Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SPRING 2021

Outdoor
FOCUS
Spring 2021

With the 'roadmap out of lockdown' now published, members may now cautiously look forward to meeting each other in a non-virtual world at Malham Tarn, in the Yorkshire Dales, 8-11 October. Next year's Big Weekend is also now scheduled and will be at Grange-over-Sands, 7-10 October. Booking for this year's event will open in May and organiser Stan Abbott is determined to deliver a real fillip to lift the spirits after a year to forget.

SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE AROUND

Andrew McCloy has some advice…

Saul Bellow once wrote: "When we ask for advice we're usually looking for an accomplice" - but in the Guild we're a little more well-intentioned and supportive!

So, the third of Ronald Turnbull's OF articles on photography for writers has just been added to the OWPG's Advice Notes. 'Shooting in raw format' is the latest in a growing list of useful 'know-how' documents from experienced Guild members. If you are a new member, in particular, it's worth checking out the list that covers everything from tips on getting published through to negotiating contracts, giving book talks and chasing unpaid invoices.

The 19 Advice Notes are all available as free downloads from the Member Area of the Guild website **www.bit.ly/OWPGadvice**. However, please be aware that they are compiled on behalf of the OWPG for the benefit of its members only, so please don't transmit or reproduce them in any form without written consent.

We're also looking to add new ones, so do you have a particular area of expertise or experience that you can share? The note doesn't have to be very long or in-depth, but if it will help fellow members in their professional work then we'd love to hear from you - especially around aspects of social media, marketing, sponsorship and e-books. Please contact us via the website or email **andrew.mccloy@btinternet.com** or **Chiz@peakimages.co.uk**.

If you'd like to contribute to the next edition of *Outdoor Focus* please send an email with your article idea to me at **davidtphoto@gmail.com**. The deadline for copy is **15 May 2021**.

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The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our members cover every field of activity and all corners of the globe. They include writers, journalists, film makers, photographers, publishers and editors, all with a passionate interest in the outdoors. For more information visit www.owpg.org.uk.

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Cover Grey Mare's Tail waterfall, Kinlochleven, Scottish Highlands

New members

Outdoor Focus welcomes the following to the Guild's membership list…

Graeme Cornwallis

Graeme is a Glasgow-based hillwalker, writer and photographer who has contributed to many travel guide books for Lonely Planet and is the author and photographer for *101 Best Hill Walks in the Scottish Highlands and Islands* (Fort Publishing). Following graduation from Glasgow University as an astrophysicist and mathematician, Graeme trained as a teacher and now works part-time as a tutor of maths and physics when he's not scaling peaks at home and abroad. He has completed the Scottish Munros twice, the Corbetts once, and all 3000-foot peaks in Britain and Ireland at least once. Graeme has taken part in expeditions to the Andes and Greenland and, along with his climbs in New Zealand, Norway and the Canadian Rockies, has a wide knowledge of mountains and mountain travel. Graeme's current research for upcoming titles includes taking him around the best hills and mountains in Ireland.

James Rushforth

James is an experienced climber, mountaineer, skier, travel writer and guest speaker. An internationally acclaimed photographer and author, James was the GTMA Global Travel Photographer and British Drone Photographer of the Year in 2020, the British Guild of Travel Writers Photographer of the Year in 2018 and 2019, a double category winner at the International Photography Awards in 2018, and Epson Digital Splash Photographer of the Year, also in 2018. His work frequently appears in national newspapers, guidebooks and magazines around the world; whilst on social media he is part of the *National Geographic* Your Shot photography team.

www.jamesrushforth.com

Julia Goodfellow-Smith

Julia is a Chartered Environmentalist and a small woodland owner. She has recently added 'long-distance walker' to her biography, having walked the South West Coast Path last year, hiking and camping solo for the first time in her life. She is now giving talks about her adventures while preparing a book proposal.

Julia writes a column for *Living Woods* magazine about her experience of being a small woodland owner and is in discussion with a publisher about becoming a walking guidebook author.

In 2021, Julia is planning to explore Senegal while serving on the hospital ship Africa Mercy, and will be looking for opportunities to write about her experiences.

www.juliags.com

Scilly Seasons

Paddy Dillon writes a book the wrong way round...

I never meant to write a guidebook covering the Isles of Scilly, but events conspired against me and the book is now into its fifth edition, selling well after 20 years and consistently one of my best-sellers.

I had a plan to get myself to a lonely cliff edge near Penzance on August 11th 1999, in order to watch the total eclipse of the Sun. I never saw the eclipse because of heavy cloud, and I never found a lonely cliff edge either as the entire world got there before me. It was odd to watch thousands of people using flash photography to capture the dark clouds. Even odder was the car-load of people who turned up after the event, asking what time the eclipse was due to start!

Rather than put in a lot of effort for a momentary event, I'd already made arrangements for some splendid walking around Land's End, followed by a week-long trip to the Isles of Scilly. I'd been there once before, on January 6th and 7th 1982, in ferocious weather. It's a long story involving an ambitious winter hitch-hike, a brutal ferry crossing, a helicopter ride when the return ferry was cancelled, followed by multiple strandings due to heavy snowfall in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. The prospect of a stress-free summer visit appealed to me. The Isles of Scilly have a reputation for offering some of the longest sunshine hours in the British Isles.

I had no thought whatsoever about writing a guidebook, but I took notes and old fashioned film photos as I explored the islands, thinking that I might have an opportunity to sell a few short walking features to a magazine. In fact, I started doing that within a couple of weeks of returning home and I even dreamed that might eventually make enough money to cover the cost of my rail and ferry fare.

▲ The lonely Bishop Rock and its lighthouse

Students of outdoor history will know that in 1999, Jonathan and Lesley Williams took over Cicerone. During the handover process I'd allowed myself to get into a conversation about overhauling Cicerone's coverage of Corsica's GR20. (See Outdoor Focus Summer 2020.) In a meeting at the Cicerone office, Jonathan asked me if I'd been anywhere interesting and I mentioned the Isles of Scilly. 'We don't have a guidebook to the Isles of Scilly,' said Jonathan.

'Well, there's only 6¼ square miles of land,' I replied.

'Still, we don't have a guidebook,' said Jonathan.

'Do you want one?' I asked.

I think it took me a couple of weeks to write the guidebook, select the pictures and hand-draw the mapping. I delivered it to the office, and as an afterthought Jonathan asked if I'd like a contract. It occurred to me that I was doing everything the wrong way round with this project, and the contract should have come first! Things got even more bizarre once the book was moving through the production process. My editor phoned to say that my 'Sicily' proofs were ready for checking. I corrected her by saying 'Scilly', only for us both to realise that there'd been a mix-up between my 'Scilly' guidebook and Gillian Price's 'Sicily' guidebook, which was in production at the same time. Honestly, you couldn't make it up!

The first edition was mostly black and white, with a few colour plates and hand-drawn outline maps. The whole book was converted to full colour, incorporating detailed OS Explorer mapping for its second edition in 2006. I welcomed the chance to re-visit the islands for the third edition of

St Mary's Pool is the main harbour for the Isles of Scilly

A basic and scenic campsite on the island of St Agnes

Rugged granite on the northern part of the island of Bryher

the book, published in 2009. I flew to St Mary's Airport, and given that the Isles of Scilly are part of the Duchy of Cornwall, I wondered why the authorities hadn't jumped at the chance to call it the Scilly Prince Charles Airport, or am I just revealing my anti-royalist tendencies?

Things don't change too much around the islands, so I was able to deal with the fourth edition in 2015 without a site visit. However, I always reckon that I should put in the leg-work as often as possible and the islands are always such a delight to visit. One thing that baffled me was the fact that my PLR statements, over a run of several years, listed my Isles of Scilly guide as my most borrowed book in the library system, way ahead of any other books I'd written. In my fevered imagination I wondered if prospective readers were fighting each other among the shelves in their haste to borrow the book!

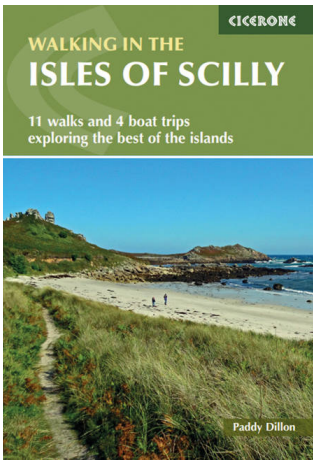
As for the contents of the guidebook, it still amazes me that I managed to get so much coverage out of 6¼ square miles of land. Fair enough, those 6¼ square miles are spread across a 50 square mile marine reserve, but all the same I managed to get over 40 miles of walking routes described, along with recommending four classic exploratory boat trips. With every visit to the Isles of Scilly, half the fun involves catching the motor launches between the islands, but it's also great fun to take a tour of the smaller islets and rocks, along with some of the wildlife cruises.

Researching the fifth edition of my guidebook involved me visiting the Isles of Scilly in the summer of 2020, immediately after finishing a trek around the South West Coast Path. (See Outdoor Focus Autumn 2020.) I thought I'd been everywhere and seen everything, but on all my previous visits there had never been a boat trip to the remote Bishop Rock and its lonely lighthouse. The boatmen simply don't go there unless it's a flat calm day.

I was supposed to be visiting Tresco when I noticed that the Bishop Rock trip was being offered, so I squashed my original plan and bought a ticket. It was pink, but I kept thinking of it as my 'golden ticket', because I'd waited so long for that trip and had pretty much given up all hope of getting there. I made sure that a picture of the lighthouse made it into my book, and for good measure I changed around 90% of the pictures in the book, as there's no point in doing these things by half-measures.

On previous visits I was always able to visit the islands incognito, but now I get spotted and get pressed into signing copies of my guidebook. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised. A quick calculation reveals that if I lay every copy of my guidebook that's ever been sold, end to end, they'd stretch all the way around the Garrison Wall fortifications beside Hugh Town. If I laid all the pages from all those books end to end, they'd be well on their way to making a second lap around all the walking routes I've described on the islands!

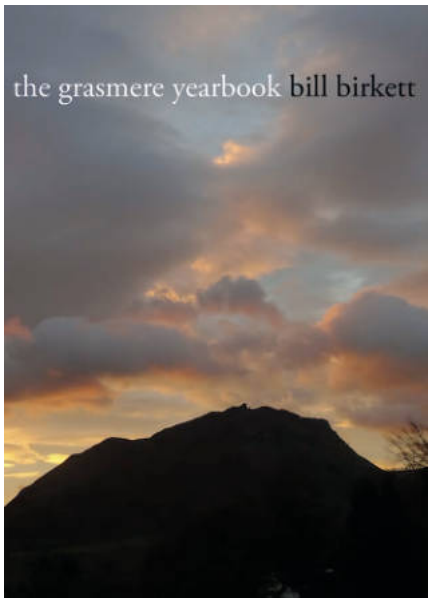
One day, when I'm too old and feeble to keep on top of my mountain areas and long-distance trail guidebooks, I hope I can still enjoy pottering around the Isles of Scilly. I might need a hand getting on and off the ferries, negotiating steps covered in slippery seaweed, but the paths are among the easiest I've ever written about. I can promise my eventual successor, a long time from now, that they'll have a great time exploring. Don't be fooled by the size of the islands. There's a whole world of discovery out there and every visit is a joy.



Walking in the Isles of Scilly by Paddy Dillon, published by Cicerone

First edition **2000**
Second edition **2006**
Third edition **2009**
Fourth edition **2015**
Fifth edition (pictured) **2021**

Book Reviews / Roly Smith



The Grasmere Yearbook

Bill Birkett

Bill Birkett Publishing, £26 (hb)

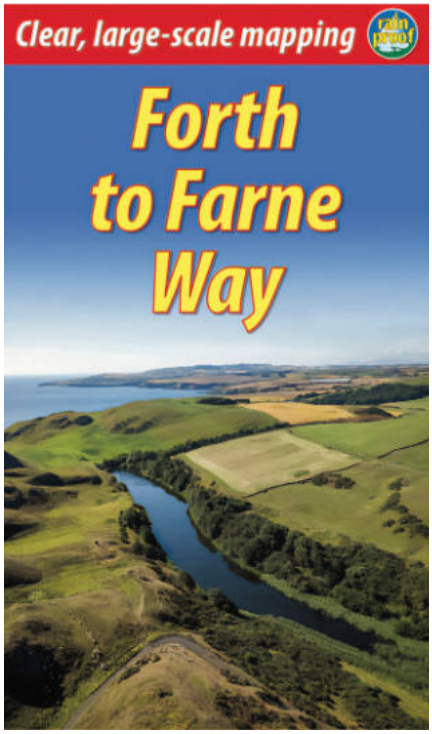
For many people of a certain age, climber and photographer Bill Birkett and his family will always be associated with his beloved Langdale, and he admits that's where his heart still lies. But Birkett moved to Benfield, just outside Grasmere, six years ago, and in this his latest self-published offering he gives us a stunning personal pictorial diary of a year in the life of his new home.

Starting from the icy depths of winter when snow dusts the surrounding fells of the Fairfield Horseshoe, the author takes the reader through the ever-changing seasons of the central Lake District. A favourite shot in this section is the atmospheric "Fire on Stone Arthur" as sunlight illuminates clouds of spindrift flying off this little-visited shoulder of Great Rigg. Another dramatic skyscape is captured in the Spring section, looking north west from Tenter's Field in Grasmere.

Minute details add to the overall comprehensiveness of the photographic coverage, most notably in his close-ups of the flora of Grasmere. Birkett's excellent photography, which characterised his classic Complete Lakeland Fells (1994) is enlivened in his latest book by his own informative and evocative extended captions.

To most Lake District aficionados, Grasmere is of course best known as the home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth at the now incredibly popular Dove Cottage. But the author notes that Grasmere's beauty even enchanted an authority as eminent as Charles Darwin, who wrote: "The scenery gave me more pleasure than I thought my soul… was capable of feeling."

This is a book to treasure, to dip into and to wonder at the intimate, affectionate relationship Birkett has built up with his new Lakeland home.



Forth to Farne Way

John Harrison & Jacquetta Megarry

Rucksack Readers, £12.99 (pb)

The east coast of Scotland often pales into insignificance when compared to the nation's more dramatic and mountainous western coast. But this pleasant coastal meander reveals some spectacular scenery, such as the folded greywacke rocks of the prettily-named Pettico Wick harbour, near St Abb's Head, and the onion-skin weathering of the rocks revealed at low tide at Burnmouth Harbour.

A highlight, close to but not actually on the route, is the classic geological site of Siccar Point, which lies between Cocksburnpath and St Abbs. It was here in 1788 that the pioneering geologist James Hutton, travelling by boat, discovered a 65-million-year unconformity between the horizontal red sandstones lying over vertical greywacke in the cliffs, proving the ancient origins of Planet Earth.

This new long-distance path down the east coast of Scotland follows the southern section of a 12th century pilgrim route, which linked St Andrews and the Holy Island of Lindisfarne in Northumberland.

The 70-mile route starts at North Berwick and takes in St Abb's Head, John Muir's birthplace at Dunbar, and the red sandstone Benedictine Coldingham Priory, before reaching the Tweed at Berwick and culminating in the recommended barefoot crossing of the Holy Island Sands to reach Lindisfarne.

And as might be expected from a pilgrimage route, the entire way is liberally sprinkled with historical and religious references. Did you know, for example that St Baldred, "the Apostle of the Lothians", built a chapel and hermitage on the gannet-haunted volcanic plug of Bass Rock, which is an almost constant companion on this walk.

Joint authors John Henderson and Jacquetta Megarry (who is also the publisher) are well qualified to be your guides. Henderson is a trustee and member of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum while Megarry is well known as the publisher of Edinburgh-based Rucksack Readers.

UK copyright and photography

1. Legally a photograph is anything that appears as a still image. This includes images made with processes such as X-Rays, lidar and thermography, as well as using a conventional film or digital camera.

2. When you take an image, with sufficient skill and effort, it gains benefit of copyright immediately, even if it cannot be viewed yet. Any metadata embedded in the image is also protected by copyright as part of the image itself.

3. The first owner of copyright in a photograph is the person who created it, unless the image is taken in the course of their employment. In that case the copyright belongs to the employer. If you hire a freelance photographer the copyright belongs to them unless you both agree to transfer (assign) it in writing.

4. Ownership of a photographic print (or other tangible, physical media) does not automatically mean ownership of the copyright in it.

5. Photographs taken for you socially or domestically, such as a family portrait or photographs of a wedding, are private to you and the photographer cannot otherwise use them without your permission even if they retain copyright.

6. As a photographer you also have moral rights associated with your images. In the UK you must assert your authorship and it is good practice to do this by including your name in the image metadata.

7. You can photograph buildings, sculptures or works of artistic craftsmanship that are permanently displayed in a public place or in premises open to the public. This is sometimes called 'freedom of panorama'.

8. You can take a photograph from anywhere you have permission to be, unless you are informed otherwise. Photos you take of people or on private property may have privacy implications. In most professional circumstances agreements called a model or property release are needed.

9. If you incidentally include a work in a photograph, for example because it is in the background, then you may not need permission.

10. Copyright in the photographs lasts for 70 years after the year in which the photographer died. Working out whether an old photograph is still in copyright is complicated, as the rules have changed over time. The current rules apply to all photographs taken from August 1989 onwards even if they have not been published.

This information was produced by the British Copyright Council and is one a series of introductions to the rules that apply to most copyright works in the UK, and does not purport to offer legal advice. Some special cases apply and in case of doubt appropriate action should be taken.

View the original at **www.bit.ly/phtcopy**

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Robert Service (Library and Archives Canada/PA-110158)

A tribute to Robert Service, Bard of the Yukon

Tony Howard on the life of a British-Canadian pioneer

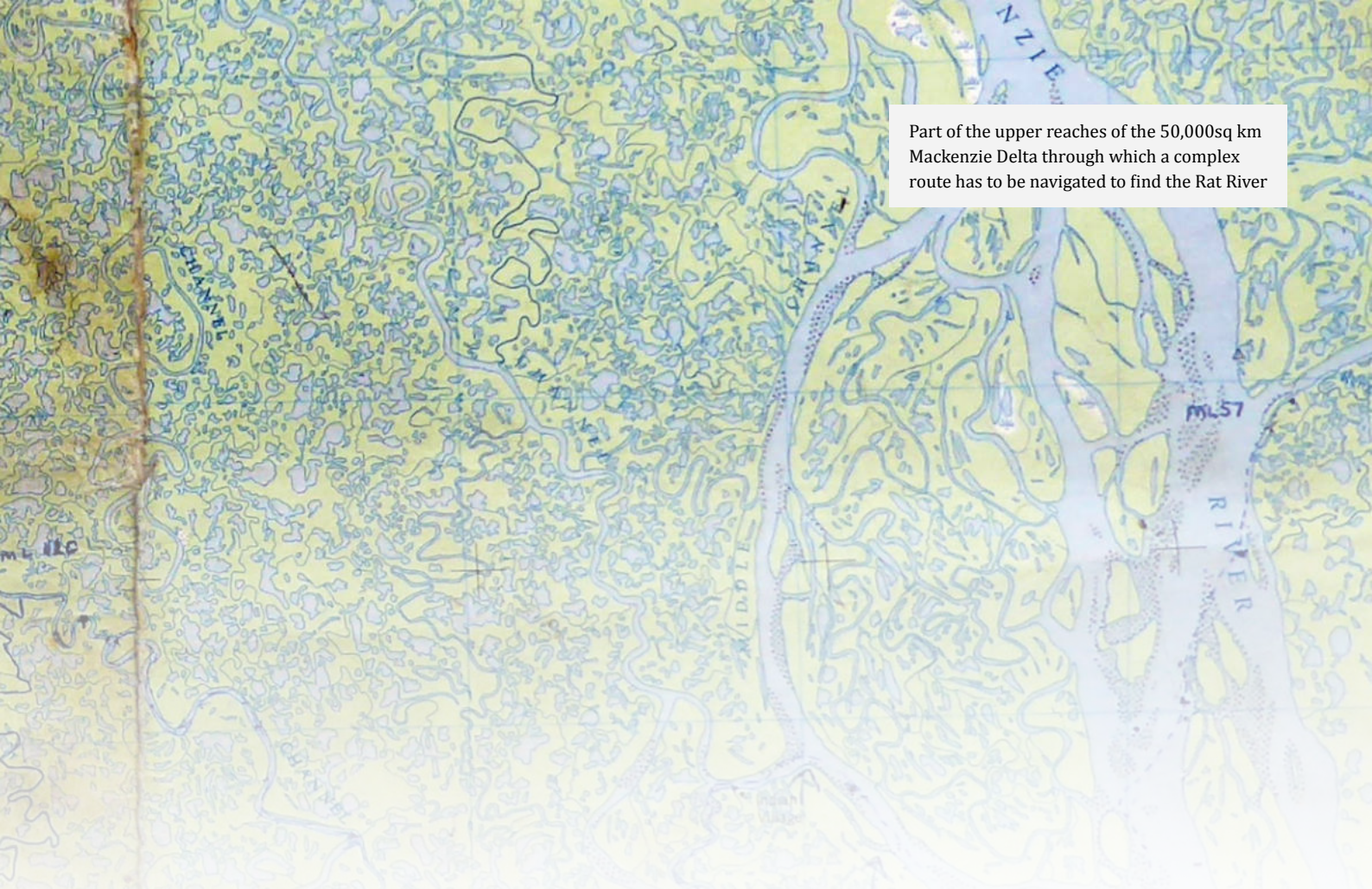
In the summer of 1971, on the last day of our canoe trip across the Mackenzie Delta and over The Divide via the Rat and Porcupine rivers, covering what we were told was the best part of 1000 miles, Ken Minchin and I emerged into the fast flowing mile-wide waters of the Yukon River. Our journey over this little known and seldom travelled Yukon gold rush trail was completed.

Hugging the shore to catch back-eddies that helped us against the flow of the river, we paddled upstream to the cabins of Fort Yukon where Indian salmon wheels turned slowly in the water. Dawson City, that Mecca of the miners, was a simple boat's journey upstream but our six weeks' break was over. We flew out in a small plane to Fairbanks and so back to the Yukon. The puzzled American passport inspector asked why we had no entry stamp. "We came in down the Porcupine," we said, not without some pride in our journey. "No stamp in means no stamp out", he replied, sending us on our way, no one any the wiser.

Just over forty years later, whilst at the annual dinner of the Black and Tans Climbing Club in February 2013, the year after the above canoe trip story was published in my e-book, *Adventures in the Northlands*, Christine Birch, wife of Eddie Birch, an old climbing friend of mine, who had just listened to it, gave me a biography of Robert Service, *Vagabond of Verse* by James A McKay. As a lover of Service's poetry, I was both surprised and pleased to find that he had done the same canoe trip as us, intending to 'pack and track like the pioneers'. According to McKay, it was 'one of the best and most exciting stories he ever wrote.... at the age of thirty seven Robert was at the peak of physical perfection... The stamina built up over the past fifteen years and the hardiness of the northern explorer stood him in good stead, without them he would never have survived the rugged hardships and dangers he encountered on this terrible overland route.' McKay wondered if perhaps 'Robert's motive in undertaking such a hazardous venture was to prove himself. He was acutely aware that although he had chronicled the Yukon in verse and prose, he was something of a fraud. He had not actually been on the Trail of Ninety-Eight and the gold rush that inspired him had been almost over by the time he got there. On hearing of his plans, the Indian agent at Fort MacMurray said, "Young man, you're going to your doom."'

> ***McKay wondered if perhaps 'Robert's motive in undertaking such a hazardous venture was to prove himself...'***

Intrigued, I bought Robert Service's 1945 autobiography, *Ploughman of the Moon, An Adventure into Memory*, in which Book 10 - *The Spell of the Yukon* describes this trip. He bought 'one of the finest birch bark canoes in the north at Great Slave Lake from an Indian considered to be the best canoe maker in his tribe'. He then travelled north down the Mackenzie River by various boats



Part of the upper reaches of the 50,000sq km Mackenzie Delta through which a complex route has to be navigated to find the Rat River

before camping at the head of the Mackenzie Delta near the Peel River amongst some Eskimos (almost certainly Gwich'in Indians, possibly at the same site that we met them). Service writes sardonically, 'They were semi-civilised, for they had gramophones that played hymns and they punished their children'. It was here he had a chance meeting with some 'mavericks' on a scow. He teamed up with them, canoeing down the margins of the Mackenzie Delta as we did and a short way up the Rat River before opting to load his canoe, Coquette, onto the scow. Together they laboriously hauled the craft upstream against the fast flowing river through 'mists of mosquitos' towards the Divide. Like us, they were 'twelve hours a day on the track-line, and most of the time in the water'. Ken and I were also plagued by mosquitos at our camps and when we portaged from the Rat River to Summit Lake. Also like us, Robert and his companions lost their craft once whilst lining it up the boulder choked rapids. Robert comments that he 'laboured to the limit and kept grinning even when things were grim', remarking that one of the men, Jake Skilly was a chain smoker, 'a cigarette fiend of the most desperate brand'. If he went ten minutes without a "coffin nail" a wild look came into his eyes and he trembled violently.'

Up near the headwaters, thinking they had taken the wrong channel, Robert was relieved to find the name of Buffalo Jones carved on a tree. 'The sight of the name of this well known Klondiker put fresh heart in him. But the worst was yet to come'. Though they eventually saw Summit Lake in the distance, the portage of the scow was onerous and it wasn't until 'after ten hours of labour our craft splashed into a sudden depth of clear, cool water'. Summit Lake had an 'end of the world feeling' and looking up at the mountains towering above, Robert felt 'crushed with awe'. Like us, they couldn't initially locate the Bell Creek that lead west to the Porcupine River and the Yukon. Robert wrote that they 'could see no sign of it and the thought that we had been deceived made me sick'. Then he found 'a fringe of willows... concealed in a deep gully at the bottom of which brawled a lusty torrent' and set off alone in his canoe, though 'the water seemed to seize Coquette with a giant hand and shake her as a terrier does a rat. It descended in a series of rapids varied by small cascades, so that often, waist deep in foam, I was forced to get out and line the canoe'. Again, later in the journey, just as we did, he 'drifted dreamily under a cloudless sky... at full length in the canoe and let the current bear me along.' He felt that if he 'had drawn a hundred mile circle around him there would not have been a human soul in its compass.'

Up near the headwaters, thinking they had taken the wrong channel, Robert was relieved to find the name of Buffalo Jones carved on a tree.

By chance he met up again with the scow on a couple of occasions further downriver.

Ken Minchin

Painting found by Tony in the abandoned Native American village of Howling Dog on the Porcupine River

Jake was more cantankerous than ever as he was about to run out of paper. In a previous paperless episode he had resorted to using pages from his mother's Bible, smoking it 'from Genesis to Revelation', saying he would have killed for it, such was his addiction. On the second occasion Service was persuaded by the others on the scow to take Jake Skilly with him in the canoe as he would make quicker time to the Trading Post at Ramparts Canyon so Jake could buy his papers. With his last pages of Argosy almost gone, Jake said, 'I ought to warn you partner, if this paper pans out, I'm liable to go bughouse'. Jake, who was in the back of the canoe, had an axe close at hand and Robert felt 'he could get me with the axe before I could swing round with the rifle. Nice messy end to a misspent existence!' On reaching the Trading Post which was long abandoned when we passed by, they were unable to land as 'the Indians were down with smallpox'. Luckily, soon after, they met a launch coming up-river which was able to supply some papers that 'saved Jake's life'. Robert felt it saved his too!

A little further downstream they met a paddle steamer which took them to Dawson City, Robert writing that 'I've had enough of paddling for the rest of my life'. In Dawson, he worked hard on his third book of verse, eventually published as *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, pinning rolls of blank wallpaper on the cabin walls and writing on them with a stick of charcoal, all eagerly removed many years later by tourists visiting Dawson. He also got lost in a blizzard one wild winter's day, being rescued by Cannibal Joe who 'had earned his grisly epithet from the rumour that he had killed and eaten his partner when the two of them had run out of food while prospecting in the Barren Lands. ...But Joe was adamant, "I never et Bob. I never et a single slice of him... but I fed him to the dogs and I et the bloody dogs."' Meanwhile, Jake, Robert's nicotine-crazed partner on the canoe trip, 'had gambled away all his capital and was heading for the Arctic again... to trap and starve and suffer. ...in his lonely cabin on the Arctic Ocean, Jake went mad and shot off the top of his head.'

On the ragged edge of the world I'll roam,
And the home of the wolf shall be my home,
And a bunch of bones on the boundless snows,
The end of my trail . . . who knows, who knows!

The Nostomaniac, Robert Service, from Rhymes of a Rolling Stone, written by Service in his cabin in Dawson after this canoe trip.

The full story of Tony's Arctic canoe trip is in both *Quest into the Unknown* – www.bit.ly/quest-unknown – and Tony's e-book, *Adventures in the Northlands* www.bit.ly/adventure-northlands

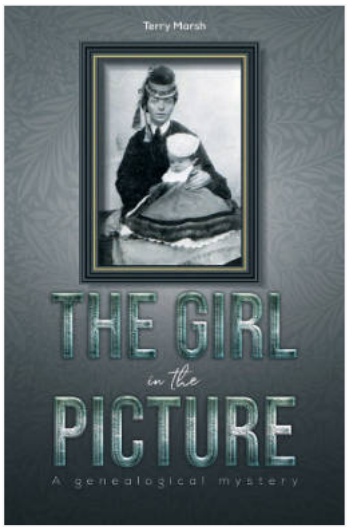
We need to mutate

Terry Marsh can see that change is here

When, early in 2020, the consequences of Covid-19 for the book trade started to become apparent, many of us will have feared the worst for our royalty income and for those involved in book production. Sure, there are greater matters to worry about – I lost my 98-year-old mother to the virus in April – and I don't doubt that there are few of us who have not been affected one way or another. It's grim. But you know that already; or, at least, I hope you do.

Then I received an email from one of my publishers saying that sales of walking guidebooks had gone 'stratospheric', and I think that took many by surprise. Things, for writers and photographers in the outdoor genre, were looking a bit less bleak … unless your mainstay was guidebooks to international destinations. The upshot for me was (a) the bringing forward of updates to existing guidebooks, and (b) a spate of new titles, well, a ripple, anyway. And it certainly helps if you've been writing guidebooks for a long time and have a decent backlist that regularly needs updating.

But things are changing; book buyers are more digitally inclined, they buy online, they are online savvy … and we must be, too. And one of the things we can do is to self-market more proactively, to Facebook up to the opportunities. We need to mutate from the passive 'let the publisher do all the marketing' to something more dynamic that helps us … and them.



I don't care what people say about Facebook; whatever I don't want – political comment, snide remarks, endless complaints – I ignore or delete. I look at Facebook (and Twitter … sorry I'm too old to figure out Instagram, TikTok, etc.) and I ask 'How can I get it to work for me?'

Well, I started by joining groups that supported walks for which I'd written guidebooks: the Coast to Coast Walk and the West Highland Way, and I would pick up on and respond to requests by other users for information/advice about doing the walk. And when anyone asks the question, 'Which guidebook should I use?', I tell them. Mine, of course, and I say why. It helps that I negotiated with one publisher to give anyone buying from the publisher's website a 20% reduction. That's good for the publisher because they get to keep 80%, rather than the 50% or less if they sell via wholesalers. And it's good for me, because I get a full royalty rather than a percentage of net receipts. And because I'd prodded the buyers, that's sales I may not otherwise have had.

But, there wasn't a Facebook group for the Dales Way, another of my guides. So, I created one – THE DALES WAY, and in four months it gained 2,000+ members, many of whom already had my guide, and some of whom went on to buy it. But that's 2,000+ people who may not have known of me, but who now do. I vet applications to join the group, and, sure, some kn..heads are only interested in posting about their fencing and shed building business, but they are soon dealt with.

I also created groups for other places I write about: FOCUS ON SKYE, FOCUS ON MULL, FOCUS ON SHETLAND, FOCUS ON ORKNEY, FOCUS ON THE OUTER HEBRIDES … you get the message. From time to time I post low resolution images in these group pages. One recent picture of Ben Tianavaig on Skye quickly acquired 1,300+ 'Likes' and several 'Shares'. Again, 1,300 people who may not have known me, or my work, but now do.

And it gives me an outlet to post about new editions of my guidebooks, as and when. I never thought that marketing was my strong point – which is probably why my own publishing business failed after 20 years. But I've seen how social media, from which you don't have to socially distance yourself, can help me, for the sake of maybe five or ten minutes each morning, checking the online traffic and comments … and responding to them.

At other times, I drip feed information: a gentle reminder about that 20% discount, news about temporary changes to a route, e.g. flood damage. But I'm keeping my name out there and not relying on the publisher to do it for me; after all, they have many authors to contend with. I've just got me.

And, as if that wasn't enough, I mutated into fiction. Okay, some will say I've been writing it for years. But, no, I really have a work of fiction, a genealogical mystery – *The Girl in the Picture* – due out in the new year, and I'm already 80,000 words into a second.

I may be getting old, but not too old to learn a few new tricks, and not all mutations are stronger than the original, but if we take the time to figure out how we can help ourselves, then this could be one mutation for the better.

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Jacquetta Megarry offers advice to those who may enter for our new Digital Award

What makes a good website and

Websites and blogs are both forms of publishing, Most of us were brought up with the experience of printed books as familiar. But printed books have been around for nearly 600 years and we take for granted certain conventions about how to navigate a book. In any nonfiction book we expect a contents page at the start, an index at the end, page numbers, a breakdown of contents into chapters and/or sections, possibly running heads and so on.

By contrast, we have been engaging with websites for only about 30 years and blogs for about 20 years. They are delivered on devices ranging in size from smartphone to desktop, rather than paper, but that is the least of the differences. Although we have imported the terminology of pages for websites, many other characteristics of books do not apply. For blogs, the language of posts probably comes from the notion of wall posters, although when I started my first blog in 2007 my naive view was "As a total newbie, I see blogging simply as writing a legible personal diary that's public rather than private." Clearly it can and should be much more than that!

In restricting the Digital Award to websites and blogs this year, we are trying to increase the number of entries. This article aspires to help by discussing quality. It has been written with generous input from Lois Sparling, who is my fellow judge on the Digital Awards, and summarises material provided by OWPG member Jacquie Budd, who is an expert on blogging.

Quality in a website

Let me start by sharing the column headings of the huge grid which Lois and I use when evaluating each website. There are eight main headings:

Content **Is it well written and well presented? Is appropriate use made of image, video and sound where appropriate, as well as text?**

Coverage **How comprehensive and coherent is the coverage of its field?**

Usability **How intuitive is the use of buttons and links, how seamlessly does content load?**

Navigability **How easy is it to navigate? Does it offer a breadcrumb trail, shortcuts to Home page, search function, well chosen wording of menus, use of accordions and so on?**

Mobility **How well does it perform on a smartphone, tablet or other small screen?**

Discoverability **How easily can users find it using likely search phrases?**

Broken links/dead ends **How many dead links does an automated link checker find?**

Collaboration **How much did the entrant rely on input and expertise from others?**

We recognise that websites cover a huge range of purposes and not all will score highly on all of the above. But since most people find it more convenient and efficient to read large amounts of text on paper, it is vital that a website makes good use of the many features it offers that printed papers cannot – instant links, powerful searching, integration with media, download options, interactivity and more.

> "Although we have imported the terminology of pages for websites, many other characteristics of books do not apply"

Quality in a blog

This section is essentially a summary of OWPG member Jacquie Budd's white paper *Guide to Blogging*. I recommend that readers obtain the original and put it into practice:. She organises her content around 20 points, which I have quoted shamelessly, adding a phrase to clarify each point. NB you will miss a great deal if you don't read the original and follow her links: her Guide is free to anybody who signs up to her newsletter. Visit her home page **www.jacquiebudd.com** to sign up.

1. **Have a strategy: why blog, who will read it and how are you unique?**
2. **Be consistent: set a schedule and stick to it**
3. **Be honest: earn trust by being truthful**
4. **Write for yourself first: find your voice and let your personality shine**
5. **Stop being a perfectionist: beware of spending hours agonising over detail**
6. **Write timeless content: search engines love evergreen posts**
7. **Be unique: avoid plagiarism and rehash**
8. **Get social: share your blog on social media and monitor the traffic**

Jacquetta is the OWPG's Awards Organiser. Details of the schedule and rules for the 2021 Awards are at www.bit.ly/OWPG2021awards

a good blog?

9. **Provide useful information**
10. **Build connections: support other bloggers with guest posts and comments**
11. **Grow an email list: offer free, useful content to those who sign up**
12. **Plan your content: set aside a few minutes every week to brainstorm ideas**
13. **Write, edit, publish: don't worry about getting it right, get it down, then edit**
14. **Tell people who you are: have a well-crafted About page for newcomers**
15. **Think about design: use a template with formatting that suits your content**
16. **Optimise the amount of text: Jacquie usually writes about 800 words, but she prioritises getting across all the useful content without padding**
17. **Make it easy to read: keep sentences and paragraphs short, and embrace white space**
18. **Learn from the experts: check the advice online, and reflect on why you admire certain blogs**
19. **Check those links: dead links damage credibility**
20. **Keep going: don't be ashamed if at first you attract only small numbers – it can take years to build a following**

Summary

As with book publishing, the most important advice we offer is to think about your users – often and always. By all means let your personality shine through, but without a clear idea of who might be reading your blog or using your website you will struggle to provide them with stuff that they'll find interesting and useful.

PS...

There are lots of useful websites that we can point to, but think this best done via the awardwinning OWPG website's members' Forum. By the time you read this, there will be a new topic under **General** on which we will post some links and hope to hear some reactions.

DOUG SCOTT 1941–2020

Roly Smith pays tribute to a pioneering mountaineer

Doug Scott on the summit of Everest. Photo: Dougal Haston

Doug Scott – one of Britain's greatest climbers and long-time OWPG member – sadly passed away on 7 December 2020. He was probably best-known as the first Englishman to reach the summit of Everest, which he did with the late Dougal Haston via the previously unclimbed South West face on Chris Bonington's 1975 expedition. But that really wasn't a typical Doug Scott-style expedition, because he made his name in mountaineering circles for elegantly-simple, swift, Alpine-style ascents, usually without the use of oxygen.

In total, he made 45 expeditions to the highest mountains on earth, and reached the summits of 40 peaks, of which half were first ascents and climbed by new routes or in Alpine style. He completed a personal goal in 1995 when he reached the summit of the Cars-tenz Pyramid in Western Papua by a new route, thus completing his ascents of the highest Seven Summits on each continent.

One of the most notable of Doug's epic adventures was his bivouac with Haston at 28,700 ft just below the South Summit of Everest after their ascent in 1975 – without oxygen or even sleeping bags – that still remains the highest ever recorded. Perhaps the most gruelling was his amazing survival after breaking both legs in an abseiling accident near the summit of the 24,000-foot Ogre in 1976, and his eight-day crawl on his hands and knees back to base camp.

Doug always had a concern for those unsung heroes whose hard, physical work transporting supplies on their backs to the mountains made it possible for European climbers such as himself to reach the summits. He always tried to put something back into the poorest and most impoverished communities in the areas where he climbed, and to try to persuade others to do the same.

It was the death of one of his team's porters on the first ascent of the South Ridge of Hanging Glacier Peak South in 1990, and his horror on a subsequent visit to his village at the unsanitary conditions which existed, which first awakened Doug's concern. Initially, he just raised the money to install a clean water standpipe for the village, and from this simple first project came the idea of Community Action Nepal (www.canepal.org.uk).

Doug was the founder and driving force behind this charitable trust which funds innovative, community-run development projects in Nepal. Since its inception, CAN has supported over 40 projects in the hill regions of Nepal, including the building of primary and secondary schools, schools for deaf children, health centres, and the provision of clean water supplies. CAN also employs teachers and nurses, and supports their training and development.

Doug was also closely involved with the setting-up of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), which tries to ensure that Himalayan porters receive a proper wage, equipment and conditions of employment.

Doug was made a CBE for services to mountaineering in 1994, and in 1999, he was awarded the Royal Geographical Society Patron's Gold Medal. In 2006 Doug was awarded the John Muir Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award. It was also in 2006 that Doug won the OWPG's (then OWG) coveted Golden Eagle award for his outstanding contribution to the world of the outdoors.

He will be sadly missed.

GOING LOCO UNDER LOCKDOWN

Stan Abbott choo choos over the events of the past year as he tries to write a book

"I've good news and bad news," said my publisher when I finally tracked her down. It was the February day after the 'publication' of the so-called roadmap out of lockdown…

I do paraphrase – as is my wont – but she was much more keen to tell me that my Spring title would be out on time and that she'd lined up Book of the Month in *Cumbria Life* and an interview on Radio Cumbria than she was on sharing the news that my last October's title (*Settle & Carlisle: The Enduring Life of the People's Railway*) had been shunted back… again.

I do feel for her though: the challenge of dealing, not just with the impact of the pandemic but also the fallout from Brexit, would stretch a saint. The positive news about book sales during lockdown conceals the rather obvious fact that some titles have done better than others.

The only purpose of a nice book about the outdoors over the last few months has been the stimulation of yet more lockdown fantasies. Bookshops are deemed non-essential, forcing publishers to become mail order companies at short notice. Social distancing in the workplace, paper supply interruptions and the removal of the European printing option has turned managing a printing schedule into a game of snakes and ladders.

The process of transforming an idea into a published book is never a quick one but I find myself struggling to identify with the conception of *Walking the Line*, which took place sometime BC, or before COVID if you prefer.

I was keen to square an annoyingly unsquared personal circle: having come up with the idea of creating a long distance walk along the route of the celebrated Settle & Carlisle Railway and published the book (at my old Leading Edge Press & Publishing business) in 1990, I had failed personally ever to actually walk more than odd sections of it.

That task actually befell fellow OWPG member Colin Speakman and photographer John Morrison, while Mike Harding, singer, comic and then President of the Ramblers, snipped a ribbon on a fellside above Dentdale to declare the route 'open'

Now my idea was to walk the 90-something miles from the small but perfectly formed market town of Settle to the Border City, stopping at pubs along the way and creating a narrative around the people thus met.

Eager to get a couple of days' walking under my belt before winter, I completed the first two day stages back in October 2019, when COVID was no more than a glint in a fruit bat's eye somewhere east of Sichuan.

The world was all correctly shaped and, leaving my car at Ribblehead, I took a tourist-packed train to Settle, and called in on my old pal Mark Rand, best known for his appearance on TV's *Restoration* as the proud owner of the repurposed water tower at Settle Station.

An aged but highly accomplished trad jazz band at my 'digs' that evening put me in optimistic frame of mind, which only waned upon my first encounter with an unscheduled Pennine bog. I met a superb printmaker at her unlikely exhibition in the station waiting room in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, a mother and son up from London on a bonding break, and an immodest barman at the Station Hotel, Ribblehead. The ascent of Blea Moor the next day, en route to Garsdale Station, remains one of my highlights for the receding view of Yorkshire's Three Peaks and the gradual revelation of the gently folded lush greens of upper Dentdale.

The plan had, of course, been to resume my narrative journey in the Spring… on Sunday, 5 July I was back on the proverbial road, a mere three months late and with the aspiration of starting the journey for my next book now shelved to Spring 2021 (I should be so lucky!).

My wife was uneasy and felt I was taking too many risks, but I had been careful in my choice of pubs in which to stay, although concerned I might not meet

◀ Smardale viaduct on the Settle to Carlisle route

▼ Baron Anthony Hothfield with a maquette of the Lady Anne sculpture

▲ River Eden near Kirkby Thore

enough characters along the way to create engaging content. I needn't have worried: fellow Guild member David Stewart, and his wife, Chris, who run the *Walking World* website, hiked with me on Lady Anne Clifford's Way, put me up in their lofty Pennine fastness and regaled me with stories of mountain rescues and a dramatic drive to rescue an orphaned dog on the very eve of lockdown.

The ebullient John Bucknall, owner of the romantic ruins of Pendragon Castle, gifted me an etching of these, a postulated birthplace of King Arthur, as they were back in the days of the redoubtable Lady Anne herself.

Diane Lawrenson, whose sculpture of Lady Anne now adorns the market place in Kirkby Stephen, improved my understanding of why this woman – who spent most of her adult life fighting to regain her wrongly disinherited lands – is these days revered and respected by people from Westmorland to Wisconsin as a feminist pioneer. The lovely Baron Anthony Hothfield shared with me how it is to be descended from such an icon.

My intended trip down a gypsum mine in Cumbria seemed a forlorn hope until I launched an appeal for help via the pages of The Cumberland and Westmorland Herald, recently plucked from administration by a local entrepreneur. And so it was that I could complement the tougher ascents of my journey with a descent to depths that all but mirrored these in magnitude.

My daily companion was the trusty railway: on each journey – either to my start point in the morning, or back in the evening from each day stage – I was subjected to surreal 'unmarketing' about not travelling so as to leave the carriages free for essential workers. A noble ambition, perhaps, in London or Manchester, but here the only trains that might have been of use to said essential workers, the early morning ones to Carlisle and Leeds, had been suspended and replaced by buses for the duration of COVID restrictions.

I had wondered about ignoring COVID when I returned to writing the book, but concluded it would be like writing a history of the War without mentioning Hitler. That the virus failed to take the edge off the story is as much a tribute to those whom I met as to anything I might personally have wrought from a situation we had all thought was in its twilight stage last July.

Arriving in Carlisle amid near-lockdown was an inevitably flat experience, as I recorded at the time: "I am by now swimming in the Sea of Surreally Disappointing Disappointment; lost in the forest of forgotten fanfares; locked in the Forbidden City of missing sympathies long after the gates have closed. I enter a Costa coffee shop close to the station, as my fluids intake is down by one flask of said drink today, having left this at the Duke's Head in Armathwaite.

"Under COVID rules, it takes three people to serve me an iced coffee: one to ensure I follow the distancing rules, one to take my order and one to pass me the drink and take payment. I hesitate to 'do the math' as the Americans would say, as I fear the answer would be the wrong side of zero from a Costa perspective. Returning outside to the square that fronts the station, there is no-one; only the odd crisp packet blowing in the breeze, and it's not going to buy a flat white any time soon."

Walking the Line: Exploring Settle & Carlisle Country by Stan L. Abbott is published by Saraband in April. Stan is currently working on his second novel and a narrative non-fiction journey through Neolithic Cumbria.

Wordsmith

the man with the world's best job

Kev Reynolds delves into his Memory Box during lockdown

Mountains in far-flung places are pretty much out of bounds for now. It's not just the impact that lack of travel abroad is having on my income from guidebook sales that I mourn, but the frustration Covid travel restrictions must be having on those who were planning their first (or umpteenth) expedition – be that a trek around the Tour of Mont Blanc, or a one-off chance to tackle something big and challenging in the Himalaya. Will 2021 be The Year? Or another whose limited seasons are marred by lockdown and face masks?

I'm lucky. I've had over fifty years of mountain adventures and can accept the limitations, because there's a storage box in my garage that's bursting with dreams and memories, and when I find myself chewing on the woodwork in frustration, I can simply open that box and in moments be transported to some of the World's most spectacular places.

Like many of my colleagues, I've always scribbled notes and observations when Out There, and kept a diary (journal would be too pretentious a word to use) of every one of my mountain trips and expeditions since 1965. And having been lucky enough to earn a living by writing about mountains and leading groups among them, you may depend there are plenty of memories stored in literally hundreds of time-stained notebooks. They can be as powerful as any photo album, bringing to life in an instant the moment those words were created, whether curled up in a storm-bound tent, or huddled in the corner of a hut while a babble of voices fills the spaces. Once again I hear the wind howling, feel the aching limbs, the blistered heel, and know that my nose is splitting like an over-ripe tomato because I failed to use enough glacier cream…

> There are night skies so full of stars you'd need a butterfly net to catch them

But that's just a part of the magic guaranteed to emerge from pages which bear the imprint of time. It's what is recorded in words I can barely decipher today that take me back to days of adventure and beauty – that's what I delve into the diaries to relive.

Most of those diaries originally had red covers, but time has faded a good number of them. But that's part of their charm. They deserve to look as old and battered as me. I'd have it no other way. When they were new, the first few pages would be written in legible script, but before long they were almost indecipherable. Just like me.

So unless there's somewhere special I'll be writing about for a magazine, book or brochure, I'll take a lucky dip into the bran tub of memories, and see what emerges. In an instant I'm no longer in my garage in Kent, but in Morocco's Atlas Mountains. And I'm twenty-one years old; fit, agile and overly-confident, tearing my fingers on the red rock and filling my boots with gravel-like scree as I make a quick descent to my tent. On the flat roof of a muleteer's house I can taste the piping hot mint tea, poured three times at arm's length into a glass, and fear its sweetness will destroy the enamel on my teeth. (Why don't the Berbers all wear dentures?)

Perhaps my hand will bring the Andes of Peru out of the bran tub, and I'm more than thirty years older than I was in Morocco. Thirty years! And there's not been a dull expedition in those thirty years. This time I'm with a family of Quecha Indians and a string of mules. We cross a new pass each day and shuffle beneath glaciers that look as fragile as if made of meringue. We pitch our tents with lakes nearby, and one night feast on mutton roasted in a make-do oven that exists of a hole dug in the ground, lined with dry grass and twigs, then covered with soil and left for half a day. It's as tasty as any mutton I've ever eaten.

Most of the diaries relive days in the Alps or (my first love) the Pyrenees. There are so many of them; every corner of those mountains coming alive in an instant. Sunlit summits on which I raise my arms to touch the sky, or gaze into the distance where one crest after another gathers a duvet of innocent clouds, and peaks I've not yet climbed poke above those clouds to seduce my ambition.

I hear rockfall and avalanche, and draw a bottle of something red and refreshing from a mountain stream at the end of a long, long day. Arriving in spring and settling in a roadless valley, I watch as day follows day and turns springtime into summer. Where first were snowdrifts, flowers appear – not just in the valley where chamois roam, but up there where my fingers search for a hold and touch something soft and delicate. There's birdsong and butterflies, marmots on their haunches, and the clash of ibex horns in the autumn rut when the larchwoods are turning to gold.

There were no larchwoods in Eastern Turkey when I climbed Mount Ararat with a local guide who chain-smoked his way to the summit, nor were there any to record in the Caucasus Mountains before the USSR fell apart. Some of the most exciting mountain scenery I'd ever seen attacked my senses from a lofty glacier on Mount Elbrus when one after another of my companions turned back when the altitude got to them.

More than twenty Himalayan adventures emerge from that storage box as fresh as the days they were written down: faces and voices of Sherpas, porters, cooks and pony-men; the smell of woodsmoke, the taste of cold chapattis and yak cheese strong enough to give you ulcers on your tongue. There are night skies so full of stars you'd need a butterfly net to catch them. There are frail bridges suspended over deafening rivers, glaciers and snowfields and passes whose crossing at daybreak froze my beard and brought tears to my eyes. There are Buddhist monks chanting their prayers, gompas as old as time, the shrieking of cicadas in the foothill jungles, the luxury of ginger tea scooped from a pot of scum and served by a mother and daughter who both blush when I speak…

How can one man be so lucky? I think sometimes that if I'd been born with a brain I might have done something useful with my life, made a name for myself in the City, driven a fancy car and kept my money in an off-shore account. But I failed to pass any exams and left school at fifteen branded a failure. Having nothing but dreams and no interest in money, I became the richest man I know. Delving into that memory box in the garage is my fortune.