



FYLDE MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2000

50th ANNIVERSARY BASH 13th MAY – NEWLANDS VILLAGE HALL

Buffet by the Swinside Hotel.

Entertainment – A ceilidh comprising an exciting local band, a storyteller and a folk comedian.

100 people maximum – first come, first served. Tickets available from

John Wiseman at £10 each. Tel 01253 826594.

If Stair Hut is full, there is Bunkhouse accommodation available at Cat Bells Barn. 12 places @ £3.50.

Book with Les Ward on 01772 684681. B&B also available at above – book direct with

Mrs Grave on 017687 78453.

Caravans and camping at Braithwaite and possibly Little Town?

Members who know of past members who may be interested, please contact them or ask them to contact Les Ward.

EDITORIAL

Mari Angeles Solera

As you can see I am still the Newsletter Editor. However, at this year's AGM, which was attended by roughly 50 members, there were a few changes in the Committee:

New Treasurer – Andy Hird

New Social Secretary – Henry Iddon

New Committee Member – Cherry Earle

No longer in the Committee: Mike Sissons and Gary Bird (Thanks for all your hard work!) Also thank you to John Wiseman who was the Treasurer for quite a few years and has now stepped down. However he will still be an active member of the Committee.

The rest of officers & members remain the same.

There were 3 motions proposed at the AGM, all of them approved:

- To celebrate the 50th Anniversary it was decided to get some members photos printed and framed to decorate the huts.

- To create a Club Website, which will be managed by the Committee.

- To subsidise an annual meal for the Committee Members in appreciation of their efforts throughout the year – £10 pp.

Thank you for your contributions to this Newsletter, especially those who made an effort to write about club meets. I will endeavour to produce the next one on the first week of July so I would appreciate it if you could send me your articles & any other items at least 10 days before (by 25th June). At the moment, people just send me their input at the last minute, just when the Newsletter is due out. I am sure this will sound familiar to all the previous Editors.

NOTICE BOARD

COACH MEET

When: Sunday 2nd April 2000
Where: The Howgill Fells



The coach meet will stop at Tebay then anywhere that you want along the A685 to Newbiggin on Lune. This will give the choice of North to South routes to Sedburgh.

Alternatively start from the A683 and try Wild Boar fell, Swarth fell and East Baugh Fell, to return to Sedburgh. Mick Tolley rates this walk in mist and rain! The coach will be at Sedburgh and when we leave we will go to a pub for a meal.

Cost: £7 per person, a bargain price! (less than the cost of the coach even if we fill it)

Booking: John Wiseman is the meet leader (826594). If you wish to go to the Howgills book as soon as you receive this Newsletter. The coach will be cancelled if we do not have enough interest in good time, we will not be phoning people up to remind them. Friends and even relatives are welcome. If you can not get through to John ring John Hickman or Les Ward to book.

Good weather has been requested!

JOHN WISEMAN

ADVANCE NOTICE
 Corris, May 6th - 7th visit an area with lots of interest for everyone.
 Chester hut, Llanberis, May 20th - 21st

CLIMBING WALLS IN LANCASHIRE

- (Blackburn) YMCA - Tel 01254 51009
1 bouldering room, various grades + overhang, 1 leading wall 9.9m high.
- (Blackpool) Stanley Park - Tel 01253 699900
1 six metre wall + bouldering cave.
- (Bolton) Horwich Leisure Centre - Tel 01204 667434
1 brick wall 5 m high.
- (Burnley) Barden High School - Tel 01282 831394
4 walls at 4.5m high.
- (Burnley) William Thompson Recreation Centre - Tel 01282 34301
1 concrete wall 6m high.
- (Chorley) Saint Michael's High School - Tel 01257 264740
1 prefab wall 6.5m high.
- (Lancaster) Lancaster University - Tel 01254 594000
1 concrete wall with 170 sq. m. surface.
- (Preston) West View Leisure Centre - Tel 01772 796788
3 walls from 5m to 10m high.
- (Ribbles Valley) Roefield Leisure Centre - Tel 01200 442188
3 walls from 5.5m to 9m high
- (Southport) YMCA - Tel 01704 538317
1 wall 12m high.
- (West Lancashire) Cliffs Barn - Tel 01704 822644
300 sq. m. of wall surface area, with warm up area.

.....
 : JOANNA GOORNEY :
 : is looking for people to :
 : do the Haute Route :
 : with her this summer. It :
 : involves a week's trek :
 : over high passes and :
 : glaciers from Chamonix :
 : to Zermatt. Anyone :
 : who's interested can call :
 : Joanna on 826080. :
 : :

ROCK BOOTS FOR SALE
 Boreal Jazz size 3.5
 Scarpa Edge size 4
 Good condition but outgrown.
 £20 ono per pair
 If interested call Kevin Stephens on 01942 606186

FULL MEMBERSHIP

Glenn Harrison
 35 Rosebery Avenue
 Blackpool

William R. Sharp
 9 Barclay Ave
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 FY4 4HH

Liz Hind
 7 Hacklands Ave
 Lea, Preston
 Tel. 01772 769337

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 7 The Avenue
 Ingot, Preston

Duncan Hogg
 17 Compton Green
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INTRO MEMBERSHIP

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 29 Blackpool Rd
 FY2 0HT
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 Tel. 886726

Elaine Scarles
 8 Bethal Ave
 Blackpool FY2 9NA
 Tel. 596804

Brian & Janet Wilkinson
 19 Larkholme Parade
 Fleetwood FY7 8LL
 Tel. 872594

CLUB MEETS

FMC FELL RACE

27th/28th Nov

Ten competitors trundled round the Cat Bells race route this year. Weather conditions were good and a very distracting rainbow provided an excuse for a rest for many runners. One competitor not even slightly distracted by the rainbow was Mike Penn who in an unprecedented display of athleticism completed the course in 48.09 to win the handicap race. Chris Thistlethwaite was fastest for the fourth year running, beating the record for the fourth time in succession. Age must be catching up with him as he was only able to beat his previous best time by four seconds. Martin Dale performed the remarkable feat of finishing in his handicap time to the second, a fell race first. The curry on Saturday night cooked by Andy and Christine was excellent as usual.

The race route

Starting from the hut go up the road to Skelgill farm then take the rising traverse track North East to join the main path up Cat Bells. The ridge is followed south to the summit of Cat Bells and on to Hause Gate. Descend West for a couple of hundred metres then North on a descending traverse track to join the wide path above the fields. This leads back to Skelgill farm where the road is followed back to the hut. The total distance is about 6k with a climb of around 345m.

Position		Time	Scratch position
1	Mike Penn	48.09	5
2	Kevan Ebbrell	50.40	7
3	Chris Thistlethwaite	32.31	1
4	Martin Dale	51.00	8
5	Vivienne Broughton	48.18	6
6	Steve Wrigley	41.37	2
7	Tom Thistlethwaite	44.41	4
8	Dave Earle	59.09	9
9	Mark Broughton	43.21	3
10	Clive Bell	75.55	10

CAVING MEET

15th/16th Jan

MEMORY LOSS, IS IT A PROBLEM ?

The caving meets are still popular and well attended, even after all these years, though the number of people actually going underground does vary. To boost interest I planned a classic trip with Paul Reid [this is to spread the blame]. Providence Pot through to Dow Cave, an out and out classic that both Paul and I had both done before. No ropes or ladders are required so a large and jolly party could be involved. The plan came together and a team of 12 set off on the estimated 4-hour trip! It being January the 2-mile walk in was in snow and a snowball fight was mandatory [Fenna was there]. The entrance is an excavated shaft and manhole cover in the bed of a stream with melt water running down it. My memory of the trip is of a short section of passage, which leads to Dowberghill Passage, into the water and follow it all the way going over one boulder choke, through a short dive and out of Dow Cave. Wrong within 10 feet I was on my back with water running in my ear! And after another few hundred feet we were at a dead end and struggling to find the way. A short calcite flow lead to 90 degree bend and squeeze into a parallel passage which then went through a tight horizontal and downward squeeze which I only just got through and would have probably no chance of getting back! Where did that come

from! The passageway continued still awkwardly for what seemed a long way until Dowberghill Passage was entered. This is an amazing long straight vertical rift passage about 60/70 feet high and very seldom more than 3 feet wide with chest deep water [chin deep for Allan Blackburn] Shortly another hold-up was found in the form of a very tight horizontal squeeze in water. I forced myself into this and got more and more stuck, even with Paul pulling and George pushing I was not moving and breathing was a problem! I gave up and George and Dennis pulled me out backwards and we found a higher route. Meanwhile another obstruction had been found which involved a tight vertical climb up a knotted rope, which had everyone fighting. Where did that come from! This was followed by a rope descent back to stream level. Paul and I had still not recognised anything. More water work led to a wide knee and back traverse over deep water [we know it was deep as Mick Van Gullic fell in it] This was again followed by another climb up to roof level and a very committing rope descent of 70 feet [muddy rope and no safety line]. This landed you in a pool and easy passage at last led to a duck under a calcite flow, I RECOGNISED THIS, and into Dow Cave. We had been underground for 8 hours. A mile and a half walk down the road led to the cars and 12 tired and dirty cavers went into the nearest pub and tried to explain to normal people why we do it!

As an exercise in increasing caving enthusiasm I am not sure it worked but we will see in March on the next caving meet.

MIKE TOLLEY

CHESTER SWAP, LLANBERIS

29th/30th Jan

It appears that this club is becoming too soft for its own five season expedition Rab sleeping bag. One bad weather forecast and they're all running to the DIY shop. Well, two of us just couldn't come up with a good enough excuse so we went down Friday night to sample the delights of wind and rain swept North Wales. Perhaps we should have used the "neither of us can light a fire" excuse as it was looking dodgy at one stage. However, no fear, Melissa is from the bush so eventually we had a nice little roaring one on the go. During Friday night it felt like the hut roof was going to be blown off, however when we got up it wasn't raining so we had to go out. Climbing a hill was out as it was still very windy, so a low level walk was decided upon. From Beddlegert, down the Aberglasyn, which was impressive, then back round up Cwm Bychan and over to Lynn Dinas, then back to the car. It only started raining at 4 pm. Time to check out the Gelert shop for some bargains for Phil Lee.

More exercise was called for so we headed indoors to the Beacon climbing wall for a few hours. An excellent indoor wall with lots to offer at the easier end of the grades, not to mention some excellent bouldering. Pub time, so a return time was paid to the Newborough Arms at Bontnewydd for some Dragon Bitter, before adjourning to the Heights for Bishops Finger. A good day, all you stay at homers.

Sunday was worse. It was wet and windy. By 2 o'clock it had stopped and the sun was out. Over at Castle Inn Quarry some hardy souls were attempting to climb but they were having more trouble holding on in the extremely strong wind than climbing. It didn't look like much fun so we decided to check out some bouldering on the Little Orme. Angel Bay is tucked away at the end of Rhos on Sea and just before the Orme. It consists of a jumble of huge boulders containing some routes and an awesome overhanging wave of pocketed limestone 15 feet high straight off the beach. It was a little greasy but the real problem was the incoming tide as Melissa found to her surprise whilst spotting me on a Bridestone like arete. There are some superb sit down starts which depend on pebble movement. For those tickers and grade freaks out there, I managed an unnamed V3 5c/6a, Hong Kong Phuey V4 6a, another superb V4 6a with a sitting start and also Keel Left Hand V6 6b, where there may be some dispute regarding pebble height as I could only just get my legs under the roof! We then went up onto the top of the Little Orme in search of some more of that man Pantons secret bouldering locations. The wind was so strong we could hardly stand up. Several sheep shit filled caves later and the weather was getting worse so we retreated down the slippery slope back to the car.

The usual top quality Sam Smiths and Chinky Chow in Frodsham saw the end of a very enjoyable weekend. Hope the decorating went well!

MARTIN DALE & MELISSA BOCK

INTRO MEMBERS MEET

5th / 6th Feb

No intros to speak of on Friday night, just Andy Dunhill, Christine and the Wiseman's. Saturday was very very windy. The Dunhill's and Wiseman's set off on long low level walk towards Coniston and beyond. Melissa wanted to go up a hill – Hellvelyn to be exact. I tried to talk her out of it but you know those Aussies! To cut a long story short we were lashed by wind and rain, were on all fours at the hole in the wall and therefore retreated at Red Tarn down into Glenridding and had time for some shopping in Ambleside before the usual beer in the Rule.

The only two intros turned up on Saturday night. Dave Hick and Elaine Scarles impressed us in the pub but they were unlikely to impress us on the hill as Sunday was pretty awful. They headed off to Kendal climbing wall. They were however very impressed with our snoring abilities. Everyone went out in the rain including the mountain bikers who all had raging hangovers. Nice to see Dave Ball back on two wheels though. It eventually stopped raining so Melissa and me walked to Coniston over Tilberthwaite. A beer in the Brit ended a strange kind of weekend. Dave and Elaine did manage a couple of routes in Trowbarrow in the dry!

MARTIN DALE

MOUNTAIN BIKING – STAIR

12th/13th Feb

Whoopee: a mountain biking meet. A chance to frighten all those rambles again!

At last a meet where the meet leader actually turned up! A small team assembled their bikes on Sat outside the hut. The weather was very windy but clear so a low level trip was called for. The team set off from Castle Inn at the north end of Bassenthwaite Lake, the only lake in the Lake District, I was reliably informed.

The Tolley's set off at a blistering pace, but not having a clue as to where they were going promptly took the wrong bridleway and got lost. The meet leader was immediately blamed for the incompetence of losing two of his party. It was nothing to do with me, they should not have set off on their own in such inhospitable surroundings with no map or compass! It was their own silly fault. Anyway they missed out on a wonderful lane full of slurry, then excellent mud, fallen trees and yelping dogs. Good n' wet. We did wait around for the lost Tolley's but they didn't show despite Duncan and myself backtracking in two directions looking for them. Maybe they'd sank and drowned in the mire.

The team of Duncan Hogg, Paul Reid, Melissa Bock, Andy Dunhill and Christine Barbier carried on. Down into the valley then up the other side climbing up an excellent track through woods to the top of Watch Hill overlooking Cockermouth. The climb was halted just short of the top when Melissa's chain broke. This was fixed in rapid time by Paul. We all pushed from then on, obviously glad of the rest. At the edge of the wood, sat happily on a wall, were the missing Tolley's. The team was reunited. The wind was so strong that we had to peddle all the way down Watch Hill which was a shame. The ground was also so sodden that instead of the usual grass, there was thick clay type mud – nice. We all needed a rest so the Bitter End brew pub was visited in Cockermouth. Just in time as it started to hail. On the return leg, the team split. The Dunhill's returning by the wood whilst the rest of us followed Tolley along the Allerdale Ramble, which was definitely only for rambles. We resorted to the road in the end as the conditions deteriorated. Tolley then found the worst Bridleway in the world ever, so I decided that he would have to suffer the mire/slurry lane as a punishment. It was even better than before! Serves them right for going off on their own.

The team was swelled on Sunday by the arrival of the mighty Tom Knowles (why he's mighty will be revealed later), Martin Bennett, Nick from Southport and Claire from Kendal. The weather was better so it was decided to go round Skiddaw via Threlkeld as a number of us had not done it before. The Tolley's and the Dunhill's decided to go off to do the Mineral Trail from Whitehaven to Ennerdale along an old railway line, presumably so they could not get lost. We set off from Keswick climbing wall along the disused railway line to Threlkeld. We then climbed up past Blencathra Centre and up the valley towards Skiddaw House. It was whilst crossing Glenderterra Beck that the mighty Tom Knowles managed to bust his seat post. Apparently this was the second one he had done. He arrived with the offending post stuck up his ass requesting an extraction.

Tom was able to continue but was finding it hard going with a reduced saddle height, so he called it a day just before Skiddaw House and returned to Keswick. Then Duncan had a puncture on the downhill from the house. The rest of the ride went without a hitch, except for a tumble by Melissa with no inju-

ries. I was goosed and struggled back to Keswick.

All enjoyed themselves and also the Tolley's and Dunhill's returned having had a good day. An excellent well attended meet, complete with meet leader.

MARTIN DALE

LAGANGARTH

19th/20th Feb

This annual meet produced another (possibly the best) visit ever made to Glencoe, mainly due to the weather and conditions. Eighteen people attended, including three non members.

Saturday was a truly magnificent day, blue skies, warm temperature and views of snow covered mountains in every direction (who needs the alps?) Climbs were done in Stob Coire Nan Lochan, Aonnach Eagach traverse and on Buachaille Etive Mor. The walkers had an equally superb day in the Mamores. Sunday whilst not as good saw climbers on Ben Nevis doing routes up to Grade V and on Stob Coire Nan Lochan. The walkers went to Bridge of Orchy and climbed Bein Dorain.

The big event of the weekend was a superb effort by Steve Wrigley and Phil Lee. They set off with Andy Dunhill at 7am and climbed Scabbard Chimney a grade V, 6 a very thin ice route in Stob Coire Nan Lochan. After descending, Steve and Phil had a drink and a meal in the Kingshouse and decided to do the Aonach Eagach ridge by moonlight (a full moon). They arrived back at the hut as we were leaving at approx. 8 am., over 24 hours on the go.

All being well the same weekend will be on for next year. Book early.

LES WARD

THE C.I.C. HUT MEET

21st/25th Feb

The C.I.C. hut is situated close under the north face of Ben Nevis and it and the surrounding climbing are of international repute. People come from all over the world to climb here, so why when the club books 6 places can we not fill them. After all these years I finally can take half terms so that is why we booked this period. Traditionally this meet follows on from the Glen Coe meet giving 5 days of hut accommodation. Two weeks before the meet I had two booked in so filled it up with non-club members.

The weather forecast was good so Martin Bennett decided to come for the weekend 15 mins before we set off. Deep powder snow and not much sign of ice meant the Anach Eagach ridge seemed a good choice. Six of us set off and after a long flog uphill the ridge was reached. In these conditions it was like the Alps deep powder, blue skies and no wind perfect. Martin and I set off and left the others stuck behind the first awkward step. We scrambled along soaking up the views and the day until a steep descent lead to the Clachaigh Pub. We arrived about 3 p.m. and chilled out over juice and beer until the others arrived about two hours later.

Sunday found us staggering up the Ben with big sacs full of 3 days food sleeping bags etc. Martin Bennett and Andy Hird came up for the day and lead the way. At the hut about two and half-hours later the gear was dumped and we set off for a route. Martin and Andy went off to do Italian Climb Left Hand, a two pitch grade 4 ice climb which you can rope back down off. Nick Hepburn [a friend from work] and Pete [friend of Andy Hird] did the same whilst Kevin Stevens and I set off for Vanishing Gully a classic grade 5. Kev was just back from climbing icefalls in Italy so I lead the first pitch and let Kev have the steep ice. It spat him out after about ten feet but he got up it on his second attempt. Another shorter pitch lead to easier ground and a couple of abseils down a gully to the left. Another good day with everyone enjoying themselves. That night it snowed and the conditions were dodgy so the next day we chose North Trident Gully, we think, a lot of ploughing followed by a nice grade 3 pitch. Nick and Pete queued for two hours to do "The Curtain" a classic three-pitch grade 4, which seemed to have people on it every time you looked.

Again in the night it snowed and the wind got up so the next day we chose the SouthWest Ridge of Douglas Boulder which would be sheltered and had no danger of avalanche. All 4 of us decided on this with Dave and Paul [more mates of Andy] did a route alongside. The route was a mixed climb with anything up to 18 inches of fresh snow covering all the holds. This style of climbing is quite difficult as all the holds need to be uncovered and it's easy to miss some. The outcome was in doubt until the last move. A short abseil and easy descent lead back to the hut, another good day.

Now when I said the place is international I was not joking. Whilst there we heard French, German, Ital-

ian, Dutch and we think Korean. The two Koreans took two days to carry their tent and kit in. Their sacs were bigger than them. Two Geordies who were staying in the hut took pity and made them a brew as they arrived which they wished they had not done later. At about 3am in the morning one of these Koreans knocked on the window, a Geordie got up and the following conversation was heard :

Korean— " Toilet"

Geordie "Anywhere" There is no toilet at the hut and you go wherever you can.

Korean " Toilet"

Geordie "Anywhere"

Korean "Water"

Geordie "Over there" Pointing towards the hosepipe sticking out of a snow drift, again there is no running water in the hut.

Korean "Water"

Geordie "Over there"

Korean "No I have shit myself"

Geordie "O f—"

The poor lad was allowed into the porch area to attempt to clean himself up whilst the geordie grumbled about the things that happen in the middle of the night!

The next day there was a thaw and as I was well tired I talked the people into an early walk down.

What a fantastic place and what a superb chance to stay at this hut. Les is running the meet next year and I have already booked my place, come on, take advantage.

MIKE TOLLEY

MEMBERS ARTICLES

VANISHING

by Kevin Stephens

The last time I had done any proper ice climbing was in 1987, Dove Crag Gully in the Lakes. A picture on my wall taken by Mick Tolley records the moment, on a tight rope clutching an old terodactyl and curver sunk into a mass of thick ice. We had started the day on Force Crag Icefall, again in perfect conditions.

We had proper winters in the lakes in them days, before the green house effect and global warming. A lot of melt water has passed under the bridge since then, including a smashed leg and sale of my ice gear.

But over the years my interest was occasionally rekindled when hearing of daring escapades by the ice nobs, in Scotland and further afield where ice could still, on occasions, be found. I decided to go for some before it vanished for good. The gleaming predators winked at me once to often in the shop and I was committed. An old mate Colin had been climbing in an idyllic sounding ice garden called the Cogne Valley in Italy the previous year and asked me along for a return visit.

The Easyjet plane from Liverpool spewed more carbon dioxide into the upper atmosphere boosting the green house affect as we sped to Geneva. Our Fiesta hire car was upgraded to a Merc A class FOC and we set off for Cogne via the St Bernard Tunnel.

Cogne is near Aosta and a popular base from which to do the 4000m+ Grand Paradiso. Most of the climbing is located in a couple of tributaries from the head of the main valley. Our hotel located in one of these had a bar and drying room, and was less than an hour's walk to acres of steep thick ice.

The weather on the first day set the pattern for the week, blue sky and -15 C with impressive views of the surrounding mountains and glaciers. We started of on Cascade de Lillez, a series of steep and not so steep icefalls following a stream up a narrow gorge. The first pitch is the steepest and starts five minutes from the road. This was the only time we had to queue all week and while we were waiting some Italians admired my new axes "but your boots are a disaster". Well they were for Phil Morris when he broke his leg in them 25 years ago.

Colin led up the first pitch, around 20 m of steep ice, Scottish IV, before the angle eased. I fumbled with my leashes and prepared to follow, momentarily holding a carabiner in my mouth... It stuck like shit to a blanket, and removed a sizeable bunch of taste butts when I managed to tear it free. My ton-

gue bled profusely for the rest of the day.

Clear away 2 inches of brittle surface ice get to the good stuff underneath, solid swing to get a placement good enough to belay on, test and move up. My arms soon got tired and the old boots and crampons seemed more secure than the new axes, but after a bit I got used to their swing and joined Colin at the stance, pausing occasionally to twirl out the new Black Diamond express ice screws. A short walk brought us to the next 50 m ice pitch, a little less steep than the first. A couple more pitches then led to a long ice coated slab, like the Curtain but 100 m long, and by now in the sunshine. Melt water trickled between the ice and one of the screws even bottomed out (for the only time during the week). We finished at the top of the gorge and ambled back down a tourist path in our tee shirts as the glaciers on the Grand Paridso across the valley glowed pink in the afternoon sun.

Next day dawned bright and cold and we headed off for La Thule, an impressive 50 m vertical fall of thick blue / green ice, with further pitches above and enticingly visible from the hotel. Colin led up a ramp forming a semi-weakness through the first pitch to finish up a steep bulge before reaching reach easier angled ground above, running out the 60 m ropes to reach the belay. The next pitch started nicely before finishing in a curtain of icicles in front of a cave. The sun reached the icicles before Colin and they soon started to look less attractive as melt water ran down the pitch. I didn't help when a Scottish climber turned up with his arm in a sling and black eye to retrieve the ice screw he had fallen off on the previous day. The Scottish lad's mates turned up and arrived at the belay as we prepared to ab off, pronouncing the first pitch as "only Scottish V, but nice". They waited until the sun went off the top pitch, it quickly re-froze before they climbed it, another lesson learned. They joined us for a few beers after and explained that they had driven down from Dundee for a six-week trip.

Next day had a Scottish flavour as we walked up to a narrow gully, guarded by yet another impressive icefall. As usual Colin led off up the first pitch. I got the second (Scottish IV) pitch, feeling more confident now, leaning back on a well placed axe, right hand disengaged from the hammer, also well planted to twirl in those wonderful screws. A few easier pitches and a snow runnel led to a chock-stone guarded by a steep rock and ice groove funnelling melt water from the sun bathed plateau above. After this the angle eased as the gully opened onto the snow slopes above. Five 60 m Abs off new bolts got us back down in time to enjoy a few beers before dinner.

The trip was starting to pass too quick and our last day found us beneath three more pitches of thick blue ice, the top one comprising a beautiful 15m free hanging icicle. We had started late, what with the hotel's credit card reader packing up, then the car suffering a puncture. Colin led the first pitch, but lost a glove as he followed my pitch so I would have to lead the icicle. This was it! my pillar of destiny stood before me, I new I could get up it, maybe even without falling off. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately) our earlier delays meant that we had ran out of time if we were to get to Geneva in time to catch the flight so we abbed off instead.

A few weeks later I was on Ben Nevis, the first time in winter for 20 years, this time with Mick Tolley. I led my first Grade V, appropriately enough Vanishing Gully. The way things are going it may not be there next winter, but that hanging icicle pitch in Italy will have reformed. Anyone fancy coming along? The Cogne Valley is a bonza spot, popular for cross-country skiing and walking as well as ice climbing. The trip cost us around 300 quid each including flight, car hire, petrol, tolls, food, beer etc. This included 27 quid a night bed breakfast and evening meal in the hotel. The Scottish lads had some good apartments at 14 quid per night B&B and self-catering facilities for evening meal. It would also be cheaper for more than 2 sharing a car. All in all it should be possible to get a full weeks climbing for less than 300 quid, which may be work out cheaper per route than a few weekends climbing in Scotland. It was certainly a good introduction to ice climbing for me. The Valley comes into condition from mid December and an early trip would be good training for Megga Route X. Yes I know, dream on....

PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE

SEE-VIEW : domestic, urban, rural

New Photographic Work by Henry Iddon

Using the strange alchemy that momentarily turns the common place into the ravishing, the images reflect on the similarities between all domestic, urban and rural environments.

Grundy Art Gallery, Queen Street, Blackpool.

(01253) 478170

17th April - 27th May 2000

Free

THE SECRET

by Kevin Stephens

The usual Tuesday evening conversation at the climbing wall: "Did you get up to much over the weekend?" "Couple of new routes in North Wales", "where was that", "sorry but I can't tell you." Over the next few weeks sketchy details of this *Crag X* began to emerge from the Tuesday evening banter, "...loads of brilliant routes..... fantastic climbing..... ace positions..... Garry Gibson will be really pissed off when he realises he missed out on this....." A picture was starting to form in my mind's eye of something resembling Denham Quarry, but maybe not as good.

Eventually I was sworn to secrecy by Sid Sidiqui and Colin Struthers and driven to this new epicenter of North Wales sport climbing. I realised where I was as soon as the blindfolds came off. It wasn't Cloggy but it looked a lot more promising than Denham. Anyone who had traveled from the North of England to climb in North Wales would have passed within 10m of the crag. Simon Panton's North Wales Bouldering Guide includes some nearby problems and refers to *the big overhanging loose crag*. In fact the rock is very solid, with the black Damoclian fangs more often facilitating upward progress through the overhanging terrain by underclings, sidepulls and rockovers, than threatening to skewer the cyclists using the track at the bottom of the crag to bypass the A55 road tunnel.

The crag, or *The Gallery* as it is now called is in fact the quarried face that was dug away as part of the construction of the original coast road. A road tunnel (first tunnel to the West of the Conway tunnel) has bypassed the old road, which now forms the cycle path. It overlooks a great beach, accessible by scrambling down from either end of the cycle track. Convenient parking at lay-byes to the East and West of the crag allows easy access by a 5-minute walk. Don't be tempted to park beneath the crag, or do anything likely to obstruct cyclists, as this is likely to result in a climbing ban. The Police use the cycle track as a convenient hiding spot for speed traps, but seem quite happy for climbing to take place.

My introduction to the crag was the 30 m central groove line bisecting the two bulging walls either side. Some nice technical groove climbing led to an alarming looking roof, which is breached by an exciting chimney - groove leading to the lower off. An excellent route at around E1. Next we climbed a couple of overhanging groove lines, at around E2 to the left of the central line, also very good climbing. It took a while to get used to the rock, it looks like shiny polished black limestone, but has friction like gritstone. The apparently loose blocks and spikes are secure enough to adequately support you whilst swinging up to the next teflon-looking, shit-to-a-blanket-sticking, slabby foothold. And of course, this being a sports crag, particularly one developed by Sid and Colin, ample bolt protection is provided.

Every secret has its price, I had had my fun, now it was time to go to work,. This involved a long scramble up the mountain to some bolts on an isolated buttress, abbing down through vertical jungle to place more bolts and lower off chains at the top of as yet undeveloped parts of the crag, then hauling up ropes to the new lower-offs so that Sid and Colin could begin working on their next projects.

An interesting looking corner at the left hand end of the crag terminating in a blank square cut roof had been ignored so far. A long diagonal abseil brought me to some blank rock above the roof and near the top of the crag. I struggled to prevent a pendulum on the ab rope as the Bocsh pounded the rock into submission creating a hole to take an expansion bolt. I put in some more bolts as I lowered to the ground, trying to link the rock features into a route, it started to rain and we went home.

Next week I was back on some of the other existing routes. The hanging arete and wild overhang to the right of the central groove proved to be stunning, not up to the standard of *The Axe* on Cloggy, but still a 3 star E3, French 6C.

I maneuvered a top rope into my corner beneath the capping roof, and found that wild painful bridge allowed a wrong way sloping hold on the arete to be reached, time to put the rest of the bolts in and go for it.

On the lead the position felt far more exposed, even with a bolt at waist level. By the time I had stretched the fingers of one hand out to the wrong way sloping hold, the only option left was a wild swing, cutting loose with the rest of the body. Things got better and the hold sloped the right way, small footholds allowed progress past the remaining bolts to the belay. *On a Swing and a Prayer* is French 6b+, around English E3 6A.

All of the routes are described in the topo guide which is in the climbing shops. This gives 20 or more bolt-protected routes from E1 to E5/6, French 7b.

I may see you there, but I must make an effort to get back to proper climbing this year.

The Orkneys are a group of low windswept islands off the NE of Scotland, wild in nature and weather and separated by fierce tide rips. The only high ground is on Hoy (norse for high) where St John's Head plummets vertically into the sea for nearly 1200' and the nearby man of Hoy is half that height. Before a visit, the Caithness cliffs at, and south of Duncansby Head should be enjoyed together with nearby Dunnet Head. Both areas provide superb walking, spectacular scenery and plentiful bird life. The area either side of Wick provides knarled cliff scenery and spectacularly situated ruined castles to suit most tastes.

For a quick overall view and edited highlights of the Orkney's, the best option is to cross the Pentland Firth from John O'Groats to Burwick by foot ferry and take one of the many minibus tours on offer. John de Groot first started ferrying people across some 800 years ago. It must have been a terrifying experience then, in the normal conditions of high winds and higher seas, scouring and fretting round the bleak headlands, crashing down the overfalls, searing through the strait.

For a longer trip cars can be taken from Scrabster, near Thurso. Do not forget to fill up with fuel before you sail. A 5 day trip is reasonably priced, but with global warming in full swing wrecking the already fragile climate, it may be worth taking the more expensive open ended ticket to allow extra time.

The main event on Orkney Mainland (name of the largest island) is to walk the west coast from Birsay to Stromness. This can be done in a day but three or four days would give additional time to get the best out of it.

Birsay, at the top, gives interesting Pictish remains and views, including Marwick Head, the highlight of the island. Plunging hundreds of vertical feet into the sea, Marwick Head provides spectacular scenery and even more spectacular nesting sites for thousands of birds. It is not to be missed. To the south the coastline is lower but no less rugged. The ancient settlement of Skova Brae is well worth an afternoon for those with a sense of history.

Working still further south Yesnaby is reached together with its spectacular sea stacks and the end of a tarmac road. It is possible to follow the coast south all the way to Stromness with Hoy looming even larger across the sound. Stromness itself is a delightful town and harbour with excellent views all around.

Inland, the stone circle of the Ring of Brognar looms menacingly above lakes and moors, speaking an incomprehensible language from the past. It should not be missed, neither should nearby Maes Howe, except by the historically deaf. The site at Allter Ness on the NE coast is also worth a visit for its history and scenery.

Stromness has a Youth Hostel, as has Kirkwall, the delightful capital. The cathedral and nearby Palaces are worth seeing before heading SE to Mull head and the Brough of Deerness for some superb seacliff walking. En route the lovely bays give delightful vistas and it is well worth parking up for a while and pottering along the shore line.

South of Kirkwall the road takes you to St Morys before crossing by cause way to Burray. The white building on the left, reflected in the loch, is a converted Nissen hut known as the Station Chapel. Built by prisoners of war, it is now cared for by the local people. The ceiling is stunning.

On South Ronaldsay the best coastline is round Hoxa, Widewall and Sandwick, finally reaching Barth Head and the foot ferry to John O'Groats. Hoy can be reached by foot ferry from Stromness, for a one day hit of the Old Man, or more leisurely via the car ferry from Houton to Lyness at the south end of the island. From here the road can be followed to the island of South Walls and provides a delightful tangle of bays and headlands around which to browse.

The main event is however in the North. A road can be followed to Rackwick Bay and its bothy which according to register of guests is inhabited only by cold and wet people, some of whom are, nevertheless, inspired by the scenery and the situation. The walk along the cliff top to the Old Man of Hoy, about 1 ½ hours each way, is glorious and well worth extending to take in St John's Head as well. The scenery is stunning and it is much better to make a day of it. You will need a large stick to fend off the great skuas (giant gulls) or a crash helmet. The coast south of Rackwick is also well worth exploring. There is a pub at Linksness, on the east coast, 3 miles away.

The Orkneys are wild, windswept and savagely cold, but hold spectacular coastal scenery and unique historical remains. The people, by contrast, are delightfully warm and friendly. Prices, with the exception of fuel, seemed surprisingly reasonable considering the location on the edge of the world.