A person wearing a red wetsuit and a white helmet with a headlamp is standing in a cave. The cave walls are dark and wet, with some white mineral deposits. The water in the foreground is clear and reflects the person and the cave walls. The person is looking towards the camera.

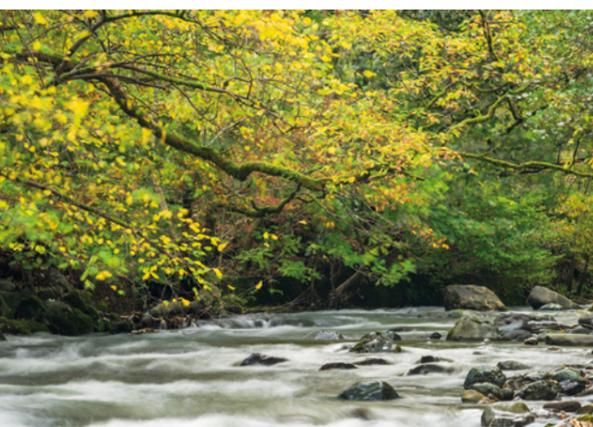
o u t d o o r
FOCUS

the quarterly journal of the OWPG | **winter** 2017

FROM THE EDITOR...

David Taylor

Autumn, a time of mellow fruitfulness, long evenings and that short journey onwards to winter. It's also the time of the OWPG AGM weekend, a more exciting event than Halloween and Bonfire Night combined. This issue of OF is filled to the brim with words and photos from this year's weekend, held at the Newlands Adventure Centre in the Lake District. Find out what OWPG members got up to over the three days (spoilers, it involves rain, gale force winds and waterproof clothing), and - more importantly - see who came away victorious at Saturday evening's award ceremony.



If you'd like to submit ideas for articles for the spring issue please contact me for further details. The deadline for all contributions is 15 February.



Cover shot
Chris Howes

Wading in an impressive upstream section of Krem Sakwa (krem = 'cave'), partly lit with underwater flash. See more of Chris's award-winning portfolio on pages 22-25.

www.wildplacesphotography.co.uk

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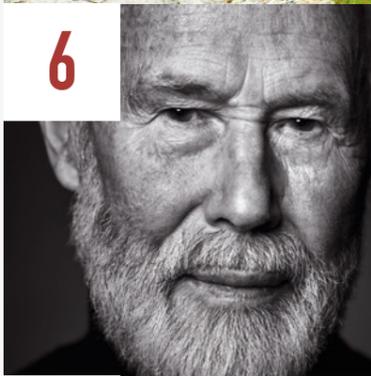
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1 DEC	Sunrise time 07.44 Sunrise direction 125°	1 JAN	Sunrise time 08.06 Sunrise direction 128°	1 FEB	Sunrise time 07.38 Sunrise direction 117°
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15 DEC	Sunrise time 07.59 Sunrise direction 128°	15 JAN	Sunrise time 07.59 Sunrise direction 124°	15 FEB	Sunrise time 07.14 Sunrise direction 110°
	Sunset time 15.51 Sunset direction 232°		Sunset time 16.20 Sunset direction 236°		Sunset time 17.15 Sunset direction 251°

Sunset/Sunrise times and direction correct for London. Times in GMT

Wordsmith

Kev Reynolds

The Man with the World's Best Job
www.kevreynolds.co.uk

Octavia Hill, Champion of the Countryside

For nearly half a century I've lived within sight of the Greensand Ridge or, as it's known in my family, the Kentish Alps. From where I write these words I can just see the crown of Mariners Hill which affords a three-county view I've gazed on a thousand times or more. Having spent fifteen years in a tiny cottage on the south-eastern slope of that hill, I'd climb it almost daily whenever I was at home. A few years ago I hung over a five-bar gate near the summit as my heart was trying to get out of my chest and thought: 'If this is the last view I see, it's a pretty good one.' An hour later I was in a hospital bed wired up to heart monitors. Needless to say I didn't die, but when I do, my ashes will be scattered up there.

Mariners Hill is accessible to you and me and to all our grandchildren's grandchildren thanks to the vision of Octavia Hill. She loved its view of 'unimpeded land and sky giving delicious sense of space. Imagine the joy of that hilltop with all its view and air,' she wrote; 'leave it free for those that love it, and will find joy and peace there for years to come.'

Octavia Hill is our local saint. Buried in our parish churchyard not a mile from Mariners Hill, I like to think she died with a smile on her face, for the day before she drew her last breath in August 1912, she received a cheque that effectively secured her favourite hill for the enjoyment of all people for all time.

Perhaps best known as one of the founders of the National Trust, her life's work was social housing and improving the lives of the inner city poor. But to my mind, her most important legacy is the free access we enjoy today to so much of our finest countryside. For this extraordinary Victorian woman, short of stature but mighty in spirit, was a tireless campaigner on behalf of those who felt 'the need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise [and] the sight of sky and of things growing [which] seem human needs, common to all men.'

Born in the Fenland town of Wisbech in 1838, Octavia was the eighth daughter of corn merchant and one-time banker, James Hill, but after he was declared bankrupt and suffered a nervous breakdown, Octavia's mother Caroline took her children to Finchley - then little more than a country village - where the girls were always 'up in the hedges, leaping ditches and climbing trees' in all weathers. It was the birth of her love of the countryside. 'There was always something to see - fields full of flowers, hedges full of one treasure or another.'

Years later, when managing slum properties and working hard to improve both the buildings and the lives of those who lived in them, she remembered the gifts of freedom and fresh air of her childhood, and turned disused graveyards into public gardens so that others could have a place in which to find some form of respite from the joyless drudgery of their everyday lives. She also arranged outings for her tenants to Hampstead Heath,

Wimbledon and Woodford, for she believed that recreation and natural beauty should not be the preserve of wealthy landowners, but were everyone's birthright.

She became involved with the UK's oldest national conservation body, the Commons Preservation Society (now the Open Spaces Society), where she met solicitor Sir Robert Hunter, and later widened her horizon of concern, to fight alongside Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley to save the Lake District from rampant development. (Hill, Hunter and Rawnsley, of course, later founded the National Trust.)

In London she helped save Hampstead Heath and Parliament Hill Fields from being built upon; she campaigned against

the destruction of suburban woodlands, and was the first to use the term 'Green Belt' as a girdle of protection from urban sprawl. And after she'd built a home on the edge of Crockham Hill Common among the greensand hills, she conducted a survey of all footpaths, commons and rights of way in Kent and Surrey, and would encourage visitors to walk the local footpaths equipped with 'at least a pair of secateurs, probably an old sword, and a pair of pliers' to dispose of any obstacles in their way.

Footpaths, she claimed, were 'one of the great common inheritances to which English citizens are born,' but were being lost by what she called 'judicious planting.'

Today I walk the same footpaths that Octavia Hill walked and fought to keep open more than a hundred years ago. I follow her spirit across Mariners Hill, continue to Toys Hill ('the first beautiful site in England dedicated as a memorial') and on to Ide Hill which she described as 'the breezy hill, wide views, woodland glades, tiny spring.'

Her spirit is in every one of those views that stretch across the great expanse of the Weald, mistakenly considered to be the overcrowded south-east, and she has my undying gratitude that it should be so.

On the west-facing slope of Mariners Hill she placed a stone seat in memory of her mother; on the crown of the hill there's another facing south, a wooden seat this time, weather-stained and drilled by woodpeckers; it was put there to recall Octavia's companion and fellow worker, Harriott Yorke. On Toys Hill she sank a well for the benefit of villagers - the view from the well-head is as exciting as any I know - while Ide Hill has its very own Octavia Hill protected sites with vantage points that never cease to draw an exclamation of wonder.

The marble effigy of this diminutive woman lying next to the altar in Crockham Hill's church, gives no clue as to her stature or status as one of the greatest of all champions of the countryside. Yet her inspiration lives on in what she referred to as 'the healing gift of space.'

Octavia Hill: local saint, national hero, to whose memory we owe so much.





Runners and Riders

Jon Sparks faces a tough challenge in the hills of the Lake District www.jon-sparks.co.uk

A recent two-day shoot embodied many of the challenges, logistical and technical (and physical!) which some assignments pose: covering a substantial distance within tight time constraints while still capturing a decent range of shots. This required careful planning as well as flexibility on the day.

Former Guild member Mark Sandamas now runs *Coast to Coast Packhorse*, providing logistical support for walkers and others tackling Wainwright's Coast to Coast route. Mark's also a fell-runner, and was planning a runners' crossing with two Australian guests. One, Chris Ord, is Publisher/Editor of *TrailRun* magazine *Down Under*, and leads running tours; the trip was a pilot for these too. Joining them for four days, partly on foot, partly on bike, freelance writer Ellie Ross would be covering the trip for outlets including *The Guardian*.

Mark and I met beforehand to discuss the shoot, scrutinising maps and considering the variety of shots required. We agreed I'd join for two days, the third and fourth of the journey. I'm no fell-runner, so my only chance of keeping pace was on my mountain bike. A further refinement was added when we realised that my partner Bernie was free on the first of these days.



▲ Day 1 Looking down Grisedale towards Ullswater. Having lost the planned skyline shot, this was some compensation, though it didn't actually need the longer lens I'd carried. **Focal length 112mm (Full-frame equivalent 168mm)**

I knew that I had to pare down my photographic kit. Time constraints ruled out faffing with multifarious lenses and flashguns. Besides, I needed to be able to keep up, and there was some distinctly technical terrain on Day 1, while Day 2 would be easier but longer.



▲ Day 1 Ellie Ross running down Grisedale with the crags of Dollywaggon Pike behind. One of the locations I'd earmarked on my way up the valley earlier. **Focal length 22mm (Full-frame equivalent 33mm)**

DAY 1

The runners were starting from Grasmere but we'd decided that I'd start from Patterdale and rendezvous at Grisedale Tarn. I envisaged my first shot being a dramatic skyline view as they crested Grisedale Hause. This demanded a long lens, and this dictated that I'd take my venerable (2010) Nikon D7000 rather than a newer full-frame camera. I also packed a cheap Sigma 55–200mm zoom; on APS-C sensors, 200mm gives an image equivalent to a 300mm lens on full-frame. Though cheap, it's sharp and crucially, it's very light. I also took a Sigma 18–125mm zoom.

Around 8am, Bernie dropped me where tarmac ends in Grisedale, before driving round to Bampton, to ride from there and meet us later.

The riding began easily but later I found myself pushing

▲ Day 1 Ellie Ross on the climb from Howtown to Moor Divock, with Ullswater behind and the Helvellyn range lurking in the clouds. **Focal length 22mm (Full-frame equivalent 33mm)**

▲ Day 1 Dramatic light over Ullswater, with steamer. **Focal length 86mm (Full-frame equivalent 129mm)**

▲ Day 1 Chris Ord running down Grisedale with the crags of Dollywaggon Pike behind. Running shots generally look good when both feet are off the ground. **Focal length 65mm (Full-frame equivalent 98mm)**

the bike more than riding. Somewhere below Dollywaggon Pike I stashed it behind boulders and continued on foot, under cloudy skies.

At the tarn, though clouds still hid the tops, Grisedale Hause was. I scouted along the north shore for the best angle for the skyline shot. Then I waited. The clouds dropped, obscuring Grisedale Hause, about five minutes before I heard voices from the mist. It was Mark and Co., but the skyline shot was gone. I knew I couldn't keep up with the runners on the initial descent, but turned that into an advantage by shooting some long-range images; the view down-valley was dramatic. Retrieving the bike, I made up time to an agreed rendezvous at Ruthwaite Lodge. From here the descent was mostly rideable, allowing me to get ahead, then to overtake after each shooting stop – most of which I'd 'previewed' on the way up.

After lunch in Patterdale we separated: the runners took the main C2C route over Kidsty Pike, while Ellie (now on a bike) and I headed for Boardale Hause. I'd chosen this route rather than the alternative Ullswater shoreline trail, which is very technical, and usually busy with walkers. This decision looked debatable, the weather turning damp and very windy just as we confronted narrow singletrack across steep slopes. Choosing discretion over valour, we pushed for a while, leaving the camera in the sack, finally meeting Bernie at Howtown rather later than planned. Breaks in the cloud gave spectacular light over Ullswater on the climb to Moor Divock as we retraced Bernie's outward ride, reaching Bampton about five minutes before the runners.

DAY 2

A much brighter day, with far-reaching views of the Howgills and the Pennines. I'd changed my camera kit completely, switching the emphasis to wide-angle shooting, with a full-frame body (Nikon D750), 24–85mm zoom, and 20mm prime lenses.

Total elapsed time was over 7 hours, but actual riding time only 3.45. Allowing for lunch in Orton, this still leaves nearly three hours off the bike: this was photography time. Studying the photos in Lightroom shows that each day included about thirty separate photography stops, each requiring dismounting,



▲ Day 2 Smardale Gill. Landscape shots were important for context. **Focal length 24mm**

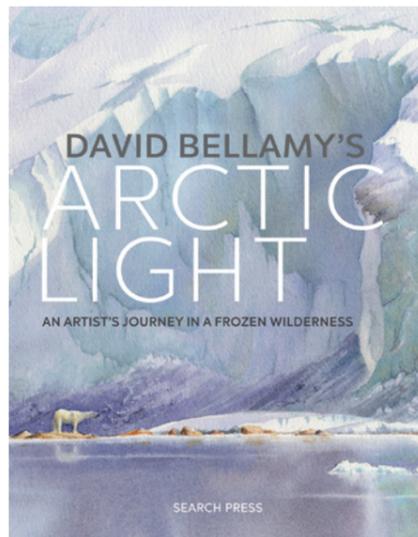
getting camera out, shooting as the others approach and pass, then repacking, catching up and usually overtaking again.

I'd expected that the generally easier terrain would facilitate repeated leapfrogging past the runners, but it didn't always work out that way. Crosby Ravensworth Fell was as wet as I've ever seen it and many of the moorland tracks were unusually 'draggy'. Sometimes I simply had to ask the others either to give me a head-start or to wait at an agreed point. The day's distance was 43km, which felt far enough!

The gear-change between the two days let me employ a lens range from 20mm to (effective) 300mm without ever carrying too much gear at one time. Limiting myself to just one change of lens each day didn't just lighten the load on my back; it also kept things simple in terms of 'seeing' potential photos, meaning that each time I stopped I usually had a good idea in my head of where I was going to place myself and how I would frame the shot(s); a useful time-saver in itself.

Final gear-note; I used an Osprey Zealot back-pack. This isn't a dedicated camera-pack but for the limited kit I took this doesn't matter; it carries far better than any camera-pack I've ever tried, comfortable on long climbs and stable on technical descents. Best riding pack I've ever had. (Unbiased and unsolicited testimonial).

BOOK REVIEWS / ROLY SMITH



ARCTIC LIGHT
David Bellamy
Search Press, £25 (hb)

Like JMW Turner, the artist whom he admits to being his greatest influence, David Bellamy prefers to do his paintings outdoors and in all weathers. That's why you can almost feel the biting wind and vicious spindrift squalls in the watercolours in his latest sumptuous offering, in which describes his experiences in the Scandinavian Arctic.

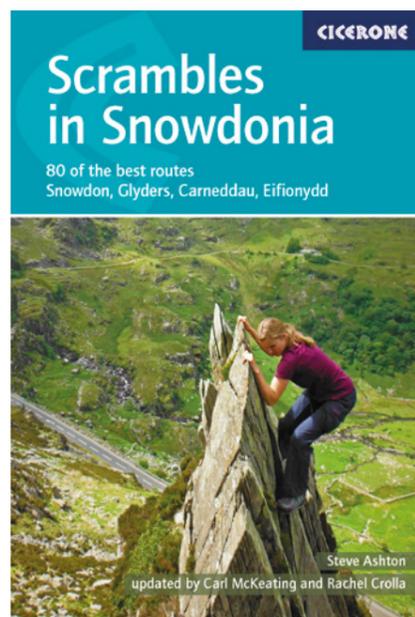
The author, who provides our Golden Eagle award painting every year, explains that his interest in the Arctic came late in life, following a trip to Iceland with his daughter Catherine. He soon found, as he explains, that his favoured medium of watercolour worked superbly well in "rendering the subtle nuances and infinite variation of tone and colour in ice subjected to changing light and atmospheric conditions."

As anyone who has been to Iceland or the Arctic can attest, weather conditions at those latitudes are every bit as changeable as the Government's plan for Brexit. As the Icelanders are fond of telling you: "If you don't like our weather, hang on for five minutes and it'll change."

Bellamy's top Arctic watercolour painting tip? Use gin or vodka, with their low freezing points, instead of water. And

why the often uncomfortable and long-winded method of sketching the scene first, instead of just taking a photograph? The author's response? "...you see and learn so much more when spending even a few minutes sketching a subject."

The result is without doubt the finest collection of paintings of the Arctic I have ever seen. Bellamy's sensitive brush-work captures every nuance of mountain, glacier and fjord and leaves the reader with the intense desire to return to these magnificent, unspoilt wildernesses.



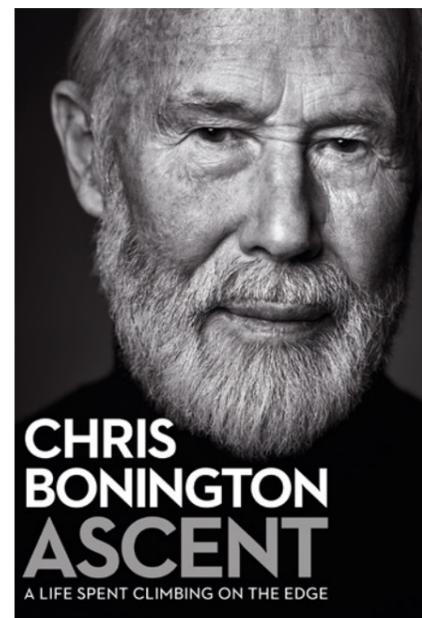
SCRAMBLES IN SNOWDONIA
Steve Ashton, Rachel Crolla and Carl McKeating
Cicerone, £14.95 (pb)

As the publisher rightly states, Steve Ashton's *Scrambles in Snowdonia* has earned a very special place in the affections of many scramblers and climbers. Not only did Ashton's pioneering 1980 guide inspire countless readers to discover the exhilaration of scrambling in the Snowdonia hills, it was also the first guide to introduce the now-standard numerical grading system for scrambling.

This much-loved guide has now been fully updated and revised by experienced Yorkshire Dales-based climbers and scramblers,

Rachel Crolla and Carl McKeating, covering 80 routes within the Snowdonia National Park.

All the old classics, such as the Snowdon Horseshoe, Tryfan, Bristly Ridge on the Glyders and the Cyfrwy Arete on Cadair, are included, but the authors also introduce 16 entirely new routes, which will undoubtedly be eagerly snapped up by the completists.



ASCENT
Chris Bonington
Simon & Schuster, £20 (hb)

At the last count, this is the fourth autobiography by Britain's best-known mountaineer and OWPG president Chris Bonington (five if you count Jim Curran's 1999 biography, *High Achiever*).

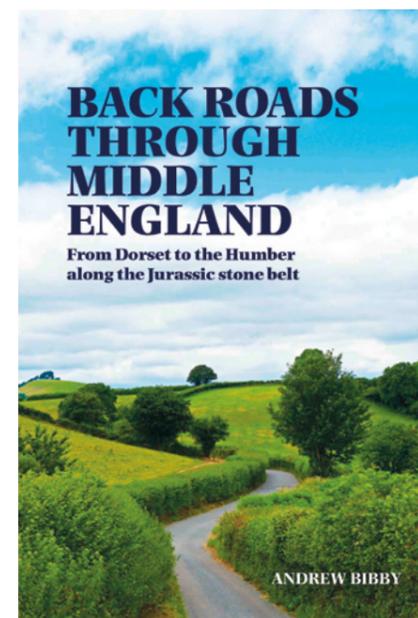
But this one is different. It is a far more personal and moving account of his personal life, loves and losses during his 60-year career as one of Britain's leading climbers and expedition leader.

The most moving sections include heartbreaking descriptions of how he coped with the tragic drowning of his three-year-old son Conrad while Bonington was climbing Sangay in Ecuador in 1966; and the long, debilitating illness of his beloved first wife Wendy, who sadly died of motor neuron disease in 2014. But they also tell of his joyful reunion

and eventual marriage to Loreto, the widow of his old climbing friend and 1960s TV climbing spectacular producer, Ian McNaught-Davis, in 2016.

In many ways, tragedy seems to have haunted Bonington's long and active life. He writes movingly of his sense of personal responsibility for the loss of so many of his close friends, such as Ian Clough, Mick Burke, Nick Estcourt, Pete Boardman and Joe Tasker, all on expeditions which he led.

He admits that writing the book was a challenging, introspective exercise, as he relived the joy and despair of a long life spent as Britain's foremost ambassador of the great outdoors.



BACK ROADS THROUGH MIDDLE ENGLAND
Andrew Bibby
Gritstone Publishing, £13.95 (pb)

The phrase "Middle England" has many meanings, the most common of which is probably as a socio-political term referring to white middle class people holding traditional conservative or right-wing views.

But as the author explains in this delightfully-different travel book, his Middle England is "an altogether more complicated, and more contested, terrain." He travelled, by bike on quiet country roads, the 430 miles along Prof WG Hoskin's "great stone belt" of oolitic Jurassic limestone, through ten counties from Dorset to Humberside, trying to capture

the modern-day essence of this essentially English landscape and its people.

And he confirms at the end of his journey, during which he meets a variety of people ranging from plain-speaking Northamptonshire quarrymen to the chief executive of the Blenheim estate in Oxfordshire, that, despite some terrible road conditions, that the bicycle is the ideal mode of transport if you are not in a hurry. John Morrison's excellent, though virtually unacknowledged, photographs illustrate his journey.

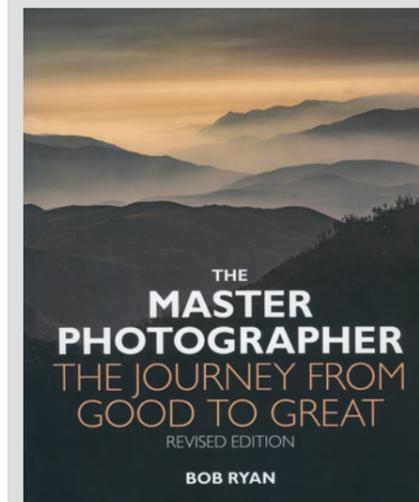
Bibby's eloquent literary companions on the eight-day journey include Edward Thomas, John Clare, Flora Thompson and the relatively unknown Dorset dialect poet William Barnes, all of whom add life and colour to this previously largely unheralded landscape.

Despite its clumsy title – which makes it sound more like an AA motoring guide – this is a refreshingly different kind of travel book, not afraid to visit places where other guidebooks fear to tread. They include the former steel town of Corby, Chartist cottages near Witney, community-run village shops in North Cadbury and Collyweston, and an innovative social housing estate at Powerstock.

It all fits in perfectly with the ethos of the publisher, the UK's first authors' publishing cooperative, and the author's own passion for community-based social enterprise.

THE MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER
Bob Ryan
Bourchier Books, £24.99 (pb)

There's something strangely satisfying about taking apart a clockwork mechanism – a watch, for instance – to see how the various pieces all fit together. That satisfaction pales in comparison to the joy of successfully re-assembling the thing afterwards though, particularly if it also works more efficiently than it did previously. Bob Ryan's new book, *The Master Photographer: The Journey from Good to Great*, invites and encourages you to try a similar tinkering with your photography skills.



This is not a simple how-do-you-do-that photography book, filled with technical explanations readily found elsewhere. It's a book that wants to push you from being merely a good photographer to becoming a great one. The main way to achieve this according to Ryan is to unlearn bad photographic habits and embrace your photographic intuition. To reinforce this message, Ryan writes about his own personal experience as a photographer, as well as presenting information gleaned from a variety of sources, including areas of academic study such as human psychology. (Though this does not mean that the book is a dry read, far from it).

Once past the introduction, the first task presented in the book is the completion – as honestly as possible – of a downloadable personal scorecard. Once complete you are then free to work systematically through the rest of the book, taking a series of exercises to chart your progress along the way.

The ultimate aim is to reach the final chapter having learnt to trust your intuition in order to shoot more emotionally pleasing and compelling imagery.

The Master Photographer is relatively text-heavy for a photography book, but it does cover a lot of ground over its 139 pages. What photography there is is varied and relevant, and includes work by Ryan, as well as photographers such as Andy Beel and Alison Price.

If you feel the need to improve your photography then reading Ryan's book will be time well spent. On the subject of which, can anyone recommend a good watch repairer?

David Taylor

AGM weekend 13-15 October | Awards special

OWPG

Newlands adventure centre | Cumbria



Welcome to the 2017 AGM weekend awards special. For the rest of this issue of Outdoor Focus you'll be able to read about and see what the participating OWPG members got up to during the weekend, as well as find out more about the OWPG award winners and why they richly deserved their prizes.

After a very successful weekend in an every-so-slightly wet and windy Lake District, thanks need to go to Andrew White for running an inspiring and rewarding video workshop; Dave Ramshaw, Viv Crow and Mark Richards for organising walks, as well as Peter for offering the Eiger as a wet-day alternative for Sunday morning; Dennis Kelsall for his role as master of ceremonies at the awards presentation ceremony; Ronald Turnbull for stepping in and organising the weekend; the awards judges: Mark Whitely of Dalesman Publications, Chris Bagshaw, Carlton Reid executive editor of BikeBiz.com, Elizabeth Multon of Bloomsbury Publishing, Lois Sparling, Craig Wareham of ViewRanger, Dave Willis and Ashley Cooper; the awards administrator, David Ramshaw; and last but by no means least, all the staff at the Newlands Adventure Centre. Here's to next year's AGM weekend, now just eleven months away...



CAUSEY PIKE WALK

Text and photos David Ramshaw

The group of six intrepid walkers set off about 9.45 am from the centre to tackle the Causey Pike ridge via the direct route (almost vertical) to Rowling End. Forty minutes later, having scrambled up a narrow bracken enclosed path with steep rocky sections the party emerged onto the grassy top having gained 333m in height through low cloud and swirling mist.

This gave the occasional glimpse to the valley below as the sun briefly illuminated farms, fields and Derwentwater to the east.

Further along the ridge towards the summit of Causey Pike (at 637m) the wind increased, becoming very variable in places and the views into the valley disappeared.

Chris and Chiz braved the wind at one spot to record a windspeed of 48 mph on Chris's anemometer. The party then took the wise decision to leave the ridge before ascending to Sail and Crag Hill by an escape route down to the Stoneycroft path under Oughterside, returning to the centre by 3.15 pm.



GOLDEN EAGLE

lifetime achievement award for outstanding services to the outdoors

Winner Richard Fox, Operational Manager, Fix the Fells

Nominee list prepared by the OWPG committee, awarded by a vote of the OWPG membership



Chiz Dakin



David Ramshaw



Chris Howes



Richard Fox receiving his award from OWPG chairman, Peter Gillman

Richard Fox is responsible for the day-to-day repair and maintenance of the Lake District upland paths through Fix the Fells.

Over the last fifteen years he has directed the repair of over 250 paths. This includes sourcing stone from as close to the work sites as possible, arranging helicopter lifts, working on the specifications and landscaping requirements, and being responsible for quality assurance. In this context Richard manages one of the most successful volunteer programmes in the Lake District.

The 'Lengthsmen' scheme undertakes the vast majority of the maintenance work – nearly 2000 volunteer hours each year – freeing

the National Trust and National Park rangers to focus on larger project work. His expertise has been utilised by the government's Environment Committee to pull together its code of practice for the repair of mountain paths, and he has shared his knowledge with path workers in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and beyond.

Without Richard, the massively popular paths of the Lake District would be in a much worse state of repair and the fells would be scarred with human erosion. His work also helps improve the water quality of the streams, becks, tarns and lakes by reducing the soil washing into water network.



For more information about the work of Fix the Fells, to see the latest photos, and possibly even make a donation, visit www.fixthefells.co.uk

DERRYCK DRAPER AWARD

for Outstanding Innovation in Outdoor Equipment

Winner Outdoor Design Logistics

Judge Chris Townsend



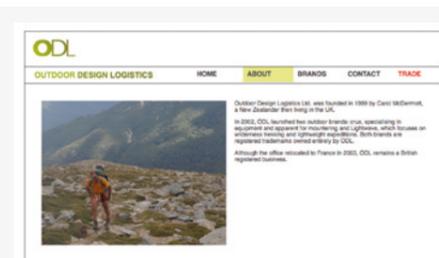
^ Carol McDermott receiving his award from judge Chris Townsend

This prestigious award is presented in the name of one of the Guild's founder members, Derryck Draper. The 2017 award goes to Outdoor Design Logistics for their unique condensation-beating X-tex breathable material for single skin tents, as used in their S10 Sigma and Lightwave and S20 Sigma tents.

Award judge Chris Townsend said: "Having now used the s20 Sigma on three nights, two of them windy with heavy rain, one calm with light rain, I'm really impressed. The fabric stayed dry."

The judges also praised the incorporation of the material into the well-designed S20 tent. X-tex uses activated carbon within the tent fabric, which allows condensation in the liquid phase (water droplets) to be carried out through the fabric. Existing breathable fabrics can only transport water vapour, not liquid droplets.

Carol McDermott, originator and director of the company, accepted the award.

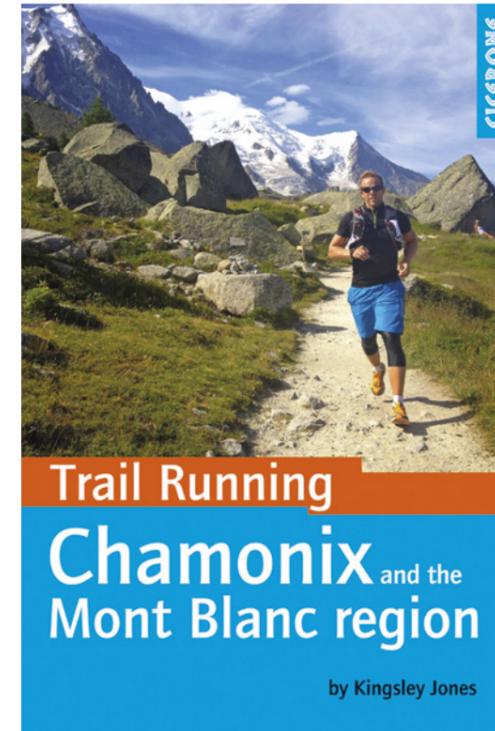


For more information about Outdoor Design Logistics visit the website: www.odl.uk.com. Or, for more information about X-tex fabric visit www.crux.uk.com/about-x-tex-fabric

GUIDE BOOK

Winner Kingsley Jones for *Trail Running - Chamonix and the Mont Blanc Region*

Judges Mark Whitely of Dalesman Publications and former OWPG member Chris Bagshaw



^ Kingsley Jones receiving his award from OWPG chairman, Peter Gillman

About Kingsley...

Kingsley is qualified as a UIMLA International Mountain Leader and Dip.P.T. Personal Trainer, who splits his time between the Lake District and Chamonix each year, to guide groups trail running in the mountains. For details on guided trail running visit www.icicle.co.uk or for information about the author visit his website: www.kingsleyjones.com.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Genuinely innovative in its choice of subject, and well written, passionate and authoritative.

Kingsley Jones

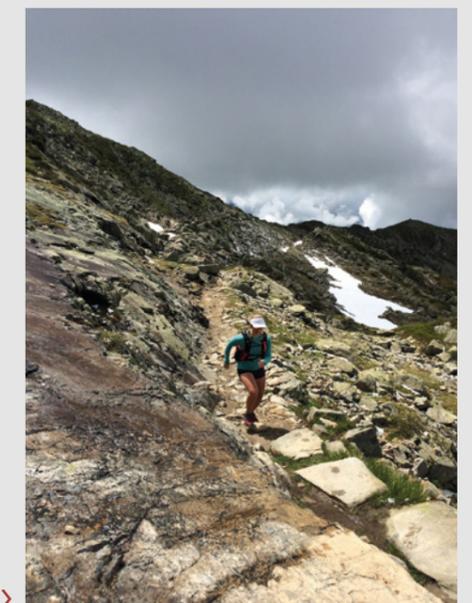
On trail running and the OWPG award

In the recent OWPG Awards for Excellence, I was delighted that my book on trail running in Chamonix, won the guidebook category. More pleasing was that the judges noted "Genuinely innovative in its choice of subject, and well written, passionate and authoritative". I'm hoping this guidebook really opens up the possibilities for runners visiting the Mont Blanc massif.

It's especially important and current, when we see the effects of modern living and diet, damaging so many peoples health. As humans we are all born runners, with our Neolithic

forefathers being persistence hunters who chased prey slowly and steadily until the animal was exhausted and could be killed. Trail running is quite literally in our genes, in a current era where many waistlines are challenging our jeans.

Gone are the preconceptions of mountain runners as wild mountain men with overly short shorts and wild beards. You are as likely to be overtaken by a woman in the latest technical compression fabrics with lightweight poles and a minimalist running backpack. Trail running as a sport has come a long way in the



Running to Le Brévent >

last 20 years, and it is more inclusive, more accessible, and more enjoyable than ever before.

Before you start out, it's worth making sure that you have enough kit with you in terms of both safety, and the rapidly changing weather conditions in the mountains. It's worth investing in a decent pair of trail running shoes. Compared to road shoes, these have a more aggressive tread, a rock plate in the sole to stop your feet bruising on rough ground, and a toe box to reduce the amount of blackened toe nails. Oh yes, forget the L'Oreal foot model contract - if you ever take up trail running, you've got to forget that as a future career.

When running in the mountains, it's worth taking a running pack to carry the essential safety gear. A running back is typically up to 12 litres volume,

and fits very well to avoid movement and chaffing. In it you should carry some water, a rain jacket, extra layer, survival blanket, whistle, phone, head torch, hat, gloves, first aid kit, snacks, map and compass. These are pretty standard obligatory kit for any trail running race, and even on the days when it looks sunny, in the Alps especially the afternoon convection storms can quickly bubble up and catch you in a downpour.

To enjoy Alpine trail running you don't have to be superhumanly fit. You need to be in good condition for running, but to be determined and highly adaptable. Adapt your output to the terrain, and the length of your run. Some of the best trail runners aren't the fittest or the fastest, but those with the most tricks up their sleeves, who save energy wherever possible.

Remember that laziness and efficiency are the same thing re-marketed!

Safety is always a key consideration, and if you are trail running in Chamonix, the mecca of European mountain sports, there is generally very good phone reception around the massif, in event of needing to call mountain rescue. It's good practice to always run with a friend, so you have some backup in case of an emergency. Navigation on the trails is fairly straightforward, due to the amount of signage in the Alps, so navigators who fear the clouds days in the UK hills, will find Alpine trail running navigation a doddle. It's still worth taking a map, in case plans change. Always check the weather forecast when setting out trail running, and don't be afraid to adapt.

Trail running in the Italian Val Veny >

>> you move light and quickly through the mountains. You get to appreciate the beauty of nature more, as you can focus on the landscape more, liberated from a heavy rucksack and boots. Trail running can improve your appreciation of the mountains, and aside of the physical wellbeing that it obviously improves, the mental nourishment and rejuvenation of trail running is phenomenal.

It's no small wonder that trail running is now the beating heart of the sporting calendar in the Alps, and that valleys such as Chamonix are declaring themselves the "Vallee du Trail" - you really don't need a translation for that one! Indeed the tourist office declared that there are now more summer visitors to the Chamonix valley, than in winter. Trail running has not just arrived in a big way - it is here to stay. Happy running!

Trail running on snow >
Chamonix 90km race route >>



< Chamonix Plan de l'Aiguille Kingsley finishing the UTMB >

Mer de Glace and the Grand Balcon Nord (France) 15.3km, + 1260m, 4h 30m

From *Trail Running - Chamonix and the Mont Blanc Region*

If you only run one route in the Chamonix valley, make it this one. Start near the Montenvers train station, and run up through the Le Planards ski slopes, along the 'James Bond' ski track out from the Vallee Blanche. In the summer it's snow (and skier) free, and you zig-zag upwards through the trees to reach the edge of the Mer de Glace next to its snout, at the charming Les Mottets buvette. Here you turn right and thread your way up through the moraines, keeping left at the junction, to arrive just below the upper Montenvers station 1913m. The view ahead to the Mer de Glace and the Grandes Jorasses at its head are breathtaking. Run up to the train station, then ascend further towards Le Signal. This is the high point of the run, and the view of the one kilometre high West Face of Les Drus across the glacier, is quite something!

After taking photos, and catching your breath, run across the balcony trail to the Plan d'Aiguille. This undulating path offers very aerial views down into Chamonix, and across to the Aiguilles Rouges. When you reach the mountain hut on the Plan, turn right and follow the trail steeply down to the car park behind the Aiguille du Midi cable car. This descent drops the height of Ben Nevis, but only takes about 45 minutes!

The key to enjoying trail running is the sense of freedom that it gives us, as >>

< Running next to the Glacier du Tour



The *Guide Book* award is sponsored by Aquapac, manufacturer of 100% waterproof cases, bags and pouches. Aquapac is British company headquartered in London, and sells all over the world.
www.aquapac.net

Highly Commended

Adrian Hendroff for *Family Walks Around Dublin* / The Collins Press, £14.99 (pb)

Reviewed by Roly Smith

Dublin, Ireland's bustling capital, shares the same toponymical origin as Blackpool across the Irish Sea on the Lancashire coast. They both mean "black pool", but there the similarity ends. While Dublin (known to the Vikings as Dubh Linn) is backed by the quartzite headland of Howth in the north and the granite uplands of Killiney Hill and the Dublin Mountains to the south, the hinterland of Lancashire's pleasure beaches are the flat, agricultural expanses of The Fylde.

Adrian Hendroff's latest offering, which was highly commended in this year's OWPG Awards for Excellence,

thoroughly explores Dublin's enticing surroundings and historical landscapes via 30 varied routes. They include the 18th century Ardgillan Castle and Park; coastal walks around Donabate; a circuit of the craggy Howth peninsula and an ascent of the 561ft/171m Ben of Howth, and a boat trip and circuit of Bull Island - otherwise known as 'Ireland's Eye' - out in the Irish Sea off Howth.

But perhaps the most interesting and unusual route is to the summit of 1,257ft/383m Montpelier Hill, overlooking the Orlagh foothills and with fine views across Dublin to the Irish Sea. The ruined building on the summit was known as the Hell

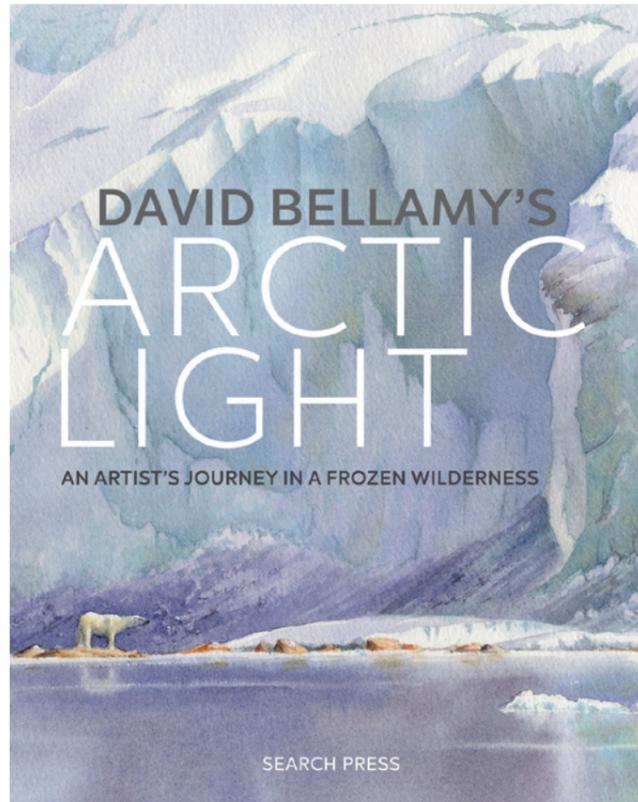
Fire Club, and was where William Conolly, speaker of the Irish House of Commons, met with friends to worship the Devil and drink scatheen, a drink made from whiskey and hot butter. Unfortunately, Conolly used the stones from a Neolithic passage grave on the summit to build his folly, leading locals to believe that its ruination was caused by the old gods seeking revenge.

Hendroff says the walks were handpicked to encourage families and non-walkers to go out and explore Dublin's fascinating and historical hinterland. It will certainly encourage me next time I'm in Ireland's Blackpool.

OUTDOOR BOOK

Winner David Bellamy for *Arctic Light*

Judges Mark Whitely of Dalesman Publications and former OWPG member Chris Bagshaw

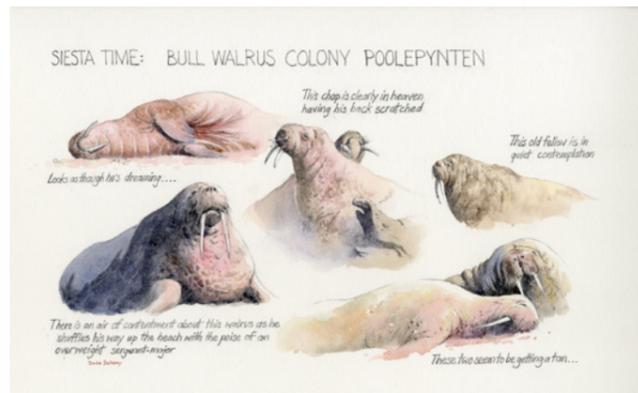


WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

In a market-place seemingly full of 'personal accounts' of some journey or another, this book is singularly different, bringing a fascinating insight into the creative artistic process, and providing a readable, informative account of exploring one of the world's wildest places.

About David...

David Bellamy specialises in painting mountain and wild coastal scenes, and is particularly fascinated by the moods of nature in the wild places. A full time artist and author, he has written seventeen books illustrated with his paintings and eight DVDs on David's techniques in watercolour have been produced by APV Films. Through his painting and writing he hopes to bring about a greater awareness of the threats to the natural environment, and he is particularly active in conserving the wild areas.



Painting adventures in the Arctic

From *Arctic Light*

The sketch was progressing well. Smugly I took great satisfaction in applying the watercolour, seeing the image of the natural ice bridge gradually forming on the paper. Then I felt the ground move – was I dreaming? It's not supposed to do that. I worked on, then suddenly the ground I stood on – a mass of mud, stones and rock debris – lurched dramatically to one side. Towards those dark, fast-flowing waters of the glacial river that I suddenly realised were undercutting the banks. Where I stood the mud and rocks covered a shelf of ice which was starting to disintegrate beneath my feet. I rapidly applied another watercolour wash to the sketch, but as a great gap ripped open in front of me I was obliged to take the mother of all leaps onto safe ground away from that roaring torrent which would have swept me away under the ice shelf, watercolour sketch and all.

In the Arctic, because of the subtle nuances in colour and tone in snow and ice, I prefer to sketch in watercolour whenever possible, though this can lead to problems when the temperature is well below zero. A drop of gin in the painting water can work wonders, but if the temperature really plummets even that doesn't work and I'm left with frozen brushes. When really desperate measures are called for I get out the watercolour pencils and rub dry colour across the paper, then pick up a snow-ball and rub it across the sketch, rather as one might expect a baboon to paint. I then quickly draw into the mess of colour with a dark pencil or pen and the result can be passable. In fact it is sometimes better than my more considered work. In a violent Arctic storm, however, you can't hang around. The temperature plunges and it feels like you've been hit by a brick wall, causing you to gasp, whilst all the art materials you've scattered across the ground rapidly begin to disappear under swirling snow or spindrift.



◀ Walrus montage ^ Inside the Greenland ice-cap Heywood Bjerg ▶



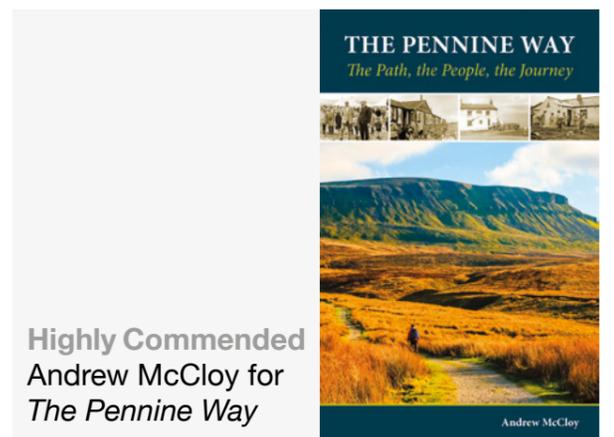
^ Amidst the icebergs

In my search for the sublime icescapes of the Scandinavian Arctic my expeditions vary, sometimes on a dog-sledge, sometimes on foot or cleaving through wild Arctic seas in a fifty-foot boat, or on one occasion taking a Zodiac up a 50-mile remote fjord, to find it was holed in the bottom. Encounters with walrus, musk ox, polar bears and other wildlife provided stunning insights into animal behaviour and many on-the-spot sketches. The walrus, with its battered and heavily-textured hide is a most accommodating model, despite the accompanying cacophony of rude noises. Abseiling into crevasses to sketch ice bridges, camping on the Greenland ice-cap and exploring ice canyons all inspired the paintbrush. At times the dog-sledging route was so steep that the sledges ran out of control down the mountainside, flattening a husky like a Tom and Jerry cartoon. Hiking was not without its dangers: at the

edge of the Scoresbysund polynya the snow suddenly gave way and I thought I was about to plunge straight through into the icy sea, heavily laden with rucksack, sketchbooks and rifle, but luckily the gods smiled on me that day and I escaped.

Not all the trips produced constant hair-raising moments though, and many were downright hilarious, such as when my Danish colleague and I were invited for tea by an Inuit photographer. In anticipation of some fresh scones we found that afternoon tea Greenland style involves a cup of tea accompanied by a raw turnip. This, however, is a great privilege as vegetables are rather scarce in Greenland. Each of the expeditions was quite different in character from the others, and gave me some of the most treasured moments of my life.

Read Roly Smith's review of *Arctic Light* on page 6



Highly Commended
Andrew McCloy for
The Pennine Way



↗ Horsen's Fjord, East Greenland

OWPG AWARD WINNERS 2017

OUTDOOR TRAVEL FEATURE

Winner John Metcalfe for *Bikepacking Broadens the Mind*

Judges Carlton Reid, executive editor of www.bikebiz.com, and Elizabeth Multon of Bloomsbury Publishing

Bikepacking Broadens the Mind

John Metcalfe

Many years ago I was transfixed by a prescient magazine image of two dreadlocked bikepackers riding laden Konas across a sunbleached landscape. I forget the magazine, maybe it

A formula for the best bikepacking experience does not exist

was MTB Pro or Mountain Biker International, it doesn't really matter. What does, is the image spoke to me of freedom, exotic places and rebellion. Perhaps, even heroism. The thousand yard stares, being in control of one's destiny. It fuelled my dreams and tuned me into the harmonics of

travel. Shortly after, I read Jupiter's Travels by Ted Simon. That book put me over the edge. The lure of travel was mainlined via the pages into my psyche. I wanted in.

Prolonged travel has had an irreversible effect on my life and its lessons are far reaching. What follows are a few observations from my time spent in the saddle.

At its rawest, the experience of travel transcends the mode of transport. The mode is a tool, an instrument to enable you to tap into the source. Yet it is not a blunt tool, far from it. Your choice of transport and how you use it has an indelible impact on your travel experience, so it is worth

giving it some thought. Hitchhiking forces you to interact, pitching you headlong into the vagaries of other people's schedules, and of course it is internationally cool. Walking is the ultimate self-sustained slow-travel,

This is where the noteworthy stuff happens... Where stories are born

and although the daily distances are curbed, each mile is intimately earned. For me though, it is bikepacking that hits the sweetspot. It's the overlap between sizeable distances, self-sufficiency and intimacy with my surroundings. It is where my learning proliferates.

A formula for the best bikepacking experience does not exist. But to stack the odds in your favour you should always try and seek out the limit of your current sphere. As Bill Merchant, an IditaSport veteran, adroitly observed, 'we go into the Alaskan backcountry to find cracks in ourselves. We go back a year later to see if we have done anything about them.' Moving to where the cracks are

When our schedules become hectic, travel is often the first casualty

enables the greatest learning to take place. I've found that these cracks start appearing at, or just beyond, the border of my current world. Ecologists know this phenomenon as the edge effect; it is at the boundary of two habitats where the greatest diversity can be found. This is where the noteworthy stuff happens. This is where stories are born.

The unknown is always scary, but would you want to know your fate? Chances are we would do very little if we knew the consequences in advance. With naivety as your ally, make your move and you will find life will move too. Things will happen to help you out, that otherwise would not have happened. Most of the horrors I have portended have come true on the trail, but things have also happened to help to me out of those same holes. Don't be over concerned with them. Don't plan for them. I was once told that we tend to carry our insecurities, have a close look at what you are packing for your trip. What incidents

have you anticipated? Right there are your insecurities. Learn what they are.

Authentic travel takes time. And second only to health, time is our greatest resource. These days our time is in great demand, yet we tend to squander it. When our schedules become hectic, travel is often the first casualty. Paradoxically this is at a time when we probably need it most. Very rarely do we travel for travel's sake. Vacilando is a Spanish word that has no English equivalent, but sums things up perfectly. It means to travel somewhere, but to not be unduly concerned whether or not you get there. I've found this is the best approach to bikepacking. It is a frame of mind, a way of living, of going with the flow. And for me it is also the hardest aspect to get right. It takes a while to peel off the layers of planning

Inspirational photographs tend to be taken when life on the trail is good

and scheduling, the very skills that are cornerstones of my regular life.

Bikepacking, indeed life, is not linear. The boxing adage, 'everyone has a plan until they get hit in the face' holds weight here. Bikepacking plans are outdated the moment you set off. The plan is, there's no plan. Be receptive and allow way to lead onto way.

Every trip is bookended with mental debris. At the start there are several days during which you are mentally decompressing from your regular life. And during the last few days you begin to feel the insidious gravitational

pull as your re-entry into your normal world approaches and your mind becomes distracted by encroaching commitments. In the middle is the best bit. Maximise and savour it.

Inspirational photographs tend to be taken when life on the trail is good. But the reality can be harsh. Brutal even. This is a time when photographs are rarely taken. The contrast is real and immutable. The long lonely hours,

I have sung all of my songs and thought all of my thoughts

the heat, the ceaseless rise and fall of the thighs like a Victorian pumping machine. The mountains, the vastness, the deserts. The preoccupation with miles and altitude. And food. Always thinking about food. As the days pass they all become routine. The monotony. When riding the Great Divide I read an entry in a hostel logbook penned by a Continental Divide walker. It read, 'I have sung all of my songs and thought all of my thoughts.' I reached a similar state a couple of weeks later. It cannot be rushed, nor is it ever forgotten. It brings with it a new perspective. But it requires time, the elusive time.

I've always resisted the temptation to reread Ted Simon's travelogue or Google the image of the dreadlocked riders for fear that the magic has gone. Or was never there. Like most things, timing is crucial. I was receptive to those harmonics at that time. A certain time, a particular mindset. Changed forever, but newly prepared for the next stimulus. And so it goes.

About John...

John is an award winning freelance writer, author and photographer specialising in adventure, sports, travel, health and fitness. His photographs have appeared in books, magazines, outdoor websites and on book covers.

www.johnmetcalfewriting.wordpress.com



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↗ James receiving his award from OWPG chairman, Peter Gillman

Highly Commended
James Forrester for *Isolation*

Highly Commended
John Metcalfe for *Lost in Translation*

TECHNICAL FEATURE

Winner Chris Townsend for *A Lightweight Approach to Big Hills*

Judges Carlton Reid, executive editor of www.bikebiz.com, and Elizabeth Multon of Bloomsbury Publishing



Chris Townsend receiving his award from Cicerone's Joe Williams

About Chris...

Chris Townsend is an outdoor writer and photographer and a passionate wilderness hiker. He is the author of twenty-five books, including the award-winning *Backpacker's Handbook*, and is Equipment Editor of *TGO magazine*.

www.christownsendoutdoors.com



The *Technical Feature* award is sponsored by Cicerone, a specialist publisher of walking, trekking, mountaineering and cycling guidebooks.

www.cicerone.co.uk

A Lightweight Approach to Big Hills

Chris Townsend

Ultralight backpacking is often portrayed as risky and masochistic, as heading into the wilds with barely enough gear to survive and certainly not enough to be comfortable. It doesn't have to be like that. I don't go into the hills to practice 'surviving' or to suffer. I go to enjoy myself. But part of that enjoyment is having as light a load as possible. How light depends on the time of year and the destination. The key factors for combining comfort and safety with a light load are the right gear for the time and place and the skills to use that gear in the severest conditions that could occur.

Whilst equipment testing means I'm often carrying gear that is heavier than

is strictly necessary I always try and keep the weight down. An opportunity to really do that came in June when Peter Elliott of PHD suggested a trip to try out some new ultralight down items. That was an ideal chance to really see how light I could get my load for a two-night, three-day trip in the Cairngorms. The forecast was for cooler than average temperatures with highs around 15°C and lows of 4°C plus a brisk westerly wind, frequent showers and little chance of sunshine. Good conditions in fact for seeing just how an ultralight setup performed.

What weight constitutes 'ultralight' or 'lightweight' though? I don't think you can or should put a figure on it. Aiming for a target weight could mean

omitting something essential or taking something too light for the conditions just to achieve it. Take the lightest items that will do what's needed and that fits the definition in my opinion. I also think there's a difference between the weight of essential gear and any optional extras such as reading matter, cameras and other non-backpacking items. Reduce the weight of essentials and you can carry more of the extras! I can't imagine going without camera gear, notebook and e-reader or paperback under any circumstances.

So to keep the weight of a backpacking load low the weight of essential items is the key, especially the weight of the big items – pack, shelter, sleeping bag, sleeping mat. For

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Elizabeth Multon Amongst a good number of well-written travel pieces (which gave me a dangerous number of ideas for holidays and challenges), articles that stood out for me were of course those that were especially well written, but also ones that gave us insight into the writer's mindset, and that made me think again about how I relate to the outdoors.

Carlton Reid As per usual the stand-out articles stand out; evocative writing, great intros and, mostly, the accompanying photographs whet the appetite nicely. Could be just me but editing seems a bit sharper this year, especially for the best pieces, but lower down the ranks there are some howlers that show that writers need to put their pieces through Grammarly or similar (cos editors clearly ain't gonna do it). Digital presentation for some of the pieces is also showing a strong improvement, which can only be good.



Keeping warm in the PHD Wafer jacket

so I used the OMM thin foam DuoMat for this. The trip involved much rough pathless terrain and quite a bit of ascent and descent. The Exodus was stable and comfortable throughout.

Shelter

Much as I like tarps they're not a good choice in midge season even with a netting inner. I like a tent so I

this trip I looked at the lightest gear suitable for summer backpacking in the Cairngorms with high level camps.

I ended up with a total weight of 9.65kg, of which 6.7kg were essentials. Around 3kg of non-essentials may seem excessive but 2kg of that was camera gear, not essential for backpacking but essential for my work. Subtracting items worn or carried (footwear, clothing, poles, cameras) the weight of my pack came to 5.9kg, to which I added 1.5kg of food so it was 7.4kg at the start. Everything performed well and I had a comfortable trip. Heavier gear wouldn't have added anything except more weight to carry.

Pack

With such a light load a pack with a frame and thickly padded back, shoulder straps and hipbelt was unnecessary. The Mountain Laurel Designs Exodus is a 535 gram ultralight pack made from tough Dyneema fabric. It has useful stretch outside pockets and a total capacity of 57 litres – more than enough for this trip as I didn't fill it. It's designed for loads up to 11kg so I was nowhere near pushing its limits. The Exodus doesn't have any padding in the back

can zip it shut and cook in the porch if necessary. I also like enough room for comfort if trapped inside by midges or storms. One of the lightest suitable tents for this is the Nordisk Telemark 2 ULW, which weighs less than a kilo (with better pegs than those provided and extra guylines the weight was 994 grams) yet is spacious for one (it's designed to sleep two though that would be a tight squeeze). The Telemark 2 is also surprisingly storm resistant. It easily stood up to heavy rain on both nights and strong winds on the second one.

Sleep System

The PHD gear I was testing consisted of ultralight clothing and sleeping bag designed to be used together. I usually take a sleeping bag adequate for the average temperatures expected, reckoning on sleeping in clothes on any unusually chilly nights. That's mainly because I've never found much clothing other than base layers to be that comfortable to sleep in due to stiff fabrics, zips, buttons, buckles, pockets and other features. However for this trip I used the PHD Ultra K down bag, which has a lower temperature rating of +8°C, plus the ultralight Wafer K series down jacket,

Mountain Laurel Designs pack & Pacerpoles



trousers and socks. The clothing has minimal features and the fabrics are very soft so it's comfortable to sleep in. The first night the temperature fell to +7°C in the tent and I was just warm enough in the sleeping bag alone. I did wake a few times feeling a touch chilly though so the second night I slept in the down socks, trousers and jacket. The temperature fell to +6 and I was very warm and cosy, not waking once. I was also very comfortable and it was nice to be able to emerge from the sleeping bag and not be hit by cold air (though that does wake you up!). PHD says that the Ultra K bag plus Wafer clothing should be warm enough down to +3°. I reckon it would keep me warm a few degrees lower. The total weight of sleeping bag and clothing was only 775 grams.



Nordisk Telemark pitched high on the Moine Mhor



Highly Commended
Kingsley Jones for *Trail Running in the Alps*

Highly Commended
Stephen Neale for *Where to Wild Swim in Essex*

PHOTOGRAPHY

Winner Chris Howes for *The Abode of the Clouds*

Judges Dave Willis and Ashley Cooper

The state of Meghalaya in north-east India is a mountain region with the highest rainfall on earth (one night we experienced 28cm of rainfall, and this was in the dry season). 'Meghalaya' translates to Abode of the Clouds, an apt description. These pictures were shot in February 2017 during an international expedition undertaking original exploration.

The images are chosen to concentrate on two aspects of the

caves: the ever-present water that has carved them out (which required the use of buoyancy aids during exploration and shooting) and the different geologies. Meghalaya has a curious mixture of limestone and sandstone caves, the latter being highly unusual and now challenging the record for the longest in the world. The interface between the rocks sometimes revealed sandstone boulders in the limestone roof, or underfoot where they had fallen.

The availability of photographic equipment was limited by the rigours of flying and travel plus battery charging in a remote area with no power, roads or drinkable water, along with the usual difficulties of camping. I was pleased to be able to use underwater lighting (flashbulbs) to highlight this aspect of the caves; the underwater lighting is what has produced the green colour in the water.

◀ Krem Sakwa

A cascade in Krem Sakwa discovered by the photo team, making this not only the first sight of the waterfalls, but also the first photograph ever taken here.

◀ Sielkan Pouk

A typical entrance, moving from lush jungle to river cave; daylight is balanced with light from three flashes.

Krem Sakwa

An area of original exploration in deep water that required swimming: this is an interface region with limestone walls and a sandstone roof.





^ Krem Dam

After torrential overnight rain flooded the huge cave of Krem Dam nearly to the roof (the water subsided in hours), it contained its own weather system: clouds of mist made the passage perfect for dramatic backlighting.

Krem Sakwa >

Calcite formations located in an active streamway that would flood during much of the year are uncommon; this passage was discovered during the expedition.

About Chris...

Chris is a freelance photographer and author who concentrates on outdoor sports, natural history and the environment throughout the world. He is a specialist in cave and mine photography, including the history of underground and flash photography. Chris has a Zoology degree, has a worldwide digital photo library of nature and travel pictures, and is a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society (FRPS).

www.wildplacesphotography.co.uk



^ Krem Mawpun

The sheer fun of caving in an active streamway, in Krem Mawpun.



^ Chris Howes receiving his award from OWPG chairman, Peter Gillman

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Once again this photographer has shown himself to be at the forefront of his specialization, using his technical mastery of lighting for visual impact and scene-setting to enhance a strong sense of composition and human drama in a very challenging environment. He is also able to edit and select strong images that form a cohesive whole, to tell the story with variety, strong use of colour, texture, shape and pattern.



The OWPG Photography award is sponsored by Conway. An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Conway publishes books that open up the world through tales of contemporary and historical exploration and adventure.

www.bloomsbury.com/uk/non-fiction/travel-and-adventure



Peghorn Lodge Sunrise, Teesdale

Highly Commended

David Forster for *Weather: light on landscape*

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Landscape photographers are always going to have their work cut out producing images that stand head and shoulders above others because this genre is a very crowded place to be. There are a number of really strong, atmospheric and individual images in this portfolio that point towards a more conceptual approach to landscape photography. A more concentrated, cohesive and thematically committed portfolio would vie for the award. As it is, the work is highly commendable.

To see more of David's work visit www.bluestoneimages.com

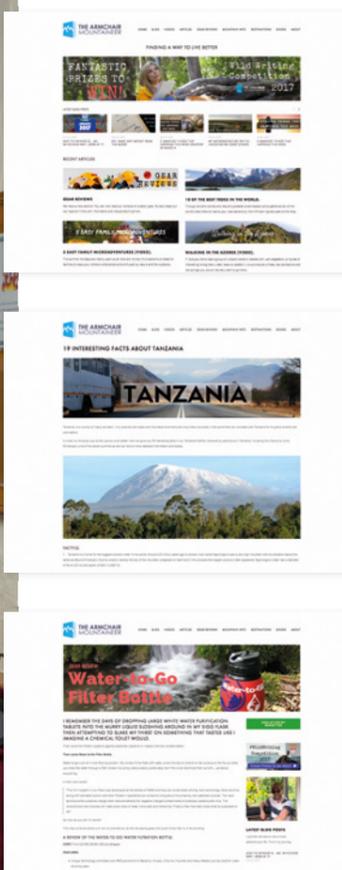
DIGITAL PRODUCTION

Winner Thomas Smallwood for *The Armchair Mountaineer* / www.armchairmountaineer.com

Judges Lois Sparling, freelance website writer/designer, and Craig Wareham of ViewRanger



Thomas Smallwood receiving his award from Lois Sparling



About The Armchair Mountaineer...

I am Thomas Smallwood; Entrepreneur, Blogger, Mountain Enthusiast and Bibliophile. In late 2016 I quit the rat race to redesign my life in a way that was more satisfying, interesting and adventurous both in my personal and professional life. I didn't know how to accomplish the large and vague objective of "living better", although I knew it meant being more entrepreneurial and spending more time outdoors.

And so The Armchair Mountaineer was born... or rather, evolved into a blog following my journey and a web site designed to inspire others to do the same.

The Italian Alps: Redefining success

An Armchair Mountaineer article

Last week I was in the Italian Alps enjoying a colourful Autumn and putting my legs through the kind of terrain that I seldom encounter in Cambridgeshire!

It was a while since I had been to the Canavese region of Piemonte and the Valle d'Aosta, from where half my family originates; a while since I had kicked steps into snow and felt my quads burning so fervently at the unusual strain of uphill propulsion. Strange to hear on this kind of web site I know, but hey, the whole idea is to get out of the armchair and back into a more adventurous outdoor life.

So one day last week, amid the mists and mellow drizzliness I set off up the Valley of Champorcher, to go



to Lago Miserin. It is a lake, situated at 2600m and has a special significance in my love of mountains because my early desires to visit it were thwarted by my parents, due to my being "too young". Consequently this unassuming mountain lake took on a significance well beyond its modest altitude and indeed the ease of reaching it, coming to symbolise the essence of the unattainable; a holy grail of wild mountain environments.

Anyway, I subsequently went there a few times but not for a good 10 years at the very least. So, nostalgia having got the better of me, I resolved to walk up there once more.

After deciding my hire car was not entirely suitable for the dirt track I was rocking and rolling over I parked up and set off up to Dondena on foot. Its a pleasant gradient and I was fortunate to get some sunshine. Beautiful walking. The colors of autumn washed liberally across the landscape with the broadest strokes. Bright yellow larches, bleached, rusty grasses and dark, dank earth, wet from an early snowfall, now melting in the mid morning sun. An constantly changing sky; action, clouds, mist, sun - everything one could want from mother nature's ample palette.

Before long it was tough going in a pair of North Face low cut boots and I soon hit enough snow to put on my gaiters. Then, instead of continuing to head up the valley towards Lago Miserin in the direction of the Finestra di Champorcher, I took a left and headed up Mont Rascias (2784m) which overlooks the lake. I don't know why.

Perhaps a boyish enthusiasm for a clean snow slope. Perhaps it just felt right. It felt as if part of this mini-adventure was going to be to do something different.

Ultimately about 50m from the top I decided to turn back. The snow was deep and getting wetter and heavier and the mist encroached on my view down the valley. When it came to the level of M. Dondena (2548m) I figured it was time to call it a day. It just felt like I wasn't prepared for these kind of conditions even though the snow was not very deep. I took a long drink and forced myself to eat a peanut bar as fast as the mist rose.

I charged back down, thrashing through the snow; sliding, glissading and occasionally stumbling. I was soon in the mist and next to zero visibility so I retraced my footmarks until the terrain became mixed and the snow gave way to dark rock and earth and I was once again able to pick up the path markers.

So I failed to reach Lake Miserin, I failed to reach the top of M. Rascias and, despite gaiters, I failed to keep my feet dry but I did succeed in finding something out about myself. When it comes to my enjoyment of the outdoors the journey is much more important than the destination. In a 2.5hr round trip I gained 850m of elevation and covered 12.5km. What I really wanted was not to reach the lake or the summit I had pivoted towards, but rather to revel in the splendour and quiet solitude of the mountains and internal triumph of physical activity.



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