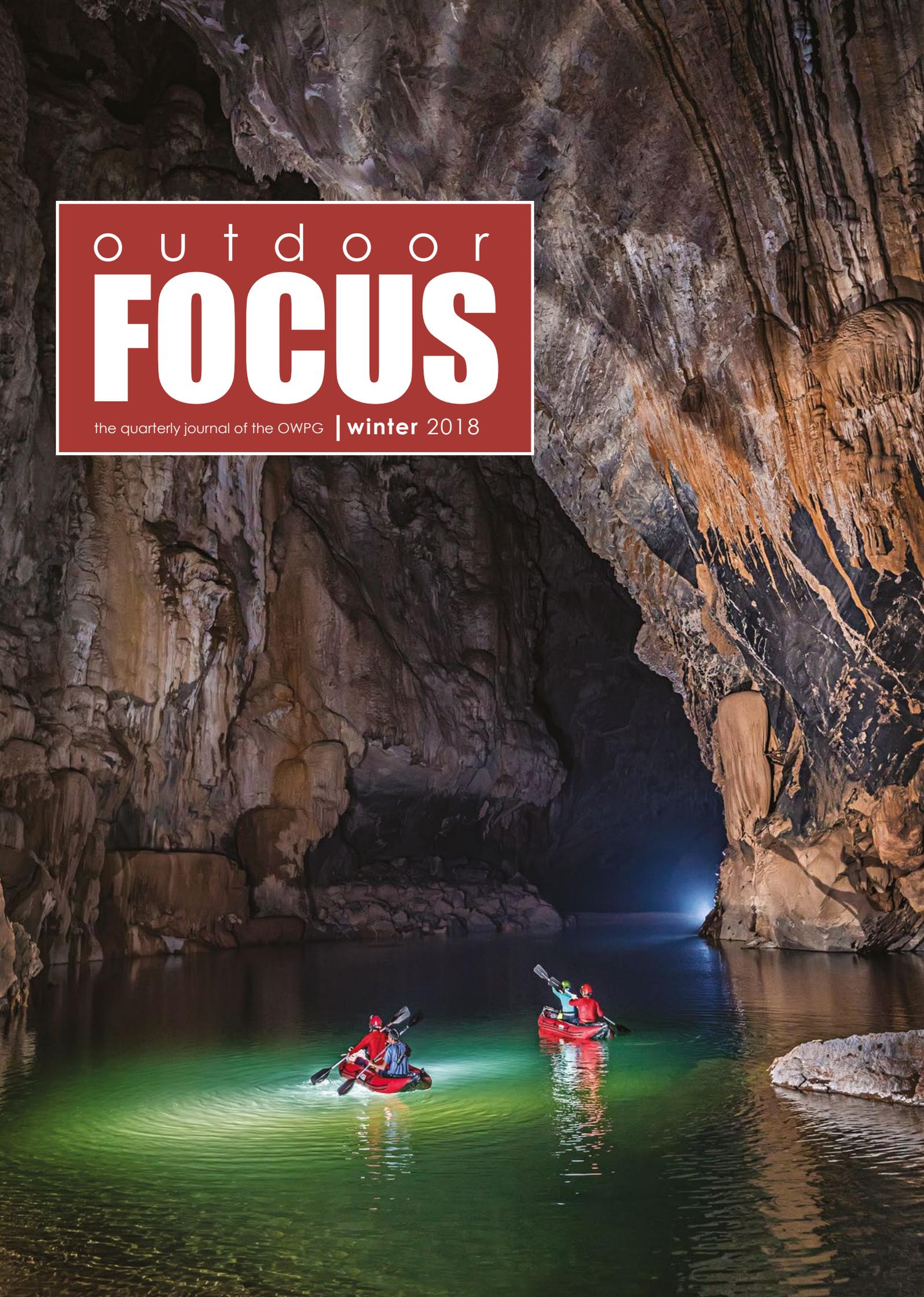


o u t d o o r
FOCUS

the quarterly journal of the OWPG | **winter** 2018



FROM THE EDITOR...

David Taylor

It's good to have things to look forward to. Christmas, birthdays (though that's more debatable the older I get), and of course there's also the annual OWPG AGM weekend. Thanks to Stan Abbott we can already look forward to next year's AGM weekend (see page 4).

Reminiscing about past times is fun too. This issue of OF is largely given over to this year's weekend, held in Simonsbath in the Barle Valley at the heart of Exmoor. Find out what OWPG members got up to over the four days (it's no secret that rain is involved), and see who came away with the top honours at Saturday evening's award ceremony.



^ The Barle on a sunnier day | Graham Swanson

If you'd like to submit ideas for articles for the spring issue please contact me by email - davidtphoto@gmail.com for further details. The deadline for all contributions is 15 February 2019.



Cover star

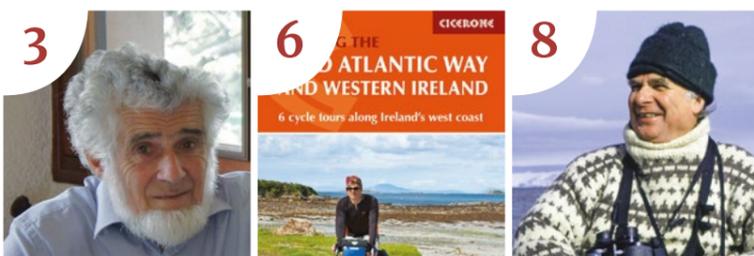
Chris Howes

The River Cave of Xe Bang Fai. Chris is this year's Photography Award winner. See page 21 for more details.

www.wildplacesphotography.co.uk

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



The Man with
the World's Best Job...

Wordsmith

Kev Reynolds and A Passion Shared

It took me twenty-five years to meet the brothers Ravier. Twenty-five years of letters, postcards, gifts of books, photographs, maps and information. Lots of information, generously offered, freely given and gratefully received. Twenty-five years during which I'd write to Jean and Pierre in English, and receive their replies in French. Twenty-five years in which we'd half-promise to meet next year – in the Pyrenees.

But we didn't. I'd dodge the opportunity to meet them face to face. Not being able to speak more than half a dozen words of each other's language, our friendship was destined to remain one of correspondence only. A friend at home would translate their letters to me, while Jean's wife Michèle would make sense of mine to them. Face to face? It wouldn't work.

Or so I told myself. Coward that I am.

It was in 1981 when I first wrote to Jean and Pierre Ravier via the Bordeaux section of the CAF (French Alpine Club), seeking permission to use some of their photographs to illustrate my history of mountaineering in the Pyrenees. Acknowledged as the finest pair of climbers ever to operate in those mountains, I was flattered by their readiness to help in any way they could. And long after my book was published, the flow of correspondence not only continued but escalated. They could not have been more generous in sharing their love and intimate knowledge of their mountains with me, yet I could not help feeling something of an imposter. Me, little more than a stumbler and bumbler, a recorder of other people's adventures; I could only scratch my head in admiration for what Jean and Pierre had achieved since their first major ascents as teenage twins in the fifties.

Born in Paris in 1933, they spent the war years at their maternal family home in Tuzaguet, a small village

set among rolling meadows and trout-streams in the Pyrenean foothills. Though it is Bordeaux in which they've lived most of their lives since, Tuzaguet has always been their Pyrenean base camp from which the vast majority of their vertical adventures began. It was from Tuzaguet that they were introduced to the mountains with a family outing to the Néouville lakes, and Tuzaguet that saw them off to create major routes on all the main summits over the following decades. In between, Jean climbed in the Caucasus in 1959, and was with Lionel Terray on the first ascent of Jannu in the Himalaya in 1962, while in the 1970s the brothers took part in two expeditions to the Hoggar Mountains.

But it is among the Pyrenees that their affections lie, and on those mountains that they've made history and gained the respect of their peers on both sides of the Franco/Spanish border. Yet the respect and admiration they've gained is not simply for their climbing achievements, but for their moral conviction, originality of thought and non-conformity that reaches beyond the mountain environment. Life-long pacifists, one night in 1960 the brothers climbed the twin spires of Bordeaux cathedral and hung a banner between them protesting against the Algerian war, while down to earth, their humanity led to making their business premises available at night to rough sleepers, of which Bordeaux has many.

In his book, *At Grips with Jannu*, Lionel Terray wrote of Jean that 'I doubt whether I have ever known a higher degree of unselfishness than [he] exhibited – almost to the point of saintliness. If one of us was cold, Ravier took off his anorak and gave it to him. When he noticed that rations were short, he suddenly produced a loss of appetite, so as to make his share available to the others. His is a spirit of the most extreme sensitivity and I am sure he finds living in this egotistical and brutal world extremely difficult...'

A Passion Shared continued...

What is said of one could equally be said of the other, for Jean and Pierre Ravier are twins after all, and the fresh air of the Pyrenees has made them who they are.

It was in the fresh air of the Pyrenees that we eventually did meet face to face. It was the early summer of 2006 and I'd received an invitation from the mayor of Gavarnie to attend a celebration of mountaineering, built around the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the north face of the Tour du Marboré, one of the landmarks in the history of Pyrenean climbing. It was Jean, of course, who'd made that first ascent, and Jean and Pierre who must have asked monsieur le mayor to send me an invitation. My wife insisted that I went. So I booked a flight to Pau, hired a car for a few days and drove to Gavarnie where I bivvied in a meadow.

Next morning we met; Jean, Pierre, and Jean's wife Michèle standing in the street before me. Three beaming faces, the brightest of bonjours, followed by a day I shall never forget. It was a day in which I was introduced to numerous climbers from France and

Spain I'd been writing about for years – all of whom greeted me as a friend. There followed presentations in the Maison du Parc, an outdoor Mass for fallen climbers, and a banquet for 200 in the evening, with me the only Englishman among all the Pyrénéistes. Speeches, singing, laughter – in a haze of wine there were no language barriers.

That night I slept in the house of a friend of the twins, and the following day drove with Pierre to Tuzaguet to rejoin Jean and Michèle and meet other members of their family. We sat in the garden at long trestle tables, a dozen and more of us side by side in harmony; a feast before us that went on, it seemed, all day. Our long years of friendship by post was toasted in champagne. We ate and drank and laughed in the warm summer sunshine, and when those who had homes to go to finally drifted away, and my three friends went to lie down, I sat with my back against a tree, notebook in hand, and attempted to get my befuddled brain to make sense of it all.

www.kevreynolds.co.uk



AGM WEEKEND 2019

The Guild's 2019 Big Weekend for members and guests is heading for the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads.

Be sure to block off the weekend of Friday 4 October to Monday 7 October in your diary and join other members and guests for what promises to be a really exciting weekend.

At the heart of the weekend, of course, is the Guild's AGM, on Saturday 5 October, at 4pm, followed by our annual awards ceremony and Guild dinner.

After our first trip to Exmoor this year, the Broads marks another first and we're talking to the Broads Authority to explore a variety of educational and outdoor exploration activities.

We'll be based at the Waveney River Centre, which is on the border between Norfolk and Suffolk, not far from Lowestoft. The Centre offers a range of different types of accommodation, from camping, yurts and pods at one end of the scale up to top

quality hotel rooms at the other. Our main accommodation will comprise three very well appointed apartments, housing a total of eighteen guests in a combination of double and twin rooms for the full three-night stay. The cost per guest per night is likely to be about £30. Those wanting to stay for fewer (or indeed more) nights will be able to choose from the range of other accommodation types.

Among facilities at the venue are an indoor swimming pool, hot tubs, and cycle and kayak hire, as well as the chance to explore the miles of scenic Broads and their rich wildlife in a motor cruiser. Trains serve nearby Oulton Broad, as well as Beccles and Hadiscoe.

Although booking for next year's weekend is not yet open, it would be a great help if you could drop an email now to the organiser, Stan Abbott, to express interest, stating whether you'll be bringing a guest and how many nights you expect to stay: AGM-Organiser@owpg.org.uk.



www.waveneyrivercentre.co.uk

Looking even further ahead, our 2020 weekend will be held at the Nature Conservancy Council's Malham Field Centre, near Settle, Yorkshire, 9-12 October.

NEW MEMBERS



Huw Kingston

Originally from Wales via Sheffield, I've been based in Oz for nearly 30 years, in beautiful Bundanoon, south of Sydney.

I've been writing on adventure and outdoor topics for a loong time and freelance for various publications in Oz and worldwide. The meagre income of a travel writer is supplemented by a lot of speaking engagements worldwide on adventure and environmental topics. I also run a small adventure tour business, Wild Horizons, which for 20 years until 2017 also ran some of Australia's largest MTB events.

I've a love of long, human powered journeys; most recently a year-long circumnavigation of the Mediterranean by sea kayak, foot, ocean rowboat and bike. My book, *Mediterranean - A year around a charmed and troubled sea*, tells the story.

I've long been engaged in the issues of plastic pollution. In 2009 I helped make Bundanoon the world's first bottled water free town. My TED talk *Message in a Bottle*, at TEDx Athens 2018 can be seen at bit.ly/tedtalksgreece.

www.huwkingston.com



Ian Wyatt

Ian Wyatt has been an active climber for over forty years, it all started with the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme whilst at school. He soon found himself enjoying all aspects of the climbing game: bouldering, sport, trad', winter mountaineering, ice and Alpine climbing as well as still doing the odd bit of backpacking and scrambling.

After writing a Ph.D about the function of landscape in the Old Icelandic sagas, and then a novel about Galileo, Ian turned his attention to writing about the outdoor activities he has spent so much time doing.

Writer and part time contract worker Ian is a regular contributor to *Climber* and *Climb* magazines on a range of topics: he has written destination articles, reviews and pieces about the physical and emotional experiences of climbing. In addition, he has produced commissioned pieces for websites and assisted in the production of two rock-climbing guides.

www.ianwyattwriting.co.uk



Sabi Phagura

I am a qualified journalist with over 20 years' experience working in national newspaper and television newsrooms. I have worked as a reporter, broadcast journalist, video journalist, investigator, producer and editor. In addition, I qualified as a fitness instructor eight years ago and teach women's weight lifting, kettle bells, spin, sand power bags and stretch classes on an ad hoc basis. Nowadays I combine fitness with travel writing and am often found travelling abroad every two to three weeks. I also review spas, bars and hotels in the UK. As a result of my travel writing, I have become a successful blogger and Instagrammer and also do a spot of fitness modelling. I enjoy all aspects of sport but there is nothing more than a good hike up in the mountains that bring me more pleasure. Oh and once I'm up there I will do yoga and meditate. Life is after all about balance!

www.fitlass.co.uk/blog
twitter.com/lamfitlass
instagram.com/fitlassontour

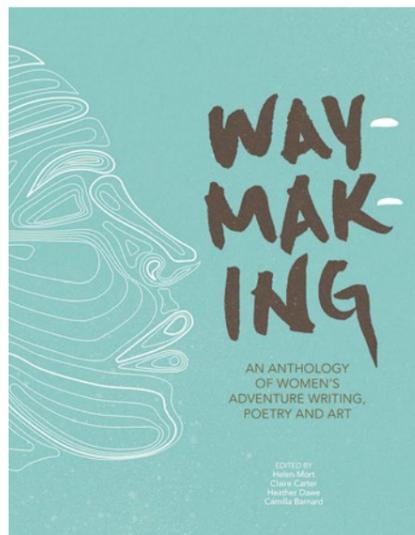
Francis Davis

Professor Davis has taught social sciences at Oxford, at Cambridge and at a variety of business schools. He is currently the Professor of Religion, Communities and Public Policy in the Department

of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham. Professor Francis was described by *The Tablet* as one of the 100 most influential British Catholics, and has worked for *BBC World*, *BBC One*, *BBC Radio 4*, *The World Tonight*, *Straits Times*, and *The Economist*.

Born in Zambia, Professor Francis has a keen interest in Southern Africa, and has served on a number of commissions and projects for the Erste Foundation, Mercy Corps International and Caritas International.

Book reviews *Roly Smith*



Waymaking: An anthology of women's adventure writing, poetry and art

Edited by Helen Mort, Claire Carter, Heather Dawe and Camilla Barnard
Vertebrate Publishing, £17.99 (pb)

This long-awaited anthology of women's adventure writing and art is a stylish compendium, which goes some way towards addressing what appears to be a serious gender imbalance in modern outdoor literature.

Not since Gwen Moffat's *Space Below my Feet* and Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* has there been a truly inspirational female voice for the wilderness – the possible exception being Alison Hargreaves, who was sadly lost on K2 in 1995

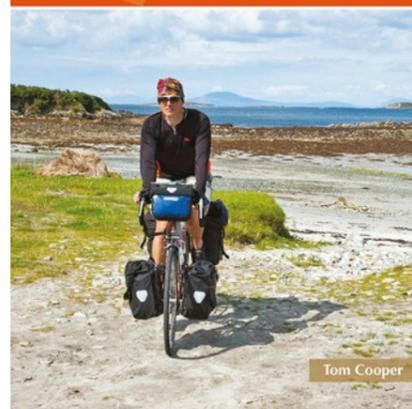
With contributors including Alpinist editor Katie Ives; award-winning author Bernadette McDonald, and renowned filmmaker Jan Randall, this is an important and seminal book which you can dip into at any point and be instantly inspired by this collective of writers, poets and artists.

I particularly liked Bernadette McDonald's essay *Snow*, which recounts a cross-country skiing expedition with her amazing 80-year-old father and the poignancy of his later passing, and Tami Knight's hilarious cartoon and account of Ken the Cross-dresser on Everest.

Apparently, the idea for the book came about as a result of a conversation between Melissa Harrison and Helen Mort out for a

run in the unlikely surroundings of central Leeds. They contacted Claire Carter, who was then working at Vertebrate, and between them convinced boss Jon Barton of the need for the book. Aided by a Kickstarter campaign and sponsorship from Alpkit, Waymaking is the handsome result.

Royalties from sales of the book will be split between Rape Crisis and the John Muir Trust.



Cycling the Wild Atlantic Way and Western Ireland

Tom Cooper
Cicerone Press, £14.95 (pb)

Launched in 2014, the romantically-named Wild Atlantic Way runs for 1,500 miles along Ireland's breathtakingly-beautiful western seaboard, between Londonderry and Cork. The author fell in love with Irish backroads several years ago on a six-week ride from Belfast to County Cork – and he's been coming back ever since.

Although it was primarily designed as a driving route, the author saw in the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) a golden opportunity for a seven-week, long-distance cycle route, and this beautifully-produced Cicerone guide is the result.

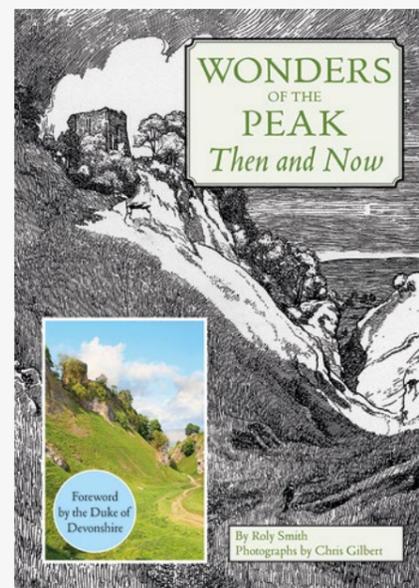
The route is split into six self-contained stages, each taking in a section of the wildly-indented western Irish coastline which could each be fitted into a week or two's

touring. But they also head out into the Atlantic for some island hopping, including a circuit of the wild and beautiful Achill Island in Donegal; Inishbofin and Clare Island in Connacht, and Inishmore and Inisheer, in the harsh limestone karst scenery of the Aran Islands moored off Galway.

Other highlights would have to include the Kerry and Dingle Peninsulas in the south west of the country, accurately described by the author as "quintessential coastal Ireland."

"This is the Ireland of film and fable – if you have seen the Emerald Isle on the big screen, a calendar or in a coffee table book, the chances are you will recognise some of the scenery on Route 5 (the Dingle and Kerry Peninsulas)."

Unfortunately, you can't take your bike to what is described as the pride of place on this route – the boat trip from Portmagee to the 6th century monastery of Skellig Michael, perched on a vertiginous rock nine miles out in the wild Atlantic.



Wonders of the Peak: Then and Now

Roly Smith
Byway Publications, £7.99 (pb)

As a life-long Peak enthusiast and former fringe resident (Glossop in its milltown days) I have two confessions to make.

One: I easily ticked-off the

original Seven Wonders but failed miserably to trace the elusive Ebbing and Flowing Well.

Two: I nearly killed the redoubtable Joe Brown when I peeled off while attempting a new route on the intimidating limestone of Thor's Cave – one of the author's new Wonders – above the Manifold.

That duo fits neatly into the first of four themes of Guild vice-president Roly Smith's historically well-researched and mildly-provocative book.

It may not ebb, but Buxton St Ann's Well is now thronged with visitors flowing to fill huge plastic containers with the free, mineral-rich waters. That's one of the original Seven, which are dominated by the timeless magnificence of Chatsworth. Here, the multi-skilled 'Mr Peak District' has persuaded the incumbent 12th Duke of Devonshire to supply his Foreword.

... (an) inspirational and (dare I say) wonderful addition to Peakland literature

Thor's Cave joins Dovedale, Kinder Downfall and Woolpacks and the mysterious, verdant Lud's Church near The Roaches, in his 'magnificent seven' Natural Wonders of today. It there had been a reserve competition, I would have suggested the curious gritstone Trinnacle Rocks at Ravenstones above Greenfield.

Few will argue, however, with the author's choice of the Seven Man-made Wonders, which include Peveril Castle, Haddon Hall and the Derwent Dams. The Millennium Walkway at New Mills might find challengers in Buxton's revamped Great Stables Dome or the spa town's art nouveau Opera House.

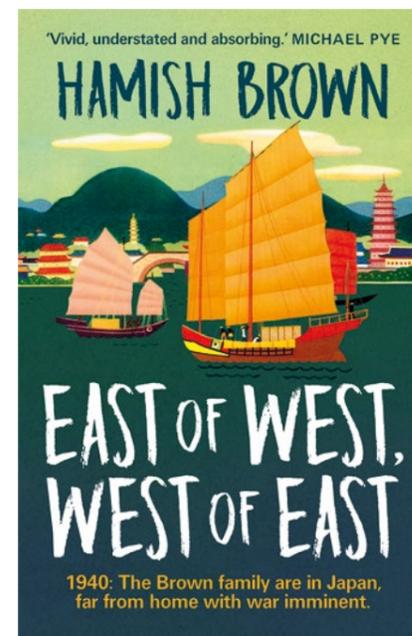
Chapter Four – the Seven Wildlife Wonders – features the unique Derbyshire feather moss, thriving under a trickling waterfall in Cressbrook Dale, and the rare leek-coloured hawkweed beside the Monsal Trail.

The book is beautifully designed with stunning photographs by the talented Chris Gilbert of a frozen Downfall and Chatsworth and Haddon, to name just two.

To enjoy the Fab Four lists (and the author's glimpse into the

future) you must surely buy, keep and treasure this inspirational and (dare I say) wonderful addition to Peakland literature.

Tom Waghorn



East of West, West of East

Hamish Brown
Sandstone Press, £9.99 (pb)

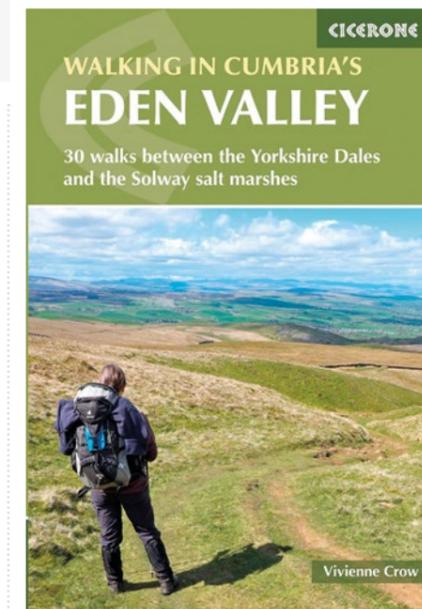
This is a fascinating memoir from the distinguished Scottish walker, climber and author Hamish Brown's early childhood, before and after the fall of Singapore, where his father had been a banker.

Remarkably, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, their parents decided that young Hamish and his brother Ian should come out to Japan, where their father was then working, for safety and away from the possible bombing of their homeland in Scotland.

But the most gripping passages relate to the Japanese invasion of Singapore, where the family had eventually settled, and their escape from the war to South Africa. It was here and in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco in the north which, despite his subsequent worldwide wanderings, Hamish admits, "stole his heart away."

At one time, Brown gave his profession on his passport as a "gangrel" – or a wanderer. This book suggests that his latter-day

stravaiging spirit must surely have been influenced by his enforced childhood wartime travels round the Far East and Africa.



Walking in Cumbria's Eden Valley

by Vivienne Crow (Cicerone, £12.95) has also been published in a new and revised edition.

Next time



Photography for Writers

In the second part of his ongoing series, Ronald Turnbull casts a 5500K light on the subject of white balance, what it is, and the effect that altering it can have on your photos.

Does your mountain measure up?

After a new mountain has been discovered in the Lake District, John Nuttall wonders how Miller Moss in the northern fells could have been overlooked until now.

Dr Rennie McOwan (1933-2018)

Roly Smith pays tribute to the Champion of access to the Scottish hills

It's a strange fact but my 25-year friendship with the distinguished Scottish access campaigner and writer Rennie McOwan, who has died aged 85, began with a heated argument conducted in an inflatable boat speeding up an icy fjord in Arctic Svalbard.

As Rennie and Hamish Brown compared the surrounding, snow-clad peaks with the ones at home in the Scottish highlands, the discussion turned to National Parks for Scotland. As a former National Park employee and a long-time supporter of the idea, I found myself at odds with both Rennie and Hamish. "There's no need for another level of bureaucracy in Scotland," insisted Rennie. "Anyway, the whole of Scotland is good enough to be a National Park and should be treated as one."

But from that initial disagreement sprang a mutual respect and lasting friendship that I'll always treasure. I never needed to mention the fact that Scotland eventually gained two National Parks (in the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs), because Rennie was also a pragmatist whose undying love of the Scottish hills and their protection for future generations was ingrained in his very soul.

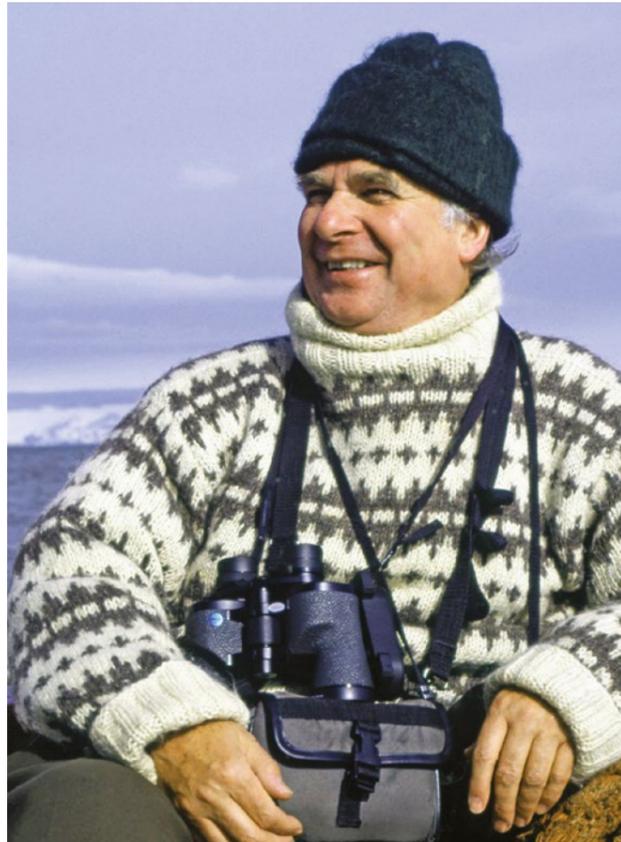
"the Percy Unna of his generation"

It would be no exaggeration to say that Rennie McOwan was the Percy Unna of his generation, such was his campaigning zeal for the freedom of access to the Scottish hills. Percy Unna was a great wilderness campaigner and generous benefactor to the National Trust for Scotland in the 1930s, who famously set up a list of rules which Rennie, as a former Deputy Press Secretary with the NTS, always strenuously upheld.

The Unna Rules were intended to ensure that land which was held on behalf of the public should be preserved for their use in a primitive condition, without development or active management. Rennie fell out with the NTS over this principle, notably in Glencoe, scene of some of Unna's greatest bequests, over the construction of the footbridge leading to Coire Gabhail (the 'Lost Valley'), and a proposed visitor centre near the Clachaig Inn.

Rennie, like me, was a journalist by profession, starting as a cub reporter with the *Stirling Journal* before moving on to *The Scotsman* as a sub-editor and later Scottish Desk Editor at the age of 23. He regularly contributed to Scottish newspapers and magazines, notably *The Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday*, and the *Scots Magazine*. He was a founder member of The Scotsman Mountaineering Club, now the Ptarmigan Club, of Edinburgh.

He later became president of Ramblers Scotland, appropriately in the year that the Scottish Parliament passed what is widely regarded as some of the finest access legislation in the world with the Land Reform Act (Scotland), 2003. Rennie had played a key role in



A smiling Rennie as he'll always be remembered, pictured on a boat in Svalbard (John Cleare, Mountain Camera)

getting that legislation onto the Statute Book.

Rennie was a prolific author of more than 15 mainly historical and children's books, and his *Light on Dumyat* (1982), an adventure by a group of youngsters called The Clan and set on the 1,375ft western rampart of his native Ochils, was a particular favourite. One reviewer sagely commented that The Clan "could outwit the Famous Five any day of the week."

In 1996, Rennie was awarded an honorary doctorate by Stirling University, where he lectured in film and media studies, for his contribution to Scottish literature and culture. He was awarded the Provost of Stirling's Civic Award for Arts and Culture, and in 1992, was the founder of the Friends of the Ochils.

The late Walt Unsworth, president of the Guild, presented Rennie with the Guild's coveted Golden Eagle award at our annual dinner at the Moat House Hotel in Harrogate in 1997. Always the proud Scot, Rennie turned up in a kilt in the McOwan tartan. Typically, in his acceptance speech, Rennie appealed for the Guild to set up a working group to look into the whole question of access to the countryside of Britain.

Rennie always took a keen interest in introducing young people to the hills and regularly visited schools and colleges as a lecturer under the Scottish Arts Council's 'Writers in Schools' and 'Writers in Public' schemes.

Ironically, Rennie's great grandfather Donald Ross was a legendary chief stalker on the Duke of Portland's Caithness estate. Born in Hillfoots, Rennie had his first brush with the lairds and their stalkers as a member of the Menstrie Scouts. He later lived in Stirling with Agnes, his loving wife of nearly 60 years, in the shadow of his beloved Ochils, and was a long-suffering and life-long supporter of Stirling Albion FC.

In later years he suffered from Parkinson's disease and his increasing ill health and poor vision robbed him of his greatest joy of striding the hills, especially his home ground of the Ochils.

The couple had four children: Lesley Andrews, who runs Rowan Tree Publishing, which has re-published Rennie's children's books; Michael, who lives with his family in Tasmania; Tom and Niall. The couple have five grandchildren.

Hillgoers throughout Scotland and beyond owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the kindly and generous Rennie McOwan, who fought so long and hard so that they could enjoy the freedom of the hills we have today.

Rest in peace, old chum.

An impeccable legacy: tributes to Rennie

Many tributes have been paid to Rennie from friends and colleagues in the battle to formalise the public right of freedom to roam in Scotland.

Ramblers Scotland's vice-president Cameron McNeish said: "In terms of campaigning for a freedom to roam and land reform, Rennie McOwan was a giant. On a personal note I have always been indebted to Rennie for so willingly and generously sharing his immense knowledge of Scottish mountaineering, history, folklore and culture."

"Rennie McOwan will be remembered as an excellent journalist, mountaineer, historian, environmental campaigner and a true son of Scotland."

Former director of Ramblers Scotland Dave Morris said: "Rennie was a huge influence on me as we made the case in the 1990s for access legislation."

"It was of enormous importance that Rennie was so supportive, so firm and coherent in his writings and speeches and so knowledgeable on Scottish traditions and culture. He was so helpful in providing advice, encouragement and information on a regular basis."

"His passing is a big loss to Scotland, but he leaves us with an impeccable legacy."

His old friend and author of the definitive *High Mountains of Britain and Ireland*, the late Irving Butterfield, profiled Rennie in an article written for *Scottish Mountaineer*.

"Throughout his journeying Rennie fast developed a broader perspective of his native country and found it fascinating to compare the different cultural backgrounds, the varying uses of the land, the effects of clearances, and the traditions of free access."

"In these studies a search for the truths of the old Gaelic culture was to confirm in him his long-held belief of the freedom to roam."

His long-time friend and colleague Hamish Brown said: "Rennie was one of the leading outdoor writers in Scotland in the Sixties... but for many years had been seriously ill and not able to follow his dreams of hills, travel, meeting people and above all, his writing."

"He was a doughty supporter of the Scottish landscape against the crass developments that appeared and he was interested in history and the natural world. We shared a great affection for the Ochils, hills we lived under at their east and west ends."

"Rennie was a poet as well, and perhaps I can do no better than show the man in something he wrote."

The Things of the North by Rennie McOwan

Let us give thanks for the things of the north...

For blue, distant mountains tipping the curving brown sweep of moorland.
for grey, drystone walls climbing the green shoulder of a sunlit hill.
for hardy white houses, low-slung against the winds as if they had taken root.
for scattered clinging woods and storm-bent trees telling of strength and solitude.

Let us give thanks for the things of the north...

For dusty roads running to quiet farms deep in the glens.
for lichened stones and hidden lochs placid beneath the cliffs.
for amber burns that wend a gentle way though white bog-cotton.
for all the silences that so delight and the clean scents of a Highland night.

Let us give thanks for the things of the north...

For winds and rain that scour endless miles of rippling heather.
for an elemental wildness that knows little of cities and towns.
for an understanding that in stark harshness blinding beauty there abounds.
for those who walk and seek and find.

Let us give thanks for the things of the north.



OWP G

AGM weekend 12-15 October | Simonsbath Hotel | Somerset

Inset photos: Chris Howes



Photo: Chris Howes

OWPG AGM weekend 12-15 October

Welcome to the 2018 AGM weekend awards special. Over the next sixteen pages you'll be able to read about the OWPG award winners and why they richly deserved their prizes. Before that though, thanks need to go to those patient souls who worked hard to make the weekend a success: Firstly to Stan Abbott for organising both the weekend and the accommodation; to David Ramshaw, the awards administrator; to the award judges and sponsors; to Sabi Phagura - now a member of OWPG - for hosting a fascinating social media workshop; to the various organisers of the weekend's activities and walks; to Andrew and the staff at the Simonsbath Hotel; to Chris Howes and Karen Frankel for stepping in at the last minute to shoot the award ceremony photos; and last, but far from least, to Jonathan Williams and Cicerone for hosting a celebratory reception on the Saturday evening.

OWPG AWARDS 2018

Outdoor Book

Winner *Andrew Bibby*

Back Roads Through Middle England / published by Gritstone Press

This has been a book a long time in the preparation

Isometimes compare the process of writing a book to that of baking a cake. There's always the uncertainty when you start off as to what the end product will be like. Will the cake come out of its baking tin perfectly risen, cooked and ready to eat? Will the book come together, so that when the last chapter is eventually concluded, it works for readers in the way that you hoped it would?

This time, I feel my book *Back Roads through Middle England* has, as it were, come good - and I'm absolutely

thrilled that the OWPG judges for the Outdoor Book award appear to have thought so, too. This has been a book a long time in the preparation. Years and years ago, when I lived in the south Midlands, I was intrigued by the way that the beautiful stone-built villages of north Northamptonshire seemed so similar to those in the Cotswolds. And indeed similar, too, to villages I knew in west Dorset and east Somerset.

The reason, of course, is the line of Jurassic oolite limestone which snakes its way across England from the English Channel up to (and just slightly beyond) the Humber. This is what the landscape historian WG Hoskins once described as England's great stone belt - though, given the way it crosses the country, you could argue it's more of a shoulder-strap than a belt.

This was the geological line on the map which, I

finally decided, I needed to explore more thoroughly. The best way, it was clear, was by bicycle, and I took the decision to start in Dorset at Burton Bradstock near Bridport and to pedal until I reached Winterringham among the reeds on the south side of the Humber (I'd have to miss out on that sliver of oolite limestone north of the Humber, I decided). And so it was that, a couple of years ago, I filled my bicycle panniers ready for eight days of exploration and headed off to find the very quietest back roads I could through the heart of England.

The book has a little geology as well - just a smattering

I sometimes have to explain to cyclists that the book is not really about the cycling. My book has other ambitions. It's a book about landscape, about why the countryside looks the way it does.

Clearly we are living at the moment in uncertain political times when, among other things, the concept of Englishness is up for debate and when there are different visions about the sort of country which those of us who are English want to live in. So my interest is in exploring whether an understanding of the landscape has something to help us here.

To accompany the 440 or so miles of my journey, I delve in the book into a range of subjects which I hope help to illuminate my theme: I explore aspects of social history, literature and poetry, land usage and agriculture, land ownership and, in particular, the economics of the countryside (ultimately I don't think you can understand the nature of the countryside if you don't explore the economic purposes that the land is put to). The book has a little geology as well - just a smattering.

It's certainly a diverse place, this England

A few weeks after finishing the bike ride I retraced my route by car, interviewing a range of people living on the oolite limestone who, in some way or another, I felt could contribute to what I was trying to achieve. My list of interviewees ran from the chief executive of Blenheim Palace to the head mason at Lincoln Cathedral. I talked to volunteers running a community-owned village shop, those running a community agriculture scheme near Bath, the organisers of a political festival in Wellingborough and the boss of a major potato marketing company in Lincolnshire. What they told

What the judges said...

'An interesting and original concept, well executed. An appealing mix of travel writing and journalistic reportage.'

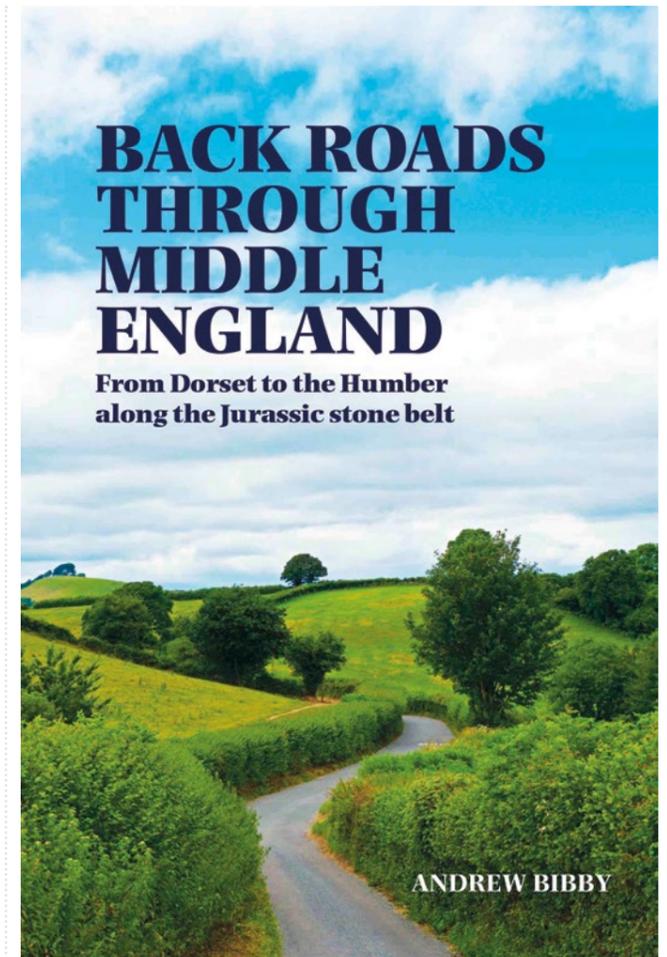
Judges Mark Whitley, editor at *The Countryman Magazine*; former Guild member, editor and writer Chris Bagshaw



Highly Commended **Kev Reynolds** **The Mountain Hut Book**

'A delightful reminder of favourite alpine hideaways - part guidebook, part reminiscence of happy days, supported by lovely photos and some interesting background stories.'

See the Summer 2018 Outdoor Focus for a review of *The Mountain Hut Book*.



me is in the book. It's certainly a diverse place, this England.

And so the book was completed. When I was first planning it, I had quite enthusiastic interest in my synopsis from the editorial side of one of the UK's leading publishers. These days though, as we have to recognise, books are commodities. I couldn't persuade their marketing people that a book focused on twenty-five or so villages and towns from west Dorset to Lincolnshire was a concept they could sell.

So the book has come out instead as a proud product of Gritstone Publishing Co-operative, the authors' co-op which - as I've explained in past editions of Outdoor Focus - unites together five of us who work as professional outdoor writers and which enables us to bring our books to market directly.

Thank you, OWPG. I'm delighted to accept the award, for myself, for Gritstone and for anyone who loves the English countryside and wants to know it better.

Guide book

Winner *Vivienne Crow*

Walking in Northumberland / published by Cicerone

Award photo: Chris Howes - Northumberland photos: Vivienne Crow



^ Vivienne accepting her award from OWPG's chair, Peter Gillman



^ The ground drops away dramatically to the north of the dolerite ridge on which Hadrian's Wall was built

I wanted to write a walking guide to the area, there was the briefest moment of hesitation... Writing a guidebook would mean getting to know the area intimately over a relatively short period of time. Did I want to break the spell that quickly? Or did I want to savour the slow reveal? The indecision didn't last long though... What an opportunity! To be able to spend weeks on end in one of the most beautiful and fascinating counties in England – and call it work! Yes please!

For those who haven't yet got round to visiting England's most northerly county, Northumberland sits right up against the Scottish border on the eastern side of the country. Its English neighbours are Cumbria, County Durham and Tyne and Wear. Stretching from Berwick-upon-Tweed in the northeast to the tiny South Tynedale village of Slaggyford in the southwest – two places that, even as the crow flies, are about 105km apart – it covers more than 5000 square kilometres. It's not quite the biggest county in England, but it feels like it as you wander its hills, valleys, moors and beaches.

Much of Northumberland receives statutory protection from unwanted development: Roughly 25 per cent of the county, including Hadrian's Wall and the Cheviot Hills, is within the boundaries of the Northumberland National Park. The county also has two designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the North Pennines, which takes in the valleys and moorland to the south of Hexham and Haltwhistle; and the Northumberland Coast.

So, what's so special about walking here? And how is it that, despite immersing myself in the county to write a guide to 36 walks here, I'm still in thrall to its charms? As I explain in the introduction to the book, it's got a lot to do with history. There are few places in England



^ The beach at Sandham on Lindisfarne

where the distant past has such a tangible impact on the landscape as it does in Northumberland. Stepping out into the atmospheric border country inevitably means stepping back in time and brushing shoulders with our ancestors. From cliff-top castles and the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site to long-abandoned prehistoric settlements hidden in the hills and enigmatic 'cup and ring-marked' rocks, there's always something interesting just around the next corner.

The magic of walking here also has a lot to do with the landscape itself. Stop for a minute and conjure up in your mind some of the most iconic of Northumberland scenes. What do you see? Hadrian's Wall clinging to the apex of the roller-coaster whin sill ridge? Maybe you picture Lindisfarne Castle, sitting atop that same dolerite intrusion on St Cuthbert's holy island? Or are you looking along a long, empty expanse of beach to Bamburgh Castle? If you're a hill-walker, you might see the smooth-sided, rounded tops of the Cheviots and the high, heathery ridge that forms the border between England and Scotland.



^ Walking the Border Ridge between England and Scotland

About Vivienne...

Vivienne Crow is a freelance writer and photographer specialising in the outdoors. A journalist since 1990, she abandoned the constraints of a desk job on regional newspapers in 2001 to go travelling. On her return in 2002, she headed outdoors... Since then, Vivienne has written and contributed to more than two dozen walking and travel guides covering the whole of the UK. She also writes for magazines and newspapers, and does copywriting and interpretation work for conservation and tourism bodies.

www.vivienncrow.co.uk

What makes Northumberland special? It undoubtedly has something to do with the wildlife too – from the upland birds that are sometimes the walkers' sole companions to the wildflowers, insects and reptiles that inhabit the coastal dunes. There are species here that are found in few other parts of England, including red squirrel, black grouse and the hen harrier. There have even been confirmed sightings of pine marten in Kielder Forest this year.

It's surely related as well to those big northern skies, largely free of pollution, unfettered by man-made constructions and allowing views that lead on into the distance for miles and miles and miles... There are wide, open spaces here like no others found south of the border. This is England's most sparsely populated county – with just 62 people per square kilometre. To put that into perspective, it compares with 73 in neighbouring Cumbria with its large areas of uninhabited fell and moorland, or, at the other extreme, 3142 in the West Midlands and 5521 in Greater London. According to one outdoor magazine, Northumberland's sprawling Kielder Forest is also home to England's 'remotest' spot (the furthest point from a public road). Want to 'escape from it all'? This is clearly the place to come.

For me, the magic lives on. *Walking in Northumberland* was published only earlier this year, but I'm already looking forward to being able to update it and maybe even add to it.

What the judges said...

'An eminently competent and trustworthy companion, a good introduction to walking in Northumberland and a welcome new addition to a competitive field.'

Judges Mark Whitley, editor at *The Countryman Magazine*; former Guild member, editor and writer
Chris Bagshaw



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.

Highly Commended
Adrian Hendroff
The Mourne & Cooley Mountains

Rudolf Abraham
Trekking the Peaks of the Balkans Trail

Jacquetta Megarry
Arran Coastal Way

Golden Eagle

Winner *Chris Packham*

lifetime achievement award for outstanding services to the outdoors



“ We admire Chris for his strength and determination, and for his willingness to put his head above the parapet on causes we hold dear. ”
Peter Gillman

The guild has presented Chris Packham with its prestigious Golden Eagle award, made for outstanding services to the outdoors. Chris – naturalist, author, wildlife photographer and TV presenter – was voted the award by Guild members for his campaigning activities towards protecting the environment and wildlife. The presentation was made on November 12 by guild chair Peter Gillman and his wife Leni, Guild meetings secretary (above). Chris said he was “flattered and honoured” to receive the award – the guild had been “very kind” to him.

Presenting the award, Peter said that guild members had made the award to Chris for his prominent role in boosting public awareness of vital environmental issues. He was an outspoken champion of causes such as opposing badger-culling, baiting, fox-hunting, driven grouse shooting, the slaughter of migrating birds on Malta and the illegal persecution of raptors. He has also spoken out in the face of powerful opposition and had been courageous in using his own high public profile to take a stand on a range of key environmental concerns.

The award consisted of a water colour by guild member David Bellamy – an evocative painting of Clougha Pike in the Forest of Bowland, with a hen-harrier gliding just below the summit. Chris was delighted with the painting: “I’m very impressed and very grateful – it’ll look great on the wall.”

The presentation was made at Kensington Town Hall, where Chris was presenting an evening devoted

to wildlife travel and photography in tandem with Paul Goldstein of Exodus Travel. Chris made clear that he was determined to step up his campaigning on wildlife and environmental issues, and that morning had met Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton, with the aim of working in a more strategic way across the environmental sector. They were hoping to bring NGOs together “so that they act in a unified way. I’m trying to be the umbrella, get them into a room together and show them that there is commonality.”

Chris clearly felt that the task was ever more urgent. “We’re back to the days of the mass trespass on Kinder Scout. We’ve got to make people listen. Everyone out there needs to empower themselves. We got to get up and make a difference.”

Chris also spoke of his activities in promoting awareness of Asperger’s syndrome, a form of autism which can make it difficult to interpret other people’s feelings or to understand body language, among other effects. Chris, who revealed that he had the syndrome last year, in his biography *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar*, said: “It can be very difficult to articulate what it is like to live in that world... So if I can help people have a broader understanding of that, then the gestures that will help improve people’s lives can be made.” In reference to his own public role, he added: “What are you here for, if you are not out there trying to make things better?”

The Golden Eagle nominee list is prepared by the OWPG committee, and awarded by a vote of the OWPG membership

Derryck Draper Award

Winner *Garmin*

awarded for outstanding innovation in outdoor equipment



Photo: Chris Howes

Garmin accepting the award from OWPG’s membership secretary, Ronald Turnbull



This year Garmin received the prestigious Derryck Draper Award for its **InReach Mini Satellite Phone and GPS**, which was commended by a panel of the Guild’s expert gear testers.

The Derryck Draper Award is given in memory of Derryck Draper, one of the Guild’s founder members. It aims to recognise outstanding innovation in outdoor equipment design and celebrate the OWPG’s close association with the outdoor gear trade. Each year, a panel drawn from the Guild’s experienced gear testers looks at the new products coming on the market and selects a winner.

This year, the testers felt that the Garmin InReach Mini was a clear winner.

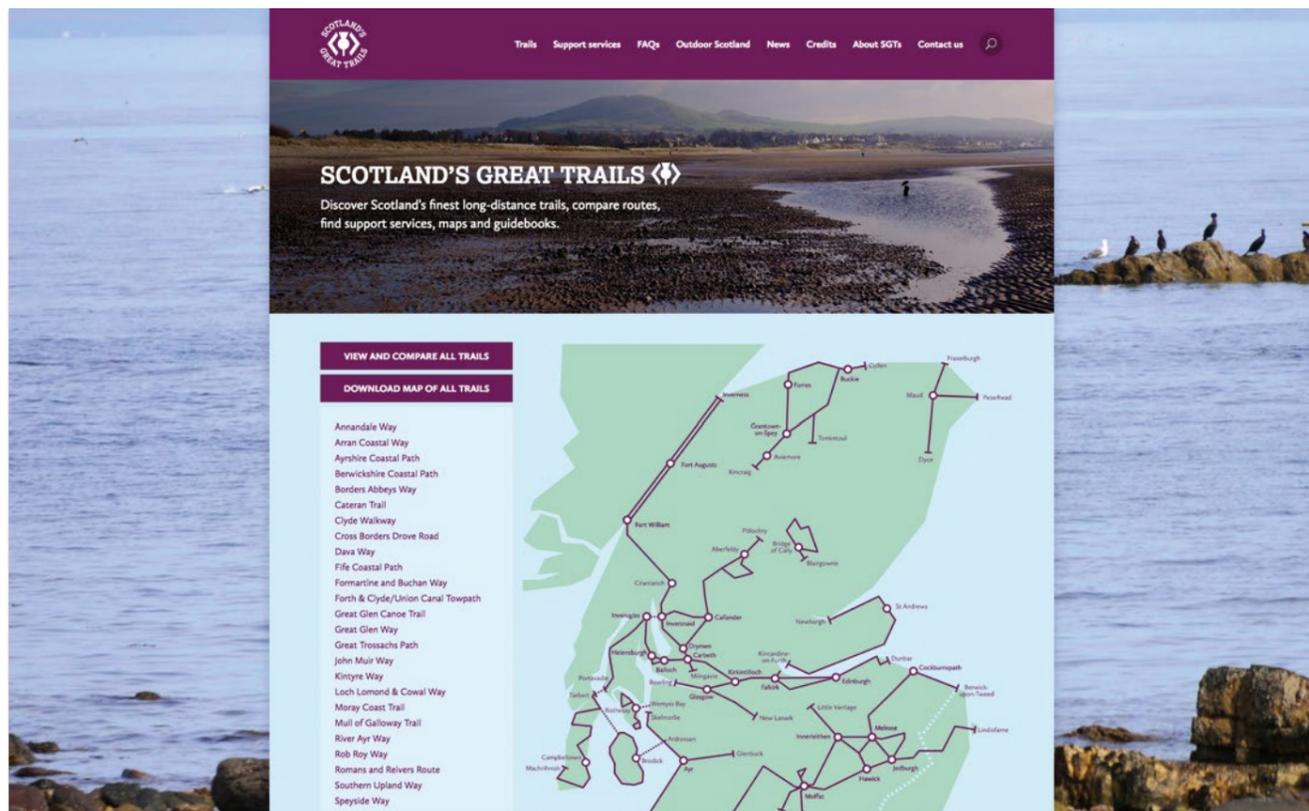
Panel member and seasoned gear tester Chris Townsend comments: “The InReach Mini is a very small ultralight satellite communicator with two-way messaging and an SOS function. It measures 10cm by 5cm and weighs 120 grams. This is much smaller and lighter than alternatives. The small size is good for sure. Particularly as these days all mobile phones are huge!”

www.garmin.com

Digital Production Award

Winner *Jacquetta Megarry*

Scotland's Great Trails / www.scotlandsgreattrails.com



Borders Abbeys Way (sample walk)

Route type/direction

Circuit: can be started anywhere, but Melrose is now close to the Borders Railway terminus at Tweedbank. Previously it was more common to start at Jedburgh.

The route is usually walked clockwise, because many people think this direction optimises the views.

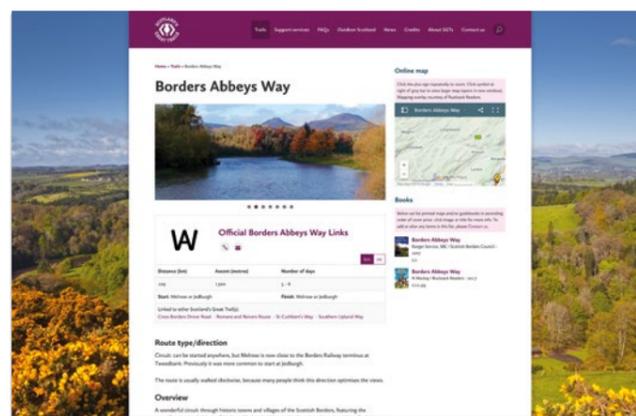
Overview

A wonderful circuit through historic towns and villages of the Scottish Borders, featuring the magnificent ruined abbeys of Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Jedburgh, and passing Abbotsford House, the home of Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).

The scenery includes some long sections beside the Rivers Tweed and Teviot, as well as more rugged hilly sections, and there are excellent chances of sighting wildlife in these peaceful settings.

The challenge

The route is well waymarked, and generally well-suited to inexperienced walkers. Although it can be walked in five days, the first section (Melrose/Kelso) is long (18 miles/29 km) and most people split it by going slightly off-route to overnight at St Boswells (for a six-day itinerary). The overall altitude gain is moderate (1300m/4265ft) and most of the terrain is sound



The Borders Abbey Way page on Scotland's Great Trails

underfoot. But allow enough time to enjoy the ruined abbeys and other side-trips.

Accommodation

The Way passes through attractive villages with welcoming B&Bs, and most villages have a range of accommodation choices including B&Bs and hotels. However, some are closed out of season, most are busy in season and advance booking is essential. For online information and booking, try Scottish Borders page on VisitScotland www.bit.ly/scottishborders-info or go to one of the three iCentres on the route, at Jedburgh, Hawick or Kelso.

Highlights

- Historical interest of visiting four major ruined abbeys
- Riverside scenery of two fine fishing rivers, the Tweed and the Teviot
- Views from the high ground towards the Cheviots
- Friendly Borders pubs, cafés and B&Bs



There are camping options, both at commercial and at free campsites (basic or no facilities). Wild camping is legal in Scotland subject to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Support services

Of the companies listed below, Walking Support provides a dedicated baggage transfer service:

- Absolute Escapes www.absoluteescapes.com
- Contours Walking Holidays www.contours.co.uk
- Macs Adventures www.macsadventure.com
- Walking Support www.walkingsupport.co.uk
- Celtic Trails www.celtictrailswalkingholidays.co.uk
- Discovery Travel www.discoverytravel.co.uk
- Hooked on Walking www.walking-europe.co.uk/scotland
- Make Tracks www.maketracks.net

Public transport

Getting to and from the route is simplest by train from Edinburgh Waverley to Tweedbank, near Melrose. Local transport includes buses operated by Borders Buses www.bordersbuses.co.uk, Perryman's Buses and Peter Hogg www.roadhoggs.net. Local taxi firms are based in Hawick, Jedburgh, Kelso, Galashiels and Selkirk: it is normal to charge mileage from their base, so check fares before booking.

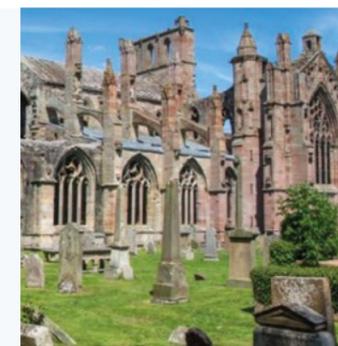
For details, visit Traveline Scotland www.travelinescotland.com, or, for the entire UK, Traveline www.traveline.info. For travel from anywhere to anywhere, try Rome2Rio www.rome2rio.com.

Downloads from the Scottish Borders Council website

Visit www.scotborders.gov.uk/bordersabbeysway to download route descriptions for sections of the route. You can also apply for a route completion certificate from here: www.bit.ly/borders-certificate

Be aware

- In poor visibility, the section on Black Hill may need map and compass competence
- Some sections include tarmac roads and farm tracks, but less than many long routes



About Jacquetta...

Jacquetta Megarry is the founder of Rucksack Readers, guidebooks to adventurous walks worldwide: www.rucksacks.com. Her publications have involved walking and publishing guidebooks to most of Scotland's Great Trails, so although this website – developed in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage – has no commercial connection with Rucksack Readers, it drew heavily on her experience of SGTs over the last 18 years.

What the judges said...

'As well as having the key digital attributes of being easy to find, quick to load and instinctive to navigate even on a mobile this attractive if unpretentious website is a comprehensive resource for anyone considering tackling one of Scotland's official long-distance paths

The information on the 29 trails is concise, clear and consistently presented making it a doddle to find not only all the stats you want to make a comparison but also links to all the guides, maps and websites you might need for planning, as well as over 40 companies offering support services.

Jacquetta's site also has an innovative section giving full credit to the photographers responsible for every image on the website (as far as possible) and offering photographers the opportunity to claim unattributed images, something many OWPG members would surely be glad to see become common practice in cyberspace.'

Judges *Lois Sparling, former Senior Editor at Cicerone, and Craig Wareham, founder of Viewranger*



The Digital Production Award is sponsored by Cordee. Having started life as a sole distributor for rock climbing guidebooks published by the largest climbing clubs in the UK, the business now includes distribution of titles encompassing all outdoor activities.

Owned and managed by brother and sister Richard and Jane Robinson, Cordee has a unique and world-renowned catalogue of books and maps.

www.cordee.co.uk

Photography

Winner *Chris Howes*

The River Cave of Xe Bang Fai



^ Xe Bang Fai river cave, Laos



^ Tham Bing, Laos

What the judges said...

'Once again a clear outright winner. Even if you saw millions of caving images, which you don't, these would be very powerful images. Technically very demanding to set up, with a clear mastery of technique, equipment and vision. His use of models is spot on. I can imagine some of these images would have taken a long time to set up, but boy is the end result worth it.'

Judges *Dave Willis, professional mountain sport photographer, and Ashley Cooper, renowned environmental photographer*



^ Xe Bang Fai, Laos



^ Xe Bang Fai, Laos



^ Chris accepting his award from OWPG's chair, Peter Gillman

Award photo: Karen Frenkel

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.

www.wildplacesphotography.co.uk

C  N W A Y

The **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.



Highly Commended
David Forster
Heather Burning portfolio

⤴ Top: Tham Bing, Laos

⤴ Bottom: Tham Bing, Laos

⤵ Xe Bang Fai, Laos

Outdoor/Travel Feature

Winner *Vivienne Crow*

Autumn in the Valleys / published in *The Great Outdoors*

Award photo: Chris Howes. Article photos: Vivienne Crow



What the judges said...

'This article sums up how hard it is to be original when writing about the Lake District, but this honesty gives the article an original angle, and allows the author to weave in a history of writers and artists who've attempted to capture the essence of the lakes, alongside other observations on the changing seasons, the impact of human activity on the landscape. Fascinating examples and contemporary quotes add colour and back up points. And all this interwoven with a walk.'

Judges *Carlton Reid*, founder of *On Your Bike* magazine, and *Elizabeth Multon*, commissioning editor of *Adlard Coles Nautical* at *Bloomsbury Publishing*

^ Vivienne accepting her award from Kevin Freeborn of Crimson Publishing

Autumn in the Valley (excerpt)

It's too early in the day for the crowds. Later, as the forecast sunshine appears, Loughrigg Terrace will undoubtedly become a sedate stream of walkers enjoying a stroll along one of the Lake District's most popular paths, but, right now, I have it to myself. I look down on the calm waters of Grasmere and the woods surrounding it. The autumn colours seem rather muted, an uninspiring jumble of browns and mucky yellows. I admit I'm disappointed: camera in hand, I'd been hoping for a dazzling early morning display. I wait... And I wait some more...

Eventually, the high cloud begins to break, allowing rays of sun to briefly illuminate patches of woodland, bringing the colours to vivid life. The canopy of Penny Rock Wood is particularly rich: its dominant oaks still retain some of their greenery, but there are also shades of gold, orange, ochre, bright yellow... Not wishing to resort to Dulux-like terms such as 'toasted terracotta' or 'honey mustard', my vocabulary palette can't do the scene justice. It's a constant stumbling block over the next three days as I weave my way through the central Lakes: how to describe such magnificence, such beauty, without resorting to clichés – even though I'm surrounded by a landscape that's been written about, painted and photographed so many times, it has itself become a cliché.



^ Great Langdale Beck in the autumn

Day One: Grasmere to Little Langdale

The Lake District offers up many different types of beauty; its appeal doesn't differ only according to the beholder's eye. In winter, it has a savage kind of beauty, its snow-covered fells eliciting both a slack-jawed admiration and a shiver-down-the-spine sense of anticipation and fear. When the cloud is low, its beauty is more mysterious as crags and summits emerge and then vanish behind a veil of mist. On sunny October days, when the true brilliance of the autumn colours is revealed, it takes on a 'chocolate box' quality, a beauty that brings out photographers in their hordes, many hoping to frame the perfect picture postcard.

So often in autumn, as I drive through the valleys or wander along a dale on my way to higher ground, the glib expression "ridiculously pretty" springs to mind: a scene unfolds that so typifies everything we've come to expect of the Lake District – all those idyllic images we've been fed since Thomas West's 1778 *A Guide to The Lakes* – it seems too good to be true.

For years I've wanted to immerse myself in this wonderland, staying low to fully appreciate the annual revolution that the changing seasons brings. Finally, in the second half of October, a three-day window of opportunity presents itself and I head for Grasmere.

The first few miles are plagued by high cloud, but there are hints of brighter times ahead. As I leave Loughrigg Terrace and head through the trees on the western side of Loughrigg Fell, the eponymous tarn appears through the transmuting beech leaves. This tiny body of water, sitting at an altitude of less than 100 metres, occupies an idyllic location that has the Langdale Pikes as its immaculate backdrop. Wordsworth described it as a "most beautiful example" and gave it its nickname "Diana's looking glass" after the Italian Lake Nemi, said to be the mirror of Diana, the Roman warrior goddess of nature and fertility.

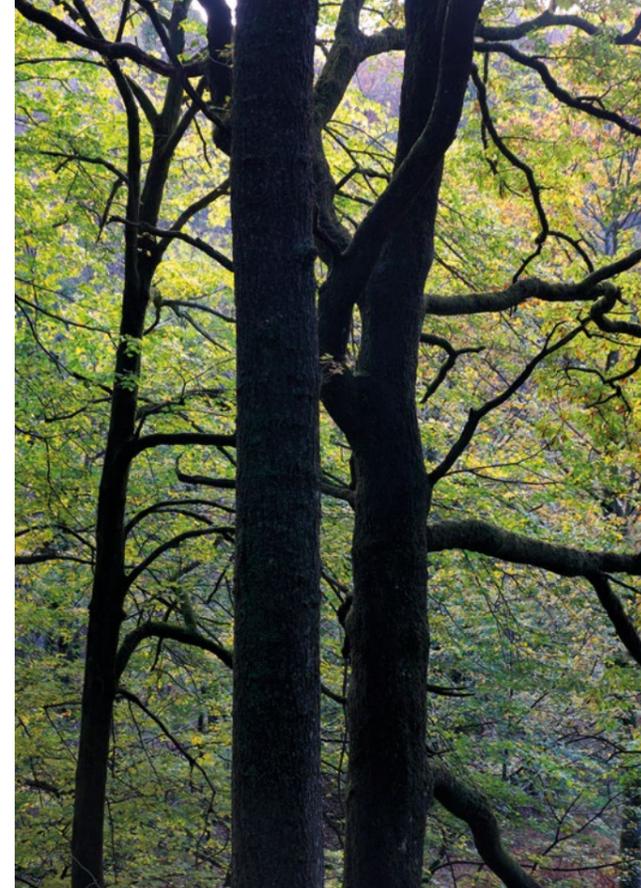
Three photographers with tripods line up along the southeastern side of the tarn, waiting for the Pikes to shake free of their morning blanket of cloud. They're following in a long tradition of artists in search of the 'picturesque'. Ever since the Cumberland cleric and artist William Gilpin, inspired by landscape painters, first began espousing his principles of aesthetics in the late eighteenth century, people have come to places such as Loughrigg Tarn to capture this beauty within a single frame. Earlier artists would've been armed with Claude glasses – small, tinted mirrors that allowed the viewer to turn their back on the scenery and view it in the glass. "Where the objects are great and near," writes West, "it removes them to a due distance, and shows them in the soft colours of nature, and in the most regular perspective the eye can perceive, or science demonstrate."

I push on, dropping into the valley and past Skelwith Force. By the time I reach Elter Water, the Pikes have appeared, rewarding those patient photographers undoubtedly still waiting up at Loughrigg Tarn. At Elterwater village, I'm joined by my partner Heleyn and our terrier Jess, and we head up into Great Langdale together. Lunch on a bench beside the beck is accompanied by a repeated popping sound, which turns out to be acorns dropping from the trees.

From Chapel Stile onwards, the Langdale Pikes dominate the view. They loom imperiously over their valley, Harrison Stickle the haughtiest of the bunch, seemingly well aware of its status as a Lakeland icon and the knowledge that, at any given moment, there are always dozens of people pointing a camera at it. Eventually, Crinkle Crags and Bow Fell appear as well, adding a little more nobility to this increasingly dramatic scene.



Late afternoon sun lighting up the Langdale Pikes



^ Penny Rock Wood

We climb south out of Great Langdale to visit Blea Tarn. I was intending to follow a quiet trail around the southern base of Lingmoor Fell, but I've been staring straight up at the high fells since entering Langdale and, despite my original intention to stay low, I can't resist the temptation of one teeny weeny top to end the day. It proves a good decision. As we near the summit of Lingmoor Fell, the sun begins breaking through the dark banks of cloud that have amassed during the afternoon. The surrounding fells, bathed in golden light, stand out against the bruised-looking sky. The cool October breeze wakes me from my valley slumber, reminding me that, as much as I love being in the dales looking up, I'd always much rather be on the hills looking down...

Highly Commended Judy Armstrong Riding Lines in the Mountains of the Gods

'Who knew? Skiing in Greece! A lovely style and reads very easily – an excellent report of an unusual skiing destination. The pictures showed good contrasts between snowy landscapes and ancient ruins'



The **Outdoor Travel Feature Award** is sponsored by OS *Pathfinder Guides*. Published by Crimson Publishing, they are Britain's best-loved walking guides. Long-established, these high-quality walking guides offer in total more than 14,500 miles and circa 6,000 hours of walking in 94 UK titles.

Technical Feature

Winner *Kingsley Jones*

Climb the Eiger



When I wrote this article, I was very aware that I'd been petrified of the Eiger before my first ascent of it (and the other times too, if I'm honest), but there is some magnetic appeal to this mountain. I wanted to share enough technical information and tips to encourage competent alpinists to consider this route. The key advice was for climbers not to be put off by the history, by the stature of the mountain, or by those who haven't climbed it. It's a dream, but not for dreamers. Do your preparation well, and you can enjoy it. The route is an absolute classic, and it's a huge achievement to climb it.

Kingsley Jones

Climb the Eiger (excerpt)

Introduction

Eiger! Just hearing the name of this iconic mountain raises the heart rate. A kaleidoscope of images, memories and history flickers through my mind: Ueli Steck running up the north face, the Jungfrauoch railway gallery windows in the lower wall, the body of Toni Kurz dangling on a rope, and the clouds that bubble up within the north face creating a weather system of their own. The Eiger is a mountain that is hard to climb, due to the weight of history and legend on your shoulders. The names of the pioneers seem to have gained a slightly higher plinth in the annals of mountaineering history than from other mountains: Hinterstoisser, Almer, Heckmair, Barrington, Harlin, Bonington, and Harrer.

Books have been written, films have been shot, and even Olympic medals have been awarded, about the Eiger. Perhaps it reached the consciousness of the public due to the well documented, and highly visible, unfolding of the dramas of the first ascents and accidents on the north face, from the hotel and train at Kleine Scheidegg. On most mountains the epics, accidents and triumphs, are hidden from the public gaze. Not so for the Eiger, where each drama was played out in a glare of publicity due to its visibility. This was far before the era of social media, but all the more compelling as clickbait.

Mittellegi Arête

As a teenager, I remember camping below the north face above Grindelwald one day. We'd arrived in the pouring rain, with the cloud low down, and no visibility. The next day dawned dry and beautiful, and I woke early. Unzipping the tent door, I looked out directly onto the north face of the Eiger. To this day I vividly remember zipping the door straight back up, and retreating back into my tent. I shook slightly; the view had been so awe inspiring, so real, so tangible. It took a minute to pluck



the courage up to take another peek. It was time to get used to it, as we were due to be climbing the Lauper route, starting the next day.

When you gaze at the north face, the left-hand skyline follows what looks like an impossibly steep starks fin of rock all the way to the summit. The line is perfect – the Mittellegi Arête. It has vast rock towers, icy runnels, rock ridges, and snowy traverses. The route soars upwards to reach the summit. It's a perfect route, following a clear line up the mountain. What makes it appeal to many climbers is two fold – despite all its history, the Eiger is just below the magic 4,000m contour, so is less busy than many surrounding peaks such as the Finsteraarhorn or Jungfrau, and a few of the most awkward parts of the Mittellegi Arête have fixed ropes to facilitate progress.

These two factors appeal to the misanthrope in me, in that I want to escape the crowds of many alpine peaks, but what about the fixed ropes on the most technical sections? Well, it all helps, and when catching mountain railways, and staying in mountain huts, the clean ethics have long sailed out of the window. There's



something more than just the line of the Mittellegi that appeals, which many routes don't, and I've long struggled to pinpoint what it is, but it was always right there in front of me – adventure. Unlike many routes that are slogs or blindingly obvious, the Mittellegi offers twists and turns, route finding decisions, and constantly changing styles and types of climbing – ice, rock, snow, abseiling, traversing, down-climbing, moving together, pitching, and more. It's a true smorgasbord of alpinism.

Spatial insignificance

As the Voyager 1 space probe left our solar system in 1990, Carl Sagan ordered the space craft to turn around and look back at Earth, a pale blue dot 4 billion miles away. He wrote, "Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves." – Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1994. Sagan was writing about the infinite stature of the Earth within the universe, but when I read this beautiful quote, it's about the Eiger Mittellegi Arête to me. We are the lonely specks on the giant all encompassing mountain. There's no possibility for self-importance, or delusions of grandeur. We are but ants on the face of a giant.



To climb this amazing route is as close as many of us will ever come to the feelings of being in space. You are completely enveloped in where you are, and what you are doing, but there is no shaking that feeling of complete insignificance on this route. To me that's the attraction of it. We live in a world where we are distracted, connected, and yet lonely. When climbing the Mittellegi you feel exposed yet absorbed, alone yet engaged, scared yet challenged, and as nothing yet happy. There's not many routes in the world, let alone the Alps, that can give you these raw emotions. It's a mountain that makes you feel so very alive.

What the judges said...

'We almost feel that this should have been in the feature category - indeed it's the magazine's 'cover feature', and it's debatable as to whether this is more of a 'how to' than most of the feature category submissions are.

Having said this, it's a great feature and he is giving information on how to tackle the Eiger - he knows what he's doing and the history and legends add colour and gravitas. We really like the philosophical musings.'

Judges *Carlton Reid*, founder of *On Your Bike* magazine, and *Elizabeth Multon*, commissioning editor of *Adlard Coles Nautical* at *Bloomsbury Publishing*

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

About Kingsley...

Kingsley Jones is an outdoor writer, mountaineer, trail runner, and UIMLA International Mountain Leader. When he's not writing guidebooks or articles, he's guiding clients in the mountains in the Alps and Lake District. He's climbed the Eiger by three different routes, but remains in awe of it. For details on mountain guided adventures visit www.icicle.co.uk or for information about the author visit his personal website, details below.

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CICERONE

Based in Kendal, Cicerone are a leading outdoor activities guidebook publisher. Founded in 1969 by the late Walt Unsworth and Brian Evans, Cicerone now have a range of over 350 guidebooks to walking, trekking, climbing, mountaineering and cycling. Since 1999, Cicerone has been developing under the ownership of Jonathan and Lesley Williams. In 2019, Cicerone celebrates 50 years of outdoor publishing. Jonathan takes up the tale...

We are sitting outside the Cabane du Mont-Fort high above Verbier, looking out at the sunset over the Combin range with Mont Blanc behind. Dinner is coming soon and the trekkers' thoughts have moved on from today's grinding 1650m climb to tomorrow's route over the wild and remote Grand Désert. The question goes out: 'What does Kev say?' and half a dozen copies of the little blue guidebook appear and are studied. Of course, most of the trekkers have read the book several times, but this is the decision point – whether

to take the high path over the Col de la Chauz with the chance of late snow, or the slightly lower Sentier des Chamois with spectacular views of the Combin and the long drop to Val de Bagnes. Plans are made, dinner is served,

beers are exchanged for wine, and conversation flows in several languages.

The scene is played out wherever we go: in the Dolomites, the AV2 trekkers at Rifugio Pisciadù are asking 'What does Gillian say?'; the GR20 trekkers at Ascu Stagnu in Corsica are asking 'What does Paddy say?'; the Munroists at the Killin B&B are studying Steve's book or Ronald's, while the West Highland Way walkers in Rowardennan ask what Terry says. Much the same scene happens from the Alps to the Canaries, from Cornwall to the north of Scotland, from Patagonia to the Rockies. Grades are dissected, times and distances computed and checked, the ups and downs investigated, the maps explored for critical turns, the photographs assessed for dodgy terrain. Every word, every comma, matters.

This is what it is all about, why the team works so hard on the guides. The guide truly comes alive where, to borrow from William Blake, 'men [and women] and mountains meet'. We reflect on the responsibility of helping so many adventurers achieve their hills, treks and trips, and we feel the pleasure of helping them do so. In the feedback we receive from walkers and trekkers, we see how every aspect of our craft must play its part, how the exactitude and quality of our authors' work and of our own work must come together perfectly; we see the importance of the highest editorial standards and great design, the best maps and photographs, the constant effort to stay as up to date as possible.

Then we look deeper and see more. We see the importance of finding inspiring new places, ranges and routes; the importance of the author's love and passion and desire to communicate it, which is the foundation of all our work; the importance of how we market and present our guides; the importance of our reputation – our brand, if you like. We look deeper and see the importance of working with great people, of training the team and of their learning; the importance of how we look after customers and how we

answer the phone, how we handle a sales visit, how we write a blog, conduct an interview.

We see the relationships with our partners, our distributors, printers, copy-editors, sales teams. We see the choice of paper, the perfection of the printing, we see the order turnaround times, the delivery accuracy, the quality of the packaging. Deeper still, we see the importance of technology, of managing cash, of good planning, of our daily processes and interactions, of running the business.



And especially we see how the integrity and passion of the team and of our authors, the ideas and relationships, combine with the day-to-day business and hard work to help walkers have days to remember with pleasure. And we reflect on how fortunate we have been to work with such great people for all these years. 'What does Kev say?' In those few words spoken high in the Swiss Alps, the whole of Cicerone is laid bare to us and we see how everything works together – all the moving parts we've strived to perfect and the people we've worked with for a good part of a generation.

Are we proud? Maybe just a little. Are we nervous about our responsibilities? Absolutely. Do we want to keep on doing it better? Definitely.

