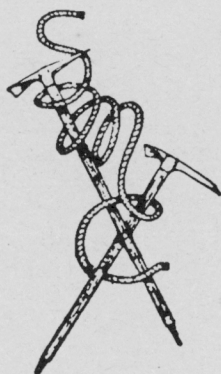


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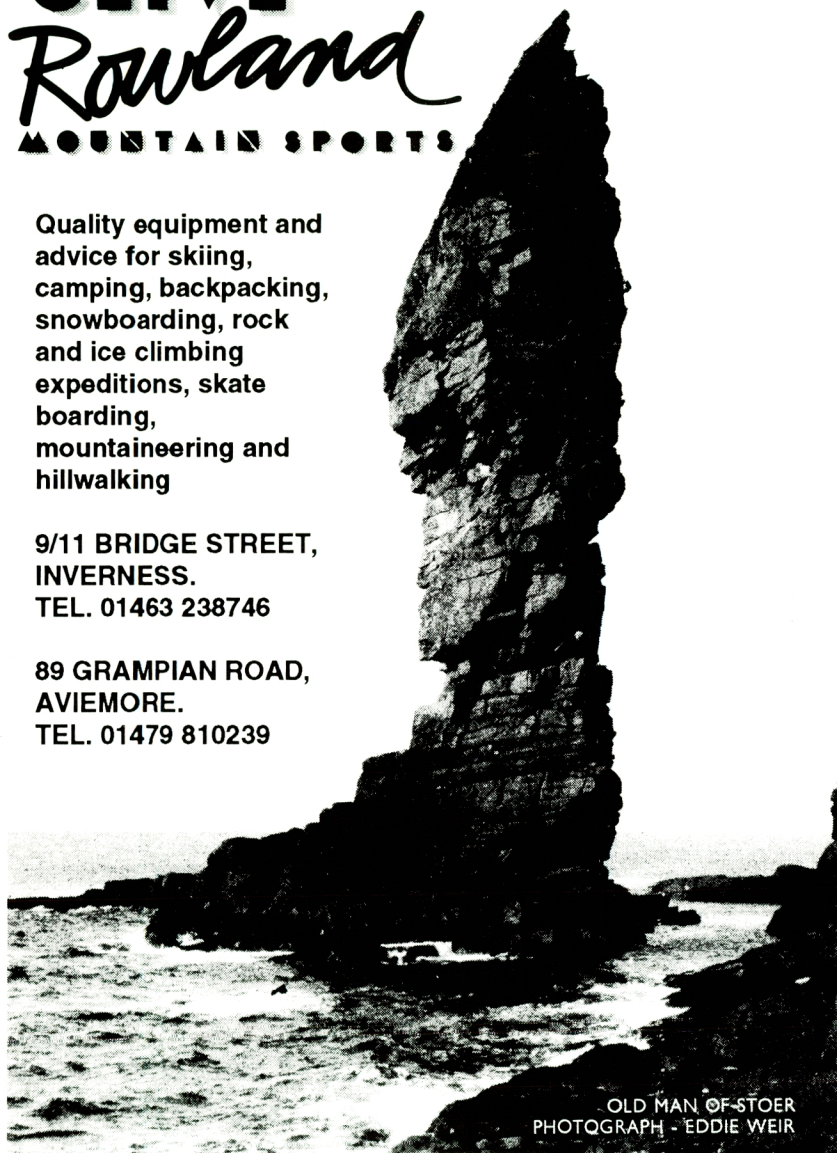
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OLD MAN OF STOER
PHOTOGRAPH - EDDIE WEIR



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D'APRÈS VIRGINIA WOOLF

By Nigel Suess

1. Views of mountains

MRS RAMSAY smiled as, through the window, she saw the blue hills rising above the woods. She smiled at the memory of her visit more than 25 years earlier, before the eight children. On their first holiday together her new husband had led her high into those blue hills. He had hired a dog-cart and with young Mackenzie they had taken the rough road down the glen almost to the beach. She recalled it had been a calm, sun-drenched day at the start of the long summer vacation. In those days she wore fuller, heavier skirts and the walk over the moor had almost drained her strength. Once on the ridge a breeze had given her some respite, and at the summit Mackenzie had pointed out, yet higher, a towering pinnacle, and told her husband that it was unclimbed and perhaps would never be topped.

Mr Ramsay moved before her in front of the window. She knew well that he would not try to climb it now with Andrew and Jasper. She knew also that his ambition had been curtailed in other ways. His age made him physically weaker, but academically he had been overtaken by a new century's ideas. She did not mind for herself that she would not go up to those rocks again, but she knew that it had been their magnetic attraction that had made her husband bring the family to this house nearly every year.

She saw one of their guests, Lily, sitting on the lawn with her canvas set up to give her a perspective of sea, sky, earth, wood and rock. Lily judged that the attention to detail in the rockier parts would be an error, despite the late afternoon cross-lighting. Oh, yes the rocks are fine, but not what I want to emphasise. No, thought Lily, to give detail destroys the harmony of colour. The blues of sky, sea and hill and the greens of lawn, wood and moor could, she had confidence, be blended; but where to put the first brush-stroke? Such a symphony required no discordant note.

George Sawicki on the East Ridge of the Inaccessible Pinnacle, Sgurr Dearg. Photo: Noel Williams.

James, the Ramsay's youngest child, had intruded on her foreground. He wanted to be taken with Andrew and Jasper, and maybe Prue, up, up, up to the clouds. Why did father not want to take him to see this famous Inaccessible Pinnacle? Each breakfast he was told it would be too far, too windy, too wet, too rough. Father, he knew, had made the climb when younger, and mother too. Now the family was there again. He decided to talk to Andrew.

Andrew wanted to go but wanted to succeed. He knew that if he was to triumph now, in his last family excursion before going up to university, all omens would have to be favourable. A seven-year-old brother would ensure the expedition's failure. The writings of Whymper and even Sir Leslie Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* were well conned, and had encouraged Andrew in planning such a venture. Recently, father had given him Tyndall's historic notes, just issued in a popular edition, and a year earlier the late O. G. Jones's Lakeland exploits had been the stimulus to push beyond mere walking ascents. Now Andrew too was to embark on an exploration into the farthest margins of mountaineering. Father had contacted an academic of the same university, a chemist, who also visited the island regularly. The coincidence was greater in that he usually employed Mackenzie, his father's guide of many years earlier. Andrew's researches taught him that these were auspicious signs. The Classics showed that one must pay attention to entrails and certain prescribed signals from the Gods.

Andrew's attention was reclaimed by the hills; the early showers of the day had passed, the clouds had broken and the wind had veered into a cooler direction. He awaited the moment of decision at dinner. Mother intended it to be a grander dinner than any yet on this visit and Andrew keenly awaited one particular guest whom, he believed, would resolve the decision of the objective of the expedition.

Jasper moved out of the house and saw his younger brother eyeing the hills, anxiously, he thought. He too had been included in the sketched outlines of the expedition and had confidence in his physical capabilities. The Army ensured that its subalterns were fitter than students. He had climbed many hills, from the Misty Isle to the Cape. Jasper's hills were for strengthening the body or for giving a pony a good outing. The salvation of one's nervous energies, aye, and limbs, for warfare demanded the exclusion of military campaigns against tottering pinnacles. He told Andrew that he would have to go alone, alone of the family. The chemist and Mackenzie would suffice for his companions.

Jasper cast his eyes over the other guests who made up this assembly of family and friends, and asked himself again whether, perhaps, he should join the expedition. The choices apart were to take leisure in the garden with some novel, to discuss campaigns past with the poet of Empire, or to hire a horse from the town for a canter along the beach. Leave would be

over in a few days and a long journey to Southampton would be followed by confinement on a vessel heading to West Africa. Perhaps a final fling at the hill would merit his time, but not gymnastics on pinnacles, inaccessible or otherwise. He broached the question with the poet of Empire. Jasper had heard that Carmichael had been favoured by the ruling class since his youthful epic saga on the campaigns after the Mutiny. He had lived in North India and had known early explorers of the Himalaya. Jasper also saw in him the signs of other Eastern acquisitions, and wondered if the hill station enthusiasts knew that they took their opium vicariously with his verse.

'Dear boy,' he pronounced, 'to advance beyond the plain yields a more pleasant view of our society.' Jasper was reminded by this epigram of the zoologist who, having devoted half his lifetime to the study of rats, expressed the view that the more he studied rats the less he cared for his own species.

Mrs Ramsay's attention was less loftily occupied. The *boeuf en daube* had been under near constant culinary attention for two days, in anticipation of the dinner which would be the pinnacle of the summer break. She had the usual help from cook, but if the meat emerged too sinewy or flavourless, the assembled academics, artists and even children would accuse the guide and not the guidebook. Escoffier proposed smaller portions of meat and of time, but a visit to Provence had suggested that a multiple of both quantities gave more flavour. The commitment had been made and she would stand by the consequences. Wine had been ordered from the hotel's cellars, table linen had been hired in the town, local crofters had been generously relieved of hard-won seasonal produce. Fruit, alas, could not be procured save for somewhat well-weathered raspberries. So the menu was to be *soupe aux moules*, *sole sur chou-marin*, *boeuf en daube* and raspberry, oatmeal, cream and whisky blended to a dessert defying French classification. For the younger children, she knew, some modifications were desirable.

The visitors for dinner distracted her. The chemistry professor was unmarried and would be called upon to hand Lily in to dinner. Carmichael could not be paired with any decent soul and so, as there was an imbalance, her eldest son would take care of him. Paul and Minta were now well paired. That left only her husband and herself of the adults and six of the seven children, 14 in all, far too many for the table. So, some of the children would need to sit...

Some hours passed and the *boeuf en daube* had been pronounced a credit to Mrs Ramsay's leadership of the culinary cohorts. Andrew saw an opportunity to distract the chemist, he thought not reluctantly, from the amiable but strictly horizontally inclined Lily. He asked directly if the Cuillin were on the agenda for the next day.

The long-limbed and quietly-spoken man did not reply immediately. He turned to look out of the window towards the West. Andrew's less-experienced eyes followed and noticed that, by now, the sky had cleared of all the cloud that had for nearly two weeks imposed a dull regime on the visiting mountaineers. He replied that he had spoken with Mackenzie that afternoon and they planned a specific objective which he had observed seven years earlier and had recorded on photographic plates.

Andrew's ignorance at first caused him to expect some new unclimbed summit, possibly the very last in Britain to stand untrodden by man. The scientist disabused him, recording that all of Scotland's summits had now been ascended, indeed one man alone had stood on every top. As for England, Wales and Ireland, the summits had long been fully explored. The challenge for the new generation lay in finding the most interesting geological features, some of which would, like the Inaccessible Pinnacle, require great skills in mountaineering to explore.

The next day he and Mackenzie would make an early start and take rope up into the Coire with a great boss of rock protruding like a wart on a toad as their planned destination. Other names have been given to such features but the scientist considered them somewhat coarse. If the two young gentlemen wished to walk up, their company would be most welcome. They could, if they chose, sit below to confirm that no engineering work on the rock would be undertaken. Andrew recalled that O. G. Jones had commented on such measures which the chemist had employed on one notorious occasion. Regrettably, it would not be possible on this occasion for Mackenzie to assist them on an ascent of the infamous pinnacle.

Later, as he lay in bed, Andrew counted himself fortunate to be a camp follower in this new venture of exploration, rather than to be the one-hundredth or whatever number to be dragged by rope (and pulley, so went the rumour) up the Pinnacle. Like all mountaineering objectives, it would remain for many years more.

2. Time passed

The house stood empty during four of the next 12 summers. Rain fell on the mountains, sun dried the rock, ice lingered in crevices. A few men who had been to the summit of the Inaccessible Pinnacle did not return again to the island, but lay instead in distant fields. Others who wished to make the ascent had been destroyed by shell, torpedo, mine or gas. Andrew was one, fallen in the Tyrol on an assignment with the Italian forces. Jasper was another, succumbing to foul disease in Mesopotamia.

Not only had the youth of a promising summer passed, but Mrs Ramsay was victim of a short and sudden illness. Carmichael's body could take no more abuse.

3. *To the Inaccessible Pinnacle*

James, now at university, entered the dimly-remembered holiday home of his childhood. Father, now in his 70s, had decided that this would be the last year that he would return to the island, and James did not care to plan his future beyond a year. He had seen the plans of his brothers, indeed of all of his family, shattered. Europe was at peace but not peaceful. So, recalling Andrew's ambitions, he knew that this might be his only chance to visit and perhaps to climb this Inaccessible Pinnacle. The family had a motor-car with driver, and next day were travelling to visit the hotel to renew a friendship. The vehicle followed the sinuous route along the fringes of sea-lochs, over heather moorland and through crofting townships depopulated by the Great War and the claims of Glasgow. James saw, always on his left-hand, the hills, both red and black. At last the road descended slightly to the head of a sea-loch notable, not for itself, but for the inn by the roadside and for the view of the executioner's axe blade poised over all onlookers beguiled by these mountains.

The chemist was in the hotel's lounge apparently intent on some research paper which had reached him from a distant laboratory. He welcomed his former colleague from the university and ordered tea to be brought. James felt that his appearance had not greatly changed in over 12 years. He must now be past his sixtieth year. Father had told James that the chemist had made advances in the sciences which would add greatly to the well-being of mankind in the peace which now prevailed. James had acquired not only Andrew's books on mountains and mountaineers, but also a strong interest in their contents. He judged that the chemist would be remembered among people such as himself for exploits on this island and on more distant ranges.

The chemist recalled their last meeting. He remembered that the strength imparted by Mrs Ramsay's *boeuf en daube* had helped him raise his earthly frame to a higher pitch, enabling the very first ascent of the Cioch. The afternoon conversation lingered on the relative merits of this route, standing in an ocean of pure rock, and the Pinnacle surrounded by unbounded airiness. Science and its methods are prosaic, but James saw in this man a concern for the symbolism of his mountain ascents. He learned that the relationship between climber and mountain should be experienced in many dimensions. The scientist had wanted to explore, to map, to photograph his subject. He also wished to experience through the relationship some mystical union with the rock. The oromaniacal blended with the analytical. James learned more. The mountains could deepen one's relationship with a companion. To some it appeared that the mountains were yet another arena for competitive challenge, to prove oneself superior to others through the ascent of yet steeper, holdless ground. The chemist thought that such conduct diminished the climber rather than the mountain.

Now that his age inhibited him from attempting those courses that had been within his powers before the Great War, he drew no less pleasure from the easier routes. His advice to the acolyte was to seek the path which brings one closer to union with the mountain.

Father asked after the health of the guide of his nuptial excursion. Forty years had not ended Mackenzie's preparedness to help others share his affection for these places, and it came about that the lead would be passed to James.

In the morning, Mackenzie was waiting at the junction where the road to the glen began. The car was to take them to the farm where the ascent would start. Unlike 1879, unlike 1906, there were others with similar ideas. James saw a car from Keswick parked there, and learned of other visitors staying at the cottage. He regretted that one could no longer enjoy these hills in isolation. Soon one might even encounter other rock-climbers on the same course. As they climbed, Mackenzie in heavy tweed commented on the lighter cloths which visitors from London and Manchester now preferred. He also noted the changing patterns of nailing boots.

His conversation was not continuous. He had learned to allow his clients to take this path steadily, to allow them time to learn the features of the Coire and also beyond the hills, if conditions allowed, the delicate line of the outer isles. The day was well advanced when James rested at the cairn below the Pinnacle. He could take only water on such occasions, though it was not through fear that his appetite had disappeared. He recalled the fast before Communion. As James moved the few yards to the rock he thought of it as a milestone in his father's marriage and, later, a beckoning lighthouse to dear brother Andrew. Now James was to confirm his self-belief and, perhaps, alter his life's course.

That day, the rock was welcoming to the hand that caressed it, and the guide was loving in his care.

ELEGY

The curve of the adze a smooth
crescent of chrome rainbow.
Its tonal edge, filed to sharpness
to cut another step, to resurrection
beyond the holds in whiteness.
A dimpled expanse rises in invitation.

Leave only rope trails on the route,
point, pick and spike marks,
a soft blueness in the rime.
The effort over, the rope moves slowly,
now ripples beyond the climb
drawn away to an unknown country.

Donald Orr.

SANDBAGGED BY A GHOST

By Mike Jacob

*'Now up on Gimmer Crag as large as life,
There is a THING that climbs at dead of night,
The Spirit of a climber dead and gone,
Enough to give a bloke an awful fright.'*

So goes a song, recited by a guitar-playing friend, climber and misfit, known to some as Grot, who died somewhere in the Cuillin a few years ago. Disillusioned with the conventional education system, he found a niche at the Loch Eil Centre, trying to impart what he called the three Cs – care, consideration and compassion.

CHORUS

*'He leaves a bloodstain on every finger-hold,
As he climbs upon the cliff,
With 'is head tucked underneath 'is arm,
And his corpse is stiff.'*

* * * * *

Well we, David and I, had seen no sign of the ghost as we climbed some of Gimmer's classics on a Philosopher's Stone of a day in early October. There was a balance between the warmth of the sun and a slightly cold east wind, and balance between the browns of dead bracken and the hues of green that define Lakeland in autumn. Balance was, therefore, our theme this day.

The song goes on, in humorously macabre vein, as the phantom *'a climber of the Old School it is clear.'*

wreaks havoc, a shadowy form following climbers up the routes, unfastening their belays. Eventually, the Langdale cognoscenti have had enough of this terrorism and agree to exorcise the ghost. They shout and cheer as the Spirit fades away in the mist. The end, apparently, of the ghost but I think – I now know – that it merely moved on in the general direction of a more appropriate place . . . Pavey Ark.

Down in the Old Dungeon Ghyll we stayed off spirits and drank 'Black Sheep' and 'Cumberland Ale', good names and good beer. Round in Wasdale you can even get a pint of 'Scafell Pike'. The temptation was to stay and try them all, especially for David when the bar suddenly filled with nubile 20-year-old females. However, we had a date with a Cumberland Sausage and left.

By coincidence, back at the hut, the topic of songs cropped up again. I

agreed to swap the words of Grot's ballad with those of a shanty that had filled the Tobermory night over a year before. As I had lain on my bunk after the last-night ceilidh of the 1997 Yacht Meet I had heard Robin Campbell's great rendition above deck. Head back, baying like a wolf to the moon, he must have caught sight of the massive wooden spars of the boat,

'Christ, Skipper, how many men does it take to hoist those?' he inquired. 'Three men,' came the reply, and a pause, 'but half-a-dozen of you SMC lot.'

* * * * *

The next day, October 4, 1998 (I give the date for good reason) wasn't so good. It had rained during the night and was no longer warm. The lower, roadside Langdale crags would have been a good choice but we were drawn to Pavey Ark. A certain lethargy or sense of anti-climax crept in as we approached the crag, totally different in appearance and atmosphere from Gimmer. Sure, you feed upon each other's lack of enthusiasm until you end up doing nothing, I recognised it from past experience. We dithered and David ate his lunch at 11 o'clock. I felt guilty, he had wanted to climb Kipling Groove the previous day but we hadn't got round to Gimmer's N.W. face. I had only met him a few weeks before, had never climbed with him before this trip and we didn't have the rapport of long friendship. It was grey and damp and the harder climbs looked unfriendly. We dithered. A voice said: 'What about Rake-End Chimney. It's only a Diff. Ideal for a day like this and we can climb it in walking boots and carry our sacks up. Always come back down and do something harder if we feel like it, or walk over the Pikes?'

Startled, I looked behind me – who had said that? But David, addressing me, said: 'Well, okay. Not my kind of climb. It's green. You can lead it.'

What did the guidebook have to say? – 'Two stars – an excellent climb – easy steps – walk up – finish easily.' Nae bother.

"Hey, look at this. First climbed by C. W. Barton – whoever he was – on October 1, 1898.'

One of Lakeland's first rock climbs and we were proposing to climb it 100 years' later, almost to the day.

1898? A time of Victorian slums and poverty, the rise of the trades union movement as the workers fought against exploitation; transport by horse and cart, and schooners plying the Solway. Only 22 years after Sitting Bull's victory at the Little Bighorn and 16 years before the outbreak of the First World War.

It seemed incomprehensible that in this era, from the 1880s until the early 1900s, was the origin of my present activity. Yet, in 1897, O. G. Jones

climbed Kern Knotts Crack, still graded MVS. Techniques may have been primitive, with heavy, unreliable hemp rope and clumsy footwear but these pioneers were probably fitter and stronger than many of our pampered generation. Jones, for example, trained with weights and was a gymnast with abnormal finger-power. According to Bill Birkett, he once traversed round a railway engine using only the heads of the boiler rivets and could do one-arm pull-ups with someone held under the other arm.

In 1896, Jones led the two Abraham brothers up a new route on Scafell Pinnacle, which was the scene of a multiple fatality in 1903 when a second ascent was attempted.

The route, not surprisingly, developed a ‘chop’ reputation, and wasn’t repeated until 1912 by George Sansom and Siegfried Herford, hotfoot from the Cuillin. They climbed in stockinged feet, realising that boots were too clumsy. This history is what gives the Lakeland crags their special appeal, despite the influx of the masses. Raeburn climbed here but that’s another story.

* * * * *

No-one else climbing on Pavey Ark as we scrambled up grass and loose shale to the foot of the chimney. Many climbs are called, correctly or incorrectly, chimneys. This was a chimney. I left rockboots in my sack, along with lunch, pullover, gloves and suchlike. This turned out to be a terrible mistake, that is, ever contemplating wearing a sack in the first place, especially a modern one with all its sticky-out bits and flapping straps. The first few moves, clutching lumps of turf and mud, took me into the confines of the chimney. Shoulder-width – and steep. And certainly green and confined and brutal and it’s all very well, if you’ve been there and done it, to say that there’s Good Protection, but not where you need it and your most useful nuts are in your sack.

The left wall was smooth and slightly overhanging as I rubbed shoulders with it. At the back of the chimney were some loose-looking flakes. The right wall had one or two sloping holds, damp and polished, polished grey. You could bridge it if you were a 3ft. dwarf or prepared to be farther out, with no protection and vertically above your second. In the end, I ‘rucksacked-and-footed’ it, unable to look above me because the lid of the sack forced my head forward as effectively as a wrestler’s arm-lock.

The trap sprang shut as I pulled up and over a chockstone that now formed the hearth of the chimney below two smooth walls that converged above me. I was wedged, shoulder to shoulder, between those unshifting tons, unable to bend forwards, unable to turn round because of my snail-like hump, barely able to move my head. If I stepped backwards I would fall off the top of the chockstone and out of the chimney. Ironically, I was perfectly secure, like a crag-fast sheep – but stuck like a pig.

I've no idea how long I remained in this ridiculous position. I heard a voice from below my heels, presumably someone on Jack's Rake.

'What the hell's that?'

'Rake-End Chimney,' replied David. 'It's a Diff.'

The latter comment was said with the hint of a sneer, and I was gratified to hear: 'That's no Diff. – looks like a VS to me.'

In front of me was the back of the chimney with a flared crack in it but out of reach. No matter which way I twisted and shoved, the sack just seemed to catch or jam on every slight bulge of greasy rock. There seemed little alternative to my idea of 'lung jams' but I wasn't prepared to try this high-risk manoeuvre without some protection. One hand managed to reach a karabiner that dangled from my harness, which I couldn't even see, and there – you beauty – was a Chouinard stopper No.7 on a long rope sling. Perfect. As I couldn't reach the crack I had to flick the nut into position.

Remarkably, this was accomplished at the second attempt but, just as I prepared to clip in, it seemed that an invisible hand pulled the karabiner from my grasp and it swung a tantalising few inches from my outstretched fingers. A gust of wind, no more than a breath, chuckled down the chimney. The ghost was extracting vengeance for its banishment from Gimmer, which is a friendly sort of a place. It is a crag of near-perfect design and position, quick-drying, clean and rough. Like Rannoch Wall or Sron na Ciche, it encourages precise movement, the world shut out while you solve the jigsaw and make the correct moves and time stands still. It is a place for dancing and I wished myself back there – the ghost, like all ghosts, was in my mind.

I sensed – oh! no! – dampness at arse level and an exploratory hand came back with sticky brown goo upon it. Gulp. But the sweet smell indicated squashed banana seeping out of the torn stitching in my battered sack. An earlier option, dismissed as being too difficult, now returned as being – well, the only remaining option. As if to reinforce my thoughts: 'Why don't you take your rucksack off?' Yawn.

So began a delicate striptease, dipping first one shoulder, then the other, fingering open the waist-belt, wriggling the hips, until the straitjacket hung around my legs. Like a fool, instead of booting the offensive object into space, being aware of how much money it had cost, I clipped it directly to my harness. This was actually mistake number three, for I should have used a long sling so that I could have hauled it up after me, as I was soon to discover. Now of normal human dimensions I was able to make proper use of the available – I hesitate to call them holds – rounded wrinkles, but as I progressed upwards there was a corresponding movement downwards as my waist-harness relocated to my ankles.

All this was accompanied by guffaws of ridicule and entertainment from below. Perhaps this lent strength to my cause because my normally feeble arms now managed, gorilla-like, to pull upwards and the rest of me trailed

behind. I belayed to a large, loose boulder, sorted myself out, and tried to regain my composure. Never before had I felt so awkward or incompetent. Only once had I witnessed someone getting themselves into such an unbelievable position when, halfway up Labyrinth on Cir Mhor, Arran, my friend had ended up stretched horizontally across the rock and then tried to finish the pitch feet first.

David shouted at me and set off, his rope coming in at high speed before suddenly stopping, and staying stopped. I yawned, loudly, just as he, somewhat threateningly, called up: 'I hope you've got me.'

This request for slack rope met with cries of outrage, and, as he eventually reached my stance, I was pleased to note that he had replaced his trainers with sticky-rubber rock boots, a fat lot of good it was to do him though, as he now assumed command and said that he would lead the next pitch. A drastic amount of gear now emerged from his sack as he covered himself with metal bits and pieces, then demanded to see all my equipment, which I tipped in a pile. A disdainful toe poked around my precious slings and then selected one, in case an abseil was called for, then he disappeared into a cave under a big overhang. I was left to ponder.

* * * * *

I don't really believe all this stuff about ghosts but there's a story, recounted in one of Harry Griffin's books and told to him, I believe, by George Sansom himself. It concerns Sansom's great friend and climbing companion, Siegfried Herford. There's a photo of Herford not in a mountain setting but in military uniform because he enlisted with the 24th. Royal Fusiliers in 1915. It reminds me of thick, leather-bound albums, with tattered edges, which belonged to my mother. Therein were many similar images: sepia-brown, men in uniform, greatcoats with upturned collars and Army caps – relatives – all killed on the Western Front. They seemed like old men to my childish eyes but were only in their 20s and 30s. Herford was 24 when he joined up.

I imagine that he might have looked up at a single star, a point of light, as we see parallel lines of white crosses stretching to the horizon, converging in perspective to the same point. Was he then, after hours of bombardment, ordered up and out of a filthy trench, his hands grasping a Lee Enfield rifle? Did he strain every muscle, as when he lay-backed up the edge of the Great Flake on Scafell's Central Buttress, to gain a purchase in the mud, only to meet whistling lumps of lead which smacked through his neck? And, as his blood oozed away into the mud, were his thoughts of the walk by Hollowstones and the scree up, up to carefree days of adventure with his mate . . . Sansom . . . ?

As Sansom tells it, he was walking down from Scafell on January 28, 1916, after a day in the hills on his own, when he spotted another, familiar,

figure approaching him across the screes below Central Buttress and was amazed to encounter his old friend. They talked awhile but Siegfried was in a hurry to go . . . yes, you know the rest.

Herford was killed on January 28, 1916.

* * * * *

Two hours' later, or so it seemed, I could still see David's feet below the overhanging boulder as the rest of him tried to exit behind it. All his gear seemed to have had little impact, other than to have had the same effect upon him as my sack had had upon me, as I dutifully pointed out. His head appeared out of a black hole and gave me a silent stare. When my turn came I was, thankfully, hidden from his view as I made another complete balls-up of the pitch – sequences all wrong, position all wrong, everything all wrong, except one thing I did right. I didn't fall off. But I paid a high price in ripped clothing, scraped skin and bruises in strange places. The guide-book was correct about one thing – there was an easy walk at the top.

Now David is nearly 20 years' younger than me and an accomplished athlete and climber, and seemed rather quiet. We sat and shared my sandwiches and he gave me a wry smile as I pointed out that this kind of thing was all part of the Greater Mountaineering Experience and, well, not to put too fine a point on it, essentially Scottish. We agreed that we'd had enough for one day and, in unison, shouted: 'That's no Diff.'

We picked our separate ways round the outcrops of rock towards Harrison Stickle under a grey sky. It was almost as though he wasn't really there and a sudden thought came to me.

Grot's real name had been David.



WELCOME TO THE CLUB

By David Hughes

I MUST tell you about this dream I had the other night. No, don't turn to the next page because, as you know, my dreams are *legendary*. You've not heard me talk about them before? Strange, I thought most people had. Anyway, the amazing thing is not just how weird my dreams are but how much I can remember about them the day afterwards. And the fantastic thing is that when I'm asleep I know I am dreaming. Weird or what? Like, as if I'm watching all these bizarre events unfolding and I can just switch off and wake up any time I want to.

Sometimes though, I get really scary nightmares. Not often; I think I can count them on one hand. I distinctly remember this nightmare I had at a campsite at Roybridge. Funnily enough it was just after I'd completed my 100th Munro. The tent was collapsing in from above. Something heavy was suffocating me, slowly but steadily squeezing the life out of me. I desperately tried to move but every muscle in my body felt as heavy as lead. I opened my mouth to cry out, but my voice sounded so weak and muted. I started to panic. This is just a dream, I thought; it's time to wake up. But try as I might I just couldn't escape, and I was beginning to think that I wasn't asleep. This was reality!

Then the next thing I remember was lying in my sleeping bag with the sun streaming in through the flysheet. It was daylight, I could breathe and I could move my limbs. A wave of relief passed through my body. Boy, that was one hell of a scary nightmare.

Anyway, going back to this dream I had the other night. You know that I've just finished the Munros, don't you? You don't? I thought you knew. I thought everybody knew. Tolmount at the head of Glen Callater, near Braemar. Yeah, that was my last one. Funny you should mention that because this was what the dream was about – my last Munro.

So there I was suddenly at this sort of compleaters' gathering where Munroists get together and swear in another person to their fold. That was me. And what I had to do, I had to get up on this stage to a sort of lectern with a microphone, a bit like a school prize night, and talk to this audience about my last Munro.

In fact, I'm sure it was the stage of my old secondary school, because there was a long line of us waiting to go on stage. Just like you were going on there to receive a prize of some sort. Except in this dream you didn't get anything but you had to talk to an audience about something. The bloke before me was on about driving along the M74 or something. And I thought, what a wally. Surely, if you're going to talk about your experi-

ences of Munro-bagging you could think of better things to talk about than the journey up to the Highlands. I knew that I could do better than that, so I decided to talk about doing my last Munro. I don't know why I chose to do that; it just seemed sort of natural.

Anyway, when it was my turn to go on stage I was suddenly out in the open air with this absolutely massive audience. You just can't imagine how many people were there. All you could see were people, nothing else, just people. No matter how far they were away from me I could make out their faces. I just thought that the people there would be fellow 'compleaters', but I'm sure I recognised more famous climbers. You know, their faces were kind of familiar, but I couldn't put names to them.

Guests. That's what I worked out that they must be. Guests. That sounds about right. If something stranger than strange comes up in a dream I always find a reason for it, and the plot moves on. So that's what I concluded. Guests. Obvious really. But what about that girl I knew from junior school, what was she doing there, and why her? How strange!...I know, she probably did the Munros when she grew up. Obvious really.

Do you dream like that? I mean like have some sort of logical framework as if on a higher level your brain is trying to make sense of a series of unconnected past events. You don't? Well I said my dreams were legendary. The thing is that this one just got weirder. 'Ladies and gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking,' I started. OK, so who's the wally now, I bet you're saying. But with so many people out there I suddenly felt very nervous and awkward.

'I've decided to tell you about my last Munro,' I continued, receiving in return encouraging smiles from millions of faces. 'It was a snowy Easter at Braemar. I just had Tom Buidhe and Tolmount to do to finish the Munros. The weather wasn't particularly good, but once I was there I had to finish them off. So the next day I set off to do a round of Glen Callater – Carn an Tuirc, Cairn of Claise, Tom Buidhe and finish on Tolmount.

'The day started slowly. I'd been staying at the Cairngorm Club hut at Inverey with my local mountaineering club, and everyone else was heading off back home because of work commitments. I decided to stay on for a couple of days – the perks of being a "rich sod", as some people in the club endearingly referred to me, and not having to work for a living.'

There was a faint ripple of laughter from my audience. I'd got their attention, they were listening. At least my story was going to be more exciting than driving along the M74. I began to grow in confidence as I continued.

'Anyway, there I was sat in my car at the foot of Glen Callater alongside the A93. Snow showers were rattling through at regular intervals, borne on by a strong northerly wind, a situation that had persisted throughout the Easter weekend. One minute your eyes were screwed up against the

blinding sunshine reflecting off the white landscape, next minute black clouds unleashed more snow with the icy wind forever sending spindrift whistling across the mountain tops. I was pretending to read the map, check out the route sort of thing but my mind was in a quandary.'

'The dilemma of a solo walk in such dodgy conditions,' suggested someone from my audience. A female face, a concerned face, so familiar but who was it?

'Exactly!' I replied, pleased both with the fact that at least some of them were listening and that there was an empathy with my predicament; other mountaineers also faced similar indecisions and misgivings. I was beginning to feel a warmth and a camaraderie towards these people. After all we shared something in common, we'd all done the Munros.

'I was driven by the desire to finish the Munros,' I continued, 'but wanted very much to do it safely. You can guess what happened. The sun came out, the winter wonderland of pristine beauty beckoned and ambition won hands down. Boots and gaiters were donned, crampons and ice axe strapped to the rucksack and I was off, beating a way up the snow covered track to Lochcallater Lodge.'

Again the warning signals. I wasn't liking this dream. I mean, it wasn't a nightmare or anything as bad as that, but something was wrong and I couldn't put my finger on it. Something to do with the reality of the situation. Do you know what I mean? Like when you dream lots of past experiences and memories are interwoven into a bizarre set of events. But this was too real. OK, so me addressing an audience of millions of faces was strange, but my story of me doing my last Munro was exactly how it happened. Why was my dream just concentrating on one thing? There seemed to be no explanation so I just continued.

'The weather was kind at first. There was a heavy shower as I approached Loch Callater but it was quickly over and the world soon reappeared. Carn an Tuirc remained clear all the way to the top, but its broad north-easterly ridge lay open to the biting cold northerly wind. I reached the snow-choked summit cairn in good time and paused for a bite to eat. Then on to Cairn of Claise with easy walking on hard, compact snow. I felt elated, privileged to be there. What's more, the weather continued to be kind, and I seemed to be enjoying a window of good weather with no threat of showers in the immediate vicinity. However, the wind was just so cold, but I figured that if I kept moving then things would be all right. I was looking forward to the celebratory pint in the pub in a few hours, and inwardly laughed at myself for being so indecisive at the start of the walk.

'Tom Buidhe came and went with ease, and there to the north was it – Tolmount. My last Munro. Just a short descent to a frozen burn and then less than 100m of reascent to the summit. Half-an-hour away, if that, and yet it was the culmination of 20 years of roaming the Scottish Highlands

in wind, rain, sun and snow. Thousands of miles of walking, thousands of feet of climbing.'

I paused to let the recounting of the elation at my impending triumph permeate my audience.

'But the day had a sting in its tail. Yes, you've guessed it, the good weather broke. Black clouds were gathering and had enveloped the Lochnagar plateau by the time I'd reached Tom Buidhe. So out came the compass. North-west down to the gap between the two peaks. Half-a-kilometre, that's 5 x 62 of my double paces. Then north up a broad ridge with just under one kilometre to the top. No problem.'

I wondered if my audience would understand this detail. I know you do, because you're a hill-walker like me. Perhaps not as good a navigator as me. OK, I know that sounds a bit cocky, but I know I'm pretty good at it. Sort of learnt by default really.

You see, when I started hill-walking I went on the hills in all sorts of weather – mainly bad weather I seem to recall. I remember this time when I'd just joined the mountaineering club and was on a meet in the Cairngorms. On one day we were on the plateau between Cairn Gorm and Ben Macdui in thick mist. At the time I was the least experienced of the party in terms of Scottish hills, but I seemed to be the only one who knew how to use a map, compass, paces and timings. We got off the hill that day without much problem, but what surprised me was that the others regarded me as some sort of Mr Wonderful. On the other hand I was surprised at how inept they were at navigation.

But I digress. Getting a bit big-headed you might say. Anyway what I didn't tell the audience was how rusty I'd got at navigating. You see nowadays if it's poor weather I don't go out. Virtually all the hills I do now I have views from, and the compass stays in the bottom of the sack.

So this is how my dream and my story to the Munroist club continued.

'The descent to the dip between the peaks was fairly straightforward, but the snow and low cloud had already encased me. Fortunately, I was out of the main force of the wind, but even in this relative shelter the snow was still swirling about me. The rising ridge to Tolmount was only sensed at first but the compass bearing was right and I soon found myself plodding uphill, head down, hood up trying to shield my face and eyes against the increasing wind and the stinging spindrift.

'As the slope flattened out the spindrift became unbearable. The northerly wind, funnelled by the narrow defile of Glen Callater, was being blocked at its southern end by the bulk of Tolmount. So it had no choice but to accelerate upwards and over the top. I was now feeling its full force. Unable to stand straight or look forward, I was staggering blind into the teeth of an almighty gale. I stumbled over a hidden boulder, the wind flipped me over and dumped me flat on the snow.





'I was rapidly becoming exhausted. The wind shrieked over me while hailstones, snow and spindrift covered me in a ghostly translucent shroud. Part of my mind began to think rationally. How far was I away from the summit? I'd stopped counting paces as I started climbing, thinking that I couldn't possibly miss the summit. But this, this was a real white out. Visibility was nil. The only sense of direction was that of the wind. What should I do? I fought back a wave of panic by telling myself that these showers were short-lived. Only a few days before I'd been in a similar situation on the slopes of Carn na Drochaide. Then I'd just sat it out and 10 minutes later there'd been blue sky. So that's what I did here.'

This was no dream, this was a nightmare like the one I had in my tent at Roybridge. I couldn't move, but this time the elements were conspiring against me to keep me there on the snow. OK, time to wake up, I thought, but I couldn't and the nightmare continued.

'The storm didn't last 10 minutes,' I continued to tell my audience. 'I don't know how long it lasted but I seemed to be losing the will to get up and do anything. I felt unbelievably cold and tired. All I wanted to do was sleep, just wait for a couple of hours until it got dark so that I could fall into the oblivion of a really deep, long sleep at the end of an exhausting day. And the next day I'd wake up tired but peacefully happy that everything had returned to normal.'

My voice trailed away. The audience was still there. I was still dreaming. I realised that somehow I was stuck. Time had stopped. Suddenly, there was no future.

Almost there, but I would never reach the top of my last Munro. Was this the reality?

Not that I'd done the Munros, but that somehow I hadn't done them?

'I never got to the top, did I?' I inquired of my audience. 'I haven't finished the Munros. Why haven't I finished the Munros? What happened?'

I started to panic. I was frozen to the spot. Let this nightmare finish. LET ME WAKE UP NOW, PLEASE!

The audience was still there, now holding my hand. Millions and millions and millions of people holding my hand. The wave of panic subsided, the nightmare melted away, the dream vanished, but there was no waking up.

'Welcome to the club,' said the previous speaker. 'It no longer matters that you didn't complete the Munros, does it? Now you know why I was talking about the M74 – me, fatal car accident, you, hypothermia. As you see it's important that everyone talks about their final hours of life. Helps them to come to terms with death. Now let's listen to the next speaker.'

I smiled and took my place alongside my dead friends.

FLASHBACK – A CAIRNGORM CHRONICLE

By Colin W. Whittit

IT IS JANUARY 1987. I was crammed into the back of Chris Forrest's ancient Datsun. Buried beneath a mountain of rucksacks and climbing gear, my face was pressed against the wet window as we ground and bumped in low gear over the ice-rutted roads of Braemar.

By the time I fell gratefully out of the back seat Chris was fixing his cross-country skis to his boots. He was quickly organised and disappeared into the darkness with an impressive, but ungainly, thrash of arms and legs. Chris wants to be an Alpine Guide and apparently needs more ski-mountaineering experience. Judging by the amount of effort required just to set off a great deal more!

Wilson and I shouldered our packs and set off towards Derry Lodge. The first part of the walk was uphill and Wilson suggested burning off Chris's ski efforts. We had not gone far before we saw Chris floundering upside down in deep powder snow at the side of the track, where he was trying desperately to get back to his feet. The more he struggled the deeper his heavy rucksack seemed to press him into the snow. I went to help him but Wilson caught my arm: 'Leave him, he needs the practice.'

I shrugged and glanced once more at the struggling tangle of arms and legs below us. Chris seemed to be completely unaware of our presence as we watched his heroic struggle from above. I turned around and once more strode out after Wilson. I was keen for conversation and tried, yet again, to match his pace. When I caught up however, he was stoic and silent. Besides, it is hard to speak and gasp simultaneously for air.

Ten minutes or so passed before a snow-covered figure clattered up behind us. 'I fell,' gasped Chris. 'Had to take my rucksack off to stand up.' He passed us with a grand flourish of his ski sticks. 'Great conditions for skiing.' Then he was gone. Skating away into the blackness of the Glen Derry path at lung-bursting speed.

Wilson, setting his own pace, soon passed far ahead of me and I was left to the miserable drudgery of the long, flat walk in to the Hutchison Hut, anxious that I might miss the turn-off, more anxious that I would miss the bridge over the burn and even more certain that I would have an epic finding the hut in the dark.

My doubts were ill founded. The tracks left by Wilson's footsteps were easy to follow and once off the estate road, the route to the hut was well marked by large holes in the snow where Chris had fallen over.

Being last to reach the hut does have some advantages, and I arrived to a warm welcome of broad grins, hot drinks and the inevitable peanut

butter sandwich which is the principle constituent of Wilson's diet. That night the temperature inside the hut plummeted and was one of the coldest I had experienced. I woke up shivering several times during the night and once even found my hair stuck – frozen solid to the wall of the hut.

We rose early the next morning and prepared to set off as dawn crept quietly into the freezing coire bowl. We had a major objective in mind and we knew that we were not the only climbers in the hut that morning with the same plan in mind. Djibangi, it was rumoured, was in climbable winter condition.

Despite the cliffs being so close to the hut I was breathing heavily by the time we reached the red slabs, and a little rock outcrop which Wilson floated over to reach the base of the route was much harder to climb than it looked. Chris and I bypassed this obstacle with a short zig-zag traverse left then right to bring us to the base of the cliff.

Standing at the bottom of the wall, the lower slabs were sheathed with thin ice, spilling over from the ice trap of the Red Chimney. The big corner of Djibangi soared above us, a thin strip of snow or *névé* clinging to the slab and wall junction, inviting us upwards to the airy overlap high above.

Wilson set off immediately, traversing way out left to the edge of the slab overlooking Red Chimney. He climbed as beautifully as ever but I was confused as to why he was heading away from the main corner. I was unfamiliar with the summer line and imagined some horrible thin ice forcing us out into no-man's land in the centre of the big slab.

The climbing, after a steep pull onto the slab, was wonderful. Delicate foot placements and gentle stabs with the picks allowed steady progress to be made, not dissimilar to the best summer padding. The situation, the ice and the climbing were absorbing as I searched the surface of the slab for subtle thickenings or tell tale ripples where footholds could be found. This type of winter climbing was so different from the other routes I had climbed that it was with a little regret that I found myself approaching the first stance and belay.

The next pitch promised more variations on this icy theme, and Chris padded neatly and confidently into a belay niche in the main corner. It was now my turn to lead, and I could not believe my luck as I craned my neck backwards to see the corner soar away above me. The *névé* trapped in the open book of the corner was perfect, and just wide enough to accommodate my cramponed boots side by side.

Each step upwards was unique; a little dab with the axe here, a hook for the hammer in the crack in the right wall there, two solid thuds into thicker snow ice, axe picks an inch apart. Step, kick. Step, kick. Reach up high and lean outwards to place a runner on the right wall. I moved on. Moved

up. Only 10ft below the roof now. The névé started to narrow alarmingly and I was forced to stand with one foot above the other to maintain contact with the wall. I panicked as I imagined the consequences of the ice above me becoming too thin or narrow to climb. Another perfect runner placement boosted my confidence and any self-doubt vanished.

I was now under the small roof which constitutes the summer crux and my calves were beginning to strain. An *in situ* nut, jammed at the overlap, made arranging the protection easy and I now felt relaxed and in control. I saw the normal belay platform above me on my right and I decided to pass it by; stepping out onto the ledge from the security of the corner looked horrendously difficult. Later, on our descent from the crag, I was mightily impressed to see Greg Strange swing delicately out of the corner onto that stance.

Leaning out slightly, I peered anxiously above the overlap. The thin strip of snow ice continued up the corner to easier ground. With a swing of my wrists the axes thudded into the névé. I stepped up. Pulled. Feet up. Points in and it was all over. As I heaved over the lip of the overhang Wilson called to me: 'Come on Colin! It's only 4b in the summer.' I looked down between my feet to see his huge beaming grin and whooped with delight, baying loudly to the mist sheathing the crags.

I climbed on and was able, just as the rope drag was becoming troublesome, to manufacture a good belay on some granite ribs poking out of the snow on the left. Both Chris and Wilson cruised up the corner, noisily enthusiastic as they reached the stance. We all talked at the same time. No-one listening to what the others were saying, each of us desperate to relate our own personal experience of the corner pitch we had just climbed.

Above us the route had become a steep snow bay ending in a *cul de sac* which Chris led into. Wilson told him that the route broke out onto the buttress on the right. When Chris was gone Wilson smiled and informed me that: 'Chris is a great climber but he hasn't got much experience on the buttresses yet.'

Sure enough, Chris took ages to climb this pitch. When I followed him, I too found it tricky. Pulling up onto the edge was committing and exposed. Teetering up the final, typically Cairngorm rib, with its rounded grooves, turf filled cracks and well-spaced protection was a sustained and surprisingly delicate finish to the route.

The plateau was gained by surmounting a small cornice and Chris confessed that the upper buttress was: 'Bloody hard.'

I smiled to myself, amazed at Wilson's dark sense of humour and wondered how many times I too had been the victim of his ploys without even being aware of it. I found myself wondering just what he said to

Chris as I set off to lead the corner pitch earlier. My sense of self-satisfaction at Chris's expense was short-lived however, when, one hour later, he effortlessly climbed through the complex overhanging icicles at the crux of Red Chimney. I had a really hard time following this pitch and the memory of that lead remains with me as one of the most competent performances I have seen on steep ice.

The next day conditions were perfect when we climbed Carmine Groove to claim an unexpected second ascent. Afterwards, Wilson and Chris romped off to solo some Grade IV ice. I didn't join them because, I said, I was knackered. The real reason, however, was that I was so pumped with adrenaline that I didn't really trust my judgment any more. I had not slept well the night before, and the number of big-name climbers on the crag had me psyched out.

As I boiled water back at the hut, I watched party after party grind up the lower snow slope, drawn by the powerful magnet of Djibangi. Some intrepid individuals climbed it direct, some just inspected it and moved on, others found it hard and gripping. Testing their skills to the full. There is one thing, however, on which all agree: Djibangi in winter is an outstanding route.

Two months passed, and it was March of the same year before Wilson, Chris and I climbed together again. This time we were based at Glenmore Lodge, guests of Jas Hepburn.

Since our last climb on the Etchachan cliffs Wilson and I had climbed Cumming-Crofton route in a fast time, and I even managed to avoid the unscripted bungee jump down Slochd Wall which I had performed the year before on an ascent of Mitre Ridge. Wilson apparently arrested my fall by jumping down the East Wall side of the terminal ridge and is still scrounging free drinks on the strength of this war story.

The day was mild when we set out from the Coire Cas car park and I was, to say the least, surprised that after 45 minutes of walking, we were still all together and the pace steady, even comfortable, to follow. Chris was on foot this time. I supposed that the conditions were 'not so great for skiing' today.

As we contoured the rim of Coire an Lochan, passing the foot of the Vent, my avalanche phobia gradually began to subside as the snowpack stayed attached to the great slab. I had seen too many photographs of the fracture line on this area of snow to feel comfortable here, while any time beyond February starts me worrying about the annual spring thaw which triggers this huge snowfield to tumble into the coire bowl below.

Despite the mild weather when we set off, it was very cold in the shadows of the coire and we decided to solo some of the easier routes to warm up. We quickly thudded our way up Oesophagus and descended via

the Couloir. This turned out to be the start of another Moir ploy since the bottom of the gully brought us neatly to the start of Fallout Corner which was still waiting for a second ascent. I wanted to have a go at Savage Slit but Wilson had already climbed it and Chris, uncharacteristically, said nothing. Fallout Corner it was.

I lead the first pitch to below the roof. The climbing was very awkward and much more strenuous than it looked. The rock jutted out in big blocks split by wide, fist-sized cracks – but nothing that you could really get a hold of.

Most of the climbing involved jamming and steep mantelshelf moves in clumsy, mittened hands. The pitch was similar to the overhanging wall on Scorpion, but much more sustained. It was with relief that I heaved myself, one hour later, into the comparative sanctuary of the little cave below the overhang. Arms pumped, lungs heaving and sweat dripping from my chin onto the snow at my feet. Wilson and Chris were less than impressed by my effort and announced that they were ‘almost hypothermic’. Wilson fixed the rope to the belay at the stance below and both of them quickly disappeared to ‘heat themselves up’.

I was furious; I had worked really hard to get to this point and felt like I had been abandoned. When they returned 20 minutes’ later I was shivering with cold and in a foul mood. Wilson is a superb climber and consequently he seconded my pitch in about five minutes flat. ‘Solid Grade V that pitch,’ he told me. I grunted an acknowledgement and we changed the gear over quickly. He set out onto the overhang. His feet seemed to be level with my head for a very long time and his efforts were punctuated with much grunting, the rattle of gear, but very little actual movement. Suddenly, there was a heave and Wilson moved jerkily upwards, crampons scratching noisily on the bare rock.

I looked out from my eyrie under the roof. He had his right arm locked off, the pick of his hammer twisted in a tiny slot and his left hand grabbing above the roof of the overhang. His teeth gritted in determination as he found the hold he needed and with a sinew-stretching heave, disappeared from view. ‘That’s hard,’ he called down to me and I heard him gasp as he banged in a peg.

That the moves were hard was obvious, and my enthusiasm to climb any farther faded fast as the icy fingers of cold which were creeping steadily into my body caused me to shiver uncontrollably. I belayed Chris up to the little cave and he too climbed the first pitch of the route depressingly quickly. I used this chance to play the hypothermic excuse and persuaded him to lower me back to the coire floor to allow me to heat up. I had, of course, no intention of returning up to the cave and happily soloed the Vent and wandered back down the Couloir to the foot of the

route. Chris was now above the overhang and a red rope snaked down the buttress to the well stomped platform that I was standing on. I generously announced that Wilson and Chris should complete the route themselves as a 'faster' rope of two. My mouth dropped open when Wilson called down in a matter of fact tone: 'You'll have to come up. We left your gear below the overlap!'

I was incredulous. They must have sensed my indecision and deliberately left my gear in place obliging me to climb on.

I was so angry that the first pitch passed in a blur of sweat and misdirected aggression. The roof however was indeed 'hard'. My crampon points somehow balanced on rounded edges and my axe pick hooked into the tiny slot in the wall above my head

I pulled hard. I pulled again, harder, and moved upwards, but found myself off balance. My left hand slapped and groped speculatively above the roof but couldn't find the hold I so desperately needed. I was tiring quickly and knew that it was now or never. I wrapped my arm around Wilson's ankle, regained my balance, climbed up his leg and collapsed half on, half off the ledge.

The ledge we were standing on was about 2ft long and 2ft wide. We were attached by a complicated network of ropes and slings to one, less than inspiring, peg. Chris was looking very unhappy as he shivered in the corner, head hanging against the wall, one foot on the ledge and the other bridging out onto the right wall. Changing the gear over was complicated and time consuming and it was some time before Chris started up the main corner. The corner itself was plated with snow and he made only about 8ft of progress before he returned to the ledge, knackered. Wilson looked to me. 'Do you want to have a go?'

'I shook my head. 'Down it is then.'

The abseil from the dodgy peg was worrying, but uneventful, and it was only when we turned at last to the Lodge and Chris collapsed that I realised how ill he had been. Chris had apparently been in bed for several days with flu but did not want to miss the chance of climbing Fallout Corner. I was humbled by his endurance and impressed with his remarkable commitment to climb a route of this difficulty when he was clearly so unfit to do so.

Later, with Chris rested and partially recovered, we passed the evening in the warm hospitality of Planet Lodge. I drank far too much beer; listened in awe to the modestly-related tales of The Guru, Andy Nisbet; discussed secret plans and vaulting ambitions with Andy Cunningham and later, I'm told, recommended some 'good Grade 3s to Dave Cuthbertson!'

RISK AND MOUNTAINEERING

By R. T. Richardson

The following three articles expound, in one way or another, on the complex series of choices and decisions which mountaineers undergo on each and every outing, consciously or not. The title article by R. T. Richardson, attempts to set the scene, while Messrs Anderson and Peden provide real life descriptions of resulting situations. A fourth article in this issue, Join the Club, may also be profitably read in conjunction with the aforementioned three. (Hon. Ed.)

TO QUOTE W. Inglis Clark in 1899 ¹.

'The mountaineer is essentially a searcher after the beautiful. It is true that this is not his only object in ascending summits or visiting mountain districts. Readers of Mr Maylard's interesting papers ^{2,3} on *Climbing considered in its Physiological Aspects*, will remember that he has there shown how complex and beneficial are the results of mountaineering on our muscular and nervous systems. In the belief of some, these purely physical results are the only aim of those who scale precipitous cliff or narrow arête *en route* for the summit. With others, the climber is credited with a mad ambition to imperil his life, while heart and nervous system are strained to the utmost by the excitement of imminent danger.

'...the rock climber finds in his pursuit such a fascinating exercise of balance and concentration and of judgment in considering probabilities and possibilities that while he in no wise undervalues the scenic importance of his climb, he may count his time well spent...'

It is the question of how we exercise this judgment and the complexity of the mental processes, conscious and unconscious, which underpin it that I would like to discuss. We may go on the hills to enjoy the beauty of the scenery or to delight in the exercise but when we say we are going climbing or mountaineering we imply that possibility of physical harm and uncertainty of outcome which is the real attraction. Considered risk and the application of physical skill and strength in situations which satisfy our love of the vertical is what attracts us.

There is probably no other *sport* which has such an extensive literature as mountaineering, and certainly no other body of literature devoted to a physical activity (including sex) which takes itself so seriously and has such intellectual pretensions. Mountaineering literature covers a wide range of approaches to its subject – lyrical description of scenery, topographical description, physical description of mountains and routes, gear worship, hero worship, ego-stroking, polemic, humour, horror stories etc. What is rarely presented is any serious examination of the nature and scale of the risks involved in mountaineering and the way that mountaineers judge them. The possibility of hazard is often mentioned, but the conscious judgment of risk is rarely discussed in the generality of mountain literature.

There are, of course, some notable and classic exceptions. Three of these may be found in anthologies, *The Games Climber's Play*⁴ and *Mirror in the Cliffs*⁵. Lito Tejada-Flores's essay on climbing as a game hierarchy is well known, as are his often-quoted remarks on the necessity of maintaining a degree of uncertainty as to the eventual outcome in order to achieve satisfaction in climbing. Harold Drasdo's essay on *Margins of Safety* is a marvellous exploration of the psychology of mountaineering but I disagree in some respects with the concept of margin of SAFETY. Mike Thomson's elegant essay on *The Aesthetics of Risk* – reprinted in *Mirror in the Cliffs* – takes a generalised, if interesting, approach to risk in mountaineering which demonstrates a knowledge of the theoretical aspects of risk perception as well as risk management of financial investments. (His classification of risk-takers into Buddhists and Hindus has a certain apt humour in climbing circles.) But, for an activity which undoubtedly involves the possibility of hazard, climbing literature takes very little explicit recognition of the nature of the risks and the approach of mountaineers to them.

Risk in all its aspects is now considered a respectable area of study and there is a considerable literature of academic study of risk. The most useful and accessible text is probably John Adams's book *Risk*⁶ and I acknowledge a debt to it for many of the ideas in this article. Risk is a universal human activity and the literature on it is well worth studying.

There is, however, a problem in reading the literature of risk and trying to apply its concepts and models to mountaineering. The usual definition of risk is based on the combination of a statistical probability of an event occurring and the *detriment* that would accompany that event. It is the statistical concept of probability as a frequency that is the problem. When applied to a large number of repeated similar actions (e.g. incidence of lung cancer in cigarette smokers) this may be valid, but a mountaineer does not think in terms of 'if I repeat this pitch 10 times, how many times will I fall off?' Rather, mountaineers think in terms of what Harold Drasdo called 'margin of safety'. I would rephrase that as 'margin of success'. This probably applies to much of human behaviour, with the individual being concerned with one particular event, or course of action, at a time and the risk theorist being concerned with the cumulative statistics of that activity as performed a large number of times.

When we climb, or drive a car, or cross the street, or have that extra whisky, we consciously or unconsciously make a risk assessment. These are self-imposed or voluntary risks and either we accept the perceived risk of a particular action, and then carry it out, or we reject the risk and avoid the action. There is another class of risk which we are subject to – for example the risk of contracting spongiform encephalopathy from eating beef or of being killed in an air crash, or of a large asteroid hitting the Earth. These are involuntary risks which are largely imposed on us and are outwith our direct control – unless we avoid eating beef or refuse to travel by plane etc. But we cannot take personal action to avoid asteroids hitting

the Earth. They have done so in the past – and there is no reason to think they will not do so again.

There is a dramatic difference in attitudes to voluntary and involuntary risk. If we attempt to explore the levels of involuntary risk that the public regards as acceptable we enter a very overgrown bramble patch. Much depends on the nature of the perceived hazard, but there are very strong sociological factors as well. What is apparent, however, is that it is the perception of the risk rather than the *real* risk that drives public response. There are currently some classic examples of this, e.g. human infection arising from BSE in cattle, disposal of nuclear waste. The perception of the hazards associated with these is such that rationality is not on stage.

The acceptable/unacceptable boundaries are often expressed by means of a graph of scale of hazard (penalty) versus risk (probability). But this can only give a general description of the average person's response. It is interesting to briefly consider the level of imposed risk which individuals are willing to accept. Obviously, this will vary widely but, in general, surveys have shown that for an imposed event resulting in the death of one individual a probability of greater than once in 10,000 years is considered unacceptable. For events resulting in multiple deaths the "unacceptable" frequency falls sharply. It is also apparent that there is a greater fear of some hazards than of others and that fear (rational or irrational) has a strong influence on governmental legislative response.

Consider the ban on the sale of beef 'on the bone' instituted in 1998 and since rescinded. The Government solemnly said that there was a risk of one in 60 million that eating beef on the bone could lead to spongiform encephalopathy. Most statisticians would suspect that the level of confidence on a frequency of this magnitude to be rather low and that, consequently, the stated frequency has very little meaning. At the same time there are a multitude of other human activities with fatal consequences and much higher probabilities that do not attract government bans (it is estimated that, on average, 10 people a year die in the UK from allergy to peanuts). It is the nature of the detrimental event that lies behind this ban. The general horror of dementia and death resulting from prior infection drove this extreme and dubious legislation, while other much more probable routes to unpleasant death are ignored. It also appears that if people are asked about probabilities that they consider "safe" and "dangerous" for involuntary risks, there is no sharp dividing line; rather, there is a large "gray area" between the acceptable and the unacceptable.

When we look at voluntary risk, the whole scale of acceptable and unacceptable probability changes and the variation between individuals becomes very much more marked. People will cheerfully accept comparatively high levels of risk when crossing the road or driving cars. Some will accept probabilities at Russian Roulette levels or (with some climbers) evens or worse. Why? Because they think they are in control of the situation. In technical terms, they think they are managing the risk because

they believe they have a measure of control over the outcome. This is sometimes referred to as optimistic bias. People usually go into these situations because they perceive a benefit from the proposed action but rarely carry out more than the most superficial risk analysis. See the average driving style.

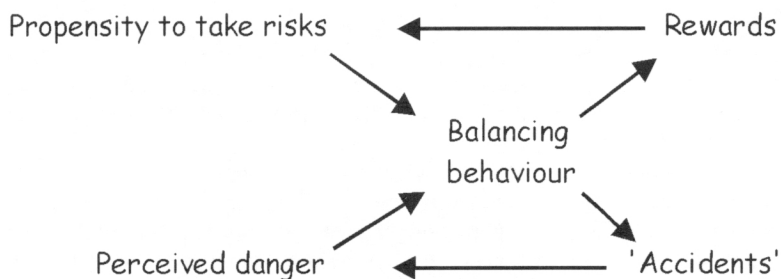
Many people are attracted to activities which depend, in some part at least, for their attraction on an element of risk of physical harm or death. Such people will seek to operate on their own perceptions of the boundary between the safe and the unsafe. Each individual is mapping out an area on the perceived risk/hazard surface within which they find satisfaction. They will derive much of their satisfaction from having successfully managed self-imposed risks. This is the territory explored in Drasdo's essay. When they consider these voluntary risks though, they don't knowingly operate on a probability versus penalty graph. The climber doesn't consciously think: 'If I do this move 100 times I estimate that I will fail on 10 of these occasions.' Instead, to my mind, we replace probability with something which you might call *margin*. Drasdo calls it *safety margin* but I think this is too restrictive a description, I would rather call it *success margin*. This is a conscious estimate of the extent to which attempting a particular route or undertaking a particular move will take us to our physical and technical limits and I would claim that most people taking part in risk sports think in the same way.

Mountaineering is certainly a risk sport but one of the things which distinguishes it from the likes of motor racing or downhill ski racing is the fact that climbing requires a whole sequence of *probabilities and possibilities* to be considered at a relatively slow pace. It is this process of deliberate and conscious judgment of both the practicality and the possible penalties of the next move (or sequence of moves) which gives climbing its intellectual superiority over those sports which merely require one quick commitment or which depend on a continuous flow of adrenaline-fuelled reactive judgments taken in haste. The climber has (usually) the time to consider the consequences of his or her actions.

Many people find that the satisfaction in climbing comes from pushing their boundaries into that area where they are uncertain that they will avoid harm on the next move (or sequence of moves) but still retain their *optimistic bias*. A guarantee of success would reduce the climb to a gymnastic exercise or a tour of mountain scenery – pleasant enough but lacking the bite of the authentic climbing experience. But, we each have our own concept of where these boundaries lie. Or, to put it another way, of how much we are willing to reduce our margin.

The factors that underlie this can be illustrated by a model known as the *risk thermostat*.

The individual consciously or unconsciously adjusts their thermostat in the light of their own personality, i.e. the propensity to take risks. (Adams's book discusses the various types of risk-taking personality – hierarchists,



individualists, fatalists and egalitarians. See also Drasdo's essay.) This, and their perception of the danger of a particular situation, results in balancing behaviour which may range from placing a runner to avoiding a route altogether. (*Balancing behaviour* is an apt concept in our context.) The perception of danger will be based on a number of factors – weather, rock or snow conditions, risk of rockfall, constitution of the party etc. which are, to a great extent, dependent on experience. Too much *balancing behaviour* may reduce the *rewards*.

The adjustment of the risk thermostat can be illustrated by the connection between the so-called advances in safety engineering in motor cars and the way in which people drive. Most people will exploit better brakes, seat belts etc. by driving faster. They adjust their behaviour to operate in a constant risk envelope. The application to climbing is obvious. To quote Drasdo: 'Whenever a significant step forward is made in equipment or technique, the average climber makes a compensation. He (sic!) does not want to widen his safety margin indefinitely; he wants to hold it to a satisfactorily narrow measure... His safety margin has to seem as marginal as ever.'

It is interesting to speculate on the *rewards* sector of the risk thermostat in the mountaineering context. I would suggest that these are complex and highly variable from individual to individual. There is (I hope) an aesthetic component by which we derive satisfaction from our encounter with the mountain or crag environment through appreciation of the perceived beauty and grandeur of our surroundings. Many of us, I suspect, derive satisfaction from the sculptural elegance of even short routes. There may be sociological components – a desire to be part of a community of people whom we admire and to have standing within that community.

On a more basic level, there may be physiological rewards. The stress situation results in the release of chemicals in the body. The most familiar chemical response is adrenaline. This is the *fight or flight* chemical which is released from a gland near the liver and speeds up the release of glucose in the muscles, thus leading to increased rate of muscle fibre twitching. Most of us are familiar with the tingling sensation that accompanies adrenaline release – *the adrenaline rush*. But sensation lies in the brain and here things become much more complex. The following is a very simpli-

fied description of some aspects of brain chemistry. Sensation is the result of the transmission of electrical impulses (firing) of nerve cells and this firing is brought about by the release of chemicals. Much current research on addiction is concerned with these chemical mechanisms, although some of them (e.g. the effect of ethanol) have been understood for a long time. Other endogenous (i.e. released within the brain) chemicals are associated with pleasure sensations. It is now widely accepted that intense physical exercise or experience of *risk* situations can result in the release in the brain of chemicals classed as endorphins. Endorphins are endogenous chemicals which affect particular neurological sites (the opioid receptors) in the brain and are responsible for the 'high' that may be experienced after a successfully completed route. (The opioid receptors are so-called because morphine and related chemicals bind to them.) Unlike adrenaline, which gives a relatively short-term *rush*, endorphin release effects are long-lasting.

It is widely recognised that physical exercise can be addictive (long distance runners are notorious for this) and this addiction is linked to the production of endorphins in the brain. It may be that mountaineering, which exposes its practitioners to prolonged stress/exercise experiences, can also lead to endorphin addiction. More worryingly, a high level of endorphin activity is associated with compulsive-obsessive disorders.

If we recognise risk, it is only to be expected that we will either avoid the risk or attempt to manage it in some way. The management of risk is now recognised as a subject of study and there is a huge literature on this subject. However, *Risk Management* means different things in different spheres of activity – financial risk management, engineering risk management, environmental risk management, to name but three.

Risk management in climbing and mountaineering takes a variety of forms. The acquisition of information from guidebooks and from consultation with other climbers. Assessment of the weather and of the snow or rock conditions. The choice of climbing partners. Assessment of one's own physical condition and climbing form. The choice of equipment – and so on. But rarely is this combined into a conscious risk-management strategy. We feel like attempting the route or we don't feel like attempting the route.

Changes in equipment have probably brought about the biggest *advances* in climbing standards over the last 50 years. At least, for the average climber – perhaps the standards at the top have changed less than we think.

Today the average climber uses specialised footwear, usually two ropes if they are Scots, a harness, a variety of expensive devices for running belays, and possibly wears a helmet. The capital cost of all of this is formidable. The object of all this technology and expense is mainly to reduce the hazard in the event of falling off. This reduction of hazard allows the climber to accept a higher probability of falling off and still stay within their individual *envelope* of risk, i.e. to indulge in risk compensation. Although they may climb at higher *standards* than the pioneers of earlier

days, the overall risk is not greater and is probably significantly less. *The leader does not fall* is not universally applicable nowadays.

Climbers have embraced risk compensation in a big way. We have used the engineering embodied in camming devices, wedging devices, light-weight ropes, sticky boots etc. to push out climbing standards. As far as the risk management of ascent goes we seem to have been fairly successful. There are very few fatalities recorded in the *Accident Reports* which arise from falls during a climb. Where mountaineering deaths do occur they are usually associated with the descent – principally from avalanche or from slips. This can be taken as a warning that when the risk is perceived to be less immediate and dramatic, the risk management becomes less conscious. This is obviously bound up with our perception of, and psychological approach to, risk, which varies from individual to individual.

What about sports climbing? Here it appears at first glance that the hazard has been eliminated and that the acceptable failure probability is very high. The point is to overcome technical and physical difficulties so that *failure* results in damage to self-esteem rather than to the body. The risk envelope has changed not only in terms of probability and extent of penalty – the penalty itself has changed. A risk activity has become a gymnastic sport. This is not entirely true; there are physical risks associated with falling off overhanging walls on to bolt runners, while tendonitis is common, but broken limbs and death are not usually in the scenario (unless a bolt fails).

In solo climbing the increase in hazard has to be offset by a drastic reduction in the probability of failure or an acceptance of much higher potential penalties. This is a contentious area but one in which the aesthetic values of climbing and the psychology of the climber become very important.

Should climbers study Risk Management as a discipline? Probably not worthwhile. One doesn't want to construct fault trees for a climb (we all do it instinctively) but the fault tree methodology might be worth while for an expedition. (A fault tree is a diagram which examines the connections between possible events which could lead to a catastrophic overall result and estimates the resulting probability.) I think it is worthwhile though, to think consciously in terms of hazard and probability (or margin, if you prefer) and to be more aware of the way in which we can minimise these without taking the point out of climbing. Or to put it another way – to take our own individual risk envelope into more interesting territory.

To risk is to live (if you get your risk management right).

1. S.M.C.J. 1898, v., pp121-125.

2. S.M.C.J. 1897, iv., pp267-275.

3. S.M.C.J. 1898; v., pp17-23.

4. The Games Climbers Play. Wilson, Ken (Ed.) Diadem Press (1978) ISBN 0-906371-01-5.

5. Mirror in the Cliffs. Perrin, Jim. (Ed.) Diadem Press (1983) ISBN 0-906371-95-3

6. Risk. Adams, John. UCL Press (1995) ISBN 1-85728-068-7

THE LEDGE

By Douglas Anderson

THE Twin Otter skimmed in over a cluster of icebergs grounded in shallows at the river mouth.

We seemed to be heading straight in. The landing place was an area of flattish gravel marked only with two torn pieces of fluorescent pink material. But no, the plane banked left pulling round the head of the river valley. We four sat gripping the arm rests at the very back. In front of us our food and equipment was piled in a random heap. Looking forward, past the shoulders of the crew, through the front windshield, a rock wall slipped by. The plane banked more steeply and beyond the wing tip I watched the icebergs then gravel come round again. More steeply still the plane turned until I thought the pile of equipment was sure to break loose. I contemplated the havoc created should centrifugal force for a moment lose its grip and send our 80kg outboard motor careering round the cabin. A deadly cargo of 400 litres of petrol in plastic bags lay wobbling about like jellies at a kids' party. I had visions of the engine flattening the fuel bags and sending a wave of four star sweeping through the plane. But such are only the imaginings of a family man who is afraid of flying. I needn't have worried, the nose dipped and with only a slight bump, we were soon rolling to a halt on the gravel bar.

Trying to play down my relief I unclipped and scrambled forward. I had something new to worry about and that was how to get a ton of gear hundreds of yards to the sea. I had no illusions about who would soon become the primary pack animal and I wanted to cut the length of the relays to a minimum.

With a generosity of spirit typical of those who navigate the northern skies, our crew unhesitatingly agreed to drive round the tundra in search of a good drop off spot. In the distance was the outline of a river leading in the direction of the sea, and soon we were bumping off towards it. As we drew nearer I began to have misgivings. On stepping down it was immediately obvious that the river was very shallow, and definitely not up to the job of floating our impedimenta to the sea. If we put in here, we would face an impossibly arduous drag through miles of braided shallows to reach water deep enough to float. I was embarrassed because the crew still had to fly on to Station Nord, and asking them to continue taxiing around this delta was not going to shorten their day. Without prompting, however, they suggested we try another direction. Guilty, but relieved, I clambered back on board and we set off again, bouncing heavily over increasingly rough ground. For what seemed a long time we trundled on until unexpectedly

lurching to a stop. Had we arrived? No. The pilot shoved the throttles forward, the engine revs increased alarmingly, but the plane did not budge.

I looked anxious. 'Don't worry...Sand,' said the pilot, giving the throttles another shove. The plane strained and rattled, and then heaved itself forward, bouncing dramatically into the air before crashing down again. 'No problem' said the pilot. Onwards we bounced, until even he thought things had gone far enough. We had made it to within a quarter of a mile of the water's edge.

We tumbled out and hurriedly unloaded. In five minutes all our gear was spread on the ground and we stood shaking hands. The pilot looked at us, me, my wife, the two children and referring I think, to our plans to circumnavigate Milne Land and boat down to the Liverpool coast, expostulated: 'Kind of crazy'...(he paused as if considering the sanity of our undertaking)... 'But good'...I was relieved, I didn't want to be condemned by this maniac for being reckless. A minute later the Twin Otter was trundling over the gravel again and suddenly it was airborne. Turning on a wing tip it was back, and we all ducked as it swooped so low we felt we would be scalped. We stood staring after it until it merged into the clouds.

We looked around and tried to take stock. 'Wow!' We were certainly alone, just the four of us, standing alone on this Arctic river delta with our gear. I began to worry again about the size of the pile, the remaining distance to the sea, and the other objective dangers that would threaten tomorrow's outcome. By 10pm camp was pitched and we were in the tent cooking tea. It had been a long day, but tomorrow looked like being harder. It started to rain but I for one was too knackered to care.

I woke early and lay thinking about the effort needed to move the gear. What stressed me was the need to make a depot at the water's edge, not usually problematic, but on this occasion it meant putting progressively more and more of our indispensable supplies into harm's way. The sand spit on which I planned to build the depot was threatened by the icebergs we had flown over the previous day. I was acutely aware that, should any of them decide it was time to roll over, a tidal wave would sweep my carefully built pile into the sea before some family smart arse could say: 'I knew that was going to happen.'

This proved not to be just idle paranoia on my part for, about two weeks' later, this did happen to another expedition in exactly this spot.

At 6am I got up, I couldn't stand the anticipation any longer. I knew the day was going to be a killer but this year I had an innovation, a secret weapon, and I was keen to see if it was going to work. The device consisted of the lid from our small crate, the boat hook, the ice chisel, and two launch wheels from the boat all tied together into a rude conveyance by two metal ties. It may sound a bit Heath Robinson but it actually performed brilliantly as a hand cart, even when loaded with 100kg of fuel. In particular, its balloon tyres prevented it sinking into the 600 yards of mud that separated

me from the sand spit. Nonetheless, it took 12 hours of stoically plodding back and forth across tundra, mud and tidal pools until all the items were moved from the drop off point to the sand spit. Meanwhile, Andrea sorted the loads and the children did what children do at the sea side.

It rained gently on and off most of the day, but I can't say I really noticed. By the time I got to load 16 I wouldn't have noticed a blizzard. This was just as well since the weather was deteriorating and we still had to get under way. By 7pm all goods and chattels were embarked and we put to sea with our six-foot, No. 2 inflatable, overloaded with fuel, in tow. This second innovation was not successful in the choppy waters, and had to be abandoned, its contents brought on board after only half a mile. The incident, though trivial, stressed our patience. We pressed on as the weather continued to deteriorate, constantly casting about for anywhere that might afford a campsite and shelter for the boat. Eventually, about midnight, we found a well-protected bay by which time everyone had had enough.

Day two was spent recovering. After that we began to explore the region in a more relaxed fashion. Leaving a depot of half our food and fuel, we set off to circumnavigate Milne Land. This large island is roughly triangular in shape, measuring about 40 miles on each side. Off the north-east corner lie the Bear Islands, a string of small islands inhabited by birds and seals and perhaps polar bears, although they eluded us. We explored these isles until the weather improved and then set off into Island Fjord.

Island Fjord brings new meaning to the word spectacular. Both shores are iron-bound for 40 miles with cliffs of mountainous proportions rising up to 5000ft on the southern shore, and 7000ft to the north. The only breaks in this vertical rockscape are created by unscaleable glaciers plunging from the icy plateaux above.

That evening we enjoyed a clear sky and mirror calm water for which we were very grateful, as fierce katabatic winds can blast down from the inland ice and, funnelled by the cliffs, build heavy seas over the fjord's 40-mile reach. The evening sun was low, making the water sparkle as we planed over its glassy surface weaving easily between well-spaced 'flows'. The huge scale of the great precipices was difficult to grasp. Immense sheets of rock facing seawards and tower after rocky tower marching inland. The snail's pace at which we seemed to crawl along their base belied the fact that we were bettering 15 knots over the water. There was more unclimbed rock here than you could shake a stick at.

For 20 miles we hugged the southern shore without seeing a single landing spot. Then we tried the northern side to see if we might fare better there. Finally, after another 10 miles, we rounded a slabby buttress to discover a tiny bay. The bay was bounded on the west by a grassy promontory. A 200ft scramble up scree brought us to a fine, elevated camping spot with commanding views up and down the fjord. The broad

summit gave us plenty of space to spread out. Leif lit a small tundra fire and we sat round preparing our meal and watched the colours of the water, ice and rock change in the evening sun. In the Arctic calm the silence of the wilderness brought peace.

It was a fine night and around midnight we turned in without bothering to put up the tent. Around 5am I awoke feeling distinctly chilly. A blanket of fog hung over us, soaking the surface of the ground and our sleeping bags. I pulled the wet fabric around my head, shut my eyes and hoped it would not rain. Thankfully it didn't, and around 8am a pale sun burned its way through; by the time everybody was ready to rise all was dry.

Without a full Yosemite rock rack the scope for land-based exploration was limited. However, behind the camp an easy looking gully split the lowest rock buttress and seemed to lead to an extensive terrace at about 1000ft I thought a short excursion to the terrace would be good for the constitution and provide some worthwhile views. Orea, regarding those who enjoy unnecessary exercise as terminally afflicted, declined my invitation to explore the gully. Leif was enthusiastic at first but retreated as soon as the ground got steeper.

Andrea and I pressed on however. In retrospect, youth showed the better judgment. All that can be said about my own was that, despite 25 years' mountaineering in distant lands, I seemed to have learned very little about the deceptiveness of easy gullies. Inevitably we kept climbing upwards, unroped for we had none, thinking each minor obstacle would be the last. It wasn't long before we had accumulated enough of these obstacles for the exposure to be no longer minor.

At some indeterminate point the adrenaline began to flow freely, the ground got steeper and looser, and the ledge simultaneously more desirable and more inaccessible. Only a little higher and I got myself into a real nervous sweat, trying to bridge an open corner that proved increasingly difficult. I had to down-climb and bypass it on a pile of shifting blocks. We were by now totally committed and only a further half an hour of careful movement and high concentration got us to the top without causing a major avalanche or other disaster.

Hauling out onto the terrace, Andrea and I immediately agreed that it had been one of life's least pleasant experiences, and one we were not going to repeat under any circumstances. I remembered a number of grassy rakes that cut down across the buttress and I was pretty sure that one would provide a saner descent. If not, the glacier which passed the end of the terrace certainly would. In any event nothing was going to persuade us to try down-climbing the gully.

For half an hour we explored the terrace and took in the magnificent views. We could see Orea and Leif 1000ft below sitting on the ground sheet playing cards. Our boat looked tiny lying at anchor in the little bay. The scenery and isolation of the place was inspiring, but we had already been

away longer than I had expected and I would be more comfortable when we had found a safe way down to *terra firma*.

The first choice was to check out the possibility of a descent onto the glacier since this seemed likely to be the quickest route. A closer inspection soon dispersed that theory. It would be quite unattainable without an abseil, and it was so crevassed that it represented a very suspect method of salvation.

I remained confident about the grassy rakes but the trick would be to identify a viable one from above.

After a couple of false trails I found what looked likely to be a major line running down across the cliff. The angle was a bit steeper than I had hoped for, but I set off down with a determined air. Andrea followed without comment. After about 200ft. the rake petered out. The slabs above and below were now steeper still. However, I managed to down-climb a small rock step to reach another, narrower rake. Andrea followed without enthusiasm. It began to rain.

This new rake fizzled out pretty quickly, merging into the cliff face. Moving out onto the face I found myself hand traversing unroped across a huge expanse of rock. I was 500ft off the deck and the holds seemed to be getting smaller and wetter. I paused and looked down at the camp but the kids had disappeared under the ground sheet out of the rain. This level of fear hadn't been in the morning's game plan, and it was again getting out of hand. One slip and the team would have to appoint a new skipper from their midst to navigate back to Constable Point. Barely in control I struggled back to the ledge where Andrea stood with a stressed look on her face. Without discussion we retreated back up the rakes, both concentrating intensely to avoid slipping on the now wet grass. Half an hour later we were back on the terrace having used up almost as much adrenaline as in the gully.

There was nothing for it now but to return to that hellish place. We both knew it, so we didn't waste any time wringing our hands over the matter. Moving close together to reduce the momentum of rocks we might disturb onto the other, we entered the gully again in defiance of our so recent promise. Never again, that eternal but unspoken thought, as we moved slowly down, taking incredible care with each step, every muscle taut, silently cursing any rock that shifted. Going down was more difficult than climbing up but we were psyched up to succeed. The prospect of the kids having to fend for themselves in this lonely Arctic fjord 100 miles from anywhere added all the incentive we needed to ensure no mistakes.

An hour later we exited the gully, relief exuding from every pore. Back at camp we rightly got an earful of abuse from the kids for being away so long. We apologised profusely, but felt too embarrassed and guilty to explain the reasons. They firmly believed we were just having fun.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

By John Peden

'THERE'S A lot of snow coming down here,' said Anthony. 'Aye, and going back up again!' I replied as another blast funnelled up the gully. 'I hope this stuff is well stuck down,' he said, 'Hmm,' I replied, my eye slightly off the ball. I was tired you see. Five months of inactivity, at least in terms of going up hills, had taken its toll and I was content now to plod up in his footsteps.

Wednesday had been a super day, all blue skies and autumn richness. Cruachan, my shining hope, was resplendent in early November snow as I gazed out of the office window. It had been a fairly relentless spell, balancing the demands of a new business and new family. Funnily enough, Mandy and I had just been talking about it the previous day. 'You should give Anthony a ring,' she said, 'See if he fancies a day on the hill.' Why not, I thought, as I realised I had no inescapable commitments for the morrow. 'Why not,' said Anthony 30 seconds later. 'Aonach Mor's supposed to give good early-season sport.' However, it transpired that the Nevis Range had, with impeccable timing, closed the gondola in order to send essential bits back to Austria for repair. So we decided to see what Glencoe had to offer. The forecast that evening was for a wee depression to whip through on the strengthening airflow, bringing some overnight rain falling as snow higher up, and clearing back to showers by lunchtime.

Thursday dawned cold, wet and blustery. Just as I was about to set off Anthony phoned from the north. 'Er, running a bit late here, and there's two inches of slush on the road, so it will be nearer 10 before I get there. 'OK,' I replied. 'I'll meet you in Nevisport and we'll see what the day's doing.'

It was still raining as we sipped our coffee and chatted, having not seen each other for months. Then blue sky appeared and we felt a stirring. There followed a sedate procession behind a straggling RV all the way to Ballachulish, which ensured that it was 11.30 before we stood at Achnambeithach, gazing hillward. The rising cloud base revealed a new snowline just clipping the top of Aonach Dubh and no particular evidence of ice higher up. This together with an arrangement to take children to the fireworks display in Oban that evening, convinced us it was not a day for ropes and gear. 'An ideal day for a quick burn up the hill,' said Anthony. 'OK, but let's take both tools just in case we find a wee patch of ice to play on.' (It did not occur to either of us to take helmets as a logical sequitur to this decision.) Thus equipped we set off up the path to Coire nam Beith, with Bidean in mind. 'And maybe Stob Coire nan Lochan if we're going well.' I added, ever the optimist.

Well, of course, I wasn't going at all well, despite setting the early pace,

and by the time we got above the waterfall I could appreciate the full horror of my unfitness. Still, it was good to be on the hill again. I dug in and trailed after Anthony, now ploughing a furrow through the new snow towards the upper corrie.

By now the day was much fresher, with squally showers of hail driving through on the north-westerly wind. I breasted the rise below Diamond Buttress to find Anthony parked in the uncertain lee of a smallish boulder. I collapsed thankfully in the snow beside him, badly in need of some fuel, and took out my pieces. After the usual exchange of unpleasantries the conversation drifted inevitably towards the Plan. The buttresses had a respectable covering, and indeed there had been some ice low on Stob Corrie nan Beith. Already there was not too much of the day remaining. The shortest route to the top was of course Central Gully, for the squat shape of Collie's Pinnacle sat directly above us. But which side to choose? The normally banked-out right branch (or should that be root?) showed a fair amount of bare and rather steep rock, promising some interest. However, the slightly nearer left side could be inspected at closer quarters and abandoned without loss of height should it look too awkward. Three or four large chockstones filled the middle section, but there appeared to be a line of snowy ramps zig-zagging through them.

Closer inspection did not discourage us, so I led up the short snow slope to a comfy wee cave below the first obstacle, there to don our crampons. It did not occur to me to test this snow for lurking menace, but Anthony later confirmed that he had dug a pit and had been reassured by finding new snow lying directly on the scree.

I started up the left-hand side of the chockstone while Anthony tackled the other; as there was little to choose between them for difficulty. I was pleasantly surprised to find good ice for the critical first few moves and was up in no time, suddenly feeling good.

Anthony was still working away while I moved up the 30ft or so to the foot of the next pair of blocks, wedged side by side. The snow was now deeper but, in retrospect, had a hint of bite at depth. Now that I could see it close to, the snowy ramp up the right-hand inclined block looked uninviting; steep unconsolidated snow on an apparently smooth rock substrata. However, the more broken rock of Collie's Pinnacle to our right seemed to offer sufficient purchase to get us up the bulge, beyond which the gully opened up to join the right-hand branch.

A squall had crept up behind us and there was soft hail flying around. For other reasons too I was disinclined to hang around. I was increasingly aware of the pressure of time and I was also still a bit cold from our lunch stop despite having a fleece and shell jacket on over my new Buffalo shirt, on its first Scottish winter hill trial! I barged unscientifically up the cruddy

old snow below the inclined block to gain a small rock platform against the pinnacle, without consciously registering the snow's age.

Anthony was moving up the middle snowfield as I started to attack the final bulge. It was only two or three moves but much more awkward than I had expected. An out-of-balance hook on the right, a high, sloping rock hold for the left crampon; nothing of substance for the left foot on the lip of the chockstone; thrutch up, right tool now at hip level, tiny crampon hold below it; then a sort of left knee – right shoulder jam until both tools could be scrabbled into some sort of placements above the boulder to allow a step up, with some satisfaction, on to an unmistakably (in hindsight) two-layer snow pack.

From his position 10ft below Anthony announced that he didn't much fancy it. I couldn't blame him, and quickly scrolled through the alternatives. They were surprisingly many despite our lack of a rope, but most were uninviting. 'Go for it Anthony,' I said encouragingly, 'it's only a couple of moves and there are good placements.' I justified this embellishment of the truth on the grounds that a positive attitude is important on such occasions. Anthony was persuaded and set about it with renewed energy. He didn't like the initial out-of-balance hook and spent some time looking for my good placements in the groove itself. I kept up a running commentary while he devised an alternative sequence, and I was mighty relieved when he landed beside me in a flurry of oaths and snow.

It was now past two in the afternoon. We had to be back at the road by 5pm so we needed to get a move on. Still, with the difficulties seemingly over and only three or four hundred feet of interesting scenery to negotiate before reaching the summit of Bidean, there did not appear to be a problem. Anthony moved up and round the corner into the main gully, then broke trail for 50ft or so to the foot of some iced-up slabby rocks. The weather was now making things unpleasant as I forged on up the rocks to the snow above, where Anthony took over again.

It was here that the opening exchange took place. What prompted Anthony to question the snow's adhesion at that moment I do not know. On reflection I was by then already thinking at a low level of consciousness about getting over to the edge of the gully. It didn't matter – two steps farther on the surface layer of windslab triggered.

Perhaps there was some sub-sonic precursor, or maybe it was the same cerebral tape-slippage that is said to cause *déjà-vu*, but I seemed to be aware of the movement long before the cracks appeared. I could see the crown wall just above Anthony, who was now in rapid motion trying to get above it. In the short space between him and me the slab was breaking up into blocks which were piling down on top of me. Already off balance, I cast right and left for the nearest safety and made an ineffectual lunge to try to lodge a pick into something solid. Then I was tumbling.

There wasn't a lot of snow travelling with me when I reached to the top of the rocks. It all happened very quickly I'm sure, but such is the speed of the CPU (brain) on turbo that there was time for an amazing amount of conscious thought. Firstly, I was keen to avoid the vagus response to snow hitting the back of the throat. This can cause layngo spasm and eventual suffocation, so I was trying hard to tuck my head inside my jacket. Then as I approached the rocks I thought: 'Sod it, I haven't got a helmet on.' I took slight comfort from having a woolly bunnet under my Buffalo hood which together might provide some padding, but made a conscious decision to protect my head with my arms. In retrospect this was perhaps rash as I still had two sharp tools in my hands. It also conflicted with the requirements of my next conscious thought, remembering that you are supposed to flap around to try and stay on top of the snow.

To my surprise there was no feeling of terror, just the same gentle resignation to the inevitable, whatever that should turn out to be. I have felt this before, at a moment of acceptance that I no longer had any influence over the trajectory of my car: 'Oh well, here we go. I wonder how this is going to turn out.' I have no memory of my foot being wrenched sideways, shattering and dislocating the ankle, only of being buffeted in the face by icy snow as I bounced down the rocks. Presumably, my crampon lodged in a crack, momentarily immobilising my foot while my body continued to rotate.

At this point I must have lost my presence of mind, for I am ashamed to report that I made no conscious effort to brake once I reached the snow below the rocks. But the Reaper was evidently away on other business that day, for somehow I did stop, in an upright position level with the top of the left branch.

My first thought after the pleasant realisation that I was capable of such (ergo sum) was to move rapidly sideways to get out of the way of anything else coming down. Three or four paces were sufficient to alert me to the fact that all was not well. My right foot seemed curiously floppy and a glance down confirmed that it was pointing east instead of north. I swore emphatically and decided against further movement until I could appraise the situation. The next thought was: 'Oh God, what's happened to Anthony?' I felt sure he was still above me but feared he might have been less lucky than I and be lying unconscious, or worse, out of sight at the foot of the rocks. This worried me a lot for I knew I would have trouble reaching help alone. In particular, I did not know the height or steepness of the rocks which lay between me and the corrie. My fears grew as time passed with no sign of Anthony. I had just begun to consult the pages of *Touching the Void* for inspiration when I saw him moving carefully down towards me and a great wave of emotion washed over me.

The analgesic power of adrenaline is remarkable, but at this point I started to become aware of pain for the first time.

Anthony reached me and took in the news. There was little need for discussion about what needed to be done and he helped me move to a little wind scoop below a projecting rock just above us on the right. The pain of movement was excruciating, but once settled on my little ledge things improved. After arranging a goodie bag and headtorch within reach I sat on my rucksack while Anthony wrapped his space blanket round my legs. That nipped a bit. Then I was reasonably comfortable with my feet dangling over the side.

I persuaded a reluctant Anthony to take a photograph of me sitting on my ledge making what I thought was a fair approximation to a grin. He was understandably anxious to get down to the glen fairly smartly as it was now after 3.30pm. My final injunction to him was to be sure to tell Mandy to take the kids to the firework display, then he disappeared off down the gully. It was disheartening to see him reappear a while later having failed to find a satisfactory route down the lower rocks, but I felt happier than ever that I had stopped where I did. A brief inspection of our ascent route convinced Anthony that he did not fancy that prospect either, then he set off once more, this time up the gully towards the summit of Bidean.

From then on life had an episodic quality as I strove to close down all parts of my brain which were either unnecessary or positively unhelpful towards the business of survival. I was impressed by the effectiveness of mind games in this process, but glad there was no-one around to hear the one hundredth awful rendition of *The Balaena*, and the other songs of my limited repertoire. To my surprise time seemed to pass quite quickly, punctuated by highs and lows. The frequent heavy hail showers blasting into the gully were unpleasant but there was a gibbous moon shining through the cloud so it was never especially dark. During a brief clearing I saw Anthony's headtorch as he turned the corner at the foot of Coire nam Beith and knew that no ill had befallen him on the hill.

Remarkably soon afterwards, I caught a glimpse of two headtorches racing each other upwards and took comfort from their acknowledgement of my signal letting them know I had seen them. Hearing the helicopter down in the corrie and seeing its floodlights dimly through the mist were a big boost. Hearing it heading back down to the glen was corresponding disappointment. Noises off, at the foot of the gully: Hooray! Then it all went quiet: Boo! Voices again, in the left branch this time, then torches flashing. 'Over here boys, good to see you!'

Soon strong substances were coursing through me and I started taking an interest in the proceedings again. Fortuitously, the cloud lifted at this point and moonlight flooded over the flank of Stob Coire nam Beith facing us. The team recalled the helicopter, a Navy Sea King from Prestwick, and

moved me down the gully on their stretcher to a point above the rocks where the helicopter could get close enough to pull me out.

I am so glad I was in a fit enough state to fully appreciate the drama and excitement of a helicopter evacuation from high on a Scottish mountain late on a winter night. The sight and feel of the huge black machine hovering motionless in the gusting wind just above the hoary walls of the gully; the winchman spinning down through the floodlit snow blowing around in the downdraught; the incessant noise and the heady smell of burned fuel. All this combined to make it a breathtaking and sensuous spectacle. And there was me with a walk-on part too! Thank you to all concerned for a superbly executed rescue.

Incidentally the Buffalo shirt passed its test. The staff at the Belford Hospital were surprised to find that I wasn't even slightly hypothermic, even after eight hours of sitting around.

While reflecting on these events I am astonished by the large number of minor circumstances and concomitant decisions, in the preceding 24 hours alone, which had a bearing on the way in which things developed. Also I find it difficult even now to separate out fully those elements of luck and judgment, both good and bad, which influenced the final outcome.

During my subsequent incarcerations in hospital I have been surprised and a little dismayed by the automatic assumption of many of my visitors from outwith our community that this incident naturally marks the end of my climbing career. This unsavoury proposition is invariably presented with a veneer of kindly solicitude but is clearly prompted by feelings varying between incomprehension of why an apparently intelligent adult should willingly seek out danger, and disapproval of such irresponsibility to his family. Of course, neither my family nor my climbing visitors have ventured any such absurd thoughts.

I have, though, been brought face to face fairly sharply with the reality of what we all court, whether consciously or not.

At first sight it may seem illogical, in evolutionary terms at least, that we choose an activity which invokes mortal peril for purposes of recreation. This lifestyle of ours is far more irrational, however. For as we all know, and as others manifestly cannot comprehend, exposure to risk in spiritually uplifting surroundings, and the achievement of a satisfactory outcome in its presence, have a life-enhancing quality that transcends the potential for unpleasant consequences should things go wrong. A risk-free existence is no more desirable than it is attainable. Perhaps those who would push society in this direction are after all doing our species an evolutionary disservice.

The last word must go to my surgeon at the Raigmore Hospital, who has reconstructed a number of climbers in his time: 'I know you guys – mountaineering is non-negotiable.'

ON SEEING THE CUILLIN FROM THE CAIRNGORMS – AGAIN

By Grant Hutchison and Jonathan de Ferranti

CAN ANY part of the Cuillin Ridge be seen from the Cairngorm massif? This is a question that has surely fuelled many a late-night discussion, as well as several spontaneous arguments around various Cairngorm cairns. There is no doubt that the Cuillin are potentially visible from the Cairngorms – from Ben Macdui to Sgurr Alasdair is a distance of 155km; the sea-level horizon, seen from the summit of Ben Macdui, is around 140km away; therefore all but the lowest few metres of the Cuillin ridge are above Macdui's horizon. *Quod erat demonstrandum*, were it not for the nearer summits that stick up inconveniently in the foreground. The Cairngorm massif is high enough to offer a view over the Monadh Liath but, farther away, the peaks around Glen Shiel clutter the Skye-ward view. Glen Shiel itself, fortuitously aligned with the line of sight, provides the only potential window in that barrier.

So the opening question can be restated as: What, if anything, can be glimpsed through the Glen Shiel gap?

In 1956, in this journal, Guy Barlow described his efforts to answer that question¹. The main topic of his article was the view from Cairn Toul. (He had previously established that no part of the Cuillin was visible from Macdui, and had therefore moved a little southwards in an attempt to open up the visual notch formed by Glen Shiel.) Here is how he approached the problem. First of all, he plotted the line of sight between Cairn Toul and Sgurr na Banachdich on an inch-to-the-mile map, using spherical trigonometry to calculate the latitude and longitude at several positions along the great circle arc connecting the two peaks. Then, he sketched profiles of the glen at various points along this line of sight, ranging westwards from Sgurr an Fhuairail to The Saddle. The profiles were constructed for a restricted range of altitudes (2000ft to 3000ft), because the curve of the glen serves to obscure the lower slopes, making them irrelevant to the line of sight. He also prepared a profile of the Cuillin, using maps and photographs.

With these profiles in hand, he now had to superimpose them so as to reproduce the actual view seen from Cairn Toul. This needed an adjustment of relative heights to simulate the effects of Earth curvature and atmospheric refraction. For refraction, Barlow referred to a 1935 article by James A. Parker², who cited the 13th edition of W. J. Macquorn Rankine's *Manual of Civil Engineering*, published in 1880. In essence, the argument concerning refraction goes like this. Light rays travel along slightly curved paths within the atmosphere. This curvature makes the rays follow, to some extent, the curvature of the Earth. Because of this, we can effectively see a little beyond the simple, geometrical horizon – it is as if the Earth's

surface curved slightly less than it actually does. Macquorn Rankine calculated that the effect of refraction was to reduce the apparent curvature of the Earth's surface by a sixth – equivalent to increasing its diameter by 20%.

Barlow used the above reasoning, together with a slightly inaccurate figure for the radius of the Earth, to arrive at an apparent Earth radius of 4748 miles (7641km). From this, he calculated how the Earth's surface would appear to curve between Cairn Toul and Sgurr na Banachdich. In effect, he treated sea level as if it bulged upwards along the line of sight, forming an arc that reached a maximum *height* of 1265ft (386m) at a point midway between the two peaks (Fig. 1). He then calculated the vertical displacement necessary to make the bases of his Glen Shiel profiles lie along this sea-level arc, so that they were aligned in a way that simulated the curvature of the Earth.

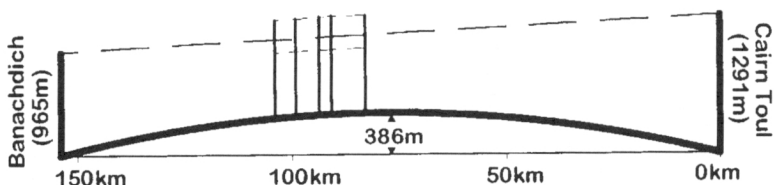


Fig. 1. Barlow's construction of the line of sight between Cairn Toul and Sgurr na Banachdich (vertical scale greatly exaggerated). His five profiles of Glen Shiel were taken in the positions marked by the five vertical lines. The 2000ft and 3000ft contours are shown as dashed lines connecting the profiles.

A quick look at Fig. 1 suggests a possible source of error in Barlow's calculations: the vertical direction at Cairn Toul is shown as being parallel to the vertical at Sgurr na Banachdich. In reality, both verticals point towards the centre of the Earth, and so they diverge slightly from each other. The Cuillin Ridge, in fact, leans slightly away from Cairn Toul, and this has an effect on its apparent height. But the exaggeration of vertical scale in Fig. 1 makes the problem appear much worse than it actually is. The angle between local verticals in Skye and the Cairngorms is 1.4° , and the resulting error in apparent heights is less than one part in 3000 – comparable to the error introduced by using heights rounded to the nearest foot, and therefore negligible in this context. Barlow built a wood and paper model based on Figure 1, but felt that errors would inevitably arise – the thing could not be guaranteed to maintain the precise shape intended for it. So he did some perspective calculations and produced a pen-and-ink drawing of all his profiles superimposed on a single sheet of paper. This turned out to agree perfectly with the view generated by his model.

His profiles are shown in Fig. 2 (reproduced from the original article). They have been combined without correction for Earth curvature or perspective – this is the view that would be seen on a flat Earth, by an

observer at an infinite distance (and presumably possessed of infinitely acute eyesight). In Figure 3 (also from the original article), the profiles have been adjusted for perspective, and have been displaced vertically to reproduce Earth curvature and atmospheric refraction.

Barlow wrote: 'All that can be seen of the Cuillin is the north summit of Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh, with a narrow shaving of its northern ridge extending down to the Eag Dubh...' He goes on: 'If we now move northward to Ben Macdui the Glen Shiel gap, contracting and rising, shifts southwards along the Cuillin. On the left in Fig. 3 is shown the gap as it appears from Ben Macdui. The lowest point is now 3220ft, hence the Cuillin is hidden.' Moving in the other direction, he speculates: '...if we go a little south of

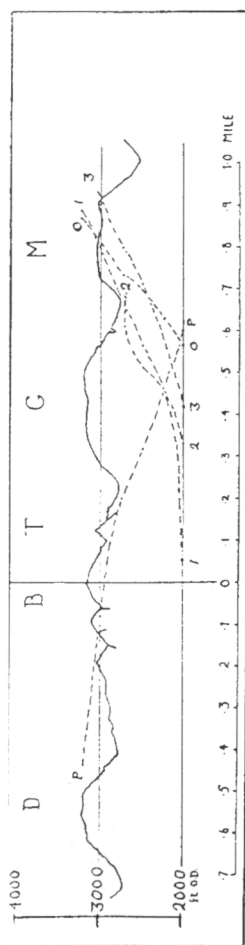


Fig. 2. The Cuillin outline, from Sgurr Dearg (D) to Sgurr a' Mhadaidh (M), with the uncorrected profiles superimposed. The line of sight is from Cairn Toul to Sgurr na Banachdich (B).

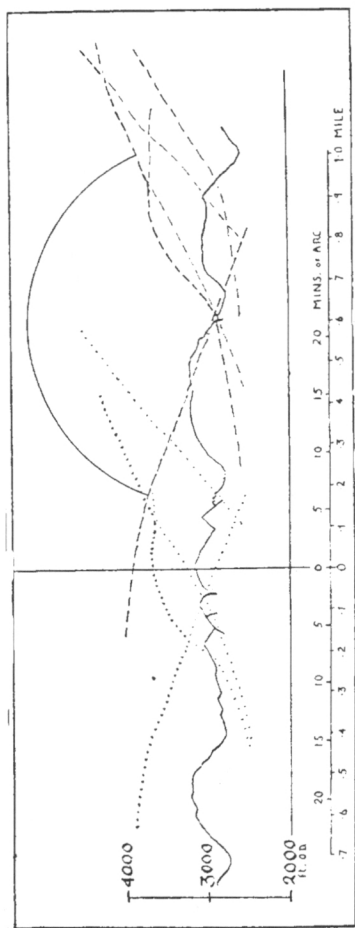


Fig. 3. The Cuillin with the constructed Glen Shiel gap. The profiles as seen from Cairn Toul are shown by the broken lines. The setting sun is shown to scale. To give the natural representation this diagram would need to be viewed at a distance of 21ft.

the Cairn Toul cairn, 150yds perhaps, we should get a glimpse of the south-west peak of Sgurr a'Mhadaidh.'

A 40-year-old glimpse of the Cuillin, afforded by nothing more than pen, paper, ruler and trigonometrical tables.

But a lot has changed since Barlow's day. We have pocket calculators to perform our trigonometry, and personal computers to produce our graphics. The Ordnance Survey provides algorithms that allow direct conversion between spherical and grid co-ordinates³, so that great circles have become rather easier to plot on OS maps. And maps themselves have entered the digital domain. For \$50, the US Geological Survey will send you five CD-ROMs containing land-surface elevation data for the whole Earth, at one-kilometre resolution⁴. The USGS also provides Digital Elevation Mapping at 30m horizontal resolution for the whole of the US, and similar products are available for many other countries⁵. In the UK, the Ordnance Survey produces a large variety of computer mapping products, including digital elevation maps and vectorised contour models⁶. These data are more for rent than for sale – you'll pay an initial purchase price, and then an additional yearly retainer.

So we can perform Barlow's calculations without ever having to lift a pencil, unfold a map, or pick up a ruler. In fact, the general problem of reconstructing the view from any point in the UK can now be addressed. One of us (JdeF) uses computer technology to do just this – creating 360° colour-coded panoramas which are commercially distributed under the name Viewfinder⁷. For this article, a Viewfinder panorama from Cairn Toul was generated, and compared with Barlow's original work. The starting point for any Viewfinder panorama is a set of vectorised contour data based on the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 map series. The contour interval is 10m, and data points are spaced at 50m horizontal intervals. This gives the computer a three-dimensional model of the landscape surrounding the chosen viewpoint, but the terrain is flat – there is no allowance for Earth curvature. To introduce curvature to the model, the computer program performs a manoeuvre analogous to Barlow's – it displaces the terrain downwards by an amount proportional to the square of the distance from the viewpoint. This doesn't generate the precise spherical surface that Barlow used for his calculations – it produces a parabolic shape that very closely approximates a sphere over the relevant distances. At 150km, the difference between the parabolic and true spherical surfaces is of the order of a metre – considerably less than the contour interval used. (This technique of choosing an acceptable approximation will crop up again. Remember that Barlow was examining a single line of sight, and therefore had a small number of calculations to perform, which he was able to do very accurately; in contrast, the Viewfinder model is performing millions of calculations across the whole field of view. So, even with the benefit of computer speeds, rapid calculation is essential.) The specific case of

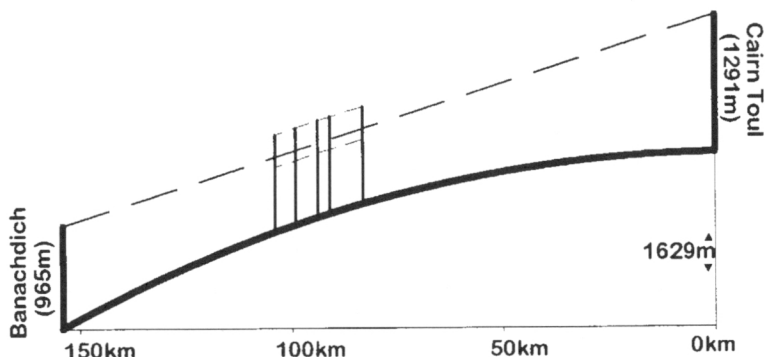


Fig. 4. The Viewfinder construction of the line of sight between Cairn Toul and Sgurr na Banachdich, for comparison with Figure 1. The position of Barlow's profiles is again indicated.

Barlow's line of sight is shown in Fig. 4. Geometrically, it is very similar to Fig. 1, although the small errors in depicting the local vertical are once again emphasised because of the exaggerated vertical scale.

After suitably arranging the terrain, the Viewfinder program sends out imaginary lines of sight across the curved computer landscape, extending each line until it either strikes the Earth's surface or disappears off into the void. Each piece of terrain is then colour-coded according to its distance from the viewpoint. By repeating this process over and over, an image of the surrounding landscape is assembled. Again, an acceptable approximation must be used to speed calculation. Spherical trigonometry is complicated, and the Ordnance Survey's algorithm to convert grid co-ordinates to latitude and longitude is tedious, even when performed only once. The plotting of a true great circle for every possible line of sight would be extremely time-consuming. Instead, the line of sight is assumed to be a straight line on the OS grid. This deviates a little from the great circle but, for the line from Cairn Toul to Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh, the maximum error is around 35m – less than the horizontal resolution of the computer dataset. So some inaccuracies may occur if a long line of sight crosses very steep ground at its midpoint, but otherwise the error is negligible. This line-of-sight method (called *ray tracing* in the technical jargon) embeds within it all the perspective calculations that Barlow had to carry out separately. The final product is a true perspective view. One final difference between the Barlow and Viewfinder calculations should be mentioned. Barlow increased the apparent radius of the Earth by a factor of 20% to allow for the effects of atmospheric refraction. Viewfinder simulates refraction in the same way, but with the Earth's radius increased by only 14%. The effects of refraction are therefore less potent in the Viewfinder world. This choice was made on the basis of field observation, and comes close to the refraction allowance Parker cites for alpine conditions, based on a paper by

Alfredo Galassini in 1895⁸. It is clear that refraction conditions will vary from season to season, day to day, and even hour to hour. There is no single *correct* value. Depending on personal bias, some folk will claim that the Viewfinder value is unduly pessimistic, while others will accuse Barlow of wishful thinking when he settled on the higher figure. For the purposes of this paper however, we've used a Viewfinder image based on Barlow's figures – the image reproduced here uses Barlow's more optimistic refraction values, favouring Cuillin visibility.

A *flat earth* view is presented in Fig. 5, to give the relationship of the various mountains. This differs from Barlow's Fig. 2 in that perspective effects have been preserved – the high vantage point of Cairn Toul therefore allows us to glimpse the Cuillin Ridge beyond the summit of The Saddle. Notice, too, at this point, that the summit of Bla Bheinn is almost perfectly aligned with Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh.

In Fig. 6, we present the Viewfinder version of Barlow's calculations. Only Bla Bheinn can be glimpsed through the Glen Shiel gap – the curvature of the Earth has taken Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh out of sight behind it. In retrospect, it seems clear that Bla Bheinn should present a significant

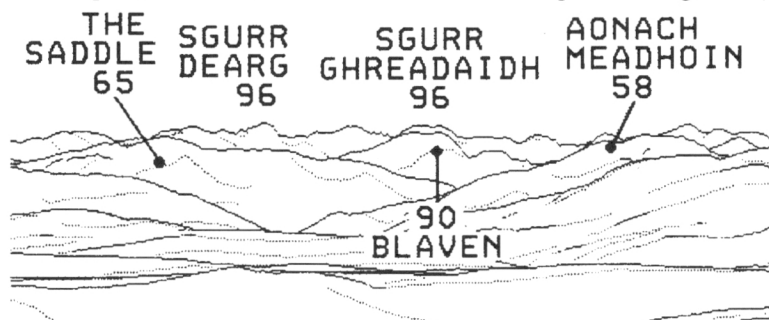


Fig. 5. Viewfinder 'flat earth' view. The 280° bearing (OS grid) is marked. Other numbers indicate the distance in miles to the mountain indicated.

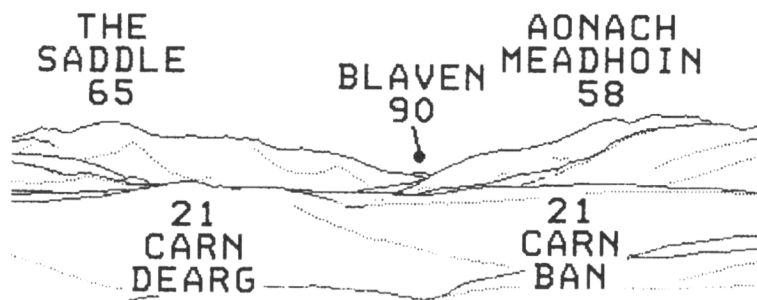


Fig. 6. Viewfinder view. The 280° bearing (OS grid) is marked. Other numbers indicate the distance in miles to the mountain indicated.

problem. From Cairn Toul, the summits of Bla Bheinn and Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh lie on bearings that differ by less than two minutes of arc. The southern summits of the two mountains are separated by a similarly tiny angle. Using Barlow's original construction, it can also be shown that Bla Bheinn, viewed from Cairn Toul, will appear half-a-minute of arc higher than Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh. For refraction to lift Ghreadaidh into view would need an effect equivalent to increasing the Earth's radius by 50% – requiring atmospheric conditions of near-Venusian density! How could Barlow have forgotten about Bla Bheinn? In fact, he didn't. He mentioned it twice, on page 21 of his article. He wrote: 'The true line of sight passes over the south ridge of Blaven,' and, 'Blaven also gives no interference.' His omission arose from the sheer laboriousness of his calculations. He could reasonably deal with only one line of sight, and his paper starts with the assumption that Sgurr na Banachdich is the most likely candidate for visibility from Cairn Toul. So he constructed his great circle between Banachdich and Cairn Toul – and that line of sight does indeed pass over the south ridge of Bla Bheinn, as can be seen in Fig. 5. But Banachdich turns out to be obscured by the slopes of The Saddle, and it became evident to Barlow, once he had made his construction, that Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh was the summit that did align with the Glen Shiel gap. By this time he was presumably rather weary of the whole undertaking, and didn't go back to specifically examine the new line of sight between Cairn Toul and Sgurr a'Ghreadaidh. In contrast, Viewfinder, with its ability to check each line of sight individually, has no difficulty in picking up the Bla Bheinn problem.

So even under conditions of near-perfect visibility and favourable refraction, only a Cuillin outlier is visible from Cairn Toul. Will the arguments now stop? Of course not – so long as there are optimists, and other summits, the Cuillin will always be there, just on the thin edge of perception.

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- 6 Contact: Customer Sales, Ordnance Survey, Romsey Road, Southampton SO16 4GU.
- 7 Jonathan de Ferranti, Lochmill Farm, Newburgh, Fife KY14 6EX.
- 8 Metodo por lo studio degli orizzonti. Alfredo Galassini. Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano Vol. 28, 1895, p 283.

SCOTTISH HILL-NAMES

The Outer Mongolian Connection

By Peter Drummond

WHEN in 1997 the Honorary Editor received the author's article, *Scottish hill-names - the English Connection*, following on the preceding years' *Irish* and *Scandinavian Connections*, he wrote that he looked forward to receiving further in the series including, in the millennium, the Outer Mongolian Connection. He was, I believe, jesting. But...

...the Mongolian (Inner and Outer) words for mountain appear from atlases to be *uul* for a high peak and *nuruu* for a mountain range. (Peoples to the south tend to use *shan*, peoples to the north and west *khrebet*). *Nuruu* is probably a cousin of the Russian word *nagorye* (the Nagorye Sangilen range crosses the Russian-Mongolian border). And there is an echo of *uul* in the Russian *uval* for hill, and it is probably the root of the Urals range, named when Genghis Khan swept past them into Europe proper. But Mr Khan and his hordes never reached Scotland, and there is no apparent connection to that word. However, *khrebet*, which is used in areas astride the modern Mongolian border (e.g. – Daurskiy Khrebet, less than 200 miles from Ulan Bator), has its ancestral fingerprints on mountains across a wide area, in *khrebet*, *hreben*, *greben*, *grzbiet*, *grebano*, *grepon*, *kreben*, *kribenn*, *cryb* and *crib* – respectively in the languages of Russian, Slovak, Austrian German, Polish, Italian, Swiss French, Breton, Cornish and Welsh. The scene of Victorian Alpinist A. F. Mummery's 1881 triumph on Le Grepon, and the celebrated Welsh ridge of Crib Goch, can easily be picked out from this list. But what about Scotland?

Easier to climb, closer to home, but prophets without much honour in Scotland are the several Crib Laws and Crib Heads in the Lammermuirs and southern Border hills, clearly related through the former Brittonic language to those in Wales. (Crib can also mean a coping stone in Scots). In the Highlands, the Scottish – and Irish – Gaelic word *cnap* for a hill is pronounced in some dialects as *crap* (krahp, to be polite), and the Gaels' pronunciation of p is very close to standard English sound b: in speech and hearing then, there would appear to be a link to the Welsh and Cornish end of the branch, *cryb* and *crib*. Then there are the Gaelic hill-name elements *gnob* and *grobán*, meaning hillock (sometimes pointed) of which there are several examples west of the Great Glen. A link, then, from the Cairngorms' Cnap a'Chleirich, Speyside's Cruban Mor, and the Fannaichs' Graham called Groban, back to the dry heart of Asia?

It has long been accepted in comparative linguistics that the many tongues of Europe speak with the accent, so to speak, of a common Indo-European heritage – a set of shared root-words from which branch a basic range of concepts¹. Number-words for example show similarities across a wide range of languages, Indian, Middle Eastern, central Asian and

¹ *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*, David Crystal, 1997. p 298 et seq.

European: and important features like rivers and mountains would be similar foundation-words for any people. There is no mystery about the processes at work: as tribes moved across the continent, as migrants or marauders, refugees or conquerors, they took with them a vocabulary which changed when brought within the hearsight of other languages: Scotland's own distinct wordstore – both for hills, and many other things and concepts – has been created from pre Celtic, Norse, Gaelic and English influences², and the same process was at work (and still is) in Europe.

So Europe's common heritage includes hill-names. However, what can unite peoples can also divide them, as I found out in mountain Europe a few years ago...

...Pyrenean mountain huts on the French side are very civilised. No self-catering, because your overnight fee includes the evening meal. It is cooked just as you would expect the French to cook. It is served to tables of eight in tureens, so one person plays mummy and serves the group: in this set-up, conversations with strangers flow easily, swirling past language barriers.

One such evening in July 1991 in the Refuge Baysellance saw further lubrication of international discourse courtesy of the house wine, Cuvee de Refuge (a fine Medoc). I raised the question of what our mountain of tomorrow, the Vignemale, meant, and opened the floodgates of toponymic discourse with a *savant des montagnes* sitting opposite. A fellow mountain-name enthusiast to be quizzed on the local mountains and name-elements – ideal company at a dinner table! So I thought, but I was dimly aware as we talked of the emptying of the benches beside us: Ian, my companion on the tops, shook his head wearily and went outside to watch the Spanish girl scouts splashing under a tap in the evening sunshine (can't imagine why); my interlocutor's son followed suit with much Gallic rolling of eyes, heard-it-all-before ennui. 'The Vignemale...pah' exclaimed my new friend (*en francais, bien sur*) '...typical of the Parisian surveyors, they didn't understand the local patois...'

Shades of the 19th century OS Surveyors in Gaeldom,' I nearly responded, but he was already laying into them: '...they did not understand that "vigne" was really "bigne" because the letters b, m and v are often transposed here.'

Shades of Gaelic,' I thought, 'where b and m often aspirate to sound v.'

'Bigne means simply a mountain, like *pigne* in the old patois, or *pena* in Spain,' he continued.

'Bigne – nearly an anagram of bingo,' my synapses crackled. '– and *mal* is bad, so could bigne-mal be the equivalent of our Ben Nevis, a little bit of Gaelic evil that is forever Pyrenean?'

Monsieur had already confirmed this before I had managed to download

² SMCJs 1996, 1997, 1998, articles by Peter Drummond on the Norse, Irish and English connections respectively.

this thought. ‘Ah, ces experts soi-disants parisiens,’ he snorted, squeezing the last word through his nasal tubes.

I had scarcely noticed the family of four from the French capital – silent now, tight-lipped, leaving the table as we moved onto other local name-elements – for I was a gold miner coming across a lucky seam. Terms like *hourquette*, *malh*, and *soum* were explained as little fork, rocky top, rounded summit. Our discussion echoed round the now empty hut. How to lose friends and understand toponymy.

Next day we successfully climbed the *evil mountain* without mishap, traversing the main glacier where, later that month, two Spanish climbers perished in a crevasse (and were reclaimed exactly four years’ later by friends returning to commemorate the anniversary³. We had followed a Spaniard’s tracks across the glacier, one whom we’d met in the hut that morning: he was called Jesus...there into a crevasse went we but for the grace of God... Ben Nevis indeed.

Six years later, again in the Pyrenees, I spent a morning in the library of Bagnères de Luchon pouring over a turn-of-the-century volume⁴, on local place-names, and was able to confirm the wisdom of the Baysellance oracle – in the author’s childhood, for instance, local shepherds called our mountain the Bigna-Mala or Pigna-Mala; elsewhere in Europe, other local peasants had their *mont maudit* or beinn nibheis And what about Pic de Campbieil, a ten thousander (*trois mille, si vous le voulez en mètres*)...could it have Scottish connections, perhaps to a celebrated SMC President (and occasional book reviewer)? After all, Lugless Willie Lithgow was one of the first explorers of the area. Romantic thought yes, but accurate no – the leather volume revealed that it is old French for peak of the old field (*champ vieux*).

Other generic terms for Pyrenean peaks have Gaelic echoes – the Spanish *pena* with *pen* (Welsh and Brittonic, as in Scotland’s Pennyngant, Penvalla, and probably the Pentland Hills, and *ceann*: when Brittonic words appeared in Gaelic they underwent a phonic shift from p to q (written as c) so that, for instance, pen became ceann⁵. The Aragonese word for mountain *mallo* or *malh* relates to *meall* or *maol*, the Catalan *turo* with *torr*, and others besides. Concepts as well as words are mirrored – the Pic des Quatres Termes, a meeting point of four properties, is one more than Carn nan Tri-tighearnan near Inverness: while Pico Royo and Pico Blanco are colour-cousins of the many Carn Deargs and Geal Charns. But there are also strong connections between the terms used for hills in Scotland and high ground elsewhere in Europe, not just in the Pyrenees. Today we equate Celtic cultures with the Atlantic fringes, but the Celtic peoples, in fact, had their origins in central Europe and on the northern fringe of the Alpine region, spreading west into France⁶. We can reasonably expect

3 *The Scotsman*, 26 July 1995.

4 *Les Deformations des Noms de Lieux*, Emile Belloc 1907.

5 For example, see G. Price *The Encyclopaedia of the Languages of Europe* 1998, p.84.

6 *The Celts*, Nora Chadwick, Penguin, 1991.

European connections between Gaelic and other languages' generic elements for hill and mountain names.

1	Gaelic (Sc.)	torr(an)	maol, meall	braigh	monadh
2	Gaelic (Ir.)	tor	maol		
3	Basque				mendi
4	Breton	tour	moal		monid, minez
5	Catalan	turo	malh		
6	Cornish	tor		bre	meneth
7	English	tor	mell		mountain
8	Finnish	tunturi			
9	French	turge, turon	mall, mail	brec, bric	montagne
10	German	turm, turon			
11	Icelandic		muli		
12	Italian	tauro, toro			monte
13	Albanian		mal		
14	Macedonian	taur		vrah, vrh	
15	Polish	turnia			
16	Romanian		mal		munte
17	Russian	tau			
18	Scots	tore		brae	mounth, mount

therefore to find roots for Scottish mountain-names into the Alps, and beyond.

In the above table, I have indicated just a few of the apparent connections between four examples of Gaelic hill-words with others in Europe, from my database of around 700 European words for hill, mountain, summit or similar eminences. (Or as Dr. Johnson would have said, 'considerable protuberances': not a word used by the Glen Shiel Gaels nor their European cousins: but then, he was a city sybarite with no eye or idiom for the hills.) If I were an academic I should probably have entitled this article *Towards an Understanding of...* that cautious hedge against accusations of speculation and worse. I have no doubt that there *is* a connection between many of Europe's hill-name elements. It needs more research time than my day job presently allows, but it is perhaps better to get the view from a few, onto the connections, than to rush to be a compleater. The Hon. Editor will, however be relieved to hear that you can't see the High Atlas from the Pyrenees, and that *The Timbuctu Connection* is not one he will have to proof-read in 2000.

I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments on a first draft of this article by Professor W. F. H. Nicolaisen, Aberdeen University, author of the landmark work *Scottish Place-Names*, 1976.

ONE AUTUMN DAY

By I. H. M. Smart

QUITE unexpectedly I ran into my old friend Quintus Horatius Flaccus. It was one of these sunny mornings you get at the back-end when the air is clear and sharp and the floors of the glens are dusted with the gold leaf on autumnal birch trees and everything else is silver with frost. I had just crossed the Coupall by the stepping stones and was passing in front of Jacksonville on my way to the Buachaille when he emerged from that fabled howff. He left with a cheery: '*Valete, sodales*'¹ to those inside. He was followed by equally civil wishes from the inmates. I could make out:

*'I in pace, O Horatio.'*²

*'Bene ambula et redambula.'*³

*'Deos obsecro, ut te nobis conservent et valere nunc et semper patiuntur.'*⁴

Πολὺς ταραχμὸς ἐν τῇ τοῖς θεοῖς ἐν

κ'ὰν τοῖς βροτειοῖς⁵

Then from someone improvising Julius Caesar's celebrated introductory line,

*'Heh, Horace – In Scotia hiemes longae sunt!'*⁶

The voices carried quite clearly in the still air. It was all a great credit to the old system of schooling in Scotland.

'I didn't know you were a member of the Creag Dhu,' I said as we saluted each other.

'I've just been made an Honorary Member for my poem on Soracte and some of my more earthy songs which were judged true to reality.'

He spoke English with a pleasant Scots accent with good pure vowels. He did indeed have a slight Glasgow intonation which was not surprising considering the company he had been keeping.

'They are a good lot,' he said nodding towards Jacksonville, 'Remind me of the Thracians in my time. We had a good party last night. I introduced them to the delights of undiluted Falernian wine and we sang songs together in the pentatonic scale. Got a bit racy by the end but we Romans can handle that. The Falernian wine seems to have got the better of them; they're a bit hung-over this morning.'

Quintus Horatius Flaccus, let me remind you, is/was a sturdy man of middle height with a young face and prematurely silvering hair. He was dressed in a sort of hippy kilt, acceptable enough by today's standards.

'So how are things up there in the Elysian Fields,' I inquired companionably. I always feel relaxed in his company.

'I am not going to waste a day like this going into the metaphysics of Paradise with someone who isn't dead yet and therefore has not the conceptual vocabulary to talk about it. Let's just enjoy the here and now.'

I can tell you, however, that although Elysium is a very fine place it's not as good as Scotland on a day like this.'

I have always suspected this. It was nice to have my intuition confirmed by someone who really knew for sure.

We climbed to the foot of the Curved Ridge talking about the qualities of different landscapes. I was fascinated by his descriptions of Athens and some amusing stories about Catullus.

At the bottom of Rannoch Wall he said he would really like to do Agag's Groove and the Crowberry Ridge.

'They all say they are classics.'

'They?' I queried.

'Yes, Bill, Hamish, Alec, Tom, George, all the members of your Club I meet up there in Elysium.'

I was understandably silent for a while sorting this one out. I could see him watching me from the corner of his eye. We reached the foot of Agag's.

'I'll lead,' he said gently. 'If I fall off it won't matter since I'm dead already.'

This seemed logical in a surreal sort of way.

He made a good job of it, moving lightly from hold to hold, belaying skilfully. Whoever had taught him the basics had done it well. I did suspect him of cheating once or twice or at least relying on special attributes for he appeared to levitate up the crux.

'I shouldn't like to have done this when I was alive,' he said, 'It would have been more terrifying than at Phillipi. It's surprising how bold and reckless the living can be.'

We crossed over and came down the Curved Ridge. Then we did the Crowberry Ridge in similar style, stopping frequently to admire the view. On the crux he even paused for a few minutes, holding on with one finger and the toe of his sandal while he turned to explain about the siege techniques of his day. They often used pitons and chocks as aids to get up citadel walls, he informed me. When I expressed surprise he said pitons were not new even in his day. Alexander the Great used them. He had heard of spikes being used in Homeric times, probably made of bronze then.

Wooden wedges were used before history began, he opined. After all, a wooden wedge was a trivial thing to make compared to a wooden horse. He recommended to me a smith named Hephaestos, the head of an old-established firm that had a name for making good state-of-the-art pitons.

On the summit we tarried, admiring the view over the vastness of Rannoch Moor.

'They were right,' he said, 'Your range of blues are better than anything we ever had in Italy or Greece; even the Elysian Fields couldn't do better than this.'

We walked back over the moor and reached the Kingshouse as dusk was

falling. Maybe half-a-dozen people were sitting around in the lounge. The barman was someone I had never seen before – a genial soul with a beard who wore a colourful robe of superior make with a geometric design in gold round the hem. He looked like a well-to-do hippie left over from the swinging Sixties. Surprisingly, he seemed to know Horace; they greeted each other warmly and chatted away in a strange tongue I eventually recognised as Greek. Some really charming loose-girdled barmaids polished glasses in the background. Things had certainly changed here since my last visit. I assumed the old Kingie had been taken over by some Hellenic entrepreneur, probably the inevitable Rio Stakis.

Horace seemed to confirm my guess when he introduced me to what I thought he said was his ‘old friend Rio’.

‘Pleased to meet you, Rio’, I said.

‘No, no my name is Dio – not Rio. Dio – short for Dionysus.’

I did a double-take. They both laughed.

Dio spoke English with a pleasant Hebridean accent. When I remarked on it, he said it was because he came from the Greek equivalent of the Hebrides.

‘I come from the fair isle of Chios. It is a sort of Aegean version of Islay except we produce good wine there instead of good whisky. Try some of this. It is the Chian equivalent of Lagavullin.’

The girls brought us each a silver tassie half-filled with the sea-dark wine. Horace paid with a gold coin he produced from a leather purse. Without pausing in his conversation Dio picked it up, flicked it in the air, caught it then tossed it towards the till some feet away. The drawer opened to receive it and then closed. Quite a trick. Horace gave him a look. ‘Don’t overdo it,’ he muttered.

Horace started topping up the glasses with water.

I tried to stop him. ‘Hey, what are you doing?’

‘Oh sorry I forgot. Here you drink wine undiluted. I don’t advise it. That’s why the Dhu were so hung over this morning. Still this is the famed Chian wine. We’ll have the next glass undiluted.’

They chatted away amiably about arcane matters I couldn’t quite follow. Then I got them on to talking about the mysteries of such well-known mountains as Olympus, Helicon and Parnassus. They told me a lot but first made it clear that it was privileged information and was only to be passed on to people responsible enough to receive it. I tried to keep my end up in the conversation by proposing that the crashing rocks encountered by both Odysseus and the Argonauts were icebergs.⁷

I mentioned that I had some experience of sailing among such things myself. They could easily be interpreted as icy mountains not fixed to the seabed. Phoenician sailors who had been beyond the Pillars of Hercules, I continued, must have picked up the story from the locals and taken it back

to the Mediterranean where they became rocks as no-one knew about ice. There was a silence. It was broken by Dio shaking his head sadly and saying: 'Odysseus was an awful liar and Jason was not much better.' By implication I was included among that august company. I felt flattered. This was the first time I had ever been bracketed with larger than life heroes unless, of course, you include my associations with members of our Club, notably with such people as Slessor, Peden and Hay.

'I started to order another round but Hora (I was now using the familiar diminutive form of address)⁸ said: 'Tonight is on me. I owe you such a debt of gratitude.'

'You owe *me* a debt of gratitude. Come on. How? Why? It's the other way round surely.'

'I'll maybe explain later,' he said, then turned to the others in the lounge and invited everyone to come over and join him in a glass of Chian wine.

I may say that the conversation in the rest of the room had stopped long ago; the others were watching us from their tables with wide eyes and dropped jaws as they registered wonder, even frank dismay. This was understandable. The crowd I was with were arrestingly picturesque.

And so we all ended up leaning on the bar – us patrons on one side and Dio and his strangely sophisticated barmaids on the other. The wine loosened tongues and the party got a glow on. The barmaids radiated charm. Our personalities and conversational ability expanded and the ambient world seemed brighter. I became involved in a conversation with one of the barmaids. It became fairly deep. She possessed disquieting intellectual and artistic insights. She was quite a lass.

Horace rather fancied one of the girls on our mortal side of the bar. She acted a bit snooty but otherwise was a fair stunner. I was sure I had seen a picture of her on the cover of a climbing glossy, looking lythe and sinuous in a grass-green lycra suit with swirls of yellow accentuating her curves. Horace was fascinated and started to chat her up. After a time she seemed to become more compliant and I recognised his Ode III, xxvi coming out.⁹ Fortunately, he declaimed it all in Latin. I was very glad of the absence of Classics from the modern school curriculum otherwise her boyfriend, a formidable looking character from somewhere up in the Grade VIIIs, might have taken offence. Even so he started to close his fist as if he sensed something – particularly at the last couple of lines when Horace put his hands together in the praying position and looked towards the heavens. He really was enjoying himself – Horace that is – not the boyfriend.

All this was interrupted by the phone ringing. Dio answered.

'Yes, I'll tell him.' He turned to Horace,

'That's MacAenas on the phone. He'll pick you up outside right away.'

Horace's face fell. He turned to the crowd saying: 'I must go now. Valetе sodales,' then to me: 'Come, see me off.'

We left to the farewells and expressions of regret from the others. At the door I turned to wave goodbye to the mysterious barmaid.

'See you later', she said. She was a disturbing girl, probably had other sides to her character, probably good with the scissors.

'Much later, I hope,' I heard myself saying. She gave an entrancing smile as if to say: 'Don't worry, it may not be all that bad.'

Outside, some kind of vehicle was waiting. Harness clinked in the darkness. It was difficult to make out anything in the shadows.

Horace turned and said: 'Once again can I say how grateful I am to you.'

'Oh come off it. How do you get that idea?'

'If it were not for you, I really would be dead. You and people like you are my monument more enduring than bronze.¹⁰ If people like you didn't exist neither would I. I would have to spend all my time in Elysium – which is okay but, all things considered, it is not as richly rewarding as being alive and in Scotland. You can't understand yet how good it is to have a day off with congenial living company. The poor souls in Elysium who aren't remembered by you mortals never get a day off. That's why I'm grateful to you, my friend.' He laid his hand on my shoulder and said: 'Before I go I would like to give you this blessing: 'May Providence bestow on you good health, a sound mind, relish for life and an old age that still maintains a stylish grip on the lyric metres.¹¹ Or in your case, since you have no sense of rhythm and don't really understand what a lyric metre is, let's say: 'a stylish grip on the handholds of life.'

He embraced me, mounted up beside the driver and the vehicle, whatever it was, passed towards the bridge. A fairly large coin was tossed to a shadowy figure lurking in a gloomy booth I had not noticed before.¹² The conveyance passed over. As it faded into the darkness the sound of hooves and wheels merged with the noise of the river. I can assure you it was no spooky phantom carriage that bore him away for it left distinct wheel marks in the gravel.

I hope I see him again. I would like to ask him more about the climbing gear Hephaestos used to make; it would be interesting to know if we have re-invented the wheel.

References and notes:

1. 'Farewell comrades.'
2. 'Go in Peace.'
3. 'Fare well and haste ye back.'
4. 'I implore the Gods to preserve you for us and to keep you in health now and always.'
5. 'There is as much confusion in the world of Gods as there is in ours.' This quotation from Euripides was not a bad effort at nine o'clock in the morning from a man with a hang-over.
6. 'In Scotland the winters are long.' The first line of 'Caesar in Britain and Belgium' begins: '*In Gallia hiemes longae sunt*'. This used to be the standard book that every school child had to translate in days of yore when Latin was considered a normal part of the curriculum. Many students never seemed to get much beyond this initial sentence. The speaker was well aware of this. The line was, of course, delivered on this occasion in appropriately flat-toned, dead-pan Glaswegian.

7. It is not impossible that Odysseus reached the Hebrides and even further north into iceberg country during his ten years of haphazard, if not frankly incompetent, navigation. The classical accounts of the narrow, turbulent, rock infested straights of Scylla and Charybdis, for example, correspond exactly to the description in the Clyde Cruising Club Pilot of the tide race through the *Bealach a' choin glais* – the Narrows of the Grey Dog between Lunga and Scarba. Scylla was of course a dog-headed monster.

8. There is no reference in classical literature to Hora being used as a diminutive for Horatius. I think I heard Dio using it and followed suit. It is declined like *nauta*, a sailor – one of the few masculine nouns of the first declension. The feminine noun 'hora' means an 'hour'. I tried to make a pun of this by coming out with the well-known motto still found on present-day sundials *Horas non numero nisi serenas* – 'I do not count the hours/Horaces unless they are serene.' He looked pained and said, 'You're two thousand years too late with that one. Besides, if I were you I wouldn't experiment with that word with these girls around; you could use it wrongly and offend them; that could be dangerous.'

9. In this delightful ode Horace addresses the Goddess Venus asking her not to involve him and his old bones in yet another affair of the heart – except maybe . . . well, perhaps . . . maybe, just this one more last time. The poem ends something like this:

'Here is my last request, Goddess ruler of the blest . . . whose sublime whip bends proud girls' knees – one last little flick for snooty Chloe, please.'

10. He was referring here to his Ode III, xxx. The one that begins, 'I have made a monument more enduring than bronze...' It continues... 'because of my poems, ...*non omnis moriar*... not all [of me] may die...'

11. He was paraphrasing here from his Ode I, xxxi.

12. The Styx has evidently been bridged and the ferry discontinued. Charon, once a skilled boatman, has been degraded to a booth attendant. The tolls have, of course, been increased; the size of the tossed coin was much bigger than the original obolus of classical times. Evidently even Pluto, originally a grim, un pitying deity, a severe punisher of wrong-doers (whose psychological function in the Classical World was to serve as a metaphor for incorruptible standards) has responded to the mood of our times and in order to receive attention (the food of the Gods) has become a role model for the grasping and vulgar, but see Note 5.



THE CLASSIC SCOTTISH ICE ROUTES

A cautionary tale

By Charlie Orr

STRANGE isn't it how things pop into your head at the most inappropriate times? There I was standing by the graveside of a friend I hadn't seen in 10 years, it was freezing, and a boss of ice had formed from a burst hosepipe. I watched as a rather cold-looking robin tried to take a drink from the last trickles of water still free of the ice and as the minister was incanting his ashes to ashes bit, I'm thinking that if it's like this in Edinburgh, how superb conditions would be on the Ben. Worse than that, as his wife and mother, quietly weeping, are supporting each other in the bitter cold, I'm thinking of an old boss of mine excusing his late and drunken arrival home from a funeral such as this, in the week between Christmas and New Year, by telling his wife that the ground was hard!

I hadn't seen Michael since University days. We had done a bit of climbing together but we lost touch when I went to work in London. Michael loved the hills but he was never really that great a climber, his nerves always got the better of him and my geographical change, coupled with the fact that we had different targets as far as climbing was concerned, all contributed to our losing touch. Even when I moved back to Edinburgh I didn't make a point of tracking him down, it had been so long, nearly 30 years.

Michael had always harboured an ambition to climb Crowberry Gully on the Buachaille in winter, but had accepted that it was a bit out of his league, contenting himself with straight-forward ascents of some of the more accessible Munros when under snow, an increasingly short commodity these days. He had once even done the long walk in from Tyndrum with his eye on that test piece of the pioneers, the Central Gully of Ben Lui, but by the time he reached Cononish Farm he had talked himself out of it, the looming steepness of its north face assuming Eiger-like proportions in his overworked imagination.

Don't get me wrong, Michael was no armchair mountaineer, although, like all of us, he had done his fair share of that. As a teenager in the early Seventies he had read and re-read Murray's *Mountaineering in Scotland*, to the extent that he felt almost like the fourth man on the rope, somewhere between MacAlpine and McKenzie I imagine. He eventually acquired his own copy, realising that he had paid enough in library fines to have bought two. Even now, 30 years on, it lies, well thumbed, atop the pile of magazines in the bog in his Edinburgh flat, although it has to be said that its pre-eminent position nowadays seemed due not so much to its being regularly read as to its prodigious weight, which kept the numerous

computer magazines and occasional copy of *Penthouse*, which made up the rest of the pile, in order.

No, Michael had done his bit, rock climbing as a student at Edinburgh University starting on the wall at Meadowbank in the days when a climbing wall consisted of a vertical wall with a few strategically-placed bricks sticking out of it. He didn't kid himself that he was a tiger, far from it, V. Diff was about his limit, and even then he preferred to avoid the business end of the rope. He had even made a guided ascent of the 'Voie Normale' on Mont Blanc, having some vague idea that it would qualify him, in his own eyes, as a real mountaineer. Two hundred quid it had cost him but it still wasn't enough.

It was against this background that the Crowberry Gully on the Buachaille in Glen Coe had assumed an almost mystic significance in his mind, a touchstone, a benchmark if you like, of his abilities as a mountaineer. To say that this was an obsession with Michael would probably be to overstate the case but there were little signs. For instance, how many people have a cat called Crowberry? I also found out from his wife that he even used Crowberry as a password on his computer at work.

Weather – fine, visibility – good, snow – firm, freezing level – 500ft., fitness level – excellent. Christmas morning 2001 and here he was with his new-found partner, Wullie Gates, roping up at the foot of the first pitch. It was amazing, they had left the car at Lagangarbh an hour ago and walked up the path just as he had done so often in days gone by, and now, standing at the bottom of the climb that had occupied so much of his thoughts over the years, he could actually feel the butterflies in the pit of his stomach.

Having made the decision to climb the route, Michael had also decided to lead it, and as he selected two of the new drop-pick SMTTMaxes, Wullie stood quietly below him roped to an ice screw and a rock peg. Michael made one or two practice stabs with his axes, he had still not quite got the hang of it properly, even although he had spent a good part of the morning practising, and it was with some trepidation that he committed to pulling up on his axes and placing the front points of his Footfangs – no, it was Stubai step-in crampons he had selected, on to a bulge of ice at waist level. 'Climbing' he shouted to Wullie, thinking as he did so that it was as well there was nobody around to hear him.

It was when he didn't turn up for dinner at his mum's as arranged on Boxing Day that the alarm bells started ringing and, being on call that day, I was first on the scene and found the body. He was still wearing the helmet, and at the post-mortem the police surgeon said that he had suffered a series of epileptic fits known medically as *status epilepticus*, the single bruise in the centre of his forehead being caused when he fell forward out of his chair and struck his head on the coffee table. As soon as I saw the CD case lying on the table, *The Classic Scottish Ice Routes on interactive CD – Vol.1*, I knew it would be Crowberry Gully – it just had to be. I had a quick look at

the replay, wondering if he had been avalanched, or had simply fallen off, but no, he had climbed it in good style, led the whole thing, so I suppose that was some consolation. It must have been the excitement of getting up it that triggered the fits, or some fault in the VR helmet.

(The Scottish Mountaineering Club, designers of the software, have strenuously denied any liability, citing the warning regarding use by persons suffering from epilepsy included with the packaging of the disc.)

I've no doubt that the ready availability of this new technology will please many in the conservation lobby, as it will relieve pressure on the popular winter venues such as Glen Coe and the Ben, while the 'Angry of Morningside Brigade' who annually rail against the irresponsibility of those who climb in winter in the pages of *The Scotsman* will like it too. But, while accepting the inevitable, there are those who, no matter how good the virtual reality technology is, or how stunning the graphics are, will still take pleasure in actually physically going to the hills, and although a committed convert myself, I feel that we in the mountaineering fraternity should accept the situation as it stands and rely on natural wastage to take care of what is fast becoming the anachronistic pastime of a few dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists.

For those of you who might need persuading, may I suggest *The Nevis Winter Classics*. This is millennium compatible and requires a minimum of 128Mb of RAM and a third generation Pentium processor for maximum effect. 'Point Five' with a dual-shock controller is, I assure you, out of this world!

AXE ADVICE

Clad and armed for frost,
ice warrior, gully raider, snow clown.
I know the skarts and scrapings,
the thrutchings and flailings
that blunt my good edge down.

I impact in a runnel,
hook into cold hope.
Will the ice screw just driven
take the weight of your whim,
test the strength of your rope?

You cannot resist an ice fall
and I too return home scarred,
gripped with effort and boldness.
But I will keep my blue coldness,
and the arctic odour of my adze.

Donald Orr.

A CREDIT TAE US A'

By Robin Shaw

The Ben:

IT WAS February and conditions were great. As George and I trudged up to the flanks of Tower Ridge we saw only one other party on the hill. So you can tell immediately it was in those halcyon days before you could drive from London for a weekend's ice climbing. The previous day we had done a new route to the left of the Italian Climb, and in fear and trembling at the end of a long, unprotected steep runout, I had lost my axe while attempting to lasso a spike of rock. It winged into space propelled by the loop of my rope and 100ft below drew curses from George as it whizzed past. I skittered to a ledge once I'd found the slater's pick in my sack.

Today, we were looking below the climb for the axe. While we hunted the slope we heard and saw climbers on Carn Dearg, and having given up the fruitless search, we went across for a look.

'Join the fun,' a voice shouted. It was Robin with whom I'd climbed quite a bit. We'd met first at an outrageous party and ended the evening in drunken building climbing and explanations to the cops. He was at Edinburgh University, I was at Glasgow, but despite this we got on well.

When we joined Smith at the top of the ramp leading on to the middle of the buttress, he was sitting on a platform with his characteristic grin. He held a rope that inched back and forth as, up above, Dougal Haston was trying to make progress on the corner of Route 2. Dougal returned puffing and we sat around swapping stories and looking at other lines near the one we'd finished the day before.

I was never as comfortable with Dougal as I was with Robin; sometimes in his company, Robin seemed to put on a mantle of toughness that was absent when he was alone. Today however, Dougal was uncharacteristically generous, and suggested I have a go at the route. Probably he had assessed rightly that I wouldn't succeed and after about half an hour during which I failed to reach his high point, I retreated, thankful to be off the steep, verglassed rock. Then Robin tried with no success.

Dougal set off again and this time, once he'd found a safe runner just below the break-out onto the slab, to our astonishment he started to take off his boots. Sure enough, his socks would hold better on the glazed rocks, but we all thought this to be a bit over the top. Naturally, we didn't say so; just exchanged glances and chatted away about other possible routes on Tower Ridge where Robin had seen us the previous day. Shouts and curses told us all was not well.

'I've dropped a bloody boot,' screamed Dougal and minutes later, lowered on the runner, he was hirpling around beside us on the ledge while

we stifled grins. On the way down to the hut Robin mimicked Dougal's lopsided gait and broke frequently into cackling laughter with which Dougal joined once we'd found the missing boot below the buttress.

Ardgour: Pissing with rain. Lying in a tent below the cliffs of Garbh Bheinn talking philosophy with Robin. Just as well we're philosophical. Water everywhere and the marsh moving below us like one of these American motel beds you put a quarter in to relieve the aches of the day. We're close together, not through some dubious wish to be tactile but due to the drips running down the thin canvas. And there is one feature that would have brought tears to a stoic's eyes. 'You bring the tent and the stove and I'll get the food. We can divvy up after.' And I had trusted him, not even asking what delicacies he had in his pack before we left the road. So here we were with about five teabags, a few Knorr Swiss cubes and a packet of biscuits that I'd had festering in my sack for ages. But, somehow, I could never bring myself to be angry at Robin. It was just the way he was and I should have known. It was my fault, I tried to tell myself.

So, in the morning, with the rain having slowed to a mean drizzle, we squelched our stiff damp underfed bodies to the foot of the Leac Mhor which was living up to Robin's name for it, the Great Leak. No guidebook of course, no idea of where the route went. Well, I ask you, would Mozart carry a guide to the composition of symphonies in his pocket? Up we went, and God knows where, over slimy unprotected slabs and vicious little overhangs. Irrepressible Smith held it all together. With anyone else I would have suggested – No! – insisted, on getting the hell down to the nearest warm pub. The only bit I remember in detail was when we were brought to a stop below a shiny bulge with a holdless slab to its left. Robin managed to fix a sling on a rare spike and swung about 20ft across the dripping slab to lodge in a crack. I surfed over screaming on a tight rope, did a slippery slidy on the next pitch claiming intent and then we were up.

Despite the prospect of a couple of biscuits each for dinner and another day of wet desperation, Robin wanted to stay. But it was my tent and I wasn't playing so we ended up steaming and drinking at the Corran Ferry, a pub which only the preceding deprivations made tolerable. To his credit, after a pint or three, Robin did not hold it against me that I had aborted the great Garbh Bheinn expedition.

Glen Coe:

We're on our way up the long platform running under the North Face of Aonach Dubh. Little clouds of midges lazily gnaw at our calves. It had been a great week, hazy summer days of warm rock and great routes.

Above us, at the far end of the cliff lay unknown rock at the edge of Pleasant Terrace. A great corner blocked by a large overhang beckoned and

we were confident. Robin was ahead as we ambled up the ramp under his magnificent line, Yo-Yo. The ramp steepened to a scramble on broken, hold-strewn ledges, easy but exposed. Ahead of me Robin stopped, looking upwards. I waited, lighting a cigarette and looked upwards with him at the possible route in the big corner. He moved up a bit, then down again. Then a few moves up and back to his ledge. Then up again, then down. What was going on?

'Let's get the rope out,' he said. 'Pass me the end and get a belay.'

This must be hard, I thought, nervously stubbing out my fag and uncoiling the rope. Tied on he waltzed upwards without a pause and when I joined him at the top of the simple scramble he was laughing and shaking his head.

'Some chance we have with the real thing,' he said. It was probably the first and last time that Smith had ever roped up for a Moderate!

Two hours' later we still hadn't managed to solve the problem of getting into the corner. A bit like Hangman's on the Buachaille, only the moves to the crack were steeper, and 40ft of wall climbing made a formidable barrier. A rotten rib had to be passed and neither Robin nor I could summon the bottle. As the shadows purpled on the Aonach Eagach, we gave up. We made our way up Pleasant Terrace and soloed the top pitches of Shadbolt's Chimney in the gloaming, tired and happy.

A couple of weeks later I returned with Jimmy and managed to get over the rotten rib and into the corner, whooping in triumph. With increasing confidence and excitement I led out a long pitch up the steep corner. Then at the obvious belay, to my horror I found a sling. Someone had beat us to it and had obviously abseiled off. I looked up in dismay. The next pitch must be even harder. I brought Jimmy up and set off. The climbing was hard but much easier than the preceding pitch. What had happened? Was it the next pitch which seemed to be straight-forward and led to a large ledge? On the ledge, without having had much difficulty, I found another sling. As I looked up it began to dawn on me. Above, a grass curtain reared for about 100ft, dripping and unpleasant. The climb was over and the best way off was by abseil.

When I got home a letter was waiting. Robin had done the climb – the Stook – the previous weekend. I hadn't been available and he apologised for leaving me out. Rather than climb the grassy choss above the corner he'd abseiled. The climb had been enjoyable; perhaps we could give it another go together, he suggested. And there was another good line he'd sussed out. But it was not to be. We only climbed together once more before his death.

Some of my friends found Robin a difficult character; if some of their stories are accurate, he could be insensitive and boorish. For my part, I found him kind, thoughtful, unpompous and modest, and I consider it a privilege to have shared some great times with him.

Paul Allen and Wilson Moir on 'Sandpiper' (HVS 5b), Seana Mheallan, Torridon. Photo: Niall Ritchie. (Left): Rab Anderson on 'Reaching the Limit' (6c), Sunnyside, Glen Ogle. Photo: Christine Anderson. Rab Anderson and Dave Cuthbertson on the first ascent of 'Star Wars' (E3 6a), Ardnamurchan. Photo: Christine Anderson.

