



Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SPRING 2022

From the editor...

David Taylor

There's something absent from this issue of *Outdoor Focus* and it's *Wordsmith*, Kev Reynold's regular column. As you'll know by now, Kev passed away last December. I never met Kev but, judging by the many tributes paid since, he was a much-loved man, as well as a prolific and enthusiastic advocate for a life lived outdoors. All I can add is how encouraging Kev was and how much I looked forward to his emails both before and after *Outdoor Focus* went to print. He'll be a miss.

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If you'd like to contribute to the next edition of *Outdoor Focus* please send an email with your article idea to davidtphoto@gmail.com.

The copy deadline is 15 May 2021.



Cover star
Chiz Dakin

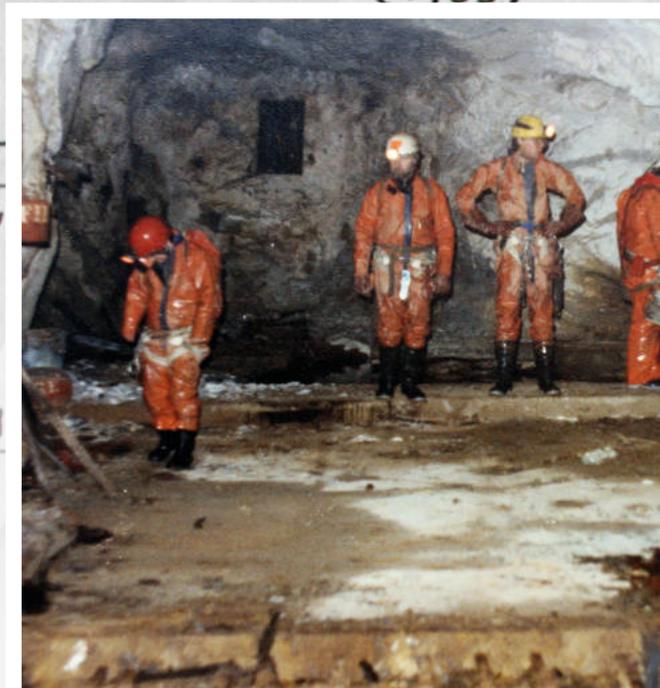
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The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our members cover every field of activity and all corners of the globe. They include writers, journalists, 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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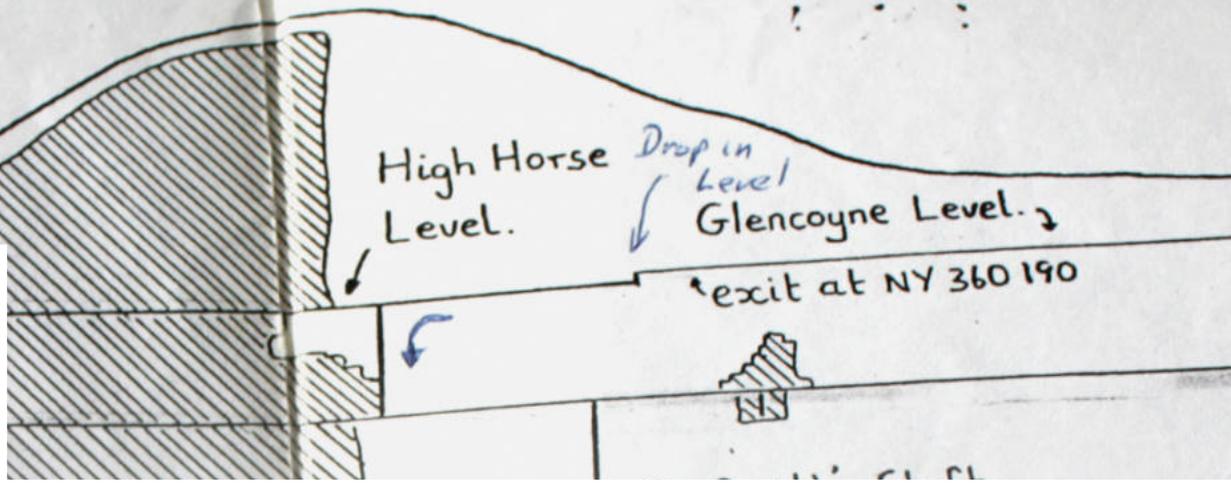
GREENSIDE SECTION (1955)



The chance to go caving at Malham AGM meeting last year brought back a lot of memories of expeditions into Lake District metal mines in my younger days. It all started when John Adams came to teach physics in my department at Trinity School, Carlisle. He joined our after school fell walking club and within a year or two became fascinated with the hundreds of holes in the ground seen on our walks. We joined up with local man Ian Tyler who ran a sports shop in Carlisle at the time as we were doing all of the half marathons and soon found that Ian was an avid mine explorer. He was a member of CAT (Cumbria Amenity Trust) in the south of the county who explored in particular Coniston Copper mines. Ian sold mining gear in his shop so within a short time we were fitted out with SRT gear, Oldham lamps, helmets and all the other paraphernalia for safe expeditions into the mines.

We went everywhere, descending down to Hospital level at Coniston from an entrance shaft at Levers Water and prussiking back to the surface several hundred metres down the valley. However, living at Carlisle, most of our time was spent in the northern fells. John Adams wrote a book *Mines of the Lake District Fells*, published by Dalesman in 1988 and later reprinted.

MINE



EXPLORING LAKE DISTRICT METAL MINES IN THE 1980S AND EARLY 90S

David Ramshaw goes underground



◀ Top of Shaft A at Lucy Tongue level in Greenside mine ▼ Caldbeck barytes mine showing state of timbers in the 1980s

However his frustration at having to wait two years before it was published, as Dalesman already had a mines book on the shelves, was the reason behind myself and John deciding to self-publish a walking guide with local history, based on our experience walking the fells over the previous (in my case 35 years). P3 Publications was born (P3 being Physics lab 3, A-level lab, where we worked on the book after school). Our first book *The English Lakes, the hills, their people, their history* (1994) was a great success and since then I have self-published over 35 books on fell-walking and local Cumbrian history, some self-authored and others put together and edited for clients.

But, getting back to the mining, we did a lot of early exploration with Ian Tyler who set up his mining museum at Threlkeld, later moving to Keswick who also self-published a range of very well-known books about Lake District mines and quarries. Greenside mine was explored by entering through the emergency escape level high up in Glencoyne valley, descending to Lucy Tongue level, which has since been opened up into Greenside valley. The mine is



flooded below Lucy Tongue level. Force Crag mine was explored from Level 1 in the valley, up the Laporte Incline, to the highest level below Sand Hill. We spent a lot of time in the Caldbecks opening up levels which had run in and John made one major find; a previously unseen hand hewn 'coffin' level in the side of the Gill at Raughtongill.

We visited the wad mines at Seathwaite, entering at a level near the top of the fell and descending through the levels and shafts to emerge at the bottom. Unlike the lead mines the levels there are not straight. They follow the large nodules of graphite going this way and that. As we explored Ian surveyed the mine, taking notes and measurements for use later in his books and mine magazines. We came across many artefacts over the years from mine trucks to windlasses, shovels etc. and good luck symbols such as shoes left on

a shelf when a level was closed. Generally all that was left was the metal, the wood having rotted away. Ian later set up MOLES (Mines of Lakeland Exploration Society). I have many images of these adventures in the past and have included a few with this article.



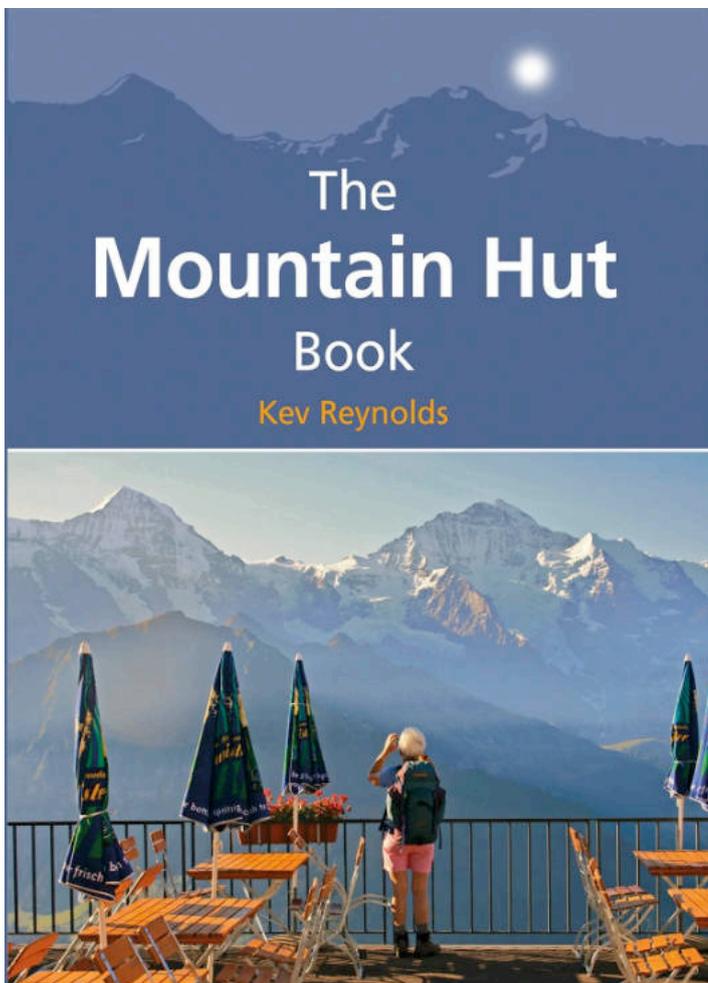
Readers of Outdoor Focus or anyone lucky enough to have attended one of Kev Reynolds' legendary lectures will recall how he often described himself as "the man with the world's best job."

And I would claim, judged from our 40 years of loyal friendship and as an admirer of his many meticulously crafted guidebooks, he was also "the best man at the best job in the world."

The sun was shining as Kev passed peacefully away just three days after his 78th birthday in December last year at his Kentish home, set rather incongruously in the millionaire stockbroker belt between the High Weald and North Downs. His close family – his beloved wife of 54 years Min and their daughters, Claudia and Ilsa – were with him as he embarked upon his final expedition.

KEV REYNOLDS (1943-2021)

Roly Smith pays tribute to the best man at the best job



A fellow Essex "bor", Kev Reynolds was born in the closing years of the Second World War at Ingatestone in 1943. He first fell in love with the mountains on a Boy Scout camping trip to North Wales. Then in 1965, at the age of 21, he had an opportunity to go on a Nansen Club expedition to the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, which he claimed was a life-changing experience.

As he recalled in his semi-autobiographical *A Walk in the Clouds* (2013): "We climbed all and everything that appealed, crossed cols and visited remote valleys and villages, and on one of the 4000m summits I made two decisions which, on reflection, seemed incompatible.

"The first was to marry my girlfriend, and the second was to abandon the job in which I was working Monday to Friday, looking forward to Saturday, and try to find work among mountains. Nearly fifty years on, I have no reason to regret either decision."

He started his working life in advertising and local government, later becoming a youth hostel warden at Crockham Hill in Kent for 18 years between 1968 and 1986. Then, encouraged by former Cicerone boss Walt Unsworth, he wrote his first guidebook in 1978 to what he called "his spiritual home" – the Pyrenees. His *Walks and Climbs in the Pyrenees* is now in its seventh edition.

Kev finally took his "leap of faith" in 1986 when he became a full-time freelance writer. His

inspirational guiding work in the Alps was to introduce thousands of mountain lovers to the Swiss Valais, the Bernese Oberland, the Vanoise, the Austrian Alps and the Dolomites, notably through pioneering his own routes such as the Walkers' Haute Route and the Tour of the Jungfrau Region.

Further afield, in the course of nearly 30 expeditions, Kev explored the Andes, Nepal and the Himalaya. He masterminded at least six guidebooks to the roof of the world, including his best-selling *Everest: A Trekker's Guide* (1995). And he wrote extensively about England too, writing six guidebooks about his homeland of Kent, Sussex, and the Cotswolds from his base in what he jokingly dubbed the "Kentish Alps."

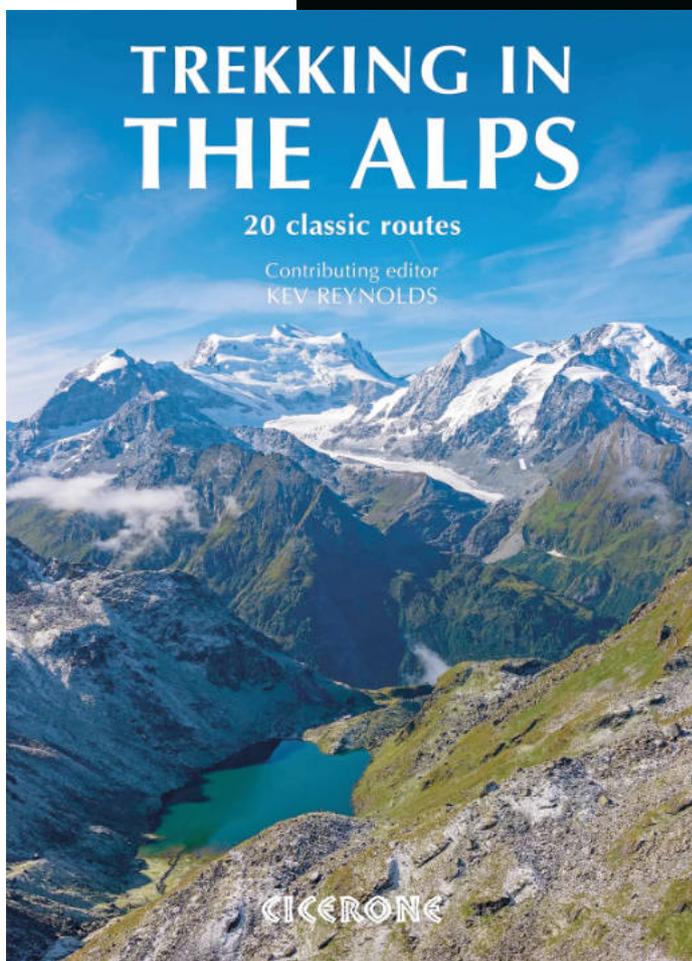
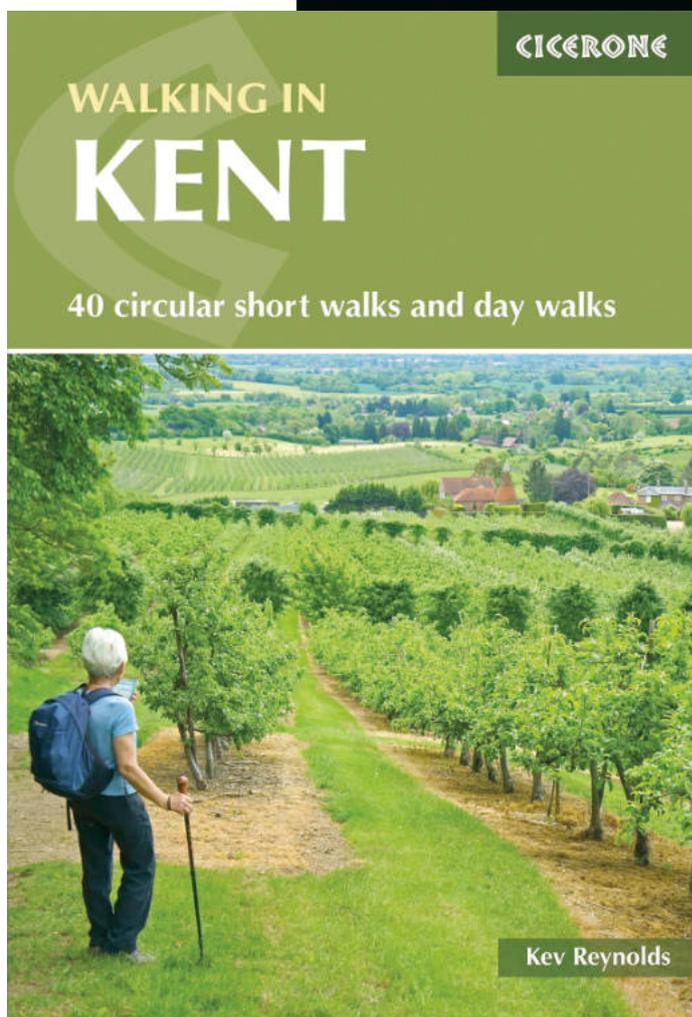


Kev produced over 50 award-winning guides for Cicerone over a period of nearly 40 years. Publisher and Director Jonathan Williams said: "Kev was the most modest of men, and the most professional of writers. We will not see his like again."

"He was a major contributor to the world of the outdoors through his books and his 100-plus lectures a year. It was there that his infectious enthusiasm, deep knowledge, understanding of local people, innumerable stories, fine pictures, ability to communicate and essential decency, allowed him to touch the lives of many."

As Kev once explained: "Enthusiasm is contagious, and there is nothing like reading someone's love of an area to make you want to go and visit it for yourself. I like to think sometimes that my job is a weaver of dreams. I cast those dreams out to the reader so that they can actually make those dreams come true."

Covers of four of the over fifty books Kev wrote or edited for Cicerone during his long career ▶



La Restinga on El Hierro, where a sub-sea eruption took place in 2011 ▼



Ashes to Ashes

Paddy Dillon tries not to erupt when nature foils his plans

When I first started writing about the outdoors, I never thought I'd be dealing with volcanic eruptions, one after another, over a period of ten years. For the most part I've been able to dodge eruptions or dismiss their effects, but now I can't outrun the streams of lava or ignore the ash falling from the sky, and forces beyond my control have obliterated some of my walking routes.

Let's start with Eyjafjallajökull - the volcano that newsreaders dreaded having to mention on a daily basis in April and May 2010. I'd only just been given a contract to write a guidebook covering Iceland when ash from the eruption disrupted flights throughout Europe. The 'ash' was amazing stuff, quite invisible to the naked eye, and like everyone else I found myself staring into the clear blue sky, wondering why all the aircraft had been grounded. It turned out that even microscopic particles of ash can cause havoc inside jet engines.

By the time I reached Iceland in July 2010, tee-shirts were on sale explaining how to pronounce Eyjafjallajökull, so I had no excuse but to learn it. For the record, Icelanders like you to pronounce things properly. Even on the way to my first walk, a bus driver refused to let me take a seat until I pronounced my destination - Hellisheiði - correctly. Sitting in a visitor centre before even setting foot on the trail, things began to sound ominous. Video footage showed boots

A voiceover warned, 'not everyone who ventures onto the lava returns'

crunching across the lava while a voiceover warned, 'not everyone who ventures onto the lava returns'.

I won't forget my trek along the Skógar Trail, crossing the shoulder of Eyjafjallajökull on a glacier that was covered in black ash, my eyes weeping and throat rasping as a gale continually drove fine ash into my face. I decided that I would use the word 'pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis' in my guidebook, regardless of whether or not I contracted the disease from the ash. I was carrying a map that had half its details obscured with pencil scribble.

'I don't care if you already bought a map,' said the warden before I started the trek. 'It's wrong and you have to buy a new map from me for 500 kronur.'

He scribbled on the map, telling me that the trail had been overwhelmed by lava, so he drew me a new trail. He scribbled out a lake, telling me that it had been filled in with ash. He added a couple of extra hills, telling me that they were called Magni and Móði, and that they didn't exist before 2010. In previous years I'd never been able to put hills into a guidebook before they were put into anyone else's guidebook, so I leapt at the chance to include these two!

I returned to Iceland in May 2011, when the sub-glacial Grímsvötn volcano erupted. It's in a very remote part of Iceland that's almost impossible for tourists to reach, and it didn't cause much inconvenience to



anyone. (When the volcano erupted in 1996 it caused a devastating flood which, for a period of a few hours, formed a torrent that exceeded the flow of the mighty Amazon!)

I made another trip to Iceland at the end of June 2011, when a part of the Katla volcano, buried beneath the glacier of Mýrdalsjökull, suddenly saw an increase in geothermal activity. It melted some of the ice and caused a sudden flood that severed the main road in the south of Iceland and disrupted traffic for weeks. Fortunately, I was already further along that road, so my plans weren't affected. I made a couple of trips onto the enormous glacier of Vatnajökull, where the ice was still largely coated in ash from the Grímsvötn eruption, which made my photographs look quite peculiar.

Meanwhile, in the Canary Islands, where I'd just had a guidebook published in 2011 covering El Hierro, a sub-sea volcano erupted just to the south of the island. Geologists say that the Canary Islands are essentially the same island repeated over and over. The way it works is that a volcano erupts from a rift between oceanic plates, forming an island that gets 'welded' to the edge of the African plate, which then slowly drifts east. When another volcano erupts from the rift, another island is formed that also gets 'welded' onto the African plate and drifts east. The same thing happens again and again, so by the time you reach El Hierro, it's almost as if geologists are waiting for the

With my reprint looming, I realised that 10% of my guidebook was off-limits...

same thing to happen again. Sadly, the 2011 eruption barely broke the surface of the ocean before it ceased, so I'll have to wait a while longer before another Canary Island is generated and I can write a guidebook for it.

I thought I was getting good at dodging volcanoes, but in 2014 the Icelandic Bárðarbunga eruption started... and it just wouldn't stop. You probably never heard about the eruption, despite it generating 85 square kilometres of lava at Holohraun,

because it's in a very remote and uninhabited area. However, my Iceland guidebook was coming up for a reprint, so I watched the news intently. I also kept checking the Icelandic weather forecast, www.vedur.is, because that's where they report on earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, as if they were just passing showers!

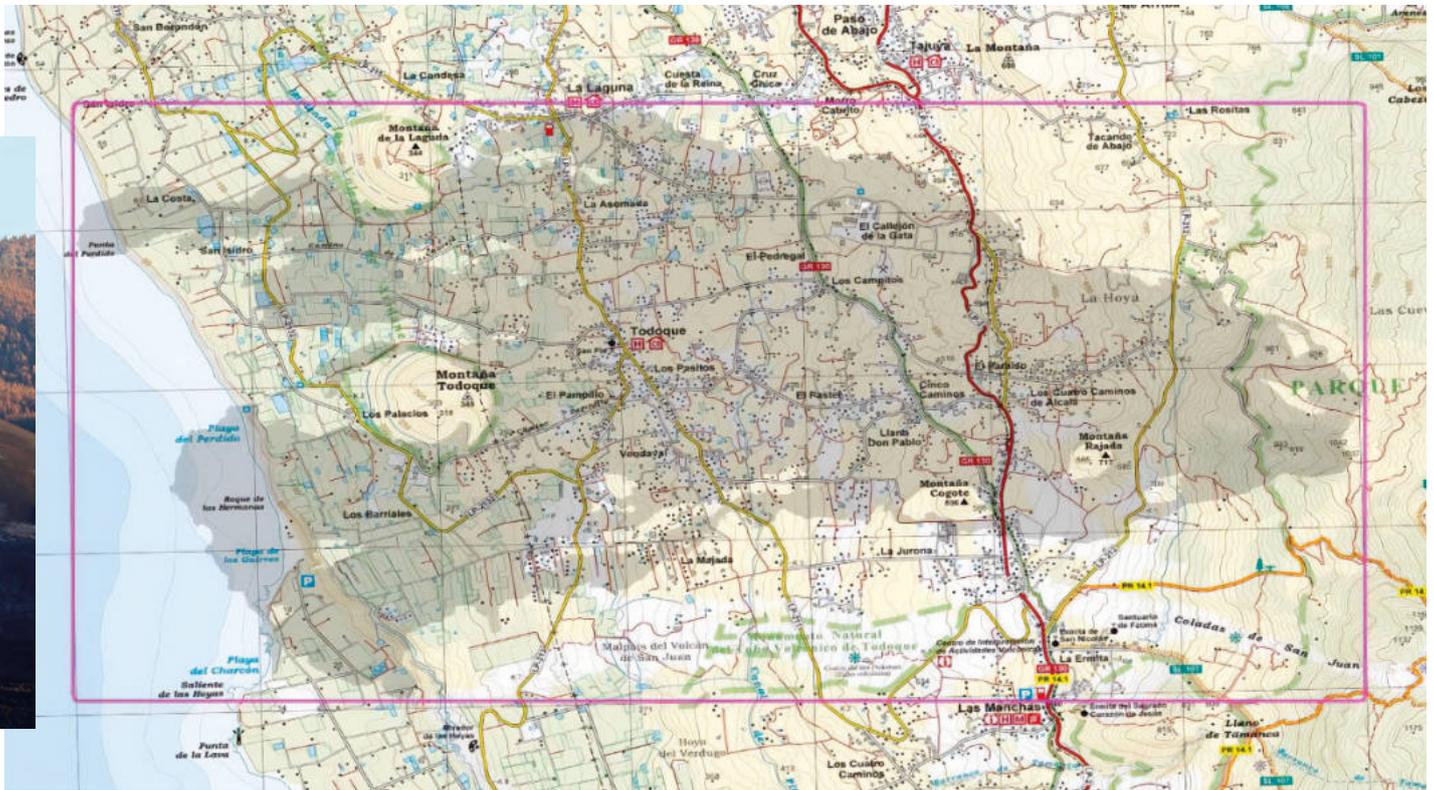
The volcano opened up successive rifts very close to the glacier of Vatnajökull, and there was a danger that if rifts opened up beneath the ice, then a huge flood might cause untold destruction.

There was an extensive exclusion zone, imposed mainly because of poisonous gases that were being vented. With my reprint looming, I realised that 10% of my guidebook was off-limits, and if there was a massive flood, some of my walks might be completely destroyed. However, just as the book was heading to the printer in 2015, the eruption suddenly stopped and I had just enough time to remove all the warnings from my pages.



▲ La Palma's volcano in action (left) and what remained afterwards (right) | Photos © Jordi Ribó





◀ Ash on the ice on Vatnajökull after the Grímsvötn eruption in Iceland in 2011

▲ The latest Editorial Alpina 1:25,000 map of La Palma features the extent of the lava flow, shaded to show the amount of land and property that was destroyed. €1 from the sale of every copy will go towards recovery funds on the island (visit www.editorialalpina.com)

Moving forward to March 2021 the Fagradalsfjall volcano erupted in Iceland, and it was immediately classed as a 'tourist' volcano. That's the Iclander's way of saying it's accessible, interesting, and unlikely to inconvenience anyone. I suppose the newsreaders of the world should be thankful that local folk didn't choose to call it Práinsskjaldarhraun, which was apparently an option at the start of the eruption!

Was it going to affect any of my walks? Well, I watched video footage day by day as the lava filled a hollow in the hills, then it spilled through gaps and raced downhill. It came very close to one of my walks then stopped short. The main change is that a quiet dirt road I described in my book became the main access road for countless thousands of volcano watchers. I loved seeing pictures of people cooking sausages on the lava, but I didn't get a chance to visit and the eruption ceased in September 2021. However, not all volcanic eruptions are so entertaining.

When I wrote my guidebook to La Palma in 2010, I described the 'Ruta de los Volcanes' and mentioned in passing that volcanoes had belched lava along the crest of the Cumbre Vieja in 1480, 1585, 1646, 1677, 1712, 1949 and 1971. I should have realised that I might not have to wait too long for another one, so there I was in September 2021, watching the news day after day as lava spilled across one of my

I watched video footage day by day as the lava filled a hollow in the hills...

walking routes, severed roads, demolished houses, wiped out businesses and ruined livelihoods. Mounds of ash covered more of my walking routes, effectively obliterating them. See the map (supplied by kind permission of Editorial Alpina) showing the area covered by the lava and the loss of almost 3,000 buildings and agricultural land.

An extensive exclusion zone effectively rendered half of the routes in my guidebook un-walkable. In fact, I'd also included the 'Ruta de los Volcanes' in another guidebook, as it's an integral part of the GR131 trekking route that runs through all seven of the Canary Islands. Anyone hoping to do that trek at the moment will have to accept that one of the best parts is currently off-limits, even though the eruption ceased in the middle of December 2021.

I guess I'd got off lightly with volcanic eruptions until this last one on La Palma. There's nothing I can do with the routes in my guidebook until the islanders spend a long time doing some very expensive repairs and reconstruction. I have no idea what happens to the property rights of anyone whose land, houses or businesses have been buried beneath lava, but there has been some talk of the eruption zone being declared a nature reserve and equipped with informative trails. Time will tell, and eventually I'll make my way there, check my routes and update my guidebook.

www.paddydillon.co.uk

A QUESTION OF STILES

Bagging peaks, islands, tarns or trails is too mainstream for Guild member **Andrew McCloy**. He gets his kicks from gates, gaps, ginnels and snecklifters – welcome to the wonderful world of the stile nerd.

It all began as a bit of a joke, with Kendal-based head teacher Mark Squires pausing on his daily runs from home to post photos of local stiles on Twitter. He admitted it was a light-hearted throwaway, a response to the irate and opinionated voices on social media; but soon others began sharing their own photos of everyday stiles and gates. It intensified further during successive lockdowns, as people sought escape, humour and harmless new hobbies.

Perhaps it's also a celebration of local heritage and distinctiveness – and such variety, too! From the ubiquitous wooden step-stile, with rails and posts, or stone steps abutting a wall (including high ladder stiles), through to wall gaps so familiar across northern England. These are variously known as squeeze stiles, squeezers, wedge stiles or vee stiles, plus there are zigzag stiles where upright stones or pillars form a barrier.

Where it starts to get seriously exciting for stile aficionados (and believe me it does) is when you come across an unusual design, such as a mechanical version. These are often homemade affairs reflecting the inventiveness of a particular landowner or farmer; but some of the more elaborate historic metal designs date from the 1850s when you could order them ready-made from estate catalogues. Older still are the so-called grid stiles that you can still find embedded in paths dotted around the parishes of west Cornwall, which were the forerunner of modern cattle grids.

There is no end to the variations of over-

stiles and through-stiles once you begin to look around the countryside. Before long you find yourself admiring well-made kissing gates or pondering over regional variations in farm gate patterns (five bar, diagonal brace - must be Cumbrian); and just wait till you come across a top-opening wooden stile with a lifting bar! Some of these so-called clapper stiles are surprisingly old, with distinctive local names like falling stiles, tumbling stiles and even ladies' stiles.

As more and more photos of stiles, wall gaps and other unusual pedestrian crossing points were shared on social media it culminated, perhaps inevitably, in a competition. The first stile 'world cup' was held in 2021, with entrants submitting their favourite stile photo and the winner decided via a series of knock-out rounds of Twitter polls. The latest, #StileCup2022 held in January, attracted 164 entries, with the winner being a delightful stone stile-and-steps combination at Creswell Crags submitted by Nic Jones (my Cornish stile entry was knocked out in the semi final).

So, when you tire of ticking off the Munros or Wainwrights, slow down and look closer to home. At first sight the humble stile may appear as functional path furniture, perhaps a faintly annoying obstacle to be negotiated on a walk; but for some of us that measured gap in the wall, or artfully contrived series of stones or wooden planks, is a thing of beauty, craftsmanship and ingenuity – something that never goes out of, well, style.





Clockwise from top left: 'Pulpit' stile, Wester Ross by Mark Squires/@LakesStiles • Stile at Ardtaraig, Argyll & Bute by Quintin Lake - winner of #StileCup2021 • Traditional granite stile near Cape Cornwall by Andrew McCloy • Stile at Bamford, Derbyshire by Andrew McCloy • Stile at Creswell Crags, Derbyshire by Nic Jones - winner of #StileCup2022

THREE MONTHS TO AN AMAZON BESTSELLER

Julia Goodfellow-Smith shares her tips and tricks

Having had an unsuccessful attempt at self-publishing in the past, I decided to get some help when I was ready to write *Live Your Bucket List*. I joined Self-Publishing School's Become a Bestseller programme and followed their process to self-publish within three months. In this article, I have summarised the four-step process I used - commit yourself, plan your book, write your book and sell your book.

Commit yourself

As many members of OWPG know, it is not easy to write a book. Without deadlines and a publisher chasing for your manuscript, you need to be disciplined to maintain momentum. It helps to understand why you are writing the book and to identify – and tackle – the things that might stop you from completing the project.

To deepen my commitment further, I used social media to announce my intention to write a book, including the planned launch date. I would have been hugely embarrassed if I hadn't then followed through. This gave me little room for self-doubt or procrastination.

Plan your book

If you want to be published in three months, you need to move fast. I allowed myself:

- Four weeks to write the first draft. I was aiming for 35,000 words, so set a daily target of 1,500 words
- Ten days for self-editing
- Three weeks for professional editing
- Two weeks for cover design and formatting
- Two weeks to recruit a launch team and another two for them to read the book before publication.
- One week for admin, for example, uploading the book to Kindle Direct Publishing and Ingram Spark

Write your book

If you want to turn a book around quickly, it helps if the book is short (in my case, I was aiming for roughly 35,000 words) and already researched.

When writing, I use a simple process. Whatever I'm writing - a speech, a book or a blog - I usually start by creating a mind map of everything I might want to include.

For *Live Your Bucket List*, my mind map helped me to determine the overall structure of the book. I then decided on the structure of each chapter and created a mind map for each (below).



I try not to edit the rough draft in any way as I write it. OWPG member Jon Doolan once shared the analogy with me of writing like a puppy and editing like a cat. At this stage, you can be enthusiastic and drool all over your writing, as if you were a puppy.

Once the first draft is complete, you can channel your inner cat and become ruthless with your manuscript:

- Does your plan still convey what you want? Does your book follow the plan?
- Is your writing captivating:
 - Have you used good storytelling techniques?
 - Have you used all five senses? I am very



Julia Goodfellow-Smith is the Secretary of OWPG and author of *Live Your Bucket List* and *Cycling King Alfred's Way: A Piece of Cake?*

visual and this showed strongly in the first draft of *Live Your Bucket List*. It was less evident in the first draft of my latest book, *Cycling King Alfred's Way: A Piece of Cake?*

- Have you used strong verbs? For example, using the verb 'striding' gives a far clearer picture of what is happening than simply 'walking'.
- Are you helping the reader to experience emotion, or just telling them about it?
- Is your writing easy to understand? I use the incredibly useful online Hemingway app (www.hemingwayapp.com) to help me identify linguistic knots that I need to unravel.
- Is your grammar correct? I run my manuscripts past Grammarly (www.grammarly.com) to check for any obvious errors.

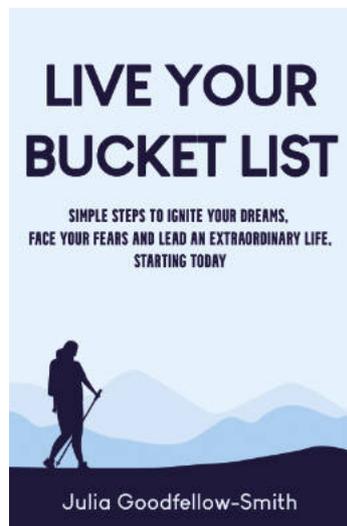
By this stage, you may have made a lot of changes to the manuscript. I find that reading the whole thing out loud before sending it to the editor allows me to spot additional errors and areas for improvement.

Sell your book

This article is about how to create an Amazon bestseller, so that is what I am focusing on. Around 70% of all book sales are through Amazon, so if you don't sell through them, you are missing out.

I used a professional editor, cover designer and formatter to make sure that I did justice to my efforts. If a book is not professionally produced, it will not sell as well as one that is.

While that is being done, it's a good time to recruit a launch team - the



lifeblood of a successful Amazon book launch. Members buy the book in the first few days, talk about it on social media, leave Amazon reviews and drive sales. However, the book is your priority, not your launch team's. You will need to remind a lot of them a few times before they do what they have pledged to.

Within two weeks of publication, most of my launch team bought the book and around half left a review. I understand that's pretty normal. So, if you want 50 reviews – enough to give your book credibility on Amazon – you will need at least 100 people on your launch team.

If you want your book to be a #1 Amazon bestseller, you need to pick your categories carefully. You can choose up to ten for each format. Make sure that at least one of those categories has lower sales volumes, making it easier to hit the #1 spot. I use Publisher Rocket for category sales data (www.publisherrocket.com).

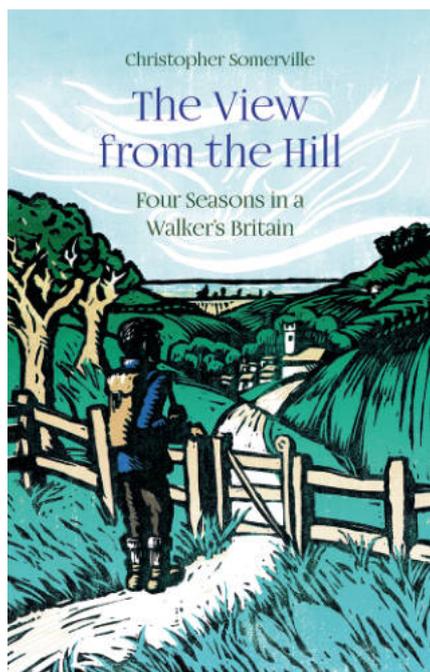
Having a launch team gets you noticed – *Live Your Bucket List* quickly became a 'hot new release' in various categories and #1 bestseller in one.

For me, being a bestseller was valuable, even if it didn't relate to £1,000's of sales in the short term. Having good reviews and being a bestseller validate the quality of my work. I have secured a well-paid corporate speaking gig with the help of this accolade, and my book sales are higher than average for non-fiction books.

Only you will know whether there's value for you in doing something similar with your next book.

www.juliags.com

Book Reviews / Roly Smith



The View from the Hill

Christopher Somerville

Haus Publishing, £16.99 (hb)

Being a rambling correspondent, as Christopher Somerville has been for *The Times* for many years, can sometimes raise a few sniggers in the newsroom, as I can confirm during my own journalistic career.

Of course, the newshounds and subs erroneously relate the title not to the activity but to your style of writing. However, Somerville's meticulous prose could never be described as rambling, and his latest offering, culled from the 450 notebooks he'd kept during a lifetime of walking, might better be described as a miscellany of magical memories.

Faced with the enforced hibernation of lockdown, Somerville turned to the dog-eared, battered notebooks he'd made during 40 years of wandering the British countryside, to revive and re-live the best and most memorable moments.

The result, in nearly 150 pithy, engaging and erudite essays, is a literary tour de force, an enchanting voyage of discovery and wonder through some of the most beautiful and fascinating landscapes of Britain. And all this in the jovial company of one of Britain's most popular countryside writers.

The View from the Hill follows the cycle of the seasons from a January snowhole on the Fiaicall Ridge in the Arctic Cairngorms to a spectacular Christmas sunrise viewed from a Neolithic long barrow near his Bristol home. In between are recollections of walks that take in everything from the vagaries of weather to geological and wildlife wonders and ancient traditions and folklore. All are narrated with moving and often humorous delight, particularly when local experts are his guide.

But Somerville also reveals himself as the world's worst backpacker. In an hilarious chapter entitled *I got 99 problems and a tent ain't one*, he recounts an uncomfortable night of incessant rain, thistles under bare feet, a missing tent pole and spent torches endured on the island of

Lundy in the Bristol Channel.

This is a book you can dip into at any page and be transported to a place and time where the wonders of these sceptred isles are revealed in clear, concise – never rambling – prose by a worthy successor to one of the author's personal heroes, the eminent walker/naturalist John Hillaby. No praise can be higher than that.

Westering: Footways and folkways from Norfolk to the Welsh Coast

Laurence Mitchell

Saraband, £9.99 (pb)

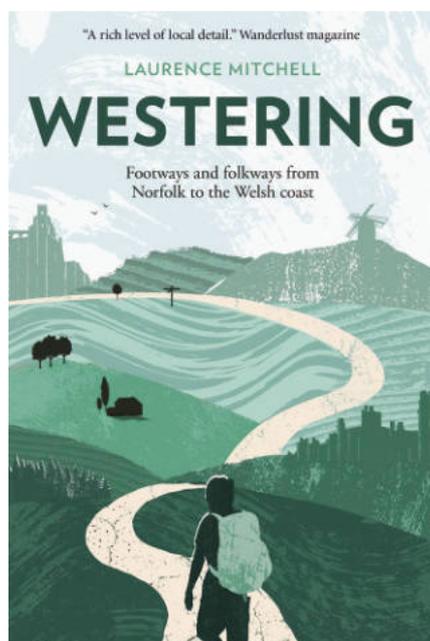
This book describes a quite different, more southerly coast-to-coast walk, starting at Great Yarmouth on the Norfolk coast, wending through the Fens, the Midlands and central Wales and ending in the ancient market town of Aberystwyth on Cardigan Bay.

The author freely admits his route goes against the grain of the land, but by taking this slightly contrary route, he visits places which are often overlooked by most walking guides. These include John Clare's hated enclosed Northamptonshire fields; the haunted deserted medieval villages of the Midlands; ancient, long-forgotten battlefields, and valleys drowned by reservoirs for the surrounding thirsty cities, like those in the Elan Valley of mid-Wales.

This is not your usual

directional guide but more of a narrative travelogue of the author's journey – he calls it a “drift” – roughly between 52 and 53 degrees north and linking two rivers “Y” – the estuaries of the Yare and Ystwyth.

As such it is a treasure trove of unexpected and little-known facts written by a travel writer with an insatiable interest in walking, landscape and local history. Because it passes through the industrial West Midlands and Black Country, it will never become an officially recognised National Trail. But that wasn't the writer's intention in any case. He succeeds in his primary objective, which is to make a connection with the past and the people who created the varied landscapes of Middle England and Wales through what he rather grandiosely describes as “the



psychogeography of liminal places.” enthusiast and a skilled, professional storyteller. Highly recommended.

Two Men in a Boat: Rowing Two Rivers

Martin Andrew

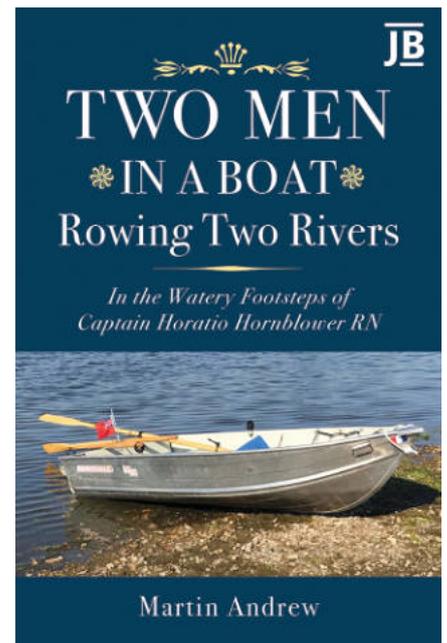
Journey Books, £14.99 (hb)

Unashamedly pinching its title from Jerome K Jerome's hilarious 1889 novel *Three Men in a Boat* set on the Thames, there are only two men (and no Montmorency the dog) in Martin Andrews' boat.

But Andrews and his best friend Richard Robinson prove to be equally entertaining guides in their extended jaunt along the British Severn and the Loire in France. Both avid Hornblower fans, they set out to retrace what he strangely repeatedly calls the “footprints” (surely paddle prints?) of the fictional Captain Horatio Hornblower as he escapes from the French by rowing boat in 1811 in C. S. Forester's 1930s Napoleonic War novel.

After some deliberation, they decided to have a trial run in their newly acquired 10-foot aluminium rowing boat named *Flying Colours* after the title of Forester's 1938 novel, on the River Severn from the Welsh border to Deerhurst. This journey, and for my money the most interesting part of their trip, takes up well over half of the book.

And there are a few similarities between Andrews' and



Hornblower's journeys. Both had their boats stolen at some stage, and in the case of the *Two Men*, their journey down the Loire was terminally interrupted and only revived after an enforced break of 16 months with a new but identical boat.

Both rowers are keen architectural historians, so the text is enlivened with fascinating observations and facts about local buildings, bridges and the historic villages and towns en route. And the author's irrepressible sense of humour, which survived several dunkings in both the Severn and the Loire, shines undiminished throughout. At least that's something he shares with the original *Three Men* (not forgetting Montmorency) – but most certainly not with the stiff upper lip, buttoned-up reserve of Horatio Hornblower.

Big Weekend 2021/extra photos



Looking out over Malham Cove | Ronald Turnbull



Owl sculpture | Chris Howes

Blea Moor | Chris Howes



Moorland gathering | Jacquetta Megarry

Evening meal | Chris Howes