

# XABA NEWS

Spring 1997

## SUBS

At the annual extraordinary general piss-up otherwise known as the dinner some changes were made to the subs, caused by an increase in Gwylim's estimate of the RBI (Retail Booze Index). Those there felt that there should be a reduced rate for people who don't use the hut much.

There are now two types of member, Associate and Ordinary.

**Associate Membership** £10

**Full Membership** £25

The ordinary membership will have the same privileges as before while the associates won't have a key and will need to pay hut fees.

Please make every effort to collect hut fees as we do need every penny.

## NEW KEY

It seems there are people out there with keys that shouldn't have them. So during working weekend the padlock will be changed.

Everybody who has paid up will get a new key.

So get yer money out!

Please pay a.s.a.p. if you haven't already as we need the money to pay Gwylim's rent.

## WEDDINGS

A very serious outbreak of **marriage** has been reported. We think it may be infectious. Several couples have been infected during the last year.

More Revelations on page 7

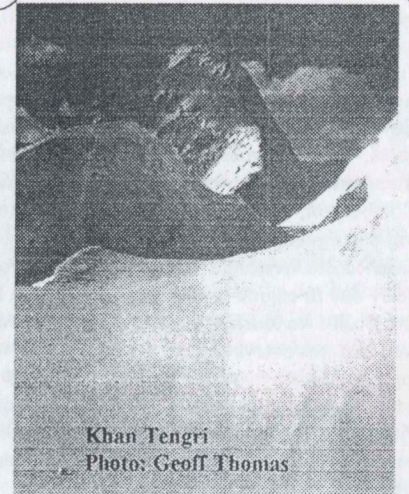
## DATES

WORKING WEEKEND

MAY 16 - 18

DINNER

NOVEMBER - 29<sup>th</sup>



Khan Tengri  
Photo: Geoff Thomas

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## Disappointment on Denali

Bill Dean

This year has been dominated by one event, I was offered a place on an expedition to climb Mount McKinley, Alaska with other members of Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Team. It was a trip I could not refuse. It took a great deal of preparation - getting fit, buying and borrowing gear to cope with the extreme of weather anticipated. We were nine friends from the Rescue Team with a wide range of ages from 19 to me.

Finally, the day of departure arrived with two very large rucksacks crammed with clothes, four pairs of gloves, socks, vapour barrier socks, thermal over boots, down booties, ice axes, climbing harness, crampons, snow shovels, ice stakes, sunglasses, sun block cream, face masks and much more. The flight had some problems - five hour delay in Amsterdam, unscheduled overnight stop at Minneapolis, another delay due to engine trouble then re-routed to Seattle and finally we touched down in Anchorage, Alaska - well that was everybody and everything except John's luggage! Thank goodness his luggage arrived on the next plane from Seattle. It was 130 mile drive to Talkeetna - a wonderful small sleepy backwoods wilderness town. A feeling of being back in the wild west days or 1950s - 60s. What a nice place.

From here it was a short 60 mile flight onto the Kahiltna Glacier on the mountain. What a flight it was! Three in a place flying over immense beautiful wilderness, over lower mountain ranges and glaciers - any one of which would swallow up all our mountains in England and Wales. We flew with wing tips almost touching mountain ridges at times then a gap appeared in the sharp ridge ahead of us - it is known as ONE SHOT PASS - well named - we swept through both planes together wing tips feet away with an immediate right hand and downward sweep, a very exhilarating feeling like being at the fun fair, then up the Kahiltna Glacier with rock and ice towering above us. Finally, a complete 360 degree circle to land up a small side glacier and so we touched down at base camp at 7,000 feet.

By the time our gear was thrown out onto the gla-

zier and we turned around, the planes had gone. We were lucky the remains of an old camp were waiting to be occupied. Camping on McKinley is a major architectural task - proper platforms or the tents, building snow walls to protect them, dig out a cooking area with ledges and protecting walls. When this is complete it is time to melt snow for drinks and food, the process takes several hours every day. We did eat quite well, even having egg and bacon for breakfast an occasion and making ice cream for pudding on two occasions, but the relentless melting of snow for drinking water was a real chore every day.

Anyway back to the expedition. The next morning we packed our sledge for the long haul - I named mine Jemima and she behaved well but it was real hard work pulling 50-60lb as well as carrying 33-40 lb on your back. Most days it was a real "head down" job with a walk of 7 hours of sheer drudgery and severe shoulder pain - then one looked around and marvelled at the sheer grandiose beauty of the mountains. We were dwarfed by the surrounding mountains hanging glaciers and ice falls in this huge desolate place. Mountains which looked like a days walk away were probably 8,000 feet above us and many days climbing.

The camp at 8000 was our first night in desolation. We were lucky and found an old abandoned site - there was another camp a short distance away, but we did not venture to say "hello" for fear of crevasses between us! Quite a lot of working was needed on the tent platforms To rebuild and enlarge walls, Improve the kitchen and build a loo! - The plastic bag with its contents (frozen) had to be carried with us! We had a substantial meal. Even though some of us are not very keen on pasta and melted endless billy cans of snow for tea, coffee and to fill our water containers for the next day. These together with cameras, inner boots and socks always shared my sleeping bag. Our Rab down bags were wonderful and most nights I would completely strip off and get a good nights sleep, waking only when the call of nature demanded - which then required serious consideration - get up and brave the

bitterly cold temperatures outside, pee into a plastic bag and hope it does not burst!! or hold on. I became adept at the latter - resorting to a plastic bag only once. Almost every morning we awoke to a complete covering of snow over our sleeping bags and the inside of the tent - all from our own breath. I shared a tent with Paul, there were two other pairs and a group of three in one tent.

Breakfast and breaking camp take hours - more endless billy cans of snow to melt. Breakfast was quite good, flavoured porridge, Granola breakfast bars, bagels and even egg and bacon on occasions with as much liquid as can be forced in, but back to the nitty gritty of the trek. Unfortunately, as we prepared to leave the 8000 camp, one member of the team became ill - so we had to leave him there in his tent with food, etc. We set out up Ski Hill - a grinding slope, then followed by endless smaller rises as we plodded relentlessly up the Kahiltana Glacier, My Gemima behaved well, some others had trouble, but nothing compared to other groups who we saw with sledges tipping over and spewing their contents if not correctly tied on.

We camped at 10,900 feet this time an old sight needed much work, but all was finished and we had eaten by 8 p.m. The next morning was still reasonable weather and we saw a group of swans flying up the glacier to get over the mountains in their migration north. Three times they tried to make it over but as they reached the crest they were buffeted back by winds and finally retreated back down the Glacier. However, we had to continue up. We planned to camp at 11,000 so that day it was a much shorter walk. We decided to split the loads and do a double carry. Most of us went up to 11,000 where we prepared camp and then returned to 10,000 for the remainder of the food and gear. Two members of the team went down to see Puss - later in the evening just as dinner was ready we were all delighted to see all three of our friends - Puss was very much better so we were all reunited, 11,000 was a time to acclimatise. it was a pleasant site despite evidence of a crevasse crossing our front entrance and running right through the loo!

The next morning it was clear but John looked up to some small whispers of white snow blowing off the summit peaks and declared a rest day! Some

used the day for crevasse rescue practice which turned into a real situation when a block of snow fell away and Lou descended into the crevasse, but he was up in no time. Russ, John and I decided to take some food up Motorcycle Hill. We stashed it in the snow at the top. This required digging a large hole 4-5 feet deep to bury the items and cover with two feet of snow - to stop the ravens digging it up, eating a bit and scattering the rest. We then marked the spot with wands so that we could, hopefully find it again. It was here that we first started to appreciate that we were in the high mountains. We could see for tens of miles and looked down onto the flat lands of Alaska in the distance - just like peering out of an aircraft window! - breathtaking! Here we felt we were making headway up the mountain, but we weren't yet half way.

The next day the wind had calmed so we took a cache of food and fuel around windy corner to 13,000 feet where we abandoned the sledges. My Gemima, snow shoes and other gear was buried at 11,000 feet. It was now crampons all the way. It was a pleasant day's carry - we could appreciate why John had stopped us going the day before because of Windy Corner's reputation. It was an exposed corner of hard steep snow and ice with gaping crevasses below. Wind here would make it very dangerous. We made our stash and returned to 11,000. The next day was the big push to 14,000 and all went well, windy corner was again easy. Here we split the group into three units. I was in the last group and we had hoped that by the time we arrived at 14,000 our tents might be up and even cups of tea ready. Our hopes were dashed because we arrived to pandemonium. A gust wind had got up. There were no available old camp sites so a brand new site had to be hacked out of the hard-packed snow. Paul got an attack of severe mountain sickness. As our tent was being erected a sudden gust of wind took it. With quick reactions John jumped onto it and saved it from blowing 1000 feet down the mountain, but in doing so a pole broke. When we eventually crawled into our sleeping bags many hours later, we were rather shattered but relieved that everything had been sorted out, but much more work would be needed to the next day to improve our walls. We did this thank goodness, as the following night we had winds gusting around 100 m.p.h. and temperatures minus 30.



The loo at 14,000 had occupied our thoughts far many days - the word of a real throne had passed down the Mountain. More than that there were 2 of them - no digging, plastic bags and balancing acts - a wonderful wooden structure in resplendent isolation - just like a throne - the seat even felt warm, it was covered with carry mat foam. It was heaven and the views were magnificent just in case you get the idea of a small privy forget it - it was just a wooden box with a hole and a large drop into a crevasse, you were Very exposed but definitely a loo with a view!

We acclimatised for several days at 14,000. Above us were the fixed ropes one day I counted a queue of 60 congested on them and the next day there were 40 people! Then it was our turn. By now the group had reorganised. Two intrepid explorers went back down to 8,000 then walked up into the North East fork to attempt the very difficult Cassin Ridge - they had climbed to 14,000 with us just to acclimatise! Russ decided 14,000 was enough for his state of health - so 6 of us set out to climb the fixed ropes to 16,000+ to put a substantial cache of food as high as we could. Unfortunately Paul found the altitude impossible after some 500 feet so he retired to join Russ and we shared his pack between us. There are 2 fixed ropes - theoretically one up and one down. There was some congestion on the "up rope" with people having difficulty crossing the bergschrund so we chose the down rope. It was very hard going with hard blue ice - every step needed to kick to get the crampon points in. We were shattered at the top, so much so that the altitude claimed 2 more. Al and Ian stayed at 16,200 whilst John Owen and I doubled up the packs and pressed on to a point just below Washburn's Thumb at about 17,000. There we stashed the food. We were high on a ridge with a fantastic view looking down as though we were in 3 jet. I felt elated. We were very LUCKY no wind, reasonable temperatures and this spectacular view. This proved to be my finest moment. We now returned to Camp down the fixed ropes - my jumar kept jamming which was a bit of problem. Finally we arrived back at camp hoping that Russ had put the kettle on - he had made thick soup for us - but I think it will be along time before everybody forgets that all we wanted was gallons of tea.

The next day dawned as next days do to find poor Bill proper ill! My worst scenario had come true. I was off colour and could not load as much liquid and food as I would need. We had always promised each other that we would confess any problems - so it was my turn to say that I could not go higher. It was for those few critical hours - I might get better but I could not take a chance for the safety and possible success of my companions and myself. It was a truly bitter sweet situation. Al and Ian had recovered from the day before so it was with personal sadness but with sincere good wishes that I waved them off up the fixed ropes and hopefully to the summit.

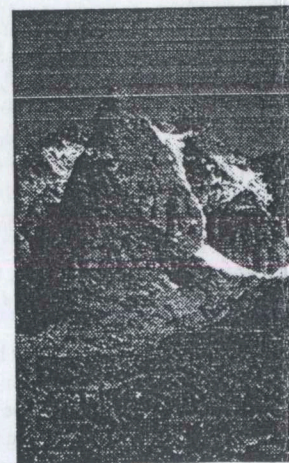
Meanwhile we packed up camp - leaving the tent for their eventual return and we set off down the mountain. The sledges were a real problem, banging shins and sliding off sideways. Down to 11,500 feet it was clear but below that there was thick cloud. We descended into the cloud - quite a strange feeling - and into the snow. Snow shoes were now essential but became a problem to keep on the feet - Russ particularly. We camped at 10,000 feet that night. A tent pole broke which meant we had to make do with a partly saggy tent! I was less snowy the next day and a very long walk out. The old track had been snowed over but there was another party ahead so we let them break trail. Nothing had prepared us for the final few hours on Heartbreak Hill, its uphill from 6,000 to base camp and the runway. It sure is well named. We unroped for the last ten or twenty minutes. As I arrived at base camp there was pandemonium - people rushing around packing and taking down tents. There had been no flights in or out for days. An aeroplane was on the runway, I had seen it land a few minutes before. I reported to Anny. She immediately pointed and said "get into that plane NOW!", by the time I got my snow shoes off all my baggage from the sledge was in the plane and I hopped into the co-pilot's seat. As I closed the door we were already bouncing down the runway - We were airborne. I looked down and waved to Puss and Paul below. What a way to leave the Mountain!

There had been blistering white snow for 15 days, suddenly everything was green as we landed in Tarketna. Planes buzzed around the air strip - it was important to get the back log of people off the

mountain. I had been lucky to be first out - fortunately Puss and Paul, in separate planes, landed before too long.

We fixed up a cheap hotel room for the night - bliss - a shower, clean clothes and teeth cleaned followed by a most wonderful 16 oz steak with all the trimmings, beer and a Denali ice cream to finish - I was bloated! A good night's sleep followed but our thoughts were still tampered with wonder of where and what the others were encountering on the Mountain.

The next evening we finished another sumptuous meal and as we walked down the road we thought we heard shouting - then a distinct "You dozy Welsh \*f+\*" It was John and Lou - They had been eating in the next room! They had been forced off their route by the weather and had just flown out. Four days later we were beginning to get concerned about the others. In the meantime we had hired large R.V. - big camper van - cheaper for us all to live in and we were mobile. We had a beautiful sight out of town by the River - we had lots of trips to the airstrip for news. Then on the 5th Day the pilot arrived on his push bike to tell us they had landed. For 4 days and nights they had been pinned down in their tent at 17,200, it had been impossible to do anything - temp. minus 40 winds constantly very high gusting over 100 mph. Their protecting walls of 2 foot cubic blocks of ice were blown onto the tent several times. Four fingers were nipped by frostbite.



They had a very rough time, then a window of less wind occurred - there was no question of the Summit - it was time to "get the hell out of there" They quickly retreated to 14,000 and then down. And so ended our attempt on Denali/Mount McKinley. At times it had been tough and arduous, awesome and yet beautiful. A wonderful experience. We had no regrets we had not made the top. We had given it a good try and no one else during the whole period of our attempt made the top.

We now had 10 days before our return flight. Paul had managed to get a changed flight and went home early. Owen - decided to hitch up to Fairbanks - 100 miles north and then bum around Alaska for a couple of months. The remaining 7 of us went for a drive around - down to Vardez - take a boat across Prince William Sound to Whittier. This was spectacular with incredible views of remote islands, glaciers dropping into the sea, icebergs & whales etc. - all on a standard scheduled Ferry!! We also went down to Seward and in no time we found ourselves flying over the Atlantic and home. A trip of a lifetime.

Needless to say the rest of the year has been rather tame and lots of work to catch up and pay for the trip. We did send some postcards from the mountain to raise funds for the Rescue team and I send many thanks to everyone who supported us. We handed over £4633.50p to the Team - well shall we say I handed over to myself as far my sins I was elected Treasurer of the Team this year!

Left  
Bation, Mt Kenya  
Photo: Tim Sparrow



## CHRISTMAS CONSUMMATION ON MT KENYA?

(No thanks dear, I've got an altitude headache)

Tim Sparrow

Mount Kenya is a large and complex mountain of many summits. Interest is focused on the 3 highest; Pt Lenana, Nelion and Batian. Pt Lenana (4985m) is easily ascended by the fit and acclimatised walker, but the ascent of Nelion (5195m) and Batian (5205m) involves rock and some ice climbing up to Grade IV climbing. The names of these summits are derived from the names of Masai tribal chiefs.

The first European to sight Mt Kenya was the missionary Dr Johann Krapf in 1884. Mt Kenya was added to the list of Kilimanjaro, discovered only a year previously, and the Ruwenzori as mountains with snow on the African equator. Though snow was known to exist on the equator in S.America, many notable geographers and "experts" denied the possibility in Africa. Krapf and Rebmann (who discovered Kilimanjaro) were dismissed as "liars and purblind fools" by one. The Irish scholar Cooley decided that Kilimanjaro's summit was covered not by snow but by red cornelians, and even Sir Roderick Murchison the current President of the R.G.S. suggested that it could not be snow but more possibly white quartzite. The mountain was first ascended by Halford Mackinder in 1899. He was aided considerably by two Alpine guides (Ollier and Brocherel) though claimed all the glory for himself. His route follows in part the "voie normale" of today up the eastern side of Nelion before traversing onto the Darwin Glacier and thence onto the famous Diamond Glacier and up to the "Gate of the Mists", the deep notch between the summits of Nelion and Batian. Mackinder was an inexperienced climber and the guides very much prepared the route for him, but he is nonetheless credited with the first ascent. A myth exists that he shot eight porters, an unlikely occurrence as the porters contract stated that the maximum allowable punishment was thirty lashes! Remember this next time you are trekking in Pakistan and your porters turn rebellious.

The mountain, when viewed from the summit (or more leisurely by map) resembles a cartwheel, the summit being the hub and the ridges and valleys being the spokes radiating away to the rim. Most of the mountain is covered in thick vegetation, arranged in concentric circles. Equatorial forest is succeeded by

bamboo and that by open parkland. Elephant, buffalo and leopard are all resident here. The parkland gives way to giant heather (up to 20 foot high) and thence to alpine scrubland punctuated by that most peculiar plant, the giant groundsel. The central area is rock, scree and ice. The rock is granitic porphyry and in the main reliable and climber friendly.

The mountain can be approached up any of the radiating valleys. The most popular is the Naro Moru route from the west and has the advantage of being the shortest and most rapid ascent and the disadvantages of being the route with the best chance of achieving altitude sickness, and also of having to pass through the Vertical Bog. Other routes ascend far more slowly allowing a better chance of acclimatising. Scenic routes like the Sirimon from the north and the wonderfully picturesque Chogoria route which ascends from the east via the dramatic Gorges Valley are a 'must' to be included in a trip here. Indeed it is normal to traverse the mountain taking in two of the routes.

I visited the mountain this Christmas and New Year (96/97) as part of a group of 10 including my newly acquired wife (it was our honeymoon). We ascended by the Chogoria route which takes 4-5 days.

On Christmas Eve, Rhiannon celebrated with a cocktail of Paracetamol, Diamox and a few swigs of sweet sherry on an empty stomach. She was unsurprisingly sick. On Christmas Day we parted company, her to walk around the peaks, me to climb Batian and Nelion. For Christmas lunch I indulged in some peanuts, dry crackers and Primula and a bitter orange (more accurately described as a green!). I too was sick. Feeling relatively perky following this expulsion, I joined others in the plod up Pt Lenana, about 1 hour from "Top" or "Austrian Hut".

A few days later I was still not at my best, suffering from an unusual digestive problem in Africa -- constipation. The cause seems to have stemmed from a hearty meal of potato, cooking banana and local sweetcorn -- var. *Leathercornicus vulgaris*.

Several of our party were complaining of similar "corn blockage". However, my only chance to make the climb came. I had as guide (we were a commercial party) John Temple, one of Mr. Kenya's most important protagonists having been involved in about one-third of the new routes on the mountain. At 62, John is still a force to be reckoned with in the mountains, a believer in light rapid travel. Photograph stops were not considered until the summit!

On top of Nelion, the weather deteriorated, so we were glad to settle into the Howell Hut - an aluminium bivouac box right on the summit, comfy for three. Ian Howell made 13 solo ascents of Nelion carrying the materials to build the hut, a remarkable feat. Howell is venerated by many in the hut book as a God, presumably by those arriving in storm or darkness. I don't know about God, but I was definitely impressed!

Dawn was clear and icy so we descended by abseil to the icy Gate of the Mists and up and out to the summit of Batian. We were grateful for the steps of a previous party as we were shod only in rock boots and this was Grade II snow and ice. It was here that John produced his secret weapon, an ice hammer once owned by Yvon Chouinard, from whom he bought it. I am pleased to say that I had the chance to wield this weapon in the Gate of the Mists, a fitting situation for such a mighty tool. The descent down Nelion was mostly by abseil, Mt. Kenya seems to have suffered Swiss disease, being adorned with bolted abseil anchors. An unexpected intrusion, but they certainly sped out descent in the deteriorating afternoon weather.

To finish, here is a quote from the plaque on the summit of Lenana

"Go safely friend, for here is high  
Go daringly, where eagles fly  
Go eternally, with Jesus nigh"

It was a privilege to sit in peace and read these words.

## MORE NEWS THE OUTBREAK TRACED

(From page 1)

It all started with Phil and Sharon in August. They were married in Llandeilo and had their reception in a delightful garden setting in . . . Next to succumb were Tim and Rhiannon in December. This was a very cold affair in many ways - Tim was 'stranded' in the market square in Buxton attracting the attention of the local constabulary. They were worried he had shed an unseasonable number of clothes! The epidemic continues with Rod and Ros who will be married on 24 May. Congratulations to All.

### POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS

Congratulations also to Phil and Sharon on the birth of Cai who was one year old in March. Double congrats as Sharon is expecting another. Although Phil had serious surgery just before Christmas he seems to have recovered enough to take fourth place in a 25 mile run around Radnor.

### OTHER NEWS

Apparently some went climbing! Well if you don't tell me what you've done I'm not clairvoyant! Please let me know. Others have promised articles for future news letters. We know who you are!

### OLD MEMBERS

Ant Jones is now married and living in the outskirts of Paris. He is keen to renew his membership. If anyone knows of any other past members (I hesitate to use the word 'old') that might be interested in getting a copy of the newsletter then please let me know.



## WORKING WEEKEND MAY 16 - 18

This has moved slightly this year because Rod is getting married on the weekend when it normally happens.

### WATER HEATER

Apparently some twit forgot to drain the water heater in the freezing weather and so it is knackered at the moment. Is it worth repairing?

*[ - am working on it  
Spide ]*

## News

Tim Lewis is on Shetland wardening for the RSPB. Nigel Hooker gained his MIC last Year. Ian Jones (Smeglette) is back from a successful trip to Ecuador. Ed Brown is working for ExLog in Algeria at the moment while Richie (Andrews) is recovering from a motor-cycle accident in Victoria, Australia - we all hope he is recovering well.

Geoff and Rosemarie Gough have finished their walk from John O'Groats to Land's End and not content with this small challenge have now set their sights on walking the coast of England and Wales. Bill Dean and Phil Tarplee spent a week ski-ing in the Trois Vallees where Phil's car blew up. This meant he had to come back ten days later to collect it and suffer another week's ski-ing. This the area where Tim Sparrow and I spent a week ice climbing in February - great fun. Chris Dainton is in Spain as I write this.

We would like to hear from members under thirty so all you 'youngsters' please let us know what you've been doing. You can do this via e-mail now. The address is: Geoff.Thomas@btinternet.com

### STOP PRESS.

John & Lesley Coupland recently visited the hut together with son (Tommy?) and friend. A new helmet was purchased and Tommy and friend went cragging while John Lesley went walking, finishing at the Ogwen M.R.T. base to see Tony Jones. A "bit of a do" was in progress, a helicopter rescue of two lads, one of whom had fallen 90' from Grooved Arete on Tryfan. Yes it was son Tommy who luckily escaped with cuts and bruises, but the helmet.... a write off. Makes you think....

Gwilym has asked that we drive slowly on the track particularly while there are lambs about. Colin McCrae impersonators please take note.

## From Our Peak Correspondent Rock Ericksson

### BRADWELL

The Peak District Mafia have been active on several fronts so far this year. Chris Dainton donated the following paragraph to the world:

"Mountain biking - bought an outrageous new frame and forks (sold the 954 frame to Tim Sparrow) - the new one is the love of my life (at the moment anyway) it's silver with black carbon front shock legs and a black carbon swing arm, coil over oil/nitrogen shock units, yellow saddle and yellow bits - bloody lovely (its a 957 Profloex if your interested). It rides like a dream - awesome - I am not worthy."

[Chris - you are not worthy and you are weak - Ed]

So Chris's new bike is the love of his life ?!. Chris has just come back from the US and is now in Calpe (Spain) cranking it out with Richard Connors (brain the size of Saturn -& lives in Bristol). When CJD (is this a coincidence ! ) isn't trying to be a bit-part in a Pepsi-Max advert or sending very sad 'bloke-jokes' over the internet, he works out of Manchester as an engineering geologist.

### GLOSSOP

Paul Revell continues his low profile.

### CASTLETON

Al Boyd and Jude have been very busy expanding the Castleton YHA over the last 18 months, and have also managed to relocate to an idyllic period dwelling between Hope and Edale. The move has enabled Al to put his private car fleet (now allegedly approaching 500 vehicles) under one cover. Sources in the Peak say that Alistair's arms (hydraulic rams) are ready to take up the battle once more....

### EYAM

The enigmatic Dr Clark (Sheffield Uni. geography lecturer and patron Saint of freshers and sixth-formers) has been flirting between his scholastic pursuit of the processes and products of cold climates and paddling in tropical climates. Chris is an active member of a protest group (which includes CJD) whose aims include increasing the speed limit to 125 mph through local Peak villages.

### OVER-HADDON

Alex Langdon no longer is the windsurfing chique chiq in the GTi but the respectable Scirocco-driving physiotherapist in the delightful village of Over Haddon (near Bakewell) and has recently developed a very keen interest in the triathlon.

### BUXTON

The year got off to a rather unusual start with Rod asking Ros to marry him on the blustery moors above the Goyt Valley just outside Buxton. He is attempting to come to terms with the situation having had a steady trickle of reality attacks per day since the event. Has anybody seen the film the 'Wars of the Roses' ?.....M-day is May 24th as some of you will now know - apologies for the working weekend re-schedule. Rod is still attempting to explore the inner secrets of Mother Earth (as a geophysicist) in the UK & SE Asia whilst Ros starts teacher training in Sheffield (where else ! ) this Autumn.

## Our reporter writes:

### A Day in February.....

Most of us have experienced the classic symptom of cold-weather cragging - bleeding lacerations through cold, numb skin into purple-blue-white blotched flesh. February, and we're at Ramshaw (Rocks). For those of you blessed enough not to have ventured here, Ramshaw forms a jagged, linear crag between Buxton and Leek on the west side of the Peak. Natural gritstone buttresses and isolated blocks form a dark, somewhat threatening crag facing south-east, "early morning sun" ac-

cording to some guides

Well here we are, it's morning, there's no sun and a cold south-easterly is trying to play cryogenics with my more vital organs. We start to boulder out a few problems - with half-arsed enthusiasm. Darran and brother Perry had been in a bouldering comp. the night before and Darran was sporting his Prana sweat-top - the trophy for his competitive efforts. More to the point they had come with an all encompassing panacea for the enthusiasm virus - they were therefore at liberty to play the 'too tired after last night card'. Gallantly, they didn't, and after a 2-hour session involving futile and painful boulder problems the England-Ireland rugby match called them back to Buxton for lager and TV.

Just as they were escaping from Hellcrag, a passing yobbo shouted up some abuse from the nearby Leek-Buxton road. A cold biting wind and the Doppler effect scrambled and blended the words into an intelligible whine. The yobbo turned out to be Sean. Approaching the crag and with a keen demeanour (and even more worryingly, he was carrying a rope), he found me in an post-session state; duvet clad, with righteous fatigue and looking to the road.

"Hello"

"Hi"

"Ramshaw Crack ?"

"OK"

(reflective pause with sinking feeling)

.....s\*\*t, did I say that ?

RC is a rather unfriendly and leaning, hand - to offwidth gritstone crack that 'offers delights rarely found elsewhere' (On Peak Rock). For the non-cyborg it demands full hand bandaging, and if available, local anaesthetic.

Sean started out from the belay ledge which slopes at 45 degrees making the crack even more intimidating than it might otherwise be. A couple of Camelots go in the lower section (3" to 6"



width). Half way up, after a loose fist jam, RC spits him out and 'respect' (fear) for our intended begins to grow. I take the lead and have a similar lack of success; more blood requiring more tape. we cycle through the torturous ritual thrice like a demented tag team. Sean eventually managed to get through the initial jamming and found transient sanctuary at the leg-hook rest about half way up; the technical overture was complete and now the body of the work must begin. Moving off the leg-hook, the left hand moved up and palmed outward on the left flank of the upper section - a hanging cleft of between leg- and body-width dimensions. A single deep breath and a searching right hand shoots up for counter-pressure on the right wall of the cleft; the torso is now ready in tension to enter the bottom-less opening. It doesn't really matter what technique one chooses next, but survival, only survival - staying in the cleft, must be the focus. Keep the torso tight in the cleft, use anything to maintain position, just don't slip out - the gear, although solid, starts to look remote. But the cleft has to be vacated; a continuous stream of swearing and desperate, powerful and violent thrutching finds a spot to throw the body-carcass out - there is no cosy ending in this film.

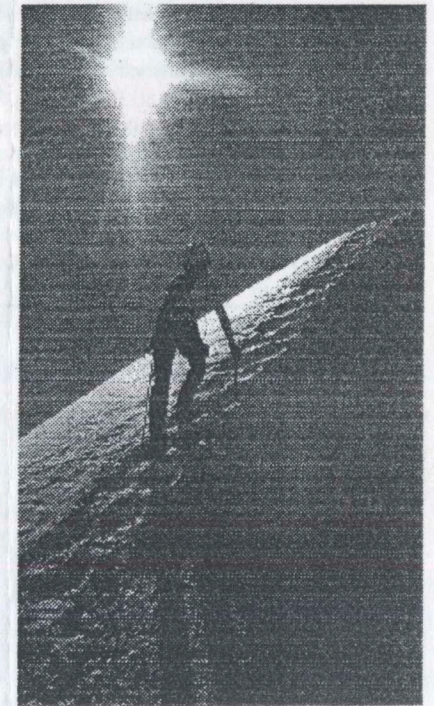
Sean's determined lead and Rock Ericksson a worn second; crumpled, breathless, we removed tattered tape and shook torn hands.

#### Rock Ericksson

[I would rather have my eyeball juice sucked out with a blunt syringe - Ed]



Rock Errickson at play  
Photo: anon.



The Editor at Play  
Photo: Tim Sparrow