

## Four go mad on Hoy



**A** SEA-STACK climbing trip had seemed such a good idea at the time: big routes, adventurous climbing and fantastic situations. At work my mind would drift away to some sun-baked ledge perched above the crashing Atlantic Ocean with gulls screaming and swooping around us. Standing below the Old Man of Hoy, with 460ft of tottering sandstone towering into the sky, the cold awful reality was beginning to dawn. Loose, damp, slimey rock covered in bird poo. It looked so damned big and overhanging, bulging out in the middle and tapering towards the top, you wondered how on earth it stayed upright. Maybe the bird poo held it together. The boulder bridge we were standing on was all that remained of a previous arch that had connected with the mainland and fallen over a hundred years ago. It had just stopped raining and the wind was picking up. If it hadn't been for Ian's enthusiasm and the fact that we'd

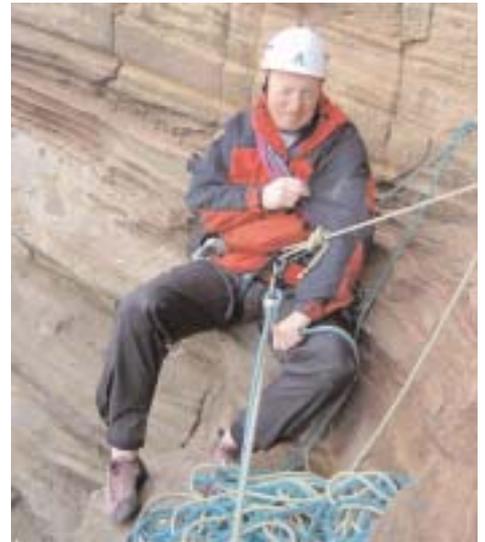
come all the way to Hoy to do just this one route, then we might have done a runner.

The Original Route was put up in 1967 for a BBC live spectacular, by Chris Bonnington, Rusty Baillie and Tom Patey (aka Dr Stack). In 1968, A second route was climbed by Joe Brown and Pete Crewe. Who did we have? Ian, me and my mate Graham and his Austrian friend Ulli. Still, we'd done the Old Man of Stoer a couple of days earlier without too much mishap. Well, apart from Ian almost losing his sandals on the swim back and me almost losing my underpants (but that's another story). Oh, and the descent didn't exactly go as planned either. We finished in the dark and didn't get back to the car until 11:30pm. Still we'd done it. But then that was a VS and this was E1.

Ian led off up the first pitch, the prospect of an epic of great proportions high on the agenda. The rock proved to be lovely and not at all slimey, and he was soon securely belayed on a large ledge (the Gallery). Graham and Ulli were still gearing up and not looking happy. We were carrying an extra rope which we planned to fix on the second pitch. This (we had read) was needed to prevent a bottomless abseil when retreating down the overhanging corner. As

it turned out, some kind soul had already fixed a rope recently. Various guide-book comments regarding the second pitch had not inspired confidence and it was a struggle to leave the security of the nice big ledge and down climb a flake onto the traverse leading into the huge overhanging corner crack. The holds were sandy and the gear I'd put in to

*Continued on back page*



*Ian is spat upon*

## A GRAND DAY OUT



**T**here was no question about the destination. It was to be Braeriach, followed by rethet of the walk round to Cairn Toul and the Devil's Point – the longest high level walk in the Cairngorms, not dropping below 1,100m for 6km. The challenge was the walk starts and ends ten miles from any point that could be described as even faintly reminiscent of civilisation. And that in December, with snow on the ground and frost in the air, there would be only eight hours of daylight. In December 2001, Gary Bebb and Geoff Deans had tried to complete the same route, but had been driven back by strong winds. To add to the adventure, they had spent two nights in a snowhole, rather than use the Corrou bothy, or take a tent. With falls of snow being somewhat capricious, in late December 2003 a party of five (Gary Bebb, Pete Durkin, Geoff Deans, Dave Bird and Matthew Taylor) settled on camping as the best option, with the plan being to spend a day walking in via the Lairig Ghru, a day sauntering round the tops, and a day marching out victoriously, also via the Lairig Ghru.

The auguries were mixed as we set off on Monday morning from

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> **Aviemore. The locks on the car had iced up. They were soon de-iced. Then we found that the door rubbers had frozen, preventing the unlocked doors from opening. These too were soon de-iced, and by 9am we were walking on a broad track through the wooded Rothiemurchus estate, meeting the lodge's snow plough coming the other way. A narrow path soon led to open moorland. The sky contained some patches of blue, but** snow and cloud meant that our world was effectively composed of just two colours. Meanwhile, the path faded and then vanished, giving us the hard work of toiling slowly uphill through shin deep snow with heavy packs (with the exception of Geoff, who had a) a lightweight pack, b) minimal contents to save weight, and c) the entire contents, including sleeping bag, made of light weight titanium). As we entered the Lairig Ghru, the gorge between the nation's second and third highest mountains, we saw a dozen ptarmigan in their white winter camouflage, rasping like frogs. At other times we heard their croaks, but failed to see them. Once in the valley, our universe turned monocolour as the blue skies disappeared, and we inhabited a world dressed in varying shades of white. After traversing a boulder field, we descended until at 3pm we reached a site suitable for camping by a lively but nonetheless partially iced over brook at the foot of the ridge up to Braeriach. The tents pitched, we looked forward to our afternoon cup of tea. It was not a good moment as two of the three gas stoves failed to work. As part of a bizarre east Hertfordshire ritual, Gary insisted on placing one of the non-functioning stoves in the inner folds of his clothes. It was therefore to everyone's surprise when, before long, we had two working stoves, and thus no longer faced the prospect of digesting uncooked spaghetti ...

There being few opportunities for entertainment nearby, we retired to our sleeping bags at 7pm. It is one of life's mysteries that when camping in winter it is perfectly possible to sleep for extremely long periods.



Waking at 3am, I wondered how to sleep for the remaining hours before our 6.45am start. But I fell asleep again and when we rose at the appointed time the morning was cold, still and bright. We left camp at 8.30 on Tuesday, my toes numb in boots that, despite being kept inside the tent, had not thawed overnight. We worked hard to make a trail in the snow to reach the summit of Braeriach by 10.30, an ascent of 600 metres, and a distance of 2.5km. As we ascended, the orange glow of the sun turned carnation pink, crept first along the tops and then crawled slowly down the mountain sides. A thin haze materialised. At the summit, we admired the arctic views extending as far as the eye could see in every direction over rounded mountain tops, tipsy plateaux, and grim sided corries. We also saw our own shadows projected by the sun onto the haze, with rainbow halos over our heads – a Brocken spectre. My third ever, it was an unexpected and additional delight. In the dazzling sun, the haze soon cleared. It was as fine a day as ever could be wanted, and we all marvelled at our own stupidity in pretending to enjoy wet weekends in Wales when such magnificent vistas were available. Removing hats and gloves, and revelling in our good fortune, we continued the round. Over on Cairngorm and Ben Macdui we could see nobody, and there was nobody

else on our route, nor had there been the day before because the snow was unmarked by the footprints, although we spotted rabbit tracks just below the summit of Braeriach. So we chatted, lunched and fell silent. We slogged up and down a boulder strewn slope to Sgor an Lochan Uaine (the Angel's peak). We slogged up and down a boulder strewn slope to Cairn Toul. The others pressed on to Devil's Point, while I waited at top of Coire Odhar, having walked enough. It was a decision I regret-



*The superb ridge of Braeriach*

ted later partly because of the allegedly fine views down the Lairig Ghru, but also because from where I waited Devil's Point must be the easiest Munro ever (but who's counting anyway ...?). So ice axe in hand, we descended the startlingly steep slope through knee deep snow to the Corrour bothy where at four o'clock we saw people for the first time that day. With our backs to the sun, setting in the south, seemingly scarcely to the west of where it had risen, we headed back to the camp. We stumbled in the dark over deep snow, heather, rocks, hidden streams and black ice for 4km before reaching the tents two hours later, but nothing could dent our deep satisfaction.

According to the plan, it should have been a straightforward hike up and down the Lairig Ghru to return to centrally heated accommodation on Wednesday, New Year's Eve. However, during the night the wind had risen, the temperature dropped to minus 12 degrees celsius in Aviemore and at dawn a virulent red sky daubed a warning. In an understandable move to save getting cold, Gary and Pete broke camp before us, and headed back. Geoff, Dave and myself finished taking down and packing our tent in bitter cold, and set off shortly afterwards at 8.45am. The strength of the wind blowing at our backs increased as we made our way up the close sided valley, and unusually we decided against removing the layers that we had put on for extra warmth while fumbling round the camp site. Spindrift was being blown off the top of the peaks and, looking back, the sky had turned into a frenzy of red with threatening dark fringes. Ahead, we could see strips of lilac and brilliant celestial blue sky sandwiching dull cloud while scheming over Aviemore. It looked supernaturally menacing. Meanwhile, we again slipped and tripped over the lateral moraine thoughtlessly abandoned in the last ice age. On more than one occasion, when I checked behind me to see where Dave was, he was struggling to extricate himself from a thigh deep snow drift. As we descended from the highest point, the wind continued to grow in force, jostling us with increasing violence. Here, the spindrift was blowing above head height, and there was intense savagery in the wind as it shoved us forward with heavy clouds and tugged at our balance on slippery, rocky paths. It was exciting and awe inspiring to be blown down the mountain, but also terrifying. At one point, I clung to a cairn to save myself from being flicked head over heels, cartoon style, down the valley. Desperate to stay upright, I repeatedly jabbed down my walking pole, which bent under the strain. Greyness closed in. Amid furious gusts of spindrift, we finally reached the shelter of the Rothiemurchus forest, thankful to be down. Shortly before 1pm, we arrived at the road, mysteriously ahead of Gary and Pete. It had been a grand day out.

*Matthew Taylor, 4 January 2004*

# Braeriach Adventure

**A**swollen knee has pushed me into boredom leaving me with nothing left to do but write an article (sorry Ed). The swollen knee is a result of the three day epic adventure we had at the start of our New Year holiday in Aviemore.

Aviemore is a top place to go at New Year's, there's always snow allowing for walking, skiing and climbing and the town is a cool place to down a few beers.

Gary suggested we do the Braeriach ridge. This would involve hiking up the Lairig Ghru, camping out for the night, climbing the ridge the following day and then walking back

poor ground conditions made it hard work. One kilometre was taking us an hour. I thought that we wouldn't make it to our chosen camping area and that we would end up walking back but we kept plodding and eventually decided on our campsite for the following two nights. We chose a spot next to a river and at the foot of a ridge which leads to the summit of Braeriach.

I always get excited setting up a wild camp. We busied ourselves putting up the tents and collecting river water for the long night ahead. The sun went down and it was too cold to stay out any longer. Oh dear! The

knew we would end up walking back in the dark but we wanted to make the most of the fine mountain blessed with the perfect weather.

We descended off the ridge on a steep snow slope and made our way back up the Lairig Ghru towards our tents. We stopped off at a bothy to chat to the inhabitants who told us they were crazy and asked us if we were too. We said we were then ran away.

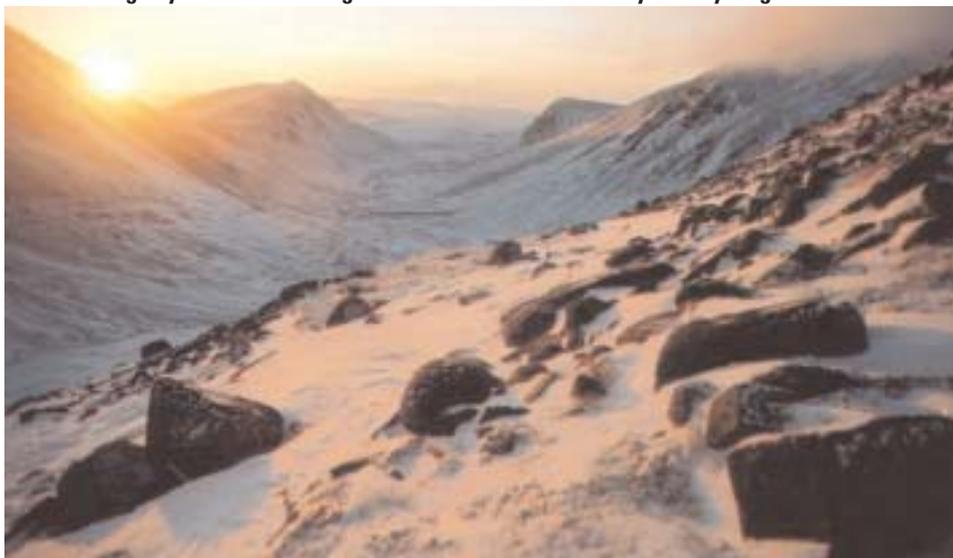
The longer day meant it was a late one to bed, eight o'clock that night! My tinned blue stripe curry sauce with pasta was not that tasty but was at least food.

The next morning was cold and very windy. We packed up quickly and headed off ahead of Geoff, Matt and Dave to avoid freezing to death. The extreme gales made walking very difficult on the soft underlying snow. The strong wind would frequently knock you off your feet. Some handy map reading by Gary eventually lead us into the shelter of the trees and back towards the cars. We arranged an earlier lift with Ann as we expected the others to be a couple of hours behind (they actually beat us!).

Home, sweet caravan, a shave and a hot shower and release of the underpants which had grown into my skin over the past three days. We were back for New Years Eve, in time for the traditional curry feast and the Ceile at the Glenmore Lodge.

The adventure was hard work but it was worth it for the stunning day on Braeriach and the opportunity to see some new mountains.

*Reported by Pete Durkin*



down the Lairig Ghru homebound on the final day. I guessed that it would be hard work and the two nights in the tent would be pretty uncomfortable. My other option was to stay in the warm caravan and spend three days climbing and skiing. However I have done a fair bit of climbing in Corian Sneacta and I fancied seeing some new mountains.

The team consisted of Geoff Deans, a.k.a. race horse, Gary Bebb, a.k.a. trousers raised to nipples, Matt, Dave Bird and myself. Early Monday morning was spent drowning the car in de-icer to release the doors. We then made our way to the car park on Loch Morlich. The initial pace was fast and I was soon stripping off excess clothes. My pack consisted of a tent, sleeping bag, roll matt and spare clothes. Gary, who was my tent mate for two nights, convinced me that his stove was the size of a kitchen oven making it only fair that I carry his tent!

We first-footed on the snow covered ground making our way south through the Lairig Ghru. The lack of path made it very hard going and legs were often lost to a metre of snow. I recommend walking poles which I didn't have. Previously thought they were just for soft ramblers.

It's a long way up the Lairig Ghru and the

gas stoves didn't work. We tried various remedies including burning the stove but the ultimate solution was 20 minutes down Gary's underpants which sufficiently drove out the moisture. I guess they would drive anything out.

After dinner and a short game of eye spy (T for tent) we said goodnight. This was at 7:00pm, there was nothing else to do and a wake up call at 7:00am meant the potential of getting some sleep within those twelve hours.

Everything seemed to stop working with the extreme cold. Zips stop zipping, cookers stop cooking, tops froze to bottles and to my dismay and amusement I discovered my contact lenses were sitting in ice cubes on opening the case. The solution every time seemed to be place a frozen article for twenty minutes against warm genitalia.

It was a fantastic day, crispy clear and still for our ascent of Braeriach and continuation of the ridge. The slog through the Lairig Ghru now seemed worth it. With the comfort of an axe we made it to the summit of Braeriach and were rewarded with fantastic views and a Brockspectre. It consisted of a circular rainbow in which you could see your own silhouette. We continued along the ridge picking off Cairn Toul and Devils Point. We

## Ed's Little Box



You know the cliché about waiting ages for a No.14 bus and then three arrive at once. Well Crux has been like that. The last issue was back in the Summer of '03. So 6 months later I get four articles in a fortnight, three of them on Scotland. Come on guys, it's not fair on your Editor.

Where else can you have your work published and read by millions across the world and archived for future generations?

I would like to introduce a Creative Writing section next issue (see Thoughts at Chair Ladder) so if there are budding novelists out there bring it on as they say. Finally, there are some great Meets lined up so get on them and tell us about it.

*Take care out there.*

*Bill*

## Middle age spread forces sale

North Face Goretex Mountain Jacket. Very good condition. Red with black reinforcing patches. Size medium. Was over £200. Bargain at £50.

Call Chris Cook on 01923 829455

# New Year in Aviemore

by Linda Powell

**H**aving joined HMC last August, I believed I was reasonably fit! After the Cheviot Hills (Northumberland meet) I realised I was not. Since then, I have been on several Meets not only to enjoy the freedom of the countryside but to also increase my fitness levels.

After a 10 hour journey up to Aviemore with Gary Bebb and Alan Goddard we finally arrived at our luxury mobile home. The next day I arranged to go walking with Geoff Deans, Matt Taylor, Dave Bird, Ann Peden and Brian Robar. We got up at 6.30am, had a hearty breakfast, made pack lunches and filled up thermos flasks. My rucksack was heavier than usual due to extra clothing, crampons and an ice axe. I was also wearing three layers of clothing.

We all squeezed into Matt's car and drove to the bottom of the mountain range with Brian following in his white wide-wheeled boy racer! It was about 7.45am when we arrived and it was still dark and snowing. We put on our waterproofs and headed off in the snow.

The snow was white and fresh and we made the first imprints of the day. The pine trees and scenery looked beautiful and the whole area was so peaceful. We decided that we were going to walk up a Monroe called Bynack More. It was fine to start with and we went at a reasonable pace, however the further we went uphill the deeper the snow became and I started to fall behind. I couldn't keep up with Geoffrey Long-Legs! Geoff soon realised this, as my strides were smaller than the rest of the party, and he suggested for everyone to go in front to make a path for Linda. He was very kind and understanding.

Brian was also very patient and waited behind with me, however if there was a deep hole, I seemed to disappear down it! After a while I sunk into another hole which was filled deep with water and I had to throw my whole body to one side to stop myself from sinking. It was then that Brian (my hero) helped pull me out. The water went half-way up my legs past my gaiters, which soaked my boots for the rest of the day. My boots were all squidgy! However being a true mountaineer I continued. My Platypus had also frozen up but thankfully Brian had two flasks of drinking water which he generously shared. I felt like I needed water as fuel to keep me going.

As we approached further up the mountain the weather deteriorated and the wind set in with a vengeance, blowing fiercely into our faces and stinging our eyes. Visibility was getting so bad that Matt couldn't even see out of his glasses but we continued on. We stopped for lunch in two bothy bags between six of us,

I got out my sandwich which Ann had made for me, I got a shock – she had made a sandwich of tuna & sweet corn and cheese & pickle all mixed into one!!! It was only when I questioned her, she said that was what I had requested in my sandwich that morning, she had asked me three times to confirm and apparently I just said yes, as I thought she was waffling at 6.30am in the morning. However it gave me, Ann and Geoff a good laugh in the bothy and believe or not it actually tasted quite nice. We only stayed in the bothy for about five minutes as my feet were so wet that they were starting to go numb.

We continued up the mountain and it got harder and harder. Thank God for the aid of walking poles, they have been my best buy yet! I started to think, what the hell are you doing here, I couldn't see anything, my feet were soaked and I was getting very tired. We continued for hours and eventually arrived at the



*Elspeth and Linda*

summit! However there was no view, as conditions were really bad and it was quite frightening. Feeling scared, I turned to Geoff and said "Do you ever ask yourself what you are doing here?" and he said "It's crazy really, we keep going whatever the conditions, only to reach the top!"

We then proceeded down the mountain and I began to get my energy back, doing the Pete Durkin dance as we descended. Then the visibility really turned. We all stopped and put on our goggles and even they iced up. We continued and before long we ended up walking round in circles. We had missed the main path back. After a lot of faffing about Geoff got out his GPS and found where we were on the map. We then had to go back up a little further and cut across to find the correct path, stopping every 5 minutes for Geoff and Matt to check their bearings!

Another two hours and the final path seemed to be going on for ever. We had now been out for 10 hours and it was dark. We walked along

wearing goggles and head torches. I was so exhausted towards the end, I thought that if someone jumped out of the bushes and tried to attack me, I would not resist. As my body was physically exhausted I couldn't care less. Ann and Brian were behind me which surprised me for Ann is always on the go, however I didn't feel so useless, when the Bionic Ann Peden admitted she was exhausted. (We called Ann the Bionic Women at this meet, due to her knee brace, which is a pretty scary item!)

We finally arrived back at Matt's car and it was heaven to sit down and as my hips felt like they were seizing up. We got back to the camp site and heard that Pete Durkin, Adrian Jones, Lyn Dodds and Neil Middleton had tried to go up the same route that day but had turned back due to the bad weather! That was when I realised our group was real Hard Core!

Having never experienced winter mountaineering before, I just assumed that this was a usual day's walk; however two days later Ann, Brian, Lyn and Neil and I decided to conquer Ben Macdui and Cairn Gorm.

The day again started dark cold and I was in a bit of a bad mood, due to being tired and having a wee hangover, however I got a chance to use my crampons and ice axe to go up a ridge, in order to continue: once we all got over the ridge the view was absolutely breath taking. It was like being in the French Alps, the snow was untouched and the sun was beaming so much that my ears were burning. My grumpy mood disappeared straight away; I smiled to myself and thought this is what it is all about.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at the Aviemore meet for their help and support they gave to me on my first winter expedition.

*Ann and Linda celebrate getting on top*



# Thoughts at Chair Ladder

Molten lines of red fire danced on an evening sea. Rough grained granite, warm from the day's heat, felt solid and comforting beneath his hands. He slithered down cracks and small rock steps, pausing occasionally, anxiety a momentary thought as the descent steepened and his feet reached towards the sea. There was no wind, the air still and quiet. His own thoughts the loudest thing in his head. Reaching the bottom, he leaned back on a seawashed rock that folded itself around him, and listened to the movement of the sea. It was an awesome place. Columns of rock like sculptured building blocks touched the edge of the sky. Walls and slabs capped by great overhangs stretched into the imagination. He had left the others in the pub, come here with the excuse of some easy soloing. Soloing, now that was a joke, he'd had enough trouble leading anything that day. His movements slow and awkward, constantly fumbling for gear, unconnected to the flow of the rock, energy sapped by fear. But his mind was still now. Here was a place to let go of thought, to let the sea flow through him, to become almost part of the stillness of the evening.

Time passed. Shadows crept into rocks and the water in the zawn darkened to an inky black. There was a slight chill in the air, the heat of the day had evaporated into a cloudless sky and an ancient coldness was now seeping out from the rocks around him. He stood up stiffly, and began scrambling along the base of the cliff. Edging his way around the rocky pools, and climbing the tumbled rocks where earlier in the day he had laughed with friends. The tide swirling around their feet, the sun warm on their backs.

It was on the edge of the water that he saw her. She was sitting on a rock, her hair a vivid green, flowing like a captured wave around her shoulders. Her breasts soft in the evening light, the curves of her body curling down to a fishy tail. He moved closer. She remained

motionless, watching him. He could see her face clearer now, a hint of a smile was on her lips. In her grey blue eyes was the vastness of the sea. A vastness that seemed to empty his mind of thought. And into that emptiness came the ache of desire. She reached out, touched his arm and he felt the ocean's energy move through his body. Her fingers moved to his lips. He could taste the salt on her fingers, sense the wildness of the storm, moonlight on an endless sea. Her smile widened, her eyes drawing him ever nearer. Reality was slipping away. He felt her body next to his, her arms holding him close, and his world dissolving into a dream.



They found his trainers next morning at the top of the cliff and his chalkbag washed up among the rocks. The coastguard said that most likely he had slipped on the descent path, fallen into deep water and been unable to get out. It was not unusual there was no body found,



the rip tide could easily have taken it far out to sea.

Strange though, I was talking to the landlord of the Tinnars Arms in Zennor the following spring. He told me that awhile ago one of the local fisherman was in the bar, had said that when he was setting his pots out by The Brisons Rocks, he could have sworn he heard the sound of two people laughing. He had found lying on a rock, glinting in the evening sun and untarnished by the sea a small metal object. It was left behind that night and he still had it somewhere. When I went up to buy the next round, he set down next to my beer, the unmistakable shape of a number 5 hex. I picked it up, held it to the light and wondered.

*John Parrott August 2003*

## The Hertfordshire Way backwards

After last years successful walk of the Hertfordshire Way, some bright spark (the Chairman said not to mention his name) thought it would be a good idea to do it backwards. No silly, not walking backwards but to do it in the opposite way round to the book. That was half the problem, the signs only told you where you had come from, at least that was some comfort.

But with some superb coloured maps supplied by Elspeth and Chris, this year's organisers, the job was made easier, and I only went off route twice on my two legs, no, I know I have two legs I mean I did one route on Friday afternoon and one on Sunday. The whole walk was finished on time but how from what I heard I don't know.

Helen got lost in a cemetery, there were plenty of people lying around but none of them could point her in the right direction. Pete Durkin and Derina walked to St. Albans from Markyate having left a car at both ends and then realised they had left Pete's keys in Derinas' car at Markyate - I think they had their

minds on other things. Then they thought they saw a ghost and were also chased by cows. Phil Whitehurst and Peter Basedo walking at night waded waist high through a corn field I hoped they kept some for their breakfast.

Elspeth walked through the night with Mark and Gina, Gina was running - a temperature - but managed to finish on time. Albert took over and watched the dawn come up together with his full pack. Pete Ambrose and Debbie did 2 consecutive legs - a long map reading exercise - 22 miles and even found a road not on the map, good job Pete's teetotal otherwise you could believe they stopped at every pub on the way.

H'ann'grenade got whipped, (now what's she been up to) Oh! On her legs while running through some sharp-edged pulse crops only to find she looked like she had been to an S & M party, the marks remained two weeks later.

Geoff Sharp did one and a half legs as did Geoff Deans. (I'm told he was soberish but met a male bovine in the dark -but I think it was

a load of bull!) Then it was me on my second leg, got lost on some grazing fields, so followed a well trodden path going in the general direction, but it led me to a water trough, but from there I could see the kissing gate I was supposed to exit the field from. Then the phone rang, the girls checking up on me, Barbara and Caroline. I was only three minutes late, but these fit girls started off running and I understand ran all the way. Lyn and Adrian (second welsh) dropped out on the last leg, but Melissa and Alex took their place and finished on time, to complete another successful Hertfordshire Way Walk. Stupid suggestions for how we do it next year to the Chairman please. In the evening there was a barbecue at Elspeth's place, the weather was good and the weekend was finished off with some good food and drink.

The walk was a sponsored event this time and about £150 was raised for Rothampstead International Charity. Well done everyone.

*Eddie Cornell*

### WARNING



If this person invites you to 'off-road' in Broxbourne Woods beware. He has a one-track mind and is likely to abandon you, lost and alone in the dark.

### PURCHASE DISCOUNTS

HMC has obtained discounts with the following shops:

**Cotswold**  
91 Victoria Street, St Albans  
Tel: 01727 847888

**Countryside**  
118 high Street, Stevenage  
Tel: 01438 353086

**The Complete Outdoors**  
Bourne End, Hemel Hempstead  
Tel: 01442 873133

**urban Rock**  
20% discount at **urban Rock** for all HMC members at the Castle and Westway climbing centres.

A current Membership Card must be shown.

# HMC Expedition to a c

**D**espite all the security scares, muggings & killings in the USA, the HMC bravely decided to mount an expedition to the wilds of a little place on the west coast called California, specifically to climb & walk in the Yosemite Valley & Joshua Tree National Parks. Some of the intrepid travellers also braved Death Valley & the Mojave Desert, where they encountered strange lights in the sky emanating from the direction of a native village called Las Vegas.

Having endured a long flight on a large virgin silver bird to a harbour town called San



*Breakfast in San Francisco*

Francisco, the group hired local transport and ventured into Richmond, in the northern part of San Francisco where they stayed with some local climbers & walkers (members of the Rock Rendezvous club) befriended by Carolyn Dent (no relation to Arthur). Carolyn is an ex-member of the HMC who now lives in Richmond. Simon of Rock Rendezvous, accepted our gifts of Branson Pickle & kindly provided the expedition members with food, beers and accommodation. Some of us bivvied in the garden and Eddie got a dose of Poison Oak poisoning.

After a hearty breakfast at the local waffle shop, the group drove up to Yosemite Valley where we camped under the trees in the Upper Pines campsite, next to a bear box, some benches, a fire hole and a loo block. We were within easy walking distance of Curry village, but no Taj Mahal in sight, only Pizza & beer emporiums, and a local store where we stocked up with food, spicy jerky & more beer.

During the week many good climbs were completed, and some members even climbed at the base of El Capitain, careful to avoid the droppings of the people halfway up the cliff face on bivvy ledges. Beware the golden rain.

A group walked up Half Dome from the campsite, gaining the top with the assistance of the fixed cables, and one member, who shall nameless only got halfway up the final 400 ft, when the strength in his arms gave out pulling

on the cables (I am afflicted with weak arms). A few days later Adrian Jones & Pete Durkin climbed Half Dome up Snake Dike without the use of the cables (as they had been laid flat for the winter). Kevin & Neil also climbed Half Dome via Snake Dyke.

There were some other good long walks around the valley including Glacier point via 3 mile walk & Sentinel. Phil Whitehurst walked up North Dome, where he was followed by a large bear for half a mile. Nearby we discovered a forest park with giant Sequoia trees. Some groups visited Tuolumne Meadows for climbing, and a walk up Mt Hoffman led by Carolyn. The journey back saw a bear crossing the road & disappearing into the forest, followed by Kevin who wanted to get a closer picture. HMC members are very brave (if that is the correct word to use).

During the week Eddie's Poison Oak got worse and he visited a local which doctor who prescribed some ointments and the swelling went down.

After a week the HMC had done Yosemite Valley (& some members had even been on the local buses), so it was time to head East over the Tioga pass & down to Mono Lake where we happened upon an old dusty mining town called Bodie, out in them there Bodie Hills. The town had some old relics of the previous century (which some of the older HMC members recognised).

By this time the intrepid group, in good old HMC fashion had split into two, the climbers going down to Bishop to take in the local good climbing, and hot showers at the campsite, whilst the brave walkers spent a night camped in the Mt Whitney motel in Lone Pine, taking in the steak & beers at the local hostelry, and having the compulsory American breakfast the

*robin in Death Valley*



*Group at Death Valley*

next day. Yee Hah

Then it was across to Death Valley where the temperature was only 98deg F, while the UK had higher temperatures of over 100deg F. The high points (Dante's View at 5475ft) & low points (282ft below sea level) of the valley were visited & pictures taken. Later we set off down to Joshua Tree.

This was plan A, but with night rapidly descending, we hove to in the Mojave Desert, circled the cars at the Hole in the Wall campground and set up camp in the desert, being careful to not back into the prickly cactus bushes when bending over pitching the tents. Eddie found out the hard way & warned the others. It was a very clear starlit night, with just a hint of light in the sky from Las Vegas village 70 miles to the east.

Next day we decamped early(ish) and drove down an empty Route 66 to Roy's Diner at Amboy, now a little used outpost due to Route 66 being bypassed with a crowded highway.



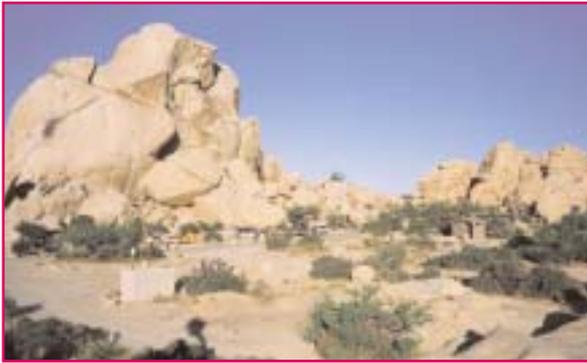
The walls of the Diner revealed hints of its glorious past with pictures of all the stars who used to drive along Route 66 to & from Las Vegas, stopping at Roy's diner for a quick one.

Finally we arrived at Joshua Tree North entrance where a slight mis-communication amongst the local wardens resulted in a quick 45 min drive to Black Rock Canyon to get a camping permit, which was available anyway. We had arrived a day late, and it confused the computer system (operator). And all this in the territory of Wild Bill Gates. I wonder if the

# Country called America

Indians had windows in their tents.

We finally arrived at the Hidden Valley campground in Joshua Tree to be greeted by a large black Tarantula crossing the road just next to where we were going to camp. This was the only one seen during the next few days, but it made sure the tents were zipped



up. For our amusement the coyotes came to visit the camp during the night and have a good howl. No one was attacked, just howled at.

The climbers seem to appreciate being to climb almost straight from the tents, judging by the smiles & drooling. In fact Adrian Jones inadvertently put his tent up under a classic boulder problem. Anyone falling off it would

have severely dented Adrian's tent. The next few days were spent climbing, walking, touring & consorting with the locals. There was no water at the campsite, and there were only long drop loos, which you knew were there from the decomposing waste odours. Bit like being on a farm; you get used to it. For interest, Albert went walk-about, camping in the desert for a couple of days to see if it could be done. Worried for his safety, Keith, Eddie, Robin & Chris tracked him down on the summit of Mt Ryan (after Albert had emerged from his sunbathing spot).

Finally we braved the highway back into Los Angeles to get the big silver bird back to the UK. Approaching the outskirts of this large village, we thought the natives were revolting as the skies went dark and the sun disappeared behind smoke, but it was just the local forests on fire, devastating the hillsides. We were through it in 15 mins & eventually found



Another group in Death Valley

the place to drop off the hire-car & get to the airport for security searches, check-in, some more jerky & a few coffees.

All in all a good holiday, and the Americans are not as fat as you read in the press. There were lots of thin ones in Yosemite, but I suppose there would be.

*For posterity, the members of the 2003 expedition were Adrian Jones, Pete Durkin, Phil Whitehurst, Lyn Dodds, Keith Hirst, Jules Williams, Leigh Singleton, Eddie Cornell, Robin Carr & son Chris, Albert Sillwood, Kevin Holmes, Neil Jobling & Pep the climber.*

*HMC Expeditions 2003 - organised by Adrian Jones & Pete Durkin.*

**Report by Albert Sillwood**

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Continued from front page

> protect Ian on the down climb pulled as soon as I started moving up the crack. Whoops. Moving out onto the right hand arête to turn the first roof, the wind hit.



Ian bridging

Wow, exposed. Still, it wasn't too bad and there was good gear. But now the second roof was looming. This involved squirming up inside a deep capped chimney and then backing out over the void to pull around the lip into the crack above (crux, as they say). It had started raining harder so I scuttled back under the roof instead and wedged myself in. There were wooden chocks banged into the back of the chimney that must have been there since the Bonnington ascent. People on the mainland had now started taking photos of the nutters on the stack. Edging out again, there was another wooden chock jammed in the lip so I put a sling around it. By now half out of the chimney and reaching over the lip for the crack, it was not a good time to find out that it was

too wide to jam. There were no decent holds on the face either and it was too late to go back. Much thrutching and squirming ensued.

The rest of the crack seemed pleasant by comparison and led to a small triangular niche belay. There was no way Ian was going to hear me with the wind, so frantic rope tugging followed. Eventually the ropes started to move: he'd had to fix prusiks on the spare rope to protect himself on the downclimb. After a while Ian's head popped over the roof below. Brilliant! We'd done the hard bit, 3 pitches to go. Nagging doubts about how we were going to get off this thing were starting to grow. Ian disappeared around the corner up the 3rd pitch. A while later, the ropes stopped moving, but well before the next belay. Then the expletives started. Who's he talking to? By leaning right out on the ledge I could just about see around the corner. There was Ian about 50ft higher, braced against the full oily onslaught of a fulmar. Great! The full-on sea stack experience. Oh, not great, he's climbing with my gear which is now covered in fulmar vomit! The next two pitches were slimey and smelly. On my lead I made the huge mistake of sticking a cam in my mouth, remembering the fulmar puke too late.

After the 2 slimey pitches, the final pitch was a soaring right-angled corner, with great jamming and bridging moves. Ian disappeared up it, bridging and jamming in fine style, and was soon tied in to a web of tat at the top of the Old Man. On the final

few feet you could see straight through the stack in two directions and the wind howled through the gaps. The summit is not as big as you might think, since the stack tapers towards the top. There's a little cairn and room to stand up and look around, even some grass. But no sheep. Also, more worrying, no abseil bolts, just loads of dodgy looking slings. On the way down we passed Graham and Ulli on the 3rd pitch. Somehow they'd managed to avoid the fulmar, or maybe it had run out of ammuni-



Ian nears the top

tion. The abseil down the 2nd pitch was pretty wild. Mostly in space and clipped into the fixed rope so that you could pull yourself back in to the big ledge on the arête. The whole thing had taken 7 hours. It was another 3 hours before Graham and Ulli got back up to the cliff top and yet another walk back in the dark. Then just enough time to get to the pub for lashings of ginger ale. Or maybe it was several pints of Red McGregor.

Reported by Tim Gledhill

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