

ACHILLE RATTI CLIMBING CLUB

JOURNAL 2010



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ACHILLE RATTI CLIMBING CLUB



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Front Cover:

The Nepal giants including Everest and Makalu from the Singalila Ridge by D Hugill

Introduction

A scan through this august journal tells the newcomer what a global athletic lot we have as members.

My thanks to Dave, Brian and his team and to all the contributors for a magnificent effort, it shows what a truly catholic and wide ranging club we have. George Partridge showed me the first journal, printed back in the mists of time, it is wonderful to see that members still love to go to extremes in pursuit of adrenalin rush although not so much in the realms of the old days of climbing. Has anyone out there got a full set of the club journals, for some reason the archives are missing odd copies, contact the Editor if you have and are prepared to donate to the club copies that are missing

Please keep your ideas fresh for the next edition keep on sending articles and photographs – the more the merrier. The membership takes great delight in reading of the diverse and daring adventures of you all.

*Yours in sport
John McGonagle
Chairman*

ACHILLE RATTI WINTER SPORTS – EXTREME SWIMMING!

Phil Hodgson

SO you thought TV star Robson Green was hard when he swam across that cold mountain lake in Snowdonia? The Ratti, as usual, can always go one better...

Early January 2010; Friday night. The Lakes was in the grip of a mini ice age, as was most of the country. I'd already ticked off two ice routes in Todmorden earlier in the week and was keen for more. Our phone conversation the night before went something like: "Everything's in! How many Lakeland ice routes do you think we can knock off this weekend?"

Dave and myself had met up with Ian and Ali on Friday night. "Shoulthwaite Ghyll is in top nick", Ian had enthused, "are you up for it tonight...I'll lead it." Looking forward to a Grade V icefall by headtorch, on a top rope, we'd agreed to meet up at 7pm. "Do you know the way?" we asked as we left the car park. "Course I do", Ian replied, "it's in a gully up above the woods". We tramped up a track, anticipation building....

"I'm sure it's up here somewhere?" Ian sounded perplexed. By now we'd been wandering in the dark in the hills above Thirlmere for two hours. "There...", he pointed up a dimly defined ravine, "it'll be at the top of that." We ploughed our way through deep snow up a never ending gully with not a glimpse of steep ice to be seen. With enthusiasm ebbing the higher up the ravine we got, and closing time fast approaching, we finally turned around, headed back to the cars and made a beeline for the Golden Rule. This was not the most auspicious start to our planned icefest of a weekend.

Saturday morning; Bishopscale. "You ever been up Dungeon Ghyll?" Dave asked. "No" I replied, "do you think it'll be in?"

"It's bound to be... we can start in the ghyll and carry on from there". We walked up to the first big waterfall but were dismayed to find it sported only a thin smearing of ice. Scrambling up higher we rounded a bend. "That's more like it!" The higher falls were icebound, a spectacular pale blue curtain rearing up from a snowy riverbed. We geared up on a frozen pool. We should perhaps have heeded the forewarning when, adjusting my position on the ice, I put my foot through it, but fortunately not far enough to fill my boot with water. The upper falls had formed a glittering tube of ice and, although we could hear the water gushing through it, it looked eminently climbable.

Dave picked his way up the steep first section. Reaching a ledge I saw him put a couple of screws in. Then he just vanished! His sudden drop from view was accompanied by a surprised moaning noise, "Aaaghhh ... Uuugghh ...



Dave, "I can't feel my legs and feet ... and my hands are frozen". "We'd better get you back to the hut", I replied, stifling a giggle and wishing I'd been able to get a picture of him swimming in a frozen waterfall. We legged it back to the hut as quickly as we could. Hot soup and several hours hugging the stove brought some feeling back into Dave's extremities. "Are you're bits all intact?" I enquired offering Dave a magnifying glass.

Amazingly, despite our second setback of the weekend, and feet that felt like frozen chickens, Dave was still up for venturing out in the afternoon. We headed up towards Crinkle Gill and found Whorneyside Force in fine fettle. An excellent lead by Dave ticked it off and, via quick forays into Hells Gill and Crinkle Gill, we returned to the warmth of the Old DG. A few pints of Yates embellished the day's events into an epic adventure, with lots more routes to be conquered tomorrow. Unfortunately, with the valley blasted by gales all we managed on Sunday was a joglet through deep snow. Our planned icefest had been pared down to just one route ... but at least Dave's gone one better than Robson Green ... the water was a balmy seven degrees when Robson took the plunge!

Aaghooghghh". I surmised that he wasn't happy. "I've fallen in a pool...brrrrrrrrrr ... up to my armpits ... brrrrrrrr", he mumbled, teeth chattering. The ice had given way and it was only his rucksack that had saved him from a complete ducking. Extricating himself as quickly as he could he looked down forlornly. "Can you get off round the back" I shouted up. I didn't want him leaving any of my gear behind if he had to abseil off. "Bbbbbbrrrr ... I think so ... bbbrrrrrr", came the reply. He chucked the rope down and worked his way round a crag. I could hear the water sloshing round in his boots as he rejoined me in the ghyll. "Golly", said

CIC TRIP 2010 – A BEN NEVIS ADVENTURE

Phil Hodgson

THE excitement was building as we drove north. The big freeze had been followed by a few thaw-freeze cycles and we were anticipating good conditions on the Ben for our annual winter pilgrimage to the CIC Hut. It was a Thursday evening and we were intending to walk up to the hut in the dark. The torrential rain from Glasgow onwards persuaded us otherwise. "Why don't we stop at the Fell & Rock hut in Aviemore, and drive over to the Ben in the morning?" The thought of last orders and a cosy bed appealed more than a thorough drenching. We headed north up the A9. "I wonder if it's snowing higher up?" someone ventured. It was. As we reached the start of the Drumochter Pass flashing blue lights and a queue of traffic alerted us to the closure of the pass. The traffic cop directing traffic shrugged, "It'll be shut all night".

"What now?" John remembered another hut in Kinlochleven so, taking a meandering route via Killin, we headed for Glencoe.

The snow was starting to stick on the road but that was soon the least of our worries. Driving through Tyndrum the petrol warning light came on. It was after 11 pm and the petrol station was closed. As a result of our detour north we only had 30 miles of fuel left in the tank ... and it was 40 miles to Kinlochleven. "Should we go for it?"

The consensus was that we coast down the hill into Glencoe and cross our fingers. I've never driven so slowly across Rannoch Moor and it was a relief to breast the pass and point the car down the



other side. We reached Kinlochleven on petrol fumes. Morning dawned. "Where's the petrol station in the village?" I enquired of a passing local. "There isn't one", he replied. Fortunately there were still just enough fumes to get us back to the petrol station in Glencoe Village.

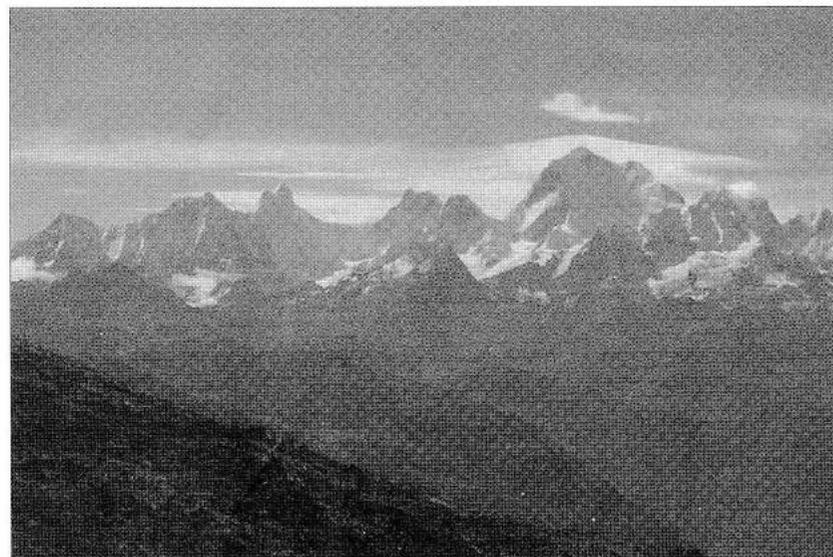
Nestled under the north face of Ben Nevis, two hours walk from the nearest road, the CIC is arguably the only true alpine style hut in the UK. It was extended in 2009 and now boasts a proper kitchen and toilets. Luxury! Friday afternoon was spent playing on the steep ice of the Cascades below the hut. We debated Saturday's outing. John, myself, Dave and Andy decided on Castle Ridge. Conditions should be good, ideal for Andy's first big mountaineering route and, with a book time of about three hours, should give us chance to tackle some more ice in the afternoon. An early morning start saw us heading for the base of the ridge where a fat ice gully tempted us to start much lower down than the normal route. The lovely ice pitch gave way to verglassed slabs and we decided to pitch the lower ridge. Leapfrogging John on a 60m rope, with Dave and Andrew climbing behind, we made good progress in the lean conditions until steeper ground barred our way. A delicate traverse took us to better climbing.

I reached John at his belay. "Looks ok higher up", he assured me, "looks like it goes, off to the right". I peered up. "You just need to climb this groove first". "HmMMM", it looked pretty lean with a couple of patches of turf in an otherwise steep and ice free cleft. I teetered up, axes somehow biting spartan turf and thin cracks. There was no sign of anywhere to place protection, and I was too pumped to stop anyway. "I hope your belay's good?" I delicately pulled myself up onto easier ground. Heart beat dropping I moved up to where I hoped to find an obvious route through the vertiginous rock above me. I climbed up to get a better view of the gully veering off to the right. It was a dead end, capped by an overhang and terminated by a precipitous drop. "We're not going this way", I shouted to John, "I'm going to have to aback down". I was worried we'd have to retrace our steps all the way down the ridge but, after another traverse, we recognised the ground; we were finally on the ordinary route, but it still lacked the good neve we'd expected. Easy ground interspersed steep rock steps until we reached the crux. With vague memories of a bold vertical crack on the edge of an abyss I was glad it was John's turn to lead. After weighing it up he shimmied upwards, axes torqued in iceless crevices, and heaved himself onto a ledge. We all followed him, relieved to have got past this intimidating pitch. "Must be nearly there now?" someone chirped. Unfortunately not. Rounding the next easy pitch the ridge reared up before me across a narrow rock arête. Further steep ground disappeared into the clag above us. And it was going dark. In a partial whiteout and the gloom of dusk, we continued upwards, eventually

reaching the small cairn that marks the top of the route, eight hours after starting the climb. Approaching darkness precluded our planned descent by No 4 Gully and we opted for the safer way off down to the path from Red Burn and the trek into the Allt a Muillin. Andy had coped brilliantly with his first winter route but was now hampered by a failed headtorch and one crampon which refused to adhere to his boot. Together with Dave badly tearing his calf on the walk out it made for a long slog back to the hut. We arrived after 12 hours on the hill to jeers from the other four members of the Ratti crew (Neil, Jim, Dave and Alex) who between them had easily knocked off three climbs including NE Buttress and Italian Climb although Neil had managed to stick the adze of his axe in his forehead on a very lean Mantrap! We'd certainly had a day to remember with plenty of incident and which had turned into an unforeseen epic but, that's the Ben for you – always a great adventure.

IN THE HIGH ANDES

Gerard Hanlon



AFTER more than 40 years in Peru, one of my regrets is not having taken the opportunity of doing more mountaineering and hill walking in the Andes. But in 1972 I did organize a small expedition to the Cordillera Huayhuash ("why wash"). This is a small range 30 kilometers long and some 100 kilometers south of the better known Cordillera Blanca in which Huascarán, Peru's highest peak, rises to 6,768m (22,205ft). The Huayhuash harbours Peru's second highest top, Yerupajá at 6,634m (21,766ft) and six peaks over 6,000m (19,686ft). It is a land of extraordinary beauty with a few small villages, lakes, streams and wetlands. It was little known until Joe Simpson ascended Siulá (6,344m/20,814ft) in 1986, broke his leg, fell into a crevasse and experienced his extraordinary adventure of "returning to life" (Touching the Void).

I set off with a young man, the scout master of our troop in my shanty town-parish in Lima, who came from the area. The rickety bus took over five hours travelling north along the Panamerican highway, up out of the coastal desert and onto the high sierra. Before descending into Chiquián, the entry town into the range, I saw one of those sights which one never forgets: the whole range of white towers shining in the sun against a blue sky. As Hilaire Belloc said of his vision of the Alps from the summit of the Weissenstein (in *The Path to Rome*), "they stood up like the walls of Eden".

From Chiquián it is a two day's march to the foot of the limestone moun-

tains. Lorgio had picked up his cousin, Carlos, who lived in the area and who was going to be the second guide. Hiking along the trail we passed a Japanese expedition returning from attempting one of the peaks and that evening we arrived at the village of Llamac. There we persuaded the villagers to lend us a horse; I promised that I would celebrate their fiesta on return (they rarely see a priest). The following evening we reached Jahuacocha (cocha = lake) where a family welcomed us and let us camp outside their stone hut. Beyond the lake rose Jirishanca (6,094m/19,994ft) and Rondoy (5,679m/18,632ft) – walls of snow and icefields, rock faces and avalanche paths. I recalled that Rondoy had been climbed by a British expedition in the 1960s: It was a stupendous setting and next day we set up our camp beyond the lake, within the remains of an old “bothy” and almost at the foot of the mountain walls.

My companions had chosen Rasac (6,017m/19,736ft) as worth attempting. It lies just to the south of Yerupajá and lacks the difficulties of the other mountains. Next day we climbed up the moraines, past two lakes and reached the snowline at over 17,000ft. At that time this was the height at which the snow in the Andes began; today, due to global warming it is receding. We roped up, but with only one 100ft rope, a couple of ice axes and little experience it would have been foolish to attempt to go higher. The summit looked quite near in the clear air.

Mist came down and we turned back. In spite of telling my guides to stick together, like good Peruvians they disobeyed and ran down ahead. I scrambled down on the ridge of a lateral moraine.

Back at camp Carlos complained of a heavy cold so I dug into the medical kit that one of the nuns had made up for me in Lima but my medical skills were no better than my mountaineering ones for he gave a great yelp as I stuck the needle into his backside!

On the Sunday I said mass on a large rock near our campsite and the locals attended, for they are a Catholic people.

Our next trip was over a high pass into the Rondoy valley. The great lungs and high red corpuscle count of the mountain peasant enabled my guides, and the horse, to forge ahead whilst I panted and puffed behind, under a loaded, old canvas rucksack. The path rose to 4,750m (15,584ft) and then down into the pastures of the Rondoy valley. Here the villagers come to graze their animals in the summer months. We set ourselves up in another stone “bothy” and ate roasted potatoes that night sitting on the earthen floor or on rocks. I thought of the wonderful man who had invented chairs!

I got up that night and went outside. It was a clear, moonlight night and Rondoy stood up at the head of the valley like a great white ghost.

Next day we scrambled up the sloping rocks of a high ridge which ran off

Rondoy, My guides were blasé on the slabs, as though they were repairing tiles on a roof. They said they had been there before: no one had ever been there!

I returned to Llamac leisurely sitting on the horse and admiring the scenery and there fulfilled my promise of celebrating the village fiesta.

We had broken no records nor crowned any tops but we had been in one of the remotest and most beautiful places in the world.

AN ATTEMPT ON BEN ALDER

Joanne Welding

WE decided to have a bothy trip in August because, of course, there would be lovely sunny weather and we would brave the midges with our Avon Skin So Soft...

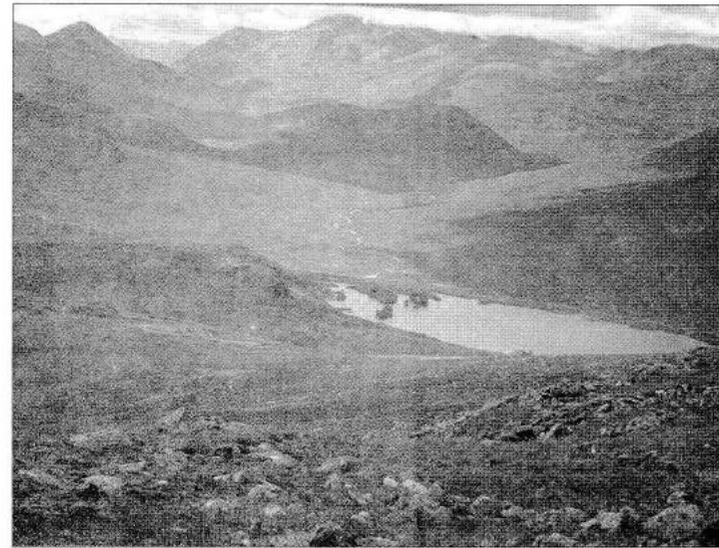
The plan was to leave the car at Rannoch station, train to Corroul, stay a couple of nights at the Loch Ossian YH and then over Ben Alder to the Ben Alder bothy, stay a night and then walk back out cross country to Rannoch and home. The weather was lovely as we arrived at Loch Ossian and the youth hostel was really well equipped and comfortable. OK, there were the straw toilets to contend with, but the early evenings were beautiful as we looked down the loch to the revamped castle home of the "Tetra pack" family. Then, as the breeze dropped, the midges came out. After years of summer holidays in Scotland I can honestly say that I have never seen midges like it. They hung in the air in clouds so dense you could actually feel them on your face as you ran along to the outside toilets. First mistake – I had left the Skin So Soft at home! Disaster. Everyone at the YH was really sociable and on the second evening a blaeberry search was set up. Everyone trooped out armed with plastic tubs to pick blueberries – largely to help the relief warden Ben who was running out of food and had no fresh stuff left. The expedition lasted about half an hour before everyone had to admit defeat and scurry back to the safety of the hostel. A huge crumble was constructed, four more young men arrived armed with more cans of beer than they could carry and a fun night ensued.

Oh and we went walking too.

On day one we went up Carn Dearg (941m) and then an easy walk along the ridge to Sghor Gaibhre (955m). The weather was perfect, the views down to Ben Alder cottage beautiful and the panorama spectacular. On the way to the summit of Sghor Gaibhre we met the only people we saw all day. The two were out for a jaunt having finished all



Joanne at Loch Ossian Youth Hostel



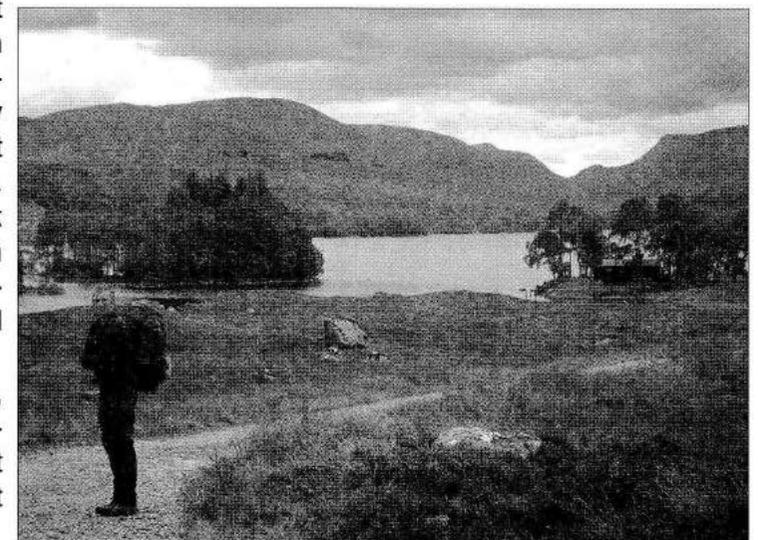
Loch Ossian

the mountain in a Land Rover for the celebratory lunch!

Day two dawned wild and very wet as we set off carrying all our gear to walk up the valley past Corroul Lodge to take in Ben Alder (1148m) on the way to the bothy. We walked for four hours in deteriorating weather and reached the point of decision. To carry on and avoid the summit, as the mountain deserved a better day, cross the bealach and head straight for the bothy. Or head back to the station at Corroul and home. There was of course a time implication as the last

train to Rannoch was at 4.30. Discretion, stormy weather and wet gear won the day. We headed back to the station in time for a fantastic chip butty and the train.

We will go again, enjoy the mountain, and make it to the bothy next time.



Dominic by Loch Ossian

OUT OF BOUNDS

Dominic Sinnett



Sgurr na Ciche

JUST for a moment the cloud lifted from the summit of the 1,040m peak of Sgurr na Ciche, to reveal the outline of Inverie Bay far below. "Are you sure? It looks miles away to me..." Joanne contemplated the view with disbelief. Inverie, home to the Old Forge, the remotest pub in mainland Britain, was the destination of our three-day trek into the Rough Bounds of Knoydart. With no road access, Inverie can be reached by boat in forty minutes from Mallaig, but we'd decided to walk in and climb some Munros on the way.

The adventure had started badly the previous day when we left our car at Glenfinnan, surrounded by clouds of midges and rain. It promptly got worse when we had to ford a swollen river in Glen Pean – thanks to slapdash navigation on my part – leaving me with wet boots for the rest of the walk. There would be no habitation, and no roads, for the next 25 miles, the only shelter a couple of bothies. We'd planned to stay

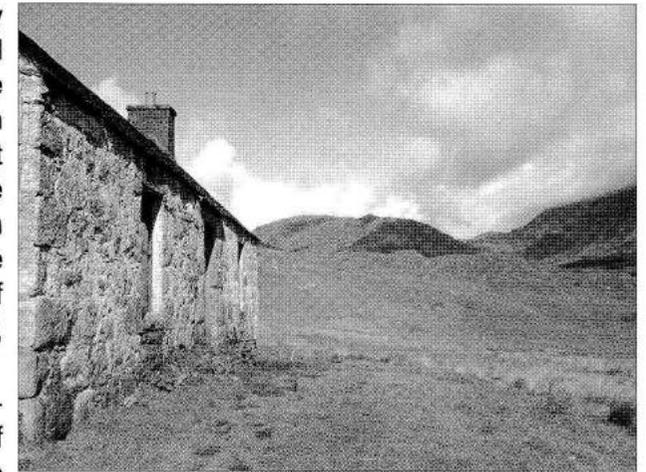


Joanne crossing the swollen river Knoydart

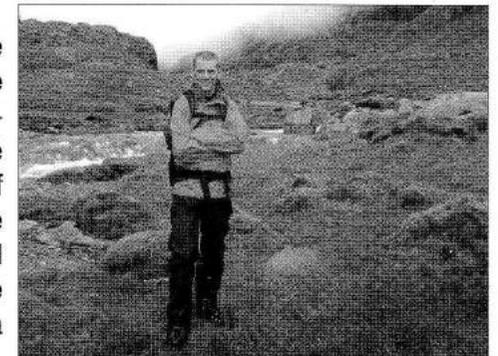
overnight at A' Chuil bothy in Glendessary. It had looked eminently feasible with the map spread on the living room floor, but the sheer scale of the landscape revealed from our mountain-top vantage point, and the reality of Scottish summer weather, were suddenly sobering. Later in the bothy we huddled round a sulky fire of twigs gathered from the forest, eating a concoction of rice and chorizo cooked up on the meths stove. We'd booked accommodation for the following night in the Old Byre in Inverie, a luxury bunkhouse with a hot tub, as a reward for the privations of sleeping on floorboards, and a table at the Old Forge with its real ale and seafood platters. And that was 15 miles away – through the desolate pass of Màm na Cloich Airde, down to sea level at Loch Nevis and then over the 550m pass of Màm Meadail. "At least the forecast is good," I said, hopefully.

Next morning we woke to the drumbeat of rain on the skylight. The first mile of easy walking on forest track gave way to huge fallen boulders and raging streams. But what a magnificent place: a narrow twisting defile, an unexpected breach in the rugged mountain barrier that shuts Knoydart off from the rest of Britain. That this ancient right-of-way was a lifeline in a different era could be seen in the beautifully-engineered hairpins dropping down to Loch Nevis, and the stones scattered in the bracken that were the remains of former crofting townships.

After three days of wilderness, Inverie lived up to its promise of luxury. The sun shone next day as the MV Western Isles ferried us to Mallaig, and we had a view that was the inverse of what we'd seen two days before: the village with its wooded shores and rhododendrons, and the lofty spire of Sgurr na Ciche towering above – a picture of perfection.



A' Chuil bothy



Dominic on the walk through to Inverie

THE INAUGURAL FRED DANIELS (OR ARTHUR WHITTON) LAKELAND PASSES CYCLE CHALLENGE

Richard Leonard

IN late August 2010 Arthur Daniels was good enough to organise the Fred Daniels (or Arthur Whitton) Cycle Challenge as a catered and supported meet for Achille Ratti members. The route was based on that of the Fred Whitton Challenge known to be one of the hardest sportive events in the cycling calendar, climbing the famous Lakeland Passes of Kirkstone, Honister, Newlands, Whinlatter, Hardknott and Wrynose. However Arthur knew that Ratti members like a challenge, so he included Red Bank, The Struggle and Blea Tarn in his route! Only 104 miles with over 4000m of climbing.

The sixteen cyclists who accepted the challenge enjoyed a filling, fuelling, energy giving breakfast at Bishops Scale before setting off in fine fettle. John Loxam was first on the road followed by Dave Bateson, Brian Hodgkinson, Peter Wilson and his son John. The Peleton set off 30 minutes later but didn't chase down the breakaway riders until Eskdale Green.

Red Bank was conquered in good form but some riders found The Struggle from Ambleside to the top of Kirkstone Pass was aptly named, with Phil "Iron-man" Hodgson wishing he was riding his own triple chainring bike instead of a borrowed double. The Peleton regrouped at The Kirkstone Inn but quickly separated again down the hill with some riders being more cautious than others. Andy Pooler won the prize for the fastest descender. The riders then passed through Glenridding and Dockray before joining the busy A66 into Keswick with a dour warning from Keith Parkinson: "Watch out for those road studs. I've known three riders come off on those road studs!"

The only blot on the horizon as we enjoyed the scenery of Borrowdale was the knowledge that it ended with Honister Pass. As usual the climb was hard work but most riders stayed in the saddle to be greeted at the top by the welcome sight of Arthur and his boiling kettle! Beryl's home made cake and Brian's flapjack were excellent and the pile of sandwiches was appreciably smaller after our group of 10 had "browsed".

Then it was back in the saddle, down to Buttermere and up Newlands. "How much further" asked Mick Howard who had been told that the whole ride was 60 miles by good friend Oz. He was suitably unimpressed when we told him another 40 or 50 miles. The riders raced down Newlands Valley toward Braithwaite enjoying the clement cycling conditions and views of Skiddaw, then changing down a few gears climbed up through the woods to Whinlatter. They there enjoyed an unexpected and pleasant surprise.

Rather than returning to Langdale Arthur had driven to Whinlatter and set up his mobile cafe again. Lack of calories could not be used as an excuse for not completing!

With the absence of any major passes or landmarks the next few miles through Lorton, Gosforth and Santon Bridge did seem to drag. This section seemed so long that Brian Hodgkinson and his group thought they had gone astray but were reassured by the welcome sight of Dot and Jean Lochhead manning the food station at Eskdale Green. They stayed too long enjoying the tea and sandwiches as the main group of riders swallowed up the breakaway group and then all together cycled up Eskdale to meet the main challenge of the day.

Dreadlock Dave and Keith Parkinson would have got up Hardknott without putting a foot down had they not met a senior tourist executing a three point turn on the steepest section of the pass! After that climb the cyclists were faced with Wrynose where Christine Preston (the only girl on the ride) showed her usual grit and determination; "I'm not putting a foot down on this climb." Nor did she. Then down toward Little Langdale, left over the Blea Tarn road where Peter Wilson showed his strength by passing more than one rider on the last hill.

All the riders completed the challenging course and were treated to a splendid dinner at the hut. Thanks were extended by all the riders to Arthur and his back up crew including Beryl, Sheila, Brenda, Leo and Freda. All agreed it had been a great event. Next year... the other way round!



A VISIT TO INDIA, NEPAL & SIKIMM

Dave Hugill



Janoo (7710m) and Khangchendzodnga (8585m) from first camp at Tonglu (3015m)

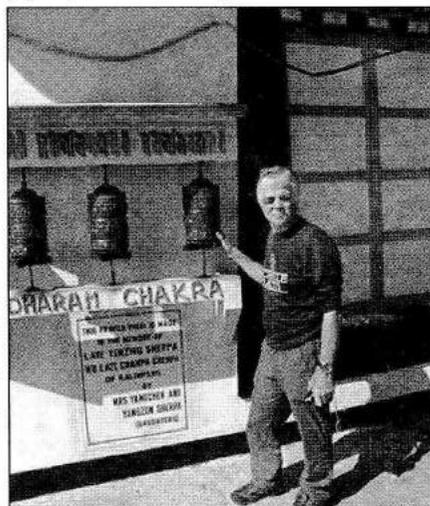
FEELING that a trip to the Himalayas should be taken at least once in a lifetime, I booked on a trek in October 2010. It combined a chance to see India for the first time, the major Nepal peaks, and some 6000m and 8000m peaks at close quarters. Also, being two treks back to back, some cultural visits were possible between treks, and at both ends.

Flying out to Delhi via Qatar, apprehension soon

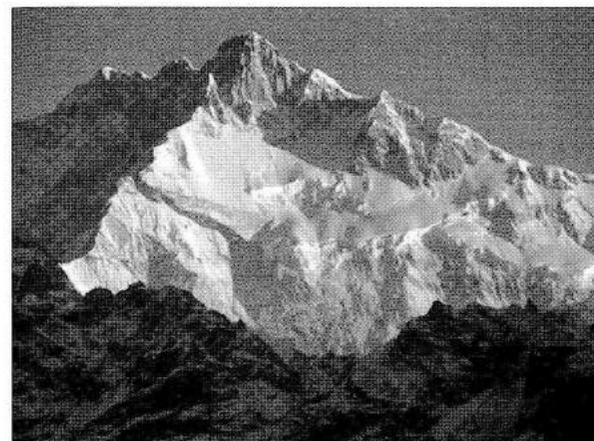
gave way to interest and fascination, as I roamed the streets of Delhi on the first day, an experience not to be missed. At the hotel, I met up with the other trekkers on the trip, amazingly only another two.

An internal flight the next day took us along the Himalayas eastward to Bagdogra, the nearest airport to Darjeeling, in West Bengal. Here we met up with our guide, and embarked on a half day jeep ride through rice fields and villages, and up the tortuous rough road to Darjeeling itself. Staying for a couple of nights, there was time to visit the Mountaineering Institute, the Himalayan Zoo, the monastery at Ghoom, the derelict Himalayan Hotel (soon to be restored), a tea plantation, and to take a ride on the narrow gauge railway up to Ghoom.

From here, our jeep took us via Maneybhanjang up to the village of Dhodray where we met with the rest of the trekking crew, loaded up the horses, and began the first six day trek, heading for the Singalila ridge. Our first camp was at Tonglu (3015m). In the morning, there were spectacular views of Kanchenjunga



Prayer Wheels in memory of Sherpa Tenzing at the Monastery above Kalimpong



Sunrise on Khangchendzodnga from second camp on Sikkim trek at 4000m

five hour descent the next day, brought us to the village of Rimbick, where we stopped in a Sherpa lodge and had the luxury of a welcome shower.

The next day our new driver and newer 4x4 arrived to take us on the long drive round into Sikkim, negotiating many landslips and amazing roads to Pemyangtse, from where we could now see up our trek route towards Kanchenjunga and the Goecha La. An early start next day allowed a visit to the hilltop monastery above Pemyangtse, a very old monastery belonging to the Nyingmapa sect. The afternoon was spent driving through small villages, to arrive at Yuksom, the old capital of Sikkim, with an old world friendly feel to it.

From here we started the second trek, the crew now using dzo (a cross between a yak and a cow) as the beasts of burden, and met some other British trekkers starting the same route. At the second day lunch stop we were introduced to our sirdar's uncle who had climbed Everest five times.

The camp was above Dzongri at 4000m, and quite cold, and even colder pre dawn, when we climbed a nearby hill to view the sunrise on all the surrounding peaks. On the walk up to the next camp, the Prek Chu river was crossed, and Pandim 6770m dominated the skyline ahead. Our next camp was at Lamoni, from where we were able to spot blue sheep(chamois) on the surrounding rocks, and large



India/Nepal border formalities at Sandakphu 3690m on the Singalila Ridge

birds of prey circling above the crags.

Another pre dawn start next day, had us well on the way to the Goecha La itself by daybreak, and in changing weather Goecha Peak 5127m, on our left, was beginning to cloud over. By the time the Goecha La 4900m was reached, the big east face of Kanchenjunga was obscured by cloud! After about half an



Three days to the Goecha La, Pandim (6691m) on left

hour and lunch, it was obviously not going to clear, so we began the long descent, past our last two camps, to below Dzongrhi for the night. It had been almost a twelve hour day, and a good sleep was very welcome.

Everything next morning was quiet, and a blanket of snow covered all around, but the cooks and porters, some in sandals, cheerfully carried on loading the animals, as we trudged off downhill to our next stop, passing optimistic parties on the way up. By late afternoon we were below the snow line, and a pleasant trek in sunshine, the next day brought us back to Yoksum. At the evening meal with all the crew in a nearby house, we said our farewells to the men, with a few beers and a bit of music, and next day began the long trip down to Kalimpong, a colourful, bustling town which grew up as a meeting place for traders from Tibet, Bhutan, and the plains of Bengal. Stopping at the old Himalayan Hotel, which had a wonderful colonial atmosphere, we sat



Snow arrives on the descent !

outside in the garden, with snow covered mountains in the distance, and relaxed, drinking tea, perfect.

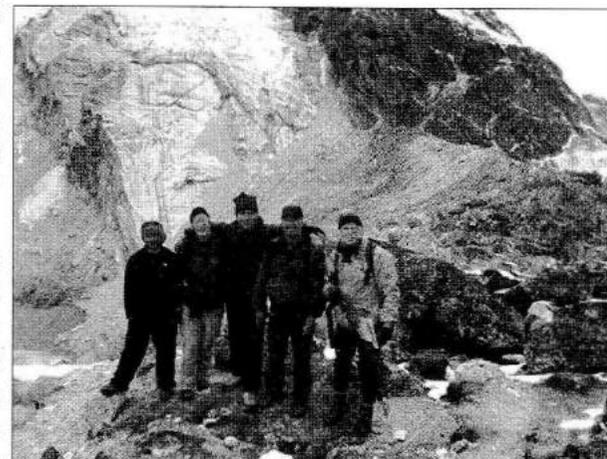
A short visit to the amazing viewpoint on Rinkingpong Hill and the monastery, a look around a Catholic church built by missionaries in the 1920s, an afternoon wandering round the bazaars, and our trip was drawing to a close.

A long drive down to the

plains, passing through Siliguri, took us back Bagdogra for the flight to Delhi. Here I said farewell to my two companions who were going on to Agra.

The flight back to Gatwick was clear all the way back, with many empty seats, and the deserts of the Gulf, the Adriatic coast, and the Dolomites, were all wonderfully visible.

Catching the trains from London to Carnforth, and with the help of a lift from Barry Rogers, I was back in Warton in time for a pint in the local. A trip I will remember for a long time to come.



At Goecha La 4900m

THE KRYPTON QUADRATHLON CHALLENGE 2010

Phil Hodgson

I STILL shiver when I remember the Krypton Challenge 2010. A few of the usual suspects were missing: reigning Kryptonman Dave J was being fitted for his wedding suit; Sue R had forgotten her wetsuit and Mark P had locked his in his car and now had no keys... (a long story). Poor excuses in my view, although the water temperature was several degrees below normal after the harsh winter. Only seven of us were intrepid, or daft, enough to brave the antarctic waters of Coniston.

As Dave M couldn't compete due to injury I'd persuaded him to be the safety boat cabin boy...errm I mean captain. "Right, we swim out to the boat and back...", I briefed the less than enthusiastic competitors, outnumbered four to one by a sadistically grinning mob of spectators, "...then grab your lilo and paddle out and back again". The motley crew of contenders lined up for the official photo...and what a picture. Sheila and Richard looking less perturbed than the rest of us as they'd opted to do only the swim, Chrispy still sporting her usual enthusiastic smile, Paula with inbuilt buoyancy aids, Roger with his backside hanging out of his armless wetsuit, Jane in neoprene helmet doing a spiffing impression of Biggles what ho, and Captain Krypton obviously looking suave in his best rubber suit. "Paddle a bit further out", I shouted to Dave. A resounding chorus of "NO, paddle a bit further in", erupted from my rivals.

Unlike England Athletics' requirements, Krypton Events require no official training course for timekeepers or scorekeepers...just an ability to read a watch and add up or, at the very least, to be press ganged into the job. Jeffers and Skinz met at least one of the criteria between them. "Right... GO", they shouted. The water literally took my breath away as we took the plunge ... brrrrrrrrrr. The thirty or so metres to the boat seemed like three



hundred and my feet suddenly felt like they were enveloped by ice. Nobody earned the fiver on offer for tipping Dave out of the boat, I think we were all too concerned with getting back to dry land asap... albeit briefly as we collected our lilos and paddled once more across the freezing water clutching assorted lobsters, crocodiles



and rubber rings. Hats off to Roger who put in the fastest swim, and the fastest lilo.

The third event in the Krypton Quadrathlon was a new discipline, one that is very likely to

be introduced as Team GB's wildcard event at the 2012 Olympics - Spacehopper Racing. Unfortunately we were limited to one adult hopper and four kiddies ones (the rest were locked up in Mark's keyless car). The kids had earlier exhibited spectacular spacehopper prowess and acrobatics on the camping field. We, on the other hand, demonstrated a particular lack of flexibility and skill. I can tell you it's not easy bouncing when your balls are only 18 inches in diameter! I was penalised by a particularly picky referee for doing squat jumps instead of bouncing. "You cheated", the unruly spectators shouted as I flopped exhausted over the finish line. "There's nowt in the rules about having to actually bounce", I protested. "Report him to the referee", they bayed. "I am the referee", I retorted. Wilting under mob pressure I reluctantly docked my not unimpressive time of several minutes for the 50 meter course. However, the penalty was academic as we'd all been trounced by Chrispy. (she did admit to having been practising in her lounge for several months.)

Although I was trailing in the overall timings I was confident I'd improve my standings in the final event, the 'Run round that tree at the top of the field and back' Race. Young Jack C, my arch rival in the Bunny Runs, had thrown his hat in the ring for this event and from the off he was on my tail. It's a long way uphill to that tree but I rounded it first with Jack and Roger just behind. Back down the hill, legs burning, but to no avail. Roger powered past me to win the run and Jack (no doubt a future Kryptonman in the making) pipped me on the line.

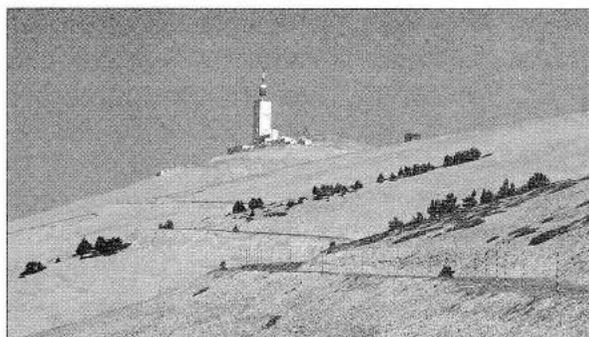
Skins and Jeffers conferred and totted and calculated. No fancy spreadsheets for them, just a pen and paper, some mental gymnastics and some interesting face pulling and beard scratching. Capn K's presentation was, as usual, slick and professional, the handsome prizes an inspiration for future Krypton contenders. As he handed out the prize cream eggs he's sure he spotted a tear in the eyes of the proud recipients.

The individual event winners: Swim, Lilo and Run Champion – Roger; Spacehopper Champion – ChrisP.

And, the proud winners of the most coveted title in the extreme sports world: KRYPTONWOMAN 2010 – Paula; KRYPTONMAN 2010 – Roger

A NOVICE'S GUIDE TO MONT VENTOUX

Helen Hodgkinson



I HAD never heard of Mont Ventoux until last year. Neil had got a new road bike and we decided to head down to Provence in the summer and support his dad, Brian, in achieving a long-held ambition to complete the celebrated Tour de France climb from Bedoin.

Mont Ventoux, the "Giant of Provence" rises to 1,909m from the rolling plains of the Vaucluse. Its white summit can be viewed from 65 miles distant on a clear day. Snow blankets the summit through to April and the top still appears snow-capped in high summer because of the limestone bleached white by the sun above the treeline. I am very new to road cycling, not so much drawn to it as resigned to it because of injury, but seeing the summit observatory shimmering in the July heat, I felt that excitement I usually associate with climbing a great route or skiing a run that's a bit beyond my ability.

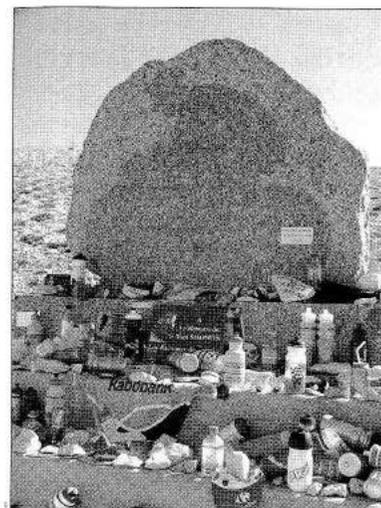
We stayed at a villa in Malaucène, a bustling village at the foot of the west ridge of Ventoux. As well as having an excellent market and plenty of good restaurants, the place is also a mecca for cyclists, and after a couple of warm-up rides it was easy to see why. Quiet roads weave through beautiful scenery: endless vineyards, limestone valleys and ancient villages with shaded squares. It was a world away from fighting my way over Widdop Road in driving rain. I was converted.

Neil and Brian's route took them from Malaucène to Bedoin, for the start of the 13 mile climb to the top of Mont Ventoux. I was part of the support team together with our two boys, Tom and Ben, and Brian's wife, Margaret, supplying drinks and sweets en route and shouting encouragement in our best French "Allez, allez!" and "On y va!" from the car windows.

At first the gradient is fairly steady but as the road enters the forest,



All together at Chalet Reynard



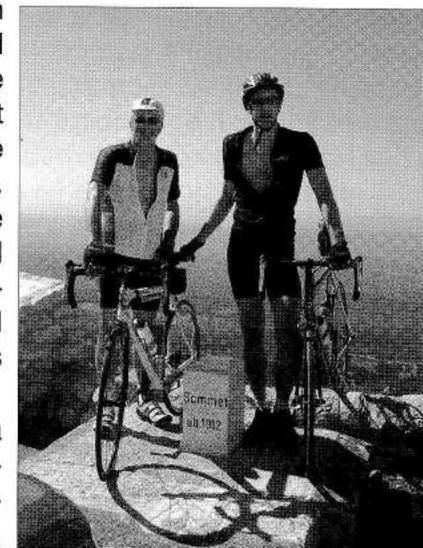
Tom Simpson memorial

it becomes relentless, averaging 1 in 8, the main distraction being the names of world-renowned cyclists painted on the road: Ullrich, Pantani and Schleck were a few I recognised.

Mont Ventoux has its own ecology, wild boar roam its forests and the rare Tengmalm's owl, a native of Finland is also resident. Sixty rare plant species are found on the summit although I don't think this fact was uppermost in Neil's mind when we caught up with them at Chalet Reynard mid-morning. This is the point where the forest gives way to the lunar landscape of bare scree slopes in the full glare of the sun, an unforgiving place when legs are beginning to tire. Neil and Brian had been riding for about 3 hours and still looked fairly strong but as we stopped further up to take photos, they weren't smiling quite as readily. I think it was with some relief that we stopped at the Tom Simpson memorial.

Tom Simpson was, without doubt, the greatest cyclist Britain has ever produced. He was an Olympic medallist, world champion and the first Briton to wear the coveted yellow jersey of the Tour de France. He died from exhaustion and dehydration, aged 29, at the spot marked by the memorial during the 1967 Tour, one mile from the finish, fuelled by amphetamines and brandy. I knew little about Tom Simpson before the trip to Ventoux, but as I stood looking at the tributes, souvenirs and the plaques from his family, it was evident that a true sporting legend had lost his life here who was a hero to a great many people. Surrounding the granite monument were drinks bottles, buffs, energy bars, and stones painted with messages of condolence. It felt as if his death had happened only last week, not 43 years ago. It was incredibly moving.

Onwards then to the summit, where a white line across the road marks the finish and the riders can finally stop pedalling! If you are ever in need of inspiration, then go and stand on that finish line. You



Ambition fulfilled

will see all types of people of all ages: super-fit cyclists with the latest gear, tanned twinkly-eyed old men in cycling caps with bandy legs (I suspected none were English), overweight men in too-tight lycra pushing their bikes around the final corner (some of them were definitely English) and even the occasional runner (very thin and always with poles). Many were greeted by family or friends, each celebrating their own personal victory and enjoying their moment of sporting greatness. It was quite special to see Neil cross that line with his dad and stand on the summit marker. Far below, the lavender fields and rolling hills receded in a misty haze. It seemed a very long way down indeed.

Neil and I rode up Ventoux two days later, this time up the Malaucène route, which takes the western slopes and is slightly longer. The day could not have been more different, cool and cloudy with a slight breeze. As we climbed higher the wind started to pick up. I decided the best way to approach it was not to think about the whole climb, but just to focus on the section I could see ahead of me: the next hairpin or mile marker.

Approaching the summit, it was difficult to stay on the bike, the wind was so strong and we didn't hang around for long once we reached the observatory. The summit was shrouded in cloud and ill-prepared cyclists were huddled in corners for shelter. What a contrast to our previous visit, and a reminder of the extreme variations of weather the mountain can produce.

The descent was amazing, 13 miles of the smoothest road surface imaginable, no traffic, no junctions and no need to turn the pedals once! I went so fast I scared myself. The scree and the forest went by in a blur, accompanied by the chirrup of cicadas and the scent of juniper and wild thyme. It had taken over two and a half hours to slog up the mountain and we were back down at the bike shop in Bedoin within 20 minutes, the adrenaline still pumping and legs a little wobbly with the thrill of it all.

We will definitely be returning to Provence for another cycling and climbing trip when our boys are old enough to ride by themselves. For now though, it's back to the Widdop loop...



What a difference a day makes!