

C.C.P.C.

Newsletter.

Sept.'97



No.55

CCPC Meets 1997

6 Sept. Rumbling Hole

14 Sept. Little Neath.

27 Sept. Providence/Dow

28 Sept. Cherry Tree/ DCRO Whitehall

4 Oct. Lancaster Hole.

19 Oct. Slaughter Stream.

25 Oct. GG/Stream Passage.

1 Nov. Notts Pot.

16 Nov. Giants Hole.

30 Nov. Craig y ffynnon.

DCRO Training Sessions.

9 Sept. Committee.

23 Sept. Controllers

28 Sept. Whitehall.

2 Nov. Matlock. "Engineering."

25. Nov. Casualty Care.

29 Nov. AGM

30 Nov. Casualty Care.

9 Dec. Committee.

13 Dec. Xmas Dinner.

Have you got Ralph's copy of "The Hard Years" by Joe Brown? If so he would like it back.

Thanks to Kev, Paul, Mark and Sharon for organising the 40th "Do". Perhaps we should now be thinking of the 50th!

Advance warning. The Belgians are planning a "New" through trip near to the PSM Watch this space.

CCPC call out to Karakorum. Pakistan.!!

This should have been a trip to East Africa, or was it to Eastern Russia ? Anyway I was on a Pakistani International Airlines flight a mere one hour late on my way to Islamabad! The plane was packed and to make matters worse the flight was "dry". The in-flight meals were best described as "unimaginative". We arrived at 5.30 am local time. The airport was CHAOTIC and I suspect the entire population of Pakistan was awaiting our arrival at the airport. I've never seen so many people packed into such a small space! To make matters worse the temperature was already unbearable .. just like stepping into a microwave oven. The airport security had been "random" to say the least. The taxis were unbelievable. You either got an air conditioned minibus like ours (more of this later ... don't get the idea of unparalleled luxury!), a battered 4 seat Suzuki saloon or a Suzuki pick-up designed to seat about six to eight but catering for well in excess of fifteen in, on or hanging on the outside!! The alternative to mechanised transport is a horse-drawn trap but these are obviously slower and in general the animals so underfed that it seemed unfair asking them to stand let alone pull a load. A few small two-seater vehicles resembling a miniature version of Delboy Trotter's Reliant Robin also exist but these are mainly confined to the city centre. Most of these look even older than the horses! A 25 minute drive resembling a stock car race took us to our hotel in Rawalpindi, the "Shallimar" a 4 star air conditioned residence. Here we met the manager of "Walji's" the oldest trekking firm in Pakistan and our Sirdar Ali Murad, a larger than life character and veteran of many international climbing expeditions. It was here that we discovered the first of his many talents .. money changing. Eat your heart out Shylock, Ali's rates were better than the banks, the service more efficient, he never closes and can change any currency into whatever was required ... all without recourse to a calculator.

Day 2. Following breakfast we came upon our first brush with bureaucracy. As we were entering a restricted area we had to attend a briefing at the ministry of tourism taking with us two passport photographs! (On a Sunday!) Fortunately we had our secret weapon and before we finished our excellent breakfast Ali had arranged for a photographer and booked us an appointment with the minister himself. Photographs done we had a quick visit to a local bazaar (rather like a massive car boot sale cum market) followed by lunch (£20 for all 14 of us!) then set off for the ministry of tourism. We had a 1 hour wait as forms were completed then each of us had to introduce ourselves to the minister who treated us to Coca-cola while he bored us to death with a lecture which ranged from pollution and deforestation of the Himalayas to a summary of his qualifications in Philosophy and Sociology, his religious beliefs plus a potted history of Pakistan. We also received details on what not to photograph; Military vehicles, aircraft, railway stations, bridges etc. etc. and women!., the list was endless. We desperately tried to stay awake and not to appear disinterested .. after all we did need his signature. Since we were back in Islamabad we went to see the biggest mosque in Asia. Costing 5 ½ million dollars (I think) it was certainly splendid faced in Italian marble and decorated with gold leaf. Certainly very impressive but I couldn't help thinking of the poverty and squalor a mere stones throw away. A short coach journey took us to a viewpoint where we could see this new city stretching away as far as the eye could see in an orderly fashion, not like the adjacent "Pindy" which had grown higgledy-piggledy over the centuries. The drive back to the hotel was as eventful as ever with an apparent total disregard for signs and traffic lights. When we did stop we were usually approached by beggars (normally minus a leg or with some other affliction) asking for alms. Sometimes the traffic was brought to a standstill by a slow moving cart drawn by a heavily overlaid emaciated donkey or buffalo struggling to pull a heavy cart spurred on with the frequent use of a whip. Cyclists weave in and out of the dense traffic often carrying two or three passengers and "Vespa" scooters often carry entire families!! Amazingly we saw no accidents. Dinner was at 7.30 followed by an early night. We hadn't slept for 36 hours or more and Ali wanted a 5am start the following morning.

Day 3 and the prospect of a 14+ hour drive up the famous Karakorum Highway to Chillas close to Nangar Parbat. The road begins rather tamely with only the occasional landslip partly blocking the way although part of a village had recently been demolished by the forces of nature at one point. Some bridges had also disappeared being replaced by somewhat dubious structures with wooden decking of doubtful vintage. Our

first break was for "Sweet tea" at a roadside "café" opposite a butchers shop. I was still suffering from culture shock and can only say that the site of the butchers made me glad I had become vegetarian. (Three other members vowed not to touch meat again until they were firmly back on British soil!) We were in a very busy village and everyone came to have a look. A stream ran through the café and it was in this that our cups were washed. Ali was unhappy and insisted that ours be rinsed in BOILING water and wiped with OUR teacloth! The tea is made 50-50 water and milk. Leaves are added and the whole lot boiled for ages. At some time copious amounts of sugar are added, at least the boiling kills the bacteria.

The journey continued. The drivers skill was considerable on the hairpin bends and it wasn't long before we spotted the recent remains of a minibus in the river below obviously driven by a driver less competent than ours. Unfortunately the air-conditioning had to be switched off on each of the frequent climbs .. the engine couldn't cope with both! A second stop took place for "sweet tea" but only after Ali had inspected and approved the premises. This time the tea was accompanied by curried veg, dahl and rice followed by mango and "custard". At our third tea stop the children were keen to impress us with their English ("One pen give" is the normal opening phrase.) and to have their photos taken. This only applied to the boys of course, the girls stay well out of sight. I remember noticing that wild hemp grew everywhere. A young couple from Denmark appeared while we were at the café. SHE drove the biggest and most impressive of the two motorbikes, I wondered what the local males made of that!! .. Their females are kept well subservient. As we left the village I couldn't help but be impressed by the terracing on the hillside to accommodate the huts and fields of rice. We stopped to relieve ourselves miles from anywhere and as if by magic a young boy appeared with his tiny tray of stones for us to buy. Other children held out handfuls of fruit as we passed by.

We finished our journey to Chillas in the dark to find that the hotel lighting was rather suspect and the bathrooms BASIC. No one had a bath or shower that night despite the long hot day. Nevertheless the meal was good as was the breakfast.

Day4, the Karakorum Highway which follows one of the old silk routes into China is amazing ... but not for the faint hearted! The road meanders through the valley often high up above the river Indus eventually coming to a point where the Himalaya, Hindu Kush and Karakorum all meet. At this point we left the Karakorum Highway with its decorated wagons resembling fairground caravans and headed for Skardu. I thought the Karakorum Highway was exciting (or is dangerous the word!) but this was worse! Frequently buried under landslips progress was often made by excavating sections of road as required. Some of the villages we passed seemed to be totally inaccessible , others by cable only, In places residents had occupied rock shelters. I spotted a Himalayan fox at one point. Lunch consisted of bread, 2 bantam eggs (VERY lightly boiled) and cold potato. I opted for freshly baked chapatti and green tea. The road continued as before. I think impressive is the word although there were times when terrifying might be more appropriate, rather like an everlasting ride at Alton Towers. We met groups from Exodus and K.E. at this point. Their flights to Skardu had been cancelled due to bad weather, a common occurrence and they had been forced to travel the Highway instead. (K.E. had completed a 24 hour non- stop drive along this route with one driver!) Skardu lies in a wide valley where the river almost becomes a lake. As we drove along the valley it was raining. Surrounded by mountains I wondered how they ever managed to land planes here even when the weather was good. As ever children lined the roads begging us to buy their produce (normally apricots) and I was struck by the site of a poverty stricken young girl barely in her teens dressed in little more than rags trying to shelter from the rain with her naked offspring only a few weeks old. I felt the child's chance of survival was minimal. Our accommodation was in the famous K2 Motel. The rooms and food were excellent we even got chips! Skardu itself is a typical Pakistani town packed with shops selling just about everything and even has its own football and polo ground.

Day 5 saw us on our way at 7am. driving along the unmade jeep track towards Askole some 92k distance. Once again I had to admire the skill of the drivers in their ancient vehicles, normally Jeep Wranglers or Toyota Landcruisers. The first thing I noticed was the complete lack of tread in many cases and on some the canvas ply could be seen!! For some reason, possibly to take on porters, we stopped in the village of Shigar and one teenager in particular was keen to practice his English. He persuaded all his young male relatives to

pose for a photograph and I promised to send him a copy. After 3 hours we stopped for lunch of rice, potato and chappaties in Hydrobad where I used my considerable bartering skills to purchase a very nice head scarf for 40 rupees (about 80p) and a spare pair of glacier specs. for 1000 rupees! (second-hand!) .. the asking price was originally 1500!! Ali continued in his efforts to find sufficient porters. The "road" continued for a further 1 ½ hours until it literally disappeared ... completely submerged, last weeks rain had swept it away. No option, we had to abandon the jeeps and wade. The water was freezing, about thigh deep but rising fast due to the sun melting the nearby glaciers!! It was just like being on the beach with an incoming tide .. except that one slip meant being swept away by the ferocious current with little chance of survival. Three jeeps had been marooned on the far side of the water but demand for them was high so Ali was left to organise transport while we walked the couple of miles to the next village Apoligo to find KE already encamped. The walk took us about 1 ¾ hours so it must have been about 6k. The temperature in the shade was 35C. It was becoming obvious why Chris our leader was recommending drinking 4l. of water a day, not easy when it tastes predominantly of Iodine!! The afternoons entertainment came in the form of a puncture to one of the jeeps which was fixed, in a couple of hours, without tools most of the time being spent arguing.

Eventually a message came from Ali instructing us to make as much forward progress as possible. Unwisely about 7 of us climbed into the back of an "equipment" jeep (previously used for carrying cement!?) since that was all that was available and we had seen the porters travelling in this manner. After a very short distance those in the back, self included, panicked. A seemingly impossible ravine with steep sides blocked our way. "STOP!" we all cried but our pleas went unheeded. "No problem, no problem!" responded our driver as the vehicle lurched over the edge, came to a halt at the bottom (by some miracle still upright!) then elegantly climbed out of the far side. I couldn't believe it! Unfortunately there was more to come. Some of the hairpin bends were so tight they became 3 point turns ... with a sheer drop into the raging torrent below the penalty for a mistake. "Survival chance nil." I thought to myself as we edged along the cliff path. To the driver it was all in a days work, he didn't turn a hair. As we stopped in a stream bed for refreshment (the porters actually drink the muddy water untreated straight from the streams with impunity) I pointed out that Allah only looked after Muslims, the driver simply smiled. We all agreed that the most terrifying part was at a point where the track was so narrow we couldn't hold on to the side rails ... there wasn't room for our fingers between the jeep and the cliff face to our right and to our left barely enough room for the tyres to fit onto the track, a drop of a couple of hundred feet led vertically into the water. If we had broken down there would have been no escape for the occupants of the cab, for once we were glad to be in the back with the gear and dust! As we approached Hoto a section of the track had fallen into the river .. along with the occupants of a jeep on a previous trip!! It soon became apparent why Hoto had been chosen as our stop for the night, the entire suspension bridge had been swept away ... including one of the massive support pillars! A small fleet of marooned jeeps awaited travellers on the far bank. Camp had been set up on a sandy "beach" near to a tent accommodating a gang of road menders, a never ending thankless task not without some personal risk. As usual green tea awaited our arrival. By nightfall we were all assembled but Ali was still short of porters. It was reputed that some of the jeeps had carried 24 porters!!! ..plus kit!! Our first casualty appeared, a young porter with a crushed finger. We were sympathetic and treated him kindly .. we were to soon learn by our mistakes.

Day6. As we breakfasted KE arrived .. they were going to get first crack at the jeeps. Our spirits were soon raised as about 40 porters arrived from heaven knows where. They had walked all night to join us and were sorting out their loads for the rest of the day. Ali's bush telegraph was certainly formidable. Soon everything was packed including our supply of live chickens and we crossed the precarious temporary footbridge which spanned the torrent. The jeep trail led to a bridge which we crossed shortly after which we came across a memorial plaque to Alison Hargreaves. A high level detour took us through the fertile village of Chonga(?) where everyone was extremely friendly and even the girls seemed interested in talking and allowed one of our party to take their photograph. This was not typical and most of them turned away at the site of a camera. The boys were not so shy, just the opposite in fact. Their houses consisted of a hole in the ground over which was built a "second" storey of mud "bricks". The roof was flat and again made of mud supported by timber. There seemed to be dozens of children to each hut and for once girls seemed plentiful. One little boy had a particularly nasty infected wound on his face. An amazing irrigation system supplied water to the village and

crops and this provided our route along a fairly precipitous path back towards the jeep track. Within 3 hours we had reached the village of Thongul (10,000 ft) having passed some sulphur springs reputed to heal just about anything. A noisy discussion was taking place between Ali and the porters, it seemed to revolve around who carried what and for how much. We rested and had lunch of chapattis and mango with green tea. It soon became apparent that close by was the public loo! As we ate we were visited by a village youth who was one chapatti short of a picnic but his talents at theft were soon spotted and he had to be "removed". Practically the entire stretch of road from Thongul to Askole had been swept away and to me looked as though it was well beyond repair, so everything had to be portered along this stretch. The walking time was about 1 ¼ hours and the temperature over 30 C. The final climb to the village was very steep and this led to our camp site on terraces (designed by Doug Scott) in the grounds of the police station, a small two roomed affair with one part-time officer. At least there was a toilet .. a cavernous hole in the ground with little privacy, for some reason the "toilet block" was locked. A constantly running tap completed the picture although the water was pronounced unsafe for Europeans.

Within seconds a young youth of about 12 years appeared with the inevitable box of stones for sale. Jokingly we said that coke would be more appropriate and within minutes he was back with a sackful that we eagerly bought at 50 rupees a bottle. (cost of carriage, he explained.) A while later we located his source .. a tiny "shop" 20 meters away, price 20 rupees!! Green tea with limes was served by the porters. The chickens were let out for a walk before one of them became the evening meal. A porter turned up with a badly cut toe. It looked an old injury to me but he explained through our young trainee sirdar/ interpreter Karim (pronounced Kareem) that it had occurred on the march in. The weather was excellent and looked settled. After dinner two disappointed female French trekkers arrived with their Sirdar and porters. They had returned from an attempt on the Gondogora La, one of our objectives, due to altitude sickness. It had taken them 4 days to cover the distance from Concordia and they were surprised to learn about the state of the road from Skardu, it had been fine on their approach journey. The evening was rounded off with an impromptu concert from the porters.

Day 7.. As usual we were woken by "bed tea" and hot water supplied by the cook team. Ian was looking rough with a touch of Montezumo's Revenge but we got off to an early start (about 7am) in an attempt to avoid the heat of the day. Photography was unpopular with the villagers and was firmly discouraged by local children who threw rocks at anyone producing a camera!! Shortly after leaving the village Ali and the cook caught us up with their latest acquisition, 3 goats. Within minutes of leaving Askole the terrain became very arid and I was reminded what immense effect a little water can have on the vegetation. Having crossed an alarmingly flexible "rope" suspension bridge we eventually reached the moraine at the snout of the Biafo glacier where we camped at a site called Korofong. The journey had taken about 4 hours so after lunch I was asked to set up a course through the boulders and trees so that members could practice the use of security cords since we had a difficult roped section to cross the following day. Once again the river had claimed the easier low level path. Chris had asked me to help him rig this section.

After our evening meal an Austrian group came into camp on their way back from Broad Peak with news that an "Exodus" porter had fallen from the difficult section of path which had not been roped and was seriously injured. A while later the Exodus leader Mike arrived in an attempt to arrange for helicopter evacuation having left two female members of his group who had first aid training with the casualty. Ali didn't hold out much hope .. never in his vast experience had a porter (or even a Sirdar) been air-lifted out. Mike hoped that his company insurance would pick up the tab.

Day 8. Chris and I set off at 5.30 along with Mustaph, a porter who was carrying 37Kg. (Some carried as much as 50Kg for which they receive double pay!) Despite his load I had problems keeping up and his agility on the stepping stones across the river was amazing. I was suitably impressed which I am sure was his intention. The news was that a helicopter was on it's way, Ali looked doubtful. Chris and I rigged the cliff with 2 100m 8mm ropes followed by 2 50m 11mm on the last steep section. I suppose the grade was about Mod. but it was rather exposed and the consequences of a slip didn't bear thinking about. Apparently groups rarely rope this section. The rigging complete Chris went back to supervise the group while I carried on to see what I could do for the casualty.

I reached the casualty at 1115. Talk about small world, Hazel was a member of Buxton Mountain Rescue Team and we later discovered we had been on many previous "shouts" together but never actually met up. (Being a park warden she also had a pathological hatred of mountain bikers!!!) Both Hazel and her daughter Kath were fairly knackered as a result of no sleep, a night spent cramped in a make-shift shelter with the injured man and 4 or 5 of his friends and the responsibility of nursing the sick man. To make matters worse their kit and a tent had arrived at dawn ... the rest of their group had carried on leaving them behind!! I told them to get some kip while I took over for a while. I also told them (optimistically) that a helicopter was on its way.

The porter was delirious and had obvious head injuries. I decided to give him pain killers and dioralyte in an attempt to rehydrate him. I redressed his head wound since his bandages had come off, (this happened several times during the day due to his struggles) His facial injuries although unpleasant to look at, particularly around his eyes, didn't appear to be too serious, apparently he had passed water during the night. My kit, including water bottle, had been left on the climb so the porters made the two girls and myself a cup of.. yes .. green tea. Hazel and Kath had been forced to drink this all night ... unfortunately the only water available was from the river and was high in sediment and heaven knows what else! One mouthful was enough for me, H and K had little choice they were by now quite dehydrated and becoming rather unwell having coped with all the heat, stress, no sleep, no food and little water. Porters started to trickle through, eventually a letter from Mike arrived. He was still hopeful of a helicopter which was by now at least 7 hours overdue. Al, our deputy leader arrived, in his bag he had a water filter which we put to good use and to keep ourselves occupied we cleared a helicopter landing area. The heat got worse as did Hazel and Kath. The tent was like an oven and there was absolutely no shade. (I found out later that the temperature that day reached 43 C. By now our group had gone through and at least fresh water and food had started to trickle back, at about 3.30 a little shade appeared as the sun moved round .. still no helicopter. Believe it or not but in the middle of all this I managed to hold a clinic for a number of porters with fairly trivial injuries. I tried to explain to no avail that I was a teacher (retired) not a doctor. Eventually I hid the medical kit.

On Ali's advice we eventually decided to abandon our casualty. If the helicopter didn't arrive then his only hope was for his companions to carry him out, I didn't fancy his chances. I left them 3 days supply of painkiller, rehydrate and bandages plus written times for their administration. I also left written details for the helicopter should it ever arrive. With Hazel and Kath in tears we set off for our camp site on the other side of the river. Kath had to be strapped into the wooden box on the Jola (a taught wire stretched across the river with a box suspended beneath it.) Our tiny group struggled towards the camp site helped by Chris who had come back to join us. On the way Hazel collapsed and Chris and I had to part carry her across the difficult river side terrain. Not surprisingly Kath was again in tears at the site of her mum. Eventually a group of our porters arrived to help. Once in camp Kath and Hazel were put to bed and I managed to get a meal and to reclaim most of my gear. I had a very restless night.

Day 9. An easy day was planned but we had left the campsite by 0610. Ian was less than 100%, Hazel and Kath had made a remarkable recovery but were having their day packs carried by porters but Al was suffering and having to make regular trips into the boulders. I was feeling tired so plodded on at my own pace somewhere near the back of the group. At one point I took the low level route alongside the river. Footprints led me close to the bank when suddenly the whole section in front of me collapsed into the river! Gingerly I retraced my steps and found a steep but climbable wadi leading up through the unstable cliff of old river sediment. I was thankful to join the others all of whom had taken the more tiring high level route. Lunch was taken in the shade of some stunted bushes, even the goats looked hot as they grabbed whatever shade they could. By now a number of our group had developed the trots so a very short afternoon was planned .. we were still on schedule. By now we were beginning to form relationships with the porters some of whom were very friendly, some less so.

The camp site was idyllic. Situated on a sandy beach with plenty of large boulders and a few bushes for shade it even had a few pools warmed by the sun where one could bathe in relative privacy. Being sited mid-way

between two normal" stages" and little used it was relatively free of turds, the porters refused to use toilets and in the dry/cold atmosphere decomposition was slow. By now my stomach was feeling distinctly uneasy and passing wind caused by the spicy vegetarian diet was becoming increasingly hazardous. The over-dinner conversation centred on the state of ones bowels and terms like "loose" and "eye of a needle" were frequently used. I opted to bivvy out partly because it was hot and partly because it was one less obstacle to overcome should I be in a hurry! I ran my first solo clinic, most of the problems concerned feet (blisters, foot rot, septic cuts.) and were normally caused by the inadequate footwear provided for the porters. Many wore flip flops but some had rubber "trainers" rather like cut-off wellies, some of these I modified with my trusty "Leatherman." There were a few chest and stomach problems too, which rapidly increased as soon as word got round that the new "doctor" was dishing out foil wrapped pills. Later patients received barley sugar sweets! I did attempt to explain that shitting in or near the drinking water was directly related to stomach problems but my advice fell on deaf ears, even when spoken through Karim! Mick arrived towards bedtime (usually well before 8 p.m.) to announce that the injured porter had been helicoptered out and that the UK based insurance company had guaranteed to foot the bill. (This was to later become somewhat of a trend!) Mick decided to push on and catch up with his group and plans were made for the girls to follow next morning. The reasoning for this was that there was a difficult river crossing ahead and the safest time to cross was early morning before the sun got to work on the glacier.

Day 10. I felt like death warmed up!! Up most of the night, repeated visits to the loo, (when I could make it that far!) I assume this is what is meant by being "regular". Most of the others had recovered by now and the general consensus was that judging by my appearance I had got a real dose, probably as a result of my enforced incarceration with the injured porter and his cronies .. either that, or from Hazel and Kath .. or both!! The source appeared irrelevant, I felt as though I was going to die! It was agreed that Faisal should carry my day pack and I, being a true martyr, would just have to struggle on. Faisal by the way, a veteran of many climbing expeditions had served as a high level porter to many famous names, was Jean's private porter, her only concession to being the only female in the party AND to being 73 years old! In reality Jean was incredible. She never held us up once and was frequently at the front of the group with her agility. Her ability to "boulder hop" the moraine or jump crevasses became the stuff legends are made of. Faisal spoke little English which was just as well since Jean was able to talk continuously even when walking uphill at altitude! Faisal simply smiled. Most of the day is a blur but I do remember a couple of river crossings, the second one being by far the worst. Kevin managed to lose 2/3 of one of my trekking poles here ostensibly rescuing a drowning porter .. I couldn't have cared less!! We reached Paiju where Exodus was camped. I couldn't even be bothered to speak to Hazel and Kath, I simply collapsed in the shade of a willow. Food was out of the question but I religiously consumed copious amounts of warm iodine flavoured water containing dioralyte.

My next target was the relatively short walk to the snout of the Baltoro glacier where I expected to have lunch. The path lay high above the river along a dangerous (in my opinion) footpath in imminent danger of collapsing into the river below and beneath overhanging cliffs of ancient river sediment. These consisted of huge boulders loosely held in place by mud, "not a place to linger" I thought as I made the best attempt at hurrying I could in my debilitated condition. I could have cried! I had misunderstood. Lunch was not at the snout of the glacier but at least 2 hours further on! Eventually after clambering over the very difficult moraine I collapsed in a heap using a "tent" made of three camping mats as a source of shade. Again food was out of the question but Ali produced a concoction made up of green tea, salt, sugar and lime which tasted pleasant especially when compared to the contents of my water bottle. 2 1/2 hours later up very steep moraine we reached our camp site at Liligo. (11,700 ft) KE had got the best site but to me they both looked equally dangerous perched beneath cliffs of river sediment similar to the path along the cliff previously described. I was feeling a little better by now and was beginning to enjoy the views of such famous peaks as Trango Tower. Strong winds blew the mess tent away. (I saved ours by diving inside it) Clouds began to appear, we were in for rain. The porters were in for an unpleasant night under their plastic sheets wrapped in a threadbare blanket.

Day 11. A fabulous if short days walk. I felt great covering the five hour walk to Urdukas (12,800 ft) in exactly the time allocated despite the difficult and steep terrain at the start. In addition to lots of boulder

hopping we saw our first white ice. Despite having been on the glacier for two days the surface of the glacier had been covered in rubble torn from the valley sides by the unrelenting flow of ice. The final hour or so was over increasingly hazardous ground as we were to find out later. The views were beyond description. In addition to Trango Tower we now had Masherbrum, Broad Peak and part of the Gasherbrum range in view. On the down side our second goat met his demise at the hands of our cook. The ledges forming the site had been carved out of the hillside by the Duke of Abruzzi's men back in 1909. (Apparently Tillman had constructed the site ledges back at Paiju but you may recall I was well passed caring!) The door of my tent looked out onto Cathedral Peak but there was little time for sightseeing. The afternoon was given over to the use of prussik knots for protection where my skills were once again required since conventional knots refused to work on the 8mm rope so the group were introduced to the Bachman knot.

The porters found our antics most entertaining. I'm not certain what the Urdu is for "Big girl's blouse" or "Nancy boy", they simply "hand over hand" over any problem or more commonly ignore the rope altogether. The accident to their fellow countryman seemed to have had little effect on their attitude towards safety, "something to do with Allah", explained their "climbing porter" cum goatherd Cher (Urdu for Lion) Cher turned out to be a really nice guy, highly intelligent and most interested in learning how to tie my "new" knots. (Bachman Knot, Munter Hitch and Clove Hitch) He was particularly interested in my ultra light jammer and we had an interesting discussion in rigging the Gondogora La. He found my attempts at Urdu particularly amusing.

Ali asked me to make up sit-slings for the cook team, apparently the porters could fend for themselves! As he hadn't got enough tape or krabs I offered to sort them out when the time came. After our climbing discussion Cher went to share out the goat between the porters, it was their day for a meat ration, a noisy affair it was too! It had been a particularly hot afternoon and I was glad to get to bed at 7.30. I didn't sleep well waking up breathless several times (the effect of altitude)

Day 12. I woke up with a nose bleed and feeling very tired both due to altitude and the latter made worse by lack of sleep. We left the site at 5.30, bed tea having been delivered to our tents at about 4. Having passed the graves of some high altitude porters we were quickly onto steep glacial moraine. The views continued to make up for the difficulties underfoot and we reached our predetermined lunch spot after 3 ½ hours. While our cook team prepared lunch I was persuaded to sample a "real" vegetable Balti produced by two anonymous porters on a suitable rock. The meal was scooped directly from the rock using a chapatti cooked over the fire on which they produced their "salt tea". It tasted delicious but I took care only to taste sufficient to be polite. I still had memories of Delhi-belly from a couple of days ago! After lunch we continued over fairly level ground to our campsite at Gore 2 (13,900 ft) The porters attempted to produce level platforms by removing the thin layer of scree, this meant that we camped directly on the ice. It was a gorgeous afternoon so most of us took the opportunity for a good wash and to do some laundry which soon dried. As soon as the sun went down it went VERY cold and we were glad to get into our down bags by 7. I heard several avalanches during the night.

Day 13. It could have been a Winters day in a Llanberis slate quarry! 2 C inside the tent, low cloud and rain outside. The porters were less than enthusiastic at the prospect of getting out of their bivvies and I can't say I blame them. We finally left the site at 7 am walking through fine rain which gradually turned to sleet. We finally arrived at Concordia (throne room to the gods.) reputed to be the finest place on earth. It was foul and I sat in the mess tent as the porters struggled to level platforms and put up tents. It was so unpleasant outside that our evening meal (goat) was allowed into the mess tent to shelter. The views of K2 etc. were purely imaginary since nothing was visible except for the glacial moraine covering the icy surface of the glacier. During the afternoon the weather improved a little and a session on the ice was planned for those unfamiliar with walking in crampons. (Being naturally bow-legged I've never had much problem adopting the required stance!)

My clinic in the evening consisted of tooth ache, back pain and a case of incontinence in addition to the usual foot injuries. Ali warned us to be on the lookout for malingerers as the prospect of crossing Gondogora La

(pass) got ever nearer. I felt sorry for the Exodus group who had decided to leave in the morning, a day early, without even a glimpse of K2. Rumours were that the road out had deteriorated even further. We learned that one of the KE team had been flown out with altitude sickness. Rick Allen (a notorious Scottish climber) turned up briefly looking for porters. He introduced himself as 1/2 of the Scottish/Australian Broad Peak Expedition. Bad weather had forced their retreat from attempting to put up a new route on the mountain. Rick was off home and his partner was planning to solo the "easy" route! He was less than optimistic about our chances of crossing the pass. Four of us decided to make an attempt to reach the base camps of Broad Peak and hopefully K2 the following morning and a 5 am start was planned. Dinner consisted of the inevitable goat, the thought of which gave me indigestion!

Day 14. I might have guessed. 5 am, freezing cold with sleet. Why do I get talked into these things? Martin took one look at the weather and went back to bed. Andy and I were about to do the same but were persuaded not to by little Pete who remained dead keen. Eventually we left at 7 with the idea of heading for Broad Peak base camp but turning back if the weather didn't improve. Route finding through the ice field was difficult with deep crevasses everywhere, but with Cher leading the way the problem was soon overcome. Feeling sorry for me Cher took my rucksack and with him leading we covered the distance to Broad Peak Base camp in 2 1/4 hours despite the foul weather. Even Cher eventually had to put on his waterproof, a polythene cape provided by "the company." The Spanish residents made us really welcome but were less than complimentary about my attempts at Spanish! (We were well over 15,000 ft and my brain was struggling to cope with English let alone Urdu and Spanish!) Cher disappeared into the cook tent and I was treated to cheese, coffee, and toast and jam in the mess tent. The Spaniards had 9 days left but the weather outlook was not good. They were considering a strategic withdrawal. Rick's mate was somewhere up on the face! After 1/2 an hour Andy arrived followed by Pete 3/4 of an hour after that. Pete indicated that he had had enough and would return with Cher. Following a brief discussion with an American team also on Broad Peak Andy and I decided to continue with Faisal and Karim.

The weather and terrain improved and one hour later we reached the Japanese K2 base camp. I was hoping to make a phone call home (via satellite) but authorisation was required from the expedition leader who had flown back to Skardu with yet another casualty, a girl climber with a broken arm. However I did manage a glimpse inside their communications tent which was very impressive, the Japs. certainly don't do things by halves!

By now the weather was excellent so Andy and I were happy to eat in the sun while Faisal chatted to his cronies in the cook tent. Wherever we went Faisal seemed to know everyone, Karim kept us supplied with mugs of tea. During our stay we met 2 of the 4 Nepalese Sherpas who were now Everest and K2 summiteers. We were suitably impressed, shook hands, took their photographs and received a tin of biscuits as a gift. Desperate to return the compliment we gave them the remains of our lunch in return, curried vegetable chapattis. Leaving Faisal and Karim with their friends Andy and I set off back to Broad Peak Base Camp where I presented the Spaniards with a gift (A tin of biscuits!) for their hospitality on our way up. Easy come .. easy go is the appropriate expression I believe. As soon as Faisal and Karim had caught us up we set off for Concordia. Despite being slightly downhill all the way it took us over 3 hours in bitterly cold deteriorating weather conditions and to cap it all Faisal managed to get us got lost in the ice field. The round trip had taken us over 10 hours.

Ali was not optimistic about our chances of crossing the Gondogora La. "Paiju is smoking." He said pointing to the clouds streaming from the summit of the distant peak, not a good sign apparently.

Day 15. We woke up to a bitterly cold day with light snow falling. There was much deliberation and eventually it was decided that we should wait a further day before committing ourselves to crossing the pass. Tomorrow was the big day, we had to move up to Ali Camp or abandon the idea altogether. Rick Allen appeared again still looking for porters since his were stuck on the other side of Gondogora La and he felt they would be unable to join him. The weather improved during the morning and we got some superb views of the peaks around us including K2. We also had a session of "walking while roped together" over the

nearby hummocks of ice. After lunch the snow began again and a group of Japanese trekkers arrived. Paiju was still smoking and Ali wore a frown.

Day 16. Again I had experienced breathlessness during the night and woke with the inevitable nose bleed. In addition an emergency to the loo was called for "not again" I thought. Thankfully the weather was good and we set off for Ali Camp first off all across difficult moraine and then up the Upper Baltoro which was fairly level at this point. Since the glacier was "dry", roping up was deemed unnecessary. After 2 hours the weather began to deteriorate again. We passed a small group of porters heading in the opposite direction looking for Rick Allen. At least the La was passable. It was getting bitterly cold and visibility was poor, views of the Gasherbrum range and of Chogolisa were completely obscured. Eventually the glacier became too dangerous for further progress and for the last hour of the journey we had to take to the lateral moraine which proved difficult and extremely tiring. Ali Camp lay on a large shelf at the edge of a massive rock fall at 16,700ft. It was bitterly cold, Gasherbrum 1 and 3 were just about visible. A young porter dressed in a wet shell suit, his feet clad in rubber trainers asked me if I had a coat to spare. I was wearing everything I possessed. It was every man for himself and anyway all the other porters were in the same boat. As I went to bed it was cold and windy but at least visibility was good and it had stopped snowing, "Bed tea" was due at midnight.

Day 17. 1210 am. Cold but at least the weather is good. We ate breakfast in silence as we waited for the off. As we emerged we couldn't believe our eyes, at least 6" of snow had fallen and it was still snowing hard. The porters had taken the tents down so our only refuge was on the floor of the mess tent. After 4 freezing hours just lying there we decided retreat was the only answer. Even if it stopped snowing now and if visibility did improve the danger of avalanche would remain for at least a day or two. If visibility remained poor the danger of crossing the wrong pass was very real and the passes either side of ours were described as "technical" i.e. hazardous. We set off down over the difficult boulder pile made even worse by the fall of fresh snow, we all felt bitterly disappointed but knew there was no safe alternative.

I was close to the rear of the group when, just prior to stepping onto the glacier when Ichbar, Ali's son collapsed in front of me. I used my whistle to signal Chris, my six short blasts were followed by the standard three in reply. The assistant cook somehow got the boy onto the glacier and porters manhandled him to the rest of the group who were huddling together in the worsening weather. Things were not looking good. Chris examined the patient who was writhing in pain, shivering violently and moaning in agony. "Appendicitis, kidney stones?" thought Chris. Helicopter rescue was out of the question in this weather. I began constructing a sked stretcher out of a couple of heavy duty camping mats and about 20m of rope cut from the 100m we had, an ice screw proved to be remarkably useful as a "drill". The majority of porters and all the remaining Europeans were despatched on their way. Porters poles were used to improve the towing harness and with my down jacket as a pillow the casualty was bundled inside a sleeping bag and sealed inside a goretex exposure bag. I must confess to being slightly chuffed with my handiwork, the porters were obviously impressed and Ali very grateful. The group set off, I prayed the damn thing would work and not drop to bits at the first obstacle. "We could do with these guys in the CRO." I thought as Chris and I struggled to keep up. Pulling a loaded stretcher plus carrying over 30K seemed to make little difference to their rapid progress.

After a couple of hours Ichbar seemed to improve and Ali insisted on Chris and I joining the rest of the group while he struggled on with a handful of porters. It seemed an age before we made it to Concordia, thankfully tea was ready when we did. Ali's instructions were to continue down the glacier to Gore, he would leave his son at the army base situated at Concordia. A helicopter was out of the question he said, Walji's wouldn't pay the fee for him let alone a lowly assistant, even if it was his son. Chris did consider overruling him, helicopter rescues were becoming fashionable.

As we left Concordia for Gore 1 we could see the rescue party had just reached the far side of the glacial moraine. My DIY stretcher had no chance amongst the sharp boulders in this final stretch. I hadn't noticed before... all the porters had brand new sunglasses with a label stuck over one eye. Apparently the manufacturers label was left in place to increase their resale value on completion of the expedition!

Sitting in the sun at Gore 2 was very pleasant but as soon as a cloud obscured the sun the temperature plummeted. Avalanches regularly occurred from the surrounding peaks, we had definitely made the right decision. Surprisingly Ali arrived just before dark with his son.

Day 18. Another double stage today, at least it wasn't too hot and we were gradually losing altitude. Lunch consisted of Hunza chapattis (rather like oatcakes and cheese), they were delicious. Despite the warm weather Ichbar wore a fleece and down jacket with the hood pulled up, as a concession his load was carried for him. The moraine went on for ever and we passed hundreds of porters with their clients heading up to Concordia, some hoping to cross the Gondogora La. I distinctly remember passing groups of Italians and a German couple on their way up. We passed a Japanese trekker in a bad way with altitude sickness. He lapsed into semi-consciousness as I tried to talk to him, I left him with his porters. We shared our camp site with a French group, the Japs. were camping not far away. As night fell their altitude victim was carried into camp. Jean managed to produce ½ bottle of whisky from somewhere, she had been saving it to celebrate our crossing of the pass but had decided to put it to good use now. Ali and the cook team, being Muslim, don't drink alcohol but since they classified this as "Hunza water" it was deemed OK (Hunza is the region from which many of the porters, including Ali originate.) A card school consisting of Europeans and porters went on until quite late.

Day 19. Bed tea at 4.30, depart at 6. Yet another double stage, our third in a row! Just after we set off we found that the path used on our ascent had disappeared completely into a large gaping crevasse, a reminder that a glacier is a moving "living" thing. Further on a large landslip again obliterated the route. A precipitous path with precarious holds in places took us along the cliff face above the glacier avoiding the worst of the moraine. In 2 hours we reached Liligo with its cliff backdrop looking as dodgy as ever. Scrambling back onto the glacier we climbed an arete of ice covered in small scree. 2 hours later we reached the snout of the Baltoro Glacier.

The route to Paiju was easier than on our incoming journey due to a dramatic fall in water levels but Chris did decide to protect one particularly difficult section with a handline. As we approached Paiju I got a slap on the wrist for daring to photograph supplies being dropped to the army base on the opposite side of the river. We had lunch in Paiju, Hunza chapattis again and I managed to purchase 3 large bottles of Coke for the princely sum of 600 rupees. (about £10.) Again the path was made easier by falling water levels. We passed a group of Australians on route to Paiju to summon a helicopter. One of their group had taken a fall into the river and required hospitalisation, a paramedic had temporarily stitched the wound. We arrived at Bardumel, my favourite site, at 3 p.m. after a 9 hour day. Most of us took the opportunity for a good wash and to do some laundry. After dinner the porters challenged us to a tug-o-war which they won. Even Ali later admitted that he was unsure how many were on their team since the end of their rope disappeared suspiciously into the bushes! The night was fine and warm so I took the opportunity to bivvy out again.

Day 20. We left Bardumel at 0640, again a double stage was planned. Low water levels allowed us to use an easier path at river level but caution was called for since undercutting by the river rendered it unsafe in places, the overhanging cliffs of river sediment also added to the hazards. In places our incoming route had vanished into the river or was buried under tons of rock. It was noticeable that our porters were becoming increasingly friendly and helpful as Baksheesh (tip) time approached! Lunch was taken just before the Jola. Chris and I left early to rig the route over the cliff but the task had been almost completed when we got there by Cher. Perhaps the belays weren't up to SPSA standards but most of them were adequate with a little fine tuning here and there. On our way to the crag it was interesting to watch the antics of the porters who would load the Jola to maximum capacity then hang precariously to the outside for the crossing.

The "path" across the cliff is best described as "interesting". Groups were heading in both directions and many of the porters considered it unmanly to use the ropes even when there was loose rock about or the holds were polished. No doubt Allah would see them right. A further 1 ½ hours saw us back at the camp site at Korophon, I think we were all suitably knackered after our 10 hour stint.

Day 21. A relatively easy 4 hour stage to Askole the road head. News had filtered through that miraculously the stretch between Askole and Thongul had been repaired. Just after crossing the suspension bridge I met Des Marshall, small world! Lots of groups continued to head up towards Concordia, I hoped they would have better luck than we did. I could no longer see whether or not Paiju was smoking. In Askole repeated request came for "one pen give" What use a pen is I don't know, paper is in short supply and the schools apparently use slates. Chris managed to trade ½ a packet of biscuits for as many fresh peas as we could carry, a pleasant change to our diet. We podded and ate the peas as we walked. It was true, we could hardly believe our eyes, jeeps were getting through to Askole. Unfortunately none were available for us so after lunch we walked the few K into Thongul, hard work in 38 C. Over lunch Ali complained of a head ache. He had been trying to calculate the porters wages. No way would he take aspirin "made in India" and a suitable alternative had to be found manufactured elsewhere!

Once in Thongul we had to say goodbye to our porters who were paid off. As usual they never seem happy with their baksheesh. A pile of our discarded clothing was distributed by our head porter but not until after the cook team had had their pick. Most of them were immediately recruited by groups heading in the direction of Concordia, apparently there was a drastic shortage of porters and some groups had been marooned for several days. Needless to say wages had doubled!

Our jeeps arrived and Al rejected one of them straight away .. we could see the inner core of the tyre! We set off in a cloud of dust rather like one sees in an old western film. Unfortunately we were soon brought to a halt as yet again the road had been swept away. Fortunately all the drivers managed to negotiate the obstacle although many of the passengers were less than happy. A couple of K later we came across carpenters making a new bridge to replace the one swept away on our incoming journey. A temporary structure spanned the torrent .. and a jeep was well and truly stuck in the middle. Stripped to the waste numerous bodies leapt in to help and soon it was back on solid ground. How it and those helping were not swept away I shall never know but they all seemed to enjoy the fun. We all opted out of crossing the river in the jeeps and the temporary footbridge was blocked by two young boys demanding money for crossing" their" bridge, Ali soon sent them packing. Once across the journey seemed uneventful despite the nature of the track. Were we simply tired or had our senses simply gone into overload? Finally as night fell we reached our campsite within the grounds of a government guest house where the cook bought a chicken off the guardian. For once we put up the tents while the cook team prepared the meal. After all most of the porters had been dismissed and once again Ichbar was distinctly unwell.

Day22. We left at 7 am in high winds. Ichbar looked awful having come out in a vivid rash. It was 3 ½ hours driving time to Skardu and the road was improving all the time, even the part washed away had been replaced. A couple of coke stops were called for and as usual women were apparent working in the fields while the men looked on. Occasionally some of the younger girls glanced in our direction, some even waved but only when males were absent. Women accompanied by their husbands always turned their backs towards us.

Several stops for minor repairs were needed but generally we made good time, the group of jeeps reminding me of a "Mad Max" film. As we approached Skardu the valley widened and the river took on the appearance of a lake. The last 5K of the road was tarmaced. The K2 motel was a welcome site as were the excellent lunch and the showers. The rest of the day we spent shopping around the town, particularly its small bazaar. Just about anything is available and just to prove it I bought a Petzl Stop!

Day23. As expected it was chaos at Skardu airport with security totally ineffective. The runway is completely surrounded by mountains causing the pilot to circle repeatedly in order to escape. Needless to state, nerves of steel are required and one can easily see why flights are more often than not cancelled. The pilot gave us a running commentary on the progress of our journey "on your left you will see Nanga Parbat" and so on, he even invited some of our group into the cockpit of the 737. We landed in Islamabad within the hour .. a

journey that had taken two whole days on our outward journey. The city was as hot and humid as I expected but at least the terminal was less crowded than the international arrivals.

Day 24 . In order to fill the day several of us took a taxi to tour the ancient city of Taxilla. Certainly very interesting for those into ancient history but it was incredibly hot and the guides are NEVER satisfied with their baksheesh. Those selling "genuine" antiques are also a pain to get rid of and wont take no for an answer. The irrigation ditches were full of children and youths swimming in the cold water. The closest I saw girls get was when they came to collect water for the household, what a pity they couldn't join in the fun.

In the afternoon several of us caught a taxi to the famous Raj bazaar, it was incredible. The main street is packed with people and vehicles. The only thing on them guaranteed to work is the horn which is sounded incessantly. Down each side of the street runs an open ditch/sewer carrying water and effluent that defies description. Arcades and little allies no more then 2m wide lead off this street and these are packed with hundreds of tiny shops measuring in many cases no more than 3m by 2m selling everything from false teeth to live animals and tractor gear boxes. The animals are of course slaughtered on the spot and the evidence litters the pavement and shop floor, often the remains of say a goat or chicken end up in the "stream" running either side of the main road. I also saw this same stream being used as a urinal and for rinsing cups for use in one of the many tea-houses.

Evening was spent having a Chinese meal cooked in a very upmarket Pakistani restaurant, a passable affair but they hadn't got the cuisine quite right. We finished the night off with a few bottles of Hunza Water obtained by Ali.

Day 25 An early departure in the pouring rain to the airport where as usual chaos reigned, I dont know how they ever get anything off the ground at all. On the flight we watched the same home made video repeatedly until someone decided to change the tape for "Evita" ... unfortunately without sound since none of the headsets worked.

JRJ. AUG., 97.

FOR SALE.

Rugby Tops, Sweat shirts with club logo. £9.00

Goretex bivvy bags. £40.00

Petzl Stop. (brand new) £ 23.

Mark Wilson (ex. member now living in Oman) has left his caving gear with Ralph to sell in aid of club funds. It includes a Petzl carbide/electric light(old model) with Fisma generator, Pigtail rack and undersuit. Anyone wishing to make a serious offer should see Ralph. Apparently there are caves in Oman which is a "friendly" Arab state. Contact Ralph if you are interested in visiting.

STOP PRESS. Lathkill upper entrance is locked at present due to access problems. Please be patient.

By the time you read this Holme Bank Chert Mine should have a new gate.(courtesy Nigel et al.)

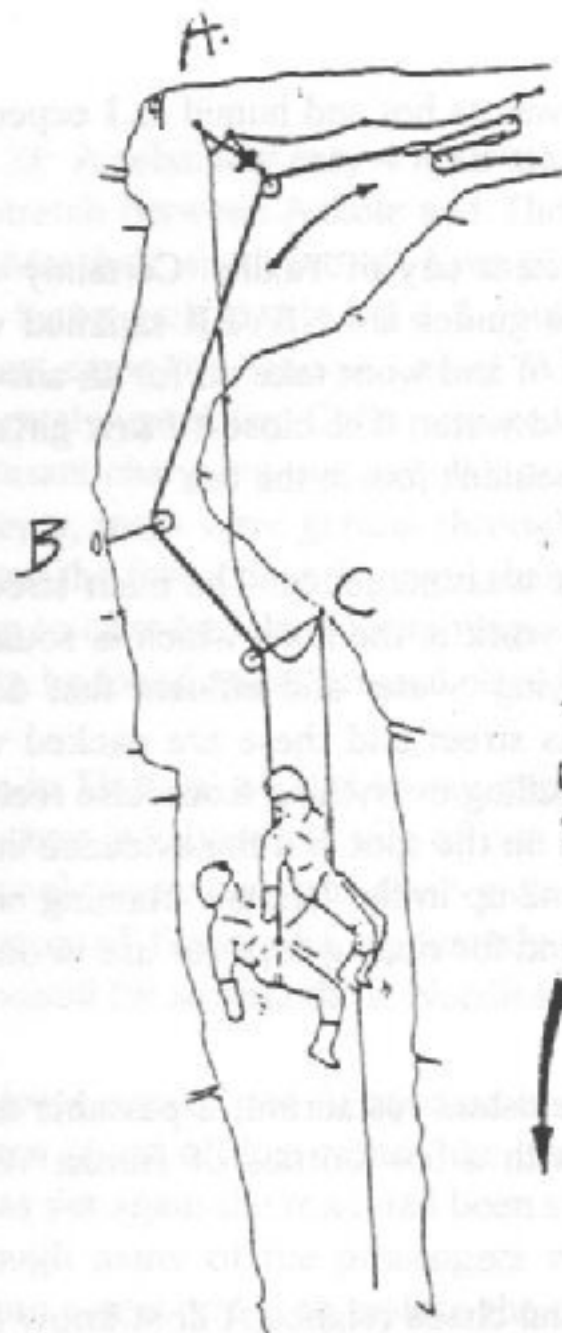
Oxlow Caverns may be "on the move" again.

"New" caves now bolted with "Eco" hangers; Ireby,GG(mainshaft), Deaths Head, Box Head, Gavel, Marble Steps(all routes), County (first pitch)

Several farmers have offered to sell laminated guides. Profits are in aid of DCRO.

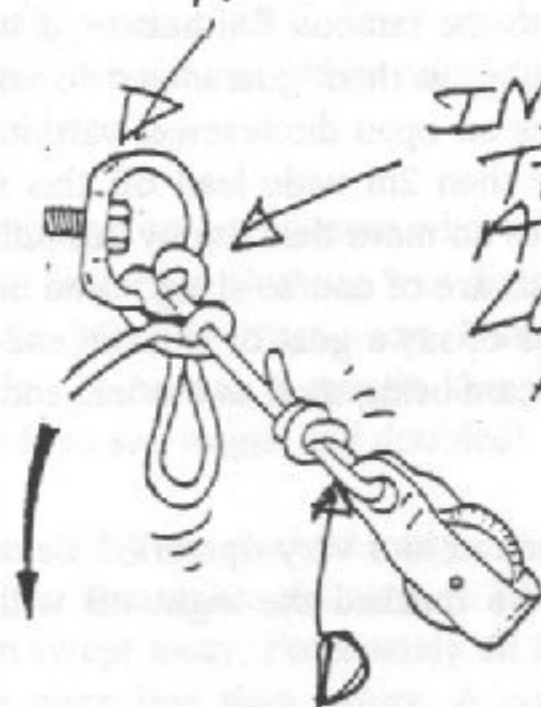
Volunteers required.

Oxlow (slope and second pitch) and Nettle Pot are still in need of bolting. If you feel like volunteering don't be shy.



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