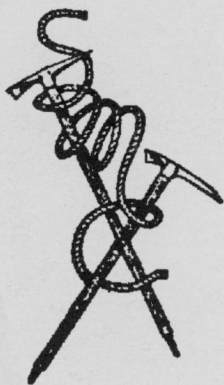


THE
SCOTTISH
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IMAGES

By Donald M. Orr

TELFER GLANCED at his watch. 'Christ,' he muttered. It was a mere five minutes to the final bell. 'Right! Finish off quickly! Put the paint trays back in the cupboard! Wash the brushes and put them in the correct containers and,' he paused, conscious of the chanting tone in his voice as he came to the mantra he had delivered to every junior class over the years, 'put your work in your folders and your folders in the drawer!'

The first-year class moved quickly and noisily to the sinks ranged against the tall, south-facing windows. The grey of their uniforms blurred against the dull light of the cloudy afternoon and he gazed abstractedly from his seat watching their erratic circular motion to and from their desks. They reminded him of sheep in Renfrewshire snow, high up in the Calder valley, picking their way with quick, fitful movements through the drifts.

The bell rang, stools clattered on top of desks and the class trooped out. Cries of excitement grew and echoed in the corridor. He thought vaguely of calling for quiet, but last thing on a Friday it would have been a futile gesture. Tidying his desk he checked inside his cupboard to make sure he had everything he needed for the weekend's activities. His tracksuit bottoms lay on the floor, where he had discarded them, in a Celtic spiral of mud and fabric. The blue of the textile reminded him that he wanted to take two of the large slings from the outdoor education store and he locked his cupboard, lifted his bag and crossed the corridor to the room that held the collection of activities' equipment. Opening the door he was struck once more by the overall odour of the store – a smell the children disliked but that he always associated with the outdoors and the gear linked to it. This mingling of boots and dubbin, canvas, nylon, and the pervading aroma of rain-soaked, force-dried waterproofs was the same in hostel and outdoor centre drying rooms throughout the country. It tingled his senses and, smiling to himself, he packed away a couple of slings into his bag. Buoyed up by the prospect of the weekend he whistled lightly in the gathering gloom of the school yard.

As he came through the archway to the car park he watched the late-afternoon sun rake the steep, grass-covered escarpment above the town and

marvelled at the quality of light. David came up behind him as he stood lost in thought. 'Right Telf, see you later in the pub.'

He turned: 'Don't you think it looks a bit like the high veld in South Africa?' he said, nodding towards the hills.

David looked up and back to his colleague. 'You been reading John Buchan again? How are things up in the old king's country?'

'Beat it Watoomba,' Telfer snarled. 'No, it's something to do with the quality of the light.'

'Well, it's the same sun as shines in Africa Boss, sorry Prester, er Mr John, Sir?'

'Christ, it must be Friday right enough if you're that shell-shocked. See you later at Finlay's,' he shouted as David continued blethering in a heavy Afrikaan accent. As he drove home an image fixed in his mind of the warm, sun-bathed veld in the high country superimposed with the tawny grasslands of the coires at that time of year.

Telfer tripped out of the drizzle and fell against the double doors of Finlay's Bar. The noise of dance music momentarily leapt screaming into the Paisley night to be cut off abruptly by the door swinging shut.

He groaned inwardly on the threshold at the noise as he contemplated the loss of 'the pub' as he knew it for the non-stop disco of an urban lounge. Standing at the bar in the gloom the low lights caught the beads of rain in his hair, reflected from the moisture on his face, and drew him out of the semi-darkness with a Rembrandt-like brilliance and clarity. To the bar staff he had the air of the slightly battered professional man that signalled the school teacher in their midst which the baggy cords and fashionless tweeds corroborated. His own abstracted sullenness resulted from the memory of a second-year showdown after lunch repeating the same message of warning, caution and attempted reason to the disruptive and disinterested. He drank angrily at his beer as he waited for David to show up.

The street door opened presently, wafting in the smell of damp lime trees and, turning, he saw David, hooded for the rain, stop and blink through his splattered glasses like a disturbed and soggy owl.

He turned to the bar to order another pint as David approached. 'I wouldn't let a wildebeest out in a night like this.' Telfer shook his head as David added quickly: 'Even if I had one.'

'Okay, okay we're not going to Africa.'

'Well, couldn't we go farther south just to be nearer it?'

'You going to shut it and drink your beer?'

'No crisps?'

The odour and musty atmosphere of a mountain bothy is a rank mixture in the early morning. The sweat stained, fire-dried clothing, the acrid smell of late wood smoke and cold embers, and the heavy waft of paraffin from the Primus merge to a fusty reek in the cold, small hours before dawn and settle over floor and furnishings, kit and clothing as the day begins.

Telfer lay awake, eyes closed, in the warm cocoon of his down sleeping

bag, slowly checking the sensations of first light. The harshness on his tongue from the late, last bowlful of flake tobacco, the stiffness in his joints from yesterday's exertions and the little grunts and snarlings from his partner as he fought to stay asleep. He thought of the time and opened his eyes to find he was only five minutes adrift on his calculations.

'David! It's half seven!'

The larval form beside him suddenly straightened knocking over the water bottle which rolled heavily across the floor. He eased out of his sleeping bag and retrieved his fibre pile jacket now worn and pilld along the sleeves. The double 'H' on the faded label was only faintly discernible and, as he pulled it on, he wondered how much life was left in it, and him. He remembered the day he had bought it and the years of hills and hostels, camps and climbs in between and felt the threadbare quality of his life match the fibres in his hand.

'DAVID!' The chrysalis split to reveal signs of life.

He moved to the door aware of the river's echoed roar drawing his morbid thoughts away and raised his eyes to the immediate prospect.

Although early in the autumn, at this height the nature of the land had assumed the tweedy browns and ochres of late October. Patches of dead bracken among the fading heather held a pinkish hue which melted into the withered fawns and tans of deer grass. The cloud had stayed high and the air carried that faint trace of low-tide kelp above the damp, rooty smell of high moorland that never failed to stir him.

'Are there any zebras?' David shouted, giggling at the figure silhouetted in the doorway.

'Hundreds,' he replied without turning.

'Lions?'

'Mm, a few.'

The giggles grew to a choking sound and he turned to see David totally incapable of delivering his next witticism. 'And there's one old mountain gorilla about to stomp the crap out of you in a moment.'

The report sent a spasm through the early morning air causing them to look up immediately. The noise, stinging the atmosphere, had their minds racing between high-powered rifles and snapping kernmantle. Simultaneously they turned north.

A rock fall. A huge, preglacial block of granite had seemingly split from the mountain and, large as a phone box, was launching itself on a voyage to the valley floor. Crashing off the gully walls it sent sparks and smoke billowing out of the cleft along with the noise of its thunderous passage which echoed down the glen rippling the late dawn haze out to sea. Leaving the confines of the gully the tumbling monolith picked up speed bounding and rebounding over the steep screes. It coursed through the first rough vegetation lengthways, and rolled fiercely on, mowing its way through heather and bog myrtle.

As it seemed to be slowing slightly it glanced against a deeply-embedded

rock and with the last of its spinning power planed end on into a brief, terminal flight over the gravel track and stunted rowans before implanting itself solidly, with a muffled whump, in a peat bog by the river.

Silence flooded the valley. Telfer became aware of the herbal fragrance of crushed myrtle. The early forenoon sun was already hot on his neck. Little trickles of sweat ran through his hair to the accompaniment of the tinkles of small stones still spilling out of the gully.

‘Christ,’ breathed David in a one-word eulogy.

Squelching forward through inches of peat stained sphagnum that served as a path, Telfer stood beside him too overawed to come up with a quick zippy one-liner.

‘I wonder why that happened?’ he said gazing up into the gully searching for a clue as to why such a large block fell, or was pushed, but he saw no coloured blobs of movement in a ravine and no one on the skyline ridge.

‘I don’t see anyone anywhere,’ he added slowly, ‘and even then, well, there would have to have been a team of them.’

‘What?’ David grasped his meaning, ‘No way. Nobody trundled that thing. Look at the size of it. It must weigh tons.’

‘What caused it to fall then?’

Telfer looked back at the block where it stood in a peaty bend of the river. The stains and scars it had collected on its journey would soon weather in and be unnoticeable. Already it had assumed an air of permanence in the valley, balanced between the gravel bars of the river on one side and the wizened trees on the other. It resembled one of the ancient standing stones that dotted the parkland of the castle grounds where they had once camped. A cold, disturbing thought blew into his mind, tugging and nagging at a memory in the way that the chill winds before dawn had strained at the flaps of the tent.

He walked back down the path, crossed the stepping stones, and went along the gravel trail to the rowans. There in the grit of the path were the scars and scuff marks where David’s badly-packed sack had been deposited while its contents were re-arranged – directly in the flight path of the boulder. He scanned the hillside again for any signs of movement knowing that had they stopped farther down the track they would have arrived directly in the line of the tumbling boulder. True, but if they had stopped to repack . . . but the impact of the chance happening affected them both.

‘Interesting. Why today? Why now?’

‘Kismet, it was written,’ said David. ‘It was its time to fall.’ He shrugged the topic away.

‘It doesn’t mean anything?’

‘We witnessed an event.’

‘That makes us part of the event.’

‘Mm, yes. So?’

‘So we still don’t have any answers.’ Telfer paused, ‘Was it coincidence, a chance happening or part of a sequence, confirming a pattern of events?’

A final flurry of small stones rushed from the gully like a distant ripple of soft applause.

'The latter. Since the mountain was put up – it's been coming down.'

'But today it needed witnesses.'

'It was a big event.'

Telfer raised his eyes from the marks in the gravel and looked at David.

'Almost a total event for us.'

David met the older man's gaze and shook his head, turning to stare at the gully on the north side of the glen. 'How well is your bag packed now?' Telfer asked, looking past his profile and out to the sea haze on the Firth.

'Perfectly,' David replied still scanning the skyline.

Scrambling carefully up the gully of split blocks that led to the bealach both tensed as a loose stone clattered down the ravine, showering them with the dust and gravel of its passing. Aware of the event in microcosm they watched intently as the rock buried itself safely in the deep heather below.

On reaching the pass a welcome breeze blew away the heat and fear of the gully. Quickening the pace to clear what crushing thoughts remained, they moved round to the foot of the slabs they had decided to explore that day and, while organising the ironmongery, selected a route that started moderately up the steep, granite plates, scored here and there by sets of parallel cracks.

The climbing went smoothly enough. David led through and belayed at the end of the second pitch under a broad roof that afforded them an eyrie like view out over the sweep of the slabs and down the glittering length of the stream far below. Off in the distance could be seen flashes of sunlight reflected from the waves in the broad bay into which the stream drained.

A faint tang of seaweed came up on the breeze. He felt a roughness on his hands from contact with the granite, a salty taste on his lips and fell into a daze as he sat on the belay ledge staring at the dried blood on his legs that was a result of his bare knees meeting the coarse rock.

'This stuff's got all the delicacy of a cheese grater,' said David scuffing at two bloodstains that had paralleled a course down his shins and into his socks.

'Mm,' he replied from his daydream.

'Scintillating.'

Telfer drew him a look and moved out to the left for the start of the third pitch. Parallel cracks flared upwards to a pinnacle on the ridge. A summit wind combing across the rocky crest sent grit and occasional small stones down the slab. He climbed steadily to a point where the cracks turned inward prohibiting the bridging action that had got him thus far. Fixing a comfortably solid runner in the right-hand crack he contemplated the problem as the wind picked up, tugging at the bag on his back. More gravel tinkled down from the ridge.

The rock here was smoother and delicately lined and, in those shadows, resembled more the hide of a fossilised elephant than the coarse granite of

the slabs. Grains of fine sand floated over the surface drifting against a tracery of small, raised seams of stone, filling tiny cracks with dust. He hesitated and mentally went through the sequence of moves necessary, and arranging his hands, stood up in the narrow gap.

A small stone, larger than the rest, clattered down the slab. The crackling sound it made grabbed his attention, snatching away a level of consciousness. His distraction was total yet his attention hungered for detail and was fed flickering images of hills and valleys, gorges and gullies, scree and sand. A view of cross referenced landscapes, rockscapes, whorls within words as if watching several slides superimposed on each other.

He was vaguely aware of a soft sadness that was associated with the final image that had stopped in his mind. It seemed to be held on film and his reason lurched when his sister appeared calling for him and he realised it was the garden at Inchcairn. A slow heaviness enveloped him. His sister turned and saw him, shouting excitedly, indicating the path to the river. The notion that his grandmother was about to appear crept over him. There was something she had to tell him, something he had to know. He choked down a wave of emotion that threatened to engulf him.

His left knee pivoted causing his right toe to shoot out of the crack. He was briefly aware of hanging in space, between rock and sky, vision and reality. 'Telf!'

The webbing of his harness dug into his thighs as the rope ran taut, jerking him on the runner firmly bedded in the granite fissure, lashing his helmeted head against the wall.

'Got you!'

A trickle of wetness ran from his nose to the corner of his mouth. His tongue automatically checked it, confirming it as blood.

He leant forward, found footholds on either side of the cracks and pressed his hands against the rock, reassuring himself of the world's solidity.

The sight of the patterned stone in front of him caused an avalanche of fractured thoughts and half memories. He glanced across at David.

'It's not easy being a friend of yours you know.'

'Mm.'

'Are you okay? Do you want me to lead?'

'No, I'm okay.' He wondered if David had seen anything, if there had been any vision for him to endorse. David grinned up at him. 'For a mammal it's the only way to fly.'

'Very good David. You can certainly bear witness to that.'

He moved slowly back to the take-off point and carefully dusted off the ledges and notions of elephant-skin rock. Placing his hands on the holds he twisted his toes to fit the crack. Telfer paused.

'How well is that toe placed now,' asked David quietly.

Telfer looked down at the young man and nodded smiling. 'Perfectly,' he replied and stepped up, quickly gaining the upper section of the crack system and on to the gravel belay ledge in the sunshine of the summit ridge.

DISOBEYING THE RULES

By I. H. M. Smart

One of the few privileges you get as President of the Club other than the honour (which is indeed sufficient) is your own personal key to the CIC Hut in a velvet bag. This privilege is reluctantly given and rapidly terminated on demitting office, in my case within seconds. During my tenure I once availed myself of my key and went up mid-week one winter without informing the Custodian and during the course of my stay I admitted unauthorised visitors. Both of these actions are in the eyes of the Custodian serious violations of the Hut Rules so I am only telling this story now because sufficient time has elapsed for me to escape the normal sentence for such misdemeanours. I seem to remember this begins with a fairly severe public telling-off in which all your past misdemeanours are rehearsed and commented on and audience participation is invited. The audience, if it has any sense of self-interest, backs up the Custodian and reminds him of misdemeanours he may have forgotten in the heat of the moment and eggs him on to impose an exemplary sentence. After the show trial you are banned from the hut for life. I much enjoy these little ceremonies when they are applied to others but have taken great care to keep in the goodbooks of Bob Richardson the 'genial Cerberus' in question. The story I am trying to tell you concerns what happened when I was up there on this visit of frank illegality and broke both these fundamental rules. As far as I can remember the events and the moral they led to unfolded like this:

I LEFT the car park in brilliant winter sunshine with the great white Ben a-twinkle like glittering Soracte. In the final hour the weather deteriorated and progress reverted to the usual slow slog through wind and drifting new snow. Once the lights were lit and the hut warmed up I sat relaxing with a coffee and a substantial dram, purring quietly and enjoying the thrill of being alone in a warm pocket of comfort beneath the big, bad Ben. I was hardly settled when there was a rattle at the door which, of course, I ignored. The noise went on and so reluctantly I went to investigate, hardening my heart as I went; someone was going to get a flea in their lug. Immediately I opened the door a figure walked in out of the knock-you-off-your-feet wind without waiting for an invitation. I pushed the door shut against the retinue of snowflakes surging in from the grey gloaming outside. As the flakes settled to the floor, the visitor removed its bone-dome, shook out a shock of golden hair and said in a pleasant Scots voice, obviously female, 'Thank God for that. You must be deaf.'

'What's the problem,' I said trying to look dour and unwelcoming, a difficult task when confronting what was emerging as some sort of Storm

Goddess. 'The problem,' she said genially sitting on the bench of the antechamber and taking off her crampons, 'is I've left three loonies up there on the Orion Face. I thought I'd better tell someone important, like a member of the SMC.' She said this with well-modulated irony. 'Besides I need a coffee.'

She wanted a coffee! She wanted in! I ran about inside my mind trying to find the manual for dealing with this emergency. What would Bob expect me to do? Should I ask her if she had booked and if so what the secret password of the week was? Should I point to the door like a Victorian father in a cartoon? I rather liked that scenario. However, my sense of self-preservation saved me. Instead I heard my voice saying: 'Come away in then, lassie.'

After all, I was the President and had a certain authority. Not that that would stand at my trial as anything but an irrelevant technicality, a despicable cry for special treatment requiring a harsher sentence.

I made her a coffee and rather overdid the welcome by pouring her a substantial dram.

'Oh good, Bruachladaich', she said. 'My home island. 'Anns an Ile thughaimh mi, Anns an Ile bhoidheach,' she sang in a simple thrilling voice.

I was entranced. Obviously a character. She had now emerged from her outer clothing as a girl in, I would have guessed, her mid-20s. She had the mischievous, intelligent face of an intellectual gamine.

'So what happened up there on Orion?'

'I'm not sure,' she said, looking puzzled, 'I met this trio in a pub in the Fort last night. Two men and a girl; they wanted to do the Orion Face and asked me to make a fourth so we could climb more quickly as two parties of two. I had been let down by boyfriend (whom I've now discarded) so I joined them. We left when the bar closed and bivvied in our cars at the golf club carpark. It was fine this morning. They moved fast, knew what they were doing and I thought we were going to make it in record time. From the start, however, there had been an 'atmosphere' between the other three. The girl and her boyfriend were tense. The spare man who I climbed with, on the other hand, was a bit laid-back. He was the real leader and I felt he was trying to calm the emotional tension all the time. Anyway, they could all climb fast and well, even though they kept arguing. It came to an end as far as I was concerned with an incomprehensible stushie at the end of the third pitch. The boyfriend, Harry, suddenly wanted to re-arrange the ropes so he could climb with Michael, that's the name of the laid-back character I was roped to. And then he wanted me and Maggie, the girl friend, to climb together as the first rope – something about giving the girls a chance. The climb was well within our capabilities; we were all leading through without difficulty. It would have suited me fine; I like the view from the front. Mike, or Michael, or whatever he was called stopped being laid-back and would have none of it. They started to shout at each other. You don't stay with an

emotionally-unstable party on high grade ice in deteriorating weather – if you want to live. I had made a mistake, so I bailed out. I tried to get Maggie to come with me but she wouldn't leave Harry. So I just abseiled off, leaving them shouting at each other.

'You abseiled off – alone – in this wind?'

'Why not? The wind's only really got up in the last hour. Abseiling isn't all that difficult, you know – would you like a lesson?', she said impishly. Before I could say: 'Yes please, any time you're free,' she continued: 'I had to leave three ice screws behind. Thirty quid, but cheap to escape from that accident waiting to happen. There are times you have to be decisive. Anyway, I thought I would warn the people in the hut here. I'll tell the mountain rescue in the Fort when I go down that there's probably going to be trouble; you know, tell them where they should start looking for the bodies.' She added matter-of-factly. I was reminded of Tom Patey's observation: 'It pays to be realistic on these occasions.'

'Why not wait awhile, they may make it and pass this way coming down from Coire Leis,' I heard myself saying.

'Can't say I want to see them again. Well, I'll have another coffee and then go down. I don't want to hang around. I've things to do.'

From then on we got on very well. Her father was an Ileanach and her mother from Deeside – from the next parish to my own. She was a native Gaelic speaker and familiar with the present literary revival which she talked about brilliantly. I had minimal learning on the topic but, nevertheless, enough to join in an adult conversation and benefit from the poems, stories and general enthusiasm prevailing in her accounts. After a third Bruachladaich I heard myself saying: 'Why not stay for supper? I have a nice bottle of Mouton Cadet and enough steak for two.' In the back of my mind I knew that, if discovered, I would now be banned from the hut for life without the possibility of appeal, but that seemed a trivial inconvenience compared to corrieneuchin cosily with a Storm Goddess over dinner.

'Okay, I'll do the soup,' she declared cheerfully, 'You do the steak.'

We had a very pleasant little party during which the conversation became incandescent. At one stage I surreally agreed to meet her two weekends hence to do Point Five Gully. She was completing a Ph.D. in the social anthropology of some Third World country. Her basic findings seemed to be that in any run down, declining community it was the men who failed first; any residual intellectual and emotional strength resided in the women who intuitively understood the realities of long-term community survival. True for Scotland, too, she declared. It was the women who were realising that you can't treat the communal home as just another salable commodity to be frittered away. Scots men she dismissed by singing a few lines from Michael Marra's *Hermless* in a voice appropriately flat and sardonic, followed by some hilarious imitations of well-known figures that, if delivered in public or in print, would have been actionable. The Renaissance in Scotland, she declared, if it comes at all, will come appropriately

enough from women. I valiantly tried to defend us men as equally aware and was just getting into my stride when there was a banging at the door. Naturally, I tried to ignore it. She was more charitable.

'Surely you're going to open it? It may be "them". They may need help'

I tried to explain about the Hut Rules and the fierceness of the Custodian. I had already endangered my standing by letting her in. She said something in Gaelic which sounded withering. When I looked it up later in the dictionary I found out that it translated, roughly, as 'pusillanimous creep'. Gaelic is an expressive language. However, this is not the place for a digression into semantics.

Stung by her body language I went to the door resolved to deal firmly with the situation. I donned a flinty expression and cautiously unsnicked the door meaning to conduct a conversation through a crack. Such was the wind pressure I couldn't hold it back from blowing open. Three people blundered into the porch while I was engaged in heaving the door shut again against the wind, snow and darkness billowing in from the outside. It was indeed 'them'. 'Can we come in – my boyfriend is in a bad way,' said a worried female voice.

'I suppose so,' I said reluctantly. What else could I do? They were in point of fact already in. Apart from ruining a pleasant evening discussing important matters concerning the future of Scotland with a well informed fellow Scot and part-time Storm Goddess here was the further infringement of the Rules. If this sort of thing went on, I could end up being the first President to be expelled from the Club while still in office. The trio decramponed, dumped their gear and helped the casualty into the inner room. I crept after them pusillanimously. The situation was getting out of hand.

The casualty was Harry, the boyfriend, a nice-looking young chap about, say, 25. He was indeed in a state of collapse. Maggie, the girlfriend had dark hair, dark eyes – a real stunner. I would have put her in her 30s. She was in a state of high anxiety. Mike seemed a detached, slightly bored bystander,

'He's suddenly become *quite* irrational,' continued the dark lady once inside. 'He's had at *least* one fit. I think he's got a *brain tumour* or something. He's *got* to see a doctor *quickly*.' She somehow very attractively inflected her voice so you knew when she was using italics, an interesting trick. She reminded me of Ursula Cairnwhapple only in a much minor key. We installed Harry in a bunk where he lay on his face moaning and twitching. He seemed in a bad way. We tried to contact someone on the radio but it either wouldn't work or we lacked the technical aptitude to coax it into activity.

'Well I'm going down *now*, he needs a doctor *quickly*,' the dark-eyed Maggie repeated. 'I've *never* seen him like this before.'

I remembered that once upon a time I had been a doctor and offered to take a look. I got Harry onto his back and examined him with my head

torch. I took his pulse and managed to see his pupils were equal and reacted to light.

'It's that bastard Mike', he moaned. 'I wanted to fall off and take him with me.'

Whatever was wrong with him it wasn't a brain tumour.

'He seems to be having some sort of anxiety neurosis or maybe a hysterical episode', I said delivering a likely diagnosis to the surrounding circle of waiting laity.

'Nonsense,' said the girlfriend contemptuously, 'He's not the type.'

I was never very convincing as a doctor – I didn't seem to have lost my touch.

'I'm going down now to get help. A helicopter with a proper doctor must come up first thing in the morning.' She said this firmly in an authoritative boarding school accent. Everyone tried to dissuade her but she was neither to hold or to bind. She snatched a cup of coffee prior to departure and sat by Harry keeping an affectionate hand on him.

'You can't go down the glen alone in a night like this,' declared the Storm Goddess. 'I'm going with you.'

'Why can't Mike here go with her, it's *his* responsibility,' I said desperately, lapsing inadvertently into italics myself at the thought of losing the company of the Storm Goddess.

Michael, however, declared quite emphatically that he didn't think it necessary.

'I think the Doctor here is right. Harry'll be all right after a rest. Go down if you want to. I'll stay with him here until he gets a grip of himself.'

The Storm Goddess went off to get booted and spurred. When she came back she quickly pencilled her telephone number on a piece of paper torn from a Ryvita wrapper. She handed it to me with a ravishing smile saying: 'Give me a ring to confirm arrangements for Point Five.'

I saw the two of them to the door. At the threshold the Goddess and I spontaneously struck the palms of our upraised hands together as if we were Pavarotti and Placido Domingo changing places on centre stage. 'Hang in there', she said mischievously nodding her head towards the inner room where Michael the laid back and Harry the recumbent had remained. She vanished into the swirling snow from whence she had come leaving a void behind her. The flame in my heart became a bonfire

So there I was left with these two unwelcome men. I sat down and started to read without trying to hide my ill-temper. Michael, a handsome bastard who might be pushing 30, if that, sat there pleasantly minding his own business with a sort of regal equanimity. An occasional moan came from Harry. After about half-an-hour my sense of hospitality returned. They were after all strangers and it was a dark and stormy night. I really ought to offer the honours due to unfortunate travellers. In spite of the hut regulations. Bob might never find out. You never knew your luck.

'How about some soup and beans on toast. It's all I've left.'

'Okay', he said pleasantly. 'I'll give a hand. I have some brandy if you have three glasses.' He got a commendably large, matt-black flask out of his sack and poured three substantial shots. It was a very, very fine brandy indeed with a rich complex bouquet redolent of Flora and the country green. While I reconstituted some soup and heated up the beans, he cut the bread and made toast. We conversed easily and he dispelled my smouldering resentment. He had a civilised manner, spoke a curiously correct English with pleasant Scottish vowels and unblurred consonants with maybe a hint of an Australian type of vowel shift. He easily opened me out. He found out that my mother came from Deeside. His mother, he averred, came from Donside and his father from Ettrickdale in the Borders. Anyone who was anyone in the hut tonight seemed to have Aberdeenshire connections. From then on I noticed he developed a pleasant Aberdeenshire intonation with an occasional unforced use of Doric. 'I suppose Harry comes from Aberdeenshire too,' I said to fill a hole in the conversation. 'Yes, as a matter of fact, on his father's side he's from the Howe of Alford and his mother is from Caithness with Orcadian grandparents; they were neighbours of mine. Maggie is from one of the big hooes near Auchterless (she's supposed to be descended from the trumpeter of Fyvie – although it's not talked about in the family) and her father's from the Stewartry or maybe next door in Galloway. I can't remember which. So we are all a bit of a mixture.'

Michael went over to the bunk, shook the twitching Harry and said impatiently: 'Come on Harry snap out of it. Supper's ready.' He heaved Harry from the bunk and draped him over a bowl of soup and made him sip some brandy. He gradually cheered up and hoovered up his share of the soup and beans. My diagnosis about him must have been right – he had been having a hysterical episode. The number of correct diagnoses I have made in my professional life-time was beginning to approach double figures.

The rest of the evening passed very pleasantly as the seemingly bottomless bottle of aromatic brandy circulated. The pair of them worked for some international conglomerate. He wouldn't say which for 'security reasons' – you had to be careful – industrial espionage and all that. 'Economics is war by other means to paraphrase one of our directors,' said Michael. They were very well informed about international affairs with fascinating and very plausible stories about what was really happening in the world with an impressive historical perspective. I kept my end up as best I could but was completely out-classed by both of them. Their historical knowledge seemed encyclopaedic. They appeared to have met anyone who was anyone in the last couple of hundred years. Under the influence of the mellow, aromatic brandy we became more and more relaxed. Michael authenticated his Aberdeenshire connections by singing *The Burning of Auchindoun* and the original version of the *Jolly Beggar*. He gave an interesting first-hand account of how Byron picked up this ancient ballad

in some inn near Aboyne and respectabilised it into, *We'll go no more a-roving by the light of the moon.*

I tried to keep my end up by singing *The Soutar's Feast* but during the first verse I saw Harry and Mike exchanging glances. Harry then put his hand on my shoulder and said: 'Na, na, laddie. No' like that. Mair like this.' And he sang it authentically and what's more, in tune.

'Singin's no' your gift,' he said kindly.

'Pity Maggie isn't here, though,' he continued gloomily, 'She can do a really belligerent Eppie Morrie.

'Maggie, sing Eppie Morrie? With that accent?'

'She may have been to a boarding school but she never lost her roots,' said Harry with some asperity. 'All the modern gentry aren't wersh as dishwater. They're beginning to come back home, culturally speaking, that is. They're taking their time but they're getting there. Maggie writes songs herself. There's a bit of Jean Elliot and Carolina Oliphant in her. A bit of Eppie Morrie, too', he said looking rueful.

I could well see the resemblance with the last. A cross between Eppie Morrie and Ursula Cairnwhapple however attractive the packaging was a femme formidable indeed.

Michael stood up, shook his head sadly at Harry and said: 'If it hadn't been for yon carry on of yours we'd have had the lassies with us still and had a much better evening.'

I agreed, mentioning that the Storm Goddess had a thrilling voice and I'd love to have heard her singing *Fagail do'n Aite* again.

'Storm Goddess?' queried Harry.

'Yes, the girl who left with Maggie.' I then realised we hadn't even exchanged names. We'd been discussing much more important things.

Mike at this point rummaged in his pack and brought out some dried bananas. I'll make some *bananes brûlés* for dessert he declared, grabbing the brandy bottle and a bag of sugar and moving off to the stove. Meanwhile, I chatted to the now completely-revived Harry who was explaining to me in fascinating detail about conversations with W. S. Bruce and some of the difficulties he had in organising the Scotia Expedition. He then told some stories about Raeburn and Naismith which included some reported speech. I presumed he had culled these from early Journals. Although I am a student of these volumes I couldn't place the articles. I must have missed them somehow. Over his shoulder I could see the dark profile of Michael back-lit by the flaring brandy as he brûlé his bananas. The brandy must have been well up the proof scale to make flames that size.

The bananas when they came were excellent. They were so good I ended by taking up my plate in both hands and licking it clean. I caught Michael looking at me quizzically but I felt too well-brandied to be embarrassed. As the conviviality progressed he gradually wove the following story into the conversation.

'I would like you to listen to this proposition, Since you are a doctor I can be quite direct and technical about it. Our pharmaceutical division has developed a system that can reverse the process of ageing. You don't believe me, of course, but let me explain. It's all quite logical. As you know the body is held together by a connective tissue called collagen. Most body components turn over their component molecules – collagen doesn't. Over the years the amount of it slowly increases and, worse still, changes chemically to becomes rigid and brittle. We accumulate the stuff round our blood vessels. The nutrition of peripheral tissue becomes diminished, an inner hand slowly strangles us. This gradual deterioration is known as ageing. My company has perfected a system which promotes the turnover of collagen. It removes the old stuff, replaces it with new springy, pliable, youthful material. The strangulation is undone and the nutrition of peripheral tissue increases. In short you become young again, but you retain the knowledge, experience and wisdom you have already acquired.'

I questioned him about the details of the enzymology and molecular dynamics underlying this hypothesis and it all seemed to hang together. I really enjoy these surrealistic conversations. I had just had one with the halliracket Storm Goddess when I agreed to join her on Point Five. I also remembered another one in a ritzy ski resort in the Alps when I found myself in a dinner party with some young millionaires. I got so carried away I thought I was one myself and seriously discussed joining a consortium to buy an enormous ocean racing yacht, chipping in my quarter million for the purchase and 50 grand annually for basic running expenses.

On another occasion years ago I once got a lift from a man who said he was a spiritualist who could foretell exactly the future. Consequently, he could drive without the usual precautions, overtaking on blind corners and so on. He proved his point. Nothing remotely near an accident happened during a hair-raising 50-mile drive. The present situation was to my mind based more firmly on reality than any of these. The discovery of a cure for ageing is much more likely than my becoming a millionaire or someone being able to predict the future exactly enough to risk his and everybody else's life on it many times in the course of a single drive or, alas, my being able to have a convincing go at Point Five Gully and shine in the eyes of the dangerously attractive Storm goddess, a *Belle Dame sans Merci* if ever there was one who shed unsatisfactory boyfriends like autumn leaves.

So I led him on. At the very least this was going to make a good story to tell later on round some fireside or maybe even (as it has turned out) as an article for the Journal. Mike was a good story-teller. He made the very valid point that the brain is capable of acquiring knowledge and skills for maybe a couple of hundred years or more if it could be kept in a physiologically young body. He pointed out that for many intelligent people it was the rate at which the brain can assimilate and process experience that limits us intellectually. For most of us it takes 60 years to complete our primary education. By then you've got over most of your hang-ups and are

beginning to be really educable. He went on about the new horizons of understanding that could be crossed, the joy of unhurried contemplation of interesting problems and the time to do things properly.

It is good policy in bizarre conversations like this to introduce a practical point to see how they wriggle out of it so I said: 'Mike, this technology is all pretty state-of-the-art stuff, yet you two seem to have been around a long time. You speak of David Hume, Adam Smith and Henry Dundas as if you knew them personally. If you did, how come you knew all this modern molecular biology before it was invented.'

'We've known how to do it for long enough, but now we know why it happens. In the old days we had found out empirically that a certain herbal regime is effective. Now we have isolated the active principles and can do it much better. It would be a disaster if it was generally available, as you can imagine. As it is we could corrupt anyone we choose, but we do not choose so to do. (He quoted here the first half of Shakespeare's Sonnet xciv – the one that begins: 'They that have the power to hurt and will do none'.) So we only consider as candidates people who have the intellectual and emotional self-control to cope with it. Most importantly, they must not be cursed with anything so boring and unoriginal as conventional ambition, still less with a coarsely competitive spirit or the desire to excel in public; all these defects carry with them the overwhelming need for status, honour, fame, recognition and all that sort of juvenilia. In our field, inconspicuousness is mandatory, as you can imagine. An off-beat, low-profile, late developer like you might be a suitable candidate.'

'Me off beat? Me a late developer? How come?'

'It's the way you behave. You're not averse to listening and learning and you reach your conclusions obliquely in a way that appeals to me. You also seem to be a case of only mild ambition, almost certainly curable. Besides when I saw you licking your plate, I knew that in spite of your white hair you hadn't quite yet made it as an adult – you may have some potential left.'

'Well, I'm going to do the dishes.' He said this as if to underline the matter-of-factness of the whole proposition. 'You can check with Harry here. He'll tell you about the disadvantages. He'll tell you why he tried to kill me today and ended up having a bubble in the bunk.'

'Well Harry you didn't look all that happy a while ago. What's it all about? What's the catch?'

'The catch is that Michael is the only one who knows how to do it: he runs the show; he makes the rules. Otherwise it's just as he said; you become physiologically young again. You feel good – physical and intellectual activities become an effortless joy again. What's on offer, mind you, is life not happiness; as everybody knows the two are different. You're not immune to the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to and all that. That burden has still to be borne. Also be quite clear about this, it's longevity we're talking about not immortality. We're dealing with the real physical world, not with metaphysics – that word makes me feel like reaching for

my revolver. Forget Mephistopheles. We wouldn't touch a character like Faust again with the longest pitchfork in the Howe of Alford. We couldna thole a' yon greetin and girnin and cairryin on. The mere thought of Faust made him turn to the Doric to express himself adequately.

Briefly, he explained about the obvious difficulties in outliving your friends and next of kin, the need to disappear and get a new identity every decade or so. They hadn't been back to Scotland since Patrick Geddes's time. They had been in Australia in recent years hence the Oz-type vowels. It was safe to return to Scotland now that everyone they had known before was 'safely dead' – a phrase that brought out a wry and weary smile. He was currently in love with Maggie but she was growing broody and wanted children and, moreover, was becoming a little suspicious that she was getting crowsfeet and he wasn't. She was starting the normal transformation from nymph into matriarch. Maggie was a good sort. He wanted Michael to invite her into the longevity club but the Rule was 'no broody females' – for very obvious reasons. Today, Harry said he'd been badly depressed and had thought of getting Mike to start leading the second rope on Orion and then threatening to pull him off if he didn't let Maggie join. 'You get these black, black, depressions,' he said. 'But you get over them too and I now realise that Mike is right. Maggie would complicate things hopelessly; she'd try to found a dynasty – imagine the complications over the years she'd try to turn the whole thing into a family business with herself as ruling matriarch. As for you, Mike has made you an offer, that's all. You'll have to do the following up and have a lot, and I mean a lot, of discussion before you are accepted. Meanwhile, these drams of brandy seem to have perked you up wonderfully.'

He said this last sentence raising his glass so the light could shine through it. Michael, meanwhile, had dried and stacked the dishes and had been outside to look at the weather. It was much better and there was a bit of a moon. He and Harry would go down now to abort any rescue preparations that Maggie had started up.

'Keeping this show on the road is not free from problems,' he said cheerfully and then with a kind smile: 'Fortunately, we don't need as much sleep as you oldies.'

They dressed up and as he left Michael gave me a card on which he'd written a telephone number. 'Give me a ring if you want to discuss things further.' We shook hands. Good firm handshakes from both of them. I realised that I actually liked these two odd-balls. I watched from the door as they bounded off into the moonlight as lithe and light as deer. At the bottom of the first slope Harry stopped for a moment and turned to give me a final friendly wave.

I returned to the hut. The door clicked shut behind me. I felt I was on the wrong side of it. I sat at the table in the lamplight all alone, solitary and by myself. (The repetition is necessary to convey the echoing emptiness pervading both me and the silent tomb-like hut.) Mike had left a last

brimming glass of brandy; he'd taken away the matt-black bottle, alas. The bouquet made me think of a flowery meadow burgeoning with life on a summer morning with maybe a background hint of earth after rain. The phone numbers of the Storm Goddess and the man who said he wasn't Mephistopheles lay in front of me. I hoped I'd have the sense never to ring either. Nevertheless, I put the two numbers in my pocketbook, in the slot, as it happened, that also held my Senior Citizen's Railcard where they made a succinct little trio.

Not so long ago life had been so simple, merely a matter of wandering on downhill until meeting with some more or less disagreeable terminal event to be borne with whatever dignity one was allowed – now the High Country and the Great Climbs were again on offer. None of this anguish would have happened, of course, if I had just obeyed the rules and kept the bloody door shut.

This account is given as it happened. Someday I may get round to writing down the full, untelescoped story, including the sequel. This sort of knowledge, however, is not for everyone which is why it is appearing in the pages of an obscure mountaineering journal where few will find it. With any luck it will even escape the notice of Bob Richardson until he demits office.

RESURRECTION

It might have been part
of a serrated pick
from an early axe, the ragged notion
of a rusted adze,
broken and buried in frozen schist.
Aschenbrenner awaiting resurrection.

But only lines and scrawls
etched on to bone
convey the bitten edge of death
torqued within a frosted wall.
Rationalised as sheep remains,
level with my floating breath.

My pick twins in the cleft,
meshing scarred edges,
and aids the movement and wonder
upward through the frost
to a place of skulls
and a shadow at the mirror.

Donald M. Orr.

IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

By Simon Richardson

I KNEW something was up when Roger Webb remained coy about his whereabouts during the last few weeks of the 1994 winter season. My suspicions were confirmed when he came on the phone at the end of March and asked whether he could borrow a size-10 Hex. I offered him an 11, but no, it had to be a 10, and further questioning only brought a tantalising mention of an unclimbed overhanging corner-crack somewhere in the North West.

All was revealed the following week when Roger rang with news of a new route with Simon Steer on the north face of Quinag. 'Front face of Barrel Buttress . . . great soaring corner . . . must be Raeburn's original line . . . finished in the dark . . .'

'How was the overhanging crack?'

'Took the ramp to the left . . . but the crack looks brilliant . . . must go back . . . really futuristic . . . just up your street . . . we'll have to give it a try next winter . . .'

The 1995 New Year was cold and snowy, and it was impossible to ignore Roger's crack on Quinag. Roger was thinking along the same lines, and after an excited phone call, we agreed to attempt the route the very next day. I set off from Aberdeen on a bitterly cold January night, and two hours later I was knocking on Roger's front door in Inverness. I'd hardly set foot in the house when Roger handed me a steaming cup of coffee and sat me in front of the projector. The slides told the story. He'd been to Quinag six times the previous winter. Up Cooper's, down Y Gully, an ascent of Cave Gully, and then two attempts on Raeburn's route before success. Roger had saved the most important slide to last, and a picture full of black overhangs appeared on the screen. 'There's the crack' said Roger, pointing towards an evil-looking slit piercing the centre of the roofs. 'But it looks desperate,' I wailed. 'Don't worry, my lead,' said Roger firmly, as he turned off the projector.

Driving through Coigach at five next morning the drifts were piled high either side of the road, well above the height of the car. The prospect of difficult winter climbing with so much powder seemed a remote prospect. I suggested leaving Barrel Buttress for another day, and trying something shorter on Stac Pollaidh instead, but Roger was insistent. We were going to Quinag. Things felt a little better when we left the car and set off across the moor. The snow was drifted in the hollows, but it was quick going over the heather as we traversed under the east face of Sail Gharbh. Ice glistened all around, and as we turned the corner below the north face,

dawn broke revealing the steep profile of Barrel Buttress to our right. The lower section looked steep enough, but the upper section bulged in an unmistakable barrel shape. A great corner slashed through the left side of the buttress. Dauntingly steep, and totally compelling, I immediately understood why Roger had kept coming back.

We moved quickly up easy, mixed ground on the lower tier, and were in position at the base of the corner by eight. It was a beautiful morning with a spectacular view looking north towards Foinaven, and to the west the snowline was down to the sea. We were in luck, for a strong north wind the previous day had stripped off much of the loose snow, and the buttress was coated with névé and dribblings of ice. The corner soared above. It looked impossibly steep, but at its back there was a crack, and in winter, where there is a crack there is always hope.

Roger led off up to where the crack steepened, and placed the size-10 Hex. Above, the crack thinned, and then became blank although there was a hopeful patch of turf 3m higher. All around the rock overhung. Roger tentatively made another move, then promptly reversed it. 'I don't want to do this. I've been here too many times before. I'm coming down.'

There was a finality about Roger's statement which surprised me. It couldn't have come at a worse moment, with my confidence already at a low ebb. Stac Pollaidh would have been a far more sensible option. This climb was clearly going to be far too hard. I deliberately took my time racking the gear, and slowly climbed up to the Hex. It was a poor placement, and it rocked unreassuringly, pivoting on two corners in an icy crack. Eventually, I moved up as Roger had done, and managed to hang on long enough to place an angle just below where the crack faded. I came back down to rest. 'You can see why Raeburn went left up the ramp,' shouted up Roger. 'That's the way Simon and I went last year.'

Another try, but it was hopeless. The corner was far too steep and totally devoid of footholds. I could see how to make the moves, but I needed arms like an orang-utan. As I came back down to rest again, I spotted a line of holds leading out right. 'Where are you going?' inquired Roger as I started to move across the right wall.

'Just having a look.'

'It looks impossible from down here. How will you get back into the corner?'

'Just watch the rope will you.'

At the end of the traverse I was beginning to regret my impulsiveness. The peg runner that had been above me when I started the traverse was now a long way to my left. I was severely out of balance, and my strength was fading fast. In desperation, I lurched up a series of flat holds above and belly-flopped into a niche. Above there were some ominous-poised blocks, and gingerly I edged past them to gain the crack above. I pulled

up tentatively on good torques, and then hesitated. Some climbs you just don't deserve, and deep down I knew this was one, but the crack was better than it looked from below and much to my surprise I continued to move up. Eventually, the crack faded at the same level as a big platform in the corner. I began to cheer up. The pitch was surely in the bag if only I could traverse back left into the corner. A little higher I found a series of rounded holds leading back left. Protection was awkward, but after brushing off the loose snow, I teetered delicately left, crampons scratching on tiny edges to reach the ledge.

A wave of elation swept over me. Above the corner was steep, but clearly climbable. We were going to get up this route after all. I looked down the rope hanging in space to Roger a rope-length below. What an amazing pitch! Totally unlikely, spectacular and exposed. Surely this was a route for the 21st century.

Roger arrived on the ledge with a broad grin. Full of confidence, he pulled over a huge, jammed block above my head and dealt with the off-width crack above in style. The final pitch started with a brutal overhang followed by another chimney set in a fantastic position and we suddenly emerged on the top of the buttress in brilliant sunshine. Despite the short January day it was still early, and there was plenty of time to continue over the main summit, and reach the car in daylight.

Later that evening, back home in Aberdeen, the phone rang. It was Roger. 'Have you read the Area Guide?'

'No, I've only just got in.'

'Its got Raeburn's original description. Listen to this: "The first chimney . . . a narrow crack, overhanging and impossible . . . a ledge on the right is taken . . . large blocks of rock . . . none too secure . . . back into the chimney . . . large jammed block . . . entrance of the next chimney is a large overhang . . . climbing is sensational . . . rock excellent . . ."'

There was little more to say. Our route of the 21st century was merely a winter ascent of the original line climbed by Raeburn, Mackay and Ling in 1906. Suitably humbled, I went to bed.

NOT QUITE FOGY TALK

By P. J. Biggar

Fool: If thou wert my fool, Nuncle, I'd have thee beaten for being old before thy time.

Lear: How's that?

Fool: Thou shouldst not have been old, till thou hadst been wise.

(*Lear I, iv, 38-42*).

MY DICTIONARY defines the term 'fogy' as 'a dull old fellow: a person with antiquated notions.' And it adds: 'Probably from *foggy* in the sense of moss-grown.'

There we were then, three old fogeys out for our annual spree of winter climbing, and resting our bones each night in the Smiddy at Dundonnell. Though we were old we were not without ambition. One of us had even come with a shopping list of things he thought might be done during the week. His list contained three items – the traverse of An Teallach, the ascent of Penguin Gully on Beinn Dearg and, for the end of the week when we meant to move on to Ben Nevis, Tower Ridge. It was a good list, and, to be fair to its author, he did say that the week would be well spent if even one thing on it was accomplished.

As it turned out it was, for, with much huffing and scuffling and pulling down of woolly bonnets, we traversed An Teallach on firm snow-ice, never even using the rope we had carried because we weren't sure we wouldn't need it. *And this is fogey-talk.*

Well satisfied we wandered, the next day, over a little hill and played on little crags, looked at rocks, gathered firewood, talked to the sheep and sat poking at the fire. Into the midst of this congenial old fogiedom came young Richard, a first-year student at a venerable place of learning. A gangling, gawky youth of some 18 summers and already, so we'd heard, a tyro on rock; he had come to continue his infant researches into the arcane delights of winter climbing. *This too is fogey talk.* He had long legs, a lop-sided grin, big feet, enthusiasm and plastic boots.

Preconceived notions about what might be done, which are no more than an airy nothing in the mind of the thinker, have a marked tendency to insinuate themselves into the actions of a group. The next item on the list was Penguin Gully. It might have been anything at all, but because it was what it was, we either chose to, or it was determined that we should, go to Gleann-na-Squaib the following day. Further, because I happened to have climbed with the young fellow before, we were to make one rope,

while Phil and Mike were to make the other. Having preconceived notions about what routes one might climb, especially in winter, is a mistake – it narrows the focus and herds the mentality. Age and experience, it seems, bring no immunity from this error. *More fogey talk.*

Each partnership went in a separate vehicle. This looked like common-sense, considering different possibilities for the end of the day, but herein also, perhaps, was a psychological error – two vehicles, two ropes, two partnerships. All of this breeds unspoken rivalry, and, as it so happened, the very breaching of the hostile barriers which bar the would-be climber from the long approach to Gleann-na-Squaib, reinforced this rivalry. The gate was open; the Forester's back was turned. Richard and I sped on and upwards in the little red van.

As we put on our boots at the top of the track where the pine woods end and the glen becomes suddenly stark and mountainous, we jokingly considered the possibility that the other two would have to walk. To our shame, the picture of our friends puffing up the track under heavy sacks was an object of merriment, and we were guiltily relieved when the sound of Mike's Jeep was heard. I fancy I know exactly the kind of conversation they had about us while driving up through the woods.

'We stopped and asked permission,' said Mike with self-conscious virtue. 'They said someone in a red Ford Escort went hammering past,' he added.

'We'll be all right though,' said Phil. 'They said they wouldn't lock up till we got down.' Actually, neither of these gentlemen is in a particularly strong position to criticise the unlawful incursions of others. There was the famous occasion when one of them was threatened with the wrath of the Procurator-Fiscal in Fort William for attempting to drive to the Dam on Ben Nevis, and the other has his lawless fits too, mainly with the Laird's salmon, but I was suitably chagrined and could only mutter something feeble about having to take these chances when one could.

Ignoring the querulousness of his companions, young Richard had set off up the track and the mutterings of the middle-aged men soon subsided as we made efforts, not to keep up, but just to keep him in sight. At our backs, out over Loch Broom, rain clouds were massing. The good, cold conditions of our An Teallach day had gone and it was plain that a thaw was beginning.

There is a point in the narrow glen where one has to cross the main burn to gain access to the crags. This crossing is often by a snow-bridge. On a good day one would hardly know it is a bridge, but today Richard put one of his big feet right through and the sound of rushing water below the snow was very loud. The omens were bad.

We foregathered by a huge boulder below the lower crag. I recalled sheltering here on a bitterly-cold day on my last visit. Then the track had

been glazed and all the cliffs sheeted in ice. My partner and I had considered Orangeman's Gully and had been repelled by its steepness, real or illusory, but we had gone to the other end of the doctrinal spectrum and climbed Fenian Gully – four rope lengths of hard frozen delight ending in sunshine by the snow covered dyke. Today was not like that. Rock faces were black and wet; ice-pitches were going from gloss to matt. Aurally too, the signs were not good: the hollow ricochet of falling ice heard above the drip and splatter. Up on Emerald Gully icicles were streaming, and The Reverend Ian Paisley's feet were composed not of clay but an avalanche cone. We did note that Orangeman's at least had no impending cornice above it. But all the signs were bad for climbing and we were subject to those feelings of uncertainty which beset the climber on a questionable day. No-one wanted to commit himself, so we wandered on up the valley hoping things would improve.

One of the items on the list was Penguin Gully, and towards the upper part of the glen we now turned. For no obvious reason, Phil got ahead at this point and Mike was not far behind him. A few minutes earlier we had agreed that we did not want to embark on Penguin as a rope of four. The approach of bad weather from the S.W. would not be long delayed. The route is long and the thought of reaching the top in dark and rain was not appealing. Things seemed to be sorting themselves out. As Richard came up to me, I asked if he fancied having a look at Orangeman's instead. He agreed, and I shouted and gestured to Mike who was by this time well ahead. I knew he didn't hear what I said, but I guessed that he realised that Richard and I would go to some other route, and he waved before going on.

Two cars, two ropes and now two routes. Here again that tiny maleficent sting of competition entered the sub-conscious . . .

'And what did you two do in the end?'

'Oh we got up Orangeman's.'

'Oh very good . . .'

Richard and I paused for a cup of tea from his splendid unbreakable flask before setting off up the lower slopes. We were glad that the irksomeness of indecision was over; pleased to be able to concentrate not on the difficult business of reasoning, but on the simple activity of climbing. We ignored the last sign – a sudden rise in temperature consequent on our choosing a route sheltered, as Penguin would not have been, from the chilly breeze now blowing up the glen in advance of the coming weather.

As I have learned to do, I prayed on the way up to the climb. It was just the usual prayer which asks for bread and forgiveness. My mind was calm and focused. I belayed by the cave at the foot of the climb and Richard set off up the slabs of the first pitch. I stood well away from the wall to avoid

falling water, and Richard, as he climbed, took pains to keep his mitts off the slushy surface of the ice. Neither of us was made aghast by the conditions in which we were climbing. In my case it can only be because I am the slave of bad habits. Richard could plead comparative ignorance. Together we took comfort in the fact that there was no cornice directly above us, our route ending in a shallow upper funnel or bowl.

For two pitches the gully twisted its way through steep rock by slab and snow slope. As I came to the top of the second pitch I could see a good chimney ahead; steep and divided vertically into two channels by a blade of rock. The left runnel looked the better, but I had run out of rope and looked for a belay. There was a well-sheltered bay under the right wall and out of the line of the chimney. Reaching well above me on the rather shattered wall I found a knob of solid-seeming rock sticking out from the surface. Behind it there was a narrow crack which accepted a small nut on a wire. I tied into this with the yellow rope, but did not judge it good enough, so I went through all the labour of placing a Deadman as well, in glutinous, wet, semi-icy material. I tied the pink rope to the Deadman. Shouts of youthful impatience drifted up from below: 'You can just wait you young mucker,' I muttered below my breath.

When the ropes were tight between me and both anchors, I brought him up. The last time I had climbed with young Richard, he had been a little hesitant when confronted by steep ice. Now the hesitation was gone. He placed a runner, a blade peg with extension, and moved confidently up the chimney. He was attacking the ice in calculating fashion and not pausing too long between each move. The top of the pitch, where the material thinned, proved a little troublesome, but he overcame the difficulty and, with a whoop, vanished from sight into easier ground. I began to relax and enjoy myself as the ropes ran out. At least we would have something to tell the others when we got back to the hut.

The ropes kept moving. The chimney was perhaps 40ft, and Richard had gone a fair way beyond that when a small fragment of compacted snow came smacking down the ice above me. Then a brick-sized lump fell, then several concrete blocks; everything darkened and, with a demolition roar the rest of the building plunged down the gully. In the splittings of seconds I had left I saw Richard's runner whisked from the rock. I screamed out: 'Now Hold!' and hunched myself down. The ropes were round my waist and hands.

As the massive downward pull came on me I heard a small click above my head as the nut settled down in its crack, and I saw out of the corner of an eye, the Deadman burrowing deeper into the slope. The next thing I really knew about was being lifted like a puppet from my feet and slapped carelessly, face first, against the rock wall. The ropes had been torn from my grasp. I was pinned tightly against the wall by the ropes, my

feet some inches from the snow. In sheer wonderment I cried out: 'It held! It held!' Then the realisation came to me that my partner was on the other end of the ropes – and he was not just my partner, he was my son.

Everything in me listened to the appalling silence. 'Lord have mercy! Christ have mercy!' I began to wriggle and struggle to free myself from the pressure of the ropes, and all the time I was listening to the silence below.

'Richard . . .' My voice sounded thin and hopeless.

'Richard! Are you all right?' Lunatic inquiry. How could he be all right? At that moment I'd have swapped not knowing for a chance of life.

My struggles at length got me out from behind the strapping of the ropes but I still couldn't move much because of the weight pulling me down. My mind began to devise schemes of escape. Which rope should I release? Could I free myself and claw my way down using the rope as a handrail? Could I shift the knots in any case? I had a knife . . . Another voice in me urged caution: you are shocked, it said; do nothing for a moment or two; things are bad, don't make them worse.

'Lord have mercy! Christ . . .' And the miraculous thing happened. Ever so slowly the tension on the ropes eased. There was motion, then, on the other end? And if motion . . . Life. With desperate eagerness I used the developing slack to move out from the bay in which I stood so that I could look down the route. A dark figure stood, framed by the dirty snow below the first pitch. At first I couldn't hear what he said, and had to ask him to repeat it. He was asking if I was all right! I wanted to weep for sheer relief, but I could not afford that luxury. I had to extricate myself and I also knew I could place no reliance on his assurances as to his condition, for he must be clinically shocked and could easily be suffering from concussion or internal injuries.

I shouted to him to untie so that I could use the ropes to abseil. The message seemed to take a long time to get through and that worried me, but in reality I think he acted quite quickly – my anxiety magnified the time. The brooding silence all around was broken only by the slight sounds I made as I arranged my getaway. Received wisdom said that a second avalanche was unlikely but with shock and fear working on me I didn't feel so sure.

The knot joining the yellow rope to the wire in the wall was utterly compacted. I had to untie from my waist and join the pink rope to my former waist loop which still trailed a figure of eight. The knots on the pink rope by contrast were relatively easy to undo. The yellow rope, it seemed must have taken almost all the force of the fall. When all was ready I took one last look at the place; I had no doubts about my anchor.

There was blood on the snow below the slabs of the first pitch, and the ropes ran out before I reached the bottom, but I slithered down the last few

feet. Richard and I, beyond a handshake, have not embraced for several years, but as I staggered down towards him I held out my arms. When we released each other I turned back towards the gully and said three words of thanks for our deliverance.

His nose was bloody but not bleeding and his limbs seemed sound. I felt him all over, but he complained of no serious pain. His pupils, of course, were widely dilated. Presently, we found that there was no blood in his urine. His helmet had only superficial damage, but one crampon had been snapped and one of the rear points was twisted through 90°. We tottered under the shelter of the buttress where it seemed best to talk and drink tea from his truly unbreakable flask, and in this way give complications time to show themselves. We estimated that he must have fallen some 200ft; nor had his fall been merely down the gully bed, for the route twists in and out of rock steps and it is probable that the avalanche came over these. The holding of the belay meant that he was dragged clear of the falling debris and not taken down into the cone. Of course, it was the easy-angled funnel at the top of the route which had avalanched – as I should have known it was likely to do in the prevailing conditions.

Retreating down the slopes we found his axe. As we paused I looked back at the cliffs: two dark little figures were kicking their way up an easy gully. Numbly, I registered that they were probably Mike and Phil. We could do nothing and turned away.

Down in Ullapool, Dr Stewart confirmed that there was no serious damage. A twisted knee, some abrasions of the chest and most interesting pink eyes for a few weeks were the worst of the physical effects for Richard. 'Get him back up there as soon as you can,' the kindly doctor said.

Back in the golden whisky-glow of the Smiddy the others listened to our tale. They had, in the end, attempted Fenian Gully, but had wisely given up after the first pitch, consoling themselves by ascending Inverlael Gully instead, in which the snow, though not good, was probably firmed by the breeze to which, like Penguin, that route is exposed. We showed them Richard's crampon and the knot in the yellow rope. Each had his turn at shifting it, none could. It took a blunt screwdriver and a vice to do that job. We tore the list up: none of us got to the Ben that year.

Everyone – my friends, the Doctor, Richard, the boy's mother and God himself it seemed, refused to judge. But as for me, I was wandering alone over Rois Bheinn on a sunny day in June, some three months later when I found myself quietly weeping and repeating over and over again: 'It held! It held!' Some writers will tell you that mountaineering is a sport. Do not believe them. Mountaineering is a sport only if life itself is one. And this is fogey talk, *and yet not quite*: some miles away, over in Torridon, Richard was fishing the hill-lochs with his girlfriend.

TALES OF A TRUSTIE (SIC)*

By David Hughes

MY GOD, it was steep – and that was the path, or would have been the path, if there had been a path, which there wasn't, but there may be now but there wasn't then, so there it is, or there it was, and there we were, and it was steep, but we were now at the rock, and it was very steep, and can we go home now please.

So we sorted out the gear, such as it was – two full-weight, hairy, hawser-laid having-seen-much-better-days 120-ft bits of Viking, and a dozen even hairier slings. He did boast a peg hammer and a few assorted bits of mild steel – Chouinard and chrome moly were light years away.

Protection is the game, and with the rock overhanging in two planes and the ground overhanging as well it seemed a good idea. There was a lot of 'what if' discussion about coming off, but then leaders never came off, so after a couple of hours fiddling with jammed knots (usually knackerer my slings) off we went, or he went and in a bit he reached a peg and hammer (abandoned). I didn't have a hammer before, but now I did 'cos I'd to take the peg out, and I've still got them both. Never throw anything away – it might come in . . .

And so to the big lay back, which I loved, because in those days I was twice as strong and half the weight and I couldn't jam any better than I can now so I laybacked everything and it was easy, and so we (or I) landed at this grimacing belay on a peg which was slotted in behind a flake – no hammer required – it was loose. And as was our habit it was getting dark and so, by a long, rising featureless, leftward-trending ramp I fled into the gloom, runnerless as usual, and we pleasantly terraced our way down to the glen and the pub. It was shut. No extensions from MacNiven in those days. And we left it for a year. Half-way we had got.

Next year we got serious and camped at the bottom, and sorted out the gear beforehand. The ropes were the same, but he'd liberated a pair of PA's – I was still in Arvon's boots, and it was still steep.

I do believe I've heard that on big walls the second goes up effortlessly behind some mechanical gadget called a Jumar. We didn't have any of those but I was fed-up with this nasty overhanging bit at the beginning so I climbed up the rope and was belayed by the other – much quicker and easier – and after a bit and a layback we appeared at this flake again. And the same peg still rocked in the same slot, so I tied on and sat on my heels below it to keep it in tension, and put my anorak hood up (Blacks sailcloth – like armour plate) and suffered five hours of bombardment from assorted shittite and vegetation.

The mind goes blank under these circumstances, but I did eventually realise that, as usual, it was getting dark; nasty black clouds were gathering round us.

It's interesting watching lightning flash below you; and then: 'Can you tie two ropes together?'

'Yes, why?'

'I think we'd better ab off.' I think he said ab! So with two ropes tied and hung round this peg still loose I drew the short straw and vanished slowly into the glen – he worked on the basis that if the rope or my knots failed he could always climb off – bright lad that! Classic abseil, no modern gear, you did it slow.

And the bloody pub was shut again – it rained on the Sunday – but the pubs were shut anyway.

So, on the Monday, here we go again with the Jumar-alternative experience, and the peg's still there, and none of the chockstones have fallen out of the overhanging chimney, which was all nice and clean after Saturday.

I never really did remember much of the top pitch, but I find it difficult to equate with the book. Anyway we terraced pleasantly about teatime and scrambled down the hill, and after all these uppings and downings we called it Yo-Yo, and we went to the pub and it was open.

And the next day I was knackered and cried off and hitched back to the big city, but Smith went and found Marshall, or Elly, or whoever, and did something else and finally got chopped in the Pamirs; and I wish he could have had half the pints I've had on the strength of it.

* (Editor's Note: it's difficult to comprehend that some 36 years – half a lifetime – separate the publication of this account from the first ascent of that great Glen Coe classic, Yo Yo. It is a magnificent line, overhanging in two planes, which, at least until Food Additives came in, could not be ignored by any young climber with ambition. The abandoned peg and hammer presumably belonged to Don Whillans, trying for an improbable ascent in the cold of winter. If only the pubs had improved as much over the intervening years as has the gear. By coincidence, before you ask, there are two authors with the same name in this issue.)

THE BREEKS AFF A BUDDIE

By Hamish Brown

AS BIG laddies three of us (Jamie, Alec and me, Eck) once did an experiment to see just how *wet* wet could be on a Scottish hill day.

We had been on a bike-and-hike trip but the soaking came from a day climbing on the Cobbler, a day which began in benign-enough fashion but ended with right meteorological tantrums. We fought down off the hill through rain, hail and snow (in September!), gasping, our bodies bent against the storm as if suffering some gripping stomach complaint.

We were thankful to find our Blacks Pal-o-mine tent still standing beside the savage waters of Loch Restil and, as it was not really cold at that level, saturated ventile cags, football strips, string vests, breeks, ex-WD boots, everything in fact, was peeled off (as if we were well-washed fruit) and abandoned at the door. Inside the tent was hardly luxury even if Alex suggested we had every mod. con. with running water inside our abode. Next day we pedalled down the Rest and Be Thankful and got the train home to Paisley – beat.

On arrival we weighed our sodden bundles and, two days later, took everything off the pulley to be weighed again, dry. The difference was 10lb – a gallon of water – each. And we were but skinny laddies.

This really has nothing to do with our more recent escapade except that it was recalled by our being granted an equally-wet day with the same companions as victims. Though our clothing and camping gear may have improved over the 20-year gap it was suggested that our bulk had done likewise, so bearing a gallon of H₂O each off Sgurr Thuilm into Glen Pean bothy was still a valid estimate. Struggling out of those clinging garments and seeing the sodden mass on the floor brought back the earlier memory.

We soon had a fire going and our wet things were hung up on bent fence wire and binder twine while socks lay on the stones like dead furry creatures. In minutes there was a grand steamy fug, distinctive and not unfamiliar to regular hillgoers, and we turned to brewing, at least the others did, for I took the chance of grabbing the central spot before the grate and held my breeches to the flames. They were soon steaming away.

The other two came and sat on big grey stones, one on each side of me, hugging their enamel mugs of tea and ‘enjoying’ what heat escaped from the flanks of my drying process. I reckoned a comment about selfishness just betrayed a regret at missing the priority in holding breeks to the blaze. Jamie sat in hairy long-johns and a Raith scarf and Alex in his old RAF pyjama bottoms.

Our breeches I may say were about the only new items we possessed. We’d obtained them from a shop in Rodney Street when through visiting the Botany in Edinburgh.

At that period there had been debate over wearing jeans on the hill because of their bad chill effect when wet, but G. T., the shop owner, argued that it was the design of jeans, not the material itself, that was at fault, and produced breeches made of denim. We considered we were very 'with it'.

My denim pair steamed away as I held them before me, rotating them every now and then as my knuckles grew intolerably hot. Concentrating on them and trying to take my tea meant that it was the seat that usefully caught the most heat.

I'd just put my mug back on the mantelshelf when the other two rolled back on their shoogly seats utterly convulsed in laughter. (Jamie fell right over backwards.) Alex pointed. 'The steam!' he sobbed. 'Look at the steam!'

'Whit about the steam?' I demanded. My breeks were drying brawly.

I was told. 'It's no steam, Eck, it's smoke.'

'No, it's no,' added Jamie. 'They're on fire.'

They were right too and when I rushed out to bang and dowse the flaming breeches on the puddled path I could hear the other two inside the bothy yelling in glee.

'It's no funny,' I girmed on return but, as I stood there in my underpants and muddy bare feet, holding up breeks with two holes in the bottom you could have put your head through, I saw it was quite funny even if embarrassing for the victim. I began giggling too.

I'm not bad that way.

In fact, my giggles soon took on a hysteria of their own, in no way lessened when the others at last shut up and told me to do so too with: 'It's no that funny.'

'Is it no?' I choked. 'Is it no?'

'No!'

'Weel I ken it is. You see, they're no my breeks. They're yours, Jamie Calder!'

GORAK SHEP: THE AMAZING CLIMBING DOG

By Chris Comerie

THE CLANKING of Yak bells, the conversation and shouts of men trekking, made him lift his head in startled arousal from his slumber beneath the clear blue sky and warm sun of a perfect day in the high mountains of Nepal. Another expedition was circumnavigating the dry and arid lake bed of Gorak Shep, the small hamlet high in the Sagarmatha National Park on the trail to Everest. From these few isolated stone lodges within the sight of the dust bowl, which becomes a lake in wetter times, he was to take his name.

By the doggy standards of Nepal, he was in good nick. A sort of short-legged Border collie with shiny fur and bright, kind eyes. A cute customer by all accounts, attaching himself to any expedition he fancied in the knowledge that he would be well fed by the abundant amounts of food available. All his life he had lived in the shadow of the great white shimmering pyramid of Pumori at the head of the glacier.

'This British lot seem friendly. I think I'll tag along. I've always wanted to climb the mountain, stand on the top and look down on my village, and maybe even look into Tibet.'

So we acquired an expedition dog. We showed him kindness, fussed him and fed him, and in return he showed great loyalty, a loyalty which almost cost him his life. He slept outside my tent in the bitterly cold temperatures of the night, and licked my face in the mornings when I poked my head out of the flap. He never complained.

We had been working hard establishing our strategically-important Camp 1 at 6100m, or was it camp 2? Another had been established at the foot of the steep climbing, the fixed ropes clearly visible while one sat on our small platform terrace of stones we had constructed onto the hillside to pitch our tent. The journey from base camp was a long taxing walk at this altitude. With heavily-laden rucksacks we needed this extra stopover point, gear and food dump. The route we had put up wound its way through fairly steep snow and ice with the occasional step of rock thrown in for good measure. The last 100m before camp were spectacular. A twisting snow arete of cream topping with precipitous oblivion either side which one was able to sit astride at points, à cheval. Then a traverse across a very steep wall of snow just below the ridge crest with bum-twitching exposure, before finally reaching the small col projecting from the south-east face on which we established our camp.

Camp 1 had been established for a couple of days and we were back at base camp resting and loading the rucksacks with more gear. No one noticed Gorak Shep slip quietly into the night, following the scent and footsteps of two of the lads carrying their loads.

'This is easy. I don't know why these men carry all this equipment onto the hill. There's another tent over there. I wonder where I go from here?'

Further bounding and leaping over boulders and loose shale in a rising traverse above the tent, brought him into a couloir filled with snow which revealed the route onwards, and the start of the fixed ropes.

'Blimey, it looks a bit steep up there,' he mused as he took his first tentative steps into the steep snow. Firmly clasping his jaws around the rope he pulled and leapt, sinking his claws into the firm snow in a slow but deliberate motion upwards.

'Who needs crampons when you have a natural set on each paw. I feel sorry for those humans having to clamp all that steel into their feet. And they have only two!'

And so he went on ever upwards, hour after hour, leaping pulling scraping. A faint pungent odour of burning bone drifted across the still night air as his claws scrabbled against the rock outcrops. His fear almost consumed him as he made the final leaps from bucket to bucket across the final exposed wall of *névé*. By now his commitment and loyalty to re-joining the men at the camp almost blinded him into losing his life, he was at his limit. One final push over the lip revealed the tent. The altitude and cold had now firmly taken a grip as he staggered over to the men and promptly collapsed.

At the appointed time the next morning the radio crackled into life, it was Simon Currin, the Everest expedition leader, who was ensconced in his pit at Camp 2 in the Western Cwm, talking to our team member veterinary surgeon, Mark Bryan, who by now had arrived at our camp.

ccssh – 'This is Everest expedition Camp 2 calling Pumori expedition. How high is your camp, Mark?

ccssh – '6100m, but there's not enough air. I think you have moved out of your cocoon this morning and breathed it all in.'

ccssh – 'Not guilty. I have my own oxygen supply here.'

ccssh – 'We have a problem . . . a dog at Camp 1, and he's drunk all our bloody water. It took an hour to melt it.'

ccssh – 'A dog! You're kidding!'

ccssh – 'Yes, we'll have to see about getting it a permit. Have you got any dog food there in the cwm? . . .'

This bizarre conversation went on for some time, with the request to take up some food for the animal. We packed chapatis and hard-boiled eggs into our sacks for the next carry.

Gorak Shep was in a bad way. He had not the strength to stand up let alone climb down, although reversal of his epic was not possible, a fall to his death would have been inevitable had he the reserves to try. He was dying, and Mark had to consider the possibility of putting him down to end his misery. He could not imagine that he would allow himself to a rucksack for a ride down, but he tried, and to his amazement he allowed his limp body to be lowered into a sack back end first. The draw cords were then lightly

Ama Dablam from Pokalde. Photo: Brian Findlay.

Ski ascent of Beinn Chaorach in the Luss Hills. Looking over the Firth of Clyde to Arran. Photo: Donald Bennet.



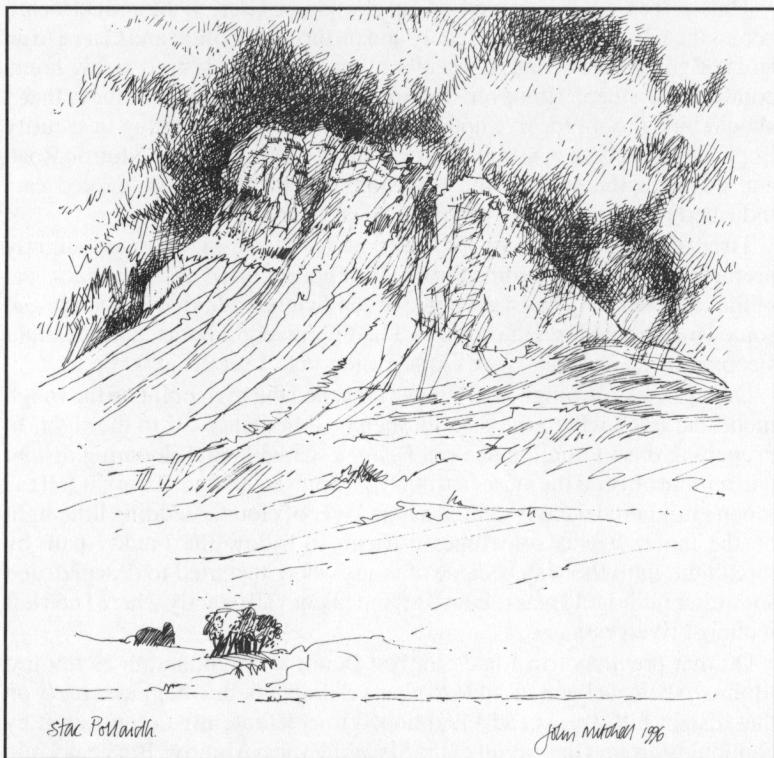


brought around his neck and the lid fastened down, leaving his head projecting. He sat quietly content as the abseiling and the down climbing descent took place. We have some wonderful photographs of this event, all with the magnificent backdrop of Everest and the Western Cwm.

By the time he had reached the foot of the fixed ropes he had made a full recovery, and on release from the sack, bounded around and licked our faces in appreciation. He sat and rested with us for a while until I made a move to begin my ascent. It was my turn to take supplies up to the camp. As I started to make my way Gorak Shep again began to follow. We had to forcibly make him go back to base camp with one of the lads.

On our return to base camp a few days later, he had gone.

We never saw Gorak Shep again. Maybe on reflection he thought his adventures were enough and retired to his home in the valleys, or maybe he joined another expedition to try for another first doggy ascent. We shall never know. Then again we may see him in the future. He never made the top, there was still a long way to go, but it was a good attempt. He boldly goes where no dog has ever been before. Life's full of surprises for Gorak Shep: The Amazing Climbing Dog.



'Down Shep!' Stray dog descending fixed ropes from Camp 1 at 6100m on S.E. Face of Pumori. Photo: Mark Bryan.

Mike Taylor approaching Rinders Bay, van Mijenfjorden down the Vallakra Glacier, Spitzbergen. Scheele Fjellet (1206m) in the distance. Photo: Bill Morrison.

DELAYED CELEBRATION

By Ted Maden

I WAS sitting in the car in the Fort William car park that overlooks Loch Linnhe at the south-west end of town, only partly relaxing in the late afternoon sunshine, my attention on tomorrow's weather forecast. That morning I had driven up from the North of England for a short working visit to Glasgow University before continuing northwards for some hillwalking on the morrow. But which hills? It was early May, quite a bit of snow lay on the tops and a chilly north breeze was blowing. By a lucky quirk of atmospherics John Kettley's voice was coming through loud and clear on the car radio. '... Highlands ... fine morning, showers moving in from the north later.' Maybe the weather would hold for long enough for me to do something good. From the possibilities jostling in my mind one came to the fore. It would require more driving, so first I called in at the other end of town to fortify myself from British Rail's bill of fare.

Thus refreshed, I hastened on up the Great Glen to Drumnadrochit, across the moorland road to Beaully and on through Contin and Garve to an isolated inn in the wilds. It was 9p.m. and I much desired a few hours comfortable sleep. However, the innkeeper declined my request that I should hire a room for five hours and depart at 2a.m., alluding to security implications! There was nothing for it but to continue by Destitution Road and down to the start of the walk into Shenavall. A few parked cars indicated that there would probably be company there.

Tired though I was, the prospect of the walk in was just slightly preferable to that of spending the next few hours curled up on the back seat of the car. For food I had a great pile of sandwiches, plus a water bottle and some Isostar powder, but no stove. I had lightweight boots, a lightweight sleeping bag, karrimat, spare clothes and torch. I set off at 9.50p.m.

Daylight was turning to twilight as I reached the high point on the rough moorland track where the path to Shenavall branches off to the right. In deepening dusk I could make out Beinn a' Chlaidheimh looming distant and remote beyond the unseen trough of Strath na Sealga. As night fell the moon glimmered weakly behind a high layer of cloud, shedding little light on the moor. It was sometimes difficult to follow the muddy path by torchlight, until the way became obvious where it started to descend, and soon after midnight I was relieved to find Shenavall exactly where I had left it almost five years ago.

On that previous trip I had climbed Beinn a' Chlaidheimh as my last Munro. It had not been feasible to plan a champagne and bagpipes party on that distant hill, so instead I had hoped to celebrate my compleation by continuing around the circuit of the Six Wilderness Munros. But heavy rain

had commenced soon after my arrival at Shenavall and by morning the rivers were swollen. I had to settle for snatching the summit in the chilly downpour followed by a swift descent to the east before the rising waters of the Abhainn Loch an Nid cut off escape. I had been mentally preparing myself for a long detour round the head of Loch an Nid, but fortunately, I found a safe crossing below the loch where the stream was split by an islet. Even some of the lateral torrents on the way back to Shenavall required care. At Shenavall a recently-arrived large party of walkers provided a psychological boost for the walk out with the streams still high.

So now I was back for the Wilderness Six. But first, I needed a kip. Downstairs was full so I spread out on the floor of an upstairs room.

I arose at 5.15. One of the bothy occupants was outside answering a call of nature. We acknowledged each other silently as was appropriate for the hour. He returned to bed but I was soon on my way across the Abhainn Loch an Nid, which this time presented no difficulties, and onto the lower slopes of Beinn a' Chlaidheimh. I breakfasted briefly in the lee of a big boulder a few hundred feet up among some heather-covered ancient glacial debris. Orange rays of the early sun pierced a cloud ceiling and dramatically illuminated the slopes of Beinn Dearg Mor opposite. I continued up heather and between little sandstone terraces for longer than I expected until eventually striking the sharp summit ridge and continuing to the cairn. To the right the hillside plunged spectacularly into the depths of Gleann na Muice. The earlier shafts of sunlight had been replaced by a bleak greyness. Little caps of cloud were forming on the surrounding hills, and curtains of snowy looking precipitation were stealing in from the sea towards Loch na Sealga and An Teallach. John Kettley's weather was coming sooner than expected.

It arrived as I descended towards the complex col terrain that precedes Sgurr Ban. Beinn a' Chlaidheimh became immersed in cloud and softly falling snow. In the lonely hollow of Loch a' Bhrisidh two cormorants honked eerily. I was experiencing ebbing enthusiasm for continuing in deteriorating conditions, with the prospect of few views and possibly the chance of the odd thunderstorm. On the slope of Sgurr Ban these negative thoughts became overwhelming. I turned around and started descending towards the Abhainn Loch an Nid. I reached a viewpoint overlooking the glen and paused to inspect the best way of continuing down the slabby hillside to the river crossing of my previous visit. A sandwich seemed in order.

While I munched, a tiny chink of blue sky peeped through the clouds. It was about 9.30a.m. Most intending hillwalkers would only just have finished breakfast and would be looking forward to their day on the hill. What on earth was I doing, giving up so soon?

Like Dick Whittington I turned again, and followed my tracks back up snow patches to my previous high point, and then without hesitation on up

the great whaleback of Sgurr Ban. Another snow shower was approaching but I reckoned I would at least traverse Sgurr Ban before considering whether to quit.

The col between Sgurr Ban and Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair is a remote spot with long descents to wild glens on both sides. Although it was snowing again it seemed preferable now to continue up the Mullach and so gain the highest summit in the area. It was my third ascent of this hill. A few years previously I had scrambled up its spectacular east ridge on a perfect summer afternoon in a brisk push from Kinlochewe. Many years earlier, during a climbing trip to Carnmore, a friend (Peter Rowat) and I had set off on a day of doubtful weather to explore the wilderness, and had done a somewhat complex walk taking in Ruadh Stac Mor, Sgurr Ban and the Mullach. At the Mullach cairn we had noticed a curious buzzing which, there being no bees, Peter had tried to interpret as water seeping through the stones, until we simultaneously realized it was static electricity discharging and we ran down several hundred feet of hillside to safety. Although there had been no lightning, the memory of that experience may have contributed to my present unease about the weather. So on the Mullach's summit I was reassured to catch sight of another chink of blue sky through the clouds, and I resolved to head for the next objective – Beinn Tarsuinn.

In misty weather the terrain to the south and west of the Mullach can be confusing, and I was surprised to see a sketchy path skirting the flank of what I took to be Beinn Tarsuinn. A direct ascent of the hill was achieved in brisk time, and not until descending out of the mist on the other side did I realise that the mountain ahead was not A' Mhaighdean, which I had expected, but, indeed, Beinn Tarsuinn. I had been over Meall Garbh, an optional bump.

More surprises were in store. From my first Carnmore trip in pre-Beatles 1957 I had remembered Beinn Tarsuinn as a dull hill which did not then even score as a Munro (it having been promoted subsequently). But now after the summit I encountered an airy, crenellated scrubby ridge of which I had no recollection. The implications were dire. Had I previously not climbed Beinn Tarsuinn at all? Had I, therefore, been masquerading falsely as a Munroist? Would I be demoted five years down the list of compleaters? Fortunately, I was to be spared such ignominy. During my first few years of climbing I had kept a detailed diary, to which I referred after the present walk was over. My early ascent had been in bad weather, but the summit ridge was clearly recorded: '... quite sharp, pinnacles of Torridonian'. Honour was saved.

To return to the present, on the descent from Beinn Tarsuinn the weather was showing tentative signs of improving. A' Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor were clear, as was Slioch to the south across Lochan Fada. The clouds were no longer of leaden appearance and there was a definite hint of blue

to seawards. I paused for lunch in a convenient peat hag before continuing up A' Mhaighdean.

There was no doubt about my previously having climbed A' Mhaighdean from the spectacular Carnmore side. A photograph of the north-westerly prospect from the summit to Fionn Loch and Carnmore Crag adorns a wall at home. The south-eastern approach, in contrast, is up a gentle slope which gave no hint of what was in store until the upper slopes narrowed into an approach ridge towards the summit. On the Ruadh Stac Mor flank a snowbowl opened out. To the south was revealed a great drop to Gorm Loch Mor with its crumpled low retaining ridge and the cliffs of Beinn Lair beyond. And then the summit, the breathtaking view. The north-western cliffs plunged vertically away and the great expanse of the Fionn Loch country sprang instantly into sight. Fresh snow had fallen on the top, its gleam offsetting the depths below and the distances beyond.

I spent only a couple of minutes on the summit, but what a couple of minutes. Hunching my shoulders against the chilly north-westerly breeze, I tried to absorb all that the wonderful panorama afforded, from the nearby Torridonian cliffs which drop from the north-west ridge of A' Mhaighdean, to the Lewisian gneiss of Torr na h-Iolaire and Carnmore Crag and the gleaming expanse of loch stretching away into the distance. I took some photographs.

Then I turned and went down the south-east ridge to a point where the frozen slopes of the north-easterly snowbowl were sufficiently easy angled for walking. And so to the col before Ruadh Stac Mor, past a distinctively built-up bivvy cave which is mentioned in *Hamish's Mountain Walk*, and the pull up to Ruadh Stac, the final summit of the day. All the peaks were now clear. Beyond Shenavall, An Teallach caught the afternoon sun. Nearer, the great horseshoe of the day's walk was revealed. From the west ridge of Ruadh Stac I recognized the view across Fuar Loch and the Fionn Loch to Beinn Airigh Charr which forms the dustcover of *The Big Walks*.

Gleann na Muice with its side glens and several cliffs partly illuminated by the afternoon sunlight were magic. Some way down the glen I passed a herd of deer. At Larachantivore I began to meet other walkers and campers. I arrived back at Shenavall at 6.25p.m. and gratefully accepted a cup of tea from two of the previous night's occupants, who had been referring to me as 'the mystery visitor'. They were from York and had done the first three peaks of my round, then descending via the east ridge of the Mullach. We started the walk out together, but I gradually dropped behind in the wake of their superior fitness.

At Braemore Junction I phoned my partner to confirm my exit from the wilderness. Having no need of another 2a.m. start, I had no difficulty in finding overnight accommodation, at a different inn from the one I had tried the previous night.

MARKETING THE MUNROS

By David Hughes

I'M SURE you can make money out of almost anything. I mean, who would have thought that you could make millions out of such basic commodities as water, electricity and gas? That's just the sort of question that Glaswegian entrepreneur, Sir Donald McBeinn, was asking himself when he first hit on the idea of marketing the Munros.

For many decades the Munros had been the domain of a few hardy hillwalkers, and they were virtually unknown outside of these circles. But the 1980s saw a gradual increase in their popularity, and McBeinn saw a window of opportunity and struck. And, of course, as they say, the rest is history.

McBeinn and his partner, Anna Keegach, are among the top 50 in terms of richest people in this country, and their financial success is entirely due to them taking an obscure obsession – namely bagging Munros – and turning it into a national pastime. The tale of their enterprise – one of money against the mountain and finance against the fell – is a story worth investigating, and I thus sought an interview with McBeinn.

We met on top of M21 on a typical blustery Highland day of sunshine and showers. I first of all asked him why he had changed all the names of the Munros. His reply was quite simple: 'I haven't changed the names of anything,' he said crisply. 'This is the 21st highest Munro, so it is called M21. Its Gaelic name becomes redundant. In any case, if you're going to market a product you can't have a list of unpronounceable names. This Munro that we are on now used to be called Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan. Now where's the market in a name like that?'

I have to admit that he did have a point, and the public seem to find the absence of Gaelic names a lot easier. But the changes haven't stopped there. M21 boasts to be one of the most remote of all the Munros, yet its summit is only two miles' walk from the nearest 'Munro Centre', a place where cars may be parked, fast food is served and souvenirs purchased.

In a bid to make his mountains more accessible and therefore more popular, McBeinn built roads up remote valleys. In fact, all Munros are served by such centres, the most accessible hill being M1 where the summit plateau has been turned into a giant car park, with a revolving restaurant just yards from the summit satellite dish and computer terminal.

'Didn't a mountain top usually have a trig point or cairn?' I inquired.

'Summit cairns or trig points were a waste of time,' he pointed out. 'They served no other purpose but to mark the top of the hill. We had to market the actual summit in some way – give people an incentive to get there. All the Munros are linked by satellite to a Communications Headquarters. Weather sensors send information every 15 minutes. We've set up a Munro Hot Line where you can ring up and find out what the conditions are like on

the mountain of your choice – like if the top is covered in clag, temperature, wind speed and all that sort of thing. All the punter has to do is dial 0891 277 followed by the Munro number of his or her choice. It's a very popular service.'

Well, that explained the satellite dish, but the computer terminal? McBeinn continued. 'That was Anna's idea. The terminal serves two purposes. You know about the Munro books? Well we've produced an interactive CD-ROM package. When a punter gets to a summit they can punch in the details of their ascent and, assuming they have the appropriate modem, the information can be automatically downloaded on to their Personal Computer. The machine will even take a photo of you, which can then be superimposed on the images already on the CD-ROM.'

And the second purpose?

'Punters can play Munlotto. They purchase cards for £1 each at a Munro Centre. When they reach the summit, they can see if they've won by swiping the card through the computer. There's a 1 in 5 chance of winning, with a jackpot prize of £10 million available each week. The concept of climbing a mountain and then descending £10 million richer is fantastic. It gives the punter a real buzz. Great marketing tool . . .' McBeinn's voice trailed away as a 'punter', clearly out of breath and consumed with mounting tension and excitement, approached the summit terminal and swiped his card.

'You haven't won on this occasion,' droned a mechanical voice from the machine. 'Have a nice day, and better luck next time.' The mountaineer paused briefly to look at the view. 'Marvellous technology,' he enthused as he scrutinised the satellite dish. 'I've got an FRS 160 in my house, but this one here's at least 100 times more powerful. Marvellous technology.'

I ventured to ask him how many Munros he'd done this year.

'This is my 210th. It's good to bag these remote ones. The two-mile walk to the summit puts some people off, but I'm a bit of a connoisseur. Plus there's always a chance of becoming a millionaire when you reach the top. Not today though,' as he forlornly waved his ticket. 'Still, two pence of my £1 spent goes to charity, so it's a worthwhile cause.'

As the 'punter' departed, I quickly asked McBeinn what happened to the other 98p of a Munlotto ticket. 'We're in business. We've got overheads, running costs and tough competition. It's not all roses, you know.'

I pointed out that some people would argue that his developments had desecrated the Scottish countryside, leaving traffic jams where there was once wilderness.

'That's the price of popularity, I suppose,' he retorted. 'But you always get this sort of moaning from the left-wing Trotsky minority.'

Had success gone to his head? Not at all.

'The knighthood came as a bit of a shock actually, and a lot of people have said: 'Why don't you change the name from Munros to McBeinns?' It was a nice thought, but in this day and age you've got to preserve tradition haven't you?'

SPIDERS AND CLIMBERS

By Isobel Baldwin

THE ROYAL Museum of Scotland has been fortunate in acquiring, during the past four years, a major collection of Scottish montane spiders. This has been made possible through the efforts and cooperation of hillwalkers, many of them members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. The spiders have been incorporated into the research collections of the museum and are already proving to be a valuable scientific resource.

The idea for the project began – truth be told – as a result of watching Muriel Gray lead a camera crew over a concourse of Munros and thinking that they could increase their productivity no end by turning over a few stones and collecting some spiders. The idea stayed with me and, eventually, I wrote to Bill Brooker inquiring if he thought it feasible to ask hillwalkers for help in spider collecting. His response was very positive and as well as giving me details of the SMC he also suggested I place a notice in the relevant magazines as he was sure that the project would attract enough interested volunteers to make it worthwhile.

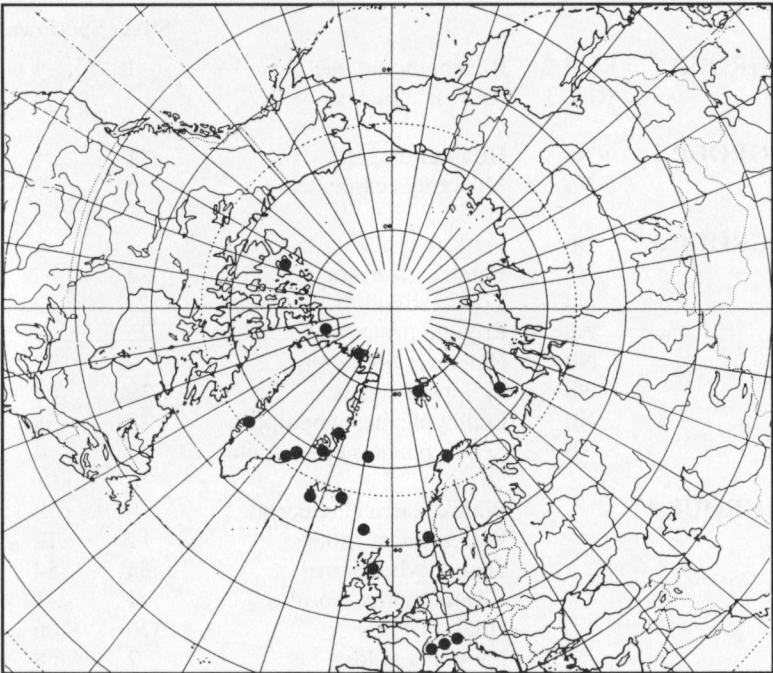
And worthwhile it has indeed turned out to be because you reach so many areas not noted for ease of access and where casual sampling throughout the year would otherwise be impossible. Coincidentally, sometime later I was to come across an article in the 1894 volume of the *Annals of the Society of Natural History* entitled *Spiders collected in the Neighbourhood of Aviemore*. In it was the following statement: 'The specimen, I ought to say, was kindly brought to me by Mr Alex Robertson, a member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club.' And 100 years later members of the Club are once again collecting spiders.

By the time the project was well underway there were 25 or so hillwalkers collecting regularly and sending their catches to me at the museum. Inevitably, there were some who expressed interest and to whom I sent collecting kits, but as I never heard from them again I can only trust that they did not break a leg or otherwise damage themselves in pursuit of their first spider. I should perhaps have warned them that they might have to turn over in excess of 50 stones to make their maiden catch.

Not only did I bid my volunteers to catch the spider, done by sucking it into a 'pooter' and then blowing it into a tube, I also required them to fulfil the equally-important task of completing a data slip noting habitat, altitude, grid reference and of course – the actual Munro. This they faithfully carried out enclosing the slip with the relevant tubes of spiders. Because it is essential that the spiders reach me in as fresh condition as possible the packets needed to be posted as soon as the collectors returned to 'civilization'. After a fine and invigorating day this is not a great task

but, after a fairly foul and knackered one, it must have been something of a chore. I am pleased to relate that most Mondays and Tuesdays saw an In-Tray full of Jiffy bags containing some of Scotland's most important species, all of them alive and kicking and somewhat reluctant to leave their plastic tubes.

In the beginning, the prime aim of the project was to discover more about the distribution of those spiders that are restricted to high ground. The Highlands of Scotland are home to all species of British montane spider and, while some of them are also found in the North of England and in the Welsh mountains, it is in our own largely inaccessible territories that the scope for investigation into these native Arctic/Alpine-related spiders is greatest. It is said that temperature falls 1°F for each degree of latitude north of the equator, and that the same fall occurs for every 300ft rise in altitude: thus the fauna of mountain tops and Arctic regions are often compared, sharing as they do the same limiting factors of a low but narrow temperature range coupled with the exposure factor. (Bristowe 1927)



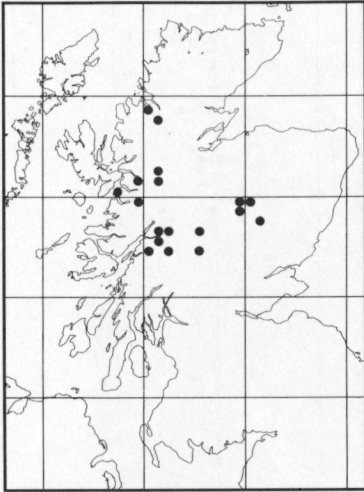
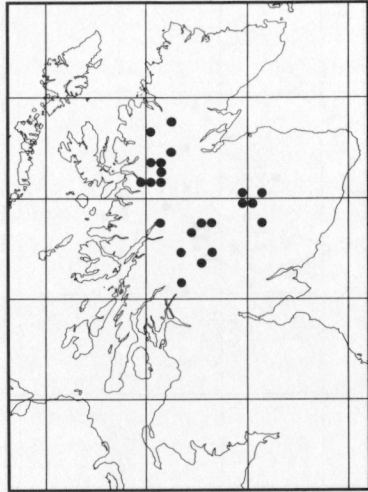
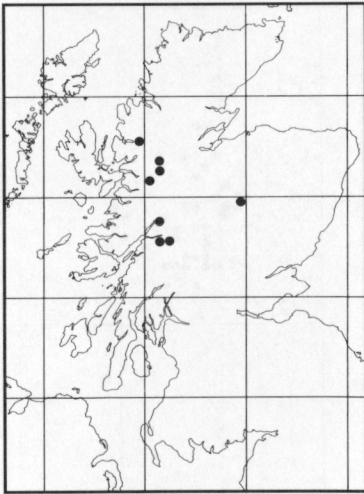
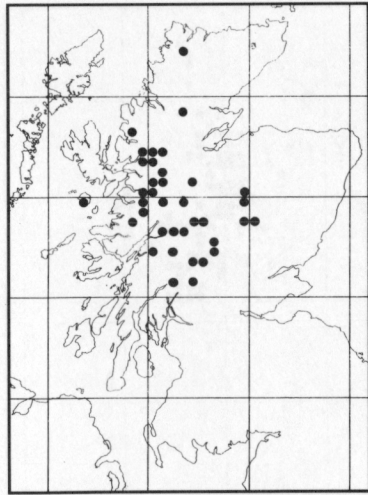
Distribution of *Meioneta nigripes* showing the relationship between arctic and alpine conditions.

The rarest, or most endangered, of British species are contained in the *Red Data Book* which is an annotated catalogue designed to protect both them and their habitat sites. Of the specimens collected (see table) two are mentioned in the RDB, *Arctosa alpigena* and *Rhaebothorax paetulus*. The wolf spider, *Arctosa alpigena* is large, chestnut coloured and exceedingly handsome and was found twice, once from a pre-recorded site and then again, most happily, from a new location. The tiny, black money spider, *Rhaebothorax paetulus* was found on Glas Maol, a new site for the species and new also to the Museum collections. Other less rare species are nevertheless recognized as Nationally Notable and 10 of these species have been found, occasionally in unexpectedly large numbers with some proving to be much more widespread than previous records have suggested. A further eight species already regarded as common and widely distributed were collected in sufficiently large numbers to show interesting features regarding their distribution, altitude preferences and biology.

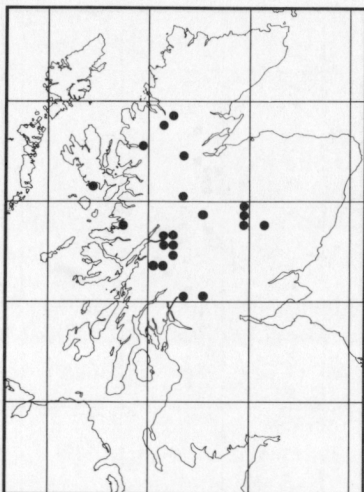
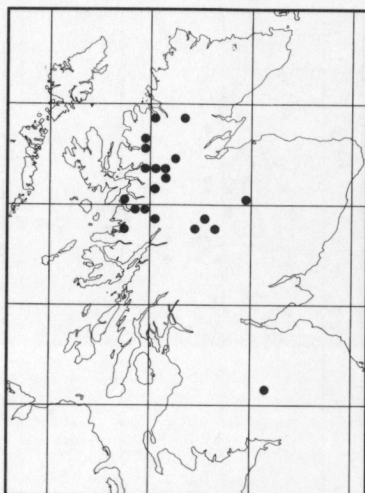
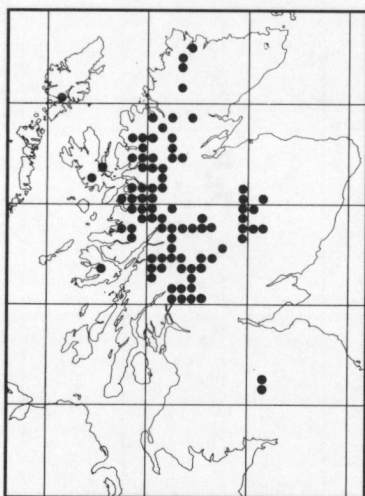
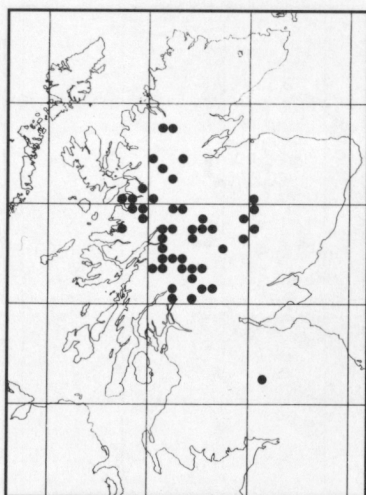
All of these species are listed below and various of them will be referred to again.

Captures of Montane Spiders 1992-95

			Sites	Specimens
GROUP 1	RDB 2	<i>Rhaebothorax paetulus</i>	1	1
	RDB3	<i>Arctosa alpigena</i>	3	4
GROUP 2	Na	<i>Hilaira nubigena</i>	1	1
	Na	<i>Macrargus carpenteri</i>	5	6
GROUP 3	Nb	<i>Pardosa trailli</i>	1	1
	Nb	<i>Entelecara errata</i>	23	32
	Nb	<i>Tiso aestivus</i>	27	37
	Nb	<i>Erigone tirolensis</i>	25	37
	Nb	<i>Halorates holmgreni</i>	9	11
	Nb	<i>Meioneta nigripes</i>	39	61
	Nb	<i>Lepthyphantes whymperi</i>	22	38
	Nb	<i>Lepthyphantes complicatus</i>	4	4
GROUP 4		<i>Walckenaera clavicornis</i>	8	8
		<i>Walckenaera capito</i>	12	12
		<i>Scotinotylus evansi</i>	34	54
		<i>Rhaebothorax morulus</i>	1	1
		<i>Hilaira frigida</i>	376	406
		<i>Meioneta gulosa</i>	7	8
		<i>Oreonetides vaginatus</i>	50	63
		<i>Lepthyphantes angulatus</i>	6	6
		<i>Porrhomma montanum</i>	9	11

**Entelecara errata.****Erigone tirolensis.****Halorates holmgreni.****Meioneta nigripes.**

In addition to the 802 montane spiders contained in the 21 species listed, certain common and widespread non-montane species were also found on high ground. A total of 374 specimens representing 50 species of non-montane spiders were collected, the commonest being *Robertus lividus* and *Lepthyphantes zimmermanni*. These specimens tend to be rather non-specific regarding their habitat requirements and are also just as likely to be found at 300ft as at 3000ft, although at low altitudes they are found in

***Lepthyphantes whymperi******Scotinotylus evansi*.*****Hilaira frigida*.*****Oreonetides vaginatus*.**

greater numbers. All of these records, both the montane and non-montane species will in due course find their way on to the Spider Recording Scheme data base and will be published in a series of annotated distribution maps.

As the project developed other interesting factors began to make themselves apparent. For instance, a greater number of females than males were collected. The montane species were made up of 194 males and 594

females – more than three times as many overall, although the proportion of males to females varies from species to species. In *Meioneta nigripes* for example, females made up 43% of the total catch, in *Hilaira frigida* 75% and in *Scotinotylus evansi* 93%. There will be various reasons for this, but bearing in mind that 99% of the spiders caught are obtained by stone turning, the main cause is probably that males wander more than females and are simply ‘not at home’ when you call. They are probably out fulfilling their purpose in life – that of searching for mateable females.

We know that when pitfall traps are used as the collecting method, significantly more males than females are trapped because they wander and fall into them. Males are also probably faster on their feet and may be smarter at evading their pursuers and thus more difficult to catch. It is also possible that in certain species males are indeed much rarer than females as seems to be the case with *Entelecara errata* where relatively fewer males have been captured either by random collecting or by trapping.

Altitude also has an effect on species distribution with certain montane species occurring as low down as 650m and some of these are indeed present and more frequent on the lowland hills. These include the sub-montane species *Meioneta gulosa*, *Walckenaera capito*, *Walckenaera clavicornis*, *Scotinotylus evansi* and *Orenetides vaginatus* but as they are also upwardly mobile they can also be found at over 1000m. Other species such as *Arctosa alpigena*, *Erigone tirolensis*, *Lepthyphantes whymperi* and *Halorates holmgreni* only occur with any regularity at heights over 1000m and are seldom, if ever, found at lower altitudes.

For a variety of other reasons certain of the species merit special mention. These include the magnificent wolf spider *Arctosa alpigena* which was first discovered in 1872 from near Braemar by a man aptly named Traill, but was not seen again until Alexander Robertson of the aforesaid Scottish Mountaineering Club, found another on Cairntoul in 1893. The Cairngorms have produced two further records, once in 1914 and then again in 1979. The species was regarded as very rare and thought to be restricted to the Cairngorms but, in a trapping programme on Creag Meagaidh during 1983-5 a total of 211 specimens were captured and another trapping programme in the Cairngorms two years later produced 141 specimens. In 1987 the species was recorded for the first time from north of the Great Glen on Sgurr nan Clach Geala in the Fannichs. The first specimens to pass into my hands came in 1992, as a result of the present project, when two males and a female were collected from a new site north of the Great Glen on Sgurr nan Conbhairean during May, and again in July when a single male was collected on Cairn Toul. Seven sites for this species are now known and where it does exist, it is likely to occur in large numbers and there are no doubt more locations where it is to be discovered.

Material housed in the museum research collections is often used to resolve differences between species and this has been the case with

Entelecara errata and *Hilaira frigida*. Adults of *Entelecara errata* (26 females and six males) have been collected during the project on 23 occasions at different sites from April to September. I recently lent the males to Jorg Wunderlich in Germany who, after examination of the specimens, informs me that this is identical to a species which occurs in Iceland named *E. media*. It is very satisfying to be able to supply specimens for taxonomic research in this way and your efforts have contributed towards the decision that the Icelandic and Scottish specimens, once thought to be different species, are identical. I also recently received and was able to fulfil a request from Michael Saaristo in Finland for Scottish specimens of *Hilaira frigida*, both males and females, again for taxonomic research. He was comparing specimens of this species from Greenland with those from Northern Europe and has concluded that in this instance, two species rather than one are involved. Isn't it nice to be helpful?

Hilaira frigida is the most common montane spider occurring in Britain and accounts for just more than half the total montane spiders collected in our survey with a single capture point often yielding several specimens. Although it is a well known species the data collected during the last three years suggests fresh evidence regarding its life history. Many of the adult females sent to me during early summer were gravid females full of eggs and a little later, by a happy accident, some were laying their eggs in the capture tubes while in the care of the postal service. During the subsequent weeks very few adults of either sex were captured, a fact which cannot solely be accounted for by the relatively fewer collecting visits. I think it reasonable to suggest that after mating and laying eggs the adults had died. The eggs laid by a female in early June were kept until the spiderlings emerged five weeks later. By mid-August sub-adult spiders were being captured and by mid-September newly-moulted adult males and females were found.

It has previously been proposed that *Hilaira frigida* takes two years to moult and become adult, but it now seems likely that this is all achieved within eight to 10 weeks, during the period of optimum weather conditions and good food resources. This new and very fat generation appears to overwinter protected beneath the snow (adult specimens have been sent to me during November and December) re-emerging in the spring as temperatures rise and the snow melts to begin the cycle again.

Finally, some words concerning the Spider Recording Scheme under whose aegis all records of your spiders will be incorporated into an atlas of distribution maps. In common with other recording schemes, spider species are recorded by 10km squares and consequently the catches from more than one top will appear in a single square. Thus, by its very nature, 'square bashing' masks the frequency of a species occurrence. However, each map will be annotated with notes on species rarity or commonality as well as details of habitat, distribution by altitude and seasons when adult.

So, all the information supplied by you will form an integral part of the Distribution Atlas and will increase everyone's awareness of this little known group.

The whole project has been a most interesting exercise, on a personal as well as a scientific level, and I am indeed grateful to all the participants. I am indebted to my spider colleague, Jim Stewart, who saved me on numerous occasions from being overwhelmed by identification backlogs and who diligently produced the 16-page computer printout; to Dot Hartley who produced the text, and to Liz Pilling who not only collected spiders, but wrote labels, checked references and proof-read the lists. I continue to work on spiders and look forward to the arrival of the 'Jiffy Bag' – for some time yet.

All that remains for me is to say once more: 'Mind How You Go.'

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ESTIMATING TIME IN MOUNTAIN NAVIGATION

(With particular reference to hillwalking in the Scottish mountains.)

By Michael Götz

ESTIMATING time in hillwalking is an important ability – indeed it can be life-saving. Such an ability needs to be cultivated and practised, and it should be a simple, quick calculation. Hillwalking in Scotland frequently involves long hikes over flattish, boggy ground. This article concerns itself mainly with the ability to judge the time a walker needs to cover one particular section of a route by looking at the map.

There are several systems currently in use. The more accurate they promise to be, the more cumbersome their use. Naismith's Rule and Tranter's Variation of the same always requires distances to be first converted from metres (or, worse, from miles) on the landscape, to millimetres (or inches) on the map, a calculation which can become difficult in adverse conditions just when it is important to be quick, reliable and accurate. Matters are complicated by the fact that most walkers still think in miles, but are often obliged to calculate in kilometres.

For my modified rules I make the following assumptions:

1. Most hillwalkers in Scotland use O.S. maps at 1:50 000.
2. The average speed on flattish, intermittently boggy ground for a party of two-three walkers, mid-spring to mid-autumn, allowing for short stops, is no more than 3 km per hour.
3. Very often the walker will have to rely on his or her map to identify a route, as paths are frequently lacking.
4. Most compasses have a millimetre rule.

The well-established 'horizontal-vertical method' for estimating times ought to be used, which means that 'flattish' and 'steep' grounds are calculated in two different ways. This is how I propose to simplify the calculation:

1. Look at the map and decide whether the ground is 'flattish' or 'steep'.
2. On the sections with significant slope, the horizontal distance covered is ignored, and only the vertical height gain or loss is calculated. The average walker in Scotland covers one contour line in $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes.
3. On horizontal ground measure the distance to be covered in millimetres; this will be the time in minutes required to walk this distance.
4. Add both time estimates.

(Calculation: using a 1:50 000 map, 3km on the ground is proportionate to 60mm. At a pace of 3kmph, these 60mm are covered in one hour, or 60 minutes. One millimetre is covered in one minute.)

The walker should appreciate that this is a rough estimate only, and that adverse conditions in any form will add time. If the walking pace is slower or faster, the calculation however remains simple, and avoids transformation from 'map mm', to 'landscape metres', and vice-versa. The following example takes us through a variety of walking paces over flattish, boggy ground.

Example (1:50 000 map)

Pace (in km/h)	Time/map distance (in walking min. per 'map mm')	Calculation for a 20mm distance on map (in minutes)
2	1.5	$20 \times 1.5 = 30$
3	1.0	$20 \times 1 = 20$
4	0.75	$20 \times 0.75 = 15$

or, using a delightful mathematical *aide memoire*:

at 3 km/h: mm measured on map = minutes to walk.

at 2 km/h: mm measured on map times 3 divided by 2 = minutes to walk.

at 4 km/h: mm measured on map times 3 divided by 4 = minutes to walk.

It is obviously important that the walker retains the ability to convert distances measured on the map into real-term distances, but as a quick way to estimate walking times using the assumptions made above, this method is thought to be helpful.

SCOTTISH HILL-NAMES – THE SCANDINAVIAN CONNECTION

By Peter Drummond

IN JULY 1995 our party of three reached the summit of North Iceland's highest mountain, Kerling. We laid claim, tongue perhaps in cheek, to its first Scottish winter ascent – in summer: or more accurately to the first summer ascent in winter conditions by Scots. The panorama on top brought to mind that Hymn-line about Greenland's icy mountains, give or take a few hundred miles west. For although it was the time of year of 23-hour daylight, being within the horizon of the Arctic Circle, a blizzard over the past three days had blanketed the top 1000m above the Lambi Hut, and ice axes were the order of the day.

The Lambi Hut looks like a B & Q garden hut held down by cables, but inside it seemed to expand Tardis-like to offer six comfy bunks, powerful stove for heating and cooking, and many mod cons. It also had a visitors' book which revealed an apparent dearth of peak-baggers in the Scottish mould. A mere handful of passers-by and hut residents had climbed Kerling at any time of year, strengthening our self-mocking claim.

But what does the name mean, I asked a couple from nearby Akureyri, doing a low-level circuit up the valley, who dropped into the hut for tea and a nip that afternoon after our return. The woman said: 'It is a word in our language for old woman.' Of course, we cried, as the bawbees dropped simultaneously, carlin. As in Carlin's Cairn, or as in the Gaels' Beinn a'Chailleach – the same word in Scots, the same meaning in Gaelic.

She continued: 'Kerling is a common name in our mountains, and sometimes there is a Kerl – her husband – nearby, usually smaller!' Our thoughts went to Glen Einich, with Am Bodach eyeballing A'Chailleach and she replying with a stony glare. We'd brought our own malt to Iceland to avoid the quadrupled price, and our guests were happy to accept another dram. What about Sultur, the sharp-pointed peak we looked north from Kerling down on to? Searching for the English word, she pointed at the stout pillars of the bunk beds. Another penny dropped, ringing up Suilven, sulr bheinn, the pillar mountain above Lochinver originally named by the Viking sailors plying the Sutherland (south land) coast.

We moved with them to the hut door to see them off; they were going down to ford the river. Above it rose two striking mountains, Kistu and Trollafjall. The former means exactly what kist does in Scots and what

Ciste Dubh in Glen Shiel indicates. The latter, almost identical in sound to Rum's Trollaval, is a common name in Iceland (and Norway) for a peak with rocky pinnacles which are likened to the trolls of legend.

But are the similarities of name mere coincidence? The Scandinavian and Scots languages share a common Germanic root which accounts for kerlings and kists. And clearly the movement of Viking peoples forged a connection – from south-west Norway to the British Isles in the 9th and 10th century, peopling the northern and western isles and the western seaboard. And also from both Norway and the Hebrides to settle Iceland from the 10th century. Quite a number of Scottish hill-names clearly contain Norse words, even if in Gaelicised form. And it may well be that certain concepts of names for hills travelled too. The Kerlings and Kerls of Iceland, the Carlins of south Scotland, the Cailleachs and Bodachs of Gaeldom, and the Old Man of Coniston in the Norse 'colony' of the Lakes, may share common intellectual ancestry.

The principal Norse mountain-word is, of course, *fjall* or *fjell*, occurring throughout Iceland and Norway. It is recognisable in Scottish hill-names from Shetland (as in Scalla Field), Orkney (as in Vestra Fiold), Lewis (Mealisval), Harris (Husaval – literally house fell) and Rum (with its Allival and Askival). Farther south the word is fell, particularly in the Lakes (the Lakeland fells) but also in Scotland (Hart Fell and Goatfell) and the Isle of Man (whose Snaefell is spelled just as are Iceland's several versions of the same). Goatfell's first appearance on maps was as Keadefell in 1650, clearly from Geitefjall – there are Geitehyrggen and Geitnyken mountains in Norway and Iceland.

There are perhaps a dozen or so other Norse hill-words embedded in current hill-names in Scotland, with clear cousins in Iceland and Norway. *Bjerg*, related to the German *berg*, appears in the Beorgs of Skelberry in Shetland, and is almost certainly the root of the various berry hills in the Borders like Nutberry Hill. *Brekka*, a slope, as in Iceland's Klettabrekka, is probably the root of Sutherland's Ben Klibreck (*klif brekka*, slope at the cliff). *Gnupr* is the simple uncompounded root of Unst's The Neap and Foula's The Noup. *Hlidr*, a slope, as in Iceland's Hlidarfjell is possibly the focus of the name Ben Lee on Skye: for while the Gaelic word *liath*, grey, is of similar sound, most of Skye's names are Norse. *Hog*, and *haugr*, two of several Norse words meaning high or height, are found in Coll's Beinn Hagh and The Hoe in Pabbay, and probably in Shetland's Hoo Kame; this latter name incorporates the word *kambr*, a crest or ridge, a common Icelandic hill-name element in hills like Kambsfell (also above our Lambi doss) – in Scotland the word kame is used for a sinuous glacial sand ridge, and also is found in hill-names like Kaim Hill above Largs, site of the battle where the Vikings' power was broken.

Hnjukur is not a word with much resonance in Scotland, although in Iceland it is widespread - our first summit of 1995 was Eirikhshnjukur named after one of the ubiquitous Erics in their history - but it does appear in The Sneug on Foula. *Stakkr* and *stor* are two Norse words with a clear Scottish link; Storkletten (big rock) in Norway, Storhøvd (big hill) and Blastakur (blue stack) in Iceland, are echoed in The Storr on Skye, Stac Pollaidh, Beinn Stack and the Stack of Glencoul, all on the western seaboard within sight of Viking seafarers, all with steep sides evoked by the name. *Varda* or *vardheld* meaning a cairn or watch hill appears as Ward Hill throughout Orkney, Shetland and the northern coast, and there may be a connection with the Gaelic faire, to watch, as in the Hill of Fare. It is no surprise to find a Vordufell in Iceland too.

Another Norse word frequently used in hill-names is *tunga*, a tongue, as in Iceland's Tungufjall, one of several; *Tunga* is a common hill-name in Norway too. Barra's Ben Tangaval, with its superfluous *ben*, is patently a Norse hill-name. Hills like Skye's Teanga Mor or Lochaber's Meall na Teanga reflect perhaps both a word and a concept crossing the language barrier into Gaelic.

Other concepts, apparently of Norse provenance, that appear to have influenced Hebridean hill-names, include references to the crow or raven, birds that frequently appear in Viking mythology - Lewis's Cracaval, Eriskay's Beinn Cracavaig, Iceland's Krakkhyrna, and the Solway's Criffel are part of a common flock. The references to ravens in Gaelic hill-names like Creag an Fhithich may well represent Norse influence on early Gaelic culture - most of the score of hills with *fithich* names are west of the Great Glen or in Argyll. The colour blue is used throughout the world in hill-names, reflecting the appearance when seen from a distance, and in Gaelic we have Carn Gorm and others: Blaven or Blabheinn on Skye has probably this meaning, and relates to the several Blafjalls in Iceland and Norway.

Even more striking is the almost exact resemblance of two Scottish hill-names to their Norse cousins. Hecla on South Uist, one of the three highest hills there - and the other smaller Hecla on Mingulay - is clearly a Norse word with its Scandinavian letter k softened to the Gaelic c. Hekla in south Iceland is a major mountain with a history of powerful eruptions in historic time, and in Icelandic the word means a cowl, hood cloak or mantle either from its shape or from the cloud clinging to its top. Iceland's Hekla was originally called Hekluvell (in the 12th century), and in an old Norwegian history was referred to as Mons Casulae, cloak mountain in Latin. There is a Heklefjellet in Norway, which could be the ancestor of both names, but it is not impossible that the distinctive form of Hekla was taken by its Hebridean Viking namers to Iceland, since Iceland was largely colonised after the Hebrides. The Cuillin of Skye,

and the Cuillin of Rum, (both often anglicised into plural forms by the media) are clearly a generic name, both lying in islands with mainly Norse names. There is a range in south central Norway called Kiølen, undoubtedly the source both of the Hebridean and Icelandic versions (Iceland's Kiølen range lies north of Hekla). It has to be said that the choice of name is not geographically appropriate, in that the Scandinavian ancestors appear to be fairly undistinguished peaks – and are probably related to *kjøl*, keel of a boat – more like Grampian plateaux than the jagged sgurrs of these Inner Hebrides.

Our 1995 tour of Iceland's mountains ended on a high note on the massif of Herdubreid, an isolated giant of 1682m rising above the black lava deserts of the interior. The hut at the foot is only accessible for a short summer season, a long way down dirt roads and icy fords from Iceland's ring road. From the hut at the foot the summit is a 12-hour round trip, the main difficulty being the constant stonefall down the only access gully round the far side that breaks through its protective ring of cliffs. On top we found an Alpine-style metal box by the cairn, containing a rather damp visitors' book. We certainly claim the first Scottish ascent of 1995, there having been only three other entries before our date of mid-July – Germans, Austrians and Icelanders. Flicking through this book we noted that all climbs took place in the window between the summer solstice and the autumn equinox. But its name does not seem to have a Scottish connection or parallel, for Herdubreid means broad shoulders, a precise description of this steep-sided but plateau-topped giant. Elsewhere in Iceland there is, for example, a Skjallabreid, broad shield, and Snaebreid, broad snow. But broad is a very rare adjective in Scottish hill-names, the usual Gaelic words *leathann* or *reamhar* being used but rarely. Of course, Scottish hills of a broad shape are mainly in the east away from the influence of the Vikings and their language. Other broad, but steep-sided, Icelandic hills are often called the name Burfell, literally larder mountain. This dates from the days when, on farms, the larder was built slightly separately from the other buildings so that the warmth from fires, bodies and animals did not get to the stored butter and cheese.

Air travel can give a false impression of the compactness of the world. Barely an hour after seeing Hekla and the other Icelandic peaks disappearing on the port wing of the aircraft we were starting our descent towards Glasgow over the mountains of Harris, with Uist's Hecla just beyond on the starboard wing. The Viking sailors took longer, and suffered far more en route, but were surely the link between some of the hill-names between Norway, Iceland and Scotland, three sides of the then Viking triangle.

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF ...

By Ronnie Robb

Thursday 29th September, 1994.

THE DAY dawned dark and cold. Faint rustlings could be heard from the other tents a few feet away. Nylon fabrics hissed against each other and the gritty sound of barking coughs mixed with the odd muffled clank of aluminium kitchenware. Last-minute items were gathered and I emerged from the tent door fully clothed, rucksack 'loaded' and ready for the assault.

We all gathered in the mess tent in nervous anticipation of the summit push over the next three days. Everyone, that is except Angus. He incurred the wrath of Andy because he couldn't be bothered to get out of his pit and we didn't have enough radios for him to go up the ice fall unaccompanied. On this particular morning, the conversation was noticeably more stunted and efforts were concentrated on keeping warm.

Eventually, four of us set off up the icefall, me at the back, in silence with a sore head in the cold. The ice was good and the crampons bit in well. I reached 'The Dam' in record time, crossed the four bolted ladders and then kept a steady rhythm going all the way to Camp 1. I amazed myself by not losing ground between myself and Charlie – a few hundred metres ahead. I was fit! Finally, I climbed the last vertical section to reach the small plateau where our transit Camp 1(a) was positioned.

While John arranged loads for packing, my headache got worse and my cough had deteriorated to a retching. I was aware that none of this was good but it wasn't unusual in this cold, dry climate or at this altitude. During the short walk from Camp 1(a) to Camp 1, I started to become aware of a 'drag' sensation in my mouth, as if I had just been to the dentist and when I had caught up with Roddy and Charlie packing the spare oxygen cylinders, it was all I could do but to watch them.

Roddy left and began the intricate process of linking the crevasse bridges together which formed the route through the entrance to the Western Cwm. I stared at him, bemused, in a faint haze and wondered why my head felt separated from my body. My head turned slowly to Charlie and eventually I plucked up the courage to ask him if my speech was slurred? The shock hit me immediately. I had heard myself mumble incoherently. Charlie looked horrified and asked me to repeat myself. I knew before I opened my mouth that I couldn't say it properly. I tried, but the words just dribbled out.

Roddy had nearly disappeared from view but he returned to John's cries and the three of them examined me for other defects. I had no power or sensation in my left arm, I couldn't move my head, my left hand tingled, I had a speech impediment, a facial palsy and a general paralysis down the left side of my body. Basically I was stuffed.

Frantic confirmation with each other ensued along with Andy who had now arrived with Angus. I was left to console the realisation that I was not

at all well. Four of them were doctors and one a mountain sickness specialist. I was in the best possible care, but despite Charlie's reassurances I was dreadfully scared. Thoughts raced through my mind but my body laid dormant. My mind wanted to escape, enter another head and leave this useless shell. I already knew that this was cerebral oedema – but why me? Why now? Why is it that I could reach nearly 26,000ft the week before, but only now I get struck down with this debilitating illness? The purpose of The British Mount Everest Medical Expedition was to study such problems but I had no wish to be the prize guinea pig.

I kept thinking about who would explain it to my partner, and what it would be like to live with a retarded physical wreck? How would I get a wheelchair through the door of my office without banging my knuckles on the sides? Rational thought was colliding with the irrational and the more questions I asked myself, the more confused I became. Unconsciousness was beckoning and I began to see it as a release from the confusion but I was rudely awakened by John who shoved an oxygen mask to my face.

This sudden human contact was too much and at this point I burst into tears. John threw his arms around me, slapped my back and the two of us cried on each others shoulder. For his part he wanted to see me down safely but I did not want to be a burden in this dangerous place. Andy explained the process of getting down but it didn't sink in. More dexamethason was taken along with a litre of fluid and the oxygen level was cranked up.

I was led, without rucksack now, to the abseil ropes, ladders and tricky descents of the icefall guided by the four of them. Simon and Angus had gone on to Camp 2 where I should have been by now. The icefall was in a dreadful condition now after two months of post-monsoon weather and especially at this, the hottest part of the day. My glasses kept misting up with tears and the breath from the oxygen mask which made it difficult to see where my feet were going. Thankfully, these seemed to be the only body parts that were working. I blubbed the whole way down. Three years' work blown with three days to go. Delaying the summit push by becoming ill, endangering the others by forcing them through the icefall again and disappointing everyonewhot cares for me. My descent was truly a lonely one. It was my birthday in two days and this was not how I planned to spend it. Half-way down the icefall another group of 'rescuers' joined us. Alison (Hargreaves), Benoit (Chamoux) and our Sirdar, Kilu had come up to help. I found it humbling that these stars of the mountaineering world should come to assist me. Four hours later my walk was stronger and I marched into Base Camp followed by a Portuguese TV crew and an entourage of doctors. I could make myself understood with mumbles and much right-hand gesturing. One of the first of such actions was to shove the said right hand into a Portuguese camera lens and this, coupled with monosyllabic Celtic grunting made my intentions clear.

All the symptoms, including some amazing retinal haemorrhages, were of a 'Transient Ischemic Attack'. A 'stroke' to the layman, brought about

by High Altitude Cerebral Oedema. I had recovered because the correct drugs and procedures had been administered quickly. I was 'fortunate' to be surrounded by specialists in this quaint corner of medicine and I had lost a lot of altitude relatively quickly. However, the likelihood of a recurrence was high and the conclusion was for a helicopter evacuation at a much lower altitude down the Khumbu Valley.

This was promptly arranged for me the following morning from Pheriche. My tent was cleared, barrels and rucksack packed, oxygen bottles assembled, doctors to accompany me and reporting stations established. The expedition was ending for me, its conclusion was dictated by my physiology and all control was removed from me. In the space of a few hours I had been reduced from a fit, clear-thinking, high-altitude mountaineer with a high degree of shared responsibility to a physical nonentity with no control over my own destiny. I was the centre of much attention but I was rarely consulted and because speech was still difficult I couldn't even curse at those around making the decisions for me. I knew within myself that I was going to be OK but no amount of pleading to stay at least in Pheriche would persuade David or Andy.

The parting was extremely emotional. I blubbed away behind the oxygen mask, hugging and kissing everyone. The most emotional was with those who would likely reach the summit without me, my climbing mates. I had got very close to Alison and John and it was all I could do to tear myself away from them and saunter down the glacier away from Everest for good.

It was a long eight miles over difficult terrain but I was feeling strong now and still without a rucksack I marched on ahead of my medical escorts. I couldn't talk much or favour their company anyhow and I did not wish to share my emotional turmoil. We stopped briefly at Lobuche and passed a few people we had met during our two-month stay at Base Camp till eventually we arrived at Pheriche at 10pm. By this time I was hyper and despite the day's events was last to bed.

Footnote: The British Mount Everest Medical Expedition 1994 consisted of seven climbers: Dr. Simon Currin, Dr. Andrew Pollard, Dr. Charlie Hornsby, Ronnie Robb, Dr. John Sanders, Dr. Roddy Kirkwood and Angus Andrew. Alison Hargreaves was also attached to the expedition and shared our permit. The expedition was non-commercial and had no significant sponsor. It's probably the last of such expeditions to leave these shores.

Despite my own personal traumas, including being avalanched down The Lohtse Face, it was an extremely successful expedition. More than 100,000 points of data were collected from more than 75 participants to the medical research work at Base Camp. Significant environmental research work was also carried out by a four strong team analysing human waste management in the Khumbu Valley.

Finally, at 12:05pm on 11th October, 1994, Charlie and Roddy made it to the summit, via the S. E. Ridge in dreadful weather conditions. Oxygen was only used from the South Col to summit and they were accompanied by two sherpas. In reaching the summit Charlie became the first SMC member to do so and Roddy, the second Scot. Sadly both of them had mislaid the St Andrews Cross that I had left them upon my departure. Lucky for me that it wasn't my prescription they lost!





A FEW DAYS IN KINNAUR

By Graham E. Little

THE FIRST ascent of Point 6553m (now called Rangrik Rang) via the north-east ridge, by a joint Indian-British expedition in June 1994. Eight members reached the summit. Prior to this ascent it was the highest unclimbed peak in the Kinnaur area of the Indian Himalaya.

A SLEEK black chough flies by on singing wings. I crawl into the Gemini to sleep through the heat of the day but, interrupted by the noisy activity in the surrounding tents, manage only an intermittent doze. Jim Lowther fares better and I wake him for a brew and a snack in the early evening. We pack and leave the others to sleep on the col at 5775m at the foot of the north-east ridge.

We move under the pale light of a half moon. Lightning tongues flicker over the distant Gangotri, great thunderhead clouds building high over the mountains. The snow is of poor quality but is already forming a crust as the temperature drops. Belays are a good reason to stop for a rest rather than a genuine safety measure. Pitch after pitch up the great flank of the ridge we go, rhythmic kicking, breathless panting, legs aching, sweet sucking at every stance. The moon slips behind the ridge but our head torch halos guide us on, their yellow light warming the snow. Ten long pitches pass by in a kind of monotonous dream, each step like the last one, each pitch as the one before, yet every one of them unique. Pitch 11 is a traverse over strange, wind-sculptured snow. Pitch 12 gains a short knife-edged level snow arête. Jim sits astride it, ice axes thrust into the crest. It is nearly 2am and we are both too knackered to go on.

We cut a narrow shelf into the side of the arête and have a brew. A wind gets up and chills our body sweat. We decide to enlarge the ledge to pitch our tent. Even though the snow is soft, digging is tiring work at over 6000m. After much effort we hollow out enough room to squeeze the Gemini in with just one corner overhanging the void. Jim crawls in and crashes out. I linger, capturing the magic of a dawn that bursts around us. I ease in on the outward side of the tent, hoping that if he wakes Jim will not misinterpret my close embrace.

The rest of the team arrives in dribs and drabs during the middle of the day. The heat in our little tent becomes unbearable and the smell from Jim's boots nauseous. I squirm round and thrusting my head out of the tent watch the rest of the Brits hacking out tent platforms. The Indians are pitching their tent at another level spot slightly further up.

Jim and I have a debate over when we should start climbing. I favour another night time session but Jim, after talking to the rest, feels that we should all join forces and climb during the following day. Against my better judgment, I agree to go along with this.

After a full evening meal of soup, fish and noodles, I set my watch alarm for 2am, pop a couple of sleeping tablets and settle into my down cocoon.

I wake to the alarm but lie in warm inertia for another half hour before waking Jim. We have two brews and melt enough snow to fill our water bottles. Just as I emerge from our tent a stream of diarrhoea explodes from a bare arse protruding from the tent above us and splashes down the side of the arête. Jim and I rope up and, carefully avoiding the brown streak, start to climb.

We pass the Indians' tent with some signs of activity, then follow the arête past patches of shattered red quartzite to the start of a long, fairly level section. Chris Bonington and Jim Fotheringham are close behind us, others straggle behind them.

Looking along the arête, a summit, buttressed by a giant serac wall, seems encouragingly close but I'm convinced that it's not the true summit. We carry on pitching along the arête, the snow already deteriorating in the warming sun. The views are expansive and stunning, there is scarcely a breath of wind. At the end of the fairly level section the ground rears up into a short ice wall. I lead this with two good ice screw runners. The snow above the wall is knee deep and unstable. I flounder around, eventually uncovering a patch of ice which takes a bombproof drive-in. At Chris's suggestion we leave one of our ropes to assist the rest then plough on up more terrible snow. The true summit is now in sight but a long way off and each exhausting snow wading pitch seems to make little progress towards it. For a short while underlying ice allows decent belays but then we are back on to bottomless crud again, trailbreaking a mind over body exercise.

At last, acknowledging the futility of belaying, we move together, Jim powering ahead. Even following in his footsteps I have to work hard to prevent the linking rope from jerking tight. Suddenly, we are on the top, a wide, flat area with the odd rock outcrop. The mountains of the Himalaya are spread around us, a magnificent, uninterrupted, near cloudless panorama. The air is utterly still; a bee and then a butterfly sail past adding to the incongruity of the moment. Although I feel little elation I am pleased for the others, especially for Chris so close to his 60th birthday. Amazingly, we find a trickle of meltwater by an outcrop and set the stove purring, providing a chi stall for the arriving groups. We all blast off lots of film and then it is time to descend.

I morbidly reflect upon the outcome if a storm should catch us. The Himalayan Gods are kind and we make a weary, but safe, descent back down to the tents. Initially, I'm out in front and later at the tail end, retrieving the abseil ropes and gear then downclimbing. As we cross the level arête the sinking sun burnishes the snow, the brown mountains of Tibet soft on the northern horizon. My fatigued condition seems to heighten my appreciation of this incredibly beautiful evening and I sit outside the tent, bathed in golden light, feeling the elation that I should have experienced on the summit.

The descent of the mountain is mis-timed and I end up last on the fixed ropes crossing the icefield below the col. Stones and ice fragments strafe the

slope as I wait my turn. At the top of the last abseil a rock whirrs past as I hug in tight to the face. Another follows and scores a direct hit on my helmet. The impact knocks me off my stance. I hang on the fixed rope lapsing in and out of consciousness. Head ringing with the impact, I shout down but get no response. Only half in control, I abseil and fall down, struggling over a wide bergschrund, to slump on to the snow at the foot of the face. Chris, Prakash and another porter run over to assist me.

I stagger down the glacier, supported by Chris, with the two porters carrying double loads. Ahead of us rears the shapely wedge of Phawarang, around us ice slopes glisten in the slanting light; in my head the sound of the mountain sings.

We call the mountain Rangrik Rang after the Tibetan Gompa in the valley at its foot. It means 'God-made mountain'. On the walk out, as the path swings round into the Tirung Gad, I have one last chance to look back at our mountain but stride on down into the valley beyond.

RETURN MOUNTAIN

He recognised the scarred hardware,
a piton's beaten edge,
grubby tape attached to krabs,
opposite their gate.

Furred and twisted climbing rope,
frozen coils of line,
swollen hands in sodden gloves,
multicoloured slings.

Felt the frosted fists that drove,
cold iron through the ice,
the hammer blows of winter trade,
in Deep Cut Chimney's vice.

Down from the hidden coires,
a slithering, stumbled flight,
from Caucasian runnels far above,
chalked against the white.

A face as raw as rhyolite
from the coired winds attack,
gazed out at this warm haven.
The mirror sparkled back.

Donald M. Orr.