



THE CLIMBERS' CLUB  
Journal 2019-20





Hand traverse,  
*Valkyrie*, VS 4c,  
The Roaches  
📷 Andrew Clark



# THE CLIMBERS' CLUB Journal 2019-20




The Editor dedicates this Journal to Joe Brown, 'The Human Fly,' architect of countless great routes and an inspiration to generations of climbers.





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Cover: Andrew Walker on the final pitch of Dream of White Horses.  David Linnett

A few years ago Andrew suffered catastrophic injuries in a motorcycle accident, these included the loss of his right arm. This did not stop him from climbing; an inspiration to us all.

Frontispiece: Robert Dufton elated on the Aiguille Dibona.  Hauke Harms

Right: On the Midi South Face  Malcolm Brown





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## Editor's Notes

By Trevor Langhorne

Welcome to the 2019-20 edition of our Club Journal, the 129th in a series dating back to 1898. The full set is now available to download from the members' area of our website. I recommend that you visit the site and sample the writing, there are many timeless classics.

These notes are being written during the first Coronavirus Lockdown, an extraordinary time when all climbing is on hold. This is the third and final journal that I will have edited and, after the trials and tribulations of the previous two volumes, I am pleased to report that this one has gone as smoothly as might be expected.

Without the efforts of our authors there wouldn't be a Journal. I have been fortunate enough to receive thirty-six articles and a number of poems; thanks to all of you for giving me such a big job! In addition to members' contributions I have been pleased to receive a number of unsolicited articles from non-members, usually friends and climbing partners of members, and their contributions enrich this volume.

Within these pages you will find a diverse selection of articles reflecting the full range of mountain activities pursued by our members: from the classic walking routes up Snowdon to new routeing in The Andes. Fiction and non-fiction sit side-by-side while poems are spread throughout the volume. The sad passing of twenty six members is recorded in the Obituaries pages, including that for Joe Brown.

There are two articles that I would like to bring to your attention, *The Climbers' Club in the First World War*, and *A tentative Roll of Honour of Climbers' Club members who lost their lives in the First World War*,

which are the result of very thorough research by Rob Seymour. Prior to this article the Club has never published any kind of roll of honour acknowledging the sacrifice of those members who gave their lives in The Great War. While the list we have is probably incomplete it is the best that we currently have, well done Rob.

Producing a book such as this is not a job for any one individual, and once again I have been fortunate to have the support of a great team: Bryan Maloney, whose design skills helped enhance our contributors' words and photographs, to make, in my opinion, a superb edition. David Medcalf compiled the Obituaries, and Chris Harle the Book Reviews. Nigel Coe, Gwyn Evans, David Medcalf, Malcolm Phelps, Philippa Saxby and Cathy Woodhead proof-read the manuscript. Sourcing photographs of sufficient resolution has, once again, proved challenging. There was a tremendous response to my last newsletter appeal, I received over three hundred images! This has caused an unexpected headache as many of them were of the same subject. Unless I have been told otherwise it is my intention to put all of the unused ones into a library for my successor. Some of the photos we have used are scans of old prints, negatives or slides and they show the signs of their age.

I am sure that everyone will discover some interesting reading within these covers and, with luck, some of you will be inspired by what you read and will contribute to Volume 130. As indicated above these notes were written during the first Coronavirus lockdown. I never imagined that the I would be tying up the various loose ends during a second lockdown.

Happy reading!

Opposite: Nick Stephens on *Barely Possible*, VS 4b, Hartland Quay.  
© Sean Kelly



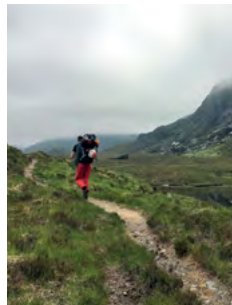




# Five Days in the Fisherfield Forest

*Carnmore is one of Scotland's more remote crags and offers magnificent climbing on superb gneiss. Lying, as it does, deep within a roadless tract of the Highlands it is protected from over-popularity by its long approach. To get the best from a visit it is best to plan a multi-day camping trip, as Sam explains.*

By Sam Wainwright



The long road into Carnmore. Starting from Poolewe the trail follows 4x4 tracks in the Kernsary Estate before getting gradually smaller as the mountains grow bigger.

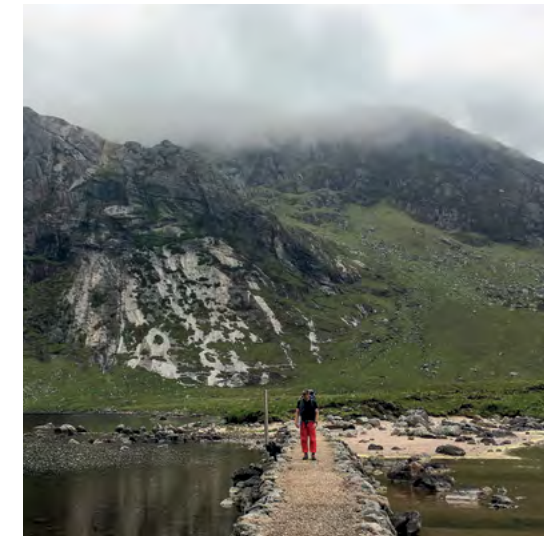
📷 All Wainwright collection

Sometimes it's good to get back to basics. Advancements in technology and the gradual rise of social media means we're all constantly online, tethered to our digital domain for work as well as play. The never ending hustle and bustle of our modern lives can sometimes be unknowingly overwhelming. Thankfully, a place still exists where all these things become a mere memory. A place still influenced by the hand of man, but only by being kept in a state of plagioclimax. (*Plagioclimax: an area or habitat in which the influences of the humans have prevented the ecosystem from developing further.* The Editor had to look it up). Frozen in technological time and stranding you in blissful isolation (depending on your view of such things, I guess). Along with Knoydart and the Wester Ross, the Fisherfield Forest is considered by many as one of the UK's last wildernesses. Hemmed in by Beinn Lair and Slioch to the south and the mighty An Teallach to the north. It's a landscape dominated by bogs, lochs, mountains and midges, and at the heart of all of this empty space, Carnmore Crag. Being over 20 km from the nearest road, yet hosting an abundance of quality climbs ranging from Moderate to E8,

Carnmore is one of the most remote mountain crags around and perhaps one of the finest to boot. Ever since reading about it in Adrian Crofton's and Guy Robertson's *The Great Mountain Crags of Scotland* a trip to this amazing mass of rock was inevitable, all that was needed was opportunity.

For the last few years a week long Scottish trad adventure has become a firm fixture in my and Rafe's calendars, usually in July/August. Following a recent run of mixed weather, we opted to go during the spring/early summer to try and avoid the usual rainy season deluges we've suffered previously.

On the run up to this trip we really struggled to agree on a venue. Scotland has some fantastic mountain crags, sea cliffs and outcrops, all of which can be found in pretty much every region. There really were endless possibilities, but as always it all really depended on the forecast. Fortunately for us a pre-summer heat wave had been dominating the Highland weather for much of May and June rendering many of the mountain crags dry as a bone. With this in mind, and a knowledge that thunderstorms and fog were plaguing eastern mountains, we decided west was best and settled on Carnmore.



Being so wild and remote, this trip would be very different to our recent annual car-camping style campaigns as everything would need to be hauled in. Although there is a shooting house, owned by the Letterewe Estate, at the base of the crag, it's kept firmly locked with access for shooting parties only. According to various guidebooks, the Estate is happy for climbers and walkers to use the old 'barn' sat about 100m from the main house and offering at least a little luxury. However being unsure of the state of this structure and also whether we'd find it full of other people or not, we still opted to take a tent, just in case.

We would have to carry everything we needed to survive for the week including: camping stuff, climbing equipment and a massive bag of food. Meticulous nutritional planning and preparation was going to be key to our success in keeping the weight down. As it turns out, this is neither mine nor Rafe's strong point which meant our food supply comprised of pasta, porridge, fruit, nuts and jam, all of which weighed a ton! Not to be dismayed, and with the heaviest bags in the world, we set off from Poolewe on the long winding path and four and half hours later arrived at the crag.



Crossing the causeway between the Fionn and Dubh Lochs into the Fisherfield Estate.

The final approach to Estate House with Carnmore looming above. Our home for the next five days.

The crag is split into three obvious sections; two very distinct tiers separated by a swathe of heathery slabs along with a large and imposing buttress on the western flank which runs the full height of the cliff. Its most striking feature is the upper buttress which is adorned with a plethora of soaring corners and dizzying overhangs which, from the valley floor, look almost impenetrable. With all these features combined, the cliff makes for quite an imposing sight being nearly 300m high and 500m wide.

After a lengthy spell of staring up and at the cliff and tracing the plum lines we decided to check out the 'barn' which, as it turned out, was pretty basic containing little more than a few dust sheets and the odd rotting mattress. I was hardly expecting five star accommodation but it was pretty scrappy even by bothy standards. Nonetheless it provided a roof for cooking under and some shelter from the midges, and would be home for the next few days.

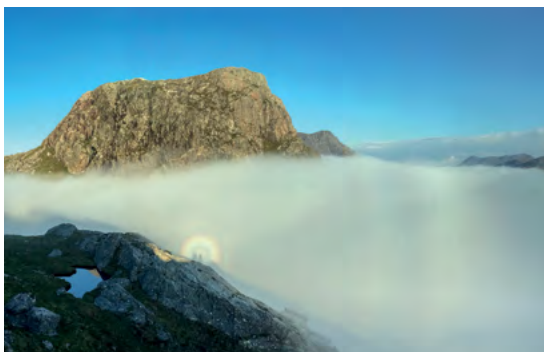
Ignoring tired and heavy legs we made a beeline for one of the great classics of the upper tier, *Gob*. With much of the day taken up by the monster walk in we opted to walk to the top of the crag and make an intimidating abseil down to the heather terrace from





Rafe on the magnificent traverse on pitch 2 of *Gob* (HVS 4c).

The bottomless groove of pitch 3 on *Gob*. By the time we'd climbed the first two pitches the glen had filled with cloud with the finish just reaching the sunshine.



We were met at the top by one of the best views I've ever seen.

which we could traverse across and access the start of the route. First climbed in 1960 by none other than the legendary team of Robin Smith and Dougal Haston, *Gob* takes a devious line under and then through the main central overhangs. With more exposure than you can shake a stick at, combined with holds bigger than the *Starship Enterprise*, it's no wonder people often compare this route to *Dream of White Horses* at Gogarth. Ironically the first pitch, which makes a short traverse before climbing a groove to below the main overhang, was probably the crux, but apart from that short bit most of the route was more or less VS, assuming you don't mind a lot of air beneath your feet!

The next few days went like a whirlwind, taking in as many of the classic lines as we could in the limited time we had including: *Balaton*, *Dragon* and *Fionn Buttress*. One of the most memorable excursions was *Abomination*, which takes a humongous hanging groove line on the upper tier next to *Dragon*. Having probably had only a handful of ascents since it was first climbed by Jonny McLean in 1966, it turned out to be a route of real character with lots of 'traditional' climbing up a series of steep cracks and chimneys all of which was completely buried in rubble and dried black slime, the latter of which we were both scratching out of our eyes for days.

On our last day, we climbed the mind blowing *Dragon*, which meant we'd now climbed the majority of notable routes graded between HVS and E1. It was then that Rafe upped the ante by suggesting we take on *Carnmore Corner* (E2). Having abbed down the line a few times over the previous days, free hanging as the cliff is so steep here, we both knew it was going to be tough. Since it was his idea I gladly handed him the sharp end of the rope. Steep, juggy but pumpy and almost rest-less, nonetheless Rafe cruised up placing almost the entire rack! This main pitch was a real challenge and a total testament to the brass neck and brute strength of the first ascensionists back in 1968.

With the route ticked, and our time at the crag drawing to a close, we walked back to the barn one last time watching the sun set behind the Western Isles. The next day we shouldered our (slightly lighter) bags and headed back for Poolewe.

Climbing in that vast wilderness was truly an unforgettable experience. The days were dominated by chatting, eating, climbing and some more eating. Social media had become a distant memory as Fish-erfield's GPRS signal free land allows your mind to disconnect completely. There are many places in the UK that hold mythical status and are often considered bucket list venues. Although Carnmore is probably one such place for a few, its isolation, remoteness and sheer scale are likely to prevent this place ever becoming popular. Until that changes this crag will forever remain a bastion of adventure only for those that know.



Above: Rafe following the airy traverse line on pitch 3 of *Dragon* (E1 5b). It follows a superb groove before making outrageous moves through a roof.

Far left: Rafe on the wild traverse on pitch 6 of *Fionn Buttress* above Fionn Loch.

Left : The first steep pitch of *Balaton* (HVS/E1 5b), the only route we managed to do on the lower tier. .

Far left: Rafe following the second pitch of *Balaton*. The first part of this pitch is negotiated by an amazing 5b traverse followed by an equally satisfying 4c crack. Perhaps one of the best quality pitches of the trip.

Sad to be leaving, but so happy to have visited. Carnmore in all its glory.



# Rules of the Ashton Parallel Universe

## — PART 1 —



*Climbers are a strange lot with numerous unusual and, at times, annoying foibles; how many of the following do you recognise in yourself and/or your climbing partner(s)? For convenience this rule book has been split into four sections.*

By Rob Davies

### Author's Note:

I formulated a few of the more obvious rules to account for the unusual behaviour that I noted when I began climbing regularly with Phil. But I soon realised that I had addressed only the most visible part of the iceberg, and that the source of this material, Planet Ashton (population: one)<sup>1</sup>, was virtually inexhaustible. These rules are all based on actual events, though I may have added some corroborative detail to add artistic verisimilitude. I am grateful to others who have contributed their own experiences.

*'It was as if I had discovered life on another planet, or a parallel universe where life was at once recognisably similar but entirely different'.*

From *Down Under* by Bill Bryson

📷 All: Rob Davies



Optimal crag location, the aptly named Warton Small Quarry near Carnforth.



A good choice of crag? Deeply Dale Quarry, near Bury, looking at its best.

### a. Selection of Crag and Route

1. Aim to climb on diminutive crags close to the road—if you can kick rocks on to the car, then the approach is the ideal length. Be unenthusiastic if someone suggests a big crag with a huge walk-in, like the Grochan. Make sure the drive to the crag takes at least an hour and a half, otherwise too much time might have to be spent climbing. Occupy travelling time by listening to Woman's Hour on the wireless<sup>2</sup>, by feigning interest in twenty-two rich guys kicking a ball about, or by playing the game “Working Class?”<sup>3</sup>

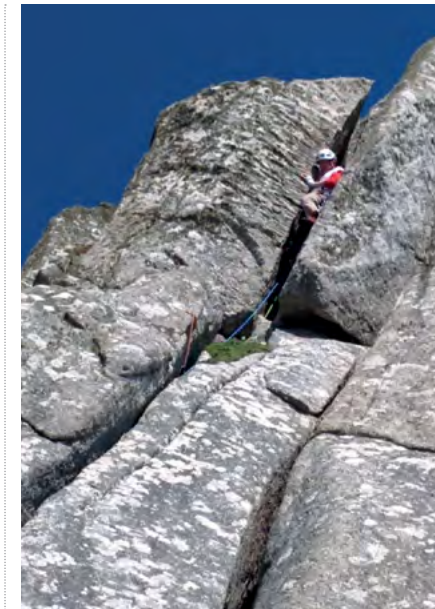
2. Prefer to visit an obscure crag where no-one in their right mind ever goes: a scruffy, loose and green Lancashire quarry in an awful north-facing hole-in-the-ground is a good choice. Bamboozle your companions by brightly suggesting ‘Let’s go somewhere different,’ but bear in mind that if you end up at

Stanworth<sup>4</sup> they are likely to reward your appalling suggestion by leaving you there, buried under a convenient pile of toxic waste. If they are so tactless as to complain about your choice of crag, respond by cackling insanely to confirm their worst suspicions about your state of mind.

3. Always choose ‘a good crag’, i.e. one well-protected by bolts (regardless of how dismal the aspect) or by cracks (regardless of how vegetated), but dismiss a crag where the gear is occasionally a bit spaced (no matter how immaculate the rock) as in ‘Bleh! Not my cup of tea.’

4. Select climbs plastered in vegetation and dirt but try to avoid clean rock. Note that the dog-pile symbol used in some guidebooks indicates high quality, and that the name of the climb is often a good indicator of high quality: *Slime Crack*, *Green Crack*, *Rhododendron Crack*, etc.

5a. If you must climb clean rock, choose a crack, preferably a wide one<sup>5</sup>: this is especially important if your companion is a sports climber who needs obvious chalk-plastered holds to pull on. Bury yourself as deeply as you can, then apply the rat-up-drainpipe, ferret-up-trouser-leg technique. Ignore positive holds on the outside as they would make the climbing less enjoyable. If a wide crack is not available, choose any steep crack that looks desperately awkward and strenuous.



Releasing your inner ferret *Chicory Chock*, St Loy Crag, West Cornwall, ‘a traditional thrutch’.



The ferret flummoxed, *Sugar Crack* at Poland Hill, Vedauwoo: graded 5.6 in one guidebook!

5b. Do not be taken in by your so-called friends, more accurately known as ‘You bastards!’, if they point you at a specific climb, e.g. a Vedauwoo 5.6 off-width that looks about Hard Severe. Be very suspicious when they offer encouragement along the lines of: ‘That’s your route, that is’ and ‘It’s got your name all over it’.

6. If the weather is bad, insist that there must be some dry rock, even though it is clearly chucking it down everywhere. Pace back and forth in the hut for hours, muttering ‘Oh, bloody hell’, to make the rain stop, as it always will—eventually. If you venture out in the rain, remember that Scottish climbs graded VD seem E3 5c when moist, so failure is inevitable.

7. Prize most highly a route that involves a lengthy car journey, dirty rock, awkward cracks and hairy abseiling. Specifically, the *Original Route* on the Old Man of Hoy. In the right season this route has additional attractions: in situ vomiting seabirds, rain and high wind. Any other large sea-stack or prominent pinnacle also gives a good objective about which to fantasise<sup>6</sup>.

8. If your companion drags you to a crag in Wales, mispronounce the name, no matter how often he points out your mistake—by the fifth time of correction he will be grinding his teeth and muttering ‘dyslexic Englishmen with cloth ears’. Apply your linguistic skills elsewhere by mangling crag names in Spain, Italy, France, Croatia and



Scotland—in fact, anywhere except England, where cliffs have names that are just about manageable, like Black Crag. Remember that foreign languages spelt phonetically present a huge challenge, though non-phonetic ones are a lot worse.

9. Avoid bouldering, as it carries an unjustifiable level of risk, except at indoor facilities with two feet thick floor padding. If your companions drag you to a bouldering venue outdoors, stand around looking disconsolate, like a one-legged man at a bum-kicking contest. If they start to solo easy routes, make yourself useful by getting the body-bags ready.

#### b. Approaching and Identifying a Climb

10. When approaching a crag, be aware that your route-finding is important for others. If there is a choice of two possible ways, behave selflessly and go first, as your companion can then go the other way, which will always be the shorter and easier of the two options.

11. When approaching sea-cliffs, never scramble down solid rock, as this is highly dangerous, though down-climbing wet grass and mud above a huge drop is fine. Abseil as a safer alternative: while some experienced climbers have been killed abseiling, they did not carry out a proper Risk Assessment beforehand. Avoid sea-level traversing, except to provide others with entertainment (see Rule #83): instead recruit someone with a boat.

12. When you arrive at a crag, identify the correct line for the chosen route, even if your companions criticise your eyesight, intelligence, horticultural inclinations (see Rule #3) and crack-seeking propensities (see Rule #5). Convince yourself, despite this barrage of unfair criticism, that you have identified the right line, by using your canals-on-Mars' ability to perceive features on the rock-face. Fortunately, modern guidebooks contain good photo-diagrams<sup>8</sup> which make route identification easy, though at the base of a sea-cliff you may have to paddle out a hundred yards in a kayak to get the view of the crag shown in the book<sup>9</sup>.

13. On arriving at a bolted crag, spend twenty minutes in heated debate with your mate about which of the lines of hangers visible on the rock corresponds to which of the lines shown on the guidebook diagram. (Player 1: 'I like to be accurate'; Player 2: 'Don't be a pedantic git'). Ignore the fact that, when you come to do them, they all seem exactly the same, so the debate is completely pointless.

14. Use your imagination when locating a descent route: choose a long fight through thorn-bushes and gorse rather than a short descent down easy rock.

Who needs a path? A Frenchman attempts the XT (extremely thorny) exit at the top of Porthguarnon East, West Cornwall.

1 'Perhaps a lunatic is simply a minority of one'. – George Orwell, *Ninety Eighty-Four*.

2 In the Ashton universe 'wireless' is the preferred term for 'radio'

3 Working Class? is a variant on the 'Four Yorkshiremen' sketch: one player makes ludicrous assertions such as 'I'm working class because my grandfather had a cloth cap', while the others respond with vulgar expressions of derision.

4 Stanworth Quarry, near Blackburn. Part of the quarry has been lost to a nearby waste disposal site, but it was a big mistake not to bury the entire crag.

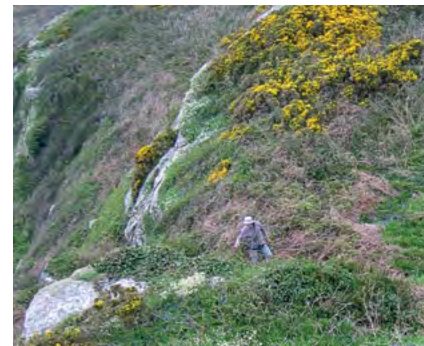
5 Sigmund Freud had keen insights into the human psyche. He would have made interesting observations about this urge.

6 In Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* (1892), Halvard Solness is a middle-aged architect whose failing powers give rise to his obsession with the erection of prominent objects like church steeples. At the end of the play he overreaches himself and falls to his death.

7 Percival Lowell (1855-1916) observed features on the surface of Mars which he believed were the remnants of an extensive system of canals. As most of his contemporaries thought, these features do not actually exist.

8 Guidebook photos are not useful when they show the wrong crag, e.g. Knight Templar Rocks in the 2008 Lundy guide.

9 A kayak would have helped a lot when we tried to identify the correct start for the sea-level pitch 1 of *Wen Slab* at Gogarth, as the sea hadn't read the tide table properly.



# Finding Balance in the Bregaglia

*The Bregaglia has many great climbs, normally on superb granite. Amongst the greatest of the classics is the Piz Badile North Ridge which gives a big day out. The author climbed this with his ten year old son! Read on.*

By Andy Brown

All: Andy Brown



A thud woke me and a couple of headtorches turned on. I was briefly confused, but I wasn't the most surprised. Beside me the hard-climbing Austrian wondered what had fallen on him, and why it wasn't very heavy. Now beside him, Christopher sat up and looked around—he had fallen out of his bunk in the Manzi bivouac hut, high in Val Torrone on the Italian side of the Bregaglia. Not the best way to sleep after a slog of over four hours up to the hut, but he had been lucky: the Austrians had arrived late and one had pulled a mattress onto the floor between the two sets of bunks; without this the landing would have been much harder. A stroke of good fortune to counter the bad luck. Mountaineering seems to be like that, a balance of great experiences with hard work, and (hopefully) minor mishaps and setbacks. Never the good without some bad. The inextricably bound Yin and Yang of Daoist philosophy: good and evil, light and dark, positive and negative. The trick is to find the balance, to push yourself hard enough to reap the rewards of the challenge while keeping sufficient in reserve so the experience is enjoyable. My friend Malcolm reckons that the best days out always include a spell when you really wish you weren't there.

Why do I always obsess about time, about speed? *The North Ridge of the Badile* was a route that I had in mind before we left—how could it not have been? A stunning line, pure and elegant, flanked by beautiful smooth granite walls and leading directly to the summit of a great peak. Christopher had seen photos and the seed had been planted, but not without warnings. It's a long route; it's popular and busy; fitness, stamina and efficiency would be critical. But the seed had germinated, the idea had grown and the Badile had obviously moved from an ambition, 'if things go well we may think about it,' to a goal. After our first couple of routes, I realised that Christopher was now expecting to do it ('when we do the Badile') given suitable weather. But as Cassin, Molteni and Co. found to their cost, during their first ascent of the NE face, the upper reaches of the mountain are no place to be caught in bad weather. Speed matters.

We had met Asterix and Obelix in the campsite at Vicosoprano, a pair of friendly Englishmen who also had plans for the North ridge. Asterix was only named as partner to Obelix, and the latter only earned his epithet as a rather unkind consequence of his shape. We end up leaving for the Sasc Fura



High on the Piz Badile North Ridge.

Christopher and Andy on the Badile summit.

hut at the same time as them—Christopher races up, leaving me trailing, and the indomitable Britons for dead. The hut is attained in half the guidebook time. Speed. I hadn't even intended to rush up. Still, that leaves more time to play with the rubber ducks in the water trough; it's good to be reminded who my partner really is.

A nice break from rushing; no need for constant checks of the clock now, just a relaxing afternoon at the hut. But concerns nag. Will Christopher cope with the demands of an early start and a full alpine day? Will we be fast enough? That obsession again—I can't get away from it. Will we get stuck behind other parties; after all, who would want to let us go ahead? The signs are good however—although unnecessary, the super-fast approach is a clear display of Christopher's motivation, and that will be crucial—this is no place to be dragging an unwilling partner.

Yin: rain, heavy rain. We shelter in the hut, only to be stung by a wasp. Teams originally intent on the *Cassin* shift their objectives to the ridge; more people, more queuing. But also Yang: satisfaction at the last-minute decision not to bivouac (a shorter day and a chance to queue-jump discarded for a lighter sac and more comfortable night).

Early starts—good or bad? Unpleasant or glorious? I've never been sure. 4am it was though, and now the obsession comes to the fore. The stopwatch starts: quick, get up; quick, toilet; quick, some breakfast; quick, sac on; quick, let's go. Balance again—gentle prodding so we don't waste time, but don't pester, keep him happy. Obelix is off shortly before us, and other teams are nearly ready. It's like a race.

04:17. Up into the darkness. Trees loom over a narrow muddy path. Then onto the boulder fields, and the trees are replaced by mountains—the

Right: Piz Cengalo and Piz Badile, as seen from across Val Bregaglia, to the north.

Far right: The Piz Badile and Punta Sertori.

Preceding page: Christopher on the gendarme of the Morimonti Route on Punta Sertori.





Cengalo, Trubinasca and the Badile, the North Ridge of the latter gently snaking down towards us, grossly foreshortened but clearly visible in the now clear night. We pass Obelix in the dark, but more pairs of bobbing lights are not far behind, and one team is clearly on the ridge already. It's not a race. But in a way it is: getting stuck behind a slow party could be serious. No need to coax Christopher though, despite admitting to nerves (good!) he is setting a fine pace. Two parties pass us while we don harnesses below the notch; we reach this, then rope up. 0615, and ready to climb. We're running to guidebook time, but the obsession remains; 700m vertical to climb, 5-7 hours. Balance again: keep moving, don't waste time, but enjoy, savour. The summit glows beautifully as the sun strikes the NE face.

I reach the Risch slab, first of the difficulties. Delicate friction moves in the sun on perfect rock. Delightful. Christopher will love this. Definitely Yang but no Yang without Yin. No light without shadow. Higher up we move from the sunny crest onto the shady West face. A gentle Westerly breeze accentuates the change and hands turn cold just in time for the fingery crux traverse. Malcolm's saying proves true as Christopher suffers hot-aches, but balance is restored back on the ridge line, as the sun and an additional layer bring warmth, and our secret trail mix raises energy levels and smiles.

Onwards, upwards, time presses. Relax! We're moving well—a smooth, efficient team—and have passed three parties. Now only the nocturnal starters are above. We're leaving behind pairs who had planned to do the *Cassin*, and is that Obelix far below? But I can't relax: time in the bag is a valuable resource. But everything requires balance, rushing would be bad too. Eat enough, drink enough, keep safe.

The ridge lays back and we're passing the early risers—a friendly Danish pair with whom we will

share the descent. The steep NE and NW faces drop to receding glaciers on each side as we clamber over and around the exposed crenellations on the summit ridge. Then the summit. 1016. Big smiles. A proper handshake. A hug. Christopher is well chuffed—his lifetime high-point and a great climb. A huge sense of achievement balances the early start, the hard walk, the cold fingers.

We've done it! 'Not yet!', I say, still unable to really relax—even at this hour mist swirls sporadically, and I have memories of a relatively complex descent. Christopher is unaware of my tension and enjoys his success on the summit. I allow us a good half-hour to share food and savour the experience before leaving Switzerland and dropping into Italy. The descent is complex, the more so as parties are climbing the upper reaches of the normal route, but mishaps are avoided and we navigate off the ridge and reach the boulder fields. Finally! I properly relax now, and we enjoy a real break—harnesses and gear stowed away, we can lounge in the sun, the Gianetti hut a rough but simple 40 minute walk below us.

'Arrivato? Badile?' We are greeted by Signor Fiorelli, the guardian, at the hut.

'Si, *Spigolo Nord*.'

'Quanto vecchio?' he asks, looking at Christopher. 'Dieci'

He gives Christopher a thumbs-up, he is impressed. The hard work over, we are left with only the positive. An afternoon of tired, satisfied, relaxation in the hut. We both sleep, then have dinner. Christopher continues his apprenticeship: two teams that climbed the *North Ridge* instead of the wet *Cassin* arrive too late for dinner. We don't see Asterix and Obelix until breakfast; they hadn't reached the hut until almost midnight. Having spent twice as long as us on the hill they had descended in the dark and abandoned their ropes on the final abseil; they were safe, though, and remained in good humour, even with each other. Speed, you see—a necessary evil.

## Epilogue

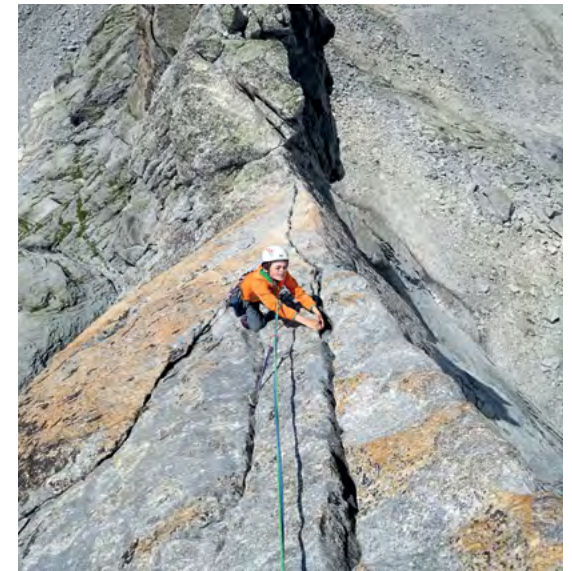
The Badile turned out not to be the highlight of the trip for Christopher. We stayed in the Gianetti for a few days, climbing a couple of short routes, another excellent route on the Badile, then finishing off with the *South Ridge of the Cengalo*. The *Vinci Route*—not a Leonardo, but a masterpiece nonetheless: beautiful climbing on perfect pale granite, the *Vinci* takes a sharp steep ridge with some difficult climbing, and is considered 'one of the finest rock climbs in the Alps'. Pushing ourselves a little more we find the right balance of difficulty and comfort, while Christopher earns a pat on the head from Signor Fiorelli.

## Notes

The Bregaglia is in SE Switzerland, not far from Saint Moritz. We drove, taking the ferry from Hull to Rotterdam, but you can also fly: on my previous trip we flew Manchester to Milan-Bergamo and hired a car. For the first week we based ourselves in Vicosoprano, Switzerland; the second in Val Masino, Italy. The nearest large town is Chiavenna, but don't expect many gear shops. The rock is granite, mostly of excellent quality (although about 2 million cubic metres of rock is expected to fall off the NE side of the Cengalo in the next year or two, and several routes are 'out of bounds'). The majority of routes can be approached and descended without axes and crampons (a light axe and crampons would open more options though). There are bolts on some routes including, disappointingly, the N Ridge, but I was pleased to find none on the Vinci.

I used the old Lindsay Griffin Alpine Club Bernina and Bregaglia guide and *Solo Granito*, by Marco Sertori. At least one of the Swiss Plaisir guides covers many routes in the area and seems to have good topos. There is a wealth of climbing for climbers of nearly any ability. There isn't really any valley cragging on the Swiss side, but Val di Mello, on the Italian side is world famous for its routes and bouldering.

We climbed the following routes. All are recommended, but particularly the longer ones on the Badile/Sertori/Cengalo. None involved any climbing harder than F6a; on most the hardest sections were F5b or easier.



Amazing climbing on the South ridge of Punta Angela (*Vinci Route*).

*Vergine-Gallo* traverse, above the Albigna dam  
*Torre Innominata NW ridge*, from the Sciora hut

*Piz Badile N Ridge*, from the Sasc Fura hut, descending to the Gianetti hut in Italy

*Pizzo Porcellizzo NE ridge*, from the Gianetti

*Punta Sertori: Yin e Yang* and *Marimonti* routes (S Ridge), followed by the *E Ridge of Piz Badile*, from the Gianetti.

*Dente al Vecchia, Champignons Merveilleuse*, from the Gianetti

*Punta Chiara S Ridge*, from the Manzi bivouac hut, above Val di Mello.

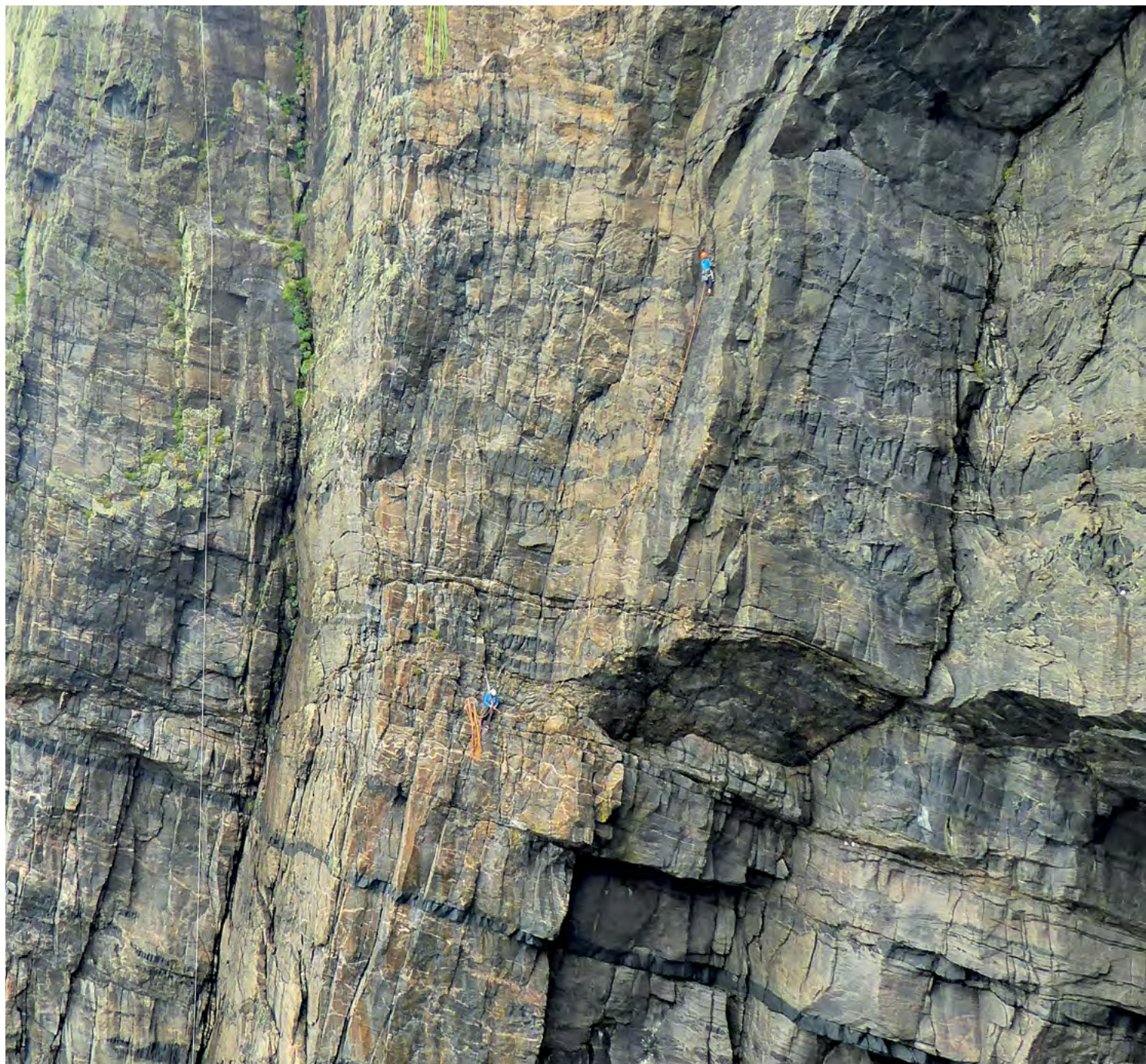
After climbing the Badile (and other routes from the Gianetti), we had the luxury of meeting Jean and descending into Val Masino. If you need to return to Switzerland, you can descend the North ridge (not recommended), walk back over a couple of chossy cols (about 5-6 hours), or (the expensive option, taken by Asterix and Obelix) descend to Val Masino and take a taxi/public transport back to Switzerland (a good 90 minute drive).

Take your BMC card to get discount in the huts. These are expensive, but less so if you don't have dinner/breakfast. People do bivvy, but I was too much of a lightweight to carry double bivvy gear over big routes. I did carry a weighty few days worth of hill food over the Badile though, as buying snacks at the huts is not economical! Speaking Italian would be great in both areas, while German is understood in Switzerland.



Christopher walking back to the Gianetti Hut after climbing the *Vinci Route* on Punta Angela.





# Gneiss Work!

*Pabbay and Mingulay are beautiful islands with stunning climbing on amazing rock. Apart from St Kilda these two islands probably offer the most remote climbing in the UK. Here, Malcolm Phelps introduces some of the gems on Pabbay.*

By Malcolm Phelps

This tale starts with a cliff-hanger. Jim was abseiling slowly down, aiming for a sea-washed ledge. At 60 metres, he reached the sea with the rock out of reach. He appeared to be trying to tread water with one leg. Would he re-establish contact? Read on!

Twelve of us were on the adventure trip of a lifetime to Pabbay, an uninhabited island at the southern end of the Outer Hebrides. I'd made the suggestion a year previously and Sue (Luck) had enthusiastically grasped the organisational baton.

A German party were first to get their towels down on the Pabbay cliffs in 1995, two years after Chris Bonington, Mick Fowler and others opened up Mingulay to the south. The rock is peerless Lewisian Gneiss—ancient, solid and with friction qualities to die for (hopefully not)!

We researched the planning needed. We would have to get everything we needed for a week—food, gear, tents, (and beer of course)—on to the Calmac Ferry to Barra and then onto a chartered boat to get us to the island. I'd heard of people carrying everything on to the ferry at Oban but that didn't appeal. We had a detailed planning meeting and decided to take two vehicles over to Barra loaded to the gills and hope that boatman Francis Gillies' *The Boy James* would have enough space for twelve plus the gear. We would also hire a satellite phone

as we would otherwise be out of contact even in an emergency. No social meeja either. How would we cope without pictures of cats or gifted offspring for a week? Suffice to say we managed, somehow!

Four vehicles headed north on the Friday: Me, Sue (Luck), Edwin (Jenkins) and Jim (Unwin) in my car, Robin (Mazinke) and Sarah (Goodman), Jane (Weir) with Adrian (Paisey), Steve (Reed), Richard (Byrom), Andy (O'Connor) and Andy (Martin). My car load stayed in the luxurious youth hostel at Oban.

Following Sue's meticulous planning, we met in a free car park above the town and packed all the gear into Jane's van and Steve's car. The rest of us went on as foot passengers.

A beautiful five hour crossing followed. Views of a snow-covered Ben Nevis, Skye's Cuillin hills and the islands of Mull, Coll and Tiree, plus the occasional dolphin dorsal fin, kept us enthralled. Soon we were almost out of sight of land before the Outer Hebrides appeared on the horizon and we rounded Kisimul Castle to enter the port at Castlebay.

Francis Gillies greeted us with good and bad news. The good news was that the weather looked good. The bad news was that the south-east wind and strong swell would prevent a safe landing that evening. He hoped to get us across in the morning

Opposite: Sarah leads pitch 2, *Prophecy of Drowning*

All: Malcolm Phelps unless otherwise stated.



The Team at Oban.  
Edwin, Sue, Sarah,  
Robin, Andy O,  
Malcolm, Andy M,  
Richard, Adrian,  
Jane, Steve, Jim.

Dolphins!  
📷 Robin Mazinke.



as well as a party of four Belgians with one Scots lass. We camped up on seriously rough ground by the police station. The brilliant evening sunshine meant that a brief dip in the sea was obligatory for Jim and a few more of us. Very brief! Sue tried drying her towel on the police station fence but was swiftly accused of ‘taking the mick’ by the local bobby. According to Francis, the locals are not sure about this newcomer yet. Sue escaped without even a caution.

Both hotels (The Castlebay and the Craigard) serve decent food and beer but had we known, we would have booked into the curry house—the Café Kisimul—which has quite a reputation.

Francis turned up around 10am, ready to give it a go. Our massive mound of gear disappeared into the hold. As it turned out, we would have had room for eight Desert Island discs each and more luxuries as well! Forty-five minutes later, having passed Vatersay and Sandray, we had our first view of the beach (Bagh Ban—white bay) on Pabbay. Seals bobbed up and down in enormous numbers to welcome us as Francis, and his daughter, prepared the tender to ferry us ashore. Two trips got us all on dry land with our gear. Mercifully, the swell had calmed considerably.

I walked up to the camping area—a beautiful green sward covered in primroses and overlooking the stunning white sand of the beach. Strangely,

there were no trees at all on the island. Even Jim, our tree expert, was stumped (so to speak) by their absence.

There is one ruined cottage left from the former settlement. The last residents left in 1912. They had hung on for several years after the six able-bodied men were all tragically drowned in 1897 while on a fishing expedition. There is a burial mound with the remains of a chapel near the cottage and the site is treated with reverence by locals. Best not to enter the cottage itself and certainly not to disturb the area around it.

There was evidence of sheep farming in the past but no current signs of mammals—even rabbits—on the island. There were certainly no deer despite Jim’s confident assertion. He had spoken with a friend who claimed to have been deer stalking on Pabbay. It turns out that Hebridean Islanders lack imagination in naming their islands and there is another Pabbay between Harris and North Uist. Do not accidentally charter a boat to take you there to climb. You will be disappointed.

We set up the tents, including two mess tents, and set off to explore. Although only some three miles by two, all the approaches seemed hard work. The largely untrodden grass is deep and tufty and the steps needed consequently high. That, coupled with carrying the gear including 100 metre abseil ropes, left us all tired. We adopted the strategy of



leaving our gear in bin liners at high points. That at least made walking out quite pleasant.

That first day we went for a view of the Great Arch. Breathtaking! Would we get on this by the end of the week? The 100 metre abseil looked daunting but the climbing verging on the possible, if we could get our acts together.

That day we looked at The Galley area (not particularly attractive and affected by rockfall) and then the Poop Deck. The sea gave a few of us a wetting but we all got something done. Even the lower grades seemed harsh to Sue and Edwin on *The Stowaway* and Jim and I on *Human Cargo*. The wet V Diff at the left-hand end (*Poop*) was not recommended by Steve, Andy O’C, Sarah or Rob! Andy O’Connor showed his mettle by taking Steve up *Corncrakes for Breakfast*, a good tick at E2. Fair to say that, overall, we were worried that everything seemed a bit hard. At this stage, the prospect of getting on the Great Arch seemed a little optimistic—at least to me.

Next morning dawned damply overcast. We delayed setting off until around midday. By then the sun was beginning to warm up the South Face of the Banded Walls. This area gave us all a big confidence boost. We knocked off some good lines at VS and HVS, all on perfect rock with great gear. Jim and I also repeated the first route on the island *Stief Breise*, a lovely VS on the extreme left-hand



Landing on Pabbay

The campsite.

end. The roughness of the rock would have taken a heavy toll on our ab ropes without protectors in place. Don’t take climbing ropes to ab on. The stretch will just get the rock sawing away at the sheaths. We took care to buy static or semi-static ropes which did the job but even then, my rope came back distinctly furry.

While most of us were on the South face, Steve and Andy (O’C) went for *Spring Squill* (E1) on the main Banded Wall area. Andy went down first but as it was soaking wet, top-roped out. They went back when the sun came round to find it completely dry and they’d also refined where exactly to abseil in. The guidebook describes the climb as stunning—one of the best pitches of its grade on the island.

Corncrakes, heard but never seen, tried, but failed, to keep me awake. Next day, as forecast, it rained in the morning. Most of us walked out to the Roisinis peninsula on the far side of the beach. Skua nests with eggs were in evidence but the skuas (also known as Bonxies) were quiet—presumably as the young hadn’t hatched. They can be vicious at other times. Once at the point, Andy (Martin) tried fishing but every time he cast, a seal would pop up. He gave up when one seal followed his float in and there was a real danger of it getting hooked. A shame we got no fish as Andy had his gutting knife at the ready—Crocodile Dundee, eat your heart out! Watching the way he expertly



Clockwise from right:  
Our private beach.

Seals on our beach.

Primroses near the beach

Below: Andy O'Connor on  
*Corncrakes for Breakfast*.

Opposite: Steve on  
*Redundancy Man*.



sharpened that blade of an evening left us a little uneasy but, as yet, there has been no reported knife crime on Pabbay.

In the afternoon, Andy (M) and Richard went to have a look at *Hoofer's Geo* followed by Andy (O'C) and Steve. Andy O'C managed to lead *Sugar Cane Country*, at E4, after a little inspection. Richard and the other Andy had moved to have a look at the Evening Walls—the closest crags to the campsite. Several of us joined them. Richard and Andy had thought they'd found the right crag and even climbed a few lines. But when they went on to *Small Boy's Geo* they found the real Evening Walls and put the rest of us straight. Lots of pleasant short pitches gave us some good entertainment in the evening sunshine. Meanwhile, Robin and Sarah had accounted for *Spring Squill*.

Back at camp, Sue served up yet another delicious veggie meal for our car-load, with token assistance from the men. We had great meals and always a pudding too. Culinary delicacies elsewhere in the party included haggis washed down with an all too limited supply of whisky. Our ration of one beer a day just held out. Comfort in our mess tent was greatly enhanced by Andy M's inflatable sofa. Quite a surprise when that appeared!

Starts in the mornings were late, mostly to let the sun get round. The air temperature, even in the sun, was cool and it was never quite tee-shirt weather particularly in the near constant breeze.

On the Wednesday morning, after the initial mist had cleared, Jim and I set off aiming for *Spring Squill*. We did a couple of HVSs on the South Face of the Banded Walls to warm up—*The Curious Bulge* and *Redundancy Man*. Feeling good, we went for *Spring Squill*. We had consulted both Rob and Sarah and Andy and Steve on where to abseil but we think in offering their advice, one was standing facing inland and the other out to sea.

As I watched from my vantage point, Jim

descended towards what we both had assumed was the starting ledge, but, as the opening of this story explains, he couldn't touch the rock. He was trying to keep the excess ab rope out of the sea while trying to find a way to swing in. Eventually, with one foot in the water, he stooped down and grabbed a frond of sea-weed. As this was attached to the rock he was able to start a small pendulum. Eventually he touched rock with his feet, then a finger-nail, then a finger and finally hauled himself, with the help of barnacles (and with some relief), onto the sloping slab.

The real start was up to the right on big flakes—still difficult of access but we were too far to the left. I joined him having much less difficulty as Jim could haul me in. Placing runners on the way down would help if, unlike us, you pick a line where you can touch the rock!

The main pitch looked impressively steep. It was Jim's turn to lead and off he set. Seriously big holds led up for twenty metres or so on the gently leaning wall and then there was a short area of respite when you could be in balance. The final moves to the belay were steep but not really 5b. The stance was of the hanging variety beneath a large overhang. A little thread on the lip showed the way for my pitch and with one hand in this, big jugs came within my reach and the rest was a romp to the top. Great route! Our hopes for the Great Arch were once again on the cards.

We popped over to have a look at teams on *Prophecy of Drowning* (E2) and also on *The Priest* (E1)—the latter our target for the next day. Both Belgian teams managed to get off route but Sarah and Rob dealt smoothly with both the climbing and route-finding on *Prophecy of Drowning*.

We heard voices on the small cliffs above the Great Arch. These were a mystery to us until, on our walk back, we saw a yacht moored off the beach. Three Brits planning to sail to Iceland had taken a day out to get in some climbing.







A swim in the sea, which was still bitterly cold, followed by luxuriating in what felt, by comparison, like a jacuzzi in the fresh water pool fed by our stream, set us up for the evening. The stream is clear and safe to drink from so taking water with us was not necessary.

We could account for twenty people on the island with the crew of the yacht. But were there in fact twenty-one? Several people spotted a figure on the skyline above our camp and also a flashlight. Stories of ghostly noises apparently disturbed the former residents and we were a little unnerved. Could we have upset the spirits of the former islanders? We survived the night but the mystery of the figure on the hill remained.

In the morning Jim and I had another lazy start to let the sun get round. The seals were also quite relaxed. When the tide was out overnight they all slept on the beach, hundreds of them. Quite a sight and noisy too! Hopefully we didn't make too much of a mess on their beach but we were advised to use the area below high tide for toilet facilities. I'd had visions of team members hopping up and down impatiently at high tide but, if we were all regular in our habits, we were fortunately regular at different times. One team shovel with a supplementary trowel proved sufficient.

*The Priest* on the Great Arch was now our objective. We let a Belgian team go down first. They were re-climbing *Prophecy of Drowning* after contriving to miss out the crux pitch the day before. Steve and Andy O'C would follow them while we would go down last. As Jim and I strolled up the hillside, we met Sue on the way down with some of her gear. She had climbed with Edwin most of the week but had decided to go for a walk and do some sketching. But her resolve crumbled when we asked her if she'd like to join us on *The Priest*. We gathered at the abseil point.

Setting off down was fine for the first 30 metres. Then I got a view of Steve on the slab at the bottom.

It didn't look possible to get over there. But that proved to be an optical illusion. After 50 more metres or so completely free and spinning gently, my feet touched the rock and I could traverse easily to the small ledge at the start of the climbs. Sue and Jim followed down and after Steve had left, Jim led off.

The first pitch was straightforward up the slab at 4c for 50 metres to belay on the edge. Lovely climbing on generally big holds and in balance. I took over for what proved to be the crux pitch. Exposed moves round the arête within sight of Steve and Andy led to a shallow technical groove line. Thin bridging moves at 5b, between good handholds and decent gear, soon led to an easing of the angle and I was belayed below the final pitch. Sue came up with only a token whimper and Jim soon followed. He dealt swiftly with the little overhang at the start of the final pitch and soon moved up and left into the attractive groove line. We couldn't see him again until he traversed left below the roof to the finish. The groove, when I got there, looked impressively blank but the right wall had several well-positioned hand and footholds that seemed to materialise as you reached them. The final 5b moves across left were a little harder but soon we were all in a group hug at the top. What a route! Sue's first E1 too. Our objectives for the week were now fully met.

Meanwhile Adrian, Jane and Edwin had accounted for *Spring Squill*, but time ran out for Andy and Richard to get it done. Instead they had a good day on the South Face of the Banded Wall with *Bye Bye to the Widows* and *The Curious Bulge* at HVS.

The climbing machine that is Robin and Sarah had gone to the Grey Wall Recess where another free-hanging 90m abseil fortunately took them to the tidal platform below the foot of the three star E2 5b, *U-Ei*—luckily the tide was low! Robin placed seventeen runners in the first 50 metre 5b pitch but still found it bold and tough for the

grade. Sarah led the middle 5a pitch passing a large overhanging block and Robin led the final traverse and overhanging 5b corner pitch.

Francis the boatman had passed by in the morning calling across to say that the weather was changing so he would need to get us all off on the Friday, a day early. We had a driftwood bonfire with the Belgians on the beach. There was much discussion over the competing merits of parallel stacking (Jim and Sue) and cross stacking (The Belgians). The evidence (in the form of flames rather than smoke) supported the cross-stacking method. Shivering despite the fire, and with smoke in our eyes, we all retired for our final night on the island.

It duly dawned misty and drizzly and, after a day of hanging around, Francis took us off in two batches and we were back on Barra at around 8.30pm. We were just in time to eat in the Craigard Hotel. Another time, we would get Francis to book us in.

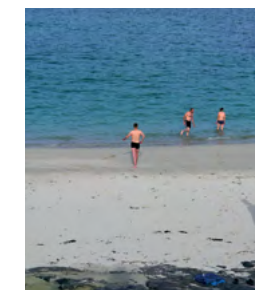
For our last night we camped below the café down by the port on their nice lawn. The ferry left at 6.15 am and we had no trouble travelling a day earlier than booked.

A great adventure. Committing but immensely satisfying. Thanks to Sue for her organisation (and the menu for our car-load) and to everyone for their great company.

Till the next time!



Sarah nears the top of *Prophecy of Drowning*.



Don't be fooled It was freezing!

Opposite: Robin on the crux third pitch of *Prophecy of Drowning*.

What we left behind.





## The Long Climb

*The Long Climb is certainly that, the most challenging route in Ken Wilson's Classic Rock. It has all the attributes of an alpine scale route: vegetation, technical moves, loose rock and complex route-finding which isn't helped by the normally vague Scottish style route description. One thing is certain, it gives a memorable day out.*

By Spenser Gray

As it tumbles down the Orion Face I hear the rumble of the boulder which, not five-seconds before, had looked and felt solidly attached to the ledge two feet above me. The first thought that crosses my mind is 'I'm alive... I think?!' Guiltily, my second thought is of my friend and climbing partner, Mark, who is belaying somewhere below me.

'Are you OK?', my voice echoes thinly back at me from the maze of gullies and ridges which form the north face of Ben Nevis, competing with the crash of the boulder which I had just dislodged. As I see the warm glow of the orange sparks split the night, in sharp contrast with the cold glow of my head torch, the mountain's true nature becomes painfully apparent. I hear the word 'Yes' shouted up from below. Fortunately, Mark was belayed beneath a small overhang and, significantly, to one side of me so the rockfall had come nowhere near him. For a second I close my eyes, and in front of me stands a friend, her smile beaming at me from the end of a sunny day on Pavey Ark, a world away from where I am now. Despite my fears I keep my nerve and mantle onto the ledge, now conveniently clear of the stacked loose blocks, a strong desire to continue living overpowering any and all doubts.

The weather forecast was amazing, the absence of Scottish climbing in my logbook woeful, and I was working in Glasgow for several weeks. My old university friend, Mark, readily agreed to go and have an adventure on a big rock route. A lunchtime perusal of UKC yielded a list of objectives, and on Saturday morning the decision was made to head for Ben Nevis to do either *Tower Ridge* or *The Long Climb*. The latter is described as being the longest vertical face climb on mainland UK. At 426m long there's no reason to doubt this statement. First climbed in 1940 by Dr JH (Jimmy) Bell and John Wilson, in Woolworth's plimsolls with socks covering them, and graded VS (Editor: I think it was actually graded S!) You have to respect their

achievement. We huffed and puffed our way up their route with decent ropes, proper rock shoes and a full rack of Trad gear, they managed with only a hawser laid hemp rope and a few pebbles in place of wires!

The route follows a weaving line, starting just beyond the toe of *Observatory Ridge* and heading up into a huge grassy amphitheatre called 'The Basin', a regular venue for late season snowball fights. Once this is navigated a rising traverse line leads leftwards to the summit ridge.

We pulled up by the Glen Nevis Youth Hostel at about 8:45 am and, after a good old-fashioned sweaty slog up and over to the CIC hut, which involved many self-deprecating remarks regarding my woeful lack of fitness, we marvelled at the scale of the place in which we found ourselves. I had never been on Ben Nevis before, and doing one of the biggest rock routes in the UK seemed a good introduction. The game was on, any thoughts of doing *Tower Ridge* were discounted and we headed for *The Long Climb*. Fortunately the snowfield which is often found below the route was long gone, this enabled us to reach the base of the route with relative ease, and with no amusing tales of bergschrund crossing. The other team which we met at the CIC hut headed off to do *Ledge Route* with a parting remark that we'd probably be alone on our route.


I set off up the first pitch, noting the lack of gear. The second was pleasant with some good moves. The third pitch had some good but very bold moves that felt 4c/5a due to moss and greenery preventing access to the rib at the point described in the guidebook. At various points on the route we had found slings placed around not entirely convincing spikes and nubbins which appeared to have been used in an abseil retreat.

The next pitch quickly yielded an explanation: the remains of a smashed helmet, broken phone and an assortment of gear were strewn across the

Opposite:  
*The Long Climb*,  
Second Slab Rib.  
© SMC DJB Collection





Craig Coid on, above, the parallel cracks of pitch 2 and, opposite, on the complex 'easy' upper section.  
 Mark McGinnes

pitch. Suddenly it dawned on me that I had climbed directly into the scene of a terrible accident. I later learnt that only six hours prior to us arriving at the base of the route, Lochaber MRT were completing what has been described as 'one of their most difficult and technical rescues ever,' no wonder they'd left a few slings behind.

A brief discussion resulted in the decision to push on up the route as I was not massively keen on the idea of abseiling from rounded nubbins; this was probably a poor decision in retrospect, given that they seemed to have worked for the previous party and that whatever had caused the accident was likely still above us.

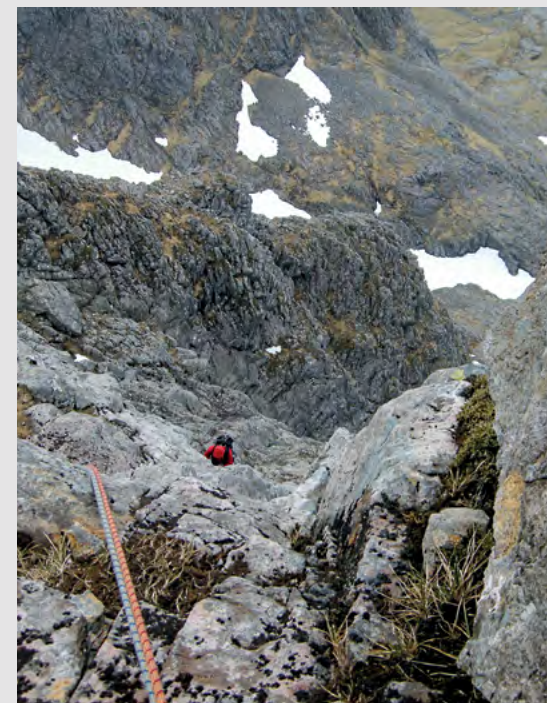
Further bold climbing brought us to the supposed end of the difficult climbing. Unfortunately the guidebook's suggestion of an easy bumble to the top was hopelessly optimistic. In reality the climbing was loose, poorly protected, still wet in places—

despite nearly two weeks of good weather—and it involved some sections of VS. As I progressed up the first of these pitches, 150m above the mess I had encountered earlier, I passed a chopped rope that was likely cut by rockfall, or by being pulled tight over a sharp edge. The red and orange bicolour pattern of the rope sat against the grey slab of rock in front of me, its sheath splaying out like the strands of a mop, exposing the clean white strands of the rope's core. I pushed unhelpful thoughts to the back of my mind knowing that if I did not our chances of walking away from the route weren't going to be great. Fearful of whatever had caused the previous day's accident I followed what looked like it would be easy ground up to the summit ridge of the North East Buttress.

A couple of pitches beyond this I found myself below a shoulder-height ledge on which two blocks the size of my torso leaned against a much bigger boulder. I gave the boulder a tug and tried to rock it; it didn't move and seemed solid; concluding that its great mass would keep it in position I committed myself. Pulling on the sharp edge of one side with my right hand and palming down with my left I bring my feet up. The next thing I know I'm stood on that ledge watching sparks pierce the night as I enquire about Mark's well-being.

After this pitch we made better progress and soon arrived at the summit bothy where a bag of jelly babies met no mercy. The loose rock and sparse gear had significantly slowed us down and it was now 11:30pm. We rang Mark's friend back at the hostel in Kinlochleven to let him know we were OK, and then headed straight down to the car which we reached at 2:30am making it a near 18-hour day. We failed to find an open takeaway in Fort William but did find two bags of crisps in the boot of my car. After a brief nap in the car, we drove back to Kinlochleven and fell asleep immediately on lying down.

As the antidote to the horrors of the previous day



Sunday brought a search for a fried breakfast, a short amble up the hill above the Grey Mare's Tail, and some paddling in the stream outside the Lagangarbh Hut, a much deserved period of recovery.

In retrospect we were probably pushing our luck a bit by attempting such a long and complex route as our introduction to rock climbing on the Ben. The reduced daylight of late autumn and not having the option of leading through didn't help. Should we have started to retreat from the route when the severity of the previous day's accident became apparent? Possibly. With solid rock, easier route finding and better protection we may well have made it down in time to get food in the pub, or at least not miss last orders. That said, I'll remember this route for far longer than the pub grub I'd have enjoyed had everything gone to plan.

## Tower Ridge

Ben Nevis

By Andy Clarke

topping out at dusk  
the summit deserted now  
glittering and vast

all life suspended -  
then a sudden tiny bird  
conjured from the snow

head cocked, appraising  
maybe a twite, streaky brown  
a long way from home

exchanging regards  
our eyes the only movement  
in diamond silence

small epiphany  
set against the whirling world;  
the moment takes flight

we go our own ways  
twilight turns quickly to night  
the burnished loch fades

the hut far below:  
calling us back from the dark  
one flickering light





# Three Days One Summer

*Every now and again all the factors required for an outstanding experience coalesce; the climbing, location, companion and weather all have to be just right. When you get three such days in the space of a week you are truly blessed.*

By Trevor Langhorne

As the hot and dry spring of 2018 slipped into summer the 'Phew What a Scorchers' press started to draw the inevitable comparisons with previous unusually hot and dry spells. This sent my mind back to August 1995, it had been hot and dry for months. Having become temporarily unemployed, Sean O'Brien had a few days free, time for a quick trip to Scotland for some mountain crag rock. After the drive up from Cheshire we had a short session on Aonach Dubh's Weeping Wall, which was bone dry. Unfortunately my inner peace was disturbed when, while halfway up the second pitch of *Quietude*, an anguished voice from below pleaded 'Could you get a move on, I'm not alone down here?' Looking down, Sean was just visible at the centre of a cloud of 'wee beasties'. A sprint for the top and rapid retreat to the car were in order as bugs stopped play. We headed to the FRCC hut at Kinlochleven.

Our real target for the trip was Bob Downes' *Minus One Direct* on Minus One Buttress. The Ben has a lot of mediocre summer climbing, loose, wet and vegetated rock abounds; the very characteristics that make it such a great winter venue. *Minus One Direct* is a rose among many thorns and probably

the best route I have ever done. At 300m in ten pitches it is a substantial undertaking. The first and last pitches are easy, the intervening eight offer sustained climbing, generally about 4c/5a with some sections of 5b. It finishes half way up the classic *NE Buttress*; if this is followed to the top it adds a further 200 m of easier climbing.

In the cool of early morning the walk up the Allt a Mhuilinn was positively pleasant (compared to winter) and we found ourselves beside the well crevassed 'Orion Glacier'. After a breather it was time to slither inside the sizeable bergschrund to find the start. The plan was for Sean to take the even pitches while I took the odd, my cunning ruse to avoid having to lead the 5b crux on pitch four. While belaying at the top of pitch one I heard voices coming from within the crevassed snow below, sure enough two climbers emerged and scrambled up to the start of *The Long Climb*. Almost as soon as they sat down there was a mighty whumph and the area of crevasses and seracs they had just passed through and under collapsed. Even at a distance I saw the colour drain from their faces, a couple of minutes later and they would probably not have survived.

We continued. The superb rough rock with sufficient protection gave maximum enjoyment, and the supposed 5b crux pitch was fine. After this we were to take the two recommended variations, *Serendipity* and *The Arête Variation*, both were VS in my guide, time to relax. Sadly no, I had forgotten about 'Scottish VS,' it pays to buy the up-to-date guide. *Serendipity* was beautiful and everything was going well on *The Arête* until I arrived on the stance after pitch six; while carefully avoiding looking at the overhung and undercut wall to my left, I asked 'where next?', 'across there' came the reply. 'Oh'. This was true Scottish VS terrain, my modern guidebook describes the pitch as 5b, second crux. Carrying every piece of gear we had, I stepped onto the wall and moved up under the roof, good runners eased my anxiety but the situation was no less intimidating. As I sidled leftwards the pitch revealed its secrets, and all of a sudden I was on the edge of the buttress; what a position: as good as it gets!

The overhang above looked exciting; after placing enough runners to stop a speeding train I found that the appearance proved deceptive and a sensationally positioned small stance was not far above.

Denis Mitchell on the second big traverse of *Bullroar*.

📷 Trevor Langhorne





Minus 1 Direct.  
Sean starting pitch  
4, the first crux.  
Trevor Langhorne

The pitches above gradually eased but the quality climbing continued. Unfortunately, all good things must end and we arrived at the Second Platform on *North-East Buttress*. Rather than follow it to the top we opted for an easy diagonal scramble down the Little Brenva Face to return to our rucksacks for some welcome water and food. This option had the additional bonus of a shorter and easier walk down to the car.

The next day we had to head south, but not before grabbing a couple of routes on the Buachaille.

A week later I was back, same mountain, same hut, different partner. This time my chosen classic was *Bullroar*, Jimmy Marshall's impressive trip across Carn Dearg, described as 'One of the finest mountain rock climbs in Scotland' in the SMC's Scottish Rock Climbs. My companion, Denis, was a work colleague and FRCC member; his preference was always alpine and winter climbing rather than pure rock so at HVS 5a this was at the top of his comfortable grade, and the plan was for me to lead the harder pitches.

Once again the walk-in was pleasant; we took our time and then lazed below the crag soaking up some of the atmosphere. Time to start. A steep wall with good holds ended with a pull into an easier angled groove, unfortunately the handholds ran out. I was puzzled and stepped down to a more comfortable position to consider my options (which included running away). At this point I became aware of someone else approaching the crag. Although out of sight there was the unmistakable clumping of heavy feet and rattle of slipping scree. Two figures came around the corner. When they saw us the look on their faces changed from anticipation to disappointment, even despair. They verbalised their feelings using many expletives, a translation of their feelings could be, 'Oh dear, what a pity, we have taken a day off work, driven from Glasgow in the early morning, walked up to Carn Dearg only to find that two chaps from England are already on our route'. With fresh impetus I was soon on the first stance. Anxious not to delay our friends below (which we didn't) Denis ran the next two pitches together and belayed at the start of the first big traverse. The hanging slab was bone dry and gave a fantastic pitch on small positive holds and with plenty of protection for both leader and second. While Denis was happy enough seconding the traverse, he decided that it would be better and faster if I led the remaining pitches.

Almost immediately things then started to go wrong as I messed up the route-finding. I knew the route went up a crack then made a second traverse to the right across a slab to reach a big ledge at the top of the chimney line of *Sassenach*. I hadn't climbed very far up the crack when my eye was caught by an amazing looking traverse line just above a large overlap: that just had to be it so off I went. The climbing was intimidating but superb and, where it mattered, adequately protected, at 5a it was significantly harder than the expected 4b. I arrived

at a belay equipped with a lot of abseil tat. As he made a crucial step across a little gap midway across the traverse Denis looked across to me, smiled and said 'I'm not coming here again!' Subsequently I learned that this pitch is part of the *Girdle Traverse*.

By rights our problems were over, just some 4c ground to the top. I should have known better, the guidebook words lacked detail: 120m 4c. Corners and slabby grooves to the top. The crag above was seamed by corners and grooves, some of which were grubby, which was the best choice? Suffice to say that we did get to the top but I found this final section unpleasant and as hard as anything below. In retrospect I should have taken the hint given by the abseil tat.

Much of the evening was spent discussing what next, we both agreed that it would be back to the Ben but the target was the subject of much debate, my preference being Kellett's *Left Hand Route* by the *Left Edge Variation* (VS) on Minus Two Buttress, but Denis fancied more of a mountaineering adventure. I'd already had first choice so was happy to go with his decision, *Observatory Ridge*, described as the hardest of the classic ridges and awarded a constellation of stars in the guide which also promoted it as a route for everyone. Denis was keen on a fast and light approach, we settled on a single 50m half-rope, a few wires and hexes and some long slings. Great, a nice light sack for the approach. We would run the full rope length out before belaying. Unfortunately our plans started to unravel on the first pitch. It wasn't possible to run out all of the rope due to drag and the runners were lifting out. It looked like it was going to be a long day. A team meeting was held on the first stance, although there are no minutes from it a solution to our predicament was unanimously agreed. The rope and gear were packed away and we continued solo. Freedom, no gear dangling and jangling, no rope snagging and pulling me back, it was heaven. The

only section of climbing I remember in any detail was a beautiful small wall that was well marked by axes and crampons and sprouting various bits of abandoned gear. In T Shirt, shorts and rock shoes it was hard to imagine the epics that had been played out on that wall in winter conditions. The route flowed and it didn't seem long before we emerged into the hordes on the summit. I felt slightly puffed and it is a long way down to the car park. Denis set off at a fair lick and soon vanished down the hill while I trudged down with tired legs and sore feet. I think he had read a novel by the time I joined him at the car. Thus ended the third of three fantastic days summer climbing on The Ben.

## Postscript

Fittingly, the next day dawned cloudy, the first serious clouds seen for weeks. We headed east to Hell's Lum in the Cairngorms for *Clean Sweep*, a route on both our To-Do lists. At this time you could still use the old ski lift so the approach walk was easy, as was the return. Halfway up pitch two the hot dry summer came to an abrupt and thundering end. The long corner of pitch three was streaming but was no match for years of climbing on grit. It was a wet tramp back across the plateau but we were both fully satisfied. I still have Kellett's *Left Hand Route by the Left Edge Variation* on my To-Do list.



Minus 1 Direct, pitch  
6. Sean reaching the  
edge of the buttress.  
Trevor Langhorne

Minus 1 Direct.  
The author on pitch  
7, the second crux.  
Sean O'Brien

Sean starting pitch 8.  
Trevor Langhorne



# Dead Heat

*In addition to remembering shared experiences, the loss of a mutual and lifelong friend can be the catalyst for an exploration of the nature of the relationships within the group. The author explores these processes over a few drinks.*

By George Gilmore

As Jim's coffin was lowered into the damp dark earth, his climbing companions Brian and Ted reacted in very different ways. Brian, Jim's main partner of many years, struggled to contain his emotions, head lowered in a determination not to meet the eyes of another man. Ted, ashen faced, stared intently down at the coffin. An outside observer could be forgiven for thinking that Ted didn't really care about Jim's death, at 70, from asbestosis.

Earlier they had both carried Jim's coffin from the church, EBs on top, assisted by Jim's three adult sons and a schoolfriend. Once the coffin was in the ground the first EB was dropped onto the top. It landed sole first, making a sharp crack that could easily be mistaken for the crack of a rifle. The second must have landed canvas first as it made a dull thud, so that the two sounds together could have been interpreted as that of someone being shot, before slowly slumping to the ground ten seconds later.

The boots hadn't been worn since the early eighties, having been replaced by Firés; one had the original lace, but the other had a bright red lace threaded incongruously through the eyelets. Brian hadn't seen these boots for about 35 years, but he remembered exactly when that red lace had replaced the original. He and Jim were attempting *White Slab*

on Cloggy; as they were gearing up, the lace on one of Jim's boots had snapped. 'Bugger' said Jim before rummaging for ages in his sack for a spare lace. Memories of that day flooded back as spadefuls of soil were symbolically pitched down onto the coffin. Brian recalled the immense hour-glass shaped slab soaring above them, as he nervously started up the greasy first pitch. He also remembered that Jim had taken an age to lasso the spike as he shivered on the belay below. A memory of just one day, to go along with some forty-five years of memories that they'd had as climbing partners.

Later, in the vault of the Hare and Hounds, opposite Manchester's Shudehill bus station, Brian and Ted raised a glass to their departed friend. It was late afternoon and the pub was full of out-of-town shoppers, bustling in and out with bulging bags containing God knows what, downing a swift pint before catching their buses home to Burnley, Bolton, Blackburn.

'Then there were two' said Ted brusquely, raising his pint to Brian. This was a reference to 'the club,' a group of five friends who had climbed together for almost fifty years, and who met regularly in the Hare and Hounds due to its proximity to bus, tram and train stations. Not a real club of course, just a

loose grouping. They'd joke that the membership criterion was that you needed to have led a route with the rope tied round your waist, and carrying just a Moac and a couple of slings for protection. Apart from Brian, who came to Manchester in 1968 to study Geography, all four other 'members' were local Manchester lads from the Gorton or Longsight areas of the city. Then, five years ago, one by one, members of the club started to die. Joe was first, followed three years later by Albert. They both died of heart disease in their mid-seventies. 'We thought we were risking our lives soloing at Stanage,' said Ted at Albert's funeral. 'Turns out it was the full set breakfasts at Stoney, Grindleford and Pete's Eats that did for them in the end.'

Ted was a competitive sod by his own admission, and by the eighties he'd come to appreciate the advantages of a good diet to his climbing performance. He'd cut down drastically on fried foods as a result. Brian on the other hand was more laid back and less driven than Ted; he too had cut down but still appreciated the odd full set, especially in winter. He recalled that Ted said 'then there were three' at Albert's funeral, as though they were engaged in some sort of macabre competition with each other.

Brian had a twinkle in his eye and enjoyed sandbagging other climbers in a good-natured way. 'That next holds a real sloper' he would shout up to Albert as he teetered up the final few moves of Shining Clough's *East Rib*, before moving up to find to his relief that the final holds were actually jugs. Ted, on the other hand, often had a malevolent glint in his eye and would take sandbagging to a whole new level. Brian recollected that one summer in the early nineties when he was working as a Geography teacher, and the long summer holiday had led to some good form in his climbing. Ted had advised him to try *Pink Panther*, when four of the team had slogged up to Dow Crag during a heat wave. He told him to take a short sling for the

crucial protection at half height and not to bother bringing anything to weigh it down with. It was only when Brian got to the poorly protected crux that he realised that a double sling weighed down to prevent it rolling off a rock boss was needed, and that a fall from there would probably land you on the deck. He recalled Ted's reaction when they met at the sacks after the day's climbing. 'Proper trouser filler, that route' he roared as they sorted their racks before the long walk down. Had Ted felt threatened by Brian's good form, he wondered and was this an attempt to put him off harder routes?

As the shoppers were slowly replaced by customers coming straight from work, the pub atmosphere gradually changed. That low buzz you get when small groups are talking to each other, along with the clink of glasses and the occasional scraping of chairs. Ted and Brian reflected on memories from years gone by; how Ted had beaten his hero, Joe Brown, at darts in the Padarn one Friday night. The group termed this a regular 'Ted tale' of his favourite subject: Ted coming out on top. Brian remembered talking to Jim about this need of Ted's a few years back; they'd been sat in the car at Den Lane Quarry one evening, having been driven off the crag by the midges. Ted had just been shown a hard problem by one of the local hot shots of the time, Chris Hardy (or was it Ian Carr, Jim would have remembered). As they left the Quarry, pursued by the midges, they looked back to see Ted, midge net on his head, trying the problem again and again until he finally got it. You couldn't help but admire the commitment, they reflected, while at the same time wondering why it was necessary. In more recent years as they'd all entered their seventies, the private discussions often centred around how Ted would cope with a natural decline and what impact it would have on his competitive instincts.

Brian was sure the source of Ted's attitude lay in his tough working-class roots and upbringing. Unlike

Turns out it was the full set breakfasts at Stoney, Grindleford and Pete's Eats that did for them in the end.



Jim, whose accent had softened with the years, Ted hadn't changed a bit. Routes were 'beltin,' and 'alright our kid' still his greeting, even though he'd moved from Longsight to Ashton years ago. The team used regularly to meet another group from Bristol (or was it Devon, once again Jim would have remembered), on their regular visits to Pembroke. They used to take the piss out of Ted something rotten. 'Where's Mistaar Manchestaar' they'd drawl at the top of their voices as they pitched their tents at Bosherton? Anyone else would have toned it down in their company, but Ted used to thrive on it, use it as a form of motivation, choosing harder routes than the Bristol team in order to introduce his success into the conversation at The St Govan's Inn that night. Brian wondered if there some sort of deep-seated feeling of inadequacy at play?

... we're not joining the bleedin' Knapsack club ...

Another element of this mystery, which Brian and Jim often discussed, was Ted's tendency to link himself with well-known climbers. As a group of five they often needed another climber to make an even number. Ted would choose people like greasy Derek<sup>1</sup> or Trevor Pilling<sup>2</sup> on these occasions. Also, Ted used to boast continually about taking two younger Longsight lads on their first climbs, Nick Colton and Nick Donnelly<sup>3</sup>. 'Belting lads, I gave them their first rope' was Ted's boast. It was only when they raised this with Albert, that this uncharacteristic act of generosity was fully explained; the rope was an old hawser which Ted had once used to tow a car! Also, the only reason why he took them climbing was because he had no one else to belay him. The whole thing was like an incomplete jigsaw to Brian, but when you pieced what bits you had, a sort of picture emerged, albeit with large sections missing. One thing was clear, Ted needed to be a big fish in a small pond, thereby ensuring his 'top dog' status. Years before, Albert had suggested that the group join The Rucksack Club. Ted was dead against it; 'we're not joining the bleedin' Knapsack club' was how Ted put it at the time, and that was that.

There was also a bitterness in Ted that Brian couldn't quite fathom. Earlier in the year he and Ted had taken Jim to try to walk up to his beloved Cloggy for one last time. In the event Jim could only wheeze his way up to the halfway station before giving up. As the afternoon light highlighted the grooves and arêtes of the Black Cliff, they spent some time picking out features such as the East Buttress and Western Terrace. Impassive to Jim's imminent demise, the Cliff stared back safe in the knowledge that it would still be there in millions of years' time. As Jim puffed and wheezed his way back down, the conversation turned to the classification of asbestosis as an 'industrial disease.' Ted became angry and animated in a way which Brian had never

seen before, his face contorted as he asserted that this term was a cover for the avoidable deaths of thousands of working men.

The ties and high viz jackets of the straight-from-work customers were being replaced now by some regulars. As the pub filled up, noise levels rose and Brian edged up to make room for an old couple they vaguely knew who lived in nearby Ancoats.

'Me bloods came back last week' said Ted, a reference to another 'Ted tale' For the past decade Ted had been having a health check every two years and he was always nagging Brian (Ted would say 'mithering') to have regular checks himself. When his latest result came through this was always a source of amusement to the group (but never to his face). Ted would regale them with his BMI (21.9), cholesterol level (4.9) and most important of all his PSA level (0.1) This, because his Father had died from prostate cancer, and the PSA test, Ted assumed, would provide an early warning and prevent this from happening to him. Brian felt that the main reason why Ted wanted him to take these tests was so that Ted could compare them to his own results; life itself had become a competition now.

Two years later Brian was to be reminded of this conversation following a phone call from Ken, a mutual friend, telling him that Ted had prostate cancer. It seems that no one had told Ted that the PSA test was extremely unreliable, (a false negative the experts called it). The big C had played its last card on Ted, a Joker.

As Brian supped the dregs of his final pint before catching the last bus back to Northenden, Ted looked at him with a familiar glint. 'So, then there were two' he reiterated. 'Which bugger do you think it'll be, sat here on their own in years to come?' Brian had sensed that this was coming. The whole session had been a strange affair, the chemistry between two people was completely different from that of three or more. If you made a joke at

the other person's expense you needed at least one other person there to make it work, to act as 'audience' and get a laugh.

'Perhaps we'll both go at the same time Ted', said Brian with a twinkle in his eye. 'Perhaps it'll be a dead heat.'

'Dead heat? Dead heat?' spluttered Ted 'how could that be?'

'An avalanche perhaps'. It happened in the Chew in 63, so it could happen again, who knows <sup>4</sup>. Ted missed the twinkle in Brian's eye and Jim was no longer here to smile and grin until Ted sensed it was a joke.

As Ted's tram back to Ashton ran later than Brian's bus, he pushed his way through the crowd to the bar for a final whisky. Returning to his seat, he swirled his Talisker in its glass ruminatively. Opposite him in old wooden frames were photographs of trolley buses, the sort found on the streets of Manchester when he was a lad. In their reflection Ted's face could be seen, lips pursed, cheeks red and, in his eye, that malevolent glint as he mumbled to himself 'Dead heat me arse, I'll show the bugger.'

Which bugger do you think it'll be, sat here on their own in years to come?

Cloggy.  Sean Kelly



1. "Greasy" Derek Hersey was a Manchester climber of some renown. He moved to live in the States and died in the 90s while soloing in Yosemite.

2. Trevor Pilling lived in Manchester in the 80s. He and his girlfriend went missing on a trip to the Himalaya. Their bodies have never been found.

3. Nick Colton was brought up in Manchester and along with Alex McIntyre put up the Colton/McIntyre route on the Grandes Jorasses. He is currently the Assistant CEO of the BMC. Nick Donnelly moved from Manchester to the States where he died of cancer.

4. The Chew Valley avalanche occurred on January 20th 1963 in *Wilderness Gully*, killing local climbers Graham West and Michael Roberts. See CCJ 128.



# The Great Escape

*Sometimes it is good to get away from it all, away from the routine of technical grades, the paraphernalia known as 'the rack', and precise lines to be followed. Hidden in plain sight are enjoyable adventures such as Bryant's Gully beside Carreg Wastad.*

By Geoff Milburn

An evening of drink in a crowded, smoke-filled pub may be pleasant in small doses but at times it nauseates those whose senses are aware. After such a session I felt the urgent need to get far away from civilisation for a short while. Next morning the feeling was just as strong and sitting in the café I resolved to decline the tempting offer of a day on Gogarth with the in-crowd.

It had often occurred to me that it would be a fine expedition to follow Bryant's Gully on the north side of Llanberis Pass, all the way up, past Craig Nant Peris, to reach the Glyderau. Such a cleft must hold some interest for the climber/botanist, but it is certainly not the place for keen rock-climbers, so I made a spontaneous decision to investigate.

With the minimal effort needed to climb over the wall I consciously turned my back on 1979 and entered a timeless zone where clocks have no meaning. The first few teetering moves over the strewn boulders seemed strange for I was an intruder. As I crunched up a little section of scree I looked down, past my legs, and immediately spotted a tiny, fleshy fungus which gleamed red against the close-cropped turf. Normally I wouldn't have paused, but today was different. Suddenly I realised what was happening. Today I was here to reach out to embrace nature, not to fight it... but why?

Greedily breathing in great gulps of fresh air, I drank of the mountain's cup. Yes, it was good to be alive and alone, under a pale sun whose rays were breaking out to flood the Pass, allowing the long shadows of the morning to slant down from the now familiar ridges.

Already my thighs were aching so I focused my attention on the ground close at hand to concentrate hard on what I was missing. Comfortingly, I recognised the bright moss cushions which I knew so well, but some pale heather flowers were a poor substitute for the blaze of glory which we had seen in the Peak District only a few weeks earlier. As I studied some russet-coloured moss capsules, which stood proudly erect on tiny stalks, I was faintly aware of my heavy breathing and a pounding heart. A cascade of water from a large boulder nearby caught my attention and I marvelled at the way that the sparkling droplets splayed out in all directions and, once spent, arched earthwards to land in what was, at present, an apology for a stream.

A tiny white cataract issued from the base of the gully and landed in a quiet pool where blood-red rowan berries floated and bobbed about, but finally sank in the shallows. From the road, the hillside had looked bare and almost lifeless but here, in the depths of the gully, the plant life was luxuriously

rank with fern fronds in profusion. The autumn-bedecked birches and oaks in their sheltered haven had put on a glorious display, but for whom was it intended? As a sharp contrast the mature hollies with dark green shining leaves looked fit and well and ready to face the ravages of the coming winter. Even a gnarled and crag-fast ash leant out enviously for an admiring glance.

Into the recesses where the plunging water sprays, mustily dank and cool with frequent facial splashes. There the smooth and slime, where rubbers decline to grip and skate off gaily. To trust to holds which have already survived countless winters requires a blind act of faith and one never knows whether or not they will really hold. A detour up to the left is necessary, then steeply up, zigzagging sharply until in a land where grazing sheep dare not follow.

And now a business-like chute, but not for me the icy chills. Instead I resort to some overhanging vegetation which somehow manages to cling on to the steep hillside; plunging into heather carpets and kicking hard into black mother earth. The carpet underfoot begins to slide and, under my weight, rapidly begins to roll up, but smooth progress without a break soon takes me up out of reach.

Bare arms, raked by scratching stems,  
dig deep  
And seek the mortal flesh of  
Nature's keep.  
Steeper yet and face to face  
With fragrant smells—an alien race...  
... of plants surviving in the wild,  
Embracing me a little child.

The angle relents—a thankful rest,  
In sunny cwm, the mother's breast.  
On far off rock a sheep, like chamois  
stands, against a sky with clouded bands.

The winter shadows sweep right down the hill, and point to man's pathetic skill.  
Those shelters which man must call home  
are pebbles in the earth-rich loam.  
A transient stage which will not last, here  
today and then they're past.  
The bilberries reach right down the slope,  
beyond the sheep which have no hope.

A mossy groove, with sphagnum green,  
despite the sun it steals the scene.  
Through milky foam—the mountain's  
tears—alleviate my deepest fears  
About mankind I leave below, if given the  
choice I wouldn't know.  
In this sanctity close to 'God', no paths  
for me where man has trod.

On sunny slope with babbling stream,  
half asleep and in a dream.  
Such tranquility and peace of mind, and  
far away the daily grind.  
In the city where ants must scurry, while  
I despise their frantic hurry.

While others test their strength on crag,  
and return to earth where they can brag.  
Content I lie fulfilled for now, but not  
for long—of that I'll vow.  
Soon the crags again shall beckon,  
and for the challenge I will reckon.

Far above on Crib Goch high,  
the figures stand close to the sky.  
The tiny dots upon the ridge,  
no more to me than nearby midge.  
The insignificance is plain to all,  
and yet they answer nature's call.  
To commune with nature—we must be  
free, open our eyes so we can see.



Forsaking the slope, I follow the stream,  
and plunge right in, to join my scheme.  
A racing torrent down the slab,  
exploring fingers, till icy stab.  
My foot I will to stay in place,  
and fingers grope: a hold to chase.  
The water chatters in my ear,  
but close to earth gone is my fear.

Each hold I use, slimy and wet,  
I am at one without a debt.  
The watery runnel and gravel-filled pools,  
the warmth giving sun after icy cools.  
Water-worn holds where rocks have torn,  
grip my boot but others warn.  
Alone in the gully where few have been,  
just one slip—I won't be seen.

For years a body might not be found,  
as who would venture up such ground?  
And yet perhaps after my decease,  
I'd linger here and take my ease.  
The seasons would come and the seasons  
would go, and over my body the  
streams would flow.  
But I'm alive—so higher still, and while I  
breathe I'll have my fill.

The walls close in, a little fall,  
a chockstone grim—the far depths call.  
Spattering drops down off the tower,  
and break the pool just like a shower.  
Glittering beads rise from the splash,  
and along the surface gaily dash.  
A thousand jewels sparkle bright,  
but only last until the night.

Suddenly I find myself in the depths of the  
mountain. The great organ pipes of feldspar,  
alas all too unstable, sweep up high, dwarfing  
Rhaeadr which looks like a boulder far, far across  
the valley. Expanses of grey slabs tower and lethal-  
looking pinnacles perch above on all sides. Great  
quartz bands sparkle and slant away out of view,  
while sharp red scree slips slowly ever downwards.  
No wonder Craig Nant Peris catches fire late in  
the evening as the sun is about to go down below  
the horizon.

To the south Snowdon and the great ridges  
stand out black, while a faint white cloud drifts  
idly across the face of Crib y Ddysgl. Close at  
hand, billowing white masses sweep up from the  
Pass from the west and slide away just as fast as  
they arrive. Just above me—nothing, and I lie,  
contentedly, in the afternoon sun watching a  
little swarm of active insects weaving a last fragile  
pattern before the final curtain.

## A Manual of Modern Rope Techniques

*Manibus tendit divellere nodos...  
Clamores simul horrendos ad  
sidera tollit*

all three tangled lines  
well and truly clusterfucked;  
a hanging belay

off a single bolt;  
Laocoon in lycra  
and bright nylon snakes

muttering knife threats

## Further Modern Rope Techniques

smug ouroboros,  
the rope has swallowed itself:  
daisy-chain snafu—

some dropped loop reversed  
while coiling in mid-banter  
and now jammed up hard

in the belay plate  
most resolutely ravelled;  
I teeter mid-pitch

survey the last gear  
fail to come up with a joke  
and sigh and untie

By Andy Clarke





## *Hardd* ~ a tale of two visits, or is it three?

*Carreg Hylldrem isn't everyone's cup of tea, being outrageously steep and composed of an unusually smooth, almost slate like, rock. This is the story of the first ascent of its original route, the marvellously named Hardd. Sadly, both Claude and Joe have passed away since this article was written.*

By Claude Davies

Easter 1960. I had heard that a steep and unclimbed crag was located fairly near to a hut occupied by the Karabiner Club and close to the road from Beddgelert to Penrhyndeudraeth just beyond the bridge over the river Glaslyn. One of their members had told me about the crag known as Carreg Hylldrem. It was at the time when finding 'secret crags' was all the rage, with certain climbers, including Joe and myself, seeking out new areas to explore while trying to make sure no one else got there first. I shared the information with Joe and we decided to go and have a look. In this particular case nobody who then had the capability for this challenge knew about our find and the Karabiner Club members obviously did not fancy it.

On arriving at the crag we were certainly impressed. It seemed to be overhanging no matter which part was considered. The obvious line of the crag was in the centre where an overhang at the start was followed by a steep slab then another overhanging section and a subsequent traverse to the left to reach a prominent groove. Joe immediately decided that this was a very attractive proposition. I wasn't so taken with it as I could see that frightening situations could be involved with the real possibility of ending up hanging in space.

We were accompanied by Doug Verity and Edgar Siddall, both were armed with cameras.

The first interesting aspect of the attempt was the discovery of a rather docile adder basking in the spring sunshine at the base of the crag. Joe immediately picked it up by the tail and held it at arm's length such that it could not twist round to bite him. The rest of us kept well away until he released it. He said that he had become used to catching very poisonous snakes as a sport whilst in Singapore doing his National Service.

The start of the route that we climbed is not the start that is now described in the guidebook. A step left from the base of a grassy ramp accessed a steep smooth wall and a vague crack that led to an easing of the angle below an overhanging wall. This section was protected by two stacked channel pegs in a poor slot, and two closely spaced line threads in the vague crack line above added to the dubious double peg arrangement. There was no other possibility of any other protection.

Above this protection accessing the area beneath the overhanging wall was precarious, involving a mantelshelf and delicate slab climbing. This was followed by a traverse left and then a steep pull up to reach a small stance in a recess. A fall here was

Opposite: Joe eyeing up the crux.

📷 All: Davies collection



Joe committing to the crux.



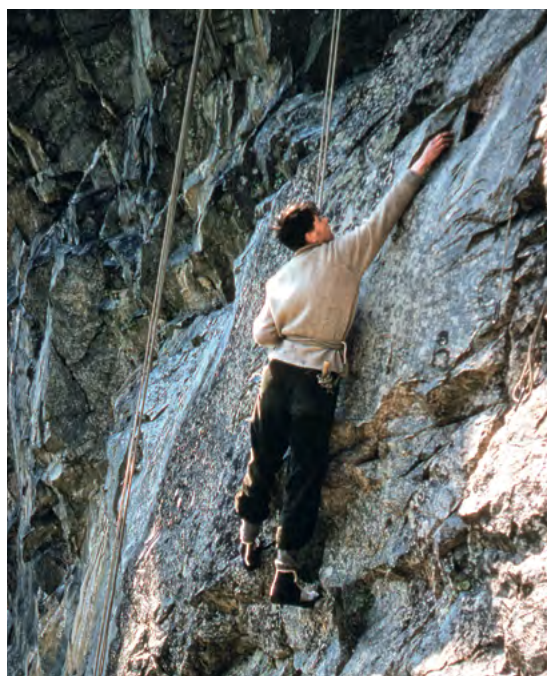
certainly not to be recommended as it would involve a pendulum and difficulties getting back on to the rock.

From the stance, Joe traversed left for about 15 feet to arrive at the base of an overhanging groove that led to the top of the crag. He decided that another stance here, directly beneath the continuation line, was desirable and I joined him. I belayed, partly in tension, from a good peg in a horizontal crack. Having placed a peg for extra protection several feet above the belay, Joe then continued to a point very close to the top where an overhanging section would need at least one more peg. At this point he almost fell off when his PAs slipping on sap oozing from a creeper that was partly obstructing the groove. He decided that enough pegs had been fixed and the result was that he came down to me and decided to abseil off. Below us, and very steep, was the lower part of the now abandoned groove line which lead directly to the ground. He set off and realised when he passed a simple leftward slanting line that the route could easily have been completed. Too late. He was below the traverse line and had to continue with the abseil; obviously I had to follow.

The next day Joe returned with Harold Drasdo and Geoff Roberts and completed the route. Unfortunately family commitments prevented my joining them. The route was named *Hardd*, which in Welsh means beautiful. I suppose the line is beautiful from a climber's view point.

The second ascent was completed by Don Whillans and Les Brown several weeks later but taking a completely different line at the start. I was there taking photographs as well as describing the line to them. Don chose to ignore the original start and went further right and higher to reach a point where he could traverse back left at the same level as the mantelshelf move on the original line. From there he followed the original line. On this ascent Don fixed a line thread runner on the steep slab before reaching the original

Claude on the crux.



line. Les, when following, in trying to unthread the sling got hold of one end which pulled through and off he came, swinging across the crag. Don quipped, whilst holding the taut rope round his waist, 'and what's yer next trick'. This alternative start has somehow, and wrongly, appeared in the guidebook as being the original first pitch.

### Postscript

Approximately 18 months after the first ascent Martin Boysen climbed the direct finish abandoned by Joe, using 3 points of aid.

Some years later, when modern gear was available, I repeated the climb with Derek Walker via the original start and finish. We were armed with Friends, a variety of wires, etc., along with chalk and sticky rubber shoes. Altogether more relaxing.



Claude traversing to the first stance.



Les swinging across the crag.



# Cwellyn April

*Preparing a new route can be time consuming, and for the belayer this can mean hours of boredom where the mind can wander. This piece was put together on top of Castell Cidwm during a period of over two hours in 1980 while Geoff was holding a top-rope for Jim Moran who was gardening a new route (eventually to be 'Hang 'em High', E4 6a) on the steep wall to the right of Brown's celebrated Tramgo, which Moran had previously freed.*

**By Geoff Milburn**

Tall stately trees sway against the remorseless wind, but at ground level all is still. As the banks of coastal rain arrive, they drive, almost unseen, along the mist-veiled hillside, but show clearly as they slant across the darkness of the pines.

The once dull, slate-coloured, rock now glistens brightly as the first spots strike the greyness... grow... blacken... and I watch entranced until they finally merge, to complete the cover.

High up in the canopy overhead groups of tiny birds dart about in noisy agitation as they prepare for the spring, now ready to make its long-awaited appearance.

Countless ranks of waves fight their easterly-way down the Llyn whose surface is broken only by the turbulent flurries, which fan out angrily as squalls strike, here and there, without warning.

The rain has already cleansed the woodland and, as the light intensity increases, a multitude of subtle shades of green stand out in vivid contrast to the wakening larches, whose lifeless branches are about to burst into the most delicate green of all.

As the blanket of cloud parts, reluctantly, a friendly blue sky eventually shows through, and after the first pale rays, patches of light dance merrily over the nearby hillside.

Distant bracken slopes immediately clamour for attention, like some giant jigsaw pieces in a so far incomplete design.

Previously hidden houses and farms, scattered prettily along the valley, come into view, and from the rich pasture of the lowland fields, long lines of man-made walls attack the steepest of hillsides to conquer the rounded summits.

The sun has triumphed, but the great grey and white cloud masses sail above the earth, and it is then the turn of the shadows to traverse the far slopes.

At last the mist, which has so far concealed Snowdon, tears away from the crags, and boiling upwards, boldly departs from the cascading rocky ridges.

Long runnels of fine speckled scree descend from countless shattered buttresses which, in turn, are interspersed by long fingers of penetrating snow, fighting to linger in the deepest gullies.

The summit is still crowned with an icy cap, adding an impressive dimension to this most regal monarch.

Here, in the hills, peace reigns supreme, but in distant faceless lands, a troubled world strives to quench the flames of futile controversies which have been fuelled and fanned by nature's greatest enemy... mankind.



# 4000m

## Climbing the Highest Mountains of the Alps

*The following extract is taken from the beginning of Dave's book with the above title, which is about his mission to climb the 52 independent 4000m mountains of the Alps that started when he began attending Alpine meets with the CC and AC.*

By Dave Wynne-Jones

### *Mont Blanc, 4807m, Bosses Ridge & Traverse, PD*

Alarm bells rang hollowly in the base of my skull, where nerves were strung, wire-drawn taut. Snow crunched reassuringly under my crampons in strengthening dawn light, but I was unconsciously hanging back and the rope tugged insistently at the waistband of my harness.

It hadn't been like this before. Three weeks of fine, cold weather, finding our way around Chamonix, learning to follow sketchy route descriptions, learning to cut the contents of rucksacks to a bare minimum, learning when to back off, but never, ever, hearing this jangling in my head. Bone-weary, snappy with each other, chilled to the core or woozy with heat, we had been very close to the edge, but I'd never felt such edginess.

Mont Blanc might be the last route for us before home and family life reasserted itself. Fit and acclimatised, we had halved guidebook time to the summit from the Gôuter Hut. We had to. With minimal spare clothing there was no choice but to keep moving in a wind with an edge of ice to it. Our rucksacks flapped emptily on our backs, and at even slight halts, teeth chattered and hands stiffened with cold. But we could see the funny side

of it. Laughter kept us warm as Ceri hopped around with one foot stuck in a leg of his overtrousers; the last item of clothing he had left to put on.

So, we'd reached the summit hours before dawn, and finally given up waiting for the light, after freezing our butts off making conversation in poor French with a duvet-clad photographer cuddling his camera and stamping around a frosted tripod. Rather than try to force our way back past parties still ascending the narrow Bosses Ridge, we decided, on impulse, to go for the traverse over Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc du Tacul to the Aiguille du Midi.

Ice reaches depths of hundreds of feet up here, and moves inch by inch like some great slow animal harkening to the dim call of gravity. As it crawls forward it is bent, twisted and cracked over underlying rock, breaking and reforming. And crevasses split its surface and plumb its depths. Polished ice-flesh gleams green and blue near the surface, plunging away into darkness where deep-frozen air is held between palms of ice. There are places where there is always a crevasse.

Winter fills crevasses with metres of snow. As spring sunshine warms the surface, water melts

out through layer after layer to trickle away down smooth ice into the depths. Here and there wind-driven spindrift scours a snow surface smooth, freezing in repairs to the spider network of cracks as a crevasse creaks ever further open, stretching its screen of snow. Day by day, oh so little by little, a crevasse yawns, spreading a polite white hand over its mouth.

And a very cold wind had been blowing out of the East for a long time now, freezing scattering ice crystals into thin white sheets on windward slopes.

In pre-dawn greyness we clicked off headtorches, leaving the summit, heading down snow-slopes to where we thought the Col de la Brenva lay. And here the alarm bells started in my head. Partly it was the lack of tracks, partly a feeling that we were drifting too far towards Italy, partly the faint shapes of other climbers I began to see emerging onto a spur way to the left of the vast snowfield we were descending. But mostly it was something else; something that made my skin crawl and find something wrong with the taste of the air, setting my teeth on edge.

Dave was leading, his squat dark shape head-down in a bloody-minded plod that took him through most obstacles. Ceri was tied on to the mid-point, his long stride cruising the descent as it had cruised the ascent. We were going well, fast, in-line, straight down the tilted white field. Only I found my steps dragging, slowing, as a rose-gold morning infiltrated the air. I was spoiling their rhythm, sensed irritation from the others, and struggled on.

Suddenly it was more than I could bear.

'Hold on!' I yelled, pulling up short.

Ceri sprung the rope a little as he halted and the movement shuttled down to Dave, stopping him in mid-stride.

'What the hell's going on?' he shouted.

I waved him closer and we all closed up a little,

taking coils of rope into our hands but still keeping distance enough to prevent all three of us finding ourselves standing over the same crevasse.

'Look, I've got a really bad feeling about this. We're sort of heading straight down but there's no sign of anyone having been this way before and we've no idea what's under the surface'.

'Don't be bloody stupid! This is the most direct way. It's too icy for any clear tracks in this light, but it's obvious there's no crevasses,' Dave responded irritably.

'Well, there's people coming up that spur over there,' I pointed, 'and they can't be coming from anywhere else but the Col de Brenva,' a pause for emphasis, 'and coming that way for a reason.'

'It could be them that's lost you know: it doesn't have to be us.' Dave shivered. 'I don't know what you're bloody worryin' about. It's so early and so damn cold, there's no chance of falling through any soddin' snow bridges.' His irritation was turning easily to anger.

Even raised voices thinned out in all that space as the wind plucked our words away. We could not stop for long.

'All I'm saying is that I think we're a bit off route and that we ought to try to get back on it again. That's not too much to ask is it?'

Ceri's head had been turning from one man to the other like a spectator at a tennis match. Now he cut in, 'Map and compass?'

'What?' I was still hearing the bells. 'Oh, right.' I began to fumble with my rucksack.

'Bugger that!' Dave snapped. 'If you think you can do any fuckin' better, you lead the fuckin' way!'

'Right. I fuckin' will!' I'd had enough too.

Reversing the order of travel, I led off on a diagonal traverse towards the left-hand spur. We slowed but established a steady rhythm despite my edginess. Thrusting my ice axe into the uphill slope with my left hand I would kick two steps



forward then replant the axe to support the next two steps: axe, kick, kick; axe, kick, kick. Breaking trail like this was easy enough; the unconsolidated snow wasn't too deep. But the alarm bells, though muffled, were still sounding in my head. The spur grew closer. I could see people stopped, leaning hunched over their ice axes, suffering from altitude and cold. It was a long way from the Aiguille du Midi and the cable car. I maintained my rhythm. Axe, kick, kick... BOOM!

Suddenly, as I kicked a second step, an explosion physically shook me and I was enveloped in a huge cloud of snow-spicules. I could see nothing through the sparkling dust. My mind emptied, I lost my bearings and nothing made sense. But I held on to one thought, an imperative: don't move!

The alarm bells had stopped.

As the air slowly cleared I took in my situation. I was standing on a flake of snow, a wedge on the brink of an enormous crevasse that cracked away for a hundred metres or more in both directions across the slope. Its further edge lay beyond a gap the width of a room. I could not see the bottom. My ice axe was firmly planted in the slope above the crevasse, but a crack ran between my boots and the axe where the flake I stood on was detaching itself from the edge.

'Not explosion: implosion,' the thought formed unbidden.

I had moved my head the absolute minimum to take all this in. Now I looked up, following the line of the rope to where it linked me to the others. I noticed that for some distance its upper surface was whitened with a crusting of snow crystals. Dave and Ceri stood frozen, mouths open, arms hanging loosely at their sides. Neither had me belayed.

Extreme self-control manifested itself in an exaggerated politeness: 'May I have a belay, please?'

My words broke the spell. Both dropped onto their axes, driving the shafts deep into the snow, and simultaneously taking a bight of rope around the axeheads. Only then did I shift my weight onto my axe and take two big steps off the flake, climbing quickly away from the edge. The flake broke away whispering into the abyss behind me.

I stopped, breathing heavily. Ceri had me tight; the rope shivering a little at my waist.

'OK, moving on!' I shouted back up the slope.

Without another word, we cautiously traversed above the upper lip of the crevasse until it narrowed to a fine line, crossed it and then descended the spur rapidly to where a few rocks stuck up through the snow.

From the tracks and sweet papers it was clear that plenty of people had taken a break there. Strengthening sunshine soaked into us and for the first time for many hours it seemed we could relax. The effect on Dave and Ceri was immediate in the sudden need for a toilet stop. I felt strangely calm sitting on a granite block to one side looking back up towards the summit and the crevasse.

Windswept spindrift was still scattering amongst irregularities in a snow surface glittering and shining as sunlight explored it. From below, the crevasse could only be made out if you knew where to look.

Suddenly Dave's shadow fell across the snow at my feet. He was standing over me, silhouetted against the sun.

'...Erm... Sorry about that... could all've been dead... no way you or Ceri would've stopped me...

going straight down like that...at that speed... I'd have been well over it when it went...I was just going down a snow-slope in Scotland in my head... altitude, I 'spect... er... Sorry.' He shifted his feet awkwardly. 'Yeah... Ok. Let's go then.' There was nothing more to be said.

We continued the traverse, down to the Col de la Brenva, where the wind snatched my glove away as I began to abseil down the Col du Mont Maudit. But there was no question of taking in the summits of either Mont Maudit or later Mont Blanc du Tacul: we just didn't have it in us. I have a picture of Dave and Ceri on the descent of Mont Blanc du Tacul where the track passed into a crevasse. Two walls of ice tower over them. They do not look happy.

How do I explain that premonition? I don't. But I remain resolutely superstitious.

If you want some science try the following. Modern cognitive research has shown that the human mind receives sensory input that is vastly beyond the capacity of conscious thought to process. Conscious decision making is therefore selective in its processing of sensory evidence and as such partial, particularly partial to conscious objectives or ambitions. The unconscious mind receives all that input and works differently. The phenomenon of waking up in the morning with the solution to a particularly knotty problem is well known. The unconscious mind seems to have been working away all night to reach a conclusion that had escaped conscious thought yet makes perfect sense once recognised. There, sleep permits the unconscious mind to interface with consciousness; that's how we dream. Superstition does something similar: it allows the irrational credibility. Perhaps the unconscious recognises some sensory input that the conscious mind ignores. Whatever—it is no accident that people accustomed to danger, seamen or sherpas, tend to be superstitious: they are the ones that survive.

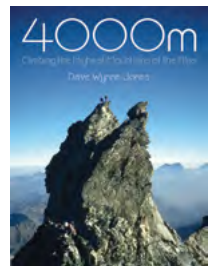


### Postscript

After that first season in Chamonix, I returned annually for nearly ten years, serving my apprenticeship before going on to climb all the 4000m mountains. I learnt a lot from the experience on Mont Blanc: about trusting my feelings; about how climbing partners can become irritable when things are not going well; about staying alive. It's not as though Alpine climbing has been full of such near-death experiences for me. The Alps have been kind to me: most of my ascents were done first time in good conditions with no more than the expected amount of hardship. The Alps weren't so kind to Rick Eastwood who died in an abseiling accident on the meet in Courmayeur when Mike Pinney, Jeff Harris and I completed our mission. But life wasn't kind to Mike or Ralph Atkinson or Pam Caswell, all CC members and seasoned alpinists who escaped death in the Alps only to fall victim to accident and health issues back home. My book is dedicated to them and all the climbing partners who made the mission possible. It's published by Whittles Publishing and available from internet suppliers as well as the publisher: Amazon offers a Kindle version in addition to the more conventional paperback. ISBN 978-184995-172-2

Above: Down-climbing the Col du Mont Maudit on abseil; the snow stake anchors were that doubtful.

Mont Blanc seen from the Col de la Brenva; the crevasse can just be seen cutting across the upper snow-slope.





# Rules of the Ashton Parallel Universe

## — PART 2 —

By Rob Davies

### c. Selection and Placement of Runners

15. When in doubt over route-finding while leading, follow your instincts, even though in the past these have always proved to be wrong, rather than reading the guidebook or listening to your mate's advice. Ignore the unhelpful stream of comments from your grumpy belayer, denigrating your route-finding ability.

16. Always err on the side of caution, as a climb cannot have any runner placements, apart from those in obvious cracks visible from the ground, no matter what the guidebook, your friends and every other climber might suggest. If runners are not immediately apparent, exclaim with unshakeable certainty, 'There's nothing, bloody nothing!', and do not venture to lead such a climb. Let your mate do it, then at the top express amazement that runners miraculously appeared when needed.

17. Remember that no runner placement serves any useful purpose unless it is above your head—and you are sitting on it.

18. Take three runners of each size, including cams up to #6, on a thirty-foot route. Large cams are attractive ornaments to carry on slabs, but, if it is obvious that a route needs outsize cams, leave them behind and haul them up later, as this allows a sneaky rest. If you visit a crag with plans to do a wide crack, leave the big cams at home, since this gives a perfect excuse for not even trying the route.

19. Since you are carrying too many runners, throw away a few while leading, but make sure any you jettison are your mate's, not your own. Your second will soon become skilled in catching dropped runners as they plummet past him.

20. No matter how many runners you carry, leave behind the one you really need. Expect your second to be adept at hurling runners straight into your hands, even when you are twenty-five feet above him. Avoid climbing with seconds who think your head is the best target when chucking runners upwards.

📷 All: Rob Davies



Hauling up the big guns Preparing for the crux of *Biggles Flies Undone*, Aire Point, West Cornwall.

21. Use only 100% reliable runner placements: bolts, crammed-in Friends or cold-welded nuts, as anything else will fall out as soon as you breathe on it. Push cams in as deeply as possible, tightly compressed, with the release triggers well out of reach. Remember: if your second can extract a runner without using a hydraulic jack, then it was not placed well enough.

22. Climb only with seconds who have passed A-Level Cam Extraction with distinction. After your second, with a lot of bad language, has hung around for half an hour trying to extract a cam and eventually given up, go down and remove it in a few seconds. Trainees will ultimately be grateful, as they can acquire cams abandoned by others: most such 'stuck' cams are feeble placements measured by the demanding Ashton standard, and easy to extract.

23. Never trust a nut runner unless it is backed up by a cam, even if your second always has great difficulty getting your nuts out. Carry a bunch of small wires purely for decoration: never place a micro-wire as it will rip as soon as you sit on it. Better still, do not try a route that needs such rubbishy gear, but stick to cracks that take cams of a decent size (Rule #5).

24. Refer to any climb where the first runner is more than eight feet up as 'death on a stick'. Two cams jammed in five feet above the ground, with additional placements of two cams every two feet is best practice. Reduce the spacing to twelve inches apart when the climbing gets hard. Stop in the middle of strenuous climbing to place more cams rather than pressing on to the next rest spot. Place all your cams in the first twenty feet as you obviously will not need them higher up.

25. Never replace your cams since, no matter how old they are, cams never wear out and the stitched loops retain their full strength indefinitely. Make DIY repairs with Araldite and bike cable to keep them in perfect working order. Decline to use your mate's new cams since they are not as effective as good luck charms as your own ancient relics.

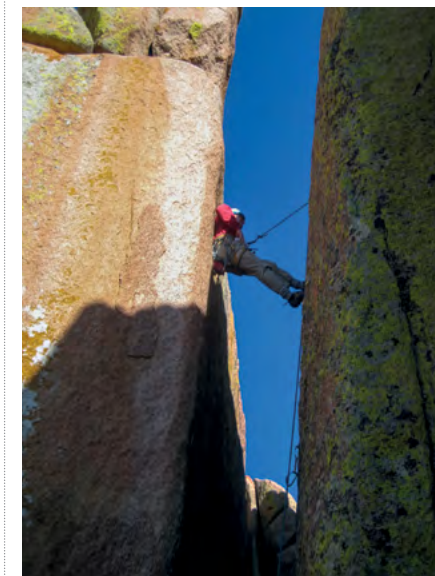
26. Always carry four large screw-gate carabiners: they are particularly useful for constructing multi-anchor belays halfway up an indoor wall. Rack them on the back of your harness when doing a tough back-and-foot chimney, as the grinding noise generated will set your belayer's teeth on edge. If he points out that the krabs are an impediment that serve no useful purpose, give a superior smug smile and say, 'That's me; that's how I do things.'

27. Tie neat knots in long slings and clip them behind you, so that they are impossible to place while hanging on with one hand: it is much more important that they always look tidy.

28. On steep ground, evaluate the next runner placement from below and identify the one you require. Then place the essential piece of gear behind your back, tangling it up amongst the heavy screw-gates, knotted slings and big cams, so that it cannot be found while clinging on.

29. When passing runners to your mate on a stance, clip them all together to maintain tidiness: this will ensure that when you drop them you lose the lot.

30. To calculate how many quick-draws you need on a sport route, count the bolts, add two for good luck; then double the result. Clip all the quick-draws upside-down, as this really winds up your mate. Do not lead a bolted route unless you have a 'Big Blue Stiffy<sup>10</sup>'. Carry a few cams on bolted routes in case of long run-outs between the bolts (i.e. if more than six feet apart). If a move looks easy, clip two opposed quick-draws into the nearest bolt. If all the clips are already in place, carry six additional quick-draws, four screw-gate krabs, a nut-extractor tool, a belay plate and a daisy chain—just in case.



Grinding krabs on *The Convict* An excellent, well-protected 5.9 chimney at Vedaauwo.



**d. Rope Management**

31. Before walking to a crag do not check that one of you has a rope, since two people would never both make the dumb mistake of leaving it behind.

32. Insist on climbing with double ropes of different colours even on short routes. Claim that this makes rope separation easier, though this would be a flagrant breach of Rule #33. When you need to place and clip the next runner above your head, get your belayer to give you tension. If your second allows you to drop so much as an inch while you do this, shout 'No! No! No! I don't want to be lowered'!

33. Maximise rope drag by placing runners to achieve at least two 90° bends in each rope: getting right angle bends in both ropes, whilst also getting them crossed, needs masterly technique. To be really secure, weave both ropes in a zig-zag pattern. On a route running in a straight line use the Z-clip technique<sup>11</sup>: the two 180° kinks thus generated are an even more effective stopper than a couple of right-angle bends.

34. Never extend cams with quick-draws before clipping, unless your belayer is so close that he can resort to physical violence to make you use an extender: as a result, (a) the cam will walk in and become even more deeply stuck, thus conforming to Rule #21, and (b) rope-drag is greatly enhanced, making Rule #33 easier to achieve.

35. When climbing indoors, maintain the rope's condition by use of a rope-bag, but when outdoors move the rope between climbs by dragging it through the dirt. If your grouchy companion asks you not to stand on the rope, smile benevolently and move away, but make sure you stand on it again a minute later.

**e. Correct Belaying Procedures**

36. Encourage the leader if he dithers. Stand fifteen feet out from the crag, fold your arms, take a photo, rummage in your rucksack, unwrap a sandwich, fiddle with your phone, yawn a lot, extract a handkerchief and blow your nose loudly. Smile benignly when the leader—who gets over-excited and should take up a more sedate hobby, like bowls—shouts, 'Would you kindly pay some attention?' (or deplorably crude words to that effect).



Right angle bends? ✓  
Ropes crossed? ✗ (not yet)  
*Mouseproof, Trewavas Head, West Cornwall.*

37. If the tactics of Rule #36 do not motivate the leader, cough loudly and persistently, as if you had smoked sixty Capstan full-strength a day for the last fifty years. To get away from the chronic hacking noise, the leader will pull his finger out and climb much more rapidly.

38. Be attentive when belaying a leader in difficulties, a situation easily recognised by comments like '5a, my (vulgar anatomical reference omitted)!' that come floating downwards. If, suffering from ridiculous (and short-lived) notions of not weighting runners, he attempts to climb down from his highest runner to a hands-off rest, do not pay out rope until he gives the correct climbing call, namely: 'Slack! I said SLACK! Give me some [expletive deleted] slack!' Contrast this approach with the correct technique explained under Rule #45.

39. Make abject apologies to everyone within earshot ('I'm sorry: he does this all the time') when the leader noisily breaks wind as he uneasily contemplates difficult moves.

40. Give very clear and precise climbing calls. Make so much noise that you sound like a TA platoon on manoeuvres.

10 In the normal universe a 'Big Blue Stiffy' is referred to as a Blue Light panic sling.  
11 Z-clip: place two runners close together, clipping the rope first into the upper one and then into the lower one.



# Snow on the Equator II Mount Kenya & Rwenzori

*Mount Kenya and the Rwenzori Mountains, alpine climbing in Equatorial Africa! John describes some of his adventures during a Mountain safari (road trip) that combined peak bagging in both ranges.*

**By John Harding**





My journey on the Simplon/Orient Express never justified the cost of the 1st class wagon lit ticket. The train's lack of facilities would have deterred James Bond (let alone Hercule Poirot) from repeating the experience. The through-service to Istanbul finally collapsed in 1977 and today's tourists get no further than Venice in re-vamped carriages which only faintly recreate the glamour of pre-First World War travel de luxe. My eight pieces of luggage made movement within the confined space of the compartment, that I shared with a large Turk, almost impossible. Nonetheless, apart from the tiresome interruptions of customs officials as the train was shunted to and fro at the Greek and Bulgarian frontiers, that first night passed without incident.

Next day, we chugged on, unhurriedly, through a Balkan countryside thickly covered in snow. There was no food on the train and when it ground to an unscheduled halt at 10 pm in the middle of the Bulgarian Plain, I carried on reading in my bunk, leaving my companion to investigate the situation. When he failed to return after half an hour, I bestirred myself to find our carriage completely deserted. Dressing in panic, I leaped outside to see that the wagon lit carriage had been uncoupled from the main train which was now gathering steam another fifty-metres down the line. Dragging my impedimenta through the snow, I scrambled aboard just as it moved off into the night.

Inside, all was panic and confusion. Both the heating and lighting had failed and distraught passengers were struggling to find themselves seats. Abandoning my luggage, I forced my way through the mêlée and eventually located a compartment unoccupied save for an individual wrapped in a blanket who was moaning and shuddering convulsively. Plague or cholera? Past caring, I moved in. At dawn next morning, a young Syrian student broke blanket-cover and insisted on sharing with me salami, bread and halva, my first food for eighteen

hours. We spent most of that day stuck in a siding at Belgrade's railway station and arrived in Trieste on Christmas Day, twenty-four hours late. Late on Boxing Day, I joined my parents and sister Jane at the Swiss ski resort of Pontresina for our first family reunion in two years.

This was the first time that I had ever been skiing. To ski had always been a boyhood ambition, but to ski well you'd best start early so I never achieved that distinction. Nonetheless, after two days in the Beginners' Class, I could negotiate the basic turns. Thus enthused I then spent the best part of February at Champéry and Kitzbühel working on a survival technique that I hoped would enable me to graduate from the piste to ski mountaineering. Precious days of home leave sped by, though not without a week in the North-West Highlands with old climbing chums Neil Macpherson, Bill Norton, John Scott and Stewart Hawkins, selecting our routes from WH Murray's classic *Undiscovered Scotland*. Our best expedition was the traverse of An Teallach, Murray's 'ideal mountain' as having the finest ridge in Scotland outside the Cuillin. High on the flanks of Sail Liath, a wind-slab avalanche broke away just below its corniced ridge and took all five of us several hundred feet down the mountain. As I tumbled down, over and over, half-buried in a black void, all I could think of was a maxim I had once read in a Swiss mountaineering manual:

'Keep hold of your ice axe whatever else. To lose it means disgrace'.

We came to rest just before the slope dropped sheer away. Miraculously, no one was injured and so, after dusting ourselves down, we re-grouped to re-regain the airy ridge. Diaphanous clouds opened and closed; a pair of golden eagles wheeled above; a Brocken Spectre lighted our way and a thousand-foot glissade down An Teallach's north flank closed a memorable Highland day.

In April 1962 I was posted to Aden, and the

following April I was unexpectedly promoted to act as the Deputy Ministerial Secretary (Security) with direct administrative responsibility for Aden's Internal Security, Police Force and security liaison between M15, the British Armed Forces and the Federal Government. The demands of this new job inevitably meant extending my tour and kiboshed any plans for that long-promised alpine summer season. Instead, when my leave fell due in December 1963, I decided to embark on a second East African Mountain safari taking in both Mount Kenya and the Rwenzori. Once again, the problem was to find climbing partners. My main contact in Kenya, John Blacker, was keen to climb in the Rwenzori 'but not Mount Kenya again!' At this juncture, Jane Fenton, a keen naturalist whom I had met skiing earlier that year and who was currently staying with friends in Nairobi, entered the picture. Jane was a walker rather than a mountaineer, but when I mentioned my plans in a letter she replied by return.

'I would love to come as a baggage bearer/cook/climber to either Kenya or Rwenzori or both. PS: I have just met your friend John Blacker.'

Within days, I got a letter from Blacker to say he had bumped into Jane at Lukenia, the Mountain Club of Kenya's local rock-climbing playground near Nairobi:

'Jane's a very nice girl' he wrote, 'but came wearing atrocious footwear and fell off an easy climb. John Hull and I have been giving her instruction, but I'm beginning to doubt whether she will make the grade and frankly don't think that she should attempt either Nelion or Batian.'

With only three weeks to go before my leave began, Jane and I were still the only starters for Mount Kenya mainly because most of the Mountain Club of Kenya's regulars were already booked to celebrate Kenya's Independence Day, 12th December 1963, on the summit of Batian (17,052 ft). I had almost given up on the project when, out of the blue, I was

telephoned by Hamish McNish, a thirty-year old Scot working with a firm of quantity surveyors in Aden. Hamish had climbed in Scotland, Norway and the Alps, but had no climbing equipment with him. This could be put right in Nairobi, but to embark on another Mount Kenya venture with one non-climber and the other coming on spec seemed crazy. Later, I would owe Hamish my life.


The flags and bunting of the new Republic of Kenya fluttered wearily in Nairobi's streets. Nonetheless, five frantic days of partying with the Happy-Valley set and the less inhibited members of the Mountain Club induced a more buoyant mood. Hamish flew in from Aden to celebrate Christmas Day and on Boxing Day, he, Jane and I, drove 135 miles to Raymond Hook's farm at Burguret in a borrowed Land Rover. Hook, looking even more grizzled than I remembered him from two years before, was absurdly pleased to see us.

'But why on earth have you come to climb the mountain at this time of year?', he growled. 'The rainy season isn't finished yet, so the Burguret track will be one big bog and I certainly don't fancy conditions higher up. Those idiots who tried to plant an Uhuru flag on the top of Batian at midnight had a dreadful time of it as the whole mountain was covered in snow. They only got as far as Nelion (17,016 ft). I'm giving you my best muleteer Daburu. You'll remember him from your last visit. Camp here tonight, and make sure you get moving early tomorrow morning.'

As Hook predicted, the Burguret track was unrecognisable from what I remembered three years before. Our two muleteers had their work cut-out hacking through the freshly grown bamboo thickets with pangas. The giant-heather zone was thigh-deep in liquid mud and light rain persisted throughout the day and into the night. After rigging up three army 'Poncho' capes for a shelter, all five of us huddled under it for the night with Daburu





Mount Kenya. Midget Peak after the storm.  
 John Harding

constantly feeding the log fire to keep predators at bay. The following morning, as we sloshed through the knee-high tussock-grass of the alpine zone, the clouds suddenly parted to reveal Batian's tremendous south-west face sheathed in a mantle of fresh snow.

At Two Tarn Hut I paid off Daburu and retired to bed with a splitting headache. Jane, ever cheerful, seemed unaffected by the altitude while Hamish broke the ice of the tarn and gave himself a strip-wash. Our plan to climb Terere (15,461 ft), after inspecting the newly built Kami Hut, got no further than a scramble up to Arthur's Seat (15,068 ft). On the third day I suggested to Hamish that we have a shot at Midget Peak (15,416 ft), the spectacular aiguille that rises like a cathedral's spire at the far end of the lake. Midget had a certain reputation and might have been Shipton and Tilman's last climb. On their way down, the weather broke and the inexperienced Tilman slipped off a snow-covered ledge and concussed himself. Shipton somehow managed to climb down to Tilman, bearing his companion's dead weight on his shoulder, before shepherding him off the mountain.

I hadn't climbed seriously for eighteen months and never before with Hamish, so it was foolhardy to have started late in the afternoon. We made the summit in good time, but this left barely an hour to get down in daylight. During Shipton's dramatic descent, he had made eight successive abseils hacking lengths from his 120 foot climbing rope with a stone to make belay loops. I had a knife and plenty of abseil slings, but after a couple of botched starts reverted to sending Hamish on ahead on a tight rope. We were still only half-way down when night fell like a blanket and it began to snow heavily. The holds became impossible to see and, for the next two hours, I clawed my way down the face like a crab, pitch after pitch, relying on feel and instinct. Back at the hut, Hamish went straight to bed, but staggered up again at midnight to celebrate Hogmanay with

Jane's hot chocolate and whisky. Next morning, I stepped outside to find that yesterday's storm had left a foot of snow around the hut and Midget sheathed in ice.

Our Midget adventure had not fazed Hamish who was now impatient to do the *Shipton/Wynn Harris Route* on Nelion. The weather relented as we began the thousand-metre climb to the Arthur Firmin Hut through knee-deep breakable-crust. The hut's door was blocked by a wall of snow and inside it was like a refrigerator with the bedding sopping wet. When another storm blew in that night and lasted until midday, I settled for my fifth ascent of Lenana (16,351 ft).

At 4am next morning it was still blowing a gale. While I was cooking bacon and eggs for two, Hamish spent the time easing himself into his frozen boots. We hadn't said a word to each other until I noticed the size of his rucksack.

'What on earth have you got in there Hamish?'

'Both my sleeping bags if you must know: just in case we have to bivouac.'

A sharp exchange lightened his load by ten pounds.

The wind never dropped and by half-way across the Lewis Glacier, the largest on Mount Kenya but already shrunk to half the size it was sixty years before, our clothes were already coated with rime. I hadn't even noticed the transition from night to day when we began what I remembered as an easy scramble up the 'Donkey Walk' but had been transformed into a serious climb up an ice-filled couloir. Another thirty minutes were spent trying to negotiate the 'Rabbit Hole,' where the rock became coated with verglas faster than I could scrape it off. After two hours, we had climbed a mere 250 ft, I broke off the engagement. During the descent Hamish managed to get himself stuck under a waterfall on his second abseil and almost

froze to death. Back at the hut, the sun came out for the first time that day.

We retreated to Two Tarn Hut that same evening with Jane weak from diarrhoea and Hamish in a sorry state with his bald pate festering with sun-sores, his eyes puffed up like balloons, and his feet a bloody mess. Over supper he blurted out:

'Look, John, I'm very sorry but I've really had my fill of this bloody mountain. I haven't got that much leave left and I'd like to get away tomorrow so that I can climb Kilimanjaro before I go home.'

'Tell you what Hamish, we're all feeling a bit battered, but give it a day and we'll see things very differently. The barometric pressure's rising and, from this hut, there's a fine route up Nelion that's well within our compass.'

Jane smiled sweetly, but said nothing.

At 5am next morning, the moon was full and the night sky brilliant with stars as we stumbled across the moraines of the Darwin Glacier below Nelion's south face. Hamish was limping badly and I had picked up Jane's diarrhoea. Nonetheless, by 6.45 am we had reached the top-most névé of the Darwin Glacier where I spotted an old abseil sling hanging from the rocks above.

'Must be the route up there', I said to Hamish. 'Doesn't look that difficult. I'm sure we can manage a more interesting variant.'

Hamish looked less than enthusiastic, but I was now feeling on form and without further chat launched myself up an open corner formed by two converging rock walls. The next three hundred feet of near-vertical rock, split by ice-filled cracks and chimneys, gave me the hardest and most sustained stretch of climbing I had done to date. After two and a half hours, I reckoned I had cracked it on reaching a point just below the lip of an easy-angled snow slope that led to the base of Nelion's summit rocks.

'Nearly there!' I shouted down to Hamish who had cunningly secreted himself into a niche in the rock



Right: Mt Kenya.  
Retreat from Nelion.  
📷 Hamish McNish

Below: Mt Kenya.  
At Two Tarn Hut,  
Jane Fenton,  
Hamish McNish & John  
Harding.  
📷 John Harding



overlooking the Darwin Glacier. I began a delicate traverse across the face towards a large granite block which abutted the snow field. It had looked firm enough until I grasped it, but at a touch, the whole thing broke away taking me and several tons of rock with it. Hamish fielded a shower of rock fragments on the rucksack he had stuck over his head while I was left hanging in space thirty feet below him.

My head was singing; my forehead was streaming with blood and my right eye was closing rapidly. Both my shoulder and hip felt as if I'd been hit by a ton of bricks.

'You okay John?' asked Hamish.

'Bugged if I am' I grunted. 'But at least we're still on the same rope. Thank God your belay held. Are you alright?'

'I'm fine,' said Hamish.

Actually, I was both shocked and dazed, yet sufficiently fired-up to consider carrying-on with the climb, now that the difficulties were behind me. Still hanging free on the rope, it was the intense pressure around my waist that brought back a glimmer of sense and the realisation that I must get back onto the rock face before the rope squeezed the life out of me. Yet, to get lodgement wasn't that easy for with only one eye operative, I couldn't focus properly. Eventually, I reconnected with the rock and Hamish climbed down to join me. The loss of a couple of slings and karabiners during the fall didn't make abseiling any easier and it took seven hours to reach the bottom of the glacier just in time to avoid stone and ice avalanches sweeping down from Nelion's sun-loosened upper slopes.

Back at the hut, Jane got busy with hot tea and bandages. Later that evening Daburu arrived with the mules. The following day's walk-out to the Gathuru Forest station in thick mist was another trial by tussock grass, mud and bamboo thicket. Conversation was limited as Hamish's feet were in tatters; Jane was exhausted with diarrhoea; and I

kept stumbling about like a drunken man having lost all perspective. We blessed the local Forestry Officer who gave us a lift from the road-head to the Silverbeck Hotel, but were too tired to face supper. I saw a doctor next day and swore that I would never climb without a helmet again.

On the 9th January 1964, Jane and I left Nairobi to begin a 800 mile drive to Mufindi in Tanzania to deliver a beat-up Land Rover to a big-game hunter. Jane might not have been the greatest climber, but her support on the mountain had been rock-solid and she now proved herself a dauntless driver. On our way down the dirt road that masqueraded as the Cape to Cairo Highway, we spent four days touring the game parks and four nights at luxurious game lodges with scarcely another tourist in sight. The snows of Kilimanjaro became the backcloth to our meanderings through herds of elephant, prides of lion and the occasional rhino, with the blue hills of Africa ever rolling away to the deep south.

Mufindi, at a little over 6500 ft, has a climate as English as exists in Africa. Our hosts were Jane's old friend Mary and husband Jonathan Niblett. He was just back from a week tracking-down a rogue bull-elephant that had been wrecking several hundred-square-miles of the Brooke Bond tea plantation that he managed. After a three-day idyll, Jane and I turned-about to catch the East African Express at Dodoma for a 400-mile train journey to Mwanza on Lake Victoria, at an average speed of fifteen mph. A thirty-one hour crossing of the lake on the SS Victoria took us to Kampala where, after a night at Makerere University, we met up with John Blacker and Charles Richards to drive to Fort Portal, the road-head for the Rwenzori.

John Buchan once described the Rwenzori as one of the world's 'Last Secrets'. For 2,500 years these fabled 'Mountains of the Moon,' as depicted on Ptolemy's famous map, were thought to be the

source of the Nile yet had defied all efforts to locate them. When Nero's exploratory expedition failed to return, the river's elusive source became one the world's greatest geographical mysteries and one for which Europe's most adventurous 19th century explorers were prepared to risk their lives. When, in 1867, the Royal Geographical Society instructed Burton and Speke to find the Nile's 'coy fountains', their specific task was to discover the Mountains of the Moon. The existence of the Rwenzori remained a matter for conjecture until Stanley got proper sightings of the range from the shores of Lake Albert during his 1888 expedition. Lake Albert is the White Nile's secondary source and the Rwenzori's snows are that lake's main feeders. Ptolemy had almost got it right all along.

Stanley's discovery encouraged a flood of European scientific expeditions to explore the Rwenzori. However its climbing history effectively begins and ends with the Duke of Abruzzi's monumental Italian Expedition in 1906 which employed three hundred porters and twelve Europeans. These included the photographer Vittorio Sella, and the Courmayeur guides Ollier and Brocherell—the first ascensionists of Mount Kenya with Mackinder seven years before. In the space of thirty-six days, Abruzzi's mountaineers and surveyors climbed every peak in the range which Abruzzi named after members of the Italian and British royal families. The photographs taken by his photographer Vittorio de Sella are still unsurpassed. Five of Rwenzori's six snow massifs he named after African explorers—Stanley, Speke, Baker, Gessi and Emin. The sixth bears his own name, Luigi di Savoia, as the Royal Geographical Society's tribute to the greatest mountaineer-explorer of his day.

The riddle of the Rwenzori's very existence was largely due to its proximity to the Congo's equatorial forests whose rain-sodden winds blanket the range with dense cloud for most of the year. Doctor





Rwenzori.  
Negotiating the  
Jabberwocky Forest.  
📷 John Harding

Noel Humphreys, who, in 1926, made the second ascent of Margherita (16,757 ft), the range's highest peak, in 1926 enjoyed only one day without rain during six separate expeditions. Fully aware of its reputation, we didn't fancy our chances so wasted no time at Ibanda, headquarters of the Bakonjo tribe, where Charles—one of the few Europeans who spoke Bakonjo, the language of the tribe that supplied porters for Rwenzori expeditions—recruited a headman and nine porters for our ten-day trek within the space of an hour. Douglas Busk, of Elburz fame, had considered it necessary to hire sixty-two porters for his five-man, ten-day visit in 1953. Carrying loads of fifty pounds apiece in near-freezing temperatures and wearing little more than Mr Ahmed Bhimji's flimsy cotton shirts and shorts, these Bakonjo porters were the real heroes of our own expedition.

Climbing in the Rwenzori had become less of an expedition since the end of the Second World War when the Government of Uganda subsidised the Mountain Club of Uganda's hut building programme. Nonetheless, given its reputation for bad

weather, we were prepared for the worst when our caravan set off in column up the Bujuku Valley on 19th January. While the weather had persistently been against us on Mount Kenya, it stayed fine for most of our time in the Rwenzori. The network of huts took the sting out of its notorious approach marches. Apart from a brush with a column of soldier ants, the familiar tales of impassable torrents, the 'bottomless' Bigo Bogs, and the impenetrable Jabberwocky Forest, any worries proved misplaced. On the morning of our third day we were comfortably ensconced at the Bujuku huts (13,000 ft), already occupied by five Brits who had driven overland for £80 a head; three Germans without a single item of climbing equipment between them; and two others who were living on a diet of porridge and Rock Hyrax.

With the weather set fair, we set the bar high. On 23 January all four of us climbed Speke's Vittorio Emanuele peak (16,039 ft) by its heavily crevassed glacier. On the following day, we moved up to the Irene Lakes Hut to squeeze into its tiny aluminium shelter prior to Blacker and I making a dawn start to attempt Margherita by its *NE Ridge*. All went well until I was half-way up a steep and exposed section of rock filmed with ice. I was suddenly seized by a paralysing attack of vertigo, something I had not experienced since my earliest climbs. My nerve failed and I could climb no further. At this John calmly took over the lead and, after reaching the top of the step, we threaded our way through a maze of fantastic ice mushrooms, reaching Margherita's summit only three and a half hours after leaving the hut. With progress so fast, we decided to carry on to Alexandra (16,698 ft) by a traverse that depends on the state of cornices, which can be impassable. Barely started, the mists descended and for twenty minutes we could only wait impatiently before a momentary clearing revealed a maze of yawning bergschrunds at our feet. Nothing ventured, we

plunged on and fifty minutes later were staring back from Alexandra to the fantastic confection of snow and ice that festooned Margherita's summit.

The original plan had been to drop down from the Stanley Plateau to rejoin Charles and Jane at the Irene Lakes Hut. But at this point, a thick mist reduced visibility to a few yards. The Plateau is a featureless snowfield, covering over two square miles and fringed by ice-cliffs. Shipton and Tilman had spent a couple of days wandering around it, blind. To chance our arm descending the cliffs in these conditions was asking for trouble so we retraced our steps and eventually came across a line of tracks that could only have come up from the Elena Hut, two kilometres further down the Elena Glacier. Following them until the clouds lifted as unexpectedly as they had fallen, we diverted to bag our third peak of the day, Moebius (16,124 ft). From the Elena Hut, a contouring traverse around Stanley's eastern flank led back to the Irene Lakes Hut where Charles and Jane were waiting anxiously. That ten hour traverse of Mount Stanley, involving 5000 feet of ascent and descent, was one of the most rewarding climbs I ever did and marked the high point of our Rwenzori expedition.

The following day, with the weather still holding, we decamped, rejoined the porters and moved on to the superbly sited Kitandara Lakes Hut where a leopard raided the porter's camp. As was his wont, Blacker insisted on having a skinny dip in the lake and, without thinking, I dived in after him from a high rock into water so cold that my body went into temporary paralysis. From the Kitandara base, all four of us climbed Mount Baker's summit peak, Edward (15,888 ft), leaving Blacker and me to continue along the ridge to bag Baker's subsidiary peak Semper (15,724 ft). An attempt to reach Lac Vert on the Belgian Congo side of the range next day was frustrated by helichrysum, an everlasting shrub which proved impenetrable.

As a *grande finale* to mark our last full day, Blacker and I decided to make a bid for Savoia (16331 ft), the highest and most remote peak in the Southern Stanley Group. Inevitably, the weather broke. After cramponing up the lower Savoia glacier, dense cloud and a howling wind made it impossible to fix our exact position. A line of snow-covered slabs led to an obvious ice gully up which we front-pointed to a bleak summit where the mist momentarily cleared. Staring across a blank space to what was patently a higher peak, John uttered an uncharacteristic expletive and then groaned:

'Bloody hell. We've climbed the wrong mountain! That must be Savoia on the other side of the glacier. There's not a hope of reaching it today.'

As if to rub it in, John skewered his right calf with a crampon while reversing the gully and twice we both fell through crevasses on the glacier. Back at the hut Charles offered some comfort after concluding that we had unwittingly done a new route on Philip. To celebrate this low-key triumph John opened the last tin of coq au vin for supper.


We left the Rwenzori by the Mubuku Valley, the route originally taken by the British pioneers whose names, thanks to Abruzzi, are preserved in the nomenclature of the range—Stairs, Scott-Elliot, Moore, Freshfield and Woolaston. Lower down the upper valley, giant groundsel gave way to heather-trees ten-metres high and, as the last semblance of a path vanished, we spiralled down into the jungle by a succession of twisting steps and a three-hundred metre near-vertical slope beside a thundering cataract. It was here that Charles suddenly lost his footing. We watched helplessly as he clawed desperately at the tree roots that arrested a fall that would otherwise have been fatal. The path had not been cut for several years. Marching single-file in extended-column, the porters had to hack their way through a mass of interlacing roots and branches that formed a vegetal mattress several feet off the





ground. Soon, we were having to ford streams and squelch through fetid swamps strewn with the carcasses of decaying trees draped in cushions of moss. We brushed aside the creepers, lianas and giant nettles that barred the way. Forcing a way through the sunless bamboo thickets, we often had to squat and sometimes even crawl to get through. The march never seemed to end, but late that night the silhouette of Nyambitaba Hut, from where we had set out eleven days before, emerged through the gloom.

After an almost uninterrupted spell of good weather, it is easy to over-enthusiast about the Rwenzori. In a normal season, the Bujuku route could have taken twice as long and the Mubuku route could have been impassable. Only three weeks before us, a German party had never managed a single day's climbing in ten, and had been chased up a tree by an elephant! Many have had good cause to curse Rwenzori's weather, yet without it the range's glaciers and snowfields, much larger than those of Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro combined, would cease to exist. Unlike those great volcanoes of Kenya, Kilimanjaro and Elgon, the Rwenzori is a proper range of mountains, sixty-miles long and thirty wide with its forests and flora more bizarre and exotic than imagination can conceive. Here, by the shores of its icy lakes and in the depths of its hidden valleys, you may still hear the shriek of the hyrax and the cough of the leopard as you gaze up in wonder at the Mountains of the Moon.

Left: Rwenzori. The fantastic ice mushrooms of Margherita from Alexandra.  
 John Harding

This is a chapter from John's book, *Distant Snows*, which follows his life in the mountains. It is published by Bâton Wicks, ISBN: 978-1-898573-78-4, and can be ordered at [www.v-publishing.co.uk/distant-snows](http://www.v-publishing.co.uk/distant-snows) cost £20. It is available from good bookshops, well known internet retail sites, and on Kindle. Review on p267.





*Skinhead Moonstomp.*  
Repeat ascent for  
photos. The waist high  
wire fell out.  
📷 Glenn Robbins



# Climbing with Mr Pollitt

*Gogarth Main Cliff is arguably one of the UK's World Class crags. During the 80s many great routes were climbed, Steve Andrews and the late Andy Pollitt had some great adventures culminating in the first ascent of Skinhead Moonstomp, a gripping read.*

By Steve Andrews

I first met Andy at Stoney Middleton where he was attempting to repeat *Little Plum*, at the time one of the UK's hardest routes. With a move to Wales I went from strength to strength that summer, climbing every day out of Pete's Eats, around Llanberis and up the Pass. I was soon knocking off the great routes *Quasar*, *Stroll On*, *Zangorilla*, etc. Then Andy arrived in town. We spent many hours talking, usually focusing on Gogarth. We saw eye to eye. It's the ultimate test of British adventure climbing and we went through the list of things Andy wanted to knock off. I couldn't believe my luck.

We were soon heading down to the water-line; first on the list was the second ascent of *Alien*, a huge rightward trending groove, almost a fault line, through the overhangs of the vast main cliff. It would probably be straightforward but the groove stops at fifty feet only to restart a little higher, with the gap forming the obvious crux. It was a hot humid day and the rock was quite greasy. Andy climbed easily to the roof, placed some good gear then pulled up towards the resumption of the groove. He cast a long wiry leg out right, at head height, onto a poor foot hold, and tried to pull through—the foot greased off the hold and he was dangling in space. Thus the next few hours went, with Andy greasing off the hold every time; exhausted he came down

for a rest. I tied on and had a look at the problem, but the foothold is key and if he couldn't stay on it there was no chance for me. We retired to Pete's Eats to lick our wounds.

Undaunted, we returned the next day in much better climatic conditions. Looking up at the crux there were huge dollops of chalk where we had struggled the previous day. Andy went up and pulled round the roof at the first attempt. He shouted down at me in glee and then cruised up to the stance of *Rat Race*. I followed, as always, with fear in my heart, but other than the crux it wasn't a bad pitch. The gear was sparse, not that Andy needed it, but I wondered where I might have ended up if I had fallen off.

We followed the much easier second pitch to the break of *Cordon Bleu*; having done the meat of the climbing it's tempting to scuttle off along the break but we pushed on with the top pitch. It looks nothing, an indistinct wall, vague cracks, some bridging, all with limited gear. Andy started to enjoy himself, shouting down "it's good, really good". I doubt that this pitch gets many ascents, a pity as it's a brilliant E3 5c. Andy commented "Good one Pat, I wish I'd found it" as we retired to Llanberis for the night.


Our next target; *The Big Sleep*, unrepeated at the time and with a big reputation!





Andy led off and I followed to the *Dinosaur* stance, one of the most atmospheric and frightening places I know. The original pegs had long since rotted away in the constant salt spray of the Irish Sea and the only decent gear was one good Friend, various other half-in Rocks were in place. You can half-rest your ass on a protruding rock whilst hanging off the Friend. Life on the very edge! The *Positron* headwall was above us on the right, a huge shield of rock with a fearsome reputation. We discussed; the line seemed straightforward, traverse right on to the wall then follow vague cracks leftward to a point where you have to make difficult moves right into *Positron*, then up the wall to finish. Andy climbed most of the pitch with ease, enjoying the situation. With his long arms he made the difficult move right into *Positron* look easy, before romping up to the top of the wall.

The second stance is the complete opposite of the first, a perfect bucket-seat at the top of the wall, with a crack in the back that will take anything you throw in to it! Andy took his seat with his skinny legs dangling over the edge. I was soon de-rigging the *Dinosaur* stance and was in for a double treat: climbing the *Positron* headwall and my first route in my first pair of Firé rock boots, yes my first pair of ‘sticky boots’. I ventured onto the wall and engaged the rounded cracks and very sloping footholds that formed the meat of the pitch. I was amazed that my feet just stuck to the sloping white quartzite as I made steady, and very enjoyable, progress up the wall. The cracks trended back left towards *Dinosaur* and, as they petered out, Andy shouted instructions for the crux. I lunged right finding a two finger under-cut and swung wildly rightward, just managing to hang on, crossing arms until my left hand grasped the diagonal line of holds rising from *Positron*. I cruised up and joined Andy in the bucket where we celebrated.

Andy on *The Bells, The Bells!* North Stack Wall.  
 Bernard Newman

Climbing with Andy was an experience, every day was the same. “What’s the biggest most audacious thing we can possibly do today?” Then off we went to try and, surprisingly, most of the time we got a result.

We ventured away from our primary interest, the Main Cliff, for a foray on Yellow Wall. *The Moon* is its classic route, in my biased opinion one of three five star routes on Gogarth: the others being *Citadel* and *Dream of White Horses*. It winds its way from left to right with a short starting pitch followed by two magnificent pitches of rising traverse. Its finest moment comes when the second rounds the corner to the second stance only to find it’s fifteen feet below them and they have to down-climb to it. To any adventure climber *The Moon* is a milestone route.

Beyond that there is *The Cow*, a counter line going more directly up the wall and, at E5, much harder. At that time there was only one other route on the wall, the super direct *Ludwig*; impossibly difficult climbing up the left wall of an overhanging groove that leads to a traverse right with a point of aid. We were off to free it. I was tied into as much of Yellow Wall as I could get gear into as Andy headed off up the groove of crumbling yellow rock, the kind that turns to sand as you touch it. My neck strained to look up, the groove overhangs severely, maybe by as much as thirty degrees. I realised that if Andy fell off, and assuming that all the runners held, he would dangle in space beside me. If I fell off seconding I could end up thirty feet out from the rock with no escape other than a prusik using my boot laces. Andy made steady progress until the line started to force him right. “I can see where I need to go but there are no holds to traverse on”. The gap was possibly six feet wide, he tried several lines, high, low, hands on the holds, feet on the holds; nothing worked. After an hour Andy got more frustrated with it, he then pulled up some slack and, like a feral cat, he leapt across the groove clawing for friction until he was established on the

other side. Fortunately he got some good gear in and continued up less difficult ground. I followed with trepidation but, on reaching the crucial traverse, a tight rope and the knowledge that there was no other option got me across. In the groove above every hold seemed to turn to dust, I even got it in my eyes, it’s not like the solid quartzite of my beloved Main Cliff.

Sitting in Pete’s Eats that evening we wrote up our day’s work. Andy: “*Ludwig* now free”. I added the cryptic comment “No one else ever needs to climb it again”.

Our finest route together was undoubtedly *Skin-head Moonstomp*.

We had been climbing on the Main Cliff and were wandering along the bottom looking up at all the amazing lines. Andy was giving me a few pointers on various routes, in particular the main pitch of *Positron* where he demonstrated the crux moves whilst standing on the ground. I took it all in; I knew it was destined to be useful.

Then, as an aside, he pointed up at the *Positron* headwall. “There is the most amazing flake up there, on the right-hand side of the lower wall, just wish I could put it together with something but there is no start for it”. I was gob smacked and pulled Andy over to the left, standing him in the huge square-cut corner that bounds the left side of the wall where *Positron* starts. “Andy—nothing goes up this corner!” We looked at each other in disbelief, our route was born. My years of studying the lines on Gogarth had paid off!

We spent a day investigating our new line, all was solid but we wondered about the lack of gear on the headwall. Andy found a small RP placement high in the flake, there was an old and rusty peg below the headwall and a poor down pointing spike nearby where you could place a Friend, that was it for maybe sixty feet of hard climbing. The square corner below looked more straight-forward. Good



climbing up to the roof with reasonable gear then a traverse right to where we could take a hanging belay. After that straight up, across *Alien*, then trend left towards the base of the headwall, before launching up it.

It was a glum day. We geared up at the top only to find Joe Healey and David Jones there too, they were going to photograph Joe on *Citadel*. This meant there would be a camera in the perfect place to capture us on the first ascent. It was one of those days when you're warm enough while climbing but the belayer can suffer in the cold, and then struggle to climb. Yes, it was a duvet day so I towed mine behind me on long slings.

Standing in the bottom of the corner I tied myself in 'just in case'. Andy set off, steady climbing with intermittent gear led towards the roof. Andy bridged across the top of the groove and we discussed the line, opting to traverse right to take a hanging stance in *Positron*. The moves were committing but well protected. After about thirty feet, Andy reached *Positron* and started setting up the complex belay. Eventually he was lashed to the rock and taking in the rope. I was cold, running on the spot trying to get warm, and was scared stiff of what lay ahead. At the top of the corner there was a runnerless thirty foot horizontal traverse to the hanging stance. Andy said the climbing was OK, but that could well mean it was only sustained 6a!

I started up the groove and made steady progress, about twenty-five feet below the top of the groove I passed a thin traverse line leading right. As I headed for the last gear it fell out, and my position instantly became serious. I didn't want to die so scuttled back down the corner to the thin traverse line that I'd noticed. "What's happening" barked Andy; "I'm going to traverse lower down". He went ape with me, "it's easy," followed by many expletives. The rope was now at least vaguely above me as I committed to the thin line, which got thinner and thinner, un-

til I just reached the arête. "Tight rope!" My nails were on edges and my feet smeared on vertical rock. In the inevitable fall I swung round the corner into *Positron*, and scrabbled back onto the rock before climbing up to join Andy. He was still mad at me; I was just glad to be alive, which I wouldn't have been if I'd fallen off on the line he had taken.

It took a long time to change over the hanging stance, but eventually I was secure and Andy free to climb. He made steady progress up the wall, crossing the groove of *Alien* with a very delicate balancing move. After this he followed *Transatlantic Crossing* for a short while as he headed for the base of the headwall. He clipped the old peg on *Transatlantic Crossing* before reaching the poor Friend placement in the down-ward pointing spike. Taking time, he did the best he could as this was the last gear before things got very serious.

He leaned out backward, looking up at the features he was going to climb. Once he had let go of the last positive hold there wouldn't be another good one for twenty-five feet or so. Then there were three successive finger jugs, a few feet apart, on the wall that led into *Positron*. The climbing started up a vague scoop where he bridged up the sides. It became more difficult with height, forcing him out, until he had to grab the blind flake on the wall above. Then there was a difficult transition from bridging in the scoop to laying-away on the flake with his feet smeared on nothing. The flake ran out after ten feet and a long reach was required to gain the first finger jug. This whole section was on perfect quartzite.

We chatted about the pitch, the main topic being the lack of any good gear. If Andy fell off there wasn't anything that we could be sure would stop him before he hit the sea, or worse, the ledges at the base of the cliff. The psychological duel began. He tried the moves up and down, trying to get more comfortable with the situation. Eventually he estab-



lished himself in the groove only to retreat, once more, to the security of the holds on *Transatlantic Crossing*. I was hanging off three solid wires on the stance, and as I shuffled about on the rock my harness pulled into my crotch. I didn't know what was hurting me most, the harness or watching Andy. High in the vague scoop he was bridging up, I saw him feel the flake. You just knew that once he had started to pull on it there would be no way back. He copped out again.

Eventually, after much time in the groove, he just went for it, his long wiry legs were flung out onto the wall and he laybacked elegantly up the flake of total commitment, miles above the gear. The flake began to run out and it was still a long way to the finger jugs. To my horror he hesitated. "Not now" I scream in my brain, it's no place to falter. He reached for his wires, trying to place something in the blind

flake. I couldn't believe it. He's scared shitless. I'm scared shitless. He's furling-in a minute RP. I didn't believe what I was watching, it took seconds but felt like an age. I knew he was exhausted, both psychologically and physically.

He screamed, really screamed.

"Take me, take me". I did.

"Lower me quick". I did.

"And take-in the other rope". I did.

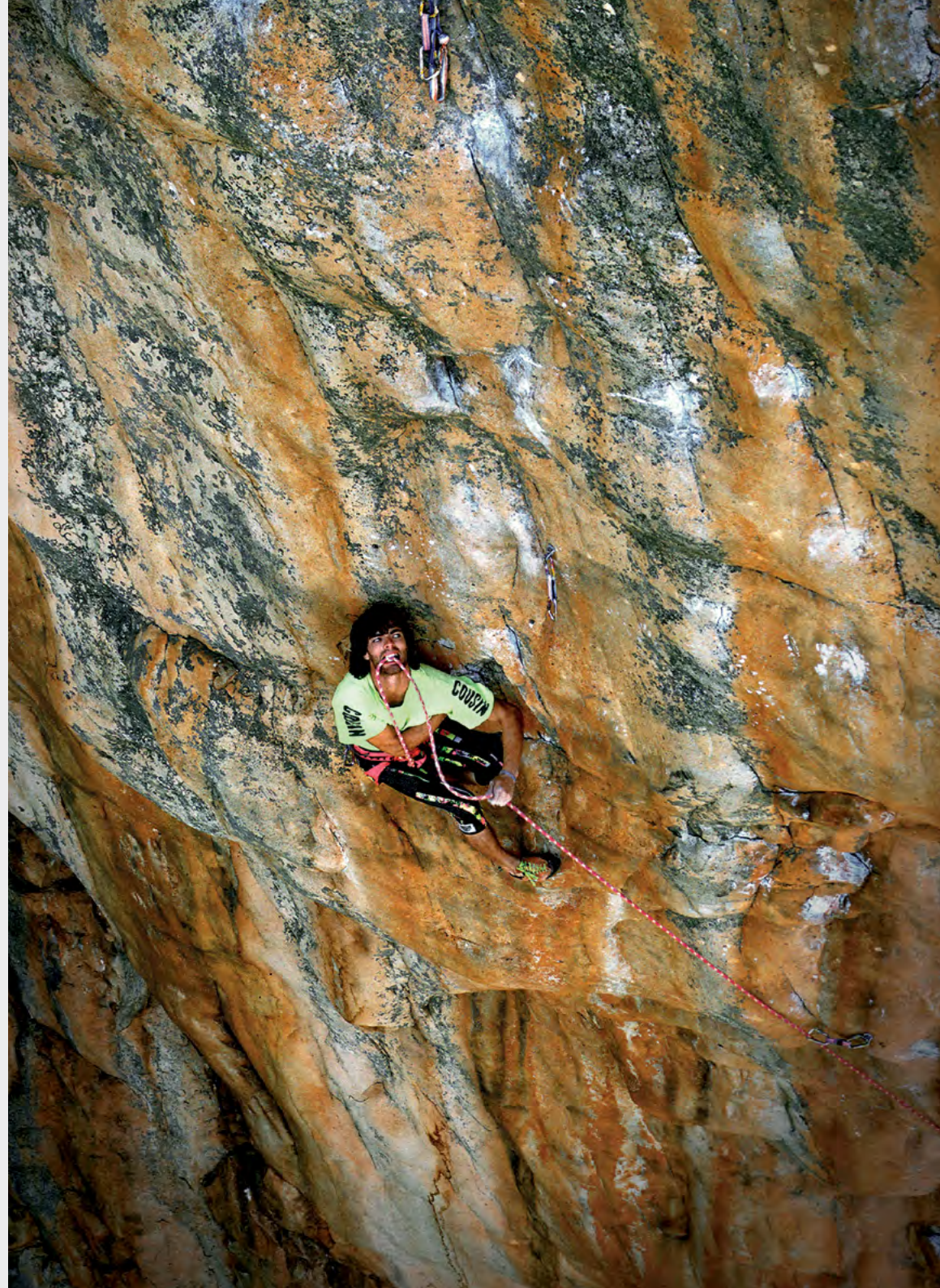
It was impossible to lower him quickly whilst taking in the slack on the other rope, but somehow I muddled through. The one thing I didn't understand was, why he wasn't dead! I could only put it down to the strength of the rock.

He rested, recovered, and composed himself for some time before returning to the wall. This time he creamed it and was soon at the top of the flake reaching for the finger jugs. After thirty feet of climbing

Cafe Libre,  
Lower Pen Trwyn.  
© Bernard Newman



Andy Pollitt, his last route, *Punks in the Gym*, Mt Arapiles, Australia.  
📷 Glenn Robbins.

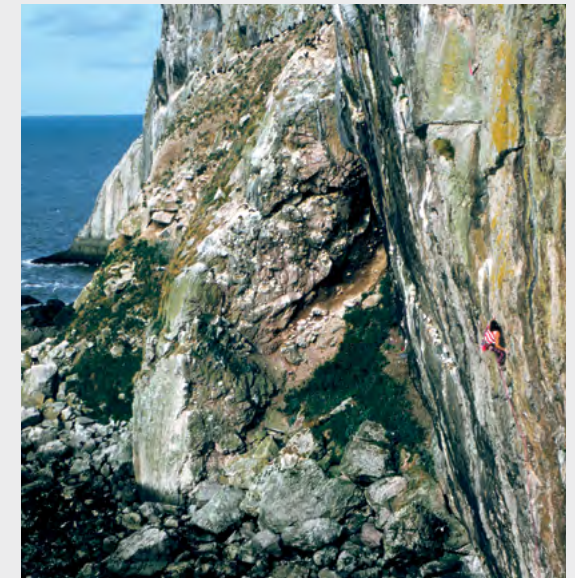


without a single positive hold you can't imagine how large a finger jug can feel! One, two, three and he threw himself into *Positron* for sanctuary before continuing to the bucket-seat stance directly above. The same one that we had used on *The Big Sleep*.

I followed with some trepidation, the climbing was good and I soon reached the base of the headwall. Above loomed the groove, bridging ever upward it got thinner and thinner until I could grab the flake. Smearing my feet wildly out right on the flat wall I knew I wasn't going to stay on this for long. I didn't have the strength so I got a move on until I reached the RP placement. I couldn't see round the flake but I needed to know. Contorting my head so I could see round the corner I saw that it was a good micro-wire placement on a wall where there was nothing else, but it should not have held! Above, exhausted, I lunged for the first finger jug; as it eased I cruised up the diagonal line of *Positron*. Andy warned me of its crux but I felt strong and did the long reach with ease. Here our line parted from *Positron* and I headed straight up the wall to meet him at the bucket-seat belay.

That evening we returned to the café and took possession of the New Routes book. We had debated the name long and hard; Andy's first choice was *East Bounded Train*, he liked the strength and power that went with it, it was my choice too. But then he got *Skinhead Moonstomp* in his head, "Imagine all those skinheads dancing round a fire at night". I didn't like it but it was his choice, and it's all history now.

When I think back on this adventure I can't believe what a wonderful route we put up. I think that if the crux were at ground level it would be the best boulder problem in the UK; if it was on Stanage it would be the most popular and sought-after route. If you're in any doubt about its quality here is a more objective assessment—the preamble from the current guidebook—courtesy of Simon Panton.



Andy on FFA of *Wall of the Evening Light*, Llandudno.  
📷 Bernard Newman

### Skinhead Moonstomp, E6 6b, \*\*\* 88+m

An outrageous adventure that is one of the best E6s in the country. A modern riposte to *Positron*, it swaggers up the centre of the perfect headwall using that route's crack as a rest before blasting upwards again to *The Big Sleep* bucket-seat belay. It is not a soft touch and the penalty for those whose confidence falters or whose stamina fails, is long flight time!

The modern description refers to a niche where you can get some gear before embarking on the headwall. This probably makes the pitch a bit more reasonable, but we didn't find it.

It was a fantastic privilege to climb with Andy and to facilitate those ascents. Thirty years later and living on opposite sides of the world we still talked about it to each other, it was our passion to climb on Gogarth, it was the time of our lives, and it has remained with us as part of our identity.

So sad Andy is now gone.





## Spacewalking with Uncle Ed

*The late Ed Ward-Drummond had an eye for a line and the determination to turn a line into a climb. The Moon on Gogarth's Yellow Wall is one of his great additions. He repeated the route in 1992 during one of his trips back to the UK. The author was fortunate enough to share the rope with him on this ascent.*

By John Spencer

### Yellow Wall, Anglesey

'Below!' A pair of ropes snaked down from above, followed by two climbers who joined me on the grassy ledge on which I was belayed.

'What route are you on?'

'*The Moon*.'

'No you're not, that's round the corner.'

Bugger, I thought as much.

'What route are we on then?'

'No idea, not sure it's even a route!'

I shouted up to Ed who was making slow progress up the distinctly unclimbed-looking groove above.

'We're not on *The Moon*.'

'Who says?'

'These guys. Starts further along.'

'Ah, I thought this didn't feel right.'

I resisted the temptation to say 'Told you so' (as indeed I had), as Ed double checked his highest piece of gear (my gear, by the way), and lowered off.

'Have you done *The Moon* before?' asked one of the lads.

'No' I replied.

'You're in for a real treat. It's amazing. Like they say, strictly spacewalking. That guy Drummond was a genius!'

Ed said nothing as he coiled our ropes, but I could see he was smiling to himself.

September 1992. We were on an overnight mission so Ed could have a look at his lunar masterpiece. He had not been back since the first ascent in 1971 and was shortly returning to the US in pursuit of his estranged wife and daughters. I had driven down from Newcastle to Sheffield after work on the Friday night and picked him up from his 'Climb for the World' office. By this time Ed's visionary if naively optimistic project was in its death throes, leaving, in its wake, disappointment and debt. It was also the straw that broke the back of his marriage, boiling down, in the eyes of some observers at least, to a case of 'obsessive idealism versus family responsibility', as Simon Beaufoy, who made the documentary *Shattered Dream* about Ed and Climb for the World, wrote in High magazine.

I had met Ed a few years before through a mutual friend, Paul, whose wife Sharon had been taught (and inspired) by him during his brief sojourn as an English teacher in Sheffield. In turn he had taught Paul to climb. Some of Paul's tales of his apprenticeship under 'Uncle Ed' are both hilarious and hair-raising. For instance, setting off from South Stack car park at lunchtime on a dreich January Sunday afternoon to climb on the Upper Tier. On *Central Park* the ropes got jammed way above Paul as he started up the second pitch. By now it was raining heavily, the two were incommunicado, the rock illuminated only by the flashes of the South Stack lighthouse. As Paul took repeated falls onto the jammed ropes, Ed above couldn't figure out why the rope was tight, yet no progress. The ropes eventually unjammed, slack was hurriedly taken in and a very wet, utterly exhausted and bedraggled Paul eventually crawled onto the steep grass at the top of the climb, eyeballs on stalks.

The tales were not confined to the climbing either. Getting to and from the crag was often eventful enough. For example, towing a broken-down car with Ed's VW campervan at break-neck speed near Capel Curig in the dead of night, the hapless 'rescued' family cowering white-knuckled within the car, sparks eventually flying as one of the tyres shredded, exposing bare metal. Ed eventually drew to a halt and left the car, and the now utterly traumatised family, by the roadside waiting for the official rescue services, the incident spawning the catchphrase 'Beware the Good Samaritan!'

I hadn't climbed all that much with Uncle Ed, but had spent enough time with him to know he was very good company—a great conversationalist, witty, erudite, a flatterer and a charmer ... and also just a bit mad. I guess I should have known what I might be letting myself in for!

Thankfully our drive down from Sheffield was uneventful, though the rain we encountered on most of the journey was not encouraging. Our conversation was mostly about the ill-fated Climb project, with which he was still preoccupied, and of course his family, but also aspects of my own life—one of the things about Ed was that he gave you his full attention, and was, or seemed, interested in your life. Thankfully there was no draw upon the Good Samaritan's benevolence on this journey through the Welsh night!

We slept uncomfortably in the car and thus were up at the crack of dawn, pleased to be welcomed by high cloud and a hint of hazy sun. It was very low tide so we were able to traverse along the shore, which afforded enough of a view from below to identify the line of *The Moon*, and most importantly, given the confusing architecture of the cliff, where the route started. Or so I thought.

Once we had scrambled up to the base of the crag, Ed was adamant *The Moon* started up an unlikely looking steep vegetated groove. After all, he'd done





the first ascent, right? He should know! I hadn't fancied the look of it, so off he went. And there he was, bridged awkwardly, pulling out handfuls of vegetation and the odd loose rock, and puzzling out the next moves when he was summoned back to base.

So, having coiled the ropes and rearranged the rack, we shuffled rightwards along the ledge. Yellow Wall leans left to right and, with corners, overhangs, hanging slabs, and cracks in all directions, orientation is difficult from below. However, despite the weird, unsettling, almost Escher-like geometry ('Was I upright or leaning to the right?' as John Kirk asked in *Extreme Rock*), the actual start of the route — a steep corner — was obvious when we got to it.

My lead. The rock was a bit greasy, unsurprisingly after the previous couple of days' rain, and the situation a little freaky, but I was well and truly psyched and dispatched the first pitch, up the juggy corner to a good stance and belay, with little effort. The second pitch, a different prospect altogether, leads onto a very steep wall and up to an overhang. A rightwards traverse under the roof then takes you, via some down-climbing, to a belay at the bottom of a groove and crack system.

I handed the rack to the man in the beret and off he went. What followed was one of the finest bits of climbing I've ever witnessed. Control, poise, elegance, technique, a masterclass. Ed had a bit of a reputation for being a slow climber. He certainly didn't rush this pitch, seemingly finding plenty of time to place and test the gear, and to obligingly pose for photos with that big beaming smile. Not so much slow as simply savouring reacquaintance with his wonderful creation. He belayed, out of sight, and took in the ropes.

'When you're ready!' came the cry, and off I went. God, it was greasy, every hold, whether hand or foot, needing careful placement, and judicious use of chalk. I slowly made my way up the impending wall to the roof, the holds under which felt extra

soapy. Here it did feel like I was 'dancing on the edge of unreality' (John Kirk again), thankfully by now in view of Ed, belayed as he was in a cat's cradle of anchors, grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

'Watch me here' I said as I slithered along the traverse and delicately stepped down and across to the belay. Phew!

Ed was keen to lead the top pitch, which breaches a band of overlaps via a system of cracks, and I wasn't arguing. It's a grade easier than the middle pitch but no less spectacular for all that. Ed floated up it effortlessly. After the tension of the previous pitch I followed as gracefully as I could, joining him belayed to a couple of boulders at the side of the cliff-top path. He was chuffed, both with this ascent under less-than-perfect conditions, and also with the route itself. It was certainly a ground-breaker in its day. Stevie Haston, writing about how the harder lines at Gogarth have been tamed by traffic and modern gear, nonetheless asks 'But how many of us would have voyaged out like its first ascensionist, Mr much-maligned Ed-Ward Drummond, into that vortex of swirling colours and loose rock?' Comments on UKC and Super Topo confirm the route's epic quality: 'One of the very best routes I've ever climbed, awesome positions and exposure and a natural line.'; 'Only the best route in the world' (Drummond's own words, by the way, ever the modest, shrinking violet as he was!)—AMAZING!; 'Awesome, awesome route!' and so on.

We coiled the ropes and headed back to the car park. I too was very pleased. A brilliant route under the belt, climbed with a grand master, what's more. Now for a pleasant drive back north, stopping somewhere for food and a celebratory drink. Or so I thought.

Now, as you may know, you can see the Snowdon massif from here, and there it was in all its glory, some 25 miles to the east, with a hat of dense-looking cloud down to at least 1500ft, if not lower.

Opposite: John among the Escher-like geometry of Pitch 1.  
Ed Drummond





Ed setting off on the crux pitch.  
 John Spencer

Rain had been forecast, and although we had escaped it on Anglesey, clearly it was still chucking it down over the hills.

‘Have you ever climbed *Vector*, John?’ asked Ed, staring wistfully in the direction of the hills.

‘Yeah, about twenty years ago... a brilliant route, eh?’ I replied innocently.

‘I like to climb it at least once a year... I think we should go and have a look, it may be a long time ’til I’m back in these parts.’

The awful truth dawned.

‘Err... but Ed, it’s obviously been pissing down over there ... and it’s already afternoon...and by the time we get there it’ll...’ but from the look in his eyes I knew this was a futile gesture.

So off we drove, and sure enough somewhere around the Menai Straits the raindrops started on the windscreen—not heavy but wet enough. We stopped in Porthmadog for some fuel. I asked the woman behind the counter about the weather. ‘Oh, it’s been proper raining all day’ said she. I marched triumphantly back to the car to break the news to Ed.

‘But most of the route is sheltered, what with all those roofs’ he replied, ‘and it looks like the rain is stopping... we should have just about enough time if we look sharp ... it’ll be fine. Gulp’.

We drove on, parked, geared up and scrambled to the base of the crag.

I led the first pitch, off the flake and up the wall to a solid spike belay, the rock so far dry. Ed led through and started the tricky rising traverse towards the infamous Ochre Slab. Again, he climbed deliberately and with impeccable style, making it look like a bit of easy bouldering, demolishing the Slab with panache and disappearing over the bulge and up to the cave belay. A few minutes later the ropes went tight and the call came from above. I launched out and, in spite of some alarmingly well-polished rock, I was pleased to find the traverse, the out-of-balance step onto the Ochre Slab and the slab

itself pretty straightforward. In fact I was positively enjoying this mad excursion. As it happened, it was just as well I didn’t dilly-dally on this, the crux pitch; by the time Ed was handing over the rack the light had diminished quite alarmingly.

I headed off leftwards, the ever-so-slightly damp rock demanding very careful footwork, along the lip of the roof, over a bulge onto a hanging slab, at last reaching the final corner where it was a mighty relief to secure a couple of bomber pieces of gear. By now it was dark. Not quite zero visibility but I was going to have to climb this last bit by feel. Were we carrying headtorches? Of course not! It had a sort-of ‘To go on was impossible; to retreat unthinkable’ feel about it, but in the end the climb-by-touch proved straightforward and I topped out in the pitch-black. Descent was a blind stumble and slide through a tangle of roots and mud, leading eventually back to the car.

And so, on something of a high, we journeyed north into the night, catching a pint and some fish and chips near Chester. I dropped him at his house in Sheffield. It had been a great wheeze, we

agreed, and we resolved to climb together again if I could somehow engineer a holiday in the US. Oh, the possibilities! I arrived back in Newcastle in the small hours, exhausted.

Within a couple of weeks Ed had left the UK for good. We exchanged a couple of letters over the next few months and that was that. I had intended to head over to Kendal when he returned for the premiere of Dave Macleod’s epic film *The Long Hope* in 2011 but didn’t get it together, which I kind-of regret; but then he probably wouldn’t have managed to find any time or space to say hello, if he were to recognise me in the first place. By all accounts the talks he gave at the festival were somewhat rambling and incoherent, not surprising in light of the Parkinson’s disease that was slowly eating away at him, casting a poignant shadow over the triumphant return to the fold of the man described as ‘probably the most visionary figure in British climbing history.’ (Mick Ward in his obituary of Ed on UKC).

Perhaps best to leave untarnished the memory of one of the most entertaining and enjoyable single day’s climbing I’ve ever had. RIP Uncle Ed.



Ed looking pleased with himself at the top of the climb.  
 John Spencer



# Stray Jottings on Slingsby

*Slingsby's name will be forever associated with the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club and the birth of Mountaineering in Norway.*

*He was also an Original Member of the CC, on the first Committee and served as the third President 1904 - 1907.*

*This is the story of his association with one mountain in Jotunheimen which is especially precious to Norwegians. That mountain is Storen, meaning the Big One, Norway's third highest mountain. Its full name is Store Skagastølstind.*

By Knut I. Tønsberg

*This article is based on a presentation given to the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club on 8 November 2017, on the occasion of the Club's 104th Annual Dinner.*



Cecil Slingsby was raised in a mill owning family near Skipton. Influenced by his governess, from early childhood, he was determined to go to Norway more than to anywhere else. He had found some inaccurate information on Norway in a charming little book called *Feats on the Fjord*<sup>1</sup>. In 1872 he was further encouraged by a jolly Skipton bookseller, when he asked for a guide to Norway she looked him in the eye and said: 'Norway! Well I think not; but 'ere's *Blacks Guide to t'English Lakes*. It'll 'appen do as weel'<sup>2</sup>.

His father had given him Whymper's *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*<sup>3</sup> a year earlier, so why not go for the Alps? The Matterhorn had been climbed in 1865 and, by 1872, few peaks remained unclimbed, the golden age of alpinism was over. Cecil longed to visit unexplored regions and Norway seemed the perfect destination. His equipment was state of the art for the 1870s, and he was temperamentally suited for adventure: 'a mountaineer with the ideal equipment, a magnificent physique, exceptional hardihood, grace and agility, an unerring judgement ... imperturbable coolness and courage'<sup>4</sup>.

So, in 1872, Cecil and Christopher Sidgwick set off to the land of the midnight sun, not principally to climb but 'to burn holes in their hats' at midnight with magnifying glasses. In Victorian times Norway was undergoing a cultural revival—an age of romanticism and nation building. Although Norwegians had yet to make skiing or mountaineering part of their new identity, interest in their mountains was sparked by the publication of books which presented pictures of them.

Imagine Cecil gazing at these mountains and being told that the highest, Storen (2405m), supposedly the highest peak in Norway, was not only unclimbed, but unclimbable.

Unsurprisingly, this captured his imagination, however during the winter of 1872-73 he badly sprained his ankle while skating and was not

ready for his next expedition until 1874. On this trip he was accompanied by his cousin, Algernon Dewhurst, a Norwegian guide and two priests they had met on the boat from England: Revs Girdlestone and Worsley.

They did not go straight back to Sognefjellet, from where Cecil had first seen Storen. He had read and re-read *Scrambles*<sup>3</sup> and had learned two useful principles: to reconnoitre mountains from nearby heights, and to look for snow and ice routes. From Sognefjellet, Slingsby had seen that no snow gullies led to, or near to, the summit of Storen. So Cecil and his companions approached it from the other side (map routes 1 and 2). Starting from Vetti farmstead, they climbed the steep hillside of the Utladalen to the Stølsmaradalen. They hoped to see more of Storen and find a possible access route but, unfortunately, the peak was well hidden behind other mountain ridges. Leaving their guide, Cecil and his companions ventured into an unexplored area. They were the first to cross the Ringsskaret col and descend the Ringsglacier to the Skagastøls, a summer farm Slingsby had visited two years earlier. They didn't see much of Storen, but were very well received at the farm.



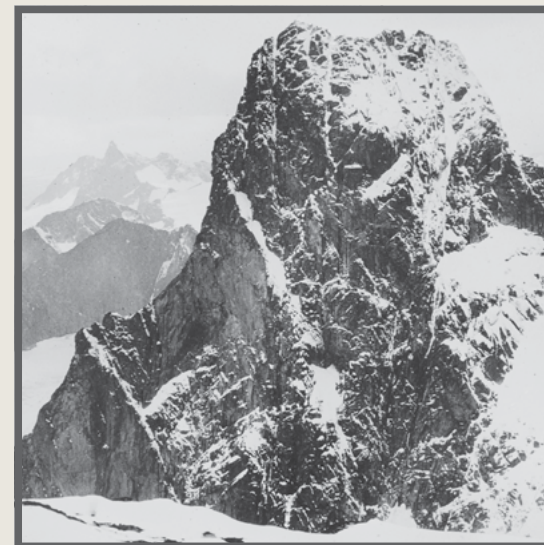
Ringsskaret

Opposite (main): Cecil Slingsby (left).

Opposite: Ladies at Glittertind

all: Tønsberg collection





Location of Storen.

Storen from  
Midtmaradalen.

On his third visit to Norway, in 1875, Cecil was accompanied by his sister, Edith. She became the first woman to reach the top of Glittertind, Norway's second highest mountain. They then headed towards his chosen peak. Passing on the eastern side of Utladalen, Norway's deepest valley, an expansive landscape gradually unfolded before them as they went from Skogadalsbøen passing Friken. Cecil finally saw the col north of Storen, noting the not so steep summit ridge; more importantly, he could now see a snowy highway to the col. The Midtmaradalen would lead him to the glacier, which was to be his highway to the top. A more desolate approach could not be found, even Arnfinn Vetti, owner of Midtmaradalen, had never been there. The area on the western side of Utladalen was, and still is, the wildest and most remote part of Norway.

Cecil's fourth visit was in the summer of 1876. He, guide Emanuel Mohn and farmer/reindeer hunter Knut Lykken, undertook the most astonishing expedition in Norway's mountaineering history. Mohn's knowledge of Jotunheimen and its landscape was second to none, yet on this trip

they discovered new places. Their expedition was remarkable and few people today would endure the same hardships, or cover the same ground as quickly. The further west they went the rougher the terrain became. They had no reliable map, no cairns to guide them and rarely did they have a path, other than animal tracks, to follow. In six days they built cairns on six previously unclimbed peaks, all above 2000m, starting with Torfinnstind and Galdebergstind by Lake Bygdin. The third day, July 18th, was a rest day. On their fourth day they summited Ura-nostind; Slingsby then climbed a subsidiary top which Mohn named Slingsbytind.

On the fifth day, July 20th, they started on Norway's longest uphill struggle, to Styggedalstind (later Gjertvasstind), gaining 1485m in elevation. This was Mohn's best beloved mountain and he was first to stand on its summit, and then he 'fairly danced with delight when some view more glorious than expected suddenly had burst upon our eyes'<sup>5</sup>. They descended to the summer farm, Vormelid, in the midst of the wild canyon of Utladalen. Mohn and Lykken had already achieved more than they

could have hoped for, they celebrated and went late to bed. The next day was the last before Lykken had to return home and they only had a vague idea of what was ahead and where to go.

The morning of Friday 21st July 1876 was rainy and Slingsby failed to get his companions up as early as he had hoped. They started about 7am, passed the tree-line beside the Maradøla waterfall and, before they reached the glacier below Gjertvasstind, turned south and climbed 900m to the col at Rolandsnosi. The weather cleared above them but, to their surprise and disappointment, they found they had to descend from the col through a previously unknown valley, which they named Skoddedalen (Misty Valley), before they turned a corner and descended into Midtmaradalen.

From the valley they looked up slabs and a steep glacier to the col that Slingsby had seen in 1875. It was more than 1200 m above them. Fresh bear-tracks showed the way for a short while. Once on the glacier the ice-climb was not straightforward and the Norwegians, without nails in their boots, were slipping about. By 6pm they had reached the col,

later called Mohn's col. Ascent that day had already totalled 2560m; 5180m since their rest day on 18th July! It is easy to understand why the ill-equipped and utterly exhausted Norwegians, knowing of the peak's reputation, did not go further.

Slingsby was determined to get to the top, but the late hour and weariness were making it unlikely. Then Mohn said something like 'If only we had two well trained alpine climbers here then I think we might have managed it'.<sup>6</sup> This was all the encouragement Cecil needed, he left the other two and started up the 500 feet of cold rock.

He later reported: 'Soon I got into difficulties, but for a ledge not so broad as my hand, from which I had to knock away the ice, I should ... have been defeated as without the aid of this foothold, the mountain on this side at least would be inaccessible. ... Three times I was all but beaten, but this was my special and much longed for mountain and I scraped away the ice and bit by bit got higher and higher... for the first time I had to trust to an overhanging and rather loose rocky ledge'.<sup>7</sup> He reached the top after half an hour. Storen had been climbed.

Above left: The upper  
slopes of Storen.

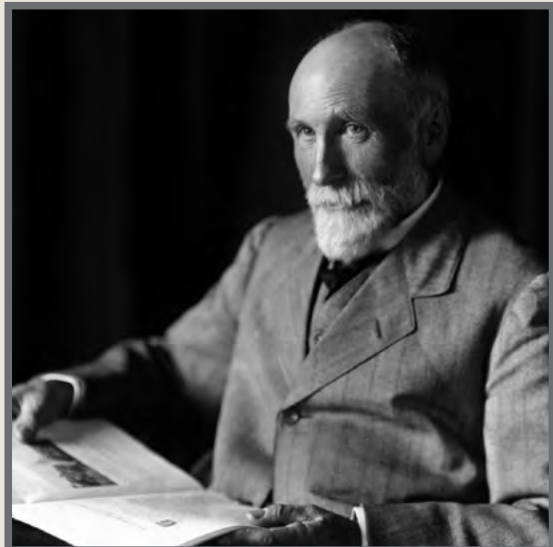
Above: Storen from  
the West.





Above: Climber at Glittertind, possibly Edith Slingsby

Above right: Cecil Slingsby



He built a cairn, left his handkerchief and collected some small rocks. ‘As to the view, which was perfectly free from clouds, ... on every hand some of the wildest crags and aiguilles and glaciers looked their very wildest. I longed to have my friend Mohn with me; had he been with me his enthusiasm would have been boundless’.<sup>8</sup>

The news of Støren’s ascent spread like wildfire with a rumour circulating that the Norwegians also made the full ascent. The disappointment was huge when it was revealed that they had not. Mohn was criticised for not having climbed with Slingsby.

Back in England Slingsby was open to criticism; climbing with guides was the norm, doing so without them was considered irresponsible. In Cecil’s subsequent report in the *Alpine Journal* titled ‘Stray Jottings on Jotunheimen,’ he played down his achievement, explaining why in a private letter: ‘You will see that I do not go into any particulars about the final ascent, if I did I should be spoken of as foolhardy’<sup>9</sup>. Slingsby also refers to the author of *The High Alps Without Guides*<sup>10</sup>, Rev Girdlestone, with whom Slingsby and his cousin had crossed

the Ringsskaret in 1874. Girdlestone had written defending mountaineers climbing without guides in the Alps and elaborated on how experienced the criticised mountaineers really were. Slingsby had far less experience and would have been even more vulnerable to criticism. He had ventured into unknown territory on two occasions without guides, crossing Ringsskaret in 1874 and climbing the last ridge on Støren in 1876 not only without a guide, but alone. He wrote about the crossing in *Stray Jottings* but he hardly mentioned climbing Støren solo.

Mohn lectured that autumn saying, if not directly, something like: ‘no Norwegian could do the same as Slingsby’.<sup>11</sup> On hearing this, Harald Pettersen, a young painter and student, rose to the challenge and tried, unsuccessfully, to repeat Slingsby’s route in 1877. He returned the following year and was successful, bringing back the handkerchief as proof of his success. Slingsby congratulated Pettersen, contrasting the two ascents and pointing out that he had been ‘fool enough’ to tackle the final rock ridge<sup>12</sup>.

Cecil’s efforts not to brag about his achievement paid off in the face of the lingering potential crit-

icism for foolhardiness and he proudly reported becoming a member of Alpine Club in 1880. Inevitably, he was asked to write articles, but was sometimes reluctant, expressing clear views on why one should write of mountaineering exploits: to encourage others, especially into new areas, to relay information on access, to glorify nature and, not for self, or mutual aggrandisement.

Nowadays the ridge from Mohn’s col to the top of Støren is classified as an easy scramble, but the ridge was changed by what must have been some huge rockfalls close to the col that allowed a more direct and easier start to the ridge. Both Slingsby and Pettersen had to start by traversing horizontally left from the col onto the eastern wall whereas the route now starts directly along the ridge. Cecil noted the difference in the ridge in a subsequent visit in 1900 when he climbed the Skagastøls Ridge which is now described thus: ‘This long, demanding alpine traverse passes through some of Norway’s most spectacular mountain scenery. Experience in alpine mountaineering is essential, as you will be tested on glaciers, steep crevassed snow slopes, snow arêtes, long sections of exposed scrambling, climbing up to grade 4, numerous abseils and often tricky route finding’.<sup>13</sup>

So both Slingsby and Pettersen climbed a much harder route to Støren’s summit than everybody else has done in the years since. In fact, nobody has tried to find the original start as it is an uninviting exposed place. I am ashamed to say the third ascent of Slingsby’s original route is still not done.<sup>14</sup> You are welcome to try!

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# Sandbagged on Granite Mountain

*We all know that grading is entirely subjective but are still surprised when things are unexpectedly challenging. We are, of course, happy to find a soft-touch.*

*Granite crack climbs lend themselves to sand-bag grades, after all they are well protected and the local expert who wrote the guide probably knows all the subtleties of the route. Join Tony as a sand-bag route gives him a memorable day out on Granite Mountain.*

By Tony Pearson

Granite Mountain is perhaps one of the less well-known climbing areas in the States as far as Brits are concerned. It was a place recommended to Ulla and myself by a couple of our friends who thought it might be worth our while checking out on the way down from Las Vegas to southern Arizona where we were intending to visit Mt Lemmon Highway and Cochise Stronghold. It is situated fairly close to the town of Prescott and is served by a beautifully situated camp ground which we more or less had to ourselves when we stopped there in October 2014, and from where there was an excellent view of Granite Mountain itself. The route that had been recommended to us had the rather intriguing name of *Magnolia Thunderpussy*, but as it was graded 5.8 we did not expect too many problems. *Magnolia Thunderpussy* was, apparently, a woman from San Francisco who did burlesque, had worked a bit on radio and had owned a couple of restaurants. One of these had been well-known for its erotic desserts which included such suggestive specialities as the Montana Banana, which rock groups and others were able to arrange to have delivered right through the night way back in the 1970s.

My wife Ulla and I set off to do the route at a fairly relaxed pace. We drove from the campground to a car park at the trailhead for the path up to Granite Mountain. After chatting for a while with a ranger, we headed off along the trail which led very pleasantly through the forest below Granite Mountain itself. It continued around, below and beyond the crags on the mountain until a small col. We then had to zig-zag up steeply following a trail to gain a very faint path heading off rightwards and back towards the crag. Up to that point all was straightforward. We had seen a tarantula on the path, but it had not been as large as ones that we had seen in other places, and there didn't seem to be any snakes around. However as soon as we left the main trail things got more interesting. The terrain became

very rocky and there was a lot of very prickly vegetation of various sorts, particularly in the way of cacti. The path itself was difficult to follow and so we picked a way up and across the hillside towards the crag, threading our way between spiky plants and sharp rocks. After about half an hour or so on the hillside we got up to the crag itself and were able to locate the start of our route. It was on the left-hand side. After scrambling up a short rocky gully with a couple of awkward steps we geared up at the base of the climb itself. It began below a long, vertical, box-shaped slot with a crack up both sides. Clearly the route was going to involve quite a lot of jamming, so we also spent some time taping up our hands.

After a few easy moves up to the box-shaped groove things quickly got tricky. It was evident that I would need to jam the right-hand crack, which seemed quite good, but it was very steep and there were few footholds on the side. The technique that was needed was to handjam in the right-hand crack and to get a foot on the left-hand side of the groove, and that meant very wide and strenuous bridging. By the time I had worked my way up the bottom crack and got into a sort of resting position higher up in the left side of the groove I was panting for breath and feeling pretty pumped. And then, at the top of the groove, things got harder. The groove was capped by an overhang with a choice of right and left exits. The right-hand side was a bit steeper but clearly had a good jamming crack above, and it looked as if it relented a bit once past the actual roof. The left-hand side, on the other hand, looked as if it might prove difficult to protect. I went for the right-hand crack. I just about got over the overhang, but then my hand started to slip in the crack, some of the protective tape rolled off my hand and, shortly after, I was off. I fell no distance at all because I had a good cam over the roof, but I was mighty peeved to have fallen off a 5.8. Back on the rock there were some good jugs just below the overhang

All: Pearson collection

Opposite: The 5.7 Roof Pitch.



Looking up the innocuous first pitch of *Magnolia Thunderpussy*.



where I was able to hang out and try and work out a better way of getting over the roof. Unfortunately, there did not seem to be any easier way to climb the crack and, after several attempts, there was nothing for it but to summon my resolve and go for it. I then managed to get past the move I had slipped off, but found that it didn't relent as quickly as I had expected and I had to fight pretty hard to get up the rest of the pitch. I was very relieved to get to a good ledge, but annoyed that I had taken so long on the pitch and had fallen off.

Ulla had to fight pretty hard too on the pitch and was glad to get to the ledge. She then led through on an easier section up to a continuation crack below which she took a belay. The start of the next pitch involved some steep moves up a slanting crack and into another groove. I climbed up the groove to where it was capped by a huge roof. From here it was not obvious what had to be done. There was a flake crack in the left wall which appeared to have good holds, but it was necessary to get there first of all and

that wasn't so easy. The pitch was supposed to be 5.7 but it certainly did not look like it. In the end the way to climb the roof proved to be via rather precarious back and footing facing towards the flake crack. A rather insecure sequence allowed me to reach and make use of the flake and a couple of quick moves using it got me over the overhang and up to a belay. Clearly it was going to be problematic for Ulla to do the pitch as she was carrying a rucksack containing our approach shoes, water and other essentials. So first I needed to haul up the sack to the roof, and then Ulla had to climb up, pushing the rucksack up as she backed and footed over the roof.

From there the route clearly got easier, but was not entirely over. There was a longish chimney followed by a traverse out to the right that led to the top of the climb. By the time we were on the top it was getting late and the light was just beginning to fade. We knew that there was just one way down for all the climbs: a set of abseils down a route called *Coke Bottle* which was over at the other end of the crag, but we needed to find it first. We headed off in that direction, but it took us some time to locate the line as the abseil started a short distance below the top and the anchors were not easy to spot. Once we were on the abseil things went quickly—three raps led down to the bottom, but by the time we got there it was dark. Luckily the rucksack contained a head torch that Ulla had had the foresight to bring with her. However, at first, we set off trying to use our night vision. Ulla was used to night navigation and reckoned that she could see enough without the head torch, but when she slipped and fell into a prickly pear cactus, she realised that the head torch was indeed essential. After I had extracted as many spines as possible using the light from the head torch, we had to traverse along the bottom of the crag. It was not easy to find the way and it took quite a while before we arrived below the gully at the start of the climb. I then headed up to retrieve

the rucksack and a few other things we had left at the base of the route.

Back below the crag again we needed to find our way down and across to the good trail that we had taken on the way to the crag, but that was easier said than done: we had weaved our way up through small cliffs and around patches of nasty vegetation on the approach and doing it in reverse would not be easy. We set off in the direction of the last couple of zig zags on the good trail, but almost immediately we were looking at nasty drops and dense vegetation and realised that heading towards where we had left the path was not going to work. But we also knew that the trail had gone right around past the crag for a reason: namely that the terrain below the cliff was difficult to cross as it was covered in large rocks and had a lot of unpleasant vegetation as well. Another problem was that the area below the crag had suffered a forest fire a couple years before and the remnants of the forest were charred and black. There was nothing for it, however, but to head downwards any way we could find, traversing where need be to avoid large boulders and small cliffs.

To add to our difficulties, while Ulla had had the foresight to bring her head torch, I had left mine behind, confident that we would be up and down the route long before dark. So, Ulla had to scramble down a few yards in front and then shine the torch back for me. Needless to say, it was a protracted process, sometimes only leading to a dead end. A couple of hours later, after much cursing and swearing on my part, we reached more level ground and started to go back up hill again, wondering if we had somehow missed the trail. By then we were feeling totally knackered from stumbling down the hillside carrying the massive amount of gear that one does seem to end up climbing with on American crack routes. When we finally stumbled onto an unmistakable trail we were both very relieved. The direction we had to take was obvious and we

had no problem following the path, but the trail through the forest felt interminable. An hour or so later we got back to the car park, by which time it was about 9.30pm. We had been stumbling around in the dark for nearly four hours.

The following day, when I woke up, I was so sore from the encounter with *Magnolia Thunderpussy* that I felt as if I had suffered a severe beating. In fact we both had so many aches and pains that it was three more days before we felt like climbing again. I was lucky enough not to have had too much contact with any of the abundant cacti but Ulla was still regularly extracting cactus thorns almost three months after our visit to Granite Mountain. Moreover, our rucksacks and clothes looked as if they belonged to a couple of chimney sweeps. I think we now fully understand the meaning of what it is to be sandbagged. Apparently, Granite Mountain is notorious for its harsh grades and we should have known better than to underrate a route with such a distinctive name.

Granite Mountain.







Sarah Goodman on  
typical Riglos terrain.  
📷 Robin Mazinke

## Lessons from the Great Towers of Aragon

*Conglomerate rock forms when gravel or even boulders are transported far enough from their original source to become rounded, or are subjected to wave action. Calcite, Iron Oxide or Silica fills in the spaces between the pebbles, cementing them together. This medium gives exciting climbing.*

By Ian Wyatt

Conglomerate: what does it mean to you? Churnet Valley bouldering or single pitch, pumpy pocket pulling at Margalef? Or maybe you don't think of it as climbable rock at all, but as glorified mud and stones, with holes where rocks and pebbles have fallen out for holds? If any of this rings true for you then Riglos will defy almost all of your expectations.

The huge conglomerate towers of the Mallos de Riglos stand in the foothills of the Pyrenees looking out over the Aragon region of Spain. Reaching up to 300m tall these towers offer the climber everything from comfortably bolted single pitch routes to full day adventures. If you're already aware of Riglos then the chances are you've heard of *Fiesta de los Biceps* (235m, 6c+/7a), anointed by some as 'the best multi-pitch sports route in the world'. That was certainly the only route I had heard of when Phil Leng and I visited for four and a bit days in early March 2019. But there is so much more here than *Biceps*, in fact, we were told that it is only the English that fixate on this fine line up the Mallo La Visera; the Spaniards head for the big routes on the Mallos Pisón.

After travelling for eleven hours, door to door, our host encouraged us to get straight on the rock as

soon as we arrived. Despite feeling utterly knackered we felt it would be rude to say no, so we did a single pitch route on Macizo Central. Oh my goodness, for at least half a pitch I didn't know what to trust. Everything looked loose, decidedly temporary, and certainly not to be trusted for pulling hard. But you adapt to this illusion, this trick of the eye, where despite looking loose and awful the rock is actually solid and trustworthy; by the end of the pitch my brain was being re-trained into assessing what could/could not be relied upon. A really valuable lesson for the first touch of a rock that appears to be nothing more than stones stuck in mud.

That night, with beers by the fire, our host gave us lots of information on the area, the routes, Riglos Conglomerate and some history of the crag. Our host, by the way, was none other than grit maestro Steve Bancroft who, with his partner Nicky, run their home as a B&B at the foot of the Pisón. Only by bivying at the foot of the crag could you sleep any closer to the rock. Steve and Nicky, along with Sam the cat, are very welcoming and offer a great spot for visiting climbers to stay.

You might be thinking, 'hmmm early March in the foothills of the Pyrenees, on big routes, it's going





Belay ledge companion.  
 Phil Leng



Negotiating the bulges called 'panza de burro' (panthas).  
 Phil Leng

Fiesta Los Biceps. Sarah Goodman on the merely vertical crux.  
 Robin Mazinke



to be cold'. No, in the sun and out of the wind the temperature was just nice, but if we drifted into the shade and/or the wind we froze. Steve's advice was crystal clear, stay in the sun. For our first full day we followed a combination of routes that led to the top of the Pisón, *Chopper* (135m, 6b) then *Chopperior* (115m, 6c) and the final pitch (30m, 5) of *Normal al Mallo Pisón*, a 280m grand day out. As you look up the sea of orange, burnt umber rock, to an ocean blue sky it's an effort not be hypnotised by the dozens of Griffon vultures soaring high above; with a two metre wingspan these are impressive birds. Gaining height on the route, you begin to level with the vultures and can look across at their nests, eventually moving above them to look down on their beautiful, soft, pastel brown wings; all while still paying full attention to your partner of course. Phil had the misfortune, or luck depending on your point of view, to mantel onto a ledge with a visiting vulture, who was not keen on the company.

Few of the routes follow strong natural features such as cracks and flakes, often one is climbing up waves of rock, a bulge followed by a ledge then another bulge and so on. The Spanish for overhang

is 'panza de burro', pronounced 'pantha', and so you work your way up, around and over systems of 'panthas'. Which brings us to another key tip from Steve, 'your feet don't have eyes' so, before you head up a 'pantha' plan where your feet will go. This, along with the adventurous bolting, can also lead to some interesting route finding. At times you have to commit to where you think you should go without being certain that you are heading the right way: i.e. before seeing the next bolt. Imagine being a deep sea diver wandering around a vertical sea bed with deep dunes, it's wonderful, exhilarating and occasionally a little worrying. On the last couple of pitches the sun hid behind a cloud and we were now in the wind. I was so cold that as we stood on the top with the guide to figure out the descent, I couldn't hold the book still.

In the guidebook, *Riglos Vertical* (2018, Desnivel), descriptions of the descents are generally pretty good but with occasional scary aberrations. Did I mention we were quite late setting off? By about the fifth abseil we were relying on light from the floodlit church, by the penultimate abseil (seventh or eighth, I lost count) Phil was using our only head-torch, tip: take two. The guide said this would be 35m, Phil set off with neither of us paying too much attention to the precision of the 70m rope's middle mark in the abseil rings. After much spinning about in space and fiddling with prusiks, Phil managed to equalise the ropes but could still only just reach the belay with his foot. When I came down I reached the belay with a little more ease, apparently because I'm fat. This is definitely more like a 37m abseil. Tip: when you see a 35m abseil and if you're using a 70m rope, send the heaviest person down first. The rope stretch might just get them down.

A brilliant but wearying day, never monstrously pumpy but the cumulative effect of so much climbing and abseiling left us feeling worn out. By way of a rest day, we opted for an easy day next and chose

*Todo Tiene Fin* (130m, 6b+). Although an excellent route, a 130m five pitch route does not make much of a rest day. Time for another tip: pace yourself even if the grades are well within your reach as everything takes time and effort, lots of it, and rest days are probably a pretty good idea. Over the next couple of days we stuck with big routes at amenable grades. The iconic feature of the Pisón is the cigar shaped Puro (*el puro* is the cigar), a finger of rock that stands free of the main cliff and, at about 150m in height, reaches about half height on the Pisón. To keep us in the sun and out of the wind, Steve recommended a combination of two routes: the first five pitches of *Serón-Millán* (6b) to the col before joining the last three pitches of *Normal al Puro* (6b) to the top of the cigar. The guide recommends taking nuts and cams on *Serón-Millán* as it is only partially protected with fixed gear, but of course we didn't. For the most part this isn't a problem as it has a reasonable number of bolts and pegs, except on pitch three. Thankfully this was Phil's lead, as it turned into a V+ test of nerves where each piece of gear is in a different post code and every hold requires forensic testing. Thankfully, this was the only pitch we came across that was like this throughout our stay. However, as a general rule (tip time) take lots of long extenders and slings to extend even further still. If you only take standard short sport quick-draws you WILL suffer from rope drag.

For our last full day we followed the wandering zig zags of *Curruculillo* (200m, 6a+) up a different tower, the Frechin. A steady, generously bolted route, I was thrilled to have a pair of vultures glide past within four feet of me, sounding like a couple of small jets as they swooped past. This route had the added advantage of a walk off, by now I'd had my fill of abseiling. A fairly well marked path goes past La Visera contouring around and down past the otherworldly and massive Cirque de Mallos. For our last day we nabbed a couple of single pitch routes before mak-

ing the three hour drive back to Barcelona. However, another guidebook 35m rope length error tried to spoil our plans. Lowering from the first pitch of *Conan* (7a) should have been easy with a 70m rope, but I was left about 5m short of the ground. After much jiggery-pokery, and some assistance from two passing Guardia Civil, all was resolved in time for us to catch our delayed flight home.

In short, Riglos is a truly astonishing venue, many of the routes may be bolted but you should approach them with a trad head and go for the adventure. The guide is very clear about which routes require trad gear but all require plenty of slings and long quick draws. During our brief stay we did over 900m of great climbing; if we'd had the sense to include a rest day we could have followed marked walks and watched wildlife. There's a lot more on offer here than just *Fiesta de los Biceps*, the numerous crags face in different directions so you can generally find a way to be in or out of the sun as conditions demand, allowing for climbing throughout most of the year. My final tip is to go there, it's amazing and the cherry on the cake is staying with Steve and Nicky. <https://casa-fiesta-riglos.com>



Not all the bolts are new.  
 Phil Leng

Red trousers, green rucksack: Alison Morris on the traverse on *Moskitos* (6b+).  
 Andy Morris





# Half Term Heroes

*On the February Half Term holiday, many teaching climbers (or climbing teachers) head north hoping/expecting to get good enough conditions to test themselves on some of Scotland's superb winter climbs. Inevitably there are some epics.*

By Ian Plimmer

We always have 'an epic'; two years ago it was our last day, on *Centre Post* with the crux of vertical ice, too high to retreat and too low for us to think that all was over when we passed it, if we passed it. Earlier still it was *North East Buttress*, where we found ourselves by mistake. I can still hear the tinkling of my ice axe falling over the rocks to the snow hundreds of feet below and with The Mantrap yet to come.

This year it came on the third day, after a muscle stretcher on Stob Coire nam Beith on day one, and a confidence booster on the ice of *Diadem* on day two. Like all days on the Ben, it began with that grind from the golf course, through the swamps and mud of the woods to the car park by the dam, and the inevitable question: 'Why do those lucky sods drive up, whilst we grind up?' Then the slow ascent; mind drifting elsewhere, flitting from one escape to another, to avoid the tedium, the weight of the pack, the discomfort of rutted frozen paths, en route to the CIC hut. A relief to shed the pack for a moment and break out the gear—crampons on, harness fitted, axes prepared—but the knowledge that the worst is yet to come, that leg aching, lung bursting slog on unfit limbs to the base of whatever climb was chosen.

'What do you fancy?' Feeling that the drag into the Upper Coire was preferable to the grind to Observatory Ridge, and vaguely sensing that a snow/ice face was a better choice than a mixed route I put forward *Route Major*, 300m, grade III/IV; long but, according to the guidebook, not too intimidating. 'Great idea, let's do that' and we were on our way. The powder snow was thin and the uneven scree below told us that we should have left our crampons until later. The higher levels were shrouded in mist, which lifted occasionally and enabled us to bypass North East Buttress—no mistakes this time—and find the broad line of snow which led the way to our climb; except that it wasn't snow, it was ice, steep ice. In making the final adjustments I pulled hard on my crampon strap, it snapped. A repair with a spare bootlace did not boost my confidence. Nor did Malcolm's attempt to avoid the steep ice of the first pitch. The alternative began easily but became difficult and led nowhere. Back to square one, and time to give the ice a go. It was steep, but the placements were good and with axe and hammer teeth biting in with that re-assuring thud, the climb was on. The scale was deceptive; sections that looked like a single pitch took two or

even three rope-lengths. The ropes, too heavy for double roping at the outset, were becoming frozen and difficult to handle. To make matters worse a party above was sending down all kinds of loose ice, shattered from the rocks by nervous strikes at its thin veneer.

Keep your head down, ignore the rattle on your helmet, listen to the whistling as it flies past. A blow on the arm and a crab goes spiralling down to the bottom, hopefully it won't be costly. The steep snow pitches began to mount, now it's nine and sometimes the snow is well over our knees and just a little too loose and soft for comfort. But the belays are good, nuts nicely wedged in obliging cracks, no pitons to be hammered out, just the careful steady rhythm of successive climbing and belaying. On a thin stance we share the sandwiches and some coffee, so essential to wash down the bread which clogs in our dry throats. 'When we find the chimney we should be near the top,' and we need to be because it is after 4pm, daylight will soon be running out, and the weather which at one time promised to clear has clamped down to a cold greyness. 'That's the entrance to the chimney,' a hasty traverse takes Malcolm to its foot. 'Christ this is f... awful' are the chilling words that come back across the snow. I follow to the belay under an overhanging rock and view the broken ice steps which lead, like a broad forbidding staircase, up into the mist.

Yes it's stepped, but the steps are big and bulging, awkwardly placed and covered with hard ice which looks ominously clear and thin. The leader of a second party appears below and begins to move up to the stance as Malcolm moves off, slowly, placing two runners for safety as the traverse to the first step begins. Now it is steepening in the corner and Malcolm is cramped against the wall. The next step is vertical, hard and brutal. Energy sapping minutes pass in fruitless hammering for placements, cutting steps and the search for runners. The tension is



Ian on *Route Major*.

reflected in the stream of cursing which is hurled at the cliff until a despairing whimper rounds it off.

Abseil 300m? It's not on. 'He'll have to have a go for it' calmly confirms the other leader who has joined me on the stance. 'Watch me Ian'; he's going for it; a step up with the left foot, it holds in the step, a flailing right arm cursed until the hammer strikes good ice, a scrabble up and the ice axe in the left hand is secured. A triumphant tone comes into the cursing as another thrutch gains extra feet towards safer ground. He's made it and the confidence returns, his not mine. My turn is still to come, and already the other leader has decided to leap frog, crossing his rope with ours. Time ebbs, spindrift pokes its steely points into indifferent morale until the call comes, 'Taking in' and the ropes tightening towards those challenging, smoothly skimmed steps. Take it gently, careful with the runners, gloves off, secure the gear, steady the nerves and move on. Tuck under the other leader's ropes, Christ its stuck over my rucksack. 'Ease off, you bastard'. Aching arms at last free it, and then to the crux. Yes, it's easy to see why he was sweating, but first the protection has to come out. Hell, the guy with the red rope has clipped into it too and the rope is so tight I can't shift



Ian weaving his way through ice bulges on *Route Major*.



it. Tell the bugger to give some slack to slip out the crabs. One out, one to go. Hands without feeling, squeeze the mitts back on and move. The left foot's in, but where, oh where, is that good ice for the axe? Arms leaden, fingers and feet numb, go for it and heave. It holds and I'm halfway up. A smash with the hammer, the blade's in, my God that was a good buy, but the axe is less secure and a foot slips. The other holds, the next axe placement is better and the worst is over. A few more feet on good holds and then the easy plod through to the summit ridge, hard crisp snow, dragging the ropes to be coiled at the top, easy enough to let the adrenaline pass and the aches and pains reassert themselves. And there's the trig point and the shelter, bathed in a strange white opaque light, as the last daylight merges with the low cloud and the snow in unreal space.

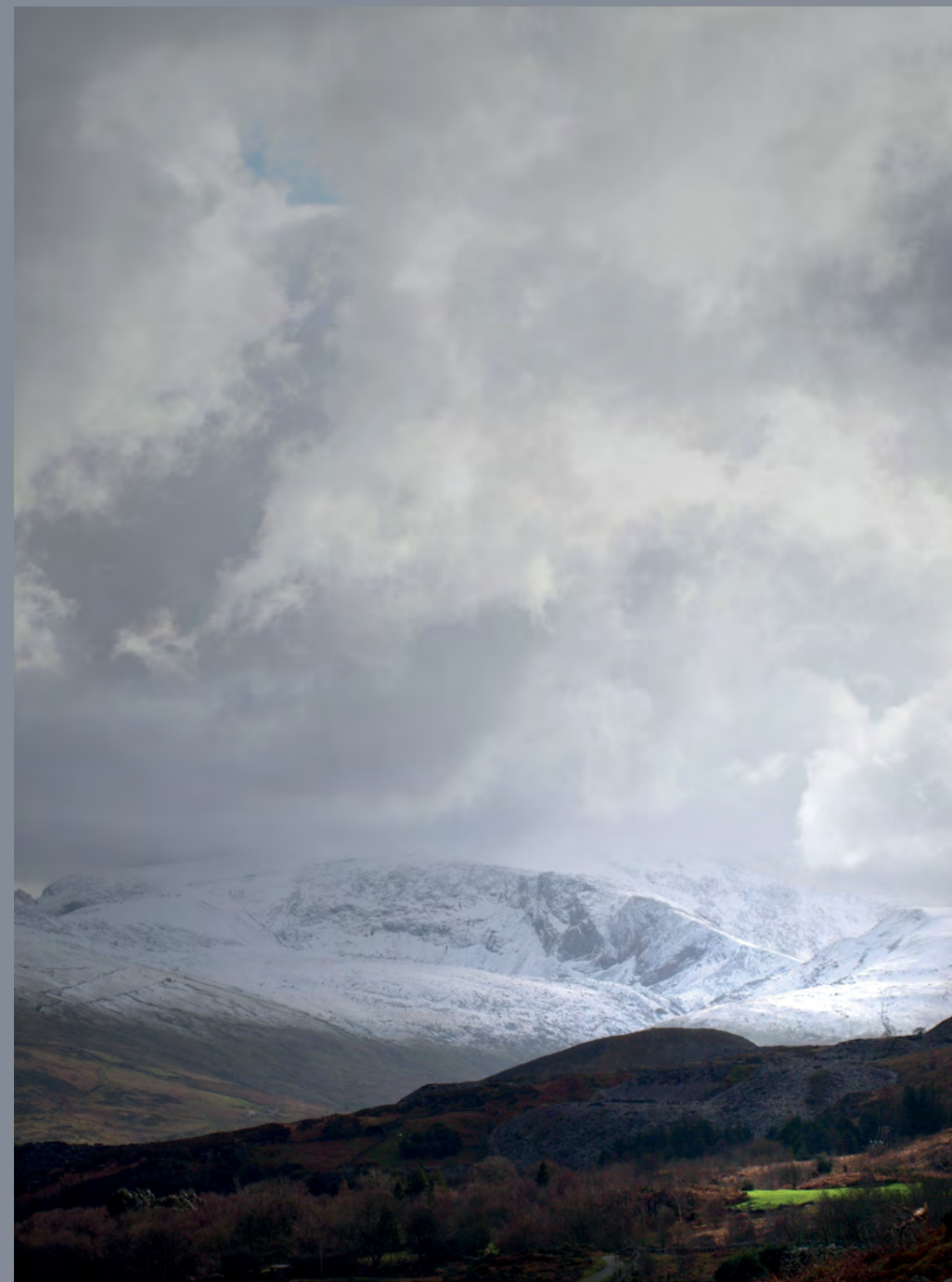
Quickly stow the gear but keep the ropes out for the abseil and off on Malcolm's compass bearing, 128 degrees heading for the ridge but not close enough to test the cornices. The light is fading rapidly and every twenty paces there's a pause for us to join forces. Steadily plodding in deep snow, with a compromise between the edge to the left and the tracks leading from the summit to the right. At last

the abseil post appears, half buried in the snow, five rope lengths down the soft snow. Then, on scree, we begin the grinding descent to the CIC. Joined by our two companions of the climb we are four torches flickering down the snow, stumbling where the rocks jolt us through the thin cover. The feet take the toll, the toenails will come off later. It seems endless, and when we reach the hut the other two, who are staying there, offer a cuppa. We decline, taking water from the burn, icy and delicious and I linger for a few minutes over an orange, so tasty, juicy, restoring spirits and strength, that the visual memory of it is ingrained.

Now the crazy ballet of the Allt a'Mhuillin; five miles of snow, ice, frozen peat then boggy peat, all alternating illogically across the various paths which I try to detect in my headtorch's beam, stronger than Malcolm's who follows behind. Pirouettes and graceless lunges as the footing switches from bog to ice, but only one full length sprawl. Will the dam and its crane never appear? Eventually they do and now there's only the drop through the steep wooded slope, riddled with quagmires, to the golf course and journey's end. We pull into the drive—9pm, 4 hours overdue—and the bottle of bitter lemon is the best drink of the day. Back at the house it all seems so normal, with the questions and fears left six miles and 4000 feet up.



Malcolm Brown and Ian Plimmer on Sgurr a Mhaim.



Cloggy under snow.  
Steve Andrews



# For Want of Fifty Pence

*Winter soloing isn't for the faint hearted, even the easy routes can have their moments. In this instance Great End nearly became Tragic End.*

By Bob (RK) Allen

A sleety Borrowdale Sunday in early January, another five minutes of standing roadside below Castlehead and I would have returned to the flat, but my lucky thumb did its magic and hitched me a timely lift to Seatoller. With the weekend's budget blown last night in The George and the prospect of a hungry, cold day with a greedy electricity meter and only the black mould on my bedroom ceiling for company, it was a no-contest hill day.

Snow had replaced sleet by the time I crossed Stockley Bridge, the valley sides fading from sight behind dancing, fluttering snowflakes. It was head-down weather with the day's rhythms provided by the pitter, patter of snow on jacket hood and my own staccato breathing.

My vague plan was to walk up to Esk Hause and see what conditions were like, but an idea had been lurking since I had packed my rucksack, *Central Gully* on Great End. That delicious nervous tension between apprehension and unreason would guide today's efforts. After all, in a previous winter hadn't

I managed a well kicked out South East Gully with peg hammer and walking axe, and shod in a stout pair of suede desert boots? What could go wrong? Now, armed with a recently acquired second-hand pair of Terrordactyls and, together with proper boots and crampons, it was time for some 'front point' experience.

I skittered up the slippery Grains Gill path, though as the snow became drier my slips became fewer. On the approach to the red scar only a slight flattening in the snow-slope showed where the trail went, no one else out and about today. As I arrived at the easing below the face the clag lifted briefly, like a Victorian lady raising her skirts to show a deliciously seductive calf and ankle. The tease worked so I slithered and stumbled up the snowy scree to the start of the gully. By the time I had reached the foot of the crag waves of mist and drift had again hidden most of the detail. Rock walls showed on either side of the gully with a rippling torrent of spindrift pouring down it. Fortunately, beneath the cascading spume, the snow was firm and each kick gave secure ankle-deep footsteps that would be easy to retreat down. Where the fresh snow was scoured, névé provided resonating placements for my axes, and my first acquaintance with that well known complaint—terra-knuckle.

Small rocky steps and chockstone steepenings created discontinuities in the snow banks that filled the gully bed. Careful observation, and timing the pauses between the waves of spindrift being necessary before making a quick commitment to overcome each impasse.

First rule of soloing; never climb up what you cannot climb down. In winter this is often a delusion, as the numerous udges, scurries and adjustments that are so necessary in these conditions leave a progression of collapsed footholds and disintegrated axe placements, often hidden beneath a curtain of spindrift. The prospect of so many insecure descents

brings the realisation that the trap has sprung, and with it the possibility of a safe retreat.

An easing in the slope and deepening of steps from ankle to knee deep marked my arrival at the fork in the gully. Progress up this terrain called for an asymmetrical mixture of techniques; on one side snow excavation and compaction to create holds followed by a controlled floundering squirm to occupy them. To balance this, delicate hooking and scratching up features on the side wall of the gully. By now the spindrift had reached Aira Force intensity, each deluge forced a futile retreat into an inadequate anorak hood. Facial skin providing the latent heat necessary to turn snow-dust back into water. First stinging, then itching this together with finger and toe hot aches provide winter climbing's uniquely unpleasant sensory mixture.

Each upward grovel required much effort and the arrival of a snowy bowl formed by a large rock in the centre of the gully provided a welcome sheltered haven to rest and take stock. Up ahead I could see the green gleam of ice, my reasoning was that when I got my ice axe picks into it the worst would be over as robust front pointing would replace my current wallowing. Further trench digging took me to within a couple of metres of the start of the ice.

The avalanche engulfed me as I was bent over trying to escape the worst of the spindrift. A brief slide and disorientation then it was full-on head-over-heels rag-doll, my fate no longer my own. Arms and legs jerked in all directions, crampons sliced through my trousers and dug into my calf, flailing ice tools windmilled at me. All senses overwhelmed by this white torrent; mouth, nose and eyes clogged with snow. Resistance was useless; then an internal calm took over and I visualised myself falling over all the small rock walls and chockstones I had just climbed. My mind curled up into a kernel of clarity 'It's been nice while its lasted, hope it doesn't hurt'. Then, as suddenly as it had started, the cha-



os stopped. The avalanche gods had become bored and deposited me back in the snowy hollow I had exited not fifteen minutes previously. My saviour rock diverted the avalanche. It cascaded over and round me, I sat watching it vanish into gaping jaws of the lower gully.

Bright red gouttes d'eau in the snow, formed by the blood dripping from the end of my nose, provided a focal point in this monochrome world. First thoughts, check myself over, can I stand, where does it hurt, can I move, can I climb, why am I trembling so much? The clarity that had started when I had surrendered to the avalanche remained, a disassociation of mind and body. Snow pitter-pattered on my hood. My future resumed.

With escape either up or down the gully out of the question I would have to venture out into unknown territory on one or other of the gully walls. A narrow snowy ramp curved up and out to my right into the gloom, it would have to do. Moving again, new irrationalities filled my head, I had escaped, I won't die today, accompanied by a strong feeling of presence; of an unseen companion, a guardian angel watching over me. Perhaps a survival mechanism we humans have evolved, an artefact from a time when dangers lurked in every shadow.

The ramp exited onto a snow field, by clearing a runnel in the fresh snow and planting the shafts of my ice tool shafts as deep as I could, I shuffled a diagonal course to an outcrop of rock. From here short walls and a turfy corner provided secure placements, and an absorbing technical climb (you know this can be fun) until an easing of the angle signalling the summit. The release of tension was tempered by an increase in the wind speed, I emerged out of the cauldron into the maelstrom that is a full bodied gale force white-out.

The left leg of my over trousers was ripped from knee to ankle exposing bare flesh and it was freezing with snow sticking to the thick blood that

oozed from the substantial scratch my crampon had caused. In addition my Dachstein mitts were covered in a pink slush from wiping my face and forehead. Running down my nose I could glimpse the outline of a congealed blood track. Wounded but walking I took a compass bearing south to take me into the slight combe on the Eskdale side of the ridge, where the Scafell Pike path goes, reasoning I might find traces of tracks and follow them back to the safety of Esk Hause. The heightened state of arousal I had felt during my escape was being replaced by numbness and exhaustion. Time slowed, co-ordination suffered. Trips, stumbles and falls punctuated the descent through those awful snow covered boulders. Snow devils engulfed me, adding to my confusion and clumsiness. In the murk boulders changed shape. I would catch movement out of the corner of my eye but when I looked again they were returned to static form. Then, suddenly, some shapes didn't stop moving, they were other humans moving with the same lurching, staggering gait I was enduring, a white out waltz. As they were below me I was almost on them before they noticed me.

As we huddled together their first question was not 'Are you OK?' but 'Do you know where you are?' From my battered appearance I was expecting some sympathy but they were disorientated by the storm, well and truly lost, and I was their saviour. Navigation was devolved to me; in the land of the lost any bearing will do. We turned northwards. With the wind now behind us the going was easier. Through thickening gloaming Esk Hause shelter resolved itself from the driving snow and mist. We had escaped and all that remained was a slippery stagger by torch light back down to Seathwaite. Fortunately my new companions' car was parked there and they offered me a lift down Borrowdale. On my being dropped in Keswick, an illuminated flat proclaimed someone home, the electricity meter had been fed its 50p.

## The Six Paths of Snowdon

*Going for a walk doesn't necessarily mean that you are planning to have an easy day out!*

By Jim Milledge

On a lovely June day in the summer of, I think, 1997 my cousin, Terry Young and I were in North Wales staying at Ynys Ettws.. We decided to walk up Snowdon, so drove up to the car-park at the top of the Pass at about eight o'clock and took the PyG Track up to the summit. It was a fine sunny day so we were in shorts, tee-shirts and gym shoes. We carried no food or drink so made fast progress. We descended by the Miners' Track, back to our car and had some water and chocolate.

Then we motored down the Nant Gwynant Valley, past Beddgelert and up to the Rhyd Ddu car park. From there we went up the Rhyd Ddu path to the summit, where we had a cup of tea in the summit café, and then descended by the Snowdon Ranger Path and back to our car. We had our sandwiches and some water.

Finally, we motored back to the Nant Gwynant Valley where I dropped Terry at the start of the Watkin Path, about half way up the valley beyond Llyn Dinas. He started up the path and I continued on up the valley and then down the Llanberis Pass, parking near the start of the Llanberis Path, which goes up beside the railway. We met at the summit at about 5pm. I gave Terry the car keys and told him where I had parked. I went down the Watkin Path and Terry descended the path by the railway to Llanberis. He then found the car and drove round to pick me up at the bottom of the Watkin Path. It was then about 7 pm and we drove up to the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel for a well appreciated pint of bitter before going back to Ynys for supper.

A fine day's walking for retired climbers!

Snowdon's summit rising from a sea of cloud. 📷 Paul Quin







## Bookends of an Obsession

*Obsession, we can all fall into its grip. Simon recounts his escape from two very different obsessions.*

By Simon Laker

### The genesis of obsession

The hard way, hard years, hard rock?  
Perhaps a poem, a picture, a person.  
For me, most probably, an affair with *Zero*  
and a picture of greatness.  
The wall of greatness, sculptured by nature, connected  
by beings evolved to enjoy this strange abstraction.  
Squashed in place, frozen.  
Limbs, stark on the black and white.  
A sea of rock, epic words, a grey sombre mood.  
Three hundred and something full moons between them.

### Zero first

We dropped in at the resurrection, a pair of twos plus one.  
Under canvas, but imagined the old boy arriving, door  
bursting, meeting his icy appointment.

We didn't sculpt steps but we did skimp protection, the  
chute remaining uncluttered.

A memory-searing move out right from a chipped red hog  
was eclipsed a little higher as the calming thread ran tight.  
The link now broken, doubt crawled its way in, each move  
taken as if the last, no expectation of arriving, just whacking  
and thrashing, but glorious when finally done.

We didn't wave a hand at the gully, we did perspire and  
weaken, but the plateau was friendly and shelter reached  
before dark, our time in *Zero* the start.

Three hundred and something times the moon quartered  
and halved, in our and others' skies. Some we saw from  
temporary lodgings, back against the wall, feet within a  
bag. Others we skipped, sleeping for warmth to dance  
and play upon the stone.

Continents were visited, zero became thousands but  
the picture still burned and the wall of great deeds still  
beckoned.

They say the dangerous man dreams by day, but will  
age dent even the day dreams?

The day of three hundred and something dawned clear,  
as had the three before.

An ascent of a dark shape against a white background  
led to a songbird singing. We shrilled back down, but still  
time before the three hundred and something was done.

Furtive glances, worried words, a whisper of moisture.

Shall we, can we, should we.

We rest, we drink, we dream.

Creeping to the now sleeping stone, we tip-toe to not  
awake. A gentle foot, a caressing hand, a delicacy of moves.

Half way and the wall of great deeds fires orange.  
The condensation of droplets is receding but still  
the outcome deliciously unsure.

Intensity of desire brings us to it. A slippery finger,  
an exquisite reach, a scuttle à droite.

Three hundred and something moons, the bookend  
is made, the postscript was Comici's, l'obsession no end.

Left: *Zero Gully*,  
climbers unknown.  
📷 Viv Scott

Right: Simon Laker  
on *The Comici*.  
📷 Pete Finklaire







# OCD and the Tree

*The Anti-Atlas Mountains of Morocco hold a huge amount of unexplored rock. The bulk of the climbing has been added in the finest British tradition, on-sight and ground up, an approach that has its own unique challenges and rewards. In this piece Paul describes one particularly exciting piece of exploration.*

By Paul Donnithorne

These finger edges are getting pretty familiar now. It must be twenty minutes I've been up here grappling with them; the foot holds, or rather smears, too. I either go for it now or try to reverse. That familiar waning feeling is beginning, I haven't got long. I haven't actually come that far from the belay, ten, maybe fifteen metres at the most and that big flat hold, or maybe it's a small ledge, is only a couple of moves away. All I've got between me and Pete is a tiny cam, not sure what make, it's Pete's rack but it's about the size of a Friend ½. It was the only available piece of protection I could find, about five metres out from the belay. But, if I come off, will it hold? It's in good rock with good knobbly friction, the quartzite here is similar to Cornish granite: colourful and solid. I don't know though, doubts come flooding in now and I should have looked more closely for a wire or two. I must be slacking in my old age.

I shout a warning to Pete, 'I might come off if I go for that hold, it's about 6a I reckon'. He just lets out a sort of uninterested sighing grunt. He's probably bored, not surprisingly, but I'm looking at a big diagonal fall. If the gear holds, that is. The handhold I have to get to looks like a flat ledge

about four inches wide and a foot long. If I get it I'm going to have to mantel onto it straight away, there are no foot holds below it and it looks flat, not incut. The rock here has that shiny surface, so gives really poor friction. I'll only have a few seconds before the cliff saps all the strength out of my forearms.

A few more moments to psyche up for it. The exposure is considerable on this, the third pitch, but feels more than the seventy metres or so that it actually is. The void is gnawing away at me. It's always the way when venturing up new ground.

If I stand on the ledge, what then? I should be able to rest; maybe. I can't see any cracks above. I will be totally committed and might not find any gear. The consequences are really serious. I've been in this situation loads of times and have always dealt with it. You have to make sure it's ok though, but it isn't always. If I end up stood on that ledge with no gear...?

My forearms are starting to fade, the pump is mild already, it won't be long. If only I had a good wire right by me it would be fine, safe. I would go for it. It's not safe though, it's pushing things too far. We're in the mountains of Morocco for Christ's

Telephoto shot of Paul before the fall.  
📷 Emma Alsford



sake and you can't afford to hurt yourself. No rescue here and no one else around.

'Watch me Pete, I'm pumping out'.

'OK', comes the grumpy reply.

I know it's been ages and there's no warmth on this sombre north facing cliff. I've been dithering here, but still, show some interest.

'I hope that cam's ok,' I shout.

It dawns on Pete, suddenly, how serious this is. Well not quite.

'Watch me Pete, I'm off'.

He braces his feet against the sloping ledge he's sitting on and sits hard against the sling he's put around the tree.

'Oh bollocks' I shout at him. 'Is that all you've got?'

It's an eight foot sling, and a skinny one at that, around the trunk of the tree and clipped to his belay loop. How fucking slack, or rather not! Why didn't he use the rope to allow some stretch in the system?

'Pete, if that friend rips, all we've got is that poxy sling!'

He puts his weight against the tree. No slack in the system. I feel my fingers uncurling and lose the final few remnants of composure.

Between looking at the cam, the foot smears, the ledge up to my right, I see a blurred Pete out of the corner of my eye, fumbling with rope, trying to bodge it around the tree.

That bloody tree looks so pathetic. As Pete weighted it, all the leaves trembled and shuddered. God, that sling looks so thin! The sound of my heart is louder than I've ever known, the banging in my temples makes my head expand. Pounding forehead. Hot.

'I'm Off'!

As I'm flying through the air I hear Pete shouting 'Oh Fuck!' and stare at the solitary little cam. Why, oh why, didn't I back it up? As the rope goes tight on the cam I glide into an arc, swinging leftwards towards Pete who never managed the last minute bodg-

ing of rope around the tree. He's also staring at the cam. We're both staring at that fucking cam. Is the rock sound enough? It's all there is! The rope tightens on it fully, stretch, stretch and then fully again.

T-w-a-n-g!

It's fucking ripped. Shit! I'm flying again, this time sailing through the air below Pete and as the rope comes taut for the second time—much harder—a serious fall factor. I feel my harness biting deeper into my waist and legs. Then the cam twats me in the teeth. No time to curse or swear. It's the moment when that fear of rope failure...

Instinct makes me look up to see what's happened at the tree. The tree. The tree.

Has that poxy sling held such an impact, two of us with all that slack in the system?

The tree shakes violently, shudders and judders. It's enough to shake all of its leaves off, but it's a gnarly Moroccan tree and they all cling on. I come to a jolt, still, hanging in space. A disgruntled marionette.

Stones and soil whistle and fly past, some hitting me. Dirt in my eyes as I look up. I'm directly below Pete and the tree.

Then, the Eclipse from Hell!

The fucking tree has ripped!

We've torn it from the mountain!

The tree, Pete and scattering debris are all accelerating towards me, not quite catching me. We're all flying, speeding to our deaths.

The noise is intense, muffled, panicked, red, blurred, whistling stones.

Pete, tethered to the tree trunk, limbs cartwheeling like a rag doll.

Me, an earth-bound astronaut, with flailing umbilical cords tangled in chaotic detritus.

There's nothing to do but wait for impact and darkness.

I curse myself for not backing up that cam.

I curse Pete for not making the belay more dynamic.

I curse myself for being a wimp, for not going for the ledge, just a move away.

Why didn't I do some stamina training so I don't get pumped so easily?

Why didn't I just reverse the moves back to the oasis of the tree?

Why didn't I try a more reasonable-looking line above the tree, instead of heading out rightwards onto that ridiculous blank headwall of hostility?

The layback flake and chalked pocketed wall on pitch two are burning onto my retinas as I flash past, almost overtaken by the fierce first pitch jamming crack I fought up just now; no, hours ago.

We all crash onto a ledge a few metres above the ground. Rocks, branches, whip and splinter. Screams of fright and pain echo in my ears, or is that fluid?

Slap, thwack, blood and bone fragments everywhere. Soil, rocks, tree limbs.

Metallic noises lost in the airborne landslide of Armageddon.

The entire tangled bundle of ropes, bodies, tree-parts, and debris from the ledge continues down through the whistling, screaming, whirring air, and I re-live all my climbs with Pete. Speed uncontrollably to Emma in the Kasbah, all my childhood, and every member of my family. Where are they now? Where are you now? To the dogs back home. All of the dogs I've ever had. Everything in my life up to this very zenith and...

I'm dangling in space. Dangling from Pete. Dangling from the tree. It's all intact. Everything is in place, textbook style. The cam ripped, but the tree held. That gnarly old Moroccan tree held. Of course it did. How did that sling hold? I under-estimated that sling. I'm puffing and panting with exertion. Mind racing. Blood thundering. Actually, the cam held as well. After all that fuss and worry, it held. Everything held. The rock was sound. The placement was good. What a piece of engineering!

I snap out of that horrendous flying daydream and

try to come to terms with it all. The whole situation. A horrifying two second daydream. My whole life squeezed into a moment's flash. That's all. I'm about twenty metres below Pete, hanging in space. All I really need to do is pull back up and carry on up to the top of the crag, via a different, easier line. Not a big deal really. An escape bid, nevertheless.

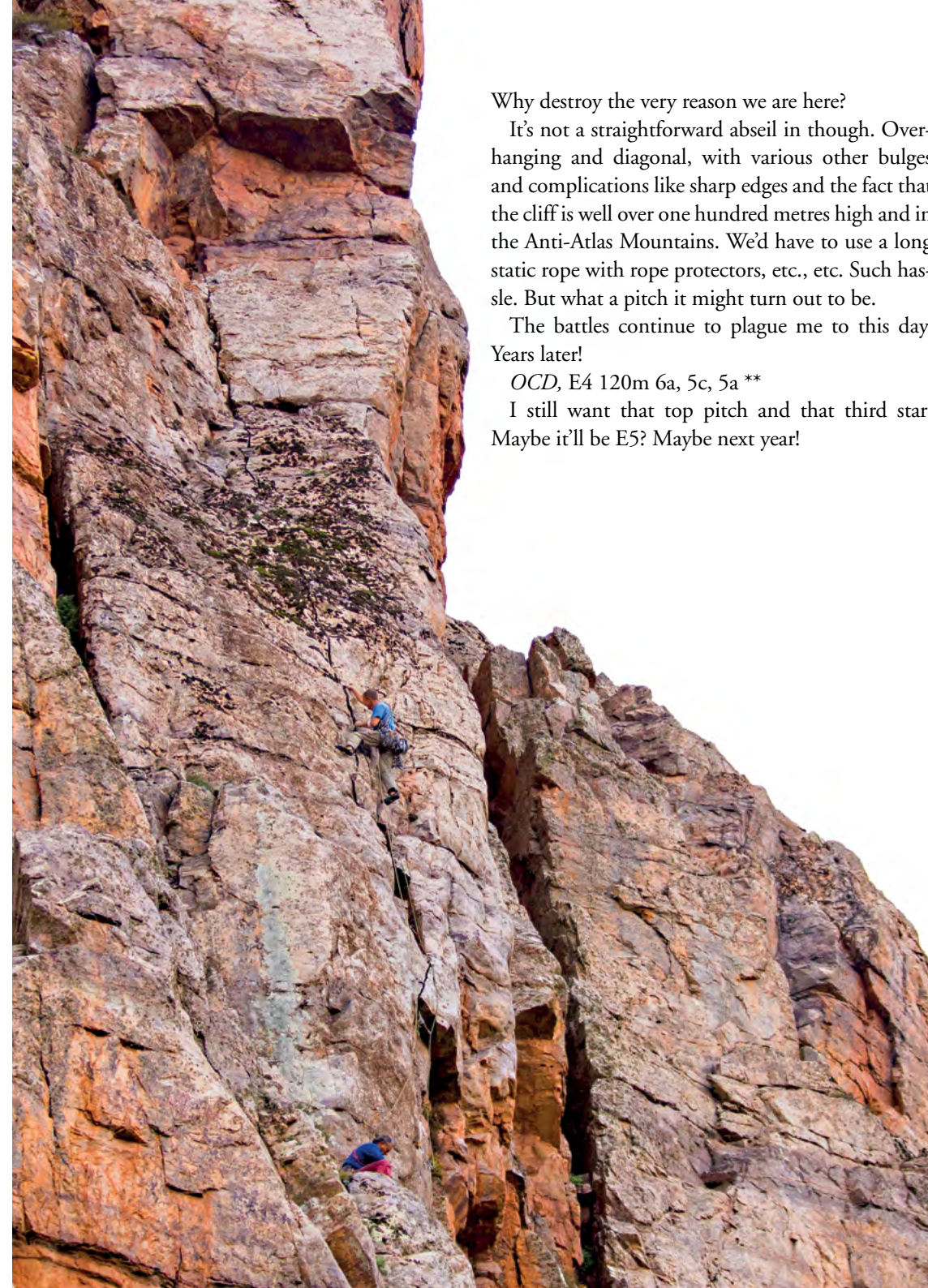
As I edge past the tree, Pete and I make wild, steely, blue-eyed contact, an unspoken acknowledgement. Twigs scratch my arm and I notice, perhaps in a heightened state, it's not just one tree, but two; and different species. An Almond and a type of Oak. Trunks entwined, competing for space on their windless, sunless ledge, clutching the rock and yet dependent on one another. Simultaneously, givers of life to countless other creatures with their fruit and flowers, leaves and bark. An affectionate caress of their bark and I head off, past Pete, who hands me a couple of Haribos. A tangy reward for my bravery.

On reaching the top we congratulate ourselves on our fine new E4 6a, 5c, 5a. We discuss each pitch, in fact each move, and the holds we found en route. The shapes of the cracks and many of the gear placements. The little cam.

The last pitch turned out to be about HVS. A bit of a shame really. It unbalances the route somewhat, but a good pitch in its own right. It would be so much better to have another 5c or 6a pitch at the top. What a route that would have been then.

Descending over the back of the mountain, another battle commences, an internal one. We must go back and try that headwall again when I'm not so tired, or perhaps a bit fitter, or braver. Maybe even abseil down to inspect it, but that's not really what we do over here in Morocco, but it would be worth it. Or would it? One of the best things about attempting a new route here in the mountains is the very fact that you don't know what's in store for you. What lays ahead. What's coming up. How hard or bold will it be, and is it actually climbable?





Why destroy the very reason we are here?

It's not a straightforward abseil in though. Overhanging and diagonal, with various other bulges and complications like sharp edges and the fact that the cliff is well over one hundred metres high and in the Anti-Atlas Mountains. We'd have to use a long static rope with rope protectors, etc., etc. Such hassle. But what a pitch it might turn out to be.

The battles continue to plague me to this day. Years later!

*OCD*, E4 120m 6a, 5c, 5a \*\*

I still want that top pitch and that third star! Maybe it'll be E5? Maybe next year!

Pete Johnson leading the 5c second pitch.  
📷 Emma Alsford

## Poems and fiction inspired by Menlove Edwards

*John Menlove Edwards, an inspirational pioneer on rock and architect of many great climbs; imaginative author and poet and a respected psychiatrist who, sadly, took his own life. These works are inspired by his life and writings.*

By Mark Goodwin

In 1996 I received a Writers' Bursary, given to me so I could attempt to make poems about Menlove Edwards. *Code of Minerals* and *Hafod Owen* were begun in 1997. Both poems have been returned to repeatedly over the years, and re-drafted.

*A Ghost Jokes* was also begun around 1997; but over the years this also has had considerable work done on it, and been through a number of transformations. *Special Lighting* was begun much later than the other pieces, and dances much more closely with Menlove's creative writing, especially *Scenery for a Murder* which was published in the 1939 CCJ.

It is unusual for me to draft work over such a protracted period of time. It seems those poems have pursued me ... until I was able to make *Special Lighting*.

I visited Hafod Owen again a couple of years ago, many years since my first visit, whilst on my young poet's mission in search of Menlove ... and on that return visit I found that all those damned rhododendrons had been removed, and that the cottage was again open to the light ... but still, I didn't manage to find Menlove ...

Hafod Owen cottage.  
📷 © Mark Percy (Creative Commons)





Code of Minerals

In memoriam Menlove Edwards

Poets expect speech  
from landscapes—hope  
to home

in on life’s innate  
symbolisms.

With that poets’ hope is how  
I first visited  
Menlove’s Hafod Owen. But

the tender ground there rambled—  
beautifully misunderstood

by my expecting eyes. It spoke

familiar syllables of tussocks; paced  
its rhythm with the rough straights of stone walls; whispered  
through softs of lichenous pallets; laughed  
flared words of rhododendron-purple; winked

silver gestures of dew. But

its syntax somehow seeped  
through itself as water

through soil. Secrets.

\*

On the ground above Hafod Owen  
there’s a proud wooded knoll called  
Bryn Castel—it stands

as a landscape’s title; it shocked me

like the first sight of a desired climb –  
a sure symbol smudged

in a mist of emerging fears.  
Cloud-filtered light garbled

the ground.

This is where Menlove’s sister & brother spread  
his ashes.

\*

Impossible-to-fathom pattern  
of dissolved ashes; flecks  
of shape-changed flesh rained gone—yet perhaps still  
present: bonded  
with the minerals of the ground; become

part of parts of rock.

Do Menlove’s minerals cling  
to this ground’s soil, feed  
a scenery’s roots,

or speechlessly follow trickles of water to the sea?

Hafod Owen

In memoriam Menlove Edwards

When rhododendrons here bloom  
it is beautiful, but they are curtains

and painted scenery poised to  
slowly reveal

this secret—a cottage-whiteness;

a little house that beseeches with its  
brightness set amongst the dim

of sheltering pines & emerald-dark  
of curled rhododendron trunks. When

Menlove lived

here the hillside was bare. The light  
was free of shade—mixed

simply with wind its stark sheets slid

through air—lit  
moorland clearly; indiscriminately picked

out every texture and shape  
of terror & beauty. Unprejudiced

light as conscientious as a ghost’s.

Sit on the bench on the southerly wall. Indulge—imagine  
hours, days, weeks blur like light through mist.

In winter each day a brief trickle  
of water across here’s

dark soils. Perhaps

the drone of distant  
bombers pulls

through your mind broken  
bodies. Feel

folded in

to the corner of  
some other’s

world. Watch

today’s ragged garden of moist greenery surround  
the particular light –

to keep it.



*One way or the other I dreamt that I was in two parts. – Menlove Edwards*

Can't remember the crag. Probably Wales, or some version-of. Thing is, I've learned everything's a version of something else. And people, humans, loved ones or strangers—they are just as changeable and ever-weathering as landscapes or frost-threatened rock routes, or historical accounts of sporting past-times. Times past. Time passes! In the end, at the last stance of the day, all people are really only versions of themselves or other people. Always versions. Route descriptions are just versions of someone's idea of a way up something. Oh yeh! How many times we've all been on a crag, all of us, and the route description seems to be the version of a climb we're not actually right-now climbing, thank you very much! I'm rambling—sorry, bad joke. Climbing! Take in! You taking this in?

Do you want to here and now the story? I bet, I just bet you do. But I bet also, just like the rest, when you hear it you won't believe it. Yes, I'm bonkers—as a cow-bell in a rurp-split. But buddy, the big twenty-four thousand pitch question about you. Yes, you! Are you going to dismiss the whole ascent just for one moment of odd route description?

As far as I care, what I'm going to tell you—that I've told dozens already, from nurses to doctors, to mum and dad, and my wife—far as I care it really happened. And if it didn't—then far as I care for anything it really did anyway.

That's what a lot of people don't get—just like climbing, it's all in the head. If you think that all-in-the-head isn't real then you really are off-route, in the mist and it's beginning to piss. Mental illness is contagious—if your partner loses it on the crux of some sandbag, or just at the kitchen sink, doesn't matter where, then for sure you'll be losing something of yourself as well.

My climbing partner, Vince, was a very good climber—steady, strong, bold, but not reckless. Solid E2 leader. Vince The Able and Invincible, I used to call him. Just a bit of a tosser when it came to women. But that's another story. Never mind, shame about his love life, but climbing with him was wonderful—some of the happiest days of my previous life. Anyway, we turn up at the base of that famous beautiful mountain crag ... only famous to yourself, but you know the one I mean. Soft, sunny September day. Smell of old leaves rising up through the woods far below. Golden sunlight drizzled into the grass, every blade crisp as if it'd been made in a jeweller's workshop. Vince's eyes, as always, keen on the crag, and the light dancing in the green of his irises—seemed as if he was making the crag happen by staring at it. The crag gleamed, warm and rough. You know the kind of day—just can't wait to feel the stone and be getting going.

Things start going wrong, for me at least, when I notice Vince is wearing a

tweed jacket. Usually wears a Craig Kit® soft-shell. And what the sandbag-bastard has he got on his feet? Big bloody dockers' boots, with nails. Who do you think you are, Vince? Looks me straight in the eye, no joking, and he says: Menlove Edwards. Great, get to go climbing with one of the 1930s legends, bloody great! Well no, it's not! I just want to go climbing with Vince. I like, or liked, I will like—can't remember the order of pitches here, sometimes the guidebook gets things arse-about-face, you know, the 4b pitch turns out to be the 5c one, just like finding out that your friend was crying not laughing, or worse the other way round, in the wrong order, wrong-wrong-wrong! Anyway, I always liked Vince's long chestnut-blond hair, it was kind of comforting to see it wavering in the breeze as he disposed of the crux like he was drawing a loved one's face with just thirteen quick perfect pen strokes. You see, Vince was an artist as well. Did I tell you? But now his hair has gone—neat 1930s short-back-and-sides. Now why was that? Why was a detail like that so very very bloody important? Just one slight bit of mis-info and the whole route becomes another route and you end up climbing something desperate and fab or you end up with a guidebook with no words and no topos just full of black daggers because, oh by-the-way, you died. Doornail. Bloody doornail! It wasn't my fault. Why did he decide

to come dressed like that? And then the light changed as well. Went darker. Not cold and dim. Kind of warm dark. With freshly painted stage scenery, still damp. And special lighting. As if both of us in separate spotlights but moving up the cliff together. Connected. It's our show—me in one spotlight on belay, him in another spotlight way up the face. And the thin lines of our nylon bonds gleaming between us. And the audience—just the bloody sheep, the ravens, and the hills beyond. The rest of the world, or bloody wrong versions of it, can't and couldn't touch us. Thing I wanted to know, want to know—who or what the bastard-sandbag was shining those spotlights on us? Shining, shining right to the end of a climb. Who? Same bloody questions the owls ask. Who? Who?

Want to know what, what ... what will really make you ill? That'd be seeing someone you love just decide to check out early. Thank you, Mister Landlord of The Crag, I will be checking out from Black Crag Inn early on in the climb. If you don't mind, let me just hand over this little wire, it's my last piece of gear, the one that would keep me from the jagged rocks below, and the hungry black mouth of the little llyn that wants to eat me up, but you take it, Crag Landlord, and this also, this little note to my climbing partner, you must get it to him, he's in room number two on the hanging stance ninety feet below, in

his own spot-lit pool, this very moment gazing up at us, you just make sure he gets this note and also ... And then there's a moist cracking sound as Vince, and I see him do this, he pushes his sandbagging hand through his ribs and rips out the throbbing bloody muscle that was his centre and plonks it into The Black-Crag-Lord's hand. Vince then shouts: 'I'm checking out!' Not: 'Take in!', no, couldn't shout that, he shouts: 'Checking out!'

Vince decks out. Just one spotlight left on the face—me in the final act. The bloody curtains are stuck though. Just want to go home and have a hot bath. But the bloody stained curtains in this version of North Wales on the Dark Crag ... the curtains won't close and the show is going on. So, Vince is lying there smashed at the bottom, but still has the audacity to pretend he's Menlove Edwards. He's dead, but still banging on about how much better 1930s climbers are than 21st Century climbers simply on account of how technical clothing is a poor version of human skin and it's better to wear wool as that's closer to nature. He's yelling this loud as hell up the crag, and he's dead. You think I'm mad! Go on then, if you're so smart, with your newly printed guidebook, your lead ... you tell me a better version of who I am. Yes?

This next bit is what no one believes. I untied the ropes, and soloed up the pitch

Vince-or-Menlove-or-whomever-he-was had just parted company from. Parted company. Parted company! Now I used to be a steady E1 leader, but there's me soloing E2 5c, and each handhold is soft and smooth as skin, sweaty skin in places, and yet I dance it like a Spaniard sad and glad all in one for his bull he's about to slay. And at the top of the pitch I find a rope made from hair. Same colour as Vince's hair—brown with golden threads, rich with the lucid season of September. Wasn't Vince's hair though, was just a version. That's how I got down—just slid down a rope of some blokes's hair. Do you know the one about Rapunzel? Kind o' like that but different characters, of course.

At the bottom Vince was a mess. And he wouldn't speak to me. After seventeen years together, on all sorts of climbs, from frozen water through grit, quartzite, limestone, slate and granite, and he just lies there pretending to be Menlove Edwards. Won't say a bloody word to me. Just as silent as if he was

that faint face in  
  
a dream I &  
you & every  
  
other bleedin' climber there  
was or ever will  
  
be dreams



## A Ghost Jokes

Menlove Edwards peels

off a pair of dainty sticky  
-rubber shoes—reveals

leather boots nailed  
scuffed-&-gleaming. Smiles

with terrifying kindness, then tears  
a bright hi-tech-textile jacket

off his chest. And there

he is

in a woollen blazer all  
ripped-&-stitched. He plays

a poet's pipe to a pretty  
coil of kernmantle making

it snake  
away hawser-laid. He laughs

saying: 'Ah, nothing has  
changed.' And you can see

he is

happy-&-sad for that



John Menlove Edwards



All poems featured in  
*Rock as Gloss* (published by  
the Sheffield-based poetry  
house, Longbarrow Press).

Reviewed in *Books* on p271.



Bristly Ridge,  
Glyder Fach.

📷 Sean Kelly



# Attempt to Climb Volcan Tupungato, Chile

*The Andes, the longest mountain range in the world, offer an incredible range of climbing targets including some impressive volcanoes. Few of us will have heard of Volcan Tupungato, it had a brief period of fame in 2000 when the wreckage of an Avro Lancastrian airliner (a modified Lancaster Bomber) that went missing in 1947 emerged from the snout of a glacier on the peak thus solving the mystery of its disappearance. You can rely on CC members to find interesting targets to climb.*

By Mike Blenkinsop



Volcan Tupungato, 6635 m, is the highest peak in the Andes south of Aconcagua, 6959 m, the highest mountain in the Andes. Although only about 50km east from Santiago, it lies on the border between Chile and Argentina; it is a remote summit with no easy approach. The President of the Chilean Andean Federation told us that after nine summit attempts, he had only been successful once. That set the bar and realistic expectations!

After some family days in Santiago, Valparaiso and Maitencillo with Micky's wife Tamara's extended family celebrating New Year, Flor, Alex and I had a few days up north in San Pedro de Atacama, acclimatising up to 4200m.

Micky and I finally set off on 8th January with our muleteer Marcelino, his horse and our two mules. After a three-day trek up the Rio Colorado we reached Base Camp at 4400m.

For the next seven days we saw no-one else as we made our way up to Camp 1, 4800m, Camp 2, 5200m and Camp 3, 5650m. Our first week of weather was quite mixed for summer, with even a white-out day.

When the clear blue skies came in the second week, it was with very strong winds of up to 100 kph, which finally persuaded us that discretion was the better part of valour, and to stay safe and retreat. A strong local team of young Chilean climbers,

who had trekked in from the trailhead without mule support and called themselves the 'Disciples of Alex McIntyre', did manage to reach the North summit, but even they described the conditions as being very difficult! Another young Argentinian couple camping next to us, who had succeeded on Aconcagua, but failed, like us, on Tupungato, stated that our peak was a greater challenge! Even if we failed to summit, it was a fantastic experience being out in 'the wilds' for two weeks with a great friend.

Back in civilisation and we headed off to Tamara's family home in Los Molles to meet up with our families, and catch up with some eating and drinking. Flor and I then headed south for a couple of weeks to Chiloe and Puerto Varas, where I managed to climb Volcan Osorno, 2652m, a worthy 'consolation prize'.



Volcan Osorno, 2652m from Puerto Varas.

On the summit of Volcan Osorno with guide Andres.



Left: The Tupungato team: Mike Blenkinsop and Mike 'Micky' Harrop.



all: Mike Blenkinsop

Clockwise from top left: Day 2 Camp at Vegas Las Flocus, 3300m.

Day 3 trekking up to Base Camp and Tupungato.

Camp 1, 4800m, Cerro Polleras, 5993m.

White-out on the north frontier ridge.





## Kirkus's Last Route



*We have all done, and been thrilled by, routes pioneered by Colin Kirkus during his heyday in the late 20s and early 30s. After a serious accident on Ben Nevis in which his talented companion, Maurice Linnell, was killed Kirkus spent less time exploring unclimbed rock. Helsby, one of his favourite crags, is renowned for its small rounded and sloping holds on scary slabs. The author imagines what might have been in Kirkus's mind as he was enjoying some time at Helsby during leave from his RAF Bomber squadron. He lost his life in September 1942 when his aircraft failed to return from a mission.*

By Nick Reuben

I seem to have spent my whole life high above empty space, half-expecting to die. In a few days I will again be cramped into the nose of an aeroplane with 11,000 feet between me and the plains of the Ruhr, but beneath me now is the Cheshire plain, home and family behind me, somewhere beyond the distant Mersey, and although I have only 24 feet of air beneath me, I am equally suspended between fear and calm.

This sandstone cliff is a petrified vertical beach. My toes are placed delicately on a hold that is not a hold at all; it is a dimple, a tiny depression, the edge of a ripple in the sand. My balance isn't quite perfect. I lift my left foot and replace it a few degrees clockwise. To twist the balls of my feet is to wake the surface of the sands, to risk the re-commencement of time frozen beneath long-retreated seas, for the grains to begin their tumble once again, as if through the thin waist of an hourglass. My fingers, taking most of my weight, are on two thin little

flakes slanting away from each other like inquisitive eyebrows on the rock. Above there seems to be nothing at all; it looks as featureless as the beach in Wales where I once walked and gathered material for the sand-pit of a friend's children. I am beginning to wonder if there is some truth in the assertion that everything achievable by mortals has been climbed on this cliff. Many times I have said that it can't be so, and many times I have been proved right, although often alone, with no corroboration possible. Even if I don't die in flames in the nose of my plane I will not reveal these secrets. If Europe is still free, and if climbers come here in happier years and claim these routes as their own, I will not announce that I was once here before them. My name is all but carved onto the rocks of Snowdonia, and I have often wished that I could smooth away those unworthy scratchings, that every climb should be as new, with my efforts on them vanishing like rain on newly sunlit rock.

Above left:  
Colin Kirkus.  
A B Hargreaves

Opposite:  
Dynamic and slopey,  
Adam Crook on CFK  
(E4 6a). Helsby.  
Dave Garry



Typical Helsby Insecurity. Adam Crook on *Brush Off Direct*.  
📷 Dominic Stockton



Upward progress seems to rely on a move which is the last resort of the experienced soloist on uncharted rock—a pull up with my fingertips on these tiny flakes, feet smearing on featureless rock, a long reach to what I hope is a hold. These moves are nearly impossible to reverse, lacking any mid-point in which to adjust my plans, precluding any improvisation or change in direction. Failure means a big fall, and I wish the sun wasn't out because it makes the cliff lie to me. The low, late afternoon light that kindles such a glow in this red rock draws deceptive shadows from the slightest of depressions, making nothing seem like something, tempting my fingers onto dangerously non-existent holds. A fall will probably not mean death, but injury is not an option at the moment. If I really loved my country I wouldn't even be here.

The mind empties for a moment and there is nothing but the sensation of rock and movement, pre-verbal, pre-consciousness, a blank that cannot be traced over or deconstructed, a hint of the eternities that our waking selves obscure, the soul in its uncorrupted form. It gapes within me but snaps shut as the fingers of my right hand meet the sloping hold that offers just enough friction to hold me as my feet pad tenuously up blank rock, enough for the other hand to reach higher—will it?—and close around a better hold with a relief that the muscles feel before the mind.

The feet find position, the body relaxes, the world expands again. I rest secure, feeling the air around me, and think of Germany.

#### Editor's note

Kirkus was one of four brothers, all of whom served in the RAF, three were killed in action during WW2.



Emily Huzzard on *Flake Crack*, one of Kirkus's finest additions.  
📷 Paul Evans



*Storm Clouds on K2*  
Oil on canvas, 2003  
Jim Curran



*Gasherbrum IV*  
Oil on canvas, 2003  
Jim Curran





# The Quimsa Cruz



*A new route on Korichuma in a seldom visited region of the Andes.  
Korichuma South East Buttress, (500m, TD),  
Martin Scrowston & Mike Hope, 12 & 13 June 2019*

By Mike Hope

I was being seduced once again by the thought of climbing in the high mountains. The attraction of basic living, harsh conditions and a degree of self-denial, coupled with pristine environments and exploratory new routing is something one either loves or loathes. Martin, my climbing partner for nearly forty years, had been on to me for 'an adventure' into the bigger ranges for a couple of years; the excuses I had used were now wearing a bit thin. We have climbed together in many parts of the world and the passion is certainly still there, but fitness, poor acclimatisation and being not far off seventy played a bit on the mind. It was going to be a fitting 'swan-song' for my high-altitude mountaineering days.

Our objective was a small range of the Bolivian Andes, south-east of Lake Titicaca and La Paz and called the Cordillera Quimsa Cruz. At about 40km in length it is the continuation of the Cordillera Real, with the massif of Illimani, 6438m, close by. Kimsa Cruz or Quimsa Cruz, like many of the local place names, is derived from Aymaran and Spanish expressions, in this case its meaning is 'Three crosses'. The highest summit in the range is Jachacunocollo

at about 5800m. There is however, still confusion about summit spot heights, peak names and new route details due to the lack of both accurate mapping and an organised climbing information centre. More popular for its early twentieth century mining rather than mountaineering, it nevertheless has seen a few parties interested in its peaks.

Although only approximately 100km from La Paz, it takes around five to six hours to access the region, two and a half hours of which are on steep, narrow dirt tracks requiring 4x4 transport. Our chosen basecamp was beside Laguna Choco Khota, with the main peak of interest being Quri Ch'uma also named Immaculado, but now more commonly referred to as Korichuma, 5312 m. From the limited information available we felt this peak had the best opportunities for new routing.

The planning was pretty straight forward once we had contacted our outfitter, Fabricio Escobar from 'The Adventure Climbing and Trekking Company of South America' in La Paz. Fabricio arranged our 4x4 transport into base camp as well as fuel for the MSR and a kitchen tent, which proved to be a godsend.

... a fitting 'swan-song' for my high-altitude mountaineering days...

📷 Martin Scrowston and Mike Hope.

Opposite: Korichuma, showing the South East Buttress and the South West Face.



“...he thought he had been the ‘chosen one’ to ride pillion and accompany the bags!”

We took advantage of a previous expedition’s recommendation regarding accommodation in La Paz and booked Hotel Rosario in advance for three nights. It proved to be a welcome refuge from the hum-drum and chaos of the city centre. It enabled us to recover from the ill effects of being at altitude and helped us to prepare in comfort for the next stage of our expedition. It also gave Bolivian Airlines a delivery address for the three of our four pieces of baggage (90 litres each) that the airline had somehow managed to leave behind at Madrid airport.

Flying into La Paz airport at 4100 m and then staying in the city which isn’t much lower (3640m), affects nearly everyone; I knew it would definitely affect me. Over the following three days we acclimatised reasonably well whilst drinking copious amounts of coffee. We shopped locally for food and equipment, buying enough to last us twelve days in the mountains. Freeze dried meals and a few other luxury essentials were brought from the UK. We met Fabricio to finalise our transport, cooking tent and fuel. He also introduced us to Denise Sanjines, a friend of his who was quite knowledgeable and had written a couple of guidebooks to the area. She was also kind enough, under pressure, to sell us her 1:50,000 map, ‘Mina Caracoles’, which covered our proposed climbing area. Her only condition was that we fed back updated photographs of the glaciers and any new route.

**June 8th** Being our last breakfast at the hotel, we certainly made the most of it. We then met with Fabricio and ‘Freddy,’ our driver. As Freddy spoke no English and Martin and I spoke bugged all Spanish, our journey of approximately six hours passed with limited conversation. Once we had broken free from the mayhem and madness of the city, the journey went with few hiccups, even though the last two and a half hours of it were on a very narrow and very rough dirt track. However,

when we arrived at the junction for the last leg to basecamp, just before the small mining village of Viloco, things took a turn for the worse. We were confronted by a stationary van on our track which was not much wider than the van itself. An inspection further up the track revealed we were not going any further even if we could shift the vehicle blocking our progress. A trench, about a metre wide and the same deep, had been carved across the track. We later learned that the few miners left in the area had been in dispute with the local village over mining royalties and that one of the parties had deliberately damaged the tracks.

Downhearted and frustrated, we headed back to the van. We could now see quite clearly the range of mountains we were heading for, and in particular the splendid peak of Korichuma—our main objective.

Freddy, however, had spotted some activity on a remote llama farm way down the hill and was heading there with gusto, presumably for help. To cut a long story short, a marvellous local man called Cerilio walked up to our position with his family in tow and came to our rescue. With much translation and decision making involving Freddy, Cerilio, Martin, myself and Fabricio back in La Paz, courtesy of Freddy’s mobile, it was agreed that Cerilio would bring his very old motorbike up from the village and take two bags at a time on the back of the bike to our proposed base camp site. Martin’s face was a picture, he thought he had been the ‘chosen one’ to ride pillion and accompany the bags!

A price of 200 Bolivianos (about £24) was soon agreed on. The charge was to use the bike to get all our kit to basecamp, and the same would apply for the return journey after our climbing. We all shook hands with smiles all round as we all found it greatly amusing. Martin and I could also now relax after what had become a bit of a nightmare. There was only one slight snag, this was all due

to take place manyana! We were close to 5000m and the altitude was beginning to affect us. It was 18.30, getting dark and cold and Freddy needed to leave for his return journey to La Paz. We were left with little option but to have a very quick scoff of a half-hydrated freeze-dried down our exceedingly dry throats, followed by setting up Martin’s bigger tent on the grassy verge of the track before scurrying into our bags for what was going to be a long and restless night.

A very long twelve hours it was. Dawn was only just breaking at around 06.30 but, as we had agreed with Cerilio to meet at 08.00, we felt the need to get a move on and be ready, although we suspected 8 o’clock could mean anytime between 08.00 and midday. Cerilio arrived around 10.00, just as we were beginning to have doubts. We both watched with interest as he began to cut a rather large inner tube into one long strip. He used this to secure the first two sacks on the rear of the bike, wasting very little time before setting off, his eldest son following behind with a plank of wood that was going to see him across the ditches. Martin and I followed along the 2.5km track, with a bag each, eventually arriving at our designated base camp in the early afternoon. Cerilio had carried on with the task at hand delivering the last of the bags just after we arrived. At last we could set up base camp. Cerilio was keen to get going, no doubt to get on with home-stead duties of his own, so with more handshakes and smiles, he revved up and shot off.

Korichuma lay in front of us, looking spectacular. We were already plotting possible lines in our minds as we completed base camp duties. Clearly base camp here was not going to be one of the most comfortable we had experienced. It was in an idyllic spot next to Laguna Choco Khota, but the immediate surrounding area was not particularly attractive due to the industrial spoils from decades of mining. It was also a dusty environment, evidently very dif-



Korichuma, the highest snow peak, seen from basecamp.



Cerilio and his trusty motorbike crossing the ditch across the track.

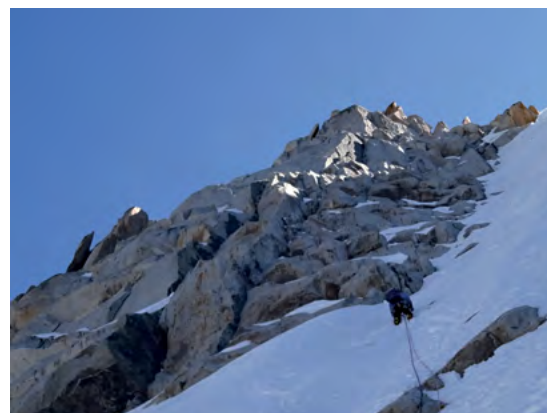


After a cold night.





Base camp festering.



The lower snow & ice slopes leading to the ridge.



On the diagonal traverse.

ferent from a base camp situated in an alpine meadow in an adjacent valley. Nevertheless, we erected our tents, including the cooking tent which proved to be well worth the hire. It not only functioned as a kitchen but gave us somewhere to stretch out, relax and chat during the long evenings. Many brews later, and after an early supper, we headed for our pits with a moonlit mountain glowing in the distance.

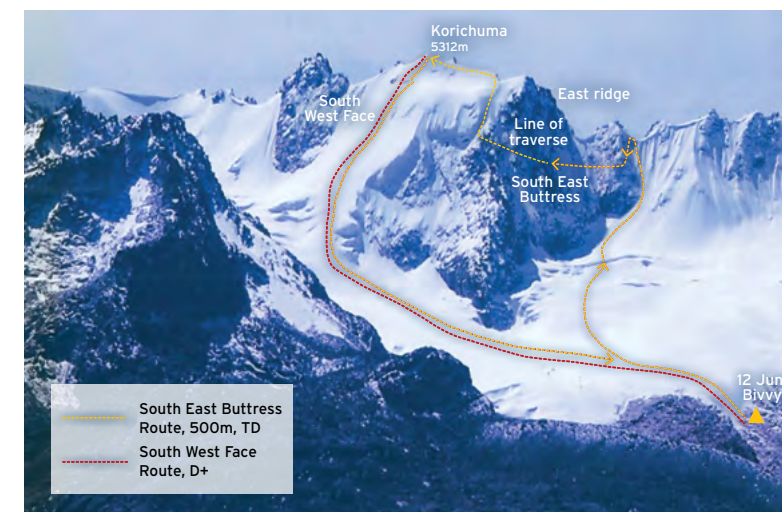
**June 10th** I was awake and up by 07.00, not able to lie horizontal any longer. It was daylight and pretty chilly as the sun didn't hit for a further hour. As I acclimatise poorly I wasn't surprised at how tired I still felt. I certainly didn't feel inclined to dash up to any summit that day, be it Korichuma, or any other acclimatisation peak for that matter. Martin soon joined me and we sat around drinking brews, listening to geese on the Laguna and discussing options for the day ahead. In the end we decided to acclimatise further by ascending slowly, each with a light sack, to locate the best passage onto the snout of the glacier, to find a reasonable spot for a bivi and to get a closer look at possible new lines. Although the miners' tracks had a negative impact on the otherwise pristine landscape, they certainly made it easier to access the lower slopes of the mountain. We achieved our objectives but, by the time we arrived back at base, I for one was most definitely knackered. By the way I felt it was immediately clear to me that the following day was not going to be the day to carry climbing and bivi gear up to the chosen site at 5000m if this was to be followed by a summit attempt the next day. Fortunately Martin felt the same, so we agreed to defer the move by a day.

Base camp festering is the same everywhere, it can drive you crackers—although there was plenty to do for the short time we had. One of the tasks, in between brews, reading, sorting gear and filtering water, was cutting grass. As odd as it sounds, I chose

to line the floor of the cook tent with it in the hope it would keep down the dust and allow us to stretch out without getting covered in the stuff.

**June 12th** It was a day of leisurely packing and dossing in preparation for the hike up to our bivi site. 20kg on our backs for two hours was not something we were looking forward to, but it went ok and we arrived around 15.00hrs. Flat sites for bedding down were not in abundance but we eventually settled for a couple of reasonable spots nestling into tyre tracks carved by large mining vehicles. It was time for a brew. Now it's not often Martin and I both make 'schoolboy errors' at the same time, but we did. For my part I had forgotten to take a lighter out of my pocket when changing jackets at the last minute back at base. We hadn't panicked as Martin knew he had his, however, after several minutes of trying, it failed to give a spark. Bollocks was about all one could say when confronted with the prospect of having just cold water for the day or two ahead. Not giving up, I decided to descend to an old miners' shack fifteen minutes down a track in the hope of finding something. No luck. As I headed back to the bivi, picking up pieces of wood on the way, I suddenly heard Martin shouting to me, 'I have fire'!

There was an old abandoned electrical generator close by, although it had seen better days a battery was still in situ. Martin had the brainwave of trying to get a spark. At first it didn't respond as he connected leads with the correct polarity, however, by reversing the polarity a touch on the terminal with the second lead gave a huge spark, it nearly cost him his eyelashes but it lit the gas stove. We were very lucky to recover from our faux-pas and fortunate to have both a hot brew and a freeze-dried meal before packing our climbing sacks and hitting the sleeping bags in anticipation of a long day to come.



**June 13th** A full moon overhead made the mountain a beautiful sight, but sleeping was similar to bivouacking in a Tesco's car park. A brew was on by 06.00, another freeze-dried sufficed for breakfast. We geared up and by 08.00 were on the snout of the glacier. Lines that we thought were possible options back at base were now clearly not in condition, but our revised preferred line would take us onto the ridge east of Korichuma summit. Approach to the foot of the route was pretty much crevasse free, but a slog as we were expecting firm snow. Martin took the first pitch, with the line looking around 60 to 70 degrees. We alternated the first few pitches on improving névé with adequate gear placements coming from the odd ice screw, or rock protection off to our left. I was feeling the pace, and the altitude. Martin combined the last two pitches together, they got us onto the ridge after a gnarly bit of mixed climbing towards the top. Our intention was to take the rock ridge to the west, but the line looked super serious. Huge monoliths of teetering granite were not what we had expected from our lower viewpoint, and the continuation of the East ridge looked much the same. There were two options open to us. The

Korichuma: the new route.

Huge monoliths of teetering granite were not what we had expected from our lower viewpoint





Mike (L) and Martin (R) on the summit.

first was the obvious bale-out down the way we had come, which neither of us wanted. The second was a rappel down a seriously loose gully on the North side, the top of which Martin had located a short distance from where we stood. He has an instinct which I have seldom doubted when climbing together and an intuitive reasoning that always ends with positive results.

We belayed off a solitary Rock Seven and rappelled a full 50m down the very shite gully. This was followed by a traverse of some 750m on a diagonal line westwards, across a granite boulder field, to a much broader channel. This was the key to getting back onto the summit ridge and involved scrambling through mixed but safer terrain. I think we were both very knackered at this point, perhaps me more so. We were now only 300m from the summit. It took a while to regain some energy before heading up the remaining straightforward ridge. With obvious celebration and delight in achieving our new route, we made the most of the glorious scenery by taking many pictures whilst soaking up the ambience.

It was late afternoon as we chose our line down the south-west face with care. One or two small slots needed avoiding but, on the whole, it went pretty smoothly despite the long, calf-screaming descent. Within two hours we were off the glacier and onto moraine, heading for our bivi spot. Martin was keen to carry on down to base camp, I was just keen to collapse into my sleeping bag at the bivi site and not risk breaking my neck by travelling a further hour and a half in my totally spent state.

It was a daunting task leaving in the morning with a fully loaded sack. The aches had improved a little and at least most of the slog was downhill. I could see Martin was up and looking far too spritely. He had seen me coming and had a brew waiting. In fact most of the day was spent reminiscing about the route, drinking tea and coffee and eating pancakes.

After a couple of days recovering it was time to decide what to do next; there was a degree of disparity between us. I sensed Martin was keener than I to hang it out and perhaps take on a further challenge. However, from what I saw, I struggled to be inspired enough to rekindle the energy and enthusiasm I would require. We considered an option to move basecamp to another valley, but agreed it would prove too costly. On top of that the weather was definitely on the change. We settled for bringing our extraction date forward by four days, which would enable us to experience other parts of Bolivia such as: Lake Titicaca, Copocabana, Isla de Sol, even perhaps 'The Death Road' or the Salt Flats. Not forgetting of course, more of La Paz, its tremendous colourful side of life, rather than its poverty and pollution.

**June 16th** We were grateful for the hire of the Sat-phone from Fabricio and fond thanks to him, Cerilio and Freddy, for helping us vacate base camp and the mountains which, by now, were in a state of near white out.

#### Logistics

The cheapest flights we could find were bought through DialAFlight. We used The Adventure Climbing and Trekking Company of South America as our La Paz Outfitters; in particular Fabricio Escobar gave excellent personal service. While in La Paz we stayed at Hotel Rosario which was great and reasonably priced and included breakfast. For a caffeine fix or food try either Higher Ground, or The Carrot Tree: both are worth seeking out. There are 2 or 3 good climbing shops on Illampu, while the best of the supermarkets seems to be KETAL.

A word of advice: Don't even think about hiring a car and driving in La Paz!



Colourful La Paz



*Old Man of Hoy and St John's Head*  
Oil on canvas, 2007  
Jim Curran



*Old Man of Hoy and St John's Head*  
Jim Curran



# I am Dinosaur

*It comes to us all, the years tick by and slowly but surely we lose contact with the evolution of climbing. We become one of 'the olds' reminiscing about the good old days, think Monty Python and Yorkshiremen having an after dinner chat. Gwyn is staking his claim to be a climbing dinosaur, but is it valid?*

By Gwyn Evans



'What you want to go there for, there's only one route'.

'What guide have you got?'

'This one; *North Wales Rock*'.

'Well, mine's got eight pages of routes'.

This was an exchange over the breakfast table at Ynys a couple of years ago. It had started with the usual pleasantries of 'What plan you got for today?' 'We're going to Llechog, haven't been there for about twenty years'.

My first real brush with selected guides, after the tick list which was Ron James' guide, came when I bought *Lake District Rock* on the basis that 'I only visit the Lakes infrequently and this will have all the routes I need to know about without buying the full set'. First day out with this guide we were in White Ghyll and quickly ran out of routes in our grade range. 'That looks a good line, what is it?' No info in our book. Eventually we found someone with a copy of the Langdale guidebook and established the name and grade of the route and a good one it was too, sadly my diary has gone walkabout so I haven't a clue what we did!

Of course all this stuff about selected guides doesn't apply in Scotland. It's a long way to drive and, usually, to walk in. Etive Slabs' *Swastika* had been talked about for a few days after the long flog into and out from *Dragon*. We walked up in progressively worsening weather just behind some wall jockeys from the south east who were becoming more and more disgruntled as we neared the crag. At the Coffin Stone they graciously allowed us to go ahead of them and then quietly disappeared into the mist, back to their car. Well *Swastika* was not to be that day but Spartan Slab looked feasible. The little slab and corner near the top, overlooking the lower slab way down to the right, succumbed to a positive approach. A measurable depth of water was flowing down it but you could see the footholds, clean patches of rock in the lichen. The walk off was long and dismal and,

once we'd collected our gear, we also retreated to the car and the Lake District. Just recently a local rock-jock inquired, on Facebook, for a source of dry rock on a forecast wet weekend. When I suggested he just adjust his grade to allow for the conditions it was obvious that he could only perform at a specific grade and lowering it would adversely affect his ego.

Over the years I have delved into odd corners of Gower's cliff scenery and established some routes. Nowadays, everything is recorded in full detail on the South Wales Climbing Wiki, almost before the chalk has had a chance to blow off the holds, but it wasn't always so. In a fit of pique after being rebuffed by some steep, bolted route in Foxhole I spied a little bit of rock to one side. This was about 10m high and had a crack all the way to the top. It was just begging to be climbed so we did; on sight, ground up, nut runners en-route and an interesting belay constructed with about four bits of gear in various pieces of rock in the grass slope at the top. Not a single piece of rock had to be trundled. With tongue very firmly in cheek it was called *Welcome to the World of Trad* (VS 4c).

It was written up and handed over to the 'keepers of the guidebook'. Turns out they didn't exist at the time, or if they did they didn't 'keep'. Last year, in the age of social media, I was referred to a Facebook post asking about two new bolted routes at Foxhole. 'Aren't these yours?' Well, one of them was and, on checking, the 'first ascensionists' had done a grand job of levering out huge chunks of rock from the crack and placing four or five bolts alongside. The hangers have now been donated to the South Wales Bolt Fund and the excellent nut placements are available for all to use, at VS 4b. The other route on this bit of rock took two cams at two-thirds height, and above three bolts, while the 'difficult rock-over' was anything but. Unfortunately these bolts couldn't be removed, ethics prevailed, it wasn't my route! These actions were not welcomed by many, particularly the testicularly challenged. Apparently I had 'ruined a



Welcome to the World of Trad bolt placement.  
📷 Gwyn Evans

Opposite: Gwyn Evans sporting his black Ron Hill's on top of Golden Slipper.  
📷 Trevor Langhorne



great route for people to practise nut placement in complete safety' (protected by the bolts!), it was 'a nonsense to put up trad routes at such a popular sport climbing venue' and 'taken away an easy way to get up from the base of the crag'. How did we all learn about poorly placed gear in the past—trial and error?—and I'm not sure why anyone would want to use this route to get onto unbolted and slippery vertical grass when there is a perfectly amenable rock scramble alongside but, each to his own. A problem with social media is that you can't see irony.

A problem with social media is that you can't see irony.

The Climbers' Club produced the first rock climbing guidebook, to Lliwedd, in 1908. This was a handy, pocket-sized offering designed to be carried for reference along the way. So it continued on routes for many years, for as long as breeches were the preferred garb, though for outcrop climbing the guidebook was usually left at the foot of the crag, unless of course you wanted a bit of weight for 'training effect'. With the 80s and sleek lycra this started to change, no pockets and so guidebooks were no longer carried, or perhaps, in extremis, stuffed down the front of your shirt. No problem on crags but more of an issue on longer routes. Later still and guidebooks have morphed into veritable tomes of a much larger format, the pocket for which has yet to be designed. Guidebook pouches are one answer but these are as unwieldy to carry as peg hammers, anyone remember those? None of these large format arguments apply to Bouldering guides of course, the bigger the better for the vertically challenged to stand on to reach the first crimp.

What's the answer? Photograph the description and use your phone as the guidebook? I get paranoid about losing my phone or battery power. The replacement cost for a book is about £30, plus the time to recreate all those ticks, your climbing life; for a phone £300+ and your whole life these days.

Of course phones can be useful, as long as they are charged and conveniently to hand. An incident on

a wet Gimmer about ten years ago springs to mind. Injured climber half way up the cliff, how to get him down to the sacks and then summon help. Initial plan was to lower him and myself and then run (except I don't do running) to the ODG to summon help. He wasn't prepared to be lowered so what to do? What's this in my cag pocket? Why, it's my phone! Fate had smiled on me; normally this would have been left in the sack, in case of emergency. The Police, Langdale Mountain Rescue and finally Air Sea Rescue all used it to communicate with us.

A recent Club Facebook post commented on the wearing of Ron Hills. Well, what's wrong with that? The ubiquitous moleskin breeches of the 60s have long gone, as have Adidas 'trackies' but the black Ron Hills have outlasted the multi-coloured lycra of the 80s and still stretch in all directions thus conforming to my continually changing shape even if I can't get my leg up as high as I used to.

*Swastika*—mentioned earlier—that was the only route where I've done a full runnerless rope length, but it was on 150ft double ropes not these modern 60m ropes. So different from clipping every few feet, but it was done on a dry day when I was young(er) and fit(ter). On another occasion, on *Lubjanka*, the first runners on my pitch were just out of reach and a long way from my second. I needed those runners and stretched for them, as I reached up my feet started to slip. 'Slow down lad, think'. Taking a deep breath I moved up, just one move, and the runner placements were to hand. Moves so much more satisfying than reaching across and clipping every few feet. Perhaps that's why I can remember the names of these routes whereas the clip-ups are mere nameless movement sessions on rock albeit pleasant exercise in the spring sun of Spain as training for the real stuff on cold rock later in the year, in the British summer.

Someone wrote in a hut logbook many years ago: 'Being of little brain and long necks we set off for...'. They did an early repeat of *Dinosaur* at Gogarth.

## Mysteries – a Ghost Story?

*The imagination can play tricks on you, especially after the consumption of a significant of quantity of intoxicants. Will anyone believe you when you tell them what you saw or heard?*

By Geoff Bennett



I don't believe in no ghosts... and I consider myself to be a rational, scientific person, a logical thinker, an atheist even. Yet over the years I've lit candles in Notre-Dame, thrown coins in the water of Lourdes, sent offerings down the Ganges and turned prayer wheels in the Jokhang. I'm not sure why that is, but sometimes my mind wanders back to the events of one Easter in the 1980s and a particular party in a particular place.

If you were a Bristolian climber in the 1980s and 1990s there were many events in the year to look forward to. The weekly pilgrimage to the Port of Call was crucial to the organisation of lifts and destinations for the coming weekend, whilst the annual Bog Wall dinner—atop the toilets in the Avon Gorge Main Wall car park—was as incongruous as it was entertaining and comedic, especially when Steve Findlay bouldered round the walls using lard rather than be seen dead using chalk! At Easter however, it was traditional to visit Pembroke; and by Pembroke I mean Bosherston and the St Govan's Inn in particular. The elder, and debatably more

Top left:  
St Govan's Chapel,  
Pembrokeshire.  
© David Skinner

Below left: A Bog Wall  
dinner, Avon.  
© Steve Berry



a different kind of fear, a primeval one based on sub-conscious, ancient, human responses to dangers we haven't seen yet...

respectable, folk used their CC membership to advantage and stayed at May Cottage. We youngsters camped in the Vicar's field, or dosses in the goat shed adjacent to this or in the remains of the pumping station by the Bosherston lily ponds, hoping it wouldn't rain, as the windows had been smashed a long time before. Some were even known to sleep in the porch of the church from time-to-time, which had the added advantage of a free cuppa from the vicar in the morning, but the disadvantage of having to be gone before the 9am morning service.

So, the Thursday night before this Easter saw us heading across the Severn Bridge, along the M4 and A48, no doubt driving at crazy speeds with cars full to the brim, music blaring, trying to discuss which routes were to be attempted. These trips generally involved much hard climbing, a lot of drinking—indeed in some years the St Govan's Inn was drunk dry—the occasional spliff, sometimes some sexual shenanigans and always a tale or two to regale later. This year, however, we planned to excel at partying, the rave culture was beginning to take off and we had organised a sound system—well a beat-box as they were called then—to party with. We wondered where to hold the party because we didn't want to upset people on the campsite and we couldn't think of anywhere on or near the lily ponds. Thus we settled, perhaps bizarrely, on St Govan's Chapel at Chapel Point. We reasoned that it was: far enough away from habitation to avoid annoying anyone, unlikely to arouse the attention of the local constabulary, dry and well-built, and with nothing remotely breakable in it. Quite how and why we felt it was appropriate to abuse a 14th century religious building in this way is now beyond my ken and I can hear people, quite rightly, choking on their Horlicks. In our defence, all I can plead is our youth and convoluted thinking, and don't worry, this tale has a moral ending.

The exact details of what preceded the party are,

unsurprisingly, vague. I know it was the Saturday night because some of us couldn't get there until then, and we can assume it involved the drinking of alcohol at the local hostelry until closing time. I do remember being driven up to the headland with two older climbers, who I shall call Nipper and Finders, giggling in the back of the car, but as to whose car it was, I have no idea. Big Mark and Ged appeared to have the alcohol situation totally in control whilst spliffs were being handed around. A couple of local activists had appeared, seemingly from nowhere, whilst Beggsy had stayed in control of his motorbike long enough to ride there. Meanwhile JP, Bart and Little Pete were in charge of the music as one of them had brought the beat-box and they had the best taste in tunes.

As the night wore on the inevitable fatigue set in, gradually the revellers fell away; the party ended. One or two people mind-bogglingly drove back to Bosherston, some more sensibly had put up tents near the carpark, others just dosses in their cars or bivvy bags they'd commendably brought with them. Ged, Haulbag, Little Pete, Beggsy and I settled down to sleep in the chapel. I'm not sure if we even had tents with us but we did have sleeping mats and bags, so it was more comfortable than most of Mick Fowler's infamous bivvies. I fell asleep very quickly but, at some point, was woken abruptly. Despite the down sleeping bag, I felt cold to the bone whilst the hairs on the back of my neck had pricked up. I had a very bizarre feeling in my stomach, which I couldn't place but wasn't nausea or pain. It felt more emotional. Was it misgivings or guilt perhaps? No, I recognised terror; not the fear we are familiar with as climbers too far above poor gear, but a different kind of fear, a primeval one based on sub-conscious, ancient, human responses to dangers we haven't seen yet but, somehow know are just hidden from view. All this took barely a matter of moments to consider before I inevitably raised my

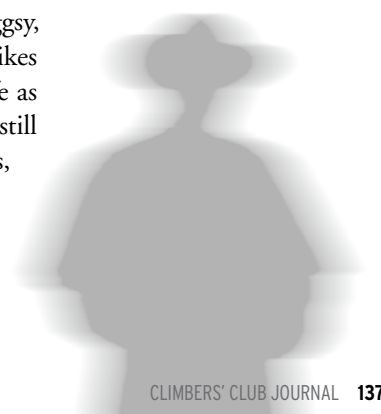
head. To my astonishment and utter fright, in the dark of the chapel I could make out a short man, dressed in what I can only describe as a long black cassock and a wide-brimmed hat, staring at me and the others, who were, incidentally, fast asleep and oblivious. His expression was shaded by the brim of his hat and thus unfathomable and he said nothing. Open-mouthed, yet speechless, I was paralysed with fear. It was all I could do to whisper 'I'm sorry' before, in a desperate concentration of effort and will-power, I turned to my mates and screamed at them to wake up. Ged woke quickly, the others less so, but no sooner had I turned back than the vision was gone; I was thunder-struck. Had I really seen anything or was it an over-active imagination? How long had I been asleep? Was I still drunk or stoned? Was it just a really bad dream? As the others gradually and reluctantly woke up, I described what had happened and what I'd seen; their reactions ran the whole range from Pete's complete disbelief to Ged's grave nod, via Beggsy's shrug to the suggestion 'Uh, you need a spliff mate'.

Shortly afterwards, in the early hours of Easter Sunday morning, dawn arrived accompanied by some heavy April showers. We were now confronted with imminent calamity because the water ran down the steps to the chapel, through the chapel doorway, as there was no door, and across our sleeping area to exit through the lower doorway. Minds now distracted, we quickly bundled up our belongings and sent Pete up the steps to see if there was a car we could get into. He slipped and slithered his way back down to the chapel with the bad news, we'd just have to wait it out, but at least we had a roof over our heads. There was a telling silence, an elephant in the room if you like; no one knew whether or not to mention what I was sure I'd seen. Beggsy referred to it as my 'dream' and suggested it was just that and nothing to get anxious or worried about; in our own ways and in our own time we all

concurred. Nothing more was said, it was just too big, too weird and too inexplicable to deal with.

The long weekend wasn't a complete washout, the rain passed quickly enough, and we resumed normal climbing activities in the afternoon and on Monday evening headed back down the M4 to home, exhausted but happy. No one mentioned the 'dream', it was left in the background, a bad memory perhaps. You'll be pleased to know that we never contemplated another party in the chapel after that, obviously some of us had stronger reasons than others, but all seemed to agree that it was just 'not right'. Regular Easter trips continued to Pembroke and the close links between the Bristol climbing crowd and the cliffs of south Wales have not diminished over time. I still enjoy climbing there as much now as I did thirty or more years ago, though it's a heck of a lot harder to get to from North Wales than it is from Bristol.

However, all was not the same as before and who's to say that just maybe the story didn't end there? My good, gentle, friend Ged unfortunately perished whilst reaching for a dropped camera, on a mountaineering expedition to Nun Kun, later that same year. Little Pete, the life and soul of any party, survived two horrendous climbing ground-falls only to be killed crossing the road on the way home from the pub in 1997. The Haulbag whom I'd known since we were at school, descended grimly into heroin addiction, though when I see him about, he's well enough. Beggsy, perhaps sensibly, retired from motor-bikes and climbing and went to find a new life as an artist in the south of France. Me? I still climb on the cliffs and the mountains, it's where I find my peace. And I light candles in Notre-Dame, throw coins in the water of Lourdes, send offerings down the Ganges and turn the prayer wheels in the Jokhang.





# County Counsel

*A tour of the crags of Northumberland revealing many accessible grade plums that are ready for picking.*

By Martin Cooper, Trevor Langhorne & John Spencer

Northumberland, known to local climbers as 'The Coonty,' is England's least densely populated county, where sheep outnumber people by a factor of five to one. A landscape rich in history, with sweeping views and fantastic sandy beaches, all laid out beneath big skies, a great staycation destination. There is plenty to attract the climber, scattered across the county is a collection of superb outcrops, the bulk of which are sandstone but there is some climbing on volcanic rock. Crag Lough and Peel Crag adjacent to Hadrian's Wall are both Dolerite and The Henhole, in the wilds of the Cheviots, is composed of Andesite. The sandstone is fine grained and gives varied climbing, with friction slabs, cracks of assorted sized and fierce fingery walls. Many climbers are familiar with the Bowden Doors/Kyloe area in the north of the county. However,

further south is a less well known set of moorland sandstone crags including, Ravensheugh, Simonside, Rothley, East Woodburn, Curtis, South Yardhope, Callerhues and Great Wanney. These are exposed to the elements and can take some time to come into good condition. Almost all lie on active grouse moor so may have some short access restrictions as permitted by CROW. South Yardhope is in an active MOD live firing range and access is strictly regulated.

The area is rightly recognised as having many fine test-pieces and mega boulder problems. Perhaps less well known is the collection of excellent and more reasonably graded routes for mortals. These three articles, presented in different styles, should help set the record straight. Perhaps they will tempt a few of you to head either up North or down South?

...less well known is the collection of excellent and more reasonably graded routes for mortals.



## P.S.

It is no secret that Northumbrian grading is tough, but if you remember these simple rules you will be, at least partially, prepared for the inevitable mental trauma:

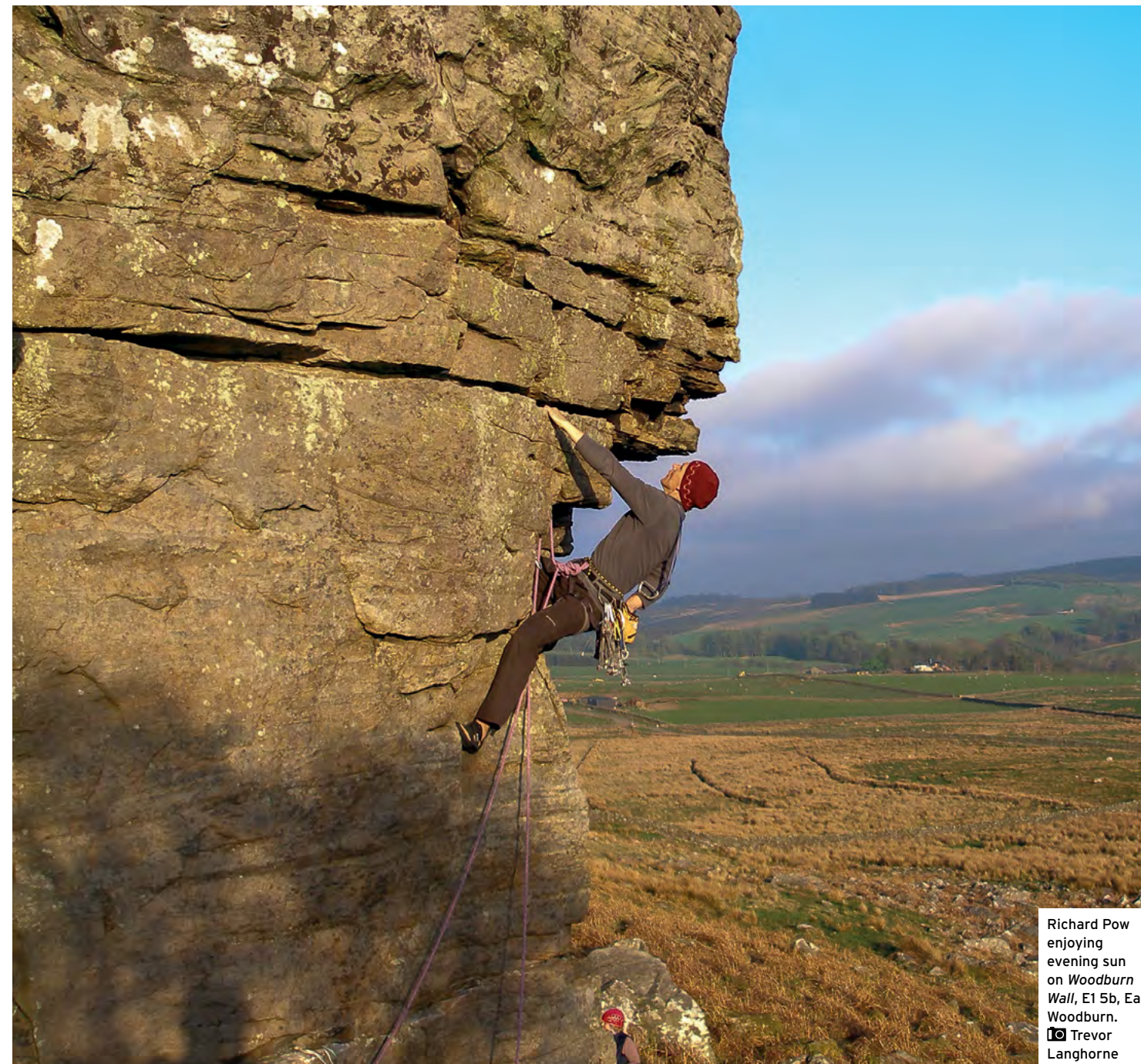
**Rule 1** The first fifteen feet (5m) of a route doesn't count in either the technical or adjectival grade.

**Rule 2** The quality of the protection isn't normally considered when a route is graded.

**Rule 3** If it used to be a particular grade, e.g. VS, then it can't possibly be any harder. No upward grade-drift is permitted.

**Hint:** A bouldering mat is useful, even when leading routes.

Above: Claudia Amatruda on *Elf Direct*, bouldering at Kyloe in the Woods. John Spencer



Richard Pow enjoying evening sun on *Woodburn Wall*, E1 5b, East Woodburn. Trevor Langhorne



### The Best Severe in The County?

By Martin Cooper

Pull yourself onto the first flake and sink your fingers deep into the crevice behind it. Now step higher, reach for holds on the right wall, fix some gear into the crack above. The climb steepens. Work your feet higher, place a cam in the crack, use the fantastic friction for your feet, step high into the bottom of the crack—commitment. Another piece of gear perhaps, but you will have to go for the move to reach the top of the crack. It is briefly strenuous and exposed, followed by enormous jugs and flakes to the top. You have succeeded on *Flake Crack* at Kyloe Out of the Woods... the best Severe in the County?

What follows has been in my head for years, the question has come back to me again and again: what is the best Severe in Northumberland? There are so many excellent routes at this grade in the County, it is an accessible grade but still a good challenge. So which is the best one? Here are my top ten, approximately in order.



Hadrian's Buttress, Crag Lough.  
📷 John Spencer



Will Tapsfield on *Sunset*.  
📷 John Spencer

#### Sunset

*Mild Severe, Peel Crag*

While graded only Mild Severe, the start became considerably harder (4c/ desperate depending on your height) after a hold disappeared some years ago. The real challenge begins with bridging moves up a corner at half height, followed by an airy traverse left to huge perched blocks below the top. This is undoubtedly a classic route: clean rock, perfect protection, exposure and a satisfyingly direct line. Catch it late on a summer evening; the name is perfect.

#### Sitting Duck

*Hard Severe 4b, Curtis Crag*

You may consider this a surprising choice but the route will do wonders for your ego if Severe is your regular grade. Easy climbing up a square block leads to a recess beneath an overhang that surely won't go at Severe. Excellent cams will give you the confidence to move left and get your feet high. Still feeling unlikely at the grade, reach through to flutings over the top, select the right one and make an athletic move to finish. A gymnastic delight in a quiet location.



Unknown climbers on *The Plonka*.  
📷 John Spencer

#### The Plonka

*Severe, Corby's Crag*

Is this the most frequently climbed route in Northumberland? It might be. The obvious deep crack cannot be ignored, easy moves lead up to the obvious bulge. Continue with the crack or dance left up the slabs. A couple of delicate, pinch-grip moves take you to a wide crack and an awkward, sloping finish. *The Plonka's* appeal is the quality of the rock, the delightful setting, with a gnarly oak at the top and a magnificent view to the distant Cheviots and, of course, the name! This is a route that never disappoints.

#### Wall and Crack

*Hard Severe 4b, Back Bowden*

Although escapable at half height, *Wall and Crack* is a route following an enticing line with a finish that makes you work hard to the very end. The lower flake crack is more strenuous to start than it looks but soon gives way to a juggy pull onto the ledge. Now move right until you are forced into a steep corner. Bridge up this until you reach the final, steeper, crack. Either handjam the crack or move right to a short arête.



Claire Clifton-Coles on the challenging *Wall and Crack*, Back Bowden.  
📷 R Finlayson collection.

There are much fiercer routes on offer at Back Bowden but *Wall and Crack* is still a good test of your commitment.

#### Idiot's Delight

*Hard Severe 4c, Great Wanney*

You will struggle to find good Severes at Great Wanney but *Idiot's Delight* is a gem, albeit right at the top of the grade. Don't be put off by the green slab which gets you started. Soon your way is blocked directly above and it is now apparent that only steep climbing will get you out of here. First make a bold traverse to the left to an exposed nose. Now the crux, a high, steep step, takes you onto more amenable holds to finish. Pull through onto steep grass and enjoy the exhilaration which comes with finishing any route at Great Wanney.



Chris Haworth on *Idiot's Delight*.  
📷 John Spencer.



Will Tapsfield on *Deception Crack*.  
📷 John Spencer

#### Deception Crack

*Hard Severe 4b, Kyloe Out*

Kyloe has so many excellent Severes. I have chosen two and *Deception Crack* has deceived me on many an occasion. Technical climbing is required, probably the reason for my frequent downfalls on this route.

The crack is at the back of a deep, V-shaped groove. Go into the crack, place gear, then keep out! The secret is to bridge delicately using small holds at the edges of the groove. Eventually you will be able to step into it and stand on a good ledge at half height. The upper half and the finish are steep and strenuous, but on more positive holds. You know you have achieved something when you top out on *Deception Crack*, not a soft touch by any stretch of the imagination.

#### Black and Tan

*Severe 4b, Bowden Doors*

A fantastic route which requires strength, boldness and technique. The start is particularly challenging, a bold layback takes you onto a steep, angular flake. Feet high and another strenuous pull places you beneath the crux moves.



Andy Saxby on the steep start of *Black and Tan*.  
📷 Trevor Langhorne

*Black and Tan* can be a daunting route because it is not until this point that you will be able to place gear. No more to be found until the easier ground higher up. You will get a bomb-proof nut, however. Move purposefully up and make a delicate traverse to the right. Once you reach the ramp you have virtually done the route. The finish, up a broadening groove, has excellent holds and gear.

#### College Grooves

*Hard Severe 4b, The Henhole*

The Henhole Crag is a delight, shared by few these days. On a summer's day, high on a long route, the College Burn far below, a curlew calling in the blue above, this wild location on the North side of Cheviot, is one of Northumberland's best kept climbing secrets—lonely and idyllic. Here you will still find thick, lush grass at the foot of the crag and little wear on the holds to identify your route. *College Grooves* is a thirty-three metre pitch, undercut to give a tricky start, then easing into a long, committing and steep slab of Cheviot Andesite with some long reaches but plenty of gear and a good feel of exposure as you



near the top. The rock may surprise you on a first visit to the crag; blocky and compact and reminiscent, in places, of the Lake District. However, take care, this is a mountain crag and there is some loose rock. A journey to The Henhole needs planning. Make the effort. *College Grooves* is an excellent route in a fabulous location.



John Vaughn on *Flake Crack*.  
 John Spencer

**Flake Crack** *Severe 4b, Kyloe Crag*  
 I have already described this route and it has long been one of my favourites. In the heat of summer with the heady scent of bracken like a drug, sun beating down as you approach the crag, anticipation building, you could spend the whole day climbing wonderful Severes at Kyloe. Enjoy each one for its unique character and savour *Flake Crack*, a really satisfying route. Choosing one route to give the accolade of the best in the County is quite a task. *Flake Crack* comes very close but, in my humble opinion, there is one route which just shades it.

## Main Wall

### Hard Severe, Crag Lough

Although the Whin Sill crags are no longer so popular, *Main Wall* is a route you simply must do. Its historical significance is a good reason (FA around a century ago, probably by Marcus Beresford Heywood and friends), but a much better one is the quality of the climbing. The initial wall is steep and intimidating. Indeed, the crux comes after just fifteen metres where a long stretch and a hold that has always moved are utilised to reach the right hand side of the buttress. Climb up the right. As you approach the top of the route, the final ledge is inside a narrowing chimney, where a bit of a wriggle is needed to make progress. Here I once disturbed a nesting jackdaw which was not pleased to see me. Pull through to finish on the Roman Wall itself, admire the magnificent view and take pleasure in completing 'The Best Severe in the County'.

A couple that just missed the cut: *Hadrian's Buttress*, Crag Lough, (photo p140) and *Straight Crack*, Back Bowden, though some might consider these two to be VS.



Jim Rigg on *Straight Crack*,  
 Back Bowden.  
 John Spencer



Al Horsfield on *Pinnacle Face*, Crag Lough.  
 John Spencer

## Now, what is The County's Best Very Severe?

By Trevor Langhorne

VS has long been my favourite grade, normally technical enough to be interesting without being too taxing. Here are some personal Northumbrian favourites, you will need to experience them all to decide which you think is best.

Emperor Hadrian took advantage of the natural escarpment known as the Whin Sill when he built his eponymous wall in the south of the county. There are several crags along the scarp face, but Crag Lough offers by far the best climbing. Being north facing it is exposed to the weather, and the Dolerite is steep, with limited friction (none if damp) and a style of climbing that is often decidedly 'old-fashioned' i.e. strenuous and



Left: Will Tapsfield on *Cannon Hole Direct*, Henhole. Natural fertiliser produced by falcons produces the bright green growth  
 John Spencer

Right: *Delicatessen*, unknown climbers.  
 John Spencer



thrutchy. There are two VSs standing head and shoulders above the rest, *Raven's Tower* (MVS 4b) and *Pinnacle Face* (VS 4c). *Raven's Tower* is the longer and easier of the pair with some perfect jamming. *Crescent Cracks* (VS 5a) to its immediately left is meatier and almost as good. *Pinnacle Face* is quite different, it has one of those well protected but enigmatic moves that can leave you baffled until, suddenly, you find the key and wonder what the problem was. Once done, never forgotten.

Situated in the far north western corner of Northumberland, there can be few crags in England that are more remote than The Henhole. There is no easy approach and you are unlikely to see anyone else. The stand-out VS is a soft-touch (yes there are some), *Canon Hole Direct* (MVS 4b). Best climbed as a single 40m pitch the climbing is

steep, exposed and, in its upper reaches, committing. Combine this with *College Grooves* for a grand day out. It is best to visit after June as Peregrine Falcons sometimes nest here.

The remaining routes in my selection are all on sandstone, starting with the moorland crags in the southern half of the county before moving on to the better known Bowden/Kyloe area.

Much of the early history of Northumbrian climbing is unrecorded, however we know that Jack Longland took holidays at Wallington Hall in the 1930s and made the first ascent of the nearby *Rothley Crack* (VS 5a), a soaring line up a perfectly plumb wall, it was probably the hardest route in the area at that time. In good conditions seasoned gritstoners will romp up it but, if the inside of the final crack is damp, it can feel good value for 5a. Sadly it is the only

significant route below E5 on this crag.

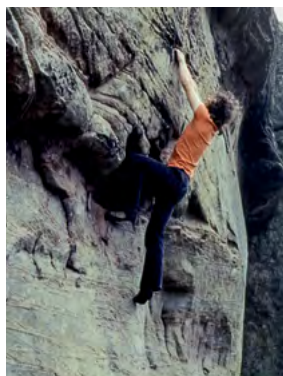
Over on Simonside Crag *Long Lay-back* (VS 4c) doesn't look it, but definitely feels it. Although protectable with large cams it is best not to stop, or you may find yourself moving rapidly, but in the wrong direction. On a neighbouring buttress, *Delicatessen* (VS 4c) does exactly what it says on the tin. From a ledge half way up the crag a delicate and unprotected friction traverse across an undercut slab is longer than you might like; thankfully it leads to positive holds, runners and an 'interesting' finish up a short corner.

The final southern crag in my selection is South Yardhope; having secured permission to access the firing range, and not had a mishap with any of the considerable quantity of unexploded ordnance, head straight for the imaginatively named *Original Route* (VS 5a)





Helen Brewitt  
entering  
*The Scoop*,  
Bowden Doors.  
📷 Trevor  
Langhorne



*Tiger's Wall*  
Trevor  
Langhorne  
committing  
to the pocket  
pulling wall.  
📷 Caroline  
Langhorne



Unknown  
climber on  
the short but  
meaty *Lorraine*,  
Bowden Doors.  
📷 John  
Spencer



1989. A  
busy day on  
*Tacitation*,  
Kyloe Out.  
📷 Andy  
Birtwistle

which is exposed and technical for the grade. Unfortunately it is this crag's only worthwhile route below HVS, but a visit to South Yardhope can be easily combined with one to another of the southern crags.

In contrast to the moorland crags in the South, the well-known northern crags are lower lying, and in the rain-shadow of The Cheviot hills, so they dry quickly.

Bowden Doors, the jewel in Northumberland's crown, is the obvious place to start. *The Scoop* (VS 4b) is technical from the outset with an absorbing middle before an uncharacteristically straightforward top-out. In a similar vein but considerably harder, *Lorraine* (VS 5a) engages your interest throughout its length, steep fingery laybacking leads to a long and strenuous reach over a bulge to (hopefully) gain a horizontal break where, unfortunately, your problems don't end. A scurry left should lead to the top; definitely a route to be savoured, in retrospect. *Tiger's Wall* (VS 5a), is similarly challenging, a thin steep slab followed by a slightly overhanging

wall of honeycomb like rock; as you struggle to place runners in the pockets take a moment to notice all the snapped edges! Solid gear finally arrives in the excellent upper crack. My final suggestion here is *Banana Wall*, (MVS 4c); think of this as Northumberland's equivalent to Froggatt's *Sunset Slab*, i.e. no runners and 4b/c moves. A good one to solo as carrying wires and cams is pointless unless you are weight training.

There are two Kyloe Crags, the larger is out of the main woodland while the smaller is situated deep in the woods. On Kyloe Out, *Tacitation* (VS 5a) is a brilliant pitch; steep, dynamic, strenuous and very sustained, it is over all too soon. Other great VSs include *Wilfred Prickles* (VS 5a) which no longer prickles as its gorse bush is long gone. What remains is steep, sustained and satisfying laying away on strangely fluted/eroded rock. Luckily the finish isn't as bad as it looks. *Trinity* (VS 4c) rises in three steps, two pass smoothly and lead to the third where the hold-less sloping top might be gained by either an elegant rounded layback or, much more likely, a precarious

grovel. Luckily it is perfectly protected should your laybacking or grovelling not be up to the task. In complete contrast *St Ivel* (VS 4c) offers relaxed and generally well protected friction slab climbing.

The steep clean lower walls at Kyloe in the Woods are a popular bouldering venue. However the routes on the crag have fallen from favour due to an accumulation of dead leaves on their upper sections. Recently forestry work has opened up a lot of the crag and many of the routes should clean up nicely with a bit of traffic. You may wish to check the finishes for any residual leaf mould, this can easily be removed with a soft brush. *Crack of Gloom* (MVS 4c) is extremely steep and perfectly protected to guarantee maximum enjoyment. *The Harp* (VS 5a) is also impressively steep and its neighbour, *Zed Climb* (VS 4c) is almost as good.

Berryhill Crag is a few miles from Kyloe, it has a small number of quality routes and can easily be combined with a visit to either of the Kyloes. A visit is well worth the effort, if only for the outstanding *Marcher Lord* (VS 5a).

Increasingly difficult moves up a crack-line lead to a fingery pull into a small cave below an intimidating bulge. The slim can escape through the cave but this misses the fun. While here check out *Western Arête* (VS 4c). Despite appearances, good holds do, as they say, appear when needed most.

Finally, if you have done all of these VSs I have a choice that will give you food for thought, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* at Kyloe in the Woods. Where else will you find a VS that is f6c? Obviously the guide-writer was having a laugh, good luck, you will need it!



Al Horsfield  
on *Marcher Lord*,  
Berryhill Crag. 📷 John  
Spencer

## Ten (or so) of the County's best at HVS-E2

By John Spencer with thanks to Jim Rigg, Al Horsfield and Steve Blake for comments and suggestions.

### **Audacity, HVS 5a, Corby's Crag**

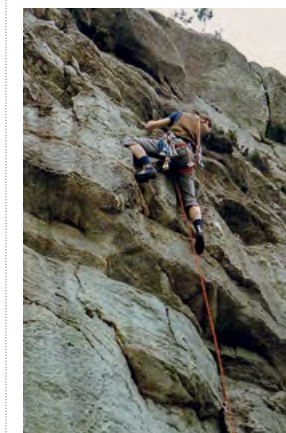
Corby's is a pleasant west-facing outcrop, the rock a soft sandstone and, although generally clean, the run-off from above after rain gives some of the routes a distinctly sandy feel. However it's a popular venue, especially on a summer's evening, when the woods below are alive with birdsong and views to the Cheviot are sublime.

The longest and most of the harder routes are on the imposing North Buttress. *Audacity* takes the central weakness, breaching a line of overhangs at about 20 feet using obvious flutings. The start is bouldery, though not hard; a large flake is surmounted at the top of which several bomber pieces can be arranged. You then move up and left to the break, before reaching up for a small jug at the base of one of the runnels. Thereafter, cut loose and brachiate up the flutings, secure more gear and step delicately up right to the base of a large flake. More gear, then a couple of moves to the top. The route can feel a tad pumpy and, although well protected, a first-time leader will be excused for feeling that it requires 'a willingness to take bold risks' (dictionary definition of *Audacity*). *Ranadon*, (E2 5b), to the left is a fine companion route and worthy of your attention.

## Woodburn Wall

### *E1 5b, East Woodburn*

East Woodburn (a.k.a. Staniel Heugh): south facing; excellent hard sandstone; clean with little drainage, and quick-drying; five minutes' walk from the road; fabulous view... what's not to like? The route of the crag is *Woodburn Wall* which takes a more or less direct line up the face to the left of the large overhang on the West Buttress. A series of thin moves lead rightwards to a break and a pull into a sort-of niche where a no-hands rest can be executed and good gear secured. Thereafter a steep sequence leads to the crux, a bold move up and right to reach a 'thank god' flake. A couple of airy moves follow, but it's not quite over, as topping out involves a somewhat ungraceful roll over onto the convex summit. A direct finish to the left of the flake is slightly harder, and *Ridsdale Wall*, (E1 5b), which tackles the big roof round the corner at a similar grade, is definitely worth a look (beta: massive holds)! 📷 p139.



John Spencer  
leading  
*Audacity*.  
📷 Spencer  
collection





Jim Rigg on Main Wall. John Spencer

Below right: Unknown climbers on The Witch. Russell Lovett

## Main Wall

*HVS 5b, Bowden Doors*

*Main Wall* is my favourite route at Bowden and I try to climb it on every visit. It starts up a short corner immediately right of a sloping shelf. It's awkward, with a feeling you might barn-door, and though protectable, that's a bit of fiddle. I prefer to 'go for it', pull up to the break and bang in a couple of cams. The crux follows, best tackled with determination and some haste. Hands on ledge, reach for crimp, rock over, reach for side pull, step onto ledge, sorted. The original line traverses left along the huge break above, finishing up the diagonal crack, but most people opt for an exhilarating direct finish, heading straight for the top using the breaks. The views across Glendale to Wooler and the Cheviot are unsurpassed. The adjacent *Main Wall Direct*, (HVS 5b), is slightly more awkward and not protectable until after the crux; *Stretcher Wall*, (E1 5c), to the left, is bold but well protected.

## Ravensheugh Crack,

*HVS 5a, Ravensheugh Crag*

*Ravensheugh Crack* is a relatively unusual phenomenon in Northumberland in that it would not be at all out of place on a Peak outcrop, and indeed the sandstone here is particularly grit-like. If you like jamming, it's the route for you. If, however, you are of the persuasion that jamming a crack is a waste of two arêtes, perhaps not! It's a climb of two halves. To start, gain the corner with a couple of awkward moves off a boulder—you might want a spotter here—using finger pockets and a nubbin on the right wall, then bridge up to the ledge; there is the possibility of some gear towards the top of the corner. Shuffle right to the base of the obvious crack, throw in some welcome gear and make another athletic move into the crack proper. Thereafter it's pure 'jam city' to the top, sustained

but straightforward. Hopefully you will have enough medium-to-large cams to lace the crack but if not, well, neither did the first ascensionists and the generation that grunted their way up the climb after them; you can maybe slide your top cam up as you go (been there, done that!) but a rack of largish hexes would do the trick. *Wild West Show*, (HVS 5a), to the right is an interesting adventure, also involving jamming and a stomach traverse!

## The Witch

*E2 5b, Back Bowden Doors*

West-facing Colour Heugh, known to climbers as Back Bowden, is a gnarly kind of place, many of the routes, across all the grades, requiring something of a thuggish approach. *The Witch* is not in that category, though it is bold. It tackles the left hand end of the Witch Wall comprised, as it is, of a particularly

rippled dark sandstone. Start up an easy runnel and climb to crozzly pockets where it is possible to contrive some protection. Step right onto the wall proper and continue up and right to the overlap on small, but positive holds. You will be relieved to be able to place small wires and cams here. Continue using underclings and holds over the overlap before a stretch right into a short groove and good holds, and so to the top. On a sultry summer's evening you will be joined by a million midges, but the anguished grunts of your mate on the neighbouring excellent if butch route, *The Arches*, (HVS, or is it E1 5b?) will distract you!

## Coldstream Corner

*VS 5a, Kyloe Out*

The Coldstream area has seen plenty of struggles over the years, for example the invasion of Scotland by Edward I in the late 13th Century. A more contemporary struggle is *Coldstream Corner*, which takes the obvious central line on the imposing, two-tiered North Buttress. There is an independent first pitch, but most people (including myself) start up the slightly easier *Bird Lime Crack* to its left—it's the natural line—to a belay on the slab beneath the corner. The route succumbs to a bold approach (it is, after all, an Allan Austin creation) whereby a short steep well-protected sequence leads into a niche. A good rest is possible, more gear, then a layback and bridging manoeuvre to huge finishing jugs. *Elevator* to the left at a similar grade and a different kind of climb altogether should also be on your tick list.



John Spencer on Rock Island Line. Don't be fooled by the apparent greenery. Spencer collection.

## Rock Island Line

*E1 5b, Peel Crag*

If you're going to climb this route, as indeed you should, be guided by the lyrics of the famous rockabilly song after which it's named: 'Well, if you want to ride, you gotta ride it like you find it'. Once upon a time this would have seen you using 2 or 3 pegs for aid. Nowadays, of course, it's completely free. Climb broken cracks below the stepped overhangs (past a couple of ancient pegs—spit on them, à la Joe Brown on *Kipling Groove*, if it helps!) into a hanging corner. An awkward sequence leads up to the roof, a rest and excellent protection. A gymnastic move or two up and left finds you on a good ledge with a straightforward finish up the crack. The jackdaws will serenade you with their chatter as you belay. Perfect. Although this is the classic of the crag, all the routes to both right and left on Central Wall are of top quality, grades ranging from E1 5a to E2 5c.

## Whinstone Churchill

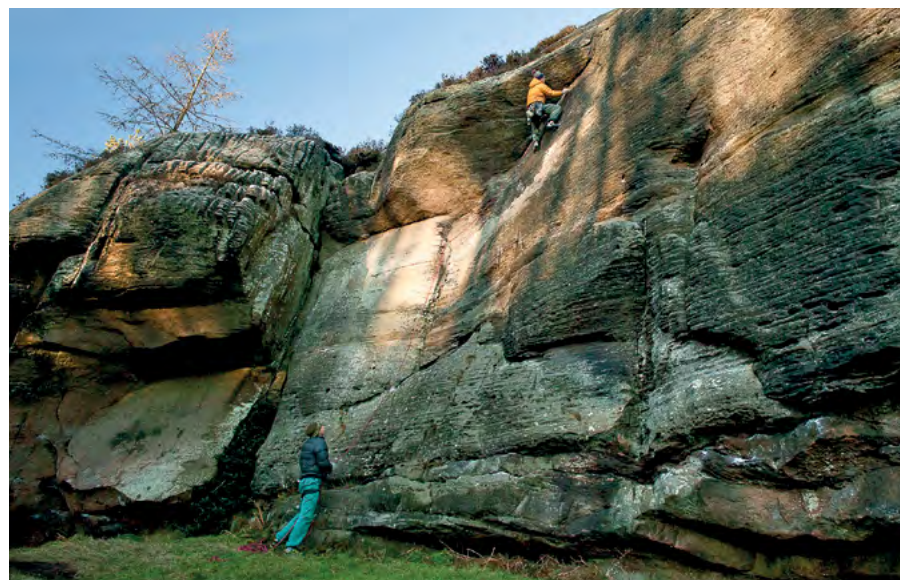
*E2 5b, (though some might say it's 5c), Crag Lough*

A former peg route, this gem of a line tackles Smooth Bastion, the slim pillar at the far east end of the crag, as far away from 'that' well photographed tree as you can get! It is best climbed in early summer when the afternoon sun warms the rock, before the crag gets lost in the foliage. You will likely have only the swans and their cygnets on the lough below for company. A steep and awkward corner behind a tree leads, with a bit of a struggle, to a perch on the arête. A gymnastic escape would be possible at this point, but instead commit to a couple of reachy moves using a flake to cross into the crack. Relax and enjoy the jamming to the top. The Direct start starting directly (!) beneath the crack is harder. *Stone Warrior* (E1 5b) to the left is a fine companion route.

## Northumberland Wall

*E2 5c, Great Wanney*

Great Wanney is where it all started in Northumberland—Geoffrey Winthrop Young described climbing here and at Simonside in 1902. It's quite a daunting spot, the crag north-facing and imposing, and routes carry an extra gravitas. *Northumberland Wall* is a great line, well protected and only 15m high, yet packing quite a punch. The initial groove is awkward, best tackled by bridging. This is followed by a steep pull into the continuation crack, thankfully with excellent jams. Shortly you will eyeball some concrete. Yes, concrete! County







pioneer Bob Hutchinson was rightly incensed when someone chipped a block out of the crack shortly after his first ascent and returned with a bucket of sand and cement and filled it in. Continue up the finger crack—getting thinner now—until an airy traverse on a break takes you rightwards to the top. And breathe! You can now relax on the other great Wanney classic in this grade range, *Great Wall* (HVS 5b).

### Callerhues Crack

#### *HVS 5a, Callerhues Crag*

Callerhues has an isolated feel to it, perched as it is on the fell overlooking Bellingham and the valley of the North Tyne and with a longish walk-in. However, the crag faces south-west, the rock is excellent and dries quickly, and the view is uplifting. Although the approach follows the Pennine Way for most of the way you should ask permission at the farm where you can park. Although Callerhues is more likely to be visited by boulderers these days, there are some

fine routes hereabouts. *Callerhues Crack* is the classic of the crag, climbing the obvious diagonal flake-crack system. There is usually a marshy patch underneath the route—but fear not, stepping off a boulder onto the rock is allowed. Thereafter it's a delightful romp at the grade, a mixture of layback, bridging and jamming, with two cracks to choose from to finish. The protection is good.

For a bit of laugh and a good honest struggle have a look at *Callerhues Chimney* to its right. It's graded HVS 4c... see what you think!

“... a delightful romp at the grade, a mixture of layback, bridging and jamming.”

Above, from Left to right:

Tim Blake on *Northumberland Wall*, Great Wanney.

📷 Russell Lovett

Tim Blake leading *Great Wall Direct*, Great Wanney.

📷 Russell Lovett

Jim Rigg on *Callerhues Crack*, Callerhues Crag.

📷 John Spencer



Autumn colours,  
Ravensheugh  
Crag.  
📷 Russell Lovett





The Cuillin Ridge  
📷 Andy Brown



Three Skye Poems

By Andy Clarke

Neist Point

two cormorants skim  
dark stones clipping rainy sea;  
green swell sprays white  
thought

terminal beauty  
end of other worlds and lives:  
the loneliest place

Weather Watching

the lochan reflects  
nothing but the sky's grey  
thoughts  
of impending rain;

I scan the dark peaks  
and muse on mortality;  
the drizzle blows in

Cuillin Dusk

bivvied on the ridge  
sipping the last of the light  
close to the solstice

long day's glowing hand  
holding the edge of the  
world—molten horizon

chalices of cloud  
smoky amber, fiery gold:  
Talisker sunset



The Cuillin Ridge  
David Linnett

Rules of the Ashton Parallel Universe

— PART 3 —

By Rob Davies

f. Ethical Considerations and Style

41. Do not be constrained by limits imposed by lesser minds, as the only meaning of the word 'Ethics' is that it's an English County, like Thuthics, but on the north-east side of London.

42. Cultivate selective short-term memory loss, so that, thirty seconds after you haul on a quick-draw, you can look with genuine astonishment at your companion if he suggests that you did not climb the route in impeccable style. Ignore snide references to Maradona's 'Hand of God'.

43. Avoid using big, obvious holds that you deem to be off route, even if there are no other climbs within twenty feet of the one that you are trying.

44. Decline to top-rope climbs since this is cheating, but if the leader gives you as much as an inch of slack when you are seconding, complain loudly.

45. Conserve energy when climbing strenuous cracks, since your arms will tire rapidly, especially when you place lots of runners (see Rule #23). Never reverse

down to a spot where you might relax a little, as this would be a waste of your already depleted energy, but take a rest on a runner above your head, exclaiming 'Sorry, my arms have gone!' and '(obscenity removed) me! I'm knackered!' as you move from rest-point to rest-point.

46. Use a clip-stick, preferably twenty feet long, to pre-clip the first bolt on sport climbs. However, do not tow a clip-stick behind you to use repeatedly, as dogging is not an acceptable practice for clean-living folk.

47. Capture on camera rare ethical transgressions committed by your companions. Climb only with people who have no interest in taking dull pictures, so your own frequent infringements are unlikely to be so recorded.

48. Never pay attention to how the leader climbs a pitch, as this removes the challenge of finding your own solution when you follow. Gaze into the distance to avoid collecting 'beta'. Ignore ill-informed comments from above, suggesting that your thousand-yard stare looks like dozy belaying.



Not cheating, honest guv, Penmaenhead Quarry, North Wales limestone

49. Write coded entries in your logbook to give a precise indication of the style in which routes were climbed, after correction for the memory lapses described under Rule #42:

'committing' means a tricky move right next to a good runner;

'very committing' means a tricky move with a runner by your feet.

'awkward' means 'sat on runners';

'strenuous' means 'sat on runners';



‘hard for grade’ means ‘sat on runners’;  
‘tough’ means ‘sat on runners’;  
‘flew up it’ means ‘did not sit on runners’;

‘needed commitment’ means ‘runners were too far apart to sit on’;

‘good lead’ means ‘did not even try to sit on runners’;

‘nice lead’ means ‘didn’t sit on runners as there weren’t any’ (only applicable to other climbers):

‘sat on runners’ means ‘pulled on runners’.

#### g. Overrated Importance of Footwork

50. Avoid using your feet on hard moves when leading. Instead, apply the Tom-and-Jerry technique: pedal so fast that the feet become a blur while remaining rooted to the spot, then suddenly surge upwards. If there are good handholds, haul away, shouting a lot, without using your feet. So that your belayer is not alarmed when your legs start flailing around, warn him by shouting, ‘Use your brain, you (crude anatomical reference omitted)’!

51. Use a semi-footless technique on very steep rock: wave one foot behind you in space, bridging against an outer rock-wall, invisible to everyone except yourself. On overhanging rock use one foot only and hop upwards.

52. Take advantage of your footless skill when climbing on polished rock. Amaze your companions, who will slide around through unwisely trying to stand on

footholds. Elsewhere, on less polished rock, simulate the effect by not cleaning your shoes: spread a thin layer of mud uniformly over the sole to reduce the risk of rubber being in contact with rock.

53. When seconding, ignore Rule #50: use effortless, perfectly judged footwork, as this will annoy the leader who has just found the climbing hard. Demonstrate precise footwork in a pair of clumpy old boots, making anyone who thinks it cool to wear ultra-tight rock-shoes without socks look like a complete wazzock.

#### h. Food and Drink

54. Follow a strict diet. Stick to fruit and vegetables that are on the approved list: mushy peas, bananas, grapes and mushrooms, preferably tinned. Eat loads of eggs. Try not to eat anything green or red; prepare for seismic bowel movements if this rule is flouted. Make provision to donate your body to medical science.

55. Maintain a balanced diet, consuming the recommended ‘five a day’, i.e. five packets of Werther’s Originals daily. For additional calorie intake, eat a bacon-and-egg bap or a bag of chips. Insist on finding somewhere to have breakfast before setting foot on rock, as café stops take up time that might otherwise have to be spent climbing: with a suitable breakfast stop and good crag selection (see Rule #1) you need not start climbing until after midday.



Essential Alpine Preparation: Hitting the bottles before Pointe Percée.

56. Use pleas for tea-breaks to manage over-enthusiasm amongst your climbing partners. Say ‘Let’s go for a cup of tea!’ after a couple of hours climbing, though not, as it might appear, to request a refreshment break: it actually means ‘I’ve had enough, let’s go home. Now’. In summer months, tempt your partner away from more climbing with the prospect of ice cream. If he pays no attention, retaliate by ignoring his later pleas for a beer-break.

57. If you embark on a long mountain route, suck two or three boiled sweets to maintain peak physical performance for hours. If you feel tired on the way down, overcome this by running down the rest of the descent.

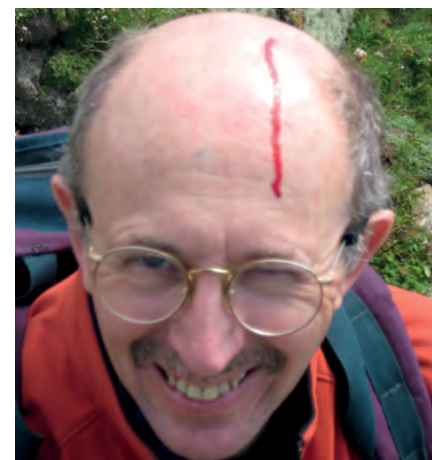
58. On an overseas trip seek out good old British food and avoid foreign muck. Search for somewhere that serves your staple diet, even if you do not know the phrase for ‘bacon-and-egg bap’, in the local lingo. If eating in a dodgy restaurant, select the meal most likely to result in food poisoning, such as a mild prawn korma, rather than a robust goat

vindaloo that would annihilate potential bugs. In the USA test cultural boundaries by asking for ‘English Breakfast tea with your hottest water, my good man,’ then look utterly blank when asked ‘Do you want a room with that, sir?’; or generate even greater confusion by asking for ‘black tea with milk’.

59. Avoid alcohol if climbing the next day, as it will severely impair performance. Conversely, when you want an excuse to do nothing, drink a couple of cans of Stella to generate a hangover on a Biblical scale. After a whisky-tasting evening, recover by spending three days in a darkened room. However, prepare for a long route in the Alps by drinking several bottles of cheap vin rouge in the hut the night before.

60. Always carry a gallon of water, regardless of the ambient temperature, as you may need water to put out a fire or to wash a car windscreen. At a climbing wall carefully position your water-bottle at the base of the route to impale the leader if he slips off the initial moves.

61. Stiffen the upper lip to ensure you do not need to execute a bowel movement while on the hill. If your partner cannot hold out so resolutely, because he does not adhere to a bung-you-up diet, locate the resulting pile and take a photo. Take delight in showing the picture to all your friends, even those who are not fellow coprophiles (i.e. not from Moulton).



The bare Ashton bonce after a helmet-less close encounter with Cornish granite.

#### i. Headgear, Clothing, Footwear and Rucksack

62. Always wear a helmet when leading or seconding, but not when belaying at the foot of a crag, since the leader would never pull off loose rock. When not wearing a helmet, wear a black cap: in the car, in the café, in the pub, in the bath and in bed. This hides the unappealing expanse of skin on top of the head: see photo).

63. Never remove clothes to keep cool as it is more comfortable to sweat profusely. Do not wear shorts, which are the work of Satan, as are short-sleeved T-shirts other than plain white ones.

64. Do not expose bare skin to sunlight. To reduce the risk of accidentally catching some sun apply lots of sun-cream with SPF 100.

65. Do not carry suitable warm clothing on cold days, but wear loose cotton tops,

as this will bemuse your companions who are feeling snug in thermal base layers and fleeces. Excuse your feeble performance by saying, ‘I’m feeling a bit cold, actually’ or ‘I really do feel the cold’. Buy warm clothing, such as a down jacket, but leave this at home in chilly weather; only wear it on hot days, while on Mediterranean holidays or in the Mojave Desert.

66. Choose the least appropriate footwear for the activity in hand. Wear rigid mountain boots on an approach hike up friction slabs, but save the sticky-rubber approach shoes for walking to the pub. Make sure you have a comfortable pair of rock-shoes for longer routes, but climb in tight ones, leaving the comfy ones in the rucksack. The additional weight, along with the heavy boots and excess water makes the experience much more character-building for your mate who is climbing while carrying the sack.

67. Use a rucksack of a size and style usually seen on the backs of youngsters contending for the DoE award: a large one is needed for all the runners (see Rule #18) that you carry and the emergency water supply—see Rule #60. A passing thief will be unable to pinch your rucksack, unless he an weightlifting Olympic champion.

68. To maintain tidiness put your gear in a nylon bag and then put this bag inside your rucksack. Do not, however, pack your cams in plastic boxes before putting them in the nylon bag, as this might seem a touch anal.



FICTION

# We could go to Stanage

*Sometimes it seems as if the crux of a day's climbing is deciding where to go, no doubt to the delight of café owners in climbing areas. It is all too easy to stick with the familiar, who knows what might happen if you seek new horizons?*

By Byrom Rouse

See, I hadn't wanted to go there at all, if I'm honest. It was Jimmy's idea, but my fault. It all started a couple of months back. It had been wet forever, everything was gopping. Then there was that break for a few days, you remember?

'We could go to Stanage', Jimmy said, a bit half-hearted. I'd phoned to see if he had any better ideas than me of where we could try.

'Nah, I was there on Tuesday with Shady, it was still really wet and the midges will be bad. If it dries, it'll be packed.'

'How about Burbage North?'

'Nah, I went along the top with Bev last week, it's still really wet.'

'How about Millstone?' Jimmy hated Millstone. If he was suggesting that, he'd run out of ideas.

'Jimmy, Millstone's boring. I'm bored with it all. We've been all over it for years and there's nothing left I want to do. I want something new.'

'There's nothing new', his voice was hollow, defeated almost. 'We're fifty years too late, lad. Everything worth doing was done years ago. We're following in the footsteps of others.'

So we went to the wall instead, just for something to do, if I'm honest. After he'd done a few problems, Jimmy went off for a coffee. I crimped on a couple of holds and pulled onto the board. Board. Bored. I dropped back onto the mat, sagging. My head wasn't in it anymore. I needed something new, something to excite me.

I looked round. Jimmy was chatting up the girl on the till in the caff. She was new, I hadn't seen her before. They looked like they'd got loads to talk about. Jimmy wouldn't be back for a while. A group of young climbers I didn't know were working a problem across the way. I didn't know them. They weren't getting anywhere. I was on my own. I'd had it with climbing, the plug had been pulled.

The lights seemed to get brighter, and I felt hot and dizzy. I was just about to pack up. 'For fuck's

sake,' I spat. Some ancient I'd not seen behind me shoved right past onto the problem I'd just failed on. He eased up it, made it look piss. He was flagging his left foot, stroke, an old injury maybe, I thought. Anyway, hurt or not he was going better than me. He pulled over the top and turned back to grin down at me. Not a nice smile, there was something hungry in it. He disappeared over the back.

I was still feeling dizzy and a bit sick, but more than that: angry. 'I'm not being mugged off by that old twat,' I told myself. I pulled back on again, really trying this time, and got it, more or less. I stood on top of the boulder and saw him pushing through the youngsters to the problem they'd been trying. They'd all given up on it. He got it first go. I'd tried and failed on it a couple of weeks ago. He caught my eye, that same hungry smile. He called over, 'Come on, kid, give it a blast.' I was drawn to it, the youngsters stepped back. I latched the first holds and felt this surge of energy. I was suddenly strong, the problem felt like a wall of buckets. As I pulled over, I looked back at the upturned, disappointed faces. 'Showed them, eh?' the old guy said in my ear. I hadn't heard him get so close. 'Come on, kid,' he said, 'There's plenty to do.' For the first time in months, I felt excited by climbing. For a couple of hours I followed him round the wall. We did every problem, every variant, every eliminate. I was drenched in sweat, but buzzing.

'I'll see you,' he said, flashed that dark smile and packed his kit. He said something to the girl in the caff before he left, still dragging his left foot a bit. Jimmy turned up a few minutes later. I'd forgotten about him, to be honest. 'Where've you been, you missed a good session.'

'I dunno,' Jimmy shook his head, 'I don't feel so good. That coffee was bad, I've been in the toilet for a while. I want to go.' Jimmy looked really ill, so we packed up and left.

A couple of weeks later, Jimmy rang. 'Listen, lad,

Opposite: Steve Dean on Jester Cracks, HVS 5a, Kinder North.  
Photo: Gordon Stainforth



you said you wanted something new? I was looking at an old Kinder guide. I've got an idea.'

'Kinder? Over the Moors and all that? Come on, that's all crap and miles from the car.'

'No, seriously. There's stuff in the old guide that's not in the new one. I'll come over, something to show you.' A couple of hours later, Jimmy was at my place. I made a brew and Jimmy spread out a pile of crappy old climbing mags and pages out of old guides on the table.

'What is this, Jimmy?'

'Treasure, lad, treasure. Here, look at this, *Damocles Buttress*,' he was really pleased with himself.

He pushed some pages across the table. I glanced at them, describing an impressive buttress somewhere west of The Edge. 'That's out of Laycock's guide,' Jimmy said, 'more than a hundred years old.' He showed me a photo of the same place, poor quality, black and white, 'That's from *Fergus Graham's Recent Developments*.' He was really enjoying himself, handing out the goodies.

'Come on, Jimmy, this is a joke, it isn't historical, it's geological. Maybe it was a big thing in its day, but it's way out of date.'

Jimmy wouldn't leave it there. He showed me an essay from *Mountain 6*, more grainy pictures and a local know-all sounding off about this amazing buttress, like Wimberry on steroids, he said, all crazy jamming cracks and fuck off arêtes.

'No-one's mentioned this place since 1975,' Jimmy gathered it all together again. 'Look, '86 guide—nothing, '98 guide—nothing, no mention in *Over the Moors*, nothing on UKC.'

'All that proves is that the whole thing has got buried in the hillside, you'd have to dig it out. Total waste of time, Jimmy.'

'Come on lad,' he pleaded, 'This is what you wanted. No-one has been up there for forty years. There's got to be new stuff we can do.'

'Where'd you get this,' I picked through the mags

and the smeared pages, 'I've never seen this stuff before. Anyhow, what do you care? You're always happy going to Stanage, it's me that's bored with it, not you.'

'I thought you'd be pleased,' Jimmy looked hurt. 'That girl at the wall, you know? We got talking.' He gave me a sideways look. 'I've seen her a bit since, her dad was quite handy in his day, did loads of new routes. She showed me some of his old guides, this lot, pointed out a couple of things he'd wanted to do before ...,' Jimmy trailed off. 'Anyhow,' he pulled the papers back together and stuffed them into his bag, I thought you'd like it.' He was disappointed. After a beer out of the 'fridge, he left.

I didn't like Jimmy's idea. It didn't suit me, if I'm honest, but I couldn't say why. It was a long slog up The Edge, with the rain we'd had, it would be weeks before it dried out. And probably when we got to it, it would be a pile of shit. The weather improved a bit over the next few days. A few days after Jimmy had come round I went to Bamford with Shady. We had a bad day and left on bad terms with the crag, and with each other, I wasn't sure if I wanted to climb with him again for a while. I went to Staden with Bev after that. See, I've climbed with Bev for years and we've never had a bad day. But again, it wasn't right. He was unhappy, nervous, didn't want to do anything. I got a bit fucked off with him. Anyway, Bev and me probably won't be out cragging again for a while. See, I'd run out of climbing partners, and that's how Jimmy and me ended up going to *Damocles Buttress*.

It was a long grind up from the Snake Inn to the Edge. We'd got heavy bags, some static rope, big rack, gear for cleaning. I was sure we were wasting our time. We staggered up, lungs bursting, sweating under a hot, angry sun. If those old guides and the mags were right, *Damocles Buttress* would be a few hundred metres beyond *Jester Buttress*, but it wasn't

that obvious. I was hot and had a bad headache. The sun stunned me. Sweat was running into my eyes. There was a haze over the moor. Jimmy was well ahead.

'Here it is, lad,' Jimmy shouted back. I couldn't see much, I was dizzy, had to scramble up this loose, gritty slope towards the top. I was slipping and sliding about on loose stuff and rubble, hands grabbing heather and gorse. When I made it to the top of the slope, I was hot, dusty and really fucked off, if I'm honest. I shook my head clear. Jimmy was just sitting there, looking across at this fantastic, clean buttress of grit, wide cracks at stupid angles, the right arête slicing up into the sky.

I felt weak and had to sit down. After a drink, I cooled down a bit and looked properly at the buttress. 'Impressive, Jimmy, how come no-one's been here for years? Maybe you were right, this could be good. It looks clean, too.' I opened my bag and pulled out the rope and some gear. 'What shall we have a go at first?'

'No idea,' Jimmy shrugged, 'Why not ask the old guy?' He stuck his chin back down the slope. It was the ancient I'd met at the wall. He was coming up the slope, leading with his good leg, but was quiet and quick, hardly a stone moving.

When he got level with us, he smiled. I felt sick. 'I've been waiting for someone to come by,' he said. 'It's lonely.' The sun went behind some clouds. It suddenly felt cold, my shirt clung to my back. I shivered. I didn't want to hang around.

I racked up, tied in and handed Jimmy the rope to belay. I set off for the right arête, slabby to start, but steepening and leaning out sideways, immediate exposure above the slope below. I got in a couple of good wires and a small cam, then carried on shuffling up and right to the arête. When I got hold of it, the arête was like a knife, really steep and sharp. I bunched up, feet high, smearing, trying to stop the barn door swinging. Suddenly this was

hard. 'Shit, shit SHIT.' Gasping, a desperate series of little shuffles and grabs got me up to a ragged break. 'Stuff a cam in,' I told myself, 'fast.' I grabbed a blue cam and placed it.

The cam went in. The break expanded. And expanded. And expanded. The whole arête scythed off and collapsed. I went with it. I hit the slab hard but the wires held, and I stopped. I'd got some bad cuts and was really shaky. I got back down to the ledge at the bottom of the slab and threw up. Dust was rising from the rock fall, the smell of cordite and sulphur stung my nose. I looked for Jimmy. He was dead for sure; he'd been right under the arête when it came down. Jimmy was mainly out of the debris, but blocks had trapped his left leg, red Five-Ten rock shoe still on his foot. A metre left of Jimmy's trapped leg; I caught sight of another rock shoe, blue canvas and white leather, old school kit, with shreds of a red sock in it. Smashed tib and fib, and beyond that, and all now clear of the boulder that had tilted and trapped Jimmy, the remains of a body.

There was a gust of wind; I felt something moving next to me. 'Thanks, kid,' breathed the old man in my ear, 'I've been wanting to move on for ages.' He slipped away down slope, not limping anymore. I haven't been out since. Bev and Shady have found safer people to climb with.





# Millennium Muttley

*Adding a new route is always satisfying, discovering subsequently that you weren't the first is usually a major disappointment.*

By Bruce Woodley



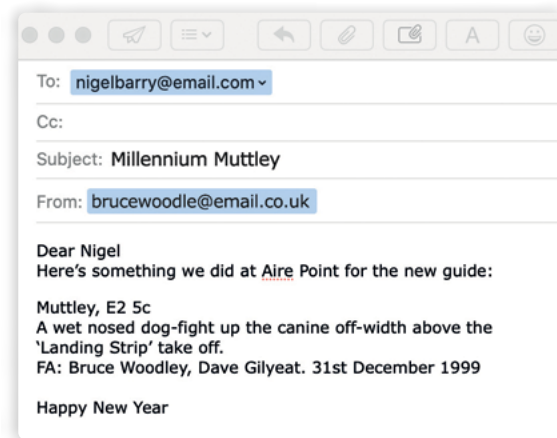
Dick Dastardly and his snickering sidekick Muttley, were the 'stars' of Hanna Barbera's 1960s cartoons *Wacky Races* and its spin-off *Dastardly & Muttley in Their Flying Machines*. Wikipedia / Hanna Barbera sanctioned promotional material.

\* *Bodhráin* are hand held, goatskin Irish frame drums. Similar to tambourines, they are more often played with a double-ended bone or tippin (*cipín*).

Where were you on the last day of the last century? The fin de siècle vibe varied. One of my pupils told his mum (who happened to be our Librarian) that he really loved her; sensing a certain undercurrent, she discovered he'd become fearful of The Millennium Bug causing global computer melt down and Armageddon. On the other hand my uncle, a Devonian Forestry worker, reckoned, 'It'll just be another day I s'pose.'

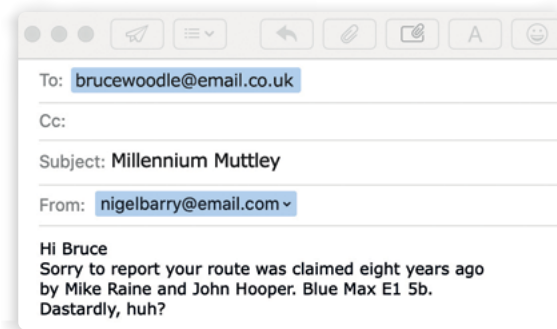
We were two families with four children between four and eight, so Kinder, Scafell and Kinabalu were non-starters. The consensus seemed to be with West Penwith; Carn Brea above Lands End Airport was sure to provide a fine vantage point from which to witness the Celtic Twilight with assorted Weirdoes, Wiccans and the Woodley family entourage. Anyway, with it being BC (before I joined The Climbers Club) it was suitably near our favourite Kelynack campsite.

Now given that keeping 'The Faith' is essential, how many of you were up to hill or rock related capers on the last day of the last century? It was mid afternoon before Dave and I got our dispensation and Aire Point was the nearest crag. Though conditions were 'sub-optimal' it was climbable, and what's more we'd found a new route. I even managed to drop a loop and pull up a secret weapon, a six inch tube chock to protect the upper chimney.



So happy were we, that after feasting and libations, our single firework disappearing into thick fog was just a laugh; though whether Plymouth Council felt the same way about their display on The Hoe is unlikely. The Circle Dancing around the fire to the squeezebox and bodhráin\* delighted daughters, sons, mums and dads alike.

The Lighthouse on The Lizard blinked through heavy layers of grey and denied us any sense of the dawning of a New Age, though our ragtag band of second hand surf spirits exalted in the icy head rush provided by Sennen's first swells of 2000.



The coveted first ascent with its significant date and place in the CC Guide for posterity had eluded me. But Mike Raine's '*Blue Max*' will always be my '*Muttley*,' my last blast of last century and now, almost unbelievably, 20 years ago.

# Free Gŵyr!

*Getting a rock route in during the festive season is always a bit special. All the better if it is a long(ish) route in a beautiful location such as the Gŵyr peninsula.*

By Terry Gifford

It was three days before Christmas. On the motorway cars kicked up a fine spray that did not raise much hope of dry rock. Four great white pinnacles rose out of the morning mist like majestic Egyptian obelisks. Actually, Isambard Kingdom Brunel had wanted Egyptian carvings on the pillars of his bridge over the Avon Gorge, but his design was abandoned when early work was stopped by the Bristol Riots of 1831. They're great like that in Bristol—regularly rioting over injustices, from limited voting rights in 1831 to Extinction Rebellion. It was the Bristol Alpinist who introduced me to the intricate climbing in the Gorge soon after I moved to Somerset and I had just picked him up for a mad plan to celebrate Free Gŵyr in a pre-Christmas break-out from days of rain and Brexit gloom. It was six days after the entry to Wales was toll-free and the first dry day between Atlantic lows. As we drove under the four soaring white pinnacles of the Second Severn Crossing into Wales we came across the new signs saying 'NO TOLLS' with an extra Christmas cheer. After fifty-two years the project's required revenue had been collected and the ownership of the bridge had returned to the UK government from the British, French and American consortium that financed and built it. Regular commuters between Wales and England are expected to save more than £1400 a

year. On our crossing we saved £5.60. Free Gŵyr climbing! And no riots necessary.

We were planning to climb the Gower's longest route, the *East Ridge of Great Tor* (70m) which I'd last climbed thirty-two years ago with my present wife in the very first spring after I'd moved in with her. Obviously a riotous honeymoon climb. And now the sun was out as we walked down the wet path towards the beach to emerge at a cliff-top bench to see that the tide was also out. My plan had been to gear up here, hide sacks and walk across the inviting empty sands and around the seaward toe of the Tor to the east side. But I'd forgotten that the Alpinist, being an alpinist, doesn't like things too easy, a characteristic that was to come in useful later. So we walked out along the headland to dump our sacks at the top of a greasy, muddy gully where I tried to cheer myself up by remarking that at least my old 5.10 rock shoes had cleats in the heels for just such adventurous sea-cliff descents.

It was one of those gullies that was narrow enough at the top to allow out-facing bum-sliding bridging above the slot, before turning you around to in-facing down-climbing on little rocky blocks to wet grass and mud ledges, where turning again to face the incoming sea brought the heels into play at the price of a wet bum-brake. I thought of Ken

They're great like that in Bristol—regularly rioting over injustices...



“The Alpinist dispatched this wall with smooth reaches and long loping steps to belay with his head poking up into the blue sky.”

Wilson in his full blue Helly Hansen suit saying that it was worth at least a grade in extra friction when you needed it. This was the man who, at first, thought chalk was cheating. There was never a dull moment, climbing with Ken, who had challenging opinions on everything and could cause a riot at any CC AGM, often needing the intervention of the old Dragoon Guards.

At last, rough rock blocks could be diagonally down-climbed rightwards towards a platform and a storm-filled pool below the undercut twin finger cracks that could be ‘climbed with interest’ at 4b. Gleaming black with damp dark bile, their interest was not high enough to tempt the Alpinist’s investment today, thank goodness. I had started to feel the pain of arthritis in my left hip and my back needed stretching out after my visiting all five primary school classrooms of my two granddaughters as a hunched-over old Father Christmas, heavily disguised so that I would not be recognised in the two crux classrooms. They claimed to have recognised my glasses! The glued on eyebrows and moustache, and the bad back, did not now seem worth the pain.

Now, it was positively hot. The sun sparkled on the sea to our left and, as the Alpinist had said, being on the east side gave us shelter from the December wind. The first inviting dry flat steps brought into the Alpinist’s reach the line of an incut break leading rightwards, and inching the left foot up the slope of a ledge enabled a swing of the right foot into a crack where a low right sidepull enabled him to crank into an upright position. Runner, more crack, runner, steep wall, runner and step left across a corner onto the front of the buttress and then a big ledge. The short pitches make this feel a friendly route.

But I could not get off the ground. It was less to do with arthritis or back pain and more to do with a lack of leanness, cultivated over many months

for my Father Christmas role. Anyway, my hands were too low to enable a crank rightwards once my foot was braced out into that crack. These days, in the winter season and with incoming tides, I find that it’s best not to test the patience of my leader, or the rope, too much, so I backed off and invited the Alpinist to abseil down for the four runners. Before you could say, ‘Just whip a rope around this block’ the Alpinist was in his familiar abseil mode as I climbed round the easy rock to the right to gain the big ledge.

To rebalance the courtesies I offered him the next lead which stepped around the seaward arête and into a groove in a very scenic position. In the steep upper part of the groove the Alpinist opted to step right up a wall, although the move onto the smooth ledge and back to the arête offered a moment for thought, before he romped away up the sunlit arête to another commodious belay ledge. At the steepening of the groove I found an almost hidden little triangular foothold that enabled a long reach for a jug from which foot friction is always easier, if a little more frequent these days due to my painfully restricted hip movement. With the sea still just enabling surprised dog walkers to pass round the Tor below us, the second half of this pitch was a blocky delight.

It was my lead, up the juggy arête and all too quickly to a final ledge below the uprearing summit wall. The Alpinist dispatched this wall with smooth reaches and long loping steps to belay with his head poking up into the blue sky. This was the longest pitch on the route and would have been unalloyed pleasure but for the creaking of my anatomy and the odd shooting pain asking me if this had been a good idea. Smiles all round at the spacious summit bowl between pinnacles seemed to answer that question. This was, indeed, a rather special place to be as the wide expanse of sand made the few people walking out there seem midgets covering miles of

the horrible horizontal. It certainly felt more than seventy-one metres above the rippling incoming sea. Perhaps the only giant out there was the man who emerged improbably from the waves only to revolt at the sight of sand, turn around and dive through the breaking waves again. Swimming, in Wales, in December! Even up here you could feel the waves of his smugness when he strode out of the water across the sands to revert to his regular costume of unassuming normality.

I, however, was inclined to take the opposite strategy. First, we had to find the down-climb. The Alpinist was in his element again, elegantly descending damp limestone, wet grass and rare lichens. I don’t mind admitting that I really appreciated him waiting for me and pointing out the undercut hidden footholds. I remember traversing the *Bernia Ridge* on the Spanish Costa Blanca with another alpinist, Jim Fotheringham, and staring at the ring bolt at the start on the east summit as Jim blithely down climbed ahead of me. Too late, I clocked that we were going to down-climb the abseils, alpine style. Jim was carrying the rope. After the second surprising discovery—that route-finding through the pinnacles on the ridge was a challenge—I arrived at a ledge to find Jim dozing in the sun. But at least I climbed with that rare sub-species of alpinist who will wait for their partner, if occasionally failing to stifle a yawn.

Back at our sacks, the cutting wind required another layer and here my alternative strategy came into play—my Father Christmas suit—cunningly designed for low temperatures. Getting in a long route three days before Christmas in my fifty-fifth year of climbing certainly trumped winter sea swimming and deserved a celebratory costume for the walk back along the cliff top. At the

bench again we sat to eat the sandwiches which the current guidebook recommends for the wind-blasted summit. (‘If you’re British, now’s the time to eat your sandwiches.’) The coffee was now cold, but the low sun still bounced off sea and sand. An amazed man popped up from the beach path.

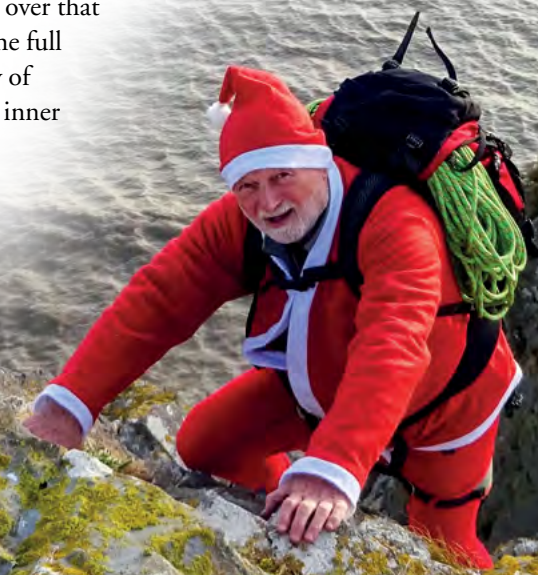
‘I’ve believed in you all my life,’ he said, ‘and now here you are!’

He left, shouting over his shoulder as an afterthought, ‘Did you get my message?’

An eccentric woman came striding past a while later, traversing the clifftop path. ‘You seem to have lost your reindeer,’ she admonished me. ‘I think you’ll find they are grazing over there,’ I said, pointing to the way she was going.

As we drove back past the eerily deserted toll booths and onto the bridge a huge full moon arose over England. The next evening, at the end of the carol service in Wells cathedral, the Bishop of Bath and Wells (of Blackadder fame) wished the congregation, ‘The joy of the shepherds and the perseverance of the wise men’. We had already fulfilled his blessing as Dave Wynne-Jones and I had driven over that bridge towards the full moon after a day of Free Gŵyr in an inner riot of joy and perseverance.

Terry Gifford in disguise emerging from Great Tor, Gower.  
© Dave Wynne-Jones







## The Struggle for Riasg

*Since 2000 the Club has added two more huts to its portfolio, Riasg and Grange Old School. The acquisition of a new hut involves a vast amount of work by a battalion of dedicated volunteers. As we reach the 20th anniversary of Riasg's purchase it is worth reminding ourselves just how much behind the scenes hard graft was needed to get it open.*

By Ian Wall based on original words by Bob (RF) Allen

The Club Newsletter for June 1996, under the heading 'Lottery Bids', advised members of the Club's attempts to 'secure Lottery funding for major works planned for the Count House and the RO Downes Memorial Hut'. In addition it stated 'It is also the Club's longer-term strategy to purchase at least one further hut to mark its Centenary in 1998'. At that time the Club was actively considering locations in the Eastern Lakes and the West Country.

The wind of change swept the initial plans off the table during the 1996 AGM, when there was an overriding vote in favour of acquiring a new hut not in England, but Scotland. By the Newsletter of June 1997 members were informed of a bid that had been submitted by the Club for a plot of land situated at Victoria Bridge on the outskirts of Fort William. It was intended to construct a purpose-built 'hut' to accommodate twenty-four people and the overall expected budget was estimated to be £150,000, of which it was hoped the Scottish Lottery Commission would provide £75,000. At the time the Lottery was able to deliver financial support fairly liberally and this didn't seem too extravagant an expectation.

The 'Scottish Hut Project' was instigated under the Presidential leadership of Mark Vallance, but the baton was then passed to Bob Allen who took over as President of the Club in 1998. By now it had become apparent that the Victoria Bridge site was not acceptable due to the problems of potential subsidence and the close proximity to local residents and the secondary school. Bob, being a good team player, quickly roped in other senior club members in the search for a suitable site and it was at this stage that Derek Walker suggested that Ed Grindley should be contacted. Ed was a member of the FRCC and had moved to Fort William from the Lakes several years previously.

Ed embraced the project wholeheartedly and readily produced lists of potential properties and sites for development. Frequent and rapid forays north of the border took place as inspections of development plots and timber-framed buildings were completed and ticked off Ed's lengthening list. During one of the visits to Lochaber, Ed introduced the CC 'Spearhead Group' to a member of the local Highland Council's planners, also a climber, and together with Bob Wright, a local builder, a potential plot of land near Roy Bridge had been identified as a suitable site that would shortly be for sale.

The 'Scottish Hut Project' was probably the biggest initiative that the CC had ever undertaken, and therefore it had been decided under Mark Vallance's presidency that the whole membership should have the right to

comment on the proposal by way of a questionnaire, as only about 8% of the membership had attended the 1996 AGM and voted at the meeting. By February 1998, 443 questionnaires were returned out of a nominal membership at that time of 1050, and 85% of those were in favour of a Scottish Hut with 77% of them keen to have a hut in the general area around Fort William. In consequence, the AGM on the 28th February 1998, at which Bob Allen took over the Presidency, overwhelmingly passed two motions authorising the Committee to acquire a hut in Scotland and the necessary steps to finance it, including the option to take out a commercial loan if necessary. The future seemed straightforward: a clear majority of the membership wanted a Scottish Hut, the site had been identified and the right 'local authority' figures were on side!

Things were moving fast: Craig Harwood had drawn up plans making best use of the site; a firm of local Scottish solicitors were contacted with regard to taking steps to confirm de-crofting arrangements; ground surveys were obtained and neighbours were kept up to date on proceedings. Fine, or was it? The first inkling of disputed ownership of a narrow, less than one metre wide, strip of land which would have to be crossed to reach our intended site, surfaced. Additionally, land drainage problems across the site and onto neighbouring land appeared as did a problem with the local residents; the list of hurdles began to increase.

Main photo: Riasg.  
© Richard Law, Creative Commons


Inset: Mark Vallance, President, planting a tree at Riasg Opening.  
© Ian Wall



The Appeal for funds from the membership appeared in the Newsletter on the 28th June and the Club's solicitor sent the formal Offer of Purchase to the solicitor representing the owner of the plot of land the following day. Due to personal reasons the Vendor wanted the sale to be completed as a matter of urgency and suggested that the Club conclude the sale on the grounds that Outline Planning Permission was to be granted. Max Biden, Treasurer at that time, was masterminding the financial strategies and, after long and soul-searching meetings, it was decided that concluding the purchase should not be carried out until all the relevant documentation had been completed, including a delayed de-crofting issue. To try to sweeten the pill an upfront payment was made to the site owner but, to Bob's surprise, instead of this being received as a good-will gesture the owner said that he needed 'certainty of purchase, not possibility' and then added that another party had made an offer and they were prepared to complete the purchase based on Outline Planning Permission only. The relevant documentation was completed and submitted for full approval by the 10th August, a full month ahead of schedule.

The landowners were notified that the full amount of the asking price would be paid within three days of receiving formal notice of the success of the Planning Application. However, the natives were restless and our inside information said that there were objections to the scale of our project.



Financial mastermind Max Biden at Riasg opening.  Ian Wall

By the beginning of August the Appeal Fund had reached £23,000 but on the 10th August the Planning Committee of the Highland Council met, only to go against the local planning officer's recommendations, and rejected the proposal by 4:3. Immediately Bob and Craig drew up a 'Notice of Representation', which entitled the Club, at no additional cost, to have the plans reconsidered at the next meeting. The reason for rejection 'the proposal by virtue of its scale, would give rise to excessive noise and disturbance'.

After several meetings with local officials and residents it transpired that many people were totally ignorant of what the Club and the new facility was all about. There were stories of undercutting the local B & B and bunkhouse economy, running a commercial organisation in disguise, re-selling the property within a few years to a hotel chain at major financial gain, of not supporting

the local economy by bringing food and supplies from 'southern supermarkets' and destroying the local peace and tranquillity by allowing a lot of rowdy door slamming, horn blowing, drunken party goers to stay in their quiet crofting community. A petition containing sixty signatures was produced, containing some names of dubious origin, and finally the Club was accused of being elitist and that it was immoral that it should try to obtain public funding for its future development.

A Management Plan was drawn up emphasising all the usual issues of no radios, three club members to a vehicle, no parking outside the Club property and that maximum occupancy would only be on a few occasions a year. There was also local concern that this would become just another 'back-packers bunk house', so the Planners proposed changes—ultimately resisted—that would have severely restricted the Club's ability to let anybody other than Club members use the hut. It transpired that the local residents had a hidden agenda regarding the owner of the land. He was a former solicitor and, apparently, was not liked within the community and had in fact been accused of acquiring the land cheaply from elderly residents who were ignorant of its real value. They did not want to see him making even more money out of the selling of crofting land. Initially the local Roy Bridge councillor was very much in favour of the Club's project, however in the face of the local mobilisation against the initiative he felt that to maintain his stance

was unsustainable. When it came to the next meeting of the Lochaber Community Council it was reported that 'the meeting was attended by twenty-seven people, the biggest turn out since the proposed closure of the local school, twenty-six of the people present voted against the proposal and one abstained'.

While all this activity was going on at mainstream level, Ed was quietly beaver away with the local network of officialdom, Craig drew and redrew plans to address small issues of car-parking as raised by the Roads Department and, eventually, the amended proposal was put forward and the tide turned ... five votes for us and three against. So, was there now a clear run to the finishing line? No! The Oban Times carried an article in November 1998 in which it quoted a Roy Bridge caravan site owner, who obviously possessed a deep understanding of what drives the local economy and what was the fastest growing section of the Lochaber economy, as saying 'I won't have mountaineering types on the caravan site, they cause a lot of trouble. As far as I'm concerned they should keep out of the area'.

Through various procedural devices, some of which appeared to have been long since forgotten, the Club's application was objected to and, despite three times winning the battle with the voting in our favour, we were still no closer to winning the war. Eventually, by yet another procedural issue, the Club was forced to have the application reviewed by the full council in Inverness. More money, not to mention the voluntary

time being given to the project by Bob, Craig and Ed (who was only a Fell and Rocker at that time). Again we lost the vote, this time reports filtered back that the Scottish National Party had an influence. A site visit was eventually carried out by a Planning Inspector and to cut a long story short ... we lost again.

By now Bob was convinced that the underlying issue of size mattered as it seemed to be the basis of every objection. So, trying to take a rational view rather than an emotional one, it was back to a completely clean sheet of paper on the drawing board. At least one issue had worked in the Club's favour, just about every vendor, estate agent and private individual was aware the Climber's Club was in the market for either a property or site to develop, and phone calls were coming in daily. Bob, along with many other senior Club members, made many visits to look at over fifty possibilities in Glen Nevis, Ballachulish and Fort William. All turned out to be unsuitable.

All seemed to be at a loss. Then, by chance, on the drive south Bob was travelling through Roy Bridge when he noticed a 'For Sale' sign. 'Schoolwood' was near to the road, it was not on crofting land, and it was a large residential property that basically only needed a 'change of use' planning application. Who would take on the Roy Bridge Council again? Bob did! Hastily more plans were drawn up, surveys were carried out, funding was put in place and all was set to go. Then, like a recurring nightmare, the letter dropped on the mat. Only hours

before the official Offer to Purchase was made, 'Schoolwood' was withdrawn because the vendor was unable to find suitable new accommodation that suited the family circumstances.

Ed and other 'scouts' located yet more properties and Bob and Craig travelled north again on an inspection visit. The last visit of the day saw them back at Roy Bridge inspecting a four bedroomed bungalow situated in about three quarters of an acre of land. It had all the home comforts; mains electric, oiled fired central heating, mains water and drainage and had been built using an energy efficient timber frame. The feelings were good this time and immediately they called on the neighbours for local reaction. Apart from reference to a crack in the wall and wavy roof tiles there was positive feedback. Craig, with his expert eye, grovelled around in the roof and emerged convinced that any movement was due to carpentry issues and that there was little chance that the building would fall in half.

Once back at home, Bob set to work on the word processor and Craig hit the drawing board. Before long another set of documents were completed for the Building and Control Manager with adjustments being made to the issue of restrictive use and lettings conditions. This time things moved quickly and on February 4th 2000 Bob was advised that the Highlands Council had granted planning approval—unanimously. The asking price was £80,000. A structural survey was organised with particular reference to the crack in the wall and the



outcome was positive with no particular new issues being raised other than identifying a potential spend of approximately £7,000 to correct the crack. Armed with this information Bob made an offer of £65,000 and, after waiting a week or so with bated breath, he received the letter of acceptance.

The battles were over and now the war had been won but, of course, that is not the end of the story, there are always loose ends to be tidied up.

Craig completed more plans and drawings; Mary Nicol provided the curtains; Reg Pillinger, Pip Hopkinson, Craig Harwood, Pete Scott and Roger Briggs all greatly helped Bob, as site manager, during the ensuing few weeks of frantic 'clubhouse' preparation (the word 'hut' has caused problems with officialdom). Pete Anderson performed with his joinery kit and produced the bunks and other carpentry fittings; Patrick Green provided a full set of cutlery, glasses and crockery, the place was carpeted throughout, with our own 'Del Boy' Allen facilitating the 'pile'. With Ikea's delivery service the rest of the kitchen was fitted out, the mattresses and chairs installed and Riasg, maintaining the original name, was ready for the official opening.

As a result of the Funding Appeal 212 members donated just over £25,000 in direct donations, plus a further £12,000 in loans. That money, together with the tremendous contribution from the Publications Sub-Committee as their donation from guide-book sales, meant that the complete project, one of the

most ambitious undertaken by the Club in the one hundred and three years of its history, had been concluded without recourse to any outside funding and without, in any way, starving any of our other huts of funds.

But there was one last obstacle, Foot and Mouth. Although this didn't directly affect the Highlands, people were unsure of the situation and so the opening was postponed from the 17th March 2001 and eventually and successfully took place on Saturday 22nd September 2001.

The weekend was warm but slightly overcast on the Saturday. The Ex-President, now Honorary Member, Bob Allen was master of ceremonies. The assembled crowd consisted of many of the Club members who had worked so hard to see the project through to the end, which was by no means bitter. It was especially poignant to see so many of the Roy Bridge community present, some of whom brought 'welcome gifts'. This particularly emphasised the ambassadorial role the Club President plays in all aspects of Club life. Mark Vallance, who started the ball rolling back in 1996, planted an acer tree in the front garden. Mike Mortimer's dog contributed to the process, and it wasn't by digging the hole, we saw you with the poop scoop Mike! Then Bob planted another tree, without the dog's help, and went on to welcome the guests, many of whom played a large role in the financial provision for Riasg. Alan Blackshaw then cut the official tape and Riasg was open. Unofficially though, Riasg had been in use since the previous autumn,

and it was only thanks to this that the Club was able to function throughout the Foot and Mouth crisis and maintain a cash flow while all other huts were shut. After the official ceremonies were closed, the members and their guests enjoyed the food provided by Morag Anderson and were entertained by Alan and Elspeth's daughter Elsie who played the fiddle. Those who had more stamina than wine went to find warm dry rock in Glen Nevis and those who had more wine than stamina had more wine. All this then led on to a wonderful BBQ in the evening with even more wine and no midges. But when the midges did arrive, and it was cooling down, the party adjourned to the pub, for more beer!

Sunday saw just about everyone out and about, with one senior member experiencing his first route on the wonderful Etive Slabs. As a post script, Ed Grindley, although not a defector from the FRCC, was by then an honorary member of the CC and Riasg's first custodian.

Believe me, the 'Struggle for Riasg' was well worth the effort.



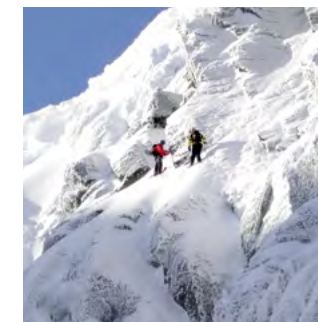
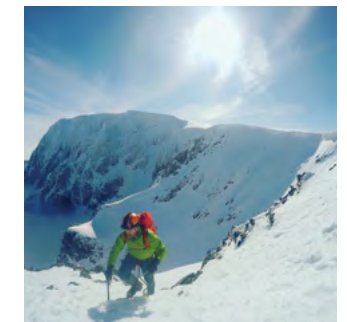
MC Bob Allen at Riasg opening.  
📷 Ian Wall

Right: Ben Nevis  
📷 Steve Jenkins

Below (clockwise from left):  
*Trophy Crack, Sron na Ciche*  
📷 Andy Brown

*The Cuillin Ridge*  
📷 David Linnett

*Squareface, Beinn a' Bhuid*  
📷 Don Sargent



Above: Winter days on the Ben  
Top: *Observatory Buttress*  
Middle left: *Point Five Gully*  
Middle right: *Ledge Route*  
📷 Piers Harley  
Right: *Tower Ridge*  
📷 Diccon Procter

Overleaf: The Cobbler, Central Peak  
📷 Don Sargent









Jim Smith

# Hut Custodians ~ the Statistics

*Huts; the jewel in the CC's crown. Unfortunately they don't maintain themselves and the selfless devotion of a small number of members has ensured that the huts remain in good order. Surprisingly, we have never kept a central record of the names of these 'hut heroes', Rob Seymour has now rectified that omission.*

Compiled by R J Seymour



E Stuart Chantrell  
29 years as Helyg Custodian.  
Our longest serving custodian.



Arthur Andrews



John Atherton

## Helyg

1926 to 1928	C W Marshall
1928 to 1957	E S Chantrell
1957 to 1962	A J J Moulam
1962 to 1972	C T Jones
1972 to 1973	J R Lees
1973 to 1993	A S G Jones
1993 to 1996	C I Dunn
1994 to 1998	D May
1998 to 2000	M Pycroft
1999 to 2009	N Clacher
2009 to 2010	R Pybus
2010 to 2014	C E M Yates
2014 to 2017	C V Lewis
2017 to date	K Atherton

## The Count House

1938 to 1954	A W Andrews
1954 to 1965	K M Lawder
1965 to 1981	J W Smith
1981 to 1996	D W Bateman
1996 to 2015	J R Atherton
2010 to date	R J Seymour
2018 to date	D J Viggers

## May Cottage

1982 to 1985	M Harber
1982 to 1991	S Lewis
1985 to 1993	G Evans
1991 to 1994	R Thomas
1993 to 1998	R D Neath
1998 to 2008	D de Mengel
2008 to date	D Reaney

The tables show the custodians who have cared for each of our huts and their period of service.

## Cwm Glas Mawr

1948 to 1951	B McKenna
1951 to 1954	A J J Moulam
1954 to 1965	D Thomas
1965 to 1973	G D Thomas
1973 to 1976	J R Lees
1976 to 1978	R E Prager
1978 to 1989	P M Newman
1989 to 2000	D Price
2000 to 2007	P Sivyier
2007 to 2009	S Andrews
2009 to 2013	P Anderson
2013 to 2014	C V Lewis
2014 to date	J A Starling

## R O Downes

1960 to 1963	E D G Langmuir
1963 to 1968	P E Evans
1968 to 1976	D K Morrison
1975 to 1981	T C Chatterley
1981 to 1984	R J Treglown
1984 to 2004	K Sanders
1984 to 2004	D Ibbotson
2005 to 2007	M Hart
2007 to 2010	C P Astill
2010 to 2016	R J Hewing
2010 to 2018	D Ibbotson
2016 to date	G Titterton

## Grange Old School

2009 to 2010	A M Blackburn
2010 to date	R C Withers

## R W Lloyd (Ynys Ettws)

1950 to 1959	R W Beard
1959 to 1964	J P Nelson
1964 to 1966	R W Beard
1966 to 1970	R H Nieto
1970 to 1973	R Handley
1973 to 1974	D Wiggett
1974 to 1976	W Hurford
1977 to 1980	R D Sykes
1978 to 1981	D J Cuthbertson
1981 to 1983	R Enwright
1983 to 1986	D J Cuthbertson
1986 to 1987	A D Newton
1987 to 1993	D J Cuthbertson
1993 to 1998	S Andrews
1993 to 1999	G D Boston
1993 to 1999	P S Feely
1998 to 2004	K Latham
2004 to 2009	L Robertson
2009 to 2011	R I Llewellyn
2011 to 2013	T H Keep
2013 to 2014	M Tuck
2014 to 2018	K Atherton
2018 to date	G Bennett

## Riasg

2001 to 2010	E Grindley
2010 to 2016	S J Abbott
2016 to 2017	A G Stotesbury
2016 to date	K Hill



Dennis Ibbotson  
working at Cwm Glas.  
Downes Hut custodian  
for 28 years.



Keith Lawder



Dennis Bateman





Helyg in the snow David Medcalf

In total 67 members have served as hut custodians. With the exception of the Count House, a typical stint as custodian is about five years. The average Count House custodian serves over thirteen years! Individual years of service are summarised in this table.

We have a lot to thank these individuals for.



The Count House



Grange Old School © Trevor Littlewood, Creative Commons

### Longest Service “All Comers” Top 32 as at 2020

1	E S Chantrell	29 years at Helyg
2	D Ibbotson	28 years in two terms at RO Downes
3=	K Sanders	20 years at RO Downes
	A S G Jones	20 years at Helyg
5	J R Atherton	19 years at Count House
6=	A W Andrews	16 years at Count House
	J W Smith	16 years at Count House
8	D W Bateman	15 years at Count House
9=	D J Cuthbertson	12 years in three terms at Ynys Ettws
	D Reaney	12 years at May Cottage
11=	R W Beard	11 years in two terms at Ynys Ettws
	D Thomas	11 years at Cwm Glas Mawr
	P M Newman	11 years at Cwm Glas Mawr
	D Price	11 years at Cwm Glas Mawr
	K M Lawder	11 years at Count House
16=	J R Lees	10 years at Helyg
	N Clacher	10 years at Helyg
	D de Mengel	10 years at May Cottage
	R C Withers	10 years at Grange Old School
	R J Seymour	10 years at Count House
21=	S Lewis	9 years at May Cottage
	E Grindley	9 years at Riasg
23=	D K Morrison	8 years at RO Downes
	G Evans	8 years at May Cottage
	G D Thomas	8 years at Cwm Glas Mawr
26	P Sivyer	7 years at Cwm Glas Mawr
27=	G D Boston	6 years at Ynys Ettws
	P S Feely	6 years at Ynys Ettws
	K Latham	6 years at Ynys Ettws
	T C Chatterley	6 years at RO Downes
	R J Hewing	6 years at RO Downes
	S J Abbott	6 years at Riasg

## The Climbers’ Club in the First World War 1914 – 1918

*The CC has not preserved a definitive Roll of Honour of those members who lost their lives in the First World War, nor has it dedicated a War Memorial to their memory. After a massive amount of research Rob has produced a tentative list of CC members who served and made the ultimate sacrifice. Biographical notes are included wherever possible. This is an abridged version of a wider study which includes other possible casualties and those who served and survived, which can be found in the members’ download area of our website.*

By Rob Seymour





Introduction

My motivation in wanting to find and record the names of Club members who lost their lives in the First World War started when I was researching the war service of my Great-Uncle, Jim Seymour, (not a CC member) who volunteered in 1914 and served with 11th Battalion Durham Light Infantry (Pioneers). He died of wounds, age 23, on 20th November 1917, the first day of the battle of Cambrai.

Many CC members served during the two World Wars, not all of whom returned. Beyond those killed, many more were wounded and suffered grievous physical injuries. Besides physical impairment, many combatants experienced significant mental trauma which they and their families would suffer from for the rest of their lives.

Nearly two hundred of our members served in World War Two and twenty-seven lost their lives. The war service of these members was published in the 1945-6 Journal as was the Roll of Honour recording the members who lost their lives. The bridge at Ynys Ettws is the Club's 1939 - 1945 War Memorial. In 2020 many events marked the passage of seventy-five years since the end of the Second World War. Inevitably the number of members who served in HM Forces during that conflict will continue to dwindle and, over the next few years, living memory will pass finally into history.



Private Jim Seymour, my father's uncle, died of wounds, 20th November 1917, age 23. Seymour Collection



The War Memorial at Ynys Ettws. David Medcalf

A comprehensive record of members who served with HM Forces during the First World War was never published, nor was a Roll of Honour commemorating the dead compiled. This article is a first attempt at compiling such lists from the Club's archives.

In recent years, members have assembled on Remembrance Sunday at the war memorial bridge to honour those who gave their lives in the Second World War 1939 - 1945. In years to come we will be able to honour by name at least some of the many club members who laid down their lives in the First World War. Known or unknown to us by name, we remember the sacrifice they made, giving their lives to secure the freedom of future generations and gifting to us the freedom to enjoy the hills in which they found adventure, fulfilment and friendship.

Preceding page: Soldiers of an Australian field artillery brigade on a duckboard track passing through Chateau Wood, near Hooze in the Ypres salient, 29 October 1917. Ypres serves as a vivid symbol of the mud, madness, and senseless slaughter of the Western Front. The third (and longest battle) of Ypres was an Allied victory, achieved at enormous cost for a piece of ground that would be vacated the following year. Frank Hurley, Public Domain (Wikipedia)

Below: Canadians entering the square in Cambrai, France, October, 1918. Wikimedia Commons



The Climbers' Club in the First World War

The lack of significant comment or recognition of its war dead by the Climbers' Club was markedly different from the way it commemorated those who lost their lives in the Second World War, and it was also at odds with how a number of other British climbing and mountaineering clubs commemorated their fallen members at the time.

The FRCC commemorated its members who had died during the war by raising funds and purchasing all the high ground above 1,500ft around the head of Wasdale. This land was presented to the National Trust as a gift to the nation, a bronze plaque listing members who fell in the conflict being unveiled on the summit of Great Gable as the FRCC war memorial. In August 2014, as the centenary of the outbreak of the war approached, the FRCC published a booklet, *We Remember—In recognition of the members of the Fell & Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District who fought in The Great War 1914 - 1918*, recording the war service of all FRCC members.

Shortly after the end of the war, Dr and Mrs Clark began the erection of a building in Coire Leis below Ben Nevis. When completed in 1928, they gifted it to the SMC to commemorate their son, Charles Inglis Clark, killed in Mesopotamia in 1918. Clark was a member of both the Alpine Club and SMC and his name is recorded on the Alpine Club war memorial and SMC Roll of Honour which appeared shortly after the war (the SMC Roll of Honour was published in SMC Journal, Volume XV, 1920).

Marking the centenary of the end of the war, the 2018 Alpine Journal included an article, *The Alpine Club at War: 1914 - 18* which records the war service of Alpine Club members and the Roll of Honour of those of its members who were killed. The 2018 Alpine Journal contains photographs of nearly all those named in the Roll of Honour on its war memorial.



Still from George Sang's film of the Charles Inglis Clark Hut Opening Ceremony, 1929. Dr and Mrs Clark are shown centre. SMC, National Library of Scotland

The Rucksack Club does not have a formal war memorial but its Journal was published regularly throughout the war and a record was kept of the service of all members and those who lost their lives. *This Mountain Life: the First Hundred Years of the Rucksack Club* (Northern Light, 2002) states 'World War I had a devastating impact on the Club. Of 138 members at the time, 42 joined the armed forces, seven of whom did not come through'.

Attempting to identify Climbers' Club members who lost their lives in the First World War

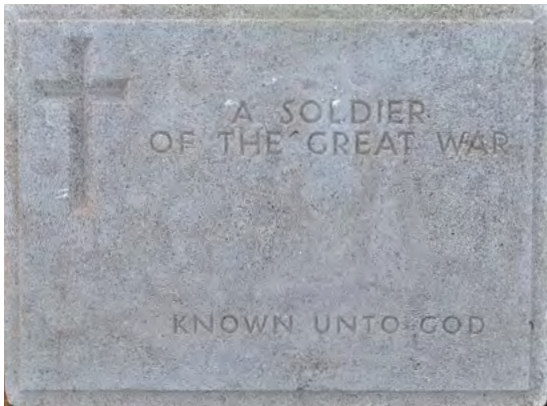
The Club published membership lists in 1910 (referred to as 1910 list) and 1914 (referred to as 1914 list), the latter appears to be the last one published until 1928 (referred to as 1928 list). There is one contemporaneous item concerning the war, published in the Journal in June 1915 (referred to as 1915 list), listing twenty-four members mobilised at the time. No other record of members' war service has been discovered, and the lack of information about members between 1915 and 1928 severely compromises any attempt to create an accurate or comprehensive record of members' war service or Roll of Honour of those killed during the war. The information that does exist is not always complete: for example members' names are recorded in differ-



FRCC commemorative plaque on Great Gable. FRCC Journal XXVII (3), No. 80 Doug Eliot



ent ways in the 1910 and 1914 lists. Some names are given in full; some have one forename and one or more initials; some are abbreviations. Further complications include soldiers enlisting under assumed names, we do not know if this applies to any members, and many of those killed were buried with no recorded name, their headstones carry the simple inscription: *A Soldier of The Great War, Known unto God.*



Potential casualties were identified by comparing the names given in the 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists (excluding those who survived the war and were in the 1928 list) with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) database, using the most complete name available. It is likely that this approach will create both false positives—where a member's name in the 1910, 1914 or 1915 lists matches a casualty named in the database of the CWGC but is actually a different person, and false negatives—where a member was in fact a casualty but the name is not shown with sufficient clarity in the 1910, 1914 or the 1915 lists to allow a match to be established, or where the name by which the casualty was listed may differ from the name given in these lists, so is not captured. Several members' names gave a single match in CWGC database but have been excluded as there are grounds for

believing these to be false positives. They are not named in this article. False negatives may exist but are impossible to identify.

There could be many reasons why members in the 1910 and 1914 lists no longer appear in the 1928 list—resignation from the club, emigration, death from natural causes over the intervening fifteen years and so on. Just because a member's name has disappeared between 1914 and 1928, it does not necessarily mean that they served during the war or were killed.

The results were filtered by conflict, country and service branch which helped to reduce the number of possible matches in some cases. This took time but yielded convincing results. The following twenty members are viewed as being certainly or highly probably the same person identified in the CWGC database as a fatality while serving with HM Forces during the First World War. The names are given in fairly complete form in 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists, and each has just a single match in the CWGC database. Some names are distinctive; it is unlikely that two individuals living in Britain would have had identical names. Several are known to have been members of the Alpine Club, Rucksack Club and/or FRCC; it is highly unlikely that these would not be one and the same person. In addition, the 1910 and 1914 lists provide members' addresses and this can provide further corroborating information. At the time, the regiment in which men enlisted would most frequently be that of the city or county in which they were from, or in which they lived, though this practice ceased after the slaughter on the Somme.

## A Tentative Roll of Honour of Climbers' Club Members who Lost Their Lives in the First World War

*Despite the various limitations referred to above what follows is a tentative and partial first attempt and it is hoped that others may be able to improve on this in time.*

### Certain or highly probable casualties

#### Arthur Cyril Adams

*Sergeant London Regiment (Artists' Rifles), died 28th March 1918*

The name is given as it appears in the 1910 and 1914 lists. The 1915 list includes AC Adams serving with the Artists' Rifles (then a Private). CWGC returns a single Arthur C Adams serving with the London Regiment (Artists' Rifles). Adams is commemorated on the Arras Memorial in the Faubourg d'Amiens British Cemetery, France, one of 35,942 United Kingdom, South African and New Zealand soldiers who died in battles around Arras who have no known grave.

#### A Gibson Cheney

*Private Royal Warwickshire Regiment, died 24th March 1918*

The name is given as it appears in the 1910 and 1914 lists. CWGC returns a single AG Cheney. Cheney is commemorated on the Pozières Memorial, France, one of 14,657 soldiers of the Fifth and Fourth Armies of the United Kingdom and South Africa who died on the Somme between 21st March and 7th August 1918 and who have no known grave.



Imperial War Museums

#### Sir Foster Hugh Egerton Cunliffe BART.

*Major 13th (Service) Battalion Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own), died of wounds 10th July 1916, age 40*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists include the name Sir FHE Cunliffe, Bart. Foster Cunliffe was educated at Eton College and New College, Oxford. He was an accomplished sportsman, particularly at cricket. He was a left-handed batsman and left-arm medium pace bowler, playing for the Eton First XI between 1893 and 1894 and for Oxford University between 1895 and 1898. He joined Middlesex Cricket Club in 1893 and played for MCC between 1895 and 1899.

Cunliffe was a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, and a noted military historian, author of *The History of the Boer War* (two volumes, Methuen & Co., 1904). He lectured in History and became the 6th Baronet in 1905. Cunliffe died of wounds at Ovillers-la-Boiselle. These twin hamlets, lying to the south of Thiepval, had been fought over since the earliest clashes in 1914. By 1916, the ruins of the two hamlets were in the centre of the British attack on the first day of the battle of the Somme. Cunliffe is buried at the Bapaume Post Military Cemetery, Albert, France.

#### Arthur William Davey

*Private Royal Fusiliers, died 14th August 1916, age 22*

This name appears in full in CWGC, 1910 and 1914 lists. Davey is buried at the Wimereux Communal Cemetery, France.

#### John Henry Davey

*Private Lincolnshire Regiment, died 31st July 1917, age 23*

This name appears in full in CWGC, 1910 List and 1914 lists. Davey is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium, one of

The phrase *Known unto God* was selected by British poet Rudyard Kipling. Kipling had joined the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) – the predecessor to the CWGC – in 1917 as its first literary adviser.

Kipling's involvement with the IWGC may have been influenced by the loss of his only son John Kipling in the 1915 Battle of Loos. John was missing presumed killed in action (his grave was only identified in 1992).

Wikipedia  
Wikimedia commons



54,896 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in battles in the Ypres Salient throughout the war who have no known grave.

It is not known whether AW Davey and JH Davey were related but it seems possible. They had different London addresses in the 1910 and 1914 lists.

### Howard Gray Downes

*Second Lieutenant 517 Field Company  
Royal Engineers,  
died March 1917, age 23*

### George Thomas Ewen MC

*Captain 1st Battalion  
Manchester Regiment  
died 8th March 1916, age 36*

Ewen is named in full in CWGC, 1910 and 1914 lists and as GT Ewen in the 1915 list. Ewen was educated at Manchester Grammar School and worked as a Barrister's clerk in the city for a number of years. He was an Original Member of the Rucksack Club when it was founded in 1902 and was elected to membership of our club in 1903 and to the Alpine Club in 1911. He organised the Rucksack Club's first Alpine Meet in 1909 and initiated the Rucksack Club Journal, editing the first edition in 1907 and each of the next four issues. Ewen is recorded in the 1910 list at an address in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. He was called to the Bar in 1913 and moved to London, his address in the 1914 list is given as Lincoln's Inn, where he practiced as a Chancery barrister. On the outbreak of war, Ewen was commissioned in the 3rd Battalion Manchester Regiment and was then



 Rucksack  
Club Archive

transferred to the 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment in France, consistent with the information in the 1915 list. Ewen was mentioned in despatches after the battle of Neuve Chapelle and was awarded the Military Cross (MC) after the second battle of Ypres in 1915. *The Alpine Club at War* cites Ewen as the first member of the Alpine Club to receive this decoration. It is likely that Ewen was also the first member of the Climbers' Club to be awarded the MC. The Manchester Regiment was then transferred to the Middle East and on 8th March 1916, Ewen was killed at Es Sinn during one of many unsuccessful attempts to relieve the city of Kut in Mesopotamia. Wounded during trench fighting, he ordered his men to leave him behind in order to save themselves. His body was not recovered. Ewen is commemorated on the Basra Memorial, near Zubayr, Iraq, one of 40,682 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Mesopotamian Campaign between 1914 and August 1921 who have no known grave. Ewen is listed on the Alpine Club war memorial.

**Edward Norman Alison Finlay,**  
Second-Lieutenant 16th (Service)  
Battalion Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's  
Own), died 4th July 1916, age 26.  
The name is given as EN Alison  
Finlay in the 1914 list and is named  
in full in CWGC. Educated at Eton  
and Balliol College, Oxford, Finlay is  
commemorated on the Loos Memorial,  
Dud Corner Cemetery, Loos-en-Gohelle,  
France, one of 20,610 British and  
Commonwealth soldiers killed in the  
battle of Loos who have no known grave.



 FRCC  
Archive

**Siegfried Wedgwood Herford**  
*Private 24th Battalion Royal Fusiliers,  
died 28th January 1916, age 24*  
The name appears in full in CWGC and  
as SW Herford in the 1914 and 1915  
lists. Without a doubt Herford's name is  
the most recognisable one in this Roll  
of Honour.


Herford was one of the pre-eminent  
climbers of his day and one of the

most significant figures in the history  
of climbing in Britain in the years  
before the war. He made a number of  
outstanding first ascents such as *Herford's  
Route* (1910, HVS 5a) on the Pagoda  
on Kinder Scout and *Herford's Crack* on  
Clogwyn y Tarw (1912, VS 4c); he is  
also credited with having invented the  
Girdle Traverse when he traversed Castle  
Naze. However he is best remembered  
for his climbs on Scafell Crag. In 1912  
he added the Girdle Traverse—described  
in the FRCC *Scafell Group* guidebook  
(1924) as '1600 feet, Exceedingly Severe  
and perhaps the best route in the Lake  
District,' now graded VS 5a. Most  
famously, in April 1914 he made the  
first ascent of Scafell's *Central Buttress*,  
possibly the single most iconic British  
rock climb of the pre-war period. The  
1924 guidebook suggests 'the expedition  
described ranks among the world's  
hardest,' now E1 5b.

Herford was elected a member of the  
FRCC in 1912 and became a member  
of the Climbers' Club in March 1914.  
Keith Treacher's *Siegfried Herford: An  
Edwardian Rock Climber* (The Ernest  
Press, 2000), Alan Hankinson's *The  
First Tigers: the early history of rock  
climbing in the Lake District* (JM Dent,  
1972) and *The Mountain Men: an Early  
History of Rock Climbing in North Wales*  
(Heinemann, 1977) contain many  
references to Herford's climbing exploits  
in the Peak District, Wales and the Lake  
District.

Immediately on the outbreak of the  
war, Herford applied for a commission  
but did not get a response from the



Stained glass commemorating Siegfried Herford,  
Outward Bound Trust, Eskdale Centre.  
 Len Smith

War Office. It is possible that, his  
German heritage, his mother was from  
Bremen, was behind the War Office's  
decision to refuse him a commission.  
Geoffrey Winthrop Young, already in  
France in August 1914, working as  
a war correspondent with *The Daily  
News*, invited Herford to join him as  
Secretary-Assistant. Herford travelled  
to France on 2nd September 1914,  
and he began driving ambulances soon  
after: on 8th November 1914, he was  
issued a certificate by the British Army

allowing him to wear a civilian Red  
Cross brassard. Subsequently he resigned  
from the Red Cross and enlisted in the  
ranks in the 2nd Sportsmen's Battalion,  
later designated the 24th Battalion Royal  
Fusiliers. Letters between Young and  
Herford suggest that he was seeking a  
transfer to the Friends Ambulance Unit  
and Young thought that FRCC and CC  
members 'in high' places would make  
it happen, but they ran out of time:  
Herford's battalion embarked for France  
in November 1915, were ordered to the  
front in January 1916. Within days,  
Herford was killed when a rifle grenade  
was fired into his trench. Herford  
is buried at Browns Road Military  
Cemetery, Festubert, France.

Although modest about his own  
achievements, Herford was well-known  
in the small and highly interconnected  
community of rock climbers and  
mountaineers in Britain. He was among  
the first members of the Climbers' Club  
and FRCC to be killed and his death  
came as a tremendous shock. The Great  
Gable war memorial bears his name  
and he is commemorated in a stained  
glass window commissioned by his  
friend, journalist and author Charles  
Edward Montague, and made by the  
noted Arts and Crafts designer Caroline  
Townsend. The window was installed at  
Platt (Unitarian) Chapel, Manchester  
in 1919. When the small congregation  
gave up Platt Chapel, funds were raised  
to rescue the window and in 1976 it  
was transferred to the Outward Bound  
Trust, Eskdale Centre where it remains  
to this day.





Imperial War Museums

### Terence Hickman

*Lieutenant Prince of Wales's 2nd/7th Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians), died 26th June 1916, age 28*

The name is as it appears in the 1914, 1915 lists and CWGC. Hickman was educated at King's College, Cambridge. Geoffrey Winthrop Young named him as a 'good friend of so many mountaineers,' in his last book, *The Grace of Forgetting* (Country Life, 1953) and as one of those he most greatly missed. Hickman was reported wounded and missing in action, presumed killed, on 26th June 1916, and is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium.

### Ernest Lawrence Julian

*Lieutenant 'D' Company 2nd Battalion 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, died 8th August 1915, age 36*

Named Ernest L Julian in the 1914 list and named in full in CWGC. The 1914 list gives a Dublin address. Julian was educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Dublin. He was an accomplished oarsman, elected captain of the



Imperial War Museums

Dublin University Rowing Club in 1901, competing with Trinity College at Henley Royal Regatta in 1900 and 1901. Julian coached Trinity College to victory in the Thames Cup at Henley in 1903. In 1909 Julian was appointed Reid Professor of Law at Dublin University. He enlisted in August 1914, and was one of two elected officers in the company. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers sailed to Holyhead in April 1915, then the Dardanelles in June 1915. They landed at Sulva Bay on 7th August 1915. Julian was shot leading an attack on Chocolate Hill that day. He was transferred to Hospital Ship *Valdivia* and died the following day. He was buried at sea and is commemorated on the Helles Memorial, Sedd el Bahr, Turkey, on the tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula overlooking the Dardanelles, one of 20,956 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Gallipoli Campaign who have no known grave. He is also commemorated at Trinity College, the Barristers' Memorial and at St Anne's Church, Dublin.



Imperial War Museums

### Nigel Cornwallis Madan

*Lieutenant King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster), died 2nd March 1916, age 27*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. Madan is listed in the 1914 and 1915 lists. He was educated at Eton and at Christ Church, Oxford. Hankinson's *The Mountain Men* mentions Madan as one of four undergraduates from Oxford University who made the first ascent of *Central Ridge* (VD) on Creigiau Gleision in 1911 and that in 1913 Nigel and his brother Geoffrey attended Geoffrey Winthrop Young's Easter Meet at Penny-Pass. Madan is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium.

### Lehmann James Oppenheimer

*Lieutenant 2nd Battalion 23rd County of London Regiment, died 8th November 1916, age 48*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists include the name LJ Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was an Original Member



Rucksack Club Archive

of the FRCC and a Climbers' Club member (elected 1899). Affectionately known as 'Opp', he was a sculptor and mosaic-maker, he wrote *Heart of Lakeland* (facsimile edition, The Ernest Press, 1988), an account of early rock-climbing in the Lake District. He was really too old for active service but amended his age, enlisting as a Private in 1915, 'in part to wipe out the ignominy of inheriting a German name,' quoted in Hankinson's *The First Tigers*. Oppenheimer's son was an officer in the same battalion (Artists' Rifles). He was soon gazetted Second-Lieutenant in 1915 and Lieutenant in 1916. He died on 8th November 1916, having been gassed, and is buried at Boulogne Eastern Cemetery. Hankinson's *The First Tigers* and *The Mountain Men* give accounts of Oppenheimer's climbs in the Lake District and North Wales, his decision to enlist and subsequent death.

The Artists' Rifles, in which a number of those named here served, was a Territorial Army unit primarily designated as a battalion for training officers.



Imperial War Museums

### Frank Shakespeare Pearson

*Lieutenant-Colonel, Royal Army Service Corps, died 5th September 1916, age 50*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists give the name Frank S Pearson. Pearson is perhaps the highest-ranking member of our club to die during the war. He suffered concussion after falling from his horse at Wareham, Dorset and died soon after. Pearson is buried at Wareham Cemetery.



Gouzeaucourt New British Cemetery  
Wikimedia

### James Luther Pitcher

*Corporal Royal Sussex Regiment, died 6th February 1918, age 40*

James L. Pitcher in the 1914 list and named in full in CWGC. Pitcher is buried at Gouzeaucourt New British Cemetery, France.

### John Russell Scott,

*Private Machine Gun Corps, died 9th September 1917*

The name is given as it appears in the 1910 and 1914 lists. CWGC returns a single JR Scott. Scott is buried at Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, Belgium.

### Sidney Skinner

*Private London Regiment, died 1st July 1916*

This name appears in full in CWGC, 1910 and 1914 lists. Skinner is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, France, one of 73,367 British and Commonwealth soldiers that fell during the battle of the Somme between July and November 1916 and who have no known grave.

### William Henry Smithard

*Private North Staffordshire Regiment, died 28th May 1917, age 24*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910 and 1914 lists include the name William Smithard. Smithard is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, France.

### Frederick Charles Starkey

*Petty Officer Stoker Royal Navy, died 29th October 1918, age 30*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910 and 1914 lists include the name FC Starkey. Starkey is buried in the Gibraltar (North Front) Cemetery.





Alpine Club Archive

**Roger Eykyn Thompson**  
*Captain 2nd Battalion Hampshire Regiment, died 12th April 1918, age 40*  
The name is given as it appears in CWGC. The 1910 and 1914 lists include the name RE Thompson and the 1915 list Roger E. Thompson. He was killed in action at Ploegsteert during desperate fighting in Haig's 'backs to the wall' defence against the Ludendorff Offensive. Thompson is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial, Belgium: one of 11,367 Commonwealth soldiers with no known grave, and is named on the Alpine Club war memorial..

His younger brother, Arnold Bosanquet Thompson, Captain Royal Army Medical Corps, had been killed earlier in the war, age 29, on 25th December 1915. He is buried at Lancashire Landing Cemetery on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Both are commemorated on a memorial plaque in St. Mary's Church, Kippington, near Sevenoaks, Kent.

#### Frank Samuel Young

*Private Northamptonshire Regiment, died 10th July 1917*

The name is given as it appears in CWGC; the 1910 and 1914 lists include the name FS Young. Young is buried at Coxyde Military Cemetery, Belgium.

#### Likely casualties

A further three names in the 1910 and 1914 lists also return a single match in the CWGC database. However, these do not provide an equally exact match as those above as detail in the way the names are given and corroborating evidence is lacking. Thus confidence in the following names is less than those named above, but these are still considered likely—but not certainly—to be the same individuals. They are:

#### Benjamin Benham

*Lance Corporal Durham Light Infantry, died 13th February 1919*

The name is given in CWGC. The 1914 list includes the name B Benham.

#### AH Binns

*Chief Motor Mechanic R N Volunteer Reserve, died 15th December 1918*

The name is given as it appears in the 1910 and 1914 lists. CWGC returns a single A Binns.

#### FH Neville

*Private King's Shropshire Light Infantry, died 6th January 1917*

A single FH Neville appears in CWGC, 1910 and 1914 lists.

#### Possible casualties

There are a further thirty-seven names in the 1910, 1914 and 1915 lists which do not appear in post-war membership lists that also match names of First World War dead listed in the CWGC database. Some return just two or three matches, others return dozens or in some cases hundreds of matches. It is unclear whether any of the thirty-seven individuals are among those listed in the CWGC database, but it is possible that some will be the same person. Anyone who had been elected to membership of the club after the 1914 list was published and who subsequently lost their life during the war will not be recorded anywhere; the actual number of members killed could possibly be higher. Depending on the accuracy of the research to date, somewhere between twenty and sixty members of the Climbers' Club could have lost their lives, between nine and twenty-six per cent of the club's members in the 1914 list.

The foregoing list of members' names is at best an indication of the magnitude of suffering caused by the war within a small community with a shared interest. Pip Hopkinson's *Brief History of the Climbers' Club* (available in the Information area of the club website) suggests the losses were so great that consideration was given to dissolving the club. If so, a war memorial and Roll of Honour would have been irrelevant. Perhaps the war memorials and Roll of Honour of the Alpine Club and FRCC which already included a number of

our members was considered sufficient. In the end, the club did not disband. No longer so reliant on members being drawn from the Alpine Club as in the past, and with so many of its younger members killed, the club looked to find new members among the mountaineering clubs of Oxford and Cambridge University, the only two universities with mountaineering clubs at the time. Two newer members, Raymond Greene (brother of the novelist, Graham) and Herbert Carr identified Helyg as a base for the club in north Wales. The opening of the club's first hut on 31st October 1925 was perhaps the most important event in re-establishing the club after the war, giving it a base from which to grow and develop. For many older members, an entire generation of their brightest and best friends had been obliterated or so utterly destroyed by the experience of war that nothing would ever be the same again.

The club honours the memory of all those named above.



... an entire generation of their brightest and best friends  
had been obliterated or so utterly destroyed by the experience of war ...  
nothing would ever be the same again.

#### Acknowledgement

The author would like to express thanks to members of the Climbers' Club, Alpine Club, Rucksack Club and Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District Ltd who have helped the research for this article by providing information from their club archives and giving consent for images to be published here. Without this assistance the article would contain a number of unforgivable errors and misattributions. The author also gives particular thanks David Medcalf for proof-reading several versions of the article and making a number of corrections and suggestions to improve it. Undoubtedly many errors and omissions remain which are the author's responsibility alone.





# The Chimney

*Sometimes you just can't read the move, it's easy according to the guide, you should just cruise up it. But no matter how hard you try, you just can't see it, frustration. You swap leads and your partner almost immediately sees the solution, double frustration. An ascent of the Vinatzer/Messner VI+/VII-, South face of the Marmolada, a route with a particularly stubborn Grade 4 chimney.*

By Simon Laker

I wonder what he was thinking, Mister Vinatzer, as he approached the red scar of his eponymous extravaganza.

For us it was dark, the scar a deep burgundy, the hour before dawn a shuffling uncertainty.

Hundreds of metres, an obvious line, but intricate, serious.

Beautiful cracks, some littered with tat, a shame, but never tamed.

A balancy groove on impeccable fels, an egyptian on dimples, toes tethered to wrinkles.

Not sure how many hours, or lengths of the rope, we arrived at the Chimney, mist swirling like smoke.

It looked nothing special, even gentle, a chance to relax after so many hard cracks.

My lead, no problem.

Mister Vinatzer wouldn't have waited, just stepped forward, not hesitated.

I moved in but came to a stop, squirmed and fidgeted, then utterly shocked.

Senses, after thousands of feet, came to focus on a place, there, in my face.

The rock by my nose was speckled in yellow, a tiny red spider lost in a meadow.

Panic, couldn't move, just stuck, glued.

I reached for a hold barely in view but the rock on my back shifted, the glue almost lifted.

No solution, couldn't find one.

An old injured shoulder now started to throb, arm jammed, neck crooked.

A glance further up but all I could see, were the walls narrowing, laughing at me.

But there, a peg!

Been there forever, maybe Vinatzer's.

Couldn't touch, couldn't reach, not even possible to cheat.

Body and head stuck tight, only eyes could move and that to the right.

There in the depths, in the black pit of a crevice, a chockstone well hidden, relief, protection.

A shout from below, time moving on, need to be out.

Inevitably they gave up; my shoulder, a leg and even my head, slid with a shout.

I didn't go far, but enough to gain movement, popped out of prison, retreated, beaten.

Back to the belay, baton passed on.

Pierre stepped up, attempted the reach, too precarious, came back a few feet.

Then something remarkable, he turned on his back, a wiggle, a squirm, and he passed my rock patch.

It was going to happen, the canny old lad, a flick to his back, just like that.

I suspect Mister Vinatzer, watching my effort, suppressed a little chuckle as Pete solved the puzzle.

The rest was superb, back to sixes and sevens followed by Messner's direct, a bit misty but heaven.

Thousands of feet, one of the best, but the memory most vivid?

Speckled by lichen, golden and brown, a miniature world far from the ground.

Home to a spider I knew for a while.

It's funny he picked the squeezey old chimney.

Then again, perhaps he knew, the innocent fissure's secret.

Not easy to read, by some not at all, Vinatzer's conundrum awaits the next call.



# Down *The Drain* (Very Severe)

*St Bees Head lies just to the south of Whitehaven and juts out into the Irish Sea. It is a big crag which enjoyed a thankfully short-lived burst of popularity at the start of the 70s before being reclaimed by the flora and fauna. It is now owned by the RSPB. The rock near sea level is reasonably solid and offers some sport climbing and bouldering. Once above the sea washed area the rock is dire, soft, loose, blocky and vegetated, an accident waiting to happen.*

By Bob (RK) Allen

with some additional reminiscences by Trevor Langhorne



## Night Rescue Drama at St Bees

The treacherous coastline stretching from Fleswick Bay to St. Bees was the scene of a dramatic rescue on Sunday night when rescuers used flares and hand search-lights as they carried an injured climber to safety. The twelve strong team of rescuers worked in relays to carry 25 year-old Alan Greig, of Warwick Road, Carlisle, the 1.5 miles to St Bees where an ambulance was waiting on the sand. Yesterday his condition in the West Cumberland hospital was reported to be 'satisfactory'.

Late on Sunday afternoon, Mr Greig was leading a party of four Carlisle climbers on the cliffs when he fell about 80 feet down a climb known as *The Drain* on to rocks below. Joint leader of Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team Mr Mike Skinsley said on Monday: 'His fall was broken by the running safety line he was tied to'.

### Swam Ashore

An immediate rescue operation was mounted by Coastguards from Workington and Whitehaven, Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team and Whitehaven Police, the latter keeping radio

contact with the rescuers from a base at St Bees. St Bees inshore rescue boat, crewed by cox, Mr Alec Kilpatrick, and Mr Richard Davies, was also launched. Although unable to move in close to the shore because of the rocks, Mr Davies dived from the boat and swam ashore to help the other rescuers with the injured climber. It was then that the two-hour long struggle back to St Bees began.

### Fortunate

A coastguard spokesman said the Mr Greig was fortunate to escape serious injury. Regarding the rescue, he commented: 'If the rescue boat could have moved in things would have been much more simple. But the heavy swell and the sharp rocks made this impossible. As things were, it was a very difficult job. Some of the rocks there look like pebbles from the cliff top, but when you get down to them they are as big as houses. We put the man on to a stretcher and scrambled over the rocks to St Bees. It was a case of pulling, lifting and lowering for a mile and a half' he said.

Jeez, how many ciggies have I left? He finished his own ages ago and started on Mel's, next he will be after mine. Our respective consumption at first followed an arithmetic progression, I got one, he got two, but now it's become a geometric one, he smokes four for each one I puff. Soon it will be exponential, and we will exhaust our supplies before new ones arrive, I'm going cold turkey at the prospect. But he does look proper poorly now. Imagine a slowly deflating climber shaped balloon, chameleon colourful; pink straight after the accident, followed by really pale leading to ashen grey. 'I'm cold' he moans. I'm bloody freezing, he's under all the spare jumpers and duvet jackets. Every time I snuggle up to try and warm him up (and get under the duvets) he complains 'Stop fidgeting', as if.

I don't know how long ago it is since Mel and Trevor set off back to St Bees to raise the alarm and bring back more fags. It took us about one and half hours to traverse the foreshore from St Bees car park to here at the South Head but the tide was right out then. We could avoid a lot of the awkward, slimy, sea weed covered boulders. Now the sea is creeping, slowly but surely, towards the base of the cliffs covering the easy options. So that's at least four hours to ration his smokes before help arrives. This time of year, darkness arrives by seven. Serious stuff for a very broken climber.

The rock climbing at St Bees Head was developed and advertised by the West Cumbrian Marras. Whose judgements as to the quality of the climbs and stability of the red sandstone rock was, I strongly suspect, influenced by their desire for other climbers to 'enjoy' their creations.

A 'Bonners' quip 'there will be room for thousands of great climbs between the South Head and the light house'. This, together with an article in Rocksport including some deceptively attractive photographs, piqued our interest. Could this be Lakeland's answer to Gogarth?

What could go wrong? Equipped with the Marra's small interim guide, Trevor, Mel, Greigy and myself left Carlisle early one Sunday morning aboard Mel's beat up Moggie 1000 van; destination St Bees.

It was during the foreshore approach that the appalling nature of the rock and cliffs became glaringly apparent, but we ventured forth with serendipity, convincing ourselves things would improve when we finally arrived beneath the described routes. Hope is an ephemeral thing. It just got scarier as we approached St Bees South Head. As well as being huge, over 300 feet high, the cliffs consisted of sand, sand masquerading as rock, and vertical grass. All patrolled by mean looking sea birds. Youthful (by geological standards) Permo-Triassic sandstone is never going to cut it as a great medium for rock climbing. Baked in a pressure cooker inside a very hot oven over geological epochs and you may get Gogarth quality Quartzite.

On arrival at the gearing up spot we selected routes suitable for each teams' abilities. Greigy and Mel would attempt the *The Drain* (VS). Trevor and I would try a large and apparently unclimbed chimney/corner crack system further along the cliff. For our style of ascent Trevor and I chose that age-old climbers' game of 'alternate attempts'. This is best played between two climbers of equal (poor) ability and involves pushing each other into the (reluctant) lead with the 'your go' gambit. The leader climbs up with the safety of a top rope to highest runner, on arrival at said runner, inserts a slightly higher piece of gear followed by inconsequential pawing about, maybe a wobble or two, retreat, announcing to partner 'your go' and repeat.

To be honest where the big waves of winter storms had washed the sandstone it was surprisingly pleasant to climb, but as height was gained it became deeply unpleasant and intimidating with insecure gear placements and ball bearing friction.

We must have played a couple of rounds of 'alter-



St Bees exploration in the early 70s. Climber Colin Read.  
© Phil Tinning



St Bees '71, Duncan Overton on *Frustration*.  
© Ron Kenyon





South Head, St Bees,  
from Fleswick Bay.  
Creative Commons

nate attempts' when the sound of substantial rock fall reverberated from the direction of *The Drain*. Quickly followed by the appearance of a very agitated Mel with the news that 'Alan's fallen off and is in bad way'. Our Sunday pastime had become a grim struggle with the possibility of ending in a friend's death.

At the accident site Greigy (Alan) was half lying/sitting on the rock platform at the cliff base where he had landed after his fall. A complete ledge system had collapsed under his weight and he had fallen about 80 feet. Fortunately, a runner had held but due to the elastic extension of the nylon rope he had hit the ground forcefully on the bounce.

We stood over his prone body trying to come up with a plan. First, we tried to place some insulation under him in the form of our spare jumpers and move his legs into a less awkward position, but the casualty objected strongly. Next, we had a ciggy. It was decided I was to remain as nurse whilst Mel and Trevor hot footed it back to St Bees to summon help. As part of my apprenticeship I had done a pretty thorough first aid course but nothing in it prepared me for this. My therapy consisted of lighting and passing ciggies to the casualty, making inane reassurances and wandering off to see if help was arriving.

An RNLI RIB suddenly appears, I wave frantically but it zooms past, stops, turns and returns more slowly. They spot me and come inshore but the wave structure and submerged rocks mean they can't get too close to the shore. Suddenly a figure jumps from the boat into the water and starts swimming toward us. The waves batter him against the rocks but he has no option but to struggle on, at least the waves are pushing him into shallower water. I worry about the crushing injuries being suffered by his ciggy supplies. Finally, he makes the beach and, using a line attached to the boat, he hauls ashore a bag of stuff. Morphine for the casualty, I get a cup of tea but no ciggies. October evening darkness is

settling in now. More boats arrive off shore. As the light fades Mel and Trevor return accompanied by members of the Wasdale rescue team, at last limitless supplies of ciggies.

The prevailing mood changes from my hopeless anxiety to a competent 'let's get this casualty rescued'. As more 'chiefs' arrive the assembled blue-light services vied with one another to imagine the daftest possible plan for Alan's evacuation; 'tie a rope to the RIB, pull it tight and the casualty can walk out with it as a hand rail'. But he has two broken legs. Next, 'Tie a rope around casualty and we will pull him aboard the RIB'. After watching the struggle of the initial uninjured rescuer getting ashore this would just add 'drowning' to whatever else was on Alan's death certificate. Next, 'We can lower a rope from the top of South Head and haul him up'. Do you have a 600 foot long rope, 'no, but I think I know a man in Sellafield who does'. So finally, we arrive at a stretcher carry back along the foreshore in the black dark into an incoming tide. There was one problem with this plan, the MRT members had come directly from their West Cumbrian homes, but the rescue gear was kept at Wasdale Head and had yet to arrive!

Eventually the rescue commences, these events happened before head torches had a functional design. The rescue team have heavy miners' ones supplemented with handheld torches. These worked fine providing illumination on an individual basis or to provide wide area lighting. But the stretcher together with eight stumbling stretcher bearers cast many deep shadows on the treacherous terrain of the foreshore. A solution was found in lighting the scene from a distance and gradually the stretcher bearers' night vision improved so the stumbles became less frequent. We were making slow but steady progress. Unknown to us news of the rescue had become national (on a slow news Sunday evening). More volunteers were arriving at the scene. In an ef-

fort to be helpful they would launch parachute flares skyward which not only destroyed any accumulated reserves of night vision but led to us deserting the casualty when the on-shore wind brought the flare to land within his close proximity. As we neared St Bees the terrain became easier and the carrying turns shorter. Suddenly night turned to day, some huge search lights had been found and mounted in a row along St Bees sea front. Their light also revealed the crowds of onlookers that had come to witness the return of the casualty (who was comfortably numb in the arms of mistress morphine).

The night ended in the wee small hours with a visit to see Greigy in his hospital bed. He was looking tired but pain free and his injury tally suggested his indomitable will could fix them in time.

I took the Monday off work and when confronted as to reason for my absence could pull out the Whitehaven News, and point out the headline 'Night Rescue Drama at St Bees' and say 'I was there'.

#### Aftermath—the following Thursday

Along with a large number of other members of the sixth-form I was summoned to see the Head. As we milled around wondering why we were there the door of his study burst open and The Pecker (so called because of the way his head bobbed when he spoke) emerged, in full academic robes. A red-flush rose up his face, we recognised the sign, things were serious, when the colour reached his forehead the sulphuric acid burn scar on it started to throb like a Belisha Beacon. (The Head was a former Chemistry teacher who subjected thousands of young minds to years of confusion and despair by being the joint author of the textbook General School Chemistry). The inevitable explosion followed, finishing with the statement 'You are all expelled, leave the building immediately'. We trailed off, disconsolately, in little groups. I can't remember whose idea it

was but, after a whip round for loose change, three short phone-calls were made—one each to the news desks at the Evening News & Star, BBC Look North and Border TV; the message being "The Headmaster at Trinity School has just expelled half of the sixth-form". Inevitably the school's phone switchboard went into meltdown and the press turned up mob-handed. The tables were now turned and later that day the senior staff scurried around the town delivering letters saying that it had been a terrible misunderstanding, that all had been forgiven and asking us to come back to school in the morning. Career plans were back on track.

Why the fuss and what has it to do with the rescue? Wednesday afternoon was either sports or a guest speaker to broaden our horizons; on that particular Wednesday the topic was 'The Permissive Society' and the speaker was a well known local whose views made those of Mary Whitehouse look positively liberal. Unsurprisingly this didn't appeal to a group of 17 year olds who were keen on joining The Permissive Society at the earliest possible opportunity. Over half the sixth form voted with their feet much to the embarrassment of the school.

Once again we were assembled in the corridor outside of the Head's Study. He stepped out of the room looking slightly sheepish, a reversal of the roles of the previous day. He looked around and for some reason I became the focus of his attention, 'and you Langhorne, where were you on Wednesday afternoon?' I replied, 'Well sir, as you know, Mr Greig (I had known Alan for a couple of years and he had recently joined the teaching staff at my school) had a climbing accident last weekend down at St Bees and is stuck in Whitehaven Hospital with no friends close by so I hitch-hiked out to see him'. He was speechless as a titter of laughter spread through the assembled masses; we were all dismissed to our lessons as the Head slipped back into the security of his study.



# A Trip in the Dark

*Things don't always go to plan but lessons can always be learned from the rare occasions when the unexpected happens. This tale relates to an accident while out fell running but it is easy to imagine a similar incident happening on the crag.*

By Alan Stone

All: Stone collection



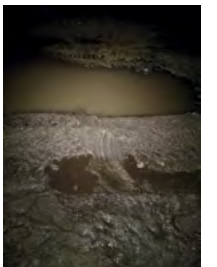
It was a standard Tuesday night run up a mountain in South Wales in the darkness of winter. The ground was wet following recent rain and there was a lot of standing water around on the tracks. There was no wind or rain and the air temperature was about seven degrees. I had gone with the faster group as I felt I'd been running well following a recent increase in training. I was preparing for the Cape Wrath Ultra in May: 400km over eight days. We had done all of the uphill and had just started the return along the top of the ridge heading back towards the downhill and the cars. We were on a muddy, rutted track with puddles in the ruts. I was mostly running on the ridges between the ruts to avoid any unseen dangers and to prevent getting too wet and cold. My foot slipped suddenly and it shot sideways into one of the puddles. I felt it suddenly stop and then a sudden snapping sensation and sounds of tearing shooting up my leg as I plunged forward onto my outstretched arms. I juddered to a halt on my front in the track and rolled onto my back to look at the damage. What I saw was not a pretty sight. My foot was pointing fifty degrees out to the side in a very unnatural shape. I knew immediately from my years working in casualty, that this was a fracture-dislocation and is one of the more serious ankle injuries. I could see the others now disappearing into the distance and didn't want to be left alone so shouted for help. Fortunately, they heard me and made their way back to me to see what had happened.

It was suggested that they carry me off the mountain down to the cars over 3km away as the crow flies. My foot was flopping around every time it moved and I knew this wasn't going to be an option. I knew it was going to require mountain rescue and an ambulance at the very least, and possibly a helicopter, to get me off the mountain. After some discussion Claire dialled 999 and called for help. The next job was telling them where we were.

Easier said than done as there is a plethora of tracks in that part of the woods. I have an app on my phone called OS Locate which gives you your coordinates and we were able to give them those, as well as general directions from the Gethin Park Woods main entrance. While we were waiting for the cavalry to arrive there were several tasks that could and should be achieved. My memory is a bit hazy as to the exact sequence but the most important in my mind was getting my foot straight. My casualty training had taught me that you try to reduce this type fracture as quickly as possible before the nerve and blood supply to the foot is irreparably damaged. There is not much finesse to this as it largely consists of grabbing the foot and pulling in the same direction as the leg is pointing. I saw Martyn ahead of me and asked him to do it. A worried expression came over his face and he looked, quite rightly, hesitant. I realised that Claire was standing next to me and as a qualified doctor couldn't think of anyone better to do it. She grabbed my foot firmly and I braced, anticipating shed loads of pain. Much to my surprise the foot came straight relatively easily with lots of grating and twanging with vibration shooting up the bones in my leg—but no pain. I presume this was partly because I was on an adrenaline and endorphin fuelled high, but also because the bruising and swelling you expect around a fracture had not yet occurred. The leg was straight within 3 minutes of the original injury. I asked Ake to hold my leg in position, as it still felt unstable and wobbly on the end of my leg, while I put on hat, gloves, leggings (on my good leg) and waterproof top.

I was aware of the cold and was starting to shiver now I was no longer moving. I suspect this was largely a nervous reaction rather than just the cold. Martyn, Matt and Marcus then went down to the cars to get warmer clothing and also to be in a position to guide the rescuers when they arrived. Claire and Martyn had also lent me spare

... and then a sudden snapping sensation and sounds of tearing shooting up my leg as I plunged forward onto my outstretched arms.



The scene of the slip.

Opposite: the cavalry arrives.



tops to add to the layers keeping me from going hypothermic. I also moved away from the puddle and sat on my bum bag to try and conserve as much heat as possible. Matt and Martyn returned with more warm clothes and wrapped me up as much as possible. After what seemed an age Marcus reappeared with two ambulance-men in tow. Richie and Mark were superb and had gone above and beyond the call of duty. They had managed to get the night warden of the park to open the gate and had driven the ambulance along the gravel forestry tracks to about a kilometre from where I was. My foot was put in a gutter splint and I was lifted on to the scoop stretcher. Between Martyn, Claire, Marcus, Matt, Ake and the ambulance-men, Mark and Richie, they carried me off the mountain and down to the waiting ambulance. I never found out if mountain rescue had been called or whether they were waiting for the ambulance crew assessment.

As you can imagine this took time, despite an immediate response from my friends, an immediate call to the ambulance, a fast recognition of my position and a quick allocation of the crew to me, it was three hours from the original injury to my arrival in casualty at Prince Charles hospital. Realistically I don't think we could have done it much quicker.

The X-ray picture taken in hospital shows the excellent position Claire had got the fracture into. If you look closely, in addition to the obvious fracture on the shaft of the fibula you can see that the talus has shifted to the right and gaps have opened up between the talus and tibia on the inner side of the ankle and between the fibula and tibia above the talus. This is an unstable fracture as all the ligaments holding the ankle joint together have snapped.

So, what are the lessons to be learnt apart from not going out running on dark nights in winter up muddy hills? That isn't going to happen, so what can we learn? Firstly, some things went well, I al-

most always carry a bum bag with a first aid kit and full body cover on me nowadays. This was invaluable on the night in preventing me getting cold. If it had been raining and windy it would probably have prevented my getting hypothermia. The first aid kit was useless for this major injury and didn't make the difference between getting off the mountain unaided and needing rescue. They are not designed for this purpose. I was going to need rescue anyway. Having a fully charged mobile is essential. Knowing my position was vital and the OS Locate app is a useful tool for that. The What3Words app would be a good alternative and possibly easier to use. If running alone then a live tracking app, such as Buddy Beacon on ViewRanger (subscription required), on your phone could be a lifesaver, but remember that the app can affect battery life in the cold. Having a good group of people to run with was also really important. If there had just been two of us then the whole saga would have become more difficult. It would almost certainly have meant the casualty (me) being left alone while help was sought. If I had been alone in that location, I would probably have still been okay as there was good mobile phone signal. If I had been alone in an area without a signal, then I might well not be here now. By the time anyone had realised I was missing and sent out search parties and they had found me then I would probably have been dead from hypothermia. A sobering thought.

With immeasurable thanks to Martyn, Matt, Claire, Ake and Marcus. I owe a huge debt that I can never repay.



OS Locate and What 3 Words - useful smart phone apps for anyone out on the hills.



# OBITUARIES

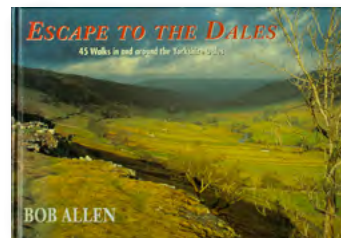
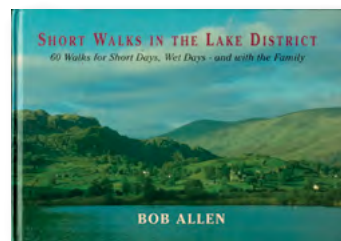
- BOB (RF) ALLEN
- AL ALVAREZ
- DAVE AMOS
- TERRY BOLGER
- RICHARD BOND
- RICHARD BROOKE
- JOE BROWN
- SMILER CUTHBERTSON
- TOM DOLDON
- WALTER DOWLEN
- AL EVANS
- DAVE GREGORY
- PIP HOPKINSON
- IAN HOWELL
- SIR JOHNNY JOHNSON
- JOHN MALLINSON
- IAN McMORRIN
- DEE DE MENGEL
- ROGER ORGILL
- ROGER PHILLIPS
- REG PILLINGER
- RICHARD REYNOLDS
- ROGER SALISBURY
- JOHN TEMPLE
- MARK VALLANCE
- NICK RUSSELL *ADDENDUM TO CCJ128*





## Robert Fenwick Allen

1936 - 2018



Bob was a man for all seasons, a steady rock-climber, a bold and accomplished ice-man and an experienced all-round mountaineer; moreover, he was a talented musician, a landscape artist, a successful businessman and a well-known author of a best-selling series of walking guides covering Snowdonia, the Yorkshire Dales and, most extensively, his second home, the English Lake District.

Brought up in the suburbs of north Manchester he took to exploring the crags of the Peak District with his future wife Marjorie Fairclough. Initially equipped with his mother's washing line (I am reliably informed) they survived early forays on Yellowlacks (since blown up by the local farmer), Windgather and the Roaches. Further experience was gained in the Lake District, North Wales and Scotland, but National Service in Germany and Korea, and reading for a history degree at Cambridge interrupted climbing for several years.

After graduation Bob and Marjorie moved north and their climbing centred on the Lake District, North Wales and Scotland with annual vacations spent in the Alps where they did such climbs as the *Traverse of the Meije* and the *North Face of the Tour Ronde*. Bob made many rock climbs in the HVS/E1 category but really came into his own on steep Scottish ice where he climbed classics

such as *Point Five* and *Zero* gullies with relatively primitive ice tools.

In the early 60s he joined the Gritstone Club, through which he met Reg Atkins, who had been at school with Trevor Jones (*Obituary CCJ No. 115 1996*). Trevor was a very experienced and enthusiastic rock-climber and mountaineer who had climbed in the Alps and in the Himalayas (members of a certain age will remember him fondly or otherwise). Bob had many attributes that appealed to Trevor, not least of which was a company car, and they became regular partners both in the UK and in the Alps. Trevor was a member of the Alpine Climbing Group and was determined to maintain his status as a full member by making at least one significant alpine ascent each summer.

They formed an unlikely team; Trevor was notorious for his absent mindedness and chaotic preparations for any climb, whereas Bob was meticulous in all things, frequently customising mountaineering equipment and garments to meet his needs. Despite this difference, they accumulated a very respectable list of ascents in a few years, always on the short holidays available to Bob. An early success was on the *North-West Pillar of Piz Cengalo*. The somewhat out-dated *Alpine Club guide to Bernina and Bregalia* states 'Nowadays it is one of the most desirable objectives in the Bondasca valley' but actually it no longer exists as a climb following a recent monstrous rockfall. On a visit to the Écrins massif along with Derek Walker and Ian Roper they made the first British ascent of the

*Gervasutti Route* up the SSE ridge of the Pic Gaspard. On a lightning visit to Chamonix they made a one-day ascent of the *Frendo Spur* and later they made several climbs in Central Switzerland, including the classic *Niederman Route* on the Graue Wand in Switzerland. Climbing with other partners he made ascents of the *Cassin* route on the Piz Badile and the *North-East Face of the Kingspitz* in the Engelhorn.

In 1996 he organised a highly successful Himalayan trip to the Khumbu region with a group of friends (the average age of the party was almost 60) and with the Ladakhi Chewang Motup as Sirdar. Four months before they were due to leave he had a coronary by-pass operation and, when the artery collapsed, this was followed by the insertion of a stent. Despite this, he and most of the team trekked to Kala Patthar, making an ascent of *Island Peak* (6189m) on the way.

Bob served on the Climbers' Club Publications Committee in the early 70s, followed by a stint on the Main Committee. He was elected President of the Club in 1998 and took on the task begun by his predecessor Mark Vallance, that of finding a property in the Fort William area that would serve the Club as its hut in Scotland. After much searching and various, ultimately futile, negotiations, a conveniently situated bungalow, 'Riasg', in Roy Bridge was purchased. An article about this challenge, *The Struggle for Riasg*, based on Bob's own writings, appears in this Journal. On the twentieth anniversary

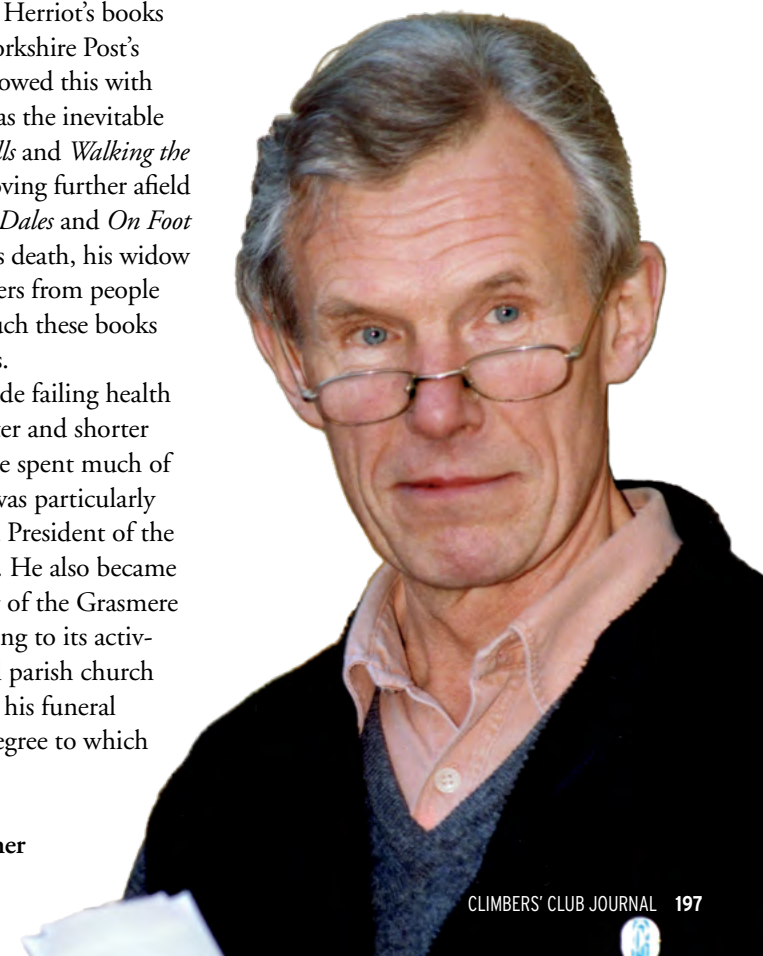
of the acquisition, the Club is planning to recognise the role of both Presidents by placing a plaque in the hut. Bob was also the President who had to deal with a stressful problem over copyright in the *Centenary Journal* which took some time to resolve. The papers are now in the Club Archive.

Bob was always a keen walker and early retirement from the carpet trade gave him the time to explore the Lake District thoroughly. *On High Lakeland Fells*, his first guidebook covering both walks and scrambles, illustrated with his own sketches and photographs, sold so well that it displaced James Herriot's books from the top of The Yorkshire Post's best-sellers list. He followed this with more best-sellers such as the inevitable *On Lower Lakeland Fells* and *Walking the Ridges of Lakeland*. Moving further afield he added *Escape to the Dales* and *On Foot in Snowdonia*. After his death, his widow Lin received many letters from people informing her how much these books had changed their lives.

During the last decade failing health restricted Bob to shorter and shorter days on the fells and he spent much of his time painting; he was particularly proud of being elected President of the Ambleside Art Society. He also became a well-known member of the Grasmere community contributing to its activities. The fact the local parish church was more than full for his funeral service indicates the degree to which he will be missed.

By Michael G Mortimer

A version of this obituary also appeared in the 2019 *Alpine Journal* and is reproduced by permission of the AJ Editor)





## Al Alvarez

1929 - 2019

Al Alvarez was that rare person, a genuine intellectual. But his persona was rather that of the gentle gun-slinger rather than that of the stuffy Oxbridge academic, due no doubt to time spent on the far side of the 'Pond'. By profession he was a man-of-letters, a poet, an essayist, an author, a novelist and a critic, by inclination a rock climber, a poker player and a lover of classical music. Al was a gregarious gentle guy who enjoyed life, he was stimulating company but was laid-back when appropriate. He looked the part too, with his high forehead, broken nose, moustache, neat beard and kindly eyes.

Al was a popular figure in sixties and seventies climbing circles, frequently seen at Ynys Ettws, the Count House or Harrison's Rocks, often in company with his Hampstead neighbour and close chum, Ian McNaught-Davis. They shared a sense of humour, each a foil for the other; indeed in their younger, wilder days both owned white Mini-Coopers and it was said that on Welsh mountain roads they would delight in approaching from opposite directions to pass the other on the wrong side. Certainly Al enjoyed fast driving and owned a sequence of performance motors including a Cooper Climax—giving rise to the quip among his literary friends 'Have you seen Al's climax?'—and then an E-Type Jaguar before family responsibilities demanded

less exuberant if still classy transport.

He was proud of being—'a Londoner heart and soul if not quite an Englishman' for his ancestors, Sephardic Jews from Spain, had settled in London a mere four centuries before. Born in 1929 into a well-heeled family living in Hampstead, he was reared by a strict nanny before being sent off to school at Oundle, which he hated. Initially a weedy boy with a damaged leg and a rebellious nature, he learned to box and play good rugby and was taken on his first rock climb. Just missing wartime conscription, Al went up to Oxford to read English. He took a rare First, joined the Climbers' Club and became a Research Fellow, though his peers in the staid fields of poetry and literary criticism rather resented his fresh ideas and disdain for convention.

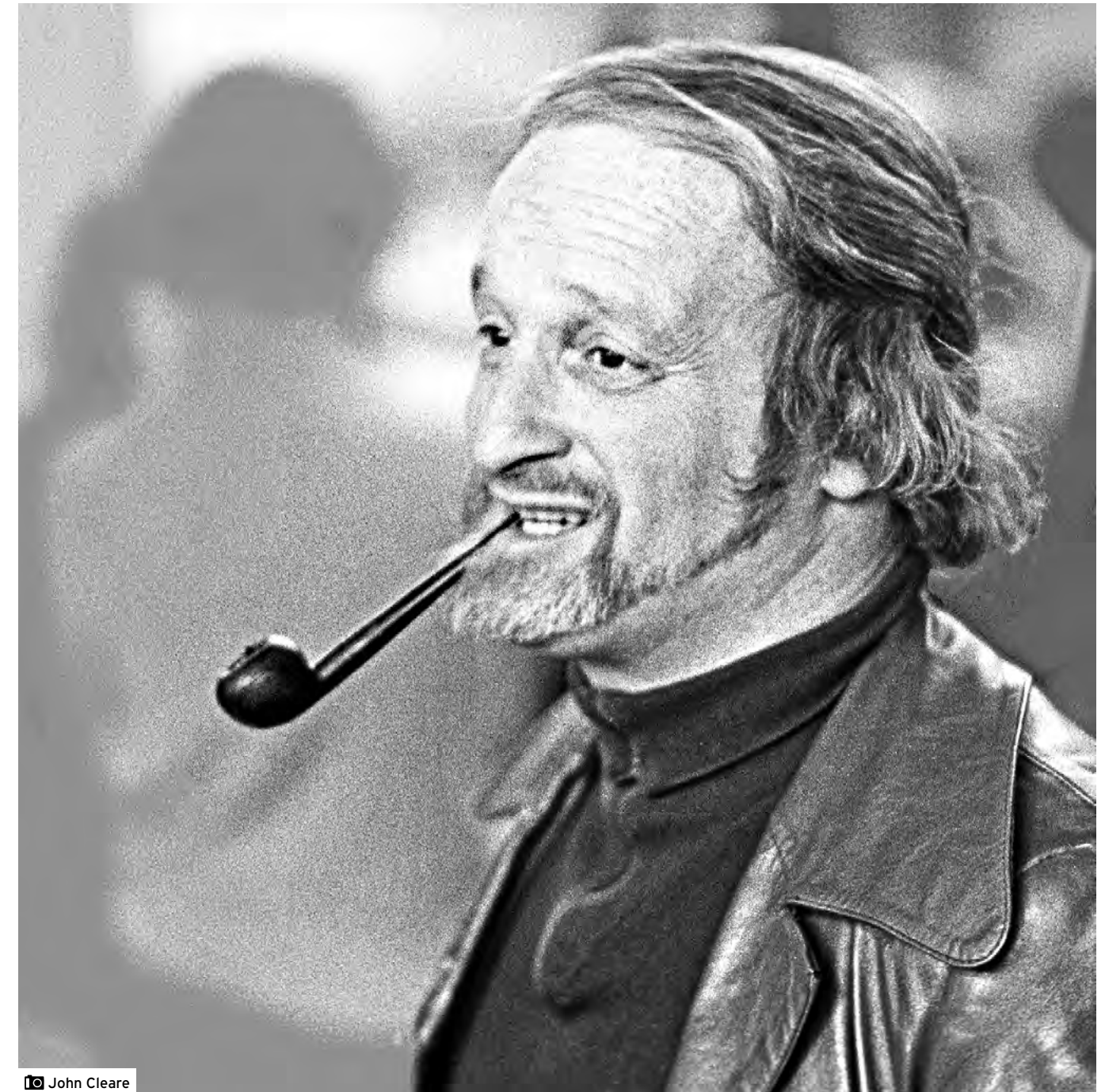
Invited to lecture at Princeton, he immediately took to the laid-back American scene and climbed regularly in the Shawangunks with university colleagues. His first two books—on poetry—and a Fellowship at the University of New Mexico followed. Back home again there was an unhappy and short-lived marriage, but after a therapeutic stint on the North Sea oil rigs, Al abandoned academe for Hampstead, and he settled into an uncertain career as a freelance writer.

Early tasks included editing Penguin's Modern European Poets series and he became poetry and film critic for the Observer during that paper's great days, doing much to establish the reputation of his friends Ted Hughes

and Sylvia Plath. He wrote regularly for top-flight British and American journals and magazines and over the years published more than twenty books, among them the best-selling *The Savage God*, a meditation on suicide—he had once tried it himself—and in due course an engaging autobiography *Where Did It All Go Right?* In 1966 he married Anne Adams, a Canadian child psychotherapist, to become, as his friend John le Carré wrote '...an impassioned husband and a family man...' meanwhile keeping fit by swimming in all weathers in the nearby Hampstead Heath ponds '...cold water delays the ageing process...', he said.

During his sojourn in the States Al became intrigued with poker; he became adept and played very well, claiming that '...poker taught me patience'. In London he played regularly, often for high stakes and periodically going over to play in Las Vegas. Chris Bonington, another keen poker player, found that playing with Alvarez was very exciting and frequently terrifying. Nevertheless in his classic study of poker, *The Biggest Game in Town*, Al asserted '... serious poker is no more about gambling than rock climbing is about taking risks..'

As a climber his interest was in rock rather than snow, ice or high mountains. A self-confessed adrenaline junkie, being close to danger was important; a climb, Alvarez wrote, '... is like playing chess with your body... every move has to be worked out by a kind of physical strategy in terms of effort, balance and conscious-



John Cleare



ness'. If not the most elegant climber, he was very capable, he was strong and moved with a purposeful muscularity, he knew most of the best leaders in the game and would happily follow them on many of the harder routes.

In 1960 the CC invited a group of Russians to climb in Wales and Al was involved in hosting them at Ynys Ettws. Unfortunately one of the guests broke a leg in a bad fall and, not to be outdone, Al also took a fall, shattering an ankle which was so badly set at Bangor that it caused trouble for the rest of his life, seriously curtailing his climbing in later years.

When, in 1964, I was commissioned to produce *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia* I invited Al to contribute the text, but the paltry advance offered by Secker & Warburg was dwarfed by that being offered for a New Yorker article, and he reluctantly declined. But a year later the Observer Magazine commissioned us to produce a major feature on the latest climbing star, the computer whiz-kid Pete Crew; Al made the second ascent of *MPP* with Pete, then considered one of the more fearsome routes in the Llanberis Pass, but not without prolific use of the F-word, a favourite expletive for which Al was well known.

Al loved climbing in the South West, often on his favourite cliff, Bosigran, with his close friends Pete and Barrie Biven and the artist Cliff Fishwick. With Pete he made the second ascent of Pete's intimidating *Moonraker* on Torbay's Berry Head, and also the first

ascent of the superb *Last Exit to Torquay* on Daddyhole Main Cliff, Devon—the name is a reference to the obscenity trial of Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* in which he had appeared as a defence witness.

Al's first mountain was an early ascent, with American friends in 1958, of Shiprock in New Mexico's Four Corners desert, but four years later he reached the Dolomites for the first time where he ticked off the regular Lavaredo classics, the *Preuss Chimney* and the *Dibona Ridge* on the Cima Grande with Graham Hughes, returning in 1963 to the Sella Towers where he climbed his first Grade VI. In 1964 I drove out to Cortina with him, an exciting journey in his Lotus Elite, shredding the Lotus' silencer on the mule track to the Lavaredo Hut where we met up with Mo Anthoine and his Ogwen Cottage colleague John Wharton, a fellow Princeton alumnus. Al's goal was the *Comici* on the North Face of the Grande, which Wharton and I had both done previously, so after warming-up on the Spigolo Giallo, Al set off with Mo up the *Comici* despite rather dubious weather. They were still climbing the overhanging section when the storm arrived and, eventually reaching the merely vertical wall above now plastered in wet snow, they were forced to bivouac with neither extra clothing nor spare food. In the early hours the sky cleared, the snow melted and their ledge became a waterfall. Then it froze. Later Al wrote "... I concluded that our luck had run out and that we too would soon be frozen"

At dawn Wharton and I climbed the regular route to the summit with dry clothing, hot drinks and food to offer what support we could. When finally they emerged, exhausted and soaking wet, Mo casually described the night as '...a bit parky...' and although both were frost bitten they were none the worse for the experience. Indeed Al was exuberant. It was an epic he had long desired and would never forget, and it had a profound influence on both his climbing and his writing. In his 1988 book *Feeding the Rat* in which he profiled his rope-mate Mo, Al declared 'My own preference for warm rock, warm food and a warm bed—as well as my plain lack of ability—ensured that I would never make the big time in mountaineering'.

Not to be put off, Al climbed on the Civetta the following season, doing several routes including the *Andrich Faè* on the Venezia with Gunn Clark and Tony Smythe, and then, to their protests, preferring to avoid actual summits in favour of the swiftest return to the hut and a bottle of red wine. In 1966 he enjoyed a long holiday in Yosemite during which he partnered Chuck Pratt on El Cap's *East Buttress* (5.10/A2). Subsequently warm limestone won the day and for the next decade Al climbed regularly in the Apuan Alps, an Apennines sub-range in Tuscany, sometimes with his son Luke or Mo Anthoine, but usually with local Italian climbers, being especially proud of his ascent of the intimidating 2,500 foot North Face of Pizzo d'Ucello with

Damasco Pinelli in 1983. Al returned to cold damp rock when Mo led him up the Old Man of Hoy with George Band and a large party in 1985, another adventure he never forgot. Although the Old Man was his last major summit, Al continued climbing for almost a further decade, albeit hobbling with sticks to the foot of lesser crags such as Harrison's Rocks. As he was to write '... climbing was part of who I was'.

In 2008 Al suffered a stroke and thereafter his final years were spent in Anne's care, wheelchair-bound in Hampstead. Meanwhile, in 2013, his final book *Pondlife: A Swimmer's Journal* was published. He died on September 23rd 2019 of viral pneumonia at the age of 90, leaving his wife, Anne, a son Luke—himself a long-time CC member until moving abroad—a daughter Kate and two young grandsons who are learning to climb.

By John Cleare

Al loved being among the biggest characters and best wits of the climbing world.

**Terry Gifford** writes: It is so long ago since I went to my first CC dinner after becoming a member that the hotel has been demolished. I walked into the Marquis of Granby at Bamford to see a little old bow-legged man leaning forwards on two walking sticks and barking at the sharply bearded man with a jutting chin standing next to him. It was AB Hargreaves and Al Alvarez. 'This is what you join the CC for', I thought, 'meeting living legends'.

Within the Club, I'm not sure that Alvarez would have been regarded as a legend, but to anyone interested in literature, poetry, and the poetry of Ted Hughes in particular, Alvarez was a legend. He had been a king-maker as Poetry Editor of the Observer newspaper, and a queen-maker in the case of Sylvia Plath whom he brought to public recognition just before she died. He was her literary confidante to whom she brought the fierce, desperate poems of the months before she committed suicide. So when Al wrote his study of suicide in literature, *The Savage God* (1971), he began with a memoir of those final months which was serialised ahead of book publication in the Observer. Ted, who had gone straight to Alvarez's London flat when Sylvia kicked him out from their Devon house, was outraged at Al's disloyalty, as he saw it, writing a long letter about the effect on the two children. Al had not considered for a moment that Ted had not told the children how their mother had died. It was the end of an important friendship, although Al told me that they had met

years later at the memorial for the poet Robert Lowell and had made up, as far as Al was concerned. But the friendship was never rekindled.

So when my friends found that the only endorsement on the back of my first collection of poems, *The Stone Spiral* (1987), was from Al Alvarez, they were suitably impressed, not knowing the CC connection. What he praised about 'the bird poems and the poems about climbing' was 'restraint and precision', Al's criteria not being what many people would associate with poetry, especially the terrified editors of climbing magazines. When I invited Al to speak at the 14th International Festival of Mountaineering Literature in November 2000 about his favourite mountaineering book, he chose an Antarctic epic rather than what was expected—*The Worst Journey in the World* by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, perhaps still the best written and most absurd survival story. Al loved being among the biggest characters and best wits of the climbing world, which was why I seemed to meet him in the company of Jim Curran and Mac the Telly, the latter his weekly poker combatant. In 2007 Al was invited to a Sylvia Plath conference in Oxford as a literary legend who shaped her early reputation. He went along, he said, 'to see how the Plath industry has developed'. I valued Al's mischievous correspondence and generosity with his time when I was in London. Flask Walk, where he lived, was his perfect location, with a pub at one end and Hampstead Heath and those chilly ponds at the other. Savour your legends while you may.



# Dave Amos

1947—2019

Dave was born and raised in Edinburgh. He was one of three children and is survived by his sister Maggie. His elder brother Bill was also a keen mountaineer and a stalwart of the Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team until his death a couple of years ago from natural causes.

Dave, as far I know, began hillwalking after his return from New Guinea and Australia where he had several jobs, some in airports. His father was a keen walker and also climbed as well. Dave would delight in long hill walks in the far North West often over a few days, staying in bothies and walking up as many hills as was practical. Dave was never really a Munro bagger but he must have done most of them and a good few Corbetts as well. He was interested in quality and not quantity as far as hills were concerned. Gradually he got into scrambling and from this progressed into rock climbing, winter climbing and also some Alpinism.

I think he started climbing about twenty five years ago and, not having a partner for much of the time, would often climb with guides such as Andy Nisbet, who often guided him in the winter as well. I use the word ‘guided’ advisedly here because in latter years they often swung leads and became occasional climbing partners with several joint first ascents (as Andy was always on the look out for new routes). Dave also climbed quite regularly, as

a client, with Martin Moran and with Smiler Cuthbertson. These climbers have also died in the last year—it has been a very sad year.

Dave worked for the local council for many years in the Department of Highways and had responsibility for road gritting in the winter, and arranging for the repair of pot holes, etc. In winter he would often do long days, perhaps twelve hours and being fortunate enough to be on flexi-time would generate at least two or three days off each month which he would invariably put to good use on the hill or crag. Once a year he would enjoy using his mountaineering skills to abseil into otherwise inaccessible places to recover the large number of traffic cones which always seemed to find their way into these kind of places. His department had a hill walking club of which Dave was a very popular member. Always modest, he was probably the most competent and experienced of all in this club, but he would never blow his own trumpet.

Dave climbed many of the classic rock routes in Scotland including *The Old Man of Hoy*, *The Needle*, *The Steeple*, *Diabaig Pillar* and *Centurion*. He excelled in winter-craft however and climbed many hard classics, such as *Slav Route* (this occurred when he inadvertently went off route on *Zero Gully*), *Point 5*, *Hadrian’s Wall*, *Two Step Corner*, *Smith’s Route*, *Orion Face* and *Indicator Wall*. He was pretty competent at around Grade 6 but often climbed harder I believe.

He had a number of escapades and

epics, notably surviving for three days in the Cairngorms (which generated much interest in the Scottish TV and news media) and occasionally some long run-outs on very thin ice, where the consequences of a fall would have been pretty grim. On his 60th birthday he made a solo one-day traverse of the Cuillin Ridge, though he was repulsed by the wet and greasy TD Gap which he was forced to circumvent.

Dave enjoyed lots of climbing trips abroad: the Rockies, Kalymnos, Dolomites, Sardinia, Morocco and many places in between. He and I, with some other friends, spent a memorable week on Mingulay where we got little climbing done because of inclement weather, but had a great time exploring this marvellous island.

Dave had his fair share of climbing mishaps. He once had to be stretchered off after breaking his ankle in Glen Nevis. I can remember gas being administered before his ankle was manipulated back into position. It was awful to watch! He broke his arm on the steep approach to a climb on his second day out in the States, where he often climbed with other CC members (Ron Kenyon, Charles Moreton, Steve Gould), and disconsolately had to return home to Edinburgh on his own. Dave also had recurrent problems with his shoulder for which he had surgery on at least one occasion.

As well as being a member of the CC, Dave was in the SMC and the JMCS (Edinburgh) and it was when he joined the latter club that I got to know him.

In the last year or so Dave, now in his early 70s and retired, began to show a bit less interest in climbing and developed an interest in skiing. He had already been on a couple of trips before he died and was looking forward to another two. He started to learn Italian and dabbled in cryptic crosswords. He also rekindled his interest in chess which he used to play with his Italian teacher and I believe he was pretty good at it. He retained his excellent fitness by regular jaunts into his local hills, the Pentlands.

As a person Dave had many excellent qualities. He was kind, considerate, unassuming, good natured, good humoured and very loyal. He was also a very good listener and could have been a good counsellor if he had put his mind to it. In winter he would be happy to share a rope with relative novices like myself. As a winter climber he was just about the most reliable companion you could find, and for that reason was never short of partners. To climb with him often felt like you were being guided and indeed he had half-considered taking up guiding from time to time.

Dave is sadly missed by many people in Edinburgh and beyond. There is still a keen sense of disbelief, given his truly illustrious climbing career, that he tragically met his end in the sanitised environment of a climbing wall.

By Patrick Winter

*The following tributes appeared in the JMCS 2019 Newsletter and are reproduced with permission from the authors.*

**Stewart Bauchop** writes: For those of us who climbed with him, Dave Amos will be remembered for his laid back approach and a cool head, whatever the situation. Quiet by nature, but with a sharp wit in understatement, Dave excelled in the drama of winter and would inspire confidence when most would be talking retreat.

There are stories of all-night drives through closed roads, strung out leads on thin Nevis ice and seemingly effortless progress in marginal conditions, all dispatched without incident and retold with a wry smile. In winter Dave’s style of climbing was, just as his character, laid back and gentle—seemingly effortless with the occasional wild scrape of a crampon revealing just how delicate the climbing might be.

I climbed on and off with Dave over twenty years and, whilst never allowed to skip a lead, I did feel very much the apprentice. We worked our way through the mid-grade classics, oftentimes in Glencoe, and on to the bigger routes on Ben Nevis and further afield. *Zero Gully* in a storm, *The Wand* collapsing in a thaw, *Fluted Buttress* verglassed and buried under powder, and many more straightforward days just enjoying being out.

My earliest encounter with Dave’s ability to kick it up a gear would be around the back of the millennium, off-route on *The Sphinx* in Stob Coire nam Beith. We had lost the line and climbed

ourselves into a cul-de-sac high up on the cliff where we were faced with a four metre wall, an impasse, daubed with thin smears of bullet hard water ice. With the sun going down and the Aggie Ridge lit up in alpenglow, it was all very scenic, but with the prospect of a long cold night in store. Facing benightment or a long retreat in the dark, Dave opted to make a desperate lead edging up the wall on crampon tips, even apologising for hooking an old peg halfway up, but ultimately leading us through.

Lots of folk will have their own stories climbing with Dave Amos, maybe further afield in the Alps or America, but for me his spirit will be blowing in the spindrift, quietly whispering encouragement around the Winter corries.

**David Small** adds: Dave was active climbing and walking in all seasons, at home and abroad, with many different companions who will all have their particular memories of him. For me, he was the best winter climber that I have ever been out with. Mixed or ice, it didn’t matter which, he just got on and climbed it. Well into his sixties (and only now, getting there myself, do I realise how remarkable it was) he went up the hill like a train, not needing walking poles to add uphill impetus, and would still be bare handed when I was on my second pair of gloves.

I would happily do routes with him knowing that I was relying on him to lead the crux—he was the built-in safety margin. But his physical gifts are not what I recall most clearly about him.





It is invidious to rate companions, but he was among the best for me, and I know lots of people feel the same way. For such a quiet guy, not at all a party animal, never putting himself or his abilities to the fore, he was constantly in demand as a climbing partner. The reason was not only his climbing ability but his modest, generous, resilient, utterly dependable character. What you saw was what there was, right to his very core.

Of course, there were mishaps along the way, which Dave overcame unflapably. He tended to shed a crampon from time to time; he ruefully confessed to me that he once had had to hop up ten metres of the crux of *Rubicon Wall* (on the lead, of course). There was the International Meet when he and his overseas companion got lost in hideous conditions in the Cairngorms and spent a night in a trench in the snow—

although he was back on grade Vs on the Ben a couple of days after the helicopter lifted them from Strath Nethy. There was the time with me on the Ben when he went off route on *Caledonia* and put in an epic lead on desperately thin ice, with never a wobble, to reach safety—I seconded and wobbled all the way.

He had an on/off relationship with cars—one ended up in someone's front garden after he fell asleep driving home in the early hours on return from a sun rock trip, and another was written off in a collision with a taxi as he crossed Edinburgh to come to pick me up in the early morning, en route for Creag Meagaidh. On the day of the taxi incident we were very delayed in getting away, having to wait for insurance and garage arrangements to fall into place, but we got there in the end and climbed *Last Post* in wonderful conditions with the mountain to ourselves. We walked off the plateau together in the gloaming and, inspired by exhilaration from the climb and our overcoming of adversity, coupled with the beauty of the fading purple to the east and the glowing embers to the west, I said to him something along the lines of how I knew that my intense experience of the pleasure of this moment would rapidly fade, and how I wished I could bottle and preserve it. I can't remember exactly what he said in reply, but it was accompanied by that characteristic shy grin of his, expressing agreement, appreciation, fellowship and contentment.

Oh Dave, how I wish I could have bottled that too.

## Terry Bolger (*Bolge*)

1940 - 2017

Every now and then a character turns up in life who leaves a lasting impression, and Terry Bolger was one of these people. I first met Bolge in 1964 along with Brian (Henry) Palmer and John Fleming—we all joined the Nottingham Climbing Club on the same night. It was in the days when we met in The Salutation and you had to prove you were worthy of being a member of the club, even going through a question and answer session. Terry worked at Stanton & Staveley, along with John Fleming, as apprentice fitters.

One of many early stand-out moments involving Bolge was when he was about to second Doug Scott on *Shadow Wall* in the Pass. Doug checked the route in Bolge's guide book and then tore out the page.

Bolge was flabbergasted, 'that's me new guide book youth'.

'It'll be all right kid, I might need it for future reference,' replied Doug.

Bolge later dropped one of his runners down a crack and Doug ended up breaking branches off a nearby tree and throwing them down to him to try and get it back—so began the many sagas involving Bolge.

He loved motor cycling and I've ridden pillion many times from Matlock to The Prince of Wales and The Moon and he always impressed me with his bike handling skills. He loved a good sing-song and *My Brother Sylvest* and

*The Lunatic Asylum* are just two of his stand out classics.

In the early days, when he was learning to play the guitar, a crowd of us were sat in my Dad's sitting room and Bolge was attempting to play something (not well) after we got back from the pub. My Old Man chimes up, 'If you're not going to play that bloody thing, chuck it on the fire and we'll have some bloody heat off it'. This cracked everybody up!

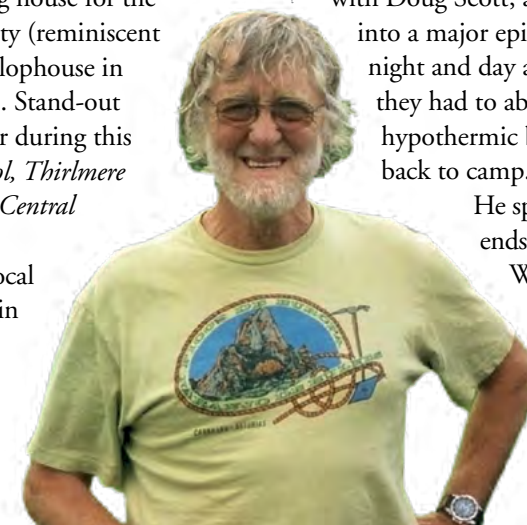
Every weekend and every holiday saw us taking off to the Peak, Wales, Lakes and Scotland—all involved much drinking and singing, mixed with minor epics. Bolge hired a Bedford mini-bus one New Year to go to the Lakes, Al Gormley was the driver and it was extremely cold, the van was a wreck and nothing worked, but it was cheap. The windscreen kept freezing so we had to take it in turns to stand on the bonnet and piss on it. We camped in Keswick where everything froze solid, even the potatoes. Bolge became a resident of Keswick for about a year living at Ivanhoe, a boarding house for the misfits of society (reminiscent of the Palace Flophouse in Cannery Row). Stand-out climbs together during this period are *Extol*, *Thirlmere Eliminate* and *Central Buttress*. Bolge worked for a local builder whilst in Keswick and his lasting legacy was the

public toilet he helped build in Borrowdale—but they knocked it down a few years ago!

Bolge wasn't the easiest guy to climb with. He was bloody-minded, wouldn't relinquish the lead even if he was struggling and, on occasions, he could drive you up the wall. And whatever you did with him, it was never straightforward, often taking a long time; therefore you could end up descending in the dark and missing last orders. We made a very early repeat ascent of The Old Man of Hoy in 1968—the climb was a small part of this adventure, the journey being more memorable ('if you stop on the red light and go on the green, you miss the mystery in between'). Bolge covered in fulmar puke proudly posing on the top, was a sight for sore eyes.

The Dolomites and the Alps saw him practising bivouac techniques on the Sella Tower with Bill New, sharing a tent and climbing with Yoff in Chamonix, with patience tested to the full. Norway in 1970 saw him make the third ascent of *Hoibakk's Chimney* with Doug Scott, a route that turned into a major epic after it rained all night and day at the bivouac and they had to abseil off. Bolge was hypothermic by the time he got back to camp.

He spent many weekends stripping ivy off Wildcat, Willersley and High Tor 'whilst new routing', producing many classic





climbs for future generations, including *Last Testament* and *High Tor Left-hand Girdle*.

In between brass rubbing, digging bottle dumps and completing most of the long distance walks in Britain, he also took up caving. Classic Peak District and Yorkshire caves became the hit list for the newly formed NCC (Notts Caving Club). This wasn't without its own epics and late night returns (Bolge, on a trip through Simpson's, was seen to strip down to his underpants to get through the squeeze, and then throw his wetsuit to the cheering crowd below). He had trips to Yugoslavia, Bel-Espoir, France and the Gouffre Berger, each was a unique adventure.

He retired early from British Gas where he worked as a pipe fitter. After many years of being careful with his money and getting a good redundancy payment, he began a life of leisure. He continued doing long distance walks and visiting different countries throughout the world—I got a postcard a few years ago from Patagonia showing Fitzroy (on the back it said 'Ah was telling the bloke in the shop, my mate Pony Lee's been ta top a that, Guess Who').

What have we got left to remember Bolge? Well we have the TV film *England Their England*, and with Bolge in his element as producer we have various Crag Rat Productions. But what all of us have are the memories. They broke the mould when Terry Bolger was born and we will never see his like again.

By Guy Lee

## Richard Bond

1940 - 2019

We first met in September 1958 in Rugby to start our engineering apprenticeships with the British Thompson Houston Company. Richard sadly died in May 2019 having battled with Parkinson's Disease for some thirty odd years. He joined the Club in 1963 and was Membership Secretary from 1973 to 1978, serving with the teams of Presidents Hamish Nicol and Harry Sales.

On arriving in Rugby we soon became aware of a newly emerging Rugby Mountaineering Club whose driving forces were Keith Miller and John Tyson. Fred Marvin ran a coach business in the town and had a sister living in Anglesey so here was an immediate facility for getting the club to the mountains of Snowdonia. Fred would drop us off at Humphrey's field in the Pass and we would begin to explore the hills and crags.

Richard at this time was also getting up to Wales with his uncle, Sam Wadsworth, also a CC member, and soon came back with knowledge of rope techniques, protection (which was quite rudimentary at that time) and belaying methods.

In our small way, we became part of the progress in the development of climbing protection starting by carrying pebbles of varying sizes in our pockets. These we jammed in the cracks before threading a belay loop tied with a Fisherman's knot. We then used varying

sizes of engineering nuts, drilling out the threads and finishing with a suitable length of line to make a runner. We also took to making wedges from aluminium bar, which gave greater scope for innovation. Harnesses had not been invented in those days, so we used a thin hemp line wrapped round the waist several times and attached to the climbing rope with a good old screw-gate krab. We experimented with tying on using a Tarbuck knot before settling on the figure of eight knot. All this was grist to the mill for the engineer in Richard.

Along the way, we exchanged knowledge with the likes of Alwyn Spires, Robin Prager, Pip Hopkinson, 'Bud' Metcalfe, Eddie Rowlands and Ian Angell, all clambering onto Fred's coach for a weekend in the Pass.

Richard was a big chap, indeed he played second row at rugby. He disliked the steep overhanging stuff, preferring slab climbing. He was very methodical in his climbing and I remember well him toddling up *Three Pebble Slab* on Froggatt in Kletts when the route was graded VS. We didn't use chalk in those days!

He was also very confident on snow and ice, deftly cutting steps when the need arose and his climbs in the Alps included the Rimpfischhorn, Alphubel, the *Trifjigrat* on the Breithorn and Monte Rosa. On one occasion, we were headed down the glacier toward Saas Fee and encountered a hole in the snow where a small boy had fallen into a crevasse. Without more ado, Richard got to work arranging anchor points and a pulley system by which I

was lowered down. We rescued the boy before the local Swiss guides arrived.

A couple of the climbs he treasured most were those we did together on the Delago and Winkler towers in the Vajolet group in the Dolomites.

At the Club's Annual Dinner at the Rubens Hotel, the final one in London, we met up with Hugh Wright, who was putting together a mixed crew of climbers and sailors as he had access to a 30-foot fin keeled yacht belonging to the REME. Hugh proposed sailing it along the south coast and then crossing the channel to France and then on to Sark. On the way we would access the sea cliffs and climb. We joined up, along with Harry Sales. Pete Biven was also invited, but unfortunately he had to drop out due to teaching commitments.

During the trip we climbed at Swanage, (approaching the cliffs from the sea), crossed to Cherbourg then on to Sark, where we climbed several new routes including *Seahorse* on the side of the Gouliot caves. John Longland joined us for the return trip back.

Richard was an accomplished and respected engineer specialising in the design of dynamic positioning systems of semi-submersible rigs used for example in North Sea oil and gas exploration. He was one of the most logically thinking people I have met, at all times calm, phlegmatic and without a hint of panic, carefully weighing up the options when things got tricky. A worthy companion in all respects.

By Dave Atchison



## Richard Brooke

1927 - 2020

In the mid-1950s, Richard Brooke completed a unique hat-trick of land-mark expeditions to both north and south polar regions and to the Himalaya, including the British North Greenland Expedition, the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, led by Vivian Fuchs, and the Combined Services Expedition that made the first ascent of Rakaposhi in 1958.

Richard was a member of the Climbers' Club for 66 years. He first went to the Alps in 1947 while on leave from the navy and had three more seasons, quickly building his experience and climbing many routes, including the *Kuffner Arête* on Mont Maudit and the *Ryan-Lochmatter* on the Aiguille du Plan, both big undertakings at the time. He was one of the last surviving British climbers from this post-war period,

having climbed in the 1950s with such brilliant mountaineers as Wilf Noyce, Geoff Sutton, Tom Patey, Mike Westmacott and Mike Banks. This group started to repeat the harder Alpine climbs; Richard and Mike Banks, for example, climbed *Route Major* on Mont Blanc in 1951, the first guide-less ascent since its first ascent in 1928 by Frank Smythe and T Graham Brown. They climbed it by moonlight, an experience well described in Mike Banks' book *Commando Climber*. In August 1955 Richard climbed the *Couturier Couloir* on the Aiguille Verte with Noyce and Sutton. This was before the days of curved-pick axes, when the route was still a major undertaking. He described his traverse in April 1956 of the Bernese Oberland with Chris Stocken in the 1956 Alpine Journal. Around this time Richard was elected as a leading alpinist to the Alpine Climbing Group. And he spanned the generations, taking a very young Nick Estcourt up the *Marinelli Couloir* of Monte Rosa.

Richard had gone to Dartmouth Naval College during the Second World War at the tender age of 13 because, as he said, 'the magic of the sea inspired me and there was a sense of adventure.' He joined the battleship HMS Warspite about a month before D-Day, seeing action off the landing beaches by manning a four-inch gun. In 1948 he joined the ship John Biscoe, taking stores from the Falkland Islands to bases on Graham Land. Three years later he joined a naval reconnaissance expedition to Greenland, a precursor to the major British North



Greenland Expedition of 1952-4, which Richard joined and on which he made his first dogsled journeys. He was away for two years and awarded the Polar Medal. Mike Banks was on the same expedition, described in his book *High Arctic*, and they became lifelong friends. It was on this expedition that Mike saved Richard's life after spilt fuel from a petrol-stove set their tent alight. Mike rescued Richard by cutting open their tent with an ice axe. Later, under the pretext of surveying, Richard and Mike Banks climbed five virgin peaks in the Barth Bjerger, including a peak named as the Matterhorn by a German expedition in 1869.

In 1956 Richard joined the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, which finally achieved Shackleton's goal of crossing the frozen continent via the South Pole, but mainly by using motorised vehicles (detailed in *The Crossing of Antarctica* by Fuchs & Hillary). Richard was allocated to the New Zealand dog teams, laying depots and spending much time on remote dogsled journeys surveying and also climbing mountains to make survey stations. He even had a mountain named after him, Mt Brooke, at the head of the Mackay glacier, which he climbed with Murray Douglas. Another achievement was the first ascent of Mt Huggins (3800m) during a 1,000-mile dogsled trip. Many years later Bernie Gunn, who was a fellow expedition member, wrote of Richard: 'he was prepared to travel hard, perhaps harder than any Polar explorer before or since.'

Richard had been away for 16 months

yet somehow persuaded the Royal Navy (in which he was still a Lieutenant) that he should join the Combined Services Expedition to attempt the unclimbed Rakaposhi (7790m) in the Karakoram. Richard joined the expedition via New Zealand on his way home from Antarctica. Tom Patey and Mike Banks reached the summit with Richard and Dicky Grant carrying supplies to the high camp at 7300m. An old and unreliable tent thwarted Richard's own summit attempt a few days later (*Alpine Journal* 1958). Patey recalled how they narrowly avoided disaster when a wind-slab avalanche swept down the face he and Brooke were climbing. Richard, with typical sangfroid, simply said: 'This place is distinctly dangerous. I propose that we turn back.'

Richard married Valerie in 1965, later having two sons, David and Patrick. He finally left the navy, having been passed over for promotion to commander, probably due to his many expeditions. He briefly took over the Mountaineering Association, a training body that employed some well-known instructors such as Hamish McInnes and Ian Clough. Richard realised the MA was in financial trouble so left to take up a post with the Electricity Council, where he remained until retirement. His responsibilities never came between Richard and the hills. Before an important board meeting in South Wales, Richard took the opportunity to do a long run over the Brecon Beacons but during the meeting got cramp, leaping up with a howl of pain. 'Been up mountains

again, Brooke?' his CEO drily inquired.

I first met Richard in 1974 after expressing an interest in joining the Alpine Club. As I knew no Club members, Richard had been appointed to see if I was made of the 'right stuff' for membership. Due to his remarkable reputation, it was with some trepidation that I arranged to meet Richard at Wyndcliff, a crag in the Wye Valley. I was warmly greeted by a lean and fit-looking Richard already aged 47 which was 22 years older than myself. We did some great climbs around VS and I must have passed muster as Richard and I subsequently climbed together in the Alps and the UK for many more years, remaining friends until he died. After every Alpine climbing or walking trip, Richard always wrote wonderful detailed letters that I still have, often analysing our performance. He was a kind, modest man and never boasted about his incredible achievements.

After our first meeting Richard asked if I would join him and Mike Banks on a winter climbing trip to Scotland in early 1975. I took along my climbing partner Dave Viggers. We had a fantastic week that included *Observatory Ridge*, *Comb Gully* and *NE Buttress* in a fast time allowing the oldies, Richard and Mike, with a combined age of 100 years, to descend *Tower Ridge*, an impressive effort. Later that year, the same party, but with Jeremy Whitehead replacing Mike Banks, went to the Alps. Richard wanted to attempt the *Hirondelles Ridge* on the Grandes Jorasses. After acclimatising with the *North Ridge*

of the Grivola, we based ourselves at the Gervasutti bivouac hut above Courmayeur from where we climbed the *South Ridge of the Petites Jorasses* and two days later, after an aborted attempt, the *Hirondelles*. We reached the summit in an electrical storm, with gear and axes buzzing, and started the unfamiliar long and complex descent, staggering into the Boccalatte Hut exhausted after more than 20 hours of climbing. This route in particular reinforced my impression of Richard's steely determination, fitness, steadiness and good decision-making (See the *Alpine Journal* 1976).

In the following years we climbed together in the Scottish winter, including classics like *Crowberry Gully*, *Glovers Chimney*, *Italian Climb* and *Castle Ridge*. In Wales we climbed the difficult *Western Gully* on Black Ladders in superb icy conditions and *Chock Gully* in the Lakes.

In the 1960s Richard had climbed with Tom Patey, including first ascents of *South Post Direct*, *Last Post* and *Post Horn Gallop* on Creag Meagaidh, in those days still cutting steps. Richard and Patey also had a spirited attempt at the winter traverse of the Cuillin Ridge. Richard was also a solid leader on rock, always modest but capable of leading at HVS and above. His footwork was a joy to watch, probably because he had started climbing in nailed boots when careful footwork was a necessity. We climbed together on rock for twenty years, visiting virtually every climbing area in Britain and climbing many classic routes up to HVS.

We had an excellent Alpine season in 1979, warming up on the *Frendo Spur* of the Aiguille du Midi and then attempting the two-day traverse of the *Rochefort Arête* and *West Ridge of the Grandes Jorasses* via the Canzio bivouac. All went well until after the Aiguille Rochefort and the Dôme de Rochefort. Descending towards the Canzio bivouac, we followed the wrong line of abseils, too far to the west. Totally committed, we had no option but to continue down steep ice into France with only one axe each and no ice screws. At the bergschrund I watched terrified with no belay as Richard down-climbed carefully towards me. His calm competence under difficult circumstances was always impressive.

Despite this failure, and only two days later, we felt ready to try Richard's long-held ambition of another major climb on Mont Blanc. Richard was now well into his second half-century and felt this was his last chance for a really big route. We chose the *Peuterey Ridge of Mont Blanc* via the Aiguille Blanche, described in the guidebook as 'the epitome of all Alpine routes'. Intending to make only one bivouac, we left the valley in the afternoon, crossed the chaotic Frêney Glacier and bivouacked near the top of the Schneider ledges. After a cold night with little sleep we traversed Pointe Gugliermine along loose ledges on the Brenva flank. The weather looked superb and as the sun rose, it turned the rocks a magnificent red colour. Having miraculously reached the ridge at the correct spot,

we traversed snow ridges across the summits of the *Aiguille Blanche* until we overlooked the Col Peuterey. Having abseiled down, we followed the rocky edge of the Eckpfeiler towards Mont Blanc de Courmayeur but progress was slow: it was not until after 5pm that we reached the foot of the final snow ridge leading to the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. Richard led, while I was just glad to follow in his steps.

Over the cornice it was a different world: wind, snow and swirling cloud with a dark and threatening sky to the west but Richard was pleased as punch, holding out his hand in congratulation. The desperate cold brought us back to reality. We found our way over Mont Blanc to the Vallot hut in poor visibility, arriving at 8.30pm. We had taken 16.5 hours from our bivouac. At last in the hut we could relax and in a euphoric mood fell into a deep sleep despite the storm raging outside. Richard wrote how the *Peuterey* 'gave me more pleasure to look back on than any other climb I have done and that includes *Route Major* (*Alpine Journal* 1980)'. In subsequent years, instead of the Alps, we had several summer trips to Scotland, climbing most of the routes in Ken Wilson's *Classic Rock*.

Richard continued to enjoy ski-mountaineering expeditions, traversing the Jura in 1983 with Mike Banks. He went twice with Alan Blackshaw and others to Sweden and Norway, writing: 'I am completely hooked on this type of ski touring which reminds me strongly of the Polar regions.' He went on four



more such trips with David Ford, quite often in epic weather conditions and covering large distances. In 1985 Richard decided to show me the joys of Nordic skiing in a snowy north Wales. The A5 was blocked before Corwen so we bivouacked in the car, digging it out in the morning. The road was deserted and we skied along it, stopping at the Berwyn Arms before heading into the hills. Richard thought he would ask the landlord if he would serve us coffee. From an upstairs window he told us to bugger off. Richards dry comment was 'I think coffee is off'! We soon discovered that the strong wind was blowing snow off the Berwyn tracks so we moved south to the Long Mynd, getting some odd looks skiing up High Street in Church Stretton with large rucksacks. It was desperately cold and windy when we camped on the ridge: even our camping gas froze. In the morning we struggled on to the north edge and I noticed Richard's nose had turned white. Richard mumbled that he had last suffered this in Greenland.

Aside from climbing and ski touring, Richard's other great talent was for fast long-distance walking, relying on his phenomenal stamina and perseverance. For example, in an organised 47 mile walk over the Brecon Beacons in 1981, he finished an hour ahead of the field. Similarly, he soloed the round of Lake District 3000ers in 16 hours in 1984 and later ran the Dorset Doddle, 33 miles along the Jurassic coast in five and a half hours.

In 1985 Richard completed his first

100 mile nonstop walk organised by the Long Distance Walkers Association and including the highest peaks in Yorkshire. The weather was atrocious but Richard finished in 37 hours, albeit with trench foot. He did two more 100 mile walks, one covering most of south Wales and the last, when he was sixty, through much of north Wales from Llanrwst to Porthmadog, Harlech, Ffestiniog and back to Llanrwst. This included 3700m of ascent achieved in 32 and a half hours. Richard also enjoyed mountain marathon events, competing in the Saunders Marathon in 1988 with David Ford when they finished 12th in the expert class. With John Daniels, Richard competed in six Karrimor Mountain Marathons between 1981 and 1988, winning the veteran class in Snowdonia in 1987.

In 1989 Richard, John and I had another Alpine holiday, with Richard, now sixty two, leading his son David and a friend. We climbed Mont Dolent from Courmayeur, followed by Ciarforon and the Gran Paradiso, with Richard still climbing strongly. Richard's last Alpine season was in 1990 with his old friend Mike Banks, when they climbed several mountains around Arolla. In 1991, despite reservations, Richard joined a 'golden oldies' Himalayan expedition to Jaonli (6630m) in the Garhwal, sponsored by Saga. It included Mike Banks, Mike Westmacott, Jim Milledge, Joss Lynam and Paddy O'Leary, all aged well over sixty. Their high point was around 6100m when they stopped following a huge earthquake that made their moun-

tain unstable (*Alpine Journal* 1996).

In 1993 I was surprised to get a letter from Richard, now sixty six, to say he was giving up serious rock and ice climbing. His reasons were many but he felt he was not as fit and had various back, knee and shoulder injuries. He was more conscious of the dangers and felt he owed it to Val, his wife, to spend more time together. He was also deeply committed to his local church, studying to become a lay reader. He wrote: 'I find this difficult to write because inside I am torn both ways. The urge to climb is no longer there and other things have taken precedence in my life.' We had climbed together for almost twenty years so I was deeply saddened but understood his reasons.

Despite this, Richard continued walking in the hills for many more years with John Daniels and less frequently myself. Richard and John also enjoyed several weeklong mountain holidays in Scotland, still with some strenuous days. Even in his 90s Richard continued walking around his home in Bath and the local hills. Only a few months before he died, we enjoyed a slideshow of our earlier Alpine holidays, rekindling old memories.

Richard died on 29 June 2020 following a stroke. He leaves his wife Val and sons David and Patrick and their families. After forty six years of friendship it seems almost inconceivable that he is no longer here. I will miss him deeply.

By Colin Beechey

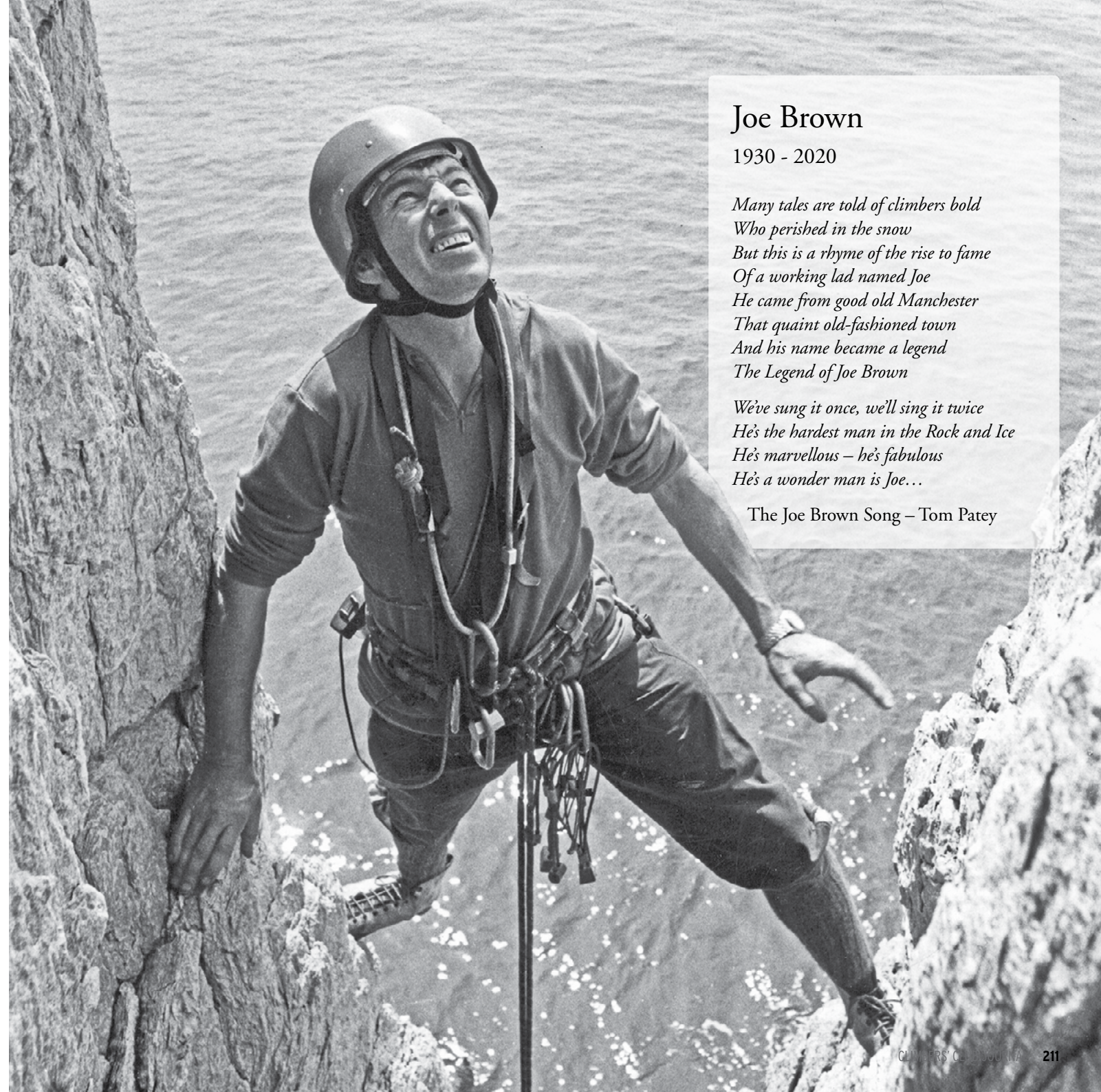
## Joe Brown

1930 - 2020

*Many tales are told of climbers bold  
Who perished in the snow  
But this is a rhyme of the rise to fame  
Of a working lad named Joe  
He came from good old Manchester  
That quaint old-fashioned town  
And his name became a legend  
The Legend of Joe Brown*

*We've sung it once, we'll sing it twice  
He's the hardest man in the Rock and Ice  
He's marvellous – he's fabulous  
He's a wonder man is Joe...*

The Joe Brown Song – Tom Patey





This obituary for Joe is a simple record of the life of an extraordinary man who changed the climbing world in many ways—his skills, his transcension of the class divide that split British climbing before the 1950s, and his business acumen that created a successful manufacturing and retail business. The next edition of the Climbers' Club Journal will have a section devoted to the personal memories, the stories and the legends about "Baron Brown".

Joe Brown, who has died aged 89, was elected as an Honorary Member of the CC in 1965.

He was born in 1930, in a terraced house at Ardwick in Manchester. His father died after an industrial accident when Joe was eight months old, leaving his mother to provide for the family of seven by cleaning and taking in laundry.

'A fatherless upbringing and a hard but happy home life encouraged me to fend for myself,' Joe noted in his 1967 autobiography, *The Hard Years*, which recounts his early years. He had a brief period as a Boy Scout and grew to recognise that he was happiest in the outdoors, and on the moors just a short bus ride away from Ardwick.

Brown began climbing in early 1947 on the rocks of Kinder Downfall, carrying a rope to assist his mates in following him. Very soon, still only sixteen, he was leading climbs at the highest standard of the time.

In the spring of that year he met Slim Sorrell by chance at Kinder Downfall. Sorrell was a 'real climber' who helped Brown to channel his natural talent and to learn established rope and protection techniques. They climbed in Wales as well as in the Peak, climbing *Lot's Groove* and *Suicide Wall*, deemed to be the hardest route in Wales. 'I didn't find it too bad,' he said. By the summer of 1948 he was making first ascents in the Peak District.

National Service interfered for a couple of years and then, in 1951 Brown and other south Manchester mates formed a 'club'—the fabled Rock and Ice which was really just a loose group of mates, but which included Don Whillans (who in 1978 was also elected as an Honorary Member by the CC). Joe's agility and innate rock sense were perfectly complemented by Don's strength and boldness and they formed a legendary partnership, not just on British rock, but also in the Alps.

Successes in the Alps were the catalyst to Joe (but not Don) being invited to join Charles Evans' expedition to *Kanchenjunga*, where, with George Band, he proved his worth by leading to the summit in 1955. A year later he made the first ascent of the *Muztagh Tower* in the Karakoram, deemed to be harder technically than anything so far climbed in the Himalaya. He was established as the greatest all round British mountaineer of any era.

Brown's relaxed style, phlegmatic humour and climbing ability made him a natural choice for the growing genre of television outside broadcasts of climbing, most famously that on the Old Man of Hoy. He worked closely with CC members John Cleare and Ian 'Mac the Telly' McNaught-Davis with whom he had a natural and telegenic rapport.

In 1961 he was appointed as an Outdoor Instructor at the White Hall Centre—one of the first non-teachers to be in such a position. He learned about canoeing here and, more importantly, how to make fibreglass

canoes. This led to a side-line in making climbing helmets as the foreign-made helmets were deemed to be flimsy and ineffective. He also developed his love of fishing on quiet rivers which lasted the rest of his life.

Over his four years at White Hall the side-line of helmet making grew and Joe decided to move to Wales and open a mountaineering shop. This in turn led to a strong friendship and joint-venture with Mo Anthoine and Snowdon Mouldings which initially specialised in making the iconic JB helmet. The shop business grew into a small chain and Joe continued to climb, in Wales, in the Himalaya and in the Andes. In Wales he formed another strong partnership with Peter Crew and they developed impressive routes at Gogarth.

In his later years Joe joined the group of 'ageing but talented' climbers developing the new climbing area of the Anti-Atlas in Morocco.

He has been an icon in the world of mountaineering who has achieved much and inspired many. The Climbers' Club is proud to have had Joe as an Honorary Member for fifty-five years.

By David Medcalf



All: John Cleare







📷 Ian Smith

## Smiler Cuthbertson

1948 - 2019

**David (Wink) Wilkinson** writes:

Growing up in the Black Country, Smiler was first introduced to mountain adventures by Harold Drasdo, Warden of The Towers Outdoor Pursuit Centre. Drasdo was an inspirational character that Smiler was captivated by; I too had had a similar experience climbing at the Towers, with Eric Byne. This introduction to climbing spring-boarded Smiler into the Wolverhampton Mountaineering Club, where he teamed up with the other young 'Tigers'. Smiler's enthusiasm was infectious; he was a natural leader and the perfect partner on the rock. The Nant Peris enclave of The Wolverhampton Bird Cage, The Vagabonds and The Ceunant Club, created a melting pot of social activity and climb-

ing competitiveness, and Smiler revelled in it. We were second tier to the likes of Eric Jones, Pete Minks, Cliff Philips and Alan Rouse, but it pushed us on to climb harder and harder.

Alpine adventures started with one of his life-long climbing pals, Gordon Caine, followed by seasons with Eric Jones, Chris Fitzhugh, and Pete Minks with whom he climbed the *Bonatti Pillar*. In 1970 we became a team, with the sole aim of a big season in the Alps (we had a long list). 12 months of full-on rock and ice saw us in Zermatt with Pete Boardman and Martin Wragg for the first of the big North Faces. We bagged four of them, but not without incident, plus another six major climbs. It would be our best season in the Alps and the start of a life-long friendship. We failed to get onto the Eiger the following year and he did eventually climb it with Pete Alyson.

After barely surviving a huge fall on the Ben, with my namesake, and a brief professional engineering dalliance with Yvon Chouinard in California, Smiler embarked upon fashioning a career as a climbing guide. This ultimately took him to Scotland with his second wife Clare and children Robyn and Laurie. There his life as a professional climber took-off, with spring rock guiding in the UK, summers in the Alps, autumn expeditions and Scottish winters as the regular annual schedule.

His thirst for new adventures was insatiable—there was always the next expedition in the planning: Hagshu with John Barry, Pachermo with Di

Gilbert, *The Nose* with Simon McCarthy, Lotus Flower Tower with Steve Long plus Himalayan adventures; and along the way he always wore his smile with an optimism that would crush the doubters' fears. An extract from John Barry's piece in *A Passion for Mountains* perfectly sums-up Smiler's enigmatic character:

'Let's hear it for Smiler—pathological optimist, Pollyanna and Pangloss; all rolled, somewhat untidily, into one. Nicest man you ever did meet and, as the sobriquet hints, Smiler smiled—a lot. The generous might argue that to smile in perfect defiance of all reason is a gift to humanity—and yep—Smiler is a gift to humanity'.

Di Gilbert writing from Everest Base Camp on hearing of Smiler's death, wrote:

'Smiler taught me lots about expedition life and was the ultimate host. He taught me that getting to the top was important but getting back down was more important. But by far the most important was the journey—the smiles, the laughs and the banter. Thank you for everything you taught me, and taking me under your arm. May your adventures continue and your smile, shine forever'.

Life for Smiler wasn't always plain-sailing, but his stoicism, supporting friends and loyal clients saw him through. In 2012 he was staying with us in Macclesfield when he literally couldn't get out of bed, it was the

start of the debilitating Rheumatoid Arthritis that would ultimately mask his cancer symptoms. Smiler had had an amazing career as a guide, making life-long friendships with his clients, but eventually his condition forced him to give up guiding. He continued climbing and was an extremely popular instructor at the Inverness Climbing Wall.

There were more adventures afoot, and we were in the first stages of writing a book (which is now in progress). And then, returning from a climbing trip to Spain, it struck, pneumonia, a collapsed lung and, on investigation in hospital, advanced cancer—Smiler knew nothing about it. Condolences and happy memories poured in from all over the world, but a poster made by one of his students hit the spot:

'He meant a lot to me because he taught me everything I know about climbing. It was the way he taught me ... so kind. I won't stop climbing. SMILER CUTHBERTSON, BEST INSTRUCTOR EVER! Kind, helpful, encouraging, positive, enthusiastic ... always urging me on'.

I had known Smiler for over fifty years, and unless he was out of the country, he would regularly keep in touch: 'Wink, Wink, what do you think about this ...?' He was excited about the next chapter and very proud about his family and what he had achieved as a climber and guide. There will never be another quite like Smiler, he is painfully missed but the memories and the smile will stay forever.

**Dave Wilkinson** writes:

So my old pal Smiler (Dave Cuthbertson) has passed away. His death came suddenly on 2nd May 2019 after being admitted to hospital with pneumonia and auto-immune arthritis. He died within a week of admission. His funeral was held at the village of Dores near Inverness where he had lived for the past twenty three years. A church service included some heartfelt tributes, and was followed by an open air buffet lunch at the village pub, in glorious sunshine, looking out peacefully over Loch Ness.

I first met him when I joined the Wolverhampton MC in the late 1960s. It was like meeting a bouncy young dog, full of energy, enthusiasm, and friendliness to all. His nickname says everything. He always had wide climbing interests. He once alarmed some policemen in the West Midlands by his night-time ascent of a disused brick-built factory chimney. Of course, his good-natured charm soon won them round, and the route was completed without further ado.

His contributions to clubs and to climbers were immense. He was a chairman of the Wolverhampton MC, Past-President of the Climbers' Club, a stalwart of the Alpine Climbing Group and Alpine Club, a member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and the Fell & Rock. On top of all this, he qualified as an international mountain guide.

We climbed together throughout the 1970s when he led me, struggling and cursing, up many hard Welsh and Lakes



Smiler in his natural habitat, Rjukan.  
📷 Trevor Langhorne

rock routes, my successful seconding being encouraged by his stream of bubbling optimism, plus an occasional tight rope. Forays north of the border for Scottish ice led to the roles being reversed. Ours was a complementary team. His notable alpine ascents include the *Bonatti Pillar*, *the Walker Spur*, *the Matterhorn North Face* and after several abortive attempts, *the Eiger North Face*.

I had a season with him in the Bernese Oberland, resulting in ascents of the Mönch, Lauterbrunnen Breithorn (first British ascent of a route on the north face) and *Ebneflüh* (a new route on the north face).

After this, sadly, we drifted apart. He moved into the guiding profession



and relocated to Scotland, whereas I concentrated on lightweight trips to the Karakoram, which he was unable to join being committed to summer guiding. His guiding activities included the UK, the Alps, Nepal, Peru, East Africa, and many more locations around the world. More recently, he organised a series of ice climbing visits to Rjukan in Norway for the Climbers' Club.

Smiler's choices of climbing venues, and styles of climbing show the width of his interests. Our sport has many disciplines: single and multi-pitch climbing, ice climbing, Alpine and Himalayan mountaineering and more, each with its own set of challenges and flavour. Smiler revelled in all of these, much as a decathlete does in the world of athletics.

He was one of climbing's great characters, and one of its most charming. Those who were guided by Smiler, climbed unguided with him or just met him in the pub, all delighted in his company, and he will be sorely missed by myself and all in the climbing world who knew him.



David Whillis writes:

Smiler was born on 26 May 1948, in Wombourne, near Wolverhampton. Educated at Ounsdale school, he left to pursue a career in Mechanical Engineering and toolmaking in Wolverhampton. But by this time an interest, perhaps better described as an obsession, with mountaineering had manifested itself, particularly in the mountains of North Wales. Scotland was an obvious draw, especially in winter. On an early winter trip to Creag an Dubh Loch, his older companions elected to climb *Labyrinth Direct*. The 'youth' was placed at the back. When the team realised the extreme nature of their aspirations, the 'youth' was persuaded to lead it. He later found that it was the ninth known ascent.

He found employment in North Wales, manufacturing climbing equipment. His engineering skills subsequently took him abroad, initially to Germany and then California, where he worked for the well-known climber Yvon Chouinard. But he was consistently drawn back to the British mountains; not even a tempting offer from Chouinard could keep him away.

As well as his main occupation as engineer/toolmaker, Smiler was also employed in teaching rock climbing in various outdoor centres. This was in addition to his regular climbing trips to Scotland, the Alps and the greater ranges including, of course, the Himalaya. So, it was no surprise when Smiler cut loose from his manufacturing career, and in 1990 qualified as an

International Mountain Guide.

In 1996, Smiler relocated from North Wales to Loch Ness, to be nearer the Scottish mountains, which is where he would be working all winter anyway. A number of new climbs in the Loch Ness area bear his name. *Ben Nevis* was his favourite mountain: he once guided *Point Five Gully* on two consecutive days. Smiler enjoyed many happy years teaching climbing in Scotland, with occasional forays back to North Wales, every summer in the Alps, and of course trips elsewhere. One of the achievements that he was most proud of was helping to set up a climbing school on the slopes of Mount Kinabalu, in Borneo. He guided a group of climbers up *Mount Elbrus*, the highest peak in continental Europe. He lost count of the number of times he had climbed *Mont Blanc*, but it was probably about forty.

He could write well and his anecdotes can be found in several climbing journals. In 2014, Smiler retired from his role as a Guide, but somewhat inevitably continued working at the local climbing wall in Inverness, initially as a technical advisor, and subsequently as an instructor, where his natural enthusiasm, good nature and infinite patience was put to good effect in teaching the next generation of climbers.

I started as a client, but became a good friend and it was a sad honour for me to officiate at his funeral.

Left: Still (detail) of montage from Wink's film: *The Outdoor Odyssey of Smiler Cuthbertson*, shown at Smiler's Wake, August 2019.



## Tom Doldon

1984 - 2017

Perhaps I'm not qualified to write Tom's obituary; I didn't know him for very many years and am ignorant of much of his biography, but I do feel his passing should be marked in the CC Journal.

Tom marched to a slightly different beat to most other people. I'll try to justify that observation below.

Tom started climbing as a lad, first with his Dad in the Grimsby Climbing Club, and only joined the CC in the last few years. He showed promise as a youth; working routes up to F7b, but it's not strength or dazzling technique that he will be remembered for, but for enthusiasm which he had in spades.

Indeed, to be on the receiving end of Tom's enthusiasm could be inspiring or sometimes wearying as I hope to illustrate later.

I became aware of Tom on the 2015 CC trip to Mingulay. We had all enjoyed good weather and were mostly pleased with the quality and volume of climbing achieved. Picture the scene; a dank calm, mizzling morning hung with midges. I awoke to the tapping of a more insistent spell of rain on my tent and heard a nearby flysheet being vigorously shaken accompanied by the call "Mark, do you fancy that E5?" The reply was along the lines of "Uh... Uh... Oh, Tom. Fuck

off". Sometime later I was forced out of my tent by an insistent bladder. As I stood there I could see Tom sprinting naked along the beach before hurling himself into the surf. Even from a distance he was clearly as happy as an otter.

At this point I had not yet had a one to one conversation with Tom.

Back on Barra at the end of the trip, waiting for the ferry to Oban, I spotted Tom sitting on a barrel reading in the bright sunshine. After some introductory pleasantries I asked 'what will you be doing tomorrow?' Tom looked me in the eye, paused for a long beat then said 'well, that depends what day it is today'.

A few hours later, on the boat, passing between Coll and Rum I was canvassing the group trying to find a partner for a trad climbing trip, to Corsica, at the end of the summer. I was getting nowhere; everyone I asked had an 'I'm all booked up/no more annual leave left' reply. George, who had proposed the trip, suggested I ask Tom. I did and Tom said 'Nice one. Yeah, I'm up for it'. I got the impression that although keen to go he had only a vague idea where Corsica was. I soon learned that Tom rarely turned down an opportunity to climb, and after Corsica we climbed together in Bohuslan, Mello, the Peak and the Grimsel Pass area.

One of Tom's life skills was the ability to sleep anywhere. I felt that should I suggest, in extremis, that in order to survive an unplanned bivvy we needed to sleep atop an array of pointed sticks he would grin, say 'nice one' and promptly fall sound asleep. That said, he



did prepare for sleep with an impressive awareness for unforeseen contingencies. In Italy in August, camping on a commercial site in the valley, Tom would take his shoes off, leave ALL the rest of his clothes on, don his Gore-Tex jacket then get into his voluminous down bag. He'd be dead to the world until morning while I tossed and turned, sweaty in only a cotton sleeping bag liner.

Notwithstanding this appreciation of potential and catastrophic nocturnal temperature drops, Tom displayed no fear of cold water. One evening in Gothenburg, a city with many canals, Tom decided he needed a swim. Perched, at dusk, on the pale stone bulwarks of a particularly murky channel clad only in his speedos a tour boat hove into view. The guide's prepared spiel was interrupted by an ad-libbed 'Oh, there is a man about to jump into the canal ... That is not very wise.' Whereupon our hero flung himself head first into the water to scattered applause.

By a cruel irony, Tom's inner demons robbed him of his contagious love for life, and deprived the rest of us of decades more trips and adventures. On first hearing of his death; along with anger and grief, I had a strong feeling that the world had become a discernibly duller place.

You are and will continue to be missed, Tom.

By Paul Wood

## Walter 'Frank' Dowlen

1928 - 2018

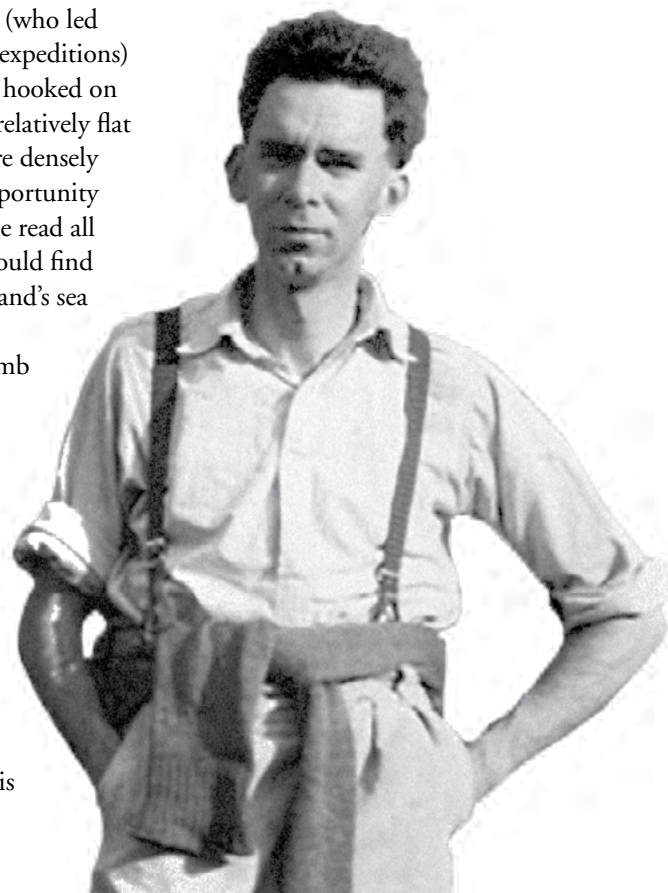
Frank was born in Trinidad, a 'preacher's boy', whose family moved to Barbados when he was aged five. His Christian name was Walter but when he went to university in the UK he decided to use the name Frank (from his given name, Francis). On marriage he reverted to Walter—apart from the time he spent teaching in Australia. This inevitably caused some confusion among those who knew him.

His interest in climbing started from a talk on Everest given in Barbados, c.1940, by Hugh Ruttledge (who led the 1933 and 1936 Everest expeditions) following which he became hooked on rock climbing. Living on a relatively flat island whose few uplands are densely vegetated gave him little opportunity for climbing. Undaunted, he read all the books on climbing he could find and began to explore the island's sea cliffs with a friend.

He kept a log of every climb throughout his climbing career. In Barbados, probably all his ascents were first ascents as no-one had recorded any climbing before that time (and possibly none since). One climb mentioned is *Cactus Chimney* near Pico Tenerife on the northeast coast. A short while after this

first ascent, Frank took Idris Mills, from the UK, up this climb who described it as 'hard as *Holly Tree Wall*'. Other climbs, mostly with Horace Miller, were at Bath and Foul Bay on the coral limestone cliffs of the east coast.

His real climbing started when he came to UK as a student in 1947. He studied chemistry at a college in Exeter which awarded London degrees. This allowed him to join the London University Mountaineering Club and he went to North Wales for the first time on a meet in March 1948, climbing in borrowed boots (his climbing log has a wealth of detail)!



In this period he climbed mainly in North Wales and on the Dewerstone.

After college he moved to Eskdale Outward Bound centre where he was an instructor for four years. He joined the Climbers' Club in 1953. In the 1950s and early 1960s, he made several first ascents in the Lake District, including *Dowlen's Chimney* (VS) on Pillar Rock with Ray Greenwood, now incorporated into *Megaton* (E1/HVS). Other notable first ascents included routes on Wallowbarrow: *Thomas* (S), *Nameless* (MS), *Bryanston* (MVS), *Logan Stone Route* (HS) and *Merlin* (HS). He also did the first ascent of *Little Taff* (HS) on Sandbed Ghyll Crag, Thirlmere. He married Ann, who was a sailor but soon became a rock climber, and they moved to Scotland, then later Carlisle, where he taught chemistry for ten years, climbing at every opportunity.

He visited the Alps several times between 1955 and 1964. The many routes he climbed included the *Ménégaux Route* on the Aiguille de l'M, a traverse of the Chardonnet, the *North Ridge* and the *Cassin Route* on the Piz Badile, and the *South* and *East Ridges* of the Salbitschijen.

In the late sixties, persuaded by an old teaching colleague, he and Ann moved to Australia where he taught at Canberra Grammar School. Canberra was home to the Australian National University and he was able to join 'The ANU Mountaineering Club'. Climbing was a fairly new sport for Australia in spite of a wealth of climbing areas, albeit widely spaced out, and Canberra

had many keen climbers. There were several post-war UK migrants and also scholars and visitors to the university from overseas. I was one such and this was where I first met Frank. A major attraction of the area was the granite massif of Booroomba and many other rock outcrops such as Mount Coree in the Brindabella range, all still in the early stages of development, and only a few miles from the city. Unfortunately for Frank, he had recurring eye problems at that time which meant he was barred from strenuous exercise and so he got little climbing, but regularly travelled to the crags with other climbers.

He returned to the UK in 1972 and settled near Huddersfield teaching maths and chemistry at a local school. He was within easy reach of the Peak District and the delights of Stanage, Wharncliffe, and other areas. The eye problem was stabilised and he could start climbing again. I returned from Australia a few months after Frank, first to North Wales and then to Sheffield. From that time we met up whenever the weather permitted and together we climbed several hundred of the better climbs on both grit and limestone. However, he had a number of climbing partners so he logged many more climbs than I ever managed. He reckoned that he had done a VS climb on every day of the calendar except December 21st.

One day Frank and I were climbing on Stanage and decided to do a quick ascent of *Inverted V* before we ate our lunch—and so we did, watched

by a small group of youths girded with enough new hardware to climb the Eiger. As we descended we heard them say: 'Come on—let's do this one—those two old blokes just pissed up it so it can't be very hard.' We sat and lunched and watched them—they couldn't get off the ground. We wandered off to our next route and left them struggling. So, 'two old blokes' could still climb the classics, but for Frank the clock was ticking. A few years later, in 2006, he had to stop climbing when the very first signs of what turned out to be peripheral neuropathy caused difficulty. The condition was progressive but he bore it with great fortitude even when, after several years, he lost all power in his legs and then, over the years until his death, the rest of his body slowly stopped working. In spite of this he was a very sociable person and his mind remained as sharp as ever until his death. He was always pleased to hear of his friends' climbing activity and if he had done the climbs would check his log for dates. Birthday cards from him usually had a footnote—on this day in a certain year we climbed this route.

Friends and family will also remember him for his niche hobby of building very realistic WW1 aircraft from Lego which he was able to do almost to the end. A fascinating man, a good friend and a wonderful companion on the hills.

By John Hoskins





## Al Evans

1948 - 2019

Al Evans was probably the most well liked person in the entire history of British climbing. The baby face, the shy, bashful smile, the gentle, unassuming manner... There was no artifice to Al. He was exactly what he seemed—the nicest guy you could ever hope to meet.

Born in Sheffield not long after the end of World War II, he started climbing in the 1960s while still in his teens. His friends were people such as Geoff Birtles, Chris Jackson and Jack Street, members of the fabled Cioch climbing club based at Stoney Middleton. Although somewhat overlooked in climbing history, the Cioch had an influence comparable with the Rock and Ice, more than a decade earlier. Highly unusually for their time, Cioch mem-

bers operated both on Peak gritstone and limestone. In the 1950s and 1960s, limestone enjoyed an evil reputation due to its looseness. As we now know, generally it's only loose until it's been properly cleaned. But the prevailing mountaineering-inspired ground-up ethic meant that routes were cleaned as you climbed: a difficult, hazardous pursuit. It took a slightly later member of the Cioch, the innovative Tom Proctor, to realise that cleaning from an abseil rope made far more sense.

The highly adventurous Cioch development of Stoney bred strong, bold climbers, willing to tackle well-nigh any crag in Britain. When Al went to Wales, Stanage VSs were quickly replaced by classic Extremes. Early on, he became friends with both Brown and Whillans. Once while drinking with Whillans and the legendary skier Jean-Claude Killy, in Chamonix, the latter went to the toilet and a young, impecunious Al reached for his wallet, to buy the next round. 'Nay, lad,' a more worldly Whillans stayed his hand, muttering, 'You don't think he pays for his drinks, do you?'. The mere presence of Killy, hero of the 1968 winter Olympics, would have lent the establishment an enviable cachet.

Al's climbing development was rapid, frighteningly so. Pretty soon, he and his mates were exploring places such as Cilan Head and St John's Head, amongst the most terrifying crags in Britain. Horrors such as the aptly named *Giant* and *Vulture* were climbed. And it was most definitely ground-up. This was a full decade before cams were invent-

ed. Wires were in their infancy. Mostly it was garage nuts, Moacs and pegs. If things went wrong, there was little hope of a rescue. It was unbelievably bold. The St John's Head explorations paved the way for Drummond's outrageous *Long Hope Route*, terror raised to the level of an art form.

Once, going ground-up on the Lleyn Peninsula on a first ascent, Al found himself stuck in the middle of nowhere. No way up. Rubbish belay; no way to abseil off. His cunning plan? Lower his climbing partner into the sea, getting him to clip a peg on another route on the way down. Get his mate to belay him (from the sea!) then jump off into the void, on to the peg and get lowered (into the sea). I can't remember what actually happened; mercifully they found an alternative. 'But would you really have done it?' I demanded, decades later. Al gazed at me with those gentle eyes. 'Of course,' he shrugged nonchalantly.

On another ground-up first ascent in the Lleyn, approaching the top, Al realised that his layback crack was moving! Sure enough, it was the side of a flake which was slowly detaching from the main face. Two Cioch stalwarts dashed along the cliff edge, grabbed the top of the flake and grimly held on to it while Al continued laybacking. Experiences such as these created fiercely strong bonds of friendship. Sure, you might have your differences (the odd new route nicked, along the way) but, when it really mattered, you were there for one another.

Al studied photography at college and spent his professional life with Granada television, as a cameraman and later a studio manager. Someone had to bring us *Coronation Street* and, sure enough, he did. He also did the requisite stints of kipping on Windy Ledge, at Stoney. Unlike some who became local specialists, he was active all over the country. In the early 1970s, on a wet day at Castle Rock, he bumped into a young lad leading *The Ghost*, thinking it to be Mild Extreme. (*The Ghost* was then regarded as one of the hardest routes in the Lakes.) Al appraised the lad of his error, realised his astounding talent and took him under his wing. The young lad was Ron Fawcett.

In the summer of 1974, the denizens of the barn at Tremadog and Humphreys' barn in Llanberis were poised to influence British climbing in much the same way as the Cioch and the Rock and Ice had before them. Two youths from Glossop were in the vanguard: Jim Moran and Gabe Regan. Jim and Al went up to Cloggy, camped there and stayed until they'd pretty much ticked the crag. (This was radical for the time; probably only the legendary Al Harris, racing up to Cloggy on his trials bike, had done as much.) Jim's mate, the gritstone ace Gabe Regan, would also become a close friend and climbing companion of Al's.

The 1970s saw a huge boom in climbing standards. With impeccable timing, Geoff Birtles captured the zeitgeist with his cult magazine, *Crags*. Al was the news editor, quickly finding himself reading

letter, after letter, after letter about new route, after new route, after new route by some unknown called Gary Gibson. Al's iconic photographs of Ron Fawcett graced the magazine. Perhaps the most fondly remembered is the famous front cover of *Crags* No 4. Al's photo of Big Ron on the first ascent of *Supersonic*, had Birtles' sublimely provocative caption, 'Can this be Britain's first 6c'. Clearly this wasn't the time or place for question marks! ('Me and Ron knew how to grade things (6a), Geoff knew how to sell magazines...') To add insult to injury, poor old Ian Parsons, on a nearby route, was rudely and crudely Tippexed out of history. Only a mysterious white blob remained, like some ghostly apparition drifting upwards. Birtles could have asked Al to doctor the photo more sensitively but hey, why stop when you're on a roll? And, back then, these boys were most definitely on a roll. The fabled Cream team: Pete Livesey, Ron Fawcett, John Allen, Steve Bancroft, and Tom Proctor, with Al, Chris Gibb and Geoff Birtles in support, were like a colossus astride British climbing.

It would have been so easy for Al to have remained merely a hero of cafe society. But he was happiest out on the crags, discovering new routes. Both as leader and second, he did first ascents all over the UK. Gogarth yielded classics such as *Freebird*, *Aardvark* and *North West Passage*. Yet he always claimed that the route of which he was most proud was the relatively humble *Jean Jeanie* at Trowbarrow. (It was named after a typically bizarre tale—Al didn't really do

normal—about a performing monkey.) He chose *Jean Jeanie* simply because it had given so many people so much pleasure. And really that's what Al was all about. He had the ability to be a great climber. He had the boldness to be a great climber. But he didn't have the selfishness to be a great climber. This isn't a slur on great climbers—but you do need to be bloody selfish. And Al simply wasn't.

Outside climbing, Al, his protégé Ron and their mutual climbing partner, Pete Livesey, shared a keen interest in running. (Earlier, in the 1960s, Pete had come cruelly close to a four minute mile.) All three were as fit as athletes. After filming the TV programme 'The Krypton Factor,' the support staff had a behind the scenes re-run of the assault course section which Al won easily. I remember him mentioning that he'd approached Mountain Rescue teams with the idea of using mountaineers such as himself, who were also accomplished fell runners, as a rapid first response to getting help to a victim. (This was before mobile phones and general availability of helicopter rescues in the UK.) Sadly this idea didn't find favour and Al wasn't the kind of guy to push things. But it seemed a very good idea indeed. Obviously your mountaineer/fell runners would have to be highly competent—and Al was highly competent. Typically he was happy to be the guinea pig for a feasibility study. But the powers that be just weren't having any of it.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Al carried on doing what he loved doing,



climbing all over the place. In 1988 he found a chance to combine his two great passions, climbing and filming, with an Army expedition to Everest. When asked, 'Did you summit, Al?' this was his reply. 'Monsooned off, on the easy slabs, 200 metres from summit'.

(By radio)

Team lead climbers: 'It's snowing heavily, sir.'

Team leader: 'Will you make it?'

'Think so, sir.'

'Will you make it back?'

'Possibly'

'Come back now, attempt aborted.'

However galling for Al and his dead-hard mates, I think we can agree that this was absolutely the right decision. It's frighteningly easy to lose your life in the Himalaya.

Meanwhile Al's career in television steadily advanced. He became a studio manager, which must have brought horrendous levels of responsibility and attendant stress. He met nearly everybody—and I do mean nearly everybody. We used to joke that how could you possibly claim to be famous if you didn't know Al. Of course he didn't give a hoot whether someone was famous or not. People are people; that's all that matters.

Once he went to Manchester United to do an interview with Denis Law. His wife, Andrea, came with him. Al wandered off (as was his wont) while Andrea waited with increasing impatience. Eventually a man came out and asked politely if he could help. 'It's OK, I've just come with my husband to interview some footballer.' 'Oh aye?' he grinned.

'Yeah, football, I mean, come on ... some guys kicking a ball around a field. What's that all about?' His eyes twinkled. 'Hmm, put like that, you may have a point...' Suddenly Al appeared. 'Hi Al, you should have said you were coming!' 'Oh hi, Denis, I've been looking all over for you!' Andrea went bright red. Denis Law just smiled gently, making light of her faux pas.

But there are good times and there are not so good times. Despite being such a highly successful professional person in a notably demanding profession, despite being such a much-loved figure in the close-knit climbing world, at times Al was troubled. And crucially both worlds shared a drinking culture.

Eventually the television world came to an end for Al and his friend/department head, Jim. Jim reinvented himself as the bestselling author, Lee Child. Al retired to the Costa Blanca. It was the early 2000s, just about the time that the Orange House started up. Al's apartment was about thirty miles up the motorway, a little way from the mainstream. In retrospect this may have been unfortunate. Had he been closer to a merry band of like-minded companions, things might have been different.

For a time though, it didn't matter. When Al arrived in Spain, he was permanently tired—probably years of gruelling television work finally catching up with him. But then he seemed to recover. He forged a climbing relationship with fellow northerner and CC member, Graham Rawcliffe. He could stand on the balcony of his apartment and look

across the great ridge of Segaria, acres and acres of virgin rock, enough to keep one busy for several lifetimes.

And the first couple of years were notably busy. Al would go out with Graham, other visitors to the Costa Blanca, or just by himself, soloing. He did trad routes, ground-up. On his single excursion into bolting, he fell foul of what certainly seemed like double standards—no bolting, it's a preserved zone (albeit one with unrestrained building development). Similarly, both Al and Graham encountered local council corruption. So unfortunately it wasn't all fun in the sun. One day Graham, fit as a butcher's dog and the most stoical of people, turned up at Alcalali and admitted that he had an acute pain in his stomach. Instantly alarm bells started clanging. Graham went for tests; it was cancer. By nature Graham was a fighter, probably as tough as Whillans in his prime and, like Al, an utter gentleman. He fought and fought, giving the last of his energy to an experimental treatment. But sadly he died.

Graham's death may have marked a turning point for Al. Old friends such as Nick Colton and Dave Parker went out to see him; so many shared climbing memories. But gradually he seemed to withdraw. Retirement promises so much—but sometimes the reality can be cruel.

And then one day you find he's gone. You want to hug him and say goodbye. But you can't.

Al was his own man. But he was also a type of person which seems to be found surprisingly often in climbing circles.

He was a giver. He just quietly got on with things, trying to make them better. For instance, back in the early 1970s, the only CC hut which allowed women (as guests) was Cwm Glas Mawr. Along with friends such as Dave Cook and Ken Wilson (both also sadly no longer with us), Al lobbied hard for women to be allowed to join as full CC members, enjoying exactly the same privileges as men. Ken Wilson once told me that helping to make this happen was the proudest achievement of his life (and this from a man whose life was crammed with achievement!) Similarly Al and his mates chipped away at the fusty, class-ridden structure. It's thanks to people such as them that the CC is such an egalitarian organisation today.

Al has left a legacy of great routes and, far more importantly, a legacy of great friendships. He was a gentleman. And he was a gentle man. He will always be remembered with deep affection.

By Mick Ward



📷 Climber



📷 Ian Smith

## Dave Gregory

1934 - 2019

If there is such a thing as life after death then Dave Gregory, that 'stocky unflappable demolisher of gritstone cracks', as Jack Soper called him, will be found eternally flogging his way up the biggest sky-splitting gritstone crack that you have ever seen. On the same day that I learned of his sudden death, news of the passing of fun-loving Al Evans also came through. Two bolts from out of the blue. Whereas Al belonged to our great Gogarth bonanza of the late 1970s, Dave was from an earlier era. In fact he was my mentor and regular rope mate from 1964 to 1973.

Dave was born in Sheffield, a city which produced many leading climbers of the day. His dad, if I remember correctly, was a keen game shooter

and they soon moved to an isolated house somewhere in the middle of a wild wood near Grenoside. Dave was reputedly one of the last boys in Yorkshire to go to primary school wearing clogs. An ex-pupil of King Ted's Grammar School in Sheffield, Dave graduated from Sheffield University and had cut his teeth with the solid old-guard members of the Peak Climbing Club such as Ron Townsend, George Kitchin, the Gillott brothers, Bert Shutt, and Pete Crew. Dave's climbing took off though when he teamed up with university-bred Jack Soper. With Jack he broke through the Extreme barrier by making early ascents of Brown and Whillans routes such as *The Shrike*, *White Slab*, *Llithrig*, *Vember* and *The Mostest*. Their exploits are chronicled in the FRCC journal.

For many years Dave was Head of Physics at the prestigious Lady Manners Grammar School in Bakewell. While there he introduced countless young people (such as Alison Hargreaves) to the 'gentle' art of climbing steep rocks. During the long summer holidays, Dave made forays across the channel to the Dolomites. To this end Dave had purchased a one-ton grey Ford van which also had a double mattress in the back for a while ... just in case Dave was lucky! It was while in this van, returning from Wales one weekend, that the police stopped Dave in Darley Dale at about 1.30 am. When asked the number of his van, Dave replied, 'Ah officer, you've got me there. It is either 5321R, or it could be R5321,



or possibly something near that.’ The officer grinned and quipped, ‘Well it’s a good job that we know you already, Mr Gregory.’ Dave had a wonderful scientific brain as sharp as a knife, but his retentive memory could be like a sieve. When asked a question about his exploits, he would frequently give a wry smile and say, ‘You’d better ask Geoff. He knows more about what I’ve done than I do.’

Dave took me under his wing in 1964 when he was 31 and I was a mere, very green, 22 years of age. Our first route was *The File* on Higgarr Tor which Dave thugged up and then, with smug satisfaction, watched my pathetic attempts at jamming. He was a hard taskmaster and it took several years before I could equal his considerable ability.

From 1964 onwards the Gregory, Brodie, Milburn rope visited Wales (Llanberis, Gwynant and Gogarth) and the Lakes (mainly Langdale) on alternate weekends. The weekend’s shopping was always done by Dave who made certain that the vegetables would last him the rest of the next week. Porridge oats had to be soaked overnight and destroyed for an hour on a primus stove, and the bacon for butties had to be well crozzled. The ration for the crag was one jam sandwich and one cheese and raw onion sandwich, washed down with orange ‘glugwasser’. Dave and Andy Brodie usually conversed in pigeon German/English and I had to learn all about krankenhouses, slauffensacks, and eine-

kleine-shufflehausen music. They also bowked (laughed loudly) a great deal. Every gallon of petrol for the van was logged, as was the mileage, so that Dave could charge exactly what was due. Yorkshire physicists don’t make fiscal mistakes.

As a philosopher, geographer and wide traveller (Greece, Alps, Yosemite, etc.), Dave was a good raconteur. One of his best stories was of a night in an Alpine hut where a throng of noisy climbers kept them awake for a while. When asked to be quiet, they took no notice until two small figures catapulted into the middle of the room. ‘I’m Brown, said the first, then ‘I’m Whillans,’ snarled the second. The pin was heard dropping and silence then reigned supreme.

In the early 60s Dave began to ream out old nuts that he found, which he threaded on to perlon line and used as chockstones in cracks for runners. Threaders were also constructed from old fence wire while hemp waist-lines were de rigueur. Helmets were ‘bone domes’, useful for storing rose hips in the autumn. Dave collected gear like a squirrel and would pick up anything he found, such as discarded or lost hats, sweaters, left or right-hand gloves etc. His cupboards in his bedsit were crammed with material of all descriptions... with at least two or three of everything.

In 1963 Dave became the secretary of the BMC Peak Area Committee, a role he retained until 1972. During that time Dave also became inextricably

linked with Peak District guidebook writing—his years and years of climbing on his beloved gritstone edges were put to good use, though he also contributed to the Northern Limestone Guide, then published by the Climbers’ Club. By 1974 he became the Peak Guidebook Series Editor, a role he continued with until 1980 when he handed over to me.

With his distinctive wiry beard, which Dave never shaved to reveal what was underneath, he stood out in a pub, as alcohol never touched his lips. His tippie was always a pint of still orange. Dave never wasted words, so every one counted and his biting wit was always to the point and apt to be scathing. At times Dave came across as a slightly less pugnacious ‘Whillans character’ and could be intimidating.

Dave wrote a host of articles for magazines and journals and carried with him a small notebook in which he jotted down any inspirational ideas. He had to, or he’d have forgotten them by nightfall! Of his several books, *A Necklace of Slings* is perhaps the most memorable. When he was offered an Honorary Membership of the BMC (at the same time as Ken Wilson), he only would agree if I was also honoured at the same time. That humbled and touched me more than I can ever say. Even though I had replaced him as Peak Series Editor, it showed what a straight and honest person was my staunchest backer. Dave won’t be forgotten by climbers in a hurry.

By Geoff Milburn

**Hilary Lawrenson** recalls: I knew Dave Gregory for many years, but only started climbing with him regularly when I started working part-time after having children and found myself a selection of retired climbers to go out with during the week. You could always tell when Dave was on the crag, as his booming teacher’s voice could be heard from great distances. He was very strong and you had to be on the ball if you should chance to step down momentarily, lest you found yourself unexpectedly winched up that section of the climb, feet skimming past the rock, denied the chance to try the move again.

Dave was a Yorkshireman through and through; plain-speaking, salt-of-the-earth and thrifty to an extreme. He wore his clothes till he couldn’t patch or darn them any more; whenever he found random items lying on the hill or anywhere else, he would take them home and wear them; if they were too small for his stocky frame he would give them to me, so (amongst other things) I became the owner of a small donkey jacket with singed cuffs and a pair of Ron Hills with patches on the knees, which he had found, sodden, on top of a Lake District hill. He used to travel with a wooden box which he had made in his youth, containing essential culinary items, such as condiments, tins of stew, corned beef and other assorted delicacies, most of which had been in the box since he made it, I think. I remember spending a rainy day in May Cottage going through the box, persuading him to discard the older

items, some of which were well over ten years old and had been travelling round the country with him for years, just in case he needed them.

It was very apt that his final wishes were to donate his body to Sheffield University for use by medical students, purportedly so that his family didn’t have to pay out for a funeral, but there was a secondary motive, in that his grand-daughter had complained about the lack of bodies to practise on while she was studying medicine. The ultimate in recycling and an example I intend to follow myself.

At his wake outside Chesterfield the hotel room was packed with friends, relatives, climbers and even old pupils from Lady Manners School in Bakewell, where he taught physics for many years. It’s a sign of a good teacher when your pupils, (Mannerisms, he used to call them), keep in touch. His son Bill gave a touching address full of memories and laughs, accompanied by Dave’s statutory pint of still orange squash; his brother, giving his own address, looked up at the gathering over the top of his half-moon glasses in exactly the same way Dave used to. Between them they painted a vibrant picture of this man of immense character with a twinkle in his eye and a love of gritstone.



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## Pip Hopkinson

1937 - 2018

**Nick Hopkinson** and **Dave Atchison** write: Pip could always get a strop on, in the nicest of ways. The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) was often a subject he would assail you with. However his stubbornness paid off when he was very young; he had a huge strop because he did not want to go to the Air Raid shelter when the sirens sounded. He was clinging to his bed and his Mother and Gran were getting increasingly alarmed at the delay. Thus, when a Luftwaffe bomb took out the shelter, he inadvertently saved the lives of his whole family, and as his brother said ‘especially the ones that weren’t born yet’.

Pip was a very generous and kind individual who gave huge support to his brother, sisters and friends at every



opportunity, as he did to the Climbers' Club. He was kind enough, in the afternoons after coming home from West Bridgford Grammar School, to take his little brother Nick out to teach him to ride a bike. Not many big brothers would do that and sixty five years later, Nick is still an enthusiastic cyclist.

Pip and Nick shared a flat in London which had a rodent problem. Pip put his electrical skills to great use by designing a 240 volt mouse trap. His brother, of a more nervous disposition, made sure it was turned off when they went to bed! He also remembers, on another occasion, Pip chasing a mouse around the flat with his ice axe.

After this, he lived for a while with Dave Atchison in his flat in Rugby. At the time Dave was working on a project with the US Navy and he was involved in work in Poland, behind the Iron Curtain, which made for interesting exchanges over supper!

There are many facets to Pip's life but, above all, he was a climber. That is where he found most fulfilment, on and off the crag in the company of climbers. His first club was the Rugby Mountaineering Club of which he was a founder member. He had left Nottingham for Rugby as an apprenticed electrical engineer with the British Thompson Houston Company in 1958—it was then, over 60 years ago, that Pip met up with Keith Miller, Robin Prager, Bud Metcalfe, Ian Angell, Dave Atchison and others—and first got into club climbing. There are those who take pride in not being in a club, that would never have

been something Pip would have boasted about for he was, above all, a social being—a 'people person'. He made friends easily and lastingly.

Dave Atchison recalls that he first met Pip at work in 1958 and at weekends, they would go up to Wales in Fred Marvin's coach to camp in Humphreys' field in the Pass. Pip, with Russ Bloor, with accordion and tin whistle, provided the backing for the sing-songs en-route up the A5. They had many climbing adventures together including *Eliminate A* on Dow, *Haste Not* and *Gordian Knot* in White Ghyll, but Dave especially remembers Pip threading the little hole at the foot of the rib on *Phantom Rib* with much characteristic puffing and grunting! It was a memorable moment. Pip was not especially nimble but was strong and had a good technique which brought success even in taxing situations.

Pip was always ebullient, full of beans, a good raconteur and never dull. He was always hale and hearty, sometimes even over-hearty. He had strong views on just about everything and naturally gravitated towards fellow opinionated enthusiasts such as Tim Lewis, Jim Curran and Ken Wilson. Being a 'clubbable' man, he took on many jobs for the Climbers' Club and during that time persuaded quite a few of his friends, including Doug Scott, to join as members.

Pip, more than anyone, persuaded Doug to stand for the role of President of the BMC in 2009. As it turned out, it was a fine, but doomed, idea as Doug was not elected. Pip wanted someone

to stand up for the clubs at a time when there was disaffection with the BMC, which was seen by many to be growing ever more commercial and contracting ever more 'employees for life'.

Pip was an arch traditionalist when it came to climbing. He was strong and he could cope well with most VS and HVS climbs on grit and on Welsh and Lakeland rock. This was good enough to ensure he could make the most of his visits to the Alps and on one occasion to Yosemite. He returned from these trips even more convinced that the British model should be preserved, with the bolting of crags and competition climbing indoors kept at bay.

Although he never had children, he did have four wives! At heart though, he was a real family man as his brother and nieces would attest. He was an inspiration and help to many young people starting experiences in hill walking and climbing. When Doug Scott left Nottingham for the Lakes in 1982, Pip offered Doug's teenage son lodgings so that he could complete his apprenticeship in carpentry. This arrangement certainly gave young Mike more freedom than he would have had lodging with his grandparents! Looking back, there were so many acts of kindness, at one time a young friend of Pip's, whom he and Nat Allen had persuaded to join the Climbers' Club, hit hard times. Pip and Nat paid his subscriptions for 10 years until he recovered financially.

By Nick Hopkinson and Dave Atchison

Steve Andrews writes: We had a very rowdy Climbers' Club AGM in 1994. It was a crowded affair in the Heights in Llanberis. I had never met Pip before but after it was over he came up to me and his opening gambit was 'We are going to have a revolution'! I went on to join the committee in 1995 and felt it better to have Pip on the inside of the Club management so I recruited him to the committee as well and we became firm friends.

The Club's Centenary was looming. Pip seemingly knew everybody in the world of climbing and came to the committee with an unbelievable proposition—he had recruited ten of the world's most famous climbers, starting with Bonington, Scott and Brown, to lecture. All our initial ideas about the event were blown away when we discovered that, at that time, no potential venue in North Wales could seat more than two hundred people for dinner. Plans were rehashed and we ended up with 550 members and guests in a beautiful marquee on the car park of the Royal Victoria Hotel in Llanberis. Pip also set about writing the history of the Climbers' Club for inclusion in the Centenary Journal, a massive undertaking to which he gave a very personal view.

When Bob Allen became Club President, he got on very well with Pip and valued his counsel. He would often extoll the time they worked together on the Future Policy Sub-Committee from 1980-1981. Bob proposed Pip as a Vice-President; he held this post from 2000 to 2003 and was in his element.

The Club elected him as an Honorary Member in 2003. His list of Climbers' Club posts held: Committee member, Assistant-Secretary, Secretary, Meets Secretary and Vice President is probably the longest you will find in a CC handbook!

In 2007 he used his contacts list again to organise the speakers for the Guidebook Centenary Celebration. He and I went to inspect the hotel and its accommodation with the hotel events manager prior to the event. With typical humour, when we were confronted with a very strange room with two double beds in it, he insisted on trying to figure out which four members would most appreciate each other's company.

Doug Scott writes: Pip went to Nepal to do some community work and really took to the rural poor. He was a founder member of Community Action Nepal (CAN) and became Secretary and a Trustee of the charity until 2017. He was hugely popular with the villagers he met on project sites during three visits he made around the millennium. He was known as the 'big sahib' with his booming voice and laugh, a tonic which echoed around the Himalaya.

In 2002, he took his brother, Nick, to Nepal along with Nick's daughter, Laura, and her fiancé. All three are qualified dentists and put their skills to good use in CAN's health centres. Pip was well known by many of the CAN staff out there and his family found that being related to him brought prestige and status way above anything which they could have expected.

What were his other facets? In the years after he retired he took up painting and art and showed much ability. He had a great ear for music and he loved jazz and folk, producing his penny whistle, flute or accordion at weekends in the pub, especially when he became a regular member of the Nottingham Climbers Club whose members were famous for their folk singing. He edited a book of concertina music which is a model of high production standards and is much respected and sought after.

We, the four authors of this tribute, all have similar impressions of Pip. He was such a larger than life character, without guile and what you saw is what you got. He made us laugh, he sometimes made us cringe, but my goodness, Pip, you were always such a good and loyal friend.







John Cleare

## Ian Howell

1936 - 2018

To his close friends he was known as 'Pin' for there were two Ians in Whillans's 1964 Gaurishankar team and Dennis Grey calculated that Howell = dowel = dowel pin = Pin. Inadvertently the expedition attempted the mountain's Tibetan flank, avoided Chinese patrols—and failed. It was Pin's first expedition.

But to climbers the world over Ian was 'Mr Mount Kenya,' for by the 1970s he was the acknowledged local guru and his advice and generous assistance were freely available to all who wanted to climb on the mountain that he had made his own.

"From the moment I first saw Mount Kenya at the age of 32 I wanted to climb it, and for 33 years I did just that..." he wrote. An ex-BBC engineer,

he first arrived in Nairobi in 1968 on a two-year contract to establish a country-wide radio net for the Kenya Police. At the time there were scarcely a dozen different routes on the mountain massif and in the ensuing twenty five years, usually climbing with other expat members of the very active Mountain Club of Kenya, he put up over twenty new rock and ice climbs of the hardest technical standards on the main peak alone. By 1985 he had reached the summit more than 160 times by dozens of different routes.

The MCK guide book warns that even the regular route to the twin summits of the mountain should be regarded as a two-day climb; the line, graded IV inf, far from obvious and liable to be iced, had been the scene of several accidents to descending parties caught out by the twelve-hour equatorial night. Thus after completing his police contract early in 1970, Pin designed and prefabricated a tiny bivouac hut in his Nairobi garden and arranged for the National Park to airdrop it in five loads on to the Lewis Glacier below the peak. Then, entirely alone and carrying the loads on his back, he made thirteen solo ascents to erect the hut at 5188m, among the summit boulders of Nelion. The tiny Howell Hut will accommodate four at a pinch and has ever since proved a god-send to so many climbers. After retirement, Pin became a regular on the CC Cornwall Meet and one evening the talk turned to Kenya. Mark Vallance asked the question—how many of those present had slept in the Howell Hut?

Out of about twenty CC members present, about a dozen hands went up! Pin was astonished and delighted.

Born in London and educated at Caterham School in Surrey, Pin's vocational training took place at the Cable and Wireless Engineering College in Porthcurno. This was before he discovered climbing, but he was later to recount that his acting debut took place at the nearby Minack Theatre, as a drunken sailor in HMS Pinafore! Pin had started work in the Caribbean for Cable & Wireless, which was also his father's employer, when in 1958 National Service caught up with him and posted him to the Royal Signals at Catterick. Here he fell in with Brian Evans, already a well-known climber, who took him out onto the gritstone edges. This was so successful that climbing soon become the principle motivation of his life.

After a couple of years climbing widely round Britain while working for the BBC Engineering Department in Ealing, Pin took a three month break in 1962 to visit the Alps with Brian and Allan Austin. Starting in the Dolomites they worked westwards via an impressive sequence of some twenty five hard rock routes including the *Comici* on the Cime Grande, the *Scarf Arête*, the *Badile North Ridge*, the *East Face of the Grand Capucin* and the *West Faces* of both the Noire and the Dru. A shorter holiday the following year added a few more similar achievements and he was elected to the ACG.

Obviously Aunty was generous with unpaid leave, for then came the Gaurishankar attempt and subsequent election

to the AC proposed by Ian Clough (the 'other Ian') and seconded by Peter Crew. Two years later Malcolm Slessor invited Pin to join his team for an abortive attempt on the Amazon Face of Yerupaja.

Pin's folks lived on the Isle of Wight and I'd first met him at Swanage in 1965 where in those early days he'd done a lot of new-routing though never bothering to write anything up. He wasn't a box-ticker. Subsequently we shared a few climbs in Cornwall and elsewhere, but then when he returned to Britain after his Kenya police contract, we hit it off as serious rope mates. Especially memorable was the second 'ascent' of Tom Patey's *Crab Crawl* on Creag Meagaidh which we did with Bill March. On a northern sea cliffs foray we did routes at St Bees and Peterhead and the second ascent, by a new route, of The Souter on Fast Castle Head. He worked for me on several film and photographic assignments, enjoying filming *The Lost River of Gaping Ghyll* but getting jammed tight, deep underground, in Ogof Daren Cilau while we worked on a story entitled 'The Cave from which Rescue is Impossible'. Underground was not quite his scene but we did enjoy a short but very sweet season in the Bernina and Bre-gaglia which included the second ascent of Carlo Mauri's *Direct North Face* route on Monte Disgrazia. That autumn he returned with Pete Biven to locate the elusive Piz Ligoncio, a facsimile Badile, and make the first British ascent of its comparable North Face. That was his style—pioneering—a magnificent but unknown route on a fine little-known

peak. He was elected to the Climbers' Club in 1973.

It was nineteen years before Pin returned to the Alps while on a business trip to UK. On the Barre des Écrins I owe him much, if not perhaps my life. High on the South Face, on steep rock, I was swiped by a large rock fall. Despite a suspected broken left arm and leg, by clever rope work he got me up the two pitches to the summit and then safely along the summit snow crest and so down the north face to the Glacier Blanc where we were forced to bivouac. Miraculously I was merely very badly bruised, and next day, with feeling gradually returning, he roped me safely over the Col des Écrins and back to La Bérarde. It was his final Alpine fling.

During his irregular UK business trips, Pin especially enjoyed amphibious explorations on sea cliffs; notable were the Elugug sea stacks off the Castlemartin coast, climbed in wild winter weather, and the Devil's Lime Kiln, that profound blow hole on Lundy, where he and Pete Biven were almost thwarted by an aggressive bull seal.

After Yerupaja his next expedition was as big as they come: we were both selected to join the much publicised 1971 International Everest Expedition attempting the first ascent of the *South West Face*. BBC sponsored and ill-fated, we were groomed to shoot the first synch-sound film from the summit. Needless to say we didn't and the full story is well covered elsewhere, including the 1972 Alpine Journal. But preparing for the expedition demonstrated another

of Pin's skills, he was handy with a sewing machine, indeed back in Kenya he had made much of his own mountain clothing, and now, working with BBC technicians, we designed and developed much of the specialised protective gear that was necessary for filming at high altitude and in low temperatures.

Having recovered from Everest he returned to Kenya to take up the post of Sales Director of NavCom, a two-man Nairobi firm selling airport radio equipment across Africa. Now new routes on Mount Kenya appeared thick and fast, usually with one of the two other leading Kenya climbers, Iain Allan and John Temple. When acclimatised and moving fast a route could just be snatched in a weekend. One such was the Diamond Couloir, the steep 300m ice gully on the South Face between the twin peaks, long considered a death trap since a RAFMA party were avalanched below it in the 1950s. In 1972 Pin and Iain Allan had surmounted all difficulties, but, on reaching the little Diamond Glacier at its head, had traversed off to be at work on Monday morning. In poor weather another attempt, now with Frank Cannings and me, was defeated by spindrift avalanches. Some weeks later Pin and I zoomed up from Nairobi before dawn one Saturday morning and on Sunday afternoon, high on the final icefall, we each in turn discovered the other had fallen asleep. Too horrified to continue, we swiftly abseiled out.

A year later Phil Snyder with T Mathenge, his African Ranger trainee, made the first complete ascent right to



the Gate of the Mists, but I always felt it was really Pin's route.

He was no stranger to the other great snow mountains of Central Africa. He'd ascended the Virunga volcanoes and with Snyder had made the first ascent of the remote *McConnell's Prong* (V A1) in the Rwenzori. His obligatory hand-shake with Idi Amin had occurred on a mundane business trip. He knew Kilimanjaro well having made the first complete traverse of the mountain, west to east, with Snyder, ascending Kibo by the Western Breach and eventually descending the wild, unexplored East Face of Mawenzi, enduring nine bivouacs en route. He had ascended each of the southern glaciers and in 1975, with Bill O'Connor and me, made the first direct ascent of the hanging Kersten Glacier, a two-day route, mostly on steep ice and involving some aid climbing on a large icicle.

Nevertheless, Pin did not relish the cold, and was happiest on sun-warmed rock. With Iain Allan, John Temple and other MCK friends he made regular exploratory climbs on the 'bush crags' and inselbergs which abound in Kenya, where climbing is spiced by unusual hazards. Descending one day from Ololokwe crag, he and Iain Allan were chased by a rhino, while on the forested Umbwe Ridge their tent was ripped in the night by a prowling leopard. A cave on one remote crag held the mummified bodies of what he assumed had been ancient tribal shamans. Benighted below a line of roofs during an attempt on the blank wall of the Ololokwe mesa, we

found neither ledge nor protection in the peculiar, crackless rock, and belayed only to vine stems hanging over the roof, we slept perched on mounds of bat guano adhering to the face. In the night the bat guano slid away leaving us held only by the now taut vines. Come daylight we retreated with some difficulty. On favourite crags such as Hell's Gate, where Pin's brilliant route *Olympian* (600ft, E2 5b) is surely Kenya's most celebrated rock climb, climbers may well encounter swarming wild bees and face the attentions of aggressive baboons whose antics polish the holds.

Predictably the siege tactics and razzmatazz that ventures such as Everest expeditions attract, left a bad taste in his mouth. Over the next twenty years Pin often returned to the Himalaya, but always with a few trusted friends, determined to climb in better style and to leave no trace on the mountain of their passing. Thus in 1978 a new route was attempted without sherpa support on remote Himalchuli (7893m) and in 1986 he and his two companions were weathered off just below the summit of Ama Dablam. For some reason success had eluded him on every 'official' expedition.

However, starting in 1974, he and I with a trusty sherpa cook, a kitchen-boy and Jimmy Robert's blessing, made a series of lightweight forays into unmapped areas of Nepal where we discovered unknown passes, traversed closed valleys and climbed several good peaks, usually nameless, of around 6000m (though later we were surprised to discover the

highest had been nearer 6700m) simply 'because they look interesting and attractive'. These journeys were probably illegal and official reports were never written. It was mountaineering at its purest, absolutely Pin's style, and years later he claimed that these trips were the most enjoyable ventures in his life.

He had first visited Yosemite in 1966 with the thwarted Yerupaja team, the first British party to do so. When Pin and Davy Bathgate became the first all British rope to climb the *NW Face of Half Dome*, Al Steck and several Valley denizens became life-long friends. Years later, at the age of 61, he toured the American West with Iain Allan, ticking off no less than eighteen of the routes in Steck & Roper's *Fifty Classic Climbs in North America*, including *The Titan*, that frightening 200m monolith of 'solid mud' in the Utah desert whose '... summit changes shape in every thunder storm'. Later, an attempt with fellow Kenya climber Peter Brett on the *Cassin Route* on McKinley, his last go at a big mountain was defeated by bad weather. But it was not really his style.

In between all this mountain activity Pin had managed both to earn a living and to find time, in 1975, to marry Ann, a teacher working in Nairobi. In due course, concerned that Kenya was no longer a safe place to bring up a family, they moved back to Britain in the early 1990s and settled near Bath. Now he commuted to Kenya, two weeks off and two months on, a gruelling ordeal. He took a fall climbing at Lukenia, a favourite crag outside Nairobi, after

which his badly damaged ankle was slow to knit and he was diagnosed as coeliac with resultant osteoporosis. Serious dietary planning became essential and so he finally returned home and retired.

A gentle, generous and unassuming man, climbing for Ian Howell was his way of life and mountains his inspiration. He was a safe climber and despite his many successes there were many retreats, for his mountaineering was about exploration, never about conquest. After retirement his explorations continued but in lower key: there was the *Groot Spitzkoppe*—at 1728m the 'Matterhorn of Namibia'—at the age of 74, (see CCJ 2011) and then one final expedition with several old friends to the High Atlas, though here the long ascents of steep snow slopes proved hard work. He was often to be found on the friendly granite of Cornish sea-cliffs, and occasionally on the bolted limestone crags of the Spanish Costa or taking gentle walking tours with Ann on various Mediterranean islands. At home he tried off-road cycling until a fall on ice outside his home did further damage, and he was a volunteer driver for the local hospital car service. As a member of both the Alpine Club and the Climbers' Club he kept in close touch with his climbing friends and with goings-on in the mountain world. But after two knee replacements his fitness gradually declined and he died unexpectedly, leaving his wife and a daughter, a Cambridge tennis blue, who is clinical director of a veterinary practice.

By John Cleare

## Sir Johnny Johnson KCMG

1930 - 2018

Sir Johnny Johnson, who joined the Climbers' Club in 1954, has died at the age of 88.

He was an outstandingly accomplished man who maintained his love of mountains and of walking throughout his life. Regrettably we know nothing of his rock-climbing, though he had been in the Oxford University Mountaineering Club and took part in at least one OUMC Alpine season, contributing an account of an 'interesting' ascent of the Tsanteleina in the Graian Alps to the Club Journal. It was no doubt through the OUMC that he was introduced to the Climbers' Club.

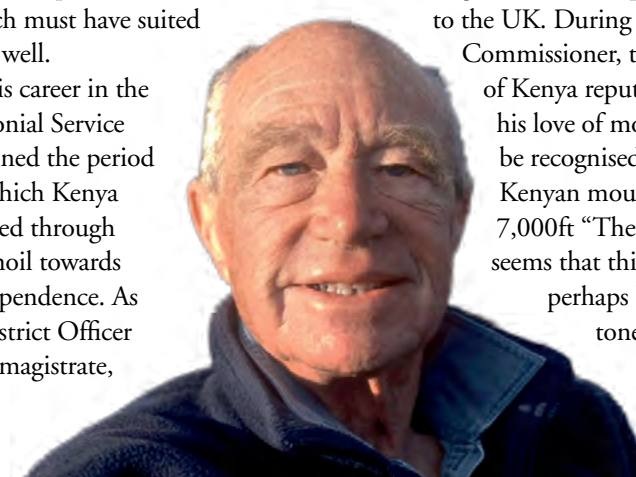
Johnny Johnson was born in India, but educated in the UK at Manchester Grammar School and then Oxford. He followed his degree with a further year at Oxford, training for the Colonial Service on the 'Devonshire Course' and was then appointed as District Officer in Embu, Kenya. Fortuitously this is on the slopes of Mount Kenya which must have suited him well.

His career in the Colonial Service spanned the period in which Kenya moved through turmoil towards independence. As a District Officer and magistrate,

Johnson played a role in dealing with the Mau Mau uprising when he was based in Kiambu, near Nairobi. After Kenya's independence was gained in 1963, Johnson returned to Britain.

On return, he worked as administrator for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and University Principals (now Universities UK), and then joined the Foreign Office where he had a distinguished career as an Africa specialist. He had a number of overseas appointments, culminating in the role of High Commissioner (the Commonwealth equivalent of Ambassador), first in Zambia and then back where he started, in Kenya where he gained the confidence of President Daniel Arap Moi and members of his government. Johnson's connections went back 30 years and he knew more of the country's history and peoples than any other diplomat. He was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) in recognition of his diplomatic service to the UK. During his time as High

Commissioner, the Mountain Club of Kenya reputedly suggested that his love of mountains should be recognised by calling the Kenyan mountains greater than 7,000ft "The Johnsons", but it seems that this was not adopted, perhaps because of the overtones of colonialism. Johnson had






moved to Amersham when he worked in London for the Foreign Office and he moved back there when he retired from diplomatic service. However, he never really retired and took on a number of paid and unpaid roles. He had a spell back at Oxford, as Director of the Foreign Services programme training foreign diplomats from around the world, in particular from eastern European countries after the breakup of the Soviet Union. He then became Chairman of the Countryside Commission (now part of Natural England) and was instrumental in raising the status of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) which at the time were very much in the shadows of National Parks. As private individuals, he and his wife Jean became patrons of *WorkAid*, a charity set up after the great Ethiopian famine, which sends refurbished tools and equipment to the people of East Africa to help to break the cycle of poverty and to rebuild lives.

He also became very involved in conservation and outdoor organisations, utilising his considerable experience as President of the Long Distance Walkers Association, President of The Friends of the Lake District, Vice-President of the Youth Hostels Association and, on home ground, he was a very ‘hands on’ Vice-President of The Chilterns Society.

As one of his volunteer colleagues has said... Johnny Johnson was a man who could, and did, make a difference. There can be no finer epitaph.

By David Medcalf



Left to right: Eric Langmuir, John Mallinson, Mike O'Hara.  Mallinson collection

## John Mallinson

1932 - 2017

John Mallinson joined the CC in 1955. He has claims to distinction in the annals of Scottish climbing; he was for a long time the youngest Munroist and he introduced Eric Langmuir to rock climbing. Together with Mike O'Hara they opened up the first routes on the Etive Slabs in 1954.

Brought up in Selkirk, John had some modest experience of the Border hills as a boy, but he was bitten by the Munro bug at the age of 16 when, in the summer of 1948, his family were staying at the Rowardennan Hotel, Loch Lomond. Disdaining his parents' enthusiasm for fishing ('surprisingly boring'), he latched on to a party of Glasgow Scouts to climb Ben Lomond.

It was an epiphany. Subsequently, aided by having access to a succession of motorbikes, occasionally to his father's van, and ultimately even to a Standard 8 of his own, John pursued Munros, mostly on his own, with an accelerating zeal and focus—'I was in the grip of completion fever. Nothing could stop me'. When he completed them in 1956 he was, at 24, by some years the youngest Munroist up to that point.

But John's enthusiasm for the hills had also taken him into rock-climbing. In 1946, starting his first term as a boarder at Fettes, he fell in with Eric Langmuir, who was to become a life-long friend. John—always known at school as 'Toby'—had been intro-

duced to rock-climbing as the result of a chance encounter with A Parkin (not CC Hon Member Andy Parkin) in Glenbrittle Youth Hostel in 1949 when they climbed the Cioch and, a month or so later, made a traverse of the Cuillin Ridge in eleven hours, no mean feat! Following these exploits, he in turn inducted Eric to the pleasures of Cuillin rocks in 1950 when Eric's talent became immediately obvious. Their climbing partnership was somewhat disrupted by Langmuir departing first for National Service and then to Cambridge, but in 1954 they came together when, in Mallinson's car, they travelled up to Glen Etive with Mike O'Hara to investigate a report by Langmuir's father of 'some rocks on Beinn Trilleachan that he had spotted when fishing on the loch and which might be of interest'. The rest is the stuff of climbing history. After a rather disappointing first venture on *Sickle* (it was damp and vegetated), Langmuir made 'the bold and brilliant lead'—in gym-shoes, the others wearing Vibram boots—of the key pitch which opened the classic *Spartan Slab*.

However, John's climbing was by no means restricted to Scotland, in fact his early climbing career took in some classics in Wales, the Lake District and the Alps. In the early '50s he and Parkin had a considerable campaign in North Wales (*Longland's*, *Great Slab*, *Curving Crack* on Cloggy, *Tennis Shoe* in Ogwen and others); later they did a selection of stiff routes in Glen Coe including *Guerdon Grooves* (a bold line, still HVS); in the Lake District they climbed *Eagle's Nest*

*Ridge*, *Kern Knotts Crack* and *Sepulchre*. In August 1951 (JM's only recorded Alpine visit) he did the *Salbitschijen South Ridge* with 'B.Schenker' (a guide perhaps?) and, again with Parkin, the *Charmoz-Grépon* traverse and the *East Face of the Grépon*.

Finishing the Munros in August 1956 seems to have marked the end, or perhaps the tidying-up, of one stage in John's life. He married in 1957. He had always had a mind to emigrate, so his subsequent career as an accountant took him to New Zealand, back to London and then to California for over thirty years; but when he retired in 1994 he returned first to Selkirk, and finally, in 2002, to North Berwick. Having maintained his membership of the SMC and of the Climbers' Club throughout his extended sojourn abroad, he then joined the Munro Society.


He was able to resume modest hill-walking and in 2006 Dave Hewitt, sometime editor/publisher of *The Angry Corrie*, persuaded him, despite his dodgy knees and a bad hip, to climb Ben Chonzie to mark the 50th anniversary of his 'Compleation' on that Munro.

Dave Hewitt wrote a profile of John in *The Angry Corrie*, this is sadly no longer available, however the obituary that John wrote for Eric Langmuir, in the 2004 Climbers' Club Journal, paints an engaging and humorous picture of some of their exploits together.

By David Medcalf

(based on John's obituary in the SMC Journal by Bob Aitken)



 John Cleare

## Ian McMorris

1938 - 2017

It was at an Alpine Club meeting at South Audley Street one evening in 1960 that Tony Smythe and I found ourselves in conversation with another young unknown with an unusual accent. Ian McMorris, newly arrived from Southern Rhodesia—and a climber of course—happened to be looking for digs and Smythe and I had a spare floor in our flat. The newcomer proved a congenial flat-mate and the following weekend in the Avon Gorge he proved no slouch on rock either: within the month we were pioneering new routes together at Swanage.

Thirty-eight years later, now a leading specialist in the field of outdoor education, Ian retired as Director of Oxford's Woodlands Outdoor Centre. Among



many appropriate advisory and committee appointments, he'd chaired the BMC Access and Conservation Committee and the Mountain Leader Training Board, he'd sat on the DoE Expedition Panel and the Health and Safety Executive, and campaigned vigorously on Rights of Way and Freedom of Access in Wales. He'd even seen his name given to an Antarctic glacier.

Hailing from Salisbury, now Harare, where his parents were in business, Ian enjoyed an outdoor childhood and learnt to climb with the Rhodesian Schools Exploration Society, and by the time he left school he was making first ascents on the big crags of the Chimanimani and Inyanga mountains near the Mozambique border, earning the sobriquet "Steaming Jim". He trained as a cartographer with the Rio Tinto Corporation and on an expedition to Kenya, among other climbs, he summited Batian via the South East Face of Nelion. But dispirited by the looming political situation, Ian eventually booked a passage to Britain. On the day of departure from Cape Town, he set off to Table Mountain with Rusty Baillie to do a final climb, which they were still struggling to complete when the Union Castle liner in the docks below started blowing its siren to signal final embarkation for Southampton. Then one of them took a short fall. Two pegs came out and both climbers found themselves swinging on a single bent piton high over Cape Town Bay. Needless to say Ian caught the boat—but only just.

After sitting various exams in London

Ian applied to join the British Antarctic Survey—or FIDS (Falklands Islands Dependencies Survey) as it then was—and in 1961 he was posted to the Stonington Island base on the west coast of mountainous Graham Land as a surveyor/mountaineer: here he befriended Johnny Cunningham, another Stonington resident. Over the course of three seasons Ian learnt to ski and became enamoured with the ethos and techniques of dog sledging. Besides making frequent multi-day journeys and climbing several virgin peaks, he completed a notable and particularly gruelling expedition mapping the coast of the Larsen Ice Shelf on the eastern side of the peninsula, travelling 900 miles over 115 days by dog sledge. Subsequently the UK Antarctic Place-Names Committee named the McMorris Glacier on the northern arm of Marguerite Bay. Not surprisingly his sojourn down south had a profound effect on his life thereafter.

Back in Britain Ian took a teaching qualification at St Luke's College in Exeter, where with Peter Biven and other Exeter climbers he made first ascents on the limestone at Chudleigh and Torbay, before moving on to teach at Lindisfarne College near Llangollen, where again there was much virgin rock. Earlier, at the AC, he had met Wilf Noyce, who was then starting work with publishers Thomas Nelson on what was to become the *World Atlas of Mountaineering*: Wilf consulted Ian on his embryo African and Antarctic chapters, but when Wilf was killed in the Pamirs in 1962, Nelson commissioned Ian to complete the book.

The task occupied his spare time for several years but when finally published in 1969 the book was well received and for some years was the only authoritative reference volume of its kind.

For many years Ian dined out on an incident that occurred in the Alps in 1967 when he, Peter Biven and I were descending the Envers du Plan Glacier, at speed on steep névé. Ian, out in front, was actually running. Suddenly a rogue crevasse appeared. Attempting a crash stop he snagged a crampon right on the lip. He leapt into the air, described a perfect somersault and landed safely on his feet on the far side. He continued his run, much to the incredulity of a guided French party who were standing debating exactly how best to cross the crevasse. Later, he and I enjoyed the North Face of the Chardonnet before going off with Bev Clark, Mick Burke and Mike Kosterlitz to shoot a movie on the Aiguille de la Brenva.

In 1970 Ian spent several months at the Directorate of Oversea Surveys, plotting the results of his Antarctic work, where he became involved in planning an Anglo-American expedition to the Sentinel Range, where only the highest peaks had then been climbed. When this fell through he started organising a FIDS-supported expedition to untrodden Smith Island in the South Orkneys—later to be Tilman's objective when he disappeared in 1977—where FIDS was keen to plant a navigation beacon. Surrounded by imposing ice cliffs, this tiny island rises to the worthy prize of Mount Foster (2105m).

Unfortunately, the BBC withdrew its backing after overspending its 'exploration' budget on a failed northern polar junket, while navigational developments soon made the beacon redundant. Ian was bitterly disappointed and Mount Foster was left to a Bulgarian expedition thirty years later.

That same year I was Best Man at his wedding to Gaynor, a talented young artist, at Gresford, not far from Llangollen. Ian was anxious to bid a fitting farewell to bachelordom, so on the morning of the wedding he insisted that we should repeat one of his own routes on a steep limestone crag in the Dee Valley. But high on the wall, spread-eagled at the crux with minimal gear, he discovered that the vital aid peg he'd left while making the first ascent a year or two before, had since been chopped. He unroped. I down-climbed, found my way to the cliff top and dropped him a

📷 John Cleare



top-rope. We eventually arrived at the ceremony, flustered, sweaty and rather late. He remained happily married for 47 years.

When Ian took an advanced teaching diploma at Oxford, the educationalist Robin Hodgkin, 1938 Masherbrum veteran and well known mountaineer, became his tutor and soon his close friend. Robin was impressed with Ian's ideas on the value of the outdoors and adventure in the shaping of young minds, along with his strong sense of fair play, and pressured him to apply for the directorship of Woodlands, the Oxfordshire Outdoor Education Centre at Glasbury-On-Wye, to succeed Colin Mortlock, who was about to retire. He was appointed and ran the Centre for the ensuing twenty eight years, teaching youngsters to live together and appreciate the environment through the gaining of outdoor skills—climbing, canoeing, caving, gorge walking and other adventurous activities—meanwhile supervising a busy staff. Unflappable, dependable and yet always up for a personal challenge, despite having never before sailed, he and Gaynor bought a Macwester 27 sailing boat in Aberystwyth, sailed it to Fishguard and then crossed to Ireland and back without serious incident.

When at last he and Gaynor, she still a working artist, retired to their coastal cottage in North Pembrokeshire, Ian maintained his links with outdoor education by setting up a charity, the Oxford Outdoor Learning Trust. Involvement with committee work and



On Central Buttress Avon Gorge 📷 John Cleare

consultancies continued but he still found time to enjoy steep rock, while taking a special pleasure in exploring the wild Pembrokeshire coast in his sea kayak, often with his Jack Russell terrier, Cadi, complete with little life jacket, riding pillion. A highly cultured man and an excellent photographer, he travelled widely with Gaynor investigating the art of India, Ladakh, Japan and Mexico. As his health deteriorated in later years he enjoyed his writing, his music, his poetry and his books while delighting in living so close to the sea. He was naturally proud of his two daughters, the one a successful marine consultant, the other—elected during the last months of his life—MP for Cardiff North. Ian died, peacefully, in Withybush hospital, Haverfordwest on October 22nd 2017.

By John Cleare



## Paul (Dee) de Mengel

1948 - 2017

*“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”* Helen Keller

“Go up the right-hand edge of the buttress to the overhang and a fine but relatively easy traverse left with thread in a crack on the lip of the overhang—sling usually in situ. The next move onto the upper face is the crux.”

*The Tippler*, E1, 5b, 1983,  
*Stanage Guide*

Those of you climbing in the Peak District from the mid 70s to the end of the 80s may have expected to find that sling. Many of us who knew Dee (Paul) de Mengel knew that he had an obsession for removing climbing tat, as he saw it, from crags in the Peak District. The sling on *The Tippler* was just one obsession for him. He removed it every time it was replaced.

Paul de Mengel—Dee to all who knew him—was one of the world’s true adventurers. As a mountaineer, rock climber, sailor, canoeist, fell runner and someone who was always up for a challenge, his passion for adventure took him around the world. Recognising his thirst for new experiences, Dee joined the Navy in 1963 straight from school and quickly became a prominent member of the RNMC—climbing at every opportunity in South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand, as



well as forging strong links with local climbers in the south-west where his ships were often based. By the late 60s/early 70s regular alpine trips had commenced with ascents, amongst many others, of the *North Face of the Dru* and the *Gervasutti Pillar* on Mont Blanc du Tacul. These early days weren’t without the occasional epic, including surviving an unscheduled 500-metre roped-together uncontrolled fall on the descent of the Tour Ronde in poor weather; unfazed he set out the next day on the *North Ridge of the Aiguille du Peigne!* Towards the end of his service career Dee was offered an instructor role at the Joint Services Mountaineering Training School in Fort George, Scotland where he immediately gained respect for his ability and enthusiasm to inspire others in all aspects of the outdoor environment. Land-based navigation was, however, not a strong point for Dee and this

lead to some ‘interestingly’ lengthened days! 1974 saw him in Norway climbing several routes including the second ascent of the *North Wall of Sondre Trollind* with Deryck Ball.

Demobbed in 1975, Dee moved to Sheffield, taking a job as a roving electrician for Thorntons Toffees. He quickly discovered that domestic wiring varied significantly from that of a frigate. He tells the tale of spending a fruitless hour trying to work out how to install two-way switches on a staircase in a shop. A customer took pity on him and showed him how to correctly wire it up! Thorntons kindly provided Dee with a van and so he was able to tour the country fixing switches and lights in shops while climbing in the evenings and weekends and on the occasional day when he should have been working. Many of Dee’s impoverished climbing buddies enjoyed this subsidised

transport. On one occasion Dee crammed his tools, climbing gear, his partner Chez and Brian Rossiter into the small van and headed for Scotland. He had a job in Glasgow to do and went through the city to drop Chez and Brian in Glen Etive for a couple of days before he rejoined them on the Friday night. On the Saturday Brian and Dee climbed *Trapeze* and after going down to the road for a cup of tea went back up to climb *Yo-Yo*—both hard, respected routes on Aonach Dubh in Glencoe. The following day they went up to climb *Shibboleth* on the Buchaille only to be defeated by the steep, habitually weeping crack on the second pitch. On another occasion the Thorntons van made its way to the Kaisergebirge Alps complete with bikes and climbing gear.

It was around this time that Dee and Brian instituted a Christmas Day run from High Neb (Stanage) car park to The Grouse near Froggatt. It incorporated soloing what they believed was *Christmas Crack*. In those days a few hardy individuals did the climb (with ropes) on the day itself leaving Christmas cards and mince pies part way up the route. The first run undertaken by this pair (of idiots) was very early in the morning and was without a guide book. Climbing what turned out to be *April Crack* (next door to the planned route) left them struggling for friction in their trainers in a dank, algae filled, dripping crack system. What was almost their first, last, and only Christmas run then became a tradition for Dee during his time in the north of England.

Dee took extended breaks from work for two long trips to the States. On the first occasion he bought a 750cc motor bike to cross the USA, East to West. He climbed around the Midwest and Western part of the country, making a successful ascent of *The Nose* on El Capitan with Alun Hughes, as well as the *South Face* of Mount Watkins. Dee was always a delight to be with, full of tales and self-deprecating humour. As such he never found it difficult to pair up (persuade would be a better word) with other adventurers to take on the near impossible.

Dee left Thorntons to focus on climbing for a couple of years. To earn money to support his addiction he worked for a season with Geoff Arkless at the Mountain Summer School in Chamonix, returning for employment at Plas y Brenin for a year. He made ascents of many North Wales classics such as *Left Wall* on the Cromlech and *Void* at Tremadoc. Under the watchful eye of Jim Hargreaves, he quickly acquired high-level kayaking white water skills. In 1980 he returned to live in the Hope Valley in Derbyshire where he worked as an electrician at the Blue Circle cement works; he had worked out how to wire up stairwells by this point. He lived life on the edge with many kayak trips in swollen rivers and down boulder-strewn weirs—frequently at night. He often forgot that the light starts fading at 3.30pm in the winter—trips were only part-way through at this time and the van was still several miles away downstream. Dee also hosted

memorable barbecues, with an oil-drum brazier roaring away, that included him adding the vital ingredient of camping gas cylinders (do not try this at home)!

Dee still had itchy feet however, and in the eight years in Derbyshire he undertook climbing and kayaking trips around the world. 1982 saw him in the Bio-Bio range of the Andes, climbing in Nevados de Chillan with Terry Story, Jim Hargreaves and Alun Hughes. Alun also had a commission to produce a programme for S4C, the Welsh TV channel. Armed with sea kayaks, mountaineering gear and cameras, Alun and Dee kayaked around Tierra del Fuego for six weeks, filming as they went including a ‘rounding of the Horn’ and a first ascent of a 7000 foot peak from the glacier. They recall, whilst in an extremely isolated location, being awakened in the night to see their kayaks, and worldly possessions, about to be swept away by a rogue wave.

In 1987 and 1992 Dee took part in attempts to climb Latok 2 in the Karakoram. May 1987 saw Dee and Joe Brown reach 22000 feet, just 1300 ft short of the summit, before having to retreat due to bad weather. In both expeditions Dee was central to their organisation and he was often at the front, breaking trail and undertaking a high proportion of load carrying. For the 1987 attempt to climb the mountain, Dee had permission for eight weeks off work. Realising the weather was not good and they needed more time, Dee got a message back to the cement works to say that he was ill and he needed to



have another month off because he had a collapsed lung. When he returned to work he maintained this pretence, much to the annoyance of the HR team at Blue Circle.

From 1988 to 2008 he lived in Pembrokeshire, initially as an instructor for The Prince's Trust. Dee was eventually to lead the Trust's operation there—developing and expanding the Centre to become their premier outdoor water-based resource and instilling high standards and expectations. His passionate belief in enabling others endeared him greatly to his staff, instructors and fellow professionals. He had warmth, humour, integrity, humility and energy. To some he was a great mentor and to others he would inspire them to reach goals they never believed attainable. Many attribute their own love of the outdoors to his enthusiasm and encouragement.

Dee not only continued climbing, as part of the Pembrokeshire Climbing Club, but was a keen advocate for rock climbers; negotiating and challenging the army for access to Range West and other areas they preferred the public not to visit. Our access to Range West is in no mean part due to the work of Dee and other local climbers at that time. A keen member of the Climbers' Club, Dee made good use of the huts and then, despite living some distance away, he later 'put back in' by taking over as the Custodian of May Cottage for a number of years. He was keen to repair and maintain the place as well as ensure that the hut was a pleasant place to be in

for all who stayed. Visitors today can still see his presence, in his guide to occupants, with his own particular sense of humour visible to all. Next time you go there, seek it out on the noticeboard.

Dee was a long-term advocate of Amnesty International with a strong interest/belief in Human Rights. He would quietly involve himself with writing supportive letters for victims of abuse and promote the Charity wherever an opportunity arose.

Dee was always able to instil confidence and calm into a situation. In all the years his friends knew him, if Dee said it was ok—it was. There was only one occasion when Brian saw him frightened. They were at the top of *Star Wars* (E4, 5c) in the Castlemartin Range, Pembrokeshire. The rope was down the cliff ready for the abseil (into space) above a rolling sea. Dee was silent. Unusually quiet. 'I'll be alright, but could you go down first?' Brian did, Dee followed and once the rope was pulled down and they had set up for the climb he relaxed and was back to his normal jesting self, shouting at Brian to get some gear in or 'we'll probably both end up in the drink.'

In the 2000s Dee recognised that sailing would enable his adventurous spirit to be sustained. As always Dee took up the activity in a big way. When Deryck met him once in the Scilly Isles both identified each other's yachts by hanging their rock boots off the cross trees. (Yes, there are some good climbs on the Scillies as well.) Dee had also now met fellow adventuring spirit

Pippa, and sailing trips around the north coast of Scotland and Ireland followed. He crossed the Atlantic with Pippa and 'Mac' Macfarlane—escaping a hurricane off the Newfoundland coast. However, this was just the prelude. From retirement in 2008 until 2015, fulfilling a lifetime ambition, he sailed with his wife Pippa around the world in Sula, a thirty-one foot Bermudan sloop. Setting sail from Pembrokeshire to the Mediterranean, on to the Caribbean, New Zealand, Australia, avoiding pirates off the east coast of Africa, on to South Africa and back to Pembrokeshire. They took in mountains, volcanoes, coasts, islands, jungles, plains, complete isolation and storms and marvelled in the beauty of an unspoilt world. The absolute success of this greatest of adventures was significantly due to Dee's meticulous planning and attention to detail and safety. When difficult situations arose he and Pippa were always prepared. A blog of their adventures can be found at <http://sula-dee-pippa.blogspot.com>

Dee packed more into his life than anybody we know. He was someone who enjoyed and looked for challenging, potentially dangerous and exciting experiences; the very definition of an adventurer.

*'The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.'*

Eleanor Roosevelt

By Brian Rossiter and Deryck Ball

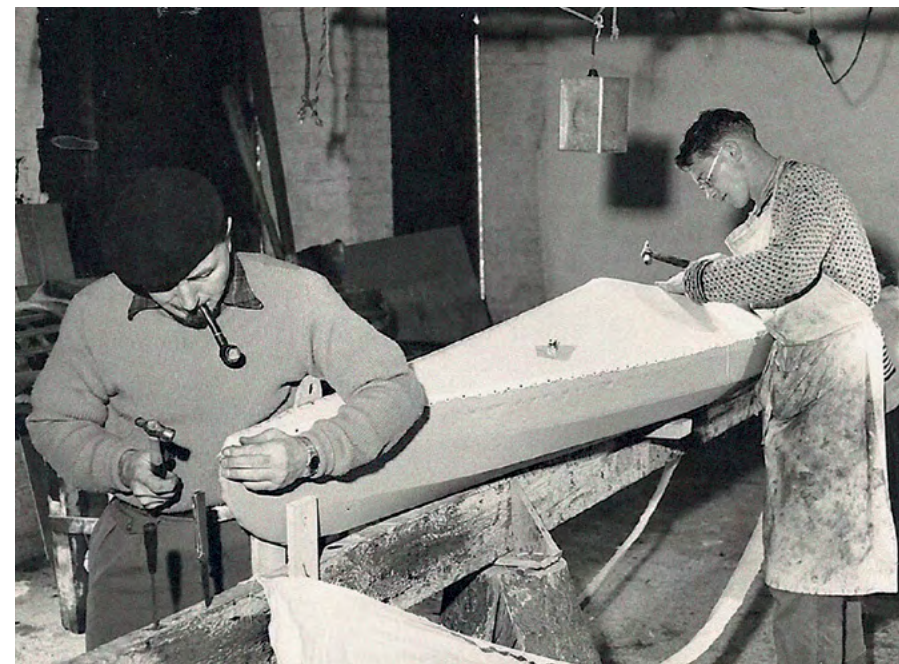
## Roger Orgill

1934 - 2018

Roger was born in Preston in 1934. He was educated at Foyle College in Northern Ireland and at a Heimvolkshochschule in Schleswig-Holstein. In 1948 Roger's mother, Gwen Orgill, took up the post of Domestic Bursar at the newly opened Adult Education College at Attingham, a National Trust property near Shrewsbury. This was to be the new home for Roger and his sister Judith.

The Warden of Attingham College was George Trevelyan, then in his early 40s and already a pioneering spirit in the new area of adult education. Roger's father was away at sea in the navy and George became an influential father-figure for Roger. Attingham provided a vast estate for Rogers's love of the countryside, a place he was later to describe as 'paradise'. Encouraged by George, Roger learned about canoe building, sailing and woodwork (he built his own sailing dinghy) and was introduced to climbing, caving and diving. Music featured strongly in the Attingham curriculum and Roger attended one of the early Eisteddfodau at Llangollen.

This was a rich formative time for Roger as many inspirational figures came to teach at Attingham: one morning at breakfast Roger found himself sitting next to Yehudi Menuhin. He had lectures by Lady Eve Balfour, founder of the Soil Association, and Richard St Barbe Baker, the founder of Men of the



Canoe building at Plas y Brenin. Photo Orgill family

Trees, now the International Tree Foundation, among many other pioneers of new thinking. George also introduced Roger to the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, saying, 'don't necessarily accept this, but try it as an idea'. Roger did accept these ideas, later becoming Chairman of a Steiner Waldorf School at Hereford.

During compulsory National Service with the Royal Armoured Corps at Catterick, he developed a new form of adventure training for recruits. When John Hunt returned from the Everest expedition in 1953, Roger was his host when he came to give a lecture at Attingham. After Hunt became Director of the new Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, he took chairmanship of the newly-opened Snowdonia National Rec-

reation Centre at Capel Curig and Roger was given early release from his National Service to become one of the four founding members of staff in 1955. He used his skills from Attingham to build all the canoes at the centre, sometimes working late at night to finish boats before a new intake of students arrived! He joined the Climbers' Club in 1959. The current Ogwen guidebook records that 'At first the centre (PyB) functioned with only a handful of instructors, who soon recognised the scope of the area for introducing novices to rock climbing and mountaineering. The nearby Llynau Mymbyr rocks and the RAC Crag came under scrutiny, with staff members Roger Orgill and John Jackson making early finds here.'



When Plas y Brenin became the National Mountaineering Centre in 1960, Roger became the first Chief Instructor, working with John Jackson. He adapted what he had learned at Attingham, incorporating the Menai Straits and the beautiful Anglesey coast into the courses as well as the mountains of Snowdonia. The aim was always to broaden the horizons of young people and encourage them to experience their environment and relationship with the planet.

Roger wrote about this time: 'A feature of courses in the early years at Plas y Brenin was the morning pre-breakfast gathering on the terrace overlooking the twin lakes of Mymbyr and up to the Snowdon Horseshoe. This was a voluntary event for students when staff took it in turn to lead a ten minute period of quiet contemplation and quotations from the best of mountaineering and exploration literature. On some occasions this also took place on mountain camps at the start of the day.'

'Overnight expeditions spent in the mountains with tents and sleeping bags were wonderful and natural opportunities to facilitate discussions and occasionally explore philosophical and esoteric topics with student groups. The atmospheric nature of a high camp in a mountain cwm at sunset can be very moving particularly for those experiencing it for the first time. The onset of evening and a quiet meal was in contrast to the earlier physical activity of the day, and contributed greatly as background to the relaxed and contemplative mood of the evening. Sometimes lying on

sleeping bags to explore the night sky, the darkness would provide a level of security and anonymity for conversation to range over the mysteries of the universe, our relationship with the planet, the existence of God or some form of superior intelligence at work in the cosmos. Students would later quietly admit to never having been able to broach such subjects before, and the exchange having contributed greatly to their enjoyment of a week's experience.'

Later, Roger was to chair the National Association for Outdoor Education (1980-90) while contributing to the emergence of the Institute for Outdoor Learning. During these years Roger became Director of Adventure Activities at the Sports Council, pioneering the Action Sport programme developing urban-based adventure opportunities in partnership with other agencies in urban regeneration programmes. In 1990 he received the MBE for services to outdoor education.

On retirement (Roger never really retired!) in 1996 he was invited onto the Board of the New Opportunities Fund of the National Lottery responsible for Adventure Sports. He was also a Trustee of the NGO World Youth Service and Enterprise and the Global News Education Trust, the charitable arm of Positive News. He acted as Chair of the Steiner Waldorf School in Hereford, guiding it to become the first state funded Academy.

Roger also tirelessly embraced the new movements emerging in the 1970s and 1980s in environmentalism,

consciousness raising and spirituality. George Trevelyan had retired from Attingham after twenty three successful years and had launched the Wrekin Trust. Roger played an important role in development of the Wrekin Trust, becoming Chairman in later years through to its dissolution in 2016. Roger was involved in north Wales in the Eryri Environmental Network and participated in the Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose.

In later years Roger became associated with the Brahma Kumaris movement and had close links with the leaders. He was also very supportive of the Chalice Well in Glastonbury and attended many of their gatherings and conferences. He was always busy, always on the move (to the next meeting), always encouraging and positive. Wonderfully, despite suffering illness, he was able to travel to the launch of The Albion Project (Exploring the essential roots of British Spirituality) at Chalice Well in April 2018 where he gave a moving speech.

By Paul Fletcher and David Medcalf



Roger at Denmark Farm.  
Tania Orgill



## Roger Phillips

1942 - 2020

**Pete Finklaire** writes: When I first met Roger in 1972 he was already an experienced and accomplished climber, with several successful alpine seasons under his belt. The Matterhorn, the *Tasch-Dom* traverse and the *North East face of the Lenzspitze* were amongst routes climbed with CC member Murray Hodgson.

Roger was a committed climber with a lifelong love of the mountains. His infectious enthusiasm inspired and contributed to so many trips over the years. He loved North Wales, walking its classic ridges in all conditions, and climbing the classic routes. I remember him leading *Cenotaph Corner* and *Cemetery Gates* with just a handful of early 70s nuts.

1973 saw Roger and Murray make an ascent of the classic *Comici* route on the Cima Grande, and from that day

on he was a devotee of the Dolomites. At this time we started climbing on the sea cliffs at Swanage; an adventurous place in the early 70s, where we made several first ascents. Swanage became a spiritual home for both of us. By 1974 he had climbed most of the extremes on the Main Wall at Avon Gorge with his friend Don Smalley. He was leading his hardest routes at about this time.

1975 saw a small group of us in Romsdal, where Roger and Murray climbed Tony Howard's classic *Breitind East Pillar*. We'd previously been rained off the *Søndre Trollind Pillar* with two very wet bivouacs.

Roger took a job with a maritime seismic survey company as an electronics engineer. This involved alternating four weeks on with four weeks off, and gave a lot of time for climbing trips!

In the spring of '77 we were in Yosemite and did the *Chouinard-Herbert* on the North Face of Sentinel Rock, our first experience of climbing a wall 'American style'. There was always a trip somewhere, skiing at New Year in Chamonix, the Vercors at Whitsun and the Alps in the summer. But it was our 1980 Kishtwar Himalayan expedition that stood out for us both as one of our greatest trips. Roger, Murray Hodgson, Rod Wilson and I, made the first ascent of *Flat Top*, a superb technical climb on a fabulous mountain.

We made many trips to the Dolomites, sometimes stopping off in the Kaisergebirge on our route down. Over a period of years we climbed many wonderful classic routes, such as the *Cassin* on the

Cima Ovest, Punta Civetta *Via Aste*, Marmolada South face *Via Don Quixote*, and so many other memorable climbs. Within these memories, the North Face of the Rocchetta Alta di Bosconero, just south of Civetta stands out. Over several trips we did three terrific routes on this magnificent wall; the *Strobel Arête*, the *Nevasa* and the *Via KCF*. On return to the hut following our ascent of *Via KCF*, the guardian made a fuss of us when serving the customary cups of tea. We all had a laugh when I stated that Roger was eligible for a free bus pass! We'd just climbed a 600m grade 6+ route in good time; Roger was sixty five at the time. There were many more trips to exotic locations around the world.

But it was not just the climbing that made these trips so memorable, it was the easy companionship, the warmth and empathy shown in everyday life. He was so easy to share a camper with. Roger was a true family friend, attending my daughter's concerts during her school and university music courses. He would host slide evenings where we would all show our pictures of the year's trips, and plan and enthuse about future trips. He will be sadly missed, like the end of an era.

**Simon Laker** writes: I first met Roger at the local climbing club. We hit it off immediately and so began twenty years of fabulous trips and one of the best friendships I have ever had.

Everyone who met him would say the same. He had a natural empathy and temperament that made people want to



spend time with him, chew the cud and, of course, drink a cuppa. His enjoyment of all things climbing was perhaps only matched by his legendary ability to drink tea.

However, this wonderful friendly demeanour hid a ferocious drive to push himself, whether on a big wall, snowy face, high mountain or at his old favourite, Swanage.

We visited many places in the world, but a constant was Swanage. We had a crack at anything our standard allowed. Many of these were somewhat esoteric but he loved them all, especially the big old classics in the Ruckle. Warming up on routes like *Argo* and *Heidelberg Creature*, Roger would lead with a couple of old roped hexes, often placed as an afterthought when well past the crux.

Occasionally we would talk ourselves into ‘having a look’ and the day we climbed *Ocean Boulevard* was a red-letter day indeed.

He loved climbing anywhere but held a real affection for Wales. An evening on *Left Wall* stands out, but any route, whether rambling up Tryfan, thrashing up an obscure route on Cadair Idris, or a mega-route on Cloggy, all meant the same to him.

An unfortunate slip whilst descending on another favourite crag, Stanage, meant a trip to hospital, a few pins in his back and many weeks recuperation. At the age of seventy his determination to get fit was an inspiration. To check progress, we went ski touring in the Vanoise. I had never seen him ski before, but it didn't surprise me that he was seriously

accomplished. A local guide even commented on his perfect technique—praise indeed from a Frenchman.

Roger had climbed with Pete in the Dolomites for many years and he absolutely revelled in the place. We had six consecutive seasons out there, always travelling in his beloved T4 campervan. His preference was for routes around 8-10 pitches. Enough to get your teeth into, but easily done in a day to allow maximum enjoyment back at the van with several pints of strong tea for rehydration. This would be followed by a bottle of deep red that was always opened during the cooking, so the cook could have a ‘chef's nip’.

The *Cassin* on the Badile was a special route for Roger, having missed out on it many years ago. Fit from a few weeks in the Alps, the rock flowed beneath us. His smile on the summit ridge showed what it meant after waiting over thirty years. The plan was to drop down the south side, enjoy the hut and walk round the next day. However, the wrong gully and a chilly bivi resulted in a North Ridge descent, he was totally in his element. Of all the routes we chatted about when he was in hospital, it was the *Cassin* on the Badile that brought a sparkle to his eyes.

Two trips to Kenya allowed us to climb Nelion by the South face and Batian by the North. The North face trip was capped when we circumnavigated the mountain, dropped down to Mackinder's and with one day left before heading out, climbed the South Ridge of Point John. Great fun on a snowy

rock climb on the equator. As good as this was, the best moment for me as we walked under the *Diamond Couloir*, was Roger regaling the tale of when he had climbed the Ice Window route with Murray Hodgson many years before.

A visit to New Zealand brought closure to another longstanding project of Roger's. Mount Aspiring could well have been named ‘Perspiring’ for us. Deep snow made even getting to the hut a mammoth task. The route was a long endurance fest, but as usual he just kept on pushing. He really wanted this one. The two-day descent and walk out felt as tough as the climb, but I still reckon the crux for Roger was running out of tea bags with a full day still to go.

Meeting a guide friend of ours during the Aspiring trip gave the opportunity to visit Peru. Three years on the trot culminated in seven wonderful mountains being climbed. Roger's generous character made him the perfect high-altitude team-mate.

With his wide circle of friends there were many trekking trips to the Himalaya, fun bolt clipping escapades across Europe, a Patagonia excursion with Dean and many epic cycling journeys including Land's End to John O'Groats.

As he moved into his later seventies, the passion never diminished even as the pack started to feel a little heavier. However, he really enjoyed his last big mountain trip to the High Atlas with Geoff in December last year. A few weeks after getting back from climbing Toubkal, he was diagnosed with cancer. Certainly, a life lived to the full.

My last route with Roger was at the back end of last summer. He had been in the Lakes for a week and decided to stay up there. Typically, he dropped me a quick note and I drove up to meet him. He said he was a bit tired and going a bit slow (I didn't see any sign of that) so we had a day on the classic *Tophet Wall*. It was a beautiful sunny day, no one else on the crag and after topping out we went for a long walk across the fells before dropping back down for a beer. In the evening, sitting on the ‘stoop’ of the camper drinking probably the fifth mug of tea, he enthused as he always did after a great day in the hills.

We talked about going back for another classic, this time on Scafell. It won't happen now, but I will head up there with a few of our mates. As we pick our way up *Jones' Route* or *Hopkinson's Gully* knowing how much he would have loved it, I will hear him in my ear, ‘I think it will go Simon, I think it will go’. Then we will make a brew, and on the camper stoop raise our mugs.

By Pete Finklaire and Simon Laker



Roger on *Yellow Wall*, E1 5b Swanage  
© Phillips collection



© Pillinger family

## Reg Pillinger

1931 - 2019

Three friends tell stories of their time with Reg.

Frank Fitzgerald writes about climbing and long distance walking in the 1950s.

I think I first met Reg in early 1952 as I was wandering along Stanage Edge seeking easy routes to solo. My elbow had been dislocated in a rugby accident towards the end of 1951 and I thought that easy routes and plenty of walking would help recovery. He was standing below the edge with Bert Shutt. I knew Bert was at that time engaged in the early development of the Lawrencefield quarries, just over the road from Millstone Edge, and I stopped to talk about the developments. I did not know the other chap but he

turned out to be Reg Pillinger, one of Bert's regular climbing partners, also engaged at Lawrencefield. As I was about to leave the party to continue my search, Reg said that he had dislocated some bloke's elbow in a rugby match and my questioning revealed it had been a match at Sheffield Tigers and yes, they had been playing Barnsley. He was duly apologetic, offering the suggestion that the real reason for the accident was that he was taught to play rugby football during his military service in the army!

I met Reg, again by chance, on Stanage some time later and we climbed together on and off for the next three years or so that I was in Sheffield. Our first route together was the *Inverted V* and we then worked our way towards the Moscar end of the edge where Reg was delighted to lead the *Green Streak* climb. We did visit other crags from time to time, but Stanage clearly was his favourite venue.

The east side of the Moors is not blessed with the likes of the western side's Dovestones Tor and winter climbing is not often feasible. Further, the faces that exist are loose, insecure and flaky. Such a one is the face of Mam Tor, but it was below it that, purely by chance, Maurice Twentyman and I met Reg and John Henry Fearon in February 1955, with each party intent on a winter ascent. There was not a flake of snow on the face and yet we knew that Back Tor on the other side of *The Great Ridge* was plastered, so we joined forces and changed the venue. *Back Tor Gully* was the result.



Reg clearly liked climbing, but his real forte was long distance walking. It wasn't until I saw the writings of his family and other friends that I realised that his other great outdoor interest was walking, including the ascent of the Munros, although the signs were there. Again in winter 1955 we met by chance in Sheffield and he suggested that we attempt a double crossing of the Marsden to Edale walk. The idea was to do Edale to Marsden overnight and return the following day. It was an ambitious plan, but we both knew Kinder and Bleaklow well and Reg reasoned the peat bogs would not be an obstacle as they would be frozen, so I agreed. Somehow, somewhere, we picked up a third man, I've no idea how and I've long forgotten his name. We left Sheffield on the evening train and arrived in Edale in plenty of time to call at the Nag's Head and tell Mr Heardman of our plans. We decided to leave Reg's large and heavy primus and then we were on our way. As we approached the plateau, the snow cover got deeper and was not as hard frozen as we expected, and when we reached it, we encountered a blizzard and a howling, biting wind. Things were getting serious and somebody suggested a retreat to the ruins of Four Jacks Cabin, though first we would have to find it in the atrocious conditions (and when Twentyman and I had stayed there overnight a few days earlier in order to get a flying start on the frozen Kinder Downfall, we had had to dig out space for two under the collapsed roof, and there were now three

of us). We made the decision to retreat, arriving at The Church Hotel in the early hours to find all the outhouses locked except a garage with a concrete floor! There was little sleep but lots of shivering.

We had plenty of time in Edale before the first train to Sheffield so we breakfasted at The Church Hotel and then went to the Nag's Head to collect the Primus and face Mr Heardman's amusement. (Fred Heardman, known as 'Bill', was held in considerable respect as he had made the first double Marsden to Edale crossing in the 1920s.)

Soon after this I left Sheffield and lost touch with Reg. Rumour had it that he was working in Africa, and when he returned he was concentrating on his academic career. But contact was re-established, and I was pleasantly surprised to meet him and his new wife Mary in Scarborough, although the event was Bert Shutt's funeral. It was fitting, as we had first met on Stanage Edge in Bert's presence and the funeral was the last time that Reg and I met face to face. We did however communicate occasionally by phone, email and letter. He retained his cheerfulness throughout his troubles, helped by Mary and his family. My own health issues prevented my attending his funeral, but I shall remember him as a forever cheerful friend, who thought the best of everybody.

**Roger (aka 'Fred') Higgins** writes about time in Kenya in the 1960s.

I have had to think long and hard about what to say about Reg. I think 'Who the Hell are the Pillingers?' would be a good place to start and not a bad working title. I remember it was just another Tuesday night at the MCK in Nairobi (circa 1968). The main attraction was certainly NOT the single females frequenting the place, although hope sprang eternal... Mostly it was the cheap beer—to a penniless, ragged-assed Volunteer (yours truly) such things were very important. The club was actually quite a stiff place and there was no immediate welcome for the likes of me—'volunteers come and go' and 'Oh, you are one of THOSE....' fairly typified the reaction.

Also, it had been quietly pointed out that mountaineering was NOT a high priority for most of the members. It was a social club for expatriates and rather conservative to say the least. Nobody talked climbing. The odd weekend safari was organised occasionally, but mainly for the benefit of a clique of four-wheel drive vehicle owners and the odd EPC (enterprising private cars, which invariably got stuck in mud). Since my sole means of transport was a beat up piki-piki (Vespa scooter), I was out at the start. So, against this backdrop, on this particular evening, there was a palpable bustle about the joint. People were uncharacteristically animated... but what about?

Well, 'the Pillingers are back and

they are coming to the club tonight...' Which explains the working title.

Clearly, these mystery members had left a pretty good impression during their previous tour of duty and their imminent arrival was, apparently, right up there with the second coming.... Impressed, I was not. And then the moment arrived—nice guy, lots of laughter, hand shaking and backslapping and so on. And then there was Sally, Reg's wife, looking like a member of the Royal family and with a voice to match.... Nice couple but not much 'mountaineering' about them... worse, they were sporting two small girls—anathema to the likes of me, who had wound up in Africa in order to get as far away as possible from the horrors of baby siblings. And that was more or less it for the next several weeks, but things started to change. There was a whiff of enthusiasm for rock climbing. Lukenya became the place to go, then Ndeiya... soon there were rumblings of routes on Mt Kenya.

Towards the end of my Voluntary Service, the British Council who administered such things, informed me that my repatriation was imminent and that my lodgings would shortly be assigned to someone else. Bummer! What to do? Whilst bemoaning my misfortune and whining to anyone close enough to hear, who should lean in but Reg?—'No problem, Fred, we have a spare room, you can move in tomorrow...' Just like that. And that was the start of it. Sally thought the idea was 'Super'. And thereby I became not just a friend of the family, but a MEMBER of

the family—included in meals, laundry taken care of, a room of my own to come and go as I pleased. In fairness, I should admit the arrangement was, 'for a couple of days...', but in reality it stretched on for most of the next four months, until the Kenya Immigration Dept. caught up with me.

The girls were as much a challenge to me as I probably was to them. But they had the vestiges of civilisation about them. We played together and bit by bit I came to understand and appreciate the great strength of a family headed by a loving, caring dad and a dedicated mum.

Many of my preconceived notions of the perils of marriage, family and commitment were eroded by my inclusion in this group. Reg and I bonded on many levels, starting from the tricks we had each perfected as teenagers to support our nicotine habits. We both suffered the privations of dictatorial fathers. We had both been led into climbing by older guys who—or some reason—saw something worth saving (or at least working with) in both of us. We both stole milk off neighbours' doorsteps... we both headed for the hills on the thinnest of excuses.

It is sobering, and not without an element of pride, that I can claim to have been a friend of my dearest mate, Reg, for over fifty years. What his love for his family taught me is a gift that I try to honour every day. So, who the hell are the Pillingers...? Well, let me tell you... Reg was one heck of a guy.

**Josie Kilner (Sandlilands)** writes about a childhood expedition with Reg and her father in the 1970s.

Mountains can be extreme places, bitterly cold and wet, but also some of the most beautiful and special places on Earth. But no matter how dire the situation, if Reg was with you, you knew everything would turn out alright. When the sun shone Reg's sheer delight in being in such wild and beautiful places meant being in the mountains with Reg was twice as memorable, twice as special—and there was always a good tale to tell at the end!

However, his delight was not always infectious, and sometimes lost on us children. Instead of being inspired by the grand beauty, we came close to never forgiving him and never stepping on a mountain again.

The most memorable day was probably descending the Marmolada in the Dolomites. It should have been perfect, with clear blue skies and the Marmolada glacier stretching before us—and the promise of Italian pizzas at the bottom. We were duly tied onto a rope in single file with Reg and my Dad Ian acting as anchor at the back in case of crevasses. As 'sprogs', we were equipped with worse-than-useless instep crampons that turned into lethal ice skates when they filled with snow. One of us would slip over and skid into the kid in front, tugging the rope and pulling the kid behind us over too, resulting in all the children lying in a heap on wet snow, with tangled limbs



and ropes. This humiliation was made doubly worse by the laughter coming behind us from Ian and Reg (consider David Attenborough's penguin films and you'll start to get the picture...)

After enduring this several times, with increasing recriminations between Jackie and my brother Dave, we were starting to have a distinct sense of humour failure—Reg and Ian were becoming increasingly helpless with laughter, until in the end it wasn't just us 'sprog' lying in a heap, Reg and Ian were holding onto each other desperately trying not to fall over, tears streaming from their eyes with laughter.

However we did recover, and have continued to be inspired by mountains and wild places ever since.

The last time I walked with Reg was in November last year. It was late afternoon and the sun was just setting over the Malverns. He told me of a time he'd seen the legendary 'green flash' sitting on a high mountain ridge as the last sliver of sun disappeared below the horizon. This magical phenomenon lasts only for a second or two and it is said that once you have seen a green flash, you'll never go wrong in matters of the heart. Reg has left me with one more challenge, never to stop exploring, searching for the extraordinary beauty in this world. Thank you Reg.



Reg at Hella Point  
Pillinger family

## Richard Gillow Reynolds

1933 - 2018

Richard Reynolds, who died on 13th December 2018 at his family seat Leighton Hall, Carnforth, was the quintessential countryman whose devotion to farming, forestry and field sports, was only matched by his passion for adventure, whether it be climbing, trekking, skiing and ski mountaineering or pot-holing.

Richard was born in London, the sixth generation of the Gillows of Lancaster, famous as furniture designers and manufacturers since the firm's foundation in 1730. He was educated at Ampleforth and, following family tradition, did his national service with the Irish Guards. In the mid-1950s Richard joined the family's cotton broking business in Liverpool and spent a year working in Egypt learning the trade. When King Cotton went into decline, he made a new career with the international engineering firm of Morgan Crucible working all over Europe and America when he took every opportunity to travel, explore and make new friends. Back in England, two years were based in Cheshire before moving to London where, in 1968, he met and married Suzie to form a wonderfully happy partnership that lasted over fifty years.

In 1975 Richard brought his bride to live at Leighton and, on the death of his mother Helen in 1977, became fully responsible for the management



of the estate. He now had to confront the daunting task of maintaining its viability and very survival in the face of potentially crippling death duties. He achieved this by adopting innovative measures to revitalise its run-down farms; developing its woodlands and shoot and expanding the open-house business both to secure Leighton's future and provide employment and affordable housing for local young people anxious to maintain their countryside links. These challenges were met with characteristic determination, imagination and immensely hard work, with Richard also taking on important roles in local and national organisations including the Historic Houses Association and the Country Landowners Association and Suzie making a particular contribution to the open house business.

I first met Richard when we were doing our National Service together at the Guards Training Battalion, little knowing then that mountaineering and my involvement with the Leighton estate as his solicitor many years later would cement a lifelong friendship. Richard had been elected to the Climbers' Club in 1962, and with Leighton Hall's unparalleled view of the Lakeland fells, it was inevitable that they should become the focus of his rock climbing activities. During the 1970s and 1980s, he was assiduous in attending CC Lakeland meets where we frequently climbed together with the likes of Richard Morgan and the Westmacotts. Almost every year, he skied with great enthusiasm and expertise in the Alps and in 1978 he joined the third stage of

my ski traverse of the Pyrenees. On our fourth day out, continuous bad weather forced a retreat from the Baysellance Hut, in the lee of the Vignemale, to the Val de Gaube. Half way down, a huge avalanche peeled off the Petit Vignemale and buried the entire party except for Richard who had managed to ski his way out of trouble. Assisted by his Autophon transceiver, he first located and then dug out three of us, still alive but trapped fast in consolidated snow which had made it impossible to free ourselves unaided. The body of the fourth member of the party, my cousin Alain, was only found three hours after the avalanche. Mercifully, he had died almost on impact.

In saving three lives in traumatic circumstances, Richard displayed the

calm courage, judgement and level-headedness that characterised his life. The preservation of the Leighton Hall estate for posterity was beset by reverses which would have defeated all but the most stout-hearted, but Richard's stoicism, honesty, patience and good humour enabled him to take everything in his stride, strengthened by his strong religious faith and Suzie's unstinted support. Her love and devotion sustained him throughout the long illness that cast a pall over the last phase of his life. He leaves behind Suzie, their daughters Katherine and Lucy, a grandson Sebastian and the many friends who will always cherish their memories of an exceptional man.

By John Harding

## Roger Salisbury

1932 - 2018

*This section is based on the Eulogy at his funeral, delivered by his son Clive Salisbury*

I think it's fair to say that Roger didn't have the easiest start in life. During the war when he was only eight he was evacuated from his home in Wallasey to the south of Manchester, but as it turned out he wasn't much safer there. When he returned home he attended the local grammar school and then completed a five year apprenticeship before working with his dad, Stan, in the family refrigeration business. His mother Ada was what you might describe as a 'strong character' and, as an early example of him wanting to be his own man, Roger

drew a twenty mile circle from her house on a map and determined that he would live beyond that limit.

Although initially a keen road cyclist, Roger had a life-changing experience in 1948 when he was first taken to Snowdonia in North Wales by rock climber and mentor Sid Wignall, an early climbing pioneer. This was a defining moment for Roger and the start of his life-long love of the hills and the outdoors. Rock climbing was a fairly niche activity in Britain in those days, but became a passion for him from then on.

His birth year of 1932 was also the year of the Kinder Mass Trespass—a populist event he would have identified with.

It was in that context of the camaraderie of like-minded outdoor enthusiasts that Roger met Val in 1960. She shared the same passion for hills and adventures. They married in 1962, moved to Helsby—co-incidentally twenty three miles from Wallasey—and started a family. Outdoor adventures were very much a routine part of family life, including annual skiing holidays in the days when they were unusual, and



countless climbing and walking holidays in Snowdonia, the Lake District, Scotland, and the Alps. Roger also wished to give back to the outdoor sports community that had given him so much and in 1973 he joined the Climbers' Club, becoming a Vice President in the 1990s. We have been supported by many kind messages from Roger's climbing friends. From one: 'A man of many parts. Tough and reliable on the hills, kind and thoughtful. Devoted to all his family. A very special person.' And another: 'A good climbing partner, a good friend and above all a good family man'.

On the day Roger retired from work, he came home and the first thing he did was set fire to his business suit. Through good judgement he had sold the business in 1989 at a buoyant economic time and, as a young-at-heart 58 year old, set off on an active retirement journey with Val: four Himalayan treks, also New Zealand and Australia, plus two US motorcycle trips with me. He returned to road cycling with trips to support the Tour de France and its cyclists. He also led the refurbishment of The Count House and Downes Hut, to 'give something back' and provide for the next generation.

Sadly Roger was diagnosed with dementia in 2011 and spent his last five years in care. That was an unwished-for later end to life and a strain for us all, but he remained characteristically cheerful and spirited. Roger died peacefully with his whole family—all three of us—at his side.

**John Atherton** writes: I first met Roger on his visits to the Count House and really got to know him when I was Custodian and the CC had a Sports Lottery grant to renovate the hut so it was closed for about a year. Roger was Chairman of the Huts Management Committee at the time and he was a great support. He was a good organiser and, between us, we emptied out all the hut contents and stored them in a Portacabin on the car park. We supervised the building work and afterwards had many working parties fitting out the building, including the construction of all the alpine bunks. I greatly appreciated his support; his enthusiasm and friendship helped to make a big project manageable and as worthwhile and as satisfying as it could be.

We climbed together in Cornwall and occasionally in North Wales. During one memorable trip to *Commando Ridge* at Bosigran, we were both injured on the descent by a falling rock and transported to hospital in Truro by the Culdrose Royal Navy Air Sea Rescue helicopter. I remember we were both lying on the floor of the chopper on our stretchers and Roger was telling

the crew that he had been a Navy man, having been in the Royal Marines. Later we went back to lay the ghost and climbed the ridge without incident! We also enjoyed trips with Roger and Val in the Dolomites and the Pindos Mountains in Greece.

Roger was more than a man of action. Janet remembers climbing at Bosigran sandwiched between Roger and Hamish Nicol who sent appropriate Shakespeare quotes to each other over her head all the way up—rather like an audio tennis match.

There are many memories of good times and a long friendship—we miss him.



John Clear

## John Temple

1934 - 2018

John was one of life's rich characters. Staying overnight at his house outside Nairobi I discovered a horse in the bathroom. Although it belonged to the then Mrs Temple, it nevertheless suggested John's unconventional ethos.

John was an extremely powerful—and canny—mountaineer, and on an earlier visit to Kenya in 1972 he had inveigled Frank Cannings and me to join him on Kilimanjaro where he planned to take a close look at the still virgin Great Breach Wall, reputedly Africa's highest cliff. We drove down to Tanzania in Temple's battered Landrover, enjoyed one desert bivouac and three more in convenient caves, and eventually reached the Great Barranco at the foot of the daunting 1400m Wall. An eye-catching 80-metre icicle at mid-height hung over a band of

black cliffs to link a precarious-looking upper ice field to the lower ice-draped crags. The scree suggested awful rock. Suitably chastened, we escaped up the Heim Glacier, the steep hanging ice tongue to the east which had been climbed several times before and is today a recommended grade IV alpine-style ice climb. If it still exists?

One more bivi just below Kibo summit, another down in the Umbwe heather forest, and we were winging our way back to Nairobi, only to be arrested en route by the Tanzanian Constabulary on the charge of 'photographing government servants'—aka cows. Apparently agriculture was nationalised in Tanzania. Although there's another story there, it was all part of the adventure you were guaranteed when climbing with Temple.

Two years later Temple returned with Tony Charlton and climbed the eastern side of the *Breach Wall* (V sup—2 days) and again the following year with Dave Cheesmond when he forced an almost direct route up the Wall, involving three days of difficult climbing on ice and horrible rock (VI). These two climbs were real tours de force at high altitude on a remote, little-known and extremely formidable mountainside, although virtually unknown outside the small local climbing community. They say much for John's commitment and prowess. Later it took Messner to make the direst straight up the 80-metre icicle.

In 1975 John invited me to join him in the Rwenzori, and naturally I jumped at the chance. Joined by expat

climbers Tony Charlton and Jim Slade and botanist John Youngs, we drove 750 miles to far western Uganda in Temple's small, dexion-reinforced and overloaded Toyota jeep. Apart from climbing gear we carried a huge supply of flapjack which John had been baking and stockpiling for weeks. It was to be our staple diet for the duration, for breakfast, lunch and supper, to be washed down with plenty of tea and a daily soup. Though rather monotonous, flapjack actually worked very well and proved a simple, inexpensive, long-lasting and efficient solution to the problem of expedition catering. Indeed, a typically Temple solution.

Idi Amin was at the height of his power and Uganda was considered inaccessible to Europeans, but John knew how to handle African officials. Scruffy, bearded and wearing his usual flip-flops, he negotiated us safely through the border and the exhaustive customs check where we watched, somewhat concerned, as an African clerical gentleman, complete with dog collar, was led away in shackles accused of smuggling a bald car tyre. Our sleeping bags were turned inside-out but the vehicle's chassis was thankfully ignored, for here John had stashed a quantity of Kenyan banknotes, knowing that petrol would demand a black-market deal.

Our first night in Uganda was spent in comfort, the last for several weeks, at a nunnery whose mother-superior happened to be an old chum of John's. Charm personified, the good lady



told me that some years before, when John was teaching in Uganda, he had earned pin money catching snakes and despatching them by air, live, to an American zoo. He had learnt that if grabbed just behind the head snakes were powerless to strike and could safely be dropped into a collecting bag. All went well until one day he grabbed a rare snake he didn't recognise and was bitten. It was apparently the one serpent that is double-jointed and able to bend its head backwards. He was carried out of the bush unconscious, she said, and not expected to survive. But now able to identify that particular snake, he had no fear of the others. Not that we encountered any snakes in the Rwenzori, though John did enjoy introducing us to the local three-foot earthworms which he let slither up his arm.

The expedition record itself (see AJ 1977, pp12-21) is hardly appropriate to John's obituary, except to mention a few incidents. At a market stall on the shore of Lake Edward, John bought a load of evil-looking dried fish: '... goes well with flapjack' said he 'very nourishing!' At the Ibanda roadhead we unloaded a hundred-foot coil of plastic hosepipe, unobtainable in Uganda, with which John paid John Matte, the local Bakonjo trader, for organising the thirteen porters and shifty-looking headman who would carry our baggage to base camp. The same porters who three days later, at the notorious Bigo Bog, dropped us in the lurch when they went on strike for double pay. Absolutely unruffled, John dismissed the lot, leaving us

sitting beside the piles of baggage as the strikers slunk away down the trail. 'Don't worry,' said John, 'it's par for the course. I expected it.' We brewed up and waited. A couple of hours later the six youngest porters emerged shamefaced from the forest and successfully begged for their jobs. We kept them on for the whole expedition; happy to make double carries, loyal and cheerful, they worked well and while we enjoyed our climbing they had plenty of spare time to hunt hyrax with their lean yellow dog and their broad-bladed spears. In due course they earned good bonuses.

Some weeks later, tired, dirty and very hungry, we found ourselves nearing Kampala on our drive back to Kenya. It was a Sunday and John recalled that the Sunday Buffet Lunch at the Imperial Hotel used to be the highlight of the Kampala week and he led us there. There was beer of sorts in the bar and a display of photographs showing Idi Amin himself, in full Highland Dress, in action at the previous night's dinner-dance: we kept straight faces with difficulty.

When lunch was served we found ourselves among Amin's top people, immaculate military brass hats, smart civil servants and be-suited cronies with their ladies in full finery, a fascinating riot of colour to which unfortunately the lunch itself would not compare. As the only white faces we were stared at but never investigated. White-coated stewards, some wearing shorts, others camouflage trousers, some wellie boots or barefoot, marched in bearing large

silver tureens from which the guests would help themselves. There was just one choice, greasy stew—the massive bones suggesting hippo—succulent tomatoes and matoke, the national dish of mashed bananas. 'Fill up on the vitamin C, fellows' said John 'but I can't recommend the hippo'. Keeping our heads down we were soon safely back on the road.

We'd enjoyed a hugely successful adventure, thanks to John's planning, organisation and, indeed, leadership. He knew Africa and, never one to stand on ceremony, he really had a way with its people. Intrepid, irrepressible, resourceful and always an optimist complete with a knowing chuckle, that's how I shall remember John Temple.

By John Cleare

📷 Ron Kenyon



## Mark Vallance

1946 - 2018

Mark Vallance was one of the most well-known and respected climbers of his generation. Through the 70s and 80s he was the most influential figure in the climbing equipment industry. He will be remembered for almost single-handedly making climbing faster and safer.

Every climber who has fallen onto a camming device owes him a debt of gratitude. Mark was more an adventurer than a businessman, yet he found he had the entrepreneurial drive to develop and bring *Friends* to the market, a world-wide vision, and a camming device which has been unsurpassed in forty years.

Mark's life was dedicated to climbing and he was a true friend to the sport in more than one sense. He had a great sense of humour and was always approachable at the many climbing gatherings he attended, a friendly, open and inspirational character.

He was a role model for climbing who once demonstrated the effectiveness of his camming device for *Tomorrow's World* on TV by purposely jumping off a railway bridge to show how they worked.

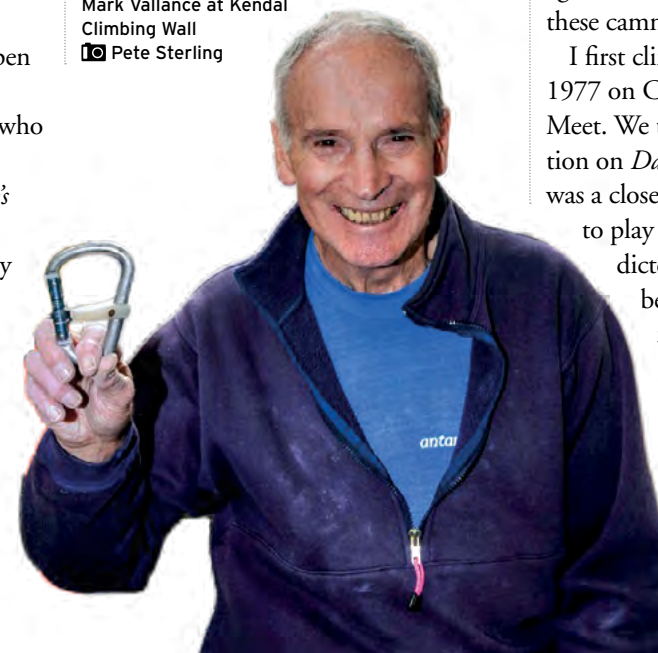
Mark told his own remarkable life story in his autobiography published in 2016; *Wild Country, The Man Who Made Friends*. My personal insight covers what he did when he wasn't making climbing gear.

Mark, whom I knew for more than forty years, was both a top rock climber and mountaineer and his knowledge of both subjects was deep and wide-ranging.

He and I shared many experiences, personal and adventurous. We started climbing together in the late 1970s but Mark had by then done most of the best routes in the UK, so we tended to focus on mountain running and had many fantastic and exhausting days on the hills. Later, when the Foundry opened in 1991, we shared a weekly indoor climbing session.

For the first twenty years of our friendship, Mark was in his prime, being extremely fit, strong and having endurance beyond most. He was

Mark Vallance at Kendal Climbing Wall  
📷 Pete Sterling



totally committed, very determined, and extremely competent in the mountains, and, drawing on his two year experience in the Antarctic, had excellent weather judgement and impeccable navigation skills.

He had worked as an Instructor at Colorado Outward Bound School and made two climbing trips to Yosemite, forming his historic climbing partnership with Ray Jardine. Ray featured on the front cover of the iconic *Mountain* magazine (# 56) in July 1977. Turning the magazine sideways, one could see Ray hanging horizontally way out over the void, on the lip of *Separate Reality*. His rope was clipped into his secret invention, hidden in the dark roof crack. Mark had already reached a business agreement with Ray to manufacture these camming devices in the UK.

I first climbed with Mark in October 1977 on Cloggy during the CC Dinner Meet. We used traditional nut protection on *Daurigol*, *Mostest* and *Woubits*. I was a close friend, but not close enough

to play with his new toys! Mark predicted then that they would soon be superseded by his secret new device, for which he was setting up a manufacturing company. A few weeks later Wild Country launched *Friends*.

By Spring 1978, *Friends* were in the shops



John Coates © Vertebrate Publishing

CLIMBERS' CLUB JOURNAL

we ran the epic 1991 KIMM in the Arrochar Alps. Mark had sewn together a couple of flaps of pertex into a minimal rucksack. He told Karrimor's MD, Mike Parsons, that he was testing a Wild Country prototype.

Mark revelled in long, hard runs including the *Howarth Hobble*, the *Lyke Wake Walk* and the *Skye Cuillin Ridge*. For the latter we wore bogus

race numbers with which we blagged our way through the bottleneck queues at the Thearlaich Dubh gap. Many of these trips were made in his Audi Avant Quattro at break-neck speed, giving his passengers a true white knuckle ride.

ests far beyond climbing. Long distance running can be lonely, but days out with Mark were not. They were full of conversation, ranging widely over topics such as literature, art, music and poetry. He was widely read, and astonishingly for a dyslectic, he was able to remember quotes from many authors. We shared the same love of poetry and would each recite our favourites. *Fern Hill* (Dylan Thomas) was always a problem for me.

He had strong views about countryside conservation. He believed that our National Parks needed a top grade of 'Wilderness', the wild country heartland beyond roads and fences. He saw the need to repair the damage we were causing to our best loved wild places and

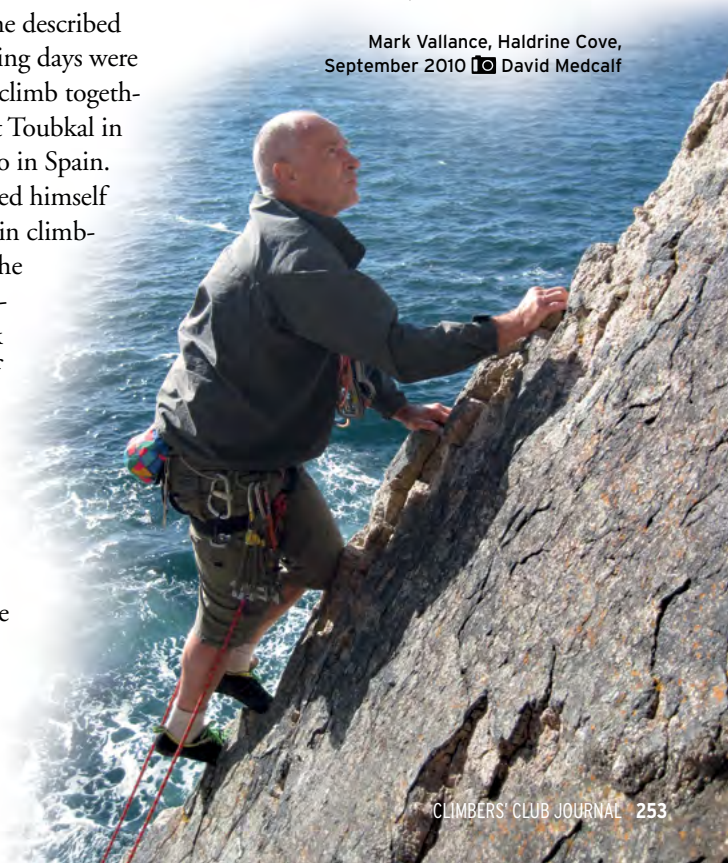
During the Wild Country years, Mark, Jan and Jody lived in Foolow, and Mark created a large garden. His final project was *The Styx*, a massive waterfall completed just in time for his 50th birthday party. He also assembled a collection of bonsai trees in gritstone troughs: these followed him to his later gardens. There was the precipitous Bakewell garden where a fixed rope might have helped. Then Elton and finally Dore in Sheffield, where he liberated some of the trees from their troughs.

He took up wind-surfing and quickly realised that he needed a new skill-set to reach the top end of this fast sport. This needed the ability to start from lying down in the water: the extremely athletic 'water-start' manoeuvre. That year the Vallance family holiday was to Vasiliki in Greece, a renowned high wind resort. Mark mastered water-starting in a week.

In 1998 everything changed. Mark retired from Wild Country at the age of 54 with a long active retirement planned ... and was then diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

From 1998 Mark devoted himself to taking on the big tasks in climbing. He was President of the Climbers' Club in its Centenary year, and then took on the role of President of the British Mountaineering Council, a task he described as trying to steer an oil tanker. He succeeded in steering the BMC through a very big turn, the 'one member one vote' decision.

Mark often gave the impression that several of his big adventures had taken place over a short time frame. This is what we called the time telescope of his memory. Our standing joke was that he climbed *The Nose*, then ran the Bob

September 2010  David Medcalf



Graham Round, and then a Mountain Marathon in the same week. ‘I resemble that remark’ he would say.

Over twenty years of gradual decline, Mark retained his humour and showed great courage and determination to deal with the unpleasant side effects of the potent drugs. I am certain he never expected to be around for so long, actively climbing until five years ago, and able to enjoy time spent with his family and friends.

Right the way through and almost up to the end, we shared great meals out, and outstandingly good red wine, every Tuesday evening, and lots of talk about past climbs and adventures.

When his death was announced on 19 April 2018, accolades from climbers poured in. He’ll be missed by the climbing community and by Jan, his wife for forty six years, and daughter Jody. He leaves behind a much safer world for climbers.

Mark was a great friend, generous, supportive and motivational. It’s been a privilege to know him. A truly outstanding man and mountaineer.

By Mike Browell



# Nick Russell

1988 - 2016

*The following appreciation was inadvertently missed from Nick’s obituary in CCJ 128.*

Nick studied Physics at Cambridge University, spent a year at Harvard where he discovered climbing, was an accomplished clarinet and piano player and was a competitive swimmer. After his undergraduate degree he moved to Bristol to complete a PhD in Quantum Photonics at the University of Bristol. In Bristol he was a committee member of the Avon Mountaineering Club.

Nick was the first person I climbed with after moving to Bristol. We were away in the Peak District on a trip with the Avon Mountaineering Club. Nick’s enthusiasm immediately became clear, as most people were put off climbing due to it being unseasonably cold. However this didn’t reduce Nick’s motivation, even while we were avoiding ice on the approach to the crag. Instead of heading straight back at the end of the day when it became too cold to do another route, we made the most of the remaining daylight by joining in with some people who were bouldering and climbed until it got dark. This first weekend formed the start of a trusted climbing partnership and a close friendship. Since then I have been fortunate to spend many adventurous weekends away with Nick in both summer and winter.

Nick was always enthusiastic about spending time out in the mountains on rock, ice or snow. Some personal highlights include: three days camping in winter below the CIC hut in perfect conditions, learning to ski tour in the Cairngorms, wild camping below Cloggy, multiple visits to Pembroke and trips to North Wales.

Nick was an excellent all round climber, reaching high levels in sport, trad and winter climbing. While he was always a better climber than me, he was always encouraging and supportive of what I wanted to climb. It is no coincidence that the majority of my most memorable climbs were with Nick as it was always easy to take inspiration from his motivation, enthusiasm and desire to improve.

The last time I saw Nick was on a post-work climbing session the week before he died, on a very hot and humid evening. Nick led *The Jackal* at Wintours Leap in excellent style with such confidence that even while he was trying to work out the crux there was never any doubt in my mind that he would succeed. This was an amazing demonstration of physical strength, mental determination, technical climbing ability and personally for me, a final memory of Nick that I will treasure.

By Alastair Begley



Sunset from Low Man, Haytor  
📷 Sean Kelly



# Rules of the Ashton Parallel Universe

## — PART 4 —

By Rob Davies

### j. Choosing Climbing Companions

69. Climb with a partner who has all the necessary basic skills: cam extraction (Rule #22), catching dropped runners (Rule #19) and runner hurling (Rule #20)—see Part 2, Section c.

70. Climb with a partner who has strengths complementary to your own. While he may be OK at run-out slabs and crimpy walls, demonstrate your superior skill in critical situations where tree-climbing is required. Even if you are much better than your partner at climbing wide cracks, bear in mind that he must be able to follow this type of pitch, not run away crying for his mum when faced with one.

71. Make sure the grades at which you and your companions climb are well matched: three climbers, each of whom is as bad as the others, works best. Climb with one who stops to dip his hands into his chalk-bag six times on every move, and another whose eyesight is so poor that he marks footholds: thus every possible hold should be obvious when you follow a pitch.



A sports climber demonstrates his crack-climbing skills Rylstone Crack, Rylstone Crag, Yorkshire.



A large team of large men assembles at the foot of Long Climb, Land's End, West Cornwall.

all Rob Davies

72. Climb easy routes, if they include tight chimneys, in the company of a large party of large men<sup>1</sup>, as they are likely to provide excellent entertainment when they get stuck.

73. Avoid climbing with seconds who have absurd notions about so-called ethical infringements, as they may make sarcastic remarks like 'VS A0, is it?' or 'Why don't you get the étriers out?' when you follow the procedures of Rule #45. Instead, climb with companions who usually keep their mouths shut, knowing that they will be caught out themselves before long.

74. Do not climb with anyone who uses the 'European Death Knot' to join ropes when abseiling: only Ashton-approved knots are permissible.

### k. Importance of Team Work

75. If you want to climb a difficult crack, make sure your partner tries first. After he wears himself out placing runners and gives up, exhausted, a short distance from the top, volunteer to take over: saunter up, place more gear and finish the route in casual style.

76. Baffle your companions by one day smoothly getting up a tough route they have failed dismally to lead, then the next backing off a ridiculously easy climb. Swing wildly between technical wizard and bumbly.

77. Keep track of important items in your companion's gear—belay plate, nut-key, etc.—as he will forget where he has left them two seconds after putting them down: this is your contribution to *Care in the Community*. If, however, your companion is very dozy and brings two left-foot rock-shoes with him, there is little you can do to help.

78. Lead from the front when mountain-walking: hare off, leaving the tortoises to plod behind at a geriatric pace. Show no sympathy with the tortoises if they get back to the car before the hare and then have to stand around, waiting in the middle of nowhere<sup>2</sup> for over an hour while darkness falls because you have the car-keys: it is their own fault for not keeping up with the hare and not getting lost.

79. If you pull off loose rock or, even better, a loose tree-trunk, shout 'Below!' very loudly. Carefully judge the delay before shouting to ensure that your exclamation coincides exactly with the resounding thud made by the falling rock or tree as it hits your belayer (or your camera, if your aim is poor and the belayer disappointingly alert and agile).

### l. Water Sports

80. Treat water with great respect, as there is a very strong short-range attractive force<sup>3</sup> between water and objects with a high albedo.<sup>4</sup>

81. Never go in the water, unless you do so to raise team morale (see Rule #83) or to demonstrate your daredevil personality: opportunities for a spontaneous splashdown include jumping into a seaside rock-pool, going for a swim while carrying 15 kg of climbing gear, and disappearing up to your waist in a bog.

82. If you 'volunteer' to have sole charge of a small rubber dinghy, make full use of your SPA<sup>5</sup> qualification.

### m. Maintaining High Team Morale

83. Never miss an opportunity to provide the team with entertainment. If water is present (see Rule #81), raise team morale through your display of cold sweat and quivering limbs as you contemplate the inevitable dunking.

84. Nurture your companions' self-esteem, even if it is unjustified. For example, after you waste half a day walking up, down and around a hill in Sardinia while your mate tries to find a large crag<sup>6</sup>, agree that the guidance in the guidebook is poor, even though you are thinking that his ability to misread clear instructions is even more well-developed than your own.

85. If one of your companions gets himself into a tricky position while

leading, calm down the situation by bouncing around at the base of the climb like a hyperactive Mexican jumping bean: cries of 'Don't panic! Don't panic!' are optional.

86. During relaxation time, enlighten your companions by explaining the rules of simple games such as Liar Dice. When it becomes clear that they have the mental capacity of inattentive five-year-olds who have had too much to drink, explain the rules again, as often as necessary, while maintaining a ghastly beatific smile. Firmly resist the urge to brain them with a heavy object.

### n. Climbing Psychology: Unleashing the Rock Warrior

87. Never venture outside your comfort zone<sup>7</sup> as only a fool says 'Identify your weaknesses, and try climbs you are not so good at, in order to build confidence and to improve all-round performance'. A wise man says 'Identify your weaknesses, and avoid any climb that might involve something you are not too good at.' Get your mate to lead the ones that do not appeal, and say magnanimously, 'If you want to try it, fine, please go ahead. I'm happy to belay.' Be tactful and leave out the important bit, 'It's your funeral, chum'.

88. Share your thoughts with your companions by talking aloud or shouting while climbing, as your thought processes are bound to fascinate others. Always omit to engage Privacy Mode when leading.



89. Focus your mind by chanting prayer-like mantras. Since the climbing on Central European sandstone gives great inspiration, mutter the incantation ‘Czech, Czech, Czech’ before starting. While leading, invoke the memory of two famous Bohemian climbers, Wočmy Yr and Wočus Onblů, by shouting ‘Wočmy Yr! Wočus Onblů! Wočmy! Wočus!’<sup>8</sup> every few seconds. At the top, while fixing the lower-off, revert to muttering ‘Czech, Czech, Czech’.

90. Remain relaxed if you get into a tense situation. To achieve a state of perfect calm shout vehemently at yourself or at inanimate objects<sup>9</sup>. Before tackling the crux, shout grossly offensive phrases, such as ‘Come on, you stupid (obscenity deleted)!’ and ‘Use the (expletive omitted) holds!’.

Such self-abuse is inspiring, but ignore crass, unhelpful comments from your companions, such as ‘Just get on with it, Phil,’ or ‘There are big holds just above you’, or ‘What’s the problem—it looks really easy’.

91. After you have passed the main difficulties, continue to shout loudly for a few minutes in post-crucial ecstasy: ‘Ooo urghh! Brrr! Ooo arggh! Woo-hoo-hoo! Gaaah!’<sup>10</sup> is a typical warm-down celebratory cry.

92. Rely solely on the reptilian area of the brain<sup>11</sup> while climbing. Avoid rational thought—it is just a distraction from the all-important terror messages emerging from the reptile brainstem.

93. Obey without hesitation ‘The Voices’ (a.k.a. the mad old woman who lives in the attic) when they tell you to back off a climb. However, if ‘The Voices’ urge you to attack one of the annoying little urchins in MAG<sup>12</sup> with a meat-cleaver, question their authority.

94. If at first you do not succeed, give up immediately. Declare with unarguable finality ‘It’s not going to happen,’ even if you are about to have another go. Gain extra kudos by giving up in the first ten feet, or, better still, before leaving the ground. Announce, with your most plausible attempt at sincerity, ‘I’m not feeling 100% today.’<sup>13</sup> I’ll do it next time’.<sup>14</sup> In the event of failure on the first route of the day, state ‘I’m not warmed up yet’; but on any subsequent route say ‘I’m feeling tired’, because too much energy was expended on the first route.

95. To make sure you complete some routes, climb with companions who sometimes show determination when leading. Avoid partners who have too much persistence, as you may lose the will to live while belaying, having watched the glaciers advance and retreat several times in the Longdendale Valley below you.<sup>15</sup>

96. Dismiss immediately any apparent compliments from your companions, suggesting that your climbing is showing encouraging signs of improvement, as they are obviously just getting desperate to find novel ways to be irritatingly sarcastic.



Warm down by shouting a lot. After the crux on *Biggles Flies Undone*, Aire Point.

97. Maintain a balance in your lifestyle: as you spend a lot of time in the company of climbers, who have a peculiar outlook on life, compensate by mixing with normal chaps, who think that steam trains, workshops<sup>16</sup>, boats, cars, football and guns are fascinating. If invited to a social gathering, disguise yourself as a postman.

98 & 99. Add your own rules here.

**o. Most Important of All...**

100. Smile sweetly when a deeply cynical so-and-so with too much time on his hands produces a list of mickey-taking but uncannily accurate ‘rules’.

- 1 *Lockwood’s Chimney*, Nant Gwynant: ‘The party should be large and of greater than average girth’.
- 2 To be more precise, the east coast of Sardinia; the author thanks the kind German tourists who took pity and gave the tortoises a lift back to the Lemon House while the hare continued his solo nocturnal exploration of the island.
- 3 This attraction is a force unknown to physics, but whose existence has been empirically verified on several occasions.
- 4 E.g. a white-skinned human body.
- 5 SPA = Single Paddle Award.
- 6 Passaggio per Chitur, Quirra.
- 7 As noted by Dr Sheldon Cooper, ‘Why would we want to do that? It’s called the comfort zone for a reason’. (*The Big Bang Theory*, *The Thespian Catalyst*).
- 8 Anyone suffering from the Englishman’s linguistic gifts described under Rule #8 will miss the point of this.
- 9 Basil Fawltly was the best exemplar of this technique.
- 10 These incoherent noises have been transcribed verbatim.
- 11 According to neuroscientists, the brain is structured into three main levels, reflecting its evolutionary development: (1) human (language, perception, social skills, etc.); (2) mammalian (feeding, parenting, etc.); and (3) reptilian (visceral emotions like fear).
- 12 MAG = Moulton Adventure Group.
- 13 This is an example of the Off-Form Ploy, as described by Tom Patey in *The Art of Climbing Down Gracefully* (included in *One Man’s Mountains*).
- 14 This is based on the same fallacy as the sign seen in pubs, ‘Free Beer Tomorrow’.
- 15 The current record is nearly 3 hours belaying on *The Arête*, Tintwistle Knarr.
- 16 In the Ashton universe ‘workshop’ is the preferred term for ‘garden shed’.






# Book Reviews

*Since the 2017-18 Journal was distributed many books have been published that come under the banner of 'mountain literature'. However, I have biased my personal selection of new books to ones that feature climbing or mountaineering. Inevitably some were more enjoyable than others, but all have some interest and are worth reading. It won't escape your attention that there are several female authors, a welcome addition to a normally male dominated list.*

Chris Harle

Eddie Church on *The Owl and the Antelope* (E2 5c), Navigation Quarry - one of the many crags featured in South Wales Rock, full review on p275.  Ben O'Neill



**The Last Englishmen:**  
love, war and the end of Empire  
Deborah Baker  
*Chatto & Windus, 2019*

Focussing on the interwoven stories of geologist John Auden and surveyor Michael Spender (brothers of W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender who both achieved literary fame). They both accompanied Shipton and Tilman on their 'Blank on the Map' 1937 Shaksgam expedition in the Karakoram. Recommended if you like a complex story of love, war, politics, exploration and mountaineering.



**The Uncrowned King of Mont Blanc:** the life of T. Graham Brown, Physiologist and Mountaineer  
Peter Foster, *Bâton Wicks, 2019*

Brown (1882-1965) was a leading British mountaineer between the two world wars with significant achievements in the Alps and Himalaya. He was ambitious and uncompromising, had a long-term feud with Frank Smythe and even Geoffrey Winthrop Young thought he was a 'vicious lunatic'.



**No Easy Way:** the challenging life of the climbing taxman  
Mick Fowler, *Vertebrate 2018*

Fowler's third volume of climbing memoirs recounting a series of expeditions to stunning mountains in China, India, Nepal and Tibet, alongside partners including Paul Ramsden, Dave Turnbull, Andy Cave and Victor Saunders. Written with the usual Fowler wit, understatement, and infectious enthusiasm and optimism.

**Blood, Sweat and Smears**  
Gary Gibson  
*2QT, 2019*

Autobiography of the UK's most prolific new router. What climber has never done a Gibson route? By his own admission some of his actions and claims have been controversial but the amount of energy, time and personal money that Gary has invested in our sport is astonishing. So reserve judgement until you have read the book. He is fast approaching route number 5000!



**One Man's Climb:** a journey of trauma, tragedy and triumph on K2  
Adrian Hayes, *Pen & Sword, 2018*

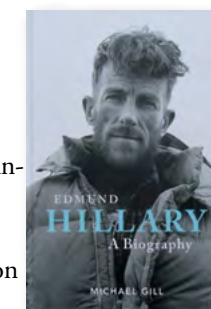
Two attempts on K2 by former British Army Gurkha officer and Special Forces reservist who has been to the North and South Poles, and summited Everest. I would not normally read this type of 'expedition' book, but it was given to me as a birthday present. I found it surprisingly readable and interesting.



**Edmund Hillary:**  
a biography  
Michael Gill  
*Vertebrate, 2019*

New Zealand mountaineer Mike Gill accompanied close friend Ed Hillary on most of his expeditions from 1959

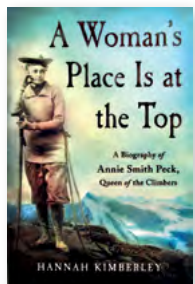
until 1979. This affectionate and honest biography reminds us why Hillary is such a remarkable and revered man, not only for his mountaineering achievements but for his tireless aid work in the Himalaya.



**The Equilibrium Line:**  
poems inspired by climbing  
David Wilson  
*Smith/Doorstop, 2019*

Poems based on climbing in the UK and Alps by an English writer and mountaineer.



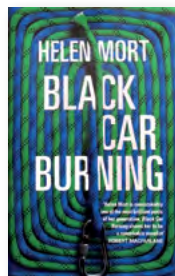


**A Woman's Place is at the Top:**  
a biography of Annie Smith Peck,  
Queen of the Climbers  
Hannah Kimberley  
*St Martin's Press, 2017*

Biography of American mountaineer Annie Peck (1850-1935), an ardent suffragist who clashed with Fanny Workman regarding claims for being the world record holder for highest altitude climbed by a woman. Peck was one of the first mountaineers to earn a living by lecturing and writing about her travels and mountaineering.

**Black Car Burning**  
Helen Mort  
*Chatto & Windus 2019*

Mort's first novel is based in Sheffield and the Peak District. Very much in the mould of M. John Harrison's *Climbers* (1989) with inner city social themes and relationship issues. 'Black Car Burning' is the name of an E7 on Stanage. The frequent reference to the 'local gear shop' and its staff is clearly Outside Ltd in Hathersage and makes for particularly fascinating reading for someone like me who works there!



**Waymaking:** an anthology of women's adventure writing, poetry and art edited by Helen Mort, Claire Carter, Heather Dawe and Camilla Barnard  
*Vertebrate, 2018*

With over 50 contributors including Maria Coffey, Hazel Findlay, Katie Ives, Tami Knight, Bernadette McDonald, Sarah Outen and Libby Peter.

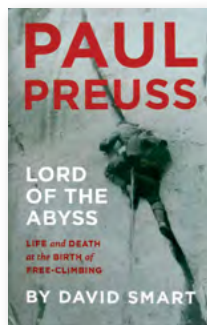


**Hard Rock:** great British rock climbs from VS to E4 compiled by Ian Parnell  
*Vertebrate, 2020*

Featuring over fifty crags and sixty-nine routes in England, Scotland and Wales, it celebrates traditional climbing in Great Britain. I am quite sure that Ken Wilson would have admired Ian Parnell's excellent fully revised and updated edition of his classic 1974 publication.

**Inner Ranges:** an anthology of mountain thoughts and mountain people  
Geoff Powter,  
*Rocky Mountain Books, 2018*

A collection of essays, editorials and profiles from the Ed Douglas of North America.



**Queen of the Mountaineers:** the trailblazing life of Fanny Bullock Workman  
Cathryn J. Prince  
*Chicago Review Press, 2019*

Biography of the remarkable American explorer, mountaineer and champion of women's rights, Fanny Bullock Workman (1859-1925), a contemporary and rival to Annie Peck. With her husband she cycled and trekked prodigious distances, wrote eight travel books and mapped significant areas of uncharted territory.

**Paul Preuss, Lord of the Abyss:** life and death at the birth of free-climbing  
David Smart  
*Rocky Mountain Books, 2019*

Austrian climber Paul Preuss was just 27 years old when he died in 1913 whilst soloing. His ethically pure and bold style challenged the core of the traditional climbing establishment and has influenced more modern climbers like Reinhold Messner and Alex Honnold.

**Hangdog Days:** conflict, change and the race for 5.14  
Jeff Smoot  
*Mountaineers Books, 2019*

Chronicling North American climbing in the 70s and 80s when a new generation of climbers were pushing the limits of free climbing. Includes superstars such as John Bachar, Jerry Moffatt, Peter Croft, Kim Carrigan and Todd Skinner, and their shift of ethics towards sport climbing and 'hangdogging'.



**The Impossible Climb:** Alex Honnold, El Capitan and the climbing life  
Mark Synnott, *Allen & Unwin, 2019*

An insider portrait of the elite climbing community by an American adventure journalist and climber who witnessed Honnold's incredible free solo ascent of *Free Rider* on El Capitan.



Alex Honnold

**Quest into the Unknown:** my life as a climbing nomad  
Tony Howard  
*Vertebrate, 2019*

Autobiography of Troll Climbing Equipment founder who was part of the first British ascent of the *Troll Wall* in Norway. Howard's appetite for exploratory climbing is boundless, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, but most notably in Jordan, where Howard and Di Taylor have been responsible for developing the climbing and trekking potential of Wadi Rum.



**The Sharp End of Life:** a mother's story  
Dierdre Wolownick  
*Mountaineers Books, 2019*

The autobiography of Alex Honnold's mum, who at the age of 66 became the oldest woman to climb El Capitan.



**Honouring High Places:** the mountain life of Junko Tabei  
Junko Tabei & Helen Rolfe  
*Rocky Mountain Books, 2017*

Autobiographical account of Japanese mountaineer Junko Tabei (1939-2016) who in 1975 became the first woman to summit Everest.



**Alpenglow:** the finest climbs on the 4000m peaks of the Alps  
Ben Tibbetts, *The Author, 2019*

A large format visual feast from alpinist and photographer Ben Tibbetts.

and finally...

**Lands of Lost Borders:** a journey on the Silk Road  
Kate Harris  
*Harper Collins /Knopf, 2018*

The only book in my selection that has no climbing or mountaineering. This is the deserved winner of the 2019 Boardman Tasker Prize. Suspend your disbelief and read it.





These books, published during the pandemic, have not yet been read or seen by the reviewer. The first two have obvious UK rock climbing relevance

**Crazy Sorrow:**  
the life and death of Alan Mullin  
Grant Farquhar (ed.)

**Slatehead:**  
the ascent of Britain's  
slate-climbing scene  
Peter Goulding

**The Black Cuillin:**  
the story of Skye's mountains  
Callum Smith

**Mountaineering &  
British Romanticism:**  
the literary cultures of climbing  
1770-1836  
Simon Bainbridge

**The Last Great Mountain:**  
the first ascent of Kangchenjunga  
Mick Conefrey

**Edge of the Map:**  
the mountain life of Christine  
Boskoff  
Johanna Garton

**The Desert:**  
a dirtbag climbing book  
Luke Mehall

**Seven Climbs:**  
finding the finest climb on each  
continent  
Charles Sherwood

**Rockhead:** a novel  
Sean Toren

**Protection:** a mountaineering novel  
Paul Hersey

UK guidebook publishers have been very active in the last two years and there is now a rival to the dominance of the Rockfax brand. The voluntary guidebook producers have finally got their acts together to share their wealth of collective knowledge and collaborate in the publication of **Wired Guides**. This co-operative includes the BMC, the SMC, the Climbers' Club, the Fell & Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District, the Northumbrian Mountaineering Club and the Yorkshire Mountaineering Club. They have sensibly followed the Rockfax model of a visually appealing, larger format photo-topo guide of selective routes and selected crags that the climbing public have clearly shown a preference for.

Other emerging publishers who are helping to fill the gaps in the UK climbing landscape include the **Oxford Alpine Club (OAC)** and **Great Western Rock**. Also, there have been several privately published guidebooks that rarely find their way into retail shops but are worth looking out for and supporting.

**Mountain Rock:**  
mountaineering  
rock climbs of Great  
Britain  
Steve Broadbent  
*OAC 2020*



Now that Ken Wilson's *Classic Rock* is out of print here is an inspiring guidebook to 100 of the best mountaineering rock climbs in Britain (up to VS), covering North Wales, the Lake District and Scotland.

**The Cuillin & other  
Skye Mountains:**  
the Cuillin Ridge  
& 100 select routes  
for mountain  
climbers and  
hillwalkers  
Tom Prentice, *Mica  
Publishing, 2019*



With 50 annotated topos to describe the traverse of the Cuillin Ridge.

**Skye's Cuillin Ridge  
Traverse:** strategies,  
advice, detailed  
topo booklet and 10  
classic scrambles  
Adrian Trendall,  
*Cicerone, 2020*



A comprehensive two-volume guidebook.

**Dumbarton Rock:**  
The climber's  
complete guide to...  
J S Watson & John  
Hutchinson *Stone  
Country Guides, 2020*

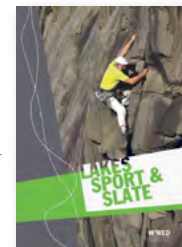


Bouldering, trad climbing and sports routes at Dumbarton Rock (13 miles west of Glasgow), known to locals as 'Dumby'.

**Islay Rock: a comprehensive  
guide to rock climbing and other  
pleasures on the Isle of Islay**  
Graham Little, *the author, 2019*

The southern-most isle of the Inner Hebrides—the ideal venue if you like climbing, bird watching and whisky. There is a full review on page 269.

**Lakes Sport & Slate**  
edited by Steve Scott  
*Wired Guides / FRCC,  
2020*



Includes the limestone crags in the South Lakes, including Chapel Head Scar, the sandstone at St Bees Head and Coudy Rocks in Appleby plus the recent developments on micro-granite at Bram Crag Quarry, and all of the slate.

**Lake District  
Climbs: a guidebook  
to traditional  
climbing in the  
English Lake District**  
Mark Glaister  
*Rockfax, 2019*



Over 1000 routes on 58 crags from low-level single-pitch outcrop cragging to long multi-pitch mountain routes.

**Lake District Bouldering**  
Greg Chapman, *Vertebrate, 2019*

The long-awaited guide to over 3000 problems at 70 venues by pioneering Lakes boulderer Greg Chapman.

**The Gilwern Area**  
Guy Percival, Gordon Jenkin & Mark Davies, *Great Western Rock, 2020*

The first comprehensive guide to sport climbing, trad routes and bouldering near Abergavenny in south Wales.

**North Somerset Outcrops: Vol 1**  
Gordon Jenkin & Mark Davies  
*Great Western Rock, 2019*

Outcrops around Bristol providing an alternative to the Avon Gorge.

**Wye Valley Sport**  
Gordon Jenkin & Mark Davies  
*Great Western Rock, 2019*

Detailing over 400 sport routes in the Lower Wye Valley

**Peak District Grit**  
Ian Carr, Niall  
Grimes and a team  
of volunteers *Wired  
Guides/BMC, 2020*



A bumper 528 page book, including over 2750 of the best routes on the best crags—Staffs, Kinder & Bleaklow, the Chew Valley, and all the edges from Wharndcliffe to Black Rocks.

**Peak Limestone**  
Alan James  
& Chris Craggs  
*Rockfax, 2020*



A complete update of the 2012 guide with all the new developments and crags included, both sport and trad.

**GSY Trad: a list of  
traditional  
climbing routes on  
Guernsey**  
James Burton  
*the author, 2019*



Over 1400 routes on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands. NB bolting is not allowed thus no sport routes exist. Also *New Routes Pamphlet 2020*.

**Quarry Life: Forest of Dean  
Bouldering**  
David Cross, *Document Now, 2019*

Esoteric bouldering in the sandstone quarries of western Gloucestershire.

**Lancashire Rock  
Update: new climbs  
and comprehensive  
first ascent list**  
Les Ainsworth &  
Dave Cronshaw  
*the authors, 2019*



The 2016 BMC definite guide did not include the first ascent list hence this privately published update.

Look out for the soon to be published 2nd edition of **Boulder Britain** by Niall Grimes, a major re-working of the 2012 edition. **North Wales Bouldering** Simon Panton / *Ground Up* is now out of print and we await the all new two volume set (Mountain and Coastal) sometime in the New Year.



Given the Coronavirus pandemic and the likelihood of more climbers staying at home the overseas selection has been restricted to areas where we have not previously had guidebooks in English available to buy in the UK.

**Mont Blanc Granite: Volume 3**  
Charpoua/Talefre/Leschaux  
*JM Editions, 2019*

The best rock climbs in the glacial basins on the right bank of the Mer de Glace.

**Mont Blanc: the complete rock climbing guide Italian Side**  
*Versante Sud, 2020*

The guide covers the Val Veny and the Brouillard-Frenay as well as the Tacul area, the Val Ferret and the Italian side of the Grande Jorasses.

**Dolomiti New Age**  
*Versante Sud, 2020)*

130 bolted routes up to 7a.

**Climbing Palestine: a guide to climbing in the West Bank**  
*Village to Village Press, 2019*

Feeling brave?  
Over 300 routes at 9 venues.

**East Tyrol: multipitch routes, crags and via ferrata**  
*Versante Sud, 2019*

Multipitch routes from Laserkessel above Lienz, to the steep, green schist faces of the Virgen Valley. It also covers most of the crags from the Dolomiten-Hut all the way to Falkenstein and the surrounding regions.

**Arctic Ice Climbing: 93 ice climbing routes in northern Norway**  
*Fri Flyt, 2020*

A comprehensive guidebook to one of the world's best ice climbing destinations.

**Cogne: selected ice climbs**  
*Oxford Alpine Club, 2019*

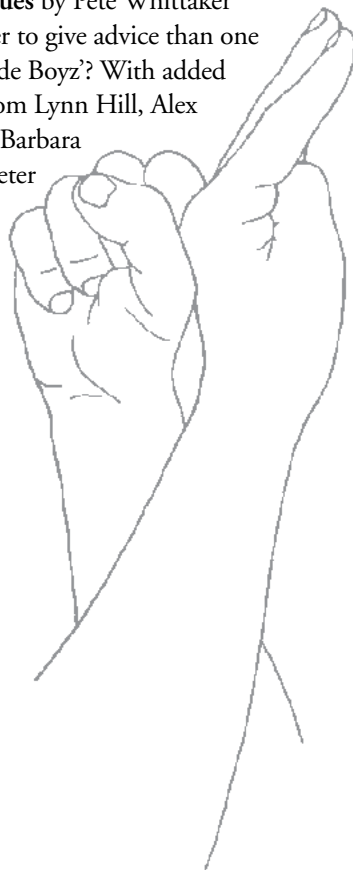
400 ice climbs around the valleys of Cogne, Urtier, Grauson, Lillaz, Valeille, Valnontey, Valsavarenche and Valle di Rhemes. The resort of Cogne is on the edge of the Gran Paradiso National Park in the Italian Alps.

**Yangshuo Rock: a China climbing guide**  
*Yangshuo Rock, 2018*

A resort town in southern China's Guangxi region, known for its dramatic karst mountain landscape – over 750 routes described.

If you are looking to improve your skills in the mystical art of jamming then the following is a must for those that like the masochistic weirdness of off-widths and finger cracks.

**Crack Climbing: mastering the skills & techniques** by Pete Whittaker  
Who better to give advice than one of the 'Wide Boyz'? With added insights from Lynn Hill, Alex Honnold, Barbara Zangerl, Peter Croft and more.



**Distant Snows**

By John Harding

John Harding, who joined the CC in 1960, is a legend in the world of ski-mountaineering, though he is also an extraordinarily accomplished alpine mountaineer who has served as Vice-President of the Alpine Club and President of both the Alpine Ski Club and the Eagle Ski Club. In short, a man who knows his way about. *Distant Snows* is his mountaineering autobiography, recording in significant detail his sixty years of climbing, both on foot and on skis.

His very first exploratory trip was to the Elburz mountains as a Cambridge undergraduate in 1956, with his training trip to Norway in 1955 partly funded by a grant from an illustrious CC member, Professor A C Pigou, famous for his economic theories and for supporting the early climbing career of Wilfred Noyce. The confidence, optimism and naivety of the CUMC team is beautifully described —the expedition was called 'The Cambridge University North Persia Expedition' although the region changed its name to Iran twenty years earlier. In spite of this diplomatic howler, the expedition successfully explored, mapped and took scientific samples from areas little known to British climbers. And everybody survived... The scene was set for a lifetime of such 'fun'.

John's conversion to ski-mountaineering was by the same route as for

many ski-mountaineers—the desire to get into the mountains in winter, by as practical a means as possible. Which meant skis, in John's eyes. Unlike most, though, his eyes lit upon places that the average mountaineer had probably never heard of, and certainly not with a view to exploring with skis. Many of his mountains probably still fall into that category "What? Where?" to most of us, but it's hard not to get metaphorically itchy feet as John describes the vistas, the unclimbed ridges and faces, the execrable rock and the locals—who often proved to be challenging both in language and their approach to life and foreigners.

John's career after Cambridge began in the world of Colonial Service, as an Administrator in the Aden Protectorate—a role which was limiting in terms of local mountains, but liberating in terms of the very generous leave that he earned. And this period saw the start of the influential networking that would stand him in good stead for the rest of his climbing career, with seemingly golden introductions to the right person in the right place to assist his travels to relatively obscure mountain ranges. His later career, as a lawyer with a City firm, was far less accommodating in terms of annual leave, but the early lesson about networking and, one

suspects, a comfortable income made it possible to squeeze the maximum in to every trip.

John's book serves many purposes beyond its primary function as an autobiography. It is a wonderful tutorial in the politics of the Middle East in the early 1960s, and the crumbling British influence there. It is also a great inspiration in finding obscure objectives 'because they are there', not for any

desire to be the first to achieve something. Though there is certainly a sense that being 'the first' was quite pleasant, and his trips and companions yielded quite a few first ascents as a natural result of his explorations.

“a wonderful record of John's exploits and will be a great reference work...”



*Distant Snows*  
by John Harding  
Vertebrate Publishing  
2016





The book documents more than a few unlikely expeditions, some of which proved to be as tricky and unpleasant as a few moments' thought might predict them to be, though that was never reason enough for John not to go and find out. And some of his unlikely ventures such as the first British ski traverse of the Pyrenees, achieved in several stages, will stand the test of time as a record of determination, skill and endurance as he kept going at it, even when he found out that the completed traverse would not be, as he had hoped, the first ever.

Although the book is a wonderful record of John's exploits, and will be a great reference work for those who choose the same approach to mountains and life, it is not as easy to read as it might be—it needed a rigorous non-mountaineering editor, I feel, to sift out the amazing stories from the wealth of detail. John's memory, or his diary keeping (or both!) is phenomenal and the reader can share the discomfort and feel the stress of long ago incidents which perhaps don't have relevance to a modern telling of the story. However, the comprehensive index and bibliography should ensure that any modern day Cambridge expedition has no excuse to be short of information, and John's narrative will ensure that they have the motivation as well.

This is a story very well worth telling, in a book well worth reading.

David Medcalf

## How's & Knott's: A guide to Lakeland Views

By Guy Richardson  
*Libri Publishing Ltd 2019*

'Not another one' as Beryl from Bristol said. A list of places in the Lakes all with Norse based names, either How(e) or Knott. There are over 400 such place names in the Lake District; eminences, not summits, places from which you can see the detail of the landscape below you.

This book takes twenty-two of these sites from across the length and breadth of the District and shows how the views and landscape have developed both geologically and later under the influence of man. Hutching's How sits above the settlement of Wasdale Head and overlooks Wastwater, Mosedale and the former packhorse trails over Sty Head and Black Sail. Did you know that the first recorded evidence of settlements in Wasdale was in 1322 when three vaccaries\* were established by the lord of the manor?

Brown Knotts  
© www.lakelandviews.uk



An interesting 'extra' is the link to the Lakeland Views website [www.lakelandviews.uk](http://www.lakelandviews.uk). This site has panoramas of the views from the twenty-two selected How(e)s and Knotts allowing you to follow the text from the comfort of your armchair. These are best viewed on a tablet where it is easier to swipe back and fore and zoom in on the detail. There is also a Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/lakelandviews.uk](https://www.facebook.com/lakelandviews.uk)

This book isn't aimed at the climber, but for the climber who wishes to appreciate more of the 'picturesque' of the Lake District then it is certainly a different way of looking at the landscape.

\*Latin scholars will already have worked out that vaccaries were cattle farms; usually under monastic control.

Gwyn Evans

## Islay Rock: a comprehensive guide to rock climbing and other pleasures on the Isle of Islay

By Graham Little  
*the author 2019*

It should be said, straight away, that Islay is not a major rock climbing island and Graham Little admits that his first new routes here were on family holidays, which may be the best way to approach the mostly single pitch climbing here. It helps if you're also a birder. There is, however, an adventurous feel to the sea cliffs: some tricky approaches can be rewarded by wonderful clean, sharp rock. I climbed on Islay in the 1970s and 80s with the island's ambulance driver and only resident climber, Peter Farrington. When Islay was included in a guidebook for the first time in Little and Moody's SMC guide *Inner Hebrides and Arran* (2014) it was given cursory coverage. It was suggested that Peter Farrington 'never recorded individual routes' in his 20 years of climbing all over the island. Actually he did record them for himself, but did not want to publish them as guidebook descriptions. I respected this when I wrote about 'The Island' in *The Joy of Climbing* (2004). Pete wanted to leave this island for the pure, unguided 'wilderness climbing' that is still possible in the Western Isles.

But now the cat is out of the Rhinns, and I find that in 1986 I was on a new route with Norman Eliot, the late Andy Birkby, with locals Tony Perrons and

Pete, making *Famous Five go to Lossit* (Severe). Since 2000 Graham Little, who has a house on Islay, has found every hidden geo and even forced routes through inland crags 'festooned in shaggy lichen' to produce this holiday fun book. The Inner Hebrides guidebook included routes of 5m, but I can't find any quite that short here, and one starred route—Peter Farrington's superb *Angel's Stairway* (Severe) on the Mull of Oa—runs to four pitches, three of them up a clean, textured ramp above the sea.

Then there are the 'other pleasures' which include distillery visits, of course, and info on cycling, birding, music, shipwrecks, flora and fauna, and an annual walking festival. My son, who still regularly takes his daughter Islay to 'her island', sticks his head out of the house each morning to test the wind direction and knows which empty sheltered beach to go to for the morning, before visiting craft shops, the natural history museum or Gordon's woollen mill. Gordon will tell you about the tartans he's weaving for the latest Hollywood film and show you tartans he made for Braveheart.

If it's wet, there's always the swimming pool at Bowmore, the result of fundraising by Pete's wife Pat. They came from Chesterfield on their honeymoon nearly half a century ago and stayed. Islay gets you like that. For the last twenty years, for example, Graham Little has been on the first ascent of every new route on Islay. Now he's sharing the varied pleasures of this bewitching island.

Terry Gifford





## Identify Mountain Flowers of Britain and Ireland

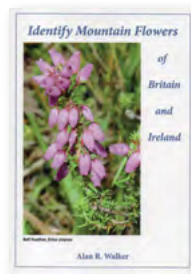
Alan R Walker

Alanwalker Books, Edinburgh 2019

Also available as a free download:

[www.alanwalker.com/mountain-flowers](http://www.alanwalker.com/mountain-flowers)

Part of the pleasure of being out in the hills is being close to nature. There is a relatively small number of different species of mountain birds and it is quite easy to learn to identify them. Mountain plants are, however, a different matter as there are so many species to learn. Many conventional plant identification books contain far too many species, covering a wide range of different environments, and are organised in a manner that suits a trained botanist rather than a passing climber. Enter this little book which is written specifically for people who enjoy walking or climbing and observing the natural life of the hills. It focuses on the commonest 100 or so species that you may find on the hill. Each is described on a single A5 page which contains: colour photos of the flowers and leaves, a line drawing of the flower showing its key features, an indication of flower size, a distribution map showing where it grows and key points to look for, and any easily confused species. Some of the descriptive

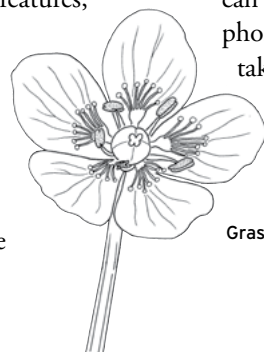


terminology in the key points is specialist and a glossary would have been useful.

So, how does the book perform in the field? The photographs and line drawings are really clear, so it isn't difficult to match flower to photograph. Initially I found the guide difficult to use because the plants are grouped by family rather than the more obvious feature, the flower's colour. I found that the easiest approach was to look at the pages to find flowers of the correct colour, and then try to match flower and photo. This worked well but was time consuming. There are a couple of blank pages at the back and I have used these to list the flowers by size and colour, this makes identification much easier and faster. Overall this is a useful book, especially as you can have a free digital copy on your phone. If all else fails you can always take a photo of the flower and identify it back at the hut.

**Trevor Langhorne**

Grass-of-Parnassus, *Parnassia palustris*



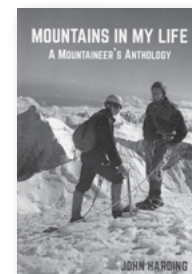
## Mountains in my Life: A Mountaineer's Anthology

John Harding

2017, available from the author

I like anthologies, the convenience of being able to dip in and out, without having to follow a set order through the chapters, suits my style of reading. This compilation pulls together over fifty articles, obituaries and reports, written during the author's active mountaineering life of nearly sixty years, cataloguing an ongoing love affair with the mountains. They were originally published in a variety of journals, principally the *Alpine Journal* and *Eagle Ski Club Year Book*, although four were originally published in our own Journal.

With a page count of 450+ this is a weighty tome; it is a pity that there are no photos or maps to illustrate the text. The author emphasises that this is not his autobiography and many of his other mountain adventures are not included because he didn't write about them at the time. His autobiography, *Distant Snows*, is also reviewed in this Journal. Had I been choosing the content I would have been more selective, in particular I feel that the Obituaries and the reports in the Ski Mountaineering section are 'of their time' and now of limited interest. However, his previously unpublished address at the Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Jack Longland, deserves inclusion given Longland's contribution to both climbing and education.



The individual articles are grouped into chapters either by geographic area or subject matter. The table of contents at the start of the book shows where and when each article was originally published and there is a brief introduction at the start of each chapter. I found these very helpful when choosing which article to read next.

What stands out in this book is how widely travelled John is, his trips ranged far and wide, from Spitsbergen to New Zealand and all before the days of budget airlines. The author obviously likes getting 'off the beaten track' and he has explored some of the (then) less widely known mountain of Europe such as The Pyrenees and those of Greece and Corsica, as well as in Turkey, Iran and beyond. The earlier articles generally cover traditional mountaineering while the more recent pieces detail ski mountaineering exploits which, the author notes, became his main mountain focus and a discipline in which he recorded many British 'firsts'.

The author writes with the detail and clarity you would expect from a member of the legal profession although, at times, there is more detail than needed to tell the story. In the introduction

he notes that the articles are unedited, I feel that this was a mistake and that some articles would have benefitted from sensitive editing. The articles cover a number of different styles, from short contributions to local newspapers to factual accounts of early visits to the alps. Others describe longer and more challenging expeditions such as the four month long Cambridge Expedition to the Elburz Mountains (1956), on which the team drove overland from Cambridge to Iran in a couple of Jeeps to climb, before driving back again. The kind of trip that is impossible in the current geopolitical climate. He recalls the Elburz trip in three short newspaper articles, written with the general public in mind, and a much beefier account for *The Himalayan Journal*, I prefer the simplicity of the former, it was obviously a great trip. Other articles take a broader look at mountains, their cultural significance and exploration and, where appropriate, he suggests further reading. His 2001 essay from the *Alpine Journal*, 'In praise of Greek Mountains', exemplifies this kind of writing and, by the time you have finished the article, you have a deeper understanding of both the mountains of Greece and the Ski Mountaineering opportunities they afford in a country better known for boozy beach holidays!

This is a fascinating collection of writing with something to interest every mountain lover, and it's well worth a read.

**Trevor Langhorne**

## Rock as Gloss

Mark Goodwin

Longbarrow Press, £12.99

British climbing poetry has enjoyed a real resurgence over the last few years. A major contributor to that is Mark Goodwin, whose latest collection of poetry and prose, *Rock as Gloss*, was recently a category finalist in the Banff Mountain Book Competition. Goodwin is a Leicestershire-based climber, walker, writer and performer, who has produced a number of collections over the last thirty years, but this is his first to focus exclusively on climbing and fell-walking. The cover features a very fine drawing of Hen Cloud by climber-artist Paul Evans and the book as a whole is beautifully produced. It is arranged in four sections, or 'compasses,' which lead us on an exhilarating journey through the glorious variety of UK rock, including mountain rhyolite, Eastern grit, Llanberis slate, sea-cliff quartzite and Scottish gabbro. Although mostly set on these islands, one of the dramatic and unsettling prose fictions takes place in the Simien mountains of Ethiopia. Goodwin also reflects on the culture and characters of climbing and the outdoors, with significant appearances from Menlove Edwards and Johnny Dawes.



For the casual reader, Goodwin's work can look challenging on first acquaintance: he plays around with layout, typography, even the density of the printing ink. But persevere—and maybe recall your most intensely memorable climbs: were they easy paths, or did they only slowly give up their secrets, with some upping and downing on the crux? This is a fascinating and rewarding collection that amply repays backtracking and rereading, as all good writing should.

Every climber will know what an intense connection with the world can be had through raw fingertips exploring a few millimetres of crystalline grit with the ground a few too many metres below. When everything flows, it's easy to feel you're at one with the rock. Goodwin's poetry evokes this beautifully:

tip  
  
toed on  
a rip  
  
ple of grit  
  
stone fin  
gers feel  
  
ing to st  
ick to  
  
geol  
  
ogy's rim...

Here is the hallucinatory focus on every detail, each fragment of word or atom of rock, with some brilliant touches. Feel the slight relaxation of tension as the lengthening rip/ple of grit provides some support, or the lovely little catch as the tentative fingers suddenly st/ick. This is free verse of real subtlety.

Goodwin has a lively and playful sense of humour. Early on in the collection he delivers a witty twist on this idea of climbers communing with the rock. Most of us have probably talked about getting a hard move 'dialled' and he cleverly plays on this as the climber looking for answers tries to get the rock to talk back to him via *Grittish Tellestone* on the *Stanage-ophone*! The fingertips suddenly find an answer as the stone replies and he's

through to  
rock's survival hotline  
now  
the conversation begins

This sort of connection (pun intended) between human and rock is a recurring theme, and often manifests itself through various metamorphoses of one into the other. In fact, one of the best known Greek metamorphosis myths gets a lyrical and inventive re-imagining in the prose piece *Slackline & Tarn*. I won't give a spoiler here, as the unfolding is fun. And the very first poem kicks off with some pretty challenging advice on *Rock Climbing for Novices*:

give yourself rhyolite eyelids. Push  
your mind's nose into mineral...

Of course, the very medium on which we act out our climbing stories is one of constant motion and everlasting change. After all, some of our most popular rock has undergone its own non-mythical metamorphosis: the slate and quartzite of North Wales, mud and sand transformed by pressure and heat. And my own scatter-my-ashes crag, the Roaches Skyline, was once itself scattered, silica grains drifting through the lazy waters of a long-gone delta.

This idea of rock as an endless process of change is something Goodwin returns to throughout the collection, quoting a typically striking phrase from Johnny Dawes: "A gritstone crag is a kinetic museum..."

moving  
though centuries  
with the immense unfathomable speed  
of  
stillness

And this impermanence helps create the perspective—that sense of the tiny flickering of our humanity—that many of us find in the mountains. In time, the very name of Stanage Edge will become

a lost sound  
that once came from the mouths  
of animals called *Homo sapiens*  
aeons ago

Johnny reappears—in slightly abbreviated form as "Ony"—in the highly enjoyable *The Tale of the Journey*, which follows a party of three descending through the Dinorwig slate quarries, from the bus stop car park to the bottom of the Lost World. He's accompanied by an abbreviated author (Ark) and a photographer (Iky). As the three head down on their adventure, there are echoes of Andrew Greig's swashbuckling epic *Men On Ice*, an important reference point for anyone interested in the poetry of climbing (and sex n' drugs n' rock n' roll). Ony is the natural climber we all dream of being, intuitive and graceful:

Ony's body  
fitted to slate's lips  
simply like tiles  
& rain  
Ony was  
slate's nimble limbs

Other, more fictitious characters appear in the course of *Rock as Gloss*, always interestingly named. A powerful sequence of poems inspired by Ted Hughes features the obsessive climber Craig (where the I meets the crag?). Similarly obsessed is Christopher Lichen, who clings to the rock so effectively he eventually disappears into it.

The fourth and last 'compass' of *Rock as Gloss* centres on Goodwin's love for Ordnance Survey maps, playfully personified and again neatly named as Ordrey. I guess only those who've had the batteries fail in their GPS can know the affection it's possible to feel for a map when you're benighted and far from home. There's an important analogy running through this final section: Ordrey maps the landscape as a poem or a story maps experience: both give a voice to the rock, enabling it to speak to us, through symbols and words.

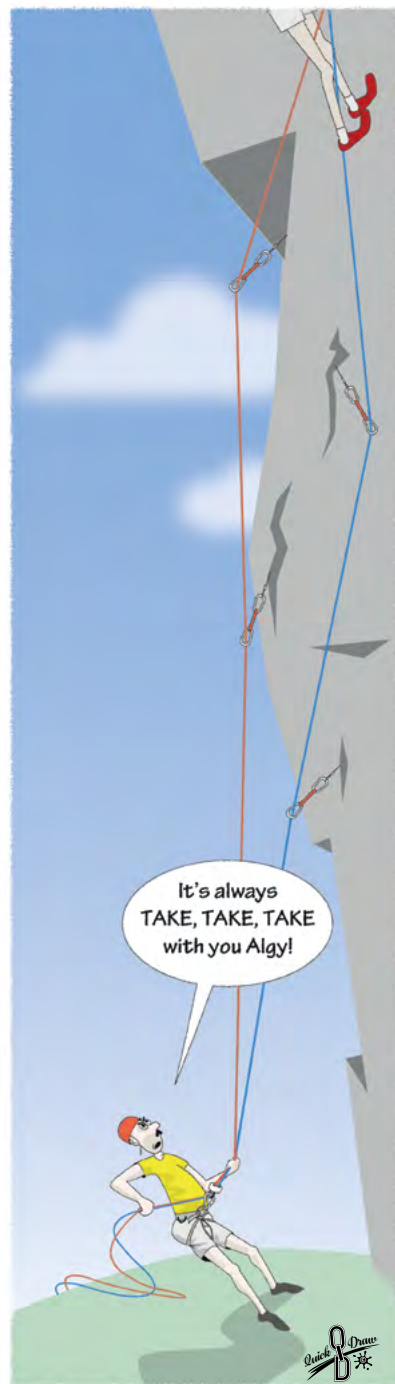
Finally, for those who might be puzzling over the title of this collection, it's worth remembering that gloss is a Greek root meaning tongue: Goodwin's poems and fictions are speaking the language of the rock. It's a powerful voice, which deserves to be heard: if you love climbing and you love literature, listen up.

Andy Clarke

This review was previously published in *Climber*.







## Scratch off Peak District Rock Climbs Map

*Maps International, £14.99*

[www.mapsinternational.co.uk/scratch-off-peak-district-rock-climbs-print.html](http://www.mapsinternational.co.uk/scratch-off-peak-district-rock-climbs-print.html)

Tired of sitting in the Downes on a Saturday or Sunday morning trying to decide the venue for the day's climbing? Want to avoid crags which are likely to be as busy as Bournemouth beach during Lockdown? Feel like you have 'done' The Peak District? If any or all of these statements apply to you then this map might be just the thing you need to direct your attention away from the familiar. Covering the entire Peak District on a single A2 sheet (approx. 60cm x 40cm) this definitely isn't a map for navigating across Kinder as you head for the Northern Edges. What it does show is the location of 239 crags, from Shooter's Nab to Rake's Dale and Mow Cop to Cocking Tor. There is basic information about each one, at a glance you can see the number of routes and how they are spread across the grades, the aspect, rock type, and if there are any potential access issues (shown by a red triangle): a visit to the BMC RAD will fill in the details of any access sensitivities.

Climbers and mountaineers are often obsessed with completing lists, witness the enthusiasm for Munros, Corbetts, Donalds, Wainwrights, *Classic Rock* routes etc. This map is described as 'Collect & Scratch': each crag has a scratch card box that can be used to show crags you have visited, immediately the completists amongst us can start on another, and substantial, tick list. There is even a

tally table so you can see your progress towards the magic number (239). It is a fun exercise to see how well you really know Peak climbing. I tried it and came to a paltry total of 67, there are so many gaps, quite embarrassing really!

As with any publication, there are some negatives, the size being one of them, in some areas the crags are very close together and their names are crowded into a small area. To help counter this the most congested areas; Dovedale, Cheedale and Water-cum-Jolly, are shown on larger scale insets. Although I haven't checked every crag, the odd one is marked in the wrong location; most notably Laddow, which is shown as being just north of Chapel-en-le-Frith whereas it is actually many miles to the north above Longdendale. With regard to potential access concerns I subconsciously equated the red icon with 'banned' rather than 'there may be some kind of restriction', an intermediate amber icon would be helpful. Furthermore the use of red and green icons, while common practice, does create a potential problem for those who are red-green colour-blind.

Overall a fun publication for the wall of your cave; it could prick your conscience and get you off your beaten track.

**Trevor Langhorne**

## South Wales Rock

*Matt Woodfield, Alan Rosier, Roy Thomas and Tim Hoddy*

*The Climbers' Club, 2020*

This guidebook is not only a new area for the Climber's Club but it also marks a significant departure from our traditional approach to publication: it is a collaborative venture with local activists, and a selected climbs guide that is backed up by the complete record online (South Wales Climbing Wiki). As such I think it deserves a short review.

The area covered extends from Swansea in the west to Newport in the east and from Crickhowell in the north to Barry in the south. Over forty venues are included; for convenience they are grouped into four geographic areas. The majority are sandstone with the remainder being limestone; disused quarries predominate and some look more attractive than others! It has to be admitted that many will be of local interest only, but with an abundance of mid-grade sport routes and a population in excess of one and a half million living within a one hour drive of them, this guide should prove very popular.

Once opened the high production values shown in recent guidebooks such as South Devon are immediately apparent with extensive use of colour, with imaginative and attractive page designs. There are the usual notes covering History, Geology, Access & Conservation and the practicalities of visiting the region. The area and crag introductions give clear and concise

information ensuring that the user arrives at their chosen destination with the minimum of fuss. There is a unique QR code (one of those square white boxy things with lots a black blobs in it) for each crag; this links to the online Wiki which has comprehensive details for that crag plus information about neighbouring crags.

Over 1500 routes are described using the now familiar style of photo-diagrams married to text; it is good to see that the route details and their accompanying photo-diagram are on the same page or double page spread, no need to move back and forth between pages. The action shots are a bit of a mixed bag but you can only work with what you have and it is always difficult to get inspiring shots of short routes. There are some buttresses/crags where few routes have stars for quality, given the rationale of the selected climbs text plus online format for the rest perhaps they could have been left in the Wiki?

In short, if you are one of the million plus people living within an hour of this area you should have this book on your shelves. Those from afar and heading to/ returning from Pembroke could break their journey here and grab a few classics.

**Trevor Langhorne**

Cailean Harker on *SuperSizeMe* (F7c), at Witches Point, South Wales.  
© Yannis Hawkins





## The Pull


By Hadyn Morris

Rock calls to the fingers lazing ache,  
The broken edge of a ridge's rearing crest  
Cuts through tomorrow's leisured dream of ease,  
And the mist's whine shivers my ear  
In pleasurable fear. Distance yields, and again  
Knobbed jug-holds caress the inside tip  
Of whitened fingers: the taughtened muscles  
Strain and lift the flesh and bone  
Against the downward-slithering stone, to reach  
A moment's balance, held a second, then  
Lost in the swiftly palpitating upward move  
To force away the last move's dangerous thrill.  
Each nerve besieges the belayed stance, that lets  
The mind respond to the position's gift.  
But what have I known of the rock  
That I held?  
A revered gratitude that my finger-  
Nails strove to earn, perhaps to wrest,  
From its aloof strength.





Dawn on Barre des Écrins

 Andrew Clark





THE CLIMBERS' CLUB  
Journal 2019-20  
No. 129 December 2020

[www.climbers-club.co.uk](http://www.climbers-club.co.uk)

