

A scenic landscape photograph of a lake at sunset. In the foreground, a tree with a thick, gnarled trunk and green foliage stands on a small, mossy rock in the water. The water is calm, reflecting the orange and pink hues of the sky. In the background, there are green hills and mountains under a sky with soft, colorful clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SUMMER 2025

The Editor Writes As this issue of Outdoor Focus goes to print, I'll pause between jobs, pick up a magazine, a real one, on paper, and read stories about adventures for an hour or so (yes, I know, you can see why I volunteered for this role). It's my break from the bright screen, a change of scene too. I'll go find a comfier chair or maybe go for a walk and take it with me, perhaps stop on a bench. Looking forward to a break made me think about the value of stories in print. I keep a lot of the books and magazines that I read, at least those I've enjoyed or value the most, so that I can reach for them when I want to revisit an article, remember something, share or show someone else. That tangibility is a foil to my fallible memory. These stories, ideas, maps and images become a part of who I am and reveal something about me to myself and others who might browse my bookshelves. I can't replicate any of that digitally. I'd first have to remember that something was there, somewhere, in a file structure online, then spend time figuring out how to find it, or hope it hadn't been 'taken down'. I can't identify with it in the same way and without that I feel like something of my identity becomes more transient or lost.



Perhaps this loss, for some, is a contributing factor in the recent dramatic rise in anxiety outlined by Jonathan Haidt.

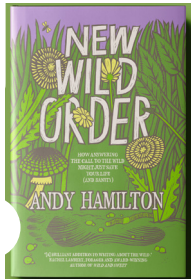
Either way, despite some industry despondency about the future of print, I firmly believe it will not just survive, but grow. Today when I break, I will be reading volume 1 of 'New Mountain Magazine', another high quality, independent print magazine launched into a market of tired people discovering the effects of 'computer vision syndrome' (no, I hadn't heard of it either, until educated by my optician). I know I'm in good company here too. Chiz, our hard-working webmaster, recently forwarded me some stats about the number of people accessing the digital version of Outdoor Focus. They were tiny. That will be some comfort to me later today, when my tired brain forgets to make the hyperlinks live for the online version!

Thanks this time to Sam Davis for the gorgeous cover image. If anyone finds themselves in Spain in August, do go visit his exhibition: "Las Cuevas de Matienzo" a photography exhibition showing the vast caverns that run through the mountains of the Matienzo depression. Full details on page 16.

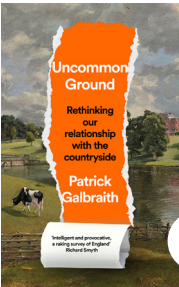
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The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild (OWPG) is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our membership covers every field of activity and all corners of the globe. We include writers, journalists, bloggers, photographers, publishers and editors, all with a passionate interest in the outdoors. For information on who we are, what we do, and where we've been, visit www.owpg.org.uk – or join us on Facebook.

New Members



© Neal Megaw

Wyl Menmuir

I've been a novelist, short story and non fiction writer for almost ten years now, and what draws my work together is its focus on landscape and place, from a literary novel set among an isolated fishing community (*The Many*, nominated for the Man Booker in 2016), to short stories set in the depths of mines beneath the sea ('*The Knockers' Ballroom*', Radio 4), to travel writing for the Guardian, to essays and non fiction books about our relationships with the natural world.

My most recent work is a trilogy of books exploring the ways we relate to the sea (*The Draw of The Sea*, winner of the Roger Deakin Award for nature writing), woodlands and trees (*The Heart of The Woods*) and the one I'm writing at the moment, *The Spirit of Stone*, an exploration of the ways we relate to rocks. My research has ranged from learning to freedive in Cornwall and tall ship sailing in the Arctic, through the conservation of Atlantic rainforest in Ireland and explorations of wood culture in Japan, to mine exploration and potholing.

When I'm not writing, I teach creative writing, often leading writing walks or residential courses among the woods or down by the sea. Otherwise, I'm often out running, sailing, swimming or whittling in the woods closer to home in Cornwall.

I can be found on Instagram [@wylmenmuir](https://www.instagram.com/wylmenmuir) or on my website wylmenmuir.co.uk

Know someone?

Do you know someone who could benefit from and enjoy membership of the Guild?
Why not reach out to them with the '[new member discount](#)' offer found on the website under 'downloads and discounts'.



Andrew Davies

Many would consider swapping the British uplands for the low-lying Netherlands as a downgrade in the outdoors experience, but when I moved to the south-eastern corner of the country over 40 years ago, a whole new world opened up.

I grew up in Manchester in the 60s and 70s. The grouse moorlands of Kinder Scout became my playground and later, mountains further afield in North Wales and the Scottish Highlands. I went on to study geography at Newcastle University, but also had a penchant for languages, so moving to the continent in 1984 felt very much like a forward step.

My adopted town is Heerlen, close to the Vaalserberg, at 1,058 ft the highest point in the Netherlands. What's more, it's barely an hour's drive to the upland massifs of the Hautes Fagnes in Belgium and the Eifel in Germany.

I have spent most of my working life as a full time Dutch to English translator specialising, amongst other things, in sport, tourism, the outdoors and the environment.

In 2019 I put together a successful exhibition on mountain cartography, commissioned by the Dutch Mountain Film Festival, likewise based in Heerlen. Six years later my first book on the same theme is due out: *Mapping the Mountains* traces the development of mountain cartography from Roman times to the present day by way of 20 or so historical essays.

I also contributed to the 2021 guide to the Dutch Mountain Trail, a 100-kilometre footpath linking the seven highest summits in the Netherlands and was responsible for the guide's English language translation in 2023.

Who knows what the next project will be? Looking forward to my time with the OWPG and to meeting you all sometime soon.

Instagram: [trigpointman](https://www.instagram.com/trigpointman)
LinkedIn: [chapterandversetranslations](https://www.linkedin.com/company/chapterandversetranslations)
Book: mappingthemountains.eu

When does a book start to exist?



When I look in dusty notebooks, and in old folders on long forgotten hard drives that whirr and creek and lag as I fire their long dormant processes up, I can find the origins of five of my books. All classed as “how to” books: how to forage, be self-sufficient, ferment everything and how to brew wine and beer. *New Wild Order*, my sixth, is altogether different. It’s a braver work, I wanted to push the boundaries of what I could do. To learn a whole new genre, that of the non-fiction narrative.

It started off in a different form, an altogether different book. “Return of the Forager”, an academically researched book about how foraging shaped our civilisation, creating everything from farming, to communities and money.

It raised the eyebrows of many editors but never managed to land. The market wasn’t ready; truth was I wasn’t ready either. I felt I needed to grow into this new way of writing, I’d underestimated how difficult a switch of genres was. Months of work went into the research and into writing and re-writing, but with no publishers biting, the idea was to lay dormant for a few years.

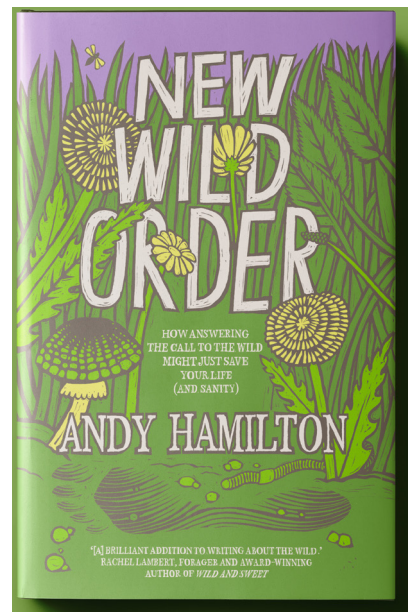
I’m a keen recycler and knew I was onto something, I just had to find the right something to fit it into. That was back in 2016.

From the period between then and getting the book commissioned a lot happened both to me and the world. Lockdown fuelled the interest in foraging, many science journals became open source and the scientific community started to accept there may not have been a clear linear progression from hunter gathering to farming. Also, that farming is only viable when the weather is reliably consistent. The case for a farming/foraging hybrid (also known as agro-forestry) both in the past and as a possible future, was also gaining ground.

As for me, I got an arts council grant to improve my practice and joined a weekly

writers group. Close reading each other’s work on a weekly basis. I slowed, almost stopped conducting my foraging walks to be a full time author. I had ‘the bit between my teeth’ and I wanted to ensure that my next draft wouldn’t be rejected. I also read, a lot!

Flesh was being put on the bones of what would become *New Wild Order*, but it still wasn’t quite there yet. I hate to admit too – but I wasn’t in a great place during some of those years. The usual rainfall that happens



in everyone’s life, but it felt like I was out in a monsoon in just my swimming trunks. I just wasn’t feeling very happy. I’d always had a vision of who I’d be at 50 and it wasn’t the short tempered fat man I looked like I was becoming. At the time I wasn’t quite sure how to make myself feel anything less than a bit depressed.

Then I picked up Isabella Tree’s, *Wilding*. I read about species after species all thriving at her rewilding project at Knepp. She said, “What we observe in nature is not necessarily the environment wildlife prefers”. That animals may just be surviving on the denuded natural

world we leave behind. The wild that she could offer these animals at Knepp she saw as their “true preferences”. The purple emperor butterfly, rare on our shores is a prime example. Experts noted that limited numbers were visiting a handful of dense woodland sites across the country and thought that was their preference. It wasn’t, they actually prefer more open habitat. They favour a type of willow called sallow, or Goat Willow a tree which thrives on open ground. She soon had the densest population in the country visiting her land every year.

Something clicked.

I started to think, maybe we are no different. Perhaps the concrete, brick and glass we live amongst isn’t the environment we are meant to live in – our equivalent of a dense woodland. But what was our open ground, our “true preference”. I’d started to experiment. I was already foraging, eating daily from the same place. I then also started going out in the early hours under each full moon. I wanted to check out biphasic sleep to see if two sleeps were better than one. (They are, but it’s too difficult to do around a family who go to school and have jobs). I put together a big list of things that were lacking in my life, things I thought our ancestors would have had. Asking myself, “How would we do this if we were wilder”.

I had a bunch of meetings with various different publishers. I was offered a big sum of money from Macmillan but was only given six months to write the book. It wasn’t enough time and I knew that a book like this needed a least a year if I was going to do everything that I wanted to. Luckily, another offer came in, it was a fraction of the money but twice the amount of time. Did I make the right decision?

Each wild aspect had to highlight where we were going wrong in the western world. I gave up sitting on chairs and sleeping on a bed to see if it helped my back problems, I experimented with giving up soaps and

detergents to see if it helped my skin (and really if anyone would notice), I micro-dosed to improve my moods, starved myself or rather fasted just as our ancestors would have done to see if it stopped food cravings or helped reduce inflammation, I even altered how I poo! And to improve my mental health I camped in woodlands for days, joined a choir and a drum circle and took up painting.

I was led to each experience by solid science and backed up my findings as I went. The text is densely researched as a result, another reason why I wanted as much time as I could to write it.

Writing the book has profoundly changed me. It’s pushed my writing practice outside and by which I mean, I write with a notepad and pen outside. I now try to spend around five hours a day or more outside every day. The optimum amount you need to ensure a good night’s sleep. I’ve learned to stop ruminating on past problems and I’ve deleted all of my social media accounts. I also turned 50 last year and I now feel that I’ve become

the man I hoped I would. I don’t feel that this journey has yet finished, rather that somehow the book simply encapsulated a period of time for me. In that sense I’m now left wondering, when does a book truly stop?

P4 New Wild Order, **P5** TOP in the woods, **MIDDLE LEFT** the bench where I sit daily, **MIDDLE RIGHT** Fly Agaric mushroom, **BOTTOM LEFT** urban foraging, **BOTTOM RIGHT** out of reach



The gear that got us there.... and back!

Backpacking boomed in the early 1970s, driven by innovative products and enthusiastic activists, writers, publishers, ‘movers and shakers’ all. Mike Parsons shares with us an extract from his forthcoming memoir.

A memoir from ‘machine top to mountain top’ by Mike Parsons, formerly Karrimor and KIMM/OMM, celebrating the innovative gear, charismatic innovators, climbers, runners, skiers, backpackers, retailers and photo-journalists, in the second golden age of British climbing, Himalayan exploration and adventure activities for all, 1950-1985.

The UK backpacking boom began in the '70s. A mixture of innovation, new technologies, and people, ‘movers and shakers all’ who got things going and inspired so many. The origins of the hip belt and aluminium pack frame were in the USA in 1948 and the innovation by Camp Trails in the early 60s of low cost, high productivity designs and logistics. These new products were both a threat and later an opportunity for my East Lancs based Karrimor business.

ww"Hello, I'm Peter Lumley, the editor of *Practical Camper* magazine." Bright and perky, he differed from the formally

dressed trade people. He looked like a real camper, with his wellie boots and his ‘just spent a night out’ attire.

I was exhibiting my Karrimor packs in November 1972 at the COLA Camping and Outdoor Life Association, Harrogate exhibition centre.

This was the era of the family camping boom, reinvented by the French who designed frame tents with bug free inners and Campingaz stoves.

Peter arrived at the show looking like he'd had a wet night in a tent. To my surprise, he explained, he had just done exactly that! But this was a business trade show and in that period, everyone was dressed formally in a collar and tie, and stayed in a nearby hotel to ensure they looked smart and

smelled sweet in front of customers.

A strange contrast. So what was going on I wondered?

A new word, ‘backpacking’, came into the conversation.

“Do you think the word ‘backpacking’ and the activity will catch on?” Peter asked. He had taken on the challenge of editing the summer focused ‘*Practical Camper*’ magazine by introducing backpacking to attract out of summer season advertising and broaden the readership.

“I honestly don't know.” I said. Secretly, many of us were doubtful. Tom Waghorn, the editor of *Climber and Rambler* magazine, opined that “such an Americanism will never catch on here in the UK.”

But catch on it did, not by accident but driven by a core group of participants around Peter Lumley and others. Writing books and articles, founding the Backpackers Club and creating a new community, generating new ideas, concepts, products, learning new skills. All driven by that ever important factor, enthusiasm!

Peter Lumley wrote ‘*Teach Yourself*



Backpacking’, which sold 60,000 copies. John Hillaby wrote his classic book ‘*Journey Through Britain*’, after undertaking a walk from Land's End to John O'Groats. Chris Townsend, on reading this, said; “I hadn't realised such adventures were open to ordinary people like me.” Chris started backpacking immediately, first the Pennine Way, then many of the multi month long routes in the USA, pioneering a new route along the length of the Canadian Rockies. He has written an amazing 40 books, and still continues today!

History Flashback!

Thomas Hiram Holding established cycle camping in the 1890s and published his ‘Phantom kit’. This weighed only 6 lbs for tent, pegs and pwoles, ground sheet, ground blanket, down quilt, cooking apparatus, and sleeping bag. The Camtors ‘Itisa’ tent, developed in 1919, was considered ‘the perfect lightweight, single-pole tent’ it weighed 1lb 3 oz (NB this is 1919, the tent weighed less than 500g!) See my full [Blacks story](#).

I got to know and supplied products to many of the movers and shakers of the backpacking boom period. They created a whole new community. Writing inspirational books, publishing and setting up the Backpackers club. Kate and Peter Lumley were influential in setting up the OWPG.

London office-based journalist Derrick Booth returned from a trip to America where he had met the Phoenix, USA based company called Camp Trails. Peter Lumley also liked his Camp Trails pack very much, taking weight off his bad shoulder. These new products were revolutionary in concept and oozed the American industrial high productivity of this period.

For me, as a designer, gear maker and gear user, the packs were both an inspiration and a severe threat to my business. I had an aluminium pack frame in my range. However, it was no match for the Camp Trails design, very effective and produced at low cost in the USA, and then in Eire.

I was very mindful that when the technology in an industry changes significantly, then the market leadership usually changes. Scary!

Gearing into action! A hip belt only functions correctly if the hip belt and upper shoulder strap attachment is the correct length for the wearer's back. The Camp Trails pack frame and fabric pack

EICMA Kate with KSA friends, Vince Mazanta, left, Constantino Ruggiero and Pietro Boselli

Buying COLT gave KSA opportunity to expand their b2b offer, being a first publisher to realise hike, bike, travel and tourism was a bigger market than climbing. The camping and outdoor leisure trade magazine had absorbed another b2b. KSA got two for the price of one!

Thank you

Duchess, bicycles, caravan. beingThere

The gold watch presentation, has been a marker for 40 years service. Hard to define that word service but let's say miles of smiles. Think smiles, then double it, add presence: you get Kate Spencer. Publishing house owner who put 40 years of trade and industry topics, plus some, into print. Yes, Kate did smiles, helped others smile: known places not visited, renowned for helping people never met: not shy of helping people achieve, Trojan when working for people.

Birthname Kathleen shortened to Kate, Katie, Kath, sometimes Lena. The Duchess tag? No-one's sure: yet a 'boss', no. Dignity, bearing, relevance, yes: yet a smiling KSA top dog, Partnership opens with her father, James Robinson, Town councillor, awarded Trades Union Gold Medal for services, Robinson, the City of London worker, with 90 wpm shorthand captures your every word: delivers it back lit-free, giving it true word shaping. The PA handling confidential "for their eyes only" Chairman briefings and reports: more solid her desk than in newspaper reporters rooms. That ethic became KSA company policy. Written large, helping partners and staffers alike.

And take that smile: "Burnham Carnival Queen Float" it said, "seen by 31,000 at procession during parade" her photo in the 'Evening Standard' and also Essex weeklies. A lass born near London, on a 500cc motorcycle, Belstaffed and bone domed joined the town's cycling club, moving around Britain's nuclear circles: going south, west, then Tyneside. Opening up the family publishing business there withing a decade. And makes history.

Her nom de plume for writing becomes the company Kate Spencer Agency. Camping, caravanning, tourism, bicycling: Ziggy Kurek, owner and organiser of the North East Camping, Caravan and Boat Show asks KSA to help broaden and develop VIP and Top Speakers' attendance for his, 10th Show. Press reporters taken on a helicopter viewing of the Show. Opened by Doug Scott, the Show tableau is the successful "Everest the Hard Way" Expedition. Box tents, mountain clothing, lots of fluffy white snow. That didn't melt despite the hot Press package KSA delivered.

Next up, the first ever "Camping Sites Guide to Spain" badged for the Camping Club of Gt Britain. It is produced by KSA. Soon other print media providers ask KSA to deliver input and pre-press services. Opportunity to acquire established titles comes along. Kate Spencer herself heads up the badge, they'd evolved to become "the b2b like no other"

Dream ticket. Offered an editorial post with KSA by Kate Spencer, he liked the job so much he'd marry the owner!

KSA spearheaded a new style of cycle b2c reading, then went on to produce the Bicycle Times magazine for a ten year run. Below: Harrogate Show with Rob Neillands, Spur Books owner and daughter Diana. Rob and Kate devised Outdoor Writers Guild, with her serving as Organiser then Secretary for 17 years. Taking leave to battle cancer, she would run KSA full time for 21 years. With Marie Curie as both a patient and Volunteer.



History Cameo!

In 1948 Dick Kelty, a Californian outdoorsman, made a pack frame from aluminium tubing, curving the parallel vertical tubes to the shape of the wearer's back, an immediate improvement of balance compared to the straight-sided wooden 'Trapper Nelson' pack. One day, he noticed some friends were inserting the ends of the vertical tubes into the rear pockets of their jeans, thus taking the load off their shoulders! So he made a belt fastening around the waist which served the same purpose: inspiration! Kelty packs remained a minor 'cult' product until Camp Trails' transformed the costs and logistics, welding the aluminium tubular frame in Arizona and sewing the packs in Mexico.

combinations were rather complex for retailers.

I took 3-4 years learning how to bend aluminium tubing, using expansion bolts instead of welding, commissioning a custom made hydraulic powered machine to punch 12 holes at once which were used for the expansion bolts. The final design concept was 2 different frame sizes, each adjustable, with the option to fit any of 7 different packs.

My advertising promotion was 'Tailor Make Your Own Pack' and this became very successful.

P6 TOP Peter Lumley on the cover of *Practical Camper*, October 1975, **P6 BOTTOM** Early Karrimor equipment demo at a press launch in Dentdale, **ABOVE** Peter Lumley's wife Kath, who was involved in the formation of the OWPG

From concept to reality

Trail founder Andrew Read tells the story of the GM Ringway, Greater Manchester's walking trail

Did my mad idea come from spotting the Mellor Moor route in ‘*Manchester Moorland Walks*’, a guidebook by local writer Nick Burton? Did it come when, out on that walk, I heard the squawk of the lapwing and soaked up the views of Kinder Scout and the Dark Peak? Or was it as I stood on the forecourt of Manchester Piccadilly station looking at the map of lines linking the city to the surrounding hills, plains and parkland? Whatever the origin, my dream – the GM Ringway, Greater Manchester’s 200-mile, 20-stage walking trail – had now become reality. Fifteen or so years after that first trip, here I was again on the platform at Piccadilly, waiting for the train to Marple and nearby Mellor Moor. The goal this time? To meet TV and radio personality Clare Balding, who had arranged to walk part of the now fully waymarked trail with me and some GM Ringway volunteers for her Radio 4 show ‘Ramblings’. So what had happened along the way? Well, after that first walk on Mellor Moor, I spent a great many hours examining the Ordnance Survey maps that cover the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. It struck me that our city-region, as it’s now known, includes some fantastic and incredibly varied natural landscapes. As well as that lovely Peak District fringe, the eastern part of the region offers more great moorland walking, in the South Pennines of Tameside, Oldham and Rochdale. The hills and valleys there merge imperceptibly into those of the West Pennines within the northern boroughs of Bury and Bolton, topped by mighty Winter Hill with its iconic TV mast. To the south of



Manchester and Stockport, I spotted two tantalising green and blue lines: the valleys of the River Mersey and the lesser-known Ladybrook. In conjunction with the canals that recall the region’s industrial history, this natural corridor could provide a traffic-free route all the way from Manchester city centre to the edge of the Peak. What, though, of the west, which I knew much less well? Here, the maps offered some enticing prospects. There was a chain of lakes and wetlands – since given National Nature Reserve designation as the ‘Flashes of Wigan and Leigh’ – surrounded by quiet countryside. On the boundary of Wigan and neighbouring Salford, there was Chat Moss, a lowland raised bog. Here, nature restoration efforts have allowed sphagnum moss, common lizards and dragonflies to reclaim the once-exploited peatlands. And in Trafford, we find a patchwork of pretty green spaces and the expansive parkland of Dunham Massey. In conjunction with Lyme Park,

to the southeast of the region, this meant that Greater Manchester had two of the National Trust’s most popular country estates right on its doorstep. My perusal of the maps, however, confirmed something else I suspected: that a trail linking these landscapes could be designed to fit the public transport network. Thanks to the many train, bus and (new) tram lines that radiate out from the city centre, I was able to combine my scribbles into 20 appealing trail stages that each start and finish at a train, bus or tram stop. As a result, the GM Ringway is probably more integrated with the public transport network than any other major UK trail. Moving the idea forward required both perseverance and luck. First, I spent tens, if not hundreds, of enjoyable days out walking the city-region’s countryside and parks to map out the most attractive route. Having seen that the GM Ringway could work, I decided it should become

a permanently implemented, popular resource rather than just the focus of the guidebook that I hope to see commissioned soon. I therefore got entrepreneurial (even pushy, some might say) and put myself in front of any official who would listen. While everyone – from local authorities, the city-region’s environment team and its activity promotion body, to the then Walking and Cycling Commissioner Chris Boardman – was enthusiastic, the trail didn’t qualify for any local funding. This is where serendipity came in. First of all, I found that many of our local Ramblers groups are committed to offering walks accessible by public transport, a practice not universal among some other walking groups. The Area Ramblers committee therefore instantly saw the appeal of the GM Ringway. Similarly, a friend of mine, Jackie Copley, happened to work for CPRE, The Countryside Charity, which was eager to promote the value of the greenbelt for the environment and leisure. Before you knew it, I was leading walks for both Ramblers and CPRE. My involvement with these charities meant we had two partners I could work with to refine the route and, eventually, win funding.

So it was that in 2022 we were awarded a £250,000 grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, topped up by smaller pots from the partner charities and other bodies, to establish the trail properly. At last we could start work on finalising the trail route with the councils and landowners, leading walks on the trail with community groups, identifying step-free, accessible sections of the trail for promotion to wider audiences, adding the trail to a user-friendly app and website, and – with the help of our newly recruited volunteers and professional installers – affixing waymarks and information panels across the 200-mile-long route. All this culminated in a ‘grand finale’ event back in August 2025. This began (naturally) with a guided walk along the



final section of the trail and finished with speeches and raised glasses to celebrate the launch. As the project has progressed, we’ve found that the GM Ringway has become a familiar term across the region as thousands of people walk the trail on their own, with friends and family, and even for charity. Every time our volunteers venture out on the trail, they bump into individuals or groups who are sampling the route or – increasingly often – making their way through all 20 stages. What’s more, the GM Ringway has gained wider recognition with coverage in all the local papers, a slot on the TV evening news, features in the *Guardian* and

Telegraph, and, of course, that grand day out with the lovely Clare Balding. Little did I know, back on that very first hike on Mellor Moor, that so many things would change in the years to come. As well as talking about the trail on radio and TV, I’ve switched career to become a consultant supporting tourism bodies, local authorities and charities with their walking and cycling projects. I’ve joined the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild, securing the first of – I hope – many guidebook contracts. And I’ve seen my vision realised as Greater Manchester has gained its own beautiful and ever more popular walking trail.



P8: TOP Heather above Castleshaw Reservoirs (Stage 9) **BELOW LEFT** Pennington Flash, Leigh (Stage 16) **BELOW RIGHT** A waterfall in Healey Dell, Rochdale (Stage 11) **P9: TOP** GM Ringway interpretation panel, displayed at ten locations along the trail, **MIDDLE** The Rochdale Canal, Castlefield (Stage 1) **LEFT** At the Mellor Moor trig point with Clare Balding, October 2024 (c) Roz Hughes

‘If once a year everyone could climb a mountain...’

Tony Howard reflects on an inheritance of adventure

It was one of those days, grey skies and drizzle, even the buttercups that filled the field outside our window looked sad. A good time to tidy up old files, I thought. Then I found this, “*On climbing mountains*”, written in 1929. To my surprise it was my father’s handwriting, he would have been twenty at the time.

It explained much. As a young boy he had taken me on walks on our local hills and when I was still in my pre-teens he took me on a twenty mile hike over the moors, diverting a short way over the peat hags to arrive at the top of what he said were Laddow Rocks. Looking down, I saw my first climbers who we watched for a while. How fascinated I was! The memory never left me. If only I could do that!

My Dad had a little telescopic metal cup he used for drinking water from moorland streams but even so, on the last miles home I was so thirsty he stopped at a moor edge farm and asked for some water for me. I never forgot that walk and those climbers, then not long after, when walking up our local Chew Valley with a friend from school, we saw two climbers on a crag high above us on the cliffs beneath the summit of Alderman. It’s only 431 metres high, but to me it’s always been a mountain. ‘UK Climbing’ calls it “a mini-peak”.

We knew they were climbers as they had a rope. Excited we scrambled up the long steep hillside to watch them, but on our arrival they had gone, though to our excitement they had left a life-changer:

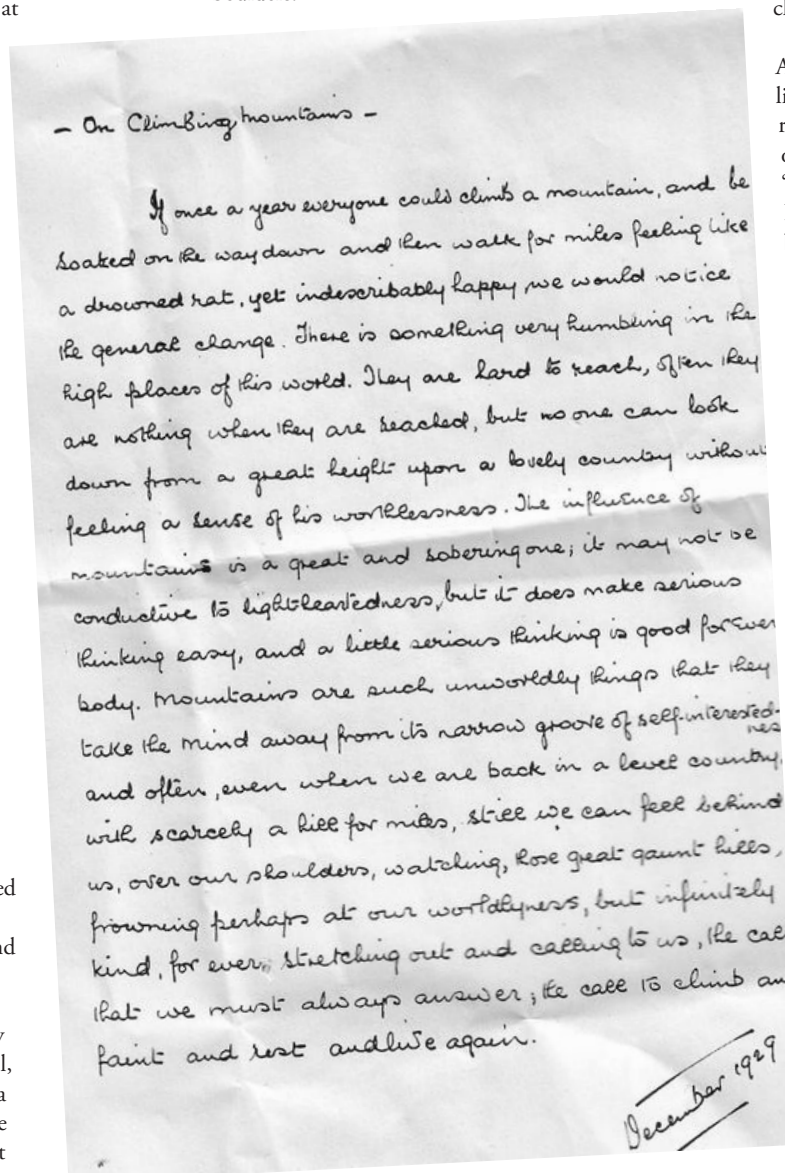
on a rock at the bottom of the crag was a small book titled *The Laddow Area*. It was a climber’s guide book! We didn’t even know such things existed, but there it was, listing climbs at Laddow and other local crags we had visited and scrambled on like Dovestones, and Wimberry with its giant boulders.

the easy way to the top, tied to a rock and threw the other end down. When I told my Dad what we had been doing, there was no criticism, just a warning to be careful, and he took me to Blacks in Manchester to buy a rope of the type just used on the first ascent of Everest. We were climbers!

After visits to our village library I scurried home to read anything I could find or order about climbing: ‘*Lets go Climbing*’ by Colin Kirkus was inspirational but the more serious ‘*Mountaincraft*’ by Geoffrey Winthrop Young, a book “for mountaineers; and a mountaineer is not only one who climbs mountains, but anyone who likes to walk, read or think about them”, was heavier going though it showed me how little I knew. But as my Dad wrote, the hills were “calling to us, the call that we must always answer.”

He also said, “The influence of mountains is a great and sobering one, it may not be conducive to lightheadedness, but it does make serious thinking easy, and a little serious thinking is good for everyone”. It was certainly good for me, climbing was all I could think about! In fact I never stopped climbing, it became my life, first as an instructor, then a BMC guide, then a partner in “Troll”, which became a very successful climbing company, designing the first ever climbing harnesses, sewn tape slings and a full range of alloy chocks though other companies were soon hard on our heels.

Eventually the business became all consuming, or would have if we let it. By then the three of us who started the



A friend of ours ‘found’ a rope on the back of a wagon and we were soon doing the ‘Mod’ and ‘Diff’ climbs in the book, even some ‘V Diffs’. We had no runners of course as we didn’t know what we were doing though we did have the good sense to top-rope a ‘Severe’. Not that we knew it was top-roping, one of us simply scrambled



business were in our mid fifties. After thirty very enjoyable years we happily sold up, in my case to continue climbing. As my father wrote, “over our shoulders those great gaunt hills, frowning perhaps at our worldliness... were stretching out and calling to us, the call that we must always answer”.

ABOVE Tony on Alderman summit © Di Taylor **BELOW** View to Alderman across Dovestones Reservoir



Books by the author

In addition to climbing guidebooks to Saddleworth’s Chew Valley as well as in Romsdal, Norway, Tony wrote the guide to Wadi Rum in Jordan after discovering its climbing potential in 1985 This was followed by a climbing, canyoning and trekking guide to all of Jordan, and a guide to The Nativity Trail in Palestine. He has also written three books:

Troll Wall about the simultaneous first ascents by Norwegian and British climbers (of which he was one) of Europe’s tallest, steepest north face back in 1965. **Adventures in the Northlands**, adventures in the Yukon, Greenland and Norway. **Quest into the Unknown**, Tony’s autobiography from growing up during WW2, to exploratory climbing and trekking around the world.

For the love of hiking



A trip to Maderia and an encounter with a hiking hotelier set Nike and Jacint on a path that would ultimately lead to writing guidebooks, and to a new business venture - Trailnotes

For many of us in the Guild, the hours spent poring over maps, downloading information and scouring books for clues about an unknown route or destination are part of the fun of a trip. But what if you have limited time, too many responsibilities, and would rather have someone else plan the trip for you, so you can just enjoy your holiday when it comes without the ‘stress’ of planning?

For Nike Werstroh and Jacint Mig, it was a new-found love of hiking, and the realisation that planning the adventure was an element they really enjoyed, that made them turn their backs on ‘regular careers’ to set up the popular travel planning website, Trailnotes. David Jordan spoke with them to find out more.

Having first met each other on a coach journey, travelling was a natural part of the DNA of their relationship. Neither had travelled much through childhood, and both had a passion to see and explore new places. Nor would either have considered themselves as hikers. Nike explained, “from the very beginning we planned our own trips, and they always included some hiking, but primarily as a way of getting around and seeing a place as much as anything else.”

But it was in Madeira in 2008 that they really caught the hiking bug. “We only had a tourist map that we had picked up, probably at the airport upon arrival, and the owner of the hotel (a keen walker himself) suggested we walk some of the ‘Levada’ trails

that Madeira is famous for (these follow the routes of the ancient irrigation canals). He drew some on our map by hand, and initially we only thought we’d walk one or two but ended up walking every day we were there. Apart from reasonable shoes, we didn’t have any real ‘hiking’ gear, but we loved every minute of it”.

The pair returned to Madeira several times and went on to explore the network of historic trails across the island through lush forests and mountains to ‘secret’ lagoons and viewpoints. From then on, wherever in the world they went, they sought out the best hiking trails, both as a means of exploration, and for the pure love of hiking. It was a trip to Cyprus that prompted their first guidebook. They’d previously always purchased a Cicerone guidebook and appreciated the style and ease of use. Without a Cicerone guide to Cyprus available they resorted to a German guide that had a fairly literal translation to English. The translation from German was “probably not the best”, said Nike, “it was hard to follow, and we took many wrong turns. When we got lost for about the third time Jacint jokingly told me that we’d just have to write a better walking guide for Cyprus”. The rest, as they say, is history.

The idea to offer a bespoke itinerary planning service was born during a long drive home from a campervan trip in Europe, Jacint tells me. “When we started writing walking guidebooks, we found that we got to know areas well. We explored and walked many trails, but of course only a selection ever made it into a guidebook



where space is limited. In the process, we learned so much about local history, culture and nature, and we got to know many sights and interesting facts that don’t typically make it into guides and forums. We’d built relationships with some local businesses too and felt confident that we knew places we’d happily recommend to others. It felt great to put some of this knowledge into a guidebook, but we had so much more insight and information on the places we’d researched and wanted to do something with it”.

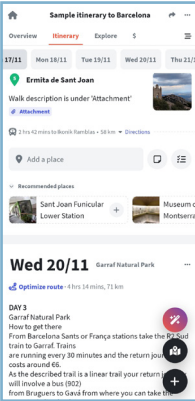
Jacint began to spend hours, then days and weeks designing and building their first website to host the service, and they began to

plan around the needs of prospective customers. Alongside this, they continued to explore new areas and took on commitments for further guidebooks. It wasn’t long before they needed to cut back on their ‘day jobs’ to commit the time required to getting the new service off the ground.

Understanding the potential customer base was an important stage of development they explained. “Lots more people are keen to explore on their trips now and are less likely to spend their days at the pool. They want to be more active and use walking trails, but finding the right trails, and piecing these together with



accommodation, local transport and places to see can take many hours of research and not everyone can or wants to invest that amount of time in planning. Good guidebooks can help, but some people prefer a more tailored approach with personal suggestions to match their unique ambitions”.



“Our customers are looking for a unique experience that is customised, considers their level of hiking experience, their interests and particular requirements. They don’t want to join group trips, but they might not have the time or patience to fully research their destination. They’ve probably already found out that the vast majority information posted on the internet about a destination is user-generated, or worse, AI-generated, and that it can be a bit ‘hit and miss’ trying to figure out what information is reliable online and what is not”.

For Nike and Jacint, their life together has been built on the memories and experiences accumulated through their travels, and it’s clear that they enjoy getting to know their customers and creating unique itineraries that enable them to build their own precious memories. Their recommended trails and trips are all tried and tested. “We’ve walked every trail we recommend to our customers, and we personally know the areas well, so the bespoke itinerary is never based wholly on internet search results, but on our deep experience and knowledge of a place” Nike says.

“When we get an enquiry, we’ll typically arrange a video consultation and get to know the customer, their interests, preferences, budget and so on. We’ll stay in touch while we explore options for them and share drafts before finalising a plan that includes flight and accommodation options, transport links, trails (with GPS coordinates), places of interest as well as other potential activities/things to do and see in the area on rest days”.



The personal knowledge and connections that Nike and Jacint have in an area, often enables them to secure preferential pricing too, but they are not a travel agency and don’t make bookings. However, they set the itinerary up in a third-party app and all the relevant links are provided, so customers can follow their itinerary on mobile or desktop and make bookings directly.

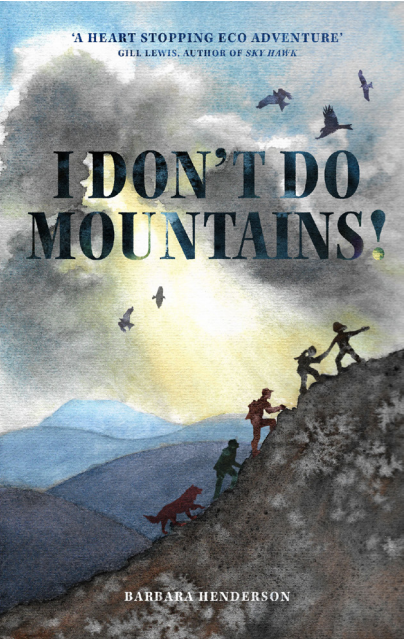
I asked them what the future holds, “more travel” they said, “the more places we explore and get to know, the more we can share with others, and that’s what we’re really passionate about”.



P12 Wild Costa Vicentina, P13 TOP The Ariège Pyrenees, P13 BELOW Medieval town of Besalú, ABOVE LEFT App Screenshot, ABOVE RIGHT Montserrat, BELOW The Troodos Mountains Cyprus
www.trailnotes.co.uk



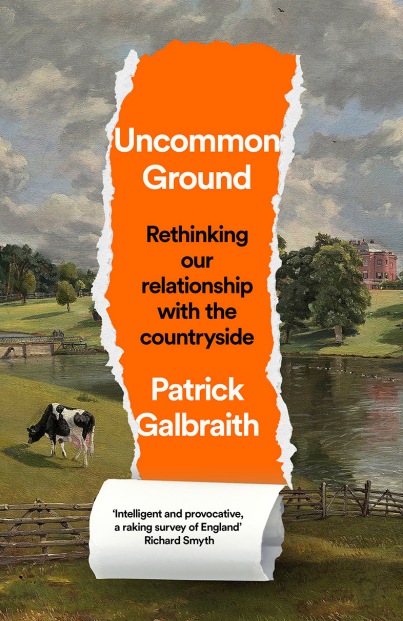
OWPG’s Roly Smith reviews the latest outdoor books



I don’t do Mountains!
Barbara Henderson
Scottish Mountaineering Press, £7.99 (pb)

Any hillgoing parent will have heard this whining complaint at some stage in their offspring’s upbringing. “I don’t do mountains,” is a common response and exactly the one that Kenzie, the heroine of this excellent fictional tale aimed at eight to 12-year-old children, gives when she hears that the school’s Outward Bound residential trip was heading for the Scottish Highlands. I don’t usually review children’s books in this column, but felt I had to make an exception with this gripping tale of an introverted young girl, (she doesn’t really do friends, either) who is unwillingly trapped into an outdoor trip which she really doesn’t want to do. To make things worse, another member of the party is her personal bête noire at school, the arrogant Sorley Mackay. All that changes as the story of the trip unfolds, and Kenzie ends up, not only with some firm, life-long friends, but with a lasting love of the mountains and the urgent need to protect the threatened wildlife which makes them their home. What happens in the company of ranger Bairdy is not just a page-turning thriller of a well-told story, but a heartfelt plea against the still prevalent but illegal persecution of raptors on shooting estates. Expertly told

by a gifted storyteller, this exciting tale should firmly hold the young reader in its grip until the surprising and unexpected denouement with which it ends. The book concludes with some practical advice and information about hillwalking in Scotland and, as with all Scottish Mountaineering Press books, all profits go to help fund the Scottish Mountaineering Trust charity.



Uncommon Ground: Rethinking our relationship with the countryside
Patrick Galbraith
William Collins, £22 (hb)

This is an important and largely fair-minded book on the history and present state of access to the countryside in Britain today. Given that the author is a former editor of *Shooting Times* and now a columnist for *Country Life*, you might expect a degree of bias in favour of landowning interests. But Galbraith presents a balanced picture, giving as much space to the views of the Right to Roam campaign as to the Country Landowners’ Association (recently rebranded as the Country Land and Business Association). Galbraith’s main point seems to be that the responsible use of the countryside should be for all, and not just for a privileged few. But he claims that access campaigners such

If you have a recent book that you’d like us to review here, please get in touch with the Editor (see page 2)

as the Right to Roam group are constantly using inaccurate figures when claiming, for example, that only eight per cent of the British countryside is accessible to the general public. He quotes the fact that in England and Wales we also have 225,000 km (about 140,000 miles) of rights of way, which can’t be shut, built, on ploughed up by any of us, “no matter how mighty.” And that eight per cent also doesn’t include beaches, woodland or permissive access agreements, all of which are not quite the same thing as the open access currently enjoyed in Scotland. But he’s equally condemning of landowners like hedge fund manager Alexander Darwall who famously excluded wild campers from his estate at Crockern Tor on Dartmoor, claiming that they harmed wildlife and caused problems for farmers. His claim was eventually overturned on appeal by the High Court. There still are, according to the author, a group of entrenched landowners who are “totally useless,” and who should do more to engage with the visiting public to allow them to simply commune with nature. But equally, the shrill, rabble-rousing voices of the Right to Roam campaign should be moderated and taught to respect the history and natural history of where they seek to roam. The answer, he concludes in this important, well-researched and timely book, is for both sides to start talking to one another, to educate the public and the unreconstructed landowners into what unrestricted access and unsustainable agriculture might mean to our precious and increasing threatened wildlife and wild places.

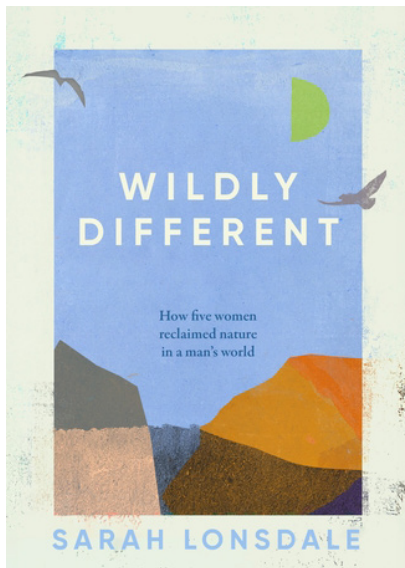
Wildly Different: How five women reclaimed nature in a man’s world
Sarah Lonsdale
Manchester University Press, £20 (hb)

The gentle sex has too often been overlooked in traditional tales of the exploration and conservation of our planet. Wilderness was a place where heroic men embarked on epic quests – think of Drake, Cook, Lewis and Clark, Scott, Shackleton and even Attenborough in more recent times.

But here, historian Sarah Lonsdale puts the record straight, tracing the lives of five women who fought and won the right to explore, work in and help save the Earth's wild places. They include Ethel Haythornthwaite of Sheffield CPRE, who with her husband Gerald helped to create Britain's first National Park in the Peak District. Lonsdale's biography of Ethel is immeasurably better and more comprehensive than the 'official' one recently published by CPRE (reviewed in *Outdoor Focus*, Winter 2024).

The others are pioneer rock climber Dorothy Pilley, who shocked society by donning mens' climbing breeches; Mina Hubbard, who bravely explored northern Labrador in a canoe; Evelyn Cheesman, first keeper of insects at London Zoo, and Wangari Maathai, who was responsible for the planting of millions of trees across sub-Saharan Africa.

These are all expert and highly readable biographies by a woman who is a senior lecturer in journalism at the London's City University, and they go some way towards filling an important gap in the literature of the exploration and conservation of the ever-shrinking wildernesses of our planet.



"Las Cuevas de Matienzo"

An exhibition by OWPG member and photographer, **Sam Davis**. A Matienzo Caves Project expedition member, his images explore the vast mountain caverns of the Matienzo depression.

Where: The Old School, Matienzo, Cantabria, Spain.

When: 6th-20th August. 12:00-14:30; 18:00-20:00. Opening night 7th August - 19:00-21:00 with refreshments.

Book your OWPG Big Weekend now!

Where and When: Field Studies Council Blencathra, nr Keswick, 3-6 October 2025
The centre is on the slopes of Blencathra (868m), one of the highest peaks in the Lake District.

The Centre: <https://www.field-studies-council.org/locations/blencathra/>

New Members: are particularly welcome. We're a friendly bunch and it's the best way to meet other members. You can take part in as many or as few activities as you like.

Rates: are inclusive of breakfasts, packed lunches and evening meals and start from £79 pppn. Single supplements are available at £30 pppn in a double room.

The AGM: takes place on the Saturday evening followed by a drinks reception, three-course meal and the annual awards ceremony.

Activity options are anticipated to include:

- » A photo walk up Blencathra led by Josephine Collingwood
- » Brush up on navigation with a workshop led by Josephine Collingwood
- » A cycle trip locally led by Jon Sparks
- » Explore Keswick's museums and take a boat trip on Derwent Water
- » A writing workshop with Ronald Turnbull
- » A foraging walk with Andy Hamilton
- » A trip to Castlerigg Stone Circle with Stan Abbott plus another a mystery destination beyond!
- » A canyoning/ghyll scrambling trip with Keswick Extreme
- » A talk on mountaineering history from the Mountain Heritage Trust

There will also be a chance to display examples of your work on the 'book table'.

How to book:

Download the form from the [Dropbox link on the Guild's website](#); fill it in; email it to Kevin at kj035@outlook.com by **WEDNESDAY 9TH JULY!**

A deposit of £100 is required at the point of booking. Invoices for the final balance will be issued soon after the weekend.

