



# Outdoor FOCUS

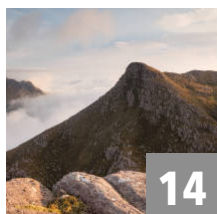
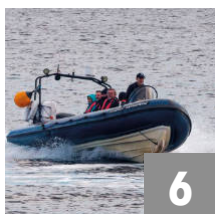
THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / WINTER 2023



# Outdoor FOCUS winter 2023

## Contents

- 3** **New Members** This month we welcome David Jordan and Anna Taylor to OWPG
- 4** **Book Reviews** Roly Smith reviews the latest outdoor books
- 6** **Big Weekend 2023** Kevin Sene, Big Weekend Organiser, reflects on a magical island visit
- 8** **Big Weekend Gallery** Members share their photo's from the Big Weekend
- 10** **The Golden Eagle Award** Rhiane Fatinikun and Black Girls Hike UK
- 11** **Technical Innovation Award** BUILT TO SEND for their X3 Alpine ultralight pack
- 11** **Digital** Lisa Drewe wins Highly Commended for her website [www.islandeering.com](http://www.islandeering.com)
- 12** **Technical Feature** James Forrest on his award-winning piece *How hiking gear became cool*
- 14** **Guidebook** David Lintern, on his triumphant book *Scottish Wild Country Backpacking*
- 16** **Outdoor/Travel Feature** Mary-Ann Ochota writes about her award-winning article
- 18** **Photography** See James Rushforth's winning photography portfolio: From the Air
- 22** **Big Weekend Gallery** See more members' photos from this year's Big Weekend
- 24** **Scotland meet-up** Felicity Martin reports on a recent members' walk in Perth



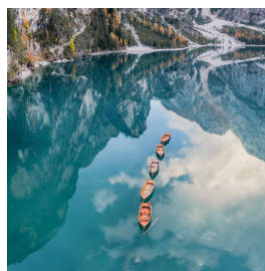
## SO LONG...

All things must pass. It was December 2016 that I was asked if I'd like to edit *Outdoor Focus*. You'll enjoy it, I was told. It'll be fun. Well, why not I thought and so I said yes. And now, seven years and twenty-eight issues later, it's time to step down. From spring 2024 onwards, *Outdoor Focus* will be edited by Alex Roddie.

*Outdoor Focus* will be in good hands as Alex is editor of *Sidetracked* magazine, as well as writing books for Vertebrate Publishing and gestalten. Alex also writes features, op-ed and gear reviews for *The Great Outdoors* magazine. From now on, it's Alex who you'll need to contact if you have an idea for an article. Get in touch with him - [alex@alexroddie.com](mailto:alex@alexroddie.com) - by 1 February if you have something in mind for the next issue.

For now though, I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to *Outdoor Focus* since 2017, particularly regular contributors and those who heroically came through when something was needed at the last moment. You all helped make the task enjoyable. And fun.

**David**



### Cover James Rushforth

A perfectly still evening at Lago di Braies. See James's award-winning photography portfolio on page 18.

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](http://www.owpg.org.uk).

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# New Members



## David Jordan

When I first walked the Pacific Crest Trail in 2016, providing updates for Brian Johnson's comprehensive guidebook to the route, I had little idea that in 2023 I would do so for a second time, becoming one of less than 200 people to ever walk the 2650 miles more than once. This time I was researching the route for my own complete re-write of the guide, in a new format, which I hope will be available in late 2024.

In between I spent four summers in Italy thoroughly researching the Grande Traversata Delle Alpi for a new edition of that guide, as well as working with Cicerone to produce one of the new 'short walks' series of guidebooks to my own beautiful little corner of the world on Arnside and Silverdale AONB.

Of course, writing is not new to me, I've spent many years writing corporate communications, strategies, speeches, and bids across the public, private and third sectors. Now, embracing the adventure of freelancing, I'm keen to use my skills and experience to write more for those with a passion for being outside, and perhaps to inspire and tempt a few newcomers out of the door along the way too.



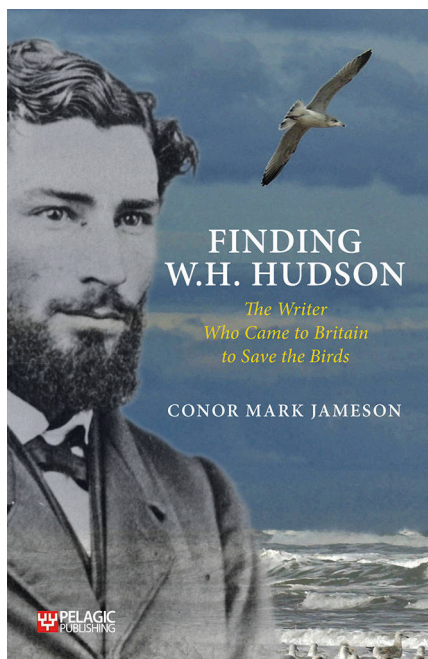
## Anna Taylor

I am a writer, activist and public speaker based in the Yorkshire Dales. I have written widely on climate justice, and my work has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *VICE* and *i-D* magazine, as well as contributing to two books on the topic. More recently, I have shifted into the world of outdoor writing - a special thanks must go to Chris Scaife from *Descent* for helping to facilitate this by making me Youth Correspondent!

When I'm not writing, grumbling about the climate crisis, or leading a group of (also grumbling) school kids up Ingleborough, I can usually be found squeezing through muddy potholes, bivvying in sub-zero temperatures and doing generally miserable activities 'for fun'. I also volunteer with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, which has sparked a passion for rewilding. Mountains and writing share equal halves of my heart, so conjoining the two brings me immense joy. I love both journalistic and creative non-fiction writing: in the latter, I enjoy breaking the boundaries of traditional nature writing by exploring the ugly, grotesque and painful. Nature is not a perfect thing (and neither are we).



# Book Reviews / Roly Smith



## **Finding WH Hudson**

**Conor Mark Jameson**

*Pelagic Publishing, £21.99 (pb)*

An imposing, life-size oil painting of a keen-eyed, bearded man holding a pair of binoculars dominates the main meeting room at the RSPB's headquarters in The Lodge at Sandy in Bedfordshire.

"The man above the fireplace" – as he is affectionately known by staff – is William Henry Hudson (1841–1922), the Argentinian-born naturalist, author and campaigner who was instrumental in founding the RSPB, which now boasts over a million members, in 1889.

This book, written by a man who worked for the RSPB for 25 years, provides a fascinating and previously untold journey into the Pampas-born naturalist's path from his journey to Britain

in 1874, to the unveiling by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin of a monument and bird sanctuary in his honour 50 years later in London's Hyde Park. Ironically, this was a place where the young immigrant Hudson had for a time slept rough when he first arrived in Britain.

But at its core, this extraordinary story reveals Hudson's deep influence on the creation of his beloved Bird Society (it became the RSPB in 1904) by its founders, who were largely women, and the subsequent rise of the conservation movement.

By the end of his life, Hudson was a household name in Britain through his voluminous and acutely-observed nature writing, and the Bird Society had reached the climax of a 30-year campaign, working to create the first global alliance of bird protectionists.

A century after Hudson's death, this is a welcome and long overdue tribute to one of our most significant – and possibly most neglected – writer-naturalist and wildlife campaigners.

## **Walking the Bones of Britain**

**Christopher Somerville**

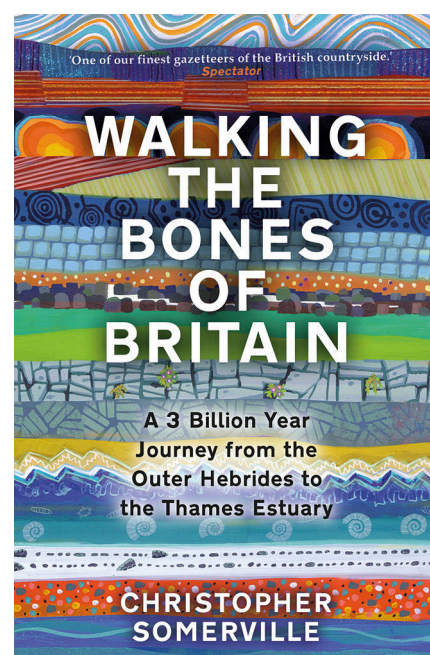
*Doubleday, £25 (hb)*

A reviewer on *The Times*, on which the author has been its highly respected walking correspondent for many years, once wrote that he could "write about mud and make it interesting."

Somerville comprehensively proves that in this fascinating epic though an intermittent, 1,000-mile, three-billion year, journey from the Outer Hebridean island of Lewis to Wallasea Island on the Thames Estuary.

And the author finds plenty of mud to interpret along the way, from the saltmarshes of Wallasea Island to the peat bogs of the Pennine Way between Gargrave and Edale, where he quotes John Hillaby, the man whom he says first inspired him to become a writer through his 1968 classic *Journey Through Britain*.

If there is one criticism of the author's own fascinating and absorbing journey through Britain, it is the overly-scientific detail he goes into about the geology and geomorphology of each area through which he passes. Aided throughout by local





geological experts, the author's explanation of the geology can sometimes be forensic in its detail. He is much better when he's striding out through the countryside he loves, always ready with an entertaining anecdote or historical story to enliven the journey.

Chris Somerville has been justly described as one of the finest gazetteers of the British countryside, and this exploration of our unique geology puts him up there alongside L Dudley Stamp and W H Pearsall.

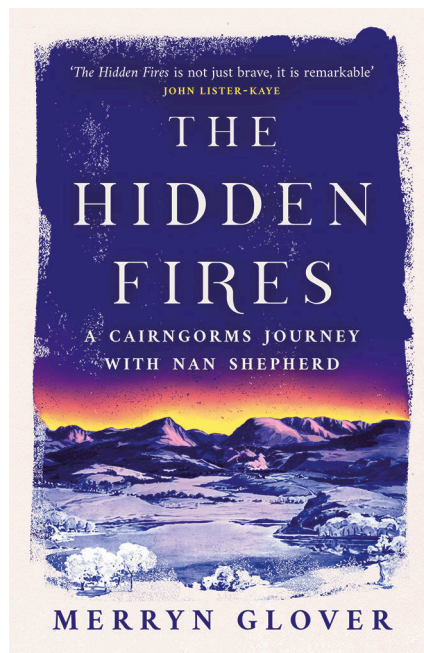
***The Hidden Fires: A Cairngorms journey with Nan Shepherd***

Merryn Glover  
Polygon, £10.99 (pb)

Nan Shepherd's 1977 masterpiece, *The Living Mountain*, changed the way many people, including some of our most distinguished outdoor writers, regarded mountain landscapes. No longer were they challenges – summits or climbs to be “conquered” – they were places for inner reflection and mindfulness, so beautifully expressed in Shepherd's timeless prose.

Inspired by *The Living Mountain*, this beautiful homage to Shepherd is a deeply personal account of the author's own love of the Cairngorms and manages to capture some of the magic of the original by faithfully retracing her steps into one of the last great wilderness of these islands.

It brings together the physical, philosophical and literary landscapes first recorded by Shepherd into a remarkable personal homecoming for the author and deserves to rank alongside the classic work by Nan Shepherd on the bookshelves of Cairngorm aficionados.



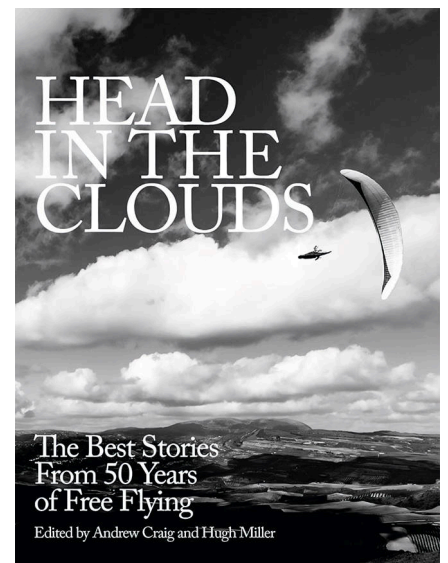
***Head in the Clouds***  
Ed. Andrew Craig and Hugh Miller  
Cross Country International, £28 (hb)

We are sometimes accused of ignoring some outdoor adventure sports in our columns, but hopefully this review will answer that criticism. Subtitled “The Best Stories from 50 Years of Free Flying”, this book claims to capture the heart and soul of free flying (ie hang gliding and paragliding) through 50 short

stories told by the adventurers themselves.

Edited by two experienced freefliers and journalists it includes such hair-raising adventures as the pilot who crossed the Atlantic in a microlight; the Canadian paraglider pilot who followed the epic migration of the Monarch butterfly from Mexico to British Columbia; the British climber who circumnavigated Nanga Parbat in the Himalaya in a hang glider, and an extraordinary, *Touching the Void* type experience of a pilot who crashed in the wilderness of the American West.

As Miller explains: “Free flying is adventure and exploration at its best. These stories represent the very best of our sport; the heart and soul of free flying.”



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# BIG WEEKEND

Kevin Sene, Big Weekend Organiser, reflects on a magical island visit



**With the Cumbrae event now in the past, both members and guests seem to have enjoyed the weekend and the chance to catch up with colleagues.**

The Field Studies Council (FSC) centre at Millport turned out to be a great venue with the weather reasonably kind (most of the time) and fine views toward Arran, Bute and the mainland. Our star guest, Rhiane Fatinikun, the Golden Eagle Award winner, stayed on both Friday and Saturday nights, taking part in the events programme too.

The weekend got underway on Friday evening with a presentation by Elke the centre manager on the history of the FSC and insights into the wildlife on the island and the centre's ecological credentials. Following Jetta's introduction to the book table, Mary-Ann gave a short talk on her publishing journey with a chance to then chat with authors who had books on display.

On Saturday morning, Jason from Wreckspeditions made the one-hour-plus boat trip south from Dunoon, hugging the coast to shelter from the Force 5-6 winds. That also made for a bouncy ride for the group who did a full circuit of Little Cumbrae while the other group had an enjoyable time exploring the island on foot. We then met up for coffee and tea with the caretakers at the island's stately home, with some taking a quick trip up the nearby castle for the views.

Felicity's hillwalking group took a different tack, taking a bus from the centre to the ferry slipway at the other end of Cumbrae and walking back over the hilly central part of the island, with the views only marred by the occasional heavy shower. Julia's presentation skills workshop was in the morning too.

In the afternoon, Josephine led a



**Top** Birdwatching on the north of the islands **Centre** The 'Starfish Enterprise' returning from Little Cumbrae **Bottom** One of the two book tables (All Kevin Sene)



# 2023



photography workshop, showing what's possible with smartphones as well as fancier kit, while another group went on a gin distillery tour, which also got great reviews. You can read about the AGM and Awards Ceremony elsewhere in this issue while the Drinks Reception was again hosted by Cicerone, with a short presentation from Maddy - many thanks again.

Sunday morning saw a very well-received creative writing workshop from Ronald and a meander through the history of Millport led by Stan. Meanwhile the birdwatching group explored a nearby peninsula on foot, seeing both woodland and wading birds, before heading to the north of the island in search of more wildlife. A very informal arrangement to meet with a local RSPB enthusiast worked out surprisingly well, who pointed out ravens and some more of Cumbrae's waterbird species.

After lunch, Jon's cycle ride around the island proved popular, including with the two people who braved a tandem trip. The second history walk of the day was led by Alastair Chisholm, organist at the Cathedral of the Isles, including a magical moment with impromptu recitals of Bach and Chopin on some historical pianos and a harpsichord. A fiendishly difficult quiz then rounded off the evening.

So that gives a flavour of the 2023 weekend, with thanks to everyone who took part and particularly those who led activities and gave presentations; sorry if I've missed anyone out. Next year's Big Weekend will be at the FSC's headquarters at Preston Montford near Shrewsbury from 11-14 October 2024 and we'll be sharing initial plans early in the new year. Hope to see you there.



**Top** Seals viewed on the boat trip **Centre** Distant island views **Bottom** Cathedral of the Isles (All Kevin Sene)





Cumrae Ferry (Ronald Turnbull)



Cumrae bike ride (Chris Scaife)

# BIG WEEKEND GALLERY



Memorial to HMS Shearwater on Great Cumrae (Chris Howes)



Isle of Cumrae Distillers (David Taylor)



(Ronald Turnbull)

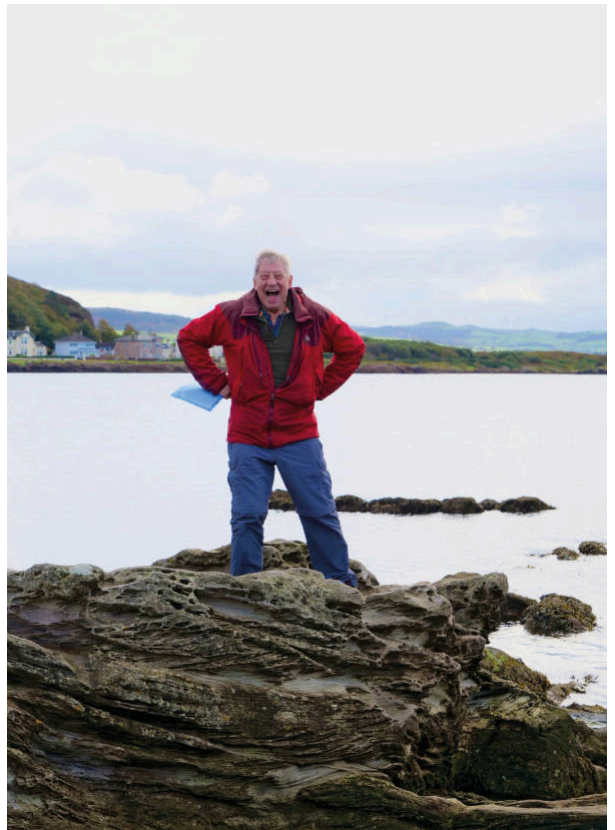


Playing Pictionary at the FSC centre (Chris Howes)





Leaving the Cathedral of the Isles (Chris Howes)



Stan's Historic Milport walk (Jetta Megarry)



View from a RHIB (David Taylor)



(David Taylor)



Little Cumbrae seafarers (Andrew McCloy)



Millport postbox (Jetta Megarry)



Heading towards the Cathedral of the Isles on the weekend's Highest Point walk (Chris Howes)





# GOLDEN EAGLE

## Rhiane Fatinikun Black Girls Hike UK

The OWPG's **Golden Eagle Award** is presented to individuals for 'Outstanding Services to the Outdoors'. Rhiane Fatinikun, this year's worthy winner, is the founder of Black Girls Hike UK ([www.bghuk.com](http://www.bghuk.com)). The primary aim of BGH is to provide a safe space for black women to explore the outdoors, to challenge the status quo, and encourage black women to reconnect with nature. To this end Rhiane, and her team, host nationwide group hikes, outdoor activity days and training events.

Rhiane is an outdoors advocate, community organiser, and a National Diversity Awards Positive Role Model For Gender 2021 winner. She has also spent several years working with grassroots organisations serving vulnerable, ethnically-diverse communities.

Golden Eagle Award winners receive an exclusive watercolour painted by OWPG member David Bellamy. This year's painting of a scene in the Peak District - *Evening light on the Roaches* (above) - is an area very familiar to Rhiane.



Rhiane receiving David's painting from Stan Abbott



# TECHNICAL INNOVATION AWARD

## BUILT TO SEND X3 Alpine

The **Technical Innovation Award** is given to a member of the outdoor gear trade for outstanding innovation in outdoor equipment design and materials. The physical award is a trophy, which this year was handed to Paul Cottee of BUILT TO SEND ([www.builttosend.com](http://www.builttosend.com)) for their X3 Alpine ultralight pack. Chris Townsend, one of this year's judges, used the pack in the Scottish Highlands in order to write a review for *TGO Magazine*. In the review, Chris described the X3 Alpine as 'excellent, easily holding everything needed and very comfortable on the back', and that 'if you want a lightweight pack that'll probably last forever the X3 could be the answer'.

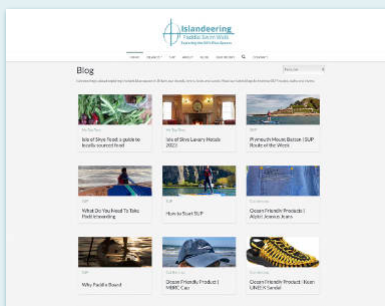
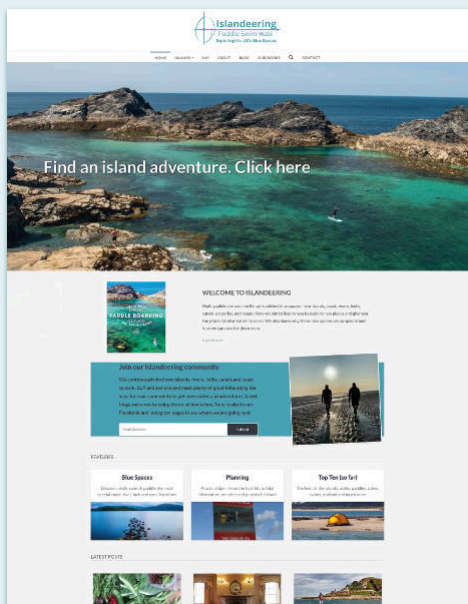


Paul receiving the award from Chris Scaife at the Kendal Wall (Photo by Dave Allen)

**JUDGES** Chris Townsend, Alex Roddie and Kassondra Cloos (all OWPG members)

## DIGITAL

There was no outright winner in the **Digital** category this year, but Lisa Drewe was awarded **Highly Commended** for her website [www.islandeering.com](http://www.islandeering.com). The Digital award is sponsored by OWPG.



### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

This website offers many ways to explore the UK's blue spaces by walking, paddling or swimming. The text is supported with lots of great images and videos, and in building a community, the site is creating a forum for exchanging information, advice, routes and adventures.

**JUDGES** Jacquetta Megarry (OWPG Awards Organiser, 2018 winner) and Lois Sparling (formerly of Cicerone Press)





# TECHNICAL FEATURE

## James Forrest How hiking gear became cool

As the resident gear reviewer for *Trail* magazine, James is no stranger to writing about hiking boots, down jackets, backpacking tents and the like. But with his piece *How Hiking Gear Became Cool* (*Trail*, May 2023) he tells *Outdoor Focus* his goal was to ‘tackle an intriguing topic, dispel some myths and do a deep-dive analysis on a little-known subject’. Here is a short extract from his award-winning article.

It is a bizarre concept. Don your technical hiking clothing in the city and you might accidentally be the most stylish person around. Why? It’s called ‘gorpcore’ – the fashion trend of city-dwellers wearing functional outdoor apparel for street cred. From retro Patagonia fleeces and colour-blocked The North Face puffers to pricey Arc’teryx waterproofs and super-cushioned Hoka trainers, head to any trendy suburb and the influence of outdoor brands on city fashion is clear to see.

Coined by *The Cut* magazine in 2017, ‘gorpcore’ is named after the American colloquial term for trail mix (‘good ol’ raisins and peanuts’) – and the trend has exploded over the past few years. *Vogue* magazine proclaimed ‘functional-wear has newfound kudos’ in a recent article extolling gorpcore’s style virtues, alongside images of supermodel Bella Hadid wearing Salomon S/ Lab XT-6 trainers and Grammy Award-winning rapper Frank Ocean in a Mammut down jacket. *The Guardian* predicted ‘outdoors brands will dominate our wardrobes’ for years to come and GQ labelled gorpcore as ‘one of

**Vogue magazine proclaimed ‘functional-wear has newfound kudos’**

the most important trend topics’ Or to sum it all up, in the words Highsnobiety, ‘fashion’s marriage with the mountain aesthetic is showing no signs of cooling down’.

What has driven the rise of gorpcore? According to fashion critics, it’s the fusion of practicality and style – utilitarian gear that keeps you warm and dry on the commute, but also looks effortlessly cool in the pub. While high-end fashion is all a bit too try-hard, outdoor clothing has gained a kind of under-stated, nerdy coolness, with vibrant colours, baggy silhouettes and heritage vibes synonymous with the look.

For some outdoor brands it appears this has all happened by accident – a lucrative fluke (Hoka recently hit \$1 billion in annual revenue), albeit one that threatens to derail their carefully-crafted outdoors reputation. For others it is a deliberate marketing strategy, with CEOs consciously courting the mainstream, a strategy Canada Goose chief executive Dani Reiss used in the 2000s to transform the flailing parka jacket brand into a global fashion behemoth. ‘We’re



still authentically outdoorsy', they all claim in slick PR releases, but how true can this really be?

Taking a different tack, several brands provide a clear distinction between their technical lines and fashion ranges - Berghaus's 90s-retro Dean Street collection and Helly Hansen's HH-118389225 imprint being good examples. Then there are lesser-known brands, such as Passenger Clothing and Fera, which have the gorpcore ethos (in various guises) written into their DNA, often from inception. Some are outrageously expensive, others are very environmentally-conscious, but they're all 'gorpcore-y', for want of a better phrase.

Do you desire the look? The options are almost innumerable, but here's our suggestion. On your feet, you'll need a pair of chunky-midsole Hoka trainers or On trail shoes with that eye-catching outsole of 'clouds'. Baggy Craghoppers cargo pants come next, paired with a retro fleece, down puffer or technical hard shell. TNF's vintage Nuptse down jacket (the world's hottest product in 2020, according to global fashion search platform Lyst) is a safe bet, or for bolder, brighter colours Cotopaxi never misses the mark. If you're after a baggier fit, a Napapijri smock - complete with cavernous, envelope-like central pocket - will do the trick, as will a Haglofs rain jacket or eco-friendly Finisterre shell. Complete the look with a Columbia beanie, Fera corduroy cap or Sandqvist rolltop backpack.

As hillwalkers, what on earth should we think about this peculiar kinship between

hiking clothing and city fashion? Often the reaction is one of bemusement and ridicule. The North Face's collaboration with Gucci - which included a pair of hiking boots for \$1,490 and a backpack for \$1,790 - was much-maligned by the outdoor community. A 2022 TikTok trend involving teenagers wearing Arc'teryx waterproof jackets in the shower, showing off how well the water droplets beaded, received similar mockery. But, in other scenarios, opinion is polarised.

Some hikers seem genuinely appalled by any brand that dares to go mainstream, as if the very idea goes against everything they stand for. Why? They don't want to look cool, they're environmentally opposed to fast fashion, and they don't like their niche culture being bastardised by 'outsiders'. Fears circle about an erosion of quality too - will style be prioritised over technical performance? How can beginner adventurers differentiate between fit-for-purpose mountain gear and fashion copycats? And will this all inevitably end up with city hikers stranded up Ben Nevis in woefully inappropriate kit?

Other (less cantankerous) hillwalkers see positives in the gorpcore movement. They believe it has the potential for good - to open up the outdoors to ethnic minorities and young people, and transform frumpy women's gear into flattering styles. They don't perceive function and fashion as mutually-exclusive (a Fjallraven gilet can be both stylish and mountain-ready), and ultimately don't see a problem with enjoying your outdoor hobbies and looking good at the same time.

## They don't perceive function and fashion as mutually-exclusive...

### ABOUT JAMES

James Forrest has been a member of OWPG since 2017. He is a full-time freelance writer, as well as a record-breaking adventurer, and is best-known for his three-year mission to climb 1,001 mountains across the UK and Ireland. James is the author of *Mountain Man: 446 Mountains. Six Months. One record-breaking adventure*, the TGO book of the year in 2019, and is a regular contributor to magazines including *Trail*, *Country Walking*, *Active Traveller*, *Lakeland Walker* and many more.

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Well written piece, interesting topic, good info, cohesive. There's just enough of a gear review in it to make it eligible.

**JUDGES** Carlton Reid (founder of *On Your Bike* magazine and former OWPG member) and Elizabeth Multon (Conway, an imprint of Bloomsbury)

# CICERONE

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



# GUIDEBOOK

David Lintern

## Scottish Wild Country Backpacking

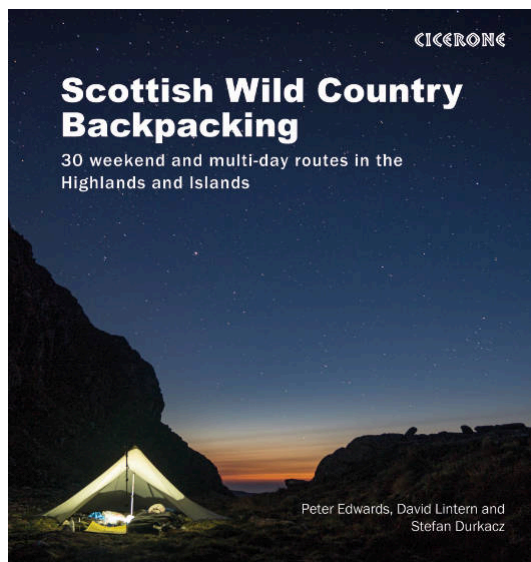
*Scottish Wild Country Backpacking* was this year's winner of the Guidebook award. Here David explains how the book came about, and why choosing the title for a book can be less than straightforward...

Just before Christmas 2018, an email entitled 'proposal' dropped into my inbox. Cicerone author Peter Edwards had a book on the simmer ring and wondered if I might help. The remit was 'routes off the beaten track with at least one night out'. I was keen, but it had come at quite a busy time and the deadline loomed large. I suggested Peter widen the circle again, and with his blessing, invited first time guidebook writer (but very definitely not first-time writer!) Stefan Durkacz into the fold.

After Cicerone gave us the thumbs up, a spreadsheet of routes and ideas followed quite quickly. Clearly Peter had a head start, but both Stefan and I were able to contribute things we'd already done, and a list of places and routes we'd like to explore further. Perhaps the best thing about the project was this sense of pooling strengths and resources. Each contributor brought individual interests and aptitudes: Peter is known for his explorations of coastal areas, and the Hebrides in particular, Stefan has a great eye for an interesting line and a love of historic trails and tracks, and I am especially interested in the links between natural and cultural history. I appreciated the objectivity of my co-conspirators as well, in making sure we had good coverage across the Highlands and Islands, and in sense checking introductory information, a job we shared.

Early on, I expressed a reservation about the working title: *Scottish Wilderness Backpacking*. An interest in hillwalking and the outdoors had slowly led me into more serious journalism work covering Scottish environmental stories on deer overpopulation, beaver reintroductions, and rewilding, and that in turn made me aware of the issues around depopulation and social inequity which present barriers to ecological reparation. I was still to learn about 'intersectional environmentalism', Black Lives Matter was still in the future, but I followed American environmental news studiously and knew that indigenous peoples and academics were starting to take back cultural ownership of public lands in the States. I put it to Peter that 'wilderness' may be a modernist fiction that was harmful for us to perpetuate.

We didn't get hung up on the semantics of the title again until later, but these issues did inform the thinking early on, and I ended up penning the section of the book that





## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

The writing stands out for its authoritative tone, never losing its enthusiasm and respect for the landscape that inspires it... Effective use of maps and photographs that contribute to a strong sense of place, which characterises an effective guidebook.

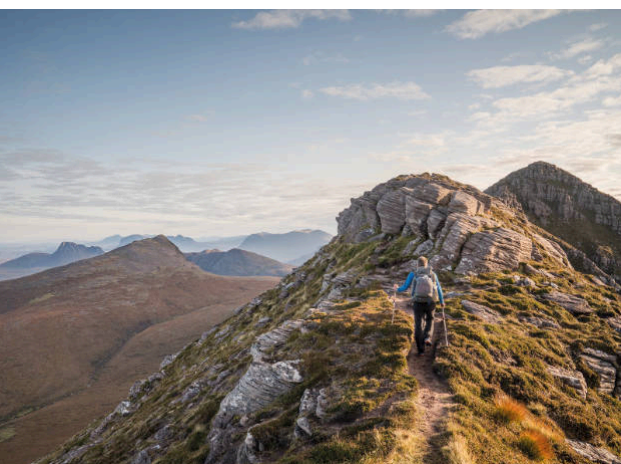
**JUDGES** Sue Viccars, author and owner/editor of *Dartmoor Magazine* and Chris Bagshaw, editor, writer and former OWPG member.

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Lisa Drewe** for *South West England Paddleboarding*



The **Guidebook Award** is sponsored by Aquapac, manufacturer of 100% waterproof cases, bags and pouches. Aquapac is headquartered in London, and sells all over the world.



(Top) Stac Polly from the Coigach Grahams (Left) The cover of *Scottish Wild Country Backpacking* (Right) Coigach Capers - the last route I contributed

attempts to navigate what 'wild' means in the context of a landscape forcibly cleared of its inhabitants. It also meant we sought out routes that might shed light on the cultural history of the landscape, rather than portray it as yet more *terra nullius* to be exploited for thoughtless recreation. Is this quite heavy material for a guidebook? I don't think so. I think a guidebook should set the stage, contextualise, and then step back to let the reader appreciate. And it's a part of the bigger picture, not the whole thing.

Then, the pandemic hit. We couldn't recce routes, and my other work went into meltdown - feast then complete famine. The publisher was of course understanding, and we all grew quite adept at getting out in-between various states of lockdown!

Towards the end of the field research, both the title and the format of the project were revisited. To the publisher's credit, they considered our reservations about the 'W' word carefully, and despite an apparent loss of marketing cache opted for 'Wild Country' instead. It doesn't seem to have harmed the book - it's on its second imprint. It may even have helped it stand out from the competition.

Partly on the strength of the photographs, and partly because some of the routes demanded more in-depth mapping, Cicerone also saw wisdom in a medium format book. Again, we made the case that people increasingly use guidebooks as inspiration, downloading GPX files and photographing pages, often leaving the heavy tome at home or in the van. Cicerone really are fantastic listeners - I can't thank them enough for being open to our thoughts and ideas as they developed.

Of course, this is only part of the story. Several months of editing followed, some of it difficult as many of our routes were away from paths and needed to be mapped very carefully.

Overall, I am pleased with the project. Together and under sometimes testing circumstance, we made something we would not have made on our own, something contemporary and relevant, and something that I hope sets a decent standard for the genre. It may be my name on the Award but that's purely an accident of OWPG membership - the gong belongs equally to Peter, Stefan, and the entire team at Cicerone also. It was hard work occasionally, but mostly it was fun!



# OUTDOOR/TRAVEL FEATURE

## Mary-Ann Ochota *The Wild Life*

*The Wild Life* was this year's winner of the Outdoor/Travel Feature. Here Mary-Ann describes what inspired her to write the article

Sometimes it feels like the stars align for a feature commission – namely, where the things that I think might interest a reader really are the things that interest me. That I can write something candid and personal, and it will have value to others, too. This walk, along the length of the Trotternish Ridge on Skye was one of these star-aligned trips and I'm proud of the piece I wrote about it.

Jenna Maryniak at *Trail Magazine* had been immediately enthusiastic for the feature. I asked – did she want more of a focus on the geological uniqueness of the ridge, the personal journey (it would be my first big walk after having my second child), the ecology of degraded upland habitats, or a route guide on escaping the crowds on Skye? Her helpful steer was, 'I may be greedy, but all of them, please'.

So I wrote about the ridge, the route, our kit and the landscape. And I also wrote about not apologizing for being slow, about trying to stay active despite pelvic floor

injury (not something I usually talk to strangers about!), about rejecting society's narrative that your body is about how it looks, not what it can do. These moments of honesty felt cathartic for me, and empowering. When the feature came out, I had the most heartfelt responses from readers – I'm grateful it meant something to them, too.

I hope, in tiny part, this kind of writing helps change the wider narrative: the outdoors isn't about faster, further, conquering summits and 'sending'. It's about everybody, and every body.





The **Outdoor/Travel Feature Award** is sponsored by Pathfinder Guides, published by Milestone Publishing. They are Britain's best-loved walking guides and long-established. These high-quality walking guides offer in total more than 14,500 miles and circa 6,000 hours of walking in 94 UK titles.



Mary-Ann receiving her award from Stan Abbott

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

Great pix. Good, lively prose. Good hook for the article. Inspiring, info-packed... really engaging and perceptive.

**JUDGES** Carlton Reid (founder of *On Your Bike* magazine and former OWPG member) and Elizabeth Multon (Conway, an imprint of Bloomsbury)

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Susie White** for *The Land of Waterfalls and Wildflowers*

### WALK THE WISDOM

#### Access 1520m

As the breeze whips ferns part of the larger waterfall flow. That's when most people walk with us, south-facing in the sun of Bradford. We're not south-facing, so we're at the tip of the island.

If large stretches have no visible path – the history says that may give a good indication for the line to take. I've found reading rock reports on Ordnance Survey maps and the *Walking* magazine website helpful.

If the ground for mudges – despite some, head and a pair of your own bag or two are essential. Keeping the momentum the chance of being able to get down without being noticed.

If there – we have a recent supply of water in ponds and small streams we can use to the trail. A clear advantage, as you'll see in the photos.

If they have water at least some depth and carry all the hot water and any other things in the water, pack as you go. It's not as easy as it sounds.

If you can arrange to carry your gear, you can avoid the stress of the photos and the weight of the gear. It's not as easy as it sounds.

If there – I've been to the *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.

The greater surprise is the walk in my hillwalking confidence. I worry more that I'll get lost if the weather turns, that I won't be able to keep up with a group. Will I get lost or annoyed if I try a challenging route? Will I fail to get enough into it to attempt a second? When I do have time away from the hills, I feel a personal responsibility to MAKE IT COUNT. It takes concerted effort to return the time that further, further, harder are the only ways to measure success.

The following week was a mixture of the John Muir Trail, the wild places charity. I found myself with three previous days on the hill of the day, children sorted back home and a couple of friends willing to walk with me. And I have just here for all the time would have spent at walking and wild camping a hiker list once, the *Walking* magazine website.

Your track along the natural line of an island, off, over a succession of dramatic hills, through the some *Stor* and *Quinn* landscapes, to the north-west point of *Stor*, *Robbie* *Hannah*, *Yan* know you're finished when you reach the sea. *Wild* *Hillwalking* describes the route as one of the finest in Britain. Back-packing gear *James* *Robbie* says "It's one you'll never forget".

**No more dithering**  
It's a two-day hike. If you don't skip any bits, it's around 100km, with 2000m of ascent. It's not just the distance. I've done other long walks and these on the way – people who've done the *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.

**Very challenging** – *pathless* and *unstable* for experienced Scottish hillwalkers. I think, there's a lot to be learned from it. If it's not for you, it's not for you. It's not as easy as it sounds.

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**We should be able to arrange our parking at the Pointe Camille, just north of the town.** It's not as easy as it sounds.

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appears to suggest we had through a broad yard and on to the hill beyond, but the track is gashed, with a large 'private no access' sign among rocks.

Further along, a thick bank of gorse bars over the road. Gosh, I had assumed this had to be easy, a route forged by lots of other hikers before us. But 'private' has already begun! We set up something like a silhouette up the last narrow *Achadh*, before finding a fence we can hop. I've been so worried about getting enough distance covered today and we've already covered a mile and a distance.

I take a swig of water. The first few kilometers are mostly rocky and I've had my calves and quads complaining, as I squish uphill and my friends wait for me to catch up. The cloud is low, so there's not even a view, and I feel myself as a spotter for my friend. She is fine, she doesn't look, she and I start myself as a spotter for my friend. She is fine, she doesn't look, she and I start myself as a spotter for my friend. She is fine, she doesn't look, she and I start myself as a spotter for my friend.

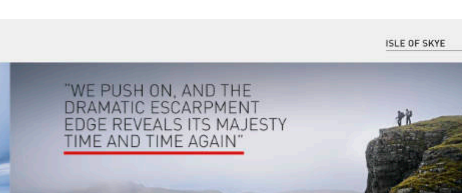
**Wild chert**  
But there's no getting away from it – I'm alone. The *Stor* to *Ben* *Deag* takes an hour there and my legs are not feeling too good. I think there's not, but I'm not sure. I think there's not, but I'm not sure. I think there's not, but I'm not sure.

**The Churning**  
The next day is about 100km of ascent and about 100km of descent. It's not just the distance. I've done other long walks and these on the way – people who've done the *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.

**Measures** – *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.

**As I learned** – *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.

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**"WE PUSH ON, AND THE DRAMATIC ESCARPMENT EDGE REVEALS ITS MAJESTY TIME AND TIME AGAIN"**

It's from the church to the rocky *Stor* *Robbie* *Hannah*, *Yan* know you're finished when you reach the sea. *Wild* *Hillwalking* describes the route as one of the finest in Britain. Back-packing gear *James* *Robbie* says "It's one you'll never forget".

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About the author  
Mary-Ann is a 70-year-old and hillwalking enthusiast. She's a member of the *Walking* magazine website and the *Walking* magazine website. It's not as easy as it sounds.







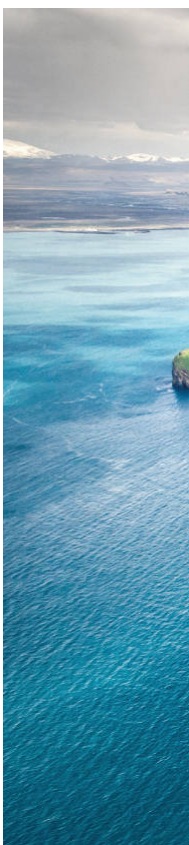


# PHOTOGRAPHY

## James Rushforth From the Air

**(Top)** A forty image panorama for the Tre Cime and Sesto Dolomites at sunset during autumn  
**(Left)** Twin valleys fork in Þórsmörk **(Right)** A geothermal pool surrounded by silica formations









(Top left) An ice cave abstract taken at the Svínafellsjökull terminus (Top right) Lava from the recent Fagradalsfjall eruption forms a dragon silhouette (Bottom left) Autumn on the Alpe di Siusi plateau (Bottom right) An aerial view of the Westman Islands

A selection of drone images curated for a recent article on the changing nature of photography and the rise of aerial imagery.

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID...

James's portfolio of drone photography was technically excellent and aesthetically pleasing. The photos also covered a wide variety of subjects, showing the Icelandic and Italian landscapes from a strikingly different perspective. A worthy winner.

**JUDGES** Chiz Dakin and David Taylor (both OWPG members)



### HIGHLY COMMENDED Chris Howes / Underworld Mulu



## C N W A Y

The **Photography Award** is sponsored by Conway. An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Conway publishes books that open up the world through tales of contemporary and historical exploration and adventure.





Cumrae Gin imbibers (Andrew McCloy)



RHIB controls (David Taylor)



OWPG highest point walk on Great Cumrae (Chris Howes)



Millport foreshore (Ronald Turnbull)



Great Cumrae robin (Chris Howes)



# BIG WEEKEND GALLERY



Top rope climbing on Deil's Dyke (Ronald Turnbull)



Felicity Martin on Crocodile Rock (Jetta Megarry)



Millport jetty near Crocodile Rock (Ronald Turnbull)



Standing on the highest point of Great Cumbrae (Chris Howes)



A person with a backpack is seen from behind, standing on a grassy hillside and taking a photo of a wide river valley. The river, the River Tay, winds through the landscape, surrounded by green fields, trees, and some buildings. The sky is overcast.

# Scotland meet-up

Felicity Martin reports on a recent members' walk in Perth

**The day had a rather shaky start as only four of us connected at the planned meeting point.** A few texts later and all eight eventually arrived at our chosen lunch destination, Breizh, a Breton restaurant specialising in gallettes (buckwheat pancakes), pizzas and more traditional French cuisine.

We were a mix of members and partners: Alex and Hannah Roddie from Forfar, Chris Townsend from Grantown-on-Spey (the furthest travelled via a scenic rail journey), Terry Adby from Dunblane, Kevin Sene and Lindsay Martindale from Edinburgh, and Andrew Thompson and me from Perthshire.

After a pleasant couple of hours eating and chatting, we walked to the nearby balcony overlooking the River Tay for a group photo. Then we said goodbye to half the group, who were suffering various injuries and were not fit for a walk.

The walkers enjoyed a 5-mile circuit of Kinnoull Hill, starting through attractive riverside gardens. We ascended via a woodland path, climbing steeply in places, along the edge of crags. On reaching the hilltop, we suddenly gained a bird's-eye view south over the Tay and east down its winding

estuary. Sheer cliffs dropped to wooded scree then the Friarton Interchange, where the M90 crosses the river and branches for Perth or Dundee. The houses and fishing ponds below us looked like miniature models on a train set.

From the nearby trig pillar and viewpoint

indicator we could see west and north over Perth to the southern Highlands, where we picked out familiar Munros. More selfies were shot at Kinnoull Tower, a folly resembling a Rhineland castle perched on the cliff edge, before a gentle descent through tall conifers. We recrossed the River Tay by a railway bridge walkway, pausing for



(L-R) Andrew, Hannah, Alex, Chris, Lindsay, Terry and Kevin

the classic prospect of Perth's grand Victorian buildings lining the banks.

The walk was punctuated by many stops for photographs and a great deal of discussion about cameras. In fact, Alex and Chris were so absorbed that Hannah and I had to keep on waiting for them to catch up!

It was good to meet colleagues only previously seen at Big Weekends and to have relaxed, unscheduled time to talk. Everyone seemed to enjoy the meet-up, so we'd encourage others to plan or join future gatherings, whether in Scotland or other regions.