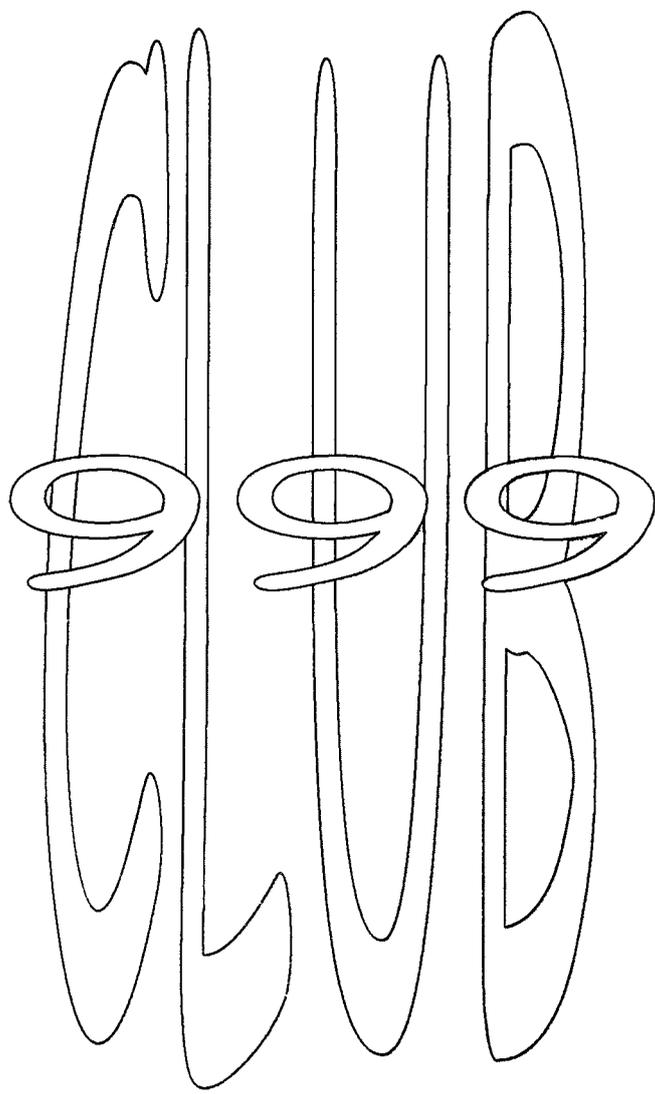


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1998

Trip to South America Summer 1998 *excerpts from a diary*

Ann Millichope

The text below has been taken from my soon to be published book. Only joking! I kept a daily diary of events whilst in Peru and Bolivia. I won't bore you with the whole epic. I'll just bore you with a little bit!

Thursday 23rd July 1998 Went to bed at 2.15 a.m. Got up at 3.15 a.m. Needless to say I was tired!

Tony and I met many people on our travels. Many of them ended up with nicknames, though of course they never knew!

There was "Our man in Peru". He was our taxi driver from Lima airport to Miraflores. He was keen to talk us to death about everything from the socio-economic situation in Peru to his own family history of the last thirty years.

There was "Mr. Slick" a sort of tour agent for the hotel, Inca II in Cuzco.

Friday 24th July 1998 We spent three nights of luxury at the Inca II. Tony likened the dining room to the hanging gardens of Babylon! "What did you expect? The hanging gardens of Babylon!" he said in his best John Cleese voice.

"Mr Slick" arranged a trip to Machupicchu for the next day on the train. Unfortunately we didn't have enough time to trek in because of our climbing plans in Bolivia.

Friday afternoon we wandered round Cuzco square and went to the Irish Bar! Wait until I tell dad that you can have a pint of Guinness in Peru! I abstained from the demon drink but I can assure you only because of the consequences of mixing alcohol and altitude! Ask Tony to recount his experience!

Monday 27th July 1998 What do you do in Lima airport for 14 hours whilst you wait for a plane to La Paz, capital of Bolivia? The novelty of watching planes subsided when there were no more planes to look at!

Remember the nicknames? Well we were served pollo and papas fritas by Robbie Coltrane in one of the restaurants.

Wednesday 29th July 1998 We went to the Andino Club. This was our first meeting with Mario. He couldn't converse in English fluently but he was much better than we were at speaking Spanish!

We arranged to go to the hills for six nights taking Mario with us.

Friday 31st July 1998 The sun went down at about 4p.m. It then went very cold. By 6 p.m. it was beginning to get dark. Tony and I had a stroll before we went to bed. In front of us was the mountain we hoped to climb tomorrow. (Wila Lluxita 5244m.)

Saturday 1st August 1998 The route was easy but I was already noticing the effects of altitude. I have to say it was one big slog to the top. First over scree, then boulders. We finally made it to the top. My first Andean ascent. I was shattered. Went to bed that night determined to do nothing the next day but rest.

Sunday 2nd August 1998 Well, it just had to be a day of rest. After all, it was Sunday! That evening I had my first experience of a high altitude poo. I hadn't been for five days! I'm sure that the fresh vegetables helped me to go! I had eaten okra and potatoes for dinner. We went to bed with the view to getting up reasonably early. Tomorrow we were to pack up all our kit and head further into the mountains. Hopefully to climb a peak.

Monday 3rd August 1998 Our day of rest was well and truly over! We arrived at base camp II at about 5,000m. We went to bed planning a walk about to get a feel for the area and to see how we would approach Jiska-a Pata 5,508m. Tony went to bed with a headache. I didn't. However, a terrible headache came on during the night (altitude problems).

Tuesday 4th August 1998 By morning I was fit for nothing. Tony got up about 8 a.m. I could hear Tony and Mario talking. All I wanted to do was sleep.

By about 11 a.m. I was beginning to feel a little better. I emerged from the tent and sat on a rock. My travel hairbrush included a mirror. My hair was a mess. My eyes were all puffed up around my eyelids. My left eye in particular was partially closed because of the swelling! I tried to make myself more human by having a wash in a very icy stream! Tony got his camera out at one point. I put some clean knickers on. The old ones were sacrificed in a fire that night! After lunch, Tony and I took a walk up the boulder field to look at the approach to Jiska-a Pata 5,508m. The way up to the glacier looked difficult. Loads of loose scree. It was difficult to ignore the snowy peak (Jiska-a Pata) looking down on us. It would have been really something to climb it but I wondered whether I was fit enough. Maybe the col would be a more sensible option. That evening I was a bit weepy. Probably a little run down by the altitude. I woke several times during the night and remember weighing up the decision. I went back to sleep thinking that the approach to Jiska-a Pata was too much like a slog at sea level never mind at over 5,000m!

Wednesday 5th August 1998 I woke up. I didn't have a headache so it was all systems go. I had made the decision that Jiska- a Pata would have been too much for me, so the col it was. The boulder crossing was laborious. We made it to the glacier, though it was much harder than I had expected. Lots of little triangular pieces of ice, which broke when you put your weight on them. My breathing was very heavy. We were stopped in our tracks by a crevasse big enough to put Lewis' in! To top it all, we could see another one just a little further on. The only way round this was a detour I could well do without! We eventually, after much contemplation, decided to call it a day. However, there was a consolation prize. We spotted a Condor!

Thursday 6th August 1998 Time to go home. Well, back to La Paz. After breakfast I thought I would go to the toilet. Before I got to the planned site, completely without warning, I had an "accident". All through our stay on the mountain I had been experiencing difficulty, not any more! Clean knickers, trousers, baby wipes and loads of toilet roll had to come out. I won't go into all the nitty gritty! A bonfire was lit to leave no trace of my presence! I took a last look around and headed down the mountain with my rucksack on my back. Name that tune!

Monday 10th August 1998 We managed to wake up in time even though the alarm did not go off! It didn't take long to get to the airport. It was still dark. La Paz was lit up and Illimani one of the highest mountains in the range, stood like a black shadow gazing down on the city. It was a wonderful sight to remember forever.

FOUR WENT SKIING

Joe Brennan

"OK. Let's go. Let's go." Suttly barked, half buried in the back seat of Dennis's much battered and travelled Sierra. Over this beleaguered position a black cloud had formed. Dennis was deep in the Book of Uncommon Prayer. Bless him, he still thought our souls were there for the saving/

"Now then. Now then". Tony strived vainly to bring some sort of order to our strategic planning on the move. It is April. We are on our way to Cham, having just completed a magic eight day ski tour over peaks and passes of the French Vanoise Alps and the Haute Maurienne. The weather had been as good as it gets.

Out of season Cham is a civilised place again, warm and quiet - until our arrival, that is. Skiers have gone home, climbers have not yet arrived. The mountains are still in winter garb and there are only a few bands of ski tourers setting off in all directions. The calm was fractured only by our usual non-stop running arguments.

"How about Mont Blanc du Tacul?"

"Bollocks. Let's do the Valley Blanc first"

"Yeah. That sounds good"

"What for? How many times have you done that already?"

"How about Mont Blanc"

"OK. Yeah, done. And we have a score to settle."

"That's all very well, but..."

"Shut up. Decision's made"

Mont Blanc it is, then. This time of the year its like a wedding cake done over by a demented icer.

The score to settle was that in the previous year Dennis had to be helicoptered off Mont Blanc from a precarious position just below the summit. Thus, he had joined the small but growing band of Ceunant helicopter riders. His leg had finally given out and he had become completely paralysed. The summit to hospital in fifteen minutes. Th week before he had fractured his leg in a heavy fall as we battled our way out of the Silvetta Alps amidst storms and mini avalanches. We decided that he didn't need medical treatment as the weather had got better and we did have our holiday to think about. So our first attempt was ruined by Dennis.

"Let's go. Let's go". Have you noticed Suttly is getting more canine, with flashing eyes like a large demented Sheffield Schnauzer.

The Midi cabin up to the half way station takes you to the start of a long semi-circular traverse under the Midi, past the Frendo Spur, favourite place for

benighting Brits. The way continues under the North Face of the Midi and on past some very tasty looking couloirs indeed, seamed into the face.

The small Rond Glacier, high above on the face, must have been hit by masses of falling rocks or ice, as it had shed its load completely, leaving the strange sight of a bare, dry glacier at high altitude. The debris had disgorged itself over half a mile of our track, encouraging speedy onward progress. This in turn led to the precarious convex slopes of the mid Bossons Glacier. With ski edges scraping on the icy surface, the cost of a slip would be terminal velocity trip to Chamonix Sud directly below> No rescue helicopters required. After this it was a relief to skin on and up to the Grand Mulete hut.

This is a spectacular and gnarly hut perched on a spike of rock round which flow and tumble tortured glaciers. Jagged needles of golden granite pierced through the ice like stakes through the body of the glacier. The last three hundred feet to the hut is a steep scramble up bits of cable and various tat. Skis are dumped at the bottom of this lot, ready for the morning.

Tony ordered the beers. It was obvious what he was thinking. How could these beers be delivered through the small serving hatch, now entirely filled by the Wardeness's enormous protuberances. This feat was accomplished, however, without any help from Tony, much to his disappointment.

It is mid afternoon. The sun lasered out of a faultless sky. It is 30 degrees Celsius. We went to sunbathe on the hut roof. The scenery is something else. With beer cooling in the snow, surrounded by topless tourettes, the life of a ski mountaineer can be hard.

From the Grand Mulete it is a long flog to the top with about 6000feet of ascent taking about seven hours. This necessitates a 1am call. No time to look at the delivery options at the hatch. By 1.30 am, it is a sudden awakening with a lethal scramble down the vertical tat. It is pitch dark. It is hard frozen, stark, armour plated cold, and no moon at all. My hands need amputation by the time I finally get into my skis.

We are soon winding our way round large seracs and deep icicled crevasses, grinning like great white sharks in the sweeping torch beams. Antarctic class seracs gleam faintly like oily wax.

Sutty is well ahead and out of sight round the back of frozen tower blocks, betrayed only by the occasional barked comment. Hereabouts was the scene of a large serac wipe-out with several deaths. At least this is not a danger in the winter.

I'm having trouble with my harsishens (ski crampons). The altitude is telling me I need a lung transplant. I keep stopping to put even more clothes on. I suspect that we could prove that temperature drops below absolute zero. Thus we continue for some hours. High up on the Grand Plateau, at about 14000 feet a cold wind whipping off the snow would leave a brass monkey without tackle.

Tony and Dennis are hours behind now. So much for the party staying together. Tony is having to shepherd Dennis, who is having trouble with his skins coming off. No skins, no climb. In the deep pit of darkness below, this little difficulty is finally resolved with carpet tape. Another lesson learned for Dennis who is not pissed off with Tony, who is pissed off with Suttly and me, and me who is pissed off with Suttly and Suttly who is pissed off with everyone.

We are now spread over half of Mont Blanc. Apologies to all those preaching safety in the Outdoor industry. I know. I know what you would say to me. I would say you are all boring bastards.

Up on the Grand Plateau the first chink of dawn starts to prise open the eastern horizon. Suttly has now reappeared. It is bitterly cold, so we make our way towards the Valot bivouac hut. What a sight. It is a good job it is still frozen winter up here. A pile of shit, half the height of the hut, just outside the door awaits the summer for further reinforcement and mouldering. We dump our skis at a respectable distance from this testimony of those who have passed this way.

We continue with crampons and axe up the Bossons Arete and on to a glorious morning on the summit, its shadow arrowing out to the distant horizon on a sea of cloud. No sign of Dennis or Tony. Cold, we cannot wait too long. Back, but not too near the Vallot Hut, it is now sunny and warm. We wait. We doze in the sun amidst the finest scenery in the galaxy. They arrive and we get the full Monty bollocking which is our due.

Reunited again, skins off, bindings into downhill mode, avoiding the giant shit mogul, we commence a gob smacking ski run back to Cham, not breaking the momentum even to stop at the Grands Mulets hut. By mid afternoon we are in a pavement café, bottle of wine in a bucket, watching the world go by.

"OK. What's next? Let's go. Let's go."

"How about the Chardonnet, over the Col du Posson and down to La Tour."

"Cobblers. Loads of avalanches"

"How about Mont Blanc du Tacul?"

"We've discussed that already."

"Dennis, we need some divine inspiration from that book of yours."

"We want it to talk to us, give us a message."

The next day it rained.

On the way home, the car blew up.

CAN I PUT MY FEET UP NOW?

Dave Rothman

After 27 years with Mr Smith (Aerospace Industries, not crisps or stationery & magazines) he had invited me and any other minions over the age of 50 to consider whether we would really fit in at the modern, dynamic, white-hot etc operation that the new generation of "suits" was creating. Odd that only a few weeks earlier half a dozen or so of us fogeys had each been designated as having "core skills" which were essential to carry on the business. It wasn't a hard decision to make; leave now with a wad, albeit a thin one, and see if I could still do anything in the hills, or stay to be the oldest one on site.

HOME:

So it's July and I'm free. Time to find out if the relevant body parts are still working, and quickly or the summer will have gone. The Cotswold Way (CW) has been on my doorstep for 27 years and I still haven't done most of it, so I shake Lew out of his hideaway in Rhiwlas and off we go. Pack light and bivvy so that we can have long days and we should do it in 3-4 days, sez I. Do the same but it will take us 11-12 days sez Lew. He is a lot closer, partly because our attempts at packing light are as pathetic as our fitness, and partly because although the CW sounds and looks like easy going it didn't feel it. The route is supposed to follow the top of the Cotswold scarp edge which overlooks the Vale of Evesham and the Severn valley, but the actual line could have been designed by The Grand Old Duke of York himself. In the first day alone we march to the top of the hill and back down to the valley three times. The days seem as hard as in the mountains but we do get to Bath without losing any of the aforesaid body parts, and even enjoy some of it. Particularly getting to Bath.

AWAY:

I did the CW because it was handy and because doing it sorted the itch it had created by being so close for so long. However I had been keen for the Pennine Way (PW) much longer, since I used to stamp around its southern end while still at school. That was well before an "official" PW existed, when you made your own route over much of it and took your chance with keepers. I hadn't got round to it before because with limited holidays there was always somewhere more obviously attractive and/or higher to go when I could have done it.

Lew had enjoyed the CW so much that when I invited him on the PW he jumped on his VFR and roared off to suss out the Pyrenees. Apparently he had considerable difficulty finding them. In fact it seems that he didn't find them, not even one, even though he seems to have been looking in roughly the right place having crossed from France to Spain and back three times. How he managed this remarkable feat is his story, but while browsing a book of Spanish Grammar the other day I discovered that according to their rules,

and I quote, "the Pyrenees would still be the Pyrenees even if they turned up somewhere else". Whatever, I can assure the reader that since then we have jointly verified that a fair number of them can be found in their normal location, more or less where Kev Reynolds says they should be. Which some would say is even more remarkable.

August, and I need some new boots for the PW. I have the following conversation, repeated more or less verbatim in several shops before I succeed.

"Can I help you?

I'm looking for some new boots.

What kind of use do you have in mind?

I'm going to do the Pennine Way in them.

Really, that's interesting, when are you going to do it?

As soon as I've got some new boots.

silently: What a prat!

silently: He's right, but a man's gotta do etc."

Buy the boots on Saturday, and off for the PW on Tuesday.

No Lew, but Katherine decides to spend some quality time with dad. This makes for a fairly gentle and civilised start, if the Edale to Crowden leg can ever be called gentle. However the path "improvements" and waymarking over Bleaklow give us an easier crossing than ever I had in the old days. After three days my full load (with bivvy gear) arrives and Katherine leaves. The pack weighs as much as on the CW, but I do have some food this time.

The plan is to bivvy, but to overnight indoors every three or four days to clean up. This plan lasts right up to the end of my first day on my own. Coming off the moor at Ickornshaw into a mess of lanes, cottages and smallholdings with chossy fields full of livestock, and it coming on to rain, I hit the road to find "The Black Bull: B&B £12, Walkers Welcome". No contest! The bivvy plan mutates over the next few days from "three or four days in a row", to "if the weather is reasonable", to "if the weather is reasonable & I find a good spot", to the final "if I have to". I never do have to, but carrying the gear gives me freedom to undertake some quite long stages without worrying about having to find a bed.

The Black Bull holds three other PW walkers, from Sheffield. I walk with them for part of the next day but they seem intent on drinking in every pub on or anywhere near the route. This is quite attractive as a sports plan but I haven't trained for it, and as they have done the PW before and it soon becomes clear that they do not really mind how much or little of the route they complete this time, I have to leave them.

I am sure that everyone in the club has either done the PW or has no interest whatsoever in it, so I will fast forward through the high and low lights.

Malham to Hawes is probably one of the outstanding legs when the weather is reasonable which it wasn't; not actually wet but clag down to Malham Tarn and didn't lift much until late in the day. It's often taken in two stages, but

cutting across from near Hull Pot avoids the drop to Horton and a biggish climb back up, so making it more reasonable in one.

Hawes to Keld should also be one of the highlights, but for me it was the day I got as wet as I have ever been, and Martin Collins little guide book let me down for the only time. The "pleasant limestone traverse" round Kisdon hill is desperately uneven and slippy in the wet, and the view of Swaledale, "beautiful in any weather conditions" was invisible through the rain, which was solid. Sensible people use the track in the valley bottom hereabout. After crossing the Swale at Keld there was so much water coming down the hillside that I couldn't see which torrent hid the track. When I did find it it led into a lane running wall to wall almost knee deep, sweeping down rocks, all kinds of farm detritus and the occasional bedraggled furry dead creature.

Keld to Middleton seemed unlikely to inspire and it didn't much. Tan Hill gave a tick of sorts, but God's Bridge was one of my big disappointments. The route goes on by Hannah Hauxwell's house at High Birk Hatt and shows yet again how much the media lie, and deliberately. It was presented on TV as isolated high on a remote and desolate fell. The camera angles must have been very carefully selected. Surprise? No!

Middleton-in-Teesdale to Dufton is superb. It gives you Low Force and High Force, the Falcon Clints (even better when done in the other direction), Cauldron Snout, and High Cup with its dramatic change of landscape. I had been looking at photos of and from High Cup for so many years and thinking it so wonderful that I was sure I would be disappointed. Approaching as I did from the east, the layout that was about to unfold kept me guessing right to the last moment even though I had seen the pictures, or perhaps because of it. When it came it was incomparably better than I could have imagined or any photo could show, and it wasn't even a good day for views.

This stage also gave me a supremely surreal moment (spelt f-r-i-g-h-t). Just below Low Force is a stretch where the track is good but narrow; on the left sturdy barbed wire and on the right a thin line of saplings and a sheer 10-20 foot drop down to the river. I came round a bend to see a bull's head poking out of the trees and stretched across the track. Its nose was up against the fence and it was gazing longingly at the cows in the adjoining field. Normal so far. Alarmingly however, the head and presumably the rest of the bull was only a few feet away from me. Even more alarmingly, although the head was normal bull-size, or at this range could have been bigger, it was only at knee-height above the ground. And where was the rest of it given that it couldn't fit into the narrow strip between the track and the drop? For a moment it looked disembodied like the horse's head in *The Godfather*, but just as I said "!*\$*%*&* are you doing there?", its front hooves and then by parts and with much bellowing, the rest of a regulation size bull emerged; from the top of a muddy slope where the sheer drop to the river had broken down.

You will have realised, as did I, that a whole bull was not going to fit into the space previously filled by its head alone. Yes, it had to turn to align itself along the track. Although by now travelling in reverse at high speed, I was relieved

to see it point its blunt end towards me and then proceed to amble the other way. I could therefore continue in my preferred direction while working out how to pass. Plan A was to cross the fence to the adjacent field, overtake it and then cross back. This couldn't work for several reasons, most importantly because although the bull's amble appeared very sedate and I was moving at about maximum speed consistent with ever getting to Dufton, it was pulling away. I failed to develop a plan B because the consequences of this observation occupied me fully. Apart from the long term problem of what I would now do if I ever met an aggressive bull in a field, for my new found data suggested that I should abandon long-held ideas of just legging it, was the more immediate problem of what I would do when, inevitably, this bull came upon one of the regular stiles which cut across this path. No sooner the thought than the stile! Fortunately the path was so narrow that the bull had to make an eight-point turn to get round. Unfortunately the track was so narrow that even an amiable bull was going to do some damage getting past. By the time it was "ambling" towards me I was once again well on my way back towards Edale. This incident does not end with either heroics or a trampling, but with me cowering in a slightly thicker patch of saplings while the bull saunters nonchalantly past, without giving me a glance but, I swear, with one raised eyebrow.

After Dufton: huge (radar) balls on Great Dun Fell, Cross Fell (another tick) and John Gregson's memorial hut; of particular interest for those club members who remember BAI club days. The Alston to Greenhead stage is uninspiring. It's down in the valley, much of the going is agricultural-choss or worse and "everybody gets lost" quote. Having stumbled onto a small section of it, I later discovered that the South Tyne Trail covers most of the same ground but more pleasantly on a grassed over railway. Hint: don't believe PW waymarkers just because they are carved in stone. I did and landed up to knees and elbows in marsh.

After Greenhead it isn't really Pennines anymore but you do get probably the best part of Hadrian's Wall, then some reasonable and varied terrain up to Kielder Forest. By then I had teamed up with Frank, from Ambleside. He is even older than me and obviously wiser. He was carrying a tent and stove and still managed a smaller and lighter pack. The track through Kielder Forest was becoming boring until, after hearing an occasional "crack, crack" in the distance, we were surrounded by the "rat-tat-tat" of automatic small-arms fire and then observed a tree hopping about suspiciously. Almost immediately a chunky looking piece of the landscape became mobile and roared up the track towards us. Just when we were about to jump out of its way it swerved into a clearing. Several pieces of greenery, including the agile tree, detached themselves from the scenery and leaped into it, after which it roared away again. Therafter we trekked past endless camouflage net covered guns, vehicles and large tents full of kit and fierce looking warriors. This is serious war games territory.

The final stage was one long squelch over The Cheviots from Byrness to Kirk Yetholm. I had to recalibrate my ideas about what constitutes "boggy"; every step of the 25 or so miles being into at least two inches of water, but The

Cheviots are grand and wild and closer to mountain walking than most of the PW.

FAR-AWAY:

September and back home!

"Think I'll put my feet up for a bit now".

"I thought you were going trekking in Nepal if the PW went well?"

That was just something I had said when people were asking me what I was going to do with my time after jumping ship, but why not?

"Hello, is that "Explore"? Yes. Have you got a slot for the Annapurna circuit. Yes."

Three weeks later and its Kathmandu. Another couple of weeks and we're over the Thorung La. Another week, Kathmandu again then home.

The Boardmans were right. It probably wasn't a good choice of trek but you have to go to know. It was always interesting and surprising and there was lots of mountain grandeur, but for me very little beauty of any sort, and of course lots of squalor. What really surprised and probably disappointed me was that there was absolutely no sense of wilderness or remoteness anywhere on the trek. It took some time for this to dawn on me, because although I thought I had no preconceived ideas about what it would be like, I guess I had just assumed we would be "getting away from it". In reality Nepal was buzzing with activity wherever we went, even at 18,000ft on the Thorung La.

HOME:

Back home and Christmas coming on. It's the PW that really gives me a lift when I think back. Enjoyed it thoroughly, and the boots were great.

"Can I put my feet up for a bit?"

"What about some climbing then?"

GOING TO THE WALL

John Cole

No, don't be alarmed, the Club continues to be in a satisfactory financial situation with money in the bank and a fine hut in 'Tyn Ion'. The 'wall' in question is of course The Rockface and the 'going to' relates to Club members who use it to work up a thirst (all that chalk dust) for the Wednesday meet subsequently at the Woodman pub.

As a newcomer I'd like to try to convey an impression of activities and characters.

Boring personal bit: It had been 10 years since my dwindling bits of outdoor climbing had ceased altogether with a second failed attempt at the Skye Cuillin ridge. Furthermore I had only dabbled with walls outdoors like the one at Ackers Trust. So the proposal by Martin Jolley and Steve Asbury that I should accompany them to The Rockface filled me with some alarm. They looked at my old equipment in disbelief, guffawed and proceeded to loan me spares. Now committed, I had visions of being wholly conspicuous as a sort of 'old man of the mountains', a pathetic and inept figure, scorned and derided. In the event I found that everyone was far too focused on their own antics to notice mine. I even developed the fond belief that there were several people who *looked* older than me!

Seriously though, I've felt welcomed to the Club activities at the pub, on outdoor meets and at The Wall. I like the mix of banter and technical talk and I've been impressed by the modesty of some I've learned are very good climbers.

Interesting characters bit: I'm looking forward to meeting more but for the moment let me attempt a thumb nail sketch of some who are 'going to the wall'. Firstly Martin, the chat to anybody, climb with anybody Jolley man. Cat like, he never seems to exert himself, although he has a bit more opportunity than most to develop technique by doing a mini climb to where tall people start! Then his mate Steve, preferring power to finesse, continually pushing himself with new targets yet finding the energy to bully me up climbs as well!

Suddenly Sue Traynor drops into view off the major roof in the main hall. Momentarily startling until I pick out Mark Hellewell, smiling slightly, securing her. Spider on a thread, Sue is in space, high above the mundane concerns of us gravity trapped mortals. Tony Mynette and Steve Coughlan go by to climb their off-vertical walls yet again. Steve concentrated, specs secured, tilted-back head, powerful shorts-clad legs, ready to go. Tony lean, flushed with exertion but always smiling benignly, perhaps the original role model for Michael Palin?

Meanwhile Paul Green may be found on almost any route, no favourites for him, look for that big smile, blond hair and swarming, upper body strength style.

Joe Brennan ambles over, big loose frame, huge freckled hands, shock of ginger and grey hair.

Joe: 'Hi chief! Been having success?'

Me: 'Yes, it's been a good night'

Joe: 'Yeah? And what about the climbing?'

Big, over-the-shoulder grin as he starts to haul himself up anything interesting; no colour bar for Joe. An obvious character, I've heard him described as the 'Celtic bard' (well I think it was 'bard!'). His clever story telling and writing (eg 'Mr Fixit', the Club Magazine 1995) I've experienced, but does the description mean he's a minstrel as well!??

As for me, sweating and straining and pleading colour blindness when using non-designated holds, I'm probably the noisiest climber at The Rockface.

However it

certainly clears my mind of other things and I enjoy the concentrated exercise and a different sort of problem-solving.

So good training and good company are on offer, and if you're not already doing it on Wednesday nights then why not join the Ceunant motley crew 'going to the wall?'

“ TWO STACKS JACKSON”
OR
THE FAT BOY, THE OLD BOY AND THE TWO
OLD MEN

Steve Coughlan

Some years ago, in excess of ten, the club held one of it's celebrated meets in Northumberland, (you know that place up in the North East with excellent sandstone crags carefully hidden from view by trees various). We were even fortunate enough to be able to bask in golden rays for the whole weekend!! Amongst the people attending were the fairies complete with au Pair (there lies another story!), Joe Brennan, Dennis Jordan, Tony Mynette and of course me myself and I etc. etc.

At this point you are probably thinking – “ What the f**k has this got to do with sea stacks?”

Have Patience all will be revealed!

Sunday evening arrived and with it the time to wind our weary (or is it beery ?) way southwards home. Well this was not quite true because some of the members had the good fortune to have been able to combine an abundance of spare time the same amount of precious sunshine.

Joe B, Jim F and Dennis J plus entourage were heading for the North with the intention to ascend the Old Man of Hoy. As you can imagine they were extremely modest about their good fortune and treated the fact that the

majority of the meet attendees were heading back to home and work with the utmost sympathy and sensitivity!! NOT.

Tony Mynette and I whilst travelling South made a resolution to, one day, go and climb the Old Man of Hoy. Many years passed by and earlier this year with at least two weeks notice we hatched the plan to head for the North and do the deed.

So on Friday 23 July at approximately 7:00pm we headed for Hoy!! The forecast

was promising with a high-pressure zone encompassing the British Isles, fingers crossed!!

When you are stuck on the M6 just North of Birmingham in heavy traffic the Orkneys seem a hell of a long way away!!

Crawling masses behind us we made good progress until desperation and terminal thirst compelled us to stop for the regulation sherbert. We were forced to stop in that well known beer gourmet's delight, East Kilbride. We found a hopeful looking Hotel, the beer was only marginally colder than the welcome. Strange place to hold

the all Scotland bigot championships.

Suitably refreshed, once the beer glass frostbite had disappeared from my right hand off we sped.

At around 2:00am we snatched a few hours sleep en-route, choosing a piece of grass with a slug count of 4 billion per square metre. Quick morning lard up at the Stag Hotel in Golspie and off to Scrabster to grab the ferry. We arrived in plenty of time to pack our sacks and catch the 12:00 noon ferry, at the Princely sum of £31.00 return for foot passengers. There is no point in taking a car to the Orkneys, unless you enjoy driving round in circles.. The crossing takes in the order of 1 hour and 45 minutes.

On arrival in Stromness we discovered that we were in the midst of something called "Shopping Week". The "shopping" element would appear to consist of buying all the beer on the Island and drinking every single drop.

We located the B&B run by Mrs McScroggins, complete with Brynlon everything. Rubber soles are essential for this style of accommodation, for fear of death by electrocution by billions of volts of self-generated static electricity.

After a successful evenings shopping HIC!! we retired with the thought of feats of daring do floating around in our amply lubricated brains.

We caught the Ferry to Hoy at 9:00am on Sunday with a sailing time of 25 minutes. One of the passengers wore a furry coat and said Baaaaah a lot! The ferry is met

by a colourful character with a beaten up transit van cum Minibus. Once you are in this old tin box he announces that " This is the first time I have reversed up this causeway etc". The van journey from the landing point to Rackwick bay is around 30 minutes.

Hoy is the second largest Island in Orkney at 57 square miles, the North and West are hilly and more 'Highland' in character, the South and East low-lying and fertile, more typical of Orkney in general. Hoy is steeped in history with sites dating from prehistoric times. The island contains the only rock-cut chambered tomb in Britain.

Much of the island is composed of Upper rather than Middle Old Red Sandstones which have been weathered into a complex of steep and craggy hills. The resulting landscape is unique within the Orkney Isles.

Rackwick Bay lies on the North West Coast of Hoy, accommodation is in either the bothy on the beach or the hostel, we had the good sense to book the hostel. From the time we had embarked on the ferry we were engrossed in climber spotting, we wanted this bugger to ourselves!! We were convinced that this was a forlorn hope; how could something as famous as the Old Man not be continuously festooned in climbers.

We arrived at the hostel and located a room, this was not difficult, as the building will accommodate 7/8 people. The plan was to get settled in, reccy the stack and then climb it on Monday. Sleeping bags now strewn on the bunks it dawned on us that it was

only 11:00 am. The weather was reasonable but overcast, we were the only climbers in evidence, a simultaneous decision was made "BOLLOCKS lets get on it!!"

Upon sound advice from fellow club members (doesn't sound like the Ceunant) I took a knife to an old 9mm rope, brought along specifically for the purpose, producing several long and various slings. Hacking through old ropes is never easy, it felt like the betrayal of a faithful old friend, lets hope he doesn't hold a grudge!

Sacks packed and suitably psyched we set off for the stack.

Hoy is without doubt the most famous sea stack in Britain, mainly as a result of the Bonnington, Paitey and Baillie TV extravaganza. The structure is in the order of 500 feet high and is composed of decaying Orcadian sandstone standing on a granite plinth. The five routes ascending the stack range from E1 up to E6, the longest being 550 feet. No prizes for guessing the one we were about to attempt.

It is about a 2 mile walk from the hostel, winding diagonally up the hillside. The cliffs start at Rora Head running North to St. John's Head, rising to 1,128 feet, being the third highest sea cliffs in the British Isles.

Having waited such a long time to make our attempt, feelings were a confused mix of excitement, impatience and trepidation combined with a stiff measure of adrenaline. The walk seemed to take forever, "where is the bloody thing?" At last the tip of this hiding giant peaks over the top of the

distant cliff. As we turned Westward off the main path there was a small group of people, probably eight in all, sat looking in awe at the improbable tottering tower, stubbornly defying all that the elements have and will throw at it. Where any of them sporting ropes and sacks? Fingers crossed.

Our hopes were fulfilled we were the only climbers, we would be the only team, not only on the stack but on the whole of Hoy. As we approached the cliff edge the full extent of the Old man unravelled before us and with it the relative isolation and seriousness of the situation now confronting us.

"Well Tony, this is it mate let's get at it."

The way down is a few hundred metres Northward of the prominent viewing point, consisting of a 400 feet descent down steep grassy slopes. This involves an improbable looking descending traverse along a single track muddy path, needless to say this should be approached with extreme care.

A short way down we located a convenient spot with a reasonable platform under overhanging rock, where we could gear up. Finally crossing the boulder bridge, presumably the remains of a former natural arch we were at the bottom of the route. From this position you can see more stack than daylight! and confidence thankfully returns.

At this point we glanced up to the cliff edge and all of the spectators had now gone, we were alone. The original (or ~~East Face~~) route goes at E1 5b, is 460feet long and is

climbed in 5 pitches. Tony led off confidently up the stack.

Pitch one, is 70feet of 4b up a shattered pillar on sound juggy rock.

Pitch two, the 'Big Pitch' is 120feet at 5b, involving a short down-climb followed by a 30 feet 'sandy' traverse, at this point the exposure kicks in with the sea around 200 feet below your feet. Put my brain into gear and launch up the main corner surmounting the overhangs on wide jams and sometimes small and indistinct holds, resisting the temptation to grab the in-situ gear, Honest! Exciting or what!? Don't forget the number four friend for the top crack, and don't do what I did and use it on the overhangs. Completing the now unprotected crack above the overhangs, the belay is obvious, a large bollard with copious amounts of tat. It is also this pitch where the leader trails an extra rope to attach top and bottom in order to achieve the diagonal abseil from the second belay to the top of pitch one.

Pitch three, 80feet at 4b, trends right then back left to regain the crackline, which is followed to another ledge system.

Pitch four, 120feet at 4b, Ascends the wall on the right then up to the bottom of the final corner.

Pitch five, 70feet at 4b, described as an Orcadian version of Cenotaph Corner but nowhere near as hard. This exquisite pitch deposits the joyous leader at the top of the stack, but not before experiencing the realisation that it is possible to see daylight at the top where the crack splits the

stack. I followed Tony up to his belay position, to join him and his Puffin pals and finally scrambled the last few feet to the true top of the stack. Tony joined me "We've done it – Haven't we?" We had been on the east face for 4 hours with a stiff breeze blowing and were amazed at how hot the sunshine was as we sat on the summit. The sun casting a giant shadow over the steep descent only served to remind of our isolation and that it was not all over yet.

Although we were elated at reaching the top with no problems we were still very conscious that we were now faced with the challenge of descent. Hoy is synonymous with epic descents involving jammed ropes. We used the rope slings to good effect descending with great care and diligence. I went first on the diagonal pitch two abseil. I found a Wild Country Ropeman used in reverse a useful aid to pull onto the pitch one belay ledge. I pulled Tony in on his descent, pausing to take the classic shot of him suspended in mid-air.

I suppose that no account of ascent would be complete without a mention of the illustrious Fulmar, that pleasant little feathered critter so renowned for it's projectile vomiting capabilities. Take fourteen thousand tins of sardines, reduce over a gentle heat for about 3 months, e voila!! Instant bird puke. Fortunately the only encounter, involving fish oil, was on the third abseil, discovering the all Orkney junior Fulmer puking champion. Luckily the little bastard was out of nearly out of ammunition.

As we sat back at the gearing up point we treated ourselves to the obligatory meat and dairy butte. We consumed that along with great sense of contentment and respect only achieved upon realisation of a long-term ambition to climb something as magnificent and timeless as the Old Man of Hoy.

As we headed back to the Hostel we encountered three climbers heading for the stack, they had arrived on the late ferry. The old adage "He who hesitates is lost" sprung to mind at this point, had we delayed we would have missed the opportunity to have the route to ourselves and with it a truly magical experience.

We spent the night in the hostel consuming the beer we had so begrudgingly lugged around only that morning, recounting our ascent to the three climbers sharing the accommodation. The same doubts they demonstrated we had also experienced, but now replaced by an overwhelming sense of achievement.

Tuesday morning we headed back to Stromness, consumed some local produce and twiddled our thumbs waiting for the afternoon ferry back to Scrabster.

Upon landing we set off for our next challenge The 'Old Man of Stoer'. The Northern Highlands are not exactly over endowed with petrol stations a quarter of a tank of petrol is no insurance against the inevitable. We discovered this following a 30 mile round trip back to Thurso having passed a couple of closed pumps. Tank full, here we go again.

We drove right through from Thurso via Durness down to Lochinver, the light was incredible, deep blue skies and glorious sunshine, marvelling as we went at the wonderfully lit sights of Ben Loyal, Ben Hope and Foinaven to name but a few.

We arrived in Lochinver just in time for food, beer and a doss. The slugs had now been replaced by the dreaded midge, a Pertex bivvy is no match for the tiny toothed one! A restless night was followed by an early start, driving to the Rubha Stoer peninsula protruding out into the Minch. The old Man of Stoer is about ½ a mile South of the point. The village of Stoer is about 7 miles from Lochinver, from the village you head toward the Raffin Lighthouse. We parked up just before the lighthouse and breakfasted al Fresco. The sunshine of yesterday had subsided into a grey drizzly overcast morning, oh! I forgot the wind! A track leads North from the parking spot through a peat bog, it is about a mile and a half to the coast and the stack.

The descent is via a very steep rocky/grassy slope, descend this with care. Stoer is a true stack in that it is separated from the mainland by a 30 feet channel of your very finest, very coldest Scottish briney. I had volunteered to swim across to the stack. At this point it was still quite cold and drizzly and the prospect of diving naked into the swelling sea was none too appealing. We set up anchors attached one end of the tyrolean, and stuffed gear into various bags. I removed my clothes tied the rope to my waist

and dived in "FFFFFFlip it's CCCCold." In the attempt to climb out I was picked up by the swell and duly grated up against the rock, in the process of re-dressing I realised cold water makes you bleed even quicker.

Clothes on, tyrolean in place the sack was hauled across followed by Tony. It's times like this you really need to have faith in your friends rope technique, "Hope those knots are tight chief " came the cry. Both now established, I was to lead pitch one as Tony had an assignation with pitch two from a previous encounter.

Pitch one, 70 feet of 4c, climbing the landward face for about 10 feet then traversing horizontal cracks leftward round the arete and onto a large ledge on the arete. The cracks were wet and greasy with moveable jams, in real terms the traverse was a slippery 5b in a fairly exposed position with friend protection.

Pitch two, 70 feet at 5a, ascends a steep slab/wall via a curving crack to overhangs, passed using a crack then delicately left to a cave. As alluded to previously, for Tony this was a special triumph as he had attempted and failed this some years previous, resulting in retreat from the route. This was also the reason for my aquatic antics. I must say that this time he showed no sign of any hesitation and climbed the pitch in fine style.

Pitch three, 40 feet at 4a, only 4a but incredibly exposed, following a ramp, ignoring the first upward break gaining a small ledge and block belay.

Pitch four, 50 feet at 4b, I suspect we may have strayed of the route on pitch four because I took the next lead which was at least 4c to start and entailed a series of steep moves between horizontal breaks with little or no gear eventually moving diagonally right to the final short corner. The pitch is said to be 50 feet

when in fact it was probably nearer 70 feet. Serves us right for using Tony's ancient guide information!

Descent is via two abseils, the first 150feet down the South East corner to a platform. The second requires a traverse right to two questionable pegs with even more suspect tat

Back on the ledge, the tide was now further in and it was my turn to use the tyrolean. I re-tensioned the rope to compensate but still encountered a small damp patch and a very wet chalk bag, "shit" I knew I had forgotten something. Tony had the pleasure of swimming this time. We packed up ascended the grassy slope took copious pictures and headed for the car.

Although Stoer is easier and smaller than Hoy we both felt that with all the logistics and damp conditions it felt no less serious than Hoy and our sense of achievement was no less than previous.

We changed into our party frocks and headed for our next destination, Carn Moor, stopping en route in Ullapool, sampling the local seafood. I also needed a dry chalk bag!

Carn Moor crag guards two of the highest quality Scottish HVS's Dragon and Gob, these were our goal. Carn Moor crag is a 12 mile walk from Poolewe, I was about to walk all that way with a sack crammed with everything you can imagine, gulp! We set off in the afternoon, the sunshine was back, this was no advantage on a walk like this with no available shade. We arrived at Loch Fionn at about 7:00pm stripped off and went for a swim, the nightmare begins. We arrived back at the sacks which were thick with midges, within seconds so were we. We dressed and headed for the bothy, we had no tent as we had been reliably informed that the barn had been renovated.

Opening the door revealed a hot dusty hovel with a dirt floor and the odd plastic sheet to sleep on. Collecting water was midge hell within seconds they were in every orifice above the neck and, they were so dense it was impossible not to breathe them in. the bothy was constantly

surrounded by a halo of these little bastards about a metre deep.

We managed about 2 hours sleep, part of which was outside until the wind dropped, I thought it was raining but it was, you guessed it a midge frenzy, resulting in a demented dash back into Dust City.

We started later than we had hoped the next morning, made the steep approach to the crag and geared up under constant attack. Setting off up the approach VS onto the main terrace, the sun was beating down, I wore black trousers

and could feel my legs burning from the attracted heat. On completing the approach route a mere 500 feet of 4c we reluctantly decided to retreat, this in itself was a serious undertaking. The thought of spending another night was not an option. It was a bitter disappointment but a good reason for a return trip and a potential future club meet to Carn Moor.

We left at 5:00pm that day, arriving back in Poolewe at 9:00pm, *question* - how many pints of ice cold cider can you drink after an episode like this - *answer* LOTS!!

We treated ourselves to a night of B&B at what we described as the residence of McScroggins Senior. We were forced into porridge for breakfast, with the haunting cries of " I'm lifting your porridge nooo"!! at 7:00am, help!

Next stop the lakes, we arrived early evening Friday, spent a pleasant evening in the George, real beer, real food, marvellous.

Saturday dawned, we had our plan, we would go up to Goat crag to do Praying Mantis, a classic Lakeland three star 260feet E1. The brilliant 5b first pitch followed by three excellent 4c pitches weaving their way up the impressive frowning buttress in a beautifully exposed position. Job done, cream tea, shower food and beer, what more can you ask for. On Saturday night we met sooty in the pub, he had spent the week in the lakes soloing several classic mountain routes making the most of the amazing weather.

Sunday we had an easy day, wandered up to Bowderstone Crag

to do Mandrake at HVS 5a, this route has an amazingly understated top pitch with top class sustained climbing in a superb position, with good gear! We packed up said our farewell and headed for home, we didn't achieve everything we had hoped to but were very happy with the whole experience, and the climbs we had accomplished.

In summary if you were to explain to someone that you had done five routes in a week and driven two thousand miles to achieve this and that you had a great time in the process would they think you are bonkers?

Or just a climber?

My trip up the Mountain in France

The Tete Blanch 3429m July 1999

Amy Millichope (11yrs)

We were camping in the Chamonix valley and dad said, "Let's go up a mountain for a few days".

The next day we went to the shop to hire some boots. The boots I had were purple and grey, and brand new! Later that day Mum drove us to the cable car, we bought our tickets and got on. Up went the cable car and when we got to the top it was very windy. The path to the hut wound round the hillside. There was a nasty smell of flowers, yes I do mean nasty! It was quite misty and foggy. It started to rain but then stopped. On the way up I had to put up with dad's dreadful stories.

When we reached the hut we first had to check in, then we had to put some rubber shoes on. The hut was nice, homely and cosy but it smelt of climbers! I went outside in my rubber shoes and all the snow went in them. We cooked our food in the little kitchen, we had mash and vegetables. I felt excited about the next day. We had some blankets and went to bed.

We got up at 4.30 and it was very dark. We had to put lots of clothes on because it was very cold. We had breakfast then we left the hut. I felt as though I wanted to go, but I didn't, if you know what I mean. Everything was white and it was very cold. We came to a steep bit in the snow where we met lots of other people. Dad tied me onto the rope. We met two men and dad started talking to them. As we were going up the steep bit my gaiters were digging into my legs. When we got a bit higher my fingers were going numb and I couldn't breath properly. Dad was walking really fast and I couldn't keep up with him (mum says this isn't unusual). I was very tired and I wanted to go down and have a nice warm bath. It seemed to be ages that dad was saying it would just be a bit further. I felt really heavy and I had a headache.

When we reached the top I felt proud of myself. I felt as though I was on top of the world. I could see other mountains but it was quite misty, I wanted to do more but I knew I couldn't.

When we were coming down I was scared I might fall down one of the big holes (crevasses). I felt as though I had the mountains to myself. On the way down to the hut we met the men that we met earlier, one called me a true pianist (I think he meant to say alpinist!) We stopped at the hut to get our things and then we walked back to the cable car. On the way I had a nosebleed and all these French people were making a fuss. When we got to the cable car it started to rain again, at the bottom Mum and Katie were there to pick us up. I enjoyed my trip but all I wanted to do was have a shower and go to sleep.

R o r a i m a

Jim Brady (46 years)

I could feel the evil all around, the German had had his arm broke, now every thing was black, I knew others had been hurt here, flight or fight? Flight. I had to escape back to the New World, but how? The route down was dangerous and what better place for the evil to get me. Any way it wouldn't be light for hours. I understood it all now, all the world had washed away and where else could the all the world's evil escape to but here, the last rocky tabletop mountain left on earth.

As I slowly awoke from my Larium induced nightmare the dream only partly faded, the powerful Anti-Malaria drug I had taken the previous day had affected me. The silt in the deep dark rivers of my mind had been disturbed, pain, death, loss of freedom, loneliness. In the Gulf War the troops called it wacky Wednesday and they had guns!

I felt spooked all that day and I was ultra careful as we descended from the top of Roraima down the slippery ramp known as the Valley of Tears, and now felt happy. Then I was safe, back in the New World, the world I normally lived in.

Roraima was the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's book Lost World in which he speculated that the flat top of this mountain or Tepui isolated as it had been from the rest of the world for 5 million years still contained Dinosaurs, it does not. It is however a totally singular place, with strange and unique plants, twisted and tortured rock formations, and one reptile, a little black frog. The borders of Venezuela, Brazil, and Guinea, meet on the top, the Orinoco tumbles off one side, and the Amazon off the other, hence the name Mother of all Waters.

We had flown eventfully (engine failure and an emergency landing) down to the Brazilian/Venezuela border in a 60 year old Dakota, we had been blagged at the airfield by a couple of touts from the local tourist company who very quickly fixed us up with a jeep, local Indian guide and the ultimate decadence a porter. They also relived us of \$350, which didn't seem too bad, between two of us for 6 days. It seems that wherever you travel in the developing world just as your plan starts to get flaky some entrepreneur pops up to relieve you of your dollars.

We were told that we were responsible for feeding the porter and guide, problem! All we had was six tins of tuna fish, a bag of bread rolls, sell by date long gone, and a load of mangled but tasty cakes, we told them they might be better off looking after themselves, which they did with a very big jar of very hot chilli chunky (to ward off the evil, the guide told me) some yucca bread that was hard as iron, and a litre of Rum. Needless to say we swapped stale

bread and good Tuna for Rum at an exchange rate that was never stated but which left both parties happy and pissed.

One long days walk, through the rolling Grand Savannah brought us tired and completely soaked by warm rain to the base of the Roraima Tepui. The Savannah is gorgeous grassland punctuated by rain forest where it dips down to the numerous rivers. The £1.50 bright red, thin plastic ponchos we were sporting were needless to say even more useless than the hugely expensive bright orange Gore Tex we had foolishly left at home.

The only thing missing at our beautiful camp, was the porter with the; tent, mats, fish, and sleeping bags! We were very near the equator and every day is totally predicable, it gets light at 6 AM and dark at 6 PM no twilight, day to night in 10 minutes flat. The porter stumbled into camp 2 anxious hours later at twenty to six and the pits were wet! A rush to put the tent up before night fall, a quick tin of fish, and off to bed, tired, damp, warm and happy, plus a packet of M and Ms in bed to cheer ourselves up a little more.

The morning was sunny and bright. The Tepui to our left sported the world's 4th highest waterfall and made a spectacular sight swollen by the yesterday's rain pouring off the top. As a couple of days before we had been up a river in dug out canoes (with outboard motors) to Angle Falls the highest in the world we were a bit blasé about big waterfalls.

It was a 4-hour scramble to the top, and we wanted to be on top before the usual afternoon storm. Joe Brown and his gang had pushed a route up the prow of Roraima in the Seventies and steep rock walls are continuous all around its 7 km by 15 km top like High Tor only much much bigger. The route we were following was a muddy scramble, the only breach in the otherwise continuous cliffs that rise out of the rain forest (PC for jungle). It was an incredibly beautiful walk, through the forest, the plants were fantastic, colours straight out of the tropical house at the botanical gardens. The top however is something else.

The top is either wet bog or wet rock, and the only places to camp are on a few cliff ledges or "hotels" which are small, dry, sandy and overhung, and so protected from seemingly ever present rain. You do need to be careful getting up in the night not to fall off the ledge. We were the only people on the top and had a choice of sites, in high season as many as 60 people are here and it can be next to impossible to find a suitable place to pitch a tent.

The top is a totally surreal place, many of the plants that grow there are unique to Roraima and are very strange; bromeliads, succulents and highly coloured mosses. Combine that with an abundance of clear rock pools, crystals and twisted rock formations and you have a place that is alien and unique. It is also cooler and free of the nasty tiny biting flies of the Savannah, mind you they are not as bad their Scottish relatives the dreaded midge. Our guide treated us to stories of evil forest spirits, and the invisible people, "wild" Indians who will cut off your head, plus tales of gold and diamonds to be found deep in the forest.

The walk out was in sharp contrast, hot and sunny all the way, all angst now gone. We camped by a river, a lovely swimming spec particularly if you don't mind water snakes. We now had a more than ample supply of beer that had been toted in by an Indian from the local village, and only cost three times the 20p a can we paid in the outside world; I bought the whole cool box full.

Our 5-day trek was brilliant, I would recommend it. Take longer if you can but don't do it quicker. You could do it easily without a guide or porter, however having at least one of them gives a level of security in case of accident, and having a light pack is a joy. It also puts some much needed first world money into the local economy. There is a park office in the village you start from and the park ranger (who can arrange a helicopter in the event of a problem may not let you do the trek without at least a porter, which can be arranged in the village, the cost is around \$150 for 5/6 days. Also a jeep to the village is essential, this will cost around \$100 return from the main road. I won't be using Larium again, I had further reactions when I got home, but to be fair we didn't get Malaria.

A WORKING SUMMER IN NORTH WALES: NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Val Beddard

At last the funding for Tyn Lon was in place, no more talking or committee meetings; let's take the bull by the horns and go for it.

It had taken four long years to reach this stage. The original estimates were a little out of date, but it was the only chance the Ceunant MC would have to refurbish the kitchen - a new dining room and refurbished wash room would be a bonus.

Over the past nine years, Bill had often said to me 'We can make the kitchen larger if we demolish the rear wall and coal store.' I would nod my head in agreement, but never for a minute thought it would happen.

The funding: we are the only club known to the BMC to have received **two** grants. The BMC have seminars these days on how to obtain grants, but we led the way.

Bill installed his caravan in the garden to live on site. It proved somewhere to shelter from the elements.

First phase: demolish the back of Tyn Lon. (This cured the rat problem). Danny was our cheerful Irishman, living in Nant Peris - an expert with JCB - so expert that a little of the inner wall came down too. No problem, as this was duly rebuilt with blocks. Next phase: to employ Emyln and Selwyn, two gentlemen of the old school and excellent tradesmen.

Bill arrived on site in May, to get things moving. The first three or four days, the weather was wonderful, shorts and t shirts. This must have been the summer of 98. For the rest of the time spent on site it rained every day.

One Saturday Bill, Roger and Sirhc spent all morning erecting scaffolding in torrential rain. The scaffold had to be up for work starting on the Monday. That morning led to Bill returning home on sick leave with flu, which he duly passed on to me.

Bill and Sirhc learned a new trade, as stone masons, sorting out the stone from the mountain which grew in the back garden from the demolition, they built new stone outer walls which will still be standing in two hundred years time.

Roy Eaves kindly obtained the steel lintels needed to hold the roof up. I think the very sight of those daunted some members of the club, but a little expertise with a block and tackle plus some willing team work put them where they needed to be.

The roof structure appears to cover a large area - considering the awful weather, I was amazed the work was completed. I have never seen floors so clean. We had to keep dragging the water out with sweepers, several inches at a time and the lounge was like a swimming pool.

I was foolish enough to take a week holiday, expecting sun bathing in the garden. Ha!

Here are some of the notes I made during that week:

Sunday 7 June	Started off dry. Installed lintels today. Day finished with rain.
Monday 8 June	Raining with a vengeance today.
Tuesday	Awake at 5o'clock; still raining
Wednesday	Best day of the week. Didn't rain till teatime. The clag was down to ground level. You couldn't see the mountains at all.

The concrete for the washroom floor arrived in the Welsh version of ready mixed concrete, not a large drum on the back of a lorry. The lorry had a large cement mixer and two men to shovel

the necessary where required. It was tipped into a wheel barrow and poured over the washroom floor. I'm sure Dick and Bill will remember levelling it at midnight.

July 30 Bill called me at home. Said it had been the worst day for rain in the past three months. All outdoor work had stopped. Rain been horrendous. Forecast better for the next few days.

August 1 Decided to try a second week holiday, sunning myself at Tyn Lon. The bad weather cannot last forever. It is summer after all. Work progressing nicely.

August 8 The washroom area was totally gutted, a shell to be rebuilt. Washroom floor tiled, new toilets and showers arrived for installation. Great to see the progress. The whole of the kitchen area is tiled. The roof tilers have been on holiday themselves for two weeks. Obviously not locally, as they have returned suntanned. Hope that the weather holds out for the roof to be slated. The large glass window has been installed. They sent the A team for this job, as Bill would not accept first delivery of the window, as it wasn't satisfactory. People coming to look at Tyn Lon are all impressed with what they see.

August Bank Holiday Bill home for a break! Rebuilding of the cottage is almost complete. It's looking very smart. I'm sure the members will be very pleased when they see it. Tony and his dad have done a great job on the electrics. The light at the top of the stairs comes on by sensor. No switch. This will confuse people!

Let me make a note of the toilet seats. These were the grand sum of £154.81. I queried the cost. It was correct as they are specially for the loos installed. So when in use, treat with respect. Not just any old lav seat. Replacements are not available at B and Q

19 September Work meet. Would you know it, the weather is some of the best this year. Thank you to the willing hands that turned up. Everyone worked hard to put the cottage back in running order. Considering that all of the ceilings were taken out, and all the disruption inside, Tyn Lon is looking great. Just a little more work and we should be up and running by 2 October.

21 September Bill hitches up the caravan to tow home. Can you believe the weather is glorious in Nant Peris? We are both ready for our holiday, hopefully in the sunshine.

14/15 November Grand reopening party. They didn't wait till we were home from holiday!

Many thanks to everyone who has made Tyn Lon the best hut in North Wales. I know John was hoping to work on the cottage, but sadly this was not to be. I know he was there in spirit. These are just some of my observations taken when Bill was working on the cottage. I kept a rough diary and writing this has reminded me of the bloody awful summer of 1998.

CHAMONIX to ZERMATT – The Walker's Haute Route

John Cole

Thirteen days, 111 miles and 37,000 feet of height gain and loss later, we were remembering Chamonix with affection – and moaning about this marketing Mecca for Japanese and Americans called Zermatt. Following a lively celebration meal with three people met en route, we caught the next Glacier Express to the Rhone Valley away from this cloud-covered, out-of-season, anti-climactic finish to our walk.

The first two weeks of September had been glorious with tee shirt days and lightly frosted nights. In these conditions, with all except one col clear of snow, even we couldn't manage to go off route. The Kev Reynolds guide book's (Cicerone Press) main function was to occupy our minds during the uphill slogs by devising 'Kevisms'. You know the sort of esoteric and intellectual repartee that distinguishes Ceunant Members. "Kev says here 'gaining height, sometimes steeply...'" "Yes, the sod means we'll need a winch to get us up some walls!"

Duguid my companion was strong but lacked perfect, stable balance due to a leg injury when young. Of course his main handicap was that he was almost as old as I am! He invested in Leki sprung poles, although mastery required a couple of days – mostly in determining the situations when *not* to use them. I was reminded of his strength when I happened to carry his pack up to the fifth floor dormitory in Gruben. It weighed 40 lbs!

Traffic' on the route: Except for two guided parties 'cherry-picking' the Route, we saw only a handful of walkers. Two

Swiss delighted me by carrying axes with wooden shafts and which were even longer than mine! We were on the Col de Louvie(2921 m), the only occasion when small snow slopes resulted in axes and backsides being used for progress. We didn't tick off close-by peaks when col crossing, being of the considered opinion that rope and gear were required. In fact we were simply too knackered. We certainly needed our goodies and vast amounts of liquids to keep going.

Accommodation: Alarmed by the size of the first party we met, we decided to book beds and food a couple of days ahead. In the event this turned out to be only essential for weekends. Each hut we used had its own distinctive character, but we certainly didn't spurn the comfort of valley hotels when it was available. The Mont Fort hut above Verbier had only four other occupants, four rooms and a picture signed in gratitude by the Duchess of York. It seems she had taken refuge there from the paparazzi. But what do you mean, 'I'm just a commoner with bad taste sleeping in what I think was Fergie's bed?' Another notable hut was at Jungen, a picturesque alp hamlet 900 m above the Matteredal and with magnificent views of peaks, like the Dom and Weisshorn, and of Zermatt 20 kms away. In this building nearly everything was of wood, including the toilet complete with tapered, fitting cover!

When combining two shorter stages of the Route we missed the chance of staying at the Hotel Weisshorn, described as 'eccentric Victorian building, something of an institution among mountain wanderers'. However a stop there for beer revealed a

cosmopolitan staff, preserved stencilled décor, new dining room and high-tech plumbing (despite the general air of British influence). The toilet pedestal was like something from the Starship Enterprise. There were lights, music and water, and a seat which was lifted, sprayed, rolled and rotated when the 'flush' operated. Well, I can tell you it wasn't the whistle and bells I was anxiously checking after that little lot!

Costs: We were impressed by the value for money of 'civilised' food and accommodation but never the less tried to contain costs by using the Chamonix youth hostel and by claiming hut reductions with our Austrian AC membership (this also provided accident and rescue cover). I must admit I didn't follow all of Tanker Tolson's advice – he completed the Route in 1992 – as a bag of oats and a fly-sheet may make for a light pack but somehow aren't quite my style! His comments on places of interest and of difficulty were sound and I can add information about cheap public transport. Getting an Easyjet flight from Luton at 8 am (£28) enabled us to cross Geneva by trolley-bus (£1 and one change) and catch the train to Chamonix (£8 and two changes) in order to arrive by 5 pm.

Haute Route compared with the Tour of Mont Blanc: Comparisons and personal impressions between the Haute Route (HR) and the Tour of Mont Blanc (TMB) may be of interest. I'm conscious that my TMB was 10 years ago and there is some danger of rosy-tinted spectacles, so let me say right out that the HR is shorter in distance but higher and significantly harder – and therefore gave me a greater sense of achievement. This was increased by the few people on the HR in contrast with the TMB (it is reported that 15,000 did part or the whole of this in 1999).

The circular trek through three countries (TMB), rather than a linear one through two, is a more satisfying concept. It makes

travel to the base (usually the Chamonix valley) both easier and cheaper and takes fewer days to complete. The HR permits little variation in route and the paths are exposed and need concentration about 30% of the time (not that a tumble carrying a pack is ever risk-free). By contrast, the TMB offers 'variantes' much of the time and rarely are the paths exposed. My recollection is of at least two chain-assisted sections per day on the HR but of one only throughout the whole of the TMB. The TMB standard route is 120 miles with 33,500 feet of height gain and loss but there are both easier and harder optional stages.

Both routes have glorious scenery although the HR feels more *in* the high peaks as opposed to viewing them. Both routes have part of the Chamonix valley in common (where the TMB as written is far superior) and also Col de Balme and Fenetre d'Arpette (although the Bovine is a lower alternative on the TMB). The Fenetre with 1188 m height gain is the hardest stage of the TMB ('the brute challenge for the experienced walker') but would rank in my view only fourth on the HR.

Both routes figure in lists of the best walks world wide and are recommended for anyone with year-round UK mountain walking experience. Described in 11 day-stages (TMB) and 14(HR), they need stamina to complete in one go. However, depending on time available, 'days off' offer a more leisurely approach and local public transport enables selected parts only to be completed.