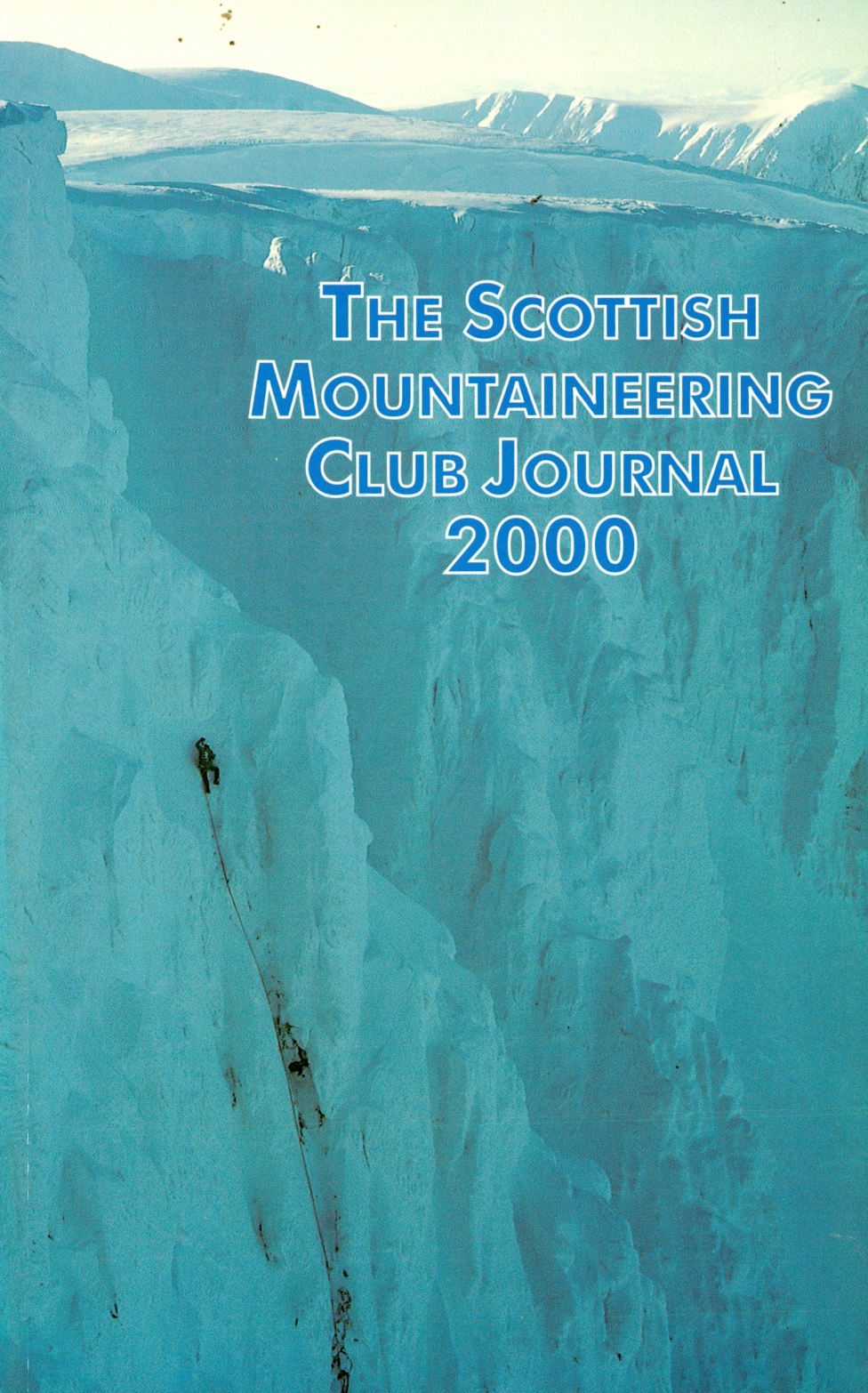

The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal 2000

CONTENTS

	PAGE
EDITORIAL	251
W. H. MURRAY REVISITED By Des Rubens	253
ON FAITH AS THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR By Andrew Young	260
BRIDGING THE GAP By P. J. Biggar	271
RELUCTANT PERSISTENCE By Rob Milne	277
IN THE SOUTH COAST By R. T. Richardson	282
THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY By Cliff Smith	283
NOT PICCADILLY CIRCUS By Peter Warburton	291
HAROLD RAEBURN'S JOURNEY HOME By John Mitchell	298
THE CROFTER AND THE GURKHA By Ian R. Mitchell	310
TWO CENTURIES OF SCOTTISH MOUNTAIN TABLES By Peter Drummond	312
MUNRO-BAGGING WITH A COMPUTER...? By Steve Carver and Steffen Fritz	317
TRIO By I. H. M. Smart	323
NEW CLIMBS SECTION	327
MISCELLANEOUS NOTES	412
MUNRO MATTERS	417
SCOTTISH MOUNTAIN ACCIDENTS, 1999	423
IN MEMORIAM	453
CHARLES BUCHANAN MONCUR WARREN	453
ARCHIBOLD C. HANNAH	454
J. W. (HAMISH) DALLACHY	455
RONALD C. MARSHALL	455
WILLIAM ROXBURGH SHIPWAY	456
PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB	457
JMCS REPORTS	460
SMC AND JMCS ABROAD	465
REVIEWS	471
OFFICE BEARERS	480

EDITED BY K. V. CROCKET

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THE SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING CLUB JOURNAL

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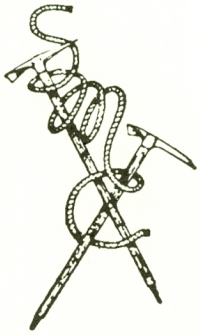


EDITORIAL

THIS is my last Journal. I have enjoyed the experience over the last 14 years, and the pleasure remains unabated, but it makes good sense to depart while the going is good and the Journal can be handed over to my successor in a good state of health.

My spell as Journal Editor has been enriched, or complicated perhaps, by accelerating changes in technology. I have seen the raw material change from ghastly, hand-written copy or at best neatly-typed, double-spaced MSS, to word-processed print-outs in small fonts. Then was unleashed the first affordable PC-compatible desktop and small, square floppy disks began to proliferate with near-universal formats. The Editor's practice moved from 'observe and discard', to 'search and replace'.

At the other end, the printer was alerted to the changes, and a slow acceptance of digital material began, firstly with clumsy codes, manually inserted into each document. Next, as the printing industry reluctantly woke up to the revolution taking place in the real world, this interim step disappeared, and desktop publishing software emerged. Floppy disks began flying through the letterbox. Latterly, these have been largely replaced by e-mails. These, while speeding up things somewhat, add their own unique flavour to the process including the palpable risk of hard disk destruction by a rogue virus. The entire spell has been exhilarating, and I enjoy it still.

Visibly, the Journal has thickened, so that I am in the happy state of having twice as much good material from contributors compared with when I began. More climbers and walkers, more writing, easier communication. Colour photographs have been introduced. Even more prominently, my final issue

Sunset on Cerro Torre, Torre Eggar and Cerro Stanhardt from the West Face of Fitzroy. Photo: Alan Mullin.

crashes through the design barrier with a photographic cover, a long-overdue change held back by a tiny, but loquacious, cabal. To a winter climber well-inured to waiting for the right conditions, this small victory was only a matter of time.

Very few organisms have remained successful without evolving; the Club and its Journal should not be an exception. A huge increase in the numbers walking and climbing has seen a likewise increase in both New Climbs and Accidents. These are, as previous Editors well know, space-hungry items in the Journal. Both are necessary and must be archived, but pressure is mounting for some sort of compromise between maintaining an interesting and readable Journal, and continuing the recording of information. In all probability the virtual pages of the Internet will, and should, take some of this pressure. The compromise will be one of the challenges my successor will face, and as current webmaster for the Club I will be in the happy position of aiding any such change. It is good to be in the position of quitting while the going is still good. No regrets on looking back, more interesting projects to look forward to.

One project which attracted my attention this year was the George Mallory Photography project, initiated by three photography students in Switzerland. Working in conjunction with a media artist, they were struck, as many of us have been, by the recent discovery of the remains of Mallory on Everest. One artefact not found however, was Mallory's camera. What, the students asked, would we see on the 24 images preserved by the deep-freeze atmosphere of the Himalayas? Did the two mountaineers reach the summit? What did their last climb look like?

Now switch to the Journal and those who have gone before. The routes pioneered by previous generations are set in stone, or occasional ice, and for this we are eternally grateful. Added dimension is given by any of their writings and photographs. Without these we would have only the bones. We need insight into the authors of these routes; their methods, inspirations, madness even. People paint the rocks, shatter the ice, enrich the medium. The Journal, as an annual publication, cannot sensibly comment on fast-moving events. Rather, we can afford to take a longer view of changes in the landscape of Scottish mountaineering.

A major source of my continuing enthusiasm has been the contact with Journal contributors. Friends have been made, my knowledge deepened, and new areas opened up by countless people. No need to name any, their names are in 'my' volumes for any to read and enjoy. And how much the poorer we would be, and our successors would be, without their efforts. Some have the courage to pioneer new routes and repeat others; fewer yet have the gall to submit an account in writing to an editor. Preserve it in stone, preserve it on paper, expose it in cyberspace.

I must thank all who have ably assisted in this endeavour; their input has always been invaluable. Each and every stone in the wall supports, and is supported by, its neighbours, and I have been deeply and humbly grateful to have been, for a stretch, part of that wall.

W. H. MURRAY REVISITED

By Des Rubens

IT WAS still possible to have heroes in the Seventies [1]. I have still, errant pages taped in, scuffed and stained, the Dent copy of *Mountaineering in Scotland,* priced 8/6d. Its archaic font and diminutive type harked back to a bygone age. The cover shows a Homburg-hatted climber, many-pitoned, boldly tackling the impossible by employing ascent techniques reminiscent of the Munich school of mountaineering. A more proper illustration would have been a ladder of crafted ice steps surmounted by a forthright mountaineer spiritually strengthened after a bout of honest labour.

The book was often with us (the respected Cohen, Geddes, Gibson *et al*) on escapades. To cries of anguish, one copy fluttered down from a belay on the steep Meadow Face of Beinn Tarsuinn. Another copy accompanied us to far away Pakistan where nightly readings were held at base camp at 14,000ft. For us, Bill was a heroic figure of a more innocent age. This was not so much through the quality of his climbs, though we respected these. Rather, through the images conjured by his writing he articulated much of what we felt of our own early experiences of the hills. As Edinburgh University students being bussed to the hills in numbers sometimes requiring two of Allan's of Gorebridge's larger buses, we envied his personal discovery of the empty hills of the Thirties. To us, his time was a Golden Age of Scottish mountaineering.

Of course, as students at the tail end of the Sixties, our respect for the man and his contemporaries was coloured by the anti-authoritarianism of the time. The tales brought back by student club representatives attending SMC dinners were eagerly awaited. These tales of our (still living) Victorian mountaineering heritage were as remarkable to us as to those scientists who discovered the living fossil coelacanth brought up from far down in the Indian Ocean. Descriptions of pipe-smoking, quavering-voiced, tweed-jacketed eccentrics were recounted in dramatic form around many a squalid bothy fireside or campsite [2].

Now, having earned our respectability through decades of sober behaviour, it can be disclosed that during those student days a Bill Murray evening was held. The parts of the Bills, Archies, Bells *et cetera* were allocated for historic re-enactments. Mrs Malloch was played by a bewildered girlfriend roped in for the occasion. Quantities of Mummery's Blood [3] were consumed and readings of The Works were held.

The Works, as *Mountaineering in Scotland* and *Undiscovered Scotland* were referred to, were critically analysed, and phrases stockpiled for use in times of drama. For a large party in difficulty on smooth slabs the cry

was 'boots off' . For some suspect initiative, usually brought on by spindly arms, we needed a piton like the 'Queen of Spain's legs', ... not only ought never to be seen, but must not be supposed even to exist. On beating one of our many retreats in the face of weather, darkness and disintegrating headtorch batteries [4], the party was much comforted by being 'tied to men of high heart, that whatever the outcome, they, at least, will not falter'. Despite this infantile taking the piss (well, it was so much youthful fun), we were with Bill. While sometimes gently derided, the spirituality of his writings struck a vibrant chord. Our enthusiasm and love for the Scottish mountains in all their glory and wrath and beauty paralleled his.

Then, he was a remote figure. Later, through the SMC, we did come to know Bill and some of his fabled contemporaries. Not least was Ben Humble, who became a friend. (There was, in similar vein, a Ben Humble Memorial Meet, but that's another story.) Conversations with Bill were valued and his keen interest in modern climbing surprised us. The eccentricities of some of his friends were well documented in The Works. That these gentlemen were as eccentric in later life added to their charm when we met them. Even now, a very few are still doggedly completing ascents, well into their 80s.

Despite his influence, I had done remarkably few of Bill's accounted routes. The Glen Coe ascents eluded me, due to weather, conditions and crowds. Later, to avoid the crowds, I went elsewhere, mainly the North West. Later still, loss and new directions diminished interest further. But only this year[5], age and a distaste of long drives took me back to Glen Coe and a delightful rediscovery. The Buachaille – what a mountain! Pre-dawn starts, Alpenglow, and the wonderful scenery rekindled a joy of winter climbing.

And so, on a fine March weekend at the Lagangarbh Hut, with friends Geoff Cohen, Simon Brown and Gordon MacNair, the answer to the first question of the day had to be Garrick's Shelf Route. Buachaille Etive Mor, that most splendid of earthly mountains, maintained the silence of a minister as we ascended the lower slopes. The few other pilgrims on the ascent were, to a soul, bound for Crowberry Gully. We redirected a few wanderers away from Easy Gully and found ourselves below the first obstacle of the climb. On this occasion, we were earlier in the day than Murray, Mackenzie, MacAlpine and Dunn. On their unsuccessful first attempt on Garrick's Shelf in December 1936, they had been delayed by Dunn who once again '...had forgotten his boots and had had to return to Inverarnan and back like a rocket to collect them.' Cohen and Brown were directed to Naismith's Route, while MacNair and I repaired to the start of the Shelf. There was a surprise at this point. On a visit in January the access ledge had overlooked a 40ft. drop to the Crowberry Gully. The gully had so filled in with snow that the drop was now a simple slope. We

roped up and MacNair opened his innings, making short work of a tough morsel in the form of a steep rock pinnacle. The shelf then opened up for a few pitches, with constant, though straightforward, front-pointing. As we approached the final pitches, the climbing steepened abruptly and the exposure overlooking Crowberry Gully increased dramatically.

It was my lead. I examined the first of the top pitches with interest, this being close to the point where Murray's party had been forced to retreat because of bad weather, extreme difficulty and nightfall. The initial crack, which yielded to Murray only on his third attempt, proved straightforward, being on this occasion clear of snow and easily protected with modern equipment. The same was true of a laborious outward-tilting mantelshelf. After the mantelshelf, Murray had attempted to effect an escape onto easy ground on the Crowberry Ridge. I was now level with the final 6ft. of rock that had thwarted these escape attempts. Murray's initial movement on this short section of rock would, of necessity, be made without handhold, a down-and-out strain being placed upon the feet; the foothold being a sloping slab covered with verglas. I examined the critical section. Even with the benefits of glorious weather, enough hours of daylight left to play a cricket match and the passage of 63 years of technological progress, the move still appeared very hard. To have attempted such a move 30ft. above a belay at dusk would indeed have been risking disaster. On that occasion, in rising storm, Murray recorded that 'I reported my position and the party consulted.' Following which the decision to retreat was made, leaving the party with 14 hours of tribulation before a dawn return was made to Rannoch Moor.

Turning my attention to the present, I pondered the difficulty of reaching the next port of call, a square-cut recess directly above. Murray, on his successful ascent with Bill Mackenzie in March 1937, regarded this part of the climb as the crux, being very severe and occupying them for two hours. Reaching the recess over steep ground involved some of these delicate moves on poor snow and with no positive axe holds. Such climbing always taxes my imagination. In this case, the final moves were surmounted by the precarious method of the 'breath holding' technique. I thought this the hardest move on the route under the conditions in which we found the climb. We continued out of the square-cut recess and over a dramatic pinnacle that proved, as Murray records, unusually delicate.

The final pitch consisted of a groove 'choked by an icefall of one hundred and fifty feet, twice bulging in fifty-foot pitches, which tried the leaders severely'. In contrast to the rocks below, these old horrors yielded without difficulty to front pointing. From the top of the Shelf, we were rewarded for our toils by a delightful ascent of the sunlit Crowberry Tower. The outlook from its summit is remarkable. So we came to the summit of Buachaille Etive Mor as the afternoon light yellowed the final slopes. The

mountains cast giant, blue shadows east over the Moor of Rannoch towards distant Schiehallion. We looked around us to pay our respects to the mountains of Argyll and Lochaber. We were content. In contrast to our own experience, Murray and his friends had undergone, both in defeat and victory, physical pain and trial in order to achieve their climb. Murray, perhaps affected by the difficulties and precariousness of the route, described the climb as leading through snow and ice scenery of deathless beauty. Although many changes have taken place in the climbing world since the first winter ascent of Garrick's Shelf, the beauty of scenery that Murray described is still there for all mountaineers who climb on the Buachaille in winter.

Our ascent of Deep-Cut Chimney on the following day proved to be an emotional experience. In contrast to Garrick's Shelf, Deep-Cut Chimney falls within a category of routes filed under 'sociable'. For us, this added to its interest. On the climb, some friendly English fellows accompanied us, a few minutes in the rear. Gordon led off and, after 100ft or so, surmounted a fine overhang to the belay. On following, I found the exit from the overhang awkward, due to the familiar lack of purchase for the axes. Eventually, I struggled up in the usual undignified fashion and joined my companion.

Shortly afterwards, the top third of one of the aforementioned Englishmen appeared, friendly and chatty as before, and free with his opinions of the joys of the climb. After some time his output of talk became more desultory as he continued to fail to make progress. I felt sympathy, though I did not express this. The situation was awkward and even embarrassing. To offer a rope could be taken to imply that he lacked ability and might therefore be interpreted as an insult. Even in 1999, insulting other climbers, particularly from the more sensitive areas of some of Scotland's larger cities, can create problems for the initiator. We were long-learned in avoiding any possible disparagement of our fellows, at least until they were known to be from our own tribe. Furthermore, the situation of the Englishman was already demeaning, with his axe ringing ineffectually on the Glen Coe porphyry around our ankles. On the other hand, not to speak out and offer help could also be problematic, at least for the Englishman. There was no immediate security to protect him, while a fall could be detrimental to him in respects additional to embarrassment. Gordon and I exchanged glances and breathed deeply. The gentleman in question solved this delicate social problem by requesting a rope in a strangulated tone. Feelings of relief were experienced on all sides.

With everyone (to our knowledge) on the climb again secure, I turned my attention to the next pitch, which gave access to a beautiful little cirque of an amphitheatre. After 40ft., the slope reared up to a rocky wall. This was the crux of the original ascent where Murray and Mackenzie had

been faced by two overhangs, one of snow and the other of rock. Today, the pitch was largely rock. Indeed, it consisted of the largest area of clear rock in the area, with only the odd bucket hold surviving in sheltered crannies. Unless the popularity of ice-climbing changes, the snow cornice that taxed Murray's wits is unlikely to form before the onset of another ice age.

The rock wall ice pitch, having been demolished by the pounding of many crampons, was thus straightforward and unattractive. However, a few feet to the left, an unsullied pillar of grey ice topped by a short, snowy groove also gave access to the amphitheatre. Instantly, I made up my mind to make an ascent of this attractive feature and without further ado stepped onto the ice. Revelling in the steepness, the Chimney falling away below, and the figure of my companion diminishing as height was gained, the joy was that of simply being in this exposed place. Other distractions were out of sight, or just being quiet, allowing full concentration on climbing. The grey pillar was ascended by the fun techniques of whacking, bridging and kicking. The exhilaration was, unfortunately, short-lived. Bridging wide and awkwardly, I stretched over the top of the pitch to make the final move up onto easy ground. The axes slithered through weak polystyrene. I experimented elsewhere on arcs up to the limit of shoulder-wrist-pick radius. More weak polystyrene.

While strains on muscles, ligaments, cartilages and all these other things that keep the body stable increased directly over time, ideas circulated haphazardly within the brain, as chaotic as Princes Street on Hogmanay. Why hadn't I put in a runner at the start (no convenient cracks, idleness?) Why hadn't pegs been carried (principle?) How did I get into this situation (forgetfulness?) What would be the consequences of falling off (hospitalisation, probably?) What would other people say if I did, given the modest grade of the route? Why did I forget the First Rule of winter climbing?[6]

The gyrations of thoughts ceased and rationality succeeded in overcoming emotion. Something had to be done, and shortly, but the brain, comfortingly, was now in order and again in charge. Then, and now discomfitingly, a great blast of spindrift engulfed the climb. My head being immediately above the parapet, cold material at maximum velocity was injected forcibly into gaps and orifices of clothing and body.

Meanwhile, the pain acting on various body parts continued to increase as before. I was minded of Bill's words on a wet day on Slav Route. 'Mountain nature is not chivalrous and wields the sword ... most fiercely when the plight of the climber is sorest.' The discharge eased and I was able to attend to the problem. The only solution was to firmly plant both axe picks into the defective snow and slowly transfer my weight acting through my crampons to the axe picks, all the time ready to reverse the

process should the force on the picks be greater than the holding force of the snow, as seemed probable. I managed it. A higher and more secure foothold was gained, thus bringing the long sought and familiar, (unfortunately) dispensation.[7] Sanctuary was won and reprieve savoured.

Modern experiential theories encourage practitioners to review actions in order to make future behaviour more effective. I did so at this point, concluding that I ought to be more careful in future when I went ice climbing. The fact that I had come to the same conclusion many times in the past without having gone to the trouble of studying the theories was, however, discouraging. A major advantage of climbing in the Thirties was the unavailability of such distractions.

Returning to practicalities I recalled Bill's problem in 1939, in gaining this beautiful little cirque, as being similar in some respects. Then, he was blessed with high-quality hardness of snow material. However, he also deployed his ice pick for security, and his mind was taxed by uncertainty as he did so. On this occasion, on transferring his weight onto his nailed boot on the top of the snow cornice, he wrote: 'I let go the rib, flung my whole weight on to the foot on the cornice, at the same instant whipping the axe-pick into a crack in the rock above.' This account could be accepted as an early-recorded example of tooling, although here used to secure a position, rather than make upward progress.

We had gained the amphitheatre. Where the pioneers escaped right, we tackled the 40ft. crack, which on Bill's ascent had been lacquered in black ice and therefore impossible. The initial moves were indeed scanty, icy and tricky, but thereafter led through a delightful chimney to the upper rocks. These also were enjoyable, and sufficiently interesting to merit keeping the rope on. Finally, unlike Murray and Mackenzie, we went on to the summit of Stob Coire nam Beith. The pioneers, eschewing the summit, as in the modern idiom, had chosen to descend an easier part of the face where, through the twilight, 'there whizzed three feet above our heads an enormous boulder...I like to think of it as a shot fired in celebration: to commemorate a first ascent and to mark the close of a year's campaign'.

I was delighted to have enjoyed two grand days on Bill's routes. One inevitably reflects on the similarities and differences of our experiences. This exercise is probably not very profitable, but was undertaken nevertheless. Like most of us, I am interested in risk. The consequences of falling off a climb are not usually as stark in the present day. Although one can still get into difficulties through lack of forethought, it is sometimes assumed that the pioneers were men who always acted with complete deliberation and where risks were always seriously measured. Yet there is a rare moment in Bill's writings where he described a loss of control. At one point on the retreat on Garrick's Shelf Route, the fixed rope somehow rolled off its hitch above. 'A split second later I landed astride Dunn's

shoulders. We are, most of us, guilty of making mistakes during our careers, and most of us are lucky.' It was always thus. However, it is perhaps pointless to dwell overmuch on these matters. In an era when we are guilt-ridden over mountain exploitation, it is good for us, sometimes, to recall the words of Bill Mackenzie. After the first ascent of the Buachaille following Murray's release from wartime prison camps, he remarked: 'The one thing that matters among mountains is that we enjoy them.'

From the summit, we descended to Coire nam Beith. As we did so, we beheld the wonderful grandeur of the views over Loch Leven and Ardgour and the stunning exposure of Glen Coe. The white world of the peaks contrasted brilliantly against the dull green below. From heaven above, the winter light shafted down on the world. We were with Bill Murray.

References and notes:

1. This homage assumes a familiarity with – or, better, experience of immersion in, or, further, a Biblical wisdom of – the works of W. H. Murray. To assume such familiarity in readers of this Journal is, naturally, entirely reasonable. That a few Murrayisms creep into the text is inevitable and will, hopefully, be accepted with the usual tolerance.
2. As this era coincided with increasing environmental awareness, there was even talk within our circles of approaching the conservation groups to encourage an embargo on changes to the SMC constitution, thus preserving the club's archaic structure for the enjoyment of future generations.
3. This mountain elixir consists of equal parts of Navy rum and Bovril, served boiling hot. Mummery's Blood never gained lasting popularity in our circles, perhaps because of the availability of more modern (and, it has to be admitted, more palatable) stimulants.
4. Difficulty was also a problem.
5. 1999.
6. Things are quite often bad at the top of a pitch. Actually, this may be the second rule.
7. Unfortunately, not because it was a dispensation, but because it was familiar. You knew this, of course.

ON FAITH AS THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR: READING W. H. MURRAY

By Andrew Young

THE title of *Things Not Seen: An Anthology of Contemporary Scottish Mountain Poetry* [1], Stuart B. Campbell writes in his foreword, 'is adapted from a chapter heading in W. H. Murray's *Mountaineering in Scotland.*' But why this adaptation? Why this particular phrase? The piece in question – undoubtedly a classic in the eyes of many, if for a multiplicity of not altogether consonant reasons – is 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen', and reflects upon a moonlight winter climb of Murray's much-loved Buachaille Etive Mor in 1939 [2]. This may profitably be read alongside chapter 20, 'Crowberry Gully in Winter' [3], and chapter 2 of *Undiscovered Scotland* [4], 'The First Day on Buachaille'.

The latter is concerned both with Murray's earliest visit to Buachaille Etive Mor, in 1935, and with his first climb there upon his return to Scotland after wartime imprisonment. Both of the previous Buachaille climbs, in 1939 and 1941 (undertaken very shortly prior to mobilisation with the Middle East Forces), culminate in a sense of anticipated revelation or epiphany withheld. To the extent that these disappointments might also have given rise to 'despair', by 1945 despair is dismissed as folly – reserved 'for the very young or very old'. The degree, however, to which Murray's conception of faith may have altered during the war years is somewhat obscured both by retrospective editing and by what, deliberately or otherwise, remained unspoken.

* * *

Campbell's assertion that the 'Things Not Seen' collection 'reflects the individuality of the Scottish experience' sits uneasily alongside Angus Dunn's introductory declaration that 'if you are a poet, your vocation is to speak about those things that are difficult to say – and sometimes to find a way to say what can't be said...Different answers from every one of [the poets in this book] – but all of them familiar to anyone who has ever looked out into the great emptiness behind An Teallach or walked in the Quiraing – or the Hindu Kush'. Already a tension appears to arise between aspirations to universal truth and the claims of elect particularity. If the Editor overstates his case – Charlie Orr's *Death on the Mountain* is hardly underpinned, as Campbell would have it, by the 'unique role of Scotland's hills in mountaineering history and the experience of climbing in Scotland'; Harry Gilonis might have read, and appropriated, Hölderlin somewhere other than on Orkney – might Dunn not himself be straying rather far from Murray, saying what can't be said?

In *The Death of Norman MacCaig,* Janet King speaks of MacCaig 'gazing/ Always obliquely,/ Beyond the surfaces of things –/ Who will surprise us now/ With their lopsidedness, their unfamiliar/ Clarity?' Beyond the surfaces of things, we may not have yet reached the realm to which Murray alludes in the phrase 'things not seen'. Like MacCaig, again in King's words, Murray may be read as '[a]t once cosmic and playful', and yet his own reflections on the limits of language in 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen' do not manifestly escape from what may be thought an overly oblique, syncretic playfulness or, perhaps less charitably, from a dogged theism that remains untouched by his excursions into Romanticism. Granted that Murray's writing does pose an interpretive challenge, it may help to begin with to outline what he did not mean by the unspoken or the unspeakable.

In one arguably innocuous sense, the unspoken behind what is said – or the unseen behind what is seen – forms but the necessary background to any meaningful utterance or perception. This is not to say that meaning must be unequivocal, but that discrete descriptions, for example, require an interpretative background in order for any sense to get off the ground. We may be more or less astute in any attempt to bring that background, unconscious and shifting as it may be, to the fore. I say 'arguably' innocuous for two reasons. Some may wish to believe that meaning is possible in the absence of language, and I shall leave it to them to explain. Of more interest is the view that language, whether at root universal and innate or particular and less susceptible to formulaic reduction, itself manifests a certain metaphysical slant. Our linguistic abilities, that is to say, may reveal a prior grasp of the ultimate nature of reality – and in this sense provide evidence of things unseen – or, more troublesome this, our particular language (English, say, or Gaelic) may betray a disposition towards some other characterisations of the ultimate nature of reality. In the first case, it might be added, the transcendental notion will be that more may be understood – whether it can be spoken of or not – than may be said within the sphere of science or comprehended within the sphere of quotidian activity or emotional disposition. In the second case, unless we are to imagine that a particular language nonetheless coincides with the movement of some greater form of spiritual progress, the metaphysical characterisations to which such a language may be disposed will be hurdles to our understanding of reality – to be overcome if we are optimists or to be suffered more or less grudgingly if we are sceptics. All camps will come across those, be they best portrayed as sceptics or pragmatists, who would rather we stopped talking about 'the ultimate nature of reality' altogether. The temptation, bloody-minded as often it may seem, is to catch these folk at it despite themselves.

Whatever our stance on metaphysics and, with luck, regardless of our ability to articulate such a stance, merely to rummage around behind 'surface' description, bringing contingent, empirical presupposition and

association to the fore, would not appear to be the mandate of poetry, even if some of what passes as poetry may indeed do little else. Something further is required, yet here opinions will again diverge – to no small extent depending upon our views on the limitations of language and the relationship between language and (the possibility of) metaphysics. Those views will influence our reading of Murray, our reading of these poems at hand, and what we take to the hills and take from them. We may even imagine that the converse possibility always holds, regardless of what the authors may have intended or believed and regardless of the 'true' nature of the hills. I cannot tell, for example, what Colin Donati means by 'the wordless/mystery of the mountain' in 'Midsummer Noon in a High Place', although it is conceivable that certain not unreasonable interpretations may influence, if not simply accord with, a reader's metaphysical stance. I take it, however, that Donati may well believe that this and other mountains, more or less supremely, are in some fashion indicative of a further reality – or further aspect of reality – that remains, at least to this point, ineffable. The poem may or may not have been intended to give some inchoate form of expression to that which is ultimate and ultimately inexpressible. This constitutes one view of that 'something further' that is required of poetry and, on one reading of Murray himself, it may appear to coincide with his own views on metaphysics and its relationship to language and to literature. There will be something missing, however, and to this I will turn after noting one, subsidiary, qualification.

By 'The First Day on Buachaille', Murray is writing as follows:

'I knew these hills so very well that they startled me into no transports of ecstasy – not even after long absence – but they had the greater power to bestow a content that I cannot name, save in terms that must seem vague to any one without a practical knowledge of them – the Recollection and the Quiet...It might then be asked whether I mean that mountains are necessary to happiness or to the true completion of any man. Quite to the contrary...They contribute happiness in so far as they elicit a man's love, at first it may be only of themselves, but in the end of the All of which they are just a part.' [5]

This may be chastening to those who have imagined that Murray looked to the hills, perhaps even the Scottish hills, as a supreme symbol of a Greater Reality. Close as he may come to it, and close as the editors of this 'anthology' may come to it, it would be less than fair to attribute to Murray the view, shared by an alarming number of Romantics, that great – in this case, Scottish – mountaineering literature is 'the articulation of some kind of not wholly self-aware spirit within a nation, and worthless unless it is that'. [6]

It is to 'nature' more broadly that Murray directs his own, still Romantic, attention. Again, this broader statement of metaphysical conviction is to be found in 'Effects of Mountaineering on Men'. [7]:

'The way in which beauty, the infinite One, reveals in the symbols of nature the infinite diversity of its life, allows us to glimpse the universe as the outer expression of an inner and spiritual unity: the one as the many and the all as one.'

I will return to the specifically Romantic aspects of Murray's writing and its reliance on symbolism. For now, I want to draw attention to the source of which Murray's adapted chapter title is itself an adaptation – the missing clue to which I alluded above. This, I take it, is the beginning of Hebrews 11 (King James version):

* * *

'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.'

The author of 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', as Karen Armstrong notes[8], was addressing Jewish Christians during a transitional period in Jewish history when, as now, 'the old symbols that once introduced people to a sacred dimension of existence no longer function[ed] so effectively'. With neither the Law nor the symbolism of traditional Temple rites any longer 'speaking' to him of God, Hebrews was composed with the intention of replacing both the Law and the liturgy and imagery of the Temple with Christ, the human 'copy' of God, as the central symbol which might provide Jews with a 'direct link' to the divine. Armstrong summarises:

'In order to work effectively, a symbol has to be experienced as a direct link to the more elusive and transcendent reality to which it directs our attention, but our author can only see the Temple as a human artefact...Now, by virtue of his sacrificial death, Christ had entered into the celestial sanctuary once and for all. He had bypassed the [Temple] symbolism and introduced believers to the sacred Reality itself. For our author, the figure of Christ had become the new symbol that brought humanity to the divine...But, as with any religious symbolism, there were difficulties. Our author is poignantly aware that it is hard to live a religious life without any tangible replicas of the divine here below. Jesus had gone away, into another dimension, and Christians had to have faith in what was unseen.'

On the one hand, it is Christ himself who is 'unseen'; on the other, the symbol of Christ is 'evidence', albeit in far from an empirical sense, of the numinous. Armstrong does not pursue the point, yet we are asked to have faith in the verity of precisely that figure who is to be elevated into the principal symbol that is intended to contribute the greatest substance to our faith. If it is not clear that such a paradox troubled Murray, nor is it clear exactly what he took the relationship to be between the (implicit) symbol of Christ and his more explicitly employed nature symbolism. I

don't doubt that Nature, as 'evidence' of things not seen, was intended to supplement, rather than displace, Christ as such evidence. What remains unspoken is the nature of that supplementarity. Murray took his symbols where he found them, reluctant as we should be to see him appropriated by the neophyte travellers of this indiscriminately eclectic New Age. Just this may follow, however, from the likelihood that he would indeed concur with what is both Armstrong's most crucial and most problematic tenet, namely, that 'we can only speak of the divine in terms of signs and symbols'.

'Since the scientific revolution...Western people have often assumed that 'God' was an objective but unseen reality (like the atom)...[b]ut theology should be regarded as poetry...Theology is merely an attempt to express the inexpressible 'as felicitously as possible'. But...some of our poetic symbols lose their power and immediacy, as our circumstances change.'

Murray's circumstances changed, it might be supposed, quite radically, but without leading him wholly to renounce his pre-war conception, and anticipation, of epiphanic ecstasy. The credendum, though – that we may still attempt to 'eff' the ineffable 'as felicitously as possible' – will remain problematic for those of us who ask further: what (felicitous) criteria could be offered that might establish any such degree of 'felicity'? In what sense is the entire enterprise not question-begging? This question is deferred, if it is noted at all. Instead, what Murray offers in 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen' is an ambiguous retreat from the possibility that God might indeed 'speak' to him directly to a resigned concession that, for him at least, the ineffable has been but faintly 'shown'. The ambiguity derives from the implicit introduction of the further consideration that only a non-linguistic manifestation of sublime Meaning is ever possible for humanity as a whole. The difference may emerge from a reading of the contrast between Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* and Tennyson's *The Vision of Sin:*

> [s]o shalt thou see and hear
> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language which thy God Utters,
> who from eternity doth teach Himself in all,
> and all things in himself.'

But, whereas Murray begins his narrative with Coleridge, he concludes with Tennyson:

> At last I heard a voice upon the slope
> Cry to the summit, 'Is there any hope?
> To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
> But in a tongue no man could understand;
> And on the glimmering limit, far withdrawn,
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.

The Romantic Coleridge, reacting against the burgeoning mechanism of Western science, subscribes to an organicist metaphysics, the language of a kind of which I have already noted in Murray. To this extent, both the Christian and the Romantic in Murray steer well clear of the reductive potential of natural science. But is this 'eternal language' that of the biblical tradition of interior illumination, as Eco puts it, so that 'we must conceive of a language that, although not translatable into any known idiom, is still, through special grace or disposition, comprehensible to its hearer'?[9]

If this is so, it is 'language' prior to the hubris of the tower of Babel, and despite the Judaic world-explanatory model of paternal transgression and sin to which Murray, with only a hint of irony, still subscribes. At odds with this interpretation, without far more by way of reconciliation which Murray does not sufficiently pursue, is the tradition of mystical vitalism which influenced Coleridge.[10]

Recalling Stuart B. Campbell's 'challenge...to collect writing which went a few steps further than merely describing the scenery', consider Berlin on Schelling and Coleridge:

'Any work of art which is simply a copy...simply the product of careful observation – that is death. Life in a work of art is analogous with ...what we admire in nature, namely some kind of power...vitality bursting forth. That is why...the great works...are called great, because we see in them not merely the surface...but also something of which the artist may not be wholly aware, namely the pulsations within him of some kind of infinite spirit of which he happens to be the particularly articulate and self-conscious representative.'

Evidently, this vitalist view is but one version of the Romantic quest for epiphany, one version of the view that understanding - be this of nature or a genuine work of art - must go beyond the simply mimetic or descriptive to some spiritual transfiguration of what is described. I suspect that, on one level, when Murray writes that he lacks the 'quick vision' of Coleridge, we may read this as gentle chiding – again, against further hubris – as well as an indication of modesty. Nonetheless, if God does not 'speak' directly to him, an epiphany of sorts is, to Murray's not wholly Romantic mind, achieved: 'To my unaccustomed eyes the scene at first bore the appearance of unreality; yet the more I gazed, the more surely I knew that I saw not an illusion greater than is usual, but truth made manifest [11]: as though our everyday world had been a dull image in the crystal mirror of Shalott, only here woven on the magic loom by an artist...throwing into high relief the hitherto obscured beauty that underlies the world. Unlike the Lady of Shalott, I failed to break the spell and gaze straight upon the ultimate reality; yet the hills that night were big with it; its signs unmistakable'.

Thus far, there can be little doubt that Murray, however coy, is pursuing some notion of the sublime as that which can be 'shown', if not (yet) said. Questionable as this is in itself, what then could be the difference between

this kind of epiphanic experience and some further possibility that still remains? If Murray's reading of Tennyson's 'a tongue no man could understand' draws an impersonal limit, this is as far as any of us might hope to progress - a consequence of universal human finitude rather than a consequence of any individual failing. Murray does not help us to resolve this ambiguity with further references to Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalot* and to Goethe's *Faust.*

Even discounting standard erotic readings of *The Lady of Shalott,* in which the poet's own idealised female object turns from the passive narcissism of self-contemplation to the Camelot of patriarchal activity, the consequence of the broken spell – the aversion of her gaze from her own static image and the passing shadows of Lancelot – is one of self-annihilation. The gaze 'upon the ultimate reality', the putative source of the Romantic vision, results in the dissolution of the self - in death rather than in a reconciliation through (sexual) sublimation and cosmic 'oneness'. Read in the equally standard terms of Plato's cave and a two-world metaphysical theory of 'true Being' and the 'mere appearances' of the world given to our senses, it might be thought that even Tennyson's poetry remains firmly within the phenomenal world of caverned shadows if art itself can but adumbrate the domain of sensible reality which reflects, we are told, the domain of ideal form. What is 'revealed' to us, through Tennyson's art no less than Murray's, remains appearance.

Two-world Platonism does seem to persist in Murray's 'mystery of the universe, of which the forms of man or mountain may be likened to veils that reveal its being yet mask its very essence [12]. '... Ask Nature what she does and we are answered, as Faust was answered:

So at the roaring loom of Time I ply And weave for God the garment that ye see Him by.'

Again, much as it may be tempting to defer to Murray's implicit claim to a pedigree of metaphysical insight, Goethe's *Faust* does not help to pin him down. *Faust* itself is notoriously replete with syncretic allusions bolted together, not the least of the challenges to interpretation being provided by Goethe's equivocal use both of Christian and of pantheistic imagery and by his ambivalent attempt to reconcile New Testament God of the Word symbolism with Old Testament God of Deed symbolism [13]. 'Faust' (part 1, lines 508-9) reads: 'So schaff ich am sausenden Webstuhl der Zeit/ Und wirke der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid'. The feminine 'Gottheit' is by no means evidently the Christian God, while the identity of the speaker of these lines – der Erdgeist or Earth Spirit, devil and god compounded – is not consistently made apparent either to Faust or to the reader. This is in part the consequence of Goethe's shifting use of symbolism during his re-working of *Faust* in later life, but if Faust himself was unsure of whom he was addressing, and of who responded, it is not clear that Goethe settled the matter for himself. Thus, for Murray to render this as 'ask Nature what she does' is to defer this central question of identity and to leave

Jonathan Baird on 'Wad Valley Pillar' III,5, Canadian Rockies. Photo: Patricia Deavoll.

unresolved the relationship between God and pantheistic or Romanticised Nature (the latter rejected in Goethe's more sober, later stance).

'We snatch in vain at Nature's veil' says the pessimistic Faust (line 672) before the Chorus of Angels, introduced by Goethe out of nowhere, snaps him out of it. By the end of *Faust* (part 2), we are presented with the lines:

'All that must disappear Is but a parable What lay beyond us, here All is made visible.' [14]

Goethe's faith in sublime Meaning – the 'open secret' to which Murray refers – is asserted, however short Faust has in fact fallen of achieving his 'eternal moment', however short Goethe's art falls of epiphany.

* * *

David Craig [15] would prefer to circumvent this heritage of two-world metaphysics entirely. 'No world was withheld', he says to Murray; 'all there was to see, you saw.' Craig baulks at 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen', imagining that Murray has lost sight of 'the earth itself...[for there is] no [ideal] Rock, there are only all the particular rocks that stand up out of...this tangible planet which is our habitat'. Craig is not alone among contemporary readers uncomfortable with Murray's spiritualism. Indeed, by the time of 'Effects of Mountaineering on Men', Murray may seem to be continuing with an unresolved distinction between his understanding of a 'last reality underlying mountain beauty' [16] and the possibility of 'any sensitive and intelligent man...[experiencing that beauty] ...not of something different, nor of greater power. The eye of his soul has been more clear, that is all'. [17] A Christianised Platonism – all that Craig detects – vies with a pantheism that may derive from Spinoza, so that the sense in which God is to be found in the world, if at all, remains opaque.

Oddly, Phil Bartlett [18], while noting Craig's exasperated criticism – albeit without observing that Craig's own position is itself, and despite itself, that of a (one-world theory, materialist) metaphysician, immediately persists with the assertion: 'that mountaineering can produce true visionary experiences is not in doubt. It is only their interpretation which causes discussion'. Fortuitously, Bartlett provides an astonishing example of precisely what is at issue, namely the brute assertion of truth and of meaning in the absence of all interpretation, which is to say, in the absence of language. As with Kant, it might appear that reason must necessarily yield to faith. But Bartlett bypasses the heritage of Kant's autonomous, noumenal subject of transcendental experience and heads straight for the authority of Wittgenstein [19], presented as the first to see theology 'not as a justification or even an explanation of religion but as a symbolic way of expressing what is essentially inexpressible[:] religious experience'. But there are problems with this.

Descent from the Gokyo Lakes, Khumbu Region, Nepal. Photo: David Ritchie.

Granted that the influence of Wittgenstein's early writing was strong enough to have affected Murray at least indirectly, we might consider its core:

'We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched...There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.' [20]

The early Wittgenstein's understanding of what can be 'shown' but not said should not be equated either with the views of the author of Hebrews or with emotive and paradoxically self-possessed Romanticism, but why this is so needs to be noted just as we need also to recall that Wittgenstein later revised his position. While the extent of that revision is still contested, attention to the differences strikes me as providing the most rewarding background against which Murray might now be read.

The passage above, which is strictly meaningless by the early Wittgenstein's own account, rests upon a particular theory of language. This pictorial theory professes to eliminate metaphysics from the domain of meaningful speech by privileging (a rather narrow conception of) the discourse of natural science or 'fact'. Ethics, aesthetics and, indeed, theology, to the extent that these attempt explanatory or justificatory theory, do not meet the criteria of meaningfulness that Wittgenstein ascribes exhaustively to the description of facts. But this is not to say that he would necessarily have baulked at Murray's not wholly ironic or self-effacing remark in 'The Evidence of Things Not Seen': 'let us speak of the unspeakable, for there is no speech so profitable'. Wittgenstein's Tractatus is not to be dismissed as Logical Positivism. Religious language might be nonsense, but still - often enough - 'important' nonsense. [21]

While we may struggle hopelessly against the cage of language, this very struggle may be an 'intimation' of the importance of God – of the World. The same was felt by Wittgenstein of certain poetry and of the adoption of a way of life that combines stoical acceptance of fate with living for others. What is 'shown' in this way of life transcends quotidian 'fact' and hence remains ineffable. But it is also a way of life through which the contingent, linguistic self is dissolved in a greater unity of immanence and transcendence; and in this dissolution our hitherto separate identities become merged with God. However meaningless this must strictly remain, we become God. There is a fine line between piety and hubris.

The pictorial theory relied upon a mystical 'feeling' of the world as a 'limited whole' [22]; such feeling in turn relies upon a prior metaphysical conception of the very possibility of viewing it as such a whole – sub specie aeternitatis. In abandoning this theory of language and, thus far, of 'language' itself as the transcendental ground upon which the mystical/ineffable may be embraced, does the later Wittgenstein [23] nonetheless leave room for 'evidence of things not seen'?

In his later writings, religion (as well as aesthetics and ethics) may appear to remain above all an 'attitude' or way of life rather than theory. While the discourse of 'science' is no longer privileged as uniquely meaningful, it seems that philosophy can still do no more than describe discourse – the various 'language games' played out within contingent and shifting forms of human life. And yet the suggestion is that religious discourse properly described and understood is a matter neither of rationalising belief – for example, by way of cosmological or ontological 'proofs' of God's existence – in order to justify faith, nor of establishing its 'probability', nor indeed of metaphysical theory that would purport to explain 'why there is something rather than nothing' or what the place of humanity in Being might be. Would Murray have concurred? How disingenuous, let alone empirically accurate, is this conception of religion, impervious now to criticism, as a practised way of life divorced from speculative metaphysics? It seems that behind this 'mere' description of (proper) language, the mystical/ineffable still hovers.

* * *

In his foreword to 'Things Not Seen', Campbell quotes Murray's observation that from '[a survey of mountaineering literature] we can hardly fail to observe the frequency with which writers express perceptions of a beauty that baffles their powers of description'.[24] As baffling is Campbell's reluctance to retain the context and point of this observation, namely the accompaniment of such perceptions 'by a certainty of the universal unity or by the premonition [sic] of an ultimate reality, the spiritual ground of things seen'. It does not seem satisfactory to reduce this, as Campbell does, to difficulties in expressing 'feelings aroused by the view', and to supplement this - watering down rather than adding to Murray - with the exhortation to express in addition the 'views, positions and opinions' which we bring to the mountains. No description, poetic or otherwise, can be 'mere' description any more than any human being can experience the 'immediate physicality' of climbing. But this should not lead us to confuse meaning with Meaning, nor lead us to share Murray's neo-Kantian regard for 'the instinct that holds as ineffective and of little true value to man the perception of a beauty in art or nature that does not bring in its train right action'.[25]

Poetry, I believe, is capable of re-formulating the language in which we articulate our understanding of beauty, of meaning, and of our selves-in-relation-to-others. It does not transcend the contingency of our status in the world, allowing us to say that 'this is all that there is; the rest can be but shown'. Even as some poetry may indeed continue with such ostensive aspirations, the attitude of love as an ethical or aesthetic way of life may 'intimate' or 'show' nothing but itself. If this is so, Murray's writing is

invaluable as a record of admirable, even inspiring, but ultimately failed syncretism – a monumental effort to say what cannot be said about 'what cannot be said'.

References and notes:

1. Editor, Stuart B. Campbell; Advisory Editor, Angus Dunn; Aberdeenshire Council, 1999.
2. SMC Journal, Vol. XXIII, No.137, 1946, pp.281-286; *Mountaineering in Scotland,* Ch. 22.
3. This is a re-working of *The Last Day on Buachaille* which appeared in *SMC Journal* Vol. XXIII, no. 133 (April 1942).
4. Published along with Mountaineering Scotland in one volume by Bâton Wicks, 1997.
5. 'Undiscovered Scotland', p. 14.
6. These words are taken from Isaiah Berlin's 'The Roots of Romanticism', Chatto & Windus, 1999, p. 99. Berlin's is a more wide-ranging discussion of anti-Enlightenment doctrines of art concerned with the 'value' of 'the unconscious or sub-conscious or pre-conscious element in the work either of the individual artist or of a group, a nation, a people, a culture'.
7. 'Undiscovered Scotland', p. 225.
8. Introduction to 'the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Hebrews', Canongate, 1999. Armstrong herself does not subscribe to the view that St Paul was the author of Hebrews.
9. Umberto Eco, 'Serendipities: Language and Lunacy', Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 24. See also Murray's 'Cairngorm Blizzard', 'Mountaineering in Scotland', p. 221: 'We felt the gross illusion that here were the only realities of a mechanistic universe - bleak rocks, bitter wind, snow, and withering cold'.
10. Berlin, 'The Roots of Romanticism, pp. 97-99. That I know of, the most instructive historical treatment of Romanticism's epiphanic theme more generally is to be found in Charles Taylor's 'Sources of the Self', Harvard University Press, 1989, in particular parts IV and V.
11. The theme has already commenced in 'Twenty-four Hours on the Cuillin', 'Mountaineering in Scotland', p. 4.
12. Compare Keats' 'Written Upon the Top of Ben Nevis': '...mist is spread/ Before the earth, beneath me,.../...all my eye doth meet/ Is mist and crag, not only on this height,/ but in the world of thought and mental might!'
13. See Marshall Berman's 'All That Is Solid Melts Into Air', Penguin, 1988, p. 47. Again, if Goethe's attempt to reconcile the life of contemplation with the life of action in a redemptive 'Faust' fails to convince, it is unlikely that Murray's reliance upon the attempt will result in greater conviction.
14. Philip Wayne's Penguin translation has 'Here the ineffable/ Wins life through love'.
15. 'Native Stones', Pimlico, 1996, pp. 135-41. It is not evident that Craig's protests would suffice to stave off Murray's charge of bleak 'mechanism'.
16. 'Mountaineering in Scotland', p. 4.
17. 'Undiscovered Scotland', p. 223.
18. 'The Undiscovered Country', The Ernest Press, 1993, p. 111.
19. Ibid., p.113.
20. 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus' (first English edition 1922), Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, proposition 6.522.
21. A more detailed recent account may be found in Brian R. Clack's 'An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion', Edinburgh University Press, 1999. If Murray is read in the light of early Wittgenstein, this would place him within the school of what Clack, at p. 48, nicely terms 'Logical Romanticism'. Again, however, we are obliged to reconcile the view that there is no value within the world of 'facts' with the view that the world and God are One.
22. 'Tractatus', 6.45.
23. A more detailed discussion of the contrasts between transcendental and 'detranscendentalized' conceptions of philosophy and language in Wittgenstein may be found in 'Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the reification of language', in Richard Rorty's 'Essays on Heidegger and others', Cambridge University Press, 1991.
24. This appears in 'Undiscovered Scotland', pp. 222-3. 25. Ibid., p. 222.

BRIDGING THE GAP

By P. J. Biggar

'I have seen you, You have told me your story.' J. Conrad *Chance.*

ME AN' JONO really stormed up to the hut, man! Jeez it was a great evening! April. There'd been this big snowfall that week, Ben was just like a Christmas Cake and there was Tower Ridge rearing right up above us! That was the one we wanted, me and Jono. He'd never been to the Ben before, in fact he'd never done a winter route before, though he'd got all the gear mind. Me, I done a bit in the Lakes and a couple of gullies on Snowdon, but I reckoned we'd be okay. After all, lots of idiots get up Tower Ridge most weekends in winter don't they?

Tell you what, it's a bit technical getting into that hut the first time. We were standing there fiddling with that metal grille thing for ages, it's a bit like a portcullis on some old castle. Jono's fingers were going white and he was shivering. We should've been sensible and put something on when we were coming up, but we just kept going, the hut seemed so near. Anyhow, we were faffing about there and getting nowhere fast, when these old guys turned up! One of them was old enough to be my Dad, tall, wiry-looking chap with a bit of a stoop and some grey hair left.

'Well boys,' he says, 'having trouble? Let's have a wee look...' Well spoken he was, a Scotsman. Probably a lawyer in Edinburgh. The little fellow, his mate, didn't say much, but I reckoned he was from Devon or somewhere way south. He had strong hands and a big chest, the little bloke, as though he worked on a building site. He was old too, but not so old as the tall guy, his hair hadn't gone grey yet and he wasn't using sticks.

They had us into that hut before you could say Jackknife, and it was as well too 'cos Jono's teeth were starting to chatter, and I didn't feel none too smart either. Know what? It was colder in the hut than it was outside! Jono collapsed on a bench and just sat there; he was a horrible colour. But them two old guys bustled around lighting stoves and putting kettles on. The tall one, his name was Mac, opened a sort of cupboard at the end of the porch place; he bent down and I could hear him striking matches.

'If you're cold,' he says to Jono, 'just stand in there for a bit. The Three Witches'll soon warm you up!'

'Aha,' says I, 'that must be the famous drying room?'

'That's it,' says he and grinned, 'the best in the country bar none.'

He was right too; half-and-hour later Jono came through to the main room looking a bit human again.

Well, we sat round this old black stove drinking tea out of little white cups, that is, the three of us drank tea:

'Young Harvey here,' says Mac, 'is the only member of the construction industry who never drinks tea, isn't that right Harvey?'

'I never could stand tea,' said the other, so quiet you couldn't hardly hear him. 'I don't know why, just never could.'

'His only other vice is, he doesn't drink whisky ,'says Mac. 'But rum's a different matter, eh Harve?'

'I like a drop o' rum,' said Harvey getting up from the table and heading for his basket, 'as a matter of fact...'

'As for women,' Mac bent towards us and winked, 'he out-paramour's the Turk!'

'Well I'll be blowed!' says Harvey and grins sheepishly. He didn't look like the womanising type to me. Not like Jono with his curly blonde hair and winning smile; he can pull them and no mistake. I've kept Linda well out of his way, you bet your sweet life!

They were close too, them old guys. Just sat there drinking quietly and passing the odd comment every now and then. Mac had a good look through the hut book to see what'd been done. I asked them what they were thinking of doing.

'No idea,' says Mac. 'We'll just see what the day brings.' But presently he went out quietly into the porch place and we could hear him rattling metal-ware as he packed his sack. Harvey just sat there spreading his pieces as he called them. Something told me he didn't have as much experience as Mac; he seemed sort of like an apprentice, bit like Jono and me I suppose. But I guessed those two were up for something big as well. Shortly afterwards, other guys started to come in and I lost sight of Mac and Harvey. They just melted away quietly into the shadows. When we staggered outside in the morning, oh man! It was one of those days you dream about! No wind, sun, snow! Guys were toiling up from the valley so we didn't waste time. There was just one set of footprints but they went straight on, and the gully you go up was virgin, man. I knew the way 'cos I'd been there once before when we came up with the Scouts from my school in Southend. 'Course that was in the summer – camped in Fort Bill. God, the midges! Mr Murphy was going to take us up the Ridge that day, but Fatty Jamieson got stuck and started blubbering and Mr Murphy had to climb down and shut him up, and in the end we all had to go back down. Anyway, that first chimney is no joke in winter. I was shaking like a leaf when I got to the top and Jono's eyes were out on stalks when I hauled him over the edge.

What a place! This huge ridge all coated with snow and dripping with ice, and we had it all to ourselves! I told Jono all about Fatty Jamieson and Mr Murphy and we started laughing like a couple of school kids.

Well, we soloed the next bit – it's just a walk – and guess what? I see this neat little row of steps appear out of nowhere. They go twisting on up the ridge and we followed them. We come to quite a steep chimney with some ice in it, but Jono, he says: 'Look, Chris the steps go round the

corner, let's follow them.' So we did, and there was a nice easy-angled shelf, much easier than the chimney, and the little steps went right up it. It wasn't as easy as it looked mind, 'cos there was a lot of fresh snow. Jono's hands got cold again and I made him put his mitts on. But it saved us a lot of time. And the steps went on and we followed them. We were really yomping along and it felt great!

Soon, the bit they call the Little Tower starts looming over us and Jono starts looking a bit nervous. You always know when he's worried 'cos he plugs his Walkman in. Between ourselves, I'd been a bit worried about this bit too, 'cos the route finding's a bit dodgy hereabouts, but our luck was right in, mate! Those little steps just went winding on upwards. I could even see where whoever it was had belayed and it was bomber! We got the second rope out, and I set off. Not easy, man. Good III. Cracker of a pitch! Good gear too and I could see just where he'd placed it as the snow was all scuffed. I was going well and getting near the top when I heard it! Someone was bloody singing! And I knew the number! My uncle Pat used to play the old piano in a little band – trad jazz and all that old wallops.

'Cold empty bed...springs hard as lead,' comes floating down from above, so I joins in with 'Just like Old Ned...wish't I was dead.' And we both gave it all we'd got in the final lines: 'What did I do, to be so black and blue?' And I smashed my picks in and scrambled over the top and, of course, it was old Mac, standing there in the snow in his tattered red cagoule and paying out the rope old-style, round his waist.

'Very good!' says he. 'You know your jazz.' And he handed me a KitKat. To me, he looked like someone who'd just led a pitch he'd been a bit worried about before. The singing was sort of a release. Well, we chatted away, merry as larks, till at one point he looks round to see where Harvey has got to, and his mood changed just like that.

'Harvey!' he bawls. 'You're off route, man! Go right! RIGHT!' And he gestured with his arm. But it was too late. Young Harvey, as Mac called him, had set his mind on going left; even I could see it was steep and slabby and led nowhere. 'He just follows his nose!' Mac complained to me. 'I shouldn't have let him go on – I was tired you know – he's good on rock but he's never been on a big winter route before, and he doesn't know the ground...' his voice trailed off in despair. 'You'd better wait till we've sorted this out.'

'Well I'll be blowed!' comes drifting down from above.

I brought Jono up and we must've stood there an hour before them two old codgers got back on route. It looked real hairy too! Poor Harvey had to climb back down out of the little cave he'd got himself into. Old Mac, he climbs right up to just under him – and he takes out all the gear! Then he climbs back to the crest of the ridge. Little Harvey did well too, climbs down cool as you like, but it all took time. I reckon the old guy was boiling inside, but there was no shouting, nor agro, nor nothing. But just fancy!

Taking out all your mate's gear! I reckon he just stopped thinking for a bit.

Do you know, even when we got up the next bit, we were still glad to follow their steps. It wasn't direct at all. We went round some huge powdery blocks and along a little ledge over not very much. The weather was changing by this time; the wind was picking up; the sun had gone, and the cloud was starting to come down.

Mac wasn't singing any more when we caught them up. He was hunched up over a hot drink – Harvey had a flask with him. The rime was sticking to Mac's grey hair which poked out under his orange helmet – I reckon it was his only bit of new gear – and his face looked sort of haggard. Little Harvey was stuffing a sandwich. He didn't look none too bright either, and he was saying even less than usual. Mac just waves us through: 'Go on boys,' he says, 'we've kept you back.' Oh, sure, it was decent of them an' all that, but they didn't need to do it. They'd saved us as much time as they'd cost us. But then, p'raps they were a bit fagged? They were getting on a bit. Anyway, we didn't need telling twice, and we forged ahead towards the Great Tower which was coming in and going out of the clagg. It looked just AWESOME!

'Course, by this time, other people were starting to arrive. I stood for ages at the end of the Eastern Traverse while Jono went on round the corner, and a bloody great queue built up behind me. Mac and Harvey turned up, and then a whole troop of Northerners arrived from God knows where! You could tell little Harvey didn't like the crowds. He just sat there sort of sunk into himself, but Mac fussed around and made him take a proper belay an' that.

It was starting to snow a bit by now, and I was just thinking 'where the f . . . has Jono got himself to?' when the rope comes tight. Old Mac he tucks in close behind me and we stepped along good-style. Piece of piss that Traverse thing, especially if you don't look down. I paused to whip Jono's runner off and Mac he stops to put one on. 'See you presently,' says he. When I got round the corner there was this huge thing the size of a house. I think sometimes you can get under it – I've seen photos – but now it was all snowed in. There was just this little passage up to the right, and Jono was up there looking real pleased, but dead worried at the same time, if you know what I mean. 'Where do we go now?' he says.

I was scrabbling about trying to get the guidebook out of my sack when old Mac comes ambling along. 'Up there,' he says, and points. And sure enough, there's this little chimney. 'There's a wall,' Mac says. 'It's steep for 20ft., but then it eases off. You two carry on up. We've nearly cracked it boys,' he says, 'but we'll need to get a move on, there's not hellish much light left.'

When we got up to that wall I thought he was having us on! Steep or what? Man, it was vertical! And there was nothing on it, just bare rock! I looked back down the chimney to where Mac was hunched up against the

wall. I shouted down to him. He just pointed straight up, I could see the flash of teeth as he grinned.

Christ it was hard! I nearly came off a couple of times, but desperation got me up. I dragged Jono up on a tight rope. He was near out of his mind with it, but when he'd calmed down a bit he staggered on to have a look at the Gap.

Down below, in the shadows, I could hear someone hammering metal. Then there was a lot of puffing and grunting, and eventually, old Mac was looking up at me; he looked really pooped, man! He was pleased as punch to get up to where I was. He gets out this tatty old yellow sling, puts it round a block, runs the rope through the krab and forgets to tie back into it!

'Thanks Chris,' says he. 'I must be getting old. That was an awful lot harder than I remember it.' He shouts down for Harvey to some on, but nothing much happens. 'He probably can't get the peg out,' says Mac, and he takes in the rope as hard as he can.

The wind was getting up a bit, and we stood hunched over looking down at our feet. I had plakkies, yetties and snap-ons. Mac's crampons looked like Mallory had worn them on Everest! The points were all ground down to nothing. Leather boots, naff canvas gaiters with holes. He had breeches on too, and his socks had slipped down; you could see bare flesh. You don't get that with salopettes. He turns towards me: 'Remember,' he says, 'when you get down into the Gap, you don't need to climb straight up the other side. There's a shelf to the left; it's usually easier.' Just then another head popped up below us, but it wasn't Harvey. Some of the Northerners must've climbed through him. Mac was angry. I could hear him cursing under his breath. My rope came tight and I could hear Jono shout. With a quick 'see you' to Mac I set off.

Along at the Gap it was like crazy, man! There were people everywhere. These teams kept coming up out of this steep chimney on the right. There was ropes crossed and swearing and shouting! I looked down sort of carefully, 'cos it's very exposed, and there were still more people coming up. Jono was down in the Gap, just about jammed against the rock behind two great big Northerners. There was another two trying to climb the other side. One of them was standing on the other's head! The cloud had lifted a bit by this time, but the light was going fast. I thought: 'Bugger this!' And I slithered down to Jono. He looked pretty grim; his Walkman was going full blast; you could hear it hissing. I ripped the plug out of his ear.

'This is going to take ages!' he wails. 'And, hey Chris, guess what, I think I've forgotten my head-torch!' That decided it! Something had to be done quick. I wormed my way behind one of the Northerners and threw our ropes down the other side of the Gap to keep them out the way. Then I got a quick gander at Mac's shelf. The light was coming from the other side and it was all in shadow.

'You'll not get oop there!' grunted one of the Northerners. 'This is the way, int'it Albert?'

'Aye, lad,' said Albert. 'But there's nowt on it see? We'll have t'try castin' rope in a minute...'

I sidled up the first few moves. It felt none too secure and I started shaking. There was a lot of loose snow on the rock and a big drop to the left. As I looked along the ledge a little something caught my eye. There was a peg. If only I could get to it we might be okay. It was as well Jono was still awake, man! 'Cos no sooner had I clipped that peg than both my feet come off! I was really pumped now and I managed to find a couple of good placements and swing myself over. I fairly shot up back to the crest of the ridge.

I got one glimpse down to the valley and the sea was all turning red. I could hear all them Northerners along at the Gap, and I brought Jono up as quick as I could. Poor old Mac was standing on the other side of the Gap by now, just a little dark figure in the twilight. He gave me a big wave, then the cloud swirled in.

There wasn't much left, but we roped it all the way.

'This is better than SEX!' bawls Jono. 'Hey Chris! We did it! Tower Ridge!' We was all hugging each other and dancing about! Then it struck us. We still had to get down. And it was cold and gnarly and really dark, and Jono had forgotten his torch! He was all for finding that summit shelter thing and sitting it out, but me? I was still pumped and I reckoned we could get down that Number Four Gully, if only we could find it.

Well, we struggled along, this screaming wind in our faces, falling over the rope and catching our crampons on rocks. Sometimes you couldn't see your hand in front of your face it was that bad. Jono put his foot right through something and I had to haul him back. We was pretty well gone when something glinted in the torchlight. You Little Beauty! This tiny aluminium marker with the number four punched in holes! It was only just poking up through the snow. If we'd been in cloud just then, we'd have missed it sure as fate.

I edges over to have a look down, and Jono comes too.

'I'm not going down there, mate!' he says. Next moment we both were, but not the way we meant! Swoosh! When we picked ourselves up and found nothing broken – 'cept Jono's Walkman – we started laughing fit to bust and couldn't stop.

It just took forever to get back to the hut. The main room was all cosy and warm in the gaslight. There was a good crowd in. Mac and Harvey were talking quietly at the far end of the table and drinking red wine out of an old plastic bottle. They looked totally knackered, man! Mac told us they'd abbed off to avoid the snarl up in the Gap.

It's a pity for young Harvey,' says he. 'He hadn't done the route before.'

Know what? I felt sorry for them poor old farts! I even offered them a drink...

RELUCTANT PERSISTENCE

By Rob Milne

SKREETCH! went my crampons. 'I'll bet that scared Rab!' I thought, 'It scared the hell out of me!' I quickly wedged myself back into the slippery V-groove. Why was I scared and where had that fun climbing mood gone?

The fun atmosphere was there in the morning as we stood in the warm sunshine at the base of Gangway on the Cobbler, debating what to do. Water was dripping down the dark rock walls, and with the lack of wind, the sunshine was warm and relaxing. The weather was too nice not to climb. We were reluctant to do the route, but also persistent enough to want to give it a try. Although the steep rock walls were dark and bare, the climbing line was well snowed up. The ledges were white like whipped cream on the tiers of a cake, and white snow oozed out of the crack like foam cavity insulation. We hummed and hawed for 20 minutes. For years we had passed below the crack, stopping and looking closely, turning our heads as if to hear it whisper an invitation.

We couldn't think of a good excuse not to try the line and we couldn't think of any other line to try (the Cobbler is now climbed-out in winter).

Reluctantly, Rab slotted a fist jam and pulled up under the overhanging start. A high tool placement gave him no excuses, but the trouble of placing a good nut almost did. A few minutes of persistence was enough for success and he stepped back down.

We weren't committed to the route yet. The first moves were slightly overhanging and harder than expected. Getting gear was hard. Do we give up or try again? More sunbathing. Two climbers pass by and mumble about us being crazy, we promise we are just having a look. I could see that Rab's mind was locked onto the route in spite of his lack of commitment. Up he went again.

He must have leaned on one arm for 15 minutes trying to get a nut in. From 20 years of climbing together, I knew what he was thinking. 'Focus on gear, then move up. Never back down.' But maybe we should just call it quits for the day? No, The crack looks superb. Focus on gear. His crampon points were only just above my head and I could hear the tone of his grunts. 'Was this worth doing? How long should I try? Why is it so hard to get this damn nut in?' To commit to the route or not, that was our dilemma. It is so much easier when you are high on a route and know you have to do it.

When he got the nut in, he had no choice but to move higher. The feeling of adventure – not knowing the outcome of the day, was high. Each time he reached up and cleared more snow, it seemed that he wouldn't get gear and would have to come down. Failure was always five minutes away.

After another hour of 'Watch me' and, 'I'm still trying to find some gear' and, 'This will be easy if I can just get some gear', Rab finally pulled around a corner and finished the pitch.

It felt good to move up and put my nose right against the crack. I had stared at the crack for many hours. Certainly, for the last two hours. And all during the snowstorm when we did the first winter ascent of N'gombi. I had developed a craving to slot my tools into its small folds and become intimate with its curves and depths. Up I went, first a fist jam, then a high hook, feet delicately and precisely placed on a small ledge. I get great pleasure from sliding my pick gently into a thin crack and leaning back. Feeling the shaft bend and then hold firm as the pick locks against the side of the crack. Unlike thin rock climbing, it feels like I am pulling up on a bar, helped by the wrist loop. I rearrange my feet on small ledges and feel the comfortable stretching of my calf muscles. At least half my muscles are in use at once, stretching and straining together. Generating warmth and fitness.

For 15 minutes, this mixed climbing was great. But when caressing a nut from a crack changed to a seemingly pointless struggle, my mood changed.

My left forearm was totally pumped. I had no idea what my crampon points were on. They had gone through the shallow layer of snow and stuck to something. As long as I don't move my ankles, they should stay put. Easier said than done when trying to jerk a wire out with your right hand. 'How am I going to do this?' I thought in panic. 'Fingers in the crack? Try the other hand? What can I use for a secure placement? Are my feet going to pop? If I hold on with the right, can I shake out my left arm?'

No wonder Rab had wanted me to watch him here. From somewhere out of the uncertainty, determination eased out. Concentrate. Focus. Think. Slowly I worked on the nut again. I was surprised my left arm was pumped and reassured myself that I was too strong for it to let me down. I have often found that such lies work. Stupid arms. Stupid head!

With the nut out, the next moves came into my focus. A rubbery arm, bad placements, a steep corner, and just above a huge ledge. So close to paradise and in so much trouble. Why can't I think how character building these situations are when I am in them? I knew I had to move and before I got more tired. Pull straight down, place the feet carefully and move in balance. Enjoy the strain of the muscles and most of all, trust that rope! Trust the rope, that was it – the concept that let me relax. I leaned out on a dodgy placement and reached high. Careful arrangement of my centre of gravity and delicate movements. 'Slow and steady' yielded a locker placement. I could now look forward to the hot aches on the comfort of the ledge.

Rab took ages to get started on the next pitch. It was a narrow V-shaped chimney and not at all secure. Classically unfriendly, and inviting at the same time. It didn't look hard, but he made a lot of fuss about it. Once into the narrow chimney, though, he didn't have many problems with the rest of the pitch.

My turn. I pulled up and into the V-groove with the grace of an albatross taking off. There wasn't much to hold onto, but my youth was spent wiggling up wide cracks and narrow chimneys. A shoulder to the right, a hip to the left. Palm down and elbow against the wall. The ice along the bottom permitted a solid pull with my tool and I could wiggle up to the chimney section.

I am not sure when my mood changed from comfortable to desperate.

I wasn't that tired, the chimney was wide, but just right for my size. My feet weren't on much, but I didn't need much. I had a solid axe placement. The only thing missing was my confidence. And I couldn't see it, or any foot ledges.

I pulled the pick onto a solid hook in the blocky overhang. I just wasn't comfortable. No other reason or excuse. I wasn't trying to settle down, but I wasn't happy being unhappy. The hardest obstacle in climbing was with me, unhappy for no reason. I climbed as fast as I could. I worried, but had solid placements. I was worried that I would get tired, but I wasn't even straining myself. That inner calm and comfort seemed to have gone walk about. Was I unsure? Was I reluctant? I wasn't even thinking. I wasn't in a panic, just not happy.

I persisted and let technique drive me upwards. A tool in the lip of the overhang. A solid horizontal placement for my pick. Leaning against the slippery wall, but with feet on small undulations of the other wall. Fiddle with swapping placements in the top of the overhang and make a powerful pull and turn. Wham! My tool was into turf and I floated up the rest of the pitch.

The mood of desperation was still dominant as Rab handed me the rack. I definitely didn't feel like more adventure. But it was my turn to lead. I swallowed and blocked myself from thinking about it. I glanced up briefly to fix the problems into my mind. It looked awful. Rab and Tom had done this pitch on the first winter ascent of Fold Direct. 'It isn't as bad as it looks,' Rab calmed me. 'The big groove is only a couple of moves. And the roof above has big flakes to grab.'

I worked mechanically to get the first nut placement. Normally, a happy calm descends while I concentrate. It was taking its time. I placed a nut and bridged over the first step. The excellent gear and making the moves well gave my confidence a boost. 'Any time now,' I hinted to my calm. But the reluctance was still winning.

After placing a secure Friend, I moved into the bottom of the groove, and swallowed hard. A couple of moves? Sandbag! It looked pretty high.

I shifted the huge rack to my left side so that it wouldn't get stuck in the groove, but that didn't help. The groove still looked hard.

I always laughed at the movies with sporting themes when the coach said: 'Focus!' What the hell did that mean? I can't imagine thinking about last Friday's party in the middle of a short race. But the meaning became clear as I balanced into the bottom of the V-groove. My mind was a blank, except for puzzling over where I would get gear, and how smooth the left wall looked. There was a thick layer of cruddy snow covering the wide corner crack. I wedged myself into the base and cleared the snow. The crack was too wide for the gear I had. Reluctantly, I squiggled a little higher and dug again.

Now I understood focus. My mind was blank, except for working out how to get some gear. The moves didn't matter, the nice atmosphere was forgotten and last Friday's party was history. I decided to try higher and stepped up with one crampon point on a small ledge the width of my thumb. Unfortunately, with the wide crack and cruddy snow, my tools were not at all secure.

But I was still focused. Nothing else was in my mind. I held in a precarious position and tried a wire. Then another wire, then another wire. Persistence. Wide cracks were my favourite, the weather was good, Rab was just below and the moves were not hard. My calf started to burn a bit, but I knew I could stand forever on it.

And then my foot slipped. Skreetch! The vacuum of thoughts that I called focus got filled in a hurry. 'The last gear is a long way down. This isn't secure at all. None of these damn nuts fit. I haven't had lunch.' The fear that I thought I had left at the base of the groove was back with me. I pulled hard and struggled to wedge myself back into the corner. I did not want to do this.

I took a deep breath and went back to work. It would have been better if I thought about last Friday's party, since worry was now the dominant thought. Reluctantly, I persisted more. I tried clearing the crack more. I tried more nuts. Nothing was working. I moved my foot, but the holds were tiny. I couldn't stay wedged against the icy walls for ever. But I was trained well enough not to move up, even though two more moves would have me over the top. I slipped again and quickly wedged myself back into the groove. Time to make a decision.

'Rab,' I called down, 'I don't think I can do this.'

'In that case we are abbing off,' he shouted up, with a tone of resignation and a hint of disgust.

'Bastard,' I thought. He knows how to kick a guy when he is down (or not up).

Reluctantly, back to work. The focus was back. Somehow I was a bit higher and a perfect nut placement was surprisingly in reach. I expected a wave of relief. I thought I would smile. I waited for that relaxed feeling of

happiness you get when you find a 'Thank God' hold. No emotions at all, just the blank feeling of focus. Almost effortlessly I moved my foot onto a higher wee hold, shifted an axe onto something flat, but not secure, and moved a few inches higher.

Wham! I nailed the turf with my right tool and pulled up. I didn't even look down at the groove, I had left too much fear behind and didn't want it to come chasing me up the next section.

The relief still didn't come as I moved under the overhanging final obstacle of the pitch. The chockstones looked easy, but they blocked the chimney with a 4ft. roof. I didn't enjoy arranging gear. I didn't find relief in another bomber nut. I didn't feel anything. For me, leading is often this way. Like when your fingers freeze and then the hot aches come. No feeling, then too much feeling. But at least after leading the feeling is a good one. Somewhere inside I knew that the good feeling would come. For now, I concentrated on working out the roof.

It was taking too long to figure out the moves. I looked at it from the left, nothing. I looked at it from the right, nothing. The gear was at my feet and the fear was rising. I wanted to stop.

Reluctantly, I poked some more. Eureka! One can sling the lip of the roof like a chockstone. A short game of throw the sling through the hole and I had bomber gear at head level. A smirk developed. I hooked a tool at the lip. 'Bomber,' I thought. A smile developed.

I needed to swing out from under the roof and onto the left wall, holding with only my left arm. 'Awesome,' I thought. 'Put those muscles to work. Look at the cool chimney/groove system below. This is going to be an impressive move.'

With a big smile I almost floated around the chockstone and into the turf above. I didn't bother to clear the lovely white snow to find gear, I just placed my crampon points on a tiny ledge and stood up. This mixed climbing is almost as much fun as last Friday's party. Elated, I stepped into an alcove and set an anchor.

Rab came up quickly and effortlessly. Marvelling at the speed he had climbed, I tried to remember the hard moves. Gradually, I realised there weren't any. The problems were all trying to get gear and feeling gripped at the same time. But I had persisted and done it. And it felt good.

Success seemed to be just around the corner. If we complete this route, that will be 20 winters since Rab and I first did a new route together, a long partnership that has seen the rise of modern hard mixed climbing.

I stepped out from under the roof and gazed up a white, turfy groove. 'Home free,' I shouted with relief. Our persistence, no matter how reluctant, had paid off again.

Note: First winter ascent of Gangway (VI,7), The Cobbler, by Rob Milne and Rab Anderson. This pair first made a new winter ascent 20 years ago.

IN THE SOUTH GHOST

Legend says men's bones have lain here.
Fugitives from ancient battle,
a howling ghost devoured their flesh.
This place is aptly named.

Now it is the trees that fight a hard battle and win a narrow victory
on thin soil beneath frescoed grey and yellow walls of rock.
The riverbed is a gravel desert.
Bleached broken stumps stand in the cracked clay of the dry lakebed.
Grey ice on the frozen lakes stretches westward to the distant mountains.
Dust clouds rise in the cold wind.

Up in the dry canyon we thread through polished walls of scoured rock,
or over shifting stones, feet sparing the small tentative trees.
Scents of sulphur and juniper.
The canyon winds upwards, rock walls surround us, bare of snow.
And then, a blue-white braid appears, stark against the rock.
Ice is alien in this place.

This is a coy climb. It twists and hides. Steep brittle falls of ice
are linked by thin white ribbons laid on black slabs of rock.
Strike gently where you can.
There is nothing but sky and rock and this thread of ice,
one single way leading us up across the grey-black rock.
The sun salutes our folly.

At last, a steep ice-wall, the final twist and the route's grand joke.
A fringe of icicles drops its glittering shower ten metres through the air.
No one will hang from this gibbet today.
We feel no disappointment. The route to this high amphitheatre
has been reward enough. We sit in the sun and are content.
The mountain cups us in its hand.

Down the ropes at last, treading delicately on the fragile ribbons,
striding down the brittle walls, dropping suddenly into shadow.
Silence and chill enfold us.
Down through the canyon's gut and the labyrinth of the forest.
Trudging the desert of the valley floor beneath the high walls.
Coyote prints in the drifted powder.

Tree-fractured moonlight, smell of wood smoke,
laughter and talk in two languages.
Embers fade while memory burns.
Go to the Ghost and it will haunt you.

R. T. Richardson.

The South Ghost (more correctly The Ghost Lakes) is a popular ice-climbing area in the Ghost Wilderness of eastern Alberta. The (uncompleted) climb, with a French and Canadian team, was Lacy Gibbet.

THE SEA OF TRANQUILLITY

By Cliff Smith

IT HAD been a good winter. Conditions, while not brilliant, had been reasonable, but more importantly I'd always been in the right place at the right time. The routes I'd done had all been memorable for all the right reasons. The combination of climb and companion had left that satisfying feeling I get when everything feels right. The whole winter had been right; even when I got it wrong it felt right.

Yes it had been a good winter and long too. I enjoyed routes well into April, even the beginning of May yielded climbs of character, quality and condition.

As the days lengthened and colour returned to the landscape my thoughts turned to summer. It's one of the great joys of Scottish mountaineering that the passing seasons bring so much variety, challenge and adventure. It had been many years since I'd had such a good snow and ice season and yet now I was looking forward to what the summer had to promise. But winter was not finished with me yet. I'd gone up to Glen Coe for the day with three friends, a familiar drive north via Callander and Crianlarich, and a familiar day padding around familiar hills. A beautiful early summer day, one of those days that we all know and love, one which exercises the body and cleanses the mind.

I can't remember much about the day to be honest; it was as uneventful as it was enjoyable. I do remember the unusually large amounts of snow lying at quite low altitudes, especially as we were now fast approaching June. I sat and enjoyed the situation over a sandwich and a flask, revelling in the beauty and simplicity of my surroundings, not really aware that the first germ of an idea had already been sown.

That seed was well watered on the return journey. As we sped south towards Edinburgh, tired bodies relaxed, the conversation ranged far and wide; from previous days out to future plans. If the bodies were tired the imaginations were most certainly not. As we traversed Rannoch Moor the sky was clear and the moon bright; brilliant stars shone and the great shapes of magnificent hills rose in the distance. I think all of us were lost in that state of fatigue mixed with contentment that overtakes you after a good day in the mountains. That mellow combination had a tight grip of me and I was happily immersed in my own inward thoughts.

It was then that I began to become aware of words around me. It felt like a dream but I recognised the voice. Suddenly, my peace was gone, as I struggled to get my brain into gear. I felt tension and anger flood into me; this all felt so foreign and unwanted. Then I saw it, Ben Lui massive and brooding in the darkness, beautifully lit; lit so beautifully that my

inner calm returned almost instantly. It wasn't just the sight of this fine mountain that was causing the stir; it couldn't have been – we'd all seen it so many times before. No, the real reason for the excitement was there for us all to see, a thin ribbon of snow running straight up the middle of its huge face. I could hardly believe my eyes, Ben Lui's Central Gully complete. I fumbled in the dark for the light on my watch to check the date, sure enough it's June, unbelievable. Now I was not the only one in the car that night that was wide awake, the whole car buzzed with excitement. Central Gully complete, this was an opportunity far too good to miss.

I ached for the car to stop, to get my boots on and to set out into that clear, bright night. I imagined cramponing up crisp hard snow uncluttered with ropes, moving up uncomplicated ground to reach the superb climax of the summit at the very head of the climb. It felt like I already knew the climb; I have a well-thumbed copy of Murray's *Mountaineering in Scotland* and *Undiscovered Scotland,* not the originals you understand but the reprint (it's signed though, and one of my most treasured possessions). I love the cover of that book, it so perfectly sets the scene for the read, framing the text that has been a source of so much inspiration to me. I'd dreamt of Ben Lui's Central Gully ever since I first got that book and here is my opportunity, as exciting as it is unexpected. My thoughts came to a grinding halt as I realised that we had just passed the turn off to Cononish. I could not believe what I was hearing. I heard but could not comprehend; talk of having to get up for work in the morning, of waiting families and dinners in ovens. I tried to persuade my companions to reconsider, to seize the moment, to live for the present but to no avail. The tarmac continued to speed beneath me and I spent the remainder of the journey in a dark and silent mood.

It gnawed away at me all night, how could I have let such an opportunity slip away so easily? I cursed my lack of ability in the spoken word, how I envied the world's great orators, people who could persuade others to move mountains for the cause. Me, I failed to stop a Renault Espace from stopping at Tyndrum!

I went to bed that night with a deep sense of frustration; sleep did not come easily. When I awoke my mind immediately returned to Ben Lui. I knew it was there, I knew it was in good condition, I knew I'd never done Central Gully before. Over breakfast I listened, as usual, to the radio. The weather forecast came on and I found myself hearing them predicting continued high pressure with cold stable conditions for the early part of the week with things deteriorating by the weekend. They also forecast a big rise in temperature; if I wanted to do this climb I would have to move and move fast.

I spent the morning on the phone to no avail. Everyone I spoke to was either at work or had other commitments, nobody was able to take time

off midweek at such short notice. Undisturbed by this I resolved to go alone, and began to plan my trip. Dead easy I thought to myself, early start from home, a pleasant drive to Tyndrum, cycle along the track to Cononish, stash the bike, blast the route, whizz back home in time for tea, bingo!

But somehow that didn't feel right, it just didn't feel right. It wasn't what I did and it wasn't how I went about mountaineering. Being in the mountains meant more than rushing and doing and ticking and chasing. I knew what was missing; it was people. It was everyone I'd ever gone to the mountains with and it was everyone I wanted to go to the mountains with in the future. I'd tried everyone though and nobody was free. I'd just have to go on my own. I knew I didn't want to but I had no option. Only I did.

It came to me as most good ideas come to me, or what I think are good ideas, without warning as a bolt from the blue and yet it was so simple. Why don't we go after work? Simple, finish work, pile into the car, drive, cycle, walk, climb, return, sleep, work. Now my time spent boosting the profits of BT were much more productive. Not only did I manage to persuade people that it was a good idea, fun even, but that if we were going to do it, it would have to be tonight. At last I moved my mountain! So at 5.30 that evening three of us assembled with an air of keen anticipation.

The drive was different for me, I felt strangeness within, and I had difficulty recognising what was happening. The speed of it all, the headlong rush to do something for the sake of it, the exactness of the plan; all combined to create an unsatisfactory taste. Yet somehow it felt right, just as if what we were doing was meant to be. People, that was the difference. I enjoyed the company of fellow mountaineers who knew and understood what I myself knew and understood. I felt happy and secure in their company, safe to express myself in a language that was both rich and basic. Yes this was to be a good night, I could feel it in my core as clean and as unsullied as fresh Cairngorm granite.

I was surprised how quick the journey was. I know it's not far to Tyndrum but the speed we got there surprised me. Not half as much as the shock I got as the cold struck me when I opened the car door. Fantastic, a cold crisp evening beckoned. I trembled but not with the cold, inside excitement, a child-like quality in me which I recognised instantly and welcomed every time he came out to play. The pleasure of preparation is another ritual I've come to know and love. Donning boots and shouldering rucksack, checking map and stowing flask. The difference this time was mechanical. My plan to cycle to Cononish had seemed a good one at the time. Now as I compared my trusty Edinburgh Contour against the two sleek lightweight mountain bikes I was not so sure. As you might have predicted I was quickly left behind, no longer in the peleton but cast adrift, destined to spend the rest

of the cycle in my own pool of Petzl light, bouncing from one impending collision of death to the next. By the time I caught up with the others they had found a place to leave the bikes and had just about readied themselves for the short, but steep, ascent to the start of the gully. My legs screamed, calves on fire, knees like jelly, wrists and elbows made of blancmange.

I enjoyed the journey. I enjoyed the rest even more. I knew the next bit was for me and as I set off in pursuit of the two dots of light I knew it was only a matter of time before they were mine. Sure enough I caught them up and was soon forging ahead. I love the plod at the front of kicking steps and breaking trail. I was surprised at how little evidence there was of previous ascents but secretly revelled in the cleanness and beauty of my surroundings. The slope steepened and the snow hardened. Conditions by now were superb, the cold clear night was enhanced by the stillness broken only by the snick of my crampons, the stab of my axe and the gasps for breath of the two hares somewhere below me. Serves the buggers right. I wanted the route to go on and on, I wanted to savour the experience, to milk it for all it was worth, but as is the way of these things it had to end.

It ended with a suddenness that overwhelmed me. One minute I was immersed in the climb, moving up and loving the feeling of freedom. No ropes and no physical attachment to the mountain yet an attachment that felt strong and secure as if I were tied to the mountain by wire hawser. The next I was on flat ground; I had expected this, I'd seen the photographs, have taken photographs since, of the climax to the route, but having done it I felt complete and utter satisfaction. I sat on the very lip of the gully and peered down the slope. I could make out the shapes of my two friends moving slowly and very close together up the final headwall. It was steep but easy, made so by the conditions that night. The quality of the snow produced climbing of unbelievable purity, it eased progress, reassured minds and created the mood.

We reassembled on the summit, a band of happy climbers content with our lot and thrilled to be where we were. We talked for ages about the climb and our feelings for it. We described the sensations that we felt and I have never been treated to such clear and compelling descriptions before. It was as if I was being treated to the climb all over again only this time it was in slow motion and told with such vividness I could almost feel the climb. The joy was unrestrained and emotional. I have no idea how long we sat on the summit revelling in the situation and enjoying the company. It could have been hours, but in reality, it was probably no more than two or three minutes. We operated in autopilot, nobody made the decision to leave but we all recognised the time. Appreciating the situation and knowing instinctively that we must return from whence we came is all part of the game. Now my knees have been giving me gyp for a while.

The battering they receive each winter is taking its toll; I'll be like Fyffie one day! I'd half spied an easy runnel on the ascent but you know what it's like in the moonlight, you can never be quite sure of what you've seen.

I found myself standing at the top of this inviting ribbon of snow, the angle looked okay, not too hard, not too soft, going in roughly the right direction, couldn't see the bottom though. Those of you that know me know that I don't like bum sliding, the legacy of countless courses at the Lodge having it drummed in that this might be fun but it is dangerous and we should be more responsible in the mountains. Well to hell with Glenmore bloody Lodge and WHOOSH! It did go to the bottom in roughly the right direction and it was fantastic fun. It was quick and exhilarating but more importantly it saved my knees from some serious grief. Oh, this winter was turning out great, but as is the way with these things I now had a price to pay. Lying forgotten was my bike and 20 minutes into the cycle ride I wish I had forgotten it as every bump and boulder on the track etched its memory on my backside.

Two lights duly disappeared into the distance and I was left to complete the journey in my own private world. In a perverse sort of way I quite enjoyed the ride, it contrasted so starkly with what had gone before and succeeded in highlighting the pleasure of the climb. Back at the car we quickly changed and readied ourselves for the journey home. It was a sombre drive, as if the beauty and difference of our experience was being diminished by the return to reality. Inside I felt elation and calmness, I felt no need to communicate verbally with my friends. The silence we found ourselves in said more than enough, certainly more than any words could express.

Work the next day arrived far too quickly. Lack of sleep and a mountain of paper ensured that the day went quickly enough and I was soon at home surrounded by familiarity. It got to that stage in the evening when sleep was well overdue that the phone went. By the tone in Cath's voice I knew it was for me.

It still surprises me how news travels so fast. Have a fall off some classic V. Diff. and you can guarantee the phone will be red hot all night. This time it was Tich, who'd heard a rumour that we'd been up to something a wee bit different. I filled him in on the details as quickly as I could, my body demanding sleep. But it was my brain that was closing down. I heard him mumble something about June and snow and Cairngorms and tomorrow and I say yes and I go to bed.

I don't even remember crawling into bed, but I remember waking. It's a beautiful day, perfect except that I've got a full day at a desk to look forward to. The phone goes. It's Tich. Tonight, then I remember where the conversation went to last night before I went to sleep.

The A9 is a road that I both love and hate. It's a necessary evil that I have to endure to reap the rewards at the end of the line. This time I have the luxury of not having to drive so I can relax and soak up the atmosphere. Somehow we manage to miss out the worst of the Edinburgh rush-hour traffic and soon find ourselves engaged in the usual A9 game of chance.

By the time we arrive at the Coire Cas car park it was an absolutely superb summer evening, heavenly colours combining with rich colours and sounds to create an unbeatable scene. The car park was all but deserted save for a few hill stragglers. We passed a couple sitting on the tailgate of their car, fresh from what had obviously been a memorable day in the mountains. It was nice to pass pleasantries with fellow mountaineers and to inquire about conditions on the hill. Snow it appeared was still about, especially in the gullies, and was apparently in excellent condition. As we passed the look of disbelief on their faces was there for all to see. I had to pinch myself to believe that I was part of this surreal scene. Here I was on June 21, on one of the best days of the summer so far, the sun is splitting the trees, not a cloud to be seen, dressed in T-shirt and Oakley's. On my pack glinting in the sun two ice axes and a set of recently-sharpened crampons.

I rarely make the trip into Sneachda in the summer, however it's a regular trip throughout the working winter months. As we started up the track it struck me just how ugly and dirty the place is when it's clear of snow. Somehow I have become blind to the scars that slash across these slopes, I can't even smell the stench of diesel, but today it hits me with all the force of a Cairngorm blizzard. It's a depressing sight, a testament to the folly of building a destructive ski centre in such a fragile and sensitive environment; God knows how they can justify expansion when faced with such overwhelming visual evidence of their impact.

Pressing on we soon left behind the ski area and followed one of the many paths that lead into the coire. Again I was surprised at the sight of such large and intrusive paths where normally I see footprints in the snow; we really are loving our mountains to death I thought. We gathered at the 'Toblerone' boulder to discuss our options. Even from this distance conditions looked very good. All the gullies looked complete, picked out by a strange iridescent light. I hadn't noticed the moon before but now I could appreciate its true beauty. The Sea of Tranquillity looked down upon Earth and certain inhabitants of Earth looked up and wondered. As a child I could clearly recall the TV pictures of man's first steps on that distant place; the grainy black and white images lived in my memory and I often wondered what the moon really looked like. I had to content myself with the moraines of Coire an t-Sneachda and I was not disappointed. A clear, cloudless night had drawn in and the temperature had dropped considerably. This was more than any of us could have wished for; the only difficulty was deciding which routes to do. Jacob's, the Slant, Aladdin's, Central,

Spiral, Crotched, The Runnel, Broken, Red, all beckoned, all easy, all done before but never in such impeccable conditions.

Talk about children in a sweet shop. We talked excitedly as we fitted crampons and helmets; it was a pleasure to do these tasks with warm fingers and without the spindrift stinging your face. It was cold but not in that through-to-the-core cold you get in mid-winter, this was a cleaner more amenable cold that froze your breath but not your soul. I could relax, everyone here knew what they were doing, no-one needed checking, and all were here for the same reason and the right reason. We should do The Runnel.

My first step confirmed that everything was as expected. My crampons bit into iron hard névé but needed that extra bite just to make sure they were secure. It's the best feeling in the world for the snow and ice climber. I could feel the quality of the medium, I had to kick in with just enough effort to confirm its firmness: any more and it would have been an effort; any less and it would have been too easy – heaven. Rising from the top of the snow bay straightforward climbing led to a fine looking chimney. Normally ice resides here but tonight it was conspicuous by its absence; things looked like they might get interesting. Tentatively, I moved up, here in the gloom of the chimney it was awkward to place your tools, never being quite sure what you were aiming at or whether the placement would hold.

The half-light played tricks with your eyes and vision, shapes and distances were distorted, most interesting of all was the lack of colour. I was in a monochrome mountaineering world, inhabited by Patey, Haston, MacInnes and Bonington. I imagined watching myself on some small black-and-white television set as the BBC outside broadcast sent my pictures to homes throughout the land. Somewhere out there a small boy would be watching me and planning his own adventure one day. Take your time I thought and you too will take your place in history, become a star of your very own show. Dreams are what keep me going sometimes and tonight's dream was unreal, however, reality meant some delicate, balance moves that proved to be entertaining enough without being unduly taxing.

Soon I was moving easily up the exit slopes of the route. As I pulled onto the plateau I became aware of the situation, alone on my very own sea of tranquillity. A strange ethereal scene as distant and different as I have ever seen laid before me, and I savoured the moment. Before long I was brought back to earth by strange movements in the periphery of my vision, as slowly but surely, one by one, grey figures gradually emerged into view like bizarre alien figures on a stark and lifeless planet. Lifeless was one word that could not describe the mountain that night; first it was the obligatory hip flask of malt, then a bottle of red wine appeared, quickly followed by a couple of cans of 80/- and a wee bit more whisky. I could

just hear the mountain safety sages whispering in my ear, but I never listen.

As a spectator I scowled, admonished such recklessness and penned my letter to *The Scotsman*. As a participant I took the first swig and rejoiced in the warm peaty flow of good malt. Talisker, such a fitting climax to a splendid night. The party that ensued was remarkable for two reasons; one that we consumed so much alcohol in so short a space of time and two, that we all got back to the car park safely. It's at times like these that I find it easy to understand what the mountains mean to me. When I'm tired, with all the trimmings of easy city living stripped away, I can think. I can appreciate and understand. I often think that it's a pointless game, but know that this can never be so. I can never argue with the end result and tonight confirmed this in the most spectacular fashion. It had been a wonderful winter mountaineering experience. A re-affirmation of the beauty of the mountains, the challenges and the pleasures that they bring, pleasures that in this case were intensified by the surreal and magical surroundings. The quality of the experience had been further enhanced by the people that I had climbed with; we all shared the same appreciation of what we were doing but it was the manner in which we did it that was so special.

Rising above all of this was the majesty and beauty of Scotland's mountains. Yet again I'd been in the right place at the right time with the right people. To be treated to two fine, classic winter climbs, both of which had been in the most glorious of conditions and so late in the year had been such an unexpected bonus. As predicted the thaw came, spring took over and colour returned to my climbing world. It had, however, been a good winter.

NOT PICCADILLY CIRCUS

By Peter Warburton

INTELLECTUALLY, I have been a late developer as well as a low flyer. That, with the alleged benefit of hindsight, is the only satisfactory explanation of the decision I reached in the winter of 1951-52 that I was ready for the Alps. At the time my experience consisted of modest excursions on British hills and in the Pyrenees. Since my preference was for solitary travel and as guides were beyond my purse, it will be apparent that the ingredients of disillusion, if not of disaster, were all there.

The outline planning was nevertheless reasonably competent and a preliminary day on hills overlooking the Val de Bagnes, which was not then flooded, went well, leaving me with the erroneous impression that I was rather a fine fellow. On Bastille Day 1952 I set off from Fionnay wearing a spacious new pair of Lawrie's breeches, carrying an ex-War Department ice axe that was too long for me and which I did not know how best to use and weighed down by an overfilled 'Commando' rucksack with a congenitally low centre of gravity and an impressive array of webbing straps for the carriage of spare Bren guns and other military ecetera but which failed to keep hold of baguettes.

The first day's destination was the Chanrion Hut – '2465m, Acc 42. Keeper in summer. 4hrs 30min from Fionnay'. It took me somewhat longer, largely because I chose the left bank of the river where there seemed to be a steeper but shorter alternative route. This path did not fulfil its early promise but I supposed that a crossing of the torrent would be easier farther upstream, where the flow would surely be reduced. Lesson one was that this theory, valid at home, did not apply to glacier fed streams. Lesson two was that the bottom-heavy character of the sack had a significant adverse effect on my long jump performance. Daunted by the force and angle of the flood, the slippery aspect of every potential staging post and the lack of any suitable launch pad, I tried to test my range before committing myself to the deep. It was embarrassing to find that this training programme was engaging the close attention of a small audience smugly established higher up and on the true path. They were probably too far away to appreciate the nonchalant air I attempted on completing an inelegant, but more or less, dry landfall. By taking an immediate rest, I made sure they had a 20-minute lead.

George Abraham was among those who visited these parts. In *Modern Mountaineering* he notes that 'The Chanrion Hut . . . yields some good climbs on the peaks of the frontier range, which may become interesting and exciting if the passports happen to be left down at Fionnay. The Bersaglieri are harder to dodge than avalanches. The Points d'Otemma (11,136ft.) and the Ruinette (12,727ft.) are worth any risks involved'. The

Pointe d'Otemma seemed too close at hand and not quite high enough for an alpinist of my calibre. I settled on La Ruinette (3875m) for my debut. Whymper, who with two guides made the first ascent in July 1865, is dismissive. This was a mountain that could be walked up, the effort being redeemed only by the view from the summit. It sounded in every way suitable.

Sleep that night, my first in any hut, was subjected to frequent interruption by the departure, in twos and threes at all sorts of ungodly hours, of the rest of the company but by 5a.m. I had the place to myself and was able to settle properly. An early start is always a good idea. Shortly after eight o'clock on a fine sunny morning I set off for La Ruinette, passport safely stowed in an inside pocket.

Glaciers were quite outside my experience but the Glacier de Breney proved to be free of the difficulties I had anticipated and, with confidence still intact, I made steady progress up steep slopes on the far side. Above 3250m the angle eased but the going became more arduous through knee-deep snow. Concentrating on the business in hand, I failed to notice the deteriorating visibility. As wet cloud closed in I saw, some distance away, two figures just recognisable as among the hut's early risers. They were on a course set to converge with mine and I looked forward to the possibility of sharing the labour of trail breaking. I interpreted their wave as a greeting, but it must have indicated a decision to turn back.

I plodded on, nursing a growing conviction that the middle of this upper snowfield, the Glacier de la Ruinette on the map, was not the best route and that progress might have proved easier along its margin. When, cool and damp, I reconciled myself to retreat I put this theory to the test. A compass bearing led to a dreary landscape of gullies made unpleasant by every combination of mud, mobile scree and boulders and melting snow. Each gully in turn became impassably steep obliging me to emerge, contour the slope and repeat the process. 'Catabatic,' I muttered, committing myself yet again to the unknown: it was a word chanced upon in the dictionary and meaning 'affording an easy descent'. None of them did. Thick mist and extreme caution on my part made for a very slow descent.

The appearance of bersaglieri or members of the gendarmerie would have provided a welcome diversion (my passport although a little bent was still dry) but gendarmes, animate or otherwise, were absent. They are indeed a comparative rarity. My only confrontation had been when two, on motor-cycles, made an unwelcome surprise appearance at our camp at the head of a remote Pyrenean valley. The company, nearly all French students, burst spontaneously into a song with the much repeated refrain: *'Merde* (or would it have been *Merdes?) les gendarmes, la-haut sur là Montagne'*. The consequence had been a thorough search for contraband, illegal Spanish Republican frontier crossers, anarchists and other undesirables. Irrelevant recollections can be soothing in trying circumstances.

The lower glacier was in far livelier condition than earlier in the day and fading light contributed to the imagined hazards of the crossing. On the home stretch, accelerating down the lateral moraine toward the hut, I met a party of four coming in the opposite direction. For the second time that day I thought what eccentric hours these Continentals kept. It came as a complete surprise when they introduced themselves, in mildly indignant tones, as a search party. There was on their faces that momentary flicker of disappointment that rescuers experience when the object of their charity turns up, alive and demonstrably capable of forward motion. My thanks were tactlessly diluted, as I too late realised, by a subsidiary clause to the effect that there had been no real need. It would have been diplomatic to have wrung them each by the hand and/or sobbed on the leader's shoulder. That is what I intend doing if it ever happens to me again.

Back at the hut the rescue quartet conferred. My German was not good enough to follow their private conversation word by word but it was clear that there was general support for the proposition that here was a 'gefährlicher Kerl' in serious need of education. A spokesman was appointed. They chose the right man for the job. English was confident, his manner magisterial. The case for the Alpine start was deployed at length followed by a section on the crucial importance of returning to the hut by 3p.m. at the latest. For good measure he appended a passage on the dangers of unprotected river crossing, revealing himself, to my chagrin, as one of the witnesses of my unorthodox techniques of the previous day. I considered myself fortunate that he had been a few minutes too late to catch my tentative and erratic return crossing of the lower glacier. The lecture assumed an oratorical character as it progressed and I could not but admire the closing flourish of the peroration: 'The mountains iss not Piccadilly Circus'.

I might have spoken of the havoc caused to my digestive system by keeping unnatural hours. I could even have told of my only pre-dawn start; how we had set off at 3.30a.m. like so many Christmas card carollers behind a leader bearing a candle in a lantern; how this irresponsible youth, with the advantage of illumination, had far outdistanced his flock as we contoured a steep and pathless mountainside; how, when we reassembled at first light, two of our number were missing, one of whom when found was a hospital case. Instead I was meekly receptive. After all, these were serious mountaineers, serious indeed to a fault (indeed a day or two later it struck me that I had heard no laughter in the Chanrion Hut) but they were well-meaning and it was good of them to have turned out to look for me in the dank dusk. Naturally, I repressed the thought that they might, just possibly, be right. Years later, reading a fuller account, I learned that Messrs Whymper, Almer and Biner had set out at 3.50a.m. I can only conclude that they were motivated by eagerness to get away from the chalets at Chanrion – 'a foul spot, which should be avoided' - combined

with thoughts about the length of their planned route for the rest of the day.

The following day I toiled wearily over the Col de Fenetre. Hopes of a bus service on the Italian side of the pass were revealed as unrealistic as soon as I reached the valley bottom. The track was a mere 2m wide, hewn from the rock and with a surface that suggested it doubled in season as a watercourse. The first sign of life was a gang engaged in road works. The foreman's words clearly went beyond wishing me the time of day, but my limited Italian is largely operatic and his was something else. There was no meeting of minds. 'Scusi, ma non parlo Italiano' I admitted, grudgingly. This statement produced disproportionately long and unpleasantly raucous laughter from the whole cast. They were beginning to look more like Verdian conspirators than comic opera brigands. I went my way at a comfortable thinking pace, turning the matter over in my mind. The verb had sounded like 'fare saltare', which bore a strong family resemblance to the French *faire sauter* – English, 'to explode'. The male chorus had vanished, so too had an oddly silent group of women, clad from head to foot in black, who had been working in a nearby field; they wielded hoes, but long-handled scythes would have suited them as well. With discreetly lengthening stride I gained the partial cover of a dilapidated wall as the first of a series of charges detonated, scattering fragments of rock in an interestingly random way. This was certainly not London W1.

That night was spent at Valpelline in a feather bed watched over by a portrait gallery of members of the ruling family of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Piedmont and Savoy. The snag was that the one bus of the day left Aosta at 6.45a.m., making a quasi-Alpine start unavoidable. As I struggled to hold my own among a crowd of ruthless old women armed with market baskets, I reflected that my situation might have brought a brief half-smile to the faces of my Chanrion mentors.

Still following, at a safe distance, in Whymper's steps I returned to Switzerland over the Theodul Pass. It was not far above the Hornli Hut that our paths again diverged. In my case discretion prevailed. I withdrew to Zermatt, finishing the holiday with some pleasantly undemanding outings mostly below the snow line.

My second Alpine venture was delayed until 1957 when the eccentric idea took hold that the Dauphine, being a little lower than the Pennine Alps and so carrying less summer snow, would be more suited to my undoubted talents. Again things did not always go according to plan, notably on the alarming occasion when the only way forward led into a series of crumbling tunnels that had formed part of long abandoned frontier fortifications. Disconcertingly, the associated buildings had been either swept away or left tottering by landslides. In the longest tunnel blocks of stone that had once lined roof and walls had fallen in, providing stepping stones of a kind until the water became deeper than the blocks. To add to

the unease a bend in the tunnel denied even the comfort of a cliché. It would have proved false comfort since the light of day revealed that 30m of track at the tunnel exit were missing, gone without trace, exposing a precipitous slope of bare, hard-baked clay which could not be avoided. To the right the ground fell away at a dizzying angle to a river gorge 1000m below, with very little between to hinder a falling object. The ground was too hard for kicking steps. Cutting an experimental footstep with the axe confirmed that the effort required would overbalance a novice. Driving in the spike as a downhill support held the same danger but by this method I advanced, foot by foot, wondering all the time whether a spirited dash might not have been the better course.

Subsiding in a hot heap on the doubtful sanctuary of the resumed mule track I reviewed the priorities that had left me without space for a safety line. Was the second wet-weather Trollope necessary and were two Thermos flasks (chilled white wine and milk) essential? Incidentally, it is a point worthy of inclusion in lists of Hints for Travellers, that a half-empty milk flask is a mistake, being apt to yield butter. The contents of the other flask, discounting the background hint of plastic left on the palate, remained wholesome and nourishing to the spirits. I gradually regained my composure: what on earth would I have done with a safety line anyway? The nomination for the one truly surplus item went to my father's 1914 Baedeker. For one day only I had mistakenly relied on its small-scale maps. It was impossible to reconcile my desolate surroundings with any landscape depicted by Baedeker. It did not need a tracker to establish that neither mule nor booted foot had passed that way for a long time but retreat being out of the question, I advanced.

I arrived that evening in Italy, an unexpected outcome but not by that stage a total surprise. The stamping of passport was then providing employment and gentle exercise for rather more uniformed officials throughout Europe than is now the case. It was rumoured at the time that the Italians were particularly keen on this little ceremony and had been known to incarcerate for a few days, just for the fun of it, those who, on leaving the country, produced passports that bore no evidence of their entry. It did not seem entirely impossible. Local officials would have authority to detain suspects 'pending inquiries' and I had been abroad enough to have got over my surprise on first discovering that the British were not universally popular.

The following morning I studied the Customs post from a prudent distance and was pleased to note a design fault that left it without windows on the rear elevation. On the strength of this observation I decided not to put temptation in anyone's way by presenting myself unstamped. The Abraham brothers, not being of the milord tendency, would probably have approved of the tactic, but what is certain is that they would have been nimbler over the ground. The trouble was that the grazed area behind the building was divided into small enclosures by awkward fencing that

deflected me closer towards officialdom than intended. At which point the inadequacy of my reconnaissance became obvious. In a recess in the back wall of the post there was a solitary window. It framed the head and shoulders of a uniformed figure. I was near enough to see that he needed a shave and that he was viewing my progress with a mildly puzzled air. I nodded in a friendly way, which briefly intensified his bemusement. Although his manner suggested someone who would find any strong emotion too tiring to sustain, there remained the possibility that this was a skilled actor who had already pressed an alarm button. Perhaps his colleagues were even now pouring out by the front door, sabres rattling? Happily, not so. I left Italy unchallenged. What a relief these anti-climaxes can be.

In France a 1914 Dauphine *Guide Bleu* – a second-hand investment of my own proved very satisfactory and cannot be blamed for the fact that respectable summits again eluded me. Later reading cast a shadow over what had been a splendid stage from Ailefroide to La Berarde over the Col de la Temple (3322m). This was the itinerary of the unnamed Frenchman on the day 10 years earlier when Barford was killed and Ward and Murray badly injured in a stonefall. Murray's hauntingly underwritten account is unforgettable: 'I told him what had happened – that Barford was dead in the bergschrund and that Ward and I were doubtful of having enough strength to get down the glacier to the valley. Would he go with us, to make sure we arrived there? He surveyed us carefully. We must have been an ugly and bloody sight. He reflected. Then he explained that he had been making for the Col de la Temple in order to descend to La Berarde, where he had an engagement. If he were to go down the Glacier Noir with us that would take him in the opposite direction. Therefore, with our permission, he would continue on his own way. Meantime, was there anything he could do for us? A mouthful of wine perhaps? He was most courteous. He could not possibly have cared less.'

Another notable crossing was the Col du Clot des Cavales (3128m) if only because it was where the long-serving Commando rucksack finally earned retirement by getting firmly wedged, leaving its wearer indignantly pedalling the air while descending an uncomfortable gully in a series of jumps thus giving added meaning to the word Clot.

Sooner or later we all find our level. It was in 1959 that I discovered mine. The Engadin caters ideally for my taste in hills and does so without disrupting cherished breakfast schedules. Established in one of the less-fashionable villages such as Zernez and armed with a regional season ticket valid on trains and postbuses, I am in my Alpine element. Piz Lischana (3105m) makes a good first day, especially on return visits when you know that the summit ridge can be deceptively corniced. Piz Ot is another favourite, although at the summit (3246m) it is disappointing to find a Gipfelbuch full of trite sentiments of the 'Ach! Die Welt ist doch so

schön!' variety. Two rather more strenuous outings are to Piz Linard (3410m) and to Piz Quattervals (3165m). Given an early start, say about 8a.m. these too can be fitted into the day without serious risk of missing dinner in comfortable valley quarters. These are quiet hills. Only Piz Languard (3268m) the easy day from Pontresina seems much frequented. Elsewhere, the few people I have met have mostly been on their way down as I went up but, although they may well have been up half the night themselves, all have shown civilized tolerance of others' eccentricities. There has been the occasional quizzical look or a diplomatically oblique reference to the length of the route ahead, but never a lecture on the subject of sloth.

The special feature of the district is the Swiss National Park, small in area (16,870 hectares) but very effectively protected against tourist development. Wildlife is the clear first priority but conservation of the mountain walker is not neglected. There is a useful network of well-maintained paths in valleys and over some of the passes. The only public road across the area has a bus service and there is a good rail service along the Inn valley line running parallel to the park boundary.

Another Alpine possibility for degenerates like me is the Dolomites. Retreating there from bad weather in Austria in late June, I found too much snow for my comfort. On a second, early September visit, there was far too much traffic on and off the hills. On stretches of mountain road I had to co-exist on unequal terms with a bonnet-to-bumper flow of motor coaches, each modestly proclaiming on sides and back the wonderful facilities within. Exposed only to the noise and fumes without, one loses sight of the spectacular scenery.

Two specialities of the region that had been hidden from my admiring gaze on the first visit were fully revealed in September. The strategically-placed steel ropes, if a little hard on the ungloved hand, offered welcome confirmation of the feasibility of the route. Even more reassuring were the occasional fixed ladders allowing the cautious pedestrian, who abounds in these parts, to surmount short, vertical sections. The necessary period of consideration can cause informal queues to form, giving me the rare opportunity to dispense advice and encouragement to the timid. Once this circumstance even led to my being invited to go to the head of the queue and lead the pitch.

I could have become reconciled to the *via ferrata.* However, other intrusions were less acceptable, specifically the proliferation of mountain transport systems of every shape and size with their attendant crowds of the fashionably dressed taking their ease in bar-restaurants at the top stations.

This piece may be read as an antidote to accounts of high endeavour and achievement, but even the subversive element has its standards. As Chanrion man said...

HAROLD RAEBURN'S JOURNEY HOME

By John Mitchell

In August 1914 during the early days of the First World War, when mobilisation in Europe made travel difficult and dangerous, Harold Raeburn was in the Caucasus and found himself faced with a difficult journey home.

The primary source for this article is Raeburn's 1914 diary in the Scottish Mountaineering Club archive in the National Library of Scotland. The neatness of the entries, the cleanliness of the diary and the tone of the entry for 2. 8.14 suggests that the diary was written up at home from notes made at the time.

His diary reveals some of the uncertainties and consequences of war: anti-German feeling; intense patriotism; spy phobia; rumour and counter rumour, and the haphazard travel arrangements. At the same time it reveals Raeburn's interests and demonstrates the humour which was an integral part of his character.

I have abridged and paraphrased most of the entries. Any direct quotes have been identified.

30. 7. 14: Russia mobilises

1. 8. 14: First ascent of Laboda.

Germany declares war on Russia

2. 8.14: The expedition went to Dsinago to collect horses. Initially, the authorities would not release them although they had been pre-booked. One of the porters reported that his brother, a soldier, had disappeared. Thus they heard the first rumours of war.

3. 8.14: They left Dsinago through a very narrow gorge. The road ran hundreds of feet above a cleft where the River Urich flowed in a swirling torrent, in and out of limestone caverns. Raeburn noticed buzzards, wagtails, chats, and quails[1]. They stopped for tea at Diechau. Payment was refused. However, a high price was demanded for a lineika[2] and two horses for the journey to the railway.

It was almost dark before they left by a poor road. Maize grew in the fields and many plover-like birds could be seen. Trees were smaller close to the steppe.

They were forced to camp overnight, pestered by flies, mosquitos and people, at the Tercyk ferry. They could not attract the ferryman's attention although the lights in Elchatov could be seen clearly. One of their tents was kicked down by a horse. Raeburn was extremely tired but could not sleep.

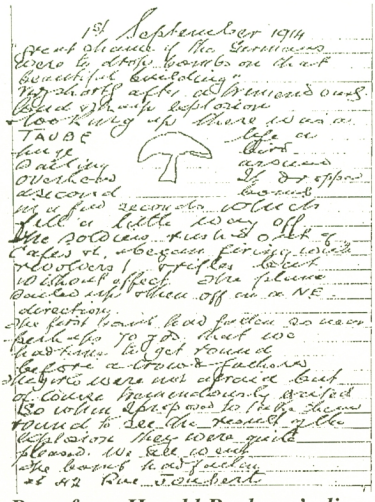
Germany declares war on France

4. 8.14: The river was crossed at daybreak. At the station they got definite news of war[3]. Austria had declared war on Serbia and Russia was

Harold Raeburn climbing on the Salisbury Crags. Photo: SMC Collection.

mobilising against Germany, who was the real enemy. Mobilisation meant many thousands of men on the move so that transport for the expedition was problematical. Initially, they were told that no passenger trains would run, then that two would.

The delay at the station lasted for eight hours. Troop trains passed constantly *en route* to Vlad and Tiflis. They ate in a first-class restaurant which was almost full of officers, officials, women and children. No-one was the worse for drink. Raeburn never witnessed officers drunk on the journey. The third-class restaurant, presumably where the private soldiers might go, was kept closed when troop trains were in the station. Tea was the usual drink but also 'quite good lager – not dear, and excellent cheap Crimean and Kaukasian (sic) wines'.



Page from Harold Raeburn's diary.

Eventually, they boarded a train, squeezed into a corridor jammed with luggage. Martinson encountered an acquaintance, Mr Isaef, another climber, who had been to 13,000ft. at the Zitch saddle on Laboda. He was intending to go to the front from Vlad.

After a long journey they reached Naltshik where two carts were hired for the trip to the Hotel Ravkaz. Raeburn thought the hotel poor with 'defective sanitary arrangements' although they had a good dinner in the orchard during which they were entertained with piano music. The 'fruit was unripe, as usual'. That night Raeburn 'slept soundly'.

Great Britain declares war on Germany

5. 8.14: The next morning was fine and not too hot. Visas had to be collected from a local official. He was suspicious of Martinson and questioned him closely. However, as he was too young for military service, and his passports were in order he was allowed to leave.

The town was 'go ahead' with extensive building works and several attractive villas. It would make a good expedition base because there were lots of stores.

Following a shave and haircut at a 'very swell place' Raeburn and party prepared to catch the early train to Kot.

6. 8.14: They had to wait seven hours at the station. Martinson and Mirandoff lost patience and jumped on one of the many troop trains going south.

Dawn from Mt. Elbrus looking at the Central Caucasus with the twin peaks of Ushba prominent. Photo: Dave Snadden.

Mountain shepherds in the Caucasus. Photo: J. H. B. Bell, SMC Collection.

When the scheduled train came it was so full Raeburn's party had to board an open wooden seated day carriage. It made slow progress to Min Vode. No-one knew when the train would leave. Raeburn describes 'an awful scene' – women and children struggling to get into already full carriages while porters dragged baggage over their heads.

They ate at the Gogoschurche restaurant, where the proprietor did not remember Raeburn from his previous visit[4]. It was crowded, but 'few escaped without paying'.

The train finally left after midnight.

7. 8.14: In the middle of the night they were disturbed by bottles thrown through their carriage window from a passing troop train. A little girl got glass fragments in her back, but otherwise no-one was hurt.

They reached Rostov in the afternoon. Having booked in to the Hotel Moscow they visited the British consul, a 'fattish young man' called Edwards. His instructions were that British citizens were to go home via Petrograd and Gulf of Bothnia. Raeburn instantly rejected this advice because there was no guarantee they would get there. They found the consul of 'very little use indeed, and to know very little of anything and to care less!' They decided to go to Odessa via the Sea of Azov and Kertch.

In the hotel gardens that evening Raeburn tried kvas again. 'Not bad in hot weather but yeasty and not too wholesome.' He thought it around 3%, a rather low proof. Two gypsy girls appeared and wanted to read the parties' hands but 'they thought not', no explanation given. Tucker had slept most of the day.

8. 8.14: Next day there were patriotic parades in which the flags of the Allies were displayed. Business seemed much the same as usual although no longer conducted in German. Raeburn noticed that the hotel boot boy was cheeky to a shabby, elderly German in a frock coat who had been the hotel manager[5]. Arrangements were made with local agents to send the expedition's luggage to Britain[6].

9. 8.14: Aboard the *Eisk,* 'a small dirty steamer without boats', Raeburn met an Englishman who was a fishing company agent. He was angry at 'some young nuts' being agreeable to some girls on board. The mate had allowed the lads aboard because they were army volunteers. Raeburn saw no reason for the Englishman's anger; they were merely 'stupid and lazy boys'.

The River Don was slow and wide, there were flat marshlands to the south and slopes up to the steppe level on the north. Passing villages and towns they saw men and boys swimming far out into the river. The boat had to change course to avoid a dog which was swimming across the river at a point where it was about three quarters of a mile wide[7]. There were large flocks of geese grazing on the banks. Gulls, cormorants and pelicans were also seen.

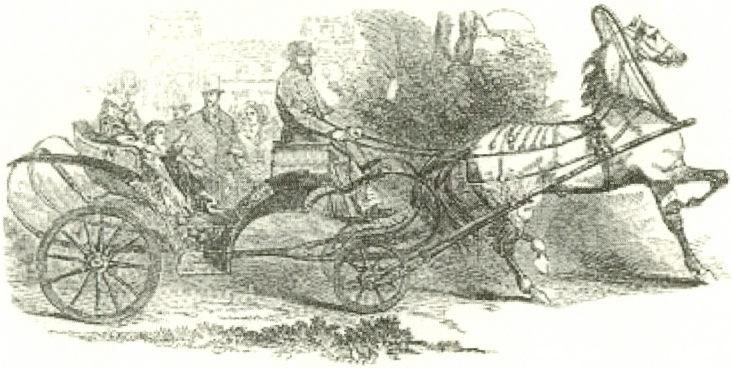
The boat entered the Sea of Azov by a shallow channel marked by posts.

It called at Taganroe, a good port with lots of vessels in the roadstead, including nine Austrian and two German, seized by the Russians.

10. 8.14: The party was comfortable; they had open bunks without bed clothes but had American cloth-covered cushions. The food was quite good, the wine reasonable, and the beer excellent. There were no set meals but passengers ordered what they wanted at any time and it would arrive in a couple of hours.

The ship called at Eask where there was a good harbour which was being dredged and enlarged. The local industries were fishing and agriculture. There was a great deal of building going on and signs of prosperity, as in South Russia generally. Excellent shops and a few guesthouses. Pigs rooted about on the beach and in the sea.

Raeburn observed that the girls wore bright dresses, hobble skirts and high heels, but the young men were not so 'dandified'. He saw many children but few people of mature years. The people at Polsk were said to be Tartars; the girls were 'not at all bad looking', and generally people were slim and well shaped.



The ship rolled in heavy seas in the evening and weathered a thunderstorm. She was small with a low freeboard, making only around five or six knots. Raeburn did not fancy a day in the North Sea with her.

11. 8.14: They sailed to the Straits of Kertch opposite the Eisk peninsula. There were now few people aboard. Sheep loaded at Actaro. Slow progress was made to Kertch through the night.

12. 8.14: At Kertch they transferred to the Chernypore, a Caucasus steamer of 1500 tons, which left immediately for Odessa. Accommodation was quite good although in second class. There were six persons to a cabin. Tucker got a berth beside a porthole but it was stuffy even when open.

The sea was blue and sparkling. Dolphins played round the bows of the ship, overhead flew great-backed and herring gulls and terns. Raeburn enjoyed a 'most charming day'.

The ship was crowded, there were many officers going to Sevastopol. Several Greeks one of whom Raeburn nicknamed the 'ancient Greek'; he was very bitter against the Germans. Another 15st. Greco – Indian was dubbed the 'light horseman' because he claimed to be a member of the Behar Light Horse. Raeburn wondered 'what the horse thought'.

The dinner was excellent, three courses, two cups (glasses) of tea, sugar, bread and butter. The wine was Crimean, Caucausian and Bessarabian. Half bottle Krasny Sagen 35 kopek = 9d (= 4p.)

13. 8.14: Feodos was a picturesque pleasure resort with first rate hotels. Richards swam in muddy inshore water. Many stone villas with tennis courts. 'The best tea cakes we have struck in Russia.'

Left for Sevastopol via the south point of the Crimea passing picturesque stacks and rocks and a castle built on high crags.

As they neared their destination they heard gunfire coming from some warships. Suddenly, a torpedo boat fired shots in the air. The captain of the *Chernypore* threw the engines into reverse, the ship trembled, swung in a circle and stopped. The torpedo boat closed and a heated conversation ensued by means of megaphones. Their ship had sailed into a minefield narrowly escaping being blown up. They were escorted into Sevastopol's side harbour.

The officers disembarked and left in droshkies[8] or cars. The authorities, suspecting a spy on board, asked all second-class passengers to gather in the salon where passports were checked. However, no-one was arrested. Only those disembarking at Sevastopol were allowed ashore. The ship sailed in the evening for Odessa.

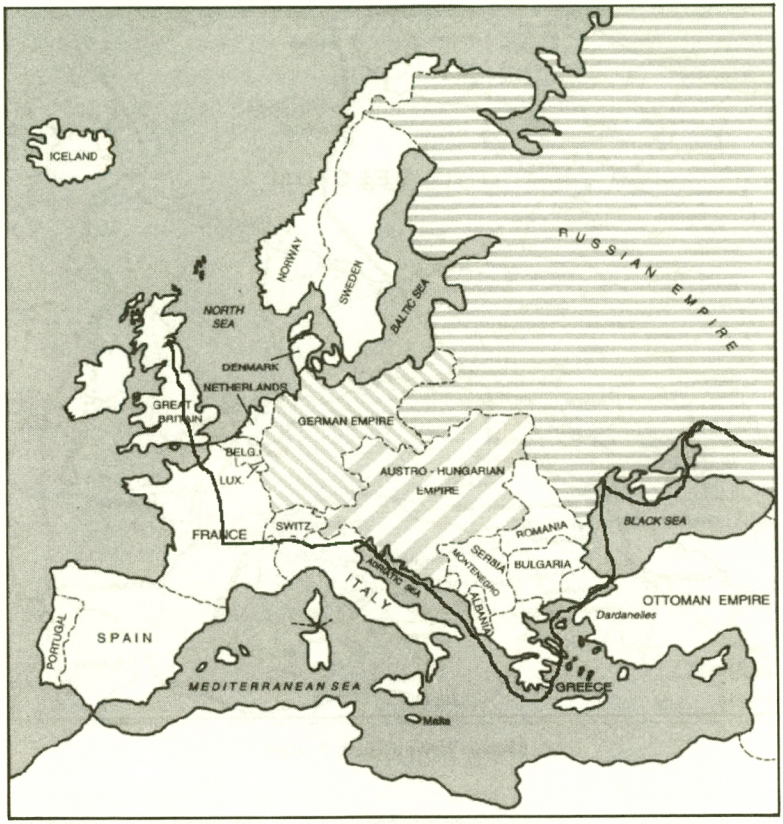
14. 8.14: A fine, breezy day. Dolphins again played round the boat's bows. Odessa's harbour was full of shipping..

Raeburn's group booked into the Hotel d'Europe. Odessa was very busy. It was a fine town with impressive buildings, good shops and hotels and an excellent electric train service. The cafes provided very good tea and cakes. Paper boys sold war news in the streets.

They visited the British consul J. F. Roberts. Raeburn thought him 'young, fat, and devoid of energy'. His Greek clerk planned a route for them through Constanza and Greece to Italy, but by then they had committed themselves to the *Efrat,* a cargo steamer which was to sail to Constantinople in the morning.

15. 8.14: Richards went to the ship to book cabins but was told there were no first or second ones left, and that he would need passports. After returning to the hotel to collect these he found that he could get three second-class cabins very easily. Tickets including meals and wine or vodka cost £2. 0s. 6d. each.

War news: a great battle in Northern France, two million men engaged. German ships captured in the North Sea. Turkey said to have bought two German ships[9] but ordered by the Allies not to fit them out. Turkey had not yet declared war, but considering it[10].



Harold Raeburn's journey home – August-September 1914.

After many delays the *Efrat* sailed in the late afternoon. A large French patriotic demonstration was held as there were many French reservists on board. Speeches, toasts and *The Marseillaise.*

At dinner, Raeburn met a Scotsman who had been an engineer on an Austrian vessel seized at Tagaurog. He was accompanying 15 Arab sailors to Alexandria. All his possessions had been lost or stolen.

After an excellent meal, Raeburn attended a *cafe chantant* between decks at which French ladies sang long, sentimental songs before they fell victims to *'mal de mer'* although the sea was calm.

16. 8.14: At Varma some Bulgar officers who had been 'aloof and sulky' cheered up as they disembarked, singing patriotic songs. There were German, British and Austrian vessels in the harbour.

17. 8.14: At sunrise the ship entered the heavily-mined Bosphorus. A British ship[11] had been sunk nearby with some loss of life. The cliffs were heavily fortified. They reached Constantinople around 9.00. Raeburn

thought it in a splendid situation, many minarets. St. Sophia looked beautiful.

They discovered that an Italian steamer was sailing to Venice. With help from the British consul Tucker was able to get first-class tickets on the *Sardegna* and they boarded around 6pm. Kites were scavenging garbage from the water.

Two warships, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*[12], having escaped from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean along with other German and Austrian boats were at anchor.

18. 8.14: Left for Piraeus. There were fine views of the Asian and European sides of the narrow passage as the ship entered the Sea of Marmara. They saw bare green hills, barley fields, scattered trees and villages, and several vessels including a German yacht. The ship had to stop at the east end of the Dardanelles because the Turks said it was too dark to go through the minefields. At sunset there was gunfire from the European side.

19. 8.14: In the morning bumboats came out selling fruit, bread and sardines for the crowd of deck passengers. The *Sardegna* was guided through the straits by a Turkish boat. There was a Franco-British fleet of warships waiting off the Dardanelles. The sea was an intense blue in the day and in the evening the sunset was most beautiful, very red. They reached Piraeus at night.

20. 8.14: The harbour was full of shipping. Athens could be seen in the distance through the smoky atmosphere. People came on board selling papers, cigarettes and fruit. A money-changer tried to cheat Richards until a steward threatened him.

Because the Corinth canal was said to be blocked they sailed across the Bay of Salamis and round Cape Matapan.

They stopped briefly at Patras. It was a warm and beautiful night, with a phosphorescent sea and shooting stars. Below decks it was stuffy. A German claiming to be half Dutch tried to ingratiate himself. Raeburn's attention was drawn to another passenger 'tall, good looking, very short-sighted elderly man, German, or more likely Austrian. Some high official in Turkey I'm sure or on a diplomatic mission'.

21. 8.14: Another beautiful day with a partial eclipse of the sun in mid-afternoon. They sailed close to a French battle squadron. Sunset by Corfu. A friendly Greek passenger told Raeburn that the island gave excellent shooting – woodcock, hares, pig and small deer. He said that the Kaiser had a holiday estate there. Raeburn suggested that he might need it for permanent residence after the war!

22. 8.14: The ship arrived at Brindisi, a dirty and unattractive town. Tucker and Richards went ashore to buy papers and post letters. Thus they got their first reliable war news.

23. 8.14: Heavy seas; the boat was rather top-heavy. There were not

enough lifeboats for all passengers. An elderly man, who seemed very anxious, had a row with the ship's officers 'nearly having a fit!!' Venice was sighted at midday. They went in past the Lido and anchored opposite the Grand Canal and St. Mark's Square.

After walking in the Square, Raeburn thought the Campanile 'a bit like a factory chimney but St. Marks very fine', the inside particularly. The war had affected Venice severely; there were few tourists about. Raeburn received a letter from 'E'[13] saying she would not come.

24. 8.14: Raeburn thought Venice a curious place where people did lots of walking because there were no vehicles, only slow gondolas. He reconnoitred the route to the station through the complex town. The weather was very hot, although not unpleasant. Raeburn was badly bitten by mosquitoes. He considered the town 'delightful for a visit but too cramped for a stay'.

25. 8.14: The next day they travelled to Milan by train where Tucker and Richards left to make their own way home[14]. He went to visit an Italian friend, Dr. Ronchetti[15]. Raeburn was impressed by the cathedral; he thought the dome 'the most splendid building I have ever seen in my life'. Later that day he left for Zermatt. Lake Maggiore was just as beautiful as Loch Lomond but larger. Two motor cyclists raced the train towards the trans-alpine tunnel. At Visp he was received by a supercilious booking clerk when attempting a transfer ticket to Zermatt. The weather was dull and cool.

26. 8.14: Arriving in Zermatt he found most hotels shut. There were many English and a few Americans in the town. A train had been arranged on the 28th to evacuate the English.

Raeburn met Newmarch[16], who had been in the Caucasus with Solly[17] and Cockin[18] in 1893. He also noticed a curious lady climber of uncertain age but with a childlike face, small features and a very high forehead. 'Not pure white, possibly quadroon or mulatto'. She spoke perfect English but did not associate with anyone in the hotel.

27. 8.14: A terrible day, the worst he had experienced in the mountains. Very cold with torrential rain. The day was spent writing and reading newspapers. Some English ladies were getting lectured by a pest of a German priest about the German successes, news of which was posted in all the hotels.

An Irish/British colonel was adamant that the Germans would be in Paris within days and that the British army would be cut off and annihilated. Raeburn vigorously argued the contrary. The colonel was shaken but unconvinced. Raeburn also attempted to 'put a spoke in the oily priest's wheel'.

28. 8.14: Most of the English left on the special train. Very few people about now; only a few stray Americans. The rain had turned to snow overnight transforming the town into a winter picture. Raeburn climbed

to 2000m then down by the Triff gorge. Up the Shoehorn by two easy routes, followed by a visit to a wineshop owned by a Matterhorn guide. He told Raeburn that 44 men had been called up from Zermatt and so the women were doing most of the harvest work.

29. 8.14: Raeburn went climbing with a young American called Stephen who had climbed in the Lake District. His father raced a yacht on the Clyde[19]. To the Taesch Alp. The weather had improved and the snow was melting. They came across a young couple, 'looked German but more likely Swiss'. The girl was clad in 'rather tight knickers'[20]. Although the mists had lifted there was no view of the Weisshorn.

30. 8.14: Left by a packed train on a beautiful morning. After a long wait at Lausanne, Raeburn caught a slow train to Geneva. On board he had a friendly argument with an American who maintained that the German army was invincible and that France was already as good as beaten. When Raeburn pointed out the economic difficulties faced by Germany the American replied that France was a fine orange to squeeze. Raeburn replied that the orange was not yet picked.

At Geneva, despite being told by an English clergyman and his wife that it was impossible to get tickets, Raeburn managed to get one easily. It was valid for the journey to London via Paris, Calais or Boulogne. The Germans were already holding the Calais/Boulogne railway line and were close to Paris, so Raeburn was not overly optimistic about getting home.

Raeburn found himself sharing a carriage with five schoolgirls[21] in the care of a 'very stout man' who knew no French. Their school mistress, who was to remain in Geneva, recruited Raeburn to look after the girls.

They had a pleasant, but slow, journey alongside the Rhone. There were soldiers all along the line and many stations had been prepared as hospitals. There were no difficulties crossing the frontier into France.

1. 9.14: At Lyons they had to wait for a connecting train from Marseilles. Although told it was full, a bribe of five francs got them a very comfortable carriage. Trains full of wounded soldiers passed incessantly – closed trucks had been converted to hold double tiers of hammocks. Many of the men appeared to have head wounds.

Paris had not yet been attacked but there were many refugees in the city. Raeburn managed to get two rooms for the girls and one for himself and Mr Light[22]. After breakfast, Raeburn went to the Gare St. Lazare to see if it was possible to get out of Paris. The Germans were reportedly near Pointoise but, if the line was clear, a train would leave for Dieppe the next morning. Outside the British Consulate Raeburn saw several exhausted-looking British soldiers. There was a lot of activity at the Ministry of the Interior. At first he thought it was the French Government leaving Paris for Bordeaux, but later discovered it was preparation for the Battle of the Marne, which would stop the German advance on Paris[23].

While walking near the Opera one of the girls remarked that it would be

a pity if the Germans were to bomb such a beautiful building. Prophetic words, because shortly afterwards there was a loud explosion. Looking up they saw a German Taube aeroplane. Almost immediately it dropped another bomb. Soldiers rushed out of cafes and started shooting at it. However, it flew off unscathed to the north-east. Raeburn took the girls to see the damage.

The second bomb had fallen in the Rue Joubert, a narrow business street. Although there was lots of fallen plaster and broken glass no-one had been hurt. People seemed unafraid and not even angry. Raeburn thought it an act of 'mean blackguardism' and the bombing of non-combatants as futile as the dropping of ridiculous propaganda leaflets.

Although Paris was blacked out in the evening, they had a pleasant walk by the Champs Elysees.

2. 9.14: The party went in taxis to the station where they found two enormous trains already nearly full. There was no room for a party of seven so they commandeered an empty guard's van. It had seats and sliding doors so it served as an observation car.

It was very much a stop/start journey particularly around Pointoise. They saw large numbers of soldiers retreating to the south-west. The railway line was strongly defended. Troops were resting and bathing in streams at the track side. The girls tried to give presents to them but officers were reluctant to allow the men to approach the train.

They embarked on a crowded steamer at Dieppe and had a 'splendid passage' on a calm sea. At sunset they passed part of the British fleet steaming through the channel. On arrival at Folkestone, passengers, all of whom had filled in landing cards, were allowed ashore without inspection so any spies would have easily passed through. There were so many people it would have taken days to examine them all. Raeburn was not even asked for his passport.

'Mr Light' and the girls were to stay overnight at the port so Raeburn travelled on to London on his own. He found the city full of French refugees.

3. 9.14: A meeting with Tucker. He and Richards had got back to London in three days. London was crowded; recruiting was going on everywhere. Business appeared much as usual although there had been a panic during the first week of the war.

4. 9.14: Having seen Richards, Raeburn caught the 11.15 train to Edinburgh.

5. 9.14: Edinburgh. Cold, wet and miserable. City as normal except for large numbers of soldiers.

Once home, Raeburn, at the age of 49, volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps. He was rejected on grounds of age. He then worked 15 -16 hour shifts in an aircraft factory during the war. His health was badly affected by overwork.

The British Caucasus Expedition 1914.

Harold Raeburn 1865-1926. Scottish mountaineer, brewer. Joined SMC in 1896 proposed by W. Douglas and W. Naismith. Vice-president 1909-11: because of his modesty declined election as President. Climbed in Scotland, Alps, Norway, Dolomites, Caucasus, Himalaya, climbing leader Everest reconnaissance expedition 1921. Reached 22,000ft. despite two months' illness. Member Alpine Club (1904) and honorary member of Fell and Rock Climbing Club. 'Leading Scottish mountaineer with a reputation from the Alps to Norway and the Caucasus,' MacRobert, p.59 *A Century of Scottish Mountaineering.* Ed. Brooker. SMT 1988.

'Raeburn...ranked with Collie as the two best of Scotland's mountaineers at home and abroad,' p.209 *The Scottish Highlands.* Murray. SMT 1976.

Chapter three in *The Edge* by McNeish and Else is devoted to Harold Raeburn.

Henry Scott Tucker. Died 1944. Solicitor. Admitted to Alpine Club 1910. Proposed by H. E. Newton and W. P. Haskett Smith. Climbed in Devon, Cornwall, the Lake District and the Highlands. First traverse of the Rateau, and Meije traverse 1906. Many other Alpine routes.

R. C. Richards. Raeburn describes Richards as being a member of the Climber's Club but may have been mistaken. Their club archivist can find no record of him. He was not a member of either the Alpine Club or the Scottish Mountaineering Club. Possibly a member of the Swiss Alpine Club. No other information available.

Rembart Martinson (19), a Russian cadet of Danish descent whom Raeburn had met and climbed with in 1913. *Aide de camp* to the 1914 expedition dealing with interpreting, hiring porters and horses.

Alexander Mirandoff (28), expedition cook. Raeburn describes him as being colourless and timid. However, he could make 'a neat and reasonable cooking fire as opposed to a conflagration'. Married, army reservist, received call up papers 6. 8.14.

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Notes and references:

1. Raeburn was a keen ornithologist.
2. A light, low, four-wheeled vehicle. Horse drawn.
3. Raeburn's emphasis.
4. Presumably on the outward journey.
5. This was typical of widespread anti-German feeling from the beginning of the war. Scotland was not exempt from this. In May, 1915, there were anti-German riots in Greenock, Annan, Dumfries, Perth, Alloa and Leith.
6. On Tuesday, December 1, 1914, Raeburn gave a talk to SMC members about the expedition. The baggage had not yet arrived home so he had only a few photographs to show.
7. It is this kind of detail that brings Raeburn's diaries to life.
8. A four-wheeled open cart.
9. The Goeben and the Breslau. This was something of a *cause celebre* during the first few weeks of the war. Were the ships German or Turkish, were they to be crewed by Turks or Germans?
10. Russia declared war on Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) on 1. 11.14. See note 12 below. (Editor's Note: consistent with other signs of chronic incompetence in matters foreign shown by Great Britain at this time was the tale of two dreadnoughts. In August, 1914, a Turkish naval delegation arrived in Britain to take possession of these two warships. They had already been paid for, partly using money raised by public subscription. The day before the handover however, the War Office ordered their requisition, without compensation. Public opinion in Turkey, which had been leaning towards a pact with the Allies, swung in favour of Germany. The rest, including the violent and, for the Allies, disastrous campaign in the Dardenelles is, as they say, history.)
11. The Craigforth, 2900 tons, registered in Leith.
12. On 27. 10. 14, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* re-entered the Black Sea accompanied by Turkish warships. They shelled Russian ports and sank two Russian ships.
13. Raeburn's sister Edith?
14. Raeburn seemed in no hurry to get home. Perhaps because the expedition had been cut short and possibly, like many others, he thought the war would be over quickly.
15. He had sent Raeburn photographs and information on M. Adai and N. Tsaya. Ronchetti lost part of his foot through frostbite on Adai but was still able to climb.
16. Francis Wells Newmarch 1853-1918. In Caucasus in 1893, 94, 95.
17. Godfrey Allan Solly 1858-1942. In Caucasus 1893, 94. Advocate of guideless climbing. Member of SMC, attended Easter meet at Inveroran in 1894. Climbed in Glen Coe and on Ben Nevis with Collie and Collier.
18. John Garforth Cockin 1846-1900. In Caucasus 1888, 90, 93, 96. Early explorer in Caucasus. Killed on solo descent of Weisshorn.
19. Yachting was another of Raeburn's interests. He became a member of the Royal Forth Yacht Club in 1900.
20. Knickerbockers, trousers favoured by lady climbers. Sometimes worn under the usual long skirts which were removed at the foot of the route and put on again on the descent. See photograph by Ruth Raeburn opposite p.127 in *Mountaineering Art.*
21. An English girl called Johnson, an unnamed Scottish girl of around 19, three 'Kentish maids' called Reader aged between 16 and 10.
22. Was this his real name or another example of Raeburn's sense of humour? See the 'light horseman' above.
23. The French government left for Bordeaux on 2. 9.14.

THE CROFTER AND THE GURKHA

By Ian R. Mitchell

Scene: A tent in Coire Lagan, Skye, summer 1899.

(Two men are finishing off a meal, among cooking utensils, climbing equipment etc. One man is dressed as a Gurkha soldier of the Indian Army, the other – who speaks first – is a bearded Highlander.)

John Mackenzie: You have eaten little for a man who yesterday did the run to the summit of Sgurr Mhairi and back, and that in less time than we have been sitting at meat. Take some more of the *stapag,* it is an excellent mixture of oatmeal and cream, and very sustaining.

Harkabir Thapa: I follow the habits of my countrymen, who eat little so as not to burden the body. And I did not find the run excessively tiring, especially as I was completing it for second time, so as to satisfy the doubts of the Macleod sahib. I was thus familiar with the ground.

John Mackenzie: And only a glass of water to drink? I myself am liking a good dram of what we call the water of life, *uisghe-beatha* in our language, as well as the same good meal the gentlemen in the next tent are eating, after a hard day on the mountains.

Harkabir Thapa: We do not generally touch spirits, for the same reason that we eat in moderation, feeling such abstinence beneficial to the body. I thank you for your most generous offer, but I will decline your spirit and keep to the water, which is here of great purity.

You speak of your language; is it not the same as that of Major Bruce and the Professor *sahib?*

John Mackenzie: Professor Collie does not have the Gaelic, my language, and so I must converse with him in the English, which I have, though few on the island have it. I guide the tourists from the hotel onto the Cuillin, and for that it is necessary that I can speak with them. This provides me with my income, for the land which I have brings in little. It belongs to Macleod, the man who doubted your run, causing you to repeat it. Now things are a little better on the island, since Macleod and the other lairds lost the power to evict us.

Harkabir Thapa: I see the land here is poor, and the people are poor. But they are not so poor as in my homeland, where most dress in rags like your beggars. My mountains are many times higher than on your island, but unless men learn to fly there will never be work for guides there. The only way people have to escape hardship is to join the Indian Army. Our pay is sent home to our families to save them from starvation.

And Major Bruce has been kind to me, bringing me to climb the highest mountain in Europe, and then to Skye with the Professor. Many of the *sahibs* are not so kind, and unlike your *sahib,* he has made an effort to learn my language and that of the other tribes. The kindest *sahib* I ever met was the *sahib* Mummery, who dies on the mountain of Nanga Parbat.

John Mackenzie: The Professor is not my *sahib* as you call the Major. I am a free man, and I guide whom I please...I love being on the mountains, and would go on my own if Professor Collie was not there. As a boy I climbed many of the Cuillin peaks for my amusement. *Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh,* which lies not far from here, I climbed as a boy of ten.
Harkabir Thapa: You call the Professor 'Sir', as I answer the Major, but the Professor calls you by your name, as the Major does with me. Likewise you carry the equipment, as I do. And we are both eating here in the mess tent, while the *sahibs* eat with the other *sahibs.*
John Mackenzie: On the mountains we are equal. We discuss what we are to climb, and sometimes I lead, and sometimes he does. But he cannot introduce me to his friends, as they are not of my kind...I would like that he would wish me to come with him on some of his trips abroad, to Scotland, or to the English hills, or to Norway, where he hopes to go and where he tells me it is just like Skye. But he has not done so and I do not like to ask. I have never left Skye.
Harbakir Thapa: The mountain we climbed today...
John Mackenzie: *Sgurr Alasdair* it was called, and that was a new way to the summit of the mountain, by a route which the Professor and myself have not done before. The mountain is named after the sheriff, the man Nicolson who climbed it first, about twenty years ago.
Harkabir Thapa: That was a mighty projection on the mountain that the sahibs photographed. It is still possible to see the great shadow it is casting. What will you call it?
John Mackenzie: I think I will name it *A' Cioch,* which in my language is meaning a woman's breast.
Harkabir Thapa: I am not certain that such is a fitting name for a rock. However, I can see the resemblance in question.
I prefer to sleep here, in this tent in the mountains, where we can watch the sun set and rise again in the morning, rather than on the floor of the Major sahib's room in the hotel, in case he needs me to fetch some water or other task in the night. But you do not stay with the Professor at the hotel?
John Mackenzie: I walk three miles back to the *clachan* of Sconser where I spend the night in my own house. I rise early in the morning to be back for the gentlemen, or the *sahibs* as you call them. We may not be their equals, but they would be hard put to manage without us. Perhaps one day the guide will be more of the master than the servant.
Harkabir Thapa: Perhaps. And perhaps one day men can fly to my mountains and my people will not need to join the *sahibs'* Army. A man is allowed to dream. Good night. How do you say that in your language?
John Mackenzie: *Oidche Mhath.*
Harkabir Thapa: Oy Kaa Maa.
John Mackenzie: Now you know more Gaelic than the Professor! Good night.

TWO CENTURIES OF SCOTTISH MOUNTAIN TABLES – THE REVOLUTIONARY CONNECTION

By Peter Drummond

NEARLY a decade ago, 1991 saw the SMCJ publication centenary of Hugh Munro's Tables. They were designed by a hill-walker for hill-walkers (though he would not have recognised this term), and were surely the first list designed for that specific leisure purpose – mountaineering for its own sake was a late 19th century phenomenon. But the compilation of lists, classifying and sometimes ranking objects, is a feature of Western civilisation going back certainly to the 18th century, when the great Swedish scientist, Linneaus, was its best-known practitioner. It is not surprising then to find lists of Scottish hills going back to the century before Sir Hugh's.

Date	Author	Source	No. Hills	No. 3000ft.+
1789	Ainslie	Map	66	15
1803	Chalmers	Gazeteer	c.150	12
1817	Playfair	Gazeteer	126	22
1823	Rhind	Guidebook	214	28
1832	Thomson	Pictorial diagram	28	15

Researching historical sources is like exploring a river – one goes in the opposite direction to the flow of time, and may have to guess at confluences which is the tributary, which the mainstream. In my journey I had a head start, for I was guided straight to one list which appeared in 1825, six decades earlier than those included in the Hall and Baddeley Guides [1] of the 1880s. Ian Mitchell's book *Scotland's Mountains before the Mountaineers* [2] throws a brief spotlight on an annual publication called simply *The Scottish Tourist* by W. Rhind, the 1825 edition. With no particular context, it contains a couple of pages entitled *Altitude in feet of Mountains in Scotland above the level of the sea* (pp398-9), listing 213 eminences alphabetically. These ranged from Bennevis at 4375 feet to Annan Hill at 256 feet – the criteria for 'mountain' had clearly yet to be defined. Ian directed me to the Mitchell Library where he had unearthed the book in question; the volume brought out to me was, however, the 1823 edition, thus taking me two years farther back into the mists of time. It had the title *Alphabetical List of the Mountains in Scotland,* was spread over eight small pages (pp31-38) and had several heights different from

the 1825 edition and five different mountains: Firmouth and Scroneach, both of Aberdeenshire, went out in the 1825 edition, while Galla Hill and Argyle Stone came in. It is clear that the habit of revising mountain lists long predates the SMC's oft-berated revisions of recent years.

Shifting briefly downstream, less than a decade later John Thomson's atlas of 1831 opened with two pages devoted to watercolour, *Comparative Views;* one of Scottish rivers, the other of the *Heights of the Principal Mountains of Scotland.* The latter, reprinted, is now available commercially from outdoor shops, and apart from the feat of making all Scottish hills resemble the jagged peaks of the Cuillin, is also remarkable for arranging its featured 29 hills (28 if we discount 'Glencoe') in order on a height axis at the side, a progression from Rhind's alphabetical order.

Moving upstream again, I tried to find what sources Rhind may have filled his buckets from. One possible tributary I spent several weeks wading up were the many volumes of the first Statistical Account of the 1790s,[3] in which parish ministers described their flock and its lands, sometimes including the hills. Some ministers 'lifted up their eyes to the hills', while others were blind to them, but they present a fascinating picture of contemporary views of high ground. 'Knockdolian rises in a conical shape...and is of singular service as a landmark to vessels in the Firth of Clyde', and 'Beinmore Assynt's sides are covered in grass and daisies – in some places it is very rocky but it affords excellent pasture for sheep', to quote but two. But I digress up this tributary...another article will chart its delights. For even if Rhind had read all these volumes, it would have accounted for barely a third of his tabled heights.

Both the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the National Library's Map Rooms in Edinburgh contain many old maps and gazetteers. Most of the maps do show hills, often marked with hachures, with names or spellings that differ from those we now use: for example, Suilven appears as Sugar Loaf, Criffel as Crawfell or the Long Fell, and Ben Wyvis as Benuaish. But in these early 19th century maps, heights were virtually never marked on the map. Lists did appear, however, in gazetteers or in tables in corners of maps. Although my order of discovering these was not sequential to their date of publication, this little expedition log will continue the preceding upstream pattern.

In 1817, shortly before his death, Principal James Playfair of St. Andrews University published a geography of Scotland [4] that has, tucked away in his appendix 8, a *Table of Heights of Mountains* listing 126 peaks in alphabetical order within shires: while some might snort at the 117ft. 'mountain' that he lists for the Piazzo at [Holyrood] Abbey, most of his list would be in modern baggers' sights. Nearly half of his list appears in Rhind's Table, so it clearly had contemporary authority too. As with Rhind too, more than two-thirds of Playfair's listed hills are south of the Highland

boundary fault, and mountainous Inverness-shire has but four representatives (Ben-nevis, Mealfourvonie, Scarsough and Scurdonuil).

The next significant point upstream is in the opening years of the century. Chalmers' gazetteer [5], on surprisingly modern lines, focuses mainly on settlements, but includes other features – including about 150 hills or mountains. In its initial summary, he incorporates a list of the dozen highest (known) peaks, descending from Bennevis at 4370ft. and Cairngorm at 4030ft. down to two at exactly 3000ft. – Benivenow (Ben Venue) and Benchochan (in Aberfoyle parish – perhaps Beinn a'Chroin at 3104ft.). A mere 12 Munros indeed – but while a small step for a modern bagger, it was a big step towards ranking by height.

Finally, we come to the Well of Dee of this particular search. It appears to lie in the corner of a map by John Ainslie, a Jedburgh man born in the year that Prince Charles Edward Stuart raised his standard of rebellion at Glenfinnan, who became a land surveyor (and bookseller) in Edinburgh. In 1789, when Frenchmen other than Charles were engaging more successfully in revolution, Ainslie published a map of Scotland in nine sheets on a scale of four miles to the inch: it must have sold well, because revised editions continued until 1840. The space at the corners of the maps, reflecting the unnameable sea, where modern maps might carry a key or legend, were filled with etchings of rural life or more prosaic but useful data. And on the left, moored as it were in the Atlantic, is a table *Heights of the Most Remarkable Hills:* this earliest Scottish hill list contains 66 separate eminences in apparently random order, from the inevitable Bennevis at 4370ft. down to Dunse Law at 630ft.: 15 of his peaks are over 3000ft., and all but five over 1000ft. Table 2 (overleaf) also appends a dozen peaks in England, nine over 3000ft. – surely the first table of furths. Some peaks on his list may need a little head-scratching. Kirk Yetton in Edinburgh is Caerketton, Bendochie is Bennachie, Noath is the Tap o' Noth, and the Scarry Hills is Scaraben; otherwise most of the names will be familiar to today's walkers, more than 210 years on. The table must have been well-known in its day, for virtually all its chosen peaks were incorporated into Rhind's 1820s annual. However, sic transit gloria, and Ainslie's revolutionary map was forgotten. Until now.

References and notes:

1. See references in SMCJ 1998, Vol. 36, pp704-5, to these two annual publications for sporting tourists of the shooting kind.
2. Published 1999, Luath Press, Edinburgh – reference on page 47.
3. *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland* in 21 volumes, edited by Sir John Sinclair, were published in the 1790s. Sir John produced a summary volume with lists of population and the like, but nowhere does he list mountains in one table.
4. James Playfair, *A Geographical and Statistical Description of Scotland,* 1817 – reference on pp341-4.
5. W. Chalmers *The Gazetteer of Scotland,* Dundee 1803.

Table 2. Based on Ainslie's 1789 *Heights of the Most Remarkable Hills From the Level of the Sea.*

Hill	Shire	Height in feet
Arthurseat	Edinburgh	814
Carnethy	"	1700
Kirk Yetton	"	1555
North Berwich Law	Haddington	940
Dunse Law	Berwick	630
Largo Law	Fife	1010
East Lommond	"	1260
West Lommond	"	1280
Dunnion	Roxburgh	1031
Minto Hills	"	858
Rubers Law	"	1419
Eildon Hills	"	1330
Carterfell	"	1602
Wisp	"	1830
Chiviot	Northumberland	2682
Peat Law	Selkirk	1557
Three Brethern	"	1760
Minchmoor	"	1877
Hangingshaw Law	"	1780
Blackhouse Heights	"	2370
Ettrick Pen	"	2200
Windlestraw Law	"	2295
Ben Lomond	Stirling	3262
Kingseat	Perth	1196
Farragon	"	2584
Ben Lawers	"	4015
Benmore	"	3903
Schiehallion	"	3564
Bengloe	"	3724
Benderig	"	3550
Benchonzie	"	2922
Benvorlick	"	3300
Benledi	"	3009
Benclach	"	2420
Hartfell	Dumfries	2582
Scrifield	Kirkcudbright	2044
Lead Hills	Lanark	1564
Tinto	"	2368
" by Rev. Ferguson		2230
Paps of Jura	Isle of Jura	2476
Scarsough	Inverness	3412
Bennivis	"	4370
Cairngouram	"	4060
Mealfourvounny	"	3060
Kermanearn	Kincardine	1020

Hill	Shire	Height in feet
Kerloch	Kincardine	1890
Klochnabane	"	2370
Mountbattock	"	3465
Bendochie	Aberdeen	1420
Bin Hill	"	1045
Beneagan	"	1582
Noath	"	1830
Buck of Cabrach	"	2377
Coryhabbie	"	2558
Benrinnes	"	2747
Benwyves	Ross	3720
Pap of Caithness	"	1929
Ord of Caithness	"	1250
Scarry Hills	"	1876
Mistylaw	Renfrew	1240
Burhullion	Wigton	814
Fell of Mochrum	"	1020
Knock of Luce	"	1014
Larg	"	1758
Cairnsmoor	Kirkcudbright	1728
Knock Dolton	Ayr	930
Cairntable	"	1650

Heights of some of the Most Remarkable Hills in England

Skiddaw	Cumberland	3270
Grasmine	"	3141
Saddle Back	"	3048
Carrock	"	2265
Grisdale Pike	"	2904
Ingleborough	York	3700
Wharnside	"	3840
Pindle Hill	Lancashire	2640
Snowdon	Wales	3470
Helvellin	Westmorland	3324
Crossfell	"	3300
Bowfell	"	3440

MUNRO-BAGGING WITH A COMPUTER...? NAISMITH'S RULE AND THE LONG WALK IN

By Steve Carver and Steffen Fritz

IT IS more than 100 years since W. W. Naismith first published his walker's rule in the pages of this Journal. In the 1892 edition, he describes a solo round trip from Crianlarich over Cruach Ardrain, Stobinian and Ben More to Luib, which he carried out on May 2, 1892. In his description Naismith[1] concludes:

'Distance, 10 miles; total climb, 6300ft.; time, six-and-a-half hours (including short halts). This tallies exactly with a simple formula, that may be found useful in estimating what time men in fair condition should allow for easy expeditions, namely, an hour for every three miles on the map, with an additional hour for every 2000ft. of ascent.'

In metric terms, this may be translated into a speed of five kilometres per hour on level ground, with half-an-hour being added for every 300m of ascent.

Several refinements have been made to Naismith's Rule since 1892. These range from Tranter's Correction that takes fitness, fatigue, load carried, ground conditions and prevailing weather into account, to the (American) Backpacker's Rule that assumes Naismith to be an optimist and so adds 50%! Aitken makes simple refinements according to ground conditions by assuming that while five kilometres per hour can be maintained on paths, tracks and roads, only four kilometres per hour can be made on all other terrain [2]. Langmuir [3] makes the following further refinements:

'Naismith's Rule of five kilometres per hour plus half-an-hour for every 300m of ascent; minus 10 minutes for every 300m descent for slopes between 5° and 12°; plus 10 minutes for every 300m descent for slopes greater than 12°.'

It is thought that the rule is generally applicable for reasonably fit mountaineers negotiating typical terrain under typical weather conditions – which from experience of Scotland often means hard going in mist and rain.

Apart from these corrections, little else has changed in the way Naismith's Rule is actually used. Current methods of application rely heavily on guesswork, local knowledge and manual calculation. This article describes the computerisation of Naismith's Rule for accurately mapping remoteness in mountainous terrain.

Mapping remoteness using Naismith's Rule.

Recent research into wild land in Scotland by the authors has required that we develop a method of drawing maps showing the relative remoteness of the Scottish Highlands. But what do we mean exactly by 'remoteness'?

Defining remote – or just how long is 'the long walk in'?

One of the defining characteristics of many Scottish mountains is their remoteness, but this is neither easy to measure or describe in general terms. Yet it is an essential element of the mountain experience since the physical nature and geographical location of mountain landscapes often instils a deep feeling of remoteness as distinct from the close, crowded comfort of 'civilised' urbanity. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why many of us go to the mountains in the first place – to get away.

Remoteness may be defined geographically as the distance of one point in the landscape from another measured 'as the crow flies'. However, this makes the assumption that the difficulties encountered in traversing the landscape on foot are the same in all directions. This is clearly not true, particularly in mountainous areas. Another, more useful, definition of remoteness therefore, is the time taken to travel between the starting point (usually a road or car park) and the destination (such as a Munro). In other words, just how long is 'the long walk in'? You would be correct in assuming at this juncture that the answer to mapping remoteness lies in the application of Naismith's Rule; which, of course, it does, or at least by our estimation.

Using travel time as a measure of remoteness in mountain areas requires that a number of geographical factors other than straight-line distance be considered. These include the various cost or push (benefit) factors that not only influence the ease of travel in a particular direction, but also the route chosen. 'Cost' factors have the effect of slowing down walking times in that some cost beyond the effect of distance covered is applied opposite to the direction of travel. Typical cost factors are slope (when walking uphill), headwinds, thick vegetation and difficult ground conditions. 'Push' factors have the effect of speeding up walking times in that some additional force is applied in the direction of travel. Typical examples are slope (when walking down gentle slopes) and tailwinds. It should be noted that certain cost/push factors, especially slope and wind direction, are strongly dependent on direction of travel; both of which are accounted for in Naismith's Rule with Tranter's Correction.

A third, and final, definition of remoteness is that of perceived remoteness. The fitness and skill of the mountaineer can greatly influence their perceived remoteness having reached a particular destination. The fitter the individual, the greater the distance that can be covered in a certain time. The greater their skills of climbing and navigation, the greater the distance that can be covered/height gained, especially on technically-difficult terrain. The physical effects of some variables such as slope, ground cover and prevailing weather conditions will have a lesser effect in fit and skilled individuals.

Nonetheless, geography remains an important factor governing fatigue, as a mountaineer's speed declines with time and distance covered. Other

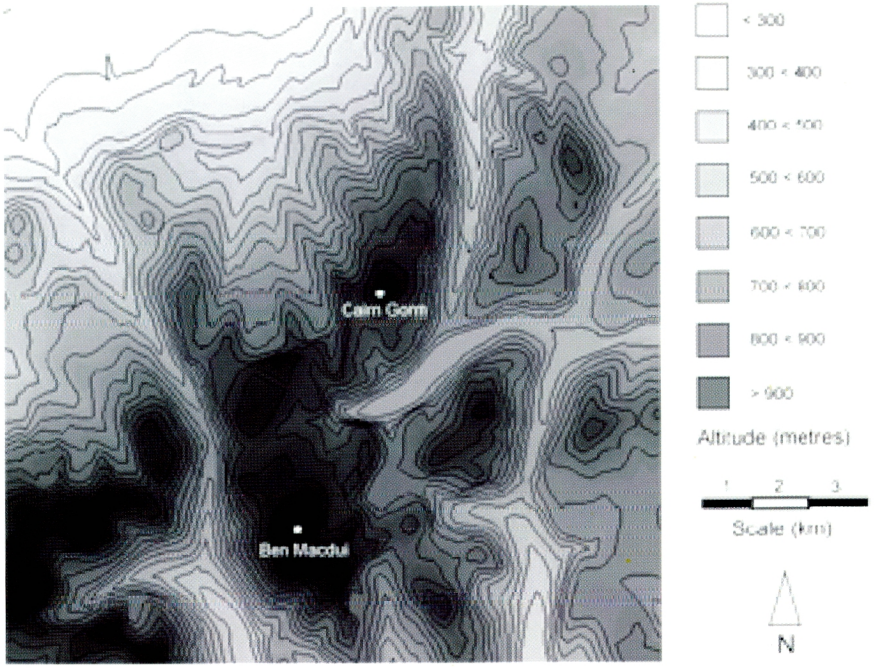

Fig. 1 – Digital elevation model (DEM) of the Central Cairngorms.

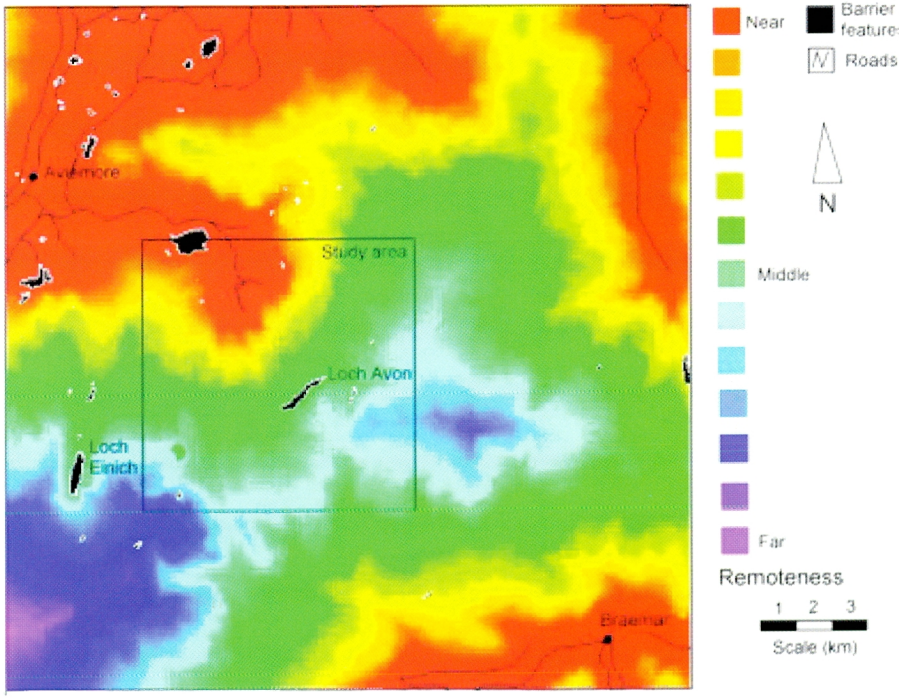

Fig. 2 – Remoteness map of the Central Cairngorms.

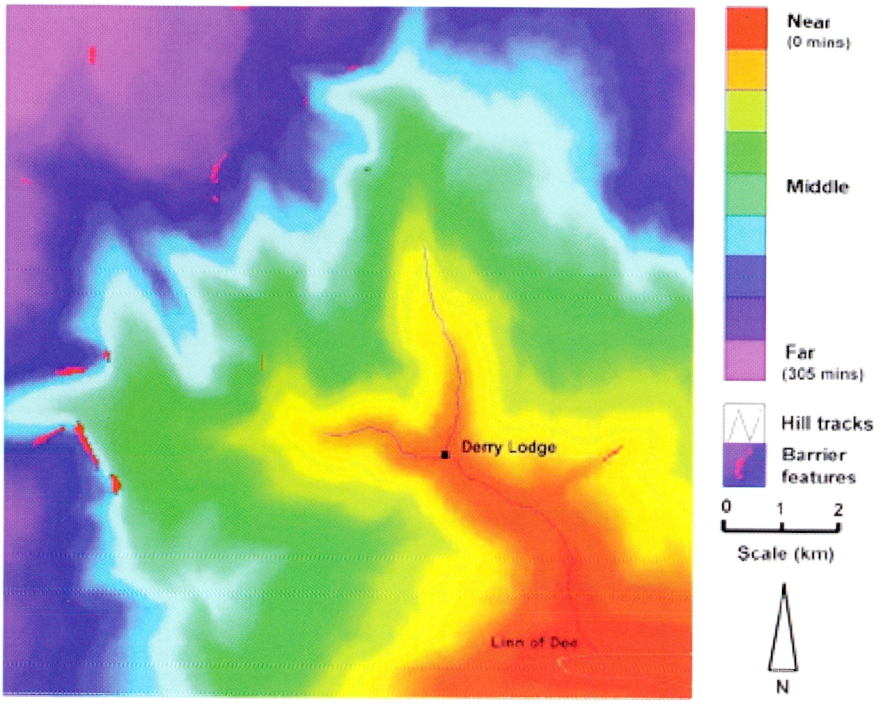

Fig. 3a – Cairngorms with mountain bikes.

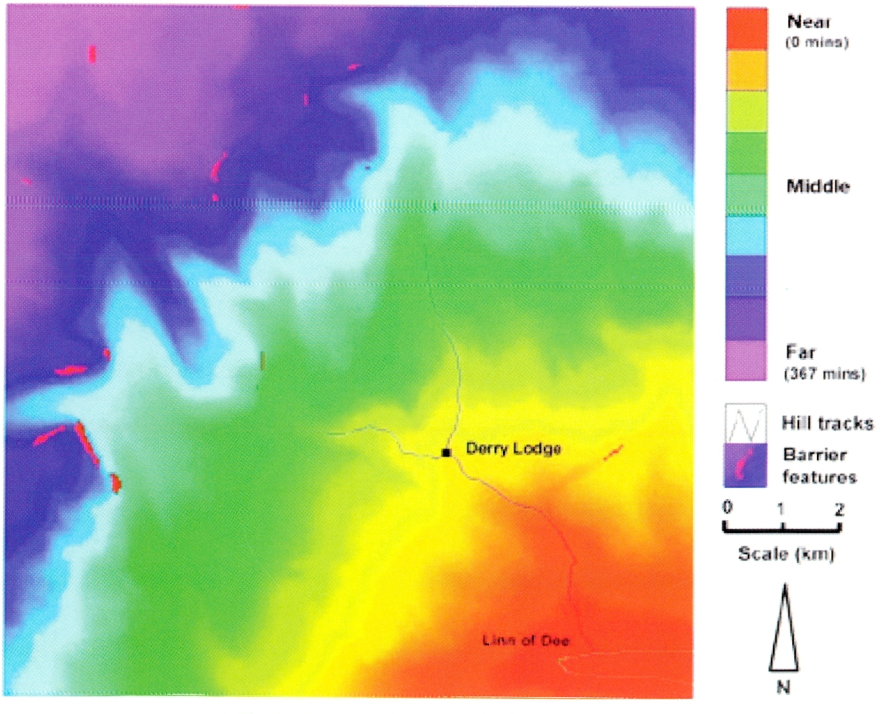

Fig. 3b – Cairngorms without mountain bikes.

variables that might have a detrimental effect on perceived remoteness are the presence of human artefacts in the landscape such as bothies and hunting lodges, hydro-electric schemes, pylons, walls, fences, plantation forests, livestock, old crofts/shielings, hill tracks and ski lifts (or dare we say funiculars?). These can significantly detract from the feeling of remoteness, especially when located deep within roadless areas. On this note, another variable that may have a significant effect in influencing the perception of remoteness is visibility. If it is not possible to see a nearby dam or hill track because of an intervening mountain or prevailing weather conditions, then the feeling of remoteness may be enhanced.

While perceived remoteness is important for wider studies of landscape character, this article focuses the idea of 'the long walk in' as a definition of physical remoteness based purely on the time taken to walk from the nearest road, taking the physical characteristics of the landscape into account.

Back to mapping remoteness.

Being a mountaineer (of sorts) Naismith's Rule is familiar, but it took a map from Bob Aitken's PhD thesis to prompt the question as to whether it would be possible to map walking times, and hence remoteness, using a computerised version of Naismith's Rule. In his thesis, Aitken uses time taken to walk from the nearest road as a proxy for wildness, and he does this by manually drawing rough walking time contours onto Ordnance Survey maps using local knowledge and Naismith's Rule as a guide. It was decided to automate this rather laborious and time-consuming procedure using computer mapping software known as Geographical Information Systems (GIS)[4].

The method of mapping Naismith's Rule described here uses Dijkstra's shortest path algorithm (a technique borrowed from mathematicians and re-programmed into the GIS) to calculate the quickest route from starting point to destination taking terrain and other variables into account. This works by estimating the relative difficulty of all possible routes between the start and end points of the proposed walk and choosing the quickest[5]. The variables that determine the difficulty of the walk and hence the speed at which a mountaineer can complete the route include:

- Terrain variables such as how steep the slope is and which direction it is facing.
- Presence of tracks and paths as these often constitute the route of least resistance.
- Conditions under foot such as thickness of vegetation and how rough, loose, rocky or boggy the ground is.
- Prevailing weather conditions, including wind speed, wind direction, visibility and temperature.
- Barrier features that may block normal progress such as lochs, crags and burns that are too deep to be forded.

- Hydrological conditions, including changes in stream levels and depth of snow cover.

Because it is not known which route a walker will take, the method can only consider the quickest possible path as determined by the shortest path algorithm. However, using this approach it is possible to map the remoteness of any mountain area using Naismith's Rule and appropriate digital datasets. The key datasets required are a digital elevation model (DEM) [6] and a map of roads, hill tracks and footpaths. Other datasets providing information on water features and ground cover are also useful in making relevant corrections and allowing for the effects of barrier features blocking normal progress.

Back to the future...from 1892 to 1999.

In June, 1999, the authors re-traced much of Naismith's 1892 solo trip based on his description in the SMC Journal. The route was made circular by dropping from Bealach-eadar-dha Beinn into Benmore Glen and thence along the A85 back to Crianlarich. The exact route was logged using a pair of Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) receivers and a record of the height gained and lost kept on a digital altimeter. The statistics for the trip are as follows:

Horizontal distance covered: 18.6 kilometres – 11.6 miles.
Total height gain: 1615m – 5328ft.
Time taken: 6 hours 43 minutes.
Number of snack/rest stops: 7, totalling 36 minutes
Weather: dry, overcast, light wind, cloud-base approx. 3000ft.

This tallies reasonably well with the statistics for Naismith's trip, even allowing for the uncertainty surrounding his exact route and changes made to allow us to return to our car. If nothing else, it proves we could just about have kept up with him on the hills!

The route taken in 1999 was transferred from the GPS to the GIS and the computerised version of Naismith's Rule used to predict the route and the total time taken for the whole trip allowing for the terrain negotiated.

The route predicted by the computer is based on linking the summits and other points visited by Naismith in 1892 as mentioned in his article. This is compared to the GPS log of the route taken in 1999 and shown to be quite similar. The predicted time was compared to the actual recorded time and shown to be about 60 minutes longer. In this case the computer over-estimates the time taken, partly as a result of differences in actual and predicted route and our inclusion of Langmuir's corrections for steep downhill sections, and partly, we confess, from the authors' desire to put in a quick time. This notwithstanding, both the actual and predicted times tally remarkably well with basic Naismith calculations based on distance covered and height gained/lost.

Mapping remoteness in the Cairngorms.

It is expected that most readers of the Journal are familiar with the Cairngorms, so they do not need any further description other than to say that the central parts of the massif, being several kilometres from the nearest road or track, are certainly remote by UK standards. In recent years, concerns have been expressed over the attrition of the remoteness of the area by, for example, the development of new access tracks [7] and increasing use of mountain bikes. In addition, concern has been voiced over expansion of skiing facilities (most notably plans for a new funicular at Coire Cas) and erosion of popular footpaths caused by the large numbers of visitors attracted to the area.

In order to plan the management of the Cairngorms effectively it is important to have information on the relative remoteness of different parts of the area. This information can be used in conjunction with other datasets to identify necessary programmes of action. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is the principal organisation responsible for the management of the natural landscape of Scotland. SNH are using the techniques of remoteness mapping described here to pursue a number of aims and objectives in the management of the Cairngorm Mountains [8] including planning visitor surveys, footpath management, access management, identifying areas for removal of human artefacts and development of wild land policy.

Remoteness maps of the central Cairngorms are shown here as an example of the use of the computerised version of Naismith's Rule described above. Figure 1 shows a DEM of the central Cairngorms overlaid with roads, rivers and lochs. Figure 2 shows the relative remoteness of a wider area of the central Cairngorms based on access from metalled public roads and with the addition of barrier features (lochs and steep ground greater than 45°). Here Naismith's Rule is modified to show walking speeds of 5 km/h on paths and tracks and a maximum of 3.33 km/h in all other areas to take rougher ground conditions into account.

Predicting the effect of restrictions on mountain bikes.

Mar Lodge estate is owned by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and managed under agreement with SNH. Recreation management is a contentious issue at the present time because of efforts by NTS to restrict the use of mountain bikes on the hill track from Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge and beyond. The two maps in Figure 3 show how proposed restrictions on the use of mountain bikes on hill tracks will affect remoteness when travelling into the central Cairngorms from the Linn of Dee. Figure 3(a) shows the remoteness map for the area under current conditions where the use of mountain bikes on the Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge hill track is commonplace. Here Naismith's Rule has been modified by assuming that a speed of 15 km/h is attainable along this track using a mountain bike. Figure 3(b) shows the alternative remoteness map for the

same area under conditions where the use of mountain bikes is prohibited. Here, all public access is on foot from the Linn of Dee at reduced speeds of only 5 km/hour along the track and other footpaths and 3.33 km/hour in other areas. Comparing the two maps in Figure 3 shows how the proposed access restrictions by the NTS will affect the relative remoteness of this part of the Cairngorms and reinforce the principle of the 'long walk in'. In real terms, the difference between the remotest part of the area represented in Figures 3(a) and 3(b) is in the order of 60 minutes.

Concluding remarks.

We hope to have shown how Naismith's Rule can be computerised in order to draw maps of remoteness for mountain areas. Now, we don't suppose for even a minute that everyone will soon be carrying PCs into the hills and using computer-generated maps of Naismith's Rule to help plan their days out or just how long it will take to bag Beinn Fhionnlaidh. On the other hand, we do see a role for this work in helping SNH and others look after our hills and mountains. Using techniques of computer mapping we can show how mountain bike access and other developments can significantly shorten the length of the 'long walk in'. We hope to be able to provide this kind of information to SNH when implementing the proposed Scottish National Parks Act. Being able to quantify and map impacts on the essential character of the hills is clearly an advantage when putting a case for or against a particular development at a Public Inquiry, be it for a ski lift or a national park. In the same way, using such techniques to help develop a national wild land policy for Scotland's mountains could help protect the very qualities of the landscape; its remoteness and challenge, that we hold so dear. Wonder what auld Naismith would think?

References and notes:

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2. Aitken, R. 1977. *Wilderness areas in Scotland.* Unpublished PhD thesis, Aberdeen University.
3. Langmuir, E. 1984. *Mountaincraft and leadership.* The Scottish Sports Council/MLTB. Cordee, Leicester.
4. GIS are variously defined as combined computer software, hardware and database systems designed for the input, storage, retrieval, manipulation, transformation, analysis and output of geographical data. They are computer mapping systems that have the ability to perform complex and detailed analysis on any data with a geographical co-ordinate reference, such as an OS grid-reference. GIS are used by all the organisations that need to handle and analyse geographical data in digital form. These range from the utilities (water, gas, electricity and telephone companies) and the emergency services, to local government and the military. See Heywood *et al.* (1998) for further details on GIS.
5. Sedgewick, R. 1984. *Algorithms.* Reading, Addison-Wesley.
6. A DEM is a digital map of height (elevation or altitude) represented in a GIS as a regularly or irregularly spaced set of point height values.
7. Watson, A. 1984. A survey of vehicular hill tracks in north east Scotland for land use planning. In *Journal of Environmental Management.* 18, 345-353.
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TRIO

By I. H. M. Smart

The Shades of Night:

THE shades of night were falling fast. Big snow flakes drifted down from a gloomy sky, swirling in the occasional puff of wind. Snow-laden woods in the silent dusk of winter are dark and deep and awesome. The two of us were skiing along the floor of a remote valley on our way to climb Mount Assiniboine, the 'Matterhorn of the Rockies', at that time a remote mountain. We were making a quick raid rather than laying siege and so were lightly laden. Success depended on moving fast and making no mistakes. In the gathering darkness we looked around for a suitable tree to bivouac under. This is the appropriate thing to do when benighted in the northwoods. The valley floors in this part of the world are not scoured by fierce winds. Trees grow straight and under vertical snowfall branches are bent rather than broken. The lowest fronds of spruce trees arch to the ground, leaving a snow-free space between them and the trunk to form a natural igloo where you can create a happy home. You can make a tiny fire from the dead wood of the old inner branches and relax comfortably after supper in sheltered candlelight, philosophising about the meaning of life while the wild world outside gets on with whatever it is up to when we are not looking at it. It is also a lot more comfortable than camping in a small tent in heavy snowfall.

As we cast about looking at the various residential properties on offer we came across ski tracks, the first evidence of our own kind we had seen since we left the road a couple of days ago. They were going at right angles to our route They looked fresh and the tadpole shape of the ski pole marks gave us the direction. The success of our raid demanded singleness of purpose, yet we somehow found ourselves following this trace of a fellow human through the flat monochrome world that surrounded us. The tracks continued through the pillared halls of a tenebrous wood to an open meadow. From the far side a ray of gold shone through the snow-spangled darkness. The kindly light led us to a picturesque log cabin with deep snow on the roof. We unclipped our skis, knocked, pushed the door open and suddenly left the cold dark world at our backs and entered an alternative universe of warmth and colour. Firelight flickered across the rough-hewn logs of the cabin walls. In the mellow glow of a hurricane lantern we could see a rifle, and snow shoes hung from wooden pegs on each side of the fire. We could feel we were standing on a deep pile carpet

of yellow wood chips, richly patterned with bits of dark brown tree bark. The aroma of pine resin, coffee and toasted bread filled the warm air.

A voice from the fireside broke the spell. 'Come on in, you guys. The coffee's ready. Pull up a bench and thaw yourselves out. It sure is one cold night out there. You're mighty lucky to hit this place. There's a grand-pappie of a snowstorm goin' to hit us.'

The minimal accommodation reserved for us somewhere out there in the swirling darkness could not compete with the opulence before us. And so we spent a very pleasant evening before a cheerful fire with genial, interesting companions and talked late into the night. The next morning we woke up late and consequently missed our window of opportunity. As it happened it didn't matter. We would never have reached Mount Assiniboine as the blizzard lasted for days. In the end it was difficult enough just getting back to the road. Nevertheless, we were not to have known that when we diverted from our route. Warmth and comfort, as we all know, are sore destroyers of initiative. Enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action, as my old friend Hamlet once pointed out.

Stairway to Heaven:

We were returning from the ascent of a minor, but shapely, rock peak of little mountaineering significance. Nevertheless, it had sufficient merit for the powerful Shiva, creator, preserver and destroyer to have shrines on its flank. It had also attracted some exiled Tibetan monks who had built a monastery into its side; the sounds of their horns and chants could be heard rising from time to time from far below. Our camp was perched on a shoulder of the mountain which we shared with some shepherds and their flocks, a holy man and a few big trees. It was very picturesque.

Each afternoon towering anvil-headed clouds, harbingers of the approaching monsoon, assembled over the distant plains of India and in the evenings spectacular lightning played across the darkening southern sky. On our last afternoon the cloud front moved in unexpectedly and overwhelmed our little Shangri-la. By some trick of light the hue of the surrounding vegetation was reflected into the air. An unnerving dense green colour filled the quietness between our camp and the cloud base a few hundred feet above.

Then quite suddenly a dark wind enveloped our ridge, bringing bountiful rain. Bright forked lightning and thunder of intimidating loudness sent a panic through the flocks on the ridge. We abandoned our tents. Everybody, man, woman, sheep and goat headed for the only solid shelter available, a nearby dry-stone fank with a minimal metre-high roof. As I ran I saw

above us two balls of lightning joined by a wiggly band of light, just like you see in horror films.

Inside the crowded shelter a noisy stream of prayers rose to the heavens. I crouched in the dung in a praying position pressed against a goat, a sheep, a shepherd and a girl from Tasmania while something mighty struck outside. I remember thinking through my fear that, all things considered, this would not be a bad way to go. It would be quite romantic to be struck by lightning in such a picturesque site in the company of fellow mortals, all of us fearful of impending dissolution while a stream of interwoven prayers, human, ovine and caprine provided a broad ecumenical stairway to heaven.

However it was not to be. After the storm had passed we found that a tree a few yards away had indeed been rent asunder and some goats, for whom there had been no room in the fank, had been killed. Maybe we had been given a warning; perhaps a merciful element somewhere in creation was allowing us all a little more time to obtain a little more merit. According to Buddhist doctrine, acquisition of merit is essential for securing a worthwhile future existence. The recommended route of renunciation runs uphill, is difficult to find let alone follow, but leads eventually to a restful state of non-being somewhere on the far side of oblivion. On the way, however, there are tracks that lead astray to seductively cheerful log cabins, where unsteadfast souls are recycled back to the main road to begin the weary trudge all over again. On the other hand the whole concept of ratcheting yourself up some spiritual stairway using serially acquired merit may be completely wrong; the true heaven may be encounters with congenial souls in fleeting safe havens whether in the dark woods of the north, under low-roofed biggins in high Asia or wild winter nights in the CIC hut.

The Aphrodite Moment:

Don't get excited by the title. What I am writing about is rather technical and boring and has nothing to do with the acquisition of merit or convivial nights in transcendental log cabins. It is about how we perceive the world, specifically about those moments of heightened awareness we all experience from time to time.

Often they happen when we are coming off a mountain in the aftermath of an adrenaline buzz, but equally often they may arrive in a period of tranquillity, the result of mood coinciding with the resonance of a particular place at a particular time in a particular light

On these occasions you and the ambient world achieve for a moment a numinous, eirenic harmony.

The ancients, being ignorant of modern neurophysiology, used to attribute these supranormal states of mind to possession by forces which were at heart also human, even if a bit more than human. Horace really seemed to think that after a beaker or two of Falernian wine he was in the presence of gentle, jovial Bacchus (Quo me, Bacche?) and in Sappho's poems there is no doubt that during these moments of transcendental beauty she felt herself to be in the very presence of Aphrodite.

To the ancients, Gods and Goddesses were metaphors used to explain and make bearable the things they did not understand. Nowadays, the myths we make up about the world are less humane and comforting than the larger than life, but still recognisably human, Gods and Goddesses. According to the moderns we are supposed to be here all alone, fashioned from subdividing particles that pop in and out of existence, while inside our heads a cocktail of neurochemicals allows us to perceive a limited model of whatever it is that surrounds us.

We may indeed be a marvellous aggregation of transiently ordered particles pushing against the grain of a universe mindlessly maximising its own disorder but operationally, that is for the practical purposes of making the most of our subjective inner lives, we could do worse than respond to the aura of the mysterious Aphrodite. Here is how C. M. Bowra recreates the mystery of her presence.

'Aphrodite was not entirely or primarily the goddess of love. Physical desire and passion strictly belong to Eros; Aphrodite's sphere was wider and slightly different from his. She is more the Goddess of beauty than of the desire for it. She is the Goddess of flowers and of the smiling sea. Her power lies in the enchantment which she throws over visible things. In her own way Aphrodite stands for absolute value, for the magic light that falls at times on life and makes it seem so desirable that men are almost driven to madness. Just as Artemis stood for the remote ideal of innocence, so Aphrodite stood for the sudden unexpected moments of entrancing beauty which occur in the visible world and seduce those who see them into a state far removed from their ordinary experience.'

My most authentic encounter with her was in fact in her native Greece while descending a steep hillside in the fire-flied dusk through a grove of dark olive trees under a crescent moon. She, or her equivalent, is present in Scotland, too. Most of us have experienced those rare moments of magic that are in her gift. Alas, I suspect they do not stem from some mystical epiphany but result from wobbles in our neurochemistry with no information content other than what we give to them. Nevertheless, there is always the possibility that the wobbles may indeed be caused by the arrival of a message from outside. It might even be a real telephone call from Aphrodite herself. It certainly feels like it at the time.