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Articles

GRAHAM SALMON,
SEALEY'S FAULT CHAMBER
NEWBY MOSS CAVE

The Yorkshire Ramblers Club

Established 1892

The mountaineering and caving club

Club Member of
The British Mountaineering Council

The Club aims;
to organise caving, mountaineering, walking and skiing excursions and expeditions,
to encourage the exploration of caves, potholes and more remote parts of the world,
and
to gather and promote knowledge of natural history, archaeology,
folklore and kindred subjects

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Supplement - China Caves

Issued with this edition is a report on the work of club members on two expeditions to caves in Tian'e and Fenshan, in Guangxi province, China

TALES OF YESTERYEAR

THE ALPS IN 1956
A CIRCUIT OF MONTE ROSA

Another account by
Wilfred (Andy) Anderson

In 1954 I was a member of a group of 3 climbers who climbed from Zermatt in the Pennine Alps.

David Smith was a member of that group and subsequently joined the YRC in 1955 (I first joined in 1953)

In 1954 we climbed the Dufourspitze summit of Monte Rosa.

WA

The photograph on the right shows David on Dufourspitze looking southwards over snow covered peaks on the Italian side of the mountain (which borders Switzerland)

In 1956 I was again in Switzerland with a party of five YRC members but based on Saas Fee

SAAS FEE

On this occasion three of the party completed a circuit of the Monte Rosa group, an account of which follows.

If it takes two climbers two days to cross one pass and return the same way how long does it take three climbers to cross seven passes?

The question arose when a group of five YRC climbers split into two groups in order to cross passes linking Italy with Switzerland. The five of us found ourselves in Magugnaga at the base of the south face of Monte Rosa having the previous day crossed over to Italy via the Monte Moro pass.

From our base in Saas Fee we had penetrated the upper reaches of the Saas Tal and, in view of the unsatisfactory high altitude weather and that forecast for the next few days, there seemed sufficient reason to cross over to the sunny side of the Alps by way of the Monte Moro pass.

From Saas Fee a pleasant walk of three hours on a gently graded path brought us to an extensive flat area in the upper reaches of the valley. This appeared to have been at some time a lake formed behind a terminal moraine which had subsequently been breached. Night was falling as we reached this spot and lights were winking eerily on the moraine to our right. Two workmen approached and passed us. We concluded that work was in hand to repair the moraine dam and re-flood the valley, probably as part of a hydro-electric project.

A few minutes later we approached a large ruinous building which presumably was, or had been the

Mattmark Inn. Not a window was intact, crates and bottles littered the surrounds, paint was peeling from the woodwork. This was to have been our night's resting place and we were about to push on hoping that the hut shown on the map as 'Distel' would offer shelter. On rounding the corner of the building a portly gentleman of Italian appearance materialised in the doorway and engaged us in conversation in English!

It always surprised me when local people recognised our nationality before we spoke and addressed us as far as possible in our native tongue. The reason became more obvious when one day I chanced to meet one of our party in a village street. His appearance in a dirty pair of ex-army camouflage trousers with a ragged anorak type of upper garment and down at heel boots was, to say the least, arresting. No one but a self assured Englishman would dare to inflict such an eyesore on the public of a friendly nation. A half grown beard sprouting from a sun-scarred face did little to soften the impression. Yet we found that the Italians endured it with remarkable volubility, in the midst of which we stood impressive and unperturbed!

Our friend the innkeeper, for this he claimed to be, apologised for the condition of his hotel but assured us that he could provide accommodation, and since it was now too late to cross the pass, and the Distel hut being closed, we had no alternative but to accept his offer.

THE DISTEL HUT - 2 miles below the Monte Moro

We ate in a gloomy room, in the centre of which a square table was surrounded by four uncouth looking Italians drinking profusely from bottles without the intermediary stage of a glass. The atmosphere seemed fraught with unpleasant possibilities; indeed the whole setting had a 'wages of fear' suggestion!

We retired to our mattresses, sheltered from the cool mists now floating eerily over the lake bed, by a few broken window panes and a half closed door. Candles stuck in beer bottle necks completed the furnishings and we were grateful for the clean blankets which our host provided.

I slept well though Wally almost disappeared through a hole under his mattress during the night. I think our fears were prompted largely by our imaginations as the cold light of dawn brought a more normal perspective. The 'hotel' seemed to be used as a billet for the workmen on the dam and was no doubt destined to be submerged. Our host was most helpful and solicitous and, since the bill was in keeping with the standard of the accommodation, we felt well pleased and set out for the Monte Moro pass into Italy. Two hours later at seven thirty, we topped the pass on softening snow into bright sunshine.

The weather had improved and a level bank of cloud filled the Saas valley, beyond which the peaks of the Oberland revealed themselves with remarkable clarity in the still morning air. The Bietschorn was most prominent and in line with the Saas Tal. Nearer peaks surrounded us on all sides and we paused for a prolonged second breakfast and photography.

We descended into Italy in hot sunshine without challenge from the deserted frontier post near the summit of the pass. The whole 11,000 foot south face of Monte Rosa was breathtaking in its immensity as wisps of cloud floated up its icy couloirs. Vegetation on this side of the Alps is more luxuriant and the tree line higher.

As we descended the heat increased, lizards were numerous on the path and a desire to immerse overheated bodies in cool sparkling water became insistent. The toy like village of Macugnaga appeared below and came rapidly nearer as we descended the steep zig-zags of the path. Soon we met civilisation in the form of holidaymakers climbing to the local viewpoint and its inevitable restaurant. We were proposing a drink at the latter when we realised that we had no Italian currency. This thought precipitated our descent into the village where such amenities could be enjoyed. In my case these included a shave, a haircut and a bathe.

We all shared in the ample and excellent food and wine.

Our arrival, or was it our appearance, was noted by the police who hounded us for our passports which we refused to surrender until we had eaten. However, to mollify the policeman standing politely in the lounge of our chosen hotel whilst we were sampling the delights of its dining room, we entrusted our passports to his care at the request of our charming hostess. They were later returned unstamped so that a similar procedure had to be observed at our subsequent resting places in Italy.

The sun shone, the wine and food were good and, even if the Refugio Sella, the hut by which we had meant to make our return to Switzerland, had been removed by an avalanche at some previously unstated date, there was always tomorrow on which to decide a plan of action.

The absence of the hut, which had been favourably sited for a crossing of the New Weisstor Pass was something we were reluctant to accept until we had cross examined many of the local inhabitants, a lengthy process with our limited vocabulary. However, the fact had to be faced, and, as we were not equipped for a bivouac at the foot of the pass in order to make the necessary early morning crossing, other plans had to be made. The local police said that the New Weisstor was impossible anyway but they also said this about the Monte Moro in spite of our arrival by this same pass!

Our choice lay amongst three possibilities; a return by the Monte Moro, a long bus and train journey entering Switzerland by the Simplon or a return by the Theodul or higher pass if conditions permitted. After much debate Arthur and Dan decided on a return over the Monte Moro with the intent of making a few climbs from Saas Fee in the week remaining to us.

Brian, Wally and I opted for the latter course which would involve the crossing of four high passes in Italy before crossing the Theodul into Switzerland to Zermatt. From there a crossing of the Alder Pass would bring us back to Saas Fee having circumnavigated Monte Rosa. We hoped also to ascend the Breithorn from the Theodul.

The remaining notes describe the adventures of the latter party of three. As we left Macugnaga the sun was shining but the peaks were hidden in cloud and Monte Rosa might not have been there at all for all we could see of it. A sighting of the Refugio Sella confirmed our decision not to have risked a bivouac in its vicinity! Our walk up the long valley to the Turlo Pass was most delightful, with intriguing backward glances through breaks in the clouds.

Signs of the Mussolini regime were evident in a ruined barracks low in the valley and the mule track climbing steeply over the pass at its head. The track, both on this side and on the Val Sesia side had obviously been repaired and modified for military use. An inscription on a stone at the summit confirmed its recent military history.

We had difficulty finding our way over the pass due to deep snow and mist near the summit; rain also began to fall and followed us down the other side. The track deteriorated lower down and traversed a long way north to avoid crags and deep gullies. We eventually reached the main valley near its head in a wild and narrow gorge through which the waters of the Sesia rushes in a foaming torrent. We leisurely followed the right bank past clusters of chalets and a small church with an elaborate mural decoration on its outside wall. We also passed extensive workings associated with a goldmine as a note on the principal building told us.

We were welcomed in the village of Alagna by a very helpful Swiss lady in the information centre and we were soon installed in the Albergo Bioni and luxuriating in a hot bath.

We found the Italian attitude to us rather different to that of the Swiss in that we were welcomed as visitors rather than customers in the tourist trade! Our stay was extended over the following day due to violent thunderstorms.

I took this opportunity to do some laundry, but the brief spells of sunshine were not sufficient to dry the clothes and the following day I resembled a travelling clothes horse as we toiled up the steep track to the Col D'Olen.

A detachment of Alpini troops were also making for the pass and, during the previous evening, had suggested that we travelled with them. This was an opportunity I was sorry to miss but we had far to go and found the Alpini pace somewhat slow it being restricted to that of the mules which were heavily loaded with artillery. The officers were handsome

fellows, proud of their appearance and their rather theatrical uniforms. The Col D'Olen proved a steep climb and we enjoyed our tea at the summit restaurant before dropping down into the valley.

Since it was only shortly after mid-day we decided to continue our circuit by crossing the Bettaforca pass. This we did in a rain storm which fortunately was as short as it was violent. In minutes the clouds rolled back to reveal our pass of the morning and the new snow on the Monte Rosa peaks. The sun again shone out of a blue sky.

We stayed that night in the Refugio Ferrare above Fiery in the Val D'Ayers. A group of children were spending a holiday there and we had an enjoyable evening in which conversation was assisted by the presence of a Swiss lady who spoke French as did also the youthful cook. Our French became almost fluent as a large bottle of Chianti was passed round and we retired feeling well content with events so far and with high expectations of an ascent of the Theodul pass the next day.

The weather again favoured us and we set off through pine woods to cross a subsidiary valley high above the river towards the Upper Col Cime Bianche. The morning was fresh from early rain, the air limpid in the soft sunlight, the valley blue and mysterious. Early morning is the best time for mountain travel and I refreshed myself in tune with the day by immersing my head under a convenient jet of sparkling water near some chalets.

On such a lovely morning the climb passed almost unnoticed. Higher, the path levelled out and wandered for some distance along a delightful flat bottomed trough carrying a meandering stream very reminiscent of the Craven Dales. We paused for refreshment by the stream. Shortly after this the track began to climb more seriously into the barren upper lands above the snow line. Clouds were low again as we climbed towards the col.
We were cut off in a world of whiteness.

Relying on the compass we fortunately crossed the col in the right place and proceeded across the upper snows towards the Theodul Pass. In a brief clearing we saw the hideous buildings of the Testa Griga above us. They seemed close but it was a weary time before we reached them and I was reduced to my old habit of counting steps to convince myself of progress. However, all things pass and we arrived.

We established ourselves in the Italian hut on the pass with the intention of climbing the Breithorn the following day. It was bitterly cold on the pass and clouds were blowing up from the Zermatt valley.

It was cold in the hut too but we were invited into the kitchen with the family and we retired to bed between meals.

The following day the weather was perfect, low clouds hid the Visptal and the Mischabel peaks soared above them. We left for the Breithorn at 6 a.m. without rucksacks. The snow was good but would obviously not withstand the sun for long. We climbed steadily and were by now feeling very fit. Other parties, one of which was two hours ahead of us, had made a track. Granted it was a snow slog, but on such a morning who could help but rejoice in the perfect combination of mountain snow and sun with untold numbers of peaks on all sides.

Our range of vision increased as we climbed. Mont Blanc forty miles away was clearly seen and the Matterhorn nearer at hand presented its less familiar outline with the Furggen ridge towards us.

We were on the summit at 8.30 a.m. having overtaken the first party on the final steep slope leading to a short ridge. We felt rather ashamed of profiting from their labour of route making, although this was not great in view of the easy angle and despite the new and unconsolidated snow. At a steeper angle matters would have been much different.

Descriptions of a summit view can be tedious to one who was not present but this view of a snowy world from which the Monte Rosa summits rose connected by narrow ridges bulging with cornices is one I shall not quickly forget.

On the way down we passed ascending parties near the summit ridge. The steps made on the way up became a trough as we broke through them on the way down but we reached the hut by 10 a.m. just before the night's snow crust began to melt. Our host expressed regret at our lack of success on the peak and was with difficulty convinced that we had indeed reached the summit.

After a quick meal we packed our rucksacks and descended to Zermatt. How different in character from the Italian side and how delightful to come

down amongst the meadows and flowers and through the cool shade of pine woods. How pleasant too was contact with the town after several 'hut' nights - hot baths, clean sheets, food served to perfection and not forgetting the release from the early start, for one morning at least!

We had one stage of our journey yet to complete with the crossing from Zermatt to Saas Fee. We would have liked to have included the ascent of a high peak during the crossing and had hopes for the Rimpfischorn.

From our resting place at the Fluh Alp hotel we viewed the weather at intervals from 2 a.m. onwards and eventually set out for the Adler pass at 7 a.m.

On the glacier conditions were not too bad except for the danger of crevasses hidden by the new snow, but the steep slopes leading to the pass seemed never ending. The snow was steep and soft here and I was constantly breaking through Brian's steps only to wallow thigh deep in an effort to extricate myself before the rope tightened. Of course I didn't always succeed and there were many interruptions. Wally at the rear suffered in silence but he never disappeared completely and his rucksack was always in evidence!

The summit of the pass seemed suddenly near and I estimated its distance -20 steps? no, must be more - distances in this light always deceptive - say 30; I gave up counting somewhere around 300! We reached the col about noon; visibility nil and a cold wind in our faces, snow was falling.

I was now in front. My contact with the ground was felt not seen. Focussing my eyes on my boots the surrounding snow became visible for a few feet - that was all! Wally in the rear gave directions from his compass. I kept on a course for a few paces and then was lost. Lower down we expected crevasses the open ones showed as black lines when we were too close for comfort. Wally still chanting the course tried to steer me through the midst of them.

However we avoided the worst though we probably crossed many bridged with new snow. Eventually we picked up traces of an old track which we followed till my eyes gave out. Brian couldn't see it either so we put Wally in front and he eventually brought us to the Britannia hut as the snow turned to rain.

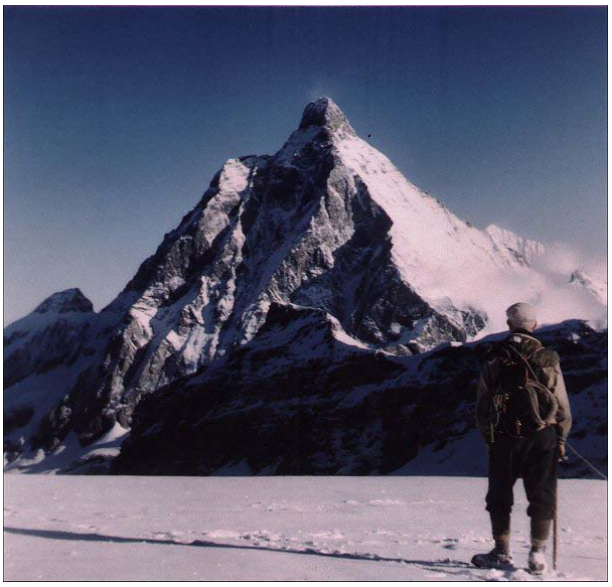
The hut guardian welcomed us warmly but when we had eaten two substantial meals within three hours his natural politeness could not restrain him from commenting to the effect that Englishmen are always eating.

Our circuit was completed by a descent to Saas Fee the following morning. The day passed pleasantly. Dan and Arthur arrived as we sat down to dinner and we felt that they were glad to see us. Apparently their answer to the question "how long does it take three climbers to cross seven passes" had been seven days not eight!

note – the party consisted of Andy, Arthur Tallon and Dan Jones all still members of the club and Brian Hartley and Wally Whardall who have since died.

THE THEODUL HUT

WALLY IN AN ITALIAN VALLEY



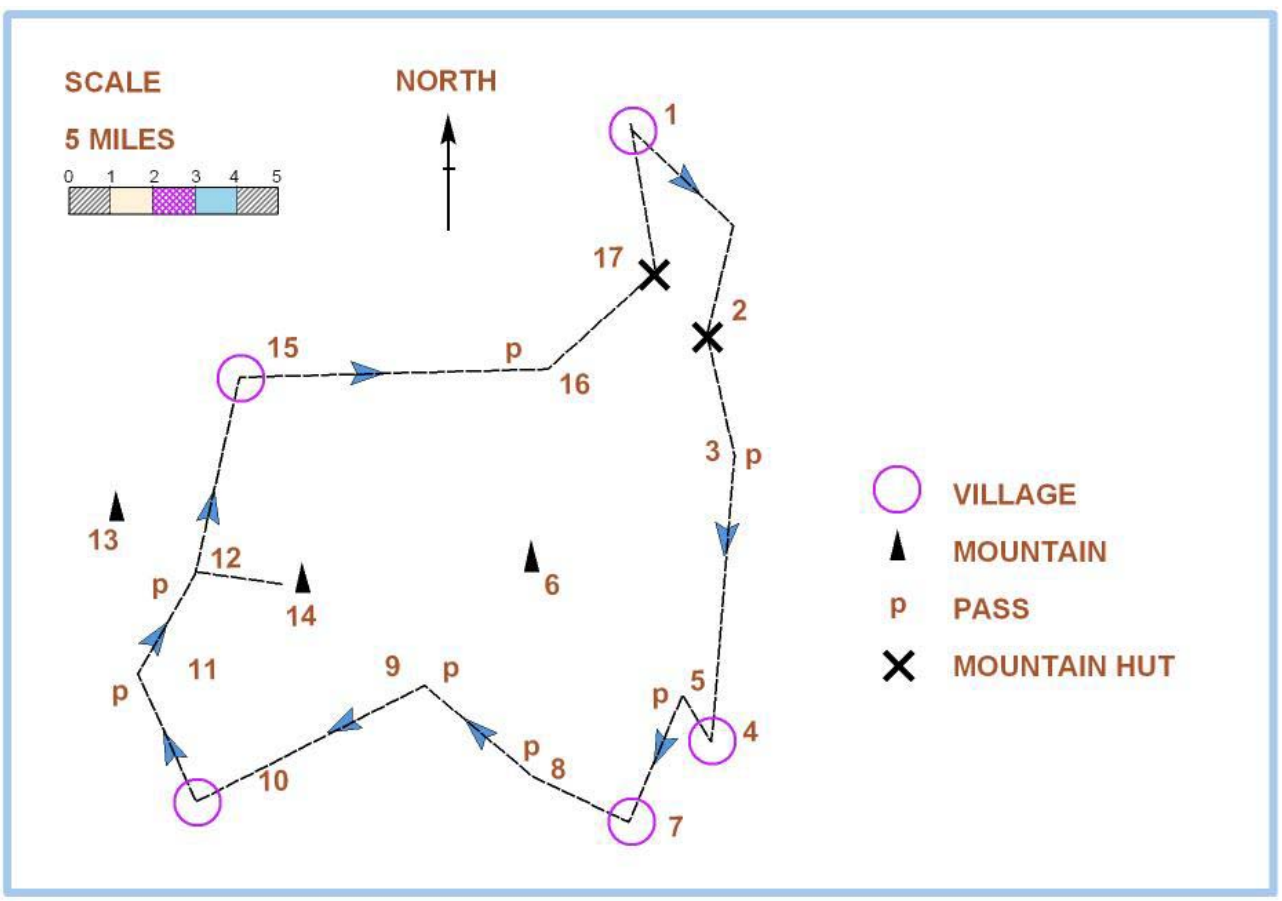
MATTERHORN FROM THEODUL PASS

THE MONTE ROSA GROUP FROM THE BREITHORN

The Dufourspitze is the second peak from the left

MONTE ROSA FROM ZERMATT

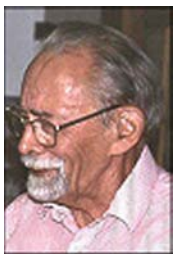
Note Dufourspitze



1	Saas Fee	5872 ft	10	Ficry	
2	Mattmark Inn	7789	11	Upper Col Cima Biance Pass	
3	Monte Moro Pass	9409	12	Theodul Pass	10900
4	Macugnaga		13	Matterhorn	14780
5	Turto Pass	8976	14	Breithorn	13684
6	Monte Rosa	15216	15	Zermatt	5301
7	Allagna		16	Adler Pass	12473
8	Col D'Olen (pass)		17	Brittania Hut	9970
9	Bettaforca Pass				

THE POLLYPS AND EARLIER MEMORIES

By George Spenceley



Following the article in the last edition which gave us an insight into George himself he now recalls the people of his early days both in and before the club.

The Pollyps, that is what we called ourselves and for what reason I never learnt. We were a group of young, enthusiastic climbers, largely from the Leeds, Bradford, Harrogate area, who met together at weekends or summer evenings in the last few years before the outbreak of war. In reality we were not a club at all, for we had no constitution, president, secretary or officer. Indeed at that stage in our youth we were rather disdainful of clubs, at least the so-called senior clubs, scorning their claim to respectability and authority. At least that is what we voiced while in fact feeling some reverence to-wards the occasional presence amongst us of some member of the Fell and Rock or Yorkshire Ramblers. It was at Almscliffe Crag, a brief cycle ride from school and home, that I first met this group and was accepted among them.

In fact, although still a teenager with limited experience and less skill, I was not entirely a novice or ignorant of the great outdoors. I had been blessed with sensible parents, loving but not over protective, encouraging me towards mild adventure. While never a rock climber or mountaineer, my father, a dalesman by background, was a great fell walker with a profound love for and knowledge of the Pennines. At the age of six or seven he took me with him up Ingleborough. Age has obscured much but I remember we looked down upon the tents around Gaping Gill. "That," my father said, "is the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club. When you grow up, you'll become a member." Prophetic words indeed.

Blessed with sensible, country-loving parents, my long summer holidays were not of the bucket-and-spade variety, more often not with my parents at all, perhaps to their relief. Instead I was let loose to board with my father's farming friends or relatives somewhere in the Yorkshire dales. For me it was idyllic. One of the first such was at Otterburn where, every evening, I was allowed to hold the reins of a horse called Ginger and take the milk float to the railway station at Bell Busk. It's so long ago, but I remember the train was pulled by an engine with an unusually large central driving wheel. Train buffs have since told me that these were Johnson's Midland Singles of 1887, and still in service in the late twenties.

Later I was to take up cycling, not as a sport but as means of getting about. All early travels were with my father who I should add never owned a car; he thoroughly hated cars and lacked any desire to own one. I have embarrassing memories of him, up to his ninetieth year, boldly striding across the busy streets of Harrogate, walking stick raised in imperious fashion, demanding that all should give way to a senior citizen of the town. Many times we cycled to Wensleydale to buy cheese direct from the farmer's wife, then a seasonal cottage industry. Other visits were to Swaledale. I remember stopping to talk to a venerable bent, bearded old man somewhere above Keld, who claimed to have been the last coal miner in the dale. Yes, there were coal mines there, thin seams at the base of the millstone grit, one of which was at Tan Hill. That was the day I walked up Nine Standards Rigg, the second of my two-thousand foot tops of England and Wales. Seventy-five years later I was to complete the last of the arguably 407 of these.

Later I was to discover Ramsgill in Nidderdale where, as at Otterburn, Malham and elsewhere, I was dumped for the long summer holiday. It was an ideal spot that I was to visit with great regularity up to the outbreak of war. There were wooded gills to explore and fells to climb. Great Wernside was a regular venue and on a bleak winter weekend I made a solo visit to Meupher in mist and snow. It was an early exercise in the use of map and compass and at the time the height of adventure. More significant was my discovery of caves, the first of which was Eglins Hole near Lofthouse, which I visited many times alone or with some chance companion. Two regular visitors to Ramsgill were Hughey Brown and John Briggs, members of the Bradford Pothole Club. They introduced me to the considerable ramifications of Goyden Pot with which in the following years I was to become very familiar. Later I was to cycle to Sellside as their guest at a B.P.C.

meet to Alum Pot, memorable in my mind for a leaking tent, wet blanket and three days of continuous rain. My parents didn't exactly coddle me.

While my father encouraged my open air activities, he held some reservations about my underground adventures, or at least the solo ones about which I may not have told him the full truth. I needed some guidance, he felt, as a result of which I was introduced to our own Ernest Roberts, then editor of our Journal and a leading light in the Club. I cringe now on reflection at the boldness with which I, a callow sixteen-year-old schoolboy, would uninvited call at 12 Southway, Harrogate, to sit reverently at his feet. No aspiring caver or climber could have a better mentor and our conversation covered a wide range of subjects. I marvelled at his depth of knowledge; a man of great learning, and I still feel privileged to have known him.

But my meetings with Roberts – and as was the custom of the day Roberts was the name I used, just as I was always Spenceley – was not limited to the drawing room. At holiday times he took me with him on minor caving expeditions, driving his splendid Armstrong Siddley open tourer. Bob Chadwick, then a law student and a prospective member of the Club, joined us on one occasion. Another expedition led to my first mention in the Journal, for Roberts never before had caved with one so slim, able to link two-cave systems.

It was a great pleasure and privilege to visit these caves with the master, but my interests were now divided. I had discovered rock climbing with all its thrills and fears. Almscliffe Crag was my nursery where I began tentatively to find my way up some of the easier routes where I soon discovered I was no natural climber. My arms were not very strong, my balance unremarkable, I lacked confidence and was easily frightened. Even so, with all these inadequacies I persevered, repeating with regularity those few routes that I had mastered. I also discovered that the pillars of a local railway viaduct provided a remarkably good climbing wall, except that I feared to get too far from the ground.

Had my father not been much involved in the musical scene in Harrogate, I would not have met Paul Cropper. Paul, later to achieve national distinction as an instrumentalist, was playing for a summer season in 1937 in Harrogate. He was a climber looking for a partner, and furthermore he had a car. At last I had a companion who could teach me more and take me to gritstone outcrops other than Almscliffe. But Paul's greatest gift to me was giving me an introduction the following year to Connie Alexander, then the warden of the Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel. Now in the crucial year of the Lower Sixth, I was to cycle to Idwal where I was to spend all the weeks of the splendid summer of 1938 acting as unofficial, unpaid assistant warden.

Connie did her best to find me climbing companions and even in the evening after supper I would con some fellow hosteller to follow me up Milestone Buttress, not then as polished as it was later to become. At other times I would hang around the foot of some crag, most often Idwal Slabs with my 100' of Jones' Alpine Line hoping to find someone to second me on one of the easier routes. On one occasion when I stood hopefully by the slabs I was approached by three proper, serious climbers who, noting that I was alone, invited me to join them. Climbing on two ropes I was taken up Tennis Shoe, Holly Tree Wall, Devils Kitchen, Devils Staircase. The three climbers were Colin Kirkus, Alf Bridge and A.B. Hargreaves. I was in good company. Kirkus, the most brilliant of them all, did devote much of his time to training young people such as myself. He was to be killed flying in the war, a great loss to British mountaineering. Of the three it was only Hargreaves, or AB as he was generally known, that I was to meet again. After the war he was one of that very active group of Lake District climbers with whom I was to be associated and I was to learn much from him. AB always held a great affection for the Y.R.C., perhaps because he had married a Slingsby and was frequently a guest at our annual dinner.

A further memory of my stay at Idwal is my participation in my first mountain rescue. A call for climbers had been put through to Connie. There had been an accident on the Black Ladders above Bethesda and help was required. Only two of us seemed to qualify, Alan Alsop, my climbing companion for that day – we had just done Hawks Nest Buttress – and myself. Feeling rather important we waved down the first car and requested to be taken to the nearest point by road. No doubt we made a minor contribution to the carrying of the stretcher at the head of which was Menlove Edwards, a formidable figure of untiring strength refusing all offers of relief. Amongst the group was David Cox, many years later to become a near neighbour of mine.

Back again in Harrogate, Almscliffe Crag was again my regular playground returning to it with

marginally greater skill and confidence, enough to begin to associate with some of the regulars. And so we are now back to where I started these memoirs, the Pollyps. Prominent among them were the three Thompson brothers, also from Harrogate. Sidney, the eldest, then Harry, both students, and Stanley my own age and still at school. The two eldest being brilliant rock climbers sought to lead V.S. routes in nailed boots. Other names that I recall were Bert Little, a gardener, Parkinson from Leeds, the son of a car dealer, the most courted among our group for he alone had the use of a car. There was also Phyllis White, reading geography at Leeds, and our own Arthur Craven. These are a few of the members of the group into which I was soon accepted as a member.

While we enjoyed frequent gatherings at the gritstone outcrops, our activities for longer weekends and holidays extended to the Lake District and, except for the favoured few who could travel in Parkinson's car, hitch hiking was the recognised mode of travel. Although fearful at first lest I be recognised by friends of my parents, in time it became a mode of travel I was to practise for many years and in several countries, developing a successful technique. There should be no casual waving of the arms; personality and purpose must be projected and, of course, respectability. A smiling, slightly pleading expression on the face I found worked wonders.

Whatever technique we did follow, we would all set out individually, more or less at the same time, from our various homes and surprisingly all arrive within an hour or so of each other at our destination - Coniston, the Youth Hostel by the mines, a barn in Langdale or perhaps Seathwaite. I mention Seathwaite because it was at Mrs. Edmonson's cottage that we all gathered in July 1939 to walk over Sty Head to Wasdale to stay for some time in Naylor's barn. We used to chat to their young son, later to win great distinction as a fell runner.

The regular climbing fraternity of those pre-war days was very small compared to the present day and we got to know each other. Our small party of Pollyps was often extended to include climbers from others areas, some to win much distinction. Only recently was I reminded that John Jackson joined us on Gimmer. He was leading Hiatus while I was being dragged up the Crack. Another character was Jim Burket. Jim, a man of superb physique, was a slate quarry worker from Little Langdale. He first took up climbing through illegal poaching of birds' eggs lowering himself down crags on his grandfather's cart rope. No doubt he sold the eggs to wealthy collectors but he soon learnt the error of his ways and he became an ardent conservationist, jealous in the protection of rare nesting birds. He was a fine naturalist but his greatest claim to fame was as an outstanding rock climber, rarely seen on the established routes but prospecting new lines on the major crags or pioneering new crags altogether. I met Jim next in that very hard winter of 1957 when I sought to climb Grey Friar in the course of a full scale blizzard. I was just beginning to wonder the wisdom of my struggle when out of the mist and swirling snow loomed the figure of Jim Burket, also reluctant to struggle further.

It was some day in early September that we were all gathered in some pub in Grasmere. We talked of the war which for most us was to close our mountain activities for a long time, forever in some cases. With us that day was Alf Gregory, an occasional member of our group. Even in youth he had a slightly emaciated, craggy face, baggy eyes, a look almost of dissipation, but dissipated he most certainly was not. No doubt he had had a long day and no day with Greg, as I was later to learn, could be anything but long. When I got to know him better after the war, he still bore the face of a man who exerts himself physically to the utmost. Why I write of this now is because the conversation turned to the Himalayas with which we were all familiar from the pages of Smythe, Shipton and others. Mountains to dream about and for us it could be but a dream for few of us had yet had the experience of an Alpine season, anyway there was a war to win. Someone spoke of Everest. "Everest," Greg said. "Yes, I'll be there some day." And indeed he was, distinguishing himself on the 1953 first ascent.

For most of us gathered in that Grasmere pub in the first weeks of the war, it was to be the last social meeting of fellow climbers for a long time. We were soon to be widely scattered. Sidney Thompson, an outstanding climber who had already been elected to the Y.R.C., was killed flying a Blenheim in the last months of the war; a great loss to our club. Harry Thompson served with special forces in the Middle East. After the war he married a girl from Langdale but while becoming something of a Lakeland entrepreneur, he never climbed again. His younger brother Stanley who became an engineer and spent much of working life overseas, now lives in Keswick. From time to time we meet to discuss the old days.

MADAGASCAR AND ITS KARST

THE GREATER MAHAJUNGA REGION

John and Valerie Middleton

PREFACE. In the late summer of 2005 the authors made a fourth and "final" investigative visit to the fascinatingly diverse karst and caves of Madagascar. Reports of their previous findings can be found in Cave and Karst Science (2002, 2003) and in the Bulletin of the Yorkshire Ramblers Club (2002, 2004). Please refer to these for more detailed regional descriptions. As virtually everything recorded on this trip was new an attempt has been made not to repeat anything previously mentioned. The objectives of this mini-expedition were fourfold - to revisit Namoroka in order to solve some previously unanswered questions; to find a way into Kelifely and bring back an "on the ground" report; to do the same for Ankara and to revisit Narinda Central, an area considered to have potential for new explorations.

PART 1.
NAMOROKA, KELIFELY, ANKARA AND ANDROHIBE

NAMOROKA

The Parc National de Namoroka is classified as a Réserve Naturelle Intégrale of some 21,742 hectares. It's karst and geomorphology has been reasonably well documented by Saint-Ours (1959), Decary and Kiener (1970) and by Laumanns (1992, 2004). French and local speleologists did some exploratory work up until the late 1960's but it is very difficult to obtain any detailed results and since then the reserve has been little visited.

We concentrated our initial efforts at the southern end of the main massif by investigating the edges of the tsingy cliffs. Firstly for 2-3km to the west of Anjohiambovonomby, then across the massif and finally back down the eastern side. The tsingy proved spectacular and was regularly up to 40m high creating a wildly jagged skyline. Large dolines and poljes which were obviously filled with water in winter edged these cliffs whilst dissolution of joints and beds had created many overhangs and short caves to 10m. We found nothing longer than this and doubt if further investigations at the southern end could be worthwhile. The route across the centre was arduous, surprisingly unrewarding and a constant battle against vegetation and getting lost! Our only "find" was a small cave housing wild boar.

We also covered the area to the west and south of our campsite for 2-3km and found many fine examples of tsingy, seasonal and perennial karst lakes (some of which reputedly contained crocodiles), superb kamenitzas and shelters or caves of up to 10m in length but nothing more promising. The flora and fauna in this section was superb with much of it being endemic. When we left Vilanandro for Andranomavo and the Kelifely the first 15km again passed through some excellent areas of tsingy including cliffs reaching 20m (?) in height to the north of the road. Unfortunately we did not have time to explore the area but further investigation could obviously be worthwhile.

ANJOHIAMBOVONOMBY (1.)
"The place of the cave with water for the zebu". Alternate name – AMBOVONAOMBY. S16° 28'07.4" E45° 20'53.9" alt. 126m. Length 4,630m.
This cave has been known for many years (Saint-Ours, 1959, Decary & Kiener, 1971) but it was left for a German team in 1992 (Laumanns et al., 1992 and 2004) to complete explorations and produce a detailed survey. It is a complex maze cave 4,630m in extent encompassing, at least, some 30 entrances many of which are preceded by impressive canyons. These extend for 500m along the base of the massif's southern tsingy cliff. Passageways are generally large and frequently well decorated with formations. In places up to five calcite floors can be noted above each other indicating periodic development of the system (Rossi, 1981).The furthest point reached into the limestone is around 250m at Lac Louise. During the wet season and well into the summer much of the cave is flooded with standing water and even after the driest of years water is always available at various points. Namoroka is an old Sakalava word which simply means "place of water". This seasonal flooding is important in explaining the caves maze-like development. The GPS reading is taken from roughly the central entrance where there is a large permanent pool.

AMBOANARABE (2.)
"The place where there are many acacia trees". Alternate name – AMBONORANABE. S16° 27'49.4" E45° 21'14.2" alt. 119m. Combined length (3 caves) around 800m.
Amboanarabe is a cave that currently remains unsurveyed and may not yet be fully explored. The cave's whereabouts seems to have caused some confusion with explorers for a number of years

(Middleton, G, 1998 and Laumanns 1992, 2004). After discussion with the ANGAP representatives in Vilanandro, village elders and zebu herders we believe that the cave is actually three caves in an area known as "Amboanarabe". This is rather like a large bay to be found about 1km north east of Anjohiambovonomby bounded to the west and north by the tsingy cliffs and to the east by many large acacia trees. Much of the bay probably floods in winter. Within this area we found three caves (see also Saint-Ours, 1959, pg. 287). The northernmost one is that referenced above; it has 4 entrances and a complex maze system of both large and small passageways totalling around 300m in length as well as some reasonable formations. The second cave is at S16°27'15.8" E42°21'03.0" alt.124m. This has two entrances and a length of almost 40m. The final cave and nearest to Anjohiambovonomby is at S16°28'00.1" E45°21'01.4" alt. 134m. This again has several entrances, is a maze and is estimated to extend for 300m. Amboanarabe may possibly connect to Anjohiambovonomby as the latter is situated within a short distance and there were several small passageways that we did not "push". Should any expedition survey these caves then it is suggested that they be known as Amboanarabe 1, 2 and 3 in order to avoid further confusion.

ANJANABORONA ZOHY (3.)
"The cave at the place of the hill of the little bird". S16°29'43.8" E45°24'43.1" alt. 177m. Length 102m, depth -10m.
Whilst out hunting this cave had been noted by Maurille, our local guide, and the entrance chamber briefly entered. It is situated about 3km due west of Vilanandro in the dry forest just below the summit of a hill bearing this name. The entrance is at a collapse amongst some ground level tsingy where a medium sized Banyon tree grows in one corner. A scramble through roots leads into a descending, flowstone walled chamber terminating at around -7m. Before the end, on the left, a narrow slot drops quickly into a high joint controlled passage. To the right the fissure becomes too tight after 30m whilst a similar distance to the left terminates in a well decorated chamber with a scree slope at the opposite side. At the top of the chamber is a further small daylight entry. This latter point can be easily found on the surface. Cross joints are very obvious in this bottom passageway. This area is one that may repay further attention.

KELIFELY.
With few visitors due to inaccessibility Kelifely has very little factually written about it. The most authoritive geomorphologic account is probably the one by Rossi (1983b) whilst the most interesting report is that by Checkley (1987). The Axbridge Cave Group attempted but failed to gain access from the south in 1998 (Price 2000).

It is only 60km in a straight line from Andranomavo to Tondraka but it took us an amazing two and a half days to actually traverse this distance. Our route passed through Tsaboahitsy, around the north of Antsosa hill (where our guide stated that there was good tsingy to be found on the western side) and finally around a series of ornithologically interesting karst lakes to Tondraka. There were no roads and for most of the way we had to follow criss-crossing cart tracks and footpaths. We chopped down trees and lopped off branches, we graded the sides of endless ditches, we built bridges and we removed numerous boulders. We continuously passed depressions and minor exposures of limestone but noted nothing of promise in the generally level or gently rolling countryside. Tondraka proved to be a small spread out village some of whose friendly inhabitants had never seen a motorised vehicle and most had certainly never ridden in one.

From Tondraka our local guides, one a herdsman and one a hunter took us to the western end of the little known 24,011 hectare Réserve Spécial de Kasiji. This increasingly interesting route passed various depressions, dry valleys and rocky limestone hillsides. The trip into the forest at S17°01'04,5" E45°53'23.7" alt. 281m (see Location) proved fascinating but extremely difficult due to the dense xerophytic vegetation, much of it made up of spiny plants and vines. Good but low tsingy proved fairly extensive as did more depressions but the only minor finds we had were two holes, each about 3m across and the same in depth. Decary and Kiener (1971) mentions three caves within the Forest of Kasiji which have never been refound. After emerging from the forest we headed even further west to a region known as Ambohijeky. This really is a magnificently wild area of barren, gently rolling and slowly ascending hills. Dolines of all sizes and shapes covered virtually every centimetre of ground and we even managed to descend a few metres in the boulder strewn bottoms of some although we never found any actual cave entrances. Tombo, our herdsman guide did say that he had actually seen open holes in some dolines a days walk further to the west. Much of the surface is covered in limestone rocks which in some places were still in the form of a fractured pavement. Periodically we would find

strange cairns that were apparently ancient tribal boundaries. The furthest point west that we reached was at S17°03'16.5" E45°49'22.0" alt 367m. A tiring but exciting day of some 25km!

In our opinion it is still an area of unknown potential but definitely worthy of further investigation and can justify a visit for the karst scenery alone. It is certainly hostile with temperatures for most of the year in the low 40°s, no water and the impossibility of getting a vehicle anywhere nearer than we did. We saw no other person all day long. But with the assistance of the villagers, a zebu and cart, exploration could be possible…

MAJERAVELO ZOHY (7.)
"Beautiful cave". S16°51'03.8" E45°52'12.8" alt. 258m. Length 70m, depth -15m.
"Beautiful cave" is indeed extremely attractive and is situated about 2km north-east of the karst lake complex of Andronovory-Majeravelo (J42 map – see "Location"). The two entrances lie in a small doline covered in deciduous scrub in an area rich in depressions and small areas of tsingy. The easier (northern) entry descends into a 2m high chamber some 12m across abounding in a variety of formations. At the start of this chamber an obvious passageway leads to the right and into a further large chamber with the other entrance a 6m climb above. An 8m drop requiring a rope then terminates in an even larger chamber with no exit. The floor is of dried mud and formations are frequent as are the bats, smell and associated fauna. This cave was shown to us by our hunter guide from the village of Tondraka.

THE TONDRAKA SOURCE (6.)
S16°55'46.6" E45°53'41.0" alt. 252m
(see Location).
The perennial source of the river Tondraka is to be found at a small area of trees and shrubs known as "Taboaka" 4.4km west of Tondraka village along the main zebu cart track. The red sediment laden river emerges at the head of its own valley amongst quite dense vegetation. We wanted to enter the obviously deep pool but were warned not to by our guides as crocodiles had been seen previously. The river flows vigorously for around 500m at which point it is joined by the dry Tondraka River or Tondraka maty *("dead Tondraka")* as it is known to the local people, from the left. We crossed from the "Source" to this dry river and followed it on foot for some way upstream. It was most certainly dry apart from a few crystal clear pools in shaded areas. We spoke with our two guides and both said that they new every "blade of grass" for a 2 days walk to the west and south and the river did not reappear again nor did the Tondraka maty flow in summer. This is not what is intimated by the 1.100,00 map (J42 Kelifely) or by Decary & Kiener (1970).

TONDRAKA SINK (4.)
S16°54'58.3" E46°00'36.1" alt. 172m
(see Location).
As the active Tondraka river moves eastwards the waters are used by the various small villages for vegetable and rice field irrigation until, just by the hamlet of Ambalakida *(place of the banana plants),* it no longer flows in its bed except in winter. The dry course can be followed until it terminates, apart from an overflow channel, at a 15m hole. The initial hole is about 5m long by 3m wide. Two metres down an attractive grey, crystalline calcite covers boulders which leave a small entrance at one end about 60cm in diameter and another at the other of about two metres diameter. A few metres down the shaft it bells out into a chamber giving a possible 15m drop from a streambed jammed tree, or 30m from the trees on the edge of the valley. This cave has been descended once by a French team but exact details are difficult to confirm. The villagers said that the visit was made about 15 years ago and that the cavers were below ground approximately two hours.

TONDRAKA RESURGENCE (5.)
The local people stated that the river resurged again after a difficult 2 hour walk eastwards towards the Mahavahy river. This resurgence is impenetrable and is normally dry towards the end of summer leaving only occasional pools in the stream bed leading into the Mahavahy. This does coincide with the 1:100,000 map. Greg Middleton, from Australia, recently sailed down the Mahavavy river visiting various potentially interesting sites and states in some personal correspondence the following: "We found what we believe was the (mainly dry) bed of the Tondraka river – and followed it for quite a way. We saw a few pools and some flow higher up. We did see what we believed was the resurgence of the Tondraka but it rises in the Mahavavy and all you could see was a clear patch in the otherwise red-orange water".

ANKARA.
Ankara is a similar block of limestone to Kelifely situated to the east of the Mahavavy river. It has been even less investigated than the former although the maps K42 Bemoto and L43 Maria combined with figure 20.2 of Rossi (1983b) suggest that the terrain is similar. We decided to make a

preliminary investigation by reaching the plateau from Maria in the south. We did this with a walk that ascended about 300m and precipitated us on the escarpment edge at S17°14'12.5" E46°25'15.6" alt. 375m. The views were stunning; a vast panorama over the fertile Maria valley to the south whilst to the north an equally vast sun burnt gently rolling savannah vanished into the distance. We headed westwards towards the hill known as Tsikara, then directly back to the plateau edge and eastwards to our starting point – an excursion of about 15km. We passed many shallow dry riverbeds often containing a few trees, some of which had the occasional pool and we were again warned about crocodiles; past a number of very, very shallow depressions; a few areas of weathered and not large limestone rocks; some broken pieces of tsingy and some minor areas of poor pavement. Our three zebu herdsmen guides told us that the plateau continues in a similar manner for a good days walk northwards but then, towards the western side, they had seen large depressions and a much rockier limestone surface. They did also state that they had never seen any caves. From our brief visit Ankara would seem not to hold our much promise of anything significant speleologically but, as a consolation, it does make excellent walking country.

ANDROHIBE.

One of our lesser objectives was to investigate the "13 petite cavities situées dans butte calcaire, belles concrétions blanches" (Decary & Kiener 1971). Unfortunately our longer than expected journey time to Kelifely meant that this was not possible but we did stop in the village of Androhibe, some 26km south-west of Katsepy, and ascertain the whereabouts and existence of the caves. These can be found about 3km from Androhibe to the east of the road to Katsepy on a low hill with obvious exposed limestone. At this point on the west (left) of the road is a small palm leaf covered hut in which an old man lives who knows these caves all of which occur within 3-400m of his house. We did confirm the house and the hill.

PART 2.
NARINDA CENTRAL. MITSINJO AND MARIARANO

MITSINJO

From the campsite at Antanamarino to Mitsinjo village is 20 minutes of rough motoring. The very pleasant scenery gradually changes from rolling savannah to one with small karst cones and eventually a mixture of cones and mogotes in the vicinity of the village. Closed depressions can be seen and occasional poljes occur up to the edges of the mogotes which themselves may reach 50m in height and 300m across. Many of the poljes are seasonally flooded. The cones are generally of larger dimensions than the mogotes. Caves, with impressive passageways and well decorated chambers frequently occur at or around base level. Unfortunately access and discovery is often hampered by dense xerophytic vegetation. The furthest point that we investigated was by the village of Amboaboaka another 20 minute drive to the north-east. We noted that a similar unvisited landscape extended westwards whilst to the east a gentle slope descended to mangroves and the Bay of Mahajamba. The German team found 4 caves here (1992, 2004) to which we added a further 4 in our two day visit.

BEKAPIKA ZOHY (8.)
"Cave of the Turtle". S15°24'19.5" E46°57'49.9" alt. 54m. Length 135m, depth -8m.
This is by no means the largest cave that we explored but it is undoubtedly the most magnificent. It is situated well to the north-east and not far from the village of Amboaboaka. The hill is an obvious forest covered mogote which at one end is split in two by a great cleft. By entering the latter a large portal on the west side entices entry down a slope into a spectacular cathedral like chamber. This is some 25m across and 12m wide with a domed ceiling 15m above. The tsingy on the surface is so eroded that a multitude of small skylights allow shafts of silver light to penetrate onto the floor and walls. A large stalagmite boss stands opposite the entrance and glistening formations abound everywhere. Three obvious passageways lead from this great hall, one to a rather gloomy chamber which has obviously been used as a tomb, one directly forward to an interesting series of chambers and the final very well decorated route exits the system on the north side.

BEKOLOSY ZOHY (9.)
"Bell shaped cave". Alternate name – MAMONO MOTRO. "Cave of no light". S15°25'11.7" E46°56'08.1" alt. 84m. Length 240m, depth -8m.
It was not until we had entered this cave and started making a survey that we realised this was one that the Germans had explored although our guide insisted that Bekolosy was in the next hill several hundred metres away. His name of "Cave of no light" is perhaps more appropriate as, apart from the cave temperature being in excess of 28°C and

humid the local palm torches soon go out. The air is obviously poor and we came back to the surface with mild headaches. In spite of this it contains some impressive passageways and is generally an interesting place to visit.

ANKAZOLEMBATO (10.)
"The cave of the tree and rock". S15˚25'11.9" E46˚56'10.3" alt. 35m. Length 35m, depth -10m
Slightly up a hillside and amongst dry forest this attractive cave is well known to the local people as a source of good water as is proven by the burnt palm leaves and fire remains that litter the floor.

ANKODROHABE ZOHY (11.)
"The cave at the place of the Kodroha tree".S15° 25'48.6" E46°25'48.6" alt. 61m. Length 25m, depth -7m.
Ankodrohabe is found in a small doline close to a col north west of Mitsinjo. Whilst the passage is not long it is quite large and is well decorated with some cave pearls.

MANARY MARO (12.)
"Place of the Palisander trees. S15˚26'04.3" E46˚54'54.8" alt. 51m. Length 8m.
At the end of quite a large polje to the west of Mitsinjo is a cliff face at the base of which much water obviously soaks away in winter. On our visit the floor was of hard cracked mud and a low passage to the left of centre could only be followed for a few metres until it became too tight.

ANJOHIBE (13.) "Place of the big cave". Alternate names – ANDRANOBOKA and ANJOHIAN-DRANOBOKA. Length 5,330m.
This extensive system has been known since 1934 and, for a brief period, actually became a "show cave" with electric lighting in the 1940's. It was accurately surveyed by A.Ramahalimby in 1952 and this plan is reproduced by Saint-Ours (1959). The cave consists of 13 entrances leading to many large passageways and chambers with very fine formations. The cave can be found to the east of the Mitsinjo track about 4km from Antanamarina village where it is best to first contact "Chez Marcel" regarding access.

ANJOHIKELY (14.)
"Place of the little cave". Length 2,104m, depth 39m (+3m, -36m).
The German Reconnaissance trip of 1991 (Laumanns 1992) explored and surveyed this worthwhile cave adding a further small section in 1992. Anjohikely is situated shortly before Anjohibe and just to the west of the road. As with Anjohibe the passageways are large and well decorated and it is again advisable to contact "Chez Marcel" first.

Three other caves were reported in this area by Laumanns (1992 and 2004). These were "Angorogabe" a maze 747m long with a vertical range of +14m; "Behenta", 127m long, -8m deep; and "Anjohihitsabady", 183m long, 24m deep. These caves were not visited by us on this trip.

MARIARANO

The Mariarano region differs considerably from that found around Mitsinjo. It is one of large open savannahs dotted with occasional Mademia palms and from which many well proportioned cones arise. Small outcrops of tsingy are also visible on the tops of some. Many very large passageways much infilled with sediment can be found at half height or even higher on these hills, rarely at base level. The entrances and exits are smaller due to collapse and dense stands of shrubbery often grow in these settings. The passageways are probably the remnants of a much greater cave system that was once associated with the Mariarano river (see also Laumanns 1992, 2004). The vicinity of this perennial stream is an excellent place to camp as the crystal clear waters frequently flow over bare limestone whilst the river banks are edged with dazzling silver sand. The area we investigated extended for about 5km to the north, east and west of Posima which is a very friendly small village and an excellent source of guides. The busy town of Mariarano is further to the north, off the limestone and consequently not visited by us. Our two days of exploration produced 7 new caves. Two others had been previously recorded by the German team in 1992. The cones continue in most directions with the further potential being obvious.

ANDROHIBE ZOHY (15.)
"Cave of Androhibe (village)". S15˚34'51.4" E46˚46'46.7" alt. 62m. Length 38m, depth -10m.
Amongst a stand of dense dry forest this cave is situated about 400m west of the small village of Androhibe. It consists of a 4m diameter entrance shaft 8m deep for which a rope makes the ascent easier. At the base of the drop and to the right there is a low, flat bat filled chamber whilst to the left a nicely eroded passage continues a few metres and a second doubles back in a fissure until there are too many bats. On the soft mud floor human bones and a skull are visible. The main passage continues as a high rift passage which we did not explore to its termination due to a very large and active Madagascan Ground Boa taking up much of the floor! Cockroaches and other cave fauna were much in evidence and rapidly crept up our bare legs. It is a cave likely to stimulate nightmares!

AMPANDRIAMPANIHY (16.)
"The place of the Fruit Bats cave". S15˚34'50.3" E46˚45'08.6" alt. 60m. Length 118m, depth -10m.
Situated about 30m above the track to Mariarano in the side of a large cone Ampandriampanihy proved an interesting find. The roof of the large entrance chamber is sharply eroded in the form of "upside down" tsingy whilst much of the floor is of a very fine dust. The rounded passageway continuing has a hard sediment floor with many formations on the walls and roof. This passage turns left, enlarges and descends into a large black undecorated chamber some 10m across, almost 30m wide and 15m high. The floor is of firm but tacky mud. The bats are everywhere! Round the hillside to the north and slightly lower down is a further cave entrance which we were unable to enter due to a very large bee colony.

AMBALIA ZOHY (17.)
"The place where there is bamboo cave". S15˚34'01.8" E46˚44'44.1" alt. 44m. Length 30m, depth -8m.
This was the northernmost cave that we visited in the Mariarano region and was known to our guide because of its bees and therefore honey. Unusually the entrance is only slightly above the valley floor and has the usual shrubs surrounding it. Also unusually, the north-west wall of the passageway is formed down the steeply sloping dip of the limestone (in most places the limestone is roughly horizontal). Whilst the 30m long passage is quite large there are no formations and it floods in winter. On the top of the hill were several impenetratable holes which dropped into chambers whilst at the base of the north-west side of the hill a considerable amount of water obviously sinks at the base of a cliff.

BESIFAKA ZOHY (18.)
"The place of many Sifakas' cave". S15˚35'25.4" E46˚44'09.2" alt. 62m. Length 110m, depth -16m.
Situated close to the summit of a cone to the north west of Posima is a circular cavern collapse approximately 25m across and 10m deep. Three sides descend through small trees to the old chamber wall which is entirely covered with flowstone and formations. To the left is a further chamber extending inwards for 6m whilst just to the right a short scramble leads into a superbly shaped and decorated passageway. This continues through the hillside for 80m to emerge amongst scrub on the hillside.

AMBIJARA COMPLEX (19.)
"The place of goodness". S15˚35'36.4" E46˚44'14.2" alt. 49m. Combined length 55m, depth -8m.
So named as cave A. has a large bees nest and therefore honey in the entrance. Just below the brow of a hill and amongst small trees there are three obviously associated caves. Cave A. simply descends a slope into a chamber some 18m across and 6m high. B. is situated barely 40m away and is again a steep scree and boulder slope into a large chamber with skylights and a low "soak-away" to one side. C. is a 6m long and up to 30cm wide slot which obviously drops around 10m into a large inaccessible chamber.

AMBATOMANANELETRA (20.)
"The place of the rock with wings". Alternate name – RAJESY ZOHY "The cave of Rajecy". S15˚35'54.0" E46˚44'11.5" alt. 66m. Length 185m.
It was not until we had drawn the survey of "Rajesy" at home that we realised this cave was the same as that previously explored by the German team and named "Ambatomananeletra". Rajesy was the name of the local village headman who had stated that he wished to be buried in the cave. In the event he was buried elsewhere but according to our two guides Rajesy was the name still in use. The survey shown is our own and is virtually identical to the German one but neither really show what a magnificent cave this is. The impressive entrance is a riot of flowstone shapes and colours leading to a large decorated chamber into which there are two skylights. Through one of these the great roots of a species of Ficus tree grow. A second large chamber follows with a small passage leading off in one corner. Thirty five metres of an 8m diameter passage then leads to a third and even greater chamber with three more skylights and a second Ficus growing from the floor. At the furthest point there is a very fine stalagmite boss and close to this the ceiling is peppered by a multitude of cone shaped holes known as "rohre karren" each around 25cm in diameter. The passage progressively becomes narrower, descends a small drop and terminates in a chamber inhabited by many bats. Our survey shows a further small cave, (B), which is also attractive and obviously included within the Rajesy system. The cave is situated barely 500m west of Posima village and about 20m up the north side of a dome shaped hill.

MAROVALA ZOHY (21.)
"Fenced cave". S15˚35'39.9" E46˚42'18.0" alt 50m. Length 70m.
The entrance to Marovala lies in a small doline in ground that is only slightly raised above

the surrounding countryside. The cave is very impressive and frequently exceeds 12 metres in width although the compact mud floor obviously fills much of the passage height. This does not prevent walking for the majority of its length. Interestingly the roof of the cave is rarely more than a metre below the surface. Termination was a very low crawl without any draught. Formations are prolific on both the roof and across the floor.

ANTSEROROKA ZOHY (22.)
"The cave at the place of the Seroka tree". S15˚34'38.1" E46˚41'57.2" alt. 46m. Length 18m.
A small but interesting find running through the end of a low ridge and never more than two metres below the surface. It has again been much infilled with sediment and contains fine white formations and a good stalagmite boss. This was the westernmost cave that we found but similar terrain continues to the west and north.

One further cave is reported in the Mariarano area by Laumanns (1992 and 2004). This is "Amboaboaka" which has 333m of very large passageways and 5 entrances. It was not visited by us on this trip.

LOCATION, LOCATION…!!
The French 1:100,00 IGN maps were used exclusively and whilst many date back to the 1960's they still tended to have greater accuracy than the more recently produced FTM 1:500,00 series. The sheets referred to were LM38 Mariarano, N38 Ambenja, I39.40 Soalala, I41 Andranomava, H41 Bevary, J41 Andrafiamajera, J42 Kelifely Centre, K42 Bemonto , L43 Maria and K43 Kandreho. Positioning was done with a "Garmin Etrex Legend" GPS personal navigator. For open sky sites 9-11 satellites were usually accessible which produced an accuracy of 4-6 metres. The data inputted was – Latitude/Longitude, WGS84, metric, and True North.

Problems were experienced with sheets J42 and K42 whereby readings proved inexplicably out by 1-3 km

As readings with all the other maps proved accurate and no amendment was made to the GPS our readings have been maintained but more detailed site descriptions have been added to the accounts in order to cover any possible fault.

The local population have few uses for caves and rarely enter them. In the past they were occasionally valued as places of burial but today their only value is as a site to find the nests of bees and their prized honey (beware!). The caves are very rarely named but at our insistence they, the local herdsmen, would often quote a descriptive name such as "Antseroroka zohy" meaning "the cave at the place of the Seroka tree". These are the names that we used but it cannot be relied upon that every local person or guide will give it the same name. We were inadvertently taken to three of the German caves due to our guide knowing them under a different name.

HAZARDS AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS.
There are three major health risks in the Mahajunga karst region. 1. *Malaria, including the deadly "falciparum" strain*. This is endemic and maximum protective measures need to be undertaken. 2. *Schistosomiasis*, again extremely prevalent and difficult to avoid as the only available water in most places is from lakes and rice field irrigation – both infected places. 3. *Heat*, the most insidious and whose effects can be serious if not fatal. The temperatures are usually in the 40°s and for much of the year there is moderate humidity. There are no poisonous snakes or dangerous animals other than a small scorpion whose incapacitating sting can last for 48 hours or more. Be aware, we occasionally found them under our tents when packing away.

We have always found Madagascar to be one of the safest countries in the world provided that normal sensible precautions are taken. Additionally, in order to avoid any misunderstandings or confrontations when in the "bush", it is always advisable to contact the local village President to inform him why you are there, to ask his permission and, if needed, could he suggest a place to camp. In remote regions knowledge of the Malagasy language is indispensable as few people can also speak French.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

As with the previous visits we could not have hoped to achieve even half our ambitions without the knowledge, persistence and friendship of our guide, Michel Rakotonirini; the exceptional skills of our driver, Lala: the helpfulness of all the ANGAP representatives in Soalala and Vilanandro; Marcel at Mitsinjo and Mariarano; the organisational skills of Madagascar Airtours and last but certainly not least the amazingly friendly Malagasy people. Thank you all.

The authors are prepared to "add to" the above and will attempt to answer any queries – e-mail joval60@hotmail.com listing "Madagascar" in the subject box.

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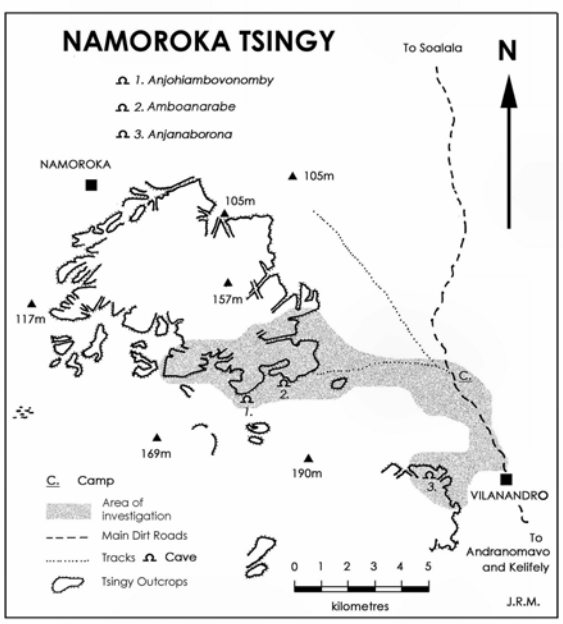
MAPS.

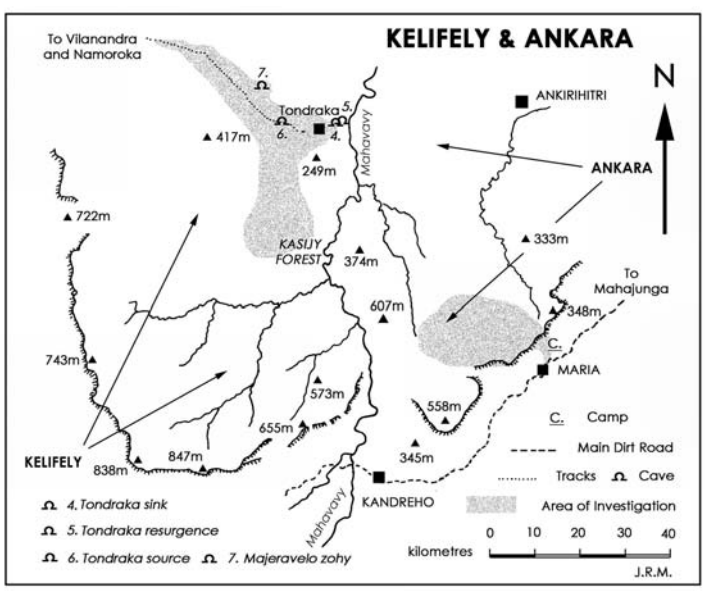
SURVEYS.

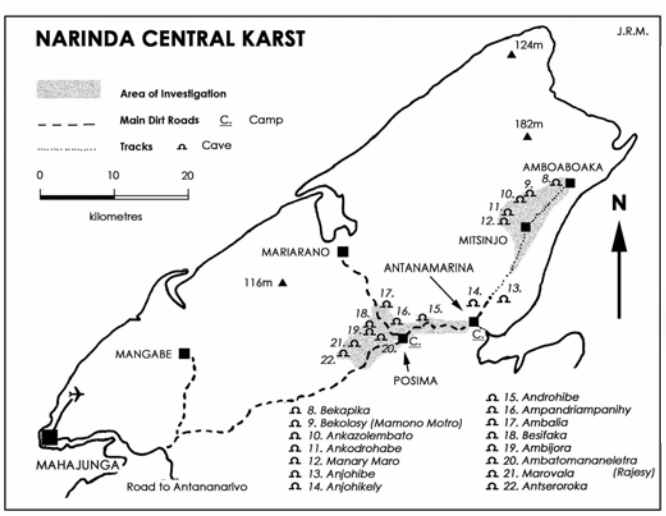
PHOTOGRAPHS.

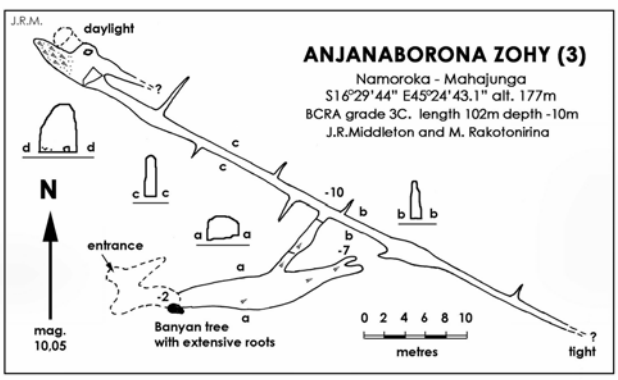

MADAGASCAR
AREAS OF INVESTIGATION
MAHAJUNGA
3.
1.
2.
1. Namoroka
2. Kelifely & Ankara
3. Mariarano
ANTANANARIVO
0 100 200
kilometres
J.R.M.

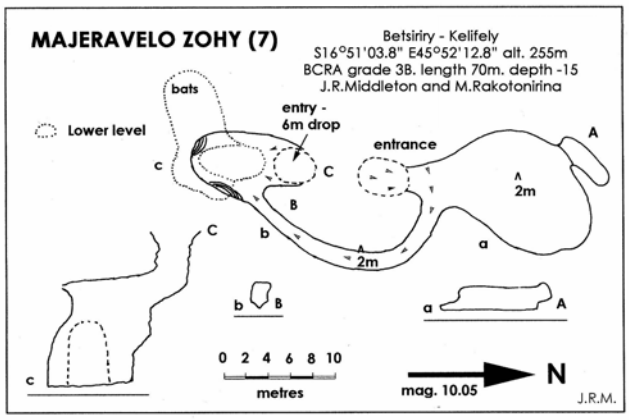

THE MAHAJUNGA KARST REGION
(AREAS OF INTEREST UNDERLINED)
MARIARANO
MAHAJUNGA
NARINDA CENTRAL
SOALALA
MITSINJO
ANDROHIBE
NAMOROKA
VILANANDRO
Mahajavy
TONDRAKA
ANKARA
KELIFELY
720m
847m
MARIA
KANDREHO
N
Dirt roads/tracks
Tarred roads
0 20 40 60 80 100
kilometres
J.R.M.

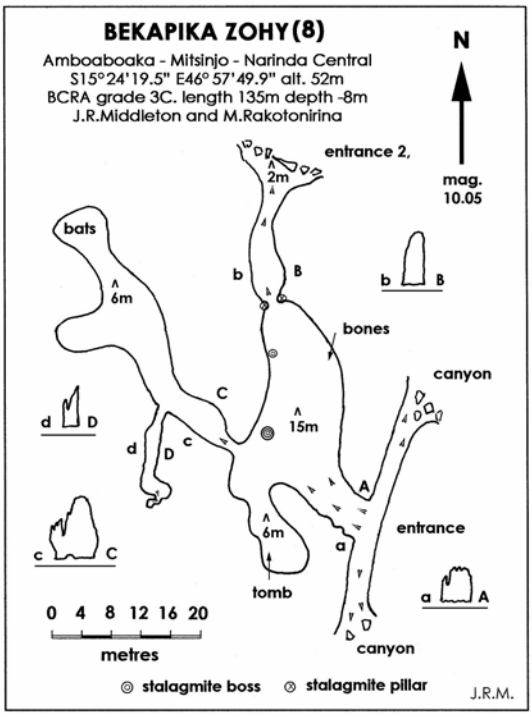

NAMOROKA TSINGY
To Soalala
N
1. Anjohiambovonomby
2. Amboanarabe
3. Anjanaborona
NAMOROKA
105m
157m
117m
169m
190m
VILANANDRO
To Andranomavo and Kelifely
C. Camp
Area of investigation
Main Dirt Roads
Tracks Cave
Tsingy Outcrops
0 1 2 3 4 5
kilometres
J.R.M.

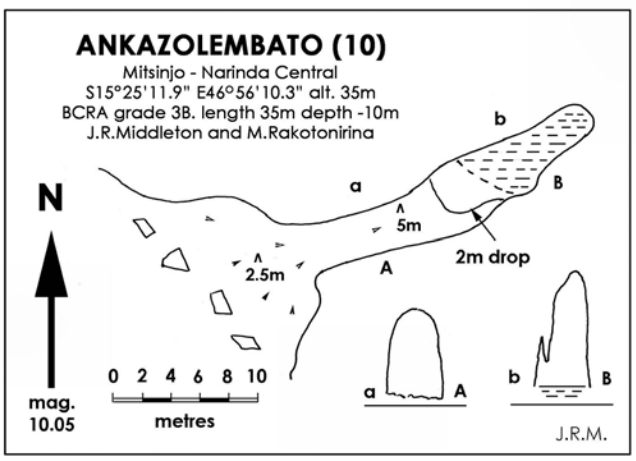

KELIFELY & ANKARA
To Vilanandra and Namoroka
N
Tondraka
ANKIRIHITRI
ANKARA
417m
249m
Mahavavy
722m
KASIJY FOREST
374m
333m
To Mahajunga
607m
348m
743m
573m
558m
MARIA
655m
838m
847m
345m
KELIFELY
KANDREHO
C. Camp
Main Dirt Road
Tracks Cave
Area of Investigation
4. Tondraka sink
5. Tondraka resurgence
6. Tondraka source
7. Majeravelo zohy
0 10 20 30 40
kilometres
J.R.M.

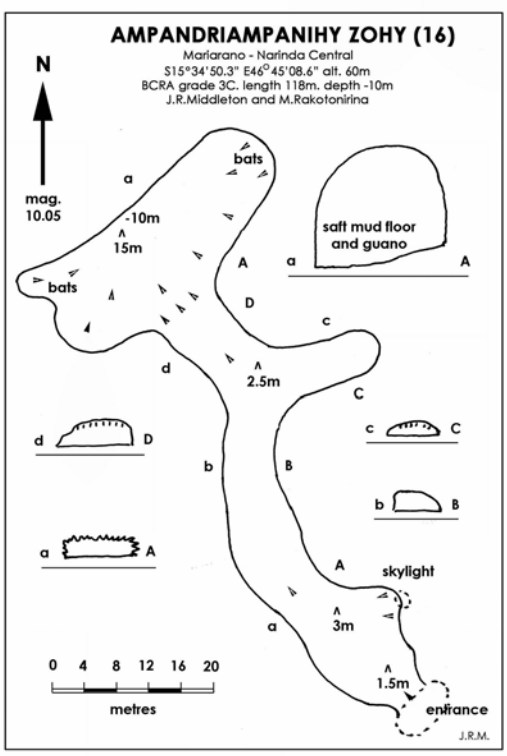

NARINDA CENTRAL KARST
J.R.M.
Area of Investigation
Main Dirt Roads C. Camp
Tracks Cave
0 10 20
kilometres
124m
182m
AMBOABOAKA
MITSINJO
MARIARANO
ANTANAMARINA
116m
MANGABE
POSIMA
MAHAJUNGA
Road to Antananarivo
8. Bekapika
9. Bekolosy (Mamono Motro)
10. Ankazolembato
11. Ankodrohabe
12. Manary Maro
13. Anjohibe
14. Anjohikely
15. Androhibe
16. Ampandriampanihy
17. Amballa
18. Besifaka
19. Ambijora
20. Ambatomananeletra
21. Marovala (Rajesy)
22. Antseroroka

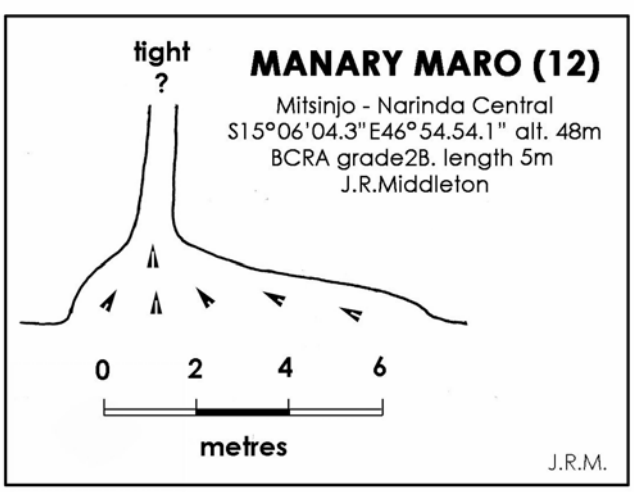

J.R.M.
daylight
ANJANABORONA ZOHY (3)
Namoroka - Mahajunga
S16°29'44" E45°24'43.1" alt. 177m
BCRA grade 3C. length 102m depth -10m
J.R.Middleton and M. Rakotonirina
N
mag. 10,05
entrance
Banyan tree with extensive roots
-10
-7
-2
0 2 4 6 8 10
metres
tight

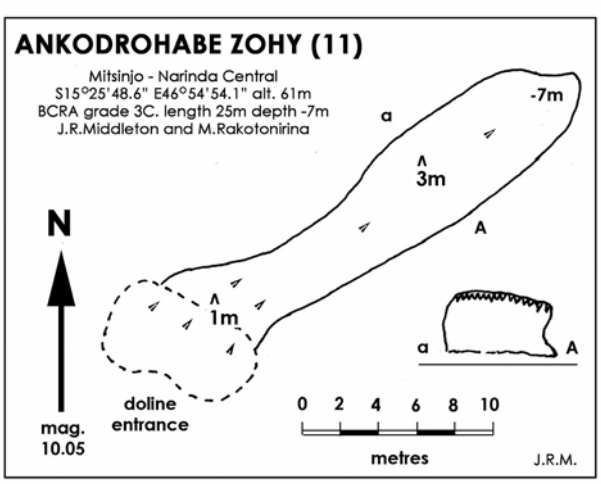

MAJERAVELO ZOHY (7)
Betsiriry - Kelifely
S16°51'03.8" E45°52'12.8" alt. 255m
BCRA grade 3B. length 70m. depth -15
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
bats
Lower level
entry -
6m drop
entrance
2m
metres
mag. 10.05
N
J.R.M.

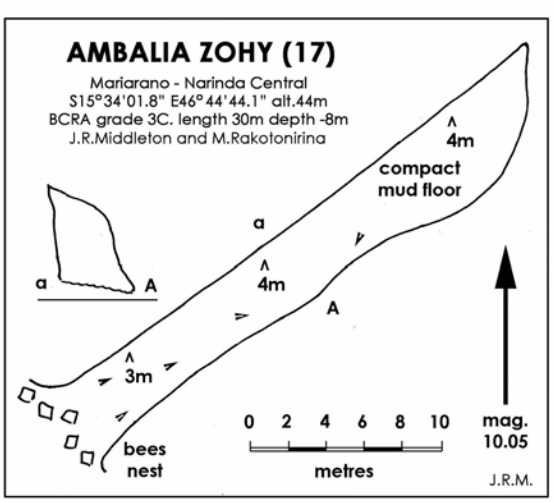

BEKAPIKA ZOHY (8)
Amboaboaka - Mitsinjo - Narinda Central
S15°24'19.5" E46° 57'49.9" alt. 52m
BCRA grade 3C. length 135m depth -8m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
N
mag. 10.05
entrance 2,
bats
bones
canyon
entrance
tomb
metres
stalagmite boss
stalagmite pillar
J.R.M.

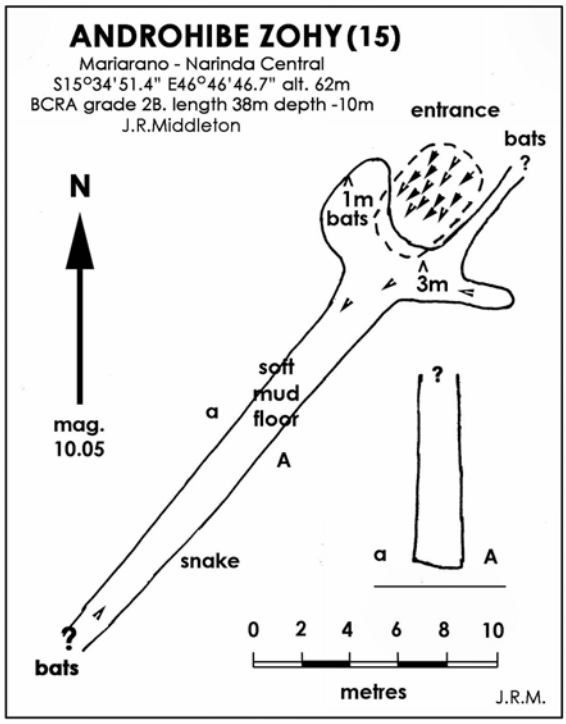

ANKAZOLEMBATO (10)
Mitsinjo - Narinda Central
S15°25'11.9" E46°56'10.3" alt. 35m
BCRA grade 3B. length 35m depth -10m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
N
mag. 10.05
5m
2.5m
2m drop
metres
J.R.M.

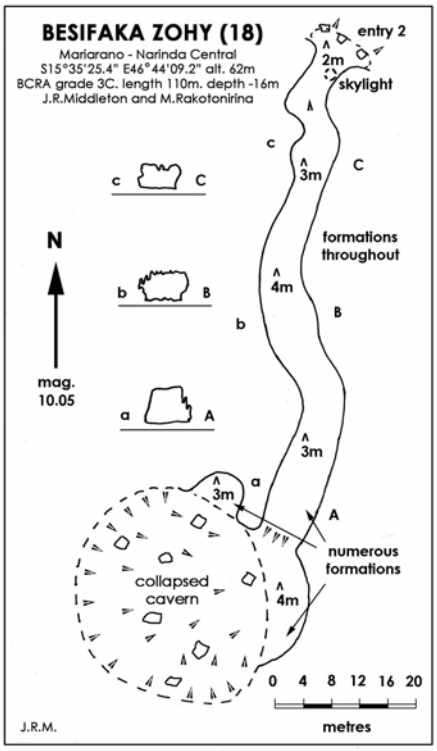

AMPANDRIAMPANIHY ZOHY (16)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°34'50.3" E46°45'08.6" alt. 60m
BCRA grade 3C. length 118m. depth -10m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
N
mag. 10.05
bats
-10m
15m
salt mud floor
and guano
2.5m
skylight
3m
1.5m
entrance
metres
J.R.M.

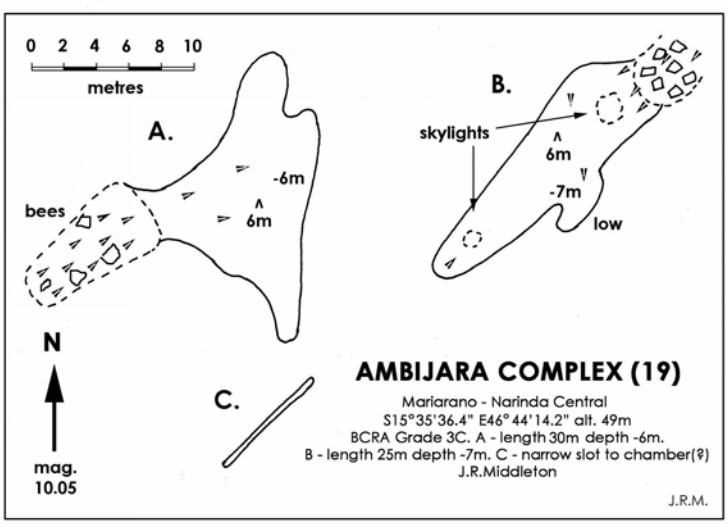

tight
?
MANARY MARO (12)
Mitsinjo - Narinda Central
S15°06'04.3"E46°54.54.1" alt. 48m
BCRA grade2B. length 5m
J.R.Middleton
metres
J.R.M.

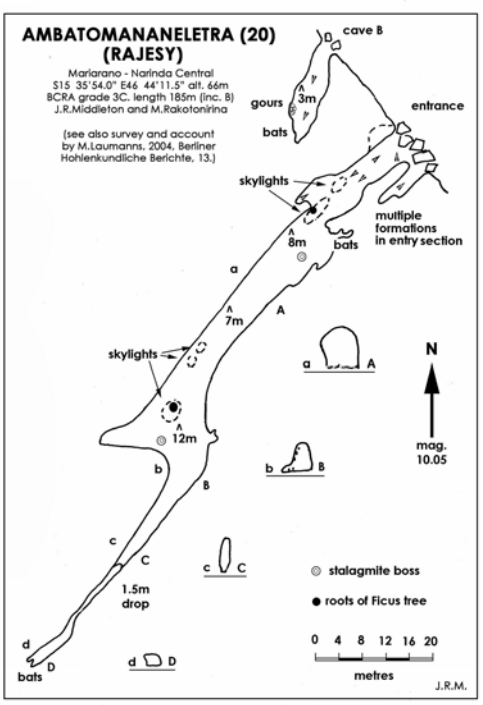

ANKODROHABE ZOHY (11)
Mitsinjo - Narinda Central
S15°25'48.6" E46°54'54.1" alt. 61m
BCRA grade 3C. length 25m depth -7m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
N
mag. 10.05
-7m
3m
1m
doline
entrance
metres
J.R.M.

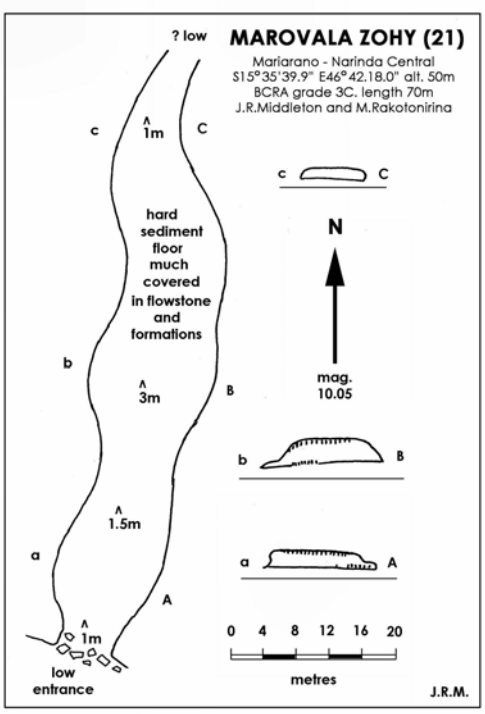

AMBALIA ZOHY (17)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°34'01.8" E46°44'44.1" alt.44m
BCRA grade 3C. length 30m depth -8m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
4m
compact
mud floor
4m
3m
bees
nest
mag. 10.05
metres
J.R.M.

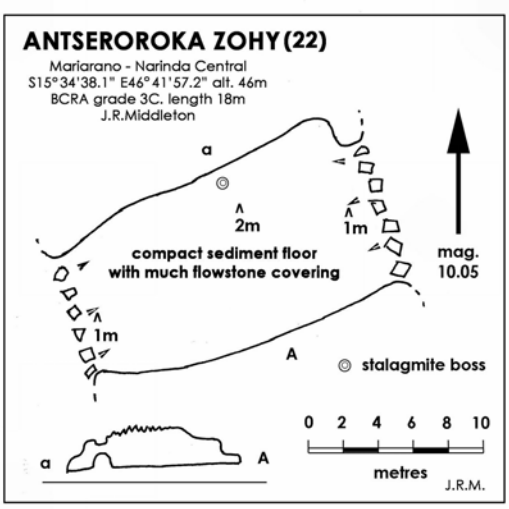

ANDROHIBE ZOHY (15)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°34'51.4" E46°46'46.7" alt. 62m
BCRA grade 2B. length 38m depth -10m
J.R.Middleton
entrance
bats
?
1m
bats
3m
N
mag.
10.05
soft
mud
floor
a
A
?
a
A
snake
?
bats
0 2 4 6 8 10
metres
J.R.M.

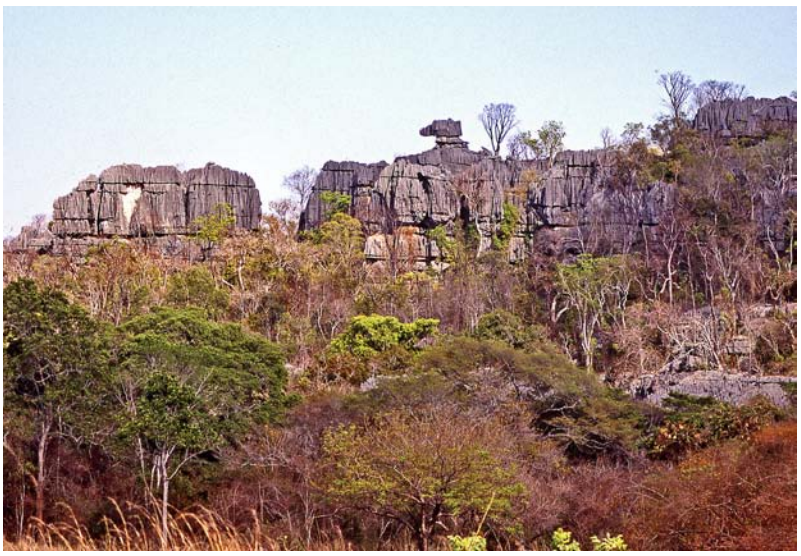

BESIFAKA ZOHY (18)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°35'25.4" E46°44'09.2" alt. 62m
BCRA grade 3C. length 110m. depth -16m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
entry 2
2m
skylight
c
C
3m
formations
throughout
N
b
B
4m
mag.
10.05
a
A
3m
3m
numerous
formations
collapsed
cavern
4m
0 4 8 12 16 20
metres
J.R.M.


0 2 4 6 8 10
metres
A.
-6m
bees
6m
B.
skylights
6m
-7m
low
N
mag.
10.05
C.
AMBIJARA COMPLEX (19)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°35'36.4" E46°44'14.2" alt. 49m
BCRA Grade 3C. A - length 30m depth -6m.
B - length 25m depth -7m. C - narrow slot to chamber(?)
J.R.Middleton
J.R.M.


AMBATOMANANELETRA (20)
(RAJESY)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15 35'54.0" E46 44'11.5" alt. 66m
BCRA grade 3C. length 185m (inc. B)
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
(see also survey and account
by M.Laumanns, 2004, Berliner
Hohlenkundliche Berichte, 13.)
cave B
gours
3m
entrance
bats
skylights
multiple
formations
in entry section
8m
bats
a
7m
A
skylights
N
a
A
12m
mag.
10.05
b
B
b
B
c
C
c
C
stalagmite boss
roots of Ficus tree
1.5m
drop
d
D
bats
d
D
0 4 8 12 16 20
metres
J.R.M.


? low
MAROVALA ZOHY (21)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°35'39.9" E46°42.18.0" alt. 50m
BCRA grade 3C. length 70m
J.R.Middleton and M.Rakotonirina
c
1m
C
c
C
hard
sediment
floor
much
covered
in flowstone
and
formations
N
b
3m
B
mag.
10.05
b
B
1.5m
a
a
A
A
1m
low
entrance
0 4 8 12 16 20
metres
J.R.M.


ANTSEROROKA ZOHY (22)
Mariarano - Narinda Central
S15°34'38.1" E46°41'57.2" alt. 46m
BCRA grade 3C. length 18m
J.R.Middleton
a
2m
1m
mag.
10.05
compact sediment floor
with much flowstone covering
1m
A
stalagmite boss
a
A
0 2 4 6 8 10
metres
J.R.M.



1

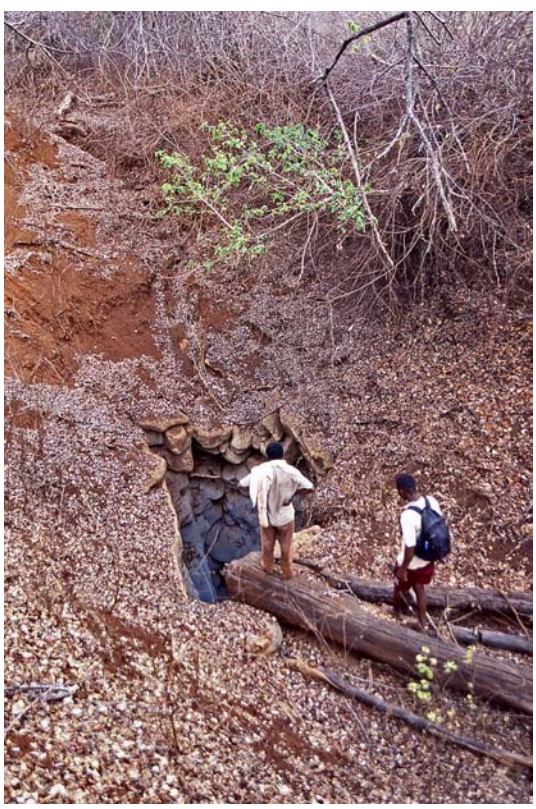
2

3

4

5

6



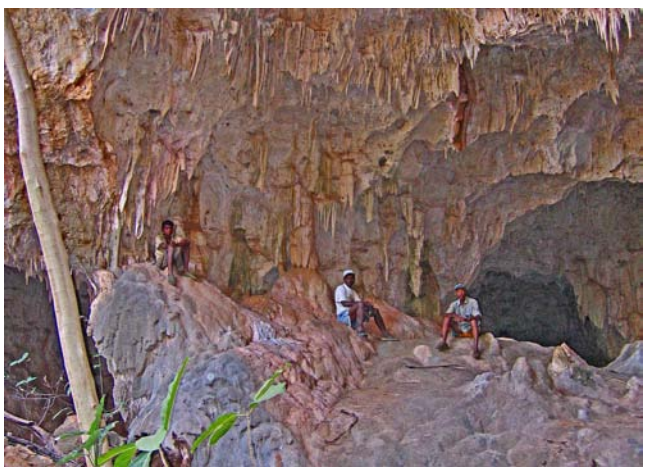
7

8

10

11

9



12

13

14

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

Roy Denney

Wildlife is attracted to all sorts of diverse habitat but by far the greatest diversity and variety can be found in the borderlands.

Woodland edges where different habitats meet, glades and rides within woodland, roadside verges, hedgerows and walls all abound with life if left free of pesticides etc.

Dappled shade and sunny glades where some protection is afforded from the worst of the winds allows plants and the insects that feed off them, to flourish.

As an orienteer I run along woodland tracks whenever practical as the alternative of crashing through bramble and blackthorn strewn tangle can, if direct, be slow and painful. As we cannot become too familiar with any given area if the sport is to retain its navigation and map awareness skills we only visit any given area infrequently and often find small tracks shown on our maps soon vanish if neglected and it is amazing how quickly such oases for smaller species can be overrun.

Over-management of country parks and estates is however also to be resisted as old timber, root stocks and winter leaf fall all provide homes for invertebrates, fungi and some plants which in turn feed larger creatures in the food chain.

Trees are often entire ecosystems in themselves, with a multitude of insect life and birds feeding off them.

Unfortunately many woodland creatures are showing large declines in population and whilst many theories abound no one seems entirely sure why. In all probability there are numerous contributing causes.

Climate change and air born pollution no doubt play a part as does predation by introduced species such as grey squirrels and mink and feeding by deer, in particular the muntjac.

Man obviously has a lot to answer for but inadvertently we do a great deal to help.

The old practice of coppicing was invaluable to wildlife and it is increasingly being re-introduced. This process was for many centuries the best way of producing a renewable supply of timber and for the uninitiated it involves cutting the stems of broad-leaved shrubs and trees to encourage growth of new shoots which grow fast and straight and can then be cut to order when they have reached the desired length. This cutting back to ground level causes the stumps (stools) to create a thicket of new growth which would be left for ten years before being partially cropped and after a further ten years the whole process would be repeated. The long straight poles would be taken for fencing etc., the older trunks for building and the off cuts for burning either as firewood or to produce charcoal.

Such woodland in the various stages of its life cycle provides a welcome variety of habitat and stimulates bio-diversity. In the first years after cutting back the warm sheltered sunny glades created on the woodland floor are a boon to many plant forms and the insects that thrive on them. As the dense thickets grow up again they provide safe nesting areas for many birds and dormice which also use the network for aerial walkways.

There is a 10 year scheme to encourage many of Britain's rarest species, on land owned by the Highways Agency and comprising grass verges and roundabouts. Evidence shows that wildlife soon learns to live with traffic racing by although some lives are cut prematurely short. This only goes to feed creatures higher up the food chain, as is nature's way.

There can be nowhere in Britain where traffic is faster and noisier than at Silverstone. The fairly rare purple emperor is making a comeback deep in the forests of Northamptonshire. There is a strong population in Fermyn Woods near Corby, but it is now being seen further affield. One was seen this year in Hazleborough after an absence of 15 years. This wood is also blessed with a good population of wood whites, another rare find. Changes are afoot in this area as some land has been exchanged with the Highways Agency to allow the creation of the by-pass for Silverstone and the net result is there is a new visitor car park at Hazleborough and fields previously isolated by road works, have been given to the Forestry Commission and will be allowed to

become scrub covered, with rides maintained through them, specifically with butterflies in mind.

The purple emperor is a large, fast-flying butterfly with iridescent wings shining purple and blue as sunlight catches them. They are canopy dwellers and need large expenses of broadleaved woods or dense thickets of willow scrub. Their unusual green caterpillars have white and yellow markings and horns on their heads.

Less intentionally land owned by the military often provides a refuge. The very presence of the army on Salisbury Plain has not allowed developments to spoil the area.

Temple Wood in Lincolnshire was a bit of a surprise on a recent visit for an orienteering event staged by the RAF. To see row upon row of parked and rusting old military vehicles left to waste away on the old runways was something of a shock. The adjoining woodlands were rich in wildlife (unfortunately not least the brambles) but the old runways, derelict equipment and the sound of the local clay shooters banging away did conjure up images of yesteryear. The story of this former airdrome and missile site would make interesting reading.

Later as the winter drew to a close, I was running in Twyford Woods just a few miles down the road and another former air base. In glorious weather as I waited for my start, I had more time than is usual to take in the surroundings and saw brimstone butterflies and started a number of roe deer out of thickets. Primroses were scattered about the area.

These neglected air bases are surprisingly helpful to wildlife. No one has bothered to tidy them up and the rough unimproved grass surrounds, often kept low by grazing sheep has preserved a wildflower rich pasture.

In addition the runways themselves create warm sunny 'glades' on which butterflies and insects thrive which support the food chain.

As with many deserted old airdromes, the old runways at Twyford Wood keep open a sunny oasis in the centre of the woods encouraging a thriving population of the elsewhere quite rare, grizzled and dingy skippers (butterflies for anyone in doubt).

Twyford is apparently also a good location for wild basil and green-winged orchids and carpets of wild strawberries providing food in particular for the grizzled skipper's caterpillars.

I spotted what was to me an unusual occurrence at an event this winter and raised the matter with a local expert. I saw two red admiral butterflies in late January but apparently this does happen and increasingly so with our warming weather.

These dramatically coloured creatures are at their most active in our gardens in late autumn as they make their way south from colder climes and pause to stack up on energy reserves from rotting windfalls and late-flowering shrubs. The channel coast is a great place to see them as they gather before launching themselves into the perilous crossing to their winter homes around the Mediterranean.

If you want to encourage these exotic creatures leave a small patch of nettles in some sheltered sunny corner of your garden as the eggs are normally laid on the juicy growing tips of these plants.

Apparently increasing numbers are actually hibernating here and come out to feed on warmer winter days but it is doubtful how many of these survive through to the spring. It is surprising how these delicate creatures and their cousins survive storms or cold weather but they are obviously tougher than they look.

In addition to the brimstones I saw playing above old runways in Lincolnshire apparently small tortoiseshells and peacocks which also hibernate can occasionally be tempted out by warm winter days.

Dry stone walls are a microcosm of life with many creatures living and hunting within them as indeed, are hedgerows. They are of course not natural, as mans creations of an earlier time, and are now invaluable corridors along which species migrate.

Nature soon learns to adapt to man's interference and perhaps things are not as black as they sometimes seem.

A HIMALAYAN WAR

Peter & Lisa Green

A short story which I hope will be of interest to YRC Journal readers. It's actually about someone not a YRC member, my late father-in-law, Geoffrey Jackson, and his time in the Himalayas 1940-43.

In the 1920s / 30s Geoff developed a love of the hills and fells of Northern England - born and brought up on Merseyside, he was well placed to spend weekends and holidays walking and climbing in North Wales, the Lake District, and in the Yorkshire Dales. It was also because it was partly in the family. Having Westmorland (as it then was) relations, Christmases were routinely spent around Grasmere and Ambleside in hotels run by uncles and aunts. Somewhere in the family archive there is a photo of Geoff's mother, Bessie Bowman, and her cousin, Lizzie Baldry, as very early women climbers, taken at the summit of Helvellyn at the turn of the century, dressed in long tweed skirts and button boots, high boned collars and carrying alpenstocks – this of course long before logos and Goretex!

My wife, Lisa, has written the following account, based on Geoff's reminiscences, of how these early experiences came to influence his wartime years, which he subsequently knew he was fortunate to be able to describe as a "generally very enjoyable war".

The way he used to tell it, it all came about because he bumped into a man in a bar – in this case the bar of the main hotel in Simla (Northern India), during the spring of 1940.

In 1936 Geoff had gone out to India to work for what then was Imperial Tobacco, now BAT (on the way out he had a stop off at Aden where he met another man in another bar, who was prospecting for Shell to see if there was any oil in that part of the world – the rest is history). In India he was based in Lahore, capital of the Punjab province, where he led a somewhat rackety life living in a house of young bachelors like himself, an establishment called a chummery in the days of the Raj. An interest they had in common was the Territorial Army, which in Lahore meant Punjab Light Horse, i.e. cavalry. One attraction for an impecunious young man was that the Indian Government paid such territorial volunteers a subsidy large enough to support a horse with a groom to attend it, which, if one was careful, could be stretched to subsidising a polo pony as well.

On war being declared Geoff enlisted in the Indian Army and went through officer training in southern India. He then joined the 17th Dogras, a Rajput infantry regiment based in the Punjab, which before long was starting preparations to sail to Singapore to fight the Japanese.

He happened to be in the aforementioned bar when he was introduced to a man called Dick Cropper, and said to him "not *the* Dick Cropper who won all those fell races in the Lake District in the early thirties?" This led to a very convivial evening in the course of which Dick Cropper persuaded Geoff to apply for a transfer to the Gilgit Scouts for service on the far northern reaches of British India, now part of Pakistan. The application went in and he forgot all about it.

To the considerable annoyance of his colonel, the summons for Geoff to remove to Gilgit came just before the regiment, sweltering through the hot weather at Bareilly, was about to set off for

embarkation at Bombay. The colonel's objections were finally overruled ("this is what comes of you, Jackson, poodle-faking up in Simla") and Geoff had to make haste as it was early September and he had to leave from Srinagar with all his kit, horses, servants, and provisions for at least six months, before the passes closed for the winter. There were no roads or regular flights even in summer, so it was a 12-14 day trek up through the mountains, staying at Dak bungalows or camping every night.

Gilgit sits in a beautiful valley in the foothills of the Pamirs at the north western end of the Himalayan range. Now there are regular bus trips there, driving along the Karakoram Highway, built by the Chinese, and package holiday flights, but then there were no more than a dozen wheeled vehicles in the whole of the province. It is famous for its own uninhibited version of polo (as seen in the Michael Palin TV series "Himalaya"), and the fact that for centuries it lay on one of the main offshoots of the Great Silk Road.

Gilgit provided a wonderful life for three years for a young Englishman in his mid-twenties, brought up on the adventures of "Blackwoods" Magazine, on Kipling and the novels of Henty and Rider Haggard. For three to four weeks at a time, as an Emergency Commissioned Officer he would be out on horse back seeing and being seen, touring the province, dispensing the justice of the Raj from a folding camp table and chair set up in a village under the shade of a tree, hearing grievances, dealing with reported crimes.

The severest sentence he could give was 14 years in the Andaman Islands for murder, and this apparently came up relatively frequently in this rugged culture of family honour and revenge!

Life was good for a fit young man who enjoyed the outpost life, the independence, the opportunity to see new things, learn new languages, and catch up on a wide range of literature (mostly read by lamplight through the long winter evenings). He saw hardly a shot fired in anger, although two minor tribal skirmishes led to twice having to postpone his wedding – with his bride to be waiting patiently for him to arrive back in Srinagar during the summer of 43, but that's another story.

Gilgit was a wonderful place to be, both geographically with its ring of high peaks like Rakaposhi and Nanga Parbat, and historically with its Himalayan links to ancient civilisations, and to be there when it was still truly remote and virtually untouched by western influences. Geoff never forgot the place.

It gave him a lifetime of memories and stories to tell, and happy days of (later) researching in the libraries of the British Museum and the India Office for a book which once written proved unpublishable, particularly in a period before British colonial history became a respectable or fashionable topic for historians, let alone television programmes.

NORTH YORK MOORS

Derek Smithson kindly provided me with a copy of the Voice of the Moors, the magazine of the North Yorkshire Moors Association and it was a very good read. This Charity can be contacted at secretarynyma@btconnect.com.

The publication covered a number of issues which also appeared in our last journal (in more detail than we could give) and in particular in relation to this area close to our hearts.

It included a detailed survey of waders present and breeding on the moors and their success rate. They report a picture emerging of significant increases in Lapwing, Golden Plover and Curlew on keepered plots at Spaunton and in Rosedale but that on an unkeepered similar plot at Sleights numbers remained at relatively low levels. Very few snipe were recorded anywhere.

They also carry an extensive piece about the proliferation of advertising etc, cluttering up the countryside.

They also discuss the future of these uplands and the fear that much marginal grazing land may revert to shrub depriving us of much of the open landscape we enjoy at present.

THE VILLAIN, AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

How much do we need to know about anybody let alone Don Whillans? Lets be clear he was a considerable force in the 60's and 70's world of climbing and his tale should be told but Jim Perrin, in many ways a doyen of contemporary mountain writing, really does over-egg it in his volume! The word hagiography comes to mind. It is undoubtedly a labour of love but never was tough love more needed. There is an interminable recording of inconsequential and forgettable incidents.

At 354 pages including index, bibliography and the most excruciating and endless footnotes, it takes a good deal of stamina to complete the read. Don's domestic life isn't spared and neither is the grinding detail of Himalayan successes and failures.

How necessary/useful/enlightening is all this? Not very, many would feel. What is needed is an abridged and unexpurgated version in which the words are cut by a third but Whillans best climbing performances, cursing, drinking, and pugilism are preserved for posterity. A summary of his mountaineering achievements by year would have been a Godsend! And who would have thought that Wittgenstein would get quoted in a biography of Whillans?

THE DIGESTED READ.
A pocket Hercules from Lancashire explodes onto the climbing scene in the 60's. He brooks no challenge but lacks many social skills. With the support of his friends they break the stranglehold of the middle classes on rock, snow and ice at home and in the greater ranges.

His cursing, drinking, and pugilism become legendary. After considerable climbing success further opportunities dwindle because of his antagonistic manner. He becomes something of an embarrassment to his friends.

To meet an untimely death in bed whilst still comparatively young adds to the myth. His rucksac remains a design icon and is still occasionally seen being used by mountain pensioners who are flattered that anyone recognises it.

I willingly concede criticism is a third rate occupation!

LEARNING TO BREATHE - ANDY CAVE

After the Whillans book this is a refreshing tonic! No footnotes, no references and no index… a spare focused tome with no pretensions. Maybe it being an autobiography makes it a better read. Cave's odyssey from working class village with few horizons to the greater ranges is not exactly unique but to make the journey from Grimethorpe probably is. To escape a life in the pit was as likely as to escape from being a poppy grower in Afghanistan.

However the miners strike of 1985 is the turning point giving Cave all the time in the world to hone his skills on Stanedge, and in the Highlands in winter followed by the Alps. His horizons are constantly rising and his ambitions fulfilled. Failure on Gasherbrum VI, but huge success and tragedy after a fourteen day epic on the North Face of Changabang confirm his extraordinary abilities as do several accounts of bold routes in the Alps.

Cave's head may be in the clouds but his feet remain firmly on the ground.

The early years are inextricably linked with being destined for a life in the pit when other life ambitions are asserting themselves. Pit village life is vividly portrayed and forms an integral part of the saga. It may offer a very useful insight for those less familiar with the claustrophobic culture of the South Yorkshire coalfield at the time of the strike. The strike was directly responsible for Cave's liberation.

One fascinating fact. The cable car from Chamonix to the Aiguilles du Midi travelled at exactly the same speed as the cage at Grimethorpe pit. Eight metres per second ! Not a lot of people know that.

Joe Simpson, in his introduction to the book, rejects the idea of Cave as a mountaineering Billy Elliot but once he'd mentioned it the parallel refuses to go away.

It is worth noting that both these books received the Boardman-Tasker book award.

David Handley

THE HUMBLE HAWTHORN

Roy Denney

The hawthorn, also known as the 'may', is in full season as I pen this article, In the past when society revolved round the seasons the 'may' was probably so named due to its association with that month. It is also known as the quickthorn or whitethorn. The blossoming of the may was always deemed the end of winter and the start of good weather and triggered many Mayday celebrations. Long before this day had political overtones it was an established celebration known as Beltane when the Maypole and May Queens appeared. The old saying 'n'er cast a clout till may is out' referred to the plant.

These traditions fell away somewhat 250 years ago when they stole 12 days of our lives by changing the calendar. By bringing Mayday forward it meant that the tree often failed to blossom in time for the celebrations and sometimes not till June. With climate change things are now coming full circle and it is fairly unusual for it not to.

Who knows we may bring back the old customs. Who fancies going out maying? (Collecting blossom at dawn on Mayday) - They used to adorn all their front doors with the blossom and use it as a crown for the May Queen. If collected whilst on a fast you were protected from lightning for a year and rubbing the dew from hawthorn onto a ladies face enhanced her looks. Indeed Mayday was something of a celebration of sexuality and many a maid went down to the woods and did not come back a maid.

The tree is linked with mystical qualities and said to be the home of little people.

Also known as 'fairy thorn', you should put hawthorn on your door to keep witches out. It is OK to lay hawthorn low for regeneration but woe betide anyone destroying a tree as it releases hoards of spirits. Other local names for this tree are quickset, bread and cheese and tramps supper presumably based on its several attributes. Certainly the young leaves of the common hawthorn can be used in salads.

The timber is very fine grained and ideal for engraving but is also hard and durable and used for walking sticks and handles for tools.

As woodland practices are restored the off cuts and fallings from hawthorns are increasingly being used for excellent charcoal. It burns very hot as firewood and there is a small electricity plant being fuelled by this renewable source.

The lovely white blossom was used as brides' bouquets and torches made of hawthorn were used to light the way to bed to bless their union.

Other parts of the country however hold that to bring the blossom indoors can lead to a death. The darker beliefs surrounding this tree include that the smell is that of death trapped in it after the great plague.

Perhaps the most common tree in Britain not surprisingly it features in many legends.

Frequently used for hedging (haw is Anglo -Saxon for hedge) if left alone these trees can reach about 500 years old, achieving a girth of about 14 feet and 30 feet tall and can contort into the most fantastic shapes. Another traditional benefit, the flowers and berries are the source of numerous natural remedies and an ingredient of many jellies, preserves and liquors.

It is a great habitat for wildlife; thorns keep predators at bay and it produces early leaves giving cover. The strong smell attracts insects which help pollinate the tree and also provide a good food supply for birds and small mammals.

There are actually two species of this tree; the common hawthorn and the Midland hawthorn, and there are also numerous hybrids about. You can easily tell the two species apart as the common hawthorn has sweet smelling flowers whilst it is the flower of the Midland which gives off the nauseating smell of rotting flesh.

The other major difference if you want to check is that the fruit of the common hawthorn has single seeds whereas the Midland will have two or three.

You often see the double red-flowered version in ornamental gardens and this is actually a hybrid called Paul's Scarlet.

The Midland was the more common plant in olden times but not nowadays. Hawthorn likes open

country but the Midland prefers heavy woodlands and ancient hedgerows and thrives on the clay soils of the Midlands, hence its name. It is becoming less common because of the changing face of the countryside with man's agricultural practices.

It is a common mistake to mistake blackthorn for hawthorn for the two are very similar in appearance, especially when without leaves. Blackthorn is one of the commonest of hedgerow shrubs, widely planted because its dense growth and fearsome thorns make it ideal for keeping in stock and keeping out unwanted guests.

It is also native to Britain and a member of the plum family and does best on heavy soils. The habits of this plant also gives name to a weather condition.

The blackthorn winter is the name given by some country folk to the sting in winter's tail that catches you out just as you think spring has arrived. Blackthorn flowers in March, before its first leaves have appeared, and may well be in flower when winter has its last flurry.

STAMP OF APPROVAL

Postage Stamps have served us well since the issue of the first postage stamp the One Penny Black in 1840. Will e-mail, broad band, bar coding of postal packages, text messaging and machine cancellations see the slow demise of the humble postage stamp?

Governments and postal agencies use stamps to raise awareness on various issues, commemorate events, promote the environment and recognise the contribution people make to life around the world. While the rest of the philatelic world are flooding the market with stamps, of which, many will never appear on a postal package, Royal Mail seem reluctant to take advantage of important events, and in particular mountaineering and exploration.

The Unites Nations declared, as they do, 2002 to be the International Year of Mountains, did you see any stamps? Excellent images were produced on small rectangles of paper by many nations including those just a few metres above sea level, borrowing the odd mountain to fill the gap. Not the Royal Mail. We have super mountains, perhaps small but if designers can get Everest on a stamp what about say Ben Nevis.

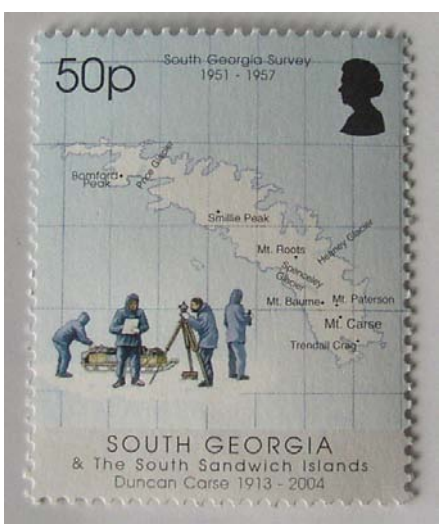
Royal Mail completely ignored, in 2005, the 50th Anniversary of the ascent of Kangchenjunga by a British team, an extreme endeavour. Nepal issued a commemorative the mountain not in its territory. In defence RM did manage to celebrate the 1953 ascent of Mt. Everest by one stamp in an issue of 6 values highlighting extreme endeavours. I wonder if we shall see Alan Hinkes on a stamp someday, many other nations have honoured their climbers.

We are thankful to the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands for issuing a set of 4 values recognising the endeavours of Duncan Carse who, between 1951 and 1957, did so much to improve the knowledge of the topography of South Georgia.

George Spenceley, and a frequent guest to the YRC Tom Price, were members of the 1955/56, the third and most ambitious expedition. The 50p stamp of the issue is a simple map of the island, many features eliminated for clarity but highlighting Mt Carse, Spenceley Glacier and Price Glacier.

The First Day cover of the issue has a nice image of Mt Carse, the 7 man sledge teams and the cancellation cachet includes the Polar Medal. The medal and clasp awarded to Duncan Carse in 1939 for his work on the British Graham Land Expedition of 1934-1937 and a second clasp awarded in 1992 for the mapping of South Georgia.

Duncan Carse died at the age of 90 in 2004. A celebration of his life was held in Stopham Church, West Sussex attended by representatives from the Scott Polar Institute, BAS the RGS, the BBC and others but not Royal Mail.



W Alan Linford

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN.

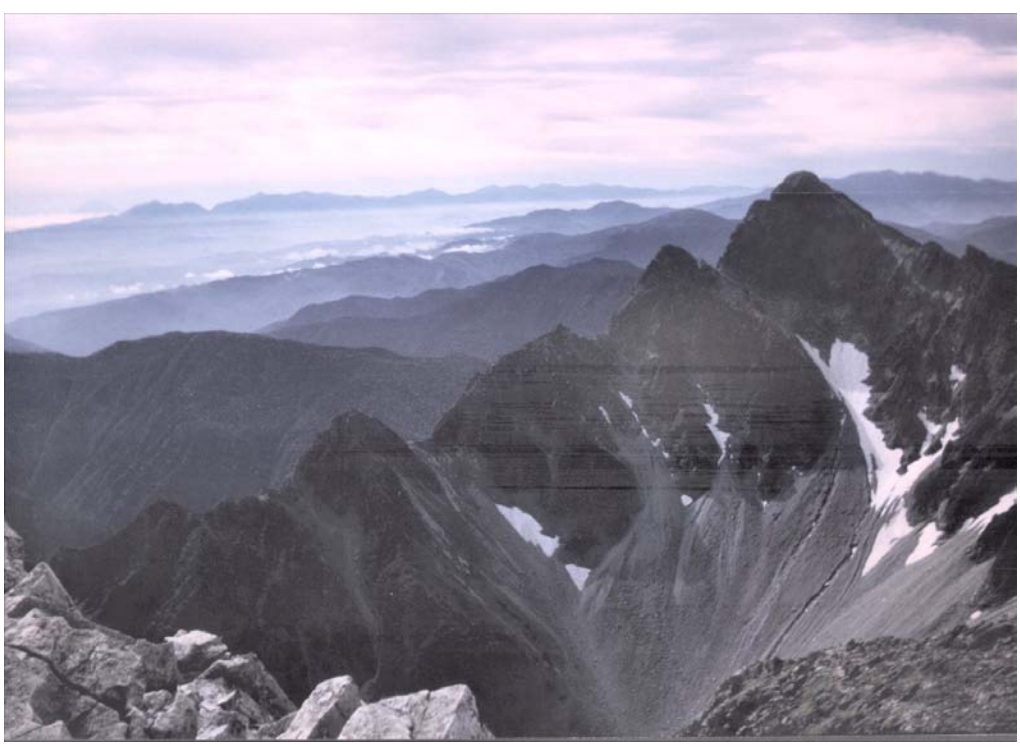
In November 1965 Richard Gowing set off with Tom Gerrard to attempt to climb Fuji out of season. After sleeping in a bus shelter at 7400 feet, they awoke to find nearby peaks were covered with mist but Fuji stood clear and bright above them so off they set.

Crampons were needed from 10,000 ft but the snow conditions were fine and Richard left Tom to watch as he ascended Hakusan-dake, the north west peak with a height of 12,470ft.

Richard then went around the crater and knocked off Ken-ga-mine at 12,535. This is the highest point on the mountain and is topped by an observatory.

They took the opportunity of deploying cameras and these are two of the better results.

Whilst in Japan Richard also took this picture of Maehodakadake in the Northern Japan Alps which stands at 10,140ft.



The picture is taken from Kitahodakadake and shows Mt. Fuji 80 miles away on the far left horizon

WOODY WOOD PECKER & THE "CANNELURES"

John Middleton

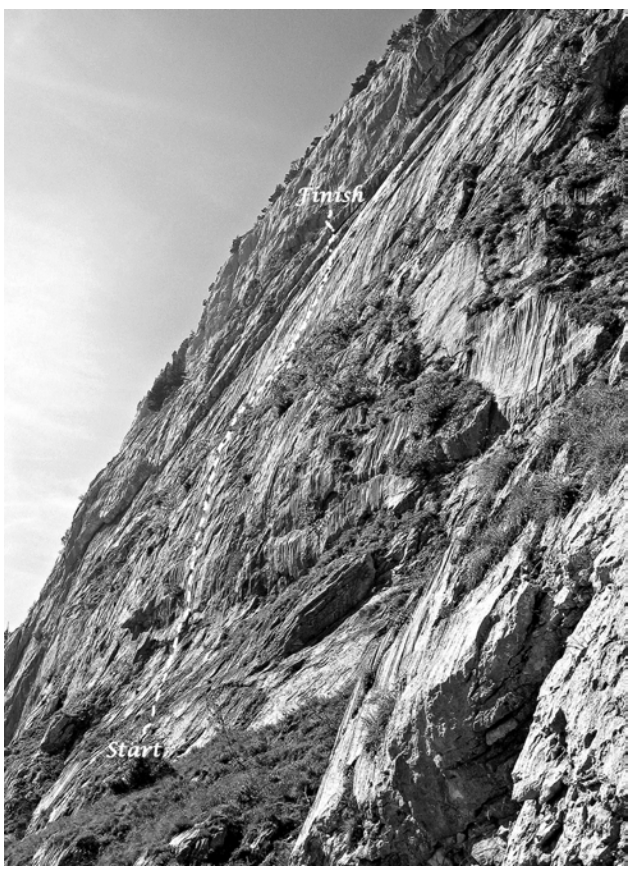
Eastwards from the serene beauty that is Lake Annecy and up high into the nearby hills there is a hidden, mystical valley named Le Sapey. Here, amongst a rich alpine flora, wild boar, deer, alpine ibex and cuddly marmots roam whilst many metres above, three mighty south facing rock walls stand guard. These are the Aretes du Sapey (1,621m), the Pointe Centrale du Sapey (1,696m) and the Pointe de Dran (1,830m). Upon these there are some 51 sports routes, mostly multi pitch and up to 200m in length all of which share the same massively solid limestone. This latter is usually just off vertical but may also include the occasional small overhang. Such criteria would make any cliff a popular climbing venue but if the almost excessive preponderance of "cannelures" is also added to the equation then these cliffs become almost unique! A must visit!

What are "cannelures"? Well, to rock climbers, these are exquisitely sculptured downward running channels, flutings, furrows, grooves. A caver might simply term them karren runnels. They may be 1cm deep or 15, a few centimetres wide or 20 and if you are lucky the edges may be just sufficiently sharp to lay-back off or, much more likely, they will be very shallowly angled requiring precarious bridging and pressure techniques; or sometimes you may have to attempt all three methods! They can run for many tens of metres and may be found singly or quite often, and hopefully so, several will occur close together. Standard protection is impossible but the substantial bolts spaced between 3 and 5 metres apart are normally adequate.

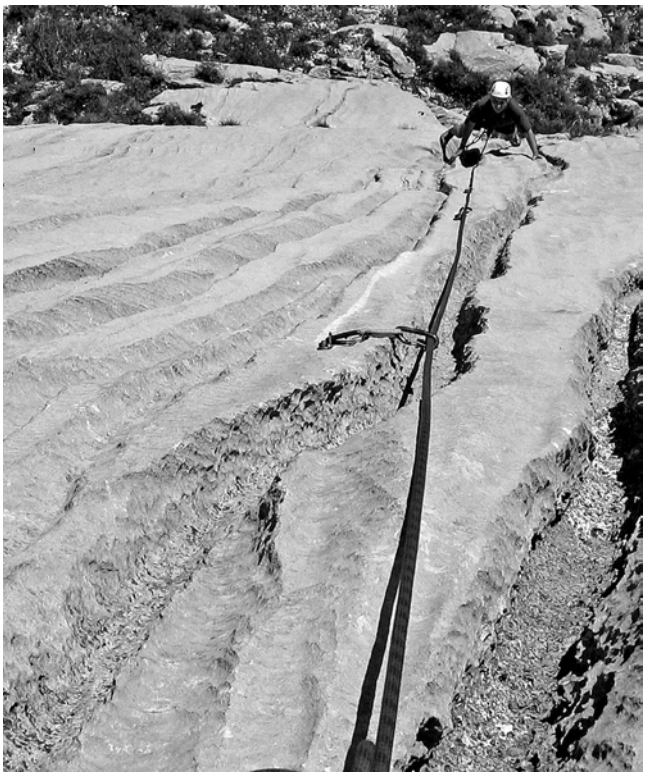
The walk from the small car park at picturesque le Cret to the base of the Pointe de Dran takes about 70 minutes of steep but pleasant walking through mixed forest and alpine meadows. Our objective was "Woody wood pecker" a three star route that the guide book* describes as "the classic 6a/6a+ of Sapey with a predominance of cannelures..."!

We were immediately impressed; the cannelures commenced almost at once and seemed to vanish ever upwards into the deep blue sky. It was Peters turn to lead off today and whilst he quickly bridged himself precariously between the wide shallow channels his upward progress only came in moves, or jerks, of a few centimetres at a time. Then it was my turn and even on the tight end of the rope progress was no faster; "good lead Peter!" I had to say. The next pitch, which was my lead, eased slightly and by the time that we had completed four of them and were 120m up we were finally mastering these new but still adrenalin fuelled techniques. The fifth pitch left a hanging stance for shallow furrows and a steepish slab before excited lay-backing led over two small overhangs via sharply edged cannelures. This finally and regrettably led to the spectacular abseil point. Wow! What a place! What climbing! What rock! What views - snow fields in the distance, jagged peaks all around, azure sky above, miniature houses and people below and just the plaintive calls of raptors from above. Let's do another we said!!

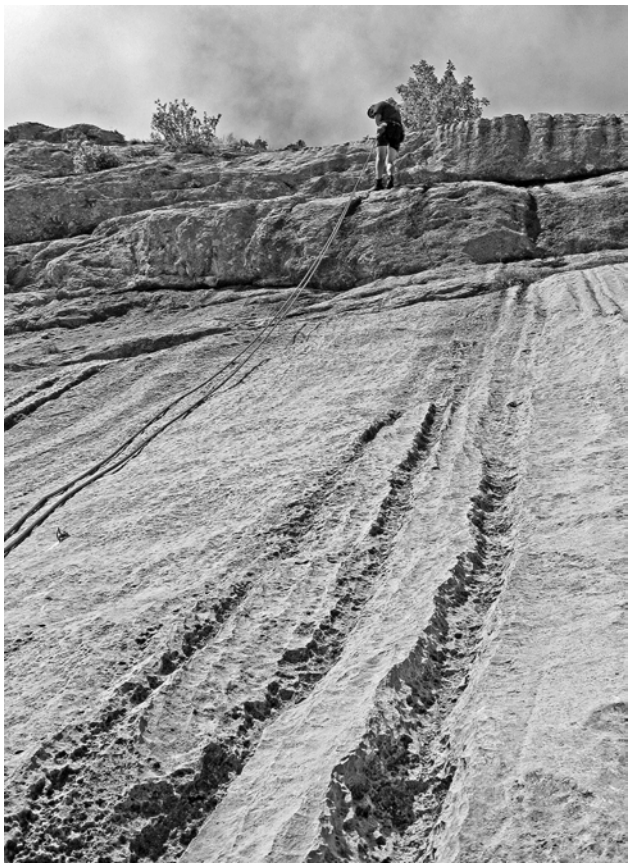
Woody wood pecker. 5 pitches. 152m long. 27m 6a+, 30m 6a, 30m 5c, 30m 6a, 35m 6a. Either a single 70m sports rope is needed or two 50m x 9mm plus 14 quick draws. About 8m to the left of this route is the slightly easier classic of "Amadeus" with 6 x 5c and 2 x 6a pitches.



THE FACE OF THE DENT DE DRAN SHOWING THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF THE ROUTE



THE CANNELURES ON PITCH FOUR



THE DESCENT DOWN PITCH FIVE

Peter Kay, my wife Valerie and myself spent almost three weeks based by Lake Annecy during 2005 visiting eight different climbing venues – all massive solid limestone, mostly multi pitch, all worthy of revisiting (of particular note, apart from Sapey, were Les Grandes Suites, Colombiere and Aravis). We climbed from 5b to 6b but there is plenty to go at from 4a well into the dizzying heights of the 8's! For the odd damp day then three local Via Ferratas can help to keep the muscles in trim.

*Le Sapey is included in the guide book *"Le calcaire en folie", tome II, Au pays du Mont Blanc by Michel Piola*. It is published by *Editions Equinoxe, Cassa Postale 244 – CH – 1257 Croix-de-Rozon* and is available in various local shops and can normally be ordered through English climbing stores.

The IGN map for the region is the 1:25,000 3431 OT Lac D'Annecy.

MY INTRODUCTION TO THE YRC

Don MacKay

Recalling my early contact with the YRC I have particularly satisfying memories of the very first meet I attended. I was a guest of my cousin, the late Brian Nicholson.

The meet, in 1962 to Ireland, started with some twenty members congregating at Preston to board one of two early car ferries, the Ionic or the Doric, delivering to Larne from where we motored to a camp site used by the YRC on earlier occasions at a place called Florence Court near Enniskillin.

(I was reminded of the Ionic and Doric ships again recently when I found myself aboard the Doric, now rather tatty, plying from Spain to Morocco).

The members must have wondered why anyone had invited an inexperienced, gangling looking guest, who was not then a strong walker or able climber and had never previously been in a pothole.

The reason only became apparent when my cooking was sampled. This, I am sure, explains why a descendant of a Highland Scot born and brought up in the fenlands of East Anglia should have been elected into membership of the YRC.

The aim of the meet was to explore properly a cave named Reyfad. As well as chief cook and bottle washer I found myself acting as general labourer hauling gear and ropes across moors and up long hills to a remote spot where the only water for tea making was from a smelly puddle in a peat bog. I never did see the inside of Reyfad but the exploration was a great success well written up in subsequent journals. Back at Florence Court, the serious work of the meet being out of the way, members treated me to a general tour of some of the more accessible caves which are extensive. It was literally a case of parting the bluebells and slipping down into what for me, seeing anything like it for the first time, was a wonderland. The caves even had their own stock of albino fish which were colourless because they had never been exposed to the light of day, and there were acres of unspoilt stalactites and mites. One of the great characters of the YRC, Jack Woodman, who I thought had been treating me with disdain, suddenly changed. He wanted someone to drive him in his Landrover down to see Sligo Bay. It was a place he said he had always wanted to see so he accepted my offer to drive. Alas. We ran into trouble at the border. A man with a gun stopped us. We didn't have the proper licence to cross the border. If we wanted to go across, the guard required a deposit of £150. Neither of us had that sort of money so I argued that my poor old friend so wanted to see Sligo Bay and if he didn't do it now he would never have another chance.

Then a character leaning up against a fence post came over. "What seems to be the matter?" he asked in his lovely Irish brogue. I explained and he said "Look here, I'm the vet. I'm stuck here all day seeing the cattle across the border. Take my car. If you're not back by 5 o'clock I'll take yours" and he explained where he lived. That is what happened.

We exchanged car keys and when we arrived at Sligo I decided to buy some chickens to make a well deserved feast for the Reyfad explorers. I asked the policeman on point duty where I could get some. He directed me to a farm "and tell the lady PC Murphy sent you" he said. She took us to some sheds. Flung open doors to expose lines of chickens on perches. "Can you see any you like". I pointed to one plump one. She grabbed it wringing its neck on the spot and went on to repeat the performance. We came away with five.

Back on the border we were confronted by the same guard. Our car and the vet had gone. "Have you bought anything" No I said. Then, as an afterthought, "Only some chickens". "Chickens" he said ."They're prohibited". Another ten minutes of argument and with maps out, I finally convinced him we were camping actually on the border. He eventually let us through with the chickens.

I spent the evening sitting on a rock in the middle of the river gutting them. They provided one of the feasts that I suspect helped gain me election into the YRC. I fell in love with Ireland from that time on. The improbable always happens there. Where else, if you take your car into a garage advertising car washing, do you collect it only to find it has been done with a pressure hose inside and out. Or where else would you find a lovely old gentleman living in a fine old house who, when he ran out of fuel to keep warm, started burning the floor boards and then the staircase in the kitchen stove. In the end the kitchen was the only inhabitable room left.

Mobile phones were just coming in at the time of my next visit to Ireland where I have since worn a groove up McGillacuddy's Reeks. The first time I met a group of Americans from Arizona just starting down from the summit. Having exchanged greetings and some gossip with them I said cheerio and had the bright idea to telephone down to my brother-in-law sitting in his car at the foot of the mountain and told him about the group of Americans. They were amazed to be greeted by him with "are you the people from Arizona".

For once we were evidently ahead with hi-technology.

FIFTY YEARS ON

Cliff Large has produced a few slides that were taken on two YRC meets in 1956.

Easter Meet - the party split in two with those who were going on the Club Himalayan expedition 1n 1957 camping on the summit plateau of Ben Nevis and the remainder camping on the riverside meadows a short distance beyond the Youth Hostel in Glen Nevis. It turned out to be warmer on the summit than in the glen.

Whit Meet - the party travelled by train to Inverness and hired a bus from Highland Omnibuses for the week. The bus is on the picture of the Inchnadamph camp site. Two nights were spent at Dundonnel to climb An Teallach before moving to Inchnadamph for the remainder of the week. Stac Polly was climbed on the way between the two sites.

They paint a picture of what now seems a very different era. The meet reports were also a lot shorter!

BEN NEVIS SUMMIT CAMP

The Easter Meet in Glen Nevis was blessed by four days of almost unbroken sunshine and splendid views. The meet was widespread, the Himalayan Team luxuriating on the summit, others suffering hard frost in the Glen, and the President and some friends living a cycle ride away in the town. A spartan routine prevailed, and great activity was observed in the gullies and on the ridges particularly by the Himalayans.

GLEN NEVIS CAMP

INCHNADAMFF CAMP

The Scottish Meet at Whitsun began in Inverness, whence a party of 24 travelled by 'bus to Dundonnell. All awoke early next day and made a concerted attack on An Teallach, the traverse of the ridge being much enlivened by mist and snow. On the next day the meet decamped to Inchnadamff with a few pleasant hours on Stac Polly en route. From the new camp parties traversed Suilven and Canisp (from Little Assynt), Quinag (in a gale), and Ben More Assynt and Conival. Some members were perplexed by the limestone of Traligill. On the whole, a very enjoyable meet despite indifferent weather.

DUNDONNELL CAMP

Alister Renton and Shaun Penny with friends in Austria

Top middle and right - On the summit of Schnceglocker
Second row - Summit Breita Crona and Piz Buin
Third - On route to Dreilanderspitze, its summit and leaving Heidleberg Hut
Bottom - On route to and view from Silvretta Hut, Klosters

YRC EXPLORATION GROUP

The formation of the Exploration Group (ExG) within the Club is to focus on providing three or four high activity open meets which would include an annual overseas trip to the Alps or greater ranges together with a three year plan of possibilities.

The external environment in which clubs such as our have to operate has changed markedly in the last twenty years. The need for access to accommodation, shared transport, equipment (especially for potholing, along with the critical mass to tackle "super severe" pots) and an opportunity to learn outdoor skills with some degree of safely were all driving forces for clubs being set up and ensured a steady flow of new members.

This of course has now changed. There is a national network of excellent independent hostels to supplement the YHA operation, with over 120 independent hostels in Scotland alone, so accommodation of a good standard is much easier to obtain at a reasonable cost. Travel is far easier, with ever growing car ownership and the cheap air fares offering access to an excellent selection of UK and overseas destinations for mountaineering, caving and potholing, rock climbing, scrambling, walking, skiing and mountain biking. Many of these being taken as weekend trips to Europe's mountains.

The advent of single rope techniques has considerably reduced the need for tackle and the group size needed to manhandle it to the bottom of a multi-pitch pothole. The internet and outdoor magazines are crammed with "how to" articles and information, as well as multiple adverts for training courses, where one can learn outdoor skills in a supervised environment with a qualified trainer at whatever level you aspire to, both in the UK, the Alps and now in the Himalayas. There is thus less need for clubs for younger people and their friends to get out there and enjoy the outdoors.

It is clear that we still have plenty of active members who do their own thing in small groups alongside the meets list. You will have read many such accounts in these pages. So will the ExG make a difference?

As with most things in clubs, it is down to the members to make the difference. We need your ideas and support for interesting meet locations, your inspiration and aspirations for overseas expeditions and for you to attract and invite active new members to join the YRC. The ExG approach should help in this but cannot succeed on its own without your support.

Article and pictures provided by Mick Borroff.

Above Y Garn

Right Nantille Ridge

TREKKING IN THE LADAKH RANGE, NORTHERN INDIA:

DIARY OF THE YRC EXPLORATION GROUP MEET

Ladakh is the most northerly territory of India, twice the size of Switzerland, strategically sandwiched between Pakistan, China and Tibet. Part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh maintains a separate religious and cultural identity more akin to Tibet before the Chinese invasion and subsequent emasculation of the Buddhist religion.

Geographically in the rain shadow of the main Himalayan range, Ladakh is a high altitude desert, historically riven by extensive glaciation and later incised by melt-water drainage. The Ladakh Range is the group of granite mountains dividing the Indus valley to the south from the Shyok and lower part of the Nubra river valleys to the north. The range is crossed by the "world's highest motorable road", the Khardung La (5602m/18,380ft) and the third highest, the Chang La (5300m/18,280ft). Ladakh was closed until 1994, but now only requires an Inner Line Permit to obtain access. The area has much trekking and climbing potential. It has so far been largely ignored by the mainstream international trekking companies. It was thus an attractive venue for the inaugural Exploration Group meet with both trekking and modest mountaineering objectives.

Our itinerary was to fly to Dehli and then on to Leh after a day's sightseeing. We had four days in Leh (3500m/11,500ft) to ensure acclimatisation. A programme of culture, short walks and white-water rafting on the Indus kept members entertained! Before we started the trek, a detour allowed us to visit Pangong Tso, one of the land-locked lakes straddling the border with Tibet.

The first leg was over a series of passes to the Shyok River valley with an extension to the access limit up the Nubra valley. The second leg of the trek was the return over the Ladakh Range via a little visited area offering the potential of some easy grade mountaineering up to 6000m, before a traverse of the Lasirmou La (5550m) returned us to the Indus valley. A day in hand allowed for any internal flight delays. If all went well, we would have a visit to Agra on the return to Dehli before the flight home.

LOGISTICS - Rimo Expeditions, headquartered in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, was engaged by Albert as the trekking company and their team headed by MD, Motup, made the necessary logistical arrangements and personally accompanied us on the second leg of the trek from Hundar. An experienced nine-strong Nepali trekking crew was provided and two local ponymen accompanied the trek with a string of mules and pack horses. The arrangements and staff were unequivocally first rate and Rimo can be recommended unreservedly as a trekking agency.

YRC MEMBERS AND GUESTS

Albert Chapman – Leader,
Mick Borroff, George Burfitt,
Jane Butler (guest), David Hick,
Frank Wilkinson, Chris Hilton,
Ian Crowther (part),
Dorothy Crowther(guest: part),
Paul Dover, Richard Dover,
Arthur Salmon,
Peter Hodge (guest),
Ann Luck - (guest),

NEPALI TREKKING CREW FROM RIMO EXPEDITIONS
Nir Kumar (Sirdar) Kumar Gurung (Head Cook, Michelin starred in our view!), Ganga Rai (Second Cook) Sangay Phuri and Ang Dame (Climbing Sherpas) Gyalo Sherpa, Pemba Bhote, Jhon Lama, Karma Lama Tsering Tnzemg and Kunchok Gyalen (Ladakhi Ponymen from Tangtse)

ITINERARY

Sat 27/8 Transit to India
We flew to Delhi via Paris arriving in the capital's steamy heat. A coach transferred us to the cool l uxury of the Imperial Hotel, just in time for a beer before the bar closed at midnight.

Sun 28/8 Delhi
After doing full justice to the Imperial's renowned breakfast buffet, we embarked on a sightseeing tour of Delhi – old and new. Those who had been here before noted the remarkable reduction in air pollution following the government's mandatory conversion of all public transport, taxis and tut-tuts to LPG, especially noticeable in the Old Delhi bazaar. We visited Jama Masjid, the largest mosque in India, climbing one of the minarets to admire Dehli's roofscape and the wheeling black kites overhead.

This was followed by a tour round the parliamentary and government buildings of New Delhi and a short visit to the First World War memorial of India Gate. After the de rigour exposure to the sales skills of the Kashmiri carpet dealers, the day was rounded off with a superb Indian meal.

Mon 29/8 Transfer to Leh
We were up at 0300 for a 0630 departure from the domestic terminal and soon we were over-flying Himachal Pradesh and then the seemingly endless ridges and glaciers of the Zanskar mountains. After an hour's flight, an exacting approach into Leh airport delivered us into a bright, warm morning with clear blue skies and the clean notes of mountain air. We were soon ensconced in the Hotel Kang-Lha-Chen drinking tea on the lawn, surrounded by dahlias, day lilies and marigolds, being overlooked by the forbidding ramparts of Leh Palace. The altitude (3500m/11,500ft) dictated little more than a gentle stroll around Leh, after an excellent Italian lunch.

Tue 30/8 Visits to Monasteries in the Indus Valley
At 5 a.m. the over-amplified, but mellifluous, call to prayer of the Sunni muezzin in the Jama Masjid mosque summoned us prematurely to breakfast. The second acclimatisation day was an exposure to the interesting and colourful culture of Buddhism, the religion of the majority in Ladakh.

The jeeps took us up to Stok Palace, nestling under the trekking peak of Stok Kangri (6153m/20,188ft) and the present day home of the King of Ladakh. Now a titular head without actual political power, he politely bid us good morning, while talking into a mobile phone.

Returning past a field of whitewashed chortens, we were taken via Shey Palace to Tikse Gompa, where the yellow hat monks were being filmed for movie entitled "The Last Monk", whilst performing their traditional dances to the throbbing accompaniment of drums, cymbals and deep horn blasts.

Wed 31/8 Rafting Down the Indus River

The next phase of our acclimatisation was somewhat aquatic with a 26km descent of the Indus River from They to Nimu, negotiating white water rapids up to Grade 3 en route, passing the chilly confluence with the Zanskar River. Our Nepali river guides quickly took onboard that we were all game for a laugh and deftly navigated the rafts accordingly. Multiple side slips into minor rapids ensured we all received frequent soakings, followed by some epic splashing battles, rounded off at the end with an al fresco curry lunch.

The afternoon and early evening was taken up with more sightseeing around Leh, with various members negotiating the 554 steps up to Shanti Stupa, or wandering aound the narrow streets and alleys of the old part of Leh and the bazaar. George and Mick made a slow ascent to the fort and temples of Tashi Namgyal, heavy with prayer flags, which overlooked Leh. The effort rewarded us with stupendous panoramic views in the dying sun over the Indus valley to the Stok range.

Thu 1/9 Leh Festival

We spent the morning amongst the procession of villagers, monks, dance troupes, musicians, polo ponies, yaks and Bactrian camels that comprises the annual Leh Festival. Originally started by the authorities to extend the tourist season, it has clearly matured into a major event for the region and along with the tourists draws Ladakhis from all parts, to participate in or simply watch the show.

After a delicious curry back at the hotel, plastic boots, crampons and ice axes were checked and fettled, with some gear borrowed from Rimo Expeditions where necessary and final preparations made to leave Leh in the morning.

Fri 2/9 Across the Ladakh Range

The jeeps took us back up the Indus valley to Karu, where we turned north and began the approach to the Chang La pass.

We stopped to visit Chemre Gompa on another magnificent hilltop setting and had a tour around the various temples and Buddhist icons.

At 17,700ft/5300m, the Chang La is claimed to be the third highest road pass in the world (after the 5602m Khardung La, north of Leh and the Taglang La at 5359m to the south on the Leh-Manali road). We paused to take in the stupendous views of the Eastern Karakorum peaks, before descending to the summer pastures of Muglib, where our camp was being set up on a grassy meadow next to a sparkling stream at about 4338m/14,400ft. A pre-prandial ascent up a rocky side valley provided some acclimatisation exercise and everyone was in bed by 2130 for an early start in the morning.

Sat 3/9 Pangong Tso

Bed tea at 0430 didn't wake us. The herders' dogs from the adjacent encampment had done that twice already! The jeeps took us along a wide flat valley passing a number of sinuous side streams to reach Pangong Tso, a vast lake 150km long and 4km wide with no outlet, nestling on the border between Tibet and India. Although only a few ducks were in evidence, we admired the ever-changing colours as the sun rose over the mountaintops, bringing much welcome warmth to the chilly morning.

Breakfast was greedily devoured back at camp and the jeeps took us back past Tangse village and up a side valley to visit Nimlung? village, where the locals were introduced to the instant wonders of digital photography. We saw a hoopoe, various ducks and our first golden furred Himalayan marmots. Ian and Dorothy then left us for their mini-trek back in the Indus valley.

Another jeep ride took us to Partee (4640m), the site of our next camp by another mountain stream. The two ponymen and their string of sixteen pack mules and horses arrived from Tangse as arranged.

Pausing for some tea, various parties scaled the slopes above the campsite to prospect the start of the trekking route opposite.

Sun 4/9 The Trek Begins - Over the Partee La
This is where we started the soon-to-be-familiar pattern of 0600 bed tea, 0630 washing water, an excellent breakfast at 0700 and departure at 0800. After a five hour climb we reached the circular cairn at the Partee La (5070m) where we disturbed a small herd of bharal (blue sheep) – the principal prey of the snow leopards - and some Himalayan choughs. We drank in the views of the distant Eastern Karakorum peaks before descending the rocky slopes to the Rale valley below for lunch beside the stream.

Our night's camp was established at around 4940m on a flattish area below the Nebuk La, where Kumar and his assistants prepared another stunning dinner.

Mon 5/9 Over the Nebuk La
A fairly easy 850m ascent soon had us on top of the next pass, the Nebuk La at 5440m, where we saw a flock of Tibetan sand grouse. A steep descent down a rocky valley followed by the pony train, took us to the next camp below the pastures of Tangyur Phu (4405m), where a pair of sleek, plump marmots provided some entertainment.

Tue 6/9 Down to Tangyur
After breakfast the ponies were nowhere to be seen! Tsering and Kunchok took hours to scour the hillsides to round them up from their distant grazing and return them to the camp to receive their loads. Meanwhile we descended to the mani wall and chortens heralding the entrance to the village of Tangyur (3990m). Delightfully set amongst terraced fields of ripe barley and overlooked by its monastery perched above, we waited for the missing string of eight ponies to bring the tents down to set up camp. The village was almost deserted, as most of the occupants were lower down the valley harvesting their barley crops.

Once all ponies were present, their shoes were checked and they were fed on newly purchased barley straw as the grazing close to the village was non-existent. Several clearly had a taste for the grain and six had to be extracted from an adjacent field in the morning much to the dismay of its owner.

Wed 7/9 Over the Kyema La
We left Tangyur passing more villagers cutting their barley with sickles and gathering it into stooks to dry in the sun. It was an odd juxtaposition to see government issued solar panels on the flat roofed stone houses, with their piles of dung drying for winter fuel, with tightly corralled goats and sheep, a scene little changed from medieval times.

After a hot, dusty three hour climb from the camp we gained the cairned top of the Kyema La (4590m) and saw Kyema village on the other side of a deep ravine. After lunch, this village was soon reached and we descended a spectacular gorge cut through glacial conglomerate moraine to reach Khyungru, where we camped beside the stream in a lush shady willow grove at 3460m.

The murmuring of the stream in the small hours was disturbed by a rather more acute cry as Albert's kidney stones made themselves painfully felt. Fortunately Jane had the appropriate analgesia in the medical kit and competently administered it, providing rapid pain relief.

Thu 8/9 Along the Shyok Valley to Khalsar

After breakfast a party was despatched to commandeer a jeep to take Albert and Jane closer to the foot of the Khardung pass, in case an urgent medical evacuation to Leh was needed. Following their departure, our now leaderless party descended to the wide stony Shyok river valley along a newly constructed road. There we turned northwest and begun the eleven-mile hike along the highway in the baking heat of the desert.

Whilst opposite the green oasis of Rongdu village, some jeeps were sighted in the distant haze - was it a hallucination or just a mirage? Fortunately real, they had been despatched to collect us. The planned campsite at Ose had insufficient water or grazing for our party and we were soon in Khalsar enjoying a late lunch and a beer under a silk parachute canopy.

The planned rafting trip had to be abandoned because of low water conditions in the liquid-cement-like Shyok river. We camped in a grassy field in Khalsar, where we met our first westerners – three Israeli lads, who were backpacking.

Fri 9/9 The Nubra Valley

The jeeps took us further along the Shyok, before turning northwest across a suspension bridge to ascend the Nubra Valley, which drains the Siachen glacier. We stopped at Kyagar (also called Tiggur) where we had one night in the luxury of the Yarab Tso Hotel. Here we caught up with Albert, who was feeling much better in response to Ann's timely nursing care (and the diclofenac!); and Ian and Dorothy.

After taking tea in the flower garden, the jeeps took us to Panamik, the authorised limit of our Inner Line tourist permit. Here we went to inspect the hot springs, where eggs could have been boiled if we had brought them with us!

Variously, we visited the old gompa above Tiggur village, walked up to Samstalung Gompa, explored the village or just chilled out.

Another British party were also staying in the hotel. Relatives of John Jackson, a well known climber and member of the Alpine Club who died recently, had decided to visit Ladakh to scatter his ashes. Subsequently, John Jackson, Jnr attended our Annual Dinner as Albert's guest.

Sat 10/9 Ladakh Festival Caravan

Mid-morning saw us back at Panamik where the final part of the Ladakh festival was to start – a caravan journey down the Nubra to commemorate the journeys of the historical travellers along the silk route from Yarkand (now in China), discontinued after the Sino-Indian war. The event was a much smaller affair than the extravaganza in Leh and had the more intimate atmosphere of a village carnival. The local beauties performed their graceful dances in traditional dress to the playing of clarinets and vibrant drum beats. Cups of very palatable chang were handed out to refresh the watching locals and tourists alike!

After lunch, we visited Samstaling Gompa and were taken round several inner temples, with their colourful wall paintings and ornate statuary, followed by taking tea and biscuits with a senior monk.

The jeeps took us back down to the Shyok and west to the small scruffy town of Deskit and onto the village of Hundar, where we rejoined our trekking crew. Ian and Dorothy departed for Srinagar and a houseboat on the peaceful waters of Dal Lake.

Sun 11/9 Up to Skarchen and Gogma

We left Hundar and hiked south on a new road still being constructed up the valley towards the higher villages. We crossed the river on a cantilevered bridge and up an increasingly impressive canyon. A

switchback trail led high above the river and we later watched anxiously as the laden ponies were encouraged over difficult exposed sections, where a slip would have been disastrous. Fortunately they were all sure footed and arrived at our lunch stop at the shepherds' shelters at Skarchen.

Crossing the river again we soon reached our camp sited outside Gogma village, where the river divided. We would firstly ascend the Palzampiu river to access our mountaineering objectives, before returning later to traverse the Thanglasgo stream to reach the Lasirmou La.

Mon 12/9 Up the Palzampiu River

We walked up the river valley sometimes in the canyon cut through old moraines and sometimes on the canyon's edge to the summer pastures of Palzampiu Dok at about 4600m, where our camp was established, shared with the local shepherds, their friendly dog and a large flock of sheep and long haired goats.

Several members ascended a rocky granite ridge, scrambling up various outcrops to prospect possible routes to the mountains above. A formidable innominate and unclimbed 6000m peak, whose steep north face presented us with a rebarbative prospect, dominated the view to the south. A satellite snow capped peak at the base of its north east ridge looked more feasible, either by continuing up our rocky ridge or by an adjacent snow gully and was taken to be Dawa peak.

Further away and to the south west of the 6000m peak, was a sinuous glacier leading to another triangular snow peak. Due west on the other side of the Palzampiu valley was Ajungliung (6020m), climbed in 2004 by a French party by a mixed route. The views back down the valley were dominated by Saser Kangri (7670m/25,165ft) Ladakh's highest mountain.

Tue 13/9 High Camp

Cloudy skies oversaw our departure from camp as we picked our way due south up a side valley to establish our high camp in a blizzard at about 5000m. The unnamed granite peak above us disappeared into the clouds.

After the ponies arrived, camp was set up and a late lunch prepared. Once the snow had stopped, the couple of hours before darkness were spent exploring the start of routes to the snow gully and to the glacier snout. Over dinner, it was decided to climb the nearer of the two snow mountains, which we thought was Dawa peak and we all retired early.

Wed 14/9 Ascent of Samgil Peak

The weather improved to its usual blue sky and after a substantial breakfast, the climbing party set off from the camp and picked their way up the steep stony slopes to the snow tongue noted the previous day. Three ropes were eventually formed (1: Sangay, Mick, Chris, George, Richard and Arthur; 2: Ang Dame, Jane, Frank, David and Peter; 3: Motup, Ann, Albert and Paul) and all finally made it to the summit, where a cairn was erected at (5811m/19066ft). The view over to the adjacent north wall and unremittingly steep ice gullies of the unclimbed peak was still intimidating.

On the descent, we met up with the Jackson party who had established their high camp just above ours. Their Nepali Sirdar told us that we had just climbed Samgil peak, named after the Sherpa who made the first ascent. He identified Dawa peak, which had also been climbed by a Sherpa, as the peak above the twisting glacier at the end of the valley.

SAMGIL PEAK

Thu 15/9 Ascent of Dawa Peak

The alarm went off at 0200 and lips were scalded on the hot tea thrust under three flysheets. We - Mick, Chris and Richard - blinked sleep away over breakfast in the chilly dining tent, before accompanying Sangay and Ang Dame out into the cold starlit night at 0300. We climbed up to the terminal moraine and picked our way up the granite boulder slope onto the bare glacier snout, leading to the snow slopes above. We fixed traction control devices and roped up, we made steady progress uphill as the dawn broke into a cloudless blue sky.

The warmth of the sun was welcomed as we continued to crampon upwards towards Dawa Peak (5875m), summiting uneventfully at about 0800. The views were stunning, from the Saser Kangri peaks looming above the distant Nubra valley, to the brown granite spires and snow capped peaks in the Ladakh range. In high spirits, we retraced our steps and stopped at the Jackson's camp for lunch at midday (they were ascending Samgil Peak and our encampment was now on the ponies' backs to be re-erected at the summer grazing site of Palzampiu Dok). Three hours later we joined the rest of the party at camp for a celebratory beer and a welcome rest.

Fri 16/9 Descent to Hundar Dok

Leaving the two shepherds and their dog guarding the communal flock of 300 goats and 50 sheep belonging to the Hundar villagers, we began our descent. We returned down the Palzampiu river back to Gogma, where we turned south into the Thanglasgo valley to follow the river up to the pastoral village of Hundar Dok, where a lesson in the open air was underway for the children at the primary school.

Passing the confluence with the Sniamo river, which drains another wild valley with unclimbed 5-6000m peaks to the south-west, we followed the sparkling stream through increasingly beautiful scenery to an idyllic riverside camp at Tsopu Cse.

Sat 17/9 Up the Thanglasgo River

The fine weather continued as we ascended the lovely unspoilt alpine valley to gain the approach to the Lasirmou pass across the Ladakh range, which would return us to the Indus valley, camping by the river at about 4960m.

Sun 18/9 Over the Lasirmou La

We made an early start under now cloudy skies, which developed into snow showers as we ascended lengthy moraine fields before gaining the snow slopes leading to the prayer flagged cairns at 5550m. A steep stony descent down the moraines on the other side was made, in weather more suited to Scotland.

After lunch in a rough stone shelter, Chris, George and Mick survived a confrontation with a belligerent one-horned yak, which, after pawing the ground, thankfully deflected his charge in the face of combined shouts and a few well-aimed stones!

Our final camp was established at the road head at Morabuk pastures, above the village of Phiang. Balloons were inflated, flags unfurled and the dinner tent readied for the final festivities. The trekking crew had challenged the YRC to an after-dinner singing competition and Arthur led our rehearsals. Kumar and his team pulled out all the stops and provided a tremendous farewell dinner, thoroughly deserving our unanimous praise for the consistently good food, the best any of us had ever eaten on a Himalayan trek.

After dinner, and quite a few beers later, the singing began. A rousing Ilkley Moor Baht 'at was countered by an equally rousing Rasem Kilili (now almost the Nepali national anthem) and so on into the night, before Motup decided it was too close to call and judged it a draw.

Mon 19/9 Return to Leh
After breakfast we all posed for the team photographs and presented each member of the trekking crew and the ponymen with a token of our deep appreciation for their unstinting efforts on our behalf. The gear was loaded into jeeps and we said our goodbyes.

Back in Leh, George, Paul, Richard and Mick had decided to tackle the descent from the Khardung La by mountain bike and had negotiated a lift up to the high point. The pass has time-bound access restrictions to allow transit of military convoys. Fettling the brakes on all the bikes delayed us and we were somewhat late for the access cut-off at 1100. We were stopped by the military at the checkpoint of South Pullu 25km from Leh, still shy of the summit. Still, the descent from there to the capital was an excellent downhill ride.

Tue 20/9 Dehli and on to Agra
The early morning flight took us back over Zanskar and delivered us to the humid hubbub of Dehli and a coach whisked us off to Agra, for a tour of the Red Fort before dinner and a party with Agra's hoteliers.

Wed 21/9 Agra to Dehli
Sunrise saw us admiring the splendour of the Taj Mahal, still impressive despite the hype. We then returned to Dehli for our farewell dinner with Motup and his family, before a late flight returned us overnight to Europe.

POSTSCRIPT
The scenes of destruction following the earthquake in Pakistani Kashmir resonated with many members, who could understand only too well the consequences for the survivors in the hill villages. We heard by e-mail that the tremors had not been felt in Ladakh and that the areas we visited were thankfully unaffected.

Mick Borroff.

RAFTING ON THE INDUS

On the 31st of August, after a leisurly breakfast we were driven down to the banks of the Indus river at Fey, where we arrived at 10:00. After donning lifejackets and helmets, which fitted snuggly over baseball caps gifted from Motup of Rimo Expeditions, our "need to know" trek advisers, we had a quick lesson on the commands that we could expect including "DOWN" which meant getting off the gun'le (gunwhale) into the bottom of the raft as the raft is about to drop into a hole in the river. All the cox'ns were from Nepal and would be going home in a couple of weeks at the end of the season.

We embarked at 10:30 and set off. Being in the last boat with the International set, it was interesting to observe the juvenile antics going on between boats one and two. Obviously discipline was at a premium.

However that aside, all the grade 2 "rapids" were easily negotiated. We stopped for a pee and camera shoot after 2 hours and then proceeded on to the confluence of the Indus and the Zanskar river which seemed to be bigger and faster than the Indus whose name the combined rivers took. (The Indus comes out to sea just south of Karachi). Not long after this we came ashore near the village of NIMU and were served an excellent hot lunch. Susequently all the meals were of this high standard. From there we were driven back to LEH and the hotel.

There was very little vegetation on the scree slopes and rocky mountains beside the river, not even close by the water. Sometimes scrubby trees and then way up at the top of the scree a bright green dot of vegetation. The odd pair of pidgeons were seen and wagtails were quite common, also several deer like animals. Otherwise it was mountains of moraine that the river had cut through and high craggy peaks of mainly red/brown stratified slates. In places these reds near the river appeared to be shiny and smooth as though they had been wax and heated and left to cool or could even have been water worn. I was informed by one of the Indian ladies in our boat that this shininess was mica in the rock.

The water was not too cold as some of the party took the chance of a dip, but before the confluence. The Zanskar was much colder. It was a thoroughly satisfying day and a good training for the trip that we should have had on the Shyok, which was cancelled because of low water. When we got to the Shyok the water looked like liquid cement so would not have been very pleasant to play in.

Crew of boat 1: George Burfitt, Albert Chapman, Mick Borroff, Dace Hicks, Richard Dover, Paul Dover, Chris Hilton and Arthur Salmon.
Crew of boat 2: Frank Wilkinson, Jane Butler, Ann Luck and others.
Crew of boat 3: Ian Crowther, Peter Hodge, 3 Indian ladies, 1 Israeli guy and 2 Irish girls.
Dorothy stayed ashore.

Peter Hodge

CYCLING DOWN THE KHARDUNG LA (19.09.05)

Not content with 13 days trekking, 17 nights under canvas and a days rafting four members of the group, namely Mick, Chris, Paul and Richard, decided they needed one final new experience. As the Khardung La (5602m) is the world's highest road pass and descends to Leh we requested that we ought to be taken to the top of the pass by motor vehicle in order to cycle the 43 km back to Leh, a descent of 2100m (~6900 ft). Motup, M.D. of Rimo Expeditions, arranged for us to be picked up from our final camp early in order that we could return to Leh, pick up some bikes and pass through the control gates halfway up the pass before it was closed to public access.

Conscious of the descent ahead of us, we all required some adjustment to the cycles we were offered back in Leh. Mike took the prize by totally rejecting his first bike and needed a total brake overhaul and a replacement wheel for his second. Tying four bikes onto the roof of the Jeep type vehicle with no cycle rack also proved to be a tricky operation. Eventually the intrepid four supported by Frank left Leh for the ascent of the pass. The first problem we encountered was just out of Leh when the driver didn't have the correct paperwork. Negotiation and gesticulation eventually bore fruit and we were allowed to continue. The temperature decreased significantly as we climbed and on reaching the control gate at South Pula we had to wait for a lorry loaded with road workers to come in front of us. Unfortunately this marked the end of public access to the higher pass and we were unable to go any further. The road was closed for maintenance. We were at a mere 4850m and 24 km from Leh, thus missing out on the top 10km of unmade road.

Undaunted, we unloaded the bikes and added a few layers of clothing before Frank photographed the group and waved us off.

The concerns over braking efficiency back at Leh proved to have been unfounded. The gradient was gentle at an average of 1 in 20 and at times it was necessary to actually pedal, brakes only being necessary when entering the many hairpin bends. Several stops were made to photograph the splendid views of the Indus valley and the greenery of the Fuchu Chu surrounding Leh.

Paul and Richard decided a little more adventure was required and took to a more direct descent using tracks and open ground, thus reducing the overall distance considerably. Probably the trickiest part of the ride was navigating from the outskirts of Leh back to the Hotel, but this was accomplished by all and we made it back to base in time for lunch.

Not quite what we had envisaged, but nevertheless a very pleasant morning's exercise.

Richard Dover.

LADAKHI PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The climate of Ladak is cold and inhospitable, unlike the inhabitants! Wrinkled faces with sunny smiles greet you everywhere with a nod of the head and the greeting 'Jhuley'. Ladakhis are renowned for their unrestrained hospitality that people on the trip were to experience time and time again.

The people of Ladakh are hardy and tough like the rugged mountains which surround their homes and yet very soft and plain at heart. With round faces, short noses, and chinki eyes they resemble the people of Tibet and central Asia. The original population is believed to have been the Dards, an Indo-Aryan race from further down the Indus. But over the years, a huge influx from Tibet overwhelmed the culture of the Dards and obliterated their racial characteristics. In eastern and central Ladakh, today's population seems to be mostly of Tibetan origin. Further west, in and around Kargil, there is much in the people's appearance that suggests a mixed origin. The exception to this generalization is the "Arghon", a community of Muslims in Leh, the descendants of marriages between local women and Kashmiri or Central Asian merchants.

Buddhism reached Tibet from India via Ladakh and there are ancient Buddhist rock engravings all over the region, even in areas like Drass and the lower Suru valley, which today are inhabited by an exclusively Muslim population. The approach to a Buddhist Village is invariably marked by 'Mani' walls, which are chest-high structures faced with engraved stones bearing the mantra "Om Mane Padme Hum". Many villages are crowned with a Gompa or monastery, which may be anything from an imposing complex of temples, prayer halls and monks' dwellings, to a tiny hermitage housing a single image and home to a solitary Lama.

Islam too came from the west. A peaceful penetration of the Shia sect spearheaded by missionaries, its success was guaranteed by the early conversion of the sub-rulers of Drass, Kargil and the Suru Valley. In these areas, Mani walls and Chorten are replaced by mosques, often small unpretentious buildings, or Imambaras, imposing structures in the Islamic style, surmounted by domes of sheet metal that gleam cheerfully in the sun. In the Leh area women of both the communities, Buddhist and Muslim, enjoy a greater freedom than other parts of the region. They not only work in the house and field, but also do business and interact freely with men other than their own relations. In Kargil and its adjoining regions on the other hand, it is only in the last few years that women are merging from semi-seclusion and taking jobs other than traditional ones like farming and house-keeping.

Monastic and other religious festivals, many of which fall in winter, provide the excuse for convivial gatherings. All over the region, summer pastimes are archery and polo. Among the Buddhists, these often develop into open-air parties accompanied by dance and song, at which Chang, the local brew made from fermented barley, flows freely. The most important element is the rich oral literature of songs and poems for every occasions, as well as local versions of the Kesar Saga, the Tibetan national epic. This literature is common to both Buddhists and Muslims.

Ceremonial and public events are accompanied by the characteristic music of Surna and Daman (Oboe and drum), originally introduced into Ladakh from Muslim Baltistan, but now played only by Buddhist musicians known as Mons. The first year of childbirth is marked by celebrations at different intervals of time, Beginning with a function held after 15 days, then after one month, and then again at the end of year. All relatives, neighbours and friends are invited and served with Tsampa, butter and sugar, along with tea by the family into which the child is born. There is a mix of music and dance, joy and laughter in the air whenever a marriage is held. The first day is spent in feasting at the bride's house, the second at the groom's place. After the wedding, the bride goes to live in the house of the bridegroom. Boys are usually married or promised for marriage at about 16 and girls at about 12. To make a proposal, a relative of the boy goes to the house of the girl and gives a ring together with presents of butter, tea and Chang. If the gifts are accepted then the marriage follows some months later. The boy offers a necklace and clothes to the girl. The parents of the girl give the couple clothes, animals and land if they are rich. These gifts are known as a Raqtqaq or dowry.

When the father of the family dies, his place is taken by the eldest brother. The other brothers must obey the eldest brother. All inheritance of the family goes to the eldest brother and then to the next brother when he dies. If the family consists of all girls, then the father will bring the husband of the eldest daughter into the house and all land stays in the daughter's name and passes to her first son. Both sets of parents must accept the proposal of the boy for the girl. Usually the marriage is set by both sets of parents, who will choose a suitable partner for their child on the basis of manner, health and ability to earn income and look after a house.

Polo and archery are the two favourite pastimes. In Leh, and many of the villages, archery festivals are held during the summer months, with a lot of fun and fanfare. Different teams from surrounding villages compete with each other in these archery festivals, and the shooting takes place according to strict etiquette, to the accompaniment of the music of surna and daman. As important as the archery are the interludes of dancing and other entertainment. Chang, the local barley beer, flows freely, but there is rarely any rowdiness. Unlike the international game, Polo in Ladakh is not exclusively for the rich. Traditionally, almost every village had its polo ground. Probably introduced into Ladakh in the mid-17th century by King Sengge Namgyal, Polo played here differs in many respects from the international game. Here, each team consists of six players, and the game lasts for an hour with a ten minute break. Notwithstanding the altitude, the hardy local ponies, the best of which come from Zanskar, scarcely seem to suffer, though play can be fast and furious. Each goal is greeted by a burst of music from surna and daman; and the players often show extraordinary skill. For example, when starting play after a goal the scorer gallops up to midfield holding the ball and mallet in the right hand, and throws the ball, hitting it in the same movement towards the opposite goal. Unfortunately, we weren't lucky enough to see a polo match, but we did see some of the players and their horses at the festival in Leh.

The whole trip was a very special experience. I didn't know what to expect and didn't have any expectations. I felt very privileged to be able to go and will treasure my memories forever.

Jane Butler

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION

The approach to Leh by air passes over the Indus valley and reveals an extremely arid climate giving the impression of a moonscape, only land along the riverbanks looked to have any vegetation. In fact, the annual rainfall in Leh is 114 mm, approximately 25% of that in the driest parts of England.

CROP PRODUCTION

When we took our first, walk round Leh it was very surprising to see the wide range of high quality fruit and vegetables on sale by local women squatting along the kerbs of the high-street and from market stalls. These included apricots, the main local tree-fruit and the wide range of familiar vegetables

including fresh peas, brassicas notably cauliflower, potatoes and carrots. All appeared to be very healthy and free from the problem pests and diseases commonly found in British produce unless appropriate control measures are taken. This aspect was not surprising in view of the dry climate, high altitude (3500m-11,500 ft) and complete isolation from any other crop production areas. However, it posed a big question in my mind as to where they might be grown in such an arid climate? All was revealed when we walked up the valley above the town two days later, a range of cereal, forage and vegetable crops were being grown on small plots with the aid of surface irrigation.

The water comes from the rivers and streams flowing from the snowfields. These are dammed and the water diverted to the field or crop where it was most required. This is the essential feature of crop production throughout the area of our visit. In the high mountain valleys where we trekked, much of the crop production was on plateaux often hundreds of metres above the valley floor. These involved bringing water from the rivers and streams in aqueducts for long distances contouring along the mountainside.

The lower Nubra valley around Tiggur at around 3000m (10,000 ft) is a wide flood plain with more fertile areas interspersed with rocky moraines. This enables a wider range of crops to be grown although vegetables were only seen in the hotel garden. In the nearby fields, wheat seemed to be the dominant cereal and the presence of a few ubiquitous wild oat plants was notable, suggesting that seed is imported from more productive arable regions. The cereal crops were sown in April/May and were being harvested during our tour by family or village groups using short handled sickles, although many of the plants appeared to be torn up with the roots still attached. The cut/pulled stems were very neatly laid in rows base-up to dry. This communal activity was often signalled by a chorus of happy chanting. After drying in the field, the crops were carried home in bundles on peoples backs, usually so large, that from behind only the lower legs and feet were showing. The grain was typically threshed in small 'village' threshing yards in late September. Mustard crops were only seen in Tiggur, it had been harvested and was being winnowed, ineffectively, in the field by an elderly couple.

Surprisingly, considering its origin is in the high Andes, potatoes were not widely grown and only seen around Leh and Tiggur. Here, the crops were being de-foliated, again by sickle, and the haulm carried home presumably for livestock feed, although this is poisonous in the fresh state. The crops appeared free from the notable haulm diseases, potato blight and viruses no doubt due to the severe winter climate and crop isolation. They are grown on the flat rather than in ridges as here. More importantly for us, when cooked they were delicious!

Legume crops such as sainfoin provided the forage for livestock. This had mostly been harvested by early September and was stored around the edge of the buildings above the walls, a common characteristic in all the rural villages. These crops are deep rooted thereby more drought tolerant and enrich the soil by fixing nitrogen and hence increase the soil fertility for following cereal crops.

At higher elevations, above about 3500m (11550 ft), the dominant crop was a 6-rowed barley, which at the highest elevations in the summer villages was harvested green due to the summer being too short for it to ripen. In such situations, it then had to be carried, often long distances, on yaks to the winter village.

On our return to Leh above the Indus valley, we passed a small thresher, the only agricultural machinery seen in Ladakh.

LIVESTOCK

In common with other areas of India, cattle commonly wandered round the town of Leh, grazing on waste and rubbish along the streets; strangely, their faeces were rarely encountered!

On the outskirts of Leh, I visited a Government cattle-breeding centre, more a demonstration farm to show good breeding and husbandry practice. My visit coincided with that of the local government vet who was also the cattle inseminator and who was collecting semen straws for use with local herds. I learned that the preferred milk cows are a 3-way cross based on a first-cross indigenous cow mated to a Jersey or Holstein bull, the farm had small herds of both crosses. On 1st September, 17 cows in milk produced 70 litres and was keenly sought by local people. It was ladled out from buckets and carried away

in all types of containers; they had sold out by 07.30. The cows were fed a ration of Sainfoin hay and cereals. By contrast, heifers were seen eating dried leaves from coppiced trees similar to poplar in the village above Leh.

Cattle are crossed with Yak to cope with the harsher climate at higher altitudes. The resulting hybrids females are called Dzomo, which are fertile and males are Dzo, but are infertile. They are robust hardy animals and the Dzo are used for draft tasks.

Very few cattle were seen in the Nubra valley although crops of sainfoin had been harvested, suggesting that most cattle were housed. At higher altitudes a number of small 'village' herds were seen grazing on extremely modest vegetation. These were typically a mixture of cattle, yak- hybrids, mules and donkeys and herded by groups of villagers. Yak were only seen above 4,000m (13,200 ft) where they were herded by families living in temporary summer camps.

In the upper Palzampiu Tokpo, the site of our base camp, a 'village flock' of around 1000 sheep and 300 goats grazed from April to late September. These came from a village below Hundar in the Shyok valley. The shepherds, of whom there were about four at a time, worked on a 15-day rota. Their 'accommodation' was a polythene sheet secured to four stone walls. This contrasted with the herders in Muglib and Changtung, the sites of our first and second camps, where families lived under 'parachute tents'. Each night, all herded livestock were brought in to small compounds adjacent to the shepherd's accommodation. In addition to the herding dogs, the shepherds used slings to propel stones towards the animals to move them on. Feed was exceedingly sparse and so the flocks covered vast areas to sustain themselves.

DELHI TO AGRA

Agra is on the river Jumna and our route followed this wide valley near the western boundary of Uttar Pradesh. Land use is primarily for crop production but flocks of sheep and herds of cattle were in evidence, usually walking down the dual carriageway-in the wrong direction! The crops included sugar cane in the drier areas with rice on the lower areas capable of being flooded. There was also evidence of banana and cotton production. Field cultivations were mechanised although there were few activities at the time of our visit. There were numerous small thatched round-houses dotted throughout the landscape but it was note clear whether these were family accommodation or used for other purposes.

The visit provided an interesting insight into the rural lifestyles. The consistent feature was their cheerful nature.

Paul Dover

LADAKH WILDLIFE

Newcomers to Ladakh may be excused for thinking that they were arriving in a cold desert with rugged mountains and serrated ridges running down to flat glacier-fed river valleys. In fact, the members of the YRC trip to this remote part of the Indian Himalayas were able to observe interesting animals, birds and flowers.

A white-water rafting trip on the River Indus provided the means to approach a small herd of antelopes, possibly chiru, an endangered animal hunted for the fine wool from its underbelly used to make shahtoosh, a soft woollen fibre used for shawls and scarves. On another occasion a bharal, or blue sheep, ran straight towards our camp and closely skirted our tents before standing on a small hill behind us outlined against the sky. We also observed marmots and other small rodents.

We saw golden eagles, lammergeyer vultures and buzzards. Black kites, which we observed in their hundreds over Delhi, could be seen over most villages and towns. Hoopoe, black redstarts and white-browed wagtails kept the twitchers among us on our toes.

September is not the best month to spot wild flowers in such an arid landscape, but on the northern slopes of the high passes we crossed, winter was just releasing its grip and summer flowers were making the most of the short growing season.

Edelweiss were quite common, as were gentians with long striped trumpets. Hairy bluebell flowers poked through snow patches, while ground-hugging yellow star-shaped flowers and vivid red sedum clumps were to be found near rivers. The scent of herbs crushed underfoot by our passing will long be remembered.

Are yaks domesticated tame creatures? Three of our group would contest this having been attacked on the descent from our last pass by a grumpy, shaggy long-horned juggernaut.

We didn't see a snow leopard, but Ladakh proved to be anything but a sterile desert.

David Hick

REFLECTIONS ON THE TREK

'God made Ladakh and we connect it to rest of the world' or so the road maker's sign would have us believe. This I now believe. Just as I now believe that it is possible to experience heat exposure in desert temperatures above 30°C one day and to be snow bound the next. Perhaps I am even beginning to believe that a female can thrive in the all male society that is the YRC. Such was the emotional impact of India. Everyone should have the opportunity to trek the Himalaya at least once in their lifetime. I was fortunate to be making my 6th journey to this phenomenal range. This particular trip was to be one of the most poignant as it followed a 5 year absence from the Indian sub-continent. It was to provide me with the peace I had sought since the untimely death of my mother last year. I left feeling comfortable in the solace I gained from tying a khata, as a memorial to her, around the newly built cairn on the top of our 6,000m peak. I thank my YRC companions for this, and by way of recompense promise never to become the first female to request membership of the club – long may it remain male!

From the luxury of the Imperial Hotel in Delhi to the discomfort of the mess tent floor at advanced base camp, the extreme contrasts of this experience will live long in my memory. Whilst the generosity and smiles of the people we met reminded me of why I needed to keep returning to this part of the world, the majesty of the scenery and the beauty of its monuments created a separate powerful attraction.
So, thank you Albert for inviting me to join you on this journey. Long may your kidneys, knees and teeth survive!

Ann Luck

Now a septuagenarian novice-trekker, I joined the YRC in 1957, simply because it facilitated my desire to go potholing; a desire I cannot fully explain, nor can I explain why I took to walking and climbing, but throughout my life these activities have been a vital safety valve, and really an escape from normal life. Now that I am retired and the routine of work has been removed, I often find myself searching for the elusive meaning to life, and getting no answer. However, I feel one is closer to the answer in the wilderness than in a supermarket.

There I was, living in a world that had changed and not to my liking, unable to do anything about it and keeping sane principally on a one-day-per-week, longish, walk in Calderdale, when the opportunity to go trekking in the Himalayas came up. My activities in the YRC have extended to camping meets in Scotland, a few trips to the Alps and one or two high level camps, but no day-after-day walking in far off places. My wife made the decision; I had to go.

I am writing this several months after the trip and, as my memory is certainly failing, my impressions, I am sure, have lost their immediate effect.

Albert was running the trip and tried to give guidance on health, equipment etc., but there is nothing like experience. I got the usual injections, and bought malaria pills but fell foul of the NHS in so far as my first visit resulted in my being told I was too early, and my last in being too late. Thus I went without protection from Hepatitis B or Rabies. I did not suffer health wise. Yes, I had the mild runs, some sunburn, due to forgetting my lips, but no dehydration problems to my knowledge. I bought some new gear but the only items I really needed were an adequate sleeping bag, and a down jacket for the cold.

Overall, walking or climbing wise, the trip was in a way, nothing new. It was cold at night – it is in Glen Etive in February, the sun was strong – it is in the Alps , but there was the continuous altitude effect. I must have acclimatised to some degree, but shortness of breath with exercise was always there. I had some other altitude affects, but nothing severe. Perhaps I didn't sleep as well as normal and I had some headache, but the worst night was in the hotel in Ladakh where the power was turned off. I couldn't find a light and had no idea of the time.

Ladakh is classed as an arctic desert. It was pleasant to have a low risk of rain, but we did have two days of snow; not unlike Scotland in winter. The terrain is impressive with deep gorges cut through mile thick moraine debris. Access is on foot or horse back, although roads are being built in the most amazing places. The impression of being in a wilderness, miles from anywhere, was not severe. We would walk several hours in a barren valley and then turn a corner and see a young child on his or her way somewhere. We had seen almost nothing all day and then 500 sheep and goats were herded by. We were trekking, rather than mountaineering and so essentially it was like climbing to an Alpine hut day after day, but without the problem of carrying your gear.

This was the most amazing part of the holiday. It was a time warp. We were looked after by our Sherpas to the extent of having tea in bed, hot water for washing (-5C outside), no chores of any kind and were fed in regal style. We had to keep to a schedule. We got out of bed and washed, dressed, and packed all our gear, other than that required during the day, and breakfast was ready. We set off walking and the ponies were loaded and passed us before lunch. We had a hot lunch and then walked for the afternoon, arriving at camp to find it already erected and a hot drink waiting. This highlighted the other aspect of the trip.

We, from the rich west, were able at reasonable cost to travel half way around the world, and be pampered by virtue of the vagaries of the world economy. We were able to dine in such a way as to waste more than the locals survived on, and the population density and poverty we saw in old Delhi, and while motoring to Agra could not be comprehended and had be pushed to the back of one's mind and ignored. But this is part of the big question and should not be ignored.

The trip was a memorable experience, which I hope time will allow me to repeat. The hardships we survived, including the toil of going uphill at high altitude, were taken stalwartly. A month spent in the company of helpful friends, and friendly helpers. An experience I must certainly try to repeat.

Frank Wilkinson.

SUNSET ON INNOMINATE PEAK (660m)

TASHI NAMGAL FORT ABOVE LEH

CHIPPINGS

ALAN HINKES

Further to the article by Alan Linford 'Stamp of Approval' which was penned towards the end of last year, I was pleased to note that Alan Hinkes received the OBE in the new years honours list.

ALL LIT UP

Since April, planning authorities are obliged to take into account outdoor lighting fixtures when considering the suitability of new developments.

Rather than lighting up the night sky or the area around them, new lights will have to face downwards.

Under the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act 2005 light pollution will find itself on similar footing to noise pollution and anyone plagued by intrusive bright lights will be able to ask for an abatement order if the light is 'prejudicial to health or a nuisance'.

No doubt welcomed by astronomers, but hopefully we ourselves, when walking the hills, might eventually be able to view the night sky in all its glory rather than blotted out by artificial light.

BOWLAND BOGS

Drainage and over farming of upland areas has left the land unable to absorb and store water and has caused flooding in the lowlands and impacted on water quality. United Utilities supplies water to the north-west of England and owns thousands of acres of upland landscape, including the Forest of Bowland and parts of the Peak District.

Over the next five years, working closely with the RSPB, farmers and government agencies, they are to develop plans that will protect drinking water quality, boost wildlife and provide a viable future for local farmers. Drainage ditches will be blocked, areas of eroded peat will be restored, numbers of livestock will be reduced and streams will be fenced off, to encourage the growth of native woodland along the valley bottoms.

It is hoped that all this work will not only restore hugely important habitats for birds such as hen harriers, black grouse, curlews, sandpipers and golden plovers, but improve drinking water quality as well.

We may however find crossing upland streams more difficult with fences to contend with.

FORESTRY COMMISSION

By the end of last year the Forestry Commission had voluntarily dedicated over 100,000 hectares of its land as open access under the provisions of the Crow Act. About 10% of this became live in December and 4674 hectares of this was in the North York Moors.

Woodlands were excluded from the formal permissions within the act as were coastal areas but campaigning to have these included is being seen

BLACK CUILLIN

The challenging Black Cuillin Mountains on the Isle of Skye could be passing into community ownership.

The Clan Chief of the MacLeods is offering them to the nation in return for having his crumbling castle repaired. A group has put forward a £30 million project, in the hope of a 75% grant from the lottery that would not only restore the castle but develop the gardens and create a £4 million visitor centre. The mountains would have a ranger service and would be run as a form of wilderness park. If the bid is successful, Mr MacLeod will give up ownership of both Dunvegan Castle and the mountains which would then be run by community trusts. MacLeod would retain a right to reside in apartments in the castle.

Previous schemes have foundered on local objections and this exciting opportunity will only be supported if the islanders are in favour.

ROAMING IN YORKSHIRE

Frances Lincoln, publishers of the Wainwright guides, are to produce four new pocket size Freedom To Roam Guides.

These will cover: The North York Moors, Wharfedale & Nidderdale, Wensleydale & Swaledale and Three Peaks & Howgill Fells.

CLIFF COBB

Cliff's widow, Betty, writes to say how much she and the family enjoyed reading the last two journals containing his obituary and pieces about him.

She commented on how much the club meant to Cliff and on how many members attended his funeral despite the weather.

THE PARADOX OF OUR AGE

We have bigger houses but smaller families;
More conveniences, but less time;
We have more degrees, but less sense;
More knowledge, but less judgement;
More experts, but more problems;
More medicines, but less healthiness;
We've been all the way to the moon and back,
But have trouble crossing the street to meet
The new neighbour.

We built more computers to hold more
Information to produce more copies than ever,
But have less communication;
We have become long on quantity
But short on quality.
These are times of fast foods
But slow digestion;
Tall man but short character;
Steep profits but shallow relationships.
It is time when there is much in the window
But nothing in the room.

H.H. The 14th Dalai Lama

Who was in was in Ley while our Ladakh Party were there.

ALTERNATIVE ALPHABETICAL MEET REPORT

At Braemar, Club Descended: Excellent Forecast: Gentlemen Hoped Interesting Jaunts.

Kindly, Lured Mountain-wise; Nippy On Perfect Quality – Really

Sunny Tops. Unfortunately Variable Weather. Xtra Young "Zulus",

A Bright Contribution – Dividend Earned – Fortunate Guests: Hearty Informal Jests! Ken Lamenting Members' "No-show-up". Oh? Police Quest Required? Safely Turned Up:

Very Welcomed. Y.R.C's "Zizzed".

Anon

I will leave members to guess who contributed this or the author to plead guilty. Ed.

END OF BREDE

In April several broadsheets reported the death of Brede Arkless, arguably the finest female mountaineer this country ever produced when you consider the era and circumstances in which she made her achievements.

Born just before the war started, whilst her parents were temporarily in Manchester she spent her early years in Dublin and took to the mountains and rocks of Wicklow, before the family moved to the States.

She was soon back working and climbing in both the Lakes and Wales where she was to become only the second woman to qualify as a British Mountain Guide.

She married Geoff Arkless in 1969 and started both a climbing school and a family and somehow contriving to spend most of her summers in the Alps with winters in Scotland.

She went on numerous, usually all-female expeditions to the Himalayas before separating from her husband and taking her younger offspring to live in New Zealand where she guided over 20

MORE ON THE LYKE WAKE WALK

After a plethora of articles in recent journals about this walk, and with our 50th anniversary crossing still to come, David Laughton hopes a short note on the history of the walk from a "Founder Member" may still be of interest.

"In 1955 I was a member of the York Mountaineering Club (YMC) and spent most weekends at Almscliffe, Ilkley, the Lakes or walking in the Dales or N York Moors. One late August weekend a group of us stayed in the youth hostel at Wheeldale (near Goathland) and on the Sunday walked across country to Helmsley to catch the 8pm bus back to York. I had taken a recent copy of the Dalesman magazine which contained an article by a North Yorks. farmer, Bill Cowley, in which he issued a challenge to walk from the westernmost point of the N York Moors to Ravenscar on the east coast within 24 hrs.

He pointed out that there were no tracks running W - E, it was crossed by only three N -S main roads and it was deep heather most of the way. Over that weekend we had discussed this and agreed to take up the challenge. I was given the job of writing to Bill to tell him. He replied saying that he would join us and "lead us across". I wrote back saying that we did not need to be led and certainly not by a "feather bedded farmer" (a topical expression at the time), despite this we later became good friends.

The next few weeks were spent reconnoitring parts of the route. On Saturday October 1st 1955 ten members of the YMC got lifts to Osmotherley and walked to the radio station above the western escarpment. Here we met Bill Cowley and three others from the Middlesbrough area who were also taking up the challenge. At noon we all set off together. Our plan was to take the most direct route whilst crossing the highest points of the moors. Other Club members had agreed to set up a small camp just over half way across where we could have a meal and a brief sleep with the aim of finishing between 10 and 11 am on the Sunday. Most of us followed our planned route which crossed the almost trackless Whorlton Moor, dropping down Chop Gate then climbing up onto Urra Moor, the highest point at 1490 ft. Bill Cowley however took the rest along what is now the "official" route around (or over) the outlying northern hill: Cringle Moor and Hasty Bank - they contoured around! Our routes rejoined on the Urra Moor summit. Both groups reached the campsite before it got fully dark (there was a full moon), had a meal and a short sleep before leaving as dawn started to break. Unfortunately one of the York party was suffering from bad blisters and had to drop out at Goathland - she did the whole walk again 4 weeks later. The final leg of the walk involved crossing Fylingdales Moor which was then being used as an army firing range (this was before the early warning station was built). The army had given us permission to cross but had warned us not to touch anything we may find. The last of us safely reached the finish, the Raven Hall Hotel, Ravenscar by 11am where we were presented with a tankard by the owner of Bill's farm. Bill was a natural publicist and in the opinion of most of we YMC members gave far too much publicity to the LWW (named by him after a North Riding old dialect funeral verse). This resulted in literally thousands of people doing the walk ever since, turning what had been a wild heather moor into a wide, muddy path.

Several of us later felt that we had cheated by using a support camp so in Sept 1957 four of us decided on an E-W unsupported crossing. We went by train to Ravenscar (using the later closed Scarborough to Whitby line) arriving around 5pm Saturday afternoon. Heading due west we did the now classic route, including the northern hills. We had discovered a ruined shooting hut on Wheeldale Moor and had a short lie down and brew there. but otherwise non-stop. Arriving in Osmotherly just before 5pm we hitch hiked back to York and, rather stiffly, went to work next morning - very satisfied. I think it was reading of the YRC's 12 hour crossing in 1956 which encouraged me to join"

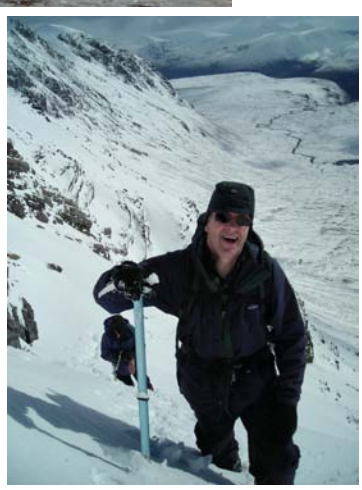
CROSSING MADE EASY

Derek Smithson and Richard Smith encounter a new (at least to them) deer fence crossing just north of Achnashellac. Set into the fence is a metal hoop with disc-shaped door. Much better than clambering over the 2m gate or fence sec-

SLEEPING AROUND

Two Smiths (M & R) and a Smithson managed a week in Scotland at Easter using a variety of accommodation. Starting from Gerry's Hostel at Achnashellac they made a few ascents in decent snow. Then they were off walking into Glen Beag bothy from the Ullapool road only to find the stream immediately before the bothy swollen (picture). They arrived with a knee-deep wetting for a couple of days stay and a wet windy day on the hills in melting conditions. This left a much deeper foaming tumult of white water to cross on the way out requiring a bridge to be improvised by the two engineers in the party. Their next stop was the rather grander SYHA's Carbisdale Castle for its drying room and then a ticking off of Ben Klibreck and a Golden Eagle. Heading back south most hostel and bunkhouse accommodation was full for the Easter weekend but they were squeezed in at the Pottery Hostel at Laggan.

GLEN BEAG



BEINN LIATH MHOR

NEWBY MOSS

The picture on the front of the journal is of the continuing exploration of this new system, reported in the last journal. We hope to have a progress report in the next edition.

A THREE PEAKS RACE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE.

A gleaning from the Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa 1998.

This race was inaugurated in 1897, lapsed for 30 years, then lapsed again for 50 years. It has become a regular event since 1997, when a record was set of 6 hours and 7 minutes.

The odd thing about this race is that the runners return to the starting point at what was the Johannesburg Hotel on Long Street, Cape Town, after ascending each peak. The starting and finishing point can be only a little above sea level.

The peaks climbed are Devils Peak 1000m, Maclears Beacon (Table Mountain) 1085m, and Lions Head 668m. Total height climbed is 2700m approx. and the distance covered must be in the region of 30k.

How long will it be before one of our members becomes the first to complete a three peaks race in both hemispheres? Is there an alternative challenge by doing the peaks in a continuous round?

Detail from David Handley with extra info from Steve Craven of Cape Town

PAY SANK.

Following the success of the Cork's Pot breakthrough into Gaping Gill the Bradford P. C. digging team turned their attention to a shakehole 50m away and set about the excavation of the glacial infill with vigour and tenacity. The pot was named Klondike Pot in recognition of the number of digs being excavated by the Bradford P. C. and the Craven P. C. in the area which made it look like Klondike in the gold rush! The engineers devised the necessary mechanical assistance to hoist out the boulders and mud and the hydrologists improvised pumps of various types to remove the water that had backed up on each visit because of the plugs of glacial rock dust that over millennia had compacted to become rock hard.

Slowly an entrance shaft of 7m was created to reach a fault line, which was followed and widened to reach the head of pitch of some 20m to yet another blockage.

On the occasion of the Craven P. C. winch meet a water test was carried out which proved a connection into Gaping Gill. Unfortunately it took some 20 minutes to flow from the bottom of the pitch into Gaping Gill, which confirmed that the downward passage is restricted and obstructed. Tea, crumpets and single malt taken with the Craven P. C. at their winch meet camp site made matters appear better.

A war of attrition commenced in pursuing the downward passage and your correspondent took the easy option of safety officer on the surface keeping in radio contact with the underground team. Whiling away the time during the spring and summer months had it's rewards because of the fauna and flora, in particular suicidal frogs determined to throw themselves down the shaft, sighting of lizards and rather surprising a badger set.

On occasions there was time available to look at other sites of interest and eventually it was decided that the P5 sink was worth a look.

In previous years (1950s and 1960s) the Bradford P. C. have spent time pushing the passages of Grange Rigg, Christmas Pot and P5 and a couple of members had hopes that a small opening in the P5 shakehole would be worth investigating. There has been queries over the years as to where the stream seen to enter P5 actually goes, in as much as it does not run down the system but disappears just inside the cave, yet again glacial infill was pulled out and the small opening began to take on larger proportions to a point where it was possible to climb down a short distance. Attention was switched from Klondike to the new dig, now named Pay Sank, and excavation began in earnest. In particular Dave Haigh the Bradford P.C. President put a great deal of solo effort into the dig. Boulders being hoisted out of the shaft left a loose but reasonably roomy pitch for one digger which required to be shored for safety reasons, of course the boulders being removed were also the boulders which supported the digger and needless to report the day came when, with a satisfying and mind concentrating rumble, the boulder floor departed downwards leaving the distinguished Bradford P. C. Past President Ged Benn looking down between his legs into a black void!

The new pitch leads to a bedding plane, which in turn goes through to two chambers, the upper chamber is under the shattered surface scar and is somewhat loose and the lower chamber leads down to where the streamway sinks. Hard work by the "diggers" eventually had the reward of a break through to the top of a pitch, which was identified as Pinnacle Hall which was climbed from the bottom in 1962 following a trip down into the system from Christmas Pot by that well known Bradford P. C. member (and later as a world famous rock climber) Pete Livesey.

In the meantime the Craven P. C. dig (named Marilyn) broke through to Disappointment Pot which was not quite what they hoped for but none the less is a success story as it bypasses the duck etc in Disappointment Pot. Work ongoing across the moor also proved successful with Small Mammal Pot giving an alternative route into Bar Pot and underground hardware was installed to produce a rigging guide to Rat Hole (and Mousehole) across at Gaping Gill.

All involved joined together in the make shift "bivvy" to share refreshments and single malt irrespective of club allegiances to celebrate success or otherwise as the seasons changed through the year.

With access to the bottom Grange Rigg/P5 now within ½ hour (or less in the case of Ged Benn!) from the surface serious attention is being given to digging out the various promising locations first observed by Bob Leaky and associates some 50 plus years ago to try to break through into what potentially could be a major streamway under Clapham Bottoms. Bob's visits down to the bottom of P5 were via gruelling trips down Grange Rigg Pot and unfortunately the passing decades have meant that rock fall and flood infill (plus the original survey is not, understandably, fully accurate) have made dramatic alterations to make difficulties in recognising the passages etc described by Bob because the infill is perhaps a few metres deep and covers what was then visible. Bob along with M. Riley and friends' explorations of 1943-46, in what is known as P5 Chamber, found a large stream disappearing through a bedding plane at the bottom. They crawled into the bedding plane but found it tight and reported that the end was only 4m away and beyond was the blackness of a large chamber with the sound of water booming in the distance. For decades the illusive bedding plane has been the subject of much speculation and search with particularly major efforts made in the 1970s

and 1980s following on from the earlier work of Bradford P. C. and Pete Livesey (one trip making national newspaper headlines and somewhat disrupting the C. R. O. 50th Anniversary Celebrations) but neither Bob's stream nor bedding plane can now be seen. Great efforts to extend the system have been undertaken over the years. Tantalising speculation is that the present day digging is in the area of the lost bedding plane.

Sunday 19th April 2006 a team of Bradford. P. C. cavers joined the digging team to prove the connection by carrying out a through trip from Christmas Pot to join the diggers at the bottom of P5 to exit out of Pay Sank. Water levels were high and very cold because of the midweek rain and the melting snow. The very tight section below Sledgehammer Pot reduced the cavers to one who was triumphantly escorted through to the surface. Without work at Sledgehammer the through trip is only accessible to thin cavers.

Work underground goes on a pace by the "hard diggers" but age tells and enthusiasm for the next (and not too far away) surface dig is a more attractive proposition for your correspondent! This dig is an obvious shakehole, which takes a small amount of water in wet weather, and has attracted attention in past years. Named after the Bradford P.C's well known electronics expert who on past occasions had attempted to remove the top layer of boulders it did not take long for the usual infill of glacial infill to be hoisted out of the immediate entrance and the ever familiar pattern of attrition to commence to push deeper. The hole has now developed into a small shaft and tantalising noises can be heard when stones are thrown through the boulders at the bottom and a sixth sense can feel that there is a deeper shaft awaiting……

Mike Hartland

HUFF'S POT UPDATE

Dateline May 2006

Six members of the breakaway caving section of the club revisited this interesting prospect. They set off by circuitous route to avoid giving away the location.

They did not exceed the some 150 foot penetration by 'J' on his previous attempt with 'ER'

' R'

BEST FOOT FORWARD

On Sunday April 23rd, I ran in the 26th London Marathon. The day was overcast, mild and damp, with no wind - ideal for such an event and quite different to how it has been throughout the training period here, when cold winds seemed to blow continuously, whether it rained or not! Running was quite difficult for many miles due to the huge numbers of people in the race, however, the crowd support was amazing. The whole route was lined with spectators, often several deep and on both sides of the road, whooping, clapping and cheering all the way; there were several bands playing too; in one place, under a main road flyover, several guys were beating big drums - 'ramming speed', beat and volume - it was a real encouragement!

My race was completed in a few seconds under four hours; I had hoped to do better, but perhaps started too far back. By the end though, I was very tired, so probably couldn't have gone any quicker even if congestion had been less. But, the real success has been in raising funds for the charity 'Children with Leukaemia'. I'd set a target - more in hope than expectation - of £6,000. Already, and with several more donations to be received, the total exceeds £9,000.

People have been very generous - from YRC members alone, well over £300 has been donated - my thanks to everyone who has supported in this way,

I expect the charity will be delighted.

Adrian Bridge

NATURAL HISTORY SNIPPETS

WILDLIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SOMETHING TO GROUSE ABOUT

Efforts to re-introduce and protect the black grouse in the north of England has seen the population stabilise. Even better news can be had in North Wales where pockets of this elusive bird are expanding into 1200 acres of blanket bogland and upland heath being created within the Penaran Forest. Numbers in Wales have increased by 39%.

Their favourite habitat is a mixture of heather, scrub and scattered woodland and bilberry is a major food source.

Unfortunately the UK position as a whole is more depressing as the much larger population in Scotland has fallen by 29% over the same 10 year period.

The male is an attractive bird with a red comb over the eye, a glossy blue-black plumage and dashing white stripes along the wings. He has little to do with preserving the species as once he has mated he wanders off and leaves the female to look after the 6 to 10 chicks she is likely to have.

They need protecting for about 3 months before any survivors move away and about half do not survive that long. The hen is much more drab but better camouflaged when on the nest with her grey-brown plumage.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?

Recent research has shown that no less than 20% of our wildflower species are threatened with extinction.

Many species which thrive on unimproved grassland and only surviving in pockets on mostly traffic islands and road side verges.

Plants of the uplands made a bit of a recovery during foot and mouth but are again now vanishing due to over grazing.

Plants of the arable areas are greatly in decline due to both weed killers and less traditional, seasonal planting.

We have numerous species on the 'red list' as endangered but very little targeted help is being given to them. Spreading bellflower is now just found at 5 locations in Wales and the fen violet, thought to have been extinct for 60 years but clinging on in a few remote pockets, are two examples where no bio-diversity action plans have been made.

We are however gaining some new species. A number of plants which until recently could only be found along the south coast are spreading north as climate changes. A recent report points out that orchids and ferns, with their light spores, are leading the way and an example is the deep pink pyramidal orchid which 10 years ago could not be found north of Norfolk but which can now be found in Yorkshire.

NATIONAL WATER PARK

The UK's first large sized sanctuary for marine wild life could be established within three years. Scotland has announced its intention to establish the UK's first Coastal and Marine National Park by 2008. A shortlist of potential sites is under discussion. Coastal communities, increasingly forced to abandon fishing based livelihoods are likely to welcome this development.

It is hoped that seas and coasts can be restored to their former glory with reefs full of colourful corals, huge crabs and lobsters, shoals of fish, dolphins and otters there for all to see. Already communities in Arran, Fair Isle, the Small Isles and the Argyll islands have expressed their wish to be part of an initiative like this. The Scottish Wildlife Trust and WWF Scotland are working to ensure that Scotland's first such park fulfils the broader vision that many have for it.

After only 18 months of protection, the Lundy Island smaller 'strict protection' area has three

times as many lobsters of catchable size when compared with nearby fished areas.

Last year I touched upon a similar park in New Zealand set up 9 years previously and a survey in this Cape Rodney to Okakari Point Marine Reserve showed 78 per cent support for more marine reserves because of their long term social and economic benefits.

PONIES TO THE RESCUE

Native ponies are very hardy creatures but are struggling to survive on the moorland acres they call home. The most well known is the Dartmoor pony now thought to be down to below 1,500 and probably only a third of these are pure bred. There is a smaller herd of Exmoor Ponies and a few more survive in parts of Wales although these are probably cross breeds.

These 'wild' ponies are tough, hardy animals and quite capable of living throughout the winter on the moors. They are also very efficient grazing animals and keep the growth of vegetation under control, preventing coarse growth from taking over.

These attributes may be the saving of these creatures as six animals from Exmoor are to be released in part of the Peak National Park as an experiment at flora management.

They thrive on the invasive purple grasses blighting an area near Sheffield whilst at the same time ignoring the native heathers.

Eastern Moors, naturally an area of heather and blanket bog, has been resided as part of a conservation project and the ponies are to act as natural weed suppressors.

SHINE A LIGHT

The glow worm is not actually a worm at all but is a species of beetle (Lampyris noctiluca), related to the firefly which is not found in Britain.

The bright gleam is caused by a chemical reaction in a specialised organ. The females gleam attracts flying males to her but unlike her cousin, the firefly, she can't turn herself on and off; her light comes on once it's dark and fades after she has mated.

She is wingless and uses her light to attract winged males to her - generally about now, between mid June and mid July. They can best be seen just before midnight although opportunities to see them are getting rare. They may well be in decline but with our light pollution it is difficult to tell and the fear is that this ambient light level may be making it harder for males to find mates contributing to a decline in population.

If you want to try and spot one find a dark area preferably on habitat borders. They are often near grassy verges, or beside hedges and where woodland meets pastureland.. They favour chalk and limestone areas, where they are most likely to find snails and slugs which is their preferred diet.

As a gardener anything that reduces these pests is welcome. The changing climate is helping some species, many of which have been inadvertently brought into this country and now survive whereas in colder times they would have died out. Slugs, snails and other invertebrates may escape notice but there are a number of new species in Britain which were not present 20 years ago. There may often now be well over 50 different species of these creatures in any given area and over 70 have recently been counted in Oxfordshire. Some are quite colourful with an array of patterned shells but some can look quite daunting. Whilst we consider them pests, they are a useful part of the food chain acting as they do as nature's dustbin men.

If you ever met a 'Leopard' or 'Ash Black' slug in all its extended mature glory it would come as a bit of a surprise as both can grow to be an inch around the 'waist' and up to a foot long.

NOT SUCH A HOOT

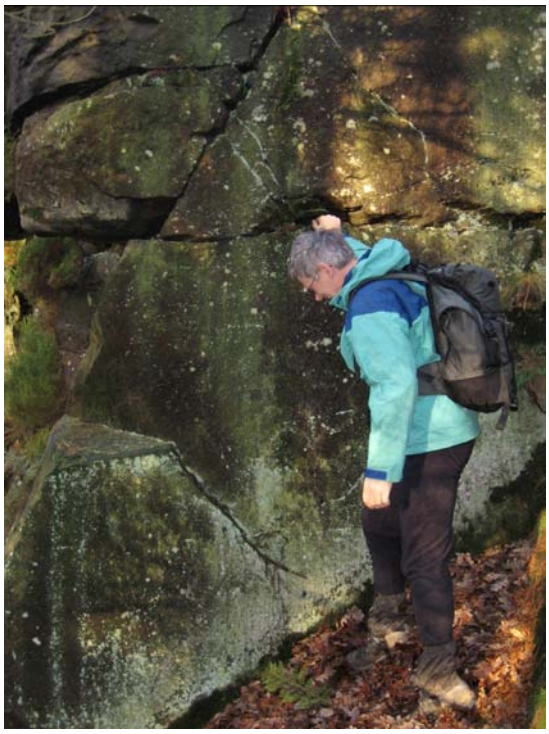
Since my piece on eagle owls in the last journal, this creature has received plenty of publicity. The BBC has done a feature on them and papers covered two escapes in the south of England and the subsequent re-capture of one after a series of attacks on quite large dogs. There seems little prospect of these birds being welcomed anywhere near town where pets would be an easy food source.

I personally would like to see them a part of wild Britain but I have to report that the male of the pair in Yorkshire (which had reared 23 chicks since 1997) has been shot.

MEETS REPORT

As a post script to our last meet report when we expressed regret at the lack of options in the area we now have a report of one party which went off to explore possibilities.

They left their car in Scugdale and went to see the rock climbing possibilities in Snotterdale, which were unknown to any of them. The picture on the right shows the slimy rock that they found and as a result they walked to Barker's Crag in Scugdale where the rock was clean and dry and almost irresistible.



LOW HALL GARTH 6-8 January 2006

The weekend started with some keen people arriving on Thursday evening, but most turned up on Friday. The weather was cold with rain, hard ice and snow on the tops. The Three Shires attracted some members on Friday night but the majority stayed in the hut and cooked dinner etc.

On Saturday morning everybody was rushing about by 7 a.m. while Frank and Alan were providing breakfast for all.
Walks were followed as below.
1. Richard Josephy did the longest walk of the day, taking in ; Wrynose Pass, Pike 'o Bliscoe, Crinkle Crags, Bowfell, etc.
2. Ken Aldred, Ian Crowther and Derek Smithson, walked to Tarn Hows returning via the Three Shires.
3. Iain Gilmour, Mike Smith, Richard Smith, Dover Paul and Alan Wood climbed Wetherlam, Swirl How, Old Man and retraced the route back.
On Saturday night there was as expected, a five course dinner which the party enjoyed.

Fifteen were on the meet. Derek Bush came on Saturday afternoon and provided some excitement when he destroyed two offside tyres on his car by hitting a large boulder on the edge of the track. A recovery vehicle came from Ullswater on Sunday morning to remove the car.

Most people went home Sunday morning.

AW

Attendance
Ken Aldred (President)
Derek Bush
Ian Crowther
Paul Dover
Iain Gilmour
Mike Godden
Richard Josephy
John Lovett
Frank Platt
Mike Smith
Richard Smith (Guest)
David Smith
Derek Smithson
George Spenceley
Alan Wood

BRAEMAR 9th-11th February 2006

The Club were last at this venue in 1998. It was good to be back in the Cairngorm area. Most members and guests arrived at the village hall on the Thursday. Two members myself and Barrie Wood appeared at the hall early evening and announced, some what smugly I think, that we had already done three Munros, albeit of course that they were the three easiest in Scotland. We parked our car at the top of the pass by the ski centre and were up the first one (The Cairnwell) in forty five minutes. The other two were fairly easy walking but with a cold northwest wind.

On Friday the weather forecasters got it right. It was beautiful. On Iain Gilmour's bed space there was a note showing his itinerary for the day. He was away by six am and did a round trip of twenty five miles from Invercauld Bridge to a top at the back of Ben Avon, Stob an t-Sluichd, MR.112027. That set the tone for the rest of the day. Most of the other members set their sights on the Loch Muick/Lochnagar area. We were away shortly after 8.00am. The biggest problem was finding the coins for the £2.00 parking fees at Loch Muick. A great deal of money lending went on.

Barrie and I were making for Cairn Bannoch and Broad Cairn two munros on the south side of Loch Muick and the Dubh Loch. It is a splendid round but it took us all day, mainly because of my advancing years. We were passed in the early part of the walk by Mick Borroff and Adrian Dixon who added two extra Munros to ours Carn an t-Sagairt Mor and Carn a'Coire Boidheach and still managed to beat us back to the car park! We are still working out how they managed to pass us without us see them. (They actually took a lower path back along the side of Loch Muick) Not to be outdone Adrian Bridge, Ian his son and Tim Josephy took in Lochnagar then the four Munros mentioned, a round trip of nearly 30 Km plus Tim climbing the Black Spout a snow and ice gully to the top of Lochnagar. Some would say he took a short cut! Meanwhile David Large and his guest David Whittles were engaged in an epic on a grade three to four ice climb on Parallel Gully on Lochnagar, but more of that later. Also on Lochnagar were David Smith and Albert Chapman accompanied to The Ladder by John Lovett. David and Albert returned from the summit by the Glas Allt a very pretty waterfall and then along the side of Loch Muick.

Conditions generally on all these walks did not require ice axes but many of the paths were icy and required some care. The crossing of some streams was particularly exciting.

Elsewhere the two Wood brothers, Michael and Alan, went to the top of the pass by the ski centre and ascended Glas Maol, Cairn of Claise and Carn an Tuirc. On this round Michael took a wonderful photograph of two white hares 'boxing'. I hope it gets attached to this article. Rob Ibberson walked on his own to Marr Bridge worked his way up to Carn na Criche MR 112944 and then back by Gleann an t –Slugain to Invercauld Bridge. On the way down he met Iain Gilmour coming back from his long walk so he got a lift back to the village saving him a five mile road walk.

The President and the next one plus a past one circa '84 to '86 (work that one out for yourselves) ascended Morven the Corbett which can be walked straight from the village. To be fair they got back slightly early to help with the catering. Harry Robinson and Frank Platt did two local walks in the area and I almost forgot Gordon Humphries and his grandson Charles Crellin did the round of Loch Muick which on the day would be quite splendid. Harvey Lomas took his mountain bike into the Cairngorms to Derry Lodge and cycled around the Ben Macdui area.

Finally Ian Crowther and Derek Smithson went into Glen Isla and camped at a height of some 1400' They reported that it was very cold in the early part of the evening but it warmed up about 11.00pm when it started snowing. They were in bed by seven o'clock but I am sure there was some whisky being passed around!

PITCHING CAMP IN SPRING

AND
THEN
IT
WAS
WINTER

Back at the village hall we had an excellent meal provided by Roger Dix and his son Stuart and the evening was going very well until somewhere about 9.30 pm we suddenly realised our two climbers were not back. Tim Josephy the Club's mountain rescue expert counselled that the only thing to do was to ring the police, get them to ask the farmer nearest to Lochnager car park to check if the car was still there and then, if it was, leave it to the local rescue team as no one in the YRC after a long day out was in a condition to get up to the cliffs tonight. Fortunately whilst we were debating this they turned up much to our relief. Apparently Parallel Gully forks at one point and they took the hardest alternative in error. The ice conditions would not be good. David Large said his friend's rock climbing skills and rope technique saved the day. We should get him in the Club!

So that was Friday, all's well that ends well, and it showed the YRC at its best.

Saturday dawned an entirely different day. The cloud was down and the weather forecast was not good. After the efforts of yesterday there was a little bit of lethargy in the air. People were still off early. Barrie and I motored up to the pass thinking we would get at a munro An Socach from the back of the three we had done on Thursday.

We took one look at the weather up there, changed our minds and decided that we would approach it from Inverey. We were joined at the Inverey car park by the two Adrians, Ian, Tim and Mick who climbed Carn Bhac a hill to the north west of our objective. They took the right decision as when the weather turned really bad they were already on the hill and felt they must push on. Barrie and I had a five mile walk in up a desolate valley in poor conditions. We were passed by a cyclist who hardly made faster progress than us. At Altanour Lodge, a ruin, we had lunch and then it really started snowing so we abandoned our project and walked back down the valley.

Meanwhile other excursions were going on. Iain and Rob walked from the Linn of Dee to White Bridge and then by compass bearing to the top of a corbett Sgor Mor MR 006914. Harvey climbed Morven and Mike and Alan wood got part way up the corrie on Lochnagar then abandoned it because of the weather. David Large and guest, despite the weather, climbed Glas Maol and the Munros to the east of the Cairnwell pass.

Derek and Ian arrived back from their high camp and most parties were in the hall or in the pub early afternoon to watch the rugby.

In the evening we had a first class meal in the hall with all the conviviality which follows a YRC Scottish meet.

Our thanks must go to Roger and Stewart Dix who got no walking in during the weekend because of their culinary duties.

Throughout the weekend there were numerous sightings of red deer. The stags looked magnificent in Lochnagar especially late evening against a backdrop of a superb sunset. A buzzard was seen in Lochnagar but I only saw one ptarmigan the whole weekend. Grouse were seen in abundance and several dippers were observed at quite a high level in the mountain burns. The sighting of the meet however must belong to the two boxing white hares.

Sunday dawned with slightly better weather. Most parties packed up and headed south although one or two had plans to climb the Munros to the west of the Cairnwell. The hall had to be cleaned up and particular thanks to Rob and Iain who stopped right to the end making sure it was in first class order. We may want to come again.

Another memorable Scottish winter meet.

DB

In Attendance:-
The President – Ken Aldred, Dennis Armstrong, Michael Wood, David Large, Harry Robinson, Stuart Dix, Mike Godden, Barrie Wood, Frank Platt, David Whittles(G) Alan Wood, Adrian Dixon, Iain Gilmour, Adrian Bridge, Rob Ibberson, Tim Josephy, Mick Borroff, Ian Crowther, Albert Chapman, Derek Smithson, John Lovett, Gordon Humphreys, David Smith, Charles Crellin(G), Derek Bush, Harvey Lomas, Roger Dix, Ian Bridge(G) (28 Members and Guests)

NORTH WALES, RYD-DDU
3 – 5th March 2006

On the Saturday of this splendid meet in Snowdonia, twenty six members and guests enjoyed a fabulous day of snow, sunshine, and perfect visibility. The Friday had been bitterly cold with a severe snow shower causing some havoc on the roads, but the weather on Saturday amply repaid those who travelled to the meet. The Oread hut, which Richard Josephy had booked for us, is ideally situated for the ascent of Snowdon or for traversing the Nantlle ridge.

On Friday there were visits to Moel Siabod, and to the slate workings local to the hut.

The writer of the meet report is most grateful that activity on Saturday was confined to a few routes that could be counted on several fingers of one hand.

Starting with the exciting double traverse of the Nantlle ridge seven members were encouraged by the splendid trail breaking by Mick Borroff in snow which varied from six inches deep to thigh deep in places. It was fortunate that a massive slab of rock which started to slide was avoided by Mick doing a hands-on body swerve. Mercifully, the rock stopped on a ledge just above Tim. The conditions of the day were so good that the party retraced the ridge, back to the hut.

Snowdon was our other top destination, by several routes. Rob and Georgina Ibberson summited Snowdon by the Ryd-ddu path, accompanied by Graham and Roger. The summit was covered in six inches of snow, and the rocks were coated in horizontal streaks of ice. The snow was soft and powdery, making crampons unnecessary. Another party led by Mike and Helen Smith, ascended Snowdon by the South ridge. The trail made by Mike along the ridge in fresh snow gave quite a sporting route. We were astonished at the numbers of people on the summit who had come up from Pen-y-Pass although it appeared that they were competent and well equipped. Most Snowdon summiteers returned by the Snowdon ranger path, and diverted left to the hut, via the slate workings. However, an interesting variation by Ian and Harvey was to take the descent from Snowdon to Llanberis. This route had some shortcomings – nothing to do with navigation, but simply the fact that buses were no longer running in the reverse direction. Rob was the noble driver who rescued absent friends.

It was good to see that Richard, the meet organiser, had such splendid control over culinary matters that he had time to summit Snowdon and return by a novel route contouring below the crags. Several parties took the low level walks from Ryd-ddu through forestry in either direction. Jim, George, and John Schofield took the route down the valley to Beddgelert, but found that the buses were no longer running, and used a taxi to return.

A gourmet dinner of home made parsley soup, venison casserole, and excellent cheese, was provided by Richard. George Spenceley brought some delicious continental apple and almond pie. Ken Aldred thanked Richard for his hard work in organising another splendid Josephy promotion.

On Sunday, the climbers set off for Tremadog, while others tackled Snowdon, Moel Hebog, Moel yr Ogof, Moel Lefn and the Glyders.

Attending: -
Ken Aldred, Mick Borroff, Adrian Bridge,Ian Bridge
Alan Brown,Ian Crowther, Roger Dix, Chris Hilton
Graham Dootson, Iain Gilmour, Mike Godden
Rob Ibberson, Georgina Ibberson (G), Alan Kay
Richard Josephy, Tim Josephy, George Spenceley
Harvey Lomas, John Lovett, Derek Smithson,
Mike Smith, Helen Smith (G, J)ohn Schofield
Jim Rusher, Nick Welch, Ossie Rose (G)

LOW HALL GARTH
4-6 April 2006

A number of members joined the hut warden in carrying out essential maintenance work on the cottage in Litttle Langdale

CONISTON
21-23 April 2006

Roy Pomfret as meet leader, along with eleven fellow members of the YRC, was grateful to the Midland Association of Mountaineers for use of their hut, Low House, Coniston. MR 302972.

This must be one of the better appointed huts in the Lake District with an extremely well ordered

kitchen, comfortable bunks and a very hot drying room.

The hut is close to the centre of the village and therefore lacks a fine uninterrupted view of the hills but this was compensated by a splendid show from a mature magnolia tree in the adjacent garden.

The weather early on Friday was glorious with clear views but showers spoiled the afternoon. Mike Godden took advantage and stretched his legs on White Maiden. Roy Denney and Martyn Trasler broke their journey north to spend a couple of hours on the lower fells around Cartmel and Dennis Armstrong spent the day in repose having ascended Sca Fell Pike with his granddaughter the day before.

In contrast the weather on the Saturday was a little chilly with low cloud, which persisted all day.

Mike Godden continued his exploration of the Coniston fells via Goats Hause.

John Lovett along with Ken Aldred and David Smith headed for Brown Pike the latter two going on to Dow Crag.

Roy Denney and Martyn Trasler walked up the Walner Scar Road meeting Derek Collins and together they then found Blind Tarn in the mist and attained the ridge above before continuing the round of Dow and the Old Man. Derek went on to Swirl How and Wetherlam.

Dennis Armstrong, Roger Dix and John Jenkin also followed the Walner Scar Road and then doubled back to Torver and finally back to the hut along the shores of Coniston Water.

Meanwhile Ian and Robert Crowther and I avoided the low cloud and took advantage of the breeze by tacking 'The Lady D', Ian's Wayfarer, out on the water.

Having made good time against the south westerly breeze, we landed on Peel Island for our picnic lunch. This brought back many happy childhood memories for Robert who had camped here.

All went well until we reached the southern end of the lake when the tiller snapped. Robert quickly improvised a tiller, dropped the mainsail, and with the jib fully extended on the whisker pole we used the following wind to come home in good order.

Back at the hut the comfortable lounge offered a chance to rest in good company prior to enjoying a grand meal, with gravy, courtesy of Roy. The beef, we were assured was produced locally near Carlisle.

Not only did Roy provide a splendid meal but also woke the assembled each morning with a cup of tea as we lay in our pits.

Three cheers.

Sunday was bright and clear however several members had prior engagements and had to return home.

The boat crew and John Jenkin wandered over the small hills to the south of Coniston Water, where all the signs of spring were in evidence from lambs and cuckoos to martins and primroses.

Roy Denney and Martyn Trasler wandered above Langdale before getting trapped in a road race when trying to rendezvous for lunch.

A relaxing weekend yes but no less enjoyable for all that.

Those in attendance were:-
R Pomfret, D Armstrong, R Denney, R Dix,
I Crowther, R Crowther, M Godden, C Hilton,
J Jenkin, J Lovett, D Smith and M Trasler.

In addition K Aldred and D Collins arrived on the Saturday morning for a day visit.

Chris Hilton

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