

YRC JOURNAL

EXPLORATION, MOUNTAINEERING AND CAVING SINCE 1892

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CAVES IN
BULGARIA**

**HAUT
LANGUEDOC
FRANCE**

**SNOW & ICE
IN MOROCCO**

**ALMERIA
SPAIN**

YORKSHIRE



**AI DONG, GUANGXI
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**PHOTOGRAPH
JOHN WHALLEY**

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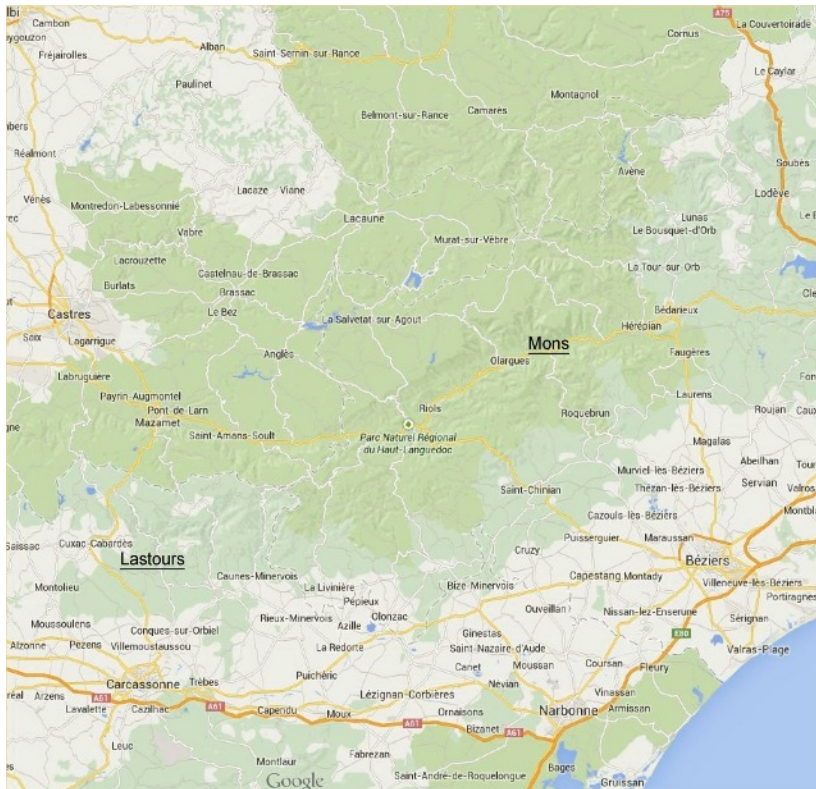
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HAUT LANGUEDOC

Last September I and my wife, daughter and her partner spent some time walking this area and it would appear that at the same time Phil Dover was walking close by. (See Chippings last journal "The Other France") We started based in Carcassonne but moved up the gorges to Lastours for a week's walking. It seems Phil was walking 'the other side of the hill'.

We found it a fascinating area very quiet and very pleasant. It seems the Dovers were similarly impressed.
Roy Denney

As Phil puts it:-



"We drove south in our camping van, through the Jura and Ardeche regions with their stark white limestone to the Languedoc area.

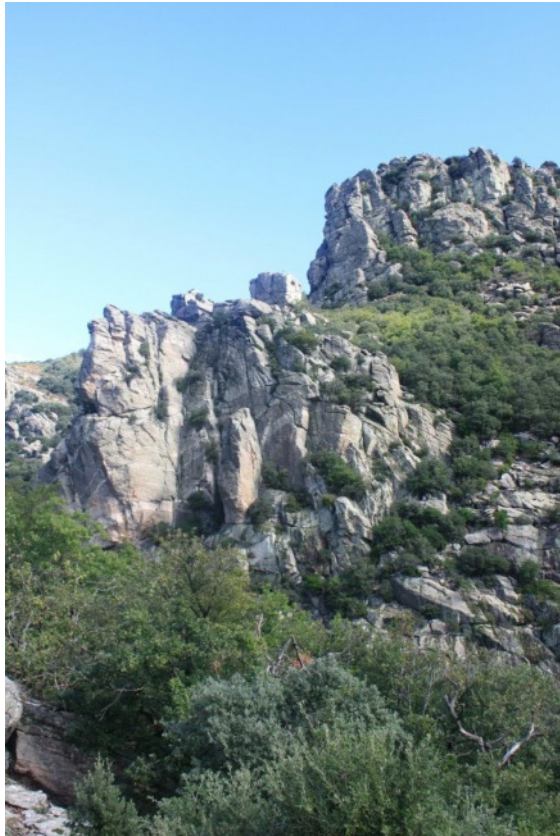
This area is north of Beziers and not far from the Mediterranean coast. It is an interesting geological area with most of the highest ground is granite and gneiss, here there is excellent walking in gorges and on the plateaux and, although I have not spoken to anyone who has been there, it is mentioned in Bill Birkett's book for its excellent rock climbing.

We spent a week there doing six walks based on ones in the Cicerone guide, "Walking in the Languedoc".

The first was up the Colombiers gorge climbing a good track first through Sweet Chestnut with the path covered with the nuts and higher beech and holm oak with views of the crags across the gorge. After passing a Gite d'Etape made from old mill buildings you emerge on to moorland land reminiscent of parts of Scotland with heather, juniper and some pine trees which the track crosses on the opposite side of the gorge before descending steeply back to the starting place, in part using an old Roman road.

Our second walk from Mons, climbing up a ridge through woodland and then a balcon path. We then followed yellow waymarks zigzagging steeply down into the Heric gorge which we descended and then took a path back to Mons.





Gneiss Crags Colombiers

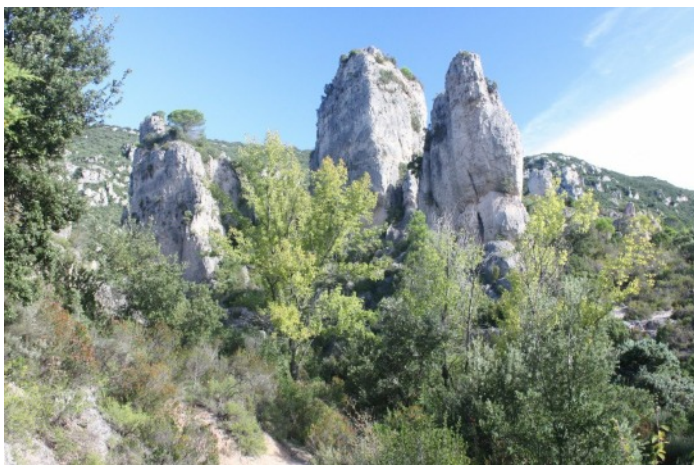


Heric Gorge

Our next two walks started at Douch, on a plateau where there is a Gite d'Etape. After crossing moorland then a descending traverse in to the Vialais valley through woodland, then a climb to a road col before following an open ridge where hopefully you may see mouflon (wild sheep), reintroduced to the area in 1956. It was Sunday the next day and the woods were full of mushroom gatherers and a party of wild boar hunters with their dogs. The path took us to a Table d'Orientation with views across the Orb valley and down to the Mediterranean and across to the Pyrenees. We walked back through woodland and moorland to Douch.



Vialais Valley



The last two walks were rather different the first starting at the old village of Moureze; the track leading through a dolomite cirque with rocky pinnacles and then climbing up Mont Liausson.

Salagou Lake, built as a water reservoir but now mainly used for recreation was on one side and we had views to the Med on the other. The other started from Puech, another old village, crossing infertile ground made up of red earth made of eroded sandstone rich in iron, called ruffles.



It crosses an open scrub covered plateau with ruins of capitelles, stone shelters built by the shepherds to protect them from both heavy rain and strong sunshine.

This is an interesting region worth visiting if you are in the area and not well known so relatively quiet."

AN INCOMER'S YORKSHIRE

Roy Denney

First, to declare my hand: I was born in Rishton, a village by name but in reality a mill suburb of Blackburn. By the time I was four I was in Manchester via three years living above an open-all-hours shop in Shaw near Oldham and I was brought up and schooled in that city. There is no reason I can find why I ended up a country boy at heart but that is definitely me now, at 70 years old. Strange how some unseen hand seems to nudge us along.

I left school as soon as it was allowed and went to work on my sixteenth birthday. I had ambitions for a number of jobs involving the outdoors but as I needed to earn a crust I ended up with a job working in a bank till I found something better. Funny that; as I retired from that bank after 36 years service. I joined Williams Deacon's, a bank with solid Lancashire roots but over the years, with mergers and take-overs it became the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Along the way I took to exploring the great outdoors. It probably started when I was 12 when the family would spend Sunday afternoons walking in Styal Woods having caught a bus out of Manchester. This 10 mile trip was an epic as the family never had a car. I discovered trees and sloping ground. Very strange!

When I was 14 the Church Lads Brigade organised an afternoon in the great outdoors, a cow field near New Mills. The rest as they say is history. From that field I could see real hills! Within a year I was catching buses, or trains along now defunct tracks, and wandering the Dark Peak; I had caught the bug.

This developed to getting two buses and travelling 4 hours to get to Cumberland with time to knock off a hill before getting a bus home, but fate eventually intervened.

When I was working at our Withington Branch in my mid twenties I got to know the staff of the neighbouring Barclays ex Martins Branch. I ended up marrying one of them, but prior to that, their assistant manager tempted me to come out on the hill with him. He did talk a good climb so I thought I should test the water. Despite appearances he actually was a hard mountain man and it opened doors to me. He took me along on a good number of meets with some club based in Yorkshire and eventually Arthur Craven, their President of the day collared me on a bus and said 'young man it is time you became legitimate and joined the club'.

To the best of my knowledge before going out on meets with the Club, Shaw had been as near to Yorkshire as I ever got. Derek Clayton has a lot to answer for.

I discovered Scotland and the Borders and the Highlands and Islands became good friends which was fortuitous as I subsequently ended up in Edinburgh on training and management courses. I talked of a Scotland few of the locals knew. Even more strange but with my folk-singing background I found myself singing all the words to Flower of Scotland when my Scottish colleague were miming all but the chorus.

When my career involved moving to take a position developing a new branch in Bradford we went to live in Wharfedale; happily so, as by then I had come to really love North Yorkshire. I know technically we were at the northern extremity of West Yorkshire but it did lay the Dales on my doorstep. To save face I told Manchester friends I was off to educate the heathens but much of the nearer areas of Yorkshire were very like the Pennine areas of Lancashire and the communities were much as the ones the other side of the hill as they had been in my youth.

Fifty years on I still love it and spend time there by choice not because I happened to be born there, so I feel I have as much if not more right than locals to actually sell its virtues.

I have to say of course, that not everything is perfect. When I moved over and knew nobody it was a bit too easy to get a lively conversation started as the locals were under the misapprehension that somebody called Boycott was a good cricketer and that Leeds had a football team. My strangest experience was debating such matters in the hotel I was living in at Haworth with another resident and a local. They were both proclaiming themselves as being Yorkshiremen and scoffing at the views of an incomer but before the evening was out (and after a few pints it must be admitted) I strangely found myself virtually translating for them as they spoke what were tantamount to being different languages. It turned out one was a rare creature called a Hull KR fan.

Anyway moving on, what's not to like about Yorkshire. Well actually quite a lot really.

When we moved to Wharfedale it took eight years to persuade one of my wife's brothers to visit us and the other never would. They had both been evacuated to Barnsley from the East End of London during the war and thought Yorkshire was what the bible called hell. My brother in law spoke a different language as well. It took us a long time to work out where he had been when he came in one evening, talking about Keeley.

It is hard to think of Yorkshire as an entity. Where we lived in West Yorkshire was very pleasant but there was an awful lot of Yorkshire south of us which was exactly that. Awful.

North Yorkshire is to my mind something entirely different and I would not argue with anybody calling it God's Own Country. There are very few corners of it I have not seen and I am hard put to suggest where is best and do not have the vocabulary to do it justice.

From the high Pennines through the Dales, across the Vale of York over the Moors and down to the sea you have vistas to die for, wonderful walking country and village communities which can be very welcoming. I say 'can' because at first experience it is not always apparent. They don't like posers but if you meet them half way, they are the salt of the earth.

I could go on for ever about my favourite places but I want to highlight one which I would probably put on top of the list.

I love the Dales and in the last twelve months have had a week in Wensleydale and another in Swaledale but my number one is Whitby. This historic and charming old community is on the coast path and within easy range of the Moors. It has something for everyone. If you are into chuff chuffs the privately run North York Moors Railway to Pickering is not only one of the best such lines in the country but gets you to bits that roads hardly reach. By getting off and walking between stations you can enjoy some remarkable short but remote walking.



Who could imagine anything better than sitting outside the tiny Birch Hall pub at Beck Hole with a pint in your hand enjoying the sun playing with the ripples on the stream below as the ducks beg for handouts.



If you are into such things, Bram Stoker and his Dracula would be friends, or should that be fiends, have their annual Goth festival but more to my taste every August there is a folk festival – old time join-in-and-sing folk, mostly sea shanties.

If you want history you have loads to go at. If you can face the 199 steps up to the Abbey that itself is magnificent. I have tried to count the steps three times but always lost count; there are a lot. You have memorabilia about the old whaling trade and remnants of the jet jewellery trade which flourished in Victorian times after Prince Albert died.

It was the discovery of Jurassic-period geological remains alongside the jet that helped the local economy, the fossils becoming very collectable.

The famous whaler, William Scoresby established Whitby's maritime importance and having Captain Cook starting out from the area did no harm. His relics, artefacts and collections from around the world are in the local museum. We have items from the coasts of Australia and New Zealand and other places he visited. Cook hailed from Staithes, a pleasant walk north from Whitby along the Cleveland Way. I live on a Clovelly road in Leicestershire and know the village in Devon it is named after. Staithes in many ways reminds me of Clovelly, not as pretty but with a stark grandeur and similar layout. It is a much-painted village for that reason.

Between Whitby and Staithes long sandy beaches up to the aptly named Sandsend give way to jagged and dramatic cliffs and the sweeping Runswick Bay where the last remnants of Runswick village cling precariously to the valley sides.

Whitby has a working harbour; really two harbours, an outer one and one just up the river for smaller craft. These rather divide the old town from the newer areas. There is a fish market on the west pier with its lighthouse and haunting foghorn. Fishing has reduced but is still a very real part of the Whitby scene. On the east pier there is a traditional kippering shed and the emanating smells can draw you in from all parts around. This has been a fishing port since the Middle Ages; Whitby had herring and whaling fleets and ship-building yards and blubber factories. The smells back then must have been very different

Inshore fishing also takes place and is for crustaceans and line-caught fish and the River Esk is renowned for salmon. I love the villages up the valley of the Esk and they are great places to strike off into the moors.

We cannot link the words Whitby and fish without mentioning the ever popular fish and chip restaurants. They are known the length of the English speaking world and for those of us obliged to live to the south they are a beacon when anywhere nearby, as the haunts where we find our abode have no clue what real fish and chips are.

The Magpie was described as the best fish and chip shop in Britain by Rick Stein and I have to admit it is exceeding good. I don't like facing the inevitable queues though, and the nearby Trencher's gets my vote. It is a bit of a food factory and turns over seats at an incredible rate but the product is every bit as good.

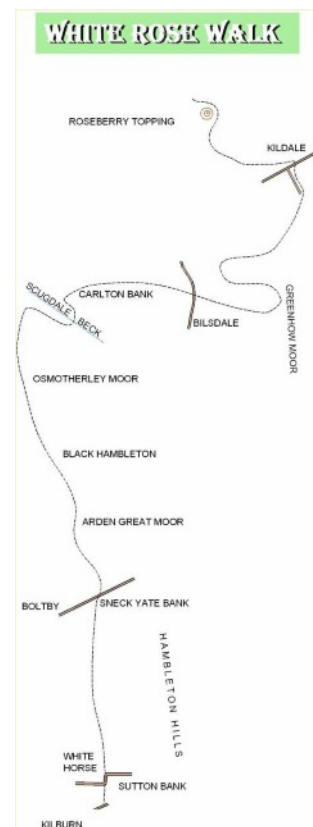
In addition to the North York Moors Railway the station in Whitby is the terminus for the Esk Valley line. The track bed of the old Scarborough and Whitby Railway also reaches the town and is now a footpath. I have friend with a property on the east side of the harbour, single story on the road but with four levels dropping down to the harbour side at the back. We have had a number of informal meets based there and recall an official meet based at some educational hostel up by the Abbey.

The moors themselves are a wonderful feature. Wild, remote in places and challenging when the weather closes in, as it oft times does. The weather can also be glorious which thankfully it was when I walked probably the longest day walk I have ever done.

I love the Cleveland Way along the coast but the other edge of the moors is equally attractive in a different way.

We walked from the nearest road in Kilburn, up above the White Horse and along the embankment edge, eventually to go over Roseberry Topping and down into Guisborough.

Overall some 42 miles which were hard on the feet in baking conditions. The moors had been closed till the weekend before because of fire risk and actual fires.



Roseberry topping is an interesting feature.

At just 1,049 feet high, it may not be the biggest hill you'll ever see, but at the end of a very long walk it seemed it. It is however one of the more distinctive. Its shape, apparently caused by a combination of a geological fault and a mining collapse has made the hill a popular landmark in the Tees Valley area. With its half-cone summit and jagged cliff, it is sometimes described as a small Matterhorn.



The North York Moors National Park itself covers an area of over 500 square miles rises to about 1500 feet and includes one of the largest areas of heather moorland in Britain.

There are sandstone and limestone areas giving a variety of land forms and quite a variety of wild life adding to its attractions. Sparkling streams run down spectacular valleys supporting a diverse ecosystem with such fish as trout and grayling. The streams attract insects which then attract spotted flycatchers, grey wagtails, and swallows etc and kingfishers, sandpipers and dippers patrol the watercourses. On the moorland areas you can see flocks of golden plovers in the grassy oases often accompanied by wheatears. The golden plover is a bird less often seen these days. The moors are also breeding areas for redshanks, green plovers and curlews with their haunting cries. Red grouse are also to be found apparently laughing at walkers as they struggle across the moor. I have seen the odd ring ouzel as well. Stonechats and rock pipits together with more usual coastal birds can be found to the east giving a wide range of bird populations to be seen in the area. This is very rewarding on walks moving between the habitats.

When we talk of Cleveland the very name can tell a tale. It means cliff land. Also to be found here is Ironstone as evidenced by the mines north of Staithes and the iron and steel industries of Teeside to the north.

One of the best ways to see much of the area is to fly a glider off Sutton Bank which I have done a couple of times.

I recall a Club long walk when we were based at Rosedale Abbey when we did about 33 miles in a circular. Keith Raby and I had elected to stay in the Milburn Arms rather than camp which was a great move.



The coast and cliffs near Staithes

When we finished, the stream side meadow where most of the club was camping was covered in swarms of hungry midges just waiting for sweaty walkers. Never has a bath and an indoor bed been more welcome. Unfortunately the last time I heard this hotel had closed. The village owes its name to an old Cistercian Abbey from the twelfth century but the only evidence remaining is in the graveyard. There is more evidence of this order just to the south near Helmsley where the magnificent ruins of Rievaulx Abbey stand.

I also remember a Christmas meet when we were looked after very well by the YHA at Osmotherley, a substantial establishment in this interesting village just off the Cleveland Way. Amongst its claims to fame John Wesley was known to preach from beside the stone cross and back then when we had the meet it boasted an excellent fish and chip shop.

I love going back to these glorious moors but then there are the Dales, the Pennines and the coast, not to mention Cumbria and Scotland. Throw in family visits to Sweden, France, New Zealand and Australia, three score years and ten does not seem long enough.



NATURAL HISTORY



WILDLIFE, ECOLOGY AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS

Weird weather, or what we need to get used to?

Unusual weather in 2014 meant that some of our wildlife had a difficult time. Figures coming out confirm the comments in our last report and add more detail. The National Trust, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation and other bodies have produced reports for what has to have been one of our strangest years but regrettably likely to be the new norm.

The end of 2013 gave us a stormy winter and whilst very mild, January was the wettest on record. Birds and plants thought spring had come but February saw the return of the storms and early nests were destroyed.

The seesaw tipped again though, and returning mild weather did actually bring an early spring, with birds nesting again, this time successfully with amphibians spawning and early flowers breaking out. Primroses, celandines and bluebells and other woodland flowers were in profusion and finished much earlier than usual.

As March rolled into April and dryer weather stayed with us, butterflies and bees became active much earlier than usual. Birds started breeding but there was a sting in Spring's tail and poor weather in late April hit early spring insects. We had seen early appearances of some endangered species of butterflies but some were caught out.

This poor interlude gave way to a warm dry May and after a short wet snap early in the month June was hot, dry and very sunny. It was also bad or bad depending on your point of view, for the more unpleasant insects. As flower beds came into their own butterflies were everywhere

Hot, wet and thundery conditions in July meant the biting flies had a field day, not to mention the flying ants.

In the gardens and hedgerows soft fruits were out earlier than usual and despite their false start birds reared young very successfully by and large and started on further clutches, perhaps not the best idea.

It turned out to be the eighth wettest August on record, with a continuing abundance of mosquitoes, although the cooler conditions did at least keep the wasps at bay

Strangely this was followed by the driest September on record and one of the warmest.

We had bumper crops of nuts, berries and seeds, and an early autumn.

Grow-your-own gardeners had a mixed year however. Many potatoes did not like the pattern of weather and in many areas apples and pears were poor, and the picture was similar amongst the range of edible crops. Some better than usual, some pathetic.

October and November stayed warm and green house tomatoes kept producing and many frost sensitive flowers continued to impress.

With so much food about small mammals did well

December was damper but still mostly mild till a late cold spell. Most of England only missed a white Christmas by a day.

2015 is again erratic. After a largely milder than usual period we had a series of very cold snaps towards the end of January with many areas experiencing very high winds.

Hopefully those cold snaps will have killed off some of the bugs and larvae of the biting insects.

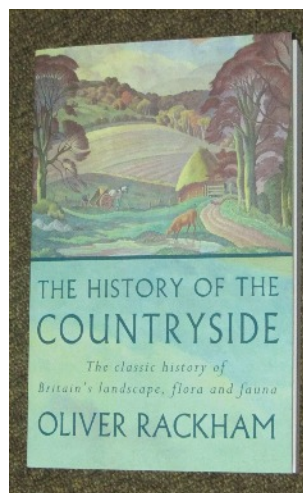
Two local friends each spent a week in the lakes mid January. The first had a glorious week based in Keswick, with mostly sunshine, light breezes and still snow covered hills down to about 800 feet. He came back on the Friday and told our mutual friend how good it had been as that friend was off to Ambleside on the Monday. He however, was battered by storms and nearly drowned.

Going out on the hills as we do we are well aware that the pattern of weather we can expect on our meets has changed and is now far less predictable which does mean planning ahead is a problem.

A BETTER CLASS OF ECO-WARRIOR

Part book review, part obituary I wish to mark the passing of a bit of a one off.

When I recently stood down after many years as county chairman of the Ramblers Association, my colleagues bought me a pipe, pair of slippers and a good book. The book in question was by Professor Oliver Rackham, who has since died aged 75.



He was one of the country's leading environmental historians and was the writer of books that frequently debunked prevailing myths and legends from a background of serious botanical academic knowledge.

For those of us who love the great outdoors we have a lot to thank him for.

He helped protect many wild places, and as much as anybody developed the

concept of 'ancient woodland' now accepted as a label for areas rich in woodland plants dating back centuries which, where managed at all, had been managed sustainably by traditional means such as coppicing.

His book of 'Ancient Woodland, its History, Vegetation and Uses in England', was a study of three hundred such woods and led to a new status for such places in the eyes of the authorities and the Forestry Commission. Another great contribution was his The History of the Countryside (1986), a four hundred page tome on the British landscape from prehistoric times to when it was published. This is the book my colleagues bought for me. It is a fascinating read but will take me some time to complete, as I still have lots of other time consuming involvements not least publishing your journal. If you have not seen it I can commend it to you.

It is a lively read written by someone whose enthusiasm for his subject jumps out of the page at you. It goes into detail on all sorts of landscape features but shoots down well held public misconceptions. The book won numerous awards including the Natural World Book of the Year, the Angel Literary Award, and the Sir Peter Kent Conservation Prize.

Never one to follow popular trends, when commenting on the ravages of young trees and shrubs by Muntjac, he had a straightforward solution: "Eat Bambi." In 1987 he described the so called Great Storm as a blessing undoing much ill-advised tree planting and advocated leaving nature to regenerate these areas.

He was an odd ball by most peoples definition. Famous for his orange socks, with a full beard and long hair and tendency to wear sandals to show off his socks ; he painted a strange figure.

He was a stalwart campaigner for the protection of the countryside and we must continue to push for it to be given its due recognition. It is all too easy to take it for granted but it is under continual threat.

It should be protected for its own right and for the benefit of future generations but on a mundane level we need to bring home to politicians that it is a valuable asset.

Many organisations do push this agenda including the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and the Open Spaces Society which is this year celebrating its 150 year anniversary. The society was formed in 1865 as the Commons Preservation Society to rescue London's threatened commons before going on to found the National Trust in 1895.

If we are to mobilise public opinion and get our parliamentarians to give it proper protection it will need imaginative and memorable ploys and I would suggest that the Irish Forum on Natural Capital, have done just that.

MAKE MINE A PINT OF NATURE

Lesser-known ingredients in a pint include mountains, forests, bogs, rivers, oceans and all living things

Rain falls on **bogs** in the **mountains** which purify the **water** mechanically, chemically and biologically. The water flows through the **rocks** deep underground - picking up a unique water chemistry - and into the **rivers**, where it is extracted and processed to make beer.

Biodiversity is nature's Research & Development department, and it's been working hard to diversify life at ecosystem, species and genetic levels for 3.6 billion years. This process gives **hops** the **genetic traits** that beer makers exploit when cross-breeding new varieties to taste 'just right'. Biodiversity also makes the **species diversity** of 1500 types of **yeast** different from each other, both taxonomically and in terms of flavour.

Woodlands and wetlands in the catchment regulate flooding and recycle the **nutrients** that fertilise **soils**. They also sequester carbon, as do the **oceans**, which helps to regulate the **climate**. These systems work together to provide the perfect conditions in which to grow the **barley** that goes into your pint.

Nature is valuable and many of us think it's priceless, but because it's free the economy treats it as worthless.

This has to change.

Ireland's natural capital has been valued at

€2.6

Scientists consider this to be a conservative estimate - the true figure is likely much, much more.

BILLION PER YEAR

The Irish Forum on Natural Capital is working for an Ireland in which natural capital and ecosystem services are valued, protected and restored.

Let's make nature count.

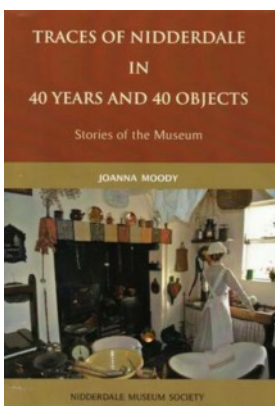
www.naturalcapitalireland.com

@NatCap_Irl

The Open Spaced Society has published two books to celebrate its 150 years, which may be of interest to members.

The first tells the story of the fight for commons, greens, open spaces and public paths and the other, the heritage of the commons, their wildlife, access and associated folklore.

They are available at £5 each or both for £8.



Whilst on the subject of anniversaries and books the Nidderdale Museum is celebrating forty years and have brought out a book "Traces of Nidderdale in 40 years and 40 objects"

Available for £12 from the Nidderdale Museum Society and a number of other outlets

ISBN 978-0-9928508-0-7

STRANGER THAN FICTION

A story came my way recently which I would like to share with you. It is about Lawrence Anthony who died three years ago and was an internationally renowned conservationist, environmentalist, explorer and best-selling author. He was the long-standing head of conservation at a game reserve in South Africa and the founder of the Earth Organization, an independent, international conservation and environmental group with a strongly scientific background. He was a member of the national council of the Southern Africa Association for the Advancement of Science, South Africa's oldest scientific association, and numerous other international bodies.

He was author of three books including the bestseller, *The Elephant Whisperer*, He fearlessly campaigned to protect elephants and regularly rescued and rehabilitated them all over the globe mostly those which had been caught up in human atrocities. He led on the courageous rescue of the animals in Baghdad Zoo during the US invasion in 2003. He is remembered and missed by his wife and family, and numerous elephants!

Two days after his death, wild elephants started showing up at his home, led by two large matriarchs. Separate wild herds arrived apparently to say goodbye to their beloved man-friend. A total of thirty one elephants had patiently walked many miles to get to his house.

Witnessing this spectacle, people were obviously in awe, not only because of the supreme intelligence and precise timing that these elephants sensed about Lawrence's passing, but also because of the profound memory and emotion the beloved animals evoked in such an organized way, walking slowly for days, making their way in a solemn one-by-one queue from their habitat to his house.

Lawrence's wife was especially touched, knowing that the elephants had not been to his house prior to that day for well over three years, but yet they knew where they were going. The elephants obviously wanted to pay their deep respects, honouring their friend who'd saved their lives - so much respect that they stayed for two days and two nights without eating anything. Then one morning, they all left, making their long journey back home.

You could not start to explain this.

CHIPPINGS



A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

We are indebted to John Snoad who has passed on a snippet from one of his friends in Norway. Apparently a copy of Slingsby's "Norway, the Northern Playground" with a dedication to Thomas Gray (our first editor) from Cecil Slingsby was being sold by an Oslo antiquarian bookshop for 30,000 Norwegian Kroner (£2,500). How it got to Norway is anyone's guess. It had been auctioned by Bonhams in London in September with 4 other books for £852. The opening to the book is below as is the inscription to Thomas Gray.

The author, a YRC Honorary member and our Second President is more highly regarded there than here

ONCE upon a time, a long, long while ago, soon after most of the world had been created, the Evil One wandered round and round, over land and sea, and when he saw that all was fair and beautiful he became very spiteful, and seizing an immense mass of rock, in his anger he threw it into the Northern Seas. It was so large that for many hundreds of miles it stood out of the waters—a terrible region of dark cliffs, sharp peaks, narrow ridges, and stony valleys, without one single blade of green grass or any sign of vegetation whatever.

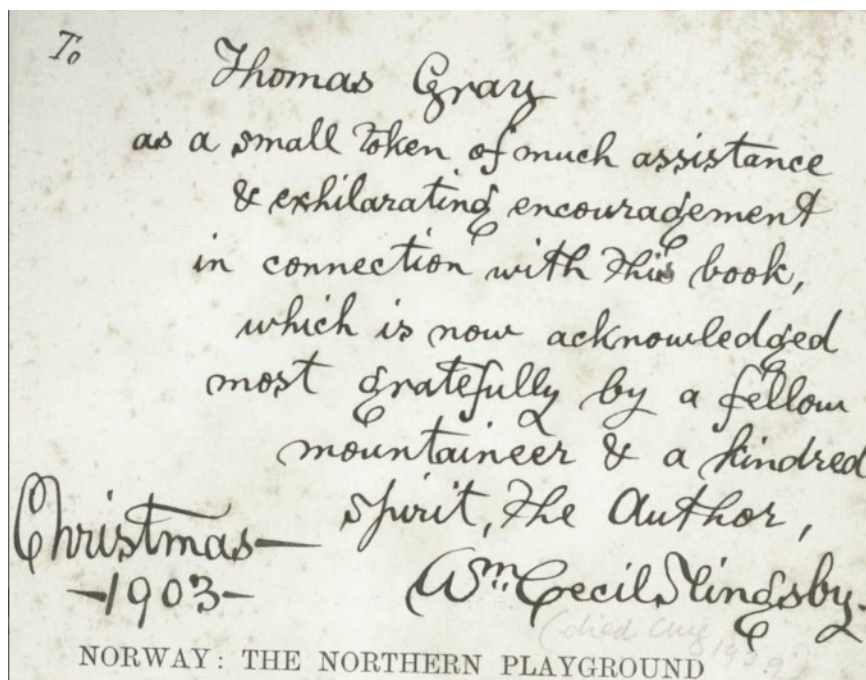
Then the good God looked down with pity upon the waste, and threw here and there a little of the good soil which, fortunately, still remained. This caused fertile valleys, dark forests, and green uplands to appear. Moreover, He commanded huge shoals of fish to come yearly to the far north, where the sea cliffs and crags were the wildest and most forbidding. Thus has man been enabled to dwell in peace, happiness, and plenty in this land which is now called Norway.

Whether this origin, which is told in an old saga in picturesque and glowing language, be the true version or not matters but little nowadays, but the fact remains that Norway is one of the most mountainous countries in the world, and is to-day recognised as being one of the most delightful of our Alpine playgrounds. True it is that the height of no peak, when represented in feet, requires the use of five figures. What of that? Does it matter? Not a halfpenny, in a country where in some cases continuous ice-falls of nearly 6000 feet and rock ridges and faces of 5000 feet await the climbers who have the hardihood to tackle them.

The catalogue stated - *SLINGSBY (WILLIAM CECIL) Norway, The Northern Playground, Sketches of Climbing and Mountain Exploration in Norway between 1872 and 1903, 32 photographic plates, 9 maps, half-title with presentation inscription, "To Thomas Gray as a small token of much assistance and exhilarating encouragement in connection with this book... Wm. Cecil Slingsby, Christmas, 1903", faint spotting throughout [Neate S83], Edinburgh, David Douglas, 1904--*

FOOTNOTES

William Cecil Slingsby, a pioneer of Norwegian mountaineering, was the first person to conquer Store Skagastolstind, the third highest mountain in Norway, a considerable feat, since the climb was previously considered impossible, and, in crossing the Keiser Pass in 1880, established the sport of ski mountaineering. Norway, The Northern Playground is still regarded as the seminal work on Norwegian mountaineering, the latest edition published in March, 2014.



John Snoad, a long-standing friend of the YRC and Board member of the Slingsby Trust, comments

"As Slingsby's daughter wrote in my copy it makes me wonder what I would get for it if I took it to Oslo - not that I'm going to!

I also remember buying three copies for £3.10s.0d each in London in 1963 and giving two away to friends in Norway!"

WITHOUT A WHYMPER.

The stalwart Victorian climbers quietly pursued their dangerous pastimes for their own satisfaction and did not make too much of a fuss of things but we look back with the value of hindsight and have to admire their going one step beyond.

We can now celebrate one milestone in that history. In 1865, Edward Whymper, (later to accept Honorary Membership of our Club) and his colleagues were the first people to make it to the top of the Matterhorn.

His obsession with the Alps began as a twenty year old, when he was commissioned to produce some drawings of this increasingly popular area. Already a member of the London Alpine Club a group combining the sport of climbing with scientific research, he got the bug and 150 years ago at the age of only 25 was to conquer the last unclimbed and challenging alpine peak.

It was a tragic affair and not without controversy. Four of the seven team members died during the descent.

Whymper later commented *"Every night, do you understand, I see my comrades of the Matterhorn slipping on their backs, their arms outstretched, one after the other, in perfect order at equal distances—Croze the guide, first, then Hadow, then Hudson, and lastly Douglas. Yes, I shall always see them..."*

Whymper had actually made eight attempts on the Matterhorn since 1861 and on this occasion he teamed up with a young English climber, Lord Francis Douglas, and his Zermatt guide Peter Taugwalder together with Rev. Charles Hudson and the Chamonix guide Michel Croze. They were joined for the attempt by a young friend of Hudson's, Douglas Hadow and Taugwalder's son Peter.

The group encountered few problems getting to the top just after lunch and spent nearly an hour on the top. Disaster hit on the way down though and apparently Croze had put down his axe to help Hadow but Hadow slipped, knocking the guide off his feet and pulling Hudson and Douglas from the mountain. Taugwalder hung onto a rock, but the rope broke below him. There has always been a question as to why an old sash cord was used to secure Taugwalder to Douglas when strong new rope used to tie up the others was available.

Since those days many people have summited this peak but hundreds have died trying.

IRISH SPELEOLOGY

The latest addition to our library is the recent journal of the Speleological Union of Ireland and it will be of particular interest to our caving members. In a similar format to our journal this edition is packed with 74 pages of detailed information.

Included are the results of a hydrological monitoring programme in Krubera (Voronja) Cave, carried out between 2008 and 2012. Expertly written up by Stephen Macnamara it provides detailed reports of the methodology and outcomes. Krubera Cave, located in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia, is the deepest known cave in the world, explorable to a depth of 2197 m. The report describes the flooding patterns of the cave and how they relate to the surface weather conditions. The cave is located in the Arabika Massif of the Gagra Mountain Range, with its entrance at an altitude of 2,256m in the Orte-Balagan valley. It has been methodically explored, studied and documented by Ukrainian, Russian and international cavers over the last 15 years. Amongst other findings the most significant flooding event occurs with summer snowmelt.

Several Irish members took part in the work and the author would like to thank in particular the Ukrainian Speleological Association and Aenigma Caving Club (Lithuania) for organising expeditions, provision of surveys and other data, and assistance with monitoring.

The journal also has a weight of material and numerous detailed survey coming out of a caving expedition to Papua New Guinea, During December 2011 and January 2012 a seven-strong team of Irish cavers visited the Southern Highlands and explored twenty-four caves on the lower slopes of Mount Bosavi, surveying a total of 6.7km of cave passage. Surveys and descriptions of these caves are presented, with an account of the area and its geology.

There are also surveys of Irish caves and the journal could give some useful ideas for possible YRC activities in the future.

GOING UNDERGROUND

After a lot of campaigning by many parties objecting to the proliferation of power lines and pylons across some of the most beautiful parts of Britain it seems we are making some progress.

As wind farms get built and fields of solar panels are 'planted' even when outside the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty they often involve transmission line through such areas. This is one reason why many feel they should only be sited near to where the power will be used.

Now it seems that the National Grid have been listening. They have set aside £500 million to remove the pylons in many of these areas and bury the lines underground.

They also have £24 million earmarked for other mitigation efforts elsewhere and they have given assurances that they will ensure that new lines being created will not disfigure the landscape.

They anticipate spending £10 Billion on new lines over the next six years as now production comes on stream.

THE OTHER RAMBLERS

I have just returned from a weekend conference of the Ramblers Association who are celebrating their 80th year. They won't catch us up!

We have a lot to thank them for not least their campaigning work starting with National Parks and, to date, including a coast path round England.

They are in the middle of a root and branch review of their entire operation as like most clubs and organisation they have problems. It is too easy now to get cheap travel to good locations and with social networking, easy to find like minded people to do things with.

Team sports are an exception but almost all other outdoor activities can be pursued using online instruction and training and visiting commercial hostels so who needs clubs and why pay subs to be in a group when you can make up your own with no formality?

Membership of the Ramblers declined over a number of years but has now stabilised but only because of massive recruitment efforts as there is still a considerable churn. The age profile is also slowly climbing as it is what should be the next generation,

who do not see the need to be part of a wider organisation. Does this all sound familiar?

I have friends in running clubs and they have the same problems.

I have just stepped down as Area Chairman of the Ramblers after many years and this conference should have been my swan song and I can only hope the steps they are taking will be seen through and things look up.

As an area we have tried many things and nationally they have moved into the IT age with much use of the web site and some social media. The basic problem is to my mind however that turkeys do not vote for Christmas. The very people who are embedded into the old ideas and like to attend these annual meet-ups with old friends are the people who have to vote in change under the current structure.

The Ramblers is basically a committee-based structure making any decisions very slow to make. There is also a built in inertia which ties the hands of the professional staff and makes outside views difficult to express.

The organisation realises this and wants to become more streamlined and is trying to introduce postal voting and one man one vote to tap into the wider membership. Unfortunately half the membership is at present effectively ignored. The Ramblers is a charity whose core work is to safeguard the places people want to go walking and encourage them to do so — from gentle strolls to challenging hikes, whether in towns or countryside. We still have over 107,000 members across 59 Areas and 500 Groups in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Ramblers arranges over 45,000 organised led walks annually across Britain. As it happens though, only about 30% of the members walk with us or have anything to do with their local group. Most want to walk with family and friends and are happy to support our campaigning side either by their subscriptions or also often by actual volunteering. The problem is that the management structure is that the groups elect Area officers and have representatives on an area committee and that body elects national officers so it is all kept within the active group membership.

The Area is the primary source of campaigning efforts in support of the national organisation and most of its actual officers are very motivated but to get decisions made they have to carry the groups with them which are often only interested in going on walks. The Ramblers is in effect almost two organizations under one roof.

We have a regular programme of inspections checking the state of our rights of way and report any defects to

help the local authority maintain them. We monitor all applications to divert or extinguish rights of way and will object and fight them if we feel it justified.

We also respond to numerous planning applications and consultations on development strategies, to protect, and on occasion suggest enhancements to the rights of way network. This currently involves level crossing closures by Network Rail, the impacts of HS2 and the many large urban extensions being suggested around the counties. Both locally and nationally we also respond to government consultations

This may seem of only passing interest to YRC members but we enjoy the benefits of the RA campaigning and share many of the problems discussed at the recent conference. It is worth mentioning some of the things tried including those that have not worked as well as hoped for, and the YRC may be able to learn from them.

One of the things Ramblers have tried with some success is the formation of 20s and 30s groups. Most groups are geographically based and here in Leicestershire and Rutland we have seven groups covering parts of the patch and another age related.

It became apparent that most younger potential members wanted a social element and did not really want to be walking with their parents' generation. These groups were initially very successful and numerous romances followed. They were almost like singles clubs. Time has moved on though and that group is now the 30s going on 50 group as they like to remain together and have not migrated to the other groups and we are now wondering whether to have to start another younger section.

That is not however an easy option as since the days when we provided this social opportunity, things like Meetup.com have stolen our thunder.

Using this site, like minded people can get together anyway. Our groups especially the age related younger ones have started putting their activities into this and other media and made increasing use of web based communications but this has its risks. It does mean a willing volunteer has to be on the ball all the time to keep things current. There is nothing worse than an out of date web site - better almost to not have one. Face book can be demanding as well; it seems a good idea to have a page giving details of what we are and contact details for other platforms but anything more ambitious takes up a lot of somebody's time.

Meetup helps but you have to be careful not to over-sell what you can offer as there is an optimum number you can reasonably accommodate.

I only lead a couple of walks each year for the Ramblers and probably only go on one other each year. I am very much on the campaigning side of the organisation. When I do lead however I tend to get a good turn out as I take them into unusual places given that my other involvements mean I know lots of strange corners and can access permissive areas they tend not to see when sticking to formal rights of way.

If you have ever stopped and waited whilst thirty members climb over a stile you will know how impractical it is to go out in large groups on a led walk.

It is beginning to seem that the internet, whilst offering many new opportunities for promotion, communication and recruitment, also adds a whole level of operational complexity and makes it ever easier for people to not need to engage with clubs at all.



The YRC's immediate past president is keen on new ways forward and I wonder what his thoughts would be?

Suggestions welcome!

COAST PATH

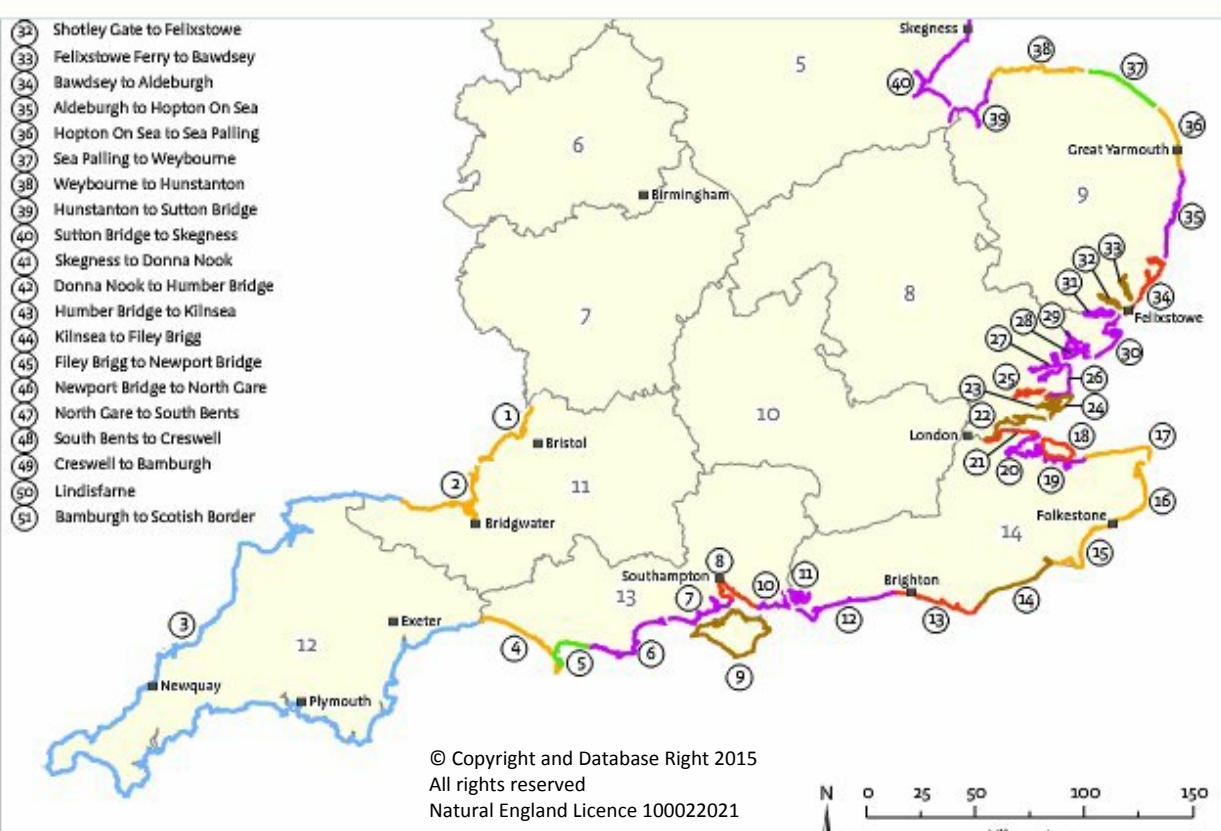
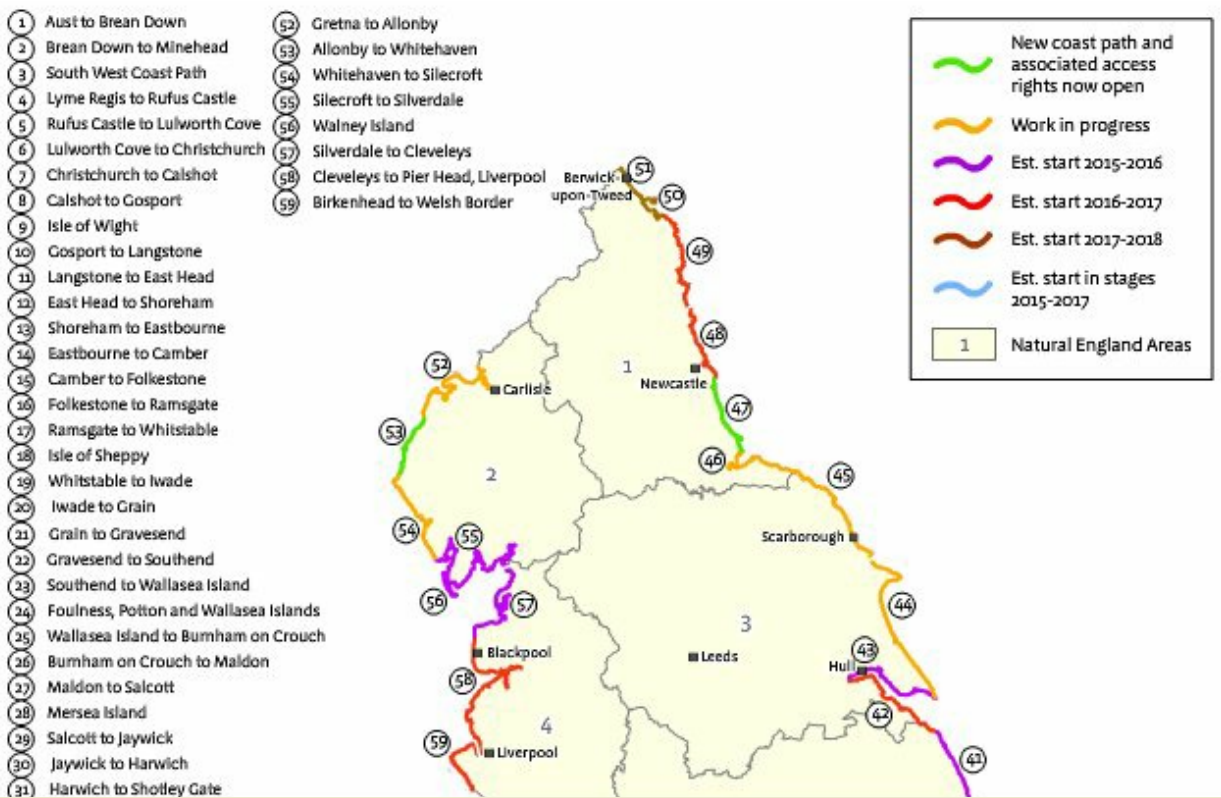
Work is well underway on the England Coast Path with funding in place for completion by 2020. The Welsh coast path is already open. The latest version of the map can be seen at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-overview-of-progress>

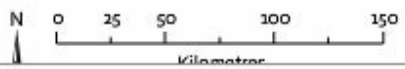


Coastal Access Completion by 2020 - Provisional Timings and Stretches

6th March 2015



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PENNINE WAY

Britain's first and most popular National Trail was 50 years old in April this year. The path was the idea of the journalist Tom Stevenson who was also the first full time Secretary of the Ramblers Association.

Taking his inspiration from similar trails in America, he first proposed the idea in 1935, and spent 30 years lobbying Parliament. The final section of the path was declared open in a ceremony held on Malham Moor on 24 April 1965.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARIES

There is something of a theme developing it seems.

We have touched on the anniversary of the Pennine Way, the Ramblers 80th, Open Spaces 150th and Nidderdale Museums 40th so we must not leave ourselves out.

We are building up towards our 125th anniversary and amongst ways we are to celebrate this, we are as previously reported, to bring out a large commemorative edition of the journal.

Work is well advanced on this and as the editor I must thank the many members who have given me ideas and contributed old photographs. I am to an extent concentrating on the last 25 years since our centenary booklet, but members wanted me to cover the history and in reality it is the old periods where my material is limited in pictures.

The format is taking shape now. There will be no summer journal in 2017 but one will arrive on members doorsteps early October the exact anniversary of the start of the club 125 years ago. This will contain no routine or administrative material but will be a true celebration of our past and a selling point for our future. It will be in colour and digital so that E versions can be created and future copies run off if required. It will be part funded by only producing one rather than two journals that year. The following year will see journals issued in March and December before we return to the usual routine timings. The March edition 2018 will include the normal admin and routine matters from the previous year.

Photos from the more unusual places are something I would like and also I am short on rock climbing action shots. You would be amazed how many countries are mentioned as having been visited over the years by the members but I have no photos of a large number of them and I am to only use members photos.

We are not trying to publish a lovely coffee table book. It is about the club celebrating what it and its members do and trying to sell the club to potential members. If it reflects the club and the people who make it up, but still ends up a lovely coffee table book all the better.

At the end of the day I can use anything if the quality is good and whilst there is only room for so many pictures, the more I get the better I can edit the balance and select the most appropriate. I do need to know however where and what the pictures are.

I have been sent quite a few old pictures including slides but unfortunately many are so faded as to not really be usable. Any pictures I do collect which are of interest I will eventually give to the web master to go into our gallery.

As to the layout, this book will have a chapter on different cultures we have come across so pictures showing traditional dress, unusual clothing-churches etc are welcome. The wildlife we have encountered and the environments we have visited will have a slot so any good animal/bird shots are also welcome.

Beyond this there will be an introduction and history of the club, a chapter on our archives, a section on underground activities and chapters on each region of the world and the places we have visited.

CAVING RECORDS

I have established a link with BBS (Bulletin Bibliographique Spéléologique) and will be having our material included in future. Speleological Abstracts (SA/BBS) is an annual review of the world's speleological literature. About 4,000 titles are included every year, most of them with a short abstract.

This annual compilation of worldwide publications relating to speleology (articles, journals, books, etc.); contains 4,000 to 5,000 references per year; Analyses of many scientific journals (Géochronique, Ground Water, Karstologia, Journal of Hydrology, etc) and of nearly all existing caving journals; Subjects covered : karstology, regional speleology, archaeology, paleontology, biospeleology, applied speleology, etc.; Country and author indexes; Paper version (A4 format) or CD ; The CD version contains a searchable list of 200 keywords in four languages (English, French, German, and Spanish).

A brand-new CD-ROM of the SA / BBS is also coming up. It contains 12 years of abstracts, from 1988 to 1999. The 60,000 references can be reached easily, thanks to a new search engine.

They are currently working on the next one and seek material on 2014 at present which I will be providing.

A BIT MORE HISTORY

THE KING AND I (The untold story)

King Richard III is now back in a grave and hopefully Leicester can return to what passes as normality here. Much has been written and programmes made but the story being told is rather superficial and sanitised. Locally we have seen the end of the story unfold but the story goes back an awful long way.

There are lots of myths and a fair amount of nonsense, not least in Shakespeare's version of events, written to entertain amongst others, the then Royal family. History is usually written by the winners.

As the story goes people from Lancashire knocked lumps out of people from Yorkshire and threw the Yorkshire King into the River Soar. It would have been a waste of time as I have walked across the Soar (no sore feet jokes please). It is very shallow and slow moving and indeed has the lowest fall per mile of any river in England. Nevertheless when a scull was found in the foundations of a mill on the side of the river there were claims that it must be Richards which rumbled on locally for years. The good folk of Leicester did however name the bridge over that river after the King.

I had the misfortune to live in Leicester when they started to dig for the remains of who we now know was the real King and during the subsequent months whilst they redesigned that part of the city and the cathedral to incorporate a visitor centre. This only added to the already chaotic traffic situation.

Going back a few years Leicestershire built an attractive and expensive visitor centre on the site of the Battle of Bosworth Field. Unfortunately we now know it is in the wrong place. Battles were not tidy affairs by then, if they ever were. There were skirmishes and chases but the major confrontation was several miles away from the visitor centre.

What of Richard the man? Richard is much maligned as one of England's most vile kings. Rubbish; during his short reign, he was a very capable, enlightened and for the times, liberal administrator and lawmaker and far from being vile was probably one of the best of our early monarchs. During his brief rule 33 statutes were passed and for the first time, published in English so that more people would know their contents. Several of them set out to reform the legal system to safeguard the individuals' rights from abuse of the law and show us a king attempting to get rid of various oppressive practices and to try and promote the growth of English trade. Richard's laws

were aimed at stopping the nobility oppressing the weak which did not play well with the powerful of the land and played a part in his downfall at Bosworth. When he needed help it was not forthcoming.

Prior to his accession, the House of Lancaster ruled the country but in effect we were ruled by Queen Margaret of Anjou as her husband Henry VI was virtually insane. Parliament had appointed the Duke of York as Protector during Henry VI's two bouts of complete insanity and was recognised by them as the rightful successor to Henry VI. Wars ensued and young Richard was packed off to France for his safety until, at the age of 12 and when the Lancastrians had been routed, he came back to be schooled at Middleham then the home of the Earl of Warwick. It is now apparent that the various earldoms bore no geographic relationship to the counties that bear their names in modern times.

As it happens my wife and I were sitting outside a pub in the square in Middleham when the announcement was made that the folk of York were not going to get 'their' king back.

As for who the combatants were, The 'Lancastrians' were apparently largely from Wales and France with a few Scots and the 'Yorkists' from Northumberland and Anglia although I have seen conflicting reports. Henry only had about 10% English in his army of about 5,000, most of them exiles who had fled King Richard's rule. Richard himself was not from Yorkshire. His mother was the daughter of the Earl of Westmorland and he was actually born into the family of the then Duke of York at Fotheringay Castle just outside Oundle, in Northamptonshire.

As far as I can see the only body of men from Lancashire were the Stanleys. Apparently one brother declared for each side but they waited to join in till they saw who was winning.

Richard has been portrayed as a weakling semi-cripple and coward but he died fighting as our last warrior king. If his remains had been found 20 years earlier they would probably have been given an unmarked grave. There was circumstantial and hearsay evidence from the time that it may have been his final resting place but it was DNA evidence that confirmed him. We now take this technique for granted but it is a very recent discovery. The DNA technique was first reported by Sir Alec Jeffreys at the University of Leicester and genetic profiling was made commercially available in 1987, the year I moved down to Leicester.

DNA profiling has moved forward at an incredible pace and can now be used to track entire populations. This proves that on the one hand we are a truly mixed up people but also a surprisingly static one.

There were more tribes living here and eventually considering themselves British than we ever realised and we are a hybrid lot. Strangely though, those tribal backgrounds are still very evident in our genetic mix in specific locations. Perhaps we should rename the country Mongrellia.

When you consider the small population on the island back in the dark ages we are all probably related and all have the blood of kings in us but DNA has proven that the original tribal inhabitants of each part of the country are still identifiably present. With the recent influx of new waves of immigrants the mix will get even wider.

Areas can be identified with substantial blood lines from Angles, Danes, Norse, Saxons, Picts, Scots, Irish and Ancient Britons and others. Before moving south I lived in West Yorkshire which was apparently a Celtic Kingdom of Elmet.

For whatever reason the upland areas we like to enjoy were frequently separate kingdoms going back to earliest times, probably because they were readily defensible but also possibly as they were less productive and therefore less of a prize. Apparently Cumbria as we know it was also a Celtic kingdom known as Rheged. Northern Ireland and West Scotland seems to have been one tribal kingdom and there were others in north and south Wales. It seems Cornwall has a distinct DNA difference from neighbouring Devon.

There is also a large Gallic and Norman influence but one thing that did come as a surprise to me was the fact that all the Celtic kingdoms were quite different in genetic make up to each other.

It is perhaps just as well that DNA was not available in the middle ages. The Kings came and went as people fought over hereditary rights but if the true parentage of some of the nobility could have been checked it would have led to even more trouble.

After the King was found, many guided tours were organised showing historic Leicester and having been on one; it was very interesting although the spiel was very much in the vein of poor old Richard. It did not seem appropriate at that point to make it known I was from Lancashire.

There is a plaque outside Mary de Castro Church making a unique claim. Two kings of England passed this spot within twenty four hours of each other. King Richard stayed his last night at the Blue Boar nearby which is now perhaps fittingly a Travelodge.

It is only right that the King was given a final resting place in the nearest consecrated ground to where he was found. Quite what this catholic monarch would think of being housed in a Church of England cathedral has to be imagined. May he rest in peace and hopefully we will now have a somewhat more peaceful city again.

Born in the East Midlands, killed in the East Midlands and buried in the East Midlands. It all seems rather tidy.

AND YET MORE HISTORY

During a recent visit to the Scott Polar Research Institute I met with some of their staff and discussed the material we have in our archives. They were particularly interested in the work George Spenceley did on South Georgia. They are putting together a new exhibition titled 'By Endurance We Conquer: Shackleton and his Men' which will run from Friday 18th September, 2015 until Saturday 18th June, 2016. The Polar Museum is open 10am-4pm, Tuesday to Saturday and is well worth a visit at any time but I am looking forward to going down to Cambridge again when this is on.

I have an ongoing dialogue with them and may well be able to contribute some material for them.

GRAMPIANS

The Grampian Speleological Group is a comparative newcomer in our terms having only been formed in 1961 - it does however claim to be oldest and largest caving club in Scotland.

Its members have discovered and extended caves all over Scotland; they maintain a thorough archive including listing all our journals and holding a copy of them and they send their very good journal to us, to end up in our library.

They seem to have much in common with us in their basic attitudes and its members have participated in expeditions abroad including England, Austria, Ecuador, Hawaii and Zimbabwe, and caved on every continent except understandably Antarctica.

They are based in Edinburgh with a club hut (The Elphin Caving Centre) which is a newly renovated and extended building in Elphin 24 km north of Ullapool.

It has self-catering accommodation for 20 people, gas and wood fires, toilets, hot showers, gas rings for cooking, a microwave oven, parking for eight cars etc It also has a great location with a superb view of Cul Mor, Sulven and Canisp.

It is available to non members at £8 per night.
hutbookings@gsg.org.uk

Their latest journal contains some excellent photographs, report of a new find, if modest, and an interesting article on the human and natural histories of Scottish caves.

IN HIS MOTHER'S STEPS HE TROD

Tom Ballard, son of the late Alison Hargreaves, has just made his little bit of history. During the last winter season he climbed the north faces of the Cima Grande di Laverado in the Dolomites, Piz Badile, Petit Dru, Les Grandes Jurasses, the Matterhorn and the Eiger.

As best I can tell he is the first person to do this. His mother was the first person to solo these peaks in a season and she did it in the summer, in 1993

NEPAL DISASTER

Under considerable pressure from climbers and with one eye on loss of revenue the Nepali authorities issued licences this season for climbing on Everest despite last year's tragedy.

They had however only permitted a route up the centre of the Khumbu Icefall avoiding the relatively easier left hand side where the fatalities occurred last year. This was an entirely reasonable compromise in the circumstances.

This old route is tougher and longer but was thought to be more stable. As it happens this was a very unfortunate decision which has led to the loss of many lives.

This was as nothing compared to the loss of other lives in the area and the devastation of many ancient buildings, known to many of us.

Even now the details of what happened on Everest that morning are unclear, and may never really be known. Suffice to say that when the quake happened, those on the lower parts of the mountain heard an ominous crack and an enormous serac apparently broke away from the mountainside and fell upon them.

Given the remoteness and conditions rescue work was slow getting up any head of steam but for many it was probably already too late. Eventually a succession of helicopters were employed ferrying bodies down to Pheriche, Namche Bazaar and Lukla.

The political fall out has not come to any conclusion yet but many are raising questions about the very

future of climbing in the area. A large number of the more experienced climbing Sherpas were lost and their dependents must be well provided for otherwise the likelihood of Sherpa support in the future is in doubt. The Nepali economy benefits from over £3M a year from climbing and this extremely poor country needs this, but not at the expense of Sherpa communities.

The extent of the devastation elsewhere in the country was appalling. I fear many of the magical old buildings in the older parts of Kathmandu will be gone forever and will just remain as memories and pictures in my albums.

I was in Christchurch just before and again just after that city was largely destroyed by earthquakes and I know the depth of challenge New Zealand is facing and that is a first world country.

Nepal needs all the help it can get. The Club and the Slingsby Trust (on which we are represented) have both made substantial donations to the funds.

SURPRISE FOR ALAN

There was a surprise for Alan Brown and a few other elderly sailors when invited to Skipton Golf Club to receive medals for their gallantry, serving in the Arctic convoys more than 70 years ago.

They were there to receive the Russian Ushakov medal for their bravery protecting merchant vessels carrying vital supplies to the Soviet Union.

The surprise came in the form of a special victory medal to mark the 70th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The men were involved in some of the most remarkable naval actions of World War II - Alan was also commander of a torpedo boat escorting Winston Churchill to Arromanches-les-Bains in the D-Day operation.

The ninety year olds were presented with the medals by Russian assistant attaché Lisa Vokorina from London, with arrangements being made by the Skipton Royal Naval Association.

Mrs Vokorina said:

"On behalf of the Russian Federation I am so happy to present these medals. We want to reach out to all of you and say what a huge privilege it is for us to thank you for your bravery. You made what was the worst journey in the world; thousands of your colleagues died and your heroism will always be remembered."

CHINA CAVES

A history of the China Caves Project

GED CAMPION and TONY HARRISON

First published in full in Cave and Karst Science, Volume 41, Number 2, August 2014 and reproduced with the kind permission of the journal editors on behalf of the BCRA. The other elements of the article will appear in our next edition.

For more information see

<http://bcra.org.uk/pub/candks/covers.html>

Abstract: The China Caves Project was initiated in 1985 by British cavers Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham in cooperation with scientists from the Institute of Karst Geology in Guilin and the Guizhou Normal University. The object was to explore and record the geomorphology and biodiversity of the vast karst regions of China, in particular by the exploration of its caves, most of which were virtually untouched by man at the start of the Project. Since the first expedition to Guizhou and Guangxi provinces and excluding reconnaissance trips, around 27 expeditions have been held over 28 years (together with several other spin-off expeditions during the same period), most focussing on Guangxi and Guizhou and other nearby provinces in southern China. The multi-national teams on these expeditions have discovered at least 117 caves of over 3000m in length and surveyed over 420km of previously unexplored underground passages and shafts (high quality surveys being one of the hall-marks of the Project). They have also discovered a number of previously unknown cave-dwelling species of fauna. The geomorphological studies of the teams have contributed significantly to the development of current theories of speleogenesis relating to China karst, including Professor Zhu Xuewen's classic work on tiankeng development, and have also stimulated a robust and extensive geomorphological literature. In recent years the expeditions have often focussed on providing data on underground and surface karst features to allow designation of given areas as national parks or geo-parks, thus supporting the responsible conservation of these areas. Prominent among the successes of this enduring Project has been the development of strong, lasting, personal and professional links between cavers and scientists from China and from not only the UK but also Ireland, Australia, Hungary, France, Japan, Poland, USA, Italy, New Zealand, Slovenia, Switzerland, Croatia and elsewhere.

Genesis of the Project

Throughout the three decades that followed the end of the Second World War, the magnificent karst scenery of China was largely hidden from Western visitors. Only scientists from the communist countries could visit the region; notable among them were Dénes Balázs, the great karst traveller from Hungary, and the Czechoslovakian Jan Šilar, who each visited a number of China's more accessible caves during the 1950s (Balázs, 1960; Šilar, 1965). During the late 1970s the "bamboo curtain" began to yield

a little, and it was a Yorkshireman, Joe Jennings, who was the first Western cave scientist to visit China. By then he was resident in Australia and was one of a group from the Australian National University that was invited to visit China during 1975 (Jennings, 1976; Hope, 1976).

Britain's karst links with China began to develop in 1978, when Marjorie Sweeting of Oxford University visited China's southern provinces with a team sponsored by the Royal Society, and was able to confirm that the photographs and paintings of China's spectacular limestone landscape to be seen in the West were not exaggerated (Sweeting, 1978). The sequel to that visit was a Chinese karst scientist coming to Britain; Song Linhua, from Academia Sinica in Beijing, was the man selected by the Chinese authorities. In summer 1980 he was sent to Britain for 2 years, spending most of his time based at the University of East Anglia, where he was mentored by Tim Atkinson. In those days, air tickets from China were particularly expensive, and Song was put on a train in Beijing for the overland journey of eight days to reach Norwich. During his stay, Song became a great friend of many British cavers, and was always known by his family name, Song, as is the convention in China.

In 1982, two British cavers, Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham, made good use of their connections in Hong Kong to join a tour group for a brief visit to Guilin in the Guangxi Province of China. They were not disappointed by the magnificent fenglin (tower) karst landscapes around Guilin and down the Li River, but had no chance to establish any additional useful contacts. Back in England they continued to be rather exasperated because Song Linhua had not been given appropriate authority from Beijing to arrange any cave exploration visits to China. However, Song was able to provide details of several useful contacts. Additionally, tourist visas for China also first became generally available in Britain during the early part of the 1980s.

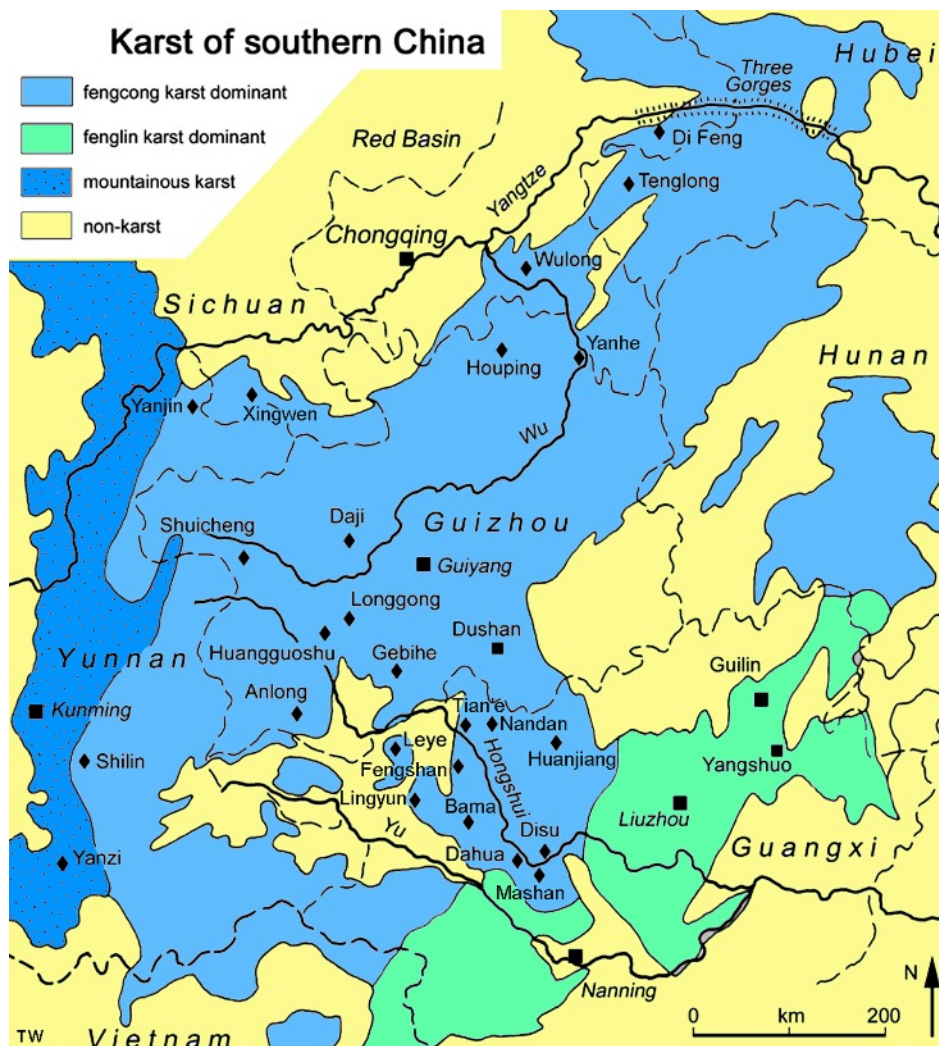
So in 1984, driven largely by sheer desperation, Tony Waltham embarked upon a one-way flight to Hong Kong, and travelled through China by train (and then returned home by travelling across Russia, also by rail). While in China he made contact with Professor Yuan Daoxian at the Karst Institute in Guilin and with Professor Yang Mingde at the Guizhou Normal University in Guiyang. While in Beijing, where he stayed with his friend Song, Tony also made contact with Professor Lu Yaoru at Academia Sinica (Waltham, 1984).

Later in the summer of 1984, Tim Atkinson, Song's former mentor, undertook a return visit to the karst of China. All in all, 1984 proved to be a critical year, because Yuan Daoxian also visited Marjorie Sweeting in England, where he met Andy Eavis and invited him to lead a team of cavers to Guilin to explore and survey some of the nearby caves (where local people had never ventured beyond the entrance zones).

Tony Waltham returned to England with a similar invitation, from Yang Mingde, to lead a team to explore caves in Guizhou



Outline map of China with its limestone areas shown darker. Not all of these dark areas are exclusively karst; because the map is highly generalized at this scale they include large areas that comprise impure and discontinuous limestone sequences in which karst is absent or developed only on a minimal scale. This is particularly true of the extensive outcrops in Tibet, in the west (modified from Zhang, 2010).



The main karst region in southern China showing the locations visited by the China Caves Project expeditions. As indicated in the key, the varying shading and the stippled ornament provide a generalized indication of areas that are dominated by either fengcong (cone) karst, fenglin (tower) karst or mountainous karst. See Waltham (2008) for discussion of the approximate equivalences of Chinese and Western terminology. (Map courtesy of Tony Waltham)

Consequently the **China Caves 1985** expedition enjoyed 6 weeks in the field, in the karst areas of two provinces, Guangxi and Guizhou, and the expedition members became the first Western cavers to explore underground in the fabled land that was China (Waltham, 1986). In Guizhou (visited by 4 English cavers prior to joining another 6 Britons to form a larger group in Guangxi), three regions were explored by the expedition. These were Longtan, which is about 70km northwest of the provincial capital Guiyang; the Shuicheng karst, much farther to the west (about 230km from the capital), which is cut by a series of major valleys including those of the Fala and San Cha rivers; and Anshun, which lies between Shuicheng and Guiyang and has a surface topography dominated by broad poljes and low karst cones.

Longtan was a region of shafts, one of which (Longtan Dong) was bottomed by the team in a single drop of 275m. Near Anshun the Longgong karst provided the expedition with 3 caves all longer than 1km, including Xian Ren Dong, a deep phreatic system with a switchback profile typical of both the ancient and modern development of the area. Northwest of Shuicheng the San Cha He (river) passes through a deep gorge and into a cave with an entrance nearly 200m high and wide, which was surveyed (along with other caves in the area) for 1.1km to its resurgence.

In Guangxi the team of 10 focused on the remarkable fenglin and fengcong topography near Guilin, and caved in three separate areas: the Guanyan Cave System near the villages of Nanxu and Caoping about 30km southeast of Guilin city; the Xingping area, which is another 20km farther south; and the Haiyang area about 25km east of Guilin. Three expedition members also paid a short visit to the west of the province, examining various hydrological sites in the Tisu karst of Duan County, north of Nanning, the provincial capital city.

Well over 20 caves were explored in the province, of which 14 were surveyed, mostly to BCRA Grade 5b or 5c levels of accuracy and detail. The outstanding level of surveying carried out in this period (with a total length of some 27km) was one of the expedition's main achievements and set the standard for all subsequent China Caves Project expeditions. Among the caves explored were Guan Yan, Xiaoheli Yan, Da Yan Chong and Chuan Yan, which together comprise the main components of the Guanyan Cave System with about 11.4km of surveyed passages. In Haiyang the Hanzhu Yan Cave System, with its streams, sumps and large phreatic passages, was one of the highlights, as was Shibanjiao Dong, which has two entrances, splendid stream passages and a middle section left to await another group of cavers prepared for a very long swim (too often on China Caves Project expeditions the teams have run out of time to complete the exploration of a cave) (Smart *et al.*, 1986; Waltham, 1986).

In terms of its speleological achievements the 1985 expedition was outstanding, but equally important were the links forged by the team and their Chinese colleagues, not only scientists and government officials but also numerous local people met in the towns and countryside. On both sides there was an over-riding enthusiasm to continue and to repeat the process, and so the concept of the China Caves Project was born.

Since then the Project has developed into a sustained, informal programme of cooperation between a variable team of British cavers (and in recent years cavers from many other nations), under the auspices of the British Cave Research Association and various Chinese research institutions, in particular the Institute of Karst Geology in Guilin, a branch of the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences. The objectives of the Project have been unchanged from the start; to obtain both geological and ecological knowledge of China's karst regions, in particular by the exploration of its caves.

Over the years, the bulk of the costs of the expeditions has been funded by the cavers themselves, only too willing to use their savings to enjoy unbelievable underground experiences. Nevertheless, sponsorship from various charities and commercial organisations has been a valuable feature in supporting the success of many of the ventures. Prominent among these is continued financial support from the UK Ghar Parau Foundation, which has had strong links with the Project since its early days, particularly in helping with the costs of producing post-expedition reports.

Other public and commercial bodies that have assisted the Project over the years include the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Society, the Sports Council of Great Britain, the Mount Everest Foundation and several caving and outdoor equipment suppliers.

In recent years expeditions have also been funded by some local authorities in the regions explored; this is not necessarily an entirely altruistic activity as the Project's discoveries have commonly had an important impact in stimulating tourism and hence local economic growth.

The expeditions

All China Caves Project expeditions are summarized in chronological order in the following table.

Details may be sparse in the few instances where expedition reports are not available, and for some of the early years of the Project, memories of which are now fading.

Date	Expedition name	Province(s) visited	Region(s) or County(ies) visited	Notes	Number of overseas (non-Chinese) cavers	References
1982	Exploratory trip	Guangxi		"Tourist" trip by Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham, which prepared the ground for the Project	2	
1984		Guangxi and Guizhou		Solo visit by Tony Waltham to plan the 1985 Expedition	1	
1985	The First Anglo-Chinese Cave Project	Guizhou and Guangxi	Guiyang Prefecture, Anshun Prefecture, Shuicheng County (Guizhou); Guilin Prefecture [Yangshuo and Nanxun] and Duan County (Guangxi).	The "launch" expedition; a "double" expedition to 2 provinces. Four cavers first visited Guizhou before joining 6 others in Guangxi. Just 3 team members visited Duan County. Some cave diving was carried out.	4 (Guizhou); 10 (Guangxi)	Smart <i>et al.</i> , 1986; Waltham 1986
Winter 1987–1988	China Caves Project 1987–1988: The Anglo-Chinese Project in Caves of South China	Guizhou (1987) and Guangxi (1988)	Shuicheng County (Guizhou); Bama, Duan and Mashan counties (Guangxi)	Another "double" expedition to two provinces. The Duan visit involved cave diving.	9 (Guizhou); 16 (Guangxi)	Fogg and Fogg, 1988; Eavis, 1990; Gill <i>et al.</i> , 1990; Fogg, 1990; Parker and Newman, 1990
1988	British Speleological Expedition to China	Guizhou	Anlong County		16 (largely from Wessex Caving Club)	Dunton and Laverty, 1993; Lewis, 1988
Mar–Apr 1989	Guizhou 89 Expedition	Guizhou	Anlong County		9	Dunton, 1990; Dunton and Laverty, 1993
1989	Bama 1989	Guangxi	Bama County; Fengshan County	The expedition was based in Yueli village, Bama County, and from there explored in both Bama and Fengshan counties.	10	Waltham and Willis, 1993
Spring 1991	Mengzi 1991	Yunnan	Mengzi County; Luxi County	Involved some cave diving.	11	Waltham and Willis, 1993
1992	Xingwen 1992	Sichuan and Tibet	Xingwen (Sichuan); Central Tibet	Another "double" expedition. One of the main objectives of the expedition in Xingwen was the making of a film.	12 (Sichuan); 4 (Tibet)	Waltham <i>et al.</i> , 1993; Waltham and Willis, 1993; Waltham, 1993
1994	The Yangtze Gorges Expedition 1994	Chongqing Municipality (Sichuan Province at time of expedition)	Fengjie County (Xin Long, also called Xing Long); Wulong County (Jiang Kou); Ba County; Fulong District; Tongjin County	A reconnaissance expedition visiting several areas in the Municipality.	9	Eavis, 1995; Senior, 1995
1995		Chongqing Municipality (Sichuan Province at the time)	Fengjie County; Wulong County	Reconnaissance by A Eavis and B Judd to set up the Yangtze Caves '96 expedition	2	
Aug–Sep 1996	Yangtze Caves '96	Chongqing Municipality (Sichuan Province at time of expedition)	Fengjie County (Xin Long); Wulong County (Jiang Kou). Also Hong Chi Ba region	The "follow-up" to the 1994 expedition. Essentially two separate explorations by different groups. Hong Chi Ba was visited by 5 members for 3 days	22 (Xin Long 10; Jiang Kou 12)	Lovett and Garman, 1996
Dec 1997		Chongqing Municipality	Fengjie County; Nanchuan District	Expedition spent 8 days in Xin Long (very wet), followed by a few days in Nanchuan (very cold)	?	
Oct 1998		Guangxi	Bama County	Reconnaissance by A Eavis and K Senior with Professor Zhu and Zhang Hai	2	
1999		Guangxi	Lingyun County	Reconnaissance trip by K and A Senior	2	
Oct 1999		Chongqing Municipality	Fengjie County	Time spent mainly at the "Great Crack"	10	
Oct 2000	Guangxi Caves 2000 Expedition	Guangxi	Lingyun County; Leye County	Two areas visited. Joint expedition with the Yorkshire Ramblers Club	16	Campion, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c
2001		Guangxi	Leye County		"Small team"	Campion, 2003
Mar–Apr 2002	The Hidden River Expedition 2002	Guangxi	Leye County		21	Aiker, 2003; Campion, 2003a; 2004a; 2004b
June 2002	The Great Crack Expedition	Chongqing Municipality	Fengjie County; Wulong County	Main objective was to link the Great Crack and the Great Doline via Di Feng	?	
Aug–Sept 2002		Chongqing Municipality	Wulong County	China Caves Project/Hong Meigui joint expedition	?	
Sept–Dec 2002	Qikeng Dong 2002 Expedition	Chongqing Municipality	Wulong County	Hong Meigui/China Caves Project joint expedition	?	
Sept–Oct 2003	Tian Xing China 2003 (also Dong Ba 2003 Expedition)	Chongqing Municipality	Wulong County	Primarily a Hong Meigui expedition with China Caves Project involvement	9	Drake, 2005
Feb–Mar 2004	Tian'e and Fengshan 2004 (17th CCP Expedition)	Guangxi	Tian'e County; Fengshan County		6	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2005
Oct–Nov 2004	Guangxi 2004 (18th CCP Expedition)	Guangxi	Fengshan County		11	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Campion, 2008
Oct–Nov 2005	Guangxi 2005 (19th CCP Expedition)	Guangxi	Bama County; Fengshan County		12	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Campion 2006; 2008
Oct–Nov 2006	Lichuan 2006 (20th CCP Expedition)	Hubei and Jiangxi	Lichuan and Jianshi Counties (Hubei); Wannian County (Jiangxi)	Only a few of the team continued from Hubei to visit Jiangxi	17	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Campion, 2011
Oct–Nov 2008	Yanhe 2008 (21st CCP Expedition)	Guizhou	Yanhe County		12	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2010
Oct–Nov 2009	Huanjiang 2009 (22nd CCP Expedition)	Guangxi	Huanjiang County		10	Bensley <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Oct–Nov 2010	Guangxi 2010 (23rd CCP Expedition)	Guangxi	Leye County; Fengshan County		12	Harrison, 2011; Bensley and Harrison, 2012
Spring 2012	Guangxi 2012	Guangxi	Fengshan County	Expedition to support National Geographic and ITV Anglia make a film about the Guangxi karst	2	
Mar 2013	Ma Wang Dong–Jiang Zhou link expedition	Guangxi	Fengshan County	Expedition organized by Jean Bottazzi and Fengshan County officials	4	
Aug 2013		Guangxi		Cave survey (laser scanning) trials by A Eavis	1	
Nov 2013	Yanjin 2013	Yunnan	Yanjin County		5	

After the 1985 expedition plans were soon being put together by Andy Eavis for a return to southern China and, in the winter of 1987–1988, British cavers revisited both Guizhou and Guangxi provinces (Fogg and Fogg, 1988; Eavis, 1990). Nine cavers first went back to the Shuicheng area of the western Guizhou plateau to follow up the 1985 findings. Their main focus was on the Fala–Pan Long–Hou Chang drainage system, where several caves were explored (Fogg and Fogg, 1988). At the end of this time, 16 Project members returned to Guangxi where three counties were visited. The first of these was Duan, nearly 300km southwest of Guilin, where a magnificent area of karst provides the catchment for the Tisu River, one of the wonders of the hydrological world (Parker and Newman, 1990). Exploration in this area was mainly by diving, including 5 dives to more than 75m depth, in shafts in which visibility was commonly extremely limited. Nearby Mashan County was also visited, and two complex cave systems were surveyed to a total length of more than 14km (Fogg, 1990). The final county visited by the expedition was Bama, where several caves in the Pan Yang drainage system, north of Poyue village in the northwest of the county, were surveyed (Gill *et al.*, 1990).

China Caves Project was first used informally as a title during the 1987 Expedition. In 1988 and 1989, operating partly under this new generic branding, British expeditions returned to Guizhou, and were referred to specifically as the **British Speleological Expedition to China 1988** and the **Guizhou 89 Expedition**.

Both expeditions were based in Doshan in Anlong County, about 220km southwest of Guiyang, the provincial capital city, and the team explored a relatively small number of large relict passages on a northward-sloping limestone plateau (Dunton and Laverty, 1993; Lewis, 1988).

It was clear from the 1987–1988 expedition that Bama County had much more to offer in terms of exciting caving in large systems, and so a team returned in **1989**, establishing a base in Yueli village in the northwest of the county. From there they explored caves in both Bama and Fengshan, spending most of the time in four cave systems easily reached from the village. These were Gantuan Dong and Ma Wang Dong in Fengshan to the west of Yueli, and to the south and east, a sequence of caves in a fracture zone and Feng Dong. Between them, the 1988 and 1989 expeditions based in Bama mapped more than 50km in the two counties, many of these kilometres being in enormous caves decorated with massive stalagmites (Waltham and Willis, 1993).

During the spring of **1991** ten British cavers, together with Chinese colleagues, explored the karst of Mengzi County, southern Yunnan Province, just 50km north of the border between China and Vietnam. Several caves on the fengcong (cone karst) plateau near Caoba village were investigated, with some explorations involving cave diving. A brief visit was also made to Luxi County, north of Mengzi, where cave diving explorations were again undertaken (Waltham and Willis, 1993). In **1992** the China Caves Project went to the spectacular karst formed on a limestone escarpment at Xingwen in Sichuan Province, finding the area to be a textbook example of karst development within a massive dipping limestone. They found a series of caves with clearly displayed patterns of development and they also studied the pollution problems associated with the local sulphur extraction industry (Waltham *et al.*, 1993; Waltham and Willis, 1993). One of the expedition's main objectives was to support the production of a film by Sid Perou and others.

Prior to joining the larger team in Xingwen, four of the British cavers joined two colleagues from the Karst Institute to make a brief survey of the limestone of the Tibetan Plateau. Here the extent of cave development proved to be disappointing, because of limited dissolutional activity on the limestones resulting from low rainfall, few fractures in the plastically deformed rock, and the lack of streams on the high limestone outcrops (Waltham and Willis, 1993; Waltham, 1993).

In **1994** the Project (operating under the title ***The 1994 Yangtze Gorges Expedition***) went to Chongqing Municipality, then part of Sichuan Province (Senior, 1995; Eavis, 1995). This was a reconnaissance expedition, aiming to visit several areas in the region but, in the event, staying in two of them for sufficient time to make some detailed studies. These were around the village of Xin Long, 35km south of Fengjie city which is 300km east of Chongqing, the capital of the municipality, and at Jiang Kou which is near Wulong city, again to the east of Chongqing. Shorter visits were made to Ba County (Xian) and to the Fulong region, both closer to Chongqing. Many caves were assessed, with more than 20 being wholly or partially surveyed, and a number were earmarked for more extensive studies by a later expedition. Prominent among those surveyed were the cave systems under and near the massive Xiaozhai Tiankeng at

Xin Long, which might rank as the largest tiankeng in the world (Zhu and Chen, 2005), and the shafts of Qikeng Dong and Dongba Dong in Wulong County, now known to be entrances to the extensive Tianxing Cave System, the deepest in China (Wade, 2007).

Chongqing was revisited briefly in **1995** by Andy Eavis and Brian Judd to set up a large expedition for the following year. In **1996** two independent groups re-examined two of the geographically separate areas visited in 1994 and 1995: Xin (or Xing) Long and Jiang Kou. The teams were inhibited by a lack of vertical caving gear (stuck in Hong Kong docks for the duration of the expedition!) and by abnormally wet weather. Nevertheless, progress was made in increasing knowledge of the geomorphology and hydrology of both areas. Beneath Xiaozhai Tiankeng little progress could be made because of the volume of water, but Tau Yuan He Dong was explored further than in 1994, and the bottom of a cave that had been noted and named the *Green Eyed Monster Cave* in 1994 was reached after descents totalling more than 200m. Many shafts were discovered and descended in Jiang Kou, as far as the restricted amounts of gear would allow. Prior to the main expedition five members of the Jiang Kou team also reconnoitred another area of the province, called Hong Chi Ba, where two deep shafts were partially descended and noted for future attention (Lovett and Garman, 1996).

In **1997** the China Caves Project was back in Xin Long, and specifically to *The Great Crack*, a 5.5km-long gorge with sheer, 200m-high walls, that leads down to the Di Feng sink. Unfortunately the weather was too wet to make very significant progress, and after 8 days the team moved on to the Nanchuan District (another part of the Chongqing Municipality) for a few days in the caves on Yingfo Mountain in very cold weather.

October 1998 saw Andy Eavis and Kevin Senior back in China for a brief reconnaissance, with Professor Zhu, of Bama County in Guangxi, following which Andy presented a lecture on the China Caves Project to the Royal Geographical Society in Hong Kong.

In **October 1999** an expedition comprising 10 western cavers returned to Xin Long in Chongqing Municipality to tackle *The Great Crack* again. This was a very tough trip; the team discovered that bolts previously placed in 1997 had been sheared off by the force of floodwater, leaving only stubs of stainless steel visible in the limestone. Nevertheless, in 4 weeks in the field, the "surface section" of *The Great Crack* was explored for the first time, with surveys totalling more than 10km completed.

The **2000** expedition to the western part of Guangxi Province was a joint undertaking, shared with the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club, to which most of the cavers belonged. It was a two-centre trip, starting in Lingyun County, with some of the team then moving to Leye County, a little farther north. Lingyun had been visited for 4 days during the previous year by Andy Eavis and Kevin Senior, a visit that provided the basis for the 2000 trip. Initial explorations centred round the Shiyui River, which sinks and rises to the north of Linyun town.

Time was also spent to the south of the town, where several large dolines are located.

Halfway through the expedition a team of 6 cavers was dispatched to Leye County, 40 miles to the north, to examine the caves there and particularly the Dashiwei Tiankeng. This spectacular feature had only become known to the Chinese scientific community in 1998 when Professor Zhu was led there by local people. It is among the giants of the tiankengs, 400–600m across, with unbroken perimeter walls that have a maximum height of 613m. In 1999 the tiankeng had been descended by a Chinese Army expedition but, tragically, one of the soldiers lost his life when he was drowned in the cave river at its foot, about 500m underground. The 2000 expedition team explored much further down the river and also surveyed six more caves and shafts in the area (Campion, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002).

The successes of the 2000 expedition prompted a return to Leye in **2001** by a small team that made notable discoveries in tiankengs adjacent to Dashiwei, including Bai Dong and Cacao Cave, thus helping to unravel part of the upstream intricacies of the river system under Dashiwei (Campion, 2003). In **2002**, a very strong team of 21 overseas cavers under the leadership of Andy Eavis was put together to take part in the **2002 Hidden River Expedition**, with the prime objective of linking the Dashiwei Tiankeng underground river with its resurgence, about 20km to the north. Whereas the hoped for connection was not achieved the expedition was incredibly successful in mapping large sections of this underground watercourse, including 4.4km beneath the tiankeng itself, and in exploring a vast array of nearby caves, most of which proved to be vertical shafts up to 400m deep with little horizontal development at the bottom. In the same year an outlying limestone area to the east of the Leye karst massif, Ma Drong, was also explored (Alker, 2003; Campion, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b).

Also in **2002**, in June, the China Caves Project returned to Chongqing and specifically to Fengjie County as the **Great Crack Expedition**, to attack this massive karst feature yet again, and to try to make an underground connection between **The Great Crack** and **The Big Doline**. Some members of the team also revisited nearby Wulong County to look at the shafts near Tian Xing village. Attention focused on Qikeng Dong, descended for over 500m and still going at the end of the expedition. Brian Judd couldn't resist returning here later in the year to push the shaft further to minus 707m, and again in **2003** when he and a small team reached a depth of 920m. (It was then left to the recently formed Hong Meigui Cave Exploration Society to link it to many nearby shafts, all parts of the Tianxing Cave System, and to reach its present depth of 1020m).

The expeditions in 2002 marked a turning point for the China Caves Project. Most expeditions up to this had been led by Andy Eavis, with local logistics and support ably provided by Professor Zhu and his colleagues at the Guilin Karst Institute. Their work to date was celebrated and publicized by the holding of the China Caves International Symposium at the Royal Geographical Society in London in September 2004, an event co-hosted by the Project and the Committee on Speleology of the Chinese Geological Society.

The wealth of information gathered over the previous two decades was described in a series of presentations, supported by the premiere of a film on the Project by Gavin Newman. Participants, friends and sponsors had the opportunity to reminisce and exchange stories, and then to join in a field trip to the caves of South Wales and North Yorkshire.

After the 2002 expeditions Andy began to share his role as leader with Ged Campion, a participant on some of the earlier expeditions. It is not the purpose of this short history of the China Caves Project to list individual contributions to the Project – either in the field or in other roles – as this would be an impossible task given the involvement over the years of several hundred people. It would, however, be inappropriate not to highlight the critical lead role played by Andy Eavis, who has devoted enormous amounts of time and effort to the expeditions, particularly prior to the early 2000s. We must also note the key role of Brian Judd, particularly over the period from 1994 to 2003. To return now to the early 2000s, Ged Campion has since organised 7 expeditions, leading them all except that in 2010. As Professor Zhu's retirement from full time employment at the Guilin Karst Institute coincided with a reduction in the amount of time devoted by Andy Eavis to the Project, the main contacts for the overseas teams after 2002 have been Zhang Hai, Chen Weihai and Huang Bao-jian, who have worked hard over many years to ensure that the teams visited potentially attractive areas and that all logistical and administrative issues were solved effectively.

In early 2004 a small team went first to Tian'e County in the north of Guangxi, exploring a wide range of different caves, some of significant depth. They then moved south to Fengshan County to discover the massive cave passages of the Jiang Zhou Cave System. Time ran out before even a small fraction of this system had been explored, and another expedition was hastily brought together for a return to Fengshan in October and November of the same year. At the end of this visit, Jiang Zhou had a surveyed length of 29km, with numerous leads still unexplored (Bensley et al., 2005; Campion, 2008). A return to Fengshan in 2005 was inevitable, and this took place in October, after a short visit to Bama County. Effort was again concentrated on the Jiang Zhou System, which after a further 8 days of caving had yielded a total of 38.5km of surveyed passages. The team also spent a considerable time looking at other caves in the area, particularly to the north of Jiang Zhou, as the rivers running under the system are believed to resurge to the north at Sanmenhei Cave, implying that a truly massive cave system exists under the southern part of Fengshan County (Bensley et al., 2007; Campion, 2006, 2008).

In 2006, at the suggestion of the Guilin Karst Institute, the Project moved north to Lichuan in Hubei Province. This county was new territory to the Project but in 1987-1988 had been visited by a large Belgian expedition that had discovered and explored the massive Teng Long Dong cave system, thought (in early 2006) to be the third longest in China. The 2006 expedition discovered several more sections of Teng Long Dong's underground river cave and related relict segments, but much more exploration is needed before the cave sections explored in 1987-1988 and

2006 can be linked together to form a continuous, traversable cave system. The 2006 team also explored an additional 15 or so caves in the area, adding to knowledge of the hydrology of the county. A small group from the expedition also spent a short time reconnoitring the karst area of Jianshi County, adjacent to Lichuan, and at the end of the time in Hubei another small team moved on to Wannian County in Jiangxi Province to extend the existing knowledge of the Shennong Gong show-cave (Bensley *et al.*, 2008; Campion, 2011).

There was no expedition in 2007, but in late **2008** a China Caves Project team returned to Guizhou Province. The original plan was to explore the caves of Bijie County in the west of the province, but at the last moment the Guilin Karst Institute suggested a change of venue to Yanhe County in the northeast, which borders Chongqing Municipality. Previously unvisited by a caving expedition, this proved to be a fascinating area, with numerous extensive unexplored caves.

Almost continuous rainfall hampered many of the expedition's plans. Nevertheless more than 50 caves were located throughout the county, and over 20 caves (ranging from a few hundred metres to 6.5km in length) were fully or partially surveyed (Bensley *et al.*, 2010).

In **2009** the Project returned to Guangxi Province, to Huanjiang County in the north of the province, adjacent to Libo County in Guizhou Province. In the northwest of Huanjiang is the Mulun Karst National Nature Reserve, an almost uninhabited area of about 100km² of dramatic fengcong scenery. As part of the conservation work in this reserve, numerous cave entrances had been identified but very few had been explored; this was the planned role of the expedition. The team visited and surveyed about 20 caves, most of which were deep shafts with little horizontal development (Bensley *et al.*, 2012).

In late **2010** Guangxi Province was again the destination for the Project. This was a two-centre expedition to Leye and Fengshan counties, both of which had been visited earlier by China Caves Project teams. The visit in fact took place exactly 10 years after the Project first visited Leye, exploring its magnificent Dashiwei Tiankeng and many similar features nearby. A prime objective of the 2010 visit was to celebrate this anniversary and renew the strong links developed between the overseas visitors and many local people. As it happened, the visit also coincided with the announcement by UNESCO of the success of Leye and Fengshan in their application for the listing of their geo-park in the Global Geoparks Network – an announcement that led to even more celebrations. Nevertheless a reasonable amount of caving was also carried out, including the exploration of previously unvisited shafts to the south of Dashiwei Tiankeng and some modest extensions in and near to the Jiang Zhou Cave System in Fengshan (Harrison, 2011; Bensley and Harrison, 2012).

In early **2012**, the China Caves Project was involved in assisting the National Geographic organization and Anglia TV, who put together a team of cavers and scientists to make a film about the spectacular karst of Fengshan and Leye counties. The film focused partly on Dashiwei as an example of a mature tiankeng and Maoqi Dong as a tiankeng under development, and partly upon the Ma Wang Dong underground river system, the part of the filming project in which the China Caves members were involved.

One of the latest of the expeditions involving two members of the China Caves Project was initiated by the Fengshan County Tourism Department (Guangxi Province) and took place in March **2013**. Organised by Jean Bottazzi, a noted French caver then employed by the Department, the objective was again to search for links between the extensive Jiang Zhou cave system and the massive Ma Wang Dong cave a relatively short distance to the north. The team comprised only four Western cavers and over a dozen Chinese colleagues, most from Nanning or Fengshan itself. This pattern, of competent local cavers initially trained in speleological techniques by European friends but now exploring and recording their own underground environments, is one that will continue into the future.

The most recent (at the time of writing) China Caves Project expedition was a small, hastily organized trip in November **2013** to Yanjin County in the northeast of Yunnan Province, an area not previously visited by a caving expedition. Involving only 5 UK cavers and a few colleagues from the Guilin Karst Institute, and hampered by bad weather that caused the closure of many local roads, the achievements of the team were necessarily limited, but the expedition was nevertheless successful in assessing the caving potential of the area and exploring and surveying a few interesting cave systems.

Related organisations

Although the British-led China Caves Project has been one of the major overseas caving organisations to be involved in exploring China's karst regions in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, it would be wrong to imply that it is one of only a few Western speleological groups to make significant discoveries. Some very exciting finds have been made by visitors from many other nations, nearly always in close and cordial cooperation with Chinese scientists and local officials.

Indeed, the excellent French-maintained **Grottes et Karsts de Chine** website lists a total of 154 caving expeditions in China since the 1980s. Notable among them are those of the numerous Sino-French expeditions, particularly those involved in the exploration of Shuanghe Dongqun in Guizhou, currently by far the most extensive of China's caves and now some 138km long (see for example: Bottazzi, 2005; Chen and Zhang, 1994).

The large Sino-Belgian expedition to Lichuan in 1987–1988, which first explored and surveyed the vast and intimidating Teng Long Dong system, is another landmark in China's cave exploration (Masschelein and Zhang, 1988). Several expeditions have been made by an Italian group, including one (their fourth Chinese expedition) in 2003 to Fengshan County, close to many China Caves Project discoveries (Ruggieri, 2004), and impressive scientific studies of Chinese karst have been carried out by a group affiliated to the Slovenian Karst Research Institute at Postojna (Knez *et al.*, 2011).

A feature of the China Caves Project over the last decade or so has been its ability to absorb or generate other organisations and groups of cavers interested in the exploration of China's karst areas. An early example is the expedition of 2000, which was a highly successful joint enterprise between the China Caves Project and the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club (YRC), one of the UK's oldest and most prestigious outdoor organisations. Since then, YRC members have participated in every one of the Project's expeditions, and made numerous valuable contributions to the Project. Another example is the expedition in 2003 to Jingxi and Pingguo counties in the west of Guangxi Province by the Craven Pothole Club, another well-known caving club in the UK, an expedition that built on the contacts and data gathered by the Project in earlier years (Warren and Porter, 2004).

The Project's most significant spin-off venture, however, was the formation of the Hong Meigui Cave Exploration Society by Erin Lynch in 2001. Hong Meigui is an international society dedicated to exploring caves in China and, since its formation, driven by Erin, the Society has been outstanding in its exploration of China's underground world, having logged over 1000 cave entrances and mapped more than 273km of cave passage, including some of China's deepest caves. Their achievements, which could easily fill an historical miscellany similar to this, include the exploration of China's fourth and fifth longest caves and the second biggest natural underground vertical drop in the world (Lynch and Collis, 2003; Wade, 2007). Hong Meigui, which currently has more than 100 members from 13 countries, generously acknowledges the role played by the China Caves Project in stimulating its interest in China's karst scenery, and retains close links with the Project.

Other groups of cavers have also grown out of the activities of the China Caves Projects over the last decade or so – those comprising the Chinese themselves. As the country's prosperity has developed, allowing a section of Chinese society an increasing amount of leisure time, so has the interest of many Chinese in outdoor activities such as caving. Increasingly, since about 2000, the Project's expeditions have been joined by enthusiastic local Chinese cavers, many from Nanning and similar large southern cities, who have learned caving techniques such as SRT and surveying from the foreign visitors, and who now contribute as much or more to the exploration of their caves as do the cavers from abroad.

Of equal or greater importance in the development of speleology in China, of course, is the role of the university departments with whom the China Caves Project has had such a close and rewarding relationship. Over the entire life of the Project the bonds between western cavers and the Guilin Karst Institute have been critical, building on the close and enduring friendship of Andy Eavis and Professor Zhu Xuewen, and also those between other British cavers and Institute staff mentioned in this paper.

Professional and social relationships

One of the outstanding achievements of the China Caves Project has been the development of close and cordial links between the numerous professional (and indeed amateur) scientists involved in the expeditions.

This is clearly illustrated by the number of papers published over the years on various aspects of karst geology that have joint authors from China and from the west. Despite occasional language difficulties, vigorous debates between geologists individually eminent in their fields have helped to push forward the frontiers of this important branch of science. And geology is not the only science to have benefitted from cooperation initiated on China Caves Project expeditions, that of biology being a case in point. An example is the discussion between a biologist from the University of Tasmania and an associate professor at the Huazhong Agricultural University in Hubei, in about 2005 on whether cave dwelling keroplastid flies discovered in northwest Guangxi are a new genus or not (the debate is probably still ongoing). But it is not just the professionals who have developed lasting friendships from the expeditions. One of the delights of returning to China on a second or subsequent expedition is that of meeting old Chinese caving friends and looking forward to further joint underground explorations (and very sociable evenings). Perhaps the most impressive example of the degree of cooperation and friendship achieved on China Caves Project trips occurred as a result of the recent 2010 expedition to Guangxi County. The British expedition leader and the attractive female interpreter from Nanning city allocated to the expedition clearly had to work closely together, a task they fulfilled with remarkable success – less than 2 years later they were married in Nanning and now live together in the UK.

Other material

Details of the discoveries made by the expeditions, their achievements in **Geomorphology, Biology, Archaeology, Expedition Medicine, Conservation, Construction and Development** will be detailed in our next journal.

Acknowledgements

Inevitably a paper such as this, covering a broad span of caving activities over a long period, will suffer from inadvertent omissions and inaccuracies. Thus, we apologize to any cavers who feel that their exploits have not been reviewed effectively, or who think that they have been overlooked completely.

The paper would never have been written without the pioneering work of Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham in initiating the China Caves Project. They have also been supportive and helpful in checking and expanding drafts and in making available their extensive knowledge and literature on China's caves and karst. Tony Waltham is also thanked for his permission to reproduce Figure 2 and for his generous help reformatting Figures 1 and 2. All photographs used in the paper (*some of which may be included in our next journal*) are credited; all photographers are acknowledged with our thanks, but with particular thanks to Jerry Wooldridge and, again, Tony Waltham. Our thanks are also due to Mary Wilde, the BCRA Librarian, who kindly located many ancient and obscure reports and journals for the authors, and to one of the editors for his formatting skills. Many cavers on all expeditions not only performed tremendous feats of caving but, after returning home, devoted many hours to writing up details of their activities and drawing numerous cave surveys.

Without access to these detailed sources of information this paper would be much the poorer.

It would be churlish for the authors not to acknowledge their debt to the Project's many friends in China, particularly the scientists of the Guizhou Normal University and the Guilin Karst Institute. They carried out much groundwork before and during the expeditions, ensuring that all teams would visit interesting areas, and thus guaranteeing high levels of success for the expeditions. Also, their diligent work over many years, examining and mapping the karst areas of southern China, has ensured that the China Caves Project's cave reports and surveys have a solid geographical and geological basis.

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**YRC Editors note -**  
**In addition to Ged Campion numerous members of our club have participated in this project over the years and one such recounts on more humorous elements of their time there on page 39**

## **SNOW AND ICE WORK - IN MOROCCO?**

I agree Morocco is not the obvious choice for winter alpine routes and steep pure ice.

In fact the High Atlas provides a haven for ski tourers and climbers looking a bit further afield. The Toubkal huts stand beneath a few months' worth of big beautiful faces, gullies and ridges, all of which are alpine in altitude, length and style, but without the alpine queues. A seven-man team, including YRC Members, Andy Syme, Pete Elliott and Tim Bateman took the opportunity to explore the High Atlas for a week in February based out the Toubkal hut.

Travel is simplicity itself with the 'budget carriers' flying to Marrakesh from most regional airports. A flight to Marrakesh and a two hour taxi ride brings you to Imlil where the porters and mules meet you for the five hour leisurely walk up to the Toubkal huts at 3207 m. While the pace is gentle it still represents 2750 m of ascent in a day so it needs to be.

Our trip was firmly aimed at climbing, as I keep telling Pete "the point of walking is to get to something interesting to do", and the valley has plenty of pure ice within 20 minutes walk.

We picked the obvious "Curtain Call" a short vertical pure ice route which is visible from the hut and provides a single pitch of pure hard ice hanging about 300 feet above the valley. It lived up to it's promise and provided a great warm up for the week.



The climb up to it also helped to provide that 'refresher course' in slick rope work and moving together that is so necessary in the alpine environment.

Having blown away the cobwebs, day two drew Pete Nick and I to the obvious gully line on Tete d'Ouanoumsus, while the rest of the team went for

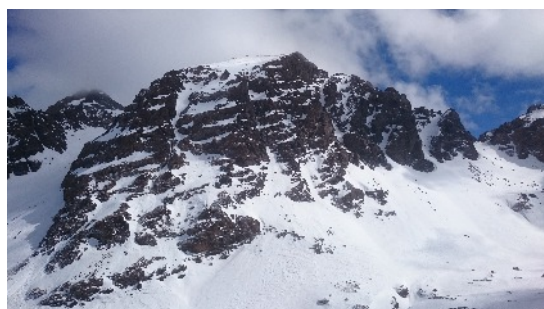
Chockstone Gully on Afrila. Both routes in the AD range and 900m long, it was going to be a good day.

Our day started with a change of plan. As we roped up in the shelter of a buttress 3 large rocks shot down our intended line and we quickly decided to move out right and find a better line. The next 400m comprised predominantly hard neve with rock sections which provided interesting, but not difficult, terrain which was thoroughly enjoyable. My only problem was a glove fault which saw me with rather to many 'hot aches' as I went from cold hands to warm and back again.

At about 400m there was a single steep ice pitch which was fantastic.



Exposed position and spectacular views combined with almost perfect ice gave me a totally memorable lead which ended at a belay where I sat in the sun beaming like a Cheshire Cat. It was about 1 PM. The sun however quickly became a curse as the gully became increasingly soft, which required keeping roped and pitching while we swam up the ever deepening snow in the gully. We topped out at about 4:30 and by then I was exhausted, a combination of altitude and about 7 hours continuous leading.



Pete took charge pouring some well needed coffee down my neck and pointing me out the route before he and Nick sorted out the gear and followed. We got to an obvious gully descent. With the light fading fast, temperature plummeting and snow starting to fall we agreed we needed to get down quickly.

I rappelled down the full 60m to a reasonable stance and was quickly joined by Pete and Nick. Nick didn't have a head torch so as the last light faded we connected him up to the ropes ready to ab and I went down again. At 60m there was no belay, but I was able to cut a reasonable ledge and the angle had dropped to be a Grade I or II gully so we could down climb from here. The loss of a small amount of height, combined with the need to keep focussed, had cleared the exhaustion. We walked on down into the Toubkal South Col and so to the hut; arriving at 21:00 after 14 hours of continuously being on the go. A truly memorable day where our skills, fitness and teamwork had all been tested.

The next day we decided we needed a rest, so while the others climbed Toubkal, Nick, Pete and I slept in then wandered up the valley for a couple of hours playing on the little ice falls next to the path.

The last full day had only one objective, Toubkal. It was basically a walk but despite my principles on walking, it was a 'tick' I couldn't miss.

We made it a round by going up the North Col before descending the normal, South Col, route and were treated to an empty and windless summit with views over the clouds out to the desert.



## **TOUBKAL SUMMIT**

After an all too short trip we descended the following morning to Imlil and on to Marrakesh for a night out and a half days shopping in the Souks before we flew back.

Logistically we took the easy option buying a logistics only package from "The Mountain People" run by James and Miriam, a young couple living in Imlil. For about £100 per person more than we could have (theoretically) done it ourselves we had everything organised from arriving in Marrakesh including a team cook in the hut.

No haggling, no changes, no hassle. It is a no brainer!

Andy Syme



# OVERSEAS MEET REPORT - ALMERIA, SPAIN

20-31 March 2016

Typical YRC! The week-long meet was first agreed the previous year in Calpe, Spain, when Tony and Val offered to organise it in the caving and walking area of their winter home in Andalucía. They fixed the Sunday start date to fit in neatly between their other commitments. Not one of the ten members flying in from the UK to Alicante arrived on Sunday: four on Friday, one Saturday and the rest on Monday. YRC members are individuals not sheep.

On the outskirts of Garrucha, in groups of three or four, we had apartments within 100m of one another and these groups took turns to provide an evening meal. As we were twelve and the apartments catered for four we arrived carrying crockery, cutlery, a table or chairs to the surprise of a passing estate agent. We enjoyed the usual high standard of catering despite everyone having active days on the hills or in the caves of the Sorbas plateau. Everything was arranged at the 'right price' with off-season accommodation costing £65 each for the week and, for example, an excellent three-course lunch with alcohol and coffee being €10 at a locals' transport cafe. We also ate out a couple of evenings at 'The Wok' in Vera and Los Contreros, Villaricos – the latter a 'final meal' half-way through the later arrivers' week.

Our meet leaders and membership secretary had been busy in advance of the meet. The local *ex-pat* caving group were primed to help get us to and down selected potholes in the Sorbas Karst area and those with GPS had been provided with digital maps and routes for scores of local walks. The weather forecast though was less encouraging, with cooler days than we have often had and some rain in prospect. In fact, the rain was mostly overnight and temperatures were suitable for walking and hotter towards the end of the meet. Rather than detail individuals' day-to-day activities an overall impression of the activities is given in outline.

Full day walks started with an outing from Alfax bridge and linked ramblas (dry stream beds), coniferous woodland, ridges and firebreaks. While not the most impressive start we did find a tortoise and got some good views. Overnight rain had left slippery glutinous mud and raised stream levels which impeded progress in places. A better mountain walk was had from Mojácar, a typical white village perched high on the northern end of the Sierra Cabrera. Beyond a radio mast were abandoned terraces leading to broad ridges with a few rocky sections and decent tracks through thorny

maquis. The high point of Arraez, 919m at the southern end was reached and a more westerly return variation gave a couple of sections of bashing through the scrub which left an impression on those walking in shorts. Red-legged partridge were being encouraged as game birds and we saw a shepherd with a large flock of sheep and goats. About an hour's drive north was the 2000m+ Sierra de Maria which was approached from an Ermita on the northern side. Access is controlled and a permit is probably needed though in this season we met only one other walker. Skirting west round the botanical reserve a good path (with small purple crocuses) was left for a direct approach to the snow covered col. The rock here was limestone and the snow covered clints and grykes required care. The summit is some two kilometres from the col with no great height gain but, expecting UK summer walking conditions the trainer-clad rambles were distinctly challenged by the strong biting-cold wind *en route* to the Maria summit. We were all pleased to turn and have it blowing on our backs as we returned to the col to find shelter and have lunch, then delighted when we decided to abandon the windswept ridge ahead and drop back to the woodland-edge traverse path below the col. At the end of the sierra we descended to return via almond groves, cherry orchards and flower-strewn paths.

Shorter walks provided plenty of interest. Below the hill village of Bedar we walked good tracks linking villages and many mines and quarries. Several mines were entered and most got pretty dusty. From Sopalmo was a 'Rope and Tunnel' walk which dropped into a rambla before entering a 500m tunnel leading to the beach and a 300m ascent via a rambla with some steep clambering which would have been rope-assisted if anyone had taken one or if the *in-situ* one had not disintegrated. Just around the corner from the apartments was a lagoon and reed-bed which entertained some birders.

Another half day was spent walking to Tenerife. No, not the island, but a summit overlooking the heavily mined Jaroso valley in the Sierra Almagrera. Interest was maintained by inspecting the extensive nineteenth century lead and silver mining remains, whilst avoiding falling into any of the many deep open shafts. At the Chimenea de Moro, we visited a restored steam winding engine manufactured by Reading Ironworks in 1837, a silent tribute to British engineering. On our return, we passed a herd of goats and sheep gorging themselves on a carpet of oranges, onions and tomatoes.

Getting to the caving area went well until we left the surfaced road. Thankfully our President's hire car was left there and his party squeezed into the other vehicles. The rain had turned dips in the rough track into mud-baths and it was mud-splattered cavers who headed for the entrances having fought to get Tony's van out of the mire. The caving is in gypsum karst. Gypsum is quarried locally and exported on a large scale. Indeed, the quarrying now abuts the Karst en Yesos de Sorbas protected area though there must be economic pressures to encroach further. Six million years ago the area was in the Mediterranean then precipitation and uplift left the 100m thick layer of gypsum for rainwater solution to form over 1,000 caves. We tackled only four. The first cave, System Ruedo, followed a steeply descending rift with climbs and four pitches to end in an chamber with a fine stal flow some 20 ft high.

The second one, System Tesoro, was a through trip enjoyed by a large party. There were three pitches, a number of interesting side passages and some impressive chambers before we exited below a line of high and crumbling cliffs. Wise heads counselled going south to a grassy area; Tony rushed off north into more and more difficult terrain through huge boulders. He had to be restrained.

Later in the week, two more shafts were investigated. One, Cueva del Agua, became too tight even for Ged, the other, System Gep, was explored to a fine stalactite chamber. One hazard was the crumbling of the gypsum forming the top of the shafts where it was exposed to water, air and sunlight. Pressure from feet or ropes sent showers of debris on those below to the extent that most chose to crawl out along a low ramp passage through blocks rather than prussik up the main shaft of the first cave. Once into the caves

however, the rock was solid, made of gypsum crystals ranging from a few mm to about 60 cm which sparkled in the lights. It was a delight to change after the trips in sunshine and warm air.

There was more to the meet than walking, caving and eating. A bird list is appended and on the Sierra Cabrera we came across clear animal tracks with paw prints a good 10cm across and spread across several miles of track. The spoor lacked claw marks except in a few places where extra traction would have been needed on a slippery uphill slope – so that rules out dogs. The 10cm size is twice that of a wild cat. That leaves the Iberian lynx but they are not supposed to be within scores of miles of the area and the prints are large even for those. These remain something of a mystery.

Despite being, at two hours, a longer drive from Alicante than our other recent visits to Spain, this area had plenty of interest within easy reach to keep us busy. Thanks go to Tony and Val for making the local arrangements and their welcoming meals.

**Attendance**

Val and Tony Penny (meet leaders)

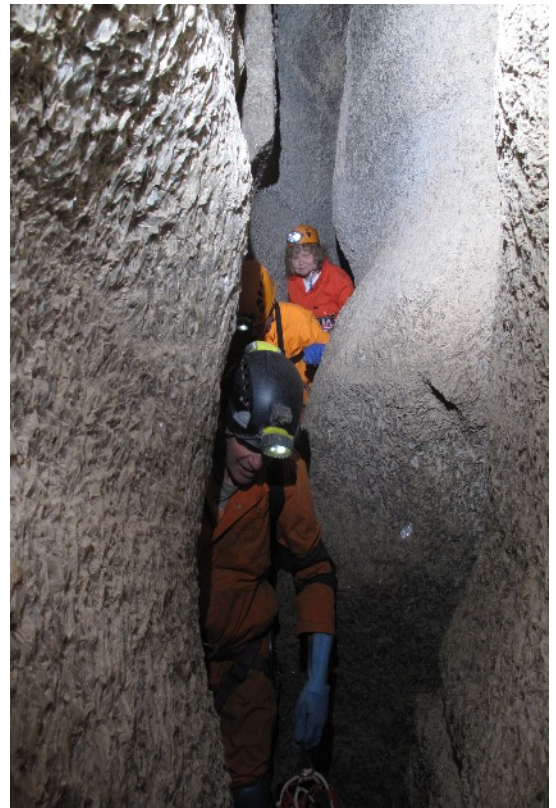
- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| John Whalley  | Richard Sealey |
| Carol Whalley | Ged Campion    |
| Mike Smith    | Aeron Campion  |
| Helen Smith   | Tim Josephy    |
| Richard Smith | Mick Borroff   |

|                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Birds:</b>      | House sparrow        |
| Black redstart     | Kestrel              |
| Black vulture      | Little egret         |
| Black wheatear     | Magpie               |
| Blackbird          | Mallard              |
| Black-winged stilt | Marsh harrier        |
| Bonelli's eagle    | Mediterranean gull   |
| Cetti's warbler    | Red-legged partridge |
| Chough             | Robin                |
| Coot               | Sand piper           |
| Cormorant          | Spanish sparrow      |
| Crested lark       | Spotless starling    |
| Egyptian vulture   | Swallow              |
| Great tit          | Tree sparrow         |
| Greenfinch         | White wagtail        |
| Grey heron         | Wren                 |









## OF MIGRANTS AND ALIENS

April 10<sup>th</sup> and the forecast is for the last reasonably sunny day after a good spell of Easter weather so a decent walk was called for. Packing an apple and orange, biscuit, flapjack and water I park by the Peak District's Snake Inn between Sheffield and Glossop having hatched a plan. Recalling the Club's Kinder Dozen long walk of some years past – a 12-pointed star shaped walk with the inner 'points' being on the Kinder plateau – following the edge of the plateau I could join up those 'inner points'. Well that was more or less what I managed though at the far western end I kept to the edge rather than cutting over past Sandy Heys trig.



**Route of the Kinder Dozen ( line with directional arrows) 12 hours, 24 miles, 10,000ft ascent and Kinder Edges (bold line), 6½ hours, 18 miles, 3,500ft ascent**

Even before parking I had seen my first Northern Wheatear of the season, a buzzard perched just metres away on a roadside fencepost, curlews, lapwings and a brown hare. Later in the day, up by the Seal Stones around 550m there was a Wren flitting through the hollows of the edge and below it a Mountain Hare mottled white and dark as it shed its winter coat. Spring is upon us.

While the southern edge, above Edale, was festooned with groups of people out for the last days of the Easter break, the northern and eastern edges were pretty quiet. Between Ringing Roger and the western tip above Ashop Head, I saw fewer than ten people, mostly singletons. It is not hard to get away from the crowds. Stopping briefly for refreshment above Golden Clough, I passed the time of day with one such chap and noted he had a Germanic accent. I caught up with him approaching Ringing Roger and we fell into conversation about the long distance paths he had walked in the Alps. Working briefly in Manchester, he had discovered the difficulties of walking across the Kinder plateau the hard way – getting lost – but undeterred had returned. He knew Scotland's wild places but had not expected to find such good walking so close to the city of Manchester. He headed east from just beyond Crookstone Knoll heading for Win Hill and Hope for a train home.

That day was one for shorts and no jacket but the next was in stark contrast. Helen and I walked the round of Laddow Rocks, Black Hill, Westend Moss and Hey Moss from Crowden several miles to the north. Within 20m of Black Hill's summit at 580m there was frogspawn in the boggy puddles. We had plenty of sunshine but tempered by a cold wind and a touch of hail. Not a day for shorts but woollen hats instead.

Such are the vagaries of the British weather.

Leaving Black Hill we entered the shallow clough towards Westend Moss and noticed a couple of developments. The peat in the clough bottom has been protected against footfall wear by a recently added layer of gritstone gravel and small stones on top of the existing thinning layer. Secondly, we spotted on Tooleyshaw Moss, sheltered by peat hags, a shoulder-height conifer flourishing at around 460m. There are no others for miles around. However, over the last few decades several have sprouted high in the Peak.



The National Park Rangers I have met put this down to less industrial pollution. One of the firs, closer to the Derwent Watershed path, gets adorned with a few gaudy decorations each December.

They do though look like an alien species amidst the grass, sedge, heather and sphagnum.

Michael Smith

## **BELLY DANCING IN BEIJING**

### The alternative 2005 Guangxi Caves Expedition

*As Bill Hawkins is at home recovering from a heart operation he has been digging through old files and now feels he can publish this. It is long enough after the event that he should get away with it.*

“Guangxi Caves 2005 Expedition; well it was certainly an expedition, and we definitely went in lots of caves, but what about the unreported little things that went on behind the scenes? Read on, and find out what the expedition was really about.

It started quite well; uneventful flights, first day in Guilin sorting tackle, Stuart Page’s introduction to Chinese food with pig’s dick on a stick in the barbecue area, and a totally forgettable journey to Bama County. It must have been forgettable because I’ve forgotten it, but the second group out apparently had a miserable day of it. Serves ‘em right for only going for a fortnight and leaving all the work to us senior citizens. Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, Bama County. Quite a few good caves as I recall, but some other interesting experiences as well.

The girls in the hotel bar were very friendly, and this was somewhat worrying as we were next door to a massage parlour, but they seemed harmless enough and were pleasant to chat to. We would not have discovered this if it had not been for Stuart, who for some reason or other seemed to find that the bar was on the route to wherever we were going. It seemed only fair that with the others having so much to do that I should nobly volunteer to go and find him. This self sacrificing action rapidly became thirsty work,

especially since we discovered that the beer seemed to be free, and the girls friendly. Whether they worked in the massage parlour I never found out, but the massage to our necks after a hard days caving was damned painful. You would never imagine that such diminutive lasses could have such strong fingers. Perhaps they misinterpreted what we said to them, which wouldn’t be surprising since I still can’t understand how we conversed with them since we couldn’t speak one another’s languages.

Dennis, our guide and interpreter, may have been to blame, as he was often in the bar and may have been liberal in his translation. However, one evening he invited us to his cousin’s birthday party. This seemed strange, as we had no idea who his cousin was, or even what sex they were. However, the older members of the expedition decided that in the interests of Anglo-Chinese relations we should go. So Arthur C Clarke, Tony Harrison, Stuart Page and myself were whisked away in a biscuit tin of a taxi to the scene of celebration. Actually “whisked” may not be the best word to describe this type of journey; rattled, bounced and several unprintable words come to mind instead. However, we arrived safely and were taken to an upstairs room in the Chinese equivalent of a Public House. The party was in full swing, the birthday girl turning out to be one of the strong-fingered lasses from the hotel bar. We were plied with food and drink, and I must say I do not know how my fellow travellers managed to consume so much and dance with so many girls in such a short space of time. Personally, as is my wont, I sat quietly in a corner

contemplating the similarities between Chinese culture and our own.

All too soon the party was over. Actually it wasn't, it was simply that it was past our bedtime, and even I had had a few drinks for the road. We said our grateful farewells and departed for the hotel, opting to walk to savour the night air and keep ourselves fit at the same time. Anyway, we couldn't find a biscuit tin for love nor money, so we had no choice. As we eventually approached the hotel Arthur C Clarke dropped a bombshell of a suggestion. He had spotted a hairdressers shop across the road which was still open. "Let's go for a shave with an open razor!" he said. No way, I thought, only a silly bugger would opt for a shave with an open razor after midnight.

Twenty minutes later I was having a shave with an open razor after midnight. It is remarkable how quickly you feel sober when a young lady who looks about twelve is scraping the whiskers of your neck with an open razor blade. The world takes on quite a different complexion, and so do your bowels and bladder but we won't go into all of that. Suffice to say it hurt, although there was not a scratch on me. Two good things came of this; I didn't have to shave for two days, and Arthur C paid the bill.

I seem to recall that the next night was our last in Bama County, and the usual feast was held in our honour. We were entertained by our hostess, (who for some reason was referred to as Wayne Rooney, although I wouldn't have given her a red card) on the karaoke machine. These infernal contraptions certainly let you know who your friends are. The rest of the group were so envious of my rendition that they quickly left the room, leaving just Bruce Bensley and myself to carry on. Later someone said he was tone deaf. Being of a sensitive nature I found these remarks rather hurtful, but anyway I hurried after them to join in a visit to the local market and barbeque area. Once I had promised not to sing they seemed willing to let me join them.

Now these market areas are truly amazing. They seem to be the social centres of most Chinese towns. We managed to find a large table and sit down. This was a mistake. Why is it that Chinese chairs seem to have been stolen from the local Infants School? I know that many Chinese are small, but even they have to sit with their chins on their knees. The seats are never big enough for your backside, and in the grand order of things my backside isn't all that big, in fact it's almost non-existent. However, at least we had seats, and something to drink, and plenty to talk about in the adventures of the day

Soon however, we were joined by a party of young ladies, who claimed they were in town to take part in a dance festival which no-one had heard of. One of them produced her card, and it didn't look much like a card about dancing to me. I am told that in London, you could find cards in phone boxes that young ladies of a certain persuasion had left to attract gentlemen admirers, and if I had ever seen one then this card would have reminded me of it. One of the girls claimed to be a teacher, possibly I guess of languages of a Gallic origin, and they were all looking for accommodation. Looking for accommodation after eleven o'clock at night? Someone foolishly told them which hotel we were staying at, and I knew I'd made a mistake as soon as I'd said it. However, we explained that the establishment was full, and after some pleasant conversation we left to get a good nights sleep.

On the way back we passed the dentists. This was an open shop, Chinese style, with the dentists chair almost on the pavement – and it was occupied! This was too good to be true for some of the photographers in the party. The patient was almost strapped in, with his mouth held open by some mediaeval device, and he seemed quite resigned to his fate until he saw the cameras. A strange gurgling sound emitted from his throat, and he wriggled uncontrollably in the chair. The dentist gave us a big smile, probably advertising, and waited until the last flashgun had operated until he continued with his work. The patient got himself under control again and we left him to enjoy the symphony of the drill and headed home.

On arrival at the hotel we were greeted by the party of dancers from the market area. They were at Reception and seemed very glad to see us. The Receptionist seemed to be trying to explain that the hotel was full, and that we were decent British citizens. All of us being chivalrous and gallant gentlemen, we cleared off to bed and left them to it.

The following day we left for Jiang Zhou via Fengshan, but not before the dancers had reappeared at the hotel early in the morning. There we left them, and were later joined by the second team who had flown into China from England a couple of days earlier. Then the serious caving began, and there was precious little time for anything else. We did observe several men for some reason trying to catch and kill a dog by using a spade (the dog escaped) during our stay at Jiang Zhou, John Whalley nearly got arrested for wandering off on his own, Tony Harrison spent an evening trying to hold up the wall of our accommodation and telling everyone how he saw a



pig slaughtered in his honour (he was also slaughtered but in a different way); Ged and Ali got on friendly terms with a bat which seemed to like to share their room; Tony added to our social life when we accompanied him to the local hospital to have his festering wounds dressed (he had been stabbed by a stalagmite), and Tim eventually joined us having forgotten which day he was supposed to fly out on. Apart from all and a bit of caving nothing much happened. Oh, except for the celebrations regarding the award of Geopark Status to the area, and the contribution the previous expedition had made to this achievement, an SRT demonstration, and other minor matters.

Anyway, the next real adventure was the journey back to Guilin. We all piled into what appeared to be the local bus from Fengshan, and set off up the hairpins to cross the mountains. At a suitable well chosen venue, where the road was crumbling away into the abyss below, the bus broke down. It seemed that the throttle cable was broken, but the two drivers fixed it in about half an hour. In fact they "fixed" it in about half an hour on about six other occasions on the journey. If that wasn't bad enough, the bus seemed to get slower, reaching its lowest speed on the motorway. We asked if the driver was tired, but only got the reply "Maybe – I don't know" from our courier Mr. Wang. We seemed to get this reply whatever the question. Ged then asked if the other driver could take over, but Mr. Wang, after making an enquiry, got no response. The other driver looked all right to me, insofar as he was breathing, but that was about all. His main occupation seemed to be "fixing" the throttle cable and occupying a seat.

Then we got lost. At least we managed to turn off the motorway at the wrong junction. It became clear that the exhausted driver was not used to motorways, since he tried to rejoin it by driving up the exit slip road. This produced a certain amount of anxiety, and we politely asked him to stop. Well, not too politely. He had just accomplished this when a coach came hurtling off the motorway towards us, the driver zooming passed with an astonished look on his face. Our driver, who thus far had been reluctant to take the advice of his now petrified passengers (it was far worse than the shave) now decided that perhaps he was wrong and so we eventually managed, after one or two dodgy manoeuvres, to set off in the right direction.

The result of all this was that our speed now decreased to about twenty miles per hour, and to add insult to injury the throttle cable broke again just as we entered Guilin.

Well, to cut a long story short we eventually arrived in Beijing to catch our flight the following day.

After being efficiently taken to our hotel, we departed on public transport to see Tianamen Square. This proved interesting, especially the tube journey, which was the ultimate in squashed in passengers.. I felt sorry for Emma, who spent part of the journey with her nose pressed into my armpit. (I was hanging on grimly to a strap) Understandably this was not deliberate, just due to the unrelenting crush, but I was impressed by the length of time during which she held her breath. Ten minutes and turning bright blue must be a record, and even then she managed to smile before she passed out. Actually she didn't, which was a miracle, and is testament to her fitness and staying power. I must remember to wash both armpits in future.

A pleasant visit to Tianamen Square followed, where the only English the guards spoke was "No photo!" Why this was so I can't imagine, unless they were guarding state secrets or had told their wives they were doing something else, Anyway, we took their photos when they weren't looking, so it served them right. What harm we can do with these photos I'm not sure, but I'm thinking of deleting mine in case they catch up with me.

Now, you may ask, if you are still awake, what has all this to do with belly dancing? Well, we were taken to one of those bars which are dimly lit, and we had a few drinks. Why these places are dimly lit I don't know – don't they clean them or something? We took a few silly photos, and then went next door to what I think was a Lebanese restaurant. There was a stage, which I sat with my back to. During the meal, which was excellent, a belly dancer began to perform, but I couldn't see much and of course I wasn't really interested. I remember thinking she was attractive from the neck down, but I didn't know she was also a mind reader. Next thing I know she's dragging me up on to the stage to dance along side her. I knew watching those educational videos would be useful. Somehow I survived, and crept back to the safety of my companions whose sympathy I knew I could rely on. Sympathy? They had only taken loads of photos, and to my horror Emma announced that she had taken a video of the whole proceedings. Copies of this are now for sale on E-bay, and Ann Summers (whoever she may be) apparently has taken an interest. Quite who benefits from all of this I'm not sure, as I haven't seen the video yet, but I am still paying the blackmail money and telling my wife I was Shanghaied. In Beijing."

*Bill is doing fine and hopes to be back on the hill before to long.*

# SPORT CLIMBING & FUN CAVING IN NORTH-WEST BULGARIA

John & Valerie Middleton

*The Stara Planina mountains are a little visited region of Eastern Europe and deserve to be better known. Our account below hopefully shows a few of the adventures that can be had in some spectacular settings.*

## INTRODUCTION.

The main Stara Planina range of hills and mountains extend from the Serbian border in the north-west of Bulgaria for some 400km eastwards towards the city of Sliven.

The highest point of 2,376 m is reached on the Kaloferska Planina at the 'Botev' summit and at least a further six peaks exceed 2,000 m.

This very variable but always stunningly beautiful range holds the highest concentration of rock climbing and caving sites to be found in the country as well as

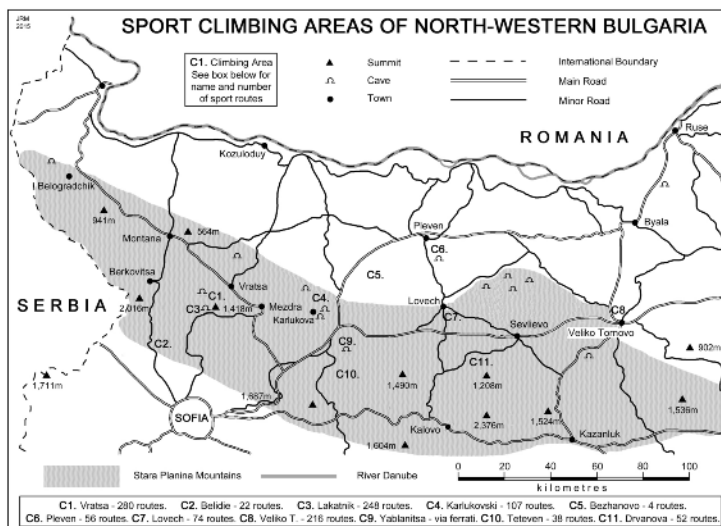
hosting a multitude of walks and outstanding natural features. Included in the latter are the dramatic sandstone/conglomerate rock formations of Belogradchik; the awe inspiring limestone gorges created by the Iskar river and its tributaries; the natural wonderland of the Vrachanski Nature Park; the many amazing waterfalls such as Borav Kamak (60 m), Krushuna and Hotnishka to name but a few and finally the ever present flora and fauna.

Human history is also well catered for as might be expected from a state situated at a crossroads between Europe and the Orient. Some of the earliest and most notable records are the remarkable Neolithic paintings and bones found within 'Magura Cave'. This is also an impressive cave in its own right with 2,500 m of well decorated large chambers and passageways. After 1,000 BC the region slowly developed into the centre of the Thracian civilisation until it was then overtaken by the Roman Empire in AD 50. Later conquests were made by the Goths, the Huns, the Slavs and finally the Ottomans who remained in power for 400 years until 1880. The current local population of the north-west tends to be rural, traditional and very friendly but with little infrastructure for foreign tourism. Additionally the Bulgarian language and Cyrillic script can present problems for travellers as few people speak any Western European languages and even fewer Cyrillic signs have translations. However some, like us, would also consider this to be part of the adventure!

The above temptations plus the arrival of yet another new climbing guide (see reference section) spurred us into organising an early season exploratory excursion to be based in the regions around Vratsa and Lovech. The notes that follow only refer to the actual sites we managed to explore. There are at least a further 4,280 caves and 10 more climbing regions with 1,100 sports routes to experience!

## THE VRATSA AREA.

Vratsa is a large town with a population of around 65,000 persons. It is situated idyllically beneath the craggy sides of the 'Vrachanski' mountains which rise for over 1,000 m above it. The town itself is a mixture of old and new, some good and some poor, but it is lively and can supply all a traveller needs. It has several reasonable hotels and a thriving café and bar culture that does unfortunately seem to prefer fast food to good restaurants – the hotels being an only exception.



## CLIMBING.

The major climbing region of the Stara Planina is to be found just a ten minute drive from the town centre and is simply called 'Vratsa'. It is reached via the spectacular Vratsata Pass which contains an Alpine Club hut, a small campsite, a crystal clear stream, parking and endless cliffs with over 500 routes up to 400 m in length! More than 250 of these are sports routes and most can be reached within just ten minutes of the road – definitely a climbing paradise! Moving upstream from the Alpine Hut there is only one cliff on the left-hand side and this is really a small isolated tower. It is called *Little Vrattsata* and has 33 routes up to 40 m in length with grades varying from 4+ to 7a. It is an excellent place to start as the rock is good, the bolts well-spaced and there is a shelter to relax in nearby. As always the grades seem quite hard to begin with and there are the odd polished holds. On the opposite side of the road is *Big Vratsa* where some tough routes start rather frighteningly at the very edge of the road whilst a few metres further on and moving away from the traffic are the very amenable *Bezengi* and *Bezengi Slab* with 26 lines.

The finest but also the most popular is 'Bezengi' itself which extends for 160 m in six fine pitches that never exceed 6a+ although some harder pitch variations can be made. More climbing areas extend upwards and away from the road but we did not have time to sample these. Away from the sectors mentioned it is necessary to check the guide book carefully as many routes may also require some traditional gear particularly after the first pitch.

The second area for climbing we visited was 'Lakatnik'. This is also within the Vrachanski Nature Park and to get there requires a 45 minute drive up the stunning Iskar River Gorge (in fact it took us well over 90 minutes as we had to make so many stops). 'Lakatnik' has five different regions, 35 sectors and 429 sports routes and if anything the situations are even more spectacular than at 'Vratsa'. Most are above the Iskar Gorge and have, unfortunately, a 20-30 minute walk in or rather 'upwards'.

We first went to the region *Alpiyska poliyana* whose access conveniently starts from a long lay-by on the main road opposite a solitary but large restaurant. Directly next to the restaurant a good footpath leads diagonally up the gorge side to a shoulder where there is a small hut and wild camp ground. Almost next to this is the first climbing sector of 13 fine routes up to 28 m in length in a beautiful open setting.

More sectors continue round to the right-hand end and directly above the gorge giving it a particularly high exposure factor! We have to admit that we stayed on the first section.

Again the rock and bolting was excellent.

The second region we visited was a five minute drive away in the even more beautiful *Petrenitsa* valley where a long wall hosted 13 routes that were obviously too hard for us. However other compensations were found in a small cave, flower filled mini meadows and a cascading stream.

Our final climbing site was *Prohodna*. This is an enormous cave passageway situated close to the village of Karlukova which in turn is an hour's drive from Vratsa. Around the entrance and exit and within are 87 sports routes ranging from 4b to 9a!! We did not climb here but did come to visit the cave – see also under the caving section.

## CAVING.

Within the Vratsa region more than 500 caves have been explored with the most productive area being that within the rugged Vrachanski Mountains. Caves found here include the second deepest in Bulgaria with *Barkite* 14 at -357 m as well as the 7km long *Temnata Dupka*. A further area about one hour's drive east from Vratsa is that around Karlukova village. The Iskar River has once more carved out an impressive 6 km long gorge and has influenced the development of karst and caves on both sides.

The extent of the Karlukova side is around 76 km<sup>2</sup>.

Caves here tend towards massive volume chambers and passageways. Our third area in this region was situated about 15 km north of Vratsa close to the village of Ciren. There are again many interesting caves and dolines are very obvious on the surface. A sample of the more interesting caves that we visited were as follows –

### 1. *Bankovitsa*. Karlukova.

Length 430 m. depth -50 m. A cave situated on the same plateau as *Prohodna* and *Svirchovitsa*. It commences with a descent on some rickety steps into a chamber 22 m across and 12 m high. At the far side more rickety steps reach upwards onto a broad ledge separating two further chambers and several hundred metres of large passageway. Unfortunately this passage is particularly muddy due to a small stream that can also flood.

2. *Bozhiya Most*. Ciren.

Length 443 m. Depth +12 m, -3 m. This short but very spectacular cave is renowned for its 128 m long arch over the Lilyashki Potok River. The entrance is 30m wide and 20m high and continues only slightly less to an exit 39 m wide and 11 m high! A third large entrance occurs about one third of the way through the cave.

There is also a 189 m long side passage within the tunnel found about 4 m above the stream. This has been given the additional name of *Prilipnata peshtera* due to a large colony of eight different bat species.

Above the arch are the remains of a 10<sup>th</sup> century fortress known as 'Gradishte'. A definite 'must' place to visit although we did find it quite a challenge to locate!

3. *Ledenika*. Vratsa. Length 226 m. Depth -16 m. This cave is reached through the Vratsata Pass and is situated at an altitude of 830 m in a beautiful wooded clearing. It is a show cave that is unusually well signposted throughout the Vratsa region and contains several large chambers and some very good formations.

4. *Ponora*. Ciren. Length 3,497 m. Depth -47 m. A fine sporting stream cave developed at the end of a blind valley. After the terminal siphon, which has now been dived, the water emerges again at the *Zhabokrek* resurgence and follows a forested valley as the River Lilyashki Potok to the impressive 128 m long tunnel of *Bozhiya Most* (see above).

5. *Prohodna*. Karlukova. Length 240 m. Depth -50 m. A truly amazing karstic tunnel with an entrance 29 m high by 35 m wide; an exit 42 m high by 20 m wide and an interconnecting 240 m passageway never less than 33 m high. There are two skylights in the roof which mean that no artificial light is needed for exploration. The exit leads into a vertical sided valley that was obviously once a continuation of the cave. It now abounds with a rich flora and fauna. Above this valley stands the new "Peter Tranteev National Speleological Society" office and Activity Centre.

6. *Svirchivitsa*. Length 231 m. Depth -39 m. A dry (at the time of our visit) stream bed leads down several cascades to a 10 m diameter shaft some 20 m deep from which a large passage can be seen leading off (not descended).

7. *Temnata Dupka*. Lakatnik. Length 7,000 m. Depth +33 m/-21 m. This very impressive system full of large passageways and a sizeable stream is reached

from the same footpath that leads to the *Alpiyska polyana* climbing sector. Its entrance, which measures around 20 m across and 10 m in height is almost directly above the previously mentioned roadside restaurant.

The stream normally resurges slightly lower down the cliff but in very wet conditions it can exit the through the main entrance. The cave fauna of 94 different species is the richest in the country.

#### THE LOVECH AREA.

Lovech is attractively situated on the Osum River and is surrounded by limestone edged hills. It is again a mixture of interesting old buildings and alleyways and not so interesting modern features with a history dating back to Thracian times. It has good facilities and makes a very satisfactory base from which to explore a fascinating region full of caves, canyons and waterfalls. With reference to the latter an excursion to the remote Honitshka falls and valley is a unique experience with its 'Disneysque' cartoon style wooden ladders and walkways. This site is an hour's drive away and close to Veliko Tarnova. Also nearby are the interesting remains of 'Nikopolis ad Istrum' a Roman town dating back to AD106.

#### CAVING.

Almost immediately to the east of Lovech is the Devetashka Plateau. This is perhaps the best known and justifiably most popular karst area in Bulgaria. It is a raised area of gently rolling hills with little exposed limestone. Closer inspection however reveals that there are some 670 dolines (Peter Beron) as well as many depressions, dry valleys and open caves in a beautiful countryside that is easily explored. Around the edge of the plateau a number of particularly fine resurgence caves are to be found whilst higher up impressive chasms and large cave entrances occur with regularity.

A further interesting area is situated around the village of Emen in the direction of Veliko Tarnova to the south-east of Devetashka. The dominant feature here is the very beautiful Emen Gorge which at times takes on the form of a 'slot canyon'. A number of sizeable caves are known here.

8. *Devetashka*. Devetashka. Length 2,442 m. This resurgence cave rivals *Prohodna* for the vast size of its initial passageway. It commences with an arched entrance 30 m wide by 35 m high and becomes progressively larger until an obvious chamber is reached of 73 m by 48 m and with a volume of

800,000m<sup>3</sup>. Three large skylights make exploration of the first 350 m possible without any artificial lighting.

Many archaeological discoveries have been made and several sensitive areas have been fenced off. Exploration of the further reaches requires full 'wet' cave gear. A small charge is made to enter the cave.

9. *Emenskata Peshtera*. Emen.

Length 3,113 m. Depth -40 m. Situated 10 m up a cliff face at the commencement of the Emen Gorge this large cave is accessed up some concrete steps. These steps lead into a series of very large chambers which in the past were used by Bronze Age, Iron Age and Middle Age peoples. During the past century it has also been used for cultivating mushrooms, a cheese factory, by the military and finally as a restaurant! A few interesting remnants of these uses still remain and the view from the entrance is impressive as is a walk along the gorge edge track above.

10. *Futoua*. Karpachevo, Devetashka.

Length 700 m. Depth -10 m. This interesting cave is reached via a driveable dirt road from the centre of Karpachevko village. It has the usual large entrance and the ensuing equally large passageway can be followed easily for over 400 m.

11. *Garvanitsa*. Gorsko Slivovo, Devetashka. Length 273 m. Depth -50 m. Situated just a few hundred metres from the main Karpachevo to Gorsko Slivovo road this obvious shaft in a field measures some 34 m by 17 m across and 34 m deep. The local villagers have built some slightly dubious steps and a ladder that allows access to the bottom. From here a short walking passage soon terminates on the upper side whilst a wide passage slopes downwards to a large chamber 60 m by 30 m by 19 m high. The lower part of this room is particularly muddy.

12. *Maarata*. Krushuna, Devetashka.

Length 1,995 m. This cave and the nearby *Urushka Maara* cave are both found within the grounds of the Krushuna waterfalls for which a small entry charge is made. *Maarata* cave can be reached by following the upstream left-hand branch of the river through attractive woodland and past many fine tufa cascades for 25 minutes.

The stream emerges from a 3 m high and 6 m wide cave entrance and the subsequent passage can be followed for several hundred sporting metres past many small waterfalls and good formations. Swimming or a dinghy is then needed to proceed

further. The return trip down the valley, which takes a different route, passes an interesting 20 metre high cliff with a dozen bolted sports routes on it.

13. *Mandrata*. Chavdarts, Devetashka.

Length 530 m. Depth -2 m. A narrow lane that leads uphill from the main road between the Aleksandrovo to Chavdarts villages terminates directly outside the 12 m wide and 8 m high entrance to this impressive cave. Apparently it was once used as a cheese making factory and the entry chamber, which measures an impressive 81 m by 35 m by 15 m high, can be driven directly into by any vehicle on the concrete floor. Headlights create a particularly surrealistic effect. Two galleries then extend from this chamber, one is wet and 165 m in length and the other large and dry for 103 m.

14. *Stalbitsa*. Karpachevo, Devetashka.

Length 145 m. Depth -48 m. This worthwhile cave is reached initially down the same rough dirt road that leads to *Futoua* cave. However where the track to the latter turns right the entrance for *Stalbitsa* continues straight on and then takes the next turn left (we detail this as it took us quite some time to find). At the end of the road is a clearing, a small shelter and the shaft. Again the local villagers have made access possible by installing a relatively stable set of steps. These lead into a massive and steeply descending circular chamber 62 m in diameter and up to 15 m high. At the bottom are several trickles of water, some reasonable gours and a large still growing stalagmite boss.

15. *Urushka Maara*. Krushuna, Devetashka.

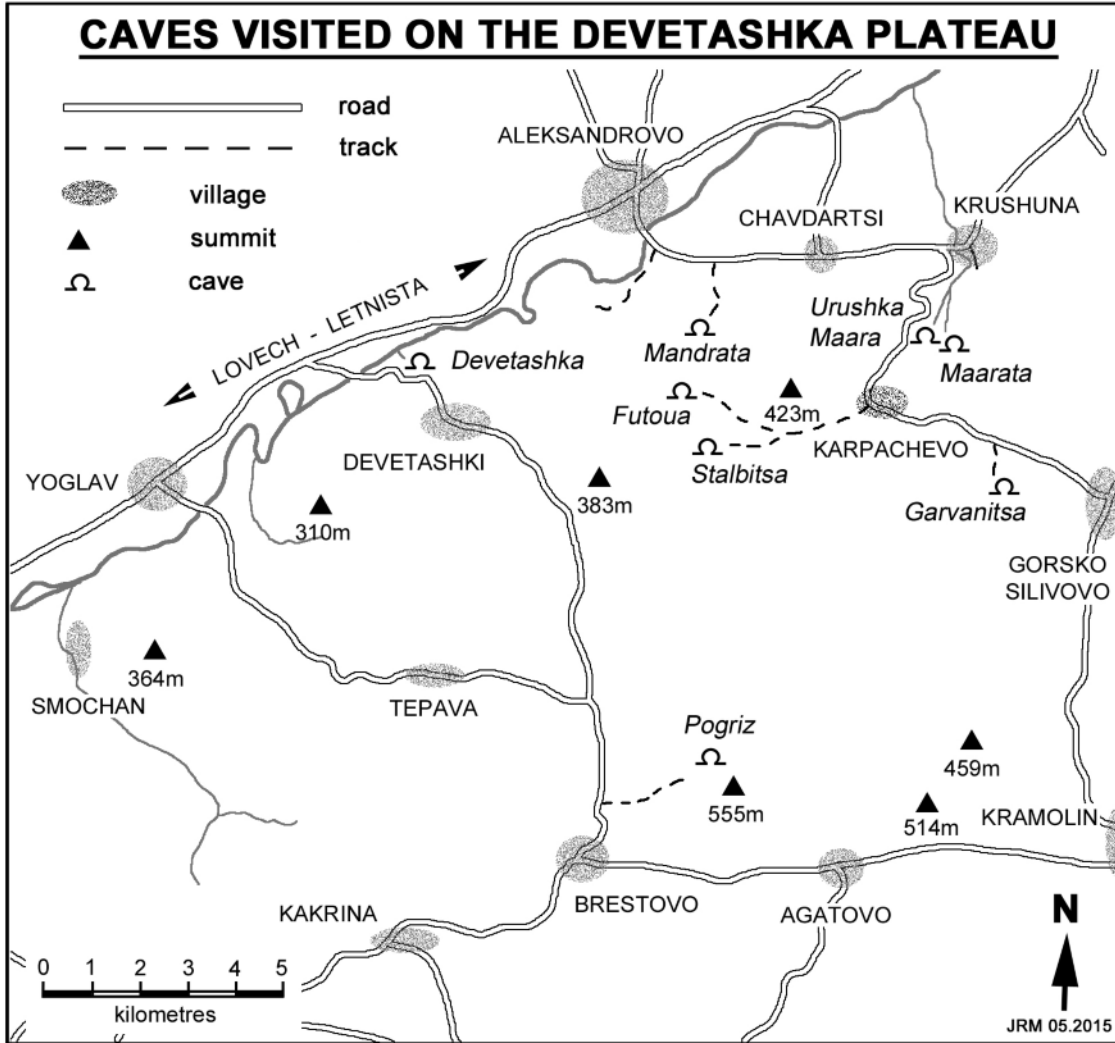
Length 1,600 m. We only visited the entrance of this stream cave that is situated not too far from *Maarata* cave. It is reached by taking the right-hand branch of the Krushuna Waterfall stream. The opening measures 10 m by 4 m high and the ensuing passage is reputed to soon end in a siphon. This can be bypassed and there is subsequently a reasonable stream-way with good formations.

### SOME CAVE STATISTICS.

Karst terrain covers 4,980 km<sup>2</sup> of the Stara Planina; this is 19.2% of the total land area (Peter Beron et al). Within this there are 4,300 recorded caves with 60 exceeding 100 m in depth and 65 exceeding 1,000 m in length.

The region is divided into 19 sub-regions for clarity.

Access to all the caves that we visited was on land that we were free to roam upon although we did become lost several times. Few fenced areas seemed to exist except on the lower agricultural plains.





ALPIYSKA POLIYANA  
LAKATNIK

PROHODNA  
CAVE



DEVETASHKI  
CAVE

## THE DEEPEST CAVES

1. Raichova dupka - *Cherni Osam, Lovech* - 387m.
2. Barkite 14 - *Vratsa* -356m.
3. Yamata na Kipilovo – *Sliven* -350m.
4. Tizoin Gubesh - *Sofia* -320m.
5. Beliar Gorno Ozirovo - *Lovech* -282m.
6. Drangaleshkata dupka Mugla - *Smolian* - 255m.
7. Lednika - *Kotel, Sliven* -242m.
8. Malkata yama, Cherni Osam - *Lovech* - 232m.
9. Mugliviyat snyag Tvarditsa - *Burgas* -230m.
10. Muglivata - *Kotel, Sliven* -220m.
11. Kazite Zimevica - *Sofia* -205m.
12. Vihren Bansko - *Blagoevgrad* -200m.

## SOURCES:

Map. Bulgaria. International Travel Maps. 1:375,000. *Country-wide coverage but in our travelled region of the north-west we did find a number of inaccuracies.*

Map. Devitashki Plateau and Nearby. 1:100,000. *Whilst trying to decipher a map on a notice board in the village of Karpachevo an elderly local man from a nearby café obviously understood our problem and presented us with this map which is produced by the local 'Devataki Plateau Association'. It efficiently shows nearby caves, archaeological sites and others but mainly in Bulgarian. They also have a website which is still under construction and partly in English at [www.devetakiplateau.org](http://www.devetakiplateau.org)*

Map. Lovech. Domino Publishing. *One side covers the area to the east of the town at 1:165,000 with tourist details whilst the other side details Lovech town at 1:10,000 – excellent but we could only find this in Lovech.*

Map. Vratsa. Domino Publishing. *One side covers the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park at 1:80,000 with tourist details whilst the other side details Vratsa Town at 1:10,000 – excellent but we could only find this in Vratsa.*

Nikolay Petkov. 2014. *Vratsa Climbing Guide*. Everguide Ltd., 320pp. *The definitive climbing guide for the Vratsa region with over 500 routes described 250 of which are sports routes (these numbers are now considerably increased). Further up to date information, including all other national climbing areas, can be found at [www.climbingguidebg.org](http://www.climbingguidebg.org)*

Peter Beron, Trifon Daalieu & Alexey Jalov. 2006. *Caves and Speleology in Bulgaria*. Pensoft Publishers, Bulgarian Federation of Speleology & the National Museum of Natural History – Sofia. 507pp. *A very comprehensive publication from which the majority of cave statistics and dimensions mentioned in our article are quoted from.*

## THE LONGEST CAVES

1. Duhlata - *Bosnek, Sofia* 18,000m.
2. Orlova Chucka - *Pepelina Ruse* 13,437m.
3. Imamova dupka - *Yagodina, Plovdiv* 8,501m.
4. Temnata dupka – *Lakatnik, Sofia* 7,000m.
5. Vreloto Bosnek - *Sofia* 5,300m.
6. Goliamata Balabanova - *Komshtiza, Sofia* 4,800m.
7. Prikazna - *Bourgass* 4,782m.
8. Boninskata - *Krushuna, Lovech* 4,530m.
9. Anduka Drianovo - *Lovech* 4,000m.
10. Tizoin - *Gubesh, Sofia* 3,599m.
11. Bacho Kiro - *Drianovo, Lovech* 3,500m.



# UK MEETS REPORT

## LOW HALL GARTH, LITTLE LANGDALE

Jan 9 -11

With the meet following fairly closely on the Christmas and New Year holidays, combined with a wonky Web system for booking, the uptake was slow, resulting in the meet caterer, Alan Clare, ringing round for support. The final attendance of 17 was comfortable, unlike years ago, and before the barn, when the club took over the upper LHG cottage and High Hall Garth as well, and catered for 40 or so.

The weather forecast was for strong winds and showers, and the Friday night journey was very wet with the danger of floods and aqua-planing. There had been some sort of incident on the Kendal bypass and it was closed. However, the Little Langdale ford had not encroached onto the lane, and although the lane was again in a fairly sorry state, the pools approaching the hut were not completely flooding the lane.

Alan put out nibbles, followed later by a pie and vegetables and a mince pie, when the two late arrivals arrived.

Saturday morning started in the dark with a full English breakfast being served before 8 am. There was a distinct mood of keeping to low level walks, but this may well have been banter. The catering party were time limited and not going high, leaving me to accept this alternative, tag on to a party which I would certainly slow down, or make my own way. I managed to persuade the president and Carol to join me on an 11 mile walk from the hut to Stang End, Hodge Close, Tarn Hows, a drink at the Black Bull in Coniston, when most of the rain came down, and back to LHG via Tilberthwaite and the upper lane coming down to High Hall Garth. We had suffered a flurry of hail and strong wind while out, but had quite a pleasant day.

By coincidence, my party had had their lunch break at the hound kennels folly on Monk Coniston Estate not far from Coniston at about 1 pm, when MB, MS, PE, TJ and PC and RT, these last two only arriving that morning, had passed there over an hour before. This party had started earlier, and from the Tilberthwaite valley had traversed the side of Wetherlam to descend to the copper mines, down to Coniston and reverse the route of my party, but without seeing us.

The party which arrived back well into the dark, consisted of RC ,MC, GAS & MT. They had crossed the valley to the bottom of the Wrynose pass and

walked up to the Three Shires Stone. They had then taken the path to Red Tarn and there forked off up to the top of the Pike of Blisco. They were in very wild weather and were nearly blown off. To compound their problems, the leisure services steps down towards Langdale, very nice for the summer tourists, were iced up. They descended to the ODG, and another coincidence, met up with IC, DB & AC, who had driven from the hut to do a short walk in Rydal and then park at the NT car park at the New Dungeon Ghyll before walking to the ODG.

The evening meal was at about 7 pm preceded by nibbles. There was a soup and roll, shepherds pie and vegetables, a mince pie and cream and cheese and biscuits. No-one went out as the Three Shires Hotel was closed for staff holidays. Alan had made a good bulk purchase of beers, and cider. There was no entertainment, but it was midnight before all retired.

The Sunday breakfast was a repeat at about the same time. The morning was dry but overcast and threatening. Of those who went out, GAS and I just walked via the Slater's bridge to the village, back across the footbridge to Stang End, then Hodge Close, Tilberthwaite and the lower route via the ford back to LHG. We were amazed to see that almost all of this lane, which once had a series of rock steps making it virtually impossible for a normal car, was now a flat concrete surface. It is only open for authorised vehicles, but easy walking and could be used by a wheel chair. We were caught by the rain only yards from the hut. PC, RT and MS came in like drowned rats about half an hour later. They had crossed to the road and walked up to Blea Tarn, and then traversed Lingmoor Fell to meet the way from Elterwater and cross the slater's bridge back to the hut. MB, PE and TJ went over to the Duddon valley and parked at Ulpha amid a myriad of hunt follower's vehicles and onlookers. They did an 11 mile circuit over Stickle Pike and Caw, returning via Natty Bridge, the River Lickle and the delightfully named Hovel Knott. They had a good day encountering very high winds on Caw and rain on the return leg.

F. W.

In attendance

John Whalley (President)

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Carol Whalley        | Arthur Salmon   |
| Peter Chadwick       | Michael Smith   |
| Alan Clare           | Richard Taylor  |
| Ian Crowther         | Martyn Trasler  |
| Robert Crowther      | Mick Borroff    |
| Michael Crowther (G) | Dave Brooks (G) |
| Peter Elliott        | Frank Wilkinson |
| Tim Josephy          | John Jenkin     |

## **BRAEMAR, SCOTLAND**

**Jan 29 - Feb 1**

Recent winter meets have not had much luck with the weather and, given the forecast, this years winter meet at Braemar wasn't expected to break the trend. Setting off on Thursday, thoughts were that at least the spacious Youth Hostel would provide a comfy space to watch the snow fall.

Friday turned out to be better than expected with only(!) strong winds hitting the upper slopes. After some last minute purchases from the shops in Braemar, albeit sans discounts, David, Chris, Richard and Richard drove up to the Glenshee ski resort to climb The Cairnwell, Carn a' Gheoidh and Carn Aosda. On the way down, strong winds practically blew them into the Cairnwell cafe for a tipple.

David and his two guests made the most of the day with an impressive walk up Ben Macdui from the Lin of Dee, arriving back well after nightfall, and most of dinner.

Andy braved skiing up Glen Callaterthe before being beaten back by the wind. Although Andy managed to take some good video of his trip, user error led to a few entertaining shots of the ground.

The more sensible members stayed out of wind in the valleys in and around Braemar. Tim, Mike, Ian and Mick headed round a northern loop through Glen Lui and Glen Quoich. Harvey, John and Carol to the Keiloch estate.

We woke on Saturday to a fresh covering of snow and even higher winds on the tops. At least the red squirrels kept us entertained feeding outside the window and playing in the snow while we washed up the morning dishes.

Not to be defeated by the weather, everyone still made it outside. Tim, David and Ian walked up the valley West of Braemar, keeping sheltered in and around the woods. Harvey, John and Carol headed in a similar direction to the Mar Lodge Estate. Richard and Chris, determined to walk up something, settled on the adjacent Morrone. Mick and Andy managed to drive round to Inverey and walked up Glen Ey. They were rewarded with the sight of an eagle at the valley head near the ruined Altanour Lodge. Michael and Richard also headed towards Glen Ey from the hostel on skis to see the Colonel's Bed - a ledge within the Ey Burn gorge where, after the battle of Killiecrankie, John Farquharson the 3rd of Inverey (the "Black Colonel") hid from the Redcoats. The hiding spot must be good, as neither they nor the Redcoats found it.

Saturday night proved to be particularly lively, with entertainment provided by folk songs from some of the other guests. After discovering their limited range of tunes, Harvey showed his diverse range of skills, took up the guitar and ensured the evenings entertainment continued.

Overnight snow meant a tiring dig out of the car park on Sunday morning - even with some help from the Mountain rescue team based next door to the hostel. With the Glenshee pass closed it was to be a long detour round by Aberdeen for us all to travel South.

Thank you to David Hick for organising the meet and providing a much appreciated great tasting food menu.

RS

Attendance:

John Whalley ( President)

Mick Borroff

Iain Gilmour

David Hick

Chris Hilton

Tim Josephy

David Large

Anca Pordea (Guest)

Niall Buckley (Guest)

Harvey Lomas

Michael Smith

Richard Smith

Andy Syme

Richard Taylor

Carol Whalley

## **BRYN HAFOD WALES**

**Feb 20 - 22**

In future attendance at this meet will be mandatory for any member contemplating a visit to Greenland. It could then be, inaccurately, described as a 'warm up' meet.

On the Friday Richard Dover explored the quarry above Coed Cwm-du. Meanwhile a Yorkshire contingent of Mike Smith, Peter Chadwick, Mick Borroff and Richard Taylor were enticed into one MS's afternoon 'strolls' which entailed ascents of Moel Llyfnant (751) and Arenig Fawr (854). On the latter they were rewarded by views through the mist and the opportunity to pay homage to the US crew of the Flying Fortress who had perished there in August 1943 and to examine some of the wreckage. With the assistance of Trip Advisor they then decided eat at the well-reviewed Buckley Arms Hotel in Dinas Mawddwy.

Arriving slightly early they were greeted with a sign on the door promising 'opening at 6.30'. An advance party was sent to review the menu but returned crestfallen but amused as the lady in charge confirmed that the opening time was indeed correct but it didn't open until Easter and she had seen no one since Christmas! They repaired to the Brigand Inn and were happily told that they were full until

8.30. Yorkshire charm was applied and they were soon tucking in to an excellent meal.

En route to the Hut they passed The Red Lion and caught sight of some familiar grey hair (sparse) through the window. They decided to identify it and were welcomed by the mellifluous sounds of Ian Crowther, Alan Clare, John Jenkin and the Whalleys who were harmonising with the welsh conversation at the bar. This was hushed somewhat as AC lapsed into distinctly non-PC language in telling one of his tales at full voice.

John and Carol were then commissioned to take the lead to the hut, which was accomplished, remarkably, without incident or further upset to the natives. On arrival Tim and Richard Josephy and Richard Dover were found huddled round the sole source of heat, but in good spirits. Richard retired to his tent so that we would be undisturbed by any possibility of his snoring.

At breakfast it was discovered that the water supply had ceased. All hurriedly donned their walking boots but Tim was too slow and was 'volunteered' (with plenty of helpful advice) to unblock the filter as part of his early morning feet-washing ritual. This only revealed another blockage in an underground pipe, which was successfully bypassed by RJ using hose borrowed from the nearby barn.

After this excitement it was agreed that two parties would traverse the ridge of Aran Fawddwy from either end. Peter Chadwick volunteered his limousine and after a pre-hire check, keys were handed to Nick Welch, Tim and Richard D who were to start from Pandy. MS, MB, PRC and RMT ascended from the hut to Glasgwm (780) in a blizzard, thence to Aran Fawddwy (905), Aran Benllyn (885), crossed with the other party and descended into the open arms of The Eagles Inn at LLanuwhllyn to be greeted by the local football team who were celebrating their 13-0 victory.

After a thorough inspection of the car, Peter then drove them directly back over Bwlch y Groes (545) which had existed since medieval times. The other party met Richard J on the top of Aran Fawddwy and they descended together. Aran Fawddwy was also ascended by John and Carol.

Meanwhile to the south Messrs Crowther, Clare and Jenkin were nurturing good relations with the natives at Maes-glas-bach under the highest waterfall in Wales.

We all returned to the 'warmth' of the hut and an excellent dinner provided by Richard J.

We then repaired to the sitting room where the seats had been artfully arranged so that all could

benefit equally from the warmth of the fire carefully built up by Alan. Peter entertained us with tales of the burghers of Ilkley and their quaint custom of vole kicking. Alan provided some of his jokes ... as we all drifted off to sleep in the warmth.

The forecast for Sunday was rain and in this we were not disappointed. A small party of Mike, Peter, Mick, Tim and Richard's D and T ascended Maesglase (674) in wet snow and made a descent avoiding the non-open access land.

An excellent meet and a hut well worthy of a return in late spring or summer.

#### **Attending**

John Whalley (President)  
Richard Josephy ( Leader)  
Mick Borroff  
Peter Chadwick  
Alan Clare  
Ian Crowther  
Richard Dover  
John Jenkin

Tim Josephy  
Mike Smith  
Richard Taylor  
Nick Welch  
Carol Whalley

## **CRIANLARICH, SCOTLAND**

### **Mar 12 - 15**

On the Thursday afternoon the further we travelled north the heavier the rain fell. At times, the road along Loch Lomond, resembled a burn. A brief stop at The Drovers Inn afforded a spectacular view of the Falls of Falloch and the heavily swollen river of the same name.

We soon arrived at Inverardran; this comfortable and well appointed Hut is owned by the Ochils Mountaineering Club. The kitchen was extended a few years ago providing a dining area and somewhere convivial to sit and chat in addition to the rather cramped sitting room.

Crianlarich now benefits from a newly completed by-pass, this rather grim scar of exposed shale will take many years to soften.

Ten places were booked with all parties arriving by the end of the evening and by which time the rain had eased. Despite the less than propitious conditions the forecast was good and preparations were made for an early start.

Friday dawned with blue skies and little or no breeze. The President, CW and HL headed east to Ben Lawers. This extensive ridge has much to commend it. MS and RS stayed a little closer to home and traversed Ben More, Stob Binnein and then found the energy to return via Stob Creagach.

The remainder of the meet, with the benefit of two vehicles traversed Aonach Eagach. The traverse took a lengthy 7 to 8 hours, in part due to the mixed condition of the snow and also to Hilton's request for a rope to drop

off Am Bodach and to negotiate the uppermost pinnacle. We were the second party on the hill followed by another group of six.

The first party by happy coincidence was Adele Pennington, a local guide and friend of PE. Adele had taken time off from her busy schedule to pair up with a friend who is soon to celebrate her 72nd birthday. Throughout the day we were treated to an extensive panoramic view, in particular to the vast and intricate range of Bidean across the way.

AS as Meet Leader arranged the catering which was first class although the quantities would have served a full Company rather than our modest assembly. On Thursday evening the Hut had played host to two chaps from Liverpool en-route to the CIC Hut and another gentleman from Cumbria who had set himself the challenge of ascending all the Munros in winter. To date he had failed to reach several summits due to the appalling conditions that have prevailed this season. Friday evening saw the arrival of the Inverness MC, a garrulous crew.

Saturday dawned fair. The President and CW headed for the Pap of Glencoe while HL floated around old haunts on Stob Coire nan Lochan. MS ascended Beinn a Chrulaiste to the north west of the Kingshouse. The Gaelic name meaning 'rocky' rather than MS's playful interpretation of harsh and tyrannical. RS accompanied MB on his longstanding quest to reach the southern summit of Buachaille Etive Beag and for completeness, gazed out from the northern summit too. North facing gullies were at risk of avalanche therefore AS and PE headed for a cliff on Beinn an Dothaidh above Bridge of Orchy and ascended West Buttress III+, taking three pitches to complete the climb. Finally RT and CH made a third and successful attempt at locating the summit of Stob Ghabhar above Loch Tulla. Approaching the top via Allt Ghabhar with magnificent views into three deep corries, this multifaceted hill failed to yield a view from the top but nonetheless provide a thoroughly enjoyable walk. The pair noticed on the road between Victoria Bridge and Bridge of Orchy, despite having passed this way a number of times, a small Hotel and bar, The Inveroran Hotel. Having previously been invisible, the casual question as to how long had the Hotel been open received the quick reply 'since 1703', and she didn't mean just after five o'clock but before the Young Pretender and indeed the Old Pretender!

Sunday too dawned bright and clear. Many a weary body reluctantly decided they had little energy remaining to capitalise on the conditions.

This is of course did not apply to the automatons who are RS and MS. The pair intended to wander along the Tarmachan Ridge west of Ben Lawers.

We were fortunate to experience excellent weather, long overdue, our thanks go to the Ochil MC for maintaining an excellent Hut and to AS for organising the meet as well as providing excellent victuals.

Attending

John Whalley (President),  
Andy Syme (Meet Leader)  
Carol Whalley, Peter Elliott  
Harvey Lomas, Mike Smith,  
Richard Smith, Mick Borroff,  
Richard Taylor, Chris Hilton

## **LOWSTERN, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

### **Apr 17 - 19**

On a very sunny weekend, 22 members arrived at Lowstern for a weekend of fun and activity. Robert Crowther led the meet, and might I say, he certainly pulled out all the stops; but we have his wife, Jill, to thank for preparing some delicious food to accompany the cheery atmosphere of a full club hut. She even personalised our apple pie dessert with the YRC logo.

As usual, due to work commitments etc., people arrived at different times and split into like-minded groups.

David Hick, Richard Taylor, Peter Chadwick and John Brown left the hut on Saturday and walked across to Horton, then up Pen-y-gent, back down into Horton again in order to climb Ingleborough; down the other side and back to the hut via Newby. JB left at Sulber Nick for a quieter walk.

On Sunday Peter C, David H and Richard T completed the 3 peaks (in a weekend mind you).

They drove to Albert's house and ascended Wherneside (assisted by starting at 1250ft!). Peter and Richard then walked to Ingleton and descended through the Ingleton Waterfalls trails, fortified by an ice cream from a seller on the lower slopes of Wherneside. They did however balk at the prospect of paying £6 each for the privilege of the descent and escaped up the side of the ravine before the entrance gate. JB was engaged in birdwatching in Trow Gill, and Alan Linford chose to walk along green tracks towards Moughton Tops, Sulber Nick and back again via Crummockdale. He reported that he'd seen a ring ouzel, one of the thrush family, the first he'd seen in years.

On the other hand, Mike Godden's walk took him up Farleton Fell where he caught site of many beautiful flowers including the following: violets, sorrel, vetches etc. and a profusion of colourful butterflies. At the same time, Ian Crowther and John Jenkin walked over to Norber, then across to the café a Feizor, which is always worth a visit, then they returned to Clapham via the Game Cock at Austwick.

Martyn Trasler arrived on Friday and decided to walk to Clapham, then head for Crummock, along the track to Moughton, across the limestone pavement before dropping down into Horton for a spot of lunch. Feeling replete, he ascended Sulber Nick, towards Simon Fell, then up Ingleborough and descended, taking a quick glimpse at Gaping Ghyll, before taking the estate track back to Clapham. Martyn had a full weekend as Saturday found him in Dent walking the Dalesway to Cowgill and back.

Although the weather encouraged one to want to walk the hills, a small group namely: Tim Josephy, Ged Campion, Michael Smith and his son Richard decided to venture underground.

John and I had previously explored Sir Francis Level, a notable lead mine in Swaledale; and so we didn't want to spend such a beautiful day immersed in ice-cold water. Harvey changed into caving gear and disappearing down a few mines, while Eddie walked on his own enjoying the sunshine. John and I ventured along the undulating trail up to Bunton Mine Workings then down to Blakethwaite Smelt Mill where we turned back as time was running out and we didn't want to miss our evening festivities. Sir Francis Level is well worth the effort. Tim takes up the tale.

The idea to visit the Sir Francis lead mine in Swaledale was suggested by the President during the Spanish meet in March. He was very enthusiastic as he spoke of the amazing artefacts to be found there. Several people expressed interest and were still on board by the time of this meet. A large party assembled at Gunnerside and set off for the walk up the gill, first through pleasant woodland then into the atmospheric ruins of the mines. Sadly I have to report there were backsliders and by the time we reached the level only four stalwarts were left to face the music.

The level is blocked not far in and access is by a 20ft air shaft not far away. The water is chest deep within a few paces and remains so for about 300 yards and progress was accompanied by the usual gasped comments about sensitive parts of the anatomy. The level is a mile long, mostly in water varying from knee deep to neck deep. Only a quarter of it is drier.

Interest is maintained by some very beautiful stonework and some colourful formations; also by thoughts of when hypothermia will set in.

At last the end was reached and all marvelled at the size and preservation of the hydraulic engine and winding drum, installed in 1879 for the shaft (now flooded). A rusting cage sits just above the

water and Ged had to pose inside it. The rest watched with interest to see if it would break free and carry him to the bottom 120ft below.

Eventually we faced the return journey which thankfully seemed to go more quickly. We surfaced to meet some of the others who were resting comfortably in the sun. Richard Smith didn't consider he'd had much of a day so we dropped him at the Hill Inn on the way home and he ran back over Ingleborough.

On Sunday the same four met in Kingsdale for a descent of Swinsto Hole. After putting a ladder in the Valley Entrance we walked up onto the moor and soon found Swinsto. Another party of three arrived as we were rigging the first pitch. They were planning to go in and out of the top entrance as they weren't sure of the way. After one pitch they caught us up and asked if they could follow us through "as we seemed to know what we were doing"! It's amazing how gullible people can be.

We all made an enjoyable if watery descent; those who'd been before were agreed that the Long Crawl had definitely got longer. The spray lashed abseils were enjoyed in varying degree, some having a different attitude to water than others. After the low passage from the end of Swinsto the Master Cave is a majestic sight. Even though one knows it is short, it is still a disappointment when the ladder appears. We emerged into the afternoon sun for a chilly change by the road and the end of a pleasant weekend's caving.

Back at the ranch where, after a very hearty meal of Broccoli & Gouda Soup with warm rolls; Chicken Chasseur with delicious vegetables; followed by Apple pie with custard, we sat back and enjoyed an evening's entertainment around the log fire, where Mike Godden proposed a vote of thanks to Richard Seeley for all his hard work on keeping our hut in pristine condition.

CW

For those who stayed above ground there was some excellent weather.





Attendees:

John Whalley President

|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| Alan Clare     | Ian Crowther   |
| Alan Linford   | John Brown     |
| Carol Whalley  | John Jenkin    |
| David Hick     | Martyn Trasler |
| Derek Smithson | Tim Josephy    |
| Mike Godden    | Albert Chapman |
| Michael Smith  | Harvey Lomas   |
| Peter Chadwick |                |

|                 |
|-----------------|
| Richard Smith   |
| Richard Taylor  |
| Richard Sealey  |
| Robert Crowther |
| Derek Clayton   |
| Eddie Edkins    |
| Ged Campion     |

## GLENRIDDING, CUMBRIA

**May 8 - 10**

Early arrivers on Friday were out on the hill; the Sheffield contingent ascended Sheffield Pike, naturally. The forecast rain arrived promptly at 4pm and all got soaked.

Saturday dawned not much better although the forecast promised improvement. The first party of seven was away by 08.30 and the rest not much later. The meet caterers, Ros and John Brown, along with guests Chris and Jim Harrison and Dorothy Heaton climbed up to Red Tarn then down into Grisedale to visit the Red Bridge (more of which later), returning via Lantys Tarn. Ian and John Jenkin took ship to Howtown and enjoyed a circular walk there. Derek Smithson took a walk down the valley and, according to his own account, inspected the lambs and sheep.

One wonders to what end?

Derek Bush ascended Helvellyn via Striding Edge and was about to descend via Swirral Edge when he was accosted by a concerned young lady who clearly thought he shouldn't be out on his own. Here he failed totally. George Spencely would have thrown himself into the arms of his saviour and would have allowed himself to be led to safety; Derek refused all help and continued alone over Catsty Cam. What opportunities we miss!

The main party of seven walked into Grisedale to inspect the Red Bridge, a temporary artwork made out of 22,000 sheets of paper, spanning Nethermost Cove Beck. (See footnote) Several took their turns posing on top of this remarkable edifice which, in your reporter's humble opinion, enhanced the view up the valley in the most striking manner. It probably cost a silly amount of money but it was pretty good. Having inspected the bridge at length, the party ascended directly to the St Sunday crags and Pinnacle Ridge. The 1500ft + of very steep grass gave plenty of opportunity to stop and admire the view. From here, the party adopted the characteristics of a string of home-made sausages, contracting and swelling in a random fashion. Some scrambled up the splendid Pinnacle Ridge in steadily improving weather, others walked steeply round the crags to the top. The rope was used for a short way on the Ridge, but for most of the way the drying rock gave excellent friction.

The party reassembled on the summit then split soon after, some to ascend Fairfield, others to traverse across to Grisedale Tarn. Dollywagon Pike followed then all reassembled atop Helvellyn. By now the weather had dramatically improved with sunshine and crystal clear visibility. After very strong representation by one member, Striding Edge was decided upon for the descent. Not far down, a damsel (in distress?) was encountered sitting beside the path. She resisted the blandishments of the first comers but was quite overcome by the charm and rugged good looks of Mick and Tim at the back and agreed to be escorted down. Once safely off the steep ground, Mick enquired solicitously where she was going, expecting somewhere like Glenridding. No, she said, I'm meeting my nephew on the top! Ah well, the best laid plans etc!

A most convivial evening ensued back at the Hostel; Alan Hinkes dropped in for a drink and a chat before dinner, which consisted of soup, shepherds' pie and crumble. Conversation, as usual, ranged from the unbelievable to the unrepeatable and most were not long retiring to bed.

Sunday dawned cloudy and drizzly. A few departed for home and one made a solo ascent of Helvellyn.

The main body sailed across to Howtown and walked back to Glenridding, a very pleasant route through forests and along the lake shore.

Our thanks go to Ros and John Brown for organising the meet and catering so excellently.

TJ



ATTENDEES



John Brown, Ros Brown (G), Chris Harrison (G), Jim Harrison, David Hick, Derek Bush, John Jenkin Dorothy Heaton (G), Helen Smith, Michael Smith, Richard Smith, Ian Crowther, Mick Borroff, Richard Taylor, Derek Smithson and Tim Josephy

### **Art in the Lake District**

As everyone was settling in at the Bury Outdoor Centre on this meet in Glenridding, our latest Honorary Member, Alan Hinkes, strode in for a chat. He had been over in the next valley, Grisedale, below St Sunday Crag at the erection of an art work by artist Steve Messam as part of the Lakes Culture project. The bright red 'PaperBridge' straddled a beck at NY 362 144 below Ruthwaite Lodge climbing hut on the slopes of Nethermost Pike. Alan showed us a few photos of it on his phone and our interest was piqued.

Saturday dawned wet and dull. The plan to scramble up Pinnacle Ridge on St Sunday Crag was then less appealing but we splashed our way round past Lantý's Tarn to drop down to inspect the PaperBridge. Shaped like the arch of a hump-backed bridge its 4.2 tonnes of poppy-red paper sheets, made a 5m long structure spanning 4m and clearing the beck by 2m. Built on a temporary wood former the sheets were simply stacked from beck-stone-filled gabions on each bank with shorter sheets added near the top to give the curve and several centimetres of shorter sheets jammed in as a 'keystone'. Compression alone holds the 22,000 sheets in place – no fixings or glue. The bridge wobbles sideways a little but withstood the overnight rain well.

Steve Messam goes in for these ambitious temporary installations in rural landscapes often in bright red. The official line is that his *"PaperBridge is a bold contemporary statement in a conserved environment and bound with layers of narrative about landscape, whilst remaining accessible to all."* It is environmentally sound in that the paper does not leach colour or toxins and is made locally by James Cropper at the Burneside Mill near Kendal. However, it was then transported to Yorkshire and back before being driven up to the site.

Aesthetically "the piece acts as a focal point within a vast open landscape, the bright red colour drawing the eye and interfering with the natural environment, while at the same time creating compositional balance with the green backdrop and flow of water... The intensity of colour used in the bridge contrasts with the verdant landscape making a bold statement of form and design."

The Daily Mail reported this as *"a once in a lifetime opportunity to see something different"* which took three years to develop. However, the helpers needed to guide people to the site (4km from the road) were not organised as the bridge was opened. If the work had been sited on any one of the thousands of other becks within sight of a sizeable carpark then I am sure it would have had greater impact without significantly compromising its artistic integrity. We visited it on a weekend and as many walkers stuck to the path 100m or so away as detoured to investigate it though dogs, children and a bike passed over it. An opportunity missed?

The artist disagrees, replying that there is no such landscape in the lakes near a car park and the location kept it special for those who made the effort as *“if it was nearer civilisation imagine how many people would walk over it.”*

The bridge was ready for the 9<sup>th</sup> May and was due to be removed after the 18 May, just two weekends, when the paper was to be recovered and returned to the Burnside Mill for recycling. The whole was funded by your taxation and Lottery purchases via Arts Council England.

On the whole I prefer Heaton Cooper’s art and consider this installation to be a rather gimmicky imitative construction but I suppose art has to strive to be different and provoke us to reflect on our situation. It did that.

While we pontificated (pont – get it?) the weather improved and we decided to give Pinnacle Ridge a go, though the slog up the steep slope directly up from PaperBridge was not to be recommended.

Michael Smith



**SOCIAL MEET  
WINDERMERE 19-22 MAY**





The only disappointment on this most popular social meet was, for various reasons, the number of absent friends.

The Merewood Hotel excelled themselves not only with the cuisine but honoured the rates negotiated by Paul for 2013 on the basis of using all 18 rooms. This Social meet was the last in a row of six to be organised by Paul and likely to be the last in this type of venue. Who else would be brave enough?

The 1966 Proceedings of the Club reported 'the Ladies Evening is now one of the Club's most popular and successful non-technical events'. It was just an evening event and in the 75th year of the club 120 members and ladies attended and enjoyed a wonderful evening at the Craiglands Hotel in Ilkley. In those far off times only week-end meets warranted a meet report. Editors did not consider a non-technical activities suitable material for inclusion in the Club Journal!

Like technology the Social meet moved on to an evening with dancing and games and a walk on the Sunday. The 1978 meet was held on the 8 March! It became an annual event in the early 60's under various presidents and the meet moved on the a full weekend not just to have a meet report in the proceedings but it was an opportunity for sharing some of the technical skills which abound in the club.. The social meet has always been hotel based and the view expressed at this meet was that this was the most acceptable format but the natural progression to mid-week, retired members and very attractive rates may not suit all in the future. Perhaps a revival of a weekend meet mixture of hotel and caravans so successful for many years.

Dennis arrived at the meet armed with considerable preplanning for an ascent of Loughrigg 355m. Who could resist his enthusiasm and determination and the assault was planned for Wednesday. Having been seriously unwell for some time this was an expedition of epic proportions. It took all day but Dennis and Joan and others made the summit and back down again without incident from the White Moss Car Park. The achievement was topped off with champagne before dinner. Readers may not agree but this joint activity is the core of the YRC and the membership.

There were many cultural excursions and it took Cliff and Cathie, from Scotland, to teach the locals that there were missed gems on our doorstep. The Threlkeld Quarry and Mining Museum, home to the Vintage Excavator Trust, is well worth a visit but surprised to learn that mining does not get a mention in National Park information in spite of its importance to the area. Dove Cottage hosted a special exhibition, Wordsworth War and Waterloo.

The ferry at Brockhole NP Centre is a 10 min walk from the hotel and the meet took advantage of the £10 walkers excursion, ferry to Ambleside, ferry to Wray Castle, walk the lakeside to Ferry Point, ferry across to Bowness, ferry back to Brockhole and still time in the day for a visit to LHG. Most enjoyable day out and good value.

A week later the ferry from Ferry Point to Bowness was closed by weather, a long walk home!

Richard and Ann Dover continue to celebrated the anniversary of their marriage at this meet, this year, 44 years topped off by having a splendid cream tea at Holker Hall.

There were unconfirmed reports that Bramble had enjoyed pre-breakfast walks over Loughrigg Fell and round Rydal and Grasmere Waters.

AL

#### Attendance.

Joan and Dennis Armstrong  
Paul and Anne Dover  
Richard and Ann Dover  
Mike and Marcia Godden  
Cliff and Cathie Large  
Alan and Angela Linford  
Tim and Elaine Josephy and Bramble.



# MEETS PHOTO-MONTAGE

Below from Spanish meet.

More from that meet next page.



Oh what a long way down!

Sierra Cabrera

The picture(s) on right is in Gordale, taken by Michael Smith on the way to the Lowstern meet and showing David Hick.

Alan Hinkes was at the top being photographed for some magazine and they had a good chat. Alan gave the photographers the full YRC history

Probably a good chance to take a breather!

Also on that meet -

Peter Chadwick and David taking time out and somebody who shall be nameless really taking the term 'taking a rest' to a whole new level.





Members going into Sorbas Caves and having a relaxing meal.



## USEFUL WEB SITES

|                               |                            |                                 |                                 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Climbing search engine        | worldclimb.com             | Mountaineering Ireland          | mountaineering.ie               |
| AA                            | theaa.com                  | National Cycle Network          | sustrans.org.uk                 |
| Alpine Club                   | alpine-club.org.uk         | National Express                | gobycoach.comcnp.org.uk         |
| Alpine Refuges (in French)    | Refuges.info               | National Health Direct          | nhsdirect.nhs.uk                |
| Bowline Club                  | bowline.f9.co.uk           | National Trails                 | nationaltrail.co.uk             |
| Brecon Beacons National Park  | breconbecon.org            | National Trust                  | nationaltrust.org.uk            |
| Brittany Ferries              | brittanyferries.com        | National Trust for Scotland     | nts.org.uk                      |
| British Orienteering Fed.     | britishorienteering.org.uk | Natural England                 | naturalengland.org.uk           |
| Cairngorm Club                | cairngormclub.org.uk       | North York Moors National P.    | moors.uk.net                    |
| Caledonian Macbrayne ferries  | calmac.co.uk               | Northumberland National P.      | nnpa.org.uk                     |
| Carlisle Mountaineering Club  | carlislemc.co.uk           | Open Spaces Society             | oss.org.uk                      |
| Coast to coast walk           | coast2coast.co.uk          | Oread Mountaineering Club       | oread.co.uk                     |
| Countryside Council for Wales | ccw.gov.uk                 | Peak District National Park     | peakdistrict.org                |
| Crag access database          | climbingcraggs.co.uk       | Public transport information.   | pti.org.uk                      |
| Cyclist Touring Club          | ctc.org.uk                 | Public transport information.   | traveline.org.uk                |
| Dalesman Magazine             | dalesman.co.uk             | R.S.P.B.                        | rspb.org.uk                     |
| DFDS Seaways                  | dfdsseaways.co.uk          | RAC                             | rac.co.uk                       |
| Duke of Edinburgh Awards      | theaward.org               | Rail enquiries                  | railenquiries.co.uk             |
| English Heritage              | english-heritage.org.uk    | Rail Europe                     | raileurope.co.uk                |
| Europe route planning         | theaa.com/travelwatch      | The Ramblers (Ramblers Assoc.)  | ramblers.org.uk                 |
| Fell & Rock Club              | frcc.co.uk                 | Royal Geographical Society      | rgs.org                         |
| Fell Runners Association      | fellrunner.org.uk          | Scottish avalanche forecasts    | sais.gov.uk                     |
| Foreign & Colonial Office     | fco.gov.uk                 | Scottish Mountaineering C'ncil  | mountaineering-scotland.org     |
| Forestry Commission           | forestry.gov.uk            | Ski Club of Great Britain       | ukskiclub.co.uk                 |
| Fylde Mountaineering Club     | fyldemc.org.uk             | Snowdonia National Park         | eryri-npa.gov.uk                |
| Fjord Line                    | fjordline.co.uk            | Southern Uplands way            | dumgal.gov.uk/southernuplandway |
| Grampian Club                 | grampianclub.org           | Speyside Way                    | speysideway.org                 |
| Gritstone Club                | gritstoneclub.org.uk       | Summits information             | peakware.com                    |
| Irish Ferries                 | irishferries.com           | The Climbers Club               | climbers-club.co.uk             |
| John Muir Trust               | jmt.org                    | Travel guide- Lonely Planet     | lonelyplanet.com                |
| Long Distance Walkers Assoc.  | ldwa.org.uk                | Travel guide- Rough             | roughguides.com                 |
| Maps & books                  | cordee.co.uk               | Traverse Holidays in Pyrenees   | traverseholidays.co.uk          |
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| Maps & Books                  | guidepost.uk.com           | Visitor information - Australia | australia.com                   |
| Maps- Ordnance Survey         | ordnancesurvey.co.uk       | Visitor information - Canada    | keepexploring.ca/travelcanada   |
| Maps - Harveys                | harveymaps.co.uk           | Visitor information - N Zealand | purenz.com                      |
| Maps - Anquet                 | anquet.co.uk               | Visitor information - USA       | visitusa.org.uk                 |
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| Maps etc, Michelin Guides     | viamichelin.com            | Weather BBC                     | bbc.co.uk/weather               |
| Medical advice, high altitude | high-altitude-medicine.com | Weather forecasts               | accuweather.com                 |
| Medical advice, high altitude | medex.org.uk               | Weather UK & Worldwide          | weathercall.co.uk               |
| Medical advice, travel abroad | masta.org                  | Weather Met. Office Weather,    | meto.gov.uk                     |
| Medication etc.               | firstaid4sport.co.uk       | Mountain Info                   | mwis.org.uk                     |
| Midland Ass. of Mountaineers  | themam.co.uk               | Weather, Scottish Avalanches    | sais.gov.uk                     |
| MOD- access to military land  | access.mod.uk              | West Highland Way               | west-highland-way.co.uk         |
| Mount Everest Foundation      | mef.org.uk                 | Wild life trusts                | wildlifetrusts.org              |
| Mountain Biking               | trailquest.co.uk           | Wolverhampton M C               | wolverhamptonmc.co.uk           |
| Mountain Heritage Trust       | thebmc.co.uk/mht           | World Health Organisation       | who.int/en/                     |
| Mountain Leader Training      | Mltuk.org                  | Yorkshire Dales National P.     | yorkshiredales.org              |
| Mountain Rescue Council       | mountain.rescue.org.uk     |                                 |                                 |

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**The Club's rules and bye-laws are printed in journal series 13  
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**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 to gather and promote knowledge of natural history, archaeology, geology, folklore and other kindred subjects.**

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Series 12 was published under the title of the 'Yorkshire Rambler' and goes back to summer 1994. Both these series are held in electronic form.

Earlier journals can be accessed for information and go back to the formation of the club in 1892

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# THE YRC

[www.yrc.org.uk](http://www.yrc.org.uk)



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**Established 1892**

**The Mountaineering, Exploration and Caving Club**

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