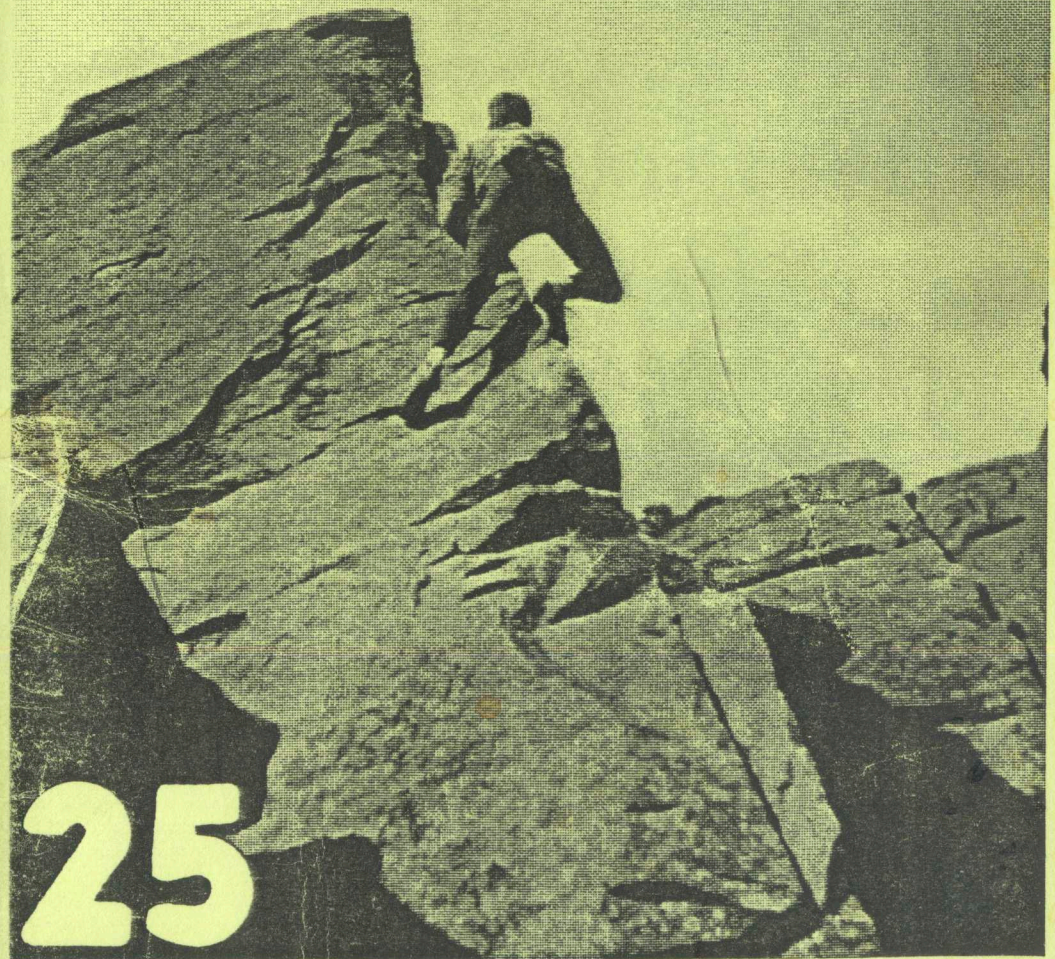


X-ABA



25



NEWSLETTER

OF THE

X -ABA

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

AUTUMN 1990



BOULDERING AT CRAIG Y LONGRIDGE

PHOTOGRAPH: HARDING COLLECTION
CLIMBER: MARK HARDING

Welcome to the special souvenir issue of the Newsletter celebrating our 25th anniversary. As well as the usual news items and articles from the more literate members there is also a short piece from Bill about the origins of the X-ABA Club way back in 1965 which makes interesting reading.

Before we go any further I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bill for the creation and running of X-ABA on behalf of us all. For me and many others Bill and X-ABA are one in the same. They say that a club can only be the sum of it's members but those members have invariably adopted the principles which X-ABA embodies; freedom from rules and committees, of adventure spirit and of self determination. This was Bill's vision and it has proved a winner.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH **BROWNS ELIMINATE DIRECT** CLIMBER: MARK HARDING

X - ABA - THE EARLY DAYS

It was a superb bright autumn morning. The primus had behaved itself and breakfast was sizzling nicely. Geoff and I pondered what to do, something in the Pass, down to Tremadoc or more of a mountaineering day in Ogwen. It was sunny and since it never rains at Tremadoc we could save that for a rainy day. The Pass somehow did not tickle our fancy so it was going to be the east face of Tryfan or the Idwal Slabs. However the bacon was burning and it needed thoughtful attention. Such a lovely morning had stimulated an early start - it must have been at least 9.30 am. We were camped at Garth and a few moments later whilst munching the egg, bacon and fried bread we heard the farmer talking nearby. First thing to consider was if we had or were going to pay the campsite fees of 2/- - that would mean one less pint tonight. However Mr. Jones was not interested in us, but talked to another chap on the other side of the wall.

The conversation suddenly became interesting and our ears greatly enlarged and flapped. Mr. Jones was offering a barn for rent at £60 per year. For years at Aber we had talked about a Hut. We had formed subcommittees, searched Snowdonia and even on one occasion reached agreement with the National Trust to build a Hut for U.C.W. It had become a grandiose scheme to be sited at the end of Llyn Ogwen near the M.A.M. Hut. It would sleep 80 with grand cooking facilities, a lounge with open fire, showers and all mod cons. The first concepts of a small Hut for U.C.W.M.C. had grown like Topsy into a field centre for Geography, Geology, Botany and Zoology departments. Prof. Bowing, a legend in his time at Aber, had been very enthusiastic about the project. The College surveyors and architects approved the design and costed it at around £20,000 and the Quinquennium for minor projects was due that year. Prof. thought we had a good chance - however our rivals, the Sailing Club had designs on a boat house in the harbour. The outcome of the meeting is history.

Back in reality the thought of renting a Hut for just £60 set bells ringing. Geoff and I felt a meeting of minds - just 12 people paying £5 a week would set us up in a Hut. Fingers and thumbs naturally counted 10 people and surely we could co-erse another two or so. First thoughts also said it would be a basic climbing hut - nothing posh and free from encumbrances of committees and lists of rules and regulations.

So in our very best diplomatic manner we finished breakfast, put away thoughts of climbing and bided our time to ask Mr. Jones if we had paid our camping fees.



BILL DEAN AT THE ROYAL GOAT HOTEL, BEDDGELERT 1982.

We were soon to learn that we were unlucky, he had just rented his last barn. However, he thought that his friend Gwilym at Cae Gewgi might have something and welcome a few oncers. Gwilym and Elma were young farmers with two small children. Yes he had a barn and £60 would do the trick. We had a look around. Outwardly it was as now except the entrance was by a door where the lounge window is. Inside there was a rough partition and a few dilapidated cow stalls on a slightly raised floor. The rest was a dirt floor covered in shit of all descriptions, knee deep in places. This was to be home. Just this and not including the lean-to outside which he still needed for his sheep. We decided it had potential. A hand shake struck the deal and that act has remained our security of tenure ever since.

Over a few pints in the Bryn Tyrch that night many plans were made but the first problem was to raise the money. We soon had eleven fivers but one more was essential. At the time Geoff and I were teaching in Liverpool. When I had arrived there without anywhere to stay a friendly teacher suggested that I should share his flat. He was a kind soul. The flat had two rooms and a tiny kitchen - so three of were no problem and the rent was only 16/- 4d each (82p). Geoff had arrived in Liverpool some months later - he needed somewhere to kip so our benevolent friend agreed as he had to others. We were now 6 and rent was 8/-4d each. We had strange looks from the landlady especially when Geoff was seen carrying his bed upstairs. It was a might bit cramped but everyone was happy. However, back to our search for money and the missing fiver. What better than to invite our benevolent friend especially as he was from Aberystwyth. Town and Gown were now united. So, the secret is out and you all know who joined us. Hello Brian - thanks !!

The first working weekend required yielves (things for shovelling shit), shovels, picks, shovels and lots of muscle power. Families had to be persuaded to part with unused or unwanted pots and pans, chairs etc. At home we had not been long connected to the electric so there was a supply of bottle gas lights, pipes and rings which were liberated. Father also delighted in going to farm sales and had quickly made cheap purchase of a large pile of stout planks and some mattresses. These were ideal for our plans for a two or three tier set of bunks. Remarkably this was all transported to the Hut for the first working weekend but those muscles would have to work extremely hard to get a space to put sleeping bags on that night. A temporary solution soon revealed itself. There was a large beam above the door on the same level as the main roof cross-member in the middle of the room. Our new timber was a few feet longer so they easily slid into position and the boards placed on top, instantly creating a good sleeping area, clean dry and out of the muck. We could still use the timber to build bunks later. It was many years before someone bothered to nail down the planks by which time the bunks idea was lost to posterity.

So ended the first night and the first of many work weekends in the earlier days when more than 70 - 80% of members turned out to work. More "liberated" material arrived including a wooden draining board which bore a striking resemblance to those in the Chemistry labs. However we had to pay £8 for the first stove as the NCB would not let us liberate it from the local colliery which was closing down. The stream outside was deepened and dammed up as a water supply and washing area.

On the second weekend we awoke to the feel of damp sleeping bags - it could not have been forgetfulness from excess beer the night before as we all seemed to wake at the same time. Sad to say the roof leaked and not just in a few places. This neccessitated a search for old slates from the quarry on Moel Siabod - and an interesting drive in the landrover to collect them. Repairs were expediated and later the whole roof above the sleeping area was reslated, but at the time we could not afford to put felt under the slate, hence the tarred silage paper under the beams at a later date. The holes were punched through due to occasional excess smoke from the fire. Pyromaniacs existed before Stumpy !!

The next major work weekend was some two years later when a great trench was dug to connect to Gwilym's water and electric. The only sadness of that weekend was the loss of our personal indoor climbing wall as the main room was finally floored in slate and the sink placed on the singer sewing machine (Have a look !) and the gas rings installed on the new cooking table - thus preventing use of the wall for climbing.

An era had passed and all mod cons had arrived - some have been improved, some stay and others have gone. Thereafter it seems climbing came first. That is how it should be. We have a sound basic Hut, not to posh and not to many rules. It works. It beholds us all to strive to keep it that way and especially to ensure our relationship with Gwilym is preserved in a tranquil nature at all times. Remember, a hand shake 25 years ago would not be worth 25 seconds instant notice.

ABERYSTWYTH TO ABU DHABI TO X-ABA

Brian Morgan recalls 1965.

The Boeing 747, Australia bound, touched down at Abu Dhabi. It was midnight on August 2nd 1990. It carried amongst many others an under 16's rugby team and two members of X-ABA M.C. My thoughts went back 25 years to when Abu Dhabi and X-ABA first became synonymous.

On a cold January Monday in 1965 I walked into the staffroom of St. Philomena's Junior School in Liverpool to be greeted by a "new face" on the staff. Somehow it was vaguely familiar and after a few minutes we worked out that we had sat near each other the previous Saturday night in the bar of the Blue Bell Hotel in Aberystwyth. This is now the Augustus Baines Off Licence opposite the Coliseum Museum. The "new face" belonged to Bill Dean.

Bills intention was to travel daily from Caergwrle to Liverpool but decided to join us at a flat in Newsham Park during that week. It soon became obvious that Bill had three main interests in life; mountaineering, stamp collecting and compiling the report of the 1964 U.C.W. Expedition to Trucial Oman. Bill had been president of the Society for Exploration in 1963/64. The report of the expedition bore the title *"Aberystwyth to Abu Dhabi"*.

My link with X-ABA was a bit different from Bills. I had been born and brought up in the town. A group of us town lads would often do some walking in Plynlimon, Cader Idris or North Wales and I had even been known to climb a little. The group split up when we left for various colleges and very little mountaineering had been achieved for a few years. Bill's enthusiasm soon put it right; I was taken to Bold Street to buy new boots, socks and a map of the Lake District ready to go to Wasdale Head to have a look at Napes Needle, Windy Gap and Aaron Slack. On the return journey to Liverpool the Land Rovers brakes failed on the Wrynose Pass. It had turned out to be a good weekend!

The strange thing is that many of the "Town Lads" were working in the Greater Liverpool area. Eddie Williams doing a Ph.D at Liverpool University, Jim Shattock quantity surveying at Chester and Richard Bennet in Manchester University. The old group was getting back together and the interest in mountaineering being rekindled.

The spring and early summer months saw many visits to North Wales. The usual procedure would be to leave Liverpool after school on Friday and travel to Bill's old home at Rackery Hall, Caergwrle where there was always a wonderful welcome and an excellent meal. Then on to Capel Curig where we would wait in the Bryn Tyrch Hotel until we found out where the U.C.W.M.C. were meeting that weekend. Hotels in Capel twenty five years ago were not very welcoming to mountaineers. We had to wait in a cold damp corner in the Bryn Tyrch where the walls ran with condensation. This is where the pitch pine panelled Siabod Snug Bar is now situated.

The U.C.W.M.C. used huts belonging to other mountaineering clubs for these weekends. They could be in any part of North Wales; Garth Farm in Dyffryn Mymbyr, Nant Peris or Drws-y-Coed in Dyffryn Nantlle. My first real memory of Jeff Gough was at Drws-y-Coed where we walked on Mynydd Drws-y-Coed and Craig Cwm Silyn. Tony Jones usually appeared on these weekends driving an old army lorry.

The need for a permanent place to meet was becoming obvious; U.C.W.M.C.

members had organised meets in North Wales but what was to happen when they left University and still want to spend time in Snowdonia? I became aware that Bill was searching for a permanent hut and within a few weeks he had announced that a possible place had been found opposite the Tyn-y-Coed Hotel. It had the advantage of being on the A.5. along which many people travel to North Wales. Bill, Jeff and I visited the Hut for the first time in early summer.

It had looked good from the outside. Stone built, slate roof with no sagging and a fairly good track leading to it. Inside was not so good. It had been used to house various farm animals who had had little regard for flagstone flooring.

There were three doors opening into the main part of the barn, two of which have now been made into windows. Across the centre of the barn ran the old stalls for milking cows. This eventually became the lounge area in the Hut, and all the remains of the milking stalls is the circular beam across the top of the partition wall. There was one small window, thick dusty cobwebs and of course the well slurred floor. Our first weekend was spent dismantling the stalls and cleaning the floor and resetting one or two flagstones.

Gwilym and his wife and young family lived in Cae-gwegi, the house near the Hut. His daughter Eirian would often visit us wearing only her napkins on those fine summer weekends. Gwilym's family and parents were excellent singers and Saturday night in the Tyn-y-Coed was an evening full of song. If there was a heaven on earth then it must be Capel Curig. This thought, however, did not prepare me for an experience I had one Sunday lunchtime.

I was fetching water from the stream when the quietness was shattered by a loud voice from above calling to Gwilym. He came out of Cae-Gwegi, looked up and called back "Yes Father!". I was sure I was in the presence of God. Then the voice said "Ma' cinio'n barod!" (*Dinner is ready*). No one had told me the Gwilym's father and mother lived above Cae-Gegwi and this was the usual form of communication between the two houses!

During autumn the sleeping loft area was constructed. Headroom was a problem and there was much discussion on how to gain inches in height. The supporting joists would normally be placed on edge across the beams but it was decided to place them flat side on the beams and gain the extra inches. Jim Shattock was bitterly opposed to this idea - it was against all the laws of construction and would collapse when any weight was put on it. The loft is still in place today but I usually leave the lounge when there are people above!

One of the advantages of being with Bill in those days is that you were assured of transport, either in a Land Rover or a mini. Left to our own devices things would not always work out. Around the start of December Jeff Gough and I had to get back to Liverpool on a Sunday evening. We had organised a lift from Capel to Pen-y-Stryt (about 10 miles from Wrexham) and then would hitch on through Queensferry to Liverpool. No lifts came so we walked a little and it began to snow heavily. We carried on walking, hoping to find shelter and eventually turned towards Rackery Hall. However, conditions worsened and we had to spend the rest of the night huddled together in a telephone kiosk at Talwrn. We arrived at Bill's home Monday morning where we had the usual marvellous welcome and meal and eventually arrived in Liverpool late in the afternoon.

The year finished with many X-University and X-Town people sharing a new years eve in the Tyn-y-Coed and returning to the Hut to sleep off the old and welcome in the New Year.

The "Jumbo" took off and left Abu Dhabi at 1:30 a.m. My thoughts were still of Capel Curig and those wonderful days a quarter of a century ago.

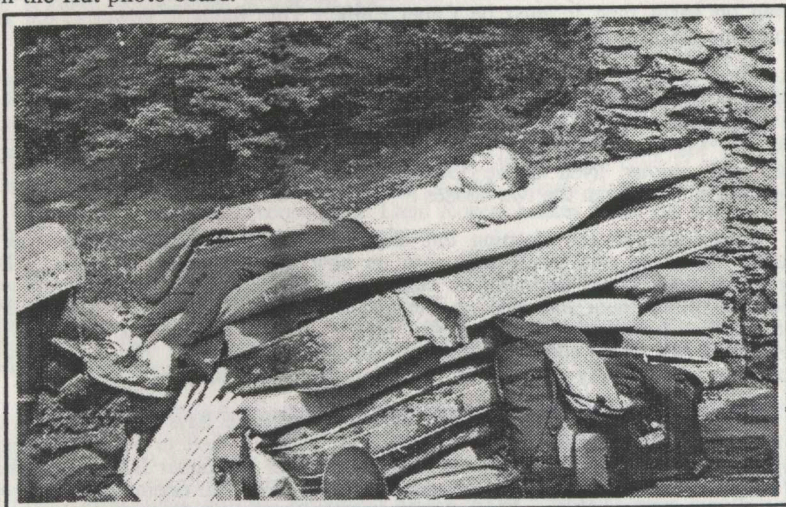
25 years later and the work goes on. Thanks are given to all those who have made their contribution over the years. Keep up the good work !!!!

WORK WEEKEND 1990

Although the number of members present was small a fair amount of work was done, with many thanks to the guests whose contribution was considerable.

Mr. Revel appeared to have developed a second shadow that answered to Wally. The name, we were told, was due to his surname sounding something like Wally. We were not all convinced. Wally, armed with chain saw and tab in mouth, (shunning even the most rudimentary safety gear), proceeded under the supervision of Revel to cut up several weeks worth of fire wood, Revel standing as far as possible from Wally and the rotating blade.

Mr. Owen, after a spell on the roof looking like a Strangeways inmate dislodging loose cement and tiles, decided to test the bedding. After several hours he concluded the experiment and announced that they were much the same as last year. He then kept all the children amused with cunning tricks with his "pencil sharpened" finger. Most of these involved placing it in various orifices, (*I've always had doubts about children at the Hut - especially ones with orifices ! - Ed.*), roll on Dinnermeet. Anyone wishing to view the finger, someone may, can see a photo of it on the Hut photo-board.



Luckily the sun shone so the Hut could be emptied and painted. The tattered remains of the roof lining were removed from the sleeping area and it has yet to be decided what to replace it with. Any suggestions ?

Mr. Sparrow potted around, mostly on the roof, with a saucpan of cement, muttering and pushing his finger through holes too. Hopefully the leaks have now been plugged and the inside of the Hut will remain drier this winter.

Mr. T. Lewis spent the weekend destroying nettles around the Hut and fiddling with bits in the toilet. The guest painters, Cardine, Sara, and Kim did a sterling job of painting the lounge and kitchen, though Sara had some work to do on her eye - paintbrush co-ordination. Several reports of seeing a ghost have been attributed to her imaginative facial painting.

Due to the sun and drying wind most of the party made for the rock, capping an enjoyable weekend. Numerous other members appeared over the weekend, some climbing, some just popping into the Hut, all contributing to the good humour and general *bon-homme* of the weekend.

21st X-ABA DINNER

Saturday 24th November 1990

Cobdens Hotel

7.30 for 8.00 p.m.

Starter

Chicken and Sweetcorn Soup.

Smoked Salmon Parcels.

* * * * *

Main Course

Grilled Salmon Steak, new potatoes, peas, broccoli & courgette bake.

Grilled Fillet Steak Garni with market vegetables.

Vegetarian Mousaka.

* * * * *

Sweet

Fresh Fruit Pavlova

Individual two Chocolate Mousse

* * * * *

Coffee and Mints

Price: £11.50

For those not wishing to select from the above menu a traditional "Turkey Dinner" is available, consisting of:- *Soup of the Day, Roast Turkey and Vegetables, and Xmas Pudding* at a cost of **£8.50**.

Please send your order indicating your choice of starter, main course and sweet if choosing from the selection offered or simply stating Turkey Dinner if not, together with the appropriate payment to reach me **BEFORE Friday 16th November.**

Cheques should be made payable to :- **X-ABA Mountaineering Club**

and sent to :-

**D. W. Lee,
1 Brookdale,
Belmont,
Bolton,
BL7 8BR**

Anyone wanting Bed and Breakfast at Cobdens should make their own arrangements, mentioning that you are with X-ABA to qualify for reduced terms which are a £10.00 reduction on each double/twin and £5.00 off a single.

Cobdens phone number: 06904 243

NEWS

So far as I have been able to find out there have been no problems at the Hut this year worth noting. It has been quite quiet up at the Hut despite yet another great summer, with a fair chance of finding peace and quiet. The work weekend was poorly attended, (*oops! sorry Blutes, I've no excuse*), and Family weekend too was apparently not to hectic. Fran and Dave were spotted at the Hut after a long absence, accompanied by their two youngsters. Brian brought up two transit loads of kiddies to the delights of X-ABA in the summer and enjoyed a riotous time. I confess that I fled to camp at Cloggy on their arrival.

To be extra boring for a moment, the *Annual Subscription* of £10.00 is now due. Please send the money to Bill for November. Non-payers will no doubt be accosted at the Dinner and vital beer money could be lost to Bill's fathomless pockets. Membership Cards will be delivered in the usual way with the Spring edition of the 'letter. Discount arrangements at Climber and Rambler still apply.

The accounts will either be presented on a separate inclusion with this 'letter or more likely with the next issue.

Situation Vacant

The position of Newsletter Editor is up for grabs from now on. Nominations (other than me) at the Dinner are welcome, or we could impose it on some poor unfortunate (Stumpy ???), or abandon the idea. It's up to you!



ON THE CARNEDDAU

CLIMBER: NIGEL HOOKER
PHOTOGRAPHER: UNKNOWN

SPOTLIGHT ON ROCK

Hello again and welcome to the 25th Anniversary edition of Spotlight - not that it has been going that long, but that's what it takes for me to write this drivel. And what do we have in store this issue? Well there is nothing like a good tale of rock athleticism and this is nothing like a tale of News of individuals is, as usual, harder to come by than leaving the pub, giving the impression that we're nothing if not modest about our achievements, but here we go anyway.

If undelivered please return to sorry - reading the notes on the back of an envelope. Lets start then with the emerging, (some say over the hill), superstar, Neil, who has searched the length and breadth of Britain for rock as well as 'plumbing a few depths' in his opinion. The rock has taken a hammering, (not literally, I hope), at his hands, as has North Wales with a notable ascent, nay lead, of Right Wall as well as becoming something of a closet Slate fan. (Hey, come on Stumpy, be serious). Visits to Pembroke have been had as well as a more recent trip to S.E. Wales where he climbed in the company of the Club dark-horse, Geoffrey Winthrop Thomas, at Ogmore, (the crag that makes Rubicon look like a slab). After initial trouble finding routes they eventually did what they thought was Fingerprint and Glycogen, with a near miss on Phaser. A move to Dinas Rock saw Neil more at home in Cheedaesque surroundings where I'm told he did some powerful routes, being quite impressed by the place. Although his climbing talent is beyond reasonable question his sanity, I fear, is clearly not as he is still under the impression that I led the Fingerflake and Void last Dinner with Rich and Al. Ho; Ho! - best joke since Left Wall. (References to Grim Wall Direct in the last issue obviously to subtle for Owen! - Ed.).

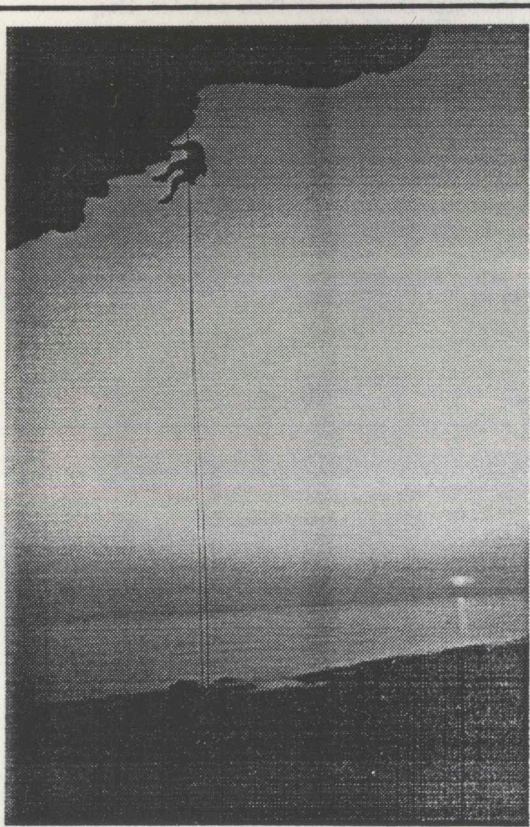
Enough of Neil - his publicity agent seems happy and has removed the gun from my head - and on to Geoff who has also been around a bit, climbing consistently well this year. A major trip was to Scotland, a favourite haunt of his, and a visit to the Etive Slabs where he was "well impressed", plus more familiar territory south of the border. However, getting facts and figures from him is like getting Neil to be civil and polite to newcomers! A recent evening visit to the Gower confirmed his good form where, with Stumpy, he accounted for some impressive and enjoyable seaside routes. An underestimated area well worth a visit.

Al Boyd seems to be in second gear as usual but managed to shift up occasionally to put us mere mortals in our place. His tick list this year is not long but he is probably saving himself for Buoux, preferring in his spare time to thrash his Scimitar around Castleton. Rich Lewis has been inactive on rock of late due to work/personal commitments, but almost managed (optimistically) to get a route done in Cave Dale within an hour of his wedding!

Ding, having made a superb recovery from his accident last year, has been back on the rock, once again hitting heights I can only dream of even when fit. However, ethical questions are being raised here as his seconds no longer hold his ropes but stand at the top with a large magnet. The order of the day with Ding now is 'laid back, maaan' and more often than not is in the company of his guitar rather than his rock boots. Known ascents include Traffic Jam at Stoney and down in Pembroke the classic Trevalen Pillar.

Another laid back lad is Smeglette who I limped into in Grindelwald this summer whilst Revel, (who else), and Walt were off on a route - more later. He was in the company of an Aussie mate Pete, having returned from his world tour. It was Pete's first Alpine season, (well it's not an easy hitch from Oz, is it), and Smeglette had got them both up the South Pillar of the Schreckhorn without mishap. I met them on a Saturday and to avoid hitching to Chammonix on the Sunday they, (or rather Smeglette), opted for the North Face Route on the Eiger - I've heard some half baked ideas before, but this ... to avoid a hitch ...! Anyway, I met them on the Sunday at the campsite and they had got as far as Alpighen before eating all their food and turning back. Just as well really as several days of storms arrived that afternoon.

Back to Revell. He arrived soon after having failed to reach the start of his route too. He had also ascended the South Pillar Route of the Schreckhorn two weeks earlier, having to spend a miserable night out in rock gear as darkness and cloud prevented them from finding their sacks - nothing ever changes! I was also on the trip but spent most of my time falling and hurting myself, first on the walk in to the Schreck where a 50' bounce down a slab left me with uncomfortable cuts and bruises, and lastly a buggered knee on the walk out to Fiesch from the Finsteraarhorn, from which I am still suffering. This walk, (Trek !?), is described in the Alpine Club Book of Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Collamb as "... the traditional approach ... long but not unpleasant...". Bollocks! The Hut itself has got to be situated amongst the finest Alpine scenery, but the route into it is 8 hours of moraine bashing and avoiding bullet shells on the glacier! The other route of the trip was the Nollen Spur on the Monch. A very worthwhile route from another good Hut.



THE GENTLE OVERHANGS OF OGMORE

ABSEILER : IAN OWEN

PHOTOGRAPH : GEOFF THOMAS



WINTER SUN ON SNOWDON

PHOTOGRAPH: NEIL PLANT

As gathered Stumpies climbing has taken a set back this year, (what's new), due to injury; ie. almost cutting off a finger whilst house building. He managed to double his tally of routes this year in a single day in the Peak, whilst his prize lead was of Stumpy the Dragon Slayer in the Pass. He hopes to hit form next year - we're all entitled to dream!

Sparrow has been relatively inactive but managed a trip to Skye with Phil England where they failed on the complete ridge traverse due to excessive damp and being consumed by midges. They managed several days of scrambling and cragging in the area.

Ned ... who's he? ... has been abroad, (I thought he was a bloke), - the Calanques I think, but he probably spent most of his time on the beach.

Back in the Alps Nigel Hooker was there as usual and my ace reporter informs me of ascents of the North Face of the Tour Ronde, the Geant and Mont Blanc. He has also been climbing well at home in the Lakes, Cairngorms and Torridon etc., but most notably with a climb of The Old Man of Hoy. Other X-ABA abroadees were Rastus - La Berade I think, but doubtless in search of loose rock and ice. Abi Patterson was in the Daupninee - that's near La Berade, isn't it? Nothing is confirmed but there has also been activity in the Lakes and Yorks. Other Club ladies have been active too, with seconding ascents of Left Wall and others.

Well that's it, I'm afraid. Just as well probably. Any libel action arising please pass on to my solicitor and if I've missed you out - and it applies to most - then tough shit. You had your chance to send news. More importantly, I hope this gets to Neil on time as it is already weeks late. He reminds me of my mother - he nags a lot, but it is my fault. He's a good sort really and has done a great job of getting the Mags together for a number of years. We'll chip in for a half for him at the Dinner - I hope you are all going.

See you there,

Stumpy

WHO GOES THERE - FREND O F O E ?

Two hours from the foot of the route and we had already passed our previous high point and a further two saw us at the bivvy site at the foot of the ice crest. The climbing had been enjoyable, solo for the most part, picking an individual route up the maze of ribs and chimneys roping up only for one pitch after the 'notch' where we had turned back three weeks ago. The weather and conditions had for once been kind enough to allow progress in no more than T-shirts and second-skins, with occasional forays into the warmth of the sun.

We considered trying to finish the route that day, even though it was late afternoon, but in the end stuck to our original plan of making an overnight stop to catch the ice early in the morning, and besides, we had brought bivvy gear with us and had the choice of several unoccupied palatial sites, finally choosing one under an overhang with a ready made wall at its base, a plastic sheet completing the weather proofing which kept out the nights showers.

A bivvy with Revel is invariably accompanied by a multitude of word games, finely tuned on form three, and 5-star room service. The long session of brews and food giving us time to reflect on the mere 4 hours of climbing that afternoon, and the very different tale at the start of the trip, having chosen this as our first route and again opting to do it as an afternoon/morning trip - following the suggestion of our "guide", a tatty clipping from an old copy of C & R.

A cunning money saving scheme was hatched whereby Revel and myself would walk up to the middle station early morning and await Geoff's arrival with the three sacks on the 'frique, hopefully around midday but in reality nearer 4p.m. due to massive queues. Still, the weather was good so we "went for it" anyway. The short walk in came and went quickly and an awkward 'schrund proved the safest alternative to the avalanche chute to the left, down which a regular flow of recently disintegrated seracs came hurtling.

Fair progress was made up the initial rubbly ground but when the time came to break out left on to a series of ribs, the coating of fresh snow that looked so picturesque from the valley bared its teeth to reveal liberal coatings of verglas, which made solo progress a decidedly risky affair, and very cold as the light was beginning to fade.

Now roped as a threesome progress was painfully slow as even easy angled stuff had to be pitched. By 9 p.m. most light had gone, and I at least to put it mildly was shagged out, and if the base of the chimney we were in hadn't been full of wet snow I'd have stopped where I was, but more in desperation than keenness I led out a further pitch onto the skyline where I floundered over a block to find myself with a boot almost in a bowl of curry belonging to two Scots lads, amid a number of good ledges. While bringing Paul and Geoff up it turned out that it had



THE SNOWDON HORSESHOE.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL PLANT.

taken these lads since 9 a.m. to reach the same point. So there are slower people than me !

An earlyish start saw rapid progress but soon slowed as I was still feeling rough, dehydrated, and several hours later at the first real steepening, 'though appearing none to hard, I suggested turning back, especially as we were lower than we had thought and the prospect of another almost inevitable bivvy, without food this time, was more than my befuddled body and mind could take. Supprisingly the other two offered little opposition and so, teaming up with the other two our dishevelled group scrambled and abbed our way back down to the foot of the route, passing two hardy, (foolish ?) souls on their way up.

Now, however, devoid of any snow and ice, the route was a sheer pleasure, and the bivvy site too good to leave, and so a lengthy breakfast, (as always), resulted in a latish start on the ice crest, now rock hard after a cold night. Slightly concave, the crest steepened to the final rognon as more dinner plates smashed down than at an X-ABA Dinner, and was longer than it appeared. By now there were several parties competing for routes up the final steep pitches, one opting to follow the ice round to the left. Several routes seem to exist, most liberally pegged on which we eagerly pulled and stood. A.O. rules O.K. ! and we sympathised with Smeglette who, as the story goes, spent hours firing off flares unable to make further solo progress.

We had been so engrossed in the climbing that it was only near the top that we noticed large black clouds enveloping the nearby peaks. Past experiences saw a greater urgency in my movements and a drop in patience as Paul took a wrong option. We gained the top in the last rays of sun and hastily bundled gear into sacks and legged it as best we could to the top station.

The cloud finally arrived, and supping some lifted cokes, we resigned ourselves to a long wait as folk were cashing in their return tickets now the view had gone. To make matters worse the cloud was accompanied by a half-decent storm, the frequent lightening strikes sending shudders through the station and bringing halts to an already lengthy job of ferrying everybody down.

Eventually our turn arrived, only to be brought to a halt a short way above the midway station. Half an hour of watching hail and lightening, accompanied by fifty or so continentals all jostling for breathing space in a 'frique cabin is not a jolly experience (the storm the good bit !). More queuing for the lower section and eventually we were back in Chamonix - heading rapidly for the self-service where a monster meal was eagerly consumed.

Meeting up with Geoff later on it turned out that he and Pete had seen us top out from the station, themselves having made a rapid ascent of Mont Blanc by the Brenva Spur. Their journey down had been less eventful as the weather then had still been good. I always said he was a jammy bugger.

These turned out to be the last routes of our season which had revolved around a series of "what might have beens.....". Now where have I heard that before ? Still, there is always next year.....

* * * * *

An account of two contrasting attempts on the *Frendo Spur*, Aiguille du Midi.

* * * * *

A justifiably popular route, objectively as safe as an alpine route can get, and with easy access both in and out - if you can afford it. Can easily be done in a day, but a leisurely 2 day affair avoids crowds provided the weather holds. Difficulties vary but plenty of pegs where it matters. Why do people have epics on this ? !!!!

THE X-ABA PROBLEM PAGE

Editorial Note: The editorial team is pleased to announce that after protracted negotiations, for the special 25th anniversary issue the X-Aba problem page has secured the services of one of the countries top *Agony Aunts*. But, for contractual reasons we are not allowed to reveal their name - if we do they have threatened to take a contract out on us ! So, instead they are writing under the name of Aunt Helen.

Aunt Helen Writes: I have been amazed at the number of letters that I have received. The problems cover a very large range of subjects and I can only include a few of them here. I think that my selection is fairly representative, with such subjects as sex, bestiality, old age and child abuse. As always, I have attempted to give straight forward, honest answers; for, god only knows - if I tried to be subtle, half of you readers would not know what I was going on about.

*Dear Aunt Helen,
I have a problem with prophylactics. Every time I try and use one, it either bursts or my girlfriend throws up in disgust and runs out of the room. I have enclosed some recent photographs of me using one for your help.*

A teacher, South Wales.

Dear A Teacher,

Thank you for the photographs, they were enlightening to say the least ! I am not surprised that your girlfriend throws up in disgust and runs out of the room. For a start you are not the most handsome man in the world and those glasses of yours are hardly flattering. What is more, doing what you were doing with a condom is enough to turn most women off.

But, I think I can see why you are having problems. Basically, condoms are not designed to fit over your head, or even up your nose and out of your mouth. A lot of packets nowadays have instructions inside telling you how to use them. If you need any more information, or even a practical demonstration, I am sure you could get one of your 5th form girls (or even boys) to show you - just do not get caught and do not tell anyone I told you. I would not ask at the Chemists - they tend to get embarrassed about this sort of thing.

Dear Aunt Helen,

Every spring bank holiday my parents drag me away to this run down dump of a mountaineering hut in North Wales. They then proceed to give me a range of really awful tasks to do. For instance, this year I had to cut down all the stinging nettles with a pair of scissors. Is this normal ?

Jennifer, Bolton.

Dear Jennifer,

No, this is not normal, most people use a pair of garden shears. In fact I am worried, very worried, about your parents behaviour. I see from my road atlas that Bolton is not a hundred miles from Rochdale and we all know what that implies in terms of ritualistic child abuse, Cyril Smith etc.

What you did not say in your letter is what your parents did with the stinging nettles after you cut them down. Did they dance around, naked, waving the nettles in the air, or dance around clothed (again waving the nettles) or even, god forbid, not dance around at all, but just burn the nettles in a bonfire ?

If I were you I would contact your local social services department immediately. They will then put you into care - and even if your parents are not ritualistically abusing you, but are just harmless lunatics, as sounds more probable, it will still take months for them to get you back home. In the mean time you can be offered drugs and seduced by your middle aged social worker, who should know better but is going through a mid-life crisis because his wife does not understand him, and then be forced to go on the game in Manchester. By then you should be able to sell your story to the Sunday Sport and could afford to give your parents enough money to buy a petrol driven strimmer. So at least in the future, you will not have to cut down the nettles with a pair of scissors!

Dear Aunt Helen,

Twenty five years ago I started a mountaineering club with a few friends. For a long time it was great fun, but nowadays everyone seems so much younger than me. All I do is collect the money and make a rather tedious speech each year. What should I do ?

A Stamp Collector.

Dear A Stamp Collector,

In my opinion, anyone who collects stamps is one plank short of a load anyway. If I were you I would admit you are a boring old fogey, put on your carpet slippers and pull up a bath chair. What more do you want from me, sympathy ?

Dear Aunt Helen,

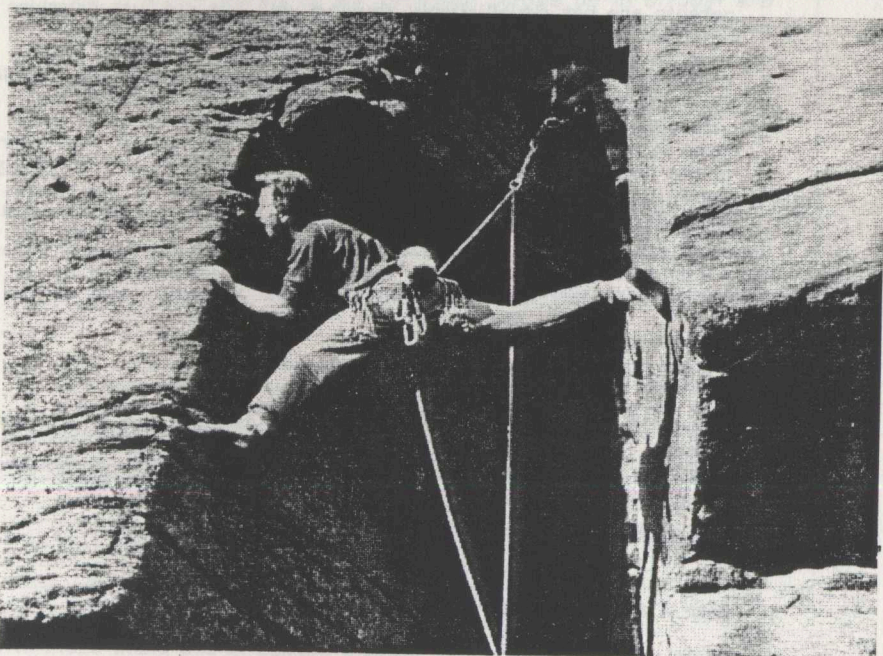
Recently me and my girlfriend, of long standing, went on an extended holiday to Africa. Whilst in the Sahara Desert, I struck up a brief, but very intense, relationship with a camel. My girlfriend is now pregnant. Should I blame the camel?

Name and Address supplied.

Dear Name and Address Supplied,

I am not surprised that you want to remain anonymous. Having any sort of relationship with a camel, brief or otherwise, is to be frowned upon! But, I have been told by people in the know, that you can use a large pair of fishermens waders, a step ladder and a handful of smooth stones, but not necessarily in that order.

Anyway, why are you blaming the camel for your girlfriends pregnancy - have you not heard of the birds and the bees? If I were you I would blame the camel driver - jealousy is a very destructive emotion. If you want my advice, I would marry the camel!



WUTHERING , STANAGE EDGE

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM VALENTINE
CLIMBER: NEIL PLANT

THE ADVENTURE FEATURE

An account of an attempted new route on St. Johns Head, Orkney

An hour out of Scrabster the *St. Ola* rocked and splashed along. As the 'Old Man' crept round the corner of Holy Island a multitude of cameras clicked in rapid succession and high heeled tourists jostled for a better view. The four of us stood quietly, hardly sparing a moments glance for the 'Old Man', like some down and out in a city park. Seen but not noticed our gaze went straight through him to where St. Johns head grew larger and larger. My stomach turned; awe and wonder, aspiration and trepidation all mixed inside. Tomorrow we would be standing beneath this monstrosity.

The descent from the cliff top was two hours of waist high grass plunging steeply into the sea a thousand feet below. Our oversized green haulage bag was lowered down gullies and dragged across traverses as we picked a way down. With only rabbit hole belays our "Big Greenie" threatened to whisk us away on a giant suicidal helter skelter ride. Muddy Tremadoc descents paled into insignificance; surely not even the most inaccessible Gogarath zawn could be as forbidding as this place.

Later, on the boulder beach, watching the Seals and Puffins the descent was already becoming a forgotten memory. Now in the sunshine, the sandstone had a warm welcoming face so different to the black lifeless frown of the shadow. Ruth and I could relax now whilst high above two small figures were weaving through the fatty folds of his chin.

Adrian and Dave were making good progress picking an obvious rightward rising line through the maze of bristling overhangs and bottomless grooves which made up the lower part of the cliff. Dave was on the second pitch, easing over an overhang looking calm and confident. Suddenly Dave lurched to one side and with his feet scrabbling frantically he pulled himself upright shaking like a leaf. A dull wet splat on the rocks nearby revealed the reason; Dave had dodged a Fulmar. It's foul smelling puke missile had missed. This time! Clearly this wasn't going to be a holiday.

The progress of the first half of the day was promising. Four pitches had led into a groove in the cliff which, although complex in structure, led naturally to the roof that guarded the corner system splitting the middle section of the cliff. Three hundred and seventy vertical feet of height gained, nearly a third of the cliff in one afternoon. Super was eaten with optimism and lots of brews. Tomorrow water would be rationed as well as food.

Next morning Dave and Adrian disappeared up the fixed ropes whilst Ruth and I prepared for the rigours of sac hauling. "Heave, heave and heave", relax, slide the jumar down the rope and heave again. Grudgingly the "Big Greenie" moved upwards. The system worked; those wet evenings hauling a bag of rocks back at Lawrencefield had paid off. Slowly we were leaving the ground behind like tiny spiders climbing a gossamer web.

Three or four hours later we slumped exhausted onto the belay, the haul bag safely suspended below. Increasing discomfort prompted a response to the note Dave had left for us tied to the belay sling. "There is a ledge 40' above and to the left. Possible bivvy?" The climbing looked straight forward enough. Thirty feet later fighting to stay in contact with a bottomless chimney full of loose rock and sand it didn't seem so straight forward. Adrian and Dave had trailed the two spare ropes leaving only the haul rope, patched in several places with Elastoplast, and also the gear retrieved from previous belays. Covering Ruth with sand I dug out a crack and placed a large friend. Then I brushed the sand off two small ripples on the chimney walls and bridged out wide trying, unsuccessfully, to ignore the swooping, screeching sea birds and the quivering of my legs. Neither chimneys nor mantleshelves nor sandstone are my forte and now I had a Fulmar to contend with too. Unimpressed with my curses it reared its head back and took aim. Retreat could only be uncontrolled so I mantled the ledge and the Fulmar had all the precision of a guided missile. The ledge? Well that was a disappointment with its pile of loose flakes, guano and semidetached feeling.

Back at our original belay Ruth and I idled the rest of the afternoon away tucked beneath a small bulge to shelter from the occasional rock that whizzed past. Rain filled clouds approached from the west.

Perched like four little eaglets on a tiny eyrie we slept very little. The drop over which our feet dangled all night didn't reduce with time or with being tied to a whole rack of friends. On the previous day just over two hundred feet of height had been gained by a series of overhanging grooves linked by wild traverses on sandy breaks. This third day started with a free hanging jumar up the full length of a 50m, 9mm rope which in itself testified to the steepness and boldness of yesterdays climbing. Adrian and Dave disappeared up the rope then it was my turn. With jumars clipped and carefully checked there was little point in delaying anymore. I unclipped the belay and flew out into space as the rope stretched. My heart missed a few beats and I span round and round, 500' above a swirling sea and amid a seething mass of seagulls. Soon the spinning stopped and I began the slow exhausting climb up the rope. Having rested the sack hauling was easy for once.

Above Dave led up a short wall then traversed to an arete and disappeared round it making for the roof that guarded the main corner of the face. If we could get into the corner things looked promising. Dave hesitated then the ropes ran out quickly. "An easy pitch at last?", inquired Adrian hopefully. "No. Bloody desperate!" "But you shot up it". "Only to stop me falling off" came the shaky reply.

Adrian followed and disappeared out right. Ruth was comfortably perched on the top of the haul bag nodding off to sleep while I wished I could get comfortable enough to do the same. An hour or so passed with us hearing the occasional shout or seeing yet another rock whizz past, this time safely out beyond us. Then a rope appeared and Adrian abseiled down to join us. After all this desperate free climbing they had been stopped by a blank sandy wall. With no cracks even for rurs, a joke belay and no bolt kit we had been forced to retreat.

The descent was smooth enough; an almost clockwork series of abseils, and three hours later we were back on the boulder beach, knackered, disappointed and relieved. Not just mentally relieved either, but relieved of a lot of pegs, several

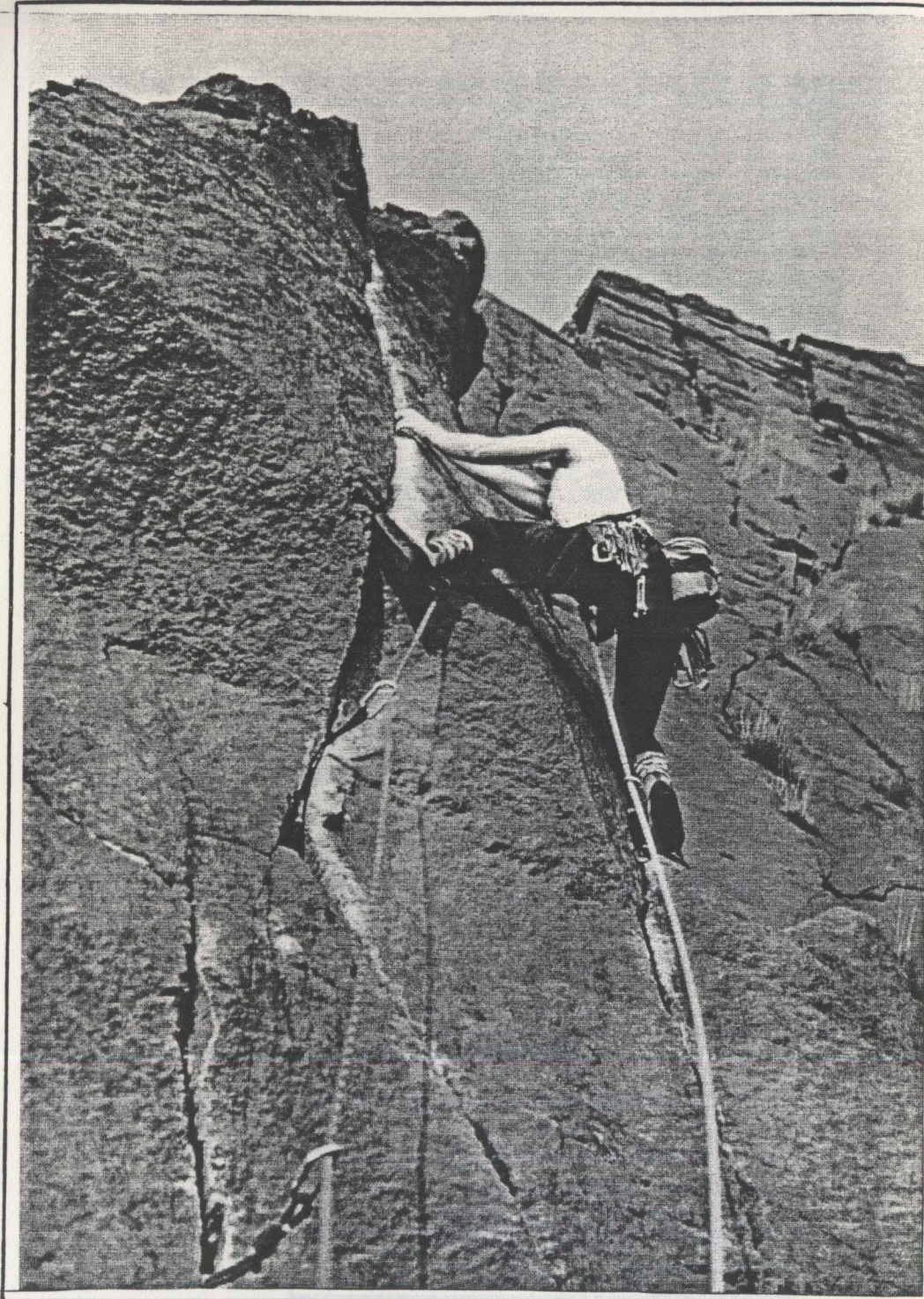
chocks and with three out of the five ropes worn out write-offs. Food and sleep was much enjoyed. The vertice was tomorrows problem, not today's.

Foot Note:

The 1200' cliffs of St. Johns' Head, Orkney, are probably the biggest continuous sea cliffs in Britain. To date all routes have been on the less imposing northern flank which does not directly overlook the sea. This account was of an attempt on the main face in May this year in which Nigel Hooker played a supporting role as sack-hauler. for the main team. The general standard was reported as about E.5. , 6b and the non X-ABA members Dave Etherington and Adrian Moore are attempting to finish the route off as we go to press.....



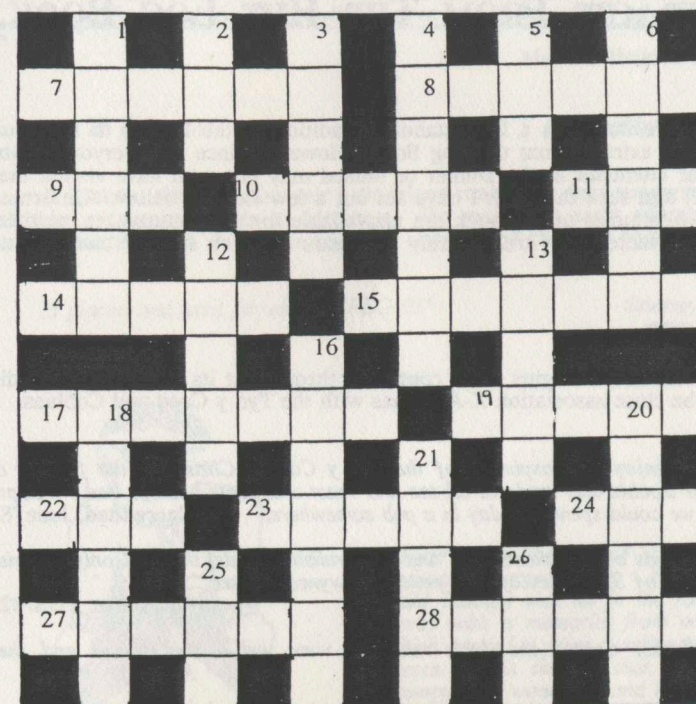
EYE OF FAITH, GARDOMS EDGE
CLIMBER: NIGEL HOOKER PHOTOGRAPHER: UNKNOWN



SUPRADIRECT, MILLSTONE EDGE

PHOTOGRAPH: NEIL PLANT
CLIMBER: ROBYN CLELAND

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

7. & 21 down What the fashion conscious climber needs after climbing at Ranshaw.
8. Welsh summit attempt with supporter.
9. Insect on the Eiger.
10. Deep valley's in the Highlands are this boys.
11. Ram turns nasty for a pull up.
14. Lewis and Harris and even in Paris.
15. Sea legs give prolonged youth.
17. Decline to part company with the rock.
19. Climbs alone.
22. Uneven.
23. Group found in poorly uncoiled ropes.
24. A poem of 3 - downs'.
27. The ice-man who gave the message.
28. Absence of iron mongery in a sponge.

DOWN

1. Devilish attire hallmark of brit climber in Alps.
2. Old man of Mow is a rozzer.
3. Everest aspirant.
4. Holy person leads at this crag.
5. Leading centre.
6. Container meets night at waymarkers.
12. Chops down hills.
13. & 16. Puking on an air journey.
18. Climber never seen with 28 across.
20. Well worn excuse for not climbing.
21. See 7 across.
25. Hole is best place for rainy morning.
26. Description of crossword setter.

EXTRACTS FROM THE HUT LOG BOOK.

There has been a long standing tradition at the Dinner to read out the more amusing extracts from the Log Book. However, since not everyone is able to be a regular attendant at the Dinner or indeed may not even have visited the Hut for years (!) and seen the book I have set out a few extracts below. Unfortunately the first two volumes of the book are unavailable for examination, i.e. neither Bill nor I know where they are. Surely 17 years of Club history can't have just vanished?

1982 - 1990.

Volume III begins as it continues throughout its pages by immediately recording the close association X-ABA has with the Tyn y Coed and Cobbies.

".....enjoy the hospitality of the Tyn y Coed. ...Chris was the first to crack with bladder trouble and made us all tea and toast and came back to bed. We...prayed for rain so we could spend the day in a pub somewhere." **Uncredited, June '82.**

"It was one of those cruel and demoralising winds, the kind only experienced in the presence of S.S. Duley after 8 pints of Gwynedd Bitter." **Ant Jones, 21/8/82.**

"Friday night - the dress rehearsal went well - lots pissed and the hut packed." **Anon. Dinner '82**

When not in the pub or recovering from a visit to it people are occasionally sober enough to write more normal sort of comments such as;

"Jess is still practising her map reading - and getting nowhere." **Anon, 23/7/82.**

"Met Linda on the top - a very hot sweaty insect." **Steve Duley, July '82.**

"Tom ... is dutifully licking the step outside." ??? **Jon. 28/7/82.**

"Our first visit to the Hut - great place ! Pity the weather didn't match." **Denise, 28/6/83.**

Ah yes, the weather ! Despite the awful weather which constantly envelops North Wales people must occasionally climb something but a tradition seems to have developed whereby routes are not recorded. One of the few entries for '83 was from Ned who did 10 routes of significance in three days **and wrote them down !** The weather is on the whole generally poor and other activities have obviously come about to relieve the endless boredom;

"There is the well known problem of sideways traversing the kitchen bench, - I have only seen Ant Jones do this once..... C\$*@ !!

Mark Harding, 11/11/83.

".....as I entered the Hut, I did observe one fellow trying to mate with the kitchen bench."

Malcom Haddon 13/11/89

"We all got pissed."

Stumpy, Dinner '83.

It is about this time that our little friend makes his first appearance in the book that he eventually comes to dominate. He makes an early reference to his close acquaintance with a route that although unspecified can only be Left Wall;

"I placed and used for aid - A PEG !!!"

Stumpy, 3/2/83.



" Here begins the tale of Stumpy with his unfeasably large gonads. Yes as a young child Stumpy was hit in the rocks (as it were) with a meteorite from outer space which caused a great swelling of the said pieces. It is thought that this endowed Stumpy with wondrous and hidden powers !".

From this time the quality of write ups steadily declines in style, content and decency into a parade of degenerate obscenity. I'm not of course suggesting Ian is responsible - 'though he might be! The trend is evidenced by comments such as;

"All right you bastards. Who's nicked my porn mag?" **Anon. 17/4/83.**

Reading through the book can however give some insight into some of the characters of the Club. Taking Ding as an example there are no less than 12 references to injury and related excuses for not climbing in 3 years, and also evidence of training runs for last years epic crater;

"Ding was suffering from his latest impact with the ground in Langdale." **Anon. April '84.**

But to continue;

".....to watch my hands uncurling ... before cutting loose and scaring a guy on Resurrection shitless who thought I was going to hit him. The queue for Left Wall was quickly reduced from four parties to one."
Andy. 23/4/84.

To return briefly to climbing, (with apologies to the hill walkers), a few people did routes in 1984, the main offenders being Ned, Owen and believe it or not Sparrow! Despite this it is easy to see what is dearest to their hearts;

"After an all nighter on homebrew I am now an outcast. I haven't got a dead cat up my arse honestly."
Stumpy. 28/5/83.

"A huge attendance - 44 people (+1 Hermaphrodite)." ??????
Stumpy. Dinner'84

Owens dominance of the book was now becoming painfully obvious and drove one person to comment;

"Is there any room for anyone else to write in this Logbook?"

This may have been Mark Harding who obviously found one of the pens that Stumpy had hidden and is responsible for the following entries;

"The idyllic situations also enhance the aesthetic qualities of the experience. To observe the sheer majesty of the Rainbow Slabs rising in chatreuse splendour from the Dinorwic Power Station was a truly mystical trip."

This was after a visit to the Slate Quarries as stated and, one can only assume, copious quantities of beer in the Tyn-ee.

"Hardd pitch 2 has great potential for being extremely silly and this was exploited to the full."
10/8/86.

"As mentioned above the bad weather drove us to Gogarth. This was cheaper than Neil driving as we didn't have to buy any petrol."
14/8/86.

Other people do get a look in from time to time though;

"Spent the Bank Holiday at the Hut with a friend who wanted ... an introduction to Welsh rock climbing, so he got it. Several routes done in rain, hail and cold wind."
Rich Lewis. 1/5/87.

From this time however bad weather must have set in with a vengeance as the boredom factor allowed the full delinquent and sex starved tendencies of certain members to shine through. There are of course the usual references to booze;

"We all got pissed - what more do you want?"

Anon. Dinner '86.

"Hello I'm v.v.v. pissed and v.v.v. happy!"

Anon. Dinner '87.

...but on the whole the tone of the book is simply foul. The only remotely reproducible comment is this;

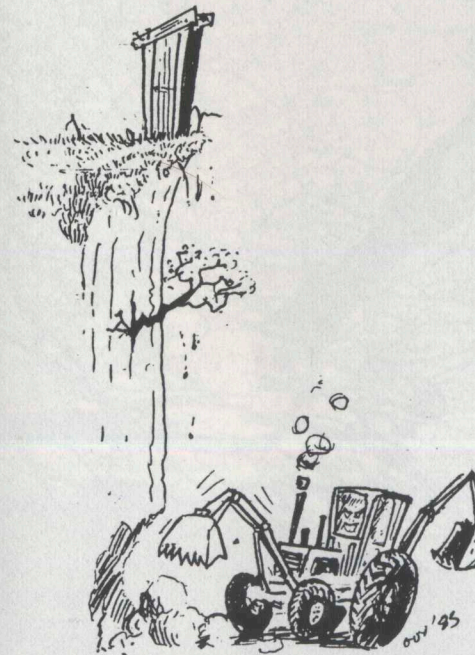
"Stumpies Log. Brown, long and very thick."

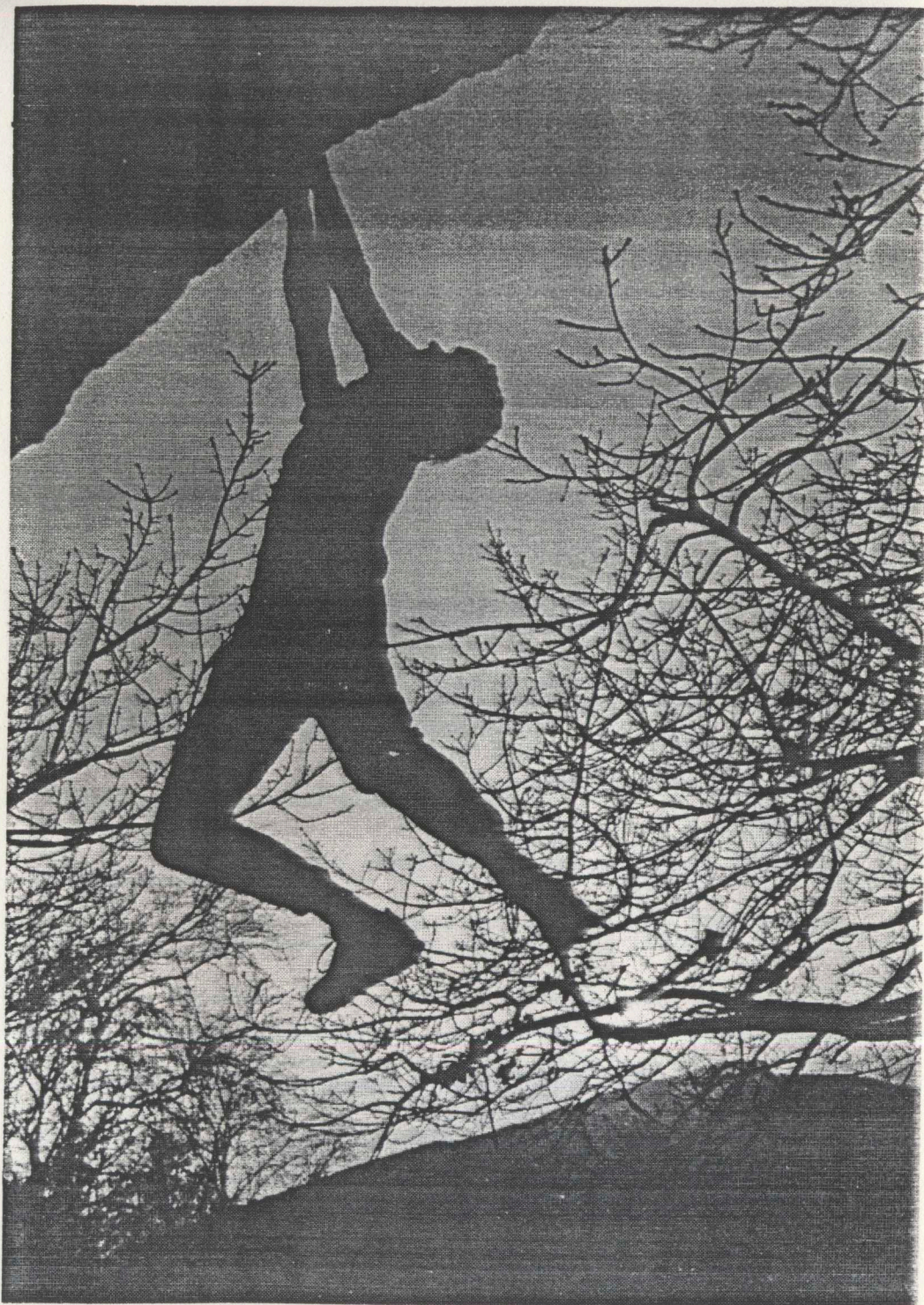
Anon. 19/9/87.

...which is confusing as Volume III is slim and grey. However, 1989 was a superb summer and people broke with the to long held tradition of not recording routes, this major leap forward opening with...

"Firstly, apologies for breaking with a great X-ABA tradition - we went climbing!"
Ding. February.

Well this is just a sample but there is a whole lot more if your stomach is strong enough! Happy reading.





*And now , stolen unashamedly from "DRINGO" is an article which
has absolutely*

TO DO NOTHING CLIMBING WITH

" I don't care for 2-bog anne,
I don't like a bob-sleigh,
But polly bag I'm her man,
On a snowy day. "

Hold still my orange steed ! "Julian grab that corner". Steady, steady,
on your knees, now fully abased ; laid low in the service of lunacy. The polythene
sheet / ship ready for the launching , mittens biting the bows and the plastic rib
cage keel in contact with the slipway snow. The laced on shoving blocks finally
raised , oddly airbourne boots ,

" O.K. - Push".

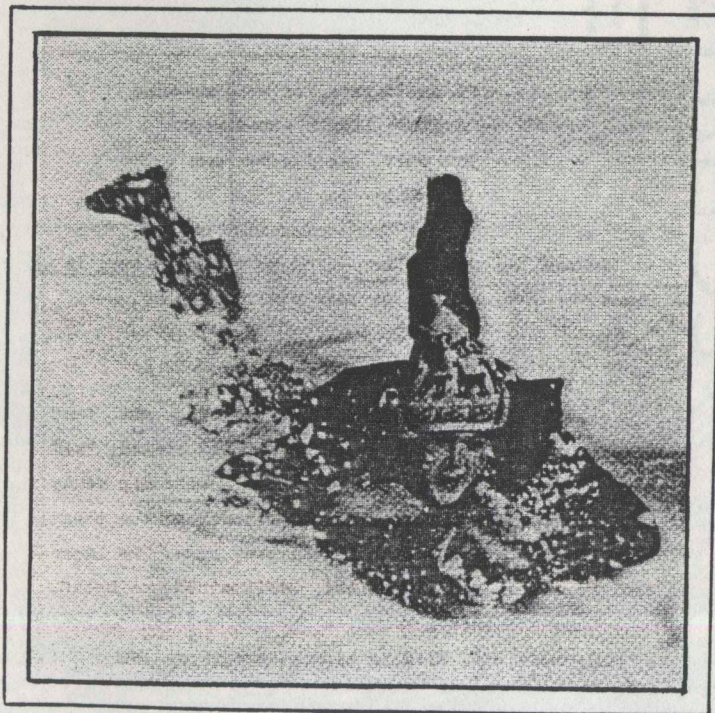
And she's off , sliding slowly , dragging. Damn ! she's going to die on
me. No , she's into the smooth groove and gathering speed. Cresta run here we
come , exponential excitement curve. It's quite fast. In fact it's more than quite fast
it's really fast. Hell ! - it's bloody fast. At this speed a rock could lay you open. A
survival bag - hah ! A friction fighter in full flight. Restricted falling in the arms of
planet mass , a captive of gravity's greed. It's getting warm.

Accelerate / Exhilarate. It's getting hot. This high speed Cnicht caress
might burn through and take something valuable with it. The Snow-Queen , the
slope slave , ploughing out unevenness and leaping undulations; ice-spray stinging
and mounds followed by a kick in the sternum; bump: gasp: bump. Blind and prone
, doing over 20 mph - mad polythene hurtling , the white hill thrill making a
take-over bid for sanity. Viva sex , drugs and adrenaline !

Then grip-slip , slide-slide and off into a tumblers travesty. A bundle of body momentum bowled into a localised shower of snow. Bounce , roll , roll , bounce , somersault , head-break and stop.

Limbs scattered , lung waves breaking and dragging at high speed , heart probably prestissimo , and somewhere a hand still gripping the precious plastic. For a moment , just lying there , trembling slightly. Snowdonia eating into Euphoria. Coming down. The wet , the cold , sliding into place.

Then on your feet , waving at the specs waiting high up the slope , shouting - "Bloody marvellous !" and starting the struggle towards them , dragging behind you the bright orange off-cut of heaven.

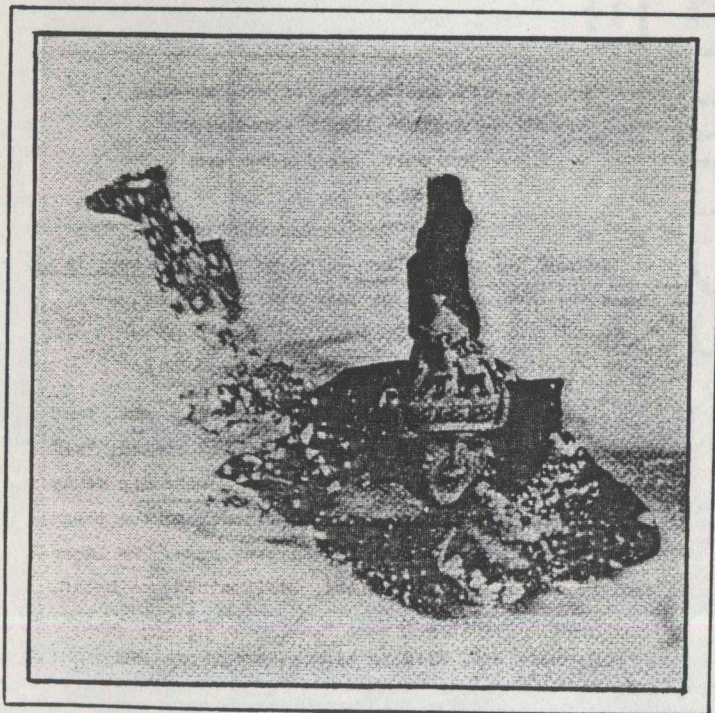


PHOTOGRAPH BY GARETH WATKINS.

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