



EXCLUSIVE!

Our War Correspondent catches up with the Basra Babe **See Page 3**

TMR – The Masochistic Route

Tour de Monte Rosa 2006

Report by Albert Sillwood

How to prepare for an 8 day walk around the Monte Rosa covering 75 miles (through Italy & Switzerland) with 8740m of ascent and descent.

Whilst Leigh Singleton, Bill Burt, Carolyn Dent & Dave Whitrow made their own preparations, in usual HMC style, I spent 3 half days walking in rain on a very wet May Bank Holiday in the Lakes, and a Saturday pottering up Snowdon South Ridge.



June 1, 2006 saw the group of 5, led by Leigh, leaving the hot sunny Margarita campsite at twee Gressoney St Jean, in Gary Bebb's car for the short drive to Stafal, where we were to join the circular route. Gary, Dave O'Gorman, Charles, Robin, Angela and Chris had already left the campsite for some serious mountain climbing.

Day 1 Stafal to Rif Ferraro (2066m)
This was a short day, which started hot at Stafal (1825m) ascending 850m to the Colle de Bettafore Pass (2670m) where it rained, and down through gentle overcast grassy tree lined fields to the Rif Ferraro at Ressay. The refuge was privately owned and being the only walkers there that night, we were able to spread out into two rooms. The food was excellent (too much) and the facilities very clean. A well recommended hut.

Day 2 Rif Ferraro to Rif Theodule
We started at 9.15am thinking this would be

enough time to walk up 1890m to the Rif Theodule. In the end I arrived last at 7pm, just in time for dinner. This was to be repeated more times over the trip. The day started sunny as we walked up a pleasant valley to Col Nord des Cimes Blanches (2982m). It rained a bit on the way and got cold towards the top. Bill was not feeling too well and struggled to make the Col, from where we descended to the cable car station above Cervinia at 2830m (and saw our first view of the Matterhorn). After a hot coffee, and Bill almost falling asleep at the table, Bill & Carolyn decide to take the cable car up to Testa Grigia & descend to the Rif Theodule on the glacier's soft afternoon snow. Carolyn's first time on a glacier - luckily no crevasses.

Meanwhile Leigh, Dave & myself decided to walk up the 490m to the Rif

(because it looked easy and there may be a cable car running halfway up). We were wrong on both accounts and made the Rif just in time for 7pm dinner (me arriving tired & last as usual). The food was good, the bedrooms warm, if a little cramped, and the toilets not too cold in the basement.



Day 3 Rif Theodule to Europa Hutte (2200m)

A much earlier start was needed to descend the Glacier to Zermatt. After roping up we started down the glacier, which was already starting to soften (so crampons not needed). Under sunny blue skies we walked down the winter ski tow to the Zermatt cable car station, stopping several times to take many pictures of the Matterhorn (Mt Cervinia to the Italians). An easy descent to Zermatt on two cable cars saw the group walking down the main road and finding a sunny terraced restaurant for early lunch.

Fully replenished with food, and water bottles topped up, another funicular took us up (underground) to Sunnegga (2288m) where it seemed a long, but flattish walk to the Europa Hutte. Bill was fully recovered by now, but Dave's leg started to play up a bit. We had good views of the Matterhorn, Zinalrothorn & Weisshorn for several miles, plus the views down into the valley 800m below, as we started to walk around the contour path. There were occasional fixed ropes/wires to ease our passage over the difficult bits. Across one avalanche field a series of concrete covered paths & tunnels had been constructed to protect walkers from sliding rocks. At 6pm, as we neared the Europa Hutte, the path was blocked & a sign pointed down. Bill investigated and found part of the path with wooded stone shelters had been avalanched away making the path a dangerous traverse on steep scree. So we descended, waded across a deep raging stream (torrent) 300m below and ascended to the Hutte. Again I arrived last & just in time for the 7pm meal. The beer on the table pre-ordered by Bill was most welcome. A good meal, but a very full hut due to its being on the Tour de Matterhorn (another long distance walk, but shorter & easier?).

Day 4 Europa Hutte to Grachen (1615m) via the Europaweg

Up early but we were almost the last to leave. As the early cloud turned to sun, we were able to see the views to the steep valley below. The walk along the contour path took us over a netting suspension bridge and past some roped sections. It gradually clouded over as we eventually found the steep path down to Grachen. Carolyn & Leigh pushed on ahead, Bill went down with Dave, whose leg was starting to play up (he thought it was splints). I brought up the rear as usual, eventually catching up with Bill & Dave at the bottom. We had just descended 600m in a very short distance. Finding Leigh & Carolyn at the first café, we pressed on to Grachen. & the Hotel Garni, arriving in rain at 6pm. A quick shower, some clothes washing and off to the local Swiss restaurant for a fine meal, a few beers and an early night.

Day 5 Grachen to Saas Fee (1772m) via the Hohenweg

Up early but it was still raining. After breakfast it was on with the wet gear and up the cable car, through mist & rain, to Hannigalp (2121m),

where we were supposed to walk along a spectacular path with excellent views down into the step valley below. Unfortunately there were clouds above us, and clouds in the valley just below so no views. We walked along the contour path in the gap between the clouds.

The rain eased & the waterproofs gradually came off. There were the occasional steep paths where the fixed cables came in useful, and there was even a tunnel under one stream. Eventually we started the gentle 400m descent through green fields & trees into Saas Fee. Dave's leg was playing up again, & after being sick, he was cajoled along by Leigh to the Hotel Elite. A shower, a beer and off to the Italian restaurant recommended by the lady in the hotel. The food was good but the service was not, the head waiter looking like some sort of spiv. Another early night.



Day 6 Saas Fee to Rif Oberto (2796m) on the Monte Moro Pass

A fine breakfast put us in a good mood for a sunny tree lined 3km walk to Saas Almagell, where the general consensus was that we take the poste-bus up to the dam at Mattmark (2200m), saving a road walk of 6km and an ascent of 500m. From Mattmark, it was along the side of the lake for 3kms (through two tunnels) and then the ascent to the Monte Moro Pass with the statue of the Madonna on the top.

The weather was fine & sunny and it was a pleasant ascent, reaching the statue early afternoon. A few photos and down to the restaurant at the top of the cable car for a coffee, food & a Grappa. The Rif Oberto was only 300m away so we booked in, bagged some beds in the adjoining sleeping hut, changed and back across to the main refuge for the evening meal, a few beers & some warmth by the fire. The weather was coming in and it rained during the night.

Day 7 Monte Moro Pass to Rif Pastore (1575m) via Colle del Turlo (2738)

The day started bright & sunny, with excellent views across to the Monte Rosa from the breakfast table. A few people remembered the mighty crash of thunder in the night, but the morning was fine. Taking an early cable car down found us in sunny Macugnaga on a festival day. Lots of St Bernard's on show, but ignoring the lure of the festivities we topped up the food rations & headed up a sunny

meadowed valley, and then the big pull up the old military road to Colle del Turlo.

This was the day I remember walking up 1500m, falling asleep halfway up, a brief sit down on the 12ft pass, and then descending 1163m to the Refuge. There was the compulsory descent through steep forest, and the feeling at the bottom of being absolutely knackered (like the end of a few earlier days). The first beer did not touch the sides. And the inevitable question – WHY? Rif Pastore was excellent, with good food, warm bunkrooms, and a marvellous view up to Monte Rosa (although no TV to watch Italy win the World Cup final).

Day 8 Rif Pastore to Stafal (1825m) via Col d'Olen (2881m)

Today my survival instinct kicked in and I decided to walk 4km down to Alagna Valsesia and get the cable car up to the Col d'Olen. Sitting on the rocks at the Col in the sun, it was possible to see Leigh, Dave, Bill and Carolyn on the last half of the ascent from Rif Calderini, up through a delightful valley to the Col, where we all met at the Rif Guglemina. After a few beers, some food and last views of Monte Rosa, it was time to take the cable car down to Stafal, where Gary was waiting to take us back to the campsite at Gressoney St Jean. We were a bit tired and glad to be down.

To sum up, it was an excellent but strenuous walk, and some parts worth repeating on a clear day.

I felt a bit uncomfortable holding everyone back at times, but then July 2005 saw me in Lister Hospital, Stevenage with my stomach stapled together after some bowel cancer was removed. So completing over 8000 metres of ascent in 7 days in July 2006 was my achievement.

Well done to Leigh for planning, organising and leading this well recommended 'walk'.

If you want more details of this trip, Leigh produced a day by day guide, with pictures of the huts, prices, number of places and details of the route (places, passes and metres of ascent / decent). Leigh's guide is available on the HMC website www.thehmc.co.uk



A Pyrenees Scrapbook

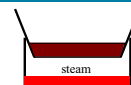


"Kevin has only himself to thank for a summit photo on Perdiguero (3222m). Barbara was sensibly very eager to descend before Kevin caught her up, as she was feeling the altitude effects of a 1650m ascent. Geoff's pessimistic weather-eye expected the mountain to be smothered in cloud and thunderstorms any moment. Kevin concentrated on the task in hand, to preserve a record of events - perhaps in case no-one would believe he'd made it to the top given the gruesome state of his heels."

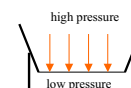
Geoff Sharpe

Adrian Jones' Cooking Tips (with welding)

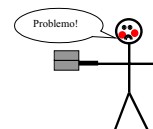
STEP 1: Heat, chocolate and bananas are applied resulting in a yummy sauce and lots of steam in the bottom pan.



STEP 2: Heat removed, chocolate eaten. The steam condenses and the pressure in the bottom pan drops. The pressure of the atmosphere wedges the close fitting pans together.



STEP 3: Attempt to explain that to the proprietors in Spanish.



Every expedition has its botanist and this trip was no exception. Jo Marsh enthused the group with info on the flora and fauna. The wild Iris and Marbled White butterfly was a familiar sight.

Top left: Adrian Sherriff thought he was going to a 'Netto' for shopping. He actually went to Aneto, the highest summit in the Pyrenees, but he did find a Tesco's on the way.

Top right: The group on the verandah of the chalet at Benasque campsite.

View from Mars(h)

Not only did I catch up with the Basra Babe in the desert but also managed to bump into her in Sydney! This is us on Darling Harbour. We met up after doing the famous bridge climb which was awesome.

The military precision which precedes the climb is re-assuring. First you sign a disclaimer, then you are breathalised, and then given your Startrek suit to change into. They have a mock-up of part of the bridge where you can practice moving with harness and special gizmo which, unlike a via ferrata, you do not have to un-attach and re-attach.

Anyway enough about me, I need more articles from you, the members, so that we can get Crux out more frequently. Go on you know you want to.

Bill



Film Critic's Corner

Croatia 2006: A Mobile Phone Video

Director: A Jones

Running Time approx 12 mins

Reviewed by Tim Gledhill



"Jan in area 'D'! Just above the car park-very convenient."

You are unlikely to come across this straight-to-DVD offering at your local multi-screen, but connoisseurs of eclectica will be well rewarded if they make the effort to seek out this little gem. The only known public showing, by amateur film buffs in the Hertfordshire Matinee Club, occurred in October at the Backside Room, an obscure venue in Southern England. However, the work has recently received a more general release on

YouTube1. Based around

the premise of a group of friends travelling abroad to achieve lifelong aims (rock climbing in this case) whilst drinking unfeasible quantities of pivo, this mini-oeuvre d'art breathes new life into a well-worn concept.

Apart from some grainy footage at the beginning, the cinematography is stunning, with a constantly inventive choice of camera angle and scene change, the whole thing being driven along at a frenetic pace by the authentic and raunchy Croatian soundtrack. The sweeping sunset panoramic shots from the summit of Anika Kuk highlight the beauty of Croatia, with views out over the islands to the sea beyond. There is so much rock here, and this is just one National Park. The cast visited a mountain crag region, high above Karlobad to the North, where several routes were filmed, although these shots ended up on the cutting room floor. The team is to be commended for shooting all sequences on-location in Paklenica National Park, rather than opting for the cheaper alternative of going to Portland.

Although the cast is little known at present, performances are superb throughout, to the extent that you can almost start to believe that some of these people can actually climb. The chief rock hard-man - brilliantly played by Joseppe Perrini, a sort of pint-sized Sylvester Stallone - launches off up a desperate F6c+ called Albatross on an obvious death mission, with worried-looking side-kick Neal in tow. Tension mounts when they fail to return to camp in the evening, having only been glimpsed once during the day high on the face of Anika Kuk. We are left on tenterhooks pondering their fate and wondering about morality within climbing circles, as fellow team members get bladdered on local wine, rather than organizing a rescue attempt.

Meanwhile, a splinter group head to the remote island of Pag, to climb the fabled White Tower, which, according to legend, is made of a particularly hard variety of local cheese. Despite a stunning ascent, they forgot to bring any crackers so had to celebrate with a dip in the sea. With so much lovely coastline on hand, a mix of climbing and water-sports makes for a nice combination on hot days.

All in all this is destined to become a genre-defining classic on a par with *Attack of the 40-foot Woman* and other B-movie greats, and heralds the emergence of a prodigious new directing talent. Rumour has it that Jones is already covertly amassing mobile phone footage for his next block buster...so watch out!

Rating: ★★★★★ Cult Classic!

Review by: Nick L. O' Dian

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S118JjBuvNg>

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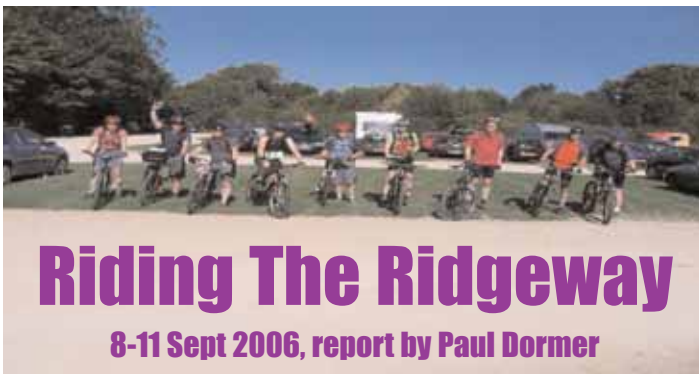
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Riding The Ridgeway

8-11 Sept 2006, report by Paul Dormer

Paul Dormer and Alex jointly organised a 100 mile ride off road bike ride following the Ridgeway from Avebury in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon on the edge of Herts.

Day 1

Despite having an EXTRA day off to pack his 85 litre day sack Alex still managed to faff enough to make the 8.00am rendezvous at my house one whole hour late. Belatedly, Alex, Paul Dolan, Alleyn and I drove to the start at Avebury to find a bunch of impatient MTB'ers eager to get started.

Under deep blue skies and ideal conditions, our group of 9 riders set off up the first climb onto the backbone of the Chilterns along which the Ridgeway runs. Within 3 miles Mark had our first puncture, but with a bit of teamwork the bike was ready to roll again in minutes. Off the puncture repair team went to catch up with the peloton. The first days riding was around 30 miles taking in some wonderful sights. We had lunch on Waylands Smithy (the oldest dwelling in Britain allegedly), and one of my personal favourite places in the south of England.



Whole group on the open trail

In the afternoon Pete's mates' gears stopped functioning, and rather than single speeding the rest of the trail Eddie came to the rescue and returned to Swindon to find a friendly bike shop and rejoined the group later.

By about 4pm we arrive at The Ridgeway YHA near Wantage where our ace back-up man Eddie was already waiting. After settling in, showering etc there is a major problem; contrary to the research the YHA is not licensed so a few of the team go to Wantage to stock up on beers for the evening. The 'Ridgeway YHA' is a marvellous YHA of converted barns with chickens roaming and superb views. Not all the beer went in the 'snug' lounge that night as some of the group were actually tired, despite only managing 8mph average on the day, light-weights! I thought you had to be able to walk/climb/cycle all day, and sink 10 pints to call yourself a real mountaineer.

Day 2

Another fine day and we were barely an hour from the Youth Hostel when Phil caught us up. Phil Whitehurst, who didn't have the Friday off work, had cycled the beginning section of the Ridgeway the previous evening under moonlit skies, and would now cycle with the rest of the group. He had planned to use his fold up shopping bike but at the last minute splashed out on a full suspension job in an attempt to try and keep up with the rest of us!



Half way

The second days riding was faster, at 40+ miles. Pints were being earned here! We reach the Black Prince Hotel and sank a few pints before showering and going out for a Ruby. We had taken over the entire hotel, and the next morning we set off after the obligatory full English.



Set-off from Black Prince, Princes Risborough.

Day 3

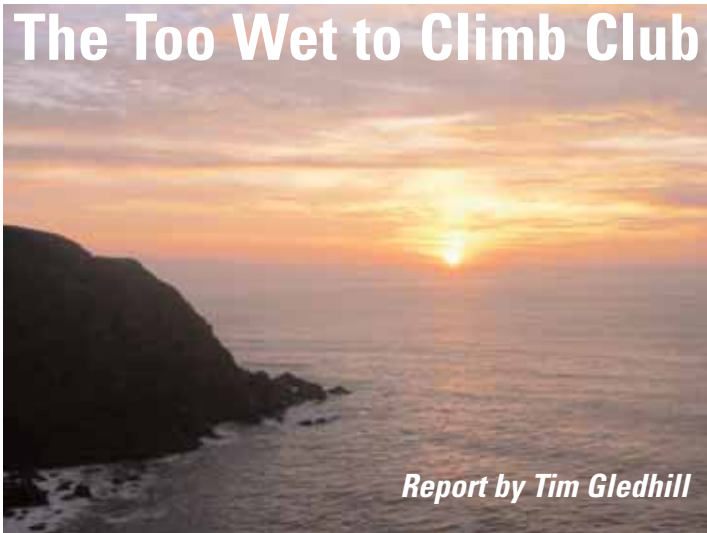
By 11.00 am we are in Wendover, and I have to get to the finish by 1.30 pm, until this point I had been providing the group with faultless navigation thanks to advanced navigation skills (had the route in my GPS). Apparently the group did make the end of the route, and messed around riding the 'drop off' at the top of the beacon for a while.

The Ridgeway Riders were: Alex Pender, Phil Whitehurst, Alleyn Bowen, Mark Cope, Paul Dormer, Melissa Beverly, Simon Jordan, Pete Ambrose, Pete's mate Paul, Paul Dolan, and last but not means least Eddie Cornell providing mechanical, back-up, water stops etc.

Next years mountain bike meet - South Downs Way.



The Too Wet to Climb Club



Report by Tim Gledhill

So what do you do when it's too wet to climb? Gear shopping can get too expensive and too many tea shops are not healthy (my body is a temple etc cough splutter). Sheep bothering is illegal and mountain biking is not cool enough. The solution: go SURFING! The concept is simple; if it's wet - surf; if it's dry - climb. Having some rock next to the sea is a distinct advantage but, luckily, we live on an island with lots of rocky coastline so no problemo.

In order to road test this cunning plan, Adrian and I chose a weekend with the required combination of a minging weather forecast and decent surf forecast, and headed down to Croyde in North Devon, surfing mecca of the UK and also home to Baggy Point, an excellent sandstone sea cliff. The plan was to meet up with a couple of mates from Sheffield, one of whom could actually surf, and had two boards to prove it. The trip started rather

ominously on the Saturday morning, when we were evicted from the campsite and told we were trespassing (on a campsite!). Down at the surf shop, things were more chilled. In fact it was freezing, windy and drizzling. Entertainment was provided by a huge bloke trying to get into a XXXXL wetsuit. At the beach we had our first lesson and learnt how to "pop-up" onto the board. This seemed fairly easy on the sand, but rather harder in the water. The sea was a mass of churning white foam, with the cloud down to about 50 feet. We were informed that conditions were "messy". We decided this was surfing speak for suicidal. In fact it was great fun J.

Back at the campsite (a different one) Graham and Chris had arrived. They scooted off down to the beach for twilight surfing, while me and Adrian headed for the Halloween parties in Croyde (Adrian had brought his spooky luminous skeleton gloves). Next morning was a little hazy after a night on Thatcher's Cloudy cider, but it wasn't raining. The fifth member of our party, Clara the Austrian, arrived with her kite surfing gear. She put her tent up while we ogled her rig. Today was dry, so we all went climbing. Baggy is a fantastic place, and we had an excellent day on Long Rock, a lovely fin of sandstone jutting into the sea. Routes climbed included Shangri La, Lost Horizon, Twinkle Toes and Pickpocket. At the end of the day we sat watching the sun sink into the sea, like a giant orange light bulb. More cider was drunk.

Next day was back to minging, so down to the beach again. We hired some boards (£5 for 4 hours - cheaper than gear fondling) and headed for the sea. It was a little less messy today, more like "untidy". We had been looking forward to seeing Clara jetting along with her kite, wiping out the locals, but unfortunately it turned out that kite surfing is banned on all Devon beaches but one, and this wasn't it.

So, the conclusion: It works, and if you don't believe me, try it! As it said on the back of some T-shirt or other, "No experience necessary".

Ten things I learnt after I jumped off a rock in France

❶ The rock doesn't have to be high to break an ankle. Particularly if the ground underneath is uneven and you're only wearing rock boots. And jumping off rocks is clearly more dangerous than climbing them.

❷ Breaking an ankle doesn't necessarily hurt, but "squish" when you put your weight on your foot isn't a pleasant feeling.

❸ French Sapeur-Pompiers are all tall, dark, handsome and impeccably charming to your face, while saying very insulting things about you in a regional dialect that they believe you don't understand (I didn't, but I got the gist of it). But this was well deserved given that I'd dragged them away from the France-Portugal World Cup match (France were winning 1-0 when they were called out to carry me off the hillside). Oh: and they can all leap around on almost vertical surfaces like it's a walk in the park.

❹ The French for 'broken ankle' is 'cheville cassée', for 'pain' is 'douleur', and for 'gallstones' is 'calculs' (don't ask about that last one). And the French health system is as good as it's reputed to be.

❺ Being operated on under epidural eliminates the pain, but still leaves the

disembodied sensations of being cut (imagine the old 'silk cut' adverts with the scissors going through cloth) and drilled into - carpentry with bones.

❻ If you board a P&O ferry with a leg sticking out of the car window in a cast, they will take care to locate you right by the lift.

❼ There are myriad different kinds of 'broken ankles'; some require surgery, others don't; all seem to require casts for 6 weeks, but some permit early weight bearing while others don't. Mine didn't.

❽ If you do internet searches for "broken ankle" you get platitudes back. If you do internet searches for "fractured medial malleolus" you get substantive information about surgery and post-operative care.

❾ Six weeks without weight bearing is long enough for every muscle from shoulder to toe to go awol, and coaxing them back into full functionality takes much longer than a further six weeks unless you're an international sports star with unlimited funds and daily physio. Muscles can behave like recalcitrant and uncooperative teenagers who won't get out of bed all day. Think Harry Enfield as Kevin the Teenager.

❿ Being overtaken by very old people with zimmer frames (as learning to walk again) is marginally less humiliating than being pushed around in a wheelchair that you can't control yourself.

Ann Blandford

Older, wiser, and expecting to set off airport security alarms for the rest of her life.



My first Munro



a half it started to get steep so we had to scramble. I found the scrambling part unnerving because all of it was dangerous. When we got near the top it clouded over so we could not see much. After three hours walking we reached the top of the mountain, also known as the summit. On the summit of the hill there was a pillar made out of concrete called a triangulation pillar which tells you where the top of the mountain is.

Coming down the mountain is always harder than coming up because you're more tired so you're more likely to fall over.

I found this a great experience and I'm sure everyone else was more proud of me than I was myself.

Reuben Sodhi, aged 9

On Monday 21st of August, me, my Mum and my Dad climbed a mountain called Blaven, the height of 3044 ft. Blaven is located on the Isle of Skye and is made of a volcanic rock called Gabbro. Gabbro is a rough rock like sand paper so it is good for climbing. At the start of the walk I felt excited about going up because I had never gone up anything like it. The water in the river half way up was clean enough to drink and was incredibly refreshing.

After I had been walking for about an hour and



HMC HEALTH WARNING

Tick Alert

Because of the recent new popular holiday destinations in central and eastern Europe there is a growing risk to travellers participating in outdoor activities of Tick Borne Encephalitis. Countries include Croatia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovakia (but also include Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden that have a more minor risk). There are 16 countries identified where infected ticks are endemic and can pose a high risk to un-immunised people or who aren't taking bite prevention measures. It can lead to meningitis and in really serious cases paralysis and death. 1 in 30 cases proves fatal. Infected ticks are typically found in rural and forest areas from late spring throughout summer.

For more info, including a map of areas etc www.masta.org/tickalert

For further information contact Julie Bowler.

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