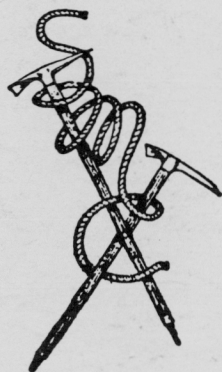


THE
SCOTTISH
MOUNTAINEERING
CLUB JOURNAL



VOL. XXXV

No. 185

1994

CONTENTS

	PAGE
UAMHAS! By Robert Davidson	365
COIRE LAGGAN By Jack Hastie	370
THE MUNROS MY WAY By W.P. Maxwell	371
CASTLES IN THE AIR By Graham E. Little	376
DARKNESS AND LIGHT By I.H.M. Smart	379
STAC OF HANDA: FIRST CROSSING	-
By W.H. Murray	381
ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE EARLY JOURNALS	-
By John Mitchell	385
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON MOUNTAIN	-
SAFETY – WEATHER OR NOT By Brian Hill	391
IMPRINTED ON THE NOSE By Philip Gribbon	400
SCALING THE HEIGHTS By Helen E. Ross	402
THE NO-HOLDS BARD By Mike Jacob	411
ANGEL FACE By Andrew Nisbet	413
SNOW ON THE HILLS By Lynne McGeachie	415
YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW	-
By I.H.M. Smart	416
NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN By Colwyn Jones	423
TILICHO SOUTH FACE By Steven Helmore	427
CLIMBING IS ALL ABOUT HAVING FUN	-
By Rob Milne and Louise Travé-Massuyès	432
NEW CLIMBS SECTION	440
MISCELLANEOUS NOTES	498
MUNRO MATTERS	502
SCOTTISH MOUNTAIN ACCIDENTS, 1993	507
IN MEMORIAM	535
GEORGE LYNN GIBSON	535
J.K. ANNAND	539
DAN LIVINGSTON	540
PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB	542
JMCS REPORTS	546
SMC AND JMCS ABROAD	550
REVIEWS	555
OFFICE BEARERS	573

EDITED BY K.V. CROCKET

Published by THE SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

Printed in Scotland by Review Publications, Aberdeen.

Copyright © 1994 Scottish Mountaineering Club, Scotland

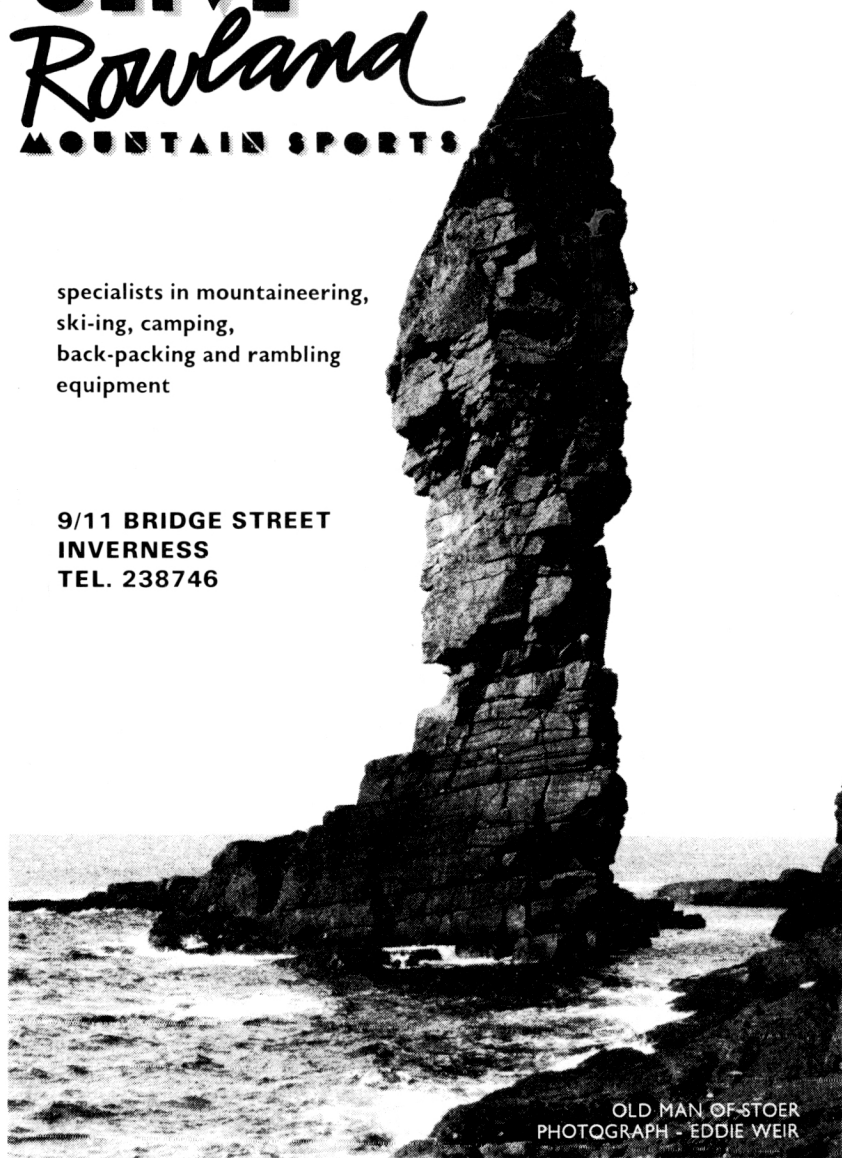
ISSN 0080 - 813X.

Distributed by Cordee, 3a De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7HD

CLIVE *Rowland* **MOUNTAIN SPORTS**

specialists in mountaineering,
ski-ing, camping,
back-packing and rambling
equipment

**9/11 BRIDGE STREET
INVERNESS
TEL. 238746**



OLD MAN OF-STOER
PHOTOGRAPH - EDDIE WEIR

CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT FOR WILD PLACES

Hill Walking
Travelling
Camping
Ski Wear



Wild Rover®

Wild Rover
53 The Plaza
East Kilbride

Tel 03552 38383

Wild Rover
228 High Street
Ayr

Tel 0292 288885

THE SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING CLUB JOURNAL

Vol. XXXV

1994

No. 185

UAMHAS!

By Robert Davidson

This article won 1st Prize in the 1992 Mountaineering Council of Scotland's Mountain Article Competition, open to all MC of S members and members of associated clubs. There are cash prizes, none of which, naturally, can fully compensate for the kudos of SMCJ publication. Information from the MC of S.

AT THIS moment I am taking my ease just below the summit of Glas Leathad Mor, the greatest part of Ben Wyvis. Perhaps summit is too pointed a word since the trig point is at the highest undulation on a long, broad ridge. Broad enough to drive a four-wheel along – which has been done more than once. Leathad is a better word, being a slope or declivity. True, for it falls away at a steep, but safe, angle below my feet. Away to the right is a distinctive bump named Tom a' Choinnich with, between the tops, a bona fide bealach, formerly trafficked on a regular basis. To the left is An Cabar, the most usual route of ascent and my way up today. An Cabar means 'the antler' and if you make your approach from Strath Bran just a little imagination will pick out the downturned headgear of a battling stag. It also means 'roof timber' but I choose to take the romantic view.

It must be said at the outset that I love this mountain, but, boy, this is not true of everyone! On my way up I met a fit-looking English chap on his way down. 'Nice day,' said I.

'Certainly is,' he replied. 'Pity you can't say the same about the hill.' Seeing me prickled he added, 'Well, it is pretty dull, you have to admit.' For the next 10 minutes of descent he had my hot, resentful gaze on the back of his head. Balding, I happily recall.

People come up here for all kinds of reasons, but mainly so they can put

a tick on their Munro list. Then, great, they won't have to come back. That 'great', is theirs incidentally. It's not that I'm glad to see their backs disappearing down An Cabar for good. No, sir. The idea is going around that this is a boring hill.

Excuse me while I beat my forehead with my palm. That's better! People can be dull and so can their words. Any politician's words might be boring, so might these, the collected works of Robert Ludlum could be fatally so, but not a hill or loch. Vocabulary like this implies that the hill can in some way be consumed. Yet it was here when our ancestors were grubbing for roots around where Kenya is now, and will still be standing when we are reduced to little piles of irradiated carbon.

Sadly, this concept has been put forward in that wonderfully entertaining body of work, Scottish hill literature, and by its most venerated contributor. Stand up W.H. Murray! Was it you who wrote: 'This is one of the dullest of all Scottish mountains' . . . ? Oh, yes it was! However, since you also gave us *Undiscovered Scotland*, justice must be tempered with mercy. Go, memorise the first two chapters of the *Scarlatti Inheritance*, and sin no more.

Another time I traversed over An Cabar to Dingwall, taking in the summit on the way. It was misty October and all was grey. I ate my frozen piece up here by the cairn and headed back towards Sron na Feola, congratulating myself on discovering a new form of madness. Suddenly, a ghostly figure materialised before me. It was wearing shorts and a vest and had a sweat band round its forehead: 'Is it much further, mate?' I continued feeling really quite sane. This question: 'Is it much further?' is often asked up here in the mist. One winter Tony and I made this trip. A big works' outing was changing in the car park and among them was an old friend with his wife and daughter. Well, Tony is as fit as all who get out so, with me trailing in his wake, he soon pulled clear of the bunch.

Up on top we fought our way through a chilling wind to here. After a few disdainful comments (Like the view? Nice shade of grey.) we headed back. About halfway along we met my friend and his family leaning into this Arctic gale. The little girl was in the middle. She had ear muffs on under her beret and wore a nice blouson jacket. Wind-blown rain had so saturated her clothes we could see the blue of her tights through her white jeans. She did not utter a complaining word. I loved her. Then came the question: 'Is it much further?' We got ourselves in front of them and said, no, it was not much further. Groups of two and three were walking past, looking straight ahead. My friend has a tremendously competitive nature and others were getting to the cairn. His face worked as he struggled internally. Eventually, he said: 'I think we had better go down.' There was something of reluctance in his manner. He looked at me and said: 'It's the wee one.' It was important that his reason for going down was understood. It was the wee one, not him. Something twisted in my gut.

As usual Tony was master of the situation. He got his face close to the wee girl. 'Cold, Miss?' She nodded and in a moment was in a Gore-Tex jacket that reached to her ankles and a pair of gloves that hung down past her knees. A toorie bonnet and a bar of chocolate finished the business and before too long, going with the wind, we were in the lee of the hill and below the cloud. All was well.

Back up here, though, the great thing is natural beauty. I mean landscape beauty. This thing produced by the hills and the water and the way the light plays on them that is not simply looked upon but reached out for. This thing that induces silence. Nor does it only come in through the eyes – blind Sydney Scroggie of the Words is proof of that. It is encompassing, the right environment for the human heart and known when experienced.

This is the way it is today and all of life seems to be in just sitting here with a sandwich and a cup of tea. Over there is Torridon. Liathach! An Teallach is a bit closer and to the right and that is where most folks' eyes linger, but straight ahead are the Fannichs and they are what draw me. Oh, the good days I've had over there. And look, out at the Torridon end, that patch of blue poking round An Coileachan is the neb of Loch Fannich. Nice!

The first time I got this view I was with my dog. Finn used to sit on the edge of the hill and look at the view. Some people choose not to believe that but it's true. He did it again that day when we got to Tom a' Choinnich and we enjoyed a tin of orange together looking down onto Loch nan Druidean. I didn't know it then but there is a lot of heartache in that view.

Away back when the glens were still well populated the people upped and drove the sheep that were to displace them out of the Straths. As they moved south others joined them, driving the growing white wave down through Sutherland and Ross to Loch Morie – just over the next hill after Tom a' Choinnich. Here there was good grazing so they stayed a while. This was in what is known as the Year of the Sheep.

Sometimes I wonder if that was when the hill got its name. Wyvis is from Uamhas (that is oo-ah-vas), the Gaelic word for fear. You see, three companies of the 42nd Regiment had been force-marched from Fort George and were resting not far away. Along with them was a goodly representation of the local gentry and 20 or so urban collaborators from my home town. Fortunately, the drovers got wind of this and scattered, so when the soldiers advanced up Strath Ruisdale all they found were smoking embers and thousands of milling, bleating sheep. I say, fortunately, because there is no doubt the drovers would have been eviscerated had they not fled. The Black Watch are no wimps. They . . .

A roaring noise of incredible volume has broken into these thoughts. I am in no doubt as to what it is and I know that to see it I must look well ahead of the sound. Over there! Above Loch Luichart, less than a 100m up is a tiny black dart going like a bat out of hell for Strath Bran. They come in pairs, so where is his partner? Wow! This one has veered round An Cabar,

wobbling at the extremity of his turn. He is just below me, well ahead of his own sound. I can see into the cockpit, see the pilot move in his seat and, look, poking out below the wings – is this one armed? In an instant he is gone, his engine noise follows, and I find I am on my feet with my sandwich pulped between my fingers.

Sit down, man. Breath deep or something. I take off my boots and sit with them wedged behind me to prop up my bad back. That's better. What can't be cured must be endured.

To speak of the military-industrial complex is no longer quite the thing. People look sideways at you. Ah-ha! One of those. As a matter of fact, I too think, it is something of an outdated term. The military makes its presence felt clearly enough but it can be difficult to identify much in the way of industry in these empty glens. It was the Northmen who first depredated the great forests. Iron smelters and ship building did for the rest. Sheep displaced the people who worked the land and the land has paid for it. Industrial tourism is everywhere, though.

The great thing to realise is that all this takes from the land without giving back. Accept that as a system and you accept its morality. Do that, and you clear the names of some real monsters – Cumberland, Sellar, Brocket. Right now, Nirex is straining to get in.

Maybe I shouldn't get so excited. After all, this is still a glorious view. Everyone says so and everyone is correct. All of it so beautiful and, compared to wherever they come from, so empty. In lay-bys and picnic spots all over the Highlands the couples, they are usually couples, look into each other's eyes and on all their lips forms the same question: 'How can we make money out of this? Buy just a little place – do bed and breakfast. Buy a bigger place – farm sheep.'

Outbidding the locals is no problem. Now more than ever before they ask: 'How can we fleece other tourists and fatten up our account in the Leeds?'

This is bartering the gift. Worse, dressing it up and selling it off as dross. The Outdoors? Plant it with ski-tows, holiday cabins! Gaelic culture? Tartan drawers in a can! What it needs, of course, is development. That would improve things. So far though, the process seems mighty like destruction. As is now well known, God made the Highlands sylvan. Improvers have developed it into a wet desert.

Here cometh the message. Harken unto the words of Jeremiah: If the development of appreciation is not put before all others then all that is natural and native to the Highlands; all that grows out of the land including its humanity and lifestyles; all that stands tall and straight and strides out to take its place in the world, will surely die.

Yet there is something we can take with us when we leave. You know, one of the hardest things to accept when we try to put our feelings into words is that just about all we are capable of has certainly been articulated before, and better.

Not long ago some people got together on the Dingwall side of the hill to erect a monument to the writer Neil Gunn. It is a standing stone, some carvings, a few trees by a small loch. More than anything else, though, it is the wild place itself that points the way into Gunn's work. On opening day they ran buses up, a piper played and everyone got to walk around. It is a participatory sort of place. Some words of Gunn's went through my head and when I got home I took out the right book, half by chance, and memorised them. Right now I am going to recite them out loud. The heat of the sun is on my neck and I can feel the tufty grass under my thighs. No one is coming so here goes . . . yet I remain convinced that at the core of every normal man and woman there lingers these days a desire for peace and renewal, however fugitively and whether actually indulged or not.

It's the word renewal that goes home. We are like the land in this respect, only so much can be taken out without something going back. Or life shrivels from within.

One time I came up here with a big bunch. There must have been about 60 people. The idea was to watch the sun go down on the shortest night of the year. Truthfully, this was not such a great idea. People who had never been on a hill before set out at 11p.m. in overcoats and town shoes. Of course, the party was soon strung out and some of us had to drop back. There were plenty of rest stops, and during one, about three-quarters up An Cabar, a certain quality in the air made itself felt. It was still. Distant voices become unusually distinct. Vision becomes clearer too and when a small cloud came creeping round Tom a' Choinnich at a level well below us the night took on a sort of fey aspect.

By the time we got to the top, cloud had gathered all around, and was closing up below. Soon we were in the middle of a cloud sea and the sun was dropping down onto the horizon like a big, golden ball, more or less to the north. Mountains jugged up like rocky islands in a placid ocean – Ben Hope, Foinavon, Suilven, the Fannichs. Away to the south the Cairngorms were an undiscovered continent.

People said little, all gathering near the cairn as the sun first touched then dipped below the horizon. The blue of the sky deepened slightly. It got no darker. When it bounced up again the crowd gave a self-conscious cheer. Everyone broke open their food and a flask of spirits was passed round. We were up for eight transcendental hours.

I look at my watch and see that if I don't move soon I'll be up for that sort of time again. Two hours too many for this great boring lump! Pulling the boot support from the small of my back induces the usual stab of pain at that damaged disc. Ah, it's worth it. Boots on and rucksack hauled up I tap the triangulation pillar for luck. That reminds me, these things aren't used any more. It's time they were gone.

Along to Tom a' Choinnich I think, then down by the Allt na Bana-Morair for a change. Every so often we need a change.

COIRE LAGGAN

From Black Cuillin, lost, we stumbled
In black air down into Coire Laggan
And gasped: 'Thank Christ'
As gabbro gave way to turf.

No stars, no wind
Gradient was all our guide
Till an abrupt edge;
Brown grass bowing before blackness.

I crawled forward, blinded
Thighs ploughing peat
And breathed on the abyss.

Trembling under my breath
Black water wrinkled
Six inches beneath.

Jack Hastie.

THE MUNROS MY WAY

By W. P. Maxwell

THERE USED to be a 'post' box (a biscuit tin) under the cairn on Carn Liath (Beinn a' Ghlo) – I mean 50 years ago, when I was a boy. The idea was to leave a post card stamped and addressed to oneself, and the next climber up would write on it a suitable message, and post it on. This is my abiding memory of climbing – what I didn't know then, aged nine – was my first Munro. No question of cars, or even bikes, in those days, just a long, dusty walk up Glen Fender from our house at Bridge of Tilt. Later in the War came the ascent of the two other Munros in the group. Memories of these happy days returned recently when I revisited the area to climb Carn Chlamain and Beinn Dearg. Beautiful Perthshire, indeed, and although one may castigate the builders of the new A9 in some respects, one cannot but compliment them on the views of the Tilt hills which the road opens up.

As I grew up, I went on hill walking expeditions frequently, and did some modest work on rock and snow, without considering the possibility, or the need, to climb all the Munros listed in my first copy of the Tables (1929 edition). In fact, I tended to return to the same hills time and again, rather than to seek out new peaks. So favourite stomping grounds from an Edinburgh base were Ben Vorlich and Stuc a' Chroin, Ben More and Stobinian and Ben Lawers.

Holidays with my parents, prior to National Service and university, took me farther afield. The first of these was to Skye – a memorable rail journey to Kyle (the family car was still up on blocks after the end of the War) and then the tremendous experience of the sail to Portree on the Loch Nevis, a seemingly huge ship. We saw nothing of the island for 19 of the 20 days of our holiday, so bad was the weather. However, on the other day, the skies cleared with dramatic speed, and I was able to see the Cuillin in all their sublime beauty. I remember vividly our cycle run from Portree to the west coast at Bracadale, then down to Sligachan where we marvelled at the well-known view that brought Norman Collie back to spend his last days near the mountains he knew so well.

My first Cuillin summit was Bruach na Frithe – not in boots – but in a pair of old golf shoes. You can imagine what the gabbro did to these. However, the bonus was that their fate induced my parents to come up with the necessary cash for me to buy my first pair of nailed boots – clinkers, tricounis and all.

I shall never forget that first prospect of the Cuillin Ridge, a landscape that I still find as thrilling now as I did then. The unique abrasiveness of the rock, the pinnacles and aretes combine to fascinate all who come to grips with the ridge and its spectacular coires. Successive visits enabled me to climb Sgurr nan Gilleann, first by the Tourist Route, and later by the Pinnacle Ridge; Sgurr na Banachdich, on a broiling day, and Sgurr Dearg, but not the Inaccessible Pinnacle. Some of my most vivid memories of these early days are of the extraordinary effects produced by mist boiling up out of the coires and parting to reveal sensational views of Coruisk, or the Red Hills, or the mainland. Above all, I think, it is the proximity to the sea which adds much to the beauty of the Cuillin and indeed all of the mountains near the West Coast. I never find here the dullness of panorama that can be experienced farther east.

This leads me happily to the Cairngorms which I began to explore when I moved to Aberdeen in 1969. Previously, I had climbed Cairn Gorm, walking from Glenmore Lodge. It was quite a long trek, and, if wishing to walk across to Macdhuil, as well, one had to leave very early in the morning. How things have changed today when one can motor to 2500ft and begin walking with more than half the work done. Truly, the wilderness is shrinking.

The impact of the Cairngorms stems from their vastness and their superb northern coires. It lies in the magical setting of the lochans, and the springs of Dee on the Braeriach plateau. My base in Aberdeen enabled me to climb all the main group, and all the others neighbouring it. A great thrill was my first outing with the Cairngorm Club. Our route took us over Cairn Gorm, down the stiff descent of Coire Raibert to Loch Avon, past the Shelter Stone, up over Beinn Mheadhoin, Derry Cairngorm and down to Derry Lodge where we halted briefly before walking the last tedious miles to the bus at the Linn of Dee. This was a high-level walk of a kind I hadn't previously experienced, but as I discovered, typical of what can be done in this terrain. The round of Loch Muick, the Braeriach-Cairn Toul walk, or the cirque of Glen Geusachan all illustrate the spacious beauty and contrasting dangers of plateau walking in bad weather when navigation, and indeed survival, can be major problems.

Somewhere in the 1980s a change occurred in my thinking about the Munros. What I mean is that, I actually began to think of mountains as Munros which is probably a dangerous, even silly thing to do. Why this happened isn't entirely clear, but, reading Hamish Brown and Martin Moran had something to do with it. And then someone, friend or foe, presented me with a copy of the SMC publication, *The Munros*. At this point in 1986 I had climbed about 100 on the list – beyond the point of no return as Hamish puts it, and he's certainly proved right in my case. Better, or worse still, from the same donor came, soon afterwards, the Munro map AND coloured pins! Thus was I persuaded as I viewed the map at breakfast each morning. Outings, with colleagues and friends were organised on the

basis of which new area next. These often involved lengthy journeys since I was based in Aberdeenshire, but somehow this didn't seem to matter because my great quest was taking me to the hills and glens I had never previously visited. Especially enjoyable was ridge walking in the Glens – Shiel, Affric and Strathfarrar. Yes, it was nice to be able to say that one had 'done X Munros' in a day, but of course, number has little to do with the quality of experience. The most memorable days are those when you have given your all physically, or when bad weather has suddenly relented to allow stunning views, or when the company of your fellows has been specially felicitous.

Sometimes, it may be a combination of all of these, as in the case of a boat trip up Loch Mullardoch to attack Beinn Fhionnlaidh and its higher neighbours, or of my first experience on a mountain bike – indeed on any bike in the previous 25 years – in Glen Affric to Alltbeithe so that the round of Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan could be accomplished. On this latter occasion, my companion was a 1973 Munroist, who had had recent heart bypass surgery. The day, highly strenuous for me, must have been almost intolerable for him. However, he seemed to have suffered no lasting damage, and was able to stroll up Am Faochgach the following day.

Slowly, but surely, as the 1980s progressed, my knowledge of the hills west of the Great Glen increased. Old friends kept appearing on distant horizons as new summits were reached. Characteristic outlines drew the eye again and again. How unmistakable they are – Bidean Choire Sheasgaich, Mullach Fraoch-choire, Sgurr na Ciche to name but three. To get to them dominated holiday planning. Knoydart, most inaccessible of all, became a top priority. So it was we went to Doune, where the Robinsons are happily ensconced, opposite Mallaig on Loch Nevis. During a moist, midge week in August, we climbed the three Munros and, poor though the weather was, we experienced something of the majestic quality of Knoydart topography. One of the pleasures of having completed the Munros will be to return freely to very special places like this. If you take the Robinsons' beautiful chalet, which sleeps 12, you will not be disappointed – stunning views of Skye of course, magnificent cuisine from your hostess and the company of your friends. What more can you ask for?

However, the view of the Cuillin did remind me that I had yet to complete the Munros there, not least the Inaccessible Pinnacle. This, the following year, was certainly one of the greatest thrills of my life. I hadn't had a rope on for 25 years, so my son dictated some practice on the Aberdeenshire coastal crags. This done, and after two attempts aborted due to bad weather, we finally got a good day for the round of Coire Lagan. How it lived up to our expectations. There can be few views so dramatic as those from the Pinnacle or Sgurr Alasdair. The scrambling involved isn't particularly demanding, even for someone who can be described as of high middle age, and the holds on the Pinnacle are generous. Nevertheless, there is the exposure.

We were fortunate that day to have it to ourselves. How different when I returned to the Cuillin this year to climb Sgurr Dubh Mhor on a gloriously hot day in late May. Round Loch Coire Ghrunnda on every visible crag there were people. Between Sgurr Dubh na Da Bheinn and Sgurr Dubh Mhor there were some two dozen of us. It was literally the case that we had to queue to reach the acute top of the latter. At the Thearlaich-Dubh gap, there were delays of 45 minutes for those waiting to cross. There is much to rejoice in this growing popularity of the outdoors, but as I've moved closer to the magic 277, I've wondered more and more about the problems caused by the pressure of numbers on the hills.

How is sufficient funding to be found to counter the problem of erosion? Will future generations of Munroists have to pay a levy for the privilege of walking the hills – an unthinkable thought, or, is it? How are the increasingly large numbers of anti-social walkers to be dealt with? We can't cope effectively with litter louts in our towns, how much more difficult to deal with them on the hills. And then there are the vandals who desecrate bothies, and cause damage to other property. Perhaps, like me, you read of and were appalled by the case where a bridge (specially built by the Affric landowner for stalkers) was dismantled for firewood by some walkers staying overnight at Alltbeithe. Small wonder indeed that the proprietor, a very reasonable man whom I've met, thought seriously about burning down the youth hostel to save himself further inconvenience and financial loss.

Another problem, and a growing one, is how to cope with the intrusive mountain bike. It can be a valuable asset if used sensibly as I discovered when in Glenfinnan, but certain estates, such as Letterewe and Fisherfield, feel forced to ban them altogether. I am sure this is the correct decision here, otherwise this area, like Knoydart, one of the last wildernesses in Scotland, will lose much of its remoteness. My overnight expedition to climb the six Munros would have been much less memorable if I hadn't walked every last inch of the way. This 'epic' was made possible by my recent retirement, enabling me to make the most of any 'guaranteed' fair weather. Sleeping out overnight without camping gear demanded the most optimistic forecast that Ian McAskill could manage, and for once he got it right. I left Kernsary at 14.15, stood on the summit of Ruadh Stac Mor at 21.00, and saw the sunset from A' Mhaighdean at 22.00. Then a quick descent to the Beinn Tarsuinn col where I bivvied at a large boulder. It was a perfect June night – no rain or wind and no darkness, only the most ethereal, roseate glow over An Teallach as I dozed amid many grazing deer.

By 04.00, I was ready to move, semi-fortified by a flaskful of tepid sausages and beans. At 06.00, I was at the summit of Tarsuinn where the temperature was already climbing too high for comfort. Along the ridge to Beinn a' Chlaidheimh, thirst became an increasing hazard. Only in the shade of the huge cairn on Sgurr Ban, where I halted for half-an-hour, did

I gain respite from the remorseless sun, and only after the long descent to the Abhainn Nid did I reach water. Till then every watercourse had been dry. Even this stream, often uncrossable, was scarcely flowing, but there was enough water to quench thirst and bathe very tired feet. I was thus sufficiently refreshed to make the final push past Shenavall and down to Corrie Halloch by 16.00. Truly, one of the great days in my life on the hills – breath-taking scenery, new perspectives, solitude, colour, and an immense sense of achievement. The six Munros were almost incidental.

Retirement enabled me to plan flexibly for the ‘conquest’ of the final 50 Munros. Somehow, I felt that I should accomplish this in 1993 since, without any apparent effort, I had reached the age of 60. So, from March onwards, I had been working my way from north to south over some of the finest peaks in Scotland – such as Sgurr Fiona, Slioch, Beinn Sgritheall. I stayed for a week at Cluanie, a weekend at Fort William, and a few days at Fersit for Loch Ossian. By this stage, I had decided that my final Munro would be Meall nan Tarmachan because its accessibility would enable friends to gather easily for a modest celebration. This decision made and invitations distributed I found myself facing self-imposed deadlines to get into areas such as Glen Etive and Glenfinnan before stalking began. Typical summer weather didn’t help at all, and I have been disappointed more than once, especially on Buachaille Etive Mor and Aonach Eagach where I had prayed for warm dry rock.

I look forward to returning to these memorable places (let’s face it, many Munros are distinctly unmemorable). I shall go back to summits like Sgurr na Ciche which was mist enshrouded to my great disappointment. What I certainly won’t do is work my way through the Tables again. It is still a flawed list – if An Teallach deserved a second Munro, (as it surely did), why not Beinn Eighe? Can it be right to include Beinn Tulaichean but not Beinn Dearg (Torridon) or Beinn Dearg Mor (Fisherfield) and so on?

I am pleased to have done the Munros once, albeit that it’s taken 50 years. I’ve learned much, including a good deal about myself. I’ve met interesting people, and made lasting friendships. I’ve experienced the delights of life in tents, bivouacs, bunk houses and bothies (ah, the characteristic odour of drying socks at Culra.) and I’ve seen nature at first hand in all its infinite variety.

I’ve witnessed the revolution technology has wrought on equipment. Rubber-soled boots, Yeti gaiters, cagoules alleged to be waterproof and condensation defiant, crampons – all of these are a far cry from golf shoes on Bruach na Frithe. And I am quite bewildered by the array of hardware which today’s rock climber carries. However, I have to admit that my suspicion of the benefits of modern technology marks me out as rather old-fashioned. Perhaps, if I’d been wearing crampons in Gardyloo Gully in April, 1949, I wouldn’t have fallen about 1000ft as I did – but that’s another story.

CASTLES IN THE AIR

By Graham E. Little

A CRY FROM the gully above jerks my attention. A body is accelerating down the hard *névé* – out of control. I stare, mesmerised, as it ricochets hopelessly towards me. It is Patricia.

Instinctively I crampon a few steps towards the line of fall as the rag doll-like form shoots out of the narrow confines of the gully. With just one chance, my free hand snatches at her blurred harness, the other axe swinging into the hard snow.

The wrench spins me around. We are falling together. Frantically I brake with one extended arm but the axe bounces out. We are sliding towards the steep bare rock slabs at the base of the snow field. Digging in crampon points, I grind the axe adze back into the crystal surface. We are slowing. I watch with fascination as axe-gouged spurts of snow glint in the sunlight. We stop; all is silent, my arm feels dislocated, the snow is red with blood.

It was Saturday, March 20, 1971. Patricia was caught up in my passion for the mountains. As we strolled across the frozen bogs of the Allt a' Mhuilinn, I was pleased that she was with me, yet frustrated that we must tackle an easy route when conditions looked so promising.

Ben Nevis was my other lover, not so warm, not so tender, yet that day displaying her magnificence in the crisp air; dark ribs, walls and buttresses sharply defined by a skeletal network of snow gullies, ribbons and patches. I reeled off a litany of names, evoking the very essence of Scottish winter climbing.

Although Patricia had only tackled a couple of winter routes before, I convinced myself that she could handle The Castle. Avoiding the bare slabs on the right, we cramponed up the steepening snow fan that fell from the twin chutes of the North and South Castle Gullies. Between them lay the dark triangular buttress of The Castle. Although the snow and ice that draped and dribbled over the crag was in perfect condition, the early onset of Spring had left much rock bare; the snow bank below The Castle receding to reveal an ice glazed overhanging wall. It looked too hard.

As I unpacked our gear I hatched a selfish plan. While I soloed The

Castle, Patricia could solo South Castle Gully, then we could rendezvous on the plateau. She was apprehensive but I assured her that the gully was only Grade I – a straight-forward snow slope. ‘You can manage it,’ I reassured her. She smiled and I felt confident.

She watched my urgent muscling over the overhang, then started her own climb. I stopped for a moment to warm my hands and admired her long dark hair tied back with a turquoise silk scarf. I regretted that I hadn’t been able to borrow a helmet for her.

After the overhang, the slabby rocks of The Castle were masked with a thin blanket of old hard snow. I ran up them with a freedom that only the solo climber could know. As The Castle steepened, I concentrated on every move: each crampon kick, every front point nick, each clumsy rock hold glazed black with ice, mittened hands making a transient union; the body’s tension and balance completely attuned to that primitive dance simply called climbing.

A short wall stopped me. Ice dribbled down it like wax from a candle. Pinching a brittle flow, crampon points scratching a shallow edge, I teetered between safe ground and commitment. This state of limbo was momentary as I crossed the barrier and climbed on via grooves, corners and chimneys through the upper ramparts.

Cutting through a curl of crusted snow, I pulled out on to the plateau expecting the welcome of a smile but I was alone. It was a windless day and the silence was immense. I walked to the top of South Castle Gully and sat waiting and thinking. Time was gauged only by my watch. Contemplation soon gave way to impatience. How could she take so long over an easy snow gully? Impatience was replaced by concern. I started to reverse down the gully.

After about 200ft of descent I encountered a short, steep ice pitch. This shouldn’t be here said my inner voice. Patricia’s crampon marks were visible below but it was obvious that she hadn’t climbed the pitch. I cursed loudly.

With some difficulty, I step cut down the ice bulge then carried on down the narrow gully. Nearing its mouth, I called her name, my voice echoing on the frosted Castle walls yet finding no reply. I traversed to our starting ledge at the foot of The Castle, dumped my sac, helmet and jacket and tried to think clearly. There could be only two options; either she was tackling North Castle Gully or she had carried on down.

Taking only my axe, I crossed to the mouth of North Castle Gully. It was empty but there were crampon marks. Reasoning that by then she must have reached the top, I turned to return to the sac.

A cry from the gully above jerks my attention . . .

Patricia’s body is crumpled and still. Blood pours from a gaping head wound. I experience a moment of hopeless despair and remorse. I am

responsible for this! I am lying next to her feeling her body heat yet I am also detached, a curious stranger observing these dramatic series of events.

On my first attempt to stand we slip a little further. With a strength born of necessity I ram my ice axe shaft into the compacted surface then clip her harness into its wrist loop. She moves one arm and groans. I crouch over her stunned by the seriousness of our situation. Blood still wells from the great gash in her scalp, plastering dark hair to her pale face. 'I'm sorry', I fatuously declare. She stares at me blankly as one accosted by a stranger. 'Where am I?' her disembodied voice enquires. 'I must go and get the gear', I explain desperately trying to control my shivering. She fails to understand, her vacant expression showing neither fear, pain nor comprehension.

As I crampon cautiously up the snowfield, a pall of guilt envelops me. I have sacrificed a special friend and lover upon the altar of my own ego. It is unforgivable.

Collecting my gear and Patricia's lost axe, I descend to the motionless figure, stranded in the centre of this great snow shield. Tiny moving figures are visible on the path far below but whistle-blowing and shouting fails to attract their attention. We are on our own.

As I bandage her head (thanking providence that I have a First Aid kit with me) it becomes clear that I must not leave her until she is on safe ground. I wipe the blood from her eyes, tears blur mine.

Using an axe belay, I commence a series of lowers; descending to her at the end of each to move her to a secure stance at the start of the next lower. In this manner we make slow, methodical progress, avoiding the rock slabs and eventually reaching flat ground below the crag.

It is late afternoon. Making her as comfortable as possible, I run, heart thumping, to the CIC Hut. I blurt out my story to the first person that I meet. Using the emergency telephone they contact the mountain rescue in Fort William and the well-rehearsed rescue procedure is under way.

Returning to Patricia, with some hut residents carrying the stretcher, I am completely numb; neither feeling tired nor energetic, neither depressed nor elated, just numb. She is as I left her, half sitting, insulated from the cold ground by my jacket and rucksack.

We spoke but I cannot remember of what. She lapsed into occasional sleep, induced by the motion of the stretcher. Our numbers swelled as the rescue team joined us, rendering my help completely superfluous. I again become detached from the course of events.

'And what climbing experience did Miss . . . have', the business-like Police Constable asks me. I am too tired to lie and answer: 'Not much.' He frowns and scribbles on a form. 'Now tell me, in your own words (as if there were any other), just how this accident happened.' It has taken me 21 years to remember.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

By I.H.M. Smart

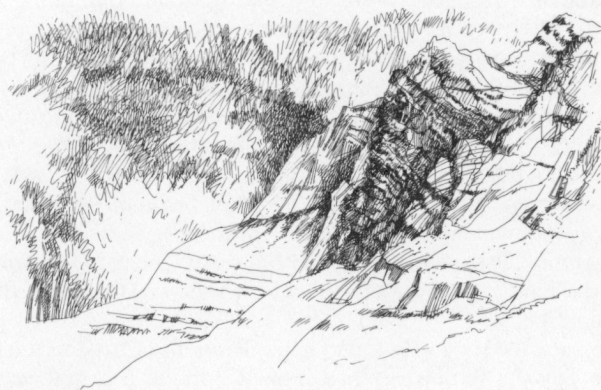
This note describes a solo flight from Riverside Airfield, Dundee, made late on a sombre winter's afternoon. Flying provides the same sort of controlled excitement as exposed climbing but without the physical effort: it is ideal exercise for a brain trapped in an ageing body, a sort of armchair exposure to the E-numbers; it generates the same creative tension as the mind tries to balance the aesthetics of the ambient situation against the gravitational imperatives of the real world.

THIS IS the story of a flight over Beinn a' Ghlo late on a still, February day. The sky was overcast with layers of blues, greys and gunmetals leading into the cave of the advancing night. The snows of the Grampians, backlit in the dim light, glowed above the dark glens. Gloom and mystery reigned over familiar country. Heading into desolation and winter darkness grips you with apprehension and exhilaration. Maybe this desire to put yourself to the test, to explore the unknown and risk passing the point of no return is keyed into the nervous system. Back in the Palaeolithic it was probably a daily necessity, a *sine qua non* for survival and the bane of your existence. In these luxurious times frolicking about under the paw of the unknown is a form of play, a toy metaphor for the bored mind to peep behind to send a tonic shiver down the spine. Maybe in the somewhat over-civilised situation I am describing, the psyche saw it as a metaphor for death, a sort of training run, a reconnaissance into territory from which this time you could return if you found it more than you could handle. North is a metaphorically safe direction to explore because, as everyone knows, come summer the darkness will turn into brilliant continuous daylight, everything will be young again and spring will return to the step. Be such speculation as it may, the little plane with its navigation lights twinkling flew into the intimidating gloom. I circled Beinn a' Ghlo about half-a-grand above the soft glow of the snow, acutely aware of being alive and in a state of high exhilaration in the closing mouth of the winter night.

Stylistically, the story should end on this eirenic note of contemplation of the final things but real life doesn't seem to be much interested in style which is a grammatical conceit, a sort of retrospective tense applied in the reflective mood. In the real life aspect of this story there was a lot more hard reality to be handled before a safe touch down allowed the luxury of literary style to emerge.

I came back the long way round using Broughty Castle as a landmark. Over the Tay the setting sun had broken through a complicated cloud system. We have all seen memorable winter sunsets; this one was as complex and colourful as they come, doubled in the reflections of the

mirror-smooth river and enhanced by the spectacular glooms that surrounded it; like an impressionist painting it was full of bits of light and dark; you were aware that there were complementary colours resonating in the shadows. An imaginative man would not have been surprised to crash suddenly into a giant Monet hung on the wall of an art gallery. Blessed with a phlegmatic, unexcitable disposition, however, no such thoughts went through my mind; I boringly lined up the plane on long finals for a straight-in approach to runway two eight zero, carried out my down-wind checks (brakes off, under-carriage down, pitch fine, carburettor heat on, engine dials reading okay and seat belt tight), lowered 20° of flap, trimmed for an approach speed of 65 knots and made a passable landing with knuckles maybe slightly white on the control column.



N. C. PAGE STAC BAN

JOHN MITCHELL 1994





STAC OF HANDA: FIRST CROSSING

By W.H. Murray

CONTINUING MY shredding of old files, I have found another exchange of letters with Tom Patey. In July, 1967, Tom (aided by Chris Bonington and Ian McNaught-Davies) had made the second crossing by rope to the top of the Great Stac of Handa. He wrote to me early in 1968, saying that he'd heard that Donald MacDonald of Lewis, whose father had made the first crossing in the 1870s, was alive, had recently visited Handa to view the scene of his father's famous exploit, and now lived at Dunoon (having been headmaster of the grammar school). Would I please visit Donald and ask if he remembered details of the first crossing? Tom still felt shaken by his own 120ft traverse across the 350ft-deep gulf. The big sag in the rope had given him a tough fight to get any footing on the Stac. He could scarcely believe that the first crossing had been made without aids, for he could not have done that himself. So what aids had been used?

My visit to MacDonald was fruitful, and my report to Tom is of interest to climbers on two counts. First, it discloses a double error in our Club's guidebook, *The Islands of Scotland* (1989), which ascribes the crossing to 'inhabitants of Handa' thus ignoring that Handa had been cleared in 1848, and also misquoting Harvie Brown's *Fauna of the North-West Highlands* (1904), which, itself erroneous throughout on the Handa passage, gave the credit to 'two men and a boy from Uist, at the request of the late Mr Evander McIver . . .' In fact, it was done by three men of Ness in Lewis on their own initiative. Second, and more importantly, it revealed a more advanced state of climbing ability in the Outer Hebrides than our Club's members had realised. Even Patey, comparing his own hair-raising traverse with that of last century, wrote (SMCJ, XXIX, p. 319): 'It is even more certain that no mountaineering amateur of that era would have committed himself to such an undertaking.'

He might be right. But, his words draw notice to a moral ripe for plucking – and for slow digestion. Climbers of every period share a common frailty (I too being guilty in past days): we imagine that our fellows of an earlier age could not have been as bold and skilful as we. From one century to the next, our self-flattering hearts offer up that much-beloved toast: 'Here's tae us! Wha's like us? Nary a one and they're a' deid.'

Loch Gail,
26 March, 1968

Dear Tom,

I have at last seen Donald MacDonald. I called on him yesterday at Dunoon. His wife died three years ago, just after his visit to Handa, and he now lives alone. One son is a doctor in Fife, and another I forget where. Donald in his mid-80s, is fresh complexioned and fit, with all his faculties

except for a slight deafness. He's not frail-looking like Tom Longstaff at the end, and is equally alert in mind. He remembers the whole story of his father's crossing to the Great Stac, which had been told to him many times by his father and friends. He can't remember the month, which would be prior to September. The year was 1876, when his father was 26.

His father's name was Donald MacDonald, fisherman and crofter at Ness near the Butt of Lewis, of mixed Norse and Gaelic stock – like all the other families around, fair-haired and blue-eyed. Donald, the son, still has strong impressions of how hard his father and all these men worked, out on the sea in all weather, line fishing, yet still managing to wring a good product from the croft: enough to put sons through universities before the welfare state had been thought of. He remarked that the mainlanders' idea of the islesmen as idlers is quite wrong, the reverse of truth, and that few mainland farmers or crofters could begin to cope with the work these men did. But they might appear idle if seen after a voyage, when they'd stand around for a brief spell with hands in their pockets relaxing. Their one outdoor recreation was rock climbing.

His father in his twenties and thirties was in constant practice on rock, very strong in the arm, and supremely confident in his physical fitness. He and the other men of Ness learned their rock climbing initially in hunting the birds on the sea cliffs of Ness, and nearly 50 miles north on Sula Sgeir and North Rona, which islands they never referred to by name, but always (in Gaelic) as 'The Lands Out Yonder'. This kind of naming seems to be a typically Norse idiom, just as they originally referred to the Scottish Western Isles as Havbredey, which meant in Norse 'The Isles on the Edge of the Sea'. Hence the word Ebudae picked up in Lewis by the Roman navigators of AD 129 and rendered thus in Latin by Ptolemy.

Donald, the son, says that the men of Ness did not merely cull seabirds for the pot. They liked birds in the same way as modern birdwatchers. They observed and studied them and could tell you as much about the life of seabirds in detail as any amateur ornithologist today. Hunting the birds for food was another matter, which of course had led to their rock-work: but they did also have a genuine love of birds for their own sake, as they did too of rock. His father would often be working out on the croft – and when the main work was done would suddenly 'disappear' – he'd be off to the sea cliffs just to enjoy the climbing. All his spare time went to the rocks. The best cliffs near Ness were those down the east coast to Tolsta. On the west coast, from the Butt to Europie, the cliffs were lower.

The men spent much more time than they do today in culling the birds from The Lands Out Yonder. Now they spend only a day or two. Last century they'd spend at least a fortnight every September, taking the gugas (young gannets) as they 'ripened', salting them in the barrel as they took them, so that they were nearly all cured by the time the boats returned to Ness. They tasted, said Donald, not unlike good kippers. The birds were

exported world-wide. The young men rejoiced in these expeditions, hard living but a wonderful change from the croft-work and deep-sea fishing. They went wild with delight and would naturally throw off some feats of daring that would make your hair curl. One of these was the Handa epic.

This was organised, not by Donald MacDonald, but by his neighbour Malcolm McDonald (no relation). Malcolm, then in his fifties, was a natural leader, full of resource and bright ideas. He planned the visit to the Great Stac of Handa and decided how it would be done. Donald was the man chosen (or maybe the volunteer) to make the first crossing. He had the needed nerve and strength. The Stac had already been reconnoitred with a full intention of climbing it from the sea upward. But no line had seemed practicable. The idea of nailing rocks had been thought of and been not acceptable. Their method of crossing was in general outline the same as yours. A long rope – five or six hundred feet – was carried end-outwards to the farther points of Handa until its centre crossed the top of the Stac. The ends were then secured to stakes. It could be they used the same boulder as you at the north-east end. Donald then crossed from the west side hand over fist, bare feet curled round the rope. He used no waist-loop or foot-loop or safety line at the waist. He carried nothing at all. The fixed rope was a thick fishing-rope normally used for securing the deep-sea fishing lines to buoys – he gave it a Gaelic name that I can't remember.

There was a tremendous sag in the middle and worse under the Stac. Donald had a hard job at that last bit. This was the only time when he thought he might fail. It was made especially difficult because he was unable to make his landing where he had hoped. There was a point where the Stac sloped abruptly down toward the gulf, and the rope had slipped while he was crossing until it hung over this sloping ground, where the steep, loose rock gave no firm hold for the foot when he tried to make lodgement. He was now fighting for his life and tapped the reserve of strength needed to pull himself up. When he was rested, Malcolm threw him a line, by which he pulled across two stakes, a block-and-tackle, a breeches-buoy, and baskets. Donald fixed the stakes, attached the tackle, and his two companions crossed by breeches-buoy. They culled the sea cliff birds and filled the baskets. All were then able to return to Handa by breeches-buoy, leaving the stakes behind on the Stac, where they were seen during the next 70 years.

This ploy became one of the wonders of Ness for many a year, but no one thought that the islemens' high-spirited play would interest mainlanders.

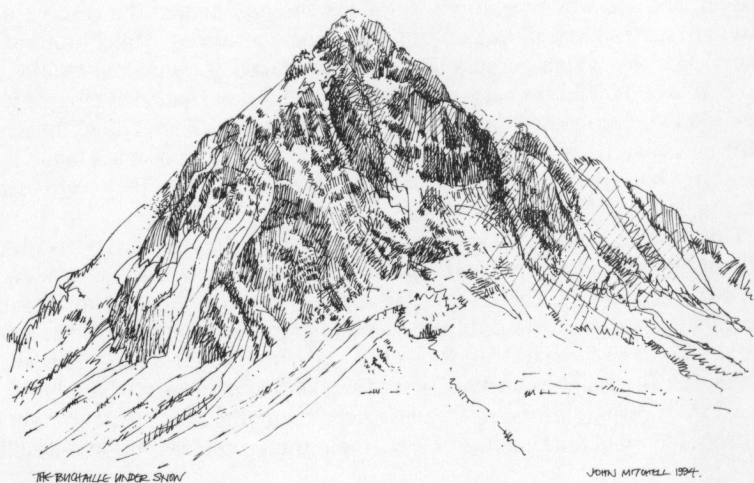
So that's the story. There are lots of details one would like to know more about. For example, how did Donald hammer in his stakes? And what was the thickness of the fixed rope? Given a very thick and taut rope, crossing hand over fist is not in itself difficult for a skilled man, as we both know. In western Nepal, hillmen habitually use this method for crossing rivers much wider than the Handa gulf. But, their grass ropes are one-and-a-half

inches in diameter, stretched so tight that little sag comes in the middle, and lead to easy landings. The rivers may be killers if one falls in, but with nothing like that fearsome drop at Handa.

Eight years later, Malcolm McDonald, the prime mover, quarrelled with his Presbyterian minister at Ness. Rather than submit to his rule of the parish, Malcolm chose self-exile to North Rona. A fellow crofter, McKay, went with him. The island had lain uninhabited for 44 years. They arrived early in the summer of 1884 and occupied a ruined house. Their friends at Ness, feeling uneasy about them after a stormy winter, sent out a boat in April 1885, when Malcolm and his friend were found indoors, dead of exposure.

I hope to see you at Easter.

*Yours,
Bill Murray.*



THE BUGHAILLIE UNDER SNOW

JOHN MITCHELL 1904.

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE EARLY JOURNALS

By John Mitchell

THE SCOTTISH Mountaineering Club has, from its earliest days, been concerned with the artistic expression of natural beauty through words, photographs and drawings.

'The glory of the hills then, gentlemen, the beauty of natural scenery, must be our motto.' So spoke Professor Ramsay, the first President, addressing members at the AGM on December 12, 1889.

When it was proposed, also in 1889, to produce a Club Journal, A.E. Maylard, an original member and the first Honorary Secretary, hoped that it would have articles on 'art, literature, and science'.

It was decided at the Sixth AGM to produce a 'well-illustrated, attractive and interesting' climber's guide to Scotland.

These examples surely underline the SMC's artistic concerns. This article is intended to show that these were amply fulfilled within the first 10 volumes of the Journal.

I suppose it was natural that the SMC, with its roots in Glasgow – that city provided the largest group of original members – should reflect the artistic aspirations of a wealthy city that had built magnificent town houses and offices in the 19th century. A city which had opened the Kelvingrove Galleries and Museum, had supported the work of the Glasgow Boys and would lay the seeds of the modern movement in the work of C.R. Mackintosh.

Remember too, that the membership of the SMC was drawn from a well-educated class, many of whom would have the means, and some the interest, to support the arts – and indeed would have the opportunity to go mountaineering.

In looking at the early Journals the most obvious and impressive illustrations are photographs. Such was the interest that on February 15, 1893, members gave an exhibition of lantern slides in the Windsor Hotel, Glasgow. Sixty members and friends viewed 180 slides. This event was reported in the Journal of May, 1893, after which J. Rennie invited members to present duplicates of their slides to the Club. As a result the Club's photographic archives were boosted when W. Lamond Howie, Howard Priestman, J. Rennie, W. Douglas, and Cameron Swan presented copies of their work. They were given a generous vote of thanks at the Fifth AGM, 'for their kindness in presenting the Club with sets of very beautiful photographs taken by themselves'.

Mountain photography, although popular in their period, was considerably different from that in ours. There were no lightweight, miniature, auto-focus cameras that allow you to take a photograph – with one hand –

of your partner as he falls past you, while holding the rope with the other. Or, if in winter, when sitting on it. Cameras were bigger, therefore heavier, however, they gave large negatives – sometimes 7" x 5", which goes some way to explaining the quality of these early illustrations.

W. Lamond Howie was an interesting man. He was a pharmacist and a member of the Chemical Society. Joining the SMC in 1892, he contributed an article on mountain photography to the *Journal* (Vol. II pp. 249-253), which not only described how he had made his own telephoto lens (lighter than commercially made ones) from old opera glasses, but went on to give advice on photographic composition and aesthetics, recommending the use of a wide-angle lens to give scale.

On one occasion he went to the top of Ben Nevis wading across the River Nevis en route, carrying a 5ft-long wooden tripod, a smaller metal one, a heavy half-plate mahogany camera, six slides, 12 glass plates and a spare box of another 12, two lenses and a changing bag. And that was just his photographic equipment.

A good example of his work can be seen (Vol. III, facing p. 316). 'Ben Nevis from Carn Mor Dearg.' This is a composite 145° panoramic view using three photographs. You will be pleased to note that mounted copies could be obtained from Messrs. Stott priced at one guinea.

This photograph is also reproduced (Vol. VII, p.166), where it can easily be compared with a similar work by William Inglis Clark on p. 146. A print of Inglis Clark's photograph hangs over the fireplace at Black Rock Cottage.

William Douglas, for 18 years *Journal* editor, also produced exciting work, including an atmospheric study of the 'Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg from the N.E.' (Vol. IV p. 201) which brings out the 'colour' and texture of the rock, with figures in the top to give scale, while the mist swirls behind and below the pinnacle. I've seen few better photographs of the Inaccessible Pinnacle than this.

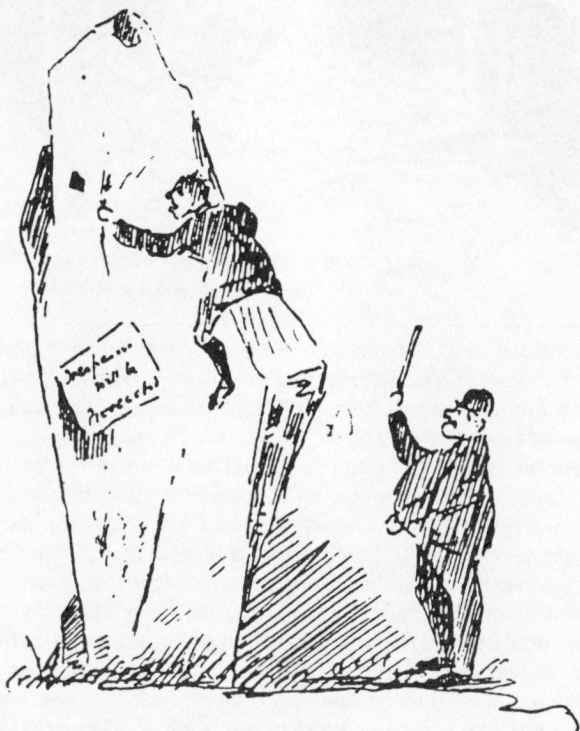
When A.E. Maylard became President in 1901, he and his wife held a reception for members on the afternoon of the Annual Dinner. Chamber music was provided by Coles' Piano and String Quartet, but more relevantly, around 1000 mountain photographs were on show along with drawings and other mountaineering-related material. This display included works by Naismith, Gilbert Thomson, Lamond Howie, and the Keswick photographer, Abraham. Lamond Howie's panoramic picture of Ben Nevis was considered to be 'the finest photographic representation of Scottish mountain scenery'.

William Inglis Clark, who joined the Club in 1895, became a prolific contributor to the *Journal*. Volume X contains his article on colour photography, (pp. 294-306), illustrated with four superb examples of his work, in particular 'In the Forest, Inveroran' (p. 304). Looking at them it is difficult to believe they were made in 1909. Inglis Clark recommended

the use of Lumiere's autochrome plates which had just come on to the market. Their advantage was that you only needed one plate and exposure rather than three as before – one each for red, green and blue. An obvious benefit was that cloud images were much sharper because they moved less in the course of one exposure rather than three. Inglis Clark volunteered to help any member who was interested in turning to colour work.

Drawings vary in kind – diagrammatic, humorous, and expressive. The diagrammatic drawings range from sometimes rather wooden copies of photographs to crag diagrams that are familiar to us in modern guide books. 'Bhastair and Sgurr nan Gilleann' (Vol. II, p. 214), is a line drawing by R. Dawson from a photograph by Harold Priestman, strongly lit from the left side of the picture to give an almost three-dimensional effect.

'Two Peelers', (Vol. IV, p. 140), is a lively and humorous pen and ink sketch of the kind often found in Victorian and Edwardian autograph books. The humour lies in the contrast between the hapless boulderer and the stout policeman attracted to the scene by the 'private' notice on the



Two Peelers

rock, past which the climber is progressing in a determinedly downward direction. This sketch also appeared on the back of the menu card for the Sixth Annual Dinner. Unfortunately, it is unsigned but I believe it may be by F.C. (see below) because of the handling of the hatched shading, and the freedom of line.

Another good example of this genre is 'Oh, my big hobnailers' by F.C. in (Vol. II, p. 204) – reproduced in *A Century of Scottish Mountaineering* (p. 12). F.C. was almost certainly Fraser Campbell, an original member,



who also illustrated the front cover of menu cards for the Fourth and Fifth Annual Dinners. His sketch for the Fourth (1892) shows Sir Hugh Munro and three other members on top of Ben Cruachan. He produced several drawings of boulderers (Vol. IV, p. 55; Vol. X, p. 110).

Sometimes the humour is unintentional but lies in our more disrespectful modern taste, as in a diagram by J. Rennie demonstrating a method of determining the angle of a snow gully (Vol. II, p. 92). See also *A Century of Mountaineering*, (p. 215). Never let it be said that the pioneers ignored the more scientific and educational nature of their mountaineering.

There are some excellent expressive drawings too. By this I mean drawings that attempt to show more than just a naturalistic impression of a scene, drawings that interpret nature using line, tone and sometimes distortion to create interest and atmosphere. Indeed it was seeing two of these that sparked off my interest in this subject. These two illustrate an article by A.E. Maylard on Ben Lomond (Vol. III, and face pp. 146 and 147).



Ben Lomond from the head of Glen Dubh.

Maylard, it will be remembered, wanted a serious agenda for the Journal. In all he contributed more than 20 articles, this being one of his earliest. The drawings, both titled 'Ben Lomond from the head of Glen Dubh' are done in pen and ink, using a lively technique to suggest light and form. The second uses a long-rising left-to-right diagonal in the foreground to give scale. The artist has distorted the height of the mountain to increase the dramatic impact of the scene. This is a legitimate tactic often used by artists, like Turner, for example, in his imaginative evocation of Loch Coruisk in the National Gallery of Scotland.

Although there are some crudities in the drawings, as in the trees in the first one, they are still interesting and of a different order than those previously mentioned. They are unsigned, are they perhaps by Maylard himself? However, I have found no similar drawings illustrating his articles.

One artist whose work appears often in the early Journals is Fred W. Jackson. Jackson, who lived near Manchester, joined the SMC in 1893. He climbed in Skye with Naismith in July of that year. Indeed it was Naismith who proposed him for membership. His method was to make sketches on the spot and to use these, sometimes backed up with photographs, to produce his final works. There is a good example of his technique illustrating his own article on Y Tryfaen (Vol. IV, p. 319). It is a fine dramatic contrast in light and dark showing the Cave Pitch, and is based on a photograph by J.B. Pettigrew.

Almost from the beginning the Journal exploited all methods of pictorial technique and approach, blending seriousness and humour, information and entertainment. What is surprising is not that this should have been the case, but that I should have been surprised to find it so.

The SMC holds a treasure trove of early mountain photography and other illustrations. It seems a pity that these should be seen so rarely, and only then in specialist publications. Perhaps the possibility of an exhibition could be explored. Such a project might attract sponsorship from the Scottish Arts Council or support from the National Library of Scotland. The work of these pioneers deserves to be seen again, and by a wider audience.

The quality of the photographic and drawn work in the early Journals surely justified and fulfilled the hopes of Ramsay, Maylard and the other visionaries of the Scottish Mountaineering Club.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON MOUNTAIN SAFETY – WEATHER OR NOT

By Brian Hill

I HAD OFTEN considered plotting the information given in the SMC Journals' Scottish Mountain Accident reports. Every new issue added another data point to what was becoming a lengthy time-series. Why were some years worse than others? Could these years be correlated with some other factor that could influence a climber's safety? The publication of the graphs in last year's Journal, displaying the trends of mountain rescue callouts from 1964 to 1992 encouraged me, at last, to have a detailed look at the accidents as reported in the journals.

Methodology:

As suggested in the graph published last year, there are a number of possible ways of looking at the data – total mountain rescue callouts or callouts involving fatalities or non-fatalities. The tables, often published, give additional break-downs summarising the total casualties which include those with injuries, hypothermia and illness, and incidents which include accidents with casualties, those cragfast, separated, lost and benighted. Initially, I looked at the casualties list although each time-series is broadly similar to any other; a dip or rise in one being generally reflected in the others with only minor differences here and there. For example, a year with a high number of fatalities is also likely to be a year with a large number of callouts and casualties, though the numbers involved in each may be substantially different.

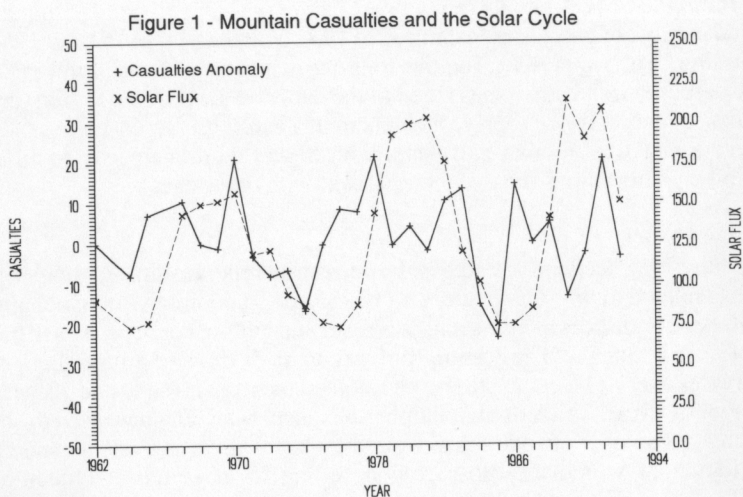
From the SMC Journals in my possession I was able to plot the annual total number of casualties from 1962 to 1992 with the years 1963 and 1966 missing. To compensate for the long-term increase in the number of casualties, a trend curve was fitted to the data and the difference from the mean, or anomaly, for each year calculated. Years with few casualties then have a negative number and years with higher than average a positive number. This allows for easy comparison with other data sets.

Solar Cycles:

I have long been interested in solar-terrestrial relationships, particularly those related to the solar cycle, an 11-year period of activity in which the number of sunspots increase and decrease. Sunspots occur in pairs as in the poles of a magnet. The leading polarity as they traverse round the sun reverses every 11-year cycle so that frequent mention is made of a 22-year magnetic cycle. Years of high number of sunspots are characterised by an increased number of solar flares from the surface of the sun and increased radiation of which the most obvious effect to us is more frequently

observed aurora. Intense flares are also responsible for black-outs by causing power surges through electrical transmission lines, and are also a frequent disrupter of radio communications, navigational compasses, and homing pigeons (even as I am writing this, two of our Anik series communication satellites suddenly developed problems within minutes of each other, supposedly caused by some cosmic outburst). Less well known is the effect on the terrestrial atmosphere, an unexpected result being the premature demise of a number of orbital satellites. These had been launched into orbit to skim just above our atmosphere free from air friction. However, during the periods of high solar activity, the atmosphere expanded to envelop the lower satellites and the increased drag took its toll.

Solar cycle relationships have been proposed ever since the cycles were first detected and are still vigorously argued and contested. There are correlations with crop yields, precipitation amounts, droughts, river and lake levels, frequency of hurricanes, power black-outs due to lightning strikes, the incidence of polar bears off Greenland, and storm tracks to name just a few. Most are directly related to the climate, thus crop yields are dependent on sufficient moisture, and the incidence of polar bears dependent on sea ice coverage to distribute them to the hunters. The two main objections to the solar-climate relationships are the inability to prove a physical mechanism whereby small changes in solar output cause significant changes in climate, and, particularly, that nearly all the proposed relationships which appear to hold true for a number of cycles, fail to hold true for a longer period of time and may even reverse. There are



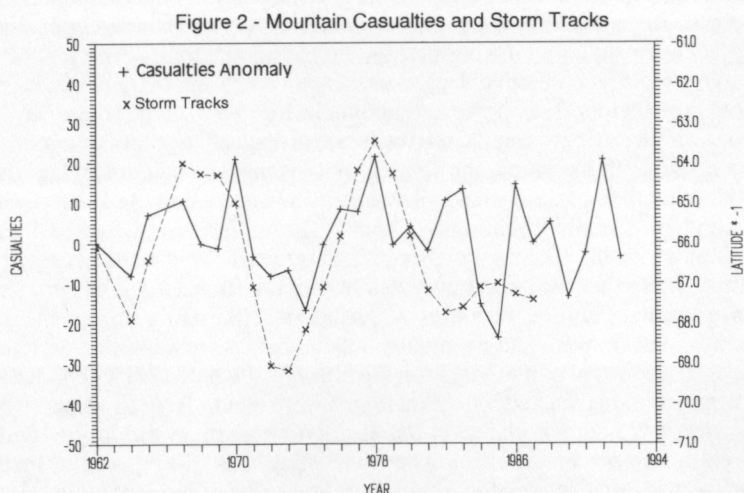
many counter arguments, of course, involving significant climate shifts, but it is not intended to get into an elaborate discussion, only to point out that many consider such relationships to be mere quirks of chance while on the other hand there is such an abundance of proposed connections, many often inter-related that it is difficult to dismiss them all out of hand. At the turn of the 18th century solar activity was at an all-time low with few sunspots observed for several consecutive cycles. On Earth, this was the time of the Little Ice Age when colder than normal temperatures were experienced and many glaciers re-advanced. It is difficult to accept this as just coincidence. For any comparison, however, the main difficulty is in constructing long enough data sets with consistent data, as observation techniques often change with time so that when comparisons with the 11-year solar cycle are attempted a minimum of 30 years of data is barely sufficient.

My own interest with solar climate relationships has been in establishing a correlation with the sea ice extent off the east coast of Newfoundland for the past 70 years and researching ice data back to 1800 which I hope will lengthen considerably the correlation. So having the time-series for solar activity readily accessible I plotted it against the anomaly of Scottish mountain accidents, as described above, in Fig. 1. Visually, there was a broad similarity between the two curves, particularly in years of maxima and minima. In the graph, the solar activity is measured as solar flux, the modern method of describing solar activity as opposed to the older visual method of actually counting the spots. The radiation is detected by a radiometer on the 10.5cm wavelength and is measured in watts per square metre. This is not meant to imply that in years of increased solar activity, the unfortunate climber becomes over irradiated, like a forgotten wiener in the microwave oven, and eventually succumbs. As we all know, weather plays an important part in safety on the hills and it would not be unrealistic to argue that many accidents or incidents were due in large to vagaries of the weather. A quick glance at the accidents reports in the Journal will reveal a number of instances where the party was ill-prepared to meet unexpected changes in the weather. Late returns, benightments, and hypothermia cases are the more obvious ones, but any sudden change in the weather can catch even the experienced parties at odds - avalanches in sudden thawing conditions, a sudden shower on a hard VS move, rapidly lowering and freezing temperatures hardening wet snow or wet ground to iron hard ice, a sudden gust of wind in an exposed situation. We can all think of several incidents.

Storm Tracks:

It seemed reasonable to assume that the implied connection between solar activity and incidents was the weather. I was aware of some work that had been done in relation to storm (cyclone) tracks, the author, B. Tinsley, demonstrating that the average track of winter (January to February)

storms in the north-eastern Atlantic were pushed further south during years of high activity. Estimating the latitudes from their publications, Fig. 2 displays those numbers with those of the casualties anomaly. For the first 20 years there appeared to be a higher number of casualties with decreasing latitude, as one might expect, so for easy visual comparison of the two data sets I displayed the latitude as a negative number in order to put the two curves in phase. This indicated that the years in which the average position of the storm track came closer towards Scotland (the north coast being about 58.5°N) then the higher the mountain casualty rate. It all made sense. In years of high sunspot activity, the increased solar flux expanded the atmosphere thereby altering atmospheric circulation and pushing the average storm track in the north east Atlantic closer to the Highlands, thus bringing more cloudy conditions, heavy precipitation, strong and rapidly-

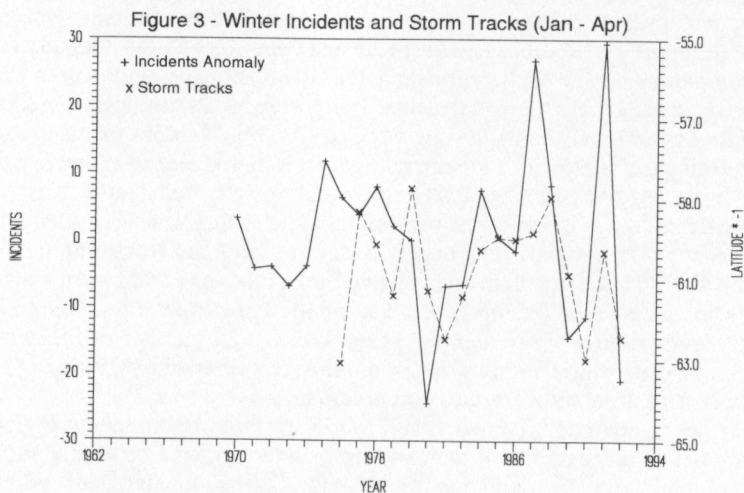


shifting winds, and large fluctuating temperatures from the effects of the passing warm and cold fronts – the combined effects of which only the sturdiest and hardiest climber could endure. Except, after about 1982 the correlation didn't appear to be so good anymore, and after 1989 I didn't have any storm data and the storm data I had for the previous years was for January and February only and I was comparing it with annual casualties. That latter point may indeed be a minor one as winter casualties tend not to differ greatly percentage wise of the annual total from year to year. Still if you are going to compare apples . . .

In seeking advice from a colleague he warned against trying to average storm-track data for the whole year. Tracks can vary greatly from season to season, by the time they are averaged every year could result in the same. He also cautioned that there could be 100 people like me trying to find weather correlations from the Amazon to the Arctic and the fact that I appeared to have found one was no more than chance alone, and he suggested that I try more specific correlations with the accidents such as temperature or precipitation.

Rather than taking the whole year, I decided on looking at the winter months January to April inclusive though that window as it turned out may, in fact, be too large as well. Though March and April are not really winter months I decided to include them as they are still winter climbing months, but I included all incidents occurring in those months whether they were winter climbing related or not. Since not all Journals included a seasonal breakdown of accident statistics I went through all Journal entries. I also decided to change tactics slightly and report the number of separate winter incidents rather than the number of casualties. In the long run this probably should not make any difference – the more the incidents, the more the casualties, but by including benignments and late arrivals a truer picture of difficulties in the hills can be drawn.

Consistent data was still a problem. Some of the early Journals in the period had no extensive accident reports and many in the early 1970s reported only some selected incidents. The earlier ones also ignored



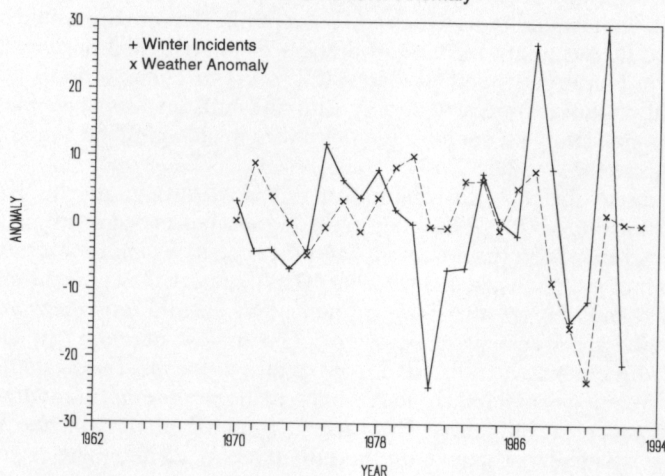
callouts for those benighted or unduly delayed. I have to admit I only made use of what was readily available to me. It is possible that mountain rescue authorities have more complete information. Again, I only made use of meteorological information and storm track data that was readily available here in St. John's, Newfoundland, the former being from 1970 and the latter 1976. The latitude of storm tracks crossing 5°W longitude was estimated from the charts as presented in the Mariner's Weather Log between 50°N and 70°N from January to April for each year. The average for the four month period for each year was plotted against the incident anomaly for the same period, Fig. 3, with somewhat ambiguous results. Again, it appears that the nearer the average storm-track latitude is to Scotland then the higher the incident rate with the converse being true, but there is still a large amount of scatter. This method of comparison is perhaps simplistic and a more sophisticated analysis would probably be of merit. As an example, if for the given period storm tracks were limited to exactly 50°N and 66°N then the average would indicate a latitude of 58° , right over the Northern Highlands where, in fact, no storm occurred at all. Nor does this approach take into account the duration of the system. A stalled low-pressure system hanging over the Highlands for days is essentially ignored since it is only counted once as it crosses 5°W .

Conclusions:

Meteorological data for a number of different stations throughout the UK from 1970 were available through the publications of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and those from Stornoway and Aberdeen were chosen as suitably bracketing the Highland area. The monthly precipitation amounts, temperatures, atmospheric pressure, and the percentage of normal sunshine hours, for the four months was selected for the combined stations and the mean and consequently the anomaly for each parameter for each year calculated. Each anomaly time-series was then compared with that of incidents. There were broad similarities in each of the comparisons but still a degree of scatter. Fig. 4 shows the results of summing the anomalies of temperature, precipitation and sunshine hours. In order to give each parameter an equal weight each value was re-calculated as a fraction of the maximum value of that time series. Again, for easy visual comparison, a negative scale has been used for the anomaly. Despite some scatter there appears that the number of incidents in winter has an inverse relationship with a combination of temperature, precipitation and sunshine. For example, years with a high number of incidents occurring in winter months are in months characterised by cloudiness, lower than usual temperatures and precipitation.

It can be argued, of course, that if a sufficient number of meteorological parameters are examined, then sooner or later, by chance alone, some combination will be found that 'looks good'. On the other hand, of the few

Figure 4 - Comparison of Winter Incidents Anomaly and Weather Anomaly



meteorological parameters available these three are ones that have a direct influence on a person's physical comfort. The one parameter omitted is atmospheric pressure but that does not have a direct influence on the physical well being unless one is susceptible to migraines, arthritis or rheumatism. It would also be interesting to include wind speed but that was not available.

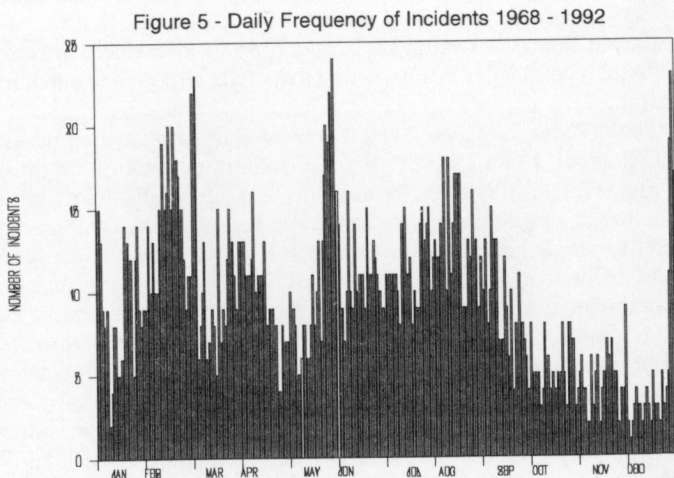
The results so far, however, even if arrived at by chance, are interesting and not illogical. I had initially perceived that precipitation might have been a major factor in relation to incidents, but the results do not indicate that. The logical argument is then that when heavier than usual precipitation occurs, people generally stay off the hills. That most incidents occur in cloudy, colder conditions is also perhaps an understatement since that is probably the most frequent condition on the hills but the reverse of this is that there are less incidents when the weather is sunnier and warmer and when more people would be expected to be on the mountains. However, the present study was still unable to take sudden weather changes into account.

The data appear to support the hypothesis that weather has an influence on accidents on the mountains. Whether this correlation has been arrived at by chance I leave to the statisticians to argue. It would be interesting to compare the fluctuations of mountain accidents or incidents with those of another sport or activity directly exposed to the whims of nature such as yachting or boating, or even motorway driving. Such associations would

reduce the probability of the correlation occurring by chance. A more detailed study of incidents with a particular weather pattern, like the proximity or approach of a low-pressure system might help demonstrate a closer relationship. The passage of such a system also implies rapidly-changing weather conditions which add extra perils. If a firm link could be established then it might increase awareness of the potential hazards of climbing in borderline weather. Organised meets of clubs, schools and other institutions are prone to going into the hills in less than ideal conditions since they do not have the flexibility in changing the venue to accommodate the weather.

Fig. 5 shows the daily distribution of incidents throughout the year totalled from 1968 to 1992. That one of the highest peaks occurs immediately after Christmas perhaps demonstrates the need to test the new ice axe or new pair of crampons, no matter what. The high peaks towards the end of February and May are also likely influenced by the mid-term break and Victoria holiday weekend respectively. The lowest period is in late autumn, a time when the hills are devoid of all but the most dedicated.

The correlations undertaken above have made no attempt to address social and economic influences. Even accepting that there is a 'flat rate' of 0.01%, or whatever, of people on the hills have incidents, there is still bound to be some year-to-year variation due to the number of people who can or cannot afford to go to the hills or who can or cannot buy adequate equipment. What about social interest? Was there a sudden rise in climbing



popularity after a particular television or movie spectacular which encouraged a surge of novices or tourists to take to the hills? If the rise in accidents in the hills continues at the present rate then we can expect about 320 incidents in 1993 with about 220 casualties. Winter incidents should be about 100. The weather anomaly for January to April was very close to zero and solar activity was about halfway down from the maximum, so all things being equal the actual figures should be very close to those above. (I have the weather data but do not have accident reports so it will be interesting to see!)

There is a strong logical argument for a weather influence on mountain incidents and it would appear that some degree of correlation can be made, though an accident of numbers cannot be ruled out. But why chance it? Next time your ex-spouse gives you an ice axe for Xmas, and sunspot activity is on the rise, and the forecast calls for lower-than-seasonable temperatures and cloudiness, take my advice – stay at home!

References:

- Scottish Mountaineering Club Journals, (1966, 1969-1993).**
- Hill, Brian T. & S.J. Jones. (1990).** The Newfoundland Ice Extent and the Solar Cycle from 1860 to 1988. *Journal of Geophysical Research*, Vol.95, No. C4, pp 5385-5394.
- John, J. Ivor. (1989)** Storm Tracks and Atmospheric Circulation Indices over the North-east Atlantic and North-west Europe in Relationship to the Solar Cycle and the QBO. Proceedings from the Workshop on Mechanisms for Tropospheric Effects of Solar Variability and the Quasi-Biennial Oscillation, NCAR, Boulder, Colorado.
- Mariner's Weather Log (1970-1993).** National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- Monthly Climatic Data for the World, (1976-1993).** National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Note: The tables containing the raw data are available through the Editor.

IMPRINTED ON THE NOSE

By Philip Gribbon

MY PARTNER and I went to climb on the unseen flank of the classic Cioch Nose in Applecross, where an irregular histogram of buttresses marched upwards on the rise and fall of the ridge. Such unfrequented rock held for us the wonderful air of mountain exploration.

We stood and looked at the new guide. Yes, we had to agree the vague gash must be the obvious 5m difficult chimney. About 30ft up, teetering on a steep slab, and faced by a mantelshelf on to a pelmet of fringing fronds I began to wonder. Where was the next traverse? Slimy ledges fading into space were not ready candidates. What about the shallow grassy scoop? A thrashing struggle up a curtain of woodrush leaves and over crumbling chokes hardly qualified, but it did lead to a well-used deer track traversing out under the upper section of our buttress.

Small snowflakes began to float out of grey clouds. We could just make out the totem, a curious pinnacle silhouetted against the sky and which gave a name to our route. We read: 'Surmount a small rocky nose.' Aye, there was the rub.

A nose? What about this short but abrupt wall wrapped round the edge of the buttress? Was this the nose? Unrelenting sandstone, massively jointed and blind cracked, stuck between ledges of vegetation. I got into a sentry box, clinging and leaning out. To the right, an uncompromising purple hippo-hide bulging flank capped with a moss mane; to the left a hanging inverted flake, tacked under the higher bedrock and towards it with some improbability a new scrabbling crampon scratched question mark. Where no man had gone before we would follow. It was an invitation to disaster, the most unhelpful of markings.

I descended and moved under the flake. Our route seemed to be overstretching its difficulties. Just a tentative attempt, once, twice. C'mon, a bit more motivation. Hooking my fingertips behind the flake I embraced its fin-like shield, legs wide, my arms all tension, and began shuffling awkwardly upwards. This is crazy!

Suddenly, there was a sharp crack and with a clean break a shaped block as long as my arm and as thick as my thigh came away. I landed in the bilberries on the ledge and then the overwhelming forces came at me. My ribcage was being stamped on by an elephant. Involuntarily, I heard my primitive sounds unlike any of those I have ever heard before. A gushing exhalation of air, a twisted groaning cry of suffering, not a breath left inside me, my heartbeat in a spasm, squirming like a worm, trying to escape martyrdom, on my knees, waiting for Time to begin again.

I lay panting, feeling more in control of my destiny, gathering specks of

sense out of my surroundings. Some minor stones were still clattering down the hillside, while my battered block lay beside me like a pet dog with its master.

'I'm alright,' I shouted down to my second.

'Are you?', came the reply.

Get back to normality, recover some *sang froid*, get on with the climb. All quite irrational. It would have been easy to retreat and escape.

'Surmount the nose' . . . before it became impossible. 'Don't hesitate' . . . go for it. Feet out on the hippo's flank, fingers embedded in the mane, struggling right to grasp frantically for the edge. It was sufficiently incut to hold, now pull and push, get an arm linked under a block, struggle, thrutch and roll exhaustedly on to the ledge above . . . the nose.

We tried the next crack. It didn't make sense with the guide book. It was getting harder. There were more crampon marks. Let's go home while we're winning. It's the means not the end that matters. My back hurt. You could say already I had the imprint of a memorable day.



... with a clean break ...

SCALING THE HEIGHTS

By Helen E. Ross

HEIGHTS and slopes are not always what they seem. From the top of a mountain the facing mountain appears much higher and steeper than it is, and a flat bealach between the two appears to slope upwards. If there are skiers descending the lower slope of one's own mountain they may appear to be skiing uphill. If the sea is visible, the horizon will appear unexpectedly high and the water will slope up to it. On descending to the bealach the ground becomes level and the facing mountain appears less formidable; however, apparent heights may still be slightly raised, and slopes continue to appear too steep from a distance.

Phenomena of this sort are well known, but their explanation remains controversial. The main types of explanation involve mistakes about eye level, slope, distance, perspective or angular size. I shall argue that slope illusions are best explained by the effects of perspective, while raised apparent heights are caused both by perspective and by the enlargement of the apparent angular size of distant objects viewed horizontally.

Mistaken eye level:

Knowledge of the true slope of the visual scene depends on knowledge of the angle of the eyes with respect to the gravitational vertical, and knowledge of the angle between the line of sight and the slope. Several authors have suggested that the direction of gaze of one's eyes is normally felt to be higher than it is, resulting in the overestimation of the height of all points and the overestimation of slope (Fig. 1).

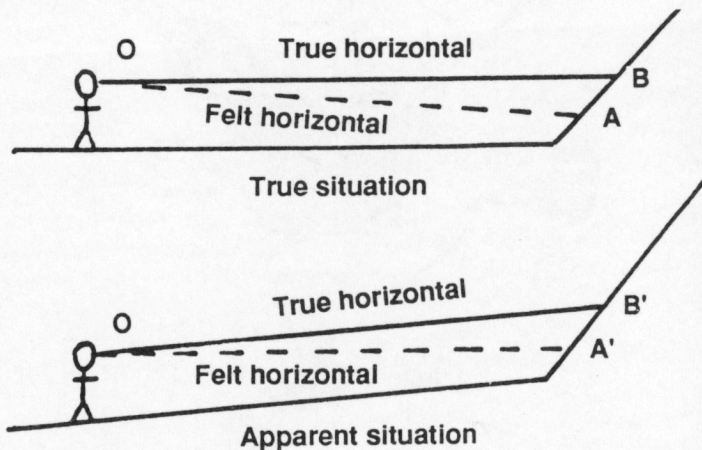


Fig. 1 Mistaken eye level. The gaze level OA is felt to be horizontal (OA'), and the true horizontal OB feels raised (OB'). Slopes are apparently steepened.

This theory supposes that the error lies in the calculation of eye, head or body position rather than in visual processing. The theory is partially supported by experiments conducted in the dark on judgments of eye level and of the apparent height of lights. However, mistakes about the height of mountains occur in broad daylight, even when the viewer surveys the scene with head erect and level gaze. The main source of the error must therefore lie in the interpretation of the visual scene.

Mistaken slope:

A common visual theory is that the descending slope of the viewer's mountain is taken to be less steep than it is: if the angle between the two mountains is correctly perceived, the opposite slope must appear steeper and truly horizontal points must appear to be above eye level (Fig. 2).

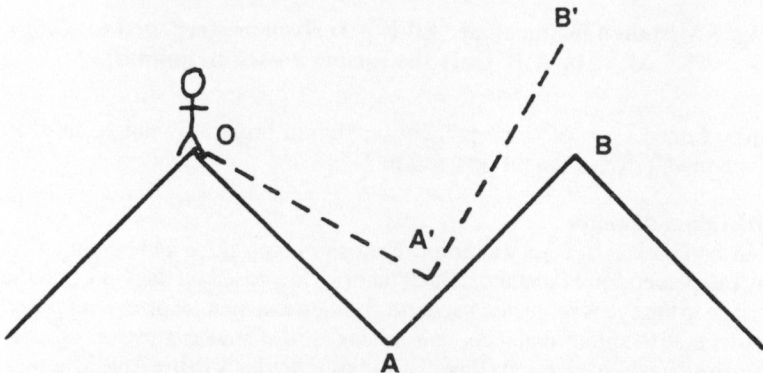


Fig. 2 Mistaken descending slope. OA is perceived as flattened to OA', and AB as steepened to A'B'. All points in the visual scene are raised in height.

However, this cannot be the whole explanation because the effect occurs when looking from a precipitous cliff over an empty gulf, or when looking over level ground, or when looking up to a coire headwall. It could be argued that the slope opposite is always drawn towards the vertical, regardless of the visual presence of a descending slope (Fig. 3). That could also raise apparent heights, but only if the slope is changed by apparently bringing the top nearer rather than by displacing the base backwards.

These slope theories fail to explain why descending slopes should be drawn towards the horizontal, or ascending slopes to the vertical. The slope errors are sometimes said to be an example of 'normalisation' towards a rectangular framework – but it is unclear why facing slopes of less than 45° should be normalised to the vertical rather than to the horizontal. An

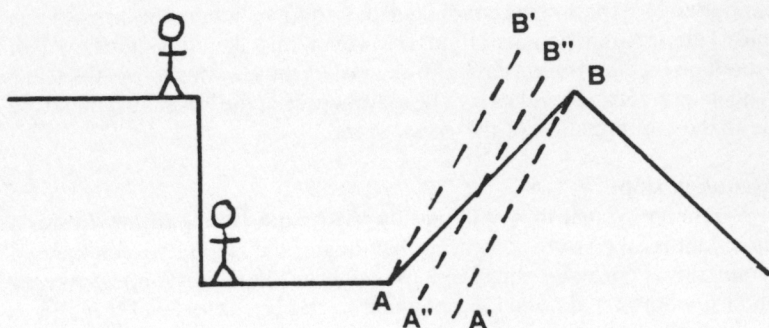


Fig. 3 Mistaken facing slope. AB is perceived as steepened to AB' or A''B'' or A'B. Only the former raises all points.

unexplained error of slope perception should preferably not be used to explain an error of height perception.

Mistaken distance:

A better class of theory attempts to explain both slope and height errors by misperception of distance. Such theories are based on the view that the image in the eye is projected back in a geometrical manner on to a supposed surface at a certain distance, and mistakes of distance must necessarily cause mistakes of size and slope. This view dates back to the Arab scientist, Alhazen, in about 1000 AD, and has remained the dominant theory of spatial perception to this day. However, antiquity and respectability do not make it correct.

The theory accounts well for the appearance of surfaces below eye level, if it is assumed that apparent distances are progressively foreshortened (Fig. 4). The decreased apparent distance flattens descending slopes, causes horizontal ground to slope upwards, steepens facing slopes, and raises the apparent height of all points.

Unfortunately, the explanation will not work for the apparent height of objects at, or above, eye level. Those at eye level must remain at eye level regardless of apparent distance; while those above eye level should appear too low and too near, or too high and too far. Thus a more general raising of height demands that lower objects appear too near and higher objects too far (Fig. 5). This would have the effect of flattening the apparent slope of a facing mountain – which is the opposite of what is perceived.

The theory can only be rescued by returning to Fig. 4 and assuming that perception is dominated by the lower part of the visual scene. While this

may be generally true, some interesting misperceptions also occur in the upper part of the visual scene (e.g. Fig. 7). It is therefore better to consider theories that encompass the whole of the visual scene.

Mistaken perspective:

Photographs of the visual scene show that many slope illusions are present in the visual image: the illusions are caused by failure to compensate sufficiently for perspective effects. Thus when looking along a rectangular

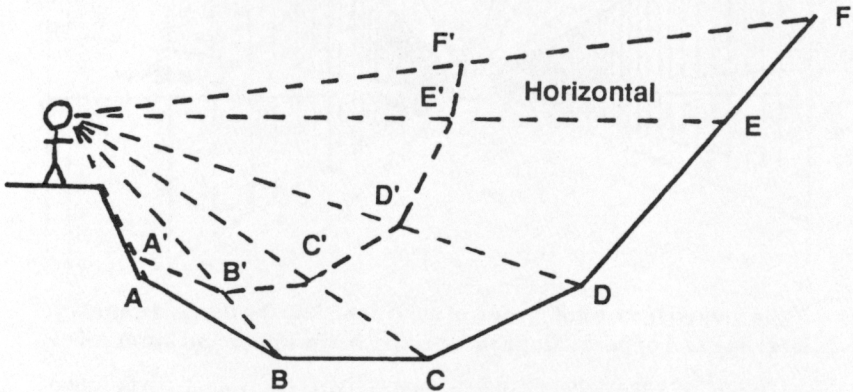


Fig. 4 Errors of foreshortened distance. All points below eye level are apparently raised, those at eye level remain unchanged (E to E') and those above eye level are lowered (F to F'). Descending slopes are flattened (AB to A'B') and all horizontal and facing slopes are steepened.

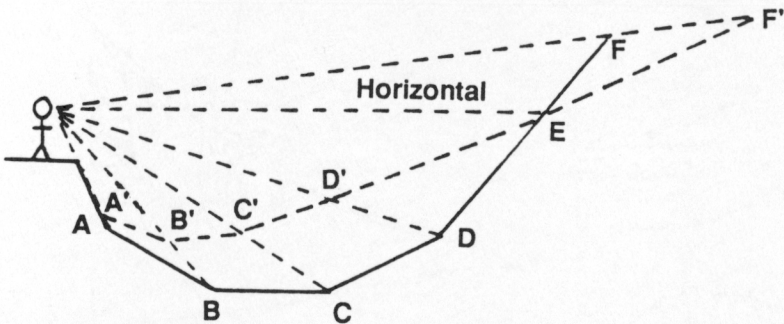


Fig. 5 Mixed distance errors. Points below eye level appear too near and too high, and those above eye level too far and too high. True eye level (E) remains unchanged. The facing slope appears flattened (CDEF to C'D'EF').

and level corridor, the image is one of converging spokes (Fig. 6). The lines below eye level slope upwards, those at eye level remain horizontal, and those above eye level slope downwards.

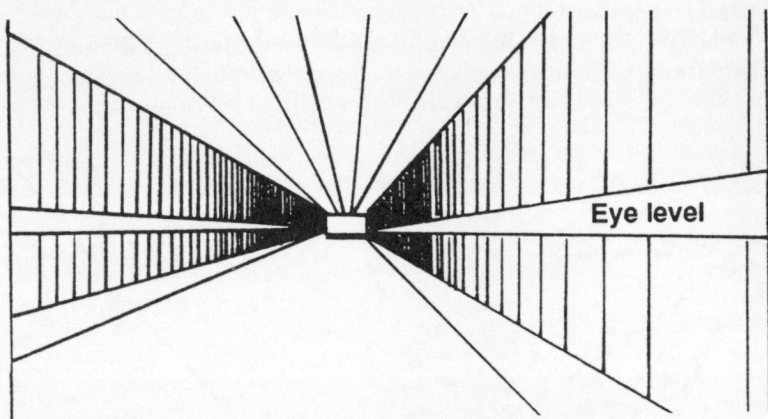


Fig. 6 Sketch from photograph of corridor, showing the horizontal eye level line and opposite slope perspective in the upper and lower scene.

It might be argued that mistaken perspective is equivalent to a failure of distance perception. This is not so, because even with excellent distance perception the apparent slope of the architecture is visible in real life. In a built-up environment we are rarely misled about the true horizontal and vertical, but in hilly country with few unambiguous cues we make frequent mistakes.

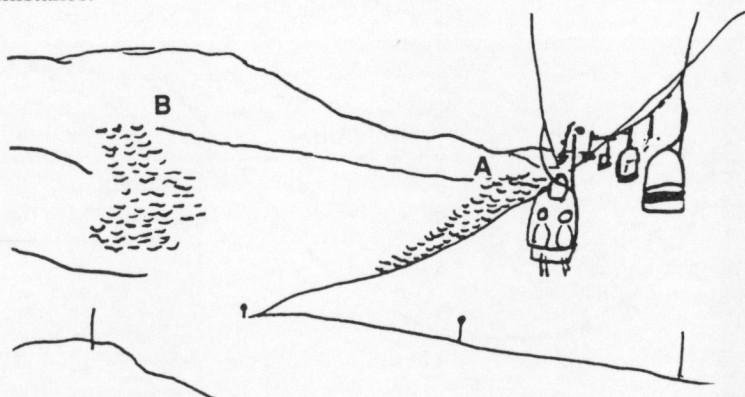


Fig. 7 Sketch from photograph looking up from the Féma chairlift, Val Ceniz, France. Skiers alight near the top of the mogul field at A, and may ski downhill to the other mogul field at B. The path appears to slope upwards from A to B owing to perspective.

The ambiguity is illustrated in the accompanying sketch of a ski area, which shows a path running apparently uphill from right to left (Fig. 7). In reality skiers ski down that path, and the false apparent slope is caused by the fact that the right side is farther away than the left and that the scene is viewed from below. The true slope is not revealed until one is nearly level with the scene.

Perspective also contributes to the raised apparent height of other mountains, and of the sea horizon, when viewed from a height. The raised viewpoint makes the line of sight more perpendicular to a facing slope (unless the slope is very steep), and thus enlarges the image in the upper part of the visual scene compared with the same scene viewed at ground level (Fig. 8). Viewed from ground level, a mountain may subtend a smaller visual angle than a tree; but viewed from a height it will both tower above the tree and subtend a larger angle than from the ground.

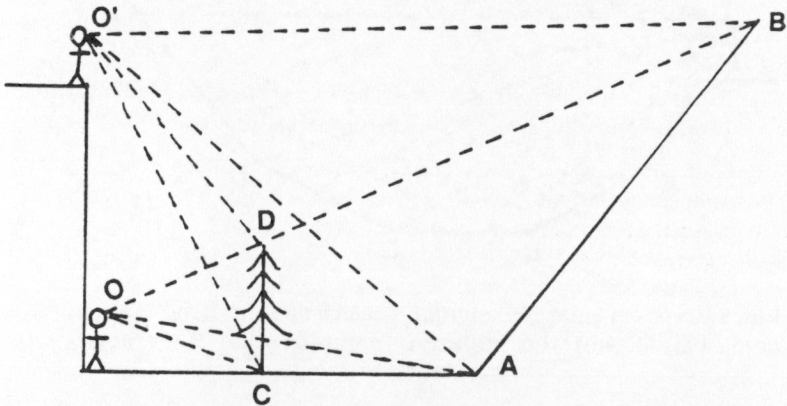


Fig. 8 Perspective and viewing height. Viewed from the ground, the slope AB subtends the angle AOB, which is slightly smaller than that of the tree (angle COD). Viewed from on high, the slope subtends the angle AO'B which is larger than AOB and much larger than that of the tree (CO'D).

Mistaken angular size:

Mistaken perspective may contribute to many slope and height illusions, but it does not explain the reported apparent raising of heights with ground-level viewing. If that indeed occurs, some perceptual scaling must operate over and above any effects that can be photographed. A possible contributory mechanism is the well-known phenomenon of size-distance scaling – the perceptual enlargement of the size of more distant objects (relative to their image size) that partially compensates for the diminution of the image with

distance. The maximum size of this enlargement is typically voted by my student class to be a factor of 3.5: they were asked to estimate the apparent magnification of distant mountains with normal outdoor viewing compared to their relative size in photographs. An open field experiment by Gilinsky (1955) also showed that apparent angular size enlargement increases with viewing distance, reaching a factor of about 4 in the distance. Apparent angular enlargement must raise the apparent height of all objects, but particularly those viewed horizontally since they are typically farther away. Slight apparent steepening will also occur (Fig. 9).

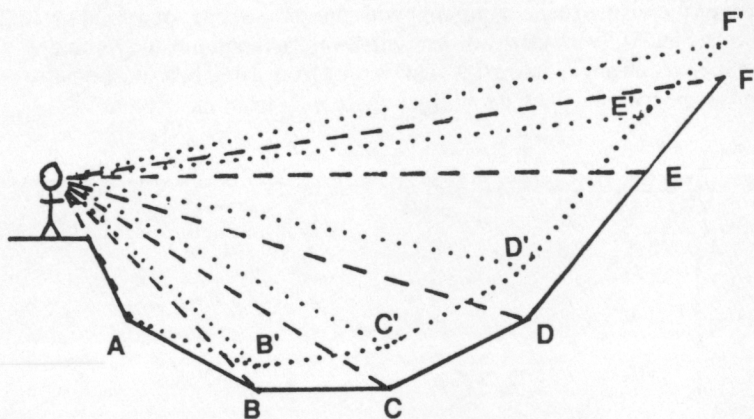


Fig. 9 Errors of enlarged angular size. All angular heights are apparently raised, but the apparent magnification is greatest with horizontal viewing.

Calculating the size of the errors:

Cornish (1935, p. 44) estimated the angular height error to be 6.5° , as measured from the mid point of the page containing his sketch of one mountain top viewed from another top. This method is questionable, but I found fairly similar errors from direct observation of several mountain sites. For example, from the summit of Beinn Bhuidhe, Inveraray (O.S. NN 204 187), when looking south-west towards the nearby top of Stac a' Chóirn, the latter appeared almost level with myself. The effect was so convincing that, as an honest Munroist (and lacking the confirmation of the promised Ordnance Survey pillar), I walked on to check out the next top. The true summit has a height of 948m, and the top about 830m, and the distance between them is about 1000m, giving an angular height error of 6.8° . Other sites gave errors between 3° and 7° .

It is interesting to consider how these errors of angular height compare with the angular size subtended by the mountain. The baseline is often

ambiguous, but it can be assumed to be the nearest piece of level ground between the viewer and the opposite mountain. The situation is sketched for the Beinn Bhuidhe scene in Fig. 10, where the heights above plateau level are shown. Calculations give an apparent angular magnification ratio of 3.56. Other sites gave smaller magnification ratios of 1.5 to 2.0.

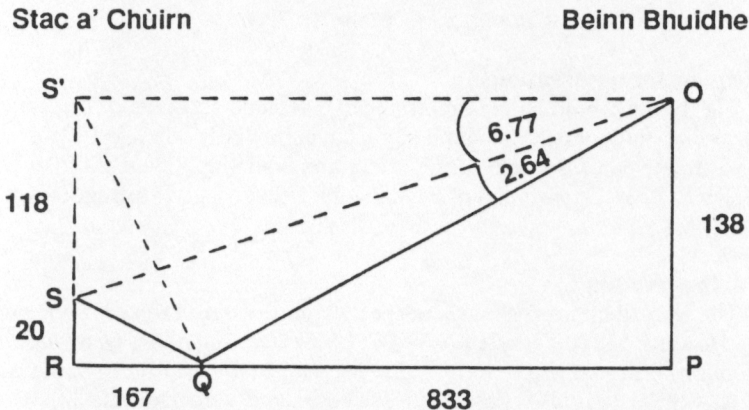


Fig. 10 Calculation of apparent angular enlargement. Beinn Bhuidhe has a height (OP) of 138m above the minor plateau (Q) at 810m. Stac a' Chùirn has a true height (SR) of 20m, but an apparent height (S'R) of 138m above the same level. The calculated angular height error SOS' is 6.77° . The true angle subtended by Stac a' Chùirn (QOS) is 2.64° , and its apparent angular size (QOS') is 9.41° , giving a magnification factor of 3.56.

Towards a conclusion:

These apparent angular magnifications are within the range usually reported for size-distance scaling and for other outdoor size illusions such as the moon illusion (the apparent enlargement of the moon on the horizon compared with its appearance high in the sky). The general explanation may therefore be similar for raised horizontals and enlarged moons: apparent angular magnification is greatest for objects viewed horizontally (normally farthest away) and is less for objects high or low in the visual scene (normally nearer).

To distinguish between this and other theories, further observations are needed. It is necessary to investigate angular errors at varied viewing distances and viewing angles. It is not known whether the angular height

error is a constant additive (as predicted by the mistaken eye level theory); or whether it increases with viewing height and height in the visual scene (as predicted by the perspective theory); or whether it increases with viewing distance and horizontal gaze, and with the angular size of the object (as predicted by the angular magnification theory). We clearly have a long way to go before the perceptual scaling of mountains can be mapped with the precision of an optician's perimetry chart.

Request for observations:

The author would be pleased to receive detailed accounts of these and any other outdoor perceptual phenomena, particularly where estimates or measurements of the size of the effect are available. Please write to Dr Helen E. Ross, Department of Psychology, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA.

Further reading:

The early literature on mistaken eye level and mistaken slope is reviewed by Howard, I.P. & Templeton, W.B. (1966) *Human Spatial Orientation*. London, Wiley. A recent technical paper on the topic is: Matin, L. & Fox, C.R. (1989) 'Visually perceived eye level and perceived elevation of objects: linearly additive influences from visual field pitch and from gravity'. *Vision Research* 29:315-324.

Mistaken distance and some other theories are described by Minnaert, M. (1959) *Light and Colour in the Open Air*. (Trans. H.M. Kremer-Priest, revised by K.E. Brian Jay) London, Bell (Ch.9). Both mistaken distance and mistaken perspective are described by Ross, H.E. (1974) *Perception and Performance in Strange Environments*. London, Allen & Unwin (Ch.3).

Mistaken angular size is loosely described by Cornish, V. (1935) *Scenery and the Sense of Sight*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. It is more precisely described in relation to the moon illusion by McCready, D. (1986) 'Moon illusions redescribed'. *Perception and Psychophysics* 39: 64-72. It is supported by several authors in an edited book by Hershenon, M. (1989) *The Moon Illusion* Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. The field experiment on angular size matches was reported by Gilinsky, A.S. (1955) 'The effect of attitude upon the perception of size'. *American Journal of Psychology* 68: 173-192.

The early history of ideas on size and distance perception is outlined by Plug, C. & Ross, H.E. (1989) 'Historical review'. Ch.2 in Hershenon (cited above).

THE NO-HOLDS BARD

By Mike Jacob

MOVEMENT SLOWED to immobility and I was becalmed. I tried moving forwards a word or two but, no, it was all so misconstructured. How could I capture the reality of the moment, a fleeting feeling, and convey it across space and time? I retreated to the safety of a solid paragraph then scored through the offending phrases. They objected to being crossed out, like slighted friends. There's nothing wrong with you, I thought to them; just not suitable, like an inappropriate move. All manner of well-rounded holds available, yet I couldn't perform with elegance, precision or style. There was no doubt that I could get up the thing, sling down some well-worn clichés as aid, but I needed inspiration for a new metaphor or fresh simile so that they, you, would appreciate the artistry involved.

I fumbled through a lexicon of gear; no help there, everything seemed so stale and lifeless. Exasperated, I tried the sequence again, and again failed. Would I ever be able to just move from left to right and allow the words to flow fluently across the rock, an uninterrupted progression, as naturally as, say, the

*sluice, chute, cascade, rush
spout, fall, splash, gush
of mountain Burns?*

I looked around, down the ramps of accomplished progression; a mistake, one that I recognised from past experience, a sure sign of broken concentration. Which way now?

The self-doubt: perhaps the problem was within, did it all matter much anyway? I could easily give up, nobody would know, I did not wish to add to

*'all the cloud screen
of human witness, dictionaried sport;
and that these rainbows steal
the selfless joy mountains can make us feel' ¹*

Was I not in danger of becoming like the tourists I had seen at Holyrood Palace, too preoccupied living through their camera lenses to see what they were looking at, that all they would have at the end would be negatives? But, deep down, I feel that this isn't a true analogy. I hoped that I was more like the photographer I met once at Camasunary who had been there two, three weeks; up and down Bla Bheinn and Bidein Druim nan Ramh with

¹ From *The Company of Hills* by G.W. Young.

extremely heavy equipment, bivvying out, waiting to capture that one coincidence of light and atmosphere that would transpose onto print with dramatic effect. He missed the one that we found and is now imprinted in the mind; the one at sunrise on the high gabbro ridge as a whole white sea boiled, billowed and flowed out of coire and over bealach as waves over rocks awash and, above, the calm blue sky and hot sun . . . Later, when we told him about it, he suffered agonies of frustration; not that he had not been there with his cameras but because he had not been there at all. So, yes, it was important to get it right, for although I could avoid the moves or even go down, I would have to come back sometime. My motive was genuine, I was doing this only for myself. I was trapped

*for thoughts that breathe and words that burn,
syntax, wordplay, parts of speech,
this noun, that hold out of reach,
expression, message, picture, surd,
sentenced to search for THE WORD*

intangible, like the bond between climbing friends that ties them together more than the rope, like the resonant chord in mountain writing played by many composers.

And so, needing some kind of affirmation, I sought out my companions there, for although I was on my own I could choose whomsoever I liked. The clouds of doubt drew apart as voices rose from the pages with a direct impact. Donald Orr touched me with his 'nebulae of sodium streetlights in the blackness that always evoked a feeling of loneliness and melancholy' so that I cried out from deep down, having hovered over the same desolation, suddenly evoked. Then the creativity and originality of Iain Smart breathed wisdom and empathy in my ear. Jim Perrin, too, and he tells me, straight; to look, to think, to feel and see, you can be taught these things by words, this is how experience is shared . . . you feel it inside – synaesthesia. Then he, in turn, quotes from Dorothy Pilley, for him the one who comes nearest to the underlying why of mountain literature and there, in her words 'the sense of an uncapturable significance will arise, and its secret – for the mountaineer as for any other pilgrim of passion – is almost an open one. Therein, reflected, is the experience of being ardently alive'.

I realised that, after all, I wasn't off route. It does matter – the desire to communicate is really a voyage within, perhaps of perception, certainly of soul-baring. But, more than that, the difference between Holyrood Palace and Camasunary and the reason you would choose to be at one rather than the other, an uncapturable significance, an intangible word, will be a constant taunt.

Inspired, I tried the sequence again. Suddenly, it was all over. With relief, movement started to flow and I knew that, this time, I would achieve an end.

ANGEL FACE

By Andrew Nisbet

MY FAVOURITE cliff is Coire Mhic Fhearchair. Nowhere else so sharply highlights the special atmosphere of climbing in the mountains. As the drips run down your arm, says the cynic. Perhaps the answer is the spectacular backdrop, an expanse of wilderness out to the north spiked with such distinctive peaks, even as far as An Teallach. Surrounding you is the classical coire with lochan and steep walls neatly enclosed but not so close to be oppressive. Dream about the windless day when the whole atmosphere is captured inside the reflection on the lochan. And if it's your first visit to the coire and you've wisely chosen to approach from below to capture the sudden panorama as you breach the coire lip, then a windless day will provide a mountaineering highlight.

Curiously enough, this beautiful approach is a serious distraction from the real issue of climbing some rock. On only a handful of my visits, have I seen another party climbing in the coire, so my rating of it as equal to Cloggy or Scafell suggests that either I am biased or a lot of folk are missing out. Not that I should complain about the lack of competition for new routes, but it has intrigued me over the years (and now they're all done!). The walk is so memorably long and arguably tedious – once you've seen the view a few times – that from an armchair at home, it is easy to think of more appealing places to go. And even if you get as far as Torridon, there's always Diabaig. The new guide has hugely increased the popularity of Diabaig but as yet, made no difference to Coire Mhic Fhearchair. I only threw off the millstone of prolonged scenery when I awoke to the climber's functional approach over the top. My choice of line has varied over the years but the latest is the left side of a stream just left of the main screes which leads directly to the meadow down from Coinneach Mhor and the clifftop. This, of course, isn't described in the Guide.

And then the descent gully leads to Angel Face, close in profile, and impressive enough to convince me in the early days of its last great problem status. But a visiting rock star could never have found the same thrill as I did climbing near my technical limit on a line of outrageous appearance. Even pre-warned, you might have problems standing tentatively under it and trying to switch off the calculating mind which will divert you towards the more amenable Groovin' High.

Early days revolve around a weekend in 1980 when Brian Sprunt and Greg Strange climbed Pale Diedre and The Reaper while Neil Spinks and I climbed easier things. The Reaper was named after Brian's impression of their first attempt on the line. Brian was well known for his bold and powerful style of climbing and launched out on-sight up the wall heading for its most obvious feature, a big crack on the right side. About 50ft from his runners and running out of strength, he managed to rest with his chin

hooked on a hold, hence avoiding meeting The Name. It's ironic that the much more improbable Angel Face is easier and safer, but the contrast is the origin of its name. So, when Greg commented on the impressiveness of our route, Olympus, and showed surprise at the grade of VS, he having just climbed what we assumed was the hardest route in Scotland (at least it should have been, based on Brian's colourful tales), it made me realise that the walls here were not always what they seemed. The ascent of Pale Rider, which we guessed at E4 and climbed at E1, confirmed the theory after a six year gap and suddenly opened up the whole coire as climbable at a sensible grade (although Ling Dynasty later disproved that theory).

The quartzite is very smooth with little friction on the vertical faces but rough and often knobbly on the horizontal plane. I've heard from more than one geologist that the knobbles are metamorphosed worm casts but there must have been a lot of worms. The key to unmasking this improbable appearance is that there are square-cut holds composed of this rough surface but these are invisible except from close up. This lack of contrast also hides the line of Angel Face (a series of shallow ramps) from the ferocious surrounding walls. Edging-style boots are therefore most suitable for Coire Mhic Fhearchair and positive fingery climbing is the style. Again contrary to appearances, the quartzite has many thin cracks and these have often eroded into wedges, sometimes too small for fingers but excellent for small rocks and RP's. Logie Head is also quartzite and similarly well protected, although being newer and softer rock, the runners are bigger and finger jamming is more common.

There is a lot of chat here because my ascent – with Chris Forrest – of Angel Face went smoothly, with faith in the ridiculous reinforced by an abseil beforehand. Not a single loose hold was found nor any brushing done, so future cleanness is guaranteed. But, of course, there are problems. As a high north-facing mountain crag, it is a bit slow to dry and one has to wait until every last snow patch has melted to end the drainage. But the end pillars of the Far East Wall (Reaper wall and Groovin' High wall) are quicker than much of the rest, particularly as they get the sun from 3.30p.m.-10.30p.m. in June. So my impression is that a few dry days is plenty and the walls are quicker to dry than their reputation indicates.

The slow-drying section on Angel Face is the left-slanting groove just below the traverse ledge, which, unfortunately, happens to be the technical crux. After the big holds of the first pitch, suddenly the fingers have to work and as the groove leans away, the feet have to keep working out on small holds to stay in balance. There are continuous small runners but eventually those without steel fingers will be obliged to show some commitment. The traverse ledge itself initially seems a relief but slowly dawns the realisation that there are no runners so a bold wee wall above it before entering a tiny ramp increases the excitement. The ground above is ludicrously steep but every time you're forced against it, a step left gains a new crackline and keeps the angle conceivable. The improbability demands lots of runners,

and backups to the lots of runners. So, however many you take, you'll run out of smallish wires. And just as you do, you'll have been forced out left under a roof into hostile territory. But as you reach 'the edge of nowhere', all is saved and even your diminished rack fits the crack, but some faith is definitely needed. Even when the tension is released, you're bound to remember the ridiculous exposure. The reassurance of those final moves provided a highlight which I will never forget.

SNOW ON THE HILLS

In the night, while we slept, the snow came
stealing over the hills with a soft step
and lying at the door
white in the dark
by morning deep and even.

And the country returned to the days of no roads
but ways through the hills
where man and beast passed on foot
and wind and buzzard and moonlight on wings.

Against the icy blast a tinker with his pack trudged on
longing for the shelter of the glen.
A messenger from the King, must cross the bealach before
dawn.

A murderer from his crime, flees to high corries – fast.
And a few douce clergy and merchants, coin heavy,
abandon their carriages, held fast in the drifts,
to curse and trauchle on
to the yet too distant inn.

The armies of Montrose knew these white hills
spent bitter nights amidst the blizzard and the dark
in threadbare plaids,
before the dawn, cold water and oatmeal.
Yet still this frozen land was home.

But now the curtains open
children burble with delight
and quickly tourie bunnets, mitts and coats are struggled on
and Dad enjoys the snowball fight.
The sparkling snow lies pure and deep up on the hill
a shepherd and his collie cross the stile
and phantoms of the long ago are quiet awhile.

Lynne McGeachie.

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

By I.H.M. Smart

Here are some serendipitously acquired memorabilia which shed a dim light on the frugal past, a wan light on the spoilt-brattish present and a gloomy light into the sadim market-oriented future.

YESTERDAY

REPRODUCED below is a letter from Robert Lawrie, one of the few pre-war suppliers of climbing equipment, written in May, 1946, in answer to a request to buy a 100ft length of hemp climbing rope. There appears to have been only one such length available in the whole country, possibly in the whole of Western Europe, and it was hanging on the market. (Nylon rope was still over the horizon). It indicates how quiet the climbing scene must have been after the war.

TELEPHONE NEWARK 786.
TELEGRAMS INLAND: ALPINIST, NEWARK.
CABLEGRAMS: ALPINIST, NEWARK.

ESTABLISHED IN 1887.

OFFICIAL SUPPLIERS OF CLIMBING BOOTS, ETC., TO
THE MOUNT EVEREST, POLAR EXPEDITIONS, ETC.
MILITARY BOOT AND SHOE MAKERS.

Robert Lawrie Limited,

ALPINE AND POLAR EQUIPMENT SPECIALISTS.

WARTIME ADDRESS

YOUR REF.

OUR REF. EL/CC.

53, Godman Street,

Newark, Notts.

(LATE OF SURNLEY)

May 10th 1946.

I.H.M. Smart Esq.,
52, Arden Street,
Edinburgh. 9.

Dear Sir,

We thank you for your letter of the 7th to hand and for your enquiry fir standard weight Rope.

We have at the moment, a 100-ft. length in stock but offer this subject to being unsold at the time of ordering. We are enclosing a price list herewith, shewing other lengths available and would suggest that when ordering, you give an alternative length.

Looking forward to the pleasure of serving you,

We are,

Yours faithfully,
pp. Robert Lawrie Ltd.

J. Director.

The leaflet that accompanied the letter is also reproduced; it, in its turn, indicates the minimal resources available at a time when happiness was having survived the war. At that time a schoolboy who could climb Severes hadn't done much compared to someone a few years older who had parachuted behind enemy lines at night or waded ashore at Anzio. We halfings kept very quiet; the day of the juvenile delinquent was yet to dawn.

Soft iron nails, like clinkers and hobs, by the way, were not all that bad for rock climbing and not as rock-destructive as tricounis. If they survived today they would have to be banned or the classic climbs would be abraded away; it is just as well that Vibrams were invented.

R. LAWRIE, LTD., 53 Stodman Street, NEWARK, Notts.

A limited supply of Best Quality

Manilla Climbing Rope

is again available and the following lengths can be offered subject to being unsold at the time of ordering

ROPE (Full Weight)	£	s.	d.
60 ft. Length	1	1	6
80 ft. Length	1	3	3
100 ft. Length	1	9	3
120 ft. Length	1	15	0
150 ft. Length	2	3	9

ROPE (Three-quarter Weight)	£	s.	d.
60 ft. Length	13	9	
80 ft. Length	18	3	
100 ft. Length	1	3	0
120 ft. Length	1	7	6
150 ft. Length	1	14	6

LINE (Half Weight)	£	s.	d.
60 ft. Length	11	3	
80 ft. Length	15	0	
100 ft. Length	18	9	
120 ft. Length	1	2	6
150 ft. Length	1	8	0
200 ft. Length	1	17	6

POSTAGE IS EXTRA ON ORDERS OF LESS THAN 25/- VALUE.

R. LAWRIE, LTD., 53 Stodman Street, NEWARK, Notts.

IMPORTANT EMERGENCY WARTIME CONDITIONS.

1. Unfortunately, many of the goods shown in this catalogue are now discontinued with no hope of replacement until after the war. However, if you will let us know of any articles in which you are particularly interested, we will do our best to meet your requirements.
2. **REGULATIONS.**
Owing to present regulations, we regret that catalogues may not be sent out without a nominal remittance of 3d. having previously been paid.
3. **SHORTAGE OF STAFF.**
When sending in parcels, we should be grateful if customers would put their name and address on the outside as this greatly facilitates matters at this end. Also on account of this shortage, we are reluctantly compelled to adhere strictly to our terms of CASH WITH ORDER, and regret that we are no longer able to allow any credit.
4. **NAILING.**
Owing to the acute shortage of nails, we are compelled to reserve the more efficient types for the toe position and forepart of the boot only and are using hobs, or the nearest available, for the heels, waists and centres of soles.
5. **SHORTAGE OF MATERIALS.**
We regret that, owing to the very limited supply of leather and nails we now find it impossible to undertake repairs to footwear other than of our own make.
6. **DELIVERY.**
We regret that owing to special Service work which must of course have priority, it is impossible for us to give any definite delivery date, but you can rest assured that we shall do our utmost to complete any order you may place with us as quickly as possible. This particularly applies to handsewn boots stocks of which we are unable to accumulate owing to pressure of service work.

R. LAWRIE, LTD., 53 Stodman Street, NEWARK, Notts.

P.T.O.

TODAY

Here is a report of a rescue of a new-age hero from the Lairig Ghru as reported in the *Dundee Courier* on September 6, 1993.

Emergency call-out—via Kent!

A PHONE call from the Lairig Ghru at lunch time yesterday set in motion one of the oddest mountain rescues the emergency services have tackled.

Two 17-year-olds, one from the Aberdeenshire village of Drumoak and the other, Neil Lawrence, from Kent, were walking from Braemar to Aviemore when the English teenager got into difficulties.

Equipped with a mobile phone in his backpack, he phoned his girl friend in Tunbridge Wells.

He left a message on her answering machine saying he was unable to continue.

When she returned home and heard the message, she contacted Neil's parents, who in turn contacted Grampian police.

A rescue operation was set in

motion, controlled by RAF Pitreavie, who had a Belgian Sea King in the area on an exercise as part of an air force exchange.

The injured teenager was found a short time later and airlifted from Corrour Bothy by the Sea King to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness, where he was treated for a knee injury before being released.

TOMORROW

Things may have been difficult yesterday and indulgent today but what of tomorrow . . . Here is a conference program for 'Customer Care in the Environment'. It is a chilling document written in 'future speak'. In years to come we will no longer be citizens of our land or members of a community belonging to our own land but 'customers' having what was once our hope and glory marketed back to us by quangos and private interests who offer the topographical equivalent of commercial sex.

The market that these dull, humourless people serve has no loyalty, no culture, no morality. If market research suggested that it might be profitable they would turn Hallaig into a theme park with a diorama of men lying on the green at the end of every house that was and the girls returning from Suisnish, not as in the beginning, but every hour on the hour during the tourist season. These people are organised, have the ethos of a nasty regime behind them and mean business, in the several senses of the last term. If we don't actively oppose this sort of take-over and defend our land and community we will have our own mountains packaged and flogged to us as if we, the real owners, were mere 'customers'. England seems to have already fallen; the battle for Scotland can't be far off. Our national pastime of misdirecting our energies is now more than usually inappropriate. Surely, even we, in spite of our aptitude for easy subornation, can fend off these ponderous twits when they cross the Border. The alternative is to be 'managed' by bearers of the 'Sadim touch' which, you may remember, is the 'Midas touch' in reverse — all the gold it comes in contact with turns to

lead. We have to find a better way for Caledonia – land of the mountain, flood, brown heath, shaggy wood and all. Sir Walter Scott when making up this list did go on to say that we were stern and wild – we should rummage in our collective unconscious and give these little-used attributes a try – for once.



COUNTRYSIDE
RECREATION
NETWORK

Customer Care in the Countryside

A practical review of techniques to meet customer
needs and expectations in countryside recreation

*29th September
to 1st October 1993*

University of Nottingham



COUNTRYSIDE
RECREATION
NETWORK

The Conference

We recognise the increasing importance of customer service and quality management. We need to develop new approaches and adopt consistent standards. This applies as much to those involved in managing countryside recreation as in any other part of the service sector. This Conference will bring together practitioners and academics to discuss the theory and practice of customer care in the countryside.

The Conference will:

- review the characteristics of visitors to the countryside and their expectations;
- review the need for customer care and quality management programmes in a countryside context;
- consider how such programmes can be undertaken; and
- investigate how performance can be measured and monitored.

Who Should Attend?

All those who are concerned or involved in countryside recreation and are keen to extend their knowledge and gain an insight into the latest thinking and practice in this area. This will include researchers, planners, managers and consultants and farmers concerned with providing quality countryside recreation. Participants are likely to work in local authorities, national parks, national agencies, voluntary organisations owning and managing land, higher education, consultancies and voluntary organisations representing users of the countryside

Conference Programme

Wednesday 29th September

- 18.30 Dinner
- 19.30 Welcome to the Conference by CRN Chairman Derek Casey (Director of National Services, The Sports Council)
- 19.45 **Experience Overseas**
Frans Schouten (Synthesis International): Best practice in caring for customers in countryside recreation and rural tourism in mainland Europe.
- 20.30 **The UK Experience**
Nick Allen (Human Resources Manager, Center Parcs Ltd): Caring for Customers at a major managed recreation site in the UK.
- 21.15 Discussion

Thursday 30th September

- 09.15 **Meeting Customer Expectations**
Dr Sue Walker (Centre for Leisure Research): A review of customers' expectations and barriers to participation at both managed and informal sites in the countryside.
- 09.55 **How to Care**
Speaker to be announced: The theory of quality management and customer care in the context of countryside recreation.
- 10.35 Coffee
- 11.05 **Review of Performance to Date**
 A "question and answer" session to a panel of members of countryside user groups representing a range of activities and different interests.
- 11.45 **Training**
Gerry Carver (L & R Leisure plc): The role of staff training in caring for customers.
- 12.15 **Discussion on Morning Papers**
- 12.45 Lunch
- 14.00 **Workshops - Round 1**
- 15.30 Tea
- 16.00 **Workshops - Round 2**
- 17.30 - 17.45 Presentation of Results of CRRAG 1992 Conference Customer Survey
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 Fringe Events

Friday 1st October

09.15 Feedback from the Workshops

10.15 Discussion on Feedback

10.30 Coffee

11.00 Making the Connection to Performance

Tony Bovaird (Aston Business School): What is the relationship between setting customer service standards and establishing performance indicators?

11.30 Customer Care in Practice

Professor Terry Stevens (Swansea Institute of Higher Education): The relevance and future of customer care and quality management in countryside recreation.

12.15 Discussion on the Morning Session

12.35 Chairman's Closing Remarks

12.45 Lunch and Depart

Workshops

Three Workshops will explore the practice of customer care programmes and quality management in various countryside contexts. Delegates will have the opportunity of attending two workshops on the Wednesday afternoon, and should indicate their preferences on the booking form.

The Workshops will each run twice and will consider the following topic areas:

Paid Access Sites (2 Workshops)

1. "The Big Sheep", Bideford (Michael Turner, Manager)
2. The National Trust (Hilary Lade, Manager, Fountains Abbey)

Training Schemes (1 Workshop)

3. Wales Tourist Board "Welcome Host" Scheme

Open-access Managed Recreational Sites (3 Workshops)

4. Inland Waterways (Ken Dodd, Marketing & Communications Manager, British Waterways)
5. Country Parks (Ian Fullerton, East Lothian District Council)
6. Forest Parks (Chris Probert, Forestry Commission, Kielder Forest)

Environmental Sites (1 Workshop)

7. Nature Reserves & SSSIs (Martyn Howat, Senior Site Manager, English Nature)

Footpaths & Rights of Way (1 Workshop)

8. Calderdale (Ian Kendall, Calderdale Countryside Service
& the Pennine Way (Tony Philpin, Pennine Way Co-ordinating Project))

NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN

By Colwyn Jones

MUSSORSGY, the composer of 'night on bald mountain' was Russian. If he had been Czech, our situation could not have been more appropriate. My sleepless mind drifted thus, as we sat in our rudimentary snow hole 7000ft up the North Face of Ganek on the Czech side of the High Tatras. At 3a.m. memories of a restless, hostile and warring Europe, from a restless, hostile and no less warring school history lesson, suggested a bleak possibility. Could Russia have been part of Czechoslovakia when Mussorsgy wrote this inspirational and predictive piece of music? I turned, intending to suggest this to my two shivering companions, when the Custodian suddenly asked: 'Have you any of that dental floss stuff with you.'

As I searched in the top pocket of the rucksack I was sitting on he added, by way of explanation: 'I'm hungry.'

'Ye cannae eat dental floss,' I chided. 'Anyway we shared the last food at midnight.'

'Naw, it's to see if I have anything stuck between my teeth.'

I didn't ask if he found anything to assuage his hunger, he may have offered to share it.

A week previously we had flown from Heathrow to the mausoleum of Prague's Ruzyně Airport, on a fresh spring morning. Customs had demanded two of us change the habit of a lifetime and shave our beards off. Could the harsh ethics of Czech winter climbing outlaw the beard as an artificial aid. Ethics which were enforced at national borders. A precedent, perhaps, to help in the preservation of the Scottish mountains? No, it was just a disenfranchised customs official longing for the power of the pre-perestroika days. We belatedly emerged, with whiskers intact, into the sunshine, to greet our hosts for the trip. The Czech State Bank Mountaineering Club.

A fleet of Skodas and a very comfortable BMW of recent acquisition, though dubious legality, conveyed us to various homes to enjoy the selfless hospitality of our hosts before travelling to the Tatras.

The overnight Prague to Poprad express was admirably priced. A bottle of whisky cost more than return sleeper tickets for eight of us. Though they were purchased at the local Czech price, not the western tourist one.

Next morning the delightful salmon pink peaks of the High Tatras turned searing white with the arriving dawn. We disembarked at the mainline Strba station and a rack railway, built to serve the local ski resort, took us up to Strbske Pleso with its ski jumps. We then walked the pleasant few kilometres through the pine woods of the Mengusovska-Dolina valley to the, grandly named, Horsky Hotel at Popradski Pleso. An adequate base for the first week.

The rough, clean granite of the High Tatras straddles the Czech-Polish Border and forms the northern end of the Carpathian range which stretches south into Romania. They are larger than the premier Scottish mountains, though not on an Alpine scale, so climbs can be completed in a reasonable day from the valley base.

Our first days were spent on ascents of Vysoka (2560m), Ganek (2459m), and Mala Basta (2285m) by fine 10 to 15-pitch mixed routes of Scottish winter grade 3/4. Ice falls on Kopky (2354m) gave excellent sport, though conditions were thin and by late afternoon the snow proved soft and tiring in descent. Our guidebook was written in Czech and gave only summer grades, while the advice of our two Czech hosts MD (Mad Dentist) and 'Bellybutton' only confused the issue when trying to gauge the difficulty of routes.

While climbing to the summit of Rysy (2499m) we found the enchanting Chata Pod Rysmi Hut (2250m) was open and from the col just above it we could gaze at the most intimidating cliff in the area, the Gallery.

The hut is normally closed in winter but Victor the warden was in residence. He had been to Scotland and after a few attempts we found the names of some mutual friends. Thereafter he insisted we stay and climb in the area and plied us with quite the most delicious tea. Next day nine of us arrived for an attempt at the Gallery on the North Face of Ganek.

MD, complete with home-made terrordactyls, joined Bill, the Raeburn Custodian and I in the obvious left-hand couloir. We think the summer grade was V. Diff., and it was imaginatively called Klasicka Cesta (the classic route).

A week had been spent finding the summer grades bore little relation to the difficulties encountered. A late start, three on a rope and thin conditions seemed a poor combination, but we started well, knocking off four pitches in the steepening gully. The virgin névé gave first time placements and the protection, which was excellent, appeared right on cue. The sun shone on the valley behind and we could see the three other parties on the distant Western Butress, as we quickly rose above them towards the clear azure sky above.

The fifth pitch led to some tricky mixed climbing ably led by the Custodian, and he moved effortlessly up to another bomb-proof belay. After a week of climbing we were relaxed and enjoying the exposure afforded by the vertical wall.

No ice lined the gully, so MD led out left on to the face which overhung below us. Retreat was problematic from here, but we thought little of it, our sights were firmly fixed above.

From a crowded belay I led into an awkward but well-protected chimney and had run out half a rope-length before traversing to the foot of an icicle between two smooth buttresses of granite. A lovely drive-in to frozen turf helped me away and I was relishing the exposure when for once an axe placement didn't feel right. The pick was well embedded in the cold névé

but felt alarmingly flexible. I hefted it out to try again and was concerned to see the pick remain in the ice. My mind wrestled with the problem, I had spare picks but the alloy head of the hammer had fractured, without prior warning, through the two retaining bolt holes. Then the penny dropped, the spare parts were of no value. My voice clicked into gear and I started to curse. My tirade harangued the hammer, the ice, the mountain, the world, but especially my conceited sense of patriotism which had prompted the purchase of the Scottish-made ice tools. I could hear righteous friends saying: 'I told you so.' Smiling Czechs reciting my acclaim of the quality of Scottish-made climbing gear back at me. Obscenities echoed around the Gallery.

The rope had gone reassuringly tight raising the stress on my sole remaining tool. The flow of invective stopped. The axe in my left hand was of the same manufacture as the broken hammer. It felt solid, but could it also fail without warning?

'A bit of slack please' I whispered.

The Custodian shouted: 'What's the problem?'

'Give me some slack please,' I hissed.

'What?'

'Give me some slack you deaf b.....,' I yelled. And the profanity recommenced as I undiplomatically explained the problem to my bemused second.

Hanging on the vertical ice by one axe and my front points, I suddenly realised how slippery it was. I gingerly placed two Czech ice screws which seemed strangely thin. Is titanium really as strong as steel?

Diplomatic relations were re-established with the Custodian and he politely suggested step cutting. I was about to castigate him for being frivolous when, of course – step cutting. He had often reminisced about the technique during long bothy nights. 'An excellent form of retreat,' I could hear him say. Why hadn't I listened, and what a place to start using it.

I eventually trusted the ice-screws, clipped them, and pulled the axe out. Starting at knee height I cut huge steps and started to inch my way up the icicle. An hour later and about two metres higher, the step cut through to the underlying rock and I placed a No. 2 Friend in a purpose-made parallel crack. I belayed, and soon the Custodian climbed past, with a bearing best embodied in W.H. Murray's descriptions of J.K.W. Dunn, 'unflinching reliability'.

The rising timbre of a solid peg placement echoed down the main gully and I soon scrambled up on a taut rope, quickly followed by an ashen-faced MD. Safely on the belay, and after lengthy examination of the fractured hammer, he announced a preference for seconding the remainder of the route. We had carried a spare ice tool every day, but considered it an unnecessary burden on the long walk up to the hut. By some strange madness, which I still cannot explain, I volunteered to lead and continued with my sole remaining and suspect axe. In the narrowing couloir my

crampons scraped the bare rock as I bridged breathlessly upwards. Almost a rope length out I reached a comfortable snow bay. The combination of a deep gully and, by now, late afternoon made it appreciably darker. My mention of the deteriorating light was initially met with a resigned silence, though the message was crystal clear: 'Get on with it.' However, a later couthy comment prompted me to take my sunglasses off. This admitted more light, but the loss of prescription lenses cancelled any improvement.

I belayed and was joined by my two panting companions. The light had suddenly gone. A surprise to those of us used to the extended twilight of more northern latitudes. The Custodian attached his head torch to his helmet and with 'studied ease' led the remaining 20m over the cornice – topping out in complete darkness.

Suitably relieved and illuminated, we readied ourselves for the descent. This followed a shallow gully before traversing onto a subsidiary ridge at the eastern end of the Gallery. We reasoned the three other parties would have used the same descent, however the poverty of footprints was disquieting. We yo-yo'd in the gully for over an hour but could find no trace of any route.

MD suggested we wait until morning. This stimulated further frenzied searching until, by a majority decision, we discontinued our nocturnal search and resigned ourselves to the ignominy of benightment. Perhaps we would enjoy company soon.

After digging a rudimentary snow hole, we sat on the gear. The Custodian and I had the luxury of bivvy bags. MD had a plastic raincoat. 'Czech Gore-Tex' he joked. We shared the remaining food and sat looking over the Border into Poland. The distant orange lights of Krakow glowed some 100km to the north, while the pure white, twinkling constellations above seemed closer at hand. Only seven hours until dawn.

We sang every song we could recall and many we couldn't. Autobiographies were told and dentistry was discussed at great length. After a few anecdotal stories, I was glad I had not admitted to losing a filling. We speculated at whose door the blame for our predicament could be laid. The others, by their absence we correctly surmised, had retreated by abseil. We also, rather prematurely I felt, boasted it was something we could tell our grandchildren. The night was magnificent, still and clear, as if the cold vacuum of outer space came down and claimed us. No one found respite in sleep.

At 5.30a.m. the sky brightened. Suddenly I felt strangely glad to be there. To survive a night of stress and uncertainty with such staunch companions was a privilege. An experience to be cherished, though hopefully, never repeated. We discovered the previous night's exploration had been too far down the gully. The descent soon warmed us and we arrived, albeit a little frost-bitten, back at the hut in time for breakfast and the good humoured, though relieved, jibes of the well-rested contingent of the party. And a cup of tea.

TILICHO SOUTH FACE

By Steven Helmore

When they were up they were up, when they were down they were down . . .

THIS WAS what happened on Tilicho South Face, Annapurna Himal, October 1990.

Our high point was a poignant moment: the red glow of sunset on Annapurna North Face, the inhospitable steep snow, and Pat and I trying hard to convince each other to continue into the freezing night. We are both beyond our previous experience, both tired after investing four weeks of effort on this face, both committed to a lightweight push beyond this never-ending headwall. Then Pat drops his gloves, and the sobering reality of 2000m exposure, a bone-chilling wind, the lack of ledges and the threat of frostbite tip the psychological scales. A groan of disappointment, an ice hammer smashed angrily into bare rock, and our numb minds were forced to concentrate on a dark, dangerous descent.

The British Army expedition to Tilicho 1990 was led by Matt, (Capt., Royal Engineers), Pat (Capt., Gunners), Ade (Paras), Dominic (cadet), Charles (doctor) and myself (taxpayer) made up the team. Sherpa Co-operative from Katmandu did a good job providing portage and managing local admin. The climbing experience was pretty limited given the task at hand . . . nor had the team met or climbed together before. A brooding dissatisfaction with finances and horror at the sight of the route was polarising the party – Pat and I, Matt on his own and the other three, out of their depth.

Our base camp was the original Annapurna north side site, pioneered by Herzog in 1950. Indeed, inspiration for our line came from his superb black and white panorama in the back of ‘Annapurna 8000m’. We shared this atmospheric place with a small Spanish expedition, and the ghosts of 20 or so unfortunate victims of the giant, whose names were inscribed in a simple memorial.

A closer inspection of our wall, the Grand Barrier, as it is known from the north, revealed only one likely line. The 7000m wall from Nilgiri in the west to Annapurna was for the most part guarded by seracs and avalanche swept walls. Above base camp, however, a ridge emerged from the bottom of a rocky headwall. Gaining this would solve the lower half of the barrier, and if climbable, would lead to Tilicho’s summit plateau at about 7000m. From here a relatively short snow plod remained.

Our first task was to force a route up the very steep west side of this protruding ridge. Grass and exposed scree led to a campsite at 5000m, soon to be named Crow Ledge. Our military compositions may have been

chemical, biological and nuclear warfare proof, but they were no match for Tibetan crows. These combative creatures avoided poisons and traps but were finally defeated by a plastic barrel from Base Camp.

Our initial efforts to climb the ridge avoided Bertha, a prominent hanging serac, by taking a long gully to the right. This provided me with two days of loose entertainment at about HVS. And 300m of fixed line later, I was leading yet another crumbling pitch when a sudden storm produced conditions more reminiscent of Parallel B on Lochnagar. We were forced down to Crow Ledge to think again.

Matt and I then investigated Bertha from closer quarters. Though overhanging and the size of an office block, Matt coolly led right up into a cave under the front wall. Ominous creaks emanated as I jumared hastily towards him.

'Your lead,' he said, pointing at the traverse right – overhanging glacier ice dripping onto gritty, sloping ledges. Two bruising pendulums later, I gave up the arms-only ice axe traverse, and began half-heartedly sweeping snow from the steep slabs beneath. Hooking small holds beneath, I inched up and right. With grim satisfaction, I gained a gritty crampon hold and an ice axe driven into Bertha's base. After a much-needed snarg runner, the gritty overhung traverse continued to a small rock roof. Matt fell and pendulumed towards me. After some recovery of composure, he torqued his way up the overhanging rock corner, up to the steep but clear ice above.

I was quickly becoming very unhappy in the waterfall belay, and talked him out of further progress. Our day's work was done – the way to Camp 1 was clear. A heavy duty static line was hung here, avoiding the worst of Bertha's wrath, but every afternoon rock and ice slides made this a frightening place. The troops named it Bomb Alley.

Camp 1 was spectacularly positioned at 5350m on a snow platform cut into the ridge. Drops of 1000m on three sides gave tremendous views, while the way on led upwards towards the headwall. After a steep initial slope, the ridge thinned to a one-foot wide helter-skelter, half-a-mile long. This was superb climbing, but a lot of balance and nerve were required on this exquisite formation. We placed Camp 2 at 5650m, below the avalanche cone at the foot of the headwall now rearing above us.

The headwall was about 1200m high, and seemed most easily gained via a steep snow cone on the right. Bands of slabby limestone, ice fields and snow flutings hid an obvious line. After a very loose initial section, we were finally climbing less rotten rock and connecting steep snow.

At this stage there were only three fit climbers, with Ade and Dom incapacitated by altitude sickness. Our non-climbing doctor, Charles, learned to jumar by lying flat on the ground and dragging himself across base camp. He then proceeded to carry loads to Camp 2, filming us with a clockwork 16mm cine machine. His debut on the snow arete was carefully monitored by ropes from front and rear.





Morale could have been better among the troops. Matt's under-budgeting and 'hands off' leadership had lost their confidence and the increasing physical demands soon began to expose unexpected vicious conflicts. Our leader became increasingly isolated. By the time Pat and I had survived an interesting night descending the snow arete with one functioning head torch, exchanging tales of adventurous pasts, we had become good friends and a sympathetic climbing team.

Matt, Pat and I rotated climbing above Camp 2, and carrying loads. The thin 7mm line snaked upwards, and it was becoming clear this endless headwall would test our dwindling resources severely. The unremitting steep ground gave no respite in the form of ledges, and each pre-dawn commute to the top became longer. At the same time I could see the friction between the two captains getting worse. Rarely have a climbing pair been worse matched.

October 12 dawned clear as usual, and while Matt and Pat left before dawn to reach the rock before sunrise, I descended to the 5000m camp to fill a rucksack with food, fuel and rope. The journey up again was lonely, weighed by a large rucksack and balancing along the thin snow arete. But arrival was a relief, and I was soon relaxed in an open tent melting snow, contemplating the mist-shrouded walls above me. The sun dipped slowly behind Annapurna, bathing the peaks in a soft Alpen-glow – a beautiful spot.

High above me on the headwall, shouts from my invisible companions penetrated the still and cold air. I tried casually to make out what they were saying. Why was there only one persistent shout? With mounting alarm, I hauled myself out of the entrance to confirm my fears. It was a scream for help.

The unlikely climbing team had come to grief. After belaying Matt on two hard, mixed pitches, Pat had had enough and vetoed continuing in favour of a return before dark. In the inevitable ensuing argument, Matt untied the lead rope, and with a suitable expletive threw it away in favour of a 50m length of static line. While Pat started down the 500m of fixed line, Matt edged outwards towards a promising arete in search of a way on. When he fell, the long bruising journey to oblivion was halted by the 50m of static rope. Suspended tangled in gear, unconscious and with a broken arm, his situation at over 6200m was somewhat precarious.

It was Matt's pleas for help I could hear. Pat was out of earshot halfway down the fixed ropes. After a three-way shouting match, Pat set off upwards again. After packing water, clothes and a first aid kit I hurried upwards into the gathering darkness. I reached them just above a traverse at 6000m. To my astonishment they were still at it.

'Bloody incompetent belaying.'

'... you, we'll leave you here and come back in the morning.'

'Pulled the bloody pegs out.'

My arrival restored some peace, and I placed myself squarely between the two combatant captains.

Matt was in obvious pain, with bloody face and bent arm, but was gritting his military teeth. Pat was sent ahead, while I fed Matt some Fortral and water. The abseil descent went slowly but surely, only the changeovers needed our help. Some overhanging sections added to Matt's bruises as he capsized and fell moaning on to the next belay.

At 3a.m. we were back at Camp 2, and decided to rest before continuing. The battered captain was examined, but not fed, and by midday we had negotiated the snow ridge and bumbled down to the top of Bertha. Matt free fell the overhanging abseil, landing on an unappreciative Pat. The mist and snow had arrived as we met the Doc, but at last we could relax in the presence of professional help and let others take over.

While Pat and I slept off our exertions, the hastily-assembled operating team of Ade, Dom, Sherpa Pemba and the cook helped the Doc set Matt's arm after heavy and alcoholic sedation. Ade and Pemba were then dispatched to summon help from Jomumsom. They reckoned on calling out an army helicopter, thus saving Matt a long and painful walk out.

Their run to Lete in 14 hours in new snow broke a few records, where they met our liaison officer, fortunately in residence at the local inn. After some tense diplomacy talking their way into the police station, and narrowly avoiding a British Embassy veto, a machine was summoned from Kathmandu. Two days' later, after a sluggish turn over the Annapurna Glacier, the clattering Allouette dropped onto our 'H' and Matt was on his way to the sanctuary of an army hospital in London.

After the noise had subsided, Pat and I adjusted ourselves to the task ahead. Our supplies at altitude were thin, and we were now just two. We reckoned on one visit to the top of the fixed ropes to tidy up after the accident, and then a lightweight push for the top. We lacked the resources and patience for a continued siege. The heavy new snow slowed us down, but after four days we were ready for the big push. We were glad at last to be 'going for it', but suitably nervous.

At 2a.m., October 20, we emerged into the windy Himalayan night and staggered towards the bottom of the fixed lines. Six hours of jumaring later, we started on new ground with very steep hollow snow which led after three pitches to a foot-wide, loose ledge under a huge block. The angle began to ease after another three pitches, and it looked as if the desperate mixed ground was giving way to moderate ice slopes at the top of the headwall. Still no bivouac sites. Time and sunlight slipped away, and with wind and darkness the temperature plummeted.

We hung on a small poor belay and weighed up the odds. We had with us food, fuel and duvet jackets, but no tent or sleeping bags. There were no ledges up here even to sit on. We would have to continue upwards towards the summit plateau. Though the 18 hours of effort were beginning to take their toll, adrenalin seemed to be enough to force us on.

Then Pat dropped his mittens. Though we had emergency spares, the psychological scales were tipped, we had to retreat. Down climbing and three abseils found us on the small rock ledge.

At 6350m, we shivered until dawn. There was, however, one final ironic twist left. Our parched throats cried out for liquid, but the valves in two gas cylinders we had relied on were both damaged. Had we continued and committed ourselves to the summit plateau, this serious failure may well have been fatal. (It transpired that of the stack of 60 we had on the trip, two more were also unusable.)

Dawn came slowly, but fortunately there was no wind. Without water for 30 hours, the headaches had now set in, and the downward move was obligatory. Back at Camp 2, rehydration and sleep brought a new burst of enthusiasm, but physical and mental exhaustion were too much for my long-suffering partner. I was on my own. Better men than me would have tried to complete the climb alone, though better men than me have died doing similar things. There were fixed ropes up the headwall to within three pitches of our high point. The way to 7000m and the plateau was 'only' a steep snow slope away, and the summit a 2km glacier plod. The weather seemed stable. What frustration.

To my eternal regret, and probable continued survival, I accompanied Pat down to base camp and said goodbye to Tilicho's South Face.



ACHIRABACH, GLEN NEVTS

CLIMBING IS ALL ABOUT HAVING FUN

By Rob Milne and Louise Travé-Massuyès

ROB: – ‘What?’ I shouted over the sound of the driving rain against my Gore-Tex bivvy bag. I could hear a faint voice. ‘I’m all wet!’ was the reply from my big wall partner. Her bivvy sack was just in front of mine on the sloping bivvy ledge that is the top of pitch 6 on Half Dome’s North-west Face (VI 5.10 A2).

‘Oh!’ I replied unenthusiastically. ‘Are you still warm?’

‘I’m getting pretty cold,’ Louise shouted back.

‘Oh, that’s okay, there is a dry jumper in the haul bag if you need it.’

I tucked deeper into my bag. I was still warm and dry, and after raining all night, it couldn’t rain all day also. After all, it hadn’t rained for three weeks. ‘It should stop soon, call if you get too cold.’

LOUISE: – For most of the night, buried quite cosily in my sleeping bag – entirely made of feathers – I had so far been able to ignore the more and more continuous plunk, plunk, of the water drops on my bivvy sack. But little by little, I began to feel a wet sensation around the hip and the shoulder of the side on which I was lying. Nothing alarming. My bivvy sack was Gore-Tex and hence supposed to be waterproof. I decided that this was just my imagination and fell asleep for another half-an-hour. However, the wet sensation did not disappear, it got worse instead. My hands could now feel the water on my clothes and the part of the sleeping bag between me and the ground seemed to be a wet sponge. I had to accept that it really was raining and that the bivvy sack I had borrowed from a friend was not as waterproof as it was 10 years ago when it was new.

This is bad luck, I thought, three weeks without rain in Yosemite and now . . . I was not happy, I had been looking forward to this big-wall climb for years and now that I was here, already six pitches above the ground, it was raining. Getting wet in a thunder storm in the Pyrenees is acceptable since it’s only two hours from Toulouse where I live, but getting such rain in sunny Yosemite seemed senseless. Better not to think too far, my immediate problem was that I was getting colder and colder. ‘Quelle galere! Rob, I am all wet!’

ROB: – In spite of the bad weather, I was feeling happy. It was the end of May, I was part way up Half Dome, it hadn’t rained in Yosemite for three weeks and the climbing looked great. Not that we didn’t have trouble getting here.

I guess the first problem was when my bags got left behind at Heathrow. Three days without my business clothes or climbing gear was okay. It was only a technical conference and the weather in Seattle was great, so I was happy.

I wasn't that bothered that the Camp 6 campground was full, I pretended to look for friends until we found a friendly campsite. It was all part of the adventure.

If I wasn't working on my sun tan, I wouldn't have enjoyed the approach. We tried to go direct from Mirror Lake to the base of Half Dome. Several people had said it was okay, but no one knew exactly how the path wandered between cliffs, slabs and dirt filled gullies. One of the problems with Americans is that they don't tell you that they don't know, they just say: 'I'm pretty sure it's obvious.' For most of the day we worked our way up a near-vertical torture chamber of dirt and trees. I was happy to be heading for the wall. Until we were misled by a cairn.

The next few hours were a nightmare. Fighting through the impenetrable willow with a pig of a heavy haul bag, in boiling hot sun. A series of cairns kept leading us deeper into a hopeless maze of dead-end willow paths. At least five times we backed off and tried another promising path, only to get ensnarled in the willows again. The face was close, but out of reach. Our plan to save a few hours turned into an all-day ordeal.

LOUISE: – I did not know what to think. In France, I would have decided long before that we were going the wrong way. But I had learned from an earlier experience in Yosemite, when trying to get the base of Snake Dike on the West Face of Half Dome, that a few simple sentences in the guide book like: 'Follow the trail up. After the second waterfall, bend to the left. Pass a dead lake and go up again to reach the base of the climb,' could actually mean more than six hours' walk, part of it in the bushes, without any trail or indications. Mother Nature wild style. That's American adventure, go for it and discover by yourself.

Now, our present adventure was becoming hell. After all, we were not in Brazil, where you need a machete to make your path in the heavy bushes to get the bottom of the climbs. *C'est trop!* I was getting tired, my bag was heavier and heavier and the face of Half Dome still far away.

ROB: – Finally, near dusk, we got back to the right trail, too exhausted to even reach the base of the wall. But the bivvy was great. As the sun turned the face the colour of gold, we found a large flat rock with a inspiring view right down the Yosemite Valley. I ceremoniously thumped that pig of a haul bag against the ground and said nothing until the tea was ready. It had been a real trial, but the wall looked great and the weather was good. It was paradise.

The next morning we felt recovered and ready for anything. In a couple of hours I was traversing the snow band to the start of the climbing. Three parties were above us already. That was fine, we didn't want to be hurried. It was so nice to be free of the haul bag that I didn't mind the giant rack of hardware.

Full of enthusiasm and energy, I started leading at high speed. Minutes later I reached the first hard section. I was here to have fun, so rather than

work hard, I aided all the tricky bits. After all, we had only been in the Valley two days and done one warm-up climb. The climbing was very enjoyable, until I finished the aid ladder on pitch 4.

Snaking above me was a fist crack behind a flake. In my youth in Colorado I loved jam cracks. But after years of French limestone I was out of practice. It was rated 5.9, but felt desperate. I concentrated hard on each jam. The lower hand reaching up in the crack, the upper hand pointed down from above. I kept saying to myself: 'Relax, relax, work to get good jams and slam in Friends as fast as possible.' Working from one Friend placement to the next I struggled up the crack like a convulsive snake, but I did it. Five minutes after it was over, I decided it was one of the best jam cracks ever.

LOUISE: – This was my very first experience of big wall climbing and we had decided to go in pure style. The leader reaches the belay and pulls the haul bag, the second uses the jumars to go up and clean the pitch. Since I could not lead the hard sections, I knew that I would have to jumar most of the climb, although I hoped to either lead or second some pitches. Contrary to what one can think, the prospect of a lot of jumaring did not bother me, it seemed another attractive feature of the adventure. What was important to me was to live this trip, to be in the middle of the face, to see the bottom of the wall farther and farther away and spend three days – or more – out of the world.

Everything was going well so far, a sunny afternoon, little impressive crack pitches for beginning my jumaring experience. We were indeed slowly putting ourselves out of the world. We enjoyed the scenery and great rock. We took our time and stopped at the bivvy ledge in late afternoon. We were there to have fun, not work hard. The fact that the ropes got stuck just below the bivvy ledge probably influenced our decision to stop early. I proposed spontaneously to rappel down the pitch to release them. I was happy to be there and it was not a problem to go down the full pitch in order to pull the rope out of the crack where it was stuck, then jumar up again. That was part of the game. Next time, we would be more careful with the ropes.

Then it started raining during the night. The first rain for three weeks in Yosemite sounded like a monsoon on our bivvy sacks.

ROB: – Mid morning, it started to rain harder. I shouted over: 'This is a good sign, it will stop soon.' In her French accent she graciously replied: 'Bullsheet, and I'm frozen.'

'Okay, Let me think.'

The first rule of big wall climbing, is that your most important task is to look after your big wall partner above all else. Take care of them before you take care of yourself. It was my duty to help, but I was warm and dry. It was clearly my obligation to get the dry clothes from the haul bag. Most people would consider our situation serious. I thought it was a great adventure.

Luckily the rain stopped before I made my moral choice. It slowly cleared and the sun eventually came out. We welcomed a rest day and a chance to dry everything. Louise's sleeping bag was the hard part. In spite of several

recommendations, she had decided that it would not rain and that she would take her very comfortable feather sleeping bag. The result was that it was now flat and wet like a floor cloth. Another golden rule of Yosemite big wall climbs is – never use feather sleeping bags.

There was still a lot of cloud about. We considered climbing to the next bivvy ledge five pitches higher, but decided retreat was easier from here if the weather stayed bad. We fixed the next pitch and had a look at the easy traverse on to the main face. After that we felt a lot better, until after dinner.

We had just finished eating dinner, sitting on my sleeping bag, and had moved over to put the gear in the haul bag. Suddenly, we heard a sound like a rifle shot. Several large blocks were crashing down the face immediately above us. We dove under the haul bag and cowered. Rocks started to land on our bivvy ledge.

LOUISE: – I was absolutely terrified. I tried to get smaller and smaller against the wall with my arms and hands above my head. The terrible noise of rock fall I had heard several times during my Chamonix climbs. Every time, they produced the same electric discharge on me. Before, the rocks had always been falling elsewhere, but today they were falling directly at me. I could not believe it, Yosemite climbs were supposed to be extremely safe from this point of view. It was lucky that neither Rob nor I are superstitious, because the rain and now the rock fall would have been more than enough to convince us that the mountain gods wanted us to give up the climb.

ROB: – When the rock dust cleared, my bivvy sack was in tatters. The rocks had made a direct hit where we had been minutes before. My bag was hanging from its tie loop. My bivvy sack wouldn't keep me dry anymore. If it happened one minute before, we would have been seriously injured. I debated moving to a small ledge up the fixed rope, but it was getting dark and this was supposed to be a safe ledge. We rigged the haul bag as a roof against rock fall and went to sleep hoping it was the only incident, probably caused by the heavy rain. The clouds came back as we settled in.

At 5a.m. it seemed clear, but at 6a.m. it was foggy. It didn't matter, our enthusiasm was back, we were going up. A warmth generating jumar and two easy pitches led us to the bolt ladder across a blank slab. The sky had cleared to a beautiful day. The easy pitches looked like a catwalk onto a giant stage.

LOUISE: – I decided to lead these easy pitches. This was one of the few opportunities to lead a section of the climb. But I was not so sure when I put the gear rack around my neck. It was heavy like a millstone and the slings were adapted to Rob's size who is a foot taller than me. I felt like I was wearing a skirt made up of carabiners, Friends and nuts. *Qu'a cela ne tient*, I could not give up now.

I began an easy walk on a large ledge, then started a big staircase section and I put one Friend in a crack just in case. The pitch turned left and continued with a flake and crack section. As I went up, the rope was getting heavier and heavier. I had to pull a few metres of slack before making my

moves because I could not climb with the rope pulling below me. This is the problem with easy pitches, they can become really hard because of rope-drag problems. I got to the belay out of breath and worse still, I now had to pull the haul bag. This was very hard work for me since it weighed almost as much as I did. Many times I was convinced that it was stuck.

ROB: – We were now on the face proper. Early attempts had failed here, until they decided to use bolts. On the first ascent, this bolt ladder was the key traverse to the chimney line up the face. The ladder ended with a 50ft pendulum. I had learned to enjoy these when I did the Nose on El Cap almost 15 years' earlier. The 900ft dead vertical drop added to my motivation. It was like being in a circus while I ran at full speed across the wall and lunged for the next crack. This was real wall climbing. I was so keen that I passed the next belay without noticing and linked two pitches together. Only the extreme rope drag slowed me down.

LOUISE: – When Rob began his lead he left me alone on my little ledge. He was concentrating so much that he did not even make a small joke as he normally does. The pitch above us looked impressive, it seemed quite impossible to go from where we were to the ledge that I knew to be the end of the pendulum way off to the right. I dreaded the time when I would have to use the sophisticated big wall techniques for traverse or pendulum pitches – and the next pitch had both.

It can be very tricky to go second cleaning the wall and a single mistake with the ropes or the slings can be disastrous. I tried to concentrate hard and to remember exactly the sequence of operations to be done when getting to a piece of gear. How to lower yourself down, then jumar up again to the next piece. I had never actually done this on a wall, all the experience I had was from France, practising six or seven feet above the ground or on the indoor climbing wall next to my home. This time, it was 900ft above the ground with a huge vertical mirror-like wall below me. This makes a big difference, believe me.

Suddenly, I realised that Rob was done with the pitch. My turn then. Once the haul bag began going up, I took a deep breath, avoiding looking down. I tried to convince myself the technique is theoretically sound, it should work. There should not be a problem if I did exactly as I had learned... Half-an-hour later, I was standing on the ledge, pretty satisfied with my performance. It had worked perfectly and I felt like I had climbed much higher on The Real Big Wall Climber scale.

ROB: – The next section was primarily 5.8 cracks and chimneys. I was warmed up and in my element. The soaking wet aid crack didn't make me upset. I thought of all those poor climbers in Scotland and the wet crags. But only momentarily, as I stepped up on a fixed nut and dry rock again.

The pitch ended in a sling ladder. I double-checked my last aid piece before using a 10ft knotted webbing ladder to reach a small pendulum bolt. I couldn't believe how rotten the slings looked, but I used them anyway to

lean around the corner. Louise followed the short pendulum with the text-book technique of threading the rope. But it got stuck and 10 minutes of pulling hard didn't help. Another big wall rule is that you take turns unsticking the rope. I leaned around the corner to see an amazing spider web of tangled webbing. 'Oh! well,' I thought, this is what makes big wall climbing interesting.

Above us loomed one of the most dreaded sections of the climb. The chimney was mostly easy bridging, but it was blocked by an overhanging flake that created a 5.9 off-width crack. The guide warned that it is not as intimidating as it looks. And it looked bad. I put in our biggest Friend and sized it up. Fortunately, in my youth I was good at off-widths. I had fun on them when others just thrashed. This is largely because I learned to climb them with knee pads. Another rule of big wall climbing – climb in knee pads.

I adjusted all the gear and the haul-line to hang from one side, moved my chalk bag to the side and squeezed in. It was short but challenging. It felt good. Here I was more than halfway up one of the most scenic big walls, safely in a chimney system and enjoying squirming up another off-width. Minutes later, I let out a whoop as I pulled onto a good ledge.

LOUISE: – Chimneys are my favourite type of climbing. I kept thinking that this would have been a lot of fun to climb if I was not carrying a big pack with the day stuff and it was not already getting late. I began jumaring pretty fast, I had good technique now. But, the chimney was becoming deeper and I began to have problems with my backpack against the sides. To make things even worse, Rob had put all the protection in the back of the chimney so that I could not stay in the wide part. I had to squeeze as much as I could to gain every single foot. At each piece of gear, my weight on the rope prevented me from taking the rope out of the karabiner. I had to be very careful not to jumar too close. I stopped below each one and was forced to make a few free moves to take the gear out.

I was already in a sweat when I realised that the haul bag had been stopped above me for a while. It was totally stuck and did not want to move a single centimetre when I pushed strongly on the bottom. I could not get above it because my rope was going under the haul bag and against the rock. My jumars were already too high up. I re-tied my back tie knot and took the jumars off the rope. Without a belay, I climbed a few metres free and put my jumars on the rope above the haul bag. I could now seize it with my arms and, pushing hard on my legs, I could lean out of the chimney and give enough impulse to release the haul bag. It was going up again and I was exhausted.

ROB: – A few pitches later, we got to the pitch I wanted to do the most – the double cracks. When I was young, there was an article in the *National Geographic Magazine* by Galen Rowell showing a climber hand-jamming up a vertical crack, with the whole wall dropping below. It impressed me as one of the ultimate jam cracks. On an expedition once, I mentioned to

Galen how much that pitch impressed me. He then let me in on a secret. It is really a flake, with a good edge to grab inside. In other words, it was trivial.

To my joy, I discovered he wasn't sandbagging me. I hung from the flake for several minutes posing for photos, waving hello to everyone from my mom to the SMC members. Another rule – get photos when you can. Fifteen minutes later, I could collapse on Big Sandy Ledges, one of the ultimate bivvy locations. I was totally exhausted, but it had been a great day of climbing.

We ate dinner and watched the sun set on a bank of clouds moving in. We were only a few hard pitches from the top, but another night of rain could be very serious. The edge was taken off the fun by the serious proposition that if it rained we would have a real epic. I decided I was too tired to care and went to sleep.

Dawn was bright and clear. It had been a cold night and there was frost on my bivvy bag. Above us arched the zigzags – a strenuous section of free and aid. Everything I had read about them indicated hard work. I wanted to sleep longer and wait for it to warm up. Louise stuffed a mug of tea into my hands to warm them up and said to get going. I took some comfort from knowing that, after many winters of mixed routes, my fingers work well in the cold.

The laughing and joking had now stopped. I was about to do battle with the last barrier. I imagined I was climbing the arches of a gothic cathedral. Cold fingers were soon replaced by grunts and strains. I was a man with a mission, to get my climbing partner – and me – off the wall. As the warm blood forced me to take my wool hat off, I remembered that this was my favourite type of climbing. To climb all day, collapse at a bivvy and then start at dawn up the next section.

A hard step right and I clipped the belay. I shouted down about the great view and the neat crack above. The sun lit up the valley below and I could see lots of fixed aid points above. The fun was back.

The zigzags were hard work. I aided every move that I could and just kept going. I started to marvel at the lichen on the wall and the nice cracks. I could see the overhanging visor clearly now, a sign that we were getting close to the top. Soon, well actually, after a long time, I was belayed at the start of the most famous of all pitches, the Thank God Ledge.

Above us loomed the summit overhangs, 200ft of overhanging rock. The Thank God Ledge provides an easy horizontal traverse around the overhangs on to easier ground – hence its name. All my climbing career I had wanted to lead this pitch, and here I was. It starts 18" wide, narrows to 6" and then widens to 18" again. I had often thought about this ledge. I had seen many photos of people standing here. Would I be a show off and walk along it? Would I make a hand traverse? Would it be easy or hard? Now I had to decide what to do. I started to walk across it like Indiana Jones. But I had to kneel to put in a Friend. Then the rack got in the way, and I didn't want

to risk a fall. In the end, I crawled on my knees. I had to slide one leg behind and one over the edge to pass the thin part, and I was across. I quickly led a hard step and a V chimney to the belay.

LOUISE: – Rob's style for crossing the ledge was not the most elegant. I was sure I could do better with the security of seconding. That was if I could get to the ledge. The hardest time I had on this pitch was trying to leave the belay about 7ft below the ledge. Because of my small size, I was missing some foot – or handhold, somewhere. The rope was running almost horizontal and the first piece of gear was 15ft away. Add to this the slack and the elasticity of the rope and I was facing a nice pendulum with a superb plunging view if I fell. I made the first moves and then back down to the belay three times. I was feeling desperate, the rope was even more slack now and my rucksack was too heavy . . . but I could not stay there.

I decided that on the next attempt I would just go for it. I must have done it right since I was suddenly standing on the ledge. I was not thinking of elegant style anymore. Once I had knelt down to take out the Friend, I stayed on my knees all the way across. Now, being smaller than Rob, I could traverse with both knees on the ledge even during the thin part. All things considered, it was not such poor style.

I was just thinking that I was done with all the problems when I reached the other end of the ledge. I had not been considering the pig of a haul bag. It had not moved for a while and I heard Rob throwing swear words. I got under the bag and tried to give it a shove far from the wall. This did not help much, the crack-chimney above me was oriented in the opposite direction of the haul-rope and getting narrower as it rose. This time, I had to crawl under the bag, lean my back against the wall and push the bag with my feet close together until it got out of the crack. I kept shouting: 'Pull now.' Finally, to end it all, it was impossible to jumar the crack, so I had to take off my rucksack and climb it free. This pitch took forever, a real mishap.

All that was left was an aid section – quite impressive though with 3000ft below our feet – and three easy pitches. We had cracked it. The mountain gods must have thought we now deserved a prize, for lying on the ledge was a brand new 50m x 5mm rope. Obviously, the parties above us had had problems in the rain. It would compensate nicely for the few new fixed nuts we had donated.

An easy traverse pitch, a VS slab and a steep step and we were on top.

In spite of the approach problems, the rain, the rockfall, stuck ropes and haul bag, hard work and cold weather, we were on top. Years of dreams and imagining what it would be like were over. We were really there. The landscape was cratered with wind carved sandy bowls. Clouds drifted in and partly covered the summit. This gave the strange atmosphere of being somewhere else . . . exactly where we wanted to be – out of the world.

We didn't have an epic, far from it. The climb had been fun, and we had had fun. And climbing is all about having fun.