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ROSS PLAYS KERPLUNK!

The new club dig in Poole's Cavern has proven to be relatively popular for a Wednesday night session, despite one or two minor problems. Initially we had a guided tour of the boulder choke with Alan Walker of DCRO and the Showcave Management, for which we were allowed to change in the visitor centre. Several possibilities were looked at but the high-level choke heading South seems to give the best prospects. In this region were plenty of ancient scrawls, some with dates from the 1700's. An initial attack on this first night seemed to show good promise amongst loose boulders, against a solid wall and overhang.

The next Wednesday (17-Feb-99) proved to be rather more exciting than we had planned. Ross was up at the sharp end passing back lumps of rock and clearing out a narrow vertical slot. Squeezing head first down into this did not seem all together to his liking, so he turned around in the body size tube and pushed himself into it feet first. Having gone a full body length into this squeeze, without his battery and helmet on as it was too tight, a friendly boulder dropped off the wall to snuggle up to his ankle...*Ross was not amused!* Once he had calmed down a little and his pulse had returned to double figures, careful clearing of the floor let him slide his foot out with not much more than a need for clean underwear and beer, not necessarily in that order. Luckily it had just been a playful nip and not a savage attack.

This prompted us to think of a more chemical means of clearing the blockage, but Alan told us before things got out of hand that bats were present, so as they don't like nitrate fumes too much we thought better of it. The following week Ross was back with a lump hammer, grinding up offending bits and clearing a crawl over the top of his narrow rift. When Matthew went in to have a dabble at it he climbed over the last boulder barring entry and went off down the crawl, for a good body length, muttering about Ross being a fat...

The dig is obviously a very promising site, but will be a slow one without bang. On the 3rd of March Nigel and I turned up with his secret weapon, Plugs and Feathers, made of finest hand tooled stainless steel, and the club drill and battery. Outside it was very wet, and quite dribbly inside as well. Alan had left us a 240v extension cable up at the dig, wired into the showcave electric's. In view of our lack of mains power tools and not wanting to die of excess energy we left this bit for another week. The good news is that this ancient technique works extremely well on loose blocks and orders have been placed for several more sets as soon as the craftspeople have been furnished with the appropriate specs and engineering drawings.

From the borehole on the hill above the TV camera could see about 50 feet towards the showcave. We must have gone a good 30 feet from the previous end of the boulder choke, so now it's just a matter of keeping on at it and reducing the original gap of 300 feet to zero. The roof of the dig looks reasonable for the most part, but who can tell, and being in a choke the floor could be just as much of a problem. However, after the most recent session where we removed a large block and cleared the crawl out, the roof looks quite unpleasant and in need of shoring up before it drops on someone.

"Xmas do." This is taking place on May 15 at The Bull in Monyash. Contact Mark Lovatt NOW

Well here we were in Argentina at last!! It had taken 25 hours so far and we still had to travel from Buenos Aires to Mendoza. Our introduction to the South American continent had not been a good one, our group of four had been conned out of a free bus service between airports and paid 140 dollars between us for the privilege by a couple of sharp taxi-drivers!!! In addition the transfer in the taxis was probably the most hazardous part of the entire month!! It was 9 am 24 degrees C and to cap it all customs had confiscated our 6 packs of Raven sausages!! BSE seemed to be the problem even tho' they were PORK sausages!! Buenos Aires seems a fairly modern city with an excellent road system (used as a race track by the taxi drivers!) with the usual smattering of shanty towns on it's outskirts. We had an excellent meal in the airport lounge as we waited for our final flight of two hours to Mendoza, a total time of 32 hours!

Darren myself and Andy (a rugby player from Yorkshire, built like a brick outhouse) were to share a room and after settling in we went to take in the atmosphere. Apparently women outnumber men 7:1 which means the women make a real effort and I can only assume that we had arrived in the middle of the "World's shortest mini-skirt Championships" (or it could have been the tightest tee-shirt championships!!) Either way it was a very pleasant distraction and we were going to have a monastic existence imposed on us for the next few weeks anyway!! For our evening meal we found a restaurant where for 7 dollars one could eat as much as one wanted, they certainly lost out on Andy who could easily eat a horse-as an aperitif to a Harry Ramsden special!!

We never slept a wink that night, it was HOT and the night life goes on until about 4.30 before a brief pause when everyone seems to get up for work at about 5.45. (We hadn't sussed out the air-conditioning at this stage, when we did it was even noisier than the traffic.)

Breakfast arrived and so did Maria. The only female in the group, she brightened up the party beyond belief. Spanish by birth but a British resident for 20 years she proved a real asset to our merry band. Petite and attractive she turned out to be fitter than all the males always arriving first into camp due to her rapid ascents and descents the latter becoming legendary. A climber for not much more than three years .. it made one wonder what she would have been like with a few more years under her belt.

A wander around town (not forgetting to take note of the mini skirts and tee shirts!), a snack in a pavement bar and back to the hotel for a discussion on the forthcoming programme. The main problem seemed to be the non-appearance of our Peruvian guide. The afternoon was spent in discussion and packing for the following day. Maria used some of her considerable charm to persuade Andy to shoulder at least part of her "group kit". Just prior to our leaving for our evening meal Damian our Peruvian guide arrived. Dark skinned and looking 100% "Indian" he later turned out to be worth his weight in gold!!

We ate in a "9 dollars for as much as you can eat" restaurant and once again Andy ate for England!

Expedition Day One.(Monday) We left at 9 am for Cordon del Plata a journey of about 3 hours. The first 2 hours went smoothly but the minibus just wasn't up to climbing the steep road to our destination, a ski resort high in the mountains. After numerous stops we eventually removed the thermostat and the vehicle struggled to a point about 500m short of our destination. Following a pleasant lunch we set off on a 3 hour walk to our campsite a height gain of some 500m. The site lay amongst boulders at an altitude of 3500m. Both Darren and I felt a bit rough but put it down to altitude and the effects of travel. The area was very arid and it was incredibly hot even at 6 p.m. making the round trip for water (15 min) a real pain. A meal of pasta and cheese was followed by copious amounts of tea. We retired at about 8.30. It was a very hot night and as light as day overnight with a full moon and superb view of the stars. Jeff declined a tent in favour of a bivouac.

Expedition Day Two (Tuesday) Our reason for visiting this region was to enable us to acclimatise so our first trip was a "leisurely" climb to a col. at 4200m (700m height gain) It took about 2-2 ½ hours and I found it tiring. It also gave us a preview of our next objective, Rincon a 5500m peak. The route lay up steep glacial moraine which became steep and unstable towards the top, a "bad step" rounded off the excitement. After lunch the group decide to climb to a higher col, I declined in order to save myself for better things!! It wasn't long before Darren returned so after a short rest we headed for the valley leaving our snow and ice gear behind. We had only been in camp about 45 min when Damian arrived followed 20 min later by Maria, both of them had run down from the col. During our evening meal we saw a Vizcacha, an animal peculiar to the region looking like a cross between a large rabbit and a squirrel. Another early night and it turned out to be a much colder one.

Expedition Day 3 (Wednesday) Breakfast was porridge which was barely edible (I hate the stuff even with sugar and we had run out!) I wasn't looking forward to the trudge back up to the col and apparently no one else was either. The good news was someone had to share a tent with Maria who didn't fancy carrying one for herself. Andy won (or did he lose?), the downside was that he had to wash(!), the rest of us could relax and be less particular about personal hygiene! Despite the hot day we made the col ¼hour faster than yesterday despite carrying a much heavier pack, but was the "bad step" becoming harder? The latter part of the day was very pleasant as was the meal of pasta and fish. Needless to say Darren managed to get sunburnt across the back of his neck. Maria spent quite a bit of time washing clothes while poor Andy had to wash himself! There seemed to be signs of minor avalanches to the side of our proposed route, the good news was that we had found a bag of sugar.

Expedition Day 4 (Thursday) Midnight and the stoves were throbbing away. 1 am and tea arrived followed by breakfast at 1.15. At 2 am we were on our way, I hate these Alpine starts! Crossing the moraine to the start of the ascent took exactly an hour and was rendered interesting due to my leaving my head torch at "base camp" with all my other surplus kit. We could clearly see the lights of Mendoza some 50 miles away as though we could almost touch them. It took a further hour to reach the crest of the ridge leading towards the summit, the height was 4600 m. We were feeling good (for this altitude that is!) and Darren had broken his height record.

The ridge was of mixed ground making the decision on wearing crampons difficult. In parts they were useful, particularly in the half-light, in other parts they were a pain. I recall two particularly difficult moves along the ridge but nothing desperate. By now Darren was feeling rough. At 6 am we reached a minor peak on the ridge. It was decided to split the party, Andy (guide) Andy, Rob, Maria and I continued in the direction of the summit while the remainder awaited the sunrise. Crossing a short snow field we reached the left hand of two parallel gullies which knew led to an easy angled snow slope by which means we would gain the summit. By 7 am we were well up the gully which was filled with penitentes, a wind eroded snow formation peculiar to the Andes, and snow becoming softer by the minute as the sun caught it. At 4700 (the height of Mont Blanc) Andy (guide) called it a day. Reluctantly I cramponed down to the others (Yes I was even in front of Maria at this point ! ...just!) and we returned to the others. A couple of hours later and we were back in camp... around a "normal" breakfast time. The pipe on my Platypus drinking system had frozen solid, I would have to do something to alleviate this problem on Aconcagua which will be MUCH colder.

The rest of the day was spent lazing around. It was RED HOT but cold when the sun was obscured by the occasional cloud, I felt listless and lethargic, had a mouth full of ulcers and a blocked nose and this was only the start! During the afternoon there were lots of rock falls. Even though the day was spent in relative inactivity we consoled ourselves with the fact that our acclimatisation programme was going well.

Expedition Day 5 (Friday) I was woken at 6.45 by Darren looking for the loo roll ... he was in a hurry! It was still cool but the sun had not yet risen. Neither of us could face porridge again so we opted for biscuits and pea

nuts for breakfast. Things were getting very smelly in the tent. Shortly after breakfast two Americans came down from a higher camp carrying ENORMOUS sacks, they two were Aconcagua bound.

At 9.50 we set off for the lower camp and then the valley. Jeff, Maria, Darren and I were in the lead. The "bad step" WAS definitely getting worse. I opted for an alternative route down the loose scree pioneered by the Americans. Maria, who opted for the step, later confessed that it was the second time ever that she had experienced "the shakes". Darren and I felt much better on the loose ground, almost managing to keep up with Maria. It took about an hour to reach camp 1 where we were invited to breakfast by a small group of Argentinians who informed us that a minor quake had caused the rock falls the previous day and that many areas had experienced heavy rain ... not a good sign for Aconcagua, the last thing we wanted was a heavy fall of snow on the Polish Glacier our proposed route. As a boost to our confidence the Americans who were also breakfasting with the Argentinians told us that the mountain had claimed 19 lives last year and 5 this, 3 of them on the Polish Glacier when a large sheet of ice on which all three were standing had broken away.

We thanked our hosts and continued down to the valley gaining a really good view of our route up Rincon on the way. We refreshed ourselves in a tiny "ski" bar as we waited for our minibus. Darren was beginning to feel decidedly ill with the "trots", fortunately the journey back was fairly rapid. On arrival at our hotel Darren went to bed but not before several visits to the loo!!

Leaving Darren firmly tucked up in bed (he must have felt rotten .. have you ever known him miss a night out?) we had our evening meal in the usual "9 dollar bar". Mendoza comes to life at 10 p.m., by 1130 the streets were teeming with life. Returning to the hotel I found Darren still comatose.

Saturday. Darren seems to have recovered, I hoped it wasn't catching. Against my advise (which he normally ignores anyway!) he went on a "wine tour" with most of the others. I did a tour of the locality then read in the park facing the hotel. Max stayed close to the hotel (and toilet) since the dreaded bug seemed to have caught up with him! The weather by now was much more tolerable being overcast and windy. I seemed to have developed a chesty cough and was suffering from nose bleeds, a common effect of altitude. In the afternoon I went on a "large shop" (over £500) with Andy (G) in readiness for our attempt on Aconcagua.

Expedition day 1. Sunday. Darren was up numerous times during the night but managed to get himself dressed and ready for off at 6.45 as did the rest of us. Our transport arrived but was hopelessly inadequate so we had a slight delay as we waited for an additional minibus to arrive. The drive to Punta de Vacas took 3 hours and it rained heavily on the way, this meant snow on the mountains.

On our arrival the bags were weighed and loaded onto the mules. We had 280 kg (not including our own rucksacks which we were to carry) and the cost of transporting this was 700 dollars. Each mule carries 60 kg. and the group of mules is accompanied by two caballeros, who are best described as "rough" Each carried a knife and wore wicked looking spurs that would both be illegal in the UK. The mules and horses carried the scars of the rough terrain and ill fitting pack frames. The mules were less than keen to begin the journey but were soon persuaded with well aimed punches and cracks of the whips which both caballeros carried.

By now I had got the "runs" having to make several swift disappearances during the 6 hour 14 k walk to our campsite. We saw numerous colourful lizards (bright green with orange tails) and a host of colourful birds (parrot like!) on the walk in. The route climbed steadily over rough terrain being over loose scree for much of the way. Finding the route was easy ... follow the donkey dung! We arrived at our campsite (Pampa de Leñas), the entrance to the "park" proper, to find it staffed by an attractive Argentinean female in her early twenties. She explained later that she liked the life (20 days on, 10 off) spending her days on duty climbing on the cliffs which formed a backdrop to the site. The mules were already in camp and the caballeros were whiling away the time by

throwing rocks at the mice which infested the site (and later our tents, rucksacks etc.!) Tents were pitched and Damian(G) made the 1k journey for water. The cableros partied with the guardienne until the early hours.

Expedition day2. Monday. 8.15, the site was in shadow (ie cold) and it was windy. Alex had decided to turn back so we were now down to 6 (plus our 2 guides) None of us were looking forward to the river crossing which necessitated riding the mules, at the last moment we were allowed onto the horses, far less temperamental beasts but the thought of a ducking (which would probably have been fatal in the fast flowing icy water) wearing a 15 kg rucksack certainly sharpened the senses.

Today's walk was to be about 16k, would take us about 6 ½ hours and at one point the temperature reached 40C. The first stretch wasn't too bad but later the route followed a dry river bed and it was rather like struggling along a dry beach. A traverse along an unstable cliff of scree led to the campsite at 3220m, a beautiful grassy site called "Casa de Piedra" with views of Aconcagua ... it looked really impressive! Maria apparently had a bath in one of the clear pools, the rest of us lounged about getting smellier by the day! It was very windy. Unfortunately most of the groups we met had failed to summit!

Expedition day 3. Tuesday. A lazy start, up at 8 but at least Darren had had a good nights sleep and my gut problems seemed to be receding. An American girl who had abandoned her expedition due to medical problems exacerbated by altitude was bivvying nearby had kept me awake most of the night with a racking cough. To add to her discomfort her boots had frozen overnight delaying her proposed start for the bright lights of civilisation.

Today we only had to cover 8k but had 1000m of ascent. This began with a river crossing on foot. Maria and I being shorter and lighter than the others detoured upstream to find a shallower section where the river ran in several channels. Being swept away was not an option we fancied! Our route lay up a steep sided valley which included 3 more river crossings which were accomplished by leaping from rock to rock, both Maria and Andy managed to fall in. The path was desperate for us but particularly for the mules and horses. I had to admire the riding skills of the caballeros, one slip would definitely have been fatal. As we left the narrow gorge a "sick" climber was being ferried down on the back of a mule. I was glad it wasn't me having to face the tortuous path down to the valley. Leaving the gorge, a height gain of 250m, the route dragged on for ever. It was a mere (!) 32C today. At 5 p.m. Darren and I finally staggered into camp at 4100m, Darren was feeling decidedly the worse for wear. The site "base camp" was entirely covered in glacial moraine with small platforms cleared to accommodate individual tents. The mice were everywhere. At least there were loos, well, large pits fitted with two planks surrounded by a rectangular "canvas" box which provided some privacy (unless the sun was shining through it!!) Unfortunately the zip regularly jammed trapping the occupant, or, worse still, denying access at a critical time (ie when in a hurry!) At least one of them was destroyed in the high winds which were common. Andy was able to avoid a wash at this point as the mules had transported Marias "personal" tent to base camp, unfortunately this was only a temporary respite. During the night I experienced dizzy spells whenever I turned over.

Expedition day 4.(Wednesday) A rest day. We took the opportunity to hone our prussiking and crevasse rescue skills. With our caving experience Darren and I should have been experts but you wouldn't have thought so to look at us! (Prussik knots have never been my preferred means of ascent!) Andy(G) showed us a really simple and effective 9:1 hauling system, hopefully we wouldn't have to try it out "in anger". The altitude was really beginning to tell on us. Washing myself (even I was beginning to notice) and my smalls proved to be an exhausting experience in the thin air. P.m. was sunny with only a little wind so we lazed about for the rest of the day. Dark clouds appeared on the North-east horizon in the direction of Brazil. In the evening "the Americans" (those we met on Rincon) appeared from a "carry" to camp one with horror stories of 1000' of loose scree. (Apparently the Americans haven't heard of metric units!)

Expedition day 5 (Thursday) We woke to a heavy frost and the prospect of a hard days "carry" to camp one. Darren was feeling rough and had been given a further rest day to recuperate. I felt like s---. My nose was blocked with blood clots, I had had to perform a dash for the loo and my balance, or rather lack of it, had almost resulted in a tumble into the latrine which was uninviting to say the least. Andy(G) had found some antibiotics which he gave to Darren and some tablets for nausea which we hoped would improve my condition. Just prior to our leaving we learned that the 3 recent fatalities were definitely on the "direct" route on the Polish Glacier (the route we had decided on!) and had been caused by a large sheet of ice breaking away from the underlying crust.

The route to camp one took the Americans over 5 hours but we managed it in 3 ½. 30 minutes from camp we had yet another river crossing to negotiate, again Andy fell in! The far side involved a large step onto the grit covered ice of the glacier followed by a monumental effort to climb the steep slope beyond. To make matters worse the river had undercut the ice at stream level threatening the whole bank with collapse at any moment. This particular problem simply got worse as the trip progressed and was always much worse in the afternoons as the sun got to work on the glacier causing the river to increase in size.

The initial walk up the glacier was fairly gentle (care was required on a couple of crevasses- I almost fell in one as I was walking along in a day-dream) but the Americans were right, the final 300 m was a nightmare up STEEP, unstable scree. (3 steps up 2 down!) At around 5000 m camp 1 was in a beautiful location at the top of the steep scree climb but we still had the "mouse problem". The journey back to camp took me about 1 ¼ hours and Darren seemed much better when I returned (Idle git!) The round trip had left me with a slight headache but at least a fair amount of our kit was now at camp 1. Base camp was by now cold and windy.

Expedition day 6 (Friday) I got up feeling VERY dizzy, Darren was feeling much better. We managed to get away by 1030, it was windy and cold, interest being added to the stream crossing in the form of ice covering the boulders in the stream bed. The final 300 m climb up the steep scree was made even worse by the cold wind. It started to snow as we struggled to the top of the gulley, both Darren and I were suffering with cold hands. As we arrived at camp 1 it was snowing heavily and it was a race to put up the tents. I managed to empty the contents of my Platypus onto the tent floor by lying on the bite valve, Darren was not amused but remained calm (just!) We put on our fleece salopettes and down jackets but it was still cold inside the tent. At 7 pm it was still snowing and windy but at least the conditions in the valley below seemed to be improving. This was the first night Jeff opted to sleep inside a tent rather than doing his usual bivouac.

Expedition day 7 (Saturday) Apparently it was -8C INSIDE the tent last night! Prints in the snow outside the tent were identified by Damion(G) as fox prints. The early part of the morning was spent fitting "Yeti" snow gaiters to plastic high altitude boots, a sight not to be missed. Eventually after much cursing and a great deal of struggling the task was accomplished. (I had super-glued mine on before leaving home!) Being a rest day we strolled up to 5250!! For some strange reason one or two continued to 5500. We abandoned our axes and crampons before scuttling back to camp one. Camp 2 looked a long way away!!

Camp one was rapidly filling up. An enormous bird (eagle?) flew overhead followed by two vultures a while later. Mice had been inside my rucksack, I was not amused especially as they had sampled my bar of marzipan which I was saving for a rainy day. To end the day Darren brought me a mug of hot chocolate. He claimed to be innocent when I found an "Elastoplast" inside it which by the shape had obviously been on a big toe!! With a friend like that who needs enemies!

Expedition day 8 (Sunday) The night had not been quite so cold but drinks inside the tent had frozen over night and it was a real struggle getting into plastic boots. The prospect of a 1000 m climb did nothing to improve my moral and my balance although improved left much to be desired. Yes, the 1000m climb was a real pain and I opted for crampons for the last 100 m or so. Still only 1000 left to go to the summit! It was bitterly cold on the

glacier at camp 2 and to me the Polish Glacier looked good. Our guides Andy and Damion, particularly Damion, looked less convinced.

The 4 ½ climb up only took 1 ¼ hours down! We had left a food dump at camp 2 but nothing else, the cold had forced us to wear our Goretex shells for at least part of the way down. Back at camp 1 we ate dinner sitting in snow in glorious sunshine.

Expedition day 8 (Monday) It had been very cold during the night and the inside of the tent had a thick covering of ice when I was forced to visit the loo at 5 am. Porridge for breakfast did little to boost our flagging spirits and no one was looking forward to the climb as we packed everything in order to move our camp upwards for the last time. To make matters worse I still felt as though I was only firing on 3 cylinders! 30 minutes after setting out I realised that I had got my boots on the wrong feet!! As we ascended we met 3 groups on their way down. Only one had succeeded on the Polish Glacier, the others had changed their plans and done the "Normal Route". Damion had found us an alternative camp site, somewhat higher but with better protection from the wind. Unfortunately we had to spend about an hour enlarging the area by cutting away the ice wall at the rear of the platform with ice axes. Needless to say it was very cold. I calculated that my tablets would run out before summit day so reduced the dose.

Expedition day 8 (Tuesday) At 6 am I went to the loo ... I almost needed crampons and the slight incline to the "toilet rock" left me exhausted. At 8.30 the inside of the tent was still covered in ice. Today was a rest day, we spent the morning planning strategies. Darren and I, still not fully recovered opted to go via the Normal Route and this was planned for Thursday. It was a very pleasant day only marred by Darren and I finding a corpse (almost buried but with the feet protruding) a mere 20 m from our tent and a couple of m from our "toilet rock". Maria found another later in the day.

Expedition day 9 (Wednesday) Those heading for the summit breakfasted at 2 and were ready for off at 3.15. Jeff opted out leaving Rob, Andy and Maria plus the two guides. Maria recorded -10C inside the tent!! Surprisingly I felt quite warm but cooled off rapidly as dawn approached. Andy and Damion arrived back at about 7, apparently Andy had found the going too hard. I suddenly had an "urgent" call of nature (my guts were still not 100%) and had a real fight to get my plastic boots on. I decided to sleep with them the following night. The day was very cold with the mountain appearing to generate it's own micro-climate. We also seemed to be running short on snacks. To make matters worse as the temperature rose during the afternoon our water supply ran out. Our source of water meant a walk downhill (i.e. UPHILL and exhausting on the way back!!) to where Damion had excavated a hole in the glacier allowing water to collect but only in the afternoons when the sun had done it's work. None of us fancied melting snow which had taken on a bright yellow colour in many areas and was no doubt polluted with faeces in others. We could see about 5 groups on the Polish Glacier, at least 1 of them seemed to be having trouble on the direct route (our plans had changed and we were trying the left and route) It appeared that some would be caught out and would have to bivouac. At about 5.30 our group of 3 arrived back, Maria in the lead as usual(I must find out what she is on!!) announcing that they had been successful.

Expedition day 10 (Thursday) Damion(G) Andy, Jeff, Darren and I left camp at 4 am. It was cold as expected and I felt rough, not unusual since I'm not a morning person. Two hours into the climb and my left (uphill) hand went so numb I feared frostbite. Removing my 3 pairs of gloves (2 thermal with Dachstein outers) I could see that they were white as far as the second joint. Damian massaged some life back into them and I shortened my pole (Darrens suggestion) in order to lower the limb and increase the circulation. We continued along ground which was snow covered climbing relentlessly, I still felt rough and couldn't get yesterdays "discovery" out of the back of my mind. The ground steepened from a walk to a climb. Everyone's light was beginning to dim but mine went out completely. (AA's seem more susceptible to cold than "flat" Duracells ... should have used my lithiums.) Continuing the climb assisted by light from the others I suddenly "lost" a crampon. Damion climbed

down to assist me, I was really grateful. As soon as it was fitted Darren complained about his hands! I got the feeling that someone up there was trying to tell me something ... I decided to turn back and was really pleased when Darren decided to do the same. We were somewhere between 6300 and 6400 approaching "Independencia".

An hour or so saw us back in camp, just in time to disturb the others who were beginning to stir. We sat around until around lunch time looking a sorry bunch, Marias lips were badly blistered as was Andy(G)'s nose. My "split ends" (fingers not hair!!) were so sore and bleeding that I struggled to undo zips and Darren looked like a victim from a concentration camp. Darren and I, sick of life at 6000+, decided to leg it down 2 camps to 4200. It took us around 4 hours and I felt knackered performing all sorts of acrobatics at the river crossing, much to Darren's amusement. Back in base camp we found that we had no cutlery and the stove didn't work. Our evening meal consisted of a tin of fruit salad followed by a drink of fruit juice. At least we didn't have to face up to porridge and we were able to breath again. (We later discovered that a bottle of "fuel" turned out to be red wine!!)

The only un-read book was Bram Stokers "Dracula" so as I read pages I tore them out and passed them to Darren. We had an excellent nights sleep despite being plagued by the mice.

Expedition day 11 (Friday) We lay in until 8. It was a sunny day which soon cleared any remaining ice. We managed to change the jet in the stove and a brew was soon ready. It's flavour was not improved by the addition of potato powder which I mistook for milk!! Cheese, biscuits and salami completed the breakfast. The mice had chewed my sandals and rucksack and also had a go at a black sit mat which seems to be their favourite colour. The groundsheet on the store tent looked like a sieve! I was beginning to experience dizzy spells again so took the remaining tablet supplied by Andy(G). The highlight of the morning took place when I went to collect water only to find a topless young lady having her morning wash!! We read, listened to tapes and generally did nothing other than watch climbers struggle up the slope leading towards camp 1. Their pace was so slow it was like watching a "moonwalk"! At around 2.30 we spotted Maria heading towards us, she was travelling so quickly we barely had time to get a brew ready! At 3.30 the others began to trickle in, each being supplied with a brew. Andy(G) had even got dried milk in his pack, we nearly mugged him for it! Tents were set up and a meal prepared. The bottle of "fuel" (i.e. red wine!) was also consumed. We decided to do the 3 day walk out in 2, Darren passed the first section of "Dracula" to Maria and I offered to fetch water in the morning!! We all slept soundly.

Expedition day 12 (Saturday) We left at 10 with 20 miles to do. The first ½ went well, even the river crossings. It's surprising how different the terrain looks in the other direction when one's attention is not distracted by "the mountain". I stumbled several times and at one point ended up in a thorn bush (I still have the thorns to prove it.) Rain was imminent and concern was expressed about having to do a crossing in high water conditions without the mules. We opted for the right hand bank although we had been advised that the scree might prove problematical (What an understatement!!) At first things went well, then went badly, and then from bad to worse!! There was no path, the ground was rock hard and covered in rock fragments that behaved like elliptical ball bearings, it began to rain and the scree, which dropped straight into the river, was positively dangerous, frightening the lives out of most of us. (worse than the taxi ride in Buenos Aires!!) Damian was a positive hero, cutting steps in the muddy crud enabling the rest of us to follow his tracks. One false move would no doubt have been fatal given the state of the river beneath our feet. The last ½ hour (quote) took over 2 ½ hours! To cap it all the mid soles of my boots collapsed giving me enormous blisters and a bruised ankle bone (not that I got any sympathy!) Eventually we all staggered into camp feeling that 2 days in one was a bad idea. The only consolation was ... we saw a condor. Needless to say the mice were out in force.

Expedition day 13 (Sunday) We left at 9 arriving at the road head at 2. Maria and Damion arrived at 12 but Maria managed to fall and break her nose on the way! She looked as though she had done a couple of rounds with Mike Tyson! Just prior to reaching the road we saw the remains of a guanaco.

The journey back was broken for the inevitable beer, it went down without touching the sides. The rest of the day was spent sorting kit for the journey home and eating out. I think Maria enjoyed herself more than the rest of us judging by her grimaces as she left the restaurant. (I wonder if she can remember going to bed?) The following day was uneventful but we did have another incredibly late night in view of the fact that we had an "Alpine" start in the morning.

Ralph J. 28/2/99

Have you visited the CCPC web-site? www.grindey.demon.co.uk

Lottery application. You were told not to hold your breath!! Needless to say another application will be made.

DCRO RESCUE PRACTICE

Sunday 7th of March saw our first club rescue practice for the year at Giants Hole. The original plan had been to do a carry from the Eating House to the start of the roof traverse beyond the Windpipe. The weather on the day was far from nice, with lots of sloppy snow lying around and plenty more wet sleet coming down. The turn out was a little disappointing, even with the weather in mind. As it was some people who would have been useful in the cave were doing surface tasks of a different nature.

Crabwalk was very cold and wet with melt-water, and mauling the large quantities of rescue kit didn't make it any easier. Reconvening at the Eating House gave us time to set up a coms link which failed to work, and to try out the bivvy tent, which did. The Molephone was sent on ahead to get a better link to surface, and the victim, a volunteer from the MRT, was bagged up ready for the carry out. A poor link up was obtained from Maggins Rift, but the best communications of the day were achieved from the foot of the cascade below our old dig in the roof oxbow. The first problem was to get the stretcher up into Maggins Rift. The new P bolts on the climb up made it more secure, but not any easier. The victim was only unable to breathe for a few minutes while wedged in the start of the crawl. The ongoing carry to the foot of the cascade was interesting and energetic. The volunteer was quite certain that he was alright and OK to carry on, despite being tipped up, allowing cold water to run up from his boots in to his warmer areas. On reaching the foot of the cascade it was realised that it had taken about two hours for this section, and that it had not been possible to drain the windpipe. In view of this it was decided to call it a day at this point. While inside the bivvy tent swilling down hot brews a pleasant debriefing session was held, during which it was decided to return via the Crabwalk rather than up the Windpipe. Once out of the tent it felt very cold and unpleasant, but after repackaging the kit a hasty exit was made.

Conditions in the Crabwalk were less than pleasant, and noticeably worse than on the way in. The water was very cold and upto knee deep in places, and of course climbing any cascade was an invitation to a face-full of very cold water. Comic Act cascade was fun, as the force of the water on your body caused the ladder to move out of place while you climbed it...interesting.

Once back at the van a quick change and another hot brew it was decided to adjourn to the Wanted Inn for something to help warm us up further. Being Sunday afternoon this could have been a problem, but Mark L. had arranged with the landlord to stay open especially for us. Good move that man! Whilst we had been in the cave most of the lying snow had melted, and the sleet had turned to rain, hence the extra cold wet stuff down the cave. All in all it had been another very useful exercise with many people getting hands on practice at what is a difficult and confusing task at the best of times, never mind with a stretcher full of moaning misery. With luck the next club practice will have warmer weather and go just as smoothly. B.E. March 99

At the AGM, in view of his sterling work as minutes secretary, Steve Knox was co-opted onto "the committee" It is also rumoured that he is making a take over bid for Descent! (see recent issues!!)

For sale; T type lamps vgc £15.00. CCPC tee shirts £6.00 DCRO tee shirts £6.50. Contact Ralph.

If you are taking beginners caving the club now has some new oversuits (in addition to those available via Ralph) I know YOU suffered but there is no longer any need to. It is also advisable that you provide prospective members with a CEE approved helmet and harness available when you collect gear.



Done anything interesting lately? Got anything planned? Going anywhere different? Got any ideas or opinions? Feel strongly about anything? Why not sit down and drop Ralph a line... all contributions welcome.

Dates for your diary (Why not put them in NOW instead of missing trips or having to ring up to see what's on. Many of you will have received DCRO info. Why not put them in as well!!)

April 8 DCRO "deep shafts". 10 Marble Steps. Yorkshire. 15 Instruction (beginners) 17 DCRO street collection. 18 Milwr Tunnel. N.Wales. 20 DCRO Knotlow. 24 DCRO AGM. 25 DCRO. Eldon Hole.

May. 8 Diccan (plus Alum) Yorkshire. 16 DCRO Oxlow. 23 JH (plus?) Derbyshire. 29 Onwards Grotte de la Diau. 30 DCRO street collection.

June: 19 Meregill./Sunset (plus Tatham?) 22 DCRO Cas Care. 27 DCRO Cas. Care.

July. 4 Magnetometer 17 onwards PSM(Pyrenees)with Belgians. 24 Bull pot of Witches (Yorks)

August. 8 Lathkill Head 21 Grange Rig 28/29/30 DCRO street collection Castleton (can you help?)

September 11/12 Slaughter/Stream-Redhouse (Mendip) 26 Penyghent/Little Hull (Yorks.)

We are now the proud owners of two video tapes that are too good to be missed. No, not that sort of tape!! These are instructional videos on SRT and Ladder/Line. Make sure you see them, ideally before your next trip.

You should find a poster with this newsletter. Please use it wisely. i.e. not for bog paper. Put it in your local library or sports centre. The idea is to publicise the club in order to boost membership.

Many thanks to the 19 of you who turned out on the rescue practice. Sorry about the weather!! We'll plan it in summer next time (i.e. 2000!) .. starting at the East Canal!! Pete Ton Equipment Advisor and Rescue Consultant.



Can't sleep at nights? Feeling guilty? Read on.

If you have not paid you subs for 99 they are now overdue. You can expect a visit from the "heavy mob" any day now.

By the time you read this Nigel and Lionel et al will have started work on Wharf Shaft. Why not give them a hand?