

# Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SUMMER 2023



# Outdoor FOCUS Summer 2023

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### Cover Allan Hartley

Climber on the Wilder Freiger in the Stubai Alps. See Allan's article on page 14 for more information.

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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](mailto:davidtphoto@gmail.com). The copy deadline is 15 August 2023.

## New Members



### Mary-Ann Ochota

Mary-Ann is a freelance broadcaster, working across a range of formats - TV, radio and podcasting, and writing. Her background training is in anthropology and archaeology, training that heavily influences the subjects she chooses to write about. Her two most recent books have been about the archaeology you can spot in the landscape - *Hidden Histories: A Spotter's Guide to the British Landscape*, and *Secret Britain*, both published by Frances Lincoln.

Mary-Ann's other focus is on improving equity and inclusion in the outdoors. She is the Hillwalking Ambassador for the British Mountaineering Council, a member of the Natural England Landscape Advisory Panel (NELAP), advocating for the interests of countryside visitors, a Patron of the Tony Trust, which gives grants to youngsters wanting to take part in outdoor activity courses and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. And this year, Mary Ann is the Patron for the Ridgeway National Trail's 50th Anniversary.

In the words of Mary-Ann: 'As biogs generally demand, this is the "polished" version of my professional life. But I do plenty of pushing at doors that don't open, saying yes to things with terrible fees because I have the freelancer fear that "no" means they'll never ask again. I doom scroll instagram looking at everyone else's fabulous outdoor lives, have done book events with three people in attendance, and I do my tax return in the panicky last week of January. If that rings true for others, then phew. We're not alone.'

@MaryAnnOchota / [www.maryannochota.com](http://www.maryannochota.com)



## Nike Werstroh

Nike is co-author of *Walking in Cyprus*, *Walking in the Algarve*, *Trekking the Robert Louis Stevenson Trail*, *Walking in Catalunya-Barcelona*, *Short Walks in the Surrey Hills* guidebooks, published by Cicerone Press.

Nike met Jacint on a long coach trip and it wasn't long before they were inseparable and started travelling and walking together. Nike went to journalism school and she would like to use her guidebooks and articles to share her passion for walking with others. Nike and Jacint live in Guildford and when they are not walking in one of their favourite mountain ranges somewhere in Europe, they enjoy exploring the diverse trails in the Surrey Hills close to their home.

And when they are not out walking they offer a personalised travel planning service, details of which can be seen on Nike and Jacint's website: [www.trailnotes.co.uk](http://www.trailnotes.co.uk).



## Chris Butterfield

A lifelong love of the outdoors and admiration for Alfred Wainwright inspired Yorkshire-born engineer Chris to build an archive that would honour the world-famous fellwalker and safeguard his legacy.

Assisted by his wife, Priscilla, Chris has amassed an extensive private collection of Wainwright material. In 2019, he became the custodian of all existing *Westmorland Gazette* Wainwright book printing materials, including negatives, plates, gold blocking, artwork, documentation and more. He also created a popular Facebook group, Alfred Wainwright Books & Memorabilia, and a website, [alfredwainwright.co.uk](http://alfredwainwright.co.uk), which will eventually catalogue Wainwright's entire publishing and printing history.

Chris, the author of *Wainwright Memories*, has published numerous articles about Wainwright and has appeared on television and radio to discuss the life, work and achievements of the late, great fellwanderer.



## Great Cumbrae / Useful information

- |                           |                                                                                  |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ① Cumbrae FSC             | ⑨ Bell Bay                                                                       |
| ② Cumbrae Ferry Port      | ⑩ HMS Shearwater Memorial                                                        |
| ③ Largs Ferry Port        | ⑪ Crocodile Rock                                                                 |
| ④ Millport                | <b>Websites</b>                                                                  |
| ⑤ Fairlie Railway Station | <a href="http://www.millport.org">www.millport.org</a>                           |
| ⑥ Largs Pencil Monument   | Cumbrae visitor website                                                          |
| ⑦ Standing Stone          | <a href="http://www.calmac.co.uk">www.calmac.co.uk</a>                           |
| ⑧ Skate Bay               | Caledonian MacBrayne                                                             |
|                           | <a href="http://www.visitscotland.com">www.visitscotland.com</a>                 |
|                           | Tourism organisation                                                             |
|                           | <a href="http://www.field-studies-council.org">www.field-studies-council.org</a> |
|                           | FSC website                                                                      |



# Revisiting the Pennine Way at 76 and 71

*Gordon Wilson walks a familiar route...*



No sign declared 'Welcome to Kirk Yetholm', no skylark sang, nobody greeted us as we entered the village towards which we had been heading for the past three weeks.

It was a beautiful June day.

As we approached the village green and Border Inn, bunting appeared for the local literature festival. Separately, an inflatable arch had been erected to welcome Spine Challenge competitors who had departed Edale three days and seven hours earlier. Meanwhile, my co-trekker Trish, and my partner Angharad who was sporting a custom-made T-shirt with the words 'Pennine Way Support Unit', had read the runes. They were talking animatedly about garden hostas and their attraction for slugs.

Between the inn entrance and its plaque declaring the end of the Pennine Way, a seated middle-aged couple smiled. Inside, we received our certificates and free half pints that are donated by the Tyne Brewery. The original fund, courtesy of Wainwright in 1968, was exhausted many years ago.

The first two Spine competitors had already completed, a man and a woman. The man had taken less than three days, finishing around the time we were having breakfast, while the woman had passed us below The Cheviot. By chance, we were staying at the same B&B, and next morning we congratulated them on their achievement of completing the Pennine Way's 268 miles (for that is what The Spine is) in a fraction of the time it had taken us. "Yes, but we missed a lot," one replied, "You don't hear the birds, see the flowers or admire the scenery." The other concurred. Then, alluding to our mature years, they added that we should be equally proud of our achievement.

You hike your own hike.

\* \* \*

The idea of Trish – a family friend - and I doing the Pennine Way was born during Covid where we formed a hiking bubble. Drinking coffee on Blackstone Edge in the South Pennines one day, she said she would like to walk it while her age would allow<sup>1</sup>. I had done it once before with another friend in 2013 but, as with all hiking

experiences that make a deep impression, I was feeling the urge to get to know it more intimately. Alas, much had happened to my body since 2013, including injuries and other medical issues.

Nevertheless, I offered to go with her. Angharad agreed to repeat her previous role of support unit.

Thus, at 0930 on Jubilee Thursday (2 June 2022) we stepped off the train at Edale, and the trek began.

We had planned to make it enjoyable. Practically, this meant staying at inns and B&Bs, having baggage carried, and taking an easier course if weather conditions dictated. On this last, we varied the acorned route on four occasions. Thus, on Day 4 we took a locally known path below Blackstone Edge rather than over it in fierce wind and heavy rain. In similar conditions on Day 8 we descended the shorter Three Peaks path from just below the summit of Penyghent to Horton (having previously climbed it countless times). On Day 10 between Hawes and Keld, with 60mph gusts forecast for Great Shunner Fell, we staggered over Buttertubs Pass instead and heard later that two people had been swept off their feet on the Fell. Finally, on Day 18, in Kielder Forest, we were officially diverted, adding three miles to the route which was blocked in places by a tangle of uprooted trees from winter storms.

We also intended to gain the full experience or, as an early 20th century campaigner for access to the Pennine moors, Bert Ward, once put it – "the trinity of legs, eyes and mind"<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, we wanted to:

- ◆ Give ourselves time to admire the varied landscape and revel in the highlights which, for us, were: Malham Cove, Penyghent (very impressive with storm clouds drifting around its summit rocks), High Force, High Cup Nick, Cross Fell, Hadrian's Wall, the Cheviot border ridge.
- ◆ Listen to the constant birdsong. Where there's a moor there are usually curlews circling overhead, attempting to escort one off the premises. But they are not the only ones. We also enjoyed skylarks,

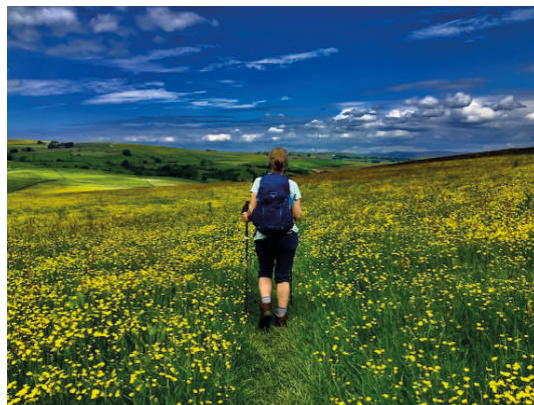
High Cup Nick ▼



On Cross Fell ▼



The Aire Gap ▼



peewits, snipes, meadow pipits and heard two cuckoos.

- ◆ Witness the wildflower meadows and rare plants of the Aire Gap and Teesdale and live our own impressionist paintings.
- ◆ Engage with people, securing a common bond with fellow Pennine Way trekkers, and empathy with B&B and inn keepers who provided early breakfasts if we needed to depart promptly. Farmers also seemed happy, giving a cheery wave as we waited for them to herd cattle. We met the family at Honeystead Farm in Northumberland that goes out of its way to support Pennine Way wayfarers, providing a do-it-yourself pit stop in a barn, replete with hot drinks and other goodies, plus a bed for the completely knackered. There is no charge, just a donations box and a notice welcoming receipt of goodies.

Tom Stephenson first went public in the *Daily Herald* newspaper in June 1935 about his idea to create a Pennine Way. Headlined, 'WANTED – a Long Green Trail', the text explained that it would be "a Pennine Way from the Peak to the Cheviots". He saw it as a tough, invigorating walk but never a competition as he described the feelings that wayfarers would have, including the highlights that I have listed above. Thirty years later, the Pennine Way was officially inaugurated at Malham.

I know, however, from other trekkers whom Trish and I met that there are many ways of thinking about the trail. Here are a few:

**The purists** who have a particular idea of the real Pennine Way, never deviating from the map route, and carrying everything they need to be self-sufficient. As someone who has experienced enlightenment and deep freedom when backpacking in the Pyrenees, I admire them. But two groups sniffed at us, and we returned the compliment. There is no need to be judgemental or zealous about the 'official' route which is an accommodation with existing rights of way, and negotiation of new ones with landowners. It need

not be set in stone. For example, six miles of the more recent South Tyne Trail heading North from Alston is arguably preferable to the acorned route 250 feet above that yomps over bog and neglected fields. Of course, it should be top priority to witness the amazing landscapes and highlights, while knowing that very occasionally one may be forced elsewhere, especially by the great British weather.

**Doing it in sections** over two or more years. For those with jobs, Wainwright advocated this, although he went a step further. He walked the Pennine Way neither in logical order nor in a single trek. Perhaps that is why his 1968 Pennine Way Companion is somewhat disparaging. You can only appreciate the Pennine Way as a complete whole, and you can't do that if you're fitting bits together like a jigsaw.

**A footpath that joins other paths to form circular walks** This is how Trish and I use the trail in our everyday hiking. It is particularly noticeable on the southern section where the route lies between large conurbations. Here the path is often paved, host to many who are out for the day. Pennine Way trekkers are a minority, and almost non-existent in winter. Things change dramatically in the North Pennines where there are few connecting paths. In places, especially Northumbria, the path on the ground becomes narrow and winding through moorland heather.

**"In many ways a pointless exercise leading from nowhere in particular to nowhere in particular"** The quotation is from Poet Laureate Simon Armitage's book *Walking Home*. They are clever words, but I disagree. For millions of hikers and trekkers worldwide, the names of wild places are laden with meaning, even when viewed only on a map. Simon Armitage walked along the Pennine Way from North to South. In *Walking Home* he also gave the trail human characteristics, imbuing it with a logic to which he vowed not to succumb. He had a special dislike of Kinder Scout which he decided to abandon in bad weather. He had walked home, reaching his destination two days previously, but did not complete the Pennine Way. The final words of *Walking Home* state that "perhaps" he would do the whole thing again, but

# YOU MIGHT (OR

Chris Howes explains all

Revisiting the Pennine Way at 76 and 71 continued

only if somebody would part the curtain on Kinder Scout and lead him over it. When planning our trip, I offered for Trish and me to oblige. The response came from his gatekeeper a week later – he was sorry but had too many commitments. I hope that he wasn't too disappointed.

\* \* \*

For Trish the Pennine Way was the fulfilment of a long-standing fascination, while the 2013 experience had actually strengthened my fascination. For both of us, the Pennine Way became a journey: that sense of moving through a landscape of river valleys, flower meadows, wild moorland, and changing local accents. This is no better exemplified than at the Tan Hill Inn where Dales turn abruptly into vast moorland as one moves from Yorkshire into County Durham and the start of a Northeast English accent.

The other place that touches me deeply is 900+ miles away – the Pyrenees. They are as different as chalk and cheese, but between mountain and moor there is a special commonality. Thirteen years ago, Angharad and I halted on a wild stretch of the *Haute Randonnée Pyrénéenne*. Holding our gaze to the South was Sierra upon Sierra, illuminated by the orange glow of a lowering sun, and stretching seemingly to infinity. We were the only boy and girl in the world at this moment, a moment that I thought could never be repeated.

But it was. Thirteen years later, on the Northumbrian stretch of the Pennine Way, Trish stopped me. We looked around, witnesses to a profound silence as we gazed at the vast emptiness in every direction.

1 / See Andrew McCloy's *The Pennine Way: The Path, the Journey, the People* (Cicerone) for the same motive. I read Andrew's well-researched, informative, and enjoyable account just after I wrote this article, noting several points of congruence between the two.

2 / References to Bert Ward are taken from David Hey's 2011 paper: *Kinder Scout and the legend of the Mass Trespass*, *Agricultural History Review*, Vol 59, No7 pp199-2016. The paper also features Tom Stephenson, although I have preferred to go straight to his *Daily Herald* article of 1935 where he first outlined his vision of a Pennine Way.

Starting 9 June at Kirk Yetholm, Gordon and Angharad are literally walking to their home in Huddersfield, virtually all of it along the Pennine Way. They will be accompanied by various family members for the first five days, spanning two generations. Fascinations don't die, they don't even fade away.



1 Mammoth Cave in Kentucky is currently an astonishing 685 km long (that's over 426 miles). If you find that unbelievable, don't forget that unlike walking a route on the surface, caves twist and turn and can be mazes on multiple levels, so you don't necessarily have to go that far to reach the furthest point. If you guessed within fifty kilometres, award yourself **one point** (and another for the cave name or location).



2 Veryëvkina in Georgia (the country, not the state) at 2,212 metres deep. That's another number to wonder at - a cave that descends over two kilometres from the surface, essentially as a series of vertical shafts. The location gains **one point**, and if you were within 200m of the depth, have an **extra point**.



3 The UK's longest cave at over 86 km is found in northern England: the Three Counties System. Its existence was first suggested in 1968, since when cavers sought to connect separate caves together, resulting in crossing the county boundaries of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cumbria to form a giant latticework of passages. This was finally achieved in 2011, but another ten years elapsed before the first complete traverse from the furthest extremities was completed in 2021. **Two points** for location and distance within 5 km.



4 We turn to South Wales for the deepest cave in the UK: Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (the Cave of the Black Spring) at 312.5 m. Unusually, because the system follows the 'slope' of the rock, it can be traversed from the highest to lowest points with minimal vertical ropework (though the lowest point does demand diving). **Two points** for location and within 20m of the depth.



5 Currently, 182 caves in the UK and Ireland over 1km long have been mapped to produce a total length of 886.5km of passage. **One point** for guessing C.



6 You could gain **three points** here, if you ticked all three. School teachings traditionally tell pupils that acid rain dissolves limestone to produce caves, and certainly acidic water is involved, but ... The geology is relevant because most caves

# MIGHT NOT) KNOW... *the answers!*

(See *Outdoor Focus* Spring 2023 for the questions)

are formed in limestone and this dissolves when acid is present (that's the chemistry). But the acid predominantly comes from bacteria or other organisms that live underground: microbes (and bats, and birds and other animals) respire and release carbon dioxide that is taken up by water, which becomes acidic and dissolves the rock. Guano releases ammonia (bacterial action again) and in some caves this is spread by draughts and even areas out of the reach of flowing water may be dissolved. Temperature affects rates of dissolution: in the UK, caves tend to be below 10°C, but tropical caves might record 30°C (and what are known as 'hot caves' - those with extreme biological action from guano breakdown - can be *much* higher, and the higher the faster the chemical reactions). The major (and that really is major) factor in cave formation is biology, which geologists might not appreciate, but there we are.

**7** If you were wrong, think of the spellings: tites cling tight to the ceiling and mites crawl on the ground. Back to chemistry for a straw, where the deposition of calcite (that makes cave formations) relies on 'degassing' - that is, when the mineral-rich water droplet meets the air, the carbon dioxide it contains is released and the dissolved calcium carbonate is deposited as calcite, initially in a ring with the droplet in the middle. And this grows, with a hollow centre: a straw stalactite. Collectively, formations are called speleothems, by the way. **One point** for the formations, **one** for answering that a straw is a hollow stalactite.

**8** Phytokarst is unusual and again depends on biology. These formations are found in cave entrances, particularly in tropical caves, and are orientated towards the light. They appear as 'spikes', but these are not growing; rather, the gaps between them are being eroded by cyanobacteria that make the pits deeper (respiration again). At least, that is the current theory. Phytogens are similar but different: these grow towards the light under the action of cyanobacteria that deposit minerals. If you answered with any concept of biological action making formations affected by light, award yourself **two points** for being exceptionally smart.

**9** When a cave passage is totally filled with water, it dissolves all the walls equally and a circular passage is formed below the water

table, which is sometimes called the phreas (a phreatic passage). Later, if the water table drops, the water flows along the bottom of the passage as a stream and cuts downwards to produce a classic keyhole shape (a vadose passage). **Two points** if you got the concept right.

**10** When a phreatic passage is totally filled with water, it flows slowly; vadose water flows quickly. Cavers use dye or lycopodium spores to trace the passage of water, releasing it at the sump and collecting it at known resurgences. By measuring the distance involved and the time taken, an estimate of the percentage of water-filled and air-surfaced passage can be made, producing an idea of how much passage is yet to be found. **One point** if you got the idea of tracing the flow of water...

**11** **One point** for describing scallops as hollow 'scoop' shapes in passage walls, formed by eddies in flowing water. The steep side of the scallop lies upstream, indicating the way in which water once flowed even in now-dry and abandoned passages. A small size, perhaps down to 1 cm long, indicates fast flow, while a metre long scallop signifies slow flow.

**12** **One point** for 1895, the year that Gaping Gill was successfully descended by Édouard Martel, a Frenchman, using a rope ladder - quite an undertaking for such a long descent - and keeping in contact with the surface by telephone. The descent triggered a new era of sport as well as scientific exploration in caves. If you fancy your own visit, a winch with a safe seat is set up twice a year by caving clubs for the public to descend to the (temporarily) electrically lit main chamber at a measured depth of 104m.

**13** Cavers are potholers ... potholers are cavers (though being named as a potholer is perhaps more traditionally applied to cavers in northern England, where many caves have a vertical entrance (or 'pot'). Speleology is the study of caves, hence speleologists. But an American coined the term 'spelunker', a name that cavers today eschew (and consider rude) as befitting untrained folk who enter caves and require rescuing. Or, it's the sound that such people make when they fall: 'spelunk!' **One point** each if you thought that cavers and potholers are the same, knew what a speleologist was, and you had any correct concept of spelunkers.



# COUNTY DURHAM

*Paddy Dillon takes a walk in north-east England*

People must look at my book list and wonder... County Durham... what's that all about? I've written guidebooks covering big-name trails around Britain and overseas. I've written guidebooks covering entire national parks and even entire countries. So where does County Durham fit into all this, and why is it now in its fifth edition?

My family connection with County Durham is tenuous, at best. My great-great-grandfather was a hunted man, on the run from the authorities due to his political inclinations. It must have occurred to him that mining coal at Tow Law was one way to keep himself out of sight; at least until he could hide in a coal mine in Lancashire.

I didn't point my feet in the direction of County Durham until 1988. There was no internet in those days. I spotted an appeal in an outdoor magazine asking for anyone with expertise in walking the coast of Britain to get in touch. It turned out that Richard Sale was compiling a coffee-table book for Unwin Hyman. In the initial rush, my preferred stretches of coast had already been snapped up by hungry outdoor writers, but I was offered south-west Scotland and north-east England.

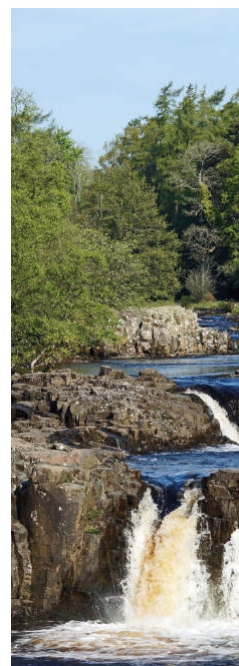
The first thing I ever wrote about County Durham was... 'Seaham can seem a depressing place, with a 'Super Pit' blocking any coastal route out of town, necessitating a long detour through backstreets and over wasteland.' Nor did my onward commentary offer many redeeming features... 'scarred by colliery wastes'... 'a noisy conveyor over the path dumps a small mountain of waste from Easington Colliery into the sea'... 'dreadful scene'... 'ugly'... you get the picture. There was a glimmer of hope. The National Trust had just started purchasing stretches of the coast, not to preserve them, but to actively restore them.

Fast-forward to 1995. I had a handful of guidebooks in print and I was sitting in the Cicerone office. Walt Unsworth had started a 'County Walking Series' and he wanted to know if I would take on County Durham. My only knowledge of the area involved following the Pennine Way through Teesdale, walking along the devastated coastline and a day spent trespassing\* on Mickle Fell, but I reckoned I could fill in the gaps.

The 'Outdoor Writers Guild', as it was known in those days, had just formulated a policy suggesting that members might want to talk to people in charge of rights of way before writing guidebooks. So, my first stop was Durham County Council and their Countryside Team, and in particular Mike Ogden. That was a good move, because Mike had a number of walks that he was keen to highlight, and he reckoned it would do no harm for them to go into my guidebook. He also offered to check my manuscript before publication. I spent the rest of the day on a short heritage walk around the city of Durham, scaling the cathedral tower in order to have a look at the countryside I was about to explore.

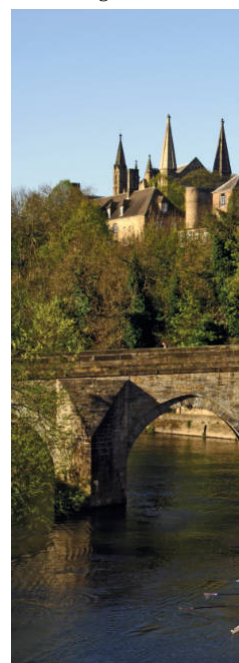
In short County Durham has a low cliff coastline, extensive uplands, verdant dales and a lot of little hills, woods, towns and villages scattered all over the place. While the scenery is sometimes very good and occasionally spectacular, perhaps the main reason for exploring the countryside is because its history and industrial heritage is just so incredibly interesting. I like to explore by using public transport, and County Durham has always had one of the best transport networks I've ever used.

The area is known as the 'Cradle of the Railways', and the earliest lines were built to serve quarries and mines that were dotted all over the place. Many of the old lines had been converted into paths



Low Force is o

▼ Durham has one of the offering a scenic walk







Some of several splendid waterfalls in Teesdale ▲  
The best city centres



suitable for walkers and cyclists, so I hired a bike and explored the entire network, planning to include them in my guidebook.

I walked the walks. I cycled the tracks. I wrote the words. I took old-fashioned transparency photos and I hand-drew my maps. Mike Ogden checked my route descriptions and Cicerone published the book, mostly in black and white, with a few colour inserts. Those were the days. Then the internet became popular, Cicerone changed hands, I was writing more and more books, life was moving very fast and County Durham suddenly came up for a complete overhaul for its second edition.

If nothing else, I like a good walk, so I checked all my walking routes again, cycled all the old railway tracks again, made changes to my text wherever things had changed, and improved on the photography, now digital, knowing that the book was going into full colour. As for the maps, Ordnance Survey extracts were going to be used, with route overlays. I checked everything all over again for a third edition, wondering why the book was proving so popular. Apparently it was well regarded locally, by people who seemed to be proud that it even existed, and I'm very grateful for their support.

The second and third editions included straplines. On the second edition it read '40 walks and 10 railway cycleways'. On the third edition it read '40 walking routes and 10 traffic-free cycle routes'. I always enjoyed cycling those old railway tracks, partly because of their heritage interest, but mostly because I can't think of any other built-up areas of the country where you can cycle to so many places without having to use roads. For the fourth edition, I was asked if I would drop the cycle routes in order to save a few pages. I wasn't too happy about that, nor was I very much against it, so the pages were dropped, and

it didn't affect the way the book was regarded in the slightest. The strapline was changed to read '40 walking routes exploring Pennine moors, river valleys and coastal paths'.

That just leaves the fifth edition of the guidebook and yet another exploration of County Durham, completed in 2022. I'm aware that some things never change in the slightest, and some things seem to change quite regularly. I focussed my attention on places where changes were expected and I found plenty. Interestingly, the Durham coastline, which I'd walked way back in 1988, had changed the most. When the development of the England Coast Path was first announced, County Durham got its signposts into the ground straight away. Those signposts now look old and tired, while many long stretches of the England Coast Path still haven't been signposted or even negotiated. County Durham was a leader in the industrial revolution, and it's proved itself to be a leader in coastal restoration and access too.

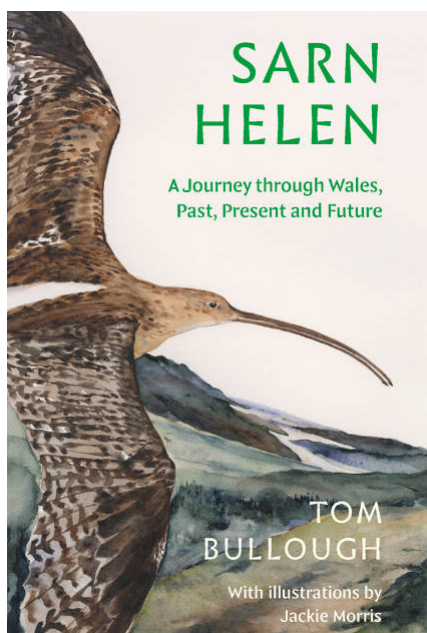
One day I'll follow my great-great-grandfather into a hole in the ground, then maybe someone else will see the benefit in writing about walks around County Durham.

### Publication History

**1996** First Edition, **2008** Second Edition, **2015** Third Edition, **2019** Fourth Edition, **2022** Fifth Edition

\* Regarding trespassing on Mickle Fell. I did it so many times, and wrote it up in so many books and magazine articles, as well as speaking about it on radio, that a large notice appeared telling walkers how to obtain permission to climb the fell. Instructions from that notice now feature in my guidebooks.

# Book Reviews / Roly Smith



## ***Sarn Helen: A Journey through Wales, Past, Present and Future***

**Tom Bullough**

*Granta, £16.99 (hb)*

Don't be fooled into thinking, as I was, that this is a walking guide to Sarn Helen, the 160-mile route based on the Roman road running through central and west Wales between Aberconwy in the north and Carmarthen in the west. Anyway, that was already adequately covered by John Cantrell and Arthur Rylance's Cicerone guide of 1992.

This is more of a journey of discovery for Bullough, a Brecon-based novelist looking for something constructive to do during the first Covid lockdown of 2020. It turned into a heartfelt *cri de coeur* over what is happening to our embattled countryside, as global warming takes its inexorable course.

The author speaks to a series of academic environmental scientists along the way, one of whom warns of inevitable severe food shortages resulting from crop failures due to increasingly wet summers and winters.

But it's not all doom and gloom, as the author walks past clumps of yews that are older than Christianity, the scant remains of Roman forts, and even has a standoff with a herd of alpacas. And his journey unexpectedly ends when he is arrested and put in a police cell during an Extinction Rebellion protest in Parliament Square in September 2020.

This is a beautifully written travelogue which is charmingly illustrated with cover and chapter headings by Jackie Morris, of *The Lost Words* fame.

## ***15 Short Walks Hadrian's Wall*** Mark Richards

***15 Short Walks in Arnside & Silverdale*** David Jordan

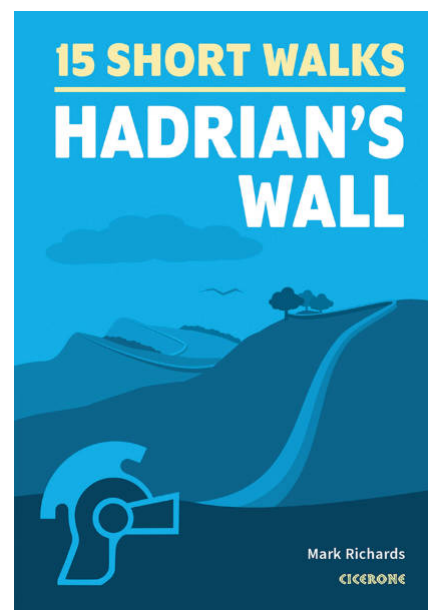
***15 Short Walks in Nidderdale*** Jon Fallis

*All Cicerone, £9.95 (pb)*

These are three of the latest titles in Cicerone's new, slimmed-down and marginally-cheaper Short Walks series, although at just short of a tenner each, the price still seems a bit steep for what are compact, 96-page paperbacks.

However, the walker can rest easy in the expert boots of Mark (now surely deserving to be dubbed Marcus?) Richards for the *Hadrian's Wall* book. All the expected popular sites are covered, including the much-photographed Sewingshields Crag, Sycamore Gap and, slightly "off the Wall", Vindolanda and Barcombe Hill.

But there are also interesting and less frequented excursions to places like the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall and Birdoswald and Gilsland Spa. As usual, Richards proves a reliable, knowledgeable and entertaining guide.



*Short Walks in Arnside and Silverdale* also covers well-known destinations in this tiny AONB, such as Arnside Knott, Silverdale and Jenny Brown's Point, in that southeast corner of the Lake District which is sometimes known as Cumbria over the Water.

Local resident David Jordan obviously knows his patch like the back of his hand, and he includes places a little further afield, as such the RSPB's famous nature reserve of Leighton Moss, with its bitterns and bearded tits, and even further south, the peregrine-haunted former quarry which is now the local nature reserve of Warton Crag.

The *Short Walks in Nidderdale* admirably covers that often-overlooked and disregarded area of the Yorkshire Dales. Lovely Nidderdale surely merited inclusion in the National Park when it was designated in 1954, and again when the Park was extended to include the Howgill Fells in 2016.

But it remains a 600 sq km AONB, including such scenic and historical gems as Brimham Rocks, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Jervaulx Abbey

and the Nidd Gorge west of Knaresborough.

All these are covered in Fallis's clear and concise text, backed by OS 1:25,000 mapping.

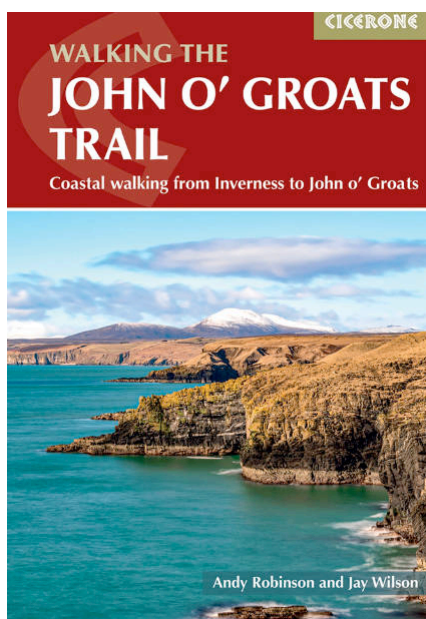
### ***Walking the John o'Groats Trail***

**Andy Robinson & Jay Wilson**  
*Cicerone, £16.95 (pb)*

This new, 145-mile trail along Scotland's little frequented north-eastern coast from Inverness to John o'Groats will be a boon to "End to Enders" finishing the popular Land's End to John o'Groats charity walk. Previous to its inception, they had to endure the busy traffic on the A9 and A99 coastal roads.

The John o'Groats Trail builds on the pioneering work of the Caithness Waybaggers, now merged with Hillwalkers Anonymous, who opened up the glorious Caithness coast path.

After crossing the Moray, Cromarty and Dornoch Firths, the route parallels the line of the A9 and A99 as they speed up past some of the most spectacular Devonian Old Red Sandstone seacliffs and geos in Britain, which are ignored, largely



unnoticed and invisible, from the road. They include the Needle's Eye and An Dun natural sea arches; the striated cliffs of Whaligoe and the amazing sea stacks of Duncansby Head.

History is never far from the coast in this part of the world, and the route passes no less than five ancient castles, including Inverness at the start of the walk; the ruined Castle Sinclair Girnigoe; Ackergill Tower, Carn Liath and Keiss and Bucholly Castles in its later stages. In addition to those, the ruined brochs of Carn Liath north of Dunrobin; Ousdale Broch north of Helmsdale, and Nybster Broch south of Auckengill are also passed on the route.

#### **Also recently published by**

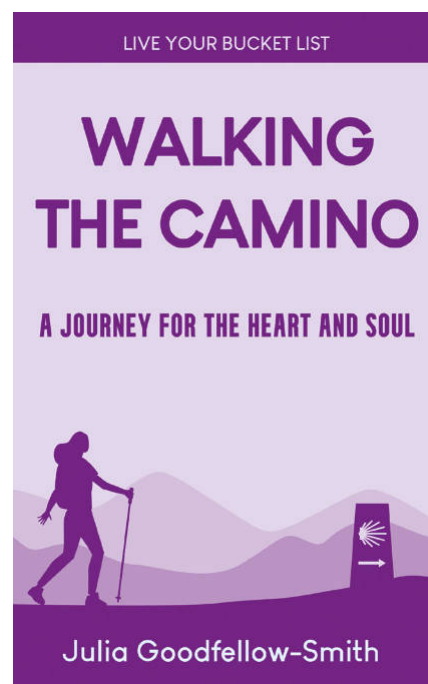
**Cicerone Hiking and Cycling**  
*The California Missions Trail* by Sandy Brown (£18.95), a second edition of Mike Townsend's *Walking on Uist and Barra* (£16.95), and a fourth edition of Leigh Hatts' *Walking the Thames Path* (£17.95).

### ***Walking the Camino: A Journey for the Heart and Soul***

**Julia Goodfellow-Smith**  
*Self-published, £10.99 pb*

This self-published book by the Guild's secretary is the first I have seen where the author freely acknowledges the fact that she was assisted in its production by AI (Artificial Intelligence). She says she used AI for research (search engines), for checking grammar and for marketing assistance.

Given the current moral concerns about AI and where it might take us, this is a particularly brave and honest



admission. By all accounts, the jury is still out on whether writers should rely on AI or good, old-fashioned NI, (ie Natural Intelligence) and their own imagination in the production of their work.

*Walking the Camino* is the latest in the author's quest to complete her personal bucket list, which she has outlined in her previous publications. In the case of the Camino, when another trip she was planning fell through, it was a last-minute decision to join a friend who was already two weeks into the walk.

This book is another which should not be regarded purely as a route guide; there are no maps and minimal directions. In any case, there are already plenty of these for this route on the market. It merely recounts in diary style one person's journey and the people she met on the popular pilgrimage route, which is officially known as the Camino de Santiago. It does, however, contain tips for others thinking about doing the route and following in the author's at times painful footsteps.

# The Wadi Rum Trail

**Tony Howard** describes the history and route of the Wadi Rum Trail

It's almost forty years now since we first went to Wadi Rum to check out its climbing potential after seeing the *Lawrence of Arabia* film. Its desert mountains were so impressive and its Bedouin inhabitants so welcoming that we have returned every year since. The result has been four guidebooks to Rum and Jordan, and the knowledge gained led to the start of our explorations soon joined by others for what became the 670km Jordan Trail first walked in 2017.

Meanwhile, over in Egypt, Ben Hoffler created his Sinai Trail which Di Taylor and I later walked with him, then his Red Sea Mountain Trail. Whilst with him on his Sinai Trail we chatted about Wadi Rum and he suggested creating what became the 120km Wadi Rum Trail. Based on our knowledge of the area we worked on it together but were also greatly assisted by many of our Bedouin friends, in particular Sabbah Eid and Sheikh Kraim. The result was a ten day route circumnavigating Rum's deserts and mountains. Perhaps uniquely it includes scrambling, climbing and abseiling though if that doesn't appeal, the rock sections can be avoided. Some of it can even be done on camels if you prefer!

From the village of Rum, the first day cuts through the 500 metre high cliffs of the massif of Jebel um Ishrin via the concealed complexities of Rakabat Canyon. This includes a couple of exposed scrambles where a rope is advised. Then after a day trekking between sandstone domes, the first summit, Jebel Burdah with its now famous rock bridge is climbed on the third day. It was shown to us in 1984 by a local Bedouin, Defallah Atieq. The ascent to reach it finishes with a 10m grade 3, Diff pitch, then another just beyond it before the scramble to the summit.

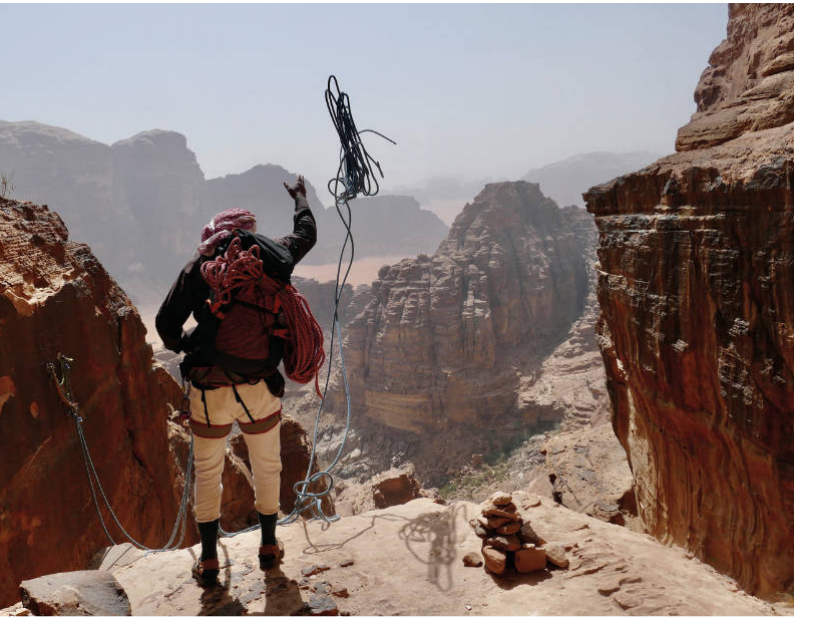
the way  
passes by the  
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T E Lawrence  
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Once down the east side of Burdah a camp is made, then after trekking through the quiet and remote south eastern part of Rum, Jebel um Adaami is reached and climbed on the fifth day. Its 1840m summit rises above the border with Saudi Arabia. Its discovery as Jordan's highest mountain was made in 1992 by Defallah Atieq after which Di and I summited it with him and his brother. The ascent is an enjoyable easy scramble with superb 360° views from the summit including south into Saudi Arabia and its Hejaz mountains and north across a desert maze to the domed topped mountains of Wadi Rum. Camp is then made in a high hollow on Adaami's western side before descending a canyon with some grade 2 scrambling the next day.

The trail to the next camp then winds through another remote and quiet area to camp 7, before continuing, still in a quiet part of Rum to camp 8 beneath Jebel Rum's west face, a barrier of rock 10 kilometres long and 500 metres high. The way to its 1754m summit is up a route named after Sheikh Hamdan who took a party of surveyors up it in 1949. It's a magnificent and complex climb up a north facing canyon wall with sections of grade 2 (Mod) and a pitch of grade 3. After summiting with another superb panoramic view, a bivouac is made part way down its eastern side in a sandy hollow with ancient junipers.

The tenth and final day to Rum village descends an awesome chasm in the mountain's east face known as The Great Siq. It was first climbed by Hammad Hamdan, a Bedouin hunter and coincidentally, son of Sheikh Hamdan. Its ascent involves 250m of sometimes grade 4c, VS climbing and as always with Bedouin routes, Hammad climbed it up and back down without equipment, an impressive achievement. Climbers





today have the safety of modern equipment and its descent is by abseiling which is a truly memorable conclusion to the trail. Then, to put the icing on the cake, before reaching the village, the way passes by the spring of Ain Shalaali where T E Lawrence famously bathed.

The Wadi Rum Trail was created over a period of three years and centres squarely on Wadi Rum. Like its sister trails, Egypt's Sinai Trail and Red Sea Mountain Trail, the Wadi Rum Trail is a community tourism initiative to specifically benefit the local Bedouin community. It seeks to boost slow, sustainable forms of travel that help conserve its natural assets for the future and give the most authentic space for learning more about its precious Bedouin heritage.

#### The Wadi Rum Trail website

[www.wadirumtrail.org/hike-the-trail](http://www.wadirumtrail.org/hike-the-trail)



▲ Sabbah Eid jumping a siq on the descent of Jebel Rum



Tony's explorations in Wadi Rum and Jordan and elsewhere around the world are described in his book *Quest into the Unknown*. Tony is also author of *Troll Wall*, which tells the story of its simultaneous first ascents by Norwegian and British teams in 1965, of which he was a member. He is also author of guidebooks to climbing and/or trekking in the Peak District, Norway and Jordan.

# Castle in the Clouds

Allan Hartley comes across an interesting tale at altitude...

Better known as Becher Haus, but what's in a name? On the face of it, not a lot but looking behind the scenes there is enough historical intrigue here for a novel and several Netflix TV series.

My first encounter with the Becher Haus was during the late nineteen sixties when having climbed the near-by Wilder Freiger we decided to drop down from the summit, cross the Ubeltal Ferner glacier to the Mueller Hut, then drop down the adjacent Pfaffenneider col, and descend the Fernstube Ferner glacier and join our wives at the Sulzenau Hut.

Little did we know that we were being watched!

Once on the Ubeltal Ferner glacier we noticed three guys had left the Becher Haus and were making their way in our direction. Speculating they were just fellow climbers until we noticed they had guns, ah, just hunters, na these guys wore uniforms, not just any uniform but that of the elite Italian Alpini mountain troops complete with Robin Hood style elaborate peaked Eagle feathered hat.

Being shouted at to HALT they approached. Since they had guns we did as we were told. In German they asked what were we doing in Italy. Having not a clue what they were talking about since none of us spoke any German other than Bitte and Bier, I just said English English. The lead guy who spoke a mix of German- English, told us "you cannot come to Italy this way, you have to go back, go back to Austria the way you came, if you want to climb in Italy you have to go to the Brenner [pass]" Yea but we are going to Austria, just going over there waving my arm pointing the way across the glacier to the Mueller Hut and Pffenneider.

The lead soldier tells us sternly, Keine, Nein, Nicht, NO you are Not, you will go back the way I told you. If you don't you will be arrested. The other two soldiers, who remained some distance away, start to raise their guns. OK we turn around and head back to the Wilder Freiger, with the soldiers following at a distance until they feel they have re-secured the Border and return to the Becher Haus and at 3196m high their Castle in the Clouds. Perhaps for them it was another boring day at their office, well at least we gave them something to do!

Years would pass and it was only when I started writing guide-books that I learnt a lot more about the Becher Haus and the so called Castle in the Clouds. As a mountain hut, Becher Haus was one of 72 mountain huts in the Austrian Sud Tyrol that were confiscated from the Deutscher und Oesterreichisher Alpenverein alpine clubs in 1919

as War Reparations following the end First World War including the annexation of the whole of the South Tyrol Province to Italy. Most of those huts along this new border including the Becher and Mueller Huts would be garrisoned by the Italian military for a very long time fearing that the Austrians would invade and fight to get their beloved Sud Tyrol back. This tension was only generally eased when Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and most border restriction were removed though the military of both sides kept an un-easy truce on both sides of the border.

For my guidebook Trekking in the Stubai Alps, I/we had visited the area several times, but never to Becher Haus as the military refused to vacate, [ as they still do at the Neuegersdorfer Hut] the closest we got was to the Mueller Hut, where I learnt of this and various other border huts general destruction, though not through needless willful vandalism but more as a need for survival. The Alpini gone, the hut was generally garrisoned by ordinary mountain troops. Poorly supplied they resorted to the need to survive by gradually burning the furniture to cook meals and stay warm. On our tour in 1986 the Mueller Hut was a semi wreck having been patched up using whatever materials there were, floor





boards, doors, our table was a door. At the time I was told that the Becher Haus was in a similar condition, but that it remained out of bounds to visitors, any visitors.

Continuing with my guidebook, I learned that there was a lot more to know about the Becher Haus and that Becher Haus was not the huts true name, the name just refers to the Becher Spitze and the lump of rock on which it sits overlooking the splendid cirque of mountains surrounding the Uebeltal Ferner glacier.

No, the huts correct name is Kaiserin Elisabeth Haus, known in history as the Empress of Austria, the reluctant Princess and fondly remembered even to this day as Sisi, the wife of Kaiser Franz Josef.

And this is where the story gets very interesting being full of intrigue, plots and twists that in some way mirrors life at the time in many of the Royal courts of Europe including the British even to this day [any names come to mind] but moreso the Austrian Hungarian Empire and Habsburg Dynasty prior to the First World War:

So who was Sisi?

But before answering that, lets look at the Becher Haus itself. At 3196m high it was the original Castle in the Clouds of the Stubai Alps.

Becher Haus terrace



During the great wealth of the late 19th century and development of the Deutscher und Oesterreichischer Alpenverein Alpine Clubs there was quite a lot of rivalry going on who could build the best huts with kudos being given to the great cities of Germany, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, in Austria Vienna, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Salzburg that in around 1890 the DuOeAV Sektion Hannover elected to honour Sisi by funding and building the Kaiserin Elisabeth Haus on the Becher Spitze. Their ambitious plan was such, that once the hut was constructed to arrange for Kaiserin Elisabeth to visit the hut being physically transported by men and Haflinger horses to the hut accompanied by her ladies in waiting and others of the Habsburg Royal Court.

While construction of the hut was successful, with the hut opening in 1894, the Royal visit never took place due to very tragic circumstances.

Now you know how the hut got its name lets look at Sisi, the reluctant Princess.

Empress Elisabeth of Austria was born into the Royal Bavarian House of Wittelbach on Christmas Eve of 1837 being one of nine children. Remember this is before German unification in 1871.

Stunningly beautiful with long jet black hair at 16 she was chosen by the young 23 year old Kaiser Franz Josef to be his wife though it was always intended at least by his mother Archduchess Sophie that he would marry her elder sister Princess Helene. How angry she must have been having the limelight stolen from her by her younger sister, but how lucky was she to escape the clutches of the dreaded Archduchess Sophie.

Leaving Bavaria at 16 Sisi was unprepared for the restrictions of the Habsburg court life wholly dominated by her mother in law Archduchess Sophie. Though Sisi captivated the public and her husband alike she found court life oppressive. Educated and enquiring once queen she travelled frequently particularly to Hungary much to the Courts annoyance who tried constantly to have her remain in Vienna. But she was Queen and got her way.

Cruising the North African Coast She said I always want to be on the move, every ship sailing away fills me with great joy, which she did several times before Austria became land locked by cruising the North African coast and visiting the Canary Islands with Madeira being a favourite destination. After the suicide of their son Crown Prinz Rudolf in 1889, that's another story, Sisi travelled extensively to try



and find peace of mind and avoid the then Press attention [sound familiar]. On 10th September 1898, in poor health aged 60, she was on her way with her confidant Countess Katharina Sztaray and her reader young Friedrich Baker, to board a Lake Geneva pleasure boat cruise when she was stabbed and murdered by 25 year old Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni, his intended target was the Duke of Orleans but could not find him. He had learnt that Sisi was in Geneva and chose her as an alternative target for no apparent reason other than to murder the first aristocrat to cross his path. In death having had such a lonely life, final greetings came from France, Switzerland, Greece, Italy and Egypt. The women of Cairo sending many Roses of Jericho.

So what happened next? At the time her death aged 60, Kaiser Franz Josef was 67, broken by the earlier death of his son Rudolf and now his wife most of his Royal duties had passed to his nephew Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Fourteen years later Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Countess Sophie were shot dead by Gavrilo Princip, a member of Black Hand Nationalist Group in Sarajevo on the 28 June 1914, while on a state visit to Bosnia that led to the start of the First World War. Franz Josef now 81 was by then a sad figure of a monarch with most Royal duties being undertaken by his nephew Karl. Two years later in 1916 with the war in full swing, with names of the Somme and Passchendaele, Franz Josef at 83 was dead.

By late 1918 the war ended, by mid 1919 at the treaty of St Germain in Paris, the Sud Tyrol was annexed to Italy, the Deutscher und Oestereichisher Alpenverein disbanded along with all their huts being confiscated. The Habsburg Austrian Hungarian Empire was broken up and disintegrated with most of the Austrian Royalty having fled into exile. Archduke Karl who tried to broker a deal for peace was exiled first to Switzerland, then later after he tried to return to Austria was exiled a second time to Madeira where in Funchal at the Reids Hotel in 1922 he would die of pneumonia aged just 34. Austria, now landlocked became a republic.

Meanwhile the Kaiserin Elisabeth Haus, was renamed Rifugio Regina Elena after the Italian

Queen Elena for a short time before reverting back to Becher Haus, that became the norm or in Italian as the Rifugio Bicchiere.

In more recent times should you be privileged to stay at Becher Haus, spend a few minutes in the hut's Maria Chapel dedicated to Sisi, and while sitting on the huts terrace enjoying the scenery and a beer consider the plight of the US Airforce B24 Liberator bomber that crashed on the Uebeltal Ferner glacier during the Second World War killing all the 12 crew after the plane took a direct hit to the fuselage bomb bay while on a bombing mission of railway yards between Sterzing and Munich on 8 April 1945. One month later the war was over. How

sad. While most of the wreckage was removed a lot sank into the ice because the fire, now 80 years on should you go to the nearby Teplitzer Hut you will be able to see some of the planes relics of that fateful day collected by Haller Davis the Huettenwirt at the hut including a battered 50 calibre machine gun.

As for the Crown Prinz Rudolf, what happened to him?

Inheriting his mothers good looks he was a wow with the ladies at Court, becoming distant from his wife Princess Stephanie of Belgium because of his many lovers, he took solace with one of her ladies in waiting the teenage Baroness Mary Vetsera, when they hatched a joint suicide pact, shooting each other at the

Mayerling hunting lodge on the outskirts of the Vienna woods in 1889. There was a film about that just called Mayerling. In his lifetime Rudolf was honoured by the DuOeAV Alpenverein with the construction of the Rudolf's Hut [1874] in the Granats Group of mountains above Zell am See but this hut would be lost and drowned in 1958 during the construction of the Weisse hyro-electric dam reservoir being replaced with the very grand Rudolf's Hut Berg Hotel.

Quite strange what you can find out when you start writing guidebooks!

I do however have one last question, who stole the Becher Haus's huts original Kaiserin Elisabeth Haus hut sign, my guess is that it was one of the Alpini that took it when they vacated?

[www.allanhartley.co.uk](http://www.allanhartley.co.uk)

