

The Climbers' Club Journal 2008 - 2010

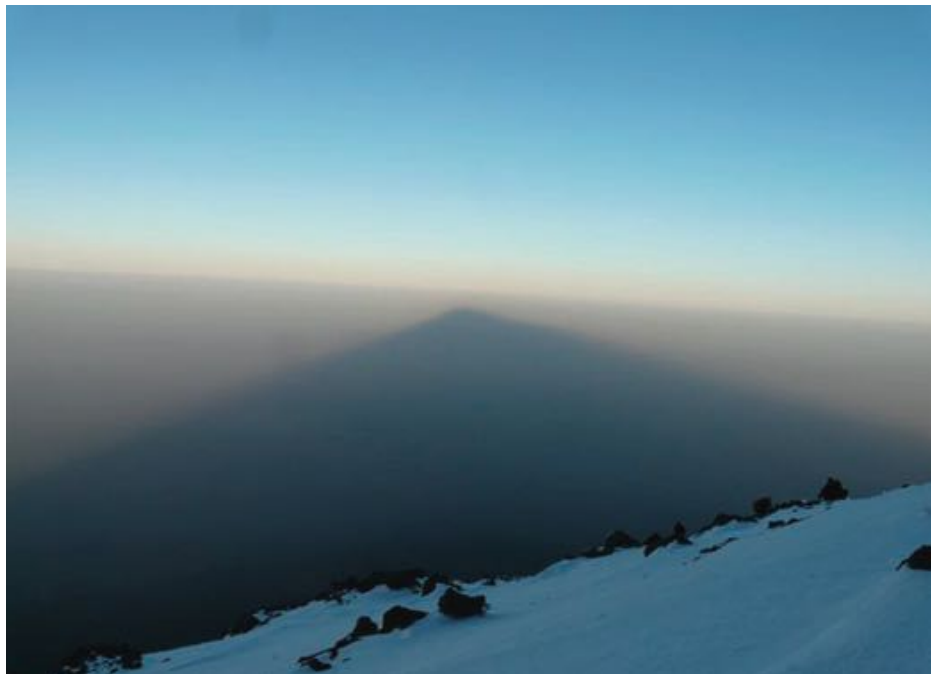


The Climbers' Club Journal 2008-10

Compiled by Iain Peters

**Edited by Tim Oliver and Geoff Milburn
Planned and controlled by the CC Journal team**

**2008-10
The Climbers' Club**



High on Mount Ararat a cold ethereal dawn broke and as the welcoming sun heralded the new day a shadow of the great mountain swept away far to the west of us.

Front Cover: South Peak of Mount Kinabalu, 7.30am Feb 22, 2008 on the descent from Low's Peak.
Photo: David Medcalf

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Editorial

'It is a sport that from some mysterious cause appeals mainly to the cultivated intellect. 'Arry or 'Arriet would never climb a hill. A few days ago I happened to be staying with a fine old English baronet in a beautiful part of Wales. This baronet had a fine old English butler, and I asked him how he liked the situation. "Well, sir," was his reply, "there is nothing to be seen but sheep and scenery." The words are those of C E Mathews, the Club's first president at the inaugural dinner in 1898, directed at his audience of 'authors and journalists, clergymen, and members of the Civil Service, merchants and manufacturers and inspectors of schools. and the best bowler in the Oxford Eleven has placed his services at our disposal. Of such excellent materials is the Climbers' Club composed.'

One hundred and twelve years later, only the sheep and scenery are still with us. Despite its prosperous membership drawn from the Victorian professional elite, the infant Climbers' Club was in many ways a subversive child who would soon challenge the establishment view that mountains worthy of the name only existed in Zermatt, Arolla or beyond. and that our native hills were mere training grounds, perhaps the equivalent in modern terms of minor crags or boulders, worthy of an hour or two's playtime en route to the real challenge of a Cloggy, Dove Crag or Carnmore.

Reading Aido Garlick's hilarious account of a Leeds University Dinner in the 70s takes me back to my first CC AGM and Annual Dinner at about the same time. Naturally ours was a far more sober affair, until meal and business over, members and their guests repaired to the bar to find it seething with every active climber from North Wales and beyond, drawn there by the prospect of after hours drinking. I vaguely remember being poured into Nick Longland's mini and then racing McNaught Davis' BMW back up the sharp bends on the road to PYG. The contest ended with a head-on high-speed argument with a solid Welsh drystone wall. Mac and Co scooped up Nick and deposited him safely back at Ynys, leaving me to explain events to the police - as the innocent passenger!

Fast and furious times, and the CC was very much a part of the action. Many of the leading young figures in British rock-climbing not only joined the CC, but as in the late 19th Century, were challenging the establishment, first and foremost by their climbing achievements, but also through their refusal to tolerate such anachronisms as the exclusion of women from the club and an acceptance that competition was not only essential but also desirable. This in contrast to no less an authority than George Mallory, in his somewhat hagiographic 'review' in the CCJ of 1920, of his friend and mentor, Winthrop Young's newly published *Mountaineering*:

'The standard laid down is one with which we are familiar, that of civilised men not competing, but co-operating.....We must obviate the least occasion for friction and do everything for harmony. Smoking is enjoined for its social utility, so that a man may sustain his part in "the effortless silence" which is a condition of comradeship and chattering forbidden..... whenever the leader is in stress or difficulties.'

Co-operation might not have been much in evidence as rival teams descended on Gogarth but the protagonists were more than capable of shouting the odds with a fag clamped between their teeth, (not always filled with tobacco). The 'effortless silence' was conspicuous by its absence in any pub or hut near the centre of things, neither was there much reticence evident in the journals of the time. Articles with such stimulating titles as 'Punch Up at The Padarn', essays highlighting the rivalries on finding and climbing hard new rock, descriptions of raids out of North Wales to steal the plum lines of the Lakes and Highlands from under the noses of the locals, even mythical routes ascended by a combination of binoculars and imagination! All very stimulating and controversial, but most certainly not cricket.

Leap forward another half century and the game and its major players have moved on again. Few young Turks turn up at an AGM to demand change, let alone consider writing accounts for the Journal, they are too busy being filmed for uTube or tweeting and blogging on their websites; that task still rests largely with the warriors of the 60s and 70s, now elevated over the years to the ranks of Sultans (of swing.... on a very tight top rope).

They can still climb, thanks to the technology holding their joints together internally, and the gadgetry jingling from their harnesses. Without their efforts this journal would be far thinner, and there's the rub. The quality of the writing, and the breadth of subject matter in the following pages is still high, despite one opinion to the contrary expressed at the open forum following the AGM at the Guidebook Centenary weekend in Shap. The same member then suggested that the CC editor should approach his task with all the military precision of a general: he should marshal and inspire his troops, ensuring that his scouts are deployed on or, if necessary, beyond the front line of climbing development, wherever that might be.

Strone Ulladale was mooted as one such battlefield although the prospect of a lone leader battling with an 8a crux in rain and wind relaying his experience via iPhone to a shivering editor crouched over his laptop in the boulders beneath, being eaten alive by midges, is one for a hardier soul than the present holder of the position to contemplate.

The CCJ has a long and distinguished reputation, but my contention remains that it is the membership who ultimately dictate the content and value of their club journal.

At various times in the past the Climbers' Club was synonymous with the cutting edge of climbing and writing, few other outlets being available. With one or two notable exceptions that is no longer the case. It's strength now lies in it being the club that increasing numbers of everyday climbers wish to join, perhaps for its ethos and tradition as much as for its meets and huts. If the Journal is to re-establish its former iconic status, then it will have to look beyond the confines of its membership for content, take its cue from the recent transformation of its guidebooks, and establish a dedicated small and highly professional editorial team, who will look with fresh eyes at every aspect of its production from design through to distribution and will have both the time and resources to ensure that deadlines are met and standards maintained. It might be regrettable but the day of the gifted and altruistic amateurs dedicating much of their free time to compiling a journal or guidebooks may well be drawing to a close.

Iain Peters

The production of this journal has been beset with problems owing to many pressures. Iain Peters compiled the bulk of the material until Tim Oliver, who has been appointed as Editor for the 2011 journal, stepped in to complete the task of compilation. Eventually Geoff Milburn completed the editing, John Howard provided the design work and technical wizardry, while Cathy Woodhead was the contact with the printer and mail house. David Medcalf worked quietly in the background as Obituary Editor. Thank you to all who helped to get this long-awaited journal out before Christmas.

Fiona Sanders (President)

Finally a heartfelt thanks to Mark Vallance and Ian Smith who came up trumps at the eleventh hour and saved the day for the club.

GM

The Helyg Story Revealed

Glenys Walters and Geoff Milburn

When we published the book on Helyg for the Diamond Jubilee in 1985 many people who read it were curious to know more about the cottage and the two children whom George Borrow wrote about in his book *Wild Wales* which was published in 1862. One ragged child was a boy of about twelve and the girl was perhaps two years younger, though they could have been a couple of years older which Glenys put down to their being probably small and sickly.

In 2000 a relative of those children, Glenys Walters, was hard at work trying to discover where her ancestors had come from. She learned from Ann Jane Davies, her grandmother, that she used to go to visit her relatives at a house called Helyg in Nant y Benglog, near Capel Curig in North Wales. Much to her surprise Glenys discovered that Helyg was actually shown on the Ordnance Survey map. Eventually Glenys was shown a copy of our book *Helyg* and she was able to read the many fascinating tales of both young and old Climbers' Club members, but she began her own account of Helyg with:

'Helyg is the final house in the large parish of Llanllechid, the nearby River Llugwy marking the boundary with the parish of Llandygai. It was owned by the great Penrhyn Estate, and in their records of rentals it is listed as Talybraich (Helyg), from which it would appear that it was originally a cottage on the land of Talybraich farm.'

Glenys had worked out that the couple who moved into Helyg in about 1840 were no less than her great-great-great grandparents, Robert Jones (born in Llanrwst parish about 1804), a labourer, and his wife Ann Williams (born at Beddgelert about 1800).

They had nine children starting with William, Jane, Anne, John, Mary, Robert and Owen, but it was the youngest of the children, another William and Catherine, who were probably the two young children who George Borrow had questioned when he passed by in 1854.

While the family was still at Helyg, the eldest daughter Jane had a daughter of her own, Ann, born in 1851. In about 1860 Robert Jones and Ann moved their family about one mile west of Helyg to the little chapel house (Ysgoldy) where Robert became caretaker, although he also spent some of his time as a labourer working on what was eventually to become the A5 road.

The youngest daughter Catherine, who would only be about 17 or 18 at the time, had met and married a quarryman who had come west from Denbighshire for work. They immediately moved into the vacant Helyg and began married life although her husband John Jones could have been accommodated at the quarry and might only have come home at weekends. It did not however prevent the couple having twelve children. The 1881 census describes Catherine Jones as a laundress living with four of her children: Ellen (9), Mary (6), William (5) and Owen (2). There was no sign of the older children as the boys would perhaps have been

working in the quarries and the girls in service. It must have been comforting for Catherine to know that her parents however were nearby at the chapel house along with two of her brothers, Robert and Owen. Two other children David and Moses were still to be born to Catherine at a later date.

Catherine's neighbours at Talybraich were Ellis Evans aged 49 a farmer, with his wife Jane and five children. There was also a farm servant William Roberts with his wife Elizabeth who also had five children.

According to the Penrhyn Estate rental records David Jones (born at Helyg in 1883) took over the tenancy of Helyg in May 1906 when he would be about 23 years old. The rent was £3 per annum and David was still there nine years later in 1915 shortly after the start of the Great War. (After the Climbers' Club had taken over the property the rent had increased to £5 per annum.)

Glenys Walters was not however a descendant of David Jones, but of his cousin Ann Jones who was Jane's daughter born at Helyg in 1851. Ann met and married in 1871 a Bangor joiner and cabinet maker called Elias Griffith. For short while they ran the old Crown Inn in Bethesda, but eventually they moved to Manchester where Elias carried on his trade as cabinet maker. Of their five children the eldest Robert Griffiths (now using the final 's') moved to Grantham where he was a senior manager of an engineering firm. One of his claims to fame is that he was a friend of Alderman Roberts, the father of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher the forceful and outstanding ex-Prime Minister. The second son Elias was an architect who was part of the team working at

the Christie Hospital in Manchester. (Ann the mother was to die in 1931 aged 80.)

One of Ann's five children was Ann Jane who married Thomas Trefor Davies. Their daughter Kate Davies married John Glyn Jones, a chemist and optician from Waunfawr. Their daughter Glenys, who became Glenys Walters, was to be the driving force for the research into the early inhabitants of Helyg.

Glenys was sorry to read of George Borrow's description of Helyg as a 'miserable dwelling' as she believes it to have been a typical single-storey cottage of that period in Snowdonia, which normally had two downstairs rooms consisting of kitchen and bedroom, as well as a crogloff in the roofspace. This could be used by the children as a bedroom which they could reach via a ladder. Downstairs there was often a

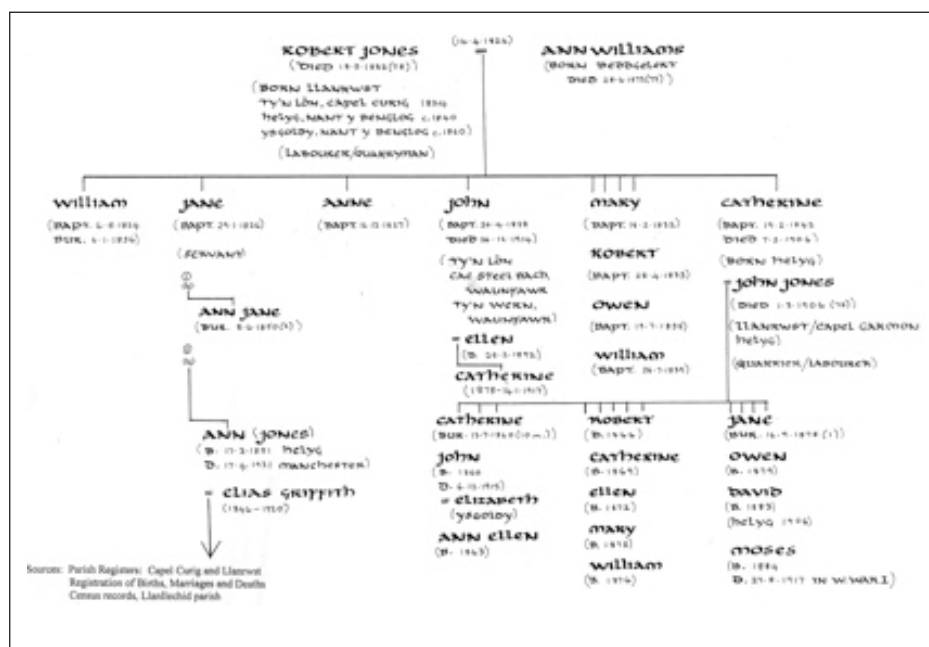


Ann Griffith who was born Ann Jones in Helyg in 1851. She is the great grandmother of Glenys Walters. Photo: Copyright Glenys Walters.

Note: The Cub intends to put a framed copy of this photograph in Helyg.

gwely bocs or box bed to enclose the couple, and probably keep the cold air at bay. In addition Glenys believes that there may have been poultry at Helyg, and perhaps a pig, and plenty of fish in the nearby river. In addition the nearby farms of Gwern y Gof and Talybraich would have been able to provide cheap food. The problem of vegetables would have been solved, as in most rural areas of Britain, by the simple means of growing their own.

Proud of the poorest of her ancestors from so long ago, Glenys Walters is delighted that Helyg has survived to be loved and cared for by several generations of rock-climbers and mountaineers.



PART 2 by GM

The CCJ Editor for 2011, while working in America, showed the above draft article in September 2010 to his cousin Gareth who lives at Tregarth in Wales. He in turn being very interested mentioned it to Elwyn Hughes a local historian and past Headmaster of Bethesda School and learnt that coincidentally the latter had just spoken to a Helen Jones a well-known professional singer whose stage name is Tammy Jones. It transpires that Helen is also a descendant of the Helyg Jones family and wanted to be put in touch with her relative Glenys Walters. Geoff Milburn promptly e-mailed her. The reply arrived a day or two later:

'I have now bought a house in the Ogwen district where most of my family were brought up after leaving Helyg. The child who was mentioned in George Borrow's book was my great grandmother, Catherine. My grandfather, Owen Jones, was one of the Helyg boys and he had four children, Owen Glyn (born 1907), Handel, Ellen (born 1904) and Elsie (born 1911). Apparently from remembering my aunty (wife of Owen Glyn) telling me that Owen Glyn her husband is mentioned in some of the climbing books, maybe the mountain rescue one. He was recognized by them because he apparently saved, or helped someone on the mountain... Owen Jones's daughter Ellen was my mother who had seven children.'

Helen continued to explain that many years ago she had even tried to buy Helyg but discovered that sadly it was owned by the Climbers' Club. She did also mention that David Jones her great uncle who was mentioned in my draft article had a son Ivor Lloyd Hughes (he took his mother's surname) who is still alive and living near Bangor.

At this point I must respectfully ask the reader if the penny has dropped yet? Have you really realized the possible significance of this new information for our club? Please read it again before you continue..... Owen Glyn Jones... a shiver ran down my spine. It couldn't be, surely? Could it? We are not just talking George Borrow, historian, here... and a family who just happened to live in our dear hut Helyg. We are actually talking about a blood descendant who perhaps was only the greatest climber and alpinist of his day, a founder member of the Climbers' Club, who met his tragic death on the Dent Blanche on 28th August 1899. I dashed to the book room and excitedly began grabbing out volumes of the Alpine Journal and the first volume of the CCJ. It must be too much of a coincidence. The names 'Owen', 'Glyn' and 'Jones' are not exactly uncommon in Wales even if combined together. I read through the tragedy impatiently, plus an obituary but could not get a fix. In desperation I turned to the 1900 second edition of Jones's book 'Rock-Climbing in the English Lake District' which has a Memoir of the great man by W.M. Cook.

'Owen Glynne Jones was born on November 2nd 1867. A Welshman by blood, he was a Londoner by birth, for he first saw the light of day in Clarendon Street, Paddington. His father, Mr David Jones, was a carpenter and builder, and the son commenced his education at a local school. Of his early life there is little to tell. He seems to have spent all his holidays in Wales, and there to have developed, among what may be without inaccuracy be called his native mountains, the passion for climbing which made him famous, and which led to his early death.'

What had seemed a certainty was suddenly not even a possibility as O.G. Jones's father was a David and not an Owen. In any case the dates did not fit, and all my hopes of linking the great mountaineer with Helyg were dashed.



On the long wintry road to Caernarfon approaching Helyg with Tryfan rising proud and impressive. From an early watercolour by A. Hunt. Photo: Geoff Milburn collection.

Continuing Helen's story, her mother Ellen married a William JONES (another one!) and they had seven children: Mary Elunid, Eifion Wyn, Ben, William Emrys, Owen Glyn, Alun and Helen Wyn. Helen's brother Owen Glyn was in a famous local music group called 'Hogia Llandegai' (translated as 'Llandegai Boys') while Helen herself won an Opportunity Knocks talent show in 1975. She went on to have a hit with her song 'Let me try again' which went to number 5 in the charts.

Although genealogical research is somewhat of a rollercoaster ride with great highs and many disappointments this story has at least revealed some intriguing facts that have previously not come to light. As to the downside, sometimes a dark cloud has a silver lining and this has proved to be so, as researching O.G. Jones has revealed perhaps an even more intriguing story about the beginnings of the Climbers' Club.

It was a wide, wide, wide world

Anon

Extract from the CCJ 1908

'Wide World Magazine, October, 1907, contains an article entitled, "Three Men on Great Gable," by R. E. Arnold, of the English Climbers' Club. There is no such name among the members of the Climbers' Club, but the author, who is a member, has used an assumed name. It is much to be regretted that such sensational articles should be published in the public press, as they bring the good name of mountaineering into disrepute. The editor of the periodical in which the account appears prefaces it as follows:

A touch-and-go experience on the Cumberland Fells.

Some people have an idea that mountaineering in England is practically devoid of danger, but Mr. Arnold's little story affords striking evidence to the contrary.'

We quote a few passages from the article.

'It was a fine piece of rock craft, but intensely risky, for had either foot slipped upon the rock face, he would have been instantly killed on the scree below. I handed him the slack, and prepared for the perilous descent'

Apparently the party started in snow for a climb they did not know at about three in the afternoon at Easter. Naturally they had to come down in the dark! Most of us who had undergone such an experience would have endeavoured to forget it as soon as possible, but the author apparently takes a pride in his discreditable performance.

The matter would not be worth noticing if it were not necessary to emphasise the fact from time to time that such articles are harmful to the club. Climbing accidents have occurred far too frequently of late on English rocks. If we cannot prevent the fatalities which happen to inexperienced climbers who are trying rocks which are too difficult for them, let us at least be united both in example and precept in warning climbers against climbs in which the looseness of the rock constitutes an almost unavoidable risk. **It is to be hoped that no one, in future, who writes in this way will use the Climbers' Club name, or shelter himself behind an alias.** ('The Earl of Fulwood' please note.)

The Wide World's publisher was Englishman George Newnes, who began his extraordinary publishing career in 1881 with a paper named 'Tit-Bits' a digest of small but interesting items gleaned from other papers and magazines. Purporting to convey the 'true' adventures of contributors, Wide World was much more a (Big) Boys' Own Paper with tales of derring do from every corner of a globe, largely tinted with the pink of the British Empire. It would last for over 75 years, until the advent of outdoor broadcasts featuring amongst other thrilling episodes, climbing extravaganzas such as Red Wall, and The Old Man of Hoy starring some of our most eminent members in their younger and more hirsute prime, meant that epics such as above could be enjoyed live from the comfort of one's own living room.

Nowadays of course it is all much more sophisticated and profound with the likes of Jeremy Clarkson wrestling Range Rovers up steep and trackless Scottish mountains or pitching his driving prowess against a couple of climbers in a race to the top of the Verdon Gorge.



The Mother of all Dinners - Leeds University 1976

Aido Garlic

I'd arrived at Leeds University for the 1972 session. I really knew nothing about the scene there at that time, but I was soon to be initiated by various 'laddies', although it took me a while to get into the team so to speak.

Studying modern languages, I spent most of the third year in Spain/Portugal although by this time I had met most of the super stars of a Leeds climbing club which was the toast of the GB climbing world at the time.

One cannot deny that the likes of Manson, Syrett, Jepson, Brian Hall, Ken Woods, Kitson and a host of others including the occasional visit from some old bugger called Dennis (something or other) who used to carry a rope for JB, and his 'Uncle Alan' from Ilkley, made Leeds and Yorkshire the place to be for climbing. I could include Mr. Bernard Newman ('the Human') but take him away from his beloved Almscliffe boulders and he is, after all, only human!!

I didn't quite get into the ring at the start – it was only in my second year when I turned up with a two-metre tall American by the name of 'Henry B' (plus obligatory white cap) that I seemed to be accepted into the inner circle. I'd finally made it! A short-lived sabbatical, as I was called away for studies to foreign parts.

By the time of my return to Leeds for the final year I found that in absentia I was now the president of the club!! [Thanks Bernard!]

There were also the new bloods in the club like Chris (The Flash) Hamper, Chris (Iron Fingers) Addy and still some of the old sticky fingers like DA (Dirty Alex), Harry Mammal (Mike Hammill), 'Did' (John Powell), and certainly odd visitors like my old acquaintances Black Nick (Colton), Blonde Nick (Donnolly), Choe Brooks, Bancroft, Jimmy Campbell, Johnny Allen, Con Carey and a host of others who saw Leeds as the hot spot to be.

There was also an amazing number of gentle ladies who had parted with cash to join this insular group. Gwyneth, 'Flick', Jan, Cherry, Maria, Joyce, and Diane to name just a few! (All these lasses barking!!)

So Bernard decided that we ought to arrange 'The Mother of all Dinners' – in other words, the biggest blow-out ever and invite anyone stupid enough to come. Bernard had received information that there was a nice quiet little spot in Pateley Bridge called the 'Watermill Hotel'. This news came from the Caving Club of the University, so it must have been good?

Bernard and I went to view the place and arrange a date. The landlord, a jovial cove with beard to match, was quite insistent that we should have a good time, despite the fact he couldn't hear a word we were saying given that he had the biggest trumpet welded into his ear. He was a very understanding guy and clarified what was, in those days, 'After Time'. "If you want to kip on the floor in sleeping bags, then you are residents, so you can drink all night and the 'bed' will cost 5p." Robbery! - but we accepted gracefully.

Well....invites were posted but not only to past and present members but also to some of my acquaintances from the 'Black & Tans' and 'Manchester Grit', also the 'Rimmon' so we were expecting a very mixed bunch. The problem was....who to have as

guest speaker? Problem solved! Bonington and Co. had just returned from a successful ascent of the NW face of some hill in Himalayas and they'd taken a friend of mine as cook and bottlewasher, one 'Tut' Braithwaite, (aka 'The Mekon').

C'mon Paul, come and tell us all your stories! "It sounds really good" were his first and last words. What a dreadful decision!

And so to the dinner.....

Everyone gathered at the appointed time, some even in proper clothes (excuse me, older members) and the proceedings began. Bernard, myself, our Guest Speaker, and a few other hangers-on were seated at top table (I think also Dave Clarke from Centrespport had come on his skateboard if my memory serves me well).

To start the proceedings, the presentations. Knowing how much Bernard was joined at the hip with Almscliffe, John 'Did' Powell, myself, and two supposed mechanics* had secretly and somewhat drunkenly left the revelries of the Royal Park pub one evening to journey up to Poole in Wharfedale to find the local signpost to Almscliffe Crag! It is quite incredible now as I look back and think of the two experts with a rusty spanner at the top of an even rustier pole, trying to take the sign off without squeaking. A nearby cottage appeared to be part of Blackpool Illuminations as the lights were on and off continuously with the noise, accompanied by the mechanics up and down and up and.....the pole. The sign was freed and 'The Human's' name was fixed! But I digress.....

So Bernard got his sign and I got the classic annual cardboard cut-out for the 'Longest Standing Member' (about six feet long, painted in bright colours, shaped as, well, imagine it!!) – no idea why as there were many more valued bodies present. (I really wanted the third prize of the blow-up doll but that was Tut's prize, although I still recall I ended up with it in the early hours!.....oh, sorry that was Joyce!).

On reflection, 'Tut' was brilliant. The only other time I have seen him shake as much when he stood up to speak, has to be when he had to pay a round in the Cross Keys in Uppermill, Saddleworth. Failing that, it was on Anglesey on Yellow Walls (but we won't go into that).

He started holding his notes, dithering and stuttering and to all intents shaking 'like a shiting dog'. His audience was very calm until a half pound lump of butter flew past his ear and smacked into the wall behind. It was the perfect escape for 'Tut' as he threw his notes into the air and stoically commented "I don't give a shit about you lot – at least I didn't have to pay for this crap!" Yes, the chips were not of Harry Ramsden's quality nor were the fried eggs – but there again, you get what you pay for!

And so to the evening and celebrations. By which time of course, most of the more responsible participants had departed. However, the stalwarts were still to the fore.

Bernard had provided the disco and so it was – 'on with the show'!!

Clearly now the evening was humming and the dance hall was full of 'pogo-ing' characters enjoying their last days of youth. It appeared that locals did not feature in these wild weekends and so we had the whole lot to ourselves. Somewhere in the evening I had a rush of blood and conscience about how it was all developing so I tried to accost the man with the trumpet earhole. He was safely ensconced in the 'snug'. I was about to suggest that it may have been getting a bit out of hand but he pre-empted me by shouting "They're havin' a good time in there, ain't they"!! I smiled and departed.

Time on and the noise was deafening. The room had lovely louvre doors leading

onto a grassed area and garden. My most abiding memory of the whole evening is to see his piano (thankfully 'upright' and not 'grand') disappear through the doors onto the lawn. It was as if we were playing dodgems.

Everyone went to sleep in the early/late hours. I hid under the table footy machine with 'dear Joyce' (not the doll!!) only to be aroused in the sweet hours by Con Carey relieving himself on a fellow sleeper (but, again, that's another story)'.

The final chapter in this episode is that the following morning, one of my 'compadres' from the 'Rimmon' had borrowed his company's artic low loader to transport a mast for a boat he had moored in Whitby, and found he had a puncture, much to his chagrin and certainly for his boss when he had to call the rescue on the Sunday.

Climbing was on Brimham Rocks and a good day was had by all. I personally even managed 'Frensis Direct' in Klets.

I recall that we did have to pay a bit of casualty claim to the hotel (!) but not a lot. Also I don't think 'Tut' has ever forgiven me – but there again he had a cheap meal!!

He's the only lad I know who can peel an orange in his pocket!! I was last with him in Delph (Saddleworth) about ten years ago having a quiet FEW drinks in 'The Heights' pub. He pulled his cash out to offer to pay but dropped a 10p coin down to the floor – he bent down to pick it up but it hit him on the back of the head!!

Yes, I know, it's an oldie, but, what the 'ell – a good crew man!

While I've been present at some monster dinners in the mid-Sixties/Seventies, notably at Kilnsey, Wasdale Head, and some frightening experiences at the Hill Inn and North Wales, nothing quite can compare with 'The Mother of all Dinners' at the 'Watermill'.

Thanks Bernard, and every other silly sod who was daft enough to try and relive an era gone by!

*The 'mechanics' have to remain nameless for various reasons, primarily for not knowing which end of a spanner to hold. Leeds somehow had a reputation in the 'Mech. Eng' department. Can't think why!!

Climbs of my youth

Dick Isherwood

'With the rise of bouldering and easy access climbing, Cloggy can be an intimidating place to those without experience of large and remote crags, and the associated boldness required on some routes can make them feel relatively difficult to today's average climber.'

Nick Dixon, CC Guide to Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, 2004

My old friend Jack Baines once tried to persuade me to write a book. When I protested that no publisher would touch it Jack told me that was no problem. I'd forgotten he was a partner in the Ernest Press. I set to scribbling but stalled around page 80. I stalled for so long that Jack died, and with him my literary prospects, but the CC Editor often seems a bit short of material so I've dug out a few passages.

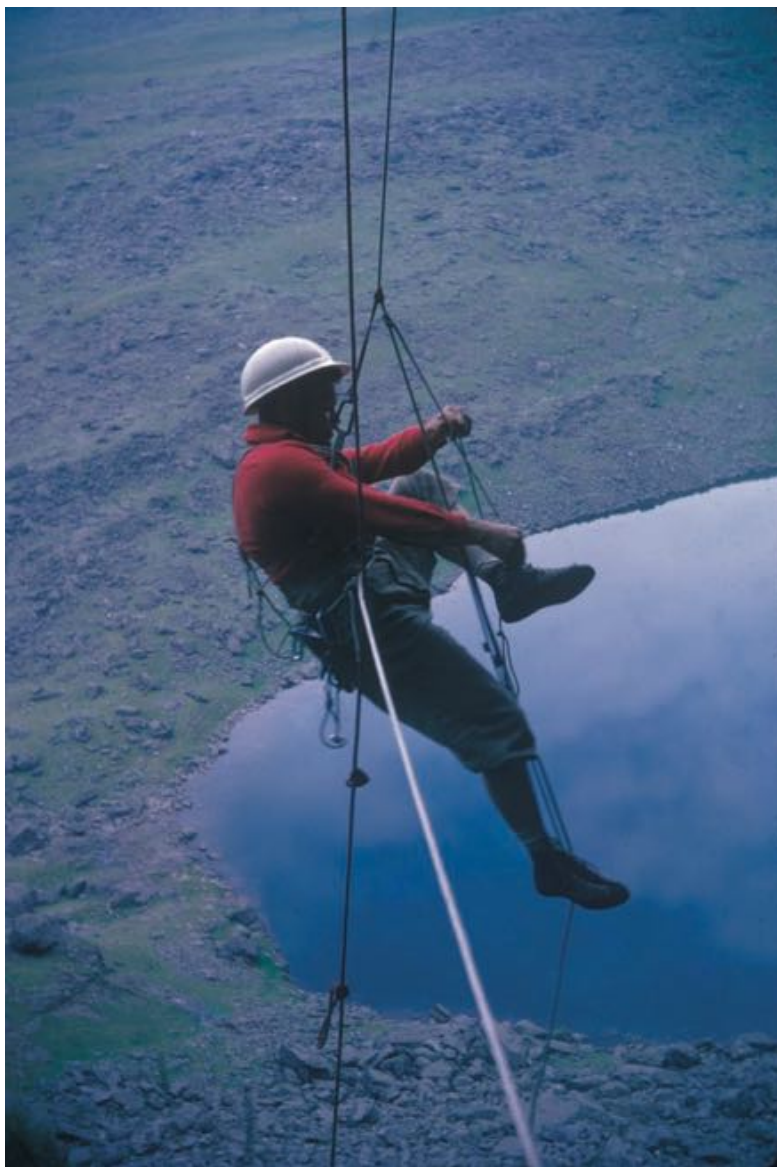
I started rock climbing in 1961 when I went to Cambridge as a very young student, so young in fact that I couldn't even go into the pubs legally. I had been nothing more than a hill walker and I wondered for a while whether I really wanted to get into this apparently dangerous activity. My fears rose when I went to a CUMC slide show and the President, Terence Goodfellow, had difficulty limping onto the stage. "My God," I thought, "he must have fallen off a climb." I discovered he had been hit by a fast rolling barrel at the annual beer party.

I decided to give it a try anyway. We used to assemble at 6.30 on most Sunday mornings for a cold, cramped four hour drive to Derbyshire where it was usually raining. The minibus driver was an enigmatic but dashing Austrian research student, Rupert Roschnik who was the only one of us old enough to rent the van. My first attempts on the rock were in big clumsy hiking boots on green, slimy and chilly gritstone. Several people fell off, including Rupert who was climbing in leather ski boots, but somehow not myself. I'm surprised today that I even went a second time.

Friday evening lectures at the CUMC were a big event. In those days British climbers, however distinguished, hadn't realised they could charge for their slide shows, and Cambridge was known as a good place to visit. Even Don Whillans came for just his travel expenses and a good dinner and piss-up. (He learnt more quickly than most though.) Chris Bonington came twice in a year – first to tell us about the Central Freney Pillar, then again in early summer, at Terence's request, to lead a discussion on Alpine safety, as the club had recently had a few nasty accidents. It was great of him to do this and I for one learnt a lot before ever setting foot in the Alps.

That Christmas during a long bus journey I read Hermann Buhl's 'Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage'. I could not put it down, even for transport cafe food. Like many other climbers before and since, I was hooked from that day. The sheer enthusiasm, the risk taking for no material reward, and the progressive maturing of Buhl's understanding of the mountains made this something totally different from anything I had come across before. I have since reread it about every five years to help prevent the onset of middle age.

My own rock climbing progressed in fits and starts. I went to a Helyg meet in mid-December and was traumatized by a chimney on the Gribin Facet which was



Jim Swallow prusiking up the initial overhang of Mynedd, Cloggy, West Buttress c1968.
Photo Dick Isherwood

virtually a cold waterfall. Big hiking boots still. As the weather warmed up I started to get somewhere. I found I could lead the occasional Severe, and I started to understand gritstone climbing at a modest level. It was a great feeling. Confidence was beginning to build. I bought a pair of kletterschuhe - you weren't supposed to use PAs unless you did really hard climbs.

The next landmark, for me, was a knock on the door early in the summer of 1962. In trooped John McCormick, Nick Estcourt and Rupert.

"We need a fourth man to fill the car to Wales this weekend. Wrottesley's dropped out."

This was a big break for me as these guys climbed VS.

The weather was fine and we did some good climbs - certainly by my standard. Phantom Rib and Brant were the highlights and I led one or two VS pitches. Rupert fell out of the V chimney of Brant and I led it feeling like a conquering hero.

The leading figures in the CUMC at this time were Nick and Rupert. Nick was very competitive and dying to lead a gritstone Extreme. He nearly did. He got hold of a car - not easy then - and went off to Stanage in midweek with John McCormick to do the Left Unconquerable, but ran out of steam near the top, fell off and was held head down, three feet off the ground. John was a big man even then.

Nick was also a prodigious farter, though less celebrated than Brian Chase, who could empty an entire hut with one quiet release. I once found myself running down from Stanage to the bus behind Nick in a late afternoon rain squall - he let one go and I almost bounced off it. The air really did become thicker.

Rupert was less overtly ambitious. He showed up in Courmayeur in 1962 with his seventeen-year-old brother in tow - a year younger than me - and sat in the campsite with a map and ruler, determining the longest route to the summit of Mont Blanc. The Peuterey Ridge!! They did it, over several days, narrowly surviving an avalanche on the descent, and I don't think his brother ever climbed again.

In my first summer the CUMC held an Alpine meet in the Bernina. We had a sufficient ratio of experience to lack of it, perfect weather and mountains of just the right size. We climbed more or less all of the good peaks, by routes including the Biancograt and the traverse of the Piz Palu, and I learnt a great deal. The meet was only marred by Il Presidente himself falling off the Piz Palu and needing a rescue. This apart, I thought it was the best introduction to Alpine climbing one could have. An attempt to repeat the experience in the Zillertal three years later ended in such a good party that the meet leader spent 24 hours in the custody of the Innsbruck police.

A certain amount of building climbing was practised. St John's Chapel was the classic, as its Victorian Gothic rock was much sounder than the real old thing. Tony Greenbank came along after a lecture and the Sunday Telegraph captured his leader bridging wide on the lower roof. Robin Devenish climbed it solo after a heavy night in the pub, forgot to go up the inside staircase and unlock the top door, and had to solo down the outside again. Kings Chapel was done less frequently as it was heavily patrolled. One night a group was on the side chapel roof, about to climb the steel bars protecting the stained glass, when lights flashed. A young gentleman half way over the college boundary spikes in his dinner jacket began apologizing to the porters. "It's all right, Sir, don't worry, it's these night climbers we're after." We stayed very quiet before continuing. An old sling of mine stayed on top of one of the corner towers for the next four years. Nick had a closer call - he was spotted very low down, jumped off and

ran, swam the Cam, then realised that the porter had crossed the bridge and was still coming. He swam another, very foul stream and ran all the way home to Magdalene.

The great prize of the time, for a few, was the University Library tower. It is a modern brick structure, singularly unsuited to free climbing, but Rupert had a plan. The square section drainpipes on the lower tier were too tight to the wall for us to free climb them but with a bit of wire and perseverance you could thread a piece of line and prusik up. This had to be redone at every bracket, so it took time. The sportplan for the tower was to bolt up to the long vertical windows, back and foot up them, and then bolt a bit more to the top. The plan foundered when we reached the foot of the tower and dawn was already breaking. I guess you could either bivouac up there or do it in the winter.

An annual ritual was the Ben Nevis Meet in March. Some of us had to hitch hike to get there. We carried a week's supply of basic food up to the CIC hut, got the stove going, hoped the weather would improve, and tried to avoid using the appalling outhouse. It was still the age of step cutting, so most of us never got beyond Comb Gully, but Rupert did lead Point Five with one 85cm straight-pick ice axe, clearing another party's two-week old steps.

The CUMC Dinner was famous, or possibly notorious, depending on one's point of view. One year, as secretary, I had to make a speech and I wrote separately to Roger Chorley (the Alpine Club guest) and John Longland (representing the CC) asking each for scurrilous stories about the other. Of course they compared notes and I got nothing. I budgeted half a bottle of sherry a head for the warm-up, though many had been to pre-pre sherry parties starting around lunchtime. Ice cream with chocolate sauce and throwable biscuits was perhaps not a good idea for dessert, and we were banned from yet another college. Some of us made the most of the evening by traversing Trinity Great Court in the snow, still in dinner jackets.

In the summer of 1964 I discovered that Henry Day had a trip to Pakistan in the works and needed a fourth person. We drove from Cambridge to the Swat valley in a short wheelbase canvas top Land Rover, containing almost all our food (mostly donated) and the climbing gear. Much of the weight was on the roof rack which had to be rewelded to the roof frame now and then. Three of us sat in the front and one lay in the back on top of all the food and with minimal headroom under the canvas. It took four weeks to get there and it was the hottest and most uncomfortable journey I had ever been on. We all got galloping diarrhoea at times. When we got to Rawalpindi we found that a kitbag containing the ice axes had fallen off the roof somewhere. Absolutely no climbing gear could be bought in Pakistan then, but we managed to borrow some axes from an Irish expedition who were coming home from Rakaposhi. Henry had various connections through which we had an audience with the Wali of Swat, who was still a genuine prince in a little whitewashed palace, dispensing justice to his subjects. The mountains were a bit smaller and less virgin than we had been led to expect, but we did a few modest first ascents and narrowly escaped destruction in a rockfall. The whole four-month trip cost £600, of which half was provided by the Mount Everest Foundation. For me it was a life changing experience, as they say.

In 1965 I really made some progress in my rock climbing. I broke through into what were then known as 'the Extremes'. An ascent of Cenotaph Corner with Peter Rowat, on a cold March day with a few snowflakes drifting around, gave me confidence and I never



John Peck on the upper long pitch of White Slab, 1965. Note the grass! Photo Dick Isherwood

looked back. So much of rock climbing is in the mind. Later that year I did The Grooves on Cynr Las with Ted Maden, then White Slab on Cloggy on a memorable summer's day with John Peck when we spent so long untangling our brand new double rope that we were almost benighted, and finally Vember. This last was by far the hardest rock climb I'd done to date and I can still clearly remember the feeling of insecurity in the shallow chimney high on the second pitch which is the crux. That summer I really came to appreciate the high crags of Snowdonia for their mossy cool recesses and splendid climbing situations.

In the same year I ceased to be a student and was forced to find work. I had very little idea what I wanted to do but the job market for agricultural scientists was amazingly good at that time – I had four interviews and was offered four jobs. I took the one that came with a company car. It was interesting enough work but most important at the time was that I could organise my life to be half way to North Wales on most Friday afternoons. My employers were very broad minded about the record high mileage on the car. They even let me take it to the Alps.

Around 1967 I started climbing regularly with Mike Kosterlitz. We had been at Cambridge together but for much of the time he was well ahead of me in rock climbing ability. I had closed the gap a bit by now and we did some good things together. Mike was smaller than me but very strong. One weekend I fell off a peg climb at Matlock, and dangled, barely in contact with the cliff. Mike just pulled me up hand over hand to the last peg.

One of our best climbs together in Wales was the Cloggy Pinnacle girdle traverse, of which I believe we did the third ascent (or crossing). I remember that we didn't get

started until one pm – a bit late for one of the biggest climbs in Wales - and even so it was cold out on the front face of the Pinnacle. I got to lead Taurus and wore out my arms yo-yoing up and down around the small overhang above the big roof ; it may have been the hardest pitch I ever managed to lead in Wales. I recently bought Nick Dixon's guidebook and was ever so pleased to see that this still rates E4. Mike climbed the short pitch round the top of the Pinnacle Arete so it was my turn to lead again when we reached the Hand Traverse. I got half way across this spectacular vertical wall and had to come back in disarray, arms and fingers not quite obeying commands. Mike stormed across it, tangling his runners and cursing wildly. It was now almost dark and we were worn out, so we decided to finish it the next day, and headed for the pub. Late in the evening Joe Brown, whom I hardly knew, approached me and actually initiated a conversation.

"I'm surprised you thought Taurus was hard – it's sooo well protected."

It was my proudest moment in the Padarn Lake. I later picked up the story that Whillans had had to give Joe a tight rope on it.

There was some more exciting steep climbing in the morning, between overhangs in a very exposed part of the cliff. Mike showed his Dolomite experience on the abseil (down what is now The Axe), which overhangs in two directions, sufficiently for you to lose all contact with the rock if you get it wrong. We had a massive knot in the end of the doubled rope in case of trouble. I galloped up the big vertical wall of Shrike to finish – it seemed so easy after what had gone before.

One weekend we went up to Cloggy at the end of a dry spell, and it started to rain. Most people headed down but it seemed a great opportunity to do the Black Cleft. If you didn't mind getting really wet all you had to do was stay in the back and work your way up clearing the watercress as you went.

We did most of our rock climbing in North Wales, but we got to the Lake District and occasionally to Scotland also. One wonderful day on Dove Crag we did the three big climbs of the time, Dovedale Groove, Hiraeth and Extol. The weather was perfect and we had the cliff to ourselves. Lots of dark steep rock, dried up lichen and cool shady ledges.

A trip to Scotland one summer let us do the famous Carnivore on the Buachaille, once rated the hardest climb in Glencoe (though probably never so). Mike led the crux after I had failed dismally and had to let Geoff Cram's team through. After this section, which is very low down on the climb, only fifty feet off the ground, you traverse to and fro across some very steep and exposed country, and eventually emerge in a load of deep heather. Geoff and party tried unsuccessfully to do Whillans's direct finish, which cuts out some of the heather, but eventually had to abseil off . That evening one of them (a future Vice-President of the Climbers' Club, no less !) worked off his frustrations by getting very drunk and loudly insulting half the committee of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, in whose hut we were staying. I thought the Scots would arrest us at the border. The inter-club repercussions lasted most of the next year.

For a while my regular climbing partner was Bob Keates, perhaps better known for extraordinary eating and drinking feats than for climbing. Getting bored at one club dinner, he ate the daffodils off the table. Curry powder by the spoonful was commonplace. To my mind his most impressive achievement in this unusual area of life was to drink a quart of Daddy's sauce non-stop from the bottle. This took place in a

motorway cafe; the truck drivers stopped eating to watch him, forks in hand, and the entire kitchen staff came out to worry about his health. He moaned and clutched his stomach all the way home but was fine after three days or so. They didn't even charge him for the sauce.

Bob was a good climber too. He had a reputation as a crazy guy for a while, but settled down after one or two epics (e.g. getting caught above the overhangs on the Cima Ovest in a snowstorm wearing PAs). One day we went to Craig Gogarth when it was still being opened up. We weren't into new climbs (that took an extra mental leap which I never quite made in weekend rock climbing) so we thought we'd look for marks of previous climbers and follow them. We found a promising line of flakes and grooves midway along the cliff which started out OK but half way up there was a choice of lines. I spotted a peg up in a corner, and struggled up to it to find it wasn't in very far at all. Going up further, I got very extended in a wide bridge between two flakes which diverged farther and farther. I pulled myself into a little niche and very nearly fell straight out of it again; it was a lot steeper and more sloping than I thought. I tried to put a peg in but it fell out and hit the sea after one bounce. Two pegs left. The next went in less than an inch and hitting it harder would send it the same way. I decided it would have to do, and went on. I could only make the next move, over a bulge to a very small ledge, by standing on the peg, it held. On the ledge I found a peg belay. Someone really had been here before. Bob led on to the top, scattering young cormorants on the bigger ledges. One, very panicked, lost its balance and tumbled over the edge. We watched as it fell, feeling a little guilty. Half way down it got its act together, learnt to fly just in time, and headed for Ireland. We met Pete Crew that evening and discovered we had done the second ascent of his Big Groove.

One Sunday on Cloggy, Bob and I were returning along the foot of the East Buttress from a climb I forget, and we stopped to watch Ed Drummond climbing the Great Wall with Crew holding his rope and coaching. Drummond was wearing shorts - very non-traditional - and at the halfway ledge he pulled up a banana for a snack. He seemed a bit strange but he didn't make it look too hard, and we learnt lots from Crew's commentary, so we stole a day from work and went to have a go ourselves on the Monday.

We had a 300-foot 7mm rope, and a 150-foot 9mm rope. This seemed just about good enough for a 200-foot pitch if you did the right things. Bob dug in at the bottom and I set off. It was not easy - we hadn't watched Drummond on the lower part and I struggled on the crux where you make a big move right on some very smooth rock and up to a peg - at least there was a peg there in 1967. A cunning lasso with a thin tape gave me some psychological protection but I swear I didn't pull on the sling - climbing ethics were peculiar but strong in those days.

I reached Joe Brown's retreat peg from around 1962, and it virtually fell apart in my fingers - just flakes of rust. I replaced it and put the remains in my back pocket as a souvenir. By the time I was at the half way ledge the mist had come in and I couldn't see Bob at the bottom. Since it was a Monday there was no one else on the cliff at all. It felt distinctly lonely. Geoff Cram had taken a stance here, but the ledge was awfully small and you really needed yet another peg, or even two, to make it at all secure, and that was surely cheating. I placed some mediocre jammed nuts and continued, up the part Drummond had made to look easy. All went fine for a while, then it steepened and I saw

the shallow crack which Crew had cleaned from above to fit his chockstones. I placed a very small nut on a very thin sling and began to layback up the next bit of crack. I got my toe caught under the sling and it popped out. It was my only protection for a long way. I half panicked, scrambled for a peg, and hammered it a little way in before continuing. For really good security I clipped in the thick rope, which by this time was out of Bob's hands and snaking up the cliff. For some reason he hadn't bothered to tell me this. It took almost five hours for me to complete the climb, and Bob was frozen, but by the time he had come round to the top he was warm enough to abseil down and collect the gear. Yet another second who didn't follow, in the great tradition of the cliff. I stayed quiet about that extra peg for years - but I only used it for protection. It wasn't good enough to put your weight on.

I did several climbs in Wales with Jim Swallow. He was of an older generation and had what I thought was an interestingly antique set of gear. Jim preferred his slings unknotted so he could loop them round chockstones. He climbed in a venerable canvas anorak with lots of pockets from which, like a snake charmer, he would produce these bits of laid rope, then loop them around something, tie a loose overhand knot in the ends and clip in. This scheme was never put to the test while I was with him, but I didn't trust it at all. My own gear was very conventional for the period – nuts large and small, one or two from the Snowdon Railway but mostly scavenged from car repair shops and supplemented with a few Trolls and Moacs which were the cutting edge things then. Jim of course trusted my gear as little as I trusted his, so we climbed with two sets.

The most memorable route by far that we did together was Mynedd, Rowland Edwards' route up the widest part of the West Buttress overhang. I suspect this was the second ascent and I wonder how many more there have been. We identified the flake on the lip of the overhang which Rowland had lassoed, and took turns trying to repeat this feat. I thought I was good at lassoes after doing White Slab but this one required a different order of skill. Jim finally got it and had the privilege of prusiking up first. We were using old-style laid nylon ropes and as he spiralled up his back rope got all twisted around the prusik rope. I had to keep twirling him free. He finally got over the overhang and it was my turn. I at least had a rope from above beside the one on the flake but again I got all twisted up and had to wait for passers by to spin me out. While we were doing this there was a cracking sound, I suddenly dropped a foot or two and something flew past me and hit the Western Terrace hard. Dr Swallow, the consultant physician, assumed his best bedside voice – quite different from his usual rather critical tone.

"Richard, I would be very careful if I were you." I felt I was being told I had some terminal disease.

When I got up to him I found that half the lasso flake had broken off. The rope had somehow stayed on the remains. Jim was standing on two very small footholds belayed to a peg that seemed to be beaten directly into the soft brown rock rather than into a crack. The rest of the route was relatively uneventful, though definitely not easy and on pretty ratty rock which all sloped the wrong way.

At times we were quite fit. Mick Guilliard and I drove up on a Friday night in midsummer, ran out of petrol somewhere between Llangollen and Betws, slept in the car, started rather late on Saturday and still managed to do November, Woubits and Slanting Slab in the day. We got down just before the pub closed. I fought my way



Bob Keates on the Big Groove, Craig Gogarth 1966. Photo Dick Isherwood

through the crowd and bought six pints – three each. The first one went down without touching the sides. That, at least, I can still achieve.

Looking back on the Welsh scene from 40 years later, the thing that stands out the most to me is the achievement of the first generation Rock and Ice climbers, mainly but not only Joe Brown and Don Whillans. How many people in the years since then could have handled first ascents of Vember, Woubits or Taurus, on sight from the ground up, on vegetated and often wet rock, in gym shoes and with next to no protection? Not many, I suspect. Certainly not me. Is it coincidence that, although they went way beyond Snowdonia and did some impressive things in the Alps and bigger mountains, not one of them was killed climbing?

Three poems from Sella

Terry Gifford

1 Eagle, Sunset

and just below the summit
going the wrong way
back down the ridge
to find the descent gap
you thought you remembered
that we hadn't looked down,

rock slightly slippery
under sharp bushes,
the cold wind of night
sprung from somewhere,
the chill certainty, now
of benightment before
reaching the track to the car.

No time to notice
the eagle, its slow drift
on big wings above us,
as I check that the sun
is definitely down
behind the black horizon
that moments before

was a bank of shafted
shadows you'd found time
to photograph. Now
we must stay together,
backs to the summit
I know we must cross.
It hurts to lose this time,
but you are calm
and say this gap must
at least be eliminated

and should have been
when first we passed
below it to the summit.
We look down at
an undescendable drop,
sheer and all wrong.
We turn again

towards the summit.
Now the way is clear
to cross its crest
and find the gap
that leads to the rock
scramble you descended
last time. A ramp,
then route-finding
downwards to darkness.
It must be done.

2 La Pileta

The 'washing bowl'
we enter over
its lip poised
above the village
swimming pool
from whose cool
August blue
we gazed up
into that barren
maw of iron jaws,
safe in the softer
element, its splashes,
children, mothers.

But to enter
that water carved
bowl is to find
cool deep shade
under flawless curves,
the iron gates
of an old *corral*,
heaven, haven,
home of the old goat-
woman no card-
players now
remember, except
in their dreams.

We climb on
over broken
bancals, carrying
baby pines
for planting
under the highest
wall where, behind
a screen of brambles
water drips
into a bowl
calcified onto
its altar of rocks,
fringed with green ferns.

Drink from the rock.
Anoint your head.
Eat now the olive-
bread, the oranges.
Turn, clean, dig, plant
the pinos for
protection from
this sliding slope
for the children
of those lovers
who opened the box
and signed the book
of La Pileta.

3 Three Peaks Into the Future: Water, Fire, Rockfall

Walking far too fast
from Finestrat's Font Moli,
tripping over tree roots
in a dark start again
until, in a chill
gunmetal grey light,
we surprise the hunter,
a peregrine echoing
high on Puig Campana.
Rounding its summit track
we look down and back
on Benidorm's towers
sucking the ground water
from under our feet.

Descending to the Col de Pouet
we push on towards Ponoch
but take five in a bower
to be burned in the fire
begun in Polop next weekend
when we watch from Sella
a red horizon leaping.
On the summit, in cycle shorts,
stands our village chemist,
deaf and dumb, an able
reader of lips, who leaves
to look over the rim
at what will become black
tree-bones and ashes.

Sanchet is all rock,
and heavy in our heads
on the horizontal donkey
trail below its looming
spine. A siesta is essential
and an orange, a fresh
stance: poc a poc, boulder
by bolder steps to find
on this summit a Hut
Bookings Sec., playing truant
from the phone, one eye-
brow
plastered, I ponder, as we
pass
below a scar of recent
rockfall,
a stark future seen for miles.

Looking the part

Peter Warland (non-member)

One of our old casual climbing acquaintances only occasionally managed to look the part of a 'hard man' but he invariably sounded just right. He knew every climb in Britain, every variation and idiosyncrasy. He studied the guide-books and listened carefully when others talked about loose handholds, toe-jams, convenient holly trees for belays and alternative starts, but had actually climbed very few of the routes. He was, to tell the truth, a very well-informed but mediocre climber back then in the 1950s, just after the war.

I was a mediocre climber too but I always looked the part. Subconsciously, I had from the start donned the right apparel for my forays into the hills and I soon fooled a very large number of people. From our very first weekend of rock-climbing in the Ogwen Valley, when we tackled a very easy route up Milestone Buttress on Tryfan and then messed about and got into trouble on the Idwal Slabs, my climbing companion and I looked the part of 'hard-men' and soon gained considerable reputations for doing Extreme climbs without actually going near them. I can still recall standing outside Merthyn's shack at Idwal and supping a cup of tea one afternoon when a group of apparently knowledgeable hikers joined us. One of them eyed us carefully but warily then announced to his companions that we had probably just come down from tackling the severe Munich Wall. I suppose I must have looked the part lounging there, a hundred feet of slightly soiled manilla hemp rope coiled oh-so casually around my shoulders and, like my companion, a sling and carabiner tastefully slung about the waist of my ex-army anorak. I'd added unnecessary patches to my R.A.F. trousers and was sporting air-force boots nailed with clinkers and a few expensive tricounis and had obtained somewhere an old trilby hat that I'd battered into submission and casual grubbiness. My friend and I were also both unshaven and muddy from our efforts. In other words, we looked the part. But, truthfully, we hadn't been near that very difficult route. So, not wanting to ruin the fellow's day, we allowed him to air the fallacy.

This costume I'd adopted must have worked over the years for, only a while back, I was sent a copy of the guide-book Southern Sandstone by Mike Vetterlein and found, to my amusement, that I was a pioneer thereabouts. I've no idea how the writer got my name for I don't think I can claim to have made any true first ascents at Harrison Rocks or the other crags but I did hang about with Hilary Longley-Cooke, Nea Morin, Tony Moulam, Johnnie Lees and other such worthies and, back then, I probably looked as if I might have given the appearance of knowing what I was doing.

To this day, I have no idea how The Mountaineering Association got my name but they sent me off - this is before lawyers were invented and nobody got sued - with guideless beginners into the hills of Wales, Scotland and The Lakes. I didn't kill any, as far as I can remember, but I did impress them because I managed to assume the aura of a competent instructor and guide. The M.A. then sent me off with groups to The Pyrenees where I acquired a beret and managed to look like a genuine French Guide until I opened my Cockney mouth too far.

I also went off to The Alps and then to Corsica. That was quite an expedition. The party met in Calvi where I'd slept out on the beach but we had to rent a tiny closet-like room in a hotel in order to store all the surplus paraphernalia that my novice crew managed to haul from Britain and then, after a short lorry ride into the mountains and a half day walk, we were forced to put up a tent and in it store even more inappropriate stuff. One of my customers, it seems, had lied to the M.A. about his mountaineering experience, wandered unsuspecting into a sports store and there purchased everything the proprietor recommended. Apart from a snappy mountaineering ensemble, he was even packing a canvas bucket for carrying water and a shovel for digging trenches around the tent, but, despite the purchases, he still didn't look the part until much later on. The success of the traverse of the mountains of Corsica was due largely to the Aussie from Tasmania who just couldn't get lost, as I did, in the maquis scrub and to the army fellow who'd fought in the deserts of North Africa. He taught us, thankfully, how to survive on virtually no water at all.

We met some interesting folk while we tramped about the mountains of Corsica and climbed the major peaks like Paglia Orba and Monte Cinto. My school-book French there stood us in good stead and so the shepherds we encountered treated us respectfully even though, by that time, we were dressed far worse than the poorest of them. One gentleman asked me if we were scared of the bandits that were supposed to terrorize the countryside in those days, but when I shook my head, he looked me and the group over carefully and apparently decided that we didn't appear to be worth robbing. Kindly, he explained that the big robber chief had recently married the police chief's daughter. He shrugged. "Brigand! Chef de police! Meme chose!" he said. And so I got away with that expedition and, again, somehow didn't lose a single customer.

Then my wife - the first sight of whom had caused me to fall ignominiously from Birchden Wall at Harrisons - and I uprooted ourselves and took off to Canada where, as the winter snows melted, we joined a Canadian Alpine Club summer camp in the Rockies and where, without even knowing a thing about the country, I was offered a lead up a fairly major peak near Jasper because, I guess, compared to the sartorial splendour of the other members, I must have looked as if I might actually know what I was doing. I got away with that one too. I guess it's the image that really counts.

Piton practice

Bob Allen

Although I read History for my university degree, I was never much good at remembering dates. I could learn them, true enough, but I had to make an effort to commit significant dates to memory. My old mate Derek Walker can trot out dates of almost anything at the drop of a hat. "When did we first go climbing in the Bregaglia, Derek?" I might ask and he would instantly pronounce "1971". Somewhat irritatingly, he always seems to be right. Even as I type this now I am not sure myself which year it was without looking it up in one of my diaries or albums of photographs, which I always take on holidays. What I can usually do, however, is recall incidents in relation to something significant that happened to me personally. For instance, I can place events in a time sequence either before or after I had my first (right) hip replacement. Perhaps most people are like that? However, at the time the incidents which I am about to relate occurred, I am not sure whether I was even keeping a diary, so I am unable to put a date to them. I do know that Marj and I had been married for a few years and that her mother was still alive. As to the incidents themselves, for the most part they are crystal clear in my memory. No doubt some of the surrounding detail is missing, but the essential story, I am certain, is absolutely correct.

Ask a non-climbing member of the great British public how climbers scale steep rocks and (apart from often commenting that climbers must be 'barmy' or asking 'what on earth do they do it for?') there is a good chance that the answer will mention the use of 'iron hooks' or 'steel pegs'. These, it is generally believed, are somehow hammered into virgin rock and the climber then uses them as a ladder of hand and footholds to aid any ascent. This was always a very exaggerated idea of what took place, although there is no doubt that 'mechanical aids' did come to be extensively employed in parts of the Alps, especially on the harder routes. Their use did enable progress to be made up rock which appeared to be impregnable and thus to link sections of 'climbable' rock. In Britain, the use of pitons (or pegs) on the crags of the British Isles is considered very unethical nowadays, except on certain historical climbs or, sometimes, on ice routes where they can be removed immediately afterwards. The use of stainless steel bolts, for which the rock needs to be drilled before they can be placed and which can remain in situ for many years, is equally, if not more, frowned upon. Bolts and pegs/pitons are tolerated on certain cliffs and crags in Britain, but essentially only on those that have been accepted as 'sport-climbing crags'. Put them anywhere else and they are likely to be removed within days by climbers who believe that such use is to reduce the intrinsic difficulties of the rock down to the climber's level of ability. The history of the sport shows that rock considered impossible to climb a few years ago is soon climbed by those who are stronger, fitter or have greater ability. The major UK climbing clubs entirely support this attitude, as I do myself. Compared with France or Spain or Italy, for example, we have far less available rock- and therefore far less to have defaced or scarred by metal-bashers. We also have a strong tradition and ethic of 'adventure climbing', which avoids the use of any permanent or semi-permanent addition or

alteration to the natural features of the rock. I do not suggest that British climbers are simply dyed-in-the-wool reactionaries in this respect. Far from it. Most British climbers love sport-climbing especially on the limestone walls of Spain, France, or elsewhere in the Mediterranean in the winter sunshine! But the vast majority of them, even if they are untroubled by the ethical questions, now also realise that the use of pegs, pitons or bolts is simply inappropriate for most climbing situations in the UK.

However, at the time of which I am now writing (some time in the 1960s) these ethical attitudes had not been clarified to anything like the extent that they have been since then and my own were no different. From remarks made by a few of the other climbers that I met in those years and from the guide books that I read, it seemed clear enough that, if I wanted to climb some of the 'big' routes in the Alps, I would have to have some knowledge and experience of 'artificial climbing'. At the back of my mind was a description of the north west ridge of the Sciora di Fuori in the Bregaglia valley of Switzerland, of which Peter Crew and Colin Taylor had made the first British ascent. (I came to know Colin fairly well before his premature death in a climbing accident.) The description stated that the route was 'very sustained, with one short section of artificial'. It was the latter part of that sentence which gripped me, as I really had no idea what it (artificial) meant in the climbing context and realised that I would have to find out. I think I had acquired a reasonable rope, hawser laid nylon, by then. I purchased a pair of nylon tape 'etriers', each one consisting of three or four loops of nylon tape linked together to form a sort of ladder. I had a suitable hammer and a number of carabiners, or snap-links, and bought some soft-steel pitons of varying lengths from Centresport, one of the climbing-gear shops in Leeds. I had some theoretical knowledge, but what I lacked was any practical knowledge of how to use them.

One Saturday afternoon Marj and I set forth to rectify this. Her mother, who must have been living with us at the time, came along in our car to watch proceedings. On our regular trans-Pennine drives from our home in Huddersfield back to Manchester, where both our families lived and we had grown up, we had spotted a small quarry beside the main road. To us, one of its advantages was that it was out of sight of both traffic and pedestrians, for I certainly did not want to make a fool of myself in full view of the great and critical British public. Nowadays, there are no longer any signs of this quarry and Marj and I suspect that it was shortly afterwards incorporated into the M62 motorway. However, the quarry was certainly there when we stepped over a fence and descended easy grass slopes to reach to it. I did have to settle for the fact that Marj's Mum was accompanying us, however, but hoped that she would not take much notice. Fortunately, she settled down on the bank with her knitting, which she had brought along to ward off her expected boredom. I examined the back wall of the quarry. The rock was Pennine gritstone, split by both vertical and horizontal cracks caused by blasting, but it looked sound enough to my inexperienced eye. The wall was probably thirty feet high, but no more.

Marj was probably anticipating a rather long drawn out business herself and so took a belay by sitting down on a block on the floor of the quarry and passing the other end of the rope to me. I attached this end to my waist with a bowline, the recommended knot of that era and then, with my two etriers hanging from my waist along with several pitons, I stepped up to the wall.

Driving a piton into a horizontal crack at arm's length above me, I clipped a carabiner (metal snap-link) into the eye of the piton and then clipped the etrier (tape-ladder) into that. Getting my right boot into one of the loops of the etrier, I stood up in balance until my weight was on it. From this position I reached up again, hammered a second piton into a higher crack, clipped a carabiner into the eye of the piton and then hung my second etrier from that. It seemed to be safe, so I moved my weight so that I could step into the upper etrier with my left boot. Having successfully transferred my weight this time, I reached down and removed the lower etrier, leaving a carabiner still clipped through the eye of the piton. Then, and this is one of the critical bits, I clipped the climbing rope into this carabiner so that the rope ran from my waist through the carabiner and down to Marj. She, as mentioned, was sitting below me on a block of stone, holding the rope. The theory was that she would pay out the rope as I ascended and hold onto it, with a positive braking action if, by any mischance, I fell. By this braking action she would arrest my fall before I hit the ground, as the rope would be running through the carabiners clipped to the eyes of the pitons. This is the job of the second man (or woman or, in this case, wife) on any climb. Belaying, as this is called, of course, was something that we had been doing for a year or two; we were both quite familiar with this bit of the routine. (I apologise to readers who know all about these intricacies.) Unfortunately, as knowledgeable readers will have realised, this was also before the invention of mechanical belaying devices, such as Sticht plates or similar items.

I slowly, too slowly, worked my snail-like pace up the wall, banging in more pitons, transferring my weight from one etrier to the other and leaving the live climbing rope clipped into each carabiner. It was absorbing, but much harder, work than I had anticipated and sweat was beginning to run down my face. Brushing it away with my sleeve, I happened to glance upwards and was surprised to see a face peering over the lip of the quarry directly above me. It was a young lad, maybe ten or eleven years old and with a big grin that ran from ear to ear.

"Eyup!" he said to someone else, out of sight. "Theer's a fella climbin' up 'e'er. Cum an' 'ave a look."

A second face appeared next to the first.

They watched me intently for a few minutes while I fiddled about self-consciously with my rope and carabiners, but the pace of the action was evidently too slow for them, for the faces disappeared.

By now I had about five pitons in place and I was beginning to feel aware of my height above the ground but, so far, all had gone well. I had occasionally shouted down to Marj to keep an eye on me and, so far as I was aware, she had done.

Reaching up to place what looked as if it would be my last piton before I reached the lip of the quarry, I gently tapped another steel blade into a horizontal crack. As I hammered it in as far as it would go, I did realise that the sound the metal was making was different from that which I had heard from the other pitons, but the significance of this did not register in my mind at the time. In fact, as I later realised, when knocking a piton or peg correctly into a crack in rock, the metal emits a sound which goes higher up the register with each blow, from an initial 'thunk' to a final high-pitched 'ping'. In this case, the sound barely went much beyond the first 'thunk' despite the blade of the piton disappearing rapidly into the crack. It was, to be honest, a badly-placed piton, but I had not realised it.

Clipping the last carabiner into the eye of the piton, I attached the etrier and stood up in it, as I had successfully done lower down several times. This was different. As my weight came onto the piton, to my utter surprise it popped straight out of the crack.

I fell off backwards. Normally, this should not have been a problem, because the live rope, attached to me at one end and Marj at the other end, ran through four or five carabiners and all she had to do was to apply a braking action to the rope to terminate my headlong descent. I should have come to a stop, dangling admittedly, but above ground and unhurt. In fact, I flew through the air with the rope whipping past me, felt a fearful blow in my back and temporarily fainted.

As I came to, I opened my eyes and saw the two faces of the urchins who had seen me earlier.

"Ee!" said one of the boys. "Look 'ere, he's fallen off."

The second voice then said, in a perfectly matter of fact way: "Is 'e dead?"

There was some hesitation, but then I groaned and tried to sit up.

"Naw" said the first voice. "E's not dead."

"Oh well" said the other voice. "Let's bugger off then."

Which is exactly what they did. My entertainment value was exhausted.

I realised that I had fallen across a slab of stone and the pain in my back was severe. With help from Marj I did, however, manage to stand and gasp out, although doubled over with the pain, that we'd better get me to hospital, quickly.

I did not hear it myself, although Marj told me later, that her mother's reaction was something like "Oh dear! Was it your fault (i.e. Marjorie's)?"

The truth is that we were both at fault, me for not putting the piton in properly and Marj for failing to hold the rope when I fell, although I was the most to blame: as the leader, I should not have fallen off. (A modern belay device would probably have jammed very rapidly and held me, of course.) Fortunately, the lessons were learned and I had been lucky. Falling nearly thirty feet and landing on my back across a sharp ridge of rock could have caused serious spinal injuries. A thirty-foot fall can quite easily be fatal.

We went to hospital, where I was X-rayed and told that there did not appear to be anything broken, although I was very bruised. We went home and piled bags of frozen peas on the injury, and I swallowed a number of aspirins to reduce the pain to a dull ache.

The following weekend we went to Borrowdale, where I led a couple of routes with great difficulty because of the continuing pain in my back. When we reached home there was a postcard waiting for me, calling me back to the hospital as soon as ever possible. They told me that a later, proper look at the X-ray showed that I had fractured my shoulder blade, so it was not too surprising that it had been hurting when I was trying to pull up using my arms. It soon healed, however and, as it happened, I never did much more 'artificial' climbing and I never did climb the north-west ridge of the Fuori.

A colleague of mine, when I worked in the carpet industry, was not so lucky. One of the sales representatives in our company became very enthusiastic about the thrill and adventure that he saw in rock-climbing. Living, as he did, in the south of England, he did not have many opportunities to pursue this enthusiasm and was desperate for some practice. However, I had called a sales conference at our head office in Bradford and this

gave him a chance. John, our rep., was friendly with another of our executives, let's call him Bert. Bert had done some climbing himself, I was told, but not for some years, so he offered to take John out to Almscliff Crag, near Harrogate, where he promised he would give John a 'top rope' on some suitable climbs. (This means that Bert would stand at the top of the crag and hold the rope, tied to John, so that it would safeguard John if he lost contact with the rock on his way up.)

I knew they were going to Almscliff because Bert came to me to borrow my guidebook.

On arrival at Almscliff, John stood at the bottom of the rocks while Bert went round the back and onto the flat top. Bert's intention was to take a belay there i.e. to fasten the climbing rope to something solid and then to himself, so that if John fell off the jerk on the rope would not pull Bert off the top of the crag also.

There were not many suitable natural places to belay the rope, so Bert took an iron piton from his pocket and hammered it into a nearby crack. He then threaded his end of the climbing rope through the eye of the piton and decided that he had better test that it was properly hammered in. Almost unbelievably, he stood with his back to the drop and gave the rope a really good jerk. As you will by now have guessed, the piton was not secure and it flew out. Bert hurtled backwards at a run and dropped like a stone down the vertical face of the crag, crashing almost at John's feet. He was seriously injured, but lucky to be alive at all, suffering compound fractures of his pelvis and other major bones. In the confusion, my guidebook fell out of John's (or Bert's) pocket but it was posted back to me about three weeks later by an unknown climber who had found it at the foot of the crag. It was some years before Bert was able to walk even half-properly. Life isn't fair: he had not even wanted to climb, just to help.



The Earl of Fulwood caught in slings
pegging in 1965. Photo: Private Eyes.

A traverse of the Cuillin Ridge – 60 years ago

Mike Dixon (Member 1955 - 2004)

An unusual and interesting account of a day on the Cuillin Ridge written in his personal diary, by CM Dixon (1931-2004) recently came to light and is reproduced by courtesy of Mary Dixon. It describes a circuit of the ridge, starting and finishing in Glen Brittle barn where Mike and two companions were staying. With his friend Don Wooller, Mike completed the traverse climbing solo and in nailed boots. They had clearly achieved an exceptional level of fitness by intensive climbing at Ilkley and in the Cuillins during the summer of 1949.

Of their expedition on September 12th, Mike wrote :-

'We rose at 3.30am. A good breakfast, then to pack our kit. We took neither guide book, map nor rope and left at 4.30am in a fine, calm, cool and nearly cloudless night under a full clear moon. We traversed the grass slopes fairly high, crossed Alt Coire Lagan and crossed the ridge about 300 yards above the summit of An Sgumain, down across Alt Coire A Ghrunda and high round the slopes of Sgur nan Eag to Coire nan Laogh, eventually reaching the grass band on Gars Bheinn. All along our route I had enjoyed the beauty of the isles and sea by moonlight and the Cuillin peaks above, purple in the gloom. Gradually the sky lightened and the stars faded, the sharp shadows of the moon waning in the growing light of the new day. The sky above was warmed with a red glow. We continued up the grass then up stones and scree, almost never ending, until at last we reached the ridge and the full splendour of dawn broke upon us. Over to the east lay a dull red disc of sun, surrounded by mists shrouding the peaks, range upon range of the mainland. And below lay dark Coruisk, opposite lay Blaven, around was the sea and the isles of Soay, Rhum and Canna in a haze of never ending distance where sky met sea and mingled imperceptibly.

On the summit of Garsbheinn, we rested for a few moments, tense and waiting... then we were off, heading northwards, north to Gilleans on, on, down and down, over rough grass and rocks to the col, then up the steeper ridge of Sgur a' Choire Bhig. We were now plunged fully into our enterprise and, although we had only come about half a mile along the ridge, we felt the heat of our exertions, the little aching muscles, tightness of the chest and the shortness of breath. I soon stripped off my shirt and jersey but I was still too hot. It had been about 7am at the cairn of Garsbheinn and we already felt the heat of the sun, though we were thankful that it was veiled by a thin morning mist. Soon we were moving up the narrow broken ridge of Sgurr nan Eag and on the level summit ridge we moved slowly for a slight rest then raced down, down the other side to An Casteal a' Garbh-choire. The sun was rising higher and higher becoming warmer every minute. Bit by bit we had seen moonlight change to dawn, now we watched the deep night still lingering in the bed of Coruisk as it receded before the approach of the sun. We watched the revelation of the Cuillin Peaks, Red Cuillin and Black Cuillin as they changed from the ashen grey of early dawn to the roseate splendour of a bright fresh morning and to the detailed softer shades of full daylight.

At the Casteal we paused, awed by the vertical 60-foot face, but only for a minute we paused. For this was the firmest, finest, roughest gabbro in the Cuillin. Everywhere its pock-marked friendly face presented holds and grips - the way was vertical, sensational, unfaulted, but we proceeded up easily, surely, finding confidence and sheer joy in the movement. At the top which came all too soon we crossed the ridge and hunted for the way down the north face, about which I had forgotten. The face was sheer and even overhung. But Don soon found a broken staircase away on the west side and down that we raced to move on up to the summit of Sgurr Dubh na Da Bheinn. A short rest here was called for and we settled down for about five minutes to take some refreshment. The view was excellent, the distance was hazy and the sun veiled by mist, but the gloomy savage loch of Coire a' Ghrundda made an awe inspiring sight. All too soon we moved on, raced down the ridge of Sgurr Dubh na Da Bheinn and up the ridge of Thearlaich.

We were now nearing the most interesting part of the ridge, where the climbing becomes more serious and soon we came to the 30-foot sheer descent, followed by the famous south face of the Thearlaich-Dubh Gap which gave a really exhilarating climb. Onward up the ridge we raced until nearly level with the top of the Great Stone Shoot. Here we made a traversing descent to the ridge and followed the stone shoot to its head, turning up the familiar ridge to the summit of Sgurr Alasdair. Our enterprise was well underway and we rested for a few minutes on Alasdair's cairn. The view of the western sea and the other isles was wonderful, a beautiful reward for our toil - if the joy of rhythmic motion over a ridge of wonder and beauty can be called toil. Then in the silence of that lovely height we heard the bark of a dog - clear as the mountain air it rang up to us. It was obviously a dog right down on Soay, we could tell the direction easily. Once more we heard the bark ringing up to us from Soay, at least five miles away. Then we turned back down the ridge to the Stone Shoot and climbed straight up the wall opposite to the ridge of Sgurr Thearlaich.

The knife edge ridge down to Bealach MhicCoinich was sensational, but we raced along it. Suddenly I felt my boots slip sharply from under my body. I might have slipped onto the eastern side of the ridge, a steep slab like a house roof, with a drop of hundreds of feet below, but a hastily grabbed hand-hold saved me from the fall and I was up again and racing down to Bealach MhicCoinich. Don who was immediately behind me, complained of a sharp sulphurous smell, caused by the grating of my boot nails on the rock. At the Bealach we paused, awed by the sheer head of Sgurr MhicCoinich barring the way on the ridge. But the ground was familiar to us and we moved up the cliff bearing to the left on Collie's Ledge, then turning directly up the Coire Lagan face of MhicCoinich directly above us. The route was the top of the Western Buttress Route which led us on small, but good holds over steep exposed rock, right to the summit of MhicCoinich.

The descent to Bealach Coire Lagan was easy and soon we had traversed the wearying screes beyond to the front of the great An Stac Chimney, up which we raced to An Stac's summit, thence to the superb east ridge of the Inaccessible Pinnacle. Here we moved slowly, our bodies resting as we moved on up the ridge, our minds feasting on the delights of our position. A short rest on the summit, the second highest in the Cuillin, then the short but exacting descent of the west ridge, slowly and carefully to the

good red scree of Sgurr Dearg whose summit cairn we reached in a few minutes. The sky was veiled in a milky mist, the sun nearly hidden, and we blessed the mist for keeping the hot sun off our backs and off the rock. Down and down to the Bealach in a series of swift wild swoops over the scree-strewn slope, then across the peaks of Banadich in thick mist. The peaks were passed sooner than we had dared to hope, for I thought this part of the ridge would prove dull and enervating.

Thormaoid was soon reached and we gained the landmark of the three teeth. Here we paused, then raced on, meeting a lone climber en route, who had come from Glen Brittle and was heading for Sgurr Nan Gilleann also. Both Don and I thought that it would be late, at least half past one so we eagerly asked him the time. We were surprised to learn that it was only 11.30 am. The sense of urgency which had spurred us on was now dispelled for I had been worried that we could finish the ridge and be back off it before dark. Now the goal was nearer and it was only 11.30 am. We joined the other scrambler on our way over the two peaks of Coire a' Ghreadaidh, but we then rested and left him in front of us. Then one by one the four fine peaks of Mhaidaidh were climbed - their short sheer faces gave fine exhilarating sport, their summits and ridges gave finer views - Coruisk and Thuilm, Glen Brittle and Blaven - the sky the sea and the sun. Slower now and wearily we reached the first peak of Bidean Drum na Ramh, and climbed the little 'Inaccessible Pinnacle' on its eastern side. The gap below was crossed, a rather hard part, and we climbed straight up the wall opposite to the summit of the central peak of Bidean Drum na Ramh. Here was a small level patch of grass and we lay down, weary, hungry and thirsty. We rested and ate but there was nothing to drink. We lay on the summit in the sun for at least an hour. The mist had cleared now and we gazed at the wide scene - the land of Skye to the North and West, the sea and the sky beyond. Looking down into Glen Brittle we saw a midget bus crawling up the road to Carbost. After a good long rest - nearly an hour, we left and (somewhat shakily and with sundry aches and pains) began the descent of Bidean.

The last peak of Bidean presented some difficulties of descent which provided interest, but the rather duller stretch over an Casteal and Sgurr a' Bhairnich was only relieved by the fine views of the peaks around and the wild corries on either side, and aggravated by a marked thirst. I remember sucking up tiny brackish pools of water in the rocks and feeling the hot rock on the exhausting ridge to the top of Bruach na Frithe. A 'cart track' of a path lead down from the summit of this 'tourist peak' and we capered down like goats, to the amusement of some tourists we passed on the way. Then up the interesting face of Sgurr a' Fionn Choire, a pause to look at the sheer face of the Bhasteir Tooth opposite and descent to the col. We were very thirsty so we descended the slopes of Fionn Choire to the little green oasis, a spring only 200 ft below the ridge. We drank and rested feeling perfect bliss in the touch, taste and sound of the cool clear ice cold water. Refreshed, we went back to the ridge and traversed onto the face of the Bhasteir Tooth.

We climbed the spectacularly sheer Naismith's Route, perhaps the hardest bit of continuous climbing on the ridge. The exposure was terrific and the finish sensational - it was a hard enough climb to attempt, solo and in our tired condition, but well worth it. From the top of the Tooth we crossed to Am Bhasteir by the strenuous overhang. Don got up it well enough but I hadn't the arm strength left. However I found a rather

more delicate crack on the right which needed less of a pull, which I got up. Then on down to the col and up the rickety crazy tumbledown ridge of Sgurr nan Gilleann - the final peak. Once afoot the ridge, I started off in a final burst which carried me on and up in my enthusiasm, and I reached the final cairn a good five minutes before Don. The view was wonderful. It was now only 4.30 pm and the afternoon sun lit up all the peaks in delightful tones. Below us to the north-east was a curtain of mist and our shadows were projected onto it with a rainbow halo - known as 'the glory', a fitting welcome on reaching our goal. At last we had mastered time, so we lay back on the good friendly gabbro, half stripped in the sun, resting and gazing up into the infinite blue of the sky, sometimes thinking or just dreaming or often just drifting along in the relaxed state where time and space is lost in the never ending sensation. Resting in body and mind we lay there until the cone shadow of our peak on the mist below began to lengthen in the setting sun and the horizontal rays no longer warmed us, but only enriched the lovely hues of the view around us. And so at last, our aim achieved, we left Sgurr nan Gilleann and headed back over Am Bhasteir down the rake from the Tooth into Lota Coire and back across the ridge to the lovely Fionn Choire. I felt happy and felt a deep reverence for the lovely peaks we had climbed today as we wandered down the grassy lower slopes of Fionn Choire, where the sheep grazed peacefully amid such sublime surroundings.

The view of Coire na Creiche is beautiful at any time but as we crossed its lower slopes, each peak bathed in the soft beauty of the evening light, we two weary climbers who had begun our day by moonlight felt something of the intimate charm and beauty of the Cuillin. Each peak now had its associations, its hopes and fears, its memories of surprise views from its summit, the beauties and secrets revealed on our visit. The sky slowly deepened, and detail was gradually lost in the shadow as we stumbled across the moor to Glen Brittle. At last we reached the road - it was now quite dark with only the sharp dark outline of the ridge against the slightly paler sky. At 9 pm we reached the youth hostel and were lured by the lights to visit it. We stayed for half an hour and then wearily limped on to the barn, where we were met with joy by David, fed, and were soon asleep. The excitement of that long day left little energy for a celebration. Sleep blotted out the weary aches of our bodies, but nothing could efface the satisfaction derived from completing the traverse and the memory of the astonishing beauty of the Cuillin Hills that had rewarded our expedition.



Looking South from Bruach na Frithe.

Dos danza magica

Arthur Green

Polvos Magicos.

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 you 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 up 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.

Diedros Magicos.

The mighty Campana, a notch in its ridge, where the sun blazes down all the day.
Where giants throw rocks like skyscraper blocks that land in the sea far away.
Magnificent crags where men with chalk bags go out on the rocks to play.
Just follow your nose up the long Diedros and you'll sure have one hell of a day.

Up he went, as quiet as the morning light.
I followed, relishing the might
Of the surroundings.
Wallowing in the soft echoes of the
mountain
And the familiar sounds of movement.
The jingle of a measured step.
A squeaky pinch, a gasping grasp,
a jolly jug.
And the silence of the jams.

He said it was strenuous. But he was wrong.
It wasn't a Quickstep he was dancing.
It was more of a Salsa.
Look and see. Touch and feel. Lean and go.
Dance with the flow.

Move after move. Pitch after pitch.
A real treat.
You could feel it in your fingers;
You could feel it in your feet.
The Rhythm of Life.
Such a powerful beat.
Four hundred feet of Poetry in Motion.
Have you seen me dancin'? Really dancin'?
Pure magic.

The mood changes. The groove is blocked.
Go right? Perhaps a chance?
Just Waltz across the wall, Real Smooth.
The Master of the Dance.
It's Boogie Time, with nifty feet,
And a laid back Tango move.

To gain some height and then retreat.
To the haven of the groove.
Feeling Groovy? Then get stuck in.
A gnarly crack directs you.
Up to the roof and a long white sling
Is hanging there to tempt you
Beckoning the unbeliever.
Discard it if you're wise.
Touch it if you're really gripped.
Satan in disguise.

The music starts and it's Rock and Roll
C'mon Baby, Twist and Shout.
Shake it. Shake it up, Baby, now
Work it. All the way out.
And you sure have to work it.
There's no way you can shirk it.

Now pause and listen, catch your breath.
Is life still left within you?
Hold on fast and grab a gasp,
It Ain't all Over Yet, Blue.
Balance a bulge with a measured touch
That demands a Flamenco step,
Shimmy the groove. Just Three Steps
to Heaven.
Only then can you holler "Yep!"

The thrill of an airy, mountain stance.
Relax. Success unfurled.
Rope down and soar like an eagle.
Just the best route in the world.

Cabin Fever

Tim Oliver



Panorama below Mt Cook. Photo Tim Oliver

A visit to New Zealand, despite the cost and time needed to get there, is well worth the effort, both for experienced alpinists and hikers. I was invited to South Island for a February wedding, some years ago, so I made plans for a three-week extended trip organized around this event. The first week was to include a driving tour of the South Island with our pre-wedding hosts Steve and Sandra and my former wife, Julie. The high point of the trip for Julie and me was to be five days of hiking the jewel of Fiordland, the Milford Track. After this we would return to east coast at Timaru for the wedding, Julie would fly home and I would spend an additional week of snow and ice climbing in the Southern Alps.

Having experienced the frustration of wasted time in previous overseas climbing trips, due to a lack of local knowledge, I was anxious to make contact with Kiwi climbers to try to short-cut the process of orientation and so make the best use of my limited stay in the area. Some months before my trip, I had written to Alan Knowles, an experienced member of the NZ Alpine Club, whom I had met at an Alpine Club slide show in London. At that time I had filed away Alan's address amongst my collection of worldwide travel contacts, as a potential climbing partner. On the strength of this rather flimsy introduction, Alan had kindly offered to take some time off in February to partner me on a foray into the Southern Alps. Looking back on it now, my goal to climb New Zealand's highest peak, Mt. Cook (12,349 feet), in only six nights was an ambitious one. Apart from warming up by hiking on the Milford Track, I had no formal training plan for the trip and I effectively started from an armchair!

Training at home in Durham, North Carolina placed more emphasis on my getting Julie used to the idea of carrying all the kit she would need for the Milford Track in a rucksack. We toted backpacks full of heavy canned food around the Piedmont forest trails near our home, and rehearsed routines for dealing with rain, boots, gaiters, polythene bags, flashlights, cameras, waterproofs, stream crossings and backwoods cooking. The Milford Track, as it turned out, was five days of perfectly photogenic hiking in wooded valleys with glaciers, waterfalls, boat rides, freshly caught trout and no rain! Driving north to Milford Sound after the hike, we stopped to enjoy a look at Fox Glacier

and I realized that I was celebrating my January birthday in summertime for the first time in my life.

I had arranged to meet Alan Knowles on Saturday, February 11 at the valley based Unwin Hut, owned by the NZAC, and located just outside Mt. Cook village. At the time, South Island was well served by a network of bus lines that interconnect most of the rural towns, so the lack of a car presented no problem for a visiting pedestrian like me. Flat farm fields of the east coast were soon replaced with hills, as the bus I rode approached the Mt Cook National Park. Windswept sheep fields, reminiscent of the Welsh Brecon Beacons lined the road, but the peaks were obscured by ten-tenths cloud cover and worse, it was raining. Just my luck I thought, the trip of a lifetime destined to be a washout! The bus dropped me right at the hut, and I dragged my enormous bag across the car park through horizontal rain. A couple of local climbers inside the hut provided welcome tea and conversation, much like climbing huts anywhere, until Alan's arrival on the next bus. Introductions were quickly dealt with and the evening was spent pooling gear, re-packing sacks, discussing possible climbing plans and cooking up a huge meal. Alan said the weather, like that in any other major mountain region, was very local and could do anything.

He went on to explain the local custom of approaching the big peaks of the Southern Alps. There was a choice: if we wanted the hard way we could carry heavy sacks directly up the eighteen mile glacial approach to Tasman Saddle mountain hut, or we could be 'beamed in' by ski-plane to the hut's front door.

Next day, with clearing skies and the promise of good weather on the way, we bummed a ride into town, stocked up on all our favourite foodstuffs at the supermarket and headed for the airstrip. In the absence of mountain railways or telepheriques, a cottage industry of charter flight operators has carved itself a niche in the economy of Mt. Cook village. Coaches filled with Japanese tourists frequently disgorge their camera-toting occupants into the hungry mouths of these pint-sized airlines. Bush pilots fly most of their tourist passengers for just ten minutes into the Southern Alps so they can get out onto to a glacier for a while, throw a few snowballs at one another and be photographed standing beneath Mt. Cook. This service is also ideally suited to the needs of the alpinist, with no more inconvenience than a modest dent in one's credit card account.

We checked in with Mt. Cook Airlines to find that all the flights were grounded due to high winds. The airline representative, eager not to scare away potential customers, cheerfully reassured us that the weather would improve and she weighed us carefully, in order to calculate the plane's total payload. I was starting to get that uncomfortable 'excess baggage' feeling as Alan and I loaded a small mountain of our gear and our bodies onto the scales. Not to worry, said Alan, like a taxi hire we were chartering the entire plane at this point, since no other passengers had checked in yet. It was therefore in our best interests to sit outside and try to recruit at least two additional riders to split the \$600 NZ tab with us.

While we waited in the sunshine, hungry for lunch and mountains, the pilot made repeated test flights up to the glacier and each time he came back with the same verdict; still too windy for a landing. By the time we got the OK to board at about 1pm,

there were six passengers waiting to cram into the now 'mid-sized' rental option, a Pilatus-Porter single prop, high winged monoplane. This strange-looking, long-nosed beast of burden, although at first sight a more expensive charter at \$830 NZ, was actually costing us less per head, split six ways, but now there was a new problem.

While we shuffled about in the departure lounge, the pilot and check-in clerk argued about whether the seven-seater Pilatus would be overloaded, since there were now four alpinists bound for Tasman Saddle Hut, each with an enormous rucksack. The other two passengers, a Swiss couple, were merely along for the short scenic ride, although the guy explained to me that he too was a climber back in his native European Alps. There were no volunteers to drop out. After hurriedly trying several different packing configurations, everyone was stuffed inside the aircraft, a seat was removed from the tail section so that one person could sit on his rucksack, the pilot seemed happy with the wind and weight, and finally we all took off. I got a seat with views out of both sides of the plane and I snapped my camera eagerly at every mountain we passed, as the plane banked and gained altitude. Mt. Cook was easy to spot, but every other second the perspective changed so rapidly that it was hard to recognize any other peaks from the photo views I had studied in the guidebook.

In what seemed less than ten minutes we were circling around Tasman Saddle, eyeballing an orange-painted shed seemingly perched on the edge of a tremendous rock precipice. The pilot made a perfect, if somewhat bumpy, ski landing on the smooth snow-covered glacier, discharged the four of us and our cargo, gunned the engine and was gone with a cheery wave.

As I picked up my rucksack and adjusted my sunglasses to the afternoon glare reflected off snow, I realized that I hadn't even thought to ask Alan how we were getting back home. Alan meanwhile was untying the ropes for the short downhill walk to the hut, since we had landed on a crevassed glacier and a wet one at that. Roped together like a couple of overloaded pirates returning from a raiding party, we staggered the three hundred yards separating us from the hut, sinking into the soggy snow beneath the weight of our sacks and our arms filled with grocery boxes. Quite a different arrival compared to your average European hut, I thought.

Tasman Saddle Hut, perched on a rocky outcrop of rock, provides access on its uphill side to the col of its namesake by a glacier, which seems destined to sweep the tiny hostelry over the six-hundred-foot drop on its downhill side. There is so little level rock around the hut that a flimsy guardrail of wire provides only psychological protection when you step outside to use the adjacent privy. More guy wires tether this corrugated iron-clad eyrie firmly to the bedrock. Simple features make these wardenless huts comfortable, efficient and self-sustaining. Black polythene water butts located in the sun outside the hut maintain a good reservoir of fresh melted snow. Kerosene stoves and lamps inside the hut are low-tech, but safe and reliable for even the clumsiest cook-alpinist. A prominent sign warns visitors against the perils of confusing kerosene and water. This advice was emphasized by Alan's story of the guy who once gave the whole hut diarrhoea after he inadvertently tainted the water butt with the wrong dipping ladle (I forget now what his punishment was). The one room hut, heated only by the Primus stoves, had two-tier bunks to sleep 14 and was supplemented with a radio telephone so

that the National Park Rangers could keep in touch with everyone.

Our early arrival at the hut gave us ample time for a late afternoon climb, so we donned crampons, axes and day sacks for a quick sortie up the easy south-east ridge of Hochstetter Dome (9,258 feet), directly over the hut. This was my first chance to appreciate the magnificent setting of this remote Alpine panorama, untouched by telepheriques and tourists.

Tasman Saddle (7,850 feet) is a col linking the upper extremities of two parallel Alpine valleys; the Murchison valley to the east and its westerly neighbour the Tasman. Both valleys have major glaciers that flow more or less south-west until the valleys but not the glaciers merge about six miles upstream of Mt. Cook village. Above the west bank of the Tasman and neighbouring Hooker glaciers, lies the main spine of the Southern Alps along which are ranged numerous peaks of 8-9,000 feet, a few 10,000+ footers and only the one peak (Mt. Cook) over 12,000 feet. Nearby Mt. Tasman comes in a close second at 11,475 feet. Given the remoteness, general steepness of most of these peaks, and lack of easy access to and from them, the atmosphere was reminiscent of the Andes, tamed only slightly by the 17+ huts scattered at strategic points throughout the Mt. Cook National Park (MCNP). Most of these huts are owned and administered by either the MCNP or NZAC. "Minimally managed wilderness" I like to call it, similar in many respects to the US and Canadian National Park systems.

After photographing the sunset from Hochstetter's summit, we raced back down to the hut with big appetites. Alan's staple alpine diet consisted of powdered mashed potato with lashings of butter and canned corned beef, after which we sat with steaming mugs of tea and switched on the VHF transceiver, waiting our turn as the Park office called the daily roll around the inhabited mountain huts in the region. We logged in our names and itineraries for the following day.

Alan and I were off to climb Elie de Beaumont (10,225 feet), taking in a traverse of Mt. Green (9,350 feet) and Mt. Walter (9,525 feet) on the way. This was to be a shake-down rehearsal for Mt. Cook. If things worked out, we would stay a second night at Tasman Saddle, then spend the following day getting to Plateau Hut, in preparation for an ascent of Cook. It looked like all we needed was the weather to hold, and the forecast was good.



Mts Green, Walter and Elie de Beaumont

Early next morning Alan and I left the darkened hut by torchlight. We quickly traversed down glacier to reach the foot of the ridge beneath Mt. Green, my new partner confidently prospecting for crevasses out front, while I trailed behind as anchor man. Apart from crossing some avalanche debris we broke fresh steps in the perfect neve, all the way up to the shoulder beneath Green as the sunrise heralded in the dawn of a perfect day. To save time we avoided the summit of Green but pressed on for Elie by way of Divers Col (8,850 feet) and Mt. Walter, since this popular and desirable summit was out on quite a limb and we were going to have to reverse the entire series of connecting ridges to return to Tasman Saddle. Straightforward mixed climbing, including a knife-edged rock ridge (negotiated 'à cheval') brought us finally to the summit of Elie at about 2.30pm.

Basking in perfect sunshine, time seemed to stand still for me while the hands of the clock raced around, so we finished our lunch and began the long haul back, retracing our steps. At least route finding was not a problem, but fatigue and soft snow made us slow. Hours later, darkness found us retracing our path uphill through the maze of crevasses beneath the hut, we were lamentably overdue. In addition, we were both tired and hungry and getting a little cranky. I was suffering from severe dehydration and a general lack of conditioning to the altitude. The sole glimmer of hope I hung onto was the guiding light left in the hut window by our wonderful hut mate, Andy, who we soon discovered had waited up with concern for our wellbeing until we staggered in well past midnight. The best part was that Andy had huge mugs of tea ready as we sat down and de-booted by candle light. It was definitely one of those days you enjoy only in retrospect. At the time I had to wonder, where was the sense in alpine climbing? Like someone working third shift, I felt I had gone to work in the dark, come home in the dark and missed my evening supper and television.

Rising late Tuesday (now an obligatory rest day for us) gave us the opportunity to get to know our hut mates a little better and review our itinerary for the next couple of days. The chief occupant of the hut was Andy Ruddell, an Australian glaciologist staying at Tasman Saddle over the New Zealand summer, accompanied by his two undergraduate assistants, whom I shall call Bill and Ben. Andy made daily forays onto the Tasman Glacier to collect ice samples and record data while Bill and Ben carried Andy's theodolite and water samples, and acted as safety crew for Andy's rappels into crevasses. Andy explained to us in layman's terms a neat system he'd devised for predictive computer modelling of the yearly flow rates of glacial ice, corrected with actual values recorded in the field from simple trigonometry and ice sampling.

The two young student climbers who had flown in with us (I'll call them Dick and Harry) were missing and presumed to be still out on the hill. The previous morning, we had noticed Dick and Harry trailing several hours behind us, as Alan and I climbed towards Elie. We subsequently discovered during our return that they had given up hope of summiting Elie so late in the day, when, during our descent and before darkness fell, we had briefly crossed tracks and exchanged greetings with them. Rather than join with us for the arguably longer but safe way home, Dick and Harry had elected instead to take a 'short cut' back to the hut by traversing into a huge and unstable looking icefall at the centre of the snow-covered, south-facing Anna Glacier. This option they had clearly preferred to down climbing the Mt. Green ridge with us, but with some



'Dick' and 'Harry' (dark blob just left of centre) descending into the Anna Glacier. Photo Tim Oliver

concern for their safety we hoped they had been merely benighted, as Alan and I calculated over a late breakfast in the hut that they were now about nine hours overdue. Although the guidebook lists the Anna glacier as a possible descent route, I clearly remember watching, with a sense of foreboding, Dick and Harry's slow, deliberate and unroped entry into the icefall's labyrinth. I convinced myself that anyone young and foolish enough to voluntarily disappear into the maw of the biggest icefall I'd ever seen, would either beat us back to the hut and brag about it, or never be seen again.

This scenario reminded me of an incident I had encountered on a prior alpine trip to Switzerland when, late in the day, my climbing partner and I had consciously elected for a very hairy descent of an active icefall runnel under the Ochs Fiescherhorn, similarly tempted by the promise of a fast return to the hut. On that occasion we literally ran the gauntlet between many sérac avalanches each spaced a regular ten minutes apart, and we had had the luxury of sprinting down a clearly visible and unobstructed route. However, when we arrived unharmed but breathless at the foot of the avalanche, just a couple of

minutes before watching a fresh jumble of refrigerator-sized blocks sweep down and push the snout a couple of extra yards, I reasoned that we had pushed our luck too far and I vowed I would never treat séracs with such contempt again. Just to rub our sense of shame in deeper, my then current partner and I were severely admonished upon our return to the Shreckhornhutte by some lively and opinionated members of the Ladies Swiss Alpine Club, who had watched our entire folly through binoculars.



Tasman Saddle Hut with Mt. Cook behind. Photo Tim Oliver

Meanwhile, back at Tasman Saddle Hut, our rest day was half over before Dick and Harry sheepishly turned up having got benighted in the icefall and lived to tell the tale. This too was Andy's team's day off from science, so his two glaciology field assistants, Bill and Ben, took the opportunity to go climbing. As you might expect from their healthy data-collecting lifestyle, Bill and Ben were super fit. In contrast to the dismal times Alan and I had logged the previous day on Elie, Walter and Green, Bill and Ben were making light work of repeating this three-peak itinerary. Like Eiger-watchers on the verandah at Kleine Scheidegg, we took turns at the eyepiece of Andy's theodolite telescope watching Bill and Ben's rapid afternoon descent from Elie de Beaumont's summit in record time. Everyone was back safely at the hut for supper that night and we reported all well to the valley on the daily radio call.

Alan and I packed up next day (Wednesday) and left for the traverse on foot, over to the base of Mt. Cook. After the luxury of a rest day, success on Cook now hinged on our making three consecutive and potentially long climbing days fall into place on schedule, if I was to make my bus and plane connections by Saturday. As it transpired, we grossly underestimated the task and what began as a simple hut traverse turned into another gruelling endurance test for us both. First we had to lose almost 4,000 feet of height until we were down on the Tasman glacier proper. Then we had a relatively straightforward trek down the middle of the glacier, a total of about eight miles. This was fairly pleasant as the weather and scenery were magnificent. We quickly reached the terminus of the glacier's loose snow cover, at which point Alan and I unroped and proceeded safely around the surface streams and boulders, peering into occasional deep, dark moulins down which water noisily plunged. Scrambling over to the glacier's true right bank, I stepped up and down between the troughs and waves of moraine, on what felt like an ocean of grey water. My mind began to wander in the heat and glare of the noonday sun and I imagined I was balanced on a raft, surfing huge waves as far as the eye could see.

All the components of this glacier seemed enormous, since at this point the Tasman is well over a mile wide. We slowly forged a route up the mountainside again, close to the Haast Ridge and continued up and onto an easy-angled snow slope that seemed interminable in the late afternoon sun.

I distinctly remember my strange fascination with finding green plants again, a phenomenon that I call 'green-out'. Far above the movement of lateral moraines below, we now encountered mosses and small flowering alpine plants growing in pioneer soil in places that provided lodgment and shelter. 'Green-out' is something I usually experience in the downhill direction, on the way out of an alpine climbing zone. In my dazed state of mind I didn't appreciate at the time how contradictory this observation seemed while going uphill. Having already spent three nights above the snowline, my eye was already hungry for plant life, even as we traversed up fertile slopes, back into the sterile snow and ice zone.



The author inside the old Plateau Hut. Photo Tim Oliver

At one point, stopping to rest at a col, we unhitched the sacks and pulled out water bottles. Alan, who had previously scorned my undersized one-litre European drinking flask, favoured instead a crushable two litre soft drink bottle and he generously demonstrated a neat trick to refill both our bottles in the apparent absence of any streams. He dumped snow onto the top of a sun-warmed boulder and presto, running water in seconds! I began to better appreciate the serious risks of dehydration I was running day after day.

It was well after dark by the time we topped out onto the Grand Plateau beneath Tasman and Cook at 7,750 feet. I have hazy memories of some night time gymnastics in which I led an awkward chimney pitch on the upper bergschrund by the light of a head torch; crampons on the ice of the right wall and my back on the rocky left wall. As we finally staggered down towards the empty Plateau Hut at some god-forsaken hour past midnight, I felt shattered and totally drained. Our arrival at the hut was a total anticlimax. Despite the impressive setting in which I now found myself, at that hour and in such a state of exhaustion as we found ourselves, it held no more ceremony or surprise for me than if we had checked into a hotel.

It was to Alan's credit that we found the place at all, since we were not exactly sure of our local position relative to the hut, until we saw its dark profile against the moonlit snowfield under Cook's majestic east face. I was asleep on my feet and hallucinating wildly as we squeezed our sacks through the door. Once again we'd blown it and ruined any hope of climbing the following day. The day after that we were committed to the walk-out in order to make my travel connections.

Thursday saw us festering in the sun outside the hut, again in magnificent surroundings. My feelings were mixed, half regretting a missed opportunity to climb Cook, half grateful for the enforced sleepy inactivity. Alan and I had begun to exhaust our conversation. These doldrums were soon remedied by the mid-morning arrival of a ski-plane unloading its two passengers, just beyond the hut. As the plane took off we realized we had missed yet another opportunity since, if we had been quick enough, we could have asked the pilot to wait while we packed up, and got ourselves a ride back to town in the empty plane (this is known as a back-flight, and can be cheaper than a regular charter). Our new hut companions turned out to be a New Zealand guide, Mark Whetu (out of Queenstown) and his client.

They spent the afternoon practising avalanche drill in the snow outside the hut with a pair of Autovox transceivers. Over supper, Mark entertained us all with his Bill Cosby recitals, the first time I had heard these hilarious stories on childbirth and parenting, complete with sound effects and facial expressions. Since then, Bill Cosby has never been as funny to me as Mark's rip-offs.

Friday we packed up and began the long walk out, part of the way accompanied by Mark and his client. After saying farewell to our new friends, Alan and I roped up and headed off across the Grand Plateau wistfully gazing up at Cook as we traversed two outlying peaks known as the Anzacs. Named in remembrance of the joint Australian and New Zealand armed forces that saw bloody combat in the WW1 Dardanelles campaign, the Anzac Peaks are striking for their separation from their neighbours (similar to the view of the Tour Ronde from the Mer de Glace in France). Passing by their western flanks brought us to the upper lip of a forty-foot bergschrund at the appropriately named Cinerama Col and the start of our descent to the Tasman Glacier.

Alan safely rigged a snow bollard belay and sent me down the rappel first. Then it was down to the Boys Col, and down, down steeply ranked fields of razor-sharp moraine to the Tasman Glacier again. Glacial activity in this region is so fast that the lateral moraine is constantly resettling to a new critical angle and never gets a chance to bed down and grow moss. We hugged the glacier's true right bank, aiming for a point above us and out of site defined by the location of the former Ball Shelter, a mountain hut abandoned years before (now gone completely) when a landslide damaged it and cut off its access from Mt. Cook Village.

After flogging up a steep and sketchy trail on the last interminable lateral moraines to escape the Tasman, I suddenly found myself on a shelf-like dirt road, which forms a continuation to the current Ball Hut Road. I was hot and bothered and some distance behind Alan, who looked like he was going for broke and might leave me behind. In order to relieve the cramp in my feet I took off my Koflach boot shells and tried striding along in the leather inners. Big mistake, first one then the other delicate felt soles blew out. After limping along for a half hour with my boots flapping open and shut like some ridiculous circus clown, I was forced to stop and bind them up with spare crampon straps. Was this final humiliation to be my swansong with Mt. Cook? Such indignity instead of the summit victory I had longed to take home. I told myself there's always another day but this philosophy didn't carry much weight just at that moment.

Alan's distant shouts jerked me back to reality. As I caught up I could see him smiling and urging me to hurry along, since he had been smart enough to flag down the bus that brought fare-paying tourists up the Ball Hut road to view the Tasman glacier. So, as I ran up the last hundred yards to catch the bus we were spared the final five miles walk back to town. That night I treated Alan to a celebratory meal and a bottle of wine at the Hermitage hotel in town. Next morning we paid our hut fees at the Park office and said our good-byes. I caught the 11:45 bus to Timaru and was back home in Durham, NC two days later.

With hindsight, the idea of climbing with a local and experienced alpinist in the New Zealand Alps was a sound one. No one got hurt and the only injury I sustained was a sunburned arm from driving in short sleeves with the car window open. If I was doing the same trip again, I would spend at least 10 days in the mountains, in order to fit in a training climb and the main objective, allowing a little more time to cover acclimatization, delays and changes of plan.



High on the Milford Trail. Looking back down from the Mackenzie Pass. Photo: GM

Old style climb

Elizabeth Cripps

Here's an experiment. Take one new-style climber, trained on a pleasant mix of indoor wall and well-protected gritstone and granite lines. Throw her at a route-finding classic on a mountain crag. Then wait for the tears.

It was a Monday in June, catching the ebb of a few days of implausibly perfect Snowdonia weather. Two days on Clogwyn y Grochan and Carreg Wasted, by far the least intimidating of the Pass crags, had given me a possibly unrealistic confidence in my own ability.

All the components were there: an intimidating multi-pitch crag which is almost never in season; a classic climb known for its bafflingly meandering route; even an old-

style climber to persuade me that this was a good idea. The crag, of course, was Cloggy. The climb was Sheaf (HVS). The Old Style Climber was my dad.

Unwisely, I let the OSC plan the walk in. He refused to countenance the steady plod up along the train track. Instead, we struck up the steep hillside behind Ynys Ettwys. As for my inflammatory suggestion that we take the train, this was treated with the contempt it deserved.

It was painful. It is a truth universally acknowledged, at least by the climbers I know, that nothing prepares you for walking uphill with a pack except walking uphill with a pack, which I hadn't been doing enough of recently. Certainly, twenty minutes on a rowing machine twice a week isn't much help – although the OSC did remark that I was complaining less than usual, which I suppose is progress of a sort.

We skirted round below Cynr Las, which the OSC stopped to admire, giving me a welcome breather. Then we worked up a spur almost to the ridge, and traversed some rocky and uncomfortable terrain to cross the railway above Clogwyn Station. I got one more rest when we paused on the traverse to watch the train. Gulping in the mountain



Cloggy. Photo Harry Cripps

air, I gazed at the passengers with about an even mix of smugness and envy.

The ridge brought me my first sight of Cloggy. To someone brought up by the OSC, who has worshipped the Black Cliff for longer than I can remember, it induced the familiar-yet-breathtaking feeling of visiting a world wonder for the first time. There it was, dominating the panorama. Vast, dark and brooding, three-dimensional after a lifetime of pictures and, disconcertingly, almost as monochrome in reality as in the black and white photo in the hut some 600m below.

We skidded down a steep grass slope and traversed round above the lake to the foot of the crag. A few other parties, who had opted for the more conventional walk in, were gearing up underneath the East Buttress. The OSC swept me past them, indicating instead the apparently endless rise of the West Buttress. Cheerfully, he pointed out the pale strip of White Slab and the numerous arêtes across which Sheaf takes its peculiar line. I tugged on rock shoes and grumbled about the slippery scramble to the start. What price Stanage now? The OSC ignored me.

He led the first pitch. I belayed perched at the edge of the middle rock, attached to a couple of slings at the foot of what promised, at the slightest hint of rain, to become a mini mud slide. It is unclear even from the new guidebook where exactly the start is and even the OSC had route-finding problems. I watched disconsolately. This didn't bode well. ("All part of the experience," he said cheerfully, afterwards.) Eventually, however, he was belayed on sloping holds below a narrow ledge, just shy of the dramatic line which marked the edge of the buttress, and confident that he was now in the right place.

I followed him up the first groove, understanding, on this grassy and unprotected ground, why he had taken it so slowly. I moved right and (crossly, since I've always hated downward traverses) down to the belay. This, at least, was protected, albeit not to the extent I would have liked. Then I realised where my pitch went. I protested.

The OSC, unmoved, clipped me into a belay, tied me off on the plate and started handing over bundles of gear. Of course, for verisimilitude, we should have done it in boots, with nothing but a hemp rope and a few slings. But I was far too cowardly for that.

Still remonstrating, I nudged reluctantly towards the arête. Beyond, as far as I could see, lay nothingness. I thought fondly of Brant Direct, with its obvious corner and gear-on-demand, which I had led two days before. I told myself I had a choice. I could retreat ignominiously and still have to follow the pitch (a worse fate, since it involves climbing down a few metres of White Slab) or I could pull myself together, remind myself that I do lead HVS and that this wasn't even an HVS pitch, being in common with Narrow Slab, and get on with it. I went for the latter.

If ever a climb had a signature move, then Sheaf has one: an improbable, exposed and committing step round from one slab to the next which forms the crux of each of the three 4c pitches. This one was the easiest and least intimidating version, but didn't feel like it at the time.

I made a blind grope for a handhold, found a finger crack, and shuffled closer to the edge. I found I could peer round at White Slab whilst still in possession of a foothold. This was encouraging. Even better, the crack above my fingers was made for small wires.

I slotted a couple in and cheered up.

After the step onto the slab, another narrow crack and a good Rock 4 made things look a lot nicer for the second. I called this back to mind, thought a bit, and then made the delicate, enjoyable moves down and right to a sloping ledge. After that, it was just a scramble up the other side of the corner to the unmissable flake belay. Linnell's infamous Leap looked as ridiculous from here as it had done from the other side. I wasn't convinced that some extra grass would have made it any more appealing.

When the OSC's hand appeared round the corner, I called to him not to take out the Rock 4 until he had rehearsed the start of the down-climb. The wire then immediately lifted out. With a calm born of decades of experience, he caught it and put it back in.

The third pitch, the OSC's lead, pulls up over a steep edge to the next slab right, then moves across unprotected grass to a corner, which it then takes. Clearly, on Cloggy, 'ungraded' is a euphemism for 'not-quite-4c'.

The one after that, which had me back on the sharp end, was actually graded 4b. It began well. I moved pleasantly out left from the belay and up a delicate crack line near the edge of a slab. Exposed and pleasantly technical, and the gear did eventually turn up. I started to feel that this mountain crag stuff wasn't so bad after all.

Then I got confused. I wasn't sure whether I should go up before stepping off the slab to the left, or try to do it where I was. In the end, I went up. Once I was committed to stepping round, I found myself in an overhanging corner from which I had to move immediately down. Not much by way of gear for the OSC and I was now on terrain which didn't appear in any way to match the description I had made him read out at least three times.

The problem, I decided (insofar as I was in any state for philosophical reflection) is that I, being of the Rockfax generation, expect routes to be so clearly described and well diagrammed as to make it almost impossible to go the wrong way. For the 'real' climbers of the OSC's era (and for the OSC's guidebook), a guidebook is simply a series of hints to assist in a complex problem-solving exercise.

At any rate, I had no idea where I was or where I was going. I said so. The OSC, out of sight but still calm, asked if there was any gear. There wasn't but, by making another few moves in what I was by no means sure was the right direction, I found some. Giving up altogether on the guidebook description, I carried on left and then up, following the line of least resistance. Then, oh joy, by sheer good luck, I seemed to be at the belay.

The OSC's lead again: a 4c pitch complete with another dramatic swing onto the next slab, this time involving a strenuous pull out from under an overhang. The crux, though, was the bold, skiddy and quite possibly 5a corner to get to it. The OSC managed the whole thing with aplomb and disappeared into the unknown. I waited for the rope, then followed less elegantly. Pull ups have never been my forte. I did my usual wriggle-and-kick routine instead and somehow ended up upright in the right place.

This time, reaching the belay, I was straightforwardly baffled. There didn't seem to be anywhere the next pitch could go. The OSC enlightened me. The most ridiculous move of the lot: a step out at full stretch across nothing to a jutting-out foot ledge, and another blind move to commit to whatever lay before it.

"No way," I squawked.

"Just try it," said the OSC, settling himself more comfortably on the belay. I collected gear, resignedly.

When I'd run out of excuses, I moved along until my left foot was as close to the gap as possible, and forced myself to stretch out with my right one. At full, painful, reach (how I wish I'd kept up those yoga classes) I found a toe hold on the other side. Another bit of wriggling and it was more secure. Trying not to think about the 100m drop between my feet, I sought blindly, got a (not great) handhold and pulled.

Actually, it was OK – one of those surprising sequences where everything just works. I found myself round the corner, laughing at the improbability of it and delighted to spot a runner placement. It was a good one, which was fortunate as it was to be my only one for some time.

The climbing after that wasn't too hard but it was unprotected – although no more so, the OSC pointed out later, than the rest of the route would have been without modern gear. It's a difficult mental shift from bolted walls and well protected gritstone, granite or dolerite (my other rock of choice) to the kind of climbing where you simply mustn't fall off. Although I scramble unroped down descent gullies often enough – and I am well aware how dangerous that can be – it felt dramatically worse now, progressing up and ever further from my last runner, the rope stretching increasingly uselessly away below me.

I gave up shouting down complaints and started talking myself through it. Hand there. Foot there. Don't fall off. Don't even think about falling off. Keep three good points of contact at all times.

I wasn't sure which line to take, moved left in search of gear, couldn't find any but then didn't want to risk reversing the move. I went on up from where I was, stepping cautiously on uncertain ground. Then, finally, a runner and, only a few moves after that, the belay. The OSC wandered up after me, took the line I hadn't, and reported it much easier. Damn.

After that, it was allegedly grassy scrambling for 24 metres. In practice, it was more like 50 to get right to the top, and easy climbing as much as scrambling so we split the pitch.

At the top, I belayed on a giant cluster of boulders and brought the OSC up. I was exhausted, although I hadn't led a pitch above 4c. I was only about 300m short of the summit of Snowdon, although I had no intention of walking it in rock shoes. Wales stretched out gloriously below me, and the afternoon was turning into evening. This one climb had taken six hours. The London walls, Peak District outcrops, even the lower Pass crags, were in a different universe.

And we still had to get down.

The enchanted kingdom

Brian Cooper

My first visit to the Italian Dolomites was in 1965 with a small party of friends, all members of the London MC. I was immediately smitten with the beauty of the area; awestruck by vertical rock walls, towering pinnacles and snow glistening on many summits. Our gear was sparse, 120' hawser-laid nylon ropes, 2 slings each and a selection of karabiners, pegs and the odd peg hammer. Hard routes were not on the agenda but I remember well my first climb, a modest grade 3 on the Third Sella Tower. The ascent was without incident until our arrival on the summit coincided with a fierce thunderstorm. Torrential rain, thunder and lightning all around, the air charged with current and our hair standing on end. Too scared to waste time looking for the route book we abseiled off to a ledge system below followed by a rockfall 'blitzed' by the lightning. Although in subsequent visits many other routes of all grades were to follow, this easy ascent remains fresh in my mind. During visits in the 60s it was common practice for locals to stand adjacent to the road with bunches of Edelweiss for sale and villages were quite primitive. Nowadays the flowers are protected and the enormous wealth generated by the Ski Industry provides a good standard of living for all.

By the 1980s my hunger for difficult rock climbs eased and I was delighted to find via ferrata routes included all the exhilaration of ascending steep rock with its dramatic exposure without the need for a rack of gear and ropes. The higher grades require considerable fitness and rock climbing skills. Many of these VF climbs were prepared during WW1 by Italian or Austrian troops as a means of gaining the high ground.

For sheer enjoyment the following routes are recommended:

VF Brigata Tridentina, near Corvara 3B; VF Via Delle Trincee, Arabba 4B;
VF Possnecker, Sella Pass 4C; VF Giovanni Lipella, Tofana Group Grade 4C

For those who enjoy multi-day routes the Brenta Dolomites offer the ultimate trekking/climbing experience. Depending on time available you can enjoy four to eight days of climbing bliss with a good selection of huts and excellent food. All at an altitude of around 8000 to 9000ft. This group of mountains regularly display snow in Summer including a few 'shrinking' permanent snow fields. Over the last decade a group of us have enjoyed many weeks of mixed activity, rock climbing, via ferratas and mountain treks.

It was during the 80s that I gradually became aware of the Dolomites (S.Tyrol) involvement in the First World War. Consequently when I recently learnt of a new long distance trail 'The Peace Path' (Friedensweg), which more or less follows the line of 'No Mans Land' it provided a good excuse to revisit the Area. Furthermore by linking this trail to various via ferratas and summits a challenging holiday beckoned. On 26th August our party of nine, all originally members of London MC but now mostly having allegiance to the CC or AC undertook the easternmost section from Sexten to Pordoi Pass. We utilised four cars and our planning required that we left a car at a strategic spot for use some days later to recover the remainder. We then leapfrogged the area

surrounding Cortina and based ourselves at the superb Dibona Hut in the Tofana Group but with another car parked ahead for future use. We spent five memorable days climbing via ferratas to the highest Tofana summits and other routes nearby. All this time we were surrounded by WW1 remains, trenches, tunnels, barbed wire and pickets, war memorials, abandoned barracks etc.

Thirteen days of strenuous activity resulted in trekking approximately 120 miles. Some members of our party climbed as many as sixteen vf routes (grades 3c to 5c) plus ascents to many summits.

This was a climbing holiday with a difference. The WW1 interest added a new dimension and made one reflect on the price paid by so many all those years ago.



Mike Banks and Dudley Cheal on a grade IV+ at Cinque Torre – Photo by Brian Cooper



WW1 remains, officers hut, at Lagazuoi - Photos by Tony Scott



Above: Tough pitch on Pumta Anna via ferrata grade 5c – Photo by Tony Scott

Left: Airtight ledge on the Via ferrata delle Bocchette, Brenta Dolomites – Photo by Ken Taylor

The Hard(ing) years

Tony Moulam

Peter and I both went to Bemrose School, in Derby, but as he was a couple of years older than me I did not really know him until he, a prefect, found me reading 'Let's Go Climbing' in the library when I should have been swotting for an exam! He seemed to know that I was a cyclist and that I had just acquired a Claud Butler racing bike, with drop handlebars and a derailleur gear. One weekend he invited me to join him for a ride and we set off along the A6 for Cromford, where I found that he had cunningly placed a heavy sisal rope in my saddlebag. The extra weight made me glad to walk up the hill towards Black Rocks, but I was even more pleased when Peter suggested that we should scramble about on the rocks, for a change of exercise.

I knew that he had climbed in Wales and he led me up some of the easier climbs, including Sand Gully, Queen's Parlour Gully and Fat Man's Chimney, none of which caused me much trouble. Peter next proposed to do Stonnis Crack (and as he had just invented a modern technique of hand-jamming) made it appear simple. My turn came and I peered into the crack expecting to find it full of jug handle holds and chockstones – but there was nothing, so I had to rely on an imperfect idea of laybacking, and the support of the now very welcome sisal rope! This introduction to rock climbing, by an expert who made everything look easy, did not do much for my self-esteem and I went off on a cycling tour of North Wales for the summer holiday.

Back at school for the next term I found that Harding had left to start an apprenticeship at Rolls Royce. However I knew that I would probably find him at the rocks so cycled out and found them covered with a miscellany of climbers and deep soft snow. Peter was showing the strangers round the crag and I was happy to watch, joining the only other inactive member of the party, a tall, anaemically pale young man wearing a black mac and a maroon paratroop beret. He told me that he was part of the Leeds University Climbing Club, and that this was their meet. As he finished speaking he was egged on by his companions, and started off up Stonnis Crack. It seemed to cause him no trouble, and, at the top, he introduced himself to Peter as Arthur Dolphin. They next did Lean Man's Buttress together and, seeing my envious expression, Peter offered me the rope end. I realised that the climb was above my class so I refused the chance, saying that a) the snow would go up my sleeves and b) I wanted to go for a walk with my girl friend!



John Nicholson, Peter Harding, Tony Moulam and George Carnham beside 'The Blue Un' a racing MG prepared by Peter for the 1934 Le Mans race, but it did not run for some reason. Taken outside Tyn y Weirglodd, M.U.M.C. hut. Geoff Milburn collection from Peter Harding. Tony Moulam adds 'Nicholson and Carnham were two of Peter's students, co opted to climb with us once or twice'.



Peter Harding, as we set off to walk from Torver (which we had reached by taking three trains from Burton on Trent) to Dow Crag, 22 April, 1946.

Despite this initial defection I soon found myself climbing most weekends with Harding, and with a group of other regulars at the rocks we formed the Stonnis Mountaineering Club.

In these early days we were restricted as to where we could climb (generally Black Rocks, Cratcliffe Tor and Rainster Rocks) by the range of our bicycles and, usually unreliable public transport. However we made one trip to Wharncliffe Crag, staying at Birley Edge Youth Hostel and, because of an invitation from Dolphin, a tedious train journey to Almscliffe on a very cold day. Arthur recommended a campsite at one end of the crag which must have caught all the winds that were available. It also attracted the local cows that inquisitively demolished our tents, with us inside them, during the night!

Our teamwork started on a long weekend visit to Dow Crag, again by train. Torrential rain meant that we did not achieve very much in the way of hard climbs, but we did find that we could rely upon one another in difficult circumstances.

Another long-range foray by train was to Castle Naze. We caught the 07.10 from Derby to Chinley, followed by a five-mile walk to the cliff, where it started to rain! Neither of us could do The Scoop, which was the only climb we knew but did succeed in soloing two routes of about VD standard. Then we had to set off back to Chinley to catch the 14.37 home, it all proving a very expensive adventure.

The next few week ends were spent at our home ground, Black Rocks, and we did the right-hand side of the Promontory, on a top rope, a couple of times. Then, on 12 July, Peter led off along the horizontal cracks at the start of the Promontory Traverse. He carried a 12.5" bar of silver steel, which I had purchased at the local ironmonger, and found that it was just too long to fit between two flutings, which faced one another in opposite sides of the niche. He swung back to his take off point at the top of Right Promontory Gully, produced a hacksaw from his sack and trimmed the rod to the correct length. Back in action he jammed the bar in place and attached our only sling and karabiner. This gave him moral support as he performed the 'contortionate back move' and established himself on the parallel cracks leading to the frog's mouth on the front. He edged along on tiptoe, at full stretch, and finally made the move up to the hidden layaway, which enabled him to pull up into the stance. Then came the trusting part. He called to me to join him and I did so as quickly as possible, to the stance with no delay. Our next objective was the spike on the second side and Peter played me out like a fish until my toes entered the hidden cracks necessary for the following moves. Our aim was to girdle the Promontory to make a complete traverse of the rocks possible. The plan was to place our (retrieved) sling on the spike and I then abseiled to the gully floor. Peter slid down from his stance to feel for the invisible cracks and shuffled along to the spike, which he abseiled from to join me. We solemnly shook hands and congratulated one another. We now knew that the girdle traverse was certain to go, but it had to wait until February 1946 before it was accomplished. Two days later we repeated the route, this time pushing on past the spike, to complete the Promontory Girdle traverse.

Our summer holiday was planned and again we took a train to Betws y Coed and cycled up the four-mile long hill to the bungalow 'Snowdonia' in Capel Curig. In ten days we did thirty climbs, the best being Javelin Buttress, Soapgut (Peter in socks, me in nails), Balcony Cracks and the piece de resistance, Munich Climb. Less memorable was the first of several defeats on Menlove Edwards' Chalkren Stairs, On Gallt yr Ogof.

A week later we were at Almscliffe again and top-roped Great Western twice, but VJ day came on 16 August and, despite the Japanese giving in, I was called up to do my preliminary training at Norton Barracks near Worcester. After three weeks I was sent to Exeter for a University Short Course, which meant I could not climb with Peter again, until the Christmas vacation. We visited Dinas Cromlech and did what was probably the second ascent of Dives, in nails and soaking rain. We inspected the feet of Ivy Sepulchre and Cenotaph Corner deciding that the former would 'go' but the latter was doubtful! This holiday was notable too for our second failure on Chalkren Stairs and our success in Great Gully (Craig yr Ysfa) in four hours. We finished in the dark and the rain had sealed our ropes' knots so that we had to descend to Helyg still tied together.

We wanted a change of scene for the New Year break so caught a night train from Tamworth, via Carnforth and Foxfield to Coniston and walked wearily up to the Barrow Mountaineering Club's old powder hut to camp outside in Peter's ex-army bivouac tent.



The Contortionistic back move' on the West Face of Promontory Buttress, Black Rocks. Photo: from Geoff Milburn collection. Tony Moulam adds 'A photo by Ken (K A W) Herbert, the usual photographer of the Stonnis Club shows PRJH doing the 'contortionate back move' on our first (top-rope) traverse of the Black Rocks Promontory on 23/3/45.

The weather was very cold and dry and, in due course, we found that some of the rocks were iced. The highlights of this holiday were an ice climb up a frozen waterfall on the west face of The Old Man of Coniston and another ice route up North Gully, escaping from the cave by a steep pitch on the north wall, which appeared not to have been done previously. We reckoned it to be Severe, or VS in the prevailing conditions. The lowlight was a failure on Blasphemy Crack, when cold forced our retreat and I had to lower Peter from a valuable sling, which we had to abandon about 60 feet up the pitch.

As mentioned earlier we completed the Black Rocks Girdle in February, succeeded on Elliott's Unconquerable and top-rope Suicide Wall in preparation for an assault on Great Western, Arthur Dolphin's new route at Almscliffe. Peter became the second successful leader and I excelled myself by hand-traversing too far and ending up suspended on the rope like a spider on its silk. Meanwhile Arthur showed us how easy it was by following us, solo, in nails!

A return match was arranged with Dow Crag, as we wanted to retrieve our sling from Blasphemy Crack. This time we were staying in luxury in the Barrow MC hut and though the crack gave us no trouble the weather was still judged too cold for our planned attack on Central Route, as 'Let's go Climbing' had fired our imagination with Colin Kirkus's description of his fall from South America Crack. Next morning, as we were drinking our breakfast brew, a young lad arrived at the door proudly announcing that he wanted to climb, and his name was Colin Kirk! He tagged onto us as we followed the now familiar path up to the cliff, and on into the amphitheatre of Easter Gully. Peter powerfully led South America Crack, despite his BP No: 6 nails skidding and scraping on the glass-hard wall. My clinkers seemed to give a better grip, but of course I benefited

from the encouragement of the rope, and Peter's beaming face as a goal. It was very cold so Peter quickly led off up the next steep pitch, which caused him no trouble. I warmed up rapidly as I pulled strongly on the rope to aid our new friend Colin up South America Crack, until he eventually sprawled, winded, on the Bandstand. Again my clinkers gripped the glassy rock well as I moved up relatively smoothly, hampered by a vicious hailstorm, to join my leader. We both hauled as strongly as we could but failed to budge Colin upwards on this crux pitch, so, rather than abandon him, we brought him up Hopkinson's Crack. The traverse onto E Buttress and the descent of an iced grassy groove did not delay us long and we three continued down to the hut, with Colin carrying on to wherever he was staying in Coniston.

We thought that our struggles would have turned off the enthusiasm of our new friend but next day, just as we were leaving the hut for the crag, in a fine drizzle, he arrived. The scrambling and awkward crack/chimney to the ledge in Intermediate Gully was easy enough and I tied myself securely to various belays. The rain still fell monotonously and very wetly as Peter moved out left on to the initial slab of Eliminate C. After an uncomfortable 20 minutes, for us all, Peter blew on his hands, slapped them on his sides and announced that he was coming back. The line did not seem too difficult so I did not delay and took his place on the sharp end of the rope. I moved out about ten feet left, and realised that the gully bed dropping away meant that I had gained about 100 feet of exposure. My glasses steamed up and raindrops obscured my view so I carefully balanced on my holds and transferred them to one of my pockets. Had I had any sense I would have moved back to Peter, giving best to the climb. However I made another move up and my sleeve dropped back to show my watch. It was twenty minutes past one. A few more moves up with numb and almost useless hands and I reached a grassy perch with assorted small spike belays.

Some time during this matinee performance Colin had slunk off down the Gully, and we never saw him again. Peter made less of a fuss on the pitch than I had and led on past me to the ledge at the top of Branch Chimney. Our rope was a plaited cotton invention that Peter had bought at our local ironmonger especially for this holiday. It had been soaking in cold water now for about two hours now and had taken on the characteristic stiffness of an iron bar! This proved something of a hindrance as we found that we were now supposed to lasso a spike on the arête to our right. We took turns to try and each attempt ended with the sling on our loop of rope flopping down in to the top of Branch Chimney. We had just decided to give up and follow the rope down the chimney when Peter had one more go, and the sling dropped neatly over the spike as if we had won a hoop-la prize. There was no time for more excuses so, as it was Peter's turn, he led off horizontally to the spike and went out of sight round the corner.

Just after he disappeared there was a long pause and then the rope started to inch out slowly. Eventually it stopped, about half the length having gone, then I heard a muffled but triumphant cry, and it started moving out rhythmically again. Another shout and I realized that my rest had finished. Communication was difficult but, as the rope tightened I stirred my cramped limbs and matched my movement to the take in of the rope. I thought my problems would be over once I had turned the corner, but I found that here was where the difficulties began. I could no longer feel my fingers and tried to hook them over holds I could barely see, as the light now began to fail.

Somehow I struggled on upwards and was able to lead on past Peter to the Easy Terrace. This was an anti-climactic end to the day, though again we could not untie the rope. We made it back to the hut for a hot meal and drink, early to bed as we had to leave at 4.00 am to return home. The end of a super –if wet – Easter holiday.

I had arranged for the Exeter University Climbing Club (me) to stay at Tyn y Weirglodd, the Manchester University Mountaineering Club hut in Rhydd Ddu for my last leave as a student. On the first day of this holiday I made my first first ascent in Wales, Angel Pavement, on Craig y Bera. The next day we went to Cloggy and failed on Bow Shaped Slab witnessed by Peter, John Barford and Mike Ward, who were climbing Central Rib from their base at Helyg. We were taking an inordinately long time and concern was expressed about our ability, but Peter told his friends that he knew me, so it would be all right! He was correct but we had to make a stressful retreat and stayed out all night looking for friends who had gone missing on an attempt on Jubilee Climb.

Next day Peter drove round on his motorbike, by now a Vincent Black Shadow, and whipped me off to Dinas Mot. He had recently invented the Direct Start to Western Slabs and wanted my opinion of it. I instantly said, "It looks very steep" as he addressed the groove. About 40 feet up he came to a halt in a break and appeared to rest. After a few moments he moved on and finished the pitch, so it was my turn. I found the first moves steep and fingery and looked forward to a rest when I reached Peter's niche. I found it was deceptively steep and I still had to hold on with both hands and had to forgo my anticipated rest. We linked together pitches of Western Rib, the Girdle Traverse, Direct Route and Diagonal and improved the last climb by adding a rather brutal Direct Finish.

After this light-hearted ramble on the clean rock of Dinas Mot we thought a return match with 'Cloggy' would raise our spirits so, although I favoured Central Rib, Peter had done it on the day I made my dilatory and failed ascent of Bow so we agreed to tackle Narrow Slab. Despite its grading of VI we were encouraged by the guidebook comment 'nowhere strenuous or extreme' and we set off cheerfully up to Cwm du'r Arddu and the wet grass fall which then fell from the lower end of the Eastern Terrace. Peter set off as for Bow but continued up the weakness, instead of moving out right, to a ledge nestling under the scarp wall of the next sheaf. It was my turn now and I struggled up until I could place a runner round a rock spike high on the edge of the, then unclimbed, White Slab. This seemed to make things a lot easier and I continued right, and slightly down to make a final long stride (Linnell's Leap) into the grassy corner. I was very glad that Peter was coming across those moves as last man, but he accomplished the traverse swiftly and continued past me to the next stance. My cunning plan to take the easier pitches had failed! The slab rearing above seemed to me to warrant being described as a wall and the guide's instructions to go up the face by the thin central crack, and the holds on each side, was not much help. I soon found myself shaking uncomfortably on an exiguous hold. There was nowhere for a runner (as in those days you needed a definite spike) so I took my courage in my fingers and moved up boldly to complete the pitch. The rest was easy - because Peter led it - and tension was broken by the fussy little train puffing up the ridge opposite on the other side of the cwm.

Rumours had reached us that Chris Preston's Suicide Wall on the East Wall of the Idwal Slabs was really the most difficult climb in Wales, so naturally we had to try it!

When we got there it certainly looked hard and we could only see the way up to

the little square stance where we knew the difficulties began. I was sent up Tennis Shoe to drop a rope for Peter to have a practice, as Chris had done, and in my turn I found the route needed a helping tug or two. Peter thought he needed another go to make sure of the moves so descended the pitch, still protected, before rushing up it with such speed that I could hardly take the rope in quickly enough.



Peter Harding lassoing the spike on the first ascent of Promontory Butress at Black Rocks in 1946. Photo Geoff Milburn collection from Peter Harding/Ken Herbert. Tony Moulam adds 'Photo taken 12/7/45 and shows the first lead of the complete traverse (ie not abseiling into the gully as we did for the girdle traverse of Black Rocks). Peter is placing our one sling on the abseil spike!

We both came down the easy way and, in anticipation of a notable ascent I braced myself across the runnel at the foot of the wall, as there did not seem to be a belay. Peter addressed the rock, wiped his hands and moved confidently up to the mantelshelf just below the ledge. By some mischance he made his move too early, found himself in an unmaintainable position so turned round and ran down the wall! I took in some rope (as text books of the time suggested) until the jerk came and detached me from my stance and we both bound downwards tied together. With bodies and egos bruised we hobbled across to Sub Cneifion Rib but even that proved too hard so we decided that the time had come to return to our respective homes and consider the future.

Mine was determined by the powers that be, I was 'recalled to the colours', which happened to be at Catterick, at the beginning of August. Valuable weekend leaves and the liberal use of my thumb for hitch-hiking meant that I was not entirely cut off from my friends. At the end of September we broke new ground by visiting Laddow. This involved hitching to Derby from where Ken Herbert, Ronni Lee and I caught the 14.05 train to Chinley and a bus to Tintwistle. Then we walked until we decided to pitch the tent below Rob's Rocks, although we could not be quite sure where we were, because it was dark. Peter arrived on Sunday morning, along with a gale, which made for exciting climbing, and also a paperback guidebook. Despite the handicap of wind and later rain Peter led the intimidating Twin Eliminate (now graded E1 5b) and Leaf Crack, amongst many other easier climbs we did with members of The Karabiner Club.

At Easter 1947 we held a Stonnis Meet at Tal y Waen, the home of mountain guide, Scotty Dwyer, half way down the road from Helyg to Capel Curig. The first success of the week was getting the whole of the party up Chalkren Stairs (then classified VD by Menlove, but now uprated to VS!). A new member of our club, Nobby Milward, played a valuable part in this triumph by leading a sing song when we all sat on a ledge from which it seemed unlikely that we would ever escape. The last route of the week was the Grimmitt, which Peter and I climbed in nails, probably the third ascent.

My military training took precedence for the next few months and I was sent to Mons Barracks in Aldershot. This meant that I could improve both my finger strength and technique at Harrison Rocks, but I missed a fateful month or two when Peter led Ernie Phillips up The Spectre and Ivy Sepulchre, both first ascents which pushed up standards in the Pass. By the time Christmas came an opportune leave meant that I was able to join Peter and Dick Meyer at Helyg. We took the opportunity of starting the tradition of the Stonnis Club's Christmas day ascent of the Grimmitt.

Our large party crowded into the Amphitheatre and scrambled up in various styles, to the Bilberry Terrace, beneath Pinnacle Wall. Peter, as director of operations, selected me to lead. Of course I had done the route before and friction on the rough edges of the gritstone-like crack soon warmed my hands as I thrust them in to it and moved quickly up to the cave whose roof formed the first overhang. This I overcame with a previously practised move and soon stood on the ledge at the top. Harding followed, demonstrating that he really had no need of the rope, and then it was Arnold Carsten's turn. He was slow and silent, possibly due to the alcohol intake the night before. That was more than could be said for Dick Meyer, who gave a noisy demonstration of calf quivering, on the crux. The fifth man was Norman Horsefield, who must have been nearly frostbitten by the time his turn came to address the rock, but he made no complaint and we all enjoyed the festive atmosphere.

Soon afterwards the army sent me to Vienna, which is another story, but meant that there was a considerable gap in my Stonnis Club activities. Eventually I returned to England, was demobbed and presented with an ill-fitting suit and a trilby. Peter had a car by now, and was a lecturer at Shrewsbury Technical College. The availability of transport and our reunion meant that we could turn our attention to the fieldwork for his forthcoming Llanberis Guide. Tiring of following the routes which already existed we noted a line of holds rising across the unclimbed wall to the left of Central Gully, which led enticingly up to the wide grassy ledge of Lords. We had a monumental fry-up in Beuddy Mawr, which slowed us on the approach march but we soon sat at the foot of the wall whilst Peter urged us to hold his rope. The first few feet of his chosen line were obvious and easy, His movements slowed as the difficulty increased, and soon he came to a halt. The time had come to place a piton and this took a few moments before Peter was able to gain an exiguous crack and move up to a little ledge, where he paused for a rest. I had already had some experience of the sort of hostile 'resting place' that he could use so I was rather perturbed when he started to insert another peg. It did not seem to want to go in, or at least not very far, but Peter was either satisfied, or tiring, so he moved on up. The groove that followed was 'protected' by tying knots in our numerous thin nylon slings, and jamming them, more or less securely, in the crack. I found the route tiring and precarious, and Disley who came up as third man also had

some difficulty. In fact he left some of the attachments in place and Peter repeated the pitch again to retrieve the valuable gear.

We did this route on 28 August 1948 which was, of course, Kaisergebirge Wall, named to celebrate my return from Austria. It was to become the benchmark for later leaders to measure themselves against before attempting even harder routes yet to be invented, by the likes of the Rock and Ice.

Now I had a year to prepare for my course at Manchester University and, to fill in time, I enrolled on Peter's course at Shrewsbury Technical College, and shared digs. We climbed at Pontesbury Rocks and went to RLH in the Lake District to instruct a troop of scouts, organised by F R G Chew. We should have had a year of high achievement, but I spoilt it all by getting knocked down by a lorry, when I was hitch hiking to Wales. This meant that I spent from 3 December 1948 to Feb 15th 1949 in the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, just outside Oswestry. There an American surgeon mended my leg but I still had to do a lot of walking and cycling in order to make it work properly. By May 13 (a Friday) I was able to sign on again for full time seconding duty when I followed Peter up Demon Rib, the Superstitious Start to Lean Man's Buttress and the Easy Exit from The Promontory. On 21st he went to Wales and achieved the Girdle Traverse of the West Buttress of Clogwyn du'r Arddu with Gordon Dyke. This involved nearly 1000 ft of difficult climbing, including the cruces of all the then existent routes. For good measure the excitement was increased when a falling stone severed the rope between Peter and Gordon – but luckily this happened when they had reached the easy ground near the end of the climbing! Peter had only just reached home on Sunday when he received a request from the editor of the Rucksack Club Journal for an article. The grapevine worked quickly even then!

In October I finally went up to Manchester University and started climbing with a different group, including Geoff Pigott and other members of the Rucksack Club. I climbed occasionally with Peter and particularly remember a reunion visit to Craig yr Ysfa in March 1950 when we traversed into an iced Cirque and made an exciting ascent of Arch Wall, rendered interesting by streaks of verglas. It would probably have been even more exciting if we had not retained our nailed boots. About this time Peter moved from Shrewsbury to Manchester to work for Small and Parkes, a brake shoe manufacturer who's Technical Director happened to be Ivan Waller.

Ivan joined us in Wales when we tied him in the middle of our rope on Dinas Mot Direct. We led alternate pitches and Ivan was bewildered, as he said that he never knew when he might be expected to take the lead! A few weeks later we performed a similar service on Sheaf when Peter and I walked over from Cwm Glas Cottage and Ivan arrived fortuitously, having been to Snowdon summit.

My last holiday with Peter was in the summer of 1950. For some reason I can no longer remember Peter came to meet me in Wales and we set off for Scotland on my 350 cc Royal Enfield (bought with the army's university grant and painted green including saddle and chain) rather than his Vincent HRD. We covered 183 miles in 9½ hours and camped somewhere outside Penrith. Next day we went on another 230 miles to pitch the tent below the Buachaille, but at least had dinner at the Royal Hotel in Tyndrum (we had had fish and chips in Wigan on the previous day). We slept well

and only managed to leave the tent at 11.30 but climbed Crowberry Ridge Direct and Cuneiform Buttress on the way to the summit of our first Munro. We treated ourselves to dinner at the Clachaig Hotel but next day was very wet and we moved the tent into Glen Nevis on the edge of the river. It rose about two feet in the night but luckily remained 3 or 4 inches below our campsite. We stayed in our sleeping bags for the rest of the day but frustration mounted and, after wading and re-wading the Nevis river in the morning, we climbed Stob Ban, though we could not really see much for the rain and mist which engulfed us the whole way.

Overnight the weather relented a little so we waded the river again, steeply reached the pony track and left it for the Allt a Mhuillinn and slow progress to the CIC hut. From here we surveyed the magnificent North face and identified Tower Ridge. We decided to start with the Douglas Boulder in order to get the longest climb. We did not find it very hard and moved together most of the time, except for a few steeper feet in a chimney about halfway up. Soon we reached the boulder's top and paused for our frugal lunch.

We descended to the gap and found interesting and pleasing scrambling leading up to the East Traverse. We took the Recess route to finish our first climb on Britain's highest peak, walked to the ruined observatory and then ran down the Carn Mor Dearg Arete, toiled up to its summit and then made a laborious way down into Coire Leis, found Lochan Meall An t-Suidhe and the tourist track down which we ran to the river and our campsite, to find that our friends Eddie Williams and George Carnham had arrived.

Next day Peter and I went up to the cliff again, and inspected the gullies on either side of Observatory Ridge. They looked inhospitable with streaks of snow and, as neither of them had been climbed, we moved across to Observatory Buttress. A forty-foot snow slope barred the foot of the buttress but we climbed it, crossed a mini-bergschrund and set off on Rubicon Wall. The first section, up yellowish slabs, was fairly easy but our nails tended to slip on the hard rock. We had no description and, whilst Peter explored I sat on my ledge, fascinated by a paper bag which was caught in an updraught of air, and gyrated round the buttress time and again as Peter climbed. Eventually he called for me to follow. More and more grooves followed until a delicate move or two brought us to easy ground, and the summit. I met Bill Murray, who had done the second ascent, some time later and he was very impressed that we had done the climb in nails.

More terrible weather set in the next day, for four days. We struck camp and rode to Glencoe where we pitched the tent outside the Clachaig Hotel. We did not get out of our sleeping bags until 1.20pm, but then, to make amends, rushed up Clachaig Gully in 3½ hours. We carried on to the summit of Sgor nan Fiannaidh, followed the Aonach Eagach and descended to the road from Am Bodach. From whence wearily back to camp. The next day I aborted this holiday by crashing my motorbike. Peter drove me, uncomfortably on the pillion, to Tyndrum where I caught a bus to Glasgow and a train home.

I climbed with Peter only once or twice after this, as his work, marriage and family took precedence over the rocks. I have already mentioned my sorrow that I missed the first ascents of Ivy Sepulchre, Spectre and Suicide Wall, but the greatest regret was that we were never able to visit the Alps together. However I was privileged to climb with this innovator and superb cragsman, from the beginning of his career and share some of his greatest achievements.

Armchair climbing

Tony Moulam

Armchair Climbing: a short review of mountain films

Have you ever found yourself getting to the top of a route, and shouting down to your bored belayer, “Yeah, it’s a tricky little number”, or “It almost got a little messy there!”? If so, you probably have a copy of *Hard Grit*. And you are a tit. This groundbreaking climbing film was a milestone quite simply because for almost the first time there was a decent film about rock-climbing. It may have been the likes of Moon, Moffat, and Dunne on high E numbers, but they were at Stanage and Froggatt and Ilkley, like the rest of us. Throw in decent technical production (maybe not 6c but pretty solid 5b-c) and a decent dance music soundtrack, and the job was a good ‘un. Before *Hard Grit* you had to make do with Clint Eastwood running after a small oriental vixen in preparation for trying and succeeding to kill all his climbing buddies on the Eiger (what was all that about?), Chris Bonington’s admittedly half-decent series on Lakeland climbs where he introduced new phenomena like women going climbing – shock horror! – and was either hauled up routes himself by Pete Livesey or where he did the hauling (Whillans), or tosh like *Cliffhanger* and *K2*. Though even the latter looks like *Bunuel* compared with the pitiful *Vertical Limit*. What was Ed Viesturs thinking about?!

Since then there has been a rack full of decent climbing films: *Dosage*, *Rampage*, *Equilibrium* and so forth. The climbing film genre is now well-established and there appears to be a healthy appetite for spending £20 on some climbing-related watching to give vicarious pleasure and help you through yet another wet weekend, or in the case of this summer an entire season.

The DVD shelf in many climbing shops has become ever longer, swelled further by recent additions such as Leo Dickinson’s film *Whillans: Myth or Legend?*, and the excellent ‘*Set in Stone*’, show-casing Dave Birkett’s talents in the Lakes. This has taken the *Hard Grit* effect to new heights (ahem) – most of these routes are unrepeated but watching the film still makes you want to drop everything, jump in the car and head for the fells.

Whilst it is the British climbing film genre that is of most interest, it is worth mentioning that there is much decent climbing film from across the pond. The most well-known is the *Masters of Stone* series, an entertaining take on hardcore US climbing, and related activities. The latest incarnation, *MoS5*, has plenty of good stuff, especially bold big wall soloing, a blind man leading 5.8 (I’m not kidding), two nutters jumping off the Polar Sun Spire, and a homage to the late, great, bold, barmy Dan Osman. How did he survive for so long? These are worth acquiring, and *MoS1* plus 2, and 3 plus 4, now come in double DVD packages.

It is funny how some of these films date quite quickly. The voice-over at the start of *Equilibrium*, from Neil Bentley’s loyal belayer explaining how he recharged his mobile phone before every visit to Burbage, seems quite comical from today’s perspective – who doesn’t now do this before they go climbing somewhere?

In 2006 we saw the Dave McLeod horror film, *E11*. Traditionally any movie title

ending in a number is normally a sequel. The French Connection 2, Jaws 3, Police Academy 8, Halloween 247 etc. (With the exception of the exceptionally bad K-9 – just one was painful enough.) E11 had a canny marketing campaign on the internet, based around a very professional trailer. Secondly there was some admittedly tough-looking climbing (though I am sure that my own 2006 new route, Laraletme, a 5b at Harrison's daringly climbed on a top-rope, would have looked just as tricky). And finally it included some impressive screaming. I dare say that I would have let out the odd squeak if I had taken a 70-foot whipper onto a handful of RPs. E11 is not as good as the trailer leads you to believe, which is exactly how trailers are meant to work. But it is still a good film, and if E12 is ever made, I would like to see it.

And so we have now reached a point where climbing films are not amateurish affairs but TV- and film industry-standard. Throw in the fact that climbing is more mainstream than ever, and it is no surprise that Touching the Void and the Mountain and Extreme series on BBC have put climbing on at the Odeon and squarely in the middle of the TV schedule. Some of us may be disdainful, and would prefer climbing to remain on the fringes. But others will look forward to the next instalment, though probably not to Vertical Limit 2.



Photo: Zion Canyon, USA.

Four Snapshots of Climbing in the Slovak Tatra

Trevor Langhorne

The seeds of this trip were planted in the early 70s when a group of mates from Carlisle got an invite to the Polish Tatra; they returned enthused. Germination was somewhat delayed, 30+ years later the seeds sprang to life one December day as I walked the dog. A quick search on the web revealed that the Slovak side of the range had the most information, least regulation and best rock; the CC Tatra meet sprouted. In total a team of 20 members and guests joined in the fun.

1. "What should we do tomorrow?"

For some reason the team expected me to have some idea about a first route; luckily I had. The Birkenmajer Route (Grade III/IV) on Lomnický Stit (2634m) seemed ideal being a short walk from the chairlift, with about 4 pitches plus scrambling leading to the second highest summit (complete with café) in the range and an easy descent. I sold it so well that a dozen went for it. A rapid re-think followed; Bradders (John Bradley) and I decide to avoid the crowds and get the chairlift to the top of Lomnický Stit and traverse the ridge to Kežmarský Stit (considerably longer with pitches of V). Next morning we were all on the first chairlift at 8:30 am, at halfway Bradders and I got tickets to the summit; 1250Sk showed on the till, the cashier said 1250 – we paid up. Minutes later the penny (rather the Slovak Crown) dropped; the time of departure was the same as the price, a 12.50 pm departure for a ridge with a guidebook time of 6 hours (summit to summit) wasn't on. Deft negotiation by Bradders ensured a refund and we were soon on our way up the chairlift to join the others.

What followed was in the best tradition of Alpine climbing; every party for itself as we climbed over, under and around each other in a mad dash to be first to the top. The ridge was pleasant with great views of the area and helped get us orientated. Following lunch and coffee on top we scrambled down the chains and ladders of 'the normal route' which is mislabelled as 'via ferrata'. As it is less than grade III you can descend it unaccompanied but can only ascend it with a guide!

2. "We could do this one, it's only 4 pitches of up to IV and a scramble to the top." We quickly discovered that many things had to be booked several days in advance; e.g. huts, cable car to Lomnický summit. A hut called Teryho Chata was a good base for routes on peaks such as Baranie Rohy (2526m) and Malý Ladový Stit (2602m). Joe (Curley) and Chris (Drinkwater) had gone up there for a couple of days; however when the tourist office tried to book us beds not one was available for another 5 days. Re-think; we will have to have a big day and walk from the valley. Ann-Marie (Henderson) agreed to this and then identified a short route for Tuesday as light preparation for Wednesday's big effort. The Birkenmajer Route on Kežmarský Stit

(2558m) was 4 pitches of IV and a scramble up a ramp to the top. Next morning saw us in the Bergschrund below the Birkenmajer – dampness pushed us to the alternative Puskas start. Pitch followed pitch, with some poor protection and loose rock; 4 pitches stretched to 5, 6 and eventually 7 to get to the bottom of the ramp. The view above made our hearts sink, so much for a scramble – a further six full 50m rope-lengths up unprotected slabs and some cracks led to a further 250m of scrambling and the top. The descent was long but easy, an unusual short route for a rest day! We decided that the next day had to be a real rest day; the trip to Baranie Rohy from the valley was on hold.

3. A bright idea

On the rest day I had a bright idea, we could go to a lower hut, Zamkovskeno Chata, which was an hour from the middle cable car station and would take at least 2 hours walking from the Baranie Rohy trip. Ann-Marie and I left at 4pm that day and were soon settled outside the hut; the presence of fly swats on the tables was soon justified as a wide variety of blood sucking nasties appeared from the surrounding woods. Just before we retreated indoors I spotted Chris and Joe walking down the path – a quick conversation suggested that the Puskas Route on Maly Ladovy Stit (2602m) at grade V looked much better than the route on Baranie Rohy, the plan changed again. After a comfortable night on the floor (mattresses provided) and fortified by a breakfast of garlic cream cheese, bread, tomato and cucumber we set off for our target. The walk in was beautiful and we were soon at the bottom of the Puskas Route under a azure blue sky. This excellent route led in seven long pitches to a ridge, as we climbed mist formed and descended adding to the experience and atmosphere. Scrambling up the ridge led to the top and another long but easy descent.

4. Working with the chain gang

After retrieving our gear from below Maly Ladovy Stit we set off over a col called Priečne Sedlo to a second hut, Zbojnicke Chata. The scramble to the col was equipped with chains and very polished but we were soon over it and out of the mist with the hut in sight. Half an hour more I thought, somehow the hut never seemed to get any closer; after another 30 minutes the problem was clear, we had to walk right round the head of a large and deep ravine to access the hut. An hour or so later we reached our destination feeling a little fatigued. After another night on the floor and a breakfast of cold meats, salad and bread we re-traced our steps towards to col until below the superb South Face of Siroka Veza (2461m) – The Swierz Route (aka Ceska Klasika) at V - was the choice, and an excellent one at that with superb slabby wall climbing on perfect granite. The topo suggested that the local guides had equipped the route with bolt belays and protection – there were no bolts but a small selection of antique pegs at belays and on the main pitches. A short easy descent took us back to Priečne Sedlo and a dilemma at the top of the chains we had ascended the previous afternoon.

There were two ways back to the funicular at Hrebienok, an hour and a half by descending the chains and out past Teryho and Zamkovskeno Chata's or three and a half hours via Zbojnicke Chata – the dilemma being that the Slovaks have a one way system on the chains (up only) – and we would have to go in the wrong direction. I took several milliseconds to decide on the path of anarchy. My beer was earned by returning to the foot of the S Face and collecting the gear, on returning towards the col I received several stern lectures from Slovaks on the traffic management arrangements – a good job I don't speak Slovak. We both agreed that the chains really shouldn't be there, they encourage walkers onto terrain where a slip would be fatal – we saw many arrive at the col with eyes on stalks as if they had just soloed Right Wall! The one-way system ensures that the scared witless don't have to cope with passing anyone. Back at the col we waited until the chains seemed to be clear of hikers and made a swift descent of the line avoiding the chains wherever possible. On our descent we met a couple of Slovaks who spoke good English; they had no problem with us descending, appreciating that we were no hazard to them. The pint I earned was duly delivered at Teryho Chata (cost £1.50) before continuing the pleasant walkout.

The Tatra lived up to my expectations, indeed virtually everyone on the trip thought them superb. Would I go again – unequivocally yes. Visually they are like a supersized Skye with much excellent granite (and some awful looking rubble), good paths, great scenery, interesting huts, cheap beer and very friendly people. If you fancy an off the beaten track Alpine Rock trip you should consider the Tatra. The winter climbing there looks incredible but conditions are very Spartan; which may partly explain the incredible record of Czech, Slovak and Slovene climbers in the Greater Ranges.

Confessions of a gear junkie - a trip down memory lane

Al Randall

FROM WIKIPEDIA

The term 'Junky' is a colloquial term with negative connotations to refer to a person who is thought to be an addicted drug user. Junkie or junky may also refer to:

A person with a drug addiction, most often referring to users of opiates.

A person enthusiastic about something.

Junky or junkie novel by William S. Burroughs.

Junkiecomic book.

Junkie XL (born 1967), Dutch musician.

So, there we have it, it's in black and white, it's official, I'm a Junkie. I hasten to add that I fall under the 'person enthusiastic about something' banner though and not the user of opiates.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

I didn't set out to collect climbing gear, honest, it just somehow crept up on me. My wife, Lynne, enjoys reminding me that years ago I would announce I was going climbing, pick up a rucksack and be out the door before I had finished the sentence. These days it takes me an eternity just to decide what to take, as my head and shoulders disappear into the cupboard, arse in the air like a terrier down a rabbit hole, to emerge some time later festooned with a variety of equipment and clothing and covered from head to toe in chalk and dust. Well it's hard. Isn't it? There are so many things to take into consideration. Are we going sport or trad climbing? Are we going into the mountains or just cragging? Grit or limestone? Should I take comfy boots or performance boots (performance of course being a subjective and relative concern)? Smearing or edging? Single or twin ropes? What's the temperature likely to be? Will it rain? Which rucksack shall I take? There's no point taking one too big, you only tend to over fill it, but at the same time it must not be too small. I could go on and that's before I even think about venturing out on ice or to the Alps. Decisions, decisions, decisions. If climbing is about risk management, planning a trip is decision management and in my case has become a major undertaking in itself. My brain hurts just thinking about it but I enjoy buying new gear and find some relaxation in the act of sorting and selecting hardware. Even the tiresome job of marking gear has its moments. It confirms your ownership, assures against loss (God forbid) and exercises your fingers and patience. This is the gear junkies equivalent of Methadone, not the real thing but it helps.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

It's ironic, I used to climb at quite a respectable grade with hardly any gear at all. Now I own three of everything imaginable but my climbing is probably what would be considered average these days. Life is just not fair is it? Lynne refuses to open my cupboard door (note the use of 'my cupboard'), for fear of becoming the victim of a rope and sling avalanche or being suffocated by free-falling sleeping bags and soft shells. I don't know why she worries there's probably an avalanche transceiver in there somewhere. On a few occasions, when I have been a little careless, she has managed to get a glimpse of my secret hoard. "Good God" she will declare (frequently and loudly) "how many ropes do you need?" My response, usually along the lines of "how many shoes and handbags can a woman use?" tends to be met by a day or two of stony faced silence, culminating in a trip to the fashion shops. In all honesty and sincerity I can explain why I NEED EVERY rope. This one is for single pitch sport, these two are for trad climbing, these two skinny ropes are for multi-pitch sport and ice climbing, this one is for when my partner already has a 50 metre x 9mm rope and I keep this one for when I go to the wall. Yeh! Yeh! Yeh! Justification you see, not that that stops the sarcasm. Then there is the physical pain. You pay a fortune for something to deform and cripple your feet in the certain knowledge that you will live to regret it in your dotage. You don't have to be a masochist to climb but it certainly helps as they say.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

Ice climbing presents us with even more opportunities to accumulate gear and challenge the domestic bliss. To this day I do not know how I managed to acquire six ice tools. And that's not counting the old sawn down, fibre glass/resin covered, wooden shafted Aschenbrenner ice axe that was my first pride and joy and later paired up with a Chouinard ice hammer. I wonder how many of you remember those? They went in the bin, under considerable duress I might add, during one of our many house moves. Oh well! The axe weighed a ton but it worked well enough or so I thought at the time. It's only in retrospect that you come to realise how embarrassingly primitive some things were; Nut protection, ropes, axes, flares, mullet haircuts, kipper ties. I could go on but I digress.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

In my defence and before anyone accuses me of having more money than sense, a sentiment enthusiastically shared by my wife and family by the way, I have been climbing for 45 years and the gear has accumulated. At least we think it has accumulated, for all we know it may be mating in there. Wouldn't that be great. I could go into business breeding thoroughbred cams and cross breed rucksacks.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

When I started out on my climbing career I owned a 60-foot, No. 4, Viking hawser laid rope, 2 or 3 slings and a few weighty Ex-WD (Ex-War Department for those of you not old enough to know) karabiners, a pair of walking boots and a canvas rucksack. That was it! There's no wonder I could get out the door faster than Seb Coe. I have a vague recollection of seeing things called PAs on Stanage in 1965 or thereabouts. These were a rock boot, designed by French climber Pierre Allain (In the 1930s believe it or not), hence the abbreviation, which came with a small, round, rubber mat to stand on in order to keep the dirt off (I'll concede that my memory could be flawed on this last bit).

The only people who had them seemed to be those few, lucky souls who had climbed abroad, a luxury unavailable to many of us in those early days. We had to make do with black plimsolls from Woolworths which worked surprisingly well on our local grit crags. There weren't many gear shops back in the Sixties, Blacks and Army Surplus stores sold some clothes and camping equipment but the first proper gear shop I remember was Brian (Tanky) Stokes shop in Sheffield. It wasn't long before I became a regular visitor so I can probably blame him for my current crisis and the start of my addiction. Sorry I meant collection.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

Rock climbing protection was still very basic back then but I worked as an electrician in the steelworks and had a lucrative (well it earned me a pint or two) sideline. When I was on the night shift I spent much of the time drilling out and filing the threads from nuts, engineering nuts that is, which were used on slings and placed in cracks as a basic form of protection. A more extreme example of mind over matter would be difficult to imagine. Put one in a crack and you will see what I mean. Now that is what you call psychological protection. I am still amazed, looking back, that we never saw the logical progression to wedge shaped nuts. It seems so bloody obvious in retrospect but we never made the connection.

In contrast there are Friends and I don't mean those on the other end of your rope. Friends were a real innovation requiring imagination and a considerable amount of engineering know how. Many items come about as updates, developments or modifications to existing products rather than being genuine new inventions. Take ice-axe leashes, of which I have every example known to man and some that are not. When I started ice climbing we attached the axes to our rucksacks or harnesses with lengths of tape or cord. It's amazing how much havoc a length of nylon tape, trailing like an umbilical cord, can cause so it was with some relief that we adopted leashes that attached to the head of the axe and wrapped round the wrists. This seemed like progress. Making the leashes removable (clipper leashes) felt even better. Next came leash-less. Surely this was it, the holy grail of ice climbing. Not quite, at least for some, as we now seem to have a return to the long leashes that attach to the waist. "What goes around comes around" as my old man used to say. Now there is choice but what I find surprising is that discussions in various forums talk about these leashes as if they are a new innovation.

Another item that takes me back is soft shell. I'm a big fan of soft shell and I'm not saying that what I am about to reveal is a direct comparison but back in the late Sixties/early Seventies I had a garment bought at the Army Stores (whatever happened to them, there used to be several on every high street?) called a combat jacket. It was possible to get ex-British, ex-US, ex-Italian and ex-any country you could think of military clothing at these outlets. I don't recall what nationality my jacket was but, and this is the important bit, it was light, hard wearing, shower proof, wind proof, did not provide excessive insulation and to the best of my recollection I did not sweat in it (breathable?). You could get them in any colour as long as it was khaki. Best of all it cost a few shillings to buy. Apart from that last bit does that not sound uncannily like a description of soft shell?

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

Part of my reason, for buying new equipment is age and wear and tear. No, not the equipment, me, my body. Paradoxically (my wife spells that o b s t i n a t e l y) I'm quite reluctant to bin gear. Over the years, and along with the gear, I have accumulated a number of major and minor injuries as well as the usual age-related aches and pains and been bitten a couple of times by the frost. Decent rock shoes are hell to wear, walking any distance in crampons is uncomfortable, in fact walking any distance at all is getting harder and, worst of all, carrying a heavy rucksack leaves me with pain in my shoulder.

Now I'm not a religious man but I have experienced a few revelations in my time and have become almost evangelical in my support of soft shell, the principle of 'light is right' and Project Management methodology (how did that get in here, I'm supposed to be retired now?). Light is right became my mantra, well before Mark Twight I might add, following a bad experience on an early Alpine trip where I carried far too much gear and took for ever to get up a route (but I'll save that for another day and another article: assuming of course that I do not push the light is right approach too far and my body holds out long enough. All I will say for now is thank god for wire gates). Since then I have become almost paranoid in my quest to reduce the weight in my rucksack. And I have succeeded, I think.

A couple of years ago I did an ML course, in the mistaken belief that this would be a good career move. I eventually came to my senses and decided that dragging a group of teenage 'scallies' around Snowdon at two o'clock in the morning in pouring rain was not after all what I was cut out for. One of the guys on the course was an ex-commando and he took a perverse pride in the fact that his pack, for the three-day expedition, weighed 40 pounds. I on the other hand was keen to demonstrate that mine was well under 25. In fact it was so well under that the instructor insisted on checking that I had all of the mandatory items required for safety. I'm glad to say that I did but my back still hurt that night.

"There's no need to worry, I have this under control, I know what I'm doing, I could stop if I wanted to."

I think that I'm just enthusiastic and passionate, my wife says I am obsessed, my son and daughter think that I'm a border line addict and most definitely a head case. What

do you think? Be careful how you answer this it could be you. Perhaps I should start an encounter group for similar sufferers and a support group for friends and families. Something along the lines of the Samaritans perhaps with a hot line and dozens of reformed gear junkies on call. Imagine the scene.

Case study 1

Concerned Partner:

"My man got back from Gogarth at the weekend. He says he dropped a No.4 Friend into the sea and now he won't come out of his room."

Gear Samaritan:

"Call your building society immediately, request a top up on your mortgage and buy him a new one ASAP"

Case study 2

Concerned Partner:

"I got home from work and found my husband, in tears, sitting on the floor surrounded by dozens of foul smelling climbing shoes. He can't decide if he should go for comfort or performance."

Gear Samaritan:

"Tell him to man-up and go for the performance shoes or take both."

Concerned Partner:

"That seemed to have worked and now he's really happy because he'll have to go out and buy a new rucksack to put them in but now I'm getting worried about our bank balance."

Gear Samaritan:

"Ditch him, he's a lost cause. He will never stop buying gear. Find yourself someone who likes golf or sailing and expensive holidays and cars it will be much cheaper in the long run."

Case study 3

Concerned Partner:

"I just got a call. He's stuck on the crux and he can't decide if he should put in the No. 4 Rock or the Wallnut."

Gear Samaritan:

"Take away his mobile phone but if this persists confiscate his Wallnuts."

"We are all gear junkies to some extent or another the secret is to not let it get out of control."

"!!!! Perhaps I should start to worry. Do I have this under control? Do I know what I'm doing?"

Oh God I can't stop, I need therapy!!!!"

The Technicolour Cruise

Paul Harrison

Easter 1985; it's a blustery sort of day and we're standing in a remote field at Hartland Point waiting impatiently for a helicopter that will whisk us over the Bristol Channel to Lundy. The race was on for new climbs, but these were to be no ordinary routes mind, this time the prize was the remaining virgin lines on a pristine sheet of granite known as The Diamond and, in our ever-increasing state of paranoia, it seemed to us that every climber visiting the island was after them. However the weather on this particular trip was far from kind and tempestuous winds and some mountainous seas put paid to our lofty ambitions.

July 1985 and we just couldn't keep away from Lundy. The thought of losing the 'lines' didn't bear thinking about especially as we knew that our arch rival Gary Gibson and his team were already over on the island. Gary had seized the upper hand and myself and climbing partner Steve 'Boydonic' Boydson could wait no longer, so we booked a boat and headed south a few days earlier than the rest of our team 'just to take a look'.

Standing on a deserted Clovelly quayside we scanned the horizon for a sight of our passage to Lundy. An ominous slate grey sky loomed above us whilst a rather bad tempered looking sea stirred menacingly below it. Our craft, a small dory called The Islander, suddenly appeared from the waves before us, then disappeared, and then appeared again... this didn't look good!

Now the skipper of The Islander was a man called Stirling, he lived and worked on the island and despite the worsening weather he seemed rather keen to get home that night. As our small craft pulled out of the lee of the bay the mood of the sea around us changed instantly and the little boat pitched and rocked violently between the increasingly large waves. Suddenly a particularly large wave lifted The Islander clean out of the water, the propeller whirled crazily in the air, and we landed with a sickening smack back in the sea. The engine was silent and the propeller whirled no more. We began drifting helplessly towards the nearby North Devon coast it and I couldn't help but notice that it looked familiar; sure enough the dark brooding form of Blackchurch loomed into view and, having climbed there earlier in the year, I had no particular desire to visit the cliff again, at least not quite so soon and certainly not through being washed up on its rocky shore.

Up went the flare and in an instant a small inshore lifeboat came zipping across the waves from Clovelly in answer to our call and took us and the stricken boat back into harbour. Sitting in the pub it became clear that a plan was being hatched, it was now dark and the wind had turned into a full force gale, blowing hard from the west. The much larger offshore lifeboat was moored off Clovelly and needed to find sheltered waters so it was decided that the lifeboat would take us as passengers over to Lundy at the same time towing The Islander behind: it could then take shelter on Lundy's east coast in the 'Lundy Roads'. The lifeboat's powerful engines roared into life and we surged out into the open sea, the crew muttered something about force 9 and we were advised to stay below, as it could get rough...it was!

I had never been a good sea traveller (certainly not since!) but this really was something else. As we were thrown about the cabin the nausea increased and I recall looking to the crew for reassurance only to see some of them throwing up! The Boydonic remained impassive and stood motionless by a window trying to fix on some imaginary dark horizon as the boat rocked crazily from side to side, hatches were fastened, seatbelts clicked,

“She could roll” we were warned, “but don’t worry she always rights herself!”

After what seemed an eternity we reached the shelter of Lundy’s east coast in what was left of the night, Stirling headed straight for the tavern (these were the days when Islanders and climbers would often stay up drinking and playing darts together until light). I still felt as though the island was rocking from side to side and certainly couldn’t face a pint so we crawled into a makeshift shelter where at least I could be sick no more. The next few days were all a bit of a blur, I remember being unable to eat properly for 48 hours but we did eventually manage a bit of climbing even naming one of our new routes Technicolour Cruise to remind us of our crossing.

Unfortunately for us Gary and his team had managed to climb some excellent new routes the week before including one of the new lines on The Diamond (Watching the Ocean), but any further efforts had been thwarted by the storm. After promising Gary and Matt we wouldn’t touch the remaining lines on The Diamond we waved them goodbye on the boat and set about more cleaning. With another week on the island we were able to add another four brilliant routes to The Diamond but much more importantly we enjoyed a calm crossing home!



Photo: Yosemite in October.

Good luck and chance encounters

Trevor Langhorne

Bugger! I woke with a start as the radio came on, it was Friday 12th September and the news was bad; XL Airlines had ceased trading. Almost certain that we were due to fly to Kalymnos with them I hurried downstairs only to confirm my worst fears. At least we were ATOL protected so no money had been lost. Unable to get replacement flights for a sensible price I e-mailed the apartment owner to cancel, I could almost hear his sigh of resignation as I read his reply; my e-mail was the 17th cancellation he'd received that day.

After far too many e mails we had a short list of two alternative venues; Costa Blanca or Croatia. Undecided I drove to the nearest large climbing shop to read the Croatia guidebooks – that evening we settled on Paklenica in Croatia. A nice surprise was in store, rather than £272 to Kos with XL (plus £70 train to Manchester), Ryan Air would fly us to Zadar in Croatia (from Stansted) for £65 return, and Easyjet would fly me from Newcastle to Stansted for £60 return; not only was a good trip on the cards but it was cheap! We booked an apartment at €10 per night each and transport from the airport to the apartment (50km) was arranged by the apartment owner for €15 each – sorted!

My flight to Stansted got in at 8 am, the flight to Croatia left at 5 pm, the spare time was spent 'improving my mind' at the Henry Moore Foundation galleries nearby. Back at the airport I waited for Ann-Marie's flight from Edinburgh, it was due at 3.50 pm, which came and went with no arrival, at 4.25 pm, minutes before our booking-in desk was due to close, the arrivals board announced the imminent arrival of the plane. Rushing to our check in desk to explain the situation and ask them to hold on seemed like a forlorn hope. Much to my surprise the check in girl was, after a little initial frostiness, rather helpful – she told me to go away! Quietly she explained that this was because she didn't want to draw attention to the fact that she was leaving the flight open for as long as she could. Finally, a full quarter of an hour after the check-in should have closed, we checked in. It is a long way from the check-in to the departure lounges at Stansted; we set off at a brisk jog. Attempting to jump the queue at the security check a manager stopped us, looked at the boarding passes which showed the boarding gate had been closed for over five minutes; after clearing security on we went with his words ringing in our ears ("try if you want but you will be back here in 5 minutes") – finally we got to the boarding gate to find they hadn't even started to board the plane. Relieved we met Jo and Fred and flopped in a heap.

Throwing open the apartment shutters next morning revealed a fabulous view over the Adriatic under a clear blue sky. Marijan from the apartments took us up to the crag in his car to show us the shortcut. In future we had to make a very pleasant 4km walk to the crags. A five-day park pass cost about €20 and we were set.

Paklenica (pronounced Pakleneetsa) is a large National Park but climbing is restricted to the Velicki Paklenica Canyon, a narrow ravine enclosed by limestone cliffs up to 350m high. The guidebook lists routes from 10m Grade 3 sport routes to 350m 8a's – there are about 150 single pitch sport routes but the bulk of the routes are 100m+

and although many have bolts these are definitely not sports routes; it is worth taking some nuts, slings (for threads) and friends on all the non-sports routes. Conveniently the guide describes all the sports routes first (in part of the gorge called Klanci) before moving on to the bigger stuff.

Jo and Fred decided to go sport climbing while Ann-Marie and I fancied a longer route so opted for a highly recommended 200m 4b+ called Sjeverno Rebbo on Veliki Cuk. A number of other local parties had the same idea and were in front of us, so a leisurely ascent was in order; the route was excellent and about MVS 4b. Descending into the gorge we met the others and did a few sport routes, it was becoming clear that the grading was tough with the French grades equating at least directly to English technical grades. On the walk out we discovered a rather nice Taverna at the Park entrance.

The biggest and most famous crag in the gorge is called Anica Kuk, 350m of towering limestone; it was the next target but gave us a wake up call. 'Catch the Rainbow', highly recommended, 5a and fully bolt protected seemed a good choice. Pitch one was slabby, about 40m long and totally devoid of bolts at about HS. Clipping the first bolt of p2 I realised that getting to bolt 2 might prove problematic, I was already bridged between a thin and (very) bendy tree and the uppermost of the two belay bolts. I did find one two-finger pocket but the wall was both vertical and devoid of footholds, even using the bolt for more than moral support there was no way I could reach the next hold never mind the second bolt. Re-thinking as we abseiled we agreed to head for Saleski (4c) which is described as fully bolted and one of the most frequently climbed routes on Anica Kuk. The route was superb but far from fully bolted; as we only had quick-draws we enjoyed the full experience. The route was exposed and, in places run-out at about HVS 5a.

A day's sport climbing seemed in order to get a handle on the grades; this was pleasant but confused the issue slightly by showing up significant inconsistencies. The main gorge is well set up for lazing about with a shop (sells some climbing gear plus ice cream, food and coffee) and excellent clean toilets – all housed in some tunnels built during the Tito era in case of war. While belaying I saw a familiar face from Carlisle walking down the gorge, Dennis just never seems to age and is as keen as ever. Next morning there was a second chance encounter, I heard an English voice ask if the gang was with Trevor, the girls pointed out that I was with them. Walking out of the apartment I saw Sue who takes the Age Concern walks my father goes on. Later on that day we meet two English climbers, conversation reveals that the father and son team live about 10 minutes drive from me in Northumberland.

The days sport climbing seems to have done the trick, the rock has many solution features which take a bit of practice to perfect the necessary techniques. Suitably fortified we completed both sports routes and a number of longer routes in the 5a/5b range, one in particular, Celjki Stup on Mali Cuk sticks in my mind as it had a brilliant 50m first pitch of HVS 5a. All too soon the week was over and we were back at Zadar airport but keen to return for a longer visit. As I sat down on one of the few free seats in the departure lounge a voice beside me asks "Don't I know you from the Northumbrian Mountaineering Club?" We live in a small world!

Paklenica Information

The Paklenica Guidebook (2007) (with details in English) is widely available in UK climbing shops. There is a separate guide for the rest of Croatia excluding Paklenica.

Climbing is possible throughout the year according to a couple of lads we spoke to from Zagreb, although it is very hot in summer and can be a character building experience in Winter. May-June and Sept-Oct seem to be the best times.

There are plenty of small shops for food and numerous local restaurants, expect to pay €15 for a meal plus beer.

Prices are given in Euros which can be used in many places, the local currency is the Kuna (Kn), exchange rate was £1 = 8Kn when we went. Croatia is not in the EU so the EHIC Card is no use.

Most routes have 30m pitches with bolted stances to allow for abseil retreat or lower off on a 60m single rope, we used 60m half ropes which helped on the complex longer routes.

We stayed at Apartmani Dado in Starigrad-Paklenica. The owner is Marijan Busljeta who speaks good English and is very helpful. He can be contacted by e mail at:

marijan.busljeta@zd.htnet.hr



Photo: The Grand Canyon.

Main Wall Cynr Las – 55 years on

Tony Champion (non-member)

Introduction by Jim Milledge

In September 1953 I was working as a handyman at Pen y Gwryd for three weeks during the University vacation. I was looking for someone to climb with and this man, who was a couple of years older than me, was also short of a climbing buddy. We teamed up and decided to have a go at the classic Severe in Llanberis Pass, Main Wall, Cynr Las. That was the only day I climbed with Tony Champion. I had never met him before nor did we meet again. I have recounted the story of that day a number of times as being the nearest I ever came to killing myself when rock climbing. I was, therefore, astonished and delighted when, a few months ago I received, out of the blue, a letter from Tony enclosing a carbon copy of a typescript of this account of that day – part of a climbing diary he kept.

He said, in his letter, that he was now retired and living in the Lake District. He got to know Bob Allen and mentioned this epic to him and, of course, my name. Bob gave him my address which was how I came to get his letter and account. I was surprised, that after all these years, his account tallies exactly with my own recollection of the events. I transcribed his account and now offer it to CC members. I had only been climbing for a couple of years and Tony for no longer. I never rated myself more than a very average 'club' climber. I hope younger members will get some flavour of the style of climbing we did in those days, when protection was so feeble, vibrams were new, and shoulder belays were the accepted best practice! For older members I hope Tony's excellent account will be pleasantly nostalgic!

Sunday Sept 13th 1953 Pen y Gwryd

Gilbert and I in the bunkhouse had now been joined by a young medical student called Jim Milledge who was working in the Hotel for his keep. As the day was Sunday, he had the day off, and suggested to me that we should join up and have a go at Main Wall on Cynr Las – which he knew was one of my great desires. I was only too willing to agree, and we set off on Jim's motorbike after breakfast to go down to Ynys. Leaving the motorbike there, we climbed up the steep path leading to Cwm Glas.

Once again, the clouds hid all the top peaks, but Cynr Las was clear and we could see four tiny figures above us, fly-like on the wall as we approached – with some trepidation as far as I was concerned. Jim had done the route before [but not led it JM], but he was not sure of the start, and we made several false tries on the steep heather and muddy rock before we found that we were too far to the right, and made our way along a narrow sheep track to the point, high up on a heathery cliff, which Jim recognised as being the beginning of the climb. We were now well off the floor of

the Cwm, and struggling with the dirty, impersonal rock problems in a position which was already fairly exposed. At the foot of the real rock, we roped up, and Jim led very gingerly up a broken wall composed of wet, muddy rocks. Both of us were wearing vibrams, and this was no place for the likes of us, shod as we were, but Jim assured me that above us the climb was superbly rough and dry, and it was only a question of going carefully down here. When I followed him in my turn, I was quite harrowed, for the holds were loose and slippery, and everything had to be tested carefully before I dared trust it. Next, we made our way up a steep, heather ledge which led towards the Great Gully and a slab of drier rock. Jim asked me if I would like to lead, but I was quite content to follow him on this sort of thing!

Small holds led upwards against the rock and then to the right, where we swung round a rib over what seemed like several hundred feet of not very much. The holds were terribly small, but in-cut and delectably satisfying, and I was very conscious that this was the best climb I had done for some years. Beyond the rib, a rising traverse on the wall took me to the pulpit, behind which Jim was well stanced and firmly belayed, and as I joined him, he moved on carefully along a grass ledge, a foot wide, to the lower of two gangways which sloped upwards to a corner on the right. The route went to the corner, and then back to the left along a further gangway which was out of sight at a higher level.

Leaving the pulpit, I crept after Jim and found a purely psychological belay the size of a doubled forefinger round which I twisted my sling. Then, standing on the grass ledge, I prepared to safeguard him. The sun was shining warmly on the rocks above us, giving a promise of dry holds further on, but here, the outward sloping gangway was still in shadow, wet and slimy, so that I watched Jim edge his way along it with some apprehension. There were no holds there, and his grip depended only on the friction of his boots on the rock. After a yard or so, the gangway steepened and Jim came slowly to a halt, his hands seeking some ledge by which he could maintain his balance against the tendency of his feet to slither outwards. It was, under the circumstances, one of the nastiest pieces of rock which it has been my ill fortune to see, and as I watched him anxiously, I dropped my eyes to the tiny belay. Jim was now some twelve feet away from me and slightly higher; if he slipped from his holds, he would swing violently across the wall below. What chance then would my sling have of keeping behind its knob of rock? Instinctively I looked down to the depths at my feet, and imagined the sudden, irresistible force that would yank me from the ledge where I stood, and hurl me downwards to the screes below. I did not like the place one little bit. For a while, Jim remained motionless, hardly daring to shift his feet on the slippery surface of the gangway, then quietly he announced his intention of coming back, and felt his way towards me again as I drew in the rope.

When he reached the comparative safety of the grass ledge, he heaved a sigh of relief and studied the pitch ahead with intense disfavour. And he spoke his thoughts aloud. There was just this one pitch of bad rock; if he could only cope with this pitch we should be all right, but he liked my belay no more than I did, and he confessed that at the end of the gangway he would have to take some of the weight of his body on his fingers, but that the handholds were outward sloping and slimy too, and his fingers

would not grip. I remained silent; he was the leader, and it was up to him whether he should try again or not.

At last he seemed to make up his mind to further effort, and once more crept carefully along the gangway. Once more he came to a halt where it steepened, his fingers vainly searching for a vital hold which might solve the problem, one foot testing the tiny wrinkles which might give him some support.

Once more I looked at my belay and felt very frightened indeed. But retreat was the wisest move now, and Jim was soon on his way back again to curse his vibrams and wish that he had his nails with him. It occurred to me that he would find it easier to climb the pitch in stockings, but I was now in such a state that I did not welcome any further attempts depending on so small an anchorage, and I kept my idea to myself.

For a moment Jim stayed with me, and he was looking now at the upper gangway. From past experience he knew that it was not the route, that it was, in fact, almost impossibly hard, but then it looked so much easier! We determined that we should give it one try and that if it did not 'go', we should give up and go home. Once again he felt his way up the rock, but this time immediately above me, and within four or five feet, he came to a V- shaped scoop, the floor of which sloped steeply outwards - like all the ledges hereabouts – but which had a fine spike of rock embedded in its corner. Quickly he hung a sling round it, and snapped his rope into the karabiner to make a good running belay. He was fairly safe in the lead for the first time for ten minutes! Above the scoop the gangway became a small, open chimney with a crack in it. The pitch overhung and though it looked easy from below, a few minutes investigation showed him that there was no way to be found there, and he returned to my ledge. But now new opportunities offered; if I belayed to the spike, he could climb the lower gangway with some assurance of being held if he slipped.

I climbed up to the scoop, and though as a stance it left much to be desired, the belay was a good one. I put my sling round it and snapped the karabiner into my waist-loop. Then, taking the rope round my shoulder in the approved orthodox shoulder belay, I watched Jim edge out along the lower gangway below me, and make his way gradually up to my level, though some ten feet to my left as I faced outwards. In a moment he was behind a rib which separates the two gangways, and out of sight, but the rope crept slowly out round the corner. Then it stopped, and I felt him desperately struggling with the wet slabs which had hitherto defeated him. For a time he managed to claw his way up on his hands, his feet finding no purchase on the wet rock, but then he began to feel the strength going out of his fingers and quickly he began to descend. All of a sudden he found that he could not keep his fingers pressed on the rock; they were refusing to grip, popping up as often as he forced them down, until he had lost control of them, and the next moment he was falling backwards. I could see none of this from my scoop, but suddenly I felt the rope go quite slack, and then a vicious tug caught my shoulder and hurled me head downwards on the floor of the scoop, smashing my face and wrist on the rock as the rope tightened over the edge. When I recovered from the shock I found myself hanging upside down over the edge from the belay, my face looking down to the bed of the Cwm 200 feet below. Jim was still there dangling on the end of the rope, 25 feet below me but only just off a grassy ledge, and I was able to ease

him down to it before I could straighten up. For a time we both lay on our respective ledges and recovered, then Jim picked up my glasses which had dropped almost on top of him, and climbed slowly up to the pulpit, and I unhitched my sling from the spike – how I blessed them both – and climbed down to meet him. In safety, behind the pulpit we inspected our damage.

Jim was quite unharmed; though he was some 25 feet from me when he fell, and six or seven feet above, he had pendulumed across the slabs keeping on his back, and had escaped without a scratch. Besides breaking my glasses, I had scratched my cheek and taken a large piece of skin of the inside off my right wrist and thumb. The rope running over my forearm, had burned a line across it as if it had been done with a hot poker. But we had been extraordinarily lucky, and I shudder to think what would have happened if I had still been tied to the tiny finger belay when the slip occurred.

There was no question of continuing now. Carefully we looped the rope round the pulpit and abseiled down to the heather ledge. There, we tried to find a way down into the Great Gully, but without success, and eventually we put the rope round a large boulder at the back of the shelf, walked down a few yards, and abseiled diagonally across the broken slabs below. It was an awkward movement to do in our rather shocked condition, and afterwards for a while we thought that the rope had jammed, but when Jim had climbed up a little, he managed to unhitch it, and we were able to scramble down into the grassy hollow of the lower Cwm Glas, and sit by a stream, profoundly thankful to have got off as lightly as we did. The party which had been ahead of us was on its way down and stopped for a chat – we were not surprised to see the leader was in nails. They were most sympathetic and offered all kinds of assistance, including a small flask of Benedictine which I was encouraged to empty. I must say, it made me feel much better!

After they left, we decided to walk a little to recover from our fright, and we made our way laboriously up to the upper Cwm Glas, which we found by mistake, thinking that it was the lower one. We were very close to the cloud line, and the grass there was so very green and restful that we sat for a while and rested. Then slowly and wearily we walked down past the main lake and back to Ynys Ettws. I rolled up the cuff of my windjacket to keep it from my scrapes and was little worried by them.

Back at the hotel, I was doctored by Marjorie, and apologised to by my leader! Next day I hung about for a while but it was obvious that I was going to do no more climbing for some time, and my wrist was becoming painful, so I caught a lift into Bangor with two old ladies, leaving Jim back at work painting the roof of one of the outhouses. My wrist took a week or two to heal and was painful in so doing, but I could not help feeling that I was more than lucky in having moved to a proper belay before the accident. I was also much interested to see how quickly and irresistibly I was bowled over by my shoulder belay, and at the shock. I began to investigate the Tarbuck method of belaying from the waist. Had I been using Tarbuck's method I should have remained upright and therefore suffered no injury whatever.

Fifty years in the wild

A reflective essay submitted for University of Leicester Diploma in Mountain Medicine in December 2004, updated 2008 for the CCJ.

David Hillebrandt

Introduction

Presumably when humans first walked the earth all areas were wilderness and their only thoughts were of food, shelter and reproduction for species survival. As people started moving into settlements, towns and cities the first division between the urban dweller and the rural dweller was noticed and some civilisations, without fully appreciating the public health and disease transmission and epidemiology, embarked on schemes for waste disposal.

People have always explored remote areas but it is only in the last 30 years that our increasing population, increasing global wealth and ease of transport has put more environmental pressures on remote areas. People have at last started taking the subject of personal human faecal waste disposal in wilderness areas seriously. I like to think that I may have played a small part in this appreciation of a potentially serious problem.

The Issues

The increasing wealth and recreational time that is available means that more people are active in the wilderness areas of the world. At the same time these wilderness areas are becoming smaller. In the highly populated United Kingdom most wilderness areas are of mountain or moorland terrain. Weather and terrain can often dictate that people tend to camp in specific areas in the mountains. Good examples are around Angle Tarn in the Lake District, Llyn Bochlywd in the Ogwen valley in Snowdonia, around the CIC hut below the north face of Ben Nevis or snowholing on the Cairngorm Plateau.

Apart from a flat, well drained, sheltered place for tents or a reliable snow bank for a snow hole, any site needs a good supply of fresh water and humans need to shit. The last two are not compatible unless very well organised, and mountaineers tend to dislike any form of bureaucratic organisation.

Although I used to be happy to drink from Scottish streams above regular habitation I would now always purify water in the Allt a Mhuilinn below Ben Nevis and in the run off from the Cairngorm plateau. Thirty years ago mountaineers in the USA realised that the lakes below Mount Whitney had become a source of Giardia infection and this had almost certainly arrived via the intestines of local guides who had taken part in several high profile Himalayan expeditions. So what can be done?

Personal background

I first started pondering this problem in 1969 when I spent a few nights camping on the lip of Cwm Idwal in Snowdonia on a rock-climbing holiday. I think camping is now banned here due to the potential environmental pressures but I remember going for my

morning crap and finding used wedges of paper under each stone I turned. I immediately became a 'paper burner' and now if not washing always carry a lighter with me when going to enjoy my outdoor morning ritual. Shit decomposes much quicker than paper and at least bacteria, cysts or viruses are not a visible marker of potential pollution although they may be a greater hazard.

I pondered this matter further during 2½ years of world travel. From 1980 to 1982 I experienced the great British bowel experience almost daily (and in some places more frequently) in cold mountains, hot mountains, wet mountains and dry mountains; from the Sahara to the Himalaya via the jungles of central Africa and central America, and in the deserts of the USA and Atacama in South America, in the Grand Canyon and below sea level in Death Valley.

Different areas need different solutions depending on the total faecal load, weather, precipitation and soil type. It was when in California that I came across a copy of the book *'How to Shit in the Woods'* by Kathleen Meyer (Ten Speed Press. Revised 1994. ISBN:0-89815-627-0) and realised that I was not the only person pondering this problem.

Since that time I have been on over 10 mountaineering expeditions from Mongolia to Patagonia and am proud to say that all have been 'non-paper' affairs. Culturally the team has just reverted to anal washing, which most have learnt previously on trips to the Indian sub-continent. Above the snow line this means that the world's cultures of wipers and washers unite in a pile-chilling, anal snowball experience.

This still leaves problems of shit disposal and depending on the campsite we have used burial well away from water sources, rock smearing with air drying, surface deposition and crevasse dumping on glaciers. Close to the sea we have relied on the dilution factor when small groups have had a base camp near Patagonian fjords.

All the above are based on a best guess solution with no long-term accurate measurements of faecal bacterial contamination of the environment to give a scientific basis for our choice.

Academic work

Very little quality academic work has been done on this subject. I mentioned 'How to Shit in the Woods' but this is very much a North American lay text geared for dry mountains. The UK equivalent is 'Shitting Pretty' by Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth (Pub. by Travellers Tales 2000 ISBN: 1-885211-47-3). This is an excellent publication with some fascinating personal anecdotes. There is a lot about the avoidance and treatment of gastro-intestinal infections but less on the practical problems of shit disposal, which is partly the cause of the intestinal infections.

The British Everest Medical Expedition in 1994 did some fascinating work on group shit disposal by air-drying and concentration of the faecal matter. This was then transported out from base camp in the ubiquitous blue barrel. This work was presented at the 1996 Plas y Brenin conference by Dr Ken Stewart although I am not aware that it was ever formally written up. Prior to the expedition they had considered composting, incineration, drying, anaerobic digestion or simple packaging and portering. The continuing problem has recently been highlighted by Hijiri Shimojima in the report,

in English, of the 2003 Everest-Lhotse Environment Expedition organised by Tokyo University of Agriculture (Japanese Alpine News Vol 5 May 2004 pp76&77 & 83-85). Currently the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee make arrangements for removal of solid human waste from Base Camp but this expedition looked at the feasibility of filtering kitchen waste water and removal of faeces from higher camps (33.5Kg). They also raised the problem of headspring water source pollution by Yaks used for transport.

After personally pondering the problem in many parts of the world I decided it needed to come out of the closet and be aired in the popular mountain press to draw people's attention to the environmental time bomb in our own hills.

I wrote an article airing my thoughts and fears in the yearly journal of the Mountain Bothies Association in 1991 and then produced a shorter version for the monthly climbing magazine, *On the Edge* (Issue 30, June 1992 pp 56 & 57). I do not claim to be an academic researcher but do enjoy taking the work of my more academic colleagues and translating the medical jargon into useful and useable information for the mountaineering public. Over the years I have done this with subjects such as water purification, first aid courses and medical kits but I am possibly personally most proud of the work I have done on shit disposal.

Bothies are privately owned shelters in remote locations in the hills of the United Kingdom. They are often old crofts or estate or forestry huts and provide basic shelter. Their location used to be passed down by an oral tradition and the Mountain Bothies Association maintain almost ninety of them as simple unlocked shelters on behalf of the owners. Until recently their only mechanism for shit disposal was a shovel and advice to bury waste well away from the bothy and any water source.

My article for the MBA journal was picked up by a major Scottish Sunday paper and I felt that the U.K outdoor world was beginning to take this public health issue seriously.

In 2000 I was thrilled to find that the Ruigh Aiteachain bothy in Glen Feshie and the Gelder Shiel Stable on the Balmoral Estate now have septic tank toilets. There has been another article in the MBA newsletter (No:149) on Compost Loos. In about 1999 the Mountaineering Council of Scotland flooded outdoor venues such as Youth Hostels, equipment shops and campsites with leaflets on 'Where to 'Go' in the Great Outdoors'(see end of essay). This fascinating leaflet has been supported by the Mountain Training Trust, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and the Henry Hindmarch Access and Conservation Fund.

Already many outdoor centres in Scotland are operating a 'carry-it-out' policy when snow holing in popular areas, especially on the Cairngorm plateau. Various packaging methods are used for disposal and transport which include zipped-topped plastic bags but also complex but rigid, secure structures made out of plastic plumbing pipes with screw fittings. Of course the plastic bags can block normal sewage processing systems when one reaches civilisation and this has been studied in detail in Alaska and on Mount Rainier ('The Poop Scoop. Shitting in the mountains ain't what it used to be' by Yale Lewis Climbing No 153 June 15 1995 pp154-157) and paper bags inside zip lock plastic bags may be the answer.

I hope we will soon see more public guidance given over this and a well thought out and commercially available one person easily cleaned shit container could be produced. A disposal point has just been set up in the Cairngorm Ski area car park and

bags can be collected on leaving the road head. I trust that this be the first of many where mountaineers return to civilisation.

It is not only in the UK but throughout the world that the issue is now being taken seriously with the excellent new toilet at the heavily used Dix hut at 2928m in Arolla, Switzerland being an excellent example. This facility is visited by most Diploma of Mountain Medicine candidates. The toilet separates the solid and liquid matter and then the concentrated solids are flown out at the end of the season. This is a great improvement from the 150' faecal smear that used to drop over the cliff and onto the Dix Glacier.

The future

In the UK it must be a very high priority for the Scottish Mountaineering Club to sort out its problem with its members' and guests' shit disposal at the world renowned CIC hut just below Ben Nevis. Whatever facilities installed must not only be available for club members and residents but also, logically, for passing climbers who have arrived from the valley. Which responsible body will join forces with them to fund this project?

Outdoor centres must continue to set a good example by using a carry down policy when operating above the snow line. The Mountain Bothy Association must continue to consider installation of environmentally friendly and easily cleaned toilets at their most used bothies.

Internationally, Alpine countries should follow the example of the Dix hut. The cost for staying in huts may rise but this is a small price to pay for a clean future and to protect water supplies.

Commercial expedition companies have an duty to work with host countries to plan realistic facilities at base camps, and above, on popular trekking and expedition peaks. These facilities must recognise the terrain and surface geology, the temperature range experienced, the number of person shitting days, the method of faecal decomposition and the need for an easily cleaned and emptied structure.

Small expeditions must also recognise the problem and ponder their own answer for the environment they are visiting. For small groups crevasse disposal is sometimes the best option without the use of that western pollutant, paper.

Postscript

When one gets so much pleasure and satisfaction over more than 40 years from a sport, it is good to feel that one has used professional skills to enhance and protect that activity and its environment for future generations. I feel that I have, in some small way, contributed to a sustainable future for mountaineering.



Author researching eco-friendly toilet. Dix Hut, Arolla, Switzerland.
Photo by **Dr Paul Richards**.

Aaaagh a rat!

Geoff Milburn

Warning! "The highest mountain in Europe will very soon not be Mont Blanc." "Really," I said, not convinced and with disbelief written all over my face. "Don't tell the French that, or they'll get right poked off." "Oh yes," the guide went on, "Turkey is about to join the European Union and as soon as that happens then Agri Dagi (Mount Ararat) or the Armenian Masis (Mother Mountain) at 5,160m (16,930 feet) will be much higher."

Just then while I was mulling over all the implications a small furry creature dashed across our path in front of us and vanished in a pile of rocks. Aaagh a rat, I thought, but the Turkish guide casually commented, "weasel." After that whenever he saw anything from a tiny mouse to what was dog-sized it was always a weasel. When I explained the hoary old joke that a weasel was 'weasily' recognizable and that a stoat was 'stotally' different he mulled over my words with a frown. Some yards up the path his face lit up suddenly and with a big ear splitting grin he said, "That's a good one, I must remember that, to tell all my friends."

The events which led up to that conversation however now seem somewhat of a blur after I woke up one morning to discover that I had become an O.A.P. (I can't bear to write the words in full) overnight. That day I mooched disconsolately around the garage as rain fell outside. In a cupboard full of junk my eyes fell on my old primus stove which brought back vivid memories of great days in Wales camping in the mountains below dark looming crags with a pan full of sizzling sausages and endless brews of tea under the distant night stars.

When my father was still alive our motto was, 'no regrets' no matter what happened but now that the ageing process has kicked in hard and bodily ailments grow by the day I mourn for my lost youth. Perhaps I might now never complete The Great Wall on Cloggy, but the good part was that my new pension offered an escape, a chance to break out before it really was too late. Glimpsing a chink of light through a slowly closing door, which was already just ajar, I determined to make a break for freedom – just like Steve McQueen in The Great Escape.

Across the Atlantic I first tasted the sharp air of the Sierras and stood atop Mount Hoffmann high above Yosemite's great crags. Then one long day behind Half Dome, while jogging around the falls and crags of the valley the leaf colours reminded me of my own mortality and that the autumn of my life was at hand. Over the passes to the old mining town of Bodie we were hit by the first snow storm of the winter and so we escaped for Zion canyon. There one clear morning I raced up to the canyon rim and felt good for the first time in years. Going well I raced back down and caught up with some locals en route for Angels Landing which must be a contender for 'The greatest walk in the sky' that I have ever done. They were surprised that I had caught up with them and even more so when they knew what I had just accomplished and what I was preparing for – the Inca Trail in



High in the glorious Taurus mountains trying to get fit enough for an attempt on Mount Ararat .

Photo by **Robert Dodd**.
Geoff Milburn collection.



Robert Dodd leaving Camp 2 in the Taurus. Photo: **GM**

Peru. Somewhat impressed at my agenda they laughingly nick-named me 'Hardcore.' More embarrassingly they would call out to anyone in front, "Hey, make way for Hardcore," or "Clear the path, Hardcore's coming through." Several national parks later our driver/guide Pete dropped me off on the Grand Canyon rim so that I could jog down the Bright Angel trail to the rolling Colorado River a vertical mile below the rim. That was the easy bit, as on the way back up when the temperature soared I 'hit the wall' but just managed to top out before distress set in. Days later after Joshua Tree and L.A. we rolled down the Pacific Coast of Peru en route for the weird Nazca Lines, Arequippa's volcanoes, soaring condors in the Andes and Lake Titicaca. After a bug picked us off one at a time the Inca Trail to Machu Pichu proved to be somewhat of a bash and after a bad attack of cramp in my groin when an obliging blonde nurse massaged me back to normal I never looked back.

Shortly after the event I remembered AB. Hargreaves once telling me that one winter in Wales his nether regions had succumbed to hypothermia and that two eminent Harley Street surgeons who were with him whipped his trousers off and massaged him until the circulation had returned. I still smile at the thought of the faces of climbers who passed by and noticed the groin massaging ceremony. I got the best deal though.

At one point we were escorted off a plane in Cusco when Wendy, my wife, who had contracted Giardia, a rather nasty debilitating protozoan, fainted twice and was violently sick in the plane doorway. We soon bounced back though and after an Amazon jaunt I celebrated the ski season in the Pyrenees with the second best haul of routes in my up-to-now total of fifty weeks on ski. It was while recovering from a somewhat nasty head-over-

heels cartwheel on ice that I decided to go for a decent mountain before it was too late. Where though? Eventually, despite the fact that in 2008 several German climbers had been taken at gunpoint by the P.K.K. from Mount Ararat base camp, I decided that the 180th anniversary since Friederich Parrot's first ascent deserved a Climbers' Club/BMC backing.

The Mountain of Pain (not Roger) as it is so aptly named which lies on the borders of Armenia, Turkey and Iran has always been in a militarily sensitive area and for much of the time has been strictly off limits to climbers. Some years ago I saw it from a plane passing over Jordan, its twin white peaks dazzlingly white in the dying sun's rays. This May I passed the mountain en route for Gobleki Tepe the oldest temple on earth which is 11,500 years old and dates from just after the end of the last (or should I say previous?) Ice Age. Ararat was plastered with snow and ice almost from top to bottom and it would take quite some time for the lower sections of such a volume of snow to melt. Unfortunately a shadow on my right lung brought about by an infection set me back somewhat and huffing and puffing up our wood I began to lose heart.

By August I felt sufficiently ill enough to wish that I hadn't already got my visa and made arrangements for a crack at the mountain. Really such a distinguished mountain needed respect and I had been advised to embark on a rigorous training programme. The days shot by and left me with only one alternative, it had to be a day round Kinder's boggy perimeter with a grough-bashing session to test my legs. If I didn't slip a disc or sprain a leg or two then it would have to be all systems go.

Just before departing, a party whip let us know that there was a big birthday bash in Glossop for Keith 'Checker' Ashton who had already survived some forty decades. It was particularly nostalgic for me as I bumped into an old friend the 'enfant terrible' of the 1970s, Steve Bancroft of Strapadictomy fame. During arm wrestling contests in the 70s he and I used to argue as to which of us was the weakest climber in the Peak District. We also used to share a common ability in that we could clear a dance floor when a Rolling Stones number struck up – as could Al Evans or Big Sid Siddiqui. Strangely Steve Harley (of Cockney Rebel fame) has the same effect on me. I only have to hear the opening notes of: 'Dum, dum, dum, dum.....dum, dum' (Come up and See Me, Make me Smile) and I find myself catapulted on to the dance-floor, immediately oblivious to time, place and people. I strut my stuff, like crazy. At The Big Surrey when the Stones struck up Steve was downstairs chatting so I soloed a biggy until huffing and puffing a bit I slipped into the welcoming shadows to cool down. Ararat? Phew! What a thought.

All too soon though I was lifting off from Manchester bound for Kayseri in Cappadocia where for the first two days we rattled round Fairy Chimneys and a variety of large phallic rocks. While casually chatting I discovered to my dismay that the rest of the group seemed to be fighting fit, frighteningly so. More horrifying was that four of the group were muscle-bound marathon runners and tri-athletes (Iron Men) while two of the women whom I had not rated up till then were up for fifty or a hundred-mile walks. My prospects were not looking good. Worryingly others talked incessantly of doing Kilimanjaro or puking their way all the way to and beyond Everest Base Camp.

Primitive survival cunning crept up on me and I decided that there was only one course of action left, I had to play for sympathy from the word go. Kevin Fitzgerald must ride again. "What was his line? I'm a sick man you know." That was it. True though acute bronchitis and an infection had left me wheezing like a walrus after just a few strenuous



Leaving the summit before the great scree run. Photo: **GM**

steps. Consequently I apologized as humbly as I could for my pathetic sorry state but also stressed that the doctor had only agreed to my participation on the climb as long as I promised faithfully not to overdo it and dash at things in my usual fashion.

The Taurus Aladag Mountains section was to provide our five-day baptism of fire supposedly to get us all, (but primarily myself) into shape. To my utter dismay the first day and a half was all uphill without any respite as we snaked our way up the Maden (Red Hole) Gorges to camp high in the mountains. An aggravated sciatic nerve is no joke so I tacked in at the rear of the peleton for much of the way reluctant to push my bag of old bones before it was absolutely necessary. A third day started over a high pass but this led to a pleasant meander down through pastures where nomads grazed huge herds of sheep and goats, guarded by some of the most savage dogs which you wouldn't want to meet on a dark night while out on your own. At one lake where the group was relaxing I decided to show my manliness by stripping off and going for a dip, a trifle higher than the ankles, for a few brief strokes. While emerging dripping with water and shivering slightly it struck me what a pathetic performance it was as the afternoon previously the marathon men had lapped an icy lake at speed several times and emerged Beckham-bronzed saying how invigorating it was and really what a pity it was to come out so soon.

My eventual play after playing the irritable bowel card to get people thinking along my lines was to state boldly that a constant slow pace was far more efficient for acclimatizing to altitude and almost immediately I began to feel nothing but scorn at the leaders of the

pack who were kicking up dust high above me. From Mount Embler's summit at 12,215 feet (it sounds much better than a measly 3,723m) with stunning all-round views and particularly to Demirkazik (3,756m), it was thousands of feet of immaculate scree running. All of a sudden all aches and pains were forgotten and I crashed past the field picking them off one by one. This was youth revisited, as in 1960 when the Sgurr Alisdair Great Stone Shoot in the Cuillins of Skye still had its scree intact. We whooped it up like youngsters and I stepped up through the first few cautious few gears into flat out overdrive.

That night in camp at Sokulupinari a 4x4 vehicle roared up the dusty mountain approach track and a medical team piled out to enquire, "Where's Dave?" How on earth did they know his first name? To our amazement it transpired that Dave while on the way out had sat on the plane in a seat beside someone who had later developed the symptoms of Swine Flu. In a bit of a panic the medics had tracked us down into the wilds of the Taurus. They decided that we were all far too healthy (apart from all my aches and pains which no-one had the decency to tell them about) and promptly left in disgust that their proposed guinea pigs (or rather 'weasels') were of no further interest to them.

The next day saw us down the Cimbar Canyon whose soaring walls are just screaming out for attention from today's rock hounds. If it hadn't been for my bad back, caused by two crashes in five years, there would have been no stopping me as I had picked out a soaring crack-line which was just my size. Somewhat wearily after six continuous days on the move we were glad to join the night sleeper train to Erzerum, before a long haul across Anatolia to Dogubeyazit (Dog's Biscuit we called it) centre for all eccentric Noah's Ark chasers.

One odd report is that in 1917 one hundred and fifty Russian scientists supposedly found and entered the Ark which was inside a glacier on the north side of the mountain. The report and all evidence was destroyed shortly after by the revolutionists who did not take kindly to God. Far more likely is the grain of truth which has the ark site on Mount Judi (Cudi Dagi) at a much lower level (2,089m) and overlooking the Tigris river which was recorded in Late Antiquity as part of the Syriac/Armenian tradition.

Despite the romantic Ark stories of the boat on the mountains of Ararat (Uratu) the magnetic pull of the mountain for climbers seems to rest solely on the fact that the mountain has been militarily isolated for so long. As we bumped and banged along the approach track to the village of Cirveme at 2,350m we saw a commotion ahead and stopped. In a stark grey volcanic landscape there was a wedding in progress and in front of primitive houses the bride and groom attended by about thirty solemn young women were circling in dance hands held high. No emotion was shown but it was an utterly bizarre scene. Some Muslim girls had blue jeans, while others had black fishnet stockings and stiletto-heeled shoes. The odd thing however was that they were dancing on dusty soil with the usual carpet of animal dung swept away to one side. Suddenly attention was directed to the interlopers. Perhaps as I was smiling broadly (despite the pain) which is my usual wont and rocking back and forwards to the music I was seized upon by a hoary old elder. Linking little fingers with me he started a breakaway male dancing group of two. (Even Steve Bancroft would have been preferable!) The circle of women broke into huge smiles as we warmed up in time to the music which sounded almost Irish. Sadly the old man failed on his attempt to go down as per The Twist and pleaded that his knees were shot. Just then as I was about to go Rolling Stones meet Riverdance the Mountain of Misery intervened and the guide whisked me away as our mules (which turned out to be horses) were waiting.



Approaching Camp 2 on Ararat. Photo: **GM**.

As the mules were being loaded up I remembered my bad back and began to think of the nearly 10,000 feet of climbing above me. No sooner had I started than I spotted a short cut to miss out a huge easy-angled zigzag. The guide whipped me back into line unceremoniously and said that I was not to join the Spanish team in front. That night thunder rumbled all round us and the heavens opened until the lashing rain turned the rocky campsite into a mud bath. Half asleep that night I stumbled out to locate the three-sided toilet tent which had to serve three expeditions with a total of at least fifty climbers. I measured my length while sliding between large boulders and began to wonder what the hell I was doing there as a stomach-cum-gut bug had given me cramps for about three days. Totally off my food I had been surviving on thick vegetable soup and honey.

Next morning although the mountain was under mist we could make out the snowline base where Camp Two lay and during our leisurely acclimatisation day we passed several descending climbers who had beaten a hasty retreat when the bad weather had struck. They wished us better luck. Camp Two with about 15 tents among huge boulders was a death trap by day, while at night it doesn't bear thinking about. People frequently got lost within a few feet of their own tent. A night later I groggily emerged from the tent feet first and was about to pee when an eerie light caused me to look up. The sky was alive, blazing with stars and it was so overpowering that I almost ducked in case my head bumped it. For some time I just stared in awe at the wonder of it all, until sapping cold sent me scuttling back into the warmth of my silk-lined down sleeping bag. Two hours later I was back out owing to the effect of Imodium pills but this time the moon was up and it was almost as bright as day.

At around an unearthly 2 a.m. we got a call to gear up and after huffing and puffing while attempting to cram on as much clothing as possible we slurped down a hot drink and joined a vaguely visible group of milling bodies outside where we stumbled about tripping over rocks and tent guy-lines. Two pretty necklace strings of head torches bobbed

about in the dark above us showing that others were already impatiently attacking the steep hillside. Half asleep I was glad that our mountain guide knew his way in the dark up such a maze of boulders, as for a while I neither knew nor cared about anything. Keeping my head down I dogged the guide's every step. Chivalry went out of the window and all that I could think about was a northern phrase, 'muck or nettles, this it,' for better or for worse. It amazed me how regularly the guide lifted each foot in turn and then paused before planting each one firmly down as deliberately as if he had been going up a flight of stairs after a few pints on the loony juice. By sticking to his exact pace I discovered that my heavy breathing actually settled down to a more regular rhythm. Preoccupied I didn't realize that some of our team had got separated and mixed up with another party, and even more confusion was caused by yet another team trying to overtake us up very rough terrain. I was however aware that altitude had kicked in and that more than one climber in some distress had already started back down.

With glazed icy streaks underfoot among the boulders I was glad that I had opted to take a couple of poles particularly when there were tricky high steps to negotiate. Without my ice axes however I did feel almost undressed as I was aware that we were entering the total snow and ice zone. Because we all seemed to follow a beaten trail no-one thought it necessary to unleash their crampons which would have made me feel much more confident and at home. As a slight light increased, dawn's welcoming cold rays took away the mind-numbing blanket of the night and as a small boulder crag loomed up those with a gippy-tummy made a dash for cover. They needn't have worried as in the half-light they merely became dark indistinct boulders. Another person broke ranks desperately looking for cover and while trying to unhook his pants in extremis he shouted out, "Fuck off, I'm desperate." Later in some degree of embarrassment he apologized to everyone but no-one admitted to being caught in the act.

After a brief rest we were off again, ever higher, anxiously looking for a respite in the angle of ascent, but there only seemed to be false summits. Suddenly almost without warning the rising sun's rays cast a colossal shadow of the mountain far away to the west. Tiredness gone for a minute and glad for a rest we unsheathed the cameras to capture the wonder of the moment. All too soon we were on the attack again and the single party quickly became two as the mountain struck every possible weakness whether it be age, fitness, medical condition or succumbing to the dreaded altitude sickness which seems to strike randomly when least expected. Even the youngest member of the team had succumbed to the latter and had gone all wobbly. At the front the fitter members, as if scenting success already, were anxious to force the pace and were willing the guide to step up into a higher gear.

As we approached a saddle, before the last steep slope to the summit, several members of an earlier successful summit team zombied past us with hardly a flicker of emotion, merely wanting to escape from the mountain's clutches as fast as possible. As the weather was clear we stopped and waited impatiently for the second group to catch us up. All we wanted to do was to get up and off before the weather might change for the worse on this most unpredictable of mountains. As soon as the guide moved, four or five of us tucked in behind him and breathing hard weaved slowly up the slope, until a glance upwards revealed that we were nearly there. Just before the top I neatly traversed off rightwards to get a view of the others arriving at the actual summit at 16,930 feet.

There was a sharp cold wind coming from the north-east in the direction of the



Robert Dodd and Geoff Milburn top out on Ararat. Photo: copyright **Robert Dodd**.

Caucasus mountains and despite it being August the temperature was between ten and fifteen degrees below zero. It struck me as being somewhat ludicrous that while I was wrapped up warm as toast in a down jacket with all sorts of thermals, in a short while not far away to the south the first bikinis would be appearing on the beach. As we celebrated joyfully the final member of the team gritted her teeth and doggedly inched her way tiredly up the last few feet to join us all. I remember breaking away to the north-east and with my heart full of emotion shed a few tears in euphoric relief that all had turned out well.

Later I was really irked when a slower member of the team persisted in asking who had got to the top first, as if it mattered. Who cared? What did strike me as important was that on the descent after we had dug in our heels into soft snow for a while the crust gradually got harder and harder until one person slipped on to their backside and began to slide picking up speed. She was fielded by others below but that slope could have easily turned into a killer convex that would have claimed as victim anyone without an ice-axe for braking. Then there was a steep tricky couloir to negotiate which put fear into those who did not have poles to help with their balance. In the end all descended safely the six-thousand feet to the first camp, but we could just as easily have dropped the full mountain in one go.

A day later, while relaxing, we dined beside the Bosphorus in Istanbul the wine flowing as freely as the great river. The adventure was nearly over and the toast which was on our lips was, 'To Ararat, the agony and the ecstasy.' Then it was home again until a far off call from the island of Arran in Scotland sent me north for the tremendous traverse of Glen Rosa's granite peaks, but that's another story.

Snapshot

Ed Grindley

The first week of the New Year has arrived and the weekend newspapers are advertising summer holidays. Britain's back in vogue due to the weakening pound. One advert for Glorious Devon took me back fifty years to those January days when my mother used to write off to get bed and breakfast brochures from places like Newton Abbott and Buckfastleigh (she preferred Dartmoor to the sea-side you see). At that time, when a week's holiday was usual in the shirt-works of Warrington, the anticipation of the brochures arrival must have been a real lift with the next break being more than six months away. Having just retired from a job that gave me thirteen weeks of holiday every year, I can well appreciate the change of working conditions that has taken place since those days in the Fifties.

Anyway, it wasn't primarily an eight year old's faltering ascent of Hay Tor by the tourist steps that resulted in me starting a degree course in physics at Exeter in 1967, more a failure to get the grades for what, even then, was the climber's place of first choice - Sheffield. Fearing the worst, I'd prepared in advance by buying the newly published 'Rock Climbing in Devonshire' by Bob Moulton.

It's often hard to appreciate the changes in life which happen from one year to the next, but I've recently driven from Warrington to Exeter in less than four hours (at dead of night I must add); in 1967 it took me twelve hours on an old BSA C11G which had a top speed of 40mph. Only a tiny fraction of the road was then motorway. When I stopped at a transport café on the Downs just south of Bristol and looked across to the fields of Somerset, I was rather taken aback by the sudden thought that the life of this northern boy from a Grammar school was about to change a great deal. I wasn't so sure if change was what I wanted.

The university climbing club in those days was very much part of the Exeter Climbing Club, but it still had a stall at the Freshers' Fair. One of the photos pinned to the stall was immediately recognisable – Quietus, but the climber who was hanging free on a top-rope from its roof wasn't Joe Brown. Who was it then? Somebody said that it was a local climber called Peter Biven. I'd heard of his routes like Moyer's Buttress in Derbyshire and the Central Wall at Malham. The previous year, I'd walked under the Suicide Face at Bosigran and had been awestruck by its steepness and smoothness: I don't think I'd ever seen anything so impressive at the time. This guy must be really old though – at thirty-two he was, or so it seemed to an eighteen year old. Nevertheless, Pete's house just south of the city centre soon became the base for planning the exploration of Torbay's cliffs to the background of Dylan's music (which, in the form of Desolation Row, has just come onto my ipod shuffle. Wow man! - as we would have said at the time).

The two clubs usually met on a Sunday morning at 10 o'clock outside Boots to divy out the transport. By the first week of November I'd climbed at Chudleigh and repeated a new route of Pete's on the Pinnacle at Anstey's Cove. He'd climbed this the previous month with a local school-kid called Pat Littlejohn. At the time there were only eight routes on the cliffs between Anstey's Cove and Babbacombe so, in view of the damp

weather that day, we decided to explore more of this part of Torbay. I had expected the journey via Newton Abbott to be a pleasant reminder of holidays past, but the untrustworthy C11G had other ideas and broke down in the town centre. No problem: the bike was abandoned and I got picked up by the rest of the team.

The plan for the day was to traverse along the Long Traverse from Anstey's Cove to Long Quarry Point before walking up to the top of the cliffs to gain access to the Babbacombe area where a local climber called John Hammond had just put up a new route. John was the archetypical Sixties hippy who lived for most of the time in a commune, apart from periods of heightened US – Russian tension when he took up residence in the caves at Chudleigh. On a recent visit, I noticed that the caves had been barred. I suppose that a little-known benefit of the east-west peace process is that John can sleep safely in his bed at night without having to worry about the problem getting into the caves before the bombs drop.

Everything went according to the plan and, with an hour or so of daylight remaining, the party decided to go back to the top of the cliffs and head for the cars. Pat and myself, on the other hand, had a better idea – why not traverse at sea-level to Long Quarry Point and reverse the Long Traverse to pick up my rucksack which I'd left under a boulder? The fact that the first section was unexplored, unclimbed and might require more than the remaining daylight didn't seem to have crossed our minds.

The first obstacle was a square-cut zawn which was passed by doing an abseil – pendulum from a small spike. Again we didn't consider that this might not be so clever if we needed to retreat. Turning a corner revealed a huge overhanging wall which dropped straight into the sea. No way on, so it had to be up. A dirty corner led up the near side of the overhanging wall to a tiny ledge below a steep grassy finish and, on reaching the ledge in the darkening gloom, we at last twigged that retreat might be the only option. After chipping a tiny spike we survived an abseil back to the foot of the cliff and doubly cheered ourselves by retrieving the abseil sling by flicking the rope. The tide had come in fully by now, but, in the optimism of youth, we stripped off and swam back to a ledge above high-water level, even keeping our clothes dry by setting up a rope pulley. We knew that we could do no more than coil the rope, sit on it and wait for dawn – after all, we had read about Terray, Buhl and Rebuffat doing this sort of thing all of the time in the Alps. This was alpine climbing at sea level or so we thought. What was to follow was strictly non-alpine.

Ten o'clock. I'd just dozed off only to be woken by what sounded like shouting. Looking up we thought we saw lights on the cliff top. Must be revellers heading back to a campsite from the pub. I dozed off again only to be woken this time by an almighty horn-blast coming from a boat which hovered around the cliff from the Anstey's direction with searchlights blazing. The boat launched a dinghy whose occupant insisted that, despite our protests that what we were doing was standard alpine practice, we get on board (maybe the use of the word alpine in this situation was unwise) – it was the Brixham lifeboat and the lights at the top of the cliff had come from four fire engines and crew accompanied by the mayor of Torquay. I could see the point of the lifeboat, but four fire engines and the mayor? Next day the front page of The Sun (then a respectable working class, pre-Murdoch, pre-page-three girl newspaper with a consequently low circulation in Torquay) announced 'student and schoolboy rescued from sea cliffs'. I hate

to think what the Sun's headline would have been if it had happened today.

Excitement over, but there still remained the problem of an abandoned motorbike in Newton Abbott and the rucksack under the boulders at Anstey's Cove. Wednesday saw John Taylor (then president of the university club) and I ignoring our studies to bus it out to Torquay. The bike could wait until later. Thankfully, or so it seemed at the time (but maybe not an hour or so later) the rucksack was still there. On the previous Sunday I'd spotted a nicely defined arete, well seen on postcards of the Cove, about a hundred yards along the Long Traverse. What better way of recovering from Sunday's jaunt than a new route? With John belayed on a rock ledge about ten feet above the sea, I set off up a fine little layback crack just to the left of the arête even managing to get a runner on a tiny spike. Climbing on Derbyshire grit had taught me that you can't get much safer than a crack; perhaps if I'd climbed more on Derbyshire limestone I might have thought otherwise. With a snapping sound, the top eighteen inches of my fine little crack revealed itself to be the edge of a large block which sailed downwards with me only to land on top of my right foot. On the bright side, the tiny spike saved me from having to make the second swim of the week; unfortunately it wasn't bright enough to hide the pain. Being a young climber with alpine ambitions, I looked down on pain as something that wimps suffered too readily. A crushed heel bone and three other breaks soon disabused me of that idea – I was just a wimp who wanted to be sick and die.

Half an hour later the pain was still there, but at least it had lessened enough to realise that any further calls on the Brixham lifeboat and its jolly crew of sea dogs were out of the question. The only option was to reverse the Long Traverse on one foot and one knee and to crawl along and over the boulders which littered the edge of the sea. Pain and time seem to have blotted out the first bit of the journey, but what followed showed the best and worst in people. As on any sunny November afternoon, there were several groups of sunbathers on the rocks between the start of the Long Traverse and the café in the middle of the Cove who, being full of the English Dunkirk spirit, surely would run across the beach to help an injured stranger who was in obvious distress. The Dunkirk spirit was there all right as shown by the speed at which they packed their towels and beat a hasty retreat from the beachhead. One couple remained, fortunately they were Welsh; a retired minister and his wife, both in their seventies, who with a strength belying their age helped John to carry me to the café. A taxi then took me on what was to be my first visit as a student to Torbay General. The nurse looked twice when I gave her my name. Needless to say, she was one of the few readers of The Sun in the Torquay area.

It was, in retrospect, perhaps just as well that the final six weeks of term passed with my leg in plaster - as we would say nowadays, a much needed cooling off period was called for. The bike was sold over the phone for scrap for a fiver and I went back two years later to finish the sea traverse with Pete Biven naming it Kraken. Even then the route wasn't for giving in easily; a hold snapped on the crux causing Pete to sink completely beneath the sea leaving a ring of slings floating on the surface. Stylish as ever, he resurfaced at speed with his head popping back through the slings before leaping for another hold with which to dispatch the move. The little arête, as far as I know, remains unclimbed.

For an out of the way place in the late Sixties, Exeter seems to have been an unlikely climbing hotspot – perhaps it was the amount of unclimbed rock in the south-west that brought together such a strong team of individuals who made their names in the sport whilst others from more mainstream areas came and went. Pat Littlejohn is the same keen old Pat exploring as ever, but on an ever widening stage; his schoolmate Steve Jones is a Swiss Mountain Guide. A lot died: Brian Nally (who had taken me on to Ansteys after the bike broke down) in the Alps, Pete Biven at Avon, Alison Chadwick on Annapurna, John Taylor soloing in Borrowdale, Keith Darbyshire in Cornwall. Looking back to those days of forty years ago, I think I can be thankful that I missed the grades for Sheffield University and ended up in Glorious Devon to meet such characters and to learn by my mistakes. The change I'd worried about on the Downs turned out to be just what I needed.



Spot the Earl of Fulwood on his country estate underneath Stanage in 1965, where he can be seen hobnobbing with some of his tenants. Photo: The Wazir of Whitfield.

A wet Saturday afternoon

The Earl of Fulwood DG

It had rained, fairly heavily, for a couple of days and then Thursday had been almost dry and then Friday actually dry. Saturday I parked early at the Popular End before the expected hordes had emerged to take advantage of a decent day and walked up to the Edge and along its top towards Moscar. There were still many pools of water in the hollows of the path and all the small oval grouse troughs were full. I touched the fence near the road at Moscar and started the return. There was no one on the End Slab, which was still decidedly green and the ground just past it was a bog. I retreated to the path and at a friendly boulder, of a suitable height, not too wet and almost horizontal I made the first inroads on the flask and sandwiches. I had balanced the flask beside me ready to re-cork it when a grouse machine-gunned low past me and in the sudden crouch I knocked over the flask. There was no dent in it but most of the coffee had gone. Not my day. I put the flask away and got out the binoculars, the Lady's Christmas present last year. Despite my scanning each hardy group, and there were few of those until I got well past where the so-called Roman Road cuts across the Edge, I could see none of those who had said that they would be out. A craven lot. I was just beyond there when the rain started lightly. I put away the bins (a word of which the Lady does not approve), put on my anorak and continued back to the car, completely ignoring the rock as the rain got heavier. The Popular End had emptied. Any Sheffielders would have gone straight home. The café in Hathersage would still be crowded but some of my craven friends might be there. Surprise, surprise, there was an empty parking place in the café yard even though the café itself proved to be very crowded. As I was peering through the door a young woman coming out pointed to the only two empty seats and said that one of them was hers but that Gillian wouldn't mind my joining them.

I asked that remaining young lady if she did mind and she smilingly gave me permission. I put my driving jacket on the seat back and asked her if she would like a drink from the café bar. Yes, please was her answer, coffee with milk and no sugar and I'm sure that Lorraine would like the same if you'd be so good. Gillian, I thought, as I carried the coffees back to the table looks rather familiar. She must have arrived at the reverse to this conclusion herself. "Haven't we met before," she said, "in Spain. I think your wife was with you." "Yes," I answered, being sure now, "indeed we have and it was in Spain." "What a coincidence, well two really. I met that Clawson, Harold actually, again you know, in California; by the way this is Lorraine." I just had time to give my name when Lorraine broke in. "Oh yes, tell us about that; I've not heard it all. She's been to The Needles," she said, nudging my elbow to make sure that I was listening. "My dear young lady," was my counter, "if you give Gillian a chance we will get the whole story from a very attractive horse's mouth".

Gillian put out her tongue just a bit and began.

She had been camping at Quaking Aspen campground with her boyfriend. He was very good she said but had been showing off, bouldering too high, and when he jumped off he landed on a stone and sprained his ankle. They had driven miles to a doctor's who thought that it might be broken and insisted on putting it in plaster, well not

plaster but this modern plastic stuff. She'd done a bit of walking and sunbathing for a few days and then he'd insisted on driving, on his own, back to the doctor's to make him take the pot off even though he'd have to drive back on what might be a dodgy ankle. "He's very obstinate", she said.

The campsite warden had seen their car drive off and was surprised to see Gillian still there. Her accent indicated her British origin, from Huddersfield in fact.

"Where's Huddersfield," asked Lorraine, obviously an adept story spoiler.

"Do you southerners not know anything about the important parts of the country," taunted Gillian, "Do you not know that:

In Huddersfield, in Huddersfield,
There is a cow that will not yield.
The reason that it will not yield,
It does not like its udders feeded."

I thought that Lorraine was going to ask what relevance this had but Gillian was in full flow before further interruption came.

The warden had said that there was another Brit on the campsite. He was older than Gillian but any port in a storm. He had a small Union Jack on his tent guy line. It would be easy to find because a lot of the Yanks had gone or were going back to work after Labour Day. "They spell it L-a-b-o-r," said Lorraine. As if both of them wouldn't know.

This Brit was Clawson. She was worried about what she was getting into but he was much more polite than she expected after the Spanish tirade, glad to see her in fact since his American friend had gone back to work and he was wanting someone to climb with. Gillian had swallowed hard and held forth expecting an impassioned response.

"Mister Clawson," she had said. "Harold," said he. "People tell me that you have a habit of insisting on leading, even on pitches that the guide says are too hard for you. You have a habit of getting off line, of getting into terrible difficulty and falling off; of dropping gear, of putting people's backs up, of..."

"I know," he had countered, "but not now. Can you lead 5.8?" Upon her saying that she had done so more than once, and 5.9 and even a pretty easy 5.10, but she'd had to have a rest on the rope. Clawson seemed pleased.

He apparently already had a route in mind. It was called Magic Dragon. It was on a long, reasonably angled ridge with one 5.8 pitch, the rest mostly 5.5; a total of 12 pitches he had added.

"And may I lead it all?" she insisted. "Of course."

They had two ropes between them, fortunately of different colours; 10 quick draws each, a set of Rocks each; a small rucksack each to climb in; a bottle of water and some sandwiches each. Oh and if he was to be second man had he a broddler? Lorraine had obviously met this northern word because she made no comment.

They left the campsite really early in his car and took the 21505 towards The Needles and parked at the obvious track end by other vehicles with bedewed roofs.

"These people must have been here at least overnight," said Clawson. "They'll have had to carry water in."

The walk-in wasn't too bad. They got just below the zigzags which lead up to the forest fire lookout and went down the gully until they reached the rock features which looked like the diagram which Clawson, - er - Harold had copied from the guide even be-

fore Gillian came. The first pitch was a widish crack which she said was hard, much harder than 5.5. She could have done with some largish Friends. Harold followed it, no problem and never got off line - well you couldn't on a crack could you. I kept quiet. Clawson had been known to. An easier slab pitch followed and when Harold had reached the top of that he saw that Gillian was sitting at the bottom of a corner.

"I don't think I can do that", she had said. "It's steep and the crack in the corner is very narrow. There aren't many footholds on the side walls and it must be hard, there are two pieces of gear stuck in it already."

I hoped I kept my face straight. I remembered those two pieces of gear. Fred always did speak bluntly.

"Let's have all your Rocks", he had said and I knew whose Rocks he would be putting in and having weight on.

"Well, don't get any of mine stuck", I begged, knowing that he would.

"You've got a room in your manor house triple locked with enough gear to stock a shop. What effect is it going to have on you if a couple get stuck."

"Heart break", I had said, and so it proved.

"You've gone very quiet," said Gillian, which was a bit harsh as I hadn't said a word since she had begun.

"Have you done it?" "No," I lied, "Please do carry on." But I remembered Fred saying, when he was sitting on the rope tight through one of my krabs on one of my Rocks that "if any of these are hard to get out, leave 'em, we can't afford to waste time. The crux pitch is near the top."

Apparently Clawson had said that if she would allow him he would have a go at the pitch and make use of his misspent youth. Only to the top of the crack she had insisted and he had promised. Out of his little sack he had produced two sewn tapes A knot near the middle of each and he had a loop in the bottom half with the sewn bit horizontal as a step; a knot near the top with a lopsided loop below it and a krab in the tiny loop at the top and he said they would do as etriers. He was ready. He too took all their Rocks and left Gillian the broddler.

"It had been worth misspending his youth", said Gillian. "He stood in the slings - er - etriers, put the Rocks in and pulled on the quick draws, used some holds on the side walls, never forgot to clip the ropes though the draws and was at the top pretty quickly. He even belayed near the top of the corner and I hardly had to work hard at all. He gave me so much tight on the doubled rope that I flew up it. I even got one of the stuck wires out, it was quite rusty but Harold said that he was proud of me". I said nothing. I had quite a few rusty Rocks already.

The next few pitches were much easier and she was really impressed by his belaying. No sitting below the belay, facing down the ridge looking at the scenery. No, he stood back tight on the belay bolts facing up the slab watching her every move. They'd already found out that her rope, well the boyfriend's actually, must be a 50-metre one. Her 60 must be in the car with him but Harold had always got them in two separate coils hanging from the belay bolts and the difference in length didn't seem to matter, providing that they always used the long rope to belay with. About eight or nine pitches up, she couldn't remember exactly, there was a hell of a long pitch with hardly any gear on it. The rope kept going out and out. Harold told her later that he was getting frightened witless. He

could see that she kept looking up not believing that she wasn't near the belay and down to see if she'd got enough rope. On one of her looks down she saw that the other end of her 50-metre rope was above Harold, following her up the slab. She was - "Wetting herself," said Lorraine. "I was suffering some severe internal pressure," said Gillian. She found out afterwards that Clawson had thanked God that he'd had no tight on the previous pitches or he wouldn't have been able to undo the knot at the end of that rope and that he was wondering how he could undo his belay if she didn't reach her belay in time and he had to follow her, both moving together. He'd undone the loop of rope to one of the belay bolts with one hand and was trying to loosen the other when a faint cry of "Safe" had come down the crag. She only took in one rope and eventually he was able to take out the piece of gear which was on the dangling rope, pulling up the spare running down the slab below him and tying on to it. Gillian told us that they could have heard his voice in Canada when he shouted up "Take in on both ropes". "You bloody marvel," Clawson had said when he reached her, "that must be a hundred and ninety feet, that pitch and only three pieces of gear, you're a star, a top rate star." "I could have kissed him," Gillian told us. "You didn't though, did you," Lorraine wanted to know, "he was miles older than you." "My dear Lorraine," said I, "some gentleman of his age may have developed excellent expertise in these matters." Lorraine's look said clearly that someone two or more decades older than herself would not be her choice for a High Sierra embrace, gratitude or not.

Gillian had then politely expressed the fact that the internal pressure was becoming critical and Harold volunteered to go over to the right on a long belay loop of rope to lessen his internal pressure and have a thorough look at the distant scenery while Gillian fought with the problems which ladies in climbing harnesses have.

"She carries a plastic..." was the start of Lorraine's unnecessary explanation but I cut her short. "A Lady I know has one and states categorically that they are better than a cut-down Evian bottle. She, of course, buys no other brand of bottled water. There may be more suitable ones for this activity" The tension lessened they managed to take off the bandoliers and the rucksacks and have some 'snap' as Harold called it and some replacement water. Gillian romped up the next few pitches and had no difficulty with the supposed crux. Their last pitch took them over the banister of the wooden walkway round the fire lookout and they were warmly welcomed by its lady occupant. She turned out to be daughter of the Ponderosa store and café near the campsite. She was certainly hospitable. She gave them each a mug of coffee and a cookie.

"Does the Ponderosa do meals," asked Harold, "I'm clemmed, that is starving," he told the lookout lady. "They don't close until the last customers have gone and then they close like lightning.. D'you want me to radio them for you?"

"Yes please," Harold had said. "Fancy meeting two incredible women in one day".

"Don't hang about, get your skates on", said the lookout, "and tell them I'm alright."

"And so", said Gillian, "Harold turned out to be a superb rope mate and a perfect gentleman. He bought me that evening meal."

We went our separate ways shortly afterwards and I spent most of the drive home trying to think of a word, I was sure I'd met somewhere, to describe Clawson's amazing change. It was several days before it came. Apotheosis. Canonisation; deified ideal. Was that quite the correct word to describe the new Clawson? *Le mot juste*? Probably not, but The Apotheosis of Clawson. That would make a good title for a story would it not?

Ma Lowe investigates: The League of Gentlemen

Moirra Viggers

It was just another dog day afternoon at the office. I was halfway down the second bottle of hooch, and considering whether tiffin, or the sun past the yardarm would be sufficient excuse for the next shot. The landlord reckons I have a drink problem – personally, I never find hooch a problem, it seems to slide down a treat – and I'd just about decided on tiffin, when the phone rang.

"Mr Lowe, oh Mr Lowe, you've got to help me, you're the only one who can .. you know about the Climbing Club and their dastardly dealings... you can solve the mystery... please help me... The voice faded into sobs. I quaffed the hooch, and gathered my thoughts.

"Lowe's the name, Philip Lowe, and I'm a private dick. Not a pretty occupation, or indeed a title, but a necessary one, especially with the likes of the Climbing Club around. One of the oldest and largest clubs in the country, my previous associations with them had involved murder, mayhem, deceit and skulduggery, and it sounded like the climbers were up to their old tricks again." Gradually, between sips of hooch, I pieced together the story.

My caller's name was Maria and she was married to one of the Climbing Club's stalwarts, Viggs. He was Commissar of Huts, being charged with the acquisition, care and maintenance of their portfolio of valuable real estate, masquerading as climbing huts. And he'd been found dead in bed at one of their premier huts, Ghyle in North Wales.

"The police were called immediately," explained Maria. "His body was blue, he'd been hit about the head with a tricouni'd boot, stabbed with a rusty piton, smothered with a Grenfell jacket and a copy of his proposals for the Ghyle hut had been stuffed in his mouth. The Constabulary, however, failed to see anything suspicious in this and are not taking any further interest. Furthermore, Viggs was alone in the hut as The League of Gentlemen had all gone to the Royal Goat for a drink, and they are indignantly denying any involvement."

"The League of Gentlemen?" I queried, baffled.

"Oh, I should explain. Ghyle is the Climbing Club's oldest hut, and there's a tradition that once a year there's a weekend meet for its 'friends', some of the older members who wish to see its history and traditions maintained. Within the Club, the group is known as The League of Gentlemen. I can't tell you too much about it, no one can – its membership is by invitation, and it's a male-only bastion. What I do know is that they had recently come into conflict with my husband over his proposed renovations to Ghyle. Viggs was keen to see the hut dragged into the 21st century, and was suggesting that the exterior be pebble dashed, the open fire replaced with a fake log appliance, the ceilings artexed, the old bunks replaced with Ikea futons, and the rather dated photos substituted with some nice contemporary flying ducks. The League was horrified, and invited Viggs up to the annual meet to discuss his plans with them – and now he's dead. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I just know something's not right, and I'm sure the League of Gentlemen are involved somehow. I'd go to Ghyle and challenge them myself,

but I don't have any proof, and besides no women are allowed in the hut during the weekend of the meet, except the cleaner.

Never let it be said that I'm one to miss an opportunity. "This sounds like another case for Ma Lowe! I shall be that cleaner, and I'll soon find out what this League of Gentlemen is up to."

Now, there are those who imply that I'm just a little too keen to slip into the black skirt, high heels and stockings (which I keep carefully clean and pressed, next to my collection of essential reading material for the discerning gentleman), but I've always found that the hired help is invisible, and the female variety even more so – a useful way of gathering information. Thus it was that within the hour I was pitching up at Ghyle, feather duster in hand.

As I entered, I saw a group of about a dozen men seated comfortably round a blazing log fire. They were dressed in tweed breeches, Norfolk jackets and brown leather boots, and each ruddy-faced individual had a large glass of Scotch in his hand, clearly not the first of the night. They did not appear to be in mourning for a dead colleague, quite the opposite in fact, they seemed to be celebrating something. There was a palpable air of sinister malevolence, tinged with Old Spice and other whimsies of a bygone generation. As I approached, rearranging the dust motes energetically (God, this place needed a clean), a tall individual got to his feet and raised his glass.

"Here's to a local hut for local people, the League of Gentlemen, and the continuing preservation of our secret." As the group drank the toast, he produced a sheaf of papers from his jacket and turned to put them on the fire.

"Come along dearie," said one member, patting me proprietorially on the backside as I passed, dusting busily. I managed to refrain from stuffing the feather duster where the sun don't shine, and under the pretence of straightening the picture above the mantelpiece and putting another log on the fire, managed to snatch the papers from the flames and hide them in my pinny. Conversation continued around me, and I caught various snippets.

"...good thing he's dead, we'll be safe now..." "...best alibi in the world..." "...turned the handle..." "...no wonder he was blue..." "...must come and see my collection of toads..." Gradually however, as yet more single malt disappeared down their throats, the League became quiet and maudlin, and I decided it was time to leave. I'd learnt everything I could.

Back in the office, it was the work of a moment to inspect the slightly charred plans. They confirmed my deepest suspicions. The League of Gentlemen was indeed up to no good. I picked up the phone to Maria.

"We must talk. Your husband was definitely murdered by the League, and they're completely out of control. They must be curbed, before they feel the need to kill again. The President will have to be told."

Maria was aghast. "The President! But he's far too important a person to listen to an ordinary member like me. He and the Committee are much too busy moving the Club's monies into numbered offshore bank accounts, and attending reciprocal dinners. The only person that can convince him there's wrongdoing in the Club is you. He'll be at the

CCJ/AGM Dinner next weekend, you'll have to try to see him there."

So it was that I arrived at the Snap Hotel, venue for the Climbing Club's centenary journal dinner and AGM. However, the President was a hard man to buttonhole, and my attempts to make an appointment to see him were brushed off. There was only one option left to me – I would have to raise the matter at the AGM. That meant it was also time to call in a few favours from a previous acquaintance, the Serious Editor for North Wales. I knew too, that as a non-member, I would not be able to gain entry to the meeting room. Time for Ma Lowe to march again! Before you could say 'League of Gentlemen', I was straightening my seams and laying out water glasses at the President's table.

The Climbing Club members filed in, assorted nursing staff left, and the AGM began. The President droned on interminably about "the fabric of the club", "the need to integrate University Clubs", and how important it was to minimise the number of those who could administer the club's finances. All this was routinely and traditionally interrupted by the club Pedant, who also managed to interject a little rant about the state of guidebook editing and climbing morals generally, under Matters Arising.

Finally, to everyone's great relief, the President peered at his agenda and announced briskly "Any other business? No? Well, we'll..."

I leapt forward from where I'd been lurking behind the table, polishing off a few glasses.

"Not so fast Mr President, there IS some other business – that of the League of Gentlemen."

There was a collective gasp. Members turned to each other in puzzlement, but I noticed that at least a dozen faces had paled. One such belonged to the tall individual who had proposed the toast at Ghyle, and he now leapt to his feet.

"Mr President, this matter is being raised by a non-member, who has no right to be here. She's only the cleaner at Ghyle. Eject her immediately!"

In the hubbub that ensued, I feared I might not be heard, but the Serious Editor for North Wales caught my eye, and pushing his way to the front, faced down the League's spokesman with a matched pair of Pembroke Guides – weapons of mass description, and not to be trifled with – and shouted, "Listen! For the greater good of this club, she must be heard!"

"Thank you, Serious Editor", I said, noting, from the corner of my eye, a phalanx of guidebook authors fanning out to block the doors, armed with some of the weightier journals – I'd had a word!

"Mr President" I cried, with all the drama I could muster, "the Climbing Club is harbouring a nest of vipers. The League of Gentlemen are not 'friends' of Ghyle, they are murderers, and if left unchecked, will bring the Club into complete disrepute. They killed your colleague Viggs when his plans threatened to expose them, and they will do so again if they feel threatened."

The President looked confused. He wasn't the only one. They're not the sharpest ice axes in the rucksack, these climbers.

"But I don't understand. The League merely take an interest in the Ghyle Hut's history and traditions. Why on earth would they want to kill Viggs?"

"Simple," I replied. "It is indeed all to do with the history of the hut. Viggs was

proposing radical changes to the fabric of the hut, and along with his proposals had marked up a set of old plans of Ghyle dating from the 1950s, which he had uncovered in the Climbing Club library. It was enough to seal his doom. At first I suspected that the League might have wanted him dead because they disliked his proposed changes so much, but I was wrong. They killed him for another reason."

There was a sudden movement in the audience as the League's spokesman once again leapt to his feet.

"This is a ridiculous accusation! We couldn't possibly have killed Viggs. He was alone in the hut – we were all down at the Royal Goat. It was nothing to do with us. Besides, even the police said there were no suspicious circumstances. It was death by natural causes!"

"No, it wasn't – the cause of death was very unnatural indeed" I replied. "The fact that he'd been tricorn'd, choked and stabbed had nothing to do with it – he was blue! He died of a prolonged lack of oxygen. It was then I realised that the League had a nasty little secret, one that they would kill to protect – and they didn't even have to be at Ghyle to do it."

I glanced around the room. You could hear a piton drop. I waited for someone to ask the glaringly obvious question. Eventually the President worked it out. "But what was the secret?"

"In the 1950s, Ghyle was used as a training base for the up-coming expedition to Everest. Several Climbing Club members were involved in that expedition, and its subsequent success brought much prestige to this country as well as to the Club, which was lauded as a bastion of all that was good and honourable in the climbing world. Imagine if it should be found out that that expedition's success was based on .." I paused dramatically... "CHEATING!"

There was another collective gasp from the audience. I saw the Serious Editor's jaw drop in horror, but continued nonetheless.

"It's a well known fact that it was something of a surprise to the climbing establishment of those days that two New Zealanders were included in the 1953 expedition team. However, they were such strong climbers, they had to be considered. How come they were so good, and why were they included? I suggest to you that it was because they had a certain advantage – they could train at altitude, without ever leaving their back garden, or even climbing a step! They were so well acclimatised they didn't need to use oxygen, and their performance benefited."

The President looked appalled. He mopped a brow suddenly shiny with sweat.

"But that's ridiculous. Everyone knows that Everest expeditions used oxygen in those days. They didn't believe men could survive at altitude without it. For heaven's sake, that's why they were at Ghyle – they were practising with the equipment."

"Not so Mr President" I replied. "I've looked at the old photographs on the wall at Ghyle and it's patently obvious that the oxygen cylinders have no valves – they're useless fakes! So what was going on? It was only when I got hold of Viggs' old plans, I realised what a cunning scheme they had. Ghyle had been secretly transformed into a giant pressurised chamber, controlled by a valve in the old custodian's room! The plans show an X that marks the spot! All they had to do was simulate the atmospheric conditions at the summit of Everest and they could acclimatise at their leisure."

The room dissolved into uproar. Trembling hands reached to quaff drinks and mop

fevered brows – this was the stuff that brought down empires, and the Climbing Club would be implicated. How the Fell and Rock would laugh!

I raised my hand for silence.

"We'll probably never really know, but I suspect that the technology came across with the New Zealanders. After all, one was a science teacher. There were vague rumours at the time about 'bees' and 'honey' and that these somehow contributed to their climbing prowess. But it wasn't honey that helped them. They had developed small pressure chambers, disguised as beehives, and had been using these to allow their lungs to adapt to high altitude conditions. Probably they offered to share the technology if they were included in the 1953 expedition, and subsequently Ghyle was adapted. However, the team couldn't let on what they were up to. The climbing world would have been disgusted at the sort of 'ungentlemanly behaviour' that attempted to gain some sort of advantage over other Everest teams. So they pretended to use oxygen, but instead exercised under altitude conditions, and when they got to Everest, they just dumped the cylinders and merely carried a couple of lightweight dummies for the summit shots. It certainly would have made the logistics easier!"

I paused for breath. The President, white as a sheet, gasped "But what have the League got to do with all this? And how did they kill Viggs?"

"The League of Gentlemen started as exactly that. They were a few members who wanted the Club to be seen as an example of gentlemanly behaviour and good ethics, a model for the climbing world. Unfortunately, when they found out about the real purpose of Ghyle, they realised how much it would undermine the whole ethos of the Club. They had to keep it quiet, and over the decades they have made it their mission to do so, passing the guilty secret on to a chosen cartel. And who knows, maybe certain members got the chance to use Ghyle as it was intended – after all, there are several Climbing Club members who have been at the forefront of Himalayan climbing over the years"

Glancing over the audience, one or two weather beaten characters with rather less digits than nature intended, refused to catch my eye. Even Sir Heathen Bassington quickly lowered his gaze, and harrumphed nervously into his beard.

"As for killing Viggs, nothing could be more simple. Having beleaguered him with a copy of his proposals, the League merely had to turn the handle of the valve to 50,000 ft, and depart for the Royal Goat. Viggs would be dead, and they had the perfect alibi."

There was a sudden commotion amongst the members, as a dozen men sprang to their feet and made for the doors.

"Get 'em boys!" cried the Serious Editor. "Viggs was one of us once! Don't let them escape!"

Thus admonished, the guidebook authors, armed with their trusty hardbacks, quickly subdued the miscreants, and the members of the League were pushed back into their seats. Unsmilingly, the President rose to take control of the proceedings. I left quietly. I didn't want to witness a great Club's shame.

As I dusted off my skirt, and folded away the stockings, I mused that once again I'd managed to uncover devious doings within the Climbing Club. The President had professed himself grateful, and invited me up to his room for a nightcap. Probably just as well I declined – I might have uncovered more than he bargained for!

Oh well, back to the hooch

A Pamir journey

Stewart Hawkins

This is an account of a journey in honour of one of the most distinguished members of the Climbers' Club and one of the most illustrious mountaineers of his generation. Wilfrid Noyce put up a number of first ascents on British crags in the 1930s and 1940s and did some remarkable ascents in the Alps in the 1930s. As a teenager he collaborated with Menlove Edwards on CC guide-books for Tryfan and Lliwedd and was guide-book Editor and Vice-President of the Club in the 1950s. His contribution to the success of the 1953 Everest expedition was vital, in view of his opening up the route across the Lhotse face to the South Col.



He regarded his ascent of Trivor in 1960 as his last expedition and he demurred a while before accepting Sir John Hunt's (as he was then) invitation to join the British-Soviet expedition to the Pamirs in 1963. They were to climb some of the highest peaks in what was then the Soviet Union. Wilfrid and Robin Smith, a very promising young Scottish climber, fell and died on the descent from Pik Garmo (6601m). As it was too dangerous to bring the bodies down they were buried in a crevasse on the mountain. By the time the British group returned to base the Russians had already built a memorial cairn to Wilfrid and Robin overlooking the Garmo glacier, not far from their first base camp.

Wilfrid Noyce taught me French at school and introduced me to the mountains, organising school meets at Cwm Glas and Helyg. He and David Cox had proposed me for membership of the Climbers' Club. Having travelled in Central Asia I had the desire to visit the memorial, partly as an adventure, but also to express my debt to him. After discussions with members of the 1962 expedition, I established the location of the memorial in the Garmo valley, one of the more remote and inaccessible valleys of the Western Pamirs and several miles from the nearest road or habitation. Google Earth is a very useful tool! I discussed the idea with Rosemary Ballard, Wilfrid's widow and Jeremy, their younger son, and he agreed to go with me.

Through the website Pamirs.org I made contact with Pamir Adventure, run by Surat Toimastov, a biologist by training and an expert photographer. He knew the area and indeed most of the Pamirs and understood what was required. He had also tried several times to get into the Garmo valley. His photographs appear in most of the documents about Tajikistan.

Above: The memorial to Wilfrid Noyce and Robin Smith. The new plaque is on the left of the base.
All photos © Stewart Hawkins.

I had planned to go in June 2008 but it turned out, after detailed analysis, that the Kyrgyz Ob river, which is across the entrance to the Garmo valley, might be impassable at this time as the glacier melt would be rising. It might have been possible to get across on horses but the return was less certain. The memorial is some 12-13 miles up the valley from the Kyrgyz Ob. Jeremy and I decided to delay the trip until success was more assured, when the glacier melt would be at its lowest and before the snows arrived. The window was the last two weeks in September and the first week in October. We decided to go in 2009.

However, I felt that a reconnaissance might be useful and continued with the original idea and so with Surat, his son and a local guide, in June 2008 went over the route as far as the Kyrgyz Ob. Surat has a number of local contacts and our requirements for horses and assistance for 2009 were discussed with the Tajik farmers.

In 2009 the party was completed with another ex-pupil of Wilfrid's, Peter Norton, and a friend of Jeremy, Barry Cooper. Peter is also a member of the CC. We arrived in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan on 21 September and we stayed in the comfortable Taj Palace Hotel. The following day we left with Surat and Zaffar, an ex-wrestler, the cook/chauffeur, in a big Mitsubishi 4 x 4 and went from Dushanbe up the main road which leads via Gharm and Jirgatal through Kyrgyzstan to Kashgar in Xinjiang, Western China. The vehicle bowled along happily for the first sixty miles or so through Kafarnihan to Abigarm on the good tarmac: thereafter the main road was spasmodically tarred until Darband. Shortly afterwards we turned off on to the Pamir Highway, a grand term for a mountain track, albeit marked in red on the maps. The Highway follows the Khingow River for several miles and goes on south to the Afghan border which it follows to Khorog, the administrative centre of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). It then goes East across the Central Pamir to Murghab, then North up to Osh in Kyrgyzstan. Access to The Eastern Pamir was frequently made from Osh, before the Pamir Highway offered an alternative.

There was a terrific storm, the rain was pouring down, and we had gone along the Pamir Highway for half-an-hour – about 20 miles – when we were diverted into a ravine. The bridge over the river had been washed away and two torrents had cut the road as well. Tortuous, steep, muddy bends led us to the bottom of the ravine and across the river and up in similar manner on the other side. The latter was complicated by a Chinese 18-wheeler which was stuck and not even with chains could it make more than a slither to give just enough room to pass. We spent the night a little farther along at a farm at Khur where the Tajik farmers were very hospitable and provided simple accommodation.

The second morning was still wet. We continued and shortly after Tavildara, 112 miles from Dushanbe, we turned off the Pamir Highway continuing up the Khingow valley. Coaxing the car over a ford, that we had to reconstruct, we travelled on broad cultivated terraces above the river, which had partly cut itself a steep-sided ravine. Sometimes it was one fast-flowing torrent, at others, where the terrain was much flatter, it was a braided river, covering a wide area. Beyond the terraces the mountains rose to 4,000 metres and higher and we were already nearly at 2,000 metres. However we had not expected the mud-slide which provided a 2-metre high barrier across the road. On one side was the mountain and on the other was a steep drop to the river –

no way round. Fortunately some other travellers were behind us and we set to with stones and bare-hands to reduce its height and make it safe to drive cautiously over.

We spent the second night in an abandoned mining camp, in Russian ex-army caravans at Sangvor. This was now used as a rest-camp looked after by the village head-man, Hairatullah, who was a friend of Surat, and whom I had met last year. He accompanied us for the rest of the trip. It had taken two days to do what we had done in one last year.

Day three was more agreeable, although the road deteriorated, the scenery was impressive; at the top of the valley, where we could see into the Garmo Valley, we could see fleetingly Pik Ismail Somoni (formerly Pik Kommunizma 7495m), and Pik Garmo. Hairatullah had sent his son with two mares and a filly, on ahead and shortly after midday we arrived at Arzing the highest habitation in the Khingow valley at 2,500 metres, some 180 miles from Dushanbe. The vehicle was unloaded. Two stallions and another horseman and a guide were provided and the four of us, Jeremy, Peter, Barry and I set off to walk to the deserted village of Pashinghar, five miles farther on, where we camped with a splendid view into the Garmo Valley and stunning views all round, but with some concern as last year I had seen bears just above the village.

Although there were just four of us, we now had, in addition to the two Tajiks who had come with us from Dushanbe, two local guides, their sons as horsemen, four horses, one filly foal who followed her mother all the way, and three dogs. It was quite a caravan. Although the Kyrgyz Ob was still fast flowing we crossed comfortably on horseback behind the horseman and then we were forced to dismount and walk, there were no paths as only the occasional hunter ventured there and the primary forest was impenetrable. It consisted of the very thin barked local, Pamir, variety of



Garmo valley with Pik Garmo in the distance. The group loading the horses after a river crossing.

the silver birch, *betula pamirica*, many wild roses, *berberis* and ivy. At one stage we managed only 1.75 km in two hours! There was a little open parkland and here one found dead trees still standing but with enormous scars where they had been struck by lightning. We saw plenty of wild-life; a bear, a golden eagle, a snake, ibex, hare and many traces of wild-boar and apparently that there were wolves as well, although we never saw them. Generally using the wide river bed provided the best means of progress.

After two days we reached the Lower Base Camp of the 1962 expedition. Our Tajik friends recognised the camp from the pictures in 'Red Peak', Malcolm Slessor's book on the 1962 expedition and we spent two nights there. On the first we had another terrific storm and wondered how long we would have to wait before the weather would allow us to do what we had come for. In counterpoint to the storm two of the dogs set upon



Memorials of Russian climbers from the 1970s.
Russian pluviometer and snow-gauge.

the third and their howls of anger and pain added to the turbulence.

However the morning of Sunday 27 September dawned fair and after breakfast our guide from Arzing, Abdul Sha'id, who had been up there once hunting, led us some 200 metres above the camp to the five memorials to Russian climbers who had died in the 1970s and then some 600 metres farther to the Noyce-Smith Cairn at 2976m. It was in the same good state as in the 1962 photographs. Jeremy arrived first and he spent a little while on his own in front of the memorial; a final closure with a father who had died when he was eight years old. It was a moving moment.

Jeremy and his mother had arranged for a commemorative plaque to be made and we affixed this to the stone on which the two names had been engraved in 1962. Jeremy said a few words and Peter gave a short eulogy whilst Abdul Sha'id knelt and recited verses from the Qur'an. Having taken all the necessary photographs we returned to the camp. The glacier that the memorial had overlooked 47 years ago has receded some two to three miles and all that remain are the slag-heaps of the moraine, 'the foulest ground imaginable', according to Malcolm Slessor.

On the return, understanding the country a bit better, we stayed as much as possible in the Garmo river bed, leaping the small streams and using a horse to cross the main torrent, when necessary. The weather was exceptionally kind to us on the way down and we had the towering mass of Pik Garmo as our backdrop all the way back to the Kyrgyz Ob. We reached Arzing in two days, having walked over 40 miles in the five days in trackless country. We returned to Dushanbe with very similar experiences as on the way out, but the weather was better!

In the three days left to us we visited one of the old cities of the Silk Road and called on the British Ambassador, Trevor Moore and recounted our exploits. In two weeks we had accomplished everything we had set out to do.

The Navvy's hankie

Dave Gregory

For their main climbing holiday they usually teamed up with a couple of mates to lessen each of their petrol costs. It made the car a bit crowded but they managed by using a roof rack. The other two were usually teachers, which meant going in July or August when everywhere was crowded but this year they had decided to go earlier when the days were longer, the weather might just be better, the midges wouldn't have started and there wouldn't be so many people about. The Ben was the main crag they were going to go for; long routes on the biggest mountain. They were fit and going well. They had all the Scottish guidebooks they could lay hands on - just in case the weather did turn nasty, and photocopies of the descriptions of all the routes they were likely to go for. What a cracker of a fortnight they were going to have.

Some of the theory worked. There weren't many people about. Well there wouldn't be would there? With the bloody rain stair-rodning down, all the burns roaring like a Noah's flood of beer and the bottom of the crags glistening as though they'd been varnished and the tops probably not there from what you could see of them. And there weren't many midges. For the same reason. Midges might be built on a sub-atomic scale but they had enough brains not to get in the way of high velocity hydro-cannonballs. And the long evenings, light up to midnight; huh. The sky was a dull dour grey from sparrow's fart to closing time, if you were daft enough to stand and look at it with the rain teeming like a waterfall. And fit they weren't.

The bug which had been laying people low at work, another of these 'Asian 'flu's' hadn't managed to get them and they had left work chortling at how lucky they had been. The 'flu' laughed last. As they drove north they felt the headache and the heavy sinuses and the shivering almost simultaneously. When they saw the sheeting rain in the Coe they wondered about sleeping the first night in the car but they summoned up the energy to put up the tent and didn't leave it for eighteen hours except to pee. They did not worry too much that the first couple of days were a washout, except to comment on the irony that the ground and crags seemed to have been snuff dry before this sousing began. They spent most of the time in their pits, happy when they were asleep, coughing and spluttering and making brew after brew when they were awake. Colum finished his large packet of man-sized tissues and soddened most of his handkerchief supply very early on in the agony. Harry was not so particular as to the disposal of the almost never-ending flow from his nose and throat.

In the early stages he would stick his head out of the tent and, after hawking thoroughly and noisily would consign yet another oyster, of the size of which he was inordinately proud, as far as he could into the gloom. His nose he would unblock by using what he called 'the navvy's hankie'. This involved his kneeling in the tent doorway and reaching as far forward as he could, supporting himself on his outstretched left arm, while he blocked his right nostril with the thumb of his other hand. The contents of the left nostril he would clear by a sudden expulsion of breath through it. The right nostril would be cleared by blocking the left nostril with his forefinger. Any slime which

remained on his fingers he would flick into the storm, wiping the residue on the grass under the flysheet. This process infuriated Colum who protested so long and bitterly that eventually Harry consented, in any easing of the rain, to leave the tent and perform the triple revolting process at some distance.

The rain eventually did stop and with the clearing of the clouds and the strengthening of the June sun the crags began to dry and after giving them the first day to get rid of the worst of the wet the pair started on their campaign. The state of the rock and their mid-'flu' lassitude pushed them onto the easier classics and they managed to get up a few without getting too soaked in seepage or having too much of an epic. Late on the third rainless day they made a point of catching a weather forecast on the car radio. It was optimistic for the next few days and they decided to gamble on going for The Ben. As ever they got up late and the shopping in Fort William took longer than it should. They knew that they were nothing like recovered because the hikes up to the Coe crags had been wearing enough with only climbing gear in the sacks but they found out just how unfit they were when they left the road by the golf club and started the long haul towards the Allt a'Mhuilinn under the load of full packs.

The sun was high and the sweat was soon rolling off them even though they cast off their shirts, packing them under the sack straps to lessen the pressure and protect their shoulders from the strong sun. Just off the path over the boundary fence they picked up a child's two-handled mug which they kept handy for the many occasions when they sat propped against each other by the stream and took their rest under the excuse of a drink. Never usually a great swearer Colum was moved to bitter profanity as Harry emptied his throat and nostrils at each stop, accompanying each catharsis by some platitudinous interjection: 'better out than in'; 'got muscles in it that one'; 'get out and walk'; all of which made Colum's blood boil. They both of them cursed; the sacks, the tent, the weather, the decision to bring peg hammers and a selection of pegs in case they met real trouble because of ice or dripping rock, the tins of meat, the potatoes, anything, everything. It was too late now; it would all have to be carried, heavy or not.

After topping the first rise they could see the cliffs ahead of them, getting slowly larger but apparently no nearer. The C.I.C. hut was the marker they were making for but it seemed to have vanished until, almost together, they saw the propeller of the generator beside it gently turning. It took ages to reach and dump their sacks thankfully against the stack of gas bottles near it and subside for one last luxurious rest. Glorifying in the release from the load they took the tent over the stream onto the other bank where it would be in the sun and after some argument over how far up the slope to put it to gain the most benefit of the sun on a long summer day they pitched it before coming back to fetch their sacks and lie stretched out, aching and lethargic, in the hot midgeless air. It was impossible to feel anything but wonder and humility whilst gazing at those faces, full of history, awe and fear and Colum's irritation eased away.

Had Harry noticed that the Orion Face actually got some sun? They scrutinised the guide and its diagrams and shuffled their pack of photocopies. Minus One Direct; 860 ft Hard VS, three stars, hardest pitch 5a, 'one of the best routes in the country'. Just about their big-enough in their present state and the top of it would be in the sun if they did it about now or a bit earlier - they didn't want to risk being caught by the dark on this cliff of cliffs. The snow patch at the bottom of the face was still pretty big and the snow

might be too hard to kick steps up it if they started too early and a lie-in would be nice. They unpacked the rest of their gear and Harry made a brew while Colum washed out his hankies and laid them out to dry on convenient tufts of grass.

They'd decided on the route but what about the way down? They neither of them fancied continuing up the North-east Buttress and going over the top of The Ben. Too much like hard work. If the weather stayed good and they stopped up while the food lasted they would most certainly have to top out on some of the other days. Why do it more than they need? They would have had to come down the ridge from the summit and either abseil down the posts into Coire Leis or go over Carn Mor Dearg as well. They might have done that if they'd felt fitter but the route would be quite long enough. Either descent would be pretty tedious and if they were going to ab down the posts why not ab anyway? It was a long route but what about the chances of abseiling down it? What a shambles if the rope stuck a hundred and fifty feet above you. How many abseils would it be if they came down on one rope doubled? Sixteen? That was a lot of anchors to find or provide. However they had plenty of slings and a knife. They lay and thought about it and came to a decision. Besides the pegs they'd got a couple of pieces of extra gear they'd found on the routes they'd done in the Coe. There were mentions of pegs in the route description. They'd carry their pegs and hammers and make a decision after they'd seen what the route was like for abbing down. There was a drawback. They'd have to carry their boots and at least one sack up the route in case they decided to come back the long way round.

The route was brilliant. Overhyped routes are never usually as good as the enthusiastic descriptions and this was perhaps not 'one of the best routes in the country' - how would they know - they'd only done a few, never mind all the others, but it was good, damn good. The start set the tone for the rest, classic stuff. Several hundred feet of kicking steps up the snowfield wearing their hill boots with a peg hammer doing service as an axe. The bergschrund was wide and seemed to be as deep as the field they'd kicked up. Once they'd realised that the snow still reached well up the first pitch the description fitted and the route went well. They got a bit lost around the sixth pitch; the description didn't seem to tally but in their wanderings to try to find the route again they found three pieces of gear, two with karabiners, and two fairly new pegs as well as two longish pieces of tape which had been left threaded in place round blocks. They had quite a long rest when they reached the top of the route and made their final decision. They'd change into their hill boots and ab down the route.

After the first ab they were beginning to think it was a mistake. After all it had been a long way up and the thought of another fifteen abseils still scared them, but it proved not to be too bad. They changed to using a better scheme. If the anchor looked good enough for the rope to run through it well they'd use both ropes and one of them would go almost to the end and test whether it would pull easily. If the first of them down found another good anchor part way down he would stop by it and they'd go from that. It took a long time but every ab they made was taking them closer to the tent -- and the weather was holding. Some of the abs were quite short but some were right to the end of the ropes, even on the stretch. They made a point of looking at both sides of them as they descended and several times they swung a short way sideways to a good anchor. Both ropes were newish and they slid through the anchors no trouble at

all. The main problem was the tendency to burn their fingers and palms on the longer abs; older, rougher, ropes would have been better for that, slowed them down a bit. Overall everything worked quite well except for Harry's habit of using his navy's hankie when Colum was below him but Colum was getting too tired to remonstrate. They got away with leaving only a handful of slings besides the stuff which they'd found. The last ab they did on one rope and Colum was first down to the trampled crest of the bergschrund carrying the other rope dangling coiled from the belay loop at the back of his harness. He moved a bit to one side and belayed himself to a Rock while he took off all his gear, except his harness, and packed it into his sack, which had been left on the peg. The coiled rope he took off and fastened to the sack before he struggled into it.

Harry was not long behind and stood on the 'schrund crest with the rope still through his figure of eight. He locked-off the ab rope and passed his gear and sack to Colum who packed the gear into the sack. They were almost home and dry. Harry unhitched the rope and had started to pull it though before Colum persuaded him, after a minor argument, to tie back onto the dead end so that if it fell into the 'schrund they would be able to pull it out. Sure enough the bulk of it fell into the abyss but the very end fell nicely across the sling holding Colum to his Rock. Standing with his feet well apart on the sugary snow he started the swinging motion of coiling the rope. Harry leaned across the gap and steadied himself with one hand on the rock face. With the other hand he started to clear his nostrils. As he flicked his hand to clean his thumb after emptying his left nostril some of the snot fell onto Colum's rope, neatly coiled and clipped to his sack.

In a sudden fit of anger that Harry would not stop his disgusting practice Colum swung the coils harder which knocked Harry's supporting arm. He fell forward hitting his head on the face and pitched forward into the darkness. As he fell he dragged many of the coils away from Colum who peered down the gap supporting himself on both arms. He could see nothing and slowly settled himself on the snow with his shoulders over the gap and his hands shading his eyes. As his eyes grew used to the dark he thought that he could see farther but he could still see nothing except the few feet of rope which still came up to him. He bellowed down as loudly as he could but answer came up from below. What should he do? He stood up and tried to pull the rope below towards him. After about twenty feet no more would come. What should he do?

He turned to face the corrie. They had seen no-one else in the corrie all day; heard no-one and there seemed to be no-one there now. He re-opened his sack and taking out his long slings, hitched three of them together clipping Harry's sack to one of the new ends and the other to the karabiner at the front of his harness. He turned to the rock face and threw the last coils of the rope strongly into the gap before leaning across it supporting himself on one arm while, for the first and only time, he used the navy's hankie with the other.

He let Harry's sack slide on the slings down the snow in front of him. The snow was not too soft and he soon settled into a regular rhythm of planting alternate heels into the snow. What should he do? Go down to the police tonight? In the morning? It would be galling to go down now with only one day up here after all that flog up. He could at least spend one more day here. Say they'd differed about which way to descend. Harry had insisted on soloing up the N.E. Buttress. He'd be found eventually. Perhaps

he wouldn't. Perhaps that snow patch would never clear. Even if he were found people would assume that he'd changed his mind and abbed down the route using the gear that Colum had left. He'd have been tired and careless and fallen into the 'schrund. It could have happened to anyone. Of course he'd been worried when Harry never came back to the tent that night. Tomorrow he'd solo something, Tower Ridge perhaps, to see if Harry was on the summit or the other way down. It would give him another day on the Ben. He couldn't put off going down to report any longer than that.

Reaching the slope below the snow he picked up Harry's sack and strapped it under the lid of his own. The sky was clear, the blue of it starting to redden slightly. Not a cloud in the sky. The crests of the ridges and buttresses were clean-cut against it. It looked like the weather was going to be good tomorrow. He took out a fresh handkerchief from his rucksack pocket and blew his nose on it, savouring the sun-dried scent of it, before swinging on the heavy double sack and starting down to the tent. Yes, tomorrow would be a good day.



A late Victorian watercolour looking up the Gwynant valley, by Alfred Powell. It belonged to Herbert Carr who loved it dearly

I'm in a slate quarry... and this time it's personal

(With apologies to Reeves and Mortimer.)

Steve Dean

*"Among brown hills and black hills
And hills bleak and bare
They have given us hovels
And a bed and a chair
And told us to labour
And not to desire
The cake of the countess
The wine of the Squire."*

From 'The Angry Summer' by Idris Davies

My fingers caress the perfect though small, square cut holds above me, as my feet struggle to find much purchase. I reach out unsteadily and clip the next bolt, before stepping up for an off-balance rest as autumn sunlight bathes the seventy-foot slabby wall of slate in a late afternoon glow. I am working my way up this excellent slate route very tentatively; I am a relative newcomer to the peculiar nature of the rock and its silky smooth character devoid of much texture is proving distinctively unnerving. The square-cut nature of many of the small holds helps to give me some reassurance as I set off for the next bolt about 12 ft above me. The air is cool and still, and I am grateful for what little friction there is as I gradually make my way to the lower-offs at the top of the wall. I clip the twin karabiners, and Mick Wrigley lowers me back to the scree slope below. The climb in question had been a fine, albeit modest F6A with good protection, and we enjoyed it so much that we did it again the following weekend.

We are climbing close to Watford Gap, in the huge Dinorwic slate quarries, with extensive views away to the south over to Moel Eilio and down to Llanberis and Llyn Padarn. The foreground is filled by the vastness of the lower levels of the quarries, a place of flawed and savage beauty where a gothic, melancholic atmosphere particularly in certain lights make it essentially Welsh. The setting is dominated by vast broken slopes of slate spoil, the huge often blank faces of slate and the debris of a bygone industrial age; pieces of old machinery, cables, rusty railway tracks, old blast huts and deep sinister pools of water. A greater contrast with the coastal setting of the white quartzite of Gogarth only thirty miles away would be hard to imagine. Earlier in the day, Mick had led us up the fine route Combat Rock on a steep wall bathed in late morning sunshine. The setting of this climb is particularly impressive, above Twll Mawr (The Big Hole) an awesome place and home to Jonny Dawes' legendary route 'The Quarryman'. My own grounding in Welsh climbing had always been somewhat traditional, but increasingly I have found the slate routes surprisingly stimulating and challenging. For me

personally though, there was also another important factor about these places.

Whenever I'm up in Wales, I invariably drive through Nant Peris and then alongside the lake down to Llanberis. As you make this journey, it is impossible not to look across Llyn Peris at the vast expanse of the slate quarries on the lower slopes of Elidir Fawr. The Dinorwic slate quarries dominate the lower part of the Llanberis valley, a staggering testament to the economic forces that dominated this part of Wales for 150 years. I always experience a pang of emotion when I see this place, because seventy years ago my grandfather worked there. Although I am originally a Londoner, my mother's family were firmly based in deepest Meirionnydd; in Machynlleth, Corris and particularly in and around Dolgellau. The Dinorwic quarries ceased to operate in 1969, and even in the 1930s were in something of a decline compared with their heyday in the late nineteenth century when over 90% of Britain's entire slate production was from North Wales (mostly Dinorwic, Bethesda where my grandfather also worked, and Blaenau Ffestiniog). Today these places remain as austere reminders of a hard and unforgiving way of life that cost many men limbs, or even their lives, and left the majority with poor health in old age. The story of the Llanberis quarries is very well told by Reg Chambers Jones in his book 'Dinorwic' which traces the history of this place from 1780 to its closure in 1969. As someone who now uses the place as a climbing playground, it is humbling to learn more about the lives of the ordinary quarry workers for whom the cutting of slate offered a tough existence in a frequently wet and bitterly cold environment. Long before the safety net of Health & Safety attitudes, working in these places was dangerous and fraught with uncertainty as the demand for Welsh slate gradually declined after the 1890s.

My maternal grandfather was called Jack Hughes and he was born in Blaenau Ffestiniog in about 1890. His upbringing was of a fairly strict, hard working chapel-based type in a Welsh speaking community at one of the main centres of the slate industry. As a young man Jack travelled all over Wales and Ireland taking on a variety of manual jobs and seems to have had an interesting life. I remember him as a very quiet, gentle man with a deep voice and a thick North Wales accent. He was about 5ft 8in tall with snow white hair and was very strongly built, like a middleweight boxer. The things I remember most clearly apart from the fact that he rarely spoke, were the blue marks in his hands and forearms, and the obvious feeling that he was physically a very strong man. My grandparents lived in a tiny cottage in Dolgellau, with a lovely view out of the back towards Cader Idris one of the finest mountains in Wales. My Grandfather Jack was well known and well liked in the town and I learnt from my mother that as a younger man he had something of a reputation for being able to handle a few pints, and could certainly look after himself if the need arose. There is a lovely family tale of Jack once knocking out an ex-Chief Constable in a Dolgellau pub after a liberty had been taken. Now that is something I would like to have seen!

The last time that I was with Jack, it was late August 1960 and I was only ten years old. We had all been out on the wonderful beach at Fairbourne, just south of Barmouth, on a lovely sunny day. I remember the sun shining on the sea in the early evening and the bulk of Cader Idris away to the east of us almost reaching down to the sea, as my brother and I savoured the delights of a childhood day on the beach. We were most fortunate; every summer we would leave suburban South London behind and spend

several weeks with our grandparents and cousins in North Wales.

It gave us both a wealth of lovely memories as children; of sun on the sea, beautiful sunsets over wide beaches, steam trains over Barmouth bridge, the mountains (I was taken into the hills at an early age) and most of all the dark, mysterious little cottage where our grandparents lived, with the endless fire, the kettle and pots on the range and food that tasted so much better than at home in London. That afternoon on the beach was the last time I was with Jack as he walked with us in his dark waistcoat, complete with watch chain, as we hurried across to the railway to watch the last train of the day up from Aberdovey to Barmouth. We returned to London the next day and Jack died before I had the opportunity to meet him again. I have regretted ever since, that I never got the chance to talk to him about his work, and his travels all over Wales and Ireland. As my own interests in both climbing and Wales developed, it would have been wonderful to have shared a pint or two with him and to have learnt all about his life particularly his time in the slate quarries.

Like most young men of his time, Jack served in the army in the First World War and was very fortunate to survive his time in the trenches. The remainder of his working life began as a coal miner in South Wales, but tragedy was to strike there when he lost his first wife and a child in a house fire in the Rhondda. Shattered by this experience, Jack together with his remaining son who was only seven years old, walked all the way north through central Wales to Dolgellau where he had family. It was there that he met the lady who was to become my grandmother Lizzie. In due course they were married and settled in that cosy little town. For a while Jack worked on the building and repairing of roads both in Ireland and throughout North Wales. In the early 1930s he spent several months working on the re-surfacing of the A5 from Capel Curig to Bethesda. At that time the road over the Nant Ffrancon in particular was in a particularly primitive state*.

It was possibly while working on this road job and staying with relatives in Bethesda that Jack initially found work in the slate quarries which were still major employers in North Wales. It is now so easy to forget the huge differences between our own lives early in this century and those of our grandparents sixty to seventy years ago. At that time, the vast majority of people in predominantly rural North Wales were still locked in an almost constant struggle with poverty and a lack of real job security within a struggling national economy. The prospect of work in the slate quarries must have seemed a relatively attractive option for Jack, despite the obvious dangers involved, and the need to be away from home for long periods although this had been very much the norm throughout his working life. Jack ended up working at both Dinorwic and Bethesda cutting slate for a number of years and only returning to the Dolgellau area to work once war broke out in 1939. I believe that he later worked in the quarries at both Corris and at Blaenau Ffestiniog, before moving on to general building work in his later years. For a short period in the late 1940s Jack worked at the famous little copper mine near Dolgellau, where Welsh gold (Clogau Gold) was found. I remember that my grandparents had a small piece of this beautiful red-tinged gold, said to be the finest in the world and it is nice to know that Jack had some connection with it.

Footnote: * It being the early 1930s, I have often wondered if Jack ever looked up from his work on that lonely stretch of Welsh road and saw young lads like Jack Longland, Colin Kirkus, Menlove Edwards, AB. Hargreaves and Ivan Waller, making their way to Helyg or heading for the crags on Tryfan or at Idwal.



An old engraving looking down Llanberis Pass

As I said before, how I wish I could have talked to him about his working life and particularly his time at Dinorwic and at Bethesda. What he would have made of us climbing for pleasure in such places, I cannot imagine. Now, as I walk through the quarries, particularly on a dank winter afternoon, I cannot help but wonder what it was like for him, working in such a place in often dreadful weather. One hopes that there was a camaraderie among many of the men in the quarries, but I wouldn't mind betting that life in the men's residential quarters and in the pubs of Deiniolen, Bethesda and Llanberis was fairly harsh, and not for the sensitive or faint hearted. It is unlikely that Jack would have got home to Dolgellau for sometimes weeks on end, although cousins in Bethesda may have offered some respite from life at Dinorwic and the temptations in the pub of drink and gambling. I like to think that sometimes on a Sunday, he was able to take the pleasant walk over the top from Deiniolen to Bethesda, and enjoy the fine views, the mountain air and the song of the skylarks above the moorland.

Years ago in Tony Smythe and John Cleare's book 'Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia', I remember seeing a photograph of a big slab climb called Gideon above Llanberis and it is perhaps the first notable slate climb in North Wales, pioneered by Joe Brown. I am sure that at that time slate climbing was considered way outside the mainstream of the sport, but by the early 1980s it had become very sexy indeed and was for a while very much cutting edge amongst the young hot shots. Rapidly changing attitudes, sophisticated butyl rubber footwear and a vast increase in overall boldness led to an explosion of activity on what had previously been a much maligned rock type both in Snowdonia and the Lake District. At that time I was involved in my own (albeit modest) long term love affair with Cynr Las, Cloggy and Gogarth and rarely climbed elsewhere in Wales. The slate seemed to be for young ultra hard climbers only, and me and my mates were not remotely in that category. As a result, the initial slate boom passed me by and I never considered climbing on it despite my family link with the workings at Dinorwic.

Several years later and after a couple of enjoyable visits to Hodge Close quarry, I was up in Wales and staying with Jim Perrin who at that time lived in Dinorwic only a few minutes walk from Bus Stop Quarry. Much to my surprise, Jim happened to mention that he had never climbed on the slate and that perhaps we ought to go and have a look at it. At this time, it was Spring 1993, slate action was still very popular and Jim suggested that we go to try Comes the Dervish over in Vivian quarry. It was a very pleasant, sunny afternoon and as we strolled over from Llanberis I was well impressed with the dramatic character of the place. I have to say that as we approached it, Comes the Dervish looked a right handful with what was obviously a very committing start above a nasty looking ankle breaker of a boulder. Notwithstanding the fact that he was a newcomer to the delights of slate, Jim got stuck into the fierce crack that forms the meat of the route and stormed up it in some style. Periodically he would slot in a wire or a small cam and shouted down his delight at a superb pitch. My own ascent, on a frequently tight rope, had considerably less panache as I was very unnerved by the strange texture of the rock. I took a while to learn how to trust my feet on it and certainly at one stage must have resembled Joe Brown's wonderful description 'a cycling window cleaner!' Gradually I worked my way up the pitch, which mercifully eased considerably higher up and agreed with Jim on its superlative quality. Full marks to Steve Haston for his first ascent back in 1982; it must be one of the finest single pitch routes in Wales and is understandably much sought after now and getting rather polished.

After a brew back at Jim's house, we wandered down to Bus Stop Quarry and in gorgeous evening sunlight he led me up Fool's Gold and Gnat Attack both again climbs of excellent quality. It had been an excellent introduction to Welsh slate climbing, but paradoxically I did not climb on the stuff again for almost fourteen years, as other objectives always seemed to get in the way. Over those years I had come to learn a great deal more about my mother's family, and their dark, brooding roots in the mountains of North Wales and to think back over the happy times my brother and I enjoyed with them during our childhood. In particular, I learnt a great deal more about my Welsh grandparents and their plain, hard working life in Dolgellau. While I was really too young to have known them (my grandmother died when I was only nine and the last time I was with my grandfather was only a year later in 1960), I have always realised that my experiences in Dolgellau as a child have a great deal to do with my own love of the Welsh Mountains. Perhaps it was the long exposure to that wonderful Cambrian Coast (we spent a lot of time on the beaches at Fairbourne and Barmouth) and the constant awareness in Dolgellau of the surrounding hills and mountains, with the consequent often dramatic changes in the weather. All this was a quite overwhelming contrast with our everyday life in South London and I realise now how fortunate we were to spend so much time up there. When I was eight years old, my brother and I were taken up onto the footplate of a GWR Manor Class steam locomotive at Barmouth station (the engine driver Meirion, was a cousin of my mother). I remember the noisy hissing of valves, the smell of oil, the incredible heat given off by the fire box*, and the overwhelming Welshness of it all. Needless to say, this particular event gave David and myself vast credibility back at school in London. We stood at the end of the platform waving to Meirion and his fireman, as the train chuffed off south towards Aberystwyth with the sun sinking over that lovely stretch

of coast. That particular day was late in the summer of 1958; up in Snowdonia it was the time of the Joe Brown's first ascent of Shrike on Cloggy, while in the Pass Hugh Banner had just made his startling first ascent of The Overhanging Arête on Cynr Las. Years later I would find myself visiting both these places and being suitably impressed by their efforts.

Another important feature of my brother and my own happy experiences in Dolgellau, was the charismatic character of our four dark-haired and dark-eyed cousins there. They were all five to ten years older than us, but were very patient with us and we spent a lot of the time with them. The two boys were twins and were full of mischief and fascinated me with their daring and wonderful sense of humour. One of them was once arrested for drunk driving in a stolen police car. They were lively chaps! I remember sneaking off with them for a crafty and deeply forbidden fag, when I was only ten years old. Thanks to them and to their older sisters we were exposed very early in life to the utter delight of rock'n roll records. As a nine year old, I remember long sessions of listening to Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and best of all Gene Vincent. Britain musically, was a very different place pre-Beatles, but I've never forgotten how great that stuff sounded even to my young ears. Above my cousin's house was the ever brooding presence of Cader Idris (after Snowdon, the finest mountain in Wales). About half a mile to the east along the road to Cross Foxes, was the little cemetery where my elder brother Alan was buried. He died in hospital in Chester while still a small baby, just over a year before I was born in 1950. I sometimes wonder how different my own childhood might have been had he lived. I loved the atmosphere of the mountain air at Dolgellau and the loving warmth of my grandparents' tiny cottage (now a holiday let, as they never actually owned it). One of the features of that very Welsh little town, are the numerous, noisy streams that tumble down from the slopes of Cader to join the river (the Afan Mawdach) and its constant flow through Dolgellau to that wonderful estuary and then the sea. Back home in London, even at nine or ten years old, the mystery of the mountains and the sea would stay with me for weeks (a kind of childhood Hiraeth, a longing for the place). This would frequently be compounded at home, by the regular visits of Mum's sister Eunace. She and Mum would happily chat away in Welsh reminding me of the mountains and the sea, far way from home. I know that the love my brother and I have for the mountains, was formed very early in our lives and for that I am very grateful.

All this brings me back to the present and the slate quarries of Dinorwic. It is a cool but still afternoon in mid-November with a less gentle hint of winter in the air. The rock has been dry, we've had some sunshine and the views over to Moel Eilio and out towards the sea have been as fine as ever. The crags still hold a tiny amount of summer warmth, but that will soon be gone with the arrival of the first frosts that are forecast for the next couple of nights. As Mick and I walk down to Dalis Hole and pass through the gates, I pause and look back at the huge inclines built into the hillside and the remains of the extensive old working buildings. At one time these buildings would have been a hive of activity, with hundreds of men working there or nearby. As we walked down the track from the old buildings towards Bus Stop area, I looked down through the Birch trees towards Dinorwic and Deiniolen. Gradually all the street and house lights were coming on, as the Welsh winter night descended. Away to the west on Anglesey the vertical Quartzite walls of Gogarth would now be deserted and bathed in the last rays of the sun before it dips away beyond the outline of Ireland on the horizon. Clogwyn du'r

Footnote: *Described by the band Pentangle years later, as "The Basket of Light".

Arddu would be virtually in darkness now, almost certainly totally neglected at this time of year, in the wet and cold conditions that will continue now until the sun gets round to it again in the spring. As I walked down the path to Bus Stop, I thought again of my grandfather Jack. I wondered how often back in the late 1930s, he had walked down this way and looked out over the same view to the west. I do hope that he found some happiness and satisfaction working in the quarries and that he had some good mates there while he was away from home for weeks at a time. Jack's working days at Dinorwic were more than seventy years ago, more than twelve years before I was born, yet I feel a deep connection there with him and it is one of which I'm very glad.

He was a very tough, down-to-earth man and I can't imagine what he would have thought about something as trivial as climbing over rocks, but I would have enjoyed trying to explain to him.

Down at Bus Stop, Mick and I sort the gear out, lob it into the van and set off down the road to Dinorwic and Deiniolen. I glance up at Jim's old house and then it is the quick downhill run through Fachwen to the Llanberis Road. An increasingly severe need for a pint is developing, because it's thirsty stuff this climbing! The long, dark drive home can wait just for a little while, as darkness descends on the great hills around us.

*'Whereon the workers toil, in quarries hewn
Upon the terraced rockside. Tier on tier,
Above the giddy depths, they edge and cling
Like flies to the sheer precipice as they strike
The thin cleft slate. For solace of their toil
Song comes to strengthen them, and songlike verse
In the old Cymric measures.'*

From 'By Festiniog' by Lewis Morris.

The Real Beginning of The Climbers' Club

The Wazir of Whitfield

Nearly everyone knows that the lead up to the formation of the Climbers' Club happened in the late 1900s during August and September when various mountaineers including lawyers, bishops and even lowly shepherds went up into the hills. Then at 7 p.m. in the Pen-y-Gwryd one day in 1896 they all sat down to dinner and conversed amicably and contentedly sharing one thing, their love of the mountains. According to George Bryant this is where 'the germ of the Club, struck its first root.' This event led to the dinner on 19th May 1897 at the Monaco in London when about 40 stalwarts decided that the first dinner should be repeated at the Pen-y-Gwryd on December 6th 1897. Nearing that date 'opinions were coming in from many quarters' to suggest the formation of a club'. Although about 25 could not attend, the foundations for the club were enthusiastically laid down. C.T. Dent (author of Mountaineering in 1892), Frederick Morshead and F.T. Bowring were prominent and the two latter became Vice-Presidents, while C.E. Mathews (ex-President and original member of the Alpine Club, who was in 1898 to become the author of The Annals of Mont Blanc) became the first President and George Bryant was chosen to be the Secretary. So far we are on well-trodden ground.

At the first general meeting on 28th April 1898 in Saville Row the first Committee was elected and the first list of members with just over 200 names included about a quarter of its strength from the solid ranks of the Alpine Club. The Committee included Cecil Slingsby and Haskett Smith as well as the 31-year old rock-climbing star Owen Glynne Jones who was one of the leading lights at that time. Harold Spender had said in some awe that Jones was easily the best rock climber in Britain and this was most likely to be true.

Now it has always bothered me that I could not find more about the lead-up to the beginning of the club from sources outside the club. It was only when I tried to link O.G. Jones to the Jones family who used to live in Helyg that I came across something of interest. In the 'Memoir' to Jones (which appeared in the second edition of his book after his death on the Dent Blanche in 1899) it said that Jones was born in London and that 'it seems that he has spent his holidays in Wales.' When Jones was 13 in 1881 he started school in London at Central Foundation School, City Road. After winning prizes in science he went on to the Technical College at Finsbury to do his City and Guilds. He succeeded at mechanical engineering, mechanical drawing, mathematics and chemistry, as well as in the mechanical laboratory and in the wood and iron workshops. When he left, the teachers spoke of him in the highest terms.

"Mr O.G. Jones," said Professor Perry, "was as able, as earnest, as promising as any other whom I can now remember."

After his course he passed to the Engineering Department in South Kensington for three years (1886-1889) until he was 22 years old. Heading the list he was appointed assistant in the Mathematical Department. It was while he was there that he learnt about serious climbing on Cader Idris. In 1890 he obtained his BSc at London University and became Physics Master at the City of London School.



The front cover of Alex W. Perry's practical guide to the ascent of all the principal mountains of Wales.

During Easter 1890 W.M. Crook went with him to Wasdale Head, when Jones was 33, and they topped Pillar Rock. Between 1891 and 1899 Jones made his name in the Alps and his many bold ascents are now well documented. Strangely though there was no list of Jones's climbs in Wales among his papers after his death. The Abraham brothers however were able to fill in details of what they had done with Jones in 1897 and afterwards. By then however things were afoot to lead up to the formation of the Climbers' Club.

One of Jones's teachers had been Professor Perry and significantly in 1896 a small book entitled 'Welsh Mountaineering' was published in London by Upcott Gill of The Strand. The author was none other than Alex W. Perry.

A burning question then struck me. Could Professor Perry living in London, who taught O.G. Jones, and who would undoubtedly be a highly educated man, be none other than Alex W. Perry?

Perry's introduction records that the guidebook was produced to give clear instructions to reach

the Welsh summits and there is an appendix of Welsh summits at the back of the book. Surely Perry had not already done all of the routes on his own? It is unlikely that the guidebook would have been produced solely by Perry as in the Pen-y-Gwryd in 1895 there must have been some discussion about the need for such a guidebook, its content and also who the book was intended for. Sadly Perry does not acknowledge any help that he received while writing the book. However, at the end of the introduction, Perry launched out with his grand plan:

'Now to a subject I have had in my mind for some time past. Swiss climbers have their Alpine Club. I want to start a Welsh Mountain club – not a club with a big house possessing dining, billiard, smoking and other rooms, but a club – or would combination be the better word? – of men interested in Welsh mountain climbing. The club could undertake various functions, such as the collection of literature appertaining to climbing in Wales; the organizing of a proper guide service and scale of fees, etc.

Of course membership of the club would have to be regulated, and I propose that before any man or woman could be elected, he or she should be required within a given time to climb certain mountains in Wales.'

The route that Perry proposed was a gruelling 10-hour one starting from Penmaenmawr on the north coast and crossing the summits of the Carneddau and Tryfan to end up finally and not surprisingly at the Pen-y-Gwryd inn.

It was revolutionary that Perry should consider admitting women at that time, a suggestion that would not have gone down well with some of the misogynist alpinists of the day. As to who first suggested the idea of a club Perry uses the word 'I' which suggests that he either wanted to grab all the glory for the idea for himself (not unlikely) or that others were simply not involved. The latter point is extremely unlikely as Perry at that time was not likely to have explored the Welsh mountains on his own. The other issue is that if Perry wanted a club then he was probably already a sociable sort of person who liked to discuss their great deeds in the PyG. Perry was in favour of a small subscription which suggested that the matter had already been discussed and said that he had the scheme already drawn up.

'If any gentleman interested in the subject will communicate with me, I will take steps for the calling of a small private meeting for the purpose of discussing the whole question.'

We must consider the fact that Haskett Smith's two volumes of Climbing in the British Isles published in 1894/5 were already available and had possibly inspired not only Perry but also other mountaineers in Britain. There is no escaping from the fact though that Perry's guidebook came out in 1896 and it was in that year that a group of mountaineers had their first dinner at Pen-y-Gwryd. Was this a coincidence? Could London climbers have simply arrived at the Pen-y-Gwryd from London clutching their copies of the new guidebook?

I suggest that mountaineers already possessed copies of Perry's guidebook and certainly when the dinner was held in the Monaco in May 1987 far more of those present possessed copies of the guidebook which had been published in the capital. Moreover it is a good bet that the well-educated Professor Perry from London who helped to educate O.G. Jones will turn out to be Alex W. Perry and moreover that he perhaps inspired his protégé the young Jones to go to Wales.

Genealogists, the gauntlet is thrown down for you to check the National Censuses to track both O.G. Jones and his father David and also to track the mysterious Alex W. Perry. One further thought though is the coincidence that George Abraham's brother was called Ashley Perry Abraham (1876-1951). Is there a close family link there?



Obituaries

N. M. Blackett	1945 - 2002
Mike Dixon	1955 - 2004
John Scott	1977 - 2006
Jill Aldersley	1998 - 2007
Henry Adler	1975 – 2007 HON MEMBER 1988 - 2007
R. A. Dick Brown	1951 - 2007
Ken Vickers	1969 - 2007
Ian Jackson	2008 - 2008
Sir Kenneth Berrill	1946 – 2009 HON MEMBER 1969 - 2009
Prof. John Buxton	1954 - 2009
Dave Elmore	1984 - 2009
Peter Hunt	1993 - 2009
Peter Greenwood	1991 - 2010
Mrs Jo Briggs	
John Evans	
George Watkins	

Nicolas Maynard Blackett (1928 – 2002)

Nick was elected to CC membership July 11, 1945. His father, Patrick Blackett, was likely instrumental in encouraging Nick to join the Club, because Blackett senior, a distinguished Nobel laureate physicist at Cambridge, mixed with individuals such as Winthrop Young, Ivor Richards and Dorothy Pilley Richards.

There is an amusing reference described in Dorothy's 1935 classic 'Climbing Days' to a joint climbing expedition in 1924 in the Praraye region of the Italian Alps shared by the Richards and Nick's parents, Patrick and Pat Blackett. When I visited recently with Nick's sister, Giovanna Bloor, I was delighted to find in the Blackett family album, labelled photographs corroborating that Praraye attempt on July 22, 1924. They show the two couples, the Richards and the Blacketts looking very dashing, dressed in climbing fashions then current.

Nick left his initials in the Helyg logbook and his name in the CCJ, which gives some important clues about whom he climbed with and what he climbed.

On December 29, 1947 Nick shared the credits for the first ascent of 'Mordred' (rated V. Diff at the time) on Craig Tre Marchog with H. Arnold Carsten, and R. E. Meyer. A note in the Helyg logbook indicates that Meyer led pitch one, because Carsten felt insecure without a nail on the tip of his left boot. The route was described as being heavily iced and part of the ascent was made in a hailstorm. The previous day, December 28, Nick made an ascent of Hawk's Nest Buttress Direct on Glyder Fach in company with Peter Harding, Carsten and Meyer, as well as a solo descent of Chasm Route in company with



Clockwise from top right: Nick Blackett; panorama taken from the Cabane des Vignettes during the CC's 1948 Arolla meet; Nick's parents 'Pat' and Patrick Blackett with Ivor A Richards and his wife Dorothy Pilley on an attempt on Praraye July 22 1924.

Carsten. Three days later on New Year's Eve, Carsten, Meyer and Blackett made an ascent of Devil's Staircase, described as heavily iced and snowed.

In 1948, Nick was part of a well attended Alpine meet of 24 climbers based in Arolla. A panorama taken from the Cabane des Vignettes shows silhouettes of nine climbers. Possibly one of them is Nick, but sadly only the peaks in the background, not the climbers in the foreground are labelled (see photo-montage above).

Arnold Carsten writes:

I first met Nick's father at Helyg in 1946 and subsequently teamed up with Nick and Richard Meyer for 3 weeks in the Dauphine in 1947. I don't remember much of what we climbed there, except the south face of the Barre des Ecrins, a new route (half of which had obviously been done up to a nasty overhang) on the Clochetons Gunneng, and Pic Coolidge where John Barford and Michael Ward had this terrible accident the year before. Somewhere up the Meije we had to retreat in the face of horrible weather.

Giovanna Bloor writes:

My brother Nicolas and I first came to North Wales in 1938 (he was 10 and I was 12). Our parents rented a cottage from Clough Williams Ellis (who built Portmeirion) in Llanfrothen. Three small rooms, no water (it had to be carried), no electricity, Elsan loo, cooking on two primuses. We came for every holiday for years and years. Nick graduated from climbing trees to climbing rocks and when he was 18 joined the Climbers' Club (proposed by Geoffrey Winthrop Young - I think my parents had known him in their Cambridge days - and E.Stuart Chantrell). Nick and his friend Peter Stubbs (later deputy editor of the 'New Scientist' for 9 years), climbed together for several years. Climbing gear was primitive in those days - any pair of boots and a rope! Later in life, family commitments meant he was not able to climb so much but he always kept up his membership of the CC. His heart was in the hills and rocks. He was at the Centenary gathering at Helyg (the tall man the back in the group photo, looking away to one side). In his final illness he asked me to take his 36 climbing books and guides to the charity shop round the corner from where he lived. I refused saying they were specialist books. He agreed I could try and sell them and send the money to the Climbers' Club, and this I eventually did this year. Nick wanted his ashes on the top of Cnicht, but his second wife, his son by his first marriage and myself could not get that far so a spot was chosen on the foothills of Cnicht - the circular foundation remains of an ancient 'round house', with a good view of the surrounding hills and the sea. There we scattered his ashes.

Bob Moulton writes:

Nick (which is how he signed himself) attended at least one of the 'early' CC sandstone meets, although at his age he didn't climb much (in fact, I understand that there used to be informal sandstone meets back in the days that the annual dinners were held in London). He was one of a small number of older CC members who attended the meets when we started a programme of evening Sandstone meets in 1995. This was a welcome feature of those meets, which hasn't survived in recent years. The only letter of his that I have on file is dated Wednesday 7th July (presumably 1997), when he thanked me for sending him a list of the meets and said that, "Old age and chemotherapy has now reduced me to no longer being able to go uphill. So perhaps it is time to resign from the Climbers' Club".

*All photos, except panorama, from **Blackett family archives** ©. I am grateful to Giovanna Bloor for the help she provided in putting these notes together, for tips from Michelle Papworth about the Richards connection, and to Iain Peters for bringing this interesting chapter of history to my attention.*

Tim Oliver

Christopher Michael Dixon (1931 - 2004) Member 1955 - 2004

Mike Dixon was a significant contributor to rock climbing, most notably on the Isle of Skye some sixty years ago, and for many years he was a member of the Climbers' Club. He also climbed in the Alps and Dolomites and travelled extensively in Europe and Africa in pursuit of his chosen profession as an internationally recognised photographer of antiquities. Mike commenced his climbing career as a schoolboy in October 1948 and within a few months achieved a relatively high standard of competence by intensive practice, most notably by soloing, often in nailed boots, large numbers of routes at Ilkley, Almscliff and other minor crags within reach of his home at Horsforth near Leeds. At this time we often climbed together and formed a longstanding bond of friendship. After walking or cycling to the crags he frequently recorded climbing fifty to a hundred recognised ascents and descents in one day. This was not just for sheer enjoyment, but also in preparation for a planned trip to the Isle of Skye in 1949. Nylon rope was a novelty, but Mike purchased 130 feet of quarter weight line (only 5mm diameter) which he actually used for climbing and abseiling. This he said was designed for the longest pitch of Mallory's Slab and Groove. The choice of rope was not only due to limited funds, but also due to the need to reduce weight since we usually carried much equipment including both nailed and commando soled boots.

It was not easy to travel to Skye in 1949, with a budget of only a few pounds. This was achieved by hitch-hiking despite the atrocious condition of some roads in the Highlands and the very sparse traffic, due to petrol rationing in the post-war period. It took four days. On arriving in Skye in indifferent weather conditions, we lost no opportunity to climb extensively including the classic Crack of Doom, the hardest route in our pre-war guide book. When I had to return from Glen Brittle, Mike remained for many weeks and continued climbing and scrambling, mostly alone, covering vast distances and achieving a high level of fitness. He completed a traverse of the Cuillin Ridge climbing the difficult sections solo in nails with Donald Wooler. Due to the lack of any transport and rigorous inclusion of pinnacles, the circuit from Glen Brittle was completed in a 19-hour day.

During his time in Skye, even under hazardous conditions Mike was a perceptive observer of his environment and wrote very eloquently of the aesthetic quality of mountain scenery, but he also observed rock architecture with a route-finder's eye. One particular face held his attention, namely the Coireachean Ruadh face of Sgurr MhicChoinnich, and in letters to me he vowed to return to climb this, which he did, by several prominent lines. While still at school he returned in 1950 and later from 1951-54, after a short period of National Service, to pursue the exploration of the crags in this vicinity. He climbed with Brooker, Patey and others, pioneering ten routes in the area, commencing with the classic lines of Fluted Buttress and Crack of Dawn. His contribution to exploration was acknowledged by the editor of the 1958 SMC guide, but after thwarted attempts to make the first traverse of the Cuillin Ridge in winter conditions, and conscious of the demands of his career, he finally moved to the south of England and climbed less frequently in the Alps and UK. He did however participate

in one further significant contribution to rock climbing exploration in Scotland in 1962, when we made the first ascent of the Direct Nose Route on Sgurr An Fhithleir. Mike is sadly missed by his wife Mary who accompanied him on his travels and by many friends who enjoyed his indomitable spirit, his brilliant but occasionally eccentric sense of humour and his great companionship in the mountains.

Neville Drasdo

John Scott (1948 - 2006) Member 1977 - 2005

In 1974, when I was working in Hong Kong, I was co-opted on to an Army expedition which aimed to make the first ascent of Lamjung Himal, the easternmost peak in the Annapurna range and just under 7000 metres in height. I knew one or two of the other members but not all. One of the latter was a big strong young guy called John Scott who was doing a short service commission in the paratroops.

We learnt a number of things in the course of this trip, many of them correcting misconceptions of mine. For instance, if you set off up the South side of the Annapurnas as early as mid-March you will meet an awful lot of snow while you are still down in the rhododendron forests. Second, when this happens, your porters tend to quit. Third, if you all eat unhygienically together in goatherds' huts, sooner or later you all get galloping diarrhoea. Fourth, when the sun finally comes out those who are unprepared for it get snowblindness. All of these things happened to us.

We were not a lightweight expedition, and those of us who got high on the mountain did a lot of load carrying, much of it in deep soft snow. Phil Neame and I climbed what, looking back, was probably a very dangerous slope of thigh deep frozen ball bearings, and we did it more than once. I have never worked harder in my life. We all lost weight despite having tons of food. John was a big lad to start, and not too slim. I was a good deal leaner. By the end of the trip we had both lost around thirty pounds – John was just getting down to his fighting weight and going like a train, while I was looking and feeling like a concentration camp survivor.

John did a lot of trailbreaking on the mountain and fixed ropes up the most difficult part of the route, through some rather impressive seracs which we had completely failed to see on an aerial reconnaissance. He and I found ourselves going for the top together, and he saved my bacon when I tottered halfway into a crevasse on a steep slope, carrying a large load. I came out with a splitting migraine headache. John lowered me down to the last flat ground and fed and watered me for two days before I was fit to try again. It was entirely my own stupid fault and could easily have cost us the summit, but he never complained. We made it to the top in an incipient thunderstorm and had another close shave when we abseiled off an ice peg hammered into snow – it held



me but came out on John. It is the nearest that I have come to the classic manoeuvre of jumping off one side of a ridge crest when your mate is falling down the other. Fortunately he stayed on the crest.

John, myself and Frank Fonfe took a different way down the mountain, descending the north side into the Marsyandi Khola – now a standard trekkers' route but then a restricted area and seldom visited by foreigners. We slid down wet snow on our bottoms for a long way in thick mist, climbed down some very steep forest and found ourselves in the most beautiful Tibetan village I had ever seen. We dined on potatoes, eggs and lots of chang, surrounded by big brass pots and painted woodwork. The next time I saw the village of Chame it had been taken over by the government bureaucracy and was totally different.

I saw John again a year later at a celebration party in Hong Kong for the Army's 1975 Everest ascent. He had been in the second summit team but gave up the attempt at around 28,000 feet to help the frostbitten Bronco Lane and Brummy Stokes down the mountain. Again his strength and unselfishness were in evidence.

I didn't see him after that for almost 30 years. He kept up his climbing, on British rock, in Yosemite and in the Alps, especially with Phil Neame. After eight years working in the oil industry, in the North Sea and farther afield, he settled with his family in Tirril, near Penrith, and became very active in the Patterdale Mountain Rescue. He was the chairman of their board of trustees for several years, and raised a large sum to build a dedicated rescue centre.

In 2003 we did a walk over Helvellyn with other old friends. John was in great shape and high spirits that day, so it was a shock to learn two years later that he had been diagnosed with bladder cancer and had much of his plumbing removed. He was amazingly cheerful about it but sadly the cancer had spread and he died in January 2006. He insisted on having his death certificate record his occupation as 'Adventurer'.

Dick Isherwood

Jill Aldersley (1943 - 2007) Member 1998 - 2007



Jill, in the 70s posing next to a Rolls Royce. **Photo © Bill Smith**

One of Jill's many watercolours - the view from Bruach na Frithe, Black Cuillin Skye. © **Estate of J Aldersley**

Jillian Aldersley, known to all as Jill, passed away on 21 October 2007 having been diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour in May of that year.

Born in London of Yorkshire stock, she spent her childhood high up on Holmemoss through the winter of '47 later moving to Longridge and Penwortham when her father secured a post with Preston Corporation Water Works. Her father encouraged her aspirations to become an artist and after local grammar school she attained a teaching diploma from Manchester College of Art. She briefly taught in Aspatria and then moved to Ambleside pottery and when it shut she became dependant on her considerable painting skills.

She was an active member of the Lakes Artists' Society and became President of Kendal Art Society in 2005.

Her childhood activities with her parents sowed the seeds of her passions for fell walking and rock climbing, particularly, but not exclusively, in the English Lake District. Her outdoor activities took her to the Alps, the Himalaya and Nepal and she enjoyed the bolted climbing scene in France and Spain. In the early years living in the Lake District she worked as a barmaid at the Wasdale Head Hotel.

She was elected President of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club in 1994 and managed to cope with this extra commitment alongside a considerable workload of teaching, demonstrations and exhibition deadlines. She was also Oral Archivist for the FRCC from 1998 till her death.

She accepted the devastating diagnosis of her condition with great bravery and got very impatient with those that didn't. Her last months were passed at Holebird above Windermere from where she could see her beloved Lakeland fells.

A great many people will have been touched by her unstinting help, generosity and friendship. Let them retain the memories of a unique person.

Graham Townsend

Henry Adler (1921-2007)

Member 1975 - 2007

Little did Peter Gomersall and I know in 1977, when we chatted to a very friendly CC member, an 'older guy' (he was 56!), in Ynys Ettws, and made him suffer a glass of our 50p/ litre French wine, what a special person Henry was and how important our friendship would become for all of us.

Henry's keen mind, sense of fun and great enjoyment of life meant he became involved in our lives from that time on and in many forays to climb at home and abroad.

Henry was born in Czechoslovakia into a comfortably upper middle-class family of German-speaking Jews. Culturally, his family's links were over the border with Austria, and Vienna, where they would often holiday. He was fluent in English and French as well as German and Czech. He was an accomplished pianist who played his baby grand until shortly before his death. He went climbing with his mother, including in the nearby Elbsandstein. This early experience was to make him love being in the mountains all his life. These two loves – of music and mountains – featured in his visit, with friends, to Poland, literally the week before he died in his sleep, unexpectedly, at the age of 86. He had remained totally sharp mentally, still gave great dinner parties, enjoyed good wines and visited the gym regularly... it was as he would have wished.

When the Nazis entered Czechoslovakia, Henry's parents and elder brother were already in England. Henry was just about to finish his schooling. He was able to take refuge in a neutral embassy for some months to escape transportation. He then trekked out with partisans, over the mountains, to safety and thence England. Those who were escaping were starving during the journey; 'we ate grass and roots'. Puts complaints about expedition rations to shame...

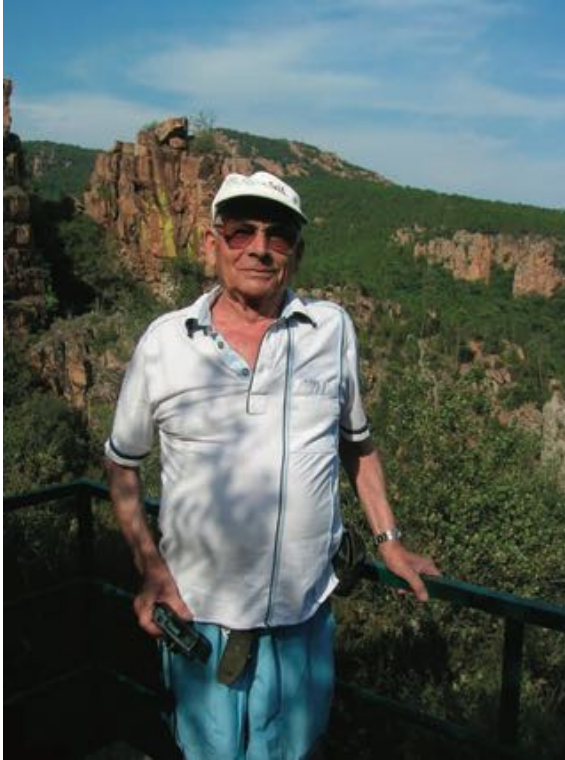
Henry gained a First Class Honours in Engineering at Imperial College. He then joined the Free Czech Forces and was involved in the liberation of Czechoslovakia at the end of the war. However, his hopes to help in rebuilding his country came to nothing. His family's house, factory and business had been taken over by ethnic Czechs, then the USSR. Again Henry came to England...this time forever. The betrayal of Czech Jews by the ethnic Czechs and then the take-over by the Communists meant that he refused ever to visit the Czech Republic, even when the Iron Curtain came down. He was proud to be a British citizen.

Despite being very focussed on his work – Henry eventually became a director in Bird's Eye (part of the Unilever group) and an international expert on the refrigeration and transport of food – he continued to climb and ski during his working life. He climbed many classic alpine routes in the Alps with friends or guides. He also skied regularly.

After retirement, Henry had more time and each winter moved to a ski resort for several months, escaping the British gloom and revelling in the mountains. He first



Henry Adler Opera Krakow Oct 2007



stayed in Verbier. I still recall him naming all the peaks around us from highpoints in that resort. When Verbier became very crowded, he moved to Vail in Colorado. As he entered his late 70s and 80s, he felt happier on the better-patrolled pistes of the USA. He only gave up skiing some years ago when someone knocked him over, hurt his knee and made him worry about his independence, as he still lived alone and did not require or want any domestic help.

On the climbing side, apart from all the usual UK venues, Henry visited many rock-climbing areas of Europe with us, e.g. Verdon, Vercors, Finale, Freyr, Joshua Tree and Yosemite. When he reached his late 60s, he

didn't rock climb anymore. However, he was still a keen walker and really enjoyed being in new areas, meeting climbers and knowing what was going on in climbing.

Retirement also meant several visits to the Himalaya, with some tough treks, e.g. across Zanskar, and ascents of trekking peaks like Chulu East.

Having 'lost' part of his youth due to the war and aftermath, although he did not say as much, Henry took great interest in helping others to enjoy the mountains. He volunteered a lot of time and effort to the Climbers' Club Huts Committee, particularly overseeing the major renovation of Ynys Ettws. Later, he sponsored the 'Aspirants Meets'. If you've enjoyed the great buffets and drinks at these meets for many years now...raise a glass to Henry. A number of young members were also helped by having their membership fees paid for the first few years. Typically he asked that these generous donations should be anonymous.

My few words really cannot sum up even part of Henry's enthusiasm, his joy in life, the mountains and the company of other climbers. However, at the Commemorative Meet when we scattered his ashes in Snowdonia, as he requested, all who had known him shared in warm, happy memories of a great character and friend.

Bonny Masson

Richard A (Dick) Brown (1927 - 2009) Member 1951 – 2007



R A (Dick) Brown was a member of the club from 1951 until his resignation in 2007 when Parkinson's disease finally forced him into full time nursing care. He was one of a strong group of CC members centred on the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club who were active in the Peak District in the 1940s and 50s.

Dick began climbing towards the end of the second world war whilst still a schoolboy and soon gained the reputation of being a fine mover over rock. He was active in his early years on Wharnccliffe Craggs producing 'Grammarian's Progress' amongst other climbs in 1944. The

1951 guide, 'Climbs on Gritstone Vol 2, The Sheffield Area', notes his 'searching wistfully for unscratched rock' on Stanage Edge in 1945. From 1949 onwards he was a guiding light in an SUMC group which produced the first clean ascents of Rivelin Needle and 'Altar Crack' on Rivelin Edge, opened up the closely kept Bamford Edge and recorded the climbs on Bell Hagg Rocks. He contributed the sections on Wharnccliffe and Rivelin to the 1951 guide though his guide to Bamford Edge did not appear until the 1957 Volume 4 of the Gritstone Guide Series, some years after it had been written.

By the early 1950s Dick had acquired a taste for polar mountaineering after accompanying a number of Oread Mountaineering Club expeditions to the Lyngen peninsula in Arctic Norway. In 1951, on his birthday, Dick with Stan Moore made the first ascent of the north-east ridge of Rukisvagagaissa ('Birthday Ridge'). In 1953 he made the first ascent of the south face of Jekkevarre, the highest summit in Arctic Norway, and in typical Rabelaisian fashion named his last major rock climb in the area, 'Storre Slangetind', when he with others made the first ascent of the great pinnacle of the Laksevtinder valley. Dick's tally that year was ten major peaks, three of them first ascents, and six new routes. In 1954 he left Sheffield for London and marriage, severing his connection with the Peak District and joining his friends from the Oread in The British South Georgia Expedition 1954-55.

His gritstone swansong was his involvement in the artificial ascents of 'Croton Oil' on Rivelin Needle and 'Black Hawk Bastion' on Stanage Edge, frequently criticized by some who can have been little more than a sparkle in their grandfathers' eyes at the time of the events. Most gritstone crags in the Peak at some time received his attention though he never ventured on to the great limestone crags, apart from the myth-enshrouded attempt on the High Tor at Matlock in 1954, when Derbyshire police proved infinitely more troublesome than the rock. It must be said that much of the myth was inspired by Dick himself though he was keen to set the record straight and early this year charged me with that task.

Dick was an iconic figure in the SUMC. He had entered the university to study medicine in 1945, left to complete his national service as a Bevin Boy in a South Yorkshire mine and returned two years later to read geology. He left the university in 1954. Much more time was spent climbing than studying. His idiosyncrasies of dress and transport marked him out in Sheffield society. His second row forward's rugger shirt led to his name 'Numero Cinq' in Chamonix; he turned up to climb Black Hawk Bastion in white tie and tails after a 'night on the tiles'; and his 1925 motor cycle captured the attention of other road users, frequently the police and sometimes his insurance company. His claim to be the only man arrested for piracy within the bounds of the City of Sheffield contained more than a grain of truth; a particularly rowdy evening ended in the early hours with a cruise aboard the boat keeper's launch in Crookes Valley Park interrupted by the arrival of the constabulary.

Although Dick's last years were blighted by Parkinson's disease he had a good life. He was lucky in his choice of wife, Liz, who predeceased him. She was a strong, truly worthy and resourceful spouse. When she had not seen him for months after he had gone to South Georgia with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey she visited him in Grytviken, overcoming problems of travel and accommodation by securing a job as a cook on a whaling ship. His friends remember Dick as a great character and an excellent companion in any situation, be it on a cliff or at a party. Fittingly, many friends and some of his climbing contemporaries, members of our Club and the Peak and Oread Clubs, came together on top of Birchen Edge on a damp day in November 2009 to drink a hot toddy and share tales of his exploits, before retiring to an excellent lunch courtesy of his daughters at the Robin Hood pub below. His passing has robbed us of a source of much fun and pleasure. Although his reputation will live on I doubt that we shall see his like again.

Frank Fitzgerald

Extract from an Oread Newsletter, July 1953 Copyright Individual Author or Oread MC

Richard A. Brown Newsletter, July 1953

His bearded, dignified, almost noble appearance contrast strikingly with his youthful sense of fun. A true disciple of Rabelais, he has long been the hero of countless legendary exploits and orgies; exploits of astonishing variety, but all characterised by some outlandish episode exhibiting the true Brownian genius. Whether climbing Arctic mountains, or supping Cointreau in a Sheffield den of vice, Richard 'A'. Brown makes a delightful if bewildering companion. He undoubtedly possesses a great future - but what sort of future is anyone's guess.

P.R. Faulkner

Ken Vickers (1941 - 2007) Member 1969 - 2007



Photo: Ian Smith

To us Leicester climbers, Ken was a Leicester man through and through, an encyclopaedia of climbing and mountains, the creator of an epic out of any event, the anarchic innovator and storyteller, the master of memorable moments - and always known as 'the trespasser'. Ken's wider reputation rested on his immense influence on the availability and quality of British climbing guides.

Born 17th August 1941 as a twin to Sandra and the younger brother of John, Ken established his rebellious style early on by setting fire to Braunstone Hall Primary School when the head of a match broke off and fell between the floorboards.

In his early teens, Ken became a member of the Leicester Museum Club and developed an interest in fossils. This led to exploring the caves at Matlock and elsewhere in the Peak District and then on to rock climbing. With a group of friends, mainly from the British United Shoe Company, who later became the Leicester Association of Mountaineers, he explored the Leicestershire outcrops and quarries creating many classic routes such as The Sorceress (A3) on Forest Rock, Sailaway in the Brand and Virago at Craig Buddon. He wrote the first two Leicestershire guidebooks - the 'Red Guide' in 1966 and the 'Yellow Guide' in May 1973, as well as venturing farther afield.

He left Ellesmere Secondary School at 15 for an apprenticeship with Cundy's of Leicester, the painters and decorators. On completion of his apprenticeship, Ken's lifelong talent for design and style led him to a job with Leicester City Architects whilst he studied for a diploma in interior design.

In 1967 Ken was a member of the Midlands Hindu Kush Expedition with Doug Scott but otherwise restricted his climbing to the British Isles and the Alps. His immense knowledge of the Western Alps was stimulated by three seasons instructing for the Mountaineering Association, based in Arolla.

Ken met his wife June in 1970 at the house-warming of their mutual friends Dave and Di Draper at Whitehall in Derbyshire and they married the following year.

He started his first business - a design consultancy EXPO-TGV - with four friends. In his spare time Ken was elected to the publications committees of both the BMC and The Climbers' Club. When he was asked to represent climbers on the Sports Council he used his influence to get the Sports Council to support the publication of the BMC guidebooks, the first one of which, the Staffordshire Gritstone Area guide, was designed by EXPO-TGV in 1973. When EXPO-TGV folded in 1973, Ken and June started a company, from the front room of their house in Knighton Church Road, dedicated to distributing and publishing guidebooks. He named his business Cordee - which had

been the name of the journal of the Leicester Association of Mountaineers.

Ken was the last LAM member to defect to the Bowline Climbing Club but he exerted a strong influence over the independent spirit of the Bowline and his active participation in gambits, climbing, fell running and skiing. Ken will be remembered by many fell runners as the creator of The Charnwood Hills Race which for over 20 years was a highlight of the Fell Running Association calendar. With the Bowline his reputation as the arch trespasser, whether climbing, running or swimming in forbidden waters lives on.

Very occasionally the trespasser was caught. Once driving June's VW on a visit to the Cairngorms, Ken and a few friends find the gates at the end of the Linn of Dee locked. On inspection of the gatepost they find it can be lifted out and replaced once the VW has driven through. After climbing on Ben a Bhuid for the weekend, they return to the car to find a note on the car from the Mar Lodge Estates. Not daring to risk the wrath of June, Ken meekly turns up at the Braemar police station and asks if there is anything he can do to make amends. The policeman, realising he is onto a winner, says £5 should sort it out. Imagine the policeman's astonishment as Ken hands over £5 – and asks for a receipt. This receipt resides in the Bowline Bullshit Book.

June and Ken's children Simon and James were born in November 1976 and March 1979 respectively and were introduced to the hills, camping, canoeing and skiing from an early age. But the strong influence of their father extended beyond such activities as can be seen by their success in their careers (Simon a doctor and a captain in the army and James a physiotherapist), in their sporting activities (try and keep up with them on a bike!) but especially in their rounded personalities.

Ken was a key influence in the development of British climbing. He provided the BMC volunteer authors with the means by which climbing guide books became the reference point of nearly every weekend for the burgeoning ranks of British climbers. From the late 1960s it was commonplace to search out routes, not from the rock in front of you, but from the guidebook either at home, in the café or in the car on the way to the crag. The guidebook was avidly devoured by British climbers, argued about, ticked, and annotated. Whole areas of the British mountains were opened up to climbers when the BMC or the SMC produced a guide to that area. Without Ken's flair for spotting the market and distributing the books they would never have given so much pleasure to so many people.

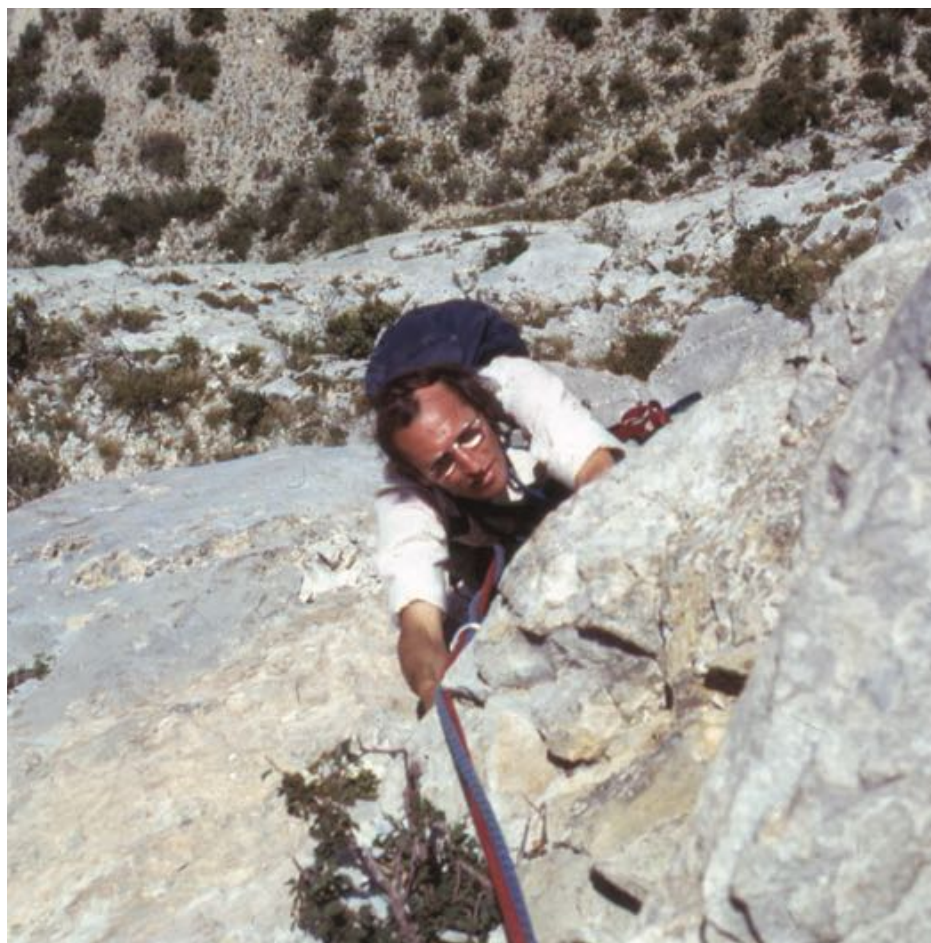
Cordee not only made guidebooks available to whole generations of climbers, but sustained a reputation for fact and accuracy. 'The Trespasser' may have exhibited strong anti-authoritarian tendencies but he, himself, became the authority on British climbing that many would turn to.

In the early 1980s, two Kens, Vickers and Wilson, both trained in architecture, linked up to establish Diadem Publishing. Following the groundbreaking new format classics, Hard Rock and Classic Rock edited by Ken Wilson and published by Granada, Diadem published a stream of books including Classic Walks, Big Walks, Cold Climbs and a series of anthologies and biographies by British climbers. Go into the house of any climber in the country now and you will see several of these masterpieces on the bookshelf. They then sold the business to Hodder and Stoughton. Ken sold Cordee in

2002 and fully retired three years later. He died in May 2007. Ken had a massive impact upon the lives of so many British climbers many of whom he did not personally meet and provided so much wisdom, warmth and entertainment to his Leicester friends.

Miles Hillmann

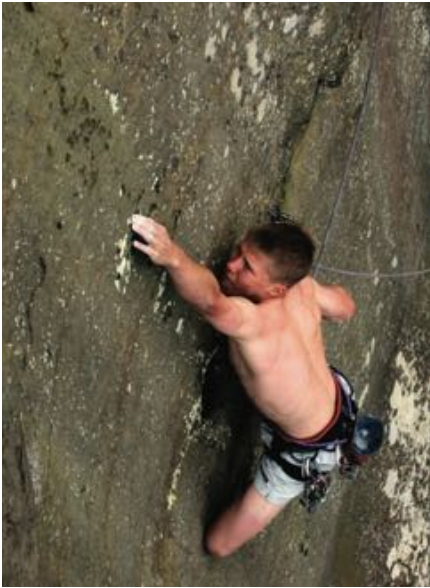
Postscript: From the 1970s onwards Ken and June Vickers extended their generous hospitality to host the regular publications sub-committee meetings which could last from 8pm until on occasions as late as 3am the next morning. June's splendid hot flans with fresh salad were complemented with a pint of local Leicester beer supplied by Ken, always with a big grin on his face. That made the long drives back to London, Sheffield or Manchester so much more bearable.



Ken Vickers climbing in the Vercors in 1977. Photo: Mark Vallance.

Ian Jackson (1989 - 2008)

Member 2008



The news of Ian's tragic accident whilst climbing in the Chamonix Valley came as a tremendous shock to all who knew him. His many friends were left stunned, having thought of him as larger than life with a brilliant climbing career ahead. That he died after a fall abseiling from an insignificant 'poor weather' playground somehow made it all seem even worse and a futile waste of what should have been an outstanding life of climbing achievements. He had seemed to be the stuff of which climbing legends are made, but alas, it was not to be.

Ian began climbing while still at school and after entering the sixth form college in Guisborough he became a member of the Cleveland Mountaineer Club. He had been an extremely keen diver but his interests changed as he matured and climbing became his great passion. On his joining

the Cleveland club at fifteen, he immediately made an impact and won the hearts of its members, with his ever smiling face, and his mature, happy knack of relating to everyone, young and old, as though they were best mates.

Unfortunately, few CC members were able to experience Ian's friendship, for he had become a member of the club only a matter of days before he was killed. He was nineteen years old, nearing the end of his gap year and about to start at Bangor University to study geology. This location had been carefully chosen with the climbing opportunities in mind and the subject highly significant.

Ian was a mountaineer in the true sense of the word in that his interests lay not only on rock nearer home, although this was very important to him, but also in long Scottish winter routes and Alpine ascents of which he was rapidly gaining plenty of experience, some of it hair raising. He was out in Chamonix for the second time, having on an earlier occasion experienced the Dolomites in very poor weather and then having had a holiday in the Mont Blanc area, soloing Mont Blanc itself and doing the Frendo Spur. These had fired him up for another season and on alighting from the bus in Chamonix, he was so excited at being back that, unable to wait for his friends to arrive, he immediately went up and soloed the Cordier Pillar. This drive and vitality was typical of Ian's infectious enthusiasm for climbing and the mountains, which could only inspire others and help to leave a remaining, telling legacy of keen young climbers in his local area.

Ian was also in touch, on line, with many climbers from all over Britain, which mainly came to light when his Blog was filled with scores of concerned and horror-struck

messages from climbers far and wide, as news of the tragedy spread.

Although Ian's life proved to be all too short, he had packed in what many people take decades to achieve and had certainly lived his life meaningfully and to the full. This, of course, is little consolation for his large and close family and for his many friends who will forever remember his cheerful countenance and modest, compelling personality. He is greatly missed.

Jancis Richards

Gwyn Evans writes:

"You want to get out more, spend less time on the climbing wall".

These were Ian's first words to me in the lounge of the Salving House. Earlier that day he had hitched up to Honister to meet a guy he only knew by way of an email and they had then gone over to Gable to do Engineers' Slabs. We saw them later in the day despatching Prana with aplomb, after they had walked back in a bitter wind from Gable.

Later that evening there was plenty of craic and Ian was soaking up the history and stories of days gone by as avidly as he had been reading the guidebooks earlier.

My impression of him was as a very pleasant and unassuming lad who was displaying those traits which we thought had disappeared with the advent of climbing walls and sport climbing; climb with someone you hardly know, get out in all weathers, get up the routes; the ideal CC member in fact! It's a shame that his membership was so short and for my part that I only met him that one time.

Sir Kenneth Berrill

(1920 – 2009) Joined 1946 – Hon Mem 1969



Ken Berrill was born in Essex, attended a state school and won a scholarship to train as a geography teacher at University College London. He soon switched disciplines to economics however, and transferred to LSE, graduating in 1941. After this he saw war service with REME then, in 1946, he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge to carry out research into economic history. At this time he joined the Climbers' Club and remained

a member until his death in April 2009. He stayed in Cambridge in various roles, as researcher, lecturer and College Bursar, until leaving for London in 1967.

Whilst at Cambridge his career as an economics lecturer had led him into public life as an economics adviser to several foreign governments. In London he became a senior mandarin in Whitehall, working for three successive Prime Ministers – Wilson, Callaghan and Thatcher. During this time, he set up and chaired the first financial regulatory body – the Securities and Investments Board. This side of his life has been well documented in obituaries in all the broadsheet newspapers, but with little mention of his interests in climbing, mountaineering and skiing. I am indebted to Brian Blake and John Cook for providing some glimpses of these aspects, particularly at Cambridge where he became President of the CUMC in 1947.

His first visit to Cloggy was with a CUMC party in 1946 – undaunted by the crag, he attempted to lead Birthday Crack, still a respectable HVS 5a, but was forced to retreat. The full party of ten then made an ascent of Longland's Climb – with, as Mike Ball wrote in a CC Journal, 'three leaders, no pegs, no nuts, just one or two slings and nowhere to put them'. By September 1947, he had extended his climbing to the Alps and led a team of four Cambridge students in an attempt on the east ridge of the Weisshorn in poor conditions. He commented in the CUMC Journal that 'the morale of the party was not high' as they encountered the recent heavy fall of snow, but nonetheless they reached the summit snow ridge before deciding to retreat – a decision taken after a team vote. The dissenting voice was Berrill's and he closes his account by asking "Well, were we right?" – a question that will be familiar to many after taking such a 'mountaineering decision' to turn back. In August 1948 the CUMC Alpine Meet was held in 'perhaps the worst weather of an unusually bad season' and the only peak of any note that was ascended was the Aletschhorn, in mist and appallingly soft snow – the leader of the team was, of course, Ken Berrill.

In March 1949 John Cook organised a CUMC ski/ski mountaineering trip to the Dauphiné, mainly for instruction. However, a few members, including Berrill, Cook and Brasher, were selected by the chief guide for a ski attempt on the Rateau, but this was thwarted by bad weather. Ken Berrill enjoyed the descent in deep snow from the high point more than any of the party – a few days later, he was entered by their guide into the local downhill championship! Remarkably, he managed to finish the course and did not come last, in spite of 'a particularly unorthodox turn' after which he was nearly carried off by the spectators who thought he must have broken at least one limb! He maintained his love of skiing all his life.

At Cambridge he became friendly with a Swiss research student called Alfred Tissières (who went on to become a distinguished scientist in molecular biology, working on the unravelling of DNA structure). In 1948, they decided that they should visit the Himalaya 'just for a holiday, a reconnaissance' – by 1950 this had become 'the Anglo-Swiss Himalayan Expedition' as Tissières had recruited two other Swiss alpinists to join them in India. The title was intended to facilitate the granting of permits rather than to indicate any formal status – they still felt it was just a reconnaissance by a group of friends. After many changes in plan, they finally opted to 'take a look at' a peak called Abi Gamin, 7355 metres, in Uttarakhand – second only in height to Kamet in that region, and at that time still unclimbed. After struggles with transport and inadequate maps, the team established itself on the NE Ridge, although Berrill was suffering with a stomach

illness which dogged him throughout the trip – losing him two stones in weight. In spite of this handicap, he made it to the summit plateau, but not quite to the summit. His Swiss companions patiently assisted Berrill as far as he could go, then went on to complete the successful ascent, collecting Berrill on their way down. Although he was no doubt mortified by not achieving the objective himself, he thoroughly enjoyed the trip, commenting, "I did not begrudge my lost two stones a bit. They were well worth it." He made several other Himalayan trips in the early fifties, but these do not seem to have been recorded.

Ken Berrill has been described as 'an inveterate committee man' and his abilities as such were well used by the CC. He became Meets Secretary in 1948, Assistant Secretary in 1949, and then served as Secretary from 1950 to 1953. He remained on the Committee until 1957 and, following a difficult financial time for the club, he was called back from 'retirement' in 1960 to serve a year as Treasurer, putting the Club's financial affairs back into good order. Not many years after this, he was appointed Chief Economic Advisor to Her Majesty's Treasury – undoubtedly a first for any CC Treasurer!

He was made an Honorary Member of the CC in 1969 and maintained his love of the outdoors through skiing and sailing throughout his life. He is survived by his third wife, Jane, and his three children.

David Medcalf
CC Honorary Archivist

Professor John Noel Buxton (1933 - 2009) Member 1954 - 2009

John Buxton joined the Climbers' Club in 1954 when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge, though his climbing started much earlier – on Ilkley crags at the age of 9 or 10, when his family lived in Shipley.

He was educated at Bradford Grammar School before going up to Trinity College, Cambridge to study mathematics with physics. His schoolboy climbing was encouraged by meeting Wilfrid Noyce, though the circumstances are unclear as Noyce did not teach in Bradford.

At Cambridge he was disappointed to find that a skin condition made climbing in cold or icy conditions impossible, thus preventing him from joining in the full range of CUMC activities. However, his rock climbing prospered and he took part in several first ascents in North Wales.

He still climbed occasionally until about twenty years ago when he was badly injured as a passenger in a road accident outside his house – an incident quoted in Parliament to press for increased safety measures on the A140 in Suffolk. His last climb was with his eldest son.

John's distinguished academic, industrial and government career has well documented in his Guardian obituary which can be seen at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/nov/12/john-buxton-obituary>.

As a computer scientist he was a leading light in the development of several

software languages, including IBM's CSL, and he became the founding Professor of Computer Science at Warwick University and later at King's College, London.

Outside academia, he worked for the US Government creating software for the Pentagon and later served the British Government as a senior scientific civil servant in the Department of Trade and Industry. No doubt as a result of these experiences he became interested in inter-organisation 'politics', devising what is still called the Buxton Index linking the different 'planning horizons' of organisations to the likelihood of successful negotiations between them.

John married Moira in 1958 and is survived by her and their four children. He died, at the age of 75, in November 2009.

David Medcalf

Dave Elmore - Member 1984 - 2009



Dave Elmore on the Needle, Lundy

Dave strode across the grassy field over towards Rheinstor rocks at Harborough to where Bruce Andrew and I were climbing. It was a Saturday afternoon in August 1977 and he was wearing his bright climbing clothes that were fashionable at the time, (a style he maintained throughout his life). He was late coming out, having completed a morning surgery as a fairly newly appointed GP in Chesterfield.

We climbed together a few times that summer and again the following year before I went to university when, for a little while, we lost contact. In early 1985 I had a day off work and was climbing the central gully on Mam Tor Derbyshire, frozen up in a hard spell of that winter. Behind me two climbers

were following up and finding their own way. We met up on the summit of Mam Tor, clad in winter clothing there was not much to see of each other.

"Don't I know you?" I asked. Thinking I was one of his patients who didn't recognise him out of context, he started explaining that he was a doctor locally.

"Aren't you Dave, friend of Bruce?" I asked again.

At once, our friendship struck up again. From then on I climbed regularly with Dave, enjoying some of my best climbing. We had trips around many of the main climbing venues in England and Wales. We had a particularly memorable week on Lundy and a great time staying at Bosigran for one of the Climbers' Club family meets organized by Sally Westmacott.

Soon after that, I got married and my wife and I moved down to Derbyshire to pursue our medical careers and our climbing, specifically choosing Chesterfield in which to settle, thanks to friends such as Dave who already lived there.

Around that time, Dave was climbing on a beach in Cornwall while his family enjoyed the sand. Thinking the outcrop was a little high to solo, he fixed an abseil rope around a chock stone. Unfortunately as he abseiled off, out popped the chock leaving him a 25-foot fall to the ground, breaking both his ankles and fracturing his back. It took him quite some time before his injuries improved; eventually he had to have further surgery to one foot to fuse the joints. Once this was done, he was back climbing with all the vigour and enthusiasm that he had always enjoyed.

He had a great ability to engage with people of all ages; he had introduced me to older members of the Climbers' Club such as Mike Ball and was much loved by younger climbers.

He had taught his daughters to climb and, years later, was to climb with me and my own children. He was always at the heart of bringing a group of friends together to climb every Thursday. Even if one of us drifted away for a little while due to other commitments or injuries, Dave was always there and always keen to get us back to go climbing. Occasionally on winter's evenings we would suggest a night walk, but we knew that Dave was always keen to get back on the climbing wall.

We did enjoy some great nights out in the winter carrying food and drink to a small bothy in the Peak District. On one such clear night there was a hard cold frost; we saw lights in the sky. At first we thought that it must be some concert with great big lights and lasers, as we watched, the colours changed and glowed quite high in the sky; we knew that this was the Northern Lights. Later we checked on the Internet and this was a rare occasion when it could be seen so far south. None of our friends or family at home saw it; we knew we had been lucky to be out there at the right place at the right time.

Through his 50s he still wanted to get better at climbing. He would head off on courses to the Mediterranean to learn how to fall off with confidence on bolted routes. He started running again steadily at his own pace, and started cycling. He loved fitness and was fortunate to maintain this. He had great determination to get over injuries and return to activity.

Dave has always loved time with his wife and family. Once he had retired it gave him more time to spend with his wife Rosie, his daughters Helen and Jessica and their husbands and their children. Both his daughters' families have enjoyed times together, and he and Rosie have always loved the times spent regularly with grandchildren both at home and on holidays.

Sadly, in 2009, Dave had an accident on his bicycle, sustaining a head injury from which he later died.

He has been so central to the enjoyment that so many people have derived from climbing and such a good friend so many of us. His loss has touched us all deeply, and although Dave was always central to our group of friends, we meet up now with more passion and commitment to see each other and Dave's family, buoyed up by the memory of how special Dave was to us.

Tom Humphries

Peter Hunt (1932 – 2009) Member 1993 - 2009

I was sitting at a drawing board/bored in a London office when a voice at my shoulder said, "Hello, I'm Peter Hunt, somebody told me you are a climber". This was in the early Seventies and was the beginning of a thirty-five year climbing partnership.

After the usual "Have you done...?. What a great route..." conversation an expedition to Harrisons Rocks was proposed, planned, executed and followed over the years by climbing in most areas of the U.K. and in later years Spain. Peter had begun climbing during his National Service, and being posted to Cyprus had the Turkish mountains as his local climbing area. His association with and love of mountains lasted for more than 55 years.

Over the years that I climbed with him his enthusiasm did not diminish and was one of his outstanding characteristics together with spontaneity and reliability. A good example of his spontaneity occurred on my first visit to Lundy. Peter had spent a week on the island the previous year and insisted that, as soon as we arrived in the early afternoon and had dumped our gear, we were to go to climb the Devil's Slide. When we had topped out and had discussed at length the quality of the route, we realised that dusk was gathering. Gear was quickly packed and we set off back to the Barn. Halfway there, with the light fading, we met the 'rescue party'. Peter was never certain if the concern on the faces of our friends was for our safety, or for precious time lost in the Marisco Tavern.

Whilst maintaining a healthy work/life balance Peter took his career as a civil engineer very seriously. A somewhat jaundiced summary of his career progression runs as follows: started with the dizzy heights of bridge design with the consultant Freeman Fox; came down to earth with highway and infrastructure design with the Greater London Council; finished up in sewage with Thames Water. As we worked for the same employers for a number of years I was well acquainted with his professional skills and knowledge. One of the most satisfying periods of our working together was a year in which I supervised the construction of a bridge over the Hertford Union Canal for which Peter was the senior design engineer. His joining Thames Water followed redundancy from the post of Chief Engineer with a company set up to continue the development of one of London's largest housing sites when the Greater London Council was abolished.

Peter was a serious bird watcher and a skilled photographer who managed to combine these hobbies with some varied and exotic travelling. Annual visits to Norfolk were interspersed with trekking and wildlife watching in Africa, India, the Himalayas, Patagonia and ancient Polish forests. The visits abroad always produced superb photographs and entertaining stories.

Peter was a good example of those many climbers who love the sport and the friends and experiences that it brings, whilst never reaching the top flights of performance. In trying to select highlights of our climbs together I can recollect few epics, and the best memories always seem to be associated with circumstances and events that add to the experience on the rock. These include:

- steaming dry in spring sunshine after being caught in a hailstorm when climbing Byne Crack.
- drinking whisky in a relentless Scottish dusk on the beach outside Dìbidil bothy after traversing the Cuillin of Rhum in perfect conditions.

- following a day climbing on the Gorros, listening to evensong in the Basilica at Montserrat.
- helping friends recover gear left on Norseman after they had been rained off. This amounted to lying in the sun on the opposite side of the zawn instructing the man on the abseil rope: "Down 10 feet"... "Left 4 feet"... "Up 6 feet...sorry".

Inevitably Peter slowed down physically in later years, but his mercurial temperament and enthusiasm remained. I last climbed with him in March 2009 at the Castle climbing wall. He was cheerful, very fit for his age, and talking of things we might do. He died in the following September of lymphatic cancer. I and his many friends will miss him greatly.

Barry Dyde

Peter Greenwood (1931 – 2010) Member 1991 - 2010



Although he rarely climbed in Scotland, Peter Greenwood was a highly influential rock climber south of the border who helped to initiate the era of Extreme climbing. He was one of the 'Bradford Lads', a loose association of working-class post-war climbers that also included the educational theorist and philosopher Harold Drasdo.

Greenwood built a reputation for climbing the hardest routes of the day in desperate conditions – but then, in 1956 at the height of his powers, he suddenly retired from the sport and gave away his climbing gear to Don Whillans, who couldn't believe his luck. In his four-year career at the cutting edge, Greenwood put up 28 hard new routes in the Lake District, including classics such as Sword of Damocles on Bowfell and Thirlmere Eliminate on Castle Rock of Triermain.

Initially more interested in ballroom dancing, his initiation into climbing came about through an attempt to impress a girl. When she expressed admiration for another suitor's climbing abilities, Greenwood – despite having never climbed anything harder than a staircase – accompanied his rival to Ilkley quarry. After following him up a few V Diffs, Greenwood soloed a Very Severe that his rival had just top-roped. It isn't known whether this won him the girl, but some of the Bradford Lads were watching, and Greenwood quickly became the leading climber of the group.

He teamed up with fellow Yorkshireman Arthur Dolphin (a candidate, along with John Cunningham of the Creagh Dhu, for best climber in the UK at the time) on several early Extremes such as Hell's Groove on Scafell East Buttress and Sword of Damocles on Bowfell. Greenwood was so infuriated at Dolphin having been overlooked by the 1952 Everest selection committee that on the day the mountain was climbed in 1953 he put up

a route on Thirlmere's Raven Crag and called it Anarchist as a two-fingered gesture to the establishment.

Greenwood was nicknamed Rubber Legs because of his ability to bend into all sorts of contortions, but things did not always go to plan. He once fell 30 metres from the top of Raven Crag in Langdale after slipping on wet snow, being lucky to land in a snowdrift and escape with just a broken arm. Another time, attempting Central Buttress on Scafell in the rain in rubber plimsolls with socks over the top, his foot slipped near the crux flake. He hit a ledge and bounced into space before the rope stopped him just short of the boulders at the foot of the cliff.

Greenwood was among the boldest climbers of the day, but he was also among the luckiest. He was also one of the most quick-tempered. When Joe Brown made the third ascent of Dolphin's route Kipling Groove on Gimmer ('the hardest route in Langdale'), he hammered in a peg below the crux. Greenwood was outraged. The following weekend he made the fourth ascent, spat contemptuously on the Lancastrian Brown's peg, and topped-out to the cheers of Tykes assembled below. The hard-to-impress Whillans greatly admired Greenwood's athleticism and ethical purity. "Pete firmly refused to countenance the presence of pitons on British rock even in their accepted role as protection", he recalled. "On occasions, he would jump for a hold. Brave it may have been, hair-raising it certainly was. Luckily it was never actually disastrous."

Greenwood stopped climbing, however, before it stopped him. One day in 1956, he decided to give it up. "I'm a spur-of-the-moment man," he said. "I was getting married the week after and I thought I'd better concentrate on that, and making some money. Climbing was a dangerous game in those days – lots of friends had been killed. So I went out one morning and told Don I was giving it up and he could have all my gear. He told me I was a bloody idiot. But he took the gear."

In the late 1980s, Aberdonian climber and writer David Craig coaxed Greenwood out of retirement – and he was soon back in the wars, breaking a leg after falling from a route in the rain. Undeterred, he teamed up with Paul Ross to create not just new routes, but to pioneer entirely new crags such as Spout Head Crag near Scafell. "We were never turned back by much, however wet it was," was his explanation for persevering on climbs in appalling conditions. "We'd hitched up all that way, so we had to have something to show for the hours and hours on the road."

Colin Wells

Tribute to Mrs Jo Briggs (1916 - 2007) Non-member



Chris and Jo Briggs with daughter Jane and son-in-law Brian

The CC is indebted to the Pen y Gwryd Hotel, inasmuch as the forming of a 'Climbing Club' was proposed there at a dinner in December 1897. The first President, C E Matthews, was elected at that meeting and the Climbers' Club was inaugurated in London a few months later on 28th April 1898.

During the next fifty years landlords came and went, including Arthur Lockwood, of Lockwood's Chimney fame, but, no doubt, the CC members still stayed at and drank at this most convenient hostelry, a continuity only broken by the Second World War when the pub was used to house an evacuated Liverpool school.

By 1947 the place was run down and unloved and when Lockwood put it up for auction, Christopher and Jo Briggs acquired the PyG and began the daunting task of resurrection.

They had never owned a hotel or any other business before, and Jo later admitted that she believed that all the mine host's wife had to do 'was to arrange the flowers and discuss with the cook the day's menu'.

This 31 year old elegant young lady, raised in Newfoundland of English parents and sent back to England to be 'educated' in the mid-1930s, suddenly found herself, together with a six-year-old daughter, and a 'chemist' husband, who was equally devoid of hotelier skills, owning a broken-down hotel, in an era of rationing, quotas, staff and supply shortages, all in a foreign country. And, there was no cook to instruct, just one middle aged maid called Blodwyn!

The only factor that Jo Briggs found that was positive about this fraught situation was that this ivy-clad building had a 'history', and what a history. It made a good claim to be the home of British Rock Climbing.

The CC, at her suggestion, held its Committee Meetings in Mrs Briggs' sitting room and abandoned the Pen-y-Pass and Cobden's hotels for their Christmas Dinners, returning to their spiritual home.

Jo capitalized on this historical asset. She was a 'net-worker' par excellence long before the term was in common parlance. She spent the next 35 years of her life cultivating friendships not only with the elite of the climbing fraternity but also with the great and good of Caernarvonshire society. She sent her daughter, to Penrhos School for Girls in Colwyn Bay, and young Jane brought home her school friends. Their influential parents were soon visiting the PyG and were enrolled on Jo's own social register.

Witness to her charm and net-working ability, is that her husband Chris leader of the local Mountain Rescue Team based on the Hotel and with not much else on his CV - became the High Sheriff of Caernarvonshire. No mean feat for a non-Welsh speaking, taciturn Yorkshireman.

The smoke-room at PyG was her 'salon' inhabited by masters of the well turned phrase and bon-mots. These doyens of conversation, such as David Cox, Kevin Fitzgerald, Jack Longland, Emlyn Jones, Dick Viney, Wynford Vaughan Thomas, Cliff Morgan and Hugh Weldon graced her after-dinner soirees. During the period of the Llangollen International Eisteddfod it would seem that half the BBC was in her smoke-room.

She had 'style'. Where she got it from is hard to say. She certainly didn't bring it from Newfoundland, or get it from the Pitman's Secretarial College she attended, or from her Manchester based husband, Chris, or his Prestwich Rugby Club. But it was there in 'spades' - chilled dry sherry at precisely 12.30 and 6.30 in slim glasses. And, an annual round of the Henley Regatta, the England-Wales Rugby match, skiing in Kitzbuhel, and the Glyndebourne Opera - when on return she could reel off the names of all the celebrities' that were picnicking there, but had more difficulty remembering what she had heard on the stage.

'Everest' was the pinnacle of her life and the life of the PyG. The symbiotic relationship with the Everest Team and the hotel was real enough but sustained over many years of Re-unions by Jo's hard unremitting attention to the cultivation of friendships.

Yes, she was a snob but she had a wonderful talent for making even a humble young climber who had come to her attention feel part of some grand design in the annals of her historic home. After all, he could be the next Joe Brown?

I remember as a young man standing with Chris Brasher in the lobby of the PyG and being fulsomely introduced by Jo to that Grand Old Man of British Mountaineering, Geoffrey Winthrop Young. I read later in one of his writings that he recalls being introduced to Brasher and Disley. He wrote 'they seemed nice enough young lads'. I can't recall if Jo was mentioned in connection with his visit? Bound to have been!

The Queen's telegram eluded her and she died in her fine apartment overlooking the Menai Straits and Snowdonia at the age of 91 in the late Spring of 2007.

John Disley - CC Committee 1955-59

John Evans - Non-member



John Evans was not a member of the CC, but was well known on the Welsh climbing scene and served climbers for over 35 years as a member of Ogwen Valley MRT. He tragically died in the Llanberis pass on 28th April 2009 while descending Clogwyn y Grochan after completing a climb, Nea, with his partner Lin. This tribute is provided by the MRT.

John was originally from Wrexham. There he joined The Scouts and through this organisation he was introduced to the mountains. Whilst staying at Hafod, the Scout hut in the Ogwen Valley, he was introduced to mountain rescue. He became a full member of Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation in May 1973. Through this organisation he was introduced to the USAF PJs (airborne rescue troops trained to be dropped behind enemy lines to extract downed aircrew). These PJs, who were based in Woodbridge, Suffolk, used Snowdonia for training and became good friends of the Team.

John became attracted to the PJs' life and in the early 1980s he left Wales for the USA to join the USAF and qualified as a PJ. He travelled the world with them over the next 12 years or so. Through the PJs he was introduced to the big mountains of Alaska.

Leaving the USAF in the mid-1990s he started as a mountain guide in the Alaskan mountains. Through this John was introduced to the Denali National Park Service and high altitude mountain rescue on Denali (Mount McKinley) and the surrounding ranges.

John would spend 6 months of the year in Alaska, much of it at the Denali high altitude camp at 14,000 feet. During the other half of the year he would return to his home in Capel Curig.

John was never at home for long. He instructed in Mountain Rescue technical rope work, Wilderness First Aid and Search Management, which not only took him around Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland, but as far afield as South Africa and Hong Kong.

John leaves two children, his son David (20 yrs) and daughter Rhiannon (17 yrs). He loved taking them on mountain adventures from a young age.

John was a true professional in his fields, a real stalwart and the man to have with you when the going got tough on the mountains. He will be missed by all those who knew him. It is a great tragedy that the man who did so much to assist those in trouble in the mountains for 36 years should lose his life at such an early age and on the mountains he loved.

David Medcalf

George Watkins (1926 – 2008) Non-member



After a short final fight against cancer, George died at the age of 82, on the 22nd September 2008 in the St. John's Hospice, Lancaster. Typical of his generation he was stoical to the end and philosophically said, "I've done everything I wanted to".

Brought up in the small working class community of Haydock, near St. Helens he was taken by his father to watch St. Helens Rugby League Club during the time that the legendary ex-Wigan and Great Britain star Jim Sullivan coached the club.

As Head of English at Lancaster Grammar School, we all benefited from his ability to create humorous and clever prose for many situations. There were also occasions when he had to clarify the meaning of a particularly long and intellectual word!

His enthusiastic Alpinism took him to the Alps regularly with friends and last year he attended the 150th Anniversary of the AC in Zermatt.

Particularly keen on introducing young people to the hills, he ensured that they were given sound and safe training in mountain craft. He was also a rowing coach.

Anyone spending an evening in a hut with George would benefit from his knowledge and generous supply of whisky.

George was a member of the Alpine Club, the ABMSAC and the Fell and Rock in the latter of which he held several posts culminating in President between 2002 and 2004. It was during this Presidency that he attended the CC dinner in 2003 at the Maynard Arms when the guest speaker Simon Yates, failed to appear and, as many of you will remember, George stood in for him at the last minute.

During one of his FRCC Presidential speeches he advised the CC representative that 'custodian' (the CC description of Hut 'Manager') was the Latin for 'Warden' (the FRCC description), thus emphasising the common ground and his intellectual capacity.

One of life's true gentlemen, George, listened and gave wise counsel when asked. He will be missed by many and it was a privilege to have known him.

Eileen Clark

Officers of The Club 2008 -2010 (compiled by Ian Smith August 23, 2010)

President	Smiler Cuthbertson [08-10] Fiona Sanders [10-]
Vice-Presidents	Pete Finklaire [08-09] Fiona Sanders [08-10] Laetitia Sterling [08-10] Steve Andrews [09-] Roger Bennion [10-]
Hon Secretary	Roy Lemmon [08-]
Hon Treasurer	David Lanceley [08-]
Assistant Treasurer Subscriptions	Steve Andrews [08-09]
Hon Membership Secretary	Andy Bullock [08-]
Hon Meets Secretary	Trevor Langhorne [08-09] Steve Jenkins [09-]
PSC Representative	Mark Vallance [08-09] Peter Sterling [09-]
HMSC Representative	Dave Viggers [08-10] Andy Prickett [10-]
Committee Members	Chris Astill [08-09] Maggie Bass [08-] Ian Gray [08-09] Kim Parry [08-10] Astrid Saxby [08-] Kevin Thomas [08-10] Gerry Martyn [08-] Iain Peters [08-10] Tony Scott [09-] Trevor Langhorne [09-] Bernard Newman [10-] Philippa Watson [10-] Rob Seymour [10-] Brian Bigger [10-]

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Hon Archivist	Chris Simpkins [08-09] David Medcalf [09-]
Hut Bookings Secretary	John Trythall [08-10] Chris Gilbert [10-]
Website Manager	Tony Scott [08-]
Librarian	Peter Spalton [09-]
Newsletter Editor	Iain Peters [08-10]
Journal Editor	Iain Peters [08-10] Tim Oliver [10-]

Publications Sub-Committee

(Chairs) Mark Vallance [08-09] Peter Sterling [09-10] (Secretaries) Gwyn Evans [08-09] Martin Kocsis [09] John Willson [10-] (Guidebook Business Managers) Bob Moulton [08-09] Richard Wheeldon [09-] (Members) John Willson [08-] Ian Smith [08-] Simon Cardy [08-] Nigel Coe [08-09] Andy Newton [08-09] Pete Finklaire [08-09] Gwyn Evans [09-10] Steve Taylor [09-] Don Sargeant [09-].

Hut Management Sub-Committee

(Chairs) Dave Viggers [08-10] Andy Prickett [10] (Huts Financial Official) Daphne Pritchard [08-] David Lanceley [08-] Laetitia Sterling [08-10] (Development Manager) Graham Townsend [10-] (Maintenance Co-Ordinator) Keith Sanders [10-] (Finance Secretary) Trevor Langhorne [10-] (Hut Maintenance Feedback) Neil Hewertson [10-] All Custodians may attend.

Hut Custodians

(R W Lloyd Ynys Ettws) Louise Robertson [08-09] Bob Llewellyn [09-] (Cwm Glas Mawr) Steve Andrews [08-09] Peter Anderson [09-] (Helyg) Norman Clacher [08-09] Ruth Pybus [09-10] Mike Yates [10-] (R O Downes) Chris Astill [08-09] Rod Hewing [10-] Dennis Ibbotson [10-] (Count House) John Atherton [08-] Rob Seymour [10-] (May Cottage) Dave Reaney [08-] (Riasg) Ed Grindley [08-10] Steve Abbott [10-] (Grange Old School) Anna Blackburn [09-10] Roger Withers [10-].

Reviews

Jim Puttrell: Pioneer Climber & Cave Explorer

J. P. Craddock

Matador 2009. £19.95

Sadly for us, Jim Puttrell, founder member of the CC, came to prefer caving. So hanging over this meticulous biography, more than two thirds of which is about Puttrell's cave explorations, is a question of what might have been for British climbing history. Maybe this is the wrong attitude to bring to an era when the early clubs were often caving and climbing clubs. Maybe the narrowing of factions, even within climbing now (trad, sport, alpine, mixed, bouldering, headpointing and bolthanging), betrays our loss in terms of adventure and a variety of physical engagements with rock. Certainly Puttrell was renowned for his feats of climbing overhanging rock in the caverns underground, perhaps most notably his climbing what he called 'The Mighty Dome' above the 'Bottomless Pit' in Speedwell Cavern in 1921.

For us the Sheffield climber, born to inherit a firm of painters and decorators, is a pioneer in the Peak of The Prow Rock at Wharncliffe in 1885 and at the same crag in 1888 the Severe (4a) Puttrell's Progress, plus in 1890 Stonnis Crack (HS 4b) at Black Rocks and in July of that year seven routes at Kinder Downfall, at Cratcliffe in 1901 the VS (4c) Hermitage Crack and between 1910 and 1913 nine routes at Stanage including Black Hawk Slit (HS 4a).

Climbing with the Abraham brothers he was on the first ascents of Keswick Brothers' Climb (S) on Scafell in 1897, in Scotland on Crowberry Ridge Direct (S) in 1900 and in Wales on Amphitheatre Buttress (VD) in 1905.

But in the summer of 1911 Puttrell declined an invitation from the Abraham Brothers to visit the Alps, having already committed to a caving trip to the Mitchelstown Caves in Ireland, and effectively ended his new routing career above ground. He had been with the brothers to the Alps in 1902 (Eiger, Monch, Jungfrau) and in 1904 when he pushed on with the guide Christian Josse junior to the summit of the Fiescherhorn whilst the brothers were engaged in photography. In 1913 he climbed 'around La Berarde' with the brothers, but their main purpose was taking the photographs from which they earned their living.

When Eric Byne formed the Sheffield Climbing Cub in 1933 Puttrell was their first President, as he was to many climbing, wayfaring and caving clubs throughout his life. Supporting the next generation in this way was typical of his generous personality, which emerges from the unstinting detail of this book as one of kindness and loyalty, underpinned by courage and determination. It is probable that Puttrell's contribution to British caving was greater than to climbing and certainly he became more of an authority in this field of exploration. He gave twenty-one talks for the BBC between 1926 and 1931, mostly on cave exploration in the Peak, reflecting on his time at the forefront of pushing what was known about seemingly every hole in Derbyshire and beyond. This biography is a labour of love and admiration, liberally illustrated, beautifully bound and usefully referenced for the next generation of Puttrell admirers.

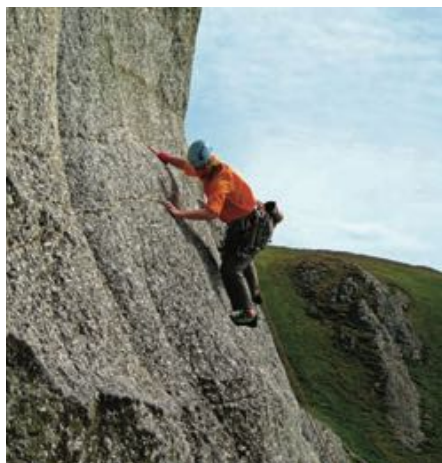
[Perhaps someone could report in the journal on a Puttrell first ascent on Arran which he called 'Gully 3' and is now 'The Chimney'; Beinn Nuis, (VS) climbed with Ernest Baker and Lehmann Oppenheimer on 18 August 1901. Is the spirit of Puttrell still discernable there? It is on the 110 year-old three Trident routes at Harborough Rocks, although I still can't work out how he thrutched (maybe that's the technical mistake) up Harborough Crack (HS 4c). It must have been those nailed boots.]

TerryG ifford

Note: Only 200 copies were produced

Lundy

Paul Harrison
The Climbers' Club 2008



Having visited Lundy over a dozen times in the last 20 years, it was with great interest that I looked forward to the new guide. Would it do this magnificent island and its climbing justice?

Wow! Doesn't it just. It has to be one of the best climbing guides that the Climbers' Club has yet produced. Great photographs, great descriptions, great work (as usual) by Paul Harrison with superb maps and photodiagrams by Simon Cardy and an excellent chronology (history) by Neil Dickson.

It has all the usual features you expect from a CC guide and don't get or expect with the various non-definitive guidebook producers. As well as the excellent and detailed chronology it has sections introducing the Island and Island life, geology, fauna and flora; all this and a detailed 1:15,000 map that is the finest to the climbing areas of Lundy yet produced. This map is credited with permission from OS, but was redrawn by Simon Cardy and appears to have been printed by Harvey to their usual high standard. It should help to minimise those frustrating trogs down interminable slopes only to find that you are in the wrong place!

Many of the photographs for the photodiagrams were taken from a boat and some of the action shots too; how lucky was Simon to get the shot of 'unknown' climbers on Redspeak!

An interesting innovation is the use of a little green flower symbol indicating that a route might need re-cleaning to be climbed at its given grade. Many of such routes are still given stars and there is a plea in the guide for any help with cleaning to while away a bad day (or just on the abseil down I suppose).

Also new is a separate short section on Deep Water Soloing, although jumping/falling into the usual Atlantic swell anywhere along the West coast would hardly appear, to this writer at least, to be a favoured means of escape!

Some of the route descriptions are a little flowery, but always literate and

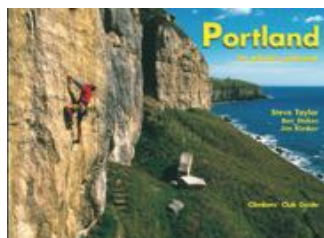
interesting. It is good to see more being made of the East coast routes, which have been under-climbed in the past and can be really useful when a gale is blowing from the West.

It is hard to find fault with this guide: all in all a great effort by Paul Harrison and the rest of the production team.

Al Evans

Portland

Steve Taylor
The Climbers' Club 2008



The long awaited Climbers' Club (CC) Portland guide is a colourful, modern book rammed full of photo topos and action shots. It contains all of the bolted, traditional and deep water solo routes that the Portland and Lulworth areas have to offer, along with comprehensive bouldering information, an interesting introduction and historical section. It will undoubtedly sell well. As well as adopting full colour and topos the CC has opted for a 'landscape' format for the book. On first impressions this seems like a good thing, providing lots of space for big topos. In practice I'm not convinced about how durable the book will be. It's a bit flaccid and lacking in spine - I've already managed to put a crease down my cover just checking the guide for this review. This is partly due to a snazzy folded cover

(no doubt a cunning plan to provide a book mark - top tip: cut it off and use it as a real book mark!) but I think maybe a failing of such a wide book. The photos provide a good idea of what climbing in the area is like. Some are really good and some are only average, but there are lots of them. The photo topos are clear although I've had a report of one line being slightly wrong (on the first crag visited during a 'road test') - I guess a potential problem with having large topos and thin lines is that the margin for error is slim. A smaller topo could in many ways be beneficial particularly when the majority of the routes are well delineated by the bolt lines and have full descriptions in the text. Smaller topos could have made for a more compact, lighter and possibly harder-wearing book

Small is, after all, beautiful and saves paper! Compared to the old CC Portland Guide this is an incredible book and a big step in the right direction for the CC. The 'which is best' comparison with the Rockfax guide is tricky. I personally prefer the look and size of the Rockfax, but taking a less subjective viewpoint, the Rockfax Dorset guide covers arguably the best of Portland, Lulworth, Swanage and Devon sport climbing for the same price - providing much better value and an ample selection for the average climber. The CC guide is comprehensive to the areas it does cover which will no doubt be of appeal to the locals and those who want to sample the esoteric delights of Portland traditional climbing (i.e. the chossy-looking corners between the quality sport routes!). So to summarise, the new CC guide is good. In my opinion its main failing is not the actual guide but the choice of content and this is something the CC may need to think

about in an increasingly competitive market. I personally think a more selective choice of routes and smaller guide could be preferable, putting the esoteric routes on the internet as downloadable supplements.

Dave Henderson

Llanberis

The Climbers' Club 2009

By Iwan Arfon Jones

Editor: Bob Moulton

A few years ago I was in the Pass bouldering on the Cromlech boulders with my 8-year old daughter when I was approached by a group of young climbers. "Can you tell us which is Cenotaph Corner?" one of them said. I gestured toward the Cromlech with my thumb, "It's the big open book corner in the centre of the cliff." "Told you so!" said my questioner to another lad. He replied rather sheepishly, "I thought it would be bigger than that." I found this rather baffling and could only reply, "It seemed big enough to me when I stood beneath it tying on at the sharp end."

How I envied these lads who had a lifetime of climbing before them. If they had the desire they could make 'The Pass' their oyster, as it had once felt to have been mine. My ascent of 'The Corner' was in the early Sixties, well over twenty years before those lads were born when the route still had a big kudos and although I must have read the current guide back then, the most crucial fragment of information I obtained was from a friend in a pub who knew someone who had done it who said that "it wasn't too bad." And that was enough.

I didn't mind the limited information available at the time, it suited my approach to climbing and indeed to life itself. These days I like as much information as I can get as if the information alone could somehow get me up my aspirational routes (which it doesn't) but then at least I have the consolation that if I fail, I'm failing on the right route and not some harder thing that I feel an ambiguous guide had mistakenly sent me up. This brings me nicely to the new Llanberis guide. What a step change the new guide seems to be, even compared to the last one, a mere 6 years ago. There is a refreshing explosion of colour on the maps, on the photo-topos and even on the contents page. The amount of illustrative and textural information in the guide is, quite frankly, astounding. There are a number of innovations to clearly aid location and description of the hundreds of routes and problems. I just want to pick out a few that for me stand out.

The colour location maps and crag and climb location photo diagrams by Don Sargeant are clear concise and stylish. Indeed Don's contribution to the modern look and feel of this guide is immeasurable. In my opinion it stands comparison with any climbing guide in the world. The book is packed with clear information about roped climbing and bouldering on every scrap of climbable rock in the Pass and gives newcomers and old hands like myself so much to go for. There are action shots a-plenty, most of them of a very high quality – an essential inspirational ingredient (the stunning shot of Super-direct on The Mot is a fine example, it just makes me want to get out there and repeat it a.s.a.p.). A minor but interesting innovation is 'the little green cartouches', half a dozen green boxes of environmental information scattered randomly throughout the guide about everything

from climate change and overgrazing to scree. My favourite however, is the chart on material decomposition times. Apparently, filtered cigarettes take up to two years to decompose while unfiltered fags only take three months. The conclusion is obvious, to avoid unsightly stances climbers should be encouraged to smoke only unfiltered cigarettes – they may die younger but at least the mountains will be spick and span!

To return to reality, this is an excellent guide and the Club should be justly proud of it. If I have one small niggle it is that the page size is bigger than the last guide and while I understand that this was one of the changes necessary to squeeze in even more information and to make maps and photo-diagrams more legible, it also makes carrying it up multi-pitch climbs that much more of a bind. I guess I shall just have to shell out on another pair of strides with bigger pockets or write out the description of my chosen climb on the back of my packet of unfiltered ciggies!

Brian Wilkinson

GOGARTH NORTH

In actual fact the previous CC Gogarth guide was brilliant! Sadly allowed to go almost 20 years out of date. It is interesting but almost unbelievable that the CC has produced two new (excellent) guides to Lundy since the 1990 guide to Gogarth (despite my rants at several AGMs).

It, like any pure sea cliff area, is a difficult area to deal with because in many areas you cannot go to the bottom of routes and pick out the lines from below. Another problem is that the guide-writers may take their local knowledge gained

over years for granted; all these factors have to be taken into account.

The two latest sea cliff guides are cases in point. The CC's excellent new Lundy guide, reviewed elsewhere, comes off brilliantly in this respect and the latest, by Ground Up, to 'Gogarth North' (no longer by the CC) has just come out.

So how does it square up? Well despite being so out of date the 1990 CC guide is a hard act to follow and the authors will have drawn on this heavily, so does this come off?

Well in a word or two, it does the job admirably, it compares very well. It's like reading the CC guide in a more modern version with reputedly over 300 new routes over the area which is now split into two guides, Gogarth North and the eagerly awaited companion, Gogarth South covering the South Stack area among other crags, which will reputedly come out in 2009. What higher praise can be given?

A few descriptions are sorted out for the good and many old routes have the original now unnecessary pegs cleansed from the text. The problem of finding routes on sea cliffs is well tackled and the photo topos are excellent, though the usual problem with sea cliffs occurs on the Main Cliff, you can't step back and align the topo to the route!

As you would expect in a modern guide the photographs are excellent and do maybe just enough to convey to the Gogarth virgin what climbing there is all about.

Maintaining the Gogarth tradition the gradings seem tough but fair in my limited experience. Not surprisingly most of the new routes are in the higher grades (but not all) so will not get the benefit of my patronage. It was interesting looking at the topos just how many large areas of rock between the routes have reasonable

looking lines. It may spark off another new route gold rush perhaps?

The history by Martin Crook is excellent, comprehensive but concise with just enough anecdotes to convey the sense of each period of exploration; nice to see a few historical photographs included too. Nice also to see the early guides featured.

All in all Ground Up authors are to be complemented on an excellent guide which is strangely like a traditional CC guide. Could the CC have done it better, I doubt it, but the real point is, lamentably they didn't and Ground Up has stepped in with an excellent guide that was sorely needed, I hope that the Gogarth South guide is as good. Good luck to them.

Al Evans

Muir and More

John Muir, his life and walks

Ronald Turnbull

Millrace 2008. £14.95

This book had me laughing out loud more than once. To begin a review in this way is risky because this may not be the case for you. In fact, it might guarantee that this will not be the case for you. So let me just say that this is not a po-faced guide to the John Muir Way (45 miles from Dunbar to Fisherrow) and the John Muir Trail (210 miles from Yosemite Valley to Mount Whitney), but a highly idiosyncratic account of walking both in the same season. If you've not come across the writing of Ronald Turnbull yet you've some entertaining and informative catching up to do. My favourite is *The Book of the Bivi* (Cicerone, 2001) – 'A bivibag isn't simply an extra bit of kit ... it rearranges the co-ordinates of space and

time and allows us to wriggle through the wormholes into a different universe'. His 'biography' of Ben Macdui, *The Life and Times of the Black Pig* (Millrace, 2007) and of Great Gable, *The Riddle of Sphinx Rock* (Millrace, 2005) are gems of a genre he has invented, whilst his *Granite and Grit: A walker's guide to the geology of British Mountains* (Frances Lincoln, 2009) must be the most accessible introduction to geology ever published. It turns out that mountain accident blackspots (e.g. the true summit of the Cobbler) are actually traps set by geology.

Much of the fun in Muir and More derives from a sceptical Scot abroad in the American wilderness of a 'trail' and its inhabitants: bears and brash enthusiasts, including the skinny-dipping girls who might have improved even an Ansel Adams photograph, suggests Turnbull brashly, and might have improved a Turnbull slide (he's the only person still using film in the American wilderness), which he leaves discreetly unclear.

The book rambles, or rather saunters (Thoreau's preferred mode of perambulation, we're told) through Muir, the Sierras, the Polish Tatras ('of course, walking Poles do damage the environment'), huckleberries, blaeberries, Leaves of Grass, 'hoofed locusts', concrete canyons in New York, waffles, eggs over easy ('rather than the British equivalent, eggs in greasy') to a Muir-inspired plea 'for everybody to do something' to counteract the planet's disease of ourselves. One person can make a difference, Turnbull argues. 'Wee Johnnie Muir from Dunbar' invented National Parks and founded the American conservation movement. If you know little about Muir this is a good place to start, for his spirit is alive in the writing of Ronald Turnbull in this small book. But be warned. This book contains one

misrepresentation of the truth – Muir’s autobiography in letters, *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings* (Bâton Wicks, 1996) is certainly not out of print.

Terry Gifford

Fallen Giants

Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver.
Yale University Press 2008. £25.00

This chronicle of Himalayan Mountaineering is comprehensive in its content and has been compared to the *Abode of Snow* which was released in 1955.

It is a tremendous history of Mountaineering in the Himalaya, compiled by the authors, Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver. They depict the story of individual inspiration mixed with social, psychological and political motives pitched against the most renowned mountain region of the world. It covers the period from the early dawn in the nineteenth century up to the present day.

Almost everyone can recount who the first ascensionists of Everest were. But few will be able to tell of the events prior to or post the infamous 1953 ascent by Hillary and Norgay. This book has set out to do just that, compiling tales of adventurous souls who set out to test themselves against some of the world’s highest and most dangerous mountains. *Fallen Giants* details accounts of significant climbs and explorations since the 1890s explaining the often complex and ulterior social and culture motives of the expedition supporters and sponsors.

Notable inclusions in this anthology of adventures include accounts of Martin Conway’s Himalayan expedition of 1892, deemed as the first authentic; the

pioneering exploits in the Karakoram range by Fanny Bullock Workman; the romantic martyrdom of the legendary George Mallory; American Charlie Houston, who in the 1930s and 1950s led expeditions to K2 as well as tales of legendary Sherpa such as Ang Tharkay.

The many and numerous factors that affect expeditions and the world of mountaineering along with the effect of political and social change are discussed at length by the authors. They offer a penetrating analysis of a culture that once embodied the ethos of teamwork, fellowship and camaraderie, which has now turned into a veritable brouhaha for individual fame seeking and glory.

Dave Brown



From Geoff

