

From this

50
1956 - 2006

CEUNANT
MOUNTAINEERING
CLUB
9th May 2006

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EDITORIAL

For some months I have had the pleasure of reading parts of the material previously published in Club Magazines. It has been the quality – rather than access slightly limited by an incomplete set from a few long-standing members – that has made selection difficult. Accordingly I have produced a ‘bumper bundle’ in order to sample each decade of the last 50 years and to illustrate all (?) our activities, including mountaineering! It starts with meaning, pronunciation and history. Don’t be too alarmed but remember that mountaineering began in the Swiss Alps, when locals tried to get as far away as possible from the noise of cuckoo clocks! There will inevitably be gaps in the articles selected, so if you feel that a particular event or member has been neglected then write in to that effect in the next magazine or volunteer to produce the 60th one!

The feeling at the March 2006 AGM was that a commemorative, easy on the eye production should be forthcoming, rather than a bundle of photo copies of old articles in all their glory. This has meant far more work than for my previous Club magazines so I hope it meets with your satisfaction! Meanwhile *I* have a small glow of satisfaction from getting Mark to write up his 1989 Eiger climb. Happy reading. Happy reminiscing.

Acknowledgements: Marg, Val, Steve H, Paul G and Joe for the loan of old magazines, to Carol Oliver for retyping all the earlier articles selected and Kevin for ‘webmastering’ the cover.

John Cole 9th May 2006 (the Club’s 50th anniversary)

PRONOUNCIATION AND MEANING, by Derrick Grimett

‘Ceunant’ A ravine or gorge: steep-sided river valley in a hillside. Pronounced halfway between ‘ki’ as in kite and ‘kay’, not as ‘koy’. I cannot think of an English word with precisely the same sound but ‘kaynant’ is near enough. There is no sibilant c in Welsh and it is always pronounced as ‘k’, although the letter k does not exist in the Welsh alphabet. Nor do j, q, v, x or z for that matter).

‘Ty’n Lon’ This is how the name of the cottage is spelled, ty’n being the abbreviated form of tyddyn (pronounced ‘tithin’) – say it with the y as the i in bin, and the dd as th in this. Tyddyn means small farm or small-holding and ‘lon’ means lane. So Ty’n Lon is the small-holding (in the/by the) lane.

‘Pen Ceunant’ ‘Pen’ means head or top and the cottage known by that name is on the sharp bend at the top of the steep section of the road that gives access to Cwm Brynog and ‘Cloggy’. The stream that drains the cwm starts the descent of a gorge at this point, hence the name.

CLUB HISTORY, by Mary Kahn and Tony Daffern

In view of the fact that this is the fiftieth anniversary, this article by Mary Kahn and Tony Daffern is being reproduced for the fifth time. It sets out very well how it all began...

Dr. Johnson defined a club as an “assembly of good fellows meeting for a common purpose”. One such club is the Ceunant Mountaineering Club. It was inaugurated more than forty years ago under its old name of The Birmingham and District Group of the Mountaineering Association.

In Spring 1953, Pete Tongue, a member of the Mountaineering Association, received a letter from J.E.B. Wright suggesting that a local members group should be formed. After discussions between Pete and other members in the area, an inaugural meeting was held at the Friends Meeting House, Bull Street in the autumn of 1953. All those invited were members of the Mountaineering Association. The first committee meeting was held in February 1954 at the Digbeth Institute under the chairmanship of Keith Holdsworth.

The Group constitution was a rigid one and hampered rock climbing activities. Only members who were certified as competent leaders by the Mountaineering Association (‘MA’) panel of Training Officers could lead on club meets. In 1956 the MA decided that only those who had passed Intermediate training courses could remain members of the Group and gave the remainder until January 1958 to obtain passes. The majority of the Group, deploring this restrictive attitude, decided to secede from the MA and form a separate club.

The Ceunant Mountaineering Club was formed on the 9th May 1956, the name being taken from the cottage, Pen Ceunant, which had been transferred from the old Group. The object of the new Club was to “provide facilities for the pursuit of mountaineering in all its aspects” and the constitution, though more flexible than the previous one, still hampered rock climbing activities. Members were classed either as “Grade A Competent Climbers” or “Grade B Mountain Walkers”. A “Grade A” member had to be able to “act safely as leader or second on V.Diff. climbs” and a “Grade B” member was not allowed to climb on club meets unless he was led by a “Grade A” member and had the meet leader’s permission. One present member, while soloing Diffs., leading V.Diff., and following Severes, was only granted Class B membership, by a rather inactive Rock Climbing Sub-Committee. At the 1957 A.G.M. common sense prevailed and the offending clause was removed from the constitution.

Perhaps the most memorable events in those early days, were the weekends at Pen Ceunant and the coach meets. Pen Ceunant was transferred to the new Club from the old Group and, under the wardenship of Brian Ruston, became a very comfortable retreat. It was a friendly establishment, though more primitive than Tyn-Lon, with tea in bed in the morning and sing-songs around the fire in the evening. The Friday night dash up the hill from the coach to secure the best beds was excellent training for the weekend activities.

As the only private transport in the Club was John Urwin's old and somewhat unreliable van, coaches were used for most weekend meets. Sometimes the Club had a coach to itself, but more often than not, shared one with either the Stoats (Birmingham University), or the Cave and Crag Club. Though a rather expensive and relatively slow means of travel, coach meets were very popular, the rather boring journeys being livened up by free-for-alls, poker schools and the Stoats' excellent repertoire of disgusting songs.

The first three Annual Dinners were held in Birmingham at The Crown, Corporation Street; The Imperial, Union Street; and finally The White Horse, Congreve Street, where the antics of one of our distinguished guests caused the demolition of half of the gents' toilet. It was decided after this to hold future dinners in Wales.

Indoor Meets were held at the Friends' Meeting House, Moseley, once a fortnight and it is to the great credit of the organisers that there were very few meetings without an outside speaker on some subject related to Mountaineering. One of the early Meet Sheets included the South Georgia Expedition, Trevor Jones talking, Norway, and Slides of North Wales and the Lake District.

1957 was a most depressing year. Many of the original members were dropping out and very few new members were coming along. Membership at the beginning of the year stood at 59 and was only 60 at the end. It was realised by the majority of the Club that changes would have to be made and the Club brought up to date and in line with rival clubs. We were fortunate that at the A.G.M. in 1958, John Knight was elected Chairman. The next two years have proved to be the most progressive in the Club's short history and there is no doubt that this was mainly due to John's quiet guidance. Early in John Knight's reign, the Club became affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council, thus achieving recognition in the world of mountaineering clubs and paving the way to official representation on the Council's Committee.

In April, two observant members, we believe they were Stan Storey and John Urwin, noticed an empty property in Nant Peris, and on making enquiries found that it was for sale for the princely sum of £150. An appeal was made for £220 to be on loan from members and such was the response that by mid-May, and after some Arab-type bartering, the cottage was ours for £130. It was a superb piece of one-up-man-ship over several rival clubs who did not move quickly enough. Possession was gained just before the August Bank Holiday and a party of stalwarts set to with great will to demolish as much of the inside of Tyn-Lon as they possibly could. This was followed by many arduous weekends of re-plastering, drainage construction, plumbing and decorating, until finally the cottage was ready for occupation during Whitsun 1959.

Another innovation, with time sponsored and edited by Mike King, was the Newsletter, which was first published on the 4th June 1958 and contained in the first lines of the editorial a quotation from Sir Ernest Shackleton's Editorial on the "South Polar Times" to the effect that the contributions by all its readers was essential for the success of the paper. It was at this time that the climbing standard of the Club began to improve, and one member in particular did a great deal towards raising the standard and inspiring others to greater effort. This was Dan Davis, who in less than a year from starting to climb, was leading the hardest of the pre-1951 routes in the area. By 1959, there were several other members regularly climbing V.S., all inspired by Dan.

There was now more private transport in the Club and coach meets unfortunately had to be discontinued. Mini-buses were hired and there were many exciting and eventful trips to and from North Wales and the Lake District.

In 1960, Colin Coleman became Chairman and carried on John's good work. By now the work of the past few years was showing reward and there was an influx of new, keen members. An inspiring Outdoor Meets programme was produced and most of the meets were well attended. Colin Coleman introduced the "Three Thousanders" meet and more campaign meets were included. The Annual Dinner was held for the first time in North Wales at the Dolbadarn Hotel and the party was so well behaved that we were invited to come again next year.

One of the schemes put forward to attract new members was that the Club should meet in more pleasant surroundings and so a room was hired for an experimental period every Wednesday night at the Cambridge Public House. This proved to be so popular that the Friends' Institute was soon abandoned in favour of the new venue. The highlight of the year was the organisation of a public lecture by Eric Shipton in the Midland Institute. Tickets were sold to other clubs at the door and a reasonable profit made on the venture.

1961 saw Mike Kerby installed as Chairman. Although the general climbing standard of the Club did not improve during this year, camping meets were well attended as more members, both young and old, bought the necessary equipment. In November 1961 we gave up Pen Ceunant and it was taken over by one of our members, Ken Reynolds, who has now carried out extensive modernisation.

The Tyn-Lon loan was finally paid off in 1963, five years ahead of the estimated repayment time; the Club is now firmly established in the mountaineering world, and provided we can still continue to attract keen, young members, there is no reason why we should not continue to flourish for many years to come.

OGWEN AND LLANBERIS COACH MEET, 2nd May 1958, by J. Burwell – meet leader

This meet was attended by sixteen stalwarts and enjoyed splendid weather. Twelve of the numbers stayed at Pen Ceunant whilst four braved the rats at Isaf.

The Ogwen contingent made the ascent of Central Gully, Glyder Fawr for historical reasons. Grossly exaggerated reports speak of mantleshelving on overhanging wet moss and then doing delicate balance moves in slime-covered boots. Frosts Climb and activities on Terrace Wall were also indulged in.

Three enterprising gentlemen circumnavigated the Snowdon Horseshoe by moonlight – 11.30 p.m. on Friday to 9 a.m. on Saturday – a fine experience.

Parties also visited the Three Cliffs and whilst H. Smith was making his magnificent ascent of Cenotaph Corner on the Saturday, our people romped up Flying Buttress, Spiral Stairs, Sabre Cut and Pharoah's Wall.

Sunday at Llanberis was spent in a variety of ways by different people – viz. in walking, a little sun-bathing, exploring Conway Crags and ascending The Unicorn.

THE GOAT, by A. M. Daffern, 1959

The Goat was beginning to look rather thin. It had been roaming across the middle slabs of the Grochan for the past three weeks, fertilising the bluebells, soiling the hand-holds, and eating the old chocolate wrappings and cigarette packets. Moreover, its bleating had been disturbing the campers below, and so it was decided to fetch it down.

Four stalwarts, led by Harry Smith, set out just after breakfast, with full stomachs, and umpteen feet of rope. Harry soloed the first two pitches of Nea and, eventually, in record time, and after much swearing and struggling, the rest of the party joined him on the large ledge at the top.

Meanwhile the Goat, stationed at the foot of the crack pitch on Spectre, was watching these proceedings with interest, occasionally giving a dismal bleat of approval. Or was it disapproval?

After a certain amount of kitting, chockstone placing, and more swearing, Harry descended, like a Praying Mantis, on the wretched animal. The Goat uttered a despairing cry and threw itself over the edge of the crag. The spectators turned away in disgust, and the rescue party cursed the suicidal animal.

However, all was not lost as there was another ledge only a few feet below. Harry, more cautious this time, descended further. The Goat made a wild rush; Harry made a wild grab; but the animal was too quick for him, and all that was left was a good portion of his finger on the wall behind. The next sortie, however, was more successful, and Harry and the Goat became one seething mass of arms and legs, suspended from a tangle of ropes. Finally, Harry emerged from the folds of one wall and truly tied up Goat which was heaved over the edge and lowered swiftly to the ground to be released by those below.

Without even a bleat of thanks the emaciated Goat raced across the scree and was last seen disappearing at a great rate round the far end of Craig Ddu.

After unravelling the knitting the rescue party returned to the inevitable brew, their consciences satisfied.

Baden Powell would have been proud of them.

THE MEIJE BY THE SOUTH FACE DIRECT (extract), by Dick Cadwallader, 1965

The wooden refuge at the foot of the Meije (13,087 ft) has two communal beds for sixteen people. The night we were there, the hut contained thirty-nine boisterous Frenchmen, Mike Connelly, Mike Richmond (a surveyor on leave from West Africa) and myself. It was unbearably stuffy; I had dozed only for a couple of hours when Richmond, acting as 'support party' woke us with hot cocoa and biscuits. Picking our way between the sleeping forms on the floor, we went out into the moonlight. The air was crisp and clear; it looked like being a good day.

Descending a steep, loose gully took three-quarters of an hour, then we were on the glacier, cursing over frozen ropes and crampon straps as we fumbled in the darkness. For the next hour only the crunch of crampons and axes in the frozen snow broke the silence. We felt a curious, tingling excitement about the climb ahead. By 4 a.m. the sun was splashing the higher peaks with gold as we reached the bergschrund at the foot of the face.

As we had seen from the hut the previous evening, the route takes an almost direct line up the centre of the face with just one possible escape route, a wide shelf across the mountain about two-thirds of the way up. Crampons and axes would be useless from now on and we gave them to Richmond to take back to the hut.

Crossing the 'berg' proved a delicate business, the snow bridge being extremely thin. Safely across, we turned to watch Richmond descending the glacier, feeling very much alone on the face.

Several hundred feet of moving together brought us to the start of the face proper. A cry of "Stein" and looking up after the stone had fallen we discovered two helmeted climbers just above. They were German students who had bivouacked at the foot of the mountain rather than face the crowded hut. There was trouble with route-finding here, the guide book being far from explicit. Each party, afraid of being delayed by the other, set out to take the lead by different routes. Mike and I managed to get in front and there we stayed.

CWM EIGIAU, by Peter Holden, 1967

Undaunted by the rough nature of the road, thence track, up to the campsite by the dam, quite a number of members vehicles bumped over the boulders on the Friday evening. Much to the amusement of those encamped, lights were seen on the wrong road across the moor, but eventually after much searching and retracing of steps everyone arrived at the proper campsite.

The following morning was a little overcast but the unusual phenomenon of seeing blue skies and bright sunshine over the crags enticed an early start up the valley. As the first parties moved up the valley, the clouds withdrew to leave a magnificent blue

sky and the sun beat down mercilessly on their heads. The ascent to the crag from the head of the valley brought pools of sweat from the bent backs of all who were carrying packs of equipment under the glare of the sun. Oh what a pleasure it was to be able to complain about the heat of the sun, the length of the approach walk and weight of the sack – excellent training for those going to the Alps. On reaching the crag, refreshments were taken and pleasure was gained from the sight of the late starters making hard work of the grind up the valley. From here the party split into three groups; firstly those who immediately roped up, put their sacks on their backs and proceeded to wander up the classic “Amphitheatre Buttress”, secondly those who scrambled up the loose gulley and then sat festooned with equipment at the bottom of Mur Y Niwl, and lastly those who just gave in to the sun and flapped out on their backs.

Amphitheatre Buttress climb and the gulley wall opposite provide an excellent example of the contrasting natures of climbs and perhaps the attitude of climbers, though the climber is capable of adapting his attitude to the climb. The “Buttress” is long and gracefully defenceless, often climbed by the novice, not much experience being required, just a little care to follow the signs. In contrast, the wall is short, fierce and at first glance impregnable, standing aloof above the men of experience who have come with determination, to use specialised equipment and more subtle techniques to gain sway with it.

The climber on the “Buttress” enjoys his climb by the physical act of moving on rock and the mental act of taking in the beauty of the surroundings as he sits on one of the many capacious and often luxurious stances, the effort is almost wholly physical, the way ahead has no real problems for the mind. In his eye most of the time will be “those” climbers over there who are on what appears to be a vertical, holdless wall – I think he is impressed at the spectacle and if he is young and ambitious, a little envious, but often he is just contented and will watch without envy but never I hope with disdain.

For the climber on the wall, he also enjoys the physical effort which can often be quite great and sustained, but he also has the psychological effort of working out the moves of each pitch before he can rely on his, often small belay, and then his pleasure is firstly, relief at gaining security and relaxation of physical effort, then a sense of achievement, then the sadistic pleasure of watching the second moving over difficult ground.

On this glorious sunny day nearly all types of climbers were performing, each one’s actions being watched by the other side with either amusement or respect. We had the slightly incompetent novices led by slightly less competent leaders, we had the more experienced mountaineers, both young and old, and in between we had the competent rock climbers. A great diversity of actors performing in that huge theatre.

The routes done on Saturday included two parties on Mur Y Niwl (a particularly good effort by Joe Brennan and Dave Irons), an ascent of Plumbagin which was found to be technical but a little disappointing, Grimmett was climbed by the same party. The remainder of the club spent the day on Amphitheatre Buttress or in Great Gully or generally wandering around the Carneddau.

Sunday was another perfect day and again Amphitheatre Buttress and Great Gully had ascents by members. On the gully wall, Agrippa was ascended and found to be quite a difficult H.V.S., very steep and on superb rock. Pinnacle Wall also had a number of ascents during the day.

A FORTNIGHT IN CHAMONIX (extract), by D. Irons, 1967

Continuous heavy rain made the drive through France tedious and tiring, but on arriving in Chamonix the clouds lifted and from the first moment we were able to see the famous granite Aiguille and the high, white shield of Mont Blanc; peaks, some of which we hoped to climb.

Hoped to climb, I stress, because one could hardly call our party – Bob Hay, Andy Dowell and myself – an experienced one when it comes to alpine matters and Chamonix isn't perhaps ideal for a first alpine holiday, which for Bob and Andy it was.

During our first week we didn't manage to do any climbs, mainly due to unsettled weather, and the best days being spent flogging (getting fit) up to Montenvers and the Plan de L'Aiguille chalet. On the Friday of our first week the weather improved and we went up to Montenvers – on the train this time – and walked up the dry Mer-de-Glace glacier and climbed the ladders on the right bank which led to the track which winds over grassy alps to the Couvercle Hut.

The Couvercle Hut is probably the best equipped in the whole of Mont Blanc and is in a marvellous situation, well placed for many interesting climbs including the Moine which was our intended climb.

The Aiguille Moine is the nearest peak to the Couvercle, the base of the mountain barely an hour away. The route we chose was the S.W. Ridge (short way) which sounded more interesting than the normal P.D. route which we used for the descent. We decided to travel light, taking only one rope and one sack and leaving ice axes and crampons behind as it was a rock route. The ice slope below the S. Face of the Moine was, however, steeper towards the top than we had reckoned for and I had to resort to cutting steps with my peg hammer, which fortunately has a pick – rock pegs were all I had to offer Bob and Andy to use as ice daggers. We were relieved to get on to rock. The route was easy to follow, traversing left over ledges then diagonally right to a couloir which turned out to be full of loose rubble and rotten ice. At the top of the couloir we could traverse right onto the ridge itself, which had some pleasant pitches of 3 and 4 and one short wall of 5 sup. near the top. The descent route, down the S. Face is only a scramble and well marked, but after a few hundred feet, we came upon an incredibly incompetent French party who screamed at us for assistance – fortunately we had plenty of time to spare and so guided them down and back to the hut. At the hut they bought us each a couple of beers and before leaving, shook our hands and thanked us gratefully for saving their lives.

Sunday we had planned to climb L'Eveque, but when we woke at about 4 a.m., it was snowing and the mountains were wrapped in cloud – so back to bed for another six hours then the long plod back to Chamonix.

The next day was fine so we went up and did the N.N.E. Ridge of the Aiguille de L'M, a short, pleasant rock climb of about 800 ft. and difficile standard. We didn't start it until about midday because it's always very crowded in the mornings. This is the best time to do the climb – there were only two other parties on it when we did it.

The following evening saw us at the Plan de L'Aiguille chalet again as we wanted to do the Peigne the next day. The weather in the morning wasn't, however, very good, grey cloud was spread thickly in every direction but the summits were just about clear so a decision was made to set out for the climb but to watch the weather carefully should it become worse. At the bottom of the Face there was some discussion as to which way our route went, so instead we went further up the glacier to do a shorter and easier route, the ordinary route to the Aiguille de Pelerins. The climb was straight-forward, up a wide, crevassed couloir till ledges could be traversed leftwards into a secondary rock couloir which gave easy scrambling to the summit ridge. This was then followed on marvellous rock to the summit. We took a few photos then hurried back down and just managed to reach the snow couloir before it began to snow.

Thursday night we were up at the Requin Hut. On our way we had met two friends of ours who were coming down, they told us that snow conditions were very bad but on arriving at the hut, things didn't look too bad.

I MUST GO DOWN, by Ben Hipkiss, 1971

As self preservation and almost reckless abandon are integral components of my personality, the decision to go and have 'a good do' on Gogarth with Harry Smith was not easily reached.

However, despite prolonged bleatings concerning health, lack of strength, and the fact that I hadn't done anything hard for ages (which is, after all, only the groundwork laid down by all participants in this particular sport before embarking on a route of some difficulty, with a new partner, to preserve one's image in case the outcome is one ghastly mess of clawing fingers and shaking limbs), I found myself, along with the company of two Cave and Crag competitors and one female spectator being herded across the heathery moors in the general direction of the crag.

Mr. Smith was looking resplendent in his Ex W.D. jacket and boots. He was sporting a fine array of krabs which would certainly be labelled as "collectors items" if they should ever come up for sale.

Upon arriving at the crag, Mr. Smith stated that we would "do this Scavenger thing" which partly relieved my somewhat anxious feelings as it was only graded V.S. With

the air of a magician producing wondrous things from a top hat, Mt. Smith proceeded to sort out his “gear”. Could all that be contained in one little Ex. W.D. sack?!

“Haven’t you forgotten your P.A.s?” I enquired.

“I don’t go in for these new fangled rubber things”, he replied.

“Oh” I said.



Harry Smith and friends having a car boot sale, 1971

Soon we were making the initial moves on the sea-level traverse, but as most of it was in fact below sea-level, this task proved to be quite difficult. However, Mr. Smith, being a born leader, soon had the party “organised” as he put it. A good swell, turning tide and strong onshore winds, are perhaps idyllic conditions for surfers but not, I’m afraid, for sea-level traverses, and so by the time we eventually arrived at the perched block of Pentathol, we were, to say the least, a little damp. As our companions prepared to tackle Pentathol, Harry turned to me and said,

“Well, it looks like we won’t be able to get round to the start of Scavenger, so we’ll go up this ‘ere wall and traverse round to join it”.

“Er..... Harry, this ‘ere wall happens to be Syringe.”

“I don’t go in for these ‘ere names, you know.”

“But... it’s graded Extreme, and it’s supposed to be quite hard at that.”

“I don’t go in for these ‘ere grades.”

“Oh!” I said.

On this pitch Harry showed his brilliance as a rock climber as he moved slowly but steadily up the impressively steep, grey wall planting immaculate runners every three or four feet.

After one particularly trying sequence of moves, he leered down at me and said,

“I’m going to have to pull you through a karabiner to get you up this Young ‘Ipkiss.”

“Oh!” I said.

Whilst Mr. Smith had been engaged in overcoming the difficulties of the first pitch, a round rubber ball plopped up out of the sea and watched his efforts with the detached interest of a barman viewing the antics of the regular drunkard. With an almost audible yawn he rolled over onto his back, pulled out his plug and sank to his cool retreat at the bottom of Gogarth Bay.

“Climb when you dare,” cried Mr. Smith from above. After fifty feet of non-stop grip on the steepest wall I have ever had the misfortune to be on, I managed to slip my right foot into a sling to have a short rest. Unfortunately this was not to be, for no sooner had I placed all my weight in the sling, when the nut shot out of the crack rapidly followed by me. Fortunately (for the image, you know), I was able to grab a hand-hold and stop my descent before Mr. Smith was aware of what had happened, and so honour was saved.

The sling, or to be precise, two slings and two alloy krabs linked together, landed on the block of Pentathol, were soon collected by a climber with a keen eye for “swag”; but later recovered in a diplomatic confrontation at the top of the crag.

“Well done, Harry,” I managed to gasp when I reached him, “not bad for an old ‘un”.

“Yes, it was quite a do. Surprising what the kids get up to nowadays. We won’t have time to finish it so if you climb about thirty feet up the next pitch and get something in, we’ll be able to pendule into the top of Pentathol.”

When this was achieved and I was securely belayed, I told Harry “to do his thing”. This he did. To save time he climbed hand over hand up the rope and swung across to me. This was quite a remarkable feat as the pitch was gently overhanging.

Three quarters of an hour later saw us jangling our way across the cliff tops to join our friends waiting at the descent gully.

“How did he manage?” enquired a feminine voice.

“Well. You’ve put me in quite a difficult position there Sandra, as you seem to think he’s a bit of a goer or something and I don’t want to spoil anything for him,” he grinned.

“Thanks a lot, Harry,” I said.

“Anytime son, anytime.”

“Oh, by the way Harry,” I said, “Can I just take a look at the guidebook to see what it says about the route?”

“I don’t go in for.....”

“Oh!” I said.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS IN THE BIG APPLE, by Jim Fairey, 1986

“Harvatt – will you please get out of your midge-ridden pit and let’s go climbing!!!”

It was almost as if the man had stuffed the remains of the barbecue into his ears to avoid hearing the word climbing ever again. Not really a question of selective deafness but more a case of perpetual sleeping sickness. (We later discovered a human alarm clock who could ensure rapid SH crack of dawn starts).

And so the team assembled – the three musketeers and a medical member. By divine selection in the Vaynol the previous night, the target for the day was to be Gogarth. Hurst had muttered something about a route he had in mind but nobody listened and so he said no more. A guide was purchased in order to sort out as many easy, warm-up routes as possible. The journey then began.

“We must ring Eric to see if he will join us there.”

“Good idea, Johnny, go and ring him.”

Four visits to broken, out of order, or just vandalised call boxes later, we came to the conclusion that Fairey must get a phone put into the flying hearse. This was a blow. Getting Eric to Gogarth was part of the plan to stall, procrastinate and pass the time away with stories of main parachute malfunctions, how to survive a double chute malfunction, and how to obtain a most unusual design in birdbaths.

A cup of tea was taken at South Stack to replace the fluids lost by all during the A5 dash at the hands of Harvatt. (If he ever asks you, “Do you want to see my 3-point turn?” just calmly look the other way).

Having survived the death defying descent crevasse (just), it was noticed that Hurst stepped up three gears and disappeared along the upper tier traverse before you could

say “one for all and all for one.” We decided that such a turn of speed could only have resulted from an urgent call of nature.

Not so! We turned the next corner and found him already geared up and waiting to hand the ropes to us for a belay. It was now our turn to experience urgent calls of nature. (In fact the medical member from that moment on kept saying, “I need a wee” every twenty-five minutes. I must research Gray’s Anthology of Urinary Disorders to discover what her problem is).

“Central Park, Johnny? Now come on, you can’t be serious? We need a nice, quiet route to warm up on, to get used to the insistent blaring of South Stack foghorn et al.”

From that moment until he reached the first belay 120 ft up, he was subjected to some of the most formidable (previously never known to fail) verbal and nonverbal attempts to arrest his progress but to no avail. The man climbed up quickly and quietly, which in the end made us think that perhaps it was not too hard and probably only the one 4c move.

Fairey next. “Jesus Christ – how do you start this?” “Bloody hell Hursty, where’s all the holds?” “How do you get up this?” By now it was becoming clear that Mr. J. Hurst Esq. had been determined to do this route for some time and he knew from the start that he would do it in fine style.

Harvatt immediately behind on the front of the next rope. “Where do you get a runner in here?” “Hey Jim, have you taken any more runners out up to here?” “What lovely flowers to the right and left.” “Wow, this is 4c all the way.” But then more seriously “Is there room for four of us on that ledge John?”

“What ledge Steve?”

Everybody’s hearts sank to their sphincters! A hanging belay – God, what next?

A wry smile came to Hursty’s lips – he knew he had the next pitch in the bag. This year’s motto was about to bear fruit – WHO DARES WINS! He set off up the second pitch leaving Harvatt marooned at the start of the traverse. There were no shouts, grunts or thrutching sounds as he silently proceeded up the crack, over the bulge and into the finishing groove. It was all over so quickly we could not understand why we expected him to have trouble getting off the ground at the start.

The rest of the team quickly joined forces by insisting that the medical member overtook Harvatt and crossed over the traverse to Jim (without passing water in the process). From then on they all followed the second pitch in various fashions but with unanimous admiration for their leader.

At the top Harvatt remarks, “I now know why this is called Central Park. It’s because of all the beautiful flowers along the route.”

“Idiot, it was put up in November!!”

But the last words were from our hero of the day. “Beautiful weather, great company and superb climbing. What more could a man want?”

True to character, the medical member could suggest nothing else.

WALKING THE LEDGES (Eiger North Face 1989), by Mark Hellewell

One Saturday morning in 1971, all of 16, Stockie and me are down the old library in Sutton making a beeline for the Climbing and Mountaineering section (a paltry selection in those days). We’d been introduced to climbing by local Youth Club leader Bob Murphy, a keen mountaineer, so now we had quite a few weekend trips to Wales and day trips to the Peak under our belts.

We didn’t know a lot then but when I saw the Brown autobiography lurking on the shelf I snatched it quick before Stockie saw it, we’d heard of him alright. Absorbed, I sat at the big oak table smugly pleased with my find when Stockie, thumbing the spines on the shelf above suddenly exclaims “Hey Mark, there’s a book ‘ere on spiders, white ones!” I was jealous now; his book was bigger than mine.

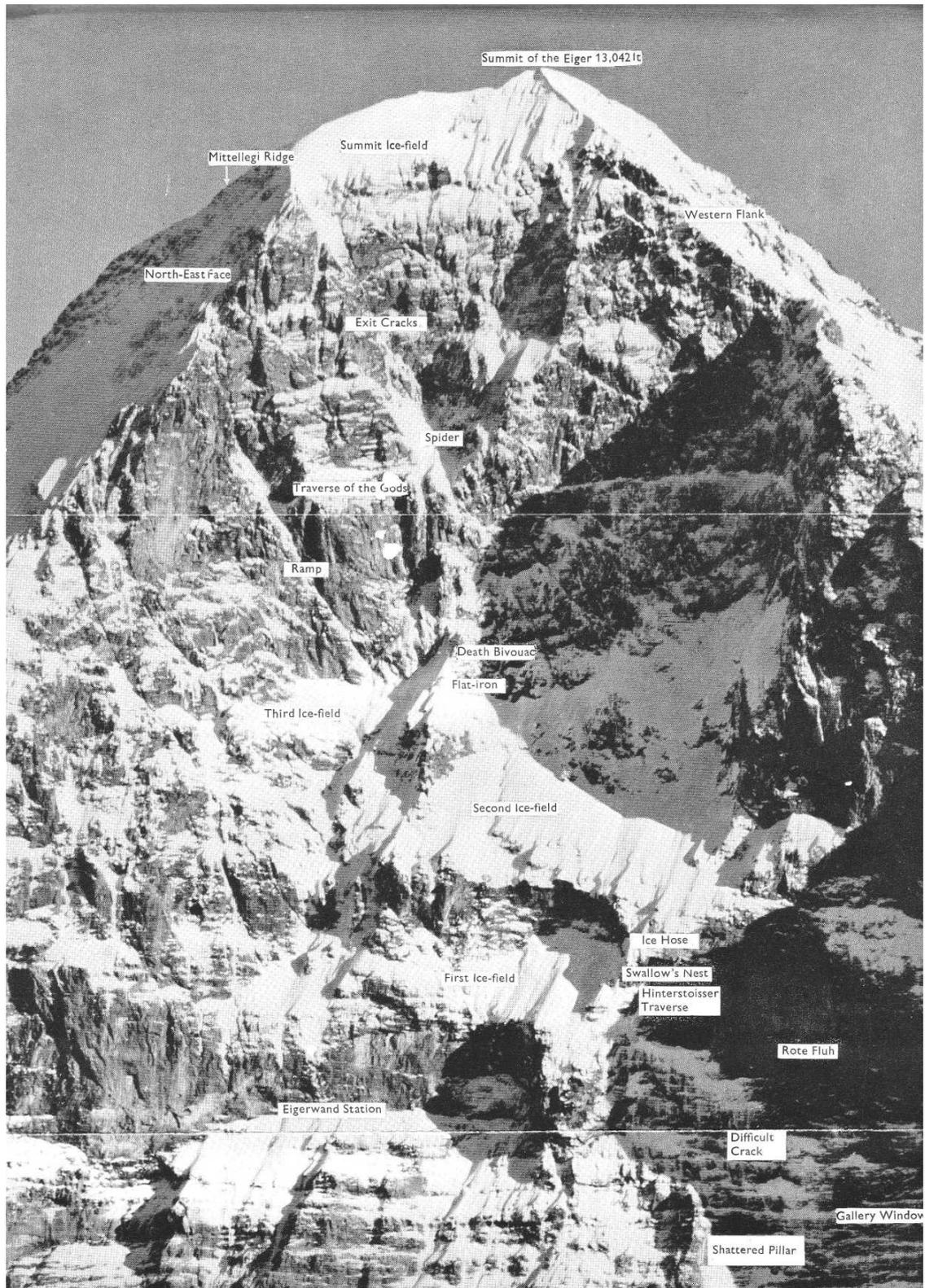
We sat at that table and looked through the fantastic photos of the Eiger North Face in Harrer’s classic ‘The White Spider’ (unfortunately the later paperback editions don’t have all these photos). Our jaws dropped as we cor’d and wowed our way through it. This was the most exciting book I’d ever seen, I needed a plan. I quickly offered the Joe Brown book to Paul saying “Here, look what I found!” He took the bait and we agreed to swap books next time. He had a long wait, I was hooked.

I read that book over and again, the history of the North Face, a gripping read giving detailed accounts of all the attempts to climb it, the dramatic rescues and the many tragedies. Stories of legendary status the world over, rapidly making this the most notorious climb in the world. More detail has been written about this one climb than any other in the world. The face itself is over a mile high with a climbing distance of 10,200 feet and yet every feature along the way has a name and a story to tell. If only every Alpine climb had this much information available on it, what a gift!

The effect it had on me was instant. As soon as I read it I knew without any hesitation that I wanted to climb it. All I needed was experience, ability and a good partner. It took another 18 years.

In 1989, I’d planned to drive out to the Alps for a month or so, amongst other things was a plan to solo the Lauper route on the North East Face of the Eiger. Firstly I needed a car so fifty quid later saw me in possession of the Maxi, a fine specimen which I duly booked on the ferry. Only a few weeks before departure I get a phone call from my old friend Sandy Wilkie, “Hello Mark, I’ve managed to get a week off work and wondered if you are still heading for Grindelwald?” Well a week’s not too long in Alpine terms so I casually enquire what he might have in mind, (a moment I never forget). “Well” he says: “There’s only one f---ing thing in Grindelwald!” This

was good, Sandy's reputation on 'loose and dangerous' preceded him just like the Eiger's. I'd found my partner.



The old Maxi ticked along through Switzerland like a well oiled Rolex and despite the overcast weather we felt surprisingly relaxed as we discussed our tactics. It all hinged on the weather, we'd promised ourselves only to start up if the forecast was good. In less than good weather the difficulties mount rapidly and we couldn't forget those memorable words of advice in the guidebook; 'If the weather turns then progress or retreat becomes a grave prospect'. Ironically the dangers also increase when the weather is warm, sometimes you just can't win.

So; my partner has only a week, we need a perfect forecast, and of course we want good conditions on the face, nobody gets that lucky.... do they?

Clouds obscured the Face when we arrived on Sunday afternoon, but all I could really think about was sleep, after a rough midnight ferry and the long drive I hadn't slept since Friday. cursory enquiries with other Brits on the campsite revealed that the weather had been unsettled with the odd storm. cursory enquiries from them regarding our plans revealed lies and secrecy. So we went off to check on the weather forecast confident of a rest day tomorrow.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry: five-days clear weather starting tomorrow! We couldn't believe it.

Next morning, wide awake now we sorted our gear out on the grass in time-honoured fashion; a couple of screws, two titanium warthogs, six pegs, half a dozen nuts, two medium cams, six quick-draws, a handful of slings and some abseil tat. Not the biggest rack in the world but then we weren't counting on regular gear placements anyway, it's not that kind of route. Of more concern was that we should have enough gear in the event of an abseil retreat. We added some extra gas just in case, packed, and went to check the weather again: This evening possibly a little snow shower, then at least four days of clear blue skies, hopefully with cold nights and frosty mornings.(Fingers crossed)

We fed our faces and caught the little train up to Kleine Scheidegg in the afternoon, excited and a little nervous to be on our way at last. Feeling a little over dressed amongst the tourists, we were glad to leave their curious stares behind at Eigergletscher, our departure point for the face. We left the station and turned the corner to walk across the foot of the face. It felt like we'd just pushed our way through those fur coats and stepped through the back of the wardrobe, such was the contrast.

As we walked across the scree slopes under the wall with our helmets on I thought about all those who had gone this way before us. Not all of them made it back through that wardrobe. The valley drops away, the view opens up and the sound of the cowbells in Alpiglen are already three thousand feet below. The exposure starts here with the 'atmosphere'.

We located the Entry Chimneys and found two German climbers just about to start up ahead of us accompanied by a young Swiss climber. Bad news we thought, nothing personal but we didn't want company. We immediately recognised them as we had seen them arrive in Grund the previous night being greeted by the younger climber.

We thought they had a certain air about them and had them pegged as Eiger candidates straight away. We'd got that right then.

The Swiss lad worked in the local hotel and spoke perfect English. He was to climb with them a short distance, leave them, and head for the Gallery Window to walk back down the track. He was at work the next morning. Like us they were aiming for the Swallows Nest Bivi but fate had other plans.

We wished them well and let them get ahead a bit whilst we geared up, then moving together we teetered steadily up loose rocks and ledge systems, the so-called 'Easy Ground'. It occurred to us that a slip here would be our last, easy is a relative term.

Somewhere by the Shattered Pillar our expected snow flurry arrived but it was disguised as a storm. We huddled up in some rocky corner and sat it out for an hour or so. If this were to happen anywhere past Swallows Nest it would be serious but here at least escape is near at hand. As it cleared and we headed towards the top of the pillar we could hear urgent shouts from over to our right. The German team were all heading toward the Railway Gallery Discharge Window. They seemed flustered, it looked like one of them was injured. We did shout over to them in case assistance was required but they didn't reply. We waited and watched for a while but they seemed to be making progress and would soon be in the tunnel. And then there were two!

Progress was pretty slow after the storm. Moving together wasn't a good option any more, so when we reached the Wet Cave Bivi we called it a day. Above lay a vertical wall followed by The Difficult Crack, all hard enough when dry. Without further ado, I banged a peg in the roof, hung the stove on it and brewed the tea. It was a great place to be, the good weather window didn't even start till tomorrow, we had a head start and I was just excited to be there.

The following morning we found our vertical wall pitch and the Difficult Crack covered in an impressive armour coating of ice, just the thing to wipe the smile off your face. We thought it best to wait for daylight, happily it dawned clear and sunny which helped to warm things up a little.

An old rope ran down the wall onto which Sandy clipped a shunt that would be his only protection. As I watched him front point and hook his way up the verglassed pitch, that rope looked very old and I held my breath.

Quite soon we became enveloped in clouds again. It was like pea soup by the time we reached the Hinterstoisser Traverse. This in itself shouldn't be a surprise on the Eiger, even on a good weather day. It was probably nice and sunny still on the upper slopes. Hence the first stone volley of the day, some of which bounced off my helmet as I belayed Sandy across the fixed rope. Tethered as I was to the belay I leaned in trying to be as small as possible thinking; hang on, this is one of the more sheltered places, what's more it's a bit early yet, and help I'm gonna die.

I was across that fixed rope like a startled ferret and soon we were at the famous Swallows Nest. The guidebook describes it as 'a small, poor bivouac site' but again this is a relative term. As bivis go, we thought it was ace and it had a roof so I banged a peg in, hung the stove, got a brew on and we assessed our situation.

It was still only mid morning on our first good weather day, a double-edged sword, it wasn't cold enough on the face. Despite the icy start to the day, the upper slopes were already too warm and stones were already bouncing on the First Ice Field on our left with increasing regularity. They were quite scary. You don't always hear them rattling down the slope announcing their arrival. No, you just suddenly hear a whacking great thud as a rock from nowhere strikes like lightning sending up a shower of ice. It was like a surprise mortar attack where the sound is turned off till it strikes. The ones you hear are the ones that go overhead like bullets, fortunately we had a roof over our heads.

Moving on wasn't an option. Too many climbers had come to grief on the Second Icefield trying to cross it in the afternoon, we could afford to wait, had no choice really. It was still very early in the day for a bivouac but we whiled away the afternoon easily, talking and drinking tea. During one of the few clearings in the cloud that afternoon we had visitors. A small red and white helicopter came to look at us. We gave them a thumbs up and off they went. We could have offered them a cup of tea I suppose.

In the morning we would have to climb the First Icefield and the Ice Hose, traverse the Second Icefield and climb the Flatiron to reach Death Bivouac, all before the first volley of stones, a tall order going by today's warm conditions. The Second Icefield alone is four rope lengths up and ten lengths across and there would be no shelter until the bivouac was reached. We would be climbing into a trap, as this is the most exposed area on the Eiger. So we decided if things didn't feel right in the morning we'd just bail out, simple as that.

I have to say things felt great in the morning. As dawn broke I emerged from the shadowy reaches of the Ice Hose just as the stretch came on the end of the ropes. I planted both axes in the Second Icefield and stared in amazement at it as I clipped into my leashes. It was like some dream coming true. I didn't want to be anywhere else. I turned round to face out while bringing up Sandy and saw the sun rising over a sea of clouds below with the occasional mountaintop poking through. Fantastic. Not a breath of wind, just silence. As I took the ropes in, I could hardly believe it. I was actually on the Second Icefield, in great conditions, enjoying it, smiling. Nobody gets this lucky, do they?

Sandy joined me on the stance. We both hoped there wouldn't be too many more pitches like that one, fifty metres of verglassed looseness with no gear. Sandy's turn to hold his breath and ponder the strength of the belay!

All that was forgotten as I ran the rope out up the icefield. When it came tight Sandy followed and we soloed up it. The ice was uneven, corrugated with troughs and covered in debris, especially along the top of it where we were, steady footwork was required so as not to trip.

We found our way through the rock band above and, feeling quite fit, we thought we'd just leg it up the side of the Flatiron when the first salvo from above arrived. So we found a strip of ice going directly up to one of the higher rock bands then teetered horizontally left for a rope length to arrive directly onto Death Bivouac, a much safer variation we thought.

I clipped some old tat and brought Sandy across, it was now looking like a repeat of yesterday's stonefall scenario, only worse. The Third Ice-field was just to our left, the entrance to the Ramp was only a rope length away but we couldn't risk it. We hardly even discussed it, there was no need to, so I shoved an axe in the vertical snow, hung the stove on it and got a brew on.

Death Bivi was totally banked out with snow, it took a while but we excavated it into a half decent cave-come-niche and settled down to enjoy the view over the tops of the clouds with blue sky all around.

Here the stone fall was truly stunning. We were directly below the White Spider which acts as a funnel for all the summit slopes and the Exit Cracks. We watched and listened in amazement, it was constant. Where else could you experience this? Some sounded like bullets, others motorbikes or cars like when you stand by the racetrack. There were doodlebugs, rockets, and bi-planes. Some flapped just like a nylon anorak in a gale. We gave them all names.

In time the sun came round to us. It was so hot we stripped down to vests and sunbathed for an hour or so, then covered up in case we burnt. How ironic and how sad we thought that on this very spot Sedlmayer and Mehringer froze to death. Looking across at the Ramp in the afternoon sun we could see meltwater streaming down it forming a series of waterfalls and hoped they'd be frozen in the morning.

Sometime in the afternoon I happened to glance at the date on my watch and realised it was my birthday. Pretty cool birthday I thought, shame I didn't have a card or anything to open, now that *would* have been cool. But we did have visitors, our little red and white helicopter rose suddenly up out of the cloud. They stayed long enough to get a good look at us, waved and went straight back down. No cake you see, but I'm sure they held up a big card with 34 written on it.

We crossed the third Icefield to enter the Ramp at first light and raced up it as best we could. At one point Sandy had to make an 's' shaped tunnel through a snow banked chimney. I got stuck inside it, that slowed me down. I had to remove my sack and push it ahead of me. Then I found myself on the sharp end of a steep, heavily iced corner pitch teetering delicately on my front points on icy rock. Pegs with tat on them winked at me from under the ice. It was a lonely lead.

The real showstopper however was the Ice-Bulge, which gives access to the Ramp Icefield. The guidebook just says "climb direct (10m)"

I gratefully clipped into a big old ring peg and looked up at thirty feet of mostly overhanging dark looking smooth rock hard ice. Your mate's big lead as they say. With our well blunt gear this was a bit cruel. I did however have a secret weapon for this pitch - Sandy Wilkie! I held my breath as I paid out the rope. It was an impressive lead by anyone's standards. As you step off the ledge you feel an awesome sense of exposure and as you gain height you wish you'd left your sack behind.

After that the difficulties eased off a bit and some enjoyable climbing led up past the Brittle Ledges to arrive at the Traverse of the Gods, our last intended bivouac site and our final leaping off point for the Spider and up to the summit.

It was Thursday now, one good weather day left with just enough gas and provisions to see us through.

So I banged in a peg (well three stacked together actually) hung up the stove and got a brew on. It was only midday and we had enough time to reach the summit but it would be extremely dangerous to venture onto the Spider in these conditions. So far our careful approach was working well, no need to spoil it now. It just seemed that in order to climb the Eiger you simply had to stay alive long enough to do so.

We felt quite confident about things really. There are four main bivouac sites on the Eiger and we'd now stopped at them all. This, however, must be our last. We were now well past any point of return and committed to getting up the exit cracks to the summit tomorrow even if the weather turned. We were a long way from home.

We could hear the drone of the helicopter long before we saw it. Working its way steadily up the face, it seemed to take ages. It felt like we were a long way up. The green pastures of Alpigen were 6000 feet below us but we could still hear the cowbells, they accompanied us all the way up the face. Often when I hear them now I'm transported right back to those ledges above the cloud and those long afternoons with Sandy, great days.

We waved and they disappeared for the last time leaving us to our solitude on this long and narrow icy ledge. 'The Traverse of The Gods' was well named we thought. I melted enough ice for the two hot water bottles to stuff in our down jackets, one to make the breakfast with and one for the road. I figured there would be just enough gas for the morning and no more. So that's it then, we'd best go down for our tea tomorrow.

Like thieves in the night we crept along the traverse feeling our way in the darkness. We only had one torch working now and that wasn't too good either but we did manage to find a couple of pegs by feel which pleased us because, although easy here, it's a hell of a place to be soloing.

In the dim light of pre dawn we stepped out onto the White Spider and gained its crest. All was quiet and still, the central backbone of the Spider that we now stood on soared upwards for 700 feet to the Exit Cracks whilst below us lay nothing. It was bottomless, a mile of space to the valley, we felt very exposed.

Once again I ran out the rope till it came tight and Sandy followed on. Soloing together like that we reached the upper rim in no time. Things were going well. We found a good stance with overhead protection. I stashed my axes behind a flake and sorted the ropes for Sandy to lead off into the Exit Cracks. Next thing I knew I was watching one of my axes sliding down the hill. Maybe the rope caught it, I don't know. Wrapped in the leash was one of my mittens. Open mouthed we watched it launch off the end of the Spider like a giant Olympic ski jump in the sky. Most impressive! Undaunted I got out the spare mitten and decided one axe was sufficient for the Exit Cracks anyway. Just then the first stone of the day whistled past and shot down the Spider. I was glad we weren't still on it.

Above us lay a thousand or so feet of mixed climbing in icy gullies that would lead us to the Summit Icefield. It was Friday morning now, tiredness was creeping in and some of those icy pitches felt as hard as any thing else on the face. We were glad it wasn't snowing.

Dark grey walls closed in around us and the atmosphere was very different today. Old abandoned ropes hung down a big wall to our left at one place and I wondered what story they could tell, many epics had taken place within the confines of these walls.

The main difficulties lay in the first half of the exit pitches, after which a traverse leads leftward across a pulpit to an easier gully system and safer climbing. Sandy was on the small terrace from where the traverse begins. The gully narrowed and steepened here, rising vertically above him for a bit. I was belayed about twenty feet down and fortunately to one side when the walls around us suddenly reverberated with the sound of rock fall. A rock the size of a fridge flew straight over Sandy's head and to one side of me before exploding down the six or seven pitches we had just finished!

It was a heart stopping moment. Seconds later Sandy was on the traverse and only seconds after that I'd climbed the ropes to join him. We'd never moved so fast in our lives. We didn't need to say much really, we just sorted out the ropes and pushed on. Not far now.

Half a dozen pitches later we emerged into bright sunshine and stood at the foot of the Summit Icefield. It was a great feeling. The weather was superb and the view that day was a bit special.

All that remained now was the icefield to the summit ridge. Sandy gave me one of his axes and said "After you".

I reached a set of footprints on the corniced knife-edge of the Mittellegi Ridge and suddenly I could see vertically straight down the South face, very dramatic! I planted the axes and turned to take in the ropes for the last time. Sandy climbed steadily up towards me on pure white smooth snow-ice glinting in the sun. It was a superb pitch to finish on. The view looking down to the green Alpine pastures so far below was breath taking.

We balanced our way along the ridge towards the summit, little realising that the fine set of prints we were following were actually those of our friends Ken and Roy who had just finished the Mittellegi and passed this way an hour or so earlier!

Finally reaching the summit we dared to admit to ourselves that we'd done it. We could hardly believe it. It seemed we did get that lucky after all.

We rested a while in the afternoon sun and tried to take it all in before heading down. "Come on" laughed Sandy "We've got some serious bragging to do!"

Sandy loved reminiscing, he would laugh and say "We're just walking those ledges" it was a favourite expression of his. We often walked them together over a beer. He was a great storyteller. Sadly I didn't get chance to walk enough of those ledges with

Sandy. Tragically he was knocked off his push bike on the way home from work one day and died as a result of his injuries. Memories are such a precious thing.

ICONOCLASTS ON THE EIGER, by Joe Brennan, 1990

The Ogre, the Monk and the Virgin, an unholy trinity like characters from some Swiss morality play. Appropriately, the Monk separates from the other two, an alpine chaperone in the sky. Add a little mountain railway, and hey presto, there you have it, International Tourism spelt with a capital F for Swissfranc.

By contrast, the fine Mittellegi Ridge on The Eiger stands remote from all this, flanking the eastern side of the North Face. Just before our arrival the face itself was climbed by Mark Hellewell and Sandy, an epic and controlled ascent over five days in very bad conditions. Well done lads – and it was their first route of the season!

For our more humble objective, the Mittellegi bivouac hut must first be reached. This is the finest situated garden shed in the universe with thousands of feet of vacant space on either side of its high-rise position. The novel approach begins by popping out onto a glacier terrace through a hole below the viewing windows of the Eismeer station inside the Eiger. Here the unpaid entertainment begins immediately for the excited passengers behind the double-glazed windows with a heady cocktail of stone-fall, serac collapse and monster bergschrunds – the menacing arse-end of The Eiger.

Moving fast through a death rattle gulch area, we eventually got to a point below the ridge where the guidebook (file under ‘fiction’) blithely states: ‘leave the ice to gain sloping rocks’. Handjamming a crack between a thin, vertical blade of ice and the rock – the ice was too fragile to touch with an axe – gained us access to a pleasant concoction of brittle, shattered, debris-covered slabs with no holds or security. O.K. so we might have been off route. Once established on this happy mixture, we heard a loud CRUMP as the load of ice blocks we had used as a snow-bridge over the ‘schrund collapsed with impeccable timing.

Eventually we arrived at the hut where about a dozen German-speaking climbers already in residence had to be elbowed out of their territorial imperatives. Not far away a long, loud and sustained rumbling announced the end of something big.

That night a big storm blew up with us as Guy in the middle of a celestial firework display. Close up, the lightning made curious flapping noises rather than big bangs, like being hit on the ears with wet pancakes. Blap, blap, blap. The hut conductors were working overtime. I could see Generating Board Steve thinking electrically: how to harness this lot through some sort of Eiger sub-station, into the National Grid and yet another promotion? One person at least stood to gain from privatisation.

Morning dawned spectacularly with the ridge armour plated in new snow and ice. The ski seasons could have started there and then. Everyone was preparing for retreat, an uninviting prospect down snow-covered high-angled guano. Steve has

much better mountain judgement than me. Basically, he is prepared to climb anytime, anywhere, in any conditions. "It will only take a couple more bivi's, that's all."

Germany was very impressed.

"Your friend, how you say, he ist mad, ja?"

"Radio rental."

Seven hundred feet of extreme skiing without skis and three abseils take us across yesterday's collapsed snow-bridge and onto the glacier terrace. On the way back we see the result of the loud noise of yesterday evening. Half of the Greenland icecap seemed to have careered across our tracks, with the other half waiting in serac lines above. This is where the Ogre keeps his monsters, creaking to be unleashed like mad dogs down the slope – an Eiger sanction we could do without.

What goes through the mind whilst tripping daintily through this lot? In my case, nothing organised, just a few shreds of thoughts drifting unconnected through hollow empty spaces: pop songs; the friendly jungfraus by the side of the Grindlewald pool; Steve's cooking; a new pair of boots so that I can at least die in comfort.

Despite this mental shrapnel, we might still have set a new world record for the hundred-metre spring – no steroids but definitely wind-assisted, Linford Christie eat your heart out.

Safely back in the hole in the Eismeer, we emerge into a large crowd of curious Japanese viewers. The train is like something from the Tokyo rush-hour. We are the only Euros. "We'll get away with the fare here Steve, just mix in, bend your knees and squint."

Having successfully committed the ultimate crime in Switzerland – not paying – we arrive at the Jungfraujoek. Yes, we have a sportsplan 'B'. The Jungfraujoek 'facility' is like a high-altitude New Street Station without the charm. Not at all a nice thing to have done to the flanks of a young lady. Close by could be heard a terrible braying and growling. We thought we were about to be caught but it just turned out to be a load of huskies in a cage at the end of a tunnel. They were being watched by a large number of touroids, taking in an authentic experience of Olde Switzerland.

On the glacier outside, the world gathered from its four corners – trepid Americans wondering whether to step onto the ice, Japanese ladies falling over in high heels, immaculate French, dressed darkly and trying to look poised as they slipped arse over tit. Large Italian families sounded as if they were having huge rows but were really having a splendid time. There was even a sprinkling of Islam in purdah. Black chastity against a white backdrop. I'm not sure if the Monk would approve of Islam but the Jungfrau would probably go along with the sentiment. The Swiss just got on with it in their own efficient way and took the money.

We took a left turn, away from husky rides, skiing and ice palaces, Monch bound. We might still bag a peek at this late hour. Monks for some reason have always been associated with the carnal in popular mythology. Sure enough, this particular one

leered a face South East towards the Jungfrau. It was the right hand retaining ridge of this face to which we were going.

“Where are you from Englander?”

“England.”

“Haaaaaaaaa, haaaaaaaaa, haaaaaaaaa.”

They’re great ones for the guffaw, these German boyos, straight to the guffaw, no time for the quiet chuckle.

“Is this the way to the Eiger, pal?”

“Haaaaaaaaa, haaaaaaaaa, haaaaaaaaa.”

And their English is good.

“Vee haf been up your Ben Kneewis.”

“Sounds like you have given me sole ownership of a mountain joint.”

“Eh?” But not that good.

From the summit of The Monch we could clearly see a completely snow-plastered Eiger west flank.

“There’s your decent route, Steve, I bet you’re glad we didn’t do the route now?”

“We could have made snow holes in that lot for bivi’s.”

“You could have been the first man to make a snow hole in an avalanche.”

We descended without incident, although of two parties we had seen slide on steep snow on the ascent, one (German) had disappeared and the other (English) was still sitting stunned below their last fall point. Not far below, a party of six earnest Germans, all roped together, seemed intent on doubling Whymper’s Matterhorn score. Even willing to help our fellow man, we vamoosed pretty pronto – we had a train to catch.

Back at prole city on the Jock, we again slid in amongst a crowd of Japanese bound for the oriental express but alas, this time we got caught. My attempt at impersonating a six foot, blonde haired, blue eyed Japanese with freckles appeared to have failed. An eventful day where we had managed to avoid injury was now about to cost us an arm and a leg. There is no realistic way back to Kleine Scheidegg other than the train. Much poorer, we took a well earned rest amidst the unrelieved ugliness of Kleine Scheidegg, sipping applesaft and dreading the final graunch down to Grindewald. Only millionaires and climbing shop owners can afford to ride all the way. A touroidial type goat, possibly suspecting that we were not sufficiently inculcated in Calvinist values, wandered up to my rucksack which I had carelessly

dumped some way off. Watched by impeccable Swiss children, it proceeded to shit and piss in unbelievable volumes all over my rucksack. The final indignity.

“Listen you well-mannered little sods, why didn’t you kick it in the tits rather than watch it shit on my sac?”

“That’s the side next to my back as well.”

We stumbled off, past unsmiling children, me now high on essence of goat, down into the evening and Grindlewald.

Back at the campsite, sitting outside the tent I could look directly up at the Mittellegi Hut, just visible to the naked eye if you knew where to look, thus completing a (train aided) girdle traverse of the Eiger. Returning my gaze to ground level, all I could see crowding in on us were the small tents which had appeared in our absence, chocker full of grinning Japanese. Time no nip on.

THOSE MOMENTS, by Mark Applegate, 1990

Those moments	
Hung in the balance	This is seeing
Finger tips	And then
Smears	Pulled through
On a steep wall	This rush
Tension applied	I feel
Though body tires	All things buzzing
And I dug deep	Keeps me still
Like a plough into the soil	Until I’m bridged out
And deeper still	Worn out
Right in the depths	But scoured clean
Through to my whole being	

THE OLD MEN OF HOY, by Jim Fairey, 1991

“There’s only three things in this world that smell like fish – and you’re one of them,” said Dennis. There was the old twinkle back in his eyes and Joe smiled. We started upwards, necks straining to see the top of the 450ft sandstone pillar from which we had just descended. Smiling, tired but elated, we packed up the gear and headed back up the cliff to rejoin the official photographer.

The standard route (East Face) of the Old Man of Hoy is on the tick list of all ambitious married climbers. Like the Old Brenva Ridge or Forbes Arete, it is long

and challenging but its technical difficulties are short. However it requires organisation, first class rope work and teamwork. Dennis Jordan, Joe Brennan and I tackled the Old Man last July. After warming up the previous weekend on the compact sandstone of Northumberland (where Dennis generously reduced his brand new 50m rope into more usable lengths for belay and abseil slings) we raced northwards to Scrabster. I knew Joe and Dennis had arrived when the cloud of clutch smoke finally cleared and the order for seats at the bar to be included in the ferry tickets was heard all round the Scrabster seafront. Dennis was already looking apprehensive.

The large passenger ferry took us to Stromness where we transferred to the short, open ferry to Hoy, which landed us at the quay of Hoy village (six houses and a pub). From there it was a short taxi ride west to the Rackwick hostel. The longer ferry ride from Scrabster to Stromness had given us a tantalizing view of the Old Man from the seaward side, but now the clouds were cloaking the headlands and the glens looked truly Scottish – wet and uninviting. However, next morning proved to be calm and the clouds had lifted. By the time we had breakfasted, packed and set off, the sun was promising to shine.

The approach is something that can only be experienced at first hand. After half an hour's walk the Old Man appears layer by layer, getting larger and visibly less friendly with every step towards it. The path takes you to within 20 metres of the cliff edge and until then about one third of the stack is visible. You are aware that this top third looks loose and unstable but nothing can prepare you for the final few paces to the cliff edge which reveal the stack in its entirety. It is enormous! It is a huge pile of flat rocks of all thicknesses layered one on top of the other which look as if they will fall down before we can get down to its base and start.

Joe won the toss for second pitch. The sun broke out and the sea became a beautiful flat mosaic of blue, green, aquamarine and black. The easy corner to the start of the difficulties belied the quality of the rock to follow. Jane remained on the cliff tops opposite, ready with cameras and many lenses, but paradoxically the excellent weather hampered taking good pictures as the East face was in shade by the time we crossed onto it, and the sun from almost directly behind played havoc with exposures. To compensate for this, she spent all day giving running commentaries to the small groups of birdwatchers who from time to time arrived and expressed great concern for our safety.

The main pitch lived up to its reputation. Damp and covered with loose sand, the 5a crack was a series of thrutches and pulls to the safety of the small belay ledge 80ft above. The exposure was immense and direct communications (even, with little opposition from the waves) was impossible. Another advantage of having a photographer on the cliffs opposite revealed itself here, as Jane could relay messages between the leader and seconds.

The next two pitches proved to be easy climbing but lacking in obvious protection. The biggest problem was the nesting fulmars with the nearly full-grown chicks. It was impossible to spot their nests before pulling over the flat ledges. I was glad we'd all worn old clothes and old cagoules and we were all pleased to reach the final corner crack which led to the top.

It was on this belay, whilst I was experiencing the elation of leading the top pitch on huge, solid holds, with the sea becoming visible through firstly the left-hand, and then the main corner cracks, that Dennis and Joe had a most moving experience together. The bottom of the corner crack was home to a nest of Puffins and, whilst standing there (hopefully belaying my ropes), a parent puffin returned with its beak crammed full with several small, wriggling fish. It landed between two ageing pairs of feet, stared up at Dennis and Joe, and then calmly strutted past them and into the crack to deliver its catch. As Joe later said, it was the sort of event that a dedicated twitcher would never witness during a lifetime of observations.

Five hours to the top was by no means the end. There followed four hours of descent by abseil, demanding meticulous rope handling and planning. But when it was all over and we stood on the cliffs opposite for a final photo call, Dennis looked back wistfully and asked, "Have we just climbed that? Amazing! – not bad for three oldies! I wonder what our combined ages are, just for the record. You'd need a pocket calculator for that!"

"No need," said Joe with a grin, "I know how many pockets I've got."

THE FIRST CEUNANT LONDON TO CAMBRIDGE CYCLING EXPEDITION, by Angus Murray, 1991

One cold and dreary Saturday morning, John (Bignose) Russell, Tanker, myself and A.N. Other, set out for Cambridge. Tanker (Mike Tolson for those who don't know him) was navigating, as he had the 'patent' Tanker map bracket on his handlebars. We went here – we went there – we went this way and that way, up hill and down dale, through fords and on tracks, until after 2 hours of continuous cycling, we arrived at a pub ½ mile from our starting point. Tanker's comment – "There seems to be a slight error with the navigation!"

We back-tracked several miles to a road which seemed to lead in the Cambridge direction, and apart from getting the contours wrong, so we had a long uphill slog where he'd promised a nice freewheel downhill, we eventually got to Cambridge. At least the weather had improved. Cambridge Youth Hostel was very good indeed, excellent food (we didn't self-cater) and small 4-bed rooms. That's 4 beds per room not 4 bedrooms. That evening we managed to find the worst pubs in Cambridge – mind you – we had to walk quite a long way to find them. Next day started as cold, damp and dreary as before, only this time it didn't improve. At least we missed the heavy rain as we'd stopped at the Imperial War Museum, Doxford at the time. I got my usual puncture (back wheel as usual – so my hands got dirty from the chain). All in all, a most enjoyable weekend.

We're cycling round the Isle of Wight in May (another Ceunant first!) – providing we can find it, that is. [a cartoon followed showing Tanker with a world globe bracketed to his handlebars and three prostrate cyclists behind him – Editor].

THE AONACH EAGACH RIDGE IN A MERE ELEVEN AND A HALF HOURS FEBRUARY 11TH 1991, by Adrian Casey (footnotes: Sue Traynor)

What was I doing? It was 5.15 am and the alarm was ringing. It only seemed ten minutes since Nick and I were in the Roy Bar agreeing to accompany Zoe and Sue on the Aonach Eagach Ridge.

To be fair, they had told us that it would be a long day and that they did not want¹ to walk fast, but a 5.15am start seemed a bit keen.

Rucsacs were pre-packed and, dressed for the hill, we went silently to the kitchen for breakfast and traipsed out to the car. It was frosty and clear, perfect weather. A gentle drive through Fort William and on to Glen Coe brought us to Allt-na-Reigh where the car was parked and boots were put on.

It was 7.40am and we were walking. Only long distance lorries already on the road down in the Pass disturbed the frozen silence. Everyone else with any sense was still asleep.²

An easy path leads to the first summit of Am Bodach and the first refreshment stop for us. It was 10.30³, the day was clear although wisps of cloud obscured parts of the ridge and Stob Coire Nan Lochan had a plume of cloud. We had now been caught up by the first of numerous⁴ teams to pass us.

“The descent from Am Bodach is an early test of nerve,” says the guidebook. Although not technically difficult, large drops loom either side to accommodate the unwary. The team ahead of us had set up a safety rope which Sue and Zoe freely⁵ took advantage of.

The ridge is a slow scramble to Stob Coire Leith, constantly losing and gaining height. Again, there were noticeable drops on both sides. The worst section under the prevailing conditions that day was the Broken Pinnacle section. Security was again found in the rope, especially where rocks had acquired a veneer of ice from the passage of ungloved hands. Cameras clicked and ungainly progress was made and crowds⁶ could be seen queueing to descend from Am Bodach.

Clouds were rolling in relentlessly, obscuring our view of the Ben, Blackwater Reservoir and beyond. Time was also pressing and it was 4.30pm when we finally got to the ridge's last summit, Sgor-Nam Fionnaidh. Drinks and sandwiches finished, we decided on our descent path; not Clachaig Gully but North-west to the Pap of Glencoe. Only a slight wind was blowing, but in the thick mist it would have been easy to walk over a cornice. Wind slab was also forming on leeward slopes.

Descending through thinning mist, we suddenly emerged from the cloud to grey and overcast views of North Ballachulish, sodium lights picking out the roads like a barium meal does intestines. The light was fading fast, Zoe and Sue were both suffering from blisters. The snow was receding, crampons were removed and headtorches put on.

Nick went on ahead⁷ to the Clachaig to get the first round in and advise Graham Spencely, who has awaiting us with transport, that all was well and that we would be some time yet. A slow and meandering descent ensued in the sleet and finally rain until a van was reached on the road to the Clachaig and four-wheel drive took over from Shanks's Pony.⁸

1. Not true! We always want to walk fast but our plans are determined by a realistic assessment of our abilities and an aversion to pain.
2. Rubbish! Anyone who isn't a Ceunant member knows that dawn is the best bit of day anywhere.
3. ... and who is this blue, shivering figure heading down the hill towards me offering to carry my rucsac to the top? It's Ade. Afraid that he'll develop hypothermia if he has to wait for me any longer, he's tempting me to sell out my feminist principles. I agonise for all of 2 nanoseconds and hand the sac over.
4. An understatement. If the Sioux nation had had dayglo Goretex and rucsacs, then the Trail of Tears would have looked like this.
5. Not entirely. I was moved to promise these helpful souls a drink later at the Clachaig. Of course they were completely pissed by the time I arrived much, much later, and didn't remember the offer (or their own names, but they accepted happily).
6. Another understatement. If Moses and the Israelites had shopped at 'Climber and Rambler' then the Exodus... etc.
7. Actually, he sprinted off with a gleeful demeanour that was distinctly irritating.
8. The bemused driver had been patiently waiting for *his* party when Zoe leapt into his van and hijacked it with the cool aplomb of an international terrorist.

LA PAZ 1, by Joe Brennan, 1995

Returning to La Paz, we rejoined our colleagues who had experienced violent weather conditions on their climb and exercised discretion.

To complete the holiday, as a group, we decided to follow the Taquesi Trail, a three-day trek over an old Inca, or more likely pre-Inca roadway over an Andean watershed and down into jungles of the upper Amazon. For this, we hired a guide and porters who carried the food and tents and did the cooking.

This was a superb way to close the holiday be encompassing in a few days both the positive and negative sides of this sort of trip. The trek up to the watershed involved bad weather, old gold and silver mines, flute-playing Indians, ascent up to 4650m and snow. The descent into the jungle provided amazing gradations of climate and vegetation, not to mention the ubiquitous mosquito (that's why we'd taken all that insect repellent), and our first encounter with fireflies whose nocturnal displays made the mountains look like giant illuminated Christmas trees.

La Paz 2 – Day-trip with Mr. Fix-it

The venerable knackerwagon wheezed bronchially up the long climb out of La Paz and onto the Altiplano. A tribute to human optimism, all the while it emitted burps, gurgles and hisses. Its suspension creaked and groaned rheumatically. On reaching the plateau it gave up, stricken with acute radiator oedema. We limped along until we reached a sort of roadside mechanic who, as it turned out, was gifted with tremendous innovative ability, allied to zero practical aptitude. After much laughing and shrieking, the radiator was eventually resuscitated with a low-tech combination of solder, wire and string. Ingenious, but it looked about as permanent as the Bolivian Government. Off we steamed again under a harsh, cold light, held together on a wing and prayer.

Captain Paralytic

We should have known all was not well when loading up the chronic vehicle. The driver, unusual for a Bolivian, was as big and blubbery as a polar bear's buttocks. Despite his rough, tough appearance, he whimpered pathetically as he humped our heavy rucksacks onto the roof. Hyper-impatient, we were off for two weeks' climbing in the Ancohuma Range of the northern Cordillera Real. This is a remote region necessitating a transfer eventually to the much more reliable and attractive llama power. Emblazoned on our portly driver's baseball cap was the unlikely logo "Captain".

The potholed tarmac gave way to rough dirt. Just past the wild and woolly town of Anchocachi, a hotbed of revolutionaries, our trusty vehicle started gushing fuel like a ruptured artery. The radiator had already suffered a relapse and had to have its insatiable thirst slaked at regular intervals. This journey was turning out to be good training for travel on British Rail. We had just taken the spectacular hill road that leads to the small town of Sorata, world headquarters for the International Shady Characters Club. Just down the road from this latest recreational stopping point was a curious army barracks that looked like something from Toy Town. Funny little turrets punctuated funny little castellated walls no more than 5 ft high. Rambo could have leapt over in one bound and filled half the garrison with hot lead before they could even spit out their coca leaves. Inside, a demented band practised loudly and interminably, each player in a world of his own, a total individualistic improviser. The Coldstream Guards had nothing to fear from this lot.

We were being watched. Shadowy figures, armed to their gold-filled teeth, moved furtively in the turrets. The Peruvian border was not far away. They had probably convinced themselves by now that we were prime suspects, the advanced guard of Sendero Luminoso spilling over the border. A hundred yards back, a dead body had

been lying in the gutter. Obviously the Bolivian welfare state does not extend down much below the Generalissimos. Hope resides in God, coca leaves and the National Lottery. The Captain mutters something about this being the first time this has happened.

The offending fuel pipe is covered in braised repairs and the securing nut is knurled from the many, many attentions of a wrong-sized spanner. We try all ways to attempt a repair: improvised rubber washers, condoms, string seals, body filler, insulation tape and invocations to the gods. Even Bill cannot fix it. The Captain is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Eventually, on a bicycle borrowed from a local farmer, he takes off across the Altiplano, clutching the offending pipe in a large podgy hand. He disappears over the horizon and a midday ennui descends on the party.

Wind whistles in the wires. Far off, the Cordilla road sets out a line of dazzling sparklers along the eastern horizon. Antarctica on the Equator. The band is still playing twelve heroic military tunes all at the same time. The drummer is suffering from the St. Vitus dance. The euphonium has sprung a fatal leak and sounds like a ruptured rhinoceros. Time passes. Our party gradually drifts into their own reveries and idle wanderings.

The Motley Crew

Steve, top executive at Midlands Electricity, sleeps on a wall, free at last from the cares and worries of overcharging the rest of us for electricity. Bill is fidgeting still. He can't come to terms with the fact that the under-bonnet of the truck, with its cat's cradle of string, tape and wire, is closer to haberdashery than to engineering. More a job for a seamstress than a plumber. Suttly is prowling like a caged puma, muttering, snarling, carrying rocks for opportunistic splashing of any unwary soul wandering near a slimy ditch. Dennis, like a bronzed colossus dressed only in plastic mountain boots and shorts, strides through small fields and small people, patting chicos here, chicas there, charming campesinos out of the adobe homes, flattering caballeros with this Herculean visitation in their midst.

John, original role model for high plains drifter, adopts typical pose: flat out with a hat over his face. Like a large iguana before sunrise, silently and unmovingly adds his pennyworth – Zen and the Art of Motorwagon Maintenance. Tony, as ever, disappears to continue his interminable struggle with chronic constipation. Stiffly he goes, clutching a copy of *Gone With The Wind*. This would be read from cover to cover before we would see him again, a relieved figure, staggering across the fields. No 'Inca Quick Step' here.

Sue, humming, wanders the empty landscape, lost in a parallel universe of her own from which by some glitch of space-time, the Coventry Education system has gone missing. With a far-off, dreamy look in her eyes, she searches for the perfect eco-niche in a new biosphere. Val sits there amused by it all, tossing her pithy Black Country comments like hand grenades into our pretensions, blowing them to shreds.

Me? I follow Dennis, listening to the Indo-Lancastrian exchanges:

Dennis, pointing at some rotting piece of wood and addressing an Indian farmer.

“Senor, what is that?”

Farmer: “Arbo, a plough.”

Dennis: “Ah, a plough. Is that what you plough with?”

Farmer: “Si, I plough with this plough.”

Dennis: “Ah, I see. You plough with this plough the ground that needs ploughing?”

Farmer: “Si, for the ground that needs ploughing, I plough using this plough for the ploughing.”

At least I learn a new Spanish word. Saves ploughing through the dictionary.

The farmer is building a new house – an adobe box capped with a corrugated sheet. The Altiplano norm. He has seven small children, all very beautiful. They live off their own produce – bean, corn, hay, potatoes, sheep, cattle and chickens. His wife is peeling several million potatoes with her bare hands. Potato peelers on the Altiplano would cause more unemployment than pit closures in Britain.

Well past high noon, a heroic figure is sighted far off. The Captain is on his way back, pedalling furiously and waving the much repaired pipe. National Breakdown, Bolivian style.

Better to Arrive Than to Travel Hopefully

We continued, staccato fashion, with regular stops to get water or replenish the rapidly expiring radiator. The truck twists and turns like a wounded elephant, writhing its way over a 4500m pass before dropping precipitously into the Garden of Eden, the Sorata Valley. The Captain hunches morosely over the wheel, squinting through clouds of steam, smoke and dust, trying to avoid the edge of the drop into the next life. Sudden lurches back from the brink provide a stern test of our atheism. Eventually, like an overheated dragon, we limp into Sorata. Here, a good, big 7 litre Chevy jeep, courtesy of the Club Boliviano Andino, awaits for the next even more mind-boggling stage.

A returning group of four climbers await the long overdue Captain. They look both relieved and doubtful at the sight before them. They load up and start back immediately. The Captain doesn't even say goodbye, thinking maybe we have put a hex on his beloved machine.

Sorota is on a shelf overlooking a lush valley with crops and fruit. We sit and eat sandwiches in some sort of holiday establishment belonging to the Army. Officers only, of course. After some time soaking in the warmth and rosy twilight, a familiar sound of clunking and hissing, faint at first, grows steadily louder. The Captain comes trundling back, the truck bellowing steam like a Victorian locomotive. The tanned and weather-beaten faces of the team of four now look ashen. The Captain

dives under the bonnet for the millionth times. Looking sheepish, he emerges with a fractured brake pipe which, unbeknown to us, had hung like a sword of Damocles over all the dizzying drops of the day.

THE CHALLENGE, by Oliver Rooke, 1995

Looking back, it was all the Berghaus family's fault. They were from Oxford, were dripping with conspicuous wealth and would never speak if they could shout. We met them in the Saarbrukner hut in the Silvretta range off the Montefon valley, which was otherwise a beautiful hut with a charming warden.

Daddy Berghaus had a habit of accosting passers-by and telling them how he would have been a professional mountaineer. And he described the countless occasions where he had narrowly cheated death with his extraordinary compass skills. He informed us that the helicopter rescue service was nowadays an unnecessary extravagance because not enough reckless, devil-may-care types like himself were getting themselves into impossibly dangerous situations any more. "In fact," he shouted, "I'm the only one here crazy enough ever likely to need rescuing." I could see the orange hairs on the back of Joe's neck bristle. Tony was muttering into his soup. Dennis stopped talking, which always made everyone jolt, rather like when a grandfather clock stops ticking and you suddenly notice how quiet it is. Being new to the Ceunant Mountaineering and Picnic Club, I was blissfully unaware that my three minders felt honour-bound to pick up this gauntlet.

The next day, we were admiring Dennis' skiing style: he keeps his legs together tighter than a Dominican nun. Then we noticed him stop above a precipice and look down. A vertical face of knobbly steel-blue ice stretched 100 ft below him. We watched him compose himself as a sinister and crazed Eddie-the-Eagle-like smile slowly developed on his face. The next second he was falling. His skis touched the ice only twice before he disappeared in an explosion of powder at the bottom. The crack of a snapping bone was audible from where we stood but when we got to him, he was already on his feet and skiing, albeit a bit skew-wiff with an air of calculated satisfaction about him.

We enjoyed that week, getting to within a few feet of the summit of the Kleiner Seelhorn and then skiing down to the Wiesbadener hut where we were greeted by an atmosphere of panic. There were reports that an Englishman had been buried in an avalanche. Soon Daddy Berghaus arrived, strapped to a stretcher, with that self-satisfied grin of someone who knows he is a true hero. We drank more beer than usual that night. Reports that the avalanche had hardly covered his skis and that the doctors could find no cause for the excruciating pain he appeared to be in were of little comfort.

The weather then turned foul so we retreated to sunny Chamonix with the idea of skiing Mont Blanc. We warmed up by skiing the Vallee Blanche and later that night, we carefully packed our rucksacks. Knowing that we would have to climb for some

hours during the hours of darkness, I was a little surprised when Joe suddenly threw his headtorch into a corner with a defiant gesture muttering something about weight. This seemed a little obsessive to me, especially as we had just been given our rations including three 4-packs of Stella Artois and a Playboy magazine each, "In case the hut runs out of supplies."

The other two looked up and, without a second's hesitation, threw their torches down as well, exchanging knowing grins. I hesitatingly deposited mine and sneaked my teddy into the space it had created. I was also a little surprised to see Tony prising the binding away from his ski with a screwdriver, but he reassured me he was mending it.

We set off in high spirits. The journey to the Grand Mulet hut went without a hitch. The next morning at 3am, the lights went on and we were hurled from our beds to start climbing. True to Ceunant tradition, we were lost on the mountain and started to stagger uphill using our ski poles like blind men's sticks. How we avoided the mass of crevasses I'll never know. At daybreak, Tony's binding eventually parted from his skis altogether. He seemed a bit upset that it had not come off higher up, but set off back to the hut with a shrug of his shoulders. Five minutes later, Joe set off after him, explaining that he would have to guard our beer as Tony was not to be trusted.

Dennis and I continued upwards for another eight hours. I was beside myself with excitement when we eventually could see the summit some 200 yards away. My joy was shattered by Dennis calmly telling me his leg had become paralyzed. Sure enough, when I examined it, it was numb, flaccid and useless.

Swinging from the helicopter some 16000 ft above sea level, Dennis looked down to wave to me. I remember looking up and feeling choked with admiration for his expression was not one of pain and disappointment as I had expected, but one of modest triumph.

Now I am sure that Daddy Berghaus would have accused Dennis of deliberately placing his lateral peroneal nerve in the fracture he had so carefully sustained a week earlier, but I say the motive for such slander would just be pure envy and sour grapes.

DOLOMITES – JULY 15 – AUGUST 6, by Mark Hellewell, 1995

Account no.1 – Summer alpine meets never were big on the agenda in the Ceunant social events calendar; in fact, they don't usually happen – at least on a grand scale. For sure, lots of us go abroad, but not necessarily at the same time or to the same place; in fact, as a club, we're quite skilled at avoiding each other sometimes! So this summer we did quite well when twelve of us met up for 3 weeks in the Dolomites. For most of us, the Dolomites were a new experience and the long drive (750 miles from Ostend to Canazai) was well worth it. The computer printed detailed route description with accompanying map sections helped us all navigate our way without mishap and the return journey was quite easy by retracing the helpful oil slick left by John's otherwise stunning TR4A.

The Dolomites, as we were to discover, were just as the guidebooks said, absolutely stunning; the rock scenery dramatic, towering pinnacles and faces everywhere. The scale of things was often very difficult to judge. Sometimes it would take a while to realise that the face you were looking at had got climbers on it – those little white dots that slowly moved. Time allowances for routes were not to be underestimated but we regularly did, a matter of some concern when afternoon thunderstorms were a regular feature in these parts!

Base camp for the duration of our expedition was a spotlessly clean site in the village of Campitello, the originally intended site in Canazei two miles down the road being a little below expectations. As we all arrived on different days, camp Ceunant gradually spread itself out with its empty wine bottles and home spun deck chairs to form ‘the British sector’, complete with generously provided ‘Happy 40th’ balloons etc. all around my tent. Needless to say, it didn’t take too long to upset the harmony of things – “English, Quiet!”

Oh, how grateful they must have been when we went off on overnight forays into the hills.

Time spent in and around the camp site on rest days was thoroughly enjoyable. The weather was baking hot every day and it didn’t take long to find the best ice cream parlour in Italy, the home made cheese shop, the ‘Rosticheria’ take out, and Heidi’s Spaghetteria and bar where many social evenings were spent. Strong emphasis on holiday mode here!

Our camp site was splendidly situated for quick and easy access to the Sella, Catinaccio, Sassalungo and Marmalada groups, providing us with a most excellent tick list of 3 star classic climbs, walks and via ferrata. Some of these, especially those in the Sella pass, were day out cragging venues, although early starts are advisable especially on harder routes. Time flies when you’re having fun on a 14 pitch route!

Other classics were tackled from enjoyable overnight stays at Refugios. Everyone enjoyed these outings, walking up to them was a piece of duff on well-trodden and waymarked paths. A far cry from all the toil and sweat normally associated with alpine huts – such a relaxed atmosphere and no 2am alpine starts!

Even the easier grade routes provided high levels of verticality and exposure, but fortunately protection is excellent and trade routes are well pegged. A good example of this was the ‘Torre de Logo’ on the Vajolet Towers in the Catinaccio, one of the most famous and celebrated climbs in the whole of the Dolomites (and only a 15 minute walk from the Alberto hut in stickies and harness). Team Ceunant’s mass ascent gave it ten out of ten for stunning exposure, good stances, good pegs, easy climbing and permanent abseil anchors to whiz you back to your starting point, a short stroll and refreshments at the refugio. A bad example of this was to be found the next day on the north face of the Punta Emma where I had time to contemplate the verticality, exposure, lack of gear and difficulty of climbing during my 40 foot pendulum fall from the final roof, as the rock came away in my hands. Helmets are good here. Other highlights included the amazing via ferratas that most of the party got stuck into. These fantastic old preserved and renovated iron ladderways were wartime pathways and now provide great sport that even Indiana Jones would be

proud of, taking you up to the most improbable places with relative ease. The Marmalada, highest summit in the Dolomites, has such a route up its east ridge and received a club mass ascent, albeit staggered on different days. Crampons and axes were used for the glacier approach. A great day out.

I was particularly pleased to round off the holiday by achieving an ambition of mine to climb the north face of Cime Grande via the Comici route with Sue. The amount of pegs on this route actually make it a safer proposition and easier of route finding than many of the easier routes and thus it was pure enjoyment (my little 40th celebration!)

All in all, a productive, varied and enjoyable trip for all – we really should go again sometime!

Account no. 2 – Buongiorno Italia!

by Sue Traynor 1995

Tuesday 19 August – 9.30pm Sella Pass – almost. It's nearly but not quite dark. An enormous pink jelly looms over the black rim of the valley. *Me*: "What's that then? Sella Towers? Sassalungo?" *Mark*: "Oh wow! That's beautiful! Look at the sunset on that rock! Where's my camera?" *Me*: "Mmmm nice. Are we nearly there yet?"

9.45 pm – The campsite, Canazei. *La Signorina*: "Ah, Eengleesh? Your friends, they were here. Now they are gone. To Campitello." Deep foreboding overtakes me. I remember the Calanques meet, half the party waiting fretfully in La Ciolat and the rest in some other town for no better reason than because its name also began with a C. Once again, we seem to be in no danger of meeting the rest of the meet. But no...

10.00 pm – The campsite, Campitello. *Joe*: "Orright chief." *Jim*: "You missed your birthday party. We had it yesterday." *Maggie*: "We saved some balloons but there's no booze left." *Julie*: "Here's your Happy Fortieth banner. You missed a great do." *Mark*: "But my birthday's today." *Jim*: "That's very inconsiderate of you." *Mark*: "Give me 5 minutes to pitch the tent, pave the patio, install the kitchen, fit the carpet, assemble the dining room suite, hang the curtains, wire up the lights, and I'll join you in the bar. I need a flat bit, where's my spirit level?"

12.00 pm – Heidi's Spghetteria & Bar. Heidi looks across at her only customers, the Ceunant, at a table covered with empty glasses and muses to herself that her biceps will be like Sly Stallone's if we call regularly.

2.00 am – The campsite. *Mark*: "Champagne, a cake with candles, it must be my birthday. Where's my second helping?"

Wednesday 20 August – After the sun has been up for three minutes, it's too hot to stay in a tent without going crisp. The early arrivals relate their adventures so far over breakfast. Maggie and Julie, the Ceunant Hard Women's Team, have an impressive collection of round purple bruises having been peppered with hailstones in a thunderstorm on their way down from their route a couple of days before. Julie enthuses about via ferrata but advises soloing the route on rock instead of clinging to steel cables if lightning threatens. Plummet into the void or go pop like a fly in a chip

shop? What am I letting myself in for? I need a lie down. But perhaps we'll go to look at something later.

The Ceunant had a close look at as many Dolomites as possible over the following two and a half weeks. Those beautifully dramatic complicated white limestone spires and pinnacles were climbed by means of rock routes and via ferrata. The Sella, the Sassolungo, Catinaccio, Pia Ciavazes, The Marmolada and The Cima were all visited amongst others. At between 2000m and 3000m with loose, well-weathered rock and a habit of glittering in the sun one minute and brewing up a thunderstorm the next, these are serious mountains. But it took a conscious effort to remember this sometimes.

Routes are easily reached by various means. It's often possible to drive up to a surprisingly high point, especially if, like me, you are not familiar with the Italian for "Cars Forbidden Past This Point". Walks through the glorious colour of alpine meadows are easy and travelling by Italian telepheriques, survival is even easier. There are lots of Refugios all of which are almost as good as Tyn Lon would be if someone else did the cooking. Except at weekends, it is not really necessary to book in advance but it is easy to do so by phone. The Hard Women's Team preferred it to after a night in a cage on a landing though. A night in a bivouac shelter would enable the very keen to wake up even closer to the start of a route. These bright red, lightning-proof boxes are held down with cables and reveal, Tardis-like, bunks, blankets, benches and a table in a space the size of an airing cupboard.

Whilst the generally lovely weather and the accessibility of the climbing made it difficult to switch out of a cragging mentality, it soon dawned on me that 'guide book times' should be multiplied by a factor of at least 2 by ordinary mortals like me. These are big, big routes. Nine hours for eighteen pitches seemed unusual. The routefinding is not straightforward either. Naturally, these are big mountains, not crags. The wiggly lines of the greying photos in the English guides are accurate only insofar as they are usually shown on the right mountain. After that they give only a vague general direction. Local guidebooks are more accurate with cleared topos and they are easily translated with an Italian dictionary in one hand. This leaves no hands free for climbing but it is well worth doing beforehand.

Traverse paths and descent routes tend to be adventures and I my limited experience are best negotiated in daylight. The advice to take more water than you think you'll need is to be disregarded only if you like eating your 'last resort' goodies like marzipan 4 hours after your last drink and 6 hours before your next. I didn't particularly.

Especially memorable bits of climbing for me included a traverse on Pia Ciavazes. How ingenious of Micheluzzi to prolong this lovely climbing by going sideways for 90 metres. Joe provided the best description of the arête on Torre de Lago: "Pinch grip the S.W. end of the mountain and climb it." That says it all really, except that you can see a very small scale relief map of the valley beneath your heels as you do so. The Cima Grande proved to be as good a place as any to try out a bit of this aid climbing I'd heard about. And it was good while descending to take the time to appreciate how friendly stars can look as they peek through clearing thunderclouds

and how intensely pink the dawn can be from the vantage point of a ledge the size of my mantelpiece.

I think it is very sad to travel to somewhere far-flung and interesting just to climb its mountains, which must after all be similar everywhere; rocky, high and pretty to look at. Dolomites are different though. It was a revelation to me that a Dolomite can be climbed from its bottom to its top. That's climbing as in using hand and footholds, ropes, pegs and bits of gear. Not as in plodding interminably upward in a character-forming red mist of pain, which is what I'm used to. So I was very happy to spend most of the time climbing, even though this was my first trip to Italy.

Even so, I was not completely oblivious to the Tyrolean flavour of the area. I noticed that it was easier to communicate in German than English – or in Italian for that matter. The food was good in a universally pasta-and-pizza way with some local exceptions; the ice cream parlour and the cheese shop being examples. But my closest encounters with Italian culture were Pavarotti on the car stereo and a compelling cable TV game show in which female judges drowned male contestants they didn't fancy in a swimming pool until there was only one left. He was the winner but I forget that he won because we were watching in Heidi's and by now the table was covered once again with empty glasses. Evidently, the Italians have some interesting attitudes to life which deserve closer study than I was able to manage on such a short trip. So, I shall be going back, and for longer. And there's a lot more rock to look at too...

TYN LON – EXTRACT FROM THE HUT BOOK, by Paul Green, 1996

The following are extracts from some of the entries made in the log book kept at the hut during recent weeks.

Feb 18 – 21: Mike and Tim Brighton on their weekend of retreats from *Amphitheatre Buttress and Milestone Buttress* encountering very poor conditions. Meanwhile Danny and Keith are on *The Sylvan Traverse Mod* and Sue and Mark make a fine snowy ascent of the *Trinity Face I / II*

Mar 18: The start of a great Welsh winter weekend. Sue, Maggie, Keith, Andy, climb *Central Trinity I / II* and Adrian, Nick and Tony ascent *Trinity Right Hand II / III*, and *Ladies Gully III* finishing in a hailstorm.

Mar 19: Amy Millichope goes to the underground power station. Meanwhile, Adrian, Tony, Nick, Sue, Hazel, Paul G., Andy and Tim make a mass Ceunant ascent of *Parsley Fern Gully I*, with Ade and Tony branching off to do *Sinister Gully III*

Mar 25: Val, Bill, Roy, Barbara, Maggie, Clive and a 'gang of dogs' wander around telegraph poles!

Apr 2: Clive and Gordon got sunburnt on Carreg Wastad climbing *Ribstone Crack Vs 4c*, *Skylon HS*, *Trilon Vs 5a*, and 'failing' on *Unicorn HVS 5b*. Meanwhile James, Hilary, Joe, Bill and Dennis scramble up Tryfan and the Bristly Ridge.

Apr 29 – May 1: A "bostin'" weekend for Danny and Keith starting in the slate quarries with *Bela Lugosi is Dead E1 5b*, *Biggles Flies Undone E1 5b*, *Gnat Attack E1 5c*, and *Massambula E2 5b* followed by *Cemetery Gates E1 5b* on Dinas Cromlech.

May 20: Clive and Tony M. climb *Sweep S 4a* at Craig Isalt and put up new route *Schwept S 4a/b*

May 27: Joe and Kat walk across Moel Y Gest together with a 'large hairy beast which tried to herd everything'.

Jun 10: Joe and Bill climb *Reign S*, *Congl VS 4c* at Craig Rhiw Goch noting an outdoor centre group 'doing what comes unnaturally'.

Jun 16 – 18: Danny and Keith climb *A Dream of White Horses HVS 4c* on Craig Gogarth twice after being held up for four hours (in an exposed position) on the first attempt by 'a total knobber'.

Jun 24: Despite the queues, Paul G. and Tim climb *First Pinnacle Rib VD* and *Thompson's Chimney HS 4b* dodging falling rucksacks and followed by the traditional silliness in jumping Adam and Eve.

June 25: Danny, Steve and Nick tackle *Amphitheatre Buttress VD* on Craig Yr Ysfa with 'thick heads and no energy'.

Jul 29: After dodging plummeting sheep and getting lost, Gordon, Paul H., Val and Dave Evans climb *Western Gully S* at Ysgolion Duon (the Black Ladders).

Jul 30: Paul H., Val and Dave climb *Spectre HVS 5a* at Clogwyn Y Grochan cooling off in the river.

Aug 5: Clogwyn Du'r Arddu – Val, Paul H., Adrian and Keith climb *The Corner HVS 5a*, and *White Slab E1 5b*.

Aug 6: Keith, Adrian and Mick climb *Lorraine VS 4c*, Dinas Mot who were apparently the only team capable of choosing a chilly climb in the shade during the glorious weather.

Meanwhile Tony, Roger, Sirch, Mick and Graham Spen. Spent the day climbing at Cwm Silyn then swimming in the lake.

Aug 9-10: *Piggots Climb VS 5a*, *Llithrig HVS 4c* whilst camping up at Clogwyn Du'r Arddu – Paul H. and Trevor.

Aug 11: Bill and Paul H. traverse *The Black Belt HS 4c*, all 645 ft. of it, at Craig Ddu.

Aug 21-24: Suttys 'trip down memory lane' and solo of numerous classic routes on Tryfan and Craig Yr Ysfa.

Aug 25: Bill and Suttys climb *Comes the Dervish E3 5c* and are attacked by rock throwing sheep on *Petite Fleur HS 4b* at Craig Ddu.

Aug 26: Graham Spenceley gets absolutely plastered and vows to drink tomato juice only in future!

Aug 27: Suttys and Adrian climb *The Strand E2 5b* at Gogarth and, on the following day, *Lighthouse Arete VS 4b* with the 'fine sight of Ade's fallen guidebook floating into oblivion on the ebb tide'. Consequently they move on to Bus Stop quarry with Suttys leading *Scarlet Runner E4 5c*.

Sep 2: Adrian and Andy on a slate extravaganza notching up a total of 9 E points with Adrian leading *Sterling Silver E2 5c*, and *Scarlet Runner E4 5c*. Andy 'Butterfingers' Ring leads *Equinox VS 4c* cleanly and also *Massambula E2 5b* and promptly qualifies for the rope course in November by dropping his rope after untying at the top.

A NINE-STAR WEEKEND, by Val Hennelly, 1997

The forecast was good. I'd forgotten my Tyn Lon key, but I knew it didn't matter because the hut would be heaving with people.

Hazel and I rushed up to Wales full of plans. Our journey was only briefly interrupted to offer help – not needed – to John and Margaret Beddard en route from Shell Island, but broken down on the A5; they'd heard the forecast too and were about to set off for Scotland.

We were, therefore, perplexed to find Tyn Lon in darkness, but fortunately, the Vaynol was open, so we hijacked Emlyn's key. Andy Dowell sloped in later that night, but there was no-one else there to wake up to a perfect morning.

We'd settled on a challenging agenda – shopping and Milestone Buttress Direct were finished by 12.00 and then it was off to Holyhead to enjoy Dream of White Horses in the sun.

Neither of us had climbed on Wen Slab, and I had but looked at 'Dream' in fear when I was young, so it took us a little time to work out that we couldn't see it from the North Stack Lighthouse. That error over, we joined the obvious crowds above Wen Lawn and were relieved to see only two other teams on 'Dream'. We didn't know the tides and the other teams were traversing in from the notch, so we did the same – nothing to do with my hate of abseiling to sea level on an unfamiliar cliff! The first pair were foreign and so moving carefully, and the second team had a false start from the hanging belay at the end of the first traverse pitch. All this led to a minor traffic jam, but I enjoyed frying gently on the slab, turning in my temporary hanging belay to

ensure even cooking on all sides. Hazel enjoyed the shade of the pinnacle and, eventually everything freed up and she waltzed across to join me.

I expect a lot of you reading this have done 'Dream', and some more have got it on your hit list. It's a great climb. The first traverse pitch is easy, as long as you descend far enough below the notch before you start traversing, and the second pitch is interesting climbing up a right to left slanting crack. The third pitch is an intricate delight. You start by descending Concrete Chimney (distance depending on where your partner ended up), and then move left and ever leftwards. The rock is surprisingly solid and the protection for you and your second a challenge to arrange.

Entertainment was arranged for us halfway through the climb by the passing of the Seacat to Ireland; though we barely saw the boat, about 15 minutes after its passing, the sea in Wen Lawn started to heave. There were several lads at sea level watching their friend on something hard, and suddenly there was shouting, drenchings and lots of concern. But they got away with wet egos and a new caution of a calm sea.

We were smug as we supped our pints. How to follow such a good day out? Overcome with idleness, we had a slower start on Sunday. Hazel had never been on the Snowdon Railway and I needed little excuse. So we took the train to halfway Station and walked down to Cloggy. Great Slab had no occupants and after the first 15 feet we both enjoyed the climb, which takes you up acres of rock at a reasonable grade. The real crux of the day had been talking to the tourist train passengers. Though the slog down the path in the evening was hard, we were glad we hadn't done it on the way up.

And nobody else turned up at the hut. We felt lucky to have had such good weather, a memory to savour in a warm and wet February.

BOLIVIA 1997 (extract), by Joe Brennan

Above us the Chilean ridge climbed sharply, so called after eight Chilean deaths in 1989. They were all roped together, so in good trade union fashion, one out, all out.

The South Face of Illimani is a well known fridge. South is the same as North in the Northern Hemisphere. There is no escape from the minus thirty until the sunlit summit ridge some hours away. Dawn put on a spectacular. Illimani's shadow stretched out to the horizon on a sea of cloud. Sajama, 6500m, the highest peak in Bolivia, was clearly visible like a rising moon 180km away. Magnificent faces and ridges glistened in the purest light. Illimani is more like a mountain range than a single mountain. Hugo is already on the top, mobile phone in action. His party is miles below with frostbite and collapse threatening. All around, ice peaks were showing off their perfect lines. While Hugo talked, I concentrated on gulping in great lungfulls of vacuum. This was not hyperventilation. This was apoplexy.

Descent was fast, into the thickening air. After a leisurely tea and sunbathe at Camp One, a rapid pack-up, dodge the guards and down to Basecamp. After an anxious vigil, the girls finally appeared out of the gloaming, frostbitten. Hugo immediately sprung into action, pulling out all the stops from his well-known best seller '*How to Treat Frostbite on a Couple of Crackers*'. After a detailed search in the most unlikely of places, Hugo pronounced it was the toes. Among his many talents, Hugo is also a practising doctor. Tea, rum, sympathy and Bolivian jungle juice followed.

Next day, laden with extra sacs and rapidly blackening girls, we stumbled down the mountain to a last outrageous thrash in La Paz.

Table surfing at 3500m. Rule: no more than two table legs on the floor at once, while at the same time emptying a bottle of Tequila. Non-participants are not allowed. Set the benchmark for next time. The girls by now were looking more like they came from Zimbabwe than from Scotland. Michael Jackson in reverse.

Then on to a selection of seedy and seedier nightclubs, led by guido Hugo, on into a tequila sunrise. Adios Bolivia. Psst: Anyone for next year?

SUMMER IN THE FRENCH ALPS, by Tony Millichope, 1997

It's a Thursday evening in July: Finish work – load family into the car – we're off!! The route's familiar, M1, M25, M20, the Channel, A26, A1, Macon, Geneva etc. etc.

It's now Friday afternoon and we (that is Tony, Ann, Amy and Katie Millichope) arrive at that extremely British bit of France – The Argentiere Campsite in the upper Chamonix valley. (The weather is similarly British – it's raining!). Adrian Casey, Martin Bernand, Andy Ring and Andy (Harry) Sharp have been here for the past week. Before the rain, they've managed climbs on the Aiguille-du-Midi and the Petit-Aig-Verte, with a few days of valley cragging at Servos and Les Galliands.

A couple of days of rain and the sun shines again, the forecast is '*beau temps*', sacks are packed and off we head for the hill. Adrian, Martin and Harry for Mt. Blanc, Andy and I for the Aig-de-Pelerins. Mt. Blanc proved that whatever route you take, it's still a very big hill, while Andy and I found that dashing out from work and acclimatising in the bar is no substitute for actually being fit. Some excitement when Andy and I almost became the latest members of the Ceunant downhill club! In the end, a more controlled descent of the Pelerin couloir was made. Still, good fun was had by all and a safe return to the comforts of the campsite and the delights of the Thursday night mobile pizza service.

A few days later, while Martin, Andy and Harry go ice climbing on the Mer-du-Glace, Adrian and I head for the Tour Ronde. Excellent planning! We find that the last telepherique to Pt.Helbronner was at 3.00 pm (it's now 3.30!). Quick change of plan (*in the telepherique queue*) and we decide on Mt. Blanc-du-Tacul instead. A night spent on the Col-du-Midi and a good climb on the N-face triangle the following

day, *despite the softening snow and falling ice!!* Catching one of the late service telecabins, we descend back to the valley, arriving just in time for Pizza-night on the campsite – *excellent timing!*

Adrian, Martin, Andy and Harry now had to return home. We had a further week. With afternoon storms becoming more problematic, a couple of days walking with Amy in the Aig Rouges turned into a minor epic with a hurried descent from our camp to a hut in the teeth of the worst electric storm of the trip. *Standing with 10-foot long tent poles in your hand whilst trying to put the tent up is not recommended when the sparks are flying overhead!!* During the remainder of the week, Ann enjoyed some high-level walking and a night under the stars, while Katie enjoyed watching parachutes land in the field next to the campsite.

Mid August saw the arrival of Mark Hellewell and John Bunny, with designs on the Dru, the N-Spur of the Droites and the Walker. Unfortunately, generally poor conditions put these off for another year. However some good climbing was had on several of the Chamonix Aiguilles and Aiguilles Rouges.

The Tick List

(apologies if I've missed anyone out)

Petit Auigille Verte Martin	N W Ridge	F/PD	Adrian, Andy, Harry,
Aiguille du Midi Martin	Cosmiques Arete	PD	Adrian, Andy, Harry,
Mt. Blanc du Tacul	Contamine Negri route	AD	Adrian, Tony
Aig du Peigne	Vaucher route	TD/VI	John, Mark
Aig du Pouce	Voie du dalles	TD/IV	John, Mark
Aig de Pelerins	?	?	John, Mark
Aig du Blaitiere	Red Pillar	TD	John, Mark

For Adrian, Martin and Harry, it was their first visit to the Alps and I get the feeling it won't be the last. With climbs ranging from valley crags to some of the best high alpine routes in the world, it's difficult to go to Cham' and not have a good time. Add to this the human attractions of the valley, bars, restaurants, swimming pools, shops and the general ambience of the place make it almost all things to all people, save perhaps those seeking solitude. For someone like me trying to combine climbing mountains with a family holiday, it was ideal.

**A WORKING SUMMER IN NORTH WALES: NOTES & OBSERVATIONS,
by Val Beddard, 1999**

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 onsite. 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 Emlyn and Selwyn, two gentlemen of the old school and excellent tradesmen.

Bill arrived onsite 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 onsite 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 teamwork, 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:

Sun 7 June Started off dry. Installed lintels today. Day finished with rain.
Mon 8 June Raining with a vengeance today.
Tuesday Awake at 5 o'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 when 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 tillers 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 lav seat. Replacements are not available at B&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 re-opening 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.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS ON THE GR20 CORSICA (extract), by Joe Brennan, 2001

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 pratt 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.

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CEUNANT'S HONKY TONK MAN, by Tony Mynette, 2003

Joseph Benignus Brennan, borne Christmas Day 1941, has other claims to fame and infamy. Immortalized in stained glass by the age of 30 - Dorian Gray astride the Bionnassay - is not bad for starters.

Consider the following balance sheet of life and award your own debit/credit ratings.

Early 60s - Weaned off cider at a coming-of-age in the old Vaynol Arms, Joe took to beer like a horse to water and has seldom looked back, except to pick up someone else's glass. Unfortunately for his camping companions it took many more years to kick the Tom Piper habit.

Mid 60s - The early lure of the Alps proved irresistible. Thus in the first flush of matrimony did Joe, Dave Stokes and spouses take off early one summer for a 3 month stint. They journeyed in a knackered Austin Westminster bought for 30 quid, armed only with a flaky tent, hemp rope and 30 bob apiece. To fund the trip Dave and Joe toiled conscientiously at their chosen careers in fast food retailing ie. Mr Whippy ice cream men.

Late 60s - Joe with another Ceunant pioneer, Roger Bennet, selflessly took on the challenge of opening up the quarried limestone walls of Llanymynech by day and the apparel of Oswestry's young daughters by night. There were notable first ascents, some free, some aided, many disputed, and where slick rubber failed Special Clinics came to the rescue.

The 70s - There followed some memorable alpine seasons in the pre-global warming era. When not engaged in campsite runners or jumping route nationale toll booths Joe and a frequent alpine companion, Nick Taylor, notched up many classic routes, among them the N. face of the Breithorn and classic ridge traverses of the Midi-Plan, Rochefort, Zinal Rothorn-Obergabelhorn-Mont Durand.

The 80s - Combining a penchant for running with a love of Scotland, Joe demonstrated his prowess one Hogmany by joining a group exodus from Aviemore's China Garden restaurant. Ghillies still talk of the night a cleaver-wielding cook of oriental persuasion pursued the group through the drifting snows of a Cairngorm evening. On this occasion our hero, ever generous, offered himself up as the Ceunant sacrificial lamb and was led away to the cheers of The Winking Owl's New Year revelers. *Note: for students of the Scottish legal system further bibliological references are available at the Office of the Procurator Fiscal, Inverness.*

Still the 80s and still running - Joe continued his love affair with Scotland. On another occasion, accompanied by the writer an ascent of Ardverikie Wall in a Highland heatwave was followed by a sprint to catch the last Mallaig ferry. There followed a dawdle to Glen Brittle to pack bivvi sacs for the Cuillin, a sprint to Garsbheinn to escape the midges, a saunter, shuffle, stagger and crawl along the ridge in a dehydrating cauldron of shimmering heat. And to conclude, a jog down Glen Sligachan to make last orders.

As the 80s gave way to the 90s Joe became steadily more acquainted with the facilities of Her Majesty's Prison Service. Having escaped the clutches of the Procurator Fiscal he pitched deftly into Caernarfon choky one Guy Fawkes weekend for the heinous crime of 'With malice aforethought, attempted misappropriation of a beer glass'. Readers will be aware that this ranks second only to sheep stealing in the Wild West. Not for the first time did JB escape transportation, or even worse - incarceration in Wales, by playing the Celtic card.

The 90s - With growing affluence and a shrinking world Joe expanded his mountain skills and horizons. Like many Ceunant he taught himself to ski assisted by a coterie of patient and supportive chums ("*C'maaaaan, we ain' awaiting*"). Despite all he progressed swiftly to off-piste, then ski touring, notching up several alpine tours among them the classic Haute Route. Joe remains a committed ski tourer. His skills and mountain judgment make him a strong member of any ski-mountaineering team.

Still the 90s - A combination of crowded alpine huts and cheap long haul flights was the spur to explore further afield. A trip to the Pakistan Karakoram sowed the seeds of a yearning for wilder places while at the same time resulting in a bad dose of amoebic dysentery. Undeterred, Joe with various parties made several trips to North America and three visits to the South American Andes. The latter included Chile and Bolivia on two occasions, where several 6000m. peaks in the Cordillera Real were bagged.

As the noughties dawned Joe, in the company of that well known Pelsall dilettante, Dennis Jordan, set their sights on the European Grand Randonnees. In the Corsican huts of the GR20 the two raconteurs entertained Parisian fashionistas long into the night with a selection of their favourite subjects - 'The well-dressed English climber', 'A gastronome's guide to Walsall', et al.

The saga continues Long may it do so.

CEUNANT SKIING ANECDOTES, by John Pettit, 2000-2003

Canazei

John Cole asked me to write a report on the 2003 skiing trip to the Dolomites. That's fine except for one thing – I was on my back most of the time! First morning out, following a boozing session from 5.00pm to 1.00am, Jim suggested that after two easy blues we take the cable car up to Sass Pordoi and do the off-piste 800m gully down the front of the face. My numbed brain failed to register the gravity of this proposal until we got out of the cable car. I felt sick. A short descending traverse down a convex unreversible slope brought us across the roof of a snowed-up refuge to the lip of the gully. Oh God! The gully was about 30 feet wide with powder covered verglas and sharks teeth fangs of rock at about 60°. Tom went first followed

by Jim. Tentatively I inched down side-slipping until the unavoidable jump turn led to less lethal ground. The rest was OK until just above the piste. A short steep slope finished me off. Tom with arrogant aplomb took the slope with just one hard turn. My cheap hire skis and my old knees failed – the lower ski went followed by about three cartwheels and the next four days in a leg brace from crotch to ankle – c'est la vie.

Morzine (1)

We started drinking about 5.00pm and were back at the apartment early – about 11.30pm. It started quietly enough soon after in the large lounge. Somebody threw a cushion, then somebody else retaliated, then all hell let loose with pillows, bedclothes, mattresses, carpets, chairs, settees – the lot being thrown in every direction. We lay on top of the debris giggling until a plaintive whimper from one of the bedrooms from Dennis said “Can't I get some sleep in here?” Seven of us wrapped him in his mattress and slung him down the stairs. He protested more and more quietly as we took every bed mattress and cushion and anything else we could find and filled the void between the treads of the stairs and the ceiling. Eventually Dennis fell silent.

We cleared up the mess including our new recruit Dennis and settled down back in the lounge for a quiet nightcap. There was a polite tap on the door and standing there were three friends of Steve's who had called in for a late one and a quiet chat. We eyed them up with hungry relish, winking to each other and smirking slyly. Somebody gave the word and we piled in. Within two minutes they were under a 6 foot pile of mattresses, cushions, settees and other stuff and eight of us. When the stifled moans finally expired and we reluctantly let them out, fun over. It's strange how some people have no sense of humour – we never saw them again.

Morzine (2)

As is traditional in the Ceunant, the first run of the first day is from the very highest point. Looking down from the top station directly below us was a very steep black mogul field. The hangover and sickness quickly got worse. I was all over the place – mainly horizontal until everyone, except for my shepherd Tom and me. We were about 50 feet from the end of the moguls leaving a steep slope and a long schuss. Tom felt he had done his duty and bent his knees and schussed the last bumps without turning. He lost an edge and flew gracefully through the air leaving the heels of his skis neatly embedded side by side while he continued his 15 metre flight. When I got to him I rolled his inert form over to see a two inch open wound across his cheek which looked serious – he was also concussed. When I got him to the nearest cable car en route to the hospital, he swears that I said “Thanks a lot Tom, I needed a rest after that tough descent”. It's all lies!

Zermatt

The Gornergrat restaurant at lunchtime. Within two minutes of arrival, Steve has left us and is using his finely honed skill, sitting very close to a pretty young woman whispering in her ear and making her smile. Cathy comes in (Cathy it should be told is a distant friend of Steve's). She walks up to the table where Steve and the girl are sitting and with legs wide apart and hands on her hips shouts at the top of her voice

“You you Bastard. You bring me to this beautiful place for our honeymoon and within two minutes apart you’re trying to get into another woman’s knickers. That’s it, we’re finished” and storms out. Untypically, but with a broad grin on his face, Steve sat there speechless.

Les Arc

My first day’s skiing. Very icy. Skis all over the place. Legs screaming. Bruises from shoulder to ankle – both sides from constant falls. Crawling down after falling from T bars. Beautiful sunshine. Spectacular views. The wonders of schussing without having to turn. The total mystery of technique. The speed. The excitement – all this in one day.

The first challenge was a black gun barrel. Steep, narrow and high-sided. Full of bodies, 90% of which were horizontal, including me. Heart in mouth crashing into people, losing skis and poles. If this is skiing, I think I ought to take up Morris Dancing.

Fat Steve meets Ian and me about 3.00pm. “Fancy a coffee and a cognac” he asks. We reply “No thanks we are going up the hill to get back to Arc 1800 in the next valley”. After telling us how experienced and knowledgeable he was we reluctantly joined him. 1½ hours later Steve having got us lost twice, we came round a bend to see the last lift (about 3000 feet high) back home with a queue about 400 strong. Oh no! The queue was wedge shaped like a cattle pen and full of giants - pushing, shoving, elbowing, shouldering, kicking. Women and children crying, people treading over each other. Is it like this at the end of every day’s skiing? 30 minutes after the lift should have closed and over 100 people turned away, I make it to the top in the penultimate chair. It’s almost dark – everyone’s pissed off. I’m on my jack. The pistuers eye me contemptuously as I commence my descent to the valley. Two of them follow me chuckling with disdain as I fall over at every turn in the dark icy conditions. After an hour of darkness I crawl into the apartment and vow not to move again that day or ever to ski again. An hour later we are all whopping ‘em back saying what a brilliant day out we all had.

Meribel

The state of the art 130 person cable car silently and speedily ascended from Courcheval in a heavy snowstorm. Peace! The door opened and Tom and I climbed towards the Saulire col. On cresting the col the gale force wind hits us and nearly lifts us off our feet. We very tentatively side-slipped down the hurricane blasted slope in nil visibility towards Meribel, resting every 20 feet or so. The goggles went first, quickly followed by my woolly hat. I couldn’t see a thing. Big cliffs somewhere to the right, I screamed to Tom “I’m going back to the top for shelter”. We remove skis and the wind pushes us gradually back up to the Meribel Lift station and we crawl under the building where dozens are sheltering. Out of the maelstrom I say to Tom “By Christ that was tough”. A voice booms out form a red bearded Jock “If ye think this is tough laddie you should try Aviemore” lifting his kilt and giving the ladies a flash.

St Anton (1)

A metre of snow fell last night. Total depth on the hill between 5 and 10 metres deep. Lift pylons were down. Restaurants had been totalled by avalanches. Several people died from avalanches in the middle of St Anton. Just the thing for a carefree fun-filled holiday break at Austria's premier ski resort.

Dennis and I don't make very good pairing on a T bar. He's stronger than me! Half way up to the sound of guffaws I'm off in very deep powder in the middle of a forest. In this case, however, all that is visible is the top metre of the 10 metre trees. I carefully traverse in the deep powder hoping to get back onto the piste somewhere in the distance. Heavy snowflakes, poor visibility, total eerie silence. Somewhere under the deep snow my ski catches a branch, releases the ski, and I am suspended upside down by my good ski. This is pointing like an arrow into bottomless powder and I'm in a snowstorm miles from any rescue. I quickly realise that when I inevitably fall it must not be vertically. Slowly I inch sideways before the branches I am holding break and I fall sideways. I swim out of the powder and after one hour eventually find my lost ski and rejoin Dennis. "What happened to you back there?" he said. I thought my reply was direct and succinctly profane.

St Anton (2)

It was John's first days skiing – at one of the toughest resorts in the Alps. We met him at about 3.00pm after his first lesson. We were on the way back up the hill for the last foray of the day. He agreed to join us, on the condition that it was not tough! It wasn't, but then John wasn't experienced. The first run down from the lift turned out to be the last. Each turn for poor old John was a fall. One hour after starting we were at the bottom of the first run. It was closed and worse, it was a dead end. Below us were crags and forest. After at least an hour in the forest, having confiscated John's skis, he clipped back into them and in the dark we gradually made our way down the piste, poor John still falling at every turn. Eventually a welcome light led us to a hostelry in the woods. Our spirits soared as the many spirits descended. The restorative powers of Gluwein were magical and soon John was laughing about his jolly jape. He was still laughing outside in the dark when we took his skis and poles from him, told him to lie down flat, grabbed an ankle each and skied him on his back with his head banging out a rhythmic tempo on the hard-packed snow to the valley two miles below. John subsequently reckoned this was his best days skiing ever. He passed the test.