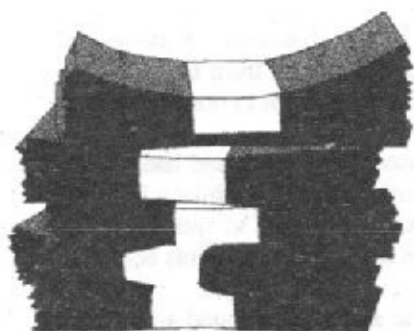
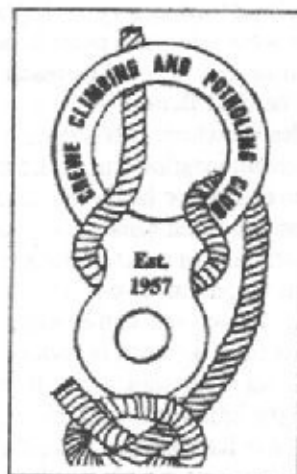


C.C.P.C. Newsletter Oct. '99 No.63



Caving Club Wins Lottery Jack Pot!

In case you haven't heard CCPC has been awarded £3000+ from the National Lottery to encourage others to try/take up caving. Why not do your bit by encouraging your mates to have a go?

TURKEY EARTHQUAKE - NIGEL'S STORY.

I awoke on Saturday 21 August 1999 with my day planned, two hours in the Gym then dig out a Summerhouse base in the corner of my garden. I returned an earlier call to Ralph and discovered Ross, Paul and Matt were off to Turkey the next day on a rescue call-out. I rang Ross and told him I was on holiday from work and able to go. He rang the Airline and booked me on the last available seat. The rest of the day passed in a blur. After an hour of phone calls I found a doctor who gave me the necessary jabs, antibiotics to take with me and plenty of good advice, then off to Newcastle for high energy bars, water purification tablets etc. and £150.00 cash we had been advised to take with us. Eventually I arrived back home to pack and try to have a relaxed evening with my wife, Glenys. She was giving me her full support, despite her own fears and worries, both for my safety and sanity, as I had never been into a disaster zone on this scale before.

After a restless night Glenys woke me to tell me that Teletext news said all rescue teams were pulling out of Turkey because of the threat of infection. A call to the Foreign Office confirmed this to be the case. Ross phoned our contact in Turkey who said that while this was the case in the major cities, there was still help needed in other places. We decided to go.

After an apprehensive journey we reached Istanbul as night was falling. We knew things must be bad when we spotted Jeremy Bowen the BBC war correspondent in the next passport queue. We were met by our sponsor John Scott and his wife who took us to the H.Q. and introduced us to members of AKUT, a civilian volunteer rescue organisation. A young lady called Amine (pronounced in a similar manner to Emily), and a driver then took us by mini-bus to the town in which we were to work. We later discovered on our return to Istanbul, that the town was called Cinarcik (pronounced Chen-ar-jik). The Mini-bus journey was quite nerve racking. As we traveled down the motorway towards Izmit our side of the road became emptier and emptier, whilst the opposite carriageway was streaming with traffic and ambulances with lights flashing. We passed through several roadblocks, where the driver produced a permit to the police or army before we were allowed to pass. On arriving at Izmit we saw the first real signs of the earthquake damage, and here we left the motorway and continued along small A-type roads along the south coast of the sea of Marmara.

We passed through several small towns including Golcuk where many of the buildings either leaned drunkenly or were, as Ross put it, 'as flat as a stamp', a very apt description. The air was thick with dust, the smell of burning and decay and dotted all along the road were soldiers and heavy plant and machinery at work on the collapsed buildings.

About three hours into the journey we arrived at the town of Yalova which took considerable time to cross as the main road and many side roads were blocked by fallen buildings. We eventually arrived at our destination where I remember we were directed to the army commander by a young soldier with eyes like saucers, he looked absolutely terrified, traumatised or both.

The scene on our arrival at what was to become our base was like a war zone, soldiers running back and forth, army trucks, the sound of radios crackling, collapsed buildings lit by searchlights, crawling with people like ants on a hill and a smell that will take a long time to forget. In the center of all this rather incongruously was a round Ice-cream and refreshments kiosk which the army were using as a point to distribute aid. On the roof of this was a wooden copy of a Caribbean beach bar with open sides and a conical roof. It could be reached by climbing a pylon, going across the roof of a telephone box and then a further three foot climb, to the tiled floor of what was to be our home for the next couple of days. The entire floor was covered with a thick layer of dust, despite which I christened it the Hotel Kontiki.

Next to our accommodation was an up turned people carrier which seemed relatively undamaged and out of place, compared to other damaged vehicles we had seen. Later we were told that it belonged to the builder of most of the collapsed buildings and had got into that position when some surviving residents tried to "have a word with him". Unfortunately he was apparently rescued by the army and is rumoured to be in protective custody.

We stowed our kit and made our way to where most of the action seemed to be, in order to prepare ourselves for what we faced in the morning. We arrived as the body of a woman was being dug from beneath a pile of rubble, looking on were three young ladies from their teens to early twenties whom I took to be her daughters. They wept quietly, comforting each other, obviously very distressed, but at the same time showing great dignity, despite the state of the body. It had been there for almost a week and was white with the lime with which the rescuers had coated it, to reduce the risk of disease. It was a heart rendering moment.

Whilst all this was happening, I noticed something very odd about the concrete. Although there were many broken edges visible, no gravel was to be seen anywhere. When I mentioned this to the others they told me (not unreasonably) not to be so daft - you can't make concrete without gravel! Closer examination revealed that this stuff, indeed contained no gravel. What it did contain however was a huge number of sea shells of all sizes and types! Obviously the builder couldn't see the need to buy washed, salt free sand and gravel, to put in his concrete buildings. It was much cheaper to send a loading shovel down to the local beach and dig that up to use instead. This of course produces concrete with the structural integrity of Weetabix. That's before the salt it contains has chance to rot the sub standard reinforcing bars, which were a smooth round bar which the concrete had little chance of sticking to. Anyway I'll get off my soapbox now and back to what was happening.

By now it was nearly midnight and we decided to retire to our 'hotel' for the night. I awoke at around 4.00am to find that Ross and Paul had been unable to sleep and had decided to start work straight away and were returning from their labours. They had found a Turkish rice chef called Mahmoosh(I think) who spoke English who was able to direct them to openings which gave access between the collapsed floors.

Paul had returned with a deep gash in one arm which we cleaned and closed with butterflies. Ross had had a most unpleasant time having spent at least ten minutes in close proximity to a partly crushed and decomposing corpse whilst a listening team on the surface established the body's position below them. It's a credit to Ross that he managed to cope so well with this, particularly as while he was there something fell on him. I daren't imagine what went through his mind in the moments before he discovered that it was just two cushions.

Matt and myself got changed and at this point Mahmoosh appeared calling for Ross. He said he had found a new hole and as Ross and Paul were obviously worn out by this time Matt and myself went to investigate. The hole was very narrow and small so I bravely dangled Matt down it by his ankles (well you must admit he's a bit smaller than me) but the hole didn't actually go anywhere. However just to the left of this hole was an opening some two foot high, choked with fallen masonry, beyond which was a crushed car. A party of men were trying unsuccessfully to remove the choke as they were very unwilling to go beneath the remains of the concrete floors. Matt and myself got into the hole and I started smashing the blockage with a sledgehammer and Matt chucked the spoil outside. We examined in and around the car but found nothing. Czech search and rescue dogs now investigated the site and gave a strong indication of a person on the opposite side of the first hole to where we found the car. Matt and myself began a dig in what looked like the roof of a corridor as there was quite a strong smell of death here and also strangely a strong smell of petrol. While we were digging Mahmoosh said it was thought an eight-year-old girl was in that spot.

We had to keep breaking off our dig as an excavator was intermittently removing rubble from the area adjacent to the car. This kept exposing further ways into voids between collapsed floors which Matt, myself and the now rested Paul and Ross investigated as they appeared. Our dig reached the tiled floor of the corridor which was only twenty inches below the roof and at one end a gap appeared some eight inches high. I probed around inside the hole and pulled out pieces of architrave, this was obviously the door to what we discovered was a bathroom but we found no body despite the smell. Meanwhile Ross had a look at the next floor up which was some two foot horizontally to my left, in which he found a bed. On going up one floor, yet again two foot horizontally further on he could see a cloth covered black mass, which we had learned to recognize was a body.

Re-examining the next floor down the body's legs were discovered. What seems to have happened is that when the earthquake started the man had been thrown head first through the window and as he was part way out the floor above him had been thrown outwards also and as it fell the large concrete beam above the window had collapsed, trapping him half in and half out of the window, but with his upper body now in the room upstairs.

In contrast to our sad discovery, whilst emerging from one of the excavator exposed holes I found myself alone (surely I didn't smell that bad), the fact that Matt was still there reassured me. He said someone had been found alive. We scrambled over to the other side of the building just in time to see a young boy plucked from the rubble and placed on a stretcher. As he was rushed to the waiting ambulance he started kicking and screaming, a quiet cheer went up, everyone started to clap and I think a few tears appeared as well. He was rushed by ambulance to the top of the hill behind us where he was air lifted to hospital in a helicopter. On my return home my wife gave me a copy of Tuesday 24 August 'The Times' newspaper on which he was front page news. His name is Ismail Cimen and he is four years old. That is a moment I will remember for the rest of my life.

Anyway back to our part of the digging. We informed Mahmoosh of our discovery and showed him the spot where the body lay. By this time it felt like evening but was only about 11.30am UK time, as we had got up so early and we decided to go for some lunch.

Lunch consisted of high energy bars (Go bars in my case) and bottled water, as we had no cooking facilities and only the food we carried in with us. Breakfast had been somewhat similar. After lunch we returned to the site of our earlier discovery to find the men from a Turkish family digging near the spot. We went down into the crater the excavator had created and I inquired via sign language and pigeon English whether they were digging for the body we had found. They were but in the wrong place. With Ross's assistance I directed them to the correct place to dig. However whilst they were extremely hard working and would have got the body out with their fingernails, even had it taken them weeks, they had no power tools and their digging technique through concrete was poor. We borrowed a Hilti jack hammer from a Bulgarian army rescue team and spent the rest of the afternoon cutting through the beam that had ended the life of this family's uncle. He seemed to have had the misfortune of being crushed by the only hard bit of concrete in the town as it took us several hours to cut him out.

I remember during the episode looking at my watch, which I kept on English time. It was 1.00pm and I thought it was bizarre that at home my wife would be watching the 1.00pm news and here I was digging out someone's decomposing relative. Also at one point during this time I stuck my head out of the hole and who did I see but Jeremy flamin' Bowen again. This bloke was getting tedious.

Throughout the extraction, as we removed the two obstructing floors and the concrete beam, the family were always there to remove the spoil whilst we took a breather. This even included a fifteen year old boy who was in at the mucky end as much as the others. When uncle was finally freed the family produced a body bag and substantial rubber respirators so that they could remove him in accordance with Muslim law. We took no part in this. I was reluctant for two reasons, as none Muslims I was afraid we may be seen as desecrating the body. More importantly from our point of view the family had not kept the body sprinkled with lime, presumably as they are supposed to clean the body before burial. I thought that this gave us an unacceptably high risk of infection.

At around 5.00pm we left the scene to go to our 'hotel' for some tea. On the way we passed a little tent city from which we heard someone shout, there were members of uncle's family waving to us as if we were long lost friends. Tea consisted of more Go bars and bottled water. After tea we decided to go for a walk around the town, down to the sea front. On route we passed another tent village where a family of at least three generations insisted we take tea and biscuits with them. They wouldn't take no for an answer even though they were all living on an earth floor, in one tent and had lost virtually everything. A rather humbling experience, would this happen in England? I don't know.

On our return to our 'hotel' Paul managed to scrounge two loaves from the army which we devoured greedily. Calories are o.k. but it's good to have some bulk in your stomach. All except Matt who couldn't share our feeling of fullness as he has a gluten allergy.

Ross meanwhile had chatted up the army phone operator (male, Carol!) and got us permission to phone home using the army satellite phones, which we duly did to the relief of our relatives who had not heard from us since we left Manchester airport. We all changed back into our working gear and decided to do another few hours digging before turning in. However within minutes of arriving back at the collapsed building it began to rain very heavily. By the time we had ran the hundred yards or so back to our camp we and most of the contents of the camp were soaked. We hastily erected ground sheets and polythene around the windward side of our beach hut and hung our sodden clothes and sleeping bags from Ross's originally mis-ordered but now very handy eight metre sling suspended across the roof. Once all this was done we decided it would be too dangerous to continue to enter the debris (we were the only team on site doing so) due to water dripping through all that it contained and on to ourselves and the increased risk of collapse in a wet rubble heap. Ross therefore phoned AKUT and arranged for our evacuation the following day. We had a few duty free brandies to help us sleep and retired to bed.

Tuesday morning dawned overcast and after being woke by the army commander who asked us when we were starting work (about 7.00am) we had breakfast, more Go bars, and returned to the fray. Tuesday was difficult as Mahmoosh our interpreter had returned to Istanbul and it was difficult to make people understand who we were and what we could do. However after a short time we teamed up with some guys from the Bulgarian army. They made holes, we looked down them. They were working in an area where it was suspected someone was alive following tests with listening equipment. Eventually we went back for lunch, during which it rained heavily for a couple of hours. Lunch consisted of more bloody Go bars, and bottled water. On our return we helped Turkish families who were now trying to dig a newly exposed face between the floors, without actually going under anything. We led by example and a few were willing to follow. Their reluctance is not surprising, when their families and neighbours had just been written off by a supposedly sound building which was now in a state of semi collapse.

During the afternoon we found a new interpreter and during discussions it was ascertained that a hole previously marked as containing a body had not actually been entered. I went down and found myself in someone's living room, largely intact, apart from the ceiling which was within two inches of the dining table top. The dining chairs, the backs of which were several inches higher than the table, had been splintered in an astounding fashion. Beneath the table they formed a highly tensioned and splintered portcullis of timber, which was pretty well impenetrable. I could find no way out of the room so presumably the doorway was somewhere the other side of the table. As I was musing on this, Paul's head appeared from the hole in the roof to say that our AKUT hosts had arrived to collect us. I passed out to him some fairly distinctive ornaments to place next to the hole, in the hope it would help it's former owners identify their home.

As I stuck my head up out of the hole I was suddenly almost trampled on by a sea of legs moving rapidly from right to left. I ducked my head back in until they had passed. I re-emerged just in time to see that the legs belonged to a film crew rushing to film a bird cage, complete with budgie still on it's swing and tweeting, which had just been pulled from an adjacent pile of rubble. This may have been what the listening team had heard. Matthew, who was nearby thought I was going to have my head kicked off in the rush.

We packed hurriedly and returned to Istanbul but this time by the ferry, which was now running again and cut several hours off the journey as we no longer needed to go via Golcuk and Izmit.

We arrived at our lodgings, the Istanbul Hilton(!) at around 9.00pm. We had to stop the doormen from handling our baggage as they were dressed in black tailcoats and our baggage was covered in a thick layer of cement dust. We met for dinner

at ten and on looking up from the menu I saw, two tables away, Jeremy Bowen. I think I now have a Jeremy Bowen induced paranoia!

After a reasonable nights sleep we lay in 'til nine then had breakfast (no Go Bars) and did some sight-seeing in Istanbul before a brief meeting with John Scott then supper with himself and one of his associates. Bed by midnight(U.K time), up at 3.30am to catch the flight home. When we got to the airport the flight was full, however in view of the reason why we were there, Turkish airlines gave us a free bump up to club class. We arrived home at lunch time on Thursday-knackered.

I have absolutely no regrets about going but do think in future the U.K Cave Rescue Organisations should play a more active role in this sort of disaster relief. If nothing else in the provision of insurance. Whilst this is not cave rescue, our experiences would suggest that teams experienced in digging underground have an expertise which could result in great saving of life which other teams may not be able to offer. This would be particularly the case if the call out came within a day or two of the disaster occurring. Even if no live victims are recovered the task for rescue teams if called out earlier would not be so onerous as at least the victims would be fresh. I never want to eat another Go bar as long as I live but I would not hesitate to do the same thing again.

NIGEL COOPER

Rescue in Turkey-Paul's Story.

I received an e-mail on Friday asking if anyone could help with the search for people trapped in the earthquake disaster. After phoning Ross and discussing it with him, we decided to help if we could. Ross then phoned round to see who we needed to contact. Derbyshire Cave Rescue said that as it was not a cave rescue situation they would have nothing to do with it, however if we were still interested they would give us the phone number of John Scott, the man in Turkey who had asked for our help. Ross contacted John and arrangements were made for Ross, Matthew and myself to travel out on Sunday.

The following day was totally hectic, as we rushed around trying to get our stuff ready to go. I went to many of the shops in Hanley, trying to beg supplies to take with us. Sainsburys, Mountain Fever, Blacks and High Peak all gave me a donation of some sort, ranging from high-energy food bars to gas cylinders and batteries. By the time I got back, Nigel had phoned to ask if he could join us, so, after Ross had phoned the airline to see if there were any spare seats, the team now consisted of the four of us.

Unfortunately my two children, Julieanne and Jonathan, were away at camp, so I would not be able to explain to them where I was going, or even say goodbye to them. I had to leave this to Anne, so as you can imagine she had two very upset children to try and explain to, where and why we had gone.

After a restless night's sleep we left for Manchester Airport. On the way we heard on the news that all the rescue workers were being pulled out of Turkey and the rescue efforts had been called off because there was a Cholera outbreak. We tried to get information from the airport but no one could tell us anything so the decision was up to us. We decided to go, and if we found we were not needed we would come straight back.

When we arrived in Turkey John and his wife Berrin met us. We split into two car loads, and Ross went with John, while Nigel, Matthew and I went in a taxi.

Our driver was told to follow John's car, but he was so impatient that he proceeded to follow them from one hundred yards in front! How he was going to know where to drop us off was a total mystery to us, but eventually we arrived at the headquarters of AKUT, the people we would be working with. After a short briefing from the leader we were given an interpreter called Amine (pronounced in a similar way to Emily) and told that we would be taken to a small town called Cinardik, that had not received much help. The taxi journey took about four hours, and that was an experience on its own (I think the taxi driver was Nigel Mansell's brother). There seem to be no rules when you drive, just put your foot down and go for it, right up Ross's street.

After we had been travelling for about two hours, the driver stopped to put his face mask on. At this time you could not see or smell anything, but this was soon to change as the air started to fill with dust. All the roads had police on them, and you were only allowed through if you had a pass to say you were part of a rescue team. As we made the journey we passed through several towns. They had all been affected by the earthquake, the destruction was unbelievable and the smell of death was in the air. Seven storey buildings were just seven slabs of concrete stacked on top of each other. All the internal walls had disappeared and the chance of finding people alive in the ruins seemed hopeless. There were groups of rescuers working along the route, but quite a lot of the buildings had no one working at them and you wondered how they decided to dig at one building but not at the others. I think the answer was that there were not enough people, or enough machinery to go to every building, so they did the best they could in the tragic circumstances. We finally arrived at our destination.

Amine got out and introduced herself to the army captain who was in charge, then she told him who we were and introduced us to him. We explained what we could do to help and told him we would do anything. Amine told us that there were three teams working and said it would be better if we waited until morning before we introduced ourselves, as some of the teams did not like outsiders. She explained that two of the teams were still trying to recover people that they thought were alive. After unpacking our gear from the bus we told Amine she could go back with the driver. She offered to stay but we said we would be OK.

We found a place to put our belongings. The best way to describe our little home is if you imagine a beach-side hut that sells drinks, on top of which was an extra raised wooden roof with no sides. To get up you had to climb an electricity supply pole, get on top of a phone box, then climb the last five feet onto the roof. The floor of the shelter was covered in tiles and a thick layer of dust, and soon everything we owned was covered in dust too. It was pointless

trying to keep things clean. We got out our sleeping bags and tried to get some sleep. Nigel and Matt dozed whilst Ross and I, unable to sleep, watched as the work around us carried on through the night. In the end Ross and I decided to get changed and try to be of some help. We went up and tried to introduce ourselves but without an interpreter this was quite hard, so we just mucked in and helped out where we could.

We had only been there about an hour when I cut my arm open on some steel reinforcing bar that had been cut with a Stihl saw. A man tapped me on the shoulder and pushed me in the direction of the ambulance that was on site, where they cleaned the wound with iodine and dressed it. It really needed stitches so we pulled it together and fixed it with steri-strips, which I changed twice a day to keep it clean. Soon after the visit to the ambulance, we met someone who could speak English. His name was Mahmoosh, and he was a rice-chef from Istanbul, who had come to see if he could help. We explained who we were and what we could do and he soon found us holes to go in and check.

The first hole we went in was at the front of a building, which had collapsed onto some cars. There was a gap which had not been investigated between one of the cars and a wall. Ross and I crawled in past the car and we could smell the first body, the stench was terrible. Whoever it was had come straight through the bedroom window and a concrete beam had dropped straight across his body. The whole body was leaking fluid, it was terrible to see. You don't really know what your reaction will be until you are in that situation. We carried on crawling until we came to another car. Ross went to the front and there was another body, this time it was on the bonnet of the car and had been crushed. Both victims had probably been dead from the first day. After we got out we explained what we had found, and were asked if the victims were men or women, but there was no way of knowing as both bodies were black and swollen. We were then asked to go in again and knock on the concrete so the rescuers above could use listening equipment to locate the bodies and recover them. They also wanted to see if anyone replied to the knocking from within the rubble. Ross must have lain by one body for twenty minutes while they tried to locate him. On the way out some cushions fell on him and nearly frightened him to death. It took him a while to recover but there was no time to ponder, we just kept going down whatever holes they found for us to look at.

After a while we returned to Matt and Nigel and told them what we had been doing. We had not been back long when Mahmoosh came to say he had found some more holes for us to check. Nigel and Matt went to look while we rested, then, after a while, we went back to do some more work. In one corner there was a team trying to recover the body of a woman and looking on were two girls that I presume were her daughters. The team recovering the body were concerned that the girls shouldn't see their mother in such a terrible state, so were very dignified in how they recovered her body, shielding it from the girls' view with a blanket. It was very sad to see people in such a distressing state, but there were many others in the same situation, all looking for their loved ones, hoping they were still alive, yet knowing that as time went on there was very little hope of finding them. Later on that morning there was an almighty cheer. We ran over to investigate and saw a little lad being pulled out alive. I think this was one of the most emotional times of the entire day. At home I discovered that his name was Ismail Cimen, and he was the last person to be pulled out alive. I find this quite sad now, to think that all those people were hoping to find someone alive, not knowing that time had run out already. We took it in turns to eat and sleep but this was difficult as the heavy machinery around us worked twenty-four hours a day. Their communications system was mobile phones and radios and there was one or other ringing all the time. If we were resting and they wanted us to look at something, they would just come across and fetch us and we would go. It was difficult work as sometimes the floors were at a forty five degree angle and covered in broken glass and tiles. There was also the danger that the interior walls, if loose, would slide down because they were covered in ceramic tiles, which made them move very easily.

We carried on helping to dig in an area where the controllers thought people might still be alive, slowly removing the floors one layer at a time. By Monday teatime we had reached the body that we had earlier located by the first car. It turned out to be the uncle of one of the men digging. He was partly in bed but had been thrown through the window and a concrete beam had gone straight across his legs pinning him to the floor. The only way to get him out was to cut through the beam and Nigel worked on this for quite some time. He was relieved every now and again to give him a rest but I must admit he did most of the donkey-work, trying to get the body out. After a three foot section of the beam was removed the body was ready for recovery. This was left for the family to do, as it is part of their religion to take care of a family member who has died. They are supposed to wash the body, wrap it in a shroud, and then bury it, but this was impossible to do because of the state of the body. Obviously the family were very distressed by this. You could often see families arguing with the army about who should take care of the bodies. People came in their cars and pick-up trucks to collect the bodies of their family members so that they could bury them. The army tended to use bags of lime to cover the bodies to kill all the germs, but on the body where Nigel was working no lime was used, so he was very reluctant to touch it.

Later on we decided to have a look around the town to see the extent of the damage. As you walked through the streets there were collapsed buildings everywhere, and you could smell that there were dead people in the rubble but there was no-one attempting to recover them. We walked past an encampment on a football pitch and a family called us over to have tea with them. We tried to say no but they insisted we join them. We were given tea and biscuits by people who had just lost everything they owned. All they had was really what they stood in, and there were very few other possessions about. All the people in the encampment had lost members of their families. The tents were from the Red Crescent organisation, but were without ground-sheets. It made you feel very humble to think that the people could still be so hospitable after such a terrible ordeal, but they were just so grateful for what we were trying to do.

We carried on walking round the town, and saw that the gutters were running with sewage, so it wouldn't be long before they had outbreaks of disease. We eventually got back to the camp and the army allowed us to 'phone

home to let our families know that we were all right. Whenever required we kept going back to work. I personally found trying to eat very difficult; I did not have any appetite but you had to try to eat something otherwise you would be in no condition to help, so I lived on high-calorie energy bars.

That night it looked as if the rain was finally going to reach us, it had been raining in the mountains for quite some time and you could see it in the distance. Later it started to drizzle, but this soon turned into a full-blown storm, and the wind blew the rain sideways into our little encampment despite the ground sheet and polythene we fixed with a rope to try and protect ourselves. We decided that the risk from infection with the rain was too great, so we phoned AKUT to come and pick us up the following day.

As no-one was working in the rain we decided to have a drink to help us drop off to sleep. It must have worked because I woke up at about three o'clock lying in a pool of water, but I got into my big bivvy bag and slept some more. When we woke up the dust had turned to mud and all the sleeping bags were wet, with the exception of Ross's. His had somehow kept dry, even though he had lain on the floor all night, with nothing underneath him, and his sleeping bag had been thrown on top of him.

We looked around and noticed that all the other volunteer groups had gone, their tents had been packed up in the night and they had left. The army Captain in charge came up to ask if we were going to start work. We explained that we felt the risk of infection was very great, but he told us that he had to carry on regardless as they were his people and he had to get them out. In the end we decided we might as well carry on searching until AKUT sent someone to pick us up. The AKUT people arrived at about 4.00p.m and told us they had come by ferry, but the driver had gone to the toilet and dropped the keys down the loo! The keys went straight into the sea and they had had to send for someone to bring another set from Istanbul. We assume that they kept going back and forth on the ferry until the spare keys arrived. The driver seemed to be quite embarrassed and didn't say much.

I went up on to the site to fetch Nigel and Matt while Ross started to pack up all our belongings. I found Nigel down a hole looking around someone's living room. He passed me some personal possessions and I put them by the hole for someone to pick up. All of a sudden there was a great flurry of activity and Nigel nearly got his head kicked off as someone produced a budgie in a cage, still alive and on its perch. The press were taking pictures of it and people were taking a great interest. I wondered if it was this that the listening device had picked up, but the rescuers had thought it was a child. It was in the same building that we had been digging in. Anyway, it deserved to live, just the same way as everything else. We made our way down the hill to get changed and around us still more bodies were being pulled out. As we left I felt that we might have been able to achieve more if we had got to Turkey earlier.

The journey back was a little quicker than the journey in, as we took the ferry back to Istanbul. Ross spoke to John on the 'phone, and John told him that there had been two rooms reserved for us at the Hilton hotel. We all thought he was joking, but it was true! We arrived at the Hilton to be met by a doorman in top hat and long black coat. You can bet he had never met such a scruffy set of individuals in his life as we had not washed for three days and our clothes were black. We told him not to touch the bags, as he would get covered in dust. A porter arrived and we loaded the bags on to his trolley for him and checked in. No one seemed to care that we were in such a mess. We went to our rooms and had showers, then I cleaned my walking boots in the bath with the shower because they were the only footwear I had. I think we were all in the same boat. After washing and changing we went to get something to eat. I think Nigel won the scruffiest person competition as he had on a T-shirt with two holes in it but I don't think any of us would have won the best-dressed man contest. The funny thing is no-one took any notice of the way we were dressed at all. After a good meal and a few lagers we retired to bed, but sleep was not easy, all I could think of was the people left at Cinardik.

The following day we had a meeting with John Scott, to discuss what we had done, and to tell him our thoughts on whether Cave Rescue relates to a disaster like this. I personally think UK Cave Rescue does have a part to play in a situation like this. Our ability to crawl into small spaces to see if anyone is alive, and our digging skills in confined spaces to help to recover someone is definitely of use. The sad thing is that if we had got there earlier, I am sure we would have been a lot more use in finding people. The thing that needs to be sorted out is the insurance, then if people want to go on a voluntary basis they can. You don't need the entire Cave Rescue stores to go with you, just some rope and your own SRT gear and a stretcher. When I first volunteered I had great reservations about whether we should go; I didn't know who AKUT or John Scott were. After meeting John and the AKUT people I have no regrets whatsoever and I would do the same thing again tomorrow if asked. Next time I hope we are asked earlier.

Paul Holdcroft.

K2- Gondogora La (Part 2) 1999.

I couldn't believe my luck. Having failed to cross this pass (La) in '97 here I was again on my way back -and being paid to do it! "Himalayan Kingdoms", possibly the UK's top trekking company had heard of my considerable talents (probably on news at 10!) and because (or maybe despite) of that had offered me the chance again by leading this particular trek. There were a couple of problems. The route lay in Pakistan, a few miles from Kashmir and Pakistan were once again virtually at war with India over this disputed territory. Gradually the number of clients dwindled as news of the conflict filtered through. As a result I lost my assistant (a very attractive lass from Bristol) but eventually it was "on" despite the fact that other trekking companies had cancelled treks in that region.

Sat 24 July/Sun 25 July. Things went fairly smoothly at Heathrow, except for the fact that I was a client short!! We hung around waiting for Phil who had gone into the departure lounge and eventually boarded the plane without telling us. Needless to say PIA were 1 1/2 hours late leaving (no explanation given) and on arrival at Islamabad it took a further 1 1/2 hours before our luggage



appeared. Our guide Noor Hayat (Nooree) was waiting for us with transport as expected and we were in the Shalimar hotel less than 15 mins after leaving the airport. Having sorted out rooms and caught up on some sleep we were taken by Nooree on a visit to the usual mosque and nearby hills. We took an early BBQ-buffet meal on the poolside before retiring at about 10 p.m. ready for a 7.30 am departure.

Mon. 26 July. We had been unable to see the Minister of Boredom (Tourism) on the Sunday (now a public holiday apparently) so a meeting had been scheduled for 8am. We hung around for about 2 hours before the appropriate officials were present and it was 10.15 before we managed to escape. I had a discourse on the state of cricket/ football (I know NOTHING about either!) and an inquisition on the state of English politics (including the biographies of Margaret Thatcher/ John Major/ Tony Blair) Fortunately he forgot to give me the usual lecture on trekking otherwise we could still be there!! During the meeting I was asked to produce signed photographs of each client. We had not planned for this, fortunately the clients had them ... all except Malcolm! In a flash of genius Dave immediately lent him one!! No one spotted the substitution despite the fact that they bore no resemblance to each other. Maybe "we all look the same!" The journey to Chilas on the Karakorum Highway was spectacular but uneventful. We stopped twice for sustenance arriving at 12.15. (midnight) Unfortunately there were not enough rooms. Bill, bless his cotton socks, volunteered to sleep on the coach as did Nooree.

Tues 27 July. Phil got up early claiming to have found 2 fleas in his bed. No one else complained but a couple of days later Jackie found a few bites that could be attributed to fleas, who knows? Breakfast, which was lukewarm (even the fried eggs/omelette- no one complained) was at 7.30am and we were away by 8. The journey was hot and FAST! The packed lunch was the usual boiled egg cold chicken and a cold potato. I was glad that I am vegetarian, Nooree bought me some dahl from a wayside "café" .. At least it was edible, it certainly looked more appetising than the chicken. By now Phil was feeling unwell, worse still he had shared a room with me! We were quite lucky in completing the journey by 4.30. In a couple of places we had to squeeze past blockages (landslides) that were being cleared by army engineers. There was just time for a brief trip into town before we took an early meal and bed.

Wed 28 July. We were away by about 8am and amazingly on the campsite below Askole by 4. The road had improved considerably in the two years since my last visit i.e. there were no bits missing but it would be very optimistic to rely on this being the case in the future. Lunch was the usual chicken (and salmonella?) for the clients whereas I feasted on cold omelette and even colder chips. The highlight of the journey for me was the purchase of two brand new ice screws for 10 dollars! The site was busy but surprisingly clean. We felt quite chuffed due to the fact that because of the rapid journey from Skardu we had a day to spare.

Thurs 29 July. The 11k walk to Korophon is easy going and took 4 ½ hours. Phil was still feeling rough and for both Bill and I passing wind was becoming a very risky business! Nooree bought 3 goats in Askole, apparently they cost "an arm and a leg" as well as a few emaciated chickens. Our photographers got the usual welcome from the kids-they throw rocks at them! The day was sunny but a cool breeze blowing from the Biafo glacier kept the campsite cool. I took a short walk up to the snout of the glacier finding a set of prints on the way which Nooree later identified as bear prints. Apparently they have developed a taste for chocolate bars and have been known to raid tents! became concerned about the tents at this point. Almost all the groundsheets leaked and several flysheets had ripped.

Fri 30 July. Bed tea at 6am, away by 7. It was fairly cool (25 C) and we were at the Jola-camp by 10.30. The footpath round the cliff now runs mainly at river level and was relatively straightforward. If the river is high at least one section of it would be difficult so it might be prudent to carry a rope in case one was forced to adopt the high level route or rope up on the lower path. *The high level route was the one where a porter came to grief on my last trip.* A (much less exciting) bridge has replaced the jola (a basket suspended on a single -doubtful looking- wire rope) much to the disappointment of the clients! Several porters attempted to take a short cut by wading the river. I wasn't surprised to see them fail, the water was ***** freezing! Nooree gave them a rollicking for their efforts, after all it was our kit they were carrying! We lunched at Jola-camp for best part of an hour. The walk to Scumbosok was mostly in shade and it rained heavily for about 3 hours once we arrived in camp (at 3 p.m.) Richard must have arrived a good hour (sleeves) and altitude.

Sat 31 July. I still had porters for a tooth has to make a fairly glacier. Apparently exciting as ever, Bill (a mild dose of Montezumas Revenge and Bill (a pharmacist) treated one of our abscess. We got away by 7.45am. Although this is a short day (about 4 hours) one exciting river crossing as early as possible ie before the sun gets to work on the Rich complained of a headache at 8.30am and took 2 Veganin. The crossing was as and Rich managed to find a place up stream where it was possible (for a long jumper!) to cross dry but the rest of us took to the water. One of the younger porters got a real soaking and we nearly lost him and his kit. The porters were most helpful with the clients. Rich seemed to head advice by slowing down for a while then suddenly changed up a gear and set off "as though on a mission." The cliff consisting of boulders embedded in river sediment close to Paiju is as hazardous as ever- a bit like Winnats Head Cave! (but was unavoidable) I of the group and as I overtook a group from KE the trek leader informed me that time. That proved to be the understatement of the trip! As I reached the campsite was sat in full sun by the side of the mess tent. He seemed unable to understand or instructions so was forcibly removed to the tent. Fortunately there was a strong both doors open we spent the next couple of hours trying to reduce his of 103.6! For the best part of an hour he suffered convulsions and his speech was be described as an uncooperative patient but in his defence I can only assume that he was not in a lucid condition for most of the



afternoon. The clients, particularly Bill, and several of the porters were most helpful. A couple of American clients with KE were doctors so I arranged a consultation for Rich.

We had an excellent lunch, treated several porters for headaches and a couple for conjunctivitis (at least Bill did) then spent the afternoon playing on a nearby crag where all except Rich did some abseiling and prussiking. The weather remained hot (30 C despite a strong wind) so Rich was confined to the shade of the mess tent. We had another excellent evening meal followed by a bouldering session close to camp. Dave and Jack normally climb at "8 something or other" (I thought E numbers only applied to food preservatives!) but as one might expect they were outclassed by the porters who proved to be outstanding.

Sun 1 Aug. This was our "planned" rest day at Paiju. We were up at 7am (I can't imagine why!) there was no wind and it was hot. However the day gradually clouded over and by 5.30 it was raining. One of the doctors from KE visited Rich pronouncing him 90% putting his condition down to a combination of heat, altitude and possibly some unspecified infection. He thought he would be OK to continue the following day but he was banned from all activities that involved leaving the mess tent! Dave, Jackie, Malcolm, Bill and I spent part of the day prussiking in some nearby trees (the last we would see for some time) in addition to looking at various crevasse rescue scenarios. Two of our goats met a sticky end resulting in liver for the evening meal. Bill treated a couple of porters for various maladies in addition to putting Rich onto Ciproxin since he had now developed a touch of Pakistani two-step.

Mon. 2 Aug. We dosed Rich with Ciproxin and were away by 7.15am, 1 ¼ hours later we reached the snout of the Baltoro glacier. It was pleasantly cool and by noon we had crossed the glacier spending about 40 minutes having lunch at Lilligo where I had camped 2 years previously. The cliffs consisting of enormous boulders loosely embedded in river sediment looked ominous and brought back memories of the restless night I spent here two years ago. A walk through pleasant vegetation led us back down onto the glacier close to the junction with the Lilligo glacier before reaching the crowded Khorbutse campsite 7 ½ hours after leaving Paiju. The views of Trango Towers, Cathedral Peak and Mustagh Tower were exceptional. Further repairs were needed to two of the flysheets, worse still we finished off the last of the European-type bread!

Tues 3 Aug. Today's 3 hour walk began along some well-vegetated paths before dropping onto the glacier for the final approach to the campsite at Urdukas. We spotted several large hamster like rodents and possibly a stoat en route. Spaces were short so our porters spent some time enlarging the Duke of Abruzzi's ledges while I swatted the flies which were plentiful. A palatial loo is under construction here and this might help reduce the fly problem. Our last goat met an untimely end so the clients had liver yet again. Various unrecognisable bits of goat carcass were spread out to dry behind my tent reinforcing my beliefs in vegetarianism! (Apparently the porters planned to eat it!) While the clients feasted on goat meat I dined on Ciproxin as I was still suffering the trots as were one or two porters. At least I felt better than one of the KE group who was passing blood. As we retired a heavy rainstorm meant that urgent remedial work was required on two of the tents.

Wed. 4 Aug. I awoke with a fairly large puddle in my tent the clients seemed to have fared better. One of our porters was dismissed and left for the valley. "Not up to it," was Nororee's explanation. We were away by 7am and the walk to Gore took us 7 ½ hours including a lunch break. The route passes the graves of about 6 high-level porters before dropping onto the glacier for the rest of the day. We had occasional drizzle throughout the day and heavy rain on our arrival. I took my second does of Ciproxin, despite having to make fairly regular "visits" I was not feeling at all unwell. Everyone seemed to be in good health and spirits despite the wet, windy and miserable weather, which was looking horribly reminiscent of 97! "Just like being in the Lake District" commented one comedian! Being on the ice the camp at Gore is cold and this combined with leaky tents made the stay rather less than pleasant. I began to hope this wasn't going to be yet another abortive attempt!

Thurs 5 Aug. My tent had leaked again resulting in a wet sleeping bag (Why does it only happen to me?) Bill seemed to be suffering a little from the altitude but it was a surprisingly pleasant day being sunny but cool with a pleasant breeze. Despite taking our time we reached Concordia in 5 ½ hours. We had pakoras for lunch which were excellent and I must confess to eating far too many despite my dodgy insides!! Six more porters were paid off and dispatched to the valley. They received a 100- rupee tip (about £1.20) but left without a food ration. Bill, despite still feeling under the weather, treated a whole range of illnesses amongst our porters. (Feet, backs and headaches in the main) It was a gorgeous evening with K2 drifting in and out of the clouds and the sunset on all the Peaks was really memorable. Fingers were up and down on shutter releases like a fiddler's elbow! Our assistant cook lost the sole off one of his boots so, being the same size as me- or so he claimed, borrowed my light-weight ones.

Friday 6 Aug. I woke at 6am as usual but we all had a lie-in till 8 as arranged! The morning was spent practising rope techniques on some steep ice close to camp. After an excellent lunch we used the same venue to sharpen up our crevasse rescue techniques. The weather was good but ominous clouds gathered from time to time.

Sat. 7 Aug. We left for Ali camp at 7am after treating a porter for the most horrendous boil I have ever seen. I suspected that surgery was the only real answer. The 11k walk took us 5 ¼ hours. Having crossed the bare ice close to camp the route lies on glacial moraine until it gives way to ice again with Ali camp in site. We kept to the glacier, which was clear of snow. This avoids the much more tedious route over the rocks which is the preferred route if the crevasses are concealed. We began the day in glorious sunshine but the cloud thickened and with a headwind blowing across the glacier the day became cold. As we approached Ali camp we met a "strange" group claiming to be Pakistani trekkers. We discovered later that part of the group had been arrested at Concordia as "Indian insurgents"! Those who avoided arrest wandered into Ali camp claiming to be lost. I never did manage to

discover their plight. During the afternoon we had rain, snow and poor visibility. Two other groups planned to cross the La that night and bed tea was planned for 12.30am. The weather was not looking good.

Sun 8 Aug. At 1am there was an incredible amount of activity so I eventually got up, kneeling on my glasses in the process! Two groups had opted to "go" but Nooree had decided against it. Our group eventually got up, the day was glorious, Nooree had obviously got it wrong, particularly as a couple of groups arrived in camp having crossed the La. On the positive side Dave felt quite ill spending all day in bed with a high temperature and eating nothing so perhaps our delay was a blessing in disguise. Malcolm, Rich, Bill and I took a walk up towards the La guided by our porter sirdar. We had some excellent views of what was to come and of the route across the glacier which looked straightforward. Malcolm complained of feeling tired returning to camp before he reached our high point.

Many of us had heard strange rumblings in the night (in addition to the usual snow and rock avalanches) A large lake close to camp had virtually disappeared as if down some enormous but invisible plug-hole. We also discovered that the large black "rock" visible 80m above the camp was in fact a bag containing the body of a porter who had died a couple of days previously. The views of Broad Peak and Gasherbrum 1, 2 and 3 were excellent but most of our thoughts were on the La. Everyone became restless. The conversation centred on the "insurgents" and the bored porters got up to all sorts of tricks to relieve the boredom the favourite being to tie the boot laces of a sleeping colleague to his bivvy pole before waking him with obvious results. Quite funny to watch but less so if you were one of those left inside having to re-pitch it! Bill produced some "magic powder" from his pharmacy to treat the porters' boil and I arranged to have Dave's sack carried over the La.

Mon. 9 Aug. Bed tea at 12.30 am, away by 2 (Why does it always take so long?) Steep moraine, then the glacier. We reached the foot of the La at 4 am. it was still dark. Hushe porters have now rigged the pass with fixed ropes on both sides, one of them accompanied us on the crossing. Rather than taking an easy line the ropes go straight up which makes it hard work. As we neared the top several groups of porters were heading down towards Ali camp. Their only loads seemed to be firewood and their footwear was unbelievable. Many

and one wore old socks "carry out" from one of and we looked forward to we had to step across fatigue on the last few arrival the weather turned and cold were sent on



had ancient crampons held on with rope. Some managed with one crampon over his rubber ankle length boots! Apparently they were on their way to the mountains at Concordia. As we climbed the pass the weather was glorious the views from the top reputed to be the "best in the world". Nearing the top several small but deep crevasses and Malcolm began to show real sign of meters. He used his Petzl jammer on this section. Within seconds of our crampons and the porters carrying the climbing gear who were poorly dressed ahead. We headed for the start of our descent. The section to the top of the

descent route is on steep ice and removing our crampons was a mistake. G.La. Alt 5650 (from memory) The descent starts with an awkward 10m traverse to reach the fixed 11 mm polypropylene rope (the type used to secure loads onto lorries-i.e. VERY slippery!) It was secured to dubious multiple anchors. Nooree went first followed by Rich. The first rope of about 50m leads to a complicated re-belay involving two ropes leading to a long "back-up". Nooree led again this time followed by Dave then Rich, Phil, Jack, Bill then me followed by 2 porters. Just after the second re-belay Dave commented that he was unhappy with the "hand over hand" techniques adopted by Nooree and the other porters and that he felt more security was needed. I agreed so took over the lead continuing past the others with a sling clipped into the rope to the next re-belay, a piton at about 25m. It could be passed in safety using 2 safety cords (caver-style) a technique we had practised a couple of days previously.

Dave continued to the next belay while Jack joined me and I explained to her the technique the others would have to adopt to safely pass the piton. I descended about 20m to the next belay and Dave continued down while I waited for Phil, Bill, Malcolm and finally Jack. Malcolm was feeling really tired at this point. Rich had declined to join us and waited with Nooree some distance up the slope. Dave shouted up to me that due to a patch of ice a prussik knot was required on the next section. Immediately after the ice there were 2 knots in the rope, presumably where it had been damaged. At this point Nooree shouted to Dufail (in Urdu) to hurry up.

We were passing this re-belay, a single rock piton, by fitting a prussik knot to the rope while protected by a security cord. The security cord was then removed and the knot slid down as one progressed. As Jack reached the middle of the patch of ice a shower of stones came down and a largish one hit her on her helmet which was later found to have sustained some damage. Apparently Dufail was also hit on the leg somewhere in this region.

Nooree shouted again (in English this time) to hurry. Jack was in the middle noticed that she was struggling to loosen her prussik knot which had been stunned by the rock and had fallen onto the knot. I descended, helped of us proceeded to cross the ice and pass the two knots in the rope protected caught up with the others including the porter from Hushe as they traversed of about 20m. A rope fixed at both ends protected this. In our haste both of end of the traverse but were checked by our security cords.



of a stone chute and I jammed. I suspect she had unjam the knot then the two by our security cords. We across a snowfield a distance us slipped as we neared the

We joined the others at a large stance protected from stone fall by a small overhang. Malcolm was by now totally exhausted and struggling. The Hushe porter pointed out that a further stone chute lay ahead but a safe descent could be made by following a broad rib immediately below the stance. The chute still had to be crossed but much lower down. He offered to look after Malcolm while I led the others down. After about 30m of descent I looked back to see Nooree at the stance with Rich and the others. I shouted back and he indicated that I should continue. By now Dufail was at the foot of the slope some distance away. Eventually we all reached the bottom of the La unscathed although there was an incident when Jack had to insist on Rich going in front because he repeatedly caused the scree to cascade down the slope onto those beneath him despite being requested to be more careful.

A long walk led to Doug Scott camp where we had lunch. A further hour saw us in Hospung, a sandy campsite on the bed of a dried up lake. Despite having his sack carried Malcolm had a real struggle and was glad to arrive. There is a tented "shop" on the site. Including our lunch stop crossing the La had taken us 12 hours. The latter part of the day had been red hot despite the poor weather on the pass. Norree complained of a headache and was given analgesics. Rich organised a football match amongst the porters. The whole affair looked extremely dangerous to my untrained eye!

Tues 10 Aug. There had been rain overnight and the regular sound of avalanches. Needless to say my kit was damp again. I learned that we had lost a barrel of kerosene on the La, at least the porter who had dropped it was uninjured. Bed tea was served at 7am but it was 8.50 before we managed to be on the move. Norree, perhaps still suffering from his headache, seemed particularly reluctant to set off and it was only when I suggested that I set off with the group that he was stirred into action. The initial part of the way was on a fairly featureless glacier in poor visibility, which accounted for Nooree's reluctance to turn me loose. When the porters finally overtook us it was by a totally different route. I suppose "all roads lead to Rome". It rained on and off all morning as the route gradually changed from glacial lateral moraine with a variety of plants beginning to creep in, a refreshing change after a world dominated entirely by rock and ice. As we approached our campsite Dalsang Pa, another dried up lake, we passed several groups of dzos- a yak/cow cross. Alt. 4180. N. 35deg. 35.0 E. 76deg. 22.9.

Wed. 11 Aug. Visibility at 7 am was perfect with amazing views all around. From here one can see 5 different glaciers. I learnt that not only had the pass cost us a barrel of fuel, in addition the wheat flour intended for the porters had been contaminated by paraffin! Without food they must have been ravenous but got little sympathy off Norree-after all it was due to their "carelessness!" The "young porter with the boil" came to show me how his infection had progressed. Bill's powder had worked wonders on the bugs that no doubt had never been exposed to antibiotics! We left at 8.30 in rain which continued on and off until we reached Saicho. The most memorable part of the walk was alongside the glacier beneath crumbling cliffs of river sediment containing the usual massive boulders. None of us lingered on this stretch particularly as it had rained quite heavily during the previous few days! I felt a bit like a pin in a bowling alley. As we approached Saicho the smell of sage and juniper (the first trees we had seen for 27 days) was overpowering. The site is situated next to "Hassim's Restaurant at the end of the Universe!" Hassim sells everything from ice screws to chicken and chips. There is a delay however for the chicken which has to be caught and plucked. The site and toilets are incredibly clean, a credit to Hassim. We sat on the veranda consuming endless bottles of coke trying our best to persuade ourselves that it tasted as good as "Boddies". Rich organised a cricket match this time and even I could see why the Pakistanis gave England a good thrashing in the recent World Cup- most of them were naturals.

Thurs. 12 Aug. 31/2 hours of more or less downhill walking took us into Hushe the end of our "trek". From a distance Hushe looks an idyllic village situated in pleasant, productive farmland. In reality the village itself is very crowded and dirty, as are the kids who appeared as if from nowhere as Bill produced his bag of balloons giving ample opportunity for close-up photography. At least we weren't stoned for our efforts. The porters were paid off, tips handed out and they left with a 3-hour walk to a bridge that was "down". Hopefully they could get a lift back to Skardu a drive of about 9 hours.

We had entered the village in bright sunshine but by 1pm we had rain, thunder and high winds. After lunch several groups of us wandered through the village and surrounding fields making the most of the photographic opportunities. The locals were particularly friendly, even the women but photographing the women was a definite NO-NO. (altho' one did say I could take a photo of her-if I paid!) My boots were returned at this point. Unfortunately I could bear them in the tent let alone wear them. Our assistant cook must have had the smelliest feet in Pakistan! The boots are still in formaldehyde! The evening meal was excellent as usual and our cook amazed us all by producing an artistic masterpiece in multicoloured jeily!

Fri 13 Aug. It rained and blew a "hooley" all night. Needless to say my kit was damp again. It rained 'till about 10am then most of us ambled around the village again. Rich went for a walk in the nearby hills. As he re-appeared he looked like the pied piper with dozens of kids in his wake. Apparently he had been showing them his considerable juggling skills and had made dozens of "friends for life".

Around lunchtime a French couple arrived having topped Gasherbrum 2. Nothing remarkable except that the male, who was well into his fifties, was having to use a crutch having broken his leg 3 months earlier! The rest of the expedition was still on the mountain. Interestingly they had refused to pay the Hushe Porters (about £30) for the use of their fixed ropes crossing the pass without. We learnt from the bush telegraph that not only was the bridge down on the way to Skardu, weather had prevented any flights to or from Skardu for about a week and the road to Pindi was blocked in several places by landslides as a result of the heavy rain. The latter fact also meant that there was precious little diesel to be had for the jeeps!

Sat 14 Aug. We were up for a 7-ish start but no jeeps. Eventually one appeared so this was filled up with clients while Norree, Bill and I set off on foot. After about 30 minutes a second jeep appeared and we scrambled in, 30 minutes on precipitous roads took us to the missing bridge. Fortunately what was left of it had been converted into a makeshift footbridge so we crossed leaving our porters to carry the kit across. Fresh jeeps were waiting in the small village just across the bridge. Two hours of dirt road and we were on tarmac. Shortly after this the lead jeep ran out of fuel! Nooree was furious the drivers blamed the landslides! We extracted about a litre from ours and set off again. The jeep ran out again as the "porter jeep", which was unbelievably overcrowded with kit and personnel, passed us so a further contribution to the fuel crisis was extracted from them. Fortunately this lasted until about 50 metres short of the hotel! We arrived at 1 p.m. a testimony to the speed at which we had travelled, it normally takes 9 hours, we had done it in about 5!

The good news was that the road to Pindi was open the bad news was that there had been no flights for 5 days. None of us fancied two days on the Karakorum Highway-once is enough!

Nooree had arranged for the "cook team" to come round for drinks which provided the opportunity for us to hand over their "backsheesh" and to say goodbye. Such was the camaraderie had been established that there were tears in a number of eyes on both sides.

After lunch we had planned to visit a "polo spectacular" organised as a part of the independence celebrations. The manager of the hotel, hearing of our plans, organised a lift in his chauffeur driven 4by4. Unfortunately he insisted in us joining him in the best seats which meant that we were well away from the action making photography difficult. Still he meant well. The match itself seemed rather more aggressive than that played in England. A French TV crew, assuming that the English were polo experts, asked us for an explanation of the rules but we had to admit that we were at a loss. After a suitable length of time we made our escape in order to visit the town and bazaar. The "down" side of the day was yet to come, Rich's mini-disc player had been stolen in his absence.

Sun 25 Aug. The weather was good ... the flight was on!!! Breakfast at 6.20 away by 7, we were all in a really good mood. At the check-in I had my Leatherman confiscated and the batteries in Phil's head-torch were treated likewise. Minutes later both were returned by Nooree, I still don't know how he managed to liberate them! As we taxied down the runway we passed several ancient anti-aircraft guns pointing skywards in readiness for an Indian attack. The Kashmir crisis had still not been solved and to exacerbate the situation we learned that India had shot down an unarmed Pakistani plane with 15 on board. 40 minutes later and we were in Islamabad. A lazy afternoon was followed by a Chinese meal in a nearby hotel.

Mon 26 Aug. I felt dog-tired as I awoke at 7.30am, no bed tea! Nooree arrived at 9 and we set off for the "Ministry of Boredom" via Walji's main office where we collected one of their managers. At the ministry we were told to make ourselves comfortable in the waiting room. A clerk lay fast asleep on the floor in the centre of the room. Things were obviously hectic. After the statutory wait that seemed interminable we were summoned in to meet the minister. I had prepared a written report which he read, thanked me for and we were dismissed. I suspect he then consigned it to the bin! There was little to do except catch up on some sleep and do some shopping. In the evening we went out for an "Indian" or was it a "Pakistani"? Either way it was an excellent meal.

Tues 27 Aug. The check-in was rapid and painless! The flight was delayed for no apparent reason for about 90 minutes. It was the second and penultimate flight of the day! Another endless delay in Karachi and we were finally on our way. We said our goodbyes at Heathrow and I think I can speak for all when I say we had a thoroughly pleasant trip. We all came back in one piece having accomplished our objective.

Ralph J. Sept '99

PS. If anyone wants to borrow photographs of this, or any other of my trips, just ask.

And now the bit you've all been waiting for: MEETS!

CCPC

October 3 Tearsall Pipe (D)
10 Peak Cavern (D)
16 Notts Pot (Y)

November 6 Ogof Draenen (SW)
13 Rumbling Hole (Y)
27 Long Rake (D)

December 5 Top Link to? (Y)

*Whitehall is a DCRO training day. ALL CCPC members are welcome. It is a good day for meeting other members of Crewe and DCRO. Various activities will take place usually of the "get out of that" variety. Cost NOTHING!

**Pindale is a DCA "Workshop" covering a variety of topics (photography, survival, SRT beginners and advanced, ladder and line etc) Cost. Excellent value at £10 per day. Application form needed.

And of course there's always the mid-week trip to Pooles Cavern. Ring Ross, Nigel or Brian.

If the trip you fancy is not here-ask John, he's waiting to hear from you!

DCRO/DCA

7 Quiz Star Inn Tideswell
31 Whitehall Training (ALL welcome)*

13+14 Pindale DCA (training)**
16 +21 Communications
27 DCRO.AGM.
4 Annual Dinner Taddington.



Castleton Street collection raised £620, £360 by Crewe. Well done and many thanks to all those who turned up.

Not seen the "Cave Safe" videos yet? Make sure you borrow them soon.

Interested in France next Summer (or even Kazakstan) see Ralph.

I am in the process of collecting serviceable second-hand warm clothing suitable for use by porters in the Himalayas. If you have anything you no longer need (Fleeces, gloves, sweaters, sweatshirts etc.) please bear this in mind. Ralph

