

Outdoor Focus

OF



There was an NUJ digital training day at Kings Cross, London, on Saturday February 13. I listened to three professional writers – @TimDawsn @Documentally @AwesomeComms – who use digital marketing to earn a crust.

I've posted their Twitter handles because I was struck by two things. First. What they do differently. Secondly, what they do best.

Take a look @TimDawsn. He posts almost nothing on Twitter. @AwesomeComms uploads mainly short conversations with others. @Documentally is a one-man Twitter feed: more productive than Stephen King on a deadline (if you do nothing else today, follow @Documentally).

They share this in common: success at selling words, by cultivating online networks of like minded *people*, via either (but not all) Blogger, or Pinterest, or LinkedIn or Youtube, or Facebook or Amazon, or Twitter etc. etc.. They use the different platforms to sell the same thing: a good story.

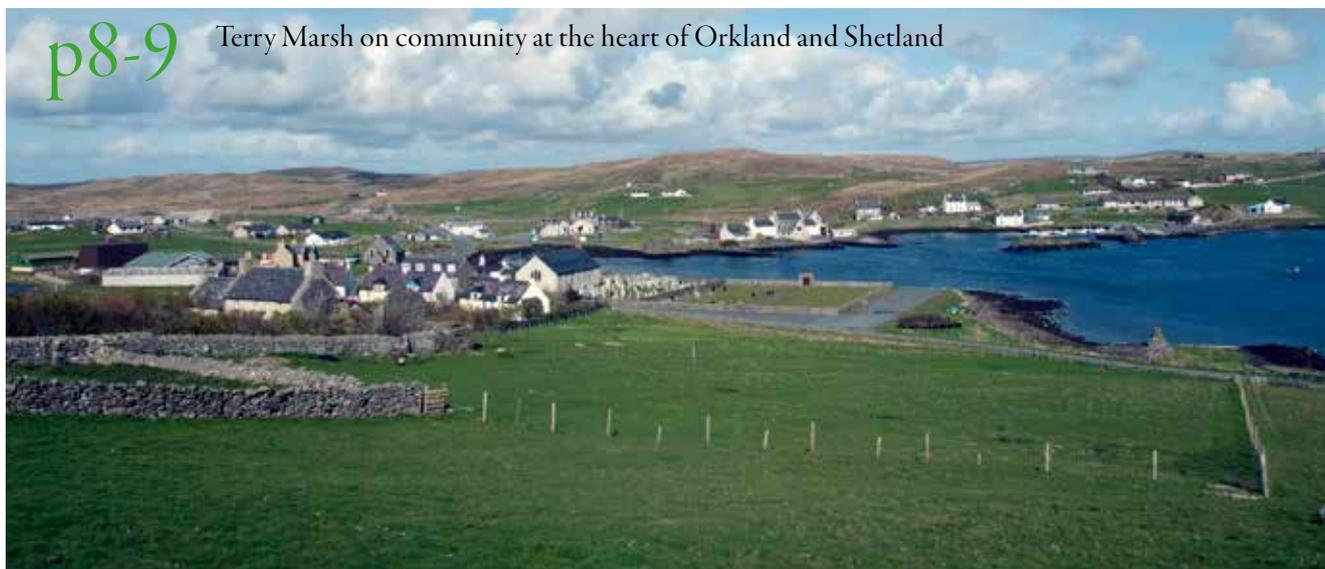
At some point throughout the day, someone repeated a truism: "The printing press taught the *people* how to read. The internet taught the *people* how to write."

I questioned the 'wisdom' in those words while re-reading Andrew's wiser ones on page 3 >. A clue is in the headline.

It's a call to arms (or keyboards). So good luck. Find a platform, find some *people*. And then, perhaps earn some crust.

p8-9

Terry Marsh on community at the heart of Orkland and Shetland



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Ronald Turnbull explains how VAT can be a tax break for writers.

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Chris Howes has a hairy encounter in Namibia.



p12-13

Townsend on Smith. Smith on Townsend. Fight? No, Reviews.

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Cover – Mountain bikers in Glen Sligachan, Skye. **Jon Sparks**

The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our membership covers every field of activity and all corners of the globe. We include writers, journalists, film makers, photographers, publishers and editors, all with a passionate interest in the outdoors. For information on who we are and what we do, and where we've been, visit www.owpg.org.uk

PARK'S AUDIT CHIEF WARNS OF 'INTENSE CHANGE' TO OUTDOORS

Writers must 'be assertive' to save our national parks

National parks are under growing pressure, but fracking and wind turbines are the least of our worries. *Andrew McCloy* explains how funding is quietly being pulled from beneath our feet, and how we, as writers, must take a 'moral stand'.

At the end of last year the Chancellor announced the results of the government's Spending Review and on the face of it our national parks got off lightly. Although day to day spending by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is set to fall by 15%, the budget for national parks will be "protected" for the next five years.

Except what Mr Osborne didn't mention is that over the last five years the government has drastically cut this core funding, for some parks by as

much as 40% in real terms, with serious implications for our most precious countryside.

As well as an outdoor writer and journalist, I'm also an elected parish member on the Peak District National Park Authority, and as chair of its Audit, Resources and Performance Committee I've had first hand experience of the growing crisis engulfing our national parks. By illustration, the Peak District's budget is currently down to around £6 million a year, out of which we run a 555-square

mile national park encompassing 11 local authorities, 125 parishes, 38,000 local residents and upwards of 12 million annual visitors. We are the statutory planning authority, access authority and coordinate a wide range of farming and environmental initiatives. And all on a budget of an average secondary school.

Although we apply for external grants, in many cases quite successfully, and have some income from car park charges, cycle hire and planning fees, like

every other national park the overwhelming source of our income is from the public purse via our core government grant - and since 2010, dear taxpayer, you have short-changed the Peak District by £3.5 million.

Cuts and cutbacks

We're all aware that the public sector as a whole has been shrinking as local authorities respond to the government's drive to reduce the deficit, but national park authorities are comparatively small with limited reserves and are restricted through statute and regulation on what they can and can't do; for instance they can't raise local taxes like other municipal authorities.

So we, like everyone

else, began by doing things differently and by being more efficient. But then we had no choice but to make deep cuts and retreat to those core, statutory functions of a national park authority (chiefly planning and conservation). We managed to avoid closing down whole programmes of work, but the impact on services in other national parks was more drastic. The Broads closed three of its six tourist information centres and withdrew from virtually all rights of way maintenance.

The Yorkshire Dales closed down its events, geodiversity, education and public transport programmes, and stopped its Definitive Map (rights of way) designa-

tions. Exmoor wound up its woodland management team and Northumberland ended its climate change work. North York Moors withdrew its funding for the Moorsbus Network, stopped work on Green Lanes and managing the Definitive Map.

Dartmoor reduced its educational support, ended its Forestry Stewardship Council woodlands accreditation scheme

“Government went back on its word and allowed exploratory fracking.”

and, like many other parks, closed down its longstanding Sustainable Development Fund.

But amid the cuts in central funding, the gov-

ernment has also signalled a way forwards for the funding of national parks, which for some might be equally worrying. The short term protection of core national park funding went hand in hand with an announcement that we would be given new legal freedoms to do business (called the functional power of competence). In other words, we've been given a breathing space to start

generating our own income streams.

The national park brand is self-evidently a strong one, so expect national

park authorities to grow their commercial activity, enter into partnerships and sponsorship deals with the private sector, launch more vigorous campaigns for

Looking west from Kinder Scout



Ashop Valley, below Kinder Scout



visitor giving, invite you to leave a legacy, and so on.

Already in the Peak District we are appointing the national park's first ever commercial director; and national parks across the UK have formed a new company devoted to identifying commercial opportunities, following a similar successful initiative by national parks in the USA that has raised millions of dollars for the upkeep of America's parks.

Sixty five years after the Peak District became Britain's first national park, this sea change in how the parks are funded will have implications beyond their budget sheets; and it is likely to challenge many people's perceptions about what a national park is and how it operates.

The bad and the good
It's important to under-

stand the funding issues, the cuts and downsizing, because it leaves our special landscapes vulnerable to a whole host of other dangers that are crowding in. In December last year, just days after the government supposedly "protected" the parks' funding, it went back on its word and allowed

exploratory fracking to take place underneath national parks (without

applications for ever larger wind turbines show no sign of abating, and the Plan-

"How parks are funded will have implications..."

even allowing MPs a proper debate and vote). At the same time, planning

ning Inspectorate seem to be allowing more through on appeal. The pressure to build more homes is relentless and in the Peak District we're girding our loins to once more fight proposals to turn the A628 into a de facto trans Penine motorway through the sensitive Dark Peak. And yet... national parks seem as popular as ever, a destination for millions of people and still a source of inspiration, pleasure and beauty.

All the research seems to show that the public genuinely value their protected areas and whether it's for peace and relaxation, cultural highlights



Peak Park old sign

or active recreation, national parks still matter. Despite the cutbacks, the redundancies and the heartache, I'm still bowled over by the spirit and dedication of the people who choose to work for national park authorities.

Most of them could be earning far more at county hall or in

the private sector, but national parks attract a certain type of person to work for them, just as they do volunteers and other supporters.

Above all, they remain organisations dedicated to safeguarding, promoting and enhancing our most treasured landscapes. There is hope yet.

Support your national parks

The 15 UK national parks are going through a period of intense change as they respond to unprecedented challenges, but as media professionals how should we react - if at all? We write, photograph and broadcast about these special places; we know them intimately; many of us make our livelihood indirectly from them.

Since they came into being national parks have been a potent symbol of the store we all place on landscape; and now, under growing pressure, they need us to be more strident.

We have the opportunity to tell their story, a story which involves us all, and say why they matter.

In celebrating their heritage, diversity and recreational opportunity, we should remind the public that since they are a national asset we all have a responsibility to guard against opportunistic politicians and unscrupulous developers - with fracking just

the latest menace.

If we're not vigilant and, I believe, more robust with our commentary, in years to come you and I will be

describing or recording national park landscapes dotted with more wind turbines, drilling apparatus, dual carriageways and housing.

Or you might end up with the Yorkshire Dales National Park sponsored by Nike, Tetleys or Jaguar Land Rover.

Quite separately, I'd also encourage individual OWPG members to understand how the park authorities work and the opportunities to get involved on a personal level.

I know one or two of us do already, but whether as a casual volunteer, supporter or Authority member (some are appointed, not all elected),

there's a way we can all play our parts individually and give something back to the places we value.

National parks in England and Wales are relatively young, and Scotland's younger still, but the concept of identifying a landscape of national importance has been recognised for far longer.

In 1810, William Wordsworth described the Lake District as "a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy".

We have now defined and identified these places, but the pressures they face in 21st century Britain require us as outdoor writers, photographers and broadcasters to take a bolder, more assertive moral stand and give national parks a louder voice.

Andrew's latest book, a portrait of the 50-year-old Pennine Way, is published by Cicerone.

“...you might end up with the Yorkshire Dales National Park sponsored by Nike, Tetleys or Jaguar Land Rover.”

Children with a National Park ranger



The Gobster

Kev Reynolds
is storytelling

When Og the Brave stumbled home after a day out hunting the woolly mammoth, his fellow cave-men gathered round while he regaled them with the story of his latest adventure.

By a series of grunts and gestures, and with his shadow stretching across the roof of the cave, he held centre stage - and no doubt rose to the occasion by enhancing his tale with a bit of exaggeration. And when he'd finished, he acknowledged the approval of his mates before accepting the juiciest slice of dinosaur steak as his fee.

Og and his companions were, of course, the first in a long line of public speakers whose oral tradition continues in one form or another to this very day...

In 2007 I was invited to speak at a four-day conference of mountain literature and art at the Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail in southwest France. Flattered by the invitation I arrived to find myself among an august gathering of academics, novelists and poets from around the globe, which made me suspect the organiser had included my name in error. Fearing I was out of my depth, it occurred to me that as I was not due on stage until the final day, this might be an

opportunity to learn something of value from others on the programme.

It was. To my shame I'd never heard of N Scott Momaday. A Native American of Kiowa descent, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his first novel, *House Made of Dawn*, and the same year I met him, he received the National Medal of Arts from George W Bush. I later learned that he's the author of numerous books of poetry, short stories, novels and plays, holds no less than 20 honorary degrees from a variety of colleges and universities, and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. But more than that, he's a master storyteller in a class of his own. As he entered the auditorium, the audience stood as one to applaud his every step to the podium. A solid-looking man in his seventies, he had the large, flat, heavy-checked face of his tribe, and a shining bald head from the back of which burst a cloud of white hair. With a beaming smile and a friendly wave of his hand, he acknowledged the welcome applause before taking his seat and adjusting his glasses.

Once everyone had sat down, an expectant hush fell upon the theatre. Our speaker used that silence like a painter preparing his canvas. He looked up at his adoring

audience with eyes that flashed warmth. He smiled again, nodded his head, removed his glasses, studied each lens, then placed them back across the bridge of his nose, hooking the arms over his ears with stubby fingers. Only then did he speak.

'The lecture I'd prepared,' he said in a crisp baritone voice that reached into every corner, 'I've decided not to give. Instead, I'd like to tell you a story.'

He paused again, as though gathering his thoughts, and at the same time filling the moment with his audience's expectation. And then began a mesmerizing, hour-long journey of poetic storytelling, the like of which I'd never heard before, nor will do again. He told of his back ground among Navajo, Apache and Pueblo reservations where he was 'in touch with sacred matters.' He told of his being named in the shadow of the Devil's Tower - that great volcanic plug of rock soaring out of the prairie surrounding the Black Hills of Wyoming - and drew his audience into a time of legend (a sacred narrative, he said) when a group of young girls being chased by a giant bear, climbed onto a tree stump and prayed to the Great Spirit to save them. The tree stump grew to over 1200 feet and turned to stone, its sides scarred by the bear's claws...

Through his words, the storyteller on the podium became in my imagination a Kiowa medicine man in a teepee, as he then described the mating flight of eagles over a dry shimmering desert, decorating that landscape, not only with colour and the sound of distance, but with unaccustomed heat that made even the rattlesnakes seek shelter from it. It was an hour of sheer magic. Every syllable of Scott Momaday's oration had meaning. Every pause was used to good effect, as important as the words that carried the story. So powerful was that story, that I and two hundred others were lost from reality, drawn as we were into lands through which the speaker led us. We were simply hypnotised by an old man whose regal presence reached out to bless all within earshot. Never once did he refer to notes. His delivery was flawless, his language as rich as the voice that conveyed it. Mesmeric, that's what it was. Truly mesmeric.

It took a while to come down to earth after that, and later that night in my hotel room which, as it happened, was next to his, I replayed all I'd heard during that masterclass in storytelling, and wondered what I could take from it for own keynote speech in two days' time. Inspiration is one thing, but how to follow that? I trembled with the prospect.

N Scott Momaday (and Og the Brave) had a lot to answer for.

Islands with **L**atitude

Terry Mash revisits 'old rocks', with a degree of fondness

In 1999, when I first visited Shetland, I was presented with a certificate confirming that I had been further north than 60°; it was a marketing ploy, but I was pleased to receive it – and still have it.

Latitude, clearly, was anything but a platitude to these people of the far north of Britain, closer, as they are, to the Arctic Circle than they are to London, and on the same latitude as Hudson Bay in Canada, St Petersburg in Russia, Stockholm in Sweden and Helsinki in Finland.

I was visiting to research for a BBC Radio Lancashire travel programme, but that, and other, visits to Scotland's remote islands conveniently served as a foundation a year later on which to build a proposal for a book – *The Magic of the Scottish Islands*.

With insufficient time in which to guarantee enough pictures with which to illustrate the book, I approached Jon Sparks to see if he would take on the responsibility. To his credit, he did think about it for three or four nanoseconds, before committing himself to what would prove to be an extended period of dashing northwards, including some queasy British Airways aerobatics on his first approach to Shetland that he may not thank me for reminding him about.

Within the year, I was touring Orkney for the same reason, a place, unlike Shetland, that I always think

of as ninety percent sky, with significant hills occurring only on Hoy.

Now, as I press on through my dotage, I've been revisiting those distant Scottish haunts and found them every bit as inspiring and energising as I did on those early visits. As I often do these days, I let geocaching be my guide, and it was a geocache – on the line – placed exactly at 60° north on Shetland, and another – 59 Degrees North – on Orkney that sparked the flame of remembrance of those visits year before. There are some places you visit where there is no need to do anything; just standing still, or sitting with a pint in hand, and letting the island come to you is ample reward for the effort of getting there. Shetland and Orkney are just such.

Shetlanders know their islands as 'The Old Rock'; and a rocky landscape it is, too, one that, like many of the Scottish islands, either enthral, or sends you back none the wiser.

Bolstered by about 100 smaller islands, the bulk of Shetland comprises the mainland and three northerly islands, Yell, Unst and Fetlar, the latter home to a large population of red-necked phalarope, one of Britain's rarest birds. The islands lie

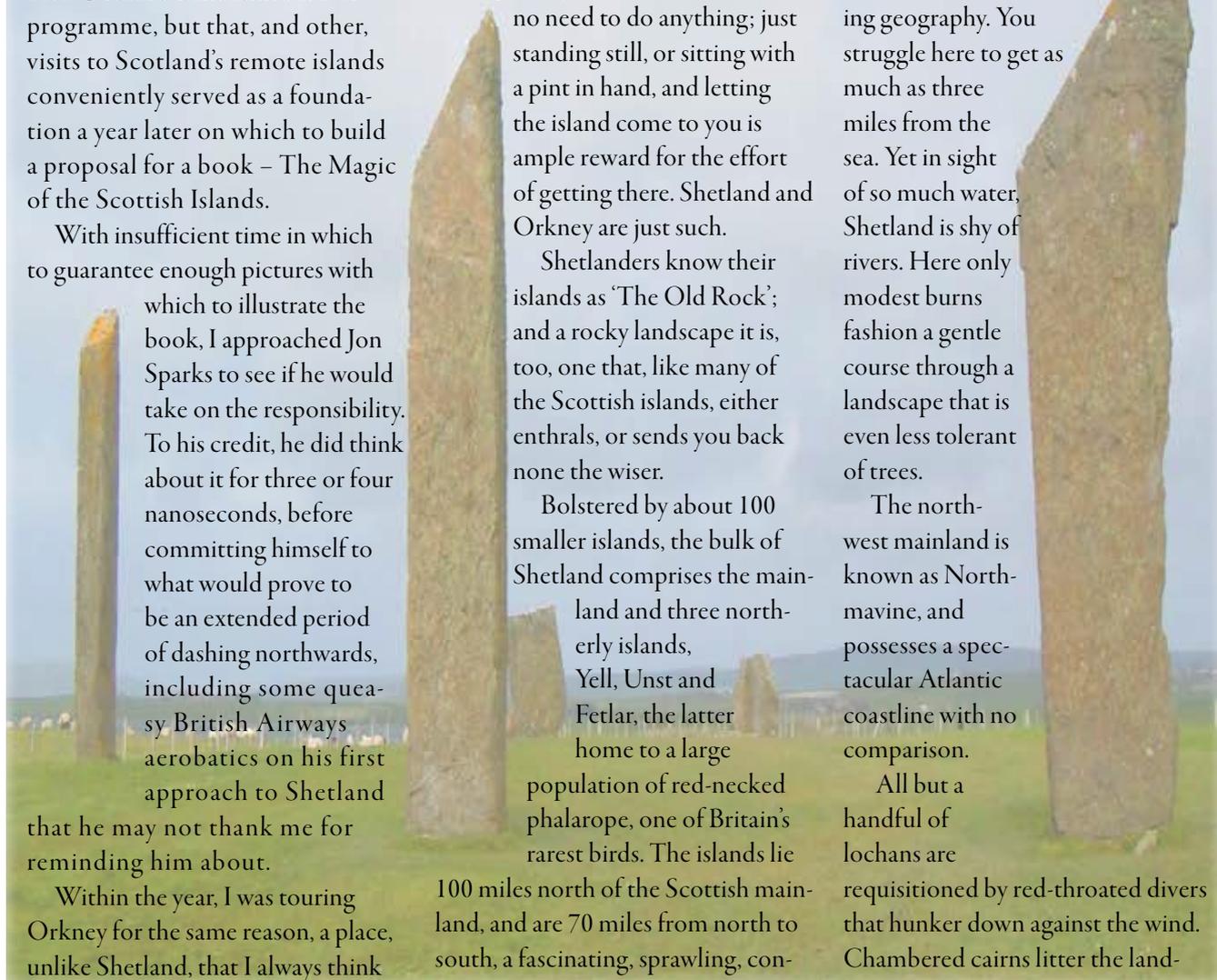
100 miles north of the Scottish mainland, and are 70 miles from north to south, a fascinating, sprawling, con-

volved archipelago, where land and water intermingle. This is the land of light nights, of the 'Simmer Dim', where anyone intent on seeing both a sunset and sunrise will get only a few hours sleep in between.

Not surprisingly, in a place where the Atlantic and the North Sea confluence, a coastline that is dramatic and stunning is something you take as the norm. A confusion of ghoups, sounds, wicks, steep-sided geos and deeper, wider voes, penetrate the land, and make for a vexed and bewildering geography. You struggle here to get as much as three miles from the sea. Yet in sight of so much water, Shetland is shy of rivers. Here only modest burns fashion a gentle course through a landscape that is even less tolerant of trees.

The north-west mainland is known as Northmavine, and possesses a spectacular Atlantic coastline with no comparison.

All but a handful of lochans are requisitioned by red-throated divers that hunker down against the wind. Chambered cairns litter the land-



scape, black-backed gulls line Loch of Houlland like spectators at a football match, opportunistic gulls eye the salmon cages out in Yell Sound, waiting – which, in Shetland, is a great way to pass the time.

But for many visitors, their first sight of Shetland is Sumburgh Head, at the southernmost tip, standing proud above the sea swell, almost part of it. A lighthouse marks the spot, erected, like its sibling on Muckle Flugga at the far northern end of Shetland, by the monopolistic lighthouse-building Stevenson family. Today, Sumburgh is famed neither for sea-defying Fitful Head nor its bleak airport, by-product of World War II, but for Jarlshof, one of the most remarkable archaeological sites ever excavated in Britain, a place that re-entered the world when violent storms exposed its stonework, rather in the manner of Skara Brae on Orkney. For many people, even as recently as the nineteenth century, Orkney lay beyond the boundaries of civilisation, islands so remote that visitors rarely went there. In 330BCE, a Greek traveller from Marseilles claimed that he could see the edge of the world from the Orkneys. Yet strangely, for thousands of years, Orkney proved to be very much at the centre of things rather than on the edge, having been at the crossroads of history in northern Europe for over 7,000 years, and we know that it has been inhabited for over 10,000 years.

The initial impression of Orkney today is that it lies beneath a mantle of peace and tranquillity. Yet there is bustling industry here from tourism and oil production to whisky distilling and Orcadian crafts, an energetic cultural life and a staggering wealth of archaeological sites, evening a thriving monastic community on Papa Stronsay, Golgotha, as it was when I helped the monks herd their sheep.

Come to think of it, they've still got my copy of Hamish Haswell Smith's book, *The Scottish Islands*.

Yet the essence of Orkney isn't distilled from its prehistory any more than it can be found wandering the delightful streets of Stromness. Here, by the way, is the home of Eliza Fraser, who in 1836 survived shipwreck on Australia's Great Barrier Reef, was captured by Aborigines but went on to become a legendary figure in Australian history; Fraser Island is named after her, and her story was turned into a film starring Susannah York.

Anyway, with far more patience than I can muster, the essence of Orkney was approached by that great writer Erik Linklater when, of the local newspaper *The Orcadian*, he wrote: '...it pays scant attention to news from London...but never fails to report...the seasonal activities of the innumerable birds that frequent its cliffs... A visiting actress would not escape attention, but a hoopoe or honey buzzard, a spoonbill or a little stint, would be most assured of a respectful paragraph.'

That all rather sums up Orkney, in an over-simplified way. But scratch the surface of Orkney and it bleeds community togetherness and mutual support. In places this remote you can't fall out with your neighbours; tomorrow you may need them to save your life. This instinctive co-operation is founded on a different bedrock than Shetlanders. Notwithstanding the dangers of generalisation, it may be said that Orcadians have been farmers who have used the sea with some familiarity, while Shetlanders were seafarers

who found their livelihood on the sea and saw the islands as just so many safe harbours.

Orkney has always been a place apart; separated from the Scottish mainland by the Pentland Firth (probably more accurately the Pictland Firth, but that's another story). It is this often turbulent passage that prompts Orcadians to refer to Britain as 'the adjacent island'; the same touch of humour that I noted in the café at the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre in Lyness on Hoy, where a sign for a Special Offer read: 'Buy one hamburger for the price of two, and get a second one free.' For years I associated that touch of wit with my travels in Australia; but a recent return to Lyness reminded me otherwise.

Getting to Orkney or Shetland involves making an effort, and quite possibly enduring some challenging weather and sea conditions. But I remember that inspirational writer Jim Crumley say (of St Kilda), that sometimes you have to endure adverse conditions in order to earn the right to be there. Maybe that's also a lesson for life in general.

I felt all the better (eventually) for having gone to St Kilda in a gale, and I've known those conditions on Shetland and Orkney. So, maybe I've earned the right to write about these Islands of Longing, these Island with Latitude.



An isolated homestead on the Scottish Isles; LEFT Standing Stones of Stenness, Orkney.

Our government offers an income top-up of around 4% to writers, photographers, and freelancers. To prevent too many people from joining in at once, they've given it an off-putting name: the flat rate scheme for VAT.

Normal VAT – if you're a carpenter. You buy timber for £10,000 + £2000 VAT, you sell chairs for £20,000; profit £8,000. If you decide to register for VAT, then you charge VAT on the chairs. So you have to drop your prices if your customers are to end up paying what they're used to. (If they're prepared to pay 20% extra, then why aren't you charging them that already?) Clearly, you lose out. You sell the chairs for £16,700 + £3,300 VAT = £20,000. You claim back the £2000 VAT on the timber. Result: you send the Government £1,300. Plus it's hassle making sure you get VAT receipts for your timber, compiling quarterly returns, and dealing with VAT inspectors.

Normal VAT for writers – this changes if you're selling your work to VAT registered companies. They just claim all VAT back. So you don't have to lower your prices. Buy ink, petrol etc for £1000 + £200 VAT. Sell words for £10,000. If you register for VAT, sell words for £10,000 + £2000 VAT, your publisher claims back the £2000

VAT, you claim back the £200 VAT on the petrol etc. You gain £200 – not enough to justify hassle of quarterly returns, VAT inspections etc.

Normal VAT for small publishers – small publishers register for VAT because their main output, books,

the photography trade is considered more expense-heavy than writing. You claim back VAT on nothing at all, apart from individual items of £2000 or over. You can even claim back VAT for those up to four years back into the past: that fancy camera, the classy

mountain bike, even that campervan. The summary below assumes you lower your prices when selling to people who have to pay the VAT themselves, so they end up paying the same and you end up getting 17% less.

So should you bother?

If you don't bother with ALCS etc, then don't bother with this, cos it's a bit more trouble. (But check out our advice note about PLR etc!) Same if your tax return always goes in at the very last minute. Under £10,000 turnover as a writer/photographer I wouldn't bother.

At £10,000 I'd start thinking about it. But not if you sell much to small, non-VAT registered entities, or if you direct-sell any significant amount of ebooks. If you're a publisher, even a small one, then it's worth registering for full VAT (rather than flat rate). However if you're a publisher of ebooks, which attract VAT, don't register for VAT until you have to. More details: www.gov.uk/vat-flat-rate-scheme/overview

Disadvantages of flat rate scheme

- 1 You have to compile accounts every 3 months.
- 2 You have to check that your main VAT-registered clients are okay with freelancers invoicing VAT.
- 3 You have to invoice people who normally just pay you – or at least tap into their 'self-billing' hassle.

Added disadvantages of full rate scheme

- 1 You have to obtain VAT receipts for all your expenses.
- 2 You have to justify expenses to a VAT inspector.
- 3 You need access to VAT-savvy accounting software

is zero-rated. Buy paper, print services etc for £10,000 + £2000 VAT. Sell books for £20,000 (zero VAT). Claim back £2000.

Flat rate VAT – those whose turnover is less than £82,000 don't have to register for VAT. 'Flat rate VAT' is designed to entice us into the VAT network anyway. But for people whose output is sold to VAT-registered entities, it represents a 5% subsidy. Here's how it works: You charge VAT at current 20% rate on all your output. You pay flat rate VAT at 12.5% rate on your entire turnover (ie your output including that VAT you added). For photographers or publishers rather than writers, you only pay back 11%; this reflects that

gain or loss				Typical outdoor writer with £9,200 profits			
Income	amount	flat rate	full VAT	Income	amount	flat rate	full VAT
sell to magazines, publishers	£1000	+ £50*	0	sell to magazines, publishers	£10,000	+ £500	0
sell to small non-VAT publishers	£1000	- £125**	-£200	sell to small non-VAT publishers	£1000	- £125*	-£167
sell books to the public	£1000	-£125	0	sell books to the public	£1000	-£125	0
PLR (Public Lending Right)**	£1000	-£125	0	PLR***	£200	-£25	0
Expenses	amount	flat rate	full VAT	Expenses	amount	flat rate	full VAT
Petrol, general admin (inc VAT)	£1000	0	+£167	Petrol, general admin (inc VAT)	£3000	0	+£500
Computer (inc VAT)	£2400	+£400	+£400				

* you invoice for £1000 + £200 VAT; you pay 12.5% of the £1200, ie £150
 ** your invoice says 'book £833 + VAT £166 total £1000'. But you get the £1000 and actually pay VAT of £125.
 *** other subsidiary rights: you can charge VAT on DACS payback payments, ALCS payments. The extra hassle there is called 'self-billing'. So this small-timer gains £325 from flat rate VAT, or £333 from full VAT.

How to get into the movies

Andrew White explains basic techniques for shooting video and film

Shot making is something we barely notice when watching TV and video if it's done well. An establishing shot, long shot, mid short, close or extreme-close are all important, at different times and for different reasons.

The art is to match the shot sizes to the style, start point or message you are trying to portray. There's no real hard and fast rule here, but it's usually best to open a video or a sequence with a wide shot, known as an establishing shot – to ground the viewer into where the video is taking place.

Each shot after that gets progressively closer; in effect drawing the viewer into the video. And when finishing, the reverse works nicely.

Knowing what shot size to use is pretty much based on what is happening in the frame. If there's a lot going on across a wide area, then a wide shot is the best.

One person talking, then a close-up is probably required. If you think the viewer will be distracted by what's in a wide shot, change to a medium shot.

There are two ways you can change your frame size. Either alter your lens or change your position.

If you have a zoom lens on your DSLR or camcorder, then changing shot size is as easy as pushing on a zoom lever or turning a barrel.

DSLRs benefit from interchangeable lenses of course, so fixing another lens on will give you more possibilities.

If you are filming with a fixed-lens camera – say an iPhone or smartphone – then move your position to change your shot size.

Avoid using the digital zoom on iPhones or smartphones – they work by enlarging the picture digitally and therefore horribly degrades the image.

Much better to film from the position you are, then use a zoom function on your edit software – that way if it does look bad, you've still got the non-zoomed in video to use instead.

The MAIN Man

Clues to the landscape ley in the names, reports Laurence Main

Roaming through the countryside, we inevitably come across monuments and follies. They pierce the horizon, catching the eye as landmarks and beacons in a landscape of rounded hills and inviting valleys.

Each has a story to tell, and you may adorn your guidebooks with mentions of them. Do not consider these features as trivial. Put there for a purpose, they may require further investigation.

The clue may well be in the name. You'll find they often park where leys cross.

I happen to be writing this column on November 30. On this day in 1874, Sir Winston Churchill, a descendant of the great Duke of Marlborough was born in Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire. Blenheim Palace is on what I call Churchill's Warrior Ley.

This links the Column of Victory in Blenheim Great Park with Churchill's birthplace in Blenheim Palace and St Martin's Church, Blazon, where he was buried on January 30, 1965.

Just let this simple fact sink in. Our greatest warrior, who was also a Druid (and I've met a Druid who worked actively in spirit for Church-

ill, at his request, during the war) was born and buried on a ley running through the Column of Victory. He also determined to marry within yards of this ley. The ley runs along the axial line, as intended by Vanbrugh, the architect of Blenheim. The Column of Victory commemorates the first Duke of Marlborough's victory over the French at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704.

It was completed in 1730. But it's marking much more than a battle. The column was erected 144 years before Churchill's birth.

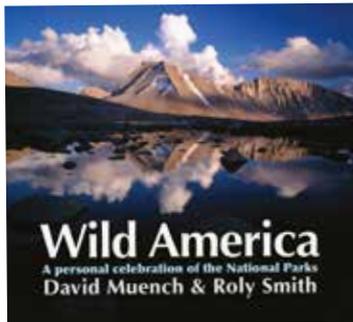
This Churchill's Warrior Ley can be extended to the venue of the Network of Ley Hunters' Moot to be held in Oxford on Saturday May 21, 2016.

There's also a coach trip along the Spine of Albion from Uffington to the Rollrights on Sunday May 22, followed by guided walks including one at Blenheim and Blazon on Tuesday May 24, led by me.

Members of the OWPG are welcome to apply for a free press pass to the moot while seats are available. Camping and Caravanning Club site in Oxford. Don't delay. Contact Laurence Main, 9 Mawddwy Cottages, Minllyn, Dinas, Mawddwy, Machynlleth, SY20 9LW, Wales.

Wild America: A personal celebration of the National Parks, by David Muench & Roly Smith; Rucksack Readers, £14.99 (hb) CT

This year is the centenary of the US National Park Service, created to run the growing number of parks, the first of which was Yellowstone in 1872. By 1916 there were fourteen. To celebrate the centenary top US landscape photographer David Muench and our



own Roly Smith have combined to produce this lovely little book covering 21 national parks

and protected areas (four of them aren't actually designated parks).

There's a wide range of landscapes in the parks described, though only two are from the eastern USA – Acadia and Shenandoah. A third, Badlands, lies east of the Rocky Mountains.

The selection is of course personal to the authors – there are 59 national parks in the USA to choose from, and everyone who knows many of them will find favourites missing. (Olympic, North Cascades and Rocky Mountain in my case). I can't really quibble with the selection as it does represent the grandeur and variety of the US national parks, from the lush deciduous forests of Shenandoah to the snow and ice of Mount Rainier and the stark desert scenery of Canyonlands and Zion.

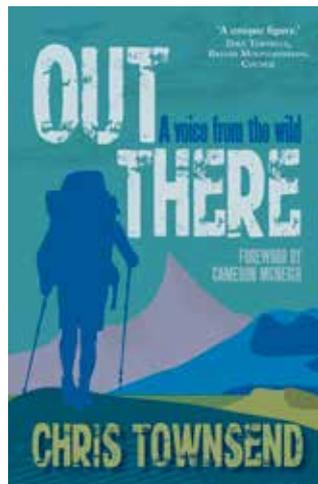
Roly outlines the story of the national parks and then describes each park succinctly and clearly with his love of these wild places shining through and a few of his own adventures thrown in – the last giving the book a nice personal touch. Along with his words the glorious photographs of David Muench really show the beauty and majesty of these

landscapes. I've been to nine of the places in the book. Now there are twelve more I want to visit!

The book has been well-designed and produced by Rucksack Readers and looks wonderful. I read it straight through but will undoubtedly dip into again and again. It's not long, just 96 pages, but in those pages there's an astonishing amount to excite and inspire every lover of wild nature. .

Out There: A voice from the wild, by Chris Townsend; Sandstone Press, £8.99 (pb) RS

There's no such thing as the loneliness of the long distance walker, according to wilderness guru Chris Townsend. According to him, in this semi-autobiographical collection of some of his greatest marathon



backpacking trips: “The best way to appreciate wild places is to go alone.

The full intensity of being in nature, of feeling part of it and blending in only comes with solitude, when you can open up to the world around you.”

Of course, not everyone is as well equipped, experientially and literally, as the longstanding outdoor gear expert for The Great Outdoors.

He has spent much of the last four decades blazing a lone trail on some of the world's most demanding and

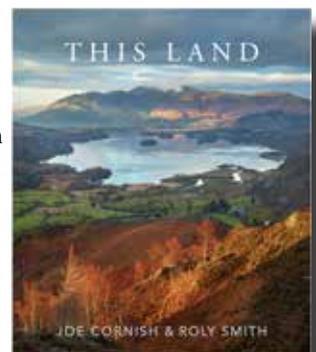
committing long distance treks, from the 2,600-mile Pacific Coast Trail, still in its infancy, to toughest of all back home in Scotland, where he was the first to walk the Munros and their Tops in a continuous, very wet and windy, walk.

But what shines through this highly readable anthology is the author's passionate plea for the protection of our wild country, whether it be in his native Cairngorms or the Cascade Mountains of the north-western USA. Along with his passion for communicating his joy in wild places has come, as he explains: “... a growing desire to help defend these places and work for their conservation and restoration.” Highly recommended.

This Land, Joe Cornish & Roly Smith, Frances Lincoln, £30 (hb) JS

If anyone tries to tell you 'print is history', show them this. This is not just a handsome book but, at 1718g on my scales, a really hefty one.

OWPG members will need no introduction to Roly Smith, and I'm sure most know Joe Cornish's work too; if not, this book clearly demonstrates why Joe would top almost any poll for Britain's most admired landscape photographer. The generous format and high-quality repro really do justice to the images. While most are bathed in 'magic hour' light, I've a sneaking fondness for those which conjure with poorer conditions; a mist-shrouded Ramshaw Rocks pleases me more than the sunny Roaches on the facing page.



If I have to pick a point of contention, it would be that there are few surprises, either in the choice

of locations or their portrayal, in words and pictures. The introduction promises that this won't be a 'Best Of' but a personal choice: I'd have liked it to feel more personal still.

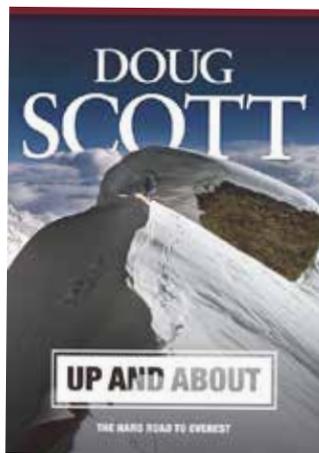
Nitpicking further, I did find the introduction a little confusing, initially suggesting that the book takes an east-west path across Britain; it does almost the opposite. And someone really should have spotted that the Lewisian Gneiss is a lot more than 500 million years old.

Up and About: The Hard Road to Everest, Doug Scott; Vertebrate Publishing, £24 (hb) RS

This first part of Doug Scott's long-awaited autobiography takes his story from his birth and upbringing as the working-class son of a Nottingham policeman to his first British ascent of Everest with Dougal Haston by the notorious south-west face in Guild president Chris Bonington's groundbreaking 1975 expedition. The author, winner of the Guild's Golden Eagle Award in 2005, made his name with light-weight, Alpine-style ascents of the world's big walls, starting in the Dolomites and later taking in Yosemite and Baffin Island's soaring granite faces.

In this honest, at times spiritual and often amusing biography, Scott relates how his distinguished climbing career all started with a Scout camp in Derbyshire in 1955 after seeing climbers on Matlock's High Tor. "I was more than curious," he writes, "I was smitten."

After a course at Jack Longland's White Hall outdoor pursuits centre near Buxton, he joined the Nottingham Climbers' Club and co-wrote the



first guide to climbing on Derwent Valley limestone.

Later expeditions included the Tibesti Mountains of Chad; the Alps; Hindu Kush; "the last great problem" of Strone Ulladale on Harris in the Hebrides, and The Nose and Salathé Wall on El Capitan in Yosemite.

The abortive 1972 Everest south west face expedition and the light-weight Bonington-led climb of Changabang in the Garhwal Himalaya two years later, eventually led to the successful Everest climb in 1975.

As he descended to Base Camp, Scott reflected: "Once again I was made aware that in going to the limits of endurance, regions of my being that are normally hidden reveal themselves and it is possible to find help within."

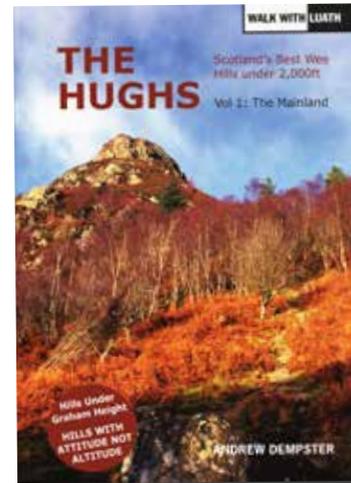
The Hughs: Scotland's Best Wee Hills under 2,000ft, Andrew Dempster; Luath Press, £14.99 (pb) RS

The classification of Scotland's hills by giving them human qualifying names is beginning to sound like the cast list of families in a well-worn soap opera. Originally we had the Munros, followed by the Corbetts, Donalds, Grahams and Marilyn's.

Now Andrew Dempster has come up with the latest acronym to tempt the obsessive Scottish summit-bagger. His "Hughs" – Hills Under Graham Height (ie under 2,000ft) – even borrows the Christian name of Sir Hugh Munro, who started it all 125 years ago.

The author's essential criteria for a Hugh (which confusingly can also be a Marilyn – see what I mean about the plot of a soap opera?) are prominence, position and panora-

ma. Of course, Scotland abounds in such attitudinally-challenged eminences, and many people will have their own particular favourites.



So this attractive listing of 100 mainland Hughs (a further 100 covering the islands is promised), includes such gems as Edinburgh's own mini-mountain, Arthur's Seat; Conic Hill on the Highland Fault near Loch Lomond; that craggy little gem of the Trossachs, Ben A'n, and legend-haunted Dumyat in the Ochils near Stirling.

The author points out that many mainland Hughs are situated in areas devoid of Munros, Corbetts and Grahams, which at least gives a good excuse, if one were needed, to explore parts of Scotland, such as the Southern Uplands, Central Belt and east, which might otherwise be overlooked. So I was pleased to see lovely hills like tor-topped Mither Tap on Bennachie, said to be the site of Mons Graupius, the last epic battle between imperial Rome and the Britons in AD84, and the hillfort-crowned Traprain Law near Dunbar, included.

It's just a shame that the actual heights of each of these enticing and interesting hills are not included, and the hand-drawn sketch maps require, as the author admits, the additional use of the appropriate OS sheet.

Six eyes and a lecture

Chris Howes gets Hannes on with Namibian spiders

Kev Reynolds' writing about his interrupted after-dinner talk in the Winter 2015/16 edition of Outdoor Focus jolted a memory of my strangest lecture and, in particular, the events that surrounded it way back in 1992. Settle down while I tell you a surreal story ...

I looked at the spider. It looked back at something – it might have been me, but who's to know with all those eyes? Six, to be exact. Anyway, it was probably a bit blinded as this spider had, until recently in its mundane little life, been sitting happily on a cave formation. Then along came a damn great bright cyclopean thing that shone in its face and zapped all its visual nerve endings. Poor little eight-legged creature!

The beast was actually quite helpful, staying still while it was studied. It was pale, anaemic-looking and shaped like a suet dumpling that's been ironed. That's to say, it was extremely flat, pasty white, with crinkly bits around the edge that Slartibartfast would have been proud of. A miniature disc with legs. This should be interesting, I thought, though such thoughts often prove to be classics of understatement.

The day had started well enough, with a matt-black, starlit sky growing bright

a little after 6am. Judith and I were camped at the edge of the Etosha pan, Namibia's jewel of a game reserve in the north of the country. It was winter, with dried grasses and an August drought forcing game to the few waterholes, making for ideal, almost predictable photography in those days of film rather than pixels. The choice was game, or caves. Reluctantly, very reluctantly, I had to acknowledge that the latter were beckoning. It was a Friday. A packed post of-

fice served as a reminder that, even here where things were 'civilised', this was nevertheless Africa. A grille divided a long, wooden room into two – by far the larger part

was inhabited by one man, while a telephone booth and six jostling people filled the other.

'What you want?' he asked. I gave him a Grootfontein number, a town in the north of the country. I waited. Eventually, twenty minutes later, he pointed to the booth. No dial-your-own around here – the operator placed your call, you answer when your phone rings. I waited some more, then spoke to

Wolfgang, a contact I'd written to before leaving the UK. He was a fixer – that is, he

would organise a caving trip and in return I would give a slideshow and talk to the Namibia Scientific Society. The name should be enough to indicate Wolfgang's background: German-speaking,

as is much of Namibia's white population (while English is the official language, Namibia – the former South West Africa – was once settled by Germany, and the legacy remains). We therefore depended on his English, which was thankfully quite good. Yes, we could be at a certain farm on Sunday. Yes, we could find it. No, there was no problem in giving the talk. Two out of three were correct.

Came Sunday and we hurtled down a dirt road through an arid, scrub landscape, insidious dust billowing high into the air. It penetrated everything: clothes, cameras, car; to slam a door was to create an internal dust cloud of fine, orange soil that spurted from the hired car's upholstery. Hills reared on either side of the road. From our last turn we were to look for a 'geological port' in the landscape at 54km, where we would find the farm. The problem was, we were late, we were travelling at high speed, and we didn't know what a geological port was. I tried to avoid the ruts, Judith scanned the scenery. By the time we reached 100km and were faced with a wide, sweeping veldt, we knew we had gone too far and the farm must have been

the only habitation we had passed. We tore back down the dirt and, yes, there was the farm set back from the road behind a gate and a low, wire fence. A veranda gave way to a wire mesh door; I rattled it and a stream of people emerged, all German-speaking and shaking hands. First were the farm's owners and their daughter, Antje, a tall, slim lady who spoke good English. Hannes was next to appear. He was short and wore shorts to match. Thick, dark boots and a bright green jacket completed his ensemble.

He looked dressed for walking the Swiss Alps all day and was probably the sort of companion that would talk cheerily whatever the conditions. It transpired that he worked as a vet in Namibia, although he had no training. The last out of the door was Wolfgang, an older, quiet, round-faced man – we too shook hands, then went inside to sign an indem-



Hannes with the rope ladder

nity before we could go underground. By the time we were ready to leave in Hannes' four-wheel-drive vehicle we felt overdressed. Judith and I wore our thin caving oversuits, Wolfgang was dressed in a white boilersuit, while Antje and Hannes wore ordinary clothes. A dirt track led for 3km into the depths of a valley at the edge of the hilly region, where the 'geological portal' opened out to the plain. We bounced and lurched over scrub roots and rocks as the realisation set in of how simple words – portal and opening – go wrong between languages. The valley sides became increasingly steep, limestone glaring in the heat of a noon sun. Hannes parked beneath a thorny tree and we loaded up with gear and water, and headed up the hill. The rock was dark and fretted; Hannes chatted about the plants and trees as we pushed through long, bleached grasses. The place was a natural heat trap in an oven-ready land. We glanced into a multitude of shafts, pots and clefts as we climbed; limestone stretched as far as could be seen, but was broken and shattered. The entrance shaft to the first cave we visited was polished smooth by baboons and it didn't extend far into the hill, though it was filled with encrusting formations.

Then came our main objective: Märchenhöhle; Fairy Tale Cave. Hannes unpacked the white cotton sack he had been hauling like a swag bag over his shoulder.

'Here, see,' he said, displaying a genuine, honest-to-goodness rope ladder with huge, wooden rungs. Its weight and carrying comfort value were high and nil, in that order. Hannes grinned, tied it to a convenient tree, then dumped it into the 10m deep entrance shaft. The rung spacing was huge and might have suited a yeti, only this was the wrong climate. From the pitch a rift opened into some chambers that supported the cave's fairy tale nature; it was impressive.

Formations abounded, glittering and echoing in the light and background hiss of Wolfgang's lantern. Every wall seemed draped with straw stalactites, and long, pointed formations hung from the roof. Surfaces were encrusted with secondary crystal growth. At the far end, inside an enormous subterranean mouth with pointed teeth, a pair of bats hung on the ends of stalactites, just like cartoon drawings. Perfect.

Then Judith spotted Mr Eight Legs. Many years ago, I found it best to keep quiet when finding a good cave bug. The theme is always to look, study and then photograph it with minimal



Hannes lowering equipment

disturbance. It was not in a good position to photograph, but I had to try. The flashes went off, though it was a futile attempt, which attracted the others to see what I was doing. Now think of it from the spider's point of view. From total darkness it's been exposed to our wavering lights plus a good bit of noise, then zapped by flashes. And now along came Hannes. Hannes, nice chap, you will remember is a vet.

Presumably he deals with big things and little things most of the time, the sort of things you would be likely to find in Namibia. Things like cows and bulls and cows and bulls and, perhaps, ticks and mites and parasites of cows and bulls and cows. Definitely not spiders.

'What is this?' he asked, proving my point. 'Ah, a spider,' immediately disproving it. I was steady-ing the camera for another shot when, like a striking rattlesnake, a blunt-fin-

gered hand shot out and scooped up the little arachnid. It sat in the palm of Hannes's hand while everyone had a good look, then he prodded the creature with his pachyderm-thick skin, raised it to eye-level and peered at it from close quarters, then poked it again. It was a good job the spider was already thin.

If it had possessed a normal, podgy body it would have long ago looked for a flat mate. My last hopes for another picture ended as, with his interest finally dissipated, Hannes flicked it into the darkness.

Where there is one spider, there must be more. Within seconds we found another, scurrying across a wall to hide in a crack. This was a different species, the body long and thin, with hairy legs that gave it a more threatening look. It was much larger and could move. I mean, it could move. This thing twitched and was gone. Not even Hannes could catch one and I never did get a photo of either species.

Later, back at the farm, we fed on bread, cheese, sausage and freshly squeezed lemon juice, taking in the warm, late afternoon air on the veranda. Then, off in a dust cloud for Otavi and the evening's talk on cave photography.

Otavi was a typical

Namibian town: wide, hard-packed dirt streets, a railway, low buildings with dust-laden, fading paint.

The meeting was to be held at 'the hostel', which turned out to be a boarding school. As we arrived, the last few children were retiring and we were bid goodnight in German by a sopolite boy of about ten years old who bowed and shook hands. It felt like as though he might have clicked heels, had he not been barefoot. Our room was spartan, a wooden bench and bed in an aged terrace with warped floorboards and door.

My time to become a lecturer had arrived. However, once inside the classroom-cum-canteen where the folding seats were set out, it was obvious that everyone from the Scientific Society was a German speaker. Most of the men were quite old, judging by the antique wheelchairs, and many had a minder. As I know no German and they spoke no English, it seemed a lost cause. There's always a cure: speak slowly and clearly (no, not loudly) and hope that someone understands. I opened with the first slide, said a few words and a susurrantion began. The supplied push-me, pull-me slide projector was a boon, but I never managed more than a sentence

or two without needing to pause for the whispers to die down – it turned out that the minders were translators, almost one-to-one throughout the audience. A couple of the more aged members fell asleep (I hope it was only asleep), but the rest seemed to be attentive. Then, eventually it was over and everyone faded into the darkness, no doubt wondering why this strange foreigner somewhat bizarrely thought that they might be interested in the history of photography in caves. It was another couple of days before we arrived in Windhoek, the capital, for the next step in the saga. We had a contact in the museum and we hoped Eugene might tell us more about our six-legged photographic models, as he was an expert on cave fauna.

He was hard to find, as nobody spoke English, but after several hours wandering in the government buildings, we found a door with his name plate. The flat-shaped spider was *Sicarius hahni*, the Sixeyed Crab Spider, while the fast mover was a species of the *Loxosceles* genus, the Violin Spider.

And both were highly venomous.

'All things are relative,' said Judith. 'What does "highly venomous" mean?' Eugene considered his

answer. 'Let's put it this way,' he said without a trace of accent. 'In the last six deaths thought to have been caused by *Sicarius*, the pathologist has refused to do a post-mortem.'

One bite from this, the most venomous spider in Southern Africa (the Violin Spider is third on the list), and death from massive internal bleeding and organ failure inevitably follows, he said. Perhaps he was overstating the case, or perhaps not.

It seems that, somewhat disconcertingly, in today's world some people in the UK keep *Sicarius* as a 'pet' (in ignorance of the dangers or, perhaps, out of bravado).

Some sources state that it is the most venomous spider in the world, rather than restricting this label to Africa; there is still no known antivenom.

And there it had been on the veterinary surgeon's hand, prodded, poked and finally flicked into oblivion. Hannes didn't know how lucky he was to be in literal oblivion. In the interests of conservation (human and arachnid), we wrote and told him that, if there is ever a next time, poking our six-eyed, six-legged friend isn't such a good idea.

Perhaps the inhabitants of Marchenhöhle will appreciate that, as they sit happily in their dark, fairyland recesses of the earth.

SPRING EDITION

Chris Townsend – the politics of re-wilding

Andrew White – video panning, and what not to do

Roly Smith – review of Bill Bryson's latest book

Kev Reynolds – become a better speaker

There are still pages to fill, so if you've a lightbulb moment that needs sharing, a story that needs telling, an injustice that needs airing, email: OFeditor@owpg.org.uk