstand the elements for long in such an exposed area).

### **Just give me some of that Rock and Roll music**

In the early years of living in Liverpool, climbing mountains was definitely put on the back burner. It was the late '60s and the magic of the big city was overwhelming to a country lad. Besides, there were loads of girls in town, in fact, there were more girls in our road than there were in the whole of North Wales. I tried my best to chat up a girl who was a member of our gang, only to be rebuffed with: "I don't go out with lads; I'm a thespian." I rushed home to consult *The Usbourne School Dictionary*. Years later I discovered she spoke with a lisp.

I owned a flashy racing bike to get from A to B, (Allison to Barbara, that is) plus, of course, the place was buzzing with music, clubs, pubs and life was for living in the fast lane — well, Penny Lane anyway. But there was that longing for the hills and it wasn't long before we were heading back to Wales for the weekends and long summer holidays. Many great walks were done during this period but we noticed that there were other ways to get to the summits of many of these peaks and we did a lot of scrambling and, of course, this naturally led us to rock-climbing.

Many of my mates and I would go bouldering at the local bridge, which was built of sandstone and was ideal for this activity. Apart from the risk of falling into the main road to be crushed under a corporation bus, it turned out to be a good training spot. But we wanted to get into some real rock. One evening, I was glancing through the local paper when I saw an advertisement for night school classes and listed amongst the various subjects (between the Macramé and the Modelling (nude) for beginners), was Mountaineering. Bloody mountaineering in the middle of Liverpool? This I just had to find out about.

The class was taught by one Arthur Green, who introduced me to rock-climbing done t'proper way; from this class grew the nucleus of a small club (The Childwall Climbing

Club). We rented a cottage at the village of Nebo and drank many a pint in the White Horse in Capel Garmon. We were lucky to be able to get out to Wales on most weekends and it enabled me to get some good routes done with Arthur. These included Cemetery Gates, Cobweb Crack and the usual classics at Tremadog. It was during this time that I got to hear of an overgrown and unused sandstone quarry near Widnes. John Bisson and I, armed with a rough map and an A4 sheet of paper with some old route descriptions, went to investigate. We took some basic rock gear with us just in case and rode around the area on John's old Royal Enfield 350cc motorbike until we eventually found our quarry. Of course, it turned out to be Pex Hill Quarry and we were amazed to find it obviously wasn't climbed on much. There were some old rusting monster bolts (home made) and some routes with wooden wedges in the cracks, but the place was crying out to be developed; so Pex became the centre of our attention for many years. It was a superb spot for developing exceptional finger strength and deft footwork; I was involved in developing the quarry and was instrumental in over 25 first ascents in the first few years. We would climb there at least three times a week and had a great gang of climbers as regulars, amongst them Arthur, Chris Hunter (who went on to do the first solo ascent of *The Beatnik* at Helsby, a few weeks before Al Rouse did, but never publicised the fact), Phil Davidson, Gaz Healey and my regular climbing partner for many years, Gary Dunne.

In the dark old days we didn't have the luxury of the fence at the top of the crag so, we would utilise the back axle of our cars for belaying. During one year the Water Board emptied the reservoir at the top of the hill for major maintenance and decided in their wisdom to empty the water into the nearest large hole they could find. The quarry slowly began to fill up with the draining water and at one point it reached some 10ft in depth, it was impossible to reach routes such as *Dateline* or *Black Magic* without the aid of a canoe, but the high level traverse to *The Web* corner (6a) became a highlight of the season. Sea level traversing in the middle of Widnes, beat that.

During one summer's evening, Gary and I were bouldering on the Web wall when a small body came flying through the air to be followed closely by another: the local urchins had discovered cliff diving off the main wall — a little disconcerting when you were well gripped up going for the crux move. Imagine them returning home soaking wet and reeking of dank water: "Oh and what have you been doing today Jimmy?"

"Just a little cliff diving practice Mum."

"Good lad off you go then and wash your hands."

One of the lads I climbed with a lot at the quarry was Robbie Mallinson, and it was with Robbie that I once more set eyes on Castell Cidwm. We had planned a weekend in Wales and were staying at my parents' house at Rhyd Ddu and having no transport had decided that a crag within walking distance would fit the bill, so armed with Ron James's selected climbs guidebook we opted for Cidwm 'to have a look', as they say. The fly in the ointment of the whole plan was the fact that Robbie was having a nose job done on the Monday and needed to be at Arrowe Park Hospital early that morning. Nonetheless, we

thought that we could maybe grab a route and then Robbie could get the train from Bangor to the Wirral in time for his pre-med. Best laid plans, etc?

We decided to have a go at the classics of the cliff :*The Curver* and *Vertigo*. They're not long routes and were well within our grade. I remember it was a cracking day and the crag was dry (Cidwm dry is different to every other crag's dry, moistish if there is such a term would be better). *Vertigo* was done first and we encountered no problem on it, so after a quick lunch we thought that we had time to do *The Curver* and Robbie could head for home. As many of you who have climbed at Cidwm will know, things don't always go to plan there. Our gear was not state of the art to say the least, so we weren't that well-armed with protection but could muster at least a few smallish wires, three 8ft slings and about 10 MOACs on rope. What should have been a fairly steady route gave us a few problems, mainly in the form of good old rope drag — something we didn't come across much at Pex or Helsby so we were a bit bothered to say the least. But with Robbie's JCB arm strength and some acrobatic seconding from me, we managed the route and were well-pleased with our efforts. But of course, time had taken its toll and there was not much chance of Robbie making it back to Liverpool that night, unless he was to try and hitch home, so there was nothing for it but a quick pint in the Cwellyn Arms.

Well, the quick pint turned into several quick pints, as they do, and, of course, the clock was ticking on Robbie's chance of making it back for his surgery in the morning. "Tell you what, youth, I'll try and hitch home tonight, otherwise my mum will have the rescue services after me." So off into the night he went and I settled down for the evening. The beer and the climbing soon had me in a slumber, but in the small hours a noise awoke me: "Ey up youth, I'm back." Robbie's return. He had failed miserably to get a lift and had decided to walk towards Bangor only to find out that after a few miles he was going in the wrong direction. There was nothing for it but to get a few hours of sleep and attempt the hitch as early as possible on the Monday morning. With a rucksack on his back and a rope slung around his neck, he duly arrived at the hospital reception desk with a few moments to spare. The startled receptionist asked if she could be of any assistance and Robbie with his usual scouse charm replied: "All rite luv, I've come ter get me nose done." Enough said; the '70s were drawing to a close.

### **The long weekend**

In 1972 I went to help the lads at Ellis Brigham's shop in Bold Street for a weekend. This turned into a week, which turned into 17 years and by the late '70s, we were climbing as regularly as was possible, mostly in Wales. We climbed on most of the crags in North Wales, but by some quirk of fate managed to avoid ever going to Castell Cidwm the excuses being many and varied, including "too hard", "too steep", "too risky to get to and you could get shot at", "built upside down; all the holds are the wrong way up" etc. So the crag was filed away in the hard drive somewhere and every now and then would resurface if you were looking through the guidebook: "We, must go to Cidwm sometime," we would

utter as we ventured to Cwm Silyn or even Llechog — I bet you would be hard pressed to find a youth today who would know where Llechog is, let alone pronounce the name.

The '80s arrived and we continued to climb as much as we could, but domesticity was claiming a few of the team and many drifted away on to other things. I often wonder where they all went, John the Money, John the Hook, Gerry the Tremble, Gary the Pig (don't ask), Mars Bar Martin and all those other sandstone stalwarts? (2.4 kids and a Ford Cortina, no doubt). But some of us soldiered on and survived the flared trousers and headbands era (I climbed *Cemetery Gates* wearing the widest pair of loons possible and still can't remember any of the footholds, hidden as they were under the folds of cloth). We then entered the glam rock stage, all lycra and blond highlights.

By the end of the '80s my girlfriend Clare said that education was a good thing and that I might consider getting some, so I found a suitable course for old farts in Aberystwyth. I like the countryside and fancied a bit of management so off I went for three years to study Rural Resource Management. There is plenty of rock within striking distance of Mid-Wales — though the beer was awful despite Aberystwyth's 26 pubs — so the old boots and chalk bag were well-used. I managed to survive the course and eventually graduated and was flung into the cruel world of the 'job seeker'; pretty bloody scary at the age of 40, I can tell you. As luck would have it, a post eventually turned up in the Local Authority in Gwynedd as a warden based at Padarn Country Park in Llanberis and I was lucky enough to get the job. On our patch were The Vivian Quarry and Bus Stop Quarry.



JCB arms needed on the upside down crag: *The Curver*, Castell Cidwm. Photo: John Cleare/  
Mountain Camera Picture Library

Managing your own crag; how cool is that?

The early '90s arrived, as did two daughters, but I was keen to find out if the skills of old would still get me up a route or two. Luckily, The Beacon Wall opened and was within walking distance of home, so as a means of getting a bit of fitness back I joined up. It was at this time that I met Mike Bailey who would come to have more influence on my climbing career than anybody previously. We hit it off as soon as we met as he shared my Pythonesque sense of humour. As a climber Mike was, and is, supremely skilful; without his leading and patience I would never have been able to do all the routes that were on my tick list from way back. We regularly climbed at E2/E3 and were out at least once or twice a week managing routes like *Ten Degrees North*, *Left Wall*, *Suicide Wall 1* and *2*, (plus a new route on Suicide Wall area, *Old Sparky* at E3) *The Dervish*, *Last Tango in Paris*, a whole load of other slate routes including all the routes on the Gnat Attack slab in one evening (a grand way of scoring a load of E numbers in one fell swoop, that) *Spectrum*, *Silly Arête*, *Vector* etc etc. They were heady days.

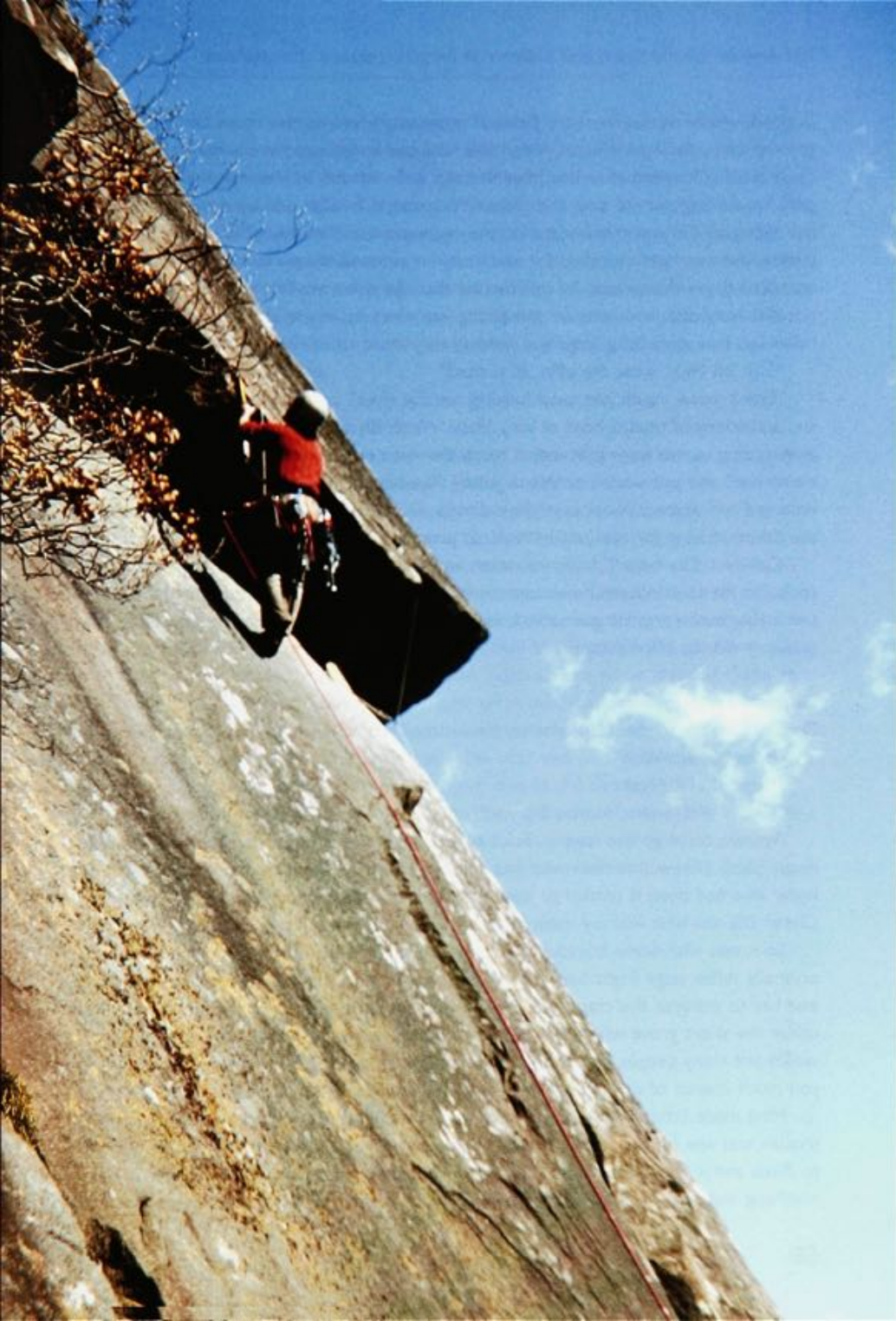
### Dancing in the dark

We climbed regularly at Tremadog and as we headed down the Gwyrfaï Valley past Llyn Cwellyn, Mike would glance across the lake and mention that he hadn't been to Cidwm for a long time and that we must try and fit in a visit as soon as possible. I would also mention that I hadn't been there either in the last 30 years and was trying to avoid the place out of good old cowardice, but we eventually plucked up the courage to go. As neither of us had been there for a long time and I was doing some work on the upcoming new Eifonnydd guidebook for the CC it seemed the time to break the trend.

We opted for *The Straighter* and at HVS should get us onto the swing of things. Ha! The innocence of trusting an old guidebook and the fact that none of our climbing mates had ever done the route should have been enough of a warning. We duly arrived at the crag at about 6pm on a glorious evening in July (a distant branch of my family owns the land that gains quick access to the base of the crag, so a courtesy call gave us permission to cross via the western end of the lake; this makes Cidwm almost a roadside venue) and geared up. We were the only ones there — as is often the norm with this crag. The only noise on an otherwise still evening was the rush of the stream into which I deposited a couple of beers to cool. I sat at the base of the crag belaying Mike and taking in the warm evening glow as the long shadows stretched across the lake and bathed the distant face of Aran in glorious sunshine. The route isn't a long climb and I thought we could maybe stop for a pint at the pub on the way home. The first section didn't cause much problem and after much grunting and cursing and general up and downing, Mike cracked the rest and eventually reached the top. By this time the long shadows had all but disappeared and dusk was fast approaching. The coolness was now having an effect and poor old Mike was

Opposite: Hanging from slings in the '70s: *Pincushion* at Tremadog. Photo: Tim Noble





dressed in only tracksters and a T-shirt, I eventually managed the route and finished the top moves by the light of a full moon. We now had to descend in the dark, not a prospect I was looking forward to with Cidwm's steep walls around us. We eventually found the gully on the edge of the crag and gingerly descended in what was by now pitch darkness, a few slides on the wet moss added to the excitement and we found ourselves back at the stream, the beer was searched for and drank in seconds, we packed our 'sacks in haste and stumbled down the stream. As we reached the lake shore we had a feeling that we were not alone and that someone or something was close by, in the darkness we could just make out that something large was moving very close to us.

"Kin 'ell Mick, what the effin 'ell is that?"

"Don't know youth just keep heading for the river," suddenly we could hear snorting and squelching of mud, a herd of very black 'Welsh Black' cattle in a very black night were investigating us, we were relieved to reach the river and didn't even bother to take our trainers off and just waded across to safety. Needless to say the pub was well shut by this time and our respective spouses were a little bit annoyed with the lateness of the day and the burnt offering for tea (understated to protect the innocent).

Cidwm 1: The boys 1. A return match would have to be arranged. A few days later I spoke to Pat Littlejohn and mentioned we had done the route and thought the grade somewhat misleading. He gave a little laugh "Aye youth, a bugger that, at least E3 5c. You probably did the third ascent."

### **Glutton for punishment**

Despite our minor epic Mike was up for another return the next month and mentioned in a whisper "*Central Wall*?"

"Pardon?" I replied.

"*Central Wall*, youth, do you fancy it?"

Aye, we could go and have a look I suppose; just hope the grade is correct in the magic book. I knew that the route was still regarded with some awe and many of the lads I knew who had done it tended to sum it up in one word answers, Hard, Desperate, Thin, Classic but the best was my mate John from Liverpool who just said: "Don't."

So it was with some trepidation that we once more set out for the crag. I don't normally suffer stage fright but I was a little apprehensive on this day. To reach the route one has to traverse the crag along a very steep and greasy grass-covered ramp and belay under the short grove which starts the route proper, getting to the base of the route would put many people off and the consequences of slipping off this ledge would not give you much chance of survival, so I was pleased to tie on to something fairly solid.

Mike made little effort with the groove and tackled the overhang without too much trouble and was on the stance in what seemed a very short time, he called down for me to climb and it was a case of now or never. The short grove was a little tricky and the overhang was more awkward than technical; what came as a bit of a shock was the state

of the pegs (I think Cassin himself had made them as a lad) they were protruding out of the cracks or were very, very bendy and wouldn't hold your washing let alone a fall. The belay was a sloping comfort and put the situation into perspective: we were slap bang in the middle of the wall and the ropes hung away from the rock by a country mile, but Mike was as happy as a sand boy and after some rearranging of the belay he was off into the distance, Zatopec in rock boots. Mike dispensed with the top pitch without much trouble and I duly followed. My arms were a little knackered and the body a little weary but we had managed the route without too much of an epic as compared to our escapade the previous visit. We were well-pleased and that was one of my best 'ticks' ever, we even managed a pint on the way home.

### Aches and pains

As with all good things there has to be a downside and it just happened to me so quickly that it was a bit of a shock to the system. I was feeling a slight twinge in my left shoulder and was having difficulty in raising my arm above head height, at first I thought nothing of it and hoped that it would heal itself and recover, I had also been climbing a fair bit with Paul Sivyer and as he was a relative newcomer we were doing the classics such as *The Wrinkle* and *Tennis Shoe*, it was great to return to these routes as I hadn't done them for a long time and we were generally having a great time rediscovering them. It was after an ascent of *Crackstone Rib* that the pain became unbearable and a visit to the sawbones was in order (bugger me, the doctor looked worse than I did) and he recommended a visit to the hospital for an X-ray which diagnosed a totally worn-out joint and the onset of osteoporosis. Despite several visits to the special unit at Gobowen and a very painful cortisone injection into the joint I'm still in the same boat and will require some major surgery to fix the problem, or as the physiotherapist said at the hospital: "What do you want to go hanging off rocks for at your age? Don't see the point of that at all, wasting all that energy." Bloody cheek! So we come full circle: Castell Cidwm will remain in the memory as a place of great fun and solitude and fear and Mike did mention *The Girdle* in passing. You never know. Watch this space.

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# Sierra Hikes and Climbs

**Gerry Martyn**

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The greatest hindrance to progress over the Kearsarge Pass is people. Not that it's particularly crowded, but they are all far too willing to stop for a chat: "Hiya, how you doin'."

"Pretty good; yerself?"

"Yeah, great, where yer headed?"

So it goes on and before long another pleasant five minutes have passed and gone irretrievably from your schedule. Still, with the 2,800ft height gain and the 50lb packs, any rest is welcome. 50lb? Well, with climbing gear, tent, mat, sleeping bag, stove, fuel and food for four nights, warm clothes (it's hot now, but freezing at night) etc. not to mention a bear-proof container for the food, it soon mounts up. Even shared between two of us it seemed heavier than my 45lb training loads.

The Pass is an old Indian trade route and the path, no doubt now much improved, is graded for pack animals, so the slope is easy but it zigzags around adding miles to the distance; the three measured map miles really do turn into the five and a half miles that the guidebook note says it is. It's all interesting though: lakes, resin-scented pine groves, stunning views, people. The view to the southwest from the top (11,850 ft) is very fine:



The North Ridge of Mount Conness. Photo: Gerry Martyn



spiky rock peaks overlooking lakes and open forest, all capped by the standard Californian clear blue sky. Well-fuelled with last night's beer and giant pizzas we'd made good time considering all the stops. We'd already been past 12,000ft up the North Ridge of Mount Conness the previous week, an interesting, long, scramble route but overgraded at 5.6, so the altitude was no problem.

After joining the convivial gathering at the col (more lost time) we stormed down the other side. Another stop for a chat, this time with an American who had already been on our South West Coast Path during the summer and we moved on to a water stop. You have to collect water where you can or there's a good chance of going thirsty later. In the semi-desert climate a consumption of a litre an hour is common and this was, we'd just been told, the last water for some way. Our next encounter was with a solitary young and stunning blonde lady; the best reason yet to stop for a chat. She'd just come from Sixty Lake Basin which is where we were headed, so a bit of route information was exchanged amongst the usual banter.

Moving on, the path turned downhill where it shouldn't have and proved for sure that any resemblance between the line on the map and the path on the ground was largely coincidence. Depressing though the height loss was, a signpost soon after proved we were indeed still on the right trail for the next uphill bit, to the Glen Pass. A steady start turned into a depressing flog up interminable hot dusty zigzags without the spice of new views at every turn or even any girls to try our revised system against. From the top, though, we had our first view of Mount Clarence King, 12,905ft and the focus for this trip, rising above Sixty Lake Basin which is reputedly one of the pleasantest parts hereabouts. It all looked depressingly far away considering it was now 4pm and dark falls by 7.30pm. Clearly, a short cut was called for and the guidebook (copies of relevant pages to reduce weight) said one existed just below, over another low pass. It didn't say the going was exceedingly rough, though, with hopping over boulders, many of them still alive, trying to snap an ankle or throw you, and amazingly it had now clouded over and was spotting with rain. Finally, at 6pm we found a good site, near a lake, which matched the stringent environmental rules, and made camp. We were in Sixty Lake Basin, just.

Morning, fine again as usual, and an early start. We soon came to another lone tent, passed with an unusually brief "Hiya" (they were only just awake; Americans don't seem much good at Alpine starts) and rejoined the trail. A mile further through pine woods and past a group of lakes and we were back to the wilds, with only an occasional faint usage trail to show we were not the first. A tent site was found atop a granite spur at about 11,000ft, near a placid blue lake amongst scattered pine trees, with fine views. The plan had been to drop the camping gear and continue up Clarence King, but it was already clouding over and anyway we were pretty tired, so we stayed put. A good decision confirmed as the weather turned really nasty soon after and thunder rolled round the peaks above. Time to start my Harry Potter book. As the clouds dumped their load on us, my rather aged SpacePacker tent proved once again that it can give good shelter to two people plus their





Mount Clarence King rears above a lake of stone. Photo: Gerry Martyn

gear, all at under 5lb weight..

I was depressed that evening; the weather's turned, we may as well go home, etc. I should have mentioned that it was September and in one of our many chats we'd learned that the average date for snow on the Glen Pass was apparently just over a week away, but the new day dawned clear and bright and fairly obviously the route was 'on'. Past the next lake a grassy gully lead to the crest of a much higher granite rib, which appeared to abut the mountain at the right point. It did, straight onto a rising traverse to the col between Clarence King and an outlier of Mount Cotter. Easy scrambling here and above the col found us out to the left, not far from the summit. A check of the guide, which was more specific than often is the case in this range, said we should be on the right. Oops. If you haven't climbed out here, then Secor's guide is a bit of a shock. Sometimes it will say roughly where to start, sometimes just 'climb the ridge' — or, one of the best, 'the route is somewhere on this face'. It takes some getting used to. I suppose it must be abbreviated to fit a range near the size of the Alps into one book. Anyway, this is maybe why I didn't check earlier, but we could see an obvious route back across and so roped up and moved on. The final pitch fell to me. Well it was probably my turn anyway; though we left these things to chance, Martin had the honour on our previous two peaks. Twenty feet of easy climbing and I was faced with a wall about 10ft high. Apparently, the second's shoulder is used here, or a chimney round on the right. So far there'd been no gear, so it was getting a bit exposed. Without the shoulder, a couple of delicate moves brought the top in reach (a sneak look afterwards at a more modern guide shows this is 5.7, about 4b/c) and I was



The camp at Sixty Lake. Photo: Gerry Martyn

soon standing on what turned out to be a flake and facing the final move onto the summit block. It was fairly obvious: a wide high step across the gap behind the flake and rock-over onto the corner of the block. The grade is supposedly 5.4, about Severe, but almost irreversible because of the gap and poor handholds and there was still no gear.

The drop to the left yawned out of sight. I flicked one rope each side of the flake (we had a 50m 9mm rope, used double), cranked my left foot onto the edge, drew breath, and lunged. Easy when you've done it, but a bit of a dry mouth moment. The top is a room-size plateau with sheer drops all round, gently sloping towards the corner just climbed and almost completely blank. Hopefully, I lifted the only obvious feature, a book-sized rock, but underneath was more blank granite. There was absolutely no belay. All our peaks up till now had had easy exits or abseil chains, so this had never occurred to us as a likely problem. Definitely my mouth was now dry. We were at 12,900ft, 18 miles from the road over two high passes; lunch was in the 'sacks where we roped up and we hadn't seen anybody since yesterday morning. Not a good place to be stranded. The guidebook says most people abseil off the top, but seems to have missed the word 'simultaneous'. Anyway, to bring Martin up was potential communal dying as the whole lot sloped toward the crux and I couldn't offer him any real protection. Nice views though, when I thought to look. After some gibbering I had a plan: bring Martin up the easy bit to where he can belay well out to the left; he would then lower me over the other side into a 20ft rock crevasse, with the rope running across the broad right corner of the block. The rope can then be used to protect Martin and then lower him back. Well I'm here, so it worked, but it was a





Storm over Geln Pass (the notch left centre). Photo: Gerry Martyn

bit of a heart-stopper lowering over the edge. Just where I landed in the crevasse was the canister with the summit book found on most Sierra mountains, and it was obvious from reading it that most people don't go to the very top. So maybe that explains things.

The rest of the descent by a short abseil and down-climb was soon over, and we were back to our 'sacks and lunch. Back at camp, more Harry Potter for me, and a dip in the lake for Martin to cool off and try to make his feet nicer to share a tent with. In the evening, after a dinner of beef jerky curry, we sat watching the stars. Not for the first time Martin said: "We must be mad."

"Nonsense," I replied, "it's beautiful here; it's quiet, nobody else around..."

"Nobody, that's my point," he said. M...mm.

We had effectively 'lost' a day due to the rain, and both felt in need of a fairly leisurely exit from the range, so the planned second mountain was out. Half the fun (madness?) was simply being in a beautiful spot so far out there anyway, so with another night allowed on our permit we started an unhurried walk out. The 'sacks were a bit lighter now, by three night's food and fuel. An initial resolve to stick to our route in, at least for the first bit, soon crumbled in the face of the rough going and Martin's determination to head straight down to the trail even if it did mean more 'up' later. At least the 'up' was on a trail and not cross-country. It worked well enough. We followed the trail up past Fin Dome and down to Rae Lakes, a picturesque spot and the focus for the entire trip for many trekkers. It was then about twice as far up to the Glen Pass than on the outbound route, but

relatively easier underfoot and the summit was reached more easily than expected. For a while, it seemed, we might even get to the road that day. Common sense prevailed, however, and we camped under some pines near our outbound water stop not far below Kearsarge Pass at what was obviously once a well-used spot with old campfire debris etc. but not recently visited it appeared

We made a leisurely start next day. It was now only about six miles of mostly downhill to the road. Again, there was a gathering at the pass. One party told us of their encounter with a bear the previous night, so they do occur even though we escaped a visit on this trip. Lots of shouting and banging of pans is the accepted defence and frightens it away. Bear-proof food canisters (\$5/trip rental) are mandatory in this area; apparently the bears know they can't get into them and simply move on, so maybe they passed us in the night without disturbing our sleep (you leave it 30ft from your tent). The instructions handed out at the ranger station before the trip said the bears are 'highly intelligent, strong and innovative'. One has visions of bears maybe whiling away the winter evenings inventing clockwork radios, or keys to bear-proof boxes perhaps. Nah ! But maybe if they figure out that we're more scared than they are and growl back.

The downhill run to the road seemed to compress the more like the map's again and gave me opportunity to get ahead (Martin was always quicker uphill). After a quick superficial wash and change of clothes at the car, supposing being a bit tidier and less smelly may help get a motel room, we were away to Lone Pine for lodgings, lunch and beer, leaving a pair of my underpants somewhere in the car park in our haste. Still, better than leaving your headtorch in the last motel, as Martin will maybe confess to if pressed, but at least our lengthy gear checklists ensured we arrived in America in the first place with everything intended.

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# The White Stuff

Graham Adcock

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"We need a fourth member of the party: the main criterion of selection being that they won't fall off..." Robin wasn't joking.

*Skeleton Ridge* is a well-named route, comprising some 450ft of climbing in six pitches, gaining about 250ft in height. It's a little like climbing up the back of a dinosaur, the route following its spine. This esoteric delight takes in the innermost needle on the Isle of Wight. Whilst not to everyone's taste, this 'adventure' route on chalk is climbed in traditional fashion, so leave your ice gear at home.

A late ferry over with Robin's car transported us to the car park above Alum Bay where we bivvied and bevvied. Saturday dawned cloudless; it had been dry overnight. We ate and sorted gear before walking the three quarters of a mile to the Old Gun Battery above The Needles. We were early and walked up to the coastguard lookout, as our efforts to make contact by telephone had so far failed. It was deserted. Just before 9am, staff arrived at the Old Battery. They'd received no notice of climbers for that day; the message from Robin's midweek call, it seemed, hadn't been passed on and the gates were closed in our face. 'Jobsworth, jobsworth, it's more than my job's worth...' began to sing out in my cranial juke-box. Tim fumbled about in his wallet and produced a National Trust Card. This worked the required magic... "Well, if you pay your entry fee, I don't mind if you climb over the wall..." We paid up and did just that. We'd still had no luck contacting the Coastguard and the number the Battery staff had was the same as ours. Attempts on their landline met with the same 'number unobtainable' and a call to the operator with a request to be put through received the reply 'Operators don't do that any more...' begging the question. 'What do operators do?' Directory enquiries, however, came up trumps and with a revised dialling code, Solent Coastguard were informed of our intentions with a request from them that we call back when we'd finished.

Back at the abseil point, Robin and I set up the ropes and Tim set off for Scratchell's Bay, untangling as he went. The changeover at about 150ft down presented little problem as the rock was far from vertical, but we were now some 40 minutes after low tide and concerned about the water level. On the beach I chased after Tim. He'd laid out his 9mm and was changing into rock shoes when I arrived. The water was calm and the approach 90% dry. I untangled my bird's nest and Tim set off up the first pitch. He found a bomber Clog 10 at about eight feet and nothing else for the 40ft pitch. At the saddle he placed a peg and belayed. The pitch was not steep but I followed carefully; the handholds consisted mainly of the small ledges my feet would be on in a couple of moves.

At the saddle, I led through on the north side of the ridge as Adrian and Robin started from the floor. After passing a crack into which a large hex dropped, and a bulge, I belayed some 40ft out around a chalky spike next to a nest and brought Tim across. The two





Wight islands in the stream: follow the skeleton to find treasure. Photo: John Cleare/  
Mountain Camera Picture Library

junior inhabitants were on chalk ledges nearby and we did our utmost not to disturb them lest we suffer the wrath of angry parents.

Tim led off toward the crux, placing a peg at the base of the arête. It was steep and gearless but a steady approach and good style saw him at the top where he gained the 'surprisingly good ledge' and belayed. The arête is climbed on its left before stepping out right and then left along a knife-edge to the ledge. Probably not 4c technically but with no protection and in an airy position, it's certainly HVS.

I led through, traversing a poor foot ledge with my hands on the knife-edge for 50ft or so to a ledge with sparse protection. I lassoed a couple of blunt chalk piles and equalised the result. Tim came across and led through for the long 120ft pitch, a rising traverse along some good ledges to start with, degenerating into a loose slab and groove to reach a stance. This pitch turned out to be nearer 140ft as there was only five feet of rope left when he stopped. I followed carefully, removing the two slings from the blocks he'd found as runners, managing to find a couple of brick-sized blocks that came away in my hand.

On the belay, we read the description, which suggested two more pitches, heading firstly for a chimney/crack. This was not apparent. We deliberated and discussed with Robin and Adrian as they arrived on the stance, coming to the conclusion that the finish had changed. The 'mainland' could be seen 80ft or so away, but we were faced with a steep 20ft arête, not dissimilar to the crux pitch. At the base of the arête I clipped the two ancient pegs and placed a new one, which sang reassuringly as I hammered it home. Ahead looked devoid of further protection so I clipped in and set off, keeping just left of the

arête. As I gained height, I could look round the arête to the south. A sheer wall of about 175ft to the shore presented itself. I tried to put it out of my mind as I continued upwards. At the top, I stepped onto the arête and gingerly edged forward until I could straddle the knife-edge travelling forward *à cheval*. The much-used guidebook-writers' term, 'in a fine position' came into my mind as I edged along the 10-inch thick chalk pile on my hands and bum, feet dangling either side for balance, the vertical face to the south and only just off vertical to the north adding nicely to the feeling of exposure. I arranged the rope over the edge behind me as some kind of protection and after 25ft or so of progress, (passing a four-inch gash into which I fruitlessly tried to place a huge hex), the edge rose and I eased cat-like up onto my hands and feet for the final moves onto the sanctuary of the top which was flat and grassy with only a small bulge to place a knotted sling around. I found a vague crack and hammered a blade home, sitting with the belay in tension so as not to shock-load it. Tim followed giving a spectacular view of the Needles lighthouse over his shoulder, the accumulated adrenaline manifesting itself in a number of strange 'whooping' noises as we all assembled on the top in front of the caged visitors to the Old Battery lookout observing the spectacle.

A few more pictures and we all shook hands after the 'experience' before traversing back to the abseil point to retrieve gear and call the coastguard, followed by a welcome pint or two in Yarmouth before catching the ferry back to the mainland.

# Thoughts Whilst Walking through Bishop

Dave Gregory

During a visit to the Owens River Gorge I was walking down a side street in Bishop looking for a shop which sold methylated spirits or, indeed, anyone who could tell me what that necessary inducement to the correct ignition of a Primus stove is called in America. I did find out eventually but have since forgotten so that you get no useful information in the first two sentences and I had in any case started thinking about bears. During my so far fruitless stroll I was overtaken by a lady, brandishing a cigarette about six inches long, who asked me for a light. Upon my replying that I was not a smoker she transferred her attention to three youths who were walking the other way. They were evidently gratified to be approached by a lady of, I began to suspect, a certain trade. One of them provided the necessary with a flick of his lighter of which those old cowboys in the Saturday sixpenny matinees would have been proud. They used to use matches but I don't recommend trying the method. You need a thumb nail trained on raising the seam on cricket balls and you usually end up burning your thumb. The trio, having provided no satisfaction but the light, passed on and I was overtaken again.

She offered the gratuitous information that she did not know whether to go to the bar or the police station. I turned to look at her. Her face had seen hard, and better, times and the unkind thought passed my mind that she might know the American for meths. A lingering trace of gentility in me stifled that response and of the various obvious rejoinders I chose the one that I was not aware that police stations in America served drinks.

She knew now that she was dealing with an idiot and, judging by his voice, a foreign idiot. "No, stupid," she said out of the side of her mouth, the smoke from her cigarette blown back into her face by the draught of her movement causing her to squint her eyes and to look more like Humphrey Bogart than Lauren Bacall, "to report a felony."

"A crime," I said. "What sort of crime?"

"How about spousal abuse?"

I looked round for any possible vengeful spouse. The street was empty of persons, or bears. I chanced prolonging the conversation.

"Have you been kicking hell out of your husband?"

"No, stupid," she said, showing me bruises pretty well all over her upper arm. "See:"

"Well, I should go to the police station."

Having thus been indirectly informed that I was not going to escort her to the bar she gave me up as a source of succour, free drinks, possible custom, or intelligent conversation and made her way down a lesser side street where perhaps there was a bar or a police station while I passed on to the hardware store, my mind reverting to the subject of bears.

I frequently, when on holiday in the States, send my young grandchildren postcards of

bears; delightful, cuddly little innocuities they are when found on a six by four of paste-board. I have yet to meet one face to face and I hope not to, but the thought that they are out there in the forest waiting for the fall of night is not far from my thoughts when I am camping in America. The kindly proprietor of our present camp site had assured us that there had been no sightings of bears in this oasis in the Californian desert since pioneer days. This remained true during our stay although we once saw a skunk inspecting the curtilage and displaying a trifle too much interest in the rear of my tent where my sweaty boots were stored under the flysheet. The assistants in the sports shop who, although they did not know the American for meths, seemed knowledgeable about the area, assured us that the only local danger was that in climbing in the Owens River Gorge in August we might easily finish up as pools of grease.

I know an American who, having been married several times and being by trade a fire captain, is used to danger. He has been on canoe expeditions down unknown South American rivers and on K2 and in other unhealthy places and, blasé about any peril, is accustomed to sleep in camp in the back of his pick-up truck with the hatchback raised for ventilation. Bears, he says, are in the middle of the night, accustomed to rest their paws on the raised tailgate, treat him to a few loud sniffs, and wander on. Were this to happen to me I cannot see myself ever recovering my sanity.

I spend the last half-hour before zipping the tent tight making sure that nothing, absolutely nothing, that smells, except me, about which, after several weeks in the western dust, I can do little, is left in the tent. I have heard stories of tents torn to shreds by a bear trying to get at a bottle of Chanel No 5 left in a purse by a bimbo, or should that be bimba? Tents savaged by a bear trying to get at a tube of toothpaste. I have seen car doors bent down like gull's wings by hungry bruin and heard them, at night, ransacking the supposedly bear-proof, armoured, cottage-sized rubbish skips and I have every respect for their intelligence and strength and the sharpness of their teeth and claws.

When a particular bear becomes more of a nuisance than his fellows he may be felled by an anaesthetic dart and transported to some region where living off humans is not so easy or possible. I have a friend who believes that such bears from the west side of the Sierras having been taken to the bear-scarce east are recruiting their naïve fellows and training them in the arts of tent-wrecking, car-opening, trash-dumpster-robbing and the general terrorising of human transients.

The real villains of bear society which have, by accident or in terror, taken pieces of humans and which, liking the taste, might spread the habit, are shot and dumped in the local garbage tip. I remember the time, near the Tetons, when an early morning jogger ran slap into a bear on a well-established trail. The surprised bear, annoyed at his early morning constitutional being disrupted and perhaps, to be fair, being as frightened as the jogger, took, before making his escape, several bites out of the jogger, who was fortunately found soon afterwards and eventually recovered. A better argument against jogging I never heard. The cynical mind might wonder that some entrepreneur has not seen here an as yet

unfilled niche in the curio market. Necklaces of bear claws and teeth would sell like hot pancakes and maple syrup and bear rugs would surely enhance the calendar shots of the next Marilyn Monroe.

Claws and teeth would surely sell well in a nation where so many foster the Stetson, the narrow-toed, rake-heeled boot cowboy image, and what about body-piercing; a bear claw through the septum would surely be one up on a key ring through one's ear or navel. Such things have no interest for me. Bears are fine where they belong — in Alaska or high ranges where I am never likely to go — or on postcards.

For those who must wander about in bear country a bell on the bum-bag or rucksack would seem to be a good idea; or perhaps a Kalashnikov. The latter, judging by too many recent news items, seem to be fairly common currency in American society, even in schools. Couldn't visitors to the National Parks be issued with one when they pay their entry fee. For a few dollars more a few lessons in its use could be thrown in. Thus protected I might find my thoughts, while walking through Bishop, or any other Sierran town, less occupied by thoughts of bears.



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# First Climb

Peter Warland

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We were sitting having a belated lunch on a high snow ridge of the Rockies last winter, Bob and I, and I was staring at a buttress across the valley. It was steep, with high clean walls and split by a snow-filled cleft.

"Years ago," I remarked casually, "we'd have spent a whole day or more climbing something like that gully." Bob wiped a bread-crumble off his mouth and looked at me incredulously.

"Why?" he asked. "You could've walked around it in a few minutes."

He shook his head in amazement at my stupidity, stood up, packed the remnants of his lunch and put his skis back on. It was getting cold and, besides, there were massive powder slopes below just waiting to be skied. But that buttress haunts me still. The gully has never been assaulted, winter or summer, and nobody has forced a route up either of those walls of limestone. If I could climb them, I am sure, they would definitely be first ascents. But I'm now on the wrong side of 75 so I just keep dreaming.

The trouble is, I can't stay away from rock. I go for a walk with my beloved and I'm off scrambling up little crags along the way. I tramp the peaks of the Rockies and I just have to tackle the odd outcrop here and there. It's in the blood. It's been there since the year I turned 19 and hitch-hiked to my friend, Geoff's, place in Colwyn Bay with a brand-new coil of manila hemp in my pack. It had begun.

Now, North Wales is not a good place for a fellow to start rock-climbing. As a rule the weather can be foul. 'It rains all the time,' I read recently, 'even inside the houses'. But fate must have been with me that weekend so long ago for the weather was almost idyllic. It only rained Welsh-style some of the time.

Geoff and I spent the remaining hours of Friday night driving in nails — clinkers, I think we called them — around the outside edges of the soles of our army boots, and then the following morning, we set out for Snowdonia and the Ogwen Valley. Naifs. Naturally, we hitch-hiked and, of necessity, walked a great deal and then, about 10 minutes short of Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel, we stopped by the wayside and there Geoff insisted that we unpack the rope, rub in a little dirt, recoil it and then, with it curled jauntily over his shoulder in what he hoped was the approved fashion, we entered the magical world of the rock-climber. That afternoon, we walked up to the Idwal Slabs and so began a 60-year love affair.

To this day, I have no idea why we started rock-climbing. It was, after all, a stupid way of mutilating oneself in those days because, frankly, the sport wasn't very safe. We used, as I said, ex-army boots, manila hemp rope, slings of doubtful value and karabiners that any

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Opposite: *Charity, Idwal Slabs; Pete Crew climbing, June 1970. Photo: John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library*



leashed pit-bull could've outwitted. I am amazed how many of my friends from those days survived into old age to tell their tales. But most of them did.

One year — 1948, I believe it was — I recorded over 200 days of climbing in Britain, so I should have been extremely proficient and as famous as Gwen Moffatt or Joe Brown, but I wasn't. Either my imagination was far too good or my ability to climb far short of my ambitions. When I re-read my log-books, I always seem to have allowed friends to lead the nasty bits and was apparently never ashamed to ask for a tight rope.

Anyway, I'd like to state that we did something noble like *Faith* or *Faith West Finish* on that very first day but it was probably *The Ordinary*. Whatever it was, we made a thorough mess of it with the rope like knitting all over the place and no use at all, except strangulation, perhaps, should either of us slipped. We drifted about on bits of *Charity* and even the delicate *Tennis Shoe*, but we made it to the upper terrace and looked around for greater walls to climb. The bit was in our teeth. Apparently, we selected *Javelin Gully* on Holly Tree Wall and chewed off a morsel too much for our novitiate. A Severe climb on our first outing was a trifle audacious but, at that time, neither of us had seen a guidebook. I don't think we knew such things existed.

'We immediately looked up for the obvious weakness in the wall and attacked just there', I wrote in my journal of 1947. 'Almost literally, we swam up the first 20 feet but were temporarily repulsed at what we later found out to be 'the sentry box'.' I became extremely thoughtful at this juncture, I seem to recall, 60 years later. Geoff, however, apparently decided that the mantelshelf in front of him was a little bit too much for him and decided to make a delicate exit to the right, then went up a wicked chimney. I shivered in the rain until, at last, he called for me to follow.

Now, my memory is what I forget with, but I do recall a certain little flake of rock that Geoff managed to dislodge immediately after he'd used it and, therefore, when I was called to follow, it wasn't there and so, shamelessly, I called for the first of the many tight ropes I've used over the aeons, and we both crawled to the top exultant. Little did we realize that we'd climbed the Very Severe Direct Finish, but then, ignorance is bliss, isn't it? I can't remember how we got down from the top of the wall without maiming ourselves. I do recall that the clouds had settled about us and we were forced to snuff about like truffle pigs in order to find a track valleyward.

But we survived and ambled down for well-earned cups of tea at Merthyn's little café outside Idwal Cottage and, as we stood there, the muddy rope now carelessly slung over my sodden shoulders, a young hiker looked over at us and said: "Where you fellows been? *Munich Climb*?"

"Nah," we replied with grins on our dirty faces, and we waved in the general direction from which we'd come, not having a clue what the *Munich Climb* was or where it might've been. The young man touched the side of his nose sagely and grinned. "It was *Munich Climb*, wasn't it? Use the piton? Hey, fellows! These chaps've just done *Munich Climb*. They're tigers." And somehow Geoff and I knew that we had arrived.

Last year we stayed with Geoff and he took us for a stroll up into Cwm Idwal. It was raining, naturally, and we stopped for while to offer unwelcome advice to a trio of youngsters at the foot of *Tennis Shoe*. They were having a bad time fussing with all sorts of fancy metal gadgets about which we knew virtually nothing and so, pulling our necks down into our waterproof coats, we drifted on. Personally, I was glad that I was now too old for such nonsense. But then...

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# In The Midnight Hour

Tim Noble

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Thirty years ago the writer spent the first of two long summers in Norway. The challenging climbing, camps and conversations he shared there with filmmaker and artist, Renny Croft, profoundly affected the nature and direction of his subsequent climbing and writing life. Renny was also a good friend and climbing partner of CC Vice President, Dick Turnbull, and was soloing with Dick in Lochnagar before the fall that killed him. Renny's death left a great hole in many people's lives and in the strong exploratory teams operating at the time on Yorkshire gritstone, North Devon sea cliffs and The Lizard. The pity was that probably (because it was never discussed — male reserve being what it is — and then it was too late to talk of the past), he was unaware of the influence his aesthetics, climbing style and love of adventure in isolated places had had on the writer. So, in keeping with the spirit of dedication of this edition of *The Journal to John Sumner*, this article, first published in *Climber* in 1987, is offered here as a (late) homage to another master climber (memories of whom are still fresh after all these years); as a testimony to the life-long influence climbing partners can, all unwittingly, exert and, perhaps, as a spur to readers to follow where Mick Fowler and other CC members have lately led: to lonely Lofoten and the wild country north of the Arctic Circle. For it is there that the fish still rise unbidden to the line, where there are still countless unclimbed cliffs, the adventure comes sharp and unalloyed and the sun shines all night long. (Editor)

Slingsby had done it all before us, of course, so he would be our guide: if we were in any doubt about a point of etiquette, custom or topography, our mountaineering Bible, Slingsby's *Norway, The Northern Playground* was always to hand. It also helped that Renny, a Yorkshire adventurer like Cecil, had also like Cecil, bothered to learn the language. One hundred and two years after Slingsby's trip to the Jotunheim with his friend Dewhurst, we too 'equipped' ourselves after the manner of the 'Father of Norwegian Mountaineering'. Indeed, apart from our little green Mini van and ancient Seagull outboard motor there was little difference between us:

'In 1874... I set out well-equipped with mountaineering necessities, including a Whymper tent, cooking utensils, soup squares, tinned meats, and a considerable amount of the needless articles with which young climbers so often hamper their movements and increase their cares'.

Then as now (1976-2006, Ed.), Norway is expensive and almost wholly lacking in beer. So, for our extended visits of six weeks we loaded up the van with cash 'n' carry goodies and spares of everything that moved (in the north, the garages can be few and very far between), including spare petrol tanks and set off for the Arctic Circle and beyond.



Now I have always believed E numbers can damage your health and after 600 miles of motoring, I knew that E6 was particularly dangerous for climbers in a green mini van. E6 is the so-called Arctic Highway — effectively the only way up Norway. It carves its way across the changing landscape, from hay-heavy fields on a Texan scale in the south to the tundra wastes in the north. Camouflaged in the 'green flash', we were hardly visible to the big logging lorries on the endless stretches through evergreen forests, even with headlights constantly blazing. But bouncing metallically across the frequent unmade sections of the road, we made it, just, with only a puncture and a broken winker to the settlement of Tvervik at the northern end of Arstadallen. Here, the sports plan swung into action.

The sports plan was to do nothing but first and second ascents — preferably on big walls or long ridges. But the weather had other ideas. Doug Scott had it right when he wrote in *Big Wall Climbing* that:

'In Norway there exist not only vast areas of unclimbed rock, but also climbs in true wilderness surroundings'.

and that:

'In Norway it is still possible to visit easily-accessible valleys that have no roads running through them, not even footpaths leading to hotels and huts and certainly no hordes of jostling climbers'.

But he says nothing about the rain and midges. Slingsby mentions being 'weather-bound' occasionally, and concedes that in Arctic Norway the mosquitoes can be 'terrible pests', but no doubt his oft-sunned carapace was impervious to even the most ravenous of kleggs. We, however, were soft and white and recently-arrived and after Renny had made us do a long reconnaissance towards the Smaatind snowfields to find a high camp site, we were well and truly soaked and bitten through.

Roger Sutcliffe and a friend from The Gritstone Club were to meet us here. It was their first ascents in the Okstind and Sjunkfiord areas, mentioned in *Big Wall Climbing* that we hoped to repeat and emulate. But in the meantime we wanted to try for the second ascent of the Smaatind Ridge and get dry. The fisherman at the hamlet of Breivik arranged for us to stay for free in a 'skogvasser' — the forester's seasonal hut and thus provided us with a warm, dry base from which to plan the campaign against the Smaatind. Thirty six hours of sunlight later found us damp again, well-whipped by 'skog', but in camp. Now 'skog' is another reason why mountaineering in Arctic Norway can be compared with a medieval penance. Forget The Beatles: this is the *real* Norwegian Wood. Off the beaten track in Elk country (and even on it in high summer), stunted, snow-pressed birch saplings grow in profusion. Rarely higher than a shoulder, but sturdy and well-rooted, they manage to do the job a 12th century flagellant did but better; gaiters are essential. Hour after

hour between sea level and the first outcrops of rock and snow, the country is what orienteers recognise as 'fight'; so if nothing else on these walk-ins, we learned to sniff out the tiniest of animal paths and cling to them.

From 'skog-camp', a long day up and onto the Smaatind snowfields brought us to the ridge and something of a set back. In the southwest, iron storm clouds were overriding the sun and the rotten gneiss of the ridge, full of mossy cracks and increasingly less visible, got more disconcerting. With a shock, we realised we'd been going for nine hours and it was nearly 10pm. The ridge rolled on in front — never more than VS, but awkward and loose. It was clearly time to call a halt: another low pressure system was looming, and though we could have easily found a bivouac and slept the sunlit night away, a full traverse of the ridge would leave us miles and fjords away from the tent and very hungry. Renny said we'd leave it and try again later from the west and a roadside camp. In the tent, after a 14-hour afternoon and night, the storm burst over us with the force of all the Valkyries at once.

At the fisherman's again for a night, we watched him and his mates cut timber on a power saw. The trunks are felled in Siberia, apparently, but float around North Cape and beach on the countless shores of the Norwegian coastline. As we left them to their Russian wood, with heartfelt thanks for hospitality, he gave us a full salmon to speed us on our way. Memories of the British help in wartime are still strong in the northern fjords.

The island of Kjerringoy lies north of Bodo, the northern capital. Just of the town, we paused and fished in the famous Saltstrumen. Here the tide rips out of the vast land-locked Skjerstadsfjord at a Strid-like narrowing and shoals of fish are swept helplessly by. We camped on a beach of silver sand that night, in perfect weather, ready to traverse the beautiful horseshoe cirque of the Strandaartind. The west peak was climbed in 1869; Slingsby and his party repeated this ascent and then bagged the higher east peak from the little glacier in the cirque. His description of the place cannot be bettered and we found it true in every respect:

'It consists of a double-peaked mountain of which both peaks rise on the south side with most forbidding ice-planed precipices from a low and partly-wooded line of foothills. At their base are smiling fields and many cosy farms. For their upper 2,000ft both peaks are exceedingly narrow, and the two walls, northern and southern have been planed by the glaciers of old to a complete absence of cracks, chimneys or ledges. There are black streaks running down the smooth sides which, on the north side, give the appearance of the inside of the frame and ribs of a shipwrecked vessel. Not one of these streaks indicates a place which would afford the passage

**Opposite:** Beyond, only sky, Lofoten and light: Renny Croft on the Strandaartind ridge.  
**Photo:** Tim Noble



for a goat. The walls are indeed terrible, that of the higher peak being fully 2000ft of smooth rock, but the lines of the mountain are exceedingly beautiful'.

We spent a perfect day traversing the ridge in strong light. Followed (like Beelzebub) only by flies, we walked up through skog and trees. Once above the vegetation level, however, a sea breeze blew gently and we could idle along on the down-climbing parts. At the gap we looked for traces of the cairn built by Hall's guides in 1889, after a notable failure to climb the crux. But this is a relatively popular ridge with Norwegian climbers and nothing could be found. Slingsby's account of Rubenson climbing the crux slab was so well-known to us that we kept falling into 'Slingsby-speak' as we climbed. The 60ft slab/wall goes easily at 4c with three good nuts. Rubenson though, was stepping into the unknown in 1912 in rubbers after a rain shower and with hemp rope. But Slingsby's 'mere scratches on the face of the slab' were better than the top wall holds on *Meshach* at Tremadog, and I had to persuade Renny that at the outside edge of the slab, we were indeed over the 'ghastly mural precipice' of the South Face.

A couple of hours dozing in the hot afternoon sun on the East Peak were followed by an uneventful but exciting descent down the Slingsby route, *The North East Ridge*. One long abseil down an obvious chimney — the crux for Cecil and party — and another to the glacier, was followed by a scoot over the snowfield in PAs and into the trees again. The sun dipped to the horizon as we reached our camp beside the silent sea, almost in a gracious gesture; then rose again as we cooked a late supper and went to bed.

The next day we failed to climb a new line up the obvious white scar of the couloir that splits the South Face. A recent rockfall, obvious from afar, made very loose and serious climbing at 5b unwarrantable on pitch 12. But by now (1987-2006, Ed) it should be secure, and would be a brilliant 20-25 pitch route.

On an earlier trip Renny had befriended a fisherman called Henning Kristianson of Rosvik. Henning and his brother were the last remaining members of their family and (were, until their deaths in the late '80s, Ed) joint owners of a lovely isolated farm at the southern end of Sjunkfjord. The farm was used by Henning as a fishing base and he'd invited us to come and stay there with him. We hired a rowing skiff from a fisherman for half a bottle of whisky and had coffee with the 'squire' of Rosvik: his sitting room was like a stage set for an Ibsen play.

Late in the afternoon, with rain on the wind, we tied the skiff behind Henning's fishing smack and set off down Solfoldafjord and round into Sjunkfjord. Henning's farmstead was at the uttermost southern end; we reached it in early evening. Henning's pet reindeer joined us for coffee and then we went fishing for our supper. Two four-pound cod, their heads almost as long as their bodies, caught in one cast were our lot: they tasted like papier maché did in art lessons at junior school.

In the morning we sat and studied the glittering peaks in the west: miles of skog then

steep rock and snow-backs. These peaks are lower than Ben Nevis, but at this latitude (in 1976) retain tiny glaciers and permanent snowfields. We could clearly see the *South East Pillar* of Sjunghatten abutting the main mass of the mountain. Roger Sutcliffe had climbed this a year or so before at HVS, but the approach looked purgatorial. Coming down the fjord the night before, we'd been singing an odd song to celebrate the fact that we wouldn't have to repeat that route:

'Oh, the Sjunk has got his hatten,  
Hip, hip, hip, hooray!  
The Sjunk has got his hatten  
So we're staying home today.'

Well, you get a little funny after three weeks in a tent together, don't you? But if not Sjunghatten, then what? Roger had also climbed the *West Ridge* of the Osantind, a mountain whose dip slope formed the southeasterly wall of the fjord and his report of 2,000ft of beautiful climbing at VS/HVS was really tempting. We packed the 'sacks in late afternoon (the sun was invariably far too hot in the morning for 'skog-bashing' and climbing) and stowed them in the skiff. At first pull the little Seagull motor pattered into life and so, probably for the first and last times in our lives, we set off climbing by boat.

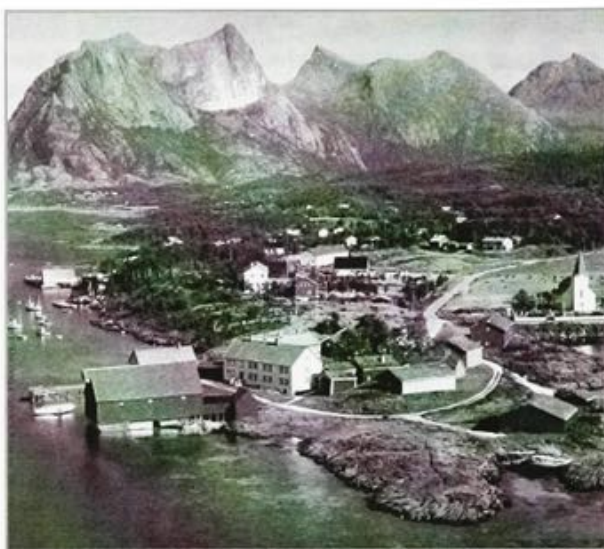
In Renny's journal he recorded the fact that we were in shade for 600ft and that the climbing was magnificent. A long jamming crack followed by 60ft of unprotectable wall climbing at 5a provided the crux of the buttress and then we were on the upper slabs. We realised that if we timed it carefully, we could top out at midnight exactly, so relished the easy VS climbing up the slabs.

Brightness fell from the air around us on the ridge, but the fjord turned purple as the shadows lengthened. A late 'lunch' of sardines eaten Bonington-style with a peg at 10.30pm and we could move unroped over the final broken ground to the summit. Far out to the west, the Lofoton Islands glimmered. Nearer at hand, Sjunghatten kept his cloud hat, but it was a wraith and the 'terrible precipice of the Husbyviktind' stuck its sliced thumb shape into the azure air. Time itself side-slipped and though the abseils from whippy birch trees down the rolling back slopes were thought-provoking and the walk back through thigh-high skog unpleasant, nothing could dispel the aura of that beautiful midnight climb.

Only one more day and night fishing for herring with Henning could be spared and since we both knew it would be unlikely that we came here again, we listened avidly to his tales of the wartime occupation of Norway. His gun and radio — both hidden in scree above the farm when German patrols came over from Rosvik — were displayed, and with Renny's Norwegian being sorely tested, we talked far into the night over whisky and coffee.

The return to Rosvik was eventful. We had anticipated a Slingsby-type journey, 'a jolly voyage north in golden sunshine and over rippleless waters' and, indeed, this is what we enjoyed all the way down Sjunghatten. But as soon as we turned east into Sordfoldfjord, the wind caught us and soon the skiff was rolling and pitching dangerously in the choppy sea-





The island of Kerringjoy, showing the ridge and clean South Face of The Strandaartind, The attempted line leads directly to the summit. Photo: Noble collection



Frozen in time, Renny Croft looks out forever from the summit of The Gaskacokka. Photo: Tim Noble

going waters. We looked fair set to repeat Slingsby's experience hereabouts:

'We made two most successful expeditions from a sunny camp at the bend of the Sjunkfjord and on returning from one had a very narrow escape from having our boat capsized in a sudden storm'.

We, however, with our 'sacks full of metal under the thwarts would simply have sunk. Renny was bailing when the little Seagull motor (which had been racing and slowing as the boat bucked the waves), suddenly cut out. But before we broached to, Renny had got the oars out and held her into wind and wave. Slingsby's companions, 'excellent oarsmen, fought manfully against a head wind' Renny was just as good — though I believe this was the first time he had used an oar.

I managed to refill the tiny petrol tank, liberally dousing myself and the 'sacks with spillage in the process and prayed that the outboard would start again, of course it did, and we were soon back on course. There was no smoking for an hour, though, in case we gave ourselves a Viking funeral in the fjord.

But the big ambition of the visits was a new route of our own on a wall and Renny had been coveting the West Face of the Lilletind for a long time. Situated north of Bodo and east of E6, it can only be reached by a very long walk or a trip across an inland lake, Kobbvatnet and a long walk. We made several attempts on this face, carrying vast amounts of equipment up and down to a high camp below the face, and then heaving a haul sack 600ft up the introductory slabs to a bivouac under the main difficulties. But expanding, overhanging flakes defeated us. Probably, we were simply not good enough aid climbers to cope with continuous (old) A3 climbing, but I suspect that the configuration of many of these isolated arctic faces with their exfoliating stepped arches of granite and dirt-choked cracks would test the best. Certainly, though, there is a line there still waiting.

We compensated by a delightful mountaineering day on the peak behind the Lilltind, the Gaskacokka. This peak also sports a superb North West Face, but we wanted something quieter after days in the vertical, and opted for one of the finest little ridge routes either of us had done. The view down Leirfjord to Sjunghatten and beyond from the top was incomparable — and once again, we could see for miles and miles in the midnight hour. Though we managed to climb elsewhere in the far north — notably above Musken on the huge slabs there and on the Stolotind, the last and most exciting challenge was on huge unclimbed walls in Bjaerangsfjord. Perfect granite and steep crack climbing made a lasting impression. Dick Turnbull and Renny completed our explorations there a year later, but there is still almost limitless scope for more routes there.

We finished our sojourn in Norway by climbing in Romsdal and on the South Face of Store Skagastoltind in the Jotunheim; but though these places are excellent climbing areas, they are not so isolated, so wilderness-like as the arctic peaks. If you can cope with long walks, midges and Scottish summer weather, a big drive and endless dried mince, then the

freedom of the arctic will be your delight: 'overnatting' where you want and 'fjellklattering' around the superb cirques and faces that appear at each bend of the E6. But it is the light through the night that really gives the north its power; all through our last sojourn there together, Otis Redding's soul-song kept playing in my head:

'We're gonna wait 'till the midnight hour,  
When there's nobody else around.  
We're gonna wait 'till the midnight hour,  
Until the sun begins to shine'.

And if the words are slightly changed, that's because we were, too, (*half a lifetime ago*) by those Arctic climbs in the sun at midnight.

# Saving The Cromlech Boulders (The End Game)

Harry Sales

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For me it began when Edmund Hammond, then the proprietor of the Waterloo Hotel, burst dramatically into a Climbers' Club committee meeting in the Pen-y-Gwryd to tell us that they were preparing to blow up the Boulders. 'They' were the Highway Authority, the wicked Gwynedd County Council, and they had already drilled holes for dynamite deeply into the Boulders. The plan, our first move, was for the holes to be filled with concrete and then for as many as possible to sit on the Boulders. But my role was in the Endgame and it was to be a long game, stretching from 1973 to 1981.

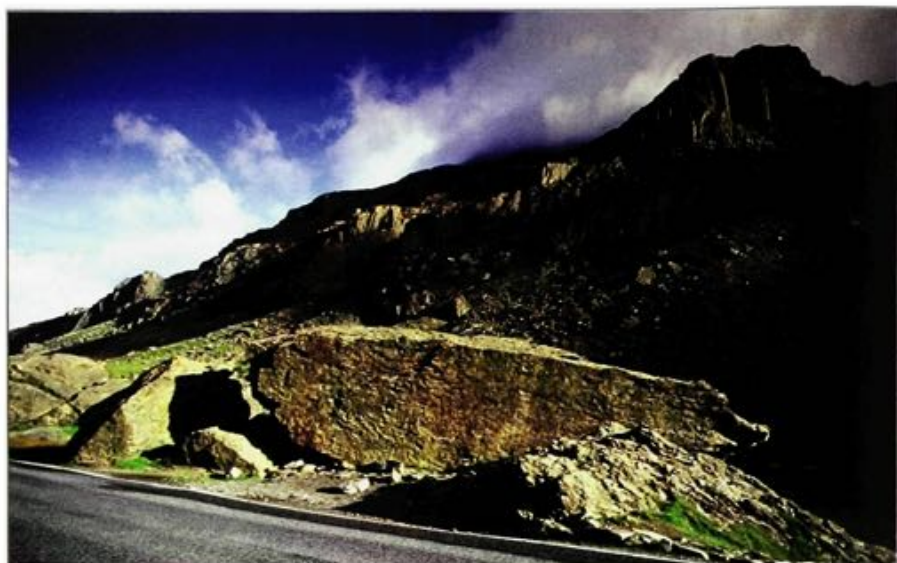
I'll come to the Endgame shortly but for the more action-packed drama of the early moves, I have recourse to a variety of contemporary accounts in the climbing press, the BMC's *First Fifty Years* and the transcript of an excellent and fairly recent address given to the 2004 Mountain Film Festival by Harvey Lloyd, the former Honorary Secretary of the Snowdonia National Park Society. I found all these thanks to John Atherton's computer and Derek Walker's encyclopaedic memory. They are largely consistent with each other but all speak from a different point of view: it would be interesting to put them all together with this article and some photographs into a Cromlech Boulders pamphlet.

The discovery of the Council's evil intentions was made by Harvey Lloyd, cycling on his way to work as the Joint Manager of the Pen-y-Pass Youth Hostel. He not only persuaded the workmen to stop what they were doing, but then alerted the local powers in the area such as the redoubtable Esme Kirby, then Chairman of the Snowdonia National Park Society. The alarm was also raised by Rowland Edwards, an instructor at Plas-y-Brenin. The skirmishing moves which followed at great speed (time being of the essence) were two-pronged, combining decisive direct action and powerful persuasion.

Edmund Hammond's plan was enacted. Taking *Mountain Life's* account of this, 'Late that night a surreptitious meeting of men from Deiniolen and thereabouts was held on top of the Boulders and the 21 holes, drilled by the workmen that morning, tamped and pounded and filled completely in'.

Persuasion could not have come from more powerful sources: a role call of the Great and the Good in the mountaineering world from John Hunt to Ken Wilson, but including such illustrious names as Longland, Blackshaw, Moffat and Brasher. To quote from *Mountain Life's* contemporaneous account again. 'So the Boulders were reprieved by a combined operation the like of which has not been seen before in British Mountaineering'.

These early moves held the enemy at bay, but behind the scenes more decisive moves were being evolved which eventually led to checkmate. The BMC in *The First Fifty Years* put it succinctly but correctly at p.173: 'The Committee (for Wales) led the objectors and in



**'Sermons in stones': The Cromlech Boulders light up the Pass. Photo: John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library**

doing so incurred considerable... abuse... and even that champion of the liberal cause, the *Guardian* newspaper, railed against the Boulders as not worthy of preservation. Harry Sales, a barrister specialising in Town and Country Planning, and Bob Dewar, a consultant highway and traffic engineer, were recruited to the cause. The cost of presentation at a public inquiry needed fund raising and...' I stop there for now to put some flesh on these bones.

I was instructed by the BMC and also Esme Kirby and Co. — both old clients of mine — to advise and do what I could to frustrate the Council's wicked scheme. I advised on two lines of attack: one obvious and purely practical, the other highly legalistic. The practical point was that the Council had said that they could not widen on the other side of the road because they had 'appointed' (a legal term used in the statute) this part of the highway as a car park. My advice on this was that if they had 'appointed' it, they could bloody well 'unappoint' it. And this they eventually did. My more legalistic advice was that they had no power to widen the highway bounds without express planning permission. The County argued that they had sufficient powers in their what were then called General Development Order rights. I have kept no papers and cannot remember exactly the highly technical and legalistic argument I put up against this, but it served to enable the BMC & Co. to put it before the Secretary of State for Wales and demand a public inquiry. This worked — not necessarily because the Secretary of State accepted my arguments, though. He agreed for different reasons: the land to be taken into the highway was technically



Crown Land, belonging, as I believe it did at that time, to the Prince of Wales. For this reason alone, express planning permission was needed and the Secretary of State agreed that an inquiry should be held.

But for reasons of their own the County demanded that the Inspector should be Welsh speaking and this saved us. There were, apparently, many highly qualified engineering inspectors and there were some Welsh speaking inspectors, but none were both and in the consequent considerable delay, I managed to do what I claim more credit for than for my legal arguments. At that time I was sharing a room with one of the Silks in my chambers and he was being regularly briefed by the off-shoot of an American conglomerate, called, in England, ASDA, then operating in the north of England but wishing to burst into the South. In consequence, because of the numerous Inquiries into their proposals, a Scottish consultant highway engineer, Bob Dewar was a regular visitor to my chambers. He was a likeable character and I got friendly with him — so much so that when I asked him whether he could help us and possibly appear as our highway engineering witness, he agreed to do so without fee.

Like any good expert witness, Bob's first action was to go and study the scene, and his second was to go and talk it over with the other side. Having studied the problem and taken all necessary measurements etc. he went to see his opposite number at the County Hall. There he managed to persuade him that by a combination of taking back the 'appointed' car park into the highway proper and a little bit of this and a little bit of that... the Boulders, less a little bit that had been chipped off in the early stages, could be saved for posterity. The importance of this makes it worth repeating this last sentences in the BMC's words. I will resume my quotation of them from where I left off earlier, 'the preparatory work required activities such as traffic censuses (in the pouring rain, of course). Bob Dewar drew up plans which both widened the road and left the boulders intact; eventually the County Surveyor accepted these and the public inquiry with which all finished was a mere formality'.

In my recollection, the BMC have got this slightly wrong in this last sentence; no Inquiry was ever held because none was needed as a result of Bob's efforts and the withdrawal of the County's plans. But if these had not been withdrawn and a full scale inquiry had been held, what a wonderful range of witnesses would have been at my disposal: all the heavy guns on the mountaineering side — some of whom I have mentioned, and some of whom, like Ken Wilson could have given evidence from experience of their value as boulders to do problem routes on, but also as a place to bivouac under.

And then there would have been all the geological and historical evidence. In the famous tour of North Wales made by Thomas Pennant in 1773, they had been used by Edward Lloyd, the 18th century keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, as a yardstick for dating the world. According to Harvey Lloyd, 'They were a part of local folklore; from times long forgotten tales were told of Giants and Fairies being a part of them and living under them. Hetty, an 18th century character (i.e. the Hetty of Ynys Ettws) had made her

home here'. Characters like Joe Brown and Don Whillans have followed in this tradition: in fact, back in 1973, a local climber said: "If they blow up those boulders, thousands will be homeless tonight."

With all of this evidence, the overall theme in my argument at an inquiry would have been that it is difficult to understand the mentality of anyone who wished to destroy such wonderful, historically and geologically important boulders which have remained where they fell thousands of years ago, and which all this time added interest to the valley, comfort and pleasure to travellers and climbers and done harm to nobody. But we won without all this, thanks largely to Bob Dewar. And now climbers are making even more use of them. The very bit that was chipped off by the County years ago, at the beginning of this saga, has left an overhang which is plastered with chalk.

# Neglected Climber

Matthew Entwistle

Who, really, was Millican Dalton? Mention his name and those who have heard of him instantly conjure up images of cavemen, homemade clothes and hand-built rafts. Rarely, if ever, is he acknowledged as a pioneering rock-climber or mountaineer, and because of this, it would seem that Millican Dalton is a 'Neglected Climber.' Yes, he may have been a vegetarian, teetotaler, pacifist, and troglodyte, all these traits are true, but for the past half century his eccentricities have tended to overshadowed his achievements on the rock. His life as the famous 'Caveman of Borrowdale' has always been part of climbing folklore, and in more recent years has become a local legend for the many tourists who flock to Borrowdale and visit his 'Cave Hotel' on the flank of Castle Crag, but his strange way of life was purely a consequence of his search for a simple life. In fact, completely forget these lifestyle choices, and look a little further into the life of this 'Professor of Adventure', and it becomes clear that he may have had a bigger influence on the British climbing scene than at first thought.

Millican Dalton made climbing a way of life after finding the stifling existence of work within a London insurance office too much to bear. Accordingly, he gave up everything to follow his dreams. These dreams quickly became true after he quit work, moved into a tent and became one of the first 'adventure guides' in the country, and led tours throughout the British Isles as well as across Europe way before the name Gaspard was even mentioned in the billiard room at the Wastwater Hotel. He wasn't the first Lakeland guide, but he did offer some of the first multi-activity holidays promoting adventures such as 'dangling over the precipice,' 'fording a rapid river,' 'exploration of a cave,' and 'varied hairbreadth escapes arranged by circumstance.'

He was a stalwart of the outdoor movement, and an early member of the Association of Cycle Campers (now known as the Camping and Caravanning Club) and was once described by George Abraham as the "genial pioneer of real mountaineering camp life." Dalton's mysterious climbing career began during the Golden Era, after several successful camping trips to the Lake District. His first classic was *Napes Needle* and after climbing this solo, he explored Welsh, Scottish and Irish rock alone. Of course these were the places to be for the Victorian cragsman in search of more challenging climbs, offering more challenging routes unavailable in the Lake District. Millican used trips such as these to not only improve his climbing and mountaineering skills, but also to further develop his range of lightweight camping equipment, which was sold by recommendation long before it was widely available. The development of lightweight camping and the ability to carry climbing gear much easier became a passion, and was something he spent much time contemplating. It was known that he was very pleased with his achievements in significantly reducing weight into more transportable loads and much humour was had regarding his obsession



Millican Dalton rafting on Derwentwater.  
Photo: from a postcard

for weight. Typically, when camping in Wasdale, he would purchase a sheet of stamps from the visiting postman which allowed him to send anything from a postcard to a parcel. On one occasion his purchase was greeted with the sarcastic comments, "Yes, but think of all the extra weight you are carrying!" Although his name is never mentioned in the same sentence as O.G. Jones, Haskett-Smith, the Abrahams' or other great names of the day, he was still a contemporary, and evidence of this can be found with only a little background research.

Contrary to belief, his ability and nerve was every inch that of the Tigers. He climbed the same routes in and around Wasdale, and also pioneered new climbs. Chronologically he was not far behind the recreational pioneers of the 1880's and had claimed a first ascent when the sport was still

only 11 years old. The very concept of searching for new routes to pioneer differentiates some climbers from others and elevates pioneers into a league of their own. Pioneering requires nerve and an element of skill in reading the climb, noticing it in the first instance and having a belief that it can, more likely than not, be climbed to the top.

He wasn't a Tiger though, he was something completely different. He may have been a man of education and culture, but unlike them his climbing wasn't restricted to Easter, Witsun or Christmas holidays. It wasn't limited by work patterns or bad weather. He

wasn't a fleeting weekender or day-tripper, he was a seasonal guide whose time, both free and working, revolved around the outdoors, with a particular emphasis on climbing. He lived amongst the mountains and could climb whenever he felt the urge, and make no mistake he did. He was a real mountain man, and anything that looked like a mountain was deemed fair game and he wanted to climb it. And if there was no rock to climb, then he would climb a tree or other vertical object.

Apparently, climbing was so appealing to Dalton that he was rumoured to have once been travelling through London along the Embankment with a friend when upon passing Cleopatra's

Needle, Dalton stopped and looked up with a twinkle in his eye. With a good idea of what he was thinking the friend urged him along and the opportunity of a remarkable first was apparently missed.

Sometimes it was obvious that he was a little too keen on climbing, especially when he worked for the Co-operative Holidays Association at the Newlands Vale Guest House. There he acted as 'guide, philosopher and friend' to their clientele. Well, he did until he decided to introduce some of the guests to the thrills of rock climbing. This was seen as far too dangerous by the management and his initiative earned him the sack.





As a climber, Millican Dalton was apparently rather over cautious, but was a very safe climber who never took unnecessary risks. Competent enough to join *The Fell and Rock* and *The Climbers' Club* and confident enough to guide novices up the best routes in the district, he was considered an expert climber and guide, and a measure of this was his perfect safety record with accidents unheard of — obviously an excellent achievement considering he guided many hundreds of people. Maybe critics who suggest he failed to use belays or other safety measures should bear this in mind. He must have done something right as his most famous student, Mabel Barker, became the best woman rock-climber of her time. That's not to say that everything always went to plan, and it must be said that some expeditions were rather hair-raising, and on occasions it was apparently lucky nobody woke up dead.

Millican Dalton's climbing was not simply a pastime, it actually formed part of his philosophy of life. This philosophy, worked out early in his life, considered climbing as important as anything else. He was completely happy with his philosophy and lived up to it 100%. Into this unison of theory and practice of life, climbing fitted as a natural part. As with everything else in his life he climbed for his own reasons and not for the benefit for others; having fun was number one priority.

So then you might ask if Millican Dalton was a pioneer why does his name not appear more frequently in the list of first ascents? It's a good question, and admittedly he only has two recorded firsts to his name, but there is a probable reason for this. As a commendable achievement well worth mentioning, Dalton's first recorded ascent of *South Chimney* on Doves' Nest Crags in 1897 was only the sixth recorded first ascent in Borrowdale. As a matter of course, it was common for Dalton not to record firsts; climbing and having a good day out was much more important — and in fact, he never recorded *South Chimney* until 17 years after his first ascent when he wrote an article for *The Fell and Rock Journal*. His second first ascent was in 1903 when he scaled *Pencoed Pillar* in Wales. Details of this climb also remained unrecorded until he gave several notes to the Abraham Brothers for use in their 1906 book *Rock Climbing in North Wales*.

When reading this book it is obvious that at this point in his life he was climbing to a very high standard. The book states that in 1897 the rock gymnast, O.G. Jones, said, "See that fine buttress on the left of the gully? That's Pencoed Pillar. It has not been climbed, and I doubt it ever will be, up this side," to which the Abrahams' added "Several strong parties had looked at it from below and passed on; others have assayed its ascent, leaving no record of their failure."

*Pencoed Pillar* is still regarded as a classic amongst classics and he certainly left a mark in Wales, but it is the Borrowdale valley where he may have had a bigger influence. Knowing Dalton's taste for exploration and adventure it seems highly improbable that he pioneered no other routes in Borrowdale. Imagine, for example, passing the cliffs on the Borrowdale Road, would Dalton, an avid climber, have cycled past and not have made an attempt? Would he have travelled high over the fells and ignored all? Would he have called

himself the Professor of Adventure if he only stood back and watched from afar? In reality scores of climbs were discovered, inspected and attempted with successful achievements left unrecorded. And the reason for this? His fun loving philosophy and lack of self-glorification. Further evidence of this comes to light when reading contemporary newspaper articles, especially those which pass comment on his 1898 exploits on the Isle of Skye when his party explored the cliffs of the Cullins when, as he put it "the climbing was known to very few at that time." In addition some interesting photos from 1919 show him on the south of Shepherds Crag, Borrowdale, with rope and boots. These photos are of interest because the south of Shepherds was not apparently discovered until 27 years later when the accomplished climber Bentley Beetham noticed the better standard of climbing there. Beetham wrote in detail about this discovery in the 1953 Borrowdale Guide, totally ignoring the fact that Dalton had been camping and climbing there from as early as 1908. Then again he never mentioned Dalton's *South Chimney* either, but he did detail his own routes on Doves Nest.

This highlights the difference between the two types of pioneer. One was purely concerned with climbing, the other was more interested in fame, maybe. Obviously the recording of a new climb is at the discretion of the pioneer and act as the only real proof, but to be honest I believe that Millican Dalton may have been the true pioneer of Borrowdale. After all, he was in the right place at the right time. Other climbers overlooked Borrowdale in favour of more challenging routes elsewhere. Dalton didn't, he even decided to base himself there. More than worthy of the title, he had considerable experience and a very good knowledge of all things mountainous having already climbed throughout the Alps and Dolomites taking the Matterhorn in along the way.

Later in life he didn't always climb to the highest standards. He would rather climb something more satisfying like Napes Needle, on which he could sit astride the top block and haul up a bundle of wood to make a fire and brew fresh coffee. He said occasions like this were "the hottest times he had on there."

I'm sure that these claims will amuse some and irritate others who believe climbing history is set in stone, and shouldn't be questioned. But look at the evidence behind the claims.

You may have now gathered some insight into the life of Millican Dalton. Do not imagine, however, that his eccentricities made him a solitary climber. When not guiding he would frequently climb with people who knew him or of him, but he would also be happy to set out on the rock on his own and ask any passer-by to tie-on and climb with him. His favourite climbs were *The Keswick Brothers' Climb*, *Slingsby's Chimney*, *Moss Ghyll*, *Arrowhead Ridge*, *Eagles Nest Ridge*, *Abbey Buttress* and *West Chimney*, and not forgetting *Dove's Nest* and *Napes Needle*. He was also a bouldering advocate and was particularly delighted with the problems on Gash Rock and the Woofe Stones.

Was Millican Dalton an expert climber? Make your own mind up, I'm sure you will, but the comments of The Beast, Aliester Crowley, maybe food for thought. He said about O.G.

Jones "He obtained the reputation of being the most brilliant rock climber of his time by persistent self-advertisement. He was never a first-rate climber, because he was never a safe climber. If a handhold was out of his reach he would jump at it, and he had met with several serious accidents before the final smash." Therefore does this comment mean that Dalton could have been a first-rate climber because he was one of the safest?

I'm not trying to say that he is one of the all-time greats of British climbing. Mabel Barker made it perfectly clear that he wasn't, but then again she also said he never wanted to be. Whether he did or not this lack of ambition doesn't mean that his role in the development of new routes or his guiding should be overlooked. His climbing record is limited, but with some insight into his philosophy several conclusions can be made.

Blessed with good health and old age, he never regarded himself as past climbing and he climbed right into his 80<sup>th</sup> year upholding his philosophy all the way. Millican Dalton was totally dedicated to his cause. He made no show of it, simply did it, then stayed with it. Whatever his lifetime achievements, whether it be dismissing Victorian protocol with the groundbreaking guiding of mixed-sex groups or his experiments with lightweight gear, he will still be primarily revered for his aesthetic appearance. At least Mabel Barker was right when she said "His picturesque figure and lovable personality have surely become part of the Heritage of Lakeland so as long as the hills endure and men love them." For decades to come people will only remember the story of the "Borrowdale Hermit," after all it is a great tale, but unfortunately few will remember his spirit of adventure which saw him roam the world for over 50 years searching relentlessly for thrills and danger. He will remain a 'Neglected Climber.' However, this will probably be the most befitting end as that is how Millican Dalton wanted it. Nonetheless a small group of admirers, or modern-day 'Daltonites,' will ensure his reputation as an important climber and his freethinking philosophy of life remain in climbing heritage for years to come.

We may now be living in a completely different age, but his philosophy of climbing may still be relevant, and should be taken more seriously. There could be valuable lessons to be learnt which could improve our enjoyment and experience on the rock. Have we lost something of the real sport and can the spirit of the unknown pioneers be rekindled. Ask yourself these questions the next time you're out on the rock.

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# Almscliff, Marvell and the Lord General

## Harold Drasdo

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*And I desire... to expresse my great thankfulness unto God for the many p[re]servacons I have had in those hazardous imployments and dangerous encounters I have mett with in the course of my pilgrimage in this troublesome world...*

(Will of Thomas, Third Lord Fairfax, 1667)

For well over a century climbers with a taste for literature have kept their eyes open for allusions to the appeal or challenge of our hills and crags. In poetry, before the appearance of the Romantics, any searches were poorly rewarded. What was found derives from a short list of perhaps ten poets. With two quite expansive exceptions these contributions are fragments, some unforgettable, some simply tantalising. One poem of interest to rock-climbers has escaped notice however, perhaps because it was written in Latin, the English version the writer usually offered is presumed lost, and few translations are available. This is Andrew Marvell's *Epigramma in Duos Montes Amosclivium et Bilboreum: Epigram on Two Mountains, Almscliff and Bilbrough*.

The poem was written between 1650 and 1653 at Nun Appleton by the river Wharfe in Yorkshire. At that time Marvell was tutor to the daughter of Thomas Fairfax, Commander-in-Chief of the Parliamentary forces during the Civil War and finally the Lord General. Fairfax opposed the execution of the King and subsequently resigned in protest at the planned invasion of Scotland. Handing over to Cromwell he retired to his country estates and properties. These were disposed in two groups. South-west of York lay those at or near Nun Appleton and Bilborough, now Bilbrough. 30 miles further up the Wharfe lay the cluster of estates east of the family seat at Denton.

Marvell's mountains wouldn't be called hills today but these expressions were used loosely by lowlanders. The monumental gritstone block of Almscliff stands on a grassy plinth and is seen from distant viewpoints though it barely reaches 700 feet above sea level. It's held about 10 names, first appearing as Almusclue or Almusclive, 1203-20. (It's thought to derive from a woman's name, Almus. That name remains unknown but -us was a feminine suffix of the time with several closely similar forms recorded locally). 'Amoscliff', which Marvell latinised in his poem, isn't seen until 1695 but would have been established in local speech much earlier.

Bilborough Hill has been so reduced by gravel quarrying that it hardly exists, now only reaching 140 feet above the plain of York. This explains a problem that puzzled some critics, since in the well-known poem 'Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilborough' Marvell uses extreme poetic license in assertions about the extent of the views.

Three full translations of the epigram are now in print. The earliest, by the Rev CA Clark, is undated and also uses the form Almias-cliff, not recorded until 1822. It's a stylish

effort but in forcing the Latin into a tight English straightjacket some strain has been imposed on meanings. The second is by W.A. McQueen and K.A. Rockwell. Almost a literal prose translation, it offers a corrective view. The third is by Mira Seo and follows the second closely. These three appear in the Lord, Donno and Smith editions of Marvell's poems. In addition David Craig, with the advantage of a climber's eye as well as Latin, has offered a reading of the crucial line.

The poem is of a kind common enough in Marvell's time and earlier, an exercise in flattery, the poet praising his patron or employer. It's in couplets, is twenty-four lines in length, and is dedicated to Fairfax. First the two landmarks are placed as dominating the plain with the observer near or on Bilbrough Hill (here, this) so that Almscliff (there, that) is seen distantly. In six shifts between one and the other their dissimilar characters are contrasted. These characters, rugged or gentle, are then shown as displayed in Fairfax's nature, unyielding or gracious according to circumstance. It ends with a brief salutation to Mary, Fairfax's pupil.

Almscliff, then, gets just six lines. Four of these are what we'd expect for the period. It rises from its mound like Pelion on Ossa, it supports the skies like Atlas, its towering rocks stand untamed. It's seen from great distances as a goal or as the turning-post to be reached in a race. A fifth line proves divisive: paraphrasing, either the jutting rocks stand erect; or the rough rocks are cloaked in terrors (Clark) this from a curious extension of meaning possible in Latin. The remaining line seizes the climber's attention:

Erectus, praeceps, salebrosus, et arduus ille

Marvell

The steep, the rough, the difficult are there

Clark

That is lofty, steep, uneven and arduous

McQueen and Rockwell

That is lofty, steep, uneven and harsh

Seo

That's high, vertical, rugged, and hard to climb

Craig

Clark's translation is intriguing since his abstract categories suggest that various lines of ascent have been noticed and that the writer realises that different approaches would present problems different in nature. It almost amounts to a prototype of a grading system. But four into three won't go unless advantage is taken of overlaps in meaning in the four terms. Looking at Marvell's work as a whole however it's hard to believe he'd wedge synonyms side by side.

McQueen and Rockwell make the distinction between height and steepness in a cliff and the sense of an on-site inspection persists. 'Uneven', on the other hand, seems a clumsy term in this context and Seo adds nothing useful. (It may be that none of these translators visited the cliff, a trivial detail in considering Marvell's output.) Craig also



rejects Clark's abstractions as not in the Latin. The expression 'hard to climb' is justified since 'arduus' carries the sense of difficult to undertake. In speaking of a cliff that can only mean to get to the top.

It may be worth considering a grammatical liberty: to take 'salebrosus', usually translated as rough or rugged, neither as scholar or rock-climber but as a traveller of the time or a poet with a subliminal image. 'Salebra' means a rut and might suggest 'rutted', a condition wearily familiar to every user of coach-roads and cart-tracks in England. To the crag's visitors the word brings to mind the parallel erosion grooves featured on these rocks, as on the climb named *Fluted Columns*.

None of Marvell's lines could have come from a distant view and the question arises: did he lay hands on the crag? It's clear he had ample free time at Nun Appleton and energy and activity characterise his life. He'd already spent four years travelling (or draft-dodging?) in Holland, France, Spain and Italy, seeing the sights no doubt. Ten years later he accompanied a two-year diplomatic mission to the courts of Denmark, Sweden and Russia. This was during his twenty years as Member of Parliament for Hull and it's recorded that he exchanged blows with Thomas Clifford on the floor of the House of Commons during his first session. He also absented himself for two spells in Holland, during the second of which he seems to have been running a spy ring in the Hague. And this is the man who, 'Had we but World enough and Time', would be willing to exercise patience --

But at my back I always hear

Time's winged Chariot hurrying near...

It's hard to believe he'd have spent two years or so looking towards Almscliff from Bilborough Hill — a favourite walk for him as it already was for Fairfax — without wishing to reach it. The possible clues in his other poems are slight and his movements and the mysterious gaps in his life have been so carefully examined that it seems unlikely that direct evidence will be found.

Nevertheless, the detail in the poem came from somewhere and the informant pre-eminently equipped to be his authority is Fairfax himself. Crucially, he owned the crag and his will reveals some incidental detail. In it he confirms settlements of his lands already made including those for his 'manner or Lordship of Rigton'. This centred on the North Rigton a mile east of the cliff.

There is also a codicil, longer than the will itself and dated 11 November 1671, the day before his death. Here he scatters bequests to rich and poor, remembering numerous tenants, family servants, and local indigents. Amongst all this he reassigns a part of the rents from four farms at Rigton. Three can't now be traced but the fourth is 'the Spoute farme.' The name is a rarity but a Spout House exists at Rigton today. The present building looks like a modern luxury home but the occupier states that parts of it date from that time. He adds that the property was a farm until as late as 1970 and that the lands might well have reached the crag. The old field walling suggests that the summit may have divided two tenancies.

West of the crag, from northwest to south, the estates of the Fairfax family and relatives formed a semicircle. Six of these lay within seven miles, with a sister barely three miles across the valley at Arthington. The Rigton estate lapped up to it from the east and may well have extended westward. Almscliff is the only viewpoint from which all these lands could be admired. It's hard to believe that Fairfax could have resisted the impulse to enjoy the summit's overviews of his domains whenever he passed by on a fine day.

He had a passion for horses and before the war he rode with the local hunts so that this practice alone, one biographer states, "had made every inch of Wharfedale familiar to him". (From an unknown but early date the crevices and cavities in the cliff were dry-walled up to prevent foxes going to earth there.) During the war his exploits would earn him the soubriquet 'The Rider of the White Horse'. As a young man he had made the rounds of all the properties on his grandfather's business and shortly began to oversee them. On any journeys to Rigton from Scow Hall or Fewston he would have been obliged to skirt the crag. Later he had to fit in more local travel as an officer of the civil administration.

Today he's remembered as a soldier. At 17 he was with an English contingent at the siege of Bois-le-Duc in the Low Countries and sent home his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the town walls and defences. During the Civil War he stormed or sieged a dozen walled towns or castles. As much as any cliff in Britain Almscliff stands like a castle on a hill. It's tempting to speculate that the besieger's eye might have been sharpened by scrambling around Almscliff.

The argument has become that if Marvell didn't visit the crag then Fairfax had given him his information. The literature is as daunting as that on Marvell though it's mainly devoted to the war and its aftermath. The Fairfax Correspondence (4 vols, 1850-52) deals almost entirely with matters of state and the biographies yield nothing. The manuscript Letters and Papers are a massive archive dispersed in three main collections and are only accessible to academic researchers. At present Fairfax is simply linked to Almscliff by circumstance. Yet he had endless opportunities, ample motives, and is the only suspect we have as Marvell's source.

Almscliff is one of the marker crags of British climbing and its great test-pieces — *Frankland's Green Crack*, *Great Western*, *Western Front*, *Wall of Horrors* — are indicator climbs for the limits of achievement in several decades. It would have been gratifying to be able to install the Lord General not only as its first known visitor but also as an habitu . Clearly we can't. Nevertheless Marvell's epigram remains unique for its instant of concentration on the form and nature of a celebrated crag long before the Romantics decided that cliffs and mountains are there to be admired.

Author's note: An earlier article appeared in *FRCCJ* Vol XXVII (1), No 78, 2002. It was written in response to the Clark translation and looked for clues in Marvell's work rather than considering Fairfax as the source of the description.

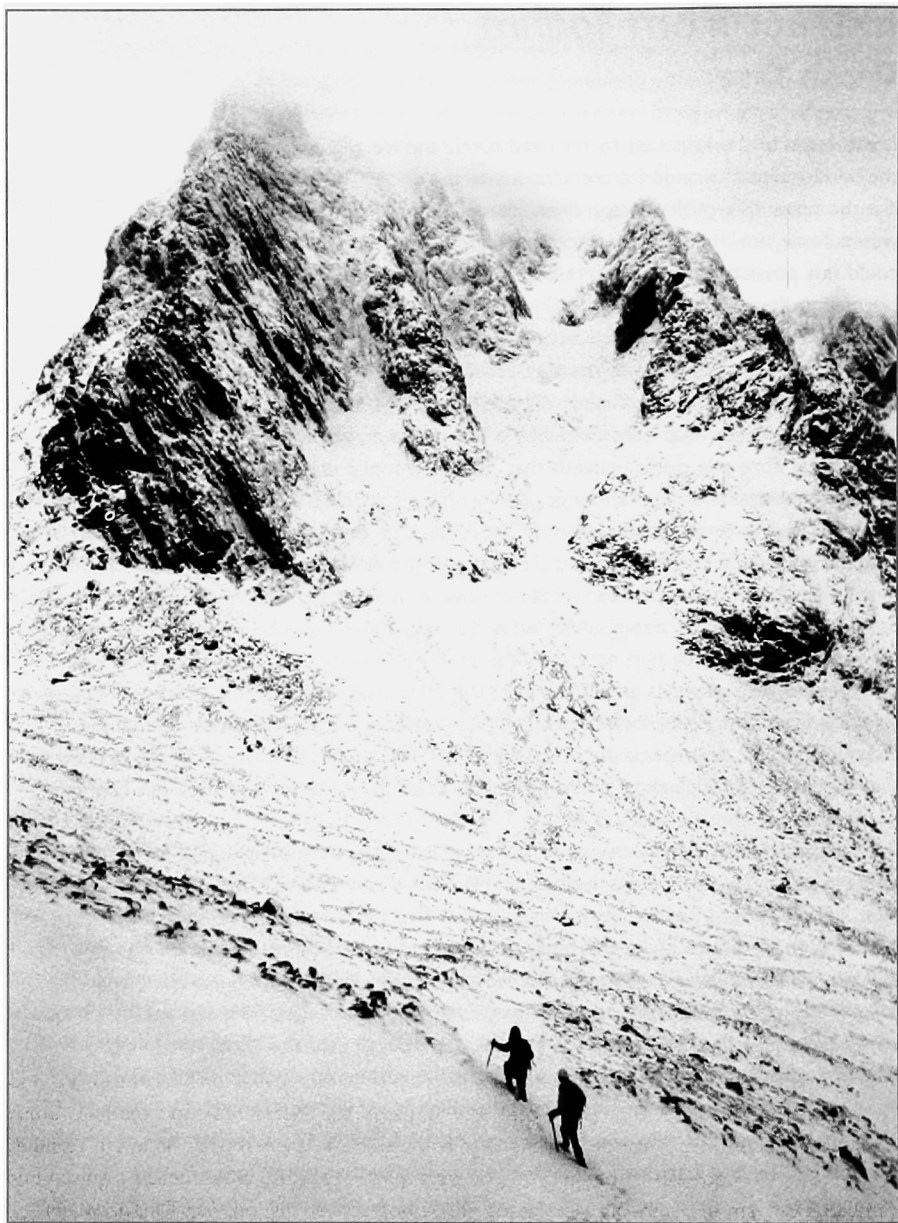
# Extract from *Todhra*

Dennis Gray

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It was eerie in the light cast by his head torch: the ice glistened in the reflected light and the wind sculpted wonderful crenulations in the snow. The cornice above his head looked like the prow of a mighty ocean liner, steaming away from its moorings. "I wish the moon would come out," he shouted into the wind, more for his own benefit than Hart's who could not possibly have heard him below in the screeching void. Unable to get good placements for the curved picks of his two Chacal axes, John decided he would just have to make do with using them for balance and rely on his feet to hold. He delicately traversed to a deep groove in the surface of the ice at his left, and straddled high up into it, pushing his leather gloved hands on one side of the feature, and bringing his left foot high. His movement was constrained by a full shell suit, jacket and trousers made out of Gore-tex, a fibre pile outfit beneath that, and thermopile underwear including Long Johns. A helmet covered his head, snow goggles protected his eyes from ice particles and his feet were encased in double plastic boots. On his back he carried a rucksack containing spare clothes, some food and a bivouac sack. John grunted as he balanced up, it was a minor miracle he could make such an acrobatic move with all of that. Far below him he pictured Steve similarly attired, freezing at his belay but urging him on with strength of purpose that never wavered. A fall by him now would probably kill them both. His belayer had two badly-placed ice screws as anchors, and in the 30m between them John had only managed to place one other piton for protection. If he parted company with the mountain now there was almost no chance of him being held. "This is it," he had to climb this groove or they would both be killed; he could not climb back down the ground between him and Hart.

Another thin bridging move and John was into the groove proper, and then he smiled as his axes bit deeply into the surface. He had struck a winter climbers dream... sound neve ice! He moved further up. It was so steep that he hung from his wrist loops, supported only by the ice picks and his crampons cutting into the neve. But he was safe, and within minutes he had wound a tubular ice screw right in up to its head. He clipped his rope in and gingerly put his weight onto it. Even in that half-light he could see that it was as safe as any he had ever placed. "Done it!" He howled into the wind, and swinging with his short axes, and stabbing with his crampons he rushed up to the cornice. Standing underneath it, sheltered from the wind he studied it for a moment, then he dug into the ice at its base with his axes and took a metal plate from off his waist. He securely placed it into the slot he had fashioned to protect him while he attempted to climb over the obstacle rising out over his head. Climbers call this contraption a 'Dead Boy'. It is a small sheet of metal shaped like a shield with a piece of wire attached, into which he clipped a karabiner and ran his rope through. If he did fall this would certainly stop his flight.



Orion Face and three great ridges of Ben Nevis. Photo: John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library

Moving out from the natural cave where the mountain slope abutted against the base of the cornice, he wandered back and forth buffeted by the gale force wind, balancing on his crampons, searching with his head torch for any weakness in the summit plateau's defences. It was a formidable battlement of snow and ice that he must breach to get himself and Steve Hart safely onto the top of Ben Nevis. He decided to try it straight above where he had placed The Dead Boy; if he fell he would have a good chance of it stopping him before he went too far. Holding his left axe high out above his head he swiped it into the body of the cornice, felt the pick bite deep and swung out into space hanging by a single wrist loop. It was an awe-inspiring situation as he hung over 500 metres of space. Far below a Hogmanay party would soon be underway. If he could only get over this bloody cornice he and Stevie could get down to Fort William and join in.

John pulled up on his left wrist and swiped his right axe into the ice above his head, a bad placement, but it will have to do, and he launched his whole body out onto the wrist of a single hand. "Oh shit," it was coming out, "Stevie!" He screamed and smashed his left axe in as he began to fall. It bit in deep enough to hold him, and despite the cold and the howling wind he could feel his body running in sweat. He gingerly reached up and placed another piton into the ice, and it wound in like a screw going into a raw plug. He put a karabiner into its eye, clipped in his rope and attached a tape from off his harness into this snap link. There was no way he could make that last move go free, and hanging from the piton he stood up in the sling. From here he could at last reach over the lip of the cornice. He strained with every last ounce of energy against the wind, placed his axes over and pulled himself up on the picks. He rolled over the lip and landed with a straddle jump on the summit plateau of the Ben.

He stood up and looked at his watch, it was 7pm They had been climbing for 12 hours, and he realised for the first time how tired he was. Standing there in the gale force wind he almost fell over from exhaustion. Tying himself down to his axe and three ice screws John pulled and heaved at the icy rope taking in and keeping it taught between himself and his second as Steve slowly climbed up to join him. The cursing coming from the darkness below alerted him that Hart was about to reach the top. He guessed that Steve would not be able to remove his top ice screw, and that he would need some help with only one good arm to get over the cornice. But he was confounded when the Scot finally rolled over at his feet and stood up, for there dangling from Steve's harness were the pitons John had placed. "You owed it to him, he couldn't keep dodging the issue, "Stevie, I want to tell you something about me," he started out in a whisper.

"Aye... what's that... you're mad, unhinged, crazy and deranged... I know, I know already," the Scot grinned at him. John meekly smiled back and said, "How did you find out you clever beggar?"

Duncan and Jean had offered to run John back to Sheffield the next day; and Jock the leader of the Lochaber Team had agreed to put Hart up until he was fit to drive back south. "Would you be interested in going to Chamonix later this winter?" asked Hart, "I've



got this major new line worked out on the left side of the Central Spur of the (Grandes Jorasses." "When?"

"Last week in February, my arm will be better by then and your ribs will be OK in a month."

"Too bleeding right I would, but I've not much in the way of cash," John agreed.

"I'll fix us up some sponsorship," Steve assured him, "I think I can sell the story to one of the Fleet Street rags. I do some accounting for Media International."

"If you can you're on," John laughed and immediately gasped in pain from his injuries. Just then Duncan and Jean arrived in their car back from a short climb in Glen Nevis. Steve Hart casually waved his goodbyes as Duncan drove away. Climbers are incredible people, John thought as he waved back, they live together, eat together, sleep together, and sometimes even die together. They can be with a single partner for weeks, in extreme danger and intimacy but afterwards are so casual, you'd never guess that they had shared so much.

Driving along, John told Duncan and Jean about Stevie's plans for Chamonix at the end of February. Duncan's facial expression tightened, and Jean was visibly shaken, "Be careful John, you're not indestructible you know. You have just had a lucky escape, don't tempt fate..."

Duncan roughly interrupted, "He knows what he's doing." Then he softened with yet another admonition to his friend, "But for Christ's be careful." John could only choke, "I will be, I will be," they were so genuinely worried. They journeyed on for a while in silence, each occupied with own thoughts, and John suddenly panicked, what about Lahcei anything bad had happened to him he felt he would die. Where was he? Sitting in the back in agony from his side, with one of the most spectacular successes in the history of Scottish winter mountaineering behind him, he did not even notice his surroundings. All he could think about was a young Berber thousands of kilometres away. "You're a bleeding queer," he mentally chided himself, but now he grinned acceptance; "Yes, I know." A pain shot through his side as he smiled and Firth winced.

# Bill Stallybrass

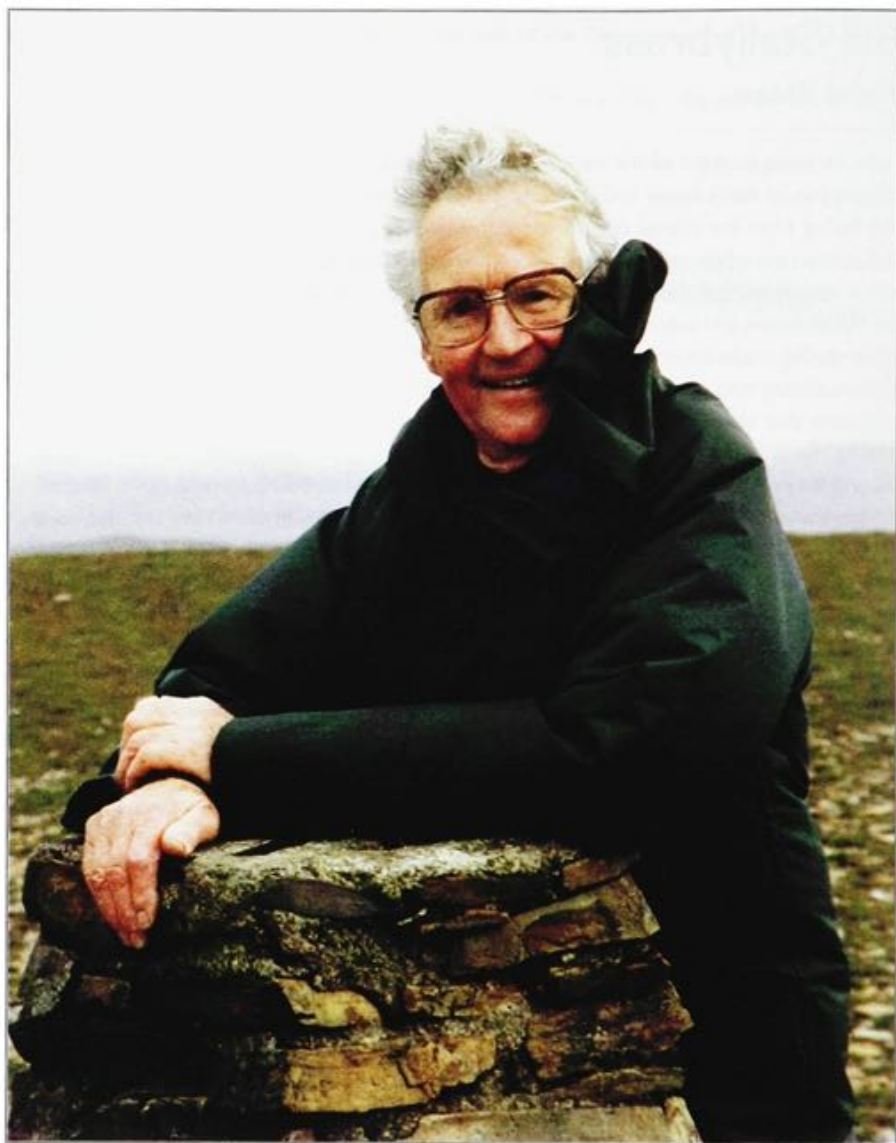
Steve Dean

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I was very sad to learn of the death of Bill Stallybrass a couple of years ago and it reminded me of many happy and interesting conversations I shared with him. Born in 1910 and hailing from the Wirral, Bill started climbing during his time at Liverpool University and at the time of his passing was one of the senior members in The Climbers' Club. He was a very important link with the halcyon days of the 1930s, when he was very active on the Welsh scene and was a close friend of Colin Kirkus, A B Hargreaves and Menlove Edwards. Bill made major contributions to Geoff Milburn's book *Helyg* including the famous photograph of a circus elephant being led up the A5, past the hut in 1931. He had a considerable input into Jim Perrin's *Menlove* and was of great assistance to me when writing *Hands of a Climber*, about the life of Colin Kirkus. Between 1986 and 1992 I visited Bill and his wife Margo frequently, at their home in Dulwich. Bill had a wonderful fund of stories about the climbing scene both in Wales and The Lakes in the 1930s and had kept detailed accounts of his own activities in the hills. He was a delightfully gentle and patient man, who fielded my endless questions with quiet amusement and a genuine pleasure that such distant adventures could still be of interest to today's climbers. Bill's recollections of his happy days at Helyg in particular threw a very clear light on the characters of a number of key figures of this pre-war period. Bill climbed with Colin Kirkus, Menlove Edwards, A B Hargreaves and Alf Bridge when these men were in their prime and rapidly expanding the art of rock-climbing in Britain. Bill became a very able climber in his own right, climbed extensively in Wales and The Lakes and visited The Alps. He also helped Colin Kirkus in the writing of the 1938 *Glyder Fach* guidebook — still regarded as an understated classic of the period.

In 1939 Bill became a deeply committed Christian and this was to form the framework for the remainder of his long life. In April 1940 he was best man at the wedding of Colin and Eileen Kirkus, only weeks before Colin joined Bomber Command. After the War Bill's climbing activities declined, as he and Margo set about bringing up a young family. He did, however, retain a great interest in mountains and travelled widely, particularly in the USA and throughout the Alps. Bill had retained a great interest in climbing and during our many conversations I was very impressed by how knowledgeable he was on the subject. At one point in the 1950s, Bill was teaching German at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and became involved in a Mountaineering and Exploration Club established for cadets at the college. There he met a young Chris Bonington who was also one of his students attempting to study German. Chris and Bill remained life long friends and regularly exchanged letters.

Towards the end of Bill's life, he wrote to me wanting to pass on a climbing story of his own that he had mentioned to very few people. It involved him making the third ascent



Bill Stallybrass.

of Colin Kirkus's *Mickledore Grooves* on the East Buttress of Scafell. The first ascent of this famous climb had been made in 1930 and Colin Kirkus had been accompanied on it by Marco Pallis and Ivan Waller. Ivan in particular had realised the great significance of the

route in opening up this superb crag. The following summer saw A B Hargreaves in very good form on the crags and he made a number of repeats of the top routes of the day. Having climbed *Central Buttress* on Scafell with Alf Bridge and Maurice Linnell, AB teamed up with Bill the next day and together they made the second ascent of *Mickledore Grooves*. Bill was in excellent shape himself and remembered the climb being dry and quite straightforward. That night after a pint in Wasdale, A B had to return home, but Bill was now eager to make his own lead of the climb. Next day he made his way back to the East Buttress hoping to find a suitable partner for the climb but was unsuccessful.

On reaching the foot of the route, Bill was still without a partner and he sat and pondered on the situation, particularly as the conditions were perfect. Finally, he stood up, stepped onto the opening moves and proceeded to solo the route in 20 minutes, making the third ascent. Now, this was quite something for 1931, people just did not solo routes of this calibre, the moral framework attached to risk was never far from young climbers' minds at that time. *Mickledore Grooves* was a formidable route for the period and very nearly claimed the lives of Menlove Edwards and Wilf Noyce who had a bad accident on it some six years later. Nonetheless, as you can imagine Bill was ecstatic and realised he was in the form of his life.

'Courage did not come into it, there was not a single moment of fear, just an amazing sense of freedom without a rope in front or behind me. A few days before, while leading *Botterill's Slab*, I had been aware of a twitch at my back; my second was not allowing me enough slack; I felt safer soloing. That day I did three more climbs solo. The next day the family left by train for home. I decided to solo any of the Kern Knotts climbs on Great Gable which I had not led, to spend the night in Langdale and to hitch-hike home. I was defeated by *Kern Knotts Buttress*, up which I had once followed Menlove. The crux comes within a few feet of a fine stance and belay and an escape route. I was not prepared to risk it without a second. As I was about to leave for Langdale, I met a lone climber carrying a rope. We agreed that he would second me up *Kern Knotts Buttress* and that I would lead him up the *Eagle's Nest Direct*. I was inordinately proud of myself. At last I was going to emulate my friends Colin and Menlove'.

Bill admitted to writing a rather boastful letter to A B Hargreaves and receiving a very curt reply. (Those of us who knew A B can well imagine just how curt it was.) A B made it clear that Bill had devalued the climb purely to feed his own ego. Bill recalled: 'He saw more clearly than I did that I was a mediocre climber; that only extraordinary luck in the weather had led to my recent successes. I now see that I had exploited his lead of the second ascent to boost my own ego. A B was six years my senior; he could be quite fierce, and I always treated him with respect and a certain amount of awe; he was the only one of my friends at that time who tried to help me tackle the defects in my character. There was never any rift between us, but it so happened that, though we met occasionally, we never climbed together again. Events the following summer showed me how foolish my pride had been. I have never since led a climb of a standard higher than 'Very Difficult' —

nor have I climbed solo. I came to feel ashamed of the *Mickledore Grooves* episode'.

I wrote back to Bill delighted by the story and his own honesty in recalling those events, yet I felt sorry he had come to regret the incident. I do hope that later in his life he came to recall those few minutes on this great climb with the pleasure he deserved for what was a very fine effort.

Some weeks after Bill had written to me about his adventure on *Mickledore Grooves*, I found myself walking past the East Buttress of Scafell. Bill was much on my mind that day and I wrote the following piece about a strange bittersweet day.

'The walk over to Scafell from Langdale is a very fine one. It was just as well, because I needed cheering up. A recurrence of an old elbow problem had reminded me that I was now on the wrong side of 50 and that some uncharacteristic patience would be required before I was out on the crag again. I'd settled on a good stroll to clear my head of various clutter and had ended up walking along the bottom of the East Buttress of Scafell, a place I hadn't been to for years. I'd forgotten what an impressive place it is and I gazed up enviously at a team enjoying the delights of Botterill and Lamb's 1979 classic *Midnight Express*. Further to my right, another pair were getting to grips with *Chartreuse*. We were in the midst of a settled spell of weather; the crag looked good and dry and I wished I was up there with them.

I sat on a rock, had a drink and decided to relax for a while. To the left of the two teams in action on the crag, was the line of *Mickledore Grooves*, one of the great classic climbs of Colin Kirkus. It is surrounded by many much harder routes now, of course, but at the time of its creation in May 1930 (not 1931 as indicated in the guidebook) it was one of the finest routes in Britain, bold and poorly protected by the standards of the time. In a period of only four weeks, the 19-year old Kirkus made first ascents of *Mickledore Grooves*, *Great Slab* on Cloggy, and the *Direct Route* on Dinas Mot to establish his own legend as the best of his day. Back in 1986, I had the good fortune to chat with both Ivan Waller and Marco Pallis who were with Colin on that first ascent of *Mickledore Grooves*. They both recalled the long walk over to Scafell from Langdale, their utter solitude at the crag and Colin's slow, steady lead of this lovely climb. They were all tired walking back, but Ivan, in particular, realised that they had bagged an absolute gem, that held great significance for the future.

I looked up at the crag as a light breeze brushed my face and thought of Bill alone up there 70 years ago, making the climb of his life. I thought of him today at his home in Dulwich, an elderly man enjoying his garden or perhaps watching the tennis from Wimbledon on television. I wondered how often the memory of that day alone on the East Buttress had warmed his spirit and reminded him of the joy and freedom of being young and of being strong in mind and in limb.

Much later that night after a good day on the hills, I sat in the Golden Rule at Ambleside enjoying a pint. At the table next to me, two young lads were reliving the five routes they had done that day up on Neckband Crag. I chatted with them awhile, delighted



by their enthusiasm, energy and optimism. I thought again of Bill, Colin and A B and the others from the early 1930s. The hairstyles and the clothes may change with time but otherwise they were probably just like the lads talking to me in the pub, young fit bodies and youthful drive galvanised by this wonderful game of ours.

Years ago I wandered down from Craig yr Ysfa with Jim Perrin after a superb day on the crag. I remember Jim's conspiratorial grin as he shouted through the wind ".... great stuff this climbing Steve!" It certainly is and as soon as my elbow is sorted out I'll be back at it again. It had been a strange and melancholy day but that reminder of a letter from an old man and the story it told together with the joyful enthusiasm of the lads in the pub brought back Jim's words: the on-going magic of climbing spanning the generations.

It was a great pleasure to have known Bill and to share so many pleasat times with him. When he spoke of characters like Colin Kirkus and Menlove Edwards they almost seemed to be in the room with us and for that I will always be in his debt. His story of *Mickledore Grooves* touched me for its total honesty and for his acknowledgement of the struggle between pride and youthful exuberance, and rational prudence. A lovely reminder that young climbers are really not so different whatever era it is. Good old Bill; I think of him often and smile and remember his gentle kindness.

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# Don Whillans (aka The Villain)

Dennis Gray

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*The evil that men do lives after them,  
the good is oft interred with their bones.  
(Shakespeare, Julius Caesar)*

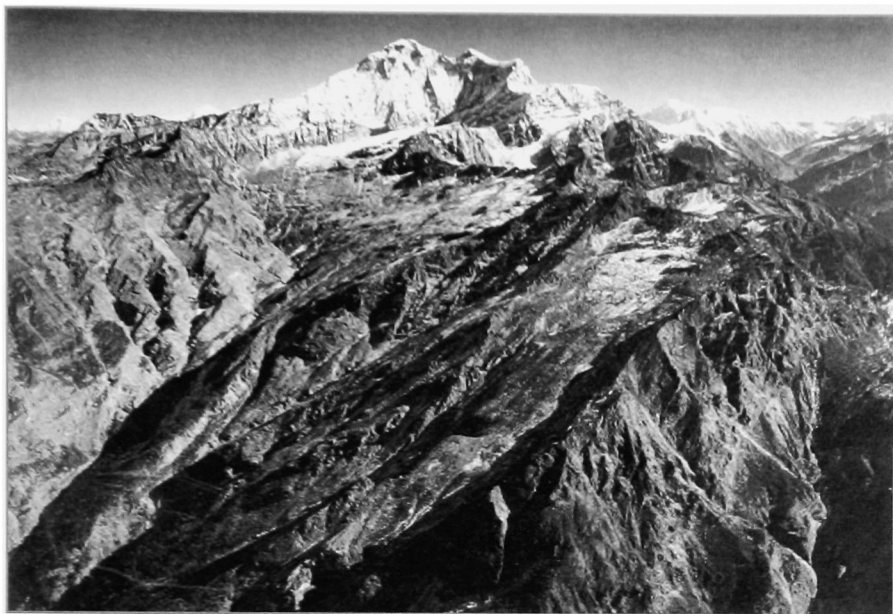
The outstanding biography of Don Whillans, *The Villain*, of necessity in reviewing the totality of his life, might mislead the reader into misjudging his true greatness as a climber. For a decade he was the leading mountaineer in the UK and for double that length of time, a premier division performer. He might have finished his days as an overweight grumpy boozier, but in his prime he was a 5' 2" pocket Hercules, capable of great feats of strength including one-arm pull ups, and pioneering achievements on rock and in the mountains that few of his contemporaries could emulate.

The record is there for all to appreciate: rock-climbs characterised by being bold and strenuous plus great feats in the high mountains, which were almost unparalleled in their era. However, what makes Whillans stand out for those of us who knew him, besides his climbing ability was his personality. Aggressive and pugnacious, but riven by northern realism, gifted with an oft-quoted dry wit he was, along with Tom Patey, the most signal character in my more than five decades of involvement in our sport. To appreciate this aspect of Don's persona, I would refer the reader to Patey's outstanding article, 'A Short Walk with Whillans'.

It was impossible to remain indifferent to the man and whilst most other climbers of the period might not wish to be too closely allied, those who were, witnessed on occasion events that would provide them with anecdotes and stories which were often humorous, sometimes frightening and occasionally downright shocking. And over this latter, there are instances of this kind of behaviour included in Jim Perrin's book .

However, Don himself never cared a fig about what anyone else thought of him and he never attempted a charm offensive. Although when occasion demanded he was willing to vigorously defend his own ego, and one of my earliest memories of this fact was once when he was being interviewed by a journalist who referred to Joe Brown and Whillans as 'The Climbing Plumbers'. This annoyed Don who was a time served tradesman, "I'm a plumber, Joe's a bleeding property repairer." was his riposte. Another such occasion was when Joe 'Morty' Smith, Whillans, Brown and myself met Walter Philip the famous Austrian climber for the first time. He rushed up and shook Joe's hand declaring: "Mr Brown I have been a fan of yours ever since I saw pictures of your climb, *The Sloth*." Whillans eyes narrowed in characteristic fashion, his face twisted and his voice rose in pitch: "You're not his fan," he told Walter "yer bleeding mine. *Sloth* is my route not his."

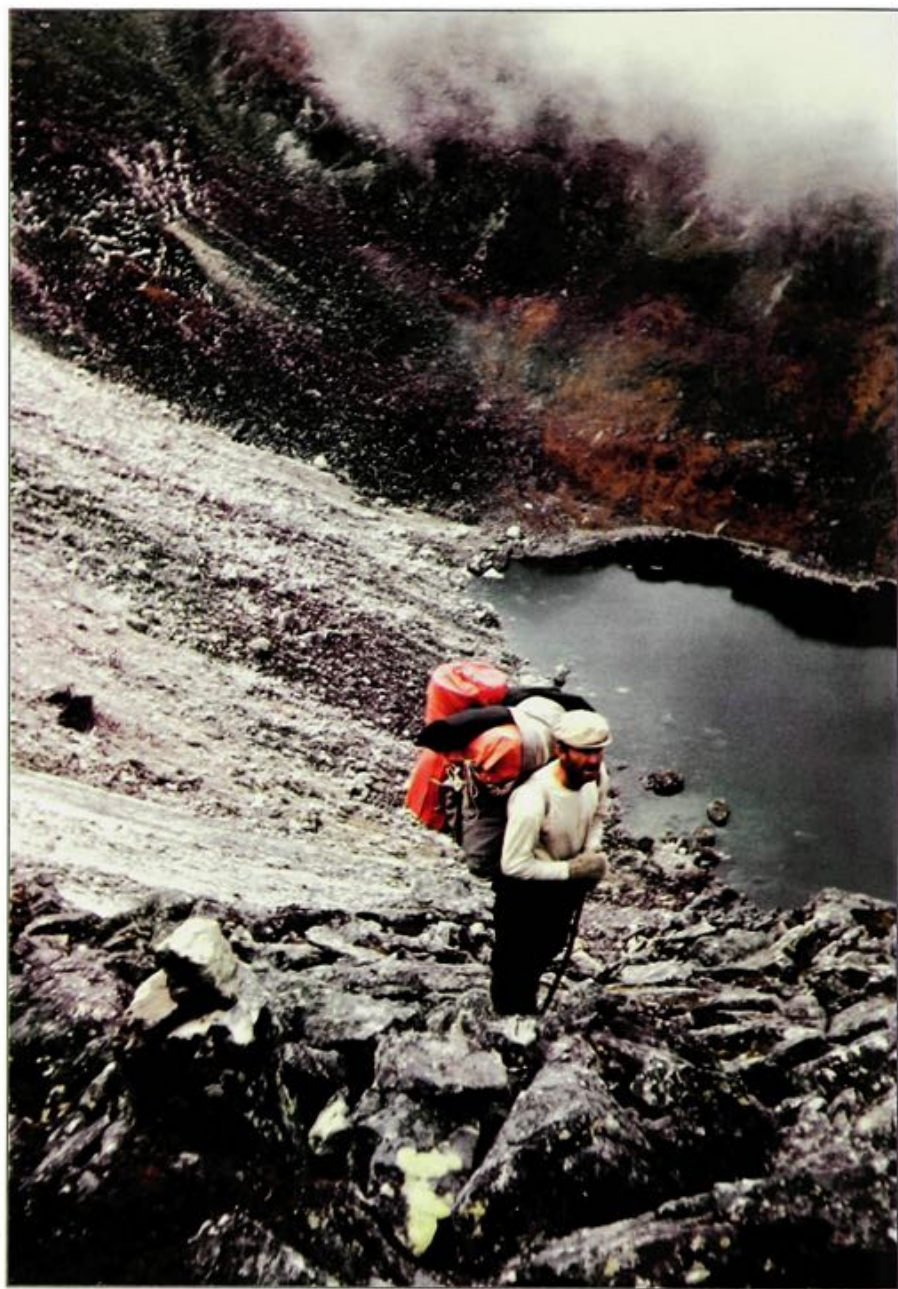
Whilst the rest of climbing world scabbled around seeking peer group approval, his



**Gaurisankar, the 'nearly' mountain. Photo: Gray collection**



**Above: Who's smiling now? The Gaurisankar team 1964: L to R: Don Whillans, Dennis Gray, Dez Hadlum, Terry Burnsell, Ian Clough, Ian Howell. Photo: Gray collection**





wayward behaviour meant that he continued to be cast in the role of a climbing villain, although on occasion he did risk his own life saving, or attempting to save, those in distress. And he did put something back into our sport by being an outstanding President of the ACG, and a Vice President of the BMC.

*The Villain* implies that Don was not as aggressive or violent as the myths and stories surrounding him made out, but that was not my experience of him, particularly in his younger most active climbing days. When I was a Rock and Ice apprentice, he being older, I was with him on several occasions when we ran into trouble. Once, at a party one night in the late 50s in Wythenshawe, a local hard man gate-crashed the event and began to wind Don up. I could see he was about to totally lose his rag and I was always afraid in such situations that he would do something which would result in a serious injury or worse. Not to him, no sir, but to his opponent.

He had in his hand a dimpled pint glass, and as he became ever more agitated, I guessed what he might do. And just as he lashed out I jumped between him and the local, screaming "No, Don." But to little avail for I was hit four square between the eyes by the pint glass which Whillans had just hurled at the local bruiser. The next thing I knew I came to with my face covered in blood, lying on a couch in a corner of the room with Whillans purring over me. "You stupid little bugger, never get in the way again," he remonstrated; and I never did, although I still carry the scar on my forehead where that glass hit me.

I was privileged to see him climb at his very best and was with him for instance when he pioneered *Cave Wall* at Froggatt Edge (1958), climbed the *East Face of the Capucin* (1958) and in the Himalaya on Gaurisankar (1964).

Over the latter, we drove to Kathmandu, just failed by a few hundred feet to gain the summit of our peak, and whilst Don and the rest of our party drove home again, I had to return by sea with our equipment. For in that era you had to take out of Nepal what you brought in, or suffer punitive customs duties. I was away from home from June 1964 and arrived back in Liverpool in January 1965. There to greet me on the pier when I arrived was Whillans: "Don't think I have come to meet thee," he advised, 'I've just come to get me bloody gear.' At least you always knew where you stood with 'The Villain'.

Although Don was very sharp mentally (both he and Brown would now be University material) he did have a mind block against what he considered arty farty activities. Hence his comment after picking up Dougal Haston's copy of *Lord of the Rings* on the Annapurna South Face Expedition, quoted in Perrin's book.

Once, I was with him in Chamonix and we were camping at the Biolay, when Robin Smith arrived fresh from the UK. We had a large billy on the stove and were making a brew, for we were fresh off the hill. Robin, who was a philosophy/logic student at Edinburgh University, began to advise us that what we thought of as a billy and a stove were

**Opposite:** When it still mattered to him? Whillans carrying his fair share over rough ground on the approach to Gaurisankar. Photo: Dennis Gray



not really a billy and a stove, just a part of our collective misunderstanding as to the true nature of things. Whillans said nothing until he had finished making the tea when he declared: "If this isn't a billy and that isn't bleeding tea then you will not be wanting any?" And proceeded to pour out only two pint mugs, one each for me and for him. When I started to study at University he ribbed me mercilessly on one occasion but maybe that was more in jest than reality.

When writing about Don it is hard to avoid the caricature and or the cliché: the little man in the flat cap with big fists, the Andy Capp of the climbing world, the dib dib dobber etc. But they are the basis of his myth and legend. *The Villain*, however, leaves us with some conundrums, for what was the reason for his aggression, misogyny, and selfishness? Especially over the treatment of his long-suffering saintly wife, Audrey — who despite everything, supported him through thick and thin (and, of course, he comes off very badly when matched with the character of his one-time climbing partner, Joe Brown). It is hard not to like Joe, whilst it was easy to feel an antagonism towards Don. He is a classic case of the anti-hero, and a product of the age and working class environment he grew up in. Yet this does not fully explain his character, for others who came from similar backgrounds never behaved like him.

I leave it to the reader to hypothesise further over the Whillans psyche. I will, however, make two further observations over this. The first is that he continued all his life to seek physical confrontation. Witness his famous run in with the Lancashire Constabulary in 1975; and, just a month before his death in 1985, a battle with a car full of road hogs on the Mancunian Way in Manchester. And secondly the fact that he was always an outsider. Anyone familiar with the theory of this personality type will know they are the race of men that don't fit in.

I think at the end of the day, Don, should be remembered as the great climber that he was. This was the reason for his being notable, and there is now an opening for such as Ken (Wilson) to produce a picture book of 'Don's Climbs'. Something along the lines of the Doug Scott *Himalayan Climber* volume, perhaps. I am sure this would refocus attention on his great climbing achievements and away from some of the more negative assessments of him.

I will finish by telling the story of the first ascent of *Cave Wall* at Froggatt Edge in the winter of 1958. We used to camp beneath the rocks on a site we called 'The Bowling Green'. This was I believe what it had once been and it was set a short way above the houses near the Chequers Inn. All the Peak regulars of that era used to know of this fine site, which was as its name suggests, flat and covered with short-cropped grass. Quite an amazing place to find on such a steep hillside. One group we used to meet regularly there was a crowd of young climbers from Sheffield who worked as labourers in the steel foundries. Their leader was a big strong black guy, who we knew as Sam, and for some reason every time he met Whillans he greeted him like a long lost brother. The only problem was that Sam, used to being in a total male-orientated environment talked mainly

in expletives.

Don, and his wife Audrey, did not arrive until the Saturday night for Whillans was still working as a plumber and he had to work a five and a half day week. I was camping with Beardie (Eric Beard) and in the evening after cooking we sat and talked over brews in Don and Audrey's tent. It might surprise some but for the first decade of his climbing career Whillans hardly drank, and he had only started smoking the year before because he had won a raffle, and the 'prize' had been 200 cigarettes. Sam and his mates went off to the pub and came back rather blathered.

After retiring, all one could hear was Sam shouting out into the night four letter words, and several times we heard Whillans tell him to moderate his language, for contrary to what some might think in this respect he was protective of his wife. 'Oh my god' I worried 'something terrible is about to happen'. Sam just kept on swearing and then I heard a noise like an eruption as Don tore across the camp site, and ripped open the tent where Sam was holding forth. But for once his adversary totally disarmed him by greeting him thus: "Hello Don, have you come to join us?" in a very friendly, happy tone of voice. I heard Don gasp out an "Err... no!" and as he came back across the green he was muttering oaths to himself, whilst Eric and I gave a sigh of relief for we were heavily outnumbered by Sam and his gang, and neither Beardie or I were pugilists.

The next morning we had to wait to go climbing until Don had listened to *The Archers* omnibus edition, which he did every week. This farming soap opera held him entranced and he used to bring a small radio out especially to follow it. On arriving at the rocks Don was determined to climb one of the last great problems of the Edge, as we then saw it, *Cave Wall*. Many of us had messed about bouldering up the start out of the right-hand side of the Cave, but none had dared to press on out onto the front of the buttress because it looked so intimidating.

With Beardie and I threading out his rope, bolstered by Sam and his team acting as fielders Whillans set forth. I will never forget how easy he made the first section look for he was up out of the Cave and round onto the front wall in a trice. Only Joe Brown in my experience could then emulate such fluency of movement. But after making a strenuous move, undercutting, he was onto the steep upper face and there he stuck. He did not seem able to reach any higher holds, and he was marking time. Those who have done the route may remember a long reach near the top. For climbers of six-foot or more it must be a doddle, but for 'little men' it is a super stretch. "Have I to run round and give you a top rope?" I ventured. "Bugger off," declared our leader and somehow he almost leapt up the crag to reach at first a smooth ledge, then some good finishing holds. And that was it, another last great problem solved, and it was climbed in an impeccable style, without a single point of protection — which was a feature of many of Don's first ascents of that era. Few other climbers then operating had either the ability combined with the bottle to pioneer such routes.

Sam and his mates were full of praise, and he asked if he could give it a try on a top

rope after I had, with great difficulty, seconded the route (it is now graded E3 5c). And though Don gave their leader a tight rope and even a pull to try to get him up the first difficult section he could not make it, even though he used his full gamut of Anglo-Saxon swear words which, on this occasion, Whillans ignored as Audrey had gone off on her own for a walk along the Derwent Edges.

So there you have it, despite his worst excesses Don was a loyal friend and though he might call me on occasion, 'A drink of water' or a 'Bleeding little ta-ta', if anyone else had criticised me I am sure he would have leapt to my defence. His story is, I suppose, tragic, but his climbs remain and they are a magnificent canon. Much of the comment since the publication of *The Villain*, has concentrated to my mind on his character weaknesses, and not enough on his climbing achievements, which are outstanding; despite everything I am glad to have known him.

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# On Bivouacs

Peter Benson

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According to legend, and mountaineers who ought to know better, there are two types of bivouacs: the voluntary, and the involuntary. The former is defined when the mountaineer sets out for his chosen route and for reasons of expediency decides to spend the night out on the mountain. That he makes and fabricates a snow-hole, finds a convenient roof or cave, or even a nice flat ledge is usually fortuitous. Armed with the tools of his trade, bivvy bag, duvet, dehydrated food, collapsible stove, the list goes on *ad nauseam*. He makes the best of the natural surroundings and survives to tell the tale, the telling of which is usually as long and arduous as the bivouac itself.

The second type, the involuntary bivouac, has a similar scenario to the first. It is generally brought about by incompetence, bad planning, lack of foresight and sometimes just plain bad luck. Dramatic changes in the weather account for a fair percentage of Alpine bivvies, though a high number could be due to simply to an inability to read weather reports. However, to have maximum effect, in this type of bivvy there should be little or no food, no dry clothing and no spare socks. The accoutrements of bivvy luxury such as a Lilo, piping hot Bovril, and bivouac slippers should be absent, and a full scale blizzard or force 10 gale almost mandatory; the survivors of this type are usually mentally scarred for life.

The first bivouac I wish to describe falls into neither of the aforementioned categories, and it can best be defined as a 'silly bivouac'. The events leading up to this unhappy state of affairs are as follows. On the last day of March 1979, Bergfuhrer John 'Fritz' Sumner took me to the 'Big Bad Ben' and with ice-craft of the highest order led me up *Zero Gully*. The 12 vertical, iced-filled hours spent on 'Nevis' that day are forever etched and seared on the memory traces like hydrofluoric acid on glass. It needs little mental effort to summon total recall, every variance in ice, every cut-out stance, the spindrift avalanches and, above all, the artistry, craft and skill of 'Fritz' dealing with every foot with masterly elegance.

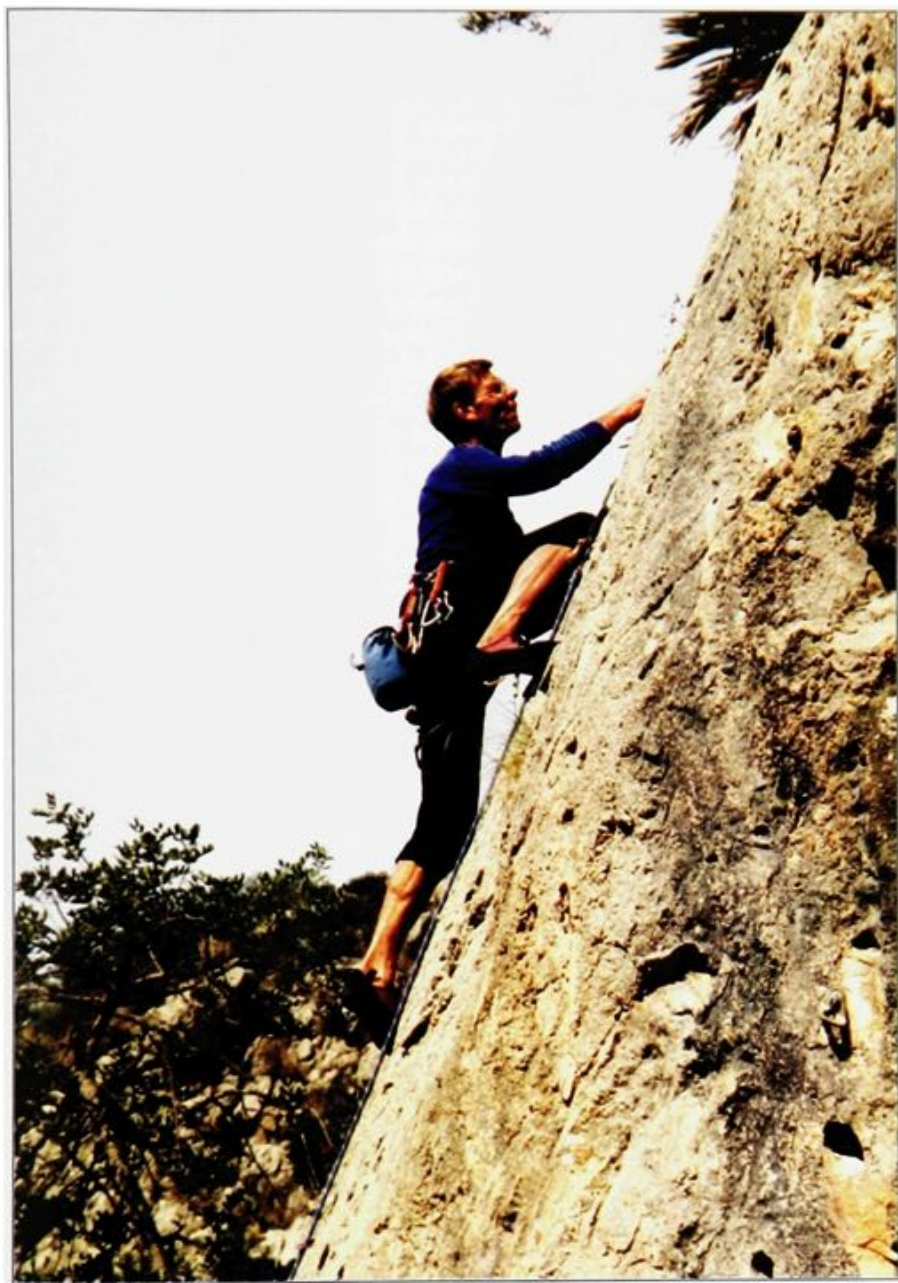
If Act One was the tense, teeth-gripping high drama of the Gully and Act Two was the nail-biting suspense of edging along the plateau in pitch darkness with a blizzard raging, then Act Three was tragi-comedy taken neat. The scene is set at the darkened, shuttered, inhospitable CIC Hut. Time 9.30pm. Two weary, hungry and frozen climbers fumble down the Allt a'Mhuilinn path. The euphoria of success in *Zero Gully* lifts tired feet as they stumble on down the valley. By 10.30pm they are safe and in the car speeding towards the fleshpots of Fort Bill and beyond, the sanctuary of the Laird of Invergauron in Glen Orchy. Suddenly the eyes of the driver notices that the petrol tank is showing zero. Now although you may imagine that you can walk on water after having done *Zero Gully*, you can't make internal combustion engines work without fuel. We stop at the police station in Fort Bill and make discreet inquiries from a real honey of a highland Police Lady. I attempt

to disguise the fact that we are 'Bloody Sassenachs' and in my Sunday Best Argyll accent try to extract information. "We've been on the Ben, ye ken, and have a wee hassle with the petrol, do you no ken a coin-operated pump." We are told "yes" there is one in Glencoe village 13 miles south, and another at Spean Bridge, nine miles north with a touch of east in it. Spean Bridge has it by four miles and pausing only to grab a handful of 50 pence coins from the Chinese proprietor of the 'Happy Highlander Restaurant' cautiously make our way to Spean Bridge. The petrol gauge now shows zero-zero, time 11.30pm. Armed with the explicit directions of the delightful highland lady, the brave lads home onto the garage. Now although 'Fritz' and myself could find the marker post of No. 4 Gully on 'Nevis' in pitch blackness and a violent snow-storm with unerring accuracy, we couldn't find this coin-operated pump, even after the most meticulous square search. Wherever the pump was in Lochaber it certainly wasn't at this garage. The awful fact sunk slowly into dulled senses: we had been out on the hill since 4.30am some 20 hours, and with clarity that was now stark and naked we realized it was going to be a night in the car, 'Fritz' announced that the position was serious. An adjective he doesn't use in jest, it had been uttered at intervals in *Zero Gully*. Philosophically I pulled my balaclava down, donned mitts, unlaced boots pulled my cag hood up and prepared to sit it out. 'Fritz' my intrepid fearless leader in the *Gully* just couldn't come to terms — he moaned and groaned, rheumatoid arthritis was the least he could get away with — pleurisy was just around the corner, and pneumonia waiting in the wings.

I dozed fretfully, aware of Fritz sobbing. Then he announced he was going to die, and at that, I bridled: "Nonsense, you can't die," I said. "I couldn't possibly go back and face the lads with, 'Well Fritz and myself did *Zero Gully* okay, but unfortunately he perished in the car.'" The whole idea was ludicrous. Oblivious to his violent shivering I sank into a comatose low-slung zizz. At intervals Fritz shook me to complain that he couldn't stand my snores, time passed, the grey dawn filtered through, breakfast was a Polo mint each, and eventually at 8am the garage man glug-glugged petrol into the tank. The coin-operated pump he told us cheerfully was 400 yards down the road at the other garage. I could have wept.

Opposite: 'A Man for All Seasons': John Sumner climbing in Spain.  
Photo: Benson collection

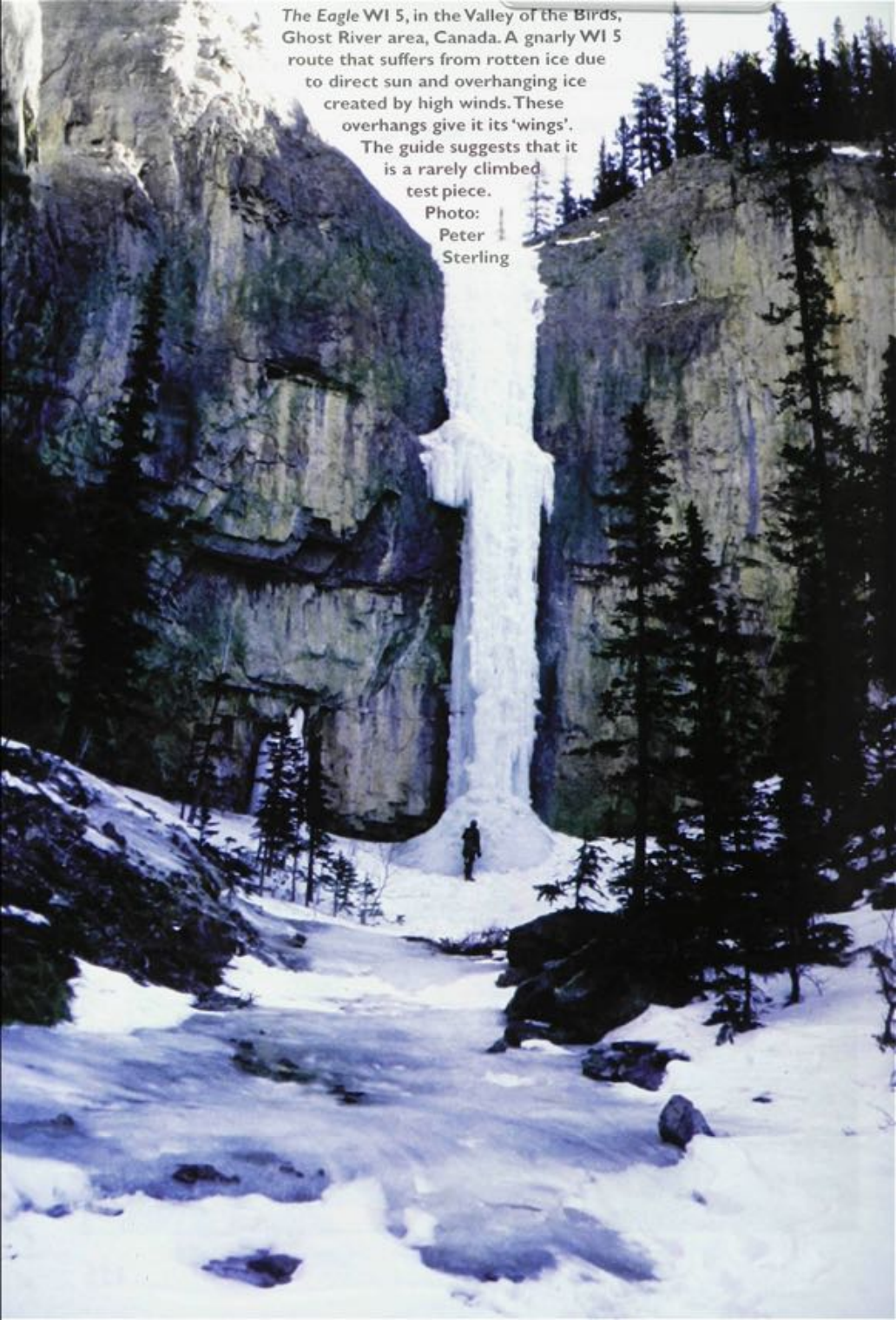




The Eagle WI 5, in the Valley of the Birds, Ghost River area, Canada. A gnarly WI 5 route that suffers from rotten ice due to direct sun and overhanging ice created by high winds. These overhangs give it its 'wings'.

The guide suggests that it is a rarely climbed test piece.

Photo:  
Peter  
Sterling





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# Bears, Bergs and Marmots

(Walking the Berg Lake Trail in the Canadian Rockies)

**Al Churcher**

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Arriving in Vancouver, the plan had been to spend a few days climbing at Squamish before heading off to the Rockies, but with rain stair-rodging down, an afternoon in the magic toyshop of the Mountain Equipment Co-op seemed a better option. Checking out an outrageously full trolley of kit some hours later, the rain was falling just as hard, and according to the forecast due to continue that way for the next couple of days.

I managed only two and a half hours of driving that night, but that was enough to leave the rain behind, and four hours sleep in a minute Hyundai is not bad for a six-footer. At 6am I was on the road again, and by breakfast the sun was shining and the high of the road had taken over. Just driving right across British Columbia is an experience in itself: seemingly endless forests, huge river valleys, the road following the curves of great rivers for mile after mile through range on range of mountains. Not fancying another night in the car, the only problem was the distance. Warned of zero tolerance for speeding and hefty spot fines, I'd spent the first few hours crawling along at the legal 50 miles an hour. At that rate I'd be lucky to arrive that day — even if I didn't fall asleep and go off the road with boredom. But as a succession of cars shot past me, my right foot gradually crept closer to the floor, and finally stayed there. The roads were long, straight and empty, and as the Rockies began to fill the horizon, excitement banished fatigue. Despite a number of coffee stops, by 4pm in the afternoon I was crossing the B C border into Alberta, and an hour later was in Jasper.

Crawling from a sunlit tent next morning, the huge snow-covered pyramid of Mount Robson hung suspended and dreamlike on the horizon. After the flight and yesterday's long drive, lethargy ruled, and after a leisurely breakfast I drove into Jasper for coffee and a look around. But all the time the mountain was there on the horizon, nudging me like a stone in my shoe. Driving past the previous day, Robson had been invisible, and part of me was secretly hoping that it would cloud over again. But as morning became afternoon, it became apparent that it wasn't going to happen. I'd few concrete plans, but the Berg Lake Trail's spectacular curving traverse around the foot of Robson was top of the list. Knowing that the odds of finding B C's highest summit free of cloud are even slimmer than finding Snowdon clear, and convincing myself that jet-lag was all in the mind, I finally stopped vacillating, tore down the tent, threw a minimum of clothing, a pit and a couple of day's food into my sac, and drove the 40 odd miles back to the parking area at the beginning of the trail.

After following the Robson River easily past Kinney Lake and its campsite, the deeply carved valley closes in as the trail winds steeply up the switchbacks of the Valley of a

Thousand Falls — and with long white ribbons of water falling through the trees on either side, the poetic licence of the name was easily justified. The most spectacular is probably the aptly named Emperor Falls, with its small, superbly-sited campground just above it, but from here the trail levels out for the last couple of miles — a good chance to stretch the legs after the steep climbs below.

With the complete return trip described as a four to five-day route, the guidebook time to here is seven to 10 hours, which allows ample time to admire the beautifully rugged scenery along the way, and most hikers split this by overnighing at one of the three campgrounds between the trailhead and the two at Berg Lake itself. If there's no companion to talk and share the experience with, I prefer to travel light and fast — that doesn't mean not seeing or appreciating my surroundings, in fact, without the distractions of conversation, I become even more immersed in my surroundings. It's not a better or worse way of travelling in the hills — just a different one. Starting at 4pm that afternoon, the air had begun to cool, and with a mixture of fast walking and a little running on the easier sections, I reached the main camp site halfway along Berg lake in four hours. This left just enough time to eat and socialize in the last of the sun (keeping one eye constantly peeled for the lightning strikes of marauding chipmunks). Stashing my food in one of the bear-proof lockers, I slipped away from my new-found friends to savour the silence of the lake, and watch the light ebb slowly away from Robson's snows above. Lying contentedly in my bivvy bag that night, gazing up at a sky full of brilliant stars and listening to another chunk of ice breaking away from the glacier across the lake, I was completely oblivious to the fact that a rogue bear was on the rampage, ripping up tents and mauling at least one hiker.

Despite the early-morning chill, and my reluctance to leave the warmth of my sleeping bag, when I saw the dawn light on Robson's glaciers I was glad I'd remembered to set the alarm on my watch. The mini-icebergs that give the lake its name, gradually melt into strange, convoluted shapes, and I postponed the porridge to spend some time taking pictures of these and the mountain above — regretting only the decision to leave the SLR in the car. With a book in my pack, I'd planned to spend the day relaxing by the lake, with perhaps a couple of hours easy walking up to Toboggan Falls or Hargreaves' Lake. But the girls at the camp the previous evening, had persuaded me to do the hike up to Snowbird Pass. Not completely convinced that a full day hike was what I wanted, they'd assured me that four hours would get me to the pass, and half that back to the lake (a brilliantly accurate estimate as it turned out) and though on the long final slog up to the pass, second thoughts did creep in, they were right on both counts — I couldn't have missed it.

Sub-Alpine meadows with cotton-grass luminous in the low early-morning sun, led to a rocky moraine contouring along the sides of the bare, rocky valley left behind by very recent glacier retreat. The path seemed to end at a waterfall cascading over a small cave, where a German couple were encouraging water into a very thin, weak Yorkshire Terrier they'd found only minutes earlier. At the camp site there'd been talk of a dog lost below

Berg Lake some five or six days earlier, and how after a day's fruitless search the owners had been forced to return to Calgary. Somehow it had made its way here, where the shelter of the cave with its supply of fresh water had enabled it to survive almost a week without food.

After a reviving drink from the pool in the cave, the path led on behind the waterfall via 20 minutes of steep, loose scree into a perfect hanging valley complete with lush Alpine meadows. With a stunning view back over the glaciers and moraines of Robson and Rearguard Mountain, this unexpected Shangri-la was studded with wild flowers, its only sounds the cronk of a raven, the wind in the grass and the shrill warning whistle of marmots. Not that they were afraid of me, or at least the one playing hide 'n' seek around a boulder as I tried to photograph it, wasn't. For when I finally sat down with the camera, it rammed its nose against the lens and seemed determined to find a way inside it.

After this, the Snowbird Pass itself was almost an anti-climax. The last stretch over awkward, rough scree and several false summits, seemed to go on and on, and is often the case with 'there and back' routes, when tired it's hard not to think of how you've got to reverse every step. But once attained, the glacier stretching away below, and the shattered peaks filling the horizon (the pass was obviously a geological boundary) were certainly spectacular. And it was one of those views that entice you on, and my feet were strangely reluctant to retrace their steps back down the screes.

An hour's rest at Berg Lake and I was back on the switchbacks down to Whitehorn campground — a lovely riverside site amongst trees, with a superb view up river to the gorge and mountains beyond. Talk here was of THE BEAR, which had visited the site and ripped up some tents the previous night. It had still been around that afternoon, before confronting a ranger on the switchbacks and forcing him off the trail — very unusual behaviour for a brown bear. These normally shy animals will be attracted by the smell of food (or even cosmetics) to raid a tent, but will rarely risk direct confrontation with humans, particularly in daytime in midsummer when there is an abundance of berries, fish and other natural food. Though a tent would offer no more than psychological protection against a bear, I must admit to feeling a little exposed as I zipped up my bivvy sack that night. But after 24 hours of strenuous walking, bodily fatigue soon numbed the mind, and brought another solid nine hours of sleep. Walking out next morning, it soon became obvious that the trail was closed to incoming hikers. Rangers explained that last night the bear had attacked a woman sleeping out at Berg Lake in just her sleeping bag — she was bivvying because the same bear had ripped up her tent at Whitehorn the night before that. Understandably suffering from shock (the poor woman must have felt the bear was stalking her) she'd been helicoptered out and the bear shot. Thinking about it on my way back to the trailhead, I realized that perhaps more than just a dog from Yorkshire had had its full share of luck over the past couple of days...



### **Other worthwhile trails & activities from Jasper**

The Skyline Trail from the much photographed Maligne Lake, is a superb ridge walk. Once again there are several campgrounds en route, and the guidebook suggests taking two to three days on it. Travelling light, it's comparatively easy to do in one long day, though it's well worth spending a night out — either at the superbly situated halfway campground at Crater Lake, or at Tekarra Lake immediately after descending from the ridge.

Right above Jasper is the perfect cone of Pyramid Mountain. A brilliant day-hike to an unrivalled viewpoint, avoid several boring hours hiking forest fire roads to gain the foot of the peak by hiring mountain bikes from Freewheel Cycles. It's still a bit of a grunt on the way up, but coming down is a blast.

Jasper is one of the best Mountain Biking centres anywhere, with some wonderful single-track — route info available also from Freewheel. Apart from classic (rubbly) mountaineering, there are two good bolted-up cragging areas: The Rock Gardens (limestone), and the long quartzite escarpment of Lost Boys.

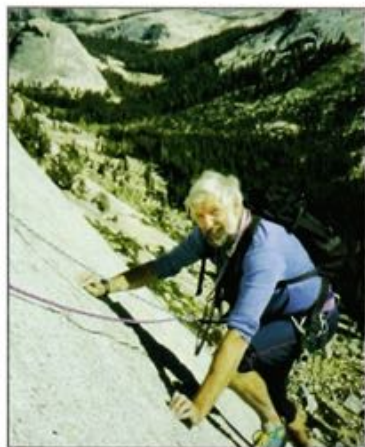
### **Guidebook**

*The Canadian Rockies Trail Guide* by Brian Patton and Bart Robinson. Published by Summerthought. Despite numerous reprints this remains the Bible to hiking in the Canadian Rockies, and likely to remain so. Leaflets with sketch maps and route descriptions are available locally — for Berg Lake from the Info Centre at the trailhead just off the highway, and for the Skyline and Pyramid Mountain at the Jasper Ranger Station. Similar leaflets are available for all major trails in Canadian National and Provincial Parks.

# Obituary

## Tony Frost 1937 (1967) - 2003

Tony Frost, who died after a short illness, understood better than most people the substance of mountains and outcrops. Born in the West Yorkshire coalfield, in one of the dense cluster of mining villages between Doncaster and Barnsley, Tony trained as a mining surveyor and knew the difference between the grit and other rock strata of his home county, because he had spent years tunnelling through them. Perhaps this contributed something to his enthusiasm for outcrop climbing, despite the fact that his massive frame did not lend itself naturally to steep and often brutal crack climbs on the Derbyshire edges and Yorkshire outcrops. But on slabs he was very good, and the long reach helped.



Tony brought to his climbing all the qualities that characterised his life: determination, diligence, strength, good humour and a sense of proportion. Climbing was important to him, but as an activity that complemented his many other interests. He was a great companion in the mountains: he would discuss politics, faith, history and contemporary society, with a well-argued view of his own, but with an appreciation of other people's differing values and opinions. Although he was critical of the acquisitiveness of modern society, and felt strongly about the social and economic decline of mining communities in the 80s and 90s, there was nothing angry about him: he lived his life as he thought most people should, and the world would be better for it if people followed his example.

Tony taught mining surveying, first in Doncaster and then at Tuson College, Preston, moving from one side of the Pennines to the other and, in so doing, beginning a 20-year enthusiasm for the Lake District mountains and rock. As a climber, Tony was steady rather than spectacular. He had great balance and strength, but he was also a big man and, as he would often reflect with a smile, his was a lot of weight to lift on his fingertips. He had climbed on a great majority of the northern grit edges and Lancashire quarries, and on most of the big Welsh cliffs, but his idea of a great day — and mine too as I was with him on this memorable occasion — would be *Grendel*, *Beowulf* and *Hrothgar* on Scrubby Crag, mid-week on a warm day in June, with not a soul in sight. He developed a great affection for the Lakes, and latterly for Lundy; he was a member of the Fell and Rock and spent

many climbing and family holidays at Buttermere. He had some short but successful seasons in the Alps, in the Bregaglia, Dauphine and around Monte Rosa, and a recent high point in his climbing travels was a trip to Yosemite.

It seems particularly cruel that someone who had never smoked, who took regular exercise and who did all things in moderation, should be brought down by a sudden and incurable illness. But even in this Tony was resilient and uncomplaining. When I saw him last, only a week before his death, he was bothered about the 'trouble' — as he saw it — that he was causing, rather than about himself.

The true measure of any life is not memorials or monuments, but memories. At Tony's funeral, Fullwood Methodist Church was packed with relatives, friends, climbing partners, his former students and neighbours, all of whom had one thing in common: we were united in sadness certainly, but more so in the knowledge that we had known and now remembered someone who was special, and who lived on in having made us better through knowing him.

Tony is survived by his wife Veronica and their son and daughter, Robert and Helen. Tony's ashes are where he asked us to leave them, close to Gimmer Crag. And then we went climbing, which is what he wanted, too.

*Michael Nugent*

## **John Galloway** **1941 (1966) - 2005**



For a certain group of climbers who have been members for around 40 years, John will be fondly remembered as part of the vibrant climbing scene in the mid to late 60s, at a time when many of us joined the CC in our 20s. I had met him the year before, on his return from a year in Italy. He and Shineen, his future wife, briefly joined the gang of itinerants sleeping on the floor of North London's Avenue Road flat. A feature at this time was Thursday nights at the Crown — weekly gatherings where arrangements for the weekend's climbing were made, mostly trips up to Wales staying in Ynys, or camping when accompanied by the then taboo girlfriends.

John started climbing at Oxford in 1960. He had what then seemed to be the standard

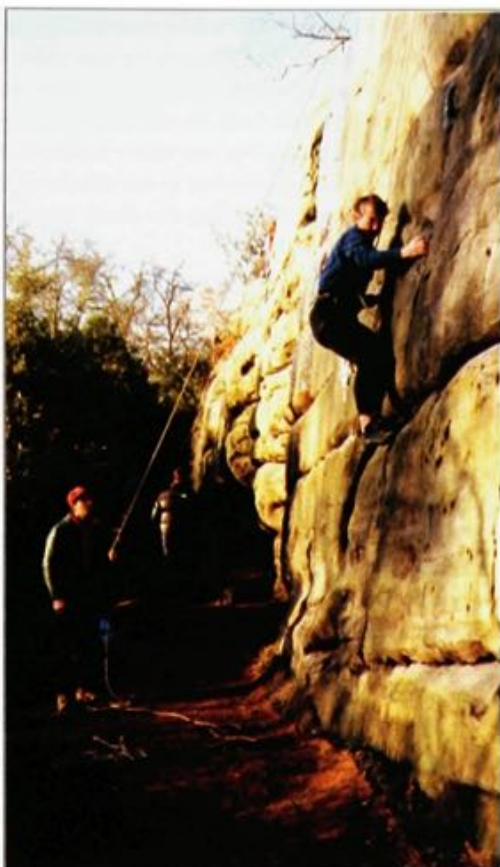
University Club introduction to climbing with an epic in his early days, in this case failing

with Colin Taylor on *Vector* in the rain, and being rescued in the fading light by Shineen and Mike Hornby, both of whom were very inexperienced in such things.

John's climbing was all in the UK to start with; he climbed with Ken on a number of the routes which later ended up in *Hard Rock*, and also with the likes of David Baldock, Malcolm Howells, and Mike Hornby. His first, somewhat belated Alpine season was described in a hilarious article in the 1970/71 *Journal*, 'Experienced Beginners' by Malcolm Howells, which described the sort of the epics that many of us have on our first trips to the Alps. Nevertheless they ended up by climbing the *North Face* of the Dru, which was not bad for a first Alpine season.

John's main job after Oxford and his year in Italy was working for IBM. He left that in 1976 and with his wife Shineen and one other set up the company EPG, developing and selling international insurance software. They started working from home, and built the company up into a highly successful business employing 150 people, which they sold in 1996. Despite his heavy work commitments he did his best climbs in the period from the mid-70s to the early 90s climbing regularly with David Unwin (see below).

We started to climb together regularly in the mid-90s. In particular we embarked on a series of climbs of an adventurous nature starting with *Skeleton Ridge* in the Isle of Wight, and culminating for John (but not for me, I bottled out on this one) with *Monster Crack* at Beachy Head. However, things then started to get out of hand on *Albatross*, a four-mile 'semi-buoyant' sea-level traverse also on the Isle of Wight, when we ended up being rescued by a lifeboat described by John in his article in the 1999/2000 *Journal*, a showcase for his self-deprecating sense of humour. John also came on a number of our Sun Rock



John on home ground, climbing at Harrison's Rocks; note the 'local' belaying technique.

Photo: Bob Moulton



trips to Spain, clipping bolts. John joined the Tunbridge Wells Mountaineering Club, of which he was Secretary of the club for two years. He met many of his climbing partners and friends through the club; he went with them to the Alps, less eventfully this time but he got great satisfaction from his last climb, when with Brian Mead he climbed the *North East Face* of the *Lenspit*. He was also a familiar face on the South East Sandstone scene. This included regular attendance at the CC meets that have been held since 1996, and he was instrumental in encouraging the steady stream of sandstone climbers who have joined the CC in the last 10 years.

John made a major contribution to BMC work in the South East. He took on the role of the area Access rep in the mid-90s. I was chair of the Harrison's Rocks Management Group, and John was my deputy, and he looked after all the other sandstone crags. We both attended numerous meetings with the owners of the various crags, with English Nature and of course BMC committee meetings, but we also got our hands dirty labouring together on the various works at Harrison's and Stone Farm. His two main legacies to local climbers are the acquisition of Stone Farm Rocks by the BMC, and the Sandstone Code of Practice. The former means that the crag is now securely held for climbers for the future, and the latter means that the crags themselves should still be there for future generations. The Code (which went through at least 10 draft versions!) is now the Bible for good practice on these fragile and much abused crags. In his BMC work he applied the skills that had been an important part of the success of EPG. His abilities were to think clearly and to resolve complex and at times controversial issues, to see the other person's point of view, and to make friends and not to alienate people.

John's other main love was skiing. He first went skiing in the late 40s when his father was based in Germany. He started to go skiing regularly in the 70s with his family, but he soon grew tired of piste skiing, and he got into serious off-piste skiing, usually with guides, venturing into steeper and steeper colours.

At the end of 2000, cancer was diagnosed, and he went through major surgery the following year. He recovered, and worked his way back to fitness and was climbing again almost up to his previous standard. Two trips to Spain, El Chorro and Riglos, and a trip to the Handegg area in Switzerland followed together with climbing in the UK, but then the cancer came back to be followed by another major operation and extensive and increasingly unpleasant medication. Throughout this time his friends never ceased to be impressed by the fortitude with which John, supported by his family, bore his tribulations. He was always cheerful, and kept up his social commitments, even if it did mean his sleeping almost the whole way through an RSC production of *Julius Caesar*. As recently as last March, he attended a packed, and at times quite rowdy, open meeting to discuss the future of Harrison's Rocks, when he made a valuable and well-argued contribution to the debate.

John will leave us all with many lasting memories. All who have climbed with him will remember John for his infectious enthusiasm. He'd encourage you to try harder and different climbs, and encourage a sense of optimism. It was a great pleasure to have known



him and to have climbed with him. Our condolences go to Shineen and to his children, Ruth and Pike.

Bob Moulton

David Unwin writes:

I met John in the mid-70s, and we did most of our climbing together for the next 15 years, snatching days and weekends away from London as and when we could. They were halcyon days for climbers of our generation. With chalk, Friends, sticky boots, and a little training, we could aspire to routes that would have been quite beyond us when we were younger.

John and I worked our way through classics in Wales, the Peak and elsewhere. We shared a particular passion for Cloggy, where John's leads included *Daurigol* and *Boldest Direct Finish*. He was a determined and consistent climber who never seemed to be off-form, and if I was gibbering and faffing about (which was frequently), he was remarkably patient and encouraging.

The journey to the crags could sometimes be more memorable than the climbing. There would be an eclectic mix of music that John had just discovered (some of which I still associate with a particular trip), and he would hurl the car round roundabouts while explaining the merits of rear-wheel drive. Apart from his enthusiasm, I remember particularly the fun and laughter. John had an unusually acute eye for the foibles of others, and a great turn of phrase in capturing them.

## David Thomas 1924 (1949) – 2005

Dave Thomas was one of the small group of climbers who for a couple of years at the end of the 1940s, resurrected the 1930s popularity of the Ogwen Valley and in particular Idwal Cottage. These climbers were a mix of Colin Kirkus's contemporaries, such as Yappy Hughes, John Lawton, Taffy Williams, George Dywer, Joe Gianelli, Dickie Morsley, Cyril Machin and newcomers: Peter Hodgkinson, Fred Ashworth, Fred Smith, Geoffrey Paine and Gwen Goddard (Moffat).

He was probably the best rock-climber in the valley at that time, doing all the Very Severe climbs in the Idwal and Glyder Fach guidebooks in the summer of 1947 in nailed boots, with his regular second, Gwen, in bare feet. They would have had just 120ft of hemp rope, two slings and a couple of ex-WD karabiners. A climb such as *Lot's Grove* in nails was a serious proposition with such little protection.

It was his father who introduced a seven-year old Dave to the Welsh mountains, taking him up Cader Idris with his elder brother Arthur. At school he opted to miss field games on Saturdays and went with Arthur across the Denbigh Moors to Snowdonia. His application to join the Rucksack Club notes that he had been 'frequenting Idwal Cottage since



John Disley, Dave Thomas and Ian Booker in October 1949 at Cwm Glas Mawr.  
Photo: Peter Hodgkinson

the days of Connie Alexander's wardenship'. I wonder if he ever, unknowingly, met Kirkus? He joined the CC and the Rucksack Club in 1949, the Alpine Club in 1955 and the ACG in 1956 and remained a member of all three clubs until he died in November 2005. He was on the CC Committee from 1952-54 and was the Custodian of Cwm Glas Mawr from 1954-1965.

With the shift in interest to the Llanberis Pass, Dave climbed regularly with Peter Harding, Tony Moulam, John Lawton, Geoff Piggot and the young climbers from Idwal who had migrated over the Glyders attracted to the Pass by accommodation becoming available at Cwm Glas, Ynys Ettws and Beudy Mawr. During this period he led most of the routes on Clogwyn d'ur Arddu except for *Narrow Slab* where, with Joe Walmsley, he found himself off route and possibly on what would later become *Sheaf*.

Dave was born in Wrexham, went to Grove Park school and at the age of 17 enrolled at Aberdeen University to study geology, sponsored by the Royal Air Force, who claimed him six months later for aircrew training. He joined 10 Squadron of Group 4 Bomber

Command as a bomb-aimer/navigator and took part in night raids over Europe in Halifax bombers. It was during his navigation training that he sighted the Tremadoc cliffs but it was to take 10 years before he could persuade a party of CC climbers to abandon a wet Llanberis Pass and recce 'his' cliffs. He was, in fact, on the first ascent that day in 1951 of the Hound's Heads Pinnacle, and in 1963 wrote to the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* protesting at the proposed demolition of this landmark. He made the point as a geologist and a climber that 'as the tower had stood substantially in this form since the end of the last Ice Age it would be an act of wanton destruction to blow it up now'.

Having exceptionally survived three years of operational tours of duty over Europe, where he first saw the Alps on a raid to southern Germany, he was transferred to Transport Command in India. It was there that he first climbed higher than Snowdon with ascents of Haramouth and Mahades in the Kashmir, both around 14,000ft.

In 1947 Dave returned to Aberdeen and graduated with a BSc in Geology, with Maths, Physics and Geography. With these credentials he joined the British Geological Survey, where he stayed until he retired in 1984. Dave was an 'inventor/scientist' at heart and determined to pass on his considerable knowledge on all things technical to his friends. He had no small talk but delivered mini-lectures. I learnt all I know about the stars in the sky from listening to Dave while lying in a pile of gravel at the side of the road on yet another journey on his motor bike that had failed to arrive at our destination by nightfall. He used a torch, extremely effectively, to direct my attention to the constellations that were so highly significant to RAF navigators 15,000ft above enemy territory at night.

He was always making things that he considered better than his money could buy. He had a Triumph motorbike to which he had fixed a home-made sidecar; its tyre had no inner-tube so Dave had stuffed it with rags and old rope. We set off from Ruabon Road, Wrexham for Snowdonia. My ride became dangerously lumpy, so Dave stopped and stuffed grass into the tyre. Somewhere near Minera, on a steep hill with a sharp turn at its foot, Dave and the bike turned right and the sidecar and I went straight on through a hedge. While we both sat recovering, Dave typically explained to me that it was a good job that the sidecar hadn't broken loose on a left-hand bend, as that would have endangered the bike as well. Later he decided to box in his bike with stiff plastic sheeting set in greenhouse spars. On a journey to Scotland he was stopped at a traffic census where he was solemnly asked if he wished to be listed as a car or a motorbike? Some miles later strong winds demolished his structure and, as with the sidecar, the remains were left over the hedge.

In the 1970s, in his 50s, white haired and overweight, he built a hang-glider to his own design using polythene for the wings. It was taken to Ilkley Moor for a test flight watched by his wife Ruth and two children Deborah and Nick. Fortunately, fatigue fracture set in on take-off and Dave retired with only a damaged ankle. Even a few weeks before he died he was working on a lighting-conductor based on a model he had seen Adam Hart-Davies making on TV.

His high class climbing career was retarded after 1955 by his gain in weight and he declined to join a 'hard rope' on the basis that it was not his weight that was a handicap to his upwards progress but rather that a fall might be difficult for his leader to handle. However, he did diet for the British Caucasus Expedition in 1958 and lost 371bs by living off three oranges a day, as advocated by Dr John Clegg. But it wasn't enough and 'Big Dave', as did other members of the party, found waist-deep powder snow on steep loose rock too unrewarding to persevere with final ascents on Ushba and Gestola.

Dave with his ever seeing eye and enquiring mind writes graphically of this epic cross Europe Expedition, and recorded that 'the trip had taken six weeks and all my year's' leave in one go, but I did not regret one moment of it'.

John Disley

Tony Moulam writes:

Dave, a large, genial Welshman from Wrexham had been a navigator in bombers during the war and, on demob, whilst waiting to go to Aberdeen University, started climbing in Wales. He rapidly became one of the best climbers in the Ogwen Valley and had done all the VSs there, many in nailed boots. He teamed up with Gwen Goddard (Later Moffat) and went to Clogwyn du'r Arddu where they did *Chimney Route*. When Dave returned from his interview at the University, far from being fed up with motorcycling, he proposed they went to the Lakes for a fortnight. When the inevitable rain stopped they went up to Kern Knotts and started on *Sepulchre*. Dave managed to fall off from the traverse to the *Innominate Crack*; Gwen held him, he climbed the rope and continued to complete the climb in stockinged feet. Their next exploit was an attempt on *Central Buttress*, in nailed boots, and after failing there they did *Moss Ghyll Grooves* and finished the holiday with climbs on Pillar and Dow Crag.

A famous exploit whilst Dave was up at Aberdeen was his attempted early ascent of *Clachaig Gully*. All went well until the team reached *Jericho Wall* where, after some struggling, Dave parted company with it still holding his holds. Time was getting on so the party retreated and motorcycled back to Aberdeen. His foot was so swollen he could not remove his boot and a visit to the Doctor next day meant it had to be cut off, to reveal a broken ankle.

I first met Dave Thomas in 1948 when Peter Harding, John Disley and I were staying in the Rucksack Club hut, Beudy Mawr, working on Peter's Llanberis guidebook. Dave arrived from Scotland on his other motorbike, a Norton. He had a sidecar to carry his gear, was protected from the weather by metal leg guards and had rigged a Perspex windscreen, which leaned back at an angle to touch his chest, forced there by the pressure of the wind.

We had checked all the climbs on Dinas Bach, Craig Cwm Beudy Mawr, Clogwyn Pen Llechen and Craig Aderyn and it was time to turn our attention to Clogwyn y Ddysgl. To relieve the tedium of the approach Dave and I opted to climb *Schoolmaster's Gully* on Cynr

Las on the way. We enjoyed it and followed up with *Ribbon Route*, which had the merit of giving us good views of *Fallen Block Crack*. Meanwhile Harding and Disley were making the first ascent of *The Ring*, in an attempt to find an early route called *The Clasp*. Dave and I found an easier way, *Gargoyle*, and then repeated *The Ring*.

Dave was a steady climber, particularly good on delicate pitches although he made an early lead of *Lot's Groove*, in nailed boots. I enjoyed climbing with him and remember our ascent of *Deer Bield Crack* (alas now fallen down) when, on the notorious chimney pitch he was struggling and drops of sweat fell from him onto my upturned face. He continued fighting his way slowly upwards and remarked when I joined him, that he had only continued because he knew that if he failed I would lead it and he would have to repeat his bout with the overhanging walls.

It was not until 1951 that Dave remembered seeing the Tremadoc cliffs from aloft, or at least it was not till then that he could persuade anyone to visit them. Even then the party had set out for Cnicht, but there were constant snow showers so we stopped at Craig Bwlch y Moch, which stayed in the sun. Geoff Sutton and I penetrated the vegetation and 'climbed a buttress to a prominent pinnacle. VD standard. Good climb'. This was Hound's Head Buttress, which became Severe, and had Thomas variations, when the guidebook was published. The climb only lasted until 1963 because the local council blew up the crag, as it claimed that it posed a danger to motorists. We shared other new routes at Tremadoc, notably *Shadrach* where Dave, because of his bulk, had to resort to the outside wall of the exiguous chimney. Our other new route at Tremadoc, which later fell down of its own accord, we called *Rienetta* after his girl friend Rie Legatte. I recall glancing back at Dave on the stance when I was having a little trouble with the rock, and thinking that if need be Dave could hold me easily even with no belay and, reassured, I carried on.

Another memory I cherish is a winter ascent of *Arch Gully* on Craig yr Ysfa. There was a basis of hard old snow but we were hindered by copious amounts of new powder, which cascaded down the pitches and found its way in to chill our bodies under ineffective ex-army anoraks. After surmounting the iced chockstone, which provided a tricky problem, a steep bank of snow ice confronted Dave and he moved boldly up it. But the straps on one of his crampons broke and he lifted his foot out of it. Unperturbed he bent down, retrieved the errant crampon and continued, axe in one hand and flailing claw in the other.

I made an inspired choice in asking Dave to be my Bbest man as he ensured that I did not indulge in the usual headache and nausea-inducing pre-nuptial practices of many. Instead he kept me awake late at night at John Cook's Markeaton home subjecting me to the Science Quiz in the first issue of *The New Scientist*.

Dave climbed regularly with John Neill, Mike Harris and John Mawe and vied with them over their modes of transport. After abandoning his motorbikes (literally in the case of one left behind a wall in Snowdonia). His pride was a green two and a half litre Riley, which looked the part but was never very reliable, so he traded this in for a new Land Rover and delighted in showing me the controllability of a four wheel drive vehicle on the dicey ice

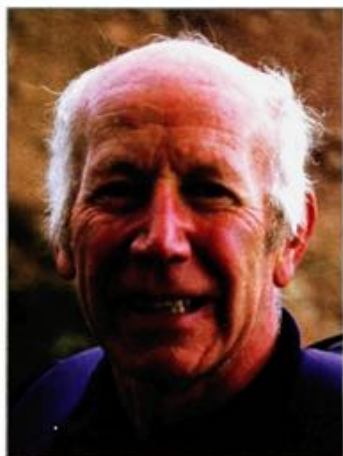


and snow-covered slopes of the Snake Pass, on our way home from some gritstone climbing. Other adventures with the Land Rover include having one of his sisters turn it over when he allowed her to drive it when he took it home to Wrexham to show in pride. Another time we endured an uncomfortable trip to Stanage as he had taken the canvas roof off and folded the windscreen flat as we set off in good weather. This deteriorated for the return journey but we were unable to replace the screen and roof, due to recalcitrant nuts and bolts.

Their companionship culminated in a trip by nine members of the Club to the Caucasus in 1958, which had long been a dream. John Hunt was leader and I think that he was responsible for Dave's slimming plan prior to leaving. It involved eating only three oranges a day, which was not much sustenance for a man of his size. However, he did supplement the bare rations with ice cream, and always maintained that it did not count as food. This foray was a forerunner of the Pamirs expedition in 1962 and I am sure that Dave's personality had helped to foster the good relationships with Russians that led to the invitation.

Just after this the Geological Survey moved Dave from Manchester to Nottingham and we saw much less of him. In fact, I do not believe we climbed together again as he married and adopted two children. I last saw him at the Centenary Dinner, being as social and sociable as ever. He will be greatly missed.

### **Eric Langmuir** **1931 (1968) – 2005**



I first met Eric when I arrived at the start of my first term at Fettes in early 1946. I was struggling to get a bulging suitcase up to my dormitory when Eric appeared and offered to help. So began a friendship that was to last just a few months short of 60 years. We both left Fettes in 1950 and Eric went off to do his National Service in the Royal Artillery before going up to Cambridge to read Natural Sciences. His athletic potential became apparent when he won the army cross country championship. I, in the meantime, had discovered a keen interest in hill-walking.

In 1950, having fallen victim to Munroitis, I set out from my home in Selkirk for the Cuillins on a three-speed Raleigh bicycle laden down with tins of food. I arrived several days later at Glenbrittle Youth

Hostel feeling lucky to survive the road from Carbost, which in those days was basically a boulder field interspersed with large and deep potholes. On the second day I was ap-

proached by a gent from Newcastle whose companion had to return home. He asked me if I could rock-climb and if not would I like to learn? I jumped at the chance, went to Portree that afternoon and had a cobbler knock clinkers and tricounis into my hill-walking boots and so I 'learned the ropes'.

Early in 1951 I was staying at Eric's parents' home in Glasgow when he asked me how I had spent the previous summer holidays. I told him that I had been rock-climbing on Skye. His face lit up. He said: "Toby (the nickname I acquired at school and which Eric used all the years that I knew him) I wish I'd known sooner. I'd love to rock-climb and I've been looking for someone to show me." We agreed to go to Skye that summer. In the meantime I had acquired a very powerful 650cc Triumph Thunderbird motorbike courtesy of my father for the then princely sum of £230. This was our transport for the Skye trip and later for many others. I would leave home in Selkirk after work on a Friday, head for Glasgow on the A8 (no M8 then), stop for a meal at Eric's then head off at top speed for Glencoe or wherever. Eric delighted in riding pillion urging me to go ever faster as we hurtled up Loch Lomondside. If you can imagine that road in the 1950s you will marvel, as I do now, that we survived these trips. But survive we did and that first summer we arrived in Glenbrittle complete with ex-WD karabiners, seven hemp slings, one hemp rope(!) and one new-fangled nylon rope. By now I had acquired, in exchange for about two weeks' salary, a decent pair of nailed boots from Lawrie of London. We were ready. After a few introductory scrambles it was apparent that Eric had a natural ability and we set off for his first climb, which was Cioch Direct, graded Severe. Three days later he was leading me up a Very Severe on the Crack of Doom. Apart from two very wet days we enjoyed perfect weather and were able to make full use of our three weeks to climb many routes. Eric never forgot that holiday and his first rock-climbs and for my getting him started on rock-climbing.

It was while we were in Skye that I first noticed Eric's amazing co-ordination of eye and body and his ability to cover rough terrain including scree and boulders at full speed. Had he misjudged he would have broken a leg, or worse, on many occasions. He must surely have broken the record for the descent of the Stone Shoot (in those days there were actually stones in it), including an apparently suicidal leap over a break at about the halfway point. I watched in amazement.

I also got a taste of Eric's mischievous sense of humour while staying at the Youth Hostel. We had on a number of occasions exchanged uncomplimentary words with a group of loud-mouthed individuals who were hogging the communal stove. The loud-mouths had boiling on the stove a greasy malodorous brown stew in what appeared to be a small version of a witch's cauldron. Since it was at the end of two days of heavy rain and the hostel's drying facilities were overwhelmed somebody had fixed a length of string above the stove on which numerous small items were hanging to dry. I noticed in particular a heavy woollen sock which was giving off an odour even more vile than the stew above which it was loosely and strategically placed. Eric and I exchanged glances. The

guardians of the cauldron were in a corner, their brew unattended, noisily and otherwise occupied. Eric had also noticed the sock and a gleam came into his eye. He said: "What do you think ,Toby?" I replied: "Go for it!" Eric reached as if for something on the line and 'accidentally' knocked the sock into the cauldron. Panic — the sock was floating on the mess but quick as a flash I used my spoon to push it under. "You can chalk that one up," said Eric. We sat down to eat and to await the outcome. Ten minutes later we were treated to a volley of oaths and imprecations from the corner, where the group eventually dined on stale bread and jam, having dumped the contents of the cauldron into the burn. Half an hour later a spotty young man came round to ask if anyone had seen a black sock. We capped our evening by directing him to the unhappy group in the corner, who, we told him, had very likely seen a black sock. His fate at the hands of the group was not recorded.

Eric and I climbed some more in the Lakes and Llanberis Pass and he introduced me to his friends in the CUMC, including Mike O'Hara and Bob Downes. In June 1954 Eric, Mike and I were at the head of Loch Etive to investigate a report that Eric's father had given of some rocks on Beinn Trilleachen that he had spotted when fishing on the loch and which might be of interest. They turned out to be much bigger than we had imagined. The angle looked deceptively easy but they were just about at the limit of friction. We were rather overawed since we did not have anything like today's rock shoes. Eric wore a pair of gym shoes while Mike and I wore Vibrams. We decided to go for the easiest looking line and the result was *Sickle*, Very Severe but vegetated and a disappointment. Next morning Eric thought he spotted a promising line so we roped up and Mike started out in a determined manner. He led the first three pitches, including a short but brutish overhang. At this point he found himself on an expanse of slabs where holds were apparently non-existent. After several abortive attempts and some consultation, Eric took over the lead and eventually succeeded in climbing a difficult and exposed pitch and then led the rest of the route. Each time we thought an impasse had been reached Eric found the vital move to continue the climb. The route was far from obvious and it was a bold and brilliant lead for the time. We had discovered *Spartan Slab*.

Eric then continued to climb with winter routes on Ben Nevis and visits to the Alps and the Dauphine with other CUMC members. He spent time too at the Ecole Nationale de Montagne et de Ski in Chamonix with Geoff Sutton, Bob Downes (both CUMC) and Alan Blackshaw (OUMC) and in these summers he made several ascents. Notable among the climbs which he did was the first British ascent of the North East Face of the Piz Badile along with Bob and Geoff. At that time it was regarded as one of the hardest routes in the Alps.

Although I did not accompany him on these Alpine trips we still found time for Scottish outings together and I am glad to say that his sense of humour remained undiminished. I by now was the proud owner of a small Standard convertible in which we were driving up Glen Ogle on one memorable occasion with the top down. We were stuck

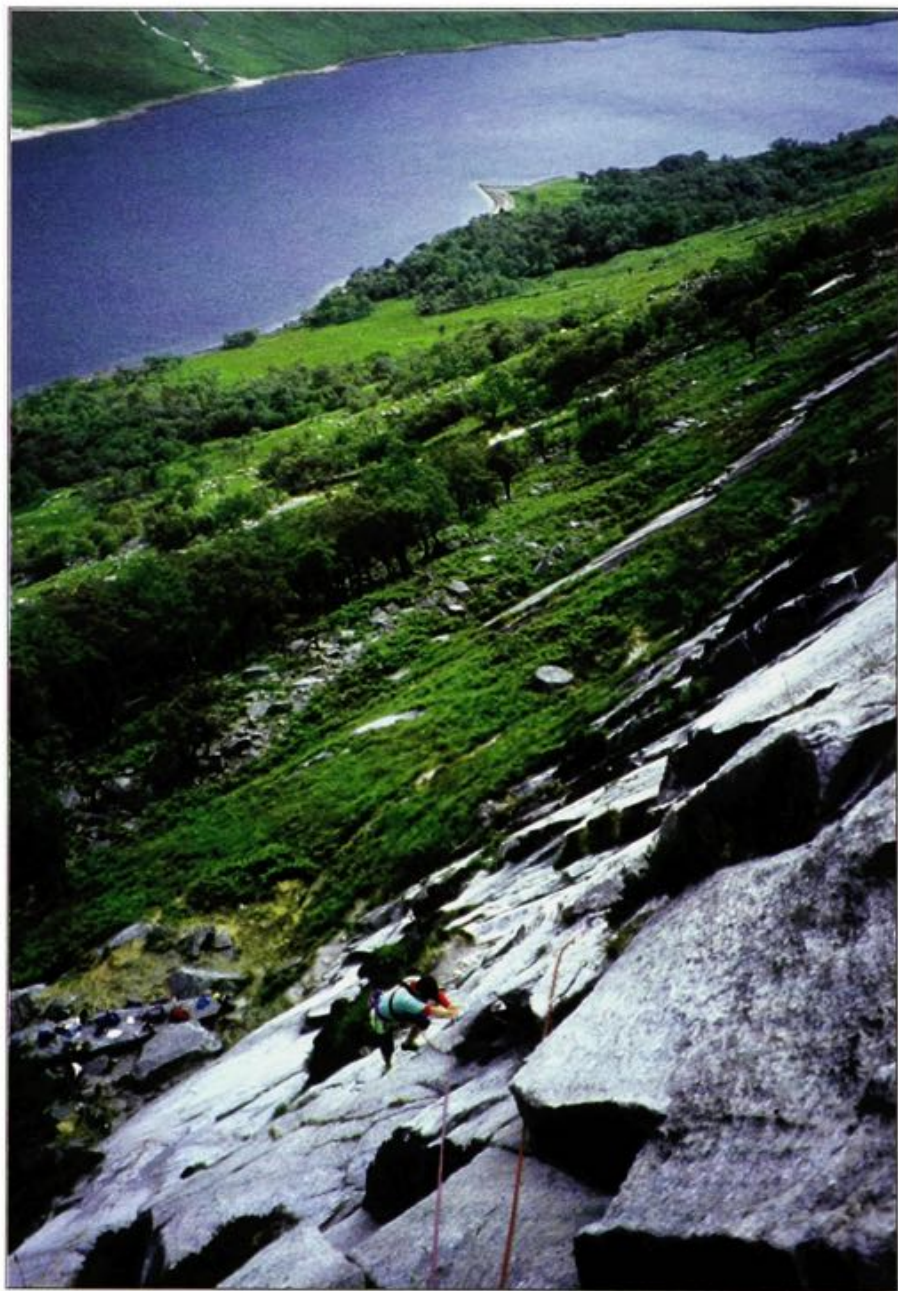


Left to right: Bob Downes, Eric Langmuir and John Mallinson lay out the gear needed to climb *Spartan Slab*, June 1954. Photo: Mallinson collection

behind a large lorry loaded with three outsize cylindrical steel tanks which were new and empty. A clear straight appeared but the driver made every effort to prevent me from overtaking. I floored the accelerator and Eric pulled out his piton hammer from the pile of equipment at his feet, stood up, and as we passed he gave each tank in turn a resounding clout. The resulting noise became a mighty echo which reverberated all around the glen. The lorry driver was totally mortified and we were laughing so much that it took me all my time to avoid an oncoming car.

After graduating from Cambridge, Eric spent time in Canada as a geologist and there he met Maureen Lyons whom he married in 1957. Shortly after this our paths diverged and I headed for New Zealand and a career abroad while Eric returned to London to teach for a short time before turning to his career in the education and practice of outdoor sport with his appointment at Whitehall Outdoor Centre in Derbyshire in 1959. He remained there until his appointment as Principal at Glenmore Lodge in 1963. He presided over the centre as the place in Britain for winter mountaineering and continued to improve his own skills. In skiing he gained the top qualification of the British Association of Ski Instructors and in later years became the hOnorary President of BASI. He was himself caught in an avalanche while out on a rescue and it inspired in him a lifelong







interest in avalanche research. He was one of those who was active in setting up the avalanche reporting system in Scotland. Later he was appointed Chairman of the Snow and Avalanche Foundation of Scotland. It was for his work in this and in mountain rescue that Eric was appointed MBE in 1986 and was made a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. When at Glenmore Lodge he first published his book *Mountain Leadership*, later *Mountaineering and Leadership* which is the official handbook of the Mountain Leadership Training Board of Great Britain. It has become the 'Bible', widely known simply as 'Langmuir', for all who would go safely among the British mountains and especially for those who must be responsible for others.

His career then took him to Edinburgh in the interests of his children's education. First he was appointed senior lecturer at Moray House, setting up an outdoor education programme there. In 1976 he moved on to become an Assistant Director in the Leisure and Recreation Services Department of Lothian Region. In this post he had responsibility for all countryside matters which included Hillend Ski Centre and Port Edgar on the Forth. He was also involved in establishing the Pentland Hills country park. It was from this post that he retired in 1988.

I followed my career briefly back to London and then on to Santa Monica in California. We remained in touch over the years and when I retired in 1994 and returned to the UK I was welcomed as warmly as ever by Eric when I visited him in Avelochan and was able to admire the house designed by his son Roddy. He still sought new and exciting experiences, and when I told him that my own house in LA had been trashed by an earthquake he claimed he was envious as he had always wanted to experience an earthquake.

It was now that we were in closer touch again that I was able to suggest that we should attend an SMC Dinner as between us we had a total of 100 years of membership and only I had put in one appearance at such a function in all those years. To my surprise Eric agreed and he was surprised and delighted to be introduced for the first ascent of *Spartan Slab* in its 50th anniversary year. He held an ambition to attempt it once more in 2005 but sadly this was not to be.

On my way to the dinner we had time for a short outing and Eric as ever was full of vigour and good spirits and bounded over a seven foot deer fence with no bother at all. I struggled a bit and when I complained and asked his advice on my arthritic knees Eric's response reflected the philosophy of his life. "Toby, you just have to keep going." This he did to the end of his life. In July and August he competed in two separate orienteering events with runs on six days in each. In August he was fellwalking in the Lake District, completing three days' walking across country with an impressive descent down the steep scree from Dore Head into Wasdale in the company of his old friend and colleague John Cook. It was, therefore, a real shock to hear that he had become very ill but he was able to summon up the strength to thank me for my friendship over the years and especially

Opposite: Bob Douglas on the classic *Spartan Slab*, Glen Etive. Photo: Ian Smith

for having introduced him to rock-climbing. For my part I was able to tell him in all sincerity that I regarded his friendship as a privilege. It was only three days later that the phone call came to tell me that Eric had passed away with his partner, Marion, and his children at his side.

How can I summarise such a full life and such a personality? It is given to very few of us to spend our life doing what we love best. Eric not only managed this but in doing so introduced the pleasures and skills of the outdoor sporting life to so many others. His list of achievements is formidable: Cambridge, Whitehall, Glenmore Lodge, senior administrator in Lothian Region, first and first British ascents, significant contribution to avalanche research and to mountain rescue, MBE and FRSE and of course the classic 'Langmuir' read by so many, and the list could go on.

The two major setbacks in his life, the loss of his wife Mo in 1980 and of his sister Marjorie in 1998 who both shared his love of the outdoors, and both to cancer, were borne with a quiet resolve. My own personal memory of Eric is not a fixed picture but a kaleidoscope of many mental snapshots from the past — the boundless and infectious enthusiasm for everything that he did: mad motorcycle rides at all hours, boulder hopping and scree running, his inspired lead on *Spartan Slab* and so many great climbing days with Eric and his friends and his ever cheerful sense of humour. Now that Eric is gone from among us I shall miss him deeply. One could not wish for a better companion in all seasons on rock and hill.

I extend my deepest sympathy to Marion and to Eric's wonderful family.

*John Mallinson*

## **Geoffrey Millwood 1928 (1954) – 2004**

Geoffrey Millwood was a member of the Club from 1954 until his death, aged 75, after fighting cancer for four years. He was brought up in Croydon and read economics and politics at the London School of Economics where he became an early member of the LSE Mountaineering Club. In the late 40s he was a frequent visitor to Harrisons Rocks, where he attained a high rock-climbing ability under the tutelage and encouragement of Nea Morin. In 1947 he started to climb in North Wales with the LSEMC and friends who called themselves the Bar Room Mountaineering Club, and he was part of the general increase in the popularity of climbing at that time. He spent his first Alpine season with the LSEMC and others in the Dauphiné Alpes, including ascents of Les Bans and Mont Gioberney.

In 1948 he suffered an unfortunate experience which led to him becoming one of the most safe and careful of climbers. He met a climber at Idwal who invited him to join him on Glyder Fach's Direct, sharing this man's hemp rope. The rope broke with fatal consequences for the owner. That year Geoff attended an Alpine Club beginner's meet in

Grindelwald with Graham Brown, who must have taught him a lot. After graduating in 1949 Geoff started his National Service in the R.A.F., which does not seem to have hindered his climbing as he remained a regular member of the North Wales scene. Geoff and other Londoners then relied heavily on motorbikes but later he owned one of the few cars available (a Citroen Light 15).

1949 saw him in Courmayeur, with Denis Greenald, where they were introduced to Toni Gobbi, the guide (who was very disparaging about climbing in nails). Encouraged by Gobbi they climbed the Aiguille du Midi from the Tarino hut, the Dent du Geant, the Tour Ronde and the Dent du Requin (voie normal) guideless, and the Aiguille de Rochefort with Gobbi. The climax was the Arette des Hirondelles on the Grandes Jorasses, a first British ascent, with Gobbi as guide. While in Courmayeur, Geoff received news of his success in obtaining his Economics degree.

In 1954 he climbed the Grivola with Denis and Gwen Greenald before meeting other Bar Room Mountaineers in Chamonix, camping, until Gwen discovered the foresters' chalet near Montanvers. The weather was bad but they traversed the Grand Chamois with Johnny Lees and climbed the Blaitiere. Geoff was demobbed from the RAF in 1951 and joined the Inland Revenue for a while.

He had a good guideless season in 1952 with Dick Tombs in the Valais, climbing the Tasch, and traversing the Zinal Rothorn, Ober Gabelhorn, Matterhorn, and Weisshorn, in two weeks in indifferent weather.

In 1953 Geoff visited the Bregaglia with friends for the North Ridge of the Piz Badile, leading through with Dick Tombs, before driving to Courmayeur for the ascent of the South ridge of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey, again with Dick. Together with the Greenalds they had two bivouacs and a thunderstorm.

After leaving the Tax Inspectorate Geoff became the manager of a flour mill in Surrey and after his marriage to Gillian in 1961, the family moved to East Africa where Geoff managed the Uganda grain mills near Lake Victoria and indulged his other sport of sailing. On return from Africa he became a partner in a small chemical and engineering factory in Gloucestershire, retiring in 1988, when it was sold.

Many holidays were spent skiing and in later years, with other ancient climbers, hill-walking in the French Alps and the Pyrenees, Corsica, Dolomites, Switzerland and Spain (where they bought a house) and sailing on the south coast. They also had a small cottage in North Wales. Until his most recent illness, Geoff was one of the fittest of his contemporaries never known to tire, and always recognisable by his mop of flaming red hair, rarely protected from the elements and often a notable lack of other equipment, e.g. boots on a winter walk on the Glyders, and anorak when doing an Easter round of the Welsh 3000ers. Imperturbable. Geoffrey leaves Gillian with a son, two daughters and four grandchildren.

*John Brownsort*

## J P (Jim) O'Neill 1939 (1989) – 2005

When Jim O'Neill joined the club he was 50 years old and bearing the rather rounded features and figure appropriate to middle age. Those meeting him then for the first time would hardly imagine that 30 years previously, as an ex-racing cyclist, he was a particularly lean and lithe athlete who was, for a time, one of the leading rock-climbers of the day.

That was the period shortly after the stars of *The Rock and Ice* had set new standards with their break-through ascents in the Pass and on Clogwyn d'ur Arddu. Snapping at their heels was Hugh Banner, making many second ascents and the occasional new route, and Hugh's preferred partner, after early 1958, was Jim. They had met at Helsby, where Jim had only recently discovered rock-climbing, but his natural ability was quickly demonstrated in North Wales. His first visit to Cloggy, after only a few months climbing experience, resulted in the second ascent of the *Girdle of the East Buttress*. That was jumping in at the deep end with a vengeance, but Jim's early promise was maintained and during the next few years the pair made many memorable climbs. They made the first ascents of *Karwendel Wall* on the Grochan, the *High Level Girdle* and the *Overhanging Arête* finish to *The Grooves* on Cynr Las. In Cwm Idwal, Jim led the new second pitch of *Rowan Tree Slabs*, which the pair considered to be the hardest slab pitch they had yet met. Since they had made, the previous day, an early ascent of *White Slab* on Cloggy, that was saying something. On a foray to Scotland the pair made the third ascent of *Creag a'Bhancair Wall*, having deciphered the notes made by John Cunningham on soggy toilet paper in the pub.

Hugh and Jim were clearly a formidable team and might have gone on to even greater achievements. However, the pressure of climbing always near the limit finally became, for Jim, nearer to pain than to pleasure and he began to enjoy himself more on less demanding routes. He had joined the Vagabond MC and was quite content to lead us lesser mortals up the standard VS and Severe classics in Wales and, on weekday evenings, at Helsby.

Before indoor walls arrived, Helsby Crag was much more important to Merseyside and Cheshire climbers than it is today. Jim was one of a group of local tigers who had developed their own party pieces, and for the spectator it was an eye-opener to see Jim, Hugh Banner, John Clements and Alan Bell vying to make the most stylish solo ascents of *Flake Crack* or *Eliminate 1*. At the time Jim enjoyed considerable kudos as the first and only ascender, on a slack top rope, of *The Beatnik*, then considered Helsby's hardest route and now graded E5 6a. But, increasingly, Jim abandoned the limelight and became a kindly guide and mentor to this writer and other novices. He had a terrific memory for the moves. "Well, you can do it like that," he would say, often, "but it's more elegant if you put your left foot up there..." or wherever. He was a most patient instructor, a quality put to good use when, some years later, he became a teacher of technical drawing at Birkenhead Technical College.

In the Vagabonds Jim met Valerie Oldham, of Liverpool. They married — to the chagrin

of every unattached male who knew Val — and set up home in Wallasey. Such was their generous hospitality that their house became the ever-open door after closing time at the pub and they became the popular hub of a wide circle of friends. Jim was highly convivial and there is no escaping the part which alcohol played, increasingly, in his life. Perhaps Val was too indulgent, perhaps his friends were; but she loved her husband and such was his sheer likeability and good nature that it was extraordinarily difficult to avoid collaborating in what one knew, at heart, was unwise.

Jim continued climbing, to the great benefit and enjoyment of those who partnered him. Like many Vagabonds he graduated to the more mature company of Liverpool's senior club, The Wayfarers, and so to an even wider circle. This easy facility for friendship was not due to any special charm, and certainly not to sparkling conversational ability. It was just that he was so easy-going, gentle and kind. If he could help you, he would, which is why, through his engineering skill, one or two of us owned droopy picked ice-axes long before they became commercially available.

The arrival of two sons, of whom he was very proud, brought with them the inescapable duties of fatherhood and his friends began to see a little less of him. He and Val had fallen in love with Scotland and in 1982 took the lease on a remote cottage in the wilds of Knoydart, at the head of Loch Arkaig. The owner was friendly and, in addition to exploring the local mountains Jim was able, as a practical man, to make himself useful about the estate.

Then, in 1989, came tragedy. Crossing the road while shopping in Wallasey, Valerie was knocked down by an accelerating motor bike and seriously injured. She died in hospital a few days later. The shock to Jim was devastating. Family and friends can do only so much, and they are not around in the middle of the night. Yet Jim rallied bravely; life had to go on, and his younger son was still living at home and needed support.

He kept the cottage in Knoydart, having made yet more friends in the area. George and Ray Lee and their family had a holiday home nearby, so he was rarely lonely. For the last few years of his life he was comforted by the companionship of Mavis, widow of one-time Vagabond Joe Lynch.

None of us can claim to be perfect. With one weakness, so heavily outweighed by the good nature, kindness and generosity which he invariably displayed, Jim leaves a warm glow in our memories.

Ben Stroude



## John Anderson Sumner 1935 (1984) – 2004

That John Sumner ('Fritz' for reasons lost in the mists of time <sup>(1)</sup>) is dead is something we will find it hard to come to terms with. A short time ago, as he was well into his 60s with vigour and enthusiasm scarcely diminished, it would have seemed inconceivable that a man who influenced our climbing lives so profoundly, and who himself always lived his own life in such a peculiarly intense way, would within a year have been taken from us. And with a career spanning a full 50 years in the forefront of climbing, two whole generations of climbers, it is not easy for any one person to summarise all of his achievements.

John was born in Manchester in 1935, and although the family moved to Blackburn in his childhood, he always regarded himself as a Mancunian. Before taking to walking and climbing, John was introduced to caving and potholing in 1951 by his father but by 1952 he had done such classic walks as the Three Peaks and the Skye Ridge in fast times. In 1953 he joined Larry Lambe on the first traverse of the Peak Horseshoe, a 60-mile walk inspired by Eric Byne, and supported by members of The Mountain Club, the club he had joined on moving to Stafford as an apprentice.

Between 1953 and 1956 he was climbing routes of increasing difficulty and by the end of that period had led many of the current hard routes, including, for example, such test pieces of the time as *Cenotaph Corner* and *Cemetery Gates*. Even today, 50 years on, these routes are rites of passage for the aspiring climber: at that time they were surrounded by an almost mythical aura of impregnability. On the basis of these and other climbs, he joined *The Rock & Ice*.

His first ventures into the new route scene were aid routes on Yorkshire limestone. At this time, Limestone was considered a dangerously unreliable medium, suitable perhaps for aid routes, but not for conventional climbing. Aid climbing was sneered at by the climbing establishment: epithets such as 'Steeplejacks' and 'The Dangle and Whack Brigade' were in currency and aid climbing was thought (by those who had never tried it) to be an easy option. However, John stuck to his guns, and produced a number of routes, including *Dierdre* on Kilnsey and *Cave Route* on Gordale with Mountain Club partners, Dave Adcock and Barrie Knox, followed by *Main Overhang* on Kilnsey with Ron Moseley. To this day, by no means all of his aid routes have been climbed free.

The Mountain Club had a hut in the Cywarch Valley in Mid-Wales, and he also put up some routes there amongst them the classic *Stygian Wall* and the aid route *Purge* (which he subsequently climbed free at E3 5c in 1979). In the early 60s he formed a partnership with Dave Sales and they put up several more aid routes: *North Buttress* on Kilnsey and *Gordale Main Overhang*. John was profoundly affected by Dave's tragic death in a fall from *Quietus* on Stanage.

<sup>(1)</sup> According to Peter Benson, this was Whillans who, when he discovered John's appetite for physical exercise and climbing, dubbed him 'Fritz' because it reminded him of German intensity.



John, with Cywarch behind. Photo: Ian Smith

In 1968 his first contribution to guidebook writing produced the Kilnsey section of the *Yorkshire Limestone* guide and, in the process, he found further new routes on that crag. Towards the end of the 1960s based on The Mountain Club's new hut, Bryn Hafod, work began on the first West Col guidebook to *Central Wales*. At that time, the hut was reserved for club members one weekend each month and these occasions were always well-attended, month after month, as, with John as inspiration and leader, an extraordinary period of new route activity got under way. He dominated these gatherings in a way which might seem difficult to imagine these days. The group doing the routes was small and close-knit; the first ascent lists read like a roll-call of old friends and acquaintances. He would set the agenda for the day's climbing, he himself would be gardening something hard with his chosen acolyte; others would be dispatched to do something less demanding: a V Diff, Severe, or VS, perhaps, where a gap needed filling; or maybe a second ascent, to check a grade. With his infectious laughter he would preside over the evening gatherings in the lounge, or as often as not in the kitchen, at Bryn Hafod, occasionally tapping the table and bringing the conversation back to 'Climbing Talk' if the subject wandered onto more frivolous topics.

It was about this time, (his first marriage had broken up some time before) that Jill first appeared on the scene. She seconded him on first ascents of the highest standard, and one often detected her lively imagination in the names given to his routes. She remained



John Sumner with Robin Bright and Roger Salisbury in Spain. Photo: Peter Benson

an essential influence for the rest of his life, partnering him on climbs, including new routes, throughout their life together. Soon, they were married, and Kurt was born, and Jill climbed less for a while, while their children were young, but it is a credit to her strength of character that she was able to keep a balance between bringing up a young family and supporting John in his activities.

While the project continued on the rock routes for the guidebooks, attention turned in the winter to snow and ice. (We still used to see snow and ice in Wales in those days.) John always said he liked ice-climbing for its similarity to artificial climbing in the sense that both involve using tools (pegs or axes) to find a way using the material in front of you. He also liked the strenuous nature of hard ice-climbing, which again it shares with artificial climbing. Among these discoveries were *Tourist Gully* (II/III), named after an anonymous walker who attempted to follow the first ascent ("Excuse me, is this the best way to the top?") and later *Maesglasau Falls* (IV) and the flagship *Trojan* (V), in summer a VS, often damp and dirty, but transformed in the hard winter of 1979 into a ribbon of perfect ice.

Following *Central Wales* (West Col 1973) and *Dolgellau Area* (West Col 1975) other guides followed: a paperback supplement *Aran-Cader Idris* (West Col 1980); *Mid-Wales* (Climbers' Club 1988). Following the appearance of this last, Martin Crocker began to take an interest in the area, leading to a chance meeting at Cywarch in 1989 which Crocker

describes in his profile of John in *Climber* (March 1996). A partnership of mutual respect and admiration developed between the modern star and the old Master and they did a number of first ascents together. John was naturally responsible for the major contribution to the encyclopaedic *Meirionydd* (Climbers' Club 2002). He continued to find new routes after this was published: his last was *Pack Rat* (E1), on Craig y Merched in the Rhinogs, climbed with Jill in April 2003.

His early Alpine career followed a course no less meteoric than his British climbing. His first trip to the Alps in 1954 included the *Hornli Ridge* and, in 1956, with Ron Moseley, Morty Smith and Dave Adcock, he attempted an early British ascent of *The West Face of the Dru*. This ended in his taking an 80ft fall due to unzipping wedges and a retreat in epic conditions. *The West Face* became a *cause célèbre* for him, and it was not until 1971, after two more unsuccessful attempts, that he eventually climbed it. In the meantime he had done a number of major routes in the Dolomites, such as the second British ascent of the *Squirrels Arête*, Cima Ovest (1970) and an 18-hour ascent of the *Brandler-Hasse* route with Ern Entwisle leading the hard free-climbing pitches and John the artificial sections.

From the *West Face* in 1971 he went on to do the *Route Major* on the Brenva Face, but it was his attempt on *The Walker Spur* the same year which all but ended his career, and indeed his life. Struck on the shoulder by a rockfall high on the route, an epic helicopter rescue ensued. The shoulder was smashed almost beyond recognition and he was told he would never climb again but, of course, they hadn't reckoned with John. His logbook bluntly states 'six months before I could start climbing again'. The next year (1972) he was back continuing to collect *Grandes Courses* in the Alps, and was elected to the Alpine Climbing Group later that year.

In recent years he took to climbing hard Alpine routes in winter. Winter approaches may be hampered by deep snow and the nights are longer and colder, but the objective dangers are less, the weather is more stable. He would climb major North Faces, but also pure ice routes on frozen waterfalls. He considered the *North Face of the Droites* to be his finest achievement. He also made trips to Canada for ice-climbing and would enthuse about the security of protection on the perfect Canadian ice compared to the uncertain material found on the big routes on, say, Ben Nevis.

By way of training for winter trips to the Alps he would do the Derwent Watershed in winter each year, carrying bivvy gear. He was fiercely competitive, and was always in the lead group on a walk. Steve Coneys, his partner on many winter routes, regarded these Watershed walks as the sort of experience after which many people would expect counselling. But, he said, all he got from John was: "Same again next year?" His last Alpine route was the *North Face of the Wildspitze* in the Otztal, another route he had pursued over several years. Shortly after his return from Austria he developed a painful lump in his leg, which proved to be a thrombosis, precursor of his final illness.

After a career such as this it might seem the final irony that John has died, not battling with an Alpine face in winter, not freezing on a storm-lashed bivouac, but in hospital, after

an illness which seemed a mystery to his doctors. But perhaps that is to misjudge him. To call him one of the great survivors might be a cliché, but what is beyond question is that he was an obsessively careful climber. He would spend seemingly interminable periods selecting belays, hacking out ice stances, while his second waited anxiously below. Before a big Alpine route he would study the weather forecasts. ("Beau Temps," he'd say, his somewhat ponderous Lancashire speech making no concessions to the niceties of French pronunciation, "Beau Temps, that's what you want. Just watch out for the 'Oranges'") But in Snell's camp site at Chamonix, if Fritz was seen packing up his gear, people would hurry to follow suit: if he was heading for the hill, the prospects were likely to be good. You felt safe with Fritz: he looked after himself, but he also looked after you. Moreover, his climbs were meticulously planned. Legend has it that he bivvied on the Pedestal at the Roaches in preparation for *The West Face of the Dru*.

Driven by forces incomprehensible to most of us, his urge to climb was on a different scale to that of the average weekend climber. It defined his whole life: he saw every activity in terms of climbing; his assessment of other people was in terms of their attitude towards climbing. After a good route, or a good day on the crag, the urge seemed to be sated for a while, like an addict who has had his fix, but soon it would return and he would become restless again. Relations with his climbing partners were often stormy: many of us have memories of violent disagreements on the hill. If you climbed with him, it was usually on his terms: at times you felt caught up in the relentless machinery of his climbing drive.

He was not an easy man to get to know and many never saw beyond the obsessed hardman to the sensitive, even shy, but essentially warm person beneath. He had an important gentle side: he loved fishing and on rest days in the Alps could often be found photographing flowers with a close-up lens. Steve Coneys recalls him talking to the Choughs outside the deserted Couvercle Hut on a winter trip.

He worked all his life as a designer of transformer equipment at English Electric and its successors in Stafford and it is another irony of his life that he had worked there for so long that he became indispensable and was not allowed to retire until his 65th birthday. He was always reluctant to talk about his work: I remember some Americans we met in the Alps who enquired, by way of polite conversation, what we did when we weren't climbing, and got an abrupt brush-off. ("Sorry, chap\*, I don't like talking about work when I'm in the hills.") Having said that, I did find him, later in that same trip, peering with professional interest at a transformer substation adjacent to the camp site.

It was John's relationship with his family that many people have found most difficult to understand. How could a man combine such an active climbing life with bringing up a family? But Jill was his most constant climbing partner: except for a period while the children were young she climbed with him constantly; they journeyed together to Wales as a family, weekend after weekend, while the guidebook work was under way. As the children

\* Note: This is not a typo. 'Chap' was an expression he used.



grew up he was immensely proud of their achievements: both Kurt and Chloë climbed with him on new routes. He adored Jill, his most constant climbing partner and, in a very real sense, his muse, and he sought her approval in all he did.

All his life he had a dread of becoming old and infirm. He trained relentlessly to keep himself fit; he continually judged his performance by the standard of a young person, making no concessions to his age at any time. For this reason, his last illness must have been particularly intolerable for him: to be incapacitated while nobody knew how to restore him to fitness.

One of the last times I climbed with him was on a trip to The Ben in 2002, just two years before his death, where we did *Green Gully*. Our combined ages added up to just under 130 (possibly some sort of a record?). We both found the route to be in quite hard condition for its grade, with continuous ice, and I'll make no secret of the fact that I had found it quite taxing. As we arrived on the plateau the evening shadows were beginning to lengthen and the top of *No 4 Gully*, our quickest route home, was barred by enormous powder cornices, so we headed off down the Red Burn. He was soon way ahead, and I caught up with him at the snowline, just as he had finished taking off his gear and stowing it in his 'sack. "We need to get down through those woods before it gets dark," he said, and hurried off across the moor towards the Allt a'Mhuillin. By the time I had stowed my own gear he was a receding dot on the horizon, and it was indeed dark as I approached the woods some time later. I got out my headtorch and slithered down the steep muddy path through the trees, eventually arriving at the car park, where John was waiting in the car.

"I don't know," I said, "We have a great day in the hills like that and you leave your old mate to struggle down in the dark."

"Well" he said with that grin of his "if you must dawdle."

So, John lad, you've gone on ahead one final time. For those of us still 'dawdling', the hills have lost some of their inspiration, some of their challenge.

Peter Cockshott

Jill Sumner writes:

I sometimes think I have served a very long climbing apprenticeship. John was like my own personal guide; he taught me the 'ropes' and how to take care of myself, look out for other climbers and have enormous respect for the mountains. These are some of my memories of John. In the early days in the '70s, whenever I was given a rucksack twice my weight (with an extra rope slung round my neck for good measure) or I was hanging off slings under the roof of a cave unable to reach the next peg, or when new (unwanted) boots, which were impossible to walk in, were forced upon me 'For my own good' and I asked "Why?" The answer was always "All good training for the Alps, Jilly." Shaking his head, with a broad smile on his face, he invented a cheating stick for me to reach the next bolt.

We had our treasured places in the mountains — John's was Mid-Wales. He would get

to the Cywarch valley after five days working at the drawing board, stride up to Bryn Hafod with his gait lengthening as he went, breathing deeply and saying: "The air is like wine," happy again to be in the hills.

For me, our special places were Finale in Italy, Pralognon in France, the sea cliffs in Wales and, in the later years, the Picos in Spain. The Picos de Europa is a small Alpine region that John and I made our own. Even when John had lots of people offering to climb some of the harder faces with him here, he said: "No, I am climbing with my wife," as he knew I could follow almost anything he could lead (with a bit of luck and the wind behind me).

For several years we became regulars at the camp site at Fuente De, our stop off on the way to the art galleries in Madrid or Barcelona and sport climbing by the Med. This type of trip had taken years of negotiation, so when John started doing his Alpine north faces in winter, I picked where we went in the summer. Or at least I thought I did, as we usually did more climbing than city sorties. But, we were a team again in the Picos, just the two of us, looking for the weather window to tick off some classic multi-pitch routes. The Picos is always an exploration, a barren land of limestone towers and steep scree slopes, a compass sometimes needed for finding the paths and John's vast experience to find the way up the routes. Caught in storms and finding the way down when we missed the last 'frique was often more of an adventure than the climbs.

Vega de Liordes is a very special place; a green oasis. We were the only people climbing there, below us were wild horses, herds of chamois, streams making patterns through the grassland and birds of prey watching us climb. We were enchanted by the valley and isolated climbing, until an electric storm rolled in, forcing us to top off quickly and rush back down the mountain to wait for the good weather to return. Sitting out bad weather was something you get used to — always frustrating but eventually it got more comfortable. We started with small ridge tents and VW Beetles in Cham and progressed to frame tents and VW Jettas all over the Alps with the kids and, finally, our trusty Super Nova dome tent and a TDi Golf.

One day, we were the first team on the big East Face of Naranjo de Bulnes, overtaking the Spaniards who bivvied under rocks as we passed with our headtorches. John had to be first on the route and was never keen to risk stonefall from other climbers after his smashed shoulder on the *Walker Spur*. We creamed the routes. *La Cepeda* one year, *Martinez-Somoano* the next and hoped to get *El Canejo* on our last trip. We never did do it. John took against it with his sixth sense and would not be moved. He kept his distance from me for half a day until I stopped ranting and I forgave him, because he always knew how to make me smile again.

I don't know what legacy John has left to the climbing world. Only time will tell. I am sure it is good one, because John was a climber and he knew what that meant. John will always be with me in the mountains. He once told me that the mountains were his church.

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# Reviews

**The Villain by Jim Perrin  
Heineman 2005  
£18.99**

If only to demonstrate what I think the general mountaineering community will come to think of this book, let me start this review in somewhat unorthodox fashion by endorsing Gordon Stainforth's assessment of *The Villain*: 'it is one of the most important British mountaineering books to have been written for several decades'. Indeed, given the nature of the territory and the hazards along the way, Perrin's achievement in successfully bringing to the page 'Whillans' the man, with all his flaws and shortcomings as well as his remarkable gifts' is itself little short of remarkable. He manages to provide an ac-

count that clearly shows this was 'no saint's life', but that also brings the reader to both sympathy for, and measured judgement about, the flawed mountaineer. And this is not just because Perrin confines himself exclusively to his subject: his placing of Whillans' life and achievements in the deep structure of the wider climbing and social context of the time is a masterstroke — for we get both a life and an invaluable social history of the period that fixes once and for all the evolution of that branch of our sport from northern dancehalls, and gritstone edges through the activities of clubs like The Rock and Ice. The book is, therefore, definitive and is invaluable as a reference point for the period, placing personal in public history. We come to understand Whillans the man as much through his



The BMC Buxton Conference 1984. L to R John Beatty, John Stevenson, Neil Foster, Don Whillans, Anon, Brede Arkless, Richard Haszko, Tom Price, Walter Bonatti. Photo: Terry Tullis

interrelationships with other climbers and the climbing dynamics and imperatives of the time, as we do as a result of Perrin's clear exposition of the impact of school, street, working and social life in Manchester in the 30s and 40s on a young authority-averse lad.

This is a scholarly as well as a populist read; but because Perrin is a master wordsmith, at the height of his powers, his scholarship is lightly-carried and always appositely applied — either in the main text, or in the extensive footnotes that delightfully, also contain some of his more interesting and provocative asides. In the superb Chapter 17 'Cult Hero', for instance, in a sustained examination of the culture that endorses the 'outlaw status' of some climbers, Perrin adduces as evidence an address by Dave Cook at the 1974 BMC Conference that perfectly counterpoints his reasoning. All in all, it is hard to think of anyone else in our climbing community who, coming from the same beginnings as Don and with similar access to the sources and necessary networks could have produced such a book.

In fact, we are lucky it has been printed at all: the book has been 'in progress' for a long time — indeed, some 20 years according to its author. Allegedly, this protracted gestation had a lot to do with the nature of the material Perrin unearthed — material some of which he judged too delicate to publish 'during the lifetime of Audrey Whillans'. Be that as it may, because of the myths that surrounded Whillans when he was alive — myths some of which he himself encouraged and fuelled (not the least in his ghost-written book *Portrait of a Mountaineer* Alick Ormerod, Heinemann 1971) — and his function in the development of British rock-climbing, Alpinism and Himalayan climbing in the post war period, and the acknowledged talent of the writer, it has been, quite possibly, the most eagerly-awaited biography of climbing literature to be published in this country (and for some of us who have only the Ormerod to go on, did not know Whillans — or saw him infrequently in public — and heard only occasional comments from other climbers who

had met, drunk with, or climbed with him, the myths certainly needed addressing).

The reader is not disappointed; there are many shocks and surprises in store and Perrin is not afraid to confront unpalatable facts, unpick myths or prick the (sometimes self-inflated) bubbles of reputation. For example, we learn that: many of Whillans' early climbing friends and some of The Rock & Ice didn't really like him — early on, he was distinctly 'prickly' and later could be 'savagely debunking of his fellow climbers'; the famous Whillans wit was a late addition (as were the appetites for beer and fags); the much lauded partnership of Brown and Whillans was never much more than a marriage of convenience, and his partnership with Chris Bonington stands revealed as one of 'expedience'; there are numerous instances in the life of overt racism and prejudice; he became very lazy and rarely, if ever, lifted a finger while on the later expeditions, being in Mick Coffey's words 'piss-poor at load-carrying or... physical assistance', thus frequently undermining team spirit with indifference and making enemies; he was an inveterate and cynical womaniser, not above chancing it with his mates' girlfriends; he could also take his wife for granted, treating her rudely and sometimes aggressively and many of the fights he got into were clearly less to do with standing up to overbearing pompous authority or defending others, than with an ungovernable temper that was later in his life increasingly fuelled by nightly inebriation (the drink-driving fight with three policeman that cost him an honour being a prime case in point).

But the biggest shock is to realise that Whillans' active career climbing new British rock-climbs is a mere 12 years long. The development of Tremadog, Gogarth and the subsequent push on Cloggy passed him by (or rather, he passed them by), whereas his erstwhile partner, Joe Brown contributed significantly to these cliffs and is still seeking new rock in his 70s. So what happened to Whillans the climber? Notwithstanding his own disingenuous protestations (in *Portrait...*) that he simply moved on to other interests and mountains, Perrin pins the beginning of the decline first to the affront he felt on not



being invited to join the Kangchenjunga expedition, with Joe Brown, after their first British ascent of the *West Face of The Dru* in 1954 brought them wide attention and establishment praise and, secondly, to the rancour and ensuing bitterness that he felt after missing out on the first successful (Bonington-led) British ascent of the *North Face of The Eiger* in 1962. Thereafter, despite two great successes in the greater ranges, Whillans diverted his energies into travelling and lecturing, 'basking in the adulation of his audiences, playing up to the image of a cloth-capped, beer-swilling Northern hard man, forsaking the habit of regular climbing'. His first climb was in 1950, at the age of 16; his last new route was *The Direct Finish to Carnivore* in 1962. So, 'before he is even out of his 20s, the Alps (including the *West Face of The Dru*, the *West Face of the Blaitiere*, the *East Face of the Capucin*, *The Walker Spur* and *Fréney Pillar*, Ed.) are beginning to fade from focus and his rock-climbing pioneering is over'.

In the early chapters dealing with Don's childhood and adolescence, Perrin eschews direct psychological interpretation of character — tying later aggressive, incipiently misogynist and anti-social behaviour to childhood experience, dispositions and handicaps — but the evidence he adduces is compelling, if at times surprising. The young Whillans had apparently 'no hand-eye co-ordination' and had no 'sense of the team'; he was 'in trouble continually' (with the school authorities) and 'as a kid' 'was frightened of girls'. He was outstanding in the gym (with an agility that later enabled him to jump off climbs from significant height with impunity), but 'didn't realise that 'boxing wasn't fighting': 'always very protective of his mates... of people he liked', and though it is hardly developed or expanded upon here or later in the book, 'his father was the only one who had control'. What the young Whillans did possess, however, was endurance, route-finding abilities and a huge appetite for long-distance walks that eventually led in 'an imperceptible drift' into rock-climbing.

A slight digression on family life is important here. Tom Whillans, Don's father, continues to crop

up throughout the book, but only in the role of financial saviour, providing loans to his son at crucial moments. Don's mother, however, is barely a shadow. What influence did she have over her married son, and what of her relationship with her childless daughter-in-law? Does the childless marriage affect the gruff mountaineer adversely? Would fatherhood have helped Whillans temper his final years and curb his excessive behaviour? Sadly, we don't discover Audrey's views — and this is a disappointment, because Whillans apparently enjoyed entertaining little children and clearly becomes a sort of father figure in his turn to younger climbers like Greg Child. It is also clear that those who were life-long admiring associates such as Dennis Gray and Derek Walker were also proffered paternal-type advice and solicitous kindness. Whillans must have learned more from his father (and felt for him) than Audrey reveals, or he does in *Portrait of a Mountaineer*. Like much else in the Whillans life, one senses lost opportunities here; things left unsaid or not confronted; issues sidestepped or covered up.

What are obvious are, of course, the climbs and Perrin is brilliantly perceptive about the Whillans new rock routes. Suggesting that 'the places we explore act as an objective correlative to our own states of mind', he finds the adjectives describing the 1955 Welsh climbs as 'shadowy, forbidding, aggressive, unappealing, overbearing, insecure, flaky, fissile'. The dozen gritstone crack climbs Perrin reckons form the basis of the most enduring Whillans myths are almost all wide cracks or overhangs 'in varying degrees painful, and all of them offering affront'. They are the epitome of what he calls 'street-fighting rock'. Taken together with Bonington's assessment of Whillans's *Extol* on Dove Crag as rather like the man himself — 'direct, uncompromising and hard' — and we have as good a psychological insight into the Whillans persona as one could wish for. Interestingly, though, Perrin still considers that Joe Brown's gritstone routes are harder than Don's.

The aftermath of the ground-breaking 1970 Annapurna expedition set the tone for the rest of Whillans' climbing life: celebrity, a variety of jobs

('offers of work were now pouring in'), including filming, media attention, travel and 'soft' climbing round the world with well-known figures, but also a series of ill-executed expeditions that saw Whillans either traduced by articulate Continentals or speaking his mind and upsetting apple carts. Just such a 'defining' moment comes for Perrin during the Annapurna expedition when Whillans rounds on Mick Burke from Ice Ridge camp, in effect promoting himself and Dougal into the lead, and, in due course, the summit. That the subsequent events proved him right does nothing to alter the fact that after the event, 'a scapegoat, ultimately would be found and his reputation assiduously blackened in the cabals of the ambitious world of professional and semi-professional climbers'.

So it was to be. Don was not invited on Bonington's 1972 Everest expedition and it is clear that the last fruitful Himalayan partnership Whillans made, with the young Dougal Haston, was also finished: 'Burke, Haston and Estcourt did not want him along'. Although two of these men had had it made obvious to them that Whillans had no time for them, it is sad to realise that the young Haston had his own reputation to make and needed to move out of the shadow, but that Whillans couldn't see this coming. Whillans, already seduced by a media-oriented lecturing life clearly doesn't read the temporality and veniality of media allegiances well (nor the need to adapt his own obdurate and socially-limiting attitudes in the face of the new commercialism, apparently being welcomed with open arms by former climbing partners). Being more concerned to maintain his aplomb than to play up to the promoters in the newly-developing game of sponsorship of 'professional' expeditions, he is, at 'not yet 40 years of age... shunted out of the lime-light and consigned to the periphery'.

There is something genuinely sad, almost tragic about the inevitability of this downward spiral (as Perrin realises and prepares us for at the end of chapter 1: 'From Annapurna's summit, it only remained to go down') — if only because Whillans apparently lets it happen. By 1975 and the final act



Buxton 1984. Interviewer: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Donna Whillans: "A short, fat hairy climber." Photo: Terry Tullis

in the South West Face saga, Whillans has been 'surplus to (Bonington's) requirements' for three years. Though gainfully employed and now more affluent than at any time of his life, Perrin notes an 'element of pathos begins to intrude' here; the weight and drinking problems, exacerbated by knee problems and increasingly frequent vertigo attacks begin to affect him significantly.

The two further expeditions to Roraima with Joe Brown and Torre Egger were sad and debilitating experiences, that brought no amicable restoration of relations with Brown; an alarming deterioration in his 'judgment and awareness of inherent danger' and an increased and deserved reputation for being 'difficult, selfish and lazy'. It is worth quoting Perrin at length here:

'With a dozen years of living still left to him... the negatives inherent in Don's character had won control. Roraima, really, was the end of Don Whillans as a serious contender in the world of mountaineering'.

A last Himalayan expedition in 1983 with Doug Scott is blighted by the untimely death of Pete Thexton which clearly affects Whillans deeply ('he sought to anaesthetise the memory'); but what is telling is that though Scott writes that Don could have made it to the summit of Broad Peak, it is also clear that the competition with younger members for rope mates left Whillans 'sidelined' and complaining in his letters to Audrey that he had been paired off with 'a black man'. It is a sad and unedifying end to a potentially great career.

One is left with a sense of utter waste: 'If only...' one wants to say – if only Whillans had found a bridge from his sense of himself that he could build towards more of the significant others in his life. If only he could have been persuaded that what the climbing world needed was not a set of myths about a great British mountaineer, but the mountaineer himself, still cutting the climbs like his sometime partners Brown and Bonington. But he couldn't show his weakness or let others see it. Greg Child has Whillans exactly, near the end of his life: 'he was a sheep in wolf's clothing who played with a hard exterior, but who was really a soft-hearted person'.

Perrin is absolute in his judgement (in the Preface) that though this was a life of 'exceptional accomplishment', it contained 'a need... for friendship that (was) out of the ordinary'. His tale is, therefore, one of 'squandered talent... soured by resentment.' It is also a prophetic judgment: by the end of this magnificent book, we are as close to the greatest of Shakesperian tragedies as any future mountaineering biography is ever going to get us. If Whillans is the Lear doppelganger (more sinning than sinned against), then Perrin is indeed the Bard.

Tim Noble

**This Mountain Life – The First Hundred  
Years of the Rucksack Club**  
Edited by John Beatty and published by  
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 fellrunner 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 Brit 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 Din-

ner 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 influential clubs in the country.

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

Derek Walker

### **On Thin Ice by Mick Fowler**

**Bâton Wicks 2005**

**£18.99**

Good climbers who become writers frequently (and often inadvertently) bring much of their climbing style to the page: how they experience a climb influences how they revisit it in recollection — selecting, emphasising, excluding, apportioning, and judging. When great climbers turn to writing their memoirs, however, it sometimes becomes difficult to separate climbing style from writing style: here, with a vengeance, one might say 'le style, c'est l'homme même'. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the second of Mick Fowler's autobiographical musings, where, as he says, 'the theme... is similar, but the pace may have quickened' — both in the climbing and the writing, he might have added truthfully.

*On Thin Ice* is an engaging read. Pitched in the sub-genre of long-haul holiday tourism writing within which, improbably, high standard climbs are effected by an Inland Revenue Tax Inspector, it is full of insights into quirky customs and habits, local colour and conditions, fellow climbers. It is also leavened throughout by an unselfconscious homiletic impulse (e.g. 'Successes that are won too easily are inevitably those that are the least rewarding'); with a sort of grown up schoolboy humour which focuses now and then on the hazards occasioned by the intimacies of high standard, lightweight

expeditioning (on a bivouac on The Central Pillar of Frêne, for instance, Fowler, dreaming of a girlfriend, leans over and kisses a be-whiskered Chris Watts), and on at least three occasions, with close encounters of the cloacal kind — one of which involves a donkey.

Fowler, the reader is to suppose from his chosen style, is no Mark Twight — not at all the model of the modern major mountaineer, driven and lethally obsessive. He would have us believe instead in the all-round modesty of his skill and indifference to physical exercise. Somewhat surprisingly, he appears to have more in common with Whillans the expeditioner than any other of his contemporaries: hating training ('I have always tended to look on mountaineering as an excellent way to keep fit rather than something to get fit for') he has a marked penchant for giving way to base camp lassitude; he can be bumbling with gear and essential climbing skills (e.g. on Taweche, an 'incredulous' Pat (Littlejohn) 'could not understand how someone who has been climbing for so long could be so poor at jumaring'), and is happy to be known by his long-term climbing partners (and his wife) as completely unsuited 'to work in the kitchen or any task to do with the preparation of food.' So, in the absence of powdered potato on The Arwa Tower, the team settle for 'alternate nights of noodles and Indian baby food.' Fowler creates a sort of Pooterish persona as his written voice, happy to contemplate, 'the dubious honour of being the first climber to be apprehended by the authorities for climbing chalk cliffs on both sides of the Channel.' And the related falls remind strongly at times of the farcial goings on on Rum Doodle: 'Pull! I shouted unashamedly as I dangled on the rope... We shook hands because that's what the English do in such situations'.

At an ice-climbing fest in Austria, Scottish winter activists Nisbet, Anderson and Fowler amaze the locals because they have 'never been on skis before'. Fowler engenders hilarity by not being able to attach skins to his skis and Nisbet falls three metres, 'catching a crampon in the pocket of an Italian climber's posh Gore-Tex suit.' Ineptitude, he



seems to say, is all; even the great are not good at everything.

The truth, of course, is very different: this is just classic British irony and self-deprecation – the ingrained habit of the amateur Englishman abroad, seemingly out of his depth, but snug within his cultural cloak. But Fowler is being disingenuous: he's far too skilled a writer, now, not to realise what wool he is pulling over his readers' eyes. The paradox, for instance, of a highly professional tax man being arrested for climbing has the hint of iconic myth about it and deliberately taps into that anarchic, anti-establishment impulse seemingly engrained in all serious climbers.

We desperately want Fowler to own up to this and explore it for us. What is it like to be both establishment and one of the unofficial lords of misrule? But he holds us at bay, maintaining a faux-bewildered and shoulder-shrugging stance where we want to see great cracks in the professional veneer.

This kept distance in the book — the failure to revel Pritchard-like in the trough — is also characteristic of a man who knows himself very well. Fowler is — and he knows it — at the top of the Alpine/ big hill game, hugely respected at home and abroad for achievements but also for deep-rooted personal skill and drive. He may not be 'a rock-climbing super star' instead possessing 'reassuringly mainstream' skills but he certainly has what Chris Bonington also claims for him in the Foreword: a place in the forefront of a New Golden Age of climbing.

Fowler's list of major, award-attracting big range climbs, accounts of five of which, accomplished with some of the best mountaineers in Britain, form the backbone of the book, are indeed, exciting reading and on some of them the combination of technical difficulty, adverse conditions and uncertain outcome make for as thrilling accounts as one could want. Herein lies another reason for this being an engaging read: we are fascinated — if made not a little envious — by his achievement in its domestic context. How has he managed to meld a developing

career in HM tax offices, into fatherhood and caring for a family and still found the time to fit in the range of climbing trips and extreme first ascents in all parts of Britain and the Greater Ranges, chronicled here?

After an opening chapter that overlaps with *Vertical Pleasure* and has the newly honoured Fowler 'the mountaineer's mountaineer' bathetically crack some ribs in a fall at Harrisons in front of an Observer reporter, and a second chapter where Fowler learns about 'Fun' with his girlfriend/soon to be wife, Nicki in Jordan, we're into the big climbs. The reader swings along in light plane, helicopter, bus, and (unsurprisingly) a bright orange inflatable boat, sharing Fowler's good-humoured battles with spindrift, the infamous 'Torture Tube' bivouac on Taweche and the iron hard ice of the final serac barrier on Siguniang.

Along the way are disquisitions on long-distance drives, struggles with bureaucracy and always incidents that remind Fowler of his family. This last is clearly important to him and the reader relishes these moments when Fowler casts off the writing persona and engages with the serious questions that (for instance) Brendan Murphy's death on Changabang throw up. It is a measure of the book that the title doesn't just refer to the desperate climbs he has accomplished. But this is a tale told by a private man; don't look here for Venables-style soul-searching and agonising.

This is another publishing triumph for Bâton Wicks. I have only a slight reservation about the photograph numbering (difficult to follow at times with the number of inserts on each page) and range: more of the domestic life and fatherhood to counterpoint the thin ice? But perhaps this was the author himself selecting and editing rather than Ken. If so, it would be quite in keeping with the true style of the man and his latest memoir.

Tim Noble



**Clogwyn D'ur Arddu by Nick Dixon**  
**The Climbers' Club 2004**  
**£15.50**

Fine crag, fine guide, fine publishing programme. This guide follows Paul Williams's masterpiece by only five years and it too ranks as a masterpiece for, who would have thought it possible, the guide is getting even better. Inside the front cover is a map showing the area and the approaches to the crag. All we need now is for someone to arrange for permission to park at Hafodty Newydd and life would be perfect. A fiver per car, or even each occupant, would be more than worth it compared to the cost of a railway ticket. Very useful additions are the lists of routes which dry quickly or rarely and the sun-faced diagram indicating when sections of the crag do or do not receive the benefit of direct sunlight. The superb diagrams of old have been replaced by even more superb photographs on which different-coloured lines indicate the routes to lessen one's getting on the wrong (and more dangerous line) where two, or several routes cross. A very useful property since the guidebook will fit into a britches' back pocket of someone unfamiliar with the cliff. The cloth-tape bookmark too will be a help when one is trying to find the right page to make that essential decision.

The increasing number of winter routes is well described with, to me, the imperative request that they are not to be tried in conditions of lean ice or snow so that the rock of summer routes is not defaced. Additionally winter climbers are asked not to use rock-placed pegs extra to those used in summer, for the same reason.

I personally approve of the historical section being omitted since the information is now thoroughly covered in the *Anthology of Ascents* which replaces it. An anthology is usually a collection of the flowers of poetry but here the rivetting cornucopia is of historical prose fragments. They will fill some winter evenings and stiffen the sinews prior to imitating the action of the tigers.

A personal foible, *Adam's Rib* (page 166) is not

on The Far West Buttress. And another, in a guide with this relatively small number of routes would it be possible to number every route and have that number on the photo-diagrams? It would have been informative to tell the reader of *Slaying the Beast* (page 9) that it concerned an ascent of *The Indian Face* which one is not told until page 184.

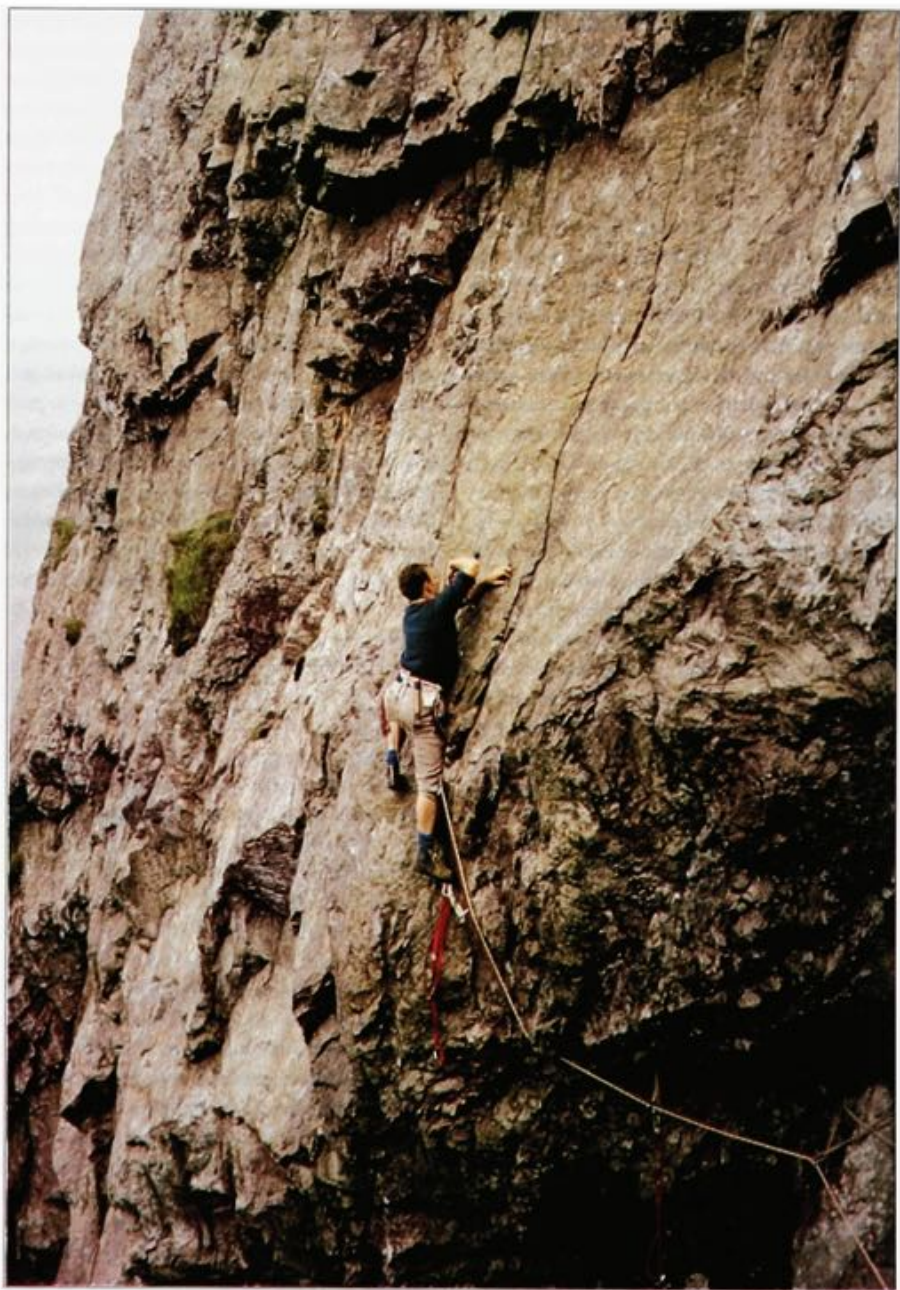
All these are minor points scarcely detracting from this superb production which should be taken note of by any other guidebook producers in the country. How lucky we are to have one of the cutting edge climbers who is willing to put so much time and effort into guidebook work, and what a fine job he has made of it.

One final nicety. The front cover photograph of Ed February on *Shrike* indicates for me that, very slowly, the family of man is welcoming its distant brethren. I hope that it wasn't too cold a day for him.

Dave Gregory

**Avon and Cheddar by Martin Crocker**  
**The Climbers' Club 2004**  
**£23**

If you were asked by the *CC Journal* Editor to write a review of a new CC guidebook in which you feature as a first ascensionist, what would you suppose has been the cut off number of those first ascents of yours before the Editor decided that you might be partisan about the historical section and possible re-grading or re-description of (your) routes and, therefore, not the person to write the review? Could he trust you to be dispassionate if you had climbed, say, 10% of the new routes and found the guide writer to be patronising about, or dismissive of your contribution? Could you find your place in the great scheme of things reduced and still be positive? Come to think of it, what is the required base-line knowledge of, and involvement with, a couple of major cliffs before a reviewer can advance a reader's appreciation of the guide better than the new writer who has, with his team, checked everything. Must you be an habitué? Should you have







**After Whillans:** Dave Alcock on the fierce *Slanting Slab* (E4 6a free, traditionally E2 with some aid) on *The West Buttress of Cloggy*. Photos: Ally Cowburn

contributed to the photos; know the regulars and have climbed with them? How many of the routes should you have climbed? The question, turned round is also applicable to the Editor. Knowing their long relationships with the crags should I have sent this to former Gorge activists: Frank Cannings, Steve Findlay, Ed Ward Drummond (wherever he is), Matt Ward the second (probably), or even Chris Woodhead (for a thorough Ofsted report)? Well, the answer CC members are getting is, I'm afraid, both rhetorical and heretical: no one is getting it. As I feature in both the historical and the first ascent list I can't let this book out of my hands; and this act of appropriation — against all the Editorial rules — may yet be my nemesis. However, I crave your indulgence.

For 20 years, the Frome Valley and The Avon Gorge were my after-school treats (*real homework*) and the pat answer to my Barber's regular ques-

tion ("Something for the weekend sir?"). Cheddar was for special visits when we felt strong and bold. I was led up the slab routes by a self-effacing Fred Bennet, before I knew his name or contribution; introduced to Suspension Bridge Extremes and *Coronation Street* by CC member, John Baker, and waited with Micky the 'amazing climbing dog' (on a leash and in a rucksack) underneath the Upper Wall while one of our extended team, 'The Bath Bike Boys' soloed up and down *Them*. I have climbed every VS more times than is good for me, taken every climbing friend who's visited up an increasingly slippery *Malbogies*; been on top of the loo for an invitation drink at a club dinner and been spooked on *Hell Gates* by the eerie flapping sound and tunnel-shaking thud of a suicide (as Littlejohn and Broomhead were, apparently, on an attempt on *Oblivion*) and I can still remember the feeling of terror and elation as, leading, I just made it to the end



**Rock-climbing in the Avon Gorge: Ian McMorris climbs *Central Buttress* (HVS) in February 1961 John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library**

of *Pink Wall Traverse*. As I write, I have the blue tape firmly in at the plate facing page 160 to relive Anna McDermott's ascent of *The Arête* and Dave Viggers on *Central Buttress* if only because, thank the gods of climbing and, according to Crocker, 'climbers have requested the E grade for the latter'. Living in flat Essex, now, that grade rings back retrospectively and warms the cockles of my heart. Avon calling: it's a siren song sung by Martin Crocker.

Building on his efforts in '92 and '04, this is a brilliant piece of work from one of our sport's most committed, most technically proficient and most prolific new routers. With the publication of this guide, Crocker also lays claim to being one of pre-eminent chroniclers, too. His energy is legendary and his writing talents, as demonstrated in the style of this volume, considerable. He has wit and a flair for the resonant phrase which makes the book

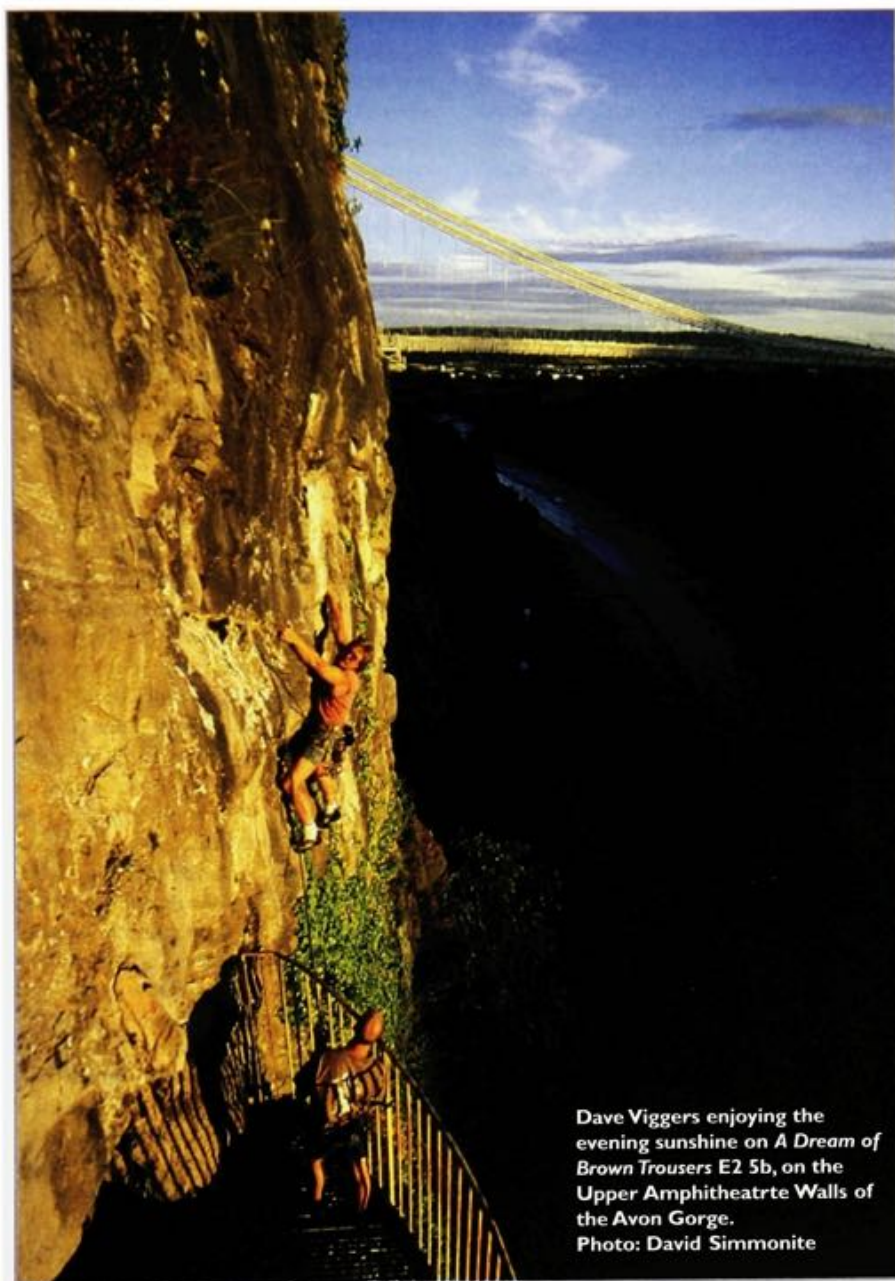
compulsive loo reading. On prime stomping ground, *Central Buttress*, I found much to amuse as well as inform: *Piton Route* requires 'polished technique'; *Central Rib* has 'quaintly directionless climbing', and a fall from 'above half height on *Centaur*' would probably be terminal – or the next best thing'. Piquant, that from the man who survived a 70ft ground fall in Great Zawn.

Cheddar has been rescued from ivy oblivion, re-equipped and brought into the 21st century as one of the most impressive of England's outcrops. Crocker's work on freeing the old Dearman aid routes on the Pinnacle attracted other attention and reading the first ascent list reminds how the best of British have been lured there by routes that rival anything in Derbyshire. With access arrangements negotiated and so many modern climbs now available, Cheddar should see a boom in climbing.

Crocker's team, too, deserve a big thank you, for bringing together over 600 new climbs in this temperate zone between Bristol, Bath and the Mendips, highlighting many little but worthwhile crags. Goblin Coombe, Brean Down and Portishead are now mainstream, of course, endowed with a plethora of modern test pieces, but there are now sufficient routes on minor crags to offer weeks of alternative delight. It's good to see the deep involvement of locals I've known for years: Gordon Jenkin, for instance, who has written the Holcombe section 'in the style of Gordon Jenkin'. Don Sargeant provides more detailed art work and John Willson's meticulous editing continues to be the standard for the rest of us to reach.

For those of us who will never see a French 7c (on either end of a rope) there is still the packed history section and the hugely entertaining list of First Ascents. This is a must buy guide for CC members and, I daresay, for all British climbers. There must be at least as many active climbers in this region as anywhere else in the country and bearing in mind how Avon attracted weekend visits from Londoners and passing visits from northerners seeking Cornish granite, I hope it sells like hot cakes.

A final thanks from me to the members of



Dave Viggers enjoying the evening sunshine on *A Dream of Brown Trousers* E2 5b, on the Upper Amphitheatre Walls of the Avon Gorge.  
Photo: David Simmonite



FROCK (Frome Rock Club) who are still discovering new routes and who shared exploration of Vallis Vale with me years ago. With only a handful of moderate new routes recorded, I think I can claim a dispassionate review and this guide will always be a precious reminder for me of those halcyon days.

Tim Noble

### **The Joy of Climbing by Terry Gifford**

**Whittles Publishing 2004**

**£19.95**

For the third time in this Journal I shall be dallying with convention. To review a book written by a friend and one-time climbing partner that features the reviewer himself in eight of the 70 featuring essays looks like a straightforward case of nepotism. But for the Editor of the *Journal* to do such a thing might surely be considered a suitable case for committee consideration (Gwyn, where is thy sting, etc?). I make no apologies, however, and here is my defence; like D H Lawrence in his poem *Snake*, I have a 'guilt' to expiate and a debt to honour. A guilt of which the writer of this admirable book is probably completely unaware and a debt I hope he will accept. Let me explain. Ever since the publication of my own book *Great VS Climbs in The Lake District* some years ago, I've been waiting guiltily and impatiently for the collected Gifford climbing essays to find a publisher and a sympathetic reviewer (me), so that I might 'balance the books' — literally. If partisanship is the price we pay for a prompt and a partnership, then so be it.

In his Dedication, Gifford tell us that it was David Craig who started him writing about climbing, 'If I can do it, you can do it'. Craig said and so started the climbing writing career of the man who, almost single-handedly has put the experience of climbing what Geoff Birtles called 'soft rock' (HVS and below) onto the pages of the monthly climbing magazines (in, predominantly, the late lamented *High*) over the past 20 years. Well, Club, I can now reveal all: Gifford did a Craig on me, too. After our second climb together (a very wet *Spartan Slab* alluded to

in the book, but sadly not realised, where every toe placement on the glassy granite produced an Irish ferry-sized bow wave), he bought me a little black notebook in Fort William and said: "If you're serious about starting writing about climbing, use this to record your notes in the field, your thoughts on reflection and the outline of the story you want to tell." That advice is still what I try to pass on to those of my pupils who aspire to be writers.

As he was already published, I took both the 'craft' as Gifford calls it and his admonitions seriously, put together several published articles quickly and before I knew it, had a book proposal accepted. Before my mentor. At roughly the same time as David Craig's iconic *Native Stones* appeared. As Eliot felt about Pound, so did I feel about Gifford: as a writer about climbing, he was *Il migliore fabbro* — 'the better maker' and this book at last proves it. Guilt expiated.

Taken on its own, every one of these documentary/reported/poetically-inspired/researched/ designed essays (plus or minus 1,500 words, with five or six shots on the route itself and, if possible, the same from an independent photographer perched in prime flanking position) has appeared in print, filling the magazine brief. The book should, therefore, be on the shelf of every aspiring writer about climbing. Sadly — perhaps because of publishing constraints — no dates and credits are given for previous publication, or acknowledgement that some of the essays have been heavily amended. This does injustice to the history of publication of climbing writing and I'm surprised the senior literary academic and CC *Centenary Journal* editor in Gifford has allowed it to pass.

But what we gain from this re-grouping and re-writing is a sense of the unity of the Gifford intention, of a gathering of the will over time to climb and then write — as if this is the natural and essential way we should practice our sport. If nothing else, this should be praise enough: he has helped climbers see how different and experimental ways of writing about climbing — pastiche, embedded poems, 'gendered voices' — within the magazine

norm can be published.

An article is one thing, of course, a book quite another. For a start it needs an organizing principle or theme. *The Joy of Climbing* groups the essays into regions. This feels like a device to give 'shape' to the book — a somewhat artificial device, too, since Gifford's ostensible subjects are either historical figures, the people he climbs with (painters, poets, photographers, writers, editors, botanists, jesters, friends and family, some of whom are known by nicknames, such as: 'The Terrier', 'The Craggigler', 'The Catcher', 'The Lady', 'The Artist') who have, by 'their generosity and patience', given him *The Joy of Climbing*, or they are 'the central personalities', the climbs themselves, their distinctive structures, flora and fauna, rather than explorations of the regions (even the extended article/poem sequence of Yosemite/Tuolumne that powerfully evokes the High Sierra makes sense mainly as a development of the academic piece about John Muir and conservation that is at its centre). But I have a theory that the real subject of the collection is Gifford himself — as writer and climber. He has been perfecting the style of himself. He climbs to write and writing drives him back to climbing so he can write again and get it right. Getting it wrong on the rock can make a story; but he rarely gets it wrong on the page.

Maybe it is because he is experimenting with form, but I know of very few other contemporary writers about climbing whose style is so distinctive, so immediately recognisable. Just as — if the subhead was removed — a CC member could surely always spot in the *Journal* a Dave Gregory piece of writing (its characteristics being: sagacious and sardonic humour, allied to a shrewd and pugnacious observation of character; deep knowledge of, and commitment to, the sport over years, countries and grades), so it seems to me one can always spot a Gifford piece. Put them all together and we have a view of the man himself behind the writing — and something more, too, something approaching a philosophy about the experience of climbing 'easy' rock and its attendant emotions; of the relationship of Art to nature and the centrality of ecol-

ogy in the mountain world; of the impact on a man of climbing with a lover and his children and the need to be involved with 'prime movers'. We get the poet writing prose; some memorable images, titles and evocations (but is he better in the role of critic on D H Lawrence in *The Count House* and in the last extended piece about John Muir than he is in the evocative prose?)

What we don't get, however, in this book is the reality of competition — that competition about writing and climbing that has powered our partnership over 20 years, but also that competitive urge in him that has provided the climbing public with 19 years of *The International Festival of Mountaineering Literature*. The man has huge drive, but the writing reduces this. Jim Perrin points out in *The Villain* how competition fuels success in the climbing world (c.f. the little vignette about the first ascent of *Grond*). My beef with Gifford has always been about him recognising and writing about this reality — the reality of the dark side of climbing.

Whether he was seconding or leading, or climbing well within his limits on routes spotted in advance and signing up with partners who could deliver him from evil, I always wanted him to go beyond the known and 1,500 word reduceable world — the climbs we could do more or less easily, and the comfortable writing about it afterward — into deeper areas of the self, into, ultimately, longer, harder, higher more remote rocks, there to plug into the big currents of the universe. Gifford is a Ted Hughes expert and a poet; he knows how to bring back the Shaman's truths. But not in *The Joy of Climbing*. There are instances here recorded of Gifford racked on a climb — both objectively, as in a storm above Ailefroide, and in the mind and body on *Spinnaker* but little of inner tension or fear is conveyed in the writing, though it is hinted at in the Tuolumne essay. The narrative wins out, the observable world is all and maybe that's for the good: his art is constrained not only by the form the publishers accept, but also by his shrewd ear for what will be tolerated by readers.

I remember David Craig berating me for over-



Terry Gifford sails up *Spinnaker* (S) on Eavestone Crag. Photo: Ian Smith

doing the dramatic language in an essay on *F Route* I sent him for comment. "Remember, Tim," he admonished me. "The fear of falling is the same for everyone, E6 leader or V Diff beginner, and the language to describe that fear is more or less the same. But you've little space for extended terror in the essay form." It's clearly advice the beginning writer Gifford took from his mentor and kept the big emotions for the poetry. But thanks, Terry, for the prompt, the partnership and the writing. Life would not have been so challenging without them. Debt paid.

Tim Noble

**Ice & Mixed Climbing: Modern Technique**  
by Will Gadd  
**The Mountaineers 2003**  
£16.95

A couple of years ago, I read Eric Horst's book, *How to Climb 5.12* and waited for it to happen. Well, I'm still waiting. However, I can honestly say that after reading Will Gadd's book, my ice-climbing jumped a whole notch almost overnight. But this book is much more than just an instructional manual. I believe it is the successor to the excellent works: *Climbing Ice* by Yvon Chouinard and *Ice World* by Jeff Lowe. This seems entirely appropriate, since Will Gadd is Jeff Lowe's prodigy.

At first, I was a bit intimidated by the word 'mixed' in the title, but the book deals just as thoroughly with classic water ice climbing as with the former. How refreshing to find an ice-climbing book with the modernity and courage to omit the seemingly compulsory accounts of French technique and various 'pied' configurations, propagated through generations of texts, rather like route description errors in guidebooks.

The instructional text is illuminated by anecdotes and cautionary tales. I particularly liked the one about Gadd seconding Lowe up some horrendously steep and exposed ice pillar only to see the detached lead rope snaking up the ice in front of his eyes. Apparently, even the mighty occasionally forget to tie on properly. Kim Cizmazia also adds a few paragraphs of particular interest to female proponents of the sport.

Gadd approaches the sport as a scientific discipline and there is no doubt he is a fine teacher. He runs an ice-climbing 'clinic' in Canmore, so is well aware of the difficulties experienced by the less gifted. He is also an articulate and inspirational writer and makes the instructional text component into compulsive reading. Although he depends heavily on sponsorship for a living, he is quick to declare any interest when this becomes an issue. But to be frank, many devotees feel that Gadd's recommendations are indeed the best. Certainly, there would



**Cascade Waterfall WI3, Banff.** An ultra classic moderate route 300m long, right outside Banff on Cascade Mountain. The picture shows the start of the steeper ice 75m from the top. Photo: Peter Sterling





**Carlsberg Column WI 5, Field.** A 60m near vertical route that is normally done in two pitches, but it can be done in one long pitch (as here) with a bit of a rope stretch with 60m ropes. You can just see the top of Cascade Kronenbourg, WI 6, in the top right of the picture. Another 90m long VERY vertical classic in the Field Valley that doesn't see the sun for most of the year. Photo: Peter Sterling

be little dissentation that his promotion of the Android leash and soft shell clothing represent state of the art.

Numerous mind-boggling climbing photographs illustrate the text along with clear instructional poses and diagrams. Useful too is an appendix on dedicated gym work outs. Just a few errors on labels but these are evident enough and cause no great problem. I would definitely recommend this book to any ice man worthy of the name. Expert and tyro alike will gain something from it.

Terry Kenny

**Millican Dalton**  
**The Life and Times of a Borrowdale**  
**Caveman**  
 by M D Entwistle  
 Mountaimere Research 2004  
 £8.99

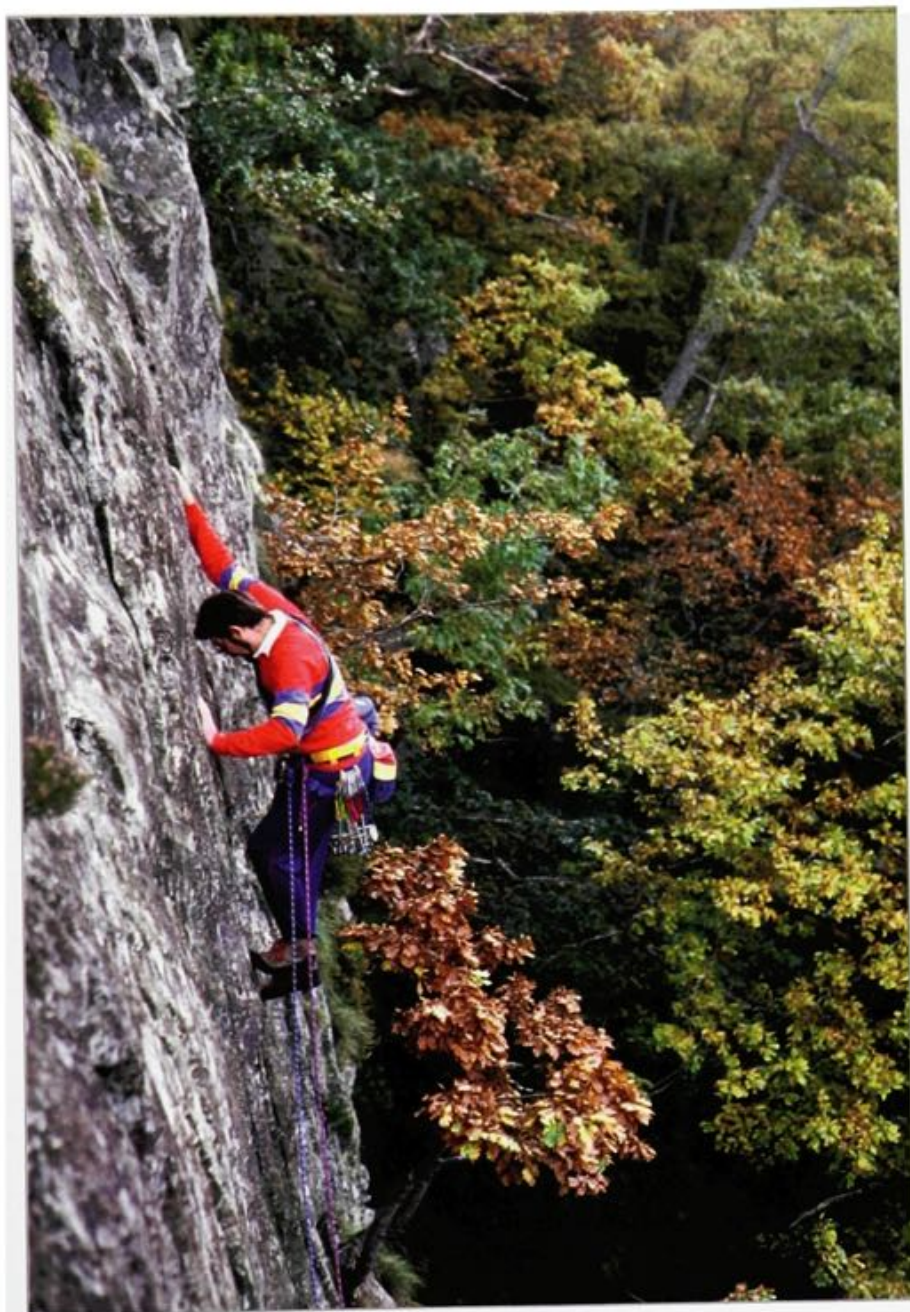
This must have been a very difficult book to write and has not been easy to review. Even with the author's painstaking research there is much that still remains hidden about this onetime 'professor of adventure'. It is not, as the author states, intended to be a distinguished piece of literature and indeed the sentence structure is occasionally odd. Nor is it claimed to be a complete history; Dalton left neither memoirs, nor diaries. Despite his vagabond-like life style Dalton, in his final illness, was admitted to hospital and even the unfinished book *Philosophy of Life* on which he had apparently been working for years, and which was beside his deathbed, in 1947, has been lost.

Millican (the name is his mother's maiden surname) Dalton was born on the 20th April 1867 at Foulard near Nenthead in southeast Cumberland, a lead mining area. His father died when he was seven. His mother Frances, with her three remaining children to raise, was helped financially by her wealthy father, Tinniswood. In 1879, when Millican was 12, Tinniswood died. Millican and his younger brother Henry remained at their Quaker school in Cumberland although Frances had moved, with her daughter, to London to be near other members of her family. In December 1880 the two boys left that school and went to live in London with their mother. Whether they continued any schooling is not known.

The early signs of his eventual longing for the outdoors were becoming evident. He and Henry managed some exciting scrapes indicating his ad-

**Opposite:** The Journal Editor savours autumnal conditions in Borrowdale climbing *Fool's Paradise* (VS) Gowder Crag. Photo: Ian Smith





venturous spirit but he had, eventually, to face reality and eventually became a clerk in an insurance company. With a reasonable wage to support him Dalton began camping expeditions using a bicycle as his load carrier. He was an early member of the Association of Cycle Campers which eventually became The Camping and Caravanning Club. Millican and his brother Henry, with some friends, undertook cycling, or rather pushing, expeditions to the Lakes, Scotland and Wales. After the late 1880s, inspired by learning of the ascent of Napes Needle by Haskett-Smith, they began to take their trips more often to the Lake District, particularly Borrowdale.

Millican became bored, dare one say imprisoned, by with his clerkly life and moved into a tent pitched on a plot of land which he had bought at Thornwood, in Essex. Throughout the book occur instances of his having access to capital, presumably from his grandfather or mother, although there is no clear statement of the source of his private income. The commuting from his tent to the City and the boredom of the working life there must have become too much because he resigned from his post, probably in 1904. Sometime later he moved his tent to Billericay, which was then still totally rural, and cultivated fruit and vegetables.

Although exact dates are not available by 1904 he was spending his summers in Borrowdale, offering, by advertisements, **Camping Tours, Adventures, Night Rambles, Boating, Rapid Shooting, Mountaineering**. The prices quoted, in shillings and pence, seem reasonable. In winter he returned to the south of England but seems to have found time for trips to Europe.

The parties responding to his advertisements were often mixed and on several occasions he climbed with Mabel Barker who is more famous now for being the first woman to do *Central Butress* on Scafell. Several of the photographs illustrating the book were taken by her. Photographs of a striking tall figure, often in what now look outlandish clothes, often self-made as was much of his equipment. To give more detail of his exploits, both

in Britain and abroad, is to spoil the book for the reader. Here was an unusual person, a teetotaler, a Quaker, a member, for a time, of The Fell and Rock, almost a troglodyte, a man fond of his own company but companionable and friendly. A man who could not tolerate the bondage of the nine to five existence. There are accounts of his exploits in the Lakes, and on them, but much of what he did is unrecorded although first ascents by friends of his mentioned in the book occur in FRCC guidebooks. What a pity that this striking and independently minded character did not leave more records of what he himself did. That we now know what we do is a debt which we owe to his biographer, M D Entwistle, who too has been somewhat retiring. We do not know his first names.

Dave Gregory



