

YRC JOURNAL

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ARTICLES

**OMAN
AND ITS KIRST**

TREKS IN THE ÉCRINS

MERA PEAK, NEPAL

**MEETS IN
WALES
CUMBRIA
LANCASHIRE
YORKSHIRE**

**CLASSIC
YACHTING**

**THE VERGORS
FRANCE**



SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

PHOTO - MICHAEL SMITH

**THE YRC
120 YEARS YOUNG**

CONTENTS

EDITION 14 - SERIES 13 - WINTER 2012

3	Treks in the Ecrins, France	Jack Short
6	Caves & Karst, Oman	John & Valerie Middleton
13	The Arab World Restaurant	John & Valerie Middleton
14	Oversees Meet, Nepal	Michael Smith
23	Chippings	
25	Natural History	
27	Obituaries	
30	UK Meet Reports	
	June 15-17	LHG, Lakes
	July 6-8	Long Walk Ogwen, N Wales
	July 17-19	Biking/Walking Welsh borders
	Aug 24-27	Lowstern, N Yorkshire
	Sept 14-16	RLH, Langdale, Lakes
	Oct 12-14	Shap Fells, Lakes
	Nov 18	Farleton Fell, N Lancashire
	Dec 7-9	Lowstern, N Yorkshire
40	Club Proceedings	
44	Heroics	Roy Denney
45	Roll of Honour	
47	Vercors	Roy Denney
48	Index of features 1994 - 2012	
50	Club Benefits	

TWO TREKS IN THE ÉCRINS

Jack Short

Introduction

There are five national parks in France, one being the National Park of the Écrins. In the heart of this park is the 'Oisans' around which is a celebrated circular tour, reaching a height of 2761m, although the Meije in the centre reaches a height of 3982m. To the east of this area is the smaller regional park of the 'Queyras'. I decided to try out the Oisans Tour first, having found a guide book by Andrew Harper (the author of *The Tour of Mont Blanc* which I had successfully used on previous trips.

PART 1- OISANS



Day 1 So in July 1996 I set out for this tour. This area was not the easiest place to reach from UK at that time, but a flight to Lyon was obtained arriving at 9.30 am. From here a train to Grenoble was the next stage, arriving about noon, and then a coach to Bourg, Chambon, La Grave and Monétier. The guide book recommends starting the tour at Bourg d'Oisans, but as there was a YRC meet scheduled for Ailefroide I decided to start at Monétier (1495m), arriving in the afternoon and making my way to a gîte in the village. A very pleasant pizzeria provided dinner that evening which together with a *pichet* of the local red wine ensured a good night's sleep.

Day 2 The GR54 continued from Monétier, with a stop for a snack by the stream of Cibouit and then over the Col d'Eychaude at 2425m, followed by an easy walk down to a road at Chambran. Shortly after this there was a side track off the road leading to an old bridge and the village of Ailefroide (1507m). The large campsite here is spread out through the woods and it proved impossible to locate the YRC members. I then booked into the local hostel where I found myself to be the only occupant and contrary to the guidebook, meals were not available. A visit to the small shop in the village to buy food and then cook a meal was necessary.

Day 3 An early start from the hostel provided an opportunity to visit the Refuge Cezanne (1874m) about 1½ hours up from Ailefroide. In retrospect this would have been a better place to stay than the hostel. However a start had to be made on the continuation of the Tour and a return to the village and onwards to the next place - Vallouise (1166m) about 3½ hours from Ailefroide, where I stayed in the local hotel. An enquiry about the mini bus to the roadhead at Entre les Aigues (1615m) elicited the reply that it required a reservation and a departure at 6.45 am.

Day 4 Having made the reservation and boarded the bus with about 8 other walkers we arrived about 8 km away at the

start of the path to Col de Aup Martin. (2761m). I should point out that it was now raining heavily and a thick mist was not encouraging. We all set off together but after a while there was a divergence of opinion as to the correct route (In French of course). I agreed with an elderly couple as to the correct compass bearing and we left the others to argue it out themselves. We soon found the correct path and after about an hour arrived at the Cabane du Jas Lacroix (1946m). We decided to push on, but after about an hour and still in incessant rain and mist, they retreated back to the hut. I carried on for a further hour but parties coming back down from the summit advised that it was too difficult without crampons due to freezing ice on the upper slopes. Shortly after this the rain turned to snow; the temperature dropped and I turned back. Arriving at the Cabane the French couple I had been with were ensconced inside with a roaring log fire. They invited me to stay which I duly did, and by pooling our food we had an enjoyable evening with the rain or snow still beating down on the roof.

Day 5 Woke to a thick layer of snow. Decision made to return to road head, hopefully for the morning bus. This we did as the bus was arriving. The French couple persuaded the passengers that it was too dangerous to proceed and we all returned to Vallouise. Here we negotiated with the bus owner to take us to Gap on the other side of the mountain, a distance of 80km, from where we could get the local bus to La Chapelle (1100m). This took most of the day and the French couple and I stayed at a very good gite just outside of the village.

Day 6 This turned out to be a very good day (in fact the only good day). We walked up to the CAF Refuge at Souffles (1975m) for a coffee and chat with the Warden. Bernard (half of the French couple) seemed to know everybody. At this altitude there were 2 or 3 inches of soft snow, but a very sunny day. The Col de la Vauze (2498m) was successfully negotiated and the steep descent to the small hamlet of Le Desert (1255m) made without any problem. Le Desert really was a desert but the local bar owner was very hospitable and we stayed in a barn he let out to travellers, and his wife cooked us an excellent meal of steak and *frites*.

Day 7 The French couple had decided to take the bus to Bourg d'Oisans as they were nearing the end of their holiday and it was snowing. I walked to the village of Valsenestre over the Colle de Côte-Belle (2290m) in about 5 hours, and then also caught the bus to Bourg where I met up with my friends again and stayed at what must have been the local Youth Hostel.

Day 8 Said goodbye to my friends and pondered what to do next, Decision made to carry on to Mizoen, where I knew there was a good gite. Took the easy way out of the town by bus to Velosc where there was a teleferique. This took me up to the Ski resort of *Les Deux Alpes*, which being out of season was another *Desert*. Walked the length of the village without seeing another soul and continued on to Mizoen where the gite I had in mind was closed. Never mind, I stayed at the local hotel.

Day 9 By now, I would cheerfully have gone home, but I had another day's walking to do. True to form, the route to la Grave crossed a loose black-shale scree but eventually I joined the route GR54 again, crossed the Col Souchet 2362m and arrived at a restaurant at Le Chazelet from where I was able to drop down to the main road at Les Freaux near Grave where I stayed at the conveniently placed gite.

Day 10 The bus to Bourg d'Oisans departed outside the gite at 8.00 am and after changing buses at Bourg and eventually taking a train from Grenoble to Lyon, I caught the 18.30 flight to England feeling exhausted.

Conclusion

Several parts of the original intended route were not taken, i.e. the route over the Col de l'Aup Martin had to be abandoned and the walk from Valsenestre to Le Bourg was replaced by the bus. The footpath from La Grave to Monetier had been taken previously and was ruled out by lack of time on this occasion.

There are several lessons to be learnt from this trip. First is that travelling alone in this area, unless one knows the route well, is not advisable. Conditions are not like the Alps where signposts proliferate and Alpine huts are well distributed for food and accommodation. Second is that the weather is not as predictable as elsewhere in the Alps and when it deteriorates it can be difficult to find escape routes to civilization. The route was mainly at low altitudes below 2000m and generally crampons and even ice axe were not needed, but for some of the steep Cols when they were needed they could be vital and should be taken for security.

Compared to the ease of getting to Chamonix the travel arrangements were very difficult and without a prior knowledge of bus timetables extremely frustrating. As most of the gites are not *Club Alpine Francais*, knowledge of availability and contact details were difficult to obtain.

PART 2 – QUEYRAS

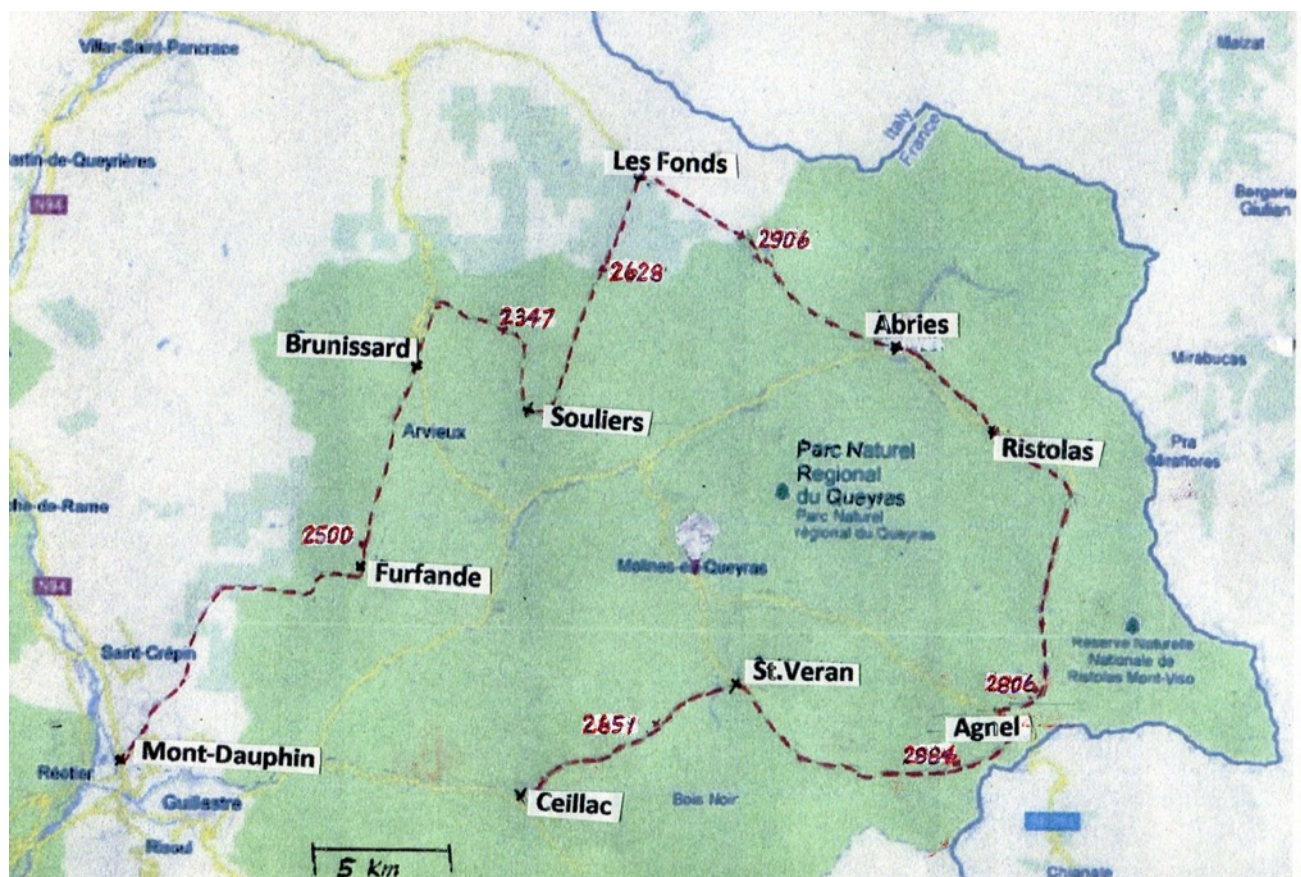
Introduction

The Écrins has two parks as mentioned in Part 1. This is an account of a walk in the second of these parks; 'The Queyras'. Remembering the problems of the previous year in the Oisans, I was accompanied this time by a friend and we were both equipped with ice axes and crampons.

There are a number of different ways of getting to the Queyras but all seem to involve a train journey at some stage. The most convenient station for starting a walk in the Queyras is Montdauphin-Guillestre, on the main line from Paris

to Briançon. Consequently we decided to take the Eurostar to Paris and the overnight sleeper onwards to Mont dauphin.

The night sleeper leaves Paris at about 9pm so we settled into a restaurant near the Gare de Lyon for dinner and then boarded the train at the last minute, as the sleeping compartments were at the other end of a very long platform. We had an excellent nights sleep and arrived at Mont Dauphin (900m) about 8am.



Day 1 The local bus was waiting in the station forecourt as we arrived and we climbed aboard for the half-hour journey to Ceillac (1656m) where we had decided to start our walk. Our first object was St. Veran; about 13km and 6 hours away via the GR58 and the Col des Estrongues (2651m). The 1000m climb took about 2½ hours and then 3 hours down to St Veran (2020m). On arrival a visit was made to the local tourist bureau who booked us into a small hotel. At the same time we inquired about booking a place at our next port of call; St Agnel, but a telephone call indicated that the Refuge Agnel was full! The rest of the day was partly occupied with inspecting the painted sundials for which the village is famous.

Day 2 Notwithstanding the news about the refuge we decided to continue and find out for ourselves. Our destination was the Refuge Agnel (2580m) near to the pass into Italy at Col-Agnel (2744m). This was 13km and 6 hours away, similar to the previous day but at higher altitude. The first half of the route followed the Aigue Blanche Torrent to the Chapelle de Clausis (2340m) then a climb up to Col de Chamoussiere (2884m) following the typical red and white flashes on the rocks. The route was straightforward although there was an increasing depth of snow as we progressed. The 300m of steep descent at the end of the ridge was rather trickier and this was where the ice-axes served their purpose, especially when I slipped off the path and had to climb back up. The refuge was clearly visible during the descent and was soon reached. Contrary to the telephone advice from the Tourist Bureau there was no problem with accommodation and meals and we were made very welcome. I think the information was intended to discourage car travellers, as it is run by the organisation GT (Grande Traversee des Alpes) and walkers were made very welcome. Close to the refuge were the ruins of the Refuge Napoleon, built in 1857 to commemorate Napoleon's classic crossing of the Alps.

Day 3 In order to visit the northern part of the Queyras the direct route to Abriès was chosen, although more interesting routes were available. However there were a number of interesting lakes en route, namely Lac Foreant (2618m) and Lac Egeourgeou (2394m). To reach these lakes the route passed over Col Vieux (2806m) (We thought this a rather suitable name for us). About 3km after the second of these lakes we dropped 600m to join a path following the River Guil to Ristolas and eventually Abriès (1541m), a total distance of about 13km again.

On arrival in Abriès we made for the Tourist Bureau, where we found an interesting display depicting the crossing of the Alps by both Hannibal and Napoleon. The Col Agnel near to where we stayed the previous night was thought to be one of Hannibal's possible routes (complete with Elephants). The Bureau also booked us into a pleasant local gite, complete with bar and restaurant.

Day 4 After Abriès there is a distinct lack of habitation and the next accommodation is the Gîte d'étape at Les Fonds de Cervieres. There are two possible routes, a choice of 6½ hrs or 8hrs. We chose the shorter of the two and headed up towards the 'Lac du Grand Laus' at 2579m followed by the Pic du Malrif (2906m) taking about 4½ hours of continuous climbing in the middle of nowhere. The Col and Pic are not spots for lingering at despite the views, and although the path is waymarked well we still had about 2½ hours walk in front of us, and we were about to walk off the edge of our map and rely on the guide book. (A dangerous thing to do). However it was all downhill and we arrived in due course at the Refuge Les Fonds de Cervieres (2035m).

This was an excellent place with about 60 beds and a bar and restaurant; located in a village of deserted or apparently unoccupied wooden buildings. An excellent log fire proved very welcoming and we persuaded the warden to use his radio telephone to reserve accommodation for us at the remote refuge of Furfande.

Day 5 Furfande was a long way off and we needed to stay at either Souliers or Brunissard on the way, so not having a map covering our present location we took advice and headed South for 4km on a very good path to the Col de Peas (2629) which was on our map, and after a further 6km downhill we arrived at Souliers (1844m). As we had made good time (i.e. we hadn't got lost) we stopped for a drink and snack and then continued on to Brunissard (1746m) via the Col du Tronchet (2347m), omitting the recommended diversion to Lac de Souliers and Pic Ouest. We stayed at the pleasant gite in the village, which left us with the remaining trek to Furfande for the following day.

Day 6 From Brunissard we followed the complicated instructions in the guide book to reach the Col de Furfande (2500m), nominally 5 hours away, but it seemed to take a lot longer, probably due to long discussions as to what the book descriptions meant.

At last the Refuge de Furfande (2283m) could be seen 200m below us and we were soon sampling the guardian's best half litres of wine. Thanks to our earlier telephone from Refuge les Fonds, we were expected, although we were not allowed into the *dortoir* until later in the day. Finally everyone was lined up and beds allocated individually at the warden's discretion. It was like being back in the army but several carafes of wine had dulled the senses and we didn't argue.

Day 7 This was our last day of walking and all we had to do was get back to the railway station at Mont-Dauphin before 8pm for the night sleeper to Paris. This was the longest section of our trip (20km and 1600m of descent). We also had to follow a change in route signs, the GR58 changing to GR541. Col Garnier (2279) was soon reached and thereafter it was all downhill, zigzagging through woodland to the ruins of Les Girards and a diversion to cross the Torrent de la Valette (1501m). Heading south on the GR541 via a good track and minor road, the villages of Eyglies (1027m) and Mont-Dauphin were soon reached, with time to find a bar and restaurant still open, and plenty of time to walk to the railway station and get aboard our sleeper to Paris.

Conclusion

The contrast between the Queyras and the visit to the Écrins the previous year was most marked. This was probably due to the good weather encountered this year, but also due to the benefits of organising our travel arrangements better, and of having some excellent accommodation, mainly in GTA gites. The mountain scenery was also superb, particularly in the remote areas close to the Italian border and would certainly justify another more leisurely trip.

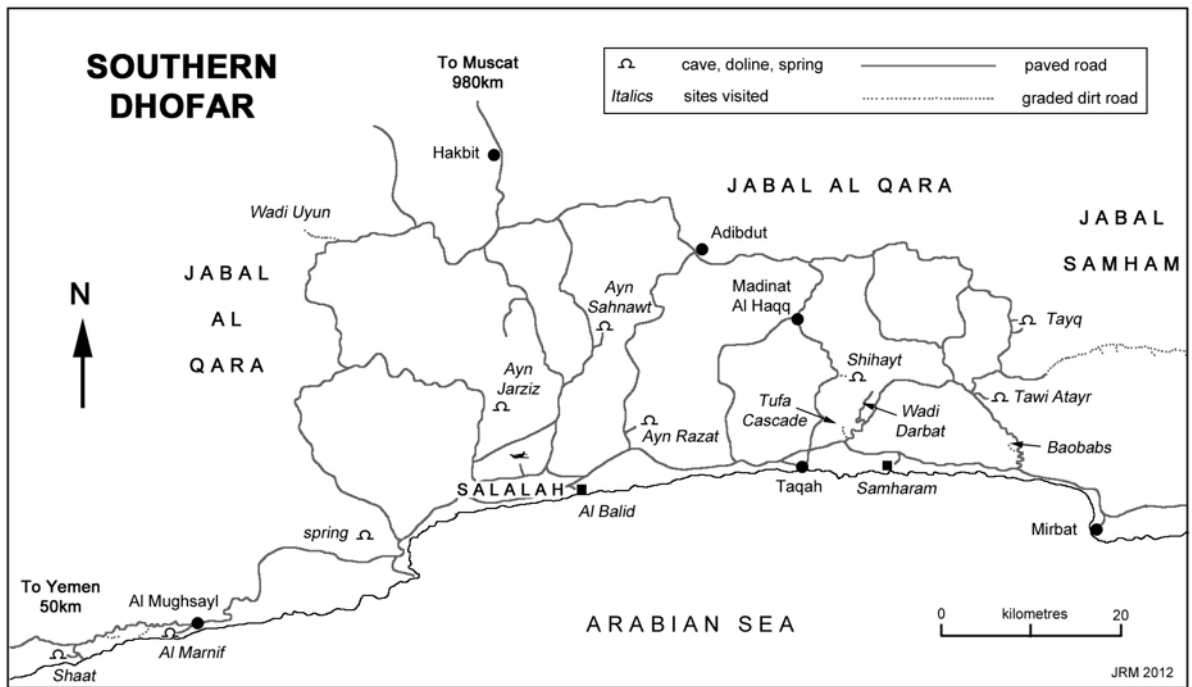
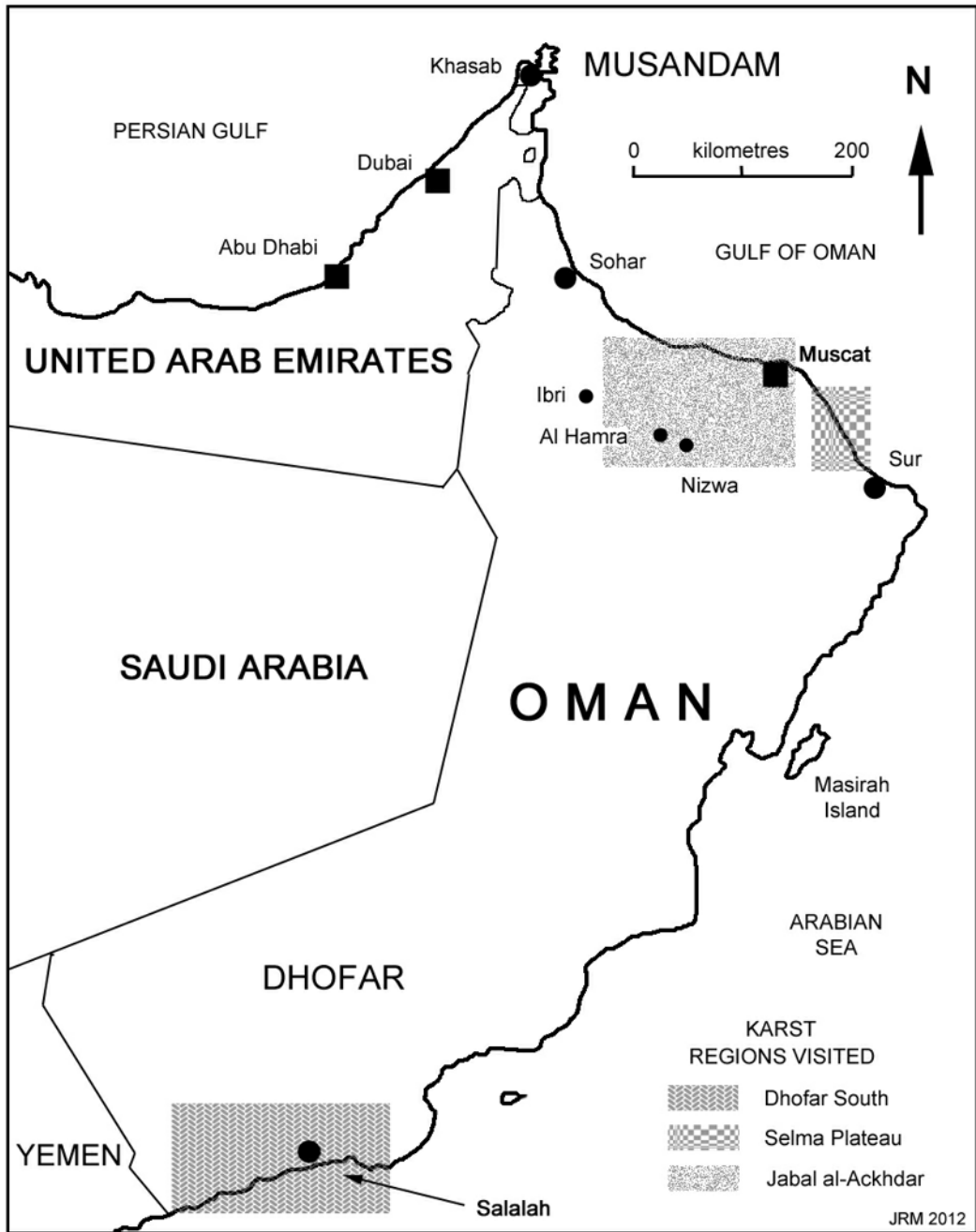
OMAN – A CAVE AND KARST TOUR

John & Valerie Middleton

During January of 2012 the authors journeyed through the various karst regions of this spectacular and geologically diverse country. There follows an account of the various sites visited, many of which are little known.

INTRODUCTION.

Oman never fails to surprise the first time visitor. It is not just a place of scorching deserts and impenetrable mountains nor is it a backward country full of religious fundamentalists. It is a forward thinking well developed state with a rich cultural heritage, a thriving economy and a very courteous population. Its visible and proud history can be traced back some 5,000 years to the impressive "Beehive" tombs of Bat and Al Ayn whilst well preserved Forts from the more recent past are to be found wherever there was a strategic advantage to be gained.



Geographically Oman is richly endowed with over 3,000km of coastline, two great sand seas, gravel plains, great defensive mountains that are internationally famous for their geology, an abundance of minerals and a climate that encompasses almost everything except extreme cold. This physical diversity combined with an enlightened conservation policy has also resulted in probably the highest number of plants and animal species, both terrestrial and marine, which can be seen in any Middle Eastern state other than Turkey.

The purpose of our visit was both botanical and speleological, two subjects that favour similar limestone habitats.

Botanically we were searching for and hoping to photograph a number of endemic arid region succulent plants that occur in the exciting wilderness of the Jabal Al Qamar and Jabal Al Qara mountains of Dhofar (Pickering & Patzelt, 2008).

Speleologically we had researched 25 different sites that we wished to visit to allow ourselves an overview of the country's special karst features. We were successful with both objectives and given below is a summary of a maybe small, but nonetheless caving paradise.

JABAL AKHDAR.

This great range of predominantly carbonate rocks situated just to the north-west of Muscat would at first seem to be the perfect place to view karst. Unfortunately a long and very arid climatic period has produced little in the way of such a landscape. The only obvious features to be seen are microkarren and rillkarren on exposed rock surfaces, particularly in the region around the 3,075m high Jabal Shamms. This is also the area where the great 1km deep "Grand Canyon" of Oman, Wadi Nakhr*, is situated together with many other awe inspiring wadis. Caves are few but do exist and these include *Al Hota*, the only show cave to be found in the country which is situated about 10km east of bustling Al Hamra town. This cave has been known for some time but in 1985 a three man British team made the first accurate survey and added several small additions (Waltham et al, 1985). It is essentially a through cave that follows the gently dipping Wasia limestone to produce a fine system 4,975m long and 262m deep. The stream-way, with its many pools, cascades and decorations measures a very sporting 4,300m from sink to rising. *Al Hota* is now a popular tourist destination complete with an informative museum, restaurant and short train ride to the actual cave entrance. Entry by active cavers is not normally permitted due to the fragile ecosystem within.

About 2km to the east of *Al Hota* the same team also surveyed the 690m long resurgence cave of *Kahf Ghubrat Tanuf* to a sump. Access to this cave is unrestricted and provides a pleasant, but short, excursion.

Just to the north of Al Hamra is the beautiful and unspoilt old town of Misfah. Visitors are welcome to explore this historic gem with its extensive falaj¹ system, date palms, bananas and a host of unusual vegetables. The falaj commences at a spring in the bed of Wadi Misfah just to the north of the town. Some 2km north-west and 300m higher from Misfah is *Hufrah Misfah*, a 435m long rather unpleasantly tight cave 197m deep. This system was an original exploration by the 1985 team and commences with a series of pitches 22m, 45m, 31m and 13m deep before following dipping bedding to a constricted but unfinished ending. We did not visit *Hufrah Misfah*.

The only other cave of real note is *Al Kitten* not far from Ibri. It is just over 400m in length and is noted both for its high air temperature of 34°C and a fine selection of gypsum formations protected by an awkward entry crawl.

SELMA PLATEAU.

This barren but dramatic karst plateau* is situated at an average elevation of 1,350 metres on the eastern flank of the Jabal Bani Jabir. It is usually accessed by a 17km long and very challenging 4x4 route from close to the coastal town of Fins some 150km south of Muscat.

The reputation of this steep and twisting track with frequent 500m unprotected drops, usually on the bends, decided us to hire a professional driver for assistance. This decision we consider to have been fully justified and money well spent!

The plateau itself measures approximately 4km by 3.5km and, apart from a few undulations, is a completely flat surface of small shattered limestone. There are also three small groupings of dwellings which are used by shepherds and their families during the long hot summer season. Surface water is none existent and the only plant life grows in the bottom of a few wadis.

Within this wilderness are to be found 5 major caves all commencing with a deep vertical drop. The first of these to be explored was *Majlis Al Jinn* during June of 1983 by the Americans Donald Davison Junior and Cheryl Jones. The cave is situated to the north-west of the plateau and within a hundred metres of a mosque and several small houses.

It is an impressive site that includes three great holes within a 200m triangle. "First Drop" proves to be a 141m free hanging abseil to the floor of a great chamber 310m x 225m with a domed ceiling 120m high (Davidson, 1985). The second shaft, "Asterisk", is 139m and the third, "Cheryl's Drop", is 158m all of which enter this same chamber which has a final depth of -178m. There are no passageways leading off and the development of this awesome place is thought to have been from within via the dissolving powers of rising hypogenic² waters (Hose, 2004).

The other four widely spaced caves, several of which have more than one entrance, are *Bayn Halayn* (Arch Cave) with a 150m entry shaft; *Kahf Kasha* (Funnel Cave) with a 170m drop; *Kahf Aqabat Khushil** (7th Hole) with a sequence of 110m, 50m and 90m drops and finally 3 *Windows Cave* with 30m and 32m pitches.

All these caves are initially joint-controlled (Hose, 2004) before converging and exiting through the giant passageways of *Khaf Tahry*. The total surveyed length of the system is 11,500m with a depth of -385m from 3 *Windows Cave*, this being the highest entry point. The resurgence of *Khaf Tahry** is situated spectacularly beneath an estimated 300m high cliff that then drops directly into a great wadi several hundred metres below. A surface return to the main 4x4 route takes around 90 minutes along dizzying tracks that cling to the canyon edge*.

Exploration of this system was carried out between 1995 and 1997 (Thomas & Robinson, 1997) with YRC members Ged Campion, Harvey Lomas, Bruce Bensley and Alan Fletcher participating in the major 1997 discoveries (Campion, 1997).

We spent two days exploring the plateau and cave but had to abandon our camp overnight due to cold winds and rain. We opted for warmth and tranquillity by the Fins beach. Surface rains can also be a problem for underground exploration as several small wadis direct all the plateau waters immediately into the system shafts.

No other caves are known on the plateau nor in its immediate vicinity but about 30km northwards and close to the coastal town of Dibab is an attractive landscaped site with an impressive doline, *Bait Al Afreet**, as its centrepiece. This is oval shaped and vertically sided measuring roughly 40m x 30m and 20m deep that has two thirds of the bottom filled with water. A flight of good steps leads into the hole and it is a place often visited by both the local population and visiting divers for training purposes. No underwater passageways have been found. *Bait Al Afreet* is within a few hundred metres of the sea and almost at the same level; however the water within remains pure and uncontaminated suggesting that it is part of a conduit that drains directly from the mountains into the sea.

DHOFAR.

This southern region of Oman proved to be the most interesting and diverse of all the areas that we visited. Whilst it is as modern as the rest of the country the people are more traditional, particularly as regards their dress; the men almost always being clothed in the “dishdasha” a hanging brilliantly white robe and “kumah”, a small embroidered head piece whilst the women cover completely with the immaculate and often ornately embroidered black “abaya”. Dhofar is particularly noted for its present and historic production of wild frankincense* with the sample known as “Hojari” being claimed as the finest on earth.

The two limestone dominated mountain ranges of Jabal Al Qara and Jabal Samham rise from the coastal plains and surround the capital of Salalah whilst Jabal Al Qamar extends from the sea westwards to the Yemeni border and well inland. But what really makes this part of Arabia special is that the coastal strip and the southern slopes of the mountains are hit by the monsoon, or khareef as it is known locally. This extra water obviously makes for a lush landscape and better karst and cave development than elsewhere. The contrast with the tops of the mountains and the arid desert to the north is sudden and quite startling.

Dolines are the most impressive feature of the karst landscape and we visited four of the finest.

Tawi Atayr is situated at an altitude of 680m almost at the western edge of Jabal Samham. It has been known for a long time and even has a small road that leads directly to a car park and viewing platform. The hole measures 140m x 100m at the surface and drops 200m to two short partially water-filled passageways to give a total depth of -211m. The cave fish “*Garra dunsira*” resides in its depths. A stream, dry on our visit, enters from the side opposite the car park. The shaft has vertical walls for three quarters of its diameter whilst the other quarter is broken by many ledges which can be scrambled down with care to -110m.

The remaining part of the shaft is now about 70m across and this continues vertically to the bottom. Calcite formations of various types can be noted at all levels. The waters are thought to resurge in *Wadi Darbat*.

To the south-east of *Tawi Atayr* and almost as far as the coast lesser dolines, also without extensions, can be found. *Tayq** is an even larger karst phenomena situated just 9km from *Tawi Atayr* that measures 1,050m x 740m x 250m deep*. The exact depth is debatable depending where on the rim the measurement has been taken from and the fact that a sizeable cave at the bottom extends, unfinished, deeper. Two considerable streams enter this great doline.

Shihayt is found about 22km to the south-west of *Tayq* and whilst smaller could be classed as an almost perfect example of cavern collapse. It is about 80m in diameter and 60m deep with overhanging walls all-round. From these hang numerous stalactites with walls covered in flowstone. No extension at the bottom is evident.

Hafraat Shaat is found at the very western edge of the map not too far from the Yemen border and only 2km from the sea. The measurements are again impressive being 80m x 50m and 280m deep! This depth includes a part water-filled passageway at the bottom.

From *Hafraat Shaat* it is possible to follow the plateau to some spectacular cliffs that plunge 918m almost directly into the sea.

Resurgences abound in the form of springs amongst the southern foothills of Jabal Al Qara. Unfortunately none of these have any associated cave extending beyond a few tens of metres. They are however worth visiting for their beauty alone as they are often found in small flowstone-adorned box canyons rich in plant life, birds and insects. Of particular note for us were *Ayn Jarziz**, *Ayn Sahnawt* and *Ayn Hamran*. *Ayn Razat* is also reputed to be very beautiful but unfortunately this is on land belonging to the Sultan and entry was not possible at the time of our visit. Several springs represent the commencement of falaj water irrigation systems that may extend many kilometres. Caves of any length are at present unknown in Dhofar but *Quanaf*, where exploration was stopped because of bad air, is 1,500m long and has a depth of -223m (Waltham, 2004). We did not visit this cave.

Other karst features include the many rock shelters and arches particularly in the vicinity of the 6km long and very attractive *Wadi Darbat*. It has even been postulated that the wadi itself might at one time been a cave system (Hanna & Belushi, 1996). Terminating the lower end of *Wadi Darbat* is the largest tufa cascade* yet recorded on earth. Its height averages 80m with a continuous width of almost one kilometre – although exact measurements do tend to vary slightly. The whole of the falls is covered by magnificent tufa draperies with a palm forest plantation extending along most of its crest. The falls were dry on our visit but they are obviously highly recommended viewing during the khareef season and several large pools at the base remain full for many months. These cascades can be clearly seen from the coastal ruins of *Samharam*, the site of Queen of Sheba's fabled frankincense capital, just 5km away. It is interesting to fantasise upon what their thoughts on these falls would have been together with what subsequent mythology inevitably developed! The final site worthy of mention is *Al Marnif* cave, close to Mughsayl on the road to Yemen.

PHOTOGRAPHS Page 17

01. Kahf Tahry entrance.

02. Wadi Nakhr, the "Grand Canyon" of Oman over 1km deep!

03. Initial view of the Selma plateau.

04. 7th Hole entrance with initial 110m, 50m and 90m pitches dropping into the "Canyon Room" which measures 200m x 80m wide!

05. "Musabha" our Guide for Kahf Tahry cave on the edge of the Selma plateau and looking down towards Fins and the coast.

06. En route to Kahf Tahry.

07. A section of the great Tufa Cascade at the entry to Wadi Darbat.

08. The mega doline of Tayq.

The term cave is really a misnomer as extensive rock shelter adorned with many formations would be a more accurate description. Associated with the cave but on a limestone platform some 50m away is an active sea blow-hole best seen around the khareef period. These two natural features combined with a several kilometre long sandy beach ensure that the site becomes a popular weekend destination from Salalah. There are also reported to be a number of sinkholes in the nearby wadis (Hanna & Belushi, 1996).

¹ Falaj is an efficient ancient irrigation system similar to the Persian "qanats" that can run above or below ground from a spring to the crops or village. It may be many kilometres in extent.

² Hypogenic caves are formed by water that is rising from below and may be geothermally warmed, where the corrosive acidity is from deep sources and not from biogenic carbon dioxide (ref. Dr A.C. Waltham).

* See photograph.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Our sincerest thanks have to go to every Omani person that we met. They were always incredibly courteous, hospitable, patient and unfailingly helpful. Our visit would not have been anywhere near as pleasurable without their presence.

POSTSCRIPT.

In April of 2012 the "Buttered Badger Potholing Club" mounted a sponsored expedition to the Dhofar region of Oman. Its aim was both to explore caves that required special breathing apparatus to overcome bad air and to extend other caves where the end was unclear. The results of this trip were not available at the time of writing. www.butteredbadger.com.





Frankincense - Boswellia sacra

TOP

Frankincense tree
(*Boswellia sacra*),
in the mountains

CENTRE

Ain Jarz,
a typical
Dhofar
spring.



BOTTOM

The doline of
Bait Al Afreet.



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THE 'ARAB WORLD' RESTAURANT

A Cultural Interlude, John & Valerie Middleton

Following ten days of spectacular karst and cave investigation together with the daily heart-stopping thrills of 4x4 mountaineering we decided it was time for a rest and relaxation weekend. Our chosen venue was at the convenient "Jumilla Guest House" situated in Al Khoud a prosperous residential district to the north of Muscat, the capital of Oman.

After settling in to our new home our first requirement was for something good to eat and our ebullient host suggested that if we liked Arabic food, which we did, then a new restaurant had just opened not more than a 10 minute walk away. So, under a brilliantly moonlit sky we headed off through the still warm streets clutching our directions. The restaurant itself was easily found standing well back from the main road within a newly built and stand-alone block. There was no menu outside and it did not have any windows for us to look through but it did have impressive doors and large welcoming signage. We went in. Everything was bright and clean; good, we thought. Opposite the entrance there sat a traditionally dressed and rather severe looking Omani man behind a reception desk. To his left were four wooden tables each with four chairs and in the corner there hung a large flat screen television, the latter being standard furnishing in any reputable local restaurant. Surrounding this area were a dozen segregated rooms each of which contained facilities for a family, or just men, to eat with privacy. We had come across this many times in the Muslim world and were not unduly surprised. It also confirmed that the food should be both good and truly regional.

We walked across to the receptionist and politely said "Good Evening, do you have a menu" to which there was no response; we then tried our best Arabic "*Al-salaam alaykum, aandakumqaa'imat al-taam*". Still there was no response. Slightly embarrassed we tried again and this time our receptionist stood up, turned, and shouted in rapid Arabic whereupon a young chef from the kitchen materialised who seemed to be, unusually, the only one with a minimal knowledge of English. "Do you have a menu" we repeated. "No, we give you (what you) like" was the accented reply. "We like all Arabic food" we attempted to say. He smiled and with this he quickly waved us towards the tables and left. We chose a corner one under the television looking back towards the entrance and the receptionist – a big mistake!

Ten minutes later an enormous plate of very large, obviously well-seasoned, long grained rice was presented to us topped with two equally great pieces of spiced,barbequed butterfly chicken and a little salad. The aroma was out of this world! Two different breads also appeared, one was the delicious flat Arabic type and the other was the even thinner and crispier Yemeni bread. We waited for something to eat it with – a fork, a knife, a spoon, a skewer, chopsticks.....anything would do! Nothing materialised. We looked at one another and realised that this really was the real thing; right hand only, bread in place of cutlery, OK but how do we cut the meat? We attempted to explain our quandary and ask for a knife but to no avail. Eventually our young chef was fetched and we again tried to explain our predicament. There then followed a lot of discussion with the receptionist and eventually he vanished into the kitchen only to quickly reappear brandishing a 60cm long cleaver above his head. We froze; the receptionist quickly jumped up, grabbed it from him then launched into a seemingly heated diatribe (?). We remained calm and tried to keep a bland expression on our faces. The chef left and the room returned to some semblance of normality. Resignedly we tore off a piece of bread with our right hand, no easy thing to do without practice, and started to scoop up the delicious rice. Silence resumed. At least we were not in an excruciating cross legged position as had sometimes happened in the past.

Actually it was not quite normal as by now most of the kitchen staff, together with the waiters had moved into our room,ostensibly to look at the television until more clients came in, but we knew differently; all eyes were definitely on us! Even a couple of local people who came in for a take-away decided to sit down, watch and then stay on even after they had received their hot food. Overcome with the desire to show a stiff upper lip plus the fact that the food really was the best that we had eaten in Oman, we persisted. Slowly the rice mountain was reduced to a respectable level. Then the chicken was mastered in a moderately dignified fashion by first wrapping it in bread before taking dainty bites out of it; another exercise not easy with just one hand.

Eventually we could eat no more, we looked around, we grinned, patted our tummies and everyone looked away. An unexpected and delicious glass of cardamom tea appeared that rounded off the meal perfectly. Our excitable chef then showed us to the wash room to clean our hands, we returned to pay our bill (less than £7 for us both including soft drinks and a tip), we attempted to thank him and the receptionist and told them how good the food was; we received great smiles all round and suddenly the room erupted with much conversation and no doubt many comments. The take-away people left, we said "*maa al-salaama*"(Goodbye) and headed outside to the ever-twinkling night sky. We also left with the thought that eating in such places was just as exciting as caving, probably as dangerous and definitely as memorable! But just to be on the safe side, perhaps tomorrow we would return to the mountains!

Footnote We later learnt that "Arab World" is an expanding chain of new restaurants highly acclaimed by the local population for its quality food, authenticity and traditionalism. We always did eat out in local places, all were good without exception but "Arab World" assuredly was the best.

OVERSEES MEET

MEERA PEAK TREK AND CLIMB, NEPAL 4TH TO 29TH OCTOBER

Participants:

Stephen Allison (prospective member)
John Brown
Peter Chadwick, Ann Chadwick (Guest)
Edmund Chadwick (guest)
Rupert Goodway (guest)
David Hick
Richard Taylor
Aaron Oakes
Michael Smith, Helen Smith (Guest)

Supported by:

Chewang Motup (Member)
Sherpas -
Pema, Ridar, Phurtemba, Phurteman Rai and Uttar
Cook team - Niri, Karma, Tsedup, Ramesh Rai, Ramesh
Tamang, Akash Rai, Ram Kumar, Jai Kumar, Bibi Rai
Porters: at one time or another some 33 porters were either
with us each day or bringing in supplies to meet us.



The team taking breakfast at base camp

Cost: US\$2,230 (£1,400) per person plus flights from the UK to Kathmandu (from £600) and tips (\$200)

Summary: An 18-day trek in total starting with a long acclimatisation walk in from Lukla over the Panggom La to the Hinku valley and up to the Mera La glacier. From a higher camp, 8 ascended to the central summit, 6 going on to the North summit at 6476m. A 3-day return trek was made down towards and over the Zatrwa La to Lukla.

Glossary:

Chorten – dome-shaped monument to a distinguished Buddhist, often a lama
Dingma – clearing
Durbar – palace or castle

Gompa – monastery or hermitage

Kharka – yak grazing area or meadow

Khola – river

La – pass or col

Mani wall – wall of stones with inscribed prayers which Buddhist pass on the left

Stupa – a heap-like structure possibly holding a relic and a focus for Buddhist prayer and pilgrimage.

The Plan

The genesis of this trip was straightforward. A long-held ambition to visit Nepal had been thwarted by the need to work during school terms – then retirement arrived. The choice of a route with a worthwhile trekking objective was left to the Club's Himalayan member, Chewang Motup of Rimo Expeditions. Of his suggestions Mera Peak sounded the most challenging and, following the 2011 Annual Dinner, gained increasing support. Indeed, at one point the numbers looked as if they would need to be capped at 15 but after a couple of health problems by mid-September just a dozen were signed up to go.

The objective, Mera Peak, is designated a 'trekking peak' by the Nepalese government. For many years the climb was graded Alpine Facile but due to depletion of snow cover near summit the final 30-40 metres is now graded Peu Difficile and requires a jumar in ascent and a short abseil in descent. On a clear day, from the upper reaches of Mera there is a panorama including among many others, five of the world's six highest mountains: Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Kanchenjunga.

The trek to and from the climb is strenuous and often on narrow rocky trails steeply ascending and descending to give every opportunity to acclimatise.

The party was mixed in a number of ways. Experienced climbers in the greater ranges such as David and Michael were joined by those who had not walked on a glacier; Ann, Steve and Rupert. Only John, Richard, David and Aaron had visited Kathmandu before; John having passed through Lukla on the way to Everest base camp. Ages ranged from 24 to 66 and for some it was their first trek.

September saw steadily increasing email and telephone traffic between us discussing kit, how essential each item was and how it might be fitted into available kitbags. Down gear purchases must have helped boost China's economy and supported the UK gear market. Larger kitbags were purchased. Then we each made our various ways to Kathmandu – well most did.

Assembly in Kathmandu

Kathmandu arrivals hall presents a challenge for the tired traveller. Finding an arrivals declaration form, securing somewhere to fill it in and selecting the right queue to get a visa feel like trials but pale into insignificance against the patience you need once you are in the queue with its jostling for positional advantage and organised groups seemingly

circumventing part of the crocodile and the animosity this generates. An hour or so though and one is through to collect baggage (matching numbered stubs required) and so to exit to confront the wall of porters, operators and drivers all insisting on helping you. Then across the road one spots Sherpa Ridar calmly holding a white Rimo sign and order is immediately restored as you are ushered to a waiting taxi.

For first-time visitors Kathmandu traffic appears chaotic with lorries, taxis, cars, bikes, mopeds and pedestrians weaving around each other, raised manhole covers and sacred cows showing little regard the correct side-of-the-road let alone lanes. However, it all works smoothly enough and appeared to be based on two principles: watch the space in front and if it is clear then go for it quickly before anyone else tries to; and, if there is someone else to left or right who might inadvertently or consciously move into that space then beep at them to signal your presence and intention. Abiding by those rules our taxi driver would approach a dual-carriageway up a ramp, cross the thankfully yielding oncoming-traffic and pass through a gap in the barrier at the next junction to join traffic flowing the 'right' way.

The ring road was surfaced as was the Kingsway to the ex-palace in the city centre. Some other roads had kerbs under construction but many were steep rutted beaten-earth roads suffering badly from the ravages of the wet season. Full taxis frequently struck their sumps on the road or had to pass through large puddles of muddy water. Practically every vertebrae-jarring journey involved these unsurfaced roads and taxi drivers seemed to prefer them to waiting in long queues to cross oncoming traffic on the better roads.

We gradually met up at the Hotel Tibet International which is on a ridge adjacent to the airport's ridge and close to one of the world's largest stupas at Boudhanath and a 20 minute taxi ride from the city centre. The hotel's top floor breakfast bar gave good views of the city, the stupa and on clear mornings the Himalayas. We ate in their restaurant with live local music on a zither-like instrument struck by hammers, or in the various restaurants and roof-top cafes round the stupa.

Excursions were made to the Swayambunath monkey temple, cultural Durbar Square with its old royal palace, ex-hippy Freak Street and touristic Thamel by those who had arrived early. An attempt to visit Gompas around the nearby stupa took us to various shops, past gardens and scuttering chipmunks but no Gompas so a retreat was made to a roof-top café for a breeze, beers and buffalo momos.

As we prepared to fly out to Lukla we were still missing Richard Dover who had neither visa for India nor a flight from Delhi to Kathmandu. Understandably, he was not leaving the UK unless these were secured. For the rest of us the Lukla flight was a frequent topic of conversation.

Firstly, the Lukla approach and landing was notoriously tricky involving a mountain ledge and an uphill (decelerating) runway. Secondly, the monsoon season had dragged on longer than normal and the rains had created a backlog of flights and passengers. Thirdly, the previous week a Lukla flight had crashed soon after take-off with loss of all crew and passengers following a bird-strike and an unfortunate attempt to turn back to the airport resulting in a stall.

A 5am breakfast for an early start, a wait in the check-in area, a baggage search, a long wait on the tarmac, a 35-minute ridge-skimming flight with grand views of Dorje Lapka (YRC objective in 1995) and other white peaks along the Himalayan chain and we were landing at Lukla, decelerating madly before reaching the mountainside and the swing right to the arrivals area. Twin engines still running, we were decanted relieved and filed off round the tail in the direction pointed out by a whistle-blowing policeman and passing the next batch of returning trekkers on their way aboard. Within a few minutes that plane was again airborne.

A nerve-steadying drink of tea in the garden of the Lukla Numbur Lodge and a lot of weight-assessing lifting of our kitbags then loads were packed and we were off on the trek.

The Walk-In Day 1, October 7th, Lukla 2,800m to Puyan 2,800m

Starting by 11am down by the side of the runway and off left and out of Kathmandu we find the path gives an easy start to the trek along the trade route out to the roadhead at Jiri – the route along which some of our camping equipment had arrived due to lack of cargo capacity arising from the cancelled flights. Dipping towards a stream crossing we are faced by a long string of ponies carrying loads of sugar to Namche Bazaar and have to step off the path to avoid being wiped out by these juggernauts. A couple of local porters carry sheets of slate about half a square metre in size while another has eight planks of wood each three metres long across his shoulders. By a stream soon after this, one of our two cook teams was waiting in a lodge garden with our picnic lunch. The daytime temperature is around 20°C.

Three hours southwards uphill across forested hillsides and we are at Puyan for our afternoon tea and overnight camp. To the relief of everyone, the last of our kitbags, having come out on a later plane, soon caught up with us. We are sharing two to a geodesic design Mountain Hardware tent and these perform well even at the high camps. The staff clean, wash and thoroughly dry the tents after each trip and store them in Lukla ready for the next party.

We all eat well that evening in a tea-house building: tomato soup with popadoms, buffalo momos with cauliflower and potato curry, salad and rice then pineapple slices and a choice of tea, coffee or hot chocolate. This is typical of the meals sometimes which included chips, boiled potatoes,

sausage, naan, chipatis, dal, mutton or pizza. David, Aaron and Peter had all been going strongly. Only John lacked an appetite.

Lukla is a modest-sized village and Puyan is much smaller but they are the largest places we will trek through. Motup briefs us on the trek routine and a card school is formed.

Day 2 Puyan (2,800m) to Pangkongma (2,850m)

A yellow-billed blue-tailed magpie flies into nearby trees as we are packing up our bags before breakfast.

Soon after starting out this morning, around 9am, we leave the main trade route south to Phaplu and Jiri to climb eastwards on a quieter, narrower trail winding steadily upwards, over a col on the Tham Danda, down to a tea-house lunch by which time Ann's knee is painful. On a steep slope David misses his footing and crashes off the path descending some metres. Thankfully he is uninjured. Later, the path leads down to a stream near which David drops his camera which is found after much beating about the bush – literally. Then we climb up through lush farmland to the small trading centre of Pangkongma. A day of light showers becoming more continuous later then drying out overnight.

Day 3 Pangkongma (2,850m) to Nashing Dingma (2600m)

The day starts with a stiff climb through lush bamboo and rhododendron forest. The latter being Nepal's national flower. Passing many mani walls we go over the Pangkongma La (3,174m) it is too cloudy to see the hoped for south faces of Mera and Naulekh. Modelling balloons brought from the UK to amuse children prove too difficult for we trekkers to inflate but passed to the Sherpas they give hours of amusement and worryingly purple faces as they warm and stretch them but with no greater success. We descend steeply a long way to the Hinku Khola accompanied by children on their way to school. After a lunch stop overlooking the river we cross by a swaying suspension bridge. The afternoon is a 2½ hour climb up the eastside of the valley to Nashing Dingma and our camp in the clouds by a simple Gompa.



Suspension bridge over the Hinku Khola (MS)



Trekking up to Nashing Dingma (MS)

In the damp conditions, with the monsoons lasting a little longer than usual, leeches abound. Several are on the tent overnight. Soon after turning in a fracas breaks out nearby among some porters with the alcohol-fuelled shouting and scuffling lasting several minutes.

Day 4, Nashing Dingma (2600m) to Chalem Kharka (3600m)

Phurtemba serves breakfast wearing dark glasses and a neckerchief across his face. A non-drinker, he had stepped in last night to try and sort out the fight only to end up with a black eye, bleeding brow and broken nose.

The trail becomes increasingly steep as we walk up to the Surke La, a pass that gives us a taste of the altitude yet to come. We need a cup of tea to catch our breath in the teahouse just over the pass. Then we continue on upwards along a tree-covered ridge to camp at the summer grazing land of Chalem Kharka. The villages are getting smaller and most buildings are single storey with no chimney and the smoke eventually drifting out of the gables or eaves. The daytime temperature has fallen to 10°C and it is drier.

At the evening meal John finds a leech on his leg and deduces that it probably came up to this site on his tent. He flicks it to the ground. Over the next hour it finds its way onto Michael's leg feeds, burrows back through his sock and then drops off.

Day 5, Chalem Kharka (3600m) to Chunbu Kharka (4200m)

One of our favourite breakfasts today: rice pudding with coconut flakes and raisins. The other favourite is porridge. Aaron has a stomach upset which is not responding to antibiotics so can't enjoy his food. He is put on a plain diet. On the other side, Ann is gaining resilience and is even carrying her sack downhill.

Today is a short sharp day taking us well above the tree line. First steeply up a corrie and then across a series of linked cols around 4400m. There are many gentians and edelweiss among the otherwise largely dry vegetation. The descent to a hanging valley is past a number of lakes sacred to Hindus, Panch Pokhari. Their shores have tridents sticking out of the ground or cairns.

There is an isolated house but otherwise this is a deserted area. An 11-year-old orphan, Suresh, is staying with relatives here. His mother died and his father is a miner in India. He has a ready smile and lively eyes.



A waterfall decorates the corrie back but the steep corrie sides block out the sun from about 4pm and the temperature fall to about -6°C overnight.

Day 6, Rest day at Chumbu Kharka (4200m)

Clear blue skies clouding up in the afternoon when there is a hail storm.

We take an acclimatisation stroll up past the waterfall to a higher corrie with a lake, 4536m. See elsewhere in this issue the description of the scattering of Howard Humphreys ashes by this lake. On our return there is an impromptu game of baseball/cricket with Suresh joining in. Aaron strikes the ball so well and hard that both bat and ball are destroyed. John enjoys a more relaxing day as he continues to find the going difficult which is odd as he is the only member of the party to have trekked in this area. Those unfamiliar with moving wearing crampons strap up and tramp across the grass and up and down a nearby slope to the amusement of the others.

More hail and snow overnight and frosting inside the inner tent.

Day 7, Chumbu Kharka (4200m) to Kote (3673m)

We are breakfasted before the sun strikes the camp at 8.15am then heading off up a ramp to a ridge, 4400m, with views down the Changdu Khola. The next hour or so was a grand traverse along a recently repaired path high above the Hinku valley amidst gathering cloud. From a grassy perch we descend in zig-zags through the Mojang Forest. Descending further across the hillside we cross the Majang Khola and our porters heating up a brown millet flour and pea mix over a smoky fire.

We were expecting lunch hereabouts but our cooks have found a better spot much further along by the Hinku Khola, close to Tashing Ongma and our day's destination, Kote or Kothe/Mosom Kharka as it is labelled on some maps. To keep us replenished two walk back towards us a couple of kilometres carrying our metal mugs and an enormous kettle of refreshing lemon drink. This section of the trail has moss-covered trees, tree-roots across the path and the occasional scramble down cliffs.

Lunch today is popcorn, beans, salad, carrot bread and chips with juice and tea.

A short note here about the forest we had been walking through. We dropped from above the tree line through scrub consisting of juniper (*Juniperus recurva*) with potentilla and berberis, all can be seen in our gardens and tree collections at home. As we descended we came into the more recognisable Himalayan Rhododendron forest with scattered and fairly large Himalayan fir (*Abies spectabilis*).

The understory consisted of Rose, Rowans and maples probably Cappadocian Maple (*Acer cappadocicum*). While walking we had seen little evidence of forest intervention except around some of the lodges where trees had obviously been thinned. There was really noticeable regeneration along the river valley and the paths. In one area shredding had been carried out. This is removing the branches from the side of the standing tree to be used as fodder and firewood, allowing shoots to grow back without being grazed off by the goats kept in the area. This was a medieval practice in our country and was carried out in some of the larger deer parks.

The remaining 45 minutes to Kote are by the widened riverbed gouged out in 1998 when a glacial lake, the Sabai Tsho, burst through its moraine dam. Clouds roll in and light rain starts by 2pm as we are exploring this larger village's small shops, butchers' slabs and carpenter's workshop. Young males bet on games of carrom in which discs slide across square tables lightly dusted with something like fine semolina.

That night we eat in a stove-heated room. Around the corner a hot shower is advertised. It is a stone-mosaic floored sentry box with a bucket for the hot water and a plastic jug. We stick to the bowls of hot water delivered each morning to our tents.

Day 8, Kote (3673m) to Tangnag (4300m)

Off by 8.30am and still in the shade of this high-sided valley. A day with views of snow-plastered peaks (Kayasar and a spur of Mera) as we head up the Hinku valley. Features appear ahead and take a long time to reach though we are moving steadily. The white-waters of the Hinku Khola are on our right.

We have a longer lunch stop picnicking in an open area but move on as cloud encroaches and we cool down in the cold wind. The temperature falls to 14°C.

The camp is at a small village which was the only one in the valley in 1991 when Motup first visited this area with a FRCC group. The small deserted shrine up the hillside then now has a few buildings, a resident lama and a steady 'trade' in blessing passing trekking parties. The shrine is now enclosed, is elaborately painted and has a stuffed eagle on the wall. Our blessing is accompanied by singing and dextrous simultaneous drum beating and bell ringing.

The evening game of film-title charades lasts until 8.30pm and amuses our Sherpas. The central stove is a hazard for the more energetic players. A foot 'pawing' the ground to indicate a bull and the first syllable of Bullet, being confused with the Thirty-Nine Steps causes general hilarity.

Cloud cover maintains the temperature and it fall to just below freezing.

Day 9, Tangnag (4300m) to Dig Kharka (4650m)

This is the first of two short days to get to base camp. We are again off in the shade by 8.30am and cross moraines and meltwater stream to a deserted grazing area - 2½ hours. On the way a short diversion left of the main valley gives a view over the Sabai Tsho lake which is now being monitored against another burst. The water level is obviously much lower.

After lunch in the mess tent we laze about in the sunshine then take another walk up to a high point to help acclimatise. This was our best campsite as it was in the wild away from settlements. There are good views of Mera's north flank until the clouds roll in. There are impressive serac collapses causing avalanches.

Day 10, Dig Kharka (4650m) to Khare base camp (4900m)

A 1½ hour walk starting later, 9.30am, having only breakfasted once the sun has reached our camp. If we thought we were chilly then our porters rising from their beds under a large overhanging boulder were sure to have been less comfortable. Three of our porters are women and this is the first time we have come across this.

Khare is a busy spot with several terraces covered with various groups' tents. Groups practice jumaring on a nearby slope. We hear that the first group of the season has made it through the soft snows to the central summit. After lunch we take another acclimatisation walk up the spine of a moraine to some prayer flags, perhaps 5200m. We are all moving steadily but slowly except John who has decided not to camp higher than this – he has no appetite and had felt for several days that he was not acclimatising well. Michael has a bad cold.

Our return to camp is accompanied by the arrival of noisy snowcocks clucking and calling. A small rodent is also spotted near the tents.



MS

Day 11, Rest day at Khare base camp (4900m)

The morning's acclimatisation walk is up a moraine on the other side of the camp up to and across a boulder field and to the snout of the Mera Glacier at 5200m. It is the same route we will take to the mountain and everyone is feeling pretty whacked.

The afternoon is a flurry of putting on, taking off adjusting and refitting kit as we have an equipment check. We are intending to have three to a tent at the next camp so this and the difficulties in portering result in a good deal of repacking and discarding of non-essential items. Helen, Ann and John are intending to stay at Khare for the few days we others are higher.

The Climb: Day 12, Khare (4900m) to Mera La advanced base camp (5350m)

For many this is the first day in heavy mountain boots. Despite this we cover the same ground as yesterday much faster. The scramble over ice and rock debris to gain the glacier is scrappy with danger in places of dislodging rocks on those below. Goodness knows how the porters manage with their loads and trainers or sandals. Once on the flattish glacier towards the Mera La we are moving parallel to the crevasses and there are several narrow snow bridges worn smooth and slippery by the passage of many feet



Crossing the glacier shelf on snow bridges (MS)

At the broad Mera La, 5425m, we see the rock tower of the next camp, called high camp, ahead but turn left and descend to a sheltered desolate rocky area to camp. Our porters had arrived here the day before to secure good spots for our tents. The edge of the glacier is the view to the right and to the left are a line of high Himalayan peaks. Food is served at our tents and we are all in our sleeping bags soon after lunch.

Late in the day two Hong Kong Chinese return from Mera staggering and dropping items of gear. They were going slowly and had not been turned back by their Sherpa. They had intended an ascent of Island Peak next but this now looked unlikely. Their cook and gear had long since descended north from the Mera La. On average we count two helicopter evacuations from this route each day.

After an evening meal about 5pm we start a long 'sleep' as we intend leaving tomorrow's start until after the sun strikes the tents. Thank goodness for pee bottles.

Day 13, Mera La ABC (5350m) to the high camp (5780m)

We rope up to practice moving together for the short distance across a straightforward glacier bowl up to high camp. Motup leads the first rope, Michael the second.

Camp sites here are cramped. Our team have secured the best sites on narrow rock terraces sheltered from the wind by the rock tower. Others struggle to hold on to noisily flapping tents or pitch on the glacier. We are in the tents and settled to sleep around 6pm as the last of the light gave Sikkim's Kanchenjunga a rosy glow. We have a short night's sleep ahead.



High camp (MS)



High camp cook tent (DH)

Day 14, High camp (5780m) to Mera summit (6461m) to Khare

Tea is delivered to the tent at 1.30am and we are well kitted up and off by headlamps before 3am. I can't imagine how many flocks of eider were harvested to fill all our down gear. Perhaps most impressive were Steve's gloves supplied by Peter Elliott's PHD - almost the size of boxing gloves. Undoubtedly the oldest were David's and Michael's 1988 jackets which had seen many a trip.

The steady trudge weaving right then left round crevasses was relieved by the odd stop for an adjustment or two and bursts of (OK, slight increases in) speed as we overtook another rope. The route steepened and those ahead stopped as a long crevasse with a collapsed snow bridge barred the way. Motup traversed right until the lips were less than a metre apart and leapt up over the gap. We followed protected by Motup's rope.



The bergshrund at first light (RT)

Soon after this Michael's cold-impaired breathing gets the better of him and Penma ties on at the front of that rope. Peter is also suffering from the same cold making breathing difficult. In the early light, another steepening and then the route levels out towards a shallow col on the broad summit ridge. Looking back we have clear views from Cho Oyu past Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse and Makalu right across to Kanchenjunga.

The main summit is a few hundred metres ahead atop a steepening which has a gully on the right. David, Richard, Aaron, Steve, Ed and Rupert follow Penma's steep lead jumaring up his rope to reach the top. The descent is complicated by a slight overhang for those less experienced in abseiling.



MS

Heading up the summit slopes to the gully

Meanwhile, Peter and Michael turn left with Ridah to the more rounded central summit before descending directly down the ascent route to high camp. The glacier's snow surface was softening but the jump over the crevasse was straightforward.

By noon all were safely gathered back at high camp for drinks and a light lunch before heading unroped over the Mera La back between the crevasses of the flat section to the glacier snout. Peering over the edge we spot Ann and Helen on the rocks below. They had been up that morning with Puttemar Rai onto the glacier and some distance above the Mera La towards high camp. After an untidy scramble down we join them in celebratory mood for a drink and a bite to eat then descend the moraine together. John has remained in Khare suffering from mountain lassitude.

Late afternoon we are all back at Khare base camp after a long but rewarding day. The ascents were firsts of their kind for many of the party and all who went up felt they had done as much as they wanted to.

The Walk-Out: Day 15 Khare (4900m) to Kote (3673m)

The walk out is often a peculiar time as the excitement is generally over, people may be getting tired and the ground is probably familiar. This was true to an extent this first day of the return journey but not the remaining two. Those were to be over the high Zatrwa La to the east of the Hinku Valley and the quickest way back to Lukla.

After the previous day's exertions we sleep well and make our "7 8 9" deadlines: 7am tent tea, washed and packed for an 8am breakfast, 9am off on the trek. The descent of the valley stuck closer to the Hinku Khola than on our ascent and passed a number of enormous boulders.

Lunch was al fresco at tables on a terrace below a solar heater. Richard disappeared to bargain for some locally-made woollen hats.

John was in poor condition with a stomach upset to add to his troubles and was wobbly on his feet. We were concerned for his ability to cope with the next two days ascent. By 4pm we are back in the busier village of Kote. The celebratory evening meal includes chicken and, courtesy of Motup, Scotch whisky. By the time we turn in the temperature is about 5°C.

Day 16, Kote (3673m) to Thuli Kharka (4230m)

There is an abrupt start to the day as we are still in our tents in the middle of packing our bags before breakfast. The cry goes out that a helicopter is on the way and the tents must come down as we are near its landing area. Tents are quickly emptied, dismantled and packed and soon the red helicopter sets down to the alarm of a grazing white horse. One door opens and while beckoning the limping evacuee packs of beer are thrown out.

The unfortunate trekker is soon strapped in and the helicopter is away - another rescue on the insurance bill.

Initially following the river down a series of cliffs forces us to make minor ascents and scrambles down until we reach Tashing Ongma before turning directly and steeply uphill towards the Zatrwa La. The path is through Himalayan firs then rhododendron forest and our porters take frequent breaks. There are German and Quebecois parties on the same trail and our lunch spot, Tashing Dingma, is busy. Perched on a viewing platform by a hut next to a large boulder we catch a strong cold wind. The afternoon has another steep ascent then a short traverse into a corrie with a few buildings and a painted rock, Thuli Kharka.

We eat in at the top of the hamlet in a building with a stove tended by a lady determined to feed it with logs longer than the stove itself. After a round or two of inferior quality Royal Stag whisky, Richard, Steve, Aaron, Rupert and Ed find a bar lower down and take their custom there. Both in our mess hut and the bar there are people trying to sleep but they do not appear to mind our staying as while we are there the stove is being kept alight and the room warm.

Day 17, Thuli Kharka (4230m) over the Zatrwa La (4610m) to Lukla (2840m)

A cold start and breakfast is delayed until after 7am when the sunlight reaches the al fresco breakfast table. Today it is porridge followed by fried eggs on pancakes.

We head directly up the steep corrie back to cross the first of three ridges or cols which form the Zatrwa La. From the last two of these we have good views to the west of snow covered peaks. John is moving steadily and in much better condition than yesterday. The descent is steep, sometimes with a poor footing and relentlessly down. We pass a high house whose water supply is hundreds of metres away across a rocky traverse then continue down below the tree line crossing streambeds to a hamlet by fields and a Chorten.

During our picnic lunch we are entertained by Thar, wild hairy mountain goats, whistling and grazing on the slope above. Grazing on crisps, biscuits and cola just below us are the younger Canadian party. We preferred the look of our pakoras, fish, salad and beans.

Another couple of hours' descent traversing wooded hillsides, ridges and streams brings us to a Gompa on the outskirts of Lukla. By 4pm we are back at the Lukla Numbur Hotel where we have a primitive but welcome hot shower. Afterwards we gather in the bar for a beer and tips are collected for the support staff. We settle on \$200 each, 10% of the trek cost, which Motup considers generous though this is only about £10 per day each to be spread across the guiding, cook and portering teams.

Beers at the hotel cost 500 rupees and are supplemented by Motup producing a bottle of Johnny Walker.

Back in Lukla then Kathmandu

Not having any mishaps or bad weather we had no needed to use the spare day built into the schedule. So we had a spare day in Lukla. There is not a lot to do in Lukla: it has

one main street and even walking round slowly, going down to the local market and watching people ride hired bicycles on the football pitch (the only flat ground around apart from the airstrip), it is difficult to make it last much more than an hour. Some managed a little shopping, two found a pool hall, five persuaded a flea-pit cinema to show a 30-year-old National Geographic video of Edmund Hillary's work in the area and Ann persuaded a yak-herder to sell her a particular yak bell and strap from one of his herd.

The hotel's bar and sitting room overlooked the airstrip and was decorated in the strong Nepalese colours with assorted expedition tee-shirts pinned to the ceiling. This is where we ate. The cooking facilities at the hotel were probably less than convenient for our cooks as the evening meal was delayed. The desert was a cake decorated with the three summits of Mera. After eating we presented each cook and guiding team member with their tips and thanked them all for such a well-supported trek. Then the dancing commenced. To an eclectic mix of tracks our enthusiasm exceeded our finesse and we soon cleared the floor of any other patrons.

An early start, queues for check-in, security hand-search of kitbags, segregated male and female channels for body searches and a wait in the departure 'lounge' then we were flying back to Kathmandu. The next day or so before everyone left, there were shopping trips, a day's visit to the well preserved medieval town of Bhaktapur, and a grand meal out at the Ghar-e-kabab Indian restaurant in the prestigious Annapurna Hotel on Kingsway. *En route* to the last one of our taxis lost track of the others leading it and was heading out towards Lhasa until David persuaded him to return to the hotel and get new instructions.

Back in the UK everyone took stock. Most had lost some weight, one a couple of inches from their waistline. A week was long enough to shake of the fatigue from a month's strenuous trekking. It took a month or so for the minor frost-nip to work its way out.

Once again the Club is indebted to Motup and Rimo Expeditions for another successful Himalayan expedition. Having Motup along was a great advantage to us in appreciating the terrain and cultures we were seeing. Our memories of the varied experiences on this trip will remain with us long after the sensation has returned to our frost-nipped fingers and toes.

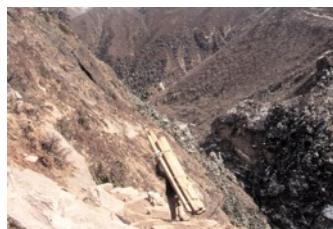
Michael Smith

Editors Note

I read this piece with great interest and some jealousy given that I could not join them. I should not complain as I was celebrating my 40th wedding anniversary in New Zealand.

To support Michael's piece these are a couple of pictures from my earlier trip to the region which highlight comments he has made.

The first shows the landing strip at Lukla, uphill to stop you coming in, but a leap into the void taking off.



We did not have the luxury or safety of a two-engined light plane but went in sitting on the luggage in a Russian army-surplus helicopter with so many holes in the fuselage that the view of the terrain was no problem.

I understand that the airstrip is at least surfaced now.

The second is of a porter carrying an impossible load as the team had observed. The nice new metal bridges were not in evidence to any extent when we were there and rather than step aside for a pack train we met on one occasion a string of Yaks coming towards us with no room to pass and a very considerable drop beside us. Our Sherpas told us to separate and lie down and let the Yaks pick their way over us.

One luxury we could have taken but did not think of were pee bottles. Going out into the snow at 14,000ft in the middle of the night is no joke.

The Birds

Tibetan Snowcock
White-Throated Kingfisher
Brown Dipper
River Chat
Crested Hawk Eagle
Steppe Eagle
Pariah Kite
Yellow-Billed Blue Magpie
Raven
Chough
Black Crow
House Crow
House Sparrow
Yellow-Cheeked Tit
Oriental Magpie Robin
Brahmin Mynah
Jungle Mynah
Indian Grey Shrike

Photographs

JB John Brown
AC Ann Chadwick
DH David Hick
RT Richard Taylor
MS Michael Smith,



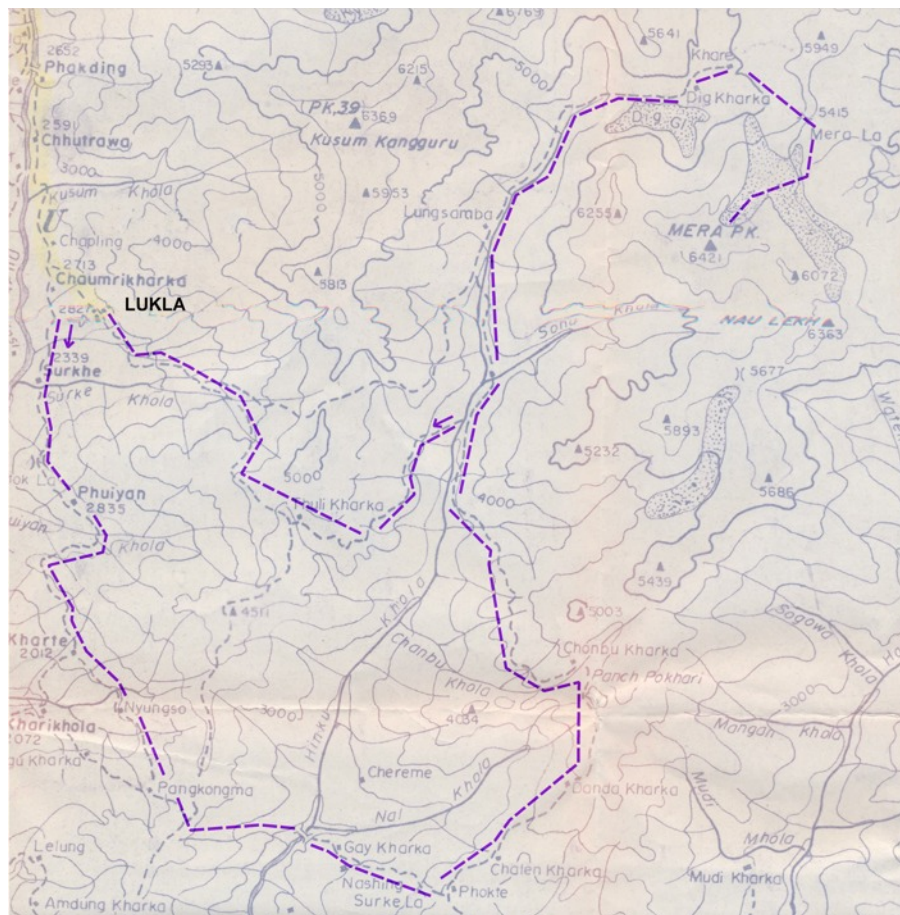
Above
Grain drying and winnowing at
Bhaktapur (MS)



Top left
Trekking up the Hinku Valley, (RT)

Bottom left
Trekking and Sherpas on the Zatwra La

The Route



CHIPPINGS



POSTAGE POWER

Alan Linford has brought to our attention just how postage stamps can tell an important story.

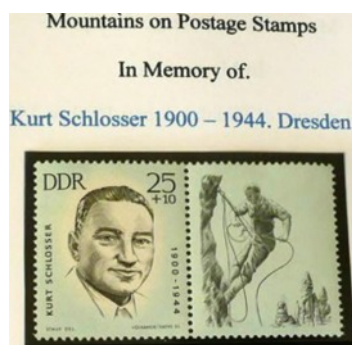
This 1963 stamp issue released under the banner of the 'Concentration Camps Memorial Fund, Sportsman Victims' shows Kurt Schlosser and a climber preparing ropes.

Kurt was a man of many parts being a climber but also a choirmaster and cabinet maker. He was also a resistance fighter and avowed communist. He was active with other climbers in illegal border work, maintaining connections between Czech and German sportsmen.

A member of the German Alpine Club he also led a choir of 140 male voices the repertoire of which included both classical and then contemporary works. They also included traditional folk song often about mountaineering and hiking.

Unfortunately he became a victim of Nazi so called justice and was executed by guillotine.

His grave stone carries the words "To our work colleague, the resistance fighter, Kurt Schlosser, executed 16.8.1944"



In following his two interests Alan is keen to locate the first stamp showing a named mountain.

Mount Roraima 2875m (Local name Parekupa-meru) is the present best contender. This stamp was issued to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria 20th June 1897, but was not issued for postal use until 1898.



Mt Roraima is an immense mountain with a total surface area of 26 sq. miles. The summit itself has an area of 12 sq. miles and sits on 700m of vertical red rock.

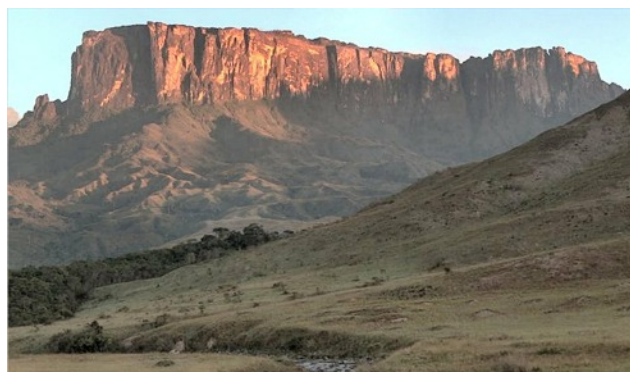
The mountain is shared between Brazil, Venezuela and the Republic of Guyana. It is a sacred mountain to the Pemon Indians who see the mountain as the Mother of all Waters, with the waters from the summit pouring into three main rivers; the Esquibo, the Orinoco and the Amazon.

The Esquibo is the major river of Guyana and has some spectacular waterfalls but it is generally sluggish, only falling 1m in 5km creating swamplands and frequent flooding making access to the mountain very difficult for early explorers.

It is thought to have been the scene of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Lost World' and considered inaccessible until in 1884 Sir Everard im Thurn and W Perkins found a ledge that led to the summit.

David Laughton visited the area in 1991 / 1992 and climbed to the top describing it as rather like an overgrown Brimham Rocks.

(See pages 29-31 'Christmas in the lost world' journal 13.2 Winter 2006)



PICTURE ON FRONT OF JOURNAL

The multi-coloured item featured in Michael's picture is a Hawaiian Bracket Fungus.

THREE PEAKS IMPROVEMENT

For those of us tackling the Three Peaks, there is good news in that a new section is now open creating an alternative path from Pen-y-ghent to Ribbleshead that avoids the chewed-up Horton Moor and Black Dubb Moss areas.

The route takes walkers further along the Pennine Way before turning off over Whither Hill and Sell Gill giving people a great view of Ingleborough, Whernside and Far Moor Bridge.

It is short of man made obstacles having no stiles or gates and goes near to Hunt Pot and Hull Pot.

Ed.

BRING YOUR CHILDREN UP RIGHT

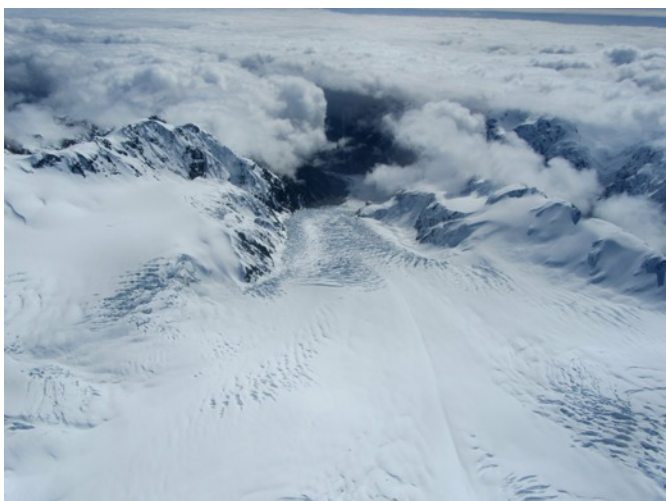
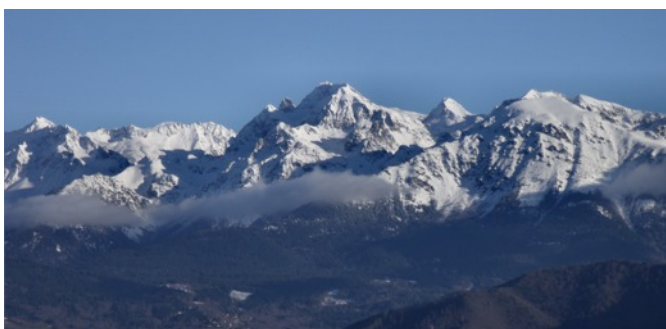
I managed to teach mine to enjoy the high life. They are not averse to fine dining especially if I am paying but I was referring to a love of mountain country.

Family visits have in the last few years taken on a whole new meaning. I spent two months in our Autumn with my son in New Zealand wandering round the Southern Alps and returned only to set off three weeks later to spend Christmas with my daughter in the French Alps.

I do not normally show family holiday snapshots but a small selection of shots might compensate for the lack of a white Christmas here, although as we go to print it is looking as though January might make up for it.

The first is of Chamrousse in the Belledonne on Christmas Eve and the next two are the Fox and Franz Joseph Glaciers taken in October from a light aircraft.

Roy Denney



ALTAI TAVAN BOGD

The latest edition of the journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa has arrived under the journal exchange scheme. It includes an article about Altai Tavan Bogd ('five saints' i.e. five high peaks) National Park, some five hours by jeep due west from Olgii, in Mongolia.

Given that the Club has discussed possibilities in this area members may well wish to read this in full. They set out to climb Mt Khuiten or 'cold mountain', the highest in the country, and possibly two or three other peaks close by.

Their base camp was situated next to the lateral moraine just below the confluence of two glaciers. It was a beautiful setting, with a backdrop of peaks stretching along and above the glaciers. As part of their acclimatisation routine, they climb a very broad rocky ridge, at 3,600 m above the camp, from where there are superb views into Siberia.

They ascend to high camp on the Potaniin Glacier the next day heading up the glacier, following the moraine wall for about an hour and then dropping onto the glacier itself. Four hours further up and across some tricky crevasse fields they reach high camp in a snow scoop on the Mt Khuiten side of the glacier. They had to protect their tents with blocks of frozen snow.

In order to maximise the benefits of the night freeze, they left early in beautiful weather for the summit of Mt Khuiten, approaching it from the northwest, along a glaciated corridor with unstable-looking cornices hanging above them, then veering southeast and then sharp south up what felt like a very steep face indeed. From the summit at 4 374 m, we have clear views in all directions, north and west into Siberia, south into China and east into Mongolia, each direction revealing a different landscape.

They got back to high camp just in time to batten down after a dramatic change in the weather that brought with it a snow storm.

The Journal covers lots of other areas including The Khumbu, Annapurna, Half Dome, The Atlas, Mustang, Czech Republic and Croatia not to mention Scotland and South Africa. This journal will be in the Lowstern library shortly.

Ed.

BOAT OF GOLD

Amongst the satisfyingly large number of Golds won at the Olympics that for the coxless fours is worthy of particular acknowledgement. Andy Triggs-Hodge, one of the crew, is the son of our member Peter Hodge.

In an unusual turn of events, Andy celebrated, I understand, by going on his honeymoon some two years after his wedding.

Ed.



NATURAL HISTORY

WILDLIFE, ECOLOGY AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



SEEING RED

The Wildlife Trusts in Northern England and Scotland have been involved in major efforts this year to assess red squirrel populations. The Red Squirrels Northern England Conservation Partnership includes Cumbria, Northumberland, Lancashire, Durham and Yorkshire Wildlife Trusts. Now the project has identified 17 large forests across northern England as red squirrel strongholds: a landscape-scale approach to conserving the species in this region.

Over the border in Scotland, the 12 year Red Squirrels in South Scotland project has now merged with the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels to run as one strategic national project.

Large blocks of pine forest habitat either side of the border will now be managed for red squirrels, with buffer areas; control of grey squirrels; ongoing monitoring; helping landowners to improve habitat for reds; involving local schools and communities; and using forest planning to maximise the value of forests for red squirrels.

Over the past century numbers of reds in the UK have fallen from around 3.5 million to a current estimated population of around 120,000.

Ed

BOOZE FOR BIRDS

The Welsh Black Grouse Recovery Project is going from strength to strength. They were targeting 270 displaying males in four years time but last year's annual survey recorded 328, the largest number since the survey began 15 years ago.

A combination of interest groups have been proving a mix of moorland, blanket bog and open forest to secure their future.

Part of the work was funded by Black Grouse Whisky who were donating to the cause for every bottle sold

Getting on the bandwagon, Orkney Brewery are making donations to corncrake conservation work with every crate of their Corncrake Ale purchased.

Perhaps somebody should bring out a Hen Harrier Hooch to generate support for them as last year there were only 4 breeding pairs and there is no guarantee of any this year in the conditions we have seen. Extinction seems a very real prospect.

It is as well somebody is trying to help as the EU certainly are not. These and other birds that rely on the heather moors will find that such moors start shrinking now courtesy of our rulers in Brussels. I am probably biased but I keep thinking they will run out of ill thought out ideas but no!

It turns out that spinach growers use a herbicide called Absulam and the EU are worried it might get in the food chain. Do they ban its use with Spinach or even all food crops? No!

They put a blanket ban on its use for anything. The only problem is that it is the only known herbicide which can stop the spread of bracken which will now slowly take over our moors without the labour intensive use of mechanical alternatives

Ed.

WINNERS & LOSERS

This year's wash-out summer saw the numbers of common butterflies and day-flying moths fall dramatically raising concerns that the wettest summer in 100 years, combined with a poor spring, has triggered population crashes that could put some already threatened species at risk.

This was not true of every species and some surprises came out of this year's survey by the Butterfly Conservation Trust. Meadow Brown almost doubled while Marbled White counts indicated a five fold increase. The Red Admiral fell back sharply with numbers down by 72% and all of the white butterflies declined, as did garden favorites such as the Holly Blue and Brimstone.

Ed.

OFFSHORE NATURE RESERVES

It has been three years since the ground-breaking Marine Act became law in England and Wales but the central idea of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the UK, still only exists on paper.

The process of designating such MPAs is proving very complex and gathering the scientific data to support their creation is expensive. Objections by some interested parties also slow progress.

127 zones in England have been recommended but the Government has asked for more information on many of them. Consultation on the rest should start about the time you receive this journal.

Ed.

NATURES MASTERPIECE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

We take every opportunity to escape the pressures of modern life and head for the Pennines and North York Moors with their sense of space, wide vistas and solitude: wonderful.

We delude ourselves however. This is far from a natural landscape and we need to work to ensure it is not slowly spoiled. It is riddled with evidence of man's interference and if neglected it could be a whole lot worse.

Nature does not help itself. Allowing verges and hedges to go wild is not all good as many of the more delicate wild flowers are being crowded out by the wilder and coarser plants becoming rampant, stimulated by the nitrogen. Believe it or not nettles are now growing to twelve foot high in places.

In the lower areas where some arable farming takes place, not only have we lost many dozens of species of wild flower to be replaced by rye grass for silage, but the early cutting of this has had a desperate effect on the young of ground nesting birds.

Recent surveys record that the destruction of dry stone walls has been halted, river water quality is now slowly improving (except during floods, of which we are getting increasingly more, and sewer overflows) and more ponds are being created but there is still much room for improvement.

This wonderful 'natural' area shows much evidence of human involvement. Numerous long defunct homesteads have left marks of their presence by the plants which thrive where man has left his waste.

Patchwork fields are all created by man made hedges, fences and walls and most of them contain crops introduced by man. Those which are used as pasture house animals which never existed in their present forms in the wild.

Many tracks in the hills and over the moors often come to an end at disused lead mines, and much of the landscape of 'beautiful' Pennine valleys, Swaledale in particular, were once at the centre of lead production for much of the world. In the twelfth century, Swaledale lead could be found on French abbeys and many Roman cathedrals as it can on Windsor Castle. Mining in the area probably started in the Bronze Age but flourished in the so called dark ages and really up to the seventeenth century.

When the industry was at its height, Swaledale and Arkengarthdale between them probably produced over 5,00 tons of lead each year.

The ore would have been carried on pack horses to smelting mills again creating tracks we use today.

The mines and mining processes have themselves left their mark on the landscape, deep grooves in the hillsides were probably 'hushes', caused by damming streams to access veins of lead and various shafts and working 'levels' are still to be found.

The industry died in the mid-nineteenth century when many families moved to Durham to work in the pits and others went to cotton and wool mills.

Nowadays in the peace and tranquility of the Dales, it is hard to imagine that the such mines ever existed.

The industry now is agriculture, mainly sheep farming, which seems so natural to the quiet countryside but they leave the sward looking very different to how it would be naturally. We bemoan the loss of hedgerows and stone walls but they are not natural. A few statistics will demonstrate the scale of our impact and perhaps it is surprising how well nature has learned to put up with us.

There are 120,000 miles of public footpaths in England alone, nearly 15000 churches, millions of cars and over half a million archaeological sites have been identified. We have lost half our hedgerows during the 20th century but we still have a quarter of a million miles of them. During the same period we have lost a lot of more natural habitat, over 70% of our wetlands, marshes and ponds. Almost all of our wild flower meadows and lowland heaths have gone and half of our ancient woodland. Wildflower meadows such as those in the Dales have been reduced by about 97% since the middle of the last century and those left are still shrinking by about 5% per year despite the efforts of various bodies to try and preserve them.

The Yorkshire Dales is one of the most surprising artificial areas; largely man made but unchanged for so long nature now claims the landscape as its own.

The northern dales with miles of wildflower meadows criss-crossed with dry stone walls and dotted with stone barns (often ruins) are home to surviving colonies of once common creatures.

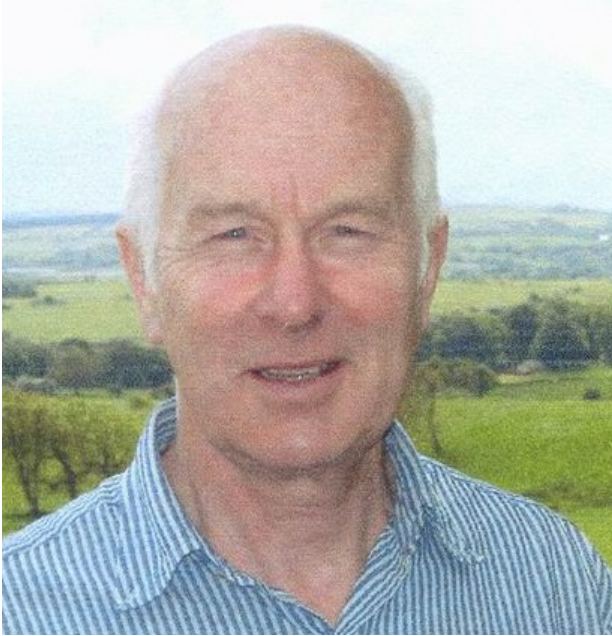
It is not uncommon to find stoats at play or patrolling the walls where they both hunt and live. They do live in many locations throughout this area but are much less common and have adapted to use walls where they are available to them.

Roy Denney

OBITUARIES

RICHARD ALLAN KIRBY

1938-2012 (Joined The Club 2000)



As most members will know, sadly, Richard collapsed and died of a heart attack whilst taking part in the YRC Annual Bike Ride in the Kington area on 18th July 2012.

Although Richard spent much of his working life in Lancashire, Richard was a true Yorkshireman, having been born in Wakefield. He was educated in Wakefield and went to Liverpool University where he obtained a BA in Geography and a Masters Degree in Civic Design.

He worked in Town Planning posts in Newcastle, Huddersfield, Belfast and Blackburn, before becoming Planning and Development Officer for Pendle District Council in October 1973 and Director of Development Services in June 1992. He retired in 1998. During this period, Richard was responsible for seeing through many major developments in Pendle and was so highly regarded that a road - Kirby Road - was named after him.

Richard was a Justice of the Peace in the Blackburn Court from 1988.

A very strong family man, Richard leaves behind his wife Jo, daughters Helen and Rachel and a son, Simon.

Always a keen walker and later a cyclist, he nurtured in his children a deep love of the countryside and outdoor pursuits. Now Simon, together with grandson Thomas, is also a keen cyclist and mountaineer.

Richard was a devoted grandfather to two granddaughters and two grandsons.

Before joining the YRC, Richard walked mainly with family, friends and a local walking group and for some time, he belonged to the Caper Montis Climbing Club in Accrington. He and Simon trekked in Bhutan with Helen and he was able to provide the YRC with useful information prior to their expedition to that country.

He and Jo had also cycled the Coast to Coast cycle route together.

I had the pleasure of introducing Richard to the YRC on the May Scottish Meet on Arran in 1999 and he became a fully elected member in 2000. He became an Honorary Warden for Low Stern soon after election and I said I would eat my hat if he was not a success. I still have that item of headwear. Richard was Warden until 2005, carrying out his duties energetically and conscientiously.

After ending his stint as Warden, Richard regularly attended Maintenance Meets at both Lowstern and Low Hall Garth and he was heavily involved with the recent improvements to the latter hut.

He was appointed Honorary Secretary in 2008, a post he held until his death. He was also Vice President from 2006 to 2008. Richard was a regular attendee at Meets and organised many of them. If Richard lead a Meet it would always be well planned and organised. He was also a regular with the Tuesday Walking Group.

Richard was a member of the 2001 Western Atlas Meet with Hamish Brown. On one occasion, he and I trekked to a remote Berber village and were invited into the home of a local family who treated us to bread, rice and mint tea. As a token of our appreciation, and typical of his generosity, Richard gave the head of the family his compass.

Richard also completed an arduous trek in North Pakistan with his daughter Helen in 2002.

Richard underwent a triple heart-bypass operation and appeared to make a complete recovery, soon attending YRC Meets again on a regular basis. He was always of a sunny and friendly disposition and had a ready smile.

Richard was an intelligent, quiet person and very modest. He will be greatly missed by the YRC and there is no doubt, he had much more to give to the Club, both as an Officer and as a member.

RogerDix

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith

The 'Ice Man' is no more and it is not down to Global Warming.

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith, who has died aged 89, probably had a wider knowledge of the geography, geology, personalities and lore of the polar regions than any other person.



In 1953-54 he led the Canadian-American team investigating the ice shelf of Ellesmere Island, and was to spend 18 summers there in charge of the first long-term and detailed survey of its ice cap. One of the first if not the very first to start talking about what came to be called global warming he died during the summer.

His deep knowledge of Polar Regions probably started when he joined the Navy after university and served as an ordinary seaman on two North Atlantic convoys. He was then commissioned as a sub-lieutenant to take part in three Russian convoys.

He went to the Antarctic in 1948, as base leader and glaciologist on King George Island in the South Shetlands for the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and spent 18 months there. Shortly afterwards he joined the Canadian Defence Board allowing him to develop his affinity with the frozen wilderness in the far north including climbing whenever he got the chance.

He has spent over 20 years conducting an oceanographic survey of the Beaufort Sea; he produced a geological map of Banks Island; placed a nuclear monitor on Cornwallis Island and dug a deep pit to measure snow and ice accumulations in the upper Seward glacier.

In later years he became principal scientific officer with the British Antarctic Survey with the job of compiling a scholarly history of over 4,500 place-names from Antarctica. It consisted of two large volumes when it came out in 1991

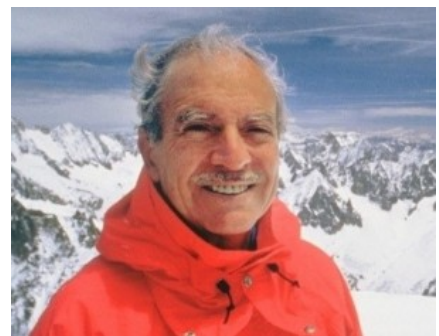
In his early years he did some climbing in the Alps and then went to King George Island, and made the first

extensive journey around the island with two dog sledges and taking eight hours to make the first ascent of the steep 1,300ft Ternyck Needle for glaciological work.

He then spent a couple of years investigating how snowflakes become ice as they fall on glaciers in the Swiss Alps

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith was a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society whose patron's gold medal he was awarded in 1966. He was also a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and of the served at various times as president of the Canadian Arctic Circle Club, the Arctic Club of Britain and the Antarctic Club. He was awarded the Polar Medal, with Arctic and Antarctic clasps, in 2006.

Maurice Herzog



(15 January 1919 to 13 December 2012)

The French mountaineer and later sports administrator was born in Lyon, France and died last month.

The feat that made him a household name was the first ascent of Annapurna (26,545ft) in 1950, the first peak over 8000m which had been successfully climbed. The ascent was all the more remarkable because the peak was explored, reconnoitered and climbed all within one season. Herzog led the expedition, but success is a relative term and it came at a high price: frostbite doing considerable damage.

Herzog's wrote a rather romanticised book giving an account of the climb, a tale of daring do, comradeship, self-sacrifice and ultimately glory, which became one of

the most popular mountaineering books of all time, selling around 12 million copies (Annapurna ((1951))).

He summited with the gifted Chamionard climber and guide Louis Lachenal, both wearing thin leather boots and carrying no supplementary oxygen. As he felt his feet go numb from cold, Lachenal initiated one of the most quoted exchanges in climbing.

“If I go back,” he asked Herzog, “what will you do?”

“I had made up my mind irrevocably,” Herzog wrote.

“Today we were consecrating an ideal and no sacrifice was too great.” Judgement fuddled by “summit fever”, Herzog replied: “I should go on by myself.”

For Lachenal, to continue meant the certain loss of his toes and an end to a glittering climbing career, but to withdraw meant abandoning Herzog to his fate, a complete no-no to a mountain guide. “Then I’ll follow you,” he declared.

In a near hypnotic trance, Herzog carried on until the moment came when they stood on the summit and the euphoria was complete. “Never had I felt happiness like this — so intense and yet so pure,” Herzog wrote. He pulled out the “sweat-soaked” tricolor and posed for the photograph that would guarantee his fame – a photo that would later be credited to Herzog, a clever trick as if he had reached the summit and set up the camera alone.

Lachenal, aware of their need to retreat, fought to snap Herzog from his stupor and they made an epic two-week descent from the peak which proved extremely challenging, not helped by Herzog losing his gloves near the summit or a night spent bivouaced in a

crevasse on the descent with one sleeping bag for four climbers. It resulted in severe frostbite, with consequent gangrene requiring the expedition doctor to perform emergency amputations in the field. Both summit climbers lost all of their toes and Herzog most of his fingers.

Having obliged the others to sign contracts against writing about the expedition, Herzog ensured that his version of events, and his heroism, dominated the public imagination.

Lachenal faded into obscurity and died skiing into a crevasse in 1955. The following year his unexpurgated diary of the expedition was published which, combined with comment from other survivors, ensured credit for the feat was more evenly divided.

Maurice was a talented climber, but far from being among the best. His war record, however, made him an obvious leader for the Annapurna expedition. He had served first with the Armée Secrète, then joined the Left-leaning French Partisans (FTP), captaining a high mountain troop. He was twice awarded the Croix de Guerre.

He was every inch the French hero: decorated resistance fighter, mountaineer, bestselling author and later a government minister. From 1963 to 1966 Herzog served as Minister of Youth and Sport under President Charles de Gaulle.

Later he was mayor of Chamonix (1968-77) and a member of the International Olympic Committee (1970-94). He was a Grand Officer of the Légion d’honneur.

His reputation will live on but he certainly ensured it got a head start.

Ed.



Annapurna

MEETS REPORT

Low Hall Garth 15 – 17 June

This meet followed immediately after the working meet: a good idea for workers who can combine two activities, but posing problems for the caterer struggling to find worktop and storage space in fridges etc.

Much drainage work had been accomplished on the track but the weather proved a stern test for noble endeavours. Slaters Bridge being under water, the paddle to the Three Shires for Friday evening's refreshments involved crossing the bridge above the ford, as illustrated in John's photo in the last YRC journal.

Saturday proved to be just as wet. The younger members set out for Langdale and Middle Fell Buttress but reported being 'washed off'.

A trio of troglodytes (John, Carol and Harvey) had a very wet walk on the Saturday, visiting the Cathedral slate mine and Hodge Close Quarry then returning via Skelwith Bridge where the falls were in magnificent spate and they were forced to return on the road as the whole valley floor was underwaters.

A clockwise jaunt going by Old Dungeon Gyll Chapel Stile was 'enjoyed' by Mike Godden's party.

The Dovers took Richard's car over Wrynose and Hardknots Pass to Eskdale, and walked from Beckfoot past the impressive Gill Force waterfall towards Great Whinscale and Ulpha Fell returning to Low Birker and the car park in Eskdale. The return trip in the car was made fascinating by Phil and Paul reminiscing about visits to local farms in years gone by.

On Sunday most people cut their losses and returned home but again younger members were reported to have gone scrambling.

A wet meet in a wet year.

Attended by

David Hick
Ian Crowther
Paul Dover
Phil Dover
Richard Dover
Alasdair Glasson (Guest)
Mike Godden
John Jenkin
Dominic Kirkman (Guest)
Harvey Lomas
Andy Syme
Carol Whalley (Guest)
John Whalley

David Hick

Long Walk 6-8 July Glan Dena

Friday and roads closed all over Britain because of flooding – it was surprising anyone turned up at all. In the end 11 members and guests arrived at Glan Dena and prepared for an early morning start which was even earlier than planned because the meet organiser misread his clock.

So it was that the first party was roused at 2:30 instead of 3:30. They took it in good heart and the Smiths plus Peter Chadwick were deposited at the Aber car park just as dawn was breaking. It was mercifully dry, although there was a chill wind and cloud on the tops. The second party set off a couple of hours later, consisting of Nick Welch with 3 guests, Clive, Jessica and Kate. A final party of one, Harvey Lomas, set off from the cottage for a solo walk.

Poor visibility and wet rock made for slow going over the Carneddau and the first party didn't get down to Ogwen until 10:00. Because of very high water in the streams and bogs, the direct descent from Pen yr Ole Wen to Glan Dena was discounted and the steep and rocky ridge down to Ogwen Cottage was taken. Alan Linford ferried the walkers back to Glan Dena for a second breakfast prepared by Derek Smithson and Tim Josephy then returned them to Ogwen for 10:30.

By now the weather was finally starting to improve and warm up as the party wended its way over Tryfan and the Glyders. Richard Smith had been champing at the bit for some time and broke loose somewhere around Elidir Fawr, speeding off on his own and arriving at the second feeding point in Nant Peris at 16:30. Fed and watered, he continued around Crib Goch to Snowdon, returning to Pen y Pass at about 20:30. Michael and Peter arrived at Nant Peris at 17:45 where they decided to finish the walk the following day.

Meanwhile the second party made rather slower progress over the Carneddau and by the time they reached Ogwen it was clear they would not finish. However they carried on to the Glyders, two turning back after Tryfan and the other two climbing Bristly Ridge to Glyder Fach returning via Cwm Tryfan.

Harvey turned up shortly afterwards having had an enjoyable day, making a big loop over the major Carneddau tops, finishing over Tryfan in warm evening sunshine.

On the Sunday, Peter and Michael completed Crib Goch, Crib y Ddisgl and Snowdon whilst Richard went the other way over Lliwedd. They met on the summit and returned via the Miners' Track.

Tim, Nick, Clive, Kate and Jessica drove to Llanberis, ascended Moel Eilio then followed the ridge to

Bwlch Maesgwm where the old pony road returns most pleasantly to Llanberis. The rain just started as they reached the cars, neatly bookending the meet.

We managed to snatch a couple of days of reasonable weather in this appalling summer and although numbers were somewhat disappointing, those who did attend made it an enjoyable and memorable weekend. Many thanks to Alan and Derek for all their efforts in support of the walkers.

Attending:

Peter Chadwick (Pres)

Michael Smith

Richard Smith

Tim Josephy

Nick Welch

Harvey Lomas

Alan Linford

Derek Smithson

Jessica Swale (G)

Clive Calmeyer (G)

Kate Josephy (G)

Bike Ride Meet 17-19 July

In 2001 a foot and mouth outbreak put the countryside out of bounds, denying the Club our annual Long Walk. As a substitute someone had the idea of staging a Bike Ride. Seventeen members rode either the primary route of 103 miles or alternatives of 93 or 60 miles, around the western dales from Lowstern. This was enjoyed so much that the Club agreed to add the ride as a regular feature to the Meets List.

Eleven years on, the Ride continues to be staged, albeit with fewer participants and over comparatively shorter distances due to the increasing age and an apparent lack of interest among the younger members (possibly due to it being held mid-week rather than at a weekend?). This year five riders set off, two completing the 60 mile 'A' course and two the 45 mile 'B' course – sadly the third rider was struck down by a fatal heart attack within a few miles of completing shorter course.

Eight members and one guest gathered at the well-appointed Youth Hostel in the pretty little town of Kington, near the Welsh border west of Hereford. Bikes were prepared and plans for the big day agreed, with two going for the longer ride, three for the shorter and the other four walking. All except the Dover brothers, who were due to arrive later, walked towards the centre of the town to the nearest pub. Although this had run out of the local draught bitter, suitable alternatives were chosen and the food proved to justify the hostel warden's recommendation. The meal was almost finished when the Dovers arrived, having dined on the way.

The forecast for the day of the ride was for early rain finishing by 11, so an early start was deemed pointless. Nevertheless most participants were away by 9 a.m.

Of the walkers, Peter Green and Patrick Jeffcoate walked the Hergest Ridge on the Offa's Dyke Path in both directions, getting "absolutely soaked". Meet Leader Roger Dix didn't ride due to an injured foot; with his helper John Jenkin he walked to Kington Church where they sheltered for an hour and a half from the heavy rain before coming down into the town for lunch, then did a short circular walk via the church before returning to the hostel to prepare the evening meal.

First away of the riders were the Dover brothers. The outward route, common to 'A' and 'B' rides, followed the River Arrow through Bredward and over Brilley Mountain, where it crosses the border into Wales, then via the hamlet of Brilley, to descend to the Wye near Whitney-on-Wye. After a short half-mile on the main Brecon-Leominster road, one of the few A-road stretches on these ingeniously Dix-designed rides, the route crossed the river by a toll bridge to follow an easy road to Hay-on-Wye. Here the two riders stopped at a cafe before, just as the B-riders arrived, continuing on the B4350 which crosses the river back to its left bank at Glasbury. A few miles on, where this B-road crosses the river to join the A470 Builth Wells - Brecon road, the route branches off to follow an unclassified road pleasantly through Boughrood, with its Castle and Court, for 3-4 miles through woods above the NE bank of the Wye to where the B4594 comes down from Painscastle to cross the Wye onto the A470.

Here the "B" route turns off right steeply up the B4594 – more of this later as we continue with the "A" team across the Wye for a steady climb of 1100 ft. onto Waun Hirwaun before descending steeply into Builth Wells where they had to divert around the town due to fire hoses across the roads as firemen were pumping out buildings flooded by the heavy storm.

After a lunch stop in Builth they were able to take advantage of some traffic-free riding along a disused rail track which now forms part of the NCR route 8 alongside the River Wye. The major climb of the day started at Aberedw and initially followed the river Edw along some very minor and steeply undulating, flooded roads. At Cregrina Richard and Paul left the valley to climb to Glascwm, again along some very muddy and rock-strewn lanes due to the earlier heavy rain. They summited Rhiwfwynws (1300 ft) before a long gentle descent took them back to the river Arrow, before climbing again to Colva and the final descent towards Huntington where, after another mile and a half, they rejoined the B route, with about 3 miles of easy riding to the finish. During this descent Richard Dover hit a washout rock which initially just caused a puncture but having repaired it and started cycling again the wall of the tyre split requiring a tyre replacement which, fortunately, Paul was carrying in his bag in the form of a foldable tyre.

The 'B' riders Ian Crowther, Richard Kirby and Richard Gowing set off individually some time after the Dovers following the same pleasant route, in light rain, joining up

somewhere on Brilley Mountain. From there they continued together, reaching the cafe in Hay-on-Wye just as the Dovers were about to leave. By the time they left at mid-day, after coffee stood by Richard K, the rain had stopped, and apart from a few drops on the return leg, it continued dry for them the rest of the day.

A mile short of the junction with the B4594 they found a pleasant seat for lunch with a view across the Wye to the village of Erwood. They continued a short way to Erwood Station on the former Wye Valley line, now prettily restored with a Fowler (of Leeds) industrial diesel locomotive plinthed outside, and serving as a cafe and craft centre. After a drink there they retraced half a mile to begin the steep ascent of the B4594, all three pushing their bikes. Part way up Richard G suffered a bad cramp attack, which was relieved by the supply of salt tablets by Ian. As RG was struggling somewhat, though still confident of completing the course, it was agreed that Ian and Richard K should push on ahead, leaving RG to follow on, strictly observing the prescribed route apart from a small diversion suggested by Richard K.

Near the top of the steep hill RG found that his speedometer dial had fallen off, so he parked his bike and walked most of the way back down the hill, without finding it. By the time he regained his bike he had lost half an hour.

Soon after gaining the top of the steep ascent he followed Richard K's diversion of an extra half mile round the base of a hill before following the pleasant B-road through Painscastle, gently ascending the valley of the Avon Bachawy to Newchurch. From Newchurch the road crosses, not too steeply, the hills of Offa's Dyke to a crossroads a mile short of Gladestry where the two routes rejoined, to ride down past Huntington to join the outward track near Arrow Court. Near Huntington, I (RG) was met by Ian in his car, who reported that Richard K had not arrived at the hostel and asked if I had seen him. As I hadn't, Ian left to continue his search while I completed the last few easy miles to Kington and the Hostel.

After leaving Richard G, Ian and Richard K had continued together, Richard K proving his little deviation round the hill as Ian went over it, by Ian finding him waiting at the far side. Towards Newchurch, with just about six easy miles left to ride, Ian and Richard K agreed to continue at their own separate paces. At this point Richard Kirby was showing no sign of distress, it was just that Ian was a more habitual rider and Richard didn't want to hold him back so near to the finish.

Richard G reached the hostel at around 6.40 pm to find growing anxiety about Richard K's whereabouts.

Soon the warden received a call from the police that a farmer had found Richard dead at the roadside, evidently as the result of a massive heart attack, all efforts at resuscitation having been to no avail.

This is quite understandable in the light of a previous experience on the 1979 Long Walk when, a few miles up from Mungrisedale, Alec Maude, a recent member of the Club, similarly collapsed and died of a heart attack.

Paul Dover, as Vice-President, took charge of the situation, receiving the police and making necessary telephone calls, with full, sympathetic support from the Hostel Warden, while we did our best to do justice to the fine dinner prepared by Roger and John. In the morning, after further arrangements had been made, the meet dispersed, the Dovers taking Roger Dix home before driving to the Wrekin, which they traversed from north to south before skirting back along its east flank, a walk of some 7 miles. The views from the top of the Wrekin were somewhat limited by the proliferation of heavy showers which typified the weather pattern of the meet.

While enjoying the activities of a well-run meet – thanks to Roger and his supporters as well as to our host, the Hostel Warden, in an attractive area new to most participants, we were all deeply shocked and saddened by the loss of a valued friend who had contributed so much to the Club during his 12 years of membership.

RG

Present:

Roger Dix (Meet Leader)
Ian Crowther
Paul Dover
Richard Dover
Richard Gowing
Peter Green
Paul Jeffcoate (pm)
John Jenkin
Richard Kirby

Family Meet, Lowstern, 24-26 August

A total of 20 members and family guests including 3 boys aged 10-13, all of whom had been several family meets for all or part of the weekends. This was fewer children than on recent family meets but was compensated by more family adults attending. They included Katrina Devenport, widow of John who died prematurely in 2011, and Alex Linford, now 18, who brought 2 friends both enjoyed their first visit to a climbing club hut or meet.

On Friday evening after all enjoyed a hearty helping of soup, Alan held his now customary training session on fitting climbing harnesses and the correct procedures for tying on and belaying in readiness for the climbing wall at Ingleton.

Saturday morning was wet with heavy rain in prospect – it arrived at about 11.00 – so all moved to Bernie's to register and hire missing items of kit for the climbing wall. The next 4-5 hours saw a hive of activity on both the bouldering walls and across the range of standards of the protected walls.

It was particularly encouraging to see the climbing progress of family members and friends some of whom had done little or no previous climbing. The boys made good progress on the wall and bouldering. All three managed to complete the crossing of the 'bridge', a real achievement. Charlie and John also got some more SRT practice.

Thomas Moret, one of Alex Linford's friends set a target for others to emulate climbing and then leading a number of grade 4 and above climbs including some on the highest wall.

By 2.30pm bodies, fingers and shoulders were feeling fatigued and time to move on. As it had stopped raining and the party split 3 ways; Paul, John and Michael ascended Ingleborough via Crina Bottom returning to Lowstern via Gaping Gill where we received confirmation that the winch would be working on Sunday.

Most of the others did the Ingleton Waterfalls walk with spectacular views of the spate. Phil and Evelyn walked half way and then returned to Lowstern to start preparing our evening meal. After a well earned rest and food in Bernie's café, Alex and friends returned to Teeside.

We all enjoyed Evelyn's home prepared three course dinner being offered a choice of menu and then relaxed by reading and some good yarns.

Sunday dawned bright and despite the previous day's rain it was considered safe to go underground. Tim and Clive took Charlie and Marco and Tim describes their day.

Sunday was warm and sunny as we joined the bank holiday crowds making their way up to Gaping Gill and Ingleborough. Fell Beck was still pretty high, confirming our decision not to go underground the previous day.

Arriving at Gaping Gill we booked in and found that the Craven had rigged Bar Pot; they kindly offered us the use of their ropes, saving us time and effort. We retraced our steps to Bar Pot and were soon ready to go underground. The tight top of the first 45ft pitch was negotiated without trouble; indeed the smaller members could have slid through double!

Once down the pitch and the subsequent slide down a greasy slab we continued through high gloomy halls to the bouldery ledge above the spectacular 100ft second pitch. All descended safely, although Marco elected to be lowered rather than control his own abseil. He must have great faith in his elders.

The passage towards Gaping Gill was enlivened by the easy but spectacular traverse around the 200ft deep SE Pot under heavy spray from Flood Entrance far above. We detoured into Sand Cavern for a while then made our way to the main chamber. This was most impressive with huge amounts of water thundering down all along the North side. Even the shaft was pretty wet. Some of the punters had come down the winch rather sparsely dressed and were clearly suffering the consequences.

We didn't have too long to wait for our turn to go up, although the other caving party led by John Brown only reached the bottom as we were starting to ascend; they had had a very long wait.

Back in the sunshine we had a pleasant walk down, fortified by an ice cream at Ingleborough Cave and back to Lowstern by late afternoon. A successful trip enjoyed by all.

John walked directly to Gaping Gill to book a decent slot but, despite the mixed weather, still required a long and rather wet wait, - heavy rain started at around



Charlie Young



Katrina Devenport



Clive Calmeyer

2.00pm. The other members of the party, Katrina, Oliver and Phil joined John after getting kitted out in Ingleton. The already wet team then got wetter during the winch descent of Gaping Gill. Phil comments, we explored the SW passage to Sand Cavern and also climbed up to Mud cave. We met the Bar Pot group at the bottom of the winch on their way out. We finally returned to the surface at 6pm for the hours walk back to Lowstern.

A third party of Ros, Evelyn, Claire, Michael and Paul had an enjoyable climb of Pen-y-ghent ascending via Brackenbottom and returned via Horton Scar. Heavy rain started on the approach to Horton so we enjoyed a refuge in the cafe before returning to Lowstern for another tea.

This was a successful meet which provided encouraging signs for the future of the club.

Attendance:

Tim Josephy
Paul Dover
John Brown
Ros Brown, family
Claire Woolston, family
Michael Woolston, family
Rachel Evans
Alan Linford
Katrina Devenport, family
Oliver Devenport, family
Charlie Young, family
Evelyn Dover, family
Phil Dover
Marko Vasilic, family
Albert Chapman
Clive Calmeyer, family
Alex Linford, family
Michael Smith
Thomas Moret, guest
John Malcohm, guest

RLH, Joint Meet, 14th- 16th September

Early-birds Colin, Steve, Jack, John Jenkin and Mike did a Langdale Valley bottom walk on Friday ending at the ODG so that they weren't too clapped out to walk on Saturday. Michael Smith had a damp excursion solo from Elterwater Common via Dow Bank to Castle How and Lang How and back. Other members arrived during the afternoon and early evening, made themselves comfortable, and prepared to do justice to Alan and Mike's evening meal. It lived up to their expectations.

Saturday dawned with plenty of warm sunshine; it was a pleasure to be out of doors. People scattered far and wide:

Pike o'Blisco (Colin, Steve, Gary, Russ)

Mountain biking at Wrynose (Neil Pamment), Grisdale (Mark Baron), Whinlatter Forest (Paul Rhodes, John Bennett)

Blea Tarn, Low Hall Garth etc. (Derek Smithson, John Lovett, Harry Robinson, Alan Clare, Derek Clayton - not all together)

Around Langdale (Ken Aldred)

Scramble on Pavey's east side, Thunacar Knott, High Raise, crossing Stake Pass to descend via Rossett Gill and upper Langdale. 9.4 miles. Cold, windy damp. (Michael Smith, Martin Trasler)

Coniston Old Man area (David Carpenter)

Arete, Chimney and Crack on Dow Crag (Dave Connelly, Dave McKie, Jon Pinch)

Troutdale Pinnacle on Black Crag, Borrowdale (Malcolm Brentford, John Hollands)

Coniston Old Man, Wetherlam and back to RLH (Dave Lawrence).

It was a good job people took advantage of the glorious weather for Sunday's was exactly the opposite and washed people out of the valley. Brave cyclists, Paul Rhodes and Geoff Sudlow, went to Coniston. but everyone else abandoned walking, climbing and Langdale on the ebb tide. Michael Smith climbed on Rylstone Crag on the way home before the rain caught up with him there

Alan Linford and Mike Godden catered superbly, friendships were renewed and it was a very enjoyable meet.
George Chambers

Present:

YRC
Mike Godden, John Jenkin, Ken Aldred, Alan Linford, Derek Smithson, John Lovett, Alan Clare, Harry Robinson, Michael Smith, Derek Clayton, Martin Trasler.

Wayfarers

Steve Auty, Colin Smith, Jack Middleton, John Hollands, George Chambers, Russ Bloor, John Bennett, Pete Dixon, Gary Mellor, David Carpenter, David Lawrence, Dave McKie, Paul Rhodes, Dave Connelly, Mark Baron, Jon Pinch, Neil Pamment, Malcolm Brentford

Shap Meet, New Ing Lodge

12th -14th October

This meet for the members present held a certain poignancy. It was originally set up by our President Peter Chadwick but in his absence in the Himalayas, Richard Kirby took over. We even had an inspection of the bunkhouse, earlier in the year, on one of our Tuesday walks. Unfortunately as you all know, Richard died tragically on our long bike ride in Shropshire. Anyway without getting too maudlin, the weather for the week end was fantastic,

lovely early Autumn sunshine, Richard could not have arranged it better. Perhaps he did!

On Friday evening seven of us, after a quick visit to the nearest pub, sat down to an adequate dinner at the hostel, later joined by Tim Josephy

On Saturday morning we were all up early and Alan Kay was away by 8.00am to walk the Great Asby round which follows Wainwrights coast to coast route for several miles, before leaving to explore Great Asby Scar, classic limestone country. He saw no one all day apart from a group of boy scouts learning how to put tents up blindfolded. It could be useful in the YRC!

Ian, Rob and John Jenkin parked their car near Keld and walked into Swindale, one of the most secluded and beautiful valleys in the Lake District. They walked right up to the Forces Falls, at the head of the valley not too far away from Mosedale Cottage.

John Lovett walked from the bunkhouse through Keld and explored the lower slopes of the Ralfland Forest area.

Tim walked from the hostel via Keld over some wet and trackless bog eventually picking up the track to Mosedale cottage which is now a fairly comfortable and dry bothy. He then proceeded (or deviated) westward to Harter Fell and via Gatescarth Pass onto Branstree and Artlecrag Pike where he joined a party of three other YRC. More of Tim later.

The last group comprising Arthur, Derek Collins, who had joined us for the day, plus the writer, parked at Wet Sleddale reservoir and took the rather wet and boggy track skirting Sleddale Hall eventually reaching the bothy at Mosedale. We had lunch in glorious sunshine and then walked up Artlecrag Pike and between there and Selside we were joined by Tim. We then hit the Old Corpse Road and dropped down into Swindale. There, we were rewarded with late afternoon sunshine hitting the rocks on Goucher Crag on the right hand side of the valley.

At the Truss Gap (I do not know how it got its name) we separated again.

Tim went on to walk directly back to Keld and the bunkhouse. He was back long before our party.

The three of us, Arthur, Derek and the writer struck up from Truss Gap, via Goucher Crag Gill on what seemed an obvious path marked clearly on the O.S. map. It was obvious until we reached the 'plateau' which separates the Swindale valley from Mosedale. There are numerous little bumps from which you think you can get a better view (you can't) The only sensible way is to take a S.E. bearing, walk on it, and ignore going up the numerous small tops. Fortunately the weather being clear we could see the Shap granite quarries away to the east. True to YRC fashion the three of us got separated each taking our favoured route and

once having separated, such is the nature of the terrain, there was no chance of seeing each other again. Finally we were all back at the car park just before it had got too dark to see with out head torches. The one bright incident on our passage over was that a herd of a dozen or so red deer were spotted, the only wild life of note seen all day.

Back at the bunkhouse we were joined by Albert, David and Rachel. Before dinner a toast was drunk in memory of Richard. The usual convivial meal followed but quite a few of us were in our bunks shortly after 10.00pm.

Sunday dawned, slightly cloudier but still excellent walking weather. Alan drove to Ravenstonedale and walked up to Smardale Bridge then northwards to Crosby Garrett Fell. He said the views particularly towards the Pennines and the autumn colours in Smardale Gill were splendid.

Tim stayed in the Lakes, drove to Hayeswater and went up High Street, coming back over Mardale Ill Bell and Harter Fell again descended down Gatescarth Pass.

Rachel, John, Arthur and the writer drove to Sunbiggen Tarn east of Orton and enjoyed an hour or so of pleasant walking on the limestone. We would have had longer but for some poor road navigation by the writer. He instructed the driver to take the wrong road out of Orton, a fact that did not impress the former Monte Carlo Rally driver!

Ian and company went to look at the ruined Shap Abbey and then on to his cottage at Ravenstonedale.

Altogether a successful weekend. The bunkhouse was efficiently run by the two young brothers Scott and Jamie Newburn and their partners.

Derek Bush

Attendance

Ian Crowther
John Jenkin
Rob Ibberson
Arthur Salmon
Tim Josephy
Alan Kay
Rachel Evans
John Lovett
Albert Chapman
David Handley
Derek Bush
Derek Collins (Sat only)

Wasdale Head - November 2 - 4 FRCC's Brackenclose Hut

This meet, with good weather from mid Saturday morning, for the remainder of the weekend, turned out to be a memorable one for the five who were eventually assembled late on a wet Friday evening. One FRCC member

was already in bed, the other yawning with the two senior YRC members, in front of a welcoming open fire.

Saturday morning looked very poor (the FRCC couple returned home, possibly to attend their Club dinner) as we five booted up slowly and praying silently, but clearly successfully, for some sunshine.

Andy wanted to impress his young guest Ali, whom he had be-friended at a Leeds climbing wall. So they sped off towards Scafell, which was a first ascent for Ali.

President elect Michael, Tim and Rob went more Northerly up the E side of Wasdale Fell and to the North of Lingmell; then, meeting up with Ali and Andy, to Scafell Pike and on to a trackless Scafell via Foxs Tarn. All four returned to the hut about 1600 relieved at getting off the treacherously slippery wet-snow covered grassy lower slopes.

Meanwhile Rob had decided not to venture too far into the soft snow and went up Mosedale, returning to the hut in time to greet the foursome with tea and a fire already starting to glow.

Later, while in the Wasdale Head allowing the meal time to mature, the building was rattled by a heavy hail shower lasting perhaps an hour. It later painfully hastened our return to Tim's car. Remaining hailstones 5mm across were still evident on the hills 20 hours later. Contrast this with the cowslips and primroses flowering in the Brackenclose grounds.

On a near perfect Sunday with full sunshine and snow on the tops we all enjoyed an outing on the steep slopes of "Yewbarrow" with a scramble to the summit achieved by three who then went along the top in a few inches of snow searching first for the 2 cairns and then the path indicated on the map; but it was not located due to the snow. Buzzards were soaring down the valley well below the ridge. Then the leader found a route that was passable – but certainly not a footpath! The path from the col was tantalisingly close but "unscrambling" themselves with a cautious first timer was interesting (YRC jargon). The track back to the car park was slow going due to the deep wet grass and mud. But a great day out.

We all agreed that this meet should be repeated preferably on the weekend of the FRCC annual dinner: when it would be likely that few of their members would be in the hut; and with more space before and after other YRC meets.

Andy had organised and catered well. We all knew that many others would have enjoyed the meet

Attending. Michael Smith;
Andy Syme; Rob Ibberson;
Ali Glasson (G) Tim Josephy.

After Dinner Meet Nov 18th Farleton Fell

On the Sunday after the AGM and dinner a few stalwarts walked from Hutton Roof past Hutton Roof Craggs to Farleton Fell (overlooking the M6) and back over Newbiggin Craggs in rather wet misty weather, a total of about 7.1 miles.

On the way up there was a difference of opinion as to which was the summit, most opting for a limestone crag, but John Lovatt insisted on going to a large cairn to the west, a solitary figure like some Old Testament Prophet.



After the descent members went through the graveyard at the local church to view a memorial to the village fallen which included a V.C.

Attending

Arthur Salmon, Michael Smith, Peter Chadwick, Derek Bush, Frank Wilkinson, John Lovatt, David Holmes, Richard Taylor, Paul Dover, Iain Gilmour, John Whalley, Carol Whalley, Martyn Trasler, John Wood (SMC) and Neil Hutton (Gritstone)



Christmas Meet - Lowstern

8th - 10th December

YRC gathered at Lowstern for the Christmas meet on a weekend when the fells were covered in snow down to a low level. A brief spell of high pressure gave sub-zero temperatures and snow depth varying from four inches to almost a foot on some tops.

Richard Josephy had made the excellent suggestion of taking a train to either Horton in Ribblesdale, Ribblehead, or Dent, and walking back to Lowstern. This provided an interesting challenge which caught our imagination.

The first party to start, David Hick, Iain Gilmour, Mick Borroff, and guest John Nolan, were expertly driven by Alan Linford to Dentdale, where we started near the Blea Moor tunnel. Alan Linford, with his customary kindness to others, gave us a flying start. A direct route above the Blea Moor tunnel led to Ribblehead. The snow cover varied from four inches deep and crusty enough to support weight, to the tiring soft snow up on Park Fell where feet sank in some ten or twelve inches.

On Simon Fell we joined forces with Arthur Salmon, Derek Bush, and Paul Dover, who had come from Ribblehead station. Now a party of seven, we became expert at following in each other's footsteps. Progressing from Simon Fell towards Ingleborough, we reached the summit plateau in cloud. There followed a fine display of YRC navigation as we were joined by several other walkers.

Paul Dover at the back of the party could see that we were going in the wrong direction, but was unable to stop the lemming-like onward rush. Some ended thrashing around at low level on the Ingleton track, some descended to the Hill Inn track before realising where they were, and some headed towards Sulber Nick before turning for Clapham. You have to admire such initiative.

It should be noted that Peter Chadwick, Richard Taylor and Pete Latham, went by train to Dent, starting quite late in the day, and descended from Ingleborough in the dark. This was no mean feat, as the path was diabolically icy the whole way down. Ingleborough cave was invitingly illuminated with a Christmas display for children as they walked past.

Nick Welch did the Ribblehead, Park Fell, Ingleborough route, and Richard Josephy visited familiar caving areas of Colt Park, Alum Pot, and Crummack Dale, returning by Long Lane.

We were delighted that Harry Robinson enjoyed Barbon Dale with John Lovett. Richard Gowing returned from Horton via Crummack Dale and Wharfe hamlet. A variety of routes for other members included Norber, Austwick, Feizor Heights, Halls Brow near Newbarrow and Wold Fell on the Dent bridleway.

Carol Whalley took the opportunity to research our library for information about one of Whympers's friends. Richard Sealey nobly worked on the hot water system, ensuring that the showers worked.

The cavers tackled Kingsdale master cave and Yordas cave in very cold and wet conditions. The group of Tim Josephy, Michael Smith, Chris Fitzhugh, guest Tom Chadwick, and guest Alistair Glass experienced "distinctly sporting" conditions. (For the uninitiated fell walker this means descending a rope through an ice cold waterfall, and crawling along a narrow crevice, head held sideways to breathe, while liberally immersed in melting snow water, just to mention a few of the attractions).

To the astonishment of the writer, our two guests professed to enjoy this. The phrase "chip off the old block" came to mind. We assembled back at Lowstern for delicious pre-dinner canapés kindly provided by Sammy and Albert Chapman.

As if these all these feats were not enough, they were hugely eclipsed by a magnificent dinner prepared by Richard Josephy. We enjoyed tastefully garnished mackerel paté, a superb flavoured venison casserole, mincemeat tart, and cheese. When considering the hard work which went into providing this excellent dinner in difficult circumstances, we are reminded of the strong bond of loyalty and fellowship amongst those who go out on the hills together.

On Sunday Tim, Nick, Ged and Aaron Champion did Lancaster Hole to Wretched Rabbit via the high level route. Others of a hardy nature took in local summits including Great Knoutberry and the Horton area.

This meet confirmed that YRC still fields a good group of enthusiasts ready to enjoy the fells to the limit of their ability. We thank Richard Josephy for a very fine meet.

IG

Attending: -

Mick Borroff	John Jenkin
Derek Bush	Richard Josephy
Ged Champion	Tim Josephy
Aaron Champion	Pete Latham
Peter Chadwick	Alan Linford
Tom Chadwick guest	Harvey Lomas
Albert Chapman	John Lovett
Alan Clare	John Nolan PM
Derek Clayton	Harry Robinson
Robert Crowther	Arthur Salmon
Ian Crowther	Richard Sealey
Paul Dover	Michael Smith (Pres.)
Chris Fitzhugh	Derek Smithson
Iain Gilmour	Richard Taylor
Alistair Glass guest	Nick Welch
Richard Gowing	John Whalley
David Handley	Carol Whalley
David Hick	Frank Wilkinson
Gordon Humphreys	

MEMBERS MONTAGE

Taking shelter on family meet, Ros Brown, Evelyn Dover, Paul Dover, Michael Woolston, Claire Woolston.



Farleton Fell - Dinner Meet



Farleton Fell



Farleton Fell



Rob Ibberson Wasdale Meet



Martyn Trasler, RLH Meet



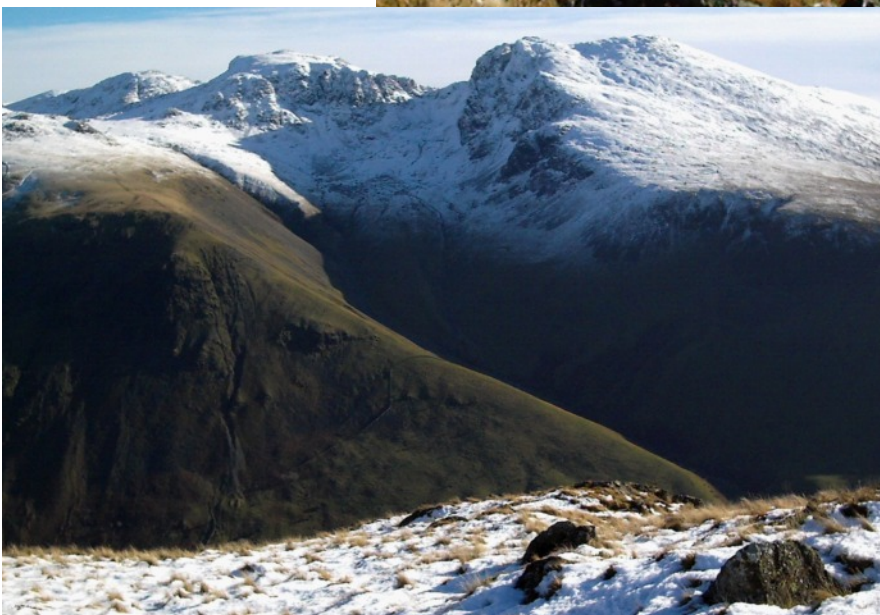


and, all taken from the
Wasdale Meet....

**Yewbarrow from
the south west**



**Gable from
Yewbarrow**



**Scawfells from
Yewbarrow**

Tim Josephy	Richard Sealey
Cliff Large	Michael Smith
David Large	Tony Smythe
Bill Lofthouse	Andy Syme
Tim Lofthouse	Richard Taylor
Harvey Lomas	Martyn Trasler
John Lovett	Frank Walker
Peter Moss	Frank Wilkinson
Harry Robinson	Carol Whalley
Arthur Salmon	John Whalley

Club Guests

- Principal Guest
- Michael Bartholomew, Yorkshire Green Lanes Society
- Neil Hutton, Gritstone Club
- David Wood, Wayfarers Club
- Russell Myers, Craven Pothole Club
- Mick Hill, Midland Association of Mountaineers
- John Wood, Scottish Mountaineering Club

The following is a precis of the report to the AGM by Peter Chadwick the retiring President.



He opened by asking members to stand for a moment to remember two members who had died during this year - Peter Lockwood who joined the Club in 1952 and lived in Canada and Richard Kirby who joined in 2000 and became Secretary in 2008. Richard was a tower of strength to the Club as well as being a close friend to many members and would be sorely missed.

“Your Committee has met four times this year, twice to coincide with Meets and twice at Lowstern. Meeting on Meets was a bit of an experiment and I think has been successful but as you can imagine suits some people but not everyone.

I want to thank all the Club’s Officers for all their continued work during the year and for keeping the show on the road. All done freely, efficiently and without fuss. I particularly want to thank Tim Josephy for stepping up to the breach to fill the gap so suddenly and left by Richard.

As you know, we have had a full and varied Meets programme this year, including 3 overseas meets in Ireland, the Alps and Nepal. I want to express my thanks to all the Meet organisers who put an enormous amount of work into making all these meets such a success. From the ones I went on and from comments about the ones I couldn’t get to, I know that they were all very enjoyable and plenty was achieved. It’s hard to remember after the dismal summer we’ve had but we did have some fantastic weather in the early part of the year. I think it’s the first time we have been sunburnt on a Scottish Meet in March and the weather for the Social Meet in Wensleydale in May was out of this world. There were really only two disappointments - the Caving meet at Lowstern in June was cancelled due to lack of demand although possibly because it clashed with the Diamond Jubilee weekend which we didn’t realise when we originally planned it, and secondly attendance on the Alps Meet was poor which seems to be the trend in recent years. It would be nice if we could reverse this.

You may remember that in the last Journal Roy Denney produced some interesting statistics about our meet attendance going back to 1994 which is well worth reading.

Excluding the Dinner, the average attendance last year was 15. I haven’t worked out the figures for this year but hope that kept that up to or even improved on it.

Michael Smith and his sub-committee have been working hard on producing an interesting programme for next year which is nearly finalised now. I’m sure he will welcome any ideas or suggestions for the year after.

We all need to be much more proactive about recruiting new members, whether they be family or friends or just people we meet on the hills. So please think carefully about who you know - show them the Meets list and bring them onto a meet and then make the effort to follow it up. We sometimes see a new face and then never again, which is such a pity.

The Committee is always thinking of ways to attract new members, for example by targeting non - club users of our huts, and having promotional material at the huts and at climbing walls. The idea of a Junior section has been discussed but I believe there are both legal and organisational problems trying to formalise this. Teenagers are always welcome on our meets provided they are accompanied by a responsible adult and the Family Meet at Lowstern is a regular fixture in our calendar.

Without lowering standards, we also want to make joining the Club less of a hurdle than it seems to be at the moment. I know that Michael and his Committee will be looking at this as a priority and will let us know of any planned changes.

You will see that we are proposing some changes to the Committee for next year. Gordon Humphreys is retiring from being LHG Warden after four years . We are very grateful to Gordon for all his hard work because looking after LHG isn't easy with problems over the road and just getting there isn't all that easy either! You can't put a good man down as Gordon has volunteered to take over as Librarian to take over from where Albert Chapman left off .

Arthur Salmon is retiring as Treasurer after 14 years which is a fantastic level of service to the Club. In fact, if you leave out the two world war periods, Arthur's tenure as Treasurer is second only to the legendary Stanley Marsden since the formation of the Club in 1892. He is being replaced by Martyn Trasler and I am very grateful to Martin for agreeing to take this on. Arthur is another good man who just keeps going and he has agreed to take on as his next challenge, the role of Warden at LHG, although he has warned me that he will want to hand it over to someone else well before another 14 years is up.

John Lovatt and others have been keeping an eye on Lowstern on a temporary basis since Barrie Wood retired as Warden earlier in the year, however I am also pleased to say that Richard Sealey has kindly agreed to put his name forward for the role as Lowstern Warden and John has agreed to show him the ropes.

Alan Linford has agreed to become the Club Archivist . As all the other current Office Holders are putting their names forward for re-election I am pleased to say that after a year or so of vacancies, we should now have a full house with all the various posts filled. Having said that, we do rely on members coming forward and volunteering (or agreeing to be volunteered) to do the jobs that have to be done and this is not going to get easier unless we can recruit new members.

At this point I want to put a proposition to you all, which is that the Committee have unanimously agreed that a certain individual should be nominated to become an Honorary Life Member. He's been a member since 1951 and has done fantastic service to the Club which we think should be recognised. He's been a committee member for many years; Vice President, President and Treasurer. I refer of course to Arthur Salmon. (Members unanimously approved this proposal by show of hands)

Lastly, I want to thank Paul Dover for being such an able, active and supportive Vice President during my term of office. Besides organising the Social meets so well , Paul has been very active on meets and has come up from Cambridge to every Committee meeting without fail except for the last one which he was only prevented from due to illness.

I also want to thank you all for the privilege of being your President and I know the Club will be in good hands over the next two years with Michael Smith as your next President,

Thank you."

In response Michael Smith the incoming President said

"It is an honour to take on the role of President and it is not something I take on lightly.

Thankfully, the Club is in an improving trend.

Our rules and policies are revised to better meet the challenges we face, the principal officers' roles are filled and we have a business-like Committee determined to help the Club move forward. With all your support we have a busy meets list with interesting meets in well-loved and new areas. Those meets are highly sociable and a significant part of that is because, unlike many other clubs, we dine communally for most meals on our meets.

We have the combined efforts of decades of members and more immediately our recent Officers, President and Committee to thank for getting us to this position.

Further increasing recruitment is essential for the future health of Club. In my estimation the three key features of our Club which attract potential members are: our varied welcoming meets around the UK; our huts (especially Lowstern) and our unusual overseas meets.

There is a real test for us in maintaining those strengths in the medium-term with a diminishing pool of established members available to help out. That challenge is not helped by our increasingly dispersed membership and the apparently greater demands of modern working lives.

This is not the time for drastic change but steady evolution. Perhaps I can highlight some areas we might consider over the coming months:

Meets - The meets list has become rather crowded in our attempts to accommodate various interests. Having meets at fortnightly intervals may put pressure on attendance rates. So thinning out the meet list a little may help while maintaining a programme of new venues, overseas meets and climbing and caving meets.

Transport - There must be more opportunities for sharing transport to and from meets. The cost of travel is for many of us the largest single cost involved in attending a meet. Can we find better ways of encouraging this sociable and green option?

Increasing membership - Several enthusiastic members are reaching out to pools of potential future members through schools; university groups; climbing walls and by information in our huts.



I hope we will also be able to forge new links with other clubs sharing our interests. However, we must continue to search out and reduce barriers to membership. Is our website information too wordy? Can we make it easier to join in a first meet, then a second and a third? Can we process applications more efficiently without changing rules, without reducing the degree of scrutiny and while maintaining current standards? I'm sure we can.

Committee meetings - Meeting midweek at Lowstern restricts attendance largely to those living close by and not in employment. To widen the scope for participation we could explore more opportunities to hold these meetings on meets. A good start was made last year but choosing Sunday afternoons interfered with activity on the hills. We will try again on but on Friday evenings instead.

Family links - The Club has benefitted from a series of recent family meets introducing both children and adults to Club activities and Lowstern. While a children's section *per se* may not be practicable we might communicate more clearly the ways we encourage families to draw on the Club's resources and encourage their engagement in Club activities.

A factor vital for the Club's future is the comradeship of members. One has only to look around at AGMs or meets for evidence that once one is 'hooked' by the Yorkshire Ramblers' then one stays hooked. In no small measure that is down to the welcome and support one gets from fellow members. I ask for your support in extending that welcome to potential members attending meets. That way we can help to build a firmer foundation for our future.

Following Peter's successful last year with three overseas meets, I look forward to next year. There will be a smaller-scale, more do-it-yourself, overseas trip to Malawi; our 100th Annual Dinner which we should make a special event; three Scottish meets and a dozen other meets. I hope you will be along on as many of those as practicable and encourage along a new face or two."



HEROICS

Heroism is a word used far too loosely and readily these days and it is also used retrospectively for foolhardiness and even stupidity when the perpetrator 'gets away with it'.

If we look back through the annals of the club there are many members who were heroes in the truest sense of that word. There were many who pushed the boundaries of exploration, caving and climbing by near superhuman efforts and there were many who were decorated for valour during two world wars.

Unfortunately the newer members only learn of their exploits when obituaries are written. Their inherent modesty means that I for one only learned belatedly of the past histories of some nice old gentlemen who turned out for the occasional dinner.

Somewhat tongue in cheek I do recall tales of heroic sacrifice related to me as a new member back in the early seventies.

I innocently bunked down next to Jack Woodman on an early meet, a mistake I was able to avoid making again. It did however come to pass that when Jack was on a meet somebody had to sleep near him. Now that is true heroism!

He could have snored for Britain in the summer Olympics (He would not have been allowed near winter games for fear of causing avalanches)

Jack's other claim to fame was that he owned a classic yacht. E.J. "Jack" Woodman, was at the time the part-time

chairman of a Bradford textile firm, and lived at Rhu House on the shores of West Loch Tarbert, Argyll, cruising the West Coast two months a year with his sons when available and with YRC members when he could press any to crew for him.

Based at Alexander Robertson's Yard, at Sandbank on the Holy Loch, Tai-Mo-Shan as she was called was re-rigged to her original plan and cruised by the Woodmans in the West of Scotland throughout the 'fifties.

For the technical by 1956 she had a two cylinder Ailsa Craig diesel engine.

I recall hair-raising stories from members who had that privilege. Some went more than once and that was heroism indeed.

This history is brought back to mind as Albert Chapman thought he spotted the yacht on television and lo and behold he was right. His experiences on the craft must have left a lasting impression.

The yacht itself has a fascinating history.

IN 1932, five adventurous young naval officers took advantage of the world slump to finance the building of this 54 foot ocean racing ketch in the yard of the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co Ltd. She was to be constructed in teak and named Tai-Mo-Shan [High Hat Hill], after the highest mountain in the colony.

Her designers were Edward Cock, chief manager at the great shipyard, and H.S. Rouse, Vice-Commodore of the Hong Kong Yacht Club, who had raced yachts of his own design in 1928-9 against the pioneering yacht designer John Illingworth, who was then serving as a Lt Cdr with the Royal Navy's submarine flotilla and racing his gaff yawl Queen Bee. Rouse designed a series of fast cruising yachts for men on the China Station.

By the end of the war, only ten Rouse yachts were still listed in Lloyds 1959 Register of Yachts. Thanks to Chinese craftsmanship, two of them were to become very famous in the post-war era and at least half a dozen have survived into the second millennium, none more magnificently than Tai-Mo-Shan.

Probably most exotic of these preserved Rouse yachts it has not been seen in British waters for many years but was recently refitted at Kusadasi in Turkey and now made available for hire.

Again for the sailors amongst us she retains her original teak hull, her camphor and ipol frames, a one-piece camphor stem, a yacal sternpost, a teak keelson, a 7 tonne lead keel and the steel floors that were installed in 1933.

Her most remarkable exploit was her very first voyage - 16,217 miles without a motor, from Hong Kong to Dartmouth. They had to ask their admiral for leave of absence to sail the new yacht to England by an unorthodox route, against the prevailing winds, via Japan, the Kuriles, the Bering Sea, the Aleutians, California, Panama and the West Indies. Permission was granted on half pay. At the end of their epic journey a splendidly-timed congratulatory telegram, was sent to Dartmouth by King George V.

Subsequent research has revealed that the voyage was more than a great yachting exploit. The young naval officers were spying on Imperial Japanese Navy anchorages in the Kurile Islands that were later used for the attack on Pearl Harbour. The crew eventually repaid the navy and the nation in the Second World War by winning four DSOs, a Croix de Guerre and a VC between them. Truly heroes one and all.

After arriving in England, the men sold Tai-Mo-Shan [29 tons TM] to the Royal Navy, to join Amaryllis [36 tons TM] as a pair of yachts run by the Royal Naval Sailing Association. Tai-Mo-Shan was raced under the RNSA burgee in British waters and by 1936 she was equipped with a marine four cylinder Morris petrol / paraffin engine.

The RNSA still awards a Tai-Mo-Shan Tankard, which is nowadays presented for the best sailing performance during the yachting season by a lady member.

Faster yachts appeared after the war and after a few seasons being demoted to cruising trips, "Tai" was sold off by the RNSA to Jack.

To quote his son John "My father was noted for hitting the odd rock, in spite of having all the charts, and we were all familiar with the techniques for getting her off. The major

impact we all remember. In middling visibility, he picked the wrong headland to take a leading line for avoiding Keils rock off Loch Sween. We were on a perfect reach, with full sail in a good force five and you know how fast she can move! It led us straight onto the rock itself. She bounced a few times then heeled over a bit further - churning up the kelp before we could get her off. The only evidence afterwards was that the bottom of the lead keel was corrugated instead of being flat. He did get the keel bolts checked that winter.

She was a lovely boat, sailed beautifully and was mentioned in books written by West Coast sailors of that time. I still have her old anchor light, no innards, a teak water funnel and a fresh water barrel - in need of repair."

So where does the television come in?

Tai-Mo-Shan caught the eye of the producers of the 2008 film of the Abba musical Mamma Mia which was screened over Christmas. She was chartered by Tom Hanks, Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson to cruise Greek waters for the shooting of the film with Meryl Streep, Colin Firth, Julie Walters, Stellan Skarsgård and Hollywood's own Commander James Bond, Pierce Brosnan, on board.

Ed.

Tai-Mo-Shan in the fifties



ROLL OF HONOUR

PRESIDENTS

1892-93 Geo T Lowe
 1893-03 Wm Cecil Slingsby
 1903-06 Alfred Barran
 1906-09 Rev LS Calvert
 1909-12 Lewis Moore
 1912-19 Walter Parsons
 1919-22 WA Brigg
 1922-23 JC Atkinson
 1923-25 EE Roberts
 1925-27 F Leach
 1927-29 HH Bellhouse
 1929-30 TS Booth
 1930-31 T Gray
 1931-32 AE Horn
 1932-34 WV Brown
 1934-36 A Rule
 1936-38 JM Davidson
 1938-46 C Chubb
 1946-48 H Armstrong
 1948-50 CE Burrow
 1950-52 Davis Burrow
 1952-54 J Hilton
 1954-56 HL Stembridge
 1956-58 S Marsden
 1958-60 TH Godley
 1960-62 FW Stembridge
 1962-64 RE Chadwick
 1964-66 WPB Stonehouse
 1966-68 EC Downham
 1968-70 EM Tregoning
 1970-72 AB Craven
 1972-74 BE Nicholson
 1974-76 JB Devenport
 1976-78 FD Smith
 1978-80 JP Barton
 1980-82 WR Lofthouse
 1982-84 WA Linford
 1984-86 JD Armstrong
 1986-88 PC Swindells
 1988-90 AC Brown
 1990-92 DA Smithson
 1992-94 GA Salmon
 1994-96 CD Bush
 1996-98 TW Josephy
 1998-00 WCI Crowther
 2000-02 AR Chapman
 2002-04 TA Kay
 2004-06 K Aldred
 2006-08 FM Godden
 2008-10 AD Bridge
 2010 -12 PRP Chadwick
 2012 - Michael Smith

HONORARY MEMBERS (PAST)

1892 Edward Whympier
 1892 Wm Cecil Slingsby
 1892 Clinton T Dent
 1892 8th Duke of Devonshire
 1892 Charles E Matthews
 1892 The Earl of Wharnccliffe

1893 Charles Pilkington
 1893 Charles F Tetley
 1893 Gerald W Balfour, MP
 1893 Sir W Martin Conway
 1900 Horace Walker
 1907 Sir Alfred Hopkinson
 1907 EA Martel
 1907 G Winthrop Young
 1909 Dr Norman Collie
 1909 James Anson Farrer
 1921 George Yeld
 1921 George T Lowe
 1923 Charles Scriven
 1925 Canon AD Tupper-Carey
 1939 Sydney J Farrer
 1939 Walter Parsons
 1946 Robert de Joly
 1949 Ernest E Roberts
 1955 Sir R Charles Evans
 1956 Harry Spilsbury
 1959 Fred Booth
 1959 Davis Burrow
 1965 Clifford Chubb
 1965 Jack Hilton
 1968 E. Cliff Downham
 1968 Stanley Marsden
 1968 HG Watts
 1977 HL Stembridge
 1985 A David M Cox
 1998 Major W Lacy
 1990 F David Smith

HONORARY MEMBERS (CURRENT)

1988 Dr John Farrer
 1997 Derek Bush
 1997 George Spenceley
 2001 Alan Brown
 2003 Alan Linford
 2008 Iain Gilmour
 2008 Gordon Humphreys
 2008 John Lovett
 2008 Chewang Motup
 2010 Albert Chapman
 2012 Arthur Salmon

VICE PRESIDENTS

1892-93 H Slater
 1919-22 EE Roberts
 1892-93 G Arnold
 1921-23 F Constantine
 1893-94 G T Lowe
 1922-24 P Robinson
 1893-94 L Moore
 1923-25 JF Seaman
 1898-00 Rev LS Calvert
 1924-26 M Botterill
 1899-01 JC Atkinson
 1925-27 L Moore
 1900-02 A Barran
 1926-28 W Villiers Brown

1901-03 Dr Tempest Anderson
 1927-29 CE Benson
 1902-04 Dr FH Mayo
 1928-30 CE Burrow
 1903-05 W Parsons
 1929-31 WA Wright
 1904-06 JA Green
 1930-32 C Chubb
 1908-10 F Leach
 1931-33 GL Hudson
 1909-11 C Hastings
 1932-34 FS Smythe
 1910-12 A Rule
 1933-35 JM Davidson
 1911-13 JH Buckley
 1934-35 GA Potter-Kirby
 1912-14 CA Hill
 1935-37 J Hilton
 1913-19 AE Horn
 1935-37 H Humphreys
 1914-19 H Brodrick
 1937-46 A Humphreys
 1919-21 CRB Wingfield
 1938-46 H Armstrong
 1946-48 D Burrow
 1946-48 AL Middleton
 1948-49 GS Gowing
 1948-50 GC Marshall
 1949-50 HG Watts
 1950-52 S Marsden
 1950-53 J Godley
 1952-54 FS Booth
 1953-55 FW Stembridge
 1954-56 RE Chadwick
 1955-57 GB Spenceley
 1956-58 CW Jorgensen
 1957-59 JA Holmes
 1958-60 JE Cullingworth
 1959-61 J Lovett
 1960-62 WPB Stonehouse
 1961-63 MF Wilson
 1962-64 EC Downham
 1963-65 BE Nicholson
 1964-66 JA Dossier
 1965-67 FD Smith
 1966-68 MD Bone
 1967-69 AR Chapman
 1968-70 JD Driscoll
 1969-71 J Hemingway
 1970-72 EJ Woodman
 1971-73 WA Linford
 1972-74 AJ Reynolds
 1973-75 JG Brook
 1974-76 JP Barton
 1975-77 WR Lofthouse
 1976-78 J Williamson
 1977-79 N Newman
 1978-80 J Stuttard
 1979-81 GA Salmon
 1980-82 PC Swindells
 1981-83 DA Smithson
 1982-84 TW Josephy
 1983-85 DJ Atherton
 1984-86 GR Turner

1986-88 R Cowing
 1987-89 CR Allen
 1988-90 DRH Mackay
 1990-92 WCI Crowther
 1992-94 H Robinson
 1994-96 K Aldred
 1996-98 IFD Gilmour
 1998-00 DA Hick
 2000-02 DJ Handley
 2002-04 G Champion
 2004-06 FM Godden
 2006-08 RA Kirby
 2008-10 M Borroff
 2010 -12 PA Dover
 2012 - HA Lomas

MEMBERS ELECTED TO THE ALPINE CLUB (CURRENT)

Mick Borroff
 Ged Campion
 Albert Chapman
 Peter Chadwick
 Richard Gowing
 David Hick
 Alister Renton
 George Spenceley
 Michael Smith
 Chewang Motup

LIFE MEMBERS

Armstrong, JD
 Bush, CD
 Casperon, JD
 Chapman, A
 Clayton, WD
 Crowther, WCI
 Denney, RJ
 Ellis, JR
 Errington, RD
 Farrant, DJ
 Goodwin, R
 Gowing, R
 Hamlin, JF
 Handley, DJ
 Garben, R
 Hemmingway, J
 Hobson, MP
 Holmes, D
 Hooper, JH
 Humphreys, H
 Humphries, RG
 Ince, GR
 Jones, G
 Josephy, TW
 Kay, TA
 Kinder, MJ
 Laing, IG
 Large, C
 Lofthouse, WR
 Lovett, J
 Mackay, DRH

Marr, AM
 Middleton, JI
 Middleton, JR
 Middleton, RM
 Moorhouse, DM
 Oxtoby, DM
 Pomfret, RE
 Postill, GP
 Renton, K
 Roberts, PD
 Rowlands, C
 Salmon, GA
 Salmon, RT
 Salmon, TW
 Short, J
 Smith, M
 Smith, SH
 Smith, TH
 Smithson, DA
 Spenceley, GB
 Stemberge, DW
 Stemberge, SW
 Sterland, JH
 Sykes, PW
 Tallon, A
 Tetlow, DM
 Varney, JA
 Wilkinson, B
 Wilkinson, F

1929-46 D Burrow
 1946-52 FS Booth
 1952-56 JE Cullingworth
 1956-57 CR Allen
 1957-66 EC Downham
 1966-68 FD Smith
 1968-79 EC Downham
 1979-83 J Hemingway
 1983-93 CD Bush
 1993-96 JA Schofield
 1996-08 RG Humphreys
 2008-12 RA Kirby
 2012 - Josephy, TW

1984-90 AC Brown
 1990-93 DJ Atherton
 1993-03 M Smith
 2003--- RJ Denney

1958-62 PR Harris
 (Lowstern)
 1959-66 FD Smith
 (Low Hall Garth)
 1962-66 FD Smith
 (Lowstern)
 1966-67 AR Chapman
 1967-82 WA Linford
 1982-91 K Aldred
 1991-96 DM Martindale
 1997--- R Josephy

HONORARY ASSISTANT EDITORS

1947-58 RE Chadwick
 1958-59 RB Whardall
 1959-60 HL Stemberge
 1960-70 AB Craven
 1970-77 DP Penfold
 1985-92 EC Downham

HONORARY WARDENS LOW HALL GARTH

HONORARY ASSISTANT SECRETARIES

1894-10 F Constantine
 1957-62 J Hemingway
 1910-12 JR Green
 1962-64 TW Salmon
 1912-19 L Moore
 1964-68 WCI Crowther
 1919-24 J Buckley
 1968-73 FD Smith
 1924-26 AS Lowden
 1973-79 J Hemingway
 1926-46 FS Booth
 1979-83 CD Bush
 1946-52 FW Stemberge
 1983-85 J Hemingway
 1952-53 O Stonehouse
 1985-92 M Smith
 1953-54 C IW Fox
 1992-95 MJ Kinder
 1954-57 EC Downham

HONORARY WEBMASTERS

2001-08 CG RENTON
 2008-09 A Renton
 2009- A Syme

1952-55 GB Spenceley
 1955-59 A Tallon
 1959-73 JD Driscoll
 1973-76 FD Smith
 1976-78 GP Postill
 1978-84 N Newman
 1986-89 WA Linford
 1986-98 FD Smith
 1998-01 D English
 2001-02 M Edmundson
 2002-07 IFD Gilmour
 2007-08 G Dootson
 2008-12 RG Humphreys
 2012 - GA Salmon

HONORARY LIBRARIANS

1899-03 F Constantine
 1903-24 JH Buckley
 1924-27 C D Frankland
 1927-29 JK Crawford
 1929-30 W Allsup
 1930-35 J Buckley
 1935-39 R Rimmer
 1946-48 HS Booth
 1948-49 DS Blair
 1949-58 HL Stemberge
 1958-62 JG Brook
 1962-71 AB Craven
 1971-79 JG Brook
 1979-96 R Harben
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LE MASSIF DU VERCORS

Numerous members over the years have been deep underground below the superb limestone plateau of Vercors and some have walked over it, taking in a few of the higher peaks.

I suspect however that most having got that far head off into the nearby and far more dramatic Alps.

Now that my daughter is a resident of Grenoble I have had a number of opportunities to enjoy what it has to offer and wish to commend the Vercors in particular, to today's younger members if only as a few days stop on the way to more ambitious things.

A real plus once up on the tops is in fact the remarkable views to be had of other peaks in the near and middle distance.

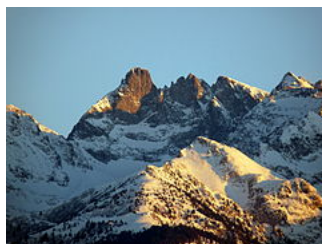
Separated from what is normally considered the start of the Alps by the Isere river the Vercors range stands like a proud fortress, defended on all sides by high limestone cliffs.

Across the Isere to the north is the Chartreuse Massif; to the northeast is Grenoble and behind that city, the Belledonne range. Also to the west, is the Rhone Valley. There are stunning panoramic views of the nearby Ecrins and Oisans massifs and further afield Mont Blanc. Jack Short has recounted two treks in the Ecrins earlier in this journal and I have a picture of the Belledonne in Chippings.



Grand Veymont

The Vercors mountains themselves top out at 2341m with Grand Veymont whilst the high point of the Belledonne, also not really in the Alps, is a very respectable 2,977m with the Grand Pic de Belledonne.



Grand Pic de Belledonne

Perhaps the most startling view as you look out is that of Mont Aiguille at 2.087m standing like one of the buttes of Arizona, a stump completely cut off from the surrounding mountains by erosion.



Mont Aiguille

With Aiguille meaning needle, it is well named.

Locals claim that the conquest of it in 1492 by Antoine de Ville and his team was the first 'rock-climb', the start of mountaineering as we know it today.

Surrounded by large cliffs and cut by countless gorges and caves, the Vercors is a perfect example of a limestone range; largely formed about 100 million years ago when layers of sediment were laid down at the bottom of what must have been a warm sea covering the area. Quite where the Alps starts geologically is debatable but that range was created around 10 million years ago when tectonic pressures thrust it upwards and Vercors etc with it.

Subsequently glaciers eroded valleys in the interior of the massif furthering the process of shaping the range and as the ice melted, the run off enlarged any faults and constant erosion since has created the deep gorges we see today.

The acidic rainwater has continued the process; enlarging the gorges; creating limestone pavements above ground, and caves and potholes underground including the 1198m deep Gouffre Berger which some members have been down.

Descending off the massif to the east and west are tortuous roads, dropping over a thousand feet and not for those of a nervous disposition or suffering from vertigo. My daughter and her partner cycle these for fun - insane!

During the war they were something of a barrier to the Germans and the caves formed great refuges and the area was a hotbed of resistance. The area is scattered with memorials to the freedom fighters.

The actual Vercors National Park covers a total area of 330,000 acres and extends beyond the massif and you could live here for years and only touch the surface (no pun intended)

There are distinctly different areas within the park; the central part, historically the only part of the range to be called the Vercors, is largely made up of high wide plains bordered by forests. To the west are more forests and very steep cliffs, gorges and those roads - The more southerly parts of the range have warm, dry climates, and the landscape reflects this.

The eastern part of the range, forms its most dramatic edge, with high cliffs overlooking the Trieves Valley. These cliffs run for nearly 40 miles before climbing up in an unbroken line to join the mountainous part of the massif above the Drac Valley and the Grenoble Plain.

The mountains themselves would enjoy more renown if it was not for their proximity to the Alps. As they march across the massif you have Bec de l'Orient at 1554m, Moucherotte 1901m, Pic Saint-Michel 1966m, Grande Moucherolle 2284m, Pierre Blanch 2106, Grand Veymont, Grandasse 2041m, Mont Barral 1908m and Le Jocou at 2051m.

In the deep south of the park there is also the Hauts-Plateaux du Vercors; a distinctly different area. These isolated plateaus are protected by Nature Reserve status, and form one of the largest true wilderness areas in France.

They are my target for my next extended visit.

Roy Denney

INDEX

Index of articles in the more recent past which can provide reference material for future trips.

Issue 13 Series 13
Summer 2012 includes:
Rock climbing in Turkey
Activities in Ireland
Caving in China
Three Counties Pot

Issue 12 Series 13
Winter 2011 includes:
The Monte Roosa Circuit
Climbing in the Haute Savoie
Use of redundant quarries
Cecil Slingsby (background)

Issue 11 Series 13
Summer 2011 includes:
Rock climbing in New Zealand
Bolivia Expedition
Trekking in the Khumbu
On snow shoes in France
Climbing in Spain

Issue 10 Series 13
Winter 2010 includes:
Britain's three peaks from
Barmouth by boat
Yosemite, California
Bom Jesus de Lapa , Brazil
Yorkshire Three Peaks by Ski
Bolivia, Quimsa Cruz Range

Issue 9 Series 13
Summer 2010 includes:
The Vercors, France
Caves & Karst of Brazil
Trekking in Sikkim
Australia, walking & wildlife
Pulking on Svalbard
Condors, Peru

Issue 8 Series 13
Winter 2009 includes:
Caving in the Levant (Lebanon & Syria)
Ice climbing in Norway
Kalymnos Rock Climbing
Tramping etc New Zealand
Stubaital, Austria
El Chorro, Spain
Lakeland tarns

Issue 7 Series 13

Summer 2009 includes
Images of Lhakang
Socotra Island
The Snow Leopard
New Caledonia
Morocco, Anti Atlas

Issue 6 Series 13
Winter 2008 includes:
Early Gliding
Southern Iran
Images of Bhutan
Fengshan, China – Caves and Karst
Lhakang Expedition
History of caving in N Pennines

Issue 5 Series 13
Summer 2008 includes:
Mapping of South Georgia
The early days of Skiing
Climbing Saint-Jeannet, France
Ice pack crossing Spitzbergen
Caves & karst in Libya
Trekking in Bhutan

Issue 4 Series 13
Winter 2007 includes:
A history of Yorkshire Rock
Telemarking with Pulks, Norway
Gunung Ledang, Malaysia
Jade Dragon Snow Mountain
China
Skye
Oparara Basin, New Zealand
Costa Blanca rock
Trekking in northern Pakistan

Issue 3 Series 13
Summer 2007 includes:
Caving in Nidderdale
in the 19th century
Jotenheimen, Norway
Fauna of Gran Paradiso
Bosnia
Loengpo Gang, Himalayas
China Caving
Flora of Ladakh

Issue 2 Series 13
Winter 2006 includes:
Tafraoute, Morocco
Jamaica
China
Spitzbergen
Venezuela
Austria
California, High Sierra
Isles of Scilly
Annapurna Sanctuary
Ladakh

The Langdales, a history
Valnontey Aosta, Italy

Issue 1 Series 13
Summer 2006 includes:
Monte Rosa
Madagascar
Skiing in Austria
Arêtes du Sapey, Lake Annecy
Japan
Ladakh
China Caving (56p. Supplement)

Issue 24 Series 12
Winter 2005 includes:
China, Great Wall
Mauritania
Skye
Kibo, Kilimanjaro
The Dolomites
Lakeland 3000s
Newby Moss Cave
History of the Lyke Wake
Nepal
The Monroes

Issue 23 Series 12
Summer 2005 includes:
Demirkazik, Turkey
Yosemite
The Sudetenland
Paine Circuit, Chile
China caving expedition
Walking in Nidderdale
North York Moors
Wanderings in Scotland

Issue 22 Series 12
Winter 2004 includes:
The High Sierra & Appalachians, USA
Caves in Ethiopia
Early exploration of Alum Pot
The history of Carabiners
Caving Tian'e, Guangxi, S W China
High level walking in Scotland
The Lakes
The French Alps

Issue 21 Series 12
Summer 2004 includes:
Caves & Karst of Madagascar
The History of Dunald Mill Hole
Erta Ale & The Danakil
Sailing off Croatia
Walking Morecambe Bay
Climbing on Clogwyn
Sardinia

Issue 20 Series 12**Winter 2003 includes:**

Activities in Mongolia
Crete
Galloway
Ireland
Switzerland
The Prehistory of Saddleworth

Issue 19 Series 12**Summer 2003 includes:**

Drakensberg Trek
Fong Yen, China
Alderley Edge Mines
Sardinia
Ben Alder
The Haute Savoie

Issue 18 Series 12**Winter 2002 includes:**

Hidden Valleys China Caves Project
Pic Du Midi D'Ossua,
Activities in Wales
The Scottish Highlands
Dartmoor.
The John Muir Trail
Sailing a Square Rigger

Issue 17 Series 12**Summer 2001 includes:**

John Muir Trail full report
Morocco Expedition Report
Madagascar caves
Lundy
Newby Moss Sink
La Meije

Issue 16 Series 12**Summer 2001 includes:**

Nanda Devi Inner Sanctuary
John Muir Trail
Skye
Sinai
Scawfell

Issue 15 Series 12**Summer 2001 includes:**

Guangxi Caves 2000 Expedition
A cave in Palawan and 3 in Laos
The Bradford Caving Community
a century ago
Fantan B
Gondogoro La
The Karakoram

Issue 14 Series 12**Winter 2000 includes:**

The Corbetts Spring Bank 2000
Svalbard

Ingleborough Cave Box
and Giggleswick School
Mount Kinabalu in Rainy Season

Issue 13 Series 12**Summer 2000 includes:**

Valleys of the Assassins, Iran
Rambling Australia, 1975 to 1999
Hiking in the South-West USA
Kohl Larsen Plateau, South Georgia
Orion Face Direct, Ben Nevis

Issue 12 Series 12**Winter 1999 includes:**

Cordilleras Cocapata
Real, Bolivia
Table Mountain,
Weissmies
The Lagginhorn
The Julian Alps
Lundy
The Cullin
Kanchenjunga
Seana Bhraigh

Issue 11 Series 12**Summer 1999 includes:**

Catamite Hole
Macedonian Caves
Blue Mountain Peak, Jamaica

Issue 10 Series 12**Winter 1998 includes:**

Iceland Expedition Report
Cycling in the Dolomites
Goyden Pot, Eli Simpson &
Pudsey Rambling Club

Issue 9 Series 12**Summer 1998 includes:**

Climbing in Wales
The Cullin
Knoydart
Bulgaria
South Africa
Australia
The Himalaya
Life and times of E E Roberts
Gaping Gill

Issue 8 Series 12**Winter 1997 includes:**

Telemarking on Piz Bernina
Andalsnes, Norway
Bungle Bungle Massif,
N W Australia
Volcanoes, Sulawesi, Indonesia
Mountain of God, Tanzania
Caving in the Dales
The Eastern Cairngorms

Trekking the Khumbu, Nepal

Issue 7 Series 12**Summer 1997 includes:**

Roumania in winter
Irish potholes
Caving in Oman
Monte Baldo, Italy
Cave exploration, Trou de Ver
France
Exploring Iceland

Issue 6 Series 12**Winter 1996 includes:**

Roumania
Easter island
The Tatras, Poland
Exploring Chile
Hill walking in the Canaries
Darien gap, Panama/Colombia

Issue 5 Series 12**Summer 1996 includes:**

Dorje Lakpa, Nepal
Eastern Greenland
Cueva del Gato, Spain
Paragliding over Tenerife

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The Yorkshire Ramblers Club

Established 1892

The Mountaineering and Caving Club

www.yrc.org.uk



The aims of the Club are to organise walking, mountaineering and skiing excursions; to encourage the exploration of caves and pot-holes; to conduct expeditions to remote parts of the planet, the pursuit of other outdoor activities and the gathering and promoting of knowledge concerning natural history, archaeology, geology, folklore and other kindred subjects.

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