Jacobites Mountaineering Club

Journal 2017

Jacobites Mountaineering Club Journal

Ed. Chris Banks

2017

Cover photograph: Sgurr Dubh Mor, Isle of Skye (C. Banks, 2016)

Contents

Editorial

Chris Banks

Welcome to the 2017 edition of the Jacobites Mountaineering Club Journal. This journal has a long tradition of documenting the exploits of the club and its members. However, it was only after a lengthy debate at the club AGM that it was indeed decided to continue with this fine tradition.

I hope that, as editor, I have been able to both live up to the tradition and to help convince future members of the club to continue it. My part in this is, of course, small in comparison to the efforts of our article authors and so my thanks goes first and foremost to them for pulling together and submitting a fine set of articles for publication. Although, some articles required more editing than others; I'll mention no names!

We have a selection of articles which, I think, each convey an aspect of the club—from climbing to skiing and from construction to literature. This is reflective of the wide variety of people and an activities present in the club today. We have a thriving membership of mountaineers of all ages and from all aspects of the sport.

The club continues to support its members in mountaineering, hillwalking, climbing, skiing, cycling, canoeing... the list goes on. The meets this year have been very well attended and we have seen a good flow of new members into the club and attending meets. There has continued to be a healthy number of members rock climbing during the summer season, as well as winter/ice climbing and indoor climbing during the winter season. This winter has also seemed to have been more fruitful for the skiers than recent past winters and many a slope has been carved up. And last, but not least, we have seen many of our members return from successful mountaineering trips abroad—from the Alps to the greater ranges and even such exotic locations as Kyrgyzstan for the recording of first ascents.

My final vote of thanks, therefore, goes to those who have made the club tick over the last year. A list of this year's committee follows this editorial and each one of them has been invaluable in the running of the club. As usual, extra special thanks goes to the meets secretaries who spend a lot of their valuable time organising the meets, the life-blood of the club. We have had a great, varied set of meets this year with accommodation ranging

from the rustic to the luxurious; the usual—and much loved—meets to Inver fit into the latter category, of course! Thanks to both the outgoing meets secretaries (Lucy Spark and Andy Waugh) and the incoming (Iain Kinnell and Cathy Southworth). Special thanks also go to Walter Robison for continuing to organise the rock climbing meets on top of balancing the club books.

Inver has seen many improvements over the last few years, owing chiefly to Adrian Proctor and his grand vision for The Great Walkway and our ever-advancing steps into the world of renewable energy supply. As ever, much of the routine maintenance and odd-jobs around Inver have been overseen by the critical eye of Alan Walker, who returns as our incoming hut custodian this year.

Finally, our thanks for hanging everything together and keeping us organised go to our outgoing president Ros Clancy and to Graham Pearson for this year and the rest to come.

I will leave you with a quote from our aforementioned hut custodian:

> "Our sport is unique in its deep and wide literature of adventure. Our journal is part of this fine tradition."—Alan Walker.

Club Committee

President	Graham Pearson
Secretary	Cat Magill
Treasurer	Walter Robison
Meets	Iain Kinnell Cathy Southworth
Membership	Jack Barraclough
Gear	Alison Beresford
Hut custodian	Alan Walker
Newsletter	Catherine Jones
Webmaster Journal Editor	 Chris Banks
Social	Cat Trebilco

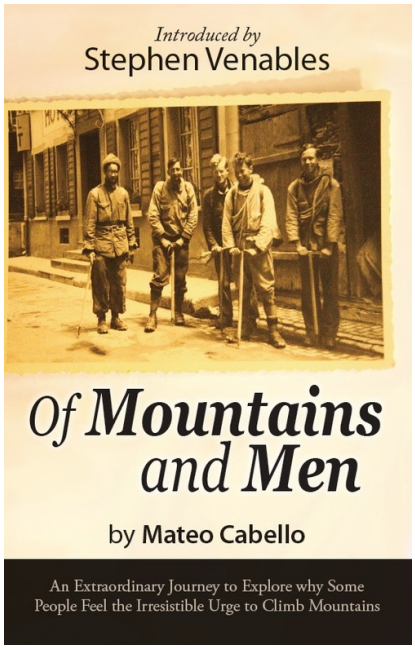
Club Meets

2–4th September 2016	Carn Dearg Hut, Braedownie, Glen Clova
16–18th September	Lagangarbh Hut, Glencoe
30th September–2nd October	Annual Dinner, Glenridding
14–16th October	Tyndrum, By-the-way Hostel
28–30th October	Onich, Alex MacIntyre Hut
11–13th November	Glen Clova, Climber's Bunkhouse
25–27th November	Invergarry, Saddle Mountain Hostel
9–11th December	Inver Croft Christmas
30th December–3rd January 2017	Inver Croft New Year
13–15th January	Glencoe Independent Hostel, Glencoe
27–29th January	Roybridge Chalet Park
10–12th February	Muir of Inverey, Braemar
17–19th February	CIC Hut, Ben Nevis
3–5th March	Badaguish Lodges, near Aviemore
17–19th March	Elphin Caving Centre, Assynt
31st March–2nd April	Strawberry Cottage, Glen Affric
14–17th April	Inver Croft Easter
28th April–1st May	The Old Inn, Carbost, Isle of Skye
12–14th May	Badrallach Hut, Little Loch Broom
26–29th May	Isle of Rum, Camping meet
9–11th June	Cairngorms, Camping Meet
16–18th June	Loch Ossian
23-25th June	Naismith hut, Elphin, Sutherland
7–9th July	Alan's Cottage, Wales
28–30th July	Inver Croft Summer
25–27th August	Ardvullin House, Ardgour
8–10th September	Glenfinnan Sleeping Car, Glenfinnan
22–24th September	Lagangarbh SMC Hut, Glencoe
6–8th October	Annual Dinner

Of Mountains and Men

Mateo Cabello

"Some moments are nice, some are nicer, some are even worth writing about."—Charles Bukowski.



The 8th of December 2016 is a date that I will always remember—that night I had the honour of presenting my book "Of Mountains and Men" following the kind invitation of the Jacobites Mountaineering Club (JMC). Although that event was part of a larger tour that took me to other places in Scotland, from the very beginning of my trip the event with the JMC was the one to which I was really looking forward; that was mostly for two reasons.

First, because the presentation of the book took place in Edinburgh, a city that not only am I deeply in love with, but that also played a key role during the research of "Of Mountains and Men".

Second, and more importantly, because that night among the audience there was a very special person, someone without whom the book would never have seen the light of day. The name of that person is Donald McKean who, on July 25th 1948, was in the Hornli hut, at the feet of the Matterhorn, with his brother Ian and two friends—William Bell and James Ogilvie; they were getting themselves ready to climb one of the most mythical mountains in the world.

That day, though, Donald felt sick and stayed in the hut. That saved his life because his brother Ian and his two friends never returned—they died in the Hornli ridge while climbing the mountain.

More than sixty years later I was in Zermatt, in a small graveyard not far from the Matterhorn, when I found the bronze plaque remembering the three young boys—"friends from Oxford killed together while climbing the Matterhorn in 1948". I knew nothing about them. I had never heard their names before. I was not even a climber, but I had the feeling that theirs was a story worth telling.

Three unknown names in a foreign cemetery at the foot of a legendary mountain—this is how the story of this book, introduced by Stephen Venables, the legendary British climber, begins.

Full of serendipity moments, "Of Mountains and Men" is a real-life, detective-like adventure that tells how the stories of William—a poet destined for greatness, Ian—a young Labour politician tipped for the top, and James—a decorated war hero—were unearthed. However, "Of Mountains and Men" does not attempt to explain how they died—the accident, no matter how tragic, was just a brief moment in their lives. Instead, the focus is put on the shared passion that brought them to the mountains. In trying to understand this passion, the book became an excellent vehicle to shed light on why for some people to climb mountains is a search for their soul.

At this point it is important to mention that I am not a professional writer. In fact, I was not in Zermatt looking for a story to write about and, honestly speaking, I never expected either this book to be published. I wrote it because I felt passionate about the story of William, Ian, and James. In this regard, deciding to follow my hunch was one of the best decisions of my life—in fact, this book, this story is one of the best things that ever happened to me. To explain why would take me hours—just let me say that while researching this book I had the privilege to meet some of the most amazing people I have ever met—people like Donald McKean or David Ogilvie, James's brother. Their generosity and support was invaluable in writing the book and I treasure the memory of every single minute I spent with them.

This book also gave me the chance to meet many wonderful individuals, all of them deeply in love with mountains, who kindly shared their stories and also their fears and dreams with me. Once the book was published, I had the opportunity to visit plenty of clubs and climbing associations to present it, which meant spending many lovely hours with people who, like me, love heights and mountains. Exactly as the evening spent with the members of the JMC—a night that, as I said before, I will never forget.

The Walkway Saga

Alan Walker

When the club's sub-committee to search for a place suitable to acquire as our own club hut they came across, in 1989, Invercroft, marked as such on the Ordnance Survey map and familiar to anyone who has often travelled the Achnasheen to Lochcarron road. The first thing to do was to create an access route. The last full-time occupants of Inver, the McLennon family in the late 1940s, used a track that can still be traced following the railway until Loch Gowan empties into River Bran, which could be forded in a pony wagon or crossed by suspension footbridge. The map dutifully marks a public right of way from the lay-by, past Inver, under the railway then up and over to Scardroy in Strathconnon. Nobody had used that in decades: the three-wire bridge had only two wires remaining, hair-raisingly first traversed by the lightest member of the sub-committee. So: first build

Photo 2.1: Invercroft, the early days.

Photo 2.2: Inver bridge construction.

a bridge, as designed by club member and civil engineer Brian Cornwell, construction overseen by builder Roy Plenderleith.

The H-section girders were delivered by lorry a day or two after the hardest freeze the club has experienced there. The "river" that connects the two halves of Loch Gowan was deeply frozen and the girders could be slid across rather than using pontoons, as per "Plan A". At this time there was an Inver work-party every weekend: it took a major epic and a few more weekends to finish the fine bridge. Next job was to construct a walkway over the areas by now known to be worst prone to flooding.

By the time of opening Inver for use, 1990, the walkway extended one quarter of the 400 metres from lay-by to Inver and worked well enough for ordinary access but was no use for carrying in gas cylinders, a strug-

Photo 2.3: The original walkway, visible from space / in use to carry in the cooker / flooded at Christmas 2015 / and repairs underway.

Photo 2.4: New walkway timber delivery / partial completion, with dead end!

gle for any large item to refurbish Inver (custodian Mike Snook guiding his big cooker onto the two-planks-wide original walkway, Photo 2.3), and some times was completely inaccessible with either the bridge decking and handrail having been swept off by hurricane (shown in Photo 2.3 being repaired by a team led by custodian Bruce Kerr) or by flooding.

"Build a better walkway!" custodian Adrian Proctor declared. First,

order in the timber. Novar Sawmill, north of Dingwall grow and cut their own spruce planks, boards and stobs and deliver it to the layby. Thomas Proctor (Photo 2.4) standing there eyeing the load was unaware that lot was just the first delivery of the day. All we had to do was carry it in, although the more walkway was built the easier that was, or so Adrian told us. Others pointed out that the further the walkway went the further the carry... This conundrum was compounded by the plan to start the new sections in the middle, resulting in an intermediate section with "No Entry" signs and dead-ends. But that lasted for only one year—just as well, it must have looked weird to the local people travelling the A890.

However, by the time the section nearest the bridge was completed the difference was dramatic (Photo 2.5). Now the area closest the loch was approached at the same level as the bridge, and at three planks wide the trolley for gas bottles and the wheelbarrows for cases of beer trundle over nicely. The middle sections of the new walkway take a more direct line than the path we followed close to the Allt Mhartuin, but a direct line from lay-by to hut would have gone too close to the low areas by the loch.

The work party volunteers look as if all they do is drink tea! Or is it just that they only stand still enough for a photo during tea-breaks?

A large number of club members have been part of this walkway saga—those that can be identified in the photos here and not already mentioned are: Bill Runciman, Nicky and Gordon Crawford, Sally Richards, Andy McCormick, Guy Wimble, Mary Inglis, Sandra Morrison, Iain Kinnell, Peter Kirby, Chris Banks, Sabine Nolte, Ros Clancey, Graham Pearson, Pavla Pospichalova, Alan and Margaret Walker, Ian Jones, and Matt Flood.

Photo 2.5: The new walkway, 2016 / work crew on a tea-break / survival of the flood, October 2017 / another tea-break? / the final work party.

Ecrins

Adrian Proctor

Shit! Did I just touch that sticky out bit of crash barrier?

"Better stop and get more coffee, old chap," said Thomas. So we pulled over at the next service station and inspected the new stripe on the left hand side of my van. Quite impressive, if superficial.

We had set off from Windermere at 7pm on Sunday night and basically just kept going. Channel Tunnel about 2 a.m. and by about 10 a.m. we were admiring the big chicken by the motorway at Bourg en Bresse. I'd already had a couple of leg stretches and cups of French coffee at various salubrious establishments alongside the motorway to keep myself awake. Doing that trip in one go was not a good idea.

Anyway, we eventually left the A43 just before the Frejus tunnel, where they helpfully put the petrol station just after the exit, so you have to go 7 miles down to the next exit and then come back if you want to get petrol and leave the motorway there. I was tempted to nip across a bit of grass onto the adjacent road but there was a police car in the car park so I thought better of that idea.

Then, it was up to 2600 meters over the Col de Galibier, which my poor van didn't like very much. A 1500m climb with hairpins and the works—part of the Tour de France I'm told. Anyway the van blew off some steam for a bit and then I filled it up again with water and it was fine. Down to the Col de Lautaret and Villar d'Arene and we had arrived. We found a small campsite which only had one tent on it and the owner had buggered off for lunch, so it seemed like a good idea to do the same. Lunch is 12 till 4 there. Conveniently, there was an adjacent bar which did passable pizzas, so we ate pizza and drank beer and made ourselves even more sleepy than we already were.

Having mustered the energy to blow up our mattresses and put our tent up and even go out for a meal, we crashed out to try and make up some of our lost night's sleep and summon some enthusiasm for the following day. Next morning, we set off for what was meant to be a few days of acclimatisation prior to having a go at one or two of the bigger peaks. So, big bags were loaded up with a rope, ice axes, crampons etc and we set off

Photo 3.1: Arriving after driving all night.

from 1700m to the Adele Planchard hut, which sits on one of the ridges of the Grande Ruine, at 3200m.

An initial steep section and then a walk for a few miles along a pretty flat valley went well, but the last 1000m up to the hut was brutal. We allowed ourselves a break every 100m or so, but boy it was hard work, especially the last bit when the altitude kicked in too. On the bright side, this was one of those rare occasions when I had to wait for Thomas—doesn't happen often!

Two boys eventually collapsed at a table outside the hut and ordered big cold drinks. Food was excellent, and there was lots of it. It turned out that the only other people in the hut that night were the builders who had been up there all summer building an extension, and this was their last night, so two sleep-deprived and knackered climbers got to endure an evening of loud French builders getting drunk.

Aside from all this, the warden kept telling us that the glacier was dangerous, which it quite obviously wasn't, unless you were stupid enough to go up the right hand side of the snout under the cliff where there was

a fair bit of rockfall coming down. I suspect the reason the guides had stopped doing tours there this year was more to do with their builders than the state of the glacier!

Anyway, we dug ourselves out at a reasonable hour the next morning to find that the mountain was all clagged out and the forecast had changed, and the bad weather was coming in earlier. So, after a certain amount of rumination and bad language, having marched our gear up the hill the day before, we marched it down again. It was even a long way on the way down. So back to the gite for more pizza and then we headed south and camped near Guillestre in the Vallee de Fressionieres. To crown our frustrating day, we then had possibly the worst meal out I've ever had in France. Thomas's dinner was truly awful. You'd think that there would be a limit to how much damage you could do to a Croque Monsieur (glorified cheese on toast) and a portion of chips. But the chips were totally solid, and the toast was so hard as to be inedible—not a happy boy!

Thursday was a complete write-off of a day—pouring rain—so we went and sat in a tea shop in Guillestre and read books and wrote post cards until they chucked us out (it closed for lunch you see!). Then we drove round in the van for several hours, including searching out one crag called Paroi de Lys, which involved some very rough off-roading followed by a dodgy footbridge—boiled some more coolant on that one. On the bright side, that evening's meal was the other end of the spectrum. We found a super little place in Argentiere les Besses and had a fantastic meal. We ordered one dessert between us and we could only just finish it; it was huge!

Friday was sunny again, but it took a while for everything to dry off, so we amused ourselves with a short circular walk up to a viewpoint which overlooked the Durance valley. It had a big rock at the top which looked like it needed climbing, so we tried a bit of a bushwhack followed by some loose scrambling. It almost went, but not quite, without a rope. In the afternoon we did actually go climbing at a small crag called Chanteloube. It was steep and balancy, but well bolted, and one or two of the grades were a bit out (in both directions) but it served as a good place to commission my new rock boots. As usual, Thomas completed the afternoon by dogging his way up some desperate route (we thought about 7a) and then expecting me to get all the clips back. So I dogged it as well and got the clips on the way down.

That evening's excitement was the arrival of Madame President by train. Ros was very worried that the reception in her hotel shut at 9 and the train was due at 8:55 and was running ten minutes late. So we went for a meal in her hotel and texted to say that they had sold her room and run out of pizza, but for some reason she didn't believe us. She even got off at the

right station too this time.

Next morning Thomas and I went for a 7-pitch route on the Dalles Magiques called L'Ombre et la Lumiere—the shade and the light! The first two pitches were steep and balancy with a couple of weird traverse sections. The upper part consisted of a few pitches of superb exposed slab climbing, rounded off with a loose, crappy last pitch. Again some pitches seemed harder and some easier than the grade given—overall we thought mostly 5c with a couple of 6a bits. But a great place to climb.

Time, then, to go find our house for the next two weeks. But first we had to find Ros. She was on her way down from a col through the woods, plodding along a track, and was expecting to be an hour or so. Due to the lack of a suitably placed bar and emboldened by Thursday's experience, Thomas decided that it would be fun to try and get the van up the track to meet Ros. So I gave it a go—mostly fine but had a couple of exciting bits including crossing a dry river bed at an alarming angle. It was worth it though to see Ros's face when we appeared around a corner half way up the hillside.

The house was on the ground floor of a chalet, and the two owners, Dirk and Nicole, lived upstairs. They were very welcoming, and had a dog called Snoopy which liked to bark at things and kind of waddled round the garden, knocking things over. The guided tour of the house took rather too long though—I didn't really need to be shown how to work a washing machine, but I would have preferred if they'd left the water supply turned on under the sink! Ros then went shopping, so Carrefour had to close the next day whilst they re-stocked the shelves.

Sunday was a lovely day, so it seemed like a good idea to get up high. We chose Pic de Rochebrune as our first peak, as it looked like fun and, even though it is 3320m, it goes easily in a day because you can start on the Col d'Izoard at 2360m. So we parked there among a few buggered-looking cyclists (it's one of the famous TdF cols—yawn). The ascent began with a well-marked path as far as the Col des Portes at about 2900m, where Ros chatted up two old Italian guys and got used to the altitude whilst Thomas and I went up the peak itself. The top section was a scrambly ridge—easy climbing but great exposure—a good mountain, and tremendous views over the Ecrins and across to Monte Viso.

Next day we had a dinner date with our friend, Sophie, in Grenoble. Then we had to pick Tabi up from Grenoble airport (which I didn't realise is half way to Lyon!), so entertainment on the way was required. We spent ages deciding on a via ferrata to do, then go there and found it was closed so found another one. The one we did do was up the side of a 300m waterfall, and was pretty impressive. French VFs seem to be a bit different from

Photo 3.2: L'Ombre et La Lumiere, pitch 2, Thomas Proctor

Photo 3.3: A view across the main Ecrins range

Italian ones in that you don't spend all that much time in contact with the rock, whereas in the Dolomites you tend to climb rock with a wire rope for protection. But if you like exposure, it was quite something! Even coming down took a while, so we were a bit late for our dinner, much to the displeasure of Mme. Beaubron. By the time we'd picked Tabi up and driven all the way back it was getting late!

Next day Ros decided that it was time for a cycle ride, so disappeared off up the Col de Vars, whilst Thomas, Tabi and I went climbing on a small crag on the side of the Durance valley, at a place called Reotier. It had a big upstanding block with routes on two sides. Again, some of the grading wasn't right—the 5b arête was harder than all the 5cs, and the right hand 5c was dead easy—more like 4c. But great rock and a good crag for a dodgy day too—you could almost belay out of the car!

The following day was a good adventure—we set off to do a 7-pitch mountain route on Le Rouchon, which is in Queyras, in the valley up above St-Veran. A relatively driveable track (apart from the last bit) and a straightforward walk of an hour or so up to the bottom of the route, which

was a 5c called Prises Surprises. Two initial steep-ish pitches at 5c, then two easy scrambly but very loose pitches. Pitch 5 was an amusing traverse, which ended in a hanging belay where you didn't want to drop the rope—just what you wanted below the crux, which was a steep 5c+/6a bit up an awkward chimney, followed by more slabby climbing. There are easy and hard variations on the top pitch—we did the easy one because Ros's new boots were killing her by that point. Great idea to commission them on a 7 pitch mountain route! Descent was by two abseils down a shorter route on the back. A great route and a good day out!

After that, it seemed like a good idea to do a peak the next day, and Thomas had his eye on the Grand Galibier (3320m), which we climbed from the eastern side. Managed to take 200m and a mile and a half off it by driving up a rough track, but still a good 1300m of ascent. The first part was following a well marked path up to a col, and the second part involved some scrambling up a rocky ridge. Some amazing views of the surrounding hills—coloured rocks and small lakes abounded, so lots of pictures got taken. The summit was also a great vantage point from which to see all the peaks in the main Ecrins range. Those will be the subject of a future trip—got all the maps and books I need now!

And then it was time for Thomas and Tabi to go home. So, we fitted in a quick via ferrata on the way to the airport, and I spent a very exciting day negotiating the various roads of the region on the way back from the airport, which just can't cope with the traffic—must be awful in the summer!

Ros and I then spent the next few days climbing some more peaks in the Queyras—Day 1 involved Pain de Sucre (a great scrambly ridge and views of Viso) and the Rocca Bianca on the other side of the Col Agnel. After that we had a day in the hills above Ceillac—walked up to Lac St Anne and climbed a small hill above it. The highlight was a very long day having a go at the Aiguille de Chambeyron, aborting because of serious rockfall danger and then doing Pic de Chauvet instead—we did about 2000m of ascent that day. Some amazing views though, with clouds blowing around the hills to make them look more dramatic. We definitely earned the huge pizza from the man in the van in Guillestre afterwards. Nearly ran out of petrol that day too, but I reckoned I could have free wheeled as far as Carrefour from the Col de Vars.

On the Wednesday, Ros decided that we'd go for a peak called the Grand Glaiza (3300m), which starts from a small car park on the side of the hill at about 2000m, and it's a plod up past a lake and a couple of smaller peaks. What she hadn't quite appreciated was the state of the track up to the so-called car park! To be fair, it did have a sign at the bottom saying that it was a bit dodgy and you drove it at your own risk—sounded like a

Photo 3.4: Adrian Proctor and Ros Clancey

challenge. It was pretty rough in places and quite narrow, and had a hell of a drop on one side in some sections too. And of course Ros was on that side on the way up. She made some quite funny noises at times, but stopped short of insisting that I turn round. Eventually, we arrived at the car park, which was like a National Trust one with a big notice and lots of space. Amazing what vehicles had made it up there. I bet a few didn't though! The walk was nice but quite ordinary after the drive! One of those where the top looks quite close, but it seems to take ages to get there.

Our last day was spent playing on a local valley crag, as it was cloudy and cold high up, with snow down to 1800m. We also visited the old fort at Guillestre—one has to be a tourist sometimes!

The trip back was pretty uneventful—we found a nice little hotel for a night an hour or so south of Calais, only to find ourselves in a room next to a room for 2 people that had 6 guys in it making lots of noise till midnight—felt just like being back in Scotland! I even remembered to pay for the Dartford Tunnel when I got home, albeit a day later than I was supposed to. But I seem to have got away with that one!

Simon "Super Dwarf" Kemper 1953–2017

Wayne Horsfall

Simon was never married but I would say that as his longest withstanding partner we were in many ways married and I could not start to count the number of his climbing mistresses—so diverse a cross section you could not imagine.

Simon was a dwarf of many facets or guises.

The reader and philosopher. Very few people who knew Simon could have not been exposed to this articulate, passionate, almost extremist aspect that illustrated his determination in everything he did or thought about.

The family dwarf. Simon adopted his niece and nephew well beyond the duties of the mere uncle that he was, always singing their praises, he was so proud to know they were his! He was also tremendously proud of his family history, of his grandfather who was a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant, mentioned in despatches in WW1, one of the first to be awarded RAF "wings", who rose to be a Squadron Leader in WW2, and his father who served with the RAF in East Africa during WW2. This shaped his strongly felt ideals and also made him the immensely honourable and proud Englishman he was.

The sports dwarf. Simon was over 10yrs ahead of me and so his beginnings are not within my scope—but for the tales that people tell! Simon started out, like so many, by joining the uni climbing club and never looked back. By 25yrs he had his first trip to a hospital, after a couple of days the prognosis was that he bounces very well and his parents could make the trek to North Wales to bring him home to London. His first Alpine trip was in 1981 when he ticked two monster peaks: the Weisshorn (4505m), directly from London without any preparation—unthinkable 10yrs later—and the Matterhorn which was a much bigger undertaking especially since he got separated from his group and effectively soloed the whole thing!

I am not sure at exactly what time Simon took on the challenge of climbing all of the 4000m peaks but by the time I appeared on his "list" in 1991 almost half of them were "in the bag". Some time later I was privileged to be able to see his precious cutting from a climbing magazine that became his definitive tick list. It is now a sort of rogues gallery of names from the climbing history of a super dwarf. If you are on it, your name is documented as part of that story for eternity.

Simon's climbing style complemented mine quite well. Simon liked his climbing physical, steep and 'ard but with plenty of gear so he could stitch it up when the going got tough. Falling off was part of the sport, with so much gear it was rarely a problem—not that he fell off that often! While I would be shown the sharp end of the rope when there was little or no gear which was ok by me, so long as it was not strenuous, I could take my time and pad up a delicate slab, with a long run-out.

So the "marriage" was forged that was to last nearly thirty years. I could now perhaps start to stream off a list of climbing tales or routes list, but that is not Simon's style. Simon evolved from a walker to a rock climber and onto being a mountaineer but his greatest love was ice—often in Scotland. So, many weekend dashes from London until he finally landed himself a contract north of the border where work and play came together in harmony. He was a happy dwarf!

Simon would have two significant accidents while out climbing, one in France on ice and the other in Scotland while walking off the top of a climb. He always claimed that neither were his fault. It matters not. What matters was that in each case he came out the other side a better man—or dwarf—having spent time with people who, he knew, would never get better. (Honourable mentions to: the French surgeon who saved his life by cutting a clot from his thigh, the heroes at Scotland Air ambulance, Glasgow Southern General where he languished in IC for six weeks, and Jacobites MC who rallied round and made the trek from Edinburgh to visit after IC.)

One of Simon's climbing tales of terror—I'm obliged to get one in!—for which there was no terror: After posting a request for an alpine partner on some forum he was met at Geneva airport by "some fit blond" in an open-top sports car who whisked him off to Zermatt. The agreed objective was Liskamm. What an opportunity, talk about falling on your feet etc. come to mind. However, all that was in Simon's mind was *Liskamm*. He marched off in front and when his new climbing buddy was "spent" he left her at the bottom of the north face, soloed it, walked off the top tied to some random passer by, back down to where she was still waiting, then off back to the airport—end of story! There has to be a "WTF" in there

somewhere!

When not climbing—because it was raining for example—he has been known to play table tennis in his buffalo salopettes which would have been quickly dispensed with, leaving you with the questionable honour of him jumping around in holey Y-fronts—he is not known to be image conscious! Elsewhere, badminton had been keeping him off the streets, always with good humour while putting his body and soul into it!

He passed many months at our house near Grenoble, drinking beer or wine, walking or skiing. You see it did not *have* to be a climbing trip, he was still happy being out in the hills for long walks away from the crowds where there is a sort of peace that you cannot easily describe. He has now found true peace.

There are perhaps only two regrets that Simon will have had: not seeing his niece and nephew grow to their full potential and being denied that one last 4000m peak to complete his collection. The latter I intend to put right by taking something of him to that summit. Such a full life with so few regrets.

The Super Dwarf's last peak. Simon was house sitting for us in Quaix en Chartreuse—you might say it was his second home. One of his last messages was to tell how we had timed our departure perfectly because it was day after day of straight rain, so we need not worry about the garden being watered; this was followed by—as if someone had flicked a great weather switch—it was sunshine and blues skies.

He had then set off to climb the central peak of les Aig d'Arves. A peak of some 3500m, a long quite remote walk to a col of the same name followed by a modest grade 3b scramble to the top. He stayed at the hut, more because he had the time and what better way to pass the time than in an almost empty hut. A night out in the hills was what he lived for. The next morning he set off early—before the only others on the hill that day, a guide and his client who would later pass him close to the summit. Simon definitely got to the top, we have a stern faced selfie to prove it. From that point we can only hypothesize. The scrambling was easy (for Simon) but there is a section with serious exposure and the rock is less than ideal. Either he went off route or a hold broke away, whichever, he slipped and fell some 200m down the steep south face. The guide had already gone and so simply reported back to the hut saying that Simon was not far behind and should be there in less than an hour. After that time had passed the guardian did her duty and raised the alarm. Simon was found at about 10pm that same day, 6th July 2017.

Tales of dwarfish climbing terror—for those who insist! Mont Blanc du Tacul, Arête du Diable, 1999: Heading out from the old Torino hut—at some crazy time like midnight!—we arrived efficiently at the Col du Diable at dawn, where the real action begins. Five over 4000m teeth in quick succession. The first 2 teeth came and went. From there the terror began. Pointe Médiane (4097m): faced with a 40m 5a/b corner with at least one piece of aid tat hanging from it or a 4c steep slab further right. Simon has the lead and his style is more adapted to the direct physical variant. After about thirty minutes swinging around on the crux and having fallen off once, a guided pair sweep through and the guide offers Simon a rope.

"Are you *mad*?" but he simply grunts, "Non! Merci!"

Gentle suggestions to swing over onto the 4c variant also fall on deaf ears. Finally by sheer stubbornness he pulls himself to the top of this obstacle. It's not over, there is then a 25m abseil into a notch that we can not see. I find the abseil tat, I lower off, but no col or notch is visible. I attach myself to a small flake (mistake 1), I invite Simon to join me (mistake 2), we agree to do another 25m abseil (mistake 3). Yes they keep coming!

We pull the rope down and now we've no choice but to continue. Simon lowers off into a void, free hanging he calls up, "No rope!"

Apparently he has one foot of rope in his hand, no knot, no prusik—oh FFS! There follows some swinging back and forth until he could get a foot on one side or the other thus pushing himself up and pulling a few centimetres of rope back through the abseil device until there was enough to tie a knot. All the time I am studying this small flake that we are both completely reliant on. Hmmm!

Simon calls up "have knot!"

TFFT. More swinging around until he manages to stick to something and climb upto the notch which is at about the same level as me. So the rope is really not helping the way you would like it. I follow—with prusik!—and Simon pulling the loose end to haul me into the notch—even so, bloody tricky. Well TFFT!

I had no idea what the time was, the clouds had come in and it was distinctly chilly. Simon was now completely cream-crackered and it was down to me to lead the next tooth. It should not have been a big deal but we were both running on empty arms, thus, even if slowly, Pointe Carmen (4109m) came and went until at the bottom of the last abseil I find myself on hard snow and ice. There follows more swinging around on the abseil rope while putting on crampons. Simon comes down with them on! And by now we have lost the light of day completely.

Somehow we manage the rest of the ridge as we started it—by head torch—arriving at the summit of Tacul after midnight—all alone. We can see lights on at the Cosmiques Hut, far below. So a full 24hrs and we're still on top. We soaked up that moment before whooshing down the normal route to just below the Cosmiques where I proposed walking back to the Torino. Simon looked at me with dark staring eyes, "are you stark raving mad?"

So it was, that we got to the Cosmiques boot room as people were leaving for Mont Blanc. Two beers and two beds, please, Monsieur! That was a good day in the hills. But only after we got the beers in!

Closing with some words from the Simon's own keyboard. On the 2nd July 2103, Wayne and I dared to climb the wrathful goddess, the hardest 4000m peak in the Alps—and lived to tell the tale! The summit of the Aiguille Blanche was a great moment—even if we spent less than a minute there, after twenty years of effort to get there!

It is twenty years, in fact more than twenty years, that I first started Alpine climbing with a brash and forceful young climber—who even on that first trip managed to complete the sought-after traverse of the Rochefort-Grande Jorasses, despite an enormous blister on his foot. In the intervening period that brash young man and I have forged an effective and harmonious partnership, as well illustrated by this scene:

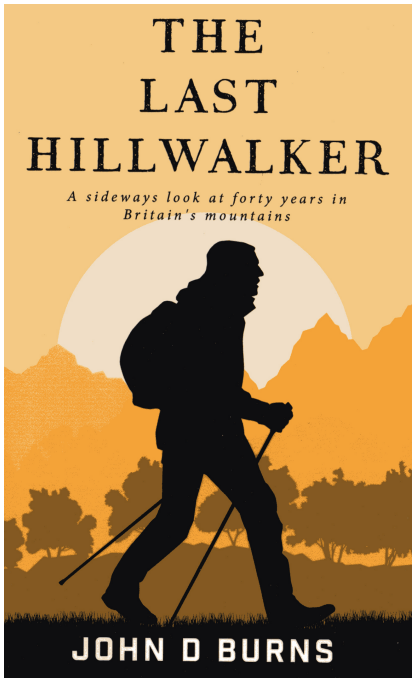
The English Camp on the Tour Ronde Ridge, the night before the attempt on the North Face of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey:

> Simon:
> "This day is called the feast of Oudaceus,
> So then audacious we must be,
> And bravely strike out for the face,
> So Alpinists in England now abed,
> Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
> And hold their manhoods' cheap, when any speaks,
> That climbed with us upon the Aiguille Blanche!"
>
> Wayne:
> "Shut the fuck up, I'm trying to get some sleep."

Book review: "The Last Hillwalker"

Alan Walker

"The Last Hillwalker: a sideways look at forty years in Britain's mountains" by John D. Burns*



John Burns is a Jacobites club member and his "sideways look" is a multi-layered account of his own journey through the business of learning how to do long distance hill-walking, rock and ice climbing, and alpine mountaineering. This is an usual contribution to mountaineering literature, for it conveys freshly and vividly the wonder of first escaping from an industrial town into the hills, the deep satisfaction of first completing a multi-day traverse of a ridge from one glen to another, the exhilaration of the final snowy ridge to the summit of Mont Blanc.

To set the scene the book starts somewhere in the middle of John's life as a mountaineer with an epic ascent of Green Gully ice-climb on Ben Nevis. Epic because he misjudged conditions that day about a climb he thought would be as straightforward as the last time. There is little here of the hold-by-hold story of a climb that is the usual fare of climbing books. Here the author shows what it is like to have to admit half-way up that this is a mistake, best remedied but continuing upwards despite the dire loose snow. The psychology of climbing is one of the threads continuing through this book.

Another main thread is the combination of his own personal history as a mountain man with the history of the scene out on the hills and crags from when he started as a schoolboy on his first trip away from the Wirral on

*published by `www.johndburns.com`, 2017, ISBN: 978-09955-958-04, Kindle Edition £3.11, paperback £9.99.

a youth-hostelling visit to the Lake District: learning the art of navigation by getting lost in the mist whilst avoiding the wrath of the school-teacher trying to keep track of his pupils. By the early seventies he and companions were one of the early parties to attempt the Pennine Way: from The Old Nags Head in Edale to The Border Hotel in Kirk Yetholm. The chapter for this is "Horizontal Everest": the route has 32,000 feet of ascent. The route had been described in 1968 by Alfred Wainwright, who had also left a fund to supply anyone who completed it a free beer at final pub in Kirk Yetholm. The team did not get their free beer, the route became so popular that the fund soon ran dry.

Scotland was first visited in the year of the big heat, 1976. They sweated their way through Knoydart, lugging a decrepit tent and brass paraffin stove on external-frame rucksacks. Their navigation skills were good by then but their maps were old, so old in this case that their planned final day going north over the Cluanie ridge then down into Glen Sheil was found to be barred by Loch Quioch, by then a large reservoir. No matter, they did the route and coped well with being offered at the Glenfinnan Hotel a meal of "poison bridies" (pies 'n bridies), then being entertained by same barman with a spot of fiddle playing on account there being no TV in the Glen (!) and on asking when the bar might close were told "when the last customer leaves". A tale of young scousers meet wiser weegie and, as long as the latter had beer to sell, all would be happy. Then on they went to camp in Torridon and met for the first time the Highland midge whilst dining on partly rehydrated Textured Vegetable Protein.

John's first job was in Sheffield, social work, and soon he was down at "The Rising Sun" joining the local club and being offered some training in the arcane art of cragging on Peak District gritstone. He bought his first rock-boots—hard rubber and high ankles was the only style then. A motor came next, a Morris Marina, whose tendency to oversteer was discovered the hard way as they travelled up a snowy A74 toward their first winter visit to the Highlands, the hard winter of 78/79. They retreated in the badly battered car to Langdale, camping as usual but within staggering distance of the Old Dungeon Ghyll bar and its Old Peculiar brew. His second job was in Inverness, and again he joined the local club and soon learnt both the arts of the etiquette appropriate for survival amongst the hard-men at the CIC hut (long before the days of its conversion to alpine Refuge style with twin internal toilets), and the more subtle art of survival in bothies. Bothies galore: Corrour, Sheneval, Coiremor, Glenbeag,...

The book contains accounts of various monsters: the mist monster, the ice monster, the midge monster. But the most dangerous of all is the sofa monster. You phone your friends to propose a day out on the hill, or to

reprise a climb, but they have all manner of excuses. You try someone else—more excuses. The question seeps in—has the sofa monster got a grip of them, as it might of me if I am not careful? Nah!—get out, get yer boots on and stravaig along to that remote bothy by Maol Bhuidhe, approached via Glen Elchaig.

Oulanka

Stuart Mitchell

Finland's Oulanka National Park is nestled in the corner formed by the Arctic Circle and the Russian border. It covers an area of c.280 km^2 and is characterised by gently rolling topography cut by the Oulankajoki, a major river which, depending on the season, flows, rages, or rests suspended through several vast lakes and a few spectacular gorges before entering the Paanajärvi National Park in Russian Karelia, eventually pouring into the White Sea, some 200-odd km away. In winter it takes an hour in a 737 followed by two hours in a car—fitted with studded tyres of course—to get there from Helsinki.

We were fortunate to have been invited to spend a week there with friends, one of whom has a house near the park. I had never been to a Nordic country, nor so far north, so it was a rare opportunity to get to know another part of the world which I might otherwise never have visited—made all the better with a semi-local who knew the place.

Once past the lakes of southern Finland, the world below the plane is dominated by infinite forest. In winter it is a monochrome landscape, almost. In March the sea ice is breaking up around the Helsinki islands but the still-frozen lakes are flat white patches within the noisier texture of the snow laden trees, their charcoal greys letting slip a hint of dark green. The measure of the place is revealed upon landing in the clearing that is Kuusamo airport: the runway service vehicles double up as snowploughs and the numerous small planes all wore skis rather than wheels. When we arrived at our accommodation at 10 pm, an hour of shovelling and strong teamwork got us into the house, woodshed, water pump and privy—in that order of importance. We dug our way into the sauna in the morning. It would be two days before the house warmed up sufficiently for us to remove hats and duvet jackets inside, especially at the dinner table.

The house and its outbuildings were set in a clearing within a seemingly endless forest. It was just south of the Arctic Circle, a 5-minute drive from the Russian border and a 15-minute snowmobile trip away from the nearest neighbours. The presence of buildings did nothing to domesticate the palpable wildness. A local handyman working on the roof during the

Photo 6.1: Approaching the Taivalköngäs hut, early evening.

previous summer reported an elk (moose) and its calf passing by his ladder, soon followed by a determined-looking brown bear. He took longer than normal on his roof job that day.

This part of Finland has had its own Highland Clearance. The original inhabitants, Sami reindeer herders, were displaced to make way for a sparse population of Finns who built the elegant timber houses which are constructed around substantial stone chimneys. These were all that stood after the grim winter war of 1941 when the fleeing Finns torched their own homes to deny the invading Russians permanent shelter. Finland lost half of Karelia and Russia lost countless young men to a winter they were unprepared for. The houses were rebuilt around the standing chimneys with the plentiful timber, and most of them have a simple, immaculate appearance betraying no great age.

Our home life was basic and mellow. There was electricity, but no gas nor running water. The priority was keeping the fire going and maintaining a habitable temperature. Buckets of water were slowly pumped and shifts were taken to dig a trench through the snow from the privy to the composting shed, a sinister timber box on the edge of the clearing where the contents of the rapidly filling drop toilet were deposited. Evenings were easily swallowed up by saunas and snow angels, followed by long meals and plans made over cans of Karhu beer.

We spent the first two days xc skiing on prepared tracks in bright blue

Photo 6.2: The most important job of the day.

sunshine, zero wind, and bone frosting cold in the shade. It was an enjoyable way to turn on our ski muscles and to socialise but it didn't really float my boat. The lack of edges on the skis felt alien and insecure; stopping generally involved a deliberate, vaguely controlled fall and the manufactured cut tracks felt like a step towards a wipe-clean wilderness. However, I did enjoy the occasional hut stops for hot cinnamon donuts and blueberry juice. The landscape was at once familiar from the rolling conifer bound Cairngorm foothills and alien from the vast open spaces on the frozen lakes we crossed. Any familiarity here was derived from Dr Zhivago. Track skiing is a hugely popular activity amongst the Finns and all ages were schussing about with immeasurably greater élan than me. Even the many elderly faces radiated a vitality unfamiliar to a dough-faced southern Scot.

Having warmed up our ski muscles, we set off for an overnight trip to a hut on the Karhunkierros (Bear's Trail). The trail runs 85km through the National Park and is the most popular walking trail in Finland. Unlocked shelters are situated along the trail which are maintained by the park and supplied with firewood which is paradoxically imported from Russia. The huts are vaguely comparable to mountain bothies in Scotland, but a strong ethos of respect for nature and other users is deeply wired into the outdoor

Photo 6.3: The Taivalköngäs hut.

Finns, and it is unthinkable that you will encounter a drunken stag party in one of those huts. In addition to the overnight huts, occasional day shelters called laavu are situated at scenic parts of the trail. These are intended for rest and lunch rather than bivouacking, and in addition to the shelter are also kitted out with firewood, drop toilets and toasting stands complete with sausage forks as no self respecting Finn would think about going into the wilds without a pocketful of the large smoked sausages that have their own dedicated aisle in the supermarket. The route of the trail is way-marked by orange stripes painted on trees every now and then, similar to the familiar red and white flashes in continental Europe. During the summer one can simply follow the path, but in winter everything is blanketed under snow.

We travelled on Nordic skis which made our progress marginally faster and significantly easier than walking. Our skis all had fish scales which made a whooshing sound, quiet enough to not be annoying but almost certainly loud enough to alert any wildlife of our approach. The woods provide a discrete and sheltered home for a number of animals that travellers of the Scottish mountains are unaccustomed to. Reindeer, giant lumbering elk (moose) and smaller, nimbler hares are all common and widespread. Their numbers and movements are checked not by estate owners and their clients but by the resident wolves, bears and wolverines. As in southern Europe, wolf numbers are rising in Finland, although the park is better known for its population of brown bears. Ursus Arctos is indigenous to the entire northern temperate zone and while the brown bears of the Pyrenees, Balkans and the mountains of the middle east are the same species, the bruins in northern Finland and Russia are more analogous to the famed grizzlies of North America, in size at least if not in hyperbole. While our wildlife sightings were limited to the occasional flit of an unidentifiable bird through the trees, the presence of large herbivores was writ large in the snow.

Imperceptibly, the forest had swallowed us up within fifty metres of us leaving the cars. Dense, straight up birch gave way to various dense, straight up conifers, including tall, orange barked Scots pines. Occasionally we would pass, and sometimes duck under, bowed trees bent over by the weight of snow on their upper branches, set like giant snares. These surroundings felt tense and comforting all at once. The fairy tale atmosphere with its learned threat and latent shelter gave meaning to what I expected to be a relaxed and pleasant but environmentally unremarkable social outing. Distant trees would occasionally rub together in a breeze we could not feel, their slowly flexing trunks creaking out a whale-like groan, breaking the profound silence. I reflected that being alone here would be a spooky experience. It was also a soberingly serious place to be in winter. While

devoid of the blatant drama of tottering seracs or loaded, creaking slopes, it was clear that getting hopelessly lost if one strayed from the path or if it snowed heavily would be very easy.

Our route crossed several frozen tributaries and took in a series of undulations which were too steep for the fish scales to grip but too short to bother with skins, so we carried the skis on our packs and walked for a few km. A few spectacular suspension bridges crossed the occasional river gorge, the water still frozen but beginning to break through at the rapids, before we arrived at the Taivalköngäs hut. Built in the early 20th century as a logging station where felled trunks were floated downriver, it is the oldest refuge on the trail. The hut had a nearby woodshed packed with logs and came with a very Finnish selection of splitting and kindling axes, and a composting toilet. The interior was simple and comprised sleeping platforms both downstairs by the stove and upstairs in the unheated loft. We were the only visitors that night and stayed downstairs. The first priority was to light the stove and roast some sausages. It only took an hour to thaw the -10°C chill from the interior. Thank goodness for hot soup, sausages and rum.

We woke the next morning to find it had snowed heavily overnight and the new 20 cm of snow provided a much grippier surface for the return hence we kept our skis on for most of the journey. The easier going combined with the familiarity of the surroundings had a relaxing effect, the primary interest being the fresh prints of a reindeer and its calf, and some round footprints visible on the river some 70m away. They were too far to identify but their size, spacing and gait suggested an elephant. Then we found them crossing our path. Quite fresh, deep and about 25–30 cm wide, sporting very distinct claw marks at the front and narrow heels to the back. It had to be a bear. While it was still early in the year for a bear to be up and about, overcast days were unseasonably warm. Daytime temperatures were occasionally getting as high as 1°C and small patches of green lichen were visible on the riverbanks. Lichens and plants form the bear's diet for the first month of the year until their gut bacteria settles after the long hibernation. After this they turn to meat and hunt for an elk or reindeer which they bury, returning to feed on it as required. No matter how many times I turned this seasonal dietary pattern over in my head, the remaining ski back to the visitor centre contained an extra frisson. While I'd loved to have seen a bear from a distance, there was an element of relief when we left the trees at the road and headed to the centre for more hot berry juice.

I showed the park biologist the photos of the prints and she reckoned that while it was a little too early for the bears to be out, it was not impossible given the unseasonal mild temperatures and the photos suggested a large

Photo 6.4: One of several bridges

Photo 6.5: Size 45 Telemark boots fitted inside these!

male of up to 350 kg. Gulp! However, the biologist also said that it may have been a wolverine, which are relatively common, do not hibernate and leave disproportionately large footprints in snow as they spread their feet out to act like snowshoes. They do not sink deep into snow though and our prints were quite deep.

The bulk of knowledge we in the outdoors community receive about bears is generally sourced from North America where an industry is sustained on teaching people how to behave in bear country, ranging from hanging food from trees to wearing bells and not running away if you see one. The Finnish attitude was pleasingly different. When I asked about returning in the summer to photograph them, I was simply told, "Unless you are in a hide, you won't see them. They're very timid." It is actually possible to spend time in hides but the animals are lured by food in order to satisfy paying photographers. While I cannot honestly say that that I would not do this, I am far from comfortable with the notion of feeding wild animals.

We spent our final ski-touring day further down towards the southern part of the Karhunkierros, toasting sausages at a laavu overlooking the still frozen Oulankajoki and visiting the spectacular Kiutaköngäs rapids, where the Oulankajoki breaks out from the ice and foams through a stunning red

Photo 6.6: Paul Fidler photographing the Oulankajoki.

walled gorge. I was told this was the most photographed spot in Finland which is quite an accolade considering how far away it is from anywhere more than a handful of people live. The evidence was there however; a large party of photographers with heavy tripods and big white lenses had walked in and taken all the best spots on the various snow covered belvederes above the rapids.

In much of Europe, to visit actual wilderness, where nature is unshaped and uninfluenced by humans, it is necessary to travel a substantial distance from roads or habitations. Here, you are acutely aware of being in the wilderness the moment you enter the forest, less than 50m from the road. What the Oulanka lacks in drama it more than makes up for in atmosphere and I would love to go back and see it an another season. Plans for a backpacking holiday on the Karhunkierros in the spring or autumn are in the queue!

Warm thanks are due to our hosts the Foster siblings Kate (host and winter rally ace), Michael (guru and Arcteryx model), and Andrea (catering and pirate juice), and to Paul Fidler (erstwhile former JMC member and master of the sausage).

Photo 6.7: Sausage time at a laavu.

There is a wealth of environmental and historical information on the area available and the humble Wikipedia page is a good place to start. If anyone's interest is piqued, more information can be also be found here:
`http://www.nationalparks.fi/en/`
and a superior account of the Karhunkierros in summer:
`http://jonsparks.zenfolio.com/karhunkierros`

On Moving Goalposts

Chris Banks

2017 was an interesting year for me. Catherine and I had just bought a tenement flat in Edinburgh and spent the winter renovating and decorating it. Having that (mostly) out of the way, I had a number of goals that I wanted to achieve during the year. As well as the usual mountaineering and hillwalking trips with the Jacobites, I wanted get back into rock climbing which was a pursuit that I had allowed to lapse during the previous couple of years. I used to climb a lot in the Peak District when I was a student in Manchester; with easy access to those fantastic gritstone edges, how could I not! However, since moving to Scotland I had spent the odd Tuesday night climbing with the Jacobites, but not enough to really keep in practice. I definitely wanted to fix this; it seemed like a worthy goal for the year.

Another goal, which in the former half of the year I was well on the way to achieving, was to take my bicycle racing to the next level. I wanted to gain my Category 3 racing license, meaning I had placed high enough in a number of road races to progress from the bottom division. I wanted to do something similar at the velodrome—to progress from Category C to B at track league. My training over the winter and spring with Edinburgh Road Club stood me in good stead to achieve both of these.

Finally, later in the year, I definitely wanted to get in a skiing holiday in the Alps, to progress my skiing from wobbling down blue runs at Aviemore to at least being a bit more competent! The grand vision was to be able to do some ski touring and at least attempt to keep up with Catherine.

I didn't achieve any of them.

On the 20th April, on the way home from work, my goalposts were moved quite considerably. I was riding my bicycle over South Bridge when a lorry opened its door on me. I swerved to avoid it—which I think I did, but it's all a bit of a blur—but ended up ploughing into an oncoming car. The next clear memory I have is flying over the car and landing in a crumpled heap on the ground. Once the usual wave of adrenaline and panic had subsided, I tried to get up... this was not happening. By now a passer-by, who happened to be a surgeon, was administering First Aid; he was worried I might have a head or spinal injury so was bracing my head until

an ambulance arrived. It became obvious, however, that my leg was very broken. The ambulance crew arrived, strapped me into a spinal board, put an inflatable splint around my leg, and administered a shot of morphine. It was only after being loaded into the ambulance and being pumped up with yet another shot of morphine, that I managed to stop hyperventilating; my arms felt numb from the drop in blood pressure.

I felt every Edinburgh pothole on the way to the Royal Infirmary.

That evening I was x-rayed, assessed, and scheduled for the first surgery slot in the morning. This involved putting my leg in plaster over night. In order for the doctors to do this comfortably I was sedated with ketamine; that was certainly an interesting experience. When Catherine arrived at the hospital I was still very much under the influence of the ketamine and, apparently in the slurred speech of a drunkard, I declared very loudly that they had "cut *all* my clothes off!"

The next morning I went into surgery. My tibia was smashed with complex fractures, but thankfully, sufficiently below the joint. My fibula was snapped clean through, and my patellar tendon had become detached. The repair work included a plate down my tibia, a handful of screws, and a "metal spider" washer screwed down to reattach my tendon. Surgery took three hours, with another three hours in recovery.

I was in hospital for a further week, but my new goals started here! Well, the first goal was maybe more for the doctors than me, but it was to get the pain under control. Even on relatively high doses of oxycodone I couldn't make it through a night without waking up screaming in agony. This was resolved somewhat by administering modified release oxycodone, which kept me doped up over night. Unfortunately, this had the unpleasant side-effect of making me feel continuously nauseous and distinctly lacking in appetite. Being unable to eat, I began to feel a lot worse.

After a few days of this I was able to keep a base-line of pain relief with paracetamol and ibuprofen and a return to the standard release oxycodone. This meant my appetite returned, I regained some strength, and the hospital physiotherapist came to see me. My new goal was to get on my feet on a Zimmer frame, then to be able to get myself to the toilet (quite a lofty goal at this point!), and bonus points were to be awarded for getting a shower.

Building up to this took the rest of the week. My morale at this point was helped immensely by my friends visiting—including a good number of Jacobites!—and Catherine's dedicated visiting every day and bringing me supplies and a sympathetic ear.

I never managed to get a shower. My first attempt at standing up resulted in vomiting over the physio. Sorry Eric.

Photo 7.1: Images not for the fainthearted!

It was great to be home after that. The next goal was to keep exercising the joint and to eventually be able to put some weight back through the leg. I spent the next three months on crutches with zero weight through the leg. Finally, on the 18th July I was given the go-ahead to start putting about 10% weight through the leg. I went for a little walk around the botanic gardens. It was amazing!

More and more physio followed and I slowly put more weight through the leg. I finally managed to get on my bicycle—set up on an indoor trainer!—on the 19th August. On the 17th September I walked up Arthur's Seat—except the very rocky bit at the top—on my crutches. More and more physio—a long and slow process of rebuilding muscle and strength. On the 3rd December I went up Dumyat Cairn on one crutch.

Over Christmas, Catherine and I finally managed to get a holiday. We went to Tenerife for a week and did some walking—still on one crutch—and soaked up some well-needed sunshine.

On the 5th January I was finally able to walk unaided and on the 10th February I rode my bicycle outside for the first time in nine and a half months! On the 18th February I walked up the Pap of Glencoe in full winter conditions. It had been a very long road to get there and there had been a lot of small goals along the way. Many of these goals moved, but I always made some progress and morale was always kept up by Catherine constantly being there for me, the hard work of my physios, and general kindness from my friends.

And there's still a long way to go.

So, goals for next year? Wind back to the beginning of this article!

Photo 7.2: Pap of Glencoe