

YRC JOURNAL

EXPLORATION, MOUNTAINEERING AND CAVING - ISSUE 23 SERIES 13

1892 - 2017

125 YEARS OF OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

ACTIVITIES ALL OVER THE PLANET

THE FIRST OUT-DOOR MEETING OF THE Y.R.C., HOPPER LANE
26th December, 1893



Standing : C. Scriven, H. Slater, L. Dean, Elliot Hill.
Seated : S. W. Cuttiss, R. Smith, G. T. Lowe, H. H. Bellhouse, F. Waggett F. Dean,
J. A. Green.

The Yorkshire Ramblers Club - Established 1892

The Mountaineering, Exploration and Caving Club

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

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**Compiled and edited by Roy J Denney, Honorary Editor
33 Clovelly Road, Glenfield, Leicestershire LE3 8AE
Editor@YorkshireRamblers.org.uk**

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

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IN THE BEGINNING

This will be the last journal in the present series and marks the 125th anniversary of the formation of the Club. The photograph on the front cover is of our first ever meet.

When it was formed it was far from easy to get to remote mountain areas even in the UK, never mind around the world. Twenty two years before the advent of commercial flying, a few stalwarts got together to form a club to provide mutual assistance in pushing the boundaries both above and below ground and exploring such parts of the world as could be accessed. Thirteen members were elected at the inaugural meeting at the Skyrack Inn, Headingley, Leeds in October 1892 and they soon became twenty.

Nowadays with cheap flights and commercial trekking companies it is easy to forget just how hard it was in those early days. The very name the RAMBLERS undersells their activities in modern parlance. Back in those Victorian days to ramble was thought to mean to wander at will, not as in today's interpretation as 'to take gentle strolls'.

This anomaly was well summed up in Punch magazine in 1952. Reprinted in the 1954 Journal Series 8 No 27:

"THE significance of the word 'rambler' appears to have changed considerably since the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club was formed. It has had ample time to do so. That body is celebrating this year the Diamond Jubilee of its foundation. It has spent the sixty glorious years since 1892 in indefatigably clinging by its teeth to overhanging crags, swarming up wholly inaccessible pinnacles and plunging through torrents of cold water into vertical abysses. There is only one thing it has failed to do in those sixty years; it has never, in any normally accepted sense of the term, rambled." The term has apparently meant many things over the centuries, not all of them polite.

If you trawl through the early journals, great names from the early pioneering days of caving and climbing jump out all over the place. In 1892 Edward Whymper was made our first in a long line of renowned honorary members including Dr Norman Collie, William Cecil Slingsby, Ernest Roberts, Geoffrey Winthrop Young and many others including in 2014 Alan Hinks O.B.E.

In 1898 a YRC member became only the second person to stand on the floor of Gaping Gill and the Club went from strength to strength, bottoming one pothole after another including Sell Gill Holes, Pillar Holes, Meregill Hole, Rowten Pot, Cross Pot, Old Ing Cave and Boggarts Roaring Holes. This was the start of a great tradition with Yorkshire Ramblers the driving force behind the growth of potholing in this country. Our cavers are still looking for new holes here and more often abroad and are doing great things. For some years now they have been helping Chinese authorities explore massive cave systems over there.

Members also take rock climbing in their stride and numerous routes bear their names.

Between the world wars members were active in almost every corner of the world but WW2 took its toll. In the 1930s Frank Smythe was doing some great climbs including the first ascent of Kamet (25,446 ft) in 1931. He took part in Everest expeditions in '33, '36, and '38.

After the war the surviving members took up the challenge again and were soon going further and further afield. In 1957 the YRC was the first Club to mount its own expedition to the Himalayas which unfortunately involved three fatalities.

Opportunities now abound for those of an adventurous spirit and either on formal Club expeditions, informal groupings of members or as individuals; the YRC can be bumped into almost anywhere, as the index of recent editions of the journal shows.

As the Club has evolved we have seen a great deal of change. In 1886 Karl Benz produced the Benz Patent-Motorwagen, accepted as being the first 'modern' car but it was another 25 years before they really started to become available to the wealthy few.

Moon walks and space stations were the stuff of science fiction. By then the Club had been going for almost 20 years even though getting to mountain country was something of an epic and probably really an option for only those of considerable means and with plenty of spare time. Tales of informal rides on goods trains and days walking in, perhaps explains why our early members did most of their climbing underground in the deep holes they were finding close to home.

Equipment was also primitive if somewhat more elegant than today. Leather boots, plus-fours, tweed jackets and candles atop bowler hats is not a sight to be seen these days and our modern cavers do not have to carry in hundreds of feet of heavy hemp ladders (even heavier when wet coming back). Many members still going down holes in the ground can remember using rope ladders and acetylene torches before technology brought on new equipment in leaps and bounds.

Things have been a lot easier in some ways over recent years. We now have our own properties where we can both store kit and stay overnight. Weekend meets have become the norm with several longer gatherings in the UK each year and normally at least one overseas expedition. We may now have some creature comforts both in our own properties and those of other clubs where we have reciprocal rights, but the better equipment just challenges us to do even harder things. Cecil Slingsby is still renowned throughout Norway for his work in that country and we still have reciprocal arrangements over there.

Easier travel abroad has opened up many new meet venues; not just Scotland, Ireland and the Alps but places like the Himalayas, the Andes, the Arctic, Africa and the countries around the Mediterranean.

Following a serious accident in 1934, the Cave Rescue Organisation was formed headed by a redoubtable pair of YRC members, Ernest Roberts, who became the first chairman and Cliff Downham the first secretary. Both were outstanding members and Presidents of the YRC.

George Spenceley was part of the team which first mapped South Georgia; was reputedly the oldest man to have reached the Annapurna Sanctuary and canoed most of the way across Canada and down the length of the Danube.

When the overland route to the Himalayas was disrupted by political activity the Club turned its attention to Morocco, having a number of trips there for mountaineering, trekking, climbing and scrambling.

Over the decades since its formation, the Club and its members have pursued their interests all over the globe and continue to do so. This can involve climbing mountains or going down caves but is often trekking through areas largely unknown to the participants. Usually organised by the members themselves using local guides where necessary, these offer much more of a challenge than using trekking companies and on some occasions the expeditions are full blown exploration of areas little known to any outsiders.

MOVING ON

Over recent years the Club and its members have continued these trekking traditions, travelling far and wide. Some of the work in Dorje Lakpa in 1995 and Bolivia in 1999 falls into the true exploration category. Both these trips involved some members trekking and some mountaineering.

The Club has a history with Bolivia going back a long way, in fact to 1898 when members of the Club first started putting up first ascents. The Club and its members have been going back there and to other parts of South and Central America on a fairly regular basis ever since.

During the last few years Bolivia has been the subject of a number of meets but other areas have been explored at length.

On the 1996 expedition to Bolivia and leaving the serious mountaineering to others, a group of members went trekking in the Cordillera Real.

Landing at La Paz airport on the Altiplano they disembarked at 4000m which makes something of a nonsense of the normal acclimatisation techniques.

They eventually set out in 4x4 vehicles on a ten hour drive in through a maze of interconnecting ridges with lush vegetation to reach Cocoya village where the trek was to start.

The trek involved a gentle ascent to a pass at 4500m before over-nighting then going up another 900m to Negruni Pass and icy footing.

Supported by a team of pack llamas they then ploughed on from campsite to campsite, through near wilderness at altitudes often about 5000m. They were watching Condors circle above and meeting very few human beings.

After completing this fairly epic trek and now reasonably acclimatised some of the trekkers joined up with the climbing party to tackle one summit. It was a treacherous ascent and some had to give up but others did reach the top of Sajama at 6542m.

It was a magical experience overall and the Club were to return to Bolivia several times more.

The Dorje Lakpa expedition was in some ways even more remote. Equally if not more difficult to actually get to and just as physically challenging. There were political barriers as well. The climbers hoping to summit this peak could only get a permit as a joint expedition with the Nepalese.

Again there was a trekking contingent taking advantage of the opportunity and they walked for weeks involving much up and down. They crossed the wildest part of the Jugul Himal; along the way climbing a very respectable peak.

One week in, they found themselves turning a corner on a curving and undulating ridge walk and staring out at the magnificent Dorje Lakpa 1 and 2, Phurbi Chyachu and Langtang Lirung. They moved on to camp at Panch Pokhari, the site of five lakes at about 4500m.

The climbing party started preparing for their attempt on the mountain and the following day the trekkers went their own way.

Their way onwards was a high pass into an area little known even to their porters and guides and after a few days they were in the wildest part of the Jugal. Views were restricted by jungles of large rhododendron trees and water was fairly scarce and becoming a problem. After a long struggle they broke out into a flattish area at 4700m where they pitched camp.

The next day involved a descent of about 1200m to cross a river only the following day to ascend the heights again. The day after that they headed for the crest of Ganga La at 5000+m.

At this point six of the party decided to try and climb Naya Kanga (5844m). Planning a 5.30am start and an estimated twelve hour day, they ended up benighted. This was something they had all experienced before but not at 5800m.

They finally returned to camp at 10.00am the following day more than a little weary.

This was the trekking team!

The Club's trekking has evolved over the years and as possibilities have opened up they have become more ambitious. In the distant past logistics were so difficult that it was normally small groups of members who vanished for weeks if not months on end but now it is a regular part of our programme for full formal meets, enabling more members to wander remote places.

Our President, Mick Borroff, has played a major part in these activities over recent years and has done a review of the efforts of the last twenty five years.

He has also produced a breakdown of the treks with references back to the original journal articles where they are covered in more detail.

THE YRC ON TREK

1992-2016: A CELEBRATION

In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks – John Muir

The aim of this review is to celebrate our Club's deep and on-going interest in trekking and look at some of the temporal changes that have taken place since the Club's centenary. Given the nature of trekking and the destinations visited, there will inevitably some small degree of overlap with other chapters in this issue, but this is probably no bad thing.

It has been a real pleasure reading about the Club's many activities over the past twenty-five years as reported in the YRC Journal. There is scarcely a year which does not record a trek of one type or another: from hut-to-hut treks across parts of the Alps or Norway, backpacking journeys along long-distance routes like the John Muir Trail or GR11, to small-group pulking trips on ski to Svalbard and of course the Club's expeditionary ventures to the Greater Ranges such as the Cordillera Cocopata, Dorje Lakpa and Lhakhang, together with numerous Himalayan treks.

TREKKING

Whilst researching this article, I realised I had no idea where the word "trekking" came from. A bit of Googling identified its derivation from the Afrikaans in the nineteenth century where the original meaning of trek in English was "*a day of travelling by ox cart, or one stage in a journey by ox cart.*" [Afrikaans, to travel by ox wagon, from Dutch trekken, to travel, from Middle Dutch trecken, to pull] One doesn't see many ox carts on club trips these days, so beware the next time you ask to go trekking in South Africa.

I have adopted its modern definition to frame our trekking exploits over the past 25 years which began common usage in the 1900's:

To make a slow or long arduous journey

To journey on foot, especially to hike through mountainous areas

Synonyms: hike, tramp, march, slog, footslog, trudge, traipse, walk, travel, journey

I can identify with one or more of these synonyms at various points on a number of the treks I have been on and I bet a number of other members can too.

This definition thus encompasses multi-day backpacking trips such as Alan Kay and David Hick's Pyrenean traverse, Iain Gilmour's visits to the High Sierra in California, hut to hut tours such as my Stubaital and Bulgaria meets and Derek Smithson's various trips to Norway, as well as classical treks and trek/climbs such as the Lhakhang and Mera Peak trips.

I have not included motorised treks, but must recognise John Middleton's very many trips to explore caves and climbs in remote places.

Editors note - *Two treks undertaken in 2016 are reported on later in this journal. One by members from Upper Dolpo to Mustang in Nepal and another by the Middletons to Azerbaijan*

YRC TREKS

My comments below really relate to treks as journeys although activities in polar areas are invariably treks and others are undertaken as part of mountaineering expeditions. I have prepared a list of treks meeting the definition I am using in an Appendix. It is an impressive compilation in terms of number of treks and their wide geographical scope. However, it is really too long a list to review in any significant detail here. I hope that in looking down the compilation you will be reminded of a trek that you went on, or a written account that you enjoyed and that you will be minded to pull out that that edition of the journal and re-live that trek.

In compiling the list of treks, there a number of individuals who in my opinion we should recognise for their outstanding achievements and contribution to our club in writing about and organising treks and enthusing members to go on them. In no particular order: Albert Chapman, Michael Smith, Jack Short, Alan Kay, Iain Gilmour and Derek Smithson. One of our newest members, John Sutcliffe, recently completed a solo backpacking journey from Cape Cornwall to Cape Wrath – this achievement should also be celebrated.

As most members will know, Albert Chapman is a great enthusiast for visiting the Himalayas and has trekked there fourteen times including on five Club trips. Some of the non-club treks served as reconnaissance for later club trips to the Himalayas.

His list of routes reads like a trekker's "bucket" list: South of Annapurna, the Jugal Himal, Dolpo, Rolwaling and Khumbu, Kanchenjunga base camps, Nanda Devi inner sanctuary, Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara, Nubra Valley, Ladakh Range, Mustang, Hunza, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Albert has of course trekked elsewhere than the Himalayas, including Morocco, Mongolia, Bolivia and South Africa. He organised the 2005 trip to the Ladakh range and it took little persuasion to get me to go on the trek. I wasn't disappointed with visiting this high altitude desert and it was Albert's inspiration which led me to take a look at other mountaineering possibilities in the Ladakh region, resulting in our 2008 attempt on Lhakhang peak in Spiti. Although we weren't successful in the ascent, we all agreed the trekking journey was fantastic, particularly down the Pare Chu river valley to Tso Moriri.



Mick Borroff and Albert Chapman

Albert has also enthused about the attractions of Dolpo in Nepal, despite having narrowly avoided being trapped there by unseasonal snowfall and having to exit by an unplanned route on his last visit. A Club group has just traversed Inner Dolpo to Lower Mustang of which more later. Albert developed a strong relationship with Motup Goba and his family since the 1995 Jugal Himal expedition where they met. Motup organised the group which was split into trekkers and climbers and was the first Rimo Expeditions trek with the YRC. This resulted in close links between the Club and Motup's trekking company over many treks in the past twenty years. Under Motup's leadership, Rimo Expeditions have become renowned worldwide and have provided excellent support on all our Himalayan treks - he was rightly elected to Honorary Membership in 2008 to recognise this.

Michael Smith's many achievements also need to be celebrated here. He is a strong all-rounder and a bit of a cold weather specialist who also happens to like warmer regions as well.

As a prelude to his pulking trips on ski, Michael is recognised in the Peak District as the unusual person who periodically straps a car wheel to his waist and takes it for a walk!

Greenland, Svalbard and Norway have literally been taken in his stride on ski, while these have had to be dispensed with for other treks and climbs in Bolivia, Malawi, Poland, Bulgaria, Morocco and the Alps.

As a past YRC Journal Editor, another of Michael's strengths is writing up his experiences for others to read and be inspired by. It is therefore no surprise that he heads the league table for the number of articles on trekking trips - without his efforts we would have much less interesting material in our journal



Michael Smith

Other members prefer a different approach to their trekking. Jack Short clearly loves alpine mountains and has repeatedly devised high level hut-to-hut treks in different parts of the Alps which he has shared with us. For example, in 1998 he did the Tour de Mt Blanc back-to-back with a traverse from Chamonix to Zermatt.



Jack, front right with other members of the team

Although both have been on a number of formal Club treks, Alan Kay and Iain Gilmour are both backpacking enthusiasts who do their own thing including having trekked the John Muir Trail. Iain's enthusiasm extended to making his own rucksack to keep the weight to a minimum on the latter.



Alan and Iain in the High Sierras

As well as organising the Jugal Himal expedition, Alan has made numerous coast-to-coast backpacking crossings of Scotland and an Atlantic-to-Mediterranean traverse of the Pyrenees with David Hick over several summers along the GR11.

Alan also organised a trek along the renowned GR20 long-distance high level route in Corsica.

A number of members including Derek Smithson and Iain Gilmour have undertaken hut-to-hut treks across the unspoilt landscape of Norway, with Derek pioneering the use of snowshoes on his early Spring journeys.

Naturally the other group we need to recognise are the large number of members who have supported club treks by going on them year-on-year. Too numerous to mention individually, without them the leaders would simply have unfulfilled visions of where they would like to go. Many of them have contributed their personal insights to the Journal to complement the main account of the trek.



Derek Smithson

We also need to thank others for simply writing up their own experiences for the Journal to inspire others to go.

TREK ORGANISING

There are several aspects that have made things easier for the organisers of recent treks: the availability of relatively cheap air travel to get there; the growth of trekking as an economic activity with easy access via the Internet to local and international trekking and mountaineering companies, who can organise anything from an ascent of Everest down to a one-day trek in the Kathmandu valley. At one end of the spectrum, the organisation can be as simple as signing up to go with a company and booking an air ticket. At the other, the administrative procedures like obtaining trekking and mountaineering permits and visas can still make one's hair curl. On the Lhakhang expedition we only received our permits at the last minute the week before we were due to leave the UK.

*Treks take days to walk, usually months to prepare for,
but live with us for a lifetime.*

TREK PLANNING

Treks still take days to walk and judging by the number of digital images we take nowadays, will live with us for several lifetimes. It is clear that over the years, the preparation aspect has really changed, particularly advancing in the last decade. We have steadily moved from an era of being relatively information-poor, relying on personal contacts, expedition reports, a photograph or two and with limited availability of good maps (e.g. for Alan Kay's planning over a three-year period for the 1995 YRC Expedition to Dorje Lapka), through the era of specific detailed trekking guidebooks and maps to a country or even a specific trek, to today's multiple international and local trekking organisations marketing treks and a digital information stream which is almost too much to assimilate without informed filtering.

The widespread availability of published digital photographs, satellite imaging and terrain data on Google Earth (GE), the use of Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) devices and their users' track data together with on-line access to digital mapping and other information has ensured that the Internet has become an enormously rich and useful tool for researching virtually any trek or expedition. (For a basic tutorial, see: Cave G. Digital Expedition Planning. *The Alpine Journal* 2015; 119: 209-14).

I can contrast my preparations for the YRC Lhakhang expedition in 2008 to the recently completed 2016 Morocco trek to the Jbel Sarhro. For Lhakhang, there were reasonable descriptions of both the approach trek from Shimla and the exit trek to the Tso Moriri Lake down the Pare Chu valley in a recent guidebook. However recent topographic maps were harder to come by. I was able to obtain a poor quality scanned image of a 150k Indian map through the Alpine Club library and a digital copy of a 1956 1:150k Russian military map from a contact developed via the Internet. These were annotated with the principal summits using information and a set of photographs provided by a member of a previous Japanese AC expedition. These were checked against the rather poor images available on GE at the time and substantial ablation of the glaciers was noted.

A month after we returned, a new set of satellite images had been uploaded and if we had been camping there when they were taken, one would probably have been able to see our tents! Today this level of detail is commonplace when you take a look at your own street and can recognise cars, gardens and houses etc. In future, the resolution of such images can only get better.

For the recent Jbel Sarhro trek, there was also a very good guidebook. After having perused this and looked at several possible itineraries on GE using the uploaded images from other travellers to gain an impression of what the different possibilities had to offer, I chose the route in conjunction with the guidebook's author, with some modification and additional objectives. Unusually, the guidebook also offered a table of GPS waypoints along the selected route. Using these and the improved high resolution imagery available on GE, I was able to plot a fairly precise route across the Jbel Sarhro with some

certainty, following the actual paths and tracks visible on the ground in the satellite imaging to link the published waypoints. GE was also used to examine possible lines of attack to the summits of our scrambling objectives. Escape routes from our route were investigated as well and plotted using GE imaging.

This route was exported to our GPS devices to be available for navigation in the field (if necessary), including the escape routes. The availability of topographical maps in digital form online allowed these to be loaded as overlays onto GE, so that the satellite image and the 1970's mapping could be directly compared along the plotted route. The GE-derived route was then transferred onto the printed map to be used for navigation as needed on the ground. Furthermore, the GE route data allowed reasonably precise estimation of the distance, cumulative ascent and descent for each day on trek to create an estimation of timings. At the end of the trek, the actual GPS track we took is available to be shared with club members or other trekkers planning future visits to the Sarhro.

Some have questioned *“Should we destroy all guide books and detailed descriptions of mountain areas so that all can have the pleasure of discovery?”*

While I can understand these sentiments, I firmly believe that like guidebooks, digital imaging and mapping should be regarded as tools to help decide where to go and are helpful for better, more informed planning and decision making. It is true that from material copied from the Internet, one could construct an entirely fictitious but very plausible account of a trek without having been anywhere near it, with routes plotted on satellite images and maps, illustrated with multiple images. But when you think about it, this is actually indistinguishable from a very detailed and thorough plan.

Some would argue this level of information spoils the attraction of going there. I would disagree and argue that this information is like the trailer for a good movie, you have to go and see it for yourself. At the end of the day you can look at as much or as little of this material as you wish.

Even on a single trek, each trekker has a different experience and interaction with the landscape and its people that make it special for them – this cannot be gleaned from the computer chair.

TREKKING AGENTS AND GUIDES

A successful trek depends on its logistics. Apart from purely backpacking adventures, inevitably the majority of our major treks have been facilitated by local agents who organise the transport and logistics. On our behalf, the agent generally engages a competent guide/sirdar, a cook and an enthusiastic trekking crew to take care of catering and transporting us and all our baggage.

We have generally been fortunate here and need to recognise this support. On our Himalayan treks, Motup's staff have universally been fantastic and a pleasure to be with - they obviously enjoy themselves on trek too! On other treks, Club organisers have had to make more effort to find a suitable agent and guides to work with and we have usually had good outcomes.

Guides invariably add a lot to our treks, with their language skills, local insight and knowledge, acting as our interpreters when we meet the locals. We will need to continue to need their services to organise future treks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, having read the many accounts of our trekking activities across the past quarter of a century, there are many common themes that persist.

The Club continues to undertake treks to a very wide range of destinations, sometimes combined with mountaineering objectives and these meets are well supported.

Our enthusiasm for trekking is undiminished. The reports in the Journal clearly show that we get a real buzz from our interactions with new mountain landscapes and their peoples whilst on trek. We are also humbled by many examples of genuine hospitality and help that locals in many countries have offered us over the years.

We enjoy each other's company on treks and provide mutual support to each other as necessary – clearly a Club strength and something that commercial treks will always struggle to emulate.

We have also bonded well with the trek support staff: the guides, Sherpas, porters, muleteers, pony men and kitchen staff, striving to show that their efforts on our behalf are very much appreciated in the sincere hope that they enjoy trekking with us too. Many of the guides and staff have been pleasantly surprised at our capabilities despite the older demographics of the trekkers.

Most of our longer treks have been supported by the retired/newly retired who have unrestricted time to go for longer periods and fortunately retained the required level of fitness.

As an example, the climbers on the Jugal Himal trip were in their 20s-30s compared to those who were twice as old going to attempt Lhakang. Fortunately, there are many examples of members in their 70's continuing to enjoy treks overseas. That should be celebrated and long may it continue.

Whilst our rate of treks per year has remained fairly steady over this period as might be expected, we will need new leaders and organisers to emerge and share their visions for treks to new destinations with the Meets Committee, to make them happen with the support of our active membership.

Let's hear from you!

Mick Borroff

Listing of Published Treks By Year Since 1992

YRC Journal	Country	Place	Author	Trek Year
1994;12(2):24-27	Scotland	Fisherfield and Letterewe	TE Edwards	1994
1995;12(4):8-12	Norway	Hurrungane	Mike Godden	1994
1996;12(5):3-26	Nepal	Dorje Lakpa and Jugal Himal	Ged Champion & Alan Kay	1995
1996;12(5):74-76	Spain	Picos de Europa	Derek Smithson	1995
2013;13(14):3-6	Alps Ecrins	Oisans and Queyras	Jack Short	1996
1998;12(9):40-56	Nepal	Rowaling & Khumbu	Albert Chapman	1997
1997;12(8):11-12	Norway	Andalsnes	Derek Smithson	1997
1997;12(8):16-20	Nepal	Khumbu Glacier	Roy Denney	1997
1998;12(10):3-27	Iceland		Derek Smithson	1998
1998;12(10):100-101	Scotland	Cape Wrath to Inchnadamph	Iain Gilmour	1998
2014;13(17):11-13	Alps	Chamonix to Zermatt	Jack Short	1998
2013;13(15):5-7	Peru	Chachapoyas	Phil Dover	1998
1999;12(11):41-44	Greece	Peloponnese	Alan Kay	1999
2000;12(13):3-11	Iran	Valleys of the Assassins	Alan Kay	1999
1999;12(12):3-63	Bolivia	Cordilleras Real and Occidental	Expedition members	1999
2013;13(16):9-10	Alps, France	Haute Savoie	Jack Short	1999
2005;12(23):21-25	Chile	Paine Circuit	Stuart Dix	1999
2001;12(16):3-11	India	Nana Devi	Albert Chapman	2000
2001;12(15):78-93	Pakistan	Karakorum	Martyn Wakefield	2000
2000;12(13):36-37	Norway	Skarvheimen	Michael Smith	2000
2002;12(17):3-10	USA	John Muir Trail	Alan Kay	2001

2011;13(12):11-14	Alps	Grand tour of Monte Rosa	Jack Short	2001
2002;12(17):59-67	Morocco	High Atlas	Tim Josephy	2001
2003;12(19):3-7	South Africa	Drakensberg	Albert Chapman	2002
2005;12(23):18-20	Poland	Sudetenland	Michael Smith	2005
2005;13(1):40-54	India	Ladakh Range	Mick Borroff	2005
2006;13(2):15-20	Svalbard	Spitzbergen	Michael Smith	2006
2007;13(4):45-49	Corsica	GR20	Alan Kay	2007
2007;13(4):40-41	Pakistan	Hunza	Albert Chapman	2007
2008;13(5):67-74	Bhutan	Chomolhari Base Camp	Frank Wilkinson	2007
2007;13(4):9-12	Norway	Hardangervidda	Michael Smith	2007
2008;13(5):22-26	Svalbard	Spitzbergen	Michael Smith	2008
2008;13(6):39-48	India	Lhakhang Peak, Spiti	Mick Borroff	2008
2009;13(8):46-49	Alps, Austria	Stubaital	Mick Borroff	2009
2010;13(9):12-18	Sikkim	Goeche La	Peter Hodge	2009
2010;13(10):54-62	Bolivia	Quimsa Cruz	Michael Smith	2010
2010;13(9):30-31	Svalbard	Spitzbergen	Michael Smith	2010
2013;13(14):14-21	Nepal	Mera Peak	Michael Smith	2012
2014;13(17):13-16	Pyrenees	GR11	Alan Kay	2013
2013;13(16):32-37	Alps, Austria	Zillertal	Michael Smith	2013
2013;13(16):12-20	Malawi	Mulanje Mountains	Michael Smith	2013
2014;13(18):11-17	Greenland	Scorbysund	Michael Smith	2014
2015;13(18):4-9	Peru	Chachapoyas	Peter Hodge	2014
2015;13(20):27-34	Bulgaria	Pirin Mountains	Mick Borroff	2015
2016;13(21):33-47	Morocco	Jbel Sarhro	Mick Borroff	2016

UPPER DOLPO TO MUSTANG

A Trek Across the Roof of Nepal - Leader - Mick Borroff

With the uncertainty following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal and a new road being built along part of our proposed trekking route in Humla, I decided to postpone our Himalayan trek for a year and inspired by Eric Valli's 1998 film *Himalaya* and various other sources, made plans instead for a YRC party to visit Dolpo in the autumn of 2016.

Introduction

Upper Dolpo is a high-altitude culturally Tibetan region in the northern part of the Dolpa District of western Nepal, bordered in the north by China. Almost ninety percent of the region lies above 3,500 metres. Dolpa is the largest administrative region in Nepal, occupying about 15% of the country (roughly half the size of Yorkshire), but it is one of the least populated. Data from 2014 indicates that Dolpa's population is around 36,700 with only about 5,000 residents in Upper Dolpo (also called Inner Dolpo). The entire district was closed to trekkers until 1989 and Dolpo presently sees only a few hundred trekkers at most each year.

Dolpo is situated north of the Dhaulagiri and Churen Himal and this cloud barrier limits the penetration of the Gangetic rains of the monsoon creating a semi-arid climate, thus extending the trekking season compared to central and eastern Nepal. This allowed us to visit in September, minimising the risk of new snow on the high passes that prevented Albert Chapman reaching Shey Gumpa during his Dolpo trek in 1996.

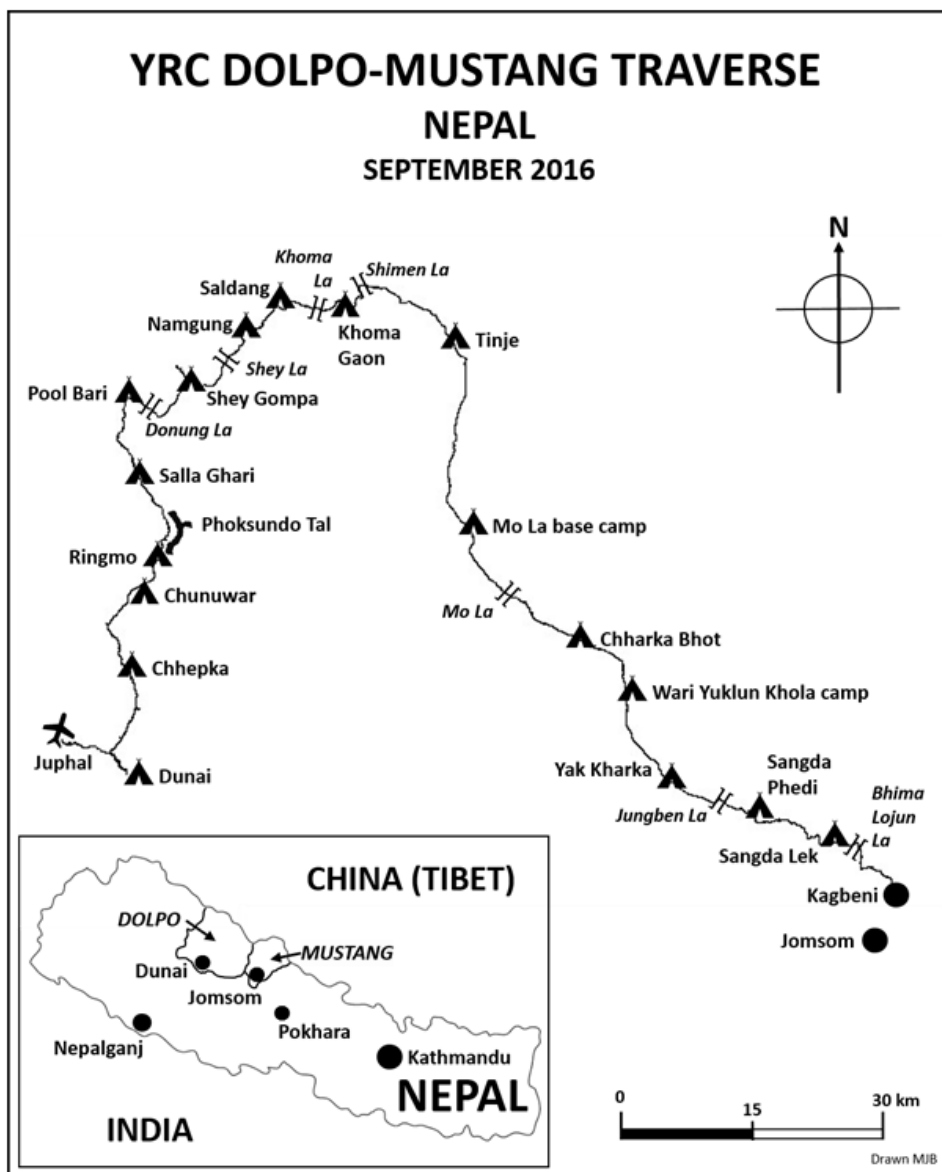
Dolpo was first settled by Rokpa farmers and Drokpa nomads from Tibet in the 10th century and Dolpo-pa, or the people of Dolpo, continue to live the traditional lifestyles of their forbears. Agro-pastoralists who live in some of the highest villages in the world, the Dolpo-pa wrest survival from this inhospitable landscape through a creative combination of farming, animal husbandry and trade.

The seasons progress from ploughing and seeding of barley, buckwheat, mustard and potato crops in the spring, whilst herds of dzos (a yak/cow cross), yaks, sheep and goats are taken up to higher pastures as part of summer transhumance. After the autumn harvest, some Dolpo-pa escape the harsh winter by retreating south, whilst others remain in the small winter villages strategically perched on hillsides to receive the maximum sun's warmth. Former trade along the ancient grain-for-salt routes with villages in Tibet is now limited to 2-3 weeks a year when the border crossings are opened by the Chinese and the Dolpo-pa no longer overwinter their herds in Tibet. Trade into Nepal continues as before using pony strings and yak caravans to move goods. Drivers also herd large flocks of sheep and goats gathered from Dolpo villages across the ancient caravan routes to market in Pokhara.

Whilst 70% of Dolpo-pa are Hindu, the northern Dolpo-pa are generally adherents of Buddhism or Bon, a religion whose origins predate Buddhism but whose modern form is officially accepted as a fifth school of Tibetan Buddhism. The remote region has preserved its Tibetan culture in relatively pure form, adding to its attractiveness. Shamanism continues to be practiced in Lower Dolpo, with houses protected by single carved wooden totems.

Added to this heady mix was the possibility of seeing a variety of Himalayan wildlife, including a vanishingly small chance of seeing a snow leopard, making a traverse across this fascinating region an irresistible prospect.

Route Summary



Beginning at the STOL airstrip at Juphal in Lower Dolpo, in conjunction with Rimo Expeditions, a long and varied route of some 270 km was planned that climbed to the turquoise waters of Phoksundo Tal then crossed a 5300m pass to reach Shey Gumpa and Crystal Mountain in Upper Dolpo. Additional passes then gave access to Saldang (the largest village in Upper Dolpo) and then, passing Shimen and Tinje villages in the Panjyang valley, to reach the remote settlement of Chharka Bhot in the Tsharka valley. With only strings of ponies and yak caravans for company, the uninhabited valleys of the Chharka Tulse Khola and Thasan Khola were followed for several days to our highest pass at 5550m, crossing into Mustang with promising views of the Annapurna Himal. Then a long, long descent through deeply incised river canyons to Santa village and on to the ancient fortress town of Kagbeni beside the wide river valley of the Kali Gandaki, and a return to Kathmandu by air via Jomsom and Pokhara.

Sept 02: Arrive Kathmandu

Sept 03: Kathmandu (sort out Trekking Permits)

Sept 04: Fly to Nepalganj (146m) in the Terai

Sept 05: Fly to Juphal (2500m) and trek to Dunai (2140m)

Sept 06: Trek from Dunai to Chhepka (2620m)

Sept 07: Trek from Chhepka to Chunuwar (3150m)

Sept 08: Trek from Chunuwar to Phoksundo Lake (3646m)

Sept 09: Trek from Phoksumdo to upper Salla ghari (3700m)

Sept 10: Trek from upper Salla ghari to base camp of Donung La (4265m)

Sept 11: Trek from base camp, cross Donung La (5353m) to Shey Gumpa (4350m)

Sept 12: Rest day to explore Shey village and Tsankang gumpa

Sept 13: Trek from Shey, cross Shey La (5115m) to Namgung (4417m)

Sept 14: Trek from Namgung to Saldang (4060m)

Sept 15: Trek from Saldang, cross Khoma La (4641m) to Khoma Gaon (4201m)

Sept 16: Trek from Khoma Gaon to Tinje (4155m)

Sept 17: Trek from Tinje to Mo La base camp (4693m)

Sept 18: Trek from Mo La base, cross Mo La (5021m) to Chharka Bhot (4316m)

Sept 19: Explore Chharka Bhot village, trek to Wari Yakhun Khola camp (4684m)

Sept 20: Trek from Wari Yakhun Khola to Yak Kharka camp (4984m)

Sept 21: Trek from Yak Kharka, cross Jungben La (5557m) to Sangda Phedi camp (4258m)

Sept 22: Trek from Sangda Phedi to Sangda Lek camp (4260m)

Sept 23: Trek from Sangda Lek to Kagbeni (2913m) and drive to Jomsom (2720m)

Sept 24: Fly to Pokhara

Sept 25: Fly to Kathmandu

Kathmandu Valley and the Terai

Uden Sherpa, our Rimo guide met us at the airport and conducted us to our hotel, just in time for a very late dinner. Whilst Uden and Rimo's Kathmandu office staff were sorting out our trekking permits, and after a lie-in and a leisurely buffet breakfast, we headed into Kathmandu to take in several of the most important cultural sights, keen to see how the earthquake had changed things. First up was Swayambhunath Stupa - popularly known as the monkey temple. Sited on a small hill, this appeared to be little changed since my first visit in 1987, although the monkeys had become a little bolder. A perfect mugging was observed as a monkey landed on a young girl's shoulders and made off with the dropped ice cream that she was eating! The temple courtyard was bustling as before with traditional religious ceremonies, chanting, turning of prayer wheels, music and wafts of incense.

Next we headed across to Kathmandu's Durbar Square, famed for its collection of temples. Here some significant damage was seen with a few temples reduced to mere rumps. Fortunately, the others were deemed safe including the temple of Kumari, the living goddess, whom we didn't see at her window. However, we did see lots of girls dressed as the Living Goddess with their mothers colourfully dressed in red, as part of a mass Kumari puja in the courtyard next door.

We knew that the huge stupa at Boudhanath had been badly damaged by the earthquake, but as one of Kathmandu's most iconic sites and Asia's largest stupa, it was one of the first monuments to undergo repair.

Over a late lunch we could see that the scaffolding was still in place, but the highest tiers seemed close to being finished and the main stupa awaited its final whitewashing.



The last site we visited was the undamaged Hindu temple of Pashupatinath located on the banks of the Bagmati River. Here we discreetly observed the ceremonies associated with the cremations taking place on ghats on the opposite bank. Saddhus in yellow robes pitched to the tourists behind us. Several boys, oblivious to these rituals, were diving into the fast flowing coloured river and seemingly all getting out again safely some distance downstream.

Dodging the rain, we had dinner in Thamel and then back to the hotel by rickshaw and taxi. Our flight next day to Nepalgunj was late morning and Uden had allowed sufficient time that not even the thronging crowds attending the Hindu festival at the Pashupatinath temple were able to make us miss the flight. The flight afforded excellent views of Dhaulagiri and Churen before landing in the steamy green south. Fortunately, our hotel was not far away and had pleasant lawned grounds to enjoy some cold drinks. We all adopted a protection strategy against mosquito bites in Nepalgunj (DEET and insect repellent clothing rather than taking malaria prophylaxis) as we only had 24 hours here and it was the low risk season. No one got bitten. An excellent Indian dinner was taken indoors washed down with Ghorka beers, to be our last for almost three weeks.

Lower Dolpo - Juphal to Phoksumdo Tal

After a 4am reveille, we returned to Nepalgunj airport. The de Havilland Twin Otter plane eventually took off from the Terai lowlands heading northeast and eased itself over numerous forested ridges and across magnificent steep-sided green valleys before landing on the unsurfaced airstrip in Juphal, the gateway to Dolpa. Our bags were rapidly unloaded and we headed across to the village to await the Rimo crew over a cup of clove tea.

Suitably refreshed, Uden led us off in the morning sunshine through the houses, past the school and down the terraced hillside. We reached a track with Greater Himalayan Trail (GHT) signs beside the sediment laden Thuli Bheri River at Kalagauda and the entrance to the Shey-Phoksundo National Park, near a beautifully inscribed 'gateway' chorten. This, the only road in Dolpa, led into Dunai, the administrative centre of Dolpa and our first campsite, where afternoon tea awaited.

After breakfast, we headed back through Dunai's bazaar and over the suspension bridge heading for the clear, sparkling waters of the Suli Gad river draining south from Phoksundo Tal. Permits checked and entrance fees paid at the Park HQ, we followed the riverside track upstream, stopping at a house to eat our lunch freshly prepared by Niri and his team. Some of the household's large batch of sun-dried tomatoes were being ground into a masala paste with herbs and spices on a flat stone outside.

Several of the houses here were guarded by totems - individual carved wooden protector deities, complete with iron tridents, as shamanism is still practiced here.



The steep-sided valley became increasingly wooded with pines as we approached the hamlet of Chhepka (2838m) and our courtyard camp, where a cheerful lady was hard at work at her back-strap loom making a colourful webbing belt.

Another day of blue skies beckoned as we continued up the Phoksundo Khola valley. We left ponymen Prim and Mal Bhadur to load up after the ponies had emptied their nose-bags filled with maize. Orchids and many other wild flowers graced the woods of pine and walnut, whilst the ever-present river thundered below as we crossed it on a suspension bridge then back again over a traditional cantilevered wooden bridge. Higher up we walked along a narrow stony causeway just above the stream, grateful that it was not running a foot higher!



Camp at Chunuwar was next to the Taprizia school's volley ball court and we soon had an attendant group of curious young visitors while some of the crew played soccer with the locals.

Leaving our camp in sunshine the next day, we passed a cluster of almost windowless flat-roofed houses in the winter settlement of Polam, used by the people of Ringmo village. The trail then began to climb steeply above the river gorge to reach a wooden shelter and attendant prayer flags overlooking an impressive 170m-high waterfall, the highest in Nepal, and a demoness's cave. We also got our first distant glimpse of the impossibly blue waters of Phoksundo Tal, Nepal's second deepest lake. The trail then descended through an unexpected wood of mature silver birch trees to re-join the Phoksundo Khola and soon after the mani walls and chortens announced our entry into Ringmo village and our lovely campsite beside Phoksundo Tal, which was shared with a few other groups.

After lunch we had time to do some laundry and have a wander around the ancient village, with its many photogenic chortens, strategically situated at the entrances of the major trails into the settlement. It is not all old though; Ringmo has a new 5kW hydroelectric scheme in operation and some new housing was being built. After tea and vegetable pakora, we accompanied Uden to walk eastwards around the lake to view the 800-year old Tshowa Bon Gompa. We were only able to walk around the outside however as the monk was taking a late lunch in Ringmo and had been delayed.

Into Upper Dolpo - Phoksundo Tal to Shey Gompa

We were blessed with more blue skies as we left camp and began our climb on a narrow path high above Phoksundo Tal. The views across the lake were stupendous. In Eric Valli's film Himalaya/Caravan, this was where a yak plummeted into the lake. Fortunately, the switchback path had recently been upgraded and we had little fear of repeating the event, but kept well to the inside when the ponies and some dzos came past. The path eventually descended to the lake shore, perfect for an idyllic lunch stop, with a large herd of dzos grazing close by.

With views up to the snow-capped summit of Kanjirowa (6612m), we followed the braided river into woodland and climbed above a large cliff to avoid having to ford the river.

We were aiming for the Donung/Dolma La, a less steep alternative pass to the conventional route to Shey Gompa over the Nangda La. After a long walk, we passed the side canyon leading to the summer pass where Barry nearly had a trekking pole swept away by the river. Camp was eventually struck in a delightful birch wood clearing below a cairn-topped and prayer-flagged promontory. It was just after a wooden bridge crossed the Ghyampo Kapuwa Khola at 3850m, some 200m higher than the equivalent camp on the conventional route, which aided our acclimatisation.

Next morning, we started with a stiff climb up past the cairn and its embedded yak skull; passing a coppiced birch wood and back down to regain the banks of the Ghyampo Kapuwa Khola. This stream headed north and then we followed the increasingly wild and desolate valley of an eastern tributary, past large patches of red bistorts to a high camp at 4697m.

The next day, broken cloudy weather oversaw our steady ascent up the river valley until we reached the diagonal slash of the track crossing the grey screes below the Donung La. Its cairn and prayer flags were eventually reached and we all took a welcome breather whilst admiring the extensive view. Our route then descended more scree to a tarn where the alternative Nangda La route was met and then we followed the Hubaiun Khola down to seven mani walls and five water-powered prayer mills that heralded Shey Gompa. Our camp was in a meadow beside the monastery and its field of mani stones with fabulous views of the calcite-streaked Crystal Mountain towering above.

Our rest day at Shey allowed us to do some more washing and then visit Tsakang gompa, wonderfully situated above the Tartang Khola with Dolomite-like towers opposite. A monk from Shey opened the doors and led us into the dark prayer hall, with its deities shrouded in coloured silks and surrounded by the sets of prayer books and commentaries. Some yaks, a Himalayan weasel and two marmots were photographed on the way back. We also had a tour of Shey Gompa itself. Later, a string of 24 laden ponies came past camp having been trading with China. The rest day allowed Niri to be more creative in the kitchen - chocolate cake with our afternoon tea. A lamb's liver stir fry with chips and freshly baked rolls were enjoyed for dinner.

Shey Gompa to Tinje

The overnight rain had cleared as we walked past Shey gompa and east along the Sephu Khola passing several summer camps occupied by herders from Saldang and their flocks of yaks, sheep and goats. A small guinea-pig like creature called a pika was captured on camera feeding in the undergrowth. On the final approach to the Shey La, John spotted a large paw print in the mud - Uden and a local Dolpo-pa lady confirmed this was from a snow leopard, our only trace of the animal. The pass afforded extensive view over ranges of peaks to Tibet, whilst eagles and vultures circled overhead. The descent took us down past long mani walls then several chortens to Namgung, with its monastery set in fields of barley below our campground. We had a lovely mutton curry for dinner perfumed with cinnamon, cloves and cardamom.



Children at Shey gompa

The blue skies returned and having visited Namgung gompa, we returned to camp to collect our day sacs. Uden spied a small herd of blue sheep crossing the hillside above us. These are the snow leopard's main prey animal, but no cats could be seen. Our trail climbed high above the cliffs and we met a number of locals crossing from Saldang back to their summer pastures with re-supplies. Saldang is a large linear village built on old fertile river terraces and sits in a mosaic of ripening barley, buckwheat, mustard and potato fields below endless peaks stretching into Tibet. Our camp was close to the primary school and as usual we provided much entertainment for the boys and girls all dressed in traditional chubas. Classes in maths, English, Tibetan and Nepali were all in progress. Schooling is free and kids attend for six months of the year May to October working 9am-4pm each day, with a half a day on Fridays and Saturdays off.

Fortified with a typical breakfast of tea, porridge, omelettes and pancakes, we walked in sunshine down through the houses, pausing to photograph villagers working in the fields against a backdrop of ancient chortens, to a gompa that was closed. Buckwheat was being harvested but the barley was late, due to heavy snows that lasted into the spring that had delayed planting, but now promised a bumper crop. We crossed the Nagon Khola on a wooden bridge and climbed steadily out of the valley heading for the Khoma La, our third major pass, marked with a cairn of calcite and the usual prayer flags. Our campsite, a damp meadow next to Khoma Gaon school in the next settlement, came into view past a line of white and tan coloured chortens. A number of polyethylene roofed greenhouses were in evidence as new technology was being tried. The kids here were in western dress but just as curious.

Leaving the village, a parade of yet more mani walls was passed on the way to a bridge over the Koran Khola, then up through a jumble of conglomerate towers to the relatively low Shimen La and down the other side towards Shimen. The Panjyang Khola was wonderfully bridged by a single cantilevered structure onto a huge heavily-fossilised rock and, having crossed, we skirted Shimen village and its lush barley fields on a riverside path to a sinuous mani wall, extending to about a kilometre in length. One of the longest in Nepal, this wall varied between about 1.5 and 3 metres in width. With an average density of approximately 15 mani stones per square metre on the surface (it's hard to estimate whether the stones underneath are all carved or not), this wall contains at least 30,000 mani stones, prompting the question of who carved them and why are the walls so long here? One explanation is that according to Bauer, the Dolpa-pa were governed by the principality of Lo (present day Mustang) and were forced to pay tributes in the form of taxes, labour and religious service. One form of this tribute combined the latter two by the carving of mani stones and the placement of these to facilitate inspection and counting is most likely to be along the principal trade routes to and from Lo.

The trail continued along the terraces above the Panjyang Khola then up crossing a side stream and down to reach the ancient faded white chortens and mani walls of Phalwa from where a major trading route goes to Tibet, whose border is just 15km away. The track now showed the odd tyre mark and we soon encountered a few parked Chinese motorbikes as we entered Tinje village and headed to our camp down by the river.



Phalwa gompas

Tinje to Chharka Bhot

We awoke to a lovely sunny morning and left camp to follow the riverside trail all day passing more mani walls and chortens into wild country. Part way along we came across a JCB excavating a new road on the other side of the river. A laden yak caravan passed us, then a sizable pony train, both heading towards Chharka Bhot. We had to ford a river here, but it was only knee deep and not too cold. We stopped in a meadow at the lower camp for the Mo La pass.



Our tents were surrounded overnight by a large flock of sheep and goats huddling together for warmth against the keen frost.

Mo means beautiful and La - pass, so it was to the beautiful pass that we climbed in sunshine, boulder-hopping at first along the braided stream, then up to a large cairn at the col. We were just in time to photograph another yak caravan and a pony train coming towards us from Chharka Bhot. We had fine views of the snow-capped peaks of Tukucho, Dhampus and Dhaulagiri against blue skies above a lower band of clouds.

We dropped down into another river valley and Chharka Bhot gumpa with the village behind eventually came into view. Chha means salt and Ka - good, in reference to the locally mined salt previously traded for grain, while Bhot refers to the Tibetans who live here. The village has an older and a newer part. The old village is like no other settlement that we passed. There are three-storey buildings which stand close together on a shelf overlooking the river with a few tiny windows on the outer walls, which give it the appearance of a compact medieval citadel. Wandering through the narrow twisting lanes one feels life here has changed very little over the years. This village featured prominently in Eric Valli's film Himalaya. Our camp was in a courtyard in the newer part of the village and some 900 head of sheep and goats were driven past just after we arrived, heading east to the market in Pokhara.

After breakfast taken outside in the sun and on our way to visit the gumpa, a crocodile of roughly 30 children from the primary school came past us on a field trip heading in single-file up the hill above the village with their teachers, waving and shouting a chorus of "namaste" and "tashi delek".

Chharka Bhot has a long tradition of Bon religion dating back to the 12th century and the present-day gumpa is the third monastery situated in the village, constructed in 1988 using timbers from the previous building. The monks in residence gave us access to the main prayer hall which was atmospherically lit by an array of oil lamps illuminating the deities wreathed in orange silks above.

Into Mustang - Chharka Bhot to Jomsom

After returning from the gumpa, we collected our sacs and headed up the Chharka Tulsu Khola valley with great swathes of autumnal colour contrasting with the river below. We waded across the river, straightforward but notable for the leader leaving his boots behind, thankfully collected by Milan! Just before forking right at a confluence, a rocky climb above the Thasan Khola and down again led us to a pristine valley camp in a broad meadow beside a tributary called the Wari Yakhun Khola. Afternoon tea was taken as the same huge flock of sheep and goats were driven across the meadow with alpine choughs wheeling overhead.

The morning was again sunny as we broke camp and continued upstream along this delightful valley. Clouds developed later in the afternoon and we could see hailstorms blanketing out the summits behind us, but these did not reach us. The sun reappeared briefly as we reached our next camp situated in a very wide plain and close to a small stone shelter used by herders in an area called Yak Kharka. This was our highest camp at 4984m.

We had a frost overnight and some fresh hail, but the chilly weather shrouded the mountains in mist giving very photogenic conditions as the sun slowly burned it off. The snow-capped 6000m peaks of Tashikang and Dhampus came in and out of view as we climbed to the first col, the Niwas La (5120m), which was soon reached without too much effort. Then we crossed a vast inclined plain which led through the mist to a final steep ascent up a loose shale slope to the multiple prayer-flagged cairns celebrating the top of the Jungben La (5557m) and our crossing into Mustang.



The high point on Jungben La

After a few photos we descended the other side to stop for lunch beside a small river. This gave us a chance to watch a caravan of 20-odd laden yaks being driven up to the pass towards Chharka. After our meal, we climbed to another col, with fine views over the next day's trek above Sangda village high on the other side of the Kyalunpa Khola valley. We then descended some 1000m of very steep, loose and earthy terrain dotted with juniper trees to a campsite on a tiny flat area, on the flank of a huge river canyon, thankful not to be sharing it with another group!



We awoke to find our camp enveloped in thick mist, which thinned after breakfast. An even more precipitous descent was then undertaken, passing below a herd of blue sheep, to reach the suspension bridge over the Kyalunpa Khola.

Then we climbed just as steeply up the other side to begin a long traverse of the valley high above the river, passing above Sangda through scrubby terrain to a newly constructed road where camp was made beside a pitifully small water source draining the Sangda Lek ridge above.

Our final day of trekking started in sunshine with a spectacular temperature inversion below camp filling the Kali Gandaki valley.

The crew and the ponies continued down the track to Jomsom, but we soon left the dirt road behind and traversed across to our last pass, the Bhima Lojun La (4450m), leaving us some 1600m to drop to Kagbeni town.



On the trail to Kagbeni

The summits of the Annapurna Himal opposite were mostly in cloud during our descent, but the unmistakable U-shaped trough of the Thorong La, on the Annapurna Circuit trek, was a handy reference point, lying next to the 7000m peaks of Nilgiri and Tilicho, which poked their heads out above the clouds from time to time.

We returned to civilisation over the new bridge into Kagbeni, watching a number of Hindu pilgrims taking a ritual wash in the Kali Gandaki before their ascent to the important temple at Muktinath. We had a late lunch and took the opportunity to wander round the town with all its trappings as a busy hub for pilgrims and trekkers. A short jeep-ride then took us down a rough track beside the river to Jomsom and our accommodation in the aptly named Hotel Windy Valley beside the STOL airstrip (tarmacked!). Our last night with the crew was celebrated with a party in the hotel with another good dinner from Niri and his team, finished with a slice of a splendid celebration cake which he had iced with "Well Done YRC". Some stayed on beer, some tried the local apple brandy and a few drank quantities of both, all of which fuelled a great evening to remember, with much dancing and singing.

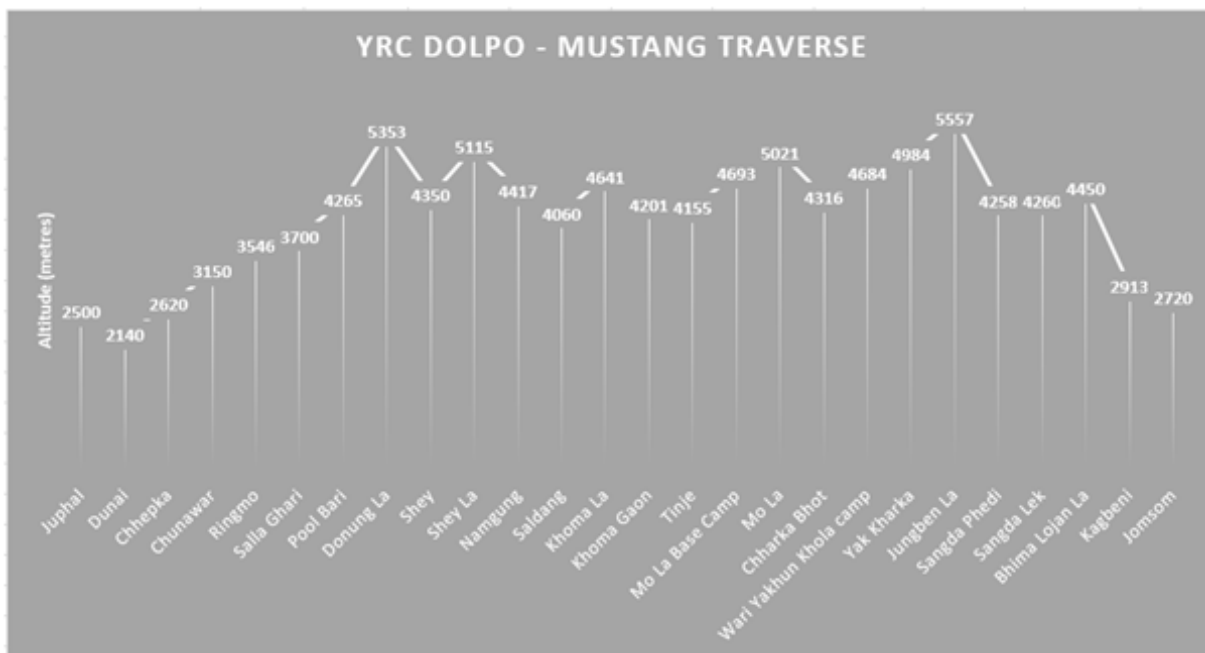
A few hangovers were nursed in the morning as we said our goodbyes to the crew and boarded another Twin Otter for the flight to Pokhara and the luxury of a night in the green oasis of the Shangri La hotel, with its stunning view of the snow-capped pyramid of Machapuchare nestling between Annapurnas I and III, shimmering in the near distance.

Whilst in Pokhara, Mick, Richard and Barry took the opportunity of visiting the International Mountain Museum. Amongst the many exhibits and photos, we found a reference to the 30ft rope ladder that the YRC had donated to the 1952 Everest Expedition with a photograph by Alf Gregory of a laden Sherpa being life-lined down the ladder.

Another flight returned us to Kathmandu where we had a final group diner with Uden in traditional Nepali style in a former palace. Barry and Mick spent their last day visiting Bhaktapur, famous for its temples (some earthquake damage) and its potters. After lunch, they went to the ancient Hindu temple of Changu Narayan situated on a hilltop surrounded by forest out in the countryside. This temple is considered to be Nepal's oldest temple and a milestone in temple architecture with its rich decoration.

Conclusion

Dolpo is a region that attracts adjectives: mysterious, alluring, magical, mystical, secretive, isolated, mediaeval, exotic with a landscape of stark, ascetic beauty. It definitely had a different feel to other parts of the Himalayas we had visited. There is some resonance with the Buddhist culture and scenery in Ladakh, but the Dolpo culture is certainly different. The gompas are much smaller and thus more intimate, the white stupas and chortens with their terracotta emblems are distinctive and the enormously long mani walls intriguing. The mountain scenery and landscapes was of course superb and this trek is to be warmly recommended.



Profile

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Motup, Yangdu and Alka at Rimo Expeditions for help with planning and logistics. Especial thanks must go to Uden Sherpa, an outstanding local guide whose comprehensive knowledge and language skills greatly enriched our visit. Also thanks to our tireless crew: cook Niri and his kitchen team Nima, Ganesh and Purna for the consistently excellent food on our trek; our three Sherpas Yash, Milan and Surya for their route finding, help and support; our two porters Pradip and Dhan Badour; and our two contracted Dolpo-pa ponymen Prem and Mal Bhadur - their twelve ponies and handling were a credit to them.

Participants

Mick Borroff (leader), Barry Dover, Richard Dover, David Hick, Bob Peckham (guest) and John Sutcliffe.

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Gallery



Pagoda temple at Bhaktapur



Chortens and Mani wall, Chharka Bhot



**Crossing
the
Suli Gad**

**Phoksundo
Tal**



**Heading
towards
The
Donung
La**



Chortens at Saldang



Camp beside Wari Kakhun Khola



Barley and buckwheat near Saldang



Charka Bhot



A typical Mani stone



**Black Bairab
In Kathmandu**

**and inside
Throngdrol
Bon
monastery in
Chharka**



JOHN MIDDLETON, MAN OF THE WORLD

Many members have been to a lot of places but none have been to so many largely unheard of places with unpronounceable names as John and Valerie Middleton. We have often touched upon their frequent trips to explore caves, karst and climbs in remote places. Sometimes formal club meets, sometimes informal groups of YRC members, sometimes expeditions made up out of the memberships of a number of clubs and sometimes with family and / or friends. The trips are invariably written up in the journals with maps etc. and provide useful material for other members to refer to. John combines caving with what he would describe as sports climbing and botanical studies.

His early caving expeditions included trips exploring the caves of Northern Ireland, two trips to Tennenengebirge in Austria and three weeks in Italy (Perugia, Monte Cucco). There were two expeditions in Turkey jointly with the Speleo Club de Paris and two caving in the Lebanon with the Speleo Club du Liban.

1971 saw him in the Zagros Mountains, leading a multi-club expedition seeking out probable cave systems in Kurdish Iran. They eventually found an incredible plateau at about 10,000 feet and this held a lot of promise and numerous holes to be explored. Several proved to be not particularly deep choked shafts, several extended for a few hundred feet of sporting cave and just one proved to be the 'big one'.



The Plateau: Photo © Tony Waltham

This was named 'Ghar Parau' and was finally explored and surveyed to a depth of 2,383 feet and about one mile of passage. *(see further comment pages 55-56)*

This was followed by work in France in the Southern Pyrenees exploring Pierre Saint Martin, the Diau system in the Plateau du Parmelan, Haute Savoie and the Gouffre Berger in the Vercors. Other French trips included visiting the karst and caves of the Causses and the Figeac region.

Also in the 70s and 80s he visited south west Iceland for a 'long' walk taking in some lava tube exploring; spent six weeks touring by 4x4 exploring the Moroccan and Algerian Sahara before touring Norway, Finland and Sweden, driving round via the North Cape. He also visited Hungary and Romania for exploration above and below ground with Romanian cavers; did some adventure walking in Spain and Portugal including the Picos; back to Andalucia for the karst, caves and natural history and El Chorro.

During the rest of the twentieth century, and now normally accompanied by Valerie, he then largely turned his attention to more distant parts and volcanoes took his fancy. There were trips to take in Kauai, and Maui on Hawaii; visits to Bali, Lombok and Java in Indonesia taking in some volcanoes and doing some snorkelling, and then Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah. This included going up Kinabalu; new exploration in Mulu caves and through the rainforest. Then followed another trip to Indonesia, to Sulawesi. This time, more volcanoes, wildlife and snorkelling in the north, caves and karst in the south.

The next area to catch his attention was South America with trips successive years to Guatemala and Honduras, Panama and Costa Rica, Columbia and Panama (*Darian Gap*) and then Nicaragua

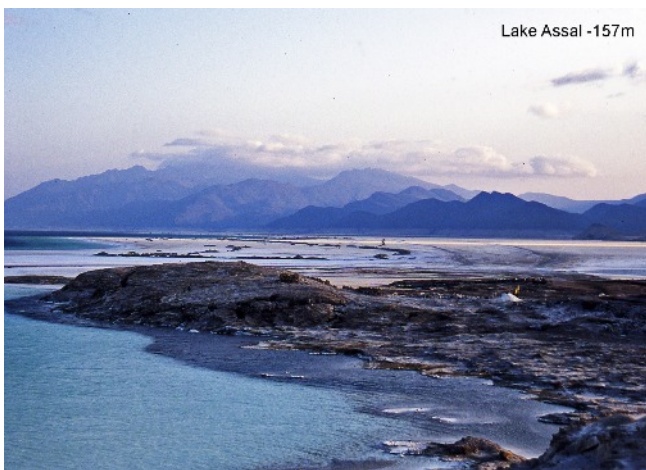
Along the way he managed to fit in a number of other visits to France, Italy and Spain.

Not one to miss anywhere out, Africa then came calling and in 1997 there was a trip to Tanzania to climb Ol Donyai Lengai and Kilimanjaro, then two years later Cameroon visiting the Wasa and Korup reserves and Mandara mountains. Later the same year he was off to Madagascar including Perinet studying the wildlife, botany, and cave exploration. The following year they went back for karst and cave exploration plus botany in areas not visited the previous year in the north and northwest including Namoroka.

Then it was back to the other side of the world again, first the Philippines to Luzon, Mindoro and Palawan for the caves and karst, with visits to Baja, Mexico exploring by 4x4 Jeep from San Jose del Cabo to Catavina and later in the year Laos including karst and cave exploration of Khammouane.

Things were hotting up now and in 2002, now retired, it was South Africa botanising in the Western and North Capes, Western Australia from Kalbari to Kalgoorlie, and New Zealand exploring North Island.

The following year saw sports climbing in Sardinia and in France in the Ardeche, Calanques, Verdon and Vercors and then a return to Madagascar, botanising, walking and cave exploration - filling in most of the blank spots including exploring the caves and karst of the Mahajunga region .



Since then they have been back to Africa again caving at Sof Omar, exploring the Danakil and Erta Ale volcanoes in Ethiopia and visiting amazing geological sites in Djibouti including Lake Assal and Lake Abhe.



Tufa Towers, Lake Abhe

They have been studying the plants and wildlife and generally exploring all Namibia (caves) and eastern South Africa; northern Senegal, adventure climbing and exploring around Tafroute in the south of Morocco and four weeks travelling all round Mauritania. They visited Jebel Acacus, Libya and had a trip across the desert and took in Cyrene limestone karst and Bir Ghanum gypsum karst.

More recently they have visited the salt karst of southern Iran; Yemen; the caves of Oman and Dhofar and climbed in the Antalya region of Turkey'.

They also investigated the flora of Chile and north-west Argentina; the flora and caves of Bolivia; then made three visits to Brazil for the Pantanal and giant caves of Peruacu, Bonito and Bahia.

They have studied the caves of New South Wales and explored the Flinders Range in Australia, and New Zealand and New Caledonia visiting Easter Island and Singapore along the way.

They have not neglected Europe with many trips to the nearer continent including sports climbing and walking around Cala Gonone and the south of Sardinia, around Cuenca in Spain, around the Dentelles de Montmirail which overlooks the Cote de Rhone villages in France, Kalymnos and Rhodes in Greece and Istria and Paklenica in Croatia. There has also been botanising and climbing near Annecy, France, in Malta, and caving and climbing around Vratsa and Lovec in Bulgaria.

Recently they have targeted the central Asia region with trips to the Almaty region of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan and have been exploring the mountains of Uzbekistan.



Boszhira, Kazakhstan

Their travels and research have highlighted many areas of caving and climbing potential in corners of the world infrequently considered for our activities and have opened the doors to many opportunities.

Their latest foray was to yet another place with a challenging name.

MANGYSTAU - A NAME TO CONJURE WITH!

John & Valerie Middleton

An account of a recent visit to a little known and rarely reported wilderness region rich in spectacular landscapes, natural curiosities, historical oddities, a few caves and non-stop adventure.

WHERE IS IT?

Mangystau, Mangyshlak, Mangghystau.

Three names to cause initial confusion but all are transliterations of the same place depending on which map, book or other authority is referred to. Mangystau, together with Atyrau are the westernmost regions or **oblasts** of that vast and enigmatic Republic known as Kazakhstan. To the south lays Turkmenistan, to the east Uzbekistan, to the west the Caspian Sea and to the north Atyrau oblast whose northern boundary is with Russia.



WHAT'S THERE - THE LAND

Mangystau has a total land area of 165,600km² which is similar to the combined areas of England and Wales. This entire region is classed as **desert** with an average of much less than 150mm rain per year. There are no perennial streams and water is extremely scarce although a number of minor springs do occur only to quickly disappear into the parched earth.

The majority of fresh water originates either from an old nuclear desalination plant close to Aktau or through an equally ancient and rusting pipeline commencing not far from the Volga River in Russia. Water raised from ever deeper wells is salty and rarely fit for drinking whilst the few isolated habitations found away from a city have to rely on water delivered by tankers. This is then stored in buried cisterns.

The oil boom and subsequent increase in population level is also helping to exacerbate further desertification. Archaeological research has conclusively confirmed that barely fifteen hundred years ago much of the countryside was fertile, verdant and rich in wildlife.

Sedimentary deposits in the form of mainly Cretaceous chalk, limestone, gypsum, clay, mudstone and shales shape the majority of the land mass. These fossil-rich rocks remain as the horizontal beds in which they were once laid down creating a general landscape of flat plains or low plateaux. A rather sparse and monotonous steppe vegetation of drought resistant grasses and dwarf herbs cover the surface although a short blooming of annual flowers can be expected after any reasonable rainfall. This steppe is regarded as a **fragile environment** suggesting that any damage done to it, such as by motorised vehicles or the installation of pipelines, may not recover for at least a hundred years or more.

The ancient seas that once help form this land have also left behind many spectacular erosion features as they receded. These resulting phenomena often rival or even exceed the spectacle of anything to be seen elsewhere on Earth. They may occur as dazzlingly white salt lakes, great multi-layered cliffs, isolated pinnacles, razor-edged ridges, deep canyons, land slips, depressions or more rarely as caves. The lowest place in Mangystau and in all Kazakhstan is situated in the **Karagiye Depression** at -127m some 60km south-east of Aktau. The highest elevation of +556m occurs to the east of Shetpe town.

WHAT'S THERE – THE PEOPLE.

The current population of this not inconsiderable region is just under 500,000. This figure relates to a density of roughly 3 persons per square kilometre. In England, for comparison, the figure is 410 persons per square kilometre!

Eighty-five percent of this population is concentrated within the administrative capital of Aktau and the second city of Zhana-Ozen both of which are situated in oil producing areas. Apart from oil other wealth is derived from smaller deposits of gas, various minerals, growing melons and rearing livestock such as camels, horses, goats and sheep.

The national and local language is 'Kazakh' with the majority of people also speaking 'Russian'. English and other European languages are rarely understood. The ethnicity of the country is 64% Kazakh, 24% Russians, 3% Uzbeks and the remainder being Ukrainians, Germans, Tatars, Uyghurs and other minorities. The current population of Mangystau also includes a considerable number of foreign oil workers. Religious freedom is guaranteed by the state with 70% of the population claiming to be moderate non-denominational Muslims and 25% Orthodox Christians.

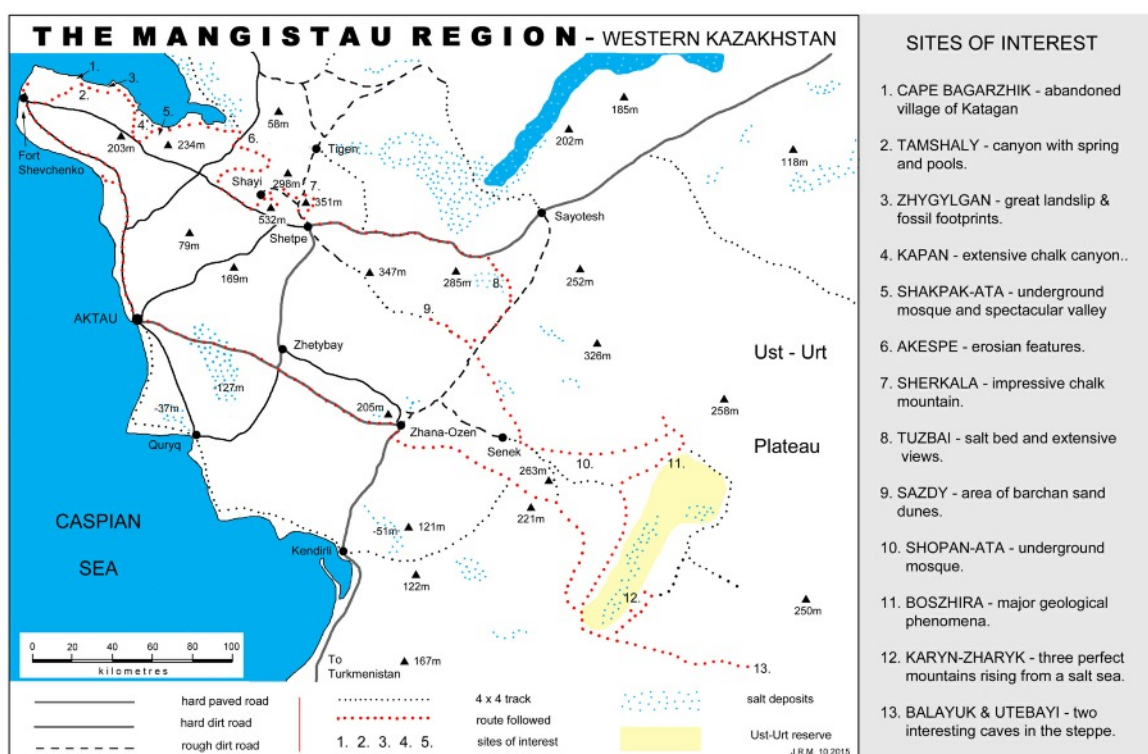
The known history of Mangystau dates back to around 1000BC when various nomadic tribes migrated to the region and claimed dominance over the land for variable periods. Notable amongst these were the Scythians from the west, the Wusuns from China, Attila's Huns and then the Sassanid's. It was particularly desirable due to the steady development of the **Silk Road Trade Routes** and the associated **Caravanserais** stops several of which passed through Mangystau. After the Sassanids occupation relative prosperity ensued, albeit with several other minor tribal incursions until the Mongols brought almost total destruction to the area during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (*note 1*).

It is as a result of their invasion and occupation that very little is left to see of that period today. One exception to this is **Kyzyl-Kala** (Red City) a town so named because of the red rocks found in the vicinity. The town developed around the 10th century with the arrival of settlers from nearby **Khorezm** and declined in the 13th century after the Mongol conquest of Khorezm itself. For some reason Kyzyl-Kala was not destroyed by the Mongols and for the past thirty years archaeologists have been slowly unearthing considerable fortifications, buildings and pottery.

Other historical sites dotted about the landscape include stone walled hunting traps, innumerable ancient cemeteries, intricately designed Islamic mausoleums and necropolis, and most unusual of all the **Underground Mosques** (*note 2*)

Note 1 - For greater detail of the above rather complex period and subsequent development of a Kazakh people please refer to Paul Brummell in the Bradt Guide for Kazakhstan.

Note 2 - see 05 and 10 under 'OUR HIGHLIGHTS' section below.



OUR HIGHLIGHTS

01. Cape Bagarzhik. N 44°37'47.86" E 50°35'10.13" alt. 8m.

The wild and sparsely populated central coastal area of Cape Bagarzhik is of particular interest due to the old fishing village of **Karagan** which was abandoned more than sixty years ago. Most of the buildings have now fallen into total disrepair and the few that do remain are barely habitable. However there are many discarded artefacts lying around that exemplify the toughness of this kind of life in such an isolated, albeit attractive, environment.

At just about the same place as the rough dirt track starts its steep descent to Karagan from the plateau above there is an excellent example of a landslip where a substantial length of limestone cliff has fallen forward.

02. Tamshaly. N 44°35'12.70 E 50°35'35.66" alt. 45m.

Tamshaly is remarkable as being one of only two places where we actually came across any fresh surface water on our travels. This water appears as drips seeping from beddings in a 20m high cliff at the head of a short blind valley. These drips are just sufficient to form a small stream that then flows through beds of strongly scented water-mint into two successive reed surrounded pools. The lower one has been slightly dammed and water does not proceed further. The whole area is particularly attractive with various leafy shrubs and a few smaller plants that were still in flower. This was the only site where we noted both damsel and dragonflies. In addition Tamshaly is home to an endemic frog and whilst their presence was obvious from the croaking we frustratingly did not manage to find a single one.

The second site where we saw running water was at the **Samal Gorge**. Here a small stream originating from a spring ran through a narrow canyon rich in unexpected trees, shrubs and water plants. It was also well populated with various birds, insects, lizards and several well fed snakes. Whilst this is a very pretty area it is obviously a popular picnic spot at certain holiday times as witnessed by the many beer cans and vodka bottles! It is found not too far from **Sherkala** (07).



Zhygylgan Chaos (© ap)



Zhygylgan Fossils

03. Zhygylgan Chaos and Fossil Footprints. N 44°36'41.28" E 50°49.05.60" alt.ave.60m.

This great chaos of jumbled limestone blocks is the result of a landslip on a massive scale that can be clearly seen on **Google Earth**. It measures almost 3.9km in length by 2.2km across and has a 60m slump at its upper end. The lower slope terminates in the sea. It has been caused through underlying soft clays being squeezed out from beneath heavy beds of limestone which have subsequently collapsed. When we first arrived at this site we were totally awestruck by its spectacle and definitely considered it to be one of the most incredible places that we had ever seen. However after we had made a steep descent down into this confusion of rocks even more amazing sites came into view.

On the upper surfaces of many of these blocks were thousands of deeply imprinted fossilised animal footprints. According to Alexander, who had previously checked with palaeontologists in Almaty, no serious studies into age and identification had yet been made here.

Our inexperienced eyes picked out at least six different animal species ranging from large cat paw prints to three-toed dinosaurs(?). Unsurprisingly we finished this day well behind schedule!

By again referring to Google Earth it is possible to note several other lesser landslips along the northern Mangystau coastline.

04. Kapan Canyon. N 44°24'18.21" E 51°04'43.11" alt. 63m.

The Kapan Canyon cuts a spectacular route through a chalk plateau for almost 3km before debouching onto a wide plain leading to the sea. It averages about 80m in depth and varies in width from 25m to 40m. The vertical and brilliantly white walls show many fine erosion features the most obvious of which is extensive and quite deep 'honeycombing' of the surface. A small sample of this is well seen on the photograph which also shows an obvious band of **flint nodules**. Flowstone can be noted in several places and one small cave has been further enlarged in the past for use by overnight hunters.



No water was present on our visit but woody scrub does exist in the narrower sections. Many **fossils**, particularly of ammonites, lay scattered on the plateau surface.

05. Shakpak-Ata Underground Mosque and Valley. N 44°26'00.62" E 51°08'18.78" alt. 20m.



There are estimated to be 18 underground mosques throughout Mangystau that date between the ninth and nineteenth centuries AD. They are normally associated either with a local **Suffi** saint or similar prominent personage. Most of the mosques were originally small caves that have been enlarged into further chambers and passageways. Some have simply been carved out of the soft rock. Shakpak-Ata is one of the oldest and particularly impressed us as it is situated in a long low escarpment above a slope with the rock exhibiting beautiful 'honeycombing' as well as other karstic features.

The mosque comprises two entrances and four low carpeted passageways that lead into a domed chamber. Many niches have been carved into the walls which may once have held books or candles. These same walls also have petroglyphs on them depicting various scenes.

At the bottom of the slope outside the mosque is a large necropolis and beyond this commences the impressive Shakpak-Ata valley. This is initially 2-3km wide but gradually narrows between glistening white cliffs that have been eroded into many channels towards their base.

06. Akespe. N 44°24'57.93" E 51°35'15.16" alt. 81m.



The Akespe chalk region is one of long-ago eroded open areas, low mounds and small valleys within which it is possible to find innumerable **fossils**. These are literally scattered everywhere and are in excellent condition. We quickly amassed, and later left, a considerable pile of **shark's teeth**, vertebrae, shells and other objects. As these fossils are in such a good state we suspect that Akespe probably belongs to a slightly later period than Cretaceous.

About 15km to the south-east there is a region of variably sized rounded boulders covering many tens of square kilometres. The area is known as the Torysh Valley and the boulders are actually **Concretions**. (See YRC Journal, Issue 18, Winter 2014 page 20.)

07. Sherkala Mountain. N 44°15'17.93" E 52°00'22.37" alt. 287m.

Sherkala is a semi-circular mountain that imperiously raises 180m above the surrounding plain – *Sherkala translates as Lion in the Kazakh language*. Its measurements are roughly 900m x 600m with all sides having at least 35m high vertical cliffs. There is just one place on the northern side where a very steep gully allows access to the top. At one time there was also a thriving Caravanserai here but very little now remains other than bits of pottery.

In times of threat or attack the local population would precariously make their way on to the summit area and hope to remain hidden.

The ancient town of Kyzyl-Kala (see also under *WHAT'S THERE – THE PEOPLE*) is found on the plain by an area of greener vegetation about 2km to the south-west of Sherkala.

08. Tuzbai Salt Lake and Panoramic Views. N 44°02'47.43" E 53°13'30.02" alt. 237m.

The main E121 road from Aktau to the east of the country is currently being upgraded from a hard-core road to one of asphalt. At the point where this new road starts to ascend quite steeply on

its journey between Shetpe and Sayotesh a rough dirt track heads southwards. This in turn leads to the edge of the magnificent Tuzbai Depression and a sensational panorama where the brown steppe at 265m suddenly gives way to a dazzlingly white salt lake 260m below!



This vast lake, up to 5km in width, vanishes mesmerisingly into the distant mists some 16km away. The northern edge of the sheer cliffs can be followed for almost 30km with the option for many stops, many gasps and many photographs.

09. Sazdy and Ushtagen Sand Dunes. N 43°45'57.52" E 52°46'50.42" alt.182m.

These are an expanse of beautifully proportioned **barchan** sand dunes up to 25m in height. We camped in the middle of this area and upon arising in the morning were fascinated to find a particularly large number of snake, lizard and insect tracks very much in evidence.

The current extent of this shifting sand-sea is roughly 160km². Ushtagen is a small oasis town to the north-west whilst Sazdy is an extended farm in the south. If the dunes are viewed on Google Earth then the classic barchan pattern becomes obvious.

10. Shopan-Ata Underground Mosque. N 43°32'53.15" E 53°23'28.90" alt. 129m.

Both Shopan-Ata and the nearby **Beket-Ata** Underground Mosques are major places of pilgrimage for many Muslims from the surrounding countries. Shopan-Ata dates back to somewhere between the tenth and twelfth centuries AD and consists of a cave entrance in a low rock face leading through a small corridor to four rectangular rooms, two of which are funeral chambers of Shopan-Ata himself and also his daughter. An extensive necropolis resides close by with many intricately engraved tombs. The Beket-Ata religious complex developed at a later date although there is a cemetery of similar age nearby. This mosque is of a greater extent and requires a 2km downhill walk to reach – photography is not permitted within the area. A more modern mosque was being constructed at the start of this path at the time of our visit.

11. Boszhira.

**N 43°25'29.46"
E 54°04'37.05"
alt. 40m.**



If we thought that the Tuzbair area was impressive then Boszhira is way beyond any superlatives that we know! Once more the endless steppe suddenly drops from its 260m elevation into a depression of blistering white salt and chalk that eventually reaches -24m at its lowest point! Long ridges of rock and bluffs protrude into this abyss whilst flat or dome topped islands arise to various heights and shapes. The fine rib of rock in photo 7 was probably formed as a result of highly mineralised water intruding into the chalk or limestone bed thereby creating a stronger rock that is slower to erode. The actual size of the depression is around 28km in length and up to 5km in width. We camped for one night on the steppe edge and had a further night sleeping in the bottom which gave us two hauntingly memorable and different overviews of this incredible wilderness.

12. Karyn-Zharyk Salt and Island Mountains. N 42°37'50.89" E 54°16' 36.39" alt. -67m.

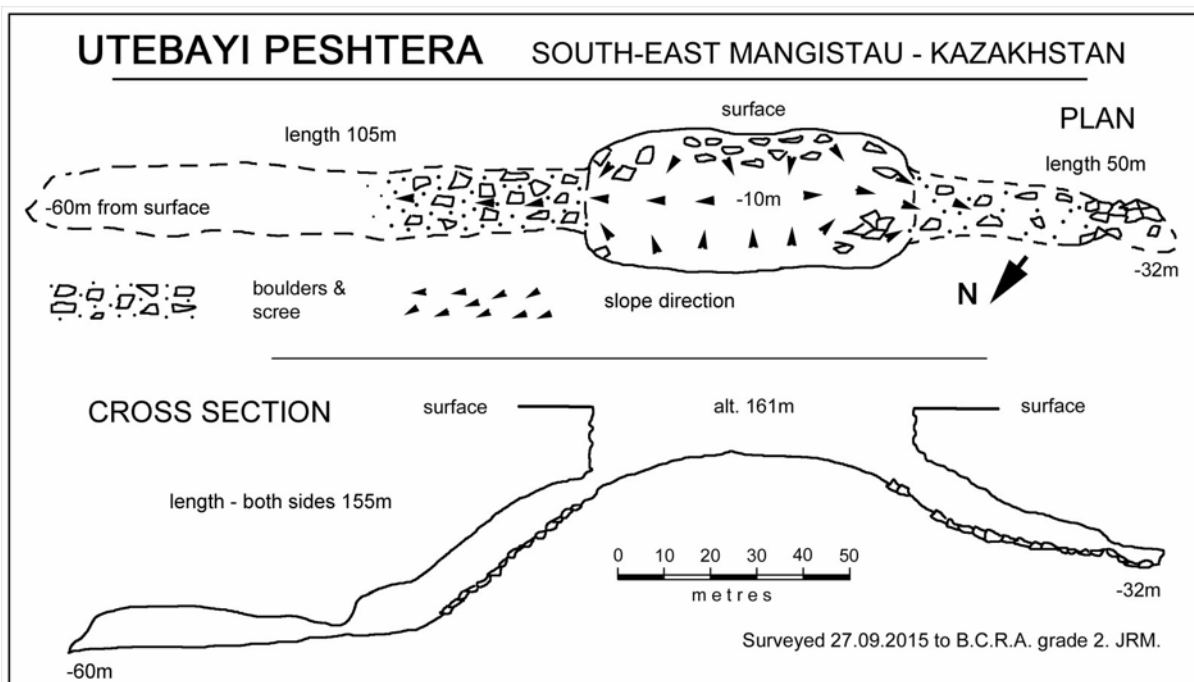
The Karyn-Zharyk area is at the southern end of the protected Ust-Urt Reserve which is marked as such on page 30. It is necessary to obtain a permit in advance before making a visit here and agree to the many regulations that must be complied with.



The visual results of any excursion here are well worth any bureaucracy encountered. This photo shows Alexander and Valerie standing on the edge of the great depression.

Where they stand is at an elevation of 170m whilst the pristine salt lake below is at -70m with the latter measuring almost 42km long and up to 10km in width. The three black mountains arising from the lake, which look even better in evening sunlight, are known as 'The Three Brothers'.

13a. Utebayi Peshtera. N 42°29'05.13" E 54°38'50.12" alt.167m.

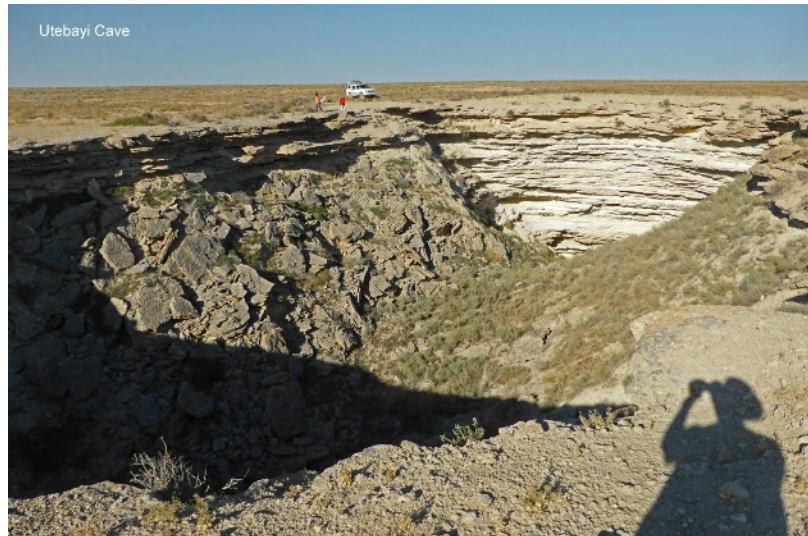


This interesting cave is situated just 65km from the old Ust-Urt National Reserve office.

Unfortunately the 70km drive across this particularly unforgiving steppe terrain took us almost three hours to complete! The entrance doline, once reached, is really a large cavern collapse measuring an impressive 65m by 30m.

An easy scramble down to the central 'plug' leads to two cave entries, one at either end of the doline. At the western end is a large descending passageway which becomes almost choked with large fallen slabs from the thinly bedded roof after just 40m.

We did manage to find a squeeze past these slabs that then dropped us into a low chamber. This had a tantalisingly strong draught blowing through the rocky floor but we could not find any further way through.

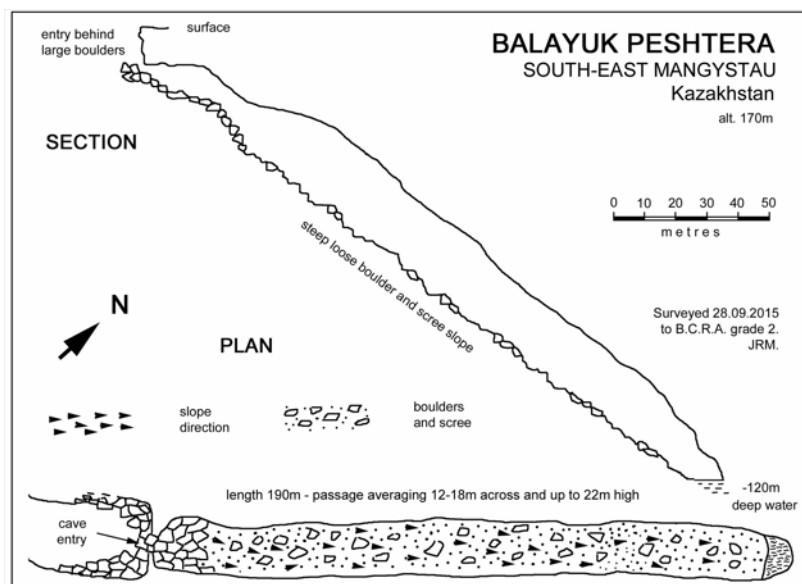


At the opposite end of the doline a smaller entrance leads to another large passage descending to a wide but low continuation. According to Alexander this was previously the end; however we found that some low stooing led to a large passage extension, some mud and the roof eventually reaching the floor to give a depth of -60m. Perhaps an extra 50m of new passageway was added to the two sections. As an added bonus we also spotted and photographed one magnificent adult and one young **Eagle Owl** within the surface doline area.

Both Utebayi Peshtera and Balayuk Peshtera are thought to have been originally explored in 1962 by cavers from Perm in Russia. However neither Alexander (in Russian) nor I (in any Western European language) have been able to find any written report or survey. Utebayi Peshtera gives the impression that very few explorers have ever visited it – there are no footprints, graffiti or rubbish anywhere whereas Balayuk Peshtera obviously does receive occasional visitors.

13b. Balayuk Peshtera. N 42° 26'47.86" E 54°43'59.13" alt. 184m.

This second cave is almost 8.2km distance from Utebayi Peshtera and is reached by following a heading of 120°. The entrance is then found amongst boulders at the end of a shallow dry valley above which stands a small cairn. It commences with a short scramble over and then down boulders into a reasonable sized chamber from which a large, tube like and impressive gallery heads steeply downwards for 190m. This then terminates in a deep crystal clear pool at -120m from which no exit could be seen.



Care is needed descending the passageway as there are several loose boulder sections the first of which is distinctly safer with a 40m handline. We believe that the slightly salty terminal pool is probably on the water table.

There are no side passages.

The small valley leading to the cave makes an excellent sheltered camp-site.



The characteristics of these two caves are typical of many other arid region caves that we have visited in Madagascar, Namibia, South Australia and Turkmenistan.

PHOTOGRAPHY.

The light and unique scenery of Mangystau make this a photographer's paradise. Unfortunately on day two of our trip the shutter and focussing mechanism on my own DSLR camera ceased to function. This was obviously a catastrophe as I was then left with just Valerie's handbag camera for the remainder of the journey. Luckily Alexander had his Canon camera with him and at the end of our time together he very generously downloaded all his pictures onto my laptop. With this article any photographs that have 'ap' after them are the **copyright©** of Alexander Petrov and not me.

ORGANISATION AND OUR TRIP.

The idea of a visit to Kazakhstan developed from our very successful previous year's trip to Turkmenistan (**YRC Journal, Issue 18, Winter 2014**). Initially, the very size of the country caused us problems in deciding which would be the best area to visit – there are so many! It is, after all, the ninth largest nation on Earth and comparable to the size of all Western Europe! It has an equally diverse range of environments, cultures and an almost 'mind-boggling' difference in altitudes from -127m at its western extremity at Khan-Tengry on the eastern border with China and Kyrgyzstan. 7,010m now seems to be the accepted height of Khan-Tengry (*Some authorities claim the height to be 6.995m!*)

We finally settled for Mangystau oblast based on the assumption that whilst it may have many affinities with northern Turkmenistan there would also be some fascinating differences, both cultural and physical. We always did like deserts anyway.

We initially contacted our recently acquired friends at **Owadan Tourism** in Ashgabat and asked if they could recommend someone who might assist us in organising such a trip. They responded that they could do no better than suggest **Alexander Petrov** of **Silk Road Adventures** in Almaty.

We duly contacted Alexander and he agreed to act as both guide and driver for us. He would also sort out the logistics and he eventually come up with a particularly challenging itinerary after taking our own wishes into account. Little did we realise at the time how lucky we really were as Alexander, who is now retired, was an original founder of 'Silk Road Adventures', one of the most highly respected of all Kazakh tourism operations. He also had a personal interest in the Mangystau area, its geography and its history. It was also suggested that we take another person with us to act as an interpreter as Alexander's English, whilst understandable, was limited. This did not prove to be a problem as many local University students learning English were eager to test their linguistic skills in exchange for a free

holiday! We obtained the very capable **Olga** who never failed us once and proved to be just as resourceful as we thought we were!

It is necessary to obtain a visa in advance in order to visit Kazakhstan. This initially seems rather daunting but it is actually a quite straightforward procedure once started. Firstly download a Visa Application Form from the Consular Section of the **Kazakhstan Embassy**. Fill it in carefully. Add a personal photograph, a passport, a copy of a return flight ticket, a letter stating any contacts and which areas are to be visited and finally a £35 fee. Send it off and within 14 days an impressive visa will be returned with the passport allowing a 30 day stay. During 2015 a simpler visa could also be obtained at the airport of entry if the duration was to be for less than 15 days. This was not so in our case.

Our trip was made from mid-September until early October and during this period we never once saw a cloud. The average daytime temperature was a comfortable, dry, 34°C with this dropping to just above freezing at night.

Twelve consecutive nights were spent under canvas without flysheets and four nights in reasonable hotels. If Aktau, Fort-Shevchenko, Shetpe and Zhana-Ozen were not included then the number of persons that we met as we travelled could be counted on both our hands!

Mangystau is definitely a wilderness experience and not for the faint hearted!

Finally we must again thank **Alexander Petrov** for his assistance, friendship, vast knowledge and patience without which this amazing excursion would not have been possible. We must also not forget **Olga** who, with equal patience, translated our many technical and sometimes complex queries into Russian and back. Thank-you!

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- Kazakhstan Embassy, 125, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EA. www.kazembassy.org.uk
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- Map – Freytag & Berndt. 2013. Kazakhstan, 1:2,000,000.
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- Noble, John; Kohn, Michael; Systemans, Danielle. 2008. Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan. Lonely Planet Guide, London ECV1 2NT. 364 pages. *Current Azerbaijan is covered in 73 informative pages although Baku and its locality are slightly out of date.*
- Silk Road Adventures, Adi Sharipova Str, 117-44, 050012, Almaty, Kazakhstan. www.silkadv.com .
A reliable 'in country' travel service that organised the logistics so that we could make our own trip. Recommended. The web site is very informative although not everything is in English.
- UK Government Travel Advice. 2015. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice .
NB. Essential reading for up to date country security and travel advice.

JURA WINTER MEET

SNOWSHOE HEAVEN

14 - 20 January
Leader - Mick Borroff

Introduction

The Haut Jura straddles the Franco-Swiss border to the north of Geneva and is characterised by long parallel limestone ridges and valleys along a northeast-southwest axis. Moving SW along this ridge from the north, the principal summits include Le Chasseron (1607m), Mt d'Or (1462m), Dent de Vaulion (1483m), Mt Tendre (1679m), Mt Sala (1511m), Le Noirmont (1567m), La Dole (1677m), Columby de Gex (1689m), Cret de la Neige (1717m) and Le Reculet (1718m). The panoramic view from these Jura summits across to the main alpine chain is magnificent, ranging from the Bernese Oberland to the Ecrins. The excellent PeakFinder website will give you a good idea of what is to be seen from many individual summits.

Participants

Mick Borroff , President
John Brown
Ros Brown (guest)
Ann Chadwick (guest)
Peter Chadwick
Tim Josephy
Rory Newman

Helen Smith
Michael Smith
Gail Taylor (guest)
Richard Taylor
Hilary Tearle (guest)
Sue Thomason (guest)

We had been checking the snow reports and webcams for the Jura for a couple of weeks before and like much of the Alps, there was little snow to be seen.

The weekend before we left it had snowed but Paul Everett, our chief Guest from the 2015 dinner who lives in Geneva, had been up Mont Sala near Les Rousses and had carried his snowshoes the whole way. Fortunately, a reasonable dump of snow had fallen late in the intervening week and all we had to do was get there!

Sat 14th

The party used a mixture of fly-drive, rail-drive and ferry-drive to get to Les Rousses on the French side of the border. The Smiths and Browns arrived first having crossed a very snowy Col de la Faucille thankful their car was fitted with winter tyres and had snow chains in the boot, as they wound around several slewed vehicles.

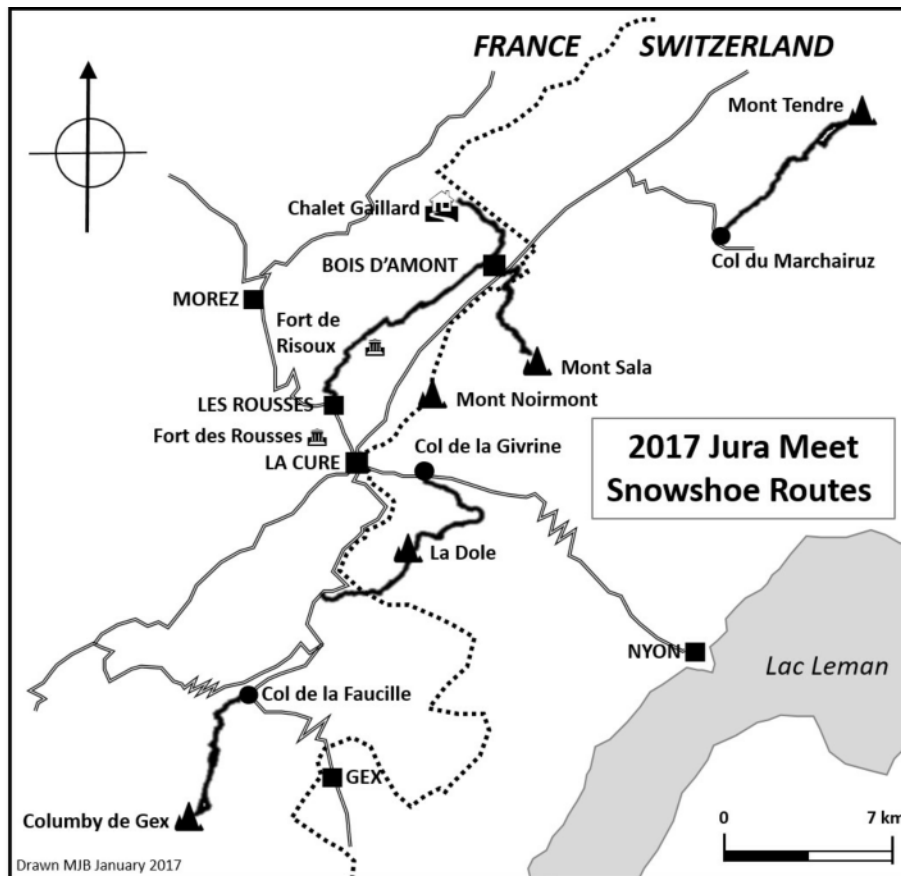
The Taylors and Chadwicks were next from Geneva and Richard put his negotiating skills to the test in the snowshoe hire shop securing a 20% group discount for pairs of *raquettes* and poles.

**Modern plastic
snowshoes m- TSL 329
Photo - Mick Borroff**



Mick and Hilary arrived at the Gai Pinson Hotel in the early evening after long but uneventful drive from Rotterdam, shortly followed by Rory, Sue and Tim, who arrived from Geneva in time for us all to finish dinner together and make plans for the week.

Based on four previous winter visits to the area, Mick had prepared a shortlist of interesting and varied snowshoe routes to choose from depending on the snow conditions and weather.



Sun 15th

Over breakfast we could see the tops wreathed in cloud which was forecast to last all day, so lower level excursions were the order of the day for the first snowshoe trips. Except for John and Ros, the remaining party of eleven now all armed with snowshoes, poles and lunch set off from Les Rousses on an introductory route through the powder snow in the lower Forêt du Risoux to Bois d'Amont where the ski-bus could return us to the hotel.



The party in Les Rousses

Photo - Richard Taylor

We donned snowshoes outside Les Rousses church and headed downhill. A short climb to a chalet led up to the snow-covered Combe de Vert car park where we had to convince the guardian of the *ski de fond* track that we were not going to cross into the forbidden winter wildlife protection zone (NB they are not used to seeing Brits on snowshoes). The track to the Fort du Risoux, constructed between 1880-1884, had a bit of a *piste* (path of compacted snow from previous snowshoe parties), but from the fort onwards, we had to break trail through the calf-deep powder snow across the silent forest.

A few blisters were repaired at our lunch stop on a fallen tree, then we made our way down to Bois d'Amont, where we were forced to take refuge in a bar for a hour to await the ski-bus

Madame bus driver was a real character and expertly showed us how to drive a coach in the snow, almost kidnapping us to Switzerland before taking us back to the hotel.



**Easier going in the Risoux Forest
Photos - M Borroff**

Meanwhile, the Browns decided to test their snowshoes by circumnavigating the Fort des Rousses. The conditions were really good with a beautiful walk through the snow-covered forest. This is France's second largest fortress built in the 19th century, with 50,000m² of vaulted rooms and kilometres of galleries, now housing more than 100,000 rounds of slowly maturing Jurafloré Comté cheese. John and Ros then crossed to La Cure on the Franco-Swiss border and back walking along the connecting very snowy side road which was free of traffic.

Mon 16th

For our first mountain day, Mick, Tim, Richard, the Smiths and the Chadwicks drove up to the Col de la Faucille and set off behind a French group along the forest path to the Le Crozet chalet, bound for the undulating ridge over the Grand Montrond to Le Columby de Gex (1688m). We were accompanied by a man carrying a hammer nailing temporary raquette route markers to trees for the navigationally challenged.

We emerged from the forest into a freezing fog which continued with fleeting blue patches as we ascended to Montrond and along the main ridge over Grand Montrond (1614m) happily following both the new French *piste* and the ice-rimed GR9 marker posts.



Photo - M Borroff

Fortunately, with wind behind us, the fog cleared as we approached the penultimate top where the French party turned back.

The blue skies and the view across to the main alpine chain were appreciated as we climbed the final slopes of scoured crispy ice and sculpted powder snow to the very heavily ice-rimed summit pylon of Le Columby de Gex.



Photo - Tim Josephy

The view across to the Alps were partially obscured by clouds but Mont Blanc and many others were picked out including the Cret de Neige, the highest French summit in the Jura, before dropping down to get out of the cold wind for lunch.

These bright conditions prevailed all the way back to the col but were accompanied by the biting wind now in our faces. We were back at the cars after about 6 hours and time for a quick hot chocolate before testing the winter tyres again back down to Les Rousses, leaving a lovely sunset behind us.



**Helen battling severe windchill
Photo - M Borroff**

Hilary drove Gail, Ros and John into Switzerland to the Col de la Givrine and they snowshoed up to the Vermeilley chalet for a pleasant lunch in front of their huge open fire.

After returning to the car, they went for a drive to Morez and up to Chapelle des Bois on the other side of the Forêt de Risoux for a late afternoon hot chocolate.

Rory and Sue gave Sue's blisters a chance to settle and walked round Fort des Rousses and then followed the GR9 to visit the ice-bedecked waterfall at Bief de la Chaille and back to Les Rousses. They saw a hare and crossbills.

Tue 17th

The weather forecasts from Meteo's France and Swiss concurred and were not promising. Low cloud and 45km/h winds gusting to 90km/h accompanied by temperatures around -8°C in the valley, meant that a lower route in the forest was required.

The Columby de Gex group decided on a drive back down the valley to Bois d'Amont and a relatively short ascent into the Forêt du Risoux and up to the the mountain refuge of the Chalet Gaillard (1232m) for lunch.



Photo - Richard Taylor

We left the the icy car park in what can be only described as very unpleasant conditions with swirling spindrift, but once some deep snow drifts had been negotiated between the roadhead and the forest, the wind's force was greatly dissipated by the trees and we snowshoed over a lot of debris - pine needles and lichen covered twigs. Unsurprisingly no-one had been up before us. Just before the chalet we were exposed to the wind again as we crossed a large clearing. The refuge was warm, the guardian friendly and the pea soup excellent, fortifying us for the return journey. Back at the snow-covered and icy road, the wind was now much fiercer driving more spindrift but just managing not to blow anyone over.

Sue decided to have a day indoors, and caught up on sleep and reading. Rory had a look up towards La Cure, which convinced him that a more sheltered route would be pleasanter, so walked down through the village, across the valley, and up to the viewpoint at La Roche Blanche.

Ros and John braved the wind-chill and walked down to the Lac des Rousses, they were hoping for a coffee at the restaurant but it did not open until February. They then walked back into town for lunch, ploughing through the snow drifts on the way.

Hilary and Gail sensibly kept within the confines of the village where the buildings provided some respite from the strong winds.

Wed 18th

Another very cold day was in prospect, but with the wind forecast to moderate in the afternoon, so Mick chose Mont Sala (1511m) as a lot of the route was in the forest. It was a chilly -11.5°C as Mick, Tim, the Chadwicks, Browns and Smiths left the car park in Bois d'Amont, but we soon warmed as we climbed up through the steep lower forest to emerge in the sun at the Les Loges *alpage*. We had been fortunately following the *piste* made by an earlier French party, but they were only out to enjoy a relatively short walk and returned from this point. More trail breaking was needed with most of the party having a turn at the sharp end following the marks of a faint *piste* past several *chalets d'alpage* and a carved boundary stone marking our transition into Swiss territory. A gentle ascent took us through the Bois de Loges and up to the unmanned Cabane des Electriciens refuge (1474m). The large cross on Mont Sala lay just 10 minutes away and suddenly the view across to Mt Blanc and the rest of the alpine chain could be enjoyed above the temperature inversion which had submerged Geneva in cloud. We returned to the cabin for lunch in the sun sat on a splendid bench seat carved out by Michael with his snow shovel.

We were getting chilly in the wind and a swift and easier return following our own well-tramped *piste* was made. Ann caught a glimpse of a chamois disappearing into the trees. As we descended back into the lower forest, the familiar figure of Rory came into view as he was prospecting our route for he and Sue to do in boots the next day. We just had time for a round of hot chocolates in Bois d'Amont before returning to the hotel – noting it had warmed up to -10.5°C.



Photo - M Borroff

As Richard was having difficulty in coming to terms that downhill in snowshoes necessitated more than merely standing still, he decided to have a rest day and hired some alpine downhill kit. Whilst he appreciated that this requires no effort to ascend (on a lift) or descend (stand still and lean from side to side) he had forgotten that this lack of effort does not keep one as warm as slogging up and down hills. He was easily able to make us of his ski pass age allowance and visited Les Jouvencelles, La Darbella, La Serra, Les Dappes and reconnoitred the Massif de la Dole. Fortunately, he had been allowed use of 'the family car' as the link lift Le Balancier had been flattened during the previous day's storm. In good YRC tradition he invited himself to finish off a sumptuous lunch buffet at mountain hut he stumbled across which otherwise would have gone to waste. The only disappointment in an otherwise perfect day was the lack of mountain bars, loud music and dancing on tables.

Rory and Sue walked down through the village and up to the belvedere at La Roche Blanche – excellent view – and explored the forest. Later Rory prospected Mont Sala as above.

Hilary and Gail went on the train from La Cure to Nyons and onto Geneva for a refined day of culture of which the highlights were the Museum of Modern Art and the Bienale exhibition of the Moving Image.

Thu 19th

Mick had his eye on a snowshoe ascent of Mont Tendre (1679m), the highest peak in the Swiss Jura. Accompanied by Richard and Tim, an excellent day was enjoyed under clear blue skies above another temperature inversion filling the Geneva valley with cloud. Starting at -9°C at the Col du Marchairuz (1446m), we headed up a well marked trail with a compacted *piste* left by previous snowshoe parties



accompanied by a retired Swiss surgeon and mountaineer on alpine skis who spoke good English. We soon reached the closed CAS Cabane du Cunay (1588m), meeting another couple of ski-tourers on the way.

We took our lunch on the hut terrace whilst admiring the astonishing 180° panorama of the *Chaîne des Alpes* – we could see from the Bernese Oberland to the Ecrins without a trace of cloud over the summits. Dragging our eyes away, we found that the main *piste* soon disappeared off to the east and we chose to ascend the undulating wind-scoured SW ridge leading to Mt Tendre's summit triangulation cone for more photos of the Alps.



**Descent from Mont Tendre's summit ridge
Photo - M Borroff**

We decided to return to the CAS hut by a different route taking the path linking the *chalets d'alpage* and then back the way we came, where Mick spotted a rabbit. Mick lost a snowshoe heel bar with about 2km to reach the car, but fortunately the *piste* was sufficiently trampled to do it in boots without too much post-holing. A very well-earned Boxer beer was savoured in the Hotel du Marchairuz as we reflected on a fantastic mountain day on top of the Jura.

The Smiths and Chadwicks decided to visit a different area northwest of Les Rousses and headed over to Morbier to snowshoe up to the viewpoint of the La Roche Devant (1144m) and then visited the upstream end of the iced-up Cascades du Herisson.

Rory and Sue drove up to the Col de la Faucille and with Sue's blistered heels still troublesome in snowshoes, followed the well-compacted trail down to the Le Turet viewpoint in boots and returned to the col, meeting Hilary, Gail, Ros and John bound for the same belvedere in snowshoes. Rory and Sue then repeated Monday's route to the summit of Montrond to admire the wonderful alpine view.

Fri 20th

For our final day together, another cross-border route was chosen by Mick which traversed La Dole (1677m), the second highest summit in the Swiss Jura, starting at the Col de la Faucille road close to the Chalet Girantette in France and finishing at the Col de Givrine in Switzerland. Mick got a replacement heel bar fitted to his snowshoe while two cars were dropped at the end of the route thanks to Hilary and Rory. From our drop-off, Mick, Tim, Richard, the Chadwicks and Smiths gradually ascended the *piste* across snow covered meadows and the border wall up to La Dole's undulating southwest ridge.

Another almost windless day of blue sky and sunshine prevailed and we had lunch beside the summit radome which watches over Geneva airspace, with the Alps laid before us. Peter had bought his binoculars and, over lunch, some time was spent identifying summits and reminiscing about old climbs.



Photo - M Borroff

The other side of the radome was an orientation table where we could check our observations. The descent was made down a section of wind-scoured ridge past some very large chunks of ice-rime which had fallen off the summit aircraft warning-light towers and down to the Col du Porte. A steep slanting descent from the col across sun-softened snow in raquettes was not for the faint-hearted. From the Chalet des Apprentis, a varied route through sections of forest and steep open ground took us to a groomed husky track near St Cergue. The air was so still here that distinct layers of mist had formed in the valley bottom giving the illusion of a reflection. A gently ascending track brought us up to the Col de la Givrine and our cars for the return to Les Rousses and out hotel.

Rory and Sue did a walk up to the Belvedere du Dappes on the Montagne des Tuffes at the northern end of the Forêt du Massacre. Previously known as the Forêt de La Frasse, it was renamed after the slaughter of 600 Italian mercenaries by Savoyard forces in a conflict between the Duke of Savoie and the King of France in 1535. They had good views and saw nutcrackers, jays, crossbills, goldcrests and long-tailed tits. Later Rory walked down to the Lac des Rousses and up to the Roche de Lavenna.

Hilary, Gail, Ros and John caught the ski-bus to Premanon and showshoed to the frozen Bief de la Chaille waterfall and then circumnavigated the Fort les Rousses and back to the hotel.

The hotel management gave us each a glass of *kir royale* as an aperitif in appreciation of our visit and we toasted the success of the meet. This was followed by yet another good dinner and an impromptu financial management workshop as we unpicked the complexities of the billing arrangements.

Sat 21st

The group split up to head home except for Mick and Hilary who were fortunate to be staying on in the Jura at La Bourbe for another week of holiday in the glorious weather.

Sun 22nd

Mick had been invited on a snowshoeing route being led by Paul Everett. A large group from the Geneva branch of the CAS took the train up to the La Givrène col where Mick met them and snowshoed up to Mont Sala, stopping on the way for a warming bowl of soup at their Carrox refuge. Mick returning via the Creux de Crou to La Bourbe, while Paul's group dropped down SE to Arzier, to catch a train back to Geneva.

Mon 23rd

Hilary was feeling unwell with a bad headache and cough and so confined herself to bed, but was happy enough for Mick to drive up to the Col du Marchairuz to snowshoe up to the cross at the Cret de la Neuve (1494m), with a visit to the Glacière de St George (a 22m deep pothole, previously used as a snow pit to store ice) and return via the Combe des Amburnex.

Tue 24rd

Hilary was still poorly, so Mick headed up to the Col du Mollendruz (the next road col NE of the Col du Marchairuz) and did a half-day route to the Chatel pastures to prospect the way to avoid the ski de fond tracks for climbing Mont Tendre the next day, returning via the Combe de la Neige.

Wed 25th

Hilary wisely stayed in bed again, so Mick drove back to the Col du Mollendruz and snowshoed in solitude up to Mont Tendre. He took the direct route from the Chalet du Pre l'Haute-Dessus via the Chalet du Rizel, making use of some previous tracks which eased both progress and route finding between the clearings in the upper forest. There were a couple of other parties on the summit this time, all having come up from Col du Marchairuz to soak up the sun and gaze at the view.

Mick returned to the car by a different route via the Chalet de Pierre and the Combe de la Neige, slowly being engulfed by freezing fog.

Thu 26th

Hilary was now feeling well enough for a little excursion to view the frozen Cascades de Herisson, so they drove to the bottom car park beside the Maison de Cascades and walked up the icy path to the spectacular 65m high L'Eventail waterfall. The Club's ice-climbers would have been drooling if they'd been there. Mick then ventured up to the next fall – the 60m Grand Saut, again very impressive and on the return photographed a Great Egret fishing in the icy stream, quite oblivious to the pedestrian traffic on the adjacent path – it even caught a fish!

Fri 27th

Mick's last day on the hill was spent on a pleasant traverse of Mont Noirmont (1567m) starting at La Cure station and returning by the Creux de Crou, to finish back at the apartment in La Bourbe thus ending a perfect second week.

Conclusion

The Jura meet achieved its objectives of introducing a good number of members and guests to the pleasures of snowshoeing in an area new to most. January is a good time to go to the Jura to miss the start of the five weeks of French half-term and snow is usually plentiful. This year it was late and we were fortunate that a significant amount of snow had fallen immediately before our arrival or we would have been hill-walking.

Everyone took to wearing snowshoes, although there were some blistered heels on the first day out (Compeed to the rescue). We undertook a variety of routes to match the conditions and summited four of the main Jura peaks, where the panoramic view of the Alps was simply amazing.

Whilst deer, chamois, fox, mustelids, hare and rabbit tracks were frequently seen, the animals themselves proved elusive, with only a couple of glimpses in the forest. We looked hard for birds but they all seemed to have disappeared for the winter to warmer climes.

Les Rousses is a good hub for this part of the Jura and is close to Geneva airport for access. We all enjoyed our stay at the Hotel Gai Pinson - Monsieur and Madame Clerc and their staff including our very patient waitress Gwendolyn looked after us very well and the kitchen team did a great job throughout the week.

The hotel can be warmly recommended to future visitors.

The leader can provide more detailed information for anyone wanting to go snowshoeing in this attractive area of the Jura.

Further reading

Mick Borroff, Snowshoeing, YRC Journal 2011;13(11):28-30

Olivier Deconinck, *30 Balades à raquettes dans le Jura*, Editions Glenat, Grenoble, 2016.

Kev Reynolds and R. Brian Evans, *The Jura*, Cicerone Press, Milnthorpe, 1989.

Gallery



**L'Eventail Waterfall, Cascades de Herisson
Photo - M Boroff**



Main Jura ridge Photo - M Borroff



**Great Egret, Cascades de Herisson
Photo - M Borroff**



**Mick, Cret de Neuve summit
Photo his camera**



Descent from Mont Sala Photo - M Borroff



**Mont Blanc and the Alps over Caban de Cunay
Photo - M Borroff**



**Breaking trail back to Col de la Faucille
Photo - M Borroff**



**Crossing into Switzerland,
heading for Mont Sala
Photo - M Borroff**



**Mont Sala summit
Photo - Tim Josephy**



**Lunch at the Cabane des Electriciens
Photo - M Borroff**



**Descent from the Cabanes des Electriciens
Photo - M Borroff**



**Col du Marchairuz
Photo - Richard Taylor**



**Tim and Richard, homeward bound
Photo - M Borroff**



**La Dole from the Chalet Girantette meadows
Photo - M Borroff**



**La Dole descent from the Col du Port
Photo - Tim Josephy**



**Chalet at the head of the Combe de Neige
Photo - M Borroff**

NORWAY - SKI TOURING

This week-long meet (8-15 February) used DNT self-service huts in the hills north of Lillehammer for a 100km cross-country ski tour. The meet was blessed with good snow and weather with the air temperature starting around -20°C and gradually warming to just below freezing.

Participating:

Peter Chadwick

Esther Chadwick (G)

Becca Humphreys (PM)

Pete McLeod (G)

Michael Smith

Richard Smith

Richard Taylor

Kjetil Tveranger

Ann-Karin Tveranger (G).

Kjetil Tveranger, being familiar with the area, organised not only the route and travel arrangements but also the provisioning and, for those without their own skis, equipment. Five others also had hut-to-hut ski experience in Norway so the three novices were well supported and in any case were experienced downhill skiers. Kjetil's plans worked out well and this was an excellent introductory/intermediate ski trip 'away from it all' besides being highly sociable. The costs in Norway were about 2,600 NOK (~£260) including a small saving on account of the three DNT members incurring reduced hut fees.

Getting there

The seven UK-based skiers arrived in Oslo's Gardermoen airport late on the Wednesday afternoon and immediately faced the single hitch in the arrangements – being told by the ticket machine that the Ringebu train was fully-booked. An attendant came up with a solution: the only two remaining normal tickets were supplemented by five in the Komfort carriage at a premium of 90 NOK each. We readily agreed to this rather than have a wait of over two hours.

Meanwhile Kjetil and Ann-Karin had driven over the several hours from Florø stopping for provisions on the way.

Meeting up around 7pm, Kjetil made two ferrying trips from Ringebu station 22km up the snow-covered valley side to 940m and a rented cabin in the southern Rondane at Spidsbergseter.

Inside, Ann-Karin was preparing a meal for everyone and introductions were made as we ate.

We were late to turn in.



Thursday, Ringebufjell to Gråhøgdbu (1,135m)

This was a short day of about 10km skiing across easy terrain to the Gråhøgdbu hut and at this time of the year daylight lasts about nine hours. So we had time to repack our gear and leave any travel clothes in Kjetil's car. A clouded sky but the temperature was -20°C as we started out about 1100 for the two-hour ski to the hut which could be seen from a long way off. Lunch inside the hut after lighting the Jøtul stove then collecting and melting the snow. The Chadwicks then ascended nearby steep-sided Muen (Hay Fell), 1,424m, and returned in the gathering gloom of dusk. Meanwhile Rich tested out his power kite as a potential leg-saver. There was ample pull in the brisk wind but the turbulent flow from the ridge behind makes control difficult.

Two reindeer hunters arrived with pulks but having dogs with them are restricted to using bunks in the wood store so we see no more of them.

Using the hut's stores we prepare a fish stew then fruit salad washed down with a selection of whiskies and sloe gin. It was warm overnight with the stove kept alight.

Friday, Gråhøgdbu to Jammerdalsbu (1,130m)

Early risers heard ptarmigan here before breakfast. Starting at -14°C the temperature rose only a few degrees so we were using green ski gripwax apart from the few on fishscale skis (ribbed soles for traction). The 19km route crossed a small ridge into the unspoilt Dørmyrin valley then descended into Flågåmyrin in deep soft snow with some problematic steeper descents. To the right of the route the Smiths spotted a pair of reindeer antlers projecting from the snow. Rich excavated these and found they were a magnificent pair still attached to the skull and upper mandible. These were hooked onto his sack for carrying. After crossing a stream, lunch was taken on the bank and out of the wind. The afternoon's route undulated before pulling up towards the hut which was hidden behind a rise until we were about 600m away. The hut's name reflects that of the area which translates as wailing or complainers' valley.

The evening meal was soup, reindeer balls with rice and then fruit. This and almost all the cabins and huts had eight beds but we were a party of nine. Here, Pete elected to sleep on the floor using one of the spare mattresses. Elsewhere others chose the padded bench seats as they were longer than the bunk beds.

Saturday, Jammerdalsbu to Vetåbua (925m)

As the previous day's route took until the sun was setting and today's 17km was likely to take longer, an earlier start was made. Porridge was ready soon after 0700. After a slight rise and drop southeast we made a 60m gradual ascent. There followed a series of slight rises and long gentle descents or level runs for 10km to Saubu, a rustic shepherds' hut. We took a lunch break there in comfort: some inside in the dark and others sunning themselves in the lee of the hut. The afternoon's skiing southwards was under blue skies with a light wind and temperatures around -5°C. Several small streams were crossed on snowbridges and a few willow grouse were disturbed as we crossed fairly flat areas heading towards woodland and Vetåbua. Care was needed in places to avoid twigs protruding from the snow – the winter had seen less snowfall than usual though this was one of this year's best areas for snow cover in southern Norway. Our earlier start proved unnecessary as improving skiing skills meant we were moving a little faster and the hut was reached about 1500.

We were surprised to find the traditional lift pump worked which saved time and fuel compared to melting snow. The evening meal started with soup by torchlight – the solar lighting system had failed and there were no candles to be found, presumably to reduce fire risk. As the sky remained clear the temperature plummeted to -18°C.

Sunday, Vetåbua to Djupslia (950m)

From Vetåbua the route took us across snow-covered frozen boggy ground southeast then south on prepared piste tracks. This made Esther's going easier as she was using the narrower Trak skis rather than the usual touring skis. By lunchtime the green wax was failing to give sufficient grip as the temperature rose towards -5°C on this 17km route. Rich tried out the kite again and managed to tow two others a short distance despite failing light winds. By Midt-Goppollen we were among cabins and soon

turning east on a ridge-side traverse towards the Djupslia. The hut being below the track we finished with a tricky short drop through trees to reach it.

Pumped water was also available here and we were soon rehydrating with tea and coffee followed by pancakes before our meal of meatballs, mashed potato and then a warm fruit soup. Here we again created a cosy candlelit atmosphere sheltered from the inhospitable landscape – Hygge as the Danes would call it. Ann-Karin found the DNT songbook and we worked our way through the English-language songs led by Pete and Becca. Two Swedes arrived but occupied the adjacent hut.

Monday, Djupslia to Hafjell (770m)

Porridge and tea were prepared ready for a 0700 breakfast and with the hut cleaned we were off by 0900. The last day of the tour took us about 20 km to Lillehammer Hafjell, a downhill ski resort. Again the route followed pisted tracks through a network of routes on the fjell with the tower-topped hill of Hafjell generally ahead to guide us.

The slightly stronger wind had had shifted to the north and was behind us and we skied in sunshine most of the day. The temperature was rising and we tried purple wax but we might have been better with blue as the snow remained cold enough.

This was a day of long mostly gentle glides with short herringboned ascents. A short break was taken at Keiken before the small top of Kjerring Knappen, 1,017m, and its views. Lunch was taken in a sunny glade amid melting snow. Then, on a steeper descent, Kjetil took an unexpected tumble falling awkwardly with his heavy rucksack. He had damaged the soft tissues of his left shoulder and this restricted his mobility. That was the only serious mishap of the trip. A week later, an MRI scan revealed that two of his three supraspinatus muscle's attachment points were ruptured and required some needlework.

Gradually we met more and more skiers until we arrived at the throng surrounding the gondola top station where Richard treated us all to beers before our gondola descent to the valley. After an hour's dusk wait a taxi-minibus took us to our cabin part-way back up the hill. The delay allowed shopping for our evening meal of soup, salmon and broccoli with wine, then more pancakes. Tired, we have turned in by 2200.

Tuesday, Hafjell tour

While the younger element enjoyed a sunny day's skiing over 20km on the fjell above the Hafjell ski slopes, Ann-Karin and Richard went via Lillehammer to Ringebu to collect the car and the others spent the day around the apartment sorting out kit and reading.

The only member of the party who did not take a single tumble over the six days was Pete.

This is Becca hitting the deck.

Photo - Kjetil Tveranger



Getting back

An early start was needed for the first three to be ferried in to Lillehammer for the 7.15 train to Oslo Gardermoen where they found their return Manchester flight was delayed an hour because of freezing fog. Four more followed on a later train and spent either the rest of the day or a couple of days in Oslo seeing the sights.

This was another unusual and well supported meet for which special thanks go to Kjetil for his meticulous organisation. Also, it is pleasing to see the Club further developing its links with Norway.



Richard & Michael Smith
Photo - Peter Chadwick



Jammerdalsbu departure, Photo - Kjetil Tveranger



Tracks. Photo - Michael Smith

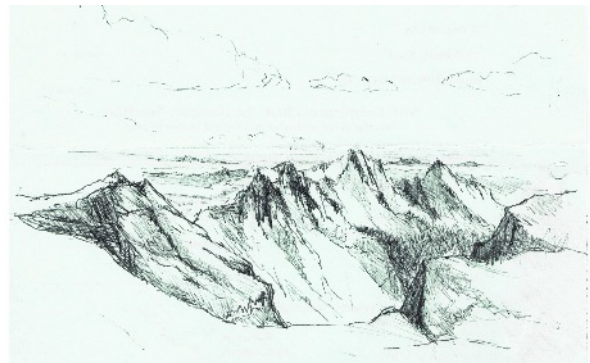
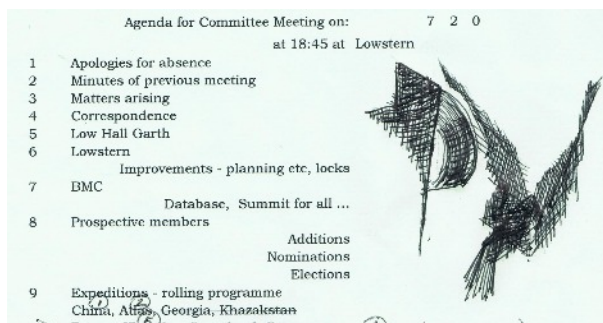
The Group

Photo
Peter
Chadwick



DOODLING DEREK?

Our archivist has found some interesting doodles on paperwork from old meetings. We suspect they are by Derek English although he has no recollection of them. They must have been riveting meetings.



THE CLUB UNDERGROUND

As we look back over the last 125 years the Club can be rightly proud of its groundbreaking activities underground (*excuse the deliberate pun*) We touched on John Middleton's early work in the article about his personal efforts but he was following a long Club tradition which continues to this day.

In at the birth of the sport of speleology, the Club spent much of its early days researching and pushing the known boundaries of caves and potholes in England. Exploration of caves and potholes was just beginning when the Club was formed. It instantly became an integral part of its activities as evidenced by the first annual meet being at Ingleton when members visited Yordas Cave and the second being at Settle when they went down Hull Pot. By 1895 the Journal was reporting that

... "during the year substantial progress has been made in the exploration of Yorkshire's caves and potholes. At Whitsuntide a thorough examination of Manchester Hole was undertaken in the hope of finding a through passage to Goyden Pot. No practical way was discovered, but the party penetrated a longer way into the cave than was known to have been reached before."

Potholing and caving are of course, both a sport and a very serious challenge. Speleology is actually the scientific study of caves and other karst features, their make-up, physical properties, structure and history. It also explores the life forms that inhabit this underworld and the processes by which it was formed. For the technical it is the study of caves, including aspects of geomorphology, geology, hydrology, chemistry and biology, and the many techniques of cave exploration.

It was the spirit of adventure and curiosity that tempted the early members underground, but every new discovery was examined and surveyed with a close attention to detail. The first survey that the Club did was of Rowten Pot in 1897. This search for knowledge saw them entering every hole in the ground they could find, many of little consequence and in 1905 they visited the modest Skoska Cave, in Littondale and stumbled on the remains of a Bronze-Age woman.

As far back as 1913, they were digging out a low bedding plane looking for a link between Clapham Cave and Gaping Gill. They found no link but did find a rock shelter with an upper living area and a lower burial space in which were found, as well as human remains, bones of numerous animals, evidence of a fireplace and pieces of Neolithic pottery.

Gaping Gill was first bottomed by the Frenchman Martel in August 1895, as the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club was planning an attempt.

They did bottom it in May 1896 and for many years afterwards, the Club virtually took over its exploration. Martel had simply walked round the bottom of the shaft but in 1896, the YRC opened up the East Passage and penetrated to the end far beyond Mud Chamber. In 1905 the Club reached Stream Chamber and in 1906 the West Chamber, the NW passage beyond Stream Chamber, the Belfry, Flood Exit Pot and the passage beyond. In 1907 they found the letter box in West Chamber and they opened up Flood Exit. In 1909 the Club discovered a low bedding plane in the side of Fell Beck, half way between the camp and the main shaft, which was capable of taking all the water under normal conditions and which thereby enabled them to ladder the main shaft dry. This they called "Rat Hole."

Also in 1909 a Club party was marooned for thirty-six hours in the bottom of Gaping Gill by a flood.

For the non-cavers, letter boxes in a cave usually denote a short, low but sometimes wide interconnection feature between larger or slightly larger passages. It requires cavers to 'post' themselves head first into it and then drop down the other side.

This is usually a tight 'squeeze'. Notorious examples of the letterboxes in the Yorkshire Dales can be found in Car Pot, descended by YRC in 1909, in Simpsons Pot, in Strans Gill Pot and down Pippikin Pot. Others are letterbox in Porth Yr Ogof South Wales and one in Calf Holes Cave, northern Pennines.

Before the formation of the YRC, underground exploration had been limited to Clapham Cave, Gaping Gill and Alum Pot. Of those known of but not investigated, Rowten Pot was amongst the first targets of the Club and in 1897 an assault was mounted and they successfully bottomed the pot. They had not discovered the easier ways in and the old ladders regularly dislodged loose rock. Lighting was a major problem and the sheer quantity and bulk of equipment made this a major epic. Knowing the reputation of the pot, they went prepared and their gear included 200 ft. of ladder, 1,700 ft. of rope, numerous coils of telephone line, flare lamps, crowbars, pulley blocks, and much other paraphernalia weighing many hundredweights. Two hundred feet of heavy rope ladders alone is a major challenge and there were numerous references in the early journals to the difficulties and effort required to manipulate wet ladders in a constricted pot. Early lighting technique advanced from wearing a bowler hat with a lump of clay on the top into which a candle was inserted, through flare lamps working off carbide, and balls of magnesium wire for long range illumination. Candles or tallow dips were the main source of illumination as they were the handiest and they were always made of tallow, not paraffin, so that they could be eaten in emergency.

The year 1910 saw the only serious accident reported in the period to 1930. After a whole day underground exploring a new hole that had been found, members came out at sunset (hence the cave is now called Sunset Hole). They had hoped it would link up with Braithwaite Wife Hole and eventually later that year they forced a through way into the sink hole (since blocked up).

In Whit that year a party of experts and some novices entered the hole but when coming out the last man fell back down the shaft as the rope broke, dropping thirty feet and fracturing his thigh. The landlord of the Hill Inn cycled to Ingleton for the doctor who courageously went straight in to the top of the last pitch to attend to the patient. The caving team had commandeered and cut down a table top from the Hill Inn to act as a stretcher and the long suffering man was eventually brought out at 8 a.m. the next day, seventeen hours after the accident.

The siege of Mere Gill was another epic. This was an assault on a super severe pothole which commenced in 1908 and was not completed until 1912 and involving several attempts pushing further each time. It was not until they diverted the beck that they were able to open the way for a final, successful, assault. Little Hull Hole took even longer to conquer. Starting in 1910 it did not actually fall until the fourth expedition in 1922, partly due to the intervening war years.

In later years our cavers went further afield, joining up with colleagues from other clubs to explore deep French caves like the Gouffre Berger and Gouffre Pierre St Martin with the world depth record in mind. They had explored numerous karst areas of the Pyrenees and Alps, and just over 50 years ago set a new pattern of exploration by mounting the expedition, led by John Middleton, to seek out probable cave systems in Kurdish Iran. John had presumed, that the Zagros Mountain range would be rich with karst and caves based on maps of the Survey of India made after World War II and on geological maps by BP.

This brought some unusual challenges before they actually got underground. They struggled to find a water supply to establish a base and once that was resolved they had to restrict their reccies to early morning as it was too hot later.

After considerable success with a lot more apparently to go at, naturally they had to go back to the area with more kit and see how deep it would go. A year later they were back with some changes in line up and this time it was a sponsored trip with TV in tow and lots of press coverage but unfortunately they could not push much further as they met an impassable sump.

These trips were made up of members of several clubs including the YRC, the first being led by John and the second by YRC member David Judson. The Club was well represented on both expeditions.

The first trip was largely self funded but the 1972 trip raised considerable funding from book and newspaper rights, and other external sources. This went so well that they set up a charitable foundation for British cavers to support serious projects to remote areas. Other financially successful trips have chipped in with funds to the charity, the Ghar Parau Foundation, and it has received contributions from the likes of the UK Sports Council. In the last ten years it has supported well over a hundred British caving expeditions.

Since 2004 members of the Club have mounted expeditions to China, with in the early days, financial support from the Club and from the Mount Everest Foundation and the Ghar Parau Foundation amongst others.

There has been close emphasis on working with the local government in the provinces and with ministries of tourism, to profile major karst areas with the promotion of tourism in mind, but at the same time giving full consideration to important issues of protection and sustainability. This involves gathering scientific data and providing clear outputs which give a deeper understanding of the karst areas. Along the way the Club has helped them achieve geo-park status. Arguably China has the most spectacular caves and karst in the world. Approximately 2.6 million km² of the country is karst, with about half of it (and most of the mature karst) concentrated in the southern regions. It is therefore no surprise that expeditions are continually drawn to areas in Guangxi where the sheer scale of caves and karst features are always spectacular.

The main thrust of the Club's exploratory caving activity over recent years has been this work in China as part of the China Caves Project. This project was initiated in 1985 by British cavers Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham in cooperation with scientists from local Chinese universities. Andy is now an honorary member of the Club.

To date there have been well over two dozen expeditions mainly focusing on Guangxi and Guizhou and neighbouring provinces in southern China. A good number of YRC members have participated, several going back many times and Ged Campion, Bruce Bensley, Harvey Lomas and John Whalley have been major contributors to this effort. The now multi-national teams on these expeditions have discovered over a hundred caves of over 3000m in length and surveyed hundreds of miles of previously unexplored underground passages and shafts.

There is a serious scientific element to their work. They have discovered a number of unknown cave-dwelling creatures and have produced quality detailed surveys which have contributed significantly to the designation of certain areas as national parks or geo-parks.

This enormous limestone region has a sub-tropical climate, and has karst at up to 2000m with the Bama and Fengshan areas especially impressive both above and below ground; the Jiangzhou cave system in Fengshan is enormous. The caves in southern China age from the Devonian to Triassic periods and are little disturbed by either tectonic or glacial influences.

Reports in the journals over the years include location maps and detailed survey drawings of caves far and wide and continue to do so.

The following photographs show the scale of the China caves.

Our cavers keep their hands in by regular work in Britain and following this article is detail of a piece of research tracing the water connections between Dolmen Hole and Echo Pot, on Fountains Fell



**Hei Dong (Dark Cave),
in the Datuo Tiangkeng area of Leye County**



**Cascade of Gours -
Long Qiao Dong**



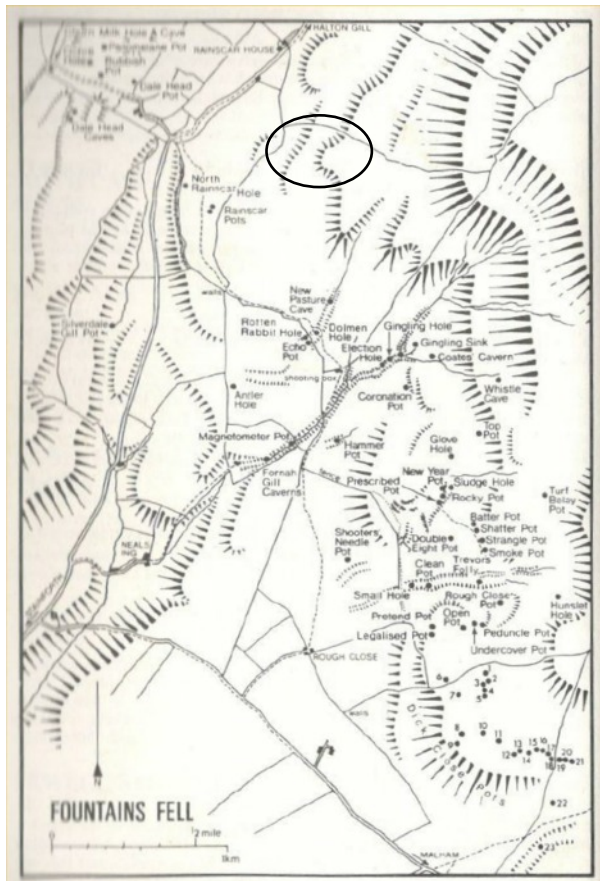
Jiang Xhou Dong

ECHO POT

Proof of a hydrological connection between Dolmen Hole and Echo Pot, Fountains Fell

The object of this exercise was to carry out dye tests to discover whether the stream sinking just above the 'bridge' on the track to the shooting hut presumed to be draining into Dolmen Hole, did so. (N.G.R S.D. 851704) - It lies in a shallow valley NNE approximately 200 metres distance from and at a higher altitude than Echo Pot and discharges underground via inlets into the latter.

Echo Pot, Fountains Fell (N.G.R. S.D. 851703) was visited during the 2016 winter period following dry, settled weather but prior to predicted rainfall.



The first set of tests began on February 28, with activated charcoal being laid at the first small, dry, right hand side inlet which one meets when heading down the passage from the foot of the entrance pitch (Location 1). A second one was laid in a small chamber formed in an eroded shale band above the second pitch, where water was showering lightly from a roof crack at the time (Location 2).

Fluorescein was then added to the surface stream (an almost static pool of water at the time) above the 'bridge'. Quantities used were in line with the method described in the article by Harrison*. The first major rainfall occurred 36 hours after laying the samples, which were removed on March 6 one week later. Analysis again followed that method with masses/volumes of reagents and LED light being adopted as closely as possible. The samples had been in place for approximately 130 hours from the time of the first rainfall.

Location 1 sample was found to be unaffected, with no fluorescence visible either with naked eye or when LED illuminated, however a small pool of water on the passage floor, at the foot of this inlet and a small quantity of debris scattered in the inlet itself both offered possible evidence that a very small flow had taken place during the intervening period.

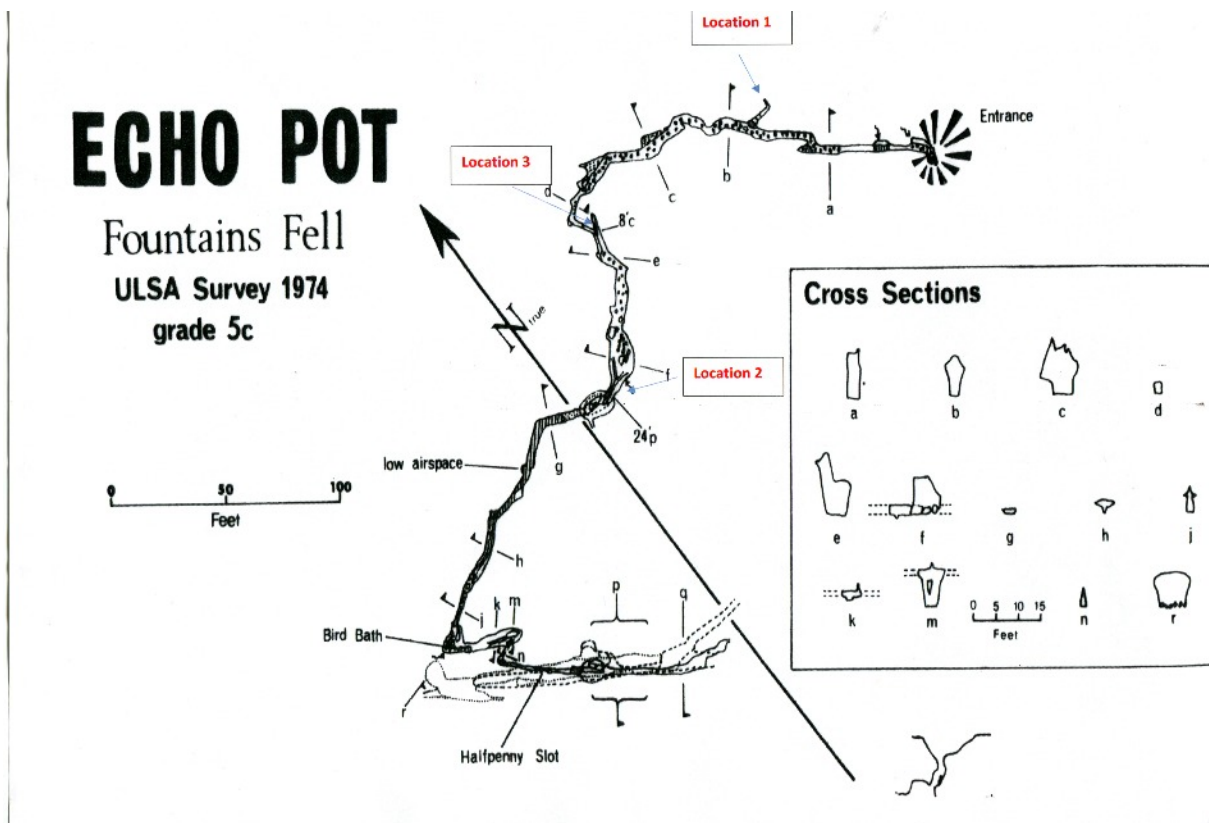
The Location 2 sample showed a distinct green colour to the naked eye and when irradiated it fluoresced quite strongly, proving that at least some of the stream drains to this inlet in Echo Pot. During collection of these charcoal samples fresh ones were laid, conditions were now wetter than they had been for the previous exercise and it was hoped that by a more prompt retrieval of these some idea of flow rate might be gained. A third location, between the previous two inlets, was also tested (Location 3) where there was some evidence of past digging into a clay-filled cross rift at the foot of which water appeared to emerge.

Unfortunately, due to very wet intervening conditions, it wasn't possible to return until March 21 to collect the samples. On inspection of them by the same method it was found that the location 3 charcoal was again strongly affected but so also was the one at Location 3, the clay-filled rift, this albeit fluorescing only weakly compared to that at Location 2.

Conclusion

Dolmen Hole was found to drain into Echo Pot to two closely separated points, suggesting the possibility of a worthwhile alternative route into the latter but necessitating considerable passage enlargement at the Dolmen entrance.

David Matthews BPC, Ged Campion YRC.



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CHIPPINGS



WHAT'S IN A NAME

It all started in a pub when we tried to find how many names we knew between us for a cob, muffin, teacake, oven bottom, balm cake et al. (17 in all). Next came a comment on TV saying that the Scots had 421 names for snow and before you could say dictionary a theme was running through conversations every time we met. All about regional variations to the language and the origins of words.

You could spend a lifetime studying the subject and it paled after about a month but all sorts of questions came up, most of which we found no answers to.

There are about 1000 living languages in the world. How many of them have words absorbed into English? Does anybody know I wonder?

The area that actually fascinated us most was that of place names. The assembled body originated from all points of the UK, and one from South Africa, one from Australia and one brought up in Houston.

What became evident very early on that most places in the old empire had towns named after places in the UK and those from those parts were most interested in where the original name had come from.

Aber means the same as Inver, generally by the mouth of a river. Aber is apparently Gaelic or Pictish whereas Inver it seems is Celtic. In old English, Bourne and Burn relate to a stream or river and Beck appears as part of many names and whilst widely used in Old English it is of Norse origin. Even Old English itself arose from earlier languages and we have a lot of Norse roots. Perhaps counter-intuitively Holm means an island.

If you visit Cornwall you will see a lot of 'Tre's. Tre just means a settlement as, in other parts of the country do Wich, Wych, Wyke and Wick, but this later can also imply a bay.

Thorp is a Middle English word for a small village or hamlet. The extensions By and Bie also mean the same and Dun, probably Gaelic, means an old fort. Bury, Borough, Burgh and Brough also imply a fortified area.

Cwm, Combe and Coombe reflect a valley as do Dean, Den and Don

Some are more obvious than others; town probably derives from the old English Tun or Ton which actually meant a homestead. These extensions are found in many place names in certain parts of the country. Just how many Dentons, Ingletons, Stocktons, Middletons and Withingtons do you know? Thwaite is a homestead in a clearing and Lea, Ley and Leigh also relate to a clearing. Then we have the Hams. This also means a homestead or farm in Old English, Clapham and Bentham for example but some have grown rather (Birmingham) – Another fairly well understood extension is Chester (Caster, Cester, Ceter) indicating a Roman camp. These abound including Ribchester near where I spent my early years, Manchester where I grew up and Leicester where I live now. In the Leicester area there are several Magnas which I understand to mean great although they are all relatively small today. We have some Parvas as well which means 'little' and has been used since ancient times.

There are no doubt hundreds of other extensions which can be explained.

SOMETHING FISHY

News has been released of a cave fish find in Germany in 2015. Possible a type of loach, it is pale pink, with understandably poor eyesight and is without scales. It was found in the huge pitch-black underground Danube-Aach cave system in southern Germany.

It is thought to have evolved from surface species comparatively recently in evolutionary terms, probably no more than 20,000 years ago. This is the first time cave fish have been discovered in Europe and experts were surprised to find one as

far north as southern Germany and believe these creatures are the most northern species of cave fish discovered.

DEEPER INTO DARK STAR

Cavers are regularly visiting the potentially massive system searching the myriad of passages trying to break through into the potentially enormous system. A recent expedition got down to an almost -1,000m depth. This cave was originally explored by several of John Middleton's British caving friends but this latest trip was made of only a couple of Brits plus Russians. John wanted to visit the region including 'Dark Star' earlier this year but it is classed as a 'Scientific Reserve' and access is extremely difficult. They did however explore the foothills of the same mountain. Part of Uzbekistan's remote Boysuntov Range it is extremely hard to access, not helped by the political instability.

Dark Star is one of two high altitude cave systems only a mile apart. Its neighbour, Festivalnaya, descends 2000 feet and has over 10 miles of passageways which it is hoped will eventually be found to link up with Dark Star. Both caves have numerous unexplored branches which could plunge much deeper

This latest expedition explored any number of dead ends but members did manage to top a previously unclimbed waterfall and after pushing their way up a narrowing passage they came to a squeeze just nine inches wide. One of the slighter members managed to force his way painfully through and it opened out into a substantial passage with the noise of an obviously fast-flowing river. Scope for much more exploration next time the caves are visited.

GRUESOME DISCOVERY

Steve Birch, of the Grampian Speleological Group, whilst recently supervising a cave excavation in the Black Isle for the North of Scotland Archaeological Society, has discovered the remains of a man buried in a recess at the rear of the cave, cross-legged with large stones holding down his arms and legs.

He was killed about 1,400 years ago in a violent assault which has left significant fractures to his

skull, but Steve has commented: "Here we have a man who has been brutally killed, but who has been laid to rest in the cave with some consideration - placed on his back, within a dark alcove and weighed down by beach stones." This is similar to treatment meted out to the famous 'bog bodies' and may have ritual overtones that we can only guess at at this remove.

The Rosemarkie Caves Project has been running for some years. The latest journal of the GSG will find its way to our library at Lowstern.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

FOUNTAINS FELL 9-10 June 1934.

This week-end, whilst not being a Cavern & Fell Club meet is noteworthy of the fact that we had with us Mr E. E. Roberts of the Yorkshire Ramblers, who was anxious to have a look at the pots the Club discovered on previous visits to Fountains.

Consequently, the Secretary arranged the week-end at our spiritual home - The Craven Arms at Giggleswick. It was a lovely day, Saturday, but as the Secretary and another were bowling peacefully along the road to Craven the tranquil serenity of a June afternoon was rudely shattered by a cannon like report. A burst tyre, and as the car had obligingly expired outside the Copy Nook Hotel and it really was too warm to be bothered with such a common complaint as a burst tyre, the couple repaired into mine hostelry to slake a raging thirst.

And so the tyre wasn't repaired, in fact it couldn't be repaired and the spare having gently expired too, a telephone message was despatched to Giggleswick begging Mr. Roberts to come and fetch the broken down crew. So, behold the imposing spectacle of the Secretary arriving in a luxurious Armstrong Sideley to our week-end retreat.

Mr. Roberts will be remembered as a frightfully active fellow although on the seamy side of life, and nothing would satisfy him but to make the journey up on Fountains the same evening to view the worlds to conquer. And so the Secretary, manfully putting behind him the alluring evening of a glorious night at darts, accompanied the doyen of pot-holing to the heights of Fountains, where I regret to say, dusk falling rapidly, he became most hopelessly lost and in

addition, failed to find the pots desired. However the evening wasn't exactly wasted for Roberts thoroughly enjoyed the walk and expressed himself surprised and satisfied at the huge quantity of possible sink holes.

On arriving back at the Craven our local representative in the shape of Thornber was patiently waiting for us hidden behind numerous empty bottles and foaming tankards. Thence followed a highly intellectual evening discussion

(Note from the early archives of the Cavern & Fell. The Copy Nook Hotel is in Bolton-by-Bowland)

DERWENTWATER DAYS

A number of members and their partners had their now-customary break in Cumbria in June. Anne and Paul Dover, Marcia and Mike Godden, Elaine and Tim Josephy, Una and Ian Laing, Cathie and Cliff Large and Angie and Alan Linford visited the Derwentwater Hotel in Portescale for five days. Portinscale, a smallish village west of Keswick and within walking district of same, proved to be an ideal venue with extensive gardens, grass and trees going down to the Derwentwater shore, near the Marina and launch station at Nichol End.

On their first full day some went off to Braithwaite and Thornthwaite and others to walk in the Newlands Valley, going via Ullock; Stair and west of Swinside; then via Skelgill and on to Little Town. Their return was via Catbells.

The following day this party set off to walk round Derwentwater via Hawse End, Lower and Higher Brandlehow, and then off to the left towards Lodore for a break before completing the walk. Others did their own thing including some doing the Tuesday's Little Town walk.

For the rest of the stay the couples all went off doing different things. This social gathering for many was sufficient and fulfilling to be able to go round to see the old haunts that used to mean so much to them e.g. Borrowdale, Honister, Buttermere, Newlands. (and to be reminded of what they could once do !)

The weather was fine, not too hot and ideal for walking; the hotel was extremely good as was the food with cheerful and helpful staff. Good hotels in Cumbria come at a price and it is likely to become worse.

The Lake District National Park after many years of trying, has just become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Well deserved but it will probably make it even busier. The visit, organised again by Paul Dover was much appreciated by those attending. If any other members wish to enjoy the creature comforts of a good hotel whilst having a walking break they would be welcome to join them.

The Lake District, famous for its stunning scenery and, for our purposes, England's most dramatic outdoor area, also has a distinct culture which added to its case. The part it has played in the past, inspiring numerous artists and literary giants helped as well.

It is still a living landscape with a buoyant farming community and its distinctive tough breed of sheep, the Herdwicks. Man's presence here covers the whole span of history with thousands of archaeological sites but its stunning countryside is its main selling point. In Wastwater it has England's deepest and coldest lake and it has England's largest natural lake, Windermere and highest mountains topped by Scafell Pike.

It is hard to see why it has taken so long to get to this point

A PILE OF OLD...SNOW?

A recent article in the Independent highlighted some Buddhist ingenuity. Himalayan villages have an increasing problem of water supply as glaciers retreat but one local engineer has come up with a clever but simple solution. Having seen ice stay frozen all summer under bridges etc., he decided to stockpile snow and ice in a fashion which would preserve it. A local structure we are familiar with is the Chorten (or Stupa in Hindi). His solution was to build similar structures out of ice.

The Chorten at Namche Bazaar Photo: Roy Denney

Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer originally from Ladakh, piped water from upstream to above a small holding pond and on cold winter nights allowed the water to drop from a



height into it, freezing as it did and creating a growing mound akin to a stalagmite. The pipe relied on gravity and was buried for most of its length. Simple and inexpensive but as it slowly melts through the summer the structure does provide the needed water supply.

COAST PATH PROGRESS

Work is well underway on the new English Coast Path, the new National Trail around our coast. Natural England still expects to complete work on the England Coast Path in 2020 and it can open up new opportunities for our long walk meet.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 aims to improve public access by creating clear and consistent public rights along the English coast for open-air recreation on foot. It allows existing coastal access to be secured and improved and new access to be created in places where it did not already exist.

Whilst called a path it does allow for spreading room beside the route and the path will retreat inland if coastal erosion takes place, meaning once created a route round the coast should always exist.

Estuaries are a bit of an issue. There is no requirement in the 2009 Act for the trail to extend up any river estuary further than the seaward limit where the fresh water of a river mixes with salt water from the open sea. Beyond the seaward limit, Natural England has discretion to extend the trail further upstream on either side as far as the first bridge or tunnel with pedestrian public access.

If we take our areas of immediate interests to be the north of England, in the North East the stretch from Filey Brigg to South Bents is open apart from a short stretch from Newport Bridge to North Gare which is approved but not yet open. The rest of the Yorkshire coast and the coast up to Berwick is still work in progress

In the North West the stretch between Allonby and Whitehaven is now open and the stretches between Whitehaven and Silecroft and around Walney Island are approved but not yet open.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

ROUTE PLANNING AND NAVIGATION IN A DIGITAL AGE

Mick Borroff

An introduction to GPS and digital mapping

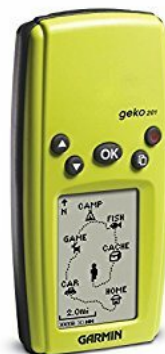
The digital age has certainly not made traditional navigation and map-reading skills redundant, however many people are unaware of the additional benefits that the Global Positioning System (GPS), digital mapping and satellite imaging in trip planning and navigation bring to the preparation for a trip.

I have used GPS units and digital mapping for over 10 years now and with an increasing number of members also using GPS receivers or mobile phones with GPS mapping apps on the hill, I thought I would share some thoughts on my current use of these digital technologies.

This article is not intended to be a guide on how to set up and use a GPS device – for that, you can do no better than to buy a copy of Lyle Brotherton's excellent book *"The Ultimate Navigation Manual"* which covers both conventional map, compass and GPS navigation in a lot of detail with very clearly explanations. My aim here is rather to look at how I am using digital technologies now in this digital age. (There is a glossary at the end to explain some of the jargon should you need it).

My Path with GPS

Once the technology became available at a reasonable price, I initially bought a *Garmin Geko 201* - a basic GPS receiver without a mapping display. I usually pulled it out of my rucksack to obtain an accurate location fix by viewing the OS grid reference of current location in poor conditions, to check on the paper map. I sometimes input a few co-ordinates as waypoints e.g. at a col I needed to return to, or a path exit from a ridge and then used the GPS to navigate to it in bad weather. I also used it as a tool to calibrate and check my pacing and compass navigation accuracy – it was always interesting to see how close I was to where I expected to be – not as close as I'd like to have been on some occasions!



Around the same time, I made an investment in Memory-Map digital OS mapping of the Lakes and Yorkshire Dales and I sometimes downloaded GPX tracks from the Geko as a record of my walks and to see where I had actually been overlaid on the OS map display.

It was Paul Dover who first introduced me to the concept of a GPS combined with digital mapping. He had loaded the Memory-Map OS 1-50k Landranger mapping app onto a hand-held PC (a Personal Digital Assistant or PDA) which we used for navigation on a scrambling ascent of Tryfan from Heather Terrace on the 2008 Welsh winter meet. I was impressed with how accurate the mapping app was relative to our actual location and how quickly it refreshed position when we were moving. However, I noted that Paul had issues with insufficient battery power when out on the hill and had to carry a back-up power pack which we needed to use part way around.

January 2010 saw Hilary and I in the French Jura for our first snowshoeing trip, from a base in Les Rousses, armed just with a 1-25k IGN Topo map and my Geko GPS. Whilst this map did have a grid, the WGS84 grid references were only printed on the map collar (the white bit) so cross-referencing the GPS co-ordinates to the map grid took some time to correctly identify a location as the map had to be opened to the edges first. I could happily navigate the forest tracks in the Forêt de Risoux in a snowstorm using the Geko, but it took a lot of time (a task not helped by the portrayal of the forest tracks on the map which was often inaccurate).

My family bought me a mapping GPS for the Christmas of 2012. It was waterproof, operable

with one hand and with gloves, no touch screen, decent antenna, the possibility of uploading home-made custom maps, use with AA cells and a decent battery life led me to choose a Garmin *GPSmap 62s* and a full UK OS 1-50k map card. I am still using it and have never regretted this choice of device. Several other YRC members have made the same decision (N.B. this model has superseded by the *GPSmap 64s*).



Benefits in Navigation

The benefits of having an accurate location in real time on a digital map are obvious in terms of knowing where you are on a mountain and then where you want to go with the direction to take. What many are unaware of is how much quicker navigation is with a mapping GPS, especially in foul weather conditions.

On a recent meet in the Galloway fells, we traversed the largely pathless Minigaff hills in traditional mist, rain and windy conditions. Safely down in the pub, we estimated that using the mapping GPS had saved about an hour and a half compared to a conventional compass, pace counting and map navigation.

This scenario has been repeated numerous times – the worse the weather, the bigger the time saving. Stops to check location and bearing are much shorter, especially if your intended route has been pre-loaded onto the GPS device. Errors are virtually eliminated and cross-checking of set compass bearings etc. are not really necessary. People therefore don't get cold and progress is more rapid. The only weakness of the *GPSmap 62s* is the relatively small screen size should you need to view a larger area of the digital map and this takes a little time to display the relevant map tiles. However, this is a minor issue since it is the screen which uses the most power and allows this device to enjoy several days of battery life.

The Digital World

There are now four key tools that can all be used together:

- A mapping GPS device to record tracks or upload routes to follow on a digital map.
- A map viewer app on a PC or on a website to view a digital map with tracks and routes as overlays.
- The Google Earth app to view remote satellite imaging and to view maps, tracks and routes as overlays.
- Websites with GPS tracks and routes to download.

Over the past four years, my use of these tools has steadily widened, as my understanding of their strengths and weaknesses has developed, as they are all digitally interrelated. For example you can:

- Plot a route you'd like to follow on Google Earth and save this route to your GPS device for later use or share it with others e.g. by e-mail.
- Upload your own GPS track of a walk to Google Earth or into a digital map viewer and look at where you have been on the satellite image or on the map.
- Georeference a scanned or downloaded or photographed digital map and load it into Google Earth to see the map overlaid on the satellite imaging of the terrain.
- Use this digital map overlay and the Google Earth imaging in conjunction to plot new routes. This is especially useful where your maps do not show the paths which are visible on the ground on the Google Earth satellite image.
- Upload a georeferenced map image as a Google Earth KMZ file to some Garmin GPS devices and immediately use it for navigation (Garmin call this a Custom Map).
- Download another user's GPX file from a route sharing website and view it on the Google Earth satellite image, on a digital map overlay in Google Earth or in a digital map viewer. This route can be checked and edited if required, then saved on your GPS device for future use.

- Enter a set of another user's waypoints and view them on Google Earth, a digital map overlay in Google Earth or in a digital map viewer and create a route linking waypoints using paths/tracks visible on the ground and save this as a route you would like to follow in future,
- View GPS tracks that you have walked and prepare them as a line with a transparent background using the free online utility *GPS Visualizer* which is ideal for preparing sketch maps to accompany meet reports etc.

These digital inter-relationships open-up a whole host of new possibilities for trip planning.

Planning New Routes

Planning new digital GPS routes can be done in three ways:

- From mapping at a usable scale in a digital map viewer using paths, tracks, bridleways, roads, rights of way, bridges etc. from the map. A route can be plotted using the map viewer without reference to Google Earth. The route can be uploaded to a GPS device and the map plus route printed out for use on the ground.
- From Google Earth, a route can be plotted using paths, tracks, bridleways, roads, bridges etc. visible on the ground without reference to any map. An image of the Google Earth screen with the route as an overlay can be captured and printed out for use on the ground. This is limited by the quality of the Google Earth satellite imaging and of course the presence of snow or a tree canopy that may obscure the ground.
- Using both Google Earth and a digital map in combination gives you the best and most detailed information. A route plotted using the map first can then be edited using Google Earth to match features visible on the satellite image for the best accuracy. The finalised validated route can then be uploaded to a GPS device and the map plus route printed out for use on the ground.

There are a few other issues to be considered here. Firstly, one needs to develop relatively deep familiarity with the operation of the digital map viewer software, the Google Earth app and the software for interfacing with your mapping GPS device. This takes some time but these computer skills are well-worth learning.

Secondly, be aware that as you move along a new route in Google Earth, happily putting in your digitising points and at the same time creating a coloured line of where you want to go, parallax creeps in, so to digitise accurately you must be directly over the point where you place each "dot". Google Earth tends to tilt the view and you can end up at such an angle that your plotted path may actually be off the path on the ground if you don't straighten up your view, so check frequently that your view is not tilted.

It is often worth rotating your view in Google Earth to get a different perspective of the route and to check your point placement, especially where following faint paths. Going back to previous satellite images in Google Earth can be helpful if images were taken at a different time of the year, when the vegetation and/or lighting may make identifying the line of a path easier.

On the El Chorro meet (see page 75), one of the issues is that while the Spanish topographic maps show all the tracks and some paths, the coverage of the footpath network is sparse, so I could not plot complete routes using mapped paths. In addition, the sierras surrounding the El Chorro area are not covered by any of the English walking guides, except for the odd route. So how do you find out what routes are available? The answer is to use the internet to search for routes that others have done and this is covered in the section entitled *Route Planning Using Downloaded GPX Files*.

How to Get Started

If this article has stimulated you to think about getting a stand-alone mapping GPS device, then my recommendations are as follows:

- Buy a Garmin GPSmap 64s bundled with GB 1-50k OS mapping - this can be had for around £275 (worth trying your BMC discount too).
- Buy a decent screen protector (glass) to protect it from scratches.
- Buy a set of four Panasonic 2500mAh Eneloop Pro pre-charged rechargeable batteries and a Technoline BL-700 Intelligent battery charger.
- Download Lyle Brotherton's free Satnav Check List to set your device up from: <http://micronavigation.com/the-resource-centre/> or buy his excellent book.
- Download Garmin's free BaseCamp software onto your computer and register your device.
- Go for a walk, record and save your track.
- Import it to BaseCamp and view it on the map. Try plotting a different track.
- Download the free Google Earth Pro software onto your computer.
- Open the GPX track in Google Earth and view it over the satellite image.

This will get you equipped and out there with your new GPS device. From then on it's a matter of getting hands-on with the Garmin satnav's operation and the software.

Another less expensive approach to consider is to use your existing smart phone and/or tablet and install a digital map viewer app such as Memory-Map, Anquet, ViewRanger etc. Some of these apps allow you to choose an area of OS mapping that you walk in, so you could get going with a mapping GPS app on your phone to navigate and record your track for under £20! Just remember to protect your smart device from rain and take your paper map in case the battery runs out. (You should bear in mind that any digital maps purchased will only work with that company's map viewer and cannot be loaded onto a Garmin GPS).

Making use of the technology - Route Planning Using Downloaded GPX Files

Walking guidebooks for an area are great to have in the hand or in your rucksack, offering you much more information than just the routes themselves and are thus invaluable planning tools for a trip to a new location. But however good a guidebook may be, it can never be truly comprehensive as practical realities such as the book size and the author's time mean that it can only cover a selection of the possibilities available, since these must be drawn from routes that the writer has already walked.

Just to give a simple example, Paddy Dillon's excellent Cicerone guide *Walking on Tenerife* covers 45 walks, but the website *GPS wanderlen in Tenerife* set up by two Dutch walkers who have visited the island every year since 2007, features 322 walks: www.gpswandelenintenerife.eu/. Featuring all these routes in a guidebook would not be a realistic proposition for any author or publisher and you probably wouldn't want to carry it around with you either! Figures 1 and 2 show few walks in western Tenerife in the guidebook compared to the many uploaded to the web by two Dutch walkers.

So, what do you do when you want to find more walking options than those covered by the guidebook you already have? Perhaps you have done all the walks close to where you are staying. Maybe you want to find out where the locals go (or don't go)? Perhaps you want to walk in an area where there is no guidebook coverage yet e.g. on the recent El Chorro meet and the available topographic maps have little or no detail on the actual footpaths on the ground?

Apart from the obvious sources: consulting locally with tourist offices, walking groups and guides, outdoor gear shops and accommodation owners etc., the other obvious resource is to use the internet. Whilst there are sometimes good route descriptions in English on the net, often they are in the local language which you may not speak too well. Using Google Translate will give you a flavour of the route, but as parts of the translation are often ambiguous or confusing, this cannot be used to provide a completely reliable description up to guidebook standard. Hence a map annotated with the route is required.

With the advent of GPS receivers built into mobile phones and many walkers taking dedicated outdoor GPS devices with them, there are now huge numbers of GPS users out on the hill. Many hikers are now recording tracks of their walks and uploading them to internet route sharing sites. The simplest option before you go is to download some of these tracks in your area of interest. A search engine like Google can be used to search for these websites to identify candidate GPS tracks to download. Searching on the place name and GPX should get you plenty of hits to investigate.

Example Route Sharing Sites

Some of these sites are excellent, with track overlays on large scale mapping and Google Earth imaging, photographs, blogs and free to download GPS tracks in a variety of formats. A few examples from the UK and beyond are as follows:

Walkhighlands www.walkhighlands.co.uk/ is a superb resource for exploring Scotland on foot. The listing of over 2000 walks include the complete inventory of Munros and Corbetts, together with hundreds of easier lower level and coastal walks in every part of the country. If you walk north of the border, you are missing out if you have not explored this site! Good route descriptions, OS mapping to 1:25k, photos, route downloads and a lively forum makes planning new walks a treat.

MountainViews <http://mountainviews.ie/> is an equally good site covering Ireland.

Randogps www.randogps.net/en/ There are plenty of overseas sites, such as this French site which currently has over 5700 tracks to download indexed by region and department and offers IGN mapping to 1:25k, Google Earth imaging and downloadable routes.

Wikiloc www.wikiloc.com/ is the granddaddy of these sites with over six million GPS tracks globally! These routes are from a mix of activities: hiking, mountain biking, cycling, snowshoeing, ski touring etc. Perhaps you fancy hiking in Norway but find that the English guidebooks are limited? Look at Wikiloc: over 2000 routes to choose from, searchable by activity, type (loop or linear), length and difficulty. A variety of mapping options lets you filter the list of routes to your requirements.

GPS Routes and Tracks

Just to clarify some terminology, GPS routes are about where you are planning to go; GPS tracks are about where you have been. Routes are pre-defined digital paths created from a group of location points (waypoints) in the sequence you plan to navigate them. These are usually created on a computer but can be entered on a GPS device. Tracks are made up of data (trackpoints) gathered automatically from your movement while the GPS is turned on whilst following a route. They are like breadcrumb trails, allowing you to see where you or someone else travelled in the past.

The waypoint and track point data for both GPS routes and tracks can each be held a variety of file formats, but the most common is the universal GPX file format. GPX is the GPS exchange format - an XML file format for storing coordinate data. Routes usually have relatively small numbers of waypoints as they have been plotted manually, whereas tracks may have thousands of trackpoints recorded directly by a GPS device.

A good way to illustrate the difference between routes and tracks is to look at a section of a walk you will all have done from Malham Tarn, along the Watlowes dry valley to the edge of Malham Cove, then across the limestone pavement and down the stepped path to the foot of the Cove.

Figure 4 at the end of this article shows a route and two tracks of this section that I downloaded as GPX files from the internet and opened them all in Google Earth and saved this screenshot. The blue path is a route – you can see that it has little detail, with just seven waypoints. The author clearly did not intend to visit the base of the Cove and plotted the route from the 1:50k OS map only. This crudely follows the line of the actual path visible on the ground, but you should be able to navigate okay with it. The orange and yellow paths are both tracks taken from the Wikiloc website that another person had walked. The yellow track has over 130 track points in this section (the red dots) and would be the file of choice to load into your GPS device. The orange track is a compressed track as it is simplified relative to the full track in yellow, with this section having just 20 track points.

Routes can usually be followed if there are enough waypoints provided and especially if the available mapping shows the paths taken by the route, but using someone else's full GPX track as a route will give you much richer information. This may be essential if you are walking in an area where local mapping does not often show paths available on the ground (e.g. Spanish topographic maps).

Checking A Downloaded GPS Route

Assuming you have now found a website with a route of interest and located the download page. What next? You should start by downloading the GPS route file, usually in the universal GPX file format. Sometimes (e.g. in Wikiloc) you will be given the option to download the author's original track or a compressed version e.g. limited to 500 trackpoints. It is always best to choose the full track file, since compression may lead to some confusion when such an abbreviated route is used to navigate on the ground, especially for long or complex routes. (N.B. Wikiloc also offers a KML file format to download but this is also abbreviated to 500 trackpoints). Hence it is better to download the full GPX file, then convert it to a KML file to view it in Google Earth as shown.

Before importing the new route into your GPS unit and rushing off to follow it on the hill, you should take the time to do some basic validation checks.

You may think that might be unnecessary, however the eagle-eyed amongst you looking at the Malham Cove example above may have some questions about the veracity of the yellow and orange tracks at the foot of the cove to the east of the stream. We will look at this shortly.

GPX File

You should ask yourself a few preliminary questions – what year was the file recorded i.e. how recently was it walked? Could it be less accurate due to old GPS technology being used? What was the time of year when it was recorded? What activity was being tracked? Sometimes the activity is given on the website but not always. If the GPX file is a track, it may contain movement data: speeds much greater than usual walking rates indicate that the route is probably a mountain biking or cross-country ski route - beware of downloading winter ski-tour or snowshoe tracks and then following them by GPS in summer when there is no snow cover.

Overall Plausibility of a Route

The downloaded GPX file should first be uploaded into a map viewer. If you already have the appropriate commercial digital mapping software on your PC (e.g. Garmin BaseCamp, Memory-Map, Mapyx Quo, Anquet, RouteBuddy, etc.) you can examine the GPX path overlaid onto the map.

If you don't have digital maps available you may be able to view the track by uploading the GPX file to the country's free national mapping or Open Street Map viewer, from which you can often print. A few examples of map viewer websites are:

Global - Wikiloc www.wikiloc.com/ (register to download GPX files)

UK – Walk Lakes www.walklakes.co.uk (register to view OS 1-25k mapping)

France - IGN www.geoportail.gouv.fr/donnees/carte-ign

Switzerland - TOPO <https://map.geo.admin.ch>

You now need to employ your conventional map reading skills to see if the proposed route makes sense relative to the mapped topography, just as you would when using a paper map to plan a walk. You can check mix of paths, tracks and roads, as well as rights of way and areas where the map shows no paths. The originators metrics for speed, time, distance, elevation plot, etc. for the track may also be available in the GPX file.

Check for Possible GPS Errors

You should also look for the presence of GPS multipath errors visible as implausible sections of the GPX track, as shown in the example below from one of my French walks shown in Figure 3, where the track is shown twice crossing the water in the lower Verdon Gorge and going round in a circle midstream despite the author remaining on the south bank path at all times!

These artefacts are multipath errors caused by the signal from some of the GPS satellites getting reflected off the towering cliffs along the gorge before getting to the GPS device. See: http://www.trimble.com/gps_tutorial/howgps-error2.aspx. Hopefully if you downloaded the above track you would question its credibility and do further research to establish the correct path (which actually sticks to the south bank path the whole way).

Going back to the Malham example, I walked this a few days ago in June with Michael and Helen Smith, together with Kjetil and Ann-Karin Tveranger. I loaded my GPX track into Google Earth and saved an image of the screenshot. The first thing to note in Figure 5 is the Gordian “knot” immediately above the Cove. This is where we had lunch and the static GPS device was simply recording its circle of uncertainty for half an hour or so. This is a regular feature of many GPX tracks but is often edited out before sharing the file.

After lunch, we crossed the limestone pavement and then descended the stepped path to the west of the Cove, before approaching the rising at the foot of the cliff. The track matches the visible path on Google Earth fairly well. At the foot of this path, we turned north to visit the rising, but kept to the west of the stream at all times and certainly did not cross it as the GPS trace would imply.

Neither did we make the implausible climb over the screes and back down again as depicted – this section of the track has multipath errors due to the 80m of limestone cliff towering above. These are very clear if the track is viewed over OS mapping.

It is interesting that the GPS track from Wikiloc also shows the same pattern of multipath errors in the same location. These errors disappear once the track is some 120m from the base of the Cove and normal satellite signals are regained.

Viewing A Route Over Satellite Imaging

Examining a route overlaid on a satellite imaging viewer such as Google Earth is a very useful adjunct to viewing it over a topographic map. It allows you to see the terrain crossed by the proposed walk and assess it. You may see an offset between the GPX track walked and the visible footpath on the satellite image which is due to limitations in accuracy of both the GPS recording on the day and the association between the satellite image and its spatial location (georeferencing). See the Malham Cove example - practically this relatively small difference is usually not a problem on the ground.

Does the route look plausible in Google Earth and does it go where you would expect it to if you were on the ground? Does it follow a clearly visible path or track or road that you can see exists on the image? Are there paths visible on the ground that are not marked on your topographic map, or is it pathless. If there are paths visible, might a different one make the route easier or more attractive? What is the trail mix - you might not want to do a walk with a very long road section or one with an unbridged river crossing. If it does cross a river, but doesn't use an obvious bridge that you can see on the image, is it due to the bridge having been swept away or the author's use of a convenient boulder-hopping crossing as a short-cut? Or is it simply due to poor or abbreviated plotting of the route, which actually does use the bridge?

If a route crosses boulder fields directly when there are clear path options visible on the satellite image which skirt them, is it because you are viewing a winter ski-touring or snow-shoeing route? If it crosses an open lake, was it done in winter when it was frozen over or is it a multipath error as mentioned above? Satellite imaging can also show clearings in forests where you might want to camp and help identify suitable parking spaces at the start.

If the walk intersects roads, you may be able to use Google Earth Street View to look where it leaves the tarmac to see if the route is signposted or waymarked or to look for suitable parking at the start/finish or refreshments or other visible features.

Route Editing

In situations where you want to change the line of the walk, it is relatively easy to edit and adjust the digital route by adding new points to the path and moving or deleting existing ones.

You can readily open and edit the GPX file as a path in Google Earth, then save the edited path (with or without the points) as a KML file (N.B. Google Earth will not allow you to save a path directly as a GPX file).

You need to check that the GE image is flat and not tilted to avoid parallax errors, so that any new or moved points are placed accurately.

You can then import your new route as a KML file into your GPS viewer if this is supported or use an online conversion program to create a GPX file from the saved KML file e.g. GPS Visualizer <http://www.gpsvisualizer.com/>.

The new GPX file can then be uploaded to your GPS device for use on the ground.

All you need now is a paper map as a back-up to take with you. If you have a mapping GPS, then you can upload the digital map onto it along with the validated final GPX route.

I will of course be happy to help any members with questions on this material – just get in touch.

Further Reading

The Ultimate Navigation Manual by Lyle F Brotherton, Collins, London, 2011

The mountaineer George Cave wrote a useful article giving various tips on using Google Earth for expedition planning: Digital Expedition Planning Alpine Club Journal 2015; 119: 209-14. This material is also available on-line at his website <https://www.67hours.co.uk/mapping/>.

Glossary

Georeferencing – locating a map image correctly to defined co-ordinates for use in a map viewer.

Google Earth – a remote satellite imaging viewer app (GE was initially known as Keyhole). It combines two sets of data: a digital elevation model of the earth and digital satellite imagery taken over a period of many years. The “Pro” version, with a few more features, is now free.

GPS – Global Positioning System. A network of satellites in fixed positions that send data to a GPS receiver to allow the device to identify its position from the time it takes to receive a signal from each satellite that it can “see.”

GPS route – an electronic path of a route usually consisting of tens of linked Waypoints (depending on complexity of route).

GPS track – an electronic breadcrumb trail of where you have been, usually consisting of hundreds or thousands (depending on track length) of linked trackpoints.

GPX file (GPS eXchange Format) - a common XML file format for sharing GPS waypoints, routes and tracks between user’s computers and GPS devices.

KML file (Keyhole Marker Language) – a Google Earth file format for storing paths (i.e. routes and tracks).

KMZ file (Keyhole Marker Zipped) – Google Earth compressed file format also allowing images to be stored along with a GPS route or track. KMZ files are readable by some Garmin GPS devices as Custom Maps.

Map viewer – an app or web program that allows a particular digital map to be viewed, scrolled and zoomed. The OS Getamap, Swiss geoportal Maps of Switzerland, Norwegian Nordeskart and French IGN Geoportail service are good examples of national mapping agency internet map viewers. Garmin BaseCamp, Memory-Map, Mapyx Quo, Anquet, RouteBuddy are examples of commercial digital map resellers, where the viewer app is generally free but you have to purchase the digital map content.

Overlay – a layer visible on top of a satellite image or a digital map. The overlay could be a map or a GPS route or GPS track in Google Earth. On a digital map the overlay will be the route or track.

Waypoint – an intermediate point on a line of travel, a stopping point or point at which the course is changed with known latitude and longitude co-ordinates.

WGS 84 – World Geodetic System 1984. A global standard coordinate system for the whole earth for use in cartography, geodesy and navigation, including GPS



Figs 1 & 2. Walking Routes in Tenerife
From a leading guidebook and a walker's website



Fig. 3
Verdon Gorge
MB track file



Fig 4.
Malham Cove
A route file with
waypoints and
two track files

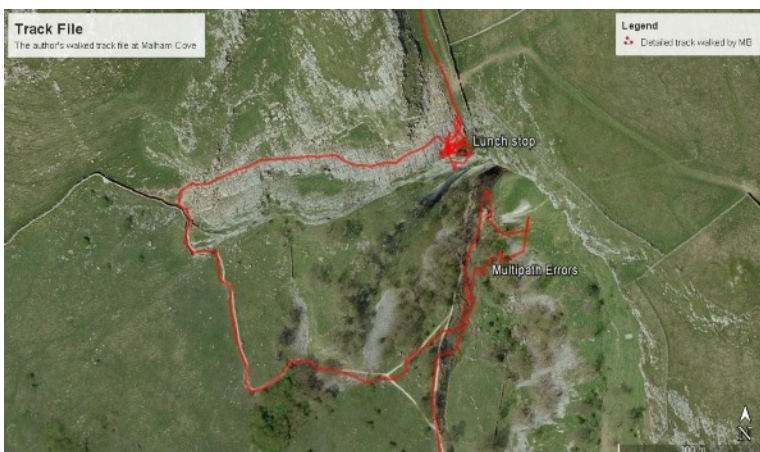


Fig 5.
Malham Cove
MB track file



NATURAL HISTORY



WILDLIFE, ECOLOGY AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

IN THE AIR

If you want an excuse to 'neglect' that disheveled garden till next year's spring brings kinder weather, bear in mind that butterflies, moths and other insects will be taking refuge in your 'jungle'. Put up with a few straggly old seed heads, dead annuals etc. If you have to brush leaf litter off lawns dump it in heaps with a log pile till next spring and you provide safe environments for pupae, caterpillars and some hibernating adults.

Not everyone realises that some do over-winter. The Brimstone, Comma, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock can often be found sheltering in log piles, sheds, outbuildings and tangled corners of a garden.

As bees struggle we are ever more dependent on moths and butterflies to pollinate our garden plants as they seek out the nectar they need so it is in our interests to look after them not only over winter but by planting appropriate flowers in our gardens.

Whilst we wish to encourage insects for the good they do they are also a food source for many birds. Species that are not finding food in farmland due to changing agricultural practices are increasingly looking to gardens for sustenance.

There are of course other reasons for declines some of which we as individuals can do little to help. Unfortunately many iconic species are at most risk. Puffins are still breeding but many chicks starve as there are insufficient small fish for the parents to catch. 50% of all seabirds are declining in numbers.

Nightingales no longer sing in Berkeley Square but not many other places either. There numbers are down 80% in the last half century.

Curlews with their haunting call are also going missing. We have lost about a quarter of a million breeding pairs during the same period. Also over those years we have lost about a fifth

of our woodland birds and half our farmland birds. Half of our wetland species have fared no better.

Greenfinches, chaffinches and starlings are declining in numbers rapidly.

Not all are suffering though. It is difficult sometimes to put reasons to the peaks and troughs but as of now Robins and blackbirds are doing well and goldfinch numbers have gone up almost 50% in the last decade.

REWILDING

Over the years we have covered the arguments about re-introductions and some progress has been made. No predators of any size look likely to be allowed although the argument for wolves in remote areas has many advocates. The major argument is that with no predators deer are multiplying at a dramatic rate and do a lot of damage. Britain once looked a very different place; there were vast natural forests and wild spaces with wolves, bears and lynx roaming the land. The UK is now one of the few countries in the world that doesn't have top predators.

The other side of the coin though is that wolves do not stay where they are released. New spin-off packs are formed which look for new territories and we only have to look over the Channel to where they are at the doors of Paris.

For all that there do not appear to have been any problems for humans other than the taking of farm animals. Wolves still roam free in many parts of upland Europe and no person has been killed by one in Europe for at least a hundred years. The last wolves in Britain were killed in the mid seventeen hundreds..

Many countries of Europe have re-introduced species and some which have hung on in remote corners are now spreading. They cannot spread into Britain though, given we are an island nation.

Top predators are now found in about 30% of mainland Europe. There are currently thought to be about 17,000 brown bears, 12,500 wolves, close to 10,000 Eurasian lynx and even 1,250 wolverines.

The bear has been mentioned in these debates about possible releases in Britain and we could learn to live with them but I cannot see it happening.

Almost all animals are wary of man with good cause and if left alone will rarely be any threat.

Michael Smith recounts an experience demonstrating this point. Along the eastern flank of the Tetons in Wyoming, there is a section of gravel road impassable from November to May. The road is sandwiched between a creek tributary of the Snake River and a steep shrubby bank at the foot of the Albright Peak, Static Peak, Buck Mountain group. Bears often came down to feed on roadside fruit bushes towards evening in late autumn.

Bears in this area are usually black bears rather than the more aggressive grizzly or brown bears. The Rangers patrol the road though and try to keep the public at a safe distance from any passing bears. Michael and Helen Smith were on the hiking trails and they had taken the precaution of carrying pepper spray and having small bells attached to their sacks. After having passed recent bear spoor while descending Avalanche Peak, Helen had started belting out 'On Ilkla Moor baht 'at' to warn any nearby bears of their presence.

A couple of days later, they had been watching a bald eagle and pelicans at Oxbow Bend on the Snake River and then went up Signal Mountain for an overview but still had a couple of hours of daylight left.

They parked at the foot of a slope and Michael strolled along the narrow road looking for movement. After ten minutes he saw some in the huckleberry bushes several metres up the slope - little more than the rustle of wind-blown leaves but the disturbance moved slowly down to within a metre or so of the road.

Michael could see nothing but camera at the

ready, he moved close in until practically touching the bush. There inside the bush was a black bear's head with a paw pulling towards it, one fruit-laden branch after another.



Unperturbed it carried on feeding and Michael backed off to get a snap or two before retreating to the other side of the road.

As he walked back to get Helen, a passing car driver asked what I'd seen and within minutes the road was blocked with stopped cars and a Ranger arrived to try and get the traffic flowing. The bear made a move out of the bush to cross the road and drink from the creek.

Panic resulted with shouts of 'get into your car' 'lock the doors' although the bear was totally un-phased and strolled down into the creek and drank.

They also encountered a moose on the same trip, another creature once found here and one suggested for reintroduction here.

FUNDING FOR WILDLIFE

There was confirmation this spring from the National Lottery that £4.6 million has been awarded to the Back From The Brink project, a new groundbreaking multi-organisational partnership made up of leading charities and conservation bodies. Plans are already underway for numerous projects to help threatened species.

UNUSUAL ANIMALS

As we wander the wilder places in Britain we may increasingly spot something different.

At the end of last year the Scottish Government decided that beavers be classed as a native species despite having been absent from Britain for many years.

Those which have been released and are living in Argyll and Tayside will now be free to wander at will and presumably create populations in other parts of the country.

Polecats are making a come back and can now be found in many locations and a colony of pine martens has been discovered in Shropshire. Landowners are working with the local wildlife trust to encourage them and re-establish this animal in England. Many of us visit the Long Mynd area and if we are in the Clun Valley and very fortunate we may sight them.

LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

When the National Parks were created they were supposed to protect our wilder places and most such authorities do a pretty good job but they are increasingly becoming bureaucratic and virtual planning authorities and this with funding challenges means that actual conservation of the places we love to walk is not as proactive as we would wish.

There is however good news about one classic part of the Lakes; Glenridding Common is likely to be managed in future by the John Muir Trust. This Trust is a conservation charity dedicated to protecting and enhancing wild places.

They campaign to keep wild places free from inappropriate development and open for all to enjoy and work to restore natural habitats and native species, to help nature flourish.

They own and/or manage large blocks of wild land in Scotland and some in Wales but this will be their first venture into England.

Glenridding Common takes in much of the land to the east of the summit of Helvellyn including Swirral and Striding edges.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GLACIERS GONE, LONG TIME MELTING

We have been commenting previously on climate change and its affect on mountain regions and as more evidence emerges it is causing increasing concern.

Its effects on glaciers have been seen in their recession almost everywhere. To show the dramatic scale of the issue, NASA reports that about 46,000,000,000 tons of ice from glaciers was lost in Alaska each year on average, from 2003 to 2010, and this picture is much the same in Asia

All the glaciers situated near Everest are retreating visibly and experts worry that most in the central and eastern Himalayas could disappear completely over the next twenty years.

Glacial melting will have an effect on sea levels, causing coastal flooding around the world and in many highland areas including the Himalayas many communities will have insufficient water supplies.

Of even more concern is the reduction of flow to the major rivers running down into the heavily populated areas and the dramatic effects that it could have on weather systems. If water is not held back in the mountains as it falls then we might see the end of the monsoons and the knock on effect could affect weather patterns and ocean currents the whole world over.

One modelled scenario sees the gulf stream moving and leaving Britain with a similar climate to Norway.

HIMALAYAN INVADER

The invasive Himalayan balsam is now becoming so widespread and out competing so much native flora that a massive campaign of eradication has been launched. Originally a nuisance along our waterways following introduction into our gardens it is now turning up in all sorts of places.

A new problem with it is emerging in that as it eradicates other plants along our rivers when the balsam itself dies back the banks are prone to erosion leading to flooding.

A TO Z OF UPS AND DOWNS

Climate change is putting wildlife populations increasingly in peril as temperatures rise, and weather becomes more extreme. Warming average temperatures in Europe are pushing sea creatures, birds, bees and butterflies further north but unfortunately some nasty bugs as well. Some native creatures have nowhere else to go and most plants cannot migrate fast enough. Alpine plants in our upland areas have are declining as they cannot go any higher. Man's changing agricultural habits and the spread of human habitation are adding to the problem as is air pollution. With the seasons changing and species adapting at different rates, birds and different animal species are becoming out of sync with the insects and harvests on which they rely, warming waters causes a massive reduction in plankton and sand eels in our seas both of which are having a dramatic impact up the food chain.

Many people and organisations are striving to help endangered species with some marked successes but there are probably more losers than winners. Creatures in urgent need of often costly assistance are slowly recovering but a lot more needs to be done.

The UK's Birds of Conservation Concern 'red list' now stands at 67 species with 96 more species amber-listed. Not good when we have only 244 regular species.

Arctic Skuas – Really struggling, down about 70% in this century.

Avocets – Lost as a British breeding bird in the 19th century but in the 1930s they were found breeding again in Ireland and ten year later a few pairs turned up in Suffolk. Help by creating lagoons in various reserves assisted them and they are now widespread again.

Barn Owl - Suffered declines through the last century and was affected by pesticides and loss of old building in the countryside- Since then with the provision of numerous nest boxes numbers may have increased slowly.

Bats – It is mixed picture with bats, some including the soprano pipistrelle, have increased thanks to new legal protection.

Bearded Tit- Almost extinct in England 89 years ago numbers grew steadily for several decades but went into decline again at the end of the 1900s. Lives in reed beds and many of these are being lost. Some reserves are now creating reed beds to assist the creatures which need them. Now amber listed.

Bees – the situation is not good for bumblebees 30% facing the risk of losing more than 75% of their current range by the end of the century. Loss of flower-rich meadowland saw our short-haired bumblebee population vanish and declared extinct in 2000 but a project has seen bees from Sweden reintroduced – honey bees are suffering badly.

Bee Eaters - Have in recent years been nesting in small but increasing numbers in the UK, and are well adapted to our warmer conditions.

Bittern – The native bittern is making a slow come-back after creation of suitable habitats by conservationists. The creation of new reed beds has enabled bitterns to recover from just 11 booming males in 1997 to 156 in 2015 - Regular breeding by little bitterns is now being seen.

Blackbird – a bit of a recovery last year but down nearly 40% in last 50 years.

Blue tit – Weather over winter dictates survival rates and breeding sometimes out of sync with insect supplies – had a good winter last year.

Butterflies – These creatures are very weather dependent. It is estimated that if climate change is not halted, 25% of Europe's butterfly species could lose more than 75% of their current range in the next 50 years. In the UK the present picture is mixed. One of our rarest the sun-loving heath fritillary faced extinction 30 years ago but has been protected by habitat management in small pockets and is doing better as the climate warms. The Wall and Small Heath have done poorly over years and usually fairly common butterflies like the gatekeeper, comma and small copper experienced a terrible summer last year for reasons not entirely known, The red admiral, was widely seen during last autumn with numbers up 70% compared to 2015. The green-veined white did well too, rising by almost 60%.

Overall, three quarters of the UK's resident and regularly visiting butterfly species declined over the past forty years but populations of some species increased. Trends over the past decade show that the long-term declines of some threatened species have been halted and small recoveries have seen numbers increase of Duke of Burgundy, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dingy Skipper. The Large Blue butterfly, once extinct in Britain is now thriving following decades of conservation works.

Buzzard – Now our most common and most widespread bird of prey they were once reduced to a few pockets in the UK due to killing by gamekeepers. In more recent times, pesticides and the loss of rabbits due to myxomatosis. As all these problems have receded their numbers over the last 30 years have grown dramatically.

Capercaillie – Badly hit by increasingly frequent heavy rainstorms to add to its ongoing problems with suitable habitat. This large grouse spends much of time feeding on the ground and vulnerable to predators. Living in the rare Scottish native pinewood, its population has declined rapidly and extinction is likely and it is a 'Red List' species)

Carrion Crow - numbers have declined over recent years but still fairly common.

Chaffinch – Slow decline but had a good winter last year- Overall though down nearly 50% over last 50 years.

Cirl Bunting – Doing well in the South West, has increased tenfold in last 25 years but is still fairly rare after major declines in the 20th century caused by changing agriculture.

Coal Tit - Population fluctuates but warmer winters help survival and numbers are well up. Almost 300% over the last half century - They had a good year last year; up 25% on the year before.

Collared Dove. Doing very well. Numbers up 300% in last 40 years.

Common Gull – Affected by bad weather round the coast but is increasingly roaming inland and had a good year last year.

Corncrake - Once common but lost in England as harvesting methods changed and hay meadows were lost. There are populations in Ireland and Western Scotland, mostly on the Isles. re-introductions in England are planned.

Crane - Small numbers migrate through the UK, and there are tiny breeding populations. Habitat loss and shooting is steadily reducing numbers in Europe so our visiting migrants are also reducing.

Cuckoo - The numbers of these spring visitors are declining alarmingly and is on the 'Red List'.

Curlew - Our native curlew is struggling, down 12% in the last decade - Its very rare relative the Stone Curlew has doubled in numbers over the last 25 years. They visit in summer to breed in fields and need careful protection from farm machinery.

Dartford Warbler - Sightings of the tiny tit rose by nearly 50% last year following the mild winter.

Dormouse – Struggling despite conservationists best efforts and re-introductions.

Dotterel – Having a difficult time. They pass up the East coast on way to summer territory in the Highlands.

Duncock – Once common 'hedge sparrow' its numbers have been declining over last 409 years.

Egrets - Little egrets are thriving with nest site moving north throughout England. The first breeding recordings of Cattle Egrets and Great White Egrets are now being made.

English (Grey) Partridge - Once widespread and very common, its numbers have declined dramatically due to loss of habitat and shooting. It is a 'Red List' species. They are doing well at present in the new National Forest where farmland has been planted with young trees but with maturity these woodlands will be less suitable.

Golden Eagle – Once seen throughout the UK, they are now restricted to the uplands of Scotland where we have a fifth of all western Europe's population. They are still persecuted by shooting interests.

Goldfinch – Their numbers are declining but they had a reasonable winter last year.

Great Tit – Population varies dependant on winter weather and they had a good winter last year, up 15% on the previous year.

Green Parakeet - now naturalised, it is also known as ring-necked due to black ring around its face and neck. A recent immigrant but now approaching 10,000 breeding pairs.

Greenfinch - Hit by disease and weather problems but mild winter last year saw some recovery. Down over 40% though in last 50 years.

Hawfinch – Our largest finch but very elusive. Numbers are thought to have dropped in recent years with a decline in many of its traditional breeding areas but a difficult bird to count.

Hedgehog –Thought to be down 40% since the turn of the century, due to habitat loss and fragmentation, by housing and other developments and being killed by road traffic. Climate change and likelihood of heavy rainfall can flood their homes.

Hen Harrier – Usually found on moorland it is heavily persecuted by grouse shooters. Breeding numbers are very low and the species is under severe threat (Red List)

Heron – The native heron is doing well and first breeding purple herons are being seen.

House Sparrow – Numbers continue to decline, down about 50% in the last 50 years.

Insects – Insects and other invertebrates (97% of all animal species) are struggling badly; half being in steady decline. These nature's dustbin men, keep soils healthy and are the lowest rung of the food chain on which all creatures depend.

The draining of wetlands has harmed many species including the large marsh grasshopper and we are seeing a number of new insects taking up residence in the UK. Often blown here in the past, it was too cold for them but colonies are being established. Not all are welcome, new larger wasps, hornets and ladybirds are a problem and numerous smaller nasties are attacking trees and shrubs.

There are some attractive immigrants however for example the small red-eyed damselfly.

Jackdaw - Numbers have declined a little in recent years after many years of increases. Still common and probably safe, due to flexible feeding habits and general adaptability.

Kittiwakes - These birds are struggling like many sea birds. Numbers are down 70% over the last few decades. Lack of sand eels in the seas has deprived them of their main food source. The sand eels are migrating northwards following the plankton as the seas warm.

Lapwings – Like cooler climates and are seeing numbers heavily reduced. Changing agricultural methods and draining of damp grasslands has deprived them of much of their food source.

Linnet –Unlike most birds of farmland this bird is thriving. The abundance of oilseed rape and set-aside land has boosted the sort of seeds they like.

Long-tailed Tit – Varies year on year and warmer winters help survival - had a good year last year.

Magpie – Was becoming ever more common until recently but numbers have declined in recent years – Still numerous.

Merlin – Suffered a population crash in the late 20th century (on the Red List) this the UK's smallest bird of prey is slowly recovering. During winter our population increases with Iceland's breeding birds migrating to us.

Moths – Declining steadily.

Natterjack Toad - habitat loss over last century resulted in the dramatic decline of this unusual and noisy creature. Pond creation and re-introductions are helping it reclaim lost ground.

Osprey – most common in Scotland there are breeding colonies at Bassenthwaite in Cumbria, at Rutland Water in the East Midlands and occasionally in Wales. Doing well now in suitable locations after decades of persecution.

Pochard – They are down 40% in the last ten years.

Puffin - The puffin is struggling largely because of a lack of sand eels in the seas as they migrate northwards following the plankton as the seas warm. These birds nesting burrows have also been extensively predated by rats. Numbers over recent decades have dropped to only about 30% of what they were.

Red Kite - Has gone from strength to strength following re-introductions but is still be persecuted by some game keepers. One bird was shot in April.

Robin - Numbers have declined of recent years but vary with the weather. Over the longer period the general trend is upwards.

Shag – Effected adversely by wider extremes of weather. They have very few breeding sites and do not wander far from base so are very susceptible to population crashes and are on the 'Red List'.

Skylark – Winter planting of cereal crops has deprived them of food sources and as ground nesting birds the crop is too tall for their nests. Numbers are badly down but they are doing well in the new national forest where farmland has been planted with young trees. Unfortunately as these grow this temporary sanctuary will disappear.

Snakes and Lizards etc. – All these creatures are in decline mostly due to loss of habitat. Survivors are in isolated pockets weakening the gene pools and putting them under severe threat. The steady degrading of heathland has caused the sand lizard population to fall.

Starling – We have lost 80% in the last 50 years.

Turtle Dove – Vanishing rapidly largely due to lack of seed and grain during their breeding season. The species is now included on the 'ed List'

Twite - The Twite has declined dramatically both in numbers and range over last 25 years and it is now a rare bird in England, only breeding in a few small locations in the South Pennines. This includes a small group near Dove Holes quarry.

Water Vole - Suffered a 95% population drop over recent decades with loss of suitable habitat, urbanisation being a major cause and where they can survive they have seen massive predation by mink – captive breeding and re-introductions and the trapping of mink are seeing a slow recovery.

White-tailed Eagle - The largest UK bird of prey. It went extinct here during the early 20th century, due to illegal killing. Following re-introductions over the last 40 years it is now doing quite well along the west coast of Scotland is probably now a self sustaining population.

Wood Pigeon - Persecuted as a pest in rural areas it has moved into our gardens and is doing very well. Numbers are up massively over the last few decades.

Wren - Numbers have declined of recent years and are very susceptible to bad winters. The species' high egg productivity means that numbers usually recover after a few years and it is still common.

Some species are surviving because they remain on islands cut off from the problems of the mainland. Some have actually been introduced onto islands as a means of protecting them. Where island populations exist it is also a lot easier to eradicate the predators. New Zealand is protecting a number of its rare creatures on island reserves and the UK is following suit. After years of conservation efforts on Ramsay Island, Manx shearwaters are up 25% in 4 years and similarly Fidra Island near Edinburgh saw Puffins numbers double over 25 years.

The eradication of grey squirrels from Anglesey has seen a dramatic recovery of the red squirrel population and the removal of hedgehogs from the Hebrides has helped ground nesting birds. One downside is that small island populations having small gene pools are open to diseases running through populations and Brownsea Island's red squirrels population has been riddled with leprosy for 50 years.

A recent study showed that a fifth of all impact on species populations was due to modern intensive agricultural practices. We are a heavily populated country but it is worth noting that three quarters of the country is still used for food production.

Climate change does have an effect. It is extending the area suitable for species previously only found in the south and they are spreading northwards and new species are making their home here from the continent. Unfortunately there are species that favour conditions further north and at higher altitudes And these may have nowhere to go unless they are birds and even with birds, if they go to countries further north they will be lost to us.

Great efforts are being made to help at-risk species but the best way of helping the entire ecosystem is to stop destroying habitats

Enjoy what you can see when out walking - it may not be there in a few years.

SPANISH MEET, EL CHORRO

24TH MARCH - 2ND APRIL

El Chorro is a tiny village in Malaga Province situated at the outflow of the Guadalhorce River as it leaves the spectacular Gaitanes Gorge. Numerous limestone cliffs tower above the village offering some of Spain's finest sport climbs. As well as the famous Caminito del Rey, the surrounding sierras offer superb hill walking and have a sprinkling of via ferratas. All in all, a great venue for another YRC meet to southern Spain and we are all grateful to Val and Tony for organising the accommodation at Finca La Campana, which can be recommended to future visitors.

Friday 24th March

Michael, Helen, Christine and Jim arrived to a colder El Chorro than expected! We had been experiencing temperatures of above 28°C so the weather, for us at least, was rather a shock.

Saturday 25th March

Saturday dawned bright and early and the Smith/Harrison party set off from Finca La Campana for an initial detour to explore the commercial opportunities in El Chorro and then to walk to Sierra La Huma. We went via the ancient Arabic Staircase, where Michael Smith checked out climbing opportunities for later in the week. In the end, we decided to loop back through the woods to Finca La Campana using a mix of paths and bicycle tracks some of which followed close to the Arroyo de Chorro.

Aaron and Ged headed over to the Valle de Abdalajis crag for their first days climbing: La bavaresa 5+, El olvillo del osillilo 5+ (attempted not completed), Fasi terminal 5+, Los currants 4, Bano de tierra 5 and Musgogenesis 6a.

Mick arrived later that day, having warmed up with two weeks excellent walking in the hills of Axarquia behind Nerja, unfortunately without John Sutcliffe, who was unable to join us at the last minute. Disappointingly, we had learned a few days before that there would not be a visit from Ann-Karin or Kjetil Tveranger either, as Kjetil had fallen and injured his shoulder on the Norwegian ski-touring meet and was in rehab.

After a long day, we all went for a hearty dinner at the Olive Branch bunkhouse and caught up with Helen Brewitt and Daniel O'Leary, two new prospective members, who were staying there for the rock climbing.

Sunday 26th March

On Sunday morning, we were woken by an early call from Richard Sealey who had caught the early train to El Chorro station having spent the night at Malaga Airport! Paul Dover and Bill Gibbs also joined us later that day.

The next crag selected by Aaron and Ged was Fontales (Sector Castrojo) and the following routes were completed: Slipped in 5, Vas pisando huevos 5 and But one 5. Then after lunch, Yo y mi Resaca 5+ was climbed on the Escalera Arabe crag above the staircase.

Mick, the Smiths and the Harrisons set off for a walk in the Sierra de Llana near the Guadalhorce reservoir to the north of the Sierra de Huma. This route had been downloaded by Mick from the Wikiloc site and uploaded onto our GPSs. Good tracks were followed initially and a clear path took us up to a gap in the cliff to access the Tajo de Balesteros summit (1012m), where bluebells were found. The next section followed the GPS trace across limestone scrub linking the odd section of goat path, flaying any untrousered skin before returning to some welcome dirt track!

Monday 27th March

Returning to the Escalera Arabe wall with Michael, Ged and Aaron's routes included: Los timbales 4, Un helado para Leo 3, Here dishes menu 5 (should be 6a!), The lest way 4, La raya a la izquierda 4 and El piarito 3. Then after lunch, another couple of routes were added on the Valle de Abdalajis crag: Oso yogui 5 and Un pobre infeliz 4+ (if direct should be 6a!).

Mick was bound for the Sierra La Huma and set off from the Finca with Bill and Paul. We took the track up through the pines below the climbers' crags which are penetrated by the so-called Arab staircase – an old path taking a relatively easy-angled weakness in the cliffs to gain an olive grove nestling under a second tier of crags.

We passed a small group of cabra montes, the Iberian ibex at the top where the party divided. Mick continued over the barren limestone summit of La Huma (1191m) and returned around its eastern flank. Bill and Paul returned via a bridle path through the forest which provided a good ridge view of the area, then down to El Chorro and back to Finca la Campana.

Following the flaying of skin on the walk in the Sierra de Llana near the Guadalhorce reservoir, Helen, Christine and Jim opted for some less testing walks. These were the Sendero Gaitanejo, part of which forms the walk to the start of the Caminito Del Rey – a peaceful trail with some interesting bird sightings such as Crossbills. After lunch we did the Pico del Convento walk which included the Mirador de la Buiteras.

Although it was a short route it offered spectacular views of Gaitanes gorge and the start of the walkway. Potted descriptions of both walks can be found on the web at <http://aloravalleyview.com/hiking-and-walking-routes-in-and-around-alora-andalucia.html>

Tuesday 28th March

The group assembled at El Chorro station to take the coach up to the drop-off point to descend the newly renovated El Caminito del Rey path, which traverses the Gaitanes Gorge. This is a canyon carved by the river Guadalhorce which narrows to about 10 metres wide and reaches a depth of 700 meters. In flood conditions, the river used to form a huge spout – El Chorro, at the exit of the gorge. The river is now tamed by the dam of the Guadalhorce reservoir and its hydroelectric scheme. The original precipitous walkway pinned to the gorge was built in the early 1900's to maintain the water canal.



The walkway fell into disuse and became very dangerous. A number of our members, including your President, recall doing the exciting traverse some twenty years ago, but it was later closed by the authorities after five deaths in two years. For more information see the website: <http://www.caminitodelrey.info/en/>.



Mick on the walkway and with Helen, Tony & Bill

The gorge is certainly impressive and newly renovated path, complete with staircases, observation platforms and a suspension bridge.

Following just above the original walkway, it has been nicely done and sees a huge volume of hard-hatted visitor watched by the griffon vultures circling above. Definitely worth a visit!

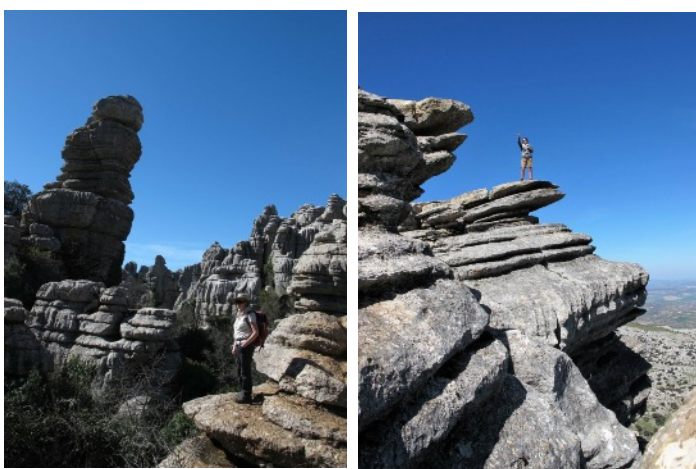
After a welcome beer back in El Chorro, Mick and Bill drove up towards the Guadalorce reservoir and walked up to the Mirador de las Buitreras close to Pico del Convento, where we were fortunate to see a vulture just 20 metres away as it soared into view above the cliff below us. The view down to the Gaitanes Gorge and the start of the walkway was equally impressive.

Following a welcome coffee the Smiths and Harrisons drove off to visit Bobastro which is the ruins of a Mozarabic church carved right out of the rock. The site is impressive, highly atmospheric and offers a tranquil space to reflect and take in the wonderful views. Prior to the church we had driven to the end of the road where the Mirador Tajo Encantada offered expansive vistas of Sierra La Huma, Caminito del Rey and the setting of Finca La Campana. A bonus at the top were sightings of at least 15 Swallowtail butterflies. Ged and Aaron went to the Desplomilandia crag and climbed Flora 6a and Parcia tonta 6a.

Wednesday 29th March

The party drove to the interesting dissected limestone of the El Torcal National Park just south of Antequera. Michael, Aaron and Ged completed the questionably safe El Torcal via ferrata, graded at Difficile and technically closed by the park authorities.

Val, Tony, Richard, Helen, Mick, Bill, Paul, Alan, Angie, Christine and Jim threaded their way through the various paths that cross the limestone terrain. The Jurassic landscape is riven by deep gullies and characterised by its fantastically weathered natural sculptures – think of a limestone version of Brimham Rocks on steroids! Lots of orchids, giant asphodels and other flowers were seen, as well as more cabra montes. Part way round, Mick and Bill traversed the ledges of the superstitiously named Cornisa del Diablo along the northern edge of the park.



Helen admires El Torcal's famous towers and Christine on the Cornisa del Diablo

Thursday 30th March

Mick and Richard set off to do the via ferrata on the Camorro Alto (1378m) but ended up simply bagging the summit with its extensive views over towards El Torcal and La Huma in a biting cold wind. Aaron and Ged returned to Escalera Arabe (Sector Suiza) to ascend Kiwi 5 and La Gaita 5 and two cars ventured to Ronda – Bill and Paul in one car with Michael, Christine and Jim in the other. Travel was by the most direct route and without problem until some tricky navigation in Ronda itself. The 3 doing the via ferratas were Bill, Christine and Michael (henceforth known as the “Threea Ferrata”) soon lost contact with Paul and Jim who decided to explore the town of Ronda. Particularly impressive was the bridge where Jim wisely removed his hat rather than chancing the same fate as the original architect. Eventually the Threea Ferrata were spotted from a distant viewpoint completing the final stages of their ascent. The groups were reunited briefly before Bill and Paul set off to prepare for the barbecue, also via an interesting cross-country route. Michael, Christine and Jim returned via the scenic route which touched on the Sierra de las Nieves national park and had many wonderful views.

Jim's idea to break for a stroll at Ardales taking in the River Turon was a mistake as none of the potential wild life treasures (crayfish, otters, genets, birds and flowers) revealed themselves.

Great barbecue organised by Bill who even sacrificed his potential afternoon in Torcal to go shopping and then managed to get his towel on the barbecue terrace first. The barbecue turned out to be a genuine Antequerian feast with a perfectly balanced menu of meats, salads and strawberries to finish – a heady mix of flavours and aromas. Everyone who contributed to the food preparation deserves commendation.

What better way to finish the day than to watch the sun go down and the moon start to rise whilst enjoying great food, wine and conversation.

Friday 31st March

Mick and Bill drove to Ronda and took a dirt track leading to the Quejigales picnic area, the start of an excellent walk in the Sierra de las Nieves first done by Mick some 20 years ago. This varied walk starts through flower meadows before crossing pinsapo woodland.

The distinctive Spanish fir is a threatened species now limited to just three locations in the provinces of Granada and Malaga in southern Spain. The first hedgehog broom bush in flower was seen at the lowest limit of its height range as we climbed the ridge leading to the old Camino de las Nieves. Passing the Penon de los Enamorados (Lover's Rock), the path reaches a well-restored nevera (snow-pit) used to collect snow which was compacted into ice blocks for transportation to Ronda. The return route then undulates past numerous stands of skeletal pollarded trees. These are all quejigales (Portuguese oaks), an unforgettable sight in this barren landscape.

Meanwhile Ged and Aaron had linked up with our two prospective members Helen and Daniel to visit the Los Cotos (sector Medios) crag where they climbed: Alucinosis 5, Number One 4+, Cursillos 5 and Bruja intrepida 5 (attempted not completed). After lunch Cerebro de broca 6a was added at the Desplomilandia crag.

Alan, Angie and Paul drove to El Mirador and walked to a col below Pico del Convento, from where we traversed difficult limestone terrain to overlook the Gaitanes Gorge. Whilst eating our lunch we were entertained by several vultures circling above and below the cliff edge. We returned via the start of the Camino del Rey.

We all had a memorable meal at the Rocabella restaurant.

Saturday 1st April

Mick left early for Malaga airport. Aaron and Ged did no climbing, but drove to Malaga to watch Atletico Madrid defeat Malaga FC (2-0) at a football game.

Bill and Paul enjoyed the experience of walks round various parts of "Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra" where, besides the many 1000's of Greater Flamingos, we saw several Corn Buntings, Black Winged Stilt, Avocets, Ruffs, 3 Woodchat Shrikes, a single Black Stork and a single Nightingale in full song. The Laguna is in a very large and fertile valley with large indoor livestock units, such a contrast to mountainous area we experienced for most of the week.

Sunday 2nd April

Paul and Bill set off for Malaga at 06.30 for a 10.25 flight but only just got to the aircraft as it was boarding due to major delays during the booking in process!

A most enjoyable week, ideal weather.

MB

Attending were:

Mick Borroff (President)
Tony Penny
Val Penny
Helen Brewitt (guest)
Aaron Champion (guest)
Ged Champion
Paul Dover
Bill Gibbs
Christine Harrison (guest)
Jim Harrison
Alan Linford
Angie Linford (guest)
Daniel O'Leary (guest)
Helen Smith
Michael Smith



**Michael, Helen, Jim, Mick, Christine, Paul.
Alan and Angie at El Torcal**

GALLERY



**Paul admiring the view over the El Torcal karst to the Sierra de Huma
Photo: Mick Borroff**



**Alan, Paul, Helen and Angie at El Torcal
Photo: Mick Borroff**

**Ged, bridge, Via Ferrata Torcal
Photo: Michael Smith**



**Female Cabra Monte – the Iberian ibex
Photo: Mick Borroff**





**Michael Helen Christine and Jim
crossing pathless terrain, Sierra Llana
Photo: Mick Borroff**



**Paul Dover at the top of the
Arab Steps, El Chorro
Photo: Mick Borroff**



**Via Ferrata
Randa
Photos:
Jim Harrison**



**View down to the Caminito del Rey
suspension bridge in the lower gorge
Photo: Mick Borroff**

AXARQUIA - WALKING IN THE SPANISH SIERRAS TEJEDA, ALMIJARA AND ALHAMA

Mick Borroff

Hilary and I have been regular visitors to the mountains that tower above the south coast of Spain for walking holidays in the early spring and have visited many parts of the hinterland from Tarifa to the Cabo de Gato over the years using flights to Malaga.

The Sierras of Tejada, Almirajara and Alhama form a National Park to the north of Nerja and have more than 50 peaks over 1000m topped by La Maroma at 2069m. There is plenty to go at - many of the valleys and *barrancos* (ravines) make great outings in themselves, as well as forming interesting approaches.

There are two principal guidebooks in English devoted to this area: Discovery Walking Guides "Walk the Axarquia" book has 30 routes, with some degree of overlap with the 24 walks in the more recent Cicerone guidebook "The Mountains of Nerja". The former publishes a useful accompanying 1:40k map (available on paper or as a digital map) and GPX route files are available from both publishers for GPS users. There are two other guidebooks to southern Andalucia which also feature walks in this area – see the further reading list.

All Spanish topographic mapping including the MTN25 raster maps can now be downloaded free from <http://centrodedescargas.cnig.es> or you can use the SityTrail Spain app to get this mapping on your phone/tablet for a reasonable price. However, you should note that unlike the UK, while tracks are generally shown, many of the footpaths are not marked on the topographic maps, so the guidebooks mentioned are indispensable navigation tools to get the best out of a visit to this interesting area.

The last time we based ourselves in Nerja to walk in the Axarquia - the Moors 'lands to the east', the weather was wet and wild, but this year, for a fortnight immediately before the El Chorro meet, the sun was out with a vengeance.

One must-do route is the traverse of La Maroma, the highest of Axarquia's mountains. There are four main ascent routes and with some late snow still on the northern slopes, I decided to walk from the Alcazar *area recreativa* over Maroma to the white mountain village of Canillas de Aceituno where Hilary picked me up. The views from the deserted trig point were fantastic, extending across to the snow-capped Sierra Nevada but it was too hazy to see the North African coast. The descent route partly followed an old mule trail and a few *cabras montés* (wild ibex) scampered away up the far side of a small valley.

One other benefit of walking in March and April is the profusion of spring wild flowers. Giant asphodels, cistus, hedgehog broom, stinking hellebores, narcissi, orchids, peonies and many, many others add colourful interest to the walks.

Another very good full-day route in the Almirajaras is the ascent of the Tajo de Alemendrón (1513m) via the Barranco de Los Cazadores and the abandoned galena workings of the Mina de la Fura and Mina del Tajo. The walk up the dry ravine passes several caves and then follows the old mine mule track before the main ascent to a col below the first summit. The Alemendrón peak is reached by a moderately exposed scramble and comes complete with a summit book tucked into a metal enclosure let into the rock. The ascent route contrasts nicely with the high-level return, passing several other rocky limestone tops before descending to reach the cool spring of Fuente del Esparto.

One other feature of walking in southern Spain is the large number of abandoned farms and other buildings that are encountered in the mountains. The ascent of remote Malascamas (1792m) in the Sierra Tejada to the north passes the substantial ruin of the Haza del Aguadero farmstead, with one small building, complete with wood-stove, now used as a bothy. This picturesque *cortijo* was abandoned relatively recently after its access track was washed away by a major flood in 2007, but can still be accessed

on foot beside the river. In the spring, its almond trees are covered in pink blossom, unlike the dark pine woods crossed after descending from the summit trig on Malascamas – a very varied walk.

Another splendid route is along the deep gorge nestling below the ancient spa town of Alhama de Granada perched on its edge. This easy walk along the bottom of the gorge passes several ruined flour mills complete with Moorish water channels, millstones, rotten water wheels and rusting driveshafts. The walk returns on the opposite cliff top through an almond plantation carpeted with grape hyacinths before the gorge is re-entered via a sinuous medieval track hewn from the sandstone. We watched a goatherd and his two dogs driving his flock along the grassy terraces of the lower gorge – a timeless scene.

On the way back to Nerja, we made a detour for refreshments at the Venta de Alfarnate, the oldest *venta* or roadside coaching inn in Andalucia located at a strategically important crossroads beside the old Malaga to Granada *camino real* (royal highway) close to the boundary between Malaga and Granada provinces. This is a rambling inn dating said to date back to the thirteenth century: with its open fire, blackened beams and stonework, old tiled floors, and old photographs, it was the perfect place for a beer or two and plates of *jamon serrano* and olives – highly recommended.

On a few of the walks, one visits sections of the technology used to create hydroelectricity at the beginning of the last century. There are several examples of these schemes featuring the usual capture of a stream at high level, then routing it down the valley in an *acequia* (canal) at a gentle gradient to feed a pipe leading steeply down to the turbines. These canals have service paths along them with varying degrees of exposure to add interest to the walk. The system capturing the waters of the Rio Chillar in the Sierra Almirajara is still in use today, while in the Sierra Tejada, the *acequia* is dry and the now disused hydroelectric scheme above Canillas de Albaida fed generators at the delightfully named (pun intended) Fabrica de Luz – Light Factory, in a lovely setting in lush vegetation, shaded by large walnut trees, which is now a small camp site.

These were just some of the interesting routes that we did highlighting the vicarious pleasures of walking in this delightful part of southern Spain at the best time of the year to be there - we will certainly be returning.

Further reading

Walk the Axarquia. Charles Davis, Discovery Walking Guides, 2005

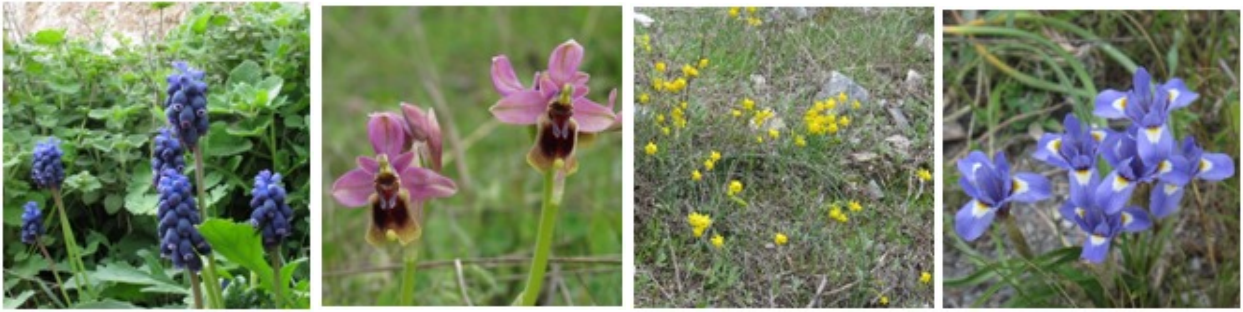
The Mountains of Nerja. Jim Ryan, Cicerone Press, 2014

Walking in Andalucia. Guy Hunter-Watts, Cicerone Press, 2016 (6 routes in Axarquia)

Andalucia South. Bernd Plikat, Rother Walking Guides, 2004 (7 routes in Axarquia)



The ruins of one of the five disused flour mills in the Alhama de Granada gorge



Grape hyacinths, orchids, tiny wild narcissi and dwarf irises are just a few of the flowers to be seen



Cabra montés
– the wild
Spanish ibex



Almond trees and grape hyacinths above the gorge of Alhama de Granada



The distant snow-capped Sierra Nevada from the summit of Malascamas and the massive IGN trigpoint on La Maroma's limestone summit plateau



Almond trees surround the Haza del Aguadero abandoned farm in the Sierra Tejada



A view to the summits of Tajo de Alemendrón and El Torre de Alemendrón



Ascending the Barranco de Malinfierno (ravine of the bad hell!)

COLLATING CONUNDRUMS

The Trials and Tribulations of an Editor Roy Denney

If we were a bowls club meeting in the local village a newsletter would be a doddle. As it is there are pitfalls you can only start to guess at. I am editing and embellishing articles about places I have never heard of in languages I cannot start to pronounce often using characters not on my keyboard.

Foreign letters using the Latin alphabet have dots, circles, squiggles, roofs, slashes and many other marks above and below them. My text recognition programme ignores them in some languages and if I scan something in they are lost. If I know they are there I can usually find them on a keyboard, hiding behind code numbers, but it can be a lengthy process. Some fonts do not actually support these.

Then there are names in non-Latin alphabets where there are a number of different phonetic equivalents used for the same place. Members sending me captions for photographs sometime use different ones than those used in the meet report.

John Middleton provides us with wonderful articles but impossible spellings and it is all useful material but when I compile his epics I have to get him to proofread them as often nobody else will know what spellings of names should be.

I was at a Banff Mountain Film Festival showing recently and during the interval a few of us were discussing a mountain none of us had heard of but which features in the National Geographic magazine one man had with him. I say discussing it but none of us had a clue how to pronounce its name.

Hkakabo Razi: Not only could we only guess at the way to say it but even surmising what language it is was challenging.

It is actually in the state of Kachin and we were no wiser. Kachin is however an autonomous state within Burma (Myanmar) and is at the far eastern end of the Himalayas. It is politically unstable with an economy based on drugs and smuggling which is why the area is little known.

Hkakabo Razi, which, according to National Geographic, is apparently pronounced something like ka-kuh-bo rah-zee, is also incredibly difficult to get to. It requires weeks of trekking through dense steaming jungles cut by numerous very steep sided gorges and inhabited by dangerous creatures including venomous snakes (not to mention the locals). When you get there it is by all accounts one of the most difficult mountains in the world to climb being a jagged mass of black rock standing over 19,000 feet high and in stark contrast, is the home of many white glaciers - picturesque but dangerous.

Another issue I face is that countries will keep changing their names and the names of features and cities. Referring back to old reports and printing the reminiscences of older members I have to decide whether to use old or new names. Long before Myanmar became Myanmar and when most of the world was pink, I became fascinated by natural geography and mountain country and thought it would be good to go and see Mount Godwin-Austin. At least K2 is easier to type.

When I did go trekking in the Khumbu (Chumbu) the best map I could find available back then talked of Kala Pattar (aka Kala Patthar), Pumo Ri (Pumori), Lobouche (Lobuche), Mehra (Mera), Pangboche (Panboche) etc. etc. etc.

I am currently wading through English language newspapers from China brought back for me by a friend who travels there regularly.

Thank goodness they were not in the local language!

THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

As a follow up to the 'chipping' about glaciers on page 74, China is becoming increasingly concerned about its supplies of fresh water especially in the south west where much of it emanates from the Tibetan Plateau. The glaciers there, which feed the rivers, have been in retreat for nearly 200 years but the speed of retreat is increasing dramatically.

The most obvious loss is the Mingyong, the lowest lying of these which is also a sacred site for Tibetan Buddhists. It provides drinking water and irrigation for a large area and it is feared that by the end of this century it may be inadequate to service these needs. At only 3000m above sea level it has receded 300m in the last 40 years. It is one of nearly 50,000 glaciers in China but almost all are also shrinking.



The China Daily newspaper reports that twelve other glaciers to the east of the Lancang river have thinned since 1968 which is of concern to the whole region. This river flows from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau through Yunnan province and then as the Mekong through five other countries.

It will also have a dramatic affect on the natural environment. This locality includes a heavily forested area which is among the world's richest in bio-diversity. The mountains between the valleys are home to rare and endangered creatures including snow leopards, the Tibetan pheasant and the snub-nosed monkey. The vegetation in this part of Yunnan province reflects the fact that it straddles both temperate and tropical zones.

TAKING IN THE VIEW

Alan Linford has spotted something different on the North York Moors. Actually it is hard to miss if you are in the right place.

It is a new three metres high sculpture in Bronze by artist Sean Henry and has been installed on the moors, near Westerdale Rigg. It is called the 'Seated Figure', and is apparently the first public sculpture to be placed within the National Park. It is scheduled to stay for 5 years.

Alan says it is not easy to find if you do not know the moors well as there is no path to it.

It faces east looking towards Captain Cook's monument and Roseberry Topping.



Alan likes it but it raises a niggle with him; should it be there?

UK MEETS REPORT

RHYD DDU, SNOWDONIA - FEBRUARY 24-26

The Welsh winter meet has a reputation for foul weather and this weekend did nothing to break with tradition. Friday had started promisingly and some members managed to get a short afternoon walk before the inevitable deterioration began. Luckily the pub is close by and so people could get there for an evening meal (London prices but apparently not matching standards) without getting too wet.

Saturday dawned with low grey clouds, gale force winds and rain. One member who had camped in the garden reported rainfall of Biblical proportions during the night and the ground was sodden. No one even considered going onto the fells; indeed for the first time in the writers' recollection the Snowdon car park was empty on a Saturday morning. Most people, in several groups, took the newly constructed bridleway to Beddgelert as a starter. The second contingent soon met the first coming back. They had been confused by the broad track, signposts and lilac topped markers and preferred to use the GPS which of course wasn't up to date. Having been put right, better progress was made and in due course a sodden party arrived in Beddgelert. They then went down the Aberglaslyn Gorge, having to scramble round one bluff where the path was flooded. The river was in spectacular spate and the truth of the axiom that there is always someone sillier than yourself was proved by the sight of a kayaker carrying his boat back up the road to have another ride down. Looking at the river it was difficult to see how anyone could live in there.

The return to Beddgelert was made via Cwm Bychan where the path was a considerable stream all the way. Even within a few yards of the col the stream still flowed strongly and on the descent it was more akin to becking. The lure of a pub showing the Wales/Scotland Rugby match ensured a swift pace along the valley and they were in time to see Wales soundly beaten.

One other party turned back at the flooded section of the Gorge and returned to the hut through Beddgelert Forest. What should have been an easy route turned into something of an epic with detours to avoid impassable torrents and they ended up being the last back.

Saturday evening was the usual convivial gathering and few felt the need to stir from the cosy lounge at Tan y Wyddfa. Mick Borroff circulated a proposal for a trip to the Western Atlas mountains of Morocco, an area the Club visited some years ago.

When Sunday dawned not much better than the previous day, those with a long way to go soon departed. There were some stalwarts; two got a lift to Beddgelert and walked back, they too seemed confused by the excellent signage and ended up halfway up Moel Hebog. Another pair set off to go up Cwm Llan to the Gladstone Rock to view the waterfalls. A final pair made it to the summit of Mynydd Mawr where they spent an estimated 30 seconds before running for shelter.

You could say the meet was a washout but members took it all in good spirits and everyone enjoyed the company and chat. To add insult to injury one local member can confirm that Monday was a lovely spring day, thus bookending the meet.

TJ

Attending: Tim Josephy
Harvey Lomas
Mick Borroff, Paul Dover
President Richard Dover
Richard Taylor Richard Gowing
Roger Horn John Schofield
Arthur Salmon John Brown
Frank Wilkinson Iain Gilmour
Richard Josephy Alan Clare
Nick Welch David Hick



**Castell Dinas Bran
near Llangollen
before the
weather
changed.
Photo:
Mick Borroff**

GLEN ETIVE - MARCH 9-12

This meet at the Grampian Club hut at Inbhirfhaolain has long been a favourite of the Club's winter calendar and indeed Derek Bush, an attendee at this year's meet, had been Meet Leader of the event for more than twenty-five years: a truly notable achievement. Unfortunately the effects of global warming clearly give participants much less certainty of having ideal snow and Ice conditions for climbing than was the case some years ago.



**Derek Smithson, Derek Bush, Arthur Salmon
Andrew Duxbury – Photo Michael Smith**

Our meet leader, Chris, along with Michael, arrived on Thursday, having stopped off on route in Callander to purchase 3 1/2 lbs of haggis for the Saturday evening meal. They also called in at the Kingshouse Hotel intending to have an evening meal, only to find that it had been closed for a couple of years for refurbishment! There is a café serving a limited menu, but they recommend that at present one should eat elsewhere. David, Anca and their guests also arrived on Thursday so as to take full advantage of the time available. The other members, including two octogenarians, arrived at various times on Friday.



On Friday conditions were not promising with the hills blanketed in low cloud. Chris and Michael drove to Victoria Bridge, which is a short distance from Bridge of Orchy near Forrest Lodge at the western end of Loch Tulla. Believing they would get decent snow above about 800m, they went up Coire Toaig, crossed the ridge to make a snow covered traverse into Coirein Lochain northeast of Stob Ghabar in anticipation of a 1000ft couloir climb to the summit.

Chris Hilton Photo: Michael Smith

The lower couloir was littered with avalanche debris, but was duly climbed, however in the thick mist they failed to turn right into the upper couloir and continued up wet snow to surmount a soggy cornice some 200m southeast of the summit. The descent was made north of Couloir Buttress, during which they came across an Irish party sheltering in bivvy bags while eating lunch. On the drive back they made a brief stop for a drink at the Inveroran Hotel, which they felt had benefited from the popularity of the West Highland Way, which passes by the door.

Meanwhile, Anca, David and guests had driven to the large car park on the Glencoe Road below Am Bodach, from where they took the usual route up Coire Nan Lochan to climb Bidean Nam Bian by way of Broad Gully on Stob Coire Nan Lochan. The snow was reported to be soft, but serviceable, although lots of ice was crumbling off the surrounding crags and falling into the gully. Two ptarmigans were seen near the lip of Coire Nan Lochan. Near white-out conditions were experienced on Bidean and the route off called for careful navigation.

They returned to Inbhirfhaolain well after dark and quite wet from a day out on the soft snow.

**Luke Judge at top of gully,
David Large lower down.**



Also on Friday, Harvey arrived at the hut with time to spare before nightfall, so he decided to walk up Laraig Eilde to the col between Stob Coire Sgreamhach and Stob Dubh, the southern summit of Buchaille Etive Beag.

During Friday night it rained heavily and Saturday dawned very mild and damp, although the weather forecast indicated that the weather should improve during the day.

Michael and Chris decided that there was little chance of finding climbable snow and, having consulted the one-inch map on the hut wall, decided to do a walk in Ardgour with the object of reaching a point marked 'camp', GR 871578, near the summit of Creach Bheinn. So, they drove to Corran, crossed the ferry and the headed south of Glen Tarbert to Glen Galmadale, some 10 miles south of Corran. Along the way they spotted an otter which had been killed by a vehicle. Walking up the valley beyond the fish pond proved to be very boggy, so they opted to ascend Maol Odhar by the ridge on the east side of the glen and then cross the bealach to the rockier Creach Bheinn. Just short of the summit they found the marked camp, a flat area with partly collapsed shelter walls. The camp was an Ordnance survey secondary triangulation station occupied in the early nineteenth century; there would have been four, or so, substantial tents and probably a larger wooden hut, perhaps an officers' quarters or mess. It was commented that the surveyors would have needed much better visibility than our two members experienced while lunching on the summit. While there, they also saw two peregrines fly westward repeatedly calling to one another to maintain contact in the clouds. The descent was made by the steep grassy slopes of Coire Cúl Mhám back to the Glen Galmadale River. As they drove back to the ferry, an eagle was spotted flying along the coastline. Unfortunately, while pulling onto the ferry, a flat tyre was discovered, the replacement of which and the arrangements needed to get a replacement for the drive back home resulted in the pair being delayed, which caused the evening meal to be delayed for everyone waiting back at Glen Etive.

Anca, David and guests opted on a trip to the Mamores with an approach via Glen Nevis. The car was parked near the base of Stob Ban and they went up Coire á Mhusghain to the bealach between Stob Ban and Sgor an Lubhair.

During the walk up the coire, David Pervan narrowly escaped slipping off the path into the river. From the bealach, they first climbed Stob Ban and then, in improving weather and visibility, ascended Sgor an Lubhair, continuing along the Devil's Ridge (Stob Coire á Mhail) to Sgurr á Mhaim.



Anca Pordea & David Pervan Photo: Luke Judge

The descent from there to Steall was made in completely clear weather with views from the West Coast to Ben Alder, all the Mamores, the Nevis range and the Grey Corries. As on the previous day, two ptarmigan were seen during the descent at around 2300 ft. By the time the Steall hut was reached, it was full moon for crossing the wire bridge, which much impressed Anca, and for the walk down the gorge to the car.

The moon was illuminating the snow high on the Mamores and a very bright Venus was perched over the shoulder of the Ben. No other walkers were seen after leaving Stob Ban.

A truly fabulous ending to their day.



Left to right - Sgurr a Bhuic, Sgurr Choinnich Beag (virtually hiding all of Sgurr Choinnich Mor) Stob Ban, Stob Coire Easain (in mist in the distance), Meall a Bhuirich (a rise on a broad shoulder connected to Stob Ban), Binnein Beag

Photo Stuart Taylor

Andrew and Derek had decided to climb Beinn na Gucaig, the Graham approximately ESE of Inchree, which is near the Corran Narrows, so Arthur opted to join them. The long SW ridge of the hill drops down to Inchree where we parked the car, but Andrew had a description of a route that took one along the Gleann Rìgh beside the river and through the forest. Initially the trail climbs steeply to a point well above the river, from where one has an excellent view of the impressive falls as the river plunges from the upper valley towards Loch Linnhe. Continuing up the forest trail, we were somewhat surprised, about two miles in and just short of the farmstead at Gleann Seileach, to hear a car coming along behind us with its very loud horn being repeatedly blown. Soon a car drew up alongside us and a rather elegantly dressed young woman wound down the window and explained that she hadn't been blowing the horn at us, but that at this time of the year large numbers of frogs crossed the trail to get to the river for spawning and her husband had recommended her to blow the horn to minimise the chance of killing them on the road. Continuing up the valley, we speculated on what occupation and lifestyle this family followed from this remote location in 2017.

Eventually, we emerged from the forest, some 4 1/2 miles from the car park. The cloud was still down on the hill and the hillside rising very steeply in to the mists looked rather daunting, so we decided this was a good time to have lunch and re-assess the situation. From a quick glance at the map, we concluded that to reach our goal we needed to cover almost another mile and 450 m of ascent, and, of course, return to the car park before dark. A unanimous decision was taken to abandon the climb and make our way back a.s.a.p. to the bar at Ballachulish where we hoped to be able to watch the England-Scotland Six Nations rugby match.

Our return down the valley coincided with the vast improvement in the weather already mentioned, so over the final descent towards Inchree we had excellent views of the falls, the Narrows at Corran and all the hills down both sides of the Loch. Also, at one point along the way, we observed large quantities of frog spawn in the ditches alongside the track. Rather sadly, during the descent to Inchree, Derek received a phone call informing him that his sister, although quite elderly, had rather unexpectedly died.

The pub at Ballachulish was packed with a lively, but very congenial crowd, despite England scoring a decisive lead by half-time, at which time we felt we needed to return to Inbhirfhaolain to start the preparations for the evening meal and get the wood fire going so that the other parties would return to a welcoming glow.

On the return of Chris and Michael from Ardgour, the evening meal of haggis, served with neeps and tatties, was soon underway as the prelude to a most convivial evening.

On Sunday, facing a long drive south, most members made their goodbyes and left shortly after breakfast. Michael reported that the tyre was sorted out in Stirling and he and Chris were able to complete their journey home without further difficulties.

AS

Attendees

Chris Hilton (Leader) Derek Bush, Andrew Duxbury, Luke Judge (Guest), David Large, Harvey Lomas David Pervan (Guest), Anca Pordea, Arthur Salmon, Michael Smith, Stuart Taylor (Guest).

DUDDON VALLEY, CUMBRIA - APRIL 21-23

The Duddon Valley, alternatively known as Dunnerdale, has to be one of the most secluded and unspoilt areas of the Lake District National Park. Tucked away in the south-west of the Lake District, it is well away from the frequently visited tourist spots of Bowness, Ambleside and Windermere. On a weekend when the weather was truly glorious, the valley and the surrounding vistas were stunningly beautiful dominated by the Scafell sister peaks to the north-west and Conistone Old Man to the north-east.

In the vicinity of Turner Hall Farm was our accommodation for the weekend, High Moss, a hut run by the Rucksack Club, located about a mile away from the Newfield Inn public house in the nearby village of Seathwaite, which provided a good rendezvous point for YRC members after completing their various treks.



Photo: Tim Josephy

On Friday afternoon before the weather improved, several members took advantage to get in an extra walk either in Dunnerdale or en route to the meet. Dorothy Heaton, Bill Gibbs and Paul Dover teamed up and walked the area around Seathwaite reservoir. Christine and Jim Harrison explored the Seathwaite area and the woods below High Wallowbarrow before rain intervened and they retired to the aforementioned pub for a coffee or maybe something a bit stronger! One excellent feature over the whole weekend was that the Inn's garden contained a tree with a bird feeder that attracted a wide variety of birds. In a short space of time, chaffinches, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, siskins and two greater spotted woodpeckers were spotted.

Mick Borroff, John Sutcliffe and Roger Horn stopped off in Arnside and Silverdale and had a 12 mile low level hike, that included Arnside Knott and several areas of ancient woodland that was coming into bloom with many varieties of wild flower (orchids, welsh poppies, cowslips, violets to name but a few; ably identified by Mick) and a mid-point stopover for some liquid refreshment. Strong sea breezes suppressed the temperature on a grey but generally dry day.

At the end of the day, after checking in, most of us congregated at the Newfield Inn for a pint in front of a log fire and a hot dinner in an adjacent room, where we learnt that Cumbrian gravy is more solid than liquid!

We awoke on Saturday morning to crystal clear blue skies and the heavenly smell of cooked bacon, just one component of a splendid cooked breakfast supplied by our host, Alan Clare and his capable assistants, Dave Brooks and John Jenkin.

As Mick Borroff, Martyn Trasler, Roger Horn and John Sutcliffe were assembling in the car park to start their walk up Walna Scar and beyond, Dorothy Heaton was seen putting on some innovative waterproof socks, otherwise known to you and me as plastic bags, after getting her feet and boots soaked the previous day.



**Mick
Borroff,
Martyn
Trasler,
Roger
Horn and
Bill Gibbs**

Richard Gowing made his way up Caw via the quarry before returning to base via Pikes and Green Pikes. Tim Josephy took a different route, up Harter fell, across to Hard Knott and then north into Moasdale, onto Cockley beck and the long slog to Greyfriar, Swirl How, Brim Fell and back to the hut via Seathwaite Tarn – 25km and 1300 m of ascent.

John and Carol Whalley set off from Ulpha and followed the path across Dunnerdale fells towards Stickle Pike. There was a profusion of lesser celandine flowers to admire along the way to the old workings at Stainton Ground quarries and on and up to Caw and the descent into Long Mire.

Christine and Jim Harrison joined Dotti Heaton for a walk to Harter Fell, en route via the River Duddon pathway and the road to Birks Bridge, where there was an excellent view of the river gorge and the effects of erosion. Onto Buck and Dropping crags and the atmospheric shape of Maidens Castle to the peaks which were relatively thronged with walkers. Along the way, there were magnificent views of the nearby mountains and the Furness coastline near Barrow. From Harter Fell they took the direct route down which involved skirting Wallowbarrow Crag and back to a rendezvous at the Newfield Inn. Mick, Martyn, John and Roger set off up Walna Scar and took in Brown Pike, Buck Pike, Dow Crag, The Old Man, Swirl How, Great Carrs, Grey Friar and back to the hut via Seathwaite Tarn. Because Mick loves trekking so much he decided to retrace his steps back to Seathwaite Tarn after we had all returned to the hut, but rumour has it that it wasn't so much for his love of walking but for the fact that he had left his camera on the dam wall. Glad to say he was able to take photos on the Sunday.

Alan et al had a four course meal waiting for us back at the hut. The food, drink and banter, especially from Alan when he tried to explain to us all why he had over charged us for the rooms, was an excellent way to finish off a splendid day.

Sunday, despite an earlier pessimistic weather forecast, was more of the same – lovely blue skies and abundant sunshine, with most of us electing to do shorter walks around the Dunnerdale fells before making our way home. At various times our paths crossed and it was good to have an impromptu rendezvous with fellow YRC members.

Christine, Jim and Dotti took the route up Walna Scar under White Peak and the Walna Scar quarries, onto Natty Bridge and westward to the summits of Pikes and Caw. There was quite a chill breeze at the top but a crag afforded some shelter and wonderful views over the Furness area, while having lunch. Paul Dover and Bill Gibbs also had lunch at this spot and later on Mick, John and Roger joined them after pursuing a similar route.

John and Carol Whalley walked a circuit of Wallbarrow from Seathwaite church, crossing Tarn Beck and the Duddon river, scrambling up Wallbarrow with its fine views and returning to Seathwaite via High Wallbarrow farm, Grassguards and roped stepping stones at Fickle Steps.

Tim's day had to be unfortunately cut short, after setting off up Black Combe, he got a panic call from home reporting a water leak, while Richard Gowing finished off his weekend with a walk up Stickle Pike from the Seathwaite-Broughton Mills Road.

Despite an amazing weekend weather-wise, what was striking about this area was the sheer beauty of the place and lack of people and motor tourists. The only place that was reasonably congested and typical of other well known Lakeland peaks was the top of the Old Man, otherwise for most of the time, there was hardly a stranger in sight.

**What a lot of emptiness!
Mick Borroff and John Sutcliffe
taking in the view**

**Photo:
Roger Horn**



Thanks again to Alan Clare and his willing assistants for hosting an absolutely splendid weekend.

RH

Attendees :

Mick Borroff, President Bill Gibbs John Sutcliffe Paul Dover Carol and John Whalley Jim Harrison
Christine Harrison (G) Richard Gowing Dorothy Heaton Alan Clare John Jenkin Tim Josephy
Roger Horn Derek Clayton Ian Crowther John Lloyd (PM) Dave Brook (G)

TORRIDON MAY 13-21

Most people arrived at Gerry's Hostel on Saturday with two arriving a day later. The venue, which was a late booking after a mix up over the SMC's Ling Hut, is situated in Glen Carron, midway between Loch Carron village and Achnasheen. It was surprisingly available when all other accommodation in the area had been booked up for months, although perhaps not so surprising on closer acquaintance.

The bedrooms were fine, linen clean if a bit seen into, showers etc rather home constructed and a bit of a work in progress. The kitchen however did not bear close inspection; apart from being a perfect example

of bad design, parts of it like the extractor fan and the tiny oven had surely been declared Sites of Special Scientific Interest. A complete lack of hot water on tap made washing up less than easy. Nevertheless we were comfortable and all managed to cook meals without any overt displays of temper.



Enjoying post-walk refreshments at Gerry's Hostel Photos: Richard Taylor

Simon Howkins, Gerry's son and the owner, as idiosyncratic as his hostel, insisted on lighting a huge fire in the living room every evening, adding to the conviviality although one or two of the transient population didn't seem inclined to join in. The meet was perfectly timed for the end of a long spell of dry weather which simplified the river crossings and delayed the onset of the dreaded midge season.

Sunday: Dry, breezy and mostly sunny. David drove to Achnasheen and climbed Fionn Bheinn in the Fannichs whilst Martyn and Paul did a circuit from the hostel to the north around Meall Bheithe and the Coulin Estate. Mick, who had already been in Scotland for a week continued his collection of Munros with an ascent of Bidein a'Choire Sheasgaich and Lurg Mor, returning the same way over the Corbett of Beinn Tharsuinn. These are two very remote Munros and Mick used a mountain bike to allow the route to be completed in one day. Helen, Michael and Richard enjoyed a great day on the traverse of Beinn Alligin in Torridon, finishing over the spectacular but easy Horns.

Monday: Very windy with a forecast of low cloud and heavy rain. With a poor day in prospect objectives were moderate. After his exertions the previous day, Mick decided to visit the NT gardens of Inverewe near Poolewe for a rest day. He was joined by Martyn, Paul and David. Richard, Helen and Michael walked around the Applecross coast, visiting the falls on the River Balgy and the River Toscaig Gorge. They also visited Sheildaig where they found the 2m high Preachers' Wall, used in the mid nineteenth century by the Wee Frees when they were not allowed to build churches following their break from the Church of Scotland. Nick and Tim did a circuit of the picturesquely named Flowerdale Miniatures north of Beinn Alligin.

These little hills provided an entertaining and scenic day. The promised rain didn't appear but the wind on the modest tops (c400m) was at times too strong to stand, vindicating decisions not to go higher.



**Nick Welch, Flowerdale
Photo: Tim Josephy**

Tuesday: Very windy, showers.

Mick was joined by Richard and David, who had borrowed bikes from Simon, and Bob Peckham, a member of the CPC (who lives in Inverness and joined us for the walk) for another very long Monar day climbing the remote Munros of Sgurr Choinnich and Sgurr a'Chaorachain. The wind was very strong on the summits and they were several times in doubt as to the wisdom of continuing. David did turn back part way but the other three struggled on to complete the round.

Paul kept out of the worst of the wind by cycling locally.

The rest of the meet attempted Beinn Eighe from Glen Torridon, using a well constructed path which petered out into steep and unpleasantly eroded going to the main ridge not far from the summit of Sail Mhor.

Initially it didn't seem too bad on the ridge, but the gusts of wind increased to the point that a retreat became the only option a mere 150 yds from the top.



Helen Smith, Michael Smith, Nick Welch and Tim Josephy
Photo: Martyn Trasler

A sheltered spot was found below the ridge for lunch, during which a lone walker passed us, took one look at the ridge and beat a hasty retreat. Not sure whether it was the wind or Michael's attempts to interest him in joining the Club. During the descent ring ouzels were spotted in the corrie. Back at the road Helen volunteered to take the car back whilst the others walked the 10 miles back to the hostel through the Coulin Estate, initially pleasant beside the lochs but then rather marred by bulldozer tracks servicing hydro-electric projects under construction. The first loch, Loch Clair, was the site of the Club's 1982 Whit camp meet, and Michael's first visit to Torridon.

Wednesday: Wind abating, sun and light showers.

Martyn was suffering from sore knees so had an easy day touring the area and visiting the Rogie Falls on the Blackwater River. Mick set off alone for Maoile Lunndaigh, another remote Munro and his last in this area. Everyone else drove to Kinlochewe, Paul to do a 12 mile circular walk to the north of the village and the rest to climb Slioch. Paul accompanied us along the lochside on the approach to the mountain, pleasant walking with masses of brilliant yellow gorse spanned by rainbows following the occasional light shower. He then left us as we made the ascent to the spectacular viewpoint of the summit. The actual top, 1m higher than the cairn is 200 metres north, on the edge of a dizzying drop of about 900m to the valley floor. Descent was via the East Ridge and the Top of Sgurr and Tuill Bhain before a very steep and rocky descent regained the upward path. The return along the loch seemed to be longer and more than one person remarked that someone had put a few ups and downs in that hadn't been there before. Paul arrived back at the car park shortly after, having enjoyed a much rougher walk than he had expected.

Thursday: showers.

Michael, Helen, Mick Nick and Tim drove the short distance to Achnashellach station and walked up into The Cold Hollow of Fuar Tholl. Splendid walking in dramatic scenery with big crags and much evidence of folding on the steep slopes of Ben Liath Mhor above Corrie Lair. No summits visited but a most enjoyable 10 mile day out.

They had good weather with only one shower, unlike Paul and Martyn who climbed the Corbett of Sgurr na Feartaig from the hostel, encountering heavy downpours and strong winds.



Nick Welch **Photo: Tim Josephy**

David and Richard climbed the Munro Moruisg and Corbett Sgurr nan Ceannaichean from Glen Carron, experiencing similar weather.

In the evening the plan was to go out for dinner to the Ledgowan Hotel in Achnasheen. Helen had booked and obtained a menu, so the party set out in high anticipation of game pie and other delights only to be thwarted when the road was closed due to a serious accident. The police expected at least a three hour delay so we went down valley to the Lochcarron Hotel, cheap and cheerful pub food (actually not cheap at all but certainly cheerful). Mutterings could still be heard about the loss of the game pie.

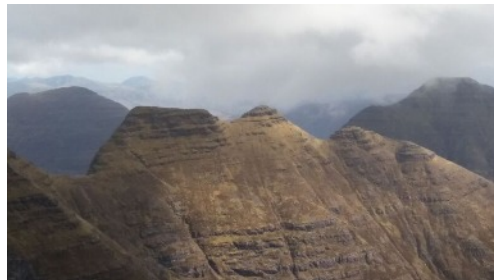
Friday: Hot and sunny.

David and Richard departed for home. Martyn toured Skye. Mick and Paul drove towards Ullapool to climb the Munro Am Faochagach. A relatively short day after Mick's marathons earlier in the week, it left him with 45 Munros to do. Since he was spending another week up in Scotland he will surely be down to the thirties by now.

Helen and Michael climbed the impressive sandstone dome of Maol Chean Dearg via Meall nan Ceapairean whilst Tim and Nick did the circuit of Beinn Alligin in glorious weather with wide ranging views over Skye and the Outer Hebrides and inland to An Teallach beyond the other Torridon giants. Both agreed it was worth the 1000 mile round trip just for that day.

Saturday dawned wet and midgy so early starts were made for the long drive home. While the Ling hut would have given an idyllic location in the heart of Torridon, Gerry's gave easier access to the Monar area while the good road as far as Kinlochewe shortened the repeated drives into Glen Torridon. Another excellent Scottish meet – the first of the year with encouraging weather.

TJ



Ascent of Beinn Alligin and the summit

Helen & Michael Smith
Photo: Richard Taylor

Nick Welch
Photo: Tim Josephy

The Summit
Photo: Martyn Trasler



Slioch summit - Nick Welch, Dave Hick, Tim Josephy, Helen and Michael Smith
Photo Richard Taylor

**Nick Welch,
Corrie Lair**

**Photo:
Tim Josephy**





**Heading homeward
through the
Cuilin Estate**

**Photo:
Tim Josephy**

**Glen
Carron**

**Photo:
Martyn
Trasler**



Lurg Mhor and Bidean Choire Sheasgaich from Beinn Tharsuinn Photo: Mick Borroff

Attendees:

Mick Borroff (President), Michael Smith, Helen Smith, David Hick, Richard Taylor, Paul Dover, Martyn Trasler, Nick Welch, Tim Josephy.

PEAK DISTRICT JUNE 16-18

Friday evening saw most people arriving at the Ponside bunkhouse, after an exciting drive, persevering to find their way from the Hathersage-Hope road turnoff, twisting and turning through Thorpe Farm and down and up to Nether Hurst hamlet, the road would not take any prisoners of low slung vehicles! One person arriving from the north found the route so narrow it was not repeated.

Mike, Ros & John walked down to Bamford's community pub/cafe/post office, The Angler's Rest, for a meal which was very reasonable and to be recommended, with others bringing food to prepare.

The bunkhouse is simple and secluded with two bunk rooms, two bijou showers and two WCs in a converted barn. Outside to the south there is ample parking and seating by a hearth and an overgrown pond. There was room for tents and several members chose to camp. It was an ideal spot in the dry warm weather as meals could be taken outdoors, in fact apart from sleeping most of the weekend was spent outside.

Photo:Tim Josephy



Earlier on Friday, Dave Booker and Fiona had a 9km ride on the mountain bikes around Langett, on single track woodland paths, with a rocky single track descent, providing for an exciting start to the weekend. Helen had been climbing at Froggatt and Michael had walked at Strines and Stanage. John and Ros stopped at Baslow on the way up and walked the Froggatt and Curbar edges, following the river Derwent on the return.

Bill decided to take a circular walk directly from Ponside after arrival. He took a northerly route through Hurstclough Lane following a path immediately east of Dennis Knoll and on up to Stanage Edge at High Neb. From here he took the southerly route along the length of Stanage Edge and then on to the top at Higgat Tor. His route back to Ponside was made via Hathersage Moor, Winyards Nick, Mitchell Field, the flower meadows here were in full bloom, making for a wonderful vista.

The night's sleep was not disturbed by snorers but something much louder. A faulty fire alarm! Just before midnight and again before one o'clock it triggered. The second time we disabled it and tolerated the eight-second beeps for the rest of the night. The farmer came to fully disconnect it the next evening giving us a better second night's rest.

Saturday:

Thoughts of going underground were abandoned in view of the glorious warm, sunny weather. Some went walking, some mountain biking and others climbing. The obvious local crag is Stanage and Tim, Michael, Becca, Richard and Helen were among the early arrivals at the Popular End. They visited areas left and right of the Rusty Wall area to avoid disturbing the Ring Ouzels nesting there. Tim, Michael and Becca managed five routes whilst the pair of Helen and Richard climbed eight. Undue exertion was discouraged by the heat and route selection was rather limited by the crowds.

Initially, John Brown and Ros were at the predictably overcrowded Stanage but after a quick route they went off south over Carl Wark and walked back to the Ponside bunkhouse; the weather was extremely hot so the ice cream at the start of Burbage Edge was very welcome. Meanwhile Bill opted to go to Edale for a figure of 8 walk on to Kinder Scout. There were huge numbers of walkers on Kinder making the most of the warm weather.

The route Bill followed leaving Edale was on the Pennine way towards Upper Booth before taking the narrow track around Broadlee-Bank to Crowden Brook and up on to the plateau at Crowden Tower. As a result of crowds, Bill decided to make his way across the moor directly to the 636m top (although completely unrecognisable as a top!) and then over to a rather busy Kinder Downfall before returning to the top of Crowden Brook on the public footpath, before returning to Edale via Grindsbrook Clough which again was rather quieter. This was a great route but probably more enjoyable on a quieter and not so hot day!

The mountain bikers were active on both sides of the Derwent valley including Shatton Moor and a stop for refreshment in Hathersage. The ascent to Shatton Moor was enjoyably technical and the boulder scattered descent from Win Hill lived up to its name "The Beast."

Carol and John walked to Hathersage, then crossed the River Derwent at Leadmill Bridge to follow the riverside to Shatton. At Shatton they walked up to Westfield which gave access to a sunken footpath that contoured below the shoulder of Shatton Edge and Offerton Moor before rising to give fine views of Bamford, Stanage and the valley. They descended a gill to rejoin the outward route, shortly re-crossing the Derwent via stepping stones, some of which were rather too sloping for comfort! Their walk ended across fields to Outseats and Hathersage, where they sought refreshments at the Scotsman's Pack Inn.

Richard and helpers provided a splendid barbecue meal supplemented by two self-service hand-pulled Three Brothers' beers: Thai IPA and Ruby Revolution. We were also joined by others, David Large and his family joined us, and Jim and Chris Harrison who lived locally called in with their friend Paul, joining us for dinner. The evening was warm and we just sat watching Mike running after bats! As darkness fell the remaining charcoal embers were used to light a bonfire. Watching this fire, the alcohol-fuelled conversation flowed amiably until it was time to turn in.



Photo: Tim Josephy

Sunday:

This day again was shaping up to be hotter than the last so after all the clearing had been done, Tim and Michael left to climb on Nether Tor on Kinder's southern edge high above Edale. They reached it via Ollerbrook and Ringing Roger, being caught up by Richard not far below the rocks. Richard and Michael climbed three routes, including the committing and enjoyable Primitive Route, HS. Tim had bruised his knee somehow so sat it out waiting for John and Carol who could be seen labouring up from below.

John and Carol went to Edale, parking before the village. they went through Ollerbrook, and up the Nab, crossing below Ringing Roger to join Richard, Mike and Tim who were climbing at Nether Tor. This lower approach was very rough and hard work so perhaps over Ringing Roger may have been better.



**Richard Smith on Nether Edge.
Photo: Tim Josephy**



Leaving the Smiths climbing, they scrambled up to the edge, pausing to watch a family of grouse.

Photo John Whalley

They then continued along the edge with Tim to the summit of Grindslow Knoll, descending to Edale village and taking the track back to Ollerbrook.

Fiona and Booker ditched the bikes in favour of a walk in the rising temperatures. Starting at Burbage Bridge they followed the edge down to Toads Mouth then descended to Hathersage and a warm uphill to Stanage edge where they watched the parapenters.

John and Ros headed south by car and spent several hours walking and birdwatching at the Carsington Reservoir in the White Peak; the hope was for Ospreys, but none were seen.



Descending from Grindlow Knoll to Edale Photo: John Whalley

David and Ross went to join the crowds at Stanage. They completed three climbs in all until the heat outweighed the breeze. All these were D/VD standard. Geraldine and Catriona walked from Stanage to Hathersage in search of coffee and ice cream which I am sure was very welcome.

Overall this meet was a great success and much of the praise should go to Richard for a great choice of venue, lovely food, good beer and arranging such good and settled weather.

JB

In Attendance:

Becca Humphreys PM; Bill Gibbs; Carol Whalley; Helen Brewitt (PM); John Brown; Ros Brown (G); John Whalley; Michael Smith; Richard Smith; Fiona Smith (PM); David Booker (PM); Tim Josephy; David Large; Geraldine Large (G); Ross Large (G); Caitriona Large (G)

Visitors - Jim Harrison; Paul Townsend (G); Chris Harrison (G)

LONG WALK PATERDALE - ULLSWATER WAY

JULY 7-9

Following Storm Desmond's extensive and destructive flooding throughout Ullswater during December 2015, the local communities developed a low level 20-mile circular walk, The Ullswater Way, as part of a regeneration scheme. A higher level version of this Way was chosen for the Club's 2017 Long Walk; *the Ullswater Way with Knobs On*. It follows much of the skyline ridges on either side of Ullswater and clocks up around 32 miles and 7,000 feet of ascent. High Street and Helvellyn were naturally included.

Several alternatives incorporating the original route or parts of the expanded route and use of steamer or bus services were offered for members preferring more reasonable outings.

Friday evening, sixteen members and guests assembled in Patterdale at the George Starkey Hut. This Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club hut is now jointly operated with the Alpine Club.

Some of those arriving early had managed some warm-up exercise on the way including Dovedale for the Priest's cave, Hayeswater via Beckstones and Hayeswater Gill, and a round of Hutton Roof and the Lancaster canal. The weather was showery and windy but better was promised for the 'morrow.

Saturday breakfast was simple and self-service as individuals roused themselves and prepared to depart: porridge or cereal, tea and toast. The day dawned dry and windy on the first two starters already passing Angle Tarn's wild campers at 05:15am. Most followed them onto High Street over the next four hours: three taking the whole route, though many sensibly caught the bus back from Pooley Bridge to Patterdale. Two followed a clockwise route skirting Sheffield Pike and over Gowbarrow to Pooley Bridge. To justify the meet's inclusion of 'The Ullswater Way' in its title, a lone Rambler completed the original route. The weather improved a little over the day to give plenty of sunshine and a little less wind – near ideal walking conditions. A few returned reddened to Patterdale and their sunburn took three days to subside.

The designated route conveniently started with a right turn from the hut's front door and in a few hundred metres was on the fell path up to Boredale Hause past Angle Tarn, Satura Crag and up the Knott to reach the Roman road called High Street. A right turn here took the purists and masochists almost a mile out south to the High Street trig point and back. Most turned left instead, heading roughly north past High Raise, Wether Hill, Loadpot Hill and above a small stone circle. The route then crossed the grassy Arthur's Pike north east to the 30m diameter stone circle of The Cockpit and a descent northwest to Pooley Bridge. In place of a traditional feeding point, Granny Dowbekin's Tea Room provided sustenance. The next section followed the Ullswater Way proper as far as Gowbarrow passing through Waterfoot Caravan Park, through fields by Maiden Castle to Bennethead below Little Mell Fell and into the pine forest leading to Swinburn's Park.

Leaving the official Way the route went over Gowbarrow Fell and descended to Dockray where The Royal provided welcome cold refreshment. Initially less clear, the route headed southwest across the slopes of Watermillock Common and west contouring gently up and across the head of Glencoyne to emerge above the Sticks Pass path. Tired legs then started the first of three ascents: to Sticks Pass then south for Raise, Whiteside and Helvellyn's Lower Man. With the removal of the Helvellyn shelter, the trig point was visited before descending one of Swirral Edge or Striding Edge to the Hole in the Wall. That Hole is also gone and replaced with a stile.

The 3km seemingly interminable eastward descent into Grisedale left only a kilometre of road to the hut, boots-off and a welcome tea and beer.

For the record this table lists who did what and when:

	Start	Finish	Miles	
RS, FS, DB	0540	2000	33	High Street trig point, Pooley Bridge (1 hour 2nd breakfast), Helvellyn, Striding Edge. RS added in Sheffield Pike.
TJ, MS	0420	1930	32	The Knott on High Street, Pooley Bridge (20 min 2nd breakfast), Helvellyn, Swirral Edge
RJ, BW, EW, NW	0830	1700	14	The Knott on High Street, added Bonscale Pike and Arthur's Pike on the way to Pooley Bridge
SK	0630	1730	24	Ullswater Way but including the Cockpit and Gowbarrow Fell summit
JH, CH	0800	1600	14	The Knott on High Street and the long ridge north to Pooley Bridge
PD, DH	0800	1700	16	Clockwise going over the shoulder of Sheffield Pike, over Gowbarrow to Pooley Bridge
MB, JS	0800	1700	16	High Street trig point and the long ridge down to Pooley Bridge (added Helvellyn on Sunday)

However, the above data does not adequately describe the meet. Long Walks are exceptional meets. There is a greater sense of common purpose than on most other British meets. Some walkers are determined to finish what they started, others to maintain performance despite the passing years, some to go further than they usually walk. No atmosphere of raw competitiveness but, as one attendee put it, comradely support and encouragement.

There's also more to the weekend than the walking. Ascending towards High Street, two foxes were spotted scampering about on the lower slopes while higher up were thirty deer and many young northern wheatears fluttering along. More flutterers were the several mountain ringlets seen at Rampsgill Head. Several ravens were seen, buzzards and a possible distant osprey. A deer was seen behind the Patterdale Hotel and a colony of house martins above Glenridding demonstrated their supreme flying agility. Stone circles and the Roman Road were added attractions.

Pooley Bridge was very busy by the middle of the day as some crossed the replacement metal bridge over the Eamont.

Later, on Saturday evening and fresh from the YHA AGM in London, Alan Hinkes called in to check on our progress and chat over recent developments in Yorkshire brewing. There was also a short planning meeting for the forthcoming meet in Wyoming and much discussion of the autumn meet near Cader Idris. Such catching up with old friends, getting to know newcomers and looking forward to future meets is a large part of the 'glue' that holds the Club together and makes meets so companionable.

The meet was catered by Michael with food preparation by Jim and Christine in his absence. Returning after so long out walking, appetites were sharpened and large quantities of chilli con carne with baked potatoes, sour cream and cob loaves were soon despatched. The earlier finishers' visit to the White Lion meant they were ready to eat as the last to return came in so we were all able to eat together – unusual for a Long Walk.

The only other user of the building was an AC member. The AC have recently joined the ABMSAC in running this hut. That Lancastrian though did not sleep in the hut so we generally had the place to ourselves and could spread out our gear.

The route choice with several alternatives of different lengths proved attractive in drawing in more attendees than many recent Long Walks. Those routes covered some of the less familiar parts of the valley and the 'highlights' of a couple of well-known peaks. The only part of the route considered overly busy was between Pooley Bridge and Gowbarrow Fell on the official Way.

Long Walk Sundays often see rather less activity than usual, and more blisters and creaking joints. Breakfast was a leisurely affair with bacon sandwiches and a slower start. Tim, who was not planning on walking, offered to clean up after the meet and others were soon away.

Despite lower cloud, groups were heading up Dovedale from Brothers Water, to follow the Tees from Barnard Castle and back from Clothstone, and, by Ullswater to Scalehow Force and back via Silver Crag then to the National Trust's Townend. Two took mountain bikes to Grisedale Forest for a red route. Splitting the Long Walk's main objectives over two days, two members walked to Helvellyn via Lanty's Tarn and Striding Edge returning via Greenside mine and looking at the leat system that used to provide hydroelectric power to the mine to drive the crushing equipment.

While this meet was in progress UNESCO awarded the Lake District World Heritage status citing the area's natural beauty, farmed landscape and cultural inspiration. On the meet, we experienced something of the stunning landscapes that contributed to that decision. Perhaps we are so familiar with it that we risk taking it for granted. It will be interesting to see what, if any, changes its new status will make to the Lake District.

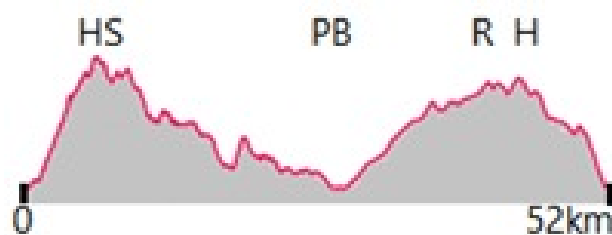
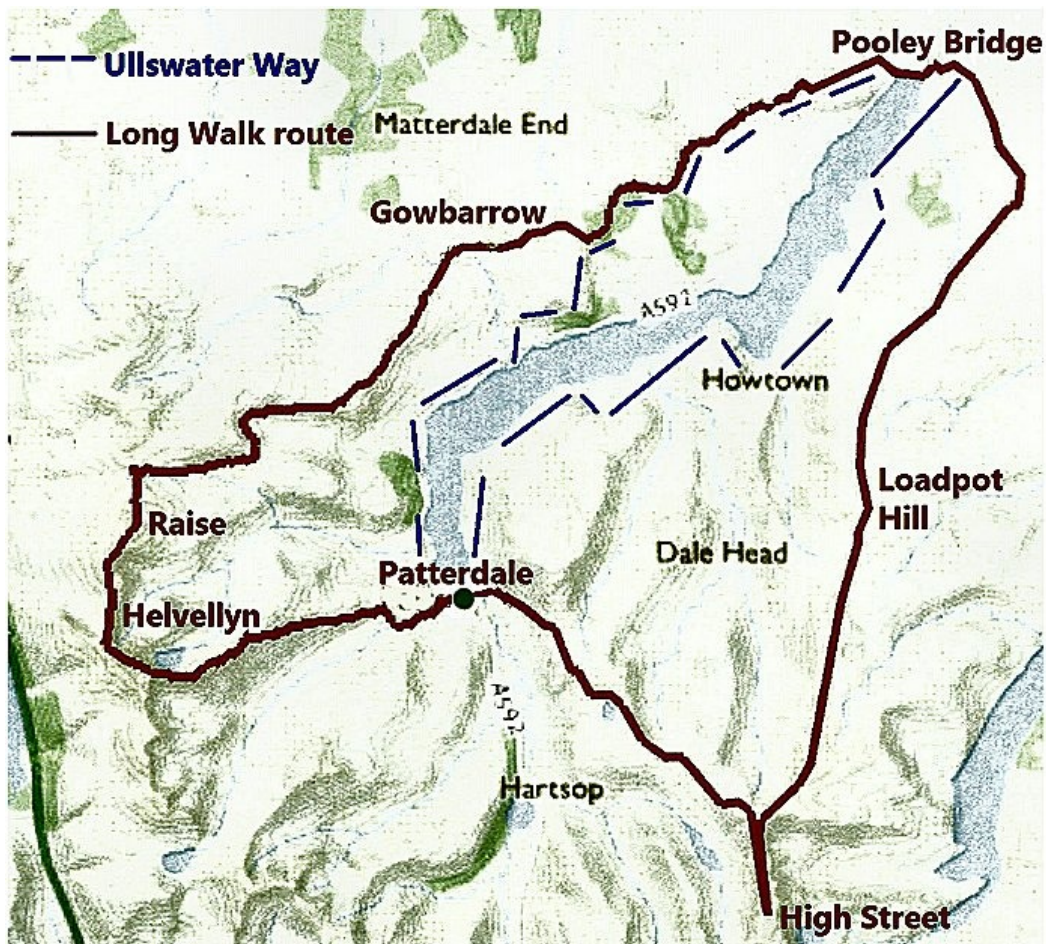
The several bodies involved in the bid believe each one-percent increase in visitors would bring an annual £20 million to the local economy. Not many of them are likely to complete the Ullswater Way with knobs on.

MS

Attending:

Mick Borroff (President)	Richard Josephy	Fiona Smith (PM)
Paul Dover	Tim Josephy	David Booker (PM)
Jim Harrison	Alan Kay	John Sutcliffe
Christine Harrison (G)	Michael Smith	Nick Welch
Dorothy Heaton	Richard Smith	Edd Welch (G)
		Ben Welch (G)

The Route





Fastest completers, Dave Booker, Fiona Smith and Richard Smith on High Street



**Mountain Ringlet
Photo JH**

**Fiona on Helvellyn with much of the route behind: the initial rising path by Place Fell mid-right; High Street's Lodepot Hill beyond Red Tarn; Pooley Bridge at the end of Ullswater; and, the traverse above Glencoyne at waist height on the far left.
Photo DB**



**Tim on the High Street Roman road descending towards Pooley Bridge
Photo MS**

John approaching Angle Tarn

Photo MB



OBITUARIES & APPRECIATIONS

Dr. Trevor Ford OBE PhD, BSc, FGS

A former member of staff at the University of Leicester, Trevor was a noted expert on the Precambrian rocks and fossils of the Charnwood Forest. He was instrumental in the recognition of the Precambrian fossil *Charnia masoni*, and the appreciation of its importance. The fossil was discovered in 1956 by a 15-year-old schoolgirl who was not taken seriously. But when a year later Roger Mason, a schoolboy from the same school as David Attenborough, took rubbings of it, scientists realised it was something special and the fossil was named after him. Sir David says it was this that fired his interest in the natural world. Mason himself later became a professor of metamorphic petrology. *Charnia* was a completely unknown fossil mid-way between a plant and an animal and at the time the earliest life form evidenced on Earth.



Trevor died in February at the age of 91 after suffering failing mobility and spending the last 10 months in a care home. He served in the Royal Navy during the invasion of Malaysia but on return decided to study geology. After graduating in Geology from the University of Sheffield in 1950, he completed his PhD on the coalfields in South Yorkshire. He taught at Leicester University, being appointed to the Geology Department in 1952 and passing on his passion for the subject. He became a Senior Lecturer in the department and also Associate Dean of Science. He retired in 1989, but continued to produce a number of learned tomes. In 1990 at the age of 90, he became an Honorary Professorship from the University of Derby

Trevor was awarded the OBE in 1997 for services to geology, caving and cave science. He had been a prominent member of the Peak District Mines Historical Society, and was a Distinguished Life Vice President of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society. His interest in caving and speleology went back to the 1940s when he was a guide at Speedwell Cavern and was involved in a number of major discoveries both there and in the nearby Peak Cavern.

He is quoted as saying "Beyond the Bottomless Pit in Speedwell Cavern is the so-called Far Canal tunnel. I crawled up a narrow passage which hadn't been used for umpteen years and discovered a whole network of passageways."

He was the editor of the Transactions of the British Cave Research Association from 1973 until 1993 (renamed Cave Science and subsequently, Cave & Karst Science) and his legacy of published work on the subject will ensure that he is not forgotten. His works included several popular ones on the basic geology of the Peak District, including a definitive study of the local Blue John fluorite. They also include numerous cave guides but also many hundreds of serious works on the geology, mineralisation, lead mines and caves of Derbyshire - subjects in which he was an acknowledged expert. His horizons were not however restricted to the area and he had also recorded evidence of the earliest forms of life in fossils at sites as far apart as Leicestershire and the Grand Canyon where he is still listed among the credits on its geological map. Apart from his obvious academic abilities he was also an adventurous man having done his work there whilst navigating it from end to end on rafting trips.

His memory will live on in the about 500 publications to his name.

Robert Gordon Humphreys 1932-2017

Gordon joined the Club in 1951 with Wilfred James (Andy) Anderson, Clifford Large, John Geoffrey Brook, Walter Patrick (Pat) Stonehouse, and John Anthony Schofield, the same year as his father Harold and grandfather Henry passed away. He was made an honorary life member in 2008 for his long service to the Club. Gordon died on the 11th May 2017 aged 85. Born in 1932 he lived in Hollins Green near Oldham before moving in and around Derbyshire and Cheshire during the war. Due to the upheaval of evacuation during the war, the local schools were full, so he was educated by two retired school mistresses, then a couple of years at prep school and four years at Wrekin College. At 17 after completing his Higher School Cert he won an English Speaking Union Scholarship to study at Philips Academy, Massachusetts and on return, applied to study mechanical engineering at university, declining a scholarship to Cambridge due to his father (Harold's) ill health.



Jason Humphreys main recollection of Gordon's activities with the club, are that they ran along-side his brother Howard's and related to the winter meet in Glen Etive. Gordon loved the mountains but especially when there was snow on them. His passion for them led to many alpine skiing trips with his family and even on the peaks of Scotland in a 'good year'. A life of adventure from the sporty rally-style drives to meets, to his tremendous determination when things got tough on the peak.

He recalls his father and Gordon building a sledge from spliced skis and a frame acquired from somewhere or other. This was transported to the Glen Etive meet one year where, he was told they hauled it up one of the peaks (Bidean nam Bian rings a bell), spending the night in an igloo or snow hole before returning at break-neck speed to the hut for breakfast. This sort of activity was not just saved for the YRC trips, but enforcing a typical Humphreys approach to a "good toboggan" down White Nancy in Rainow, Cheshire, having to make sure you stop before the river which would always get the heart racing.

This rather summed Gordon up. He would see the problem, come up with a solution (no matter if it's the correct solution, but a solution all the same), crack on and get it implemented. The same get-up-and-get-on-with-it attitude drove Gordon to become the club Honorary Secretary in 1996 and a club representative on the BMC area committee in 1997. Gordon also become the Hut Warden for Low Hall Garth, a place he liked very much. With his driving force and usual committed and determined approach, he negotiated with the National Trust for the opportunity for the Club to convert the derelict agricultural barn across the lane at LHG. Through hard work and dedication this was completed by Gordon and a small team in 2010, becoming an excellent asset to the Club.

Gordon handed over the Hut Warden role in 2012, when he had to admit he needed to step back a bit, but this did not stop his remaining passion for performance, with his main contribution to the AGM proceedings being one of chorus leading the traditional performance of 'Yorkshire', even from his wheel-chair in the later stages.

In his business life, Gordon was a senior engineer, businessman, innovator and entrepreneur, who ended up working with Lancaster University. His first contact with them was in the 1970's, whilst Commercial Director of B&S Massey in Manchester. He started his association with them through a postgraduate industry-based training programme, run jointly with Cambridge University Engineering Department.



Later he became the Innovations Manager for Renold Research Ltd where, recognising the shortcomings of the industrial robots of the 1980's, he devised a system of modular elements which could be combined to create large versatile robots for bespoke applications such as stacking pallets or the laser cutting of large sails. After the earlier successful work with Lancaster, he commissioned a marketing contract with Lancaster

University Engineering Department where a team of four engineering lecturers researched the field, made visits to potential users and set out a detailed study of the technical and economic requirements.

In 1985, product development and manufacture began with the aid of a DTI-sponsored "Teaching Company" contract between Lancaster and Renold, arrangements later to be known as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. On the closure of Renold Research, Gordon and a senior business associate, bought the rights to the modular robotic system and formed a new company Crocus Limited to exploit the technology. Many successful sales followed to a wide range of companies, including majors such as BAe Systems.

After moving to the Lancaster area, Gordon's contribution to Lancaster University continued. He was appointed as a Visiting Professor to the Engineering Department and also joined as an external Advisor to then Vice Chancellor's senior management group. He contributed to the work of the Engineering Department for many years by running the 40-lecture third year Engineering Management Module, where his industry-based anecdotes delighted the students, but in no way diminished the rigour which he applied in his teaching and to his searching examination questions. He also chaired for several years the Engineering Industrial Advisors Board up to the late 2000's. He was greatly respected and a valued friend and colleague to many at the university.

David Handley was acquainted with Gordon for some five decades but has two particular recollections of him and his brother Howard again at the legendary Glen Etive meets, maybe in the 80's. They were frequent attendees and although he never walked with them their presence could always be expected.

The other recollection is vivid, more recent and had a profound and lasting effect on both David and he says, the Club. He is referring to the Low Hall barn project! No other event at least in modern times; generated more heat and light than this.

Maybe in the early 2000's the idea was floated that the barn across the track from our cottage could be made better use of by the Club. The idea was discussed and various suggestions were made including making it a fuel store but also that it would make a comfortable sitting room, a facility much needed by all users of the cottage. Some were diametrically opposed to any sort of development and asserted their views loudly.

The issue went backwards and forward informally and within committee with a resolution looking a remote prospect until up stepped Gordon who proposed he would draw a plan and put it to the committee and the membership, which was duly done but discord still reigned.

Clearly Gordon was not to be denied and he applied for planning permission from the National Park and in short time got it. He assembled what became known as the barn sub-committee, five in all, and he scheduled the necessary work which commenced amid anger from some. Gordon never faltered or became agitated and after maybe two years the project was complete and within budget.

David comments that Gordon's capacity to plan; resolve difficulties; engineer pieced of equipment and ride the occasional ridicule impressed him greatly. He displayed planning skills that impressed all who were involved in bringing this project to fruition.

There was rarely any dissent from the team as to what to do and how to do it: Gordon delivered.

As David says, all this from a man who said little, had an objective and led by example.

The LHG barn is his memorial, certainly as far as the Club goes !



G Richard Potts

Born to a North Yorkshire farming family in 1939, on a farm near Richmond, Dick always had a strong interest in the wildlife in the neighbourhood, and the effects on birds during the severe winters in 1946/7/8 hit him hard. Courtesy of a generous bursary from North Riding Education Committee he went on to study zoology at Durham University, where he specialised in ecology and entomology, as well as taking part two years running in a Durham University expedition to the Faeroes to study seabirds. After graduation, he undertook a PhD on the breeding ecology of the shag on the Farne Islands, Northumberland. He saw the devastating impact of a toxic algal bloom on seabirds which reinforced his interest in poisons found in the environment, later involving the examination of organochlorines in shag eggs.



He studied the processes that regulate bird populations wanting to understand declines so that he could devise ways of reversing them. This led to the Game Conservancy asking him to inspire research project exposing three main causes: reduced young survival through herbicide-induced reduction in invertebrates, lack of suitable nesting habitat and poor nesting success due to increased predation pressure. He brought them together in a computer simulation model as the “three-legged stool” on the grounds that if one leg failed, the partridge “stool” would collapse.

Dick and colleagues also initiated a detailed study of cereal ecosystems introducing the concept of conservation efforts on lands worked by man

His legacy is the accepted wisdom that wildlife could exist happily alongside modern agriculture. He probably did more to bridge the gap between conservationists, farmers and the game shooting fraternity than anybody else. Unlike many in the game conservation world, he strongly opposed persecution of hen harriers on grouse moors, and challenged the widely held belief that birds of prey are responsible for the reduction in songbird numbers. He always worked closely with land managers, seeing them as the key to reversing the declines in farmland wildlife, and improving its biodiversity.

Dick became the Director of Research with the Game Conservancy developing practical solutions that could co-exist with modern farming. His ideas were often viewed as before their time and it was nearly 20 years before governments or their agencies bought into his ideas. In 1987 he was made a Doctor of Science by the University of Durham and in 1992 he received the Massey Ferguson prize for services to agriculture. He achieved international renown and became Director-General of the Game Conservancy Trust in 1993 until he retired in 2001.

His contributions won him several other major awards, including the Godman-Salvin medal from the British Ornithologists’ Union and the Country Landowners’ Association award for services to the countryside.

On the day of his death earlier this year, he was told that he had won the RSPB gold medal.

ROLL OF HONOUR

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 1950-52 Davis Burrow
 1952-54 J Hilton
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 1956-58 S Marsden
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 1982-84 WA Linford
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 1990-92 DA Smithson
 1992-94 GA Salmon
 1994-96 CD Bush
 1996-98 TW Josephy
 1998-00 WCI Crowther
 2000-02 AR Chapman
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 2012-14 M Smith
 2014-16 JC Whalley
 2016- MJ Boroff

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 1988 Dr John Farrer
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 2003 Alan Linford (m. 1957)
 2008 Iain Gilmour (m. 1990)
 2008 John Lovett (m. 1950)
 2008 Motup Goba (m. 2008)
 2010 Albert Chapman (m. 1955)
 2012 Arthur Salmon (m. 1951)
 2014 Alan Hinkes (m. 2014)
 2016 Andy Eavis (m. 2016)

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 1929-31 WA Wright
 1904-06 JA Green
 1930-32 C Chubb
 1908-10 F Leach
 1931-33 GL Hudson
 1909-11 C Hastings
 1932-34 FS Smythe
 1910-12 A Rule
 1933-35 JM Davidson
 1911-13 JH Buckley
 1934-35 GA Potter-Kirby
 1912-14 CA Hill
 1935-37 J Hilton
 1913-19 AE Horn
 1935-37 H Humphreys
 1914-19 H Brodrick
 1937-46 A Humphreys
 1919-21 CRB Wingfield
 1938-46 H Armstrong
 1946-48 D Burrow
 1946-48 AL Middleton
 1948-49 GS Gowing
 1948-50 GC Marshall
 1949-50 HG Watts
 1950-52 S Marsden
 1950-53 J Godley
 1952-54 FS Booth
 1953-55 FW Stemberge
 1954-56 RE Chadwick
 1955-57 GB Spenceley
 1956-58 CW Jorgensen
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 1958-60 JE Cullingworth
 1959-61 J Lovett
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 1961-63 MF Wilson
 1962-64 EC Downham
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 1977-79 N Newman
 1978-80 J Stuttard
 1979-81 GA Salmon
 1980-82 PC Swindells
 1981-83 DA Smithson
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 1983-85 DJ Atherton
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 1985-87 AC Brown
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 1992-94 H Robinson
 1994-96 K Aldred
 1996-98 IFD Gilmour
 1998-00 DA Hick
 2000-02 DJ Handley
 2002-04 G Champion
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 2006-08 RA Kirby
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 2010-12 PA Dover
 2012-14 HA Lomas
 2014-16 RM Crowther
 2016- CDB Hilton

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MJ Borroff
 G Champion
 AR Chapman
 PRP Chadwick
 R Gowing
 DA Hick
 A Renton
 M Smith
 CM Goba

MEETS SECRETARY

1996-09 JH Hooper
 2016- P Elliott

LIFE MEMBER*(after 35 years in Club)*

Aldred, K
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 Crowther, WCI
 Denney, RJ
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 Humphries, RG
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 Smith, M
 Smith, SH
 Smith, TH
 Smithson, DA
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 Stemberge, SW
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 Tetlow, DM
 Thompson, MJ
 Varney, JA
 Whalley, JC

Wilkinson, B
 Wilkinson, F

TREASURER

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 1899-04 J Davis
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 1921-24 C Chubb
 1924-51 BA Bates
 1951-78 S Marsden
 1978-83 D Laughton
 1984-90 JD Armstrong
 1990-98 TA Kay
 1998-12 GA Salmon
 2012 - MB Trasler

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 1898-09 L Moore
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 1924-29 J Buckley
 1929-46 D Burrow
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 1956-57 CR Allen
 1957-66 EC Downham
 1966-68 FD Smith
 1968-79 EC Downham
 1979-83 J Hemingway
 1983-93 CD Bush
 1993-96 JA Schofield
 1996-08 RG Humphreys
 2008-12 RA Kirby
 2012- TW Josephy

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 1910-12 JR Green
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 1954-57 EC Downham
 1957-62 J Hemingway
 1962-64 TW Salmon
 1964-68 WCI Crowther
 1968-73 FD Smith
 1973-79 J Hemingway

1979-83 CD Bush
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 1949-58 HL Stemberge
 1958-62 JG Brook
 1962-71 AB Craven
 1971-79 JG Brook
 1979-96 R Harben
 1996-98 MP Pryor
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 2003- 12 AR Chapman
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FOUR HIT NINETY

OR PERHAPS ? NINETY FOR FOUR , NOT OUT

Four longstanding active Club members reach ninety this year. Is there something about the YRC which links to longevity? Perhaps it is the healthy lifestyle.

Bill Lofthouse had his birthday celebration in February. Bill and Brenda, stalwarts of the social meets, were contemplating a move from Nidderdale to the northwest to be nearer Tim and his sisters when Brenda's health declined and she passed away in April. Bill has clocked up 66 years of Club membership including serving on the Committee 1953-56 and as Vice President 1975-77, then President 1980-82.

He is now living north of Manchester near the Bury road.



Bill on the 1974 Mallerstang Long Walk (Journal, Vol 11 No.37 p193)



Harry Robinson, with 39 years' membership, turned ninety just before Easter enjoying a family celebration at the Pendle Inn in Barley. The small band of members who meet at Lowstern on Tuesdays had a birthday get-together later in the month at the Golf Club in Burneside near Kendal. Harry and Margaret were also supporters of the social meets.

Harry served the Club as Lowstern Warden 1988-90, on the Committee 1982-85 and as Vice President 1992-94. Through his contact with Harry, John Snoad recently joined after many years of intermittent contact with the Club.

Harry by his trailer tent, Fannichs Meet, May 1981

Thirdly, **John Hemingway**, a member for 64 years, is heading for ninety in December.

Again, he and Janet are stalwart supporters of the social meet. Likewise, John helped organise the Club as Assistant Secretary for three spells in the years 1957-85, Honorary Secretary 1979-83 and as Vice President 1969-71.

John in 1968
(Journal Vol 10 No.34 p287)



The three couples have been friends for many decades and have enjoyed a dozen or more trips round Europe together.

All three continue to support the Club and are regulars at the Annual Dinner.

Bill's son Tim is a member who organised the Long Walk in Northern Ireland a couple of years ago. Harry brought a recent new member, John Snoad, into the Club. John introduced Dorothy Heaton to the Club a couple of years ago.

The fourth nonagenarian is Life Member, **Philip Sykes**, who was introduced to the Club by Stanley Marsden.

He lives with his twin brother in Pocklington and they celebrated their birthday in July.

He was involved in the early stages of developing Low Hall Garth. Once a keen hillwalker and golfer, he is now frustrated by near blindness. Phillip has clocked-up 61 years membership.

Heading the right way to be joining them next July is **John Sterland** way down in Cambridge. He was the botanist on the Club's successful 1988 Bolivian Apolobamba expedition when he also supervised the basecamp and eventually served as paramedic back in La Paz.

Despite his distance from the Club's heartland, John served the Club as Honorary Auditor from 1984 to 1990. His voice and performances entertained us at our Annual Dinners. Besides taking part in Long Walks (indeed you can see his right ear in the photo of Bill on the Coverdale to Mallerstang in 1974), he later provided welcome feeding points on them.

An inveterate raconteur, he has entertained many sitting round on meets.

John in a La Paz street market 1988



Then in October, it will be the turn of **Dennis Armstrong**.



Dennis served on the Committee from 1974 to 1977 before becoming President 1984 while simultaneously being Treasurer through from 1984 to 1990.

He and Joan have been on many of the Alpine and social meets.

As with John Sterland, many members will recall Dennis for his entertainment, leading us in singing Yorkshire at Dinners and with his erudite quotations from German literature.

Dennis

and singing *Yorkshire* at the 2015 Dinner



In addition, Don Mackay and Cliff Large have all already passed the ninety landmark, as has Brit Wilkinson.

Our thanks and congratulations to all of you – a case of ninety for four not out, with extras.



Don



Cliff

Roy Salmon was to have been included in this piece but unfortunately he has just died

Roy joined the club in 1950 and was a life member



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**Secretary
Tim Josephy
Secretary@YorkshireRamblers.org.uk**

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Club Properties

For enquiries regarding the possible hire of Club cottages contact

**Richard Josephy 135 Divinity Road, Oxford OX4 1LW
Tel. 01865 723630
bookings@yrc.org.uk**

Lowstern, Clapham, North Yorkshire



Low Hall Garth, Little Langdale, Cumbria

