

CEUNANT MOUNTAINEERING CLUB
MAGAZINE 2002

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Frontispiece: The window at Tynlon was inspired by Joe Brennan on the Aiguille de Bionassy. Helena Holmes, artist in stained glass and Club member, created it and subsequently installed it in May 2000.

EDITORIAL

Well, three years after the previous edition, here it is at last. It is tempting to suggest that it has been well worth waiting for, but that I fear would be setting up a hostage to fortune. The publication of the magazine has not been high in the interests of members, some of whom have been trying to make up for the lost opportunities and the frustrations felt from the foot and mouth cattle disease epidemic. Significant activities of some members are shown in the section 'For the Record'. This initiative, together with current activities referred to in the Club newsletter, obviously attempt to inform the membership. Is there any possibility to go further with the trilogy of directives of Lord Reith to the BBC "to inform, educate and enthuse"? Sounds far too ambitious, even pretentious to me, although tales of derring-do on Wednesday nights at the 'Spotted Dog' (especially after a few pints of Hook Norton) *could* enthuse intent listeners! Perhaps better then to relax and focus on the Magazine's attempts to entertain.

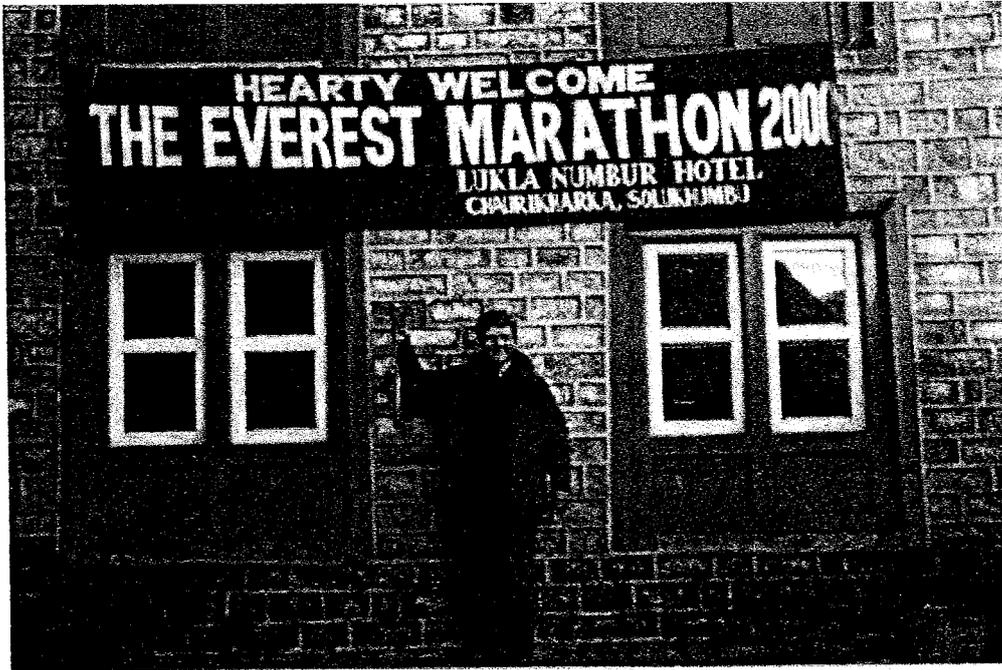
This edition, partly of necessity but also with the backing of the club committee, has included several articles that go beyond narrow definitions of mountaineering. Kate Thompson has recorded her experiences in running the Everest marathon and Phil Brown enlightens us on aspects of parapenting. I have included comments and a book review on Shackleton's legendary Antarctic expedition. In a more traditional mode Gordon Orme describes the Annapurna circuit and his attempt on the Chulas; closer to home Richard Swinden reveals what happened on The Island when he went climbing with 'the colonel'. I'm sure you're all agog, after all the Ceunant is enriched by a variety of characters within its membership. Amongst them is 'Tanker' Tolson whose personality I've attempted to perjure (sorry, I mean portray) in a light-hearted way. Joe and Dennis are also (in)famous and you can read about what happened to them – and what they did unto others – on the Corsican GR20 as well as commiserate with their wet walk around M.Rosa. On yet another island (Sardinia) Ade 'caseys the jaunt'.

As this is a slim(ish) edition the traditional thanks to our contributors are especially warm. Articles are badly needed if we are to avoid another long gap. Do consider seriously putting pen to paper (or fingers to word processor). If we can receive contributions from just 5% of our membership each year then there will be an annual edition. This target we should surely aim for.

John Cole, Editor, October 2002

KATE'S EVEREST BASE CAMP MARATHON ACCOUNT
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 26TH 2000

Editor's note: Kate Thompson is a long-standing friend of our family. A highly qualified nurse she has served in Nepal for some years, firstly with VSO and latterly with the Army as a welfare officer to Gurkha families.



Kate recovered and displaying the hard-earned medal

Well, I'm recovering from the marathon with a day in bed and a hefty dose of antibiotics for a chest infection which inconveniently 'brewed up' whilst on the trek to the base camp. There can't be many marathons you would run with chest infections, altitude sickness, vomiting etc but there were several other people in similar situations to me. Anyway, on with the details!

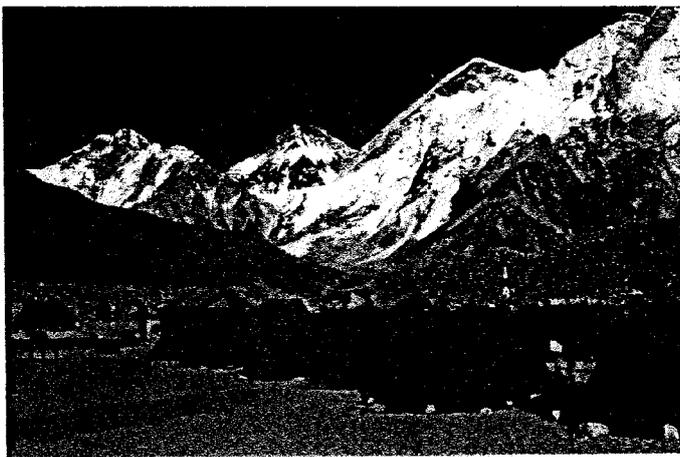
I soon realised why the Everest Marathon is called one of the hardest in the world after arriving in Namche Bazaar, the finish, and being taken with the group on the so called 'dreaded Thamo loop'. One of the reasons it's dreaded is that you arrive at Namche Bazaar after doing 20 mile and can see the finish below, but then have to head out again for the final 6 gruelling miles. Officially it's termed 'undulating' but at just over 10,000 feet any exertion is tiring if you're not properly acclimatised, the slightest incline feels like a huge hill. It also dawned on me at that point that I was way outclassed by the other runners, a lot of whom had done serious events like this before in far flung corners of the world (it seems there is a market for them), all of

whom were fell runners (I've never done one in my life) and had been seriously training for well over a year (I started running again nine months ago and never seemed to get round to a training schedule....). Fortunately they were a nice lot (even though they constantly mistook me for a marshal rather than a runner). I was lucky enough to have joined up with a couple of the party, Bruce and Ged, at Kathmandu, who were also joining up at Namche rather than walking in. Bruce had run it twice before and was now going to be a marshal so was able to fill us in on all the (horrific) details.

It was almost impossible to remain healthy at the lodge we stayed at in Namche as there was a South African called Andrew working there who had a streaming cold and no concept of hygiene. We spent long hours sitting in the homely warm kitchen/living room but paid for it by catching colds ourselves. The person in charge of the lodge, Pemba, had climbed Everest in March, only the second Nepali woman to do so. Bruce had met her before and soon had her talking about her experience, which was fascinating. If she had been British she would have now been on the lecture circuit, but instead she was serving up food for westerners...

We then spent a week walking the 20 miles up to base camp, or more correctly Gorak Shep. This included a couple of rest days to acclimatise. Although the distances weren't great it was hard work at times, especially the higher we went. At Pheriche (approx 12,500 feet) we had an excellent lecture about altitude sickness by the American doctor at the Himalayan Rescue Association who said over 30 people had been evacuated by helicopter out of the area this season alone (since around September), due to altitude sickness.

The temperature became much colder from this point on, especially after the sun went down, getting to minus 10-15 degrees at night. I haven't been so cold in my life, and could hardly fit into my sleeping bag due to all my layers. The most annoying part of acclimatising to the altitude is that you go to the loo more often,



The base camp at Gorak Shep

exactly what you don't want to do when it's minus 15 degrees outside and it's the middle of the night .

In case it's starting to sound a bit grim already I should say that the food was good, lots of rice and potatoes, the odd cake and lots of hot drinks. The porters were amazingly cheerful and worked incredibly hard. I was really

impressed by the organisation. There was also a good sense of camaraderie in the three separate groups (we joined the 'Late Birds', as opposed to the 'Early Birds' or 'Arun Birds').

On the Friday before the marathon (on Sunday) there was an optional climb up Kalar Patar (just over 16,000 feet). I was starting to feel ill so only went up half way. Unfortunately three runners had to be taken down to Pheriche due to altitude sickness after they had been up and were not allowed to start the race at Gorak Shep on Sunday which must have been terrible for them. One of them, Trevor, was in my group and had passed me on the way up making sure I was OK, as I was breathing with a bit of difficulty. He apparently then rapidly developed cerebral oedema and was in a pretty bad way at the top. It was a shame that after all the training and 3 weeks trekking that he and others had done. They didn't get to run on the day, if there was a health risk. I'm not sure how many other people dropped out due to other types of illness but there seemed a fair few out of the 65 people. Unless it was altitude sickness most people kept quiet about their illnesses for fear of being 'sentdown the hill'.

The day before the race the atmosphere changed noticeably as the various marshals trekked back down to their respective aid stations. These were about every 3 miles and included a doctor at each. The runners went up to the final camp at Gorak Shep, just over 15,000 feet. A lot of people, myself included, were amazed at how difficult the terrain was for running as the path is across a hilly rocky moraine for 2 miles before Gorak Shep, impossible for most people to run across especially at that altitude. It got worse as we saw that the first few hundred yards of the race would be across soft sand. However, after some discussion the general consensus seemed to be that we all just wanted to get it over with and get back to Namche as soon as possible for a hot shower. The practicalities were such that we would have to get back down on foot anyway in the absence of public transport.

After a night of wheezing, coughing and feeling generally grotty it was still difficult not to be caught up in the excitement of the pre-race countdown. The race started at 7am and the preparations went like clockwork. At 0600 we were woken up (most had been awake for several cold hours), 0610 porridge and tea were delivered into the tents. We had been told to stay in our sleeping bags until the last possible moment, after packing our other stuff ready for the porters to carry down that day. Most people slept in their race gear. At 0620 we were told to pack our sleeping bags ready to be at the start for 0650. I shall never forget the sight of all the runners assembled in the sandy former glacial lakes, shadowed by Mount Everest and other huge mountains as the sun was just rising, hearing somebody shouting out 'Ladies and Gentlemen,

welcome to the start of the Everest Marathon 2000' . It was quite emotional.

The next 10 hours became a bit of a blur. Although I, like most people, walked over the moraine I struggled to breathe and soon my stomach muscles were aching with the effort. It was good to reach the 3 mile check point (after over an hour) to take off my thermals and have a hot drink. Although the next few miles were an overall height loss I still found breathing difficult and couldn't run properly even downhill which was a bit worrying. I had accepted I wouldn't realistically be able to run up the hills but assumed I'd be OK on the flat and downhill stretches. The valley soon widened out and we had probably the easiest stretch until the 7 1/2 mile post at Pheriche, although bearing in mind this was still at 12,500 feet. I now understand how an asthmatic feels as my breathing was quite 'distressed' at this point, and was issued with a Ventolin inhaler which probably allowed me to get to the finish.

The people at the aid stations were just brilliant, so encouraging, especially after a several hundred feet climb up to Thenboche Monastery at 14 miles when they sat me on a chair and gave me hot lemon and rice pudding whilst a doctor listened to my chest. This was the first cut off point, at 12.45 hrs. When I first read about it I couldn't understand why anybody wouldn't make it, but now can. Three people didn't and were disqualified. Luckily I made it with over an hour to spare.

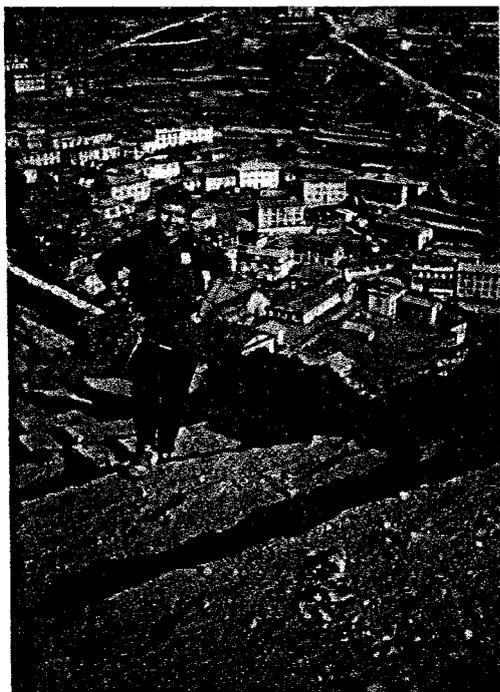
Although each step was painful you couldn't help but appreciate the wonderful scenery, with snow capped mountains constantly in view, glacial rivers and gorges, yak trains (a good excuse to stop as they passed), and the Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags and walls. Local people waved and smiled and trekkers shouted encouragement. It was an amazing experience!

Just before the 17 mile mark there was a killer of a 1,500 feet descent followed by a 600 feet plus ascent. I'm afraid my lungs and legs seemed to grind to a halt at this point and I really thought I wouldn't make it to the 20 mile cut off time. It was a real struggle trying to push on with the thought that I could be disqualified for not being at Namche on time. The sympathetic marshals at Sarnassa aid station (17 miles) encouraged me on with yet more Fruesli bars (available at every aid station) and hot lemon and I trudged on, and on, towards Namche.

I actually made it to Namche a good 40 minutes inside the cut off time and was met by Bruce, who as planned had put prayer flags all around the station. More encouragement and I was noisily sent off for the dreaded 'Thamo Loop'.

I've heard people talk about the loneliness of the long distance runner, but never the loneliness of the long distance runner who's in last position! I've never been last in a race before and it proved an 'interesting' experience. At first it was enjoyable looking down on Namche, hearing the cheers for runners crossing the finish line and then meeting runners who were returning from 'the loop'. Gradually they became fewer and it got a little bit colder and the scenery a bit of a blur. I couldn't understand how the 3 miles out to Thamo could possibly take so long and be so hilly. Each time I rounded a bend there was just another, and another. Eventually I came across Fumi, a Japanese runner who was about 10 minutes ahead of me and after an eternity saw the aid station. If there had been a bus going back I think I would have gladly hopped on and called it a day. By this point I'd had enough of Fruesli bars and hot lemon. I was too tired and cold to care about anything. The doctor gave me an electrolyte drink and told me not to push myself, as if!

There are no words to describe the last 3 miles, every step was uphill. I was slowed down even further by around 15 prize Yaks being taken off to market in Namche. They kept running off the path forcing the owners to run after them and shepherd them back to the main pack. Each time they did this I had to stand patiently. There was no way of getting past them. It was a shame as I had wanted to finish with a flourish but instead had to trail into Namche Bazaar following the Yaks. However I had to laugh at one point when imagining myself



Starting the Thamo Loop above Namche

following Yaks down the Mall for the London Marathon. Having said this I still jogged into the finishing field with a smile and a wave, and got a cheer from the small enthusiastic crowd. The precious medal was placed around my neck by Hari Rokar, the Nepali who had earlier set a course record of under 4 hours.

Wow, I'd actually done it!

Would I do it again? No!

Was it worth it? Yes!

Just to be part of it was amazing. The week's walk up to the start; the incredible backdrop of Mount Everest at dawn for the start; the stunning scenery all the way down; the passing Yak trains and just the feeling of being involved in such a special event. It was well worth the effort!

**THE ENDURANCE: Shackleton's legendary Antarctic Expedition
By Caroline Alexander, Bloomsbury, 1998.**

You may have seen or heard about the January 2002 recreation on Channel 4 of Shackleton's attempt to make the first crossing of the Continent on foot in 1914 with 27 companions. Although he failed – they spent 22 months in the ice and on the tiny Elephant Island – articles in professional journals extol the virtues of his leadership and imply its relevance for managers today. So what does Caroline Alexander's finely produced volume add to our understanding or to our pleasure?

Firstly it gives details of characters and incidents that no prime-time TV programme can do. Secondly it includes a selection of the previously unpublished photographs from the expedition by Frank Hurley. These monochromes are informative and often absolutely stunning. In the book we learn more about Shackleton's assessment of men both in a class sense (he gave the crew preference over the officers and scientists in allocating basic resources) and in his selection of the boat teams. His leadership style was most unusual. He combined harsh autocracy with the drive that came from vision (initially for success, then for survival) and yet was prepared to endure more than anyone else as he acted the servant in bringing small but significant creature comforts to his fellow sufferers.

Shackleton's character was flawed however (whose isn't?) and not because of an alleged mistress as well as a wife. He was vindictive. He never forgave McNeish the carpenter, nor Vincent the bosun, for their opposition to him when traversing the ice. This was in spite of the amazing modifications to the long-boat 'James Caird' achieved by McNeish and the strength and skill of Vincent. Both were in the team that made the incredible journey of 800 miles from Elephant Island to South Georgia in the semi-open 22 ½ foot long 'James Caird'. This voyage in the tempestuous Southern Ocean is regarded as one of the greatest feats of sailing of all time. In spite of this, McNeish and Vincent were the only two of the whole party not to be recommended by Shackleton for the Polar Exploration Medal.

The author has researched the published literature and diary manuscripts and interviewed key descendants. Accordingly we learn of the long lives of the faithful Crean and of the enigmatic 'Colonel' Orde-Lees, the sad ends of

'Chippy' McNeish and camp leader Frank Wild and the irony of most of Shackleton's comrades being killed in Flanders within six months of their safe return.

Shackleton's life subsequently seems an anti-climax although he did get South once more. He died of heart failure at the age of 47 in South Georgia. Here it was fitting that he should be buried. The last heroics of his expedition had been the mountainous traverse of the island with Worsley ('Skipper') and Crean. From the Stromness whaling station they obtained rescue for the other three on the west coast and subsequently for the 22 left on Elephant Island. The last words are best left to Shackleton in the cable to his wife in that they encapsulate his ego, his vision, his lack of support and the endurance of his companions. "I have done it. Damn the Admiralty..... Not a life lost and we have been through Hell".

Recommendation: This is a good read, greatly enhanced by the photographs.

Alternatives: 'Endurance – the true story....' By Alfred Lansing, Orion, 1999. This author interviewed survivors and copyrighted in the 1950s. This is a more detailed and gripping account but without any photographs.

'Shackleton's Way – leadership lessons'....by M.Morrell and S.Capparell, Penguin, 2001. This 'people-centred approach to leadership can be a guide for anyone in a position of authority'. Shackleton was impressive with unconventional but successful selection methods and with his teamwork.

Introduction

We were a team of four climbers – Alan my brother who is retired, now lives in SW France and climbs regularly in the Pyrenees; Jacqueline from Troyes, an exceptionally strong mountain walker; Liz my daughter with very little high mountain experience; and myself with three Himalayan trips to my credit.

Alan started his climbing when a student at Bangor University and was active in Ogwen when Ron James and co ruled the valley. He climbed to a good standard on Glyder Fach, on the better routes on Tryfan and later introduced me to rock climbing. The following season we moved to the Llanberis Pass to the more modern steeper routes – like Crackstone Rib, Shadow Wall, Brant Direct and the delectable Phantom Rib.

Regarding our expedition and booking, we had previously used a Kathmandu agency but this time we booked our Sherpas directly via the internet, ostensibly to allow the Sherpas and porters to keep more of what we paid out. Our number one Sherpa had been to 27,000 feet on Everest North Ridge. It was also necessary to obtain the peak permit costing about \$500 US.

The Chula range of three summits of around 20,000 feet is an ideal introduction to Himalayan climbing. Across the valley somewhat higher than this are peaks of the Great Barrier, Annapurnas two, four, three and Ganga Purna, the sacred peak. Annapurna one was hidden from our base camp at Hongde. We would see it later from Phewa Tal, Pohkara at the climax of our trip.

The Annapurna Circuit

For all you amblers, ramblers and E2 failures this is the one for you. Sixteen days of lowland and mountain trails that must rank with the best that the great range has to offer. I'd done the trek nine years ago in extreme heat with tent, stove, fuel and even inadvertently descended into a minor gorge. This time a friendly porter carried most of the gear- the more I gave him the more he smiled. By the end of the circuit I was even prepared to hand over my Swiss army knife (and live dangerously).

Attempt on Chula Peak

Hongde village camp, our springboard for Chula Peak, was pleasant enough with

shops and a bakery within shouting distance, zero street crime and three meals a day. The ice ridge of Chula Far East seen in profile from our camp, appeared to be innocuous. Would it simply be a Bosses Arete at 20,000 feet?

On day two we slogged up to a rock spur which we crossed and descended slightly to an excellent advanced base camp site. Most of the party appeared fit except one porter, who later recovered from minor respiratory problems. Unfortunately Jacqueline suffered a serious bout of altitude mountain sickness during the night. It was sad to see her descending slowly assisted by a porter; she had been the fittest of us all. At about midday Alan and I prepared sacs for the ascent to high camp – a route through moraines and boulder fields. The weather closed in on us but not before camp was established and a water supply found. Stonefire was raking the slopes above us during the afternoon. The salvos continued into the night, but we estimated they were falling at least 200 yards either side of the tents.

The morning broke fair. The two Sherpas were ready to roll at 6am and we were soon into hard going on ice covered scree. Later Alan found the effort became too exhausting and was forced to return to camp. This was his third attempt at a twenty-thousander in the Himalayas. The altitude factor is intriguing. I almost enjoy the effort of cramponning, drawing breath, getting higher. No headache for me this time as I reached the col and roped up.

From then on our progress was rapid – the ‘Chula Two’ (our Sherpas) were attempting to burn me out I suspected. It was no real surprise when we reached a difficult ice wall and could go no further. I made the decision and we lowered off the wall, leaving and losing some gear down the west face as we went. We got off the mountain safely, passing the high camp already vacated by the porters who preferred the comforts of advanced base.

That night I slept like a brick. The next evening in the village of Hongde we were entertained by very young girls dancing to traditional tunes. This will remain perhaps as our most endearing memory of our visit to Nepal and its mountains.

We had planned to spend the weekend in the horizontal. Not a bad concept for a weekend, as things go, except that the horizontal in question, was not the sun-loungers in our respective back gardens, but Pembroke. Here, despite spending half one's time in the searingly vertical, the over-riding impression is of the alternative plane. Crag and sea and horizon, step upon far off step of the utter horizontal, stretch away into the wild Atlantic.

But it was not to be; storms were marauding the south Wales coast and it looked for a moment like we may well get away with it. But for the weather-man we might have pulled it off and indeed got to know our back gardens a little better. It was he who planted the seed, a faint possibility, of some finer stuff in the north of the region. This meant that there was nothing else for it but to well - go for it.

So at a suitably early hour, the big silver-grey beastie pulled up and disembarked from his big silver-grey car. Off we sped. What a contrast, leapt into my slumbering brain, between the impecunious, rain-drenched hitching, the freezing, fear-filled motorbike dashes and the sputtering, nail-biting "will we ever get there?" of our youth, to the blei-frei fuelled swish of this big Bavarian cruiser.

Before we knew it we were faced with our first dilemma of the day, where to partake of second breakfast? The station café at Betws had always been a reliable bet, so we chanced it only to find it had been made-over. It was now a trendy pine and house plant, low fat emporium where there had previously been only grease and formica. Nonetheless, the food was excellent and suitably fattened, we headed for the slaughter.

Optimistically, the rain appeared set in for the duration and with light hearts we stopped in Capel to make the futile phone calls to Anglesey, which would confirm that we could indeed be looking at a whole weekend of revisiting the damp, smoky delights of long forgotten hostelries. I spoke to some ominously cheerful individual from a nature centre on the Island - "Aye it's lovely over here, sun's shining, 20 degrees" etc. Was the man *mad*? Had he lost his senses *completely*? Did he not realise that we had dependants, loved ones eagerly awaiting our safe return? And what's more we were cowards! Stunned, we realised our fate was sealed, our hand forced and any other meaningless euphemism we could think of for being up shit creek without a paddle between us, and what's more, in a barbed wire canoe!

Gogarth it was then. Fifteen years or more since I had sampled the particular delights of that nightmare by the sea, but the memories haunted me still. Clinging witlessly to some antique piece of rotting iron-mongery, gazing upwards into an ocean of overhanging quartzite with arms and heart and head throbbing in fearful anticipation, yes I remember it well! But, sly old foxes that we had become, we cunningly hatched a plan that would guarantee both bodily and spiritual safety. This was it, we would head for Wen Slab, yes, there we could romp all day on sun kissed, *easy angled* rock, a gentle lapping of briny at our feet, the odd curious seal popping up to say hello while the runners fell into welcoming slots with monotonous regularity, ah-ha!

Poor fools, this was such an alluring prospect that we lulled ourselves into a sense of totally

misguided security. Slab implies non-strenuous, therefore low grip-factor. Ergo, why bother with a lowly H.V.S. when we could bag an E number? Oh the kudos we would gather next Wednesday in the pub when our innocuous "Oh how did the day in the Peak go?" would lead magnificently to "us, oh we did Quartz Icicle - yeah E2 - piece of piss really". The only difficulty would be which one of us would deliver the coup-de-grace.... mmmm!

So we went in search of the aforementioned lump. It took some finding. Between the -"well it could be up this road" - which almost got us arrested for kerb crawling by Holyhead's finest, and the - "this gully looks familiar" - potentially resulting in an alarmingly early bath, we finally located our victim about two incompetent hours after arrival in Holyhead. The terrifying descent to the abseil point should have reminded us that all was not as it seemed, and that our intended 'romp' may have something up it's sleeve yet. However with the confidence of years of experience and cunning to call upon, we rigged the ab and slithered into the void.

Now I had actually done this route, albeit 20 years or more ago, but I couldn't have told you anything about it other than the name. This we interpreted as 'well if you can't remember it followed there was nothing *to* remember i.e. nothing to worry *about*'. And, we reasoned, we now had the technology, the super-light, multi-cammed, micro-wedged sticky-rubbered vorsprung-durch technologie of the modern wall warrior. Unfortunately it was the other bits that were missing. The cool headed, problem-solving, when the going gets tough bits, and, as I have already pointed out, we *were* cowards. It could as they say still all end in tears.

The route lay to our left, up past relatively easy flakes and pods to where things looked like they may get exciting. Ominously, instead of the anticipated gear leaping off my harness into the cracks, the protection had been fiddly and not over abundant, plenty of time for things to improve however! Left again was a thin quartz seam (hence the routes name) which arced up diagonally into the wide blue yonder, this gives the substance of the first pitch, which I now began to realise to my horror was starting to get mean. Endless fiddling managed to see several dubious (to my mind) bits of gear stuffed into various crevices and thus, not very convinced, I launched boldly out along the vein. Oh dear, a mistake I thought as arms and legs struggled hopelessly to find purchase and establish some sense of rhythm on what now felt like an overhanging wall. Ahead was a peg, winking tantalisingly from the continuation of the so-called crack. This was my target but getting there, well, that was another matter. Twenty years ago I'd no doubt floated gracefully up without even stopping to draw breath. Alas, time had taken it's toll and this prosaic thought flashed through what remained of my brain as I arrived gasping and jelly-like at the iron man. The peg was poor and I realised that beyond lay more hard climbing, the technical crux. Plucking up what little courage I had left, I swung on up. I was now desperate to rest arms and feet - unfortunately my wonderful new shoes were a little too asymmetric for my very symmetric toes and I was feeling the pinch in more ways than one! Fumbling and fearful, I clawed across and up into the relative safety of the now wider crack. In my chastened state I thought that every piece of gear was doubtful, but I wasn't in any fit state to argue and plodded on until, with heart and head exploding, and suitably chastened I arrived on the stance.

Up came the colonel, slowly but surely picking off each difficult sequence in turn. Of course he's got the luxury of a top rope I thought meanly, not wishing to acknowledge that I was just totally crap and had made a sow's-arse of the thing. He arrived beaming and chortling beside me. It was now that the awful realisation that I'd volunteered to lead the whole route dawned on me, supposedly as I'd had a bit more climbing under my belt for the summer. This suddenly



The colonel lording it over The Pass, photo D Simmonite

struck me as a load of horse-shit and I thought of denying I'd ever agreed to it, quoting amnesia, a sudden psychotic episode or just plain ignorance. However, ignorance is no defence in law and besides, despite the fact that I was now officially middle-aged, I still held firm to the 'rope boy' school of thought which dictated that however advanced in years one may be, I would always be apprentice to the 'master'. In other words I should just get on with it.

As is traditional on these occasions, we indulged in the time-honoured ritual of gear shedding. This most hallowed and ancient celebration is practised throughout the

great mountain ranges of the world. Its leading exponents are held in particularly high esteem by the hordes of acolytes who can often be seen snorkelling around the zawns and inlets that stud our lovely coastline, or scouring the bases of the inland crags, in the hope that they may find some talisman jettisoned from on high (though not too high!). Wishing to appease whatever local deity may have some say in our fortune, my personal choice was to dispatch of a brand new flexible friend along with several wires for good measure. As the liberated equipment plunged majestically downwards, I uttered a sacred mantra to accompany the offering. 'BAAASTAARD' summed things up nicely.

These niceties complete we pondered the voyage out, an apt analogy as it happens, because if I were as incompetent on the top pitch as the previous one, we'd be swimming.

Across to our right the slab steepened and entered an evil looking, curving groove. Still, the sun was shining merrily on us, and so I gathered what was left of my resolve and my now depleted rack and set off on the traverse, the colonel's encouragement ringing in my ears. It began benignly enough and even had a good runner or two. But true to form this was a complete red herring and things began to look ugly. Out of my dim recollection, a vision of a sylph like twenty odd year old, in a blue and white rugby shirt and E.B.'s flashed before my eyes. Trying my utmost to dispel the thought that visions of one's past life usually precede something nasty i.e. death, I battled on across. After some particularly anxious moments when I wandered off course, I found myself established (?) above a small overlap, committed, scared and thinking of mother. Not fancying a retreat (other than a Trappist one) I thought 'fuck it' and launched. That dreadful moment when one realises that it's shit or bust was nigh. "Go, go, go" I repeated to no-one in particular, reaching and stretching right into the little groove hoping against hope that some holds would appear, some strength or courage would appear, some decent gear would appear, or, failing all of the above, a top rope would appear. None did and I now contemplated the enormous howler I would take if I didn't get my arse into gear. Not wishing to break my duck in this rather embarrassing manner, from somewhere I summoned a desperate and last-ditch effort. A mean little traverse from the top of the groove and I reached a break, deep enough to throw in multiple large cams, my arms and any other bits of my anatomy I could manage. Thus fortified I scurried thankfully to a pleasantly commodious ledge, complete with sitting space and room to disinter my feet from their place of torture.

Well to cut a long story as they say, the colonel was soon up and scooted up the final awkward little crack that led to bags and butties and welcome, multiple roll-ups. At this point I can only assume that a moment of sheer, undiluted stupidity overcame us. Not content that we had just undergone more terror than we would normally expect to experience in a year, given our mature and sensible lives, we somehow persuaded ourselves to do it all again, and, what's more on an even steeper bit of rock. So, not altogether convinced, we lurched off over the cliff tops to the Upper Tier, just to 'have a look' you understand. Arriving breathless at the gear-up spot, we sorted ourselves and began the precarious traverse-come descent to the crag. This had not diminished in terror over the years and we arrived, panting and dishevelled at the foot of our route. This time we had picked a crack, what's more a crack that I knew would gobble as many cliff-towing nuts etc. that I could throw at it. This boded well but looking up, I suddenly realised the folly of our decision. Bathed in the coppery, autumnal evening sunlight, the route looked fabulous, but oh! the steepness. The steep grass that led up to the base, coupled with the *actual* steepness of the wall, combined to give the impression of an overhanging crack. Whether we had underestimated the difficulty of the route or overestimated our ability was a moot point at this juncture. Musing on the fact that we also appeared to be the only climbers daft enough to be on the crag at this hour, I headed for the base of the rock.

As soon as I stepped onto the rock, the exposure hit. Ten feet up felt like a hundred, but the holds were positive so far and the gear top notch. The climbing progressed with almost monotonous regularity. A short difficult stretch, interspersed with a rest, or half-rest and bomber pro. However the steepness was beginning to take its toll and above the crux loomed. To bail out now was unthinkable I had convinced myself. Go for it and hang the consequences, that's the spirit! But spirit and flesh and all that, and the flesh at this point, was definitely flagging. A mean looking overlap sneered at me from above. Sneering back, I threw in as many nuts, cams, whatever came to hand, into the greedy crack, reckoning that I wouldn't need much more kit and the loss of weight might come in handy. Off I launched and quickly realised that there was only enough gas in the tank for one try. In a flurry of flailing feet and finger jams, I somehow hauled myself round the aforementioned obstacle and grovelled up the steep slab above to the stance. It was getting late. The sun, now hovering just above the horizon, cast a spectral glow over the sea and rock and that wondrous end of day, indeed end of summer haze permeated the air.

Up he came, puffing and blowing a bit, but up all the same. He topped out on the slab looking for all the world as though he'd just crested the summit of El-Cap, his gear racks groaning under the weight. That'll teach him to point me at well-protected cracks I thought. The sun had now dipped completely over the horizon and the pub was calling, so we raced back down to the sacks and set off homeward.

Now I suffer from terminal night-blindness, so it was imperative we got back to the safety of the motor tout-suite as they say. No problem, big wide white track, plenty of light left - not so. We reached a fork and foolishly decided on the top path to get us back quicker. Soon we realised our folly. The night seemed to creep up on us with alarming speed and before long we were groping our way down a steep path that led through a sea of gorse and bracken. A strangled cry reached me from somewhere behind in the gorse. Peering through the gloaming, I saw the colonel emerging from the depths of the tangled undergrowth, cursing and spluttering. He had missed his footing and propelled himself Kinevil-like into the hungry maw of a giant gorse. He looked like he'd snogged a porcupine and was clearly not best pleased.

Things did not improve. Sixty odd years of collective mountaineering experience mattered not a jot as we slithered, ducked and careered our way, now totally lost, through the unrelenting tide of angry bushes. Suddenly, as in all good thrillers, a light appeared down below, then more and at last we saw we might just make it to the car before morning. The last few hundred yards were a blur, as we sped recklessly down, the thought of pints and succour now driving us on. And then there it was, salvation. To say we were relieved was an understatement. Feeling as though we'd been released from some malevolent presence, we counted our blessings and headed for the pub.

A hitching surfer bundled in just outside Holyhead and regaled us with tales of derring-do in the monstrous seas of Ireland. He must have thought we looked a right pair, dishevelled and torn to shreds and virtually speechless with thirst. He piled out in the middle of nowhere no doubt thinking that climbing must be a mug's game.

Well, an hour later we had forgotten our tribulations. The beer slid down a treat, the colonel puffed on his cigar and we were the bravest of the brave, for a while anyway. Collapsing into our pits, we dozed off safe in the knowledge that tomorrow we could relax and have an easy day at Tremadog. Well thereby hangs another tale, but for now, we slept the sleep of the smug.

Quartz Icicle-E2 5b and Strand-E25b climbed Sep 2001 by Tony Mynette and Richard Swinden

Close Encounters on the GR 20

Joe Brennan September 2001, Corsica

Day Zero

We arrived at the start of the route within 20 minutes of each other – Denis by bus, train and boat from Alicante, me by plane from Brum. Canalzona is the start of the GR20, a village of some 500 souls who reputedly control the whole of the Mob in Marseilles. Denis comes striding up, legs like oaks which have borne him across the Pyrenees, Dolomites, Spain (1100 miles), Pennine Way.

Already his sack is starting to split and leak his possessions in a trail behind him, a problem that remained unsolved for the next three weeks. Nevertheless, my chances of keeping up with Denis's formidable speed will depend upon the time honoured way of equalling pace within the party – i.e. how many rocks I can infiltrate into his venerable rucksack.

The Gite warden was the usual standard issue surly git, a lugubrious lump who obviously considered it his job to keep all comers at bay and thereby earn a promotion to join his Brotherhood in Marseilles.

September 9

To the Refuge d'Ortudi u Piobbu on a hot and cloudless day. Breakfast at a pavement café with passing locals admiring Denis's mighty, naked torso. After some stitching repairs to Denis's 200-year-old rucksack we were off. Little did we know that this was to be the last really hot day in the mountains.

A steady graunch took us to an airy col where a number of GR 20 earnest types were adjusting their altimeters, chronometers, GPS systems, working out average rate of progress, heartbeat, height gain, height lost, modal response rates, incremental induction feedback quotients with micro adjustments to anorak drawcords. Denis immediately went on the scrounge for a needle and thread. Also, a new and more serious problem was starting to arise – Denis's brand new boots, which he had bought at a bargain price of seven pence, were starting to disintegrate after just one day.

Up a ridge, down a slope, up a gorge and we arrive at a small, overcrowded hut into which we bludgeon our way. After a fairly restless sleep we awoke to a totally empty hut. Last again.

September 10

To the Ref do Carozzu and a good rocky day over ridges, around large pinnacles in a switchback route between crest and valley. A guided group of Germans was exhibiting some hysteria, fear and terror. We did our bit and lightened their loads by making serious inroads into their schnapps supplies. And their rucsac repair kits. Denis had by now acquired a fan club of some girls who he had assisted in negotiating round some particularly large protuberance on the ridge.

September 11

After adding an optional extra peak to the day we arrived at Haut Asco, an optimistic ski resort where it has not snowed for 15 years. Dusty and nearly deserted it did have a hotel and bunkhouse. We made for the bar. Inside, a group of people gathered around the TV.

“Must be a football match, Den. Why are they so silent?” Then the penny dropped. This was the first broadcast of the scenes of September 11.

September 12

To the Ref de Tighjettu and another funny Corsican place name.

Early morning and the Gite is already deserted. The daily race for bunk space ahead was underway. Nobody stopped to watch the news.

We met the serious types again above the Cirque de Solitude, a hanging valley steep enough to cause multiple nervous breakdowns and severe twitching amongst the now stopped gathering. I notice that Denis’s fan club gets particular treatment despite the fact that his boots have now worn through to the inners. The others seemed intent on hurling every loose rock in Corsica onto our innocent heads.

September 13

To the Bergeries de Ballone. This was a day away from the GR20 to climb Monti Cinto, Corsica’s second (?) highest peak, and an excellent alpine ridge type outing. The serious Party followed in our footsteps but suffered several casualties and major tremblings along the way, providing an opportunity for us to apply our scrounging skills and replenish our non-existent food and drink supplies.

September 14

To Ref de Manzanu. A day of vicious storms and a dash over a ridge tense with electricity. A British walker got hit and was out for an hour, apparently. The rain and wind reached hurricane force. We were quickly soaked and super chilled. Gore-Tex doesn’t work. Whole mountainsides turned into raging torrents. Later, helicopters were used to pluck off people clinging to boulders. We eventually stumbled into the hut. The roof was off. Water was gushing through the walls. People squeezed in. There was nowhere dry and nowhere to sit. Sleeping bags were being wrung. Lightening fizzed.

“Denis, let’s get out of here.” Earlier I had spotted a vague track going down-

wards. In Corsica if there is no track you can't move through the thick, thorny vegetation.

A voice addresses us. "If you can get us out of here you can have free beer for ever."

It was the British Army, five instructors. Five hours of bash, wallop, squelch took us to a 'hotel' in the back of beyond. It had no heating, drying or food. But it did have beer.

September 15

To Pietra Piana and Ref l'Onda. Two stages in one, sort off. This morning Denis's antenna was particularly focussed on getting us a lift back towards a now distant main ridge. With unerring accuracy he homed in on a charming French couple who had a car. We had got our lift. The only snag being that we ended up even further from the ridge than our current position. A long day ensued, followed by a long night, as our camping and sleeping kit was still wet. Denis's economy sleeping bag did reach his waist but he woke me every hour to tell me how cold he was. In the morning a member of that common species the Bellowing Warden appeared out of nowhere to collect his camping dues.

September 16

To Vizzavona and the halfway stage. Unfortunately the bunkhouse was like the inside of an oil well semi-run by a bunch of greasers. Here we met another bunch of Her Majesty's finest, two officers and three sergeants doing the ridge before posting to Bosnia.

"Yeah, we're gonna hit the top of the ridge tonight and then multistage the route in three days".

"But its snowing, its dark, its cold, your sacks weigh as much as a planet".

"Yeah but we're the greatest fighting force in the world".

"Who are you going to fight, the goats?"

The door opened momentarily to a screaming storm outside and they were gone. Little did I know I would meet them again at the end of the holiday.

The morning saw us thankful to be on our way but not before we had to have a word in the ear of a Mr Cool, a fellow dosser who was noisily protesting about our preparations.

September 17

To the Bergeries de Campanelle. Here we met four gynaecologists from Paris. Denis immediately launched into his infinite repertoire of gynaecological jokes without getting as much as a glimmer of a smile. Parisian humour is obviously different from that of Pelsall. We continued to bump into them at various points on the route. Each time Denis regaled them with further selections of the choicest jokes and despite these being the most obscene possible he was met only with increasingly puzzled faces.

September 18

To the Ref de Prati. We got accompanied by a tagger-on, a silent shadow, despite us panting some sharp remarks in his direction. The warden passed with two horses, the only supply method permitted in Corsica.

We camped near the hut. As it was going to be another sub-zero night Denis nicked a mattress from the hut only to be discovered by the warden who went absolutely bananas. In the midst of this harangue Denis was banned forever, not allowed to cook or to buy a beer. The result was another sleepless night as Denis woke me at regular intervals to tell me how cold he was.

September 19

To the Ref d'Usciolu. A fine ridge with worrying thunder and lightening making for interesting progress. We were out of water and food; most of our supplies had disappeared through the now gaping holes in Denis's rucsac. This was no problem however as Denis gave a master class in the art of extracting supplies from all the startled souls who came our way.

Denis's language skills, always excellent, had now developed to the stage where he could converse for hours on end with people with whom he had not a single word in common. One dehydrated couple gave us their last drops. We accepted, not wishing to hurt their feelings.

September 20

To Ref d'Asinao. The day included an ascent of Monte Incudine. At the summit there was a large choir singing hymns. Denis was visibly impressed. I'd

have preferred hip-hop myself.

On the way down the steep descent we helped an English couple, he with a badly twisted ankle. Although they spoke 'terribly, terribly' they did have chocolate to add to our non-existent supplies. Later we found that he worked for MI5. A spy!

The Gynaecologists were installed in the hut. A further raft of Denis's jokes, this time on a bodily function theme, brought the usual puzzled reaction. By now they were convinced that we were perverts.

The Refuge was wardened by a charming, cheerful woman, showing that you do not have to be a complete prat to be a warden.

September 21

To the Ref Paliri via the 'Alpine Route', a fun via ferrata in and out of superb granite spires. The rock climbing here is easily accessible with the sports routes taking very photogenic lines on sunny rock.

By now Denis's boots were in disrepair. His feet had worn away completely, leaving only shredded ankles on the ends of his legs.

(You think I exaggerate. I do not exaggerate. Exaggeration has to have some basis in reality. Here there is no basis in reality. Therefore there is no exaggeration.)

We passed the Serious Types. They were having lunch in a loose rocky gully. Foul looks indicated that we were getting the blame for the rocks that rained around them. Nor were we successful in getting a contribution from their supplies, no needle and thread and no spare boots.

There was great excitement at the Paliri hut as everyone tried to photograph some kind of horned critter looking like a cross between a goat and a wombat.

September 22

To Conca, the last stage. Everyone seemed to congregate at the Gite at the end of the Universe. Dennis got smothered by his grateful female fan club. The gynaecologists told us a joke which we did not understand. The Serious Types were busy totalling metres up, metres down, average rate of progress, amount of

plaster given to Denis, and counting scars from falling rocks.

The End

The next day we went our separate ways, Denis to jump a boat back to Marseilles, me to wander back to Calvi with a couple of days to spare.

I hired a bike but this was not very successful as my legs felt as though they had worn down to stumps above the knees. I wandered the superb beach trying to look cool amidst all the naked flesh on display. But hold! What is this? It's our British Army heroes. On the beach; not in Kosovo in the midst of it all. And with great tans.

An embarrassed silence greeted my innocent questions. Eventually they admitted, under torture, that they had completed half a stage. I thought this was pretty good, considering the size of their sacks.

"This is our last night," they said. "You can join us if you like but we're going out on the town to get shit faced on a shed load of beer. So we must warn you, you can drop out at any time".

"I'll come. I could do with a little moisture".

Two hours later. Two hours later! "We are off now. Tired".

"But it's only ten o'clock!" I protested.

Going to bed so early I couldn't sleep. It was like being back in the tent with Denis again.

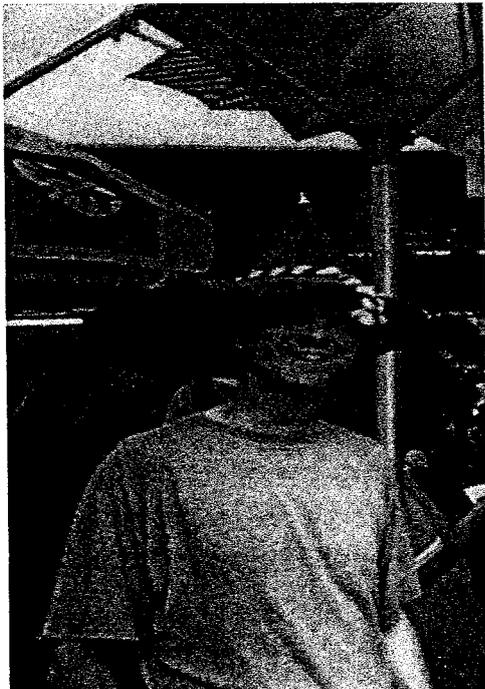
TANKER TOLSON-A CEUNANT CHARACTER

By his (erstwhile?) friends including John Cole

Me? I blame Tanker, myself. Well I ask you. Stands to reason, dunnit? If he had to change the habits of a lifetime - no, he hasn't got hitched or anything sensible like that - why couldn't he have picked another time? But no, it had to be the Club meet at Wasdale couple of autumns ago.

Perhaps firstly I should explain to members who don't know him - yes, all three of you - that Tanker has a long-standing, if not to say carefully cultivated reputation as the worst-clad geezer in the mountains and with gear that George Mallory would have recognised. Why, even his rock shoes have built up heels! 'Handbags' they are known as, or 'Zebedees'. Anyway, you get the point. They're crap.

Now the plan was that Tanker, Martin Jolley, Steve Asbury and I would converge on Wasdale by various routes and means. Tanker decided to walk. Yeah I know, 'par for the course' you're thinking, but in fairness he did catch a bus first from London to Keswick. The weather was superb until Tanker arrived late on Saturday sporting brand new Brasher boots. He had discarded his 'Stirling Moss racing slicks'- old friends since puberty- and had the blisters to prove it. This was of little consolation to the rest of the Meet as his arrival was marked by thunder, lightning and torrential rain that lasted until we struck camp in disgust.



Gandalf from 'Lord of the Bins'
photo John Russell

So let's jump forward to the Little Langdale meet the following January. In the hope of fixing Tanker's sartorial needs for the next 30 or 40 years, the three of us plotted to put him in a situation to achieve this (and hopefully better weather ever thereafter) in one fell swoop. The plan was to strip him bollock naked and, armed only with his credit card, thrust him into Gaynor Sports in Ambleside. Unfortunately he smelt a rat and ran in the one direction we never anticipated. This was straight into Gaynor Sports itself. After trying unsuccessfully to disguise himself as 'Gandalf from Lord of the (dust)Bins' he *eventually* bought an Alpine Lowe jacket at

an absolute bargain price. What happened next you've probably already guessed! Yes, the weather deteriorated and the rains came, and came, and came. The river Brathay, normally 200 metres from the hut, rose up the road to lap at the door and the ford changed position from alongside to on top of the hump-backed bridge. Clearly a survival strategy was needed based on our talents. When a brace of nubile members of the Fylde MC splashed in to take shelter in their/our hut, it confirmed that building an Ark was the best bet (Steve designs, Martin builds, I navigate). Tanker, with his eye on the nubile, thought he would



Tanker modelling his extreme mountain survival gear
photo John Russell

have a starring role. "Well he would" we explained as we knotted the rope around him. "It was called the anchor!" "Tanker the Anchor" seemed the minimum recompense acceptable from him in the circumstances, and any thoughts of 'Noah' were ridiculous – 'Jonah' would be more fitting.

Then in November the four of us travelled to the Club Meet in Glenridding via a late night gargling hole in Troutbeck. Tanker was wearing his ancient 'Lord Anthony' gaberdine jacket and flat cap for the journey. On the hill he reverted to his 'Man of Millets' style in a sort of tight-bottomed, yellow blouson that might have suited a child refugee. We swore it was made of tea bag material as it

appeared to let water in but let nothing out! As a result Tanker looked more and more pregnant as the rainy day wore on. In truth it only rained on *part* of each day and this we attributed to the fact that he never bought anything dangerous like kit but only his usual diet of beer and porage oats.

You may be wondering how Mike acquired his nickname? It was simply, he claims, as a result of working in several Birmingham branches of Lloyd's. Hence 'Tanker the Banker'. Well-read and urbane, he will contribute knowledgeably on the arts or on current affairs. Patient in character he nevertheless can erupt. This he did in the confined space of the car in Ambleside. The combination of needling on about his kit and the rich food he'd eaten at the Britannia, Elterwater became too much. We were well bloody educated about his hatred of 'the whole shopping scene' and of the wicked parsimony of 'lean cuisine vegetables'.

Ah well, nobody's perfect.

The final conclusive evidence against 'Tanker the Wet Weather Man' came on a late-May weekend at Tyn-lon. The forecast was awful and 10 hours before we departed Tanker dropped out. He mumbled excuses about preparing his pad, bowling a maiden over and needing to practise leg-overs rather than rock-overs. We were unaware until then of his interest in cricket! Seemingly in Spring *this* young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of leather on willow (pillow?). Anyway, also conscious of the slowness of three on a rope, we set off in some disappointment. Our mood changed dramatically with the weather however. A wet and windy start to our mountain scramble and walk turned into a glorious late afternoon and day two was spent 'sun-bathing' on the Tremadoc cliffs.

So we rest our case. As I was saying, stands to reason, dunnit?

So if that Ceunant character Tanker is on a Meet with you, the best tactic is to try to ignore his appearance and restrain him by forcible means should he show inclinations to buy kit or gear. This of course assumes you are there to climb, rather than paddle!

The Grand Tour of Monte Rosa

June 2002

Joe Brennan

Denis Jordan and Joe Brennan splashed their way two-thirds of the way round the Monte Rosa circuit in mist, hail, rain and snow, snow, snow. This proved to be much tougher than the Mont Blanc effort. It is also not very good and not very alpine.

By the time we reached Zermatt we had had enough. This Japanese watering hole was wetter than an octopus's jock strap. Zillions of Japanese, having taken a pilgrimage half way round the world, clicked away at the bottom two inches of the Matterhorn. Behind the cloud it was absolutely plastered in new snow, much more than the norm for winter, let alone the summer. So far this year (July) it had not been climbed. One brave soul had a go whilst we were there but he ended up in a wooden suit.

We managed two peaks (ish) before packing it in and heading for home. Denis went off to meet John Beddard for two more weeks of the same. Donkeys look weak minded by comparison!

1982. It's a beautiful, early summer evening and my wife, Wendy and I, sit at a wooden table, behind a pub, below Clent Hills. A pair of blackbirds work tirelessly, darting to & fro, beaks loaded with dangling grubs, feeding a noisy nestful. I gaze in wonder at their flying control; a swooping final approach to a tiptoe landing, before scurrying along to the waiting mouths. My bruised backside bears testament to my own clumsy attempt, just half an hour previously, to emulate their soaring flight!

Playing, kite-like, with a "square", ram-air parachute near the top of the hill, the idea occurs to me that gliding down the hill may be possible? So, poised nervously atop a narrow gulley facing the evening sun, with a light breeze rippling the grass, I clip into my "rig" and run, jump, run, rise, sink, slide and - for fleeting moments - feel the upward pull of my harness as my skipping toes dance over the turf. Then Newton's law confirms that insufficient airspeed and lift means rapid descent!

This is not the romance of pioneering. I did not soar Icarus-like into the face of the sun. This was an ungainly turkey-trot, ending bruised and grass-stained, amid tangled rigging lines and canopy fabric. Evening dog-walkers snigger, as they pass by me and I carefully unhook myself from the hawthorn and limp back to the car. The twittering sparrows in the hedge are not impressed. The simple facts are these: I was too fast for safety and too slow to fly! If I want to achieve my goal of flight without the expense of an aircraft then I need more speed and that means steeper, higher ground!

A fortnight later, sees me emerge from my tent in the "Pass" to what seem to be perfect flying conditions? But.. all my parachute flying experience to date had been over flat, open airfields or carefully managed displays into football grounds, fairgrounds etc. With no precedent for what I was planning, I have no reference point, only a belief, that once I'm flying into clear air, away from the hill, then my instincts will allow me to land safely by my tent!

The current issue of "Craggs" magazine featured an article from an alpine journal, documenting the safe footlaunch of a parachute, high in the Swiss alps, that required much running, jumping and pulling to achieve success, so full of confidence, I have convinced my brother-in-law to accompany me onto the grassy slopes, high on the northern shoulder of Crib Goch!

I leave him, camera at the ready, somewhere above Dinas Mot and at last I am alone. I gaze down the "pass" and note that the breeze is still blowing gently uphill. I lay the canopy out on the grassy slope, nose of the canopy on top, the lines all spread out with no slack, lines crossed over; facing the canopy with my back to the slope. Magazine articles swim through my mind: running and pulling, running and pulling! I turn to face the slope and see the distance to the edge; it doesn't seem far enough but it's all the unbroken ground

there is. My mouth is now dry, but my palms are wet! I check my harness: two, half-metre tapes are attached to the leg loops of my climbing-harness; two karabiners connect the tapes to my parachute and I feel certain that I've done everything right.

I decide that it's time to go and I turn to face the canopy once again. Gently pulling the front lines, the canopy slowly fills with air and assumes the familiar rectangular-wing shape and I carefully turn to face into the wind. The breeze is sufficient to keep the canopy buoyant above my head as I delay the moment of no return. What did that article say? Running and pulling!

Suddenly the breeze dies for a moment, and I take a steadying step forward; then the wind is in my face again; the rigging lines tighten and my feet are lifted from the grass and without apparent effort I'm flying! I allow the canopy to fly quicker as I race down the slope and out over the edge. Within seconds I can see, far below, the edge of Craig-y-Rhaedr. All around I can see the familiar landmarks but seeing them as if for the first time. I can hear someone shouting and it's a few moments before I realize that it's me! I'VE DONE IT!

Over and over. I spin and swing the canopy just for sheer joy but keep my eye on the drop-zone. Next to my tent I've raised a pole with a paper streamer on top to show wind direction at ground level and everything looks okay. All too soon, instinct tells me it's time to prepare for landing; a textbook crosswind leg sets me up onto finals only to realise that the wind has died completely and instead of sinking gently to earth, I'm now racing across the campsite, heading straight for the dry-stone wall. I hit the ground running with the canopy in full-brakes and manage to stop with my feet on the wall! The canopy drapes itself over the stones but I don't care! I've done it and I landed safely. The adrenalin rush keeps me chattering for ages. The deserted campsite is suddenly awash with people asking questions but I want to know if Neil got some good photo's.

Within weeks, I make further flights in Snowdonia, launching from the summits of "Cloggy" and the Glyders and take Eric Jones on his maiden flight from "Cloggy" station. We land in the bunkhouse carpark, just up the road from Tyn Lon. Twelve months later, at a meet organised by Geoff Birtles and Ron Fawcett I discover that the true pioneer of U.K. ridge soaring [parapente] Gordon Williams, had beaten me to the first ever footlaunch by about four weeks. His initial flights were all from hills and ridges in the Peak District. So as far as I know, I was the first to fly in Snowdonia.

Those early attempts were all made on a skydiving canopy, porous fabric and a relatively low glide ratio, resulting in short flights. Third generation soaring canopies enable the current pilot to launch from Cnicht and land in Oswestry! I was wrong about one aspect of the new sport. Like Williams I thought that "everybody will be doing it when the sun comes out" but it doesn't seem as popular as I thought.

FOR THE RECORD

A note of significant activities since the last magazine by those few who knew about the invitation to contribute and who met the short deadline. Tap them for info if you are planning something along the same lines

Name(s)	Month/year	Location	Route/activity	Comments
Mark Hellewell Martin Bemand	Aug 2000	Chamonix	N.face Dru	Wintry conditions, 1 bivvy en route
Mark Sue Traynor	Aug 2001	Pala Gp, Dolomites	S.Pillar Pala di S.Martino	600m most enjoyable S+ ever. 5*route immediately repeated for pleasure!

Names	Month/year	location	route/activity	comments
R.Mirfin + Me (Martyn Peters)	Sep.99	S.W.France	Voie Normale Rancune Chaufeour Valley	Great 2 pitch on a pinnacle
Ditto	ditto	Ditto	Aiguines-Verdon	N.facing bolted routes
Me + M.Bemand	Mar. 00	Lecco Italy	Bolted routes	
Me+Ade+Col	Sep 00	Cheedale	Sirplum+Aplomb	
Me+J.Walker	May 01	Gogarth	Gogarth+Resolution	
Me+ 3Non members	Sep 01	Font	Bouldering	
Me+J.Bunney	June 02	Gogarth	The Strand	

Random excerpts from Tony Mynette's climbing diaries - 2001/2

Date	Location	Route/activity	Comments
Sept 02	Pass	Cenotaph Corner (E1)	worst lead (15ft!)
Aug 02	Lundy	Formula 1 (HVS)	best lead
Aug 02	Lundy	American Beauty (E1)	longest abseil (260ft)
Aug 02	Lundy	“ “	longest prussik (150ft)
Aug 02	Lundy	Marisco Tavern	longest bar tab (£170)

April 02	Arapiles	various (grades 11-18)	best climbing/conditions
May 01/02	Cairngorms	Creag an Dubh Loch	most elusive routes
May 01	Cairngorms	Ballater Crags	most expensive routes (after Arapiles)
May 01	Braemar	Fife Arms to hotel (300m)	longest walk (2.5 hrs)
Various (eg. May 02)	Sheffield	Brennan's nocturnal wanderings (ungradeable)	most unexplained phenomena (found under table clad in the writer's trousers, worn back- to-front!)

Name(s)	Month/year	Location	Route/activity	Comments
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Martin Jolley Tony Mynette	June 99	Scafell E. Buttress,	Centaur	5 pitch 3* HVS top grade outing
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MJ+Steve A, John C, Tanker	Oct 99	St Sunday crag,	Pinnacle Ridge	3* grade 3 winter scramble, Lakes' best
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MJ+Phil Brown	Sep 02	Swanage Boulder	Ruckle, Finale Groove	3*HVS superb line
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Steve Harvatt John Cole	July 02	Symonds Yat, Exchange	(HVS), Golden Fleece(S)	Two 2* classics
		Matlock Bath, Wildcat	2* severes	Fine intro to crag

Steve Asbury John Cole	Sept 99	Cromlech, the Pass	Wasted, Crackstone Rib	Easy multi-star classics Fun in the sun
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