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ceunant

MAGAZINE

OCTOBER '95

Hello Everyone

This, the latest issue of your magazine, is a good one of course. There are ten excellent articles, all of them informative and entertaining. They show how much travelling Ceunant members have done since the last issue: trips to the Andes, the Atlas, the Rockies, the Pyrenees, the Alps, Patagonia, Tremadog and Nevis Sport are all described here. Congratulations and thanks to all the contributors.

I hope these tales of derring-do and erring-don't will encourage you to put pen to paper, fingers to keyboards and voices on tape to record your own experiences for Club posterity. The current editor, James Walker, will welcome all contributions in whatever form they are put together.

The next issue is intended to be a celebration of the Club's 40 year history. It's our 40th birthday next year! So reminiscences of significant events, blasts from the past and senile ramblings generally will be especially welcome. Dig a little dirt, release a few cupboard-bound skeletons, delve deep into your personal archives and put something together for the next issue. Let's do some serious nostalgia!

Cheers

Sue Traynor

Contributions to:

James Walker

KNOT HERE **Paul Hennelly**

"You didn't even try to make the hard move!" Mark Hellewell looked disgusted. He'd climbed the slippery corner they call Y Broga in smooth-soled trainers. His feet had barely paused on the glass-like surface of the highly polished slab. And I'd just fallen off.

"I'm unconscious", I said.

It was Sunday afternoon, December 1st, at Tremadog. We were on the second day of the rope safety course led by Nigel Shepherd, noted guide and alpine gardener. Nigel is the author of the definitive book on modern rope techniques.

A few feet from me, Zoë Green was hauling Graham Spencely up Oberon. This feat of strength was helped with the pulley-like system of the *assisted hoist*, a method we'd learned to ease the task of lifting heavy loads. The live rope is secured with an autobloc knot, the *French Prusik*, which jams under load but which is easily released. A bight of the "dead" rope is lowered to the second and attached to the harness. This method provides a safe, easy and rapid means of hoisting a climber over an obstacle when both climbers are pulling on the rope. But what do you do if your second is unconscious?

Mark rapidly locked off the rope on the belay plate by taking it back through the karabiner and round to a couple of overhand knots at the front of the belay plate. Satisfied that this was solid, he then tied a *French Prusik* of the live rope and linked it with a sling to a *Klemheist* knot on the main anchor. This done, he was able to unlock the belay plate and untie himself from the belay system.

He abseiled down to check my condition, administer a few cuffs round the ear and take all my gear. He used a long sling to make a *Parisian Baudrier* - an impoverished chest harness - to stop me inverting. Hauling himself back to the top of the slab, he set about forming an *improved Z hoist*. An *ordinary Prusik* knot is tied on the live rope as close to the victim as possible and linked to a karabiner on a bight of rope dropped from the belay anchor where it passes through a *French Prusik* knot which is used as an autobloc. A further *Prusik* is tied to the bight of rope on the "dead" side of the karabiner and this in turn is linked to a length of rope which passes through a karabiner tied to an independent anchor.

Are you still with me? If you followed the instructions, then you're looking at a system with three pulleys. It enables the rescuer to hoist the victim quite easily, although it takes time to carry out since the Prusik knots have to be readjusted as the rope is taken in. This technique is considered suitable for crevasse rescue.

I gave up playing unconscious on Mark's third attempt to pull me through, rather than over, the overhanging lip of rock near the top of the slab.

We'd been practising the techniques we had learned the previous day at Lion Rock, Fachwen. We'd covered basic knots, quick escape from the belay system and prusiking up the rope using knots and mechanical devices such as jumars. We'd also practised *assisted evacuation*. This technique allows two climbers to abseil from the same device and provides a means of lowering an injured climber to safety. A sling is divided into two unequal lengths and tied to the abseil device (Figure 8, Tuber or belay plate). The victim is tied to the shorter length and the rescuer ties in to the longer piece. The victim can then be secured across the rescuer's lap or between the rescuer's legs. The rescuer can safeguard the descent by tying a French Prusik around the controlling rope and into his leg loop.

It was an enjoyable and informative event. Nigel is a great source of practical advice on all aspects of rope safety. In addition to all this, you get a free copy of Nigel's book if you attend.

A FEW OF THE EVENTS OF A FOUR-WEEK TRIP TO ARGENTINA AND CHILE

Julie Brady

Six days earlier, we had arrived in Ushuaia, the southernmost town in the world. On the southern tip of Tierra del Fuego, this area was surrounded by vast unspoiled mountains. On our first trip into these, we saw wild guanaco, condors and Cape Horn. But after the trip, we had a problem - how to travel on from Ushuaia to Torres del Paine.

The solution came in the form of a chance encounter with the softest-spoken person from Northern Ireland that I've ever met. Dave had renovated a Ford van, fitted it with aircraft seats and was on his first circuit of South America with five others. During that evening around the campfire warmed by gluwein and the cheapest Irish whiskey in the world at £2 a bottle from the local duty free, we scrounged a lift.

After four long dusty days of driving, we finally arrived at the Torres del Paine. Wild and raw, this was the world as it was built: no cultivation, no development and unspoilt by progress, unlike Ushuaia. Now we stood in one of the three buildings in the Torres del Paine National Park, a park the size of Wales. The building housed the park guards and it was here that anyone trekking in the park had to come to register.

Our original intention had been to do a tour of the Torres del Paine, a seven-day backpack around the mountain range tucked into the edge of the Patagonian icepack which dominates the Park. Unfortunately, we were informed that one of the passes was blocked with snow and a bridge had been washed away by floods. It was late in the season - Autumn - and bad weather was already setting in.

We had to content ourselves with a three-day trek up to the Grey Glacier. I was quite impressed to find out that the water in all the lakes and streams was drinkable. The seven of us set off complete with pumpkin and pressure cooker and camped that night to the sound of avalanches crashing down the Horns of Paine.

The next day, we walked in light snow up to the Grey Glacier. This is an offshoot of the Patagonian Icecap which pushes its way into Largo Grey. This is very different from its Lac Bleu cousins in the Alps not only in size but in its incredible matt grey colour and sprinkling of icebergs.

After the trek, we stayed for the night in what must be the most beautiful campsite in the world. The famous Patagonian wind, which had blown nonstop for the past nine days had disappeared. We were treated to a magnificent view of the towers and horns of Paine with a perfect reflection in the lake. For our $2 fee, the camp warden brought us an enormous wheelbarrow load of logs and pumped water so we could have our first hot showers for 6 days. (Phew!).

I was very sad to leave the Park for another day of hard driving on dirt roads back over the border from Chile into Argentina as we headed north to Fitzroy.

Contrary to common belief, most of Patagonia is not mountainous but very flat, very dry and very dusty. It is also very boring with 200 miles between petrol stations and even further from one wind-gnarled bush to the next. After a brief side-trip to see the world-famous (at least in Argentina) Moreno Glacier, we arrived at Fitzroy.

Apparently, people had been here for up to three months without having had a glimpse of either Fitzroy or Cerro Torre because of bad weather. So it was with some pessimism that we set off the next day for a beautiful walk through a forest of silver birch dusted with snow to Cerro Torre base camp. We hoped to catch a glimpse of this infamous mountain through the low cloud.

The bivouac, made from flattened oil drums which is Cerro Torre base camp, is very moving. There was a shrine in one corner dedicated to some climbers who had died the year before. We waited around for an hour or so and were rewarded with magnificent views of the peaks of the Cerro Torre group. With one look at that vertical, ice-plastered phallus of a mountain, I resolved that it wasn't for me, standing as it does taking the full brunt of uninterrupted winds off the South Pacific.

My abiding memory of Patagonia is of the unbelievable vastness and desolation and the constant wind blowing across the plains that carried the dust that we ate and breathed.

A WALK IN THE ATLAS

Angus Murray

Part One

..... or rather, two walks, as I went to the Anti-Atlas in February and the High Atlas in June. Both of these ranges are in Morocco, the Anti-Atlas being further south and bordering on the desert region. The Anti rise to nearly 11000 ft and the High to nearly 14000 ft, the highest peaks being Jebel Siroua (10850 ft) and Jebel Toubkal (13665 ft).

Few people think of Morocco as mountainous, but in fact, much of the country is a mountain region. The people are varied from the Touareg in the southern deserts to the Berber of the mountains, with Arab and Negro mingled throughout. The Berber have their own language(s) and customs and tend not to inter-marry. Tribal traits are quite marked and noted by tattoos and fabric patterns, both noticeable in the women. Transport to and between Berber villages is almost solely by mule or by foot. Anyone travelling in these mountains has to hire mules (and muleteers) as Berbers do not work as porters.

Hire of a muleteer and mule is about £4 a day. They are reliable, friendly and honest and will do the cooking and provisioning.

The mountain villages do not usually have facilities such as electricity, running water or medical treatment. If you break a leg, the best you can hope for is to get strapped on the back of a mule until you get to "civilisation". No-one is going to call in a helicopter for you - there aren't any phones or radios.

The Anti-Atlas scenery is dramatic, rising from desert to snow-capped mountains. In February, there was quite a lot of snow and one night at our campsite near the village of Tisgui (approx. 7500 ft), about 2 ft of snow fell. The muleteers and mules took refuge in the village while I and a few others camped out for two nights in raging blizzards and sub-zero temperatures. The mules couldn't move and avalanche danger was high so we stayed put, kept the tent clear of snow (clearish anyway) and had vicious snowball fights with the muleteers: "vicious" because anything went including ice and rocks.

The snow persisted making the steep tracks impossible for the mules - they are valuable and the muleteers will not risk them unnecessarily - so we back-packed for a couple of days ascending Jebel Guilize (pronounced *gee/eez*) through waist-deep snow - great scenery but bloody hard going! The mules caught up with us below Guilize. Funny how these people know where the others are!

The mules are actually treated quite well though they work hard for it. In the higher mountains, all of their fodder has to be carried in as the high villages have nothing to spare. Thus, quite a small party requires a lot of mules as the fodder and the muleteers food, tents, cooking gear, etc. all have to be carried. There's also a local guide plus a headman to sort out any disagreements about loads, payments, provisions. All very complicated but colourful - you know you're not in Europe.

Below the snow line, the almond trees were in blossom and lower down still, the hillsides were covered in aromatic herbs - rosemary, sage - and thyme in abundance. The Moroccans could sell the scented air if they really tried. Lower still, the valleys were often set in crops of barley, saffron crocus and root vegetables with larger numbers of date palms. Other areas have enormous numbers - millions it seems - of *argand* trees. They produce a fruit very rich in oil - a sort of up-market olive which only grows in Morocco. Goats climb the argand trees to get to the fruit, getting onto the smallest branches - Lord knows how!

Part Two

In June, I returned to the High Atlas and made ascents of the highest peaks - Tubkal, Ajd, Ouanoukrim and Oukaimedane. There was still a lot of frozen snow about and some of the steep ascents were a bit hairy. The views were stunning - much of the time we were above the clouds. These mountains are famed for the variety of their minerals which are sold as souvenirs in all the towns. Consequently, the mountains themselves are a variety of colours ranging from red ochre to black. In June, wild flowers were in bloom everywhere: Morocco has over 3,500 species. Also there were numerous white-water rivers and waterfalls from the snowmelt. These were refreshing for bathing as they were just above freezing. You were sometimes not quite sure if there was solid ground or a raging torrent beneath you. The snow was easy to walk on when the sun was on it but froze quickly in the shade though it was probably safer then.

One of the high villages we passed through had some sort of festival. Some of the men, dressed up in stinking goat skins complete with horns, chased other men - including us - around the village while throwing bags of dust as us. You were covered in dust if a bag burst. No allowances made for travellers passing through!

The Berbers are quite a cheerful lot much given to festivities, singing and dancing. Everyone seems to have drums, pipes and tambourines. We often had a sing-song with *Wild Rover* and *Frère Jacques* alternating with the local hits. Once we got invited to a wedding. The girls dress up in their finery of white or pastel dresses of silky material. Berber girls are very pretty and do not wear veils. The men just wear their usual djelabiahs (*jelabas*). Men and women sing and dance separately and you have to join in - unfortunately, photos aren't really possible and in any case who wants to look like a tourist? Goodness knows where the girls keep their best clothes as everyone lives in mud or primitive stone houses with animals in and out of the place.

Back to Marrakech to catch a plane - touts worse than ever: "See the Souk - see my shop - I guide you". Speaking Arabic makes no difference. Find a hotel, sit by the pool or the bar and stay there till our taxi arrives to go to the airport. Marrakech is a place to pass through and as quickly as possible. Fortunately the mountains are still relatively unspoiled. For how long, I wonder?

BREATHLESS IN BOLIVIA

John Handley

It was a chance too good to miss so, courtesy of American Airlines, I was landing at La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, as a member of a party from the Ceunant Mountaineering Club.

Flying in from Miami, the change in altitude tends to take one's breath away. La Paz is situated at 3925 m and lies in a huge canyon splitting the high desolate plains of the Altiplano and overlooked by the massive bulk of Nevado Illimiani, at 6460 m the highest peak in the Cordillera Real.

Headaches were ever present. It was a major epic to walk upstairs to the hotel bar. Our plan was to spend a week in the capital acclimatising and arranging transport links and food for a ten-day trip to the Illampu area of the Cordillera Real. We contacted the Club Andino Boliviano and they were very helpful arranging all the transportation and the llama hire to enable us to convey our gear up to base camp.

The journey proved eventful with the radiator disintegrating on the truck within the first five miles. Later, the petrol pipe split leaving us stranded outside an army barracks for three hours listening to the band practise, and yes, it was just like one imagines - sheer mental torture. The exhaust fumes and the desert dust invaded the van and the broken exhaust pipe burnt through the brake hydraulics just as we finished descending the hairpin bend approach to the village of Sorata.

Sorata is described as the Eden of Bolivia and was the centre of the gold trail when the Spanish were plundering the assets. For us, it was a pleasant stop, a quick beer and sandwich at the Residencial Sorata, then a change of vehicle for the final six-hour journey to the Mina Candalaria. This was too optimistic for darkness overtook us and thick mist enveloped the narrow, rough and eroded track and, feeling like victims in a Stephen King novel, we were forced to bivi alongside the vehicle.

A cold morning revealed our location to be a high mountain pasture overlooked by the Pico del Norta, at 6060 m, a satellite peak of Illampu.

Travelling on, the old mine road ascended a truly frightening series of switchbacks where the driver had to take several attempts to negotiate the tight and crumbling roadway. At the Khala Montuna we were rewarded with a fine view over the clouded valleys which lead to the tropical rainforest and the Mamore river, a tributary of the Amazon. A short time later and we arrived at the old mine where we found we had another day's wait as all the available llamas had been acquired by a Spanish expedition. To add to the situation, the nearest drinking water was two miles away and our transport had returned to Sorata! It was necessary to filter the water, a task which always felt like a penance.

Six-thirty the following morning, forty llamas arrived accompanied by their handlers and the journey to base camp began with a 600 m descent to the village of Cocoyo. Amazingly, this isolated high mountain settlement supported a primitive shop. The people were obviously very poor and, without money, practised a barter economy. They seemed very shy, especially the children who looked at the strange gringos from behind their mothers' skirts. They all seemed well-fed and smiled all the time. In fact, during our stay in Bolivia, we never heard a child crying.

Base camp was at Lagna Kohota, 4661 m, and we arrived six hours after leaving the village. We were joined by a group from the Birmingham based Cave and Crag Club who had a similar itinerary to our own. Unfortunately, one of their members became ill with pulmonary oedema during the first night and had to be taken back to Sorata. This meant that almost a week was lost before they returned.

Our time was spent trying to acclimatise. I found this difficult and was afflicted by headaches which consistently appeared at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. While I suffered, the rest of the team, hooked on Diamox, proceeded to climb Viluyo Jankhouma, 5540 m, and Yapuchanani, 5526 m. These peaks should have been technically easy with mainly snow-covered approaches but the returning teams told of bare ice and horrendous conditions on the glaciers due to an immense number of wide and long open crevasses causing major route-finding difficulties.

My problems with acclimatization continued despite easy walks and scrambles around the base camp area, so I became a spectator as the team planned the conquest of Jankhouma, 6427 m. This high peak necessitated an advanced camp on the glacier at about 6000 m so the teams set off early with heavy packs for a long slog.

The following day, tales of high overnight winds, sickness and faulty stoves explained the early arrival at base camp of one despondent team. The second pair had more success and reached the summit without incident.

Generally satisfied, we returned to La Paz, declining an invitation to take part in the village football competition yet partaking in an enormous pizza-eating session at Sorata.

In La Paz, we decided to split the group with some going to another climbing area to try Huana Potosi, 6088 m, and the rest of us taking in a trek to Sun Island, the religious centre of the Incas.

I joined the group going to Copacabana on Lake Titicaca. For over three days we walked the Inca roadways and with the aid of a dubious motor boat, reached Sun Island. This trip proved excellent value and there was no sign of commercialism. We got the distinct impression that the local people still have affection for the old gods. The Inca palaces are in ruins but the area does not

appear to have been excavated and pieces of decorated pottery are lying around on the surrounding terraces.

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 by 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 4650 m 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 repellant) and our first encounter with fireflies whose nocturnal displays made the mountains look like giant illuminated Christmas trees.

DAY TRIP WITH MR FIX-IT

Joe Brennan

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 Cordillara 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 hot bed 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 mid-day 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 Vitas 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 underbonnet 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. Sutty 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 their adobe homes, flattering cabilleros 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 spacetime, 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 - beans, 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 4500 m 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.

Sorata 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 weathered faces of the team of four now look ashen. The Captain dives under the bonnet for the millionth time. Looking sheepish, he emerges with a fractured brake pipe which, unknown to us, had hung like a sword of Damocles over all the dizzying drops of the day.

A NOVICE IN BOLIVIA

Val Beddard

I fluctuated between excitement and panic when Bill and I decided to spend a month in Bolivia in July 1992.

I borrowed an excellent book from the library which told me of all the diseases one can catch and of people needing oxygen when arriving at La Paz. The airport is 13000 ft up on the Altiplano, a flat plain above La Paz. The brave members of the party had the necessary jabs to protect us against typhoid and rabies.

After departing from Heathrow, four of us had a trouble-free journey through Caracus, Bogota, Lima in Peru and then up to La Paz. When the plane was coming in to land at La Paz airport, I had butterflies in my tummy. What was I letting myself in for? My first view of Bolivians were men well wrapped up against the cold, working around the very basic airport complex. Our luggage arrived intact along the conveyor belt and we found ourselves outside being ushered into waiting taxis. I was relieved to find that I had not collapsed due to lack of oxygen.

The taxi journey into the city descended 1000 ft. By road, the view of the city was spectacular and in the distance was the snow-covered Illampu. July is their winter. We met up with the rest of the party who had travelled via Miami. Some of their luggage had gone astray, so Air Venezuela (our airline) was not all a joke!

The first three days were spent in La Paz, a bustling city full of ladies all wearing large skirts and bowler hats. How they kept those perched on their heads is beyond me. It is said we are a consumer society. I have never seen so many market stalls selling every commodity you could require and one sector, known as "Witches' Market" sold magic spells, potions and herbs.

Having made ourselves known at the Bolivian Alpine Club, we arranged transport to the Cordillera Real by being driven to the Candalaria Mine where we could meet up with Lorenzo, the local rip-off merchant, with the llama herd.

Departing La Paz with great excitement, we had only reached the top of the canyon when the van we were travelling in needed some welding done to its radiator. Two more hours into the journey and we broke down near a military fort where someone was practising a musical scenario. The fuel pipe had split and necessary repairs were carried out in the last village we had passed through. Three hours later we were mobile again.

We finally met up in Sorata with a 4-wheel drive. This looked much more reliable. After having a meal and transferring the luggage we took off with our driver, Victor, for the second part of the journey. Unfortunately, it grew dark so we pitched camp at 10 pm. We woke the next morning to some beautiful mountain scenery. The "roads" we drove along were just tracks created for the mining industry. The scenery was wonderful. We passed through a village

where we were the centre of attention and arrived finally 3000 ft above the village of Cocoyo. Cloud was coming up from the Amazon and we were above this.

Our driver rang a large triangular gong to call the llama man. One and a half hours later he arrived to say we had arrived a day late so they could not round up the llamas until the following day. So we camped again. The next day at 8 am a pack of fifty llamas appeared.

The altitude poses no problems for the local people. The village boasted three football teams and no-one to play against. There was talk of a challenge match but I don't think there would have been any competition.

We descended 3000 ft into the village where life appeared very simple and basic. The houses were small, little more than mud huts. The ladies worked outside peeling potatoes surrounded by pigs which roamed around like dogs. There were lots of children everywhere. Lorenzo owned the "shop" where we were surprised to see Glenryck Pilchards as well as sticky (condensed) milk, tea coffee and pasta, but no sweets. Sticky milk was a great favourite with Dennis.

Having passed through the village, we started our walk to base camp. In the right season, the valley must be covered in flowers but we only saw the plants in their winter state. It was a day's steady walking for me but Bill was very encouraging. As the day wore on, I thought every col was going to be the last one. Four lads from the Cave and Crag Club were walking in at the same time as us. We were sorry for two who were sick at the top of one col.

At last, base camp. It was situated between a large lake and a fast-flowing glacial stream. We were still some distance from the snow-covered mountain. All the equipment had been mixed up by the llamacharos. After finding for our own equipment, we put up our tent, had a brew and settled down to our home for the next ten days.

I loved the alpine flowers. A carpet of marguerite-type flowers, pale blue and white, were growing like daisies. Lots of alpines were tucked away under rock crevices - flowers we had never seen before - which appeared after the snow had melted. We spent ten days at base camp, all of the party doing their own thing. My personal highest point reached would be about 17000 ft although 20000 ft was reached by some of the others, Dennis and Steve Harvatt going the highest. There are no rescue facilities in Bolivia so we always kept this in mind. The days were short so we would often be in bed by 7.30 pm. Bill was often up in the early hours looking at stars, making tea and taking the cooker to pieces.

On the pre-arranged day, the llamas arrived in camp in readiness to descend with our equipment the next morning. Lorenzo's son brought his pan pipes and the only tune he appeared to know was *Oh My Darling Clementine* taught to him by some South Africans. We made a steady return trip to the Candalaria Mine to meet up with our transport back to La Paz.

It was a week of fiesta when we passed through Cocoyo which was shrouded in mist and very eerie. All the women and children were wearing best clothes and sitting around in groups chatting and playing. The men were playing football - the big match of the day. I felt like we had been transported back 100 years.

Our journey back to La Paz was uneventful. We all had a really good Italian meal - pizza and pasta - in Sorata. We wondered why the Italian owner of the restaurant was living in Bolivia with his wife and family? Passing through a checkpoint, the guards asked our professions. You can imagine the answers - Sooty as a bricklayer, Bill as a professor, Doctor Joe etc, etc.

It was good to arrive back at the hotel for hot showers and good food. Tinned fish and powdered potatoes had become boring. Sooty and Joe attempted to wash their clothes in the shower tray. No-one had told them about the very reasonable laundry service available in the hotel.

At the weekend, we split into two parties. Joe, Dennis, Sooty and Tony went off to attempt a mountain nearer to La Paz. The rest of the party left for a long weekend on Lake Titicaca. We travelled by bus to Copacabana on the lake. It was still fiesta and the town looked very colourful. Copacabana boasts a very large moorish-style cathedral. Lots of stalls were erected in the square selling different goods. Apparently, if you wanted a new motor or truck or good fortune for the coming year, you bought a miniature of your desired object to have blessed by the Virgin and with luck, you acquired the real thing.

With the assistance of a guide we set off on Friday afternoon to trek alongside the lake. We walked all afternoon enjoying the scenery. As dusk fell, the guide asked a local if we could sleep in his storage space. After they had swept the sweetcorn kernels out, we spent a very comfortable night in the upstairs store, using candles for light. There was a terrific thunder and lightning in the distance which made us think of the others high up in the mountains.

The next morning, a boat had been arranged to take us across the lake to the Island of the Sun. The boat was not very seaworthy. I think we all had our fingers crossed that it would make it.

Our first stop was to look at some pre-Inca ruins. Then we sailed round to the next bay and disembarked. Legend says this is where the Inca Empire originated. It is a really beautiful island where time has stood still. Walking across the island, it was bright and sunny and the water was so blue. We passed many peasant communities. It was reminiscent of the Greek Islands. A super packed lunch was provided by our guide and his helper.

Late in the afternoon, the guide spoke to the head of the village and asked if we could sleep the night in the school. We enjoyed a supper of bangers and mash by candlelight. Several local children came and pressed their noses against the window to see what our meal was. I am sure that Sue, being a teacher, saw the difference between what is available in English schools and the very basic Bolivian school.

On Sunday morning we walked to some more Inca ruins where it is rumoured there is a tunnel that takes you under the lake to Cusco, Peru, another sacred city in the Inca Empire. We could also see the Island of the Moon on the lake where all young maidens were taken for the King's pleasure. We sailed back to Cocacabana on a more stable-looking boat, passing the Bolivian navy headquarters. It is the only land-locked country with a navy.

The town was still enjoying the fiesta. Many people had come over the border from Peru for the festival. The hotel where we stayed on Sunday night supplied a delicious meal but by contrast, although there were wash basins and showers in the rooms, the only available running water was in large tin drums on the balcony. Ironic, when several yards away was one of the largest lakes in the world!

Back to La Paz on Monday to meet up with everyone else. We were leaving again on Tuesday morning to trek an Inca Trail into the jungle. We were transported to the head of the trail where we made our way to the top of a snow-covered pass. Once over the top, our walk was downhill for three days. The trails were excellent, reminiscent of old Roman roads. Ancient cultures appear to have much in common.

We passed through countryside not unlike North Wales, passing the odd local peasant on his way to La Paz to sell or barter goods. Further into the trail we walked along huge canyons, thickly covered by trees and shrubs. An attempt had been made at some cultivation but it would almost be like trying to cultivate Grib Goch. As we came to the jungle, there were all sorts of flowers growing wild - lilies, gladioli and roses. We stopped at the Cottage of the Roses for a beer. The owner had seven children, two donkeys, caught trout in the river and grew his own vegetables. We passed a gold mine where working conditions were Victorian. We also saw some brown and gold parrots and banana trees - quite a contrast to the high mountains. All too soon, we came to the point where we had to find transport back to La Paz.

Most of the return journey was on the back of a lorry. The guide books says it is the most spectacular road in Bolivia. I was too nervous to look over the sides of the truck. When we had to pass other vehicles, I just shut my eyes tight. The guide told us that his father had been killed on this road two years before. Unfortunately, it grew dark so we missed some of the spectacular scenery.

Our trip was coming to an end. But I am sure we would all like to return to Bolivia again and experience more of the country. There is still a lot we never saw.

THE PYRENEAN MUNROS

Pauline Rooker

What do you do when:
(a) all the Munros are finished, or
(b) (more likely) you're fed up of Scottish weather?

The answer is to go to the Pyrenees. For the last six years, John and I have spent our main summer holiday there, at first using the "English" Battagel guides supplemented by Kev Reynolds. These guides are fine for your first visit but you quickly realise that they are seriously out of date with respect to glaciation and approaches and they are also very limited in what they describe.

We then moved on to French climbing guides - quite expensive but with many routes to the summits. However, there is a problem with these guides - they are out of print. I understand that the Spanish are now printing guides and it could be that these will be translated into French.

You can also buy small local walking guides to the various popular areas that you may visit - these give graded walked from 2 hour strolls to full mountain days and for about £4, they are a good starting point. A book we particularly like is *100 Sommets des Pyrenées* by Georges Véron. This goes across the whole chain and gives detailed routes for the peaks from under 1000 m to over 3000 m.

The magic "3000" is of course an instant attraction and there are well over one hundred summits to "collect". Two recently published French books list these mountains although they do not give routes of ascent. The best time to go is July-August as access roads are open and huts in the high mountains are guarded.

We have had three holidays at Bagnéres de Luchon, two holidays at Gavarnie and one holiday or Arangouet, staying in tents, ski apartments and a gîte. These centres are all on the French side of the Pyrenees but close to access roads for forays into Spain. We have spent most of our holidays in France as information seems to be more readily available and Spanish maps are a joke!

Some mountains can be climbed in a day such as Pic de Néouvielle as the access roads to the high dams, which are part of Electricité de France, go right into the heart of the mountains. Sometimes however, it is necessary to walk to a refuge and stay the night before climbing the peak the next day.

Hut walks are generally reasonable. This week, we did a delightful 1 hr 30 min hut walk which gave access to at least ten major peaks, but we also did a 4 hr 30 min hut walk giving access to about twice that number of peaks. Huts can be booked from the valley or you can just turn up. As in the Alps, they can be very crowded and CAF members or those with reciprocal rights cards are given priority. Sometimes, the hut guardian will accept a Ceunant card (BMC

affiliated) as entitlement to reciprocal rights - a reduction of 50% on overnight fees. This works out at about £15 for a night's dinner, bed and breakfast! A typical evening meal will be soup, perhaps an entrée, meat and vegetables, cheese and dessert. The breakfast will be the usual French *petit déjeuner* of stale bread with tea, coffee or chocolate.

We usually walk up to the hut in the afternoon to avoid the heat of the day and we carry up a sheet sleeping bag as only blankets are provided Unlike the Alps, it is not necessary, unless you want a big day, to get up ridiculously early as peaks will be at the easiest 1 hr 45 mins away, and at the hardest 6-7 hrs away. In general, 3-4 hrs should see you on the summit of your chosen "3000 er".

Equipment carried in your sack will be much the same as for Scotland with the addition of shorts, lip salve, sun hat, sun cream and glacier/sunglasses. The weather does however change very quickly and a storm is often the rule for late afternoon. It is essential to carry plenty of water as once the valley is left behind, there will be few opportunities to re-supply on rocky ridges and it goes without saying that the sun can play havoc with your choccy bars. By reading the guide carefully, looking at the map and asking people, you can find out if ice axe and crampons are necessary.

The glaciation has changed so much that what were simple snow plods, have now become technical rock climbs on rotten rock. Quite often, there will be 20-30 mins on the glacier in a 3 hr route although mountains such as Maladetta and Vignemale still have reasonably-sized glaciers. A light rope with a couple of slings and a descendeur should be enough for the *voie normal* and a Ceunant member would probably not even need these.

Don't worry too much if you are in the valley and there's a mass of white cloud above you. You can often rise above this into the sunshine and on a summit it's typical to be in brilliant sun looking down on a sea of clouds.

I hope by this article to introduce others to the Pyrenees and although you may know all the information about huts etc. from Alpine visits, it may be that newcomers to the Club have no idea what to expect.

THE DOWNHILL ONLY CLUB

Nick Oldfield

Scotland, Easter '92. This time we managed to avoid killing any deer though Ade was keeping his foot down to try to get there in time to put the tent up in the light. We didn't ..... Incidentally, when I first knew him, Ade never went above 60 mph. What have we done to him?

The next day, we headed up the Ben. Objective: to get to the top via No. 2 Gully to check out the conditions. Up at the CIC Hut, the usual knot of Untouchables excluded from the hut, huddled on whichever side offered some shelter, were on their way down in disgust.

We carried on, heading for a likely-looking gap through Sron-na-Ciche. It narrowed into a mini-gorge which reared up at the end. Aha! Some climbing at last - on with the crampons and attack the waterfall. Five minutes later, most of the ice is on the floor and I'm ten feet up, axes gradually sliding downwards. Time for an escape plan: jump off into a handy snowbank to leave a more-or-less human-shaped imprint in the snow.

Thwarted, we decided to head back but have a play around on a small ice cliff. Having just bought a pair of crampons, they needed trying out so what better way than to solo up above a large pointed boulder. As the ground receded, I realised I hadn't really checked the fit on my second-hand Footfangs. A tenuous sideways move onto a ledge brought comparative safety again. These near-death experiences make life more worthwhile, don't you think?

Another quick traverse and we were into a gully. Scorning all newfangled modern aids, Ade kicked his way up, though he did use an axe on the cornice. Then we got an inkling of Ade's true aim in life when he decided the best way down was to hurl himself over the edge and down the gully.....

The next day, the plan was to take the Gondola half-way up Aonach Mor, then walk from there. Having brought a Gondola-only ticket, we saw as we went up that there was a chairlift that went up another 500 ft or so. In best Ceunant tradition, we decided to scam a lift. Sauntering up like we owned the place, we jumped on and were away. As we jumped off at the top, obviously not skiers, an employee of the Chairlift Company hailed us: "You should have walked". But as he looked like Paul Daniels, it was difficult to take him seriously.

The summit was soon reached after that but we could hardly tick it as a Munro. Next stop: Carn Mor Dearg. Ade "Death Wish" Casey sorted out the descent route and threw himself off. Ten minutes later, the party was reassembled at the col. Now we had towering slopes on either side there was nothing for it but to put in some effort. Trudge. Trudge. Wheeze. Wheeze. Now we knew how the early skiers felt flogging uphill for hours in order to hurtle downwards for a couple of minutes hoping nothing breaks.

Suddenly, the view widened out and we were on the top. The planned trip to Ben Nevis along the Carn Mor Dearg Arete looked amazing in the bright sunlight. But time was too short so we opted to go down a broad ridge to Carn Dearg Meadhonach, added to which it gave the opportunity to do more sliding. On the odd patch of harder snow, I was able to do a standing glissade and kid myself I could do turns. Even Ade "Lemming" Casey was sort of impressed.

We were soon level with the top Gondola station. Unfortunately, there was a valley in between. Time for one last slide. Now we discovered why plastic bags are considered essential kit in winter. It's to give less friction when the snow gets too soft. However, a dead sheep in the flight path made us consider the possibility of hidden rocks and it was back to boring old foot power.

On the final slog up the other side, lethargy set in. God knows why, considering the feeble amount of uphill we had done under our own steam. Even the secret weapon, a king-size Mars Bar, failed to give the usual nitrous oxide type boost. That skiing lark looks easy we thought, sliding downhill all day so we decided to give it a go next day. After all, we had seen only one bloke plough into the fences. (Little skiing pun there - plough .....? OK, suit yourself .)

Next day, when we all piled out of the car at the ticket office, it seemed different. Omnidirectional sleet, biting wind, clag, nice warm car ..... With one voice we all said "Sod it. Let's go to the café". While we were in there, taking turns reading someone's Guardian, the snow level must have come down sufficiently to ski along the High Street judging by the boots most people deemed necessary to reach the café. By the time we left, this meteorological miracle had passed and the limit of human endeavour for us now was to work out how to operate the Grey Corries Lodge stove.

THE CHALLENGE

Oliver Rooke

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 Vallée 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 3 am 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 that his leg had become paralysed. 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 at 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.

GRANITE WRANGLERS

Paul Hennelly

This year, Chamonix was a washout, by all accounts. We weren't there. Instead, ten of us went to the USA in July on a tour of the Mid-West. In three weeks we only saw two days of rain when we were up in the mountains. The rest of the time it was bright sunshine and temperatures in the 80's. Costs were fairly reasonable once we'd paid for the flights and vehicle hire. For example, a steak dinner was around $8-$9 and motel accommodation worked out around $10 per person.

Lumpy Ridge

We started in the Rocky Mountain National Park near Estes, Colorado. Lumpy Ridge is a number of exfoliated granite domes. Loads of VS and HVS routes here (or 5.6 to 5.8 in American grading). Batman and Robin (5.6) got most ascents: a cracked slab requiring a climbing technique familiar to anyone who saw the old TV programmes. Hand over Hand (5.7) followed a steep crack to an overhang then followed a thin traverse out left to the belay ledge. Globs of Blobs (5.7), another inventive name for a climb, traversed a knobbly slab to an overhanging corner. Every route we did was exciting. The guidebook has more stars in it than the Milky Way.

A Mexican meal in Estes went down very well when Joe ordered a litre of Marguerite for seven of us (Graham, Bill and Val were visiting the floods in St Louis for a couple of days). The portions were enormous - no wonder Americans are well built. In a bar, we got talking to some tough-looking guys with big hats. "We're wranglers from Arizona" said one. We found out that they were pony trekking instructors.

Cirque of the Towers

It took about eight hours to drive from Estes to Pinedale, Wyoming. From here, we went to the Cirque of the Towers in the Wind River range. The approach walk into the mountains took us six hours. Then we had two days continuous rain. We were unable to do much more than cower in our tents up by Lonesome Lake. The rangers found us and made us move the tents because of the regulation that you can't camp within ¼ mile of the lake or 100 yds of a water source. We had to carry our tents across a bog in the rain to a site that flooded when the next downpour came. We were lucky that the rangers didn't see our campfire - also illegal.

We walked up to Pingora peak but there was much more snow around than we had expected. Apart from Dennis (who'd worn his plastic boots everywhere) we'd all walked in in trainers. We hadn't brought equipment and we were unable to do any climbing.

This remote cirque of granite peaks is magnificent. Warbonnet gets its name because it looks like a chief's headdress. Wolf's Tooth has a 5.5 traverse

classed as one of the best fifty climbs in the USA. Mitchell's Peak has a superb line which the book gives as only 5.7. A place to revisit in better weather.

We dried out back in Pinedale, a cowboy town with a supermarket where there's a dozen moose heads over the checkouts. The Cowboy Bar has a really good C&W duo if you like that sort of thang. Somebody suggested the City of Rocks in Idaho as a possible rock-climbing venue, some 2-3 hours drive away. It took us about 7 hours to get there.

City of Rocks

The City of Rocks is down near Mormon country in the desert and may be best reached from Salt Lake City. The nearest bar is 18 miles away although American beer makes you wonder why they bothered with Prohibition - or whether they repealed it. The City of Rocks is a collection of granite pinnacles near where the Oregon trail used to run. Camp sites are in bays below the rocks - each site is provided with a barbecue. Camping was $5 per site.

On one evening, there was a fresh wind so it seemed to make sense to put the Trangia in the back of one of the vans while brewing up. The result was a perfectly circular hole melted into the carpet.

There are about two hundred and fifty climbs in the topo guide, mostly traditional crack climbs with some bolted face routes, all about 140 ft long. Some of them seemed a bit hard at the grade but the rock is clean and sound and the weather was perfect. Rye Crisp (5.8) on Elephant Rock is a large crack that's really exciting if you're got no big gear, while Carol's Crack on "Decadent Wall" offers sustained stemming (bridging). We were followed up one route by a soloist, Alf, a local climber who makes his living by resoling your boots with sticky rubber overnight. He was a difficult salesman to get away from.

Grand Tetons

We left Idaho and drove back north to Wyoming. Jackson Hole is a typical mid-western city laid out on the grid pattern with so much wasted space you have to drive from the motel to the breakfast bar. It has a good night life, though. In the Million Dollar Cowboy bar, there was a band on. At first they performed C&W type stuff and men with big hats swept cowgirls round the dance floor. As the evening wore on, the music changed and got more rocky. Their final number was a fine version of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

North of Jackson Hole is the Grand Tetons range. This name is French and means Bit T ... well, it refers to the three (!) shapely peaks seen by the first explorers. We walked up Garnet Canyon from the ranger station on the first afternoon and camped on gravel below the glacier. We saw a pine marten, some black bears, many marmots and chipmunks and a rodent with round ears that may have been a pica(?). We rose at dawn and climbed Middle Teton (12804 ft) by the South-west Couloir, reversed this and climbed South Teton (12514 ft) by its Northwest Couloir. This was classic alpine climbing up snow gullies of about Grade II. On the summit of South Teton, we saw a whole flight of pelicans

swoop past. Descent was by the classic American method of sitting down and sliding for about 500 ft. We got back to our camp site about 3 pm, packed up and we were in the bar in Jackson Hole by 9 pm. The following day we went north to Yellowstone Park for a brief visit to the Old Faithful geyser before heading east.

Devil's Tower

The Devil's Tower in north-east Wyoming is the extinct volcano where the aliens landed in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. It's been eroded into columns separated by wide cracks. Most routes follow the cracks at varying standards of difficulty: there is a superb looking 5.10d called El Matador which follows a wide parallel chimney for 150 ft. The classic climb on the tower is the 5-pitch Durrance Route (5.6). This is a good test of your ability to get up a wide crack and there is an exciting move on the "Jump Traverse". Even more important is the ability to get up early. Sue, Bill, Val and I were the first there and we were joined by five other parties within 4 minutes. Fellie and Ollie had lingered a little longer over breakfast: it must have been perfect porridge! On the summit that afternoon, the four of us met Joe and Graham who'd done Soler, a 5.9 with a first pitch that was 180 ft to a hanging belay! So when we were abseiling down from the top we saw Dennis, Fellie and Ollie still on their way up. There was time for Joe and Graham to get back to the campsite, shower and a have a couple of beers before returning to the Tower after dark to collect the intrepid trio just as they completed the final abseil.

On the specially constructed asphalt path that runs around the screen slope at the foot of the Tower, there were a number of large men carrying cam-corders. They looked like Sumo wrestlers but they were just normal American tourists. They ask you the only, the crucial question: "Did you reach the top"? and record your answer. You feel rather ashamed if you have to say that you'd only planned to do a short route before abseiling off. Sue Traynor had to show the contents of her rucksack to one persistent tourist who wanted to know what all the different pieces of gear were for. The Visitors' Centre sell an illustrated booklet with the title *How Do They Get Their Ropes Up There*? It may save you answering the same question forty times.

Mount Rushmore

The Mount Rushmore Needles are in South Dakota and just down from the place where the presidents Washington, Lincoln and two others are carved into the rock. While waiting for the others to return to the van, we strolled down the road and up a short track to a woodland clearing. We found ourselves staring up George Washington's nose. In front of us was the largest man-made scree slope we'd ever seen. Obviously when Guzman Borglum did the sculpting with dynamite and drills, he didn't bother to clear up the debris after him - but it's probably hidden from the conventional tourist viewpoint by all the trees.

What does "gossamer" mean? Here is was a 5.8 (about 5a) route that took the very edge of a thin fin of rock about 600 ft high and 3 ft wide with a window in the middle of it. One of the most photogenic climbs you'll ever find. Stargazer is a 5.9 sports climb that takes a compelling line up a nearby face, though it's said to be tough at the top.

The nearby Needles on Needles Highway are worth a visit but more for the scenery than anything. These pinnacles attract a lot of tourists and the crowds are off-putting. The climbs are bolted lines on friable granite with fairly long runouts. It's OK if you like that sort of thing.

Boulder Flatirons

The Boulder Flatirons in Colorado, give climbing on sandstone conglomerate. They get their name from their unique shape. The standard East Face route (5.4) up the third Flatiron has been described as "probably the best beginner climb in the solar system". It's like the Idwal slabs but about three times as long and takes you to the summit. In the sunshine and with only one or two runners per pitch required, the climbing was fast and enjoyable. When we got to the top however, the sky suddenly clouded over. I began to get worried when the hair on my head stood on end, indicating the build-up of an electric charge. We abseiled off the summit in record time but the storm passed by and hit Boulder instead. This gave us time to do Friday's Folly, the last climb of the holiday. It goes back up the line of the abseil to the summit so route-finding is no problem. This was the enjoyable crack climb that takes you round an arete and up an exposed face. The last move was the hardest.

Unfortunately, we had to split the party at this stage. Six of us had to return home while Joe, Sue, Bill and Val had an extra fortnight out there. At Denver, we unpacked the van and discovered that we had one of Joe's plastic boots. Graham wrapped it up and posted it to the Jackson Hole post office together with the toilet plunger that Dennis had insisted on taking everywhere with us. What happened when Joe opened the parcel, and on the remaining two weeks is another story.

If you're looking for long mountain routes or bold climbing on sunny granite crags for next year, my advice to you would be - GO WEST!