

THE GWYDYR No17 (APR2011)

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB



The old shooting lodge on Denbigh Moors

Thanks to Chris Harris for the above picture taken in 1974, the lodge was and still is a familiar though increasingly diminishing landmark on the drive over Denbigh Moors. Do any other members have such photographs as these of places familiar to us now but which were so different many years ago ?

I've got some pictures somewhere of the old slate quarries behind Llanberis which were used during the Second World War to store art from the National Gallery. I remember the signs on the wall saying there would a fine of two shillings for spitting ! The old railway lines were intact as were the platforms and storage bunkers, I'll try to find them for the next issue !

Wow, what a gorgeous start to the spring we are having ☺ !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

If it's like this all summer we can have no complaints and let's be thankful there is so much to do.

First things first though is that Andy Chapman has sent the following email to me from Everest Base Camp :-

Hi Alan

Thank for the email glad that Wales is good for climbing there is many good new or rediscovered lines in Wales now.

I have not had many emails from GMC people but then I can't email anyone out because I have not got an address with me at base.

so this is the story, we have been above 5000 m for 2 weeks now and mostly its becoming easier, yesterday we descend from camp one at top of the ice fall, I lead the trip to camp one as David Hamilton had a cold we climbed the ice fall in 6 hrs and had a very cold and windy night at 6100m camp one, this is usually as the wind was blowing into the western cwm, anyhow at 6 am yesterday 20th April we set off down, it was a biting wind and very cold, this year I am told the ice fall is not too bad with only one big crevasse ladder bridge of 3 ladders tied together. the fixed line is mostly in case you trip over and to make the way as it's a mine field of navigation I did not need the Jumar for ascent to camp 1.

The next stage is the Sherpa's are building camp 2 near SW face and we go again on Saturday to C1 then C2 for two nights. we have all tents for C3 and south col at C2 now and the plan weather permitting is to sleep at C3 on oxygen around 2-3-4th may by this time we hope to have all Oxygen around 90 cylinders and tents on the col for the attempt.

we have had a big leaders meeting with other teams to sort out rope fixing and generally avoiding events of 1996, the plan is to have 8000 m which amounts to around 32 loads of rope from C2 with aballock off threads on Lhotse face as ice screws melt out and a thin rope leading from the col just to follow. we have a Sherpa on the team Mimgma he has been on my Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam trip the 2nd time he summited Everest was 10th may 96 so far he has 15 summits, and K2. Our Sherpa team is recognized as the strongest on the mountain even the Americans say that.

we are possible looking at an ascent around mid May onwards depending on the jet stream moving, but the base is quiet comfortable with DVD film nights email access books and daily social visits from the two female Dr at eth Everest clinic, they are closest camp and they pop in for coffee and to play scrabble with some very interesting words... I not heard words like that on channel 5!

Anyhow that's what is happening with the Jagged Globe Everest expedition, over on Makalu I believe the team are at ABC 5700m but I guess you will have more idea as we have a seen receive system and not at internet connection.

So hope to hear from you in due course
Andrew

I think Andy would like to hear from a few GMC members to wish him luck on the big push come mid-May. Andy's email address is : chapman@jaggedglobe.uuplus.net so if you get a chance drop him a line.

Well many members have been out this past month partaking in various activities ranging from Canoeing on Lake Derwent in the Lakes (John & Christy) and Cycling around Cheshire (Chris, Margaret & Graham). I've done a bit of cycling this month as well and while nothing exciting it is has confirmed to me that to cycle out to the Chapel and back later this month would be nothing short of foolish and probably quite painful too !

Mike McEneaney went for a walk on the canal from Chester to Tatton Park, in preparation no doubt for his popular Thursday walks.

On the 10th April Andy Odger, Phil Earl, Neil Metcalfe and his friend Sam together with Me and my Daughter Hollie had a lovely day at Llangollen and Trevor Rocks. Hollie and I left the climbers in Llangollen to visit a cafe and ensure Hollie kept her ice cream quota for the weekend intact. We then walked up to Castell Dinas Bran to join the climbers at Trevor Rocks under a blazing sun. It proved to be a relaxed affair with climbing on the right side of stressful and Hollie didn't seem to get too bored by it all.



Hollie @ Llangollen Station



A thirsty girl !!



Hollie seeking shade ☺



Phil, Neil & Sam

Dave Gray took the notes on the following Tuesday evening and I re-produce them here :-

My own and Helen Avison's successful mini base pack and bothy trips in the Western Cairngorms (Glen Feshie). We did in aggregate two munro's and two munro tops, and had some fantastic views in what was a pretty mixed few days weather-wise.

A trip – sorry I can't read my own writing – up Tryfan by Heather Terrace. Two people.

Two canal walks – Katie's epic traverse of the Oxford Canal, Sylvia and Maria on the Lancs Canal near Garstang

Mike Davies' walk in the Peckforton Hills from Tarporley

A major circular cycle trip by Geoff B around the Wirral Cycle Loop.

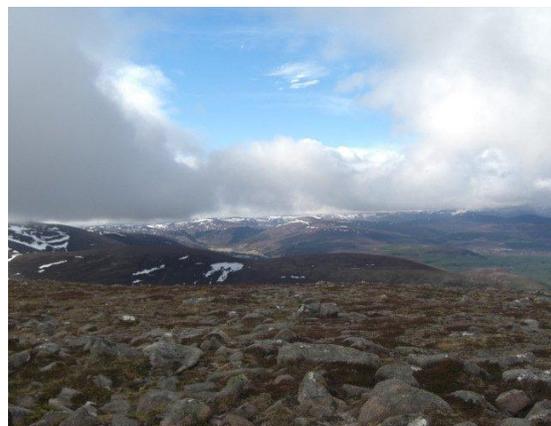
I have taken the liberty (sorry Helen !) of uploading a few of Helen Avison pictures from her Facebook page of the Bothy extravaganza



A picture paints a thousand words ☺



The Bothy !



A couple of snowy mountains



An old SAS saying.... never be more than an arms length away from your noodles



Apparently there were 3 river crossings just to get to the bothy

On Thursday 14th April 2011 Mike Mc had the first of his popular Thursday walks with six members in total enjoying a sojourn up Conwy Mountain and a refreshing pint in the delightful and perfectly named Liverpool Arms rounded off a really good day.

The following weekend saw yours truly (Saturday) on Milestone Buttress, Cregiau Dena, Tryfan's West Face, Bochlywd Buttress and the Idwal slabs, mostly climbing and scrambling, I managed six routes in total under a scorching sky – and I found some gear too. Ronnie and Geoff attempted to walk from the Chapel to Beddgelert but sadly from the summit of Moel Siabod they followed the wrong fence (!!) and had to end the walk early near to Llyn Dinas for fear of missing the last bus back to Capel Curig. On the Sunday I had a superb day wandering around the Llanberis slate quarries looking at and admiring the impressive workings and huge structures / inclines, all made by the hand of man. It was a boiling day and was one of those days where just being outside was all that mattered.



Serengeti Slab, the climbing bits are in the sun



Anglesey Barracks, where the workmen lived 6 days out of 7, Sunday they could go home to Chapel



This Slate wall is over fifty feet high & 2000ft up



Snowdon & Llyn Peris from the quarries

Also on the Sunday Keith Colwell had his walk near Llangollen covering 11 miles and some 2600ft of ascent. John & Christy also went for a walk in the Cheshire countryside and were chased by some cows !

The Easter weekend was a quiet affair this year (for me at least) and it's good to see Andy Odger back out on the rock again (finding his MOJO !) and together with Phil Earl he climbed Pinnacle Ridge Route on Braich Ty Du.



Phil & Andy – Brothers in Arms !



Phil on the delightful Pinnacles

Lin & Paul Jensen were also having fun on a rather long bike ride and Lin has kindly put the following together.

14-19 April 2011

'Coast and Castles' (South)

Sustrans Route 1 - Newcastle to Edinburgh.

The adventure started the day before when we drove up to Heather's in Rowlands Gill (about 10 miles from Newcastle.) She had kindly agreed to house our car for the duration which was a huge bonus. Thanks Heather.

The route was packed with historical and cultural interest; imposing castles, ruined abbeys and majestic bridges together with dramatic seascapes, rolling hills and huge forests. We were 'oohing and 'aahing' with every turn of the pedals.

We managed to split it into six days; three days up the coast to Berwick on Tweed, then three days inland following the river Tweed before finally turning north over the Moorfoot Hills into Edinburgh. There was so much to see and do on route we were not prepared to cycle like maniacs just to say we'd done it in so many days!

Day one was extremely memorable as after only 10 miles whilst cycling over the Millennium Bridge in Newcastle my saddle rail snapped! Then, to add injury to insult, whilst trying to locate a bike shop, we cycled down a road which was being resurfaced and I fell off!! What a start! I'm glad to say it was the only mishap and I managed to buy an identical saddle. In fact, the day turned out to be a cracker and we completed 54 miles, overnighting in Amble.

Other days ranged from 30-40 miles depending on how many castles and abbeys we wanted to explore; Dunstanburgh, Bamburgh, Norham, Melrose and Kelso to name but a few.

The quality of the actual surfaces also varied hugely; paved promenades, cinder tracks, quiet lanes and remote B roads. Surprisingly our toughest day was actually the shortest having to cycle over rutted tracks and fields into Berwick. Not easy with full panniers!

From the onset I had been angsty about the final day into Edinburgh from Innerleithen. This involved a beautiful B road over the Moorfoot Hills. My concern was the 900m of ascent! However my fears were unfounded as the gradient was very gradual over a distance of 12 miles and I managed with no 'get offs'.

I had pre-booked most of our accommodation and on reflection was glad I did this; at least there was no hassle at the end of the day trying to track down a place to stay. We used a mixture of B&B's, hostels and a wooden wigwam on a superb campsite at Seahouses. We finished the holiday with two nights in Edinburgh where we enjoyed some sightseeing and a lot of eating and drinking!

Stats for the trip were 233 miles and 3700m of ascent.

I don't mind admitting I'm dead chuffed! Yes, we did have brilliant weather, no rain at all and yes, we did do some preparation before the trip. However, none of this would have been possible without the patience and support from Paul who, as ever, encouraged me every mile of the way. Thanks mate it was fab!





The May Day bank holiday was a day longer this year due to the royal wedding and the weather has continued to remain fine. Allan, Mark & Ronnie went to the Chapel and we had some good climbing on the slate quarries above Llanberis and Bochlwyd Buttress.



Ronnie on Equinox in Bus Stop Quarry



Mark on Seamstress in Serengeti Quarry



Ronnie leading Arete & Slab



Mark leading on beginners slab

On the Saturday we were joined by Andy Odger and prospective member Fiona Langton who was keen to give this climbing lark a go. The winds were quite strong and for once the Moelwyns were not as sheltered as the usually are and so we only managed one route each in the buffeting winds. Mark & Ronnie climbed Slack while Andy and I took Fiona up Chic for her first ever climb.



Andy & Fiona half way up Chic



Andy & Fiona nearing the top of Chic

The next day we went to Little Tryfan, apart from Andy who went back to the Moelwyns with Neil Metcalfe, Phil Earl & Kevin McEvoy where the winds proved just as strong as the day before though at least Little Tryfan was sheltered somewhat from the annoying winds blowing from the East.



Little (not so !) Tryfan



The two Buddha's in their cave :-O

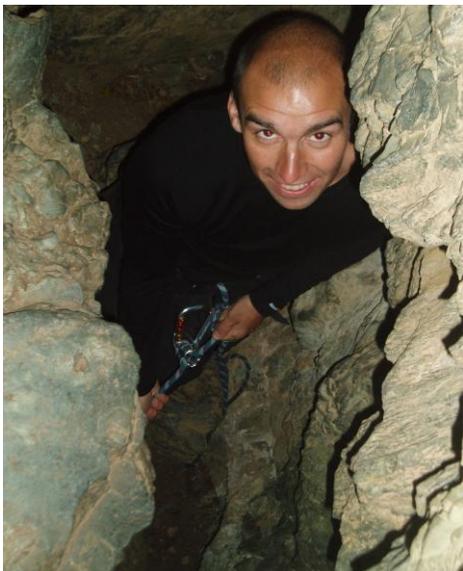
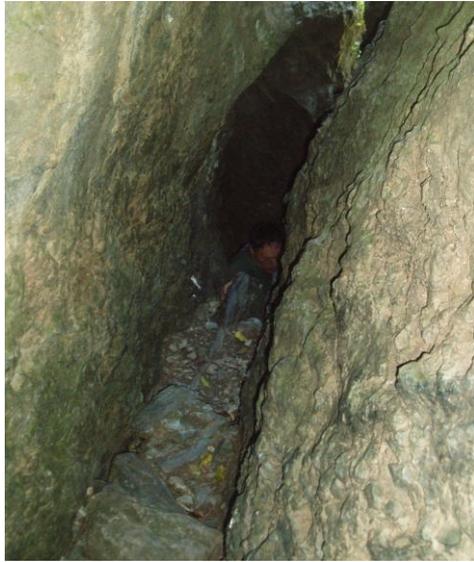
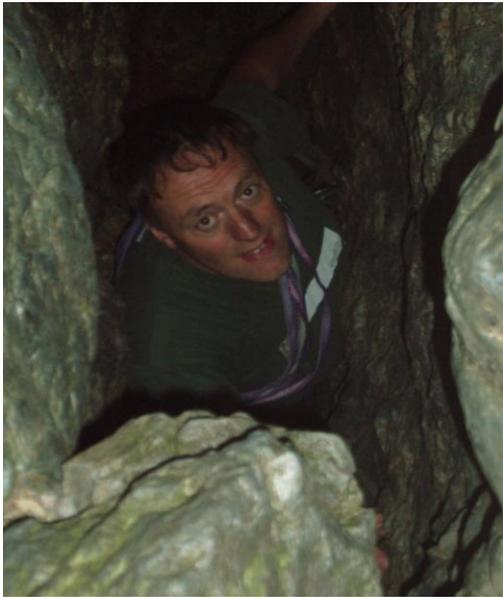
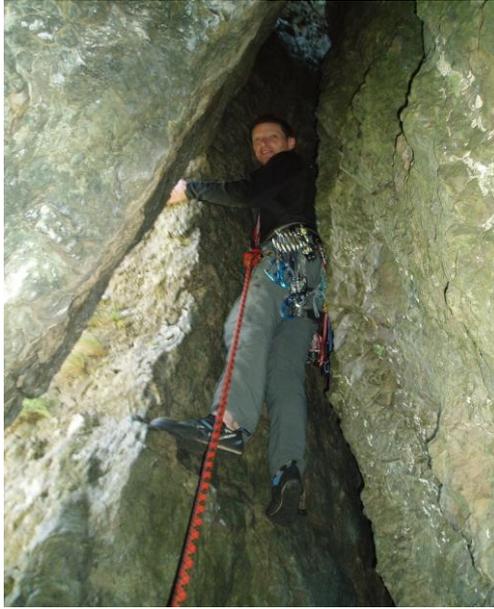
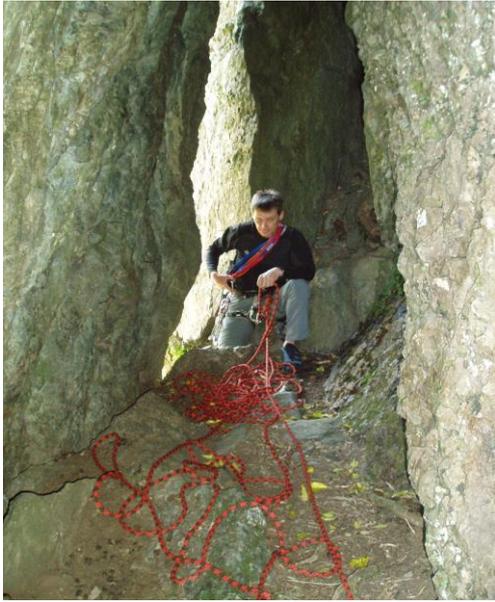


Fiona smiling her way up Little Tryfan ☺

After Fiona had gone home we were joined by Neil Metcalfe who seemed keen to up the ante somewhat and several beers and much playing of pool in the Pont Y Pair Hotel in Betws Y Coed saw a merry bunch back at the Chapel for some food. Neil had nothing to eat and so I cooked some Spelt and Pouting fish which had him in raptures of delight – so much so that he kissed Ronnie and Mark in a ‘really love you man’ moment of weakness !!!!

For some inexplicable reason Mark (who does not drink BTW) drove us to the British Legion in Llanrwst for more entertainment. Mark danced like a madman to a woeful two piece band while Neil and I took a seat and drank beer. We got chatting to a lovely girl (who thought both Neil and I looked ten years younger than we really are !) who told us her life story and how scouser’s are scaly thieves. I felt a strong desire to defend and uphold the honour of my home city and so I pinched her mobile phone when she was not looking (I gave it back btw ☺). She also informed us that we were sitting in the ‘Gay Corner’ of the legion and it then dawned on us that a lot of the women near to us were rather ‘butch’ though thankfully the evening was drawing to a close and we went home getting back to the Chapel at 1.30am after a long day.

Our last day dawned with a late start and Neil and I thought that such a day (the wind was even stronger than the day before) would be an ideal one to introduce Mark & Ronnie to the delights of Lockwood’s Chimney. For those unfamiliar with the climb it essentially consists of a long thin chimney cum cave pitch of about 100ft length. It is quite tight in places and for anyone of above average girth it can be a grim place. Much laughter and struggling saw us all at the top with Ronnie particularly finding it a struggle with language and expletives as blue as the sky ☺



We were not the only ones who were out in the hills and Chris Harris sent me the following about his and Janet's preparation for the GR20 later this year :-

GR20 – The Dry Run

Janet and I went up to the Lakes on the Monday before Easter for two or three nights backpacking and camping to test ourselves and our equipment in readiness for the Corsica GR20 3 week trek in June. We have not camped for 30 years and have never backpacked in our lives so it seemed a good idea to practice before the real thing in June.

Day 1: We set off at midday, in the sunshine, for Helm Crag, Gibson Knott, Greenup edge and then down Greenup Gill to Rosthwaite, 10 miles and 2750 ft ascent. Two more Wainwrights in the bag, we would have liked to throw in Eagle Crag but it was a bit late and we didn't want to miss the food at the pub. Katie and her friend should have been walking with us but due to some changes she would be setting off later – she actually started after 5pm ! First night camp should have been at the Stonethwaite site handy for the Landstrath Country Inn where we intended to dine that night. Problem: pub closed Mondays ! The bar at the Scafell Hotel was too far to walk back from after closing time so we decided to camp at the Rosthwaite site – basic site concrete outhouses for toilets and showers. £5 per person + 50p per shower – the Chapel really is good value.



The new 2 man tent

Day 2: Woke up to brilliant sunshine. No sign of Katie, probably because we changed sites. No phone reception of course. We called in at the shop and café to buy some lunch for later and sat in the garden for a while enjoying the sunshine and a cup of coffee before setting off. Janet's shoulders were a bit sore from the rucksack so instead of going to Wasdale via Great Gable we went direct to Langdale over Glaramara and Allen Crag (no relation to Allan McD). 10.5 miles and 3550ft ascent.



Practice for the Cirque de Solitude ?

Arriving at the Langdale site about 7.30 gave us time to set up camp and go to the Old Dungeon Gill for Dinner.

Day 3: Another hot sunny day. To give Janet's shoulders a rest I carried a rucksack and she left hers at the site. We spent the day having a leisurely 9 mile walk to Elterwater and little Langdale (pub lunch) and back via Blea Tarn where we had a paddle. We had intended to do Pike of Blisco but it was far too hot to climb up there mid afternoon – we should have done it in the early morning. At Fell Foot in Little Langdale we happened across the Yorkshire Ramblers hut which looks like it could be worth a visit. Back in the Old Dungeon Gill that night, Katie arrived at about 8.30, with friend, having gone via Wasdale the previous night. They left us at closing time to walk up Stickle Tarn to wild camp – 1300ft steep ascent in the dark !!

Day 4: More sunshine ! We packed up and went to join Katie and friend at Stickle Tarn. The climb was tough, not so much the ascent but at 10 am it was very warm. Having watched Katie brush her teeth and pack up the tent the four of us continued over Blea Rigg to Easdale Tarn and Grasmere arriving mid afternoon. - 6.5 miles and 1700ft ascent.



Decision time above Coledale Tarn – left or right ?

This left some time for retail therapy – I bought a larger rucksack, Janet bought some lightweight trousers.

The conclusion: All in all it was a very successful backpack / camping trial with all our new kit. The tent is small but comfortable. The tiny, down sleeping bags were warm enough even though the nights were pretty chilly. We do need larger rucksacks but I've just bought an Osprey which is 30% bigger and half a kilo lighter than my Berghaus. The full bags weighed in at about 9 kg each but we were carrying extra clothing which we won't need in Corsica – we didn't actually need the hats, gloves and softshells on this trip. I reckon we should be able to get my bag down to 8 kilo without water and Janet 6 or 7 kilo which is not a lot for 3 weeks backpacking. Although we are not taking cooking gear and are only carrying emergency food (muesli). Very unexpectedly we were also able to test ourselves walking in hot conditions having had 4 days of glorious sunshine. We did notice a significant increase in time it takes to climb with even moderate sized backpacks. We even did a short scramble with our packs, on the approach to Glaramara.

Roll on Corsica.

Thanks very much for that Chris, I'm really pleased with the stuff I'm getting of you all now and I'm sure you will agree it improves the newsletter and will give prospective members a better idea of what we all get up to.

FORTHCOMING MEETS :

06-07	Coniston Hut Meet (Kev McEvoy)
13-14	HUT Weekend
19	Thursday Walk: Winter Hill (Mike McEneany)
27-30	Spring BH – Skye Camping (Andy Odger)
27-03	Spring BH – Mull S/Catering (Reg Cromer)
29-01	May BH-TBA

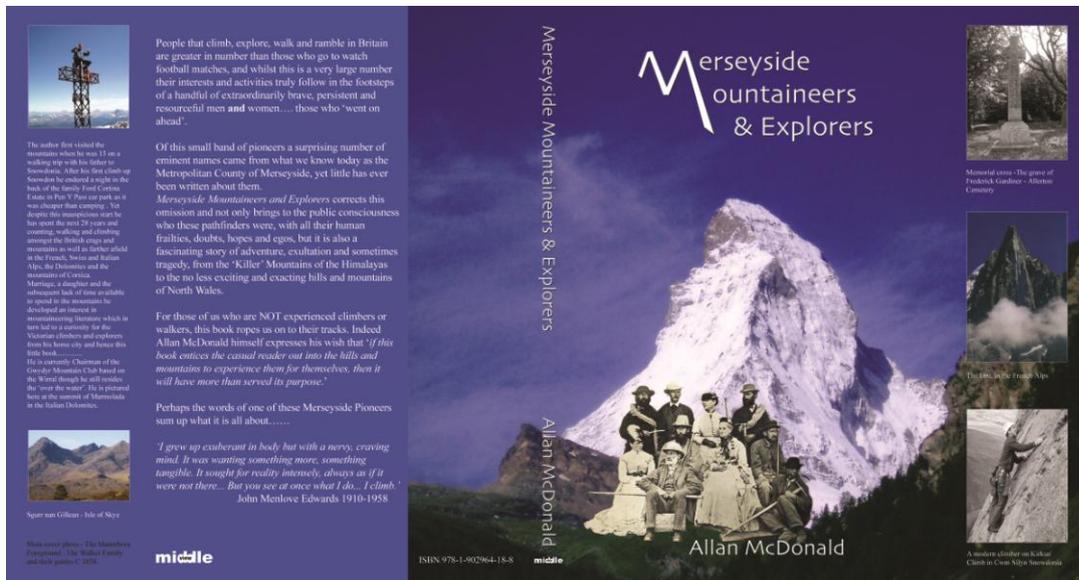
Having spoken to Kevin McEvoy recently the Coniston trip is cancelled due to a poor take-up though thanks to Kev for trying to organise. I think the problem is that it falls after two long bank holiday weekends and people have other commitments both financial and family wise.

The hut weekend of the 13/14th May is the, now legendary, annual cycle out to the Chapel and back weekend – just thinking about it makes me break into a cold sweat – but whatever floats your boat 😊 !

The Spring Bank Holiday weekend is a busy one this year as we've two trips running concurrently. Reg has organised a soiree on the Isle of Mull while Andy Odger has put

together a trip to the magical Isle of Skye. If you want any more information please email the organisers or me (allangwydyr@hotmail.co.uk) and I'll forward you the info. Sadly as we are away (and I know some of the Burnley MC read our newsletters) we will miss them when they are staying at the Chapel however we hope to catch up with them at Rhoscolyn later in the year.

BREAKING NEWS..... VERY VERY IMPORTANT !!!!!



It's a coming.....

My book is due out on 1st June 2011 (or thereabouts), the title is really self explanatory (well, I think so !) and if you would like a copy (or copies ;-) then I will be bringing a big box of 'em down to the Stork on a Tuesday and can post to those who can't attend. I think the RRP is £11.95 plus postage but I will let you all know nearer the time – perhaps in the next news-letter ☺

Keith Colwell has kindly written the following piece for this month's news-letter :-

THE BOTHY MOUSE



Sourlies Bothy

Crossing the last few yards of the grassy shore of Loch Nevis, I lift the latch and push wide the green door of Sourlies bothy. Despite the two skylights in its corrugated roof, the light inside is meagre.

The place smells of stone flagging, charred wood and a cold grate. A spade leans against the wall by the door, ready for latrine duty. Blackened grate below a slate mantle. Two grubby tables stand in the light below the plastic skylights; three iron-framed wooden chairs shoved back as if three people had left quickly; wall benches, and a wooden sleeping-deck. I'm not quite all in but I know if I sit down I won't want to move, so I dig out the Gaz stove from my rucksack and have a pot of chicken savoury rice cooking in no time.

The bothy's blue-backed log-book lies on the table, near a wine bottle with a candle stump jammed in its neck. Certain things are essential, even to those who travel lightest. There's a postcard propped there. It shows the white cottages on the tiny harbour of Inverie, miles away down Loch Nevis, where I'd landed two days ago. Someone had written on the card in big letters, SPARE FOOD. PLEASE HELP YOURSELF. I can't see any.

Taking the rice outside, I find a stone close to the bothy to sit on while I eat. I look and listen. A red and a yellow float hang from a bit of rope on the wall behind me like two balloons. On the other side of the narrow strip of sea-loch a low, rumped brown peninsular wriggles into the sun's huge fiery disc. I watch a small flock of oyster catchers wheel round together to land on quivering wings on the sea-loch, which is so still it looks more like a park lake. I watch while the changing light making all colour deeper and richer so everything, from the tufty grass and the sea-polished stones before me to the distant hills stand out more.

I crash. Laying there on the crumbling edge of sleep I hear this little noise. Some vague scratchy sound. I raise my head and, tipping it slightly in the direction of the noise, listen to the dark room.

The little scratchy little sound comes and goes. Starts. Stops. Starts again. Scrawm scratch. Scrawm scratch. There's something scuttling on the floor.

I grab my head-torch aim and fire it all in one movement and it lays a brilliant Dulux white egg shape on the floor. There, frozen inside the blunt end of the white egg, stands a mouse. A mouse, up on its hind legs, its front paws up like arms, its tiny triangular face tilted up at mine, as if it's about to start a boxing match. For a few moments it poses there like a cute garden ornament, and then it makes a break for it, making its panicky zig-zaggy stop-start progress first one way then the other out of the egg's light, and skedaddles into the pitch dark below the table.

Only a mouse. Switching off my head-torch I lie back down. I'm down less than a minute before the mouse has forgotten all about the big white light in its sky and takes off exploring again. I sit up, sweeping the room with my head-torch beam. I miss the mouse this time. The next time I flick my head-torch on, the beam locks the mouse to a table. It looks frozen in the act of tip-toeing away. The next time the mouse is on the floor again, looking strangely like it's trying to glance over its shoulder at me without letting me see it's actually turning its head. I decide to ignore it, but I can't. When the mouse becomes quiet I lay there straining my ears, wondering what it's up to, waiting for it start clomping round again. When it does my head-torch pins it like a little prisoner-of-war caught in a searchlight, trying to blend himself in with the leg of a chair. I think: this bothy isn't big enough for the two of us.

I pick up my boot and lay waiting, ear tuned for the mouse. When I hear it, I'm convinced it's on the table nearest the door. I aim my headtorch at the table and prepare to hurl my boot at the mouse. Craftily, I wait a second to make sure the mouse is still nosing around, oblivious to my murderous intent. Then, all together in a flash I flick on headtorch illuminate startled mouse on table and hurl my boot at it with every pound of my tired exasperation. My left Meindl Borneo bounces on table, ricochets off Gaz stove, cannons into pots and the wine-bottle, with the candle stump in its neck, wobbles drunkenly before regaining its balance. Unhindered by my boot the mouse springs three feet into the air and hits the floor running for the dark below the table.

Never mind the bothy -- The Rough Bounds of Knoydart are no longer big enough for the two of us. One of us must *die*. Preferably not me. Determined not to let a mouse make a monkey out of me I crawl out of my sleeping bag and pad outside in my bare-feet. I shine my headtorch and soon find the right sort of twig and return inside. I pick up a cooking pot, get a length of red nylon cord from my rucksack, and start setting a trap. You're finished mousey.

I clove-hitch the cord around the twig, then I balance the rim of the aluminium pot in the twig the middle of the floor. I sow a little trail of muesli across the floor and under the pot to a tiny, tempting, heap of it.

Switching off my headtorch I slide back inside my sleeping bag, prop myself on my left elbow and wait, holding the red cord in my left hand. Now I hear the mouse, but I cannot pinpoint its position. I need to know the mouse is definitely under the rim of the pot before I pull the twig away so the pot drops and traps the mouse inside it. I need the help of my eyes. I have to switch on the head-torch to see exactly where the mouse is, but if I switch it on, the mouse could be yards away from the trap I've set.

Then I remember about the sharpness of the peripheral vision of the human eye. It's well known that in the dark, you see better out the corner of your eye. The trick is not to look directly at anything you want to see well. It's better if you aim your gaze slightly off the target. If what you are looking at moves at all, the corner of your clever eye will see that movement, even in the dark. It's part of our ancient survival instinct.

So that's what I do. I aim off, listening for the mouse; watching out the corners of my eye. The dark shapes of tables and chairs and the floor begin to undulate, and my eyeballs feel like they're moving outwards, slowly shifting towards my ears, which not only gives me a headache but eyes like a halibut.

I'm beginning to doze when a noise makes me flick on the head-torch. It shines on the aluminium pot, which is still balanced on its twig on the floor. The red line still runs from the twig to my hand, but when I look more closely with aching eyes there's only a few grains of muesli left. There is no little mound of it beneath the pot. There's no mouse there either. Switching off my head-torch I lie back down. I'm down less than a minute before the mouse has forgotten all about the big white light in the sky and takes off again on its adventures. I sit up, sweeping the room with my head-torch beam. I miss the mouse this time. The next time the beam finds the mouse on a table. It looks frozen in the act of tip-toeing away. The next time the mouse is on the floor again, looking strangely like it's trying to look over its shoulder at me without letting me see it's actually turning its head.

I've had enough. I pull the head-torch on my head and scramble out my sleeping-bag to grab one of the spades by the door. I spin around like some laser-eyed Cyclops swinging its head this way and that, searching the floor hoping to nail the mouse in the beam of its single eye.

I am well aware of what I'm doing, but gradually the picture I have of myself doing it comes into sharper focus. There I am creeping about the bothy wearing only a Petzl head-torch, boxer-shorts, a pair of sweaty Thorlos socks, and a snarly gob, with a spade raised like an axe to send a mouse to Valhalla. Oh boy. It wasn't a pretty picture I saw. I put the spade back and returned to my sleeping-bag, and lay there listening.

It wasn't long before I hear the mouse scratching about. I flick on the head-torch. The beam nails the mouse to the floor. I flick the head-torch off. The mouse's tiny claws rustle something. On goes the headtorch and there's the mouse in its beam. Quickly I flick the off head-torch and the mouse rustles away. I flick it on and the mouse freezes in a cage of light. Off. Rustle. On. Frozen in the act. Off. Rustle. On. Stopped dead on its hind legs on the table nosing at the wine-bottle. Off. Rustle. On. Hunched like it's expecting a smack round the ear. No matter how quick I flick on the head-torch, I never see it moving. My eye lids are very heavy. My body seems to be undulating. I feel sleep

shutting me down. I smile. A chuckle bubbles up. I lie down in my sleeping bag trying not to listen. I hear the mouse's stop-go scampering. This time I leave the head-torch off.

The morning air is beautifully clear. Grass crunches frostily under my feet. I feel the cold air going up my nose and down my throat. There is a long way to go to Glen Finnan. I'm expecting this to be the last day of the good weather, and I want to get there before it breaks because I've come without a tent to save weight.

Rucksack packed, I go to the bothy log-book on the table under the left window. An A4 notebook, its marbled blue back smudged and faded. There's a pencil attached to it by a piece of hairy string. I flip the pages, reading bits of what others who have rested here have written. I've been lucky. Rain's a constant theme. The unexpected hardship of mountain miles through wind and rain and snow. But then the quietness and the awesome quality of the Scotland's light are celebrated. The evening skies are mentioned a lot, and the sight of porpoises humping through the shallows of the loch, and the fun and achievement traversing Knoydart's Munros. Someone from Edinburgh had written about the tasty cockles and mussels gathered from Loch Nevis at low tide. And I have a moment's regret for not having read the logbook last night while the tide was out. And then my eye lands on mention of a mouse. No timorous beastie this, but a hyperactive rodent which kept a Geordie couple company for a night, running about the place. Nibbled its way into Rice Crispies and Mature Cheddar. The latest one was written at the end of August, less than a week before I arrived, by Lauren from Solihull, on behalf of all her friends who ended with a courteous request not ever to kill the bothy's mouse.

Having slept such a refreshing sleep, I can afford myself a wry smile. I write about the way I'd come from Inverie over the mountains, the brilliant weather I had enjoyed, and the high bivvies. Then, with a last look around the bothy in case I've left anything, I shoulder my rucksack, and step outside.

It's after 7 a.m. on the beautiful morning of Friday, September 10, 2004. Frost powders the shadows. Puddles are frozen between stones. The steely blue finger of Loch Nevis is again as still as a park lake. Above the hills big alto cumulus clouds stack up majestically, make me hungry for mashed potato.

I head for the shadowy defile at the end of the sea-loch where, the map tells me, I'll find the beginning of the way through Glen Dessarry to Glen Finnan and home. I soon find the path and I stop, put down my rucksack and walk back to the bothy. It's a habit of mine. Even when I'm in the car I do it. I drive away, stop after three hundred metres and get out checking I've put everything in the boot. Crazy. But there you are. I always go back to make sure I've left nothing behind.

I go in the bothy, which already is cold as stone larder. I know what I've really come back for, but I have to play this out so I don't think I'm being sentimental. I look under the tables, under the sleeping benches. There's nothing left behind. On my way out I open the logbook to the entry I've just written. I pick up the pencil again, lick the blunt graphite, and print in big letters:

DONT KILL THE BOTHY'S MOUSE.

HE'S ONLY PLAYING WITH YOU.