

the climbers' club
JOURNAL 2013-14





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The Climbers' Club Journal No.126

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EDITOR'S NOTE

By John Yates

IT is almost two decades since the American sociologist Robert Putnam first published his classic essay *Bowling Alone* in which he claimed to detect a dramatic decline in the numbers of people engaging with civic and voluntary associations. A similar trend has been detected on this side of the pond, and, along with it, a corresponding and related loss of public trust in once respected institutions such as Parliament, the National Health Service, the Police Force, and the Banking community. What, you might ask, has this to do with the Climbers' Club? Well, if Putnam is correct, a voluntary association such as ours should be in terminal decline. In reality, the opposite appears to be the case: our membership numbers are relentlessly rising, not falling. Our success seems proof contrary to the argument that the digital age of Facebook and Twitter is making 'real' social groups such as the Climbers' Club redundant. But is the rise in mere numbers an accurate guide to the health of a club such as ours? Perhaps not: the bigger a club such as ours becomes, the less intimate and cohesive it is bound to feel. More worrying than this, however, is the fact that as the task of 'running' the club is getting bigger and bigger, the number of volunteers willing to shoulder the burden of this responsibility is getting smaller and smaller. Such a situation is not sustainable.

It is not the role of the Journal, or its editor, to suggest solutions to this dilemma, or to attempt to usurp the authority of the committee in charting a future course for the club. But, in drawing together the various stories that comprise this 2013 - 2014 edition, it is clear to the editorial team that the Climbers' Club is something to be celebrated and cherished, especially in an age of an incessant media, with its culture of celebrity and instant gratification. The stories in these pages are confirmation that the best experiences in life

often come when we brave the new world beyond our comfort zones. James Pearson could have followed the conventional path and gone to university, but instead made the bold decision to pursue a less orthodox route. His reflective contribution to this edition of the Journal is a measure of how far he has travelled both as a climber and a human being since he took that fateful decision just a few years ago; and his observations and ruminations on what it is to be a full-time climber will strike many as refreshingly candid in a world of sponsored heroes.

A different kind of energy and zest for life comes through in the second piece that James McHaffie has kindly contributed to the Journal. Always a man to sing the praises of others, James is surely the most gifted climber of his generation, operating at the highest levels and in the very best of styles (and this is not a reference to his choice of floppy hats). His ascent of *Longhope Direct*, with fellow CC member Ben Bransby, shows that the spirit of adventurous climbing is alive and well in Britain, and that its practitioners are capable of executing hard technical climbing in the most difficult of environments. Ben's own recent repeat of John Dunne's outrageous *Parthian Shot* on Burbage – the first since the demise of a crucial part of the protection flake – is further proof that the advent of sports climbing and indoor walls has done little to diminish the willingness of an elite to push back the boundaries of the possible.

The rise of indoor walls, and with it the growth of competition climbing, has not always been seen by traditionalists as a healthy development. When the BMC, hesitantly at first, decided to support the campaign for climbing to be accepted as an Olympic discipline, there were predictable grumbles of dissent from a predictable minority. In this issue of the Journal, club members Iain Peters and Rob Adie give

Left:
Commando Ridge,
Bosigran, Cornwall.

Photograph:
Sean Kelly

expression to some of these divergent opinions. Rob, who is also the BMC's officer tasked with promoting competition climbing, makes a passionate plea for the sport to be accepted as an Olympic event. While not wishing to spoil the readers' enjoyment of the two pieces, it is fair to say that though Iain takes a slightly different viewpoint, the two men are much closer in their perceptions than might have been imagined. Rob's BMC colleague, and fellow CC member, Dave Turnbull, takes time off from the day job to explore the surreal landscape of Patagonia. His account of climbing Cerro Torre by the *Ragni Route*, and the stunning photography that accompanies his piece, captures the hazards and rewards of alpine style mountaineering in this kind of terrain. Dave's piece has an especial resonance, since this issue of the Journal also contains an obituary to Derek Walker, a past president of the club, and the man who led the first British expedition to Patagonia in the winter of 1960-61. Derek was also a member of Chris Bonington's expedition in 1962-63, which made the first ascent of the Central Tower of Paine. Derek, with Ian Clough, made the third ascent of the North Tower.

And here I must confess an interest. Derek Walker is the man who first introduced me to the joys of climbing and the pleasures of seventeenth century English history, both of which have remained abiding passions. As a pupil at Helsby Grammar School, I was one of the first fortunate few – along with Chris Calow – to be introduced to the intricacies of sandstone climbing. Derek was a special man. Perhaps the greatest pleasure of being asked to edit the Journal three years ago is that it led to us getting in touch after far too long a silence. That we got to meet shortly before his death at the launch of the new BMC sandstone guide is a memory I will always cherish. His close friend, Mike Mortimer, conveys wonderfully what it was like to share a rope with Derek and how his enthusiasm for rock and climbing remained undiminished across the years.

Derek's commitment to climbing was also mirrored

in his commitment to the club – and this brings us back to Putnam and *Bowling Alone*. For a voluntary association like the CC to thrive, we need more than card carrying members: we need people like Derek who are willing to get involved in the life of the club. The production of this Journal could not have been done without the support of dozens of volunteers – from the writers and photographers whose personal stories and opinions populate its pages, to those outside the club who have been willing to give their services for no reward, other than to contribute to something they believe is worthwhile. James Pearson's article, for instance, is illustrated with photographs from his climbing partner, Riky Felderer, whose support has been tremendous. Likewise, Dave Turnbull's piece on Patagonia is made all the more breathtaking by the images of Belgian photographer Sam Van Brempt. Rob Adie's argument in favour of climbing becoming an Olympic discipline is strengthened by images of athletes performing at recent competitions. James McHaffie, who never seems to be in one place for long, had no hesitation in helping out not only with a passionate piece about living and climbing in Wales, but also in chasing down pictures from his climbing partners and friends.

What is truly humbling for an editor, however, is the range and depth of experience that is to be found in an organisation like the Climbers' Club. Tony Moulam's account of his early days with AB Hargreaves may evoke a different era, but the emotions and events he retells will resonate with modern day climbers who still understand the magic and adventure of being out in the hills and on the crags with good friends. And while few of us can ever hope to match the standard of a Pearson or a McHaffie, we can be inspired by their example, and share their passion for something that is much more than a sport – almost a way of life, or living. As long as the CC has members who have great stories to tell, and who possess the same spirit of adventure as its founders, it will remain a vibrant and essential feature in the climbing landscape.

Right:
*The sun hovers
over the stillness
of Nigeen Lake,
Srinagar, India.*

Photograph:
Dave Pickford



JOURNEYS

A Moment of Geology. By Sean Kelly and Dirk Versfeld

Everest the Long Way. By Geoff Bennett

A Path of Inspiration. By James Pearson

Shakti & Dust: An Indian Journey. By Dave Pickford





A MOMENT OF GEOLOGY

Climbing is an addictive – some might say bizarre – passion. While the element of risk is always present, most of the time our thoughts are of ascending some great climb on sun warmed rock in beautiful surroundings with the gentle caress of the breeze on our faces. It is only when the unforeseen happens that we are reminded of the narrow path we tread, as this account of a tragic accident, written from two perspectives, reveals.

By Sean Kelly and Dirk Versfeld

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

Sean's story

It was the late spring of 2011. May is renowned for the settled weather that Scotland, and the Western Highlands in particular, experience at this time of year. Nevertheless, this was no normal year. Here in deepest Devon we were in the middle of a drought. There had been no significant rain for over two months and even the Government said that a drought existed. But this news had not reached the distant parts of the kingdom that are the Western Highlands.

We first encountered rain as we drove to the summit of Beatoch and it accompanied us all the way to Glen Brittle. A large puddle greeted our arrival at the door of the BMC hut and nobody else in occupation. A note in the kitchen from the departing warden made reference to faulty electrics, which meant no heat unless we got the fire well stoked. The weather had been inclement for weeks with triple the average rainfall for the month of May. The previous week's hurricane winds had flattened all the road-signs on Rannoch Moor. Tempest would be putting it rather mildly.

Left:
*Geological
masterpiece -
Corrie Lagan*

Photograph:
Sean Kelly

Right:
Tessa soloing
Tafelberg Frontal,
Cederberg, Cape.

Photograph:
Dirk Versfeld



It was still raining steadily the next morning as we set off for Sligachan and a shapely peak of the Red Cuillin, with the unpronounceable Gaelic name of Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach. In total, there were seven of us from the South Devon MC that toiled up very boggy slopes on Sron a'Bheallain, and the Druim na Ruaige ridge that led to the main top of Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach. The wind was noticeably stronger when we arrived at Sligachan and, as we ascended, so it gradually increased in strength and violence. So much so, that any upward progress required a very determined approach.

By now, I was at the front of the group and having second thoughts about the wisdom of our venture. We were somewhere about the 400-metre contour and a quick glance at the map revealed a very exposed rounded ridge to traverse. I turned to the others to

express my doubts when I was immediately lifted and transported by the wind some way across the hill. I picked myself up to resume what I had been saying when the same thing happened again. An instant decision was made as I turned, somewhat bruised, and made my way back the way we had come. The others wisely did likewise, and we retired to the succour of the Sligachan Hotel.

Dirk's story

Tessa and I loved climbing. She found a physical expression and competency in the mountains best described by what I call her 6,000 foot smile: the higher, wilder, and more remote – the bigger the smile.

I had often talked to her of Scotland. I had lived there in '86, spending my spare time climbing and exploring. The beauty of the Highlands, the lack of a law of trespass, and the fact that the Scots take pleasure from people in their hills drew me back.

Last year we met new friends, Rick and Hillary, who have a croft on the very remote Knoydart Peninsula, not far from the Isle of Skye. What more could one ask for? We flew to London, joined Tessa's daughter Laurel and her family, travelled together by train to Edinburgh, and all descended on Rick and Hillary's Edinburgh flat. The weather had been foul, was foul, and was set to remain foul. We spent a couple of days in the city, Laurel running the Edinburgh half-marathon and Tess and I bicycling around and grabbing a break in the weather for a little climb at Limekilns, across the Firth of Forth. We then had to wait out a big wind and rainstorm before travelling, with Laurel, Clive and children to Glencoe, taking a slow road towards the croft. The weather did not make for much. Tess and I drove down to the head of Loch Etive and, between squalls, caught a glimpse of the Etive Slabs, which we had hoped to climb. Dripping, miserable, impossible. A couple of days later we headed to Arnisdale and were finally taken across the water to spend a few days at the croft.

The weather persisted but we were able to take some short walks in the hills and ponder the history and ecology of the place, the past land use and its impacts on the

landscape. Evenings were spent in conversation over good food, bottles of wine, and reading. As the dusk lengthened, Rick and I would go off and light a fire in the Tipi he had erected for Tessa and myself, and there we would commune in a brotherly way over a bottle of whisky, leaving Tess and Hillary in the warmth of the croft house.

Sean's story

If anything, the weather the next day was worse. The mist was down to valley level and the winds were gusting strongly across the Cuillin. It was noticeably colder too. Steve, along with Lou and Nick, opted to climb up into Coire na Banachdich, but somehow lost their exact bearings and, besides, there was little chance of making any kind of progress onto the Ridge. It was a dreich weary team that returned to the hut.

In the meantime, I had discovered the hut library and a sizable collection of past SMC journals. Most interesting was the 'Index' at the back that detailed all the mountain rescue statistics for Scottish mountain accidents. One in particular attracted my attention. Some unfortunate soul had to be rescued from Tower Ridge (Ben Nevis) after becoming crag fast. The next day another rescue followed on Tower Ridge, to retrieve the very same scrambler the MRT had encountered the previous day. One can only imagine what was said.

As the visitor drives over to Glen Brittle, the road climbs over a high pass with a forest on the left and gradually the full panorama of the Cuillin is revealed, dominated by the hulking mass of the imposing spur of Sgurr na Fheadain directly ahead. It is readily distinguished by the great gash of Waterpipe Gully, incised deeply into the flank of the mountain.

In slightly improving weather, we parked the car and climbed down past the Fairy Pools of the Allt Coir'a Mhadaidh. We, being Keith, Bob and myself, made for the mighty spur of Sgurr na Fheadain. The guidebook description was somewhat obscure but a route



Right: *Happy days - Dirk and Tessa in Corsica*
Photograph: Dirk Versfeld



Above:
Sron na Ciche

Photograph:
Sean Kelly

materialised out of the mist as we slowly ascended damp rocks, keeping well to the left of the clawing recesses of Waterpipe Gully. Bob had climbed it one winter in the company of Martin Moran but now, as a summer route, it did not inspire investigation into its moist, dark interior.

Although our climb was described as a Grade 3 scramble, we did not trouble the rope and thought the severe grade unwarranted. Keith was not feeling too well and so retreated, while Bob and I continued to the summit spur's shapely pinnacles. The way ahead now opened up to reveal a snaking rocky ridge leading onto the Main Ridge. Bob is not much a mountaineer and expressed scant interest in continuing along a ridge that terminated at Bruach na Frithe. Somewhat dejected I turned to follow Bob down into the stony

depths of Coir'a Mhadaidh.

Later that day, the weather improved quite dramatically, and so I took myself, together with camera, up past the impressive Eas Mor waterfall and along the banks of the enchanting little Loch an Fhir-bhallaich, and into the magnificent hollow of Coire Lagan, resplendent now in early evening light. I encountered only one other soul in the Coire as I focused my lens on the imposing cliffs of Sron na Ciche, tracing the line of climbs, previously ascended many years earlier with Beresford and Tommo. Standing proud from this immense cliff was the imposing form of the Cioch Stone, clearly depicted by the evening light, as if a great shadow drawn like a giant curtain, draped across the cliffs. Waterfalls tumbled from high, unseen above these cliffs, wet

streaks strongly reflected and glinting in the setting sun.

It was a 'Murrayesque' moment, as I stood riveted before this ever-revealing scene of stunning beauty. Sron na Ciche and the climbs on its colossal cliffs are the reason why so many climbers 'head over the sea to Skye', a mountain so big that it has cliffs within cliffs. Climbs on the Western Buttress are in excess of 1,000 feet, and linked climbs on Sron na Ciche, the Cioch Slab, and Upper Buttress may exceed even this great length. Only the cliffs of Ben Nevis and Creag Meadaidh stand comparison with such dramatic crags, and those are essentially winter venues. Add to this the truly wild rocky setting, almost completely devoid of any semblance of vegetation or life, and it is indeed a magical place. As I slowly retraced my steps back to the hut little did I realise what the 'morrow had in store.

Dirk's story

A weather window promised and we re-crossed the water and drove via the ferry at Glenelg to Skye. These were to be our days alone – always special after times of gathering. We stocked up on oatcakes and whisky in Broadford and headed for the Cuillin Hills and the campsite at Glen Brittle: early season, uncertain weather, and lots of fine camping. We pitched our dear little tent and headed up towards Corrie Lagan to get some exercise along with some understanding of the mountains surrounding us, and the route we might climb.

The beauty of Skye, with the views out over Eigg and Rum, immediately reasserted itself in me, and took hold of Tessa. Her 6,000-foot smile was firmly in place. We tramped up to Corrie Lagan, munched oatcakes, reviewed maps and route books and then scrambled across rocks and slabs until we found ourselves below the Cioch and what must be the most popular route in all of Skye – the combination of Cioch Direct, Arrow and Integrity – that would take us all the way to the summit ridge. Technically very very easy, the sort of climb we would probably undertake without ropes back home – but a fun way to climb the mountain. We were into fun!

Back down to the tent, content to know where we were headed in the morning with our simple and undemanding plan. It rained in the night and we were disappointed at possibly having to re-think our day, but the sun started breaking through as we took a slow breakfast of bread and cheese and two pots of coffee. Packing carefully and making all shipshape, we left camp shortly after 10 am.

Sean's story

Bob was up early and buzzing with enthusiasm, which the weather did its best to dispel: the early promise of the previous, starlit night, had been obscured by a grey curtain of gloom. Others were up in the wee small hours with big plans, big ambitions, and small sacs, and setting off in the direction of remote Garbh Bheinn. A complete traverse of the Skye Ridge was perhaps a ridge too far in the adverse conditions. For us, the great West Buttress of Sron na Ciche must wait until after midday before any sunlight optimistically warms a face damp from all the recent heavy rain. It was perhaps a little after midday when we departed from Glen Brittle, and followed the now familiar path that led up into the coire, a path much improved in recent years.

As we rounded the coire rim, it was pleasing to note that nobody else was on the crag, or busy unpacking sacs underneath. The final track across to our objective was replaced by scree and loose rock all set at a tedious angle, with a steep final pull to the base of these great cliffs, now soaring over a thousand feet above our heads and into the clouds. The weight on our backs, with two double ropes, assorted climbing tackle, camera and tripod made itself felt, and it was with a sense of relief when we could finally dump the sacs. Bob was not acquainted with the crag but expressed a keen interest in tackling the famous Cioch Direct. A cursory glance at the cliffs revealed that recent rain had channelled down this gutter and it was literally dripping. I read the guidebook description which detailed a lot of thrutching in greasy cracks and chimneys. It did not inspire much attraction or confidence.

Right:
*Cuillin draped with
cloud inversion.*

Photograph:
Sean Kelly

This was my first visit to the cliff since I had initially climbed here in the early seventies and now I proposed that we attempt *Cioch West*, a climb with pleasant memories of agreeable open dry climbing. The start was obvious with CW etched distinctly in the rock, and the initial chimney and cracks, although streaked with water, did not look too unpleasant. Having cooled from our ascent, the cold became noticeable, and every vestige of clothing was used, including gloves stuffed in pockets. My original memories of the climbing were hazy, but I seemed to recollect an exposed traverse higher up. As I started to ascend, the climbing improved and I was enjoying the technical intricacies, especially avoiding the wetter areas of rock. At the steep chimney, it was possible to ascend delicately on small holds that were mostly outside the chimney, and consequently drier. A steep pull led to easier and speedier climbing and a belay soon gained. Looking across the cliff I saw another climber materialise from below, obviously on *Cioch Direct*, and watched fascinated as he carefully arranged his belay in classic textbook fashion, equalising both anchors with care. He suddenly became aware of my ardent gaze and shouted something inaudible that the wind carried off into the depths of the coire. I just waved back as any meaningful conversation was impossible.

Dirk's story

Nearing the route we saw that the mountain was already busy. Another party was heading up an even easier climb to the right, and a small party (Mark and Carole) were preparing to climb our route, Cioch Direct. A third party came up behind us. This is Britain, where queuing is endemic. We prepared to climb with obvious enthusiasm, chatting to Mark and Carole about how we might interact on the route, especially if we found that we climbed much faster. They were very warm to us: understanding, and willing to share the rock. As it happened we moved ahead very quickly. I led the first pitch of 35 metres, Tessa the next 40 metres onto a wide blocky sloping ledge with the obvious break for the third pitch up above. The climbing was really easy, but fun, great friction on the Gabbro.

The rock could be very slippery when wet particularly as the route was so popular that some of the grips had become polished from wear. An infamously slippery section lay somewhere above and, although completely within the range of Tessa's capability, it was my task to lead this.

Sean's story

By now, Bob had appeared, and was impatient to get at the next pitch, which terminated in an ear shaped flake that would necessitate jamming or lay-backing. So I passed over the gear, sent Bob on his way, and drifted back to my thoughts of cold rock and even colder legs. I was wishing for my winter thermal bottoms back at the hut.

The climb now skirted off to the right, initially following easy ledges that terminated at a steep vertical groove that disappeared into the stygian gloom above. The climbing transpired to be very satisfying with runners and rests whenever required, and so quick progress to the belay below an overhanging wall. I climbed up for a good anchor and dropped back to a small ledge to bring up Bob. We had now arrived at the crux of the route as the climb traversed off to the left, to unseen progress high above.

However, I first had to continue in the groove line, now much steeper, as I bridged up in search of protection. At the start of the traverse proper, a hidden Rock 9 placement revealed itself, and feeling in much better heart, I carefully teetered across, with overhangs above and much exposure sensed beneath my feet, to arrive at a funny mantle. Before heaving over, I thought about protection for Bob following below, and looked for suitable runner placement to protect the traverse. My fingers were scratching about over a bulge and had located a shallow fissure, much resembling a pianist playing a piano while sitting on the floor: but someone had thoughtfully removed the pedals!

At this precise moment, my concentration was dramatically shattered by a loud cracking sound, much like thunder, the sound reverberating around the coire for what seemed like an age. I quickly scanned the low clouds for signs of lightning to accompany all this



noise. There was none.

I shouted down to Bob, 'Did you hear that? Thunder! There must be a storm brewing.'
'No, it's not thunder, its rock fall,' he shouted back
'Are you sure?'

'Yes there was a terrible scream, followed by distress whistles! I'm off down to help.'

All thoughts of climbing the crux dissipated and I quickly reversed to the security of my good nut and lowered down to Bob. Meanwhile he had unearthed some kind of rounded dubious belay spike that I eyed with suspicion, but backed up with a large cam. As Bob is blessed of more generous physique and proportions, I readily volunteered that it would be best for him to abseil first. We had an easy if steep abseil down into Cioch Gully that required the full length of our ropes, interrupted only by a small ledge that revealed a glistening red wire-gate. Some easy scrambling and another shorter abseil finally gained the foot of the crag.

Dirk's story

Tessa belayed with a long sling around a big block. Carole came up behind and she and Tess discussed where she could sit comfortably. I was already scampering up, placing occasional bits of protective gear. Then, as I started to move onto a big slab of rock above me, it was as if the whole mountain started disintegrating in front of my eyes and this huge slab slid away from underneath me, breaking my leg and descending in an avalanche onto the ledge below.

I screamed out of fear and a desire to warn those below – and fell. I knew this was bad. A great crash of rock, and imprinted in my soul are grains of sand, like ball bearings, on the freshly exposed rock beneath.

My fall was short – perhaps just three metres – when the rope caught me. Tessa was holding me from the belay, somehow. By rights I should have crashed the 20m I had climbed, back to the ledge. I looked down and could see that Tessa had been hurt, she seemed unconscious at first, but I was held tight. She came to, and although I knew that she had been badly injured, I thought we would be ok.

Carole had also taken a nasty rock on her helmet, and, unbeknown to us, Mark, 40 metres below, had had his hand smashed by a rock. Carole and I yelled for rescue. With so many people around we thought this would come quickly.

Sean's story

Perhaps half an hour had now elapsed since the accident, and rescue and aid was already in progress. It was only at this point that the full extent of what was an horrific accident became gradually apparent, and that it involved at least four climbers including the man I had spoken to earlier during the climb. There was no mobile signal, which is not a surprise in this remote part of the Highlands, and accordingly someone was hurriedly dispatched to alert the Rescue. But that would take at least an hour. First-aiders and helpers had promptly materialised out of the mist and much was being done to assess, aid, and help evacuate the injured. It appeared that two teams on *Cioch Direct* had been hit by the rock fall, and another pair had narrowly missed being hit by diving into a cave at the crag base.

After our gear had been quickly stuffed in our sacs, we moved forward to offer any help, and that was when I noticed a harrowing figure with heavily bandaged arm, staring at me with wild-looking eyes. I immediately recognised the climber who I had watched belaying so carefully, but now his arm and shoulder were shattered, with smashed mangled fingers poking out uselessly from the dressing, like a wild beast's talons. With wild staring eyes looking directly at mine.

'It was that big!' he exclaimed, indicating some shattered rocks nearby with his good hand.

I turned round to look.

'No. Bigger than that! That big! It almost bloody killed me! I must have jumped to the side.'

With that, he turned, supported by two rescuers, and hobbled off down the mountain towards Glen Brittle and succour. In the press the following day, he was dubbed 'The Ironman!' for his solo rescue and descent.



Left:
Ferrying Cas to the
waiting Sea-King

Photograph:
Sean Kelly

Dirk's story

What happened from there is a long story. I was hanging from my blue rope (we climb with two) and could not figure out how to get down. Tessa was conscious and communicating with me. She was clearly in pain, but managing. She asked after rescue and she asked if I was ok. I did what I could to reassure but time dragged, and my offering was not much. Eventually, after an hour or more, other climbers on an adjacent route, Martin and his son Sam, came onto the ledge. Sam later described hearing an avalanche of rock and seeing a 'block the size of a fridge', falling down the route. I tried to explain the situation to Martin from my perspective. I wanted to be lowered down but he was rightly a bit impatient with me, noting that Tessa was the one really needing help. Nevertheless he took me on, cut the blue rope once I was happy with my waist belay. I rigged the second (green) rope through the gear at my waist and he started to lower me carefully down. As the angle grew less and less vertical my right leg was snagging and that made me whimper. Worse, I had rigged the lower-off badly and the rope snagged and jammed and eventually

I was left stuck still five metres or so above Tessa. I secured myself through a perfect cam placement at chest height and Martin went on to do what he could.

Mark had, in the interim, been helped off his stance by an 'escape route' to the left that, in his later words, he could virtually walk off. Martin helped Carole in a dual abseil down to the walk-off ledge, himself nearly abseiling off the end of his rope, severed in the rock fall. He fortunately spotted this and tied it off. Everything Martin did, was sensible and solid in every way. From the base of the climb, Mark bravely walked back to camp at Glen Brittle – 'To save the helicopters and because I wanted to keep warm' He is a solid man with a lovely attitude to the hill and mountains, and climbing, and the things that can – and sharing all of these. I love him for holding that place so clearly both for me and for himself. He has since had his right index finger removed.

Sean's story

Fortunately, one of those helping with the injured was both a casualty nurse from Bolton A&E and local

Right:
RAF - winching Cas
to safety

Photograph:
Sean Kelly



MRT and was providentially best qualified to offer help and advice. Both climbing teams' ropes had been shredded in the rock fall, so other ropes were used to facilitate the rescue of the 'Ironman's' female climbing partner, Carole, who had sustained head and serious back injuries. She was in considerable pain but eventually, with the assistance of Bob and many other helping hands, she somehow safely negotiated the traumatic abseil descent to reach the foot of the crag.

The plight of the other team above was unclear, but their injuries appeared much more critical, with a suspected shattered leg sustained by the male climber Dirk, and unknown but serious possible internal injuries to his female climbing partner, Tessa. We could only await the arrival of the rescue services and hoped that would be soon. I felt I could do little so busied myself by taking a few photographs. As I ascended the ground below where the rock fall had occurred, it bore much resemblance to a battlefield, with rocks shattered and pulverised by the impact of the avalanche and the ground much disturbed. Strangely I could sense a burning smell.

A faint groaning emanated from high above.

I felt conscious of intruding into others suffering with my camera, and tried to be unobtrusive as I went about this unwelcome task. Over two hours had now elapsed since the initial rock fall, when a bright red Coastguard helicopter appeared out of the gloom, closely hugging the cloud base, as it slowly manoeuvred towards the accident scene. There were now about fifteen people below the cliff and many raised their arms in the designated 'V' shape to confirm that assistance was required. Because of the likely risk of further rock fall, the helicopter sensibly hovered a safe distance away from the cliff as it deposited the first of the MRT down amid the rocks and scree.

Dirk's story

Martin could see that Tessa was weak. Carole had been close to her and had comforted her but could do little more. I was pretty useless up above. My broken leg was not especially sore but any thought of banging or twisting it stole all the courage from me. I rigged my second rope through the new protection I had placed, Martin cut the blue rope, and managed to lower me some of the way

down. I had rigged this rope badly and it jammed. In some frustration Martin left me to provide assistance to Carole. I was eventually able to fit another cam, pull up a loose length of rope and lower myself the last five metres, to be next to Tess. By then she was quiet, calm and heavy, her head had slipped forward against the rock wall and I could only put my arms around her, and hope.

Sean's story

The first rescuer to arrive was the team leader Gerry Ackroyd, who I carefully informed about the perceived condition of the casualties. His initial information from the police had suggested a minimum of six casualties, so it was some relief to learn that we now only had four injured at the scene. A handline had been previously rigged to help assist evacuating the walking wounded, so the MRT now availed themselves of this helpful aid, to swiftly reach the remaining stricken climbers high above. It was sometime about then that the second rescue helicopter, a yellow RAF Sea King from Kinloss materialised from over the sea, and deposited a second MRT down among the rocks. Gerry's radio noisily crackled into life.

'Any vital signs of life?' I heard him ask.

I turned and walked away. I didn't want to hear the reply.

Dirk's story

I am unclear as to all who were involved in these hours on the ledge before official mountain rescue crews arrived. I think Martin and Sam carried the brunt of this. Initially Martin thought that Tessa had suffered a head injury – but it turned out that the damage was to the middle of her body, most especially I think the pelvic area, and she died of multiple injuries. Martin asked Sam to get more warm clothing out to cover Tessa. He could not find much but there was a black down jacket, and a brown Tibetan-style cap with flaps that covered Tessa's ears. I hope they have these back. Martin felt for her pulse and could not find it. I think I knew she was dead but could not accept or absorb the enormity of it. I stole a little kiss, her face warm where I had been cradling it in my hand, colder where I couldn't

reach. My hand desperately seeking for and believing and sometimes finding a small puff of warm breath from her nostrils. More rescuers arrived. Another young man searched for pulse and then looked into her eyes with a torch but could see no dilation. 'I am no doctor but I have to tell you that I can find no vital signs.' Honest and forthright.

Sean's story

There was nothing else to be done, and with that, Bob and I departed this tragic scene to return to the hut in Glen Brittle. We descended a little away from the great cliff and as I looked back, I could now distinguish two figures, one in a bright red bobble hat, huddled in the bay below the chimney of *Cioch Direct*. Two of the rescue team administered first aid. With a heavy heart and sombre mood, we turned and descended the loose scree.

As we joined up the Coire Lagan track that descended from the Ridge, we encountered Steve, Kevin and Lou, who had aborted their traverse of the Main Ridge after encountering settling snow and great difficulties at the TD gap, much more akin to winter climbing in these unseasonal times. They had finally abandoned their attempt at the Inn Pin. At this point the sun made a belated appearance as we traversed back alongside the sparkling lochan. The mood in the hut later that evening was subdued when the silence and my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by someone shouting my name. 'Sean Kelly! Sean Kelly!'

I looked up from reading and recognised Gerry Ackroyd from the rescue team. He had been informed that I had been climbing on the cliff, and was checking that everyone had been accounted for. We sat and conversed for a time and it transpired that the seriously injured female climber, Tessa, a visiting South African climber, had sadly died at the scene. Surely, the dark mood could not get any worse.

Dirk's story

The rescue took hours. Three RAF and rescue helicopters swooped in and out but focused on people

below. Our ledge was hard to reach, the weather deteriorating and the rescue dangerous. Eventually medics arrived, straps were fitted around my legs and chest and I was lifted away from the Tessa I loved. I had to know that she was dead, but the enormity of this has, even now, still to sink in. I could only hold and feel her, try and keep her face warm, and feel helpless whilst rescue efforts clattered around me, until finally I was lifted away from the woman I loved, my Tessa, for the last time.

I was flown to the little Broadford hospital. The Afrikaans-speaking doctor saw my x-rays, received news, and gently but clearly confirmed that Tessa was indeed dead. I could only nod numbly. I don't know the exact details but she died of multiple internal injuries. I am assured that, while initially in pain, this pain would have seeped away. I am consoled that, as she always worked things though in life, so too she worked through her death.

I wanted to be close to Tessa, and was told that she would probably be brought to Broadford for the night. That made me easier. Later that night I heard the clatter of a helicopter. This came in to the landing pad outside my window, hovered and slowly descended to rest, idled for ten minutes or more and then took off again. Perhaps they had brought Tessa to the hospital but it was my belief that Tessa was finally going away from me forever, and the emptiness of loneliness and loss started seeping into me, an emptiness it will take a long time to come to terms with.

Sean's story

Two days later, I returned with Bob to a now bleaker Sron na Ciche, still festooned with shredded ropes, and completed our climb in mostly similar cold damp weather. At the mantle where I had fussed about the lack of protection, there was a gleaming peg lurking just a little higher. We discovered on attaining the top, a crevasse-like terrace traversed the cliff. On the slab above this terrace were many perched blocks balanced precariously. Indeed, the guidebook noted that on the first ascent of Cioch Direct in 1907, there had been a major rock fall here, as the route is a natural channel, so care was cautioned.

Over the succeeding weeks, I corresponded with

both Dirk recovering at home in Cape Town, and Cas in Glasgow General, and gradually a fuller picture of what happened emerged. After inserting a cam in a solid vertical crack in the face to the left, Dirk started the move right onto and up a large slab when it literally slid out underneath him, striking and breaking his right leg still on the face below. It was his partner, Tessa who took the full force of the shattering slab, with some of the smaller rocks hitting 'Ironman' Mark, and Cas climbing below. Tessa had been conscious for more than an hour suffering in great pain. Somehow she managed to tie Dirk off. Dirk tried to keep her talking but finally her head fell forward and she spoke no more. She had suffered massive internal injuries. All three have spent lengthy spells in hospital, and Mark had his index finger amputated. Cas forwarded a picture of her water bottle that had been crushed in her rucksack at the time. Her rucksack and water bottle fortuitously must have afforded some protection to her back. Interestingly, there is much proffered advice on UKC forums advising making the ascent of Cioch Direct without the encumbrance of a rucksack, as it seriously impedes progress in the difficult constricted chimney. More scans and physiotherapy lie ahead as their bodies slowly continue to mend. The mental scars will take a lot longer to heal..... I myself have continued to climb.

Dirk's story

There is always the question of 'what can one learn?' It would seem to me that we were caught up in a moment of geology. Rocks weather and fall and this happens every 100 or 1000 years. My weighting the slab advanced this timing a wee bit to match our presence. I am slowly gathering other inputs and perspectives and every piece of the puzzle helps. I am also aware that my own perspective of time could be much skewed. Our ropes were given back to me – Beal Cobra 8.6 mm – chopped virtually clean through in at least 10 places. My leg will be ok pretty soon, and I expect I will climb again. Tessa would want that. She will be in my broken heart forever – she was an extraordinary woman.



Left:
6,000 foot smile -
Tessa in Corsica

Photograph:
Dirk Versfeld



EVEREST THE LONG WAY

It is two decades since Geoff Bennett and his partner Juliet packed in their jobs and embarked upon the journey of a lifetime – an overland odyssey to Australia. Here he reflects on the part of the adventure that took them across Russia and the ancient Silk Road to Everest.

By Geoff Bennett

Completely exhausted, I collapsed in a heap; lungs heaving, legs unable to go any further. The rucksack weighed a ton, stomach running on empty, throat beyond parched. It was early afternoon, yet it was bitterly cold in the shade. The wind howled relentlessly in our faces and would continue to do so until dusk. The way ahead stretched on uphill, seemingly without end. There was nothing to see in the barren landscape except dust, rocks and mountains of tottering choss. Not a soul in sight, not a habitation, not even a sign of water frozen or otherwise. I couldn't do it, I'd pushed myself too far: the dream was over.

Crying, physically and emotionally destroyed, I just sat there feeling very, very, sorry for myself. I heard Jules, or rather I heard her dry, hacking, cough and then her weighted, trudging footsteps sluggishly dragging her load up the slope towards me. She sounded as knackered as I felt. Gravity took possession of her too and, leaning on me, she promptly burst into tears. What on earth were we thinking when we embarked on this journey? We were so far from home, so far from comfort, safety and anything familiar: surely it must be time to turn back?

By early December 1993 we'd been 'on the road' since July. We'd left secure jobs to embark on an overland odyssey to Australia. It had taken three years of skimping and saving, a year of serious planning and six months just to get the private invitation visas to Russia and Kazakhstan. Then there were the four



Left:
*Across Aksai Chin
by truck*

Photograph:
Geoff Bennett

months learning enough Russian to buy tickets over the counter and the three months it had taken us to reach Tibet. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain three years earlier had opened up our previously impossible route. We'd hitched to the Baltic states, taken ridiculously cheap overnight trains through them and spent a month in St. Petersburg and Moscow, staying with a family and some students, whilst indulging a passion for Russian history. From there, Volgograd – or 'Stalingrad' if you prefer – had led to Turkmenistan and the steppes of Central Asia.

We'd followed the legendary Silk Road by overnight train journeys to avoid hotels and the consequent authorities' interest in our passports. We'd visited the fabled cities of Astrakhan, Khiva, Ashkhabad, Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent before arriving, much relieved at the foothills of the Tien Shan, in Alma Ata. There had been more than a little interest from the FSB at every place we alighted. Secreting \$2,000 cash in webbing belts we'd repeatedly got away

Left: *The end in sight – Everest*
Photograph: Geoff Bennett



with \$10 fines by being friendly and helpful; posing as naive tourists, all the while knowing that travellers' cheques and credit cards were unknown and useless outside of Moscow. On our way to the Torugart pass in Uzbekistan we'd had to bribe our way past numerous police checkpoints to get through the country, only to be turned away by a Russian border guard immune to bribes on the Uzbek/Chinese border, 150 km short of our next goal Kashgar. The consequence of which was a huge detour back to Alma-Ata, which in the meantime had become quarantined due to a cholera epidemic, whilst our visas had moved ever closer to elapsing. Having gained passage to Urumqi in Xinjiang, China, an epic five day bus journey – involving a collision, two broken down buses and daytime temperatures hovering above 40° C – got us to Kashgar.

At this point our thumbs re-appeared as the unpaved road into Tibet was closed to foreigners, necessitating an illegal hitch-hike eastwards along the Himalayan chain into Tibet. The first day's journey from Yecheng began in the dark at an altitude of about 1,300 metres, and ended the other side of a 5,000-metre pass. This would have been manageable except that I had been obliged to shovel grit and rocks under the wheels of the reversing truck towards the top of the pass. This enabled the truck to grind its way up the icy gravel road but it had also left me dazed, head pounding in agony, worried about Acute Mountain Sickness and imminent death. The driver had descended the hairpins on the other side of the pass in pitch black darkness at a crazy speed, no doubt saving my life, but leaving the two of us speechless in terror.

The consequent days saw Jules suffering as I had done, as we drove over two more high passes, but we had at least avoided the authorities! At the half-way point in Xiquanhe the police finally caught up with us: we were fined \$4 each and had to sign a

*Left: Hitch hiking Tibetan style – Jules tries to keep warm.
Photograph: Geoff Bennett*



statement apologising to the Chinese government for our misdemeanour. Nevertheless we gave the friendly Tibetan policeman a free English lesson and were promptly put on the back of a police truck back to where we'd said we'd come from. Except that we'd lied and said we come from Xigatse, our destination.

Beware what you wish for; our reward was to sit in the shade, on the back of a Chinese police truck, in the freezing cold November mornings of the 3,500 metre Tibetan plateau for three days. As a form of transport it has to be endured to be believed. Nevertheless with down jackets, sleeping bags, purloined blankets and much wriggling of toes, we had survived. After a month based in Lhasa visiting monasteries, trekking and suffering from the seemingly obligatory bouts of stomach and bowel problems we'd hitched to Xegar and the start of the trek to the most famous mountain in the world. It was now early December and we were so close – and yet it seemed so painfully far from – Qomolungma, Sagarmatha or just plain old Everest.

This was supposed to be one of the high points of the journey, in more ways than one. As a climbing teenager I'd devoured books on the Everest expeditions of Messner, Bonington, Hunt, Shipton

and of course Norton. At school I'd listened rapt as a visiting speaker, Noel Odell, had described glimpsing Mallory and Irvine below the infamous Second Step on the North East Ridge. I'd been brought up in the village next to Currie, Dougal Haston's home and my dad's firm had even sponsored one of Bonington's early attempts on the South West face. So much of me wanted to see the North face of this mountain. This was 'our' side; the side that so many British pre-war expeditions had begun their assaults. The received opinion of experienced mountaineering friends in Bristol was that the views from the north were so much better than anything from the southern Nepalese side and in 1993 there was no tourist trail on this side, few creature comforts and the whole route – let alone Base camp – would be deserted at this time of year. That suited us; we went to the mountains for solitude not crowds. It was for these reasons we'd chosen to trek from the Tibetan side, rather than take the more commonly trodden trail from Lukla on the Nepalese side, where incidentally we intended to head for Annapurna afterwards.

However, this meant some serious challenges. We had very little information to go on, bar the briefest of descriptions in the ubiquitous Lonely Planet guide

Above:
*Tibetan plateau and
salt lake en route to
Lhatse*

Photograph:
Geoff Bennett



Above:
*The valley to
Chosung.*

Photograph:
Geoff Bennett

and some brief notes we'd made from a friend's copy of *Trekking in Tibet*, so we were largely travelling in hope. No one there spoke English or even Chinese, which Jules had a smattering of, and our Tibetan was minimal to say the least. There were no tea houses or lodges; almost no food available except thukpa (delicious noodles) and tsampa (not quite so appetizing roasted barley flour). We'd brought some instant noodles and dried fruit and nuts from the market in Xigatse, but we knew food was going to be in short supply.

The Tibetan houses we'd stayed in thus far were veritably medieval, not only in their construction but also their rudimentary fires for cooking and heating, not to mention the plentiful supply of pestilential insects. Cleanliness and hygiene appeared not to exist in any Western sense whilst ingestion of the water-borne parasite giardia was pretty much guaranteed as it was impossible to get the water to boil hot enough

to kill it. Added to this were recent bouts of dysentery which had left me in a parlous state and our sacks, which were full of useless stuff, totally unsuitable and way too heavy for mountain trekking.

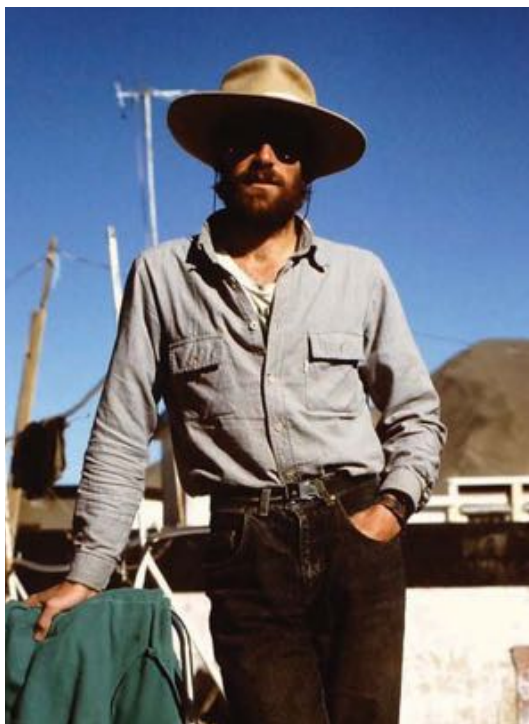
However, what we had found so far was that the hospitality and humour of the Tibetans we'd met had more than compensated for the other concerns and had made the tough travelling in the country more than bearable. We knew this was going to be the mother of all challenges but so far we had risen to every other one we'd set ourselves on this odyssey and overcome them all. Thus it was hardly surprising, but still soul destroying, to grind to a complete halt on only our fourth day from the road. We were heading for Rongbuk monastery but it now seemed unattainable.

We heard the sound of steps and a carefree whistle, so at odds with our parlous mood, that we were abruptly woken from our depressed reverie. Reluctantly

standing up, we watched a Tibetan strolling down the hill towards us, giving a cheery wave; we thought we were hallucinating. With a spring in his step he walked over to us and asked in pidgin English if we were headed to Rongbuk. Had I been more my normal self I might have replied 'Where else?' but all we could do was nod. We understood that he had two trekkers with him and they had just walked down from the monastery that morning. Sure enough they appeared within a matter of minutes and told us the unlikely news that some friends of ours had left a letter for us at the monastery. It was also apparently only three hours away. Furthermore the monks were friendly, there was food and the views were stunning. We must not give up; pressing on would be worth it, especially having got this far: so much for giving up and going back to the hovel at Chosung in the valley below. After goodbyes we discussed what to do, reluctantly shouldered our packs once more and plodded onwards and upwards. An hour got us into the sun and the entrance to the Rongbuk valley where the path and our spirits improved slightly.

As we trudged slowly on, the western ridge of Everest appeared but it was a further two hours of torment before we finally glimpsed more of the North face. Cocooned in little worlds of pain, every so often collapsing in a heap, we just got up and trudged wearily on. Words were few and far between, occasional sighs mumbled and then ignored as we focussed on putting one foot in front of another. Messner's description of his alter-ego altitude automaton crossed my mind and promptly departed. Sucking a boiled sweet, even one of my teeth gave up the ghost. Time seemed suspended, Jules' cough got worse, the light began to fade, every part of our bodies ached, but we couldn't seem to stop.

At 6pm, nine hours after leaving Chosung, the massive face finally loomed up in front of us as we crested a brief rise. The monastery appeared below, perhaps twenty minutes of easy descent away: we were too spent to even cry. Staggering downhill on the point of collapse, a monk appeared and shepherded



Left:
*Geoff in Xigatse
before heading for
Everest.*

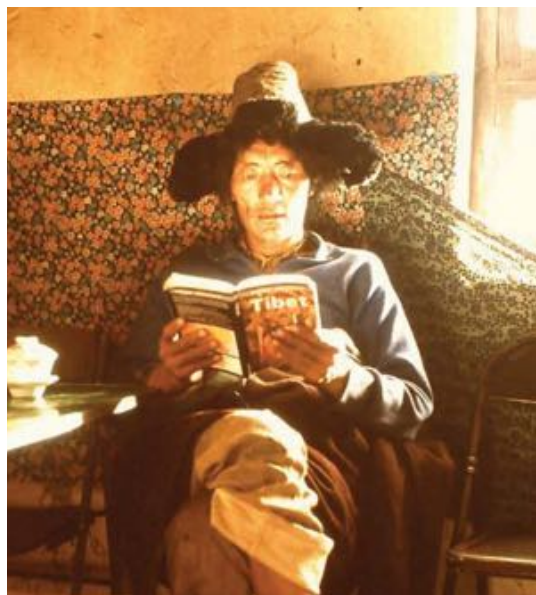
Photograph:
Geoff Bennett

us to a building. It was empty except for four beds, a heap of blankets and two piles; one of kindling and a second of dried yak dung awaiting our attention. We didn't care as we took the sacks off our backs and lay down. We'd made it.

Looking back through the diaries of our travels twenty years ago what amazes me is not only what we achieved but, more so, what we had the temerity to even attempt. Maybe we were naive; single-minded and determined certainly, braver than I remember feeling and tougher than I feel now. The more favourable geo-political and religious situations in Russia, Central Asia, China and Tibet helped us in many ways but for long periods of time and over huge distances, we had no way of contacting our families or getting help. We were left entirely dependent on our abilities and the kindness of others. Anything could have happened to us and no one would have known anything about it.

Right:
*Lonely Planet gets
everywhere.*

Photograph:
Geoff Bennett



Yet, although we got into many scrapes and awkward situations, nothing serious did happen to us. How much of that was down to our resourcefulness and how much of it was due to the compassionate help and humanity of the people we met is a moot point. As climbers and mountaineers I suspect that this strikes a chord with most of us. I've certainly had to pull out all the stops at times in my subsequent climbing experiences but never have I been so completely exhausted as I was on that day twenty years ago. Yet the encouraging words of the strangers we met and the indomitable support of the lady, who I subsequently married, made the effort that day possible. I've often wondered if it is the personal interaction and the bonds we make with others, as much as the personal satisfaction we derive from our successes, that makes our sport so enjoyable and why we keep returning to it. Perhaps this is more important than the apparently dangerous situations we put ourselves in just to get out of!

How much of what we saw had changed in the sixty years since Ruttledge, Norton and Bruce had passed that way would be interesting to uncover, but I

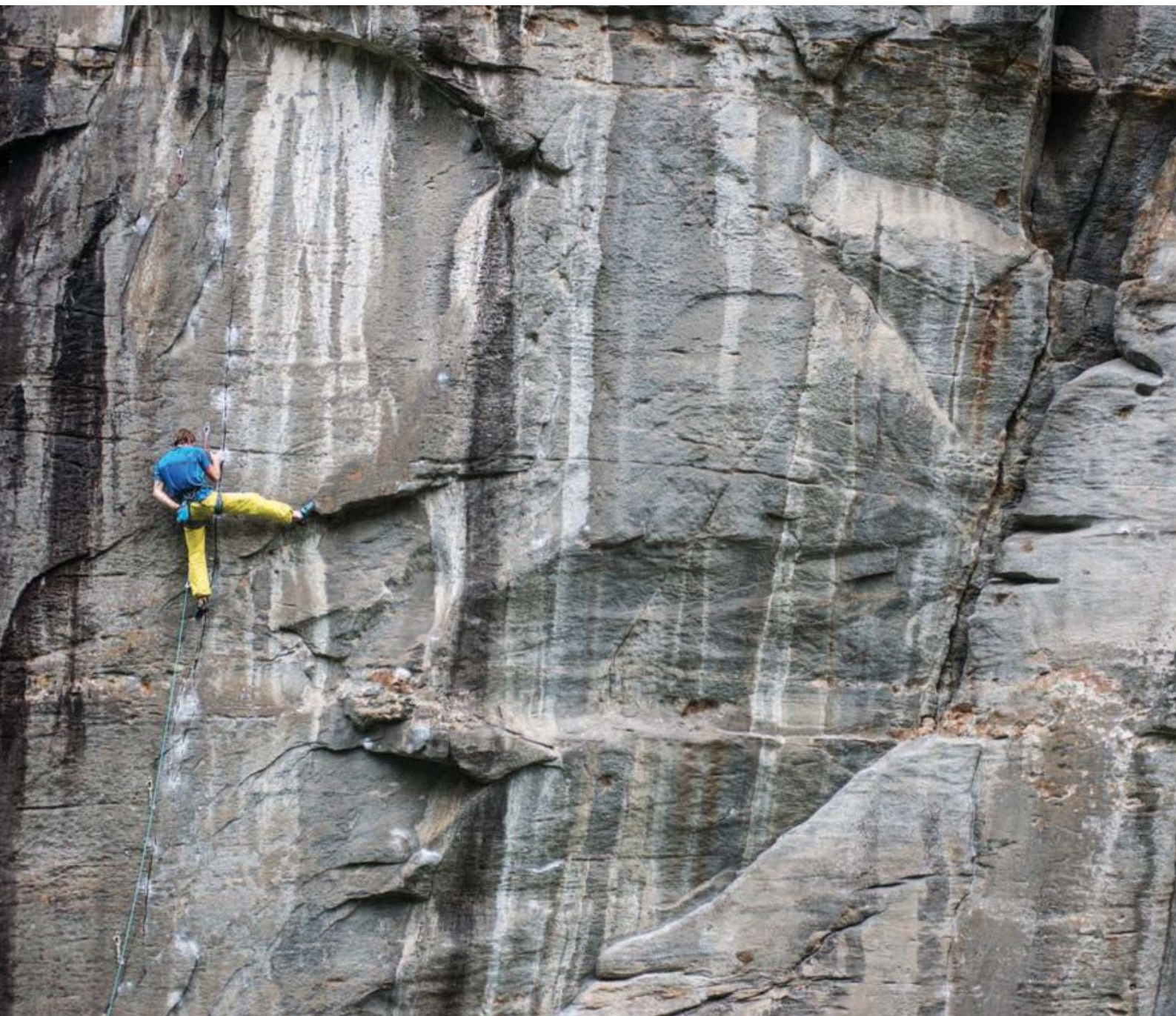
suspect the answer would be 'not that much' especially when contrasted to the present day. Twenty years on and much has altered; some countries and areas are closed, more are open. Some are safer to travel in; others more dangerous. There is a railway to Lhasa and the Chinese outnumber the Tibetans in their own land. There is a tea-house at Everest Base camp and the mountain is a hive of activity all year round. Footpaths have become trails and trails are now tarmac roads. Tourists flock to areas that previously only the most adventurous or privileged mountaineer or explorer could get to. Would be ascensionists of Everest queue on both sides of the mountain and human traffic jams are not uncommon.

Yet there appears to be a sad inevitability about this. Living in Llanberis I see Yr Wyddfa/Snowdon literally 'loved to death' on a regular basis. The last August Bank Holiday witnessed an almost endless queue of people making for the summit. Chris Bonington suggested people heading for North Wales look elsewhere for their leisure: he could easily have substituted Everest for Snowdon. And yet, if you let your eyes wander from Yr Wyddfa to Moel Cynhorion or perhaps from Everest to Ama Dablam, you see little sign of humans, let alone congestion. The concept of the sacrificial mountain is alive and well.

As climbers we have a duty to protect the cliffs and environment we love and cherish, nevertheless we contribute to their destruction every time we sally forth or write an article or guidebook. Yes, that includes me. How to square this with the fact that many, perhaps most Tibetans and Nepalis crave an increased standard of living, much as most of us do, and who are we to deny them this? Edmund Hillary clearly understood this dilemma as he dedicated much of the rest of his life to helping the Sherpa people of Nepal develop their communities in a sustainable manner through the Himalayan Trust. Maybe the greatest gift the ascent of Everest bequeathed was that.

Right: *The Rongbuk and Everest highway.*
Photograph: Geoff Bennett





THE PATH OF INSPIRATION

During a gap year before he was due to start a course in astrophysics, CC member James Pearson had climbed what was thought to be the hardest route in the country – Equilibrium E10 7a. The ease with which he climbed it got him thinking: Just how far could he go? The life of a student was put on hold as he went on a journey that continues to this day – a journey that has seen him grow in stature as a climber and as a young man who understands the pain and joy the sport can bring.

By James Pearson

It is hard for me to believe it has been two years since I was first asked to write something “about my climbing life”. It should have been an easy task to accomplish; a simple brief, with lots of stories to tell. However, the deeper I dived into my memories, the murkier things became. I am a firm believer in fate and the intended yet sometimes confusing path we are destined to take. No matter how perplexing a moment may be, when you look back from the clarity of the future, a path can be seen and everything starts to make sense.

It works in theory. But in practice, the dots of one’s life can be anything but obvious to link together. Boulderering, trad, sport, multi-pitch. England, Austria, France. Amateur, hopeful, professional. These are all distinct and important parts of my history, and whilst at first glance they may seem a little disjointed and unrelated, I’ll do my best to explain how the pieces of the puzzle fit together in the jigsaw of my life.

I grew up in the Peak district, a beautiful part of England, famous for its gritstone edges, where it rains just as much as everywhere else. Climbing is something that always came naturally to me, be it in playgrounds, buildings, or trees, and I could always be found in places a child should not be.

It’s no secret that the usual climbing style in England is trad, and no surprise that the general population’s opinion of climbing is one of reckless danger, where one is literally holding on to the rock for dear life. It was for these very reasons I didn’t start climbing until 15 years old, since it was almost

impossible to start climbing as a child unless you were lucky enough to have family members or ‘responsible’ friends to show you the way.

One night after school I took my first steps in the vertical world. I top-roped a VDiff and a HVS, and at that moment I realised this is what I had been searching for my whole life. Climbing felt so natural, like slipping on an old pair of slippers, made just for you. Speaking of footwear, the very next day I purchased my first pair of climbing shoes, and whilst they were not quite as comfortable as old slippers, the difference they made to moving on rock was unbelievable.

Left & below:

James’s on-sight attempt at A denti stretti (8b+) in Balmanolesca. He fell on this try, but succeeded later in making the second ascent.

Photograph:
Riky Felderer.



Right:
*Sea and blue skies:
James and Caro
during their first trip
to Sardinia.*

Photograph:
Riky Felderer

Over the next two years and more I climbed mostly trad routes on the gritstone. I was quickly seduced by the world of *Hard Grit*, climbing routes with little or no worthwhile protection, where the consequence of a fall did not bear thinking about. Gritstone is never usually physically difficult, but mentally it is a serious challenge indeed. The cliffs are never too high, usually between 10 and 15 metres, but don't let that trick you into thinking that makes them any less dangerous – the closeness of the floor makes even medium distance falls likely to finish on the ground. During this period I climbed some of the hardest routes on grit, culminating with *Equilibrium*, the world's first E10 7a, and at the time considered the hardest traditionally protected route in the world. I had just turned 19.

By then, I had a place reserved at university to study Astrophysics and my gap year was almost at an end. It was time to join the real world, study, get a job, and grow up. But at the same time I began to wonder "what if?" I had just climbed one of the "hardest routes in the world", and it hadn't felt too hard. Maybe I could take things even further? Perhaps one more year to play wouldn't hurt? After all, university is always going to be there.

So I did just that. One year became two, two became three, and three became. Well, I lose count, but I am still here doing what I love and loving every minute. It hasn't all been easy, and there have been several dark moments, but every rocky step along the way has helped me to grow, as both an athlete and a human. One particularly difficult time was shortly after climbing *The Walk of Life*, a route that would turn out to be quite aptly named.

I realised, and accepted, that my lack of endurance and wider climbing experience was seriously holding me back – Gritstone and the occasional bouldering trip were not ideal for building bulging forearms or rounded technique. I was stuck on a plateau, and if I ever wanted to get moving again I needed to do something drastic.

I left my home, my family and my friends and moved to Innsbruck, Austria in search of a 'magic pill'.

Innsbruck is the place to be for any aspiring sport/competition climber, and it seemed like the obvious choice for my re-birth. I half expected to turn into a 9a monster overnight, but in reality, after almost a year, I was even worse than I had been in England. I saw the local climbers training in the gym, I understood how hard they worked, but try as I might, I just couldn't seem to apply their methods to my training. By focusing all my attention on my weakness, I was also neglecting my strengths. My bouldering level was going downhill, I couldn't remember the last time I had climbed a Trad route. By trying my best to improve I was actually getting worse!

I met Caroline during a particularly unsuccessful climbing trip to Turkey. She was climbing again for the first time after three months off from a serious injury, and even then was far better than me. We were from opposite sides of the world, as different as two people could be, but over the following weeks we became inseparable, and have remained like that up to this day. Caroline was a lead competition climber and had been competing in World Cups for the last 10 years. She knew a thing or two about training, and offered to 'coach' me if I wanted that, warning that it would be painful, and that it would be boring, but promising that I would see results.

Three years down the line I can confirm that what she said and promised is true. It is painful, and my god is it boring, but it works like I would never have believed. When we met I was struggling to climb 8a. After six months with Caro I had climbed my first 8c. A further six months on and it was 8c+. A year later brought me the magical grade of 9a. Don't get me wrong, it's nice to finally be able to climb some hard sport routes, but the most monumental change of gaining some endurance has been to my trad climbing, and there was no-more glaring example than my trip to Pembroke, Wales in 2011

Pembroke is a place I had tended to avoid due to the pumpy nature of the climbing. The rock here is a bullet hard limestone that eats up small wires and succumbs to a confident climbing style. I decided to





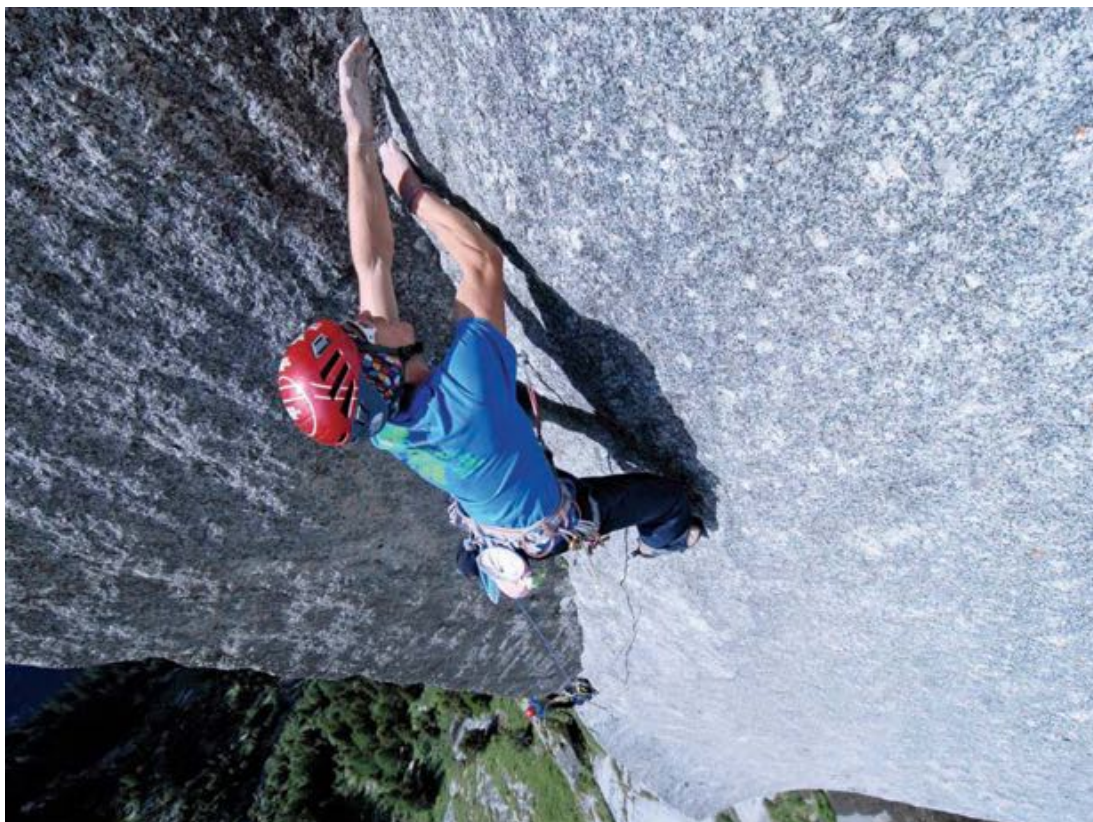
return to the UK to test my old skills and see if my two years away had changed anything. I was unsure of how my body and mind would switch back into trad climbing mode, but discovered it was like riding a bicycle... once you learn you never forget. It was actually even better than that, as my newly discovered fitness not only allowed me to attempt physically more difficult routes, it also kept me calm and relaxed when in dangerous situations. After two weeks back in the UK, I had made the first ever “ground-up” style ascent of an E10, and on-sights of E8s became an almost daily occurrence.

All of the hard work, all of the pain and the suffering was totally worth it. My entire approach to the sport had changed; not only am I able to climb physically harder routes, but I am mentally so much more comfortable when climbing in dangerous situations, knowing that I have a lot more left in the tank should I ever need it. Routes that had been long-term projects have now become potential on-sights. Climbing has once again become something exciting; the exhilaration of a hard challenge to come far outweighing the fear of failure.

Armed with this newfound fitness and confidence I began to explore new worlds. Multi-pitch had been something I had only ever done on easy, grass covered “mountains” back home, so when Caro and I started off on our first joint multi-pitch project *Le Chemins du Kathmandu*, 8b+/c we really had a lot to learn. Our rope management skills were non-existent, and we were so slow we took us an entire day to climb the three amazing pitches. But after we had finally topped out on successful ascents, we knew that multi-pitch would become a big part of our lives in the future. *Joy Division*, the 800-metre 8b granite wall from Simone Pedferri in Val Di Mello, Italy, was one of my biggest ever projects and perhaps my proudest achievement to date. It is certainly the route that required me to give the most, searching my soul for

Left: James Pearson overcome by Joy.

Photograph: Riky Felderer



Left:
James Pearson
grappling with the
fierce laybacking
on Pitch 1 of Joy
Division 8b.

Photograph:
Riky Felderer

the reasons to keep on going back. It was my third ever multi-pitch, and a significant step up both in height and sustained difficulty from anything I had done before. The extremely technical nature of the climbing makes even the individual pitches frustrating, and the idea of linking them all together in one push is a daunting prospect indeed. When I look back on that time I can hardly believe I ever decided to try it. But try I did, and over four visits during the summer of 2011, I was chewed up and spat out by the route more times than I care to remember, but finally found myself standing on top of Monte Qualido, and in some ways, changed from a boy to a man.

Joy Division was a mixture of bolt and trad protected pitches, and in the months that followed my ascent I began to dream of the prospect of opening, hard, fully

trad protected multi-pitch. The possibility is very real, all the ingredients are there; the difficulty is simply in finding a wall with continuous opportunities for protection, especially at the belays. Whenever and wherever that might be, I was beginning to understand how all the parts of the puzzle fit together. If I truly wanted to create something unique, I needed to know that each of my individual skills were as developed as they could be. That meant not only working on my weaknesses, but also honing my strengths. There is not just one true method that leads to success, but there will be one combination that works best for you.

The last year of my climbing life has been devoted to this dream; exploring the world of rock climbing, learning new tricks, and developing old ones. I'm incredibly lucky to have Caroline as a partner in



Above:
Riky Felderer
officiates at the
'surprise' wedding of
James and Caro at
the North Face event
on Kalymnos 2013.

Photograph:
Ciavaldini collection

both climbing and life. Having someone with similar dreams and motivations, similar goals and aspirations, and perhaps most importantly a similar ability level, makes every day easy. We never have to search for partners for the cliff or an expedition, and motivation from the other is on hand, whenever you may need it.

Every few months we change our focus, from sport climbing to trad, from big walls in the mountains to competition bouldering. There is no real pattern to it; it just fits around how we are feeling and which projects are most motivating at the time. If there is a masterplan it is simply to become as developed all round as we can be – avoiding snow, which is the one condition of Caroline. We travel a lot, sometimes too much, and there are days when we are hungry for a lazy day back at home, watching movies and eating chocolate. However, as soon as we are there, thoughts of new exciting places begin to fill our mind, and the desire to leave on a new adventure is impossible to ignore.

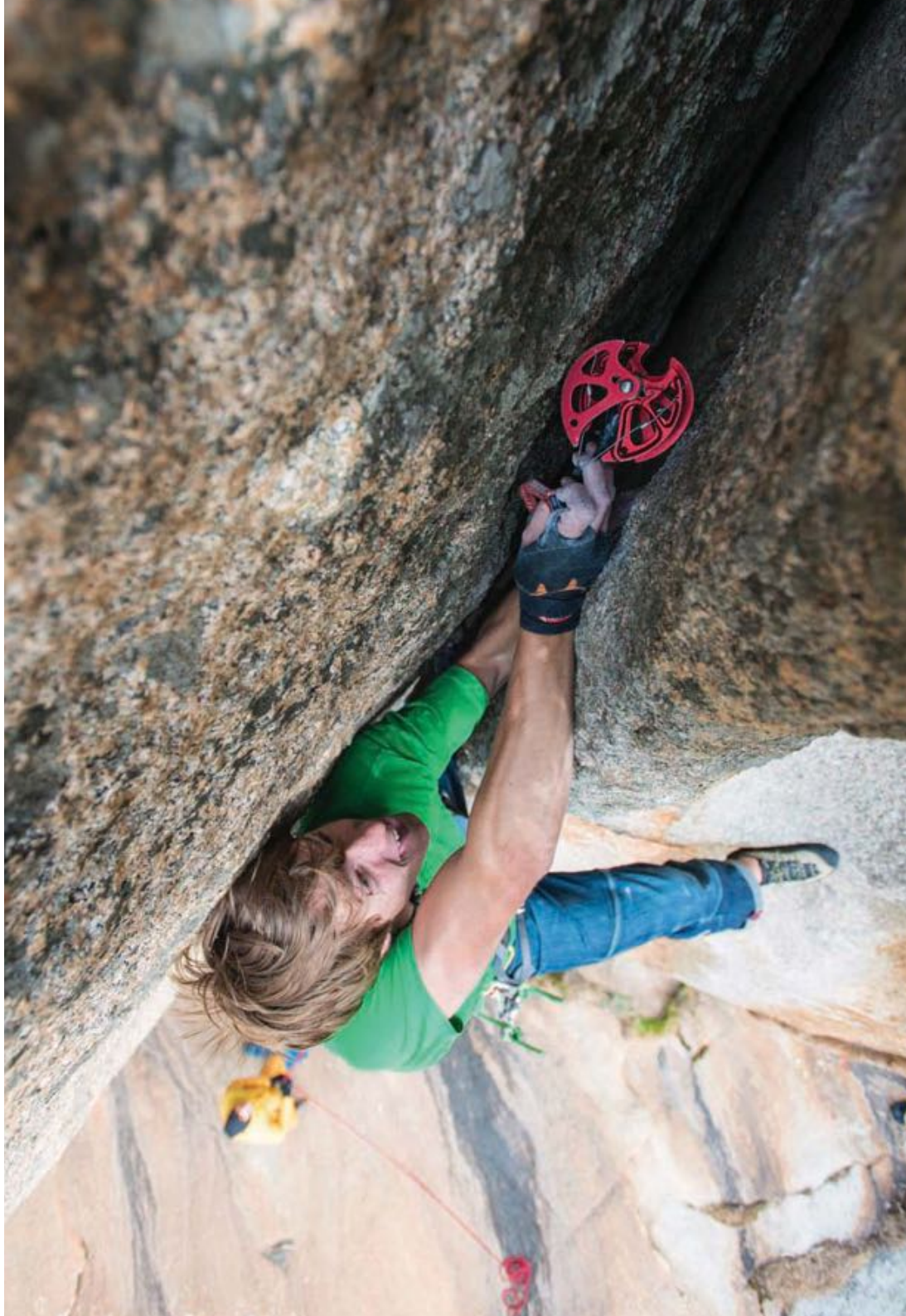
The world is so vast and there are more things to do than any one man could ever wish; yet at the

same time it is tiny. Everything and every place is now so accessible, within 24 hours you can be almost anywhere on the planet with whomever, and doing whatever, you want. I sometimes question the impact I am having on the globe with this perpetual travelling life. I'll be the first to admit that my carbon footprint is bigger than most, but the deeper you look into the situation, the less obvious things become. We spend a lot of time travelling, but also a lot of time living close to nature. When all things are considered, the situation is not black and white.

Thinking deeper still, I sometimes question the worth of what I am doing as a person, my contribution to the human race if you will. What good or what bad, if any, do I bring to mankind through my climbing? Climbing itself is rather pointless. Through climbing we are unlikely to end Third World poverty or cure fatal disease. At the end of the day it is just something that is fun, something challenging, and some way for us to escape. Does there need to be more point to it than that? Is that not enough?

I don't know if I will do something "truly" great in my life. I'm not a politician or a bright scientist, and I don't have much power to change the world. However, if I can inspire those people around me; if I can make my family, my friends, and even the people who might read about me smile, then perhaps I am changing the world in my own little way. After all, a smile and a story are like dropping pebbles in a pond. The ripples spread far and wide.

As we go further into our lives as professional climbers, I understand more and more that long-term success is never based on one glorious moment, but a continuous flow. If your worth is based on doing the hardest, being the fastest, or lasting the longest, there is only one direction things can go, until one day, someone comes along who will do it harder, faster or longer than you. Better to follow the path of inspiration, wherever that may lead, as inspiration is something we can all understand, and something we can all relate to. Inspiration is a universal truth, and in all its beauty it is unquantifiable.



Left:
Getting involved:
James on a new
off-width in Sardinia,
in Gallura. No
name, French 6c/7a.
1st ascent done
together with Michele
Caminati.

Photograph:
Riky Felderer

A full-page background image showing a sunset over a body of water. The sun is a bright yellow circle in the upper right, casting a long, shimmering reflection down the water. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow. In the background, a dark silhouette of a hill with a flat top (a fort) is visible. The water in the foreground is dark with some ripples and a few small, dark shapes that look like boats or logs.

SHAKTI & DUST: AN INDIAN JOURNEY

Travel writer, editor, photographer and high performance climber, Dave Pickford, is always seeking new adventures. Here he recounts a sometimes life-threatening motorcycle journey through India, where the bouldering became a peaceful interlude between perilous rides along some of the sub-continent's most treacherous highways.

By Dave Pickford

Namaste...? Hello, Mr Singh?" As I peer through the darkness of Lalli Singh's basement workshop in a side street of Karol Bagh, I break into a gentle sweat induced by the inhalation of stagnant petrol fumes. My hopes of finding our Enfield Bullet 500 serviced and ready to hit the road are diminishing with every breath. "Hello Mister" one of Mr Singh's affable young mechanics pipes up. "I am most very sorry good sir, but we have problem. Bike not finished." The boss, it transpires, is away, and the Bullet won't be ready until the day after tomorrow.

Delhi is the kind of city in which a great deal of time and energy may need to be expended simply in order to get out of it. This is an experience familiar to many climbers heading up into the Himalayas. After a four-day epic of multiple high-speed rickshaw journeys between Connaught Place and Karol Bagh, the Bullet was finally ready and the prospect of escape from the metropolis, alpine-style, was imminent.

The phrase 'baptism of fire' took on a slightly whiffy irony on the first day of our three-month mega road trip around India. Just a few hours outside Delhi, between the bustling plains' towns of Ghaziabad and Haridwar, my girlfriend and I found ourselves squatting with an alarming urgency in a large field of sugar cane, attempting to camouflage ourselves from curious locals, as the notorious bacteria of the capital began to take serious effect.

After numerous impromptu stops, our journey became a nauseating comedy as I steered the fully loaded Bullet at walking pace through a swarm of cyclists and vegetable sellers amid the catatonic traffic of Muzzafaraghar whilst Sarah made impressive arcs of projectile vomit over my shoulder.

Amazingly, she took commendable measures to avoid spattering the town's numerous cows with vomit. Cows are sacred to Hindus, and we just escaped

the disdain of the local brahmin by a combination of her good aim and a few well-timed swerves on my part.

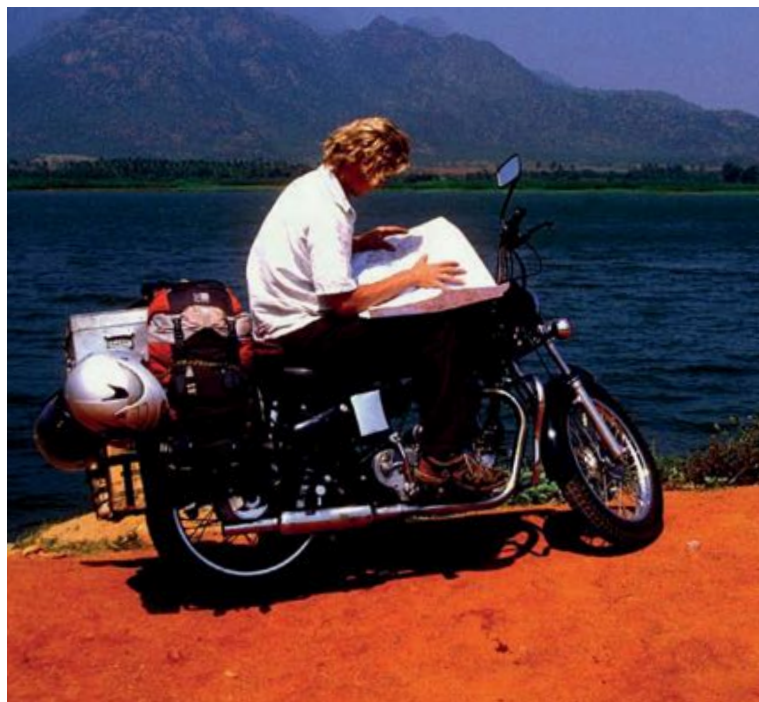
After a few days in Rishikesh recovering from this febrile introduction to motorcycle travel in the subcontinent, and after giving ourselves an even stronger dose of antibiotics, the magnetic pull of the mountain roads of Himachal Pradesh proved too strong for us or the bike to resist.

The air grew steadily colder as we wove through the foothills of the Himalaya, heading westwards toward that troubled frontier country of Kashmir. We emerged from the Jawahar Tunnel into the sharp December sunlight of the Kashmir Valley after surviving more than three miles of terrifying icy darkness filled with diesel smoke.

Passing various avalanche warning signs, I realised we were in the precarious position of travelling on a motorcycle in the approaching clasp of the Himalayan winter – with only one way out should the first snows arrive.

Below:
Charting a course – consulting the map for the next stage of the journey

Photograph:
Dave Pickford



Left: *The sun hovers over the stillness of Nigeen Lake, Srinagar.*

Photograph: *Dave Pickford*



Above:
Rocks in a hard
place – the Hampi
boulders, one of the
most spectacular
venues in the world
but a long hard ride.

Photograph:
Dave Pickford

The weather was fair but the ever-present thought of a cold front coming down from the Karakoram was enough to make our stay in the place Salman Rushdie describes as “a paradise not so much lost as ruined” a short one.

In good weather, the renowned Highway 1 from Jammu to Srinagar is one of India’s most dangerous roads. In snow, the bellow of pressure horns erupts from Indian Army trucks as they slide around blind corners above thousand-metre scree slopes (all whilst triple-overtaking bullock carts and clapped-out buses, naturally). Riding a bike on a road like that makes even the most dangerous forms of climbing look safer than tennis.

At around 3 a.m. on the morning of December 12th

2005, the shockwave of an earthquake originating in the Hindu Kush measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale hit Srinagar and generated a series of minor tsunamis on the city’s lakes.

Woken by this unusual nocturnal intrusion, the seismic wave subsided as our rickety houseboat pitched violently for the last time, and I meditated on the local wives’ tale that earthquakes are caused by the angry writhing of a subterranean serpent. Not being a superstitious person, I am however a keen advocate of respecting local custom, and did not wish to wait and see if the apocryphal snake’s powers extended from plate tectonics to the generation of blizzards.

We left Srinagar the following morning – which was later reported as the coldest December morning

in Kashmir for five years – wearing every item of clothing we had. Back on the other side of Jawahar Tunnel, and despite almost being forced back through the gargantuan fume-filled pipe by a clamorous posse of Indian soldiers demanding our passport details, visions of imminent frostbite subsided with the first few gusts that came in from the south.

And with that warm air blowing up from the Punjab came hallucinations of a distant country; the granite plains of Karnataka far to the south, and of boulders watching over the ruins of lost empires among the lush green of the paddy fields. With that in mind, the Bullet and its two shivering riders made haste out of the icy claws of the Himalayan winter and south towards the sands of Rajasthan's Thar desert.

A couple of weeks later, having covered 4,000 kilometres since leaving Delhi, Sarah and I rode the Bullet into the ivory sand at Mandrem on the Malabar coast on December 30th. The Arabian Sea glistened with preternatural zeal that evening; this must have been what Roman centurions had known, I thought, on seeing the Mediterranean again after long years of battle in distant lands.

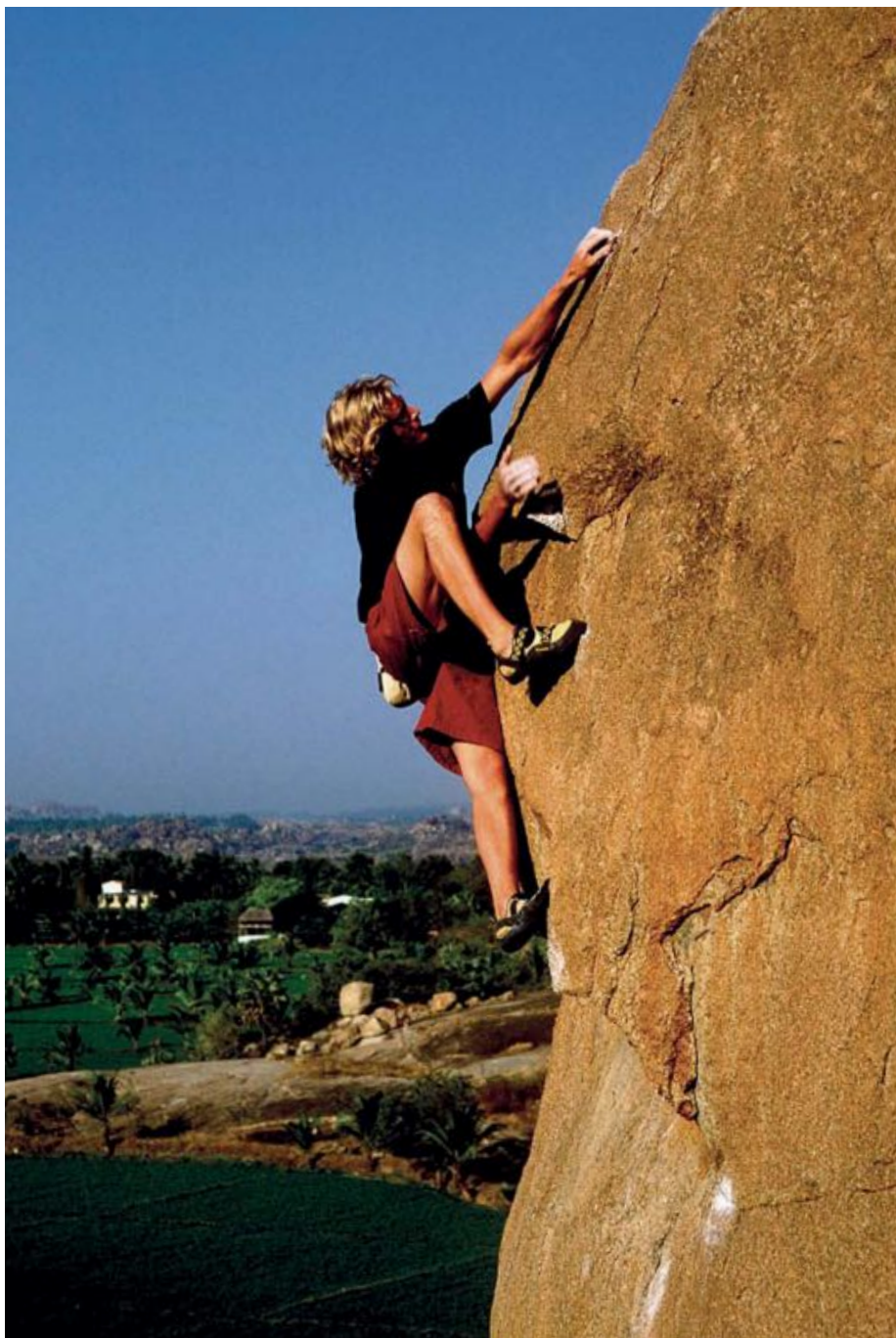
We spent a blissful new year in Goa, celebrating our survival of the world's most dangerous roads with an appropriately poisonous-looking bottle of Maharashtrian rum. At last, it was time to escape India's potholed highways and homicidal driving – for a while.

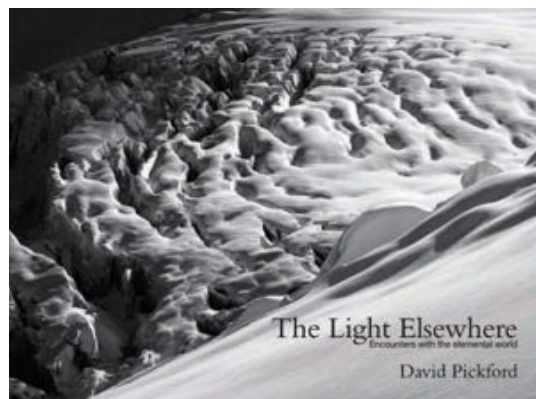
After a break from the road to explore the climbing at Badami and Hampi, we covered a lot more ground. The Bullet took us south from Goa to the Nilgiri Hills of south Karnataka, the Cardamom Hills of Kerala, then west again to the Indian Ocean and Kayakumari in Tamil Nadu, the most southerly point of the subcontinent. From there, we continued south to Sri Lanka.

We headed back north in mid-February as the

Right: *High stepping – a relief to be out of the saddle and on rock. Dave bouldering at Hampi.*

Photograph: Dave Pickford





pre-monsoon heat was already beginning to build, thickening the morning air like swathes of smoke in black bamboo. Sarah had to fly back to England in a week. I had a loose plan to ride back to Delhi over the following month, completing a huge, jagged loop around the country.

The following week, in the middle of a hot afternoon in the arid heart of India with the monsoon still months away, I turned the Bullet around and headed back to Hampi, first to climb and then to go home. I'd made good time that day from the small village in rural Karnataka I'd left at dawn all the way to the border of Andhra Pradesh.

By now, I properly understood how hard the road would be up through India's poorest east coast states to Varanasi and on to Sikkim in the eastern Himalaya. As I manoeuvred the Bullet through the chaotic traffic of another anonymous, dirty town somewhere on the high Deccan, I remembered my near miss with a truck in Java three years before and the effects of too much riding: I realised I'd been on the road long enough.

Soon afterwards, I hit the main National Highway that links Bangalore with Hyderabad, where I'd have to fork south and then east again back to Karnataka. Here, I stopped at a little roadside dhobi-stall for chai and a cigarette, and paused for fifteen minutes before riding on.

In the next hour, just after turning around, I

encountered the biggest cobra I have ever seen. Curling into the darkness like a scene from the Ramayana, the great snake quickly disappeared into an immense, overgrown well. In India, the hooded cobra (or 'naja naja') is replete with surrounding mythologies: the Hindu god Shiva is often painted with a protective cobra around his neck.

Snakes make me superstitious, and just after I saw the cobra I passed by a Hindu funeral procession in a dusty village on the plains. The mourners' songs meandered out into a hot, empty sky. It felt like that huge snake, vanishing as quickly as he came, had come to tell me that I'd reached the end of my journey.

I rode west into a golden blue spring evening as thick clouds of insects descended on the cooling rice fields. After a while, the sun went down over the Deccan and I rode on into the night. As I neared Hampi, frogs croaked through the darkness from the Tungabhadra river as a huge full moon rose over the plains, breaking the drone of cicadas.

Above me, towers of pale granite were shadowlit against a night sky pinned with luminous stars. After a while, I stopped by a lone coconut tree and cut the engine. Silence – that most elusive thing of all in the world's busiest country - overcame me. At the end of the very last day of my journey around the subcontinent, I finally understood why India is not just another country, but another way of seeing.

'Shakti and Dust' is taken from David Pickford's new book The Light Elsewhere - Encounters with the Elemental World a collection of his images and stories from some of the most stunning places on earth for climbing, mountaineering, and adventure. To order your copy today for the special price of £35 including UK P&P (£7 off RRP of £42) please contact Cordee on 01455 611 185 quoting the code TLE3500. Alternatively, you can order the book by emailing sales@cordee.co.uk and quoting the same code. The offer is open to overseas readers, who should contact Cordee first on +44 1455 611 185 or via email.

Right:
*Tenzing Norgay and
Edmund Hillary
drink a celebratory
cup of tea at Camp
IV in the Western
Cwm after their
successful ascent of
Mount Everest,
30 May 1953.*

Photograph:
George Band,
Royal Geographical
Society



PEOPLE

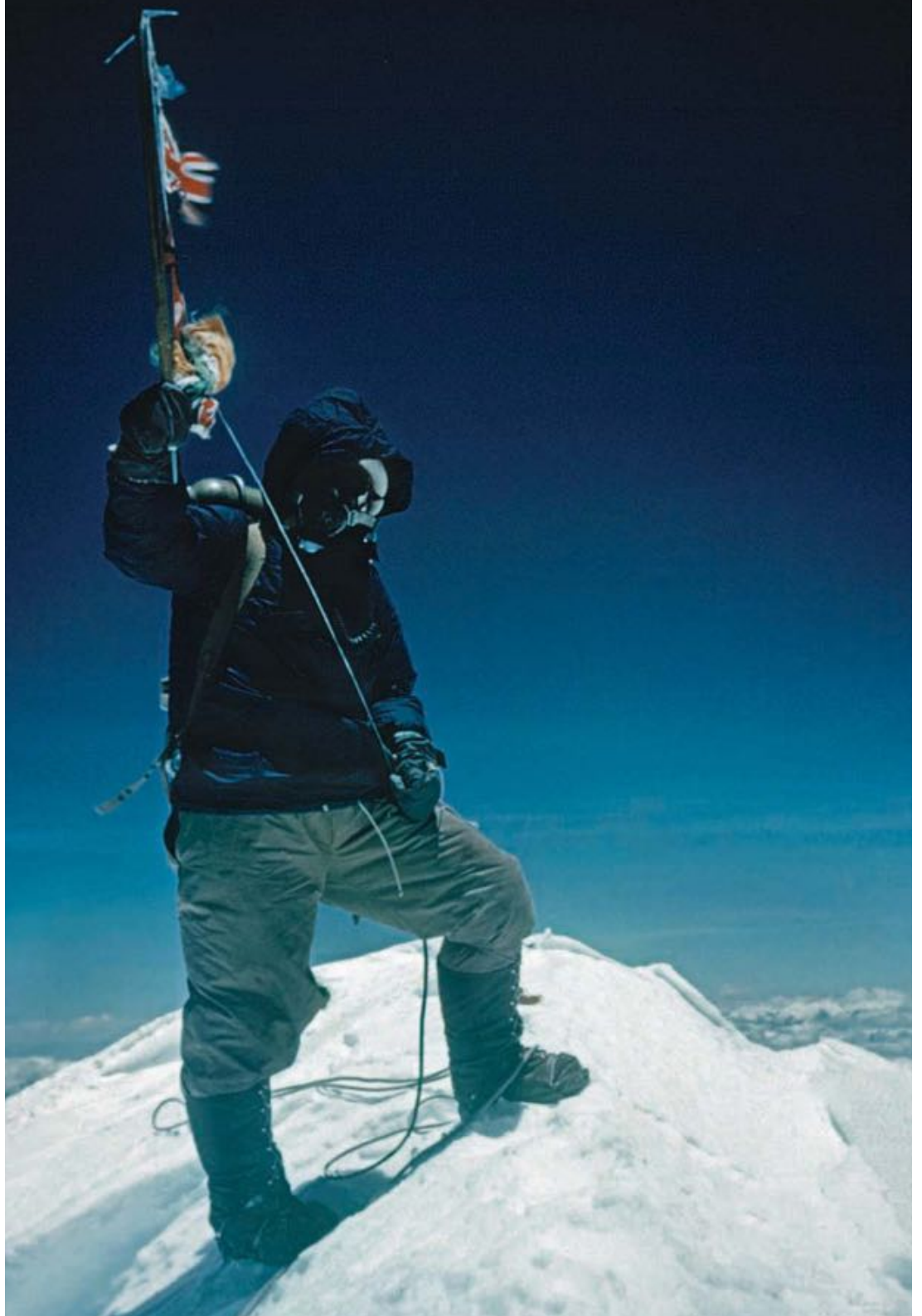
A Fellowship of the Mountains. By Mark Vallance

Fifty Years of Friendship. By John Harwood

Silver Salvagers at the Sligachan. By Tony Moulam

Right:
*Tenzing Norgay on
the summit of Mount
Everest at 11.30am
on 29th May 1953.
Tenzing waves his
ice-axe on which
are hung the flags of
Britain, Nepal, the
United Nations and
India.*

Photograph:
Edmund Hillary,
Royal Geographical
Society



A FELLOWSHIP OF THE MOUNTAINS

Former Climbers' Club president Mark Vallance represented the club at a dinner held at the Pen y Gwryd Hotel last year to mark the 60th anniversary of the ascent of Everest, and the 58th anniversary of Kanchenjunga. In a brief, but moving personal account of the day, Mark finds himself transported back in time by a pub steeped in mountaineering history and a gathering of some of the greatest names in the history of high adventure.

By Mark Vallance

I was pleased to be asked to represent the club at this celebration of the 60th anniversary of the ascent of Everest and 58th of Kanchenjunga. I had been to the 40th at the Royal Geographical Society, and the 50th at the Leicester Square Odeon. This was a very special party, more intimate than the other events because of where it was held.

It had been a long time since I had been to Pen y Gwryd, and even longer since last I had eaten there, but nothing seemed to have changed. As a pub, it is no longer fashionable with the modern generation of elite climbers, but it is still frequented by an older climbing fraternity whose members once broke new ground.

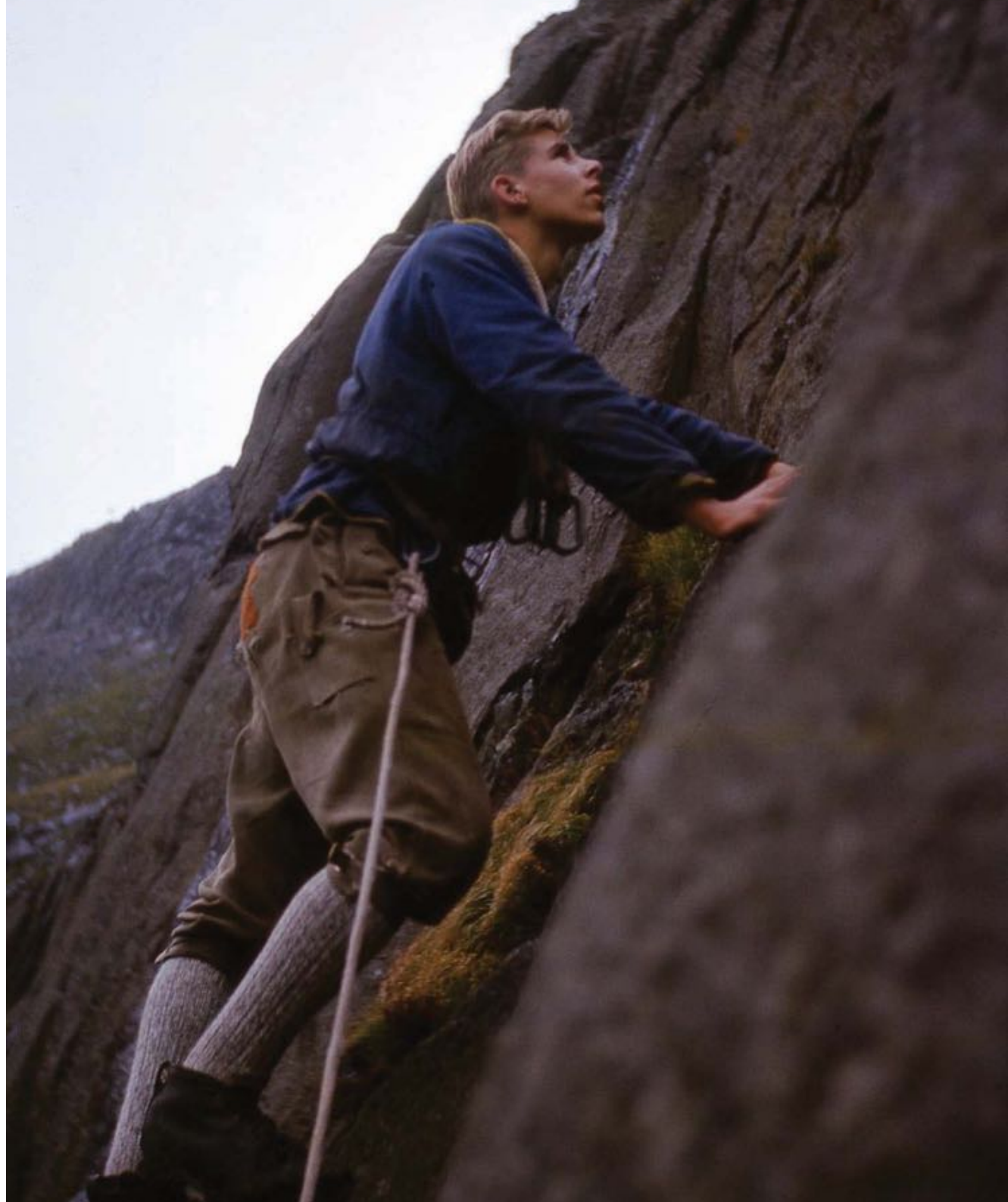
As I entered the bar, memories came flooding back. As a teenager I used to walk with friends, over the hill from the Climbers' Club hut down in the Pass, for a beer and the hope that some of the talent, fame and glory imprinted on the walls of the PYG might rub off on us. There were times when we were called upon to make up a mountain rescue team led by the landlord, Chris Briggs, local mountain rescue supremo, Sheriff of Caernarfonshire, and the presiding genius of a mountaineering institution.

But this was many years ago, long before more recent generations discovered the delights of Llanberis. Even so, the spirits of those great climbers still haunt the rooms, their signatures written on ceilings. This was the place where I had peered into the inner sanctum

to see John Hunt deep in conversation with Wilf Noyce, or where I realized in a moment of panic that the three chaps I was pushing past to get to the bar were none other than Charles Evans, George Band and Mike Westmacott: all of them luminaries of the 1953 expedition and pioneers in their own right.

Today, however, the bar seemed eerily quiet. I was brought back from my reveries to the present by a voice asking if I had met Jo Scar. I knew the name but not the face. As she took my hand it came to me – she was the first woman to lead *Cenotaph Corner*. She seemed pleased to be identified, but not half as pleased as I was for remembering. I went through the narrow hall that leads to the dining room, and suddenly there were lots of people I knew.

A hundred and twenty climbers, families and assorted guests had come to celebrate and honour those who had helped to fly the flag from the summit of the highest and the third highest mountains on the planet. None of the original 1953 climbing team were left but it was good to see Jan Morris, whose Times scoop was timed to perfection. The great and the good were well represented with Emlyn Jones, Denise Evans, Rebecca Stephens, Stephen Venables, Doug Scott and Chris Bonington and no less than three of the Kanchenjunga summiteers, Tony Strether, Norman Hardy, and the greatest of them all, Joe Brown, there with his family.



FIFTY YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

From his first tentative moves on Scottish rock as young teenager to the granite of Yosemite and the coastal reaches of Pembroke, bio-scientist and prolific new router John Harwood remembers the friendships of the rope as much as the routes ascended.

By John Harwood

I started climbing by chance in the early 1960s. The story was thus. I had a rather impecunious background but was lucky enough to pass the much-maligned Eleven Plus exam and won a place at a Midlands grammar school. This gave me a break in life – something I wouldn't have got nowadays.

While my school was excellent it was an all boys institution. This meant that we spent much time plotting to meet girls. One good place was the local library. Every Monday my friend, Dave Robbins, and I would go to borrow books and hope to get lucky. We didn't always find girls, but we did find climbing.

I remember Dave borrowed a book called *The White Spider* by Heinrich Harrer. It was a story of attempts on, and the eventual climbing of, the North Face of the Eiger. Dave read it first and insisted I read it after him: by the time I had turned the final page we were both inspired. It was Boy's Own stuff. There were heroic struggles against the elements; the rescuing of colleagues; tales of skill and strength on rocks and ice; acts of self-sacrifice; and visions of nature at her most cruel and capricious. How could we not want to become mountaineers?

So, in the summer of 1963, we enrolled on a climbing course run by the Scottish YHA. It was in the Cuillins of Skye, which, the previous summer, Dave and I had toured during a five-week cycle-ride around Scotland.

Before we got there, however, I had had a first taste of climbing when my father took me for a short break before my exams. We stayed at the Pen y Gwryd Hotel at the head of the Llanberis Pass. Although it rained every day, I was out climbing on boulders most of

the time. Seeing my enthusiasm, Dad hired a guide for a day. His name was Chris Patterson. Because of the weather, Chris took me down to Tremadoc and on the drive down we picked up hitchhiker. He was a climber: very keen and quite talkative. We have remained friends ever since – his name was Ken Wilson. We made the most of the rather indifferent conditions climbing *Hound's Head Pinnacle* (Severe and since blown up), *Christmas Curry* (Hard Severe) and finishing with *Merlin* (VS). The latter I found very strenuous as a beginner climbing in walking boots, but Ken was very encouraging for which I was grateful.

Then came our long awaited course. Dave and I were assigned to a Canadian, Dave de Gruchy. 'Canada' was a very experienced climber with good humour and we learnt a lot and had a good time doing long routes in the Cuillin. The chief instructor was 'Big Elly' Moriarty but we only climbed with him one day when he decided we were quite good as climbers and we all soloed the *Pinnacle Ridge* on Sgurr nan Gillian. The week after the course, we continued to climb with 'Canada' but with me in the lead, including my first Scottish VS.

Fresh from all this inspiration, I hitched straight to North Wales where I climbed with whoever I could find. I managed a few HVS and Extreme climbs in my Masters and met quite a few characters including Don Cowans, Spider Penman, Al Harris, John Gerrard, Lew Brown and a number of Rock and Ice and Alpha Club members.

Then it was off to Birmingham University to study biochemistry. I enrolled with the climbing club having great expectations, only to find that I was climbing

Left:
*Harwood on Javelin
Blade, Ogwen 1963.*

Photograph:
John Harwood



harder routes than any of them. Thus, on Freshers' meet I was partnered with the best of the old stoats (Birmingham University MC were called 'the stoats' after their inelegant way of moving on rocks) – Roger High.

Although I had already done harder routes than Roger, he was a better technician than I and we were well suited. However, things didn't start off too promisingly. I had lectures on Saturday mornings: so, by the time I had hitched to Snowdonia, we only had one day to climb. It was damp so we soloed Idwal Slabs before deciding on *Javelin Blade*, which was graded V.S at the time. Fortunately, in my big boots and in drizzle, I had the sense to back off. The route is now given EI.

After this inauspicious beginning our partnership went from strength to strength and we still occasionally get together. Roger was a very determined climber, but also very considerate. A good example was when we made an early ascent of *Vector* (E2). We were not alone on the route. Ahead was a crack team from the north of England. The leader had struggled on the second pitch and, when it came the second's turn to climb, he fell off and couldn't get back on the rock. After much swinging around the second managed to grab a flake just before his rope ran out and they were able to abseil.

It was Roger's lead but by this time I was pretty nervous. As usual he flowed smoothly up the rock and reached the peg on the Ochre Slab without much trouble. He could so easily have continued in his graceful progress, but he thought of me and moved back down to place our only small nut runner in a crack to protect me on the difficult moves. Typical Rog.

One of our later trips was a return visit to Skye in 1968. Armed with my previous knowledge, we had a list of new lines to try. So, when we arrived at the end of a dry spell (notice I said 'end'), we were full of ideas. Gwen Moffat was in the BMC hut and being

Left: Roger High on first ascent *Leviathan*, Skye 1968.
Photograph: John Harwood

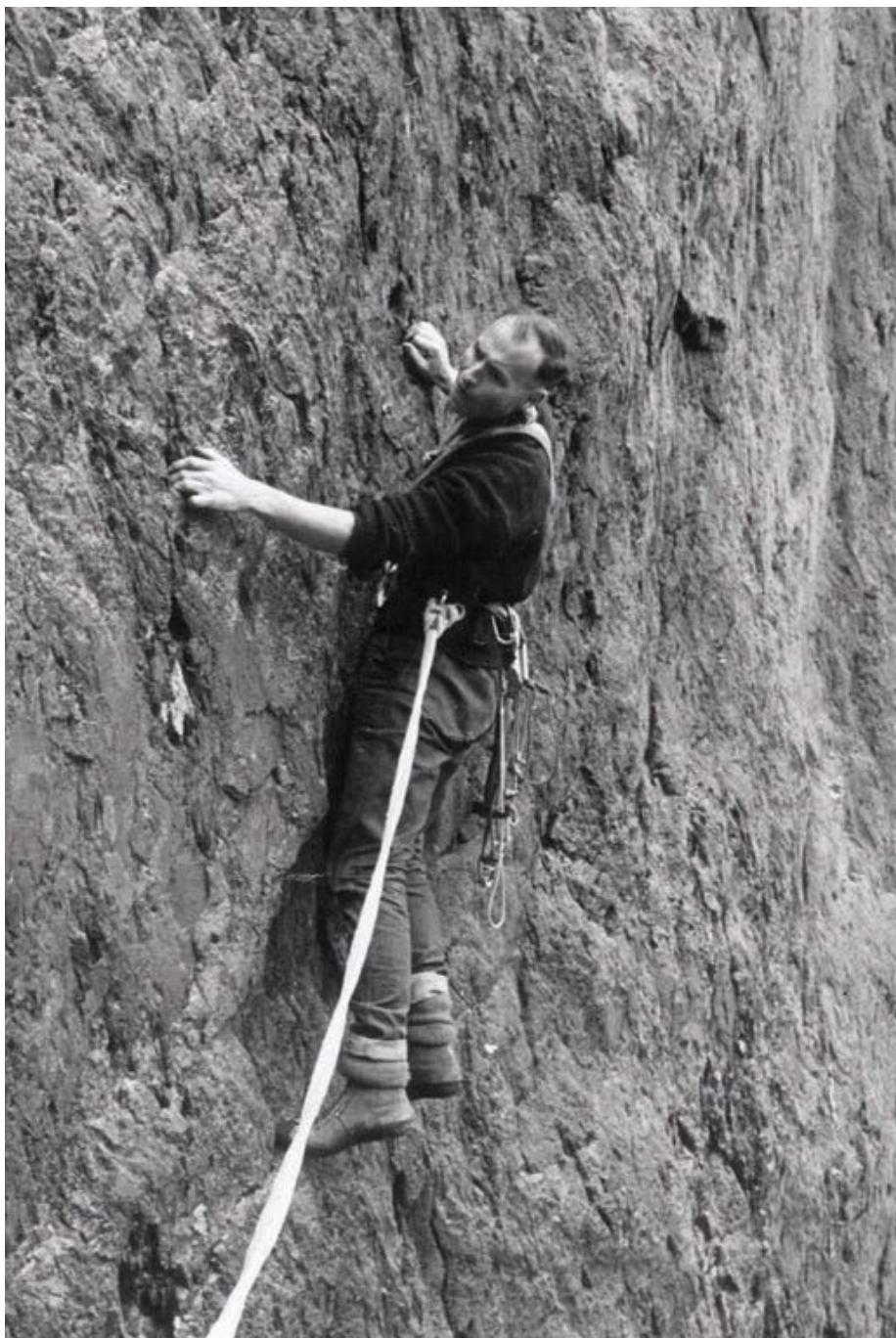
treated like royalty. She was friendly enough but wasn't very interested in what we were up to until we had completed our third day of new routing. *Leviathan* (E1) was the most notable of our efforts and was on the north face of Sgurr nan Eag, which took us nearly three hours to reach. It had a couple of Robin Smith routes on it, so I figured it must be interesting. Our route took a diagonal line between huge overhangs and seemed pretty serious, with retreat looking all but impossible. There was an air of anxiety between us as we climbed: but, then, that's what new routing is all about, isn't it?

While climbing with Rog most weekends, I made contact in 1964 with Eric Jones. Eric, like me, was new to the sport and together we were working our way through the Extremes. But Eric had a particular difficulty in that he worked shifts. While this gave him time-off mid-week, there were not very many people around to climb with. I solved this problem by working weekends on my Ph.D. and taking time off during the week.

Eric was one of the safest climbers I have ever climbed with. I never ever saw him in the slightest difficulty. Not that we got up everything we tried – but we always retreated in good order. Small wonder that Eric became one of Britain's most famous soloists.

One of our best times together was a trip to the Dolomites in 1966. We trained by doing HVS and Extreme climbs in boots – I don't know why it never occurred to us to climb in EBs in the Dolomites and carry our boots. Anyway we got quite good and could manage climbs like *Cenotaph Corner* (E1) quite easily in this style.

Once in the Dolomites we made a number of first or early British ascents of Grade VI/VI sup. culminating with the Buhlweg on the Roda di Vael. This was a great climb enlivened by a book to sign near the top which had a portrait of our hero, Buhl, in it. We were climbing behind two Italian aces, Sepp Shrott and



Right: Eric Jones on *Suicide Wall*, Ogwen 1967.
Photograph: John Harwood

Erich Abram when a storm hit us three pitches from the top. The Italians seemed amused at the young whippersnapper (me) struggling up a long unprotected VS pitch in the snow.

We congregated at the top of this under an overhang to wait out the storm. Eric and I had some spare clothing but no food while the Italians had food but no spare clothing. So, between the four of us, we were in good shape. Eventually the storm abated sufficiently for us to make the top and then the hut where we celebrated in the usual style while an increasingly inebriated Abram regaled us with stories of climbing with Buhl.

There was a vibrant social scene in North Wales in the 1960s and it centred on two pubs – The Vaynol in Nant Peris and The Padarn in Llanberis. Wendy's café in the same town was also good on a rainy day, even before Al Harris bought it.

It was at these watering holes you got to meet all the active climbers and swap news and stories. Two of the stars at the time were Baz Ingle and Pete Crew. Crew was a master of the one-liner. One evening we were in the pub when Al Bell burst in. Al and his partner John Clements were doing some significant new routes at the time. Al came straight over to us, without even getting a beer. He was grinning from ear to ear. 'We did *The Thing* (E2) in the morning and *Surplomb* (E2) and *Hangover* (E2) in the afternoon,' he volunteered. Wow, we thought – they must be going well. Crew looked up from his beer with a raised eyebrow and asked: 'and what did you do in the evening?'

In the late 60s the Stoats Club was strengthened by a number of strong climbers, including Chris Perry with whom I climbed a lot. Chris is very tall and, although we were generally well matched, there were sometimes one or two moves on a route that were really easy for him but almost impossible for anyone else. We did many climbs at the Avon Gorge especially after he had moved to Bristol with *Peryl* (E4) being one of our challenging ventures. Chris partly used his working time at Bristol Aerospace to construct homemade micro-nuts of titanium. Since these were

the days before wires, they came in very handy.

Chris and I still climb together occasionally in Canada where he has made Canmore his home. The home he built has a kitchen/living room upstairs with a picture window view of Three Sisters, Chinaman's Peak and Mount Rundle spread out in front of you as you eat breakfast. It is really hard to think of a more inspiring vista for a climber. True to form, Chris has been very active developing new routes all over the area for the last 40 years. His guidebooks are really excellent – if only I could get him to respond to e-mails as well.

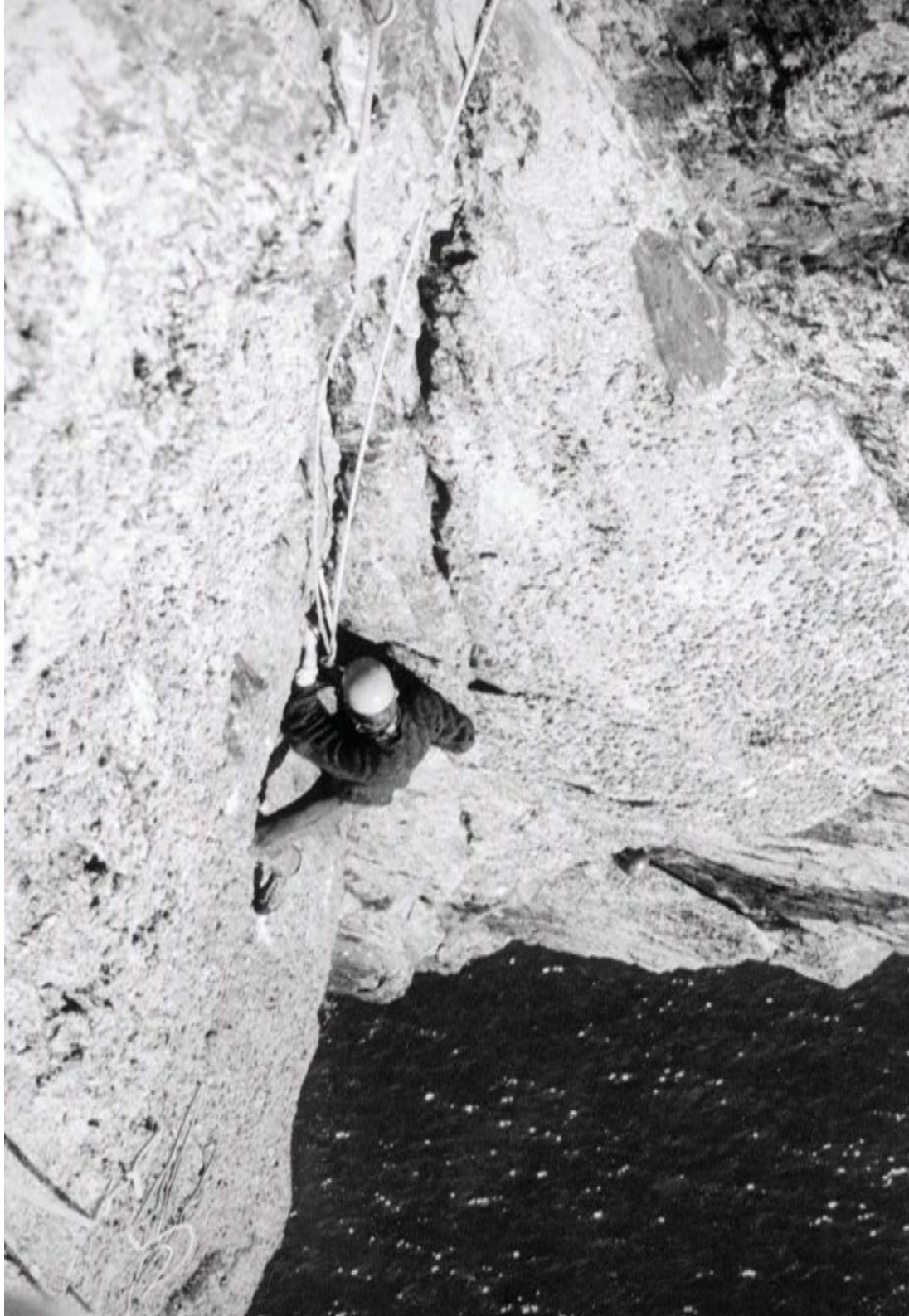
On finishing my Ph.D. and, with an academic career in mind, it was customary to go to the USA. Naturally, for a climber, that meant heading out west. Fortunately, the University of California was an excellent venue and I was able to secure a position. I had a young family so it was nice for my son and my wife who were looking forward to the sunshine. For me, I was dreaming of Yosemite.

Within a couple of days of arriving I had made contact with a climber, Wally Reed, who was one of the 'golden age climbers' of Yosemite. Unfortunately, Wally pretty soon got fed up of following an enthusiastic Brit in the rain – winter had begun – so pretty soon I was searching for another partner.

I heard there was a German climber in an adjacent department and set out to find him. Until then my impression of Germans had come from watching war films or sharing routes with noisy and somewhat arrogant climbers in the Dolomites. The fact that my partner-to-be was called Adolph didn't help matters either. But how wrong can you be?

Adolph Baur turned out to be as nice a person as you could wish to meet. Always smiling, he had a wealth of experience and was an excellent companion. We climbed together regularly and developed areas both in the foothills and the High Sierra, including the 700ft high granite of the Cosumnes River Gorge.

It was tragic, but typical of the man, that on his return to Europe, Adolph was killed trying to rescue someone in the Alps near Konstanz. Since those



Left:
*Chris Perry on Big
Groove, Gogarth
1968.*

Photograph:
John Harwood



times, I've become a lot less prejudiced and have made good friends, including climbers, all over the world.

One of the things I liked about California in those days was aid climbing. In Britain aid routes were on steep loose crags but in Yosemite you could really concentrate on technical difficulties. Stepping up on a series of rungs or sky hooks on an A4 was pretty exciting.

The other advantages were the weather and the boundless unclimbed rock. During one winter season I led two Californians up a lovely little two-pitch new route in the San Francisco area in a gentle but warm drizzle. When Jim and Bob arrived at the top, they both confessed that, although they had been climbing for seven and eight years respectively, neither had ever climbed in the rain before.

And new routes and new rock was there for the taking. On many occasions we would go into the High Sierra, walk one hour from the road and pick the best line on an unclimbed cliff of 500-1500ft.

But our stay in California was limited to two years so I returned to the UK in 1971 with a job at Leeds University. At that time, although I knew little of Yorkshire, the idea of changing the abundant sunshine of California for the bleakness of Ilkley Moor didn't sound like a fair exchange. But, once again, I was to be proved wrong.

In the early 70s Leeds was a powerhouse for climbing. Part of it stemmed from the University's indoor wall – built by Don Robinson and the first of its type in the UK. John Syrett learnt to climb there but there were a host of other star performers. Al 'Brickedge' Manson and Bernard Newman were great technicians while others associated with the scene included John Stainforth, Pete Kitson, Geoff Hankinson, Tim Jepson, Roger Baxter-Jones, 'Dirty' Alex MacIntyre, Brian Hall, and Angela Faller. Al Rouse and Mick Geddes would call in on their way north to raid the Scottish winter scene and other

Left: Adolph Baur on Goodridge Pinnacle, Yosemite 1970.
Photograph: John Harwood

visitors included Dennis Gray or Ron Fawcett. All this was supervised by the 'Bergfuhrer' Allan Austin who ensured the highest ethical climbing standards were observed.

The advantage climbing on a proper indoor wall gave to aspiring rock athletes was clear in the performances of the mercurial John Syrett who, on his day, was as good as anyone in the country. But most people did their practising by bouldering outdoors and not very often either – once a week would be typical.

Protection was still rudimentary and hard leads were a terrifying combination of keeping cool and technical difficulty. Even bouldering was pretty dangerous. One trick to save a bone-crunching deck out was to stand on the fingers of someone grappling with a rounded or shiny finish – painful, but less life threatening than a ground fall.

In Yorkshire I teamed up with Ken Wood who must be one of the most underrated British climbers ever. There were very few hard Lakeland or gritstone climbs that he hadn't made an early ascent of.

Certainly, he was every bit as good as Syrett but far more consistent – often doing an ascent in far from ideal weather conditions. He kept very calm when climbing even in the most demanding situations. Austin named *Poker Face* (E1) after Ken's expression when seconding a pitch that Allan had found hard.

Indeed, when Dave Cook wrote a magazine article *Gritstone* – the sombre face of Yorkshire climbing some wag crossed out gritstone and wrote Ken's name. But this was rather unfair for Ken had an excellent sense of humour, in a dry Yorkshire way. We had lots of good times and laughs together.

Two incidents illustrate his prowess and character. The first was an evening spent with Ken new routing on Chevin Butress. Ken's approach was ground up and on sight. After 25 feet of difficult, runnerless climbing, Ken paused to survey the line. The rock wasn't absolutely solid and was a bit green so I suggested he could move right and place a runner in an adjacent climb. 'Oh no,' said Ken, 'that would be cheating.' He completed *Gronff* (E2) without further incident.



Left:
Ken Wood, second ascent of Encore, Almscliff 1972.

Photograph:
John Harwood

When one of the Yorkshire regulars, Tim Jepson, returned to Leeds from North Wales, having followed Colorado ace Steve Wunsch up what they thought was the first free ascent of *Left Wall*, he was raving about the route. The following weekend Ken and I went down to do it. It was a cold, windy day and not really suitable but Ken strolled up the pitch making it look quite reasonable.

I know the route is considered relatively straightforward nowadays, but back in 1972 it was one of the first fly-on-the-wall style of climbs and, of course, we didn't have many runners either.

In 1973 I got a job at Cardiff University and starting exploring South Wales. Pretty soon I was climbing regularly with Phill Thomas, known as Ginger Phill to distinguish him from all the other Phills around. Phill is probably the best all-round climber to come



Above:
*Phill Thomas on The
 Bat, Carn Dearg*
 1975.

Photograph:
John Harwood

from South Wales particularly after some of the major routes he did with Mick Fowler.

In those days he had a reputation for bravery that sometimes got him into trouble. One of our early new routes together was *Nyth* (E3) at Ogmere near to the aptly named *Wipeout* (E4,5c) that Phill had already had an epic on. He got 30 feet up its initial steep wall and was running out of strength as he desperately tried to get a peg runner in.

All this was above a solid rock platform, which meant that falling off might give one 'a severe dose of death' as one of our regular climbing partners, Clive Horsfield, so bluntly put it. Fortunately, Phill got the peg in and the remainder of the ascent was devoid of further drama.

One of our best trips together was to Scotland in the summer of 1975. Apart from a snowstorm on *Yo-Yo* (E2) we had good weather throughout and ticked off all the classic extremes on the Ben and in Glen Coe. The best route was *Shibboleth* (E2) where we both marvelled at Robin Smith's lead, especially on the famous fourth pitch.

But another notable route we ticked on that visit was *The Bat*. I used to devour mountain literature and Smith's article *The Bat* and the *Wicked* was a particular favourite. I didn't realise how good the writing was until we got on the climb. Every pitch was perfectly described. I got the 'Hoodie groove' and then Phill had the big corner. He started out confidently, but as the layback that got harder and more strenuous it became clear he was running in to trouble.

My mind darted back to Smith's description of the climb – 'making eyes at my two little piton belays....I pulled down my jersey over my hands and took great grip of the ropes' – but Phill was not to suffer the same fate as he got bridged in the corner and the situation was saved. Higher up he was belaying me as I disappeared into the upper grooves and another climber arrived doing the traverse of *Bullroar*. The climber looked at my rope snaking upwards and remarked 'there's only one climber I know with a rope like that (it was one of the first nylon ropes with a sheath) – John Harwood.'

'That is John Harwood,' said Phill

It was around this time (1976) that Pat Littlejohn arrived in Cardiff. He opened a climbing store and set about raising climbing standards a notch or two – especially at Ogmere where he climbed *Sorcery* which was one of Britain's first E6s. I have written before (CCJ 1981) of what it was like to climb with Pat.

He was not only a superb climber but also believed in adventure. Of course, this often meant that the second had an adventure as well. After all we are talking of the man who went onto *El Capitan's Nose* route without pegs or a hammer in the days when it was an aid climb.

Our first day together should have been a warning. I was climbing with Pat and Clive Horsfield down to Ogmere. We warmed up on a line Clive and I hadn't had time to do previously and then I took Pat to an unclimbed crack on a steep bit of cliff. 'Looks nice,' he observed before indicating, 'I think I'll try here.'

The cliff he was intent upon looked like a combination of Kilnsey's *Main Overhang* followed by

its North Buttress. I couldn't believe he was serious. But, as someone once observed, Pat can look as unstoppable as a grizzly in the mating season. So, sure enough, he calmly went where hapless seconds would fear to tread and *Phaser* (E3) was born. It was 80 feet high and overhung 28 feet. Clive took one look and said 'you're not catching me up there'. With wilting arms I just made it. For 1977 it really was a very steep climb.

In 1975 I did my first climbs with a very young Andy Sharp. For about a year I could match his standard but, pretty soon, he was much better. Andy was known for his finger strength and, with Steve 'the youth' Lewis, he formed a formidable partnership before Steve gave up.

But Andy and I have continued to climb together, often in the company of his old school friend Pete Lewis for almost 40 years now. I have written (CCJ 1991) of a week the three of us spent together in Colorado. But Andy and I ranged the length and breadth of Britain as well as taking in France, Malta and Spain.

One early trip was up to Cloggy on a beautiful Saturday in 1977 where we made an early free ascent of *Great Wall* (E4). I had failed on this in 1969 when I was climbing well and had been despondent about ever doing it. But on this occasion we ran up it in less than an hour and half.

We completed the day with *Haemagoblin* (E2) and *The Mostest* (E2) and still had time for another route. On *The Mostest* I enjoyed the second pitch so much I reversed it to repeat the experience. Having saved ourselves for a new route on Sunday, it rained. Even worse, Jimmy Moran knew the line we had in mind and did *Curfew* three days later.

One of my best weeks with Andy was in Pembroke in 1986. We climbed a bunch of new routes as well as easing down on early repeats. *Class of 86* (E5) was probably the best of the new routes. It really suited



Right: Pat Littlejohn on a pegless ascent of Bute Street, Ogmore 1977. Photograph: John Harwood



both of our styles and was solid quality all the way. Those days of pioneering in Pembroke were great – there was so much to go at and the rock seemed just made for climbers.

Pete Lewis grew up near to Andy in the valleys of South Wales. He is really a 'Mister Cool' on the rock, unflappable and calm even in hairy situations. He and Andy had a typical occasion on a climb called *The Serpent* (5.10b) in Eldorado Canyon (Colorado). Andy had led a difficult pitch to a ledge where two Americans ahead of them had belayed. When Andy got there he realised he needed RPs for the anchors but RPs had yet to reach Britain, so he just sat on the ledge and brought up Pete after which Pete had to lead another difficult pitch.

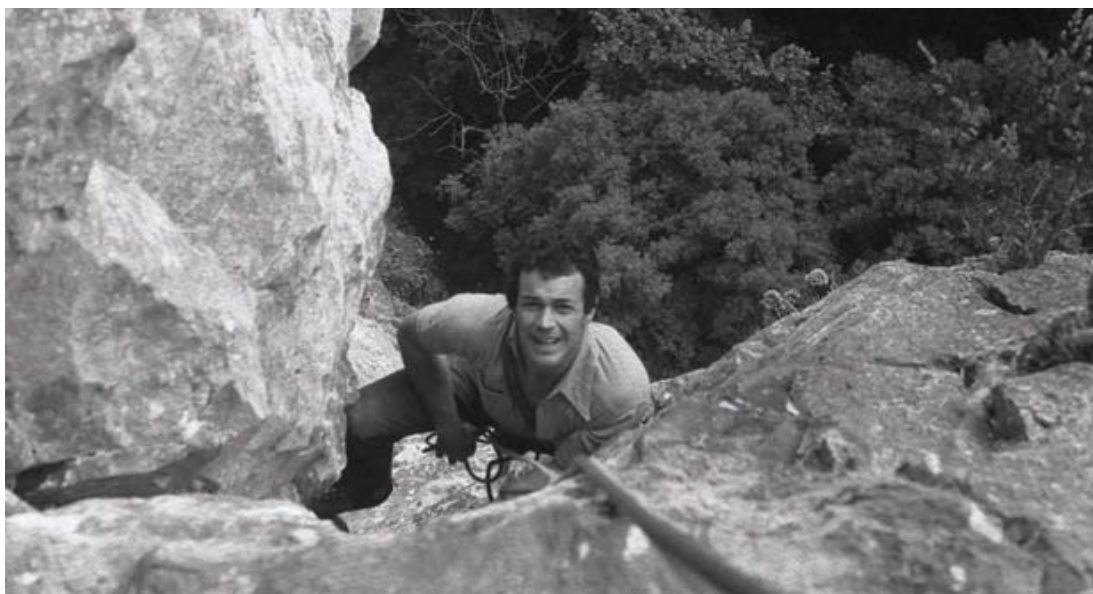
At a less difficult level, Pete and I were doing a new route at Ogmore on sight one evening. I had led the first pitch and Pete continued to the top. As he took in the rope he shouted down: 'I can't find a belay, so don't fall off.' But because of the noise of the sea I couldn't hear what he said. We called the climb *Sense of Adventure* (VS).

Intertwined with my climbs with Andy and Pete was the arrival of Tony Penning. For our first time out, we went to Llangattock and, for some reason (I don't remember what), I took him to the Eastern Edge. Around the corner from existing routes, we discovered a stretch of unclimbed cliff. We almost danced for joy.

Our routine was every Tuesday or Wednesday I would finish work as early as I could and race to join Tony on our chosen crag. If a new route was in mind, Tony would have it pretty much cleaned by the time I got there. That way, we did some great first ascents and enjoyed ourselves afterwards in the pub, where I would often be helpless with laughter. The rest of the clientele didn't know what had hit them (see CCJ 1989/90).

Tony's humour and sense of fun reminded me of a young Al Harris (before things got out of hand). On

Left: Andy Sharp on the first ascent of *Glycogen*, Ogmore 1977. Photograph: John Harwood



Left:
Tony Penning on
Kangaroo Wall,
Wintour's Leap,
1981.

Photograph:
John Harwood

one typical occasion we were climbing at Wintours Leap with Andy Sharp. I followed Tony, stripping the gear, but, when it was Andy's turn, Tony said 'let's see how Andy finds this' and flicked the rope from our reasonable groove into a holdless horror alongside.

Andy came up with a determined look on his face and, thanks to his finger strength and skill just made it. 'Pretty hard, eh?' Andy nodded (obviously thinking that Tony was going well). 'Yes – we came up over there!'

Another time, Tony and I were doing *Yellow Wall* (E3) at Avon. He was belayed on the edge at the top of the last pitch, watching me come up. When I got to the final pull over, I couldn't find a decent hold. I tried this way and that and began to run out of strength. 'What's up John – you're making really heavy weather of it,' said Tony but, when he started laughing, I knew he was up to one of his tricks. Sure enough he was sitting on a flake. What a character and a great man to hit the crags with.

In 1991, I started to climb with Martin Crocker. We immediately found we were kindred souls in many ways. We loved exploration and going to wild places,

appreciated history and relished a good physical and mental challenge.

Of course, Martin was a much better climber than I although, generally, I was able to do my bit as a supportive second. Our campaigns went in surges once we had discovered an area to develop – Pembroke, The Arans, Cornwall, Cheddar, The Gower, S.E. Wales, The Rhinogs, Avon Gorge, Nesscliffe, and Exmoor.

We didn't waste a moment and, even when I was waiting for my arthritic hips to be operated on, Martin would either kindly help by carrying the gear or finding an easier approach for me to take to the cliff. One day we were climbing local because the weather forecast was so bad. We managed a couple of climbs at North Quarry in Somerset before a monsoon set it. I was ready to repair to the pub when Martin announced: 'I've just the place for us'. He took me to The Quarry in Snuff Hills Park. This was basically a hole in the ground, but our chosen line had a huge leaning tree above. The latter's trunk provided a dry strip of cliff up which we clambered. Only Martin could have such local knowledge.

We've done so many great climbs together during



a partnership of over 20 years, that it is difficult to pull out a particular memory. Perhaps *Suzie's Plot* (E8, 6c) is the one. We were in one of our Pembroke exploration phases and Martin had arranged a 'family holiday' so that he could go scouting there.

He phoned me on a Tuesday evening to announce finding a 'fantastic line/really photogenic/ colourful rock' etc. He was a little too enthusiastic. On Thursday he phoned again to explain that he had abseiled the line to clean the rock and place some peg protection. This time he did let slip that it was 'a bit steep' and I started to fear the worst.

On Saturday morning I picked up photographer Carl Ryan and we drove down early to meet Martin. When we got to Rainbow Zawn, Carl immediately went to the edge to suss out the location. Now anyone who knows Carl, will vouch that he can talk for Wales. On this occasion he kept talking but only used two words – 'f**king hell' repeated a dozen times or more. At last I had to stop him – I was getting too nervous about the sight of where I had to go.

The climb was a brilliant lead by Martin and, certainly, the most difficult route I've been on. Eighteen years later it has still not been repeated – and not for want of trying. Perhaps that is a good place to finish this essay.

More than any of these routes, however, the thing that has struck me during half a century of climbing is what good friends I've made. When I was widowed – a very harrowing time – it was my climbing buddies, more than anyone else, who helped: from Pete and his wife Sue who kept inviting me round for meals, to all the others who were very supportive and real friends.

And, of course, the love of mountains and the joy of climbing were themselves therapeutic. Thank heaven that my hormones were rising in my teenage years or I might never have discovered this huge part of my life.

Left: Crocker and Harwood on first ascent of un-named, Llynmouth, North Devon 1998.

Photograph: John Harwood

SILVER SALVERS AT THE SLIGACHAN

Alan B. Hargreaves was one of the few pioneers from the golden age of rock climbing to span both the Lake District and Welsh groups of leading climbers. He was one of a select group of just three individuals who served as president for both of England's leading climbing clubs – the Fell and Rock Club, 1952-54, and the Climbers' Club, 1960-63. He was also a member of the Alpine Club. Here Tony Moulam recollects his first decade of climbing with the legendary AB.

By Tony Moulam

I climbed with AB for more than 50 years. A longer association than with any other friend. Peter Harding was my first partner, with whom I achieved most, but my relationship with Alan was more prolonged. He had known George Basterfield and Graham Balcombe and, of course, had climbed not only with Maurice Linnell but also Colin Kirkus. Colin was killed, as a 'Pathfinder' in 1940, and I met Alan five years later and was able to help him to continue climbing at a reasonable, but not suicidal, standard for some more years. He was grateful that I did not need holding from desperate falls and always maintained that I reminded him of his namesake, A T Hargreaves, in my steady and persistent method of climbing.

The liberation of Europe came on 7th May 1945 and later that month Harding and I made our initial visit to our first mountain cliff, Dow Crag. Our choice for this trip was dictated by public transport – as neither of us owned a car or motorbike and, anyway, there was no petrol – so we caught a night train from Tamworth – near Peter's home in Burton upon Trent – to Carnforth, Foxfield and finally Coniston.

We struggled up the Walna Scar track with heavy Bergen rucksacks and finally set up camp by an old powder hut above the outflow from Goats' Water. On Saturday we did *C Ordinary* and *Lazarus* and retreated to our tent. Next day was characterised by torrential

rain, which kept us in our sleeping bags, except when one of us brewed some tea to combat the boredom.

Monday, 21st May, was somewhat better weather and we quickly ticked off *Giants' Corner* and *Trident Route* before moving over to Easter Gully to look at *Great Central Route*. As we sat at the foot of *Hawk Route* peering up into the cloud that lurked in The Amphitheatre three climbers came up the scree and passed us before proceeding up *D Ordinary* solo. The last man I noticed was decidedly small, and as he neatly placed his no: 1 tricounis on the incut holds and vanished upwards into the gloom, Peter said to me, 'that's AB Hargreaves' who I knew had climbed regularly with Colin Kirkus, my hero. So I saw, but did not meet AB that day in 1945.

I had volunteered for the army and, ironically, was called up on VJ +1 day to report. For preliminary training in the army I was sent to Norton Barracks, near Worcester and my subsequent career in the army gave me opportunities to climb in Devon, Wales, the Lakes again, Weald sandstone, Highshields Crag (Crag Lough) and to ski, in and near Vienna. I was demobbed in York in August 1948 and given an ill-fitting suit, a trilby hat and various pairs of shoes, as well as a railway warrant to Derby via Bangor, so that I could revisit Wales, on my way home.

My demob leave was spent helping Peter with his Llanberis Pass guidebook, and when I returned

to civilization I found that I had missed the intake deadline for Manchester University but enrolled as a pupil of Peter's at Shrewsbury Technical College, and shared his digs. Our ambitious plans for climbing were spoilt when I succeeded in being knocked down by a lorry in a hitch-hiking accident and spent three months in the Oswestry Orthopaedic Hospital, instead of on the rocks.

My convalescence was slow and consisted of remedial walking and cycling and abortive attempts to climb at Black Rocks, with a still stiff leg. My rehabilitation as a climber started at a 1949 Easter meet at Ogwen Cottage, to which I was invited by Alf Bridge. His party included two ex-commandos, Bryan Hilton Jones, Jack Longland and his teenage son John and AB, who scorned the sybaritic existence provided by Mrs Williams, and spent the time at Helyg with his son Richard. AB took me on to two 'proper' climbs, Craig Aderyn with the 3 Pinnacle Start and Horned Crag.

We climbed in large parties and I was interested to see the different approaches to this foreboding cliff of the extrovert John Longland and the quieter Richard. The last morning Jack led us up *Hope* dressed in our decent travelling clothes, and I remember being very annoyed when he pulled the rope so tight so that I pressed a knee into a muddy streak and badly marked my pristine grey flannels.

I did not climb again with AB for a long time, as he was tied down by work and I was busy writing the Carneddau guide, and exploiting my time at Manchester to get as much climbing as I could. I did see him at several club dinners, after one of which he referred me to the Lower Amphitheatre Wall of Craig yr Ysfa. He joyfully described his adventures with Colin Kirkus, on the Crack, at its left hand side but the deadline for the guidebook was near and I had no opportunity to try the wall until after it was printed.

The next time I was on a hill with AB was September 1951 when we accompanied Kevin FitzGerald on his ascent of Tryfan, which is described in Kevin's, 'I'm a Sick Man, FitzGerald' (published

in the 1960 CCJ, and deservedly reprinted in the Centenary Journal). In March 1952 AB persuaded one of the Fell and Rock activists, Jack Carswell, to visit North Wales and one morning before breakfast I led the pair up *Wrinkle* before they returned to their northern habitat.

In April I joined AB for 10 days in the, not yet open, Birkness hut. On our drive there from Ulverston AB was able to run down a hare, which he hung in the drying room to enjoy when he returned home. I was not much impressed by *Route II* on Round How, which was a cliff smaller than Carreg Wastad and a considerable walk from the valley, rather than the Welsh strolls I was used to. Next day was a different delight. We took a short walk to Haystack and climbed Stack Gill, a connoisseur's route with a difficult iced slab protected by AB tied to a robust icicle and not helped by having no axe!

I was left under no mis-apprehension that the best crags were far from roads as I was led up to Birkness Combe from the Fish Inn, and introduced to the steep *Pigott's Route* on Eagle Crag. I found this quite hard enough for a severe, in nails and far from ideal circumstances with snow lying on most of the inadequate holds and perpetual hot aches in my fingers. The pain was soon followed by pleasure as we enjoyed the rough rock of several ways up Harrow Buttress in late sun and rubbers.

This promise of fine weather was not fulfilled as next day we resorted to shopping in Keswick before duty took us to Shepherd's Crag and *Little Chamonix* in the rain. We were teased again next day as it dawned fine and lured us up Sour Milk Gill to Gillercombe Butress where I found the main pitch quite a trying lead as I still could not bend my right leg far enough for the crux move. The day was curtailed as AB had to leave for a meeting, but not until after a visit to a pub, and a large meal.

The last of this Lakeland interlude was Newlands Buttress in nails, wet and cold. We cleaned up the hut, and, not forgetting AB's hung hare, left for Ulverston for an early start for Wales the following day. The



evening was fine so AB and I snatched *Crackstone Rib* before a Committee Meeting and a party at PyG.

Again in Wales a much more serious occasion was a mass ascent of *Longland's Route* on Cloggy. We set off in fine weather with occasional patches of wet on the rock. I led in rubbers but it was pouring with rain by the time I reached, 'Faith and Friction', the crux. By this time our rope stretched from the foot of the climb, where AB and his son were miserably crouched beside John Mawe who muttered dire predictions of folly, before slinking off for a walk.

About this time eerie groans rose from below from Paul Bleiker and Pat Vaughan who were locked in combat with *Sheaf* and then we heard the news that Mac had fallen from Central Rib, after nearly

completing the *West Buttress Girdle*. A large loose block had abandoned contact with the cliff and Mac rode it for some way, like a toboggan. It eventually threw him off and he was held by his second as he landed at the foot of the forty foot corner and hung suspended in mid-air as the stretched nylon retracted to its normal length. Mac was lucky in two respects: first that he only broke a toe, and second, that there were so many good climbers on the crag (a rare event in those distant days) to manage his rescue.

In fact Des Birch was first to reach him, abandoning his nailed ascent of *Narrow Slab* and shepherding him up the upper part of *Great Slab*. Meantime I finished our climb in socks, brought up the other five members of my team, which included Jack Longland and his

Above:
*Dick Cooke, AB,
and Geoff Barker;
three stalwarts of the
Fell and Rock.*

Photograph:
*Tony Moulam
collection*

son, John. We waited until Mac reached the top and then helped to get him down to Llyn du'r Arddu and Halfway House, from where nine of us bumped down the track in a V-8 Ford Pilot by courtesy of Peter Mayo's father. AB and I left the Pen y Gwryd for Ulverston at 11.55 pm, after an incident packed day.

A month later I managed to get a lift to Windermere, where AB met us and after a drink or two whisked me off to Ulverston. On the Saturday he drove us to Cockley Bridge Farm, notwithstanding the hazards posed by a meet of the Lancashire Auto Club who had a rally using the narrow roads we were following in a counter direction! After a few heart stopping moments, which cost some of the competitors lost time, we reached the farm and set off over several interesting ridges to my first sight of Esk Buttress. It glowed in the sunlight and we had a classic day on the delightful *Bridge's Route* and *Bower's Route*, both of which struck me as excellent climbs, nearly up to the standard of my favourites in Wales.

My examinations were imminent but did not interfere with my climbing. Eventually I had sat every paper but one, and there was a gap of a week, before the final one. So I spent most of it in the back seat of AB's car revising, whilst he drove to Skye. On the way we called on various friends such as Eric Arnison, Bill Clegg and Sandy Edge until we arrived at Sligachan, at the same time as the rain.

My introduction to gabbrows by the Sgurr nan Gillean pinnacles and then its west ridge to Am Bhasteir. We made a descent, in an extremely exposed position, of Naismith's Route on Am Bhasteir and continued down Corrie Bhasteir and the Sligachan river, back to the Hotel, all in thick mist and cold rain.

My tour of the Cuillin continued next day, starting with a drive to Glen Brittle. In those days the road was only single track with a grass ridge between the wheel tracks and a hidden boulder tore off the exhaust from AB's Citroen Light 15. He seemed undismayed and finished the job by pulling out the entrails and depositing them in a nearby bog whilst we were viewed

sardonically by a golden eagle standing on a nearby telephone pole. (The rest of the trip was accompanied by the roar of the unmuffled engine and I heard later that AB made it back to Ulverston, before being apprehended by the local bobby). Abandoning the car we walked up into Corrie Lagan and climbed the South Buttress of Sgurr Dearg, then the *South Crack* on the Innaccessible Pinnacle and then back to Glen Brittle, a sunny but cold day.

The mountains were in a fierce mood as we were greeted next day with hail storms rain and a driving wind. We walked round Marsco and up to a col to look at Coruisk and there was no respite next day. We aborted our walk up to Coire Lagan and visited Portree as tourists, to admire the harbour and try the local beer.

Our circumambulation of Marsco had inspired us with views of the Clach Glas/Blaven ridge so we drove to Torrinn. About a mile up the road we came to the head of Loch Slapin and then took to the rough hillside towards our first objective, Sgurr nan Each. An interesting scrambling route brought us quickly to the summit. We didn't stop though because the penetrating wind was cold and flurries of hail already masked the views. We hurried down to the bealach and sheltered there contemplating the great rock tower between us and Blaven. Stiffening up we soon decided to move on and found little difficulty until we came to turn the final tower and could not, initially, find the conspicuous slanting gully that was supposed to be to the west.

We eventually embarked on it and soon reached the bealach, went on and found Naismith's half-crown pinnacle, so we knew we were on the route. Rough rock and interesting scrambling took us to the top and then the straightforward south ridge brought us quickly to the Alt na Dunaiche and the road, near the car and a means of escape to the pub, where we rewarded ourselves at the bar, before dinner.

All too soon it was our last day on the island, and I had not done as much revision as I ought. Friday was a good day, even if it did not seem so as we toiled up Allt

An Uedh Bhuide to Meall Odhar. Once on the ridge we soon reached Bruach na Frithe and then enjoyed the constantly unfolding view of the ridge until we reached Sgurr Alasdair. From here we ran (it was still just possible) the famed Stone Chute and on to Glen Brittle.

On the Saturday morning we reluctantly left Sligachan for our drive to Kingshouse. Here we persuaded the landlord to leave us six eggs to boil for breakfast at 5.00 am.

We chose *Cuneiform Buttress* as our route to Buachaille Etive Mor, which we reached at 9.00 am. The summit was duly celebrated with half a bottle of vintage port, which Eric Arnison had pressed onto Alan when we had set off a week before.

My exam was at 9.00 am on the Monday and, after making my best effort to answer the questions, I hitch hiked to Wales arriving in Llanrwst at 6.45 pm. It took me four more hours to walk to the Pen y Gwryd, so sparse was the traffic in those days.

I started work on 14 July and was very pleasantly surprised that I was expected to take a week's holiday by the end of September. I arranged to meet AB again but, at the last minute, he was 'caught by the heels' and had to let me down. However he let his son take his place and we stayed at Brackenclose, climbing on Pikes Crag, The Napes, High Crag (Windy Gap) and Scafell East Buttress until AB joined us on the Thursday.

Thus reinforced we tackled North Climb on Pillar. The move over the nose was extremely difficult for AB as he could not reach the crucial holds. I had to haul on the rope amidst his lurid protestations, but we descended New West and returned in the dark. Our final day started with light rain so it was appropriate to climb *Great Gully* on the Screes in truly traditional style – ie we got wet through.

My next trip to the Lakes to meet AB was when we climbed on Boat Howe and Raven Crag, Coombe Gill before a return match on Pillar. This time, despite snow on the ground, we set off up *Walker's Gully*. I remember one particular pitch which proved taxing

as the flat holds were glazed with ice and, though we soon got to the foot of the final pitch we had to abandon our climb as it was choked with a sort of ice cauliflower and we had no axe. I remember the pitch mentioned earlier even better in descent as it was very precarious, but we were soon able to traverse off across the Shamrock on snowy ledges. After this expedition we both started smoking again when we had dinner at the Anglers Inn at the end of Ennerdale Water, soon closed (in 1961) as part of a plan to raise the water level by several feet. The plan was aborted by Michael Heseltine when it was decided that neither the nuclear power station nor the chemical works in Wigton, needed the water.

Our last climb together in 1953 was *Jubilee*, on Clogwyn du'r Arddu after a committee meeting at Pen y Gwryd. We, along with almost everybody else, had little idea of the route's quality or where it went. On my second visit to the cliff in July 1945 *Bow Shaped Slab* had repulsed 'Teddy' Brown and me and another MUMC party had been benighted on *Jubilee*. This intrigued me and I was pleased to find that the first section gave pleasant climbing with only a slight qualm when I stood on a rock flake jammed into a horizontal crack like a miniature diving board which wilted as I put my weight on it. AB peered out at me anxiously from his stance and he tightened his grip on the rope. In fact all was well except the final few feet to the Jubilee Terrace which was rather slimy in my Vibram soled boots.

We soon gathered on this ledge and traversed it to the easy upper groove. We left in the dark with Tom Bourdillon and George Band still high on the cliff.

The Fell and Rock Climbing Club had a meet in Skye at Whitsun 1954 and AB, their President, invited me to join them. We approached in a leisurely fashion staying again with the Edges in Stirling. We climbed *North Face Route* on Buachaille Etive Mor and then went on to Ardgour, crossing the Ballachulish and Corran ferries.

We drove on to the village and called at the Inn in Ardgour, a long low white building with a bar redolent

of 'Heavy' and 40 shillings, where the first person we saw was an Indian itinerant carpet seller, with his wares draped on a tired bicycle. We sought out Captain Bannister in his mansion who allowed us to camp near the start of the path to Garbh Bheinn. Next day the heavens opened but we climbed the Great Ridge, with little trouble, then lost ourselves and descended below the Pinnacle Ridge.

We both took off our clothes to change into dry ones as a tourist coach, seemingly full of Womens Institute members who witnessed our striptease, drove slowly past!

The rain continued so, rather than staying to outrage other visitors, we drove on to Skye, and I pitched my tent outside the window of AB's room at the Sligachan Inn. We spent the next three days on Sron na Ciche, including *Cioch Direct* and the *Crack of Doom*.

The next two days were the piece de resistance of the trip. We (AB and me and Dick Cooke and two other Fell and Rock) drove round to Elgol then hired a boatman and a boat, with what seemed to me a very dodgy outboard motor, to cross Loch Scavaig landing at Rudha Port Sgaile from where we followed the Dubh ridge.

This presents a magnificent moderate scramble on rough gabbro boiler-plate slabs enhanced with steep drops on both sides. The first summit was Sgurr Dubh Beag and an abseil solved the descent of its tricky west face. We continued to Sgurr Dubh Mor, Sgurr Dubh na da Bheinn and the Tearlach Dubh Gap. At this stage of the day, whilst the other two Fell and Rockers carried on down to Glen Brittle, AB, Dick and I followed King's Chimney to Mhic Coinnich and on to Bealach Coire Lagan for a look at the Coireachan Ruadh face as Mike Dixon had enthused to us about routes he had done there a year or two earlier with Bill Brooker.

We were sufficiently impressed to decide there and then to return the next day. So we cadged a lift to Glen Brittle and toiled up to Coire Lagan and soloed Abrahams' *West Buttress Route* to the col between

Mhic Coinnich and Tearlach in two hours. We descended a gully on the extreme edge of the cliff (which we later found was called, aptly, Rotten Gully. We traversed some slabs but then had to return but eventually identified the foot of our route. I recently found a letter from AB about the climb, written on 1st May 1996, 42 years later. I will let him take up the story:

'It was a cold dank place with this great steep buttress standing up. There was going to be a lot of it. It started with an overhang leading up to a ledge on the outside edge from which you worked round the corner on the right. After that it was steep but not very difficult until we came to a floorless corner where there was no security, the corner was difficult, rather overhanging at the top, much the hardest move on the climb. It was late in the day when we finished it (the climb took three hours) and we could see down into Glen Brittle where the F & R were getting into their cars for the run back to Sligachan for dinner. We then had to decide whether to run down to Glen Brittle hoping to get a lift, but no certainty of it so we decided to make for Elgol where I had left the car.'

So we went over the top of Mhic Coinnich, down King's Chimney again (this was getting boring) then down rough slopes to Coruisk. We left the ridge at 6.00 pm and traversed the loch to Camasunary – the river was high so we had to go right up to the deserted croft to cross it – and then negotiate the 'bad step' before continuing to Elgol which we reached at 10.30. We drank the rest of our Australian Burgundy (10/- per bottle) , fortified with rum, which had kept us going, and telephoned the Sligachan Inn to ask for some provisions to be left out.

We arrived at midnight and found silver salvers of meat and fish, and more importantly, 12 bottles of beer! This was the highlight of the holiday, even of our climbs together. In the rest of the week we did *Central Buttress* on the South Crag of Sron na Ciche, and *Cioch West* in high wind. On the Monday we left at 4.00 am to catch the 5.30 ferry and share the driving back to Carlisle.

Right:
*Full moon over
Camp 2: Jon and
the team well away
from main camp*

Photograph:
Jon Griffith



POLEMICS

Altitude Sickness. By Jon Griffith

Careering Towards Contempt. By Nick Hinchliffe

Going for Gold – Climbing & the Olympics. By Rob Adie

Climbing & the Olympics: A Matter of Principle. By Iain Peters



ALTITUDE SICKNESS

Alpinist and photographer Jon Griffith went to Everest to film Ueli Steck and Simone Moro attempt a difficult, oxygen free ascent of the highest mountain in the world. The challenges they encountered, however, had little to do with the physical conditions on the mountain. Here he reflects on the aftermath of a terrifying incident that made international headlines and made the three men fear for their lives.

By Jon Griffith

I learnt a lot on Everest. I learnt a lot about people, who your friends are, and most of all about the media. I've also had time to reflect on that horrible day, and I've also had time to read all the comments people have written about us.

It has been a huge relief to see that, on the whole, climbers understand the problems of Everest – because at the end of the day, that is the most important thing to me.

Climbing is part of my career. I live in a climbing town, Chamonix, and I meet climbers from around the world all the time. It is my community and it is incredibly important to me that my community understands.

Nevertheless, even if for every 100 nice comments there is only one bad one, it still stings. The controversy has raised my profile in unwanted ways. It has kept me up at night; it has stressed me out during the day. It's an unfortunate nightmare: I lost a lot on that trip.

But there are many sad factors to this tale. You speak to most people about Everest at Base Camp and they are all there for the summit: for that single moment when they can stand on top of the world.

We all seek our challenges in life and at different levels. When I first started climbing I had it in my mind that one day I wanted to be there as well. Back then, however, the style and ethics of how you climbed didn't even come in to my thinking. It was only through years of experience on the mountains that my approach to climbing style and ethics evolved into one that looks upon the challenge of Everest in a

way very different to others at Base Camp. This does not make me better than them: just different.

For me the challenge of Everest is to climb it without supplementary oxygen: that seems to me the whole point. But then I will happily use the fixed route through the icefall and I will, for sure, use any track that someone has put in ahead of me. But I can also look at my other team-mates Alexey and Denis who wanted to climb a new route Alpine Style on the South Face of Everest. My style of ascent is just as bad from their point of view, as a fully supported one is from mine.

Like I say, we all find our own challenges. I just happen to be lucky enough to live in the Alps and climb all year round. This experience counts for everything and I can understand that most climbers at Base Camp are very different – they have real jobs, families to support, and live in cities, all things that prevent you from accruing the kind of experience that I can get. This is a fact of life and you will see it on all the mountains of the world.

But for me the real draw of being on Everest last year was on the professional side. I was there to film and photograph a really cutting edge high mountain ascent: the kind of filming and photography that had never been done before.

It was going to push me to my absolute limit to capture it all. It was going to be light and fast, but at 8000m and higher. There would be no retakes; no second chances. I would have to see every shot in advance, 'run' ahead of two of the world's best climbers, shoot the shot, then repeat. I would be on

Left:
Happier days: solo on a big day out linking the Mont Blanc traverse.

Photograph:
Jon Griffith



supplementary oxygen so that I could carry the extra kit as well as be able to move faster than them.

That was the plan anyway and, while on paper it sounded easy, I don't know of many people running around above 8000m even with supplementary oxygen. The logistics of the filming alone got me tingling. This was no huge budget thing either. It had taken Sender Films months to get sponsors involved just to pay for my basic costs. I would end up putting more money into this project than any other

expedition I have been on as well, and my pay would just allow me to break even. But it would open up a whole new realm of high altitude filming possibilities and that was incredibly exciting.

We all seem to want to do something new on Everest. So, for me, the appeal of shooting such a climb was the draw – yes it is Everest, but that is the point really: to be able to shoot something of this magnitude on the world's highest peak. It might get harder, but it doesn't come any higher. And that is the



draw. It was the same for Ueli and Simone. You can say that they should know better than to go on Everest and that it is not a climber's mountain – but it is still the world's highest peak and that attracts them just as much as it attracts any other summit candidate on Everest.

Yes, they could climb something lower and more technical, but have you seen Ueli's technical climbing resumé? Surely it was natural for him to set himself the height challenge and see how hard and fast he could

climb at the highest point on earth – it is unfortunate that Everest is Everest, but does that mean he should know better and never come to this challenge? Does it mean I should know better and never come to my challenge?

I've already had my say on styles on the mountain and how we all differ. It doesn't make us any better: we all find our own challenges in life. Even now, the reasoning behind the attack at Camp 2 is still blurred. Maybe it will never be a clear thing to any of us. But

Above:
*New arrivals:
ascending towards
Camp 1 with Nuptse
in the background*

Photograph:
Jon Griffith

the finger of blame has to fall somewhere; everyone needs a justification and it seems that people find it hard to believe that maybe the main reason is just a personal and human one.

Everest is complicated. If you've never been there, or tried to understand how it all works, then you can easily imagine the commercial expeditions being the evil beast behind it all and how their greed has brought the mountain to its knees. But commercial expeditions are a product of basic economics. They exist because there is a demand for the services they provide.

If I preach that the mountain is for everyone then who am I to say that some people can't go? Of course, I think it is overcrowded. For me, this is a simple fact. I also think that it is a fact that the average Everest climber is not experienced enough to succeed without the help of his Sherpa and the lines and systems set in place. This is all fine and well when the system is working 100%, but when bad weather hits, a fixed line breaks, oxygen runs out, or any other link in the chain breaks, then you have a recipe for catastrophe. People die on Everest because they aren't ready or equipped for Everest.

They rely on a system that they don't understand and have had no part in setting up – how can they mend something if they don't know how it works? How do they get off in a sudden storm when they've never dealt with bad weather at this altitude before? We've all experienced fear and uncertainty when something goes wrong in the mountains, but it is through years of experience that we learn how to remove the panic element and teach ourselves how to deal with the situation.

What would you do if you'd never had any experience and suddenly you were caught in the middle of a huge storm on the summit ridge of Everest? Would you rely on your years of experience and work out how to get down, or would you just sit there and wait to die because you had no idea of what to do? Look through the history of Everest and the latter happens all too frequently.

But it's not just Everest. Take a look at the disaster on K2 in 2008. Climbers were stranded above the bottleneck because a serac collapsed taking out the fixed lines. The more experienced climbers were capable of down-climbing the snow /ice field and survived. Others were left stranded simply because they couldn't down-climb the terrain: some didn't even have an ice axe with them which left them totally dependent on the fixed lines and the system set in place which, when it failed, cost them their lives.

I have nothing against the style used on these big mountains. I think it is a shame, but who am I to force my style on others? Just because Ueli will go and solo the Eiger North Face in a few hours does not mean that he will demand that this becomes the new style. Style evolves. There is no right or wrong, it isn't black and white. But in the end, wasn't the first ascent of Everest done with fixed ropes, oxygen, and many more fixed camps than nowadays?

I'm not really trying to compare them like for like as the first ascent was a completely different affair to a modern day ascent, but all we do is talk about 'commercial' style when, in fact, if you look at the system used nowadays it is very similar to the one used 60 years ago. What has changed is the equipment and this has allowed more people on the mountain with far less ability than the first ascensionists, and that's the issue for me really.

Style is just what you make of it: we had a Sherpa and a high altitude porter on our team to help us ferry loads up the mountain. We've never said that using Sherpas is cheating or tried to hide it. We had our way and style of climbing and it wasn't a totally pure alpine style and it wasn't full-on 'commercial' style, but we never claimed it was. We were never hypocritical, as some have claimed: find me one quote from us that says that using Sherpas or local help is bad?

Neither do I feel that commercial expeditions have pushed aside the smaller, independent climbing teams. If anything they help by bringing the amount of people necessary to the mountain to pay for the ice fall doctors; they help set lines and put in tracks which,



Left:
*Base Camp below a
very moody Everest.*

Photograph:
Jon Griffith



no matter how good you think you are, you will always appreciate.

But it's a very fine balance. There is no 'us' and 'them'. We're all commercial in a way. I make my living from photography and Everest was part of that living. Ueli makes a living from his slideshows and that would have formed a part of that. Simone is currently flying rescue missions off the mountain. We never blamed the commercialisation of Everest because we are cashing in on the mountain as well: it's just that we do it differently.

Who is right and who is wrong? Maybe both, maybe neither? Find me a person who has climbed Everest and who didn't make money or fame from it afterwards. We're all commercial on this mountain: let's not kid ourselves.

A couple of days after the incident the Nepalese were keen to have an official and public ceremony where, in theory, we would all shake hands and we would continue our expedition.

But we were almost killed and that doesn't go away with a handshake. That's just bullshit. Apart from

Simone swearing at the Sherpa on the Lhotse Face we honestly didn't feel that we had done anything wrong. We didn't think it was right to apologize for being on the face – it would have been a dangerous precedent to do that. If two of the world's best climbers are forced to apologise for being on the face then no one ever has a leg to stand on in the future.

I understand the underlying reasons behind the Sherpa anger. Since we've been back it's all we seem to talk about. And the thing is, I totally empathise. I often wonder whether, if I were in their position, with their Maoist upbringing, and for dozens of other reasons, would I have done the same thing at Camp 2? Nurture is a very powerful thing. But it is still inexcusable. Mob rule is never excusable. I empathise but I do not sympathise.

Time has passed now and I still find it hard to swallow what happened to us. The aftermath at Base Camp was a very tiring time. Emotionally we were drained from what had happened at Camp 2. Physically we had had a huge day as well. Sleeping was impossible. But we had endless meetings with Base Camp 'leaders' and officials.

Of course everyone had their own priorities and agendas and it was hard and tiring to keep on top of that and see the motives behind what people were telling us. In the end we were told that if we proceeded in the legal sense the ringleaders would be beaten in a Nepalese jail and there would be a riot at Base Camp (that was the actual word used: a riot).

In retrospect I see that I totally missed the point. There would have been no mass riot at Base Camp, but it would have led to a strike or general work stoppage. The climb must go on. Whilst we felt the ringleaders deserved to spend time in jail (after all, they did try to kill us) we understood that sending these young Sherpas to jail would effectively ruin their lives and it wouldn't solve any of the problems on the mountain.

It was they who told us that the Sherpas feel treated badly by Westerners: it was they who told us. And we fully understand the issues at play. The only way to

really resolve the situation is to listen to the problems on a personal level and try to re-establish the respect so necessary between Westerners and Sherpas on the mountain. But that wasn't for us to do: that was for the Base Camp community to deal with. So, we left it in their hands, we trusted them to resolve the issue, and to also discipline those responsible.

As for the mountain itself, nothing changed: it didn't even hiccup. Ueli fixed the lines to Camp 3 thus completing the projected work. The following day was a pre-scheduled rest day for the fixing team, and the day after they resumed their normal duties.

Climbers from all around the world summited Everest, as they do every year: and, for many people, their dreams became a reality. As for the ringleaders who we were assured would be 'disciplined' – well, no one was fired; no one was reprimanded. We put our trust in the hands of people who didn't care past their own bank balances. It was business as usual – I wonder how safe the Western clients feel knowing they are still on the mountain.

For those who believe that we deserved what we got, that is the most worrying sentiment, because next year a client will knock down some ice on a Sherpa, he will get tangled up in the fixed lines, and no doubt a tired client will shout at his Sherpa on the summit ridge. It happens every year.

If you believe that we deserved what we got then we should be very afraid for the future of the mountain because it will happen again and next time it may not be such a lucky story. If I were a young Sherpa I would see this as empowerment – a signal that there is no law and order on the mountain.

As Messner said, the Sherpas are the king of the mountain. What is to stop another group of young Sherpas doing the same thing when a tired client shouts at them, or knocks some ice down? Will I return? Everyone asks me this. I want to go back. I want to complete my filming project but I don't feel welcome or safe on the South side right now. This isn't just a story about numbers: it's about human emotion as well.

Left:
Moving fast and clear: Ueli on perfect snow well out of the way of the Sherpas. How could we have knocked ice on them?

Photograph:
Jon Griffith

Right:
In flight: after the assault, fleeing for our lives down the untracked and heavily crevassed glacier by Nuptse. No rope, just run.

Photograph:
Jon Griffith

The media was huge. I think it's probably one of the world's most covered climbing stories, unfortunately for all the wrong reasons. We did interviews with every major newspaper, radio, and TV news agency around the world. I hated it. It was front page in so many national and international papers that I can't even remember them all. I had over 200 different reporters emailing me within the first week for interviews, and that was just me- for Simone and Ueli it was the same.

This media hype was inevitable, we didn't just email news agencies to try and get some publicity out of this. This is the worst kind of publicity anyone of us could ever imagine; it was a really scary time. (I didn't sell any photos or make any money whilst dealing with the press storm). But the story of three Westerners almost getting stoned to death on Everest is too big an interest piece that it wouldn't leak out. We knew that straight away, and the following week was taxing in every possible way.

I'd never dealt with the media before and it was even harder to have to give interviews with such an exhausted and screwed head. But it was important that we did speak to the press to try and fight for our names. Wouldn't you do the same? Personally I was terrified of the media – people are swayed by what they read and I had a horrible feeling that we were going to get trashed. It was really tiring to deal with.

We couldn't sleep and we didn't eat much, we were still at Base Camp and felt rooted there simply because we had internet connection. It was horrible and I was praying for it to just go away: but once you start you have to fight to the end and speak to every reporter to make sure you've had your say. I was really concerned that if I didn't speak to a certain reporter, but had done to others, that he would take a bad stance against us. It was a really worrying time.

I also learnt that the media will lie and make stuff up. I realised that Skype interviews over a bad connection allows people to effectively 'cut and paste' what you say in to what they want you to say. The bad connection allows for the change in pitch. I also read

a lot of quotes that I know I never said, and I know that Ueli or Simone never said. But there's no point in doing anything about it: once it's been published, it's been read. The damage is done.

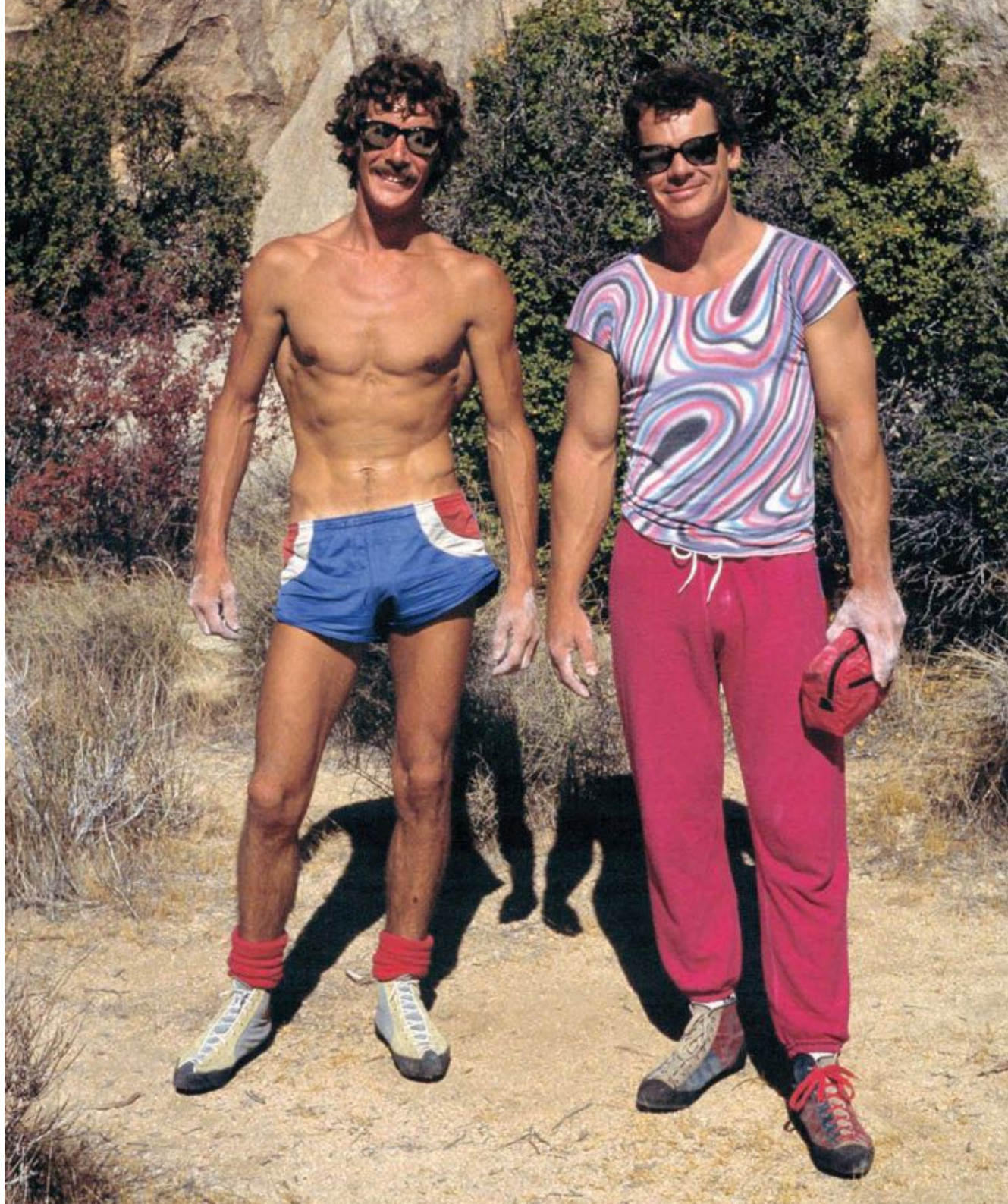
But maybe the saddest thing of all was seeing some people jump in on the opportunity for their two minutes of fame. Whilst we were trying to fight for our reputations I saw Cathy O'Dowd and Alan Hinkes come on national television and say that we were arrogant and ego driven and that was why we had angered the Sherpas.

We've never met them, they weren't at Base Camp, they knew nothing of the story: they didn't even think to get in touch with us. Somehow it seemed like getting two minutes of air time on national television was worth trashing people you'd never met before; kicking us when we were already down. It was a sad sight to see.

On the flip side it was amazing to see such strong international support. I have received tons of emails from all sorts of climbers around the world recounting their past troubles with Sherpas and how close it had become as well. It was also really warming to see the climbing media take our side on this and be able to read the climbing forums and see that on the whole climbers understood the problems of Everest.

At the end of the day I don't really have an answer or an explanation for what happened on Everest. I am deeply saddened about the whole affair and it still haunts me. We're not bad people, we're not after publicity here and we're not trying to trash any Sherpas or give them a bad name. We stopped talking to the media as soon as we came home, but after weeks of deliberating we did decide to finish our Everest film off with Sender Films. They had invested a lot of time and money in to this project, but it was not an easy decision to make. For now it's just amazing to be back home and out climbing again; the summer has begun, I'm happy to be out in my favourite mountain range, and I'm back off to Pakistan in 2 weeks. As for Everest, if you've read this far there's not much more I can add – I guess only time will tell.





CAREERING TOWARDS CONTEMPT

A new breed of sponsored hero has replaced the climbing characters of old, and with it has come a sometimes-sneering contempt for mere mortals, and an arrogant belief among the super elite that they have an entitlement to the lifestyle of full-time professional. Here Nick Hinchliffe laments the passing of the characters and cautions against the rise and rise of the climbing celebrity.

By Nick Hinchliffe

The last CC Journal was a thought-provoking read, and I was particularly struck by the articles about life on the road as a full time climber. They left me with mixed emotions, partly envy of that freedom and the boldness to choose it, putting me in mind of Larkin:

Ah, were I courageous enough
To shout Stuff your pension
But I know, all too well, that's the stuff
That dreams are made on (1)

And partly feeling, 'well it's alright for them but someone has to work.' Not the most admirable of responses perhaps, and possibly an indication that I have become that crotchety old man I dreaded being: my father. Ah well, it comes to us all. The whole business set me thinking about responsibility and freedom and that curious modern phenomenon, the full time professional climber.

Whilst climbing as a way of earning a living is common enough for instructors and guides the full time 'professional' climber is a relatively modern manifestation. One might trace the beginnings back to the youthful Chris Bonington, who famously *Chose to Climb* (2), and to his contemporary Doug Scott, who, between them, were perhaps the first to have made mountaineering (with the emphasis that places on the Greater Ranges if we can still call them that) a

full-time paying job.

Then there was Ron Fawcett who was purely a rock climber ('I have no desire to be a snow plodder like Scott or Bonington, give me rock, man, rock!'). At the time, many climbers thought this was a pretty rum way of earning a living – including Fawcett himself. 'Since no one was going to pay me to go to the crag, the most obvious thing to do was leverage my name into some kind of moneymaking enterprise.' He is very open about the difficulties of ploughing this furrow, and the novelty of the emerging sport climbing circuit. (3)

Fawcett was closely followed by Thatcher's millions, at a time when you could live in Sheffield, sign on and get a cheap bus out to the Peak (sadly no longer the case thanks to our integrated transport system). Jerry Moffatt is the most obvious example of that generation, a man who knew how to sell himself to sponsors and by dint of hard work, natural talent, and a shrewd business head made a successful career out of climbing rather than just getting by and being able to get out as often as he wanted. Moffatt moved the enterprise forward by negotiating sponsorship based on performance in competitions and ensuring that his sponsors got value for money: 'I worked hard to fulfil all my obligations to my sponsors. This wasn't something I enjoyed, or something I found easy, but I did it.' (4)

Moffatt claims that very few climbers could survive on sponsorship at this time, but there followed a

Left:

Rock athletes and rock stars – Ron Fawcett and John Long enjoying the California sun and not a logo or brand between them.

Photograph:
Bob Gaines

number of talented climbers who, in varying degrees, were full-time, if one includes rope access work and instructing/coaching as part of the job.

Then we have the emergence of what seems to be a more modern breed, where I feel the emphasis has shifted to one of entitlement, rather than of earning a living. By this I mean an attitude one detects at times in the climbers concerned which suggests that they somehow feel it is their right to climb for a living. I was told recently of a well known climber giving a lecture tour (a well established and perfectly fair way of making some money out of one's climbing) where the speaker said after a few minutes of rambling 'Well I've done this talk a lot recently and am getting a bit bored with it, does anyone have any questions?'

In similar vein I shared a hut one winter week a few years ago with the cream of the then up and coming generation who were doing part of their guide's qualification, and I was surprised by the contempt they felt for the 'punters' as they referred to clients. Their view seemed to be that these were some lower form of life who it was entirely fair to charge for their services, but deserved nothing in the way of companionship or camaraderie: they were damn lucky to be dragged up stuff by these cutting edge boys.

This is a far cry from the attitude of guides I have seen at work who are guides first and foremost, not merely using it as a way to part-fund a lifestyle, where the care of the client was bound up with ensuring that they had a good time as well as getting up the route.

These examples (and there are others, but I do not wish to bore) seem to me to evidence an unfortunate combination of arrogance and disregard for the paying audience which I suggest would not be tolerated in any other sport.

Some professionals appear to have moved from working hard to give value to their sponsors to feeling entitled to minimise their your own efforts in spheres other than climbing, even if they fund said climbing. This is not a charge I level lightly, but there seems to be consistent evidence of this attitude amongst some of the leading lights today, and I find it offensive.

How did we get here?

Well, when was it that I read an interview with an American climber, and he listed his sponsors, the nineties some time? The emergence of climbing competitions and the possibility of sponsorship being more widely available certainly added a new element to the climbing world and to the number of climbers who could conceivably be full time.

This meant that giving up a more conventional career to be a full time climber was now a more viable and less risky choice. It also meant that the climber needed to be business-like (see Moffatt, above) and present an acceptable, even homogenous image to sponsors. I suggest that this was a real change from the 'characters' who had been the previous climbing drop outs, think of 'Dirty' Derek Hersey or Gary Hemming and the first generation of Alpine bin men. Back then, dropping out to climb was an uncertain and high-risk thing to do: two fingers up to the world.

Nowadays, it is a business proposition and you are a clean-cut celebrity, an extreme athlete, so you deserve the money. And there is a pecking order too, the very hottest climbers getting the plane tickets and invitations on road trips with accompanying professional photographers; at the shallower end of the gene pool it might be a jacket or a pair of shoes. You know how good you are by how much free stuff you get and how often your picture appears.

The gear industry, of course, loves these marketing opportunities and has exploded since say 1970s when you wore fibre pile (Helly or Javlin), EBs, a Whillans harness, Ron Hills and (if you were influenced by a certain magazine interview with Ron Fawcett) a Union Jack woolly hat. There was relatively little choice of gear and it was not always easily available. Think of Keswick or Llanberis now, full of shops tempting you with a plethora of kit all sanctioned by the great and the hard, because if this jacket will get you up the Eiger in winter it should be OK for Catbells in August.

We are being sold kit that never previously existed, remember walking in to crags in fell shoes or hiking

boots ? Now you need approach shoes, and what a choice there is to beguile you.

This exists in a cosy symbiosis with the magazines who profile the sponsored athletes and the gear companies who sponsor them and spend big bucks on advertising and promotion, so that we the consumer can identify with our chosen hero or heroine and buy their endorsed kit. We need to see profiles telling us how great they are to feel that we are making the right choice, and so it all goes round again.

Then we have that great money-spinner the autobiography, where climbers are following the example of actors and page three models by writing them ever younger. I recently read *Beyond the Mountain* by Steve House (5), who is clearly an immensely talented and focussed individual, but for me the book was a let down. There is a good deal of detail about some very hard climbing, but I find that there is a limit to how much of this I want to read. His climbing companions are sketched rather than fully drawn, and suffer for it. Scott Backes comes across as quite arrogant, yet House clearly has a great deal of affection for him, why not show us the qualities that merit this affection?

As for the moment when House tells his girlfriend about the continuous ascent in record time of the Slovak Direct on Denali (an outstanding achievement, let's be clear about that) by saying of his relationship with his partners on the route 'I didn't know that kind of connection was possible with another human being' he seems a little surprised that she walks out. She wasn't keen on that, eh? Women.

House rarely says it directly (although a conversation with the same woman about the relative difficulty and, by implication the merits, of the Slovak Direct and the West Buttress on Denali which she has struggled on comes very close), but one senses a contempt for those who are less talented, less committed, less single-minded.

Perhaps House gets a lot of it from his frequent partner Mark Twight, who is by no stretch of the imagination a shrinking violet. Anyone wanting

some excellent writing about climbing coupled with an attitude which will make you either grin wryly or projectile vomit should address themselves to *Kiss or Kill* (6).

I confess that I find some of the modern super heroes to be a little less admirable than those frequently forgotten heroes, the great amateurs – think of the remarkable talents and exploits of Mick Fowler (extreme Alpinism whilst working full time for the Inland Revenue and having a family) and Bob Smith (rock climbing within a whisker of the Sheffield full timers in the Eighties whilst working full time as a roofer, and having a normal family and social life). These are genuinely friendly, decent people, with no edge or ego to be flaunted. Perhaps we are all to blame – in putting the modern professional climber on a pedestal we have encouraged him to look down on everyone else.

So, is there a point to all this rambling you ask?

Well, it seems to me that if you are talented and fortunate enough to pursue your hobby as a full time job, you ought to be pretty bloody grateful about that, and do your best to be fair to those who support you, either directly by buying your lecture tickets or books, or indirectly by saying, with Larkin:

Give me your arm, old toad
Help me down Cemetery Road (7)

1. *Toads* by Philip Larkin, from *Collected poems*, Faber and Faber, 1988
2. *I Chose to Climb* by Chris Bonington, Gollancz, 1966
3. *Rock Athlete* by Ron Fawcett, Vertebrate, 2010.
4. *Revelations* by Jerry Moffatt, Vertebrate, 2009.
5. *Patagonia books*, 2009.
6. *The Mountaineers*, 2001
7. *Toads revisited* by Philip Larkin, from *Collected Poems*, Faber and Faber, 1988



GOING FOR GOLD – CLIMBING & THE OLYMPICS

In the first of two articles reflecting different views on whether climbing should be an Olympic sport, Climbers' Club member and British Mountaineering Council's Competitions' Officer, Rob Adie, provides an informed account of the International Federation for Sports Climbing's (IFSC) Olympic bid and how he thinks Olympic status could affect climbing in the UK if it were to successfully bid again in the future.

By Rob Adie

Over the last twelve months there has been much discussion as to whether climbing is a sport or a pastime. For the purposes of this article I am going to stick with Ernest Hemingway's definition: "There are only three sports: bullfighting, motor racing, and mountaineering; all the rest are merely games."

With climbing, and more specifically competition climbing, falling under the gamut of mountaineering, please don't get offended when I keep referring to climbing as a sport, if you don't agree that it is. Competition climbing has been a part of the climbing world for more than 20 years and the first International World Cup was hosted by the BMC in 1989. Competition climbing has grown since that point and even in the six years I have been organising competitions on behalf of the BMC I have seen a significant increase in the number of climbers keen to compete, and the demand for competitions has grown as a result.

More surprisingly, I have also seen the number of people keen to watch competition climbing, either in person or online, grow massively as they see it as a great spectator sport, rather than the oft-quoted 'watching paint dry' sport that it was once perceived to be.

The BMC's role is to represent the interests of all its 75,000 members. It also works to help the many climbers, hill-walkers and mountaineers who are not

members. What most people don't realise, however, is that the BMC is supported behind the scenes by an army of volunteers who put in countless hours of service to protect the sport's interests on everything from access to Stanage, to nesting Peregrines and the state of the local climbing wall.

Being the BMC's competitions officer, I am staggered by the amount of effort each and every one of these volunteers puts into a sport they are passionate about. There are a huge number of volunteers who work incredibly hard for the BMC and a large proportion of those volunteers are involved with the competitions that I am responsible for organising.

To give a quick example – the biggest event the BMC runs is the Youth Climbing Series, the final of which happens annually at the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena (EICA), as that is the only wall in the UK big enough to fit everybody in. The stats make for pretty impressive reading considering I am the only employee of the BMC that is involved directly.

- 27 regional rounds – all run by hundreds of volunteers
- 740 competitors in the 2013 competition
- 330 finalists at EICA
- 1,200 spectators at the final
- 80 volunteers involved in running the final

Left:
Ned Feehally
competing at 2013
Boulder World Cup.

Photograph:
Heiko Wilhelm



All these people willingly gave their time to help these young competitors achieve their climbing dreams to stand on top of a podium: a podium which, they hope, is the first of many by competing in a sport that has so many different and equally rewarding avenues to pursue. And this happens at 16 other national level competitions that the BMC runs each year including senior and junior championships in lead, speed and bouldering; para climbing series; fun leading ladder events; and, in most years, an international youth cup.

I should at this point provide some personal background for those who don't know me. I am not, and never have been, a competition climber. I am just your average punter, an all-rounder who enjoys trad climbing, a bit of sport, delights in winter climbing in Scotland and has done a few trips to the greater ranges.

I was originally employed by the BMC to be the Climbing Wall Development Officer when Lucy Creamer was taken on to run competitions. Lucy soon realised how much work was involved and how little climbing she was getting done and the baton was passed to me. I now do both jobs as well as I can, but I am still learning every day and the volunteers involved in all the events the BMC runs definitely keep me on my toes.

Climbing has such a wide range of venues that keep hundreds of thousands of us entertained every weekend in the UK and, although winter climbing on the Ben could be regarded by an outsider as a totally different sport when compared to pulling on plastic at your local climbing wall, they do all fall under the same umbrella of climbing and subsequently the same representative body of the BMC.

I believe that every climber in the UK should be allowed to pursue his or her chosen elements of the sport as far as they wish to, and that those with the talent, drive and determination to take them to the top of their chosen game will continue to wow us with feats we previously thought impossible on rock, ice, high mountains and, dare I say it, plastic.

We all enjoyed watching the 2012 games in London

and I am sure we can all agree that the pinnacle of any competitive athlete's career is to represent the country at the Olympic games. So the same can definitely be said for those representing the UK at an international level, at what is now a very well established World Cup and Championship circuit.

The Olympic games should be the ultimate goal of any amateur athlete's ambition – as it definitely would be for potential Olympic climbers. The same cannot be said for footballers, tennis players and golfers, most of whom are highly paid professionals, which is why many people thought that at least one of these sports should have been removed ahead of the bidding sports that were with competition climbing in the shortlist for 2020.

The IFSC's bid to the IOC for Olympic inclusion focused on three main points, which it emphasised to the IOC representatives who visited the 2012 World Championships in Paris where 10,000 spectators crammed into the Bercy Arena in Paris and a further 50,000 watched avidly online. These are:

1. The motto of the Olympic games – 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' perfectly embodies the three major disciplines of competition climbing – speed, lead and bouldering.
2. Climbing is the only fundamental human movement that is not represented in the games – and it should be.
3. Climbing appeals to everyone from young to old, able bodied, disabled, experienced and beginner. The explosion of indoor climbing walls across the world has made it relatively easy to try the sport for the first time – in most places a taster session at a climbing wall costs about the same as a cinema ticket.

When it was announced that competition climbing would be shortlisted for the games it was met with mixed reactions from within the UK climbing community with many lengthy discussions on various Internet forums on the subject. However, most people seemed to be either ambivalent to the idea or

supportive, understanding that competition climbing is here to stay regardless of Olympic inclusion and that all climbing athletes would want to aspire towards representing their country at the greatest competition in the world – the Olympic Games.

Watching the London Olympics I became more and more convinced that climbing would make a fantastic Olympic sport. With some clever adjustments to the format of each discipline and, of course, the amazing camera trickery that is possible these days, it would be an amazing feat to watch either in the area or on TV.

The sheer awe of speed climbers racing up a 15 metre route in under seven seconds; the crowd gasping at the falls taken by lead competitors after battling their way up the most ridiculously overhanging routes; and the grace and power with which elite boulderers style their way to the top of the blocs, could not fail to get the public fully interested in climbing.

The next opportunity for the IFSC to re-bid for Olympic status will be for the 2024 games (which they have indicated that they will). Were they to be successful, in my opinion it would be a great step forward for the sport, as long as it were carefully managed. The increased interest from the wider media would have a massively positive effect on funding, exposure and support from government bodies. This would not only give huge advantages in training and performance for those who qualified to compete at the games, but would also filter down directly to the climbing facilities that thousands of climbers visit every week throughout the UK.

This will allow for better-designed climbing facilities, improved coaching and more structured entry and exit routes to and from each avenue of the sport. Allowing people, whether they are young or old, to take advantage of these improvements to fulfil their own climbing aspirations.

The BMC, along with climbing walls across the UK, are already working towards these goals, but investment in all tiers of the sport from grass roots right up to the elite athletes that could potentially represent GB in the games would dramatically increase

Left:
*Molly Thompson
Smith at EYC Ratho.*

Photograph:
Nick Pope

Right:
GB Junior team
at 2013 World
Champs.

Photograph:
Nick Pope



what we could do at all levels of climbing. It should be noted that the BMC's current government funding comes from Sport England, which is an organisation that provides funding to promote grass roots and mass participation sport only. All elite level sport is covered at government level by UK Sport, who currently fund Olympic disciplines. So, if our sport were to be accepted into the games, any extra funding for the running of an Olympic programme, and the athletes that would compete in it, would come from UK Sport. This should not affect any funding already coming in from Sport England which is used to continue the BMC's efforts in all aspects of its work – from access issues to running competitions.

A lot of people would say that this sort of organisation and structure would detract from the free flowing nature of climbing, a sport that has no rules or regulations, no structure and no one telling it what to do and when. I disagree. Climbing's inclusion in the Olympic games will not result in a sudden explosion of would-be climbers rushing to drill bolts at Stanage on a post-Olympic climbing psyche the day the games finish. The main interest in the sport in an Olympic era of climbing will derive from what people see in the actual games – competition climbing on artificial climbing walls. If there is a surge in interest it will be in this side of the sport and the use of climbing walls across the UK will probably increase quite dramatically. If this happens, and climbing walls get too busy, more will be built, hopefully bigger and

better than those we already have – and climbing wall managers across the UK will rejoice.

If the sport's inclusion in the games is managed correctly there should be no adverse effect on the outdoor crags that we all love to use. I am not saying that there won't be more climbers on the crags, because as the sport progresses and increases in popularity (which it is doing, with or without Olympic inclusion) this is inevitable.

What is important is how we manage those climbers who come from climbing walls – perhaps having learnt about climbing through the Olympics – and then decide to progress to climbing outdoors. Even without Olympic inclusion there are now more people climbing indoors in the UK than there are outdoors according to Sport England's Active People Survey.

A portion of these increased numbers of climbers will choose to take their sporting endeavours further and hit the crags and mountains of the UK. The BMC will have to make sure that these climbers have all the right tools and information at their disposal to make sure this transition is made in a manner that takes into consideration the feelings and safety of these keen climbers and other crag/mountain users. How it promotes its indoor-to-outdoor transition information is crucial – something it is already doing a fantastic job of, and something it will have to continue doing should we become part of the Olympic family.

In general, were climbing to become an Olympic discipline, then those climbers who want to continue doing as they always have done – heading out to the crags every weekend and enjoying the great outdoors in whatever manner they choose – would still be able to do that without any issues or restrictions. However, those who have chosen to pursue their sport in the enjoyment of competition climbing – whether it is in a league at their local wall or competing at the highest level representing their country in the Olympic games – should be given all the support they need to achieve their dreams. And I think most of us can agree it would be fantastic to see a British climber stood atop of an Olympic podium in just over 10 years' time.

CLIMBING & THE OLYMPICS: A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

In the second part of the Olympics debate, former CC Journal and Newsletter editor and dedicated South West activist, Iain Peters, makes a powerful argument for the BMC to distance itself from any further bid to make climbing an Olympic sport. For Iain, the BMC should hold true to its principle and remain a representative rather than a governing body.

By Iain Peters

The summer of 1966 was good. I was eighteen, broke, living unofficially at the Count House and extremely competitive. The Biven/Peck era was coming to an end, their legacy a series of superb extreme routes up and across Bosigran's immaculate sweep of granite. Too young and arrogant to realize that I might be tilting at windmills I decided that the time was ripe to put these old timers in their place, after all Pete must have turned thirty. There was one small problem: I lacked a climbing partner. This was duly solved by a decision to solo as many of these new XS routes as possible.

Against all the odds I survived, the closest call coming ironically on the magnificent but straightforward *Doorpost*, when a jackdaw shot out of one of the deep cracks near the top straight into my face. Unthinkingly I took both hands off, forgetting

Right: Leah Crane competing at 2013 Boulder World Cup.
Photograph: Heiko Wilhelm





that I was 200 feet up on a vertical wall. Luckily the holds were huge and a blind reach prevented a nasty mess on the terrace below.

There was not much fame, fortune or future for that matter in soloing. Perhaps new routes, on undiscovered crags, harder than anything that had gone on before, would get my name in lights or at least the next guide? The result was *Right Angle* at The Gurnard's Head. Definitely extreme, at least when viewed from above, but in fact an amenable, if very dramatic Severe. Still it taught me that a great climb is just that, whatever the grade. I realized that competing with the best might not necessarily be my true vocation.

What has this snippet from a misspent youth got to do with competitive sport climbing and the Olympic Games? Simply this: my daughter, now at the same age and equally competitive spends her lunch breaks from college at our local wall. She's keen, strong and agile, so I suspect she will soon be entering various bouldering and lead climbing competitions, many of which are organized under the aegis of our very own representative body, the BMC.

She also loves climbing in all its different guises, so she's no different from thousands of other young people up and down the country who enjoy this crazy pastime of ours. And sure, if climbing was to become an Olympic sport and she was good enough she'd jump at the opportunity to compete at the highest levels.

So am I against the principle of climbing in the Olympics? No, I'm not. But what I am against is the direct involvement of the BMC. From its inception it has performed an increasingly pivotal role in the development of mountaineering in this country, and I for one am grateful for the sheer hard work that both its volunteers and its staff put in to protect our interests, fight when necessary to ensure that access to our crags remains open to all, lobby politicians and even buy the odd crag or two on our behalf. But, and to my mind it is a very big but, the BMC is and should remain the representative body for English and Welsh mountaineering, not in any way a governing body.

Governing bodies make rules and punish those who break them. Governing bodies in any sport are required to instigate and pay for drug testing programmes. Governing bodies will tell you how to play the game, ban or fine you if you transgress. Governing bodies acquire a multi-layered bureaucracy and the need for massive funding to maintain it. Governing bodies are completely alien to the spirit of mountaineering.

Many other sports, particularly those where there are both professional and strictly amateur participants, have recognized that the two may not be compatible; canoeing and equestrianism are just two examples, both well-established Olympic sports, but both having independent representative and governing bodies.

Even the UIAA, albeit out of mismanagement, have clear water between themselves and the IFSC, currently the governing body for competitive climbing. To my mind there is a huge difference between a line of brightly coloured, man-made holds on an indoor climbing wall and a *Spiral Stairs* or *Cenotaph Corner*. Both are subject to the laws of gravity, but the two activities are poles apart in the actual experience and given the quantum leap in the popularity of indoor climbing ought now to be treated as separate sports. Indoors one must obey strict Health and Safety rules and soloing is strictly verboten, so is placing your own gear or tying a non-approved knot. Outside you can do your own thing entirely, even if your somewhat cavalier attitudes to rope management and protection might mean finding a regular climbing partner is difficult.

Of course, many now take their first tentative steps upwards on their local indoor wall, and some will remain there, aspiring to the numerous competitions as their strength and technical skills improve. Why not? Competitive climbing is a perfectly valid and increasingly popular form of athletic exercise that has now developed into a sport that no longer needs to be considered as yet another activity within the generic term of mountaineering.

There's no doubt that those regular sessions on a

climbing wall are a great way to increase climbing fitness, with the added advantage of often being pleasant social occasions. Serious competition is a different ballgame needing dedication, properly funded training programmes, increased facilities, and major sponsorship, similar to those enjoyed by cycling and swimming but above all significant amounts of money.

Sport England should recognize this and make the necessary commitment if our indoor climbers are to compete successfully at Olympic and world level. If clay pigeon shooting, Greco-Roman wrestling and ballroom dancing on skates are acknowledged as legitimate Olympic sports then so should climbing, but for that to happen I maintain that the sport here in the UK will need its own national governing body affiliated to the IFSC. As such it can source its financial and logistic requirements either through sponsorship or from the state without relying on an organization that has to address the varied demands of its core membership.

The BMC has already distanced itself from mountain training, medicine and rescue, each of which has its own administrative and regulatory set-up, leaving it free to concentrate on the really important issues affecting our freedom of the hills, a freedom that increasingly is being compromised by conservation interests, changes to planning policies and economic development as well as the deep cultural change away from risk in all its forms towards a cotton wool society obsessed with litigation.

I do not say that the BMC should divorce itself entirely from indoor sport climbing. In fact it could play an important role in the setting up of a British Competitive Climbing Federation since a number of its current employees and volunteers have great experience in the running of competitions and in training, but once established it should concentrate on its key role which is "working for climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers in England and Wales."

I guess a feature of the argument for the Council to remain closely linked to an Olympic bid is that, if

Left:
Dave Barrans
competing at 2013
Boulder World Cup.

Photograph:
Heiko Wilhelm

Right:
Jon Partridge
competing at 2013
Boulder World.

Photograph:
Heiko Wilhelm



successful, the profile of English and Welsh climbing and mountaineering might be significantly raised, along with increased funding and sponsorship.

In the latest round the BMC has received £3million of public money (our taxes) over three years: a tidy sum but a drop in the ocean for any sport with serious ambitions for Olympic success, even less when one considers the demands placed on that money. We should also remember that there are tens of thousands of us who pay an annual subscription and I strongly feel that before any further decision is taken by the National Council to continue the process of re-applying to the IOC the membership should be fully consulted.

In the final analysis it is the mountaineering community in Britain who will need to decide whether or not competitive climbing is an integral and valid form of mountaineering or a separate athletic sport in its own right with clearly defined rules and protocols.

I strongly believe it should be the latter and if it is going to grow as a sport then keeping it within

the control of the BMC is bound to cause a conflict of interest. In fact one could argue that substantial state funding of mountaineering might well turn into a poisoned chalice. Such tails all too often end up wagging the dog. Fighting the increasing number of access and conservation issues, dealing with a risk averse bureaucracy or continuing to support the hundreds of clubs, large and small, as well as its individual members is, in my view, the most important function of our representative body.

This brings me back to the theme of my opening paragraph. Yes, I was young and foolish, could have got myself killed, but I want my BMC to defend my right, firstly to be able to get into that position through open access agreements and secondly to have the freedom to choose how I climb. That requirement will increasingly demand an organization that has the resources and the necessary political muscle to carry out my wishes and those of the tens of thousands of others who seek the challenge of our hills and coasts and not be sidelined into the Machiavellian world of the present day Olympics.

Right:
*Neil Moreby
enjoying the sunrise
from the top of Jebel
Rum after climbing
through the night.*

Photograph:
Dan Arkle



MOUNTAINS & DESERTS

Rum Goings on in the Desert. *By Malcolm Phelps*

One-Armed Redemption from the Monk. *By Andrew Walker*

The Dark Side. *By David Wynne-Jones*

Patagonia – Land of Blue Sky and Fair Wind. *By David Turnbull*

In Search of Crag X. *By Emma Alsford*

RUM GOINGS ON IN THE DESERT

In a bid to escape the chill grip of the English winter some of the more adventurous climbers are fleeing to the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East. Here Malcolm Phelps tells us of a recent trip to Jordan, in the company of a group of fellow CC members.

By Malcolm Phelps



‘Allahu Akbar. Allahu Akbar.’ Well, greater God may be, but being woken in darkness every morning at half past five by the muezzin’s first call to prayer didn’t feel that good – particularly when most nights were also interrupted by the sounds of dogs howling, cocks crowing, Israelis talking into the wee small hours and, on the final night, the screech of cats fighting.

Notice I make no mention of Raz’s snoring. It’s not that he didn’t snore, or that this is an act of kindness on my part, rather that any noise he made was drowned out by the surrounding hubbub and the din of someone else going for it big time. Although this guy had considerably camped 50 metres away, thinking he might be out of earshot, the sound of his snoring carried long and far in to the night.

So, Wadi Rum in the south of Jordan is not the best place for light sleepers. Nor is it the place for devotees of glamping. Facilities were – how should I put it – basic at best. Some members of the party claimed to have managed a hot shower at some point, but I only got cold water and although the women’s section was reasonably clean and tidy, it seems that men’s problems don’t stop at leaving the seat up. Enough said.

That’s the negative stuff out of the way. This was a great adventure trip in a stunning country with a team of very mixed ages which gelled really well even though many had not met before. The guidebook we used was *Treks and Climbs in Wadi Rum* by Tony Howard who had been invited by the Jordanians in 1984 to help develop the climbing in Wadi Rum as a tourist attraction.

Robin Mazinke and Sarah Goodman had been there before and were the instigators of the trip and provided a wealth of information on suitable objectives and practicalities. Pete Finklaire and Simon Laker formed a very business-like and keen partnership and were both full of irrepressible enthusiasm. Pete’s laugh is a thing to behold. Sue Hazel and Neil Morbey had climbed regularly together as had Dan Arkle and Simon Clark. Dan was nursing a

repetitive strain injury so, for the first few days, Sue, Neil and Simon formed a fast team that didn’t need to get away too early. This was just as well for Sue is not an early morning person it seems. The party was completed by Rasik Parmar – better known as Raz – and myself, both fresh from Morocco.

We had all flown to Amman. Pete and Simon arrived on an earlier flight and immediately took a taxi down to Wadi Rum. Sue, Simon, Dan and Neil stayed the night with friends of friends near Amman and the rest of us settled in at the Black Iris hotel in Madaba, named after the national flower of Jordan.

In the morning, we took a quick tour of the town centre which typifies Jordan as a haven of peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities. Pristine, striking and often modern, mosques are juxtaposed with older more careworn Christian churches – many with intricate mosaics. We had time to visit St George’s – the Church of the map – which hosts the famous mosaic map of the Holy Land dating from the 6th century.

It was then time for the four-hour taxi drive south – about 250km. After the relatively fertile northern area, the desert soon asserts itself. The Desert Highway passes through a largely unremarkable and barren landscape until the mountains appear on the horizon and the turn off to Wadi Rum finally arrives.

At the entrance to the National Park, we paid our fees with what could be regarded as a refreshing lack of bureaucracy and transferred our gear to the next mode of transport: a beaten up Bedouin 4X4. This could only be started in gear, as it had no clutch. Around the halfway point we passed a broken down Toyota 4x4. Our driver promptly drove up behind it and unceremoniously crashed into it in an unsuccessful effort to get it going. The lack of seat belts was only a minor worry. The Toyota was still there when we left a week later.

We arrived at the Rest House in Wadi Rum find Pete and Simon tucking into chicken, chips and rice. They had already managed a good three-pitch route (Salim 5+) on Abu Maileh Tower just behind the

Left:
*Dawn above the Jebel
um Ishrin massif.*

Photograph:
Dan Arkle

Right:
Neil Moreby
descending the huge
'Eye of Allah' cave.

Photograph:
Dan Arkle

campsite. Pretty keen.

At the Rest House we met Salim who was to be our mentor and local gopher for the week. We settled on 2 dinar (more or less £2) per night for the camping and after pitching our tents, went for our own chicken dinner with a beer – at 5 dinar a bit excessive, but irresistible. We managed to drink our hosts dry by the end of our stay, supping just one can a day.

The remaining four members of the team turned up after dark following a fractious journey. But we were now all in position and raring to go. Pete and Simon said that it had been really cold on their journey down but it stayed hot for the rest of the week and thin clothing was all that was needed, even climbing in the shade. Fortunately, it was warm rather than hot at night.

Rob, Sarah, Raz and I set off for Jebel Rum's East Face. Rob and Sarah were going for *The Eye of Allah* (AD Sup) while Raz and I would start with them, but aimed to do the route they had climbed last time: *Hammad's Route* (AD). We felt this would give us a good feel for the geography of this complex mountain and crucially – the descent route. Or so we thought.

Easy soloing saw us arrive at the start of three or four pitches of pleasant roped climbing leading to an easy ridge overlooking the Great Siq – the big ravine that bisects Jebel Rum. Robin and Sarah were down in the Siq itself at the start of their route. Raz was not really enjoying this sort of scrambling, route finding, and it did occur to me that we might make a short day of it but we carried on for now.

I knew we had to take the second chimney along the ridge to descend to our route and, after a conversation with Rob down below, we found a chimney to descend. It was quite tricky and we chose to abseil the final section to the floor of the Siq. We moved along to the end of the easy climbing where our route would climb the left wall. I offered the lead to Raz and he set off above a substantial pool of greenish water. It looked a bit steep for a route graded 5 minus, but Raz got some gear in and moved up to the steeper area.

I had meanwhile manoeuvred myself to get a better view. Suddenly, Raz was off and upside down. The gear held. For a while I thought I could stay out of the water but inexorably I was dragged in before I had time to worry about water snakes and the like. I waded out holding on tight to the rope and then lowered Raz to the ground. His pristine new red tee shirt was torn and he had a nasty graze on his back. Also, his arm hurt. At this point, Simon, Sue and Neil arrived following Robin and Sarah. I was surprised that they had come down our chimney, but it was good to see them and together we assessed Raz's condition and gaffer tape his tee shirt.

Before we retreated I nipped up to get the gear. We set off back up the chimney to find the descent route. Raz was doing ok, but his arm was hurting and it seemed he had also turned his ankle over. We soon found the well-marked descent route and the crucial abseils. These took us to the descent gully and were home well before dark.

Raz by now had an egg shaped bruise on his arm and his ankle was swelling up. He was concerned that he might have some broken bones but, fortunately, his injuries were to soft tissue and within a couple of days he was able to climb again.

Simon and Pete had returned enthusing about *Black Magic* – a ten pitch D Sup - about HVS - largely in the shade – on the Dark Tower of Jebel Rum's East Face. The others all returned safely from *The Eye of Allah* as it got dark. The latter route involves through cave (The Eye) before a long section of padding to the summit, which was pretty unnerving to descend.

In conversation, it now became apparent that Raz and I had descended the wrong chimney, hence my surprise at Sue, Neil and Simon following us down. Robin thought he might have misled us and had apparently tried calling after us to no avail. So I had inadvertently pointed Raz at the wrong exit from the Siq. That didn't make me feel too good.

Raz and I decided that, as we wanted to go to Petra on one of the days, we would go the following day to give him a chance to recover. We set off for the daily





bus which, depending on who you asked, leaves at 8 or 8.30 every day: but which, in fact, left at 9.30. We teamed up with a French Canadian lad called Hervé who had been on *Black Magic* at the same time as Simon and Pete and was astonished that such old people were not only out climbing, but climbing well and incidentally doing a much better job on the route-finding.

Petra was magic and as the day wore on the pain in Raz's ankle eased which was just as well as there's loads of walking to get the most out of a visit to this 'blood red city half as old as time.' Although my guidebook suggested 26 dinar to get in it was in fact 50. That's pretty steep but then we weren't as canny as the others who went the next day (more later!).

After a gentle stroll from the entrance past massive carved 'God' blocks and some wind eroded carved tombs, we reached the start of The Siq. In any other country this, on its own, would be a must for tourists as the path winds its way narrowly through a deep gorge (Cheddar eat your heart out).

For 1,200 metres you descend almost imperceptibly with sheer sandstone walls above you picking out carvings, remains of water pipes and parts of the old Roman paving. The gorge narrows to just a few feet and is almost closed overhead when suddenly you get a glimpse high up ahead of what you are here for. A small patch of carved stone appears and grows as you approach the end of The Siq. It takes your breath away to realise that this exquisite monument known as The Treasury was carved out of the solid rock over 2,000 years ago. Questions such as 'how' and simply 'why' leave you awestruck.

As we emerged from the end of the Siq into the space in front of the Treasury we could marvel at the full frontal beauty of the rock carvings. So magnificent is the vision that the noise and bustle

Left: A typical long and complex descent. Si Clark and Neil Moreby descending towards the welcoming green of Lawrence's Well.

Photograph: Dan Arkle



of the crowds of tourists doesn't seem to matter. We lingered for a while, soaking up the atmosphere before setting off for the rest of the ancient City. Although few match the symmetrical perfection of the Treasury, the tombs around the Outer Siq are still impressive, as is the magnificent Theatre which was capable of holding 8,500 people.

As Raz seemed to be recovering well, we decided to go for the long walk to the Monastery which is an hour or so away. We had many offers of air-conditioned taxis: also known as donkeys. After a while, Raz decided to give one a try. I have to say that neither he nor the donkey looked very happy and they broke up after the shortest of relationships, even before the path started its climb.

There are steps of sorts all the way, but in the

afternoon much of the climb is mercifully in the shade. Raz was going well by now and after passing many stalls with the usual tourist fare we caught a glimpse of the urn that marks the top of the monument. The approach is beautifully thought out. Apart from the urn, you see nothing until you reach the plateau. Turn a corner, however, and suddenly the whole magnificent façade is there in front of you. Its symmetry produces an optical illusion such that it is difficult to comprehend its scale. The doorway itself is higher than a substantial two-storey house and the whole facade is 50 metres across. Pictures with people in show the true scale.

We settled down in the comfy chairs of the café opposite for a mint tea trying to take in the sheer scale of it. Refreshed, we made a quick trot up to the col

Above:
*In the shadows:
abseiling down the
sandstone cliffs of the
Wadi Rum.*

Photograph:
Phelps collection

to take in the big views out to the East and then we were back off down. A welcome ice cream and it was a return walk up the Siq – which felt steeper at the end of a long but fantastic day.

Ahmed, the bus organiser, had sorted a taxi for us to get back and we arrived under a full moon in time for dinner. Rob and Sarah confirmed the quality of Black Magic while Simon and Pete had had an adventurous day accessing *The Edge of Zernouk el Daber* (D Sup) via the Kharazeh Canyon on the North side of Wadi Rum. They ended up descending the striking line of the *Beauty* (TD) meeting up with Sue, Neil and Simon for the descent.

It was time for Raz and I to get climbing again. We settled on Salim, the shorter route that Pete and Simon had done on the first day. Despite painfully turning his damaged ankle on the walk-in, Raz was up for the climbing and led off up the easy first pitch. The three pitch route showed its teeth a little on the three dimensional second pitch which after an awkward groove and chimney finished via an airy juggy arête. Raz led the next chimney pitch confidently and I finished up the sandy corner which was pretty tough for 5+. But we had a good route out of the way and Raz was pleased that he could still climb despite his injuries.

Most of the others had gone to Petra for the day but Robin and Sarah, having been before, went for Alan and his *Perverse Frog* (TD Sup) left of the *Beauty*. This apparently blank wall succumbed to the team's 6b leader: Sarah.

The day's Petra party had been more canny than we were with the entry fee. They bought two-day passes for 26 dinar and then hung around the bus the next morning to sell them on to the next day's punters to save almost 50%. The punter just had to remember what their name was for the day!

Next day, we were all off to the desert. Somehow, ten of us got into Salim's 4x4 which had 750,000km on the clock. Our baggage was on the roof. Neil rose to the occasion producing a range of music to suit all tastes. Who would have thought we would sing along

to Cliff on his Summer Holiday or that Neil would know all the words to Rawhide let alone have it at all on his i-pod? Surfing Safari also went down well.

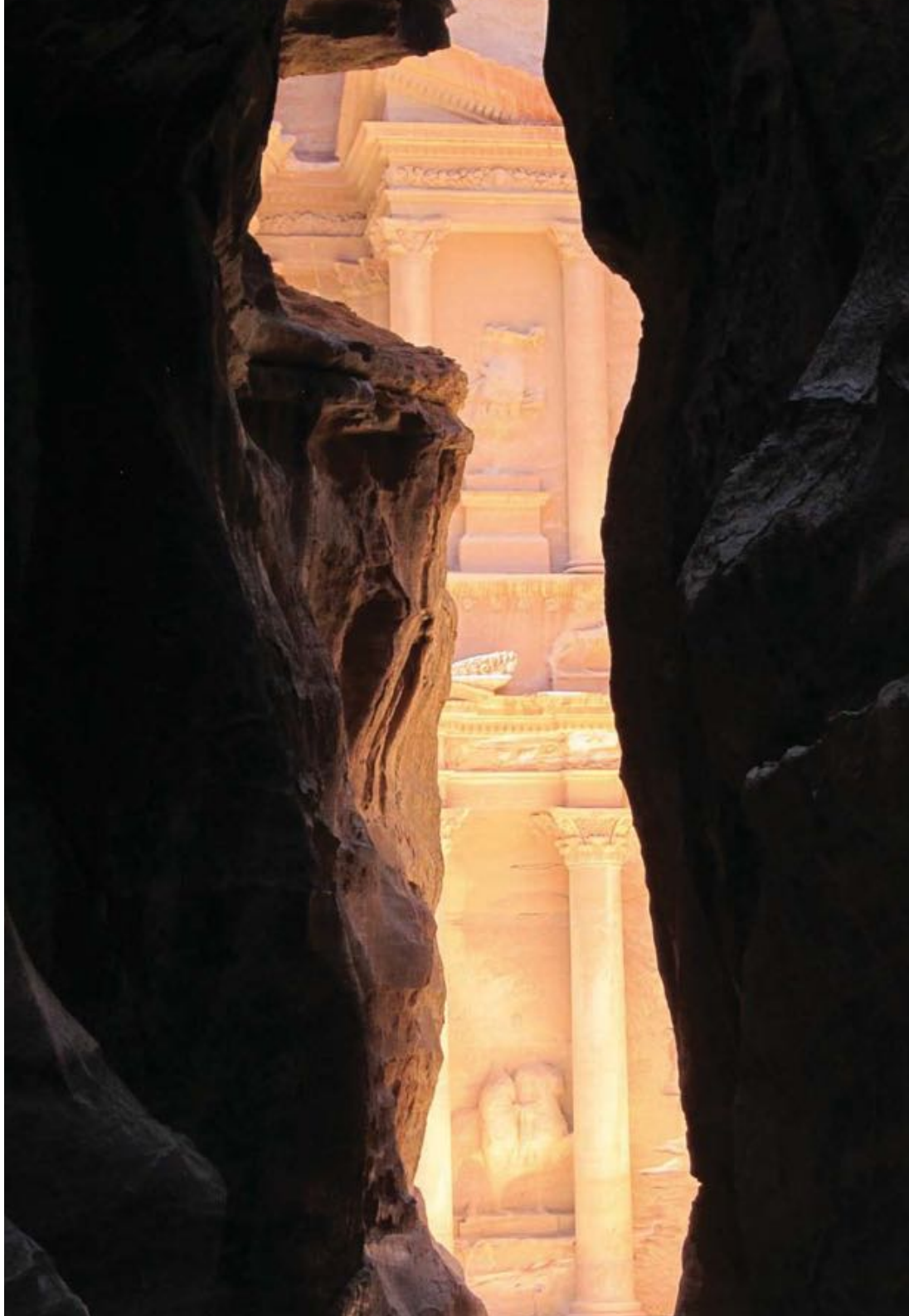
It was great to get away from the campsite which had become flooded with Israelis. They did not endear themselves to the Bedouin. First they spent not a penny to aid the local economy, buying nothing at the shops and not even so much as a cup of tea at the café. But, more arrogantly, they used up all the water on their first evening by taking long showers and filling enormous butts with water of doubtful quality, when bottled water was not only safer, but also cheap. By keeping in with the locals, we were able to sneak a shower in the staff bathroom on condition we did not tell any Israeli.

Salim dropped us off in Barrah Canyon and we set about looking at the major crack lines to choose a route. Dan, who was now ready for climbing, and Simon settled on the striking straight crack of *Merlin's Wand* (4 pitches up to 6a+). Sue and Neil went for the *Star of Abu Judaidah* (ED Inf) leaving the rest of us to divide up the three crack lines of *Rain in the Desert* (Pete and Simon), *Storm* (Robin and Sarah) and *Sundown* (Raz and I). They were all great routes with pitches up to 6a. Ours ate up all our big gear including two friend fours. The chimney at the top looked intimidating, but took some gear and had a drilled peg.

All three teams converged for the abseil descent, which was both reassuring and sociable. At the bottom we realised that a large proportion of the team were sponsored by La Sportiva whose Mythos boots are, in our opinion, the last thing in both comfort and elegance. Hopefully there's a cheque in the post now.

At our base under the cliff, Simon got his 'beast' going. This petrol stove was another way in which we were woken up in the mornings, but here it came into its own with an endless supply of welcome tea. There was a general air of calm efficiency about the Pete/Simon team some of which almost rubbed off on the rest of us.

As we waited for Neil and Sue, we cooked up the evening meal – an excellent ratatouille with added



Left:
*The classic first view
of 'The Treasury',
Petra.*

Photograph:
Dan Arkle



spices and garlic plus pasta and pitta bread. It was the best meal of the week. The café at the campsite, while acceptable, was a bit limited. Starters were very good with various types of hummus, salads and yoghurt plus pitta bread. For non-veggies the main course was either chicken or fish and the fish was just fish fingers. In the end the veggies did better.

Back at camp in the desert, night fell and the stars came out. Dan set up one of his trademark time-lapse efforts and we argued for a while about the location of the Pole Star. Then the moon rose, flooding the West Side of the canyon and the Ocean Slabs which looked a much more attractive proposition than in the full heat of the sun. We lit a fire with what brushwood we could find and chatted on until one-by-one we drifted off to our pits.

We didn't put the fire out, unlike Pete and a friend, who, on a previous occasion at Swanage had come across someone else's fire. After warming themselves for a while, in true neighbourly spirit and bearing in mind health and safety considerations, they had made it safe in the way that only boys can. A little later, safely ensconced in their tents, they heard voices: 'I wonder if those potatoes are cooked by now?'

For once, a great night's sleep followed for everyone. The next morning the beast roared and tea was brewing as routes were decided upon on. Raz and I would follow Pete and Simon up *Merlin's Wand*; Robin and Sarah would go for *The Star of Abu Judaidah*; Dan and Simon for *Neige Dans le Desert* (TD Sup) and Sue and Neil for *Honte a Vous* (TD), just to the right of *Merlin's Wand* with the aim of doing that too.

We watched and waited as Pete and Simon dealt efficiently with the clearly technical first pitches of the Wand. A troupe of goats passed through – the males facing off in spectacular fashion. The silence and tranquillity of the desert was wonderful, only to be broken by a full a capella version of American Pie from Neil while belaying Sue at the foot of their route. The irrepressible Neil claimed to have been chatted up by girls of all ages and nationalities and by the end of the week even had the telephone numbers of the

most attractive camels.

All too soon it was my turn. I was very quickly engrossed in a lovely long first pitch. Easy slabs at first, a stiff little overhang and then a flared crack with finger locks in the back; utterly absorbing. At the top there was a juggy steepening before the comfortable stance. Raz came up grumbling gently but he loved it really. The second pitch had a short, brutal overhang, which turned out to be a one move wonder. By then we had dealt with the starters and were on the big ledge below the main course.

It began easily enough before a taster overhang on slightly worrying, yellow rock, but with the biggest jug imaginable in just the right place. Then I was perched under the crux. The now thin finger crack led out left and there was an obvious foothold out on the front. A committing move up found my left foot on the hold and finger jugs in reach. Although awkwardly placed these jugs enabled contortions to be made to get in a bridged position above the crux. It looked as if we might get this done. I belayed quickly.

Raz came up well, his bad leg causing no trouble, and I set off up the long fourth pitch. After a pause to let Pete abseil past me I finished the pitch being videoed by Simon as I grappled with awkward runners in the flared crack. The pitch seemed to go on for ever and I was getting mentally drained as well as very thirsty. I needed to suck the very last out of Simon's platypus before I could even contemplate setting up the belay. Simon roped on down and Raz followed up before I led off up the final pitch. Not hard, but long and needing care before it deposited me in the obvious niche. When Raz came up I sent him off to the right, trusting that the abseil was over that way. It was, and with great care to avoid trapped ropes, we abbed off in 4 lengths to the valley floor. A great route – about E2 5b was the general consensus. We were well pleased with ourselves.

We packed up while we waited for Sue and Neil (no chance of them getting *Merlin's Wand* done as well) and the ever-reliable Salim turned up on time to get us home. As we entered the village, traffic had built

up and we found ourselves held up by a fully laden truck going incredibly slowly. It was only as we drew alongside that we realised it was being driven by what looked like a six year-old. How his feet reached the pedals we never discovered.

The trip to the desert had been great fun but I for one was tired and most of us took a day off to go to Aqaba for a swim in the Red Sea. Dan studied the guide and decided we were going to the Royal Diving Club. It would cost a little but would be worth it. Meanwhile, Rob, Sarah, Pete and Simon had got up at 4am before we went to Aqaba, intent on doing a long Bedouin route over Jebel Rum, *Al Thalamiyyah* (AD Sup).

We were in two taxis and ours took us via Aqaba itself, the ancient site of Aila and a small but interesting museum. At the dive centre south of Aqaba we paid 15 dinars to enter and a further 5 to hire a mask and snorkel. Dan's choice was spot on. About 30 metres out was a fantastic coral reef with as many colours shapes and sizes as you could imagine plus tropical fish of incredible variety. It was just like swimming in an enormous aquarium. You expected David Attenborough to be whispering in your ear at any moment. Spectacular.

Sue, Raz and I travelled back together. Meanwhile, the lads (Dan, Simon and Neil) had hatched a plot. They were after the *Inshallah Factor* (E4 5c) which snaked up a tough looking 450m line right behind the campsite. Graded ED Inf, it had a French 6c crux pitch. The problem was that it was in full sun all day.

The obvious thing (to them) was to climb it at night. Sue helped carry their gear to the start of the real climbing, but was disappointed not to be going with them. As night began to fall we could see their head torches making steady progress.

The party of four (Pete, Simon, Rob and Sarah) arrived back from their massive outing on the Bedouin route as darkness fell, having been held up for 90 minutes by an Israeli guided party who had insisted on sending 18 novices down the crucial abseil with top ropes and refusing to let our guys through: bloody

Left:

Robin and Sarah starting the huge 'Star of Abu Judaidah', Barrah Canyon.

Photograph:

Dan Arkle

Right:
*Amazing startrails
from Barrah Canyon
- Which way is
North?*

Photograph:
Dan Arkle

arrogant. In addition to this delay, Pete had earlier damaged his big toe quite badly and had cuts to his hand. He was on an easy passage and going at speed when a piece of the dark, coal like rock had simply broken away and sent him flying. Despite this, they'd had a great day out.

On the final full day, the three lads (Simon, Dan and Neil) were not back in the morning, but there was no sign of them on the cliff, even with binoculars so it looked like they were on top. The others were keen on another desert trip and set off for the Burdah area with Salim's younger brother Sulamein to do *Orange Sunshine* (D Inf). Sue and I meanwhile would do *Black Magic*. We set off in full sun but with a pleasant breeze blowing and were immediately slightly off route. Soon however, we were romping up pleasant grooves, slabs and the occasional fist crack to reach the obvious tree on the halfway ledge. Here, now nicely in the shade, and on the advice of the others, we took the steep crack rather than the unprotected slab.

I reached the obvious belay equipped with a maillon and everything and brought Sue up. We consulted the guide, which said to go out left. Sue climbed a crack first and then moved left, but it was all wrong at the grade so she retreated using gear that others had left behind from a similar excursion. She was having a look round to the right when I spotted chalk and more worn rock lower down over to the left. Had we taken the slab instead of the crack we would have landed at the correct belay on the arête. Having got out to the arête, from here on the grades were right – a traverse at 4, a nice groove pitch for Sue at 5 and the final diedre pitch at 5+ for me. About HVS 5a we thought overall.

We didn't bother with the scrambling to the top (which wasn't a real top anyway) in favour of making sure we got down well before dark. Easy abseils led to a more awkward one from the half way tree. After a nasty scramble down a short chimney we were back on the screes. A great day out.

Meanwhile everyone else was home. The lads had finished their route at 5am and had passed a

leisurely day getting down, finishing with a paddle in Lawrence's Well. The desert rats had had an entertaining day with Sulamein showing off his driving skills on the dunes and over the domes. They'd had trouble following the route as described, but still managed a good outing with Pete following along in trainers with his bad toe.

For our final meal we were invited to Salim's house. He has 10 delightful children and he himself is one of five brothers and 16 sisters. We only saw his wife briefly to thank her for the delicious baked fish and apart from her we saw no Bedouin women at all the whole week. It seemed to our Western eyes such a shame that his bright intelligent and communicative 11 and 12 year-old daughters would soon have to cover up and not been seen outside the family. Nevertheless, it was a very pleasant evening and the children liked the pens and sweets we offered them.

Lifts were arranged for the morning. Simon and Pete had an earlier flight but the rest of us went via the Dead Sea. That was weird. 30% salt content and all but impossible to swim on your front. We posed reading books and seeming to float above the water. We all obeyed the notices about avoiding going under the water or getting it in our eyes or noses. All, that is, except for Dan who made himself quite ill by going completely under. Twice. No sympathy from the rest of us!

It remained to get to the airport and for Raz and I to have our hand luggage rejected – the others had learned the hard way that climbing gear can often be turned back as a security risk. Fortunately, after a brief hiatus we were ushered back through security and our hand luggage was taken into the hold at no extra charge from Easyjet.

And so we found ourselves back to a freezing and still wintry Kent. It had been a great adventurous trip. Thanks to Robin and Sarah for inviting us and organising things so well. Thanks also to everyone else for great company, good humour and some new friends made. Hope to see you all out on the hill some time.





ONE-ARMED REDEMPTION FROM THE MONK

When Andrew Walker lost his arm and seriously damaged his legs in a motorbike accident he spent two and half years in a wheelchair and was told he would never climb again. Here he tells how he defied the consultants and got back to the Alps with his long time friend and Alpine climbing partner Jean Michel.

By Andrew Walker

Head hanging out the window in the hot clean air, going up on the Scheidegg toy train, again. Howling my eyes out in front of the August tourists. The old German boy opposite is staring at me, but I am used to it. He keeps looking at his right arm: the cheeky git, what with me missing mine. But no, his arm is prosthetic, and he meets my eyes, Teutonically clenches his jowls, and the false arm moves. I'm an emotional mess, with the taste of sun tan cream on my lips, titanium legs squeezed in to the old yellow Nepals, a rucksac on what's left of a shoulder: a one-armed fraud with big boots and ice axe. My best Swiss rope mate of 30 years is doing the traditional pre-route munching of cheese and trying to ignore the blabbing babbling Brit. Still, I am howling with joy to be back here after so long, and after so much pain.

The Guggi Hut, on the Monch via the 'Mam Tor South Face' hut/choss walk. Nobody. Not even a guardian. The hut is a stunning shed on a shelf: you could die going for a careless shit here. There's even booze. Hell, it's been a long time. Five years. The hut walk, not the booze. One of those years spent lost in a white hospital room. Two of those years' spent in a wheelchair. 'You'll never climb again.' I went mad and tried to kill myself. A rare wheelchair assisted attempt.

Left: *One armed and breathless on the summit ridge of the Monch, above the Nollen Route on the North West face.*
Photograph: Walker Collection

So, a 1,000metres mixed route seems sensible. Perhaps it's a second attempt. Boy, had I not prepared. Five years of booze and drugs, prescribed and otherwise. Forget Coronation Street on a measly wrap of powder, Jim. Forget 'salt water cure' with a bad cold. So, welcome back.

'Nollen' is 'to moan' in German. I moaned. And groaned. And swore. Hundreds of metres of steep loose rubble in the dark, with a knee that doesn't bend. And then mixed choss. So, welcome back. Nothing changes. The easy stuff is dangerous; the hard stuff is harder; the route is still always several hundred metres longer than the height of the hill. I

Below:

A great friend – portrait of Jean, rock climber, Alpinist and perfect partner.

Photograph:

Walker collection





Above:
*Dawn on the
Monch – in search of
redemption.*

Photograph:
Walker collection

could accuse the Swiss of sandbagging, but the word does not exist in German, French or Romanche. And anyway, we will always sandbag ourselves, no?

Dawn finds us, as it always does. This time I am in a beautiful blue cloud of tobacco hunched on a rubble belay with sore toes and a painful phantom right arm. Above me the 100 metre ice bulge that gives the route its name. The Nollen is in 'hideous Brenva serac mode on an angry day'; dribbling overhanging icy gibblets to left and right, smooth and mean above. This next bit is meant to be 50/55 degrees. Today it has 30 metres of vertical ice, straight off the rubble, and it's rock

hard horrible, bleached of Rébuffat type spectral blue ambience, more a consumptive old pants grey. I've not swung an axe or worn crampons for five years. And my right arm was amputated six months earlier. And we have a single rope. Like we had on the Walker, all those years ago. Another great weight-saving decision. I think we had a single axe sharing collective then, too.

Jean Michel eventually slays it after a return trip to the belay, and some dick-wilting, sclattering about. It still amazes me that we'd not even discussed how I am meant to second this. So yes, welcome back. I'd

love to believe this was due to absolute confidence in my ability to 'sort it out'. And, that I subsequently cruised it, whooping loudly. The tried and trusted experience of 30 years of frigging, four seasons, and four El Cap routes, found me, thirty minutes later, still on the rubble belay in an ice-blue dawn of despair, helped not at all by the stretch of a 'tight' 9mm rope, and a leader, possibly belayed, out of sight and sound. So welcome back. I had tried one armed axe dynos, aiding on ice screws, front points in slings, hooking ice screws, a one armed prussic, standing on my ice axe, climbing the stretchy 9mm rope. At one point I'd resorted to hanging off a quick draw with my teeth. And those stupid rope cam things don't work. And my phantom limb was proving as unhelpful as ever. A static line, a chest harness and a jumar would sort this out. At least I hadn't dropped any kit yet. Oh, now I have. And to be honest, anything beyond two moves in the vertical with one arm is, well, 'ambitious'. Downhill Racer, Johnny? Try Sloth. Well there I am: one armed, stuck, and knackered senseless with left arm cramps.

Unlike the historian David Irving, I'd like to think the final solution was premeditated. But mine wasn't. Finally detaching myself from a high ice screw (try it with one arm on vertical ice) I cut loose and swung over the dangling icy innards to my left. But it's nice ice, still vertical, but blue/green, with those lovely little front point steps that used to so flatter us. And it wasn't my ice screw. But with that move completed, the dawning realisation - there's no going down from here. Instead of flailing dynos I find I can stand and chop a handhold. Place axe at waist height. Use hand hold to get foot on axe. Stand up. Get front points in. Scream for tight rope. Tug axe up on wrist loop. Hurrah. Jimmy Marshall, you rascal.

Above the Nollen there is a plodding sloping plateau, a small rimaye, and a swoop of snow direct to the summit of the Monch, or to rock on the south

Right: *Jean moving through the crux.*

Photograph: *Walker collection*





Above:
*With the crux behind
us, just the pull now
to the summit*

Photograph:
Walker collection

summit ridge. An hour at most. Ever thought it's all over, when it's not? The 'snow' is in terrible condition. Hence the Guggi Hut - nobody. Instead of moving together and pummelling up steep snow, we face six pitches of black ice, screw belays and much ticking of the clock. But this is still wonderful stuff; much better than, say, going mad in a wheelchair.

The simple acts of removing an ice screw and placing an axe has the tears back in my eyes. Long forgotten memories flood back with each belay and each movement. Memories buried under endless

hours in operating theatres, physiotherapy, nerve and bone grafts, hospital wards, trauma, medication and relentless daily nerve pain. Old pathways are reconnecting in my brain, triggered by the smell and taste of the place and moment. Everything is tainted with the rarefied magic of a lost dream: the dreamtime of mountain days where the nuance of each act is like that in a beautiful film. But, ever wondered where the past few hours went, in this Murray-esque dreaming, to make those short shadows so suddenly long?

We end up scrambling up the rubble to the top of

the south ridge. It's a fine summit ridge, it's late in the day, and the forecast storm is gathering. My right leg is no longer working properly; giving way with no warning. Both lower and upper legs are held together with titanium rods and screws. We exchange looks last aired years ago on the Scheidegg Wetterhorn, after the North Pillar (a 'classic' route most remembered for a very dehydrated attempt at piss drinking). In 30 years and hundreds of alpine routes together we have never had a rescue – although we've seen and helped with many. Even in the pre-mobile phone era we would argue for hours over the 'ethics' (and weight) of taking a radio. It's a PD descent. Albeit in oncoming dark and storm. We've done worse. Much worse. Try it with one leg? Keep rolling the dice?

We make the call. I sit down, and roll a fag, feeling most un-heroic under the embarrassed glare of my partner. Twenty minutes later we're drinking fine fresh coffee in the helicopter hangar at Lauterbrunnen. They are not at all unhappy to have rescued the cautious living rather than recovered the brave dead, for a change. This was a final redemption that the Monk gave me that day.

Two days later I was having stitches in my head in Chamonix hospital, after head butting a moraine in the Aiguilles. I was last there five years earlier with a broken right femur, arriving with a friend on the back of his motorbike. Funnily enough, they remembered me. With one helicopter rescue and a hospital visit in the past three days (in two different countries), I was starting to feel I needed parental supervision out of doors. So the next day Bob Drury and I paraglided off Planpraz, summited Mont Blanc, then took a three-hour glide over thirty years of alpine memories. Dangling at 5,000 metres over the fractal airiness of the north face of the Jorasses, I regretted nothing, except possibly the decision to wear a T-Shirt for the flight.

Right: *Lifted off the summit ridge on the Monch, at 4,000 metres - no drama, just a collapsing right leg*
Photograph: Walker collection





THE DARK SIDE

Having climbed all the Alpine 4,000 metre peaks David Wynne-Jones has devoted much of the last two decades to exploring the mountains and deserts of the Maghreb and the Middle East and expeditions further afield – most recently, Greenland. His first taste of long routes in Oman, however, was almost his last, as he recalls in this gripping account of a descent in a hot and hostile environment.

By David Wynne-Jones

OK I should have done my homework, read my Thesiger, had a look at the Empty Quarter on Google Earth, but I was going to Oman with Paul who had been five times before. That surely meant that for once I didn't have to worry about the minutiae of planning a trip, could just go and enjoy it without responsibility for the logistics or much else.

And I thought I knew something about desert mountains having been to the High Atlas and Wadi Rum. A web-search gave me no reason to think Oman was going to be very different with comments about swimming in wadi pools and deep water soloing: after all, in Jordan there had been springs at the bases of the sandstone cliffs and in Morocco there had been snow. Besides, how often do we set off on a trip with our heads still crowded with all the preoccupations of our lives at home despite our best intentions?

Paul picked me up from Muscat airport at 10pm on a balmy December evening, leaving time for a brew before bed. Bearing in mind his emailed comments about a lightweight approach, I'd acquired a collapsible carbon fibre walking pole and lightweight alpine rucksack that I was keen to show off.

'Well you won't need those. I'll have my usual sack with rack and water, a couple of energy bars and you'll be carrying the ropes.'

'What about medical kit? Spare clothing?'

'Thermal T-shirt and windshirt are all I bother with. Can't afford to carry the weight of a medikit. With technical climbing involved, it's essential the leader climbs without a sack.'

'Right,' but it was with some misgivings that I took all that on board.

Carrefour was just opening when we arrived the following morning to pick up supplies before heading into the mountains of the interior. We drove through a cubist landscape of flat-roofed buildings and mountains, rising above angular outcrops and dry riverbeds, dusty under the glare of the sun. Grinding up a bulldozered road we found a deserted village where we could make camp for a 'warm-up climb' on the northern flank of Jabal Kawr.

6.30am on an unexpectedly chilly morning found each of us wearing microfleece pullovers as we picked our way across scree-scattered slopes towards a distinctive, shallow, cave-like feature at the base of a gully, with the intention of climbing the pillar to its left.

A debris-littered traverse ledge took us to the edge of the gully where a broken diedre led onto its bounding rib. That rib continued easily pitch after pitch with some linking ledge-walking and a few harder moves to the top of a pinnacle from which we could see that we'd been climbing the right edge of a pyramidal feature semi-detached from the main cliff.

An unusually cold wind had reinforced the chill of climbing on the shadowed, northern side of the mountain and at times we doubted that even adding a windshirt was going to make enough difference, so it was good to keep moving.

By now it was clear that the climb was bigger than it had seemed. I scrambled down to the col that separated the pyramid from the cliff and Paul led a wandering

Left
Dave enjoying the evening sun having topped out on the Dark Side. Jabal Misht in the background.

Photograph:
Paul Knott



line up a testing slab on the main face. Further tricky pitches followed, trying first one line then another. A crack would run out in the middle of a blank wall or a likely line founder amongst crumbling rock and detachable holds.

One long pitch involved a steep slab that gradually became very smooth. Having climbed myself into an impasse, I retreated, traversing beneath a shattered chimney to climb the wall to the right on small, incut solution pockets and very spaced protection from a thread and a tied-off chickenhead. The neck of the chickenhead was such thin, sharp-edged rock that I couldn't make my mind up whether it would be more likely to snap off or cut the sling if I fell on it.

Only rope-stretch enabled me to find a belay. Paul was generous enough to describe it as 'a fine lead.' Later a chimney crack proved equally challenging, involving precarious bridging and laying away, facing first in one direction, then the other. It was tight enough for Paul to have to swing the sack up separately on one of the ropes when he followed.

After 17 pitches we gained the broad shelf at the top of the face. From there a walk and a short tough scramble through an upper cliff led to the summit plateau. The west face of Jabal Misht glowed red-gold while a kind of 'haze inversion' drew a shining, ruler-straight line across the sky. It was 6pm.

As we sorted the kit, our euphoria was tempered by the recognition that we were at 2,400metres and night was falling. Paul shouldered the bag while I coiled both ropes rucksack fashion and thus loaded we hiked across the summit plateau as the night reddened into darkness.

The plan was to hike down the virtual route that Paul had scouted on Google Earth until we linked into territory known from a previous route he'd climbed further to the north, across a col where he'd logged a waypoint. With the benefit of a full moon Paul was confident we'd be back at camp soon after midnight. But the link wasn't there. He was shocked by the unexpected complexity of the topography and, despite the light of the moon, we kept finding ourselves on the

brink of cliffs with no clear way down in the darkness.

It had been cold all day and, at the setting of the sun, a bitter little breeze began to leach away our warmth as uncertainty regarding the route slowed us down. With temperatures that could drop to -10°C overnight there was a real danger of hypothermia.

We backtracked to a deserted Bedouin shepherds' camp to look for shelter and found a small, stone-built hut with a stout, earthed-over, timber roof. The cold slab floor meant there was no chance of comfortably lying down but Paul sat on the ropes while I perched on a rickety stool, which meant that whenever I drifted off it was only to be awoken with a start as I tilted off my perch.

We made one further attempt at finding a way off when we thought the moon might be high enough to make a difference. It wasn't, and we were driven back to shelter by uncontrollable shivering. There was nothing to be done but resign ourselves to eight hours of sitting bivouac, enlivened by occasional fits of shivering as body core temperatures dropped with inactivity.

In the merciless dawn light Paul looked as rough as I felt. A blue, plastic bag hung from a roof beam and we could see the dates pressing stickily to its interior, presumably emergency rations. But neither of us thought of ourselves as being in enough of an emergency to justify taking any: we'd be back in camp by lunch with any luck, although the remaining water might need rationing. We finished the crumbs of our last energy bar and swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of water before setting stiffly off.

Crossing a small dam, we skirted the cliffs that fell away to our left, heading more or less in a southeasterly direction. Sooner or later we hoped to strike back north to reach Paul's col. Scrambling down a rake circumvented the first cliff band leaving us on a broad bench above a second band with a valley lying below that ran north and seemed a good bet. It was as we tried to find a way down to that valley that we became separated.

We had been moving on parallel courses, somewhat



on auto-pilot, with Paul nearer the cliffs, scouting for a break, while I plodded dully along, hoping my well-trodden path would lead to an obvious descent: it had to lead somewhere. I caught sight of a big cairn that the path seemed to be leading to and turned to shout the news to Paul, but he was nowhere to be seen.

I retraced my steps to where I believed I'd seen him last and shouted. No reply. He must have found a way down, so I started descending in hopes of catching him up, repeatedly stopping to shout. Nothing. There was a lot of steep rock below me so I tried traversing further right, shouting again as I did so. The sound echoed from the cliffs above and opposite but with no answering shouts. I came upon a black hosepipe, dry and coming from who knows where, but didn't like the look of the ground below it, so descended further on what I thought was a safer line. I shouted again and again. Still nothing.

Then I caught a snatch of music. Scanning the valley below, I spotted a couple of Bedouin shepherds in the shade of the cliffs opposite. They were just below a col to the south and seemed to be listening to a radio.

Left & above:
*Paul climbing the
initial pillar of the
Dark Side.*

Photograph:
David Wynne-Jones

I called and waved but there was no response.

There was no option but to climb back to where I'd last seen Paul and wait, hoping that he would do the same. I probably didn't wait long enough. At 9.30 the heat was intensifying and Paul had all the water. There was also an anxiety that he might have had a fall and be unable to reply. I reasoned that I should be able to scan the cliffs from below more easily if that was the case and so decided to take the cairned route I'd found which, sure enough, led to a straightforward gully.

There was one section of uncomfortably smooth slabs, but that was it before reaching another valley just to the south of the shepherds' col. Climbing to that col, I found no sign of them so decided to descend the valley to the north: it had seemed a good bet and perhaps that was the way they, and Paul, had gone.

Persuading myself that I was on a path became increasingly difficult as the trail unravelled into what looked more like animal tracks. These finally ran out amongst a jumble of boulders above a precipitous water-worn drop-off. My continuing shouts had elicited no response from either Paul or the shepherds. I realised I had no real idea if this was the way out and could be getting myself into trouble if I tried to force a route down the rock, so toiled back up to the col.

I figured the shepherds must have come up from the other side so descended the valley to the south. There were discarded blue plastic kegs and rusty tins that seemed to support my theory, but this valley also narrowed to a drop-off. Bare, bone-white rock plunged into the depths, polished by uncounted flash floods and now gleaming in the sun.

I retreated to the shade of a huge boulder and took stock, leaning against the cool rock. I had the clothes I wore, two ropes, a helmet, a lighter, and no real idea of how to get out of these mountains. It was gone noon and my last drink of water had been six hours earlier.

'Mad dogs and Englishmen' ran through my mind. Given that I'd probably drunk no more than a litre of water the day before, I might live for 48 hours, but this was a desert environment and I'd been sweating uphill in full sun more than once that morning. Then

it struck me that there were at best only another six hours of daylight. There was little chance of finding my way out in that time and I was still at around 2000metres. Without shelter it was unlikely that I'd survive the night. So there were two ways I could be dead by morning. There was no panic, just a grim sense of facing up to it. Those I loved I would never see again, but ironically there was no regret about all the climbing I'd never do; instead it was the writing I'd never finish – what a waste.

I briefly considered climbing back up to the hut in which we'd spent the previous night but wasn't sure I'd manage the climb or welcome another sleep deprivation experience. Paul had told me there was no chance of a helicopter rescue in these mountains, so going back there would actually make me harder to find as it was further away from any exit route Paul might have found.

I noticed a traverse path climbing the bounding rib of the valley. It wasn't far: worth scouting. Leaving the ropes in the shade of the boulder, I crossed over the rib and started down the slope beyond, then stopped. It wasn't much of a path. I couldn't see where it went or whether it led towards safety. It could continue traversing in a southerly direction, directly opposite to where our camp had been to the north, but how close was a village, people? There could be tens of miles of this and in such heat I wouldn't make it. Mad dogs and Englishmen came to mind again. I turned back to the boulder.

An easy rake might lead out of the valley up the opposite slope but I realised the danger of wearing myself out with this casting about for a route. I needed to reach people, people with water, or, at least some kind of shelter for the night. There had never been any plan to walk out to the south. If Paul had reached safety, a search party would focus on the area to the north. If he hadn't I'd have to find my own way out or I was dead. Either way, north made sense.

Looking back up the slope in the hard light, I knew I had to climb back up to the col. But now I could see that the cliffs that had shaded the shepherds were part

of a ridge, looking from here like a rock pyramid, that divided the col and the upper part of this valley in two. I had crossed one col to the left but right of the ridge was another. It was the only option left that made sense of the shepherds' presence at 9am that morning. There had to be a path in that direction.

I discarded my own rope, knowing that Paul had a spare back at camp. Recoiling his rope in a loop that I could sling over my shoulder rather than lash to my back, I clipped the chinstrap of my helmet around it. Windshirt and microfleece were tied about my waist and my long-sleeved base layer turned into protection from the sun by tying it into a sort of turban about my head. I was ready to leave the shade of the boulder.

The slope was in full sun. Slowly I struggled upward linking islands of shadow, created by bush, rock, or stunted tree, and leaning my forehead against any cool stone as I paused at each island to regain my breath. I tried not to breathe through my mouth to avoid exhaling too much water vapour, tried not to swallow, for my throat was literally sticking to itself. At one point I tracked a dark stain on the rock to a smear of damp earth in a crack in the wall of a side gully, but there was nothing to do me any good.

Nearing the foot of the ridge that divided the col, I thought I spotted a small cave above that could offer shelter and perhaps that was a trickle of water I spied running out of a nearby niche? Leaving the rope, I climbed carefully up a cracked slab to find that only an evaporation stain remained of the water, and as caves went it was meagre shelter, more like a chimney crack and not as deep as it looked. It was while climbing down again that I saw the traverse path leading across towards the rock walls beneath the right-hand col. I followed it.

The first thing I came upon was the gutted carcass of a feral goat, hung up by the horns in the branch of a tree. The main organs had been removed and one foreleg neatly carved, presumably for a meal. Scavengers had gnawed the rib cage but the open cavity of the stomach was a sack of shit crawling with insect life. On nearby rocks, the tracks of ferrety feet

were printed in blood. I had no knife but if I could get a fire going with my lighter I might be able to burn a leg off the carcass. The goat meat might be greasy enough to get down my suffering throat. At least that explained what the shepherds had been eating.

Continuing along the path, I glimpsed a splash of colour beside a tree and called out, thinking it might be a person resting in the shade. There was no reaction. On getting closer, I could see that it was just blankets draped over a branch to dry in the sun after any downpour. Blankets! I could survive the night.

I was on the edge of another deserted Bedouin camp. Cut branches, stacked end-on against the overhanging cliff wall, created makeshift shelters, whilst stone circles surrounded tent platforms, sometimes containing the rotting remains of canvas and wooden poles. There was even a stone-built shelter but this one was padlocked. A well-trodden path followed the base of the cliff up to the col above. I took it, leaving the rope and helmet by the blankets, and on the saddle found a large cairn with signs of two paths into the valley beyond. This could be my way out. But it was late afternoon, and I didn't know how long I might be on the trail. I couldn't carry the blankets and could not survive a night in the open. On the way back to camp I gathered armfuls of brushwood to make a fire close to the dead goat.

Once there was a good blaze I tried to lift the goat out of the tree but was neither tall enough nor strong enough to free it. The two shepherds must have heaved it into the forked branch together. Unfortunately my efforts to lift it must have triggered a reaction because to my surprise, and not a little dismay, I suddenly felt an overpowering urge to pee.

'Noooo! I can't afford to lose water like this!'

I'd a desperate idea that I might be able to drink the urine so cast about for something to drink from. A discarded tuna tin, wind and water-scoured to an acceptable state, provided the means. I drank two measures. It didn't taste too bad. But it went straight through me. I managed to keep my trousers clean but had to burn my underwear. A doctor friend later told



Above:
*Paul climbing on the
main face*

Photograph:
David Wynne-Jones

me the liquid was probably so full of concentrated toxins that my gut just evacuated it immediately.

Back to the goat: if I couldn't get it out of the tree and onto the fire perhaps I could burn off the other foreleg with a brand from the fire. When that didn't work, I tried to sever part of the leg with a sharp stone and, reaching into the chest cavity, tried to break apart the shoulder joint, but it was no good; the tendons were far too strong. It was hopeless.

Then suddenly the words, 'Oh no!' floated up on the breeze.

Way, way below, down the valley to the south, near the rib on the traverse path I'd scouted, it looked like a small party of trekkers was pitching tents as night fell. It was 6pm. I watched the distant movements of people and faint lights inside the tents as twilight gathered into darkness. Surely I could get down there in an hour, get water, help. I left the fire burning itself out and stumbled down-valley.

An hour later I was in total darkness except for pinpoints of starlight. What I'd thought was a tent in the fading torchlight turned out to be a pyramidal boulder. Neither tent lights nor any signs of the way were visible. I shouted repeatedly for the trekkers to show a light or come and help. My throat grated and

a note of pleading had crept into my voice. There were no lights or any answering shouts. Just echoes. I clicked off my head-torch and sat a while in the dark. I shivered. There was no alternative to climbing back up to the blankets that remained my only chance of surviving the night.

The darkness fumbled with my feet but cooled my head: my enemy, my ally. Slips turned into tumbles as I became less able to recover myself in the muted head-torch-light. Then, as I neared the camp, I saw lights on the col. One on the right went over the pass and disappeared near where the cairn was situated. The other seemed to be looking for a way through the huge boulders that blocked access to the left, then began to descend towards me.

I hurriedly gained the camp and called up, 'I need help. I'm lost and have no water. Please help me.' And so on. Then I sat down on a rock, turned off my fading head torch and waited for them to draw level with me.

Only they didn't. About 50 metres away, the torch went out and in the darkness I heard the sounds of that person making their way across the rough ground towards the path up to the right side of the col; cutting the corner to avoid me. It took a while to work out what was happening. I switched my head-torch back on and called out again, my words becoming less coherent, more querulous.

'Please. Let me have a drink. My throat's so dry.... I've been lost for hours..... What have I done for you to turn your back on me? Please.... Would you like it? To have someone turn their back on you when you needed help?' I sat in silence staring at the dark place where the last of the torchlight had disappeared.

Reaching the blankets out of the tree, I made a bed in a stone circle rather than under the overhangs. There had been some smudges of cloud against the sky as the sun set and if there was any chance of a shower I wanted to be able to open my mouth to it. Swallowing was becoming so painful I could feel the membranes of my throat sticking together then tearing as they parted. Stretched out on the fine gravel, wrapped in blankets, I fell asleep.

Sometime later I was woken by my body talking to me. It was an authoritative female voice: Satnav Sally with overtones of Hal from *2001 A Space Odyssey*: 'Encountering unacceptable cold episode; shivering reflex initiated.'

Immediately I was shaken by violent, uncontrollable spasms in every limb, despite feeling warm enough in myself, almost sweating. There was no ignoring it. I couldn't go on being shaken like that or waste any more energy upon the convulsions. A trembling search around the camp produced another, earthy blanket from the debris in another stone circle. Back under the covers I pulled them right over my head so that not even the little breeze I had felt earlier at my neck could get through. The shivering stopped.

An orange dawn found me rested, but as I sat up I began to choke on the build-up of solidified mucus at the back of my throat. I had to hook it out with a finger, fighting down the reflex to retch, before I could breathe easily. Looking down-valley there was no sign of anyone coming my way or even in sight: the trekkers must have made a pre-dawn start. Still, I was now sure that there was a way out over the pass above: no one would have gone over it by torchlight unless the destination was close enough and the route easy enough to be completed in the dark.

During the night my body must have been doing some metabolic rebalancing as I was suddenly seized by another urge to pee. It was no good fighting it. The trusty tuna tin was at hand, although this time I only moistened my mouth and throat: no drinking. I folded the blankets over a branch, hitched the rope over my shoulder, and climbed up to the pass.

The most likely path had seemed to cross the valley and traverse the opposite western side towards a break in the cliffs lower down. It didn't look so obvious now but the path started cairned and worn so I took it. The descent became more of a scramble, less distinct, and I

Right: Looking down onto the initial pillar from the belay above the chickenhead pitch.

Photograph: David Wynne-Jones



realised there was no way that shepherds would drive their flocks up this.

The other path that had descended the eastern side of this valley from the big cairn at the pass must have been the access route. But I'd come some distance down the ridge. Looking back up at the pass, I just couldn't face climbing back up to it. Perhaps I could climb down the cliffs below me to the valley floor?

The terrain looked dauntingly steep, but after a couple of false starts I found an open book corner that offered a possible line. Pressing feet and hands against each page of the book, I was able to bridge down, actually finding a residual pleasure in making the moves despite the certainty that messing up would mean, at the very least, breaking a leg. Crossing the valley, I struck a good trail under the overhanging cliffs where more brushwood lean-to shelters and stone circles showed evidence of intermediate campsites.

By now I was very slow and more and even more unsteady. If I slipped on unstable rocks I was less and less likely to recover myself and took several tumbles. With each it was more difficult to get up. Mercifully, the valley faced north so remained in shadow but I still had to stop, rest, and cool my forehead and wrists against the cold rock with increasing frequency. My temperature was rising in response to the decreasing volume of blood plasma. I had time to think about how I might die. Would it be heart attack or stroke as my blood thickened? Or would my kidneys just pack up? I was glad not to know the details. The landscape seemed to be mocking me with rustlings of secretive birds, distant bleating of goats and the waxy green foliage of dusty trees. How come they could find the water to keep them alive when I could find none?

Where the valley narrowed the trail crossed polished boulders in a dry riverbed leftwards to a large cave that had been enhanced as a shelter with stout lean-to brushwood walls. It was so substantial that it occurred to me there might be some supplies left there. As my eyes accustomed themselves to the dimness, I saw a blue plastic bag hanging from a cross-beam. Dates? I clambered onto a lower beam and stretched up to a

split in the bag, reaching out a handful. Nothing but gnawed and desiccated husks remained.

Back out on the trail it was late morning and I was now on the sunny side of the valley, forced to pick my way from shadow to shadow. I reached another campsite where the valley opened out briefly before descending steeply into a dry but complex gorge. No trail went that way. Instead, a mesh of tracks led up a bare rocky slope to the north in full sun. Above could be the col Paul had talked about with a village beyond. I sat in the shade of a big rock, looking at the slope, and knew I wouldn't make it.

There wasn't a trace of shade on it. The only chance was to try it in the cool of evening, but would I last till then? Would I be able to descend to the village in the dark? And Paul had said something about two gullies leading down and only one of them led to the village but it wasn't obvious which until you were half-way down. If I chose the wrong gully I probably wouldn't have the strength to climb back up to descend the other. Another night out would finish me.

I sat on the bare earth with my head in my hands. 'My heart is low. My heart is so low.' The words of a song Adele had played to me before I left home strayed into my head. Strange how these snatches of song, lines of poetry and the like, come bubbling up from the unconscious to recycle in our heads at moments when they fit. And the next line followed as they do: 'As only a woman's heart can be.'

Only it didn't fit: I was so low, that low, giving the lie to those sexist lyrics. How dare Mary bloody Black presume to arrogate such suffering to her sex alone! The smug complacency and sheer self-indulgence sparked a flash of anger. That just wasn't acceptable, damn it! None of this was. My gaze lifted to the slope again. Surely there was some patch of shade, no matter how small, that could be used to get me up it.

There was a flash of colour, movement.... people. I rocked to my feet, took a step forward into the light with my arms widespread and called, 'Help! I need help! I've been lost on the mountain and have no water.'

And a voice called back: 'We have water. We have everything.'

My arms dropped and I stepped back into the shade, slumping into a sitting position again, watching them picking their different ways down through the rock and scrub towards me. There was something familiar about the one coming fast ahead of the rest. It was Paul. As he arrived, I reached out to shake his hand, but he hugged me, then produced a water bottle. No drink has ever tasted better.

'Happy New Year! Sorry we've got no beer.' It was Rob from Muscat Diving and Adventure. I'd forgotten it was New Year's Day.

I met the rest of the search party, a team of Rob's trek leaders, in the process of being plied with Oral Rehydration Solution, banana, apple, dates, chocolate, biscuits and water, water, water; slowly so that I could manage it.

'This is a plus for us you know. We normally bring out bodies.' They were cheerful enough after spending most of New Year's Eve getting in position for the search.

As I rehydrated I chilled down and had to move out of the shade and into the sunshine. Unexpectedly, the team found they had good mobile phone reception, though as one remarked: 'That wouldn't have done you much good I suppose as you didn't know where you were.'

Another asked, 'Didn't you hear our shouts and whistle-blowing from the col up there?'

'Not a sound. The desert must have just swallowed it up in all that space.'

After a couple of hours I was able to walk up the slope in one push, always with one person ahead and one behind me in case I collapsed. Then it was a rest before the steady slow descent of a loose gully. En route I found a kind of broken geode containing a few cups of the only natural water I'd seen for days. The village was no more than 100 metres below.

There was a police presence at the roadhead: a squad of them in dark blue overalls and big boots, waiting for word to carry out the body. Two officers drove me

in a Landcruiser down to the tarmac road where the ambulance was waiting. This in turn drove me to Ibri A & E.

On the way one of the paramedics looked at me very seriously and asked, 'Did you see any ghosts on the mountain?'

'I don't think so.'

Blood pressure and pulse had been monitored en route and seemed OK so the hospital ran some blood and urine tests. When these also proved satisfactory, after a couple of hours I was discharged with not one but two packed lunches.

'Build your strength up,' explained the consultant in impeccable English.

Some days of recovery were essential, but afterwards the pair travelled to the south side of Jabal Kaur, where they made the first climb in an impressive cirque that surrounds the remote settlement of Nadan. Triassic Superbowl takes the north side of the Nadan pillar (430m of climbing, TD- UIAA VI-), and the pair descended south along the route put up by Knott and Richard Simpson in 2007 (AD+). On their way down they found a rock shoe dropped on this ascent. In little-explored outlying areas they climbed three more new lines.

Above Sidaq village, north of Jabal Misht, they put up Giant Slab (193m of climbing, V-), while left of Amqah Tower, north of Jabal Murri, they climbed a steepening slab via Arabian Knights (311m of climbing, D+ VI-).

Finally, they added a third route to the striking Jabal Nakhus, where in 2010 Knott had put up the aptly named Hand Grater. This time it was Karst Corner (242m of climbing, V). The rappel anchors from 2010 were still in place.

The Dark Side, gave 680m of climbing (17 pitches) at an overall grade of TD- VI-.

Lindsay Griffin

"Hot days, Cold nights: British new routes in Oman," BMC website report.



PATAGONIA – LAND OF BLUE SKY AND FAIR WIND

Tales of howling winds, month-long storms and weeks spent in snow holes are sufficient to deter all but the most determined from climbing in Patagonia. But reports from those who had braved the elements persuaded Dave Turnbull that the rewards were worth the risk. Here he tells of his ascent of Cerro Torre by the Ragni Route and the physical and psychological stress it puts on those who attempt it.

By Dave Turnbull

The nameplate on Rolando (Rolo) Garibotti's house in El Chalten reads 'World's Worst Weather'. As the author of the stunning new Patagonia guidebook, and a mountain guide of more than 20 years living and climbing in Patagonia, he's a man who should know. Tales of howling winds and month-long storms with weeks stuck in snow holes abound in Patagonia: ask virtually anyone who has been there and you'll hear a similar story. But, having spoken with quite a few climbers who'd been to Patagonia over the years, I'd always been struck by the fact that people felt the climbing was so good, and the mountains so stunning, that even if you only got a few climbing days – it's still worth the effort.

So, having shelved the idea over the years, the opportunity to climb in Patagonia finally materialised when Stuart McAleese suggested we repeat the Bonington-Whillans route on Paine in January 2013. Stu had had a bad weather Fitzroy trip 10 years earlier, and was initially wary about going back. But in the end we opted for the Fitzroy side for combination of reasons – more reliable weather forecasting; the option of retreating to Chalten if the weather turned bad; and a better chance of getting up something on a relatively short trip.

Climbing as a three is common practice in Patagonia and so Bristolian Dan Donovan was soon recruited to the party. In October we booked with British Airways for a three-week trip then settled into

training for our initial target – the stunning 1,250m Goretta Pillar of Fitzroy – by some accounts one of the best rock climbs on the planet. Plans change, however, and whilst monitoring Rolo's website www.pataclimb.com it gradually dawned on us that Cerro Torre was in uniquely good condition and that perhaps we should switch objective to this more elusive summit.

The west face of Cerro Torre has always had a big reputation, but the Ragni Route with its unprotectable rime ice, overhanging tunnelling and infamous

Left & Below:
*Dave Turnbull on the
first headwall pitch*

Photograph:
Sam Van Brempt





Above:
*Second night bivi spot
below the West Face,
with the Chilean ice
cap in background*

Photograph:
Sam Van Brempt

summit mushrooms had been seeing multiple ascents in November and December. What's more, by late December the guidebook had come out. We had no idea it was even in the pipeline but were quick to get a copy: the eight-page route description for the Ragni was the clincher for us. It begins: 'Cerro Torre's Ragni Route is so fantastic it should be on every climber's dream list...the route has some of the most incredible rime formations to be found anywhere in the world.' So with that, the decision was made.

On 6 January we arrived in a cold, damp and windy Chalten where a tip-off from Rolo put us onto the climber-friendly Aylen Aike hostel which was to become our basecamp for our stay. The first few days

put paid to the preconception that if the weather's bad in Patagonia there's nothing to do. Despite unsettled weather we managed a couple of big walks with occasional views of Fitzroy and the Torre Valley, some sport climbing and even some mild bouldering. By 9 January the forecast was showing a three-day weather window and we set out for Cerro Torre.

The next four days were probably the most physically demanding of my life: the route itself is only part of it, getting to and off the mountain were the real issues. Patagonian walk-ins are not to be underestimated. In retrospect, the ideal is to be in 20-mile and above fell running fitness and good climbing form before you go, but this is a big ask in November and

December for UK climbers. Being 20 years younger would also have been useful.

Day 1 involved an eight-hour trudge up the Torre Valley against a strong head wind, around the glacial lake of Lago Torre, across a moraine field, then across the glacier to a bleak bivi under a boulder at Niponino. Here we met the young Belgium climbers Sam San Van Brempt and Tim De Dobbeleer who were back on the mountain, having failed to negotiate the ice fall on the second day of the approach a week or so earlier. We agreed to combine forces on day 2, set our alarms for 12.45am and settled down for a sleepless night.

For me, day 2 was the hardest. My knees had been aching on day 1, I'd slept badly, was concerned about my fitness and knew that once over Standhardt Col we'd be committed with no easy way out if the weather changed. Niponino to the col involved 1,000 metres of steep and complex terrain followed by 150 metres of abseils down iced-up chimneys on the Chilean side, a descending traverse around the toe of a buttress then a hard pull up to the Col of Hope and the start of the route proper. We arrived at 5.45pm after a 17½ hour day, cut a bivi site and settled down to a night watching the stars.

At 3.00am we were off again, we summited at 5.00pm and made it back to the bivi by 7.40pm. The route itself felt like a race against the sun. It had been a warm week with night time temperatures at 3,100m (the height of Cerro Torre) above freezing at times, and with descent relying on abalakov abseils it was important to cover as much ground as possible before the sun hit the face.

In the event, the sun was just catching Stu's back as he sprinted up the top (crux) pitch and through the tunnel in the summit mushroom. The climbing had been great quality with good ice and solid protection most of the way. We were held up by slower parties and spent a lot of time fending off falling ice, but

Right: *Into the blue* – Stuart McAleese on top pitch
Photograph: Sam Van Brempt





the fact that others were on the mountain (around 12 people topped out that day) had its advantages and definitely gave a feeling of strength in numbers if anything was to go wrong or the weather to turn bad.

In addition Sam the Belgium turned out to be a top mountain photographer so we got some stunning images looking down from above. We led the route in blocks with Stu taking us up to El Elmo, me doing the central mixed pitches and headwall, followed by Dan then Stu for the last pitch. Blue sky and zero wind greeted us on the summit, with perfect 360° visibility and a crystal clear of view of Fitzroy.

The abseil was tense at times as the face was in full sun and water began streaming down on us. Abalakovs from earlier parties were already melting out so we backed them up where necessary. At one point there was a loud crack above as an ice pillar split off and hit the ledge a few feet to my side. On the final traverse to the bivi a laptop sized rock came whizzing down between Stu and Dan, then all of a sudden we were back

at our sleeping bags in time to exchange glances with some stern looking Hungarians and Austrians who were settling down before their summit push the next day.

Day 4 involved a 22 mile /18 hour ice walk north along the Chilean ice cap, down the Marconi glacier and out via the Electrico valley. Rolo had advised getting off the ice cap before the crust started melting so we left at 1.00am with the Belgians and Americans. In contrast to the mountains, the icecap was a flat and featureless expanse (akin to Antarctica perhaps), and the glare from the sun burnt our pale skins as we set course for home. (I later discovered that Eric Jones and party spent around 40 days on the icecap in the 70s whilst exploring in the Chilean side. I can only take my hat off, they must have been hard back then). The Marconi glacier didn't prove much easier either.

Patagonian glaciers are in active retreat and we found the terrain complex with difficult route finding. This, of course, is where a guide's training comes into its own: Stu was brilliant on the glaciers and led the way as Dan



and I, the Belgians and Americans followed. Reaching Lago Electrico (the glacial lake leading into Rio Electrico) our hearts sank when we rounded a moraine heap to find we had to backtrack half a mile across unstable rubble then traverse the western side of the lake via 1.5 miles of 45 degree scree and moraine.

It was around this point that we all went very quiet. Apart from the occasional outburst resulting from a stubbed toe or stumble on rotating boulders it was a case of heads down and deal with it. An icy cold and slippery river crossing rounded off a thoroughly taxing day and at 6.00pm eight very weary climbers staggered into the Piedra del Fraile camp ground and collapsed on the grass.

Back in Chalten where the temperature had by now hit 30°C, we drank beer, ate steaks with the Americans, pizzas with the Belgians and hung out with some great characters from the mountaineering world. And, back in Aylen Aike, a familiar pattern began to emerge when every day or so a different party of hard

core but battered alpinists would hobble up the steps, drop their packs and slump in a heap barely able to talk. However good you are – Patagonia takes it out of you.

To round off the trip Dan and I climbed the super-classic Cliaro Di Luna (750 metres, E3) on Saint-Exupery in a 22.5 hr round trip from the Polacos bivi opposite Cerro Torre. Forcing bare hands and cold toes into freezing cracks at 4.30am felt harsh compared to gloves and axes but the perfect views across to the sun-baked rock of the Torre east face more than made up for it. The descent in the dark was a grim affair of multiple jammed ropes, uncertainty of line, and a final loose gully that had seen a major rock fall the day before. The next morning Stu and friends strolled up from Chalten to meet us with cold beers, pastries and the offer of carrying our sacks back down the track. We chatted and smiled big smiles on the walk out: what a great end to a great trip.

Trip account: *Patagonia 5-27 January 2013*

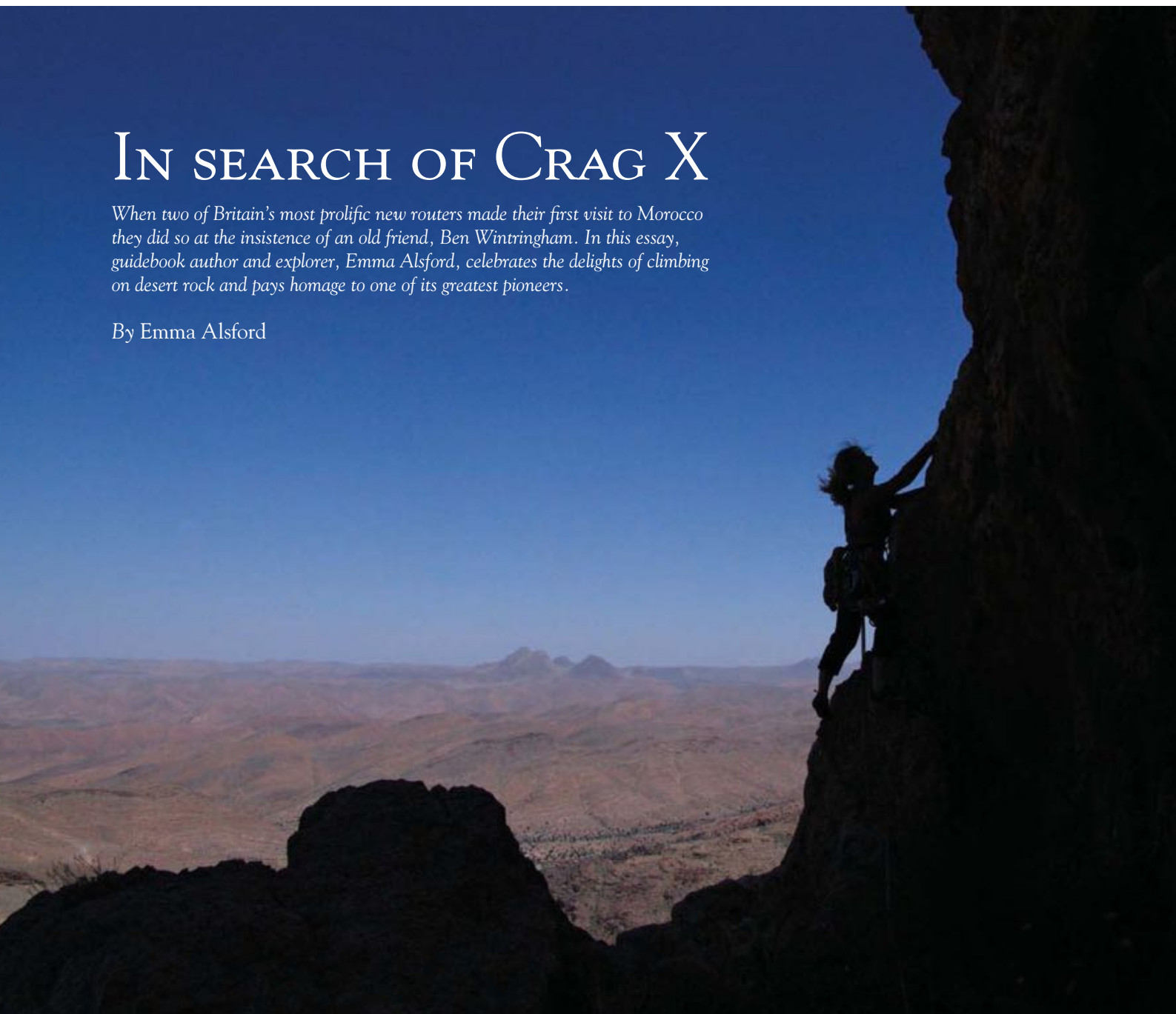
Above:
A summit trio – Stuart, Dave, and Dan Donovan with Fitzroy behind – but still a long way down.

Photograph:
Sam Van Brempt

IN SEARCH OF CRAG X

When two of Britain's most prolific new routers made their first visit to Morocco they did so at the insistence of an old friend, Ben Wintringham. In this essay, guidebook author and explorer, Emma Alsford, celebrates the delights of climbing on desert rock and pays homage to one of its greatest pioneers.

By Emma Alsford



Blistering colours and blistering heat: a Mordor-like landscape composed of innumerable, rambling peaks scattered across a dusty, ochre terrain, with gargoyles sprouting from cliff tops and ancient ruins at their feet.

Women toiling on the hillsides, often curious, sometimes indifferent, their bodies hidden beneath burqas while men idle on street corners, putting the world to rights. The insistent call to prayer ringing across the hillsides competes with braying donkeys, ranting like the onslaught of a freight train. Countless goats in prickly Argan trees and elusive boars doing daring night crossings of the single-track roads. A slower pace of life and a memorable first impression back in 2007, when this barren and arid part of the Anti-Atlas had been suffering from five years of drought.

Fast forward four-and-a-half years and I have déjà vu. I've done this drive a thousand times, but this is such a different journey. Now I'm on my own, with just my own thoughts for company – and they're not swamped with all the glorious new routes yet to do and the endless amount of rock still to climb. There is no constant chatter amongst comrades in arms. A multitude of vivid colours are burnished on my retinas from the stunning scenery, but this is not the hot and dusty landscape of Northern Morocco. There is a distinct chill in the air: for this is a fresh autumnal day and I am making my way to North Wales and the funeral of a very dear friend.

Paul reckons we first met the Wintringhams – Ben and his wife Marion – at a North London Club dinner in the early Nineties. I have a terrible memory for these things so I honestly couldn't say, but I expect he's right. All I know is that, right from the start, Ben's enthusiasm and zest for life was hugely infectious and his infectious laughter with its Mutley-esque shrugging of the shoulders would get me psyched for just about anything – whether a foray on the main cliff at

Gogarth or a hair-raising drive up a 40 degree incline in the Costa Blanca in search of new cliffs. So, it really was quite surprising just how long it took us to make the trip to Morocco.

Ben had been harping on about this little area in the Anti-Atlas and nagging us to go for ages. He mentioned it practically every time we joined them in their quaint little house in Spain, situated rather idyllically at the top of the fort town of Finestrat. He was well aware of our insatiable appetite for new routing – it takes one to know one – and, in usual Wintringham style, he just couldn't say enough good things about this adventurous North African venue, which a small band of slightly ageing legends migrated to every year at springtime.

He described a place where there was guaranteed sunshine, more rock than you could ever manage to climb, a mysterious eastern culture and a rather classy, but very affordable hotel, together with a swimming pool. It all sounded too good to miss, but miss it we

Below:

Goats in trees by the road from the airport.

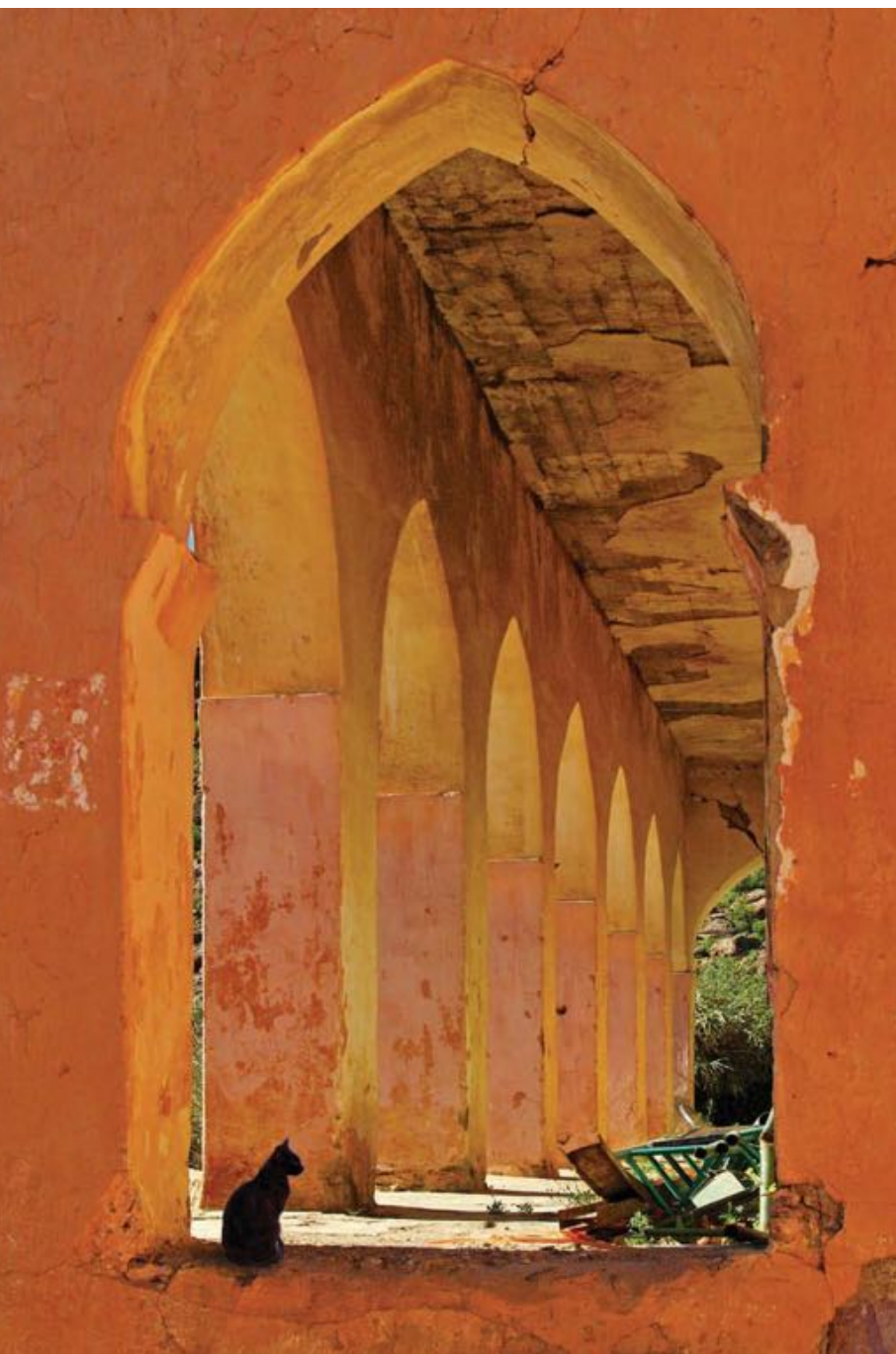
Photograph:

Paul Donnithorne



Left: Emma Alsford climbing Zorba, VS.

Photograph: Don Sargeant



did, until eventually we woke up and smelt the coffee, so to speak.

A few years later and we were speeding down a road out of Tafroute, on a white-knuckle ride as Ben played 'chicken' with the local lorry drivers, in typical Moroccan style. We were actually on a rest day, but for Ben these always consisted of scoping out new crags, which was all very fine by us, especially as he was extremely good at it.

Now, one of Ben's secondary loves – the first being climbing and his wife Marion – was driving, but I'm not just talking about speed and fast cars, for which he was well known. He also had a rather worrying addiction for 'testing the hire car to the max' on roads which were little more than a few stones on a hillside. This could be a tad nerve-wracking for his passengers, though I have to admit that Marion always seemed to remain remarkably calm while Paul and I were slowly turning a paler shade of white in the back, wondering who was going to wimp out and pipe up first.

Somehow, though, it was always worth the incessant thump of a head being banged on the roof of the car, or the threat of the exhaust dropping off at any moment, because Ben really was a master at finding the elusive Crag X which, let's face it, is every new route pioneer's dream.

On that first trip to Morocco, the arid landscape yielded a constant stream of new climbs of impeccable quality. We discovered countless new crags and had many memorable adventures. We drove along the Afantizar Valley road whilst it was still being built and we discovered the Kasbah Tizourgane, a circular, medieval village straight out of a fairytale. We had a few epics and late nights, some mechanical breakdowns and interesting interactions with the wonderful local Berbers, and not a single day without wall-to-wall sunshine. It was our very own Nirvana, a perfect holiday in the company of great friends. And so it carried on, pretty soon extending to two trips a

Left: *Ida Ougnidif.*

Photograph: *Don Sargeant*



year, and sometimes even more.

One of our first discoveries, together with Ben and Marion, were the routes *Black Beauty* and *Immaculardar* on Lower Eagle. It was our first Moroccan Crag X, although I have to admit that it was Ben who pointed the cliff out to us on our first drive down the Afantizar Valley road, then still under construction.

We climbed it in true pioneering style, racing for the starts and continuing neck and neck all the way. It was a fantastic day out, the immaculate, golden quartzite offering up wow-inducing surprises at every turn. But it was what ensued that tested my true addiction – for we had all seen the winking chimney, fiercely guarding entry to the next line further right.

Paul and I were well aware of Marion's disgust of chimneys, so we mistakenly believed that the line could wait. However, we underestimated Ben's true grit and while we were occupied on another new line

elsewhere, team Wintringham snuck in to try the line. Later that evening, at the Hotel Les Amandiers in Tafraoute, they related to us over dinner just how fiercely the chimney had spat Ben out.

Now I'm not quite sure why I love chimneys so much, but there is something about the awkwardness and the fight which holds a perverted attraction for me. I just cannot understand the negative vibe a chimney creates for so many climbers, as the idea of a good battle in extreme bridging techniques only tends to excite me. Chimneys can even inspire me to get up pretty early if I have to – and let's just be clear, I'm an owl not a lark. So Ben's failure on the ugly looking off-width was just like a red rag to a bull for me and, in a most unusual turn of events, I was the one dragging Paul out of bed the following morning.

The thing is, you really do have to try with chimneys. This is what makes them so special: you just won't get away with any half-hearted attempts, even at

Above:
Kasbah Tizourgane

Photograph:
Don Sargeant



Above:
*Emma Alsford above
the golden pillar on
Dragon Butress.*

Photograph:
Don Sargeant

the V Diff level, which means they are almost always entertaining.

Surprisingly, the chimney went at a 'trying' 5a in the end and I ended up climbing one of the best 60 metre E2 5b pitches I've ever done. The chimney led up to a ledge, from where I had to make a committing and airy traverse leftwards into a soaring groove line, which ascended steeply to an isolated ledge and slim flake/corner above.

Oh the joys of on-sight new routing and the treasures which can be discovered. *Moroccan Gold* ended up being a mighty jewel in the Crown and not for the first time we were drunk with joy from another adventurous and absorbing mountain day out.

The Tizi Escarpment was another favourite area of Ben's and it was also one of the initial areas we explored intensively on our first trips to Morocco. This linear escarpment is on the north side of the Jebel Taskra mountain range, situated close to the Kasbah Tizourgane and its limited development at the time meant it was a great venue to go in search of yet another Crag X. It was during a descent from another one of these that Ben first spotted a huge bastion of rock protruding into the skyline, way above the settlement of Taskra, but hidden from the escarpment road.

On sharing his newfound knowledge, we began to get excited and make plans for ways to get to it. Ben

reckoned it must be situated somewhere behind a little gorge which they had been busy developing, and so a decision was made to bushwhack up this. Stumbling and fighting our way through vegetation that made a pretty good job of fighting back, we eventually emerged at the top a little worse for wear, scratched from head to toe. Of course this didn't deter us in the slightest from our much sought after goal and we were soon justly rewarded with a vast sweep of untouched rock, which emerged ahead of us as we contoured around the hillside.

While Paul and Ben were busy discussing the merits of the central slim and featureless corner line, a far bigger prize had immediately come to my attention, further to its left. To me, this was by far the greatest attraction on this impressive bastion of rock, though I could see straight away why it had escaped their attention, for this huge, curving corner featured the biggest, ugliest, off-width I had ever seen. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and I immediately set to the task of persuading Paul that this was what we wanted to do. Both Paul and Ben sounded rather doubtful and so I had no choice but to play my trump card. 'Are you a man or a mouse?' I teased. 'Oh dear Paul, it looks like she's thrown down the gauntlet!'

Paul shuffled about uncomfortably 'Give me a piece of cheese and I'll let you know.'

And so the banter continued, until we were roped up and Paul was on his way to the first stance, at the base of the gaping chimney, insisting that I lead the main pitch, which, of course, I was more than happy about.

On reaching the stance I hurriedly grabbed the rack from Paul, eager to get stuck in, which didn't take long at all – I was soon udging my way up from the belay, back and footing and engrossed in the complete awkwardness of hanging over grimly exposed terrain. Then, suddenly, as I was thoroughly contorted trying

Right: *Emma Alsford on Tramspire, HS.*
Photograph: *Don Sargeant*



to reach my number 6 Camelot, which had typically ended up on the wrong side of my harness, I became what I can only describe as unwedged.

To my great surprise, and instant alarm, a house-sized piece of quartzite behind my back had peeled away from the mother rock and had gone tumbling down into the abyss with a deafening roar and mighty explosion as it hit the ground way beneath us.

I had expected to follow it down, but, remarkably, one of my shoulders was still pushing against what was left of the wall behind me and miraculously I remained in situ. But I was not a happy bunny and, like a true girlie, I suddenly went to pieces and started spouting tears, trembling all over.

Paul looked a little shocked himself but nevertheless offered, rather chivalrously, to swap leads. In any other situation I would be accusing him of being a chauvinist, but at that particular moment I was gratefully relieved and jumped at the offer: no wonder men get confused, poor things. With thoughts of mousetraps and cheese at the forefront of my mind, I lowered back down to the belay and slowly calmed myself down, while Paul busied himself with the gear and challenge ahead.

The fact that the pitch ultimately went at E3 5c+A1 and took Paul a couple of hours to complete, went a long way to healing my rather battered pride, though the whole episode provided much amusement to us all for a long while afterwards and the route name Man or Mouse was inevitable. I also have to admit that even I avoided man-eating chimneys for a few days after that experience.

The adventures seemed endless and continued for several years, which is how we got hooked on Morocco, forged a firm friendship and built a cathedral of memories. But, in a cruel twist of fate, Ben was gone. A tragic abseiling accident in a single moment changed everything and suddenly we were all left with a gaping hole in our lives.

Somehow I didn't quite feel the same way about climbing for a while and instead, along with Paul, I threw myself into the chore of creating a guidebook

to the area, as we couldn't bear the thought that all of Ben's efforts would go to waste. Unbeknownst to Paul and I, this turned out to be a sizeable project, and instead of having adventures together out in Morocco, I found myself spending much of my time traipsing about with a camera, getting crag shots at the right time of day and photographing others, trolling through scribbled first ascentionists' notes in new route books and spending all day at the Kasbah working on the computer.

Yet sometimes the best moments come when you least expect them and a few months after Ben's funeral I discovered my very own Crag X. I was sitting at the bottom of the Safinah buttress, in the Samazar Valley, shooting Paul and Sue Hazel on a route for the new guidebook and wandering about at the base of the cliff, looking for better angles.

It was late in the afternoon and the sun was well into the west, which I think is why I noticed it – for the light was reflecting off an unusually-shaped piece of quartzite, causing it to glow an eye-catching deep, golden orange in the afternoon sun. I was looking at a west-facing, elegant and sword-like, golden pillar, standing out from the rest of the cliff, which faced north. I started to imagine various new routes, tracing the lines in my mind, like snakes running up the rock face from the ground and I had the whole crag pretty much worked out by the time Paul and Sue returned.

Trying to judge lines from a distance is always an interesting pastime. I was convinced this new Crag X was only a couple of pitches high, dwarfed as it was by the gargantuan Waterfall Walls behind it (Samazar's very own Darth Vader). I thought that one particular line I was interested in was going to be a gnarly E3, as it followed what looked like a very thin groove up the front of the golden pillar and it appeared steep, with the probability of only minimal gear in a faint crack.

I could only just make the line out from my vantage point across the valley and I pictured myself bridging tenuously above the void below. Paul, on the other hand, reckoned the cliff was at least three or four pitches high and that the groove might only



Left:
*Emma on Wing of
Bat, E2.*

Photograph:
Don Sargeant



Above:
Ben and Marion at
Taskra.

Photograph:
Paul Donnithorne

be E1. I put this perception down to a misguided male spatial awareness problem. The most important thing, however, was he was up for giving it a look the following day.

Apart from the arduous drive down the Samazar Valley, whose dirt track had fallen further into disrepair due to a couple of heavy bouts of recent rain, the whole day could not have been more perfect. We knew that Ben would not have shirked at negotiating the multiplied potholes or the vast chunks of missing track that were now deposited all over the surrounding hillside, so we soldiered on, all the way to the isolated rustic village of Tamdkrt.

We had decided that, rather than try and hike up to the cliff from the valley below, we might be able to contour around the hillside behind the cliff. We could not have been more delighted or surprised by the approach as a well-worn track led across terraces, up over a small notch where carved steps led down to an idyllic and secluded little area and an easy path meandered along a pretty, tree-lined trail beneath the crag. It only took about ten minutes and there was a

perfect gearing up spot in a small clearing below the main wall.

It was now that we discovered the true scale of the cliff, which was around two hundred metres high, and my sought after 'groove' was actually a rather large corner/chimney. The surprises just kept on coming. The rock turned out to be some of the best quality quartzite we had ever climbed on and the route was a very amenable HVS, with four contrasting pitches up the beautiful, sword-like pillar. An added bonus was the unique and picturesque ridge scramble at the top, before an easy descent on gentle slopes, which deposited us back to our comfortable gearing up spot twenty minutes later.

Our very own discovery had provided the perfect day out – *Brisingr* ('Firesword') was born and we christened the cliff Dragon Buttress, after a fantasy book I was reading at the time, which seemed appropriate for a piece of rock which was situated in the heart of a Tolkeinesque landscape, in a land lost in time.

A year later and our very first self-published guidebook was out and we were back at Dragon Buttress, having just descended from our fourteenth new route there, *Fantasia*. The cliff now boasted 28 routes altogether and many other climbers had come and gone. Some routes had even received third and fourth ascents and the crag was becoming an established and popular venue - a lot can happen in a year.

'We really do climb the best new routes together don't we?' Paul said with a very satisfied look in his eye. 'Another three-star classic, I reckon, though I don't like to boast.'

Paul looked down at the ground, rubbing his sore feet. He seemed a little lost in thought, looked at me and said: 'A top Crag X, Ben would be proud.' 'I still miss him,' I sighed, as a tear formed and I pondered all that had been given to us because of his enthusiastic invite to a place we would never have thought of going to.

'Me too,' Paul replied. 'Me too.'

Right:
*Cork's finest,
Damien O'Sullivan
on pitch one of
'Borinot' (6b+),
El Falcó, Arbolí,
Tarragona.*

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan



PLACES

In Praise of North Wales. By James McHaffie

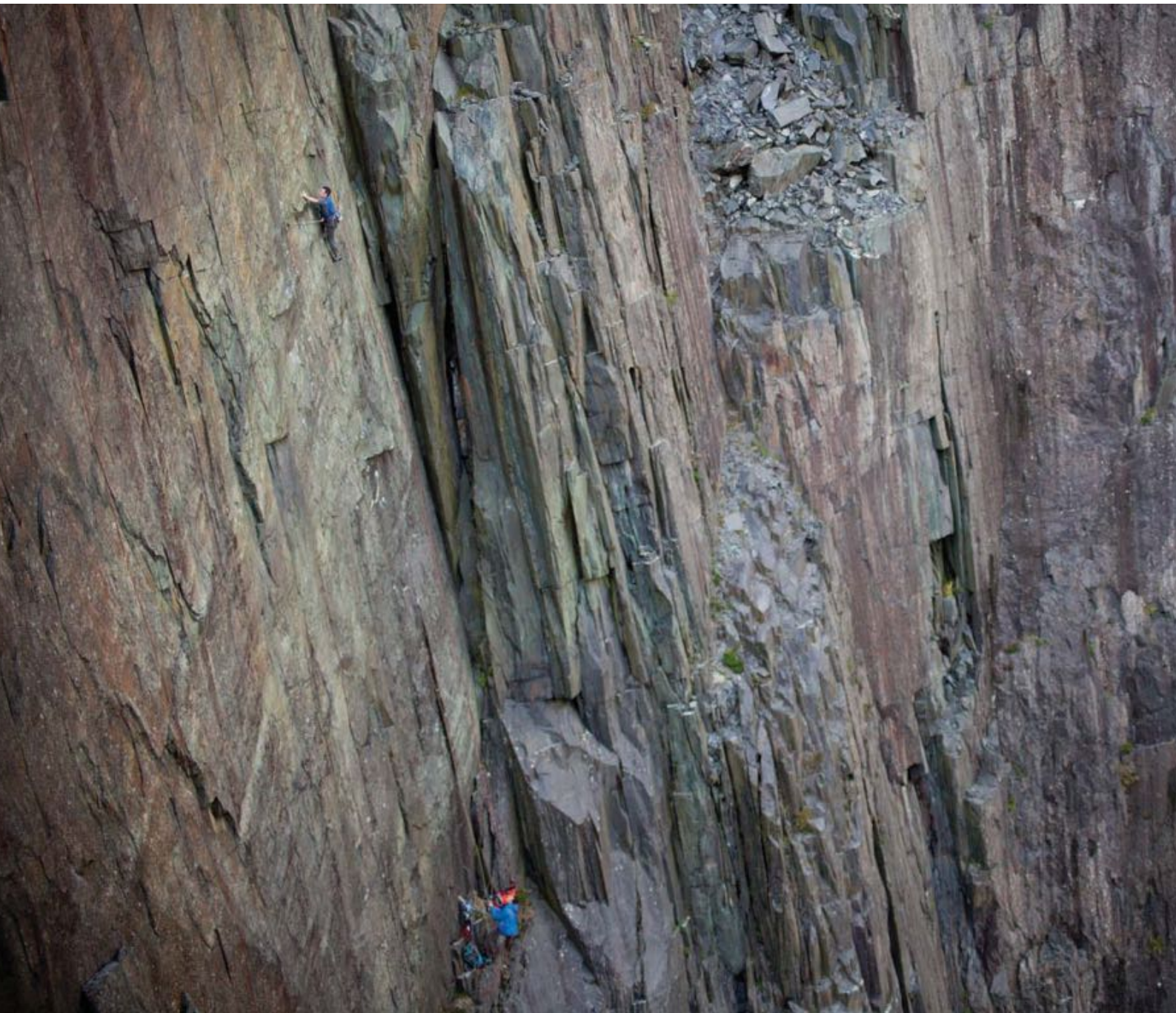
Bank Holiday Chips. By Bruce Woodley

Homage to Catalunya . By Pete O'Donovan

Snell's People. By Simon Laker

Peak Rock – A Tribute to Giles Barker. By Graham Hoey

Old Men & the Sea. By Dick Turnbull





IN PRAISE OF NORTH WALES

Cumbrian turned Cambrian, James McHaffie has made North Wales his stomping ground. Having quietly gone about repeating some of the hardest routes in the region in the best of styles, he is increasingly making his mark with formidable hard routes of his own. Here he tells why Wales is such a special place.

By James McHaffie

North Wales is without doubt the best place for a keen climber to be based in Britain. Don't get me wrong, I love the Lakes, Scotland is fantastic, and even the Peak has the odd 'alright' person living there.

But nowhere comes near to matching North Wales for having as much climbing history and community concentrated in such a small area. The post-industrial landscape makes it less twee than the Lakes, but I can attest to the fact that people from Wales are generally friendlier than Cumbrians. The climbers, the climbs, the landscape and the locals have a history about them that can rival that of any climbing area in the world.

From local climbers such as Ioan Doyle and Al Hughes, to old-school legends Joe Brown and Anthony 'Ginger' Cain and lifers such as Mark Reeves, the area exerts a magnetic attraction that makes it hard to leave. Pilgrims travel from all over the world to climb here, soaking themselves in the history and experience.

Dream of White Horses, Cenotaph Corner, Hope, Great Wall (definitely not the limestone one), Main Wall, Vector, Christmas Curry, Positron, Comes the Dervish, Right Wall, The Cracks, Diagonal, The Grooves, Vulture, Path to Rome, Statement of Youth – are all route names that will resonate with climbers.

Left:
High on Meltdown, Britain's hardest slab route weighing in at a mighty French grade of 9a.

Photograph:
Jack Geldard

The list is near endless, but any keen climber living in Britain has probably gotten excited about the prospect of doing one of these climbs at some point. This is for good reason: having climbed some of the best routes in the world on big granite faces I can guarantee that, despite their relatively meagre size, these routes compare well for the varied experiences they offer. It could be the sensation of being watched by curious seals at Gogarth; of edging your way up to escape one of the quarry climbs; of watching somebody climbing for their lives on *Right Wall* whilst you relax belaying atop the Left; of looking at the views of Llyn Padarn from the grit like rock of the Plexus Buttress in the evening sun; or of wondering why you are on a climb on Cilan Main

There is currently a positive and vibrant scene in Wales. You've got youths like Calum, George, Gwen, and Anna going about doing really good things in the mountains and on the sea cliffs. Out on the limestone Chris Doyle, Pete Robins and Pete Harrison are developing the Ormes on a week-by-week basis. There are always loads of people to do stuff with, be that going for a stroll on the beach, walking a slackline or a drinking a beer. During the spring and summer the Galt y Glyn, the Heights and the Vaynol will offer good socials along with the two main climbing walls, Indy and the Beacon, during the winter. My work means I'm outside in pretty much any weather and although sometimes it can feel Biblically awful, there are times when you see incredible things. On an Mountain Leader night navigation exercise, for instance, I've seen the light from Mars and Jupiter shine straight lines across Llyn Cwmfynnon. Another time I've been walking through stunning and huge fields of cotton grass in that same area and have also been skidding across frozen ponds in the Moelwyns with a full moon out. Normally I'd have just been in bed.

The Pass is perhaps 'social/climb central' and I nearly always bump into someone I know whilst in this valley. Most of the south-facing routes dry within a day after heavy rain and ones on the other side are not too

bad either.

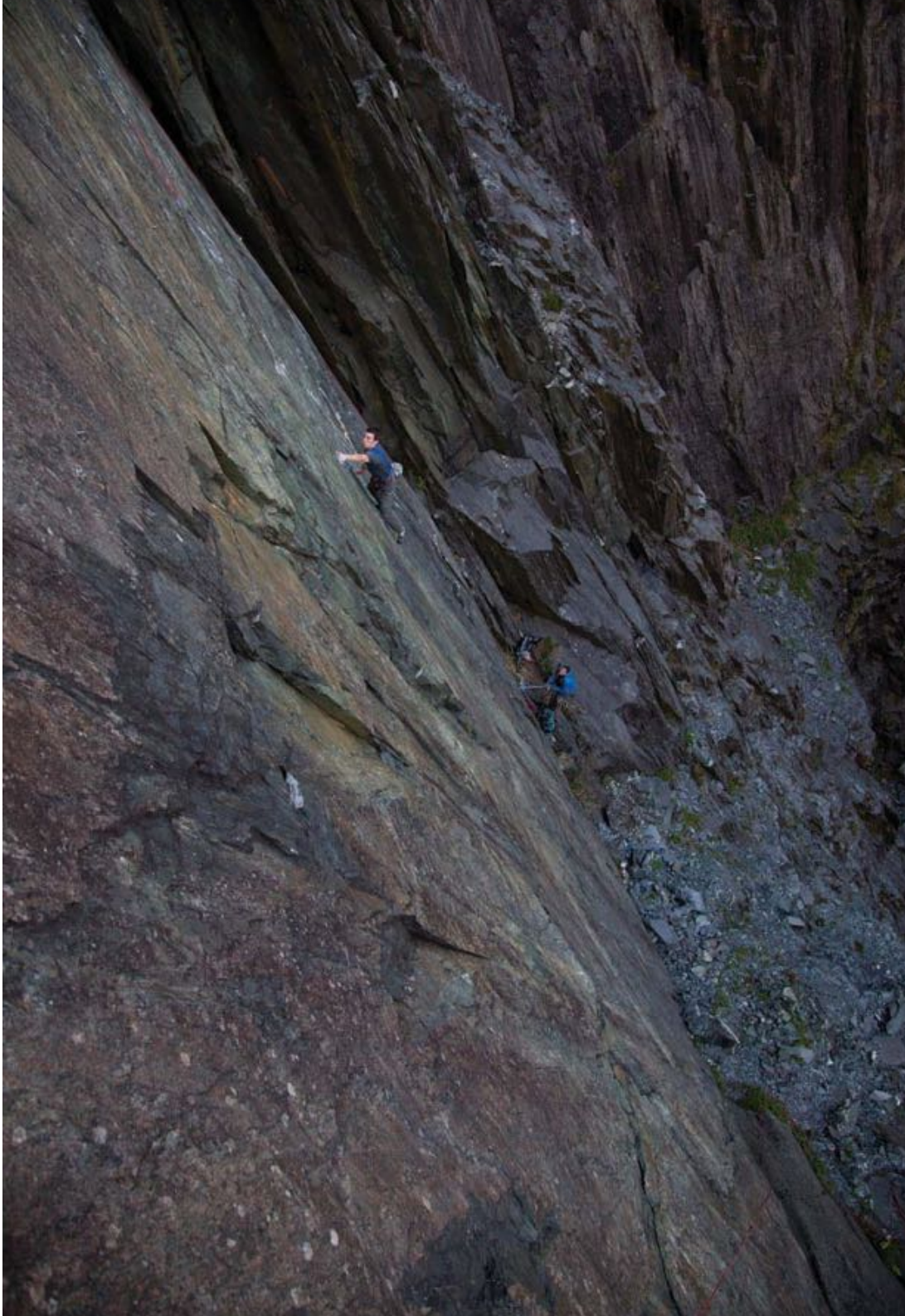
Driving down the Pass I often find that my memories get mixed up with the all-pervading sense of history: on Scimitar Ridge belaying Pete Robins when he takes a huge fall onto a single poor Rock 1, a trick he's performed a few times; Joe Brown dropping a hammer onto his belayer on the first ascent of *Cenotaph Corner*; Big Ron battling the pump on *Lord of the Flies*; or watching my friend Kevin Avery take a massive tumble off *Right Wall* on just our second trip to Wales.

Looking left to the Mot my eye might catch Leo Houlding's *Trauma*, still probably the most physically demanding climb in the Pass and certainly the highpoint of Ray Woods' photography. My first climb on that crag was *Diagonal* with Wesley Hunter and Adam Wilde and my most recent outing involved putting up four new routes in a great day with Pete Robins last year. I often think of Cliff Phillips falling the length of the crag and crawling back to his car: how he survived is a miracle.

Just beyond this is Craig y Rhaedr, home of Ghosts and two of Britain's finest ice falls sometimes form. Beyond this is Cyn Las or Diffwys Ddu (Grey Horn or Wild, Dark place). Originally this was my favourite crag of the Pass. The solo of the arête finish was crazy for its day. The first year I moved to Wales I remember turning round and facing outwards on the final traverse of *Lubyanka* on an on-sight solo and feeling a bit woozy. Above there is Crib y Ddysgol, with its columnar jointing and Crib Goch, the Red Ridge, best scene in the evening sun from Watford Gap in the quarries.

Further down the valley and almost hidden from view are the Gravestones and a stack of micro routes including gems such as *Weasels* and *Ecover*. On the other side of the road is possibly the worst crag in the pass, the Wastad giving its most brittle rock. Although the crag is best missed, John Cleare's photograph of Pete Crew on *Erosion Groove Direct* with a rope tied around his waist and virtually no gear is one to savour.

The Grochan is never a favourite place but is super



Left:

*Looking down into
the depths of the West
Wall of Tŷll Mawr
in the Dinorwig
Quarries as Caff
races the Meltdown.*

Photograph:

Jack Geldard



quick drying and a five minute walk: with routes like *Nea*, *Stroll On* and *Cockblock* it will always be busy. Dad spun me a yarn about him and Adrian Liddel being there when Al Harris wanted rescuing from a solo attempt on *Hangover*. For some reason Dad didn't rescue him, which led to trouble in the pub when Harris turned up later.

The best routes hereabouts are to be found above Clogwyn Ddu on the conglomerate. Apart from being a red zone for sheep deaths, it reminds me of dark horse Craig Parnaby top roping Tim Emmet's E8/9 before leading it and being very disappointed he didn't try and on-sight it as he found it easy. As he had also climbed two E7s on-sight at Gogarth on the same day in the mid 90s, who knows?

Driving through Nant Peris past the Vaynol (where Iuoan Arfon Jones and Dai Lampard can often be found) the Dinorwic slate quarries come into view with the rippled Rainbow Slab. The big pinnacle in the middle is the Peppermint Tower where they filmed *Willow*.

The quarries are just an amazing place. Dinorwic used to be one of the biggest quarries in the world employing 3,000 miners and many thousands more indirectly. It was closed in 1969 and it was not long before Brown, Harris and co were putting up routes like *Opening Gambit* and *Gideon*. Before long, lycra clad climbers were seen taking huge falls and putting up outrageously serious routes. The Rainbow Slab was home to Britain's hardest slab for two decades, courtesy of Johnny Dawes: *The Very Big* and *The Very Small*. The main British climbing film of the 80s, *Stone Monkey*, was filmed here in Twll Mawr – Welsh for Big Hole – and, for me, it remains one of the best climbing films.

I'd climbed many of the existing hard sport and trad routes after a few years of living in the area and

Left: *Full of hope: Caff approaching the start of Britain's most difficult and demanding sea-cliff climb, the Longhope Direct, with a possible E11 7a grade.*

Photograph: Ben Bransby



in 2007/8 added two new 8bs, *Sauron* and the *Serpent Vein*. I was close to getting a third and was a bit gutted when my friend Pete Robins swooped in to grab *The New Slateman*.

I had my revenge. I first tried *Meltdown* in 2007 and was realistically pretty optimistic because I never quite made it past the step left a third of the way up which is where the main difficulties begin. I'd managed to do all the moves on the final traverse right, where Dawes had pulled a hold off, and the moves suited me being very bunched and fingery. When the quarry was shut

for the filming of *Clash of the Titans 3* I gave up, unable to put myself and my friends through such a long siege, in what can be a grim place.

In 2011 after climbing *Big Bang*, at 9a the hardest sport route in Wales, I'd broken through a performance barrier and decided to go give *Meltdown* another look. I soon managed it with two rests and was impressed at how good the moves were. After an awful trip to Yosemite I hit a 'sports science burnout', but in 2012 I regained focus and *Meltdown* was top of the goal list.

I'd given it top priority because of a double kick

Above:
*Caff about to do the
'belly shuffle' pitch on
Longhope Direct.*

Photograph:
Ben Bransby

up the arse. First the publication of the Dawes autobiography had thrown down a gauntlet. And second, there was the publication of the new slate guide. The latter led me to think that it would not be long before the route received some interest from some of the 'pro climbers' knocking around. I got precious and began the same brutal regime as *Big Bang* until success came a little earlier than expected. I'd booked in 20 to 30 possible sessions into my diary, showing a lot of respect for how hard I thought the climb was going to be. It went on about the seventh session of the year and this was, without doubt, a fluke go.

It is the new route I am most proud of. It is a different level from *The Very Big and the Very Small*, with the climbing being harder than this just to get three quarters of the way up, where you are faced with two of the hardest sequences on the climb, both eminently fluffable. However dialled you get the final rightwards traverse, it will always feel very precarious. I rang Dawes straight after, who said he was 75% chuffed and 25 % gutted.

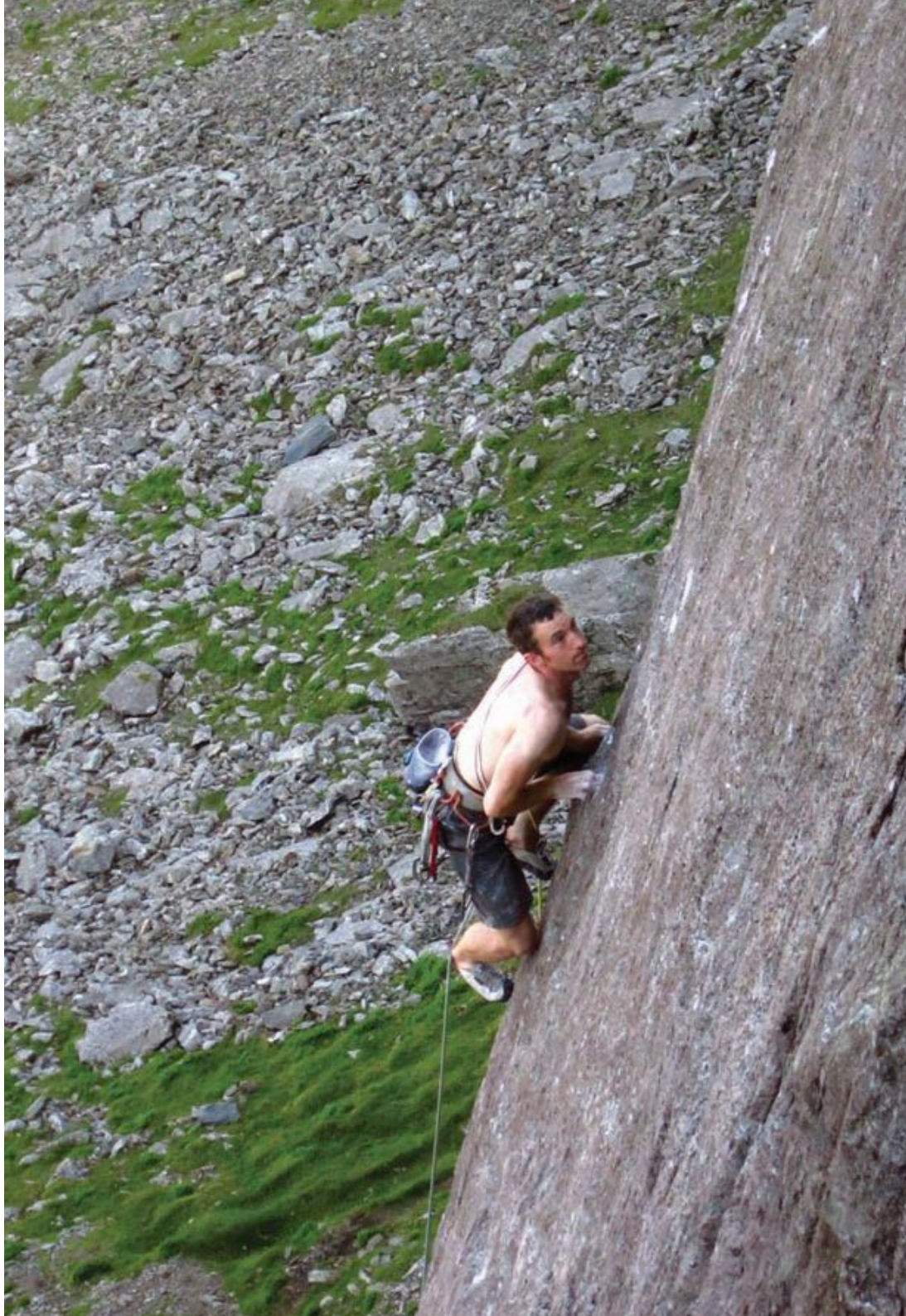
Indian Face. I am still not entirely sure about this one. I did a few routes of around E9 last year and although technically the easiest this was also the most serious. A week before the lead I'd decided I was going to try it as I had become curious as to what the route involved above my high point of 13 years earlier. I wanted to do it in the best style/quickest ascent I could manage. After looking at the hardest moves on a gri-gri in the morning and leading it in the afternoon, it felt equivalent to on-sighting a serious E7 in terms of difficulty: the kind I'm less inclined to do nowadays. The lead went as smoothly as you could hope for: but it's not a quick affair and, not knowing the moves too well, the lead took a bit over 20 minutes and is as near to a solo as a 30/40 metre climb can be. There are two body weight, placements at 10 and 12 metres. At three-quarters' height there is an RP2 which you may be able to lower off, combined with three other RPs that I wouldn't weight. Four metres above this there is the foot ledge rest and leaving this is the hardest move of the route, probably easy 6c leading into 6a/b

ground, mainly on side pulls.

I didn't feel euphoric about doing this historic climb. In fact it produced feelings very similar to those I experienced when doing *The Bells The Bells* in 2000: a cold reflection about the need to climb carefully and quickly and of not really being able to justify the risk for a 'tick'. The climbing isn't any better than that found on routes like the *Plum* and *Weaver*, in fact it is less varied and the rock poorer. Are the first ascentionists of these climbs people to be emulated? The week that followed was equally nerve racking, knowing that two friends were going to try it. Thankfully all went well, but how close to tragedy things had been is anyone's guess. Perhaps driving 10,000 miles over a year is more dangerous than climbing *Indian Face*? I know the parents of one of the climbers were petrified until their son texted them of his success. If anything had happened that day I would have felt I had been a catalyst towards a young man's death and that would've changed the retrospective experience somewhat.

I received more pats on the back after completing the *Indian Face* than for climbing any other climb. Just two months earlier, along with Ben Bransby, I had climbed the *Longhope Direct* on Hoy, probably the hardest sea cliff climb in the world, massively harder than *Indian Face*. Yet people placed this single pitch route on Cloggy – effectively a piss poorly protected 7b+/7c – above the far more difficult and much longer *Longhope Direct*. Perhaps it's the history, and the controversy that surrounds the climb, which makes it stand out. This was, after all, Britain's first E9 from possibly Britain's most renowned climber, put up on one of the country's most formidable crags, Clogwyn Du'r Arddu. John Redhead's early attempts and repeats by Nick Dixon, Neil Gresham and Dave Macleod have all added to the aura of the route.

And maybe this is what makes Wales so magical. There are few places in the world where the history of climbing is enshrined in the routes and areas in such abundance. The Llanberis Pass and Borrowdale are the two valleys in Britain where I feel truly at home.



Left:

*The face of
concentration: Caff
engrossed on Indian
Face E9 6c - a rite of
passage for those not
afraid to run it out
on highly technical
moves on Cloggy's
East Buttress.*

Photograph:
John Orr



BANK HOLIDAY CHIPS

We are all too familiar with what happens to quiet places at busy holiday weekends. Here Bruce Woodley paints an imaginative picture of life on the fells on one such occasion high above Black Moss Pot, a favourite plunge pool for climbers and walkers in the know.

By Bruce Woodley

Borrowdale was full. The queues outside Keswick chip shops grew; car parks and campsites were crammed; barbecues were tended by the burnt; and rambler jams formed at every stile and gateway. The lure of the Lakes: sunshine and a three-day bank holiday weekend. Thankfully though, Grange's old schoolhouse was empty and cool. The great and the good of the Climbers' Club must've known better.

Black Moss Pot looked cold and deep. Four kilometres from the road and there were only two swimmers and they were drying off and homeward bound. 'Look before you leap' I'd always told Beth, but eyeing the take off and black beyond just brought on the fear for me. 'Go on Dad,' She chided 'you're never scared!' My fragile ego finally forced me over.

A bit of pathetic left arm flagging gave me a fine slap on the wrist as I hit the peat-dark water. Our warm-up a scramble along Cam Ridge. Passing a bivi site and then pressing on over the crag, to the relief of the young couple there for the night. The evening light softening the slopes and receding ridges.

Day two and Raven Crag: hopefully late enough in the afternoon's lengthening shadow to leave the five pitch classic *Corvus* (The Crow) free. Two parties high on the cliff. They'll be long gone by the time we've hoofed in. I glance across at the sun-soaked Dove's Nest Crag, a favourite of Millican Dalton, self-styled 'Professor of Adventure,' who published a mini guide to it in the 1914 FRCC Journal.

Just one pair of cragsters there, by the look of it; though how many others may lurk within its labyrinthine chimneys? Essentially a huge detached

and cracked slab, the passages therein might be cool, a laugh. Though rumour has it the whole thing is still mobile. Climbers missing in lakeland mystery. No, we'll stick to Plan A: Dad and daughter swinging leads up *Corvus*, a classic. Well not exactly: I have to give her some belay bolstering advice and in my long-rope-let's-use-it haste there may have been some simultaneous movement. Then we were queuing.

The foursome I'd spied from way back on the walk in were still engaged on 'the hand traverse.' 'Go-for-it Dad' was hauling his five or six year-old son up the wall, the traverse being a non-starter. Lost on pitch one, Dad had been put right by the party of two, 'safe and sorted sisters'. He'd abseiled or climbed down and then continued to essentially solo the route around said sisters. The son could paddle well, but neither belay nor extract gear effectively. They were totally reliant on the kind offices of the sisters of mercy. One of whom I will admit seemed 'out of sorts' by pitch five. Beth and I exchanged glances and sat down to enjoy the show.

The old dog fox and his now grown cub slunk away from the top of the crag, not wishing to piss on the chips of the young fox buzzing with joy and pride in his small cub and their adventure. The she-foxes too, though one more than the other, glanced fondly on the cub and its father.

A faint soaring croak suggested a raven pair, heading toward Glaramara perhaps. Padding downhill, just before Combe Ghyll starts cutting into steep rock, our fox and grown cub disturb a crow at a sheep carcass.

Left:
*Langstrath Beck
falling into the maw
of the waiting Pot.*

Photograph:
Cmdr Gravy





HOMAGE TO CATALUNYA

Former Peak District activist, photographer and entrepreneur Pete O'Donovan now divides his time between two fiercely independent provinces, Yorkshire and Catalunya. Here he gives us an insider's insight into where and when to go to get the best out of Spain's global climbing destination.

By Pete O'Donovan

Throughout the short history of our sport there have often been climbing hotspots, places that, at a certain period in time, captured the imaginations of not only the world's top performers, but also of those of more modest accomplishments who simply wished to sample rock at its very best.

In the 1970s and 80s North America was undoubtedly the place to go, with centres such as Yosemite Valley, Joshua Tree and Smith Rocks topping the wish-lists of anyone who considered themselves serious about climbing.

As sport climbing gained in popularity so France became a major attraction, with Easter trips to the newly developed limestone cliffs of Verdon and Buoux becoming something of a pilgrimage for many British enthusiasts.

The result was that, for a time, these locations were considered climbing Meccas – must-visit places by anyone serious about their sport, but in the early years of the 21st century the situation is nowhere near as clear-cut.

Our world has seemingly shrunk and an ever-expanding list of new and exotic destinations, combined with cheap air travel and internet-based knowledge, means today's travelling climbers are literally spoilt for choice.

Despite this, if a cross-section of climbers from

Left:

A typical Montsant situation: Lupe Hurtado negotiates acres of rock as she climbs an un-named 6b+ at sector Racó de la Missa.

Photograph:

Pete O'Donovan



around the world who regularly take foreign holidays were asked to make a list of their favourite destinations, the name Catalunya would almost certainly be near to, or even top of, the heap.

Considered as merely a region of Spain by most, but as an entirely separate country by the majority of its six million inhabitants, Catalunya lies in the far northeast corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Sandwiched between the Pyrenean mountains to the north and the Mediterranean Sea to the east, this is a land of contrasts, where the old and new worlds exist side by side.

The highly developed coastal strip, with its capital Barcelona, is home to more than two thirds of Catalunya's population, and is as modern and cosmopolitan a region as any in Europe.

But just a few miles inland, busy rural towns full of newly built apartment blocks are often overlooked by the ruins of medieval hilltop castles, and kids on skateboards sporting the latest hip-hop fashions share sidewalks with diminutive old ladies, dressed in black from head to toe.

The topography of Catalunya is also one of extremes and few of the annual hordes of tourists sunning themselves on the sandy beaches of the Mediterranean realize that only two hours' drive to the northwest lie deep gorges and towering limestone cliffs, forming some of the wildest, most dramatic landscapes in western Europe.

For a country where free climbing was virtually unknown until the mid 1980s, some of Catalunya's more established areas have now become famous far beyond its own borders, their names synonymous with beautiful rock and awesome climbing.

Few could ask for more, and the growing numbers of overseas visitors bears witness to this. In fact, such is the current worldwide appeal of the area that the casual visitor turning up at any one of a

Left: *Albert Cortés on 'Raiverd' (6b) at L'Argenteria in the gorge of Collegats, Lleida province.*

Photograph: *Pete O'Donovan*

dozen locations during the winter months might be forgiven for thinking there was some kind of organized international meet going on!

That said, in climbing terms this is a big country and the vast quantity of well established zones combined with an ever-growing number of new cliffs means those seeking solitude rarely have to search too far.

Climbable rock is found throughout the region, but while the north-eastern provinces of Barcelona and Girona are popular enough with natives living in the large coastal cities, it is to Tarragona, in the south, and Lleida, in the north-west, that the majority of visitors head for.

These two provinces contain a mind-boggling amount of rock and even single zones, such as Siurana (an admittedly large zone) are home to enough sport-routes to keep the average punter happy for several lifetimes, let alone a couple of holidays a year. Some of the routes in Siurana, as well as in nearby Margalef (both in Tarragona province) are not just the hardest in Catalunya, but the hardest in the world, and this situation is echoed in the Lleida zones of Oliana and Santa Linya.

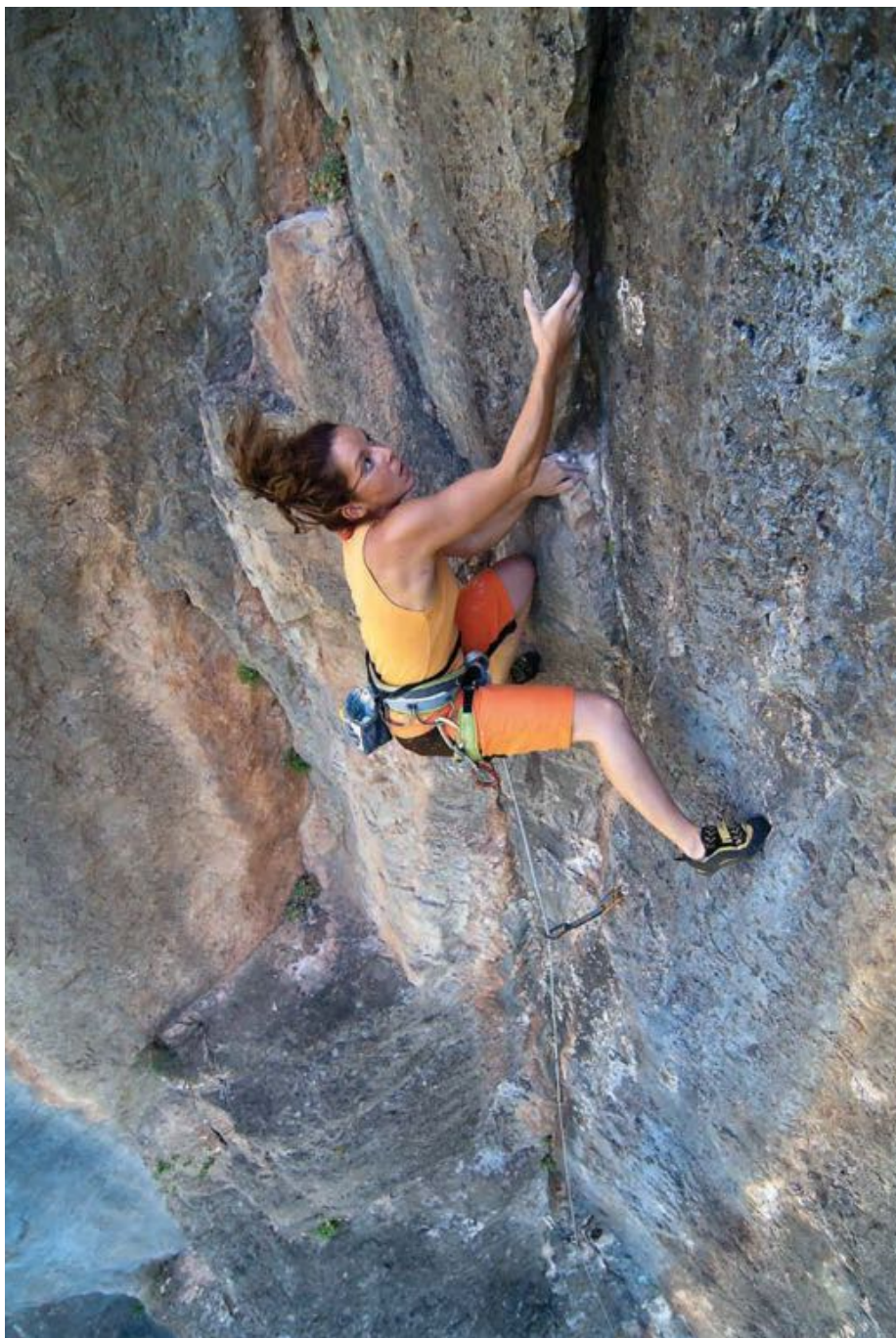
The hard-core crimper will almost certainly know all of this already, primed on years of reading in magazines and on websites about the exploits of local climbers Dani Andrada, Ramon Julián and Edu Marin, together with visiting superstars Chris Sharma (so regular he's virtually a resident) and the Czech wunderkind Adam Ondra.

What isn't so widely known, however, is that the area also offers a fabulous wealth of lower and middle grade climbs, and of such variety – everything from bouldering and short, roadside crags to remote 500m trad routes – that it is arguably the most versatile year-round climbing destination in Europe.

My own involvement with climbing in Catalunya goes back to the late 80s and early 90s when, as a

Right: Virginia Rodriguez on 'Tascones Lejanos' (6a+), Kuestalon la France, Camarasa.

Photograph: Pete O'Donovan





Above:
Isidre Escorihuela
on 'Sa Mare
Cante' (7a), Sector
Samarkanda, Coll de
Nargó.

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan

consequence of having recently married into the country (so to speak), I became a regular visitor. As far as information was concerned these were the dark ages. Sure it existed (often in word-of-mouth form – useless unless you knew who to ask), but was extremely difficult to come by if you were a foreigner.

Often the only topos available were kept in dog-eared new route books tucked beneath the counter of some local village bar. But, which village? Which bar? And even if you did find the right bar, there was always a slight sense of foreboding as you asked for your 'Café solo', and more quietly 'el llibre de ressenyes d'escalar' (book of climbing topos) as if, at the very mention of the words, everyone in the establishment would fall silent and turn to stare at this outsider who dared to ask for the sacred tome.

This situation was far from ideal, particularly as at that time I had yet to establish links with any locals. In desperation I turned to the national magazines, taking out subscriptions with Desnivel and the now defunct Extrem, and the beginning of each holiday would see me scouring their pages for information

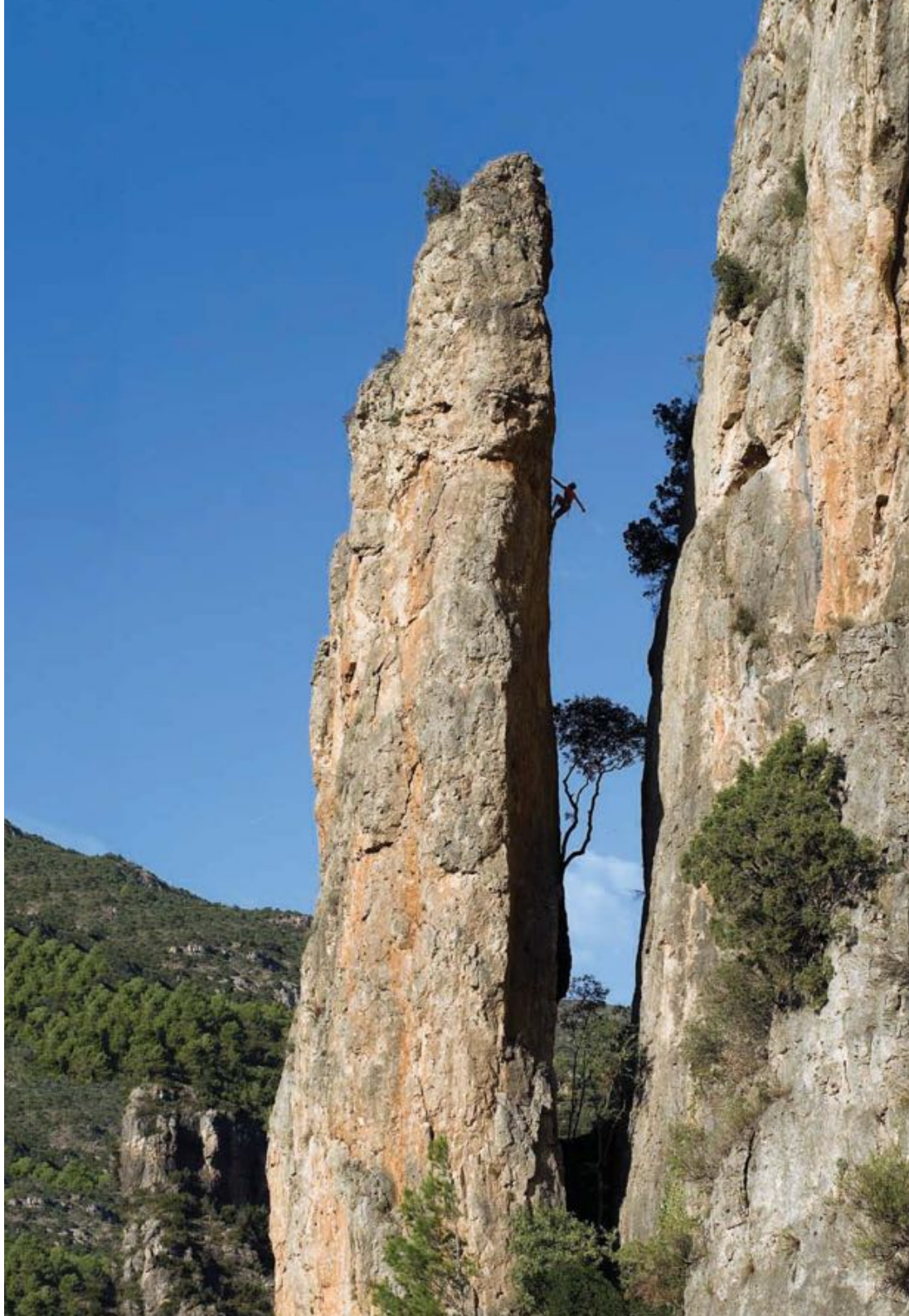
relating to my local area.

Occasionally I struck lucky – a full article about a major crag I knew absolutely nothing about. But more often than not, the information I was seeking was usually hidden away in the news section, perhaps just a few teasing lines and maybe a small, out-of-focus picture. And so, armed with just the scantiest of details, perhaps the names and grades of half a dozen routes, plus some invariably inadequate approach description, the missus and I would set off into the wilds of Catalunya.

My memories of these days are a mixture of good and bad. Sometimes we'd find the crag easily, have a brilliant day and drive back home tired but happy. On other occasions we'd waste hours driving up and down perilous dirt tracks, peering up at hillsides and into gorges for a glimpse of anything looking remotely like 'it', or perhaps fighting bodily through almost impenetrable vegetation, brambles and clematis tearing at our clothes, only to find the crag so late in the day it was hardly worth bothering to unpack the gear.

These days the situation has thankfully changed, and there is a wealth of guidebook material available, both definitive and selective. The only downside to this is that with so many wonderful and well-documented crags on offer it's becoming difficult to know where to start. Here then, is a little logistical information aimed at pointing prospective visitors in the right direction.

To begin with, the where rather depends on the when, by which I mean that, unlike most other climbing regions in Spain, Catalunya, and more especially Lleida, is not strictly a winter-only destination. For a start, many Catalan areas traditionally considered as cold weather options actually feature a number of individual crags with orientations giving shade for part or all of the day, while in such excellent zones as Camarasa and Tres Ponts, where the predominant orientation is north/northwest, the season actually starts at Easter rather than finishes. And then there is the fabulous high-



Left:
Albert Cortés on
'Un Bon Passatge'
(6c+/7a), La Pera,
Camarasa.

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan

Right:
*Big pitches, small
pockets: Andreas
Klarstrom on 'Rata
Arraconada' (7a),
Racó de la Missa,
Montserrat.*

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan

mountain granite of Cavallers in the Pyrenees – snowbound through the winter months and at its best from June to September.

Being further south and nearer the coast, Tarragona is not quite so well served in this regard, though the high, exposed walls of Montsant generally offer good conditions in summer, particularly during late afternoons and early evenings, which are often accompanied by refreshing breezes.

However, despite all the above, I recognize that most UK climbers will continue to associate Spain with 'fun in the winter sun', and in this respect Catalunya excels. Winter temperatures here may be a degree or two lower on average than the more southerly venues of the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol, but if the customary, stable anti-cyclonic systems are in place, this is rarely a problem. Cold nights are generally followed by clear sunny days, providing not only optimal climbing conditions, but also a visual treat for connoisseurs of beautiful places.

Of course, there are no guarantees: it can snow in Siurana at Easter, and extended periods of rain during the winter months are not entirely unknown. But freak conditions (and let's not forget that they also happen elsewhere in Spain) are rare and it's an unfortunate visitor who loses many days climbing during a 1-2 week climbing trip.

Having dealt with the when let's look at the where, and this is where tough decisions have to be made. Catalunya is a big place, even when concentrating on only two of the four provinces, and while the thought of taking in as many different zones and crags as possible may be tempting, there is a real risk of spreading oneself too thinly, resulting in more driving than actual climbing.

For a start, choose either Tarragona or Lleida, and then narrow it down to a group of climbing areas you particularly fancy. In Tarragona this might mean being based somewhere near the village of Cornudella, from where the major zones of Siurana, Montsant and Arbolí are each accessible in from between ten and thirty minutes.

But for other, equally notable zones – La Mussara, Mont-ral and La Riba, for example, there are alternative bases, which won't entail starting and ending each day's climbing with half-an-hour-to-an-hour's rallying up and down twisting mountain roads. Plan ahead. This is even more the case in Lleida province, where the journey between various groups of climbing areas can sometimes stretch to several hours.

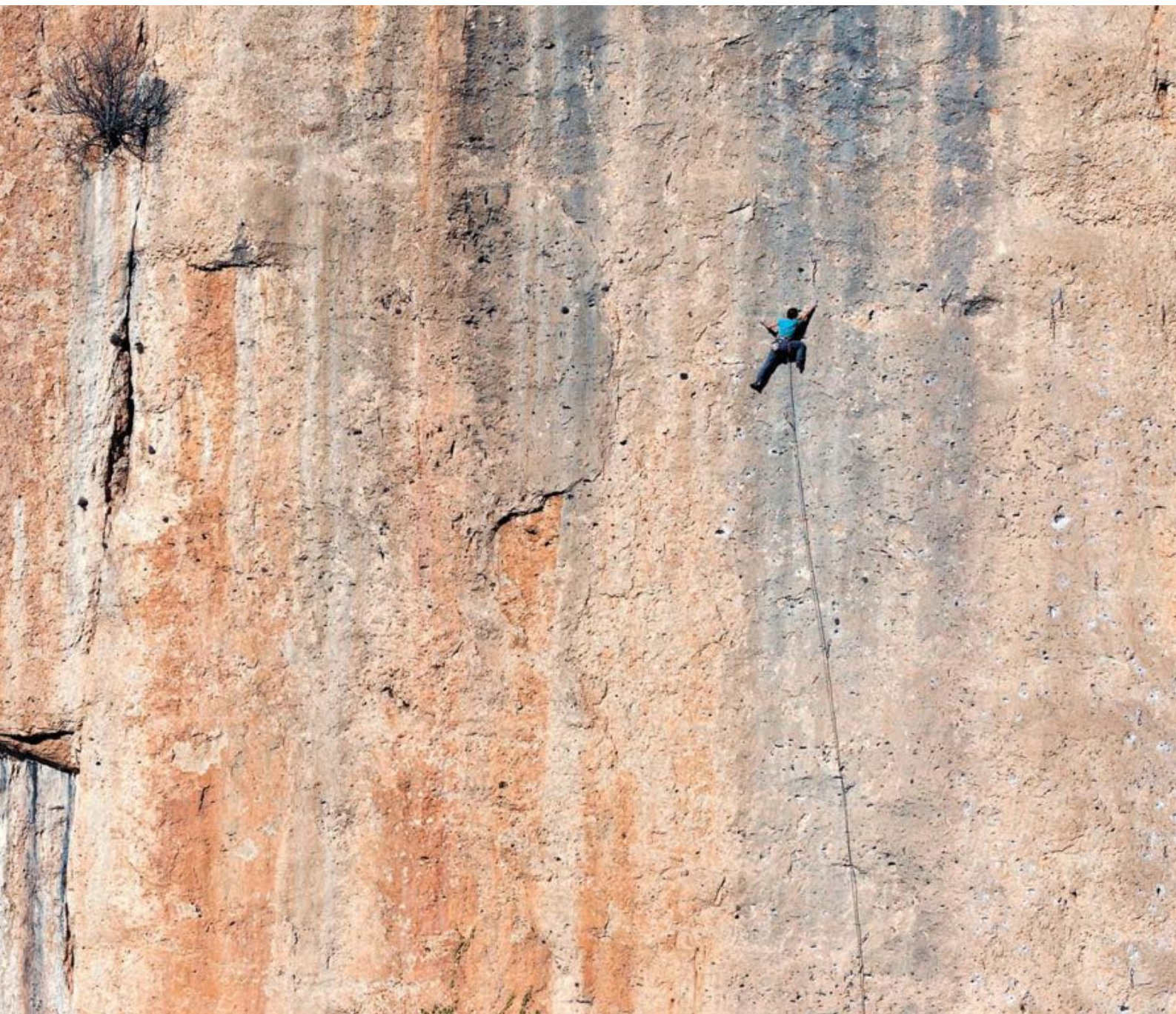
Wherever you choose to stay the choice of accommodation is wide and becoming wider, as local providers wake up to the potential off-season trade offered by overseas climbers.

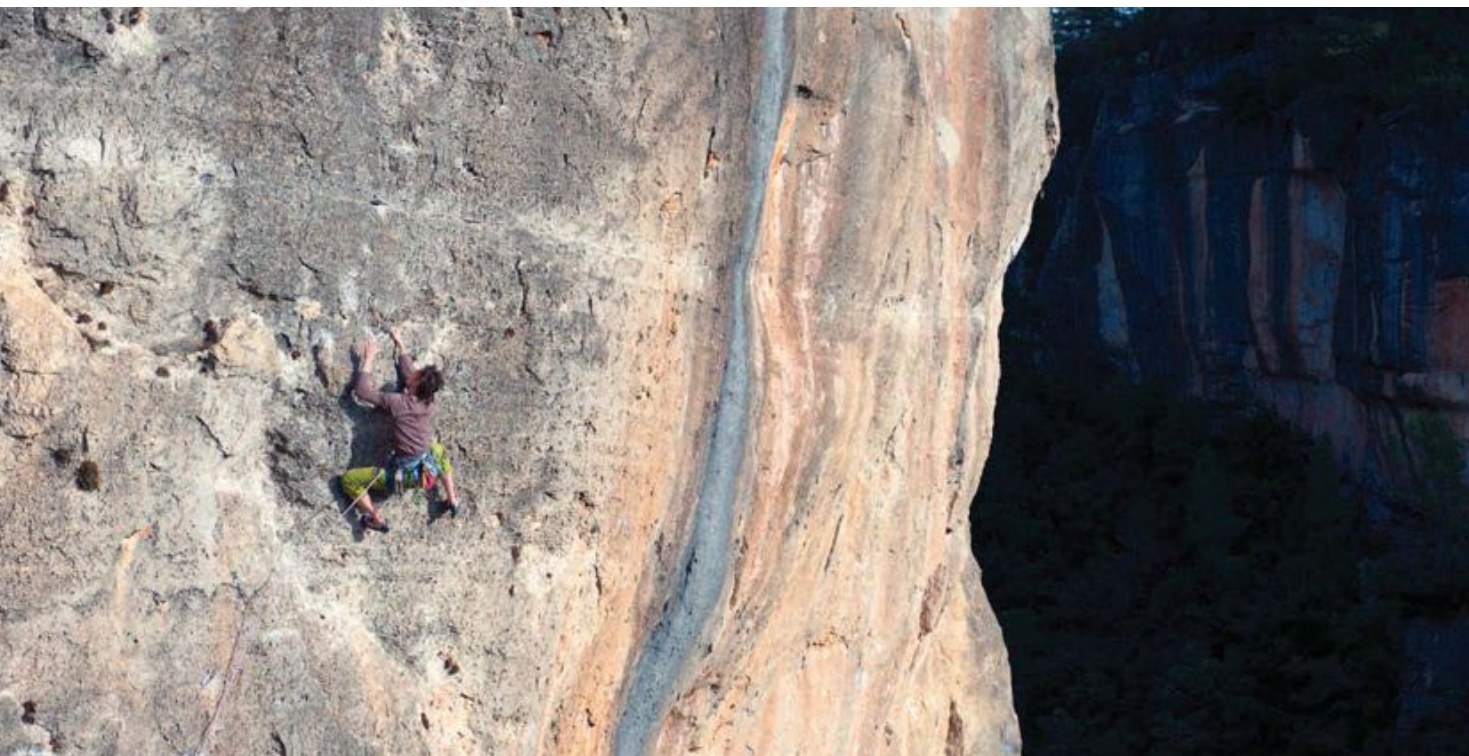
A decade ago the traditional haunt for both locals and foreigners were the Refugis – mountain huts offering basic food and accommodation, owned by the Catalan Outdoor Federation and situated in the very heart of the climbing areas.

In the early days of Catalan sport-climbing these establishments played an extremely important role in the area's development: previously the reserve of passing walkers and travellers, and generally only open during weekends and holidays, the late 80s saw an influx of 'climber-guardians' moving in, running the Refugis full-time, and attracting a growing clientele of paying climbing guests by using the proceeds to bolt routes on the nearby cliffs.

Perhaps the best known and most influential of the Refugis was the Ciriac Bonet in Siurana, a particularly impressive building set into the side of a huge overhanging boulder at the highest point of the village, with magnificent views of the valley below. As well as forming the rear wall and part of the roof of the building, the new tenants wasted little time into transforming the boulder into an indoor training gym, though diners could sometimes be heard complaining about the amount of chalk falling into their Bolognese!

Most of the Refugis are still in existence, and for those seeking simple food and shared bunk-style sleeping arrangements (though a few now offer smaller bedrooms) are well worth considering. Their situations, generally within a few minutes' walk of





Above:
*Unknown climber
 finding out just why
 Siurana is so popular
 on 'Tant s'en Fot'
 (6b).*

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan

the cliffs, makes them particularly useful for climbers without their own transport.

But for folk requiring a little more comfort and privacy there are now many more options for winter digs, ranging from campsite bungalows and self-catering country houses to local hotels of various levels of luxury. This being the 21st century virtually every establishment has a web presence, often with English translations, so a simple internet-search should reveal multiple choices. Catalan food is both tasty and filling: be sure to sample the local food staple 'Pa amb Tomaquet' – crusty bread rubbed with tomato and drizzled with olive oil. It's delicious!

Though a climbing trip to Catalunya using only public transport is possible, most visitors will find a hire car essential. As with accommodation, use the Internet to find the best deals and book well in advance.

One thing to bear in mind is that the approaches to certain cliffs require driving along unsurfaced tracks, and damage to vehicles in these situations is almost certainly not covered under the hire-car terms and conditions. Be careful out there!

Before leaving the subject of transport and accommodation, a few words on the increasing prevalence of camper vans using 'unofficial' overnight campsites seem pertinent: the Catalan authorities seem incredibly tolerant at the moment, but there is a growing feeling amongst many local climbers that overseas visitors on extended trips are taking things too far, with possible consequences for the future. Sleeping in your van in a quiet lay-by then moving on to a different spot the next night is one thing: staying in the same public car park for a month, erecting washing lines on trees and leaving bags of smelly rubbish hanging from windscreen wipers all

day is quite another. With so many excellent climbing areas on offer, I'm somewhat reluctant to single out certain zones as more worthy than others, particularly as overcrowding has become common at some of the more famous crags.

However, I recognize that prospective first-time visitors will be expecting just that, so here goes, my top ten recommendations – five from Tarragona, five from Lleida.

Tarragona

Siurana: this has to be one of the finest sport-climbing locations anywhere in the world, offering upwards of 1,500 routes on vertical to gently leaning limestone walls, clustered around the magnificently situated crag-top village. Arguably the really good stuff starts at 6c, or thereabouts, but from there upwards it's a crimpers paradise.

Margalef: once the sharp edges of Siurana have relieved you of your fingertip skin, head over to Margalef and get pocket pulling. The conglomerate here ranges from good to excellent and with a wide choice of sectors offering excellent routes at all levels of difficulty. Margalef's status as one of the region's most popular venues is unlikely to change anytime soon.

Montsant: the southern aspect of the Serra de Montsant massif presents a ten kilometre-long bastion of conglomerate walls and pinnacles, offering a tremendously impressive vista for climbers and non-climbers alike. Fortunately, for those of us who wish to more than simply observe, these crags are as good as they look. Climbing in Montsant is all about big pitches and small pockets. Prepare to be pumped!

La Riba: this historic little zone was one of the first in Catalunya to receive the full sport climbing

Right: *Isidre Escorihuela on the magnificent 2nd pitch of 'Tos de Gos' (6c) at Perles, one of the finest and most beautiful climbing locations for medium grade climbing in the whole of Lleida.*

Photograph: Pete O'Donovan





treatment, and even as early as the late 1980s visitors from near and far were enjoying themselves on its many superb and excellently protected pitches. With the rise and rise of Tarragona's more fashionable 'new' areas (Siurana, Margalef etc.) in recent years La Riba's local popularity has declined somewhat, but a new generation of foreign visitors are once again frequenting the crag, and finding that for steep and juggy grade 6s there are few zones to match it.

La Mussara: yet another fine example of the refugid-driven development of the late 80s and early 90s, the cliffs of La Mussara offer hundreds of superb grade Vs, 6s and 7s. On a recent trip there (after a long absence) I was surprised how hard and technical the climbing felt compared to my initial impressions many years ago.

Thinking about it later I realised that, like many others, I had become accustomed to climbing wall type moves, powerful lunges between generally positive holds, rather than daintily bridging up blank grooves and mantleshelving sloping ledges – 'old school' techniques, in other words. Perhaps that's why Margalef is so popular these days.

Lleida

Camarasa: on first appearance the cliffs in this zone, lining the banks of the River Segre a few kilometres north of Balaguer, are not particularly impressive. Closer acquaintance, however, reveals some of the best grade 6 climbing in Catalunya. The secret lies in the rock – superb, rough, red and grey limestone, featuring so many juggy finger pockets and in-cut edges that routes which look prohibitively difficult from below often go at surprisingly amenable grades. As mentioned earlier, the Camarasa 'season' unfortunately excludes the coldest months of the year (except for one particular sector) though conversely summer visitors may combine morning and early afternoon climbing with evening swims in the nearby Segre.

Left: Araceli Segarra on 'Si fa Fred no fas Free' (7a), Paret de les Bagasses, Terradets.
Photograph: Pete O'Donovan



Left:
*Àngel Arrabali on
 'Maximo Riesgo'
 (6c+), Paret de
 l'Os, Sant Llorenç de
 Montgai.*

Photograph:
Pete O'Donovan

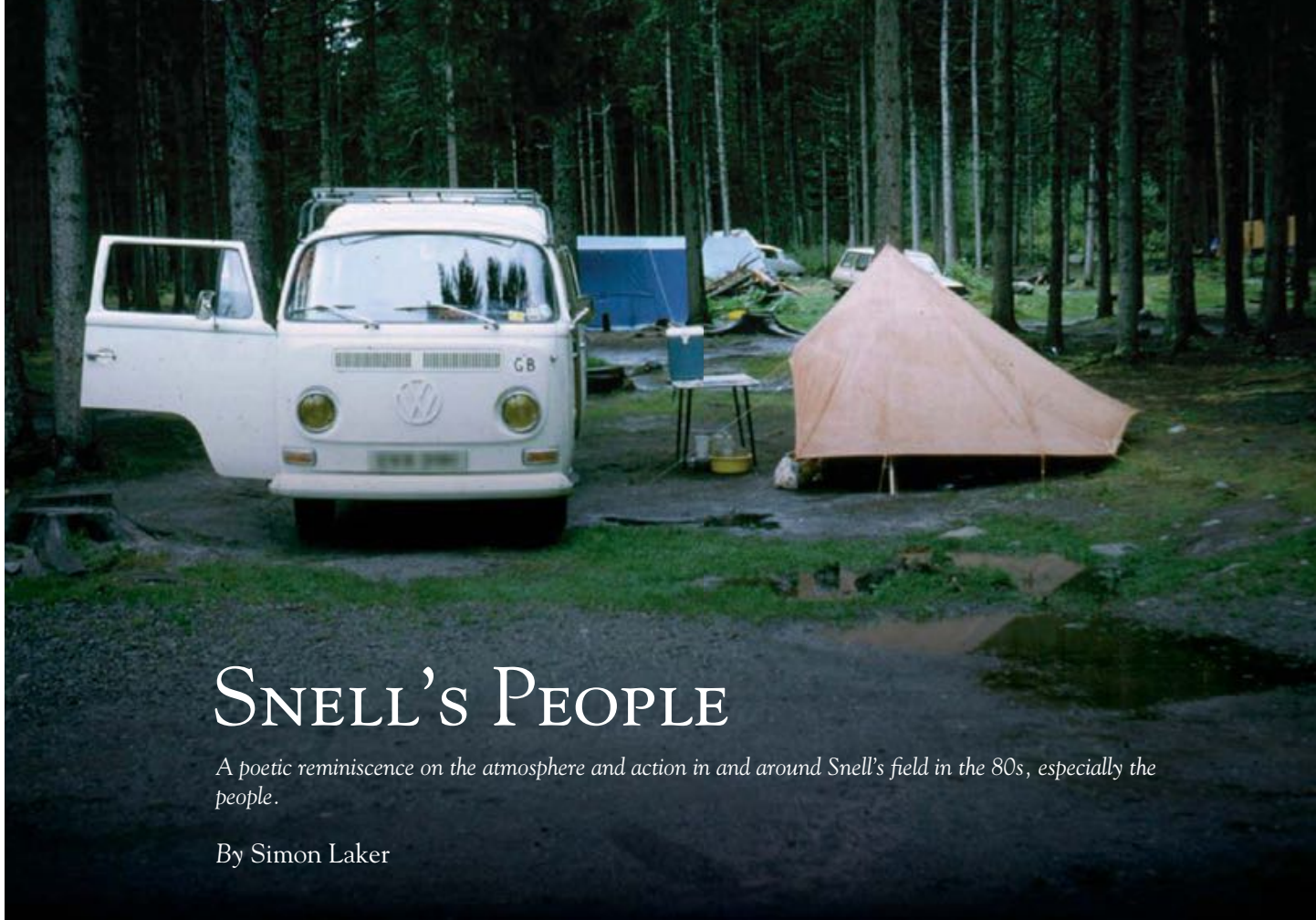
Sant Llorenç de Montgai: situated just a few kilometres west of Camarasa, this zone was one of Lleida's earliest forcing grounds for the top climbers in the area. Today the emphasis for those seeking the highest levels of difficulty has moved to crags such as Oliana and Santa Linya, but Sant Llorenç still attracts a good number of visitors. The old test-pieces are still considered worthy ticks, but these days the zone's most frequented routes are its delightful middle-grade, multi-pitch sport climbs.

Santa Ana: officially speaking Santa Ana is not situated in Lleida province at all (not even in Catalunya), but just over the border in the neighbouring Spanish region of Aragon. However, its proximity to the city of Lleida and history of development by climbers from that city has led to it being 'adopted' by the Catalans. Of the various sectors comprising the zone perhaps the finest (at least for mid-range climbers) is 'Les Agulles', an impressive group of pinnacles situated high above the road, on

which a number of long sustained pitches on excellent rock provide memorable excursions.

Coll de Nargó: as one heads north towards the Catalan Pirineos the landscape becomes truly dramatic, nowhere more so than the Dinosaur-like crest of rock above the village of Coll de Nargó. This zone offers hundreds of routes on a mixture of perfect white limestone and rough, red conglomerate. Benign mid-winter temperatures combined with a generally southerly orientation frequently permits shirtless climbing here, even though the view may well include snow-capped hills.

Cavallers: the high-mountain granite of Cavallers provides yet another dimension to Catalan climbing. Situated within the Aiguestortes national park, this extensive zone offers everything from bouldering and single-pitch sport climbs right up to multi-pitch traditional routes with summit finishes. Don't expect perfection – Yosemite it isn't, but climbers visiting Cavallers rarely leave the place disappointed.



SNELL'S PEOPLE

A poetic reminiscence on the atmosphere and action in and around Snell's field in the 80s, especially the people.

By Simon Laker

Above:
*Cool Van - camping
in Chamonix with
style.*

Photograph:
The Deanery

Snell's
Squalid, ragged, but free, ours.
Endless summers: end of commitments.
Colourful tents, some new, most faded, orange and
weathered, green and floppy.
Plastic sheets draped on trees, spanning branches,
making communes.

A home for gathering, chatting and planning.
Too much was drunk, too many were drunks.

The little green bottles, breeding like flies around
the grimy putrid pits.

Stacked next to cheap wine, a trap for the morning.
A franc-fifty was our vintage, a few cents back worth

the trek, or at least, we thought so.

Troughs dug with axes, a Romanesque drainage.
Futile works to hold back the rain and it always rained.

Hence the sheeting.
You couldn't stay in the little green tent, listening to
the rain bashing, no height for standing.

The sheeting allowed sitting on stolen plastic chairs,
always a brew on. Slowly they would come in as the
rain gathered pace, couldn't stand the confinement,
fed up with the place.

There was always an inner team, knew each other
and each others ways. They talked the same language,
did the same routes, thought the same dreams.

They were, to me, a little scary.
Big guys, big routes, the Walker, the Droites, Bonatti, the Dru.

You couldn't just join them and chew on their stories; you had to have been there, up close, done a few.

Of course, nothing was said but the banter was vicious, they seemed erratic, unexpected, random.

One turned up in his old beaten van, all painted in purples and swirls. Rammed by his mate in a jester of greeting, jammed by the door, they couldn't release him.

He wound down the window and pummeled the bonnet, laughed all that evening as they started their scheming.

Not just Brits, others.
Like the Spaniard, chased by lightning, shoulder left burning.

While we'd been under plastic, drinking and chatting, his night had been up there, fighting, surviving.

They'd found a ledge, off-loaded the gear.
It wasn't enough.
The sizzling and fizzing was closer than Hell, his compadre got it too but he has nothing to tell, ever.

They got the Spaniard down in a whirlwind of blades, fire extinguished, scalding diminished.
Then back to the field, this time alone, his friend left lying on the stone.

Always the big stories, big plans. An attempt on the Freney, free, their fifth.
No joy, a stormy retreat, back to Snell's to eat, to sleep.

The Yank, just done the Chere, thought he was ready, settled on the Super but was never a contender. He wandered around, looking for partners, no takers. Too many suspicions, too much unknown.

He talked a good story and said he'd go solo, we never heard, never asked, never saw him again.

Us, we weren't much good, managed the Frendo, but typical Brits, took too much kit. Passed by the French with their diddy daypacks, whilst we sat on the night's bivi, still deep in our sacs.



The summers stretched for months, we stayed.
By September, squalid had fallen two notches. Not many left now, tents taken down, just the ditches remaining like an Inca ruined town. Empty cans, plastic bottles, crushed boxes of wine. Bits of peel, soggy old matches, mixed with the mud and sticky cold ashes.

A final few routes: a last grasp of the granite. The long thumbing home, back to the smoke, worse for wear, totally broke. Out of place now, with crampons and axes. No one cares where we've been, what we have seen. But we know, as we jostle on tubes and fight through the queues.

The moments of madness, of silence and fright, Falling stones, tinkling ice, thumps in the night. Midnight moons, summit dawns, success on the top. They couldn't know, didn't care, didn't want them to.

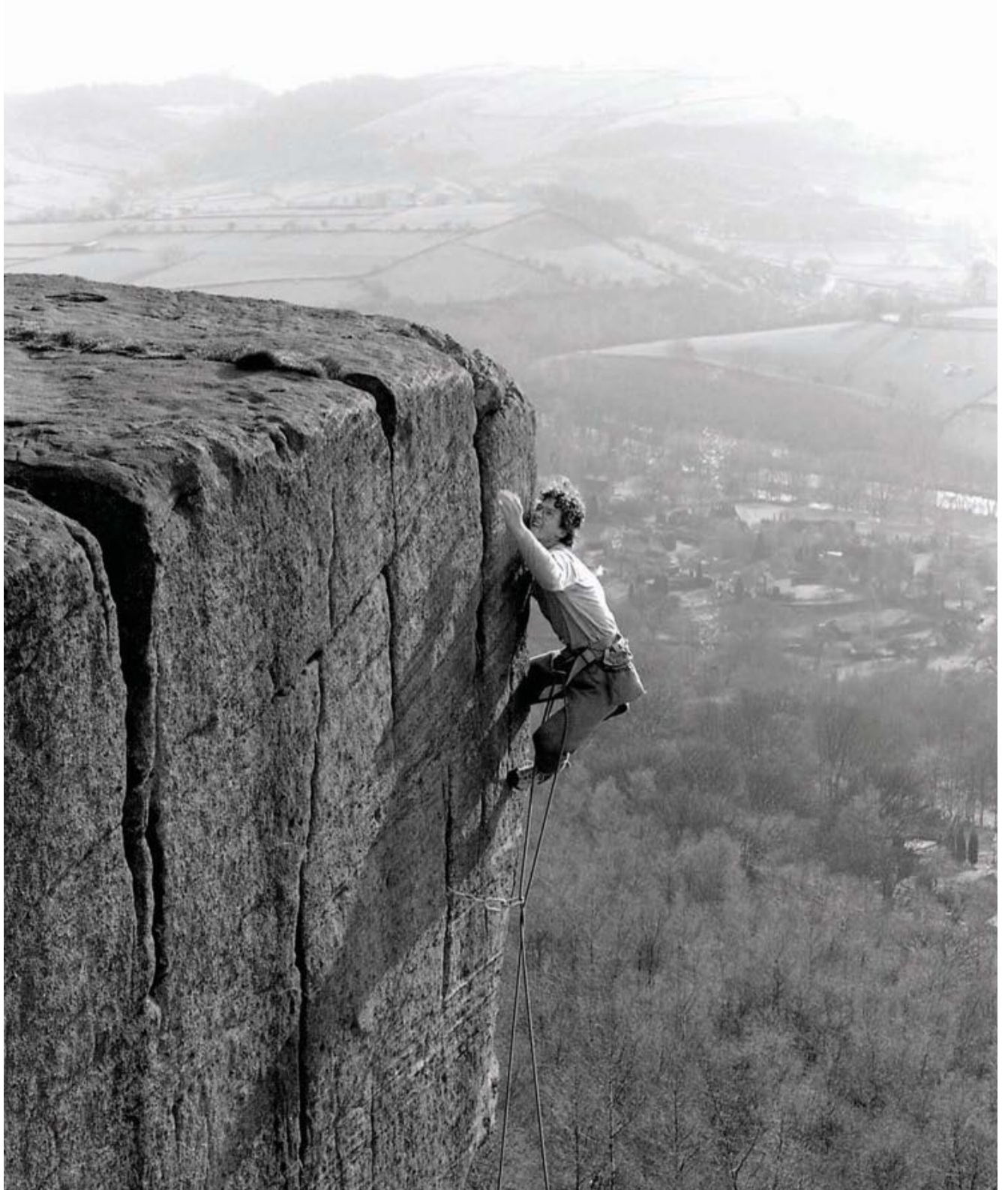
I guess it's all gone now, lost in the past, living in memories, just dusty old paths.

It could have been Camp Four, a Whillans memorial, a legacy to last.

But now just a park, no soul, no reason, no more excuse for our endless freedom.

Above:
Our bivi on the Frendo - typical Brits, took too much kit.

Photograph:
Simon Laker



PEAK ROCK – A TRIBUTE TO GILES BARKER

When climber turned caver, Giles Barker, was killed in a caving accident in 1992, the manuscript of his history of Peak District climbing might have been lost forever. But thanks to the tireless efforts of Phil Kelly and Graham Hoey – and a supporting cast of more than 150 climbers – Giles's book was completed and published to critical acclaim late last year. Here, Graham gives us an illuminating account of how Peak Performance became Peak Rock

By Graham Hoey

My first involvement with the project, which ultimately was to become Peak Rock, began in the early 1980s. Originally called Peak Performance, it was the brainchild of Giles Barker who asked me to comment on draft versions of his early chapters. I was more than happy to do so, for Giles and I were kindred spirits who had both immersed ourselves in the history of climbing, particularly in the Peak District.

We first met in 1976 when I arrived at Sheffield University and joined the infamous SCUM, probably the hardest university mountaineering club in the country at that time. They were an anarchic but very able bunch, snapping at the heels of the cutting edge climbers, and were responsible for many early ascents of the country's hardest routes in the seventies and early eighties. Not many clubs held their first freshers' meet on Gogarth where it was almost literally sink or swim for some attendees.

Giles and I worked on the BMC Peak District guides and were both to become active members of the Climbers' Club by the early eighties. We climbed together on many occasions and it is fair to say that, with Giles, there was never a dull moment. Eventually we went our separate ways, Giles moving initially to South Wales while I remained in Sheffield. We continued to meet occasionally and it was at one of these meetings that Giles told me about the Peak

Performance project.

He had been interviewing a number of leading climbers, past and present, and was writing a book about the history of climbing in the Peak District. Having realised the enormity of the task he asked if I would like to help. I jumped at the chance and before long the first chapters arrived describing the exploits of James Puttrell and his friends. The detail was simply astonishing and it was clear to me that this was going to be a hugely ambitious project.

I heard little more about Peak Performance after that. Giles, after suffering from injured elbows, gave up climbing and took up caving. After investing thousands of hours in the project, fitting it in around his work and play over a number of years, he decided to take a break and the book was placed on the back burner. There is no doubt that Giles would have returned to it later in life, but he died tragically whilst exploring a cave system in Spain in 1992.

I can still remember standing in the windswept graveyard in Hathersage in the late summer of that year and deciding that one day I'd try to get Giles' book finished – as a fitting tribute to him and for his family and friends. But the best laid plans of mice and men. Twenty years of BMC guidebook work, a family and a demanding job, meant it was something I just couldn't contemplate. On a couple of occasions I tried to interest others in carrying the baton, enthusing

Left:

*Jonny Woodward
on the upper arête of
Beau Geste.*

Photograph:
Ian Smith



about the material Giles had accumulated, but no-one picked it up.

Then, in the late 2000s, I mentioned the archive material to the filmmaker, Paul Diffley, of Hot Aches and he was interested in the audiotapes of Giles' interviews. I put him in touch with Giles' family, but heard nothing further. It later transpired that Paul had done the fantastic job of digitising all of Giles' recordings before passing them on to the Mountain Heritage Trust – nice one Diff!

Two years later I received an e-mail from Phil Kelly. I didn't know Phil, but knew of his climbing activities in Lancashire. He was working on a web site archiving rock climbing material and wanted to meet to discuss digitising some of the Stoney New Route books. We met a number of times in the café above Outside in Hathersage and it became clear to me that here was a person absolutely dedicated to preserving the history of climbing, someone who would be willing to put in the huge time and effort required to take on Peak Performance, so I mentioned it to him. It was like lighting the blue touch paper and standing back.

Unbeknownst to me, Phil immediately met with Giles' family and obtained their agreement in December 2010 to complete and publish the book. He then contacted the Mountain Heritage Trust who had the recordings and the draft manuscripts, together with what at first appearance looked like a nearly completed script that finished around the early 1980s. Phil pitched the 'finishing the book' project to the MHT's Maxine Willett, who sought and obtained the approval of the MHT trustees.

On closer inspection of the manuscripts, however, it was clear that there were at least three full chapters missing. Phil typically carried on digging and discovered that CC member David Ball (son of the esteemed and sadly missed CC stalwart Mike) had some old disks from Giles' Amstrad word processor. Unfortunately, when these were converted, it

Left: *Dave Pegg on the first ascent of MaDMAn.*
Photograph: *David Simmonite*

transpired that parts of the discs had degraded and much of the later material was lost or presented as a sequence of random characters. Occasionally there'd be part of a route described and the fun was trying to guess the route from just a few details. The three missing chapters remained elusive however, and would need to be written from scratch.

It was at about that time that Phil let me into his secret and asked me if I'd like to come on board, something he would have had great trouble stopping me from doing. And so, about three years ago, we began.

The first job was to get a patron for the project. The choice was obvious – and when Ron Fawcett was asked, he did not hesitate to give us his support. The next task was a little less straightforward. It involved collating all the various forms of the chapters: hand written, typed and digital, and then deciding on our approach. Phil took on the task of working on the early years and writing the missing chapters prior to the 1980s. I worked on completing the book from 1980 to the present day, although later on we were both to work on the whole book.

In addition, we brought in climbers to help frame, write, comment on, or edit the new chapters: climbers who had been closely involved in specific developments in the Peak over the past thirty plus years. This included Mark Pretty, Keith Sharples, Mick Ward, Steve McClure, Jon Read, Andi Turner, Adam Long, Percy Bishton and Tom Randall. It's fair to say that without their input the book would have been much the poorer.

Early on it became clear that a significant amount of editing and rewriting was needed. This was necessary not only to enable the book to be a reasonable size and weight but also because, thirty years on, it was possible to view the events of the sixties, seventies and eighties with a clearer historical perspective, particularly the role of aid climbing and the advent of sport climbing. On top of this, Giles' manuscripts raised many questions and led us to undertake our own research during which we came across new material which we

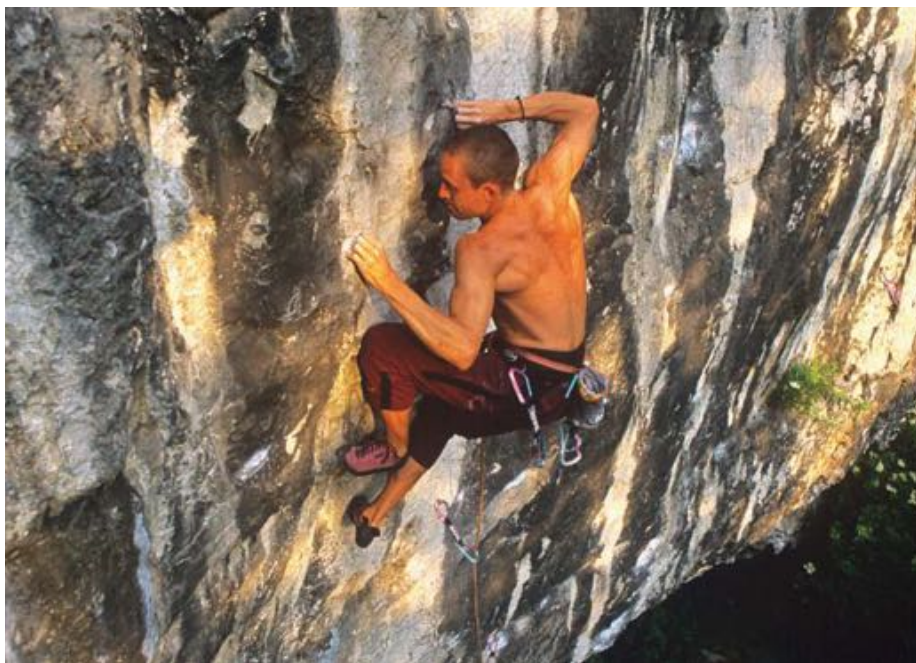
felt had to be included.

Part of this research involved conducting a new series of interviews. A lot of climbers had made history since Giles last put pen to paper and we also wanted to re-interview a few of the original subjects. In many ways these interviews were the most enjoyable part, covering an amazing age range of 21 to 103 (Frank Elliott). Listening to the views (now often well-considered over time) of some of the world's greatest climbers was absolutely fascinating. The transcripts of these alone would probably be a best-seller, although possibly controversial – who hates Yorkshire people and boulderers, who 'fessed up about using his butter knife to 'clean' routes, and which E9 leader claimed he wasn't actually mad after all? I even got to spend a couple of days climbing with Antoine Le Menestrel – how cool is that?

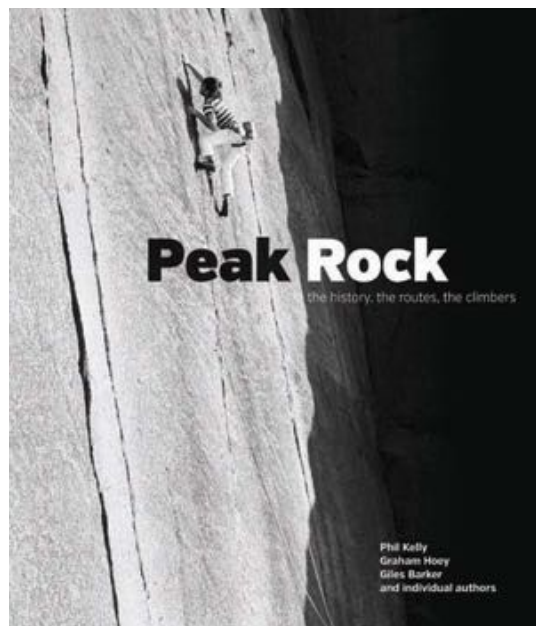
Not all the chapters were easy to write: The chapters including: Peter Harding's later routes and John Dunne's *Parthian Shot* being the most difficult. Considerable research went into these and we hope

Below:
*Steve McClure on
Mutation.*

Photograph:
Keith Sharples



Right:
*The cover of Peak
Rock: The history,
the routes, the
climbers.*
By: Phil Kelly,
Graham Hoey and
Giles Barker
Vertebrate Publishing



that the finished text provides fair and balanced accounts. If nothing else, it might cause more evidence to surface.

One of the biggest parts of the research was obtaining photographs. Hundreds of hours were spent scouring guidebooks, magazines and journals in order to identify the best, most historic shots. We then had to track down the photos and photographers to obtain their permission. Finding Greg Griffith's bouldering cartoon (last seen in a skip outside Stoney Café) was hard enough, but chasing down Greg took us three weeks and a huge chain of forwarded e-mails until the power of the internet won through.

In fact, the internet was a key tool in our research. For example, Phil eventually managed to find archive material in America belonging to a relative of an early pioneer. Within a few minutes the material had been scanned and received. Every climbing photographer we could think of was contacted and asked if they would allow us access to their collection. On every occasion bar one the photographers (many of whom were professionals) gave us free access to their work,

even spending weeks tracking down material.

Regular CC guidebook contributor Carl Ryan, who had lost his photo index, spent countless hours searching through some 60,000 photos eventually coming up with the goods just two days before the book was sent to the printers. A number of photographers went out especially to get images for us. Some of the photos are well-loved classics but others have never been seen before and will hopefully take your breath away: one from an attic in France, another resulting from a chance meeting with an unknown climber at Stoney, another only following the persuasive efforts of a climber's 'better half'!

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the process was the sheer generosity of everyone we approached – in excess of 150 climbers. I think it helped tremendously that the project was a non-commercial one, with no one receiving any payment or expenses for their work and with all proceeds from the book going to the family of Giles Barker and the MHT.

Furthermore, it seemed that everyone felt that now was the time for this book and it just seemed to develop a momentum of its own. Even after the book was at the printers we were being offered more amazing material from climbers keen to support the project who just happened to be in the right place at the right time in history. It would be a shame if we weren't able to include these in a revised edition.

Finally, there was the little matter of financing. Fortunately the BMC and Vertebrate Publishing saw the potential of the project and stepped in to support it. Fittingly the launch became a charitable event supported by the BMC, Vertebrate Publishing, Arc'teryx, The Climbing Works, Cordee, 5.10 and Wild Country with all proceeds going to Climbers Against Cancer and the Mountain Heritage Trust.

Was it all worth it? At the time of writing this article, the book hasn't yet reached the shops, but the 300 limited edition copies sold out within a week or so. I think it's the best thing I've ever done in climbing and I'd like to hope that it is seen as a fitting tribute to Giles and to Peak District climbing.



Left:
*Pete Whittaker on the
first ascent of Loose
Control.*

Photograph:
David Simmonite

OLD MEN & THE SEA

As the confidence of youth evaporates with the years, older climbers sometimes find it is less the actual route that takes its toll, than the relentless need to be on your guard. This is especially so on trad sea-cliffs – where even finding the start of the route can be a challenge. Here Dick Turnbull joins a team of veterans on the high seas in search of adventure and lost youth.

By Dick Turnbull



Climbing in Scotland is always special. Many of the greatest crags in the UK are north of the border and all of them have climbs whose pedigrees are unsurpassed and are top of the 'must-do' list for ambitious trad climbers. Most of these routes are venerable, well-known and extensively documented, but now some of the most exciting and spectacular are more recent and precariously positioned on the savage Scottish periphery, far out to sea, practically in the middle of the wild North Atlantic.

These days most of my rock-climbing is done with a group of (maturing) friends known loosely as 'the Grumpies'. The Grumpies are a varied group of climbing senior citizens based around the Peak and Sheffield who spend the winter climbing indoors at the Edge with occasional forays outside on 'good' days to remember what real climbing is all about before scurrying back again into the security of 'plastic-land'!

As the summer comes around two factions develop, one heads off to the various bolted quarries of Derbyshire, each more dismal than the last, and the other group heads for the edges to do battle with the fabled grit. Each faction also organises the odd trip away either to gorgeous sun-soaked limestone 'bolt-holes' or to the much-visited trad UK venues of our youth. New brilliant bolted venues seem to crop up every year but it is rare for a new exciting trad destination to be proposed.

Last year a select few from the Grumpies trad section teamed up with a similar group of anchorites from Scotland (Scrumpies?) to make a trip to the farthest periphery of Scotland's Outer Hebrides to attempt some of the great new classics that have been developed over the last 20 years on the wild outlying islands of Pabbay and Mingulay. I couldn't make that trip which eventually fizzled out in the face of northerly gales, but this May I was deemed old enough to be included in the team for another attempt.

A long drive north saw the ageing motley team assembling in Oban before the gangway of the 'Lord of the Isles' ferry. It looked like a 1950s attempt on one of the great Himalayan giants with a vast pile of baggage waiting to be loaded aboard, except there was no team of worthy Sherpas to make the gear disappear and conjure up steaming cups of 'chai'! Meanwhile the 'Sahibs' were too busy queuing to get their Senior Citizens' discount to worry about any 'chai'.

The journey out was a fabulous voyage north in splendid high pressure sunshine and light winds, through the Sound of Mull (endless lectures on the 'great caldera' from our amateur geologists) before turning left and pushing west across the Sea of the Hebrides to the delightful haven of Castlebay on Barra, our hub for access to Pabbay and Mingulay. Here we swapped a ship for a boat as we threw our tents, gear, and food aboard before carefully passing our much more valuable and clinking supplies across to be diligently stowed swaddled in sleeping bags and duvets.

Below:
*Some old faces and
some new faces on
the Boy James.*

Photograph:
Dick Turnbull



Left: John Jones on the third pitch of Silkie (E3).
Photograph: Dick Turnbull



Donald Macleod, with his family as crew, pushed off in our reassuringly robust transport, the 'Boy James', complete with eight of us and our mound of gear, food and other necessities. The inshore shipping forecast has several categories of 'sea state' from 'slight' to the scary 'very rough' culminating in the frankly terrifying 'high', 'very high' and finally 'stupendous'! We were lucky, and happy to get away with 'slight'.

The hour-long trip south past the fabulous beaches of Vatersay, then Sandray, the peat island of Lingeigh and finally Pabbay took us into the spectacular white sands bay of Mingulay. Here Donald had cunningly left a mooring buoy with a small tender complete with outboard as a landing craft.

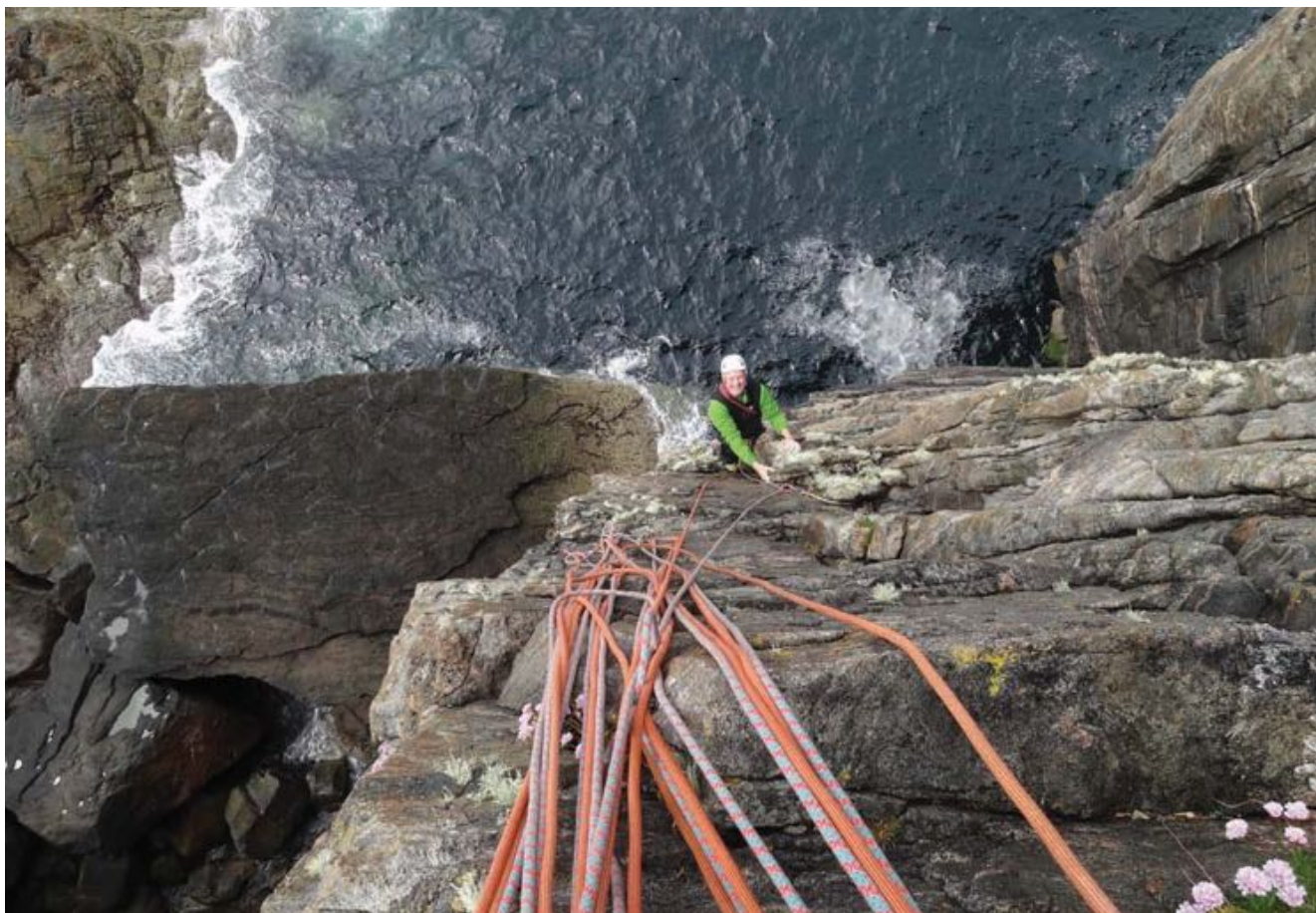
The landing spot was straight onto the rocks to the south of the beach, close under the steep bank leading up to the campsite. Perched on the rocks were gathered a group of young climbers ready for the transfer back to Pabbay or Castlebay. What followed was a melee of action as our gear was slung ashore (not the fragile cargo), and theirs back into the 'Boy James'. We were carefully handed ashore, as befitting our age and appearance, whilst those going the other way leapt down into the boat with youthful exuberance – swine!

A steep slog followed as we moved all our expedition of gear and supplies up the tricky bank to the well-positioned campsite close by the old school house. This is now a hostel reserved for the RSPB volunteers staying on the island, who carry out research on the myriad of seabirds thronging the cliffs ringing the island.

These days it seems that a semi-permanent camp exists every summer as climbers have woken up to the possibility of the island's great crags. As usual the potential for conflict between bird conservationists and climbers is ever present. So far so good as everyone has brought an unusual level of common

Left: *The long abseil in to The Priest – typical of the access problems.*

Photograph: Dick Turnbull



sense to the issue. Now we were firmly ensconced on the island in brilliant weather and surrounded by a wealth of great routes, all our excuses had run out. Time to go climbing.

Climbing on the islands requires a 'plan of action' – no simple 'let's go cragging' mentality as you need an extensive extra array of gear just to get to the bottom of the climbs. Tide tables, 100m non-stretch abseil ropes, descenders, ascenders, shunts, prussik loops, rope protectors, not to mention the extended rack you need just to fix your anchors at the top of your route. You have to remember/re-invent your abseiling skills as you never do it on Stanage; do you put your security

prussik above the brake or below it: where do you put the rope protectors; then you need faith.

Being 'of a certain age' suddenly exposes you in these situations. Your long experience sets you up nicely when you are fixing up the anchors and checking your rack, but then the moment arrives – and suddenly you hesitate, 'Do I really want to do this?'

Strangely this is often the crux. You realise that your commitment, which you have never doubted in the past, is uncertain. It takes you by surprise and your initial reaction is to dismiss the doubts, clip on and get on with it. Now it becomes really important that

Above:
*Dick Turnbull on
the first pitch of The
Priest (E1).*

Photograph:
John Jones



Above:
*John Jones on the
third pitch of Sula
(E2).*

Photograph:
Dick Turnbull

all goes well as the simple self-confidence of youth has long since left the building and any problem can knock you back, opening the taps that drain the confidence and certainty from your system.

Fortunately we hit the crag running. Well, more like 'slowly progressing'. We were headed for Dun Mingulay and we were in the right place (no thanks to the guide book). The abseil anchors were solid, the weather was great, the sea calm enough and somewhere down there we've seen a good ledge above the sea.

So off I go, focusing hard on getting it all right and desperately assessing where to put the rope protectors.

Sliding slowly seawards (no soldier-boy antics for us) gives me a good chance to check out the rock and the holds as a bit of beta never did me any harm. Wow, this looks very promising – the rock is rough and solid and the holds look BIG but it's steep, actually really steep and the gear looks a bit trick-some. Oh bugger, I'm at the ledge, but it's not my pitch next – phew! Jonesy comes down, slowly like me, taking in the views, puffing out his cheeks, looking pretty impressed by the surroundings. He's on the sharp end and seems composed – actually a bit too quiet. I can see him slyly checking the belay and being 'cool man', looking

up, trying to visualise the pitch – I can see his body swaying as he anticipates the moves. ‘Go on, get on with it’ and off he goes, climbing smoothly, powerful as usual, a bit of hesitation here, a quick look down, and before I know it he’s on the belay. So much for nerves.

Now it’s my turn. *Sula* is supposed to be E2 5b but actually it feels OK, more like E1, great! Brilliant rock, good gear – wow, we’re actually enjoying it! My pitch is harder (of course) and the gear tricky to place in the bottoming, sea-worn cracks. It’s steep and intricate, no real line but up a bit, left a bit then edge back right along a thin break fiddling in small gear but at least it doesn’t look as hard as the beetling rock above the next stance.

We’re cooking on gas here and from my snug little belay I can happily push John on up into the overhanging zone above. He’s trying not to look worried, but from where I am it all looks pretty forbidding. He steps up and carefully rocks over to stretch past the blank bit just above the belay and then he’s into the steep stuff. I’m impressed – he doesn’t look like he’s going to be 70 this year – how come he can still do it so effortlessly. Soon all I can see are his heels and then he disappears with occasional garbled shouts – is it fear or joy? Then my go. After the tricky blank bit I quickly see how the old bugger can do it. It’s covered in jugs. No wonder he looked so smooth. This is great – everything we came here for, committing, exhilarating and do-able. Fantastic!

On top we realise with trepidation that we have a whole week of this ahead of us.

After that first route we upped the ante. E2 was OK so let’s get on an E3. We may have been deluded, but the rock wasn’t and *Silkie* E3 6a was harder and not helped by the guidebook saying ‘step left’ at the crux when they really meant step right. Yet again the top pitch made up for everything – steep, solid, but

Right: John Jones on the first pitch of *Spring Squill* (E1).
Photograph: Dick Turnbull





Above:
*The Grumpies meet
the Scrumpies.*

Photograph:
Dick Turnbull

covered in jugs and again Jonesy romped up it not even stopping for photos.

Then back to the fleshpots of Camp Mingulay despite there probably being time for another route. Let's take it easy we say to each other – two great routes is fine blah, blah, blah. There was a time when we wouldn't finish until it was dark but we are older and wiser (?) now.

This became the pattern for the week that followed. No early starts but no real hanging around dodging the issue. It didn't take very long before we became somewhat jaded, losing what was left of that youthful push that gets you out early every day. Were we feeling our age? The weather started to crack up and threaten drizzle – a great excuse for being just a bit more careful than we might otherwise have been. We were getting tired with all the traipsing over rough ground, lugging 100m abseil ropes and searching for crags that were difficult to find from the top.

The truth was, our nerves were stretched by the daily level of commitment required to find the crags;

identify the routes; rig the ropes; and then commit to going down into the unknown. After day two one of the Scrumpies' abseil ropes was knackered. The rough rock was lethal, even with low stretch ropes, getting the protectors in the right place was really tricky. Were we getting just a bit too old for all this?

Looking back on the trip we probably didn't do ourselves full justice but every day we managed to get on the routes we wanted – and got up them. The 'island' grading is such that if you can find and get on the routes you choose, you will probably get up them as the rock and the climbing are mostly very accommodating. To make the most of it, you mustn't weaken.

After a couple of brilliant days on Mingulay it was time to get to grips with Pabbay. The 'Boy James' duly arrived after our radio summons. Bird watchers, bird counters and climbers were being ferried about on the Hebridean equivalent of the Circle Line. It was actually more like catching a bus than having a bespoke taxi as we were just a small part of the human traffic between the islands taking advantage of the short summer window of opportunity.

Camping on Pabbay was just the same as on Mingulay – no midges, noisy corncrakes and snipe drumming, but with a new set of companions this time a bunch of enthusiastic students from Edinburgh. John and I had been on Pabbay 11 years earlier and climbed the great island classic of *Prophecy of Drowning* – now downgraded from E3 to E2 after we had done it. Gordon and the Scrumpies made a bee-line for it whilst John and I slipped off to see if the smaller Pabbay crags were any good. The Banded Wall only gives you 2 pitch routes but was definitely 'up-to-snuff' with more brilliant rock, soaring overhanging pitches, great holds, but still desperate to properly identify where to abseil from.

Our choice was the recommended *Spring Squill* E1 5b and we went down in trepidation as you can't see the base of the crag from above and the sea was breathing heavily below. John swung in from the overhanging abseil to my sea-level perch only to swing



Left:
*John Jones on the
second pitch of Silkie
(E3).*

Photograph:
Dick Turnbull



Above:
*Mind the gap – all
change as the old
guys leave and the
young guys arrive.*

Photograph:
Dick Turnbull

out again as he set off up the overhanging traverse to start the first pitch. Somewhere, half way up the pitch, he succumbed to an unusual fit of indecision. These crags do that to you as you have to make decisions to climb into areas that you think 'I can't do that' or is it 'I don't want to do that – again!'

So he did the sensible thing and took a stance. As it happened the rest of the route was OK but after topping out we took the hint and went off to get photos of the others on the fantastic *Prophecy of Drowning*. Seeing the others dwarfed on the incredible rock architecture of the Great Arch galvanised us for one last push before we went home in two days time. John and I had already done *Prophecy* so we knew the abseil and how to rig it. If it didn't rain tomorrow we would do *The Priest* E1 5b as our last route on these fabulous crags.

For once we could see where we were going. Down, down, down right to the end of our 100 metre abseil rope to a tiny ledge just above a quietly menacing sea. It was drizzling and the rock was just-more-than-damp. If this was winter it would be the thinnest of verglas and that didn't help our confidence. John led away up

the steep right edge of the long slab of the first pitch. The ominous atmosphere and the surrounding soaring rock architecture were oppressive but the holds were positive and the moves reasonable and in an instant John was calling down for me to get a move on. This place is extraordinary. It might be dark and dreich but the climbing was magnificent. The exposure is formidable but the rock is so accommodating that you can actually enjoy it.

Then, my turn. Quite where to go was the first problem as everything around me looked forbidding. This was the crux pitch mainly as the route now edged rightwards with no obvious line into the ever-steepening area of grooves and roofs.

Even though the rock was rough and grippy, the thin veneer of damp made the climbing tense and absorbing. A couple of false starts then bingo, it all fitted together and a couple more quick pulls had me onto a hanging slab beneath the final diagonal corner. This was sumptuous climbing; rough rock, incut holds leading up the right facing ramp system ever stretching out over the zawn 200ft below. The overhangs above gave some protection from the clearing drizzle but barred the way to the top. Just as it looked desperate a kind leftwards traverse side-stepped the roofs and with one awkward last pull I was sitting on the grass and sea-pink sward looking over the wild sea-scape towards America.

Jonesy followed easily, of course, and that was that. Gordon and the Scrumpies returned from their abortive venture to the Pink Walls and slid down our rope for a quick ascent before it was time to get back to pack. They said it was no more than Hard Severe! Yeah, yeah! More like HVS 5a before the 'Island Factor' kicks in.

Our journey back was a relief. Time to go home – frankly we were tired but elated that we had had a brilliant trip to one of the great trad climbing destinations in the UK. If we had been 30 years younger we would have done twice as much but, of course, like wise old owls our purpose was quality not quantity – well, that's our excuse.

Right:
*Mike Banks and
Tom Patey on
Rakaposhi.*

Photograph:
*Royal Marine
Museum*



OBITUARIES

Derek Walker. 1936 - 2013

Mike Banks, MBE, Polar Medal. 1922 - 2013

Richard (Dick) Isherwood. 1943 - 2013

Ian Heys. 1945 - 2012

George Bintley. 1932 - 2013

Ray Harris. 1956 - 2013

Alex Jones. 1930 - 2013

DEREK WALKER 1936 - 2013

Derek Walker was probably one of the best known climbers in the UK; not so much for his climbing achievements, though they were considerable, but for his contribution to the Climbers' Club, the Alpine Club and the British Mountaineering Council. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1960. David Medcalf summarises his careers in education, climbing and climbing bureaucracy; Iain Peter describes Derek as a colleague and climbing friend; Mike Mortimer writes about climbs with Derek over many years.

Derek was born in Widnes (which was then in Lancashire) in 1936, and went to Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby where Hugh Banner and Alan Blackshaw were also pupils. After National Service, Derek followed Banner to Bristol University where he read History.

After graduating, he became a teacher and, after short spells in schools in the north west of England, in 1966 he took up the post of Head of the British School at Punta Arenas in Chile, moving there with his wife Hilary. He returned to the UK in 1971, when he joined Helsby Boys Grammar School as a History teacher. He worked at Helsby, where he used the proximity of Helsby Crag to introduce many students to climbing, until taking early retirement in 1989. Fortuitously for Derek, and for British mountaineering, the role of General Secretary at the British Mountaineering Council was about to become vacant as Dennis Gray retired.

The BMC in the late 1980s was going through a sticky patch. Its credibility was low with climbers and, equally importantly, with the Sports Council who provided funding. Derek said later: "The key things were to improve our credibility, reinforce the element of trust in the organisation, launch a more professional advertising and marketing campaign to gain more members and sell more BMC insurance and services." Under his leadership the BMC did just that. He oversaw the move

to new offices in a converted church at West Didsbury and negotiated the BMC policies on issues such as competitions and bolt-protected climbing. Between 1989 and 1994, the number of individual BMC members doubled to 10,000 and the number of affiliated clubs increased from 260 to 312. He retired as General Secretary in 1995, but returned as President in 1999.

Derek's mountain career began with hill walking in the early 1950s, but his life changed in 1956 when his National Service took place with the RAF Mountain Rescue Team at Valley, North Wales. He discovered rock climbing and formed a long-lasting friendship with the Team Leader, Johnnie Lees. His first Alpine season was in 1958 and he became President of the Bristol University Mountaineering Club in 1959.

In 1960 he was on the first British expedition to Cordillera del Paine, the spectacular range on the edge of the Patagonia icecap which has some of the wildest weather in the world – this was the start of a love affair with this part of the world. In the next few years he returned on further expeditions, taking him back to the Towers of Paine and to the Fortress.

Through climbing he became a friend of Don Whillans. Their first route together was when Derek seconded him on the first ascent of the Direct Finish to *Carnivore* on Creag a'Bhancair in Glencoe in 1962.



Following Whillans' death in 1985, Derek chaired the memorial committee which led to the acquisition of Rockhall Cottage, at the Roaches, as the Don Whillans Memorial Hut. In 1991 Derek himself led *Carnivore* and commented: "I had all the benefits of modern gear and remain in awe of the Villain's enormous strength and drive back in 1962". Later he set himself the target of climbing all the routes in his friend Ken Wilson's iconic book *Hard Rock* – an activity he described as "puerile ticking", but over the years he succeeded in his quest, climbing all except *The Scoop* on Strone Ulladale which he believed Ken had included as a 'stopper'.

Derek joined the Climbers' Club in

1960. He became a Committee member in 1965 and served in various roles before becoming President in 1984. He was made an Honorary Member in 1988. He had joined the Alpine Club in 1964 and was elected a Vice-President in 2003.

Following his retirement from the BMC in 1995, he travelled across the world, often with Hilary, climbing and trekking in the Himalaya, China, South Africa and back in Patagonia. As Mike Mortimer recounts below, he did some great Alpine rock climbing in this time. Derek also enjoyed sharing in the new-routing boom around Tafraoute in Morocco with Mike and their old friends Joe Brown, Trevor Jones, Les Brown, Claude Davies and others. Some of Derek's first ascents in Morocco are now classics.

Chris Bonington says "He was a wonderful diplomat, very inclusive, always had time for everyone and never had a bad word for anyone. He was devoted to the climbing club scene, took an active part in club business and was a very effective President of the Climbers' Club. He's a huge loss; a person loved and respected by all."

We offer our sympathy to Hilary and their two daughters on their loss.

By David Medcalf

I first met Derek back in 1989 when he was appointed as General Secretary of the BMC. Chris Bonington was the President at that time and Derek came in to replace Dennis Gray. Derek would be pleased that I managed to get a date into my first sentence – he always liked his dates. The BMC has always been quaintly old fashioned in that the staff are called officers

– and the Officers that Derek inherited were Bill Wright, Roger Payne and myself. Hard to imagine a group who were less officer like.

Derek had a tough job. The BMC back then, was a pretty fractious organisation where life consisted of a series of interminably long and frequently bad-tempered meetings. The complicated committee structure made it very easy for there to be little in the way of progress. We officers were not convinced that a retired schoolteacher was what the organisation needed. What some saw as democracy we saw as the establishment's way of stifling development and change.

How wrong we were! Derek turned out to be an inspired choice as General Secretary – we always called him the "Gaffer" which, although he looked a bit uneasy, I think he secretly quite liked. He had great support from Chris Bonington, from Ian MacNaught-Davies and of course from Paul Nunn. Derek wasn't just a retired teacher; he was a climber first and foremost and, most importantly, he knew about climbing and he understood climbers.

In a time long before the Internet, websites and Facebook, Derek understood the need to be inclusive, to communicate and to build consensus. He used these skills to change the face of the BMC and with it the face of the British climbing. There was no big bang or seismic shift; instead there was a steady hand on the tiller and gradual improvement across the board (and lots of long evening meetings). The all-important senior clubs were wooed, and gradually the atmosphere changed and we started to make progress.

He re-established good relationships with the Sports Council and the

Government; he steered the organisation through the minefields of competition climbing and bolts. It was under Derek's supervision that BMC became the natural home for competition climbing and climbing walls and so a potentially disastrous split in the climbing community was avoided. He also helped Bill Wright get the Access fund established – bolstered by donations from the sale of BMC, CC and FRCC guidebooks. All these things were agreed through Derek's influence and contacts.

Of course, only part of his job was actually about climbing. It was Derek who was convinced that the BMC needed to reform and become a limited company. The production of the Memorandum of Understanding together with the political support of all parts of the BMC took three long years of hard, dedicated work. In 1993, at the BMC AGM, the organisation was "incorporated" and the BMC was set up for the future – not just as a body dependent on grants and subscriptions but as a trading entity. Like most good ideas, it seems so obvious looking back.

The other big achievement for Derek was the move from Booth Street East in Manchester to Burton Road in West Didsbury. It is hard to imagine now just how bad the old Precinct Centre was – cars were regularly broken into and stolen, the office had to have special reinforced plastic windows to stop them being broken and the contents robbed. During one evening meeting a sneak thief was disturbed as he made his way around the office, on his hands and knees, nicking wallets out of jackets hanging on the backs of chairs!

Again, it was Derek's wide network that

helped make the office move possible – many properties had been examined but it was Claude Davies, a climbing friend of Derek's, who identified the converted church that is now the home of the BMC.

However, it was not only as a paid bureaucrat that Derek served the climbing world. He was President of the CC from 1984-87 and President of the BMC from 1999 -2002. During his BMC Presidency, his support for the work of Alan Blackshaw did so much to further the BMC access cause.

Derek was also the Chairman of the Mountain Training Trust, the charity that manages Plas y Brenin from 2002 until 2005. I was Chief Executive under him and he was the perfect Chair – offering cautious support for me and my various initiatives, combined with wise counsel whenever it was needed. He was always a good man to go to for advice. He helped to make Plas y Brenin a place for climbers run by climbers.

And, of course, he was a friendly face in the staffroom where he was always keen to talk with the instructors about their climbing exploits. He really liked to be amongst climbers.

As well as the time we shared working, we always tried to make time for climbing; winter climbing in the Cairngorms and numerous routes at Tremadog and in the Pass. We also ventured further afield – some great routes around Chamonix and a ski touring trip to the Dauphine. He was always the perfect companion.

Climbing with Derek was very much "old school". When I climbed *Carnivore* in 1990, he took great delight in reliving his first ascent experience with his great mate Whillans in 1962. Poorish anchors and

a shoulder belay whilst Don climbed the steep, direct finish above with no runners. Derek didn't think that he was a bold climber – that was just how it was for good climbers of his generation.

As you will understand, we were not just work companions, Derek became a good friend. Climbing has lost a great ambassador, a tireless and selfless servant and above all a genuinely nice man who made everyone's life that little bit brighter.

By Iain Peter

Derek was a man of many parts and also of contrasts. He was a family man and yet an enthusiast who climbed most weekends and had many holidays in the Alps. He was a very talented rock-climber, naturally strong and with a very neat and efficient technique. In many ways he was an extremely lucky man: for instance, who else lived next door to a girl named Hilary? He was a very experienced fell-walker, capable of gruelling long-distance treks such as the Welsh 3000ers. He undertook backpacking trips, sometimes in a team, but always with Hilary, in many parts of the world including the Alps, Patagonia and the Himalaya. He was an accomplished skier who loved winter holidays with friends and especially with his daughters and grandchildren.

Derek was as well known and liked in the climbing community as just about anyone. Here is a little story to illustrate this. Six years ago the Alpine Club celebrated its 150th anniversary with a series of events in the Swiss Alpine Resort of Zermatt. Conditions were not particularly good for mountaineering and so Derek and I set off to climb the

Breithorn, the easiest 4000-metre peak in the Alps. It is little more than an easy walk from the Klein Matterhorn cable car station but my problem was getting Derek from one end of Zermatt where we were staying to the other where the cable car started. It seemed that Derek knew almost everybody we met on the way and felt the need to spend more than pleasantries with each of them.

I first met Derek in 1971 when he was camping in the idyllic mountain village of La Berarde in the Massif des Ecrins with regular alpine partners Trevor Jones and Bob Allen. Three weeks of wonderful weather meant much climbing was done but there was ample opportunity to get to know each other in the intimate confines of the tiny campsite.

On returning to England my wife Jane and I were regular visitors to the Walker household (we were living in Liverpool at the time) and he introduced me to the delights of climbing at the crags of Frodsham and Helsby. The proximity of these to Derek's home enabled him to maintain a high level of climbing fitness well into his sixties; he was able to reach Frodsham crag on foot and one or two hours climbing solo on this was enough to exhaust anybody. At the time he was just settling down to his new job as history master at Helsby Grammar School and on Wednesday afternoons he had started to take sixth-formers out climbing on the local crags; more than a few of these followed in his footsteps, taking up the sport seriously.

Over the years I joined Derek and his family on several summer holidays but with one exception we did not climb together in the Alps until 1986 when we found

ourselves camping above Cortina close to the Tre Cima di Lavaredo. Derek was with Trevor Jones and I with Marjorie. We decided to climb as a rope of four across the difficult and very exposed traverse that is the centrepiece of the Cassin Route on the North Face of the Cima Ovest, especially as Trevor had borrowed a pair of my boots several sizes too large for him. This went well but very slowly (it was Trevor's alpine swan song) and inevitably we had to bivouac, albeit at the end of the difficulties. A not entirely comfortable night was made more bearable by Trevor's imitation of Climbers' Club worthies.

After that we immediately moved to Civetta where two years previously Derek and Hugh Banner had climbed the formidable diedre on the North Face, known as the Phillipp-Flamm; this was Derek's first really big route in the Dolomites, quite an achievement as neither of them had done an alpine route for more than a decade and they were far from fit. Riccardo Cassin was the instigator of four great routes in the Alps; with the Cima Ovest Derek had now ticked off two of these and the S.E. Ridge of the picturesque Torre Trieste was to be the third. Not only is this route consistently difficult for 700 metres it has a long and complicated descent so we were very pleased to be back in the valley before evening. Derek was so keen to have a full set of Cassin's great routes that he rang the Torino refuge to enquire about the conditions on the North Face of the Jorasses but was told that the Walker Spur was plastered with fresh snow.

Six years later with Derek now in his mid fifties Marjorie, Hilary, daughter Jane and I were back in the Dolomites for a

brief visit – just as well as there was no accommodation available anywhere. In between routes we were forced to bivouac in car parks. We were both in good form and climbed the Comici on the North Face of the Cima Grande and the Spigolo Stobel on the Rochetta Alta di Bosconero without using direct aid and in very respectable times.

A year later we planned to climb the Walker Spur but Derek broke an ankle whilst training on his home ground so that was put off for another year. Unfortunately he was not destined to complete the quartet as the following year on our one and only attempt we narrowly missed disaster when a young and inexperienced party just managed to get in front of us and then proceeded to pull off a large block that just brushed past Derek. The debris left behind seemed to preclude further progress and the way back down was now being raked by stones from above. My half-serious suggestion that we might need to call for rescue was treated with incredulity – the thought of the General Secretary of the BMC being lifted off by helicopter was not to be contemplated. We continued down to the Chamonix valley and arrived at nine in the evening having been on the go continuously for 21 hours.

I think that it is important to mention briefly a unique episode in climbing history. Derek became part of a team exploring the crags of the Moroccan Anti Atlas. This included Claude Davies, Joe Brown, Les Brown, Pete Turnbull and Chris Bonington. You might call it a "Last of the Summer Wine" team. More or less single-handed this bunch of grandfathers initiated the development of a major climbing area with routes that are beginning to be

recognised as "classics". After a visit last November I was able to report that many of their routes had become increasingly popular with visiting climbers from all over Europe.

1996 saw us back in the Dolomites for what was to be our last great climb together, this time on the South Face of the Marmolada the highest mountain of the Dolomites. Our proposed route was a relatively modern route first climbed by the redoubtable Alessandro Gogna in three days. This has 1100 metres of difficult climbing including some suspect rock in the upper half. Derek was now sixty years old and we knew that if we were to have any chance we would have to cut our gear down to the minimum – neither of us were able to climb hard with rucksacks and so we walked up to the hut with our climbing equipment in supermarket shopping bags. What a sight we must have made. Sometimes ascents are spoilt by the presence of others but that day we seemed to have the whole mountain to ourselves and that made it a very special experience.

The afternoon storm that signalled a break in the weather served to spur us on, not having any foul weather gear and we reached the top with enough time to descend the decaying glacier on the north side and back to our wives in the Alleghe campsite that evening.

In subsequent years we continued climbing together in the Dolomites but that was the end of big routing for the two of us. We did our last route there less than six months before his untimely and shocking death that leaves not only his family struggling to come to terms with the loss.

By Mike Mortimer

MIKE BANKS, MBE, POLAR MEDAL 1922 - 2013

Mike Banks was a Royal Marine, excellent rock climber, powerful alpinist, high altitude mountaineer, journalist, travel guide, adventurer, would-be politician and more. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1949. Here two people who knew him well, the photographer John Cleare, and CC guidebook editor Bob Moulton, reflect on the life and times of a most remarkable man.

I first met Mike in the 1960s. Approaching the Alpine Club with Tom Patey one evening, a slight, neat-moustachioed figure came striding towards us – dark suited, bowler-hatted, rolled-umbrella-wielding. ‘Ha ! A classic civil servant!’, I remarked. But Tom rushed forward to embrace the fellow. It was Major Banks, serving out a desk posting at the Admiralty and dressed for the part.

Mike’s profession was soldiering. Born in Chippenham, after early years in Malta where his father worked, he returned home for his schooling. War came, his elder brother in the RAF was killed over France, and in 1942 Mike was commissioned into the Royal Marines. After service on the battleships *Malaya* and *Valiant*, he was posted in 1944 to 42 Commando in Burma to fight in a sequence of fiercely contested amphibious landings on the Arakan coast.

Though reluctant to talk of the war, he asserted that he owed his life to the atomic bomb – heavy casualties had been expected on the next assault, aborted at the last minute upon the Japanese surrender.

Mike always said that the bloody aftermath of battle dispelled any idea that war was fun, but peacetime must have seemed an anti-climax. Thus in 1948 he volunteered for the Commando Cliff Assault Wing. He learnt to climb in Cornwall, Wales and Cyprus, to mountaineer in the Cairngorms and Norway, became an instructor and put up

his first new routes – *Raider’s Route / Giant Steps* at Chair Ladder (S - 1949) and *Commando Crack* (VS - 1950) at Sennen – climbing of course in tricouni nails with cotton ropes – and was elected to the CC in 1949. After three excellent alpine seasons and a memorable night ascent of the Route Major with Richard Brooke, he joined the AC in 1951.

After other postings, the now Captain Banks returned to the CAW as Commanding Officer, where among his talented crew were Surgeon Lt. Tom Patey RN, Alan Blackshaw and Barrie Biven. He found time to climb a dozen or so new routes on various West Penwith crags, often in partnership with his brilliant Sergeant, Zeke Deacon. Of these *Ding* (VS) and *Dong* (S) on the Bosigran Face are probably best known, though most notable was the solving in April ’57, of the long-standing problem of the *Green Cormorant Face* (originally XS-A2) – first of the imposing Great Zawn walls.

Naturally Mike had been much involved in Services Mountaineering, initially during a lengthy series of Naval expeditions to North Eastern Greenland, where his swift reactions and cool head twice averted tragedy; once when his Weasel tractor plunged into a crevasse and again when in winter, miles from base, his lonely tent was destroyed by fire. He also bagged several virgin summits and was awarded the Polar Medal. Then In 1958, leading a strong British/Pakistani Forces

Expedition, Mike reached the summit of Rakaposhi (7788m) with Tom Patey, a peak he’d attempted privately with Hamish MacInnes two years earlier. It was a major prize and earned an MBE. In 1962 his small Joint Services team became the first all-British party to summit Mount McKinley .

Conventional military duties intervened. In Aden in 1964 as a 45 Commando company commander, Major Banks saw fierce action against Arab insurgents in the desert mountains of the Radfan, where his intrepid night assaults on heavily defended mountain tops led the commanding general to write that success was due to “...Banks’s skill and free-spirited approach to orders.” Later, Mike was to write that “perched on my summit I had time to reflect that in peace there is no finer place than the top of a mountain; in war there is no safer.”

Mike had always been outspoken, something of a maverick, a free thinker; indeed it was his suggestion that the CAW should take on the additional role of Arctic and High Mountain Cadre they have today. Nevertheless, eventually warned by his Colonel that his mountaineering activities would earn him no promotion, Mike aged 47, retired from the Service in 1969.

Initially he tried politics, standing twice unsuccessfully in the Liberal cause, meanwhile climbing in the Logans and on Ellesmere Island and enjoying good routes



in Britain, the Alps and Peru with such friends as John Hunt, George Band and the Westmacotts. Now Mike fell in with Mountain Travel, the adventure firm run by the Californian climbers, Allen Steck, Barry Bishop and Leo LeBon, leading the first commercial dog-sledding trips in Greenland for them before moving on to assignments in the Himalaya, the Tien Shan and East Africa.

Back home, with his wife Pat, he operated luxury trips alternating classic hikes with celebrated sights such as Stonehenge and famous hostelries such as the PyG. Always the gentleman, Mike's perfect manners, clipped British accent, moustachioed military bearing, and fund of well-researched stories, endeared him to his rich American clients.

Mike had written six books and was writing for publications ranging from the national broadsheets to the outdoor

press, when he persuaded Saga Magazine to sponsor Golden Oldies expeditions. Attempts in 1989 and '91 with 'senior citizen' teams including Alan Blackshaw, Joss Lynam, Paddy O'Leary and Mike Westmacott, on Jaonli (6632m) were beaten by weather and the Garhwal earthquake which obliterated the final ridge above their top camp. Successful Saga Expeditions followed to Greenland, the Tien Shan, Kinabalu and the Australian deserts. One Saga exploit was an ascent of the Old Man of Hoy in 1990 when Mike was 67, a feat he repeated twice more for charity, becoming surely the Oldest Man of Hoy in 2000.

Although Alzheimer's was creeping up remorselessly, Mike continued to climb on his garden traversing wall and at Bosigran, and even after being widowed and moving into care in 2004, he made frequent visits to the Bristol climbing wall with

chums. Unfortunately, ill health foiled his final biographical attempt; with his wry humour, entertaining turn of phrase and unexpected sensitivity, it would have been enthralling. He was already slipping away when we celebrated his 90th birthday a couple of days before Christmas and he died six weeks later.

Characteristically reticent about his considerable achievements, he once claimed: "I've made the first ascent of some 35 mountains, but few are worth repeating."

By John Cleare

Mike was halfway in age between my father and myself and it was through his being in the Marines and his friendship with my father that I got to know him; my first memory of him is when I was a schoolboy and he took me for a drive in his green Austin Healey along Portsmouth seafront. A few years later, when I first started climbing, he took me for a weekend to the Count House and among other climbs he took me up Bosigran Ridge (also known by some as Commando Ridge in recognition of its use by the Cliff Assault Wing). I climbed with Mike off and on over the years, mainly in Devon and Cornwall. For much of the time he was living in Devon, and as Chairman of the Royal Navy Mountaineering Club he readily accepted my offer to edit the second edition of the Devon guide in the mid sixties, my limited experience of climbing in the county being offset by youthful enthusiasm.

It was through the Marines that Mike started climbing, at the relatively late age of 26, with the Cliff Assault Wing, which

was set up at St Ives in the late 40s, and this led on to his climbing throughout the UK, particularly in Scotland where he was based for a time, and then in the Alps and the Himalayas and elsewhere. It was also climbing that gave him a new career in the

trekking/tourism business after he retired from the Marines. He told me, as one of his executors, that it was for these reasons and because of his love of West Penwith, he was leaving a bequest in his will for a significant proportion of his estate to go to

the club to be spent on the Count House. Mike's association with the Count House will serve as a reminder to the many CC members who knew and climbed with him and enjoyed his excellent company.

By Bob Moulton

RICHARD (DICK) ISHERWOOD 1943 - 2013

Dick Isherwood was a scientist, humanitarian, climber and explorer throughout his life. In his twenties he was a very accomplished rock climber in the UK and the Alps. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1965 and over the years he wrote a number of articles for the Journal. His career later took him around the world, mostly in the Far East, when he focussed on mountaineering in the Greater Ranges. Three of his friends Geoff Cohen, Richard Owen, and Martin Sinker pay tribute to the man and his achievement.

Although he had not lived in the UK for over 40 years, Dick Isherwood was an active member of the Climbers' Club and a regular contributor to the Journal. He was born in Lancashire in 1943 and attended Manchester Grammar School, where he excelled both academically and as a cross-country runner. I was in a class several years below his and I well recall our chemistry teacher one day going into rhapsodies about a brilliant student in the sixth form, the finest he had ever taught – none other than Dick.

At Cambridge Dick studied Natural Sciences and did a postgraduate diploma in agronomy. Perhaps more importantly, he discovered rock climbing. His first job on leaving university gave him a company car and had him visiting agricultural test plots around the country. Conveniently, he could arrange for Friday's test plot to be on the road to Wales or the Lakes, regular visits that gave him the chance to reach the top levels of climbing ability. As related in his excellent Climbers' Club Journal article 'Climbs of My Youth' he

quickly progressed to the leading edge, with early ascents of Cloggy's Great Wall and Anglesey's Big Groove, plus pioneering routes such as *The Sword* on Carnmore Crag. His Alpine career progressed too. A summer trip to the Dolomites was frustrated by bad weather, but succeeded on one quality route, the Aster Diedre on the Corazon di Brent. In 1968, with Mike Kosterlitz, he climbed an important new route on the north-east face of the Piz Badile. They had intended to follow the existing Corti-Battaglia route, but ended up doing a *direttissima*. Many years later Dick was delighted to discover that their route was number 100 in the Rebuffat-style book 'Hundred Best Climbs in the Bregaglia'.

Dick's career in exploratory mountaineering began in 1964 when he joined an overland expedition to Swat Kohistan led by Henry Day. They managed to lose all their ice axes on the journey out, but nevertheless proceeded to the mountains, and accomplished some respectable ascents (the ice axes were

eventually replaced through the good offices of Colonel Buster Goodwin). In 1969 Dick returned to Pakistan to lead an expedition to Thui II in the Hindu Raj range. This signalled the start of a decade of activity in the Greater Ranges. Dick moved to Bangkok in 1969 and to Hong Kong in 1972. From Hong Kong he organised, together with Jack Baines and Leo Murray, an expedition to the Carstensz Pyramid in New Guinea. Not only did they succeed in an early re-ascent of this then remote peak, but Dick also soloed a new route on the north face of Sunday Peak, of which he gave a typically hair-raising account in the Alpine Journal in 1973. The following year Dick joined Rob Collister on the first ascent of Parbati South (6227m) by a very impressive rock route.

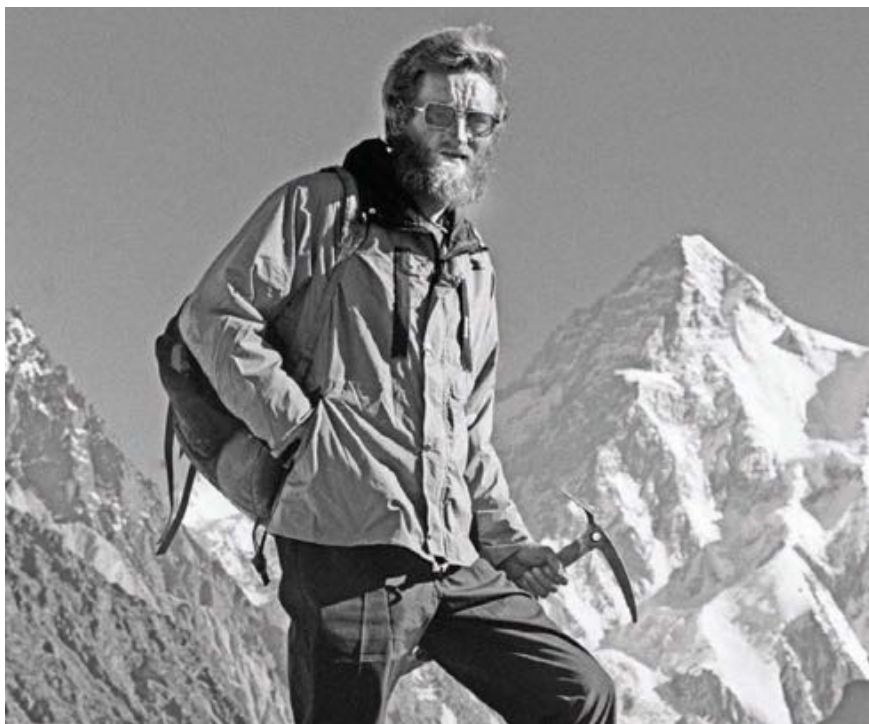
In 1974 Dick took part in a joint services expedition that made the first ascent of Lamjung (6983m) in central Nepal; and in 1976 accompanied by Ron Giddy and Dave Holdroyd he succeeded in gaining access to Kanjiroba via the

difficult Jagdula Khola and reached the virgin summit (6883m) with only Sherpa Pemba for company. In 1978 Dick and Rob Collister made a bold two-man attempt on Annapurna II but were beaten back by weather and snow conditions.

In the early 70s he worked in Hong Kong as an agricultural representative of Cyanamid, with a brief to support research and trials of pesticides in a variety of Asian countries, then he took up a post offered by the UK Overseas Development Department to manage a UK-aided farm at Pakhribas in eastern Nepal. This gave him a hugely enjoyable two years in which he enlarged his knowledge of Nepali, did a vast amount of solo and accompanied trekking in the Arun & Barun valleys, as well as enhancing his appreciation of all things Nepali, especially raksi and chang. The agricultural project developed very successfully under his leadership, but at the end of two years, feeling the need of a change, he tried his hand at leading treks for the American trekking company Mountain Travel. Although he was clearly a popular and highly competent trek leader, Dick was too interested in exploring byways for this to become a career choice.

With a need to change career Dick self-funded an M.Sc. in Community Medicine at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in 1980-81, and then took a post back in Asia with Save the Children. He had married Janet in 1981 and in Bangladesh they adopted their daughter Marion, followed by a son, Sam, adopted in Nepal a couple of years later.

A serendipitous meeting with a former colleague resulted in Dick rejoining Cyanamid in 1985. After a spell in Singapore, he and Janet relocated to New



Jersey in 1987, though he kept a foothold in UK by purchasing a house in the Duddon Valley that was very conveniently situated right next to the pub! Over the next decade Dick's work took him regularly all over the world supervising agricultural field research trials, but his family responsibilities allowed less opportunity for climbing expeditions. The family went on camping/canoeing trips every summer in the Adirondacks and to various Canadian lakes and rivers; trips which got progressively hairier until the teenage kids called a halt!

Having retired in 1999 at the age of only 55, Dick entered a new phase of his adventurous life. The family relocated to Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula of north-west USA, where remote

mountain and sea kayaking trips were on the doorstep. Dick took to making winter canoeing trips in Baja California and also canoed in the Arctic, making a attempt to circumnavigate Bylot Island in two-man kayaks. They got half way round but were driven back by adverse weather.

Throughout his life Dick was a keen naturalist, and on treks was rarely to be seen without his binoculars. He was particularly interested in birds and an abortive climbing trip in the Gilgit area in 1975 was put to good use when he wrote an article for the Himalayan Journal: Birds of Swat and Gilgit. To trek in his company was a privilege; it felt like having a personal wildlife handbook. Even if he couldn't identify a plant or animal he could usually have a good stab at the family

it was related to; and of course he noticed far more birds and interesting plants than most of us.

A slightly strange feature of Dick's climbing life was how he changed from being a top class rock climber in the 1960s to lacking confidence on technical ground once he moved to the Far East where he had no opportunity to climb regularly at a high standard. But he was always amazingly strong when it came to carrying heavy sacks for long days over difficult ground, and my diaries of our trips together frequently stress that he 'made 95 percent of the steps' and 'I would never have made it without his steps'.

He was quite highly strung in the sense of having a huge amount of wound up energy which could occasionally be released in flares of temper. These bouts were never in my experience directed at fellow climbers; obstructive porters or bureaucrats were the targets of his rage. Long years of working and travelling throughout the developing world, but especially in south Asia, induced in Dick strong emotions regarding the incompetence of bureaucracies – not that he was much more patient with the European variety. Despite his occasional rants, his attitude was always leavened with humour and his lack of self-regard meant that his impatience could be taken at face value – the wish of a highly intelligent and competent man that things should be managed better for the sake of everyone, rather than the selfish desire that things should be organised better for his own benefit.

Dick added a formidable intelligence and an eclectic range of interests to his enthusiasm for travel to remote places.

When holed up in a tent in bad weather he might be well into a serious book on English history, or he might engage in thoughtful and wide-ranging discussion of politics and economics, as well as touching on his agronomic areas of expertise. He was really a delightful companion. The climbing world has lost a splendid character and a very fine mountaineer.

By Geoff Cohen

Richard Owen's memoir of Dick Isherwood awakens many vivid memories from nearly fifty years (cripes!) of armchair slumber. Supremely firm of purpose, Dick's approach to his climbs included meticulous route research, followed by long-legged and eager surges up the mountainside to reach the first stance. Stragglers were treated to his searing shout of "Come on!", as every lost minute mattered to Dick. His drive and enthusiasm were also applied to good effect in building up club membership during his year as CUMC Secretary, to the dizzy heights of over 150 from a typical baseline of under 100. As Treasurer that year I had to collect the money and, together with Dick, be then subjected to the searching inquisition of the Senior (in every sense) Treasurer, vortex expert and AC member A M Binnie of Trinity - there having been an embarrassing financial mishap in the CUMC some years earlier. Dick's entrepreneurial membership efforts included arranging to give a lecture on climbing at Homerton College, at that time women-only. He duly talked us past the porters and into the College, only to find an assembled audience amounting to just three. As his strategy had included time for setting up an assignation at a pub

for the following evening, he kept the talk short and moved on to Plan B.

Early on at Cambridge we climbed at a similar standard and had memorable days in the Lakes on Dow Crag, White Ghyll and elsewhere, almost all of the routes in the beige cloth-covered FRCC guidebooks seemingly within our scope. Dick planned and led the 1965 CUMC Alpine Meet, first to the Zillertal, where our large party rapidly became snowbound for several days in the Kasseler Hutte. Finally escape was made in deep new snow with a traverse of the Grosser Löffler. Funds were running low and a trip down to the highest farm to buy a single enormous cheese kept the party going for a few more days and more routes. The diminishing meet then moved on to the Biolay campsite in Chamonix; the weather continued poor but Dick led us up the N Ridge of the Peigne, and onto several lesser rock routes. Finally better weather was found in the Civetta where he and I managed a long (3500 feet) route on the West Face of the Cima Della Bussazza, the main difficulty was finding a meaningful relationship between the rock topography and Pete Crew's 1963 guidebook.

Back in England the world of work loomed. Exciting things were happening in Wales in the late 1960's, and the CC New Climbs Bulletins and the Crew/Whybrow typescript Gogarth guide (price 5 shillings) provided a seductive draw to head for Ynys at weekends. Dick's climbing standard and ambitions had by this time far outstripped my own, but I was lucky to find a role as occasional second for his forays to Gogarth where he did several second ascents, also to Cloggy. On Gogarth in particular I have starkly-etched memories of following

him up scary vertical vegetation to reach routes on the upper tier, of a particularly rough sea traverse to reach and climb *Jaborandi*, and also of an early ascent on the crumbling flakes of the *Red Wall*. Time spent in Dick's company was always entertaining, and almost always demanding and memorable. I feel enormously lucky to have known and climbed with him.

By Martin Sinker

My first recollections of Dick at Cambridge are of someone I was hearing lots about but was still failing to meet. He was a year ahead of me, and his early climbing reputation had been gained with exploits such as those outlined in *Climbs of my Youth* (CCJ 2008-10). I had initially dithered about climbing, although I'd already done a fair amount, but when it became clear that rowing was going nowhere, climbing started to look like my thing. This coincided with the triumvirate of Nick Estcourt as President, Mike Wilkin, and Dick being the leading lights in the university mountaineering club. Everyone knew about Nick, and Dick and I were by then well acquainted, thanks to meeting on a winter visit to the Cairngorms. Mike had earlier made an impression when I watched him nonchalantly back and foot his way through the roof trusses at Tony's Cafe on the A1, on the way back from climbing in Derbyshire.

Dick and I were on the Committee of the CUMC in our final year, he as Secretary, and we both quickly distinguished ourselves on the academic front by having rows with our Directors of Studies - he for a supposed lack of diligence

in working for his Diploma, I for arguing with my supervisor, which I had always thought you were entitled to do on matters of opinion and style. We both fought back successfully, he by taking the bold and none too tactful line that "I'm sick and tired of being got at by you" which was quite something for the '60s - but he got his Diploma all the same.

He was an outstanding Secretary, having the rare gift of being able to combine his own high level climbing goals with the demands of running the club, all aided and abetted by his never flagging energy, and his speed and fluency with the written word.

Around the same time, a number of us went into training as Bob Keates's support party for the infamous King Street (pub) Run. On one occasion this got Richard into an altercation in one of the pubs with a well known anti-student local by the name of O'Malley. Voices were raised and there were sounds of splintering furniture, but we made a timely retreat and danced a jig, led by Richard, on the pavement outside. Bob successfully completed the run soon afterwards.

Another incident, which again turned out to be harmless, was his encounter with the law in Innsbruck at the end of the 1965 Alpine Meet, as mentioned in COMY. We were a large and boisterous party and eating out, but there was a dispute over the bill, and Dick ran out of patience. This resulted in him raking the front window area of the restaurant with a large handful of small change, and the Polizei were soon there in their wailing Beetles and took him away. I was apprehensive about trying to recover him in the morning, but common sense and colloquial German prevailed,

there were smiles and handshakes all round, and he was free to go on payment of a modest accommodation charge.

But let it not be thought that Dick's student life was only about immense energy, graded lists of climbs, super intelligence, and brushes with authority. He also found huge satisfaction in his interactions with people, and in the quiet and reflective companionship which this brought. I first realised this when it so happened that the two of us were finishing our finals at the same time and in the same place, and we had a golden opportunity to talk and celebrate together. Much later, too, he deliberately sought me out at a CC Dinner that neither of us knew the other was attending, we talked late, and the 20 years since our last meeting might as well never have happened. These were privileged occasions which I still recall with great pleasure.

Back then, too, there were light hearted trips to The Wall, a steep, brick built retaining structure in a disused chalk quarry at Cherryhinton, where top roping was the order of the day, you came back covered in chalk, and Richard always did at least 50% more routes than anyone else. There was one bracing spring morning when he and I stood together in St John's, and smiled quietly at the gamekeeper's rubber decoy duck which someone had rammed with precision down onto one of the lightning conductors on top of the massive chapel tower, and which pirouetted gracefully whenever there was a breeze.

I salute the memory of a good friend from those distant times, and of one of the most complete people I have ever met.

By Richard Owen

IAN HEYS 1945 - 2012

Ian was a Lancastrian who began his climbing with his brother and friends around Burnley, before working and climbing in Scotland, Canada and Derbyshire before finally settling in Cumbria. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1994. Here his daughter Amy gives an affectionate tribute.

It was characteristic of Ian that on learning of his wife Anne's diagnosis with cancer, his response was "It looks like we have a big fight on our hands". That was in October 2011 and Ian had just returned from Sicily where he had enjoyed the sun-drenched crags and quality climbing. He spent the last year of his life caring for Anne as she fought her illness. During this difficult time Ian himself was diagnosed with cancer, deteriorating rapidly before dying near his home in west Cumbria. Sadly Anne lost her battle too and died at home in January 2013.

A lifelong love of the outdoors began whilst Ian was a teenager. He started climbing with his twin brother Peter near their home in Burnley. Their first routes were over the border in Yorkshire's Ilkley Quarry. Having an adventurous,



perhaps even reckless, streak, Ian was drawn throughout his life to new places and the next summit. Climbing with a close group of friends, "the Burnley Lads", Ian developed his footwork on grit and limestone. He was so impressed by his first trip to Stanage, he woke Pete up after arriving home late on a Sunday night to tell him "You will never believe it, kid, there's gritstone for as far as you can see!" He did the first ascent of *Midge Bite* on Blue Scar with Jack Firth, and *Caberate* in Goredale with Pete. The Burnley Lads hitched, climbed and drank together as they travelled further afield and began to discover North Wales and the Lakes. Here Ian found some of the wilder places that remained a huge part of his life from that point on. After finishing an apprenticeship as a joiner, Ian moved to Scotland, working all over the highlands and climbing at every opportunity.

In the late 60s Ian joined a number of other British climbers and moved to Canada. Drawn to wide open spaces and adventure, he climbed in the Rockies and the States from his base in Calgary. Canada was very important to Ian and he returned there many times to visit Jack and Georgina Firth, helping them to build their house in Canmore and in later years climbing in the canyons of Carrot and Cougar Creek with Jack and the younger members of the Heys and Firth families. Always keen for an adventure, Ian ran the Rundle Ridge with Jack from Banff to

Canmore in 11 hours.

After returning to England in the early 70s Ian moved to Glossop where he married Anne. It was here where he met and climbed with Al Parker, Bob Hughes and many others. Ian climbed with Al most weekends for the next few years, he was always keen to pack in as many climbs as possible come hail, rain or shine.

Ian and Anne moved to Anne's native Cumbria in 1975 and Ian divided his time between raising a young family, renovating the family home and getting out on the crags. He began climbing with Jim Loxham and Bill Young and did many of the Lake District classics including *White Wizard*, *Cruel Sister* and *Ten Tears After*. Ian then, like many climbers, began fell running completing the Bob Graham Round and supported many others on their attempts. In the early 1990s Ian taught his daughters how to climb, although his advice was limited to two things, "watch your feet" and "put a jam in". It was around this time that he joined the Climbers' Club and the family went on many family meets to the Count House. Ian continued to climb until 2011, discovering the pleasure of Spanish, Greek and Italian bolts.

Ian was as happy on hard climbs as he was on easy classic routes. He would enjoy talking to people about birds, or wild flowers or Burnley Football Club. He loved climbing and never grew tired of its variety or the beautiful places it took him.

By Amy Heys

GEORGE BINTLEY 1932 - 2013

A gifted rock climber and talented Alpinist, George Bintley joined the Climbers' Club in 1973. As a native of the Wirral, Helsby was a passion for him, and it was here that he made friends with fellow sandstone devotees Derek Walker and Hugh Banner. Here his long time friend and climbing partner from his Wayfarer days, Ben Stroude, celebrates the life of a man for whom the word 'clubbable' might well have been invented.

With the death of George Bintley in April 2013, the British climbing world has lost one of its most active, best-known and popular characters. For nearly 60 years – apart from an interlude for sailing adventure during the 1980s – his cheerful and friendly face could be found almost every weekend in one or other of the barns, bothies, club huts or pubs in which climbers congregate. He seemed to know everyone; yet he was no extrovert, he never put up a new route, he wasn't a writer, he had no connection with education or administration. He was just a thoroughly nice guy who loved the mountains.

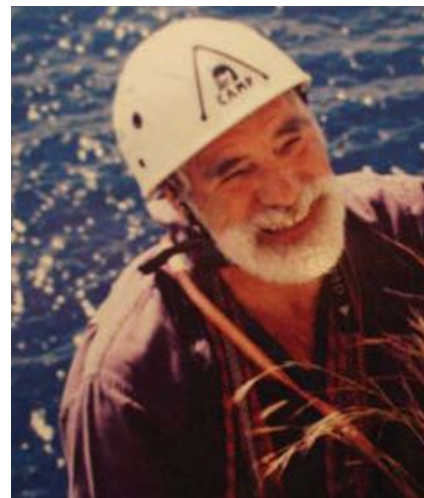
George began his climbing career in the 1950s with that slightly controversial Wirral-based club known to outsiders simply as "the Wallasey". This was one of those groups of townies – the Bradford Lads, the Creag Dhu and the Rock & Ice were better-known examples – who went to the hills to escape authority, to climb hard, to booze when funds allowed and to make merry. There are folk tales of what – depending on one's age and outlook – some called high spirits and others hooliganism, and in which George certainly played his part. Yet only a few years later he was invariably welcomed with open arms by two of the supposed victims", Sid Cross and Chris Briggs, of the ODG and Penny-Gwryd hotels respectively, and it's hard to believe much harm was done. It was in the Wallasey MC that he met Cora Baker,

a climber whose good-natured tolerance helped to sustain a happy marriage which ended only with George's death.

In 1958 George traded up, with other ex-Wallasey refugees such as Roger Salisbury and Alan Minett, to the respectability of Merseyside's senior club, the Wayfarers.

There, with a wider circle of climbing partners, particularly Allan Stuart, he climbed consistently at VS/HVS and occasionally harder (much more difficult to achieve then than now) and ticked off a long list of Welsh and Lakeland classics. It was Allan who introduced him to the Alps, and although George invariably suffered from altitude sickness on the first route or two of each trip, they completed an impressive list of middle-grade routes, including the North Ridge of the Peigne, the Traverse of the Drus and the Frontier Ridge of Mont Maudit.

I joined the Wayfarers in 1966, and George and I immediately clicked. He was a superb climbing partner, with a calm confidence and unflappability which more than made up for my nervousness. He was much the better rock-climber but, by chance, I was more confident on snow and ice, so that in the Alps we became quite a useful team and thoroughly enjoyed knocking off the classic mixed routes at Chamonix, the most boast-worthy being Route Major and the Innominate Route on Mont Blanc. However, while retreating from the East Face Direct on the Requin in



1978, we stupidly slipped on the steep slope of afternoon slush below the rocks and, but for the good fortune of hitting an isolated boulder some 500 ft lower, would have undoubtedly ended up very dead on the Mer de Glace, a long way below. George, though much battered, very gallantly crawled to the hut to initiate my rescue.

That episode put an end to alpine climbing for a time, but George had long been an admirer of fellow-Wayfarer Bill Tilman, of mountaineering and sailing fame, and he sought, in admittedly pale imitation, to learn a new set of ropes so that, during most summers in the 1980s, he was to be found more often at sea than in the hills. In pursuit of mountains near the sea we did once reach northern Spain, but found that it just took too long. Home

waters were more productive and in one memorable six-week cruise from the Wirral to the Hebrides and back, George knocked off no fewer than 25 Munros/Corbetts as he went. The “sea interlude” did not last, but Munro-bagging did and he duly completed the list; a feat made the more impressive as he had never owned or driven a car, and consequently became an expert on Scottish public transport. Not that he had ever normally suffered from a lack of lifts; as an electrician at the local shipbuilders he had been known as “the only Sparks at Lairds

with six chauffeurs.”

Despite such distractions it was always rock-climbing which was George’s first love, and as a summer evening habitué of Helsby crag – much more important as a training ground then than now, in these days of indoor walls – he had befriended some of the Climbers’ Club “Cheshire set”, particularly Hugh Banner and Derek Walker. They introduced him to the CC and a yet wider circle of friends. Later, with a promiscuity which was really just a tribute to his popularity, George was induced,

additionally, to join the Fell & Rock CC and the Merseyside CC. As he had long been an Alpine Club member as well, it can be seen how the word “clubbable” might have been especially coined. Few men holding down a full-time job in industry, and with a close and loving family, can have used their weekends and limited holidays to better advantage. His life was full of action, adventure and kindness to others, and the climbing world is much the poorer for his passing.

By Ben Stroude

RAY HARRIS 1956 - 2013

A quiet but determined climber, Ray Harris was a powerful and tenacious figure on the sharp end of the rope capable of pulling out big leads on hard routes. An engineer by training, he had a meticulous and carefully calibrated approach to the sport. He joined the Climbers’ Club in 1996. Here are recollections of some of his close friends, Steve Jenkins, Eric Sinclair, Derek Miller and Peter Shepherd.

I met Ray in 1999, very soon after I moved to Bristol. We both worked for Airbus, though he and I never worked directly together and when we went off climbing there was a rule not to discuss work.

One trip stands out, amongst many great ones. We visited the Pennine Alps in 2007 and I know that he really enjoyed the trip – it often cropped up when he reminisced. We were very lucky with weather, the snow conditions and the decisions that we made. We had none of the usual sitting in valleys waiting for the weather to improve. Neither of us were completely fit and I know we both had moments where we were really exhausted, but not wishing to let each other down, we managed to

keep going – taking turns leading a pitch or kicking steps. Few words needed to be exchanged as we instinctively knew when to take over.

I do remember one moment when he showed his displeasure with me – I got a stern look & a sigh - after hours of slogging through deep slushy snow up to a hut. I had managed to forget half the food.

We climbed seven 4000m tops in that two week trip. The highlight was a traverse of the Breithorn ridge – a really memorable day. However, the Ober Gabelhorn proved to be a peak too far. There were many factors - we got lost, the snow had not frozen, it was getting late in the day, big cumulus clouds were gathering. After a really big effort, we decided to retreat



before we got beyond the point of no return. It was a difficult call, as Ray hated failure, but he was a good decision maker (though he often deliberated for too long).

As they say: “When the going gets tough”. You could really rely on Ray – more than on most. He was a tough character mentally and physically. I mean that in a nice way, of course. He was a great guy and

good friend; I feel lucky to have known him and will really miss him.

By Derek Miller

Ray died from cancer of the oesophagus on 2 February 2013. His passing was a great shock to all of his friends, most of whom didn't even know he was ill until a week before he died.

I first met Ray at Yarm Grammar School in 1972. We were the only new kids in the 5th year and quickly became friends. Ray was already hooked on climbing, having learned from his brother Brian before they moved from Harrogate. Keen to find someone to climb with, Ray borrowed Brian's rope, swami belt and a few slings and introduced me to the rock.

We first visited the crags of the North York Moors, enhancing our limited skills with occasional references to Alan Blackshaw's book 'Mountaineering'. Later that same year Ray's parents had booked a holiday in Colwyn Bay – en route they dropped us off in Llanberis for two weeks. It was a brilliant trip - we spent our time ticking off as many routes as possible in our new 'Three Cliffs' guidebook. It was here that I learned to dread all routes with pitons. Ray had a pathological hatred for pegs and was almost incapable of climbing past one. He would dither about for hours trying to get past it without clipping it (and certainly not pulling on it). Right from the start, Ray had a strong sense of the code of climbing ethics which he never let go of.

Ray's natural ease at being on the crags and in the mountains became obvious during the trips to Gogarth, Skye and Glencoe that followed. He wasn't put off by bad weather or difficult route finding and seemed to have a natural eye for a

line. Decision making could sometimes be frustratingly slow, but Ray always seemed to get it right. Over the following years work pushed us in different directions, but we still managed to fit in trips to the Alps and Norway.

By Steve Jenkins

My first encounter with Ray was across a meeting table when we were both working on the 'super-jumbo' aircraft, the Airbus A380, during the initial development and design phase. He was a Lead Engineer, and I was developing the technical life cycle and economic model for the wing. I had been in the climbing, mountaineering and adventurous sports circle for a few decades, but as we discussed and argued technical points, I never guessed that Ray was a 'hard man' adventurer.

Bizarrely, although we worked for the same company and lived in the same town, it was several years before we met in the hills. A mutual friend arranged a rock climbing week in the Picos de Europa; when we arrived, from our various directions, I found that Ray was to be my climbing partner. I was apprehensive, but once the introductions were made and the climbing started, my perceptions of him changed from 'can he really climb?' to one of utmost respect in his ability and technical prowess.

That was back in 1992 and Ray and I have had many similar adventures since then. His mountain and seafaring navigation was uncanny and he always seemed to know by instinct whether a route would 'go' and where it went. He showed self-discipline and restraint when a route was problematic and his tenacity

would kick in as he endeavoured to succeed rather than relinquish the lead. Demonstrating true mental control and ability, he could assess the situation within the boundaries of safety and forge a way forward, making him the adventurer that he was on both land and sea.

Ray was never verbose, preferring to maintain a presence and contribute to the conversations only when he had a point to make and something to say. He invariably added value and it was always worthwhile listening to him. He loved the outdoors and had many personal achievements as a climber, mountaineer, sailor or simply as a trekker over the high mountains.

Most of us scheme and plan a 'big' adventure and Ray was no different. For a while, he had cast a distant eye on Greenland where he hoped to find a peak, sail out, climb it and sail back. Sadly this was not to be.

By Eric Sinclair

My climbing with Ray started in 1999. Over the years since then we had some great times in the UK, in Europe and on trips to the States. Ray led us up some great hard classics, such as *Right Wall* in North Wales, *Wraith* at Sharpnose, *Crime and Punishment* on the Gower and *Darkinbad* at Pentire.

I recall one incident, from July 2007: Ray fell off the start of *Sea Green* at Sharpnose and broke an ankle. Undaunted, he prussicked out, hopped up the slope, walked two miles out with the aid of a stick fashioned from a gorse bush, took me home then drove himself to hospital for treatment. Hard man.

By Peter Shepherd

ALEX JONES 1930 - 2013

Alex Jones was a long-standing member of the CC, having joined in 1953. He worked hard for the Club, as a Committee member and then as Chair of the PSC for 16 years. He was a Vice-President from 1987 to 1990 and was made an Honorary Member in 1995. Bob Moulton recalls their days on the PSC and Alex's wife Amanda adds some personal details.

Alex was Chair of the Publications Sub-Committee (PSC) from 1978-94, a 16-year period which saw the publication of 35 guidebooks and supplements. At the start of that period, things weren't going well with the CC Journal. There was a lack of continuity and long delays between publications. Responsibility for the Journal was transferred to the PSC, which oversaw its return to regular publication (eight in the 1980s) thanks to the efforts of first Geoff Milburn and then Ian Smith. Although Alex was not involved in the detail of the work being done, there were some strong personalities on the PSC and chairing the meetings and handling its communications with the main committee was not an easy task.

We used to meet four times a year at Ken Vickers's house in Leicester on weekday evenings. Alex and I usually travelled up in his car from London, (first a BMW and then a Porsche, which helped as we were

often running late) and I got to know Alex very well both through our work on the PSC and through the time we spent in the car together. This was before the days of the Internet and emails and the meetings used to go on until late into the night, which is not a criticism of Alex's chairing, as we had a lot of business to cover. In the summer months I used think myself lucky to get home before daylight.

Thus we spent many hours in the car, and conversations with Alex were never dull. We discussed many subjects, and I learnt a lot about his life. I only climbed with him once, after a weekend guidebook meeting with other voluntary guidebook publishers in the Lakes. In fact, during the time that I knew him he was spending more time skiing than climbing, but he was a regular at CC and AC social events.

By Bob Moulton

I don't need to tell CC members that my husband, Alex, was a one-off. He was a very special and highly intelligent man and a complete lover of life and all its adventures - climbing, sailing and skiing, not to mention those adventures experienced while partying and socialising! As Bob Moulton notes, Alex became very enthusiastic about winter sports, especially skiing, though a highlight was his toboggan descent of the Cresta Run - he kept his helmet as a proud trophy.

He was also a keen sailor in his

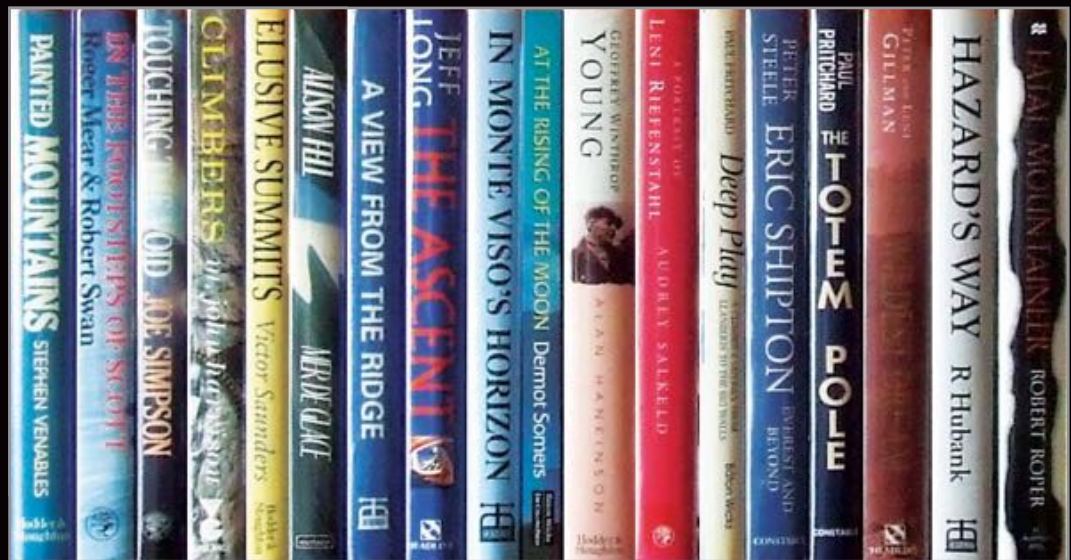
venerable X-boat Puffin which gave him years of pleasure. When Puffin, built in 1911, reached her centenary, Alex was presented to the HRH Princess Anne at the Cowes Regatta as part of the celebrations. Puffin's new owner has completely refurbished her to look smart and "as new". Just before she sailed at Cowes this year, we were able and very proud to fulfil Alex's wishes - to have his ashes scattered on the Solent from Puffin. It was a very moving day for us all to see his beloved yacht take him on his last sail.

He graduated from Oxford in physics and then, after a term as a naval meteorology officer, he was involved in the launch of colour television. Later, with colleagues including Ian McNaught-Davies, he started the first computer timeshare business and he remained in the computer world for the rest of his working life.

Alex and I had an amazing 14 years together, sharing so many joys and so much fun. We brought together our families and friends and, thanks to his endless generosity and love of gatherings, our home was always open house for the company of so many well-loved friends. Even when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and faced the relentless progress of the illness, he continued to live every day with courage, humour and stoicism, and never more so than when, in addition, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

By Amanda Hobson Jones





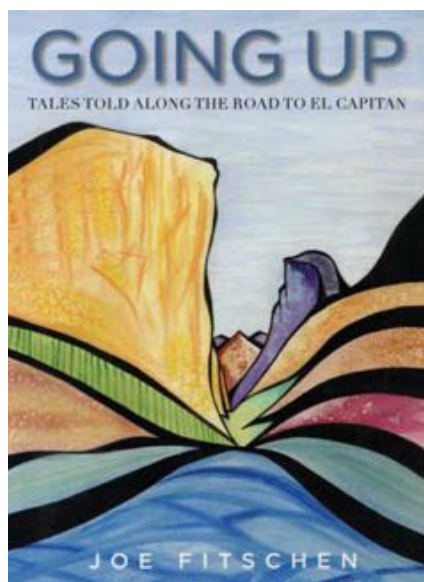
BOOK REVIEWS

Going Up. By *Joe Fitschen*

Tears of the Dawn. By *Julian Lines*

Everest, The First Ascent. By *Harriet Tuckey*

Langdale. By *Max Biden*



GOING UP: TALES TOLD ALONG THE ROAD TO EL CAPITAN

by Joe Fitschen

Published by Whole Tone Press US 2012

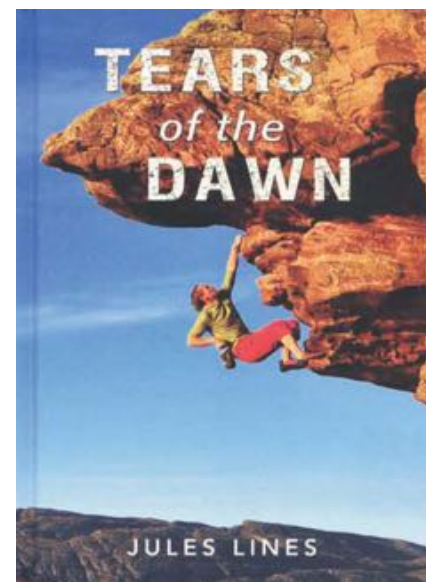
Like the equally unknown fact that Juerg Marmet made the second ascent of Everest in 1956, Joe Fitschen made the second ascent of the world's most famous rock climb. He was Royal Robbins's main climbing partner in the late 1950s and together with Tom Frost they climbed The Nose on El Capitan in 1960 in one continuous seven-day push. With Pratt and Frost he also made the second ascent of Half Dome's regular route on the northwest face, plus first ascents of routes that were considered at the technical vanguard of world climbing.

Fitschen is now a teacher of writing, philosophy, film and music appreciation, and the history of western civilization – a broad range of subjects that reflects the

length of this book, which, at over 400 pages, is quite lengthy. However Going Up is another commendably produced self-published title and is a memoir about a small group of climbers who took to the big walls of Yosemite Valley during the so-called Golden Age of climbing in the 1950s and 1960s. Do not expect a catalogue of sordid revelations about the Camp 4 climbing fraternity because Fitschen is clearly an amiable, nice guy. However his nostalgic reminiscences give added colour and depth to personalities of that pivotal age, many of who were to become climbing legends. Among other pioneering climbers, we get to hear about Yvon Chouinard, Jerry Gallwas, Warren Harding, TM Herbert, Bob Kamps, Mark Powell, Chuck Pratt, Dave Rearick, Mike Sherrick, and in particular Royal Robbins. The narrative is not exclusively about Yosemite because these characters also played a role in the development of climbing in other areas such as Tahquitz Rock, Longs Peak, the Grand Teton, and in the desert of the Southwest. Fitschen admits that it is a collection of scenes rather than a coherent narrative, yet somehow the rambling style worked for me. It almost takes the form of a campfire chat with climbing companions, cleverly interacting directly with you the reader. He manages to paint a vivid picture of life in the USA with a rather random series of chapters visiting a whole range of sociological issues that give context to their climbing lifestyle. Fitschen's experiences of film and music, religion, sex, racism and politics will certainly resonate with anyone that was born in or lived through that tumultuous time of cultural change. I really enjoyed reading

Going Up in conjunction with Tears of the Dawn; although describing different generations about 40 years apart there are many similarities. Both modestly describe cutting edge climbing escapades and both show the intensity and richness of life that committed climbers can achieve.

Review by Chris Harle



TEARS OF THE DAWN

by Julian Lines

Published by Shelterstone 2013

“Chris, there’s a guy here who wants us to buy some copies of his book. Shall I send him up?” I was having lunch in the café and was intrigued by what a self-published author would present me with. Julian Lines introduced himself and I admitted to him that until recently I was only vaguely aware of his name. I warmed to his

confident, quiet demeanour, his naiveté about the publishing business and more importantly the look and feel of his book. If the scary YouTube video of him falling off a potential new route in Glen Nevis (which he successfully soloed three weeks later to give *Hold Fast-Hold True*, E9) was representative of his climbing story then this book was certainly worth a gamble. The deal was done and I started reading a copy that night.

Having quickly finished the book let me congratulate the author for actually reaching his mid 40s because it would seem to be a significant achievement. Equally, photographers such as Mike Robertson and Dave Cuthbertson should be congratulated for braving the trial of watching a soloist on extreme and tenuous routes and taking some of the excellent photographs that illustrate the book.

Tears of the Dawn is a roller coaster of a journey around the world with the type of intense and vivid climbing prose that you might hope for from someone Dave MacLeod reckons is the best free-solo climber in the UK. The writing steadily draws you into his world of soloing and every climber will empathise with his description when “every nerve cell monitored any unwanted shift of balance that might accelerate me into a terminal vortex.” At times it felt like watching a hi-octane thriller where chapter endings become a short, welcome respite before you plunge back into the fray of action. Attendance at Gordonstoun School seems to have inspired his adventurous lifestyle. Whilst there he completed all the Munros, but soon progressed to rock climbing which eventually led to soloing and what he calls the ‘dangerous game of self-deceit’.

Lines works on offshore oil rigs so throughout the book Scotland is well featured, including descriptions of deep water soloing along the Aberdeenshire coast, and routes on the mountain crags of Skye, Torridon and Cairngorm. We also visit other parts of the UK, Yosemite, Rio de Janeiro, Namibia, Australia, Singapore... and it will not surprise you that his activities extend to BASE jumping, paragliding and gambling. Lurking in the background some family issues are alluded to. Understandably these are not delved into too deeply but, having been teased with their potential impact on what drives his climbing impulses, I wanted to know more. At times I felt that each chapter could have been read as an isolated magazine article and that the book lacked a compelling overall narrative. However these are minor complaints because this is a modest, thoughtful, joyous, dark, suicidal and powerful book.

Lines has a keen sense of place and history, his writing is agreeably literary and I suspect it is one of only a very few books that I will read again.

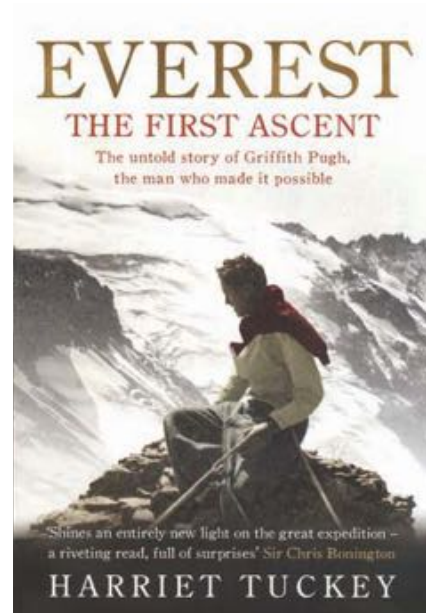
Review by *Chris Harle*

EVEREST, THE FIRST ASCENT: THE UNTOLD STORY OF GRIFFITH PUGH, THE MAN WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE

by *Harriet Tuckey*

Published by *Rider* 2013

The fact that this book won the 2013 Boardman Tasker Prize for mountain literature last November seems to have completely escaped the attention of the



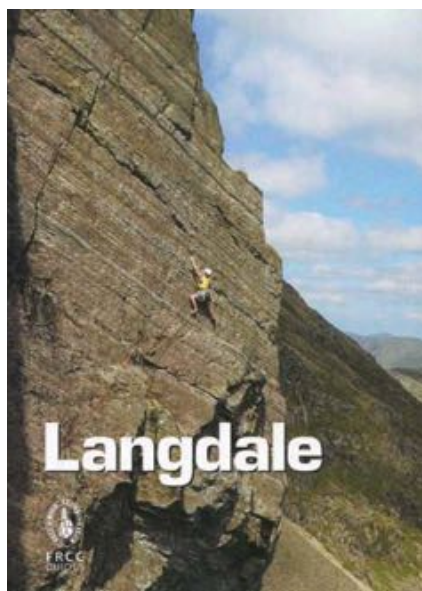
press. I found no reference to it in any newspaper or magazine, and even the far-reaching Internet struggles to find a connection. Perhaps it's because Harriet Tuckey is an unknown author and not being a mountaineer or climber is unheard of in our small world of adventure. Besides, what more could she possibly know about something that has been written about ad nauseam? Also, the subject is an unknown scientist who, at the age of 43, was the oldest member of the successful 1953 ascent where his presence was overshadowed by the likes of the more heroic Hillary, Tenzing, Hunt, Gregory, Noyce and Lowe. Finally the title includes the word 'Everest' – yawn. Everest, The First Ascent was published in the same year (no coincidence of course) as the 60th anniversary of the actual first ascent, but the market is already saturated with books on Everest and the re-hash of material

already published during the 40th and 50th anniversary celebrations. So book browsers could be forgiven for ignoring this title. Harriet Tuckey is Griffith Pugh's estranged daughter who makes it abundantly clear in the opening chapters that she lived in uncommunicative co-existence with her difficult, bad-tempered, philandering father. So we know that it will not be a rose tinted biography of her loving, intrepid dad. In fact it was not until she was 46, when Michael Ward made an impassioned speech at the RGS, that she became aware of the extent of her father's contribution to Everest. Apparently Pugh had designed the oxygen and fluid-intake regimes, the acclimatisation programme and diet, plus the high altitude boots, tents, stoves, down clothing and airbeds. However, in Hunt's official expedition book, he is rather dismissive about such a scientific approach to mountaineering because it wasn't sporting, it was cheating; therefore Pugh's role as physiologist was seen as a nuisance and the value of his work was largely ignored. Other iconic figures such as Shipton, Tilman and Hillary were similarly indifferent to Pugh's work. Without giving due deference to these illustrious mountaineers with gold-star reputations, Tuckey is unflinchingly candid about their treatment of her father.

This is not just a book about Everest because Pugh made significant contributions in the fields of mountain warfare training, hypothermia, and high-altitude training for Olympic athletes. He was also on the 1952 Cho Oyu expedition and led the scientific 'Silver Hut' expedition to Makalu in 1960-61. Meticulously researched, enlightening and compulsively readable, this is a well-

deserved winner of the BT Prize. As Chair of Judges I would highly recommend this book: anything that beats Nick Bullock's *Echoes* has surely got to be worth reading.

Review by *Chris Harle*



LANGDALE

by *Max Biden*

Published by *FRCC*

This is the ninth edition of the ever popular Langdale guide and the first book to appear in the new FRCC style and there have been some significant changes. Firstly the overall size has increased marginally (no doubt throwing many a Fell & Rock members neat bookshelf lines into complete disarray!) secondly the stalwart encapsulated cover of previous editions has gone to be replaced by a new card cover which should help to keep the price down.

Harvey's maps have been incorporated for the first time to aid with crag locations and assist with car parking (complete with GPS co-ordinates) – always an issue in the Lakes. So to the contents. Just about every cliff has the luxury of its own photo diagram. For me these are the guide's strength, the quality being almost universally excellent – especially so on some of the bigger cliffs. These are clear, attractive to look at and easy to follow – a fine achievement from the team. Route information is thorough and clear and as a guidebook writer I particularly appreciated the route intros, coming up with a few inspirational words that sum up the character of a route as well as giving you an idea where it goes is no easy task and should be applauded, a refreshing change from the sterile approach adopted by some of today's authors. I was however interested to learn that I should be carrying a skyhook on *Cruel Sister*, *Pavey*, something most E3 leaders will not have on their rack.

In another new development all those obscure/vegetated or just downright crap routes and crags that every area has have been demoted to the FRCC website archives, a useful way of cutting down on size and weight of a guidebook and something the CC will be looking at in forthcoming publications. I'm struggling to find a negative, but for me some of the action photos were (with one or two notable exceptions) pretty average but then I know nothing about taking a decent picture. All in all the author Max Biden and his team have produced a first class guide that does credit to one of our country's greatest climbing areas.

Review by *Paul Harrison*



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