

CHAPTER FIVE

ON BRITISH CRAGS AND MOUNTAINS

WALKING THE HOMELAND MOORS

..The man who never was lost, never went very far. "

G.H.B. Ward in "High Peak" by Byne and Sutton

On the 'homeland' moors of the Peak many will remember Geoff for his remarkable sense of direction and many are the Oreads who have followed on his track over Kinder and Bleaklow in dense mist conditions. For many years now a hardy perennial in the Oread calendar has been the Bullstones Meet. Traditionally, this used to be led by Harry Pretty and recently that tradition has been carried on by Don Cowan. The nature and distance of the walk has varied over the years and now involves a Friday night crossing of Kinder having first spent a convivial .hour or so in the Nags Head in Edale. But for a long period the meet took the form of a December weekend out on Kinder and Bleaklow bivvying the Friday night in Poltergeist Barn, on the slopes of Grindslow Knoll above Edale, and Saturday night at Bullstones Shooting Cabin below Howden Moors near the Head of the Derwent. Unfortunately Bullstones cabin was destroyed by vandals in the mid-sixties and the Saturday night bivouac site is now 'another' shooting cabin deeper into the heart of Bleaklow.

Much could be written about the characters and experiences on such meets during the past 20 years, but all those who have been on Bullstones meets will associate the name of Geoff Hayes with his nocturnal arrivals. Those soundly asleep would curse the disturbance which invariably occurred with the arrival of the 'Nottingham Shower', but those who had joined him on the trek from Edale during the hours of darkness held nothing but admiration for his navigation over Kinder and Bleaklow. Geoff frequently brought his own team along starting from Edale about 9.00 p.m. after a day in the shop. Often the shooting cabin would be bursting at the seams with human bodies and he would bivvy outside in company with those sometimes new to the rigours of such a weekend. Needless to say some novices were never seen again, but others have stayed the course and have become keen club members. Geoff's wife, Anne, was one such member, who met the Oread through being dragged up to Bullstones Cabin in the early hours of the morning.

Bleaklow and Kinder in December can be damp and miserable or lashed with rain or blinding snow storms, but many are the crisp frosty weekends with a weak wintery sun lending a fascination of its own to the wild open landscape — probably the moors at their best. Bleaklow and Kinder have lost in Geoff one who knew them intimately and appreciated them in all their moods.

Two classic walks on 'homeland' moors which must be mentioned are the Marsden-Rowsley and the Horseshoe of the Peak. The Marsden-Rowsley walk is an extension of the Marsden-Edale walk and first appeared on the Oread Meets list in 1952. from Marsden it follows the Wessenden Valley over Black



1954 Group at Robin Hood Inn below Birchen Edge. (From Left) A.N. Other, Jim Winfield, Pete Cole, Tony Smith, Malcolm McCarthy and Brian Richards.

Photo - Jack Ashcroft



Marsden Rowsley 1954, Snake Inn. (L to R) Brian Cooke, Ken Wright, Clive Webb, Mark Hayhurst, Jack Leeson, John Briggs. (Front) Mike Moore, Geoff Gibson, Jack Wolfe, Laurie Burns, Pete Cole.

photo: Jack Ashcroft



Bullstones Cabin 1961. (From Left to Right) Eric Wallis, Dave Weston, Barry Williams, Laurie Burns, Doreen Hodge, Colin Hobday, Pam Weston.

Photo - Jack Ashcroft

Hill up Wild Boar Clough to Bleaklow Head, onto Kinder Scout and along Seal Edge and Blackden Edge to Win Hill and Yorkshire Bridge. The walk then changes in character following the somewhat easier going along the Gritstone Edges from Stanage to Birchens, finally finishing with the walk through Chatsworth Park. The route must be studded with memories for many Oreads. Friday night bivouac in Marsden gas works; ‘bivouac’ in the bar of the Old Isle of Skye Inn high on Wessenden Moor, after being invited in to join the landlord and friends in a private party at 1.00 a.m.; Bivouacs in torrential rain in the ruins of the Isle of Skye after it had been demolished in 1958; hot mugs of tea and bacon sandwiches early on Saturday morning at the George and Dragon at Woodhead after the traverse of Black Hill; the spontaneous hospitality of the Barnsley Mountaineering Club in their club hut in the Snake Pass after particularly inclement weather conditions during the crossing of Black Hill and Bleaklow.

The early meet leaders, like Dave Penlington, always insisted on a ‘route on each edge’ and Geoff enjoyed carrying on this tradition starting with the Chinese Wall routes on Seal Edge and finishing with a Hayes’ favourite — Och Aye Wall on Gardoms. The walk is usually taken as a two day event with a Saturday night bivouac at Bole Hill — Penlington’s Plantation overlooking Bamford. In 1959 the meet was gifted with particularly fine weather save for an almighty thunderstorm about 6.00 p.m. on the Saturday. Geoff and myself were safely installed in the Yorkshire Bridge Hotel before the cloudburst. During the next hour we witnessed various Oreads appearing somewhat bedraggled on the hostelry steps with Mike and Meg Moore having a standup argument with the landlord about diminishing hospitality in the Peak Inns as they stripped off their sodden clothes — Meg more than Mike.

The weather was unusually fine on the Sunday and Geoff and I extended the walk to Matlock via Beeley Moor. This became traditional for some years with afternoon tea provided at the end of the walk by the girls of Matlock Training College — ex-Whitehall pupils. The walk was also extended in the North **one** year when Ron Dearden, Glen Gundry, Clive Webb and Phil Falkner started from Colne,* involving a distance of over 70 miles of rough moorland walking. The Marsden-Rowsley walk “pure” involves over 40 miles of walking and taken over two days provides an enjoyable club walking meet traversing the best of the Dark Peak.

Probably the piece de resistance of walking in the Peak District is the Horseshoe of the Peak. This starts at the Roaches, follows the Dove to Three Shires Head, continues north to Whitehall, Sparrowpit then on to the Snake Road top

◆The officially recognised Colne/ Rowsley walk was inaugurated in 1926 by Fred Heardman, Harold Gerrard and John Firth Burton. It followed Boulsworth Hill, Widdop Reservoir, Blackstone Edge, Stanedge, Black Hill, Salters Bridge, Outer Edge, Margery Hill, Derwent Edge, Stanage Edge, Froggatt Edge to Rowsley. The Oread way combines the best of the Marsden/Edale walk with the original Colne/Rowsley walk and is marginally farther.



Ashop Clough Cabin 1959. (From Left) Frank Goldsmith, Bob Pettigrew, Clive Webb, Harry Pretty and Ron Dearden.

Photo – Jack Ashcroft



Marsden Rowsley 1958. Snake Inn. (From Left) George Sutton, Jim Winfield, Jill Daffern, David Widdows, Harry Townsend, Harry Pretty, Jack Leeson, Laurie Burns.

Photo – Jack Ashcroft

via Kinder Downfall. It then follows the desolation of Bleaklow around the Head of the Derwent to Margery Hill and along Derwent Edge. The comparatively gentle walk down the Griststone Edges follows, and the walk is completed over Beeley Moor down to Matlock. The Oread have over the years done variations on the theme of the Horseshoe of the Peak.

This appears to have started in 1954 when Geoff Gibson led a Five Inns Walk. On that occasion six Oreads attended, Geoff Gibson, Laurie Burns, Jim Kershaw, Mark Hayhurst, Mike Moore and Jim Winfield plus Larry Lambe from the Mountain Club. Which are the official five inns, is difficult to extract from the newsletter write-up since a few were thrown in for good measure! But over 65 miles was walked between the Three Horse Shoes near the Roaches and the Robin Hood near Birchens via The Cat and Fiddle, Nags Head and Yorkshire Bridge. The Saturday night bivvy was in the vicinity of the Flouch Inns, only just reached before 10.30 p.m. Total time taken for the walk was 45½ hours including sleep. Charlie and Mary Cullum walked independently of the main party but finished the walk at the Flouch having bivouaced the Saturday night at the entrance to Ashop Clough in the Snake 'a delightful spot and a lovely night.'

The Horseshoe of the Peak at the time of writing still awaits an Oread 'pure' traverse. The write-up by Geoff in the Newsletter after the 1971 epic, summarises three attempts on the original walk as initiated by Larry Lambe and John Sumner of the Mountain Club.

"The Peak Horseshoe Walk 1971" •

Eric Byne in 'High Peak' wrote at some length about the epic Peak Horse-show walk, first done by Sumner and Lambe of the Mountain Club of Stafford in 37 hours in 1953. Long before this book was published the Oread had attempted the same marathon walk. The first attempt started from the barn at the Roaches early on Saturday morning in '59 (I think). It ended for some at Buxton in the foulest of weather, with Gordon Gadsby being transported from Whitehall seated in a wheelbarrow. Ashcroft, Frost and myself did get as far as Edale, but a night at Poltergeist Bam in pouring rain put paid to us and we took the train to Grindleford before limping to Rowsley.

The second attempt, about a year later, was a little more successful. This time we started from the Roaches on the Friday night and slept later at Three Shires Head. The Saturday was spent walking to Bullstones Cabin, but we avoided Bleaklow and crossed from Edale to the Snake and then over Alport Castles. Rowsley was easily reached on the Sunday.

After a ten year lapse I decided in a weak moment to lead the meet once again. A few weeks before the date I was regretting the decision, but lived with the belief that no other Oread could be interested in doing such a slog. It was therefore with much surprise that on Friday evening, 19th March this year, I saw assembled at Trevor Bridges' home in Derby the following young and not quite so young Oreads and friends: Dave Williams, Paul Gardiner, Clive Russell, Chris Radcliffe, Trevor Bridges, Neil, Doris and dog!



Bob Pettigrew Pipe Concert at Poltergeist Barn Eda/e, in December 1965.

Photo — Harry Pretty



Outside Wood Cottage - The Barnsley Mountaineering Club Hut in Snake Pass. (From Left) Fred Brown, Stan Moore, Dave Williams, Jack Ashcroft, Bob Gill and Pete Janes.

Photo — Harry Pretty

The same faces also appeared in the pub at Upper Hulme before leaving at about 9.30 p.m. for a barn close to Three Shires Head. The night was dark and the bogs in prime conditions as we slogged over the top of the Roaches and later up the Dane Valley.

After a slight loss of route and an encounter with a large horse guarding a farm (Williams muttering about the Black Horseman) the barn was reached about midnight. This barn provided everyone with a comfortable nights kip and led to a far too leisurely start on the Saturday. However the Cat and Fiddle road was soon reached and then the A6 close to Whitehall. Combs Moss was crossed and the low cloud began to clear as we descended to Dove Holes and a rendezvous with Sheila Bridges and Jean Russell. After hot drinks and eats, the team set off for Sparrowpit. Doris and dog retired much to the relief of Williams who had spent most of his time lifting the dog over the numerous stiles which blocked our way. It was then up and over Brown Knoll and onto Kinder Low with the pace slowing down as thick cloud spread in again.

Kinder Scout was reached as it began to rain and blow in earnest. From here the party began to split up and the arrival at the Summit of the Snake saw us in some disarray and with a faltering spirit. It was quite cold and getting dark quickly, and our unhappy crowd hunched in the shelter of the support car. Here the party decided to split and Trevor, Chris and myself decided to carry on as best we could, with the others hoping to find shelter at the Barnsley Hut or at Heathy Lea.

It was pitch dark as the three of us set off for Lower Small Clough Cabin by about the most direct route via Grains-in-the-Water and the Westend Clough. All went well with the map reading and about 10.00 p.m. the Cabin was found. Don Cowan was in residence just drinking the last of the tea, having decided that we wouldn't make it. Don had walked from his home in Sheffield. After another good night and late start it was down to the Derwent, then up to Bullstones and Margery Hill. The weather was an improvement on the previous day and a fast time was made over the Derwent Edges to the Ladybower Road where our support party was a little surprised to find that we had survived the night. Here we were joined by Rusty who had walked up the Edges from Baslow to walk back with us for the remainder of the walk. All that remained was an easy run in over Stanage, Burbage, Froggatt, Curbar and Baslow Edges to the hut at 6.45 p.m. having spent a total of 25 hours walking.

Well, there is still the chance for the Oread to do the complete Peak Horseshoe. The main parts we missed were over Bleaklow Head and round the head of the Derwent, and if there is a purist in the party, the section from Baslow to Matlock was done by the Mountain Club in 1953!"

In addition to the Marsden-Rowsley-Matlock and the Peak Horseshoe, Geoff and his fellow Oreads walked the round of all the various titled stones on Kinder and Bleaklow, the Eastern Edges Walk, the straightforward round of the Edale Valley and Harry Pretty's Sixteen Stones Walk, starting and finishing at Edale.

To conclude walking in the Peak one cannot omit mention of the White Peak. For many years a January walk in the limestone country has been customary in

the Oread calendar of events, a favourite being from Ashbourne to Bakewell taking two days, as most people in the 1950's worked on a Saturday morning. The Newsletter accounts reproduced here, without bus and motorbike sections, will be reminiscent for many of 'Welbourn Wanders' in the Dales but with better weather conditions it is hoped.

Two Derbyshire Weekends

Jim Kershaw

1. December 7-8th 1957

Ashbourne is a friendly sort of place. Moore, Geoff Hayes and myself arrived there on Saturday hot on the trail of Welbourn who had left for Dovedale on foot. It began to rain and I was persuaded into waiting for the Ilam bus by the other two members of the party who refused to follow my example in buying a pac-a-mac (price 17/4).

It arrived eventually.

Now the Ilam bus isn't really a bus at all; it's a sort of rival time machine set 50 years in reverse. Cold comfort characters share their seats with a crate of fowls, an old sow or two, oblivious to eccentrics in anoraks.

We stepped back into 1957 and the rain at the Isaac Walton and set off for the stepping stones and Dovedale (myself in pac-a-mac value 20/-).

Just past the point where you always fall into the river we came across a group of huddled figures outside a cave. They spoke and pointed upwards to where Welbourn had disappeared in search of an old Valkyrie campsite.

Impressed at this well-deserved translation to a higher plane of existence, we retired into the cave and discussed the rival merits of a memorial on the spot or at Stanage, but were relieved to have him back with us a few moments later in a most ungodly condition. The whole party proceeded to Halldale where tents were set up in high wind and heavy rain.

Sunday morning was fine and sunny, Moore, Geoff and myself set off for Hartington, Welbourn and party pegging on Ilam Rock before walking over to the Manifold. It soon began to rain again and Moore and Geoff eyed my pac-a-mac (value 30/-) enviously.

We followed the usual path up Milldale and Beresford Dale, tried a scree run down the side of the valley, all going well until a short cut over a bridge which no longer existed involved us with the serpentine bank of the Dove and brought us into a Hartington bar with a cloth on the pumps and all the farewell sadness of late Sunday dinner.

We ordered a pot of tea, eyed the polished horsebrass on the walls and rafters, deplored the weather, and memories came back of previous Oread visits to the inn.

It is unfortunately possible to walk through Lathkill Dale to Bakewell from Hartington. Moore and I were persuaded to do so against our better judgement, as it was still raining and I was obliged to refuse Moore's offer of £2 for my pac-a-mac.

I don't need to discuss the Hartington-Lathkill walk. Most of you have done it in your younger days. There isn't much to it really if you keep walking and

talking — time soon passes and you find yourself walking downhill into Bakewell wet through and wondering what the hell you do it for.

Walking down to Bakewell in the black wet misery of a winters evening stimulates the mind into activity. The night's particular fantasy took the shape of an Oread National Anthem, (tune — Jerusalem), something to sing in your bath at Bryn-y-Wern.

It might go in the following manner:- “And
did those feet in Gibson's time Walk upon
England's mountains green.
And was the President himself
Upon the gritstone edges seen?
etc. etc.
And was the Oread builded here
Amongst these Welsh Touristic Hills?”

Try it yourself and you'll probably get stuck on the second verse as I did.

We finally ended up in a Bakewell cafe where Moore was delighted to find that I was as wet as he was in spite of the pac-a-mac (17 4), and, assuming his impeccable Yorkshire accent, shamed a number of walkers from Sheffield into silence.

That's about it, really, except that I had a day off on Monday to get over it. Healthy pastime, mountaineering.

II: January 4-5th 1958

I suppose I am too easily talked into things. Someone in the warmth and comfort of the ‘Bell’ says Bamford Edge this weekend and you automatically agree without really considering what Bamford Edge in January entails.

However, there I was on the 12 o'clock bus on a Saturday afternoon with Geoff Hayes, looking at the snow on the Derbyshire slagheaps, and before long, listening to the life story of a Glossop exile in the Bakewell bus shelter, a confused story of a man with one leg. the inescapability of mother-in-laws and Christmas Day in Bakewell. Retreat to a cafe for tea involved another skirmish with a local, fortunately on the safe ground of weather, and we caught the bus to Grindleford without further incident. John and Janet Ashcroft were found thawing out in the Sir William Cafe after a motorbike trip from Derby. We arranged to meet them at Bamford Edge as we intended walking from Grindleford via Lawrensfeld, Millstone Edge and Stanage. Conditions weren't very pleasant with two inches of snow on the ground and a drizzling mist obscuring visibility.

We were glad to reach the campsite where a cloud of steam was issuing from a corned beef hash in the Ashcroft tent. (This particular site is reported to be where R.C. Pettigrew erected his tent on a Marsden-Rowsley walk after previously assuring the rest of the party that tents would be unnecessary — it rained, naturally). Fortified by hash, the party ivalked down to the Yorkshire Bridge where draught ‘Younger’ bitter and a dartboard occupied us until closing time.

Heavy rain fell during the night and washed away all traces of snow, the value of a sewn-in groundsheet for keeping water inside the tent being admirably demonstrated.

Geoff and I went to look for Welbourn on Sunday morning but were unable to catch site of the 'Towers' in any of the usual places. We returned to collect John and Janet and went to look at Bamford Edge. There are certainly some routes there for those capable of doing them with a sling hanging in a hair raising position to show the possibilities. Geoff did one and a half routes in atrocious conditions and we called it a day. There is an excellent view of the Derwent reservoirs from the Edge, and a gamekeeper in residence who seems friendly enough out of the grouse breeding season.

As for the return journey, I can't say I really enjoyed walking from Bamford to Baslow by road in the rain, but as I say, I am easily talked into things."

Lyke Wake Walk

A further example of Geoff's appreciation of long distance walking in hill country is in his own account taken from the Newsletter of his first Lyke Wake Walk, in 1966.

"Finally just a short report on the Lyke Wake Walk. This for me will I expect be 'The Meet of the Year'. To cover about 45 miles in completely new country in under 24 hours in wonderful conditions (that is anything from thick fog in the dark, to hot sun in the day, with fantastic cloud and mist effects and a Brocken Spectre thrown in for good measure) is something I and I'm sure all the others will always remember.

We realised it was going to be an epic when on the Friday evening Gordon, Chris and myself arrived in Wakefield in John Crosse's car. We were welcomed by Jean Russell and had coffee and chips whilst awaiting Rusty's return from York. He and his friend Jeff elected to sleep the night at Wakefield.

We soon found that fog on the A1 was going to hold us up and arrived at Osmotherley about 1.00 a.m. on Saturday. Here we found Mick Berry and three friends, including one female who was sleeping out alone by the stream. Gordon and myself, like true Oreads, elected to protect her by sleeping either side! It may have been because of this, that Mick, Malcolm, Les, and Josephine departed into the night and mist at approximately 5.00 a.m., after rising for breakfast at 3.00 a.m! A little later Rusty's party arrived and departed for the first trig point leaving us still a little dazed lying in our bug bags. So now the meet was split into three parts which of course is true Oread. Not disheartened at being left at the post, the Nottingham four left at first light and reached the first trig point at 7.15 a.m. Seventeen and three quarter hours later the whole party minus one C.C. member including one female and one lad of 15 (Chris) arrived triumphant at Ravenscar 45 miles at least away!

During these hours of day and night occurred many incidents. Our party of four had the bit between our teeth and managed to meet up with the other two small groups some 15 miles from the start when we rendezvoused with Jean and

Rusty's mini van. Here Les Hughes dropped out with badly blistered feet. The Oread took control of his woman from then on! Up to this point we had all encountered fantastic weather conditions — a magnificent sunrise with the whole of the Yorkshire plain covered in ground mists and the moors rising clear. Then just the occasional tree top would appear, to be suddenly swallowed up again. As the route ascended and descended we were often plunged into the thick mist, but were pleased that another short climb would soon bring us out once more into the dazzling sunlight.

By the time we were ready to move off from that first rest point it was really hot. Shirt sleeves were the order from then on as sacks were picked up by Jean in the mini van, now with springs nearly touching the ground, on to the next check point. We were informed that a seven year old boy was about half an hour in front of us, but we never did catch him and his father (the father was on his eighth crossing). As you can imagine with this walk becoming increasingly popular and up to 150 people attempting the crossing each weekend, there must be quite a good track at least up to the stage where most drop out!

However, despite this track, we all had to wade sections of the moor (Wheeldale) that followed and Mike Berry capped the lot by sinking up to his waist at least twice. The seven year old, who was not in sight, gradually drew away on this section as he just trotted over the bog! Another stop for tea etc. on a road near Wheeldale Youth Hostel lost us quite some time as people tended to their feet, tried to get lifts in over full vans and generally enjoyed lazing about in the hot sunshine. At last we all moved off together saying farewell to Jean (what would we have done without her).

This was to be our last check point and we were on our own until the end at Ravenscar with all of Fylingdales moor to cross in the now gathering darkness. Fen Bog House was soon reached (well named for we all had to wade it here!) and 'joined up with another team who had started about the same time as ^{Soo} elves. After supping their beer and making eyes at the girls in their support ^{our S} _{t v we a} all decided to cross Fylingdales together. The Early Warning Station ^{ar} _{ose} to the road is not marked even on the latest map. We decided to turn ^{Ull}h South. Setting off in the mist we soon found ourselves at the main gate! The Oread party then said thanks for the beer and walked back to the road to try ^{North}, the other party said, not likely, as they had seen it in daylight and ^{so} _t further South. We later found out that they returned to the same spot and ^{w c k e d} on the front door of the station, were invited inside, shown a detailed map of the area, went out and got completely lost on the moor, arriving at the finish well after us.

We had ^{lost} another hour getting back to the road and walking North. On ^{mpass} bearing we set off once again only to run foul of the station barbed fence nd perimeter track. This was a bit disheartening as we were not sure of the direction it would eventually lead us. We carried on and after a stop for food and general commiseration we were joined by a party of boys led by a hard man with a torch who seemed to know the way. This party had at its rear a tail-ender called Charlie and we followed thinking all was now well. About two hours later the Oread were in the front leading the hard man with a torch (now kaput) off the



moor. He had managed, despite having crossed the same moor earlier that day when going to meet the boys, to get us all lost exhausting his party in the process, falling waist deep into a water hole and in the end having to admit defeat and fall in behind us!

Another road was reached. Here it was a hive of activity despite it being thick fog and well after midnight. Various support teams were searching for their charges as the Oread (swept?) through. A final extremely wet and muddy path across the last moor and we were there in the welcoming arms of Jean — a total of 17 hours and 45 minutes including stops.

Here's to the next Lyke Wake next year — you should try and join us you virgin dirgers!"

Geoff did the walk to my knowledge twice, not in anything like record time, this was not Ms interest. For the statistically minded the time on the second crossing he led was 11 hours 45 minutes. In fact Geoff was no record breaking fell runner with good performances behind him for the Lakeland 24 hour 'trot', Tan Hill, Cat and Fiddle or Pennine Way, neither was he an XS man on rock, "but always climbed within himself" as Dennis Gray has remarked; "His gaunt looks, which belied his power as a walker/mountaineer, as on Kinder in foul weather, and there he came into his own ploughing through the groughs and the peat bogs." Dennis, who is now 'Mr. Mountaineering', being the National Officer of the British Mountaineering Council, is married to Leni, who worked at one time in the Hayes Bookshop in Beeston and was introduced by Geoff to the Oread.

Geoff was not a man with an impressive expedition record, but this undoubtedly is where he would have excelled. No, Geoff Hayes simply represented all that is best in a member of a British Mountaineering Club, his untiring enthusiasm for club activities; his encouragement to novices; an exceptionally competent all rounder who loved the hills and all they had to offer in companionship, and physical and mental recreation.

CHAPTER SIX

ON BRITISH CRAGS AND MOUNTAINS

SCOTLAND

"Mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery."

Ruskin

"True and Beautiful in Mountains"

For British mountaineers there is no doubt that Scotland provides the best climbing and walking these islands have to offer. Naturally for those resident in the Midlands visits are all too infrequent, but Geoff Hayes always made the best of his visits North.

A Cairngorm Traverse

Gordon Gadsby describes a typical Cairngorm weekend in March 1968 when he tells how Chris Culley, Geoff and himself walked over to Coire-an-t-Sneachda, climbed one of the 700 foot five finger gullies, walked onto Ben Macdhui, dropped down to Loch Avon and the Shelter Stone for tea, and then came back over the top of Cairngorm in a vicious blizzard. Geoff's sense of direction in the storm and white-out conditions as they came over Cairngorm was described by Gordon as 'uncanny'. The following day just Geoff and Gordon walked up Glen Feshi, Geoff having long cherished an ambition for the walk since reading an account of its wild grandeur.* Gordon writes, "Having no transport to meet us at Linn of Dee, we knew we couldn't do the complete crossing, but what Geoff had in mind was far tougher. It was to walk through the glen over the highest point at 1834' and down the other side as far as Glen Geldie and the ruins of Geldie Lodge, then retrace our steps back over the pass to our starting point. A walk of almost 30 miles. This we did on a wild and windy March day completing the round trip in just over ten hours, running on downhill stretches on the return journey to be back before dark. The scenery throughout was of the highest order, one of the wildest and finest glens it's been my privilege to visit." This was no mean feat, especially as it followed an equally inspiring day on the Ben Macdhui traverse mentioned above and here described in detail by Gordon.

"For two days and nights raging blizzards had been sweeping over the mountains and valleys of the central Cairngorms. Sleep, in the confines of Geoff's Dormobile, had been virtually impossible and we had been forced to retreat the vehicle to a corner of the Aviemore Centre in order to escape the nightly buffeting on the campsite.

The morning of March 8th 1968 proved to be an exception and I awoke to the merry glint of sunshine filtering through the frosted windows of the caravette.

♦"Mountain Holidays" by Janet Adam Smith (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.)



Geoff Hayes on Summit of Cairngorm during Ski Traverse 1962

Photo — Harry Pretty



Glen Etive - Easter 1971.

Standing - Konrad Kotowski, Lloyd Can's, Andy Dunham, Robin Reeve, Dave Guyler, Jim Kershaw, A.N. Other, Chris Radcliffe, AN. Other, Stuart Bramwell.

Sitting — Kyrzia Kotowski, John Dench, Margaret and Gordon Gadsby, Christine Craddock, Kath Bramwell, Paul Craddock, Dave Brady, Anne, Geoff, Michael and Peter Hayes.

Photo — Gordon Gadsby

Geoff was already up and about, and no wonder, it had been his turn to sleep in the ice chamber conditions of the top bunk. He handed me a steaming Mela ware mug of tea and said, “Wake Chris up quick, it looks like being a great day for the tops.” I managed to wake the remaining occupant of the lower bunk, Chris Culley, with a couple of shakes and he too received his cup of Hayes tea (Hayes tea is different to any other variety as it usually contained at least six spoonfuls of sugar).

Within the hour we had breakfasted and were on our way up the snow covered mountain road through Glen Morlich. The clouds were clearing and great patches of blue were spreading across the early morning sky. As we drove along Loch Morlich we could see the sun sparkling through the trees on the great sheet of clear ice that covered the loch. At the next clearing the irrepressible Hayes pulled up, yanked on the handbrake and said, “Come on Gordon let’s have ten minutes skating on the ice; it might be the last time we get the chance this year.” The thrill of the next fifteen minutes or so as the two of us glided effortlessly across the dark waters of that silent loch will remain with me for ever. Chris sat and watched us in pensive mood — he’d left his skates at home in Derbyshire! Talk about getting as much into life as one can, this was probably Geoff’s greatest gift, and even as he skated, a thousand thoughts of the day ahead must have been tumbling through his mind. Always a great and serious planner of his mountaineering expeditions, he very seldom revealed his true hand until very late in the day — little did I dream of what exploits he had in mind that day.

We arrived at the car park beneath the ski slopes of Cairngorm at about 9.30 a.m., one or two cars were already there but it was hard to realise that by 10.00 a.m. the park would be the resting place for hundreds of cars and a dozen or so buses.

Geoff thought a gully climb would be a good idea, and soon the three of us were plodding across the silent snowfields towards Coire an-t-Sneachda. As we approached the main corrie beneath the magnificent face of Sneachda Geoff pointed out the main features. Over to the right was the wide snow fan of Aladdin’s Couloir, the lower part in dark shadow. This reached the ridge at the lowest point and was the easiest way up. Geoff together with Molly Porter and her husband had climbed this last year whilst working as an Instructor at Glenmore Lodge. He then switched his gaze to directly in front of us — there, unbelievably steep looking, were five of the finest gullies I’d ever seen, each one a long slender ribbon of snow and ice at least 700’ long, and each one imprisoned by bulging walls of rock. “We’ll tackle No. 3” he said, and before we had chance to dispute this he was loping across the corrie floor and cutting steps up the far side to a stance below the chosen climb. We fitted our crampons on and Geoff led off up the gully with what seemed to me a very long run out of rope. Soon it was my turn and only then did I realise what a heavy sack I was carrying. I grumbled down to Chris and he muttered tersely, “So’s mine, that bugger Hayes has probably left his food behind again.” As we gained height in the gully the rock walls narrowed and at times it was possible to touch the sides with an arms span. This enabled Geoff to place some good rock belays and in fairly quick time we emerged on the crest of the plateau near the top of Sneachda. Even as we did so a

blanket of mist enveloped us like a shroud, robbed us of what should have been a fine view and dampened our enthusiasm for staying on the tops. Chris and I were all for going down by Aladdin's Couloir, but Geoff would have none of it, "Nonsense" he said, "let's have a bite to eat and then head over the plateau to Ben Macdhui; this mist will soon clear."

As usual the Hayes' persuasive technique worked like a charm and after a bar of chocolate and some biscuits we were on our way. If I'd realised how long it would be before we were to sit down for lunch, I would have eaten a good deal more.

We descended a very gentle snow slope for what seemed like hours and then crossed a large expanse of marshy ground by Lochan Buidhie. Visibility was down to about ten yards and Geoff was constantly checking his map and compass. Eventually we began a slow descent through deep powder snow, at times so deep we had to wade through. I remember thinking that the skiers must be having a field day on the White Lady. Several times I thought we'd reached the top, but always more high ground loomed out of the mist. It was an eerie world and I certainly wouldn't like to have been there alone. At last at 12.30 p.m. the trig point marking the four thousand three hundred feet summit was beside us, bathed for a few minutes in the weak afternoon sun. We flopped beside it, even Geoff was relieved to be there. The view was almost non-existent, just a thirty yard patch of sunlit snow, a beautiful blue sky above and all around us a wall of impending mist. I felt that if we'd had a short ladder we could have seen above the mist, but the sight of rolling clouds and a few tops peeping through will have to remain in my imagination, for today it was not to be.

As we shared our food and sucked a mouthful of snow the mist closed around us bringing a chill to our bones. Hundreds of times over the last fourteen years I've been on mountain tops in fair and foul weather from as far apart as the rock towers of the Corsican Alps, the snow summits of Arctic Norway and the highest peaks of Monte Rosa, but never have I felt more isolated from the mundane world, than here on the grey mountain of Ben Macdhui. "Have either of you ever been to the Shelter Stone?" asked Geoff, rubbing his hands briskly. Chris replied in the affirmative, but I shook my head. I realised my mistake almost at once, but by then it was too late. "Great, that's it then" said Hayes bounding to his feet. "If you haven't visited the Shelter Stone, you haven't lived." Chris was in agreement with him. The die was cast!

Quickly we left the cairn and descended a seemingly endless snow slope into the deepening gloom of a winter's afternoon. Suddenly the pair of them leaped into the air and with yells and cries of "Yo-hoo" and, "What about a water bottle Biddle," hurled themselves down the ever steepening slope in a series of glissades and tumbles. Horrified at first, I watched, and then as they all but disappeared from view into the rolling mists, I decided that Geoff must have been down the slope before and knew it was a safe runout and that for once valour would be the better part of discretion. I too threw myself onto the slope. Instantly I was away, zooming down in a flurry of powder snow, skiing was never like this! At times I was glissading under control and then sliding feet first on my stomach using my axe as a brake. When I eventually ground to a halt and emerged from a great

mound of snow, I found Geoff and Chris all ready for the off. "What kept you?" Geoff enquired. I looked behind me and back up the mountain face we had just descended, almost a thousand feet in under five minutes, it seemed impossible!

Ahead of us now was a frozen tarn, but unlike Loch Morlich this was covered with a fantastic depth of snow. Rather than skirt the perimeter we decided to go straight across as this would save a good half hours walk. To get onto the surface we had to cross a large bergshrund that had formed where the mountain slipped into the lake. As we did so we could see that the depth of snow was at least ten feet thick. Geoff further assured us that it was only in a very hot summer that this mountain tarn would thaw completely. I found out later that it was one of three tarns clustered in a group, and lay at an altitude of over three thousand feet. The surface was not as flat as it had seemed and as we pressed on into the mist all kinds of unusual snow formations kept appearing in front of us, some were like giant moguls and others were complete waves of snow. These had obviously been formed by the tremendous winds that regularly roar across the bleak expanses of these hills, sometimes with gusts of over a hundred miles an hour.

The mist still swirled around us and now and then a flurry of snow promised worse to come. Soon after crossing the tarn we reached a second lake, long and slender. We turned North here and walked along the left hand bank to the stream at its mouth. The stream eventually ran into the main watershed Garth Uisge. Here the way became much steeper and the slopes very icy. With a sudden cry, "There it is," Geoff excitedly pointed out the huge expanse of lovely Loch Avon far below as a break in the clouds opened briefly for a tantalising glimpse of the Cairngorms most famous water. On the right of us we could see the steep cliffs of Shelter crag, a massive flat topped buttress and on the east the impressive rocks of Cairn Etchachan plunging down to the head of the loch. The ice axes came in very useful on this final tricky descent and it was with some sense of achievement that we at last stood beneath the mighty Shelter Stone, the time was about 3.00 p.m. Just when this massive block of rock fell from the cliffs towering above it on the south is unknown. The stone has been measured and its dimensions given as 40' long, 20' wide and 22' high. The space beneath gives ample room for eight people to sleep and provides good shelter from the elements. It has been used for such purposes for many centuries by freebooters, highland clansmen, shepherds, drovers and of later years by mountaineers and Outward Bound Courses. The Poet, Robbie Burns, once spent a night under its roof and the stone is mentioned in many of the old Scottish books, including *The Wolf of Badenoch* by Sir Thomas De. Lauder. Visits would be much more frequent were it not for the Stone's inaccessibility, lying as it does twelve and a half miles from the nearest town, Aviemore, and sixteen miles from Braemar in the other direction.

It was with a sense of awe and thoughts of its illustrious past that we entered the narrow opening and sat ourselves upon some convenient boulders inside the spacious cavern, formed beneath the rock. The light from the entrance was very poor but Geoff produced a candle from the flap of his rucksack and soon a warming cheery glow filled our shelter. We shared what little food we had left, mostly Mars bars, and burnt the wrappings and a few sticks at our feet to provide a little warmth.

Geoff, who could never keep still for more than seconds at a time, now emerged from the darkest corner of the bothy with the visitors book! We filled in our names and addresses, then found Geoff's entry for 1967 when he was with a party from Glenmore Lodge. Putting the book back into its box, Geoff moved over to the entrance. "It's starting to snow" he said. "We must be over Cairngorm before darkness."

It was a sad moment as we left that remote spot, Places like this, especially to a mountaineer, are something precious, a kind of sanctuary from this mad, mad world. Others not of the same kindred spirit would be repelled by the Shelter's isolation and wildness, appalled by the effort needed to reach it.

One last look back as we crossed the narrow neck of the river Avon, the stone looked insignificant now, just a barren block of rock scarcely visible against the black wall of Shelter crag. I thought as I walked, of climbers past and of generations yet to come who would seek out this haven for themselves and spend their evenings in quiet contemplation as the shadows lengthened across the brooding waters of the silent loch.

The snow was falling heavily now, large flakes blanketing the nearby rocks as if by magic; high above us we could hear the dreaded North West wind roaring like an express train across the spurs and ridges of Cairngorm. The way was steeper now, a smooth slope of virgin snow reaching for the sky, Geoff was leading, I followed and Chris last. As we climbed slowly with an alpine rhythm, the wind began to buffet us and our position became ever more exposed, the snow beginning to swirl and now and again a fierce blast would sting our faces to the bone. We knew that conditions would only get worse and that we must get over the top before dark. Balaclavas were pulled down around our ears without a slackening of the steady pace, and as the steepening slope became icy, our axes were put to good use. For more than an hour and a half we toiled against the elements of nature in their most violent form, the gale threatened to pluck us from our lofty perch. As the angle eased a little, Geoff changed direction slightly and moved leftwards. "The summit is just over there" he shouted, his voice almost lost in the crashing waves of wind. I never bothered to look, I was too intent on fighting for breath. Geoff's sense of direction throughout was uncanny and never in all the years we climbed and walked together did I ever see him make a serious error of navigation. The storm was now at its height, I could sense Chris was right behind me, but in the conditions could not be sure. We all knew that this was the crux somewhere just ahead were the enormous cornices overhanging Coire Cas, many mountaineers had come to grief there and several tragedies had been enacted in winters past. We carefully edged our way forward, eyes straining through swirling snow Hakes in the gathering gloom. Strangely it wasn't too cold and I remember thinking how lucky this was; often in conditions like this the cold can be intense.

Geoff cut a few steps over an icy patch and then we started a gradual descent which soon became much steeper. The snow was good and within twenty minutes we began to emerge from the storm clouds, another five and we were sheltered from the wind by the lee of the mountain. For the first time for about three hours we could see our surroundings; there just in front of us were the gaunt structures

of the Coire Cas ski lift, silent and empty against the ever darkening skies.

Within the hour we were in the caravette, only needing our torches for the last few hundred yards. Later that night in the convivial atmosphere of the Wolf bar in Aviemore it came home to me what a hard day it had been.

We sat mulling over a pint, beneath a great tapestry, when Geoff suddenly perked up and said, "What about crossing Glen Feshi tomorrow." "Not on your life" said Chris, "I'm going swimming!"

Christmas at Kingshouse

A much earlier visit to Scotland by the Nottingham Gang in 1960 had not been quite so successful. "Christmas 1960 is indelibly printed on my memory" says Celia Berry, "For that was my first experience of anything even remotely approaching tragedy in what, at that time was my cocoonlike existence." Their spectacular accident made front page headlines in the local paper and caused much consternation and hot-line phone calls to Scotland from their families and friends to ascertain that they were indeed all right. Celia tells the following story.

"Geoff, Margaret Lowe (now Buckland), Margaret Attwood (now Ellwood) Barry Shakespeare, George Potts, Ken Beech, Kay White, Mike Berry and I spent Christmas in the bunkhouse of the Kingshouse Hotel in Glencoe.

In those days the Kingshouse Hotel was completely unsophisticated. It catered for its guests in an old fashioned but comfortable manner with good food and warmth. The bunkhouse, for its poorer guests, was a building set slightly apart from the main hotel, and had two rooms for separate male and female sleeping quarters.

Although the bunkhouse doesn't sound very luxurious, to us it was better than the Ritz. We were young, healthy and high in spirits and enjoyed immensely every moment of the few days we spent there.

I remember one night when we, the female party, were tucked up in our sleeping bags in our quarters, when the door was suddenly flung open and Geoff was thrown into our room in his sleeping bag wearing only his underpants. He was covered by embarrassment, if little else. I recall that his predicament suddenly became less important when one of the girls sighted a mouse and we enthusiastically joined in and chased it. The poor creature was eventually found and then given its freedom elsewhere.

Pleasant as our stay was at the Kingshouse Hotel, after a few days we moved to the campsite at Glenmore Lodge. The area at this time bore very little resemblance to Aviemore and the skiing resorts of the Cairngorms today. The road to Jean's hut existed only in a very sketchy way and there were no ski-lifts or tourists. In fact there were very few people.

We pitched our tents in snow and what seemed to me at the time to be arctic weather conditions. The following day we set off to do some gully climbing. On the way Margaret Lowe developed a fairly severe blister and had to return to the campsite. The rest of us pressed on towards Coire an t-Sneachda. Geoff, Mike and I did a gully, and Ken and Kay did a butress quite close to us. Barry, George



and Margaret did Aladdin's Couloir, from which the previous year Mike had helped to carry a dead climber.

Geoff, Mike and I reached the top of our climb and were relaxing eating chocolate, which Geoff invariably carried with him, when we heard Barry calling to us for help. Geoff and Mike went towards the edge of the cliff in the direction of the voice. Geoff remarked that he and Mike were probably standing on a cornice and should retreat and belay the rope, when the snow beneath Mike's feet broke away and he disappeared from our sight carrying the rope. The moment is very clear in my mind and I am still amazed at the silent way in which he sank from view. There was just a gentle swish of snow and Mike descended with his hands held in a classical pose like that of a ballerina.

Ken and Kay were just finishing their climb and had a vantage point on the buttress. Geoff called to them and asked what they could see of our comrades, but they shook their heads and didn't hold out much hope for the safety of Mike and the others.

Geoff immediately took control of the situation and when Ken and Kay arrived he assigned me to them so that we could rope up and carefully descend, whilst he went by a quicker route to see if he could assist the others. When Geoff reached the coire floor he found only the remains of an avalanche and many bloodstains. He waited until Ken, Kay and I arrived and then we followed the footsteps and bloodstains until we reached Jean's hut. By this time it was dark and when we entered the candlelit hut we found seated, Margaret, George and Barry, with their faces bloodstained and not a little battered.

It is difficult to describe our feelings on finding our friends like this. For my own part I had certainly expected Mike if not all of them to be dead. To be told by this battered, but obviously very much alive trio, that Mike was virtually unscathed and had run down to Glenmore Lodge about 3 miles away to get help, filled me with great relief and incredulity. I had felt numb for the past couple of hours, but now the sight of my friend Margaret with her nose swollen suddenly made me feel like weeping copiously (I suppose this must really have been with relief). Feeling ashamed, I left the hut slipping several times on the ice as I did so. After reaching a respectable distance from the hut I was having a jolly good cry when Geoff came up behind me and asked in a down to earth manner why I was crying. I gave the ridiculous answer that I was crying because I thought Margaret had broken her nose, whereupon he sensibly exclaimed that she might have broken her neck. This, of course, brought me back to reality, so that I returned to the hut to try to make myself useful.

Mike returned in due course with an instructor from Glenmore Lodge and several other helpers. The injured were then shepherded to the instructor's car about half a mile away, which was as close to Jean's hut as they could get it. Barry was placed on a stretcher on top of the car, and Margaret was seated inside. George, however, declined the offer of a lift and walked most of the way to Glenmore Lodge trying to organise things himself, as well as being most solicitous for Margaret's welfare.

At Glenmore Lodge an ambulance was waiting to take the injured to hospital at Inverness. There it was discovered that Barry had broken his collar bones,

several ribs and fractured his skull, George had a fractured skull, and Margaret had a fractured skull and a chipped spine.

The weather turned very ferocious after the accident and further mountaineering was out of the question for the rest of us. Needless to say we had no heart for it anyway and we spent the rest of our holiday visiting our injured but cheerful friends.”

Many are the Easter Meets Geoff led in Scotland, to Glencoe or Glen Nevis in the early 1960's and latterly to the South Cairngorms. Tom Frost comments on a typical meet, “I shall always remember that Easter Meet at Glen Nevis when Geoff's personality seemed in harmony with the natural wonders around us. It was a typical get-everybody-out-and-enjoy-it-meet. The “Ben” via the back wall of Coire Leis on the first day with the ladies, Tower Ridge the next day (men only) and as a finale a crocodile up Terminal Gully on Stob Ban on the last day with a final whopping glissade off Sgurr a Mhain.” Perhaps Geoff's own words best portray a typical Easter Meet. No doubt Geoff had in mind the Winter Traverse of the Four Peaks on the ‘Big Day’ he describes — but I also know he would not have been concerned if the party had not attained it. Just to have a long active day in the mountains with those of common interest was all he asked,

Easter Meet 1969

Geoff Hayes

As I motored over the top of the Pennines at the head of Teesdale above High Force with snow towering well above the roof of the van and blue sky above, I remember thinking why go to Scotland, surely it can't be better than this. This was on the Thursday evening. Returning on the Tuesday evening five glorious days later I remember thinking, that was the best Easter weather in Scotland for at least ten years. It was 1959 when I first went on the Oread Easter Meet in the North. That year it was held in Glen Nevis and I had some excellent days on the “Ben” and nearby hills with Pretty, Kershaw, Pettigrew and Co. The weather was good that year but 1969 topped the lot.

By Friday morning there was a good crowd of Oreads camped amidst the trees close to the Linn of Dee. The sunshine seemed to drive away the fatigue of the long trip and it was soon off and away to the climbing and ski grounds. Only one team seemed to feel the strain, but I'm told Wendy Allen, Pete Scott and Simon Crosse did manage to drag themselves out of the tent after dinner! We realised later that Pete and team were making the most of a restful time before that Human Dynamo, Chris Radcliffe, arrived on the Saturday. Excellent skiing was had on the Cairnwell with plenty of tows and lifts, a number of club members had a first bash on the boards that day — no broken legs. Brian Cooke and Lloyd Caris decided on an easy day and spotted a crag which the guidebook said could be approached by car, however a locked gate gave them a ten mile walk as well.

The Dynamo arrived about 8.00 a.m. Saturday having driven across Scotland in about two hours. Pete, Wendy and Simon were first out of the tent that day! A few went skiing but the main group of about 14 climbed on Lochnager. It was the first time on this fine peak for everyone. The heat of the sun on the snow was sending minor avalanches down the cliffs when we arrived. This did not stop

Lloyd from ascending Black Spout and Brian Cooke, myself and my wife did a fine steep snow slope to the summit ridge. On the top we met the others. I can recommend Lochnagar, it has the finest snow cliffs I have seen away from Nevis.

Easter Sunday was to be an easy day, one or two went to Glen Shee for the snow, the others sat around enjoying the sun and the fine campsite, but not for long. Chris Radcliffe decided that a fine Scots Pine would provide good pegging practice and roped up loaded with a dozen slings and crabs. Progress up the tree was slow, too slow for Lloyd who shot up the 150 feet to the top before Chris had got his fourth peg in. Chris Martin wisely moved his new car just in time to miss a lump of tree from the summit. After an early dinner everyone set out for a short walk up a nearby valley to see the waterfalls. This short walk eventually took in a small peak with a bit of snow. The views from the top were terrific with all the Cairngorms set out under a cloudless sky. Even Brian Cooke, who was in suede shoes up to his knees in the snow and Paul Gardiner, who was seen with his son Douglas on his back, enjoyed it all.

The Bar at the nearby Mar Lodge was popular each evening. It was a very hospitable place with a fine open log fire, which seemed to consume a giant tree every night.

Because the weather was Alpine (cold at night, hot sun during the day) and because the snow was also Alpine (hard ice turning to deep slush soon after midday), we decided that Alpine practice should ensure a very good day. The call came at 4.30 a.m. The stars were still out and the water frozen. A quick breakfast and an attempt to thaw out frozen boots, a slight delay when Pete Scott's car had to be pushed started (his Ever Ready U2 battery had failed), and at last we were all off for the 'Big Day'. A ferry service of cars took the eight of us to Derry Lodge along the private road. A herd of stags looked on unafraid as we set off in the brilliant early morning sun. After about two miles the Luibeg Burn had to be crossed, this proved interesting on the ice-covered rocks and there were a few wet feet. Later we saw the bridge higher up the stream! The Lairig Ghru was reached with Wendy Allen making a fine pace. The crowd of people we saw outside Corrour Bothy as we passed on the other side of the Dee must have spent a real sardine night inside.

Our first main objective was to be Cairn Toul 4241' and this took us five hours from the cars at Derry Lodge. A steep snow couloir still rock hard in the shadow gave us the N.E. Ridge. The snow was still hard but now we were out in the sunshine. Our Friendly Giant, Pete Scott, led the way. We all agreed that this peak today was more Alpine than Scottish. The views were extensive particularly to the West where the 'Ben' and Glencoe were immediately recognised; further still were the peaks of Wester Ross and perhaps even Skye. Not too far away over the snow plateau was the 4248' Braeriach and across the Lairig, Ben Macdhui looking every bit its 4300'. By the time we had crossed the Wells of Dee and reached Braeriach we were all beginning to get sunburnt. Over to the East we could see the ski slopes of Cairngorm. We expected a good glissade from Sron na Lairig to the Pools of Dee in the Lairig Ghru, but by this time the sun had been to work and we had to wade it!

Here the party split. Paul Gardiner, John Dench, Wendy and Kryisia returned

by way of the Lairig whilst Simon Crosse, Pete Scott, Chris and myself went up the long diagonal snow slog to the summit of Macdhui. We envied two skiers who had visited the summit as they shot past us going north back to Glencoe. A fast direct descent and we were back at the cars at 7.30 p.m. just 12 hours after leaving them. There was no sign of the others so we drove back to camp. They eventually arrived there about 10.30 p.m. having walked the full length of the Lairig Ghru and then all the way alongside the Dee, much further than the Macdhui team.

Winter in Glen Torridon and Kintail

A much earlier trip to Scotland with Geoff is described by Doug Scott* the Nottinghamshire Schoolmaster, who was on the 1973 South West Face of Everest Expedition with Chris Bonington.

“In those formative years of youth there are many conflicting attitudes of behaviour that are assimilated and assessed to give a new direction to life’s course. The 1960 Christmas holidays were for me divided between a life of debauchery at Wasdale Head and adventurous mountaineering in the North of Scotland. Wasdale Hotel was traditionally the Christmas home of the Rock and Ice (Cock and Spice), their camp followers and also impressionable hangers-on such as myself, Dez Hadlumand Wes Haydn. For us three aspiring Oreads it was a time to challenge our heroes — not at climbing but at barn rugby, feats of strength and continuous drinking without falling over. In between these festive events when George Potts broke his ribs and Uncle Don Whillans was beaten in a press-up competition (which he insisted was rigged), I made enquiries about the chap who had invited me to go up north with him to Torridon. “Hard bloke Geoff Hayes.” “Walk you off your feet.” “You’d best stay off the liquor if you want to keep up with that one.” Such mines of information as Nat Allen, Derrick Burgess and Ray Handley could not be wrong. I left in a hurry determined not to keep a superman waiting. We were to meet at Ambleside Bus Station. I walked over Sty Head and up Langdale hoping the exercise would remove concentrations of Black Velvet out of my system. That would help me in the coming battle.

I arrived early and watched a third rate film at the local cinema listening to the music in the interval croaking out from a wind-up gramophone seated on a chair in the aisle.

Geoff arrived at midnight on the 27th December with Margaret Lowe and Ray Gillies from Nottingham. We continued north towards Carlisle with all three passengers and mounds of equipment and food crammed into the back of Geoff’s A35 van.

Lean in build, short cropped hair, the features of an aesthete, Geoff peered through the sleet driving hour after hour talking incessantly about the mountains and revealed to us his astounding enthusiasm for them. He opened our eyes

* Author of ‘Big Wall Climbing’ (Published Spring 1974 by Kaye & Ward). This book traces the development of big

to rock climbs and mountain ranges that we had never even heard of. He seemed to be an energetic life crammed full of work during the week and bustling about every corner of the British Isles at weekends and holidays. We were impressed with his trip to the Ben on a B.S.A. Bantam motorbike, with Mike Berry and rucksack clinging on behind, leaving Friday night from Nottingham and then all the way back again on Sunday night to start work Monday morning.

The hours passed by winding around road works on the A9 to Glasgow, and by Loch Lomond with Geoff still yarning away — a veritable storehouse of information. But he was more than that for he was just as interested in our modest accomplishments on gritstone, and bog trotting in the Peak. It was Geoff's sympathetic attention and considered advice that made him first class company.

We drove straight up to Glen Torridon, had a few hours sleep and set off across the heather to Liathach. The mountains were purple, uniformly covered with a dusting of snow above the 2000 foot contour. The pale blue winter sky gave hope of lasting settled weather. Geoff strode out in front with the three of us hot on his tail. He never wasted a step even on the rough tussocks he moved with great certainty in his bounce, never tripping and stumbling. We walked the whole ridge from East to West finishing at Sgurr a'Chadail before descending back down to the car and our camp.

We were roused to an Alpine start with a brew passed into our tent by Geoff. Ray, myself and Margaret staggered after the bounding Hayes to the Eastern end of Beinn Eighe. We all gathered steam and by the time the sun was shining on our backs we were on the ridge at Sgurr Ban. We dropped down and up innumerable saddles before being taken on a conducted tour of the 'finest corrie in Scotland Coire Mhic Fhearchair (the corrie of the son of Farquhar)'. No sooner seen than off again round to Loch nan Gabur and up Beinn Dearg. It was getting to be 'quite a day out for a lady' with the sun now shining golden over Upper Loch Torridon. On the northern prop of Beinn Dearg we stopped to rest and spot peaks that were unfolding every step of the way. Margaret had done better than most ladies we knew and decided to go on down to the car. Ray and I were keen to join her especially with our blistered feet from Arvon Jones' Tiger boots. "Try Alligain" urged Geoff. "It's too steep, take too long," we said hopefully. "It'll flatten out when you get to it, that's how ridges look head on."

We went down to the Alt a'Bhealaich and left Geoff and Margaret to descend. We scrambled up to Beinn Alligain's summit shattered after an eight hour day. We revived with the setting sun shining on a placid Loch Torridon. One more bump over Tom Na Gruagach and off down to Geoff thoughtlessly shouting our young heads off about the sunset and how the last peak had finished the day off nicely. He praised our efforts with just a touch of envy that lay bottled up inside. He never let on — just accepted his responsibility to Margaret. That was the sort of bloke he was.

It was raining next day so we set off South to the Five Sisters of Kintail. We made a leisurely camp and set off early next morning in a light snowfall up the Eastern summit of the ridge. The wind increased in force blowing hard from the South West and with it the snowfall became a blizzard as we climbed over the first of the Five Sisters. Ray and I went ahead floundering in the snow unable to



see through our snowed-up spectacles. “Keep the wind on your left cheek,” yelled Geoff who had followed up with Margaret. No talk of going down. This was our Everest thaj day and at that time—an easy walk made hard for youthful climbers in those conditions. We kept on, over all five summits in the full fury of the blizzard. We descended into a forest and temporarily lost each other. Ray and I came across a Nissen Hut set in the middle of a forest clearing with no sign of a track leading to or from it. The door was on the latch and opened to reveal a double bed fully made up with clean sheets and damp blankets. Apart from two coat hangers on the wall and a home sweet home message there was no other furniture. Being so tired we naturally hung our sodden trousers and anoraks on the coat hangers, put our boots on the bed post and jumped into bed.

Twenty minutes later there was a clatter at the door and peals of laughter as Geoff and Margaret, amused at the incongruity of the scene, arrived. They went off to fetch their sleeping bags and came back to the shelter of the hut. Whose it was we will never know, still they can be thankful that we gave their blankets a good airing.

The snow lay thick and deep the next day as we continued south to Glencoe. “We’ll just make it,” said Geoff as we left the Queen’s Cairn and stormed the Fortress of Bidean. We did make it, but after dark and in sleet that steamed off our clothes all the way back to Nottingham.

It had been the sort of holiday that young lads could shout the odds about, playing games with the hard men but more than that, it was a holiday that gave a glow of contentment through the next few weeks at least.

It was about this time that Ray and I decided that there was not much else we cared to do than climb mountains. It was climbers like Geoff, with their infectious enthusiasm who pointed the way.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON BRITISH CRAGS AND MOUNTAINS

MONTANI SEMPER LIBRIS

(The Title given by Geoff to his Mountaineering Diaries)

-Beyond all, towers the long jagged line of the Black Cuillin, their teeth raking the fast travelling clouds."

W.H. Murray "Skye"

In his first youthful newsletter Geoff talked of his love of the mountains and climbing "but I am determined in my mind never to give up mountaineering for just pure rock climbing." Geoff was true to his word, but nonetheless he had led many of the major rock climbing routes in the British Isles. It was with Brian Cooke on the Isle of Skye that he achieved one of his first ascents. Brian Cooke at that time living in Chester had been Geoff's climbing partner through his national service, and they spent much time at nearby Helsby Rocks overlooking the City of Liverpool (on a clear day!). Although ten years senior to Geoff and his friends, Brian proved to be a great companion and leader of them all. It is not without reason that he is now known as 'Uncle Brian' amongst the Oread members. He now lives in Hexham and excuses his absences from frequent club meets, to the need to protect his two tall attractive teenage daughters from the temptations of Oread camp life.

Masquerade — Marsco Buttress — Isle of Skye

Brian describes their first ascent of this new route.

"In July 1964 I went to Skye for a week to traverse the Main Cuillin Ridge with Jack Ashcroft, Dave Penlington, Jim Kershaw and Wally Richardson. We camped in Glen Sligachan between Marsco and the Bloody Stone in Harta Corrie. After two days of wind and rain, a glorious sunny day traversing Clach Glas and Blaven; on the Wednesday we planned to leave for Gars-Bheinn and the Main Ridge after lunch. The weather was again fine, so Wally and I spent a couple of sunny hours before lunch on the rock of Marsco.

The main buttress has a prominent prow. To the left of the prow lie Odell's and Wrangham's climbs, to the right there is a very steep wall which faced us as we walked up to the Crag and I noticed about half way up, a narrow groove which appeared to be the key to an ascent of this wall. But not for us I thought as we looked for the start of Wrangham's route. Roping up about ten yards to the left of the prow, we climbed fairly easily up to a wide comfortable ledge. From here we tentatively looked for the way up, but this part of the cliff was in shadow, and any way up looked hard. Tempted by the sunshine I walked along this ledge to its right hand end and looked around the corner of the prow. I realised I was now about the same level as the start of the groove on the wall that I had noticed on the way up. Although the wall below was steep and relatively holdless, I found I could traverse a lonely line of incut holds to a small stance below the groove. I



fixed a doubtful runner. About twenty feet up the groove I could see a good ledge on the right of this groove, and an easing of the angle. I felt that this pitch was probably the crux, and the rest should be straightforward. I concentrated on bridging up the groove, very conscious of the sheer space between my legs straight down the wall. The bed of the groove was rather damp and rotten. I used the side walls as much as possible. Half way up, and poised rather too delicately for my liking, I noticed a slot in the right wall, handwidth, finishing about two feet below the desired ledge. Could I but reach this with my right hand, I felt I could make it. Was it good? Another careful bridging move and my right fingers reached the edge of the hold. It was sharp! I slid them down into a lovely jug! I wasted no more time in the groove, and quickly moved up to a comfortable seat on the ledge astride this bounding rib of the groove.

There was a good belay on the floor of this ledge at the back, room for two at a pinch. I felt this climb was in the bag. I felt great as I took in Wal's rope and looked over to the campsite to see if they were taking any interest in our climb. I looked down, Wal had reached the bottom of the groove. "The others are waiting for us" he said; for the moment time was running short, we decided to leave it for another day. As Wal retraced his steps, I looked up at the rest of the route, and I was tempted to go solo. Before going down I tried the next move, but it was going to be an awkward one. I fixed a nylon sling round the ledge belay and roped down. Reaching the bottom I pulled the rope through to leave the sling behind. It was to stay there undisturbed, as far as I know, for the next five years until Geoff Hayes led us on the first ascent of this climb.

It was in 1969 during Skye week, on the Wednesday; we'd all been involved in bringing down a climber from the Eastern Buttress of Sron na Ciche, who had broken his ankle in a short fall from the crux pitch. Geoff made a rope stretcher, and we had a strenuous job taking him first across to Eastern Gully and then up this Gully onto the ridge and down to Glenbrittle. At camp we had some welcome hot soup and then Jean and Anne calmly reminded Rusty and Geoff that they had promised to take them to a Ceilidh in Portree. Bill and I thought they were all crazy!

Naturally the next morning we were late rising and lazed around 'til lunch. Geoff came over to chat, "Well, what are we doing this afternoon?" "There's a new route waiting to be done on Marsco! only take 3 hours!" I said. "An hour's walk down Glen Sligachan, an hour for the climb and an hour walk back to the Sligachan Bar for a drink in the evening." So Bill Money, Geoff, Rusty, Anne, Jean and I left Glenbrittle in the vehicles about 2.30 p.m., and leaving Sligachan and the wives about 3.00 p.m. we set off for Marsco Buttress. It took us two and a half hours to walk to the foot of the crag! Rusty opted to watch; Geoff and I roped up and Bill tagged on the end. We were soon up to the first ledge, and from the right hand end of the edge of the prow I described the traverse and the groove pitch to Geoff. He was soon across the wall, and managed to find a better running belay than I did. As I paid out the rope I couldn't watch him climb, but I was pleased the rope didn't go out fast, but steadily and surely. A cry announced he had reached the ledge. "Is the nylon sling still there?" "Yes," came the reply, it was still wedged behind the flake on the floor of the ledge. My turn now, traverse

across, where are the incuts — got them — good. Looking up the groove — still not easy — grotty at the back, thank God for the handhold — not as big as I remembered it, Geoff was impressed, and there was just room on the ledge for two.

Now we were breaking new ground; Geoff moved up the rib ahead for about ten feet and made a traverse to the left (fifteen feet) then a ten foot pitch in a corner led on to a wide sloping ledge leading up to the right at about 30 degrees. He belayed, and I called to Bill to start the lower traverse. He was rather apprehensive when he looked up the groove, but he soon joined me on the ledge. Now it was my turn for the unknown, and I was glad I hadn't tried to continue on my own five years previously.

I found the first moves up off the ledge very awkward, but as soon as I was traversing to the left it became easier and soon we all joined Geoff on the final ledge below the last pitch. We each tackled the last wall (about 25') in different ways, with no particular difficulty. We looked at our watches, it was about 8.00 p.m., the climb had taken 2 hours!

About 60 yards away a 100' crack in a final wall was very tempting, but we realised we still had a considerable scramble up and to the right to find a way down to join Rusty who was waiting below.

Surprisingly it took us about an hour to get back to our starting point to pick up the sacks. Geoff and Rusty raced on ahead back up to the Glen to join Anne and Jean, who, as darkness fell, would be wondering, as usual, if we were all right.

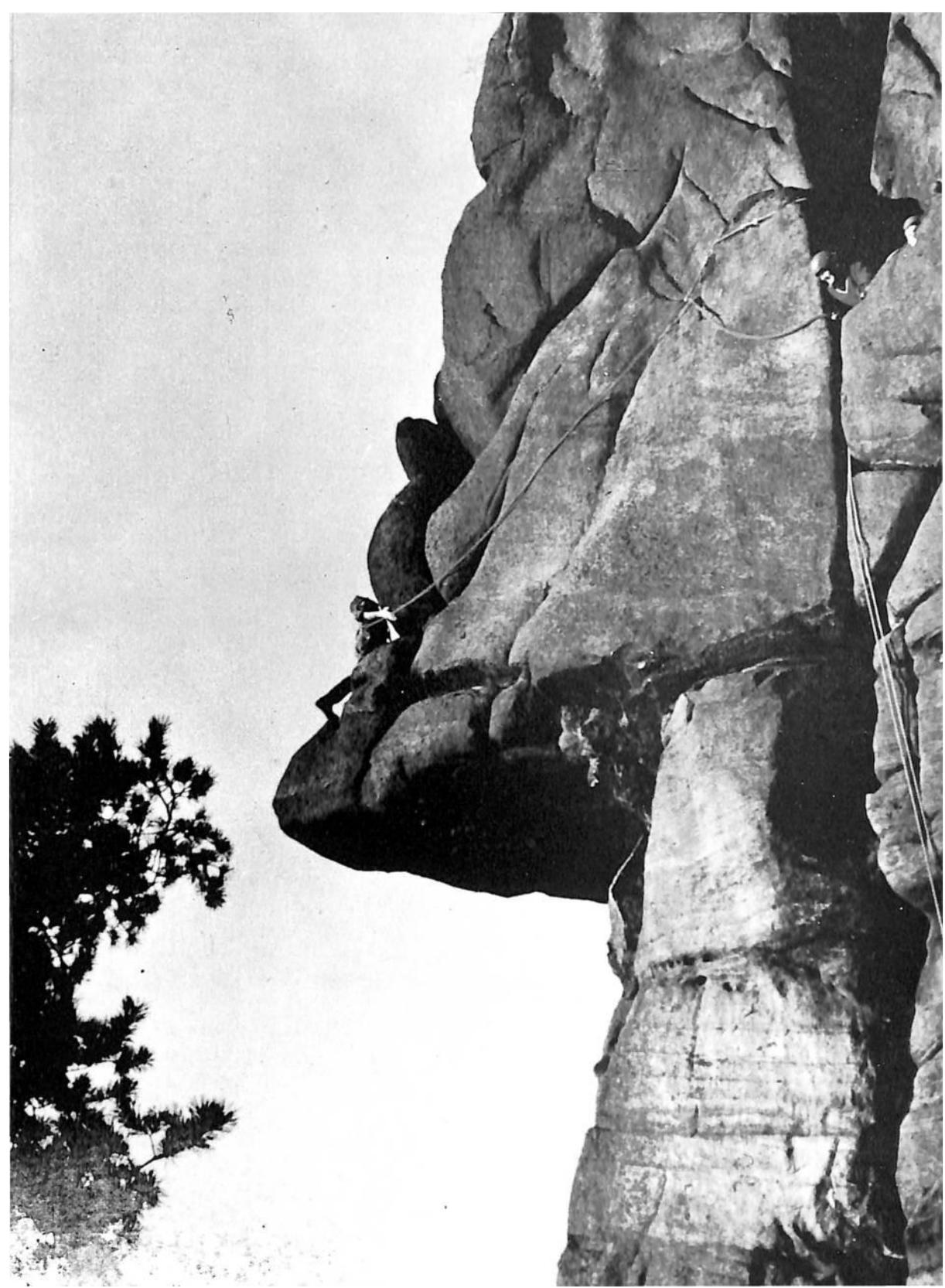
Bill and I took the walk back more leisurely, and saw the silhouette of our climb first of all masking the moon, and finally the new moon emerging to light our way back to Sligachan.

It had only taken six hours instead of three!

Geoff left the naming and recording of the climb to me. This was fatal, because only now, three years later, have I decided to call the climb by the name I first thought of, and which Geoff knew — 'Masquerade'. It was about 200' long and in our opinion 'Severe' even by Scottish standards.

I must write to the Editor of the S.M.C. Journal about it some day!"

The earlier chapters of Geoff's diary tell of his first climbs. First mention in the Newsletters of his appearance on the Oread scene was in June 1956 when he attended a meet at Ilkley and Almscliff led by Brian Cooke. Geoff launched himself out capably on such routes as the Direct variant of Josephine, Little A climb and Bogy Wall at Ilkley. At Almscliff he led the polished Birds Nest Crack. In 1957 we read that he led Goliath's Groove and Mississippi Buttress on Stanage and reports on a whole host of active weekends about this time name routes at Yellowslacks and Laddow as well as Wales. But I think that it would be fair to say that his particular gritstone favourite (and who could blame him) was Hen Cloud and the Roaches, a gritstone crag with a distinct mountain atmosphere. He did the fine classic Valkyrie, but his favourites were the traditional routes like Jeffcoat's Buttress, Central Route, Black and Tans, and a particular gem, Via Dolorosa, which he always finished with a little extra by traversing out



onto the easy but airy slab finish to Valkyrie. In the early 1960's many attempts were made to prevent climbing on these popular rocks by the owner, whose brother had been killed in a climbing accident in the Alps. On one occasion, pitch was poured down some of the climbs to fill up the holds. At another time tickets were introduced and it cost the princely sum of two bob for a day's climbing! Only the weekend before he was killed, with Rusty, Geoff spent a leisurely afternoon at Cratcliffe Tor and Robin Hood's Stride, near Rusty's cottage in the Peak District, doing Giant's Crawl to finish the day. This was the first time that Geoff had taken his four year old son, Michael, along to the crag without the rest of the family. Geoff was half way up a climb when his son let out a plea for help whilst attending a call of nature, so Geoff had to abseil down the climb to 'sort Michael out' before continuing on the climb.

In recent years Geoff's interests had turned to limestone and Gordon Gadsby recalls an early limestone route which impressed them both, the very severe West Wall climb on Beeston Tor in the Manifold valley, which Derrick Burgess led them up. This fired Geoff with an enthusiasm for limestone.

Geoff loved Wales and had climbed on all the major cliffs. He had led the Cloggy classics of Longland's and Curving Crack, and in the Lake District he had seconded Central Buttress on Scafell with Dez Hadlum.

In the Western Isles mention must be made of Arran, surely the ideal venue for a mountaineering club meet with all interests catered for. Geoff led several Whit Week meets here and in 1961 traversed the Main Ridge. This meet as a whole was marked by the fine array of climbing, with such routes as 'S' Crack, Rosa Pinnacle Direct, South Ridge, South West Slab, Labyrinth and the Rosetta Stone. Geoff always preferred his Whit Holiday to be in Scotland whilst many of his colleagues in the club would race to Cornwall or Pembroke in an attempt to snatch a bit of English seaside with their climbing. Probably Geoff's attitude to climbing is characterised by his nearly always climbing in boots; what more needs to be said!

Lakeland Days

Much of Geoff's Lake District climbing was done with Brian Cooke who writes, "I couldn't keep up with Geoff on the hills, so I was lucky to climb with him as often as I did; they were memorable long days. One evening on Dow with almost everyone else having gone, we stayed to do two more; Hawk and Raven before leaving for the hut (Tranearth, the Lancashire climbing and caving hut above Coniston water) in the gathering darkness. There were few routes he hadn't done on Dow. Eliminate A led by Geoff was his last successful climb. I had hoped to be with him, but he was concerned that Andy Dunham, a young Oread member, had no one to climb with so I joined him at Geoff's request. Scafell also; Geoff and I climbed Tower Buttress, Hopkinson's Gully and Steep Ghyll Buttress one day. Another day we were determined to break a 'barrier' and do a VS climb on the East Buttress. The mild (VS) grade is a great encouragement. There was a queue for Great Eastern, so about to give up I said, "Why not Morning Wall?". Geoff led as usual, and managed to cleanly lead the awkward



corner without using any of the in situ pegs as aid. Finally on that magnificent day we did Moss Ghyll Grooves — a climb I had looked forward to for a long long time.

Sometimes he coaxed me into leading — usually so that he could take photographs. I got involved in a wet traverse on Esk Buttress once, and so one had the pleasure of seeing oneself on display at the Photo Meet. Geoff was the complete mountaineer. For a winter weekend in the hills, he would have as well as an ice axe and crampons, skis and skates. I welcomed a rest period by Sprinkling Tarn one day to see him change into ice skating boots for a half hour session on the blades. We were together on his last trip to the Cairngorms, and I treasure the thought that for his last run down he tried out my new skis and boots. He appeared to have a Norwegian style of skiing, a stiff boot seemed to him quite superfluous. I was only too pleased to exchange my new stiff boots for his soft comfortable ones.

At Dow I would often arrive at the Cave early, and watch ‘the Oread’ wending their way up first to Goats Water and then up the steep screes. A lean dark figure with a long stride would be moving faster than the rest — would catch my eye and for a few minutes I would have the satisfaction of having been there before Geoff. He would then of course, without stopping, greet me, pass on ahead, pause for a moment and say, “Well old man, how about Murray’s for a start!”

Cuillin Ridge — Isle of Skye

Clive Russell

In the summer of 1969 with Clive Russell, Geoff accomplished what has been called ‘the finest mountaineering expedition in the British Isles’ — the Skye Ridge. Here Rusty describes their exhilarating experience.

A successful mountain trip depends to a great extent on matching the rigour and severity of the trip to the abilities of the participants, so avoiding the twin pitfalls of boredom on the one hand and peril on the other.

For myself the traverse of the main ridge of the Cuillin Mountains on Skye was the culmination of a lifetime’s dreams. The fact that the feat had been performed \with contemptuous ease by thousands before us was of no account, the beauty of the Western Isles in fine weather and the magnificent climbing on the range of hills which I love more than any in the world combined to bring about the trip of a lifetime. As we shared the last quarter of an orange on Sgurr nan Gilleann the unpalatable compromise of a sedentary office bound existence receded completely and I experienced the true contentment that can only be bought by such titanic efforts. The climb was hardly planned, it was just a tacitly agreed ambition which was brought forcibly home to Geoff when I dragged him out into the moonlight at about 2.45 a.m.; this was the first and last time that I took the lead in fact. The walk round the rough coastline of the island to the foot of Gars-Bheinn was gruelling indeed to one with a queasy stomach from early morning bacon butties, The canny Hayes had wisely confined himself to more digestible carbohydrates and was in better shape at this early stage. We drank our fill at the highest water on the slopes of Gars-Bheinn and then slogged up the interminable screes to the 3000’ summit. It was now light, my stomach had improved, and we made



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good progress along the ridge to the first significant obstacle, the Thearlaich-Dubh Gap. We roped swiftly down into the gap and then used our respective talents as Geoff led the ascent swiftly and economically and I followed with cruder technique but both rucksacks. In no time at all, soloing where we had previously reconnoitered on a rope, we were at the top of the Alasdair Stone Chute, scene of our ten minute descent earlier in the week. Geoff opted to include Alasdair in what I felt was an already adequate expedition and so I strolled slowly to King's Chimney and allowed him to catch me. After Sgurr Mhic Coinnich we negotiated what I considered to be the most dangerous section of the ridge, descending on the seaward side of the ridge and traversing on doubtful rock by a gloomy and tortuous path.

The head of Coire Lagan provided a landmark, the illusion at least of reasonable progress, and brought me to the area which I knew well from a protesting descent with a terrified female some six years earlier in swirling mist. This trip down memory lane was in reality up an inconspicuous gully which provided a little known route to a point below the Inaccessible Pinnacle where we left the sacks and quickly 'knocked off' An Stac. The beneficial effects of highland air became apparent when I enjoyed the ascent of the easy ridge of 'In Pin' where earlier in the week the exposure had seemed too great. We abseiled off (how much longer will that belay last?) and dined regally on the summit of Sgurr Dearg. Thirst was now beginning to make itself felt, and our sandwiches tasted like rucksack straps, but we stoked up regardless and eked out our dwindling supplies of liquid and fruit.

The traverse of Sgurr na Banachdich proved a shade easy, somehow out of place on a chain of hills which generally requires more than just hill walking, but once we were past Thormaid the difficulties increased considerably again and I was glad of the rope at more than one place. All the way from Thormaid to the Bhasteir Tooth sections of the ridge presented difficulties which were more acute than some of the better known ones like the Pinnacle, but by now the perspective was altering, Gilleann was looking larger and our minds were dwelling more on the formidable chimney pitch which had to be negotiated to reach the top of the Tooth. We eventually reached the Col, passing southbound parties who had clearly been too late in starting, and studied the problem. The climb was only V.Diff, a lithe twelve-year-old could have performed the movements, but the psychological effect of starting above a 200' drop, the fatigue of a long day, boots and only one runner combined to present it in a different light. Geoff led, it was the sort of route which demands true rock climbing ability or your life, the absence of incut holds precluded any mere muscling up, friction, steadiness and balance were essential and the bridging position such that delay was dangerously tiring. The first 80' was bridging up a chimney, then a single flake on the left wall allowed a respite before a capstone compelled a bold swing out of the chimney and mantelshelf to the right. Geoff wisely conserved his single sling to protect this final move and not for the first time I envied his sheer innate ability as he conquered the pitch. The only consolation lay in having the strength to follow with both bags.

After this, confidence rose again to such a pitch that we soloed the overhang



Inaccessible Pinnacle on Skye from Sgurr Dearg.

Photo — Gordon Gadsby



Abseil from the Inaccessible Pinnacle during a traverse of the Main Ridge. Mike Berry in action.

Photo — Geoff Hayes

from The Tooth to Am Bhasteir itself. The final section up ridge and chimney was a delight, we passed parties who were using the rope as we enjoyed the final scramble up the moderate west chimney of Gillean. As we stood on the top and looked back I felt that fortune had granted me sweet revenge for the bitter failures of mountaineering exploits in the past.

Geoff raced down the tourist route to the waiting wives at the Sligachan, but after drinking the first stream dry the triumph of the day had purged the competitive instinct from me and I made no effort to follow, arriving about ten minutes later. From Glenbrittle campsite to Sligachan Hotel had taken us just under 14 hours. The memory will remain for a lifetime and this is more important.”