

A photograph of a forest with tall, slender trees and a dense carpet of bluebells in the foreground. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark band at the top.

Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SPRING 2023

Contents

- 2** **Big Weekend** Kevin Sene describes what's in store for members at this year's Big Weekend
- 4** **Artificial Intelligence for Outdoor Writers** Julia Goodfellow-Smith (machine) learns about AI
- 6** **You Might (or Might Not) Know...** Chris Howes puts your knowledge of caving to the test
- 8** **Austria and Liechtenstein with a little 'un** Chris Scaife takes his son Oscar across the Alps
- 10** **Beach of Dreams** Martyn Howe on a project to walk the coastline of the UK and Ireland in 2025
- 11** **Inspirational outdoor books** David Taylor nominates *First Light* by Joe Cornish
- 12** **Gritstone Co-operative** Andrew Bibby on a more communal approach to publishing
- 13** **Picture... Nothing!** Paddy Dillon is forced to make a change....
- 14** **Book Reviews** Roly Smith reviews the latest outdoor books



Cover David Forster

Bluebell Wood in County Durham, England. See more examples of David's photography on his website: www.david-forster.com

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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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 2022.

Big Wee

This year's Big Weekend will be from 13-16 October on the Isle of Cumbrae.

Isle of Cumbrae

Heading west from Glasgow, the River Clyde soon shakes off its shipbuilding past and opens out into the Firth of Clyde, a wilder area with spectacular island views.

Ferries for the short hop across to Cumbrae leave from the seaside resort of Largs. By road, Cumbrae's one and only town, Millport, is then just a few minutes away, set attractively on the shores of a bay. It has most of the facilities that you would expect of a tourist destination including pubs, cafes, a chemist and a bank.

While many people visit for cycling and other outdoor activities, sights include the Cathedral of the Isles - the smallest cathedral in the British Isles - and Garrison House, a community centre that houses the Museum of the Cumbraes.

The island's smaller neighbour, Little Cumbrae, lies across the bay and is widely known as 'Wee Cumbrae', while others nearby include the Isle of Arran and the Isle of Bute. Cumbrae itself also goes under the names of Great Cumbrae and Millport.



▲ Millport with the spire of the Cathedral of the Isles rising above the trees

FSC Millport

The venue for this year's Big Weekend is the Field Studies Council centre on the outskirts of Millport. Reception is in a grand old building that used to be a marine biological research station making this perhaps the only Big Weekend destination ever to have its own aquarium, slipway and scientific library. The aquarium and a small marine-themed museum alongside are another tourist destination.

Weekend 2023

Kevin Sene describes what's in store for members at this year's Big Weekend



▲ The main entrance to FSC Millport

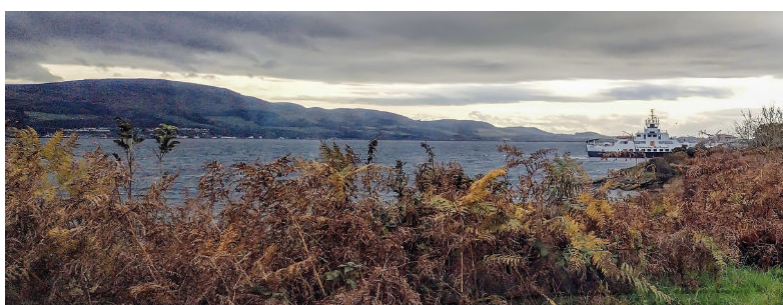
Most guests are housed in two modern outbuildings with ensuite accommodation and we will have sole use of the main conference centre. This is located in a purpose-built building nearby which includes a smaller room alongside for workshops and an annex which can also serve as a bar. Shared lounges and a bar are also available in the main building. The Garrison Motorhome Site is just a short walk away with electrical and water hookups; book early if you'd like to stay there.

Programme for the weekend

Following tradition, we'll be sending out an email in late March sounding out interest in a range of activities before deciding on the final programme.

Cycling seems to be a must as it is billed as the 'National Sport of Cumbrae' and there is a popular half day route around the island. For hillwalkers, the Inner Circle Walk to the island's highest ground should provide great views of the Firth and mainland.

We're also looking into whether a boat trip will be feasible and maybe a taster rock climbing session on the centre's own bouldering wall, which lies on a crag within



▲ The Calmac ferry arriving from Largs

the grounds. Discussions have already started on workshops too.

As usual, the AGM, meal and awards ceremony will begin late on Saturday afternoon. Following last year's trial run, we're also planning to have a book table again. This is a chance to view recent examples of books published by members and to buy a copy if you like what you see. You are also welcome to bring examples of your own work for display.



▲ Cyclists on the round-island tour

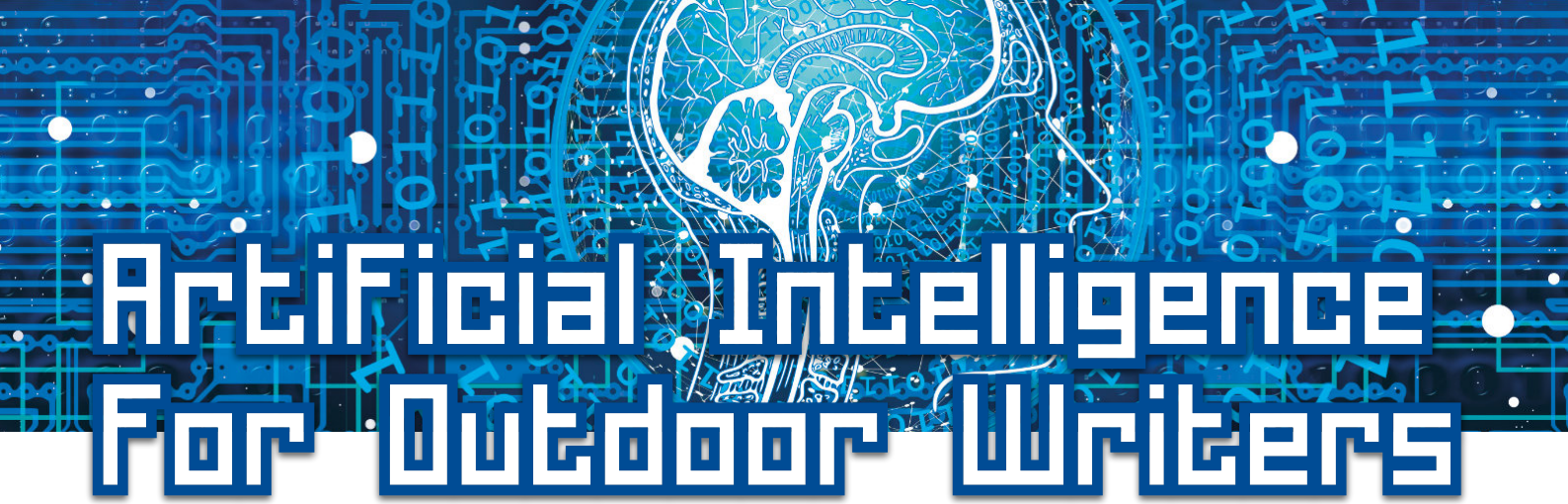
Getting there

The island is easily accessible by road and public transport with Largs lying about 35-40 miles west (ish) of Glasgow. Calmac ferries operate up to mid evening and take about ten minutes for the crossing, with a half hourly service at busy times.

By rail, the trip from Glasgow to Largs takes about an hour and then it's a short walk to the ferry departure point. On arrival, the ferry is met by a service bus which stops near the centre. Other members will help out with a lift if you get stuck.

The story so far

So, that's the plan so far and we hope you can make it for what should be an enjoyable social weekend away, with plenty to explore nearby if you want to make a longer trip of it. As always, new members are particularly welcome. Check in should be available during the afternoon on Friday 13 October with the programme starting that evening and ending on the Sunday evening. Many members stay the full three nights but you are welcome to make a shorter trip if you can't do that.



Artificial Intelligence For Outdoor Writers

Julia Goodfellow-Smith (machine) learns a thing or two about AI

In the last few months, a buzz has been developing around artificial intelligence (AI) - including a discussion on the OWPG Forum

GPT3, a natural language generation tool developed by OpenAI, has been trained on 45 terabytes of data. This is equivalent to 3-4 times the amount of reading a human can do in their lifetime and has led to AI-authored writing that is indistinguishable from human-authored writing for most readers (Clark et al. 2021).

Does this development pose an existential threat to outdoor writers?

Whether we like it or not, GPT3 and other AI 'foundation models' are forming the basis of many tools now available to generate copy. I think they provide an exciting opportunity to develop and improve our writing services. If we try to fight AI, we will lose - it is better to learn to work with it and become AI-assisted writers.

How can outdoor writers use artificial intelligence?

Here are five ways I think we can use AI in our writing businesses:

1 As a creative prompt. For example, I asked Hyperwrite to 'write me a description of what it's like to see a flock of goldfinches'. The response included phrases I could imagine adapting: 'they look almost like sparks of light as they flit from branch to branch' and 'when they take off in a flock, it's like a shower of gold'. Of course, you wouldn't just use the descriptions provided verbatim - we still want to write in our own voice, and AI does get things wrong, too. The same prompt suggested that they fly in

formation, something I have certainly never seen.

2 To optimise websites for search engines. AI Writer's SEO Editor asks you to choose a keyword. It then generates a list of other words that will boost your search engine ranking for the selected keyword. It scores your writing, claiming that if you reach 100, you have a 73% chance of outranking any other website on that keyword. Our skill as writers is to maintain the integrity of the writing while using more of those words.

3 To write blurbs or sales copy. I told Ryter the title of my book, *Live Your Bucket List*, and inputted my existing blurb. Its suggestions for sales copy included: 'Ready to embark on an extraordinary journey? Live Your Bucket List is the perfect guide to help you take charge of your life and start living your dreams today!' And 'Unlock the potential inside you - get started with Live Your Bucket List today!' If, like me, you're self-published but not very good at writing sales copy, a tool like this could be handy. Nevertheless, you will need to edit the output to keep the best bits and remove the nonsense. In this case, the sales copy also included 'written by a certified life coach', which is incorrect.

4 To translate. AI is making translation more viable by producing the first draft and thus reducing cost.

5 To narrate. Tools such as Podcastle can generate audio from text, and you can train them with your own voice. They could be useful for producing audiobooks at a lower cost.

References and links

I was first alerted to the possibilities of AI for writers by Joanna Penn on **The Creative Penn** podcast (www.thecreativepenn.com). She has written a book on AI, Blockchain and Virtual Worlds (www.bit.ly/AI-BC-VW) and has a course – The AI-Assisted Author (www.bit.ly/CPC-AI).

Elizabeth Clark, Tal August, Sofia Serrano, Nikita Haduong, Suchin Gururangan, and Noah A Smith: *All That's 'Human' Is Not Gold: Evaluating Human Evaluation of Generated Text.* *arXiv preprint arXiv:2107.00061* (2021).

Stanford University's report on the Opportunities and Risks

of Foundation Models: www.stanford.io/414Ky9p

Grammarly plagiarism checker is available as part of its Premium subscription or free here: www.bit.ly/Gram-PC

Is copyright broken? www.bit.ly/Copyright-broken

The Alliance of Independent Authors' Ethical Author Code www.bit.ly/ethical-author

Tools mentioned in the article

www.openai.com · www.ai-writer.com · www.rytr.me ·

www.hyperwriteai.com · www.podcastle.ai/editor/projects

You are probably using tools powered by AI already, including grammar checkers, the 'Auto' button on photo-editing software, search engines and dictation tools. We are already AI-assisted – this new development just broadens the scope.

I asked HyperWrite to write on the same topic. This is the unedited result:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming ever more prevalent in the world of outdoor writing. Here are five ways that writers can make use of the technology to improve their work.

1 Automated Research: AI can be used to quickly search for relevant and up-to-date information, freeing up writers to focus on crafting their work.

2 Automated Editing: AI can be used to help writers edit their work, pointing out potential errors or suggesting improvements.

3 Automated Writing: AI can be used to generate content from a given set of parameters, creating drafts of articles which can then be edited and refined by the writer.

4 Automated Image Recognition: AI can be used to detect, classify, and recognise objects in images, allowing writers to quickly create captions for their articles.

5 Automated Media Analysis: AI can be used to analyse audio or video

content, allowing writers to quickly and easily identify interesting patterns or topics to write about.

AI is becoming an increasingly important tool for outdoor writers, and these are just a few of the ways that it can be used to improve their work.

Is it ethical to use AI in our writing?

There are several ethical issues related to the use of AI in writing, including:

Plagiarism. I used Grammarly's plagiarism checker for this article, and it found 4%, none of which concerned me.

Copyright of the base data used to train the models. What texts are the foundation models based on? Should the authors be paid for their contribution? Is this different from reading books, blogs and papers as part of our research?

Quality of the base data used to train the models. Existing gender, racial, disability and other biases from base data are built into these models. If this is not addressed by the models or the writers working with them, those biases will be amplified as new writing is fed back into the loop.

Passing off AI output as our own. In Britain, any words a person creates by prompting an AI language generator are that person's copyright. We don't have to declare the use of such tools. But should we do so? The Alliance of Independent Authors thinks we should. It has added a clause to its Ethical Author Code to 'declare the use of AI and other tools, where appropriate'.

Definition of artificial intelligence

Open AI 'Highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work.'

IBM 'Artificial intelligence leverages computers and machines to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind.'

YOU MIGHT (OR MIGHT NOT) KNOW...

Chris Howes invites you to put your knowledge of caving to the test...

The December, pre-Christmas OWPG blether proved... challenging for most. Those present on Zoom appreciated all the effort that had gone into the production of a quiz, with variable (ahem) results generally proving ignorance rather than extreme knowledge. At least in my case.

So instead of looking upwards at mountains and moorlands and weather and all, here is your challenge: to record your answers (and guesses) without any Smartphone or computer in sight, with a post-Christmas quiz dedicated to caves. Yes, those pesky holes that represent not an Everest to be climbed 'because it's there', but

depths to descend because the rock is not there.

This is not a fiendish quiz (though cavers would mostly find it easy), but perhaps more an excuse to reveal a little of the wonders of the underground - the objective is to entertain, not to expect you to know all the answers. You have a lucky 13 questions, with a maximum of 24 marks to attain (those tuning in at the end of the blether have a slight head start). The answers will be printed in the next issue. Oh, and if you attempt this quiz at a later date, bear in mind that new caves and passages are being discovered all the time, so the answers might change...

1 **Where** and **how long** is the world's longest known cave?

2 **Where** and **how deep** is the world's deepest known cave?



3 **Where** and **how long** is the UK's longest known cave? Clue: it contains this interesting roof...

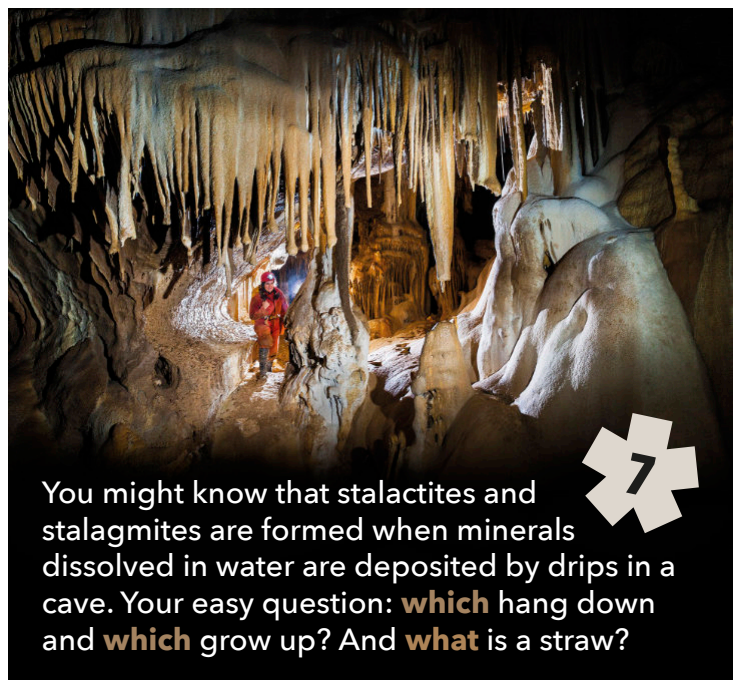
4 **Where** and **how deep** is the UK's deepest known cave?

5 **How many** caves in the UK and Ireland are longer than 1km?

- A Fewer than 50
- B About 100
- C More than 150

6 **Which** forces are involved in forming caves? Here's a hint: remember your schooldays and the effects of rain...

- A Geology
- B Chemistry
- C Biology



You might know that stalactites and stalagmites are formed when minerals dissolved in water are deposited by drips in a cave. Your easy question: **which** hang down and **which** grow up? And **what** is a straw?



8

Staying with cave formations, **what** are phytokarst and phytogens - typically found in tropical caves? A clue is in the photo above.

9

Passages might be defined as phreatic or vadose, but **what** does this mean?

10

Imagine a cave passage carrying water that flows into a sump (think of this being like a U-bend under your sink: an old name for a sump was 'trap' or 'siphon'). **How** can cavers estimate how much traversable cave passage has yet to be discovered beyond the sump?



11

Scallops tell us much about caves... **how**?



12

Gaping Gill (left) is a cave in the Yorkshire Dales with a vertical entrance shaft that, traditionally, was considered to be 365 ft deep (one for every day of the year). **When** was the first successful descent made?

- A 1840
- B 1876
- C 1895

13

The media, aside from considering those interested in the underground to be mad, uses a variety of names to describe them. **What** is the difference between a caver, a potholer, a spelunker and a speleologist?



Austria and Liechte



Having grown up in the hills of northern England, at 16 months old my son Oscar went on his first walking holiday in the Alps. My wife Carolina and I chose the Ratikon range, where Austria and Switzerland meet Liechtenstein, for a number of reasons: it looked stunning in photographs; the walking seemed straightforward enough that a child could be carried fairly easily; Carolina and I had been to Austria just once before, when we were locked into a graveyard while looking for hamsters – sorry, no time to explain; and I hadn't dared to dream that one day I would visit Liechtenstein.

We started in Austria, flying out to Innsbruck and travelling by train to Bludenz. The dramatic and wild scenery all around was making me wonder why I hadn't been to the Alps for so long. It must have been at least ten years – I must promise myself not to leave it another decade before I return.

We stayed in Bludenz, a lovely town in a fairytale setting of forests and mountains, then travelled by bus and cable car to the large mountain lake known as Lünensee, where our three-day hike began. Easy to reach by public transport, with cerulean waters and soaring peaks, it was no surprise that this was a popular place. Pleasingly, almost everyone was there to walk around the lake, so before long we were walking in relative solitude.

The lakeside path was smooth and child-

friendly, but Oscar stayed in the child carrier as we walked, for the simple reason that he had fallen asleep. I wish he'd sleep in his bed at night as well as he does in the carrier during the day. He woke when we found a quiet spot for lunch, and we let him have a little wander. It's good to stretch your legs from time to time and he seemed impressed by the scenery.

We were struck on this walk by the abundance and diversity of wildflowers, even though we were there in mid-July – a couple of months too late to see the Alpine meadows at their best. A far cry from our local sheepwrecked (to borrow an excellent word from George Monbiot) Lake District and Yorkshire Dales, in the Ratikon we were surrounded by the blooming marvellous.

There was a dairy farm beside our first hut – Lindauer Hütte – and a pint of

unpasteurised milk was a welcome refreshment at the end of the day's walk. We were a little apprehensive about staying in Alpine huts as it's not as if Oscar was generally sleeping through the night. To our immense surprise, we were given a private room. I had no idea that was even an option.

Day two comprised a long, zigzagging uphill, followed by a steady and sedate descent. Having read that there were in situ ropes at the top of the pass, it did cross our minds that perhaps we were biting off more than we could chew and being irresponsible parents, but in fact the



▲ Carolina carrying Oscar towards Carschinahütte

nstein with a little 'un

Chris Scaife takes his son Oscar on his first walk through the Alps

ropes were mere handlines beside a straightforward path. We stopped for lunch at the Tilisunahütte, watching marmots as we dined, and soon crossed the border into Switzerland. The parallels between our journey and that of the von Trapps did not pass us by, but fortunately the harmony of several alpenhorns rising up from the valley below prevented us from bursting into song. We didn't want to spoil the moment.

That night we stayed in Carschinahütte and this time we did not have a private room. Our roommates put on brave faces when we entered, but I assume they were dreading a night interrupted by screaming. They needn't have been, as Oscar slept well that night. The hut was in a spectacular position and was surprisingly busy, bearing in mind how few people we had seen during the day. In a remarkable gesture of child-friendliness for a remote mountain hut, there was a sandpit to play in.

Our final day was spent traversing around the Swiss side of the Drusenfluh ridge, before we crossed back into Austria and descended back to Lünensee. Carolina carried Oscar in the child carrier throughout our three-day hike, except of course when he was walking, so I carried three people's provisions for three days – I make that the equivalent of nine day packs. Although we had a child carrier with a sunshade, at times there was a bit too much vitamin D for our

troglophilic liking, so we hung a sheet over the top to provide 360° protection.

A few days later, we travelled by bus to Malbun in Liechtenstein. En route, we stopped in the world's greatest capital city, Vaduz. At the bus stop, there was an information board pointing out the highlights – vineyards, the castle, the medieval Red House – and every single one was visible from the bus stop. Malbun

was an out-of-season ski resort with numerous options for short walks and one genuinely wonderful ridge walk – Fürstin-Gina-Weg.

Walking along this rocky horseshoe, which towers over Malbun, was a delight. On one side, we could see almost all of the tiny, double-landlocked country, stretching out; and on the other, rugged mountains as far as the eye could see. I doubt I would even have heard of any of

those peaks before I went there – they were mostly small and insignificant by Alpine standards – but boy, were they impressive.

Oscar had a great time. He enjoyed the views and on the long flat section towards the end of the Fürstin-Gina-Weg, he walked farther than ever before. As tends to happen when he's abroad, he was a hit with the locals. When we stopped at a hut on the Austria-Liechtenstein border, the owner wrote out a postcard for him saying he had enjoyed his visit. This postcard is now stuck to our fridge as a permanent reminder of Oscar's first trip to the Alps.



▲ Looking down to Malbun from Liechtenstein's Fürstin-Gina-Weg



Beach of Dreams

Martyn Howe describes an artistic community project to walk the coastline of the UK and Ireland in May 2025

We are all members of the OWPG for the love of the outdoors and our desire to write and photograph landscapes, seascapes and communities to inspire others. My journeys by foot and bicycle are enriched by public art in sculpture, poetry, music, paintings and even graffiti. It stimulates the mind and often remains a thought for many miles. What did that sculpture mean? What was the poet trying to say? That seascape reminds me of a famous painting.

I am currently walking the England Coast Path. Stopping to pay for a coffee in Southwold, I was asked by the cashier how far I was walking, and I explained my coastal ambition. “Oh, a group walked by here a few days ago, all carrying flags”, she said. The conversation repeated a day later with a stout gentleman on a beach chair. A quick online search revealed this as a storytelling and community engagement project to walk from Lowestoft to Tilbury. Each participant, joining at different stages, carried a silk pennant that they had designed and represented their vision for the future.

These personal stories reflected their concerns for their coastline (coastal erosion, bird protection, pollution, etc.) and a more deeply held anxiety for our own lives and those of future generations. Travel journalist Kevin Rushby documented each day’s walk, with summaries published in *The Guardian*. It received a good deal of exposure in the national and local media, and a film was commissioned to be screened in London in January 2022.

The project is called *Beach of Dreams*.

I am sure members of OWPG will participate or even volunteer for the project

At the culmination of that epic 500-mile walk, Ali Pretty, the artistic director of Kinetika, the UK Arts Company who ran it, announced a new ambition to extend this project to the entire coastline of the UK and Ireland, some 10,000 miles. In partnership with Creative Lives, an organisation that champions volunteer-led creative activity, they propose to hold a month-long walking festival in May 2025. I was so moved by the scale and nature of the project that I offered to help. I have walked, cycled or campervanned almost the entire coastline, including the hard-to-reach places and had a background in technology and operational strategy that I knew they would need.

I am now affectionately known as “Martyn the Mapper” and set about breaking down the challenge into 45 sections, mapping routes, and planning itineraries for the coastline. While England and Wales have (or will soon have) established waymarked coastal routes, Scotland has a very complex coastline and many island networks (Orkney, Shetland, Western Isles), but does have an enlightened approach to access. Ireland is yet another challenge, with much of the coast in private hands, but we hope to use kayakers, sailors, cyclists, kite surfers, swimmers, or any zero-carbon means of travel to join the walking sections. Each mile is allocated a silk pennant which can be adopted by anyone who wishes to have a voice about the future of the ecosystems and the communities along the coastline.

In addition, I am building a digital platform to capture thousands of stories, pictures, and experiences from this mass participation event,



linking common themes and threads across each nation. This digital map will link to other similar projects in play around the world as part of our membership of the World Trails Network, starting with a project engaging with indigenous communities in Costa Rica along El Sendero Pacifico – a trail from the rainforest to the Pacific.

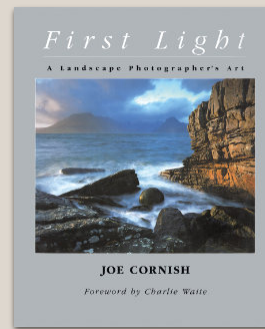
As part of the project, we expect to reach out to writers, journalists, photographers and filmmakers in 2024 or earlier to document the event, with some paid-for commissions. We are entering a fundraising phase and have had a solid response from future stakeholders in Ireland, Wales, England and Scotland.

It is early days, but I am sure members of OWPG will participate or even volunteer for the project. Our immediate requirement is for route and itinerary planners, able to schedule up to 27 days of walking and identify beach locations on one of the sections. You might know someone who has an intimate knowledge of their coastline and loves maps and walking, and I would love to hear from them. Likewise, you may know artists with a passion for the coast who might like to run complementary events in their area. We have information packs for interested people and will launch a new website shortly.

More information and links to the film can be found at www.beachofdreams.co.uk, or you can contact us directly at ali@kinetika.co.uk or martyn@kinetika.co.uk. This is a beautiful opportunity to get involved at an early stage with a project which will be an incredible artistic event for anyone who loves the coastline.

Inspirational outdoor books

David Taylor on *First Light* by Joe Cornish



Joe Cornish is arguably the UK's most influential modern landscape photographer. *First Light: A Landscape Photographer's Art* was his first solo book, published in 2002 by Argentum. His philosophy is made clear in the opening sentence of the

introduction: 'First, light. Everything else follows, for light is the language of photography as well as its raw material.' And this he demonstrates again and again with a collection of sumptuous colour images. These were largely shot in the Britain Isles, but there are a handful from Italy, France, Tasmania, New Zealand and the USA too.

My copy of *First Light* was a (gratefully!) received Christmas present in 2002. Twenty-odd years on it's now looking decidedly battered, as it's a book I return to over and over again. Partly for the photography obviously, but also for Joe's (often self-deprecating) descriptions of how and – perhaps more importantly – why the photos in the book were shot. (A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a picture *and* a thousand words is better still.)

First Light are also a reminder that a landscape comes alive in 'good' light, and that these moments of perfect illumination are often fleeting. (In my experience occurring just before I've arrived at a location, or just after I've left.) 'As a poet uses words, so a photographer uses light.' No technical advances in camera technology will ever change that.

If you have a favourite outdoor book and want to share its virtues with other OWPG members, then do get in touch (contact details are on page two).

CICERONE UPDATES

Roly Smith keeps us up-to-date

Cicerone has published a fourth edition of Steve Ashton's 1980 classic *Scrambles in Snowdonia* (£16.95) with the author's original book revised and updated by Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla; a fifth edition of Paddy Dillon's *Walking in County Durham* (£14.95), and a third edition of Richard Barrett's *Walking on Harris and Lewis* (£16.95).

Also recently published by Cicerone are two new books in their compact (90-page) but pricey Short Walks series: *Windermere, Ambleside & Grasmere*, by former Cicerone bosses Jonathan and Lesley Williams (£9.95 pb) and *Surrey Hills* by Nike Werstroh and Jacint Mig (also £9.95 pb).

GRITSTONE CO-OPERATIVE

Andrew Bibby on a more communal approach to publishing

Publishing has changed radically in recent years, and an industry which was once strongly editorial-led has increasingly become much more focused on marketing. When pitching a potential new title, you'll be expected not only to explain what you want to say in your text but also how you expect your book can be marketed. What other existing successful titles will your book resemble? How do you intend to promote your book yourself?

At the same time, the financial rewards for authors have been shrinking. The regular Society of Authors survey of authors' income makes depressing reading. In 2006, median author earnings were £12,330. In 2022, the median had fallen to £7,000.

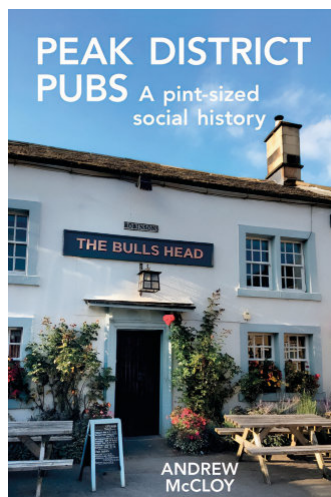
So perhaps the alternative of self-publishing should no longer be seen as inevitably a second-best option. E-book publishing, in particular, is now extremely straightforward and can be a low-cost way for authors to find an audience.

The seven of us in Gritstone Publishing Co-operative have been developing a hybrid solution to the challenge. We are all professional writers, writing variously about the outdoors, landscape, the countryside and natural history, and all of us as it happens have had books which we have written for mainstream publishers. (Several of us are also committed OWPG members, too!). What we are doing through Gritstone is a form of collective self-publishing, where our books come out bearing the common Gritstone imprint and are marketed and sold on our central Gritstone website

We began in 2016 when two of us were walking back to catch our trains



GRITSTONE
PUBLISHING
CO-OPERATIVE



in Manchester following a regional Society of Authors meeting, and when we began discussing whether a co-operative publishing option was an idea worth exploring. Now, seven years on, we have just published our eighteenth title and have two more titles coming out in the Spring – both incidentally very strong titles.

Gritstone has built up something of a reputation for the quality of our books – all are produced to the sort of professional standard you'd expect of any publisher and we would challenge anyone to guess that they were in fact self-published. We use one of the main trade distributors for outdoors books, Cordee, and our books also reach the book trade through the main book wholesaler Gardners. We also like to make much of the fact that we are so far Britain's only author-run publishing co-op (though there are similar co-ops in other countries).

Our two forthcoming titles are typical of our list. Eileen Jones is following up her very successful *how parkrun changed our lives* with a sequel designed for what's being called parkrun tourism (!), *p is for parkrun, a journey from A-Z*, while Chris Goddard has the first of what will be a comprehensive walker's guide in five volumes to the *English Coast Path* also appearing in time for Spring walks.

Other Gritstone books which might be mentioned include OWPG Golden Eagle award-winner Colin Speakman's recent biography of pioneering geologist *John Phillips*, Andrew Bibby's *Back Roads through Middle England* (OWPG Outdoor Book of the Year in 2018), Laurence Rose's *Framing Nature: Conservation and Culture*, and Andrew McCloy's fascinating social history of *Peak District Pubs*.



Picture... Nothing!

Paddy Dillon is forced to make a change....

Being in Gritstone doesn't preclude us from being published by mainstream publishers. Two members, Chiz Dakin and Andrew McCloy, have recently had contracts with Cicerone, for example, and we know that sometimes another publisher will bring something to a book that Gritstone itself can't offer. Marketing is inevitably the big challenge facing all small publishers and, although we feel we've done a lot right over the past few years, we know that there's more that we could do in this respect.

However, it's not just about the publishing process. One of the big advantages of Gritstone is the support and solidarity which we each give to and receive from others in the co-op. Being a writer is a solitary occupation and, as we know, can be lonely. Gritstone meetings (held quarterly, sometimes online and sometimes in West Yorkshire, often Hebden Bridge) provide an opportunity for us to share our ideas, discuss how our writing is going and get feedback. It's invaluable.

We've grown gradually, from four to five, to six and now seven members, and we feel that potentially the co-op could usefully grow still further in the next year or two. Although we now have a social history imprint our focus remains primarily on the outdoors, nature and the countryside, so we welcome the invitation to write about our operation in this *Outdoor Focus*. Fellow professional outdoor writers (particularly those based in the north of England, our home base) who feel that they could potentially be interested in joining the co-op are invited to contact us via the website (www.gritstonecoop.co.uk); our secretary Andrew Bibby can be reached on andrew@andrewbibby.com.

Google algorithms are pretty sharp.

At 0940 on Wednesday 8th March 2017 the world-famous rock arch of the Azure Window, on the island of Gozo, collapsed in a storm. Local folk got onto Twitter and the Times of Malta immediately picked up on the story. Google algorithms figured out who needed to know the story and an alert was quickly pushed into my newsfeed.

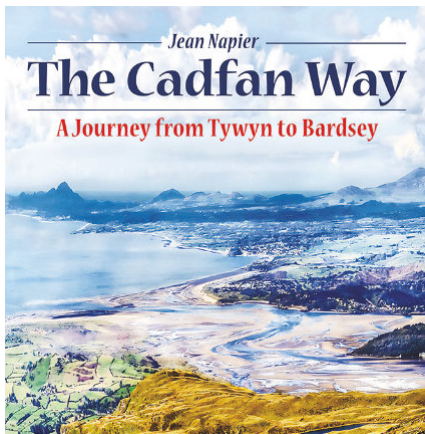
I'd written a guidebook covering Malta and the neighbouring island of Gozo, where the Azure Window had amazed visitors for centuries. When it collapsed, I was thousands of miles away in the middle of the Atlantic, checking routes on the Azorean island of Faial. I was impressed by Google's speed and efficiency.

I sent an email to my publisher and they put a note on their website the following day, advising readers that the rock arch was gone forever. Of course, that wasn't going to change the printed pages in my book, which featured two pictures of the Azure Window - one in the introduction and another illustrating a walking route where the rock arch was the star attraction. Fixing the book was going to take time.

When my family said that they intended spending Christmas 2018 on Malta, and did I want to share an enormous apartment, I checked with Cicerone and they told me that a reprint of my book was due early in 2019. The stars were clearly aligned and my family were agreeable to a day trip to Gozo on Christmas Eve. Of course, they asked me why I needed to go there, so I told them I needed a picture of 'nothing'. I never put so much effort into getting a picture of 'nothing' before or since!



BOOK REVIEWS / Roly Smith



The Cadfan Way

Jean Napier

Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, £7.75 (pb)

This is another very attractive and well-designed walk guide from the small Llanrwst publisher Gwasg Carreg Gwalch. This one is unusual because it does not give detailed directions or mileages but follows an approximate 90-mile route around Tremadog Bay and the Llŷn peninsula between Tywyn and Bardsey Island, mainly using the Wales Coast Path.

The link is the 6th century Celtic Saint Cadfan, who created a Christian community at the starting point of Tywyn around 1,500 years ago, and later founded a religious settlement on Bardsey, Ynys Enlli, "the island of saints", at the western tip of the Llŷn peninsula. The Diocese of Bangor are in the process of developing the route into an established pilgrimage route.

This is an intensely personal pilgrimage for the London-born author, who came to live in Tywyn 30 years ago and finds solace in the 13th century St Cadfan Church, which contains the 9th century Maen Cadfan monument, which is thought to bear the earliest inscriptions in the Welsh language.

It is Napier's outstanding landscape photography which elevates this guide into the little

treasure that it is, despite some missing captions. Her stunning sunset image of the golden snaking meanders of the Mawddach estuary and the aerial view of Bardsey are among many which stick in the memory.

This stunning collection of images perhaps provides some forgiveness for some howlers in the text, such as her naming of The Cob at Porthmadog as both Madocks and Maddocks. Also in her description of the annual Three Peaks fell running, cycling and boating race, which starts at Barmouth, she names "Scarfell" as the highest point in England to be reached by competitors, when it should be Scafell Pike.

Guardian of the Dales

Nigel Watson

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, £14.99 (pb)

"In a sense," wrote Bill Mitchell, long-time editor of *The Dalesman* and winner of the Guild's Golden Eagle award in 2007, "the National Parks were born in Malhamdale."

And in a sense, Mitchell was right, because it while he was living in Kirkby Malham, in the midst of war-torn Britain and suffering from the debilitating effects of tuberculosis, that John Dower, the architect of Britain's

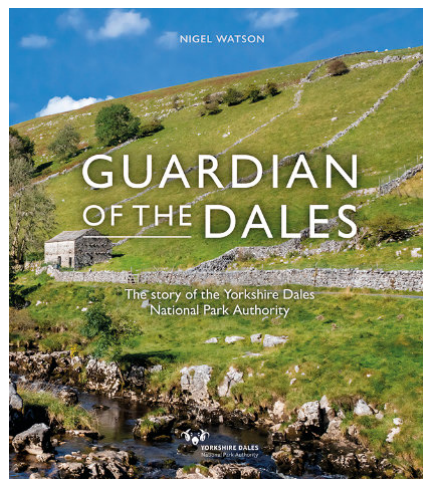
National Parks, wrote his 1945 report which laid down the blueprint for our Parks.

The author of this splendid and timely survey, a former elected member of the park authority, tells the story of the Yorkshire Dales National Park over its 69-year history, and gives due credit to Dower and his seminal report. "It was the Dales that inspired Dower," Watson writes, "and it is the Dales that can claim to be spiritual home of Britain's National Parks."

The book rightly highlights the considerable achievements of the Dales park, most notably perhaps the Dales Rail project (led by the Guild's Colin Speakman); the saving of the Settle-Carlisle railway; pioneering footpath restoration work on the Three Peaks; supporting England's first Environmentally Sensitive Areas, and the launch of the fund-raising Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust.

Featuring vintage photographs and news articles from the archives, it is a no-holds-barred chronicle of the work of the National Park Authority as told by members, staff, supporters and even the many critics of the National Park. Watson faithfully records some of the darkest days of the park, including the infamous 1991 petition signed by 1,700 residents expressing no confidence in the park authority.

Due credit is given, however, to its outstanding leaders such as its long serving chief officer Richard Harvey, John Baker in park management and George Hallas as head of planning. Baker, who died prematurely from cancer in 1998, was the husband of Angela Baker, a founder member of the famous Rylstone WI Calendar Girls, who subsequently raised millions of pounds for cancer research.



St Magnus Way

David Mazza

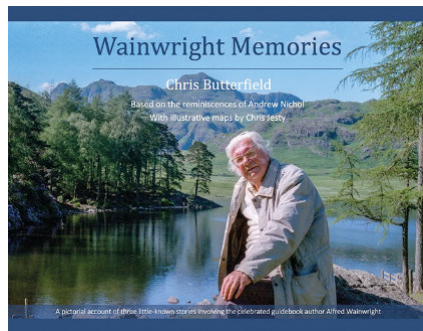
Rucksack Readers, £14.99 (pb)

St Magnus, the patron saint of Orkney, is an otherwise little known Celtic saint who was martyred after a Norse power struggle on the outlying island of Egilsay in 1116 or 1117. This 60-mile route, starting with a traverse of Egilsay and then winding across Orkney's Mainland to Kirkwall, is in every sense a pilgrimage in his footsteps, and follows the themes that he followed in his life.

The guide is written by a Guild member who is also the GP for Westray and Pappa Westray, and is in Rucksack's new, perfect-bound format in place of the former spiral-bound books. But it faithfully follows the publisher's well-proven formula of 1:30,000 Lovell Johns mapping and clear directions printed on rainproof paper.

The Mainland route takes in many of Orkney's historical features, such as St Magnus Church and the ruins of Earl's Palace at Birsay; St Michael's Church at Quean; Firth Church and the Cuween Chambered Tomb at Flinstown; Scotland's only round church at Orphir and ending at the magnificent St Magnus Cathedral in the capital of Kirkwall.

It seems a pity that the route could not have included the fascinating prehistoric highlights of Orkney in places like Skara Brae, the standing stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar, all of which are now included in the UNESCO Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site. But being much earlier in date, I suppose they did not fit into the story of the saintly Magnus.



Wainwright Memories

Chris Butterfield

Chris Butterfield, £24.99 (hb)

The author of this mainly pictorial account of three lesser-known stories associated with the legendary fellwanderer Alfred Wainwright could lay claim to the title of being his greatest aficionado.

His archive of Wainwright material, website and Facebook group devoted to the work of AW is unmatched, as is his unstinting, almost hagiographical, worship of the author of the ground-breaking, best-selling series of guides to 214 of the Lakeland fells.

Taking the form of a series of holiday snaps taken by the author and Andrew Nichol, former publisher of the Wainwright guides when he was manager at Westmorland Press, the book records then and now photographs of locations on three excursions they took together in the late 1980s. This pictorial homage inevitably results in some duplication, and one image even features the ghostly image of AW towering over the author by a wall at Gatesgarth near Buttermere.

Wainwright was a regular visitor to Scotland, and the first chapter recalls a holiday the Wainwrights took to Wester Ross with Nichol and his wife in 1988. The final records when a notoriously shy AW was persuaded to do a photoshoot with photographer Ken

Shepherd in Langdale in 1990. One provides the cover of the book and they represent the finest series of pictures I have seen of the reclusive yet on this occasion, surprisingly relaxed, guidebook author.

But perhaps the most interesting is the unfinished book which Wainwright hoped would be published but never was. The title was *Points of Interest on the Coast to Coast Walk* and it was designed to be used by car drivers who, like AW at this time, could not walk very far. In this chapter, for example, there are no fewer than eight pictures of Wainwright at the start of the walk on the beach at St Bees.

New maps of the routes have been drawn by Wainwright's successor, Chris Jesty, and additional photography is by Steve Barber and Sheila Richardson.

The Lost Rainforests of Britain

Guy Shrubsole

William Collins, £20 (hb)

When you think of a rainforest, the chances are that an image of a subtropical Amazonian jungle, dripping with epiphytes and bromeliads, will spring to mind.

But this new book from one of the founders of the Right to Roam campaign reveals that Britain is one of the last remaining strongholds of temperate rainforest, a habitat now even rarer and more precious than its much heralded Amazonian equivalent.

Climatically, temperate rainforest could occupy up to 20 per cent of northwestern and western Britain. But a new map compiled by Shrubsole and Tim Richards in this fascinating and important book shows the fragmentary remains now cover

less than one per cent of the country.

Led by local experts, Shrubsole visits many of these precious fragments in this inspirational book, inevitably including a deliberate trespass to reach the "Lost World" of Holne Chase on the banks of the Dart in Devon. Other excursions include the misnomer of Young Wood, a "huddle of wizened corkscrew oaks" on the remote slopes of Bowscale Fell in the Lake District; the scattered birch and rowan woodlands in the ravine approaching Coire Gabhail, Glen Coe's fabled Lost Valley and the so-called "ghost woods" where placename evidence indicates where these natural, native forests once stood.

Shrubsole describes how awe-inspiring and important these places can be to the human spirit: "Immersing myself in the dripping, viridian fastness of an Atlantic rainforest is the closest I've ever come to a spiritual experience."

Great Walks on the England Coast Path

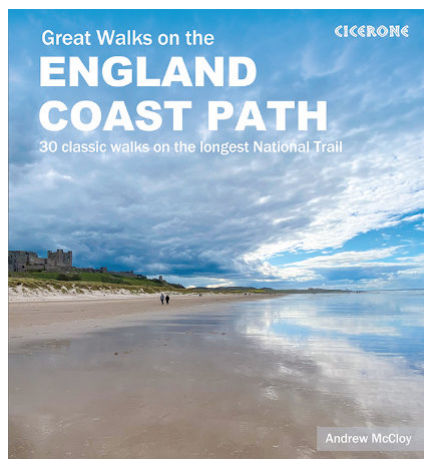
Andrew McCloy

Cicerone, £20 (pb)

When the 2,795-mile England Coast Path National Trail is completed as a continuous route, it will be the longest purely coastal path in the world.

The author of this sumptuously illustrated new guide to 30 walks based on and around the trail, is Guild committee member Andrew McCloy. His *Coastwalk* of 1996 foreshadowed the day when the England coast walk would be combined with the pioneering Welsh Coast Walk, which opened in 2012.

Though the book is graced with the essential OS 1:50,000



mapping, you are not likely to want to take this weighty, 216-page, 22cm by 24cm tome with you on any of the walks. So the best option might be to get the free GPX download of the routes (www.cicerone.co.uk/989/GPX), or to photocopy them before you set out.

The routes themselves vary from the lengthy 31-mile Scarborough to Staithes sortie along the crumbling Yorkshire coast, to the five-mile stroll around Arnside above the shifting sands of Morecambe Bay, but most fall within an easy day-trip distance.

Many, like the Scarborough-Staithes walk and the 28-mile Pendeen to Penzance route along the westernmost Cornish coast, stick closely to the designated route along the cliff tops. But others have an added frisson of danger, such as the Spurn Head walk to that shape-shifting spit on the Humber estuary and to Hilbre Island in the Dee estuary, which are subject to submersion at high tides.

A beautiful book, but one to use to plan or reflect on your walks, rather than to take with you.



Scottish Wild Country Backpacking

Peter Edwards, David Lintern and Stefan Durkacz

Cicerone, £25 (pb)

A beautifully illustrated celebration of wild country backpacking in the Scottish Highlands and Islands from Cicerone, this time with 1:100,000 locational mapping by Lovell Johns.

The 30 routes featured are described as "weekend and multi-day" walks by the authors, and they all come with an appropriate health warning to less experienced hill goers and wild campers.

The longest route described – an airy tour of the ridges of Ben Alder – is a thigh-busting 38 miles, starting and finishing at Dalwhinnie station. The shortest is the eight-mile stroll around the island of Mingulay in the Outer Hebrides, featuring a dizzying bird's eye view of the imposing seastack of Dun Mhughalaigh (Dun Mingulay) on its eastern shore.

Few would argue with the authors where they claim in their introduction that the Highlands and Islands are "the most ruggedly beautiful, expansive and challenging backpacking country in the British Isles."

"Out among the mountains, moors and glens and along the wild coastline it is still possible to walk for days without encountering roads, settlements and other people."

That surely is the essence of wild trekking and camping, and this 200-page doorstopper will whet the whistle of many wilderness lovers willing to follow in their doughty footsteps. But again, the book is far too weighty to take with you, and Cicerone advise readers to download the GPX routes (www.cicerone.co.uk/904/GPX).