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NERVE WORKING IN
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*(H.L. STEMBRIDGE.
CLUB PRESIDENT
1954-1956)*

Yorkshire Ramblers' Club Centenary 1892-1992



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There can be few more appropriate words which recall the enduring spirit of adventure that characterises the history of this great club of ours, or indeed the incentive upon which it was founded on sixth October 1892 at the Skyrack Inn, Headingley in Leeds, and titled with a formidable sense of understatement.

For the past 100 year history of the Yorkshire Ramblers Club

reveals itself to be anything but 'rambling'. Indeed, the Y.R .C. has enjoyed a brave, boisterous and, on occasions, all-conquering presence that continues to leave its mark both here in Britain and around the work.

At this October meeting twenty members were enrolled and Edward Whymper was elected as the first in a long line of distinguished Honorary Members. A resolution was passed to hold two meetings during the winter for the 'reading of papers' and one each



summer month for 'the arranging of expeditions'. All that remained was the selection of an appropriate challenge.

Journal, Thomas Grey, the editor, concluded with due modesty:

"A certain amount of interesting matter was accumulated during



Whether these founding fathers could foresee the future achievements and great names recorded here must be consigned to conjecture. What is certain is that these were not slow to come.

Commenting in 1899 on the results of this search in the clubs first

the period of waiting".

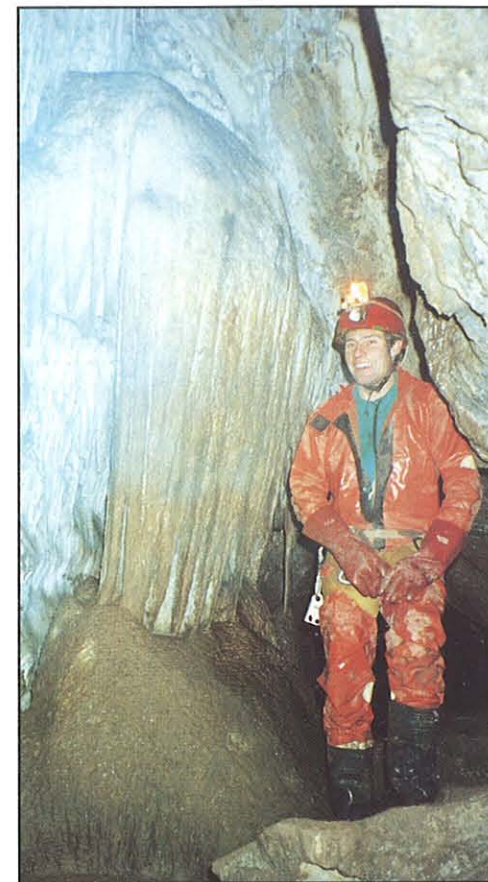
It certainly had. That early challenge was realised in the largely unknown and unexplored caves and potholes of the Yorkshire Craven District which the young club now set about with a relish that was hard to be denied.

Unfortunately the planned descent of Gaping Gill in 1896 was preceded by a certain Frenchman, Edouard Alfred Martel, by one month and in any event the Y.R.C. members Calvert and Booth were forced to abandon their efforts 190 feet from the surface.

The team returned in 1898 and this time Calvert became only the second man to stand on the floor of the now famous pot, cutting Martel's descent time of 23 minutes to just two in the process by using an innovated Boatswains Chair.

Fired by this success, one pothole after another now fell to the rambling pioneers: Sell Gill, Rowten Pot, Boggards Roaring Hole, Cross Pot and Old Ing Cave. The beginning of a great tradition that was to establish Yorkshire Ramblers as the driving force behind the growth of potholing in this country.

Yet the club was not content with the world of underground mountaineering when fresh challenges beckoned so invitingly from above. A number of members were to make important contributions to rock climbing generally and none more so than William Cecil Slingsby.





Elected an Honorary Member in 1892, and serving as President between 1893 and 1904, Slingsby had already completed his most historic Norwegian campaigns before the club was formed, but his assaults continued to inspire the club as they do to this day.

His success in climbing many major Norwegian peaks establish him as both a great Yorkshire climber of all time and a major British figure, whilst in Norway itself he is still widely known and respected.

In 1903 Fred Botterill was establishing his new route on Slanting Gulley, Lliwedd and making that great climb, Botterill's slab on Scafell, that was to immortalise his name. Between 1902 and 1907 yet more potholes and passages fell to the club culminating in the first descent by a Y.R.C. member of Marble Arch Caves, outside Eniskillen. They were undoubtedly great times for the club.

The following year saw the election

of another significant figure and life-long influence in Ernest E. Roberts. His initiations on an early visit to Mere Gill proved a baptism by fire that is still part of club legend. It took six years before the pot was 'bottomed' in 1912 and inspired Roberts classic of pot holing literature, 'The Siege of Mere Gill'.

For now the war years intervened and sadly lost the club some fine members, but it still had F.S.

Smythe. By 1932 Smythe had reached the summit of Kamet and then took part in the Everest expeditions of 1933, '36 and '38, achieving an important and well documented place in the history of British Mountaineering.

In 1929 the club suffered the death of William Cecil Slingsby, but he left it with a great tradition that surmounted the mere desire to conquer with a genuine love of the

prudent respect for its dangers. Thus, this address to the club upon his retirement in 1904:

"On the mountains, or in the potholes and caves, let prudent thought and remembrance of



those left at home govern your daring. It is always hard to turn back, but if ever to go forward is to court an unjustifiable danger, show that moral courage which is greater than physical".

Members were active in almost every part of the world before the second world war intervened, and once more deprived the club of both its Journal and some fine, promising young members.

Upon its return the Journal carried a long obituary to he who had been an Honorary Member since 1907 and had done so much to spur the clubs early achievements:- 'The Master', Eduardo Alfred Martel, who died in 1938.

The club now opened it's first hut at Low Hall Garth in Little Langdale although against this happy event, the passing of Thomas Grey, at the grand old age of 93, must be recorded, and with him the last link with the early days of the Y.R.C.

It is now the 1950's and following the historic British ascent of Everest, the world of climbing stood at the threshold of a new era. The age of potholing was to move aside to make way for the modern rage for mass expeditions.

In 1957 the club planned its own expedition to a 22,500 ft virgin mountain in the Jugal Himal range, ten days march north-east

of Katmandu. Individual Ramblers had been to Kamet, Kan Chenjunga and Everest, but never as a club expedition and what should have been its finest hour was tragically clouded by the loss of Crosby Fox and two Sherpas in an avalanche. Nevertheless this attempt had fired the Y.R.C. and firmed its future resolve.

Just one year later the members had established a second club hut, this in the Craven Potholing country near Clapham Village. Lowstern Club Hut was opened on 16th November 1958 by the serving President, Ernest Roberts, just two years before the death of this much loved guiding hand and doyen of modern potholing.

He may not have witnessed the Seventieth Anniversary of the club in 1962, but he would surely have applauded the way in which it was celebrated.



For after some twenty three years and numerous attempts, the Y.R.C. finally broke through to explore the extent of Reyford Caves, County Fermanagh. First discovered and named by Roberts in 1939. This effort serves to render even 'the siege of Mere Gill' brief by comparison.

On into the 'sixties', new regions were still being added to club geography: Czechoslovakia and Poland, Turkey, the Chichibu Alps in Japan, the Caves of Ardeche in France and caves of Lebanon. By comparison the 1970's were quiet, but the club came back in the 1980's with renewed energy.

The 1983 Whit meet caught the imagination of the whole club when it succeeded in placing a member on top of every Scottish Munro.

In 1986 the Y.R.C. introduced the first annual Alpine meet which is so popular with members and

families. Two years later witnessed tests of an altogether more vigorous nature in Bolivia, and meanwhile funds were being raised to construct a purpose built cottage at the Lowestern club hut as a base for future potholing expeditions.

In 1992 all eyes have been on the Centenary celebrations and a packed programme of events.

A club party has returned from cross country ski trips in the Jotunheim and Alfoten regions of Norway, a precursor to the large summer expedition retracing many of the Norwegian peaks and passes conquered by Slingsby. Elsewhere the club stage a traditional descent of Rowten Pot and a weekend ascent of all Yorkshire peaks in excess of 2,000 ft.

In 100 years the club has climbed or walked in almost every known region of the planet whilst almost all first descents of Yorkshire

Potholes were made by club members; a history that has been meticulously recorded in a legacy of fine reporting and descriptive writing compiled in the club journals.

What is most apparent is the breadth of interest, not only for climbing or potholing, but in skiing, walking, in methods, in safety, surveying and mapping,



photography, climatology, natural history and geography. It transcends the mere desire to conquer with a genuine appreciation for the participation, and the landscape itself, wherever that may be.

Yet future challenges will be sought and long may they continue. Back in his Seventieth Anniversary review, J. Geoffrey Brook offered this thought:

"Even on the moon the mountains are supposed to be 36,000 ft high and full of caves".

Wouldn't the founding fathers smile at that?



Yorkshire Ramblers Club

Enquiries to the
Honorary Secretary