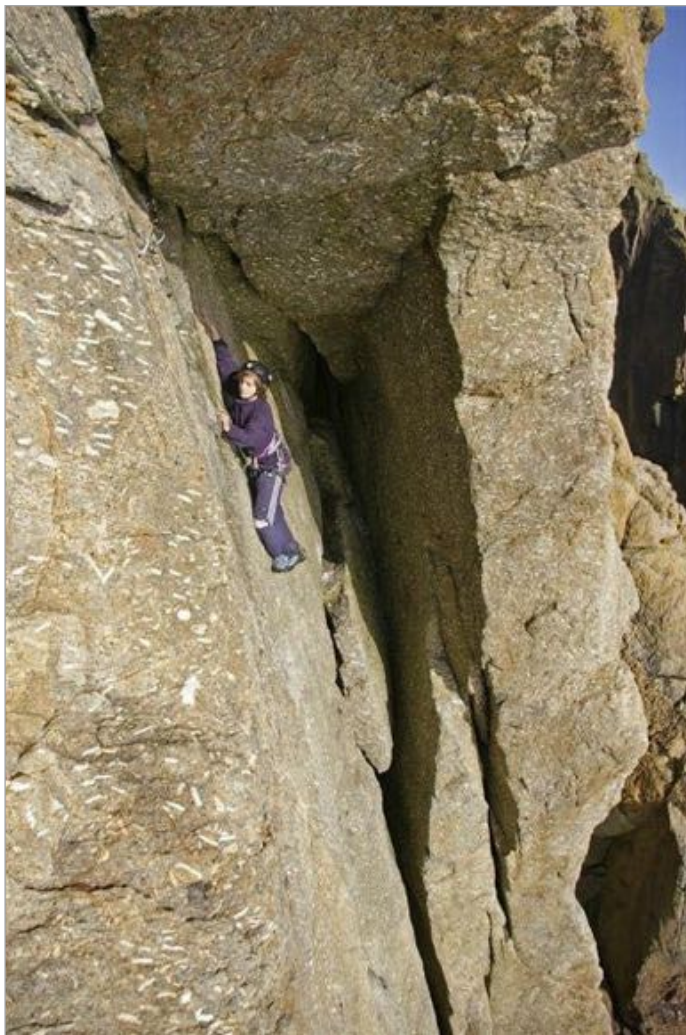


**The
Climbers' Club Journal
2006-7**

**Edited by
Iain Peters**

**2006-2007
The Climbers' Club**



"An Garrek nevek." Cornish tr. - "God's Own Rock." **Diocese**, Chair ladder
Photo: Don Sargeant

The 122nd issue of the **CLIMBERS' CLUB JOURNAL**

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Editorial

The evolution of language is fascinating. Take the word 'journal'; originally it described a book containing the plan or times of daily prayers, hence *diurnal* in late middle English, or *journal* in old French if you prefer! Its journey from the sacred to the profane travelled via a daily diary to its present principal meaning of a newspaper or magazine on a specific subject.

Whether the Climbers' Club Journal fits into any of the above definitions is open to interpretation. It is certainly not a timetable for prayer although its contents may be reflective, if not inspirational. Neither is it a climbing diary, although some may well have used their own journals as aides memoires. My own is nothing more than scribbled dates and initials next to a route description. Half a lifetime's experience compressed into a series of fading pencil marks hardly qualifies me as a climbing Pepys, but they certainly bring back those 'moments of being'.

Without the full page glossy ads, fancy typefaces and sections on training and gear, it is no magazine, and lacking headlines about Amy Winehouse's alcohol consumption or the latest downturn in the global economy it will never appear on the news stands along with the Daily Sport or The Guardian.

Perhaps, in the end, the CCJ is simply a celebration of the reason why there is a Climbers' Club at all, let alone one that more people than ever before wish to join. There are those who believe, indeed, have expressed their opinion to me in no uncertain terms, that this Journal should be the standard bearer for British climbing writing, charting and commenting on the major developments and issues such as the rise and rise of now mainstream, once fringe, activities such as DWS and bouldering. It should contain more commissioned articles from the best contemporary authors, and less of the holiday reminiscences. My reply is that this is a club for climbers of all abilities, and that applies to paper as well as the crag. As Ian Smith pointed out in a Newsletter article on the subject, this is part of its *raison d'être*. The Journal can and must give the membership an opportunity to have articles printed on topics which no commercial magazine would consider. One only has to read through some of the CCJ's from the 1950s and 1960s to realise that many of the present household names in mountain literature cut their creative teeth describing what they did on their holidays!

It's a wee bit different these days and attracting an increasingly professional and sponsored elite to consider, first joining the Club, then spending unpaid time on writing an article for an in-house journal is a tall order.

Therein lies the real threat to the future of the CCJ, and it is not simply due to recalcitrant editors or the problems and spiralling costs of printing. Back in the sixties the annual journal was a big fish in a comparatively small pond, with no sharks lurking in the murky depths of commercialism. We were a club for gentlemen (only!) rather than players and expected no financial reward for our literary efforts. Almost overnight, a Mountain came to Mohammed in the shape of a beautifully produced monthly magazine, and impoverished gentlemen and even a few ladies realised that perhaps they too could now become relatively prosperous and famous players. Nearly half a century on, Information Technology has utterly transformed the playing field again. Those at, or writing about, the cutting edge of all forms of mountaineering now publish on the web, giving them an opportunity to reach a potential readership of hundreds of thousands. The traditional magazine editors, including distinguished members of this club, have become an endangered species, their titles initially

absorbed by multinational publishing empires and then their habitat further threatened by powerful invaders like website and retailers' on-line newsletters. Forums, blogs, even home movies filmed on a mobile phone and broadcast on YouTube or Facebook provide an instantly accessible outlet for hundreds of aspiring climbing wannabes, and, with a bit of good luck as well as an ability to headpoint E10 or 8c+, a relatively quick and easy path to fame and fortune, or at the very least an open door to potential sponsors.

How the Club and its Journal should adapt, if at all, to this changed (and fast changing) environment is bound to be the subject of much debate. On the one hand the CCJ maintains a long and distinguished tradition for encouraging mountain writing, but, as stated above, the electronic media is becoming increasingly sophisticated and attractive, particularly to a new generation who have grown up with the technology.

Another factor that might affect the Journal is the age profile of the membership. Although the Club continues to attract new members, the average age rises inexorably and is now in the mid-fifties, in the FRCC it is nearer sixty. Many of the baby boomers who joined in their twenties and spearheaded the development of such major areas as Gogarth or the North Cornwall Coast, ruffling a few feathers in the process, can now claim their bus passes and an extra bob or two at Christmas to keep themselves warm. They still can and do climb the big routes of 40 years ago, both at home and abroad, the difference is that their ascents then often resulted in an article for the CCJ, but not now to any great extent. Gwyn Evans's new take on the old theme of Extol in these pages shows one way of addressing the problem. Such routes, and there seemed to be an endless supply of them, once provided a rare feast (both on and off the page) if one was good enough to try them, but fast food climbing, some of it undoubtedly of exceptionally high quality, is the new name of the game.

Tap "Kalymnos climbing" into Google and in a fraction of a second you will have a take-away menu of 70,000 dishes at your fingertips, articles, photo essays, topos and the like. Many of our members frequently indulge. What's it to be, 6b on immaculate limestone with a bolt every few feet and a warm sun on your back or Mild Extreme on the Lleyn with disposable holds and the next front racing across the Irish Sea? No contest really is it? Of the two experiences the latter will always provide more drama when written down, Nick Bullock's piece on the Red Wall is a classic example, but the ultimate irony is as more and more of us choose the safe, albeit highly enjoyable option, there is far less for us to write home (or to the CCJ) about.

Of course if you are lucky enough to come across an as yet unclimbed Hellenic classic, the local community will even provide you with the bolts and a gun to put them in with, then sell you a cold beer and kalamaria when you're done! Is this an example of a new synergy between climbers and non-climbers that might be worth exploring in print? The micro economics of climbing doesn't really fire the imagination. Likewise, the V12 boulder problem or the months of training and top-rope practice required to headpoint a 'last great problem' on the grit or in The Pass have added yet more texture to our cloth of gold but can a five minute explosion of energy and commitment be translated into a 2000 word essay?

The Climbers' Club is 1500 individuals who happen to share a common love of the mountains and crags. For most of the time sharing simply means going out and climbing with your mates. Don't play safe; cast off any diffidence about your ability or modest achievement and consider sharing the experience with the rest of us inside the covers of the CCJ. You may not set the world of climbing literature alight but I'm damned sure that someone will find a resonance, and that's what it's all about, isn't it?

At the seaside

Des Hannigan

In Zawn Duel, by Gurnard's Head, by Pedn Kei,
The light resolves,
Into darkness, thick, blood-black;
Reforms to jet and then dissolves.
We fell from grace and the golden light,
To midday's midnight
In one long glide;
An abseil into the afterlife, at the seaside.
Three hundred feet we fell
Between those adamantine walls.
Two madmen in control
of nothing more than gravity and gall.

The deep zawn stood, a bare three fathoms wide.
Its shrouded nave
Echoed to the roar of ocean swells
Whose driven, distant waves
Struck other canyons and cathedrals drowned.
It shuddered with the sound
Of shoaling fish a million strong.
They turned on the tide, struck ground.
And where we lodged in Zawn Duel's undercroft,
We felt the lifeblood
Of that undersea; its tides, its legions
Raging towards the flood.

All we had for favour shone,
A beam of golden light at grass. Enough
To draw us up the savage rock
That soared, implacable, above.
We checked our gear;
Then spun our rocky rope trick to the sky;
The neat pavane of climbing's futile dance,
The game of gravity defied.
We rose with grace to the golden light.
A half tide's turn it took to pass,
From Zawn Duel's deadly artifice;
To climb that hooded wall to grass.

Raven crag time *(for Stephen Goodwin)*

Terry Gifford

'Do you think we will be late?' he said
on the summit of Summit Route,
the summer light leaking power slightly
now that we'd climbed into it, sorting gear,
still amazed at that last rearing up of rock.
'There's no such thing as late from climbing',
I said, having been late from climbing
all my life. Today his breakfast was to blame:
toast, croissants, peaches, another coffee,
another book to recommend to each other.

So, after sweating up sultry Combe Ghyll,
at the cragfoot a rockclock started ticking,
or perhaps not, as the timeless dimension of steep
moves into heather, belays for grazing
bilberries without hands, then shocking laybacks,
stopped valley time all the way to the top
when a view should be taken, let sink in.
This Zen-time takes time. As does
the decompression of descent: an alpine peak,
Honister, looming on our left, Dove Holes
on our right, a shining shield covering its caves.
Selfless and selfish, both, is Raven Crag time.

Climbing gloves

Julian King



Say the word Dachstein to a climber and the first thing that comes into their mind is those classic woolly mitts associated with the winter climbing. The Dachsteingebirge, the mountain from where those gloves derive their name, is located at the far eastern end of the northern limestone alps of Austria, in the county of Steiermark, just north of the great world cup ski town of Schladming and above the town of Ramsau.

As you drive away from the main road through Ramsau the range presents itself to the north at the head of its own glacial valley as a broad and imposingly tall south face of Dolomitic limestone, at its maximum height a mighty 1000m of near vertical rock rising from steep scree over meadows. The range stands alone as do many of the mountain groups in the east of Austria. Green grass to the south, glaciers and extensive glacial screes falling away to lakes in the north, the main ridge of peaks

running east west forms a slight curve with the highest point in the middle. This curvature allows the sun to illuminate the eastern faces in the evening with a warm red glow until long after the fields below have gone dark and the crickets gone silent, an impressive sight. Even more impressive is the morning fanfare as the sun lowers itself down the face of the Höher Dachstein, an imposing glow awakening first the 2995m high summit of the range, the intended high point of our climb.

My Austrian climbing companion Franz has brought me here to climb the long and truly classic line of the Steinerweg. The route is long, over 1000m of climbing over a vertical height of 850m, in 28 pitches. We arrive early the evening before, park up and walk up to the Dachstein-Südwandhütte, our base for the night, a steep but easy 30 minutes. That for me is one of the joys of Austrian climbing, short walk-ins to clean and well provisioned huts. A little logistics exercise before we leave the jeep ensures that we take only what we need for the night and the climb. Everything is coming up with us; Franz is a stickler for not wasting energy, either by having to carry too much or by returning to a high hut to get equipment when descent paths lead to the car park first. Fresh clothes, food and water enough left in the car, wrapped in blankets to stop it going off, that is going to be our returning treat.

We eat well in the hut. Communal tables of climbers from all over Europe and particularly the new eastern European states across Austria's eastern border fill the dining area. British climbers are rare in these parts, and are missing some real treats. Some of

Above: Dachstein Südwand main face; the route continues off the Plattendach (Great Ramp) roughly up the line between light and shade in the middle of the picture."

Opposite: Dachsteingebirge Sud. L to R - *Torstein (2947m), Mitterspitz (2926m), Hoher Dachstein (2995m) and Hoes Dirndl (2829m)*

Overleaf: The final moves on the **Salzburger Band** traverse - Pitch 11, 300m of overhanging face below my feet!

All photos: Julian King col.



these guys look like they have only just left the 70s if one judges by the attire, but by reputation they climb hard and have put up challenging new lines in these ranges. The Südwandhütte is illuminated by gas; that and the old climbing pictures, newspaper articles and memorabilia on the walls and shelves really set my mind for tomorrow's climb. The route was put up in 1909 by the brothers Steiner Georg "Irg" and Franz. Their father was a famous local climber before them and they were well equipped with his knowledge, he having got as far as the top of the 'Plattendach' Slab Roof, the great ramp feature of the lower half of the line, to see this classic problem through to the summit. The line they discovered follows a clever threading together of classic features, all of a grade no harder than UIAA 5. The lower section of the climb, an easy pillar, then a wall and rising slabs lead to the vertical headwall and summit canyon/ corner, which is reached by an initial airy traverse.

The next day will be long. I go outside for some air and a look at our destination of the morning. The Südwand is falling into darkness, the red glow deep and now less comforting than the iridescence of the earlier evening. Our room is clean and simple, illuminated by candle, wood furniture, panelled walls, a simple crucifix, lace on the table and dried flowers in a glass. The brothers Steiner could have been here yesterday. My room's view is of the face, now a black silhouette under a deep blue, starlit sky. My watch's barometer is rising; tomorrow the weather will be fine. Good.

Alarms at 5.00am wake Franz and I from deep sleep. Actually Franz doesn't wake and gets the right hump when I rouse him 10 minutes later. He doesn't like falling behind on a plan. The usual bleary-eyed breakfast and hot (yes hot, not luke-warm as in France) tea freshly made by the Guardian's wife is consumed in 10 minutes, packs, prepared the night before, shouldered and we are on our way by 5.30am, a good early getaway, but we are not the first out. It is important to us that we are amongst the first parties on the line as we are planning to keep a good pace for the day.

The walk-in is a good hour and a half, rising diagonally over rock bands with some steep scrambling and scree to a notch and the first full view of the face. The amphitheatre of the south face is still grey in the slightly hazy, pre-dawn light. Only the very tip of the summit is bright, already in the sun, but the sky above already blue. A falling path the other side of the notch leads to the final obstacle of the approach, the face's snow (read 'ice' at this time of the morning) field. We have brought ultra lightweight crampons with us for this and glad we did too. The ice field is steep and long and the crossing is right at the top. A slip wouldn't be very pleasant. That said Franz's idea of ultra lightweight crampons is more like glorified and mechanically adjusted Sunday roast carving forks with bailer twine for straps. He had a pair for each of us, I didn't see them before we left the car, more fool me. These and well shaped lumps of rock to substitute for ice axes saw an adventurous 100m crab crawl traverse to the start of the route, or is this the start of the route, at the edge of the ice field? My hands are getting cold. I try not to think too much about it, ice is not really my forte, don't we have a glacier to descend at the end of the day too? No point in worrying about it now, just go.

A quick change into rock boots and we are climbing, my fingers feel woody for the first couple of pitches, thankfully there is nothing difficult. As luck would have it we managed to overtake everyone on the walk-in, passing the last party at the start of the ice field. They had no crampons so needed our path to make the crossing. Our steps were light, no need to spoil the ice or help them stay too close to our tail, eh?! The first 6 pitches should be done in under 1 hour. That is the traditional measure of a party's fitness to complete the route. By 8.00am we are at the Dachgiebel breakfast ledge eating and drinking, the face above clear of climbers, the sky above clear of clouds. We are in for a good day. The view down the great ramp of the Plattendach is impressive and no sign of those following. Our panorama is of the great Austrian ranges of the Goldberg group and the Hohe Tauern with the Grossglockner and Grossvenediger just visible on the horizon, the Venediger's ice white summit sparkling like it always does in the early morning light of summer.

The real climbing on this route starts above. A short, truly cone shaped pillar is climbed on the rear left via a series of cracks to its apex and the start of the first key section, the traverse. Here there are two choices, the traditional "Steiner Band" upper traverse which has 1 point of aid or the lower "Salzburger Band" climbed without aid. Both 3 pitches long, we opt for the lower ledge system that gradually narrows to leave you suspended by finger tips and toes over a massive 150m drop into open air. A quick hop up at the end and back slightly right on a well pocketed but vertical face brings us to the end of the original traverse. This all feels very open and airy for a climb put up in 1909! A comfortable belay allows us to take a quick look at the Münchner Kamine, a chimney system, that although only grade 5, is frequently the undoing of parties off route and the scene of many a rescue. The chimneys remain wet for most of the season and are very difficult to down climb Franz tells me. Silence is broken by a clattering and that heart stopping screaming zip zip noise from above. Instinctively we press our bodies against the wall. Stones fall, and not just a few, from directly overhead, which wakes us up again to where we are. Pitch 16, and we are getting into the real heart of the climb. The morning cloud is rising past us from the valley below, not heavy, but dim enough with the stone fall to sober our mood a little and get us paying attention to what we are doing.

The next 6 pitches will see us to the crux of the route via a devious line through compact rock split by discontinuous cracks and gently bulging limestone roofs and around pillars, all in the most vertical of arenas. I still find it hard to believe that climbing of this grade (not

difficult, between 3 and 5-) can be mixed with such vertical terrain. It is a very inspiring place to be and my hat goes off to the first ascensionists for working out the line. Short ropes of hemp, pitons and nailed boots would certainly have added something to the event. As we move through the pitches the cloud rolls in and out a little adding to the mood of the day, each twist and turn of our line following strong classic limestone features fixed into this vertical wall. The crux of the route comes in the form of a short overhanging crack at the top of a small 'canyon' in the face on pitch 22, just at the base of the Gipfelschlucht (summit canyon) corner system. The verticality eases back a bit from here on. It looks like a very, very large block has fallen away from hereabouts many centuries ago. We choose to pass the crack in the roof by climbing a crack and slab some 10m left along the belay ledge. This choice comes with a water polished surface and is today a little wet. After 15m of grappling with the slab, that in this condition is closer to 6+ than the 5 given in the guide, our choice of line would seem no better than the normal option of aiding through the roof crack with a rucksack on. You have to live with your choices in this game.



Pitch 23 and we move out left to get onto the left hand side of the canyon wall. This move gets us out of the stone fall corridor. It is another place that parties often go wrong Franz tells me. The right wall under the fall line of the summit looks climbable, however the rock is very brittle and compact, and places to put in protection are sparse and unreliable. We are high on the route and the air is getting cold. We are higher than the glaciers to the north and it shows. There is permanent snow and ice on the route now and the natural water weeping in curtains from between the rock bands freezes the fine scree and soil together on the small ledges. We stop to put an extra layer on. I hope it gets no colder as I've got nothing else bar a water proof. The final 8 pitches take a line always on the left that keeps us out of the fall line of the canyon which threw down on us earlier. The rock becomes more friable here too as we ascend, a result of continuous freezing and thawing over the millennia. Little pieces here, there and everywhere and we move carefully, mindful of the parties below, we can hear their voices, not too far behind.

The climbing becomes easier with each pitch that passes now. The canyon widens and the sky above increases in size. The birds that live up here start to move around over our head, sensing that humans are approaching, which in their mind means the arrival of snack food. Right of the penultimate pitch are the summit ledges that the first party followed as was the remit of that time to finish a route right under the summit. They don't look like a reasonable alternative even for the sake of nostalgia. We pass them by, glad that the rules of the game have changed now. These days everyone climbs out onto the west ridge and walks the 50m to the summit cross. There is a klettersteig cable here. I suppose it could be useful for the ski tourers in the winter but seems unnecessary considering the ridge at this point is all but flat.

The summit arrives after 6 hours and 25 minutes on the route, allowing the generous breakfast stop, I feel that is a pretty good time for 28 pitches and over 1000m of climbing. I'm pleased with myself and Franz and I shake hands on our success, 'Berg Heil'. Franz tells me the record for the climb is an astonishing 1 hour by the local guide Kurt Ringhofer, I feel a little deflated.

Now I remember the descent is by glacier, and that means those crampons again. The down climb off the summit is, to be honest, the antithesis of the ascent. We go down by the Normalweg, the RandKluft-Steig, which to put it bluntly is rubbish (and littered with the same). This is the easy klettersteig route the guides use all year to bring tourists to the Gipfel for their photo. There is polished ironware everywhere, it faces north so is covered in ice, there is a total lack of etiquette when passing and to top it all a bergschrund to leap when you get to the bottom. After the grandeur and beauty of our south face climb the reality of mountain tourism hits me square in the face. I want to get off this line quickly before the change of ambience resets my mood. Thankfully Franz is eager to get off too, but for another reason. We put on our crampons and un-roped, head down the steep, receding glacier diagonally eastwards toward the shoulder east of the summit pyramid. I assume Franz is taking the scenic route away from the tourist track and gladly follow behind. The glacier rises a little and levels out and we walk long toward the south edge of the ice and the Dachsteinwarte.

A turn of a corner and suddenly heaven appears before my eyes. There are people, mainly climbers, stretched out on sun warmed slabby rocks drinking tall glasses of cold draft beer!! I must have fallen over the edge or something! Nestled deeply into a natural cleft in the ridge is a small hut, the Seethalerhutte, with the usual good food and excellent drinking. We both buy Apfelsaft gespritzt - apple juice with fizzy water, to quench our thirst and a grosses beer to....well basically for no reason other than we can and it seems daft not to! We laze in the sun bare chest and feet, letting clothes dry a little. There is a fantastic view of the Steinerweg from here and I do a bit of videoing. A basket of chips each, another beer, just to be sure that the second one is as good as the first. It is. Then back on down the mountain. The descent is a dream, no crampons required, just a comfortable 'rutschen' ski slide on our boots, to the main ski lift which operates all year. A cable car ride down and we are back at the jeep in no time for fresh clothes, water and food. I buy a climbing guide to the range in the lift station and lose myself in it as we travel down.

Our journey ends with a visit to one of Franz's friends, who as luck would have it, is the inn keeper of the hut below the lift station. Austrians still consider it impolite to pass through a place and not call in on those you know, and to pass someone on a path in the mountains or a village and not extend a greeting is not done, certainly in rural areas, and taken as a sign of unsociability. I guess it goes back to the days when to pass over or around a mountain range was a long journey and so social visiting was as important as conducting business. We drink more social beer and tea, eat 'Kuchen'n Schlag' - cake and cream, listening to stories of local events. Climbers and climbing always seems to add something to life in the mountains, even if it is just a source of income and gossip about recent ascents and rescues. It is good to add to as well as take away. As we drive down the valley towards home I watch the sun set over the Dachstein again. It would be nice to come back, there is so much to do in this country. I may or I may not, but I will certainly never forget this mountain.

Lavish praise for what was an Entity

Gwyn Evans

Many years ago, at the start of the hippy era, I read my first rock climbing article. Many of its phrases stayed in my mind to be recalled at silly moments; when the trudge becomes interminable and the song which has been circling in my head suddenly gets too much out will come,

... nothing is lineless in the realm of the artificial ...towering like a robber baron's fortress over the head of the valley..." couldn't be a better description of Dove Crag. To me, this is the most forbidding crag in all Lakeland and its routes typify those of the modern era: brief, brutish and hard. The crag is very compact but really consists of North and South Buttresses separated by a triangle of slabs, soaring upwards into a huge overhanging corner.

...it is between these Buttresses where the great line of the crag lies.

This is Extol, and is so impressive in its line that it was stated by the guidebook writer to present a challenge unanswerable by unaided climbing. Hiraeth takes a rather improbable line up the highest part of the South Buttress, immediately left of Extol, while Hangover climbs the central slabs and escapes rightwards below the huge and overhanging corner of Extol.

After a CC Journal article entitled Entity, Extol was to be a Hard Rock essay subject and it grew in my eyes as a must dowhen I was good enough.

It could have been the end of the world. Everything was hidden by a thick yellow mist and all would have been silent but for Wee Brother's incessant moaning about his feet and the sac and why couldn't we go to Tremadog? Then we found the crag as it bumped into us. We argued about who should carry the gear home until the mists began to evaporate and then we argued over cruxes until the full dimensions of the crag impressed us into silence.

I don't have a Wee Brother, instead I have My Boy. It was on his tick list also; a result of my subliminal mutterings? September 2005, a weekend in the Lakes, but unfortunately we chose a cold and windy one and after a couple of blowy days on Gimmer and Black Crag we spent Monday in White Ghyll. "It's the biggest pitch I've ever done. It's awesome". My Boy was getting the beta from some local lads while I fought with Do Not Direct. He was contemplative in the car on the way home.

June 2006. "The weather forecast is good, only one place to go." So the adventure began. Walking up in the early morning it was difficult to recognise the frightening crag of which I had read so much; the sun bathed the North Buttress and it all looked quite amenable

The North Buttress impends continuously for 200 feet and is lineless but for a line of rusting irons indicating that nothing is lineless in the realm of the artificial.



Today the North Buttress sprouted a few pieces of tat showing that in the land of the strong fingered, E7 is possible.

...he wanted Extol, so I graciously led up the first pitch of Hangover to a fabulous perch at the apex of the slabs where the beetling great roofs gave shelter from the weather. From here the long pitch of Extol takes origin.

We wanted Extol but I knew my place so I led up the first pitches of Hangover; well, who wants an “unpleasant chimney” when there are pleasant slabs to climb?

...on the stance life was very peaceful. What a great day: if only the crag wasn't shadow-bound I wouldn't have to fight off the creeping death. The occasional squeak or grunt slid down the rope ... with 10 feet of rope left of 150, tufts of moss and turf floated past – life must be hectic up there. As the ropes ran out, sounds of song from above relieved the tension. He must have borrowed or stolen another rope so we didn't have to climb together at both ends after all.

An abortive attempt to defreeze as I unspike, then it's my turn for battle. A great swing across an overhanging wall, a creaking groove and my knees were knocking below the first crux. A sling tied round a downward-pointing spike provided momentary amusement. Sprawled across the groove like a great spider, with anaesthetised fingers and toe-nails scything moss through tatty

PA's I discovered the most rewarding progress facing outwards invoking Faith: the God of Friction. This delivered me below a beetling great wall where the difficulties only began.

Perched happily in the middle was a spike bearing the faithful abseil sling and high above, a roof where a sling drooped temptingly. For the next 20 feet that was the whole theme of my existence, for there was security. Speed was essential, but there's little joy in little jugs on a wall like this – "What a lead" I kept thinking, "Whillans must have been in a really foul mood for the first ascent". Finally, with a spectacular layback and little grace I grasped the sling.

All's well that ends well and I was rewarded by the grinning coconut face of a brother now much bigger in my esteem. I heaved into the groove passed a very crafty runner and quickly discovered another crux. The moves out onto and up the right arête were transparently thin – "What a lead" as I crawled onto grass again. I would have said this out loud if at this moment he hadn't dropped the ropes and gaily skipped down the hill, howling Dovedale Groove to anyone who cared to listen.

Cool on the stance, after the sun had gone round the corner to warm the South Buttress and points further west. A long time later the ropes were taken in. Big jugs across a steep wall, what was the Boy's problem? "Groove doesn't seem too bad, ooh, aah, what's this? A smoother groove and an overhanging wall and then an overhang and ropes running up through runners. That must be the way he went". After the groove I inspected the runners on the overhanging wall; is it a good idea to put nuts behind flaky jugs, perhaps slings would be better? But My Boy's of a new generation and doesn't understand line slings, even Dyneema ones. Under the roof what looked like a rest point wasn't, "how the hell did Whillans place a peg from this position?" Being of the old school I clipped a sling into the nut and hung from it. Even after a rest the holds in the groove above were not accommodating. Established in the groove the promised jug up on the right was well out of reach and needed a blind faith move. Then there was the rib.

I was really impressed by Wee Brother's lead, maybe he should play at Big Brother now. Still we'd better wait; he's sure to burn himself out soon. I should know ... I'll soon be twenty-one.

I was impressed by My Boy, not for the first time I might say, but he does tell me he's slowing down. I should know... I'll soon be sixty.

In Italics: extracts from "When a man gets old" by Robin Barley, Manchester University Mountaineering Club Journal 1964

Personae:

Wee Brother	Tony Barley
My Boy	Haydn Griffiths

Opposite: "... What's the boy's problem?" Haydn Griffiths contemplating the crux section of Extol.

Photo: H Griffiths col.

Dangerous places

Dave Gregory

The British Mountaineering Council provides a comprehensive insurance policy against the objective perils of the mountaineering game but the small print mentions little of the hidden risks of staying in those havens, beloved of the mountaineering community, which are scattered about the hill regions of Britain and Europe, the climbing club huts. It ought to because club huts are dangerous places.

The most hazardous are those with which one is not familiar and at which one arrives in the small dark hours. Typically huts are old cottages with the thick walls, low ceilings and beams, abrupt changes in floor level and unexpected projections common in buildings of their age. These obstructions marshal themselves along the path which the unfamiliar must take in finding the dormitory and can inflict severe contusions. They can be avoided by switching on the lights but of course the relevant switches are hidden behind a hunchback drape of anoraks on the hooks by the door. A torch would be an adequate substitute and all climbers own a head torch but, of course, it is at the bottom of the rucksack, or is it in the car boot? Or did you leave it in Tom's car last Sunday night? It doesn't actually matter very much because the battery has run out and is leaking alkaline solutions into the battery case and corroding the terminals beyond use.

Besides the built-in hazards the way to the bed space will be strewn with recumbent forms. Despite them and the fact that each sizeable chair and sofa containing a contorted occupant provides the immediately and obviously deducible conclusion that the dormitory is full, if not overflowing, the late arrivals bump noisily into it and find its light switch with great ease, flooding the rows of tightly-packed sausages with unwanted light. Followed at the least, by curses or, in further stages of anger, by a number of boots, the unfortunates stagger back along the gauntlet of antique obstructions to spend the night in the car.

To have secured, by early arrival, the luxury of a bed space is no guarantee of safety. Most huts have a high bunk, last to be occupied, and difficult of ascent. The furnishing of the necessary holds will have been random and unplanned. The structures of the bunks below are major provisions but the occupants of those bunks will have placed their limbs or faces in exactly the location upon which one wishes to place one's feet. There will be cast iron coat-hooks as artificial aids. These have a critical load-strength the exceeding of which may precipitate the overweight, or merely large, with some agony to the floor. These same hooks present a real danger to the person descending from that upper bunk. When the descender failing, in his flailing, to find an adequate foothold, decides, unwisely, to slide to the floor relying on his handholds and luck those hooks lie in wait to catch on folds of clothing or the tender places of their anatomy.

Lower bunks are the safest places but even there care is needed if one is to arrive in good physical condition at the crag. Having one's face trodden on by the occupants of upper bunks is not a pleasant experience. A person may spend several nights in the bottom bunk of one hut and, changing location, find himself in an upper bunk in another. Having been accustomed to swinging his legs easily onto the floor, to stagger loowards when midnight pressure signals, he may still so do in this upper bunk. He will probably damage himself

but, more frightening for the occupants of lower bunks, he may, if their legs or arms project somewhat in the abandon of sleep, fracture, even guillotine, these members in his comatose descent. Newton and his apple are no friends of the man in the top bunk, or the person below him.

Many continental huts insist on their users wearing a form of clog and of course the stairs to the dormitory will be of hollow and resonant wood designed to awaken the early sleepers. Once reached the communal mattress will not lead immediately to the arms of Morpheus. The British seem, as a defensible generalisation, to be happy to sleep in rooms with open windows, in fact may insist on this. Those teeming nations which begin beyond the silver sea are not so hardy. Their dortoirs and matrazzenlagers will wish to confine maybe a score of generators of various exhaust gases in the frowst of a hermetically sealed atmosphere. Over the nature of some of these odours it is best, perhaps, to draw a thick blanket. Suffice it to mention that the presence of a sleeper with a rampant and ill-controlled gastric process can lead to a night of abused nasal organs and a morning mouth like unto a parrot's cage. Asphyxia is one danger; the possibility of ill-tempered conflict over the repeated opening and closing of windows another. Happy the users of those commodious huts where all those who wish to rise at the same time are accommodated in the same room. Early morning disturbance and the fighting across still dormant semi-corpses with its resultant production of ill temper are thereby reduced.

All the domestic hazards to which members of the party will have become accustomed in their own homes will lie massed in wait in the unfamiliar hut. The gas and electric water heaters whose indicator lights do not work, whose switches are live and lethal, and which spit super-heated steam in one's face, or which take years to reach the boiling point of water and play organ tunes in the middle of the night. The stove will be unfamiliar and take whole evenings to light. If gas, the control tap will be stuck and upon the necessary torque being applied to it will break, filling the building with an explosive mixture, necessitating its evacuation. Coal and coke fires are still allowable in rural, non-smoke-free zones, and can give a welcoming, homely glow, and the possibility of roasting chestnuts and toasting kippers, which most city dwellers can no longer savour. The technical intricacies of lighting such fires are beyond most of us. The use of paraffin to speed up the process is fraught with danger particularly if the tin contains petrol. The lighting process is sure to fill the hut with smoke despite the jackdaws having been evicted from the chimney space. Even if the chimney-sweeping brushes lying innocently in the coal shed tempt one to clear any flue obstruction, be dissuaded. In chimney sweeping lies disaster. A floor covered in soot; a brush lost in the chimney; abraded knuckles; a clutter of objects behind you smashed by the waving rod length, and an irretrievably lost temper lie that way, not to mention the permanent loss of the respect of one's companions.

I ought to add as a final warning that other dangerous havens in which the mountaineer may occasionally find himself do exist. I refer not to the impromptu bivouac; nor to the last resort telephone kiosk when hitchable traffic ceases; nor to the lethal, car-seat night in a Tallahassee layby. I refer to the Youth Hostel. One does not often find in a Youth Hostel the more usual of the dangers illustrated above; or predatory and uncapped crampons, or drunkards and the like; but beware before one treads unwarily into the curtilages of the Auberges de la Jeunesse. They often contain that most dangerous of organisms, children.

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

Recovery

Nick Bullock

A moving-modern-art painting passes in front of my face. Green-black-grey-white but most of all red. Slipping. Swirling. Blending. Like shimmering greasy-oil on the surface of a pool at the side of a busy road. I slide the length of the abseil rope. Inspecting, dissecting, attempting to fathom lines amongst the mayhem of runnels and cracks. Bands of soft white clay cut through the red-rock with Stanley-knife precision. Pink fibrous scar tissue, a reminder for life and a lesson for life, running the length of an inmate's face was the last time I had seen a line this true.

Seagull shit runs in festering-infecting, fish-stinking-sticky streaks. It pours from insect ridden nest sites like icicles pouring from an overflowing gutter in winter. Nests fill the ledges, blocking the clay bands with their mud-thatch construction, sprouting from between congealed lumps of soft rock. The fledgling seagulls have long departed, living on their own now - making their way in an unforgiving-bad-mad world. The sickly stench of shit and fish and sea, mingle together making a heady aroma. The smell burrows like cigarette smoke into the fibres of my clothes.

The climbing restrictions have been lifted; remnants of family life are strewn all over the face. Stu McAleese and I settle on the grass ramp at the foot of Left-Hand Red Wall. The sea crashes into the gaping void at the base of the face. Gulls swoop and soar on thermals, screaming, crying, liberated. I envy their skill and their view, but not their ability to fly.

Insects burrow and squirm in the dirt and slime. Speckled-fat-spiders spin a yarn between thick-crinkled and leathery dock leaves. Vibrant-green bunches burst from the ramp that we carefully sort our gear for the first time this season. For me it's the first time ever on Red Wall at Gogarth in North Wales and the excitement I feel is threatening to burst from my fingertips.

"Go for it, but take your time and lace it."

Stu, who has teamed up with me for the time I'm here in North Wales calls, he in-stills confidence in me. His energy and easy-going nature are just two of a long list of credentials that make climbing with him a joy.

Stepping from the green and sloping and into the red and grey-vertical world of the crumbling first pitch of the climb, Stu adds encouragement

"Twid says to climb here you have to spread your weight." I move back and forth several times too scared to pull on a single hold.

"Yes, well that doesn't give me loads of confidence as Twid's a Jedi on this stuff."

I recall a conversation with Louise, Twid's partner the previous day, "He says the rock on Red Wall isn't loose, it's soft." She follows this with a look that tells me more than words.

This gives me no confidence at all as I ease five points of contact into a rising clay chimney. Pushing. Pressing. Palming. Careful transference of weight in an attempt to become an astronaut in a solar system of red and smelly, I wished gravity didn't rule on planet Gogarth. Really though I'm glad it does. Life would be staid, unexciting, passé without gravity.

I have carried more gear and placed more gear in the last few minutes than ever before in the previous weeks of cragging.

"Place as much as you can, whenever you can," Stu calls.

He really doesn't need to convince me. Placing cams into clay, wires into moving flakes and slinging spikes whenever possible I tell myself something will hold should the unthinkable happen.

Sitting belayed on the pedestal in the middle of the wall the first pitch is in the bag. Relatively easy, but feeling more serious than many of the harder climbs I've led. I peer down to the glittering sea crashing into the zawn a hundred feet below and reflect on the reason I'm now in Wales cragging, and not mountaineering in Peru.

My climbing partner on many adventures over the previous ten years, Jules Cartwright, had been hit by a rock and fallen with his client while guiding in the Alps. I thought I was OK until I started climbing on my early return from the mountains. It was then I discovered that my usual carefree attitude had taken a serious knock with the death of my friend. Jules was indestructible. If he can die what hope for the rest of us? The last occasion we had climbed together was here at Gogarth, the sea sparkled much as today...much as his eyes. The first few weeks were difficult and I was still carrying a rack of gear more suited to the walls of Yosemite, a heavy heart and a head of emotion, but my confidence was returning along with the strength in my arms.

The Blonde God passed by looking honed, sure, and in control. Breezing the more solid, but technically more difficult second pitch, we met on top of the crag to ask what next?

"Cannibal sounds interesting don't you think?" The blonde confident one of the partnership states while reading the guide.

"You reckon? It sounds pretty bloody scary to me." From the old, knackered, unconfident one, knowing it was my lead.

Feeling the need to push myself a little more I soon found myself on the downward journey once again ready to do a slow-cautious and calculated dance amongst the soft.

E4 5c is not a popular grade for some climbers. It suggests scary run-outs and sustained unprotected sequences. Normally this is the type of ground I love when I'm going well and feeling confident. Unfortunately I was neither, although the voice had returned, the voice of castigation, a sure sign my drive was returning.

Dust covered fins of suspect potato-crisp quality had to be pulled. Another clay band was grovelled, sitting and recovery, mentally preparing, then launching once again into the mad-moon-like-meringue structure jutting above.

Pulling the lip of Red Wall for the second time that day my thirst for adventure was sated and with the blonde one wilting in the heat,

('Ha, not looking so good now' I thought), we ran away for a car-park ice cream hit.

A couple of days later I returned with the original Catalogue Man John Bracey. Steel jaw and chiselled features, sophisticated and young, I vowed to look for climbing partners that were preferably on a par with my plain looks, or even better - bald fat and ugly!

Once again stood on the grassy ramp at the base of Left-Hand Red Wall, the dirt and smell shocked me with the intensity. Catalogue Man slid beside me and looked with disgust at the first pitch of Pagan, the three star Pat Littlejohn route. His lip curled as if the barman had served his martini stirred and not shaken.

"Wow, that looks disgusting...your lead I reckon."

"Ok, but it isn't so bad once you start," hoping to sandbag Bracey into leading the pitch.

"No that's OK Nick, go for it, I know how much you like this sort of thing."

This sort of thing was a traverse along a green and slimy, wet and festering ledge. A nest filled the ledge at one point. Lush grass bushed from beneath and above, dripping clear, clean

water, sparkling in the sun, before mixing with green slime to become tainted and infected, welcome to the world!

Cleaning my shoes for the fifth time, knocking the lumps of ash from the rubber, I wondered why I was bothering, this would be no technical, soft-shoe shuffle across clean solid rock. The thought of chalk was laughable.

Launching once more into the vertical, or rather, gently and cautiously stepping, moving slowly into the world of the unknown, it surprised me how quick I focused on the climbing. Easing along the brake avoiding the old dried smears of bird shit, tapping the rock, assessing, gently weighting, creeping, inching, pulling. Consuming.

Escaping from the normal and climbing into the dark intense place in my head I save for these special occasions is definitely one of the best reasons for climbing. Forgetting the mundane, ignoring the insane, questioning mortality....Escape? My immediate future depends on dirt-encrusted-cracks, sand-coated with ball bearing like friction, cams wedged in clay and pockets overflowing with grime like an ash-tray in a busy Saturday night bar. This is adventure. Life is never better, life is sweet and well worth the risk.

Bracey ambles along the first pitch with the confidence of a top-rope and begins to take on the second. The rock here in the middle of the wall is cleaner, steeper and more solid. The moves are beautiful exercises in technical footwork, planning and route-finding.

I climb the final pitch that traverses right following flakes and cracks then back left with less gear and more exposure. Bracey reads the guidebook and gives me running commentary on the direction I should be climbing. This is no place to take a wrong move and launch into a sequence that once committed to could prove irreversible. It would be too easy to find oneself high and dry, marooned in the middle of a blank section of the red with no way out other than allowing gravity to take its course.

Topping out with the route in the bag the old desires return, I long to be back on the wall pushing myself, living on the edge, close to the edge....

How fate twists and turns our way in life. One day everything is fine, the next you find life is kicking you hard, like being curled in the gutter outside the nightclub. Arms and legs pulled in tight, the blows keep coming. Hopefully, inner strength is enough for recovery.

I stare into the Gogarth guidebook and look at the pictures. One stands out more than the rest. Paul Pritchard's eyes burn into the rock. He peeps from his duvet jacket focused only on his immediate future. Thin, black striped lycra-clad legs poke from the oversized jacket. Socks pulled high. Clinging to life on a cold wind driven day. South Stack lighthouse glows yellow in the background, lighting the way with methodical, mesmerising regularity. The sea is in turmoil below. Stare long and hard and be there with him. Listen long and hard, hear the gull's cry and the crash of the sea...listen to his heartbeat. Feel your heartbeat.

Another day...recovery.

A falling rock or falling from rock, life can be difficult to fathom at times. What's it all about I wonder, as I sketch across the biggest holds on the climb, nearly falling, pumped stupid, feet scrabbling. Reaching the ledge I look back at the gear that I nearly tested. It surely would have ripped. Two wires wedged behind an expanding red flake.

Shittleguber, climbed in 86 by Pritchard and Harms gives intense, technical climbing with spaced gear and thought provoking sequences. I feel fully satisfied as the steep overhanging groove above the fiery-blank wall of red is climbed. It's in the bag now. Life is moving on.

Time is short. In two days Stu and myself fly to the Alps for a quick hit. I fear that on my

return I will be useless once again. My body wastes and grows weak in the mountains. I fear my head may also weaken on my first visit to the Alps since Jules died. The memories will be strong. The cafes we sat outside together after epic struggles, ogling the school girls, pissed on a pint after hanging on the North Face of the Grandes Jorasses in a winter storm.

Heart of Gold Direct is mine for the taking if only I can get on it.

I'm living in Ynys Ettws, when my mobile informs me I have a text message. Bracey wants to climb and as the rain pours down the window, it looks like my chance has arrived for a date with Heart of Gold.

Racing across Anglesey, the clouds part. A shaft of sun blazes and spotlights the way to Red Wall. Within no time Bracey is inching into the middle of the wall, carefully pulling and testing with every move.

He reaches the hanging stance and rigs a bomber belay. I move toward him stretching and warming my arms between moves. Crowds of tourists stand on the promontory by the RSPB information centre, no doubt hoping to witness an epic, something to brighten their Daily Mail, daily stale existence.

"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin now."

I leave Bracey hanging from a cat's cradle of half sunk wires and cams rammed into clay. I don't envy him. By the time I've led 40 metres of uncertain and technical, his legs will be dead and his head numb.

Time stands still now. The sea is quiet, the gulls are quiet, no more the cacophony like revellers on the dance floor. Stu's beta on how best to approach the route runs constantly through my head,

"It's all on good holds, you just have to trust and yard. Don't stop to think, just keep moving."

I wonder if life is on good holds?

I screw the inside edge of my right foot onto a sharp flake. It doesn't break as I weight it. Leaning from the wall I rock back and stand in one flowing move. Pushing down on the same hold that is now level with my waist, my eyes dart looking for edges, crimps, cracks, and crozzles. Bracey is 25 feet below, leaning from the rope watching me carefully. We have both been in this position before. At least this time there is a rusty old peg between us. Unlike the fall from Omega on the Petites Jorasses last winter when I broke my ankle.

"Trust and yard, keep moving."

The consequences of falling don't enter my head now. The moves flow without fear, the rock is read and climbing once again is the way.

The End.

The danger of noticing the flowers *(or how I nearly gave up climbing and became a botanist – an African interlude)*

Rawdon Goodier

“Climbing party proceeding Easter Melsetter, Phone Cockburn 26751 Salisbury immediately = Buckland”.

The telegram arrived on the 28th March 1956. At that time I was working at Kariba on the Zambesi attempting, with others, to minimise the risk of the dam construction workers developing sleeping sickness. This we were doing by means of reducing the density of tsetse flies (the vector) by copious applications of toxic chemicals. Mountains were not foremost in my mind though when the temperatures were in the high 90s or above thoughts of the Cornish coast left behind such a brief time ago, were not completely absent.

How CC member Roy Buckland had traced my whereabouts I cannot recall but the prospect of a brief spell away from the furnace of the hot season low veldt was attractive. I had heard that there were mountains on the border of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) with Mozambique, rising to about 8000ft. Rumours had also reached me concerning the formation of a Mountain Club of Rhodesia.

When I set off early next morning the road out of Kariba was very sticky due to recent rain and I had to take some care not to add to my slightly embarrassing distinction of being the first European to arrive at Kariba on a bicycle, having left my vehicle axle deep in mud on a side road 20 miles short of my destination. It was a six hour drive to Harare (then Salisbury) in those days, mainly over strip roads, and gradually rising from an altitude of about 1000 ft at Kariba to 5000 ft at Harare where a far more equable climate prevailed. I had arranged to meet up with the other participants at that symbol of colonial splendour, Meikles Hotel. They turned out to be a friendly bunch of climbers, mainly members of the newly formed club and of South African background and climbing experience. They were able to tell me a bit more about our destination – the Chimanimani Mountains near Melsetter – but not much as, having sorted out the cars and gear, we were off that evening within the hour. I recall that there were two carloads in the party.

We drove along the quite good road towards the eastern border and camped around midnight by the roadside under a tarpaulin somewhere near the Umvumvumu River beyond Mutali (Umtali). Next morning we continued via the small settlement of Melsetter and then struggled along muddy tracks through wattle plantations before reaching the road end at the base of the “Long Gully”, the main access point to the central part of the mountains which had recently been established as a National Park.. The weather was still poor and we could see little of the mountains as we climbed the gully but, as we crossed the col and started to descend into the central valley of the Bundi River, we began to get some impressions of the magnificence of our surroundings, completely uninhabited, roadless mountains bearing their primal vegetation. Rising only about 3000 ft above the 5000 ft land surface of the Rhodesian plateau they were not big mountains but felt of similar scale to the Scottish Highlands. On our initial visit the climate also felt similarly damp – but we were to find that this was not typical.

We camped in some woods near where a new mountain hut was being built. From the



Just two of the plant species which were to become a “danger” to Rawdon Goodier’s climbing career. ***Protea enervis* and *Plectranthus chimanimaniensis***



campsite we could look eastwards across the Bundi River to the massive cliffs on the highest peak of the main range, Mawhenge (called Turret Towers by Mountain Club members), they looked an attractive climbing possibility and we planned to explore the approach to them on the following day.

Next day the weather was much improved though everywhere was soaked by the recent rains. We had to descend and swim the river to gain the lower slopes of Mawhenge. So far so good, but then we made a serious error of judgement in attempting an obliquely ascending route to the base of the cliffs which were probably about 1500 ft above the valley floor. It turned out that these lower slopes were riven by deep chasms cut into the quartzite which contained fascinating but in many cases well nigh impenetrable vegetation. We wasted so much time struggling up and down these ravines that no sooner had we reached the base of the great cliffs than we had to start off back to camp. – fortunately by a much easier route – straight downhill between the chasms!

We were not able to renew our exploration of the buttress until we returned to the Chimanimanis in the dry season four months later. On this second visit we were able to make use of our earlier experience and follow a much less painful approach to reach a good bivouac site by a small stream about 400 ft below the base of the cliff which, by this time, we had named as Mitre Bastion. Three of us, Archie Cockburn (the Chairman of the Club), Shirley Dodds and myself set off climbing about 8.30 am. Mitre Bastion was a massive block of quartzite riven with great clefts which seemed to penetrate the mountain and with substantial overhangs at just over half height. Luckily we had been able to pick out what seemed a possible route from across the valley near the campsite.

The climb started with a 90 ft chimney pitch which led to a second 80 ft pitch involving bridging and chimneying leading to a stance on top of a large bollard beneath a steep wall split by a vertical grassy crack. This crack turned out to be the crux of the climb, probably of Hard Severe standard, after which the route continued to provide enjoyable V Diff climbing until we reached the summit of the buttress about 700 ft above the start of the climb at about 2 pm. Being three on the rope we had climbed quite slowly. So far as we knew this was the first rock climb achieved in these mountains. The description appeared in the first issue of the Journal of the Mountain Club of Rhodesia.

My next and final climbing episode in the Chimanimani's was with CC member Arthur Streetly. This was an enjoyable though, from the point of view of climbing achievement, not so successful a foray – we chose to attempt another potential route on Mitre Bastion that proved to be very much harder than that achieved on the previous visit. After four hours climbing we had gained only 200ft of the 800 estimated for the route and had to give up and rope off. Perhaps the 500 mile overnight drive from Karoi, and in Arthur's case from Lusaka, fuelled on dexedrine, had not prepared us well!

That weekend with Arthur was my last experience of roped climbing in the Chimanimanis though by no means my last association with these mountains. For the remainder of my six years in Africa I devoted all my spare time to a study of their vegetation. Although I had discovered on my first visit just how impenetrable the vegetation could be I was even more strongly impressed by its peculiarity, even strangeness – there seemed to be nowhere else like it in Central Africa.- an impression confirmed by visits to Mlanje Mt in Malawi and the Drakensberg Mountains in Natal.

If you look at a relief map of Africa you will see that there are mountain ranges trending up the eastern side of Africa starting in Cape Province in the southwest all the way up to the

high East African Mountains such as Mt Kenya and Ruenzori. These mountains are sometimes described as the **Afromontane Archipelago**. The analogy with islands is appropriate for, unlike the Andes for example, the mountains, though on a common axis, tend to be isolated from each other by deep river valleys which have a very different climate – thus the eastern border highlands of Zimbabwe are terminated to the south by the low lying valleys of the Sabi and Limpopo Rivers and in the north by the Zambesi Valley. This has led to the isolation of the eastern districts enabling the development of peculiar mountain floras. The Chimanimani have the additional peculiarity of having a rock type, quartzite, which is not found at high altitudes elsewhere in Central Africa. Their flora therefore contains many endemic species which are unique as well as others occurring more widely within the eastern district highlands.*

To arrive at any understanding of all this it was of course necessary to identify all the Chimanimani plants. This was no small task even though some collecting had been undertaken 50 years previously. This basic work was undertaken in close cooperation with Jim Phipps, a friend in the Government Herbarium who later became Professor of Botany in the University of Western Ontario. After about two years we were able to prepare a **First checklist of the Vascular Plants of the Chimanimani Mts**, a revised version of which was published in 1961 containing 859 species, mainly collected from the central sector of the range about 150 square miles in extent. The plants could not be identified from a **Flora**, there being none, so had to be collected and compared with specimens in the Government herbarium or submitted to Kew or Lisbon. However the preparation of the great **Flora Zambesiaca** through collaboration between workers at Kew, Lisbon and Harare had just commenced so that there were many experts throughout the world working in the field of “Zambesiaca” botany. Several features became evident quite early in our work – (1) that the Chimanimanis contained many undescribed plant species, (2) that a significant number of species were not known from anywhere else in the world - i.e. they were endemic, (3) that there were some very interesting relations between the plant species and the ecology of the area and (4) that all the endemic species seemed to be confined to the quartzite rather than the schist based soils.

Having identified most of the species, it was now necessary to embark on an ecological study involving looking at the geology and soils and identifying and mapping the plant communities: this we did so that by the time I left Africa to return to work in Britain in 1961 we had prepared **A Preliminary Account of the Plant Ecology of the Chimanimani Mts** which was published in the **British Journal of Ecology** in 1962.

A study of the endemic plants of the Chimanimanis was made by Hiram Wild, later Professor of Botany in Harare, who was able to use our information to list all the 40 or so endemics and confirm their restriction to the quartzite based soils. Our studies had demonstrated the chemical peculiarity of these soils in terms of their very low phosphate content that only peculiarly adapted plants could tolerate. This had allowed the evolution of the endemic species over a considerable length of time. Indeed Wild identified the Chimanimani summits as the remains from erosion over 50 million years or so, of the old Gondwanaland land surface (the massive southern mega-continent).

Preparation of the **Flora Zambesiaca** has proceeded over the last 50 years in spite of radical political change in the area. I am informed that over 80 Chimanimani endemics have now been identified so that one finds the specific name *chimanimaniensis* quite commonly on Kew's **Flora Zambesiaca** website.

What is the moral of all this ? Does it simply show the dangers being distracted from simple climbing by looking too closely at the vegetation which impedes the passage to



A far cry from String of Pearls and Raven Wall at Bosigran. **The Mitre Bastion** in the Chimanimani Mountains of Zimbabwe. **All photos: Rawdon Goodier**

the foot of the climb? This sort of close attention is not something I had always been guilty of – I have zero recollection of the plants and vegetation encountered on my early alpine climbing days excepting a clear memory of getting lost at night in the Chamonix forests after traversing Mont Blanc via the Old Brenva Route. It probably appeared to climbing friends that I got thoroughly lost among the shrubbery in the Chimanimanis even to the extent of rejecting possibilities of visiting the Himalayas – but was it worth it? – emphatically yes!

In retrospect it is not too difficult to justify this change of emphasis in interest as it helped pave the way for my later career in nature conservation. At the time however, I was aware of the contrary attractions – the acres of unclimbed rock versus the fascination of the mountain ecology. Neither did the old habit of tracing out in the mind's eye the potential routes disappear – and it probably never has in spite of the chance of their realisation diminishing to zero.

Anyone interested in knowing more about the biogeography of the Afromontane archipelago can find all the main references in: White F.(1978) The Afromontane Region. In Biogeography and Ecology of Southern Africa .Ed. Werger;W.Junk, The Hague.

Thirty years of CC Dinners

Dave Atchison

The last AGM Dinner to be held in London was at the Rubens Hotel in Kensington in 1974, was organised by Pip Hopkinson and was my first. Prior to that the AGM had been at the Hurlingham Club also in London.

That first dinner left me with several memories. Among our guests were the esteemed Chris Brasher and Winford Vaughan-Thomas, the broadcaster whom I was delighted to meet. During conversation and on the back of a dinner menu I recall him drawing the outline of the West Wales coastline with such precision it would have done justice to an Ordnance Survey Map. He did this to illustrate the locations and background to the history and English place names found in those parts.

The circular dining tables seated about 12 and one of my neighbours was Hugh Wright a major in the REME who, at one point, enquired whether I had any experience of sailing. 'Do the Broads count?', I ventured. He countered with an invitation, 'How about the sea then?'. A tentative pause and then, yes, and before the evening was through the die had been cast. Hugh put together a crew comprising climbers and navigators with the objective of accessing our familiar climbing areas on the south coast such as Boulder Ruckle from the sea, then to cross the Channel and repeat the exercise in France and the Channel Isles, and in particular the Isle of Sark. Our means of getting there being a 28 foot plus Nicholson belonging to REME. I was to organise the climbing gear with Peter Biven, who was earmarked to join us. Regrettably he was unable to get time off from teaching and did not make the trip but we did succeed in carrying the plan through and completed some new routes on Sark. On the way we experienced first hand, the tricky business of crossing the busy shipping lanes overnight. But all that's another story as they say.

Our president at that time was Hamish Nicol and back in Wales as we were approaching a climb called Yellow Groove on Craig Ddu, Hamish asked if I would like to organise the next AGM dinner. I agreed.

Robin Prager, secretary at the time had determined that the centre of gravity of the Club membership was, something like 20 miles north of Coventry and so the next dinner was destined for Derbyshire and not London.

1975 saw the culmination and resolution of the great 'women issue'. There was so much debate and lobbying among the rank and file as to whether the Club should admit women as members prior to the dinner, that food and drink were almost forgotten!

This was my first as organiser, the venue was the Maynard Arms and progress in setting it up was abruptly halted when the hotel came back with an emphatic NO to climbers. Apparently an earlier function attended by a 'climbing club' had ended in trapeze activities using the chandeliers. I solicited the help of Jack Longland and his influence did the trick and we were in.

Our chief speaker was Ken Wilson and he left us in no doubt as to his pleasure at seeing the motion 'that women should be admitted to the Club on merit' being carried an hour or two before. This far on, and one wonders what all the fuss had been about. Incidentally the cost of the dinner was £3.50 per head, not bad going for the star attraction!

It was about that time that Hamish inaugurated the Ton-up club and I well remember him bundling the tickets into an old rucksack ready for the draw.

The following year we were at the Royal Victoria in Llanberis under the supervision of Harry Sales and were treated to one of those inimitable discourses by Kevin Fitzgerald. He attended the dinner again a couple of years later and by this time I was a little more involved with him. Organising Club dinners can be fun especially when one encounters a larger than life character such as Kevin. He booked into the dinner thus:

"February 3rd, 1979

My Dear Atchison,

Forgive the absurd formality of a by-gone age but I actually don't know your Christian name. You probably don't know mine, either, but it will appear at the foot of this letter.

I'm writing about the dinner, of course. David Cox and I hope to be in Wales for it but neither of us has received any sort of 'chart' or booking form from Pip Hopkinson. Is there one? Charles Crosthwaite, older than me, if that is possible, telephoned yesterday and seemed to think because I'd given him the date that I was running the whole affair. I explained that such activities were not nowadays normally left by the Club to blind members and he was appeased as he can get, which is not very far.

Cox is coming over to lunch on Tuesday and we'll know then whether he can drive me up. I'm only allowed to potter about locally and in daylight as far as motoring is concerned. I know that I can't hear from you before that but perhaps if you would be kind enough to scribble a line and let me have it, (I enclose a stamped envelope to save you a bit of time and trouble), I could book our room in Pyg before it's too late. All good wishes

Yours

Kevin Fitzgerald"

And a little later with a smidgin of familiarity

February 9th, 1979

Dear Dave,

Please forgive the pig's breakfast of a form enclosed with my cheque. David Cox and I are half up the pole trying to work out how to get there, and it also seems that Barbara James may be at the Dinner to see us. Hence the double cheque. Will there be room if Ray Greenall suddenly finds he can come to the dinner. I wouldn't like to leave him out if he can.

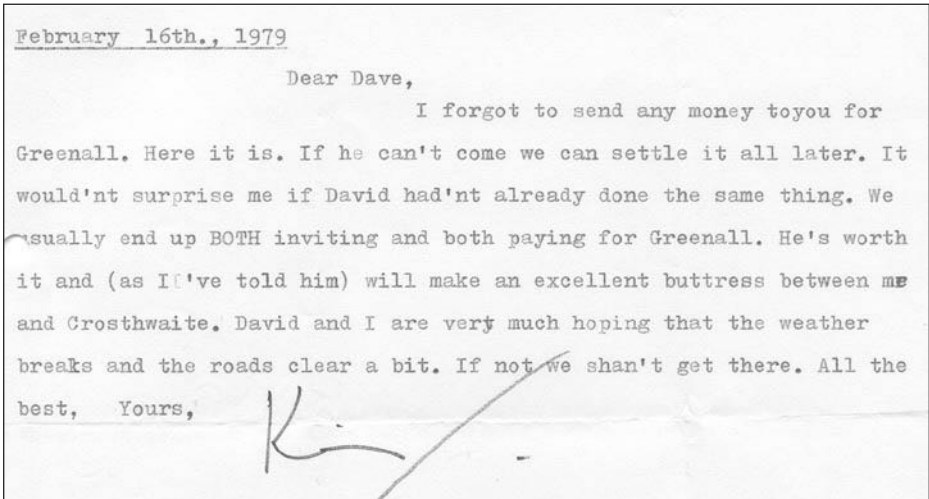
If you think this is the letter of a distraught madman you are quite right; you will think, this morning that this hovel was the very heart of ICIs Billingham works what with the blind owner rushing about 'helping' a fencing operation, his wife madly editing the Parish magazine, the Chinnor Society hammering on the door, and a pile of letters a foot high at my left hand. In a few minutes a stream of young mothers, all with prams, will be infesting the place collecting 'spare time' typescript. I'm greatly looking forward to seeing you at the Dinner and thank you for your nice letter.

Yours

Kevin

Editor's note: the author included photo copies of the original typewritten letters from both Kevin and A B Hargreaves, but unfortunately, like their owners, their typewriters [and typing] were quite 'unique' and only the last (opposite) reproduced legibly in this smaller format.

And finally:



This was Mike Westmacott's inaugural dinner and no doubt Kevin had a chuckle or two listening to the Longland/Hargreaves' double act as did all of us.

Another contributor to that memorable evening was C. Douglas Milner the photographer and he didn't let us down either.

1982 heralded in the Trevor Jones era. Interestingly dinners up to that point had been very well attended with numbers usually in excess of a hundred. That year for some unaccountable reason we were down to a mere 60 and were closeted in the small breakfasting room at the Vic instead of our usual banqueting room. Our chief guest was none other than the redoubtable Don Whillans and Derek Walker introduced me. "So ow's it going?" Enquired Don. "Numbers are right down, the lowest I've seen yet", I replied. "Good, I'm a small club man me", came the reply.

A couple of years later, at the same venue, Trevor invited the Secretary of State for Wales, the Rt. Hon. Nicholas Edwards and word got around that he was in town. Just as the gong was about to sound, the place became swamped by the Anti Nuclear lobby who blocked all access to the dining area. We convened an extraordinary 'huddle' comprising the key parties including the Chief Constable of Caernarfon to resolve the situation. The soup course was on hold. Eventually the lobby got their way and met the Rt. Hon. separately so that dinner could commence.

It was about this time we experimented with after dinner discos and although reasonably successful the effort required to man doors, keep out gatecrashers and accept a reduction in time to meet and chat meant their season was short.

AGM Dinners have of course always been exuberant affairs, a sense of release, the year's business completed, accounts adopted and an anticipation of speeches to come. Not so in 1986. Snow conditions on the hill were nigh on perfect with the top 1000 feet covered in

crisp névé, and most had had a wonderful day's climbing, when news came through just before Derek Walker's AGM that Anthony Rawlinson, our chief guest had tragically died as a result of a fall on Crib Goch that very afternoon. The mood at the tables was decidedly muted and so Derek abandoned the anticipated 'Al and Mac' double and threw the floor open to members appreciations and reflections. It was a sad and poignant moment.

Alvarez and MacNaught-Davis most certainly kept their promise the following year and duly gave us splendid entertainment at the Marquis of Granby.

For my part the action that day started a little earlier. Back in Rugby I had arranged to travel with Robin Prager and en route to his home I overheard on the radio that there had been a derailment on the line between Manchester and Sheffield. I would not have given this a second thought save the fact that during the run up to the dinner I had agreed to pick up AB Hargreaves from Bamford station, a mile or two from the Marquis.

We didn't have the luxury of mobile phones at that time so call boxes it had to be. Several were used on the way up in order to anticipate AB's movements. Where was the hazard, and was he likely to be bussed past it, and where to? Was he heading for Sheffield or was he stuck on the other side of the obstruction? After an abortive sortie to Hope station we eventually homed in on Bamford and sure enough there was the little man with knapsack and walking stick striding up and down the platform wondering where in hell his taxi had got to. "Everything OK? Fine, off we go." Phew! On reflection AB's effort in getting to the dinner, distance travelled from Ulverston, age, public transport, the whole shooting match, put every thing else into perspective. This was AB's initial request. Uncanny.

In his subsequent thank you letter he had even considered the mile or so walk to the hotel a mere formality: An amazing guy.

Dear Atchinson,

I shall be approaching by rail on Saturday, ex. Manchester due in at Bamford at 16.51. Will you please be kind enough to arrange for me to be collected there and taken to the Marquis of Granby Hotel. This is because I have now become very lame and could not very well walk it from the Station to the Hotel carrying luggage. I have a room at the Hotel, and it would obviously be very convenient if I could get there at about 5.30 p.m so as to be ready for the General Meeting at 6.00 p.m

I hope all your arrangements for the dinner have gone satisfactorily and that you will not be subjected to any last minute excursions or 'alarums'. I also hope that you, yourself have some good climbing on both days of the Meet.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

A.B. Hargreaves

During the after dinner speeches and as if the Al and Mac show was not enough, AB felt he needed to make a point. Standing a mere 5 feet tall he was all but lost in the crowd so he climbed onto a chair and immediately got the rejoinder 'Would you mind standing up!'

Hugh Banner's dinner in 1988 had Paul Williams introducing Pete Livesey who promptly used the moment to give us a long discourse on the joys of caving, with little or no mention of his climbing exploits, but I guess that was Pete.

We were ably led into the 90's by Jancis Allison (now Richards), our first lady president and her chief guest was John Hunt, the venue Hadden Hall in Buxton. John of course was very appreciative of our hospitality and arrangements and sent a nice thank you letter to Malcolm Cameron, who passed it on to me with the comment 'Knighthood in the post'!

We were back at the Maynard in 1993 after a break of 12 years and whilst conditions outside were pretty bleak with a northerly blizzard closing the high level approaches, inside the Windsor room it was cosy. With 50 or so packed in like sardines the debate, focussing on aged member subscriptions and BMC involvement in climbing competitions, became so protracted that the dinner had to be delayed. Quite unusual, that sort of thing never happened, even during the heady days of the 'women' debates of the mid seventies. In due course 110 sat down to enjoy good fare and to listen to Paul Nunn and Charles Clarke, all rounded off in amusing fashion by Jancis.

In 1994 Mike Mortimer found a very cosy gathering at The Heights. A last minute change of venue prompted by the Vic propelled all 98 of us down the street and into tighter accommodation. There was little time to sort things out so everyone just piled in and grabbed a seat. Somehow it all worked and we were treated to a repeat of AB's 'chair act' of '79 as part of a contribution to Steve Deans' reflections on the life of Kirkus. Colin's brother Guy was also present to nod approval.

Mark Vallance initiated the pre-AGM general meeting in 1996 and this made for a brisk record breaking AGM proper in spite of such weighty agenda matters as rewriting the Club's Rules and Regulations and Lottery Grants. It was during his term that he instigated the search for a hut in Scotland.

Bob Allen took over the reins in 1999 and was immediately involved in finding a Scottish hut. This he pursued with great tenacity and enthusiasm and won through after many disappointments and setbacks, a real hero. We were delighted to hear at the 2000 dinner that formalities had been completed and Riasg was ours. Also during that year the Downes hut was not serviceable due to renovation work so practically all available accommodation in the immediate locality including Heathy Lea, chez the Oread MC, was reserved for our do.

Following Bob was a hard call but Ian Smith was up for it. However he faced problems. The foot and mouth restrictions in 2001 severely cut into our revenues from both guide books and hut usage. Ian's 2004 dinner saw Royal Robbins and his wife attending as principal guests and Royal's references to his climbs and the personalities involved left us enthralled.

At the 2005 dinner, Gwyn Evans introduced Tony Penning who brought along some excellent climbing shots which required a DVD projector. The last minute scramble to muster the kit was prompted by prohibitive hire costs. Fortunately Al Downie came up trumps and we got the show on cue with projector, screens, cables and speakers.

One or two practical aspects of organising this dinner over the years spring to mind.

Menu printing has naturally been transformed by the computer and word processing. No such facility existed in 1975 and the unique Club logo printers' blocks had to be located and passed to the printer. Menu details, speeches and the guests' list had to be settled and presented months before the event and this necessitated badgering the Assistant Secretary for details. Nowadays of course the menu can be designed and modified on the screen and printed a couple of days before the event.

Seating plans were a source of amusement, frustration or sheer panic. Did one toss all the names into the air to determine the place settings or treat booking forms seriously? Experience gained, sometimes painfully, suggested the latter worked best and generally kept most people happy.

So, having settled the names, drawn the plan and agreed numbers with the hotel caterers by the Friday evening, the phone rings with a request for a further half dozen, and can they sit with their latest climbing partners on the next table. Ken Wilson once came up with just such a request saying his extras were all young potential members and needed to get to know the Club so how about it? Somehow it all worked out, it usually did. Ken at the time was keen on seating plans provided he was put with someone who would talk! Some time later he floored me with, *'Dave – you will be amazed by this early booking, but I thought I had messed you about so much over the years that I should try to mend my ways.'* Mmm!

Eating habits have also changed. In 1975 requests for vegetarian dishes were almost unheard of but habits and life styles change and nowadays the ratio is about ten per cent. Readers of this article will no doubt have shared some of these memories and will remember some of the participants, so to conclude and perhaps stimulate further reflection an appendix of the AGM Dinners over the past 30 years with the dramatis personae is attached.

Boy I've enjoyed it!

30 Years of CC Dinners - A short prequel by Frank Palmer.

I was a fairly new member in 1965 when the Assistant Hon. Secretary John Longland asked if I would organize the Annual Dinner, to be held at The Criterion Hotel in Piccadilly. I was a little reluctant; - "nothing to it" said John - so I agreed.

In 1965 a government minister booked twice, sent too much money, said he would collect the change at the dinner, then never turned up! Then there was the member who wanted to sit next to X but, "under no circumstances at the same table as Y," a very well known member.... The cost that year was 32/6 and the principal guests were Bernard Pierre and Peter Fleming.

John Hunt was President the following year and expressed concern that the AGM might take longer than usual. He asked me to warn our main guests Freddy Spencer Chapman and Chris Chataway MP and look after them, whilst the debate raged over the admission of women. The motion was lost.

Another member sent a long, rambling note that he was in bed with flu and much too ill to make out a cheque, but would pay at the Dinner. He did!

!1967, my last year in the job was very straightforward. The guests were Eric Shipton (AC), and A S Pigott (Rucksack Club) and the price of the Dinner had risen to 35/-. About 100 members and their guests attended each of these dinners.

Appendix: CLIMBERS' CLUB AGM DINNERS 1974 to 2005

1974	Rubens' Hotel, Kensington.	President: Hamish Nicol
Guests:	Chris Brasher, Winford Vaughan-Thomas.	
1975	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Hamish Nicol
Guests:	Ken Wilson, John Herzog SMC, J.White, J. E. Byrom, J. Pritchard, G. Smith OMC.	
1976	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Harry Sales
Guests:	Kevin Fitzgerald, Tom Waghorn RMC, Ben Stroude WMC, N. Nicholson.	
1977	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Harry Sales
Guests:	Chris Bonington, Les Brown SMC, Boyce Cardus, RMC Keith Gregson. OMC	
1978	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Harry Sales
Guests:	Kevin Fitzgerald, Derek Burgess OMC, Bernard Cook WMC, Michael Ferguson RMC, Keith Burns SMC, Charles Pickles FRCC.	
1979	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Mike Westmacott
Guests:	Jack Longland, A.B. Hargreaves, C. Douglas-Milner WMC, David Sinclair RMC, Reg Atkins FRCC.	
1980	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Mike Westmacott
Guests:	Jim Perrin, Mary Walker, Henry Walker, Mike Burbage, Malcolm Cameron AC, Ron Leather, John Scott OMC.	
1981	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Mike Westmacott
Guests:	Brian Wyvill, Peter Moffatt, Jim Pritchard, Richard Isherwood, Mark Vallance.	
1982	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis	President: Trevor Jones
Guests:	Don Whillans, Dave Roberts FRCC, Ben Stroude WMC, Tony Griffiths.	
1983	Marquis of Granby, Bamford.	President: Trevor Jones
Guests:	Peter Harding, C. Douglas-Milner AC, Sherwood Wiseman CMC, Ben Stroude WMC Harry Ironfield FRCC, John O'Reilly OMC.	
1984	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Trevor Jones
Guests:	Rt Hon. Nicholas Edwards, Bert Russell SCW, Harry Ironfield FRCC, Stella AdamsPC, Lyn Jones SMC, John Byron-Grounds ABSAC, Ernest Snow WMC, David Adams NMC Tim Josephy YRMC, .	
1985	Marquis of Granby, Bamford	President: Derek Walker
Guests:	Ivan Waller, Roger Chorley AC, Ken Crockett SMC, Dennis Gray BMC, Dave Roberts FRCC, Ernest Snow WMC.	
1986	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Derek Walker
Guests:	Anthony Rawlinson, Al Alvarez, Ian McNought-Davis, Peter Swindells YRMC, Dave Roberts FRCC, Bill Wallace SMC, Dave Eaton WMC	
1987	Marquis of Granby, Bamford.	President: Derek Walker
Guests:	Al Alvarez, Ian McNought-Davis, Denis Gray BMC, Sally Kier PC, Geoff Cram FRCC, Pete Crow, George Band AC.	
1988	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Hugh Banner
Guests:	Pete Livesey, Paul Williams, Hilary Moffatt FRCC, Dave Eaton WMC, Ivan Waller SMC.	
1989	Marquis of Granby, Bamford.	President: Hugh Banner
Guests:	Denny Moorhouse, Pip Hopkinson, Andy Grandowski Staffs MC, Dave Miller FRCC, Bill Wallace SMC.	
1990	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Hugh Banner
Guests:	Chris Bonington, Jim Curran, Gerry Gee RMC, Dave Miller FRCC, Keith Rigby WMC.	
1991	Hadden Hall, Buxton.	President: Jancis Allison
Guests:	John Hunt, Ian Smith, Sid Clarke FRCC, Roger Payne BMC, Des Marshall SMC.	
1992	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Jancis Allison
Guests:	Tony Greenbank, Sid Clarke FRCC, Margaret Clennett PC, Bill Deakin RMC.	

1993	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Jancis Allison
Guests:	Charles Clarke, Ron Kenyon FRCC, Mike Westmacott AC, Arthur Salmon YRC, Mike Wynne OMC, Richard Barnes NMC.	
1994	The Heights, Llanberis.	President: Mike Mortimer.
Guests:	Steve Dean, Guy Kirkus, AB Hargreaves CC, Rod Valentine FRCC, Rhona Lampard PC	
1995	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Mike Mortimer
Guests:	Mike Banks, Jill Aldersley FRCC, Angela Soper PC, Rick Reeve WMC, Ron Chambers OMC	
1996	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Mark Vallance
Guests:	John Streetly, Lt Col. M. B. Portman, Jill Aldersley FRCC, Keith Rigby WMC.	
1997	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Mark Vallance
Guests:	John Dunne, Julian Barker Mynedd MC, Keith Rigby WMC, Cec Rhodes Black and Tans MC, Lorna Marsland Karabiner MC, Ian Makin Lancs Cave and Crag, MC, Paddy O'Neill FRCC.	
1998	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Mark Vallance
Guests:	Maggy Body, Graham Sutherland, Tony Jones MC of South Africa, Dave Wood WMC Andy Wielochowski MC of Kenya, .	
1999	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Bob Allen
Guests:	Terry Gifford, Ed Grindley, Loise Pellett PC, Terry Kenny WMC, Barry Chislet FRCC.	
2000	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Bob Allen
Guests:	Geoff Lowe, Moira Viggers CC, Dave Rhodes FRCC, Dave Roberts MAM, Yvonne Barde PC.	
2001	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President Bob Allen
Guests:	George Band, Doug Scott AC, Alan Rowland FRCC, Dave Wood WMC.	
2002	Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis.	President: Ian Smith
Guests:	Bill Stallybrass, Emlyn Jones, Dave Turnbull BMC, Alan Rowland FRCC, Andy Lole SMC, Ken Fyles WMC.	
2003	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Ian Smith
Guests:	Simon Yates (did not appear), George Watkins FRCC, Pete Brooks CC, Graham Robinson.	
2004	Quality Hotel Snowdonia, Llanberis.	President: Ian Smith
Guests:	Royal Robbins, George Watkins FRCC, Sally Keir PC, Ken Fyles WMC.	
2005	The Maynard Arms, Grindleford Bridge.	President: Gwyn Evans
Guests:	Tony Penning, Eileen Clarke FRCC, Alison Cairns PC, Chris Kenny WMC, Brian Waters MAM.	

Clubs:

SMC	Scottish M C	OMC	Oread MC
RMC	Rucksack Club	FRCC	Fell and Rock CC
WMC	Wayfarer's MC	AC	Alpine Club
NMC	Northumberland M C	MAM	Midland Assoc. of Mountaineers
YRC	Yorkshire Ramblers Club	PC	Pinnacle Club

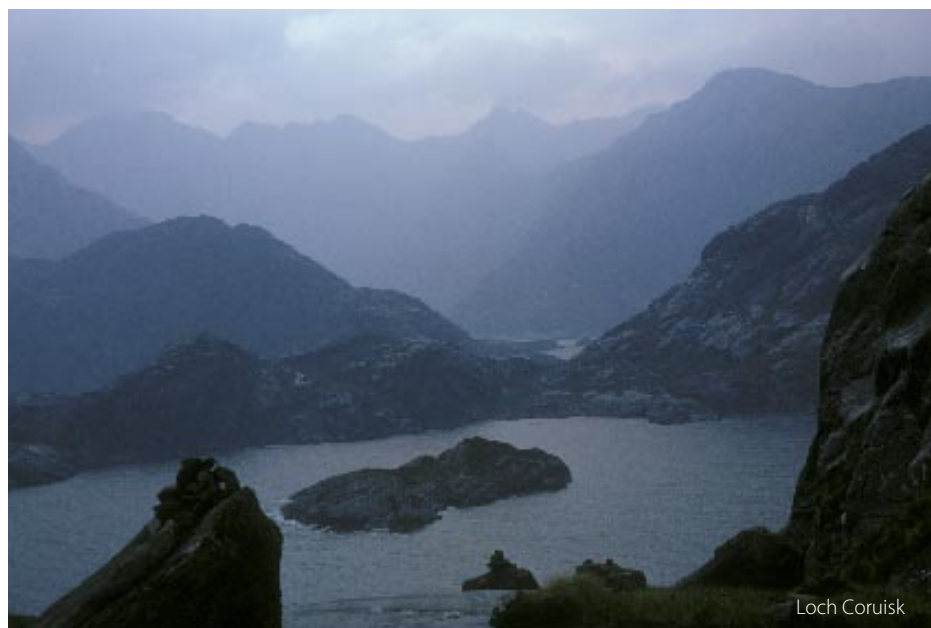


Gutted. The Downes Hut in 1999/2000. Photo: Dave Atchison

Peter Gerrard



Peter Gerrard



The Head of Gold (Cabezon de Oro, Costa Blanca)

Terry Gifford

It was said of Tommy Caldwell that when he free climbed The Nose and Free Rider on El Cap in one day on October 31 2005 that 'it was impossible to tell when he was doing a hard move'. A letter in *Alpinist* 15 complained that Caldwell was hardly stretched, having climbed what is now called 'The Free Nose' (5.14a) three times in three weeks. Sometimes my subscription to an expensive magazine featuring climbs way beyond my natural ability seems almost to be worth it. At last my climbing style, honed through a lifetime of long pauses well below the crux, prior to almost silent peels, is endorsed by a cutting edge magazine. I know that I shall never be the subject of public complaint, at least by the criteria he wisely favours, by one James Lucas of Santa Cruz, California. Ask Jim Fotheringham. He also apparently prefers as his partner someone who is polite enough to show definite signs that he is thoughtfully engaged on a hard move. For the last three years Jim has joined me in February for long traditional routes in the Costa Blanca. As we've started to run through the easier ones, the grade has risen to my falling-off point and to a most dramatic contrast of my style with that of young Tommy that would be the admiration of James Lucas, if not of Fotheringham himself.

All this is but a confessional preliminary to recommending two long, impressively positioned, routes on what the Costa Blanca Rockfax calls 'Cabezon de Oro', the Head of Gold that catches the last golden rays of the sunset. Last year we climbed the gradually improving rock of 'Via Gene' 5 (VS) that rises to a vertical arete exposed to sun, wind and mists that in winter can be the veritable bride's nightie of a Whillans epigram. A hire car would meet the James Lucas criteria if it attempted to drive to the parking place below the route as advised by Rockfax. Deep ruts now provide hard moves that can be cruised only by a 4x4 Tommy, or in our case a 'Jimny'.

Dave Gregory gave me a tip years ago to be sure to take trainers for the descent of this route. I'd recommend boots. But in February no sacks of water were needed and we switched leads on the pleasant rising traverse of the first three pitches. This arrives at a large sloping belay of loose stones. This is actually the base of a funnel from the upper half of the mountain. Another reason to wear a helmet in Spain. The next pitch was my lead and makes a brief traverse left before offering dramatic steep swings up a series of holes. (No water and no camera.) Then a long languid rib became a pillar leading to easy ground and a bolt belay back at the base of a groove. Jim then laced this groove with nuts, which was just as well. Wrong groove. Now was my chance to enhance his fluent lead by doing the decent thing and revealing the hard moves. We should have moved further left to another groove, as the guidebook makes clear. But an alpine approach and some degree of sweat got me onto Jim's little belay platform out on the rib in a spectacular position.

The steep ridge above looked blocky and it was my turn to grab the rack, so I set off up the vertical arête taking in plenty of air from both sides., until a bolt announced the arrival of the hard moves on the right of the edge. Small footholds, I find, need good handholds for compensation and, after a brief foray of failing to find any, I backed down to the bolt and decided to belay on it. (No water, no camera and no courage.) This decisiveness was intended

to save time, which it certainly did as Jim rushed rapidly upwards. I can lead some grade 5 pitches at Sella, with a following wind, but when I came to follow Jim I still found those crux moves thin and sustained.

Jim was sitting astride a now horizontal arête six pitches above the ground with the sea waiting to swallow the sun. I scuttled along the arête for 45 metres until I found a cable bolted to its shaded side. Two 60 metre ropes allowed us to reach scree in two abseils down the back of the mountain where a broad gully funnelled forever in an ankle-biting avalanche towards home. I'd definitely recommend boots. The scree turns around the base of the mountain so that it is possible to return to sacks where water, camera and a small bottle of courage may have been left.

This year, two seven pitch routes of 5+ in successive days led to a dramatic representation of the James Lucas principle. First, I fell off the crux of 'Directo UBSA' 5+ on the Peñon de Iflach at Calpe. To be fair, Jim had also thought he might fall off it, but led it delicately with an exceedingly calm clipping of the banana-shaped ring peg just after the crux moves. I failed to make the change of feet in a hole before attempting to move out left towards the iron banana. My fingers simply came unstuck from the rounded holds I'd expected to be incuts at full reach above the hole in question. Since I swung away from the line of the route, I was lowered to the previous belay on the traverse line of 'Valencianos' where Jim soon joined me. The long 4+ slab pitch of 'Valencianos' seemed like one of my Desert Island pitches – and probably is.

Next day, mist drifted around the Head of Gold as we approached. Rain was forecast for Benidorm. 'It would be called a "good day" in Scotland', said Jim in positive mode as we headed up to the foot of the impressive arête that hosts 'Espolon Paiju' 5+/A1 (HVS). The diagonal scar that is the final aid pitch revealed itself only reluctantly from the mist. 'The rock is actually dry!' Jim enthused, leading up the slab and into the corner on the left that gives a steep bridging move onto the arête. Now two pitches of grade 5 wound their way up the rib with bolts only for belays, to be followed by two pitches of 4+ where the rock was more suspect and some blocks had already left the buttress. At the belays the mist teased us with the views. A family arrived for Sunday lunch at their casita below us. Children dispersed at top speed from the car in all directions, then disappeared in white fog. At one point black spots started appearing on the rock. 'Stop raining!' Jim commanded. And it did.

Thus we came to what the guidebook describes as a 'semi-hanging belay' for the rising crackline crux pitch. 'Semi-hanging is an exaggeration. It is no such thing. There are blocks to stand on and, in addition to the historic wooden wedge, there is a thread and a bolt. We could even stand on separate blocks to arrange for Jim's send-off up this ascending leftwards crack, below which the rock quickly curves away in a great sweep of space. It began as a series of 'edge' moves with the right leg in the mouth of the crack until the first in situ peg invited a foot-loop to make the left foot useful and Jim disappeared, with a deft change of feet in the sling, round the corner. The rope kept moving with tugs at my feet around which it was wound for convenience. This was sometimes counterproductive, as Jim occasionally pointed out with loud shouts from round the corner, such as, 'I'm hanging on with only one hand here!' as I found the rope had become a tourniquet around my ankle. At some memorable point he thoughtfully heightened my anticipation with the question, 'Do you have any prusik loops?' My negative reply brought the warning, 'A fall from here and you might find it hard to get back on'. But I had my trusty daisychain on my harness and a certain amount of experience in judicious cheating.

What I had failed to realise was that 5+/A1 means that there are unprotected sections of 5+ which, when a crack is both undercut and uphill, provide a greatly increased chance to display what Tommy Caldwell cannot. Free climbing followed the use of the first foot-sling and, concentrating hard, I forgot to reach back to retrieve it. I fell off two further free climbing sections, having tired myself out with bad aid technique on the other sections. After appropriate rests I managed to get back up to the ascending crackline only to find that another rest was probably also appropriate. They have probably caused either indignation or embarrassment already. A little fog had not delayed the Fotheringham. And damp rock is, for all I know, counted as 'A Good Day' among the boulderers of the Borders. Better, at this point, to draw attention to the heroic patience of my partner, whose only intervention was to quietly say, very near the end of my ordeal, 'Terry, it is nearly five o'clock'. (We were due at a flamenco display with our wives in Finestrat's Casa Cultural at seven.) I was only interested in reaching the end, somehow, of those long, uphill, undercut 35 metres.

When I did, Jim told me I had taken one hour and forty-five minutes on this pitch. He then pointed out, with more feeling, that, for the first time on this route, there was no bolt belay and that every time I fell off he was pulled across this wet slope of gunge because there was no solid stance on his inclined ledge. Could I manage the 10 metres of grade 3 left to the top of the route? Greasy though it was, apologetic as I was, he deserved no less. It was time to attempt to adopt the Caldwell approach, however briefly.

Following Archer's Arrow

John Appleby

“The most important addition to the climbers’ domain since the annexation of Craig yr Ysfa in 1900”

For the normally taciturn Edwardian hard man, James Merryman Archer Thompson, these immortal words used to describe the complex, vegetated matrix of cliffs known as Creigiau Gleision above Nant Francon, could be seen today as the ravings of a deluded fantasist, a dark soul whose glittering trajectory across the climbing firmament in the early 20th century would crash and burn in disillusionment and suicide.

Today, Archer Thompson's legacy and his place in climbing folklore remains assured. A brilliant and bold pioneer who is appreciated for his dedicated exploration of many of North Wales's more remote and intimidating cliffs. Large and often vegetated faces such as Lliwedd and cliffs within the Ogwen and Nantlle district. However, unlike its legendary champion, Creigiau Gleision itself quickly melted into obscurity after a brief salvo of early routes established by, amongst others, George Abraham and Hugh Rose Pope. Fast forward a century and the cosy back room of the Vaynol in Nant Peris harbours a small band of climbers brought together in the guise of the 2008 Ogwen guidebook team. As one of the team I had followed my Menlovia fascination with obscure, dank places by volunteering to take on Creigiau Gleision - amongst other equally obscure crags - inspired by a couple of photo-copied pages from Tony Moulam's 1966 Carneddau guide, which was the last CC guidebook to detail the climbs on Creigiau Gleision. These pages described some long mountaineering routes which sounded interesting?

By the time Tom Leppert's 1982 guide had arrived, the crag had poetically been laid to rest by the author who had offered the following purple passage....*“when among the many isolated towers and pinnacles one is seemingly surrounded by ghostly multitudes that furtively drift into focus, to sink back once again into the mist and give no suggestion of their stone affinity. Thus, while the time has probably arrived to lay the individual climbs to rest, embalmed in the pages of antiquity, it is not without some lingering regret.”* And so, Creigiau Gleision's faded rock script is once again about to be revived within the pages of a CC guide book. Suggesting perhaps, that climbing history is a subjective interpretation dependent on the guidebook writer's perspective.

Strangely it wasn't just Archer Thompson who was inspired by the isolated towers and pinnacles which extend around the great bowl of Cwm Goch. A young Ed Drummond arrived in Nant Francon in the 1963 seeking answers to the eternal questions which so vex the poet's soul and secreted himself in a shepherd's stone hut in the valley. After three days of starvation and dehydration, a delirious youth emerged from the dank hovel and pushed his wilting frame to the limits of endurance. Some hours later, he fell like a boxer from quivering ropes onto a flat boulder overlooking the cwm.

For a climber whose fame and reputation rests on a range of bold rock adventures and political stunts around the world, it seems perverse that his stone epiphany came amongst the grey wet rock of Cwm Goch! From his high stone perch, blinking eyes traced a line



Creigiau Gleision

through the pale stone and vegetation. A line which would draw him back two weeks later, by now physically and spiritually renewed, to complete and kick off his nascent climbing career. Sadly the actual line remains unrecorded except as a passage within an ED article. Around this time it is doubtful if the cliffs above Cwm Goch were seeing much traffic. Even if Tony Moulam's 1966 guide inspired the odd mountaineer to take a look, the only real revival which drew climbers to the cwm was the 1980's publication of Welsh Winter Climbs which detailed some middling winter lines amongst the gullies and towers and Steve Ashton's Scrambles in Snowdonia which offered a variation on an old mod rock climb North Arête, renamed by Steve as Needle's Eye Arête. Incidentally, an esoteric adventure in these parts is an ascent of the aforementioned arête followed by a walk to the summit of Foel Goch with a hair raising descent down the impressive but rotten arête of Yr Esgair which requires an abseil into the gap from a dubious fang of rock. Strictly for adherents of the dangerous sports club !

Further exposure came in the form of Jon Spark's Scrambles and Easy Climbs in Snowdonia which used another oldie, South Arête, as an approach to the summit of Foel Goch. One other arête on the north face throws down a rocky tentacle into the cwm. Vanishing Arete although like South Arête its quality as a means of ascent is limited by its lack of continuity and escapability.

Time to tackle the trio of mountaineering routes on the north west face around the corner. As Tony Moulam suggests in his guide, several visits are required to really work out the complexities of the Gleision cliffs. After establishing where one feature, Lilliput Devil's Kitchen was, I could at least work out the start to Central Arete which began within it's dank maw.

Returning one indifferent spring day with two young multi pitch virgins, Henry and Daisy Hobson, we scrambled up the awkward scree and vegetated slopes into the mouth of a small cwm beneath the arête and I was rather intimidated by the sight of the steep wall above. Despite its V Diff grading I was familiar enough with old, rarely ascended routes to realise that it was more likely to be a sandbag than a walk in the park.

Bridging out of the fissure I landed on a large grassy ledge with the steep wall looming above. After some tentative probing, things looked positive enough to launch out on a rising traverse line on wonderful holds which continued up a steep rib and left me gazing down upon my young partners ensconced within the dark kitchen.

A rather nasty, vegetated groove was followed quickly by a third pitch of delicate slab climbing leading to an awkward traverse across to a veritable eyrie like stance. With my two young cohorts brought up and sharing my precarious stance the space below our feet fermented and boiled in a misty soup. Three hundred feet of climbing felt like three thousand with the clag transforming mere pinnacles into dramatic towers and tame clefts resembling avalanche strewn gullies.

The fourth and final pitch took me out of sight around the corner, up a steep exposed crack to finish on a photogenic serrated knife edge.

As the guidebook writer I had to respect the V Diff grading but added a star for its flashes of real quality, position and atmosphere.

With a deadline approaching, later extended by a year, I had to crack on and complete the final two mountaineering routes before autumnal storms brought an inevitable end to climbing on this high, north facing mountain cliff.

My then 14 year old son, Luke, joined me for what I imagined would be a gentle meander up the impressive flake of detached rock known as The Tower Ridge and graded a mere Diff.

Unlike Central Ridge, The Tower Ridge proved a more slippery customer! Firstly, a rather nasty scrambling approach was necessary before one had even reached the Tower itself. The traverse across a steep concave hanging amphitheatre of shiny aspidistra like grass felt precarious and uncomfortable. Bringing Luke up to share my little stance, I gazed around for suitable anchor points should escape be necessarythere weren't any! The ridge looked steep and serious and I felt a rather irresponsible parent bringing my youngest offspring on such an undertaking.

Not for the first time. On Luke's first multi pitch outing Will o the Wisp in Cwm Cowarch, Mid Wales, a jammed rope on the run together first and second pitches had resulted in my shouting down to Luke to untie the knotted rope. Luke had interpreted this as an instruction to untie from his harness and had soloed the first two pitches with me blissfully unaware drawing up an empty rope. When I told Jim Perrin this some time later, he looked at me coldly and said, "You want slapping." Ouch!

With escape unlikely, nothing for it but to go out and see if like Central Ridge it unravels in a endless flow of jugs and protection. The initial steep chimney/ groove quickly extinguished this theory. Quite hard and unprotected to boot. This innocuous little cracked

groove could well be a site of significant climbing history for it was within this remote cleft that Archer Thompson offers possibly the very first account of hand jamming in a route description. Writing in the Creigiau Gleision section of his Climbing in Snowdonia, he writes *on the left side is a short, vertical chimney. The closed fist fitted in prevents the body falling out!*

After overcoming the feature without resorting to hand jams, I set off to find a way through the short hanging slabs and complex rock architecture which denied access to the ridge itself. After balking at a steep direct slab, a traverse around the back brought vertigo inducing exposure. The ground fell away steeply for three hundred feet. Back to the edge and a nervous, graspy pull mercifully delivered a hold studded slab.

Still advancing, I was very much aware of the need to secure a bombproof belay, somewhere, anywhere and soon! I eventually halted at a jammed flake beneath a short hard looking slab. This was the classic au cheval stance. Perched high above the scree with legs straddling an uncomfortable stone saddle, I threaded a thin tape around a flake which when pounded sounded hollow. A couple of big nuts jammed together side by side in a flared crack was the best protection I could manage to compliment the tape. Luke manfully followed up with the exposure snapping at his heels to join me on my precarious little perch. At this point I had arrived at one of those rare moments of climbing synchronicity.

Writing in his guide one hundred years before, Archer describes this lonely place... *'the final portion is a slab of repellent aspect. Its centre is seamed by a shallow groove of twenty five feet. This furnishes adequate holds, which it may be necessary to unearth with a penknife.'*

A century later, one of climbing's journeymen finds himself reprising Archer's gardening tactics by unleashing a new secret weapon; a horse's hoof pick liberated from my partner's equine tool kit. This little tool sports stiff bristles on one side of the head and a sharp pick on the other, small enough to dangle unobtrusively from your harness but handy to scrape away lichen from an essential hold or pick out a potential life saving crack to accept a nut. Scraping away at the very crack which had been picked out by JMA's penknife, I failed to unearth anything which would offer protection or even a hold. The best it could provide was an insecure toe slot to compliment the tiny spaced holds on the exposed slab. Mindful of my young partner anxiously paying out the rope on his tiny saddle below, I carefully edged my way up the slab and was greatly relieved when I unwrapped a perfect finishing hold. The climb had another pitch of some exposure and interest but by then the main problems were over and we could retreat satisfied to the welcoming bar of the Stables hostelry in Betws y Coed for a well earned brew.

Nearly there now, but it was early October and I really needed to nail The Great Ridge before the autumn gales and Atlantic storms made this high, north facing cliff a no-go zone. Just the big one to overcome and with winter drawing on it was time to bring in the heavy gun in the shape of the enthusiastic editor of the Ogwen guide, Mike Bailey himself! Archer Thompson in his original description of The Great Ridge certainly wasn't averse to a bit of hyperbole. Graded Exceedingly Difficult, AT advised the route was only *for an expert party*.

It is certainly one of the finest in Wales; neither is it easy to select another for comparison, for it is approximately twice as high as The Central Arete of Glyder Fawr and the point of difficulty has been compared by one of its explorers to The Central Route on the East Face of Lliwedd...

When I finally hauled myself back up to the high cwm for the umpteenth time that summer, with Mike and Malcolm Fraser of the CC, the day was overhung with cloud and a cool wind suggested a day of finger sucking, clapping and stance hopping! Taking the first



The finale of Central Arête, Creigiau Gleision. **Photo: John Appleby**

pitch, I meandered up the scruffy start, finding a steep little corner quite testing before I reached a decent small platform. Mike now took off without further ado only to be brought up sharp by a stiff little wall some 40' above our heads. By hanging out from the stance and craning my neck I could just make out his frequent sorties on the wall only to see him retreat to a sloping vegetated ledge. By this time poor Malcolm, who had spent at least thirty minutes submerged in his cag and hopping around as best he could on our little perch, decided he had had enough. Taking up the slack rope he effected an abseil retreat and was last seen running at great speed in the direction of Bethesda, presumably in an attempt to keep warm!

In the mean time a sudden tug on the rope suggested that Mike had briefly departed from the cliff. What's going on here? Mike who leads comfortably into the mid extremes peeling off a V Diff. ? After two hours we hadn't even completed two pitches. Time for a retreat and a re-think. Mike lowered off a number six rock and after gathering our thoughts and our hardware we scurried down into Nant Francon with my thoughts fixed on when and IF we would return this year ?

Within a fortnight, Mike and I had returned on a rare dry October day although a bank of cloud hanging over the cwm extinguished hopes of an Indian summers' day of quiet exploration. After quickly reprising our respective roles from our last visit, Mike once again reached his previous high point and after some initial probing decided on tackling a gnarly corner to the right which brought him up to Archer's Moss Bight. Above, another steep corner provided a good traditional thrutch which I followed with little grace to exit on a ledge beneath a rather fine slabby arête. The arête proved delicately pleasant and led to a small stance with an impressive slab looming above. Standing proud of the main body of the

mountain, the narrow slab continued the agreeable climbing which had preceded it and led to a saddle connecting the ridge to the broad slopes which fetched up on Foel Goch's 3000' summit. With the final scrappy saddle out the way, thus concluded a fine trad expedition.

Mike and I could only agree with AT's initial comments that the climb would be delectable in good weather; inadvisable in bad, Interest well sustained throughout....

Archer's initial exceedingly difficult climb is now a good honest severe and carries a star. Hopefully, the publication of the 2008 Ogwen guide which will see one of North Wales's forgotten climbing venues rightfully restored in print will see Creigiau Gleision re-energised as a traditional playground and at its centre, one of the regions great esoteric mountaineering adventures. One of Archer's lost arrows, The Great Ridge.

Two young multi-pitch virgins, Daisy and Tom Hobson following Archer's Arrows on Central Arete, Creigiau Gleision.



'Veterans', Luke Appleby (L) and father, John Appleby (R) on Tower Ridge.

Photos: John Appleby



Postscript

After completing this article, I received an email from Mike Bailey, the Ogwen editor who informed me that he had discovered a forgotten Abraham's Brothers route on the cliff. For reasons unknown The West Ridge had been left out of successive CC guidebooks since 1921 ?

Mike and I climbed the route and pencilled it into the guidebook text. Craigeau Glesion's four esoteric mountaineering routes are to be re-united in print once again after an absence of nearly 90 years !

For the record West Ridge was a worthwhile 5 pitch V Diff but without some of the character of its neighbouring routes. Loose rock and devious route finding make this a serious outing so not recommended for novices.



The late Mike Harber on the North Face of the Tour Ronde, September 6, 1979

Photo: Tim Oliver.

SSSIs – don't get me started!

Colin Struthers

There is quite a tasty little cliff in Borrowdale called Car Park Crag. It's a natural crag excavated from the hillside in the early 1980s by local activists and, being close to the road, for a period it was fairly popular. However, a few months after news about the place got out to the public the powers that be became aware that climbing was going on within what turned out to be an SSSI.

All hell broke loose. The activists were roundly condemned, the landowner, who up until that point had seemed fairly indifferent, was suddenly prompted into a much less amenable attitude and various climbing worthies were wheeled out to condemn their irresponsible brethren and to declare that the crag was crap anyway and that nobody should mourn its loss (actually not true). In due course all access was banned.

Interestingly, all this followed on from a sustained period of climbing activity during which time not one environmental scientist, amateur botanist or general purpose tree hugger had objected or even been seen near the place.

I can remember an argument I had at the time with a friend who worked for the National Trust. I asked; what was the point of an unusual fern or moss if nobody ever looked at it? I wondered, since the species concerned were not actually at risk of extinction, if it mattered that such things existed at Car Park Crag at all. And I asked why the views of the environmentalists (who cared so deeply about Car Park crag that none of them could be bothered to go there) should prevail over the large numbers of climbers who had been having a jolly good time on the cliff in recent months?

And I was told that that it did indeed matter because people could enjoy knowing about the presence of said species even if they never had any intention of going to see them and that this vitally important "user value" had to be taken into account. My counter suggestion, that the pleasure obtained by climbers could also have some "user value" and that such value might even outweigh that derived by the absent environmentalists was dismissed as provocative dilettantism.

Similar attitudes and a willingness to discount the claims of recreational users were evident more recently when sweeping restrictions on climbing at Stanage were proposed by the RSPB due to the presence of nesting ring ouzels (thankfully with little success). Given the massive and long established popularity of Stanage among climbers I think most of us regarded such a suggestion as unreasonable. Similarly, a growing number of climbers feel that the resurgent peregrine population is no longer truly endangered and should therefore not automatically secure first claim on any bit of rock they happen to fancy building a nest on.

However to utter such thoughts is still heresy to those who consider our need for recreational access to be pretty insignificant and who would instead assert prior "rights" for the natural environment that transcend many of the claims of mere humans.

Now, this is an argument that is philosophically defensible (just), but it is also one that the vast majority of us wholeheartedly reject in the everyday conduct of our lives. To varying degrees we accept that land is cultivated (we want to eat), that housing is developed (we

want somewhere to live), that motorways are constructed (we want to get around), that factories are built (we want jobs) and that shopping centres exist (we can't live without our consumer goodies).

All of these things have a cost in terms of disruption and damage - but often we feel that this is a price worth paying. Every day society considers and accepts trade offs between our wants and needs and the environmental destruction that they may create.

But woe betide the person who suggests that, somewhere in this great debate, we should countenance even the slightest negative impact on nature in return for recreational benefit. No, recreation is trivial. We need food, jobs, homes yes, but recreation – that's surely a luxury we can, if necessary, do without.

However, in an age of unprecedented plenty is this really true any more? By the standards of the 1960s virtually everyone in modern Britain is materially well provided for. And yet, if researchers and pundits are to be believed, our material success has not made us any happier. We are not at ease with our wealth or even with ourselves. Psychologically the crisis many feel seems to verge on the existential – if I have achieved all my material needs what else is there? Well maybe, if striving to make a living, to get by, no longer defines us then we need to look at the other things in our lives - and one of those things is recreation.

A lot of climbers know this already. When I was younger and people asked me what I did I didn't tell them my job, I simply said I was a climber. This wasn't an affectation, it was genuinely how I saw myself and how all-important climbing felt to me. Now that I'm older I might answer differently, I might say I'm a husband, a father, someone who tries to provide and look after the people I care for but still, I'm a climber. Thank god for that!

I know how life affirming, how joyous, how liberating 35 years of climbing has made me feel. I can't necessarily explain why or how this works but I can say that anyone who thinks that my "recreation" is simply a luxury, an add-on, just does not get it. My recreation is, in the real sense of the word, essential to me. So I get pretty annoyed with people who want to treat it as something trivial.

And now I've got that off my chest we can get back to Car Park Crag and the SSSI.

If our society was in the habit of properly acknowledging the importance and value of recreation then the debate about access to this crag might have been different. It would not necessarily have ended with the environmentalists declaring "it's an SSSI - so game over eh?" or with the majority of climbers conceding, "Yup, SSSI, we might as well all go home". Instead we might have had a proper discussion about how useful or essential the crag was as a habitat for plants versus its value as a recreational resource for climbers.

The outcome of course, might have been the same – everyone could have agreed that the climbing was not that important but that the flora was. Conversely, the conclusion could have been that the plants concerned had plenty of other suitable habitats in the valley and that considerate climbing should be permitted. We'll never know because the debate never happened in these terms. The reason it didn't was because nobody thought that the recreational demands of climbers were worth considering seriously. Maybe it's time they were, maybe it's time we acknowledged the right to recreation as an important public good.

So here's a proposal for the next round of access based legislation – rather than something similar to the 'one size fits all' CRoW Act which neither addresses the real concerns of climbers or for that matter, the needs of reasonable landowners, perhaps we could have something designed to hit the target. And let's be honest about it, the target is access to the specific places where we want to climb, not to some nebulous designation such as open

land or coast and foreshore. And let's also not use secondary arguments about why we want it, such as touting the Health of the Nation agenda, or arguing that outdoor recreation is a mainstay of the rural economy.

Am I alone in thinking that it was absurd to couch the debate about parking and approaches to the Allt a Mhuilinn in terms of the benefits of increased tourism to the hoteliers and shopkeepers of Fort William? I'm not suggesting that the economy of Lochaber is unimportant, but should it not have been enough to simply state that the North Face of Ben Nevis is Britain's premier mountaineering destination and that recreational access to it is a sufficient public good in itself?



Borrowdale. A candidate for the country's first **Site of Special Recreational Interest?**

So let's stop apologising for what we want as recreational users of the countryside and start asserting our own rights as climbers. We could begin by campaigning for a new form of land designation - A Site of Special Recreational Interest? (SSRI if you want an acronym).

Any group could ask for an area to be designated an SSRI, not just climbers - canoeists, surfers, mountain bikers, walkers, horse riders and so on. We have a shared interest with all of these groups in obtaining better, more relevant access law and together we have potentially a powerful voice to demand the changes we need.

The ability to apply for SSRI designation could provide those who have a recreational interest with a means to counter the claims of private ownership, military and industrial use and even environmental protection. SSRIs would not mean recreational users always getting their own way - at times competing interests would have a better claim - but they would ensure that both sides of the argument were properly heard.

Surely this has got to be a better approach than to simply seek an extension of the CRoW legislation to other land types. The Vixen Tor case on Dartmoor illustrates the limitations of a law that deals with general public access to something as hard to define as "open countryside". We settled for CRoW as the best that was on offer at the time but what we really wanted was a law that specifically granted access to the places where we wanted to climb - the places where we could exercise our right to our chosen recreation.

So next time let's ask for that instead.

Crest Jewel, North Dome – Yosemite

Bill Wintrip

The guidebook – Yosemite Valley Free Climbs – states that Crest Jewel is “*likely the best climb of its type and grade on the planet.*” How could any climber ignore that recommendation? North Dome towers above Curry Village, the base for our time in the Valley. Most nights, Bill Geary, Alison (my wife) and I would sit on the verandah of the Lodge, drinking beer and trying to decide on the next day’s plans.

After our exciting ascent of the North West Face of Half Dome - rain/snow storms/enforced bivvies etc – we had spent a couple of days relaxing with Valley walks around Mirror Lake and being forced by Alison to drink lots of Californian wine at a picnic down by the Merced River. Now it was time to get back on the rock. The above description of Crest Jewel sounded so tempting, even though many years ago, Chris Jackson and I had failed to find the start of the classic South Face route on North Dome. Chris and I had planned to continue up the South Face route after our ascent of Royal Arches. However, after a couple of hours of fruitless jungle bashing we ran out of time and had to hightail it back to the Valley, avoiding a massive king snake on the way, (I reckoned it was at least 10ft long but it was getting dark and shadows can deceive).

With this prior knowledge, Bill and I decided to get to North Dome from Highway 120, the road that takes you up to Tuolumne Meadows. This approach entails a fairly long walk-in but on paper looked straightforward. The guidebook does mention a *‘bushwhacking descent that is difficult to find*, but we thought this was probably an exaggeration. It wasn’t!

The walk down through the deep, dark woods from Highway 120 was very deep and dark, taking us across a couple of snow patches (early June). The footprints in the snow were definitely bears. Bill wasn’t convinced; he said bears do not normally wear Nike trainers (Bill’s a scientist so he knows these things). We finally emerged from the deep, dark woods on to a subsidiary dome, looking directly across at North Dome. The path we had been following disappeared on the featureless dome and looking down to where we needed to be heading I could see a ‘bushwhack approach’ approaching. We managed to fight our way through the man eating manzanita bushes to the base of North Dome where we proceeded to skirt round its base in an attempt to find our route. In fact, by this stage we would have settled for any route as it was nearly midday and getting benighted on a slab was not part of the game plan. A feeling of déjà vu was coming upon me and the thought of fighting our way back through the killer bushes did not appeal. An abseil retreat in the dark from the route (when/if we found it) was not recommended as most of the pitches were traverses and locating the belays again would be very difficult. Finally, we spotted the start of Crest Jewel, unfortunately it was 50m below us. We had somehow managed to traverse up on to a ledge system. We added one of our precious slings to the bits of tat stuffed around a jammed boulder (it seems we weren’t the only incompetent route finders) and abseiled into the start.

The route looked fantastic, hanging thousands of feet above the Valley and directly across from the huge North Face of Half Dome. I started off across pitch 1, thankfully Bill didn’t argue, even though it meant he got pitches 2 and 8. These are the 5.10a crux ones. For those who have never climbed in Yosemite, 5.10a equates roughly to HVS/E1. However,



Royal Arches with North Dome above, and (inset) the line of **Crest Jewel**. Photo: © **Chris McNamara**



Man eating golden-mantled ground squirrel.
Photos: **Bill Wintrip**

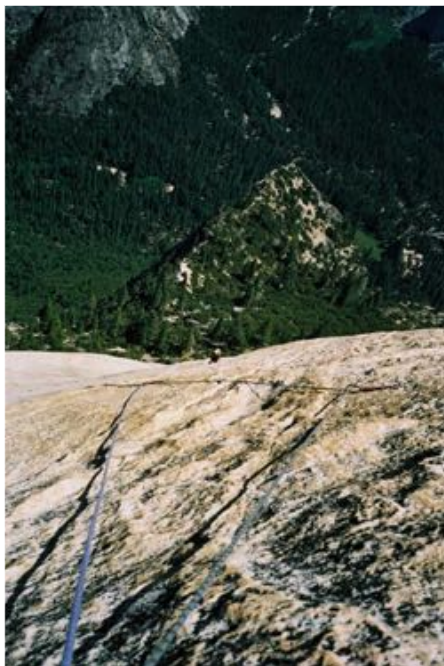
5.10a Yosemite slabs are something completely different. The protection on Crest Jewel averaged six bolts per 150ft pitch. Seconding pitch 2, the first crux, I resorted to the classic slab climbing technique of staring at the blank rock, willing a hold to appear, a knobble, a crystal, anything, but faith and friction was the name of the game, (and, of course, clear instructions to Bill to keep it 'comfy Humphrey'. Not as though I needed a tight rope you understand. It was that I wanted to avoid any undue shock loads on Bill's belay, just in case a quartzite crystal moved when I stepped up on it – honest). We swung the leads up the route, running out long pitches on perfect rock, with the protection coming just when the panic started to rise. We had decided that if one of us fell whilst leading, the best thing to do would be to spread your arms and legs and go for a belly slide, hoping this would slow you down enough to only lose a couple of layers of skin. I insisted that Bill try this theory first. He was the scientist after all.

Swifts kept us company all the way up the route, swooping by us to get a closer look, another bloody good reason for a snug rope when I was following pitch 8. The birds were definitely much bigger when I was climbing; I reckoned they were the eagles that were actually chasing the swifts.

Crest Jewel takes you up across acres of granite, the rock left and right has no other routes on it. The nearest – the South Face route – is out of sight to the left. There were no other climbers on North Dome and the weather was perfect. The guidebook description was not wrong.

Topping out in the late afternoon after 10 glorious pitches, we sat eating our snack bars in the company of a couple of ferocious-looking, man-eating ground squirrels. We had fantastic views of Half Dome and unfortunately (or fortunately depending on your point of view) no one was with us to share our bullshit as we traced our route up the North West Face. We could see down to Curry Village, nestled in the trees several thousand feet below. Where Alison would be sat on the verandah, soaking up the late afternoon sun after her walk up to Yosemite Falls. I bet she would be thinking "I wish I was up there with the boys, so I could hear yet again how they climbed Half Dome, pitch by chuffing pitch."

After yet more photos of guess what? we packed up the gear, coiled the ropes, said our goodbyes to the ground squirrels and made our way back through the deep, dark, bear infested woods back to Highway 120, looking forward to those ice cold beers and another route to regale Alison with.



"Acres of granite surround the climber."



Enough rope to hang oneself...

Peter Warland

It wasn't W H (Bill) Murray nor was it Frank Smythe, I'm positive of that, but it was one of those 1940s climbers who, when he walked the length of Euston Station with his hempen climbing rope threaded through the top of his Bergen, was asked by a porter, "Goin' to 'ang yersel', mate?" Anyway, I had cause to recall that incident the other day when someone brought up that delightful phrase, 'Give a man enough rope and he'll hang himself.' I sat up, shook myself out of the evening lethargy, switched off the TV with the pointy end of my trusty ice-axe and had several scary memories, all rope-related.

You see, ropes are extremely dangerous things if a person doesn't treat them with the respect they deserve. I don't necessarily mean the business of walking all over them with crampons or nailed boots, of allowing them to rot in some garden shed for years, nor permitting nasty chemicals to get at them. I mean actually mis-using them on a rock-face, a glacier or mountain ridge and getting oneself into dire straits or worse.

For example, I can still remember clearly that rare sunny day up in Glencoe when I almost cashed in my chips. I was working for the Mountaineering Association and teaching a small group of novices how to rappel. My beloved spouse and I had discovered a gently sloping slab some 200 feet high but with a nice ledge about halfway up and I had tied together two 120-foot ropes, one nylon, the other manila hemp, and flipped them round a convenient rowan tree. I was demonstrating the Classic Method, a painful business that involves wrapping the rope around one's body and using it as friction. There were, in those days, no karabiners nor fancy descendeurs involved.

Anyway, there I was talking up a storm and walking backwards down that slab when I noticed the interesting phenomenon of the two ropes above me unknottting themselves and heading my way. I think that I had some sort of epiphany that involved seeing myself in little broken pieces on the slopes below so I turned around, scampered crab-wise down to the convenient ledge, stopped, gathered the ropes, and gave a stern lecture on testing knots before launching oneself on an abseil of any sort. I hope my pupils were impressed. I was to remember this advice when we dropped down off the top of the Grépon that summer.

It was on The Monolith Crack climb in the Ogwen Valley when I almost allowed my newly acquired wife to throttle herself on a descent. This time we were far more advanced in our technique and she was using a sling round her thighs, which was passed through a karabiner. The doubled rope went through that same krab then up over her shoulder for friction. Geoff and I watched her coming down to us, probably making sarcastic comments as to her style and progress. Then she stopped. "I'm choking!" I think she said. "My anorak's got caught up." I forget now what we did to remedy that situation but it almost certainly involved Geoff or I standing on the other's head and shoulders in a very perilous position and thus relieving the stranglehold on my beloved's neck by letting her trample all over us. Luckily, she had already adopted the new-fangled Vibram soles on her boots. We didn't wear ex-army anoraks when abseiling after that.

Opposite. Pico Roncagli, Cordillera Darwin, Tierra del Fuego. **Photo: Don Sargeant**



On another occasion I was up on the moors in Yorkshire, Almscliffe or somewhere, and I was belaying the late lamented Johnnie Lees. He'd had his beady eye on an overhang and had sent me scrambling to the top in order to give him a top-rope. I found a huge perched boulder, I recall, and slipped a loop of my rope around it. I then tied all sorts of the new knots that Ken Tarbuck had been advocating and sat myself down for a pleasant smoke and view of the moors. However, John did something most unusual for him, he fell off at the crux. He was under the overhang and so swung out into space, and the rope came tight, and began pulling me towards the edge. It seems that my safety line had slipped down the boulder until it was almost under it. Consequently, there was an enormous amount of slack involved and so I got dragged edgewards. I can't remember if I screamed, but I probably swallowed my fag. Luckily I ground to a halt, my trousers damaged and my ego shattered with Johnny dangling below only about a foot off the ground. We didn't get over that

overhang that day but I may have learned another lesson about the dangers that ropes can put us in. Lees was not amused; he told me that in no uncertain terms.

We were trying some new routes on the sea cliffs down in Cornwall but the wind off the ocean was frustrating our efforts to get a top-rope over the precipice. Each time we tossed it down, the gale blew it back in our faces. So I had an idea. Ingeniously, I made a sling round a largish granite boulder. I tied the end of the rope to the sling and the rock and thoughtfully, moved the coils of rope well away from my legs, placing them on a ledge above me so that they wouldn't snag as they whizzed past. Then, warning all and sundry to stand clear, I swung the boulder out over the edge and let go. The seagulls weren't impressed and screamed at me, unlike my friends who applauded my skill and ingenuity. The rope slipped silently over the edge and down into the storm. I felt smug. Then one lone, solitary coil with a mind of its own leaped upward, swished through the air like a lasso and encircled my arm. I was dragged towards the edge like a calf about to be branded. It was a long way down to the surging surf. But again I got away with it.

On that slab in Glencoe I'd damaged my hands, using them as brakes. On the Monolith I'd had my head trampled on. In Yorkshire I'd learned that gritstone is most detrimental to the britches and in Cornwall I earned a nasty rope-burn but, as I said before, I got away with it and, I hope, learned a few facts about the danger of ropes., or perhaps about the danger of idiots with ropes? Anyway, treating any rope, be it manila, hemp or nylon, without due care, attention or respect can cause a climber to get severely dead. Luckily, I must've survived it all somehow.

"All I want for Christmas...." A dentally challenged Peter Warland, with Johnnie Lees on Skye.

Photo: P Warland

Alpine apprenticeship

A personal tribute to Mike Harber

Tim Oliver

The inspiration for this piece comes from the many wonderful climbs I shared in the company of my late friend and former CC member Mike Harber, between 1979 and 1983. Sadly, a divergence in our respective career paths interrupted this climbing partnership in 1984, followed abruptly by Mike's death in July 1985. The news of Mike's disappearance with fellow climber Mike Morris, in the Snow Lake Peak region of the Karakorum, reached me July 29 in a phone call some months after I had left the UK to take up permanent residence in the US.



Initially, the details surrounding their disappearance were brief and unclear, compounding my sense of shock with feelings of frustration, anxiety and cultural isolation. With an acceptance of Mike's death, began the process of grieving that was to have protracted and complex repercussions for me. In the initial phase, I felt angered that in my absence, Mike had somehow let his guard down with fatal consequences. Anger gave way to a sense of remorse, and the realization of two flawed assumptions. First, I had assumed that Mike and I shared similar thresholds of risk assessment, whether we climbed together or separately. Second, Mike had acquired an aura of immortality in my eyes, based on our accident free record of achievements together. Sure, we had gotten ourselves in over our heads on more than one occasion, but like many of our peers, we had muddled through successfully each time. In the mountains, I had generally deferred unhesitatingly to Mike's cautious sense of judgment that represented an older and more experienced mentor. However, Mike's reputation as a slow climber meant that you often came home late or bivouacked, but you came home nonetheless, safe and sound. Now that simple faith was shattered and seemed shockingly naïve. This time Mike had not come home, and in the loud silence surrounding his death, I felt that he had perhaps raised the threshold of risk to a more dangerous and potentially self-destructive level. All climbers know how easy it is to be this judgmental upon reflection, especially when viewing the problem from the comfort of sea level. Who is to say that under the same circumstances, faced with the same difficult choices when climbing far from home, trying to cope with changing conditions high on the mountain, and with a looming travel deadline, any of us in Mike's place would not have made the same decisions?

Slowly, more details of the Karakorum tragedy emerged. A cumulative series of seemingly minor accidents had quickly eroded a strong and experienced group of six down to just two players. First one team member became ill and departed for home with

his teammate, followed soon after by another member who was injured in a crevasse fall and was evacuated from the scene with his partner. Undeterred, the two Mikes alone had seen fit to remain in the mountains and carry on with their plans to complete their climbing objectives on Snow Lake Peak (Lukpe La Brakk), but something had happened to them. A search by helicopter found only a tent containing their personal effects. A memorial service back in Wales with no bodies to grieve over represented a double tragedy for Welsh climbing, as well as a huge personal loss for those who knew the two Mikes as family, friends or loved ones. An added twist to the irony was the realization that I had initially made a commitment to partner Mike Harber on the ill fated Himalayan trip, but I had subsequently withdrawn from the team in order to relocate to the US instead. For a long time after Mike's death, a profound sense of personal loss haunted me, together with the irrational fear that the story might have had a different outcome if I had been present on the trip instead of my replacement, Mike Morris. Slowly I buried these feelings but I was saddened that none of my friends seemed to be talking about Mike Harber anymore. Years went by until quite recently I felt that a fitting tribute to him would be to document some of the very positive and fun times he and I had shared together, with some of the many photos I collected along the way.



1979

On my first visit to the Alps in 1979, Mike and I made what must rate as the all-time slowest ascent of the northeast face of Les Courtes, an 800-meter ice slope above Argentière that good skiers now descend regularly. At the time, the Courtes represented my first really big and exposed snow face. With only the two routes of the Aiguille de l'M and the Midi-Plan traverse under my belt, I vividly remember my indoctrination into the strange culture of alpinism at the Argentière hut the night before the climb. The rubber hut shoes, the insufficient food we took, the mass of bodies packed into the communal bunkroom and the restlessness of the person lying next to me who got up before us at midnight to solo the Swiss Route.

Bleary-eyed, but full of optimism, Mike and I left the hut at two o'clock, but the trail of old footprints we hoped would quickly lead us across the glacier to the base of the climb soon went cold. Footprints that, unnervingly, seemed to have vanished overnight under a cone of avalanche debris freshly fallen at the foot of the face. Undeterred, we stumbled on by only the light of head torches, looking for a way across my first bergschrund, whose dark uncharted depths terrified me. We were unsure where exactly above us the line of the route started, until dawn's first light showed us just how simple a crossing it really was and put us back on the right line. Thereafter, our progress up the face was painfully slow, since we were pitching it one rope's length at a time, with Mike providing me the security of a top rope all the way. At this early stage in my apprenticeship, I had not yet acquired the confidence for us to "move together". It was a very long day. Giddy with the ever-growing sense of exposure below me, my anxiety and the rapid passage of time kept pace with one another. I watched with frustration as the distinctive profile of the Courtes's shadow grew ever longer on the glacier below my heels, while the sun disappeared behind the summit above. By this time the air temperature had dropped, but not low enough to firm up the snow, which resembled sticky, wet porridge and clung to my crampons like balls of heavy clay. We gained the summit in time for a photo-op sunset. My face in the photo that Mike took still shows the strain after all these years. We stumbled down by torchlight past the beautiful Ravanel and Mummery gendarmes to the Col de Cristaux. By this time, we had been on our feet for almost 24 hrs. I was hallucinating and trying to jump down fifty-foot high seracs below us, which when viewed from above in my exhausted stupor, appeared shorter than they really were. Mike eventually had the good sense to call a halt in the proceedings, and for the second time we waited until morning to negotiate another scary bergschrund, just above the Talefre glacier. We spent the remainder of that night trying to fit both of us into Mike's single orange plastic bivouac bag on a miserable sloping, gravel-strewn ledge. My bag surfaced later in the Chamonix campsite! The misery of that night was only dispelled by the joy we celebrated upon our arrival at the Couvercle hut mid morning, in bright, warm sunshine, to enjoy a welcome lunch of omelets and beer. Life felt good again.

Next, we set up camp in the CAI Torino Hut over on the Italian frontier for a couple of nights. From this relaxing base we enjoyed good weather on the Dent du Géant's Burgener Slab route, and a round trip along the Rochefort Arete. I was fascinated with the aluminum Madonna figurine on the Geant's summit. She sported a fine hole melted in the crown of her head that you could sink two fingers into, a stern reminder of the awesome power of lightning that favors such sharp summits. The relative informality of the Rifugio Torino came as a refreshing change after the more stringent "hut etiquette" I had just observed in a French hut. Our mid-week arrival at Torino coincided with that of a party of Italian soldiers. It seemed as if people were clomping up and downstairs in heavy boots until much later than the customary evening quiet time. There was a definite party atmosphere about the place and we, like many others, found ourselves staying up late in the bar, which our CAI hosts ran like a commercial restaurant. In fact, the informality was so permissive that no one objected when Mike discreetly pulled a stove out of his rucksack and brewed up tea on the dining table! Lingered over some delicious desserts we bought, Mike and I

Opposite: "the distinctive profile of the Courtes's shadow grew ever longer." Tim on NE Face Les Courtes and (inset) Tim Oliver and Mike Harber on the summit, September 1, 1979. **Photos: Mike Harber/Tim Oliver**
 p57. Mike Harber in a chimney on the Zinal Rothorn. **Photo: Tim Oliver**

got into a discussion about just how low standards of human behavior could sink under appropriate duress. A story circulating the South Wales Mountaineering Club at the time, concerning Mike's apparent reputation for begging food off strangers' plates on previous Alpine trips, prompted this topic of conversation. The idea of panhandling for food began to take on added appeal as the altitude and cold air of the Torino hut continued to stimulate my appetite. Suddenly I found myself unable to resist going into the hut kitchen and begging the serving staff for some handouts of bread. They generously indicated a large brown paper sack standing in the corner, containing the leftover baguette slices retrieved from the tables after each meal, and I shamelessly indulged.

An inspection of the visitors' logbook in the Torino reminded me of the hazards awaiting those venturing beyond the hut. Idly scanning the previous years' pages, I joyfully cruised past several recognizable British names, until I stopped, horrified to find a cluster of entries annotated by small black crosses in the margin. Mike recalled how a group of climbers based at the Torino hut had died descending the Tour Ronde when their ropes had tangled after one individual had slipped and fallen, dragging the rest to their deaths. The incident was later to become notorious for the legal débâcle it precipitated. The ensuing international court case mulled over the issue of whether one individual could be held responsible for the deaths of others during such a multiple climbing accident. Eventually they threw the case out of court. This accident gave Mike and me much cause for concern during our ascent of the Tour Ronde's North Face. However, our fears were unfounded. The weather and snow conditions were perfect and our ascent and subsequent safe return to the hut were uneventful. We celebrated our successes with spaghetti and wine in Courmayeur.

Sadly, Mike and I never fulfilled the dream of climbing two of the biggest plums on our tick list, ascents of the Drus and Mt Blanc. In 1982, we set off in good faith for a half-serious attempt on the former objective. En route to climb the mighty Drus' North Face, we jokingly discussed whether we should buy single or round trip tickets before boarding the funicular railway to Montenvers. A dark sense of humor peculiar to climbers suggested that in the worst-case scenario, the prepaid return portion of the fare would go unused and therefore our money would be "wasted" if we failed to return from the climb. The issue was never resolved since on the day in question, ten-tenths cloud, driving sleet and mist greeted us we arrived at to the Rognon de Drus and the start of the climb. Disgusted, we walked back down again, alas too late to catch the last train anyway! With hindsight, both of us lacked the mental commitment at the time to feel comfortable on a climb of such caliber, but at least we were making plans. As early as 1980 Mike suggested the possibility of our attempting one of the big routes on the Italian side of the Blanc, routes like the Route Major or the Sentinel Rouge. He encouraged me to look upon such routes as a graduation exercise to round out each trip we made to Chamonix. Mike reasoned that we would both be at the very peak of fitness by the end of a climbing season and in the best possible physical shape for routes of this seriousness. By way of winter preparation for the Blanc, I pored over a copy of Graham Brown's *Brenva*, familiarizing myself with all the minutiae of these classic mountain mixed climbs, and more significantly, the objective dangers challenging us just to reach the foot of these long routes. We both knew that any one of these routes required the elusive combination of good form, (including personal acclimatization and fitness) and perfect weather. Sadly, we never put it to the test.



Despite these thwarted plans, Mike could be pushy enough when the situation required. As a test piece for the end of my first Alpine season in 1979, Mike decided we should try to bag the Frendo Spur. It seems laughable now, looking back, how optimistic we were at the time and how casual were our mental and physical preparations. The photos of me dressed in an old Compton hard hat and carrying a homemade rucksack recycled from a US army kitbag rebuilt on my mother's sewing machine, illustrate what a true novice I was. We made a "crack of noon" start

on the Frendo, emerging with an unhurried air from the Plan des Aiguilles téléphérique station, reasoning that we only needed to reach the security of the bivi cave "halfway" up the route, before nightfall. I was probably the deciding factor in our failure to reach our planned destination that night, since amongst all the other weighty trappings I carried in my sac, there was a half gallon bottle filled with pre-cooked Irish stew, that required simply reheating in the pan I also carried, once it was placed on my equally handy stove. Clearly, my biggest fear was running out of food! Later in the afternoon we were still traversing back and forth across chilly rock ribs and slabs coated in fresh snow, while a Stygian gloom of descending cloud enveloped us. We made an unsuccessful effort to keep to the correct line of the route, which was not entirely obvious. Adding to our clumsy route finding, we were again pitch climbing the steeper sections one rope's length at a time for added security. By the time darkness fell, it was clear we would have had a considerable shortfall to make up the following day had we continued. At our final high point for the day, we were extremely fortunate to find a dining-table sized ledge just below a prominent steep crack, but well below the site of our intended bivi far above us at the foot of the snow arête. At the back of our impromptu, low altitude ledge was a sort of trench into which we stuffed our excess gear, including significantly, our ironmongery.

Making the best of our benightment, we settled down to enjoy a huge feast of hot stew, eaten by the light of head torches, while we sat comfortably in our sleeping bags gazing down at the lights of Chamonix. Just after dinner, in darkness, Mike accidentally kicked the empty cook pan off the ledge. We heard it clang as it bounced down the crags beneath us. Almost immediately, the cloud cleared briefly enough for us to notice, but not fully register the significance of flashes of lightning on the distant horizon to the north. Satisfied we were in an OK situation and blissfully unaware of the approaching storm, we stretched out on the ledge and fell asleep with filled bellies. At least this time we each had a bivouac bag! Some time later, a series of catastrophic bangs woke us in alarm, as lightning repeatedly struck the steel cables of the Midi téléphérique directly over our heads. So close were we to the action that we perceived each flash and bang simultaneously. The hair on my head seemed to stand on end and our ironmongery at the

"...a Stygian gloom of descending cloud..."Tim Oliver on the Frendo Spur, September 7, 1979

Photo: Miker Harber

back of the ledge hummed a warning. Clearly, the mountain gods were angered at us.

Undeterred, we sat the storm out and by dawn's light we determined that we were unharmed, just covered with a couple inches of fresh snow. Looking up at the ice-plastered buttresses above, we felt in no mood to continue the climb. Mike coolly indicated that by abseiling, down climbing and abandoning gear where necessary, it would take us many hours to reverse what we had climbed so far. In a fatalistic mood of procrastination, we finished a leisurely breakfast in bed trying to avoid thinking about the task ahead of us. Suddenly aware of a new sound that broke the stillness of the morning air, I searched the horizon, spotting a small red dot of a helicopter with a flashing light coming out of the valley below, arrow direct towards us. Like the sick feeling one gets looking in the car mirror just after a State Trooper's flashing light pulls you over on the highway for speeding, I was jerked from reveling in our wilderness experience to the realization that we were under surveillance. The Peleton Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne were coming to check us out! With the helicopter closing rapidly on our position, and the growing acceptance that we were about to become objects of an impromptu rescue, Mike and I looked at one another questioningly. We had only moments to agree on how best to respond to visual signals that the copter pilot would undoubtedly use. Simultaneously, it took less than five seconds for each of us to swallow all personal pride about being self-sufficient and trying to wave the 'copter away. Raising our arms in unison, in what we hoped was the international signage of disaster victims; we prayed we were making a responsible choice. We could not talk to one another due to the noise of the prop wash. However, we continued to stare at the pilot, who by now was just a few feet in front of us behind his Plexiglas window. Mike and I hoped he would understand that, although uninjured, we would very much like a ride to the valley if he just happened to be going that way...

By way of reply, the pilot skillfully manoeuvred the hovering aircraft just long enough for his French mechanic, wearing boots and a striped sweater, to emerge from the passenger door of the airplane. Stepping neatly onto snow-covered rock, this crew member immediately began to untie Mike and me from our climbing ropes in readiness for boarding the helicopter. The pilot had meanwhile pulled the helicopter away from the mountainside and was circling airspace to mark time.

Encouraged by the crewman's cries of "*Vite, vite!*" and afraid we would lose our gear in his hurry to evacuate us from the mountain, Mike and I scooped up armloads of rope and hardware from the ledge, to indicate that it was all going with us. The crewman motioned for the pilot to return, the 'copter's skid touched the ledge again, and with our heads ducked, we and our gear were bundled into the cabin, followed by the crewman, who jumped in after us and pulled the door shut. The adrenaline rush I felt boarding a helicopter for the first time was like an overdose. The pilot began his descent by standing the plane on its nose. It seemed that the force of gravity alone held us in a kind of freefall, plunging us headfirst towards the valley. Over the roar of the engine, the mechanic shouted amicably in broken English, trying to establish if Mike and I needed medical attention. He indicated that they had watched us the previous day, and from his tone it was clear that he thought we were very slow climbers. In the warm security of the cockpit, I let my attention drift away from this conversation. I felt spellbound by the over-riding sense of unlimited three-dimensional space around the aircraft, after our confinement on the ledge the previous night. It was as if, in this harsh alpine environment, we had suddenly become time bandits on fast forward mode. I mentally anticipated the short time it would take the helicopter to cover the distance to the



Tim on the Midi Plan Traverse. Beyond is the Aiguille du Midi and just below the rightmost summit is the distinctive profile of the Frendo Spur's snow capped rognon and the ice arête below. **Photo: Mike Harber**

valley, compared to the horrendous series of all-day abseils we had just escaped.

All too soon our five minute fairground ride was over, and we were dumped unceremoniously onto the asphalt of the Chamonix heli-pad, while the 'copter and crewman took off again immediately. It appeared that another search and rescue operation had already begun. Mike and I looked down at our feet to discover that in our hasty decent, we still carried fresh snow caked on to our boots and crampons that in the moist, warming, air of the valley floor was melting into trickles of water that ran across the black tarmac! With huge grins on our faces, we waited as instructed, for a Gendarmerie van to take us into town for debriefing and to pay our rescue bill. Our smiles quickly evaporated when the helicopter reappeared a few minutes later, disgorging a couple of German lads into an ambulance that had meanwhile pulled up alongside us. Judging by the hypothermic appearance of the two evacuees, and the miniscule rucksacks they carried it seemed to us that the two crag fast Germans had not fared so well as us after their night out. It was a sobering thought that we had passed a comfortable if somewhat exciting night, despite our apparent inexperience and poor climbing judgment. Maybe, just maybe, there was still some truth in the old proverb that, "the Britishers carry big sacs because they bivouac"; in contrast to the often-cited version that incorrectly suggests that "the Britishers bivouac because they carry big sacs..."

1980

It was with a sense of vindication that Mike and I completed the Frendo the following year, after returning to Chamonix for my second season, better prepared this time with improved fitness, technique and rope work, a solid weather forecast and, significantly, smaller sacks. Despite the potential reassurance of all this, I continued to be haunted by a sense of bad karma as Mike, myself and our respective girlfriends lounged at the poolside of a local

Chamonix hotel, which commanded a spectacular view of the Frendo. I fretted as I kept looking up at the route, dominated by its prominent ice arête, wondering if we were not pushing our luck. I had in the intervening twelve months, been warned by everyone with any knowledge of the Frendo about the potential difficulties we could expect to encounter once we reached the upper rognon, near the route's finish. This steep and compact buttress characterizes one of the peculiar appeals of the Frendo, and in our eyes promised to be harder and more exposed than any obstacle on the lower section of the climb. Rumors abounded that less fortunate parties, spooked by this feature, had tried with varying degrees of success to escape the rognon's clutches, by cutting steps up the steep, icy couloirs on either side. This thought terrified me...

While the prospect looked daunting, the reality of the climb was one of mostly confident and rapid progress up the lower section, to reach the true bivi cave comfortably by late afternoon. A snug enclosure awaited us, partly reinforced with stones bricked up by generations of previous climbers. As the sun set over the Chamonix Aiguilles we had a superb bedside view of a cloud inversion that settled into the valley below us.

Next morning we cramponed up a crisp, sunlit staircase of footprints and deep ice axe sockets lining the entire 1000-foot arête, until an icy steepening of the route forced us into a rightward traverse to reach the dreaded rognon off to our right. It was during this traverse, to establish ourselves in the rognon's lower crack system, that there were a few tense moments. I dropped a piece of gear, followed only moments later by a piece that Mike fumbled. We watched, open mouthed, as each nut noiselessly slid out of sight. Not a place we wanted to entertain a fall. Then, galvanized into activity, Mike forged an aggressive lead, up and across the rognon, to the final overhanging wall. Lacing each peg generously with a long sling, to speed our mutual progress, Mike finally shouted down that he would have to pause to put his crampons on again to make the awkward exit from the rock summit onto the upper snow slope. I felt the infectiousness of Mike's positive tone and, following him, I too quickly dispensed with the overhanging wall, just grabbing at each sling and reaching for the next one until I stood on the same awkward top step. Unlike Mike, who had removed his crampons to lead the wall, I had kept mine on. While the tension in the rope above me was reassuring, the tension in my head evaporated. Looking up, I found we had popped out of the shadows into warm sunshine and the welcoming sight of the Midi cable car station, less than a hundred yards away. The easy way down never looked so good, and to our delight, a crowd of friends and well wishers had ridden the cable car up to greet us, pleased to share the overcoming of our favorite "bogey" route. We rounded out the rest of the summer with respectable ascents of the Ryan Lochmatter route on the Plan, and the south face of the Dent du Requin, before calling it quits for another season.

1981

An opportunity to climb in the Cordillera Blanca of the Peruvian Andes presented itself in the spring of 1981 after only my second alpine season in Europe. Peru sounded like an attractive option to my South Wales climbing friends, including Mike, several of whom had previously tasted high altitude climbing in the Himalayas. Everyone's recollections of the Himalayan experience were, at the time, still tainted with some bitter memories. As Mike explained to me, getting to Peru only required purchasing an airline ticket for each member, since there were no peak fees or other encumbering bureaucracy attached to expeditions journeying to the Andes. Moreover, Peru promised spectacular mixed snow and ice routes, just a few

days' walk-in from civilization. By comparison, the Himalayan trip had started badly, with a road wreck in Turkey that had totaled the expedition van and its contents en route to the mountains. Two occupants injured in the wreck, their gear stolen by bandits, and hostility and intimidation from the local police investigating the accident had further aggravated this incident. Even after the team successfully regrouped and persevered forward with replacement gear and supplies, the tragic death of team member Chris Elliot numbed any sense of victory felt on the mountain. Chris succumbed to high altitude cerebral oedema and could not be brought down the mountain fast enough to save his life.

Given this precedent of my friends' encounter with death in the Himalayas and the personal loss of a close climbing companion of mine, I saw myself as the only member of the new team whose performance at high altitude was untested. I was very nervous digesting all this as I weighed up the decision to go to Peru. I sought to reassure myself by reading scientific papers on the known risk factors of individuals acclimatizing to altitude. Before our departure from the UK we were prescribed Diamox, and advised that on no account should we try to accelerate our exposure to altitude beyond the recommended guidelines.

Our flight to Lima was memorable for the copious volumes of liquor consumed by the passengers before our plane, stuck at the gate in Miami with mechanical problems, finally took off several hours late. Prior to departure, we had watched with trepidation as an endless stream of mechanics serviced the engines in the stifling heat and humidity of a Floridian summer night. We wondered if we would not be arriving prematurely in the Andes if the engines could not make it all the way to Lima. Early in the morning, Mike woke me in my seat to point out snow-capped peaks far below us, but I was too groggy to pay much attention. I slept off an enormous hangover in our Lima hotel room while the rest of our party of six went sightseeing.

Next day, after a breakfast of fried egg sandwiches cooked by the house cleaner in our cheap hotel room, we boarded a bus headed north into the mountains, temporarily feeling the breathlessness associated with high altitude as we crossed the Altiplano. Everyone felt relieved when the symptoms disappeared as we began our gradual descent into the Rio Santa Valley that runs roughly parallel to the Peruvian west coast.

Our plan was to begin with a series of training climbs above the Rio Honda Valley in the Cordillera Blanca. We reached the valley easily after a couple days' truck and mule ride from Huaraz, the nearest market town, capital of the Ancash Region, and our hotel base when we were not actually on the hill. While good maps were available to us and most of the peaks well catalogued in John Ricker's excellent book, *Yuraq Janka*, getting local on-the-ground information was more challenging, given the fact that none of our team spoke a word of Spanish. We took prototype versions of the new concept dome tents for our comfort in the valley, but our strategy of fast and light in the mountains hinged critically on the use of Goretex bivouac bags instead of tents above the snow line. Mike must have devised this plan, which at the time seemed very much in the vanguard of the then current "Alpine style" revolution, while Goretex was a new material that promised a more comfortable solution to planned bivouacs than the traditional polythene survival bag. This typified Mike's attention to detail, a characteristic that also served him well in his profession as a medical researcher.

Thus, it was with a mixture of relief and optimism that we left the comfort and familiar reassurance of our otherwise bulky tents at the foot of a glacier tongue called Camp Coal Tip and, shouldering what still seemed unreasonably heavy sacks, we began the steep treadmill up the fractured icefall towards the Qopap plateau. After having paid off our mule drivers

the previous day, we were at last independent, fit and facing the prospect of good weather in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Our camp that evening on the ice plateau above was a little unorthodox by conventional expedition standards of comfort. We simply scraped a shallow mass grave in the snow, climbed into our “bag systems” and slept in relative warmth and comfort, despite looking like a row of brightly colored sardines in a can, until dawn’s warmth roused us. Mike was excited about the possibility of bagging new routes up the peaks around us, but tempered his enthusiasm for the first day on the plateau, which we devoted to a mass team-building ascent of Qopap IV (5566m). This climb was uneventful but enjoyable for the views it gave us back down into the valley from whence we had come. That second night, lying again under a starry sky, we collectively evaluated our first shakedown day and night on the plateau as a wholehearted success, and we felt confident enough in our food, clothing and surroundings to divide into two groups for the next day’s program.

Next day, our third on the plateau, Dave and Helen Parsons, Mike Danford and Don Hillman set off to investigate a Swiss-roll corniced ridge leading to Qopap V. Meanwhile, Mike and I decided to tackle the west face of Nevado Perlilla (5587m). This fine looking peak offered the potential for a new route, even though the guidebook indicated that the summit, like most of those in the area, had previously been climbed. A gently rising trek of about one hour across the Qopap plateau brought us to the foot of an improbable looking wall of ice. If Mike was ever tentative or slow on steep ice, he had forgotten it now, as he tiptoed rapidly up this initial pitch with a steady, confident style. Placing a couple screws on the way, he moved up and beyond my line of sight, until he shouted down that he had found a belay. Attempting to emulate Mike’s impressive style, I was immediately impressed with the steepness of the ice which reared up in my face and reminded me of pitch one on Aonach Dubh’s Number Six Gulley. Feeling totally committed after thirty feet, I gave it everything I had. In my urgency to finish the pitch and relieve the strain on my arms and calves, I began yelling desperately at Mike to “Take in, take in!” Somehow, I managed as best I could and, trailing loops of slack rope, I quickly joined Mike on the belay to catch my breath. Alas, Mike could not hear me, even if I stood next to him and shouted in his ear. I had completely lost my voice with a bad case of laryngitis exacerbated by the thin, dry air and all I could manage the whole day was a hoarse whisper.

The route eased after that, and gave way to a gentle ramp that led to spectacular summit views all around the peak. We rappelled down past curtains of icicles dripping in the afternoon sun and retraced our footprints that were visible from the summit, back across the flat, featureless plateau to our coffin-camp. Next day we broke camp, retreated to the valley, rendezvoused with a truck that the mule drivers had thoughtfully arranged to greet us at the road head and returned to the fleshpots of Huaraz for some welcome rest and recuperation.

The main objective of the expedition, the southwest ridge of Huascaran Sur, lay in a different part of the Blanca, just west of and close to Huaraz. Its photo teased us from the back cover of Ricker’s book, its profile dominated the backyard view from our downtown hotel at Edward’s Inn, and it promised us more of the same style and situation climbing as that we had already tasted, but on an even grander scale. This upgrade in scale carried with it a potentially greater risk factor for us, so lightly protected in bivouac bags. The stupidity of youth won the day despite our common sense recognizing that climbing Nevado Huascaran Sur in “alpine style” demanded a bold sense of commitment, plus the luck of the mountain gods, if we were to avoid being caught in bad weather without at least the security of tents.

Buoyed up with a sense of self-confidence from our experiences in the Honda Valley, we said goodbye to Huaraz for a second time and contracted fresh mule drivers to carry our gear as far as they could up the south side of the mountain, before dismissing all but one porter. That porter helped us carry loads to an upper moraine camp, where the massive bulk of Huascarán blotted out the sky in front of us. We studied the serac-filled bowl that comprised the west and south faces respectively of the southwest and southeast ridges of Nevado Huascarán Sur, and reviewed our options.

Back in England some months before, in my search for further reassurance about this trip, I was ushered into Norman Croucher's apartment in South West London, seeking Norman's advice and sage wisdom about the relative merits of climbing in Peru. Norman's recent and successful ascent of Huascarán Norte, as part of a small, self-supported team like ours, represented a very positive influence on me that played no small part in my ultimate decision to join the South Wales Andes trip. One particular photo on the wall of Norman's apartment dominates my memory of that evening, a photo of Norman proudly standing on the summit. I badly wanted to hang my own version of that picture in my own apartment. To get that photo, I now realized, Mike and I would have to run the gantlet of several nights bivouacking, between strenuous days spent negotiating whatever obstacles lay on the enormous ridge that towered over us. One thing comforted us and outweighed all the negatives: we were unlikely to encounter avalanches if we stuck with the crest of the ridge. This prospect contrasted markedly with the steep, fractured and unstable nature of the ice and snow flutings to be found on every face of every peak we had studied. After a day's reconnoiter by Mike, Dave and Helen up to the foot of the SW ridge, the team decided once more to split into two groups. Mike and I would tackle the southwest ridge in one continuous alpine style push, attempting to traverse the mountain in a first ascent, while the other four would make a variant approach to the traditional Garganta Route.

To cut a long story short (see AJ 88, 1983, p157-160), Mike and I had a truly memorable time together, completing the route over the course of three nights and four days of near

perfect weather and ice conditions, with the last day spent slowly and breathlessly negotiating gigantic cornices and one enormous crevasse we found along the summit ridge. We reached the top in time for a dramatic sunset, despite having been bedeviled most of the afternoon by the presence of clouds swirling around us. Conscious of the lateness of the hour, and realizing we were both anxious to get down rapidly to safety, I was touched when Mike who was some yards ahead of me on the final plateau, took the time to pause, and wait for a few moments until I had caught up with him. He grasped my arm and together we walked the last few steps, across the flat summit to a yellow T-shirt anchored into the snow, marking the apparent highest point of the peak. In contrast to the level and otherwise unremarkable profile of



Sunset on Huascarán Sur's Summit Mike Harber July 11, 1981

Photo: Tim Oliver



Above: Mike on the summit of Huascarán 22,334ft, July 11, 1981.
, “like a row of brightly colored sardines.” Dave and Helen Parsons, Mike Danford and Mike Harber at the Qopap plateau sardine bivi, Peru. **Photos: Tim Oliver**

Huascaran Sur's summit, the view that greeted us was the stuff of climbers' dreams. We shook one another's mittened hands in the freezing air and from behind rime-crust ed balaclavas, our frozen grimaces turned into smiles. The photos tell the story better than any words I can find. Horizontal yellow light bathed everything around us, saturating the bright primary colors of our shell clothing. Peaks and valleys stretched off into the horizon above a total cloud inversion below us. Occasionally wisps of cloud scudded around in a frigid breeze that together with the rapidly failing light discouraged any tendency in us to want to linger. We snapped the obligatory summit pictures and made all haste down the crampon highway of the Garganta Icefall Route. After a final night's bivi above the icefall, made remarkable only by the memory of its relative discomfort (my sleeping mat was picked up by the wind and carried away the day before), we rappelled on down through the icefall to safety. Once back on the crevassed, but well trodden glacier below, we paused on our journey back to base camp to tell our tale to a pair of hospitable Swiss climbers, Edi Casali and Fritz Dick who welcomed us with cups of soup inside the shady sanctuary of their dome tent.

Before we left Peru, Mike and I shared another experience equally moving to that shared at altitude, this time at sea level, during an informal tour we made of Ermitano Alto 4to Sector Parish on the outskirts of Lima. This time it was a guided tour in the company of Father Ed O'Connell, an old family friend of the Harbers and a practising Catholic minister with the Society of Saint Columban. Growing up in South London, Mike and his brothers had shared the same school district as Ed, and before we left the UK, Mike's mother had asked if we would re-establish contact with Ed while we were so close to his parish. He arrived outside our Lima hotel in an old but very shiny VW beetle, and surprised us immediately, dressed in his everyday shirt and pants, contradicting my naive expectations of a monk in a medieval robe and tonsure. From the backseat of the Beetle I admired Ed's driving skills as he weaved his way through the downtown section of Lima, dodging taxis and buses to reach the suburbs. My ears pricked up when he warned us that some of the neighborhoods he was going to take us through were dangerous enough that we should resist the temptation to stray beyond sight of the car. Despite Ed's warning, I nearly blew it while on walkabout in the port of Callao, trying to photograph warships of the Peruvian Navy anchored just offshore. I would have been detained if Ed had not rapidly intervened using his fluent colloquial Spanish, just as a uniformed officer of the Peruvian Navy was demanding I hand over my camera. I also risked losing all of the precious exposed film canisters that I was carrying on my person at the time. With international accord once again restored, we continued the driving tour in some desperately poor, but densely populated neighborhoods built on what appeared to be the slopes of a mountainous cinder cone of rubble. Getting out of the car at our destination we were confronted by diminutive, one story houses built of mud bricks and corrugated iron, that covered the hillside in terraced rows, while in the pothole filled streets between them, a few men and women, many stray dogs and throngs of children looked upon us with curiosity. A posse of smiling kids immediately clustered around Ed, who quickly began to take on the persona of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. While we strolled along listening to Ed chatting to his flock, Mike turned anxiously to check the car, and was initially alarmed as he spotted a suspicious looking group of kids gathered around the Volkswagen, until with relief and a growing sense of wonder we noticed they were not removing the hubcaps but instead were polishing them lovingly with rags.

Walking past many humble dwellings, Mike and I noticed that each had a mysterious looking oil drum in front of it. This, Ed explained, was for water storage. Since none of the

neighborhoods on this hillside had piped city water, its inhabitants depended on a weekly visit from a water truck to fill their barrels. Ed further elaborated on the deplorable state of the civic infrastructure of this community with depressing statistics emphasizing the high infant mortality that haunted his parish. He proudly walked us past a women's health clinic and a children's day care center, whose construction he had helped mobilize, and he went on to describe how he intervened when police aggression in the community threatened his parishioners' welfare. Confronting a police officer suspected of roughing up an apparently innocent suspect in one case, Ed made it clear to the official that there would be no more baptisms for his family until he dropped the charges. This one story reinforced Ed's stature as minister in the community and the respect with which he is accorded.

Ed's tour raised my awareness of the human side of Peru. It was not until I returned



home to the UK that I found time to reflect on the marked contrast between our relatively affluent circumstances as visiting "credit card adventurers" and the plight of Lima's downtrodden permanent residents. Surprisingly, the farmers we had met while climbing in Ancash region, though poor, seemed somehow to enjoy an agrarian prosperity that was visibly lacking in Lima. However, the Ancash mountain dwellers live under a different shadow. One has only to read Barbara Bode's *No Bells to Toll: Destruction and Creation in the Andes*, to appreciate how fragile this rural community is in the face of frequent earthquakes and landslides that are occupational hazards for the residents of the Andes. The last major earthquake in 1970 buried the town of Yungay in a mudslide. As a child of the sixties growing up in South Wales, I was very familiar with the devastating effects of a mudslide on a mountain valley community in Aberfan. Many miles

separate Aberfan in Wales and Yungay in Peru, but the impact of similar disasters on both communities was similarly horrific. Since my visit to Peru, I have kept in regular touch with Father Ed, and every year I look forward to his cheerful letter, describing the good work he continues to pursue amongst his needy but sincere city community.

1982

My experiences from the successful Peru trip were to have long lasting results, and they reinforced my growing sense of confidence while climbing in the high mountains to the point where, on our next seasonal climbing trip to Europe, I noticed a marked improvement in the times that Mike and I were logging for alpine routes. Although my basic role in the partnership was still one of anchorman and photojournalist, under Mike's direction we were tackling harder climbs together and getting down consistently before darkness. Mike's on-the-job mentoring in the mountains was still apparent in our choice of routes and the strategies we employed to pursue them. Off the hill, we rarely spent time together socializing, planning trips or even rehearsing techniques to deal with contingencies. For

example, we never actually practised ice axe arrests or crevasse self rescue together. Instead, like many of our peers, we naively assumed that if the need arose, we could readily employ and customize these techniques from theoretical concepts familiar to us. In retrospect, that attitude now seems short sighted to me.

Despite some very poor weather in our 1982 season we border-hopped in our search for blue skies, and rounded out the year with respectable ascents of the South Face of the Schreckhorn, Ochs Fiecherhorn, Chamonix Face of the Aiguille de Peigne and the Ottoz Route on the Aiguille Croux. This felt good, even at the cost of an entire week wasted in a wet campsite in Grindelwald waiting in vain for the Lauper route on the Eiger to clear.

1983

The section in italics below reiterates my last alpine season with Mike in Zermatt. I have deliberately presented it in the original journal format that I used at the time to record my impressions of such a memorable trip. Despite its jerky, idiosyncratic style, the notes still recapture for me the excitement and strong appetite for climbing that had matured in me by this time after four years apprenticeship with Mike. At this stage in my climbing career, I not only felt confident enough to safely plan and lead major climbs of my own, but I enjoyed the added challenge and rewards of supervising a new and less experienced partner than myself for the first week in Zermatt.

Bob Williams and I had already completed the Breithorn's Triffigrat and the Matterhorn's Hornligrat in guidebook times, before Mike and his girlfriend, Meryl, arrived in the campsite a week after us. In a period of three weeks of perfect weather in the Valais Alps, Bob, Mike and I logged thirteen four thousand meter summits between us. The freshness, novelty and added security of climbing and moving together as a very compatible rope of three brought a new dimension to my enjoyment of alpinism, and offset the inevitable intensity that often develops between a protracted team of two. We suffered not a single bivouac in those 3 weeks.

On the Zinal Rothorn I witnessed another side to Mike's character that I had failed to appreciate before. On our descent from the summit block of the Rotthorngrat we came upon a solo German climber, looking confused, ill equipped and distressed, despite his visible lack of injuries. He indicated in broken English that he very much wanted to continue on to the summit, but he was intimidated by the exposed ground facing him alone and in the absence of any available rope protection. Mike summed up the German's predicament and promptly convinced the man to abandon his attempt and instead accept a safe roped escort between the three of us, off the peak and down to the hut. For some reason I inwardly bristled with indignity that we should even consider interrupting our seamless teamwork with the added responsibility of shepherding a potential novice down very rough terrain, most likely delaying our arrival back at the hut.

It was only later that I realized that Mike's initiative came from the correct and morally higher ground, and I am reminded even now what true humanistic spirit Mike demonstrated by his actions that day. Our subsequent discovery during the descent, that someone else on the mountain besides our German orphan was apparently in trouble, added another level of complexity and emotion to the logistics of that long day. All the way down the route, we were sure we could hear faint but distinct cries for help in the still afternoon air. Once safely back at the Rothornhutte, we bid a hurried "Guten Nacht" to our strange German foundling, who chose to eat and bivouac alone on the cold ice of the nearby glacier that

night, against our protestations that he should join us in the hut. Instead, we directed our attention towards discovering who else on the mountain was in trouble, before we lost the advantage of daylight. After hearing our story, the hut guardian stepped outside, and through his binoculars, he carefully searched the ledges and cliffs of the mountain face opposite the hut, in the direction we believed the cries for assistance to have come from. Quickly spotting two figures crag fast on a small ledge, the guardian radioed for a helicopter and the Swiss mountain rescue service gave us a front row view of their professional skills. The hovering aircraft speedily extracted a young Swiss couple from their predicament and, just before darkness fell, we witnessed with relief and excitement the helicopter's timely landing onto the makeshift circle of stones that served as the hut's helipad. By this time, the dozen or so occupants of the hut, some sipping tea or a beer, had turned out to watch the helicopter's arrival in the alpenglow. As we stood and stared, a young woman stepped out of the copter, with her male companion, and I saw her struggle to hide her tears of relief as she realized their daylong ordeal was finally over. I quickly turned away, overcome with emotion myself and acutely aware of her sense of embarrassment in the face of onlookers. The emotional exhaustion of the long day suddenly caught up with me, in a very profound way. I felt a humbling sense of just how precious life is, as I warmed to the realization that three individuals who had been potentially at risk earlier that day were once again home unharmed. Without Mike's proactive attitude, his selflessness and his sense of responsibility towards a complete stranger, we undoubtedly would have dined earlier at the hut that night, but only at some cost to our collective conscience.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. I'm awake, waiting for the moment to break the tension. "Rrrrrrrrrrrrr" The alarm goes off at 3:30am. By now it's become routine. That over-warm, fuzzy feeling your body gets when it thinks that you should be still asleep. The scramble to get downstairs first, bumping, jostling shoulders. Bent down, trying to pull boots onto two left feet in the dim pool of light cast by a headlamp. We're not in a hurry, besides you'll only have to queue for breakfast. I wouldn't mind the price of breakfast so much if you got something more substantial than one slice of bread. That bastard of a warden wakes everyone in the hut for just one breakfast sitting, so he can go back to bed undisturbed afterwards. Didn't take long to figure him out. His dismissive response last night to Mike's question about route finding across the Grenzgletscher: "Take a guide!" Huh, some welcome in the hillside here... We've been three nights out from the valley now, with the second night up at the Margharita hut after the Norman-Neruda route on Lyskamm. Now we're back down here in the Monte Rosa hut, after panicking our way down in a white-out like scared rabbits.

Bed and Breakfast done, it's into the adjacent tin shed for kit routine. Feels like the inside of a 1940's air raid shelter in a blackout. We are the last to leave the hut because Bob is still in the bathroom, while I'm struggling just to get two halves of a bootlace to remarry in the dark. Meanwhile Harber is waiting for us at the bottom of the ladders. Clomp, clomp, clomp, down the rungs and there's a cool breeze coming off the glacier. It's nearly a full moon, so we've got the mountain's silhouette to aim for. The lamp is dim; the battery is three weeks old. We manage with just two headlamps between the three of us. Then it's into the ice maze, like Theseus and two Athenians, guided only with footprints instead of a ball of string. Bob has not played this game before. It's only the second time he's been on a glacier with big holes in, and when the footprints run out we are now breaking trail. We follow a vague line, aiming for Zwillingjoch, and still trying to use the "lie" of the glacier to our advantage.

We make good progress and daybreak finds us in the worst part of it, the final seracs before the snow terraces. Harber finds the crucial "door" out of the maze, and it is smiles and sandwiches all round for a second breakfast. Now we continue the slog up a gently rising glacier, split by some very long and deep crevasses. Through the valley of the shadow of Lyskamm, and up towards Saserjoch. Looking back, the hut is lost in the fine print of moraine debris, across the vastness of the Grenzgletscher's shattered flow. Clouds are scudding over and it's difficult to tell what the day will be like. We join tracks converging on ours that are coming down from Saserjoch.

That day became the memorable last one I climbed with Mike, in company with Bob Williams. We did the North Ridge of Castor, and the standard ascent of Pollux to finish in perfect conditions. We celebrated our successes with a noisy meal at the Gandeggghutte, then as the fatigue set in, our banter subsided and we paid the bill, picked up our sacks, and finished our descent to the valley. In the gathering darkness and under a starry sky, we walked down through alpine pastures, each of us lost in his own thoughts, as we strode along ancient Swiss farm lanes where our headlamps cut through clouds of choking dust and masses of butterflies kicked up by our boots from trails that had seen no rain in three weeks.

Shortly after this I trip, I was visiting Mike's home in Keppoch Street, Cardiff to preview some color transparencies of the mountain objective in the Karokorum that Mike had researched for the upcoming Himalayan expedition he was planning. A trip on which I was invited. As an image of the massive rock and ice ridges of Snow Lake Peak filled the wall of Mike's front room, I found I was not really paying attention. I had mentally disconnected myself from the idea of visiting the Himalayas, as new challenges in my career and personal life beckoned from across the Atlantic. I was looking forward to marriage and a new job. As I left Mike's house it was with some difficulty that I had to break the news to Mike that, sadly, I was not going to be a part of his next trip, as I divulged my alternate plan to move to the US. That was probably the last time I saw Mike.



Lukpe La Brakk Tragedy.

A six-person group of the South Wales Mountaineering Club came in July to Snow Lake in the Biafo-Hispar Glacier region, hoping to climb there. Dave Parsons had altitude problems and left with his wife. After Bob Williams was injured in a crevasse fall, he was evacuated by Don Hillman. Dr. Michael Harber and Dr. Michael Morris stayed on, hoping to climb Lukpe La Brakk. They have been missing ever since. Despite an extensive search, no trace of them has been found.

The American Alpine Journal 1986, p282.

Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia - forty years on.

A fond recollection by Steve Dean.

"Our bible was 'Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia' which we used to borrow alternately from Birkenhead Library so that no-one else could get it, and Alan used to speculate about how hard these climbs really were."

Nick Parry (recalling early schoolboy climbing days with the late Al Rouse.)

Forty years on, it is clear that 1966 was quite a year for British climbing. The growth in the sport's popularity was well under way and that year saw the publication of Chris Bonington's instant modern classic "I Chose to Climb", the Eiger Direct was climbed in a blaze of publicity that quickly pushed a young Dougal Haston onto the world stage, Chris Bonington, Rusty Baillie and Tom Patey climbed the excellent East Face of the Old Man of Hoy (a year before the legendary television broadcast) and the rapid exploration of the sea cliffs on Anglesey put the name of Gogarth on the lips of all serious climbers. An exciting time of cultural and social change, 1966 also saw the Beatles release their finest album Revolver, Bob Dylan released the wonderful Blonde on Blonde and a young American guitarist settled in London and recorded his first single "Hey Joe". Truly Jimi Hendrix seemed like something from outer space and typified an exciting era. That year also saw the publication of the first really modern book about climbing in Britain, "Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia" by John Cleare and Tony Smythe. At last something had appeared in print that in words and pictures really managed to convey just how rock climbing felt. The book changed the whole way we looked at the sport and in its brisk and businesslike format was a wonderfully cool piece of work capturing the era beautifully.

It is now the fortieth anniversary of what turned out to be a hugely influential and much loved book and the time seems right for an affectionate reappraisal both of the photographic aspect and the text. Perhaps a little unfairly, given the quality of Tony Smythe's well thought out prose, the book is perhaps best known for the superb quality of John Cleare's near-iconic black and white photographs. The book contains thirty nine plates all of which serve to capture something both of the nature of hard climbing and the mysterious nature of Snowdonia itself. At the time that the book was produced, John was working in London as a fashion and advertising photographer and climbing regularly in Wales at weekends. A contract was agreed with the publishers Secker & Warburg in late 1964 for an advance of £60 and work on the book commenced. The publishing director at Secker & Warburg was Robin Collomb, and to quote John Cleare "...that book was Robin's initial inspiration. Having seen some of my pictures around, he invited me out to lunch and suggested I did the book. His idea was that it be the first of a series, to later cover The Lakes, Scotland and the Alps, but just before "Snowdonia" was published he moved on from Secker & Warburg, and that was the end of an intriguing project." John was already a very experienced climber, but the production of many of the photographs required considerable persistence and effort.

The scope of the photographs is of great interest, ranging from the famous images of Cenotaph Corner, Cemetery Gates, Hangover and The Thing in the Llanberis Pass, to

dark atmospheric shots of the then modern routes on Clogwyn du'r Arddu and bright sunny shots of Tremadoc. In addition there were various illustrations of climbs situated elsewhere in Snowdonia, my own favourite being a superb image of the wall of Mur y Niwl in bright sunshine. Perhaps the finest of the photographs is that of Pete Crew on the Great Wall of Cloggy, Welsh Gothic at its finest and an image to whet any appetite. Many of John's illustrations in the book have become famous, and rightly so, they were the finest examples of the art at that time and were hugely dramatic.

John's own account of the project tells us of how he drove up from London to Snowdonia over thirty times in the period through the (often wet) summer of 1965 to try and get all the necessary photographic work done. Despite the often poor weather, he was fortunate in being able to enlist the help of a number of the top performers of the day including Pete Crew, Baz Ingle, Rusty Baillie, Martin Boysen, Dave Alcock and Dave Potts. John recalled how he often used an abseil rope to get in close to the action and wide angle lenses to enhance the perspective. Although not unusual today, no one had really tried to photograph climbing in this way before and the results were often wonderfully dramatic. John's work vividly captured the feel of hard climbing; the sweat on the fingers and the dry mouth as a hard or bold move was executed. Nothing like this had been seen before and the quality of the photographs were the foundation of John's reputation as a master of mountaineering photography.

When John got the project under way he initially approached Al Alvarez (many years later the author of 'Feeding the Rat') to produce the text. Such was the demand on Al for his writing skills, that he was unable to take on the work. As a result John approached an old school friend and regular climbing partner Tony Smythe to put pen to paper. At the time Tony had recently returned from Alaska and had worked for some time at Plas y Brenin. John's choice turned out to be an astute one, Tony Smythe knew the nature and character of Snowdonia very well and whilst not one of the elite climbers of the period was a very able extreme leader who knew his way around.

The text Tony produced is to my mind something of an understated gem that perfectly balances John's excellent photographs. In less than 40,000 words Tony manages to combine the traditional and contemporary aspects of Welsh climbing and his text retains a strong sense of awe and mystery about Snowdonia itself. It includes interesting accounts of early days in Ogwen, personal experiences on the hard climbs of the day (the high prestige still attached to the likes of Cenotaph Corner, The Grooves and Vector for instance is made quite clear) and something of the legend and awe attached to the heroes of the day. It is for instance fascinating to read the sections about Joe Brown and Don Whillans written in 1965, and to realise just what a vast influence they and their exploits had on British climbing at that time. Tony's text also conveys the sense of increasing pace and modernity creeping into the sport as traditions, even those of the fifties, were being rapidly eroded. Along with the traditional flavour of some of the text, there is a sense also of urgency and rapid travel in cool new cars like Mini Coopers, to a background of music by The Beatles and the Rolling Stones. A new modern age had arrived and this was a period largely dominated in Wales by the climbers of the Manchester/Sheffield based Alpha Club. Some of the Club's members featured in John Cleare's photographs but despite the pre-eminence of this youthful group, there was still huge respect for Joe Brown at that time. (Joe was all of thirty five when the book was being written and had barely begun his extensive exploration on Anglesey.)

Here is Tony writing about The Master, forty years ago:

"The interesting thing is that Brown himself is not the least bit aggressive. He never raises his voice, and seems to do more listening than talking, except when he occasionally starts reminiscing or theorising, which causes an attentive silence to fall. I have always had the feeling that Brown has no need to be dynamic, conspicuous, and so on when he climbs, as most other 'hard' men are, because he has such an affinity with rock. I once watched a man breaking flint with a hammer into little pieces were to be used in old-fashioned matchlock guns. Every piece, after a few taps, finished up exactly the right size and shape, and it turned out that the man had been doing this work all his life. He was a craftsman, a man who not only produced good work, but understood the material with which he worked, all its foibles, its occasional refusal to behave as expected, its bouts of stubbornness. There was hardly any possibility of his getting upset, and there was certainly no need for an elaborate workshop and expensive tools. In some ways he reminded me of Joe Brown, who understands his own medium with the same timeless instinct and lack of pretence. It seems fitting, perhaps inevitable, that Brown, too, should have a very ordinary background and have been at one time a manual worker, a plumber. I can't imagine someone from higher up in the social order or from the professional classes having the same ingrained skill and almost earthy understanding."

Tony's text captures climbing in Wales, just before the exploration and wide interest in the sea cliffs of Anglesey. The main theatres of activity were still the Llanberis Pass, Clogwyn du'r Arddu and the cliffs of Tremadoc, and with the wonderful gift of hindsight it is clear just how traditional the scene still was. Great changes were soon to come, the likes of Positron and Right Wall were not far away, and the forthcoming advances in vision, nerve and athleticism were to be quite revolutionary within a British context. What the book demonstrates is how Welsh climbing felt before the boom in interest and the increases in general ability that arrived in the late sixties.

These days Tony, who is the son of the great Alpine and Himalayan explorer Frank Smythe, lives in Staveley, just north of Kendal. He is still frequently out in the hills walking and mountain biking, and remains a very fit man. Talking to Tony about the book, I was struck by his modest diffidence, amounting to almost slight embarrassment about it all. When I indicated just what an influence the book has had on so many climbers of a certain age, Tony seemed genuinely surprised and pleased that the work he and John put in was so well regarded to this day. In truth I have always felt that the book captured the spirit and rhythm of the time perfectly and remains a hugely enjoyable read. Tony is particularly good when writing about Cloggy (he later contributed a fine essay about Vember for 'Hard Rock') and because he had genuinely struggled with some of the top routes of the day, is able to give good, honest insights into just what the experience of hard climbing felt like at that time. One has to remember just how new and revealing this type of writing was, and it came across as dynamic and refreshing to many readers. Like Tony, John is still very active in the hills "as photographers don't really retire!" He still climbs as frequently as possible, is a keen ski mountaineer, and has recently taken up long distance mountain biking.

The legacy of '**Rock Climbers in Action.....**' has proved to be strong one. The superb photographic work of the likes of Ray Wood, Dave Simmonite and Cubby Cuthbertson lean strongly on the work of John Cleare all those years ago. Gradually more written work appeared about Welsh climbing; biographies of Brown and Whillans, **The Black Cliff, Welsh Rock**, biographies of Menlove Edwards, Kirkus and Herford to name but a few. Despite the passing years, the book is held in great affection by many climbers not least for capturing a

particular period so clearly and with such charm. I have met people who can recite pieces of text (honestly!) and its cult status has endured because the book was not produced in great numbers (for many years it was rumoured that there were only 1,000 copies but that is not true.) The book originally retailed at £1-75 (about the price in 1996 of eighteen pints of bitter!) these days copies very rarely crop up on used book lists, it seems that most people who bought the book want to keep it, such is its quality. Very occasionally a second hand copy comes on the market and there are rumours of up to £250 being paid. Like *'The Black Cliff' and 'High Peak'*, it remains one of the most sought after, and scarce, British mountain books of the modern era. In the USA, copies in good condition have fetched \$500.

As I indicated earlier, to climbers of a certain age the book is held in huge affection. I once sat around a campfire in the Alps, listening to people who not only knew the order of the photographs but could also recite the captions almost word for word! (This event was very funny and clearly demonstrated under the influence of cheap wine that male obsession can veer seriously near to mild forms of mental illness!) I have also met Rock Climbers in Action tickers, trying to knock off all the routes in the photographs. The inclusion of The Thing, Erosion Direct, Pellagra and Cloggy's Great Wall has always ensured that that would be no easy task while much of Carpet Slab is simply no longer available, having fallen down in 1986.

While still at school in South London in 1967, I took a copy of the book down from a shelf in Brixton Library. I turned the pages, saw John's photographs and can genuinely say that I was hooked---like many others I wanted to be out there on those routes and be a part of that world. Just revisiting the book both in terms of photographs and text brings back wonderful memories of great days on the crags of mysterious Snowdonia. Forty years down the road, it is full marks to John and Tony, for creating a gem of a book that has brought huge pleasure to so many of us and inspired many a pushy and unforgettable lead! Wales was never to be like this again---the rush across Anglesey to the vertical adventures of Gogarth was soon to sweep over the mainstream and more people then began to look further afield to Europe, the USA and elsewhere but all that is another story.

Short Walks in the Lake District

Ted Maden



I parked the car just off the Birker Fell road opposite a gated track that leads to Devoke Water. From a short way along the track I headed up over tussocks to Rough Crag and Water Crag. It was early one midweek morning in December 2005 and no-one else was about. The low sun was creating stunning light and shade effects, both near at hand and around the skyline of distant peaks from the Central Fells to the Conistون Group and the starkly silhouetted pyramidal Caw. From Water Crag I went down to the outflow of Devoke Water and carried on up to White Pike, Yoadcastle and Woodend Height. The sun was brighter now but continued to work its magical spell as I descended again to Devoke Water. From near the start of the track back to the road I diverted up the rocky knob of Seat How, which my guidebook promised would “appeal to youngsters of all ages”. That included me, a veteran youngster.

The guidebook describes a collection of sixty walks under the title *Short Walks in the Lake District*, and is one of several hillwalkers’ guidebooks by our former President Bob Allen. The above walk, *A Circuit of Devoke Water*, was my fifty-second. Eight to go!

Sybil and I had bought a copy of the book several years previously, attracted by the subtitle, *60 Walks for Short Days, Wet Days and with the Family*. We were making frequent short visits to the Lake District, and we fitted in walks mainly from the South-Eastern section of the book when opportunities arose. These South-Eastern walks were highly enjoyable and relatively undemanding. But as the “ticks” approached the halfway mark the remaining walks were further from our base in Windermere and also to varying degrees steeper, rougher and wilder, and we began to use other reference sources for our walks together. I meanwhile pursued the “Short Days” spirit of what had become the “Bob Allen project” by making early starts and finishing by lunch-time, usually avoiding the “Wet Days” element of Bob’s remit.

From the frequented limestone of Scout Scar to the seclusion of Back o’ Skidda’, from the winding lanes of Tilberthwaite to the steep-sided fells of Borrowdale, every walk was enjoyable. Many were off the beaten track and gave a sense of adventure, no doubt enhanced by the early starts and consequent solitude. The walks include eight hills of over 2000 feet and several other Wainwrights, as well as many outings which do not visit peaks or tops. All except one of the walks are circular. Guidebook times are between two and four hours and usually fitted my own pace well, but some of the distances seemed a bit underestimated based on Naismith’s rule of three miles per hour plus a thousand feet of ascent per half hour. From some of the starting points it would be feasible to link two walks together. I considered a few such options but did not take any of them and was always satisfied with one walk at a time. Here are some highlights from the later stages of the campaign.

February 2005. Tarn at Leaves and Bessyboot seemed an interesting proposition, as I had never heard of either of these features! The book informed me that they are on the northern end of the Glaramara range. Starting from Seatoller one frosty morning soon after sunrise I spotted the view towards Rosthwaite Cam shown in Bob’s photo, but did not notice the line of the route up the hillside by a stream to the left of the Cam. Then contouring above Combe

Gill I met quite a bit of ice. With eyes down to avoid slippery patches I again failed to see the guidebook's "faint path" that slopes up to the left. I was ascending the amphitheatre at the head of the combe before I realized my mistake. It would have taken some time to back-track, so I continued up this fine and remote place. Turning left at the exit in the direction of Tarn at Leaves I kept to the crest of the ridge and took in a bonus Wainwright, Rosthwaite Fell. I continued to Bessyboot and Tarn at Leaves, completing the guidebook walk with a steep descent into Langstrath, where there were lots of people on more ice, and so back to Seatoller.

April 2005. On a sunny spring day Sybil and I went round to Wasdale. Sybil did some painting near Overbeck Bridge while I climbed Yewbarrow. This was not an early start, and I was familiar with Yewbarrow, so on the face of it I should have felt relaxed, but I was slightly apprehensive about the descent of the North Ridge. I had been up this many years ago when I was still an active rock climber and had found it to be a distinct scramble.

The way up from Overbeck Bridge is by a grassy ridge and then left to a steepish ghyll, to the left of which some climbers were starting up a route on the comically named Dropping Crag. Above the ghyll the main path rises left to the broad summit ridge, but a fainter path, indicated in the book, slants up rightwards to a narrow part of the ridge where a notch called The Great Door gives a spectacular view down to Wastwater and across to the Scafells. There is some mild scrambling here before the ridge widens.

The summit of Yewbarrow is almost ringed by high peaks of the Central Fells. The view from the North Top into Mosedale and Wasdale Head was memorably airy. So also was the descent. The first two hundred feet were no problem. Then came two tricky bits down little rock bulges. The book description makes encouraging remarks about bum-friction and slithering techniques. I used to be quite adept at these, but seemed to have lost the skill did not find them helpful now. Instead I faced inwards and chose my holds very carefully, aware of the steep and rocky ground that continued for some way below.

Although a few of the tops visited on the walks involved minor scrambles, the North Ridge of Yewbarrow was the only place where I felt the scrambling was serious. On a later outing I met two experienced walkers who recalled having been fazed by the same descent. Therefore it may be useful to mention that the North Ridge can be avoided, by using a way that is familiar to Bob Graham Round contenders. From the lowest point between the north and main summits an obviously trodden scree slope goes down the west (Overbeck) flank, between and well clear of cliffs on either side. Once below the cliffs, one can either go right (north) to Dore Head, as in the Bob Graham Round, or continue down to join the return path from Dore Head under Dropping Crag and so to Overbeck Bridge.

June 2005. It was high summer and I set off early for Mungrisdale and Bowscale Fell and Tarn. I had done most of the Back o' Skidda' hills previously, but not this one which commands a central location in the hinterland. As I breasted the upper slopes I had only sheep for company. Seen from the summit plateau, Skiddaw, Blencathra and all the other peaks of this lonely northern enclave were arrayed resplendent in the morning sunlight, while down in the valleys quiet rivers threaded northwards and eastwards to where the Cumbrian agricultural plains could be seen through a gap in hills. Nearer and steeply below, Bowscale Tarn was mirror-like in the still morning air. I descended to the tarn and returned by paths and a country lane to Mungrisdale.

This was an occasion when I had considered doing a double, as the Scales Tarn and Souther Fell walk also starts from Mungrisdale. However, a heat wave was prevailing, and even at nine in the morning the sun was already hot, so I was happy to leave that walk for the time

being, and returned in the autumn.

Final countdown. Early in 2006 I did a few Long Distance Walkers events and did not get started on the remaining Bob Allen walks until May. However, I wanted to complete the walks during the year and was prepared to tolerate a wet morning for the first one, a low level circuit by Tarn Beck and Fickle Steps in the Duddon Valley. Later in the month I did a delightful walk based on Great Sca Fell, which is not to be confused with Scafell or Scafell Pike but is a grassy height on the northern edge of Back o' Skidda' with fine views out and across the Solway Firth.

Early in June another spell of fine hot weather arrived and I decided to address the problem of how to deal with the only linear walk in the book. This, the Buck Barrow to Devoke Water traverse, starts at Stoneside Hill, the high point of the Duddon Valley to Waberthwaite road. The walk goes northwards over a range of hills with Whitfell at the centre, to Devoke Water and the Birker Fell road where the description recommends that a rendez-vous be arranged. However, setting up a rendez-vous here would have been somewhat inconvenient. Having previously done the final section of the walk during the Devoke Water Circuit I decided that honour would be satisfied if I were to do an out and back walk from Stoneside Hill to the region of overlap with the Devoke Circuit at White Pike and Woodend Height, which would be a considerably longer outing than the linear traverse. I fulfilled the plan in an exhilarating five hour walk which started at 5.30 am in a roseate sunrise and included, among other delights, a brief sighting of a fox on Woodend Height.

There remained one walk in the South-Eastern area, The Tarns of Claife Heights, which has a forest section where the book warned of "much stepping over tree roots and diving down dark tunnels". Somewhat daunted, Sybil and I set out one day in July and found the walk not as difficult as we had imagined. We were rewarded with panoramic prospects of the surrounding fells from where we least expected them, in the forest, thanks to some vantage points on rocky outcrops.

One morning in August I did Whitewater Dash and Great Calva, in which this remote hill is approached by a scenic route that was new to me.

Then there were just three walks left, all in the Duddon-Eskdale area. Of these, the one that was most entertaining in retrospect was Harter Fell from Froth Pot in the Duddon Valley, which I did in September. The route ascends the eastern aspect of Harter Fell by a faint path. At one point I could not make out the line of the path, but was encouraged by what looked like a white post above. I waded up through luxuriant vegetation, rationalising that the path was somewhere beneath my feet, only to discover that the white post was actually a dead

tree minus its bark. I gave up hope of regaining the path and soldiered onwards and upwards through an ecosystem of considerable depth and diversity. A little higher I came across a small cairn of old stones on a natural rock plinth. There was still no path, and I concluded that the cairn had been built before the hillside became forestry land.

Forestry land is usually fenced off, and this was to prove no exception, hence the ecosystem. Sure enough I soon encountered the fence. Because I had lost the path





there was no stile in sight. Here I ask readers to visualise me translocating Peter Pan style to the other side of the fence. Thence it was easy going on the grazed hillside, and shortly before the top I rejoined the path that I should have been on, coming in from the left.

That was not quite the end of the episode. I had supposed that I had been up Harter Fell twice before. On one occasion it had been misty. The other time had been on a Duddon Valley Fell Race. In fell races, for obvious reasons, check points are not located on actual summits if the latter are awkward of access. On the present visit I saw that the true summit is a substantial mass of rock. This proved to be within my scrambling capability, and I clambered up, not once but twice. The second time was to have my photograph taken, in conquistador pose, with my own camera, by another hillwalker who had just arrived. Unfortunately I omitted to instruct him to activate the zoom, and I was portrayed as a diminutive spidery figure on the skyline. The return to Froth Pot was initially down the far (south-west) side of the mountain and then by a muddy forest path which I now realized was the voie normale from the Duddon side.

The last two walks were on opposite sides of Eskdale. Green Crag and Lower Birker Tarn was done in vivid autumn colours in late October, and Eel Tarn and Stony Tarn was snatched from the teeth of the weather in early December. Together they made a worthy finale to this most rewarding project, which had been rich in unexpected discoveries and had sustained its freshness and novelty right to the end.

Previous page. Ted on Great Sca Fell. Bowscale Tarn & Knott Fell. Above. Saddleback from Souther Fell.

All photos: Ted Maden

Slab Happy

Paul Ross

The San Rafael Swell is a wilderness area of canyons, spires, and walls spread over 6400 square miles in the eastern part of Utah with

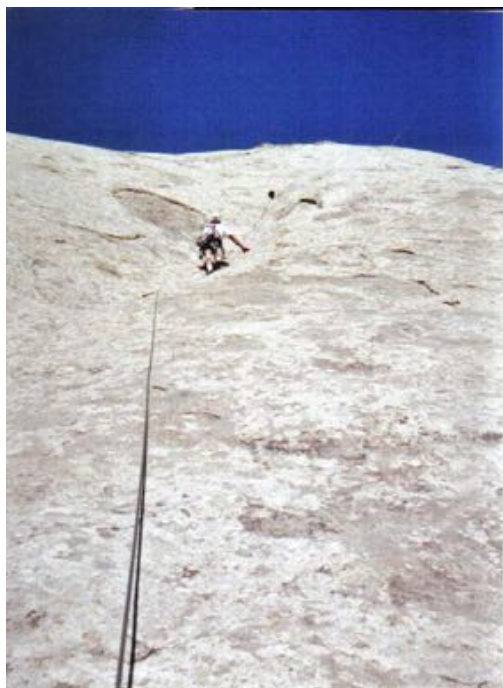
unlimited new route possibilities, and this beautiful unspoiled location is only about an hour's drive from the more well known town and climbing area of Moab.

One of the main US Interstate highways I.70 cuts through Colorado and into Utah and just past the small town of Green River it enters the San Rafael Swell. As one enters the Swell and just off the highway to the south is a long line of sandstone slabs and slot canyons. On my first estimate as to their height I thought they looked about 600'ft. Boy, was I wrong about that! I also assumed that as they were so accessible to the main road that someone must have checked out the climbing possibilities. As it turned out ...wrong again. In March of 2002 with my climbing partner Layne Potter and his son Sheridan we decided to have a closer look .We picked out one of the slab formations that looked about average height. It was obvious that the lack of cracks and smooth looking slabs would not produce much natural protection so we lugged with us our 13 pound Bosch hammer drill and what we thought to be a reasonable number of bolts for a 600'route.The first surprise was the 140' 5.9R (5b the R means scary run out) pitch one that took three protection bolts, the first bolt at 60' from the deck'. Luckily the climbing difficulties eased a bit as pitch followed pitch, our 600' estimate was soon swallowed up... this crag was big...At about mid height we came across a massive tree filled garden totally invisible from the ground. We at last reached the top of the slab. The length of the route was 1400'and no walk off as the back of the slab formed a 400' overhang into unknown territory. Fortunately our bolt supply was just enough to fix rap anchors and escape back down our climb that we named "Surfing the Swell". As of October 2006 on this seven mile long line of slabs with some vertical climbs on the side canyon walls we have to date done 70 new routes ranging in length from about 400 to 2000ft, with a total of over 60,000ft of climbing.

The difficulty of our new routes ranges from 5.4 (V.diff) to 5.10 (5c). All have big run outs. Many slab pitches below 5.7(VS) we run out a full 200' with no protection. Most times I lead with the 13-pound drill and other bits of gear, such as a few cams and stoppers strapped to my back. Other times I take a chance, leaving the drill with Layne hoping to find a natural belay; many times this did not happen and it meant taking what I called an 1890 firm stance hoping Layne did not slip before he arrived with the drill and so put in our belay!! The other option we used was leading without the drill into no man's land until one's confidence ran out or a possible slip would be disastrous, One would then have to haul the drill usually in a very precarious position with one hand and alternating holding the rope and drill with one's



Above. The San Rafael Swell. Eastern Reef. Slabs. There's even a 6,000 ft girdle if you like that sort of thing. Opposite. Scene of a '30 footer', Nowhere to Run. **Photos: Paul Ross**



teeth while trying to ignore burning calf muscles. The quality of this sandstone is mixed, sometimes really good and sometimes not so good. Friction climbing is not common on sandstone, but fortunately tiny edges are often available, whilst the pure friction moves on gritty sandstone are the real heart stoppers.

Not every climb we did went according to plan. We set off up a thousand foot unclimbed area but this time as the route we took was not direct and as we did find the odd natural belay I decided to wait until we were descending to place the abseil bolts in a more direct line. On reaching what would be the last pitch I decided to place a couple of bolts ready for the descent. Opened the pocket that contained the drill bits ...and guess what ... no bits! We both looked at each other and after the exclamation "Oh Shit", we both grinned at each other and agreed this was going to be

a really good adventure.... Fortunately for us this area of slabs was somewhat broken and after some dodgy down climbing, and abseiling off the odd mini bush, much to our relief we eventually reached terra firma. We named the climb "Senile Dementia."

In August 2004 my climbing took a three month vacation when at the top of a steep groove at what looked like the end of the difficulties I launched myself onto a small ledge. The ledge and myself then took a diagonal forty footer back down the groove resulting in a broken ankle and a 600' hopping abseil down to the steep scree approach. I arse crawled the scree to level ground, from where Layne gave me a piggy back ride back for the last quarter mile to my truck. Here we sat in the hot desert sun drinking ice cold beer from our cooler and after a lunch of Ibuprofen I drove the 150 miles back to my doctor. He kindly supplied me with a cast and a pair of crutches for the next three months. To say the least I had been pushing the boat out on these routes, but as this was my first real injury from climbing in fifty-one years I suppose I could not grumble too much. We returned in February 2005 and finished off the route naming it "Come -uppance".

Come 2006, I took another 30' fall, (from minute holds); one of those unexpected falls, where one minute you were there, the next you were heading downhill at a great rate of knots. This time I had the heavy Bosch drill on my back, but fortunately, for once, I had removed the four inch bit otherwise I may have had to request the help of my second to remove it from an area where the sun never shines. This 600' route ended up being 5.10R (5c) named "No Where to Run".

One season Layne and I decided to see what it was like new routeing on these slabs

in August. Due to the immense heat nobody hardly ever goes into the desert in August, let alone to climb on sun baked slabs. It was interesting, and after climbing an 800' route we named it "Hot Tin Slab", which summed up our 105F in the shade adventure. On staggering back to our truck much water followed by much cold beer never tasted so good. July and August is definitely the time to hike the cooler fourteen thousand foot peaks of Colorado.

When I lived in New Hampshire in the 1970's I introduced the concept of the Girdle Traverse to America, girdling its three major crags. First On Whitehorse a 2000' traverse, then with "Pot" Henry Barber (a physical description not a drug habit) a 3500' traverse on Cathedral Ledge and finally on Cannon cliff a 6000' traverse. Not to let the American SW desert feel neglected, in 2001 we traversed at mid height the most famous of all desert towers the 450' Castleton tower near the town of Moab. This produced a two day 900' nine-pitch route graded 5.10 C2 with plenty of high exposure; as yet this traverse is unrepeatable. In 2005 with my son and Layne we decided a long 900' high section of the slabs presented a good looking traverse line which did turn into a pleasant 5.8 expedition - another 6000+ft effort; we're not quite sure what the locals think of such climbs! Over the last couple of years some of the less difficult slab climbs have become quite popular, although it is very rare to have a day when you are not the only climbers in this area. It has recently come to our notice that some climbers who claim to be 5.11+ (6a) leaders have backed off even some of our 5.7R (VS) pitches. With the modern trend of short sport climbs and the expectancy of protection every few feet, as is often the case with the more popular desert crack climbing in areas such as Indian Creek, many of the so called local hard men have avoided doing second ascents of our run out routes graded 5.9 and above. Two very necky and high grade climbers from Salt Lake City are to date the only exceptions to the rule and have started to do new climbs on these slabs and walls up to 5.12R (6b+) in very spectacular situations, and consequently they have been taking some very long falls in the process.

This adventure new routeing on these slabs and spires from the ground up is somewhat



reminiscent of my days way back in the 1950s on sighting with minimal protection on the Borrowdale Valley crags. I personally feel that on sighting from the ground up on unclimbed rock is the purest form of climbing. Messing about for sometimes a year or more, top roping a single pitch route or boulder, practising and chalking every move before a "first ascent" does not impress me. I think this is the same as learning to do a series of gymnastic tricks, and does not really give a true evaluation of that person's physical or mental climbing ability. As I have said in the past:

Rock Climbing without some risk is killing the sport

Atop Texas Tower, but who's he gesturing to behind?

Photo: Paul Ross col.

A very British summer

Mark Stevenson



Photos clockwise from top L

Cloggy; defeated by the weather! **Photo: ©HRC**

Mark climbing **'Suicide Wall'** at Cratcliffe Tor. © **David Simmonite**

Old Man of Hoy abseil. © **HRC**

Overleaf: Mark on **Shibboleth** © **David Simmonite**

Regular readers of the CCJ may recall Derek Walker's account in the 1999/2000 edition of his 40 year quest to 'tick' all the routes in Hard Rock, (starting, it has to be said, in 1959, long before Ken Wilson's magnificent 'baby' was a twinkle in it's creator's eye!), but a notable effort all the same. Derek probably wouldn't have considered, even in his wildest dreams, that a journey that had taken him nearly half a century to complete, could be repeated in a mere 5 weeks! CC member Mark Stevenson and climbing partner Rich Mayfield spent the summer of 2007 doing just that and in the process raised over £10,000 for Mountain Rescue.

This is Mark's account of what was a remarkable feat of climbing and endurance, particularly given the weather conditions they had to contend with.

This article has already appeared in the Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association, and is reprinted here with the permission of the author.



Good Ideas

I've heard someone say that the best way to come up with good ideas is to have lots of ideas and the ones you keep returning to will be the good ones. That might be true. However, I've also been reminded that the British weather doesn't care whether anything is a good idea, it'll just please itself regardless and no doubt rain on it.

For the last two years I'd been contemplating whether a 'round' of all the routes in *Hard Rock*, Ken Wilson's landmark book on British climbing, was possible. The underlying idea of spending the summer on a major climbing road trip around Britain was even older, stemming from my last visit to the Alps in 2003.

I had the normal mixture of alpine hits and misses during 3½ weeks spent in Chamonix. Despite the numerous failures, the abseil retreat in a thunderstorm, the lack of partners, the dashed hopes of climbing the Walker Spur in the best conditions for a decade and the empty wallet, summiting on the Gervasutti

Pillar had made up for it all. However, what I kept mulling over was the question of why I was climbing in the Alps when I'd hardly scratched the surface of rock climbing within Britain? I resolved to rectify that omission and following in the footsteps of Brown and Whillans I'd complete my 'apprenticeship' on British crags before returning to the Alps and the Greater Ranges.

In 2005, a wet-weather discussion with fellow climber Rich Mayfield on the feasibility of ticking all of *Hard Rock* in one trip took place but floundered quickly on the realisation that we'd need to learn to aid climb. That seemed an easier option than the alternative of climbing *The Scoop* free at E6. However, this was all long forgotten at the start of 2006 when the chance to climb in Yosemite cropped up. The 'glamour' of big-wall climbing won out and the plan for a 'summer of British climbing' was postponed yet again.

The 'eureka' moment came last November. After spending June in Yosemite, I could now aid climb; there was nothing to stop us ticking all of *Hard Rock*. At least that was how it seemed: historic routes, great moves, classic crags, sound rock, wonderful landscapes, British pubs, sunshine – what could be better? Rich would be up for it, I was sure of that. How could he not be? All we needed to do was persuade his wife, Sam, that a road-trip around Britain would be the perfect way to spend the summer.

Big Plans

It's strange how things take on a life of their own. My plans for a climbing trip visiting loads of new crags and doing some classic routes rapidly turned into a serious 'climbing challenge'. When we told people our plans, their sceptical responses made us even more determined that it was achievable. The repeated questions of whether this was 'sponsored' resulted in the

easy decision that we'd raise some money for Mountain Rescue. 2007 is the 50th anniversary of the Army Mountaineering Association, so our trip was soon adopted as one of the 'official events' commemorating half a century of military climbing and mountaineering.

My decision to 'sort out' a website was one I rapidly lived to regret as it consumed inordinate amounts of time and effort. Approaching a few companies resulted in a modicum of gear, a pair of rock boots, some DMM cams, fleeces and a few T-shirts from North Face.

Rich and I spent a glorious week climbing together in North Wales in April. By the end of May I'd managed more 'E' points in 2 months than in the previous 2 years. I was averaging 5 days' climbing per week and was looking forward to some relaxing mountain days in the sun on classic HVs and E1s.

It then started raining, and rained, and rained. It's now official; it rained more in the summer of 2007 than at any time since Noah decided to take his family on a sailing holiday.

Rain

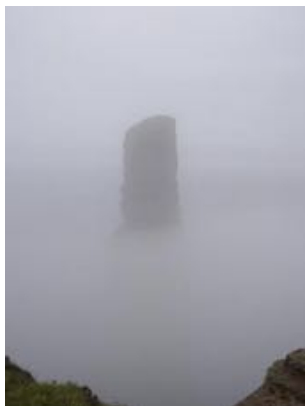
On Friday 13th July 2007 after 6 months of planning we were stood at the bottom of Cheddar Gorge being interviewed by an Army news team watching rain clouds gather overhead. Three hours later, our optimistic 'sound bites' were forgotten and Rich was swearing profusely as he teetered up wet rock at the top of the Gorge with the 400-foot drop below him. I was more preoccupied with the rainwater running off my helmet and down the back of my neck.

As some of you may already know, over the next 35 days and 4 hours we racked up over 4,500 miles visiting every major cliff in Britain from Land's End to the Outer Hebrides. Wet limestone, wet granite, wet rhyolite, wet Lewisian gneiss. After this Summer, if I never climb in the rain again it will be too soon.

Highs and Lows

Day 2 - I open my eyes against the wind and look up. Through the swirling mist, endless sheets of granite sweep away from us. There is no sense of scale. The next gust hits me. Despite my balaclava and my waterproof hood pulled tight over my helmet I shiver as the rope sneaks up slowly, too slowly. I try desperately to keep my mind on the route; "We're on the twentieth pitch, the wind is up again but we're pushing on up the headwall aiming for the shoulder at 24,000 feet". It proves a colossal effort to believe that I'm not storm-lashed on a granite spire in the Karakoram and this is only a VS on Arran.

Days 5 & 6 - The tiny sliver of brass clings to the crack and I reach up for another piton. I don't hold out much hope. I'm proved correct, again, and the rusted remains fall into space below. I am beginning to get a bit fed up. It is day two on The Scoop and my entire body weight is hanging on the smallest micro-wire ever made. My main distraction from the dizzying exposure and the wet, loose rock is thinking up ever more imaginative ways to curse Ken Wilson. The Scoop's reputation as the 'stopper route' is well deserved. The famous rump on the first pitch is still there, just, as are 2 in-situ skyhooks higher up, only rust holding them against the cliff. In the course of our ascent over 20 pitons break off at the slightest touch, including two from the belay we used that morning to jumar up to our high point. The crux roof above is desperate with every peg badly rusted and scarce opportunities for other gear. Our salvation by the slimmest of margins proves to be an insitu hammered wire clipped in extremis. After climbing The Scoop, I think anyone is entitled to the rest of the year off.



Day 9 – Late in the day on Carnivore, Whillan's direct finish looks damp and desperate. Based on an earlier glance at the topo in Hard Rock we start along the '5a' original finish. Cold and tired, we have a demoralising time, swapping the lead, resorting to a point of aid and even a back rope. Just relieved to be off the cliff we drown our sorrows in the Clachaig; only 11 routes done in 9 days and we are so exhausted we can't even manage a '5a' traverse. The next day we are much relieved to find out our mistake; the pitch, originally an aid traverse, goes free at 6a but even then only in far drier conditions.

Day 11 – The Old Man of Hoy is swathed in swirling clouds of mist. The surrounding cliffs of St John's Head look so much like something from 'Jurassic Park' we half expect to see Pterodactyls flying overhead. Despite the mist, we are lucky with the weather. We summit in the dry and the rain holds off until we start the long walk back to the ferry.

Day 13 – We spend over 8 hours sitting in the CIC hut waiting for the rain to stop and the rock to start to dry before we finally set off up Centurion. On the second pitch, after 25 metres of wet and stressful bridging, my motivation flags so I take an early belay. Much to my chagrin (and Rich's amusement) it soon transpires that I was one move short of good incut holds and easy ground. We get 2/3 of the way up before the next band of rain arrives. As I negotiate the exposed traverse leftward in the midst of the downpour, Rich manages to belay completely dry under an overhang. Despite the rain we finish the day in good spirits, and head back down the Allt a' Mhuilinn at a steady run. The next morning halfway up the approach to Aonach Dubh in heavy rain, common sense prevails; we turn back and swiftly abandon Scotland for better weather in Yorkshire and the Peak District.

Day 18 – Finally, we have a perfect day of climbing. With clear skies, sunshine and high spirits we visit four of the Lake District's most impressive crags and climb Central Buttress, Ichabod, Central Pillar and Gormenghast. I don't think a better day's climbing is possible at that grade in Britain. The last route of the day takes us to a total of 30 routes and the halfway point.

Day 19 – Sir Chris Bonington joins us to climb Praying Mantis on Goat Crag. He makes short work of the strenuous crux, 43 years after he made the second ascent of the route. He then proceeds to leave us standing on the walk-out. It is a pleasure and a privilege to climb with him.

Photos. Above left. Rich climbing 'Dwm' in North Wales © David Simmonite. Centre. "The Old Man of Hoy is swathed in swirling clouds of mist". © HRC. Right Mark climbing Trapeze, Glencoe. © HRC

Day 22 – The weather is deteriorating and by midday on Gogarth the wind has risen to a force-7 gale. British climbing champion Gaz Parry has joined us for the afternoon to provide some moral support. Dispelling any thoughts of retreating to the pub, the three of us climb 'A Dream of White Horses' in outlandish conditions. Afterwards, Gaz is sincere in saying he really enjoyed the experience but rapidly declines to join us for any further routes.

Day 24 – After much debate we are back in Scotland again and head into the middle of the Cairngorms in heavy mist and rain. Threading The Needle proves another taxing, arduous and stressful battle against the rock and the elements. Two weeks later we are unbearably smug as we receive news that similar weather has forced the BBC to abandon plans to film some of 'the world's top climbers attempt routes on the same cliff.

Day 29 – We are back in Wales and still have 5 routes to climb on Cloggy. The forecast is 5 days of rain followed by a 'Severe Weather Warning' for most of the UK. Things are not looking hopeful but the mist lifts late in the day. Unfortunately by 8pm things are not going well. We had unaccountably started climbing White Slab at about 6:30pm. On the arête pitch I miss the guidebook's 'awkward step right' so compensate by making an irreversible move right onto a thin, lichenous crack in the centre of the slab. After making an increasingly tenuous series of moves above uninspiring gear I get back on line and collapse at the belay utterly blown. Not realising how badly off route I was, we can't imagine doing '5c' given the last section was '5a'. With daylight running out and mentally exhausted, we desperately try to lasso the famous spike on the next pitch. Minutes away from having to abandon the climb, I get the rope tenuously hooked over the spike and commit my safety to it. With dusk rapidly approaching I race for the top leading the remaining pitches so hastily and with such scant regard for runners that I might as well be soloing.

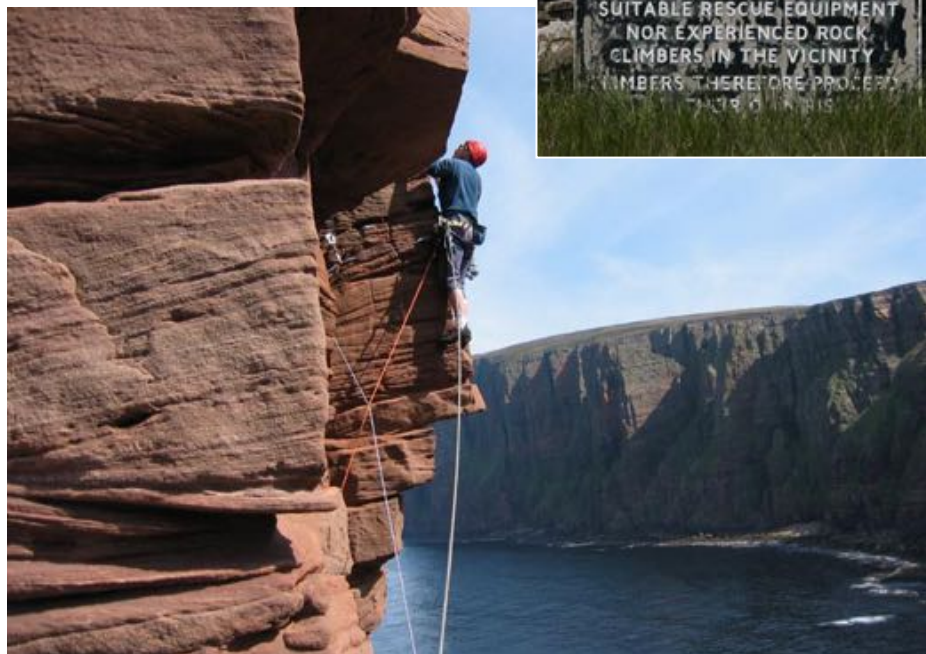
Day 31 – We are back at Cloggy after a night of rain, which has left the cliff dripping with water. After several hours of effort by Rich, we abandon our first attempt on Slanting Slab as streaks of water render the bold slab above the peg impassable. Four hours later, after climbing Great-Bow Combination, the cliff is slightly drier but with the weather closing in and more rain forecast we face our final chance on the route. Success or failure of the entire 'challenge' hinges on whether there are enough patches of dry rock for me to climb 20 feet across an unprotected slab.

Day 36 – At 2pm we sit on top of Berry Head in South Devon and I've got the biggest smile on my face as we've finally done it.



More old men on the Old Man

Smiler Cuthbertson



It felt the same as that day in the '70s, and also that day in the late '90s. Yes, I'd been up this great sea stack twice before. Both times guiding, both times perched in that same chimney, hovering over that seemingly bottomless void, trying to pluck up the courage to move around the arête without recourse to pulling on the tape. That little orange lifeline threaded so many years ago around that dreaded old wooden wedge. Yes, it felt just the same, and as I moved uneasily out under the roof towards the sloping holds of the front face, the resolve slipped away like the grains of sandstone under my rockshoes. I could say I was almost there, but that wouldn't be true. As I reached across and up, my rear end leaving the safety of the comfortable, wedged position in the chimney, I realised today would be the same as on my previous two other occasions. I made a long reach, grabbed the sling, clipped in a quick-draw and one of my ropes, and forgot to let go.

In a further flurry of action, I was out onto the front face and moving up on the good hold over on the left. The moment of truth! I let go of the tape and jammed my right-hand into the wide crack now above me. A short pull and I had finished the sequence. Suddenly I was comfortable again. I shouted down, with a crackled voice, as dry as the rock,

"Done it, Tony, but I had to use the sling!"

I couldn't tell if he heard me but it didn't matter. The pitch is such that after the first overhang twenty-five metres lower down, you're on your own. It's a lonely time.

Back on the island of Hoy again for the third time, each of these visits, to guide the Old Man of Hoy. I never forget any part of that first great visit with Paul, from the Clogwyn Climbing Gear factory, in those far-off days when climbing was our lives, or even ten years later when as a full climbing guide, the Newcastle Climbing Club presented me with Andy, his ascent made a little less fraught, with his colleagues both above and behind him. This time, another official engagement with Tony, a decent climber, aged fifty-eight like me, and all the way from Berkeley, California, hoping to combine his and his wife's bird-watching visit to Orkney with an ascent of the Old Man.

We met up on the ferry pier at North Hoy, and Yvonne drove Tony and me to the delightful rented cottage at Rackwick bay. We had a nice meal, sorted the gear out for the climb and after watching for any prospect of rain, settled down for an early night. The weather had been stunning all day and we held our breath for good fortune for our climbing day.

It was a brilliant morning.. A brisk, one-hour stroll over the fields and along the headland brought us to the dramatic viewpoint overlooking this fabulous monolith. I knew the access point which led to the steep and fairly serious footsteps leading down to the ridge that was the original archway joining the sea stack to the headland. This had collapsed around one hundred years or so ago, and now lies like a crushed caterpillar heading for the sea stack. We slid down the greasy path and were soon gearing up under the easy first section. Loaded with cams and chocks, I moved up the first pillar, taking care with some very loose blocks. Not enough care it seems, as a leaning shoulder suddenly pushed a block off into space. Tony watched it carefully, then realised it had changed direction, needing him to move smartly to one side to avoid a disaster. I have to admit I was probably more concerned with my two brand new 'state of the art' 60 metre ropes, a 9.2mm Revelation and, my pride and joy, an 8.9mm Serenity, both from Mammut. I breathed two sighs of relief.

Tony also made short work of that first pillar. We unfolded the spare 6mm static rope which was then fixed to the belay point. This would be trailed, then fixed at the top of the big pitch. On the abseil descent, the first man down would clip a short sling into it, and he wouldn't be hanging five metres out in space at the end of that abseil. There would then be a need for a great deal of swinging backwards and forwards to get back onto the stance.

Moving up the first groove, the climbing was steady, and a move out right onto the arête avoided the first overhang. The groove above led up to the widening chimney and the ominous second roof. Straightforward but steep climbing led me into the wide chimney, giving a sanctuary of good footholds and large cam runners under the roof.

This is where we came in!

Having reached the upper part of the climb, I knew the standard would now relent, and today, for some reason, the fulmars were less active than on previous visits, seemingly oblivious to us passing by. A few snarls and unprepared take-offs were all we were presented with. The easier ground led for 40 metres to a final stance below the last corner. This pitch is a delight, steep and strenuous but technically low in the 5a grade. A brilliant finish to this majestic climb.

We were soon celebrating, not only with ourselves, but also with the few onlookers watching us from the mainland. Tony took time out to capture many shots of the puffins and fulmars who reside on top of the stack but soon it was time to leave. Climbing back down a few metres to the abseil ledge, we threaded the ropes through the mass of slings, pegs, and chocks all linked together, forming the abseil point. Dropping down on the 60 metre ropes



we by-passed the next and usual station, and, although it was probably possible, I wasn't prepared to go too far on each abseil. The possibility of a jammed rope and an unwelcome prussic had to be avoided.

I abseiled down the crux pitch, clipped into the trail rope. It was perfect. I stepped onto the first belay, tied on and yelled to Tony to release the trail rope. I would be able to pull Tony in on his abseil ropes. One more shorter abseil and we were down on the ridge, a quick handshake, a drink from the rucksacks; we coiled the ropes and made our way back up onto the headland. Scoffing our sandwiches at the viewpoint overlooking the sea stack, we reflected on a great climb on a superb day. Back with Yvonne at the cottage, more celebrations and reflections.

Old men on the Old Man? Well maybe. It's pretty good work!



previous page: Smiler studiously ignoring the warning notice after the crux of the Old Man.

above: "The fulmars were less active."

All photos: Tony Brake

Tail lights down an old dirt road

Dave Jones

A lot of climbers are interested in cars and driving cars fast and beyond their limits but not necessarily dangerously. Quite a few have ventured into Road Rallying, a sport not well known because it 'happens' in the dark hours between 11.30pm Sat. and 6am Sunday morning. Remember Ladies, Road Rally Lads keep it up all night but Lads remember Road Rallying is no place to meet a Lady.

Possibly the cc's (sorry couldn't resist that pun) best known member involved in this being Nick Dixon, who I remember used to thrash the wheelnuts off an old Saab whilst at North Staffs Uni.

Road Rallying in the mid eighties was getting serious, the memory fails me here but of all the rules imposed I do recall a ban on Pace Notes and this was first threatened, with searches, on the Stockport Motor Club's Regent Rally in the Peak in 1985.

There was much conversation amongst the fast lads who had put the hours in and possessed such things. Many crews devised ingenious ways of circumnavigating the rules. One particular team had built a door panel that on first inspection seemed to be screwed in place but could be peeled back to access the aforesaid notes (and to hide them of course). Other bright sparks wrote theirs out on rice paper, the plan being to scoff the lot at the first manned control! Some wag suggested they would be checking stools at the finish, with the final control being stationed in the Gents.

Other teams stuffed them down their underpants surmising that no marshal would want to trawl those murky depths. There were some female marshals around however who would be only too pleased to take on the task sooo this plan wasn't 100%.

Most teams got by on good old accurate map reading and time honoured memory. I remember navigating Ewan Murray to third fastest over the Goyt that particular night without notes, as on some events I didn't wear underpants! It eased the pressure on an already stressed stomach not to mention brain..

The rules got tightened even further in 1987, no notes, no map markings allowed, your route being issued seconds before you were off didn't do it for me. I was in it for map reading at speed, virtually controlling the car from the left hand seat (this being especially true when reading notes). So it was retirement from the lanes and back to the rock.

1992 saw the maps out again navigating for Dave Astbury in his Alpine A110 but it finished me off as a road navigator for good. Imagine Buxton in November, its cold, wet, very windy, it's 3am, the poor Alp had been dragging its very french backside down some of Derbyshires' gnarliest and muddiest Whites. We had ventured on beneath that leaden sky but I decided the body could only take so much mental torture, it was easier to do a 40ft runout on the Etive Slabs.

I made enquiries towards Stage Rallying.

'Jumping' Jeff Wincott had this Avenger you see, a car that needed a constant talking to, branch in hand, remember Basil Fawlty! He was into Forest Stage Rallying, boy what a social sport, do a few (phew!) miles, get out, have a cup of tea, harass mechanics, cruise to the next Stage, get out for a chat and a piss, thrash the bitch, cruise to the next stage, etc. All in daylight.

It always amazed me how Jeff could press on whenever I lost my way in the notes, threw up in my full face helmet (all sounds enhanced over the intercom), when the screen misted up or when I told him to keep his foot planted on the pedal over that blind crest. I couldn't decide if he was better at Climbing or Driving, both needed very similar skills, as does Mountain Biking all these sports compliment each other and are excellent alternatives if you haven't already tried any of them.

Fast forward to 1999, like all proper climbers I had my heart on a VW Transporter Van and was saving up for such a device but a little 309 Gti got in the way. It had all the comforts.....Roll Cage , Kevlar sump and tank guards, Bilstein suspension .

It was ready to go so the forearms got weaker in direct proportion to a shrinking wallet. It only needed a few individual mods to satisfy my particular needs..... Now where were those box spanners, my best AF's and Whitworths, that rusty Mole Grip? Memories started drifting slowly through the scrapyards of my mind. Memories of ratching around the floor of my Dad's garage trying to fix the brakes on my £25 mini at 1am when four longhairs were due to go to the Bregaglia at 8am. Failed to fix the brakes of course but it got us there anyway and it didn't half improve my anticipation. Spares included a can of beans to hit the fuel pump and suspension knuckle joints just in case. Both were needed!

What a trip, bonnet propped open with a stick, heater fully on up the many passes, doors opened out to aid the lack of brakes (and aid the cooling) on the descents. All these bodes and more besides are used to their extremes down the lanes.

It's not been unknown for teams to lose all their brake fluid and one audacious plan was to fill the system with water and human waste when that ran out but apparently their aiming was poor. Mole grips are often used to squeeze the rubber brake hoses of the offending corner....Trail tip....pack two and don't forget to gaffa tape them shut. It's not unknown for them to flick open (thus releasing the fluid) when you happen to be braking for that 90 right.

All these tweaks were of absolutely no use to me on The Winter Rally in 2000. As usual conditions in North Wales were inconsistent, dry then wet, then icy, then dry, then more ice. Nick Bullock may like ice but he only drives a pick ! We hatched a great plan in running on the same minute but just 50 metres or so behind the car in front. They would hit the ice, crash and we would have prior warning of the hazard and avoid.....Wrong! The car in front hit the bank as we had imagined BUT we found the rock! This forced the wheel and tyre back against the wheel arch. We struggled up the narrow lane to park up. Miffed at my misfortune I decided to stroll down the lane to defecate on the aforesaid rock but a combination of time in pulling down pants (1 minute between autos), treacherously icy footing and low ambient temperature around my nether regions foiled my efforts...

BUT I WILL RETURN



Before it all got too serious! Making waves at the 1983 Midland Championships

Photo: Dave Jones

Un Sendero Luminoso

The Right Hon. Earl of Fulwood, D.G.

For once in a while the good lady wife agreed to combine a holiday of my climbing, 'with your disreputable friends,' as she puts it, with one of her week-long, pool-side siestas. We had been loaned a time-share apartment overlooking Los Christianos. Very polished, but no more than one deserves. Can't afford that sort of thing ourselves of course, more's the pity, but what are friends for, if not to take advantage of? Richard, the charmer, although one of my climbing friends, was almost approved of and he and his wife were to accompany us. The others were in lesser apartments here and there among the concrete, seaside jungle and the climbers met by pre-arrangement each morning in some supermarket car park to combine for the venture of the day.

In the evening most of the group tended to eat in but occasionally we all met for a meal and Gillian's vote was always for Charlie's bar. It had two young Spanish singers whose warblings did marvels for a young girl's blood pressure, or so she said. We always got good service, which was more to do with the shape of Gillian's frontage than with the value of our custom. One of the waiters in particular liked to combine his admiration of that natural phenomenon with practising his English with her, ignoring my consort completely, which did not please her at all. We were there one evening and making a noisy party of it, crammed round several tables pushed together, and shouting across them to each other. We had all, well all of us except the good lady and Richard's wife, done the Barranco de Masca that day, down to the sea and back, and were all pretty excited, full of jokes about incidents of the day, the slipping into pools, the boulders that overbalanced and so on. I was sitting back a little from the tables, watching the youngsters, and wondering if the good lady had not looked a little too much on the wine when it was red, or rosé in her case, when a hand slapped me on the shoulder. I looked round to see Clawson. He had been sitting at the back of the bar, well away from the loudspeakers, having a meal with a Spanish friend, and now they were off.

Praise of the Masca Gorge was still in the air and Clawson wished to hear about it. The Spaniard, a mainlander, had heard of it and recommended it.

We, of course, had all done it, for which those of us who knew Clawson were profoundly grateful. His Spanish friend was busy for a couple of days and could not accompany him.

'Which is a pity,' said the friend, 'it is said to be a superb expedition.'

Clawson was nuzzling at the bait.

'A brilliant walk,' said Gillian, 'not technically difficult, but tough going to do it there and back.'

'Un sendero luminoso,' was Colin's two-pennorth. He prides himself on trying to speak the language.

'Could he do it on his own?' Clawson asked his friend.

'Claro,' said the Spaniard, 'you are un alpinista con mucha experiencia. Para ti, no problema.'

'Had she done it?' Clawson asked Gillian, taking the hook into his mouth. Yes, she had and he swallowed the bait, hook, line, and sinker. He was not to be beaten by some young chit of a girl. He would do it on his own.

Someone offered to draw him a sketch map and that was that. Clawson went off with his diagram drawn on the back of an empty bill cadged from the waiter and we forgot all about him. The next day it rained quite heavily and we nearly all spent most of the day buying nothing in the

shops. The night after we were in Charlie's bar again and the waiters were being very attentive to Gillian and to the good lady wife, which pleased her immensely, and the two young Spaniards were pushing out Beatles imitations over the speakers at high decibels when a car pulled in to park across the road and a much worse for wear Clawson came storming across to us.

Little of the first five minutes' monologue bears repeating but we gathered that he was not a happy man.

He too had lazed yesterday and done the gorge today. He'd found the village, no problem, and walked down the zigzag path below the multi-pinnacled hill down into the gorge. The path was OK at first but then it petered out where the water went down a scoop. Perhaps, he'd thought, this was easier when there was no water and ventured to have a closer look. He got bridged across the smooth channel with the water swirling under him and found that he couldn't get back. In desperation he pushed off as hard as he could with his right foot and then – we were hanging on his every word – his left foot slipped and he went down the flume into the pool below.

He waited several seconds for effect before he said anything else. It occurred to me that Clawson had missed his métier. He really could tell a story, savagely wild or not.

'I could have been killed,' he said.

It had occurred to us.

The pool was chest deep and there was no way he could get back up the water-smoothed rocks against the flow of water. He had to slide down two more water splashes before the gorge began to widen and he could get out of the stream, only to have exchanged death by drowning for death by a thousand cuts. Every species of plant with spikes, spines, hooks, and razor-edged leaves was represented in that gorge. Those that weren't equipped to bacon-slice the passer-by held gallons of foetid water full of dead flies and rotten seeds to scatter infection into the cuts inflicted by the incisive varieties.

I was fighting for life,' said Clawson, and we believed him. 'The rock came close to the stream again and I had to get into the water. It saved me that did because jammed between two rocks, just above the water level was a shovel.'

'A shovel,' said one of us, slack-jawed.

'Yes, a bloody shovel,' said Clawson. 'It's in the car now,' and he could only just be restrained from fetching it.

'I'm going to clean it, and oil it, and linseed the handle, and hang it on the wall at home and none of you swine is going to be invited to see it.'

'Please,' said the waiter, who was trying to follow the tirade despite repeated calls to duty from the counter. 'What is a bloody shovel?'

I took my pocket dictionary from beside my place setting, hurriedly found 'shovel' and thrust it at him whilst hanging on to Clawson's every word.

'A shovel,' he said, 'round-nosed, with a D handle. Old and as rusty as hell, but God, it was sharp.'

'There's a path down the gorge now,' he said. I slashed my way down that gorge like the dragoons at Waterloo. I cursed you lot uphill and down gorge. I've got blisters on my hands like footballs,' and he offered them in evidence. Not footballs perhaps, but fine blisters, most of them bloody and weeping and I saw Gillian's eyes fill with tears.

'Those bloody cactuses that look as though they're playing tennis with hand grenades were the worst.'

It took me some time to recognise his description of a prickly pear by which time he was much further into his story. What the waiter was making of it I hadn't time to wonder.

'You'd think they were all squashy and full of water. The little ones are but the old big ones

have got trunks like yew trees. And when I gave them a good solid thump those blasted hand grenades fell off onto my head.'

He paused and I was sure that I could still see one or two spines sticking out of his scalp outlined against the lights above the singers who had given up the hopeless battle of keeping our attention and were merely strumming as a background to the major attraction.

'My boot sole came away,' and it was plain when he lifted his leg, just about covered in the tattered remnants of his Rohan trousers, that it was held on by several turns of string.

'One of the pockets got torn off my rucksack. I've lost my camera, and my hat.'

We could not vouch for the camera but there was a set of vivid parallel scratches across the fine scarlet of his bald head to contrast with the irregular criss-cross of grazes on his face.

'All my sandwiches turned to bread paste. My boots were full of grit. My anorak's a catastrophe. It's got more holes in it than a string vest. I put it in my rucksack to stop things falling out of the holes in that.'

'And then I reached the little concrete dam you mentioned, where the two branches of the gorge join. And there were people coming down the other branch of the gorge. Germans, all spic-and-span, with dry clothes and shiny boots with lovely rucksacks, all bulging with brot and wurst and clinking bottles. They laughed at me and my shovel, the kraut swine. I took it with me down the gorge, past your blasted green and yellow gate, right to the sea and back.'

'And on the way back I went up the other branch, and it was a doddle. I crossed the stream on a super wooden bridge and when I got to the car park a fool of an Englishman asked me if I'd enjoyed my walk. If it had been any of you I'd have smashed the lot of you with that shovel!'

I nudged the waiter and mouthed 'Una gran cerveza' at him, pointing at Clawson. It came in record time; the waiter didn't want to miss a second of this English lesson, and when it did, Clawson, who had never stopped his tirade, left it on the table in front of him and continued his outburst about the untrustworthiness of most of humanity, and of our section of it in particular. He hoped that someday we would find ourselves in a situation where people we trusted had let us down. Eventually he ground to a halt.

In the comparative silence he stood up and scabbled in the tatters of his shirt for the breast pocket and drew out a scrap of paper. He opened it, checked that it was the one he wanted and threw it on the table.

'There's your bloody map,' he said grimly, 'that's the map you drew me.'

Colin had the gall to say, 'It's dry,' but he was sitting out of Clawson's reach.

'It's the only thing that is,' shouted Clawson. 'I left it in the car. It doesn't take a lot of remembering. I wish I'd never seen the bloody thing and I never want to see it or any of you again,' and with amazing dignity, considering his appearance, he walked slowly out and across the road to his car, ignoring the schooner of beer.

The map passed round and my turn to look at it came. There were the winding road from Santiago de Teide, the car park, and the little houses of Masca. There was the many-pointed hill dividing the gorge into two branches but the path marked, instead of zigzagging down to the bridge over the left-hand branch of the stream was drawn rightwards down where we had not been.

For some seconds no-one said a word until Gillian, after dabbing her nose with a tissue before trusting herself to speak, put into words what we were all thinking.

'I don't think it's right to give a man a wrong map just because you don't like him,' she said.

We drank up, paid and departed, leaving Clawson's gran cerveza untouched on the table.

Polvos Magicos

Arthur Green

High on the Penon, spidermen on missions smear on glass.
And gecko girls twist and curl their way with feline class.

Why do they climb? What do they feel? Is it all because
It's there?
Or super strong addictive scare? The lure of Magicos.

A long, smooth corner beckons and enchants you with its ease.
Rising up, it grabs you with a subtle, gentle tease.

It holds you fixed and stabs you, with a vice-like mortice touch,
Then spits you out with venom, an evil slip, too much.

6b or not 6b? Too smooth? Perhaps that is the question.
That hangs your mind as you scramble astride a thrutchy section.

Then a long, slabby corner rises up. And, somehow, can the answer
Be found up there, high on the crag, in the world of the Private Dancer?

Deceptive smoothness now gives way to subtle might.
Lean out, push up, stretch out your legs and bridge up to the light.

Reach, pull and bridge. For in that bridge of sighs
What dreams may come when you reach the ridge?
And azure skies.



A visit to the dentist

Dick Renshaw.

The nagging toothache, which had rankled for the past couple of days exploded into pain. I decided to set off that evening to get dental treatment. It was a 30 kilometre walk to Caraz where I hoped to find a dentist. Dusk was settling as I left Laguna Paron and I hurried to make use of the remaining light so that I could cut out the zigzag bends of the road by going through the bush. The valley gradually narrowed to a gorge and I stared up at the dark walls, which framed a frenzied, starry sky. It was intoxicating,

tasting the earthy odours of a tropical night, and the naked solitude made me rush madly through the night savouring the richness of it all. I outran the primaeval gloom and stood in a field, once more rational and cool whilst gobs of sweat trickled down my body. I put on my shirt and listened to the dogs howling in the valley below. As I passed adobe huts by the roadside, maddened dogs lurking in the shadows pounced out into the glare of my head-torch and green eyes glowered back at me.

I passed a glade of eucalyptus trees where a candle lit up an effigy of the Madonna. The town slept, so I unrolled my sleeping bag outside the bus station. I arose at four thirty racked by thirst and went to the square where I bought a strange brew from a man with a tricycle. His kettle spluttered and boiled on a primus and the blue light gleamed on a row of bottles containing the rich colours of vegetable fruit extracts. I refused the offer of a rum and accepted a combination of juices with hot water. I sat in the square watching the baleful shadow of Huandoy looming over the town like a giant bat with outstretched wings, melting to crimson snow in the morning light. The brew man was doing a roaring trade as the rum bottle slowly emptied. An Indian broke into song more poignant than the dawn chorus, and a drunk took a few faltering dance steps. At six thirty, the square was alive with travellers. A bus arrived with cockerels bundled up in nets on the roof, crowing at the day and injustice whilst guinea pigs squirmed silently in sacks.

I went into a café, ordered breakfast and found out where the dental surgery was. It was a long wait and I took the opportunity to examine the surgery whilst the dentist had a leisurely breakfast. Language was the main difficulty but I managed to put across my problem and he examined me smelling of coffee and fresh bread. After probing, hammering and pulling the recalcitrant tooth he gave the verdict – “nada.” Nothing – and he drew me a diagram showing the filling in close contact with the nerve endings. Altitude and hot and cold drinks exacerbated the problem. I felt relief that no operation was necessary, but a little concerned that the pain would return. He packed the tooth with cotton wool, we shook hands and I stepped outside in the glaring light. Passing through the market I bought avocado pears and oranges and carried on up the road to Laguna Paron.

Workers in the field waved and shouted “buenas dias, gringo!” I reconciled myself to the 30 kilometre walk but I was content enough and I could see the things which I had missed during the night. After four miles I stopped for a rest in a grassy clearing surrounded by cacti. As I stooped to sit in the shade of a large cactus, I reeled back. It was as though someone had

punched me in the eye. Then, the terrible realization that I had speared my eye on a cactus spike - and I felt nauseous. The eye was not bleeding but my vision was hazy. Then the blood started running from my nose and dropped on the grass in thick, dark red blobs. I picked up my sac and retraced my steps, covering the eye to keep out the dust. I was convinced that I had pierced the eyeball and that there was a danger of losing my sight. I had come into town clutching my tooth, skipped out of town in the midday sun - now within twelve hours I was returning clutching my eye. I passed the people I had seen earlier that morning, but this time there were no cheery greetings.

At the hospital, a doctor gave a cursory examination of my eye and told me that the eyeball had been grazed but there would be no permanent damage to my eyesight. The furry ball of fear knotted in my stomach eased off as I followed the orderly who bathed my eye, placed an ice compress on it and told me to lie still for an hour.

The compress seemed to shrink my skull, but after a while the dull pain around my eye eased off. I wallowed in the feeling of release after many hours of tension, my limbs heavy and I let my mind drift. The mountains were veiled in the early morning mist and the lake murky in the half light reflected shadows which dissolved as the sun rose. Piramide emerged, like a dream recalled in the morning. It had been climbed three times to our knowledge - the SW face was still unclimbed. It took us one and a half days to work our way up to the foot of the face, manoeuvring a route through a contorted, dying glacier. From the security of a comfortable bivouac site in a crevasse, we surveyed the route. On the SW face, the line was unmistakable - a couloir flanked by snow flutings went straight to the summit. It looked deceptively foreshortened and relatively straightforward.

Next morning we rose early, emerging from the enticing softness of warm pits into the penetrating cold of an Andean morning. Befuddled with sleep and leadbellied with breakfast, we set off by headtorch and wangled a way over several bergschrunds. Higher up we climbed on perfect neve and moved unroped up the 50 degree slope. My body was awaking; senses came alive, probing beyond the automatic responses of a mind bludgeoned into instinctive gestures by a brutal environment. I stopped, breathed deeply and the cold air seared its way into my lungs. As the stars lost their icy intensity, morning light encroached on a night which had once seemed endless. Dave was slowly catching me up and feeling the cold, I moved on. My ice axe didn't seem to penetrate neve so effectively and, looking at it closely, I saw that the end of the pick had broken off. I decided to carry on and tell Dave higher up, where he would be less likely to suggest turning back.

A third of the way-up the face, a steep rock band barred the couloir, so I stopped and waited for Dave. I mentioned my broken pick as casually as I could and he suggested filing the pick and then continuing. After fifteen minutes of filing, the blunt end had been reduced to a slight chamfer. We roped up, put in a deadman belay and somehow I found myself on the leading end of the rope. The snow was steep and rotten and I gingerly gained the rock standing on a crumbling tongue of snow which threatened to collapse. Dave was a long way below me and I had a strong desire to place protection but there was none. Further to the right there was a break in the rock, so I moved over and placed an insecure peg. The next objective was to overcome a bulge of snow. I bridged out wide and tried once, twice, three times, but I was unwilling to commit myself to the next move as the snow was so insecure. Dave was becoming impatient and spurred me on. I took off my gloves, rammed the shaft of my ice-axe into a crack at waist-level and, with a final effort, levered myself up. The next



"During the night, the mist cleared and in the morning they awoke and peered over the ridge. They were on a 40 foot cornice which overhung the face."

All photos: Dick Renshaw col.



bit on steep ice seemed easy in comparison even though my axe only chipped at the hard ice. Seconding, Dave fell off when the snow collapsed and he admitted that it had been a hard pitch. After that, the individual pitches blurred into anonymity. The ice was steep and we tried to avoid the grey sections where it was hard and picks and crampons made little impression. Dave led a lot of the upper section as my axe was ineffectual.

By mid-afternoon, it had turned much colder and a chill wind brought in wisps of cloud, obscuring the summit which did not appear to be too far off. The mist cleared as dusk fell and there seemed no likelihood of finding a bivvy site. We decided to break out right onto the SE ridge, where we hoped to find a suitable site. It was dark as Dave led the final pitch to the ridge by a snow-filled gully. He floundered through deep snow cutting a deep trench and using a snow stake to gain purchase. At the ridge he found himself on an ice mushroom which offered a precarious bivvy. I swam up the gully and gained a wee perch with barely enough room for one person to sit. It was even more disquieting to realize that where we stood was the flap of an ice mushroom. An hour of hacking produced sitting room for two and a dubious belay. We brewed up and ate sparsely as we only had a day's supply of food left and we did not know how long it would take to finish the route and to descend. The ridge above us bristled with ice towers that reached up to the summit. Beyond the stubbles of rock and ice an indigo sky shimmered with stars and mysteries while I slept.

The orderly entered the room and brought me back to earth. "Bien, gringo?" he inquired as he lifted the compress to examine my eye. "Muy bien, gracias".

He left silently and I was once again swallowed into a distant airy country where two figures cocooned in red awoke to a morning glowing in a pink light. They took a long time preparing food and drink. Few words were spoken and they looked as if they were absorbed by a burdensome task without emotion, as they packed up and then descended the gully. It took them all morning to climb the 800 feet to the summit up steep grey ice, climbing carefully and ponderously. I was curious to know what was their destination and what they were searching for. But all was covered in cloud as they groped around as if searching for something; they sat around waiting for two hours, then unpacked their rucksacks and got into their sleeping bags.

During the night, the mist cleared and in the morning they awoke and peered over the ridge. They were on a 40 foot cornice which overhung the face. After attaching their ropes to two stakes, they threw them over the edge. The bearded one slid down the rope whilst the other stood on the two stakes. When the 150-foot abseil was completed the one still on the ridge removed one stake, looked long and hard at the remaining stake and with an impassive face glanced below, down the 3,000 foot face, then looked up at the sky as he inched himself over the edge. For the remainder of the day, they down climbed and abseiled the rest of the face.

A hand shook my shoulder.

"Gringo, hey gringo; vamos - es bien."

I felt sleepy and my eye was sore as I got up and looked at my blackened eye in the mirror. I tottered out of the hospital into the glaring afternoon sun and closed my eyes as gusts of wind whipped up sand from the street. I walked back to the plaza where people still waited for the bus. Huandoy was still watching over the town; the brew-man was still selling his concoctions. Nothing had changed - except my vision.

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Lambs to the slaughter

Iain Peters

The big cave below the Red Walls at Carn Gowla is not the healthiest place to sit out a full-blooded Atlantic, equinoctial gale, especially when it's riding on a high spring tide. Not that Rowland and I had any alternative, having pulled down the abseil rope with escape via the aptly named Teflon Slab not looking very attractive. Instead we made plans. Rowland was due to leave for Yosemite in a few days to fulfill his Tangerine Dream, before taking off for the badlands of Dakota, to work through the winter as a roughneck on the rigs. I was headed south in February/March to Tierra del Fuego to continue a seed-collecting programme for the Forestry Commission. Why not meet up in Miami after Christmas then fly down to knock off a peak or two in the Cordillera Darwin, whilst waiting for the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness to arrive?

Eventually the sun came out and so did we, then went our separate ways. Christmas arrived, and as a gesture of goodwill to the other member of the team I decided to wash my thermals at the local launderette, still unpacked after the previous winter's activities. With the benefit of hindsight, this was probably the first in a series of ill-judged decisions that would eventually only get us halfway up our objective, but it seemed like a good idea at the time; an essential part of the meticulous planning necessary if one was to presume to follow in Shipton's footsteps or Tilman's wake. Minimalists they may have been but I'm sure that both these great mountaineers always set out on their epic adventures wearing clean underwear. There was also a spiritual dimension; a ritual cleansing before a long and arduous journey, perhaps not quite on the same karmic level as a visit to the Head Llama in Thyangboche, but spiritually uplifting in a Persil brightness sort of way. Zen and the art of washing longjohns has its limitations as a meditation technique so I decided to pop next door for a brew with an old mate, inadvertently leaving my bag containing passport, dollars and air ticket on the bench amongst the old copies of Cosmopolitan.

It turned out to be a very expensive cup of tea. Whilst some thieving bastard was giving himself an early Christmas present, Rowland was thumbing his way across the States towards the sunshine state and I was stuck in a long queue at the passport office in Newport, wondering how to persuade my bank manager to cough up some replacement cash.

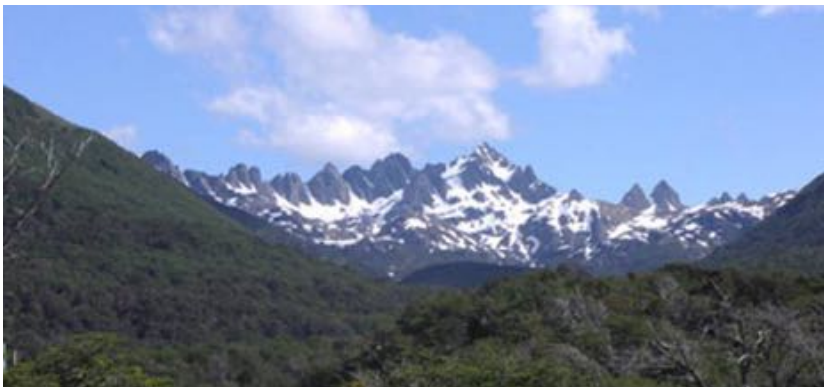
My partner, when we eventually met up in the car lot at Miami International was a little impatient and not at all sympathetic. He had been living under a parked winnebago for nearly a week, dodging security and hanging about in Arrivals whenever a UK plane landed. We caught the first available flight going in approximately the right direction, a banana republic deathtrap of an ancient 707, reeking of fresh kerosene, stale sweat and cheap scent. Our fellow passengers were all expelled, illegal immigrants who screamed and crossed themselves furiously every time another rivet popped in the cabin. Two more flights and a dusty bus ride from Rio Gallegos in Argentina got us to the bottom of the continent, in more ways than one, the Asturias bar in Punta Arenas.

In those days, the only way to get into the eastern end of the Cordillera Darwin was with the Chilean Navy via the Magellan Straits and the Beagle Channel as the more logical approach overland from Ushuaia in Argentine Tierra del Fuego to the border at Lapotaia was

forbidden for military reasons. Both countries were perpetually verging on a state of war over the ownership of two small islands in the Beagle Channel. On previous trips it usually took weeks for the various required protocols and permissions to be resolved and passage authorised on a naval vessel. Luckily I held a trump card in the form of a letter of introduction from the Rector of the Patagonian Institute, on whose behalf I had agreed to collect samples for their herbarium. We barely had time for a few games of snooker in the magnificently decaying and almost deserted British Club, with its faded portait of a young Queen looking suitably regal at her coronation, peeling wallpaper and a dusty visitors' book containing such distinguished signatures as C Bonington, D Walker and D Whillans, before we were sitting on the bridge of the *Piloto Pardo*, the Chilean Navy's Antarctic supply ship, watching the sun set behind Mt Sarmiento.

After a brief stopover at the penal settlement on the utterly desolate Isla Dawson, where the few surviving political opponents of the Pinochet regime were incarcerated, we turned into the main Beagle Channel. The captain lent us a helicopter and driver for an hour or two so that we could take a look at our peak. Within minutes we were enjoying a spectacular low level ride along the Beagle before hopping over the central peaks of the Cordillera for a condor's eye view of our objective, Pico Roncagli. The pilot pointed his machine straight at its impressive North Face and stepped on the throttle. Watching the huge seracs approaching at 150mph was an invigorating experience, especially when he suddenly executed a sharp right a few feet from the ice wall and the door on my side flew open. I had neglected to strap myself in and found myself staring straight down at the glacier a thousand feet below with most of my body outside the aircraft and hands clenched vice-like round the door handle. I could hear Rowland howling with laughter, as the pilot threw the chopper in the opposite direction and I was hurled back into the cabin across my companion's knees. Aerial reconnaissance has its moments.

Puerto Williams, a naval base on Navarinho Island is spectacularly situated on a sheltered inlet at the eastern entrance to the Beagle Channel and is protected from the prevailing sou'westerlies by the Skye-like Dientes (Teeth) de Navarinho. Don Sargeant and I had enjoyed an eventful day on a previous trip traversing a couple of the numerous canines



Los Dientes de Navarinho from above Puerto Williams naval base. The author and Don Sargeant climbed the twin peaks on the right and a section of the ridge in 1979. **Photo: Iain Peters**

and molars of the range, many of them a dentist's worst nightmare of decaying sandstone and schist, but worth the trouble for the spectacular view from the main ridge, taking in Wollaston Island and Cape Horn, the unexplored interior of Hoste Island and the main peaks of the Cordillera Darwin.

On this occasion we were whisked to the isolated Border Post of the Carabineros de Chile at Baia Yendegaia on an ex- WW2 motor torpedo boat. The police seemed pleased to see me again and after another heavy night on our Scotch and their home brewed Pisco, with numerous toasts to "La Reina Isabella" and "El Presidente Pinochet", we rode up to our base camp at the fast receding snout of the Roncagli Glacier, enjoying a short, sharp sheep hunt en route, as the earnest young lieutenant tried to shoot a semi-feral young ram for us. After emptying his .38 at the beast and missing, his sergeant lassoed the unfortunate creature and casually cut its throat. Having heard about the abduction, torture and mass murder of dissidents in Santiago on the orders of Pinochet, with the tacit support of the CIA, I didn't like to ask him how he had acquired such skill with a knife. Fred, as we christened this newly deceased third member of the team was destined for the natural fridge on the glacier, and would become the real star performer of the expedition. Without him, Rowland, a pasty addicted Cornishman would have abandoned ship far earlier, especially as my only success in sponsorship had been three month's supply of soya-based mince substitute!

The Cordillera Darwin covers roughly the same area as the Alps, and even today has only been visited by a handful of teams from Europe. Whilst it doesn't possess anything like the spectacular spires of Paine or Fitzroy, the peaks themselves are alpine in nature, often presenting formidable mixed North Faces and complex ridges, which combined with heavily crevassed glacier approaches and the usual fierce weather conditions, certainly make for an invigorating change from the traffic jams of the Midi-Plan. When I first visited, the range was still very much Shipton country, and even this legendary stalwart had found it tough going. The unclimbed Pico Roncagli had become something of an obsession of mine. Three earlier attempts in previous years had barely reached the foot of the mountain, but they had been large and unwieldy four man expeditions intent on peak bagging. With just the two of us and a dead sheep to worry about I was quietly confident.

Most Patagonian expedition accounts mention those endless days of being confined to base camp due to bad weather. It's not altogether true, as there can be quite lengthy periods of fine weather, but not that season. In the following six weeks we had just four days of sunshine. Rowland took up woodcarving with a vengeance. Anyone who cares to follow in our footsteps might think the crude, carved objects littering the last forest glade before the main icefall below Roncagli were the work of some pagan, primitive Neanderthal obsessed with fertility symbols - and they would be right! I enjoyed the bad weather, as it meant I could spend my time plant hunting through the woods, with some success, discovering a tiny *Ourisia* in a waterfall which was later classified as a sub-species of a similar plant endemic to the South of South Island in New Zealand and was a new addition to the Fuegian flora. Perriment, missing his 5 fruit or veg a day, only wanted to know if it was edible. Luckily the sun eventually appeared so we cooked up a mound of Pasta Frederiko for our picnic boxes and headed uphill.

The north side of Roncagli consists of two very steep hanging glaciers separated by an impressive rock buttress with a long relatively easy angled ridge defining the far western end of the face. Now most normal people when faced by an unclimbed peak will look for the line of least resistance, but not these boys. The West Ridge was the obvious way, but reaching its



base would have taken at least a day and a half threading through yet another icefall and then trudging over a heavily crevassed ice field. The left-hand hanging glacier was far closer and appeared to lead to an attractive ice face. With an earlyish start we could probably reach it in time for breakfast, climb the thing and be back with Fred by nightfall. Dawn found us abseiling into an enormous bergschrund, the first and biggest of a maze of crevasses and serac walls zig-zagging up the mountain. This was ice speleology with a vengeance and we soon discarded the rope on the grounds that in the event of a serac collapse, the fastest sprinter would not be held back by his companion.

Four hours of this cold claustrophobia were more than enough, and with some relief we emerged to find ourselves beneath the upper ice slope. Apart from another fearsome-looking bergschrund it looked in fine nick, mostly steep névé leading to the crest of the ridge and the headwall. Suddenly it was a lovely day. Except it wasn't. A major storm, born in the aptly named Drake's Passage had been lurking to the south, waiting for us to appear, and now curled itself greedily over the summit. The face disappeared in a maelstrom of spindrift. Time to go home, Fred would be getting worried. The prospect of renegotiating the ice maze didn't appeal, so we ended up abseiling down the true right hand side between the ice and the retaining rock wall. We had dismissed this as a possible route of ascent, due to the amount of fresh debris on the

Above. The upper half of the *North Face of Pico Roncagli*. The first attempt ended at the level of the two large ice caves. Just visible at the bottom righthand corner is a section of the ice cliff whose collapse caused the abrupt termination of the second and final attempt. Roncagli was eventually climbed in 1989/90 by David Hillebrandt and party, via the West Ridge to the West Summit, (out of shot to the right). This main peak is still unclimbed.

Photo: Don Sargeant

ice, but as the temperature had dropped with the arrival of the storm, we convinced ourselves that nothing would come down from above and that this embryonic lateral moraine would be frozen enough to provide abseil anchors.

We were almost moved to tears when we were finally re-united with Fred, and he willingly sacrificed a whole leg to celebrate our survival, spit-roasted and devoured to the sound of a furious fifties gale tearing at the canopy above us. One of the great joys of climbing is the excess that seems justified after surviving an epic. On this occasion, gluttony was the only available sin, so we indulged shamelessly.

Another week of botany and wood carving followed, with Fred diminishing in stature by the day and becoming ever more fruity in his old age, as the summer heat melted his icebox. Finally, the wind dropped and the condors gathered in their hundreds searching for the well-ripened carcasses of any guanacos or sheep who had failed to survive the winter, always a sign of good weather. Time for another go.

Our new master plan involved tackling the central buttress direct. As we had brought very little rock gear we had originally dismissed it as being too steep and technical, but from our highpoint on the hanging glacier we saw that after the first 3 or 4 pitches the angle eased, and that a subsidiary ridge from its crest appeared to provide a safe way through to the upper rock band and massive cornices guarding the summit. Another pre-dawn start. Not early enough though as the sun hit the upper seracs whilst we were still a good half mile from the foot of the buttress. On this occasion sloth undoubtedly saved our lives, because without warning a massive section of ice cliff crowning the rock buttress detached itself and in slow motion started to keel over. It fell in total silence then disappeared from view, leaving us momentarily relieved that there must be a hidden gully system up high that had channelled the avalanche away from our chosen line, when a tsunami of ice suddenly surged over the crest and swept the entire buttress. It was one of those explosive moments in the mountain experience when time stands still and the mind switches off completely. Mine at least. Rowland's was still working. "For fuck's sake – RUN!" So we did, pursued by all sound and fury. In fact the avalanche ground to a halt about two or three hundred yards away from us. Serendipity never gets a mention in the textbooks, but it should.

The whole face seemed to have decided to come alive, and we had no stomach for any return match with this mountain, especially as Fred had turned a peculiar shade of iridescent green: obviously a sign to go and do something useful for a change. We bid him a fond adios, spread his pathetic remains onto a convenient boulder as a peace offering to the condors, and headed for the isolated and half derelict estancia of Yendegaia a day and a half away down on the coast, and the base for the botanical phase of the expedition.

Ironically, a fine spell of Indian Summer coincided with our arrival at the estancia, but at least it meant that for the next fortnight I enjoyed some of the finest seed collecting days I've ever had in the Chilean archipelago. I found a botanist's Shangri La in a sheltered, sylvan glen containing some of the finest specimens of Southern Beech I have seen anywhere. They grew straight and true for 80 feet to the canopy, and gaining access to the seed-bearing branches provided us with the best technical climbing of the entire trip, just like front pointing up the finest vertical snow ice. The tensions of the past few weeks vanished. Now and again as I crouched over an interesting plant or carefully picked a leaf sample I would hear the distant rumble of an avalanche. It came from another world.

By the end of April it was time to go. I had over 50 kilos of seed from many different species, and we were a long way from the temperature controlled storerooms at the Forest



Research Station labs in Surrey. Whilst life on the range had its own slow rhythm, the sky had become a hive of aerial activity. The clouds seemed permanently stitched together by vapour trails, appearing from the east and vanishing beyond the peaks to the north. No one seemed to know what all this was about as there was no direct means of contact with the outside world. Apart from the police post, a day's ride away on the other side of the bay, the estancia was the only permanent habitation in an area the size of Switzerland.

With the seed dried, labelled and packed into kit bags with silica gel, we borrowed horses as far as the border post where we could use the police radio to ask the navy for a lift out. The police were strangely non-committal about the increase in air traffic, although they did seem less jovial than usual. A couple of days later a venerable converted tug, the Fuente Alba duly turned up. Usually the arrival of a boat was an excuse for a piss-up and asado, but not this time. We were greeted by unsmiling faces and the muzzle covers off the guns. Jokingly I asked the young skipper if the Chileans and Argentinians were playing their war games again. "No, you are, and you're losing! They have taken South Georgia and the Malvinas!" So that explained the vapour trails. Later, back in the UK, we would learn that nearby Ushuaia was the base for the Mirage jets and their Exocet missiles. Sure enough an Argentinine gunboat was waiting for us out in the Beagle Channel, just on their side of the border, and shadowed us all the way back to Puerto Williams, guns swinging menacingly; they had obviously been monitoring the police radio.

Rowland and I had suddenly become an embarrassment as British nationals in a highly sensitive military area, and the navy wanted us out of the way as soon as possible, but not on any of their ships or aircraft. A Chinook full of Royal Marines had crash-landed further up the Magellan Straits soon after Chile had declared her neutrality. and the subsequent explanation of how a British military helicopter with a maximum range of a few hundred miles came to be in Chilean air space in the first place had upset Argentina even more. With his superior weaponry and manpower Galtieri could easily have ordered a "defensive" attack on Chile. Two gringo spies, appearing out of the mountains that overlooked one of his main military air bases would only have added fuel to the flames. A low profile seemed called for, especially as it was beginning to look like the conflict might spread, so we headed off once again into the trees, for me an unexpected opportunity for more botanising, but a sore trial for a man who had expected to be wrapped round a pile of empanadas by now.

Salvation eventually arrived in the form of a decrepit old fishing boat, infested with rats, fleas and cockroaches. The Don Ernesto was on her way back to Punta Arenas for the winter, having spent the last 3 or 4 months in the Canales. Despite her grand and macho Castillian

name, she was the most unseaworthy vessel I had ever seen. In fact, when I first saw her, I thought she was part of the jetty that had been constructed out of various hulks. Still, she was due to leave on the tide for Punta Arenas, and judging by the lurid accounts of how the Argentines treated prisoners, death by drowning seemed preferable to being captured should the enemy decide to open up a third front by invading Navarinho.

The skipper was straight out of a Spanish translation of a Melville novel; a swarthy little man, with a scar across his forehead and piercing brown eyes made even more disconcerting by a reverse squint which had the effect of making you think he was staring at some strange growth on each of your ears. Two berths were swiftly secured in exchange for three demijohns of Gato Negro and a flagon of moonshine Pisco, a parting gift from our police friends. We sailed at dawn, the silence of a rare, windless morning shattered by thunderous farts and noxious clouds of black smoke coming from the engine. By midday Ushuaia was off the starboard beam. Every now and again a Mirage jet would take off and roar away over the shapely silhouette of Monte Olivia. It may not have been the Ark Royal, but standing on deck of the good ship Don Ernesto, I counted them all out, and (since our top speed was only a few knots), counted not all of them back in again a few hours later.

We called in at Yendegaia and as there was no-one around we helped the crew acquire another sheep, in fact one of the estancia's top breeding rams and subsequently nearly the cause of another international incident! It looked as if Barney, as we christened him might would have to pay a far higher price for his passage than a couple of bottles of wine, especially when his legs were tied together so that he spent the voyage on his back in the bows, bleating pathetically. Doubtless mutton stew would soon be replacing sea urchin broth on the menu. Rowland and I were given the galley to sleep in, sharing the limited floor space with an army of cockroaches. There were compensations however. The Don Ernesto didn't follow the usual route back to her home port of Punta Arenas. She might have been a leaking, pestilential bucket, but the skipper certainly knew how to cosset the old girl, and we always ended the day tucked safely into some hidden, landlocked bay so small it didn't show up on any chart, before heading off down some exceedingly narrow channel, often only a few yards wider than the boat.

On the last evening we reached the Magellan Straits. With plenty of sea room, the ship's idiot was handed the wheel whilst the rest of us crammed into the galley to play cards and finish the last of the wine. Suddenly pandemonium. A willywaw from nowhere hit broadsides and the Don Ernesto went over. The skipper was first to extricate himself from the tangle of limbs, broken glass and upturned tables. He bellowed at the helmsman, quite forgetting that the poor guy was not only a few centavos short of a peso but was a deaf mute to boot. Then all was just as suddenly calm again, the boat lurched back onto a relatively even keel, and a very bedraggled and totally traumatised sheep hanging by his bindings from the anchor was dragged back on board.

We tied up that evening alongside a 'soft adventure' luxury cruise ship, bound for the Antarctic. The contrast was sublime. Our own adventure, which had taken us from a sea-filled cave in Cornwall, via a remote mountain in Tierra del Fuego, geo-political war games in the South Atlantic and a quixotic old seahorse of a boat, to a plant science research laboratory in wildest Surrey was almost over.

Opposite: Catching the "Beagle Bus", the Chilean naval tug Fuente del Alba arrives at Yendegaia, and then onward using local transport. **Photos: Don Sargeant**

The gentle art of hitching

Ken Latham



Hitting the blacktop for a journey to a place you hope will give you a weekend of freedom seems to be a thing of the past; where are the boys (and girls) of the road now? Driving their BMWs down the A55 no doubt.

It was whilst driving down the Pass with my wife Clare that bought it to light; she asked why we didn't see anybody hitching these days and it rekindled some memories and questions that seemed to need further answers. Travelling through the mountain

areas of North Wales on a daily basis and journeying to and from Liverpool on a regular basis confirmed the disappearance of the 'road gang'. Are there any characters left?

In the late sixties/early seventies the only way we could get to Wales was by cadging a lift in a mate's car (rare things) or by hitching, and it was all part of the weekend's adventure to start the journey with a lift in some strange vehicle or worse still a strange driver who would either want to tell you his life story or wouldn't say a bloody word.

It all began for me when I started to climb on a regular basis and having to exist on a meagre wage meant no car (also I had just read *On the Road* by Kerouac, so I can blame him a little for all the angst). The journey would invariably start with a train or ferry trip as hitching across the Mersey was a nightmare, once the divide had been crossed then the serious stuff would begin in earnest and there were ethics to adhere to, I kid you not. It was all important to walk the short distance from the ferry terminal or the underground at Birkenhead to the Welsh road, the open highway and direct link to the hills (if you were lucky). Unfortunately this meant that you had to pass the horrendous stench of the leather tanning works which would turn an extreme leader's stomach to jelly in one small swift nostril full (it will remain in the memory as one of those reminiscent aromas of one's life like sherbet dips or pear drops) but it was a small price to pay for the trip ahead.

There would invariably be one or two other guys in line for a lift and we would take it in turns when offered a seat and it was all very courteous and you would often meet the same crew from week to week.

The Kit.

Of course the traveller needed the right kit to get a lift and this contained the essential lift getter, the climbing rope, the rope would not be tucked away out of sight in your sack but had to be carried around the neck and be in full view of the oncoming car, it was meant to symbolise the fact that we were not just plain hitchers but men on a mission.

The use of the rope became a good badge in later years when I was living in Wales and needed to hitch to go shopping, never failed, but we did get some strange looks from Mrs Williams and her brood as we trundled around the Co-Op in Caernarfon. The cardboard sign was also an invaluable tool for the hobo and it was possible to choose your destination by writing in large enough letters the aim of your journey, I used this to great effect on one trip.

I had decided to spend the weekend travelling and thought that for a change I would head up North, maybe the Lakes, the M62 Rocket Roundabout was a mere mile from home so that seemed like a good place to start. Arriving at the Rocket I was confronted with a long queue of other hitchers with various signs 'the Lakes' 'Coventry', 'Leeds' etc, so I thought 'I'm in for a long haul here if I don't come up with something'. Out came the new piece of card and on it I wrote in big black letters 'Anywhere' within two minutes I was heading for the Peak in a brand new artic. Of course I could well have been heading for Hull or Norfolk but that was the buzz, you didn't know where you would end up. During my stay at Bigil where I managed to live in the same house as Al Harris and lived to tell the tale we had an essential hitching tool, to enable us to travel from the wilderness of Dinorwig to Bangor or Caernarfon. The 'petrol can' was our version of 'trade' plates and would be used with great effect on drivers who obviously felt sorry for us, there was a special hiding place in the hedge at the Llanberis/Bangor junction where the 'can' would be stashed for emergency use if lifts were a bit short on the ground, we must have ran out of petrol on a regular basis.

The Enemy.

There were only a few things that would make it difficult to get a ride in the 'old days'

1 **Rain, (still exists)**

This was a pain in the arse; invariably you would only get lifts in grotty old vans delivering car parts. Rain would mean that a chance of a lift in a decent motor was out of the question if you looked like a drowned rat.

2 **Rutger Hauer**

Rutger Hauer starred in a movie about a psycho killer who hitched lifts to get his hits; this film called 'The Hitcher,' did for hitching what 'Das Boot' did for applications to join the submarine corps. Good old Rutger.

3 **The Law**

Maybe it was just me that looked like a suspicious hippy but I was confronted by Her Majesty's Officers on more than one occasion, they would ask the most absurd questions as to why you were thumbing a lift carrying a rucksack and rope. "Where are you going son?" "Bondage classes officer" "Nuffin suspicious then eh? On yer way lad"

The most bemused policeman ever was a Gendarme in Chamonix (more of that later), a mate and I were called over for jaywalking and were asked to empty our rather full rucksacks, this we duly did on the side of 'la rue'. All was fine till he came to a small plastic bag containing a white powder. "Zut a lore, vat ave we ere? Vous may wish to phone 'ome, no Monsieur?"

It took over twenty minutes to convince the poor man that it was climbing chalk, (early days when Magnesium Carbonate came in those little blue and white boxes from 'Boots.' Who remembers them?) He tasted it several times (he may well have been an addict) and we were convinced that we were to be sent to the guillotine. Eventually all was well and he wandered off muttering something about wanting 'la toilette'.

The Vehicles

I have had lifts in hundreds of run of the mill vehicles but one or two stood out from the rest,

1. *The Bedford Camper.*

My mate Bob and I had decided to meet up with a few of the lads who were camping in Betws y Coed and started hitching on Saturday afternoon, we were only going for a few beers so not much gear was carried, but we had 'the rope' so all would be well, it was a fine summers day and most of the traffic was holiday makers on their way to Wales with their kids. We waited a long time and seemed to do a lot of walking but eventually an ancient Bedford Camper van stopped, the driver and his wife were off for 'A jolly little trip' and could they give us a lift, eight hours later we were dropped off at the bridge in Betws, the van, a 1950s classic had a top speed of approximately 25mph (down hill) and the driver and his wife had a combined age of 186. We of course missed the beers and couldn't find the campsite (but the old dears may well have reached their destination by now).

2. *The Black Cab*

This was a very strange trip, again it was with Bob (he must have attracted them) and we were hitching at the start of the Welsh road, many vehicles passed but eventually a black cab drew up, I said to Bob he must be mistaken and thinks we were flagging him down for a fare but no the 'cabbie' insisted that he give us a ride as he was off the meter and going to Talacre to pick his wife and five kids up, fair enough we thought, loads of space to stretch out and we duly got in. we've all been in an old black cab at one time or another, (usually at about 2am as you fell out of the 'Cabin Club' after a heavy night and trying to remember where you left that phone number she gave you, ha! A million years ago my lad) and we all know how they seem to be unconnected to the wheels via the shock absorbers, this one was a speciality version as we weaved a merry journey towards the countryside, it was a particularly hot day and the cabbie, a large portly chap who was dressed in a string vest and shorts asked if we were thirsty, he duly passed over a lemonade bottle, we noticed the label was missing and assumed he had filled it from home with orange juice, that's what it looked like to us anyway, it seared the throat like your first secret swig of your parents scotch when you were a kid, it turned out to be home made tea wine with a 80% proof warning, we handed it back and the cabbie happily drank it as we swayed our way to the seaside. Whether he made it to his destination was debatable

3. *The Bentley.*

I was stuck in Bettws y Coed and holiday traffic was making it rather difficult to get a lift, eventually a rather sedate 1940s Bentley stopped, I assumed the driver was looking for directions but no, he pulled up and wound the rather grand window down and asked if I required a lift. "Yes I'm heading towards Beddgelert," I replied. "Jump in young feller we're headed that way." I still remember him saying *we're* heading that way but he was the only occupant. As we travelled majestically towards our destination he regaled me with tales of all the hills he had bagged and how he loved a jolly ramble followed by a dip in a cold mountain stream. I was rather concerned as to his intentions at this point and was hoping he wasn't about to invite me for a ramble to show me some puppies, and was quietly working out if it would be possible to leap out at some opportune spot James Bond style and roll down some grassy bank as they do in movies. I worked it out rather quickly that this is obviously a good way of shortening your life, so I had to stick with his lordship till the journey ended. He kept on

about how much he enjoyed coming to Wales, and that he was off to fish a little known lake at Rhyd Ddu. "Damn fine rainbow my boy, a sporty fish, needs a cunning skill," of which I would of course not be privy to, but he was well in with land owner.

"That wouldn't be Llyn y Gader would it?" I asked.

"Aah, yes young feller, know of it do you?"

"Know it my arse, part of the family estate don't you know" I replied, "I hope you've got a licence guv."

Needless to say his attitude changed somewhat after that. He dropped me right outside the front door and his only words as I was getting out of the car were, "well I'll be bugged." Often, I thought.

4. The Boy Racer.

The boy racer was a real loon, I was on the A5 at Cerigydrudion when a rather battered Triumph GT6 stopped, just about enough room for two and a small rucksack I thought and jumped in to get out of what was becoming a cold evening. He was a farmer's boy but liked to play about with cars apparently, (I think that's what he said over the din), he had been able to squeeze a 'blown' Rover engine that his mate had then race tuned for him into this tiny car, the engine might have been in good fettle but unfortunately his mate had neglected the other essential bits, such as decent brakes to slow the thing down and the body work was held together with non sticky glue and string, I actually closed my eyes at 130 mph and just thanked Telford for designing a really straight piece of A5 at this spot. He was obviously proud of his car and wanted to show it off to me and was determined to see how fast it was capable of going without actually taking off, I managed to shout loud enough that I was meeting someone at the pub in Pentrefoelas and we screeched to a halt by the bridge, I fell out and he muttered "shame your not coming through the padog bends boy, then you could see what she really handles like", after he had disappeared in a cloud of rubber smoke I spewed up over the wall, and believe me I am a real speed freak. (This chap must be either long dead or testing nitro fuelled cars on some drag strip somewhere, God help him if he is anywhere with bends in the road)

5. The Furniture Van.

Once again I was with Bob and we were returning after a disastrous hitching trip to, wait for it, -----Belgium. (Don't ask, it was Bob's idea, he had never been to Belgium and just fancied a trip there. If you're thinking of having a hitching trip then remove Belgium from the map, walking to the north pole pulling a pallet of lard would be easier than hitching in this country). We decided to return to home soil after having to sleep in a skip, in a shop doorway (before it became the abode a homeless one), under the trailer of an artic lorry, a rather grand golf course that we only discovered that we were on when the morning mist cleared to find us bivied on the green; such comfort was never before experienced, perfectly groomed and flatter than a billiard table, and the tent pegs pushed in with such ease! And finally, the ultimate luxury of a church graveyard. We accepted defeat. The return journey to the coast was undertaken by train and was pure relaxation. Bob then decided that he hadn't been to Cornwall either and now seemed as good a time as any to experience clotted cream and pasties. The drag along the coast was very difficult as every other bugged was towing a caravan or was full to the gunwhales. A white van pulled up and enquired as to where we were heading. "Penzance mate" we replied. "OK lads no problem I'm heading in that sort of direction." He got out of the van

and proceeded to open the rear sliding door. "Sorry lads but I'm not supposed to give any lifts but you can get in the barrck." In the rear of the van was the most expensive looking leather three piece suite imaginable. "Just use that boys, it's destined for some famous aaaactor's summer 'ouse an ee wownt know will ee? Make yersels at 'ome." He slid down the door and we sat in comfort for what seemed hours without a clue as to our whereabouts. Eventually the van drew to a halt and we were a couple of miles from our destination. I wondered for many years whom the owner of the leather furniture was, not old Rutger Hauer I hope!

The Big Trip

Every once in a while life changing moments make you do the strangest things: for me it was the break up of a long time relationship that led to the big trip. After gathering my thoughts and life in general together, I decided to pack in my job and 'see the world', well a bit of it anyway with a mate, Dave, who was willing to join the venture. We gathered our gear together and decided that we should head for the Alps and strange as it seems the trip was to start at the Rocket Roundabout once again. With what seemed to be the biggest and heaviest rucksacks imaginable we set off as early as possible and to our surprise within minutes we were in a lorry headed towards London and Dover. We 'foot passenger' ticketed it across the channel and, hey presto, a totally knackered 36 hours after leaving Liverpool we were camped up in Chamonix. Things were about to change though. It took a while to recover from the mammoth hitch and we took it really easy for a few days. One morning at some ungodly hour, a rustling sound coming from outside the tent woke us up. 'Ay up youth, oi eard you were ere, any chance of a brew loike, I wuz wonderin if yer fancoid doin a route loike?" This very famous mountaineer will have to remain nameless to protect the innocent and keep Interpol at bay, was equipped with no more than a safari suit, plastic shopping bag, a pair of EB's and a bank card (not his own). He was determined to attach himself to us so it looked like we were stuck with him for a few days. As luck would have it the weather turned foul on the hills so we were spared the major rescue that would undoubtedly have ensued had we been tempted to follow our 'mate,s' advice to 'knock off a couple of rock routes for starters', maybe we were all supposed to bivvy in the plastic shopping bag.

As it happened another mate was heading out for the Alps for his honeymoon and said he would meet up with us in Argentiére for a drink. We set off only to find the place deserted. Meanwhile it was getting more and more difficult to avoid the hanger on and he was looking more and more like Fagin in his looks and antics. The next evening we attempted to sneak away to the pub under cover of darkness but he appeared out of the gloom and sort of invited himself along. After a few beers with the honeymooners it was time for us to head back to Cham and for the honeymooners to go and do what honeymooners do. It transpired that the reason they had not appeared the previous day was because they had mistakenly gone for a short walk, without food or much water, into the Verdon Gorge without realising it was a long way down and had only an in and an out exit, approximately 17 miles apart. We found it impossible to hitch back as all good French folk are in bed asleep by eight and the newlyweds were doing the same thing, but not the sleeping bit obviously.

A short while later Fagin, who had disappeared to relieve himself, announced that he had found our transport back to the campsite. To humour him we went to have a look; sure enough there in the car park was what looked like an abandoned 2CV with its doors open. Fagin said he could get it going and that we shouldn't worry as he was accustomed to borrowing other peoples cars without their knowledge.

Drunk as we were we weren't really sure that this plan was a good idea but the prospect of a long stagger back to base didn't appeal much either. We clambered in and Fagin had the motor running in no time as we prepared for the long trip to the local nick. Unfortunately, despite Fagin's skill at hot wiring the vehicle, he had failed to release the steering lock and we did a perfect 360 degree circuit of the gravel car park. This was now becoming a farce and we weren't too keen on this idea of Fagin's that borrowing other people's cars was the done thing, plus the cold air was beginning have a sobering effect. We said that the walk might do us good and that we might see him back in the camp site in the next few days.

After weaving down the road for a few minutes we heard the sound of a vehicle, and put our thumbs out hoping for a lift--- what we got was what we weren't expecting: up pulled a council tipper wagon and driving it was Fagin. He was adamant that we should get in and we were too knackered, drunk, and afraid to argue with him.

Arriving in Chamonix in the middle of the night in a 'borrowed' council truck was bound to arouse suspicion but not a soul was about and Fagin happily parked the truck in a lay- by as if he did this sort of thing on a daily basis (he probably did). He then set off at great speed mentioning that he knew where we could raid an ice cream machine: time to do a quick disappearing act before the three of us spent the rest of the holiday breaking rocks on an unnamed island somewhere in revenge for what we did to Napoleon.

The weather in the Alps was very poor and Dave was beginning to suffer with flu symptoms so we decided to head back towards home to gather our thoughts and sanity together after the excitement of being Fagin's boys for a few days. It had been a doddle to get there so we assumed it would be the same on the return journey. Don't you believe it, the return journey was to take five gruelling days of weaving our way around the French road system including a trip down the Mulsane Straight at Le Mans in a very fast artic wagon. The driver let us sleep on his floor and during the small hours a noise woke us up. In the darkness we could just make out the shape of a rather well endowed female; before long much grunting and moaning was heard. "Christ youth she's having an asthma attack," I said to Dave who was also rather bewildered by what was going on. In the morning the driver calmly asked us if we had slept OK and that we weren't woken in the night by his girlfriend who he described thus, "I 'ope you vernt voken in ze nite, my voman is what you say, a ladee of ze night yes." Others who 'helped' us on our way included a very mad Algerian with a suicide wish, three women and a baby (which was sat on Dave's knee when they hit another car head on), and a yoghurt selling hippy in a Morris Minor without any seats in it. Apart from that it was all pretty plain sailing really.

Needless to say the hitching bug was rapidly wearing thin and it was time for a bit of role reversal.

The American

After a while I decided that a semi permanent move to Wales would be a good idea, this semi permanent move meant that I could still take my washing home and indulge in some home cooking which would be a change to Al Harris's famous omelettes or chips with chips which was staple fare to us dwellers of the spare room at Pete's Eats. It was whilst I was working at Pete's that I met the American (we shall call him Bud for that was what he called himself) I had been up to Capel Curig and was using Pete's van, an ex Post Office affair that had seen better days to say the least, being held together with non sticky glue and Gaffa Tape. The doors were a speciality and had an alarming life of their own: they would be impossible to open on

some days and required an acrobatic entrance through the windows, whilst on others they would swing open as you drove along. This was pretty scary if you were a passenger and required the skills of a sidecar racer to avoid falling out. On my return to Llanberis as I was descending the pass there was a guy in the lay-by opposite the boulders with his thumb out; as a fellow traveller it was the norm to give lifts and I duly stepped on the anchors. I eventually stopped after approximately 100 metres (the brakes were also only slightly better than your granny's pushbike) and reversed back. I felt the van rise slightly at the rear and an alarmed face appeared at the passenger window.

"Oi mate ya just backed over my backpack."

"Sorry la. anyway you're lucky I stopped when I did otherwise you would have had to walk to Llanberis to catch up with me. Throw your pack in the back and get in."

Of course the door was jammed and Bud had to climb in through the window.

"So where you headed then Bud and where have you just hitched from?"

"I'm trying to get to Llanberis and I've been told to head for Pete's café and I've just hitched from Czechoslovakia, where I met up with a guy called Al Rouse and he gave me a list of routes to do and told me I'd be OK if I headed to Wales."

"Oh you'll be OK Bud me old mate, welcome to the crazy gang hideout."

At every party at Al Harris's or on every cassette that we all had, our favourite song was Desperados by the Eagles, for that's what we were for sure. Christ we even looked like them.

I asked to see the routes list and recognised Alan's handwritten scrawl. He had given Bud a fair mixture of stuff to do and he was as keen as mustard to get on the rock. First he had to have somewhere to stay, so he sort of attached himself to the 'second floor room gang' at Pete's and joined in with great gusto. Over the next few days we managed to do The Corner and Grond and he was well pleased with the quality of our 'small brutal little climbs' (his words, not mine, which would later return to haunt him). One evening as we were all in the Padarn Lake having a pint and Bud was touting his list around and was asking for climbing partners for a trip to Gogarth, who should appear ghost like from the throng but our old mate 'Fagin', "oim up fer a cwple o rewts mait loike, gis a lewk at yer list", the list was slowly being ticked like all good lists should be but so far Gogarth had been missed; little did Bud know he was in for a real treat.

The story of the day was described to us over a pint and it was pure theatre. Fagin had arranged to meet Bud in the lake side car park and would pick him up at ten in his car. This was a good start as Fagin didn't possess a vehicle of any sort but had 'borrowed' someone else's, (nothing new there then) a rather classic Morris Traveller. It was to get much better as the story unfolded. Fagin decided that to get to Gogarth they would travel in style and had informed Bud that they were going to use his ocean going yacht. Fagin didn't possess a boat either. As they travelled towards Port Dinorwic in their borrowed car they turned off into the marina and parked up. By this time Bud was thinking that he had struck gold with his new climbing partner. He was told to wait in the car and Fagin would call him when they were ready to set off. After a short while he heard a shout and was called over to the dock wall, and there on the water was a small tender with its engine running and innocent old Bud got on board. The small boat then took them out to a 40ft ocean-going vessel that wouldn't have looked out of place in the harbour in Monaco and they secured the tender to the boat and climbed aboard. At this point things began to go a little pear shaped. They were on deck but Fagin was having a little difficulty gaining access to the cabin as he had left the 'key' at home. Suddenly to Bud's surprise there was an almighty crunch and lo and behold the door was open. According to Bud they spent the day on deck quaffing fine wines till the sun went down

and abandoned all thought of Gogarth and its climbs. What would have happened if the real owner of this yacht had turned up and found the wayward duo helping themselves to his cellar doesn't bear thinking about. Strangely Bud and his list quickly disappeared shortly afterwards and was never heard of again.

Once was enough

One weekend Robbie Mallinson and I were heading out to Wales and were offered a lift with Tom Hurley. Those of you who remember that fine fellow will no doubt know what's coming! We were picked up in what can only be described as a 'wreck'. This car, an Austin 1100 had been around the world at least twice and most of that had been under water judging by the state of the bodywork, 'clean but rusty' as it would be advertised in the local rag. We duly set off and were almost overcome with the petrol fumes emanating through the non-existent floor pan, as we approached the Betws Bends, for yes dear reader, we got that far without passing out, although alarmingly Robbie did put his climbing helmet on which caused me some concern as I'd left mine at home. Tom must have been a sailor in some past life as steering this car was akin to being at the helm of a tea clipper in a storm. We veered from side to side as if this was a normal way to drive, probably was for Tom. Time was rapidly moving as were the dry stone walls which were alarmingly close at times, when our hero decided that the pub in Llanberis was just out of reach before official closing time so a very fast right turn was taken by surprise and we were heading rapidly over the Ugly House road. After a while as we raced past the Towers OPC there was an almighty grinding and crunching noise.

After coming to a halt and inspecting the source of the sounds we discovered that the very, very bald tyre was shredded and to make it for a pint would need Formula 1 team wheel changing speed. On opening the boot a spare was extricated but was very, very, very bald which is one more baldness than the one that was punctured; there was also a slight problem in the fact that Tom had omitted the wheel jack. Robbie pulled a gate post from the wall, I gathered some stones and Tom amazingly lifted the car up bodily as we constructed this home made effort. What was good enough for constructing the pyramids was good enough for these boys, and girls, as Tom's future wife was also on board but muttered not a word from journey's beginning to end. Amazingly we made it to the pub in Llanrwst and quaffed a few but the rest of the weekend is totally wiped from the memory. I went round to Tom's house a few weeks later as we were going to Frodsham or Helsby. He offered me a brew and I said that I would fill the kettle as he got his gear ready. The sink was full of cogs and sprockets and kick-starters from various motorbikes, soaking in four star to get the grease off; his harness was on the floor next to a greasy rag and bits of slings were everywhere. What a man, what a hero. As rapid as a sten gun and as mad as a box of snakes. Very sadly missed.

Joining the rest of the herd

All this revelry and rivalry was coming to a head and it was time to move on. I moved back to Liverpool and gained a job with the stunning title of 'New Vehicle Sales Executive'. The job was absolutely crap but it meant that I was given a new car every month so it was ideal for repaying all those poor other buggers hitching out to the crag. It lasted a while, until some nice bloke armed with a sterry milk bottle full of four star and an old hankie chucked it through the showroom window one night and started the Toxteth riots. So that was that; nothing for it but another long weekend at Brighams.

Now, where did I put that piece of cardboard?

Obituaries

Sadly the Club has recently lost a number of its most eminent, loyal and popular members. Obituaries to the following will appear in the next edition:



Henry Adler, a modest and generous man who had been a great supporter and benefactor of the Club over many years died peacefully just before Christmas 2007. Henry generously supported the extremely successful Asprinats' Meets at Ynys Ettws for a number of years.

Jill Alderseley, who died last October from a brain tumour was a member of both the CC and the FRCC and enjoyed an international reputation as a painter of watercolours, many of them inspired by the landscapes of the Lake District mountains, her home since 1967.



Paula Biner, seen here (r) with Walter and Rosanna Bonatti at last year's AC 150th Anniversary Celebrations in Zermatt died shortly afterwards. Although not a member, Paula, who ran the famous Bahnhof in Zermatt for many years, was well known to generations of alpinists, including CC members,

Ken Vickers who had been suffering from depression brought on by years of ill health took his own life in May of last year. Despite his personal misfortunes, Ken freely contributed his knowledge and experience of publishing guides to the Club, both through his company, Cordee and his work on behalf of the Publications Sub-Committee.

Nicolas Blackett, a former member of the CC died last year. Tim Oliver and Nicolas's sister Giovanna are currently trying to gather information on his climbing career. He was active in North Wales in the early fifties. If anyone knew or climbed with him, please contact Tim, whose details are in the CC Handbook



F.L.Symon (Eric) died on 8th November 2006. After graduating from Glasgow University, where he was a member of the G.U.M.C., he made a career in the oil industry with BP, much of which he spent overseas. In later life Eric became keen on off-shore sailing and cruising. If any members knew Eric in his climbing days, would they please get in touch with John Peacock who would like to compile a full obituary.

Hugh Irving Banner 1933 (1956) - 2007

Honorary member (1990)

Hugh died peacefully in the early hours of April 23rd 2007, St George's Day, after a brief stay in hospital. He had recently been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and his time with us was limited.

Born in Crosby on Merseyside, his mother had died when he was an infant and he was brought up by his father, grandmother and a maiden aunt. His first experiences of the hills were trips to the Lake District in the 1940s with his uncle Tom staying in the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel. He retained strong memories of this time, climbers sitting all the way up the staircase in the hotel, piles of boots in the hall, and formed a lasting friendship with the landlord, Sid Cross. He attended Merchant Taylor's School in Crosby where he sat next to Alan Blackshaw as both their names began with B.

This tribute to Hughie has been compiled by a group of his close friends and climbing companions. My own linking text is in italics.

David Lanceley



Hugh Banner on the summit of El Capitan after his and Mark Vallance's successful ascent of The Nose in 1983.

Photo: Mark Vallance

Derek Walker

I was first aware of Hugh as a schoolboy at Merchant Taylor's' in Liverpool in about 1950, but as he was a sixth former and I was in the lower school, he would never have known me. I remember he was captain of the School chess team, an absorbing interest he was to keep all his life.

His father had forbidden him to climb so serious rock climbing only began when he went to Bristol University in 1951.

Steve Dean

As a bright boy at school, Hugh went to Bristol University in the early 1950's to study chemistry. While he was there, he became part of a talented group starting to explore the climbing possibilities of the Avon Gorge. Hugh was involved in 1952/53 in the production of three major routes at Avon (Central Buttress, Great Central and Desperation) and he also made the first ascent of Sceptre at Cheddar. This latter route was a major breakthrough in attitude towards climbing at Cheddar, and perhaps never received the full appreciation it deserved. I haven't done Sceptre, but I can offer some views on Hugh's routes at Avon. During his time there he operated as part of a very talented group of climbers including Joe Griffin (who was a lecturer at the University and a brilliant slab climber, who soloed Diagonal on Dinas Mot) and Barrie Page. Later names that were to also emerge included Mike Harvey and Derek Walker.

Joe Griffin and Hugh made the first ascent of Central Buttress in 1952 and the climb retained a big reputation for many years. Originally graded VS (it is now a serious E1) the climb was a very important breakthrough in Avon climbing. It is delicate, distinctly serious with quite minimal protection and needless to say has become very polished. Even when I first climbed at Avon in 1970, it still had a big reputation and was regarded as the route to do before you ventured onto the Main Wall. I climbed it as a twenty one year old, well gripped and when I repeated it again about ten years ago it felt nearly as hard as the long pitches on White Slab (Cloggy). In truth, Central Buttress is superb and one not to miss at Avon. After I saw it featured as a 'Climb of Quality' in a very early edition of Climber it had to be done, and it was certainly memorable and no pushover.

The following year (1953) Hugh produced both Great Central and Desperation, again in the Main Area at Avon. Climbing with Joe Griffin, Hugh linked together all the intricacies that make Great Central such a lovely climb, easing its way through the roofs on the left hand side of the Central Buttress. It provides two excellent pitches, (at an overall grade of HVS and quite hard for that) the first a pretty delicate affair at 5A, the second a more friendly but very exposed 4C. The first pitch in particular is a brilliant piece of route finding and offers lovely technical climbing.

Hugh's other route that year was Desperation, to the right of Central Buttress. Again initially graded VS, this route is now E1 5A, and still regarded by some as a right handful. It had a very big reputation and I recall that in the early 70's it was somewhat neglected (i.e. you rarely saw anyone doing it!) I climbed it in 1971 and found it scary with very poor protection, a situation that has not really changed!

These three climbs were the early new-route experience, of someone who was to become a great rock climber, with fine routes to his name all over Britain. By all accounts Hugh didn't like limestone much, but these three efforts at Avon are of great quality and boldness and are well worth a visit. This type of climbing with poor protection was gently pushing the way forward in 1952-1953, and to quote Ed Ward-Drummond in 1968:

"Many XS climbers have failed to make Central Buttress their first Gorge VS."

Back at home in Crosby for vacations Hugh also began a long association with Helsby, working his way through the classics and adding a few of his own. However it wasn't all hard climbing, there were some lighter moments....

Barrie Page:

Hughie and I were students at Bristol University in the early fifties. Whilst we accomplished together a number of climbs that were possibly impressive for that era of rather sparse protection, the following episode was definitely not one of them! It happened on a drizzly evening during which we had several ideas, only one of which was good, namely, to go to the pub. On emerging from the pub, in the dark, the next idea was certainly unsound – to go to the Milestone Buttress and nip up a climb called Soapgut, a route not that easy on a dry day. You could say we were in good spirits and I set off from the first belay. Hughie, whilst paying out the rope, thought that a few choruses of “Ring the Bell Verger” would be helpful. And indeed it would have added to the jollity but unfortunately his singing was accompanied by bell-ringing actions. I, at the sharp end, found the gravity of the situation becoming increasingly tangible and descended - appropriately like the clappers - in a technical manoeuvre known as the uncontrolled slither. We retreated across the road to Glan Dena, the MAM hut, and although we were students at an institute of advanced learning, we had not yet mastered difficult words like ‘responsibility’. Thus our third idea, this one definitely bad, was to emulate Marley’s Ghost and enter the hut shaking our ironmongery and making highly unseemly noises. We found that our hosts at the hut, the august body of the MAM, were in less good spirits than ourselves and as a consequence, both Hughie and I received, quite rightly of course, a lifetime ban from Glan Dena. Sadly, Hughie has now completed his sentence, but I will always remember the humour and fun of being on the crag with Hugh Banner.

National Service 1954 to 1956 near Wolverhampton saw more frequent visits to Wales and other mountain areas.

Derek Walker;

In Wales after working through Peter Harding’s routes in the mid 1950s he made the third ascent of Cenotaph Corner in 1956, and then began to repeat some of Joe Brown’s hardest Cloggy routes, starting with the second ascent of Diglyph in the same year. In that era of myth and lack of knowledge Hughie was the first to break through that psychological barrier of the Rock and Ice climbs, and after early repeats of climbs like The Grooves , White Slab or the East Buttress Girdle was frequently heard to say in his precise nasal drawl “Well, what’s the hardest climb in Wales now then?”

Earlier on, at his local crag , Helsby between 1952 -54, he had climbed all the existing routes in the Carsten Guide, and created many of his own (all carefully annotated in his newly found guidebook). Five years later, when back in the area he dramatically upped the standard with fierce climbs like Crumpet Crack and Gorilla Wall, while his main contribution to gritstone climbing was Insanity on Curbar in 1958 where both Brown and Whillans had failed before him.

1959 was his finest year on Cloggy. In May he made the first big non Rock and Ice route since John Streetly’s ascent of Bloody Slab in 1952 by climbing Gecko Groove, but in October his defining moment came with the ascent of Troach, very bold, poorly protected and the first climb to encroach onto a blank wall. It was a great step forward and the climb has maintained its high reputation.

That was really the high point of Hugh’s climbing career. Work took him away from the Northwest to Wiltshire and then to Northumberland, where again he impressed the locals and upped the standards with many new routes on the sandstone like Thunder Crack and the Trouser Legs.

There were many other notable ascents as well; Rowan Tree Slabs climbed with Jim

O'Neill the day after the White Slab ascent, Craig a Bhanchair Wall (never Carnivore to Hugh), Crosstie on Dinas Mot climbed on the day of the first Welsh Dinner. He always put his success on Insanity down to moving one hand up to the other and maintaining balance rather than reaching through as was the instinct of the Rock and Ice stars. There was also the sensationally exposed Hand Traverse and of course that other exposed problem, the Overhanging Arête finish to the Grooves.

Richard McHardy,;

Summer 1958; in England and Wales the reputation of the Rick and Ice Club and Brown and Whillans in particular was more than legendary, it seemed unassailable at least to the likes of us. We were spending our short holidays in the Pass dossing under the Cromlech boulders. Dave Sanders had been taking me and Al Parker up a few VS's. Then Phil Gordon had taken me up Spectre. He was an inspiration, more because of his personality, mad as a hatter, always happy and immensely strong. Phil was not going to break the Brown myth, rather he could have produced one of his own. Several days after my Spectre trip Phil was doing an early ascent of the Grooves, it was pissing down and we were watching progress through Les Brown's binoculars sheltering under the Grochan. Belayed by one of the Smoker brothers Phil took several falls as he battled with the soaking wet moss. To break the myth it needed someone who would seem, at least on the surface, more normal.

Then Banner appeared from the South West. His slightly posh, high pitched voice was very different from what seemed the norm for the hard men, whether from South or North of the border. Of course it had not always been like this but we were too young to know and anyway a war had changed the past. He rode a big Vincent and seemed more approachable than most of the people who had a reputation as 'name' climbers. Not long after his appearance he did the Grooves with Barlow and a mystery man called John Sutherland. After this ascent Hugh did the first ascent of the Overhanging Arête finish with Jim O'Neill, a member of a gang from Liverpool who were friends of ours. The date for this ascent in the guide book seems to my memory a bit early. Hugh must have spied the line on his ascent of the Grooves with Barlow and Sutherland.

Hughie did more routes with the Liverpool bunch. Gecko Groove on Clog with Bob Beasley who was wearing old klettershoes held together with a leather strap. I remember watching Hughie doing what was probably the second ascent of Shrike, hanging from a spike; he had Jim tie a bunch of line slings on the rope and then pulled them up to himself. At the time the route must have had lots of small flakes and he had run out of runners. For a time we would meet at the Hanging Gate on our way home from Derbyshire. The landlord must have taken us all for Bikers as big machines roared into his car park. Maureen, who became Hugh's wife, would sometimes be there. He was always encouraging with advice, telling us how Brown fed his myth with disinformation as to the true grade of many of his routes. From the point of view of Brown's iconic status this was pointless but for us it made any proposed ascent of a Brown route intimidating.

In 1970 I was doing the Skull on Cynr Las with Lyn Noble. Behind came Tut, Dave Little and Ed Birch. Lyn had to leg it back to the Lakes and his work. The others and I were regular mates and all in the same car so instead of hanging around I set about soloing the Grooves before they topped out on the Skull. Contrary to the history section of the Guide Book, I had done the climb before, in 1962 with Les Brown. The second pitch which had contained the crux was easier, the crack was clean.

The grass ledge under the arête was safe, if I called “help” would they hear me or maybe they were already on their way down. With a sight solo of Woubits and countless other solo ascents behind me this should be OK but without a rope the pitch looked entirely different than it had in 1962. To Hugh Banner in 1958 it must have appeared truly horrendous. As everyone who has done the route knows, after a reasonable wall above the grass ledge, the way traverses out to some large flake holds on an overhanging arête. Banner obviously would have had a couple of sling runners on these flakes but even so a fall from above would have left him dangling in space 400 of 500 feet above the bottom of the crag, or a thousand feet above the kettle in Ynys. Tied on with a bowline around his waist, far from the rock and with no chance of being able to be lowered off he would have been in deep shit. His crafty answer to this was to place a piton not too far above the flakes which would have kept him nearer the rock in the case of a fall. How he placed this peg is hard to imagine, it must have involved climbing above the flakes, taking a hand off to shove the peg in a crack and repeatedly climbing up and down to the flakes and with one or two hits at a time eventually getting a good placement.

At these flakes my hands were tired but it's possible to get both arms on one of them. The steepness prohibits staying there long. I had some tape tied around my waist so I threaded a quarter sling through the old rusty peg and climbed above the flakes. No holds good enough for any upward progress presented themselves so I climbed back down to the flakes. Convinced I was as good as dead it became apparent that whilst I was tied into the sling like an umbilical cord I would not have the freedom to reach any further than before, so I untied.

At first I still could not anything very good, a slight move left entailed looking at where I could place a foot, Cwm Glas was everywhere below. But the hold did appear and on top of the crag Eddy and Dave were still coiling the ropes.

My memories of Hugh Banner will never go away, and although we knew him for only a few years he gave us the confidence and knowledge to open our horizons. These were the days when sand-bagging was normal practice, it helped to keep the competition at bay, but Hughie never did this, at least not to us.

Hugh married Maureen in 1961 and moved to Wiltshire to work for Plessey. Climbing continued and in 1963 he produced with Peter Crew the “minimalist” guide to Cloggy. This guide also did much to dispel the myths and half-truths of the Rock and Ice although some of the descriptions perhaps underplayed the difficulties of the routes. Shrike which for many years had quite a reputation was “a fine steep route on good holds, the difficulty is not great”. Octo was “a good introduction to the harder cracks”. Nearly fifty years on it's surprising how appropriate these comments are, at the time they must have been an inspiration to many.

Myth demolition could have its downside though, as this possibly apocryphal story demonstrates. Discussing the first ascent of Slanting Slab in the pub Hugh said he thought Morty Smith was second on the route. When someone pointed out that it was Vin Betts he commented (not realising that Whillans was standing behind him) “Ah yes, Betts's only claim to fame” “and what's thine Banner” came the response from a disgruntled Whillans. Hugh was reported to have gone quite pale!

Arriving back on Merseyside in the '70's he formed a partnership with Derek Walker.

Derek Walker

On his return to Merseyside in the mid '70s I began to climb with him regularly and we were climbing partners for the next fifteen years or so. In Hughie's view many of the great crack climbs of the '50s had been wiped out by modern protection like nuts and hexes, which enabled normal mortals to get up them rather than the elite few. Gogarth (on The Sea of the Angels!) was his special favourite for Saturday afternoon climbing while Cloggy (The Great Arbubu!) still figured highly in his priorities. Although we swung leads he usually managed to get the harder and bolder pitches and he was certainly the finest long term partner I ever climbed with.

He was, of course, a formidable solo climber, perhaps especially at Helsby where Eliminate 1 was a special favourite. He would often say to me "You know Derek, you should understand that you can recognise a VS move whether it is 10ft above the ground or 100ft". He loved "Tossing for Crowns with the Altrincham All-Stars", the regular soloing with the likes of Dave Pearce, Martin Boysen, Malcolm Howells and Nick Escourt at Helsby or on Grit. Indeed he said the Tuesday night scene was ruined when some people (including Ken W.) began to bring ropes with them!

Every year until his terrible motor bike accident in 2000 he would solo Belle Vue Bastion, probably his first Welsh VS lead in 1952, and shortly before his death he told me that the accident had actually solved the problem of when he would decide not to do it again. Fast driving, either on a big bike (Vincent in the '50s, Fireblade in the '90s) or in his Alfa was also a passion. He liked others to share the experience including his beloved cat Thomas the Good, who liked to sit on his knee with his paws on the wheel as he negotiated the bends between Ruthin and Cerrig.

When we did the Philip-Flamm in 1985 he hadn't been to the Alps since 1964 when he did the Brown-Whillans on the Blatiere, and I hadn't been since 1976, but my suggestion that we did a training route was treated with scorn. "If we do a training climb we'll be slow, frightened and tired. We may as well be slow, frightened and tired on the main objective!" That climb with Hughie was the best major route I ever did and I could not have wished for a better partner.

Hughie had joined the Club aged 22 in 1956 and was certainly our greatest star as a rock-climber in the late 1950s. With Pete Crew, the next young climber to try to demolish the Joe Brown legend, he wrote the Cloggy guide in 1963. We both became Presidents in the 1980s and he was enormously supportive of me, offering, for example, advice on how to counter Ken if he were particularly difficult or argumentative at AGMs: "There's only one way to deal with Wilson, and that's to fire 12" shells straight back at him!" He was always concerned with good climbing style and as President in 1990 was instrumental in formulating a CC policy statement to this effect.

Hugh made a number of trips to the States in this period and was always a great enthusiast of all things American. Earlier business trips had involved the compulsory rental of "fully loaded" monster American cars and he had greatly enjoyed cruising the freeways in them. In 1982 a visit to Yosemite resulted in a memorable ascent of the Nose.

Mark Vallance;

In Mountain 4 (July 1969) there is an article called *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, by Robin Wood. It is about the first British ascent of The Nose on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. It described a place that I did not then know, a route that I could not do, techniques I did not understand,

and it lit a fuse that burnt for thirteen years. Hugh Banner and I both had unfinished business on El Capitan, so when Hugh suggested that we should climb together in Yosemite I was not only pleased, but very flattered. That was in 1982 and HB was already a climbing legend of twenty years standing. He had climbed Troach, the route he will be remembered for, and the first to venture onto the blank walls between the main crack lines climbed by Joe Brown and his Rock and Ice friends when I was a callow youth of fifteen but we made a good team.

Our ascent of the The Nose in three and a half days was pretty much text book for the time. The three and a half hours that some people take today does not detract from the fact that it was the best rock climb I ever did. I think Hugh thought so too. We climbed it in cool conditions after a rain storm. My previous attempt in 1975 had been in a temperature of ninety six degrees Fahrenheit in the shade and there is no shade on The Nose. After a spell of good weather the rock smelt of urine. I had done most of the leading on the first day, which meant that I did most of the sack hauling too. I remember putting my forehead against the rock and watching the sweat running down as I used my body weight to haul the sack, and the spasms of cramp on Dolt Tower that resulted from the dehydration of that day. I had not been ready for it then, and though I was apprehensive, I knew I was ready now.

A couple of Swiss climbers had started two days before us but were well ahead when we started. The first day in the Valley, we climbed Coons Yard, a 5.9 slab on the Apron using the excuse that we should get over the jet lag before tackling El Cap. I had failed to lead this route on two previous trips to Yosemite, but this time I had a pair of Canyons and the new sticky rubber helped to bring the route down to my level. Next day we agreed that all we needed was a rack made up of two sets of Friends and Rocks but then Hugh decided that he wanted to take this special 'mascot' nut - I think it was a number five Stopper. The argument that followed nearly put an end to the whole trip. We spent that afternoon climbing the first four pitches up to Sickle Ledge where we left our haul bag and rapped down the blank slab to have a good nights sleep in our tent in Camp Four. I lay awake for hours in a cold sweat and was almost thankful when the alarm clock roused us for breakfast before getting to grips with our route the next morning.

We swung leads all the way, and without planning it, we both got the pitches that most suited us. There was one really bad moment on day one. The haul bag slammed hard into the side of the dihedral below Dolt Hole and I remember the water leaking from the bottom of the bag as I jumared up underneath it. Not only did this mean we would have lost a whole gallon of water, but depending on which plastic container had burst, probably meant that our sleeping bags, which were wrapped around the water bottles, were going to be wet. Hugh also got the dodgy aid pitch above Dolt Hole up some manky old bolts, but the Swiss were big lads and if the bolts had held them, they would certainly hold Hugh. The swing into the Stove Leg Crack follows immediately and is best achieved by lowering further than at first seems enough. Hugh got it first time. Run towards the cracks, jump the dihedral and get as close to the bottom of the crack as possible. Then race back left as fast as possible to build up the swing. Then run like hell, jump the dihedral and reach the null point of the swing as you reach the bottom of the crack - the hand jam is a real sinker - then pop in a unit. I got the third pitch of the Stovelegs - which I'd climbed in 1975 - but this time I had two No. 4 Friends which I made the most of by pushing them up in front of me, and did not have to repeat the seventy foot unprotected run out from the last No.11 Hex.

We spent our first the night on Dolt Tower and our sleeping bags were not wet. As soon as we were ensconced Hugh offered me a little pill.

"What's it for" I said.

"Valium, it'll make you sleep".

And it did.

Next morning we overslept. The day started with an easy swing to reach the good jam cracks on El Cap Spire. Ray Jardine had suggested we might climb his Eagle Ledge variation which cuts out Texas Flake and the complicated swing from Dolt Flake, and as we were running late we took his advice. As luck would have it, Hugh led the unpleasant Grey Band traverse, which meant that I got to carry the haul bag, tied to my waist, whilst seconding, which Hugh would have found difficult. We were really enjoying the climb now, both relishing the climbing and the exposure as we settled in for the night at Camp 4 - and the best was still to come.

The rock above the Grey Bands is some of the best granite in the world. I had always wanted to lead the Great Roof pitch with its fantastic micro stance at the edge of all things. This three inch wide, eighteen inch long ledge offers a stance, but it was the diamond of four new 3/8" bolts that eased my mind. Also, the hauling was noticeably easier now that the bag was lighter. We were getting good at the system. Pancake Flake and perfect three star pitch following perfect pitch. We got to camp 6 early, though not early enough to get to the top that day, but who cared, this was fun. On that fine evening, relaxing at Camp 6, high up in the final dihedrals, watching the traffic pouring into the Valley for the Columbia Day Weekend, relaxing, knowing that we would top out the next day, Hugh and I discussed the possibility of him working for Wild Country, if, as he suspected, he was made redundant from the Chemical Engineering company he was then working for.

There was one uncomfortable moment at the top of the climb. I had nearly lost my little Rolli camera by being too casual while taking photos of Hugh the next morning, and when I let the haul bag go before juggling the last pitch - a pitch I had wanted to lead because I had a morbid fear of seconding it after a climber became detached from his jumars while following it, I watched the haul bag swing out under the overhang. But as I watched, it went too far - it seemed to keep on swinging as though gravity had gone berserk. I had failed to grasp the size of the rock architecture.

The final pitch fell to Hugh, but not having the local 'beta', he made the mistake of clipping all the bolts. The result was that the rope drag forced him to belay on the last few overhanging feet of the route preventing him reaching the comfortable ledges just a few feet higher. The view down, past Hugh's upturned face as I cleared the final few feet of overhanging rock is one I will always remember. We lazed around in the warm sun for too long, and when we started walking down with the brand new head torch the Maureen had given him, the damn thing wouldn't work and we spent an extra night, and a cold one at that, arriving at Camp 4 via the Yosemite Falls Trail early the next morning and dined that night in style at the Awwanee Hotel.

Hugh was almost fifty when he did the Nose so the advancing years didn't seem to be troubling him too much and he continued to be full of energy and enthusiasm. After a spell with Mark's Wild Country Hugh and Maureen moved to Wales in 1988 to establish HB Climbing Equipment. They lived in a cottage near the village of Llanrug bought as a weekend base and gradually extended and improved over the years to provide a comfortable home with a magnificent garden. HB initially operated out of a barn at the house but later as the business grew moved to a large unit on an industrial estate near Bangor. HB quickly established a reputation for manufacturing

innovative, world-class climbing equipment and provided welcome employment in the area. The success of the company came at the expense of consuming almost all of Hugh and Maureen's time and opportunities for climbing had to be snatched between breaks in the Welsh weather, visits to trade shows around the world and the day-to-day grind of running a specialist manufacturing operation in a highly competitive market.

Hugh's climbing career entered a consolidation phase, repeating old favourites and filling in the gaps. I remember arriving at Cloggy one Sunday in the late '80's to find Hugh and Malcolm Cameron half way up Sunset Crack. After a bit of banter about the combined age of their party (over a hundred, we were a three and probably less) we discovered they were heading for Taurus, a route which even now has a bit of a "rep", and was led on the day in good style by Hugh.

I started climbing with Hugh around this time although we'd first met sometime in the 70s and shared some earlier history, both being born in the same hospital on Merseyside, "several years apart" as I always pointed out. Vivid memories from this time are Hugh demonstrating the "no hands" rest on the second pitch of Nightride, an ascent of one of the Yellow Wall routes as a three with Malcolm and about the fastest trip I've ever had up the Bonny Banks in his Peugeot GTI. We also managed the first ascent of a scruffy little pitch to the right of Belle Vue Bastion which Hugh threatened to write up as the Ignominate variation but to my relief never did.

Hugh was never much for marking birthdays but for his 60th he decided that there were a couple of things he wanted to do. One was to ride his motorcycle at some illegal speed down the Helg straight and the other was to do an extremely severe rock climb. Fortunately I wasn't required for the motorbike bit which was successfully accomplished but the climb turned into an epic retreat from Mousetrap in a thunderstorm.

The pub was always one of Hugh's favourite forums, the Padarn Lake in the sixties and seventies, moving to the Heights and the Vaynol Nant in later years with many Lakes and Peak pubs in between.

Steve Andrews

Hugh was a great socialite and to that end his favourite institution was the Pub. A good night for going to the pub was Wednesday/Thursday/Friday/Saturday and on a bank holiday Sunday. Hugh would traverse from his home in Llanrug the 3 miles or so to the pub in Llanberis where he would indulge in tales of climbing, put the world to rights and drink to his maximum.

Hughes maximum was not a tank full it was but a carefully calculated amount that you could drink without risk of failing the breathalyser on the way home. This had been determined by experiment over the years, the officers of the law being always keen to oblige by making Hugh blow into the bag. Hugh had blown at least a dozen times and had never failed. Still it was always sensible to avoid contact with the officers, if it could be avoided so parking ones car in front of the pub was not a good idea, better to secrete it in a side street so as not to arouse the interests of the officers.

Then one Saturday night in the Heights much police activity was noticed, Hugh decided that a quick dash to the car was in order to avoid being seen. As he and his companion ran across the road they were caught in the lights of another police car, it was obvious that the officers would be doing a u-turn and coming back to investigate. We quickly drove off through the back streets of Llanberis coming out at the top of Goodman Street only to find that our track had been predicted and a police car met us.

There was no choice we had to turn left and go over the mountain. We drove up the

narrow winding lane and out of the village to where deserted quarries lie on each side of the road, Hugh turned to me and said, "Well at least they can't overtake us here," at which point the blue lights came on and we had to stop. We got out of the car and looked at the officer 10 yards away. His reaction was instant, "I can smell alcohol on your breath sir, I'm going to require you to provide a specimen." Hugh quietly prepared himself breathing deeply to expel as much alcoholic air as possible before the test. He blew into the machine and the officer waited but as always the result was negative.

The boot was now on the other foot as Hugh turned to the officer, "I don't believe I committed a moving traffic offence officer, can you tell me why you stopped us please?" It's rather difficult to commit a breach on a narrow country lane and the officer knew it, looking to the left he peered into the huge deserted quarry, looking to right he peered into a second huge deserted quarry then turned to Hugh and said "We have a lot of burglaries round here".

Ian Lowe

To know and to climb with Hugh in the '90s was a privilege. He was getting older but still a very capable climber: I was as good as I was ever going to be so we made a fair match. Hugh was fully committed to his new business – HB Climbing – and a six and a half day working week was quite common but there were many good climbs as well.

At Tremadoc on Neb and Wasp Hugh demonstrated his superb hand-jamming techniques; at Gogarth he was in his element on routes like Resolution, Strike, Needle, Nightride and Aardvark, although one day in the company of "Smiler" Cuthbertson Energy Crisis resulted in total exhaustion for all of us.

But the most memorable days were in Ogwen; soloing Hope to go on to climb Original Route, Continuation Crack and then Grey Arête in the late afternoon sun. Alpha, Lot's Groove and Hawk's Nest Arête, then yes, why not, Bochlwyd Eliminate on the way back to the road. Soloing up to Terrace Wall to repeat Belle Vue Bastion was one of his favourites and became an annual event. Soloing on Carnedd y Filiast; Hugh – "no point in a rope here, there's nothing to belay on". Hugh always talking, whether climbing, walking with our dogs Fido and Spot, or at the bar in his favourite pub. Pet subject were naval battles and military campaigns; USA v EU (Hugh so Pro-US, me the Europhile) and he was always engineering detail by redesign or modification, once going back to the factory to remake a bent friend after a fall on Nexus.

During these years we also enjoyed one or two good winters, Hugh discovering that modern clothing and gear made winter climbing almost enjoyable when the neve was perfect and the skies were blue.

Then there was the motorcycling – Hugh, "my wrists are painful so I'll take it easy going home" – only to see him disappear at some highly illegal speed not to be caught again before home – but that's another story.

Hugh in the nineties provided many happy memories.

Derek has already mentioned the motorcycle accident in 2000 that cost Hugh a leg and reduced mobility for the rest of his life. An earlier accident in 1957 had resulted in a fractured skull and kept him out of climbing for a year. Hugh never allowed his disability to trouble him too much and rode an adapted bike until very recently as well as continuing to run HB until retirement

in 2005 and maintain an active social life. Walking the dog around Penmaenmawr Mountain became the preferred exercise and he often said that Fido would grow one leg longer than the other if he didn't reverse his route occasionally. Many will remember him from this period propped against the bar in the Vaynol Nant (he never liked to sit down in pubs) telling climbing tales going back to the early fifties, before many of his audience were born. A lifelong interest in military history often produced an Adam Hart-Davis style lecture on the lessons learnt from an obscure naval battle in the 17th Century and how they could be applied by the (always hopeless) Government of the day. Most people preferred the climbing stories. Not given much to marking anniversaries he'd always promised a celebration of his three-score-and-ten years and what became known at the allotted span party was enjoyed by a large group of friends.

One of his last outings was the Annual Dinner in March 2007 this year which he greatly enjoyed and where he was able to meet and chat with many old friends and make a few new ones.

I shared a pot of tea with him a week before he died and we talked about climbing. The Gogarth guide book controversy, his ascent of the Nose on El Cap, the mural at Cwm Glas Cottage. He was pleased to have seen the rope-grab that he recently developed through to production and spoke of future engineering projects and plans for the garden. He was confident that he would recover from what he saw as some minor complications arising from the recent radiotherapy and looked forward to getting out and about again although recognising that his time was short.

Editor's footnote

The fact that a number of his close companions over the years have each wanted to share their individual memories of Hugh, speaks volumes for the man, not just as a climber but as a warm and colourful friend.

In the late 60s and early 70s the harder routes in The Pass and Cloggy were mandatory rites of passage for any aspiring young climber, and I was no exception. Along with various other southwest ne'er-do-wells, I would make infrequent raids into North Wales, pick a Brown/Whillans classic on Cloggy or the Cromlech, cruise (euphemism for struggle) up it and head back down to the seaside. Once safely across the border, we boasted amongst ourselves that routes such as The Corner, Vember and White Slab were overgraded 'paths' compared to any of our homegrown extremes. One weekend we tried Troach. It was a very subdued and respectful team who drove back south with their tails between their legs! For us Banner was the myth not the myth breaker, and a successful ascent of any of his routes carried much more weight in our small circle than a Rock & Ice special. I only met him briefly, and never got an opportunity to tell him how much his routes meant to me. Now, sadly, it's too late, but his climbs survive and for that alone both I, this Club and climbers everywhere have cause to be grateful.

David Young 1929 (1947) - 2002

David Young was born on 5th September 1929 and died on June 12th 2006 of a heart attack. He moved from Hounslow via Blackpool to Earls Court in 1942. He once told me of a conversation he had with his Mother during an air raid. Two incendiary bombs had crashed through the ceiling of their flat and were burning holes in the carpet. A stirrup pump and a bucket of water were assembled and, with the rising flames threatening to engulf the room, David was asked: "Would you like to pump or spray dear?" - David retained that kind of unflappable courtesy all his life. Three years ago he had a hip replaced, allowing him to start taking walks again, although climbing was by then a thing of the past. In April he had a knee replaced and was recovering extremely well.

For many years he and Gill spent most of the Summer months at their cottage in Scotland at Bettyhill in Sutherland, walking, cutting peat, taking the odd dram and putting the world to rights with their many friends. Before he died he had quietly arranged with his eldest Grandson that, wearing Highland dress, he would pipe David's coffin from the cemetery gates to the graveside, a most moving and memorable occasion.

David joined the Club in 1947 with the support of Wilfred Noyce and Rear Admiral Lawder. He had spent his Service years in the Navy as a Stoker and told me that he owed his survival, given his very English accent, to an ability to recite lewd verse of a quality and invention that astonished his messmates. He was probably rather tickled at having a Rear Admiral as one of his sponsors and even more tickled at being brought tea in his bunk by the same Rear Admiral. He was inordinately proud that another sponsor was Wilfred Noyce. During the middle 1950's he climbed extensively in Scotland, North Wales, the Dolomites and the Alps. It appears that he started climbing in about 1942 as he records that he was forced to make a very rapid descent from Prince Albert's head whilst attempting to scale the Memorial soon after he arrived in London. The policeman did not catch him "probably because he was a Special." His excuse was that there was very little else to climb in London except statues and he had to climb something!

At about this time he persuaded a school friend to go half shares in a 120 foot alpine rope and they headed for the Lakes staying in Youth Hostels and climbing anything they could find, only identifying the Needle after having seen a photograph of it on a postcard - they had not heard of Guide Books. His excursions also took him to the Southern Sandstone and to the Cheddar Gorge. At 18 National Service in the Royal Navy caught up with him and of course, he joined the Royal Naval Ski and Mountaineering Club.

My knowledge of his climbing exploits from the 1960's until we met in 1982 is very limited and I am indebted to Harry Sales for adding his recollections to this obituary and to that in last Summers Newsletter.

In 1982 or there about, I was an aspirant member standing rather nervously in Helyg.



Harry Sales said in his best loud whispery voice, "I think you might get on with this chap" indicating a figure slumped in a corner. The figure rose slowly to its feet, an event that took quite some time, and eventually blocked out most of the light. A large hand grasped mine firmly and a slightly diffident, very English baritone voice said from a point somewhere above my head, "Hello, I'm David Young". We climbed together from then onwards at many Meets and developed a serious reputation for being good at washing up. He possessed a quiet courage, exemplified by his action in driving me home after I had fallen off February Crack to deliver me, and my new crutches, to my wife and children, - and my mother-in-law.

Despite his apparent diffidence, David had very clear ideas on a wide range of issues, from what constituted appropriate Hut behaviour to the state of the environment. For many years he worked regularly with the Lower Mole Countryside Volunteers and when he and Gill moved from Hersham to Cranleigh in 2002 he continued to work with this local group.

He disliked driving, probably because his feet and the pedals did not really get on, so he navigated and I drove, a model we followed on the mountains, except that his feet were happier and he didn't need driving. We attended Richard Huddy's Meets as often as possible and had memorable excursions into the magnificent countryside around Helyg, more often than not in exhilaratingly appalling weather. Helyg remained the model of the Ideal Hut for him- he did not like other, more 'civilized', environments, believing that the simple ethos of Helyg was closer to the spirit of the pastime of climbing. He was not competitive in any sense and was simply interested in the problems that a particular climb posed us - however, I think that a good day out in the hills was always his primary objective.

David was a wonderful companion for at least three reasons - he knew the route of every climb I was ever likely to attempt, he had a serious aversion to spending money and he brought me a cup of hut tea every morning whilst I was still in my sleeping bag. Whenever David and I drove up to Wales or Derbyshire he was always a little concerned when Harry Sales came too. Harry liked eating and drinking in "decent", and therefore, "expensive", pubs, whereas David's natural financial caution directed us towards a transport caff at the luxury end or the "Happy Eater" chain at the other. Whilst still on the subject of food, we used to frequent Pete's Eats and on one occasion retired there after a particularly wet and grubby climb to ponder the experience and drip on the floor. David decided that he needed to change his shirt before we went on to a Club function, an AGM perhaps. He stood up, stripped to the waist, dug out a cleanish shirt from his sac (he had planned ahead!), hauled it over his head, tucked it into his damp trousers, sat down and resumed his meal - of course nobody took the slightest notice.

When he started climbing, safety equipment was a hemp rope, a sling or two and nailed boots, certainly not a major industry, and the lead climber simply did not fall off! As we creaked our way past 60, enthusiasm undiminished even if ability was, any new equipment that might keep us going at V Diff level was taken seriously - everything else was mere vanity - although he did once have more than one look at a pair of Joe Brown's excruciatingly pink and black, appallingly patterned cotton trousers and always regretted that he had not bought them.

One of the traits that endeared him to me was the ability to set out for a days climbing with a couple of sandwiches, perhaps an apple, various bits of chocolate, possibly some mint cake plus a thermos and the odd jersey or waterproof in his sac. We would spend half an hour or so ambling to the foot of a climb. We would sit down, look round at the landscape, look at the rock, have a swig of tea, peer at the rock again. After we had finished bemoaning

the state of education, he would start to tell me affectionately scurrilous anecdotes about other members of the Club, recount events from his very extensive knowledge of the history, literature and poetry of climbing, and even break into verse, often extremely and hilariously rude. During these mini histories etc. various bits of chocolate would be consumed and more tea drunk. Eventually we would decide that it was lunchtime and that meant eating the sandwiches. Having accomplished this a siesta was necessary for one's digestive system. This usually took us to well past two and, "well there is only time to do such and such a route on this face – or we could go round the corner to look at – ". On other days we stood together at the bottom of some magnificent piece of Welsh rock, slowly and carefully checking our kit, before setting off on another wonderful adventure, watching out for each other and trusting each other's judgement. He masked his experience and serious purpose with an almost Edwardian diffidence. This courteous reticence led me to cook him spaghetti Bolognese as a treat for years until I discovered quite recently that he really did not like it – he preferred a good fry up.

One winter we decided to walk round the Snowdon Horseshoe. The snow was deep and it was very cold; the sky was a bright blue. As we passed the frozen lakes by the Pyg track the slope in front of us that leads up to the summit ridge glittered in the sunshine, - it glittered enticingly. A few exploratory knee-deep stamps showed that the snow was firm and would not slide. Ice axe in hand, I set off slowly straight up the slope, kicking steps as I went, and David followed. It was an exhilarating climb. It was not a "serious" climb – we did not do "serious" – but it was unforgettable. We reached the top of the slope; the sparkling, frost-encrusted ridge led up to the summit on our left. We were just below the undersides of the broken clouds and shafts of late afternoon sunlight turned distant Anglesey into a moving patchwork of brilliant, glittering snow and long, intense shadows. We stood silent, and gazed in wonder at that magnificent sight for a long time; I will never forget standing by his side, sharing a unique companionship that did not need words. He enriched my life.

David Weaver

Harry Sales writes:

David Young was a gentle giant. He was an excellent companion, which meant a lot as our journeys together from Surrey to CC meets were on the long side. The sandstone rocks of the southeast were closer and Swanage, a favourite of his was not too far. And then there was the occasional trip to the Alps, on one of which David acquired a touch of frostbite in his fingers on the Matterhorn: he found his gloves later in one of those wicker food baskets in the hut. The general feeling of travelling and climbing with David was not one of outright hilarity but of good humour and fun. He was extremely generous with his time and help: he and Gill were particularly helpful when Pat and I were setting up house together. Pat also really appreciated his help when she was stuck in a chimney on Stone Farm Rocks. David got underneath and told her to stand on his head and managed to apply the necessary upward thrust. All of which reminds me of the famous incident of Keith Lawder on the Dewerstone but as I'm not quite sure whether David was a member of the party, I will keep that for another occasion.

Funny experiences abounded whenever I was with David. He was a big man with a deep chest and so, when one rainy day, we decided to climb the Monolith Crack, he began in the lead but could only make limited progress with his upper half: off came his anorak (they were worn in those days): a little more progress but a squeeze back and off came his shirt: and a little more but not enough progress: back again and his vest comes off and then with a painful abrasion of his nipples he was through.

Again, as a tribute to his strength and helpfulness I recall a steep descent on an obscure track somewhere between Lliwedd and Y Wyddfa with Pat and our dog Fred who managed to go lame. So we unpacked David's rucksack and stuffed Fred in it, tying the top around his neck. When we got to the bottom out jumped Fred and ran along the track; had he done it out of devilment?

What David Weaver and I have said is enough to make my point that David Young was a good companion on the hills, the cliffs, the mountains and life in general.



Photo: Alan Maggs

"I was with David on VE night when he climbed the side of Admiralty Arch with the encouragement of a massive crowd of onlookers. On the way home we did the Albert Memorial - it was a very rare occasion when pretty well anything was allowed - a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Alan Maggs

Alan Roberts 1941 (2005) - 2005

This is a poem Alan wrote in 1962 when he was exploring Northern Norway as part of an RAF expedition. He told me that while sitting on a high col he was overwhelmed by the beauty of it all. **A McW**

This cairn built by hardy wayfarers
The altar.
And this grey rock
Wrought here in aeons past
My pew.
This vision of these mountains
Of snow capped bastion
And spire is His cathedral
Its stained glass window.

Al and I were born in the same week on opposite banks of the Mersey though we were not to meet until many years later, despite both starting to climb in our late teens and frequenting the same haunts - ours was the Liverpool of the Beatles era. Alan's introduction to climbing was through the local Liverpool Boys' Club, sponsored by Lawrence Holt of Holt Shipping Lines on a camp in Snowdonia, and to whom he always felt he owed a great debt as the most formative event of his future life. Some of the lads then formed themselves into a local climbing club called the 'Argonauts'. His decision to join the RAF for 5 years was a milestone in his life. Much of this time was spent in Norway where he learned to ski and also to join various exploratory expeditions, one of which nearly got him arrested behind the Iron Curtain!

Back in civvy street and now established as a mountaineer of considerable talent, Al became an instructor at Ullswater Outward Bound. He came to believe very strongly in the OB ethos and it became a guiding principle of his professional life. After then qualifying as a teacher at Charlotte Mason College, he achieved his greatest ambition which was to become a qualified mountain guide and later a ski instructor. This was followed by a period in Zambia at the Outward Bound Centre there from where he managed to make some notable ascents in Kenya during holidays.

In 1975, Al was invited to join the small Cumbrian team, organized by Colin Read to join a shoestrings expedition to Changabang where they succeeded in making the first alpine style ascent of a major Himalayan peak. Because none of the team sought publicity or fame, this first alpine style ascent has often been credited to Joe Tasker and Pete Boardman who pioneered a different route shortly afterwards. Alan told me that he got very cold towards the summit of the final ridge and had to keep moving. I was gobsmacked when I saw the slides of what he had actually soloed.

Soon after this Alan joined a small group of British Outward Bound instructors to help set up similar structures in USA, principally in Colorado. In true British tradition, they arrived with their climbing gear and a fiver! Later he worked with Paul Ross for a time in the school he set up there. When we visited Paul recently, travelling around the States and sleeping in the car in winter, he described us as 'the oldest teenagers in town'!

A further spell with Outward Bound in Scotland was followed by an attempt by Al to set up his own guiding business from Millom but he was lured to Hong Kong to work back in the sunshine with OB after a spell of bad weather. Ever the wanderer, he used his seasonal breaks to explore mountain regions in China, Vietnam and Thailand, as well as spells back in the USA and new routes in Peru. To try and gain more flexibility between

earning a living and his mountaineering aspirations Al set up his own business doing rope work maintenance on Hong Kong skyscrapers until he ran foul of the local mafia.

It was here that Alan came into contact with a young Vietnamese refugee named Loi Nguyen who had been imprisoned in an internment camp in Hong Kong for a number of years. Having taught herself English, she acted as an interpreter when Alan got permission to take some inmates of the camp out for occasional days of outdoor activities. Loi asked Al to take her to a life of freedom in Britain, which he did by marrying her and then helped her through study to a degree in economics. When she wanted to live her own life independent of him, Alan's attitude was 'I didn't take her out of one prison to keep her in another'. They remained close friends following their divorce.

Alan and I finally met in the Lakes in 2002, and the circumstances were quite unusual. Sid Clark after a day's climbing introduced me to Al. I asked him what route they had done and he replied, "Anne's Agony". This was a recent addition to Black Crag, Pike O'Blisco by Tom Walkington and myself - the name saying it all as far as I was concerned!

Now living a relatively settled life in England, Alan worked as a seasonal instructor at Bowles Outdoor Centre where he had done spells before and who have a similar ethos to Outward Bound, as well as working as a guide and ski instructor in various parts of the globe in the winter months. I was able to observe at Bowles his particular rapport with children, especially those with any kind of special needs with whom his boundless enthusiasm, patience and sense of fun worked wonders. You could always find him easily on site there – just follow the children's laughter and singing. Small wonder that Colin Mortlock described him as one of the finest instructors in the world. One of the things Alan is best remembered for at Bowles was a disagreement between himself and the Duke of Edinburgh over Kurt Hahn. Alan was right!

Our last winters were spent in Spain, mainly on the Costa Blanca, but also exploring other areas, including Cuenca. We had 'sussed out' a huge area of unclimbed cliffs north of Moraira and begun some new routing, with lines of many more possibilities put aside for future exploration. Sadly it was not to be. Just a couple of weeks after our return, and before Al was able to join me permanently in Threlkeld to start his own guiding business, he collapsed from a massive cerebral aneurism whilst climbing after work and died shortly afterwards.

Al has been described as one of the outstanding mountaineers of his generation. But by his many friends he will be remembered most for his friendliness, humanity, generosity of spirit, vitality and sheer enthusiasm for life which inspired so many of all ages, creeds and nationalities. A life lived and enjoyed absolutely to the full.

Anne McWatt

J W (Jim) Smith BEM 1920 (1959) - 2004

Honorary member (1981) and Count House Custodian

Jim joined the Royal Marines in 1939, serving in Africa, Burma and the Pacific. He wrote, "let's just say we had a hard but interesting war." He was with 44 commando and ended the war in China, in charge of 120 Japanese prisoners. At his funeral I spoke to an old soldier who was sitting behind me, wearing a mass of medals, who made it clear that the war in Burma was very tough.

At the end of the war Jim joined the War Office mountain school on the Austrian/Italian border and in 1959 joined the Commando Cliff Assault Wing as a mountain warfare instructor. Jim was an interservice boxing champion and captain of the Royal Navy (Great Britain) association football team.

In 1954 Jim was a founder member of the RMFVR, St Ives. He trained hundreds, even thousands of boys and young men in rock climbing and mountaineering and for this work he received the BEM in 1963, when he was officer commanding the unit – a very unusual position for a QMS.

He wrote: *"On this training we had no harnesses or rack. Climbing gear consisted mainly of a waistline (usually made of Italian hemp), a steel screw gate karabiner and rope slings for belays. Most leading involved a twenty to fifty foot runout, with protection being a one and a half inch manila rope over the shoulders of the second or third. Everything was climbed in tricouni-nailed boots and a good leader never fell. Imagine what would have happened if someone had dipped into a bag of chalk? He would have been laughed back to camp".* Rightly or wrongly he considered it a shade pompous to record first ascents and never bothered, but he would have climbed many in those years.

In the early 1960s he re-taught Norman Croucher to climb. Norman had booked some instruction but had failed to mention that he had lost both legs until Jim was driving him to the climb. Jim's reaction was typical: "I've always found legs to be very handy when you're climbing, but we'll see what you can do." Croucher went on to climb in the Alps, the Himalayas and the Peruvian Andes, including an ascent of Cho Oyu at 26,906 feet.

I first met Jim in 1952, learning to climb with the Royal Marines Cliff Assault Wing in Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. Much later, in the 1980s and 1990s we teamed up again with his great friend in St Ives, Cyril Bennetts to run day-courses as an introduction to rock climbing for school children, based at Halldrine Cove, near Bosigran. Jim devised a perfect adventure day, with an introductory talk, exciting though safe climbing and great stories over packed lunch on a grassy sward overlooking the cliffs and sea. At the end of the day Jim, then around 75, would run up the hill to put on the kettle for tea at the Count House and we would toil up after him.



Above: Jim Smith BEM at The Count House in front of the MRC plaque he worked hard to get installed. The original suggestion that the Hut should become a Rescue Post was made by Jim's predecessor Admiral Keith Lawder. The coastguards (trained by Jim) subsequently took responsibility for all cliff rescue operations but the plaque remains in the hut.

Photo : Toni Carver

One day, having run all the way up as usual, he had a blackout and had to be helicoptered to hospital. Mary, his wife for some fifty years, put her foot down and told him to hang up his climbing boots, which he did forthwith. However, some months later my wife Jane and I were preparing to climb Commando (Bosigran) Ridge when Jim appeared out of the blue, attired in blazer, flannels and highly polished shoes. I asked him what the bottom pitch was like, not having done it for forty years. "I'll just nip down and show you" he said, and proceeded to lead the first pitch in his shiny shoes, brought me up and then said "Must go now – you should be OK from here."

Well, he has gone now and we are OK with the memory of a gentle, humorous man, a great climber, passionate instructor throughout, with wonderful enthusiasm and a marvellous zest for life.

My thanks to John Atherton, CC (picture), Mike Jones CC, Toni Carver, St Ives Times and Echo and Hayle Times, and Norman Croucher for a great deal of background information.

Peter Cullinan

Iain Peters writes:

1966 was a good year for revolution, and as I couldn't get to California, West Penwith seemed a reasonable alternative. £10 a month as a student teacher in a run-down Penzance Secondary Modern did wonders for my socialist beliefs but didn't buy much food or provide a roof over my head. Jim came to the rescue, and I became a strictly unofficial, resident assistant custodian. Jim would appear once or twice a week with pots of paint, hammers, nails, a box of food and, best of all, a packet of Players! I arrived in January and until Easter few climbers came to stay, so I had the big house to myself for weeks on end, painting my way from room to room. A one man rebellion was a lonely business and I looked forward to Jim's visits. He was never judgemental, condescending, or critical: I think his innate kindness together with his wartime service must have given him an understanding of the fragilities of human nature in general, and young people in particular, that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

At a time when, like many of my contemporaries, I was inspired by the anti- Vietnam War protest movement in the States, Dylan, Woodstock, and CND here in Britain, Jim even managed to recruit me into the St Ives detachment of the RMVR! Tuesday nights in the Drill Hall finished up with a run in heavy boots up and down the steep, narrow streets (and back gardens!) with the last man at the bar buying the round. Then there were the training days on the greenstone of Gurnard's Head, bouldering in nails, ideally suited to the small incut edges, with Jim leading us round his favourite circuits. Although he was an extremely competent climber, he was not so interested in putting up new routes himself as in motivating others. It was whilst walking back to the Count House after one of these sessions that I peered over the cliff edge and found myself looking down an impressive, bottomless corner. There was a big sea running and the waves were exploding halfway up the crag. It looked bloody desperate, but so was I and told Jim about my 'find' as well as my doubts as to whether I could climb it. His response was that I'd never know unless I tried. So I did and after our successful ascent of the spectacularly straightforward Right Angle, he was as pleased as if he'd discovered and climbed the route himself.

For Jim, like both his predecessors, (and his two successors, Dennis Bateman and John Atherton), the Count House was far more than just temporary accommodation for climbers,

and whenever he had a spare moment he would be out there, either making running repairs or improving the facilities. It was Jim who started the process of transforming the place from a comparatively spartan and quite dark establishment, full of *"ghoulies and ghosties and long leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night"*, as the Cornish prayer would have it into the bright and welcoming home from home it is today. Through his St Ives business connections, he acquired comfortable furniture and fittings, modern gas stoves that weren't covered in layers of hardened grease and even such luxuries as showers and a hot water system that actually worked.

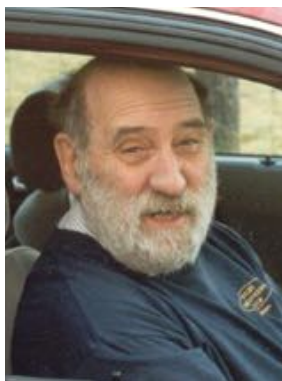
Sometimes, if the March sun was shining over Bosigran Head we would down tools and jog down to the Main Face to solo Jim's favourite enchainement of the classics; up the first pitches of Anvil Chorus, then the Andrew chimney, down Ledge Climb, and finish up Doorway or Doorpost. I was young and very fit, and these were all standard fare technically as far as I was concerned, but keeping pace with Jim, over three times my age, as he moved effortlessly up and down the rock was a real struggle.

On another occasion in early summer, a truckload of SAS turned up for three or four days of instruction; Jim regularly used his extensive military connections to fill up the hut during the week. The following morning I was detailed to take them all down to the Alison Rib area and commence the usual preamble of tying on, belaying and so on until Jim arrived. I decided to get them practising on the boulders and small buttresses of the Landward Cliff. Within minutes half a platoon of Britain's finest were spreadeagled ropeless across the Main Face from Suicide Wall to Big Top shouting the odds to each other and generally showing a gleeful disregard for most of the traditional protocols of climbing. With no support forthcoming from the CO, who was himself grappling with the first technical difficulties on Little Brown Jug, I was beginning to think that I was somewhat surplus to requirements when Jim turned up and spent the next hour shepherding his unruly flock back to relative safety! Those were the days, long before MLTBs, SPAs, H&S and all the other acronyms that a fearful society can hide behind, when climbing was about trust, and the sheer joy of movement, and Jim's genius at getting this message across was an inspiration to so many.

Sennen was another of his favourite crags. Once he had got his instructors and students safely ensconced on their routes, he would spend his time traversing backwards and forwards offering advice and practical guidance wherever necessary, inspiring confidence even in the most nervous. His end of day party trick was the desperately slippery low tide traverse of the breakwater. He probably knew every limpet and crab by name! He certainly knew where the tiny incuts, so essential for progress, lurked beneath the green slime seaweed. Those following often found themselves heading into deep water in more ways than one.

Ian Wall, in a CCJ article about the Count House, described it as "the jewel in the crown" of Club huts and Jim, only the third custodian in forty years, (it's now just five in seventy!) was an inspired choice as its keeper. More than that, he was a gentleman in every sense of the word and a true friend.

Peter Cullinan's obituary notice was inadvertently omitted from the 2004 -5 edition of the Journal



Professor Keith Miller 1932 (1957) – 2006

The environment in which the Rugby Mountaineering Club was formed was not unlike that on a high mountain ascent. Friendships were paramount to bring a successful conclusion to the establishment of a safe and well-supplied base camp. The ascent was accomplished in good and bad weather, with the route frequently being modified as insurmountable difficulties either necessitated a partial descent or a traverse.

Keith went to Rugby in 1956 after the English Electric Co. had promised him a job at Whetstone near Leicester and also agreed to three months leave of absence to participate in a 1957 Karakoram Expedition to be led by Eric Shipton. The events leading up to the latter probably cost him his job for he was transferred to Rugby after completing some five weeks pre-Himalayan training in the Swiss Alps.

Early in 1957 his EE Co. bosses gave him permission to go to London to 'fight', as the newspapers of the time put it, 'McCarthyism in the UK'. Hansard faithfully recorded the events inside Parliament but only hinted at his personal turmoil as he was shuttled between different Government departments and Embassy officials seeking reasons as to why he was denied an entry visa to Pakistan. The local Rugby MP James Johnson plus others including Barbara Castle, James Callaghan et al eventually won the day and the visa was granted.

His first expedition was with the Imperial College Siachen Expedition in 1957 and could not have been bettered. As he walked down the valleys towards home his mind turned to the possibility of forming a mountaineering base in Rugby or possibly Coventry. Although he thoroughly enjoyed his research work with the EE Co. he was forced to resign due to work he had completed on the failure of turbine blade lacing wires being published without his knowledge or acknowledgement of his role or authorship. He had also been severely reprimanded for including the cost of a bottle of wine on a hotel bill having worked continuously for 3 or 4 days with little or no sleep and having completed a successful on site investigation over an Easter shut down.

Several Karakoram lectures followed and brought him into contact with many ramblers and mountain walkers but few climbers; none in Rugby itself, so the search began in earnest. It was about this time he joined the Climbers' Club and although the Clubs' address list gave no immediate clues he chanced upon the Midland Association of Mountaineers and the name of Mike Shaw was revealed. At the same time he met up with Nelson Watkins, an apprentice at the EE Co. who was also in one of his classes at the Rugby College of Engineering Technology where in 1958 he became a full-time teacher.

He and Watkins planned a summer trip to the Alps and decided to enlist the assistance of apprentices at the nearby British Thomson Houston Co. Circulars were distributed and on the appointed day in 1958 several people gathered amongst whom were Pip Hopkinson and Robin Prager, later to make their marks with the CC.

A senior figure was needed to bring respectability to the embryonic club and to give witness to the legitimate formation of a club wanting a bank account. Problems of

transportation to the hills, equipment, recruitment and evening meetings were added to the agenda and David Edmundson agreed to be the first President. At about this time he became friends with Sir Hubert Rance an ex-roving ambassador for the Government who agreed to be the Patron of Keith's 1960 Soltoro Expedition to the Karakoram. The organisation of which was centred on the local Rugby college as four members including John Tyson, formerly a housemaster at Rugby school, lived abroad and David Haffner, a leading rock-gymnast from Coventry had a postal address in North Wales.

The nucleus of the RMC was now well established. Robin Prager decided wisely to go off to the Alps and learn to climb ice properly while Keith led a youthful Cec Burton at 46 up his first rock climb. Crackstone Rib remained a cherished memory.

Returning from Pakistan in 1960 after an unsuccessful attempt on a peak designated K12 he found that mountaineering was hindering his professional career and so went to Nigeria to seek pastures, and mountains, new.

Keith returned from West Africa to take up an appointment at London University where he repeated his earlier efforts of 1955 to form an Expeditions Society at Queen Mary College. In all he was involved in no less than 18 expeditions, a number of which took him to Greenland and the Staunings Alps but the 1980 Royal Geographical Society International Karakoram Project became a truly international affair which among others had Paul Nunn doing filming and Radar Ice Depth Soundings. Much of this resulting in his account 'Continents in Collision' (1982) a well respected reference work. He was awarded the Founders Medal of the RGS.

In 1988 he joined an RMC meet based on Fallcliffe Cottage near Hathersage. His wife Catherine had baked an enormous steak and kidney pie for the Saturday evening meal. My recollection of that Saturday was that the mists were down and quite thick with visibility down to something like 30 yds. Our leader was not impressed, he knew Kinder like the back of his hand, so the plan was to circumnavigate the summit plateau. We set out from the Snake Inn and all followed like sheep paying little regard to maps and compasses, and relying on Keith's knowledge of the terrain. When rocky features failed to fit, familiar doubts as to our position crept in. At length, a consultation resulted a course correction and we set off across many groughs and hags until we emerged from the mists only to discover we were not far from our start point after all. We had walked in a complete circle, but not the one intended. A classic tale of rambling on Kinder in thick mist. Keith was nonplussed. However, ahead lay Catherine's pie. It was odd that he could organise major expeditions to remote corners of the globe but could not find his way round his own back yard!

His health after retirement declined and following major heart surgery the onset of cancer in the blood brought about his end. His legacy was vast, starting with the establishment of the RMC and going on to organising expeditions, glaciology, surveying and geomorphology and respected works on fracture mechanics.

Dave Atchison



Peter R J Harding 1924 (1949) - 2007

Honorary member 1996

In the half-decade following the end of the Second World War two contrasting men vied for the unofficial title of 'Best British Rock Climber'. In the Lake District the undisputed star was the gifted Arthur Dolphin, tall and thin, almost to the point of emaciation. Among Welsh crags and northern English gritstone it was Derby engineer Peter Harding, thick set and solidly built, with very long arms. Both men were intent on pioneering a new brand of 'extreme climbing', consistently pushing physical and mental limits beyond those achieved before. But it was Harding who would literally define the new climbing, using the term 'Extremely Severe', for the first time to describe the grade of these desperate new wave routes during his editorship of the Climbers' Club Llanberis guidebook of 1950.

Like so many influential British rock climbers, Harding honed his skills on the gritstone of the Peak District, not far from his home of Derby. Here, according to a long-standing climbers' myth, he 'invented' the modern hand-jam. In fact, Harding had more likely rediscovered a technique probably first adopted by late 19th century gritstone climbing pioneers in places such as Yorkshire's Almscliff Crag. However, like most ideas of genius, the hand-jam, which seems so intuitively obvious to climbers today, was a concept of such simple sophistication that it took someone with the analytical mind of Harding to perfect it. This was demonstrated by the time it took for many of his peers to catch on. Even after being shown the technique, many persisted with exhausting layback manoeuvres or, even worse, followed the exhausting and inelegant textbook suggestions of the day which advocated climbing vertical cracks by forcing fingers and palms onto opposing walls of the fissure as though attempting to part extremely heavy sliding doors. In the end, it is said Harding resorted to stunts to prove the efficacy of his technique, holding a lit cigarette between his fingers while he jammed smoothly up fearsomely steep gritstone cracks.

Thus armed with his 'secret weapon', plus the newly available ex-War Department karabiners and slings made from new-fangled nylon, Harding started 'testing the limits of their tolerance' as the young engineer himself might have put it. He announced his arrival with his ascent of Promontory Traverse (E2 5b) at Black Rocks near Cromford in 1945, cycling 'uphill most of the way' the 15 miles from his home. It was a major landmark in the sport. At the time of its ascent Promontory Traverse was one of the hardest routes led on gritstone, involving highly technical friction climbing and a dynamic move. Nowadays protectable with modern camming devices, in 1945 the only dubious protection came from an improvised metal hook that Harding, then a young engineer at Rolls Royce (where he had become friends with, and highly influenced by, the great inter-war climber Ivan Waller), had designed and manufactured himself.

Emboldened by his success at Black Rocks, Harding, with his fellow Derby climbing partner Tony Moulam, went on a route-bagging spree in North Wales, repeating most of the test-pieces of the era in nailed boots or, when it was raining - in socks.

The young men were nevertheless running considerable risks. Protection equipment, taken for granted today, was rudimentary to the point of insignificance. A fall could easily

mean death and in 1946 Harding had a hair's-breadth escape while attempting to make the first repeat what was then arguably the hardest climb in the country, Suicide Wall (E2 5b) in the Ogwen Valley.

"Some fair way up I made a silly mistake", he recalled. "I mantleshelfed, intending to slip my toe into a small hold... but the toehold wasn't there! With a hand push I leapt backwards, turning half-about in mid-air, to make a splendid three-point landing. Tony tightened the rope at touchdown and there was no bounce. But I ate my lunch standing up: 30 feet is farther than it looks."

Undeterred, the tyros headed for the ferocious Yorkshire gritstone crag of Almscliff. Here, Harding made his second ascent of Great Western (HVS 5a), then one of the sternest tests on gritstone and still far from being a pushover even with modern gear. His joy was somewhat tempered by the fact that his Lakeland rival (and originator of the climb), Arthur Dolphin, followed them solo – in nailed boots. "I realised afterwards that we had experienced competitive climbing for the first time", remembered Moulam.

In response Harding's new routes in 1946 included the incomparable Suicide Wall, (HVS 5b) at Cratcliffe Tor in the Peak District – an exposed, strenuous and intimidating route even today and an extraordinary leap into the future given the laughably inadequate protection equipment of the late 1940s. "We had not yet been brainwashed about safety or Tarbuck knots, and anyway our cotton or plaited hemp ropes would have broken under the impact of the slightest fall. So we had decided that peeling off was not on", remembered Tony Moulam of the stakes the lead climbers played for. Courage and confidence were the climber's best safeguard on such routes. The same year Harding also climbed Valkyrie (HVS 4c) at the Roaches in the western Peak – a route now accepted as one of the all-time classic gritstone climbs.

Now armed with a motorbike Harding literally and metaphorically stepped on the gas and set forth to conquer Welsh climbing. In 1947 he climbed the breakthrough route of Spectre (then 'XS', now HVS 5a) on Clogwyn y Grochan, followed by Ivy Sepulchre (E1 5b) on Dinas Cromlech, two austere cliffs on the north side of Llanberis Pass. They were among the hardest routes in the area for the remainder of the decade, Spectre repulsing all attempts to repeat it (sometimes viciously) until 1949. (Harding emphasised his superiority by making the second ascent solo in 1948).

In 1948 Harding continued his Welsh campaign on Clogwyn y Grochan to create Kaisergebirge Wall (originally 'XS', now HVS 5b). The route was controversial, for, as its name hints (alluding to the part of the Austrian Alps where 'mechanically aided' climbing had first been developed), Harding employed pitons to overcome its difficulties. Although commonly deployed in continental Europe they had been shunned as unsporting by British climbers before the war. The climb was important as it showed Harding was not only one of the most technically proficient climbers in the country, but he was willing to eschew the current ethical considerations over aid and protection in order to push standards of difficulty. His example would open the doors to the eventual acceptance of limited 'pegging' in the 50s and for some years Kaisergebirge became in Moulam's words, "The test piece, a sort of bench mark, for aspiring XS leaders." Indeed, in the fifties it was probably 'the most fallen off route in the Pass'. (Later ascensionists also warped Harding's concept of limited artificially-placed protection by hammering a bicycle crank into one of the cracks below the crux. Its presence saved the necks of many a flying leader during its useful life.)

1949 proved to be the apogee of Harding's spectacular climbing career. In just two



Peter Harding in 1947. A true Vagabond.

'He never forgot concepts like 'make do and mend' which became a way of life, and within the family he was famous for refusing to embrace consumerism. If it wasn't completely worn out or broken beyond repair, there was no need to replace it!'

weeks in April he climbed 38 routes, eight of which were first ascents including the celebrated Brant Direct (HVS 5a) on Clogwyn y Grochan which involves an unrelentingly steep and sustained pitch of bridging and jamming. The latter showed just how good Harding was, and also put the kibosh on accusations that he was too fond of aid. The route had already been attempted by members of the Climbers' Club who had been trying to 'peg' their way up it for three days. As Harding approached they taunted him, saying that when it was complete it would make all his routes look like a 'Sunday School picnic'. In response he simply free-climbed it there and then. (According to the apocryphal-prone Trevor Jones, when his audience had recovered from their astonishment, they signalled their appreciation of his effort by urinating on him as he abseiled back down!)

Back in Derbyshire Harding made a short but outstandingly bold and technical route at Black Rocks, Demon Rib (E3/4 5c), the significance of which has merely increased over the years as climbers have recognised its true nature. Regarded by some as the first hard gritstone climb in the modern idiom, the climb followed thin protectionless seams and grooves on bulging grit with tenuous holds impossible to climb without a great deal of technical proficiency and confidence. Now recognised as the first climb to merit the E3 (or possibly even E4) grade it was, in the words of climbing commentator Ken Wilson, 'simply light years ahead of the game'; it would be over two decades before routes of this degree of difficulty began to be tackled by top climbers on a regular basis. (Even the legendary Don Whillans, attempting to make the second ascent, failed to climb it - and had to be rescued with a top rope thrown down by Tony Moulam.) Its ascent was all the more remarkable for having been undertaken almost nonchalantly after Harding had cycled from Burton to Shrewsbury, (where he was now a lecturer in engineering at the town's technical college), in just four hours, before motoring to Black Rocks with Moulam and leading the route in the evening - in plimsolls.

In 1950, Harding, together with co-author Moulam, brought out his highly influential guidebook to Llanberis Pass which indicated how far he had advanced the sport. Its recognition of Extreme climbs provided a spur to a new generation of ambitious climbers - such as a compact plumber from Manchester who arrived fresh from his National Service the following year. He was called Joe Brown. Together with his peers in Manchester's legendary Rock and Ice Club Brown would soon change British climbing forever with a host of breathtaking routes. Harding's brief reign at the top was over.

Harding instead concentrated on his engineering career with the Mintex brake linings company, became a successful amateur rally driver and raised a family. But the audacious climbing skills remained and he continued to climb well into his seventies when he was still capable of startling a younger generation by escapades such as his solo of the Matterhorn in the mid-1990s.

Colin Wells

Robin Prager 1936 (1965) – 2006

Honorary member 1998

Robin died in late December 2006 from Multiple Sclerosis.

He was born in Madras, in India and educated at the Bishop Cotton's High School for Boys in Bangalore. At school he was a keen athlete and on the occasion of the school sports day, the Deccan Herald of the 12th September 1949 reported:

Pragers' Brilliant Performance

'.....though no records were broken, the absence of this , was amply made up for, by the brilliant performance of a diminutive athlete R.Prager, who made a clean sweep of all the events in the sub-junior division, on the final day of the Bishop Cotton Annual Athletic Meet, held at the schools sports ground on Saturday afternoon.....'

On a separate occasion a special award was given to Robin for being the best loser, in a school boxing bout during which he held out round after round valiantly against a stronger opponant before accepting defeat with grace. This same fighting spirit was much in evidence up to the very end of his life. It was during his time at the school that he attended a lecture given by none other than Dr Howard Somervell, and which was to sow the seeds of mountain climbing and to have a significant bearing on his future sporting activities. In 1954 Robin started a Student Apprenticeship with the British Thomson Houston Company, manufacturers of electrical motors, generators, steam turbines, gears and control equipment. On completing his apprenticeship he joined the Medium Machines Engineering Department and became an electrical machine designer. It was about this time he met up with a certain Keith Miller (whose obituary features in this issue) and who was starting a Mountaineering Club and was looking for interested individuals. Robin immediately joined up and became a founding member of what was to become the Rugby Mountaineering Club (RMC). Other like minded individuals who enrolled at that time were Pip Hopkinson, Dave 'Shandy' Manderville, Russ Bloor, Eddie Rowlands (all of whom became members of the CC), Alwyn Spiers and 'Bud' Metcalfe.

Robin was very lithe and supple and most of us considered him to be 'double jointed' He could get pretty close to getting his foot on a hold alongside his ear! En route to Wales during the 50s we would stop off for refreshments at the 'Spread Eagle', a pub on the A5 and would immediately attempt the testing window ledge mantleselves to see who was on form. Such a test invariably proved to be a 'piece of duff' for Robin.

Then there were the bar tricks to be attempted following a day out on the crags. Rolling the match box end to end whilst standing on one leg was a popular one and in spite of his height his ability to shove a beer bottle half way across the bar room floor whilst supporting himself from a second bottle without touching the floor was to say the least amazing. Such evenings also involved a table traverse. Over the top, down under, then back on top without touching the floor. All good fun.

Most guys I climbed with were smokers and Robin was no exception. At first it was fags and clinging to steep walls cluttered with gear whilst manipulating cigarettes and matches required a certain dexterity. Later he switched to a pipe, the model with an aluminium



Robin and 'friend' content after a fine fettle on Flannel Avenue, Chair Ladder.

Photo: John Atherton

John Atherton writes:

I have lasting memories of climbing with Robin, mainly in Cornwall. Whenever Robin came down here we always had to do Helluva Slab at Porthgwarra before he felt his holiday had really got going and somehow the sun always shone on the occasion!

Then there was the pipe – I recall arriving at a stance on Flannel Avenue to find Robin with a broad smile and the inevitable pipe in mouth, captured by my camera for posterity. One day there was a calamity – we were gearing up amongst the boulders at the top of Commando Ridge when Robin dropped his pipe irretrievably down a crack between the enormous stones. What was he to do without that pipe to “fettle” whilst we sank our pint in the pub after the days climbing? A visit to a Penzance tobacconist soon put matters to rights. The ritual of dismantling and cleaning the pipe was a Robin thing at that period; it was fettled much more frequently than it was actually smoked! Good times remembered.

condensing tube and removeable bowl. There were tissues, cleaning rods, backy and matches, the lot. Dexterity indeed raised to new heights!

One of his early trips to the Alps was with Ian Angell and the route they completed was the North Ridge of the Blatière. It was not without incident. Towards the summit it started to snow quite heavily and descent was out of the question so an enforced bivouac was taken. A long cold night ensued, with no water and but a single bar of Kendal Mint cake for nourishment. Happily the pair got down and survived to tell the tale. This was but a start and Robin logged some wonderful Alpine seasons especially in company with Martin Harris, Roger Withers and Hamish Nicol.

Martin reminded me of several busy and rewarding seasons:

In 1964 the pair were pretty fit and managed to cram 7 routes into a three week window, chiefly in the Dolomites. The SE face direct and the Cassin SE face route on the Punta di Frida and the Preuss crack on the Piccolissima (inadvertantly increasing the grade by carrying sacks) got them started. They had a fright at the top of the Yellow Edge due to missing the correct traverse line, which resulted in the use of much doubtful rock, but put matters right with a fine ascent of the SE face of the Pilastro de Rozes. A change in the weather enabled an ascent of the Triftjigrat on the Zermatt Breithorn en route for home.

In 1968 following the Voie du Pilier on Mont Gerbier they did the Papillons ridge and Chamonix face on the Peigne. With Hamish he climbed the NW face of the Lenspitze a British first, the Bishorn/Weisshorn traverse and climbed Monte Viso. On another trip to the Pyrenees they climbed the SW pillar on the Vignemale. With Roger he climbed the north ridge on Piz Badile and the SW ridge of the Pic Nord de Cavales in the Dauphiné.

In 1969 he was invited to join a youth party led by John Hunt which visited the Tatras and apart from the climbing, which was tempered somewhat by the weather, I recall him relating an incident on the way back through Belgium. Driving Joy Hunt's Morris Traveller in very wet conditions the car rolled over on a roundabout. Luckily no one was hurt, the car was relatively undamaged and the trip was completed without further incident.

As already mentioned, he was on his day, extremely fit and could cover difficult terrain very quickly, close friends referred to him as a 'mountain goat' and he did well in several Karrimor Mountain Marathons. He also indulged in a number of Orienteering competitions which at the time were relatively novel events and of course the Dovedale Dash didn't escape his attention.

He was always enthusiastic but stopped short of being fanatical. His passion for whatever he got involved in was infectious and rubbed off on all who came into contact with him.

Mindful of this, I recall a very hot day whilst climbing at Bosigran. As we walked along the foot of the crag, an attractive lass, sunning herself, cornered Robin and requested the application of sun tan lotion. He obliged and we never heard the last of it.

For some years we attended the local college woodworking classes and his skills there extended through furniture making to wood turning. A day's climbing in Derbyshire was occasionally shortened whilst we searched out a workshop deep in the dales in order to buy tools for his newly acquired lathe.

Every Monday evening we would slake our dusty thirsts with a pint in the 'Dirty Duck' in town, in the company of several Rugby School masters. Robin's forte on such occasions was to regale the 'educators' with all manner of subjects ranging from his latest woodworking feats to Indian philosophy and the guru.

He introduced me to the Hamish Nicol/George Band annual Fishing Trip to the Scottish Highlands. This enterprise attracted a number of keen participants over the years. Newman, the Westmacotts, Simpson, Slee-Smith, Treglown, Ward, Kenny, Salisbury, Walker, Allen and others, not forgetting Bill Thomas, the Westmacotts' friend who would fly in specially from California for the trip. The party of course masqueraded as a serious bunch of climbers, and this proved to be an essential charade especially when confronted by a suspicious ghillie.

Needless to say, Robin was an enthusiastic and active member and nothing slowed him down, not even the notorious midges. His reaction to the onslaught was to don his trademark deer stalker and to light up his pipe.

Over the years we accumulated some cracking routes on remote crags, knocked off a few Munros and caught a few fish. He was in his element, no more so than leading the way up the Fiddler Buttress.

We did Boat Tundra on the Fuar, Investigator on Mainreachan, and Ardverikie Wall, The Nose on Sgurr a'Chaorachan, with 'Trig' and The Toit and A Walk On the Wild Side on Beinn a' Mhuinidh and many others.

Then there was the fishing. Typically he was seriously involved and quickly into the technical detail and skills. It fascinated me during conversation how readily he could switch from, for example, the technology associated with the design and manufacture of karibiners, matters such as sub zero creep in light weight alloys, to the tensile strength of monofilament nylon line, telescopic rods and his beloved Mepps No 2 spinner.

There was always friendly competition as to numbers and size of fish caught and he was ever ready to impart his knowledge and skills whatever the subject.

'He taught me how to fish' was an immediate reaction by Sally Westmacott on hearing the sad news.

Robin was a fine raconteur in the best sense of the word, and was blessed with an acute memory. He could bring to mind climbing exploits, months or even years later, in incredible detail. The twinkle in the eye, that endearing smile and chuckle will be sadly missed.

Between 1968 and 1981 he not only served on several CC committees but was also custodian of Cwm Glas for a while and in 1974/5 was the Hon. Secretary during Hamish Nicols' Presidency. It was during his tenure that the membership debated and voted on the motion to 'admit women to membership on equal merit'. Robin was naturally in the thick of things and contributed significantly to seeing the motion passed.

One of the Rugby Mountaineering Club members remarked that he had been actively involved with the RMC for some thirteen years during which time he had not known Robin without a walking stick. Sadly his illness was a long one and for something like 15 years Madeleine and the family coped with the growing tragedy with great fortitude. Whatever his skills and situations, Robin always regarded himself primarily as a climber.

A life lived to the full, leaving those who knew and climbed with him, many fine memories.

Dave Atchison.



Edgar Siddall 1929 (1961) - 2006

Honorary member 1978

Edgar was born in Salford in 1929, one of a family of 9 children including 5 boys and 4 girls. One of his sisters is Anne Ward originally married to Bernard Barnes who was killed whilst climbing in the Alps in the mid fifties.

Edgar's background was working class and times were hard during his childhood days and early teens, much of which took place in the 1939-45 war when the Manchester blitz was a significant factor in his life on occasions. The family lived close to an area of Salford, not far from the docks and a marshalling yard, and where the German bombing was particularly destructive.

An avid reader of books from an early age Edgar became enthralled with those describing the outdoors. In particular Alastair Bothwick's – "Always a Little Further" was a particular favourite, along with his bible, Kirkus's "Lets Go Climbing". They stimulated him, and along with a small group of Salford friends, he ventured forth by bus and train into the Peak District where initially long walks were the main interest, often sleeping in deserted shooting cabins, caves, and later in tents. They all naturally graduated to climbing on gritstone and Edgar was soon a leading light both in the small group, and amongst others they met. It was apparent that Edgar was naturally gifted with particularly strong arms, a factor that was to be significant later in his climbing career.

At the age of 18 conscription took Edgar in to the army and at this time signs of a medical problem first became apparent when he began complaining about pain in his right leg. Shortly after, whilst being transported in an army lorry, the vehicle overturned and Edgar suffered some minor damage to the leg but at the time insufficient to affect his position in the army. However whilst embarking for overseas service he slipped on the gangway and this time it was clear that a serious problem had developed. He was taken into a Southampton hospital and subsequently this was diagnosed as tuberculosis of the hip. In those days a hip replacement was not an option. Consequently a pioneering operation was undertaken resulting in the total fusion of the hip and hence for the rest of his life Edgar had no rotation available in this important joint. All of this resulted in Edgar spending approximately 15 months in hospital in Salford. He was encased in plaster from his waist to his ankle and even when discharged this encumbrance remained for some time.

However he was determined to climb again and with the help of Sherwood Wiseman, his childhood friend, and Ron Lane, they made adjustments to the footrest for the pillion passenger of a motorbike such that with a totally straight leg Edgar's heel could rest on the footrest. They then went off to North Wales where they climbed Holly Buttress on the Cromlech, this being a direct line so that Edgar was well protected from above. I doubt that the surgeon would have been impressed with the sight of Edgar with his right leg fully extended sitting on a motorbike for 100 miles, or indeed for climbing with a plaster cast from waist to ankle on the right leg.

Edgar was not at all deterred by all that he had suffered and was adamant that he intended to continue climbing. Although his clerical occupation involved a five and a half

day week he nevertheless would visit Wales and the Lake District on a regular basis, as well as his beloved Gritstone. He bought a motor bike and sidecar and treated his companions to some entertaining drives including an epic visit to Scotland where the group ended up cut off by floods in Glen Nevis and the motor bikes totally submerged. On another occasion with Sherwood Wiseman in the sidecar, Edgar failed to take the sharp right hand corner at the end of Rushup Edge road, Derbyshire, burying the motorbike into a pile of road gravel and with the passengers legs left sticking out through the front of the sidecar, luckily without serious injury.

Subsequently the Cromlech Club members' joint ownership of a decrepit Wolseley ex war department saloon changed his mode of transport, although Edgar was unable to drive it. In fact only one member had the ability to cope with the meandering steering of this car and which eventually "died" at Cae Gwyn. This inability by Edgar to drive a car was overcome later when my Father supplied him with a hand controlled Ford Thames van in which he travelled extensively for many years until automatics became generally available at a sensible cost.

I first met Edgar in the early fifties, after he had returned to the climbing scene following his operation, and he had been instrumental in the formation of the Cromlech Club. They had established a hut at Cae Gwyn, Nant Peris, above a cattle byre, a home from home to many of the Manchester and Salford climbers, and indeed others including the "trespassing" Rock and Ice. (Contrary to what has been written elsewhere, Edgar was never a member of the Rock and Ice and graduated to the Climbers Club from the Cromlech Club in 1961).

I climbed a lot with Edgar during the fifties and early sixties. He had developed a particular style to compensate for his hip disability. Step up with the left leg, transfer the weight to the stiff right leg, and then repeat the process, all aided by his exceptional arm strength. He followed me up many of the so called hard routes of the day including Cenotaph Corner, Sheaf, Spectre, The Corner, East Gully Grooves and many others. The choice of route was obviously important. Gritstone routes, with their greater need for flexibility, were generally too awkward for him.

In 1965 he was persuaded to visit the Dolomites but this proved, from a climbing point of view, to be a mistake. I took him up the Piccolissima on the Tre Cima via the Preuss route and although the ascent was no problem the descent was a different matter. In those days no harness or abseil devices were available. You simply folded a rope sling into a figure of 8, sat in it, clipped in an ordinary karabiner, (no screw gates) passed the rope through and over the shoulder and set off into the void. In some cases the single abseil piton was located below foot level making it extremely awkward to set off, even more so for someone who could not bend one leg. It was an epic getting Edgar down the multiple abseils on relatively short ropes and a bivouac was narrowly averted. He was totally shattered by the experience and vowed never again.

In 1963 tragedy struck once again. Whilst returning from Wales one Sunday night the car Edgar was travelling in was involved in a head on crash and because Edgar always had to travel in the front passenger seat with his right leg fully outstretched the leg was shattered by the impact in about 6 places. The rebuilding of the tibia and fibula involving much metal work, took many months and again Edgar was on his back in a hospital bed. Fortunately the fused hip was not damaged. How he managed to remain cheerful at this time is quite amazing and how he also managed to be hopeful of continuing climbing was even more remarkable. Nevertheless he did so and did climb again but to a much lesser degree.

In the 1970's Edgar moved from his job with Esso Petroleum in Salford to their Caernarfon depot where he became a senior clerical officer. Now married to Anne, and with two daughters, he was in a position to still get out on the Welsh hills and continue

his passion for photography. Indeed this passion was to the fore in the 50's and he was present on many first ascents by Rock and Ice and Cromlech Club members. Many of the photographs taken on those occasions have never been published, or indeed seen by other than Edgar and a few friends: they form a significant visual record of climbing in that era, particularly in North Wales and on Gritstone, and it is hoped that they can be sought out, examined and eventually published as a lasting tribute to him.

Claude Davies

Harry Sales writes:

Edgar had a hazardous life. I don't mean his climbing although that had its hazards. I mean his propensity to be involved in vehicular accidents. Claude Davies has referred to his two major ones where the drivers of a transport and of an ordinary car lost control. I think there was at least a third, where Edgar himself got out of control whilst driving the motor bike and sidecar that his rigid leg then obliged him to use. He managed to swerve into a pile of roadside stones which shot his passenger through the front of the sidecar: Edgar himself was not too damaged this time. But control is the theme of my short contribution to Edgar's obituary. As will be clear from Claude's fairly detailed account, Edgar so controlled himself through all his vicissitudes that he was able to indulge in his passion for climbing whatever happened to him. Most of us would have given up: Edgar went on.

As a person, away from the cliffs, he was in perfect control of himself. He and I held various offices in the Club over the same period and we were companions in all the huts and at committees all through this time. With his quizzical look and perky manner but calm voice he was an ideal companion. I suppose I should put his various offices on record. He was on the Huts Sub-committee from 1968 to 1979 and I think Chairman for a large part of that time. He was Membership Secretary from 1981 to 1983 and on the Huts Procedures Sub-Committee from 1983 to 1984. He was made an Honorary Member in recognition of his continual service to the club. It was a great thing for a man at last defeated in his desire to climb to contribute so much to this Club.

He lived in a lovely house in Caernarfon with his lovely wife, Ann, and two lovely daughters. Unfortunately this idyllic existence ended in the way we all fear. Edgar developed Alzheimer's disease and it progressed badly. In effect he lost the control of his mind which put him in a state which bore no relationship to the control of his mind and body that he had exerted in his earlier years. But he will be remembered for his good years, the bulk of his life.

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Brotherhood of The Rope.
The biography of Charles Houston
Bernadette McDonald
Bâton Wicks 2007. £16.99.

I am not sure if I am the right person to review this book since, by the end, I felt a strong bond with Charlie Houston and consequently may lack objectivity. Like Charlie's own life this book grows and blossoms to reveal deep wisdom and insight in its final chapter. In common with Houston I love climbing, enjoy rural general practice and find stimulation in the field of mountain medicine. I qualified in 1978 and it was two years later, when already in his mid 70s, that Charlie Houston first published his book *Going Higher*. Here was a mountain physiology book that somehow combined the spirit of the mountains with medicine in readable English. What an inspiration to a young doctor at the beginning of his career.

In 1998 I was privileged to hear Dr Houston speak at our own centenary dinner held in that storm lashed tent at the Victoria Hotel in Llanberis. I now read this magnificent biography as my formal career in general practice comes to an end and Charlie faces the final chapter in his own life. It is inspiring to learn that he still contributes as a mentor to many youngsters.

As I picked up this book I could feel its quality. Bâton Wicks have done justice to the work and the author, Bernadette McDonald, has done justice to the subject in terms of her eloquent use of English and diligent research. Her introduction sets the scene of her exploration of a man who himself has explored life in its fullest sense, and who still continues that journey.

The book is frankly honest and acknowledges Charlie's conflict over the

death of his first child, his guilt regarding war service, his inability to accept his wife's family and his own insecurity and tendency to periods of depression. Medicine has always attracted some very talented high achievers and many of these doctors struggle with self-doubt and a feeling of inadequacy. Charlie is one of these people but it appears that he finally finds inner peace as he gets older. A peace that I suspect that he previously only used to find on the walk out from an expedition, or for a short time after a gruelling research project.

Chronologically the author takes us from the excitement of his first trip to Chamonix with his father through his classic Anglo American expedition to Nanda Devi, to his 1938 and 1953 expeditions to K2. We also experience the groundbreaking high altitude physiology research in pressure chambers on Operation Everest One in 1946 and Operation Everest Two in 1985 as well as on field trips to Mount Logan. These chapters give insight into varied expedition personalities, including Tilman, but also reveal the pressures of academic research and aspects of international politics during his work with the American Peace Corps. It is difficult to criticize a book when the quality of the text does such justice to a subject but one criticism might be the dearth of medical references, although there is no doubting the quality of the author's research.

Hidden in the back page of the book is a DVD of a film produced by Houston of his two legendary K2 expeditions. This alone is worth more than the £16.99 charged for the book but I would recommend that readers save this jewel in the crown until they have read the whole book.

Much of Houston's pioneering Mountain Medicine research is now taken for granted.

At least this book will ensure that he is never taken for granted. I remain haunted by his typically visionary comment that in both medicine and mountaineering "the vocation is no longer an art but a business".

David Hillebrandt.

Boys of Everest

Clint Willis

Robson Books 2006 £16.99

The dust jacket of this 529 page book proudly proclaims that the American author has been climbing for ten years, has written over forty anthologies and contributes regular articles to Boys' Mags. I was relieved that I received the English edition of the book but despite this he still refers to Bonington's time at Sandhurst as being at "school" and one gets confused when every autumn is described as "fall", especially in a book in which every imaginable adjective is used to describe the deep psyche of the terminal falls experienced by "Bonington's boys".

Willis claims to have interviewed many of those involved in British high altitude mountaineering in the 80's and 90's and in some cases spent a couple of days gaining profound insight into their motivation and innermost thoughts. There is a large selected bibliography. This is very impressive.

As a reviewer I felt obliged to read the complete tome but I soon found myself simply listing the truly impressive descriptive sections and predicting the next insight into death and personal tragedy. As early as page 15 I was told that "Young climbers stranded by storms often froze to death on their exposed stances". On page 121 we join Willis to climb with Bonington on the North Face of the Eiger and be told that "he was aware of his body and a thought rose like a muddy bubble to

the surface of his thinking mind". It is not long before he then dismisses the British members of the Annapurna South Face team as "foul-mouthed, vice ridden British". Later on the same trip Bonington was leading where "no person in the history or prehistory of the world had been before".

The analysis of the thoughts of those still living is nauseating, the analysis of the thoughts of those now dead is not only absurd but totally inappropriate. We start with Willis's personal knowledge of exactly what went through John Harlin's mind as he fell from the North Face of the Eiger. This almost prompts me to make a sick joke, but I refrain. We also share the last thoughts of Ian Clough in the serac fall, Dougal Haston in the Alpine avalanche, Mick Burke on the final ridge of Everest. Clint excels with Nick Estcourt's death in the avalanche on K2 where we are told that, as he fell, he appreciated that "the peak itself was a mere barnacle, a microbe on this massive planet". By the end of the book the reader will appreciate that it is inevitable that the climbing world will at last find out exactly what did happen to Joe Tasker and Pete Boardman on the Northeast ridge of Everest in 1982; and Clint does not let us down.

I can only assume that either Willis has powers of communication with the dead that would astound even the most skilful spiritualist, or he is a crank and a buffoon. I suspect the latter.

Even writing this review I feel slightly sickened. The whole book would have benefited from the use of an editor's red pen; or better still, a shredder

David Hillebrandt..

Classic Rock (second edition)
Compiled by Ken Wilson
Baton Wicks 2007. £32.00

Never, never ask the Honorary Editor for a favour unless you are willing to accept a challenge in return; mine was to do something new, review a book. Not too difficult? Perhaps; but the book just happened to be the second edition of the legendary *Classic Rock* (1978).

The concept behind the original was a celebration of the great climbs up to Hard Severe, complementing *Hard Rock* (1972) and to be followed by *VS rock* (which, sadly, never appeared) and *Extreme Rock* (1987). The format was a personalised essay with photographs, mainly black and white evoking the atmosphere of the routes. The selection was arranged geographically from Scotland to the South West. In the preface Ken dismissed the idea that the book was “Soft Rock” or “Geriatric Rock” and that it was only of interest to the inexperienced, the inactive or the infirm; there were routes of real depth and substance and the book became a classic.

Much has changed in the 30 years since the first edition was published. A new generation is on the crags, clothing and equipment have evolved and publishing technologies have been revolutionised. So how does the new edition stack up?

A November afternoon – outside is bleak, windy and wet; the review copy and my first edition are in front of me. The second edition is large format with striking cover images hinting at a feast of visual delights within. Turning the first few pages reveals cracking shots of many crags including a magnificent shot of the North Face of The Ben in spring sunshine. A great start and my spirits are rising already, I glance at my box of rock gear in the corner and my mind starts to wander.

Concentrate. An illustrated essay



Megan Beaumont on The Arête, Glyder Fach.

Photo: Ken Wilson

on the early days of classic climbing is now included. The reader is then taken to Stanage and the routes begin. The order is different, starting in The Peak and Pennines and culminating in Scotland; from the highly accessible outcrops to the remote majesty of the Highland giants. This book aims to inspire climbers wanting to make the intimidating transition from indoor walls to the real thing. A recent conversation with a young couple on a stance highlighted this challenge: they described how they normally “do sport” and that it takes them a couple of weeks to psyche up to “do trad”! This is a far cry from the previous generation’s introduction to climbing when the first edition was published. *Classic Rock* fills a need by describing a possible apprenticeship – starting on Flying Buttress and culminating with the semi-alpine Long Climb.

The individual essays are largely unchanged; as such one or two might seem dated. A new essay is provided for Tower Ridge. As a collection they give the reader a great taste of climbing writing over several generations. The presentation of each climb has been modernised with a clear route and crag information box enriched by some delightful historical thumbnail portraits of the pioneers.

The major difference is the photographs, out go most of the black and white shots of warriors in Super RD's running it out in style; in comes a blaze of colour with hundreds of new action shots showing comprehensive racks and even chalk bags on Flying Buttress! Some original images remain, overall a century or so of quality climbing photography is represented. One or two of the large pictures seem a little soft e.g. the shot of Dow Crag on p176-7, but the overall quality is high. Sadly the atmospheric image of Tophet Wall from p137 of the First Edition has been replaced by a colour shot.

After the routes there are several useful appendices, including a comprehensive list of other challenges in each area and a map locating the routes. These are supported by information on current maps and definitive guidebooks. The grade comparison section has been expanded to acknowledge the changes in protection, climbers' experience of seriousness and scale plus the impoverished skills of wall trained climbers. Grade re-alignment means that there are now a dozen or so VS's. Interestingly the back endpapers show images of classic climbing on Jersey to tempt the reader to explore.

In revisiting this book I think Ken has produced a gem that should be on the bookshelf of every climber with a feel for the full heritage and breadth of our sport. At £32 it is substantially cheaper in real terms than the £12 First Edition.

Trevor Langhorne

The Mountains of Montenegro
A walker's and trekker's guide
Rudolf Abraham
Cicerone Press £12.95

This is a hugely welcome and finely presented walking guide to the mountains of a European country which not many British people think of going to. Montenegro, newly independent from Serbia in 2006, may have only 700,000 inhabitants and few natural resources but, inland from the relatively well known coastal delights of Budva and the Gulf of Kotor, lies a truly mountainous country with four National Parks already designated and another area, the Prokletije range in the far south of the country up against the Kosovan and Albanian borders, about to become one, and about time too! The Durmitor National Park in the north takes in both the Tara river canyon, 1600m deep, and Bobotov Kuk, at 2523m not quite the country's highest peak. That accolade goes, albeit with some controversy, to Maja e Kollatës, 11 metres higher at 2534m on the Albanian border. Durmitor is the most visited area and also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The mountains are limestone, part of the Dinaric Alps, and as the author says on p.15 of his book, "*... are at their most impressive in the inland areas of Durmitor and Prokletije, where the stunning terrain typically consists of glacial cirques surrounded by fine ridges, often wonderfully exposed, and steep-sided 2000-2500m peaks, some of which require a degree of scrambling to ascend. High pastures, often scattered with stone or wooden shepherd's huts (known locally as katon), give way to valleys, the lower slopes of which are cloaked in dense pine and beech forests, and picturesque lakes. Between these mountain areas the landscape is slashed by deep canyons – one of which, the Tara, is the second deepest in the world.*"



The superb mountain scenery of Montenegro and N Albania. Richard Hargreaves and supporters of the Balkans Peace Park Project. **Photo: Richard Hargreaves col.**

This guide describes 15 waymarked walking routes in 7 different mountain areas, with suggestions for further exploration and for multi-day treks because these mountains are as attractive to walk through as to climb. The coloured sketch maps are clear and the whole book has a wealth of information on Montenegro itself: history, geography and geology, fauna and flora, language (a very useful section), travel to and within the country, food and drink, contacts and useful addresses. There is important advice on maps, which apart from those produced by the National Parks, are hard to come by. The photographs are highly seductive, but it is a pity that the author had bad luck with the weather when he was in Prokletije; atmospheric scenes of cloud-wreathed valley sides can't do justice to the dramatic, saw-toothed ridges and peaks of this amazing area.

I wish this admirable guidebook had been available in 2003 when I first visited the Prokletije and spent one day in the Grabaje valley blundering about on steep hillsides with no map or information on possible routes. This was on a journey through Kosovo/a, Montenegro and northern Albania to promote the concept of the "Balkans

Peace Park", www.balkanspeacepark.org, a cross-border, environmentally protected area in the adjacent mountains and valleys of these three countries. It gets a couple of honourable mentions in this book.

In such a valuable book quibbles about details are unwarranted but I would like to add two bits of further information for readers. First, on p.43, the author warns about the problems of straying across possibly land-mined borders into neighbouring countries like Bosnia and Croatia, sensible advice, but he has some harsh words to say about the 'lawless' reputation of northern Albania which I think is now unmerited. I would urge readers to keep an open mind about this and not to read the book 'The Accursed Mountains' by Robert Carver. In each of the last 5 years I have been in the mountains of northern Albania, where the people are as hospitable as the scenery is spectacular. (*TGO March 2003 carried an article, 'Mountains for Peace; about my first visit there.'*) It is one of the most magical places on earth. This summer 2007, with a small group of friends on a 'multi-activity, borders-crossing trip' based on Plav in Montenegro, another initiative to develop the Balkans Peace Park

project, I did a four day trek into Albania and back, getting prior police permission to cross the border in two 'unofficial' places. Our route started on what is Walk 15 in this book, up the Ropojana valley from Vusanje, then on an old trade route path through the wildest Prokletije mountain scenery to Theth in the Shala valley in Albania, then over to neighbouring Valbona before crossing back into Montenegro via the Qafa Valbona, another 2000m col, above Zastan (see the map on p.179). It was a physically demanding but totally peaceful and satisfying trek, enhanced by welcoming home stays in three Albanian family farmhouses.

Second, the author recommends the lake marked 'Jezero' at the head of the Ropojana valley, p.179, as an attractive campsite and his photo on p.196, taken in July 2006, shows the lake with water in it. This year in July there was no water in the lake and the lake bed was covered in lush grass and vegetation. The nearest water was 8km down the valley towards Vusanje where the river emerges for the first time at an extraordinary azure pool marked 'Oko' on the map. I have asked friends in Plav for more information about this lake and its missing water. If you want to camp near the 'lake' fill up with water at the blue pool!

This is an important book, not just as an attractive and enticing guide but because Montenegro needs visitors to its mountains and valleys to climb, walk, kayak, mountain bike or study the environment; all 'sustainable visitor activities', bringing money into the local economy and leaving the mountains still unspoiled. If you glance at Rudolf Abraham's book you too will want to go there.

Richard Hargreaves

We Cannot Fail Geoff Powter.

Constable & Robinson 2007. £8.99

When I received a book written by a Canadian clinical psychologist detailing the fine line between adventure and madness through a series of portraits of twelve international adventurers, I must admit, the task of reading this book, let alone reviewing it, was as appealing as receiving an unpublished Barbara Cartland novel or a Jim Davidson biography!

However, I am delighted to report that far from being an onerous task, *We cannot fail* made such a positive impression that I felt sufficiently enthused to look more closely into the lives of several of those case studies detailed by Geoff Powter.

With six of the twelve being English, I wondered if the author was falling victim to the mad dogs and Englishmen stereotype or are the English really more prone to tilting at windmills? Whatever the historical English compulsion to measure, calculate and analyse our planet scientifically offers writers like Geoff Powter a rich anthropological seam to mine. The author divides his cast into three distinct categories.

The Burdened are those he describes as haunted by the tremendous pressure to succeed either from within or without. The Bent are likely to be drawn to adventure because of a deep seated malignancy in their psychological make up. The Lost are people whose adventures had the same rudderless quality as the rest of their lives, drifting sadly, frantically and naively towards their unhappy conclusions.

Climbers will find their interests well sated by the inclusion of Alister Crowley, Maurice Wilson and Earl Denham, Eiger oaf Claudio Corti and the brilliant, but ill-fated US climbing family, the Watermans.

However, other lives outside the sport

fascinate with Shakespearian elements of tragic farce colouring their adventures. Donald Crowhurst, the caddish round the world yachtsman for example, whose brilliantly concocted, nautical subterfuge almost fooled the yachting world in the late 60s before isolation and guilt drove him to madness and almost certain suicide in the middle of the Atlantic.

Great British heroes John Franklin and Robert Scott see their stories unravel under Powter's powerful historical spotlight. Franklin comes out as a bovine imbecile whose rank stupidity and swollen hubris took 147 men with him to pointless deaths.

Scott at least comes out as a flawed hero, but I have to say, still an idiot! His refusal to compete with the methodical and calculating Amundsen on equal terms because it wasn't the British way was beyond reckless and like Franklin, Scott took good men down with him because he allowed his mission to be guided by an almost medieval code of honour. It's just not cricket could be his epitaph.

For me, one of the most interesting portraits featured someone I had never heard of?

Jean Batten was a New Zealand born aviator who for a few short years in the 1930's was possibly the most famous woman on the planet through her genuinely heroic and extraordinary achievements in the air. Feted by royalty, pursued by millionaires, her life read like fairy tale until the candle flickered in the gale of publicity. Unlike those whose lives ended prematurely in pursuit of their quixotic pursuits, Jean Batten lived to old age but ended up in paupers grave in Spain. How on earth did an extraordinary life end like this?

I can tell you, it's worth finding out.

Of the climbers, The Waterman's story resonates most profoundly in its depth of tragedy and elicits a real sense of despair

when you realise the inevitability of their externally guided catastrophe. Johnny Waterman between father Guy and brother Bill appears to have had an almost supernatural talent as a bold mountaineer. The tale which unfolds is chilling in its predictable denouement as the gifted clan fall under a hereditary curse which claims them one by one.. Similarly, the outcome of Maurice Wilson's insane tilt at Everest is all too quickly perceived in its grand folly. Less predictable is Earl Denham's fate after his micro expedition to Everest with Tenzing Norgay in 1947. Apparently, until his death, Tenzing recalled Denham's expedition fondly and unlike Wilson, Denham survived to die in old age after living a reflective life of quiet anonymity in New Zealand.

The extreme consequences of not recognizing when you are beaten will never be more clearly illustrated than in the respective fates of Wilson and Denham !

As for Crowley and Corti ?...Perhaps mad, bad and dangerous to know would best sum up their contribution to mountaineering !

I'm sure that most climbers and mountain activists will find Geoff Powter's 12 brief but revealing portraits of these flawed and usually doomed adventurers, totally fascinating. If it opens up a wider window onto the lost lives of people like Jean Batten and Johnny Waterman then the author will have achieved something beyond his own work.

The editor apologizes for the lack of the author's name for this review.

Unfortunately, the email to which it was attached cannot be traced. If he or she would care to contact me I will gladly ensure that they are credited in the newsletter and the next CCJ.

Lower Wye Valley
Edited by John Willson
The Climbers' Club (2007). £19.50

The latest CC guide book to come hot off the production line just in time for Christmas is with out doubt a major step up in pretty much every area, a must have addition to every UK based climber's bookshelf.

The latest advances in printing have been used to produce a guide that might sit happily on your coffee table with Ken Wilson's large colour classics and not feel too poor a cousin. I think the cold and damp winter evenings will be cheered by using this bright tome to plan for many climbing adventures as soon as it warms up and stops raining.

I have been looking at the very fine new Stanage guide produced this year by the BMC. This is without doubt a definitive guide to a much loved area that is endlessly pawed over by thousands of climbers every year. It might be enough to say that the Wye Valley of this and future editions will thankfully take many years to reach the definitive stage of development seen at Stanage these days.

If you are looking for a pleasant feel of adventure in a beautiful woodland setting then it's to be found using this new guide to the Lower Wye area. Almost every type of limestone climbing can be found here and if you take the time to read the guide properly in addition to looking at the pictures "which is all many of the climbing wall clippies can manage" then many and every kind of adventure will be found only a few rope lengths away.

I have a few niggles, but unless you are prepared to help with guide book work to improve things for others, it's best not to be too critical.

The use of coloured text to mark the sport climbs "for the clippies" is a great idea that might have been carried through to the lines marked on the crag photographs,



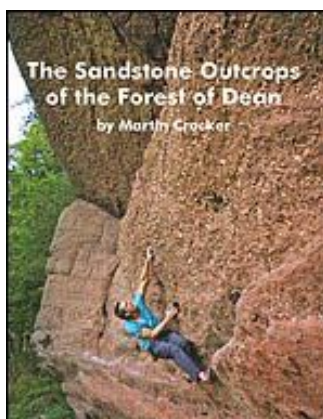
I thought they had done it when I saw the yellow lines used, but on closer inspection it seems the colours are used just to make the marked routes clearer if they cross.

There's no graded list and if you use a star system to mark the better climbs then you may as well try to help the climbers who are looking to move up the grades by having a stab at a rated listing "also good for debate in the pub after lights out."

Being a confirmed sun worshipper I like the indications/symbols given in some guides concerning the best time to climb on a given crag or climb. Wintour's Leap before mid day at most times of the year can be a little cold and damp while Wyndcliff basks in sunshine all day. I never go to Ban-y-Gor because it never sees the sun and is frequented by creatures of the night with arms dangling down around their knees. Tintern Quarry and Shorn Cliff are both afternoon/evening crags.

In short the Lower Wye climbs should be used by those who like to sleep in late, then climb until you need a head torch to find your way back to the Pub. Climb with good friends and give the speed tickers a good example to follow, go slow and enjoy the day using a great new guide book.

Gary Lewis.



**The Sandstone Outcrops
of the Forest of Dean
Martin Crocker**

The Climbers' Club 2006. £10.00

First, a confession. Until this slim volume came through my letterbox, my knowledge of the Forest of Dean was limited to noticing the odd sign en passant to North Wales, something about mediaeval iron and coal mines, and the place had a few trees. But rock for climbing?

Thanks to Martin Crocker and all those involved I now know better. The Wye Valley provides the complete climbing experience within a relatively small area. Long multi-pitch sport and trad expeditions, out and out sport climbing venues and now the bonus of these hidden gems - micro routes or highball bouldering - the choice is ours. With Ogmore and Cheddar/Avon also within easy reach, Pembroke can no longer rest on its laurels!

The new format works extremely well visually, although I haven't been able to field test it. There are no crag photos or topos, but the action shots combined with Don Sargeant's clear outline maps should be enough for most, and when all's said and done these extensive but miniature outcrops are tailor-made for self discovery.

The introduction with its sections on ethics and its unusual adaptation of the traditional adjectival grading system is informative. Regarding the latter, I can see the logic of incorporating the distance to the ground into the overall grade where it is assumed that most routes will be soloed; however 6-8 metres below your feet is a fair old distance, even with a 'soft, leafy' landing and a bouldering mat. It's 8 metres from my front doorstep to the ridge, and I wouldn't like to jump off my roof, let alone fall. Combine that with some fairly hefty technical grades and I suspect that the true on-sight soloist/highball boulderer will be a rare creature in these woods. This makes the paragraph on avoiding cliff-top damage even more relevant.

Personally, I like a history section in a guidebook as well as a First Ascent's list. As in this case, where one doesn't have to cart the thing up the crag, the extra pages don't matter and as long as there is some individual flavour and texture to the writing, it makes for a good read off the crag and lends context to the climbing. Crocker has a distinctive style which sets his own considerable achievements alongside those of Clark and Percival in a balanced and readable way.

So it's hats off to Martin and the Publications Sub-Committee. All power to your elbows, tendonitis permitting!

Iain Peters

The editor's last word

In the past there was always a section in the Journal recording the achievements of members at home and abroad, and more recently "area reports", which were little more than linking text for a list of new routes based on our guidebook areas. Nowadays that information is far more suited to the web, where slowly but surely more of our members are beginning to realise that an active website with discussion forums, the latest news on huts or external climbing news, is just as important as the Journal or the quarterly Newsletter. Who knows, in ten years' time both of these might be "paperless"?! Even as I write these words I can hear sharp intakes of breath and muttered 'over my dead body' reactions.

However I think that there is one achievement by a CC member that merits being recorded in these pages.

Over the last 18 months Tony Scott, the Club's website manager has turned what many thought an impractical dream into reality. This Journal and all its predecessors have now been digitised, over 100 years of some of the finest writing in British climbing is securely stored as an electronic archive.

We were not the first to attempt this gargantuan task. Both the FRCC and the American Alpine Club have been, (and still are), working on similar projects. Initially it was thought that the only way to achieve this goal was by recruiting enough volunteers with their own scanners, and literally scanning each and every edition, page by page, which would have taken years to complete.

Luckily, Tony, with all the experience of a professional web consultant, managed to locate a company who not only were able to scan all the Journals in a matter of months, if not weeks, but did so at a fraction of the cost of publishing a new guide. But that is only half the story; it's one thing to have a 'pile' of scanned pages, but quite another to turn them into a user-friendly format, and I know that Tony has spent long hours at his computer so that this unique record can be made available, not just to members, but to all genuine researchers and historians from the wider climbing community.

It is still a work in progress; the issue of copyright law as it applies to electronic storage and availability is a legal minefield, but to have got as far as he has is a major step forward. I would go further: as a contribution to the preservation of the climbing record, Tony's project is arguably the most important single achievement off the crag by the Club in the last decade. We lead the entire climbing world in this respect, and the fact that it has been taking place quietly and efficiently with no public fanfare is a tribute to Tony's modesty and hard work.

To bring this project closer to a successful conclusion, he now needs the help of all those members who have been published in past and present Journals to agree, via a permission form, included with this edition or on the website, to allow their material to be made available in electronic form. For those authors who are still alive, this is a simple process, but with copyright lasting for 75 years there are obvious problems. One way any member can help is by putting Tony in touch with deceased members' families or heirs with whom they might still have some contact or know of their whereabouts.

The CCJ electronic archive is a fantastic resource and this Club, or anyone interested in the history and development of British climbing owe Tony a huge debt of gratitude.